



SPECIAL INVESTIGATION TEAM SET UP, TOLD TO FILE PRELIMINARY REPORT IN THREE DAYS

At least 27 killed in weekend blaze at Rajkot amusement park, many children among dead

Officials say gaming zone didn't have NOC from fire dept; four detained

GOPAL KATESHIYA
RAJKOT, MAY 25

AT LEAST 27 people, including children, were killed as a massive fire broke out at TRP, a private amusement park/gaming zone, in Gujarat's Rajkot on Saturday afternoon. Officials said TRP did not have a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the fire department. In a statement, the state government said 27 bodies had been brought for post-mortem at the

Rajkot Civil Hospital. Most of the bodies were charred, making identification difficult. "Their DNA samples are being drawn for identification... The process is on at the Rajkot Civil Hospital police post to collect DNA samples of family members so that the DNA can be matched," the statement said.

Rajkot District Collector Prabhav Joshi said most of the victims were children. Officials did not rule out the possibility of the toll rising.

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The gaming zone that burned down in Rajkot on Saturday.

'Fire spread in seconds... area was full of smoke'

GOPAL KATESHIYA
RAJKOT, MAY 25

THE FIRE at the Rajkot amusement park/gaming zone on Saturday spread within seconds, and the narrow gates made escape difficult, said eyewitnesses. "Plywood and other construction material lying in the area caught fire all of a sudden. The fire spread within seconds and sent people running helter-skelter. A

few staff members tried to put it out by using fire extinguishers, but to no avail," said Yash Patoliya, a visitor at the gaming zone.

He said he was sitting in the reception area when the blaze began. "The gaming zone was a two-storey structure. The ground-floor had the reception area, and the floor above that had facilities like trampoline, bowling etc. We tried to go to the upper floor to rescue people, but

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PM Narendra Modi with Bihar CM Vijay Kumar Sinha and BJP (Ram Vilas) chief Chirag Paswan in Patna on Saturday. PTI

REFERS TO LAND-FOR-JOBS CASE

In Bihar, PM warns of Tejashwi arrest, says INDIA bloc can do mujra for votes

Dare you to touch me, not afraid: Tejashwi

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, MAY 25

REITERATING HIS allegation that the INDIA bloc wants to carve out a quota for minorities, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said the Opposition could perform "mujra" or do "slavery" for its "vote bank", but he would thwart any attempt to divert the SC, ST, OBC reservation. While he did not name RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, Modi, who addressed a series of rallies in Bihar, also warned that the "countdown" for arrest had started for those behind the alleged land-for-jobs scam.

Addressing a rally in Karakat, Modi said: "Main aaj Bihar ke lo-

gon ko ek aur guarantee de raha hoon. Jinhone Bihar ke garibon ko lutkar naukri ke badle me zamin likhwayi hai, kaan kholkar sun lo, unka bhi jail jaane ka countdown shuru ho chuka hai. Yeh jaise hi helicopter me chakkar markar chakkar pura hoga, jail ka raasta tay ho jayega (Today, I am giving one more guarantee to the people of Bihar. Those who looted the poor to get land registered in lieu of jobs should listen carefully, their countdown for going to jail has started. Once he completes his rounds on the helicopter, his road to jail will be decided.)"

Responding to his remarks later in the day, Tejashwi said in Patna: "It looks like the PM is afraid of losing the elections. A

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Phase 6: Overall turnout dips to 61%, Anantnag-Rajouri touches 54% high

58.70% polling in Delhi; only 57 seats left to vote

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

THE TURNOUT in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections in 58 constituencies across eight states and Union territories on Saturday was 61.01 per cent, according to the Election Commission (EC) data at 11.30 pm. The overall turnout in Delhi, where all the seven Lok Sabha constituencies voted in the sixth phase, was 58.70 per cent, down from 60.60 per cent in 2019.

In 2019, the seats which voted on Saturday had recorded 64.73 per cent polling. But this does not include the Anantnag-Rajouri constituency of Jammu and Kashmir, which was redrawn during delimitation in 2022. The constituency saw 54.06 per cent polling on Saturday.

The final turnout is likely to increase.

Haryana saw the biggest dip in polling -- from 69.93 per cent in 2019 to 59.63 per cent this time. Among the other states, the turnout was 54.03 per cent in UP; 55.24 per cent in Bihar; 79.30 in West Bengal; 69.32 per cent in

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President Droupadi Murmu after voting at a 'pink booth', managed by women staff, in New Delhi, Saturday. Renuka Puri FULL COVERAGE, PAGES 8, 9



THE CITY, PAGES 3, 4
HOW CONG, AAP CAMARADERIE PLAYED OUT
ROLLS TO DATA: A POLLING AGENT'S DAY

Under attack, EC releases number of votes cast in five phases

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

FACING CRITICISM — and a case in the Supreme Court — the Election Commission (EC) Saturday released the absolute number of electors who cast their votes in each constituency in the first five phases of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, even as it said there was "a pattern of false narratives and mischievous designs to vitiate the electoral process".

Unlike in 2019, when the EC released and later removed data on votes cast from its website due to alleged discrepancies between the provisional number of votes cast and those counted, the Commission only released the total number of electors and turnout percentage after each phase of voting this time.

The EC's silence on the absolute number of voters this time had led to an interim

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Payal Kapadia's All We Imagine As Light makes Cannes history with Grand Prix win



EXPRESS AT CANNES

SHUBHRA GUPTA
CANNES, MAY 25

"THANK YOU very much Cannes Film Festival for having our film here. Please don't wait for an-



(From left) Cast members Hridhu Haroon, Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha and Chhaya Kadam, and director Payal Kapadia at the Cannes closing ceremony on Saturday. AP

other 30 years to have another Indian film," said Payal Kapadia as she picked up the prestigious Grand Prix for her debut feature, All We Imagine As Light, at the 77th Cannes Film Festival. Kapadia had entered the much-feted Competition Section thirty years after an Indian film made the cut — Shaji N Karun's Swaham was in the Competition line-up in 1994.

There has been a long

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RELATED REPORT
THE WORLD

From Iran to India: 6 men, a fishing boat and a daring getaway on the high seas

PAGE 1
ANCHOR

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, MAY 25

NOTHING ABOUT the day seemed extraordinary. On the morning of April 22, the sea crashing into the predawn darkness of the shore, the six fishermen hauled their nets, hooks, baits and food supplies onto the



The fishermen left Iran on April 22, reached India on May 6

deck of the boat, and set sail. Just as they did every day.

Except, that day, the six men in the boat had a daring plan: to flee their employer in Bandar-e Chiruiyeh, a harbour in the Iranian province of Hormozgan, and sail all the way back home to India, a distance of over 1,500 nautical miles, threading the geopolitically volatile Strait of Hormuz before entering the forbidding, blue expanse of the Arabian Sea.

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Kerala (6D) Aug 28 - 35000	Hungary (8D) Sep 15 - 210000	Best of Greece (10D) Sep 25 - 255000
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Ragging death: JU council accepts recommendation of panel to expel 4 students

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 25

THE EXECUTIVE council of Jadavpur University accepted the recommendations of the anti-ragging committee, which has asked for the expulsion of four senior students allegedly involved in the ragging of a first-year student, leading to his death last year, an official said on Saturday.

The four expelled students, who are currently in police custody, belong to the civil engineering, economics and sociology departments.

In addition to this, the anti-ragging committee of the university has also recommended that five other students, found to be involved in the case, be rusticated for four semesters. These five students are from the science and engineering departments.

● 'Fire spread in seconds..'

There was too much smoke," he said.

Pruthvirajsinh Jadeja, who had come to TRP with two of his friends, said the fire started from the ground-floor. "We were bowling when two staff members told us there was a fire on the ground-floor and we should leave. The area was soon full of smoke... We tried to escape from the rear-door but couldn't. I saw a beam of light coming from outside. I kicked down the tin sheet and five of us made our way out, jumping from the first floor," he said, adding that his two friends were still missing.

Jadeja said there were at least 70 to 80 people, including children, on the first floor when the fire broke out. "Some welding work was being carried out on the ground floor, the fire started from there," he said.

A TRP staff member, who identified himself as Santosh, said that after the fire started, he rushed to his room, also on the premises, to check if his wife and son were safe. "When I reached my room, I found the door was broken... I found my wife and son in the crowd after one-and-a-half hours," said Santosh, adding that he had been working at the TRP gaming zone for three years now. He said he was in the paintball section when the fire broke out.

● Man accused of raping tribal girls

Confessed to raping three others.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav took cognizance of the incident and handed over the investigation to a Special Investigation Team headed by a woman DCP-rank officer. The state government also issued a cyber security advisory, warning people about voice changing apps.

"In one case, the accused raped a woman and her minor sister by luring them into a forested region. The POC SO Act has also been invoked against him," Verma said. According to the police, the accused is a labourer who learnt how to use the app on YouTube. He procured the phone number of the first victim with the help of the co-accused, Rahul Prajapati and Sandeep Prajapati, police said.

"He called that woman to an isolated spot promising to provide her scholarship money. Posing as a female college professor, he told the woman that her son would escort her to their home, where the scholarship would be disbursed. The accused then took the victim

to an isolated spot in a forested area, where he raped her at an abandoned jhopri belonging to his family," Verma said.

Police said he would also rob the women's phones and threaten them with dire consequences. The accused would look for contacts of other women on their phones. "He would randomly call phone numbers and speak to women 10-20 times a day. He would offer scholarships, and in case they were not going to college, he would offer government schemes to lure them," the officer said.

The police have claimed that the incidents have been taking place since January, and the police took action after two survivors approached them. "In one case, a survivor managed to flee while she was being taken on his bike. At the same time, the first survivor also contacted us. After arresting the accused, we analysed his call detail records and looked at the phone numbers that he called repeatedly, which helped us trace the other victims," the officer said.

● Payal Kapadia's All We Imagine As Light makes Cannes history with Grand Prix win

drought since, and Kapadia's film has broken through, gloriously.

This Cannes has already begun well for India, with a Best Actress win for Anasuya Sengupta for Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's dark tale of female exploitation Shameless (Un Certain Regard section), in which she plays a sex worker on the run. In the La Cinef category, Chidananda S Nair's Sunflowers Were The First To Know and UK-based Mansi Maheshwari's Bunnyhood got the first and third prizes respectively. Cinematographer and director Santhosh Sivan also received the prestigious Pierre Angénioux Excellens in Cinematography honour at Cannes, the first Asian to win this prestigious award. Kapadia's coveted trophy, the fes-

tival's second-highest award, is a perfect cherry on top. The Palme d'Or went to American filmmaker Sean Baker for his film Anora.

Kapadia's film, an elegiac exploration of urban loneliness and connection, follows Kani Kusruti and Divya Prabha as two Malayali nurses working in Mumbai, experiencing the very specific kind-cruel ways of big city life. That striving, much more of a challenge in the mahanagri that is Mumbai, comes with the anonymity and safety that women savour.

It is present in every frame of this film, with its interplay of light and dark, as it probes the crevices of suppressed desire in Prabha and Anu. The latter is in a clandestine relationship with the Muslim Shiz, played by Hridhu Haroon, and has become an item of gossip amongst the nursing staff at their hospital; the older Prabha is married, but has to deal with the inexplicable prolonged absence of her husband. Disapproving of Anu's free ways, Prabha spends time with Parvati, played by Chhaya Kadam, a widow who has no papers to prove that she has lived in her modest home, and is on the verge of being thrown out: migration and dislocation in never-ending waves is also a Mumbai reality, which the film reflects. All three actors joined Kapadia on stage.

"This film is about friendship between three women and often-times women are pitted against each other. This is the way society is designed and it is very unfortunate. But for me friendship is a

FROM PAGE ONE

FULL REPORTS ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

At least 27 killed in weekend blaze at Rajkot amusement park, many children among dead

The government has set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT), led by Additional Director General of Police (CID-crime) Subhash Trivedi, to probe the incident. The SIT, which includes Banchhanidhi Pani, commissioner of technical education; H P Sanghvi, director of Forensic Science Laboratory, Gandhinagar; J N Khadiya, chief fire officer of Ahmedabad; and M B Desai, superintending engineer of road and buildings department, has been asked to submit a preliminary report within three days, followed by a final report within 10 days.

Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi, who was on his way to Rajkot, told *The Indian Express* that the SIT has been directed to begin work immediately. "I will be holding a meeting with the officials at 3 am (Sunday)," he said. Rajkot Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Parthraj Gohil told *The Indian Express* that four persons associated with the gaming zone had been detained. "We are finding out who the land, on which the gaming zone was set up, belonged to, and who was running it," said Gohil.

Police sources said TRP was set up about two years ago. A senior police officer said the co-owner, Yuvrajsinh Solanki, and manager, Nitin Jain, were among those detained. "We are also looking for Prakash Jain, another person associated with the gaming zone. He is reported to have been inside the premises when the fire

broke out," the officer said.

Rajkot Mayor Nayna Pedhadiya said the gaming zone, operating from a two-storey tin shed, did not have any NOC from the fire department. "We will investigate how it was functioning without a fire NOC... No politics will be allowed over this issue. This is not a small incident," Pedhadiya told mediapersons after she arrived at the site to oversee the search and rescue operation. Deputy Municipal Commissioner Swapnil Khare said TRP had not applied for any fire NOC. "We are checking the details. But prima facie, there are no records of the operators having applied for a fire NOC. Nor had they applied for any other type of clearance from the municipal corporation," Khare said.

"The fire control room received a call at around 4.30 pm regarding the blaze. Fire-tenders and ambulances rushed to the spot," District Collector Joshi said. "Part of the shed has collapsed. Firefighters managed to control the fire, but the fumes are still emanating from the debris and we apprehend that more people could be trapped under it," he said at around 8 pm.

Joshi said that prima facie, the cause of the fire appeared to be an electrical short-circuit. "As the park had been set up under a shed, many air-conditioners had been mounted there. The electrical wiring may not have been able to handle the load, leading

to a short-circuit, which could have sparked the fire," he said.

DM Haripara, police inspector of Rajkot taluka police station, under whose jurisdiction the gaming zone is located, said they were in the process of registering an FIR.

The incident comes at a time when the Gujarat government is in the process of regulating amusement parks and is scheduled to come out with guidelines.

In a post on X, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel announced that "the state government will provide Rs 4 lakh to the families of the deceased and Rs 50,000 to the injured." He said "instructions have been given to the municipal corporation and the administration for immediate rescue and relief operations... It has been instructed to prioritise arrangements for immediate treatment of the injured".

"Extremely distressed by the fire mishap in Rajkot. My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones. Prayers for the injured. The local administration is working to provide all possible assistance to those affected," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on X.

President Droupadi Murmu also expressed "deep anguish" over the loss of lives. "My heart goes out to the families who have lost their near and dear ones including young children. I pray to the Almighty for the speedy recovery of those being rescued," she said. **-WITH INPUTS FROM ENS, AHMEDABAD**

● Phase 6: Overall turnout dips to 61%

Odisha; and 63.76 per cent in Jharkhand.

According to data available on the EC's Voter Turnout App at 11.30 pm, Bishnupur constituency in West Bengal recorded the highest turnout of 83.95 per cent, while Phulpur in Uttar Pradesh recorded the lowest at 48.97 per cent.

Of the 58 seats which went to polls on Saturday, 14 were in Uttar Pradesh, 10 in Haryana, 8 each in Bihar and West Bengal, 7 in Delhi, 6 in Odisha, 4 in Jharkhand, and one in Jammu and Kashmir. Polling was also held for 42 Assembly constituencies in Odisha.

In 2019, BJP had won 40 of these 58 seats, the BSP and BJD had won four each, TMC and JD(U) three each, and SP, LJP, NC and AJSU one each.

"Polling in Anantnag-Rajouri parliamentary constituency in Jammu and Kashmir was completely peaceful with a turnout of 52.28% as at 7.45 pm, which is the highest in many decades. With this, the polling to the parliamentary seats in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir has concluded. In the ongoing General Elections 2024, the three parliamentary constituencies in the Valley, namely Srinagar (38.49%), Baramulla (59.1%) and Anantnag-Rajouri (52.28% as of 7.45 pm) have recorded voter turnouts which is the highest in many decades," the EC said in a statement earlier in the day. The turnout was revised to 54.06 per cent in the data available at 11:30 pm.

PHASE 6 VOTER TURNOUT (in %)

Overall turnout (58 seats)	2019	2024
	64.73	61.01
States where polling ends		
Haryana (10 seats)	69.93	59.63
Delhi (7 seats)	60.46	58.70
Jammu and Kashmir* (1 seat)	NA	54.06
Turnout in other states		
Uttar Pradesh (14 seats)	54.41%	54.03
Bihar (8 seats)	58.36%	55.24
Jharkhand (4 seats)	64.39%	63.76
Odisha (6 seats)	71.35%	69.32
West Bengal (8 seats)	84.35%	79.30

* Anantnag-Rajouri was redrawn after delimitation in 2022. Overall turnout does not include this seat; Note: Figures till 11:30 pm; Source: Election Commission

With the end of the sixth phase, polling is over in 486 Lok Sabha constituencies. The remaining 57 seats will vote in the last phase on June 1.

The first three phases of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections saw a dip in turnout as compared to 2019. In the first phase on April 19, when 102 constituencies went to polls, the final turnout was 66.14 per cent, down from 69.29 per cent in 2019. In the second phase on April 26, in which 88 seats voted, the final turnout was 66.71 per cent, down from 69.43 per cent in 2019. In the third phase on May 7, across 93 constituencies, the final turnout was 65.68 per cent as compared to 66.58 per cent in 2019. But polling increased in the

fourth phase on May 13, when the 96 constituencies that went to polls recorded 69.16 per cent turnout, up from 68.8 per cent turnout in these seats in 2019.

The fifth phase, too, saw a slight increase, with an overall turnout of 62.2 per cent as compared to 61.82 per cent in 2019. Also, unlike the first four phases, the turnout of women voters was higher than the turnout of men voters in the fifth phase on May 20, when polling was held in 49 Lok Sabha constituencies across eight states and Union territories (UTs).

Reversing past trends, the overall turnout of women voters (67.18 per cent) was marginally higher as compared to men (67.02 per cent) in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

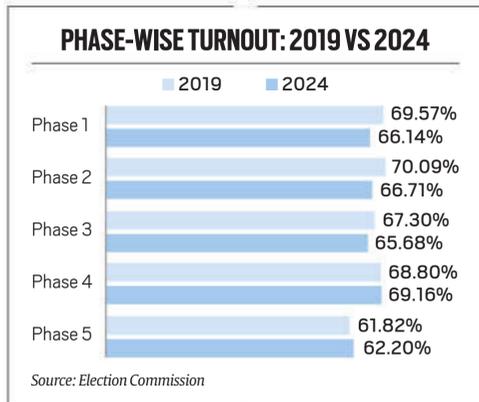
● Under attack, EC releases number of votes cast in five phases

application filed by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) in the Supreme Court, seeking directions to the EC to compile and publish this data on its website after each phase and also upload Form 17C for each polling booth.

Form 17 C is the sheet on which the presiding officer records the total number of votes recorded on polling day, a copy of which is also handed over to the polling agents of candidates.

However, the top court on Friday refused to issue such a direction to the EC in the middle of elections and even rejected attempts to cast doubts on the role of the poll watchdog. "Everyone is for free and fair elections... We cannot interrupt something... We are also responsible citizens. Let us trust some authority. We will keep it pending and (it) will be heard along with the writ petition after the elections are over. In between elections, a hands-off attitude has to be there," Justice Dipankar Datta said on Friday.

Stating it feels "duly strengthened" by Friday's developments and the SC's observations, the EC released data a day later showing that of the 76.4 crore eligible voters in the first five phases across 424 seats, 50.7 crore actually came



out to exercise their franchise on polling day. Overall, the voter turnout in the first five phases has been put at roughly 66.3%.

Asked why the EC decided to share the number of votes cast, albeit only after five phases, a senior EC official told *The Indian Express* that it wasn't done earlier since the top court was hearing the matter. The official added that the EC decided to release the data in the interest of transparency. The Commission's statement on Saturday also states that the EC "decided to further expand the

format of turnout data". However, in 2019, the Commission had shared the absolute, but provisional, number of voters.

Even as the EC released the absolute turnout numbers, sources said it will not upload all copies of Form 17C for open viewing given that it is under no statutory obligation to do so. "There are over 10 lakh polling stations in the ongoing elections. Even if we assume that four candidates in each station have polling agents and others don't, even then 40 lakh people have Form 17C with them," the

EXPLAINED Old practice revived

THE EC has gone back to its old practice of sharing provisional, but absolute, number of voters. It had stopped this in 2019 following a controversy over a mismatch in provisional turnout numbers and total number of votes counted.

senior officer said.

"The total number of votes polled in a constituency, as recorded in Form 17C, can never be changed even by anyone's hypothetical mischief, as it is available with all contesting candidates... Agents of candidates are always allowed to accompany EVM and statutory papers, including Form 17C, from polling station till storage in a strongroom as per Rule 49 V (2) of the Conduct of Election Rules 1961," the Commission said in the release to rule out doubts about the authenticity of turnout data it maintains.

"The Commission remains fully committed to the highest level of transparency and involvement of stakeholders at every stage of the electoral cycle," it said.

uing with Kapadia's thematic preoccupations. "It was very important for us to take note of those people who do not have documentation ('kaagaz') to prove their identity," she says. Parvati represents those lost souls who are forced to leave their homes. In the film, the return to her roots in Ratnagiri is seen not as a loss but a gain, when all three women, and the man, find themselves in an idyllic spot, far away from the claustrophobia of the city, breaking out into the light.

Where does the name of the film come from? It's the name of a painting made by Kapadia's mother, the artist Nilini Malani. "When I saw it, I was struck by how much of it reflected my work, and I asked her for the name. She generously agreed," says Kapadia.

And now that name is out in the world, glowing.

Indian Ocean. "From there, we sailed towards the Oman border," says Dayalan.

Most days, their small boat would be the only vessel for as far as they could see. The little food they had was running out, so they would eat only once a day — mostly kubos and fish curry.

The days stretched on. "We took turns to be at the steering wheel. There would be two of us at the wheel for at least 3-4 hours, after which somebody else would take over. We kept our eye on the GPS to know where we were, if we were crossing international (maritime) boundaries. One of us would monitor the engine and stay alert for leaks, while the others caught up on sleep," he says.

Some days were torrid as they were caught in storms and heavy rains. "Somewhere near Oman, a storm hit our boat and water entered the radiator. We had to

● PM warns of Tejawhi arrest

74-year-old person is trying to intimidate a 34-year-old man. Always remember, this is not Delhi but Bihar. I dare you to touch me. A Bihari is never afraid of a Gujarati. As for the jail threat, I am not worried. Lord Krishna was born in a prison."

Addressing another rally in Pataliputra, Modi said: "Bihar is the land which has given a new direction to the fight for social justice... INDI alliance ko apne vote bank ki ghulamni kami hai to kare. Unko wahan jake mujra kama hai to bhiki kare. Mein SC, ST, OBC aarakshan ke saath datkar ke khada hoon, khada rahunga. Jab tak jaan hai, ladta rahunga (The INDI alliance can do slavery for its vote bank if it wants. It can even go there and perform mujra if it wants. I am standing firmly with SC, ST, OBC quota, and will continue to do so. I will continue to fight till I am alive)."

Speaking at Buxar, Modi took a dig at three "shehzadas" (princes) — referring to Tejawhi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and SP leader Akhilesh Yadav. "I heard the UP shehzada saying that they would win all 80 seats of UP. But his own party men have been laughing at this," he said. He said while Rahul would be preparing to holiday abroad, Tejawhi would be engaged with securing "zamaanat" (bail) and protecting his "amaanat" (inheritance).

Modi also criticised the RJD for not seeking an apology from the Congress for alleged anti-Bihar remarks made by the party's leaders in Punjab. "Lantern (RJD's poll symbol) lekar mujra kar rahe hain. Congress ke charan chum rahe hain, unse jawab nahi maang rahe hain (It is performing mujra with the lantern. It is kissing the Congress's feet, it is not seeking any answers from the Congress)," he said. He said similar anti-Bihar remarks were made by other INDIA bloc allies too.

Modi claimed that the INDIA bloc has "decided that if they are voted to power, the first thing they would do is to change the Constitution so that even the court is unable to overrule their attempts to divert reservation to Muslims. I have been challenging

them to refute me in writing but they have been reluctant because they have a guilty conscience."

He said several deprived castes, including Yadavs who have traditionally been RJD supporters, "could end up losing their constitutional rights if the INDIA bloc succeeds in its plans".

Accusing the Congress of scare-mongering, he said: "These people used to say that Jammu and Kashmir would be on fire after Article 370 was scrapped? Did anything like that happen? In fact, they are cowards... They used to say that since Pakistan has atom bombs, we should be alarmed. It is because of these cowards that Pakistani terrorists would carry out attacks in India. But Modi is not scared. Modi told the Army to enter their (terrorists') homes and kill them. Today, Pakistan thinks a hundred times before doing anything."

"They want your votes to scrap CAA, restore Article 370, allow re-entry of infiltrators," he said. While BJP leaders Ram Kripal Yadav and Mithelesh Tiwari are contesting from Pataliputra and Buxar respectively, Rashtriya Lok Morcha leader and former Union minister Upendra Kushwaha is contesting from Karakat.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra hit back at Modi over his "mujra" remarks. Speaking in Gorakhpur, she said: "Modi ji gave a speech in Bihar and uttered such words for Opposition leaders which no Prime Minister in the history of the country would have said... Your faith and your hopes were once attached to Narendra Modi, but isn't it the responsibility of the Prime Minister to maintain the dignity of the post... the way he (Modi) is speaking today, the sad thing is that his reality has been exposed."

The RJD, too, reacted sharply to Modi's remarks. "After machhli (fish), mutton and mangalsutra, it is now the turn of mujra. Does it belong to the Prime Minister of the country to speak such language? He has torn the norms of civil discourse to shreds," RJD leader Manoj Kumar Jha told PTI.

WITH PTI INPUTS

● From Iran to India: 6 men, a fishing boat and a daring getaway on the high seas

On May 6, after two weeks of dodging patrol ships and surviving rough weather on the seas, the six men sailed into Indian waters.

This is the story of Nithya Dayalan, 31, his brother Arun Dayalan, 29, cousin Kalidas Kumar, 22, Muneeswaran, 37, Rajendran, 38, and Maria Dennis, 37, and their long, perilous journey from Iran through Qatar, the Strait of Hormuz and Oman, before they were detained by the Indian Coast Guards off the Kochi coast. After the initial inquiries, the six are now back in their homes in Tamil Nadu. While five of them are from Ramanathapuram district, Dennis is from Kanyakumari.

Speaking *The Indian Express* from his home in the Thiruppalakudi fishing hamlet in Ramanathapuram, Nithya Dayalan says that it was early last year that he and some of the others got an offer to work on a fish-

ing vessel in Iran.

He says that for fishermen like him in Tamil Nadu, life on the sea has never been easy. "There isn't enough fish, the weather is erratic, there are restrictions on fishing, and the cost of living has shot up. It has become difficult to sustain our families," he says.

So when a friend from Kanyakumari told him about a "reliable employer" in Iran, he didn't think twice.

Finally, sometime in January last year, Dayalan, his cousin Kalidas and Dennis from Kanyakumari flew from Thiruvananthapuram to Tehran via Dubai. The others joined them in Iran around September last year. In Iran, they were taken to Bandar-e Chiruiyeh, located on the northern shore of the Persian Gulf, where they began working on a vessel owned by an Arab, Syed Jaffareh.

The work turned out to be far tougher than they imagined. "Our routine was backbreaking — 10 days at sea, followed by 10 land. We barely got two hours of sleep a day while at sea," Dayalan says.

He says that while they were promised Rs 30,000 to 40,000 a month, most months, they barely got Rs 10,000. "Gradually, even that stopped. Our employer denied us food when we said we would not go to sea without being paid. But the employer had taken away our passports and there was little we could do. We were trapped," he says.

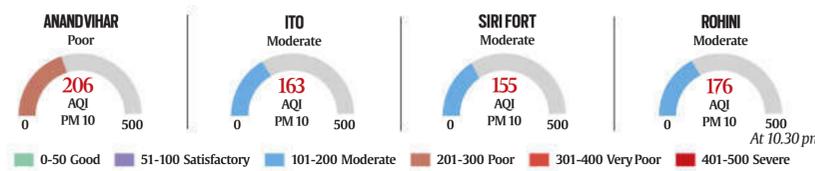
Finally, on April 22, Dayalan and the others decided to flee. The plan was to stray into Qatar waters and turn themselves in, in the hope that they would be deported to India.

That morning, Dayalan turned on the boat's ignition and the 350 cc Chinese engine stirred to life.

Soon, the wood-and-fiberglass vessel was bobbing in the sea, the Iranian coast now a distant streak on the horizon.

"When we entered Qatar's (maritime) border, we were confronted by their coast guards. We pleaded with them to arrest us and take us to the Indian embassy. But they said we would be kept in prison for six months for entering their waters before being taken to the embassy. They advised us to go back to our employer or go to the Indian embassy in Iran," he says. But for the fishermen, going back was never an option. "The Indian embassy is about 600 km from where we lived. We didn't have money to travel that far. Besides, we had no passports," he says.

Returning to Iranian waters, they turned their boat around to the Strait of Hormuz, a critical choke point in the Persian Gulf and the only passage into the



SKY WATCH
 May 26
 Mainly clear sky. Heat wave conditions at many places and severe heat wave conditions, warm night at isolated places.
MAX: 44 | **MIN: 31**
 3.6°C above normal | 4.4°C above normal

DELHI GOES TO POLLS IN THE SIXTH PHASE OF THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

At 58.7%, voter turnout slightly shy of '19 figure

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MAY 25

DELHI RECORDED a tentative voter turnout of 58.70% in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha polls, inching close to the tally in 2019, which stood at 60.60%.

According to the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, P Krishnamurthy, voting started at 7 am and continued till 6 pm. In several booths, officials said, the timing had to be extended as many people had lined up even after 6 pm. "Despite the intense heat, over 58% of votes have been polled. This number is expected to go up a little in the final tally as in a few booths, voting continued till late in the evening," sources from the Delhi CEO office said.

The highest turnout was recorded in Northeast Delhi at 62.87% where BJP's Manoj Tiwari went up against Congress's Kanhaiya Kumar. The lowest turnout was seen in New Delhi - 52.93% - where AAP's Somnath Bharti faced BJP's Bansuri Swaraj. The turnout in Gurgaon and Faridabad, which went to polls alongside the rest of Haryana, was 60.7% and 60.2% respectively - lower than 67.33% and 64.10% recorded in 2019.

All three principal political protagonists in the Capital - two of which, AAP and Congress, contested under the INDIA bloc umbrella, and the BJP - exuded confidence that their respective candidates would make the cut.

This, however, sources from all three admitted, would be with "smaller victory margins" given a mix of various factors ranging from the heat to a long weekend.

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva expressed happiness on the completion of what had been a peaceful election adding that the "almost 60% voting" reported amidst 44 degrees Celsius temperatures showed that the people had enthusiastically voted for the continuation of the "development of Delhi" by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.



(From top) BJP's NE Delhi pick Manoj Tiwari, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal, Delhi minister Gopal Rai and Congress's NE Delhi pick Kanhaiya Kumar on Saturday. PTI

"All through the last three months, we heard a lot about the alliance. But as Rahul Gandhi and Arvind Kejriwal did not share the dais in any campaign meeting, today AAP and Congress workers did not work together to bring out the voters," he said.

The AAP, however, said that the people of Delhi had made it clear that they valued "good education, healthcare, 24/7 electricity, water, and free bus rides over rhetoric". Delhi Congress in-charge Devender Yadav said that the voting trend indicated that the people of Delhi voted for change and that the alliance would win all seven seats.

Meanwhile, complaints about malfunctioning EVMs were reported at a few booths, including the one in Ballimaran. "Only few complaints were received and action was taken immediately. The overall process was very smooth," a Delhi election officer said.



CAPITAL TALES

Bansuri Swaraj, BJP candidate from the New Delhi Lok Sabha seat, and her father Swaraj Kaushal at a polling booth in Delhi on Saturday. PTI

The numbers game

DELHI (Overall)
2024* | 2019
58.70% | 60.60%

*Total voters: 1.52 cr

Top three Assembly segments

Matia Mahal	67.18%
Gokulpuri	67.09%
Babarpur	66.03%

Bottom three Assembly segments

Mehrauli	48.10%
Bawana	48.37%
Greater Kailash	48.84%

Gurgaon

2024	60.70%
2019	67.33%

Total voters in 2024

24 lakh

Faridabad

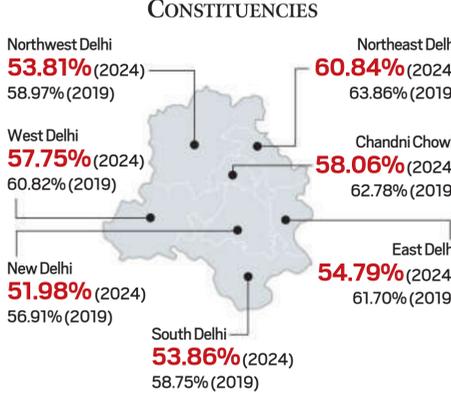
2024	60.20%
2019	64.1%

Total voters in 2024

23.45 lakh



Voting underway in Budh Vihar, Northwest Delhi, on Saturday. Abhinav Saha



*All figures approximate; ** Figures released at 11 pm; Source: ECI

As Capital votes, war of words between Delhi CM Kejriwal and Pak politician

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MAY 25

AS ALL seven seats in Delhi went to polls in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha polls on Saturday, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal engaged in a war of words with Pakistani politician Chaudhry Fawad Hussain over his remarks on the general elections in India.

After the former Pakistan minister replied to Kejriwal's post on X (formerly Twitter) on voting with his family, and said: "May peace and harmony defeat forces of hate and extremism", Kejriwal replied in Hindi: "Chaudhry Sahib, the people of my country and I are fully capable of handling our issues. Your tweet is not needed. The situation in Pakistan

is very bad right now. You take care of your country... The elections taking place in India are our internal matters. India will not tolerate interference from the biggest sponsors of terrorism."

Chaudhry responded: "CM sahab! Indeed electioneering is your own issue but hope you will appreciate extremism, be it in Pakistan or India, is a borderless phenomenon and dangerous for everyone be it Bangladesh, India or Pakistan so everyone with some conscience must be concerned... Situation in Pakistan is very far from ideal but individuals must strive for a better society wherever they are."

The exchange started when posting a picture of his family after exercising his franchise, the Delhi CM wrote: "I voted today

with my father, wife and children. My mother is very ill. She could not go. I voted against dictatorship, unemployment and inflation. You too must go and vote."

Within minutes, reacting to the exchange between the two politicians, BJP took a dig at the AAP chief. "Big news for Delhiites. Appeal to vote for Kejriwal made from Pakistan!" Delhi BJP posted on X.

In a press conference soon after, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said: "If the nation's enemy, Pakistan too has stepped up to support Kejriwal's corrupt politics, it proves what we have been saying since day one about his relations with banned and terrorist organisations from whom he accepts funds."

He added: "It proves that

these organisations have a significant role to play in funding his politics. If Pakistan is speaking in his favour... I want to ask: there have been five phases of election so far in the country, but there was no such statement. Today, when there is polling in Delhi, when it is Kejriwal's election, why is Pakistan interfering?"

BJP's attack comes in the backdrop of Home Minister Amit Shah's statement during a public rally in South Delhi on May 21.

"Kejriwal aur Rahul (Gandhi) baba do log aise hain jinko Bharat main koi samarthan nahi karta, unke samarthak Pakistan main zyada hain (Kejriwal and Rahul are two people who nobody supports in India; they have more supporters in Pakistan)," he had said.

BRIEFLY Selfie points, pink booths for voters' ease

New Delhi: The specially designed pink and model booths were a hit among the voters. A vibrant effort to enhance the voting experience, the polling stations featured model encouragement facilities, including pink sofas, spacious waiting areas with water fans, pitcher water, colourful rangoli, beautiful hanging decorations, selfie booths, carpets and wheelchairs to help the disabled. ENS

Fire at neonatal care unit, 11 infants rescued



Fire at the care centre. PTI

ARNABJIT SUR NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Eleven infants were rescued from a neonatal care centre in Shahdara's Vivek Vihar area, which caught fire on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, fire officials said. Atul Garg, Delhi Fire Services chief, said: "A fire call was received from a baby care centre at Block B of Vivek Vihar. A total of nine fire tenders were rushed to the spot."

On being informed, a rescue operation kicked off, said officials. Infants were being brought out by fire officials through the windows. Garg said 11 infants were rescued till 12.45 am on Sunday. The building where the fire took place is a three-storey structure.

'Got everything, now our turn to give back': Voices from an EWS high-rise in Capital

ANKITA UPADHYAY NEW DELHI, MAY 25

"JISKO SLIP mil gaya hai, wo aa jaye (Whoever has received the voter slip, hop on!)", announces an e-rickshaw driver hovering outside a high-rise that stands out amid various slum clusters - Navjivan Camp, Nehru Camp, Bhoomiheen Camp - in Kalkaji Extension. The high-rise houses 3,024 EWS flats inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2022 as part of "Jahaan Jhuggi Wahaan Makaan" scheme.

All through the day, around 25-30 e-rickshaws kept doing the rounds of the building, ferrying voters to the nearby Deepalaya School which served as a polling booth on the day. The e-rickshaws were arranged by BJP workers, said a local resident, adding the drivers, some with an orange



People cast their vote in Govindpuri on Saturday. Tashi Tobgyal

scarf wrapped around their neck, have been asked to bring "as many voters as they can".

One of these voters is 45-year-old Vijay Kumar Gupta, a tailor, who said that everyone in his locality is excited to vote. As for him, he was clear about the party he was going to vote for. "Modi ji got us these flats. We were living in slums till 2022 and

now we have our own home in a high-rise," said Gupta while sitting in the e-rickshaw.

Anita Devi, 38, said she got everything she wanted in the form of the house and that now it was her turn "to do something for this country". Hailing from West Bengal, Anita had been living in the slums till 2022. "We want development for our country and

nothing for ourselves," she said. To assist in polling, a large area inside the society was taken over by different political party volunteers assisting residents in finding their name in the voting list. However, many voters complained that due to a change in the address, it was difficult to find their names in the list.

Despite the e-rickshaws, 70-year-old Shakuntala Devi said she went out to vote on her own because "she did not want to take any help from anyone". Shakuntala lives on the 14th floor of the EWS society and complains about water and lift issues. "I have voted for change. We need a government who can think about 'gareeb janta'."

According to the residents of this society, around 1,800 families have occupied flats on the premises while the rest are still vacant.

Checking electoral roll, voters, sending data once EVMs sealed - A day with a polling agent

DAMINI NATH NEW DELHI, MAY 25

HIMANSHU, A resident of Jyoti Nagar West, had a copy of Form 17C for his polling booth in Northeast Delhi by 6.45 pm - less than an hour after polls closed in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections on Saturday. The form had the total number of votes recorded at the booth - 793 - a datapoint that has become a topic of controversy this election.

Over a month since polling in the Lok Sabha elections began, the Election Commission of India (ECI) on Saturday released absolute figures of voters for the first five phases, after only releasing the voter turnout percentages so far.

At the heart of the debate is Form 17C, which as per the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, is the account of votes recorded at a polling booth. While some in the Opposition and civil society have demanded that the ECI make the Form 17C data available on its website, the ECI has maintained the form can only be given to polling agents of candidates at voting booths, as per the rules.

At one polling location at Konark Public School in Northeast Delhi's Jyoti Nagar West that had three booths, three polling agents each of BJP candidate Manoj Tiwari and Congress's Kanhaiya Kumar were handed the Form 17Cs soon after the polling was complete.

As Himanshu, a polling agent of the Congress, exited the voting booth with the Form 17C, party workers were there to greet him and collect the document which would be deposited at the party office. As soon as he handed over the form, the analysis began. "It looks like the number of votes cast is less this time," pointed out a Congress worker.

Another added, "It is because of the heat".

Out of the 1,271 eligible electors in one of the booths, 793 had cast their vote. Overall, the three booths had a turnout of 61.80% - the agents and party workers discovered when they got the three Form 17Cs together.

When BJP agent, Anand, exited the polling station at 7.50 pm,



Polling agents at a voting booth in Konark Public School, Shahdara in East Delhi, on Saturday. Amit Mehra

his form was quickly collected by a party worker, who placed it in a saffron-coloured bag, which would be handed over to a mandal-level office-bearer.

"The polling agent is very important. They are residents of the area, they have gone through the electoral roll and identify the voters as they come in. They keep a note of how many voters have come in. Once the EVMs are sealed, the polling agents send the data to us, through the mandal and then district-level office-bearers. We take the notes and collate the data by the next afternoon," said Delhi BJP President Virender Sachdeva.

The ECI allows every candidate to have one polling agent, and up to two "relieving" agents, who can step in when needed. These agents are meant to observe the polling process, oversee the sealing of EVMs and VVPATs, and sign off on the Form 17Cs. The Form 17C, which is the "account of votes recorded", contains the name of the polling station, the ID number of the EVM used, total electors, total voters who enter, total voters deciding not to record vote, voters not allowed to vote, and total votes recorded per EVM. It is signed by polling agents present.

The second part of the form is filled on the counting day, with the details of votes counted.

At the polling station, the agents had taken their seats before the first voters streamed in at 7 am. Armed with copies of the electoral roll, they spent the day checking the names and photos of voters as the polling officials called their names - to

make sure only genuine electors cast their vote. After polls closed at 6 pm, they witnessed the EVMs being packed and sealed.

"We have to make sure there is no wrong voting, that the photo, name, and address match. After the election, we have the copy of the electoral roll with those who came to vote marked. For the next election, we can use this to encourage those who did not come to vote this time, to vote," Anand said.

Throughout the day, both parties' agents were passing updates on the number of male and female voters who had cast their votes every hour. With cell-phones not allowed inside, the authorised "relieving agents" took notes out to the party workers. "From seeing the number of male and female voters, and the total voters in Form 17C, we get an idea of what the result may be," a party worker said.

At the same time, a sector officer appointed by the ECI was updating the progressive number of the voters every two hours via a dedicated application. For the public, however, the ECI's Voter Turnout app shows the turnout in percentages.

When polls closed in the 1.14 lakh polling stations in 58 Lok Sabha constituencies across the country on Saturday, the ECI announced the tentative turnout of 59.06% at 7 pm. The ECI said that the final figures would be released by May 30, after collating and verifying the data. For polling agents at booths like Konark Public School, there was no uncertainty over the turnout - down to the last voter.

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Heat no bar, voters step out to cast vote

Many rue lack of facilities; few cite work commitment, weather to skip process

ANKITA UPADHYAY & VIDHEESHA KUNTAMALLA
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

IT'S ALMOST an hour past noon. In Bijwasan, where a banquet hall has been converted into a polling booth, a policeman at the entrance gate is drenched in sweat as he checks the voters, ensuring no one carries their mobile phone inside. Moving further inside, the scene is no different.

"It is very hot," exclaimed a booth-level officer, as he downs a glass of water. "We are sitting here in this unbearable heat. And it doesn't concern anybody. We are spending our own money to buy water... I hope we don't get a heat stroke sitting here," the officer, part of a six-member team, said.

As temperature continued its high run in the Capital — Safdarjung observatory recorded a maximum of 43.4 degrees Celsius — voters, election officials and security personnel had a tough time going about their business Saturday.

One such voter was Sangeeta Singh, a 53-year-old homemaker. "It's very hot outside but I had to utilise my right to vote. I will sit right in front of a cooler as soon as I get home," she said.

A few kilometres away, at an MCD boys' school, businessman Vivek, 35, was the only member of his family to have turned up to vote. "No one was ready to step out in this heat," said Vivek, a *garmchha* around his neck.

Around 27 km away, at a school in Kalkaji Extension, Beena Devi, 41, complained of the absence of drinking water or fan on

the premises. "Everyone is sweating," she said.

For some voters, it was unbearable to stand in a queue and wait for their turn. "We will return later in the day when it isn't so hot," said a voter.

Santosh Kumari, 48, from Northeast Delhi gave the polling process a miss, thanks to the heat. "Why should we step out to vote for candidates who cannot even ensure proper water facility near the polling booths?" she asked.

For Aiswarya, 24, from Dwarka, her work hours were also a deterrent. "I have night shifts, so I sleep during the day... Also, it was very hot outside..."

Another Dwarka resident, who did not wish to be named, said, "I do not feel like voting for any specific party as I don't believe anyone could make a change."

On the other hand, in Mehrauli, Poonam Devi (45) was seen waiting patiently for her husband Shri Ram Singh to get her a wheelchair. She has cerebral palsy, Singh told *The Indian Express*. Despite her condition, she never misses a chance to vote and this time was no different, said Singh, who works at a car showroom in Adchini.

Another Mehrauli resident, Bholi Devi (97) ensured her grandson took her to the polling booth. "She has been after me since morning," said her grandson Amit Khattar, a businessman. As she stands with the help of her walking stick, Devi said she was not worried because of the weather.

"This was my duty. I can bear the heat," she said. (With inputs from Gayathri Mani and Saman Husain)



DELHI'S 1.52 CRORE RESIDENTS EXERCISE THEIR FRANCHISE

How 'broom-in-hand' camaraderie played out

'Hand' wields AAP's 'broom' in Delhi's VIP enclave while 'broom' deftly navigates into Congress's 'hand' at Civil Lines

JATIN ANAND & ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

WHEN SONIA and Rahul Gandhi stepped into the Nirman Bhawan polling booth at 9.36 am Saturday, it was already history in the making. For the first time, the New Delhi Lok Sabha constituency didn't have a Congress candidate, and the party's 'hand' symbol wasn't on the EVM display board. The AAP's 'broom' was among the symbols displayed. 12 km away — and an hour and a half later — CM Arvind Kejriwal entered the Under Hill Road polling booth in Chandni Chowk constituency. AAP's 'broom' was not there but it was the Congress's 'hand'.

In fact, Rahul Gandhi had already spoken about this "interesting" coincidence. "Kejriwal will press the Congress button and I will press the AAP's...", he had said at a rally last Saturday, asking supporters of both INDIA bloc partners to unite.

At 7.25 am, an AAP worker was setting up two desks outside the polling booth on Maulana Azad Road. "Others (workers) are just about to arrive," he said. The booth worker wasn't attired in customary AAP colours. BJP had also set up two desks across the road and voters, stepping out of their cars, were already assembled around the four BJP booth workers.

At 8 am, the turnout was sluggish before picking up slightly as residents of the Capital's VIP enclave — families, first-timers, and government servants — began trickling into the polling station to join the Gandhis when it came to choosing between the BJP and the first political alliance of its kind in the city.

Adesh Kumar, a resident of the Akbar Road staff quarters who said he had been voting at the same polling booth since 1992, described the local voters in the VIP enclave as "silent", questioning, however, the need for "any political alliance".

"What message does this send out? That the Congress is not even strong enough to put up its candidate?... I don't think there was any



Anil Sharma

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi after voting. (left) CM Arvind Kejriwal and his family



need for an alliance in Delhi. I feel this will still end up splitting the vote," he said.

Parvesh Devi, another voter, also questioned the need for an alliance. Her husband, Ashok Kumar, said he had voted in half a dozen elections but this was the first time he had seen two parties come together against one in the city. "... They have

come together for convenience; this only proves they are willing to go to any extent to win, nothing else," he said.

While K K Jha said whether or not there was an alliance "did not matter" since his vote was "for development". His daughter Madhu Kumari, a first-time voter, termed the alliance "just political" and said it did not im-

portant her first vote.

There were, however, "staunch supporters" of both parties as well who stepped out to exercise their franchise. "I can't say whether or not it will make a difference or who will win the election, but I support the alliance because it seems like the right thing to do," said Shiv Charan. Meanwhile, amid an en-

gone on holiday or shifted residence from the (staff) quarters."

Asked about the response that they had witnessed since they had set up their desk, one of them said it had been "good" and that their candidate, AAP's Malviya Nagar MLA Somnath Bharti, had a "good chance of winning" even if this happened with a "small margin." Bharti is up against BJP's Bansuri Swara.

The scene outside the Under Hill booth is similar yet different. There is no AAP candidate in the Chandni Chowk constituency. The party is supporting Congress candidate J P Agarwal, who is up against BJP's Praveen Khandelwal.

A little after 11 am, two black cars stop at the entrance. AAP convener Kejriwal arrived at the booth, accompanied by his wife Sunita and two children. His father, Gobind Ram Kejriwal, was also with him. His mother, Geeta Devi, Kejriwal, later said, was unwell and couldn't vote.

"I have voted against dictatorship, against inflation, against unemployment. I would like to appeal to voters... it is very hot, but you should definitely vote and exercise your right," he said as he stepped out of the booth.

For some who voted at the Civil Lines booth a little before or after Kejriwal, the absence of the broom on the EVM was not something they gave much thought to. "It anyway used to be just the Congress and the BJP in Delhi earlier, and the AAP came in later," said Sunil Passi, 54, a resident of Colony number 33 on Under Hill Road.

Anil, 32, an Under Hill Road resident who has a job in a private company, said: "In the juggles and colonies like ours, some Congress voters would have switched to AAP... now that they are together, the BJP stands to lose at least to some extent."

For Shamsher Ali, 48, a driver, who waited at the booth while Kejriwal voted, Agarwal's candidature from Chandni Chowk, of which the booth is a part, was important. "Purane netra hain... we have seen him around for a long while. Why should the alliance lead to any confusion over who to vote for?"

tourage of escort vehicles and security personnel, Rahul and his mother arrived at Nirman Bhawan, walked briskly inside to cast their vote, emerging minutes later and taking their leave.

Outside, the INDIA desk had relocated to Janpath Road alongside the BJP's. White 'meta topis' on their heads, these were blank, bereft of the 'broom', 'hand' or INDIA symbols.

"We had tried to stop Sonia ji here so we could welcome her and Rahul ji with a bouquet (of flowers) but they left," complained a member manning the INDIA desk. "It would have sent a good message for the alliance had they stopped by," he added.

As the noonday sun ascended above, a scooter stopped by the INDIA desk, asking how it was going. "Chal raha hai; public hai hi nahin. Sab ya to chhutti pe chale gaye ya shift ho gaye quarter se (It's alright; there just aren't enough people. They have either

What do first-time voters want?

A doctor, a government job aspirant, a high-school graduate. UPASIKA SINGHAL, NIRBHAY THAKUR & VIDHEESHA KUNTAMALLA spoke to 8 first-time voters about what they voted for:



"This area has suffered a lot. There are many issues with the water supply - we get it every alternate day. The roads are broken and remade over and over again, I

don't know why. I want the government to focus on things that actually matter such as development and not get into matters that provoke people like Hindu-Muslim differences."

NEELAM (25),
A GOVERNMENT JOB ASPIRANT FROM BUDH VIHAR



"I want my vote to bring change. We do not want the country to be divided based on religion which we have been seeing for the last 10 years."

SAAD (18),
A HIGH-SCHOOL GRADUATE FROM SHAHEEN BAGH

"My family and I came to vote because we want a new government and some improvement in the

education sector. I was never interested in politics before but while preparing for medical colleges, I was so upset because of the paper leaks and the general system that I decided to vote for a different government and a better education system."

HAMID KHAN, (23),
A NEET ASPIRANT FROM SHAHEEN BAGH



"We don't want to leave our country. We want to better contribute towards building our economy, for which we want better job opportunities."

RIDDHI MITTAL AND SIDDHI (18),
HIGH-SCHOOL GRADUATES



"I want better education opportunities and quality education to be available to all."

PRACHI SHARMA (18),
A HIGH-SCHOOL GRADUATE



"Since first-time voters aren't politically aware, they often get completely influenced by their family members. It's important to be politically aware to make your own choice."

SWASTIKA (21),
PURSUING HER BSC IN PHYSICS FROM VENKATESHWARA COLLEGE

"I wanted my opinion to matter."

ISHITA (26),
A DOCTOR FROM GURGAON

"I have friends who are Muslims and there are parties that are talking about women's mangalsutras being snatched. This affects them deeply and I am voting against that."

ASHISH KUMAR (18),
A HIGH-SCHOOL GRADUATE FROM TIMARPUR

2.52 LAKH young voters in Delhi (aged 18-19 yrs)

At many polling booths, the first-time voters were also awarded certificates.

Names missing from booths, several head back disappointed

SAMAN HUSAIN
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

ON POLLING day, several people were out of Delhi for two reasons — the heat and the summer holidays. Others in the city went to exercise their franchise — and many returned home without an inked finger as their names were missing from the voter list.

JNU professor Ayesha Kidwai was among those unable to vote. "I have voted at the same booth for the last 30 years. My husband and I went to the booth-level office for voters' slip but it showed my name had been deleted, though my husband's name was still there... Why was I not informed of this?" she questioned.

Delhi Panchayat Union Chief, Than Singh Yadav said, "I live in Nanjloi Saidan village. People who have been casting their votes for years have either had their votes cancelled, transferred or declared to be absent — I had a first-hand experience of this today, so did many others in my village." Hari Prakash Yadav, 69, from Madipur Pocket 2, said he found his name deleted after he reached his polling booth at 12 pm. "... my daughter reached the booth at 3 pm and she was told her name

was deleted," he said.

Meanwhile, the mother of women's rights advocate Vrinda Grover said her name was missing from the voting list. "Today is voting day, I am almost 89... this might be my last chance to vote... I had not received any number slip and was told I would get it at the polling center at DAV school. It is a 5-minute walk from my house for a normal person who can walk, I cannot," Pushpa Grover said.

She said despite making multiple attempts to rectify the issue, she was repeatedly told her name was not on the list. Vrinda Grover, also a member of Ukraine Commission of Inquiry, said she plans to file a lawsuit.

Meanwhile, some voters also complained about barricading at polling booths.

East Delhi AAP candidate Kuldeep Kumar also posted a video on X and alleged the Delhi Police was "stopping" people from voting by barricading the middle of the road in Khajuri road, Joga Bai Extension. Ansenior police officer looking after arrangements said, "We are not checking anyone physically and barricading is part of protocol... everywhere, barricading was outside polling centres at a distance of 100m-200m... We are just checking their phones and voter IDs."

GROUND REPORT FROM DEMOLISHED SITES

'Ummeed hai ki kuchh hoga...': Homes razed last yr, people travel back miles to vote

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

FROM NORTHEAST Delhi's Bhajanpura to Sunder Nagar near Mathura Road, 31-year-old Salman travelled over 17 kilometres on Friday, spent the night in the rubble of his now-demolished home, and headed to vote on Saturday morning.

At the polling booth at Delhi Public School (DPS) Mathura Road, Salman and several other former residents of the area travelled a long way to cast their vote for the Lok Sabha polls.

Salman, a driver by profession, said that the DPS Mathura

Road polling booth is the closest to his previous house, which was among the nearly 300 structures demolished by the Land and Development Office, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, on November 21 last year, in an "anti-encroachment drive".

"Ummeed hai ki kuchh hoga... We had even stayed here for a few days after the demolition, and then moved to a rented house in Bhajanpura. We still have family in that area," said Salman.

"The hope is that a different government might help us with the rehabilitation," said 23-year-old Md Moinuddin, a college student, who lived with his parents at their now-demolished house

till a month ago. The rubble is yet to be cleared from the area.

The demolition followed a Delhi High Court order, which held that the slum cluster did not exist before January 1, 2006, and was, therefore, not protected under the existing rules. The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) were ordered to provide the machinery for the exercise. The demolition was part of other similar drives across Delhi including in Trilokpuri, Khajoori Khas, Narela, Aya Nagar, Green Park and Sadar Bazar.

Moinuddin, who came all the way from his new residence in



Residents from the Nizamuddin area whose homes were demolished seven months ago. Tashi Tobgyal

Sarai Kale Khan to DPS Mathura Road to vote on Saturday, said

that his family moved to the rented accommodation only

when the heat got so unbearable that they could not live outdoors any longer. "The BJP government at the Centre has made people living in jhuggis a vote bank... but they don't actually do anything for us. Houses have been razed in so many parts of Delhi, but no one has received any relief yet," Moinuddin added.

Farida Begum and her husband Mohammad Shauqat, who came from Ashram to vote, said: "We absolutely had to come to vote... this is a vote for change," said 38-year-old Farida. Her husband is an e-rickshaw driver, and they have three children.

Like other children who lived in this area before the demoli-

tion, Farida's son, too, is a Class 11 student of the DPS on Mathura Road. They had taken admission in the school under the EWS (economically weaker section) category.

"... we hope that there will be some change if the government changes. We had our own house here. Now that it's been demolished, we live on rent," Farida added.

Sharing how the area feels like home, Salman also said that the Saturday visit to DPS Mathura Road was one of many that the former residents had made to the area over the past few months. "We broke our fast (during Ramadan this year) here

together. Sometimes, we come and sit here in the evening... we don't want to give up our land," said Salman, who travelled to Sunder Nagar along with his wife, son, and brother's family on Friday. The family would return to Bhajanpura on Saturday evening, he added.

A few of the family's belongings, including furniture and utensils, still lay at the site of the demolition — like that of many others. The Sunder Nagar area is located in the East Delhi parliamentary constituency, from where AAP's Kuldeep Kumar and BJP's Harsh Malhotra are contesting the Lok Sabha elections this year.

Odisha: Polling interrupted after BJP candidate 'vandalises' EVM

SUJIT BISOI
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 25

POLICE IN Odisha detained BJP's Khurda MLA candidate Prasanta Jagadev for allegedly vandalising an EVM, which affected polling during the sixth phase on Saturday.

Jagadev, along with some of his supporters, had gone to a polling booth at Kuanripatna in Begunia assembly constituency while polling was underway in the afternoon. He had an argument with polling officials, following which he allegedly vandalised the EVM and left. He was chased by the police and his vehicle, in which BJP's Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha candidate Aparajita Sarangi was also present, was intercepted. Jagadev has been detained at Begunia police station. The BJP candidate, however, denied the allegations against him and sat on dharna inside the police station. He claimed the EVM got damaged after it accidentally fell on the ground.

Chief electoral officer Nikunj Bihari Dhal said an investigation will be conducted. "The control unit of EVM was damaged...we have changed it. Voting is continuing in the booth," said Dhal.

In Nuh riot epicentre, villagers vote 'to make LS listen to them'

AISWARYA RAJ
NUH, MAY 25

ASINGLE-STOREY brick structure is the only government building in this village. It is booth number 90 for the 725 voters registered here. Nalhar, this sparsely populated hamlet was the epicentre of the communal riot in Nuh last August. And on Saturday when villagers gathered here, they wanted to vote to make the Lok Sabha listen to the problems of one of the most backward districts in the country.

The village was up before 7 am, a mix of voters — first-timers, a woman who was carried inside after having gone through an abdominal surgery, and professors from the medical college nearby — queued up. At 7 pm on Saturday, Nuh district polled 63 per cent while the Nuh assembly segment polled the second highest at 64.7 per cent.

When 20-year-old Mohammad Nazim was queuing up to cast his vote for the first time, his daily commute to a private college in Gurgaon, where his family has to pitch in a tuition fee of Rs 2 lakh a year, was the crease on his forehead. "Rao Inderjit has been the MP for close to two decades. There are a few colleges and no university in the district. I don't support the



Voters at a polling station in Firozpur Jhirka in Haryana's Nuh on Saturday. Gajendra Yadav

Congress either," said Nazim. In the alley where the road ends in Nalhar, Mohammad Asif sits on a charpoy at his brick house, which he has yet to get doors or a coat of paint. He has an auto-rickshaw and earns Rs 20,000 in a month. His house was torn down by three bulldozers for allegedly encroaching into forest land in the wake of riots last year that left six dead. "We got support from private organisations and built a house on a small piece of land," he said.

Nuh district has always been a Congress bastion with all its three MLAs being from the party. The BJP's Rao Inderjit Singh faces off against the Congress's Raj Babbar in the constituency.

In the urban part of the district, Megha Thakur, a housewife in Nuh, wants a "government

like the one in Delhi". "My son is at a government school in Delhi and he gets all the incentives he needs. They have free water supply and electricity connection while we have an open drain at our doorstep and no water most days. I will send all my children to my mother's house in Delhi to schools. Schooling in Nuh doesn't get you anywhere," she said.

In the 2023 board exam, Nuh district, which has consistently struggled on education indicators, fared the worst in Haryana with a pass percentage of 51%.

At nearby Firozpur Jhirka, Rahul said he wanted to boycott polls, but Rahul Gandhi's promise to revoke the Agniveer scheme gave him hope. The 18-year-old discontinued his studies and took up a job in Alwar, 70 km away, which pays him Rs 8,000.

RED ALERT IN MANY BENGAL DISTRICTS

Cyclone Remal: Flight ops suspended at Kolkata airport

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, MAY 25

A DEEP depression over the Bay of Bengal intensified into a cyclonic storm, named Remal, on Saturday evening and is likely to turn severe before making landfall between the coasts of West Bengal and Bangladesh on Sunday (May 26) midnight, the IMD said Saturday.

Cyclone Remal, which has developed in the Bay of Bengal, is expected to make landfall between Sagar islands in West Bengal and Khepupara in Bangladesh, the department said.

In view of Cyclone Remal's impact on the coastal region of West Bengal, including Kolkata, flight operations will remain suspended from "1200 IST on 26.05.2024 to 0900 IST on 27.05.2024 due to forecast of heavy winds and heavy to very heavy rainfall at Kolkata," Kolkata airport authorities said Saturday.

North and South 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur, Howrah, Hooghly districts in West Bengal have been placed under red alert, as the storm gets

closer Sunday. Extremely heavy rainfall (over 204mm in 24 hours) with gusty winds over these districts. The Met department has warned of heavy rain and gusty winds over north Odisha and Bengal till the early hours of Monday.

"Cyclone Remal is likely to continue to move northwards. It will intensify into a 'severe' cyclone by Sunday morning and move over northwest and adjoining northeast Bay of Bengal. It is expected to cross Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal coasts between Sagar Island and Khepupara by Sunday midnight as a severe cyclonic storm. The expected wind speed is 110 to 120 km/hr gusting to 135 kmph," the IMD said on Saturday.

In Odisha, Mayurbhaj, Bhubaneswar, Kendraparha, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Khorda and Puri districts are likely to receive heavy rainfall (64-104 mm in 24 hours) Sunday. The Tripura government has also issued an alert across all 8 districts following the IMD's warning of heavy to very heavy rainfall, gusty winds, and thunderstorms over next 48 hours.

First heatwave alert in Assam in yrs, Guwahati sizzles at 40.1° Celsius

SUKRITA BARUAH
GUWAHATI, MAY 25

THE IMD on Saturday issued its first heatwave warning for Assam in recent years. The northeast is sweltering under extreme heat conditions and experiencing the country's most severe departure from normal temperatures.

On Saturday, Guwahati recorded the highest maximum temperature in May since 1960 at 40.1° Celsius — a departure of 8 degrees from the normal temperature. On May 1 1960, the city had experienced a maximum temperature of 40.3° C, the highest recorded temperature here, said a scientist at the Regional Met Centre (RMC), Guwahati.

Not just Guwahati, all 18 Met stations — except Imphal — in the region experienced maximum temperatures more than 3 de-

grees above the normal on Saturday. Nine of these stations — across Assam, Arunachal and Meghalaya — experienced maximum temperatures more than 7 degrees above normal. In Pasighat in Arunachal, which recorded 39.4° C, it was a drastic 9.4° C higher than normal.

"On May 24, some stations such as Silchar, Guwahati and Lumding clocked maximum temperatures closed to and above 40° C and we were expecting the same trend to continue today as well, which is why we issued a heatwave warning, especially for the plain areas of the state — in the Brahmaputra Valley and the Barak Valley. This is the first time we have done it in recent memory..." said a scientist at RMC.

The heat conditions are predicted to end Sunday with Cyclone Remal expected to make landfall in West Bengal.

Clashes, protests mar voting in Bengal's 8 seats

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
KOLKATA, MAY 25

CLASHES BETWEEN party cadres, protests against nominees and a BJP candidate getting injured after allegedly being attacked by villagers in Jhargram — polling in eight constituencies of West Bengal during the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections was marred by multiple incidents of violence on Saturday.

According to officials, around 78% voter turnout was recorded till 5pm in the eight seats. "About 77.99% average polling has been recorded till 5 pm. Polling has been peaceful with one or two incidents of violence being reported from some constituencies," said a senior EC official.

At 81.47%, Bishnupur recorded the highest polling percentage, followed by Tamluk (79.79%), Jhargram (79.68%), Ghatal (78.92%), Medinipur (77.57%), Bankura (76.79%), Kanthi (75.66%) and Purulia (74.09%).

Till 4 pm, the election office in West Bengal had received 1,985 complaints, an official said.

In Jhargram's Garbeta, BJP nominee Pranat Tudu was injured after he was allegedly chased away by a group of villagers. A security personnel who was part of Tudu's security detail was also injured when stones and bricks were pelted at them. One of the vehicles in the BJP leader's convoy was also damaged.

Talking to media persons after the incident, Tudu accused the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) of "instigating people". "The TMC instigated the people to attack my vehicle. I had gone (to Garbeta) after receiving reports of some irregularities (during polling). I was chased away by the villagers. Stones were hurled at us. I have been injured. One of my security personnel is bleeding from his head. I will take this up with the Election Commission of India (ECI)," said Tudu.

Denying the charge, the TMC alleged Tudu and his security personnel had beaten up a woman voter in one of the polling booths in Garbeta.

As BJP MLA resists arrest, Siddaramaiah says law is 'for all'

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BANGALORE, MAY 25

KARNATAKA CHIEF Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday questioned whether BJP MLA from Belthangady Harish Poonja could be allowed to go free in a non-bailable offence registered against him for threatening police officers. The BJP MLA has been resisting arrest by the Dakshina Kannada police for several days with the support of BJP workers.

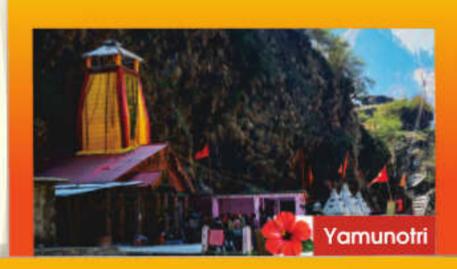
"An FIR has been registered under Section 353 of IPC in connection with a case of intimidation of the police by MLA Harish Poonja. It is a non-bailable offence. Should he be allowed to go scot-free because he is an MLA or should he be brought to book?" the CM said at the Mangalore International Airport on Saturday.

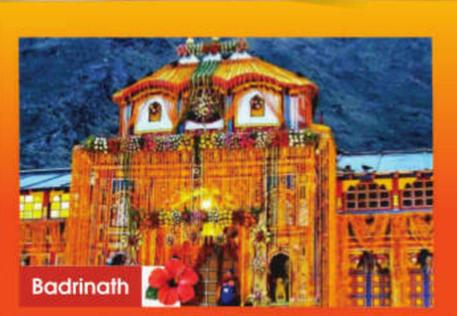
"The law is the same for everyone," Siddaramaiah said. "According to Section 353, the punishment is seven years of imprisonment. Should the allegations against Harish Poonja be denied just because he is an MLA," the CM said.

Two FIRs have been registered in four days against the BJP MLA for "abusing police officers". His residence at Gardadi in Belthangady taluk, Dakshina Kannada district, witnessed high drama on Wednesday after BJP workers had an altercation with police officers who arrived in an apparent bid to arrest the legislator.

The first case against the MLA was registered on May 18, after he barged into a police station demanding the release of one Shashiraj, president of the Belthangady taluk BJP Yuva Morcha Unit, accused of illegal quarrying. The second case was registered on Tuesday, after a protest was organised in front of the taluk office against the FIR registered against the MLA. In the protest, the MLA had hurled abuses at the local police officers and tehsildar, while ridiculing the SP, CB Ryshyanth.

Defending his actions which led to the first FIR, the MLA said at the protest, "In the future too, if they touch BJP karyakartas from Belthangady, I am ready to pull them (police) by their collars."

Devbhoomi Uttarakhand

A heartiest welcome and greetings to all the visiting devotees of Chardham Yatra

Appeal

- Pilgrims coming to Char Dham are requested to do mandatory registration online.
- Permission for Chardham Yatra will not be given without registration.
- After registration, visit to the Dham will be allowed only on the day mentioned in registration
- Offline registration of Char Dham Yatra has been closed till May 31, 2024. Only online registration is being done.
- Do not use single use plastic during yatra.

Means of registration

registrationandtouristcare.uk.gov.in | +91-8394833833 (Type 'yatra' on WhatsApp)

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BISHKEK MOB VIOLENCE

Indian students stay in hostels, join online classes

VIDHEESHA KUNTAMALLA NEW DELHI, MAY 25 A MEDICAL student from Andhra Pradesh moved to Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek six years ago, dreaming of the day she would complete her MBBS course and send a graduation photo to her family. Till a fortnight ago, that dream seemed closer to reality. But now, after mob violence targeting foreign students erupted in the city, her academic future looks uncertain.



At one of the hostels where the locals had scaled walls and broken in, as alleged by some Indian students.

The Indian Express interviewed several Indian students pursuing MBBS degree courses in the Kyrgyzstan capital. There was one common answer to what triggered the turn of events

in the city, indiscriminately. About 17,000 students from India are reportedly studying in Kyrgyzstan. The Indian government on May 18 asked its students in Bishkek to stay indoors. A 24-year-old Indian student, who is currently in MBBS final year at Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University, said in the early hours of May 18, he saw around five people dressed in hoodies, faces covered with masks, breaking the main door of his hostel, which was about 30 minutes away from his university.

PUNE PORSCHE CRASH

Grandfather of boy held, 'tried to force' driver to take blame

CHANDAN HAYGUNDE PUNE, MAY 25 PUNE POLICE Saturday arrested the grandfather of the teenager who allegedly knocked down and killed two people with a Porsche car, saying the 77-year-old tried to pin the blame for the May 19 incident on a driver employed by the family.

The man, a top realtor in the city, was arrested on charges including kidnapping and wrongful confinement following the driver's complaint. A court remanded him in police custody till May 28.

Pune City Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar said the driver was told he would be rewarded if he took the blame for the incident and was threatened with dire consequences if he did not comply.

Police filed an FIR in this case at the Yerawada police station early in the early hours of Saturday under IPC Sections 342 (wrongful confinement), 365 (kidnapping), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 34 (common intention).

As per the FIR, the 42-year-old complainant said he was returning home from the police station on the intervening night of May 19 and May 20 when the 17-year-old boy's grandfather forcibly took him to the family's bungalow.

The minor boy's grandfather and father then took away the driver's mobile phone and confined him in the bungalow, the FIR stated. Both allegedly told the driver to take the blame.

The minor's father, who is in judicial custody, has also been booked in this case. The teenager is in an observation home.

"He (driver) was taken to the accused's home... his cell phone was taken away and he was confined to the house. He was asked not to speak to anyone or go anywhere. He was pressured to give the police a statement as per the family's wish," Kumar said, adding that the driver was promised rewards "as per his wish" if he took the blame.

"When the driver failed to reach home, his wife reached the residence of the accused on Monday, created a ruckus and took him away with her. The driver was brought to the Crime Branch Thursday and his claims were corroborated," Kumar said.

When police produced the grandfather before judicial mag-

UTTARAKHAND BUILDER'S DEATH

Gupta brothers sent to 14-day judicial custody

DEHRADUN. He was rushed to a nearby hospital by his son, where he was pronounced brought dead by the doctors.

According to a statement issued by the Dehradun police, a written complaint was lodged by Sahni's son Ranveer Singh at Rajpur police station. The police said, a "suicide note" was found in which Sahni wrote that Ajay Kumar Gupta and Anil Kumar Gupta had "intimidated, threatened and blackmailed him".

Also, his son said Sahni had earlier lodged a police complaint, which was being investigated by the City Superintendent of Police.

In the suicide note, addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, Sahni accused the Gupta brothers of coercion and interfering in his projects, said the police.

Based on the complaint and the suicide note, an FIR under Section 306 (abetment to suicide) was registered against Anil Kumar Gupta and Ajay Kumar Gupta at Rajpur police station.

Jayalalitha true Dravidian: Sasikala slams Annamalai over 'Hindutva leader' remark

ARUN JANARDHANAN CHENNAI, MAY 25

A RECENT statement by Tamil Nadu BJP leader K Annamalai that the late AIADMK supremo J Jayalalitha was a "far superior Hindutva leader" has drawn sharp rebukes from her close aide V K Sasikala and AIADMK leader D Jayakumar. Both have condemned Annamalai's remarks as a gross misrepresentation of the late CM's secular and inclusive legacy.

In a recent interview, Annamalai said, "When Jayalalitha was alive, she was the far superior leader of Hindutva than anybody in Tamil Nadu."

"When you consider BJP as a party, and Jayalalitha as a leader, and when both of them co-exist, the natural choice of a Hindu voter would be Jayalalitha — I am talking about a period before 2014. She used to display her 'Hinduness' openly. She may be the first politician in our country, outside BJP, to say that 'if you don't build Ram temple in India, are you going to build it in Pakistan?' A lady who brought anti-conversion law in the 2002-

03 period, who donated liberally to temples, contested from Srirangam, who took efforts to revive the temple in a big way, getting elephants to major temples. If you look at her activity as a persona, she was a far superior Hindutva leader," Annamalai said in a video he posted on social media.

The remark immediately drew criticism from Sasikala, the close aide of Jayalalitha who lived with her for about 25 years and actively participated in all major political decisions taken by the AIADMK leader. Sasikala said Jayalalitha was an "unparalleled Dravidian leader of Tamil Nadu soil... a revolutionary leader, Amma!" She said Annamalai's statement reveals his ignorance and misunderstanding about Jayalalitha.

"Amma (as Jayalalitha was called by her followers) had faith in God, but she never had religious beliefs. She was the only unparalleled leader who treated everyone equally throughout her life... I would like to state at this moment that no one can confine such a distinguished leader to any narrow bounds," Sasikala said.

"Amma transcended caste, re-

ligion, and divisions, and was revered and admired by people from all walks of life throughout her life. Amma always said, 'I am for the people, because of the people', and dedicated her entire life to the welfare of the people of Tamil Nadu. Following the paths of C N Annadurai (follower of Periyar, founder of DMK and a former CM) and revolutionary Leader MGR (matinee idol, AIADMK founder and a former CM), she lived as a true Dravidian leader until her last breath," she said.

Reminding that her policies and decisions continue to benefit the people of Tamil Nadu even today, Sasikala said it was Jayalalitha who brought in the 69% reservation law for the advancement of the backward communities, adding it to the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, earning her the title of "warrior of social justice".

AIADMK leader D Jayakumar also criticised Annamalai "for defaming Amma by portraying her as a sectarian leader".

Asserting that Jayalalitha was a leader who transcended caste and religious differences and functioned as a leader for all, Jayakumar said she "treated all religions equally".

ENGINEERING WORKS IN TINSUKIA DIVISION

Tender Notice No. : TSK/Engg/25 of 2024, Dated: 22-05-2024. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: Item No. 1: Brief Description of Item: Merging of L-ring gate (FM 55 & FM 54), (FM 65, FM 67 & FM 68) by elimination of FM 55, FM 65 and FM 68 respectively.

CONSTRUCTION OF OHE/PSI DEPOT

E-TENDER NO. RE-NJP-TENDER-ENG-NT-294. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Name of work: At Molvorn: - Construction of OHE/PSI Depot, 8 Wheeler TWS, Linking of Track at TWS site with other ancillary works and TSS building including development of the site by earth filling, construction of RCC retaining wall, approach road to TSS site etc. with other ancillary works in connection with the Railway Electrification works in Dimapur-Kohima section (New Line Project) in Lumding Division of N. F. Railway.

WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY

Open Tenders, Engineering Department Corrigendum dated 20.05.2024 E-tender on behalf of the President of India acting through Sr. Divisional Engineer (Co-ordination), Divisional Railway Manager (Works), West Central Railway, Jabalpur for the following works- NIT No.: DRMW-JBP-84-2024 Dated: 07/05/2024. Name of work with location: Supplying, stacking and loading of 65mm machine crushed hard and durable track stone ballast as per Rly's specification for track ballast IS/RDSO-GE/0001:2023 including all lead, lift taxes, royalties, duties etc. at Khanna Banjari depot under Assistant Divisional Engineer (Maintenance) Kaini Sub division., Earlier published Last date & time for submission of tender (Up to 15.00 hrs on): 31.05.2024, New date & time for submission of tender (Up to 15.00 Hrs.): 14.06.2024, NIT No.: DRMW-JBP-84-2024 Dated: 08/05/2024, Name of work with location: Supplying, stacking and loading of 65mm machine crushed hard and durable track stone ballast as per Rly's specification for track ballast IS/RDSO-GE/0001:2023 including all lead, lift taxes, royalties, duties etc. at Damoh depot under Assistant Divisional Engineer, Damoh sub division., Earlier published Last date & time for submission of tender (Up to 15.00 Hrs.): 14.06.2024.

Metro Railway, Kolkata

Tender Notice for e-tendering is invited by Principal Chief Engineer, Metro Railway, Kolkata for and on behalf of President of India for the following work : Name of work : "Through Rail Renewal on UP & DN Line from Km 7/14 to 25/11 in between Station Central (Ex) to Kavi Subhas (In) under AEN/South." Approx Cost of Work : ₹ 5,92,60,034.30. Earnest Money : ₹ 4,46,300/-. Completion Period: Twelve (12) Months. Date and Time of Closing : 18.06.2024 at 12.00 Hrs. The Tender Document and other details can be obtained from the website www.ireps.gov.in Amendments/Corrigendum, if any, would be uploaded only on the website.

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER IRRIGATION DIVISION NO-1 BARHAIT, SAHIBGANJ

Corrigendum PR NO-325008 Tender Reference no-WRD/IRR/Barhait F2-01/2024-25 Dated-20/05/2024

अपरिहार्य कारणों से निविदा विपत्र वेबसाइट पर प्रकाशन की तिथि-25/05/2024 एवं परिमाण विपत्र डाउनलोड करने की तिथि -27/05/2024 के स्थान पर उक्त दोनो तिथि को 28/05/2024 11.AM पढ़ा जाय। बाँकी नियम एवं शर्तें यथावत् रहेंगे।

U.P. RAJYA VIDYUT UTPADAN NIGAM LTD. Anpara Thermal power project

E-Tender Notice 1. E-Tender Notice: T-89/PD-II/ABTPS/ANP/CF-144/2024-25, Online e-Bids are invited for the "Supply of Burner Tilting Mechanism Spares of boiler for 2x500MW, BTPS, Anpara."

"E-Tender Has been uploaded on 23.05.2024 on http://etender.up.nic.in, Estimated cost: Rs. 80,800.00 only, E.M.D cost: Rs. 1000.00, Last date of Tender: 06.06.2024 at 16:00 Hrs.

2. Short Term E-Tender Notice: 104/PD-II/ABTPS/CF-287/2024-25, Online e-Bids are invited for "Supply of Miscellaneous Items for BTPS, Anpara." "E-Tender Has been uploaded on 14.05.2024 on http://etender.up.nic.in, Estimated cost: Rs. 7,05,240.00 only, E.M.D cost: Rs. 7,000.00, Last date of Tender: 28.05.2024 at 11:00 Hrs.

3. E-Tender Notice: 105/PD-II/ABTPS/CF-370/2024-25, Online e-Bids are invited for "Supply, Installation and commissioning of Metallic Expansion bellow for Ball Mills of 2X500 MW, BTPS, Anpara "E-Tender Has been uploaded on 14.05.2024 on http://etender.up.nic.in, Estimated cost: Rs. 29,86,400.00 only, E.M.D cost: Rs. 30,000.00, Last date of Tender: 06.06.2024 at 11:00 Hrs.

Total quantity of work/supply, Tender specification and other term & condition is as per tender document available on the E-tender portal. Concerned Officer reserves the right to cancel the e-bids without assigning any reason. Corrigendum, Addendum, Extension if any shall be uploaded only on the above website. Bidders are advised to visit the website regularly for updated information from time to time.

पत्रांक : 2510 / मुआमिल (स्तर-1) / अडतापो / कला अनु 0 दिनांक 25.05.2024 "Save Electricity for Nation"

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY STORES DEPARTMENT E-AUCTION PROGRAMME

Online auction sale through www.ireps.gov.in for disposal of scrap Ferrous, Non-Ferrous Scrap comprising of Rails on line, other P. Way Scrap, M.S. Sheet, Axles, Machines and condemned wagons/coaches will be held as per schedule programme given below:

Table with columns: Depot/Division, Almer Depot, Almer Division, Jodhpur Depot, Jodhpur Division, BKN Depot, Jaipur Division, June 2024, 07.06.2024, 12.06.2024, 14.06.2024, 11.06.2024, 13.06.2024, 14.06.2024, 24.06.2024, 26.06.2024, 29.06.2024, 25.06.2024, 27.06.2024, 28.06.2024

Note: The amendments regarding the date of auction can be seen on IREPS site only. No publication will be done in newspaper in future.

(1) Indian Railways is selling all the scrap through e-auction. Bidders are requested to get registered for E-auction with www.ireps.gov.in an early date.

(2) Bidders should obtain class-III digital certificate with firm's name before registration. For payment, bidders will have to open an account with SBI (sarasalvyapar) with net banking Rights for depositing earnest money etc.

WESTERN RAILWAY-RAJKOT DIVISION VARIOUS ENGINEERING WORKS

E-Tender Notice No. 06 of 2024-25 date 20/05/2024; Office Address: Divisional Railway Manager (Engg.), Western Railway, Kothi Compound, Rajkot, Gujarat - 360 001; Website: www.ireps.gov.in

Table with columns: Sr. No., e-Tender No., Name of Work, Approximate NIT Cost, Earnest Money

(1) Viramgam (excluding) to Surendranagar (including). (2) Surendranagar (including) to Dhrangadhra (excluding) under the jurisdiction of Assistant Divisional Engineer, Surendranagar;

(3) Surendranagar (excluding) to Wankaner (including) under the jurisdiction of Assistant Divisional Engineer, Wankaner;

(4) Wankaner (excluding) to Bhaktinagar (including). (2) Wankaner (including) to Navlakhi (including). (3) Dahinsara (including) to Maliya Miyana (excluding) under the jurisdiction of Assistant Divisional Engineer, Rajkot;

(5) Wankaner (including) to Hapa (including) and Hapa Colony under the jurisdiction of Assistant Divisional Engineer (East) Jamnagar.

(6) Hapa (including) to Kanalus (including). (2) Jamnagar (including) to Windmill (including). (3) Kanalus (including) to Sikka (including) under the jurisdiction of Assistant Divisional Engineer (East) Jamnagar.

(7) Kanalus (including) to Dwaraka (including) under the jurisdiction of Assistant Divisional Engineer (West) Jamnagar.

(8) Dwaraka (including) to Okha (including) under the jurisdiction of Assistant Divisional Engineer (West) Jamnagar.

(9) Okha (including) to Rajkot Division: Providing Pump Room and Sump at various LHS under Sr. Divisional Engineer (East) Rajkot's jurisdiction.

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE

DRM (Electrical) Jaipur for and on behalf of President of India, invites E-tenders for following works. (1) NIT No.: ELJJP/45R/2023-24. Name of work: Replacement of isolation switch for starting battery in power cars & provision of high capacity IV coupler (500 Amp) & 150 sqmm feeder cable for AC coaches under Bulk RSP program 2022-23. NIT Cost: ₹ 139,983.36/- Earnest Money: ₹ 27,990/- Tender opening date: 19.06.2024 (2) NIT No.: ELJJP/16R/II/2023-24. Name of work: Jaipur: Electrical work in connection with provision of hostel facility DBN (PG) Doctors 18 Nos. by construction of 2nd floor on existing old OPD building at Central Hospital. NIT Cost: ₹ 14,60,282/- Earnest Money: ₹ 29,200/- Tender opening date: 19.06.2024 Note: Date & time of closing of e-tenders: On tender opening date upto 15.00 hours. Date & time of e-tender opening: On tender opening date after 15.00 hours. Complete details of tender can be seen on website: http://www.ireps.gov.in

PROVISION OF RO/RUB AT LUMDING DIVISION

Tender Notice No. LMG/ENG/78 of 2024. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: SI No. 1. Name of work: Feasibility study and detailed project report for elimination of 31 Nos. Level Crossings by provision of RO/RUB under the jurisdiction of DENV/ Lumding Division. Tender value: ₹ 1,30,60,484.14/- Earnest Money: ₹ 25,15,300/-. Date & time of Closing of tender: 17-06-2024 at 15:00 hrs. Date & time of Opening of tender: 18-06-2024 at 15:00 hrs. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available up to 15.00 hrs. of 17-06-2024 in website http://www.ireps.gov.in.

Office Of The Superintending Engineer 9th Circle Public Work Department Dehradun

Office of the Superintending Engineer, 9th Circle PWD, Dehradun Uttarakhand Website: http://pww.uk.gov.in E-mail: sepwdddn09@gmail.com Letter No. 3108/C-9/2024 Dated: 25/05/2024

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING e-tender Notice (Short term)

The Superintending Engineer 9th Circle, Public Works Department, Dehradun on behalf of "Governor of Uttarakhand" invites short term tender in two bid system for the following work. Information regarding tender shall be available on https://www.uktenders.gov.in from date 28.05.2024

Table with columns: Sl. No., Name of Work, Earnest Money (Rs. in Laacs), Cost of Tender Document (In Rs.), Validity of Tender (In days), Period of Completion (In Month), Contractor Category of Registration

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

9419439P LNK RAM KUMAR PRADHAN 26 MAY 1999

On this day 9419439P Lnk Ram Kumar Pradhan of 1/11 Gorkha Rifles (BATALIK) made the supreme sacrifice during 'OP VIJAY' on 26 May 1999 in a true act of valour. The brave soldier will always be remembered for his raw courage and indomitable team spirit. To this braveheart we pledge that we shall always be guided by his immortal spirit and make his name proud.

CO AND ALL RANKS, 1/11 GORKHA RIFLES (BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE) (BATALIK)

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY WESTERN RAILWAY - VADODARA DIVISION

ई-ऑनशन आम्ब्रित करने की सूचना संख्या: Comm/E-auction/2024/95, दिनांक: 24.05.2024, उक्त के संदर्भ में स्टेशनों पर पार्किंग स्टैंड/ए.पी.एस (MPS) एवं विभिन्न माडिओं में विद्यमान (विनाइड रैमिंग) के ट्रेके हेतु ई-ऑनशन आम्ब्रित की गई है। केंद्रों/आईप्रेस वेबसाइट पर प्रकाशित किए जा चुके हैं। (1) कार्य का नाम: (1) जोधपुर मंडल के विभिन्न स्टेशनों पर पार्किंग स्टैंड हेतु ई-ऑनशन। (2) जोधपुर मंडल के विभिन्न स्टेशनों पर एम्.पी.एस (MPS) के ट्रेके हेतु ई-ऑनशन। (3) जोधपुर मंडल के विभिन्न स्टेशनों पर बालिस्टिक विद्यमान (विनाइड रैमिंग) के ट्रेके हेतु ई-ऑनशन। (2) कार्य की अवधि: (1) पार्किंग-3 वर्ष, 1 वर्ष (2) ए.पी.एस. (MPS)-5 वर्ष (3) विद्यमान (विनाइड रैमिंग)-3 वर्ष (3) लॉट के ई-ऑनशन प्रारंभ की तिथि व समय: (1) Parking-JU-40, दिनांक 04.06.2024 को 11:00 बजे से (B) Parking-JU-41, दिनांक 08.06.2024 को 12:00 बजे से (2) MPS: (1) MPS-JU-24-13, दिनांक 05.06.2024 को 11:00 बजे से (3) ADVT: (1) Vinyl-JU-21, दिनांक 06.06.2024 को 11:00 बजे से (4) वेबसाइट जहाँ से लॉट बाइन ई-ऑनशन के सम्बन्ध में जानकारी प्राप्त की जा सकती है: www.ireps.gov.in 606-DK24

Tender No. EL/TRD/Tender/24-25/02. Tenders for and on behalf of the President of India are invited by Divisional Railway Manager (Electrical T.R.D) Western Railway, Pratapnagar, Vadodara - 390 004 for the following works. Sr. No.-1. Tender No.: EL/TRD/Tender/24-25/02. Name of work: Addition and alteration in OHE in connection with provision of 12 m wide Foot Over Bridge and other allied OHE activity in Surat-Vadodara section of Vadodara division. Approximate cost of the work (In ₹): 1,72,52,399/- Bid Security (In ₹): 2,36,300/- Cost of Tender documents and completion period: Completion period 12 months. Tender scheduled on: Tender closing date 21/06/2024 and time of closing at 15.00 hrs. on the same date. Web page particulars and notice for location where complete details can be seen & address of the office and clarification: Website @ www.ireps.gov.in Divisional Railway Manager (Electrical T.R.D) Western Railway, Pratapnagar, Vadodara - 390 004. (EL/TRD/Tender/24-25/02.dtd. 21/05/2024). 050 Like us on: facebook.com/WesternRly

Sion Hospital forensic head arrested over accident that killed patient

SAGAR RAJPUT
MUMBAI, MAY 25

DR RAJESH DERE, professor and head of the forensic medicine and toxicology department at LTMG Hospital, has been arrested by the Mumbai police for allegedly running over and killing a 60-year-old woman patient inside the premises of Sion Hospital late Friday night.

Initially, the incident was not reported to the police. However, upon further inquiry and review of CCTV footage, it was found that Dr Dere was driving the vehicle. According to the police, the incident occurred around 7:30 pm on Friday when Dr Dere was on his way to punch his attendance in his car.

DCP Prashant Kadam (Zone IV) said, "The doctor stepped out of the building and got into his car. While driving towards the punch machine, as he turned left near Gate Number 7, he did not notice the woman on the floor and ran over her."

Following the incident, Dr Dere called other hospital authorities and admitted the woman to Ward Number 20. She was placed on a ventilator, but the hospital did not inform the police about the accident.

"We initially that a woman was found in an unconscious state near Gate Number 7 around 11 pm. A woman officer was sent to inquire at the hospital. Upon seeing the injuries, further investigation revealed that an accident had taken place inside the hospital," a senior police officer said.

The victim was identified as Zubeda Shaikh, who lived with her husband, two sons and a daughter in Mumbra. Her son Shah Nawaz said, "My mother, who had diabetes, got a cut on her hand that worsened. She was admitted to the hospital in April and discharged on May 16. For regular dressing of her injury, she stayed with a relative in Bandra and visited the hospital on Friday for her routine check-up."

Telangana: Over 2,000 registered during recruitment drive for Israel

Third such drive this year; high remuneration biggest draw for Indians workers

NIKHILA HENRY
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

THOUSANDS OF labourers from Telangana have lined up to go to Israel, a country which is reportedly reeling under labour shortage after its conflict with Hamas escalated earlier this year.

After four-day recruitment drive that concluded in Hyderabad on Friday, a total of 2,209 labourers registered to be recruited for skilled construction work in the West Asian country. After a few rounds of tests, during which they had to display their work prowess, 905 people were selected to be added to Israel's foreign labour force.

The recruitment drive was conducted by the state government and facilitated by the National Skill Development Corporation International (NSDCI).

The Telangana recruitment drive was the third to be held in the country this year, under an agreement between India and Israel governments. As per the agreement, Israel recruits labourers from India after screening their skills and flies them across the borders to be employed in their country.

Earlier this year, similar recruitment drives were held in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. "In those two drives over 9,000 labourers had turned up," an NSDCI official said.

Such recruitment drives are expected to be held in Maharashtra, Bihar and Rajasthan too, the NSDCI official said.

At least one batch of 60 immigrant labourers have so far reportedly left the country for Israel. As the conflict between Israel and Iran amplified in March, killing, among others, a Kerala man

working on an Israeli farm, the Indian government had temporarily stopped allowing its citizens to fly to the war-torn country. Air India too had suspended its flight operations to Israel till mid-May.

The labourers recruited in Telangana are carpenters and plasterers and iron bending. The biggest draw for the Indians leaving for the war-torn region is the high remuneration provided by Israel's construction industry. As per the recruitment team, each labourer will earn between Rs 1.2 lakh and Rs 1.38 lakh per month-salaries which are manifold higher than the market rates for such skilled labourers in India.

Israel has been seeking foreign labour to meet its domestic construction needs. Till the beginning of this year, around 80,000 Palestinians were employed in

Israel's construction industry. However, as the conflict with the Arab nations imploded in January, Israel cancelled the work permits of the Palestinians. It is this labour shortage that Indians are expected to bridge.

Speaking to The Indian Express, an NSDCI officer who was in the know of the recruitment drive said, "On the first day of the drive we ran the camp only for half a day as the number of people turning in was less. From the second day onwards, hundreds came in to be recruited." In a way, recruitment through a government-led drive is better than "paying illegal recruiters and taking an arduous route to Israel without proper safeguards," the officer said.

It is not known when the recruited labourers will be able to fly to Israel. "This takes time and we need to ensure all safeguards are in place," an official said.

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJI NAGAR: CLASSMATES INTERVENED

Helpline nos on report cards help prevent 12 child marriages in a day

PALLAVI SMART
MUMBAI, MAY 25

EARLIER THIS month, authorities successfully prevented 12 child marriages that were to take place on the auspicious day of Akshay Tritiya in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar district. The authorities intervened following calls received on a helpline, alerting officials to the illegal marriages. Notably, all these calls were made by classmates of the girls being forced into marriage. The classmates knew who to call as the helpline number had been strategically published on school report cards across the state as part of efforts to combat child marriages.

In early May, following the declaration of results in most schools, students were handed report cards bearing the child helpline numbers 1098 and 112. Assurances were given that their identities would remain confidential if they reported any instances of concern.

In the days leading up to Akshay Tritiya, falling on May 10

this year, the child helpline received calls from young students across the district, alerting about child marriages. These calls provided specific details such as the names of the children, their villages, and the dates of the ceremonies. Prompt action was then taken by the child helpline, in collaboration with the police and local social activists, to intervene and prevent these marriages.

This successful intervention owes much to the proactive action of several school students who promptly reported their friends or classmates being forced into marriage. It is a direct outcome of a year-long awareness campaign against child marriages conducted in schools across Sambhajnagar, one of the 12 districts in Maharashtra identified by the National Family Health Survey as having a high prevalence of child marriages.

The initiative to print child helpline numbers on report cards is just one facet of a comprehensive awareness campaign implemented in schools to combat child marriages in the state. Other activ-

ities include taking oaths against child marriage during morning assemblies, organising competitions such as essay writing and poster-making on the topic, and creating WhatsApp groups for teachers to share reminders and proactive steps to identify and prevent child marriages.

Dyaneshwar Rode, District Coordinator for Girl Education from the Education Department, emphasised the collaborative effort involved in combating child marriages, stating that all schools are required to prominently display the helpline numbers and conduct awareness activities. Regular monitoring is carried out through a dedicated portal to ensure accountability.

"Apart from printing the child helpline number on report cards; all schools are instructed to display the number at all visible areas inside school premises. Students — girls as well as boys — are made aware of the consequences of child marriages in schools by teachers," Rode said.

FULL REPORT
www.indianexpress.com

'Saw death up close': Asst engineer with PWD dept first Goan to summit Everest

PAVNEET SINGH CHADHA
PANAJI, MAY 25

WHEN PANKAJ Narvekar, an assistant engineer with the Goa government's Public Works Department, was descending after summiting Mount Everest, an icy ridge collapsed near The Hillary Step in the "death zone", considered the most technically difficult part of the climb. Within seconds, two climbers were dragged down the side of the mountain.

"I was standing on the edge of the cliff when a cornice collapsed. It happened right in front of me. Two of those climbers are now presumed dead. At that moment, my only thought was whether I would be able to reach home safely. The oxygen supply was also limited," he recalled.

Narvekar, 41, scripted history when he summited Mount



Pankaj Narvekar atop Mount Everest. Xj@DrPranodPSawant

Everest around 5.30 am on May 21 and unfurled the Tricolour, becoming the first Goan to scale the world's tallest peak at an altitude of 8,848 metres. "Mountain climbing is my passion," Narvekar told *The Indian Express* over phone from Kathmandu.

From Porvorim near Panaji, Narvekar describes himself as an explorer and traveller. He has successfully climbed Mount

Kamet (7,756 m) in Uttarakhand, Mount Kun (7,077 m) in Ladakh and Mount Kang Yatze (6,400 m) in Ladakh. For Everest, Narvekar's first summit above 8,000 m, he trained for the past two years.

Last year, his daughter Gunjan, aged 12, successfully climbed three peaks above 6,000m in Markha Valley in Ladakh. "Climbing is about endurance. While summiting, you have to often walk for 18 hours a day where oxygen levels are low. Typically one has to train daily for five-six hours. I have travelled half of the country. I started with trekking first and gradually got into mountaineering in 2012. This year, I climbed with supplemental oxygen. In the future, my plan is to scale Everest without any oxygen support," he said.

Narvekar said Khumbu Icefall, which is at an elevation of 5,486m and historically accounts

for several fatalities, was the most dangerous and arduous part of the climb.

"It is a moving glacier and has to be crossed during the night. One can easily fall into a crevasse and die," he said.

Goa CM Pramod Sawant hailed the achievement on X: "A proud moment for Goa as Pankaj Narvekar becomes the first Goan to climb Mount Everest! Heartiest congratulations and best wishes to Pankaj for a bright future. This achievement shall inspire young mountaineers from the state."

Pankaj's father, Bharat Narvekar, said, "We are extremely proud. I could only speak to him for a few minutes due to poor network. He told me the weather had cleared up and though there were some challenges, he was able to overcome them and climb successfully."

1 dead, 6 injured in Chhattisgarh factory blast

Raipur: One worker was killed and six others injured in a blast at an explosives manufacturing factory in Chhattisgarh's Bemetara district Saturday morning.

The incident took place around 8.30 am in a privately-owned factory spread across 100 acres in Borsi village. Bemetara District Collector Ranbir Sharma said the factory manufactured detonators and explosives used for mining.

A rescue operation was underway and several workers were feared trapped under the debris. However, the officials could not ascertain the number of workers missing.

Chhattisgarh CM Vishnu Deo Sai said a magistrate's inquiry has been ordered. **ENS**

ARMY INSTITUTE OF LAW
SECTOR-68, MOHALI - 160062
Tel: 0172-5095336-38, E-mail: info@ail.ac.in

ADMISSION NOTICE LLM (One Year Course) 2024-25
1. Online applications are invited for admission to LLM (One Year) by Punjabi University, Patiala at www.pupadmissions.ac.in
2. Total Seats - 15 (Indian Army Cat - 10, Indian Navy Cat - 01, Indian Air Force - 01, Pb Res: Gen Cat - 02 & All India Gen Cat - 01).
3. Eligibility: Minimum 55% marks in BALLB (5 years) or LLLB (3 years).
4. Application form. Last date of Online Registration without late fee is 18 Jul 2024 and with late fee of Rs 2000/- is 23 Jul 2024. Candidates are advised to apply on admission portal at www.pupadmissions.ac.in and also e-mail copy of application form at allllm@pupadmissions.ac.in
Principal

अखिल भारतीय आयुर्विज्ञान संस्थान, नागपुर
ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES, NAGPUR
Plot No.2, Sector-20, MIHAN, Nagpur, Pin: 441108,
www.aiimsnagpur.edu.in
Academic Section

AIIMS - PhD Programme July - 2024 Session
All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Nagpur invites applications for admission in **PhD Programme July 2024 Session**

DATES FOR APPLICATION		
PhD Programme	Opens On	Closes On
	30 th May 2024	25 th June 2024

Important: For Prospectus, detailed information etc. please visit the website www.aiimsnagpur.edu.in. All subsequent Corrigendum/Addendum/Updates will be uploaded on the website ONLY.
Executive Director

JOIN THE INDIAN AIR FORCE

AFCAT Registrations open from 30 May 2024 till 28 June 2024

ENTRY	Air Force Common Admission Test (AFCAT) Entry	NCC Special Entry	For updates, follow us on DISHA by Indian Air Force careerinair CareerinIAF
BRANCHES	Flying/ Technical/ Weapon Systems/ Administration/ Logistics/ Accounts/ Education/ Meteorology	Flying (NCC Air Wing 'C' certificate is mandatory)	

AFCAT Entry: Registration mandatory and online exam/ NCC Special Entry registration mandatory and no online exam
 Aadhaar card is mandatory for online registration Registrations open from 30 May 2024 till 28 June 2024
 For more details, refer to Employment News dated 25 May 2024 and for detailed notification visit our website careerairforce.nic.in and afcat.cdac.in
 DISHA Cell, Air Headquarter, Vayu Bhawan Tel: 011-23013690 | Toll-free No.: 1800-11-2448 | E-mail: career.iaf@nic.in

8 DECISION 2024



NEW DELHI: CJI DY Chandrachud and wife Kalpana Das at a polling booth. PTI



ANANTANG-RAJOURI, JAMMU & KASHMIR: Voters who live along the Line of Control (LOC) show their inked fingers. PTI



PRAYAGRAJ, UTTAR PRADESH: A scene from a polling station as a woman casts her vote. ANI

I HEREBY DECLARE



GURJEET SINGH AULIJA, 51, sitting Amritsar MP, has been fielded by Congress again

TOTAL ASSETS
₹5.34 CR (2024)
₹3.40 CR (2019)

Movable Assets*: ₹3.52 cr
Immovable Assets: ₹1.82 cr
Liabilities: ₹1.37 cr
FIRs: None
Education: BA from Guru Nanak Dev University
*(including of spouse)



EMAAN SINGH MANN, 52, SAD's Amritsar candidate

TOTAL ASSETS
₹5.21 CR (2024)

Movable Assets: ₹31.71 lakh
Immovable Assets: ₹4.90 cr
Liabilities: ₹16.08 lakh
Education: BA, Knox College, USA
FIRs: None

AS BJP CONTESTS ALL 13 SEATS ON ITS OWN

Captain Amarinder Singh's absence from campaign rings loud in Punjab

Setback for state BJP, which raises concern; Singh's wife Preet faces heat in home turf of Patiala

KANCHAN VASDEV
CHANDIGARH, MAY 25

FORMER PUNJAB chief minister Captain Amarinder Singh, 82, has been missing from the BJP's campaign in the state during the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Amarinder was not seen even at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally held on Thursday on his home turf Patiala, from where his wife Preet Kaur is contesting on the BJP's ticket. This was PM Modi's first rally in Punjab in the current polls.

A close aide of Amarinder said he had written a letter to Modi on Wednesday to tell him that he would not be able to participate in the rally as he has been unwell. His aide said it was Amarinder who had requested Modi to address a rally in Patiala in support of his wife.

Amarinder was also not with Preet when she had gone to file her nomination papers on May 13.

Punjab BJP spokesman Pritpal Singh Baliawal, who is also the party in-charge of the Patiala Lok Sabha constituency, said that Amarinder has been keeping "unwell".

"Captain Amarinder Singh was hospitalised for a health issue, when Preet Kaur had gone to file her nomination papers. Later, he was discharged."

We were waiting for him to join the campaign and then he suffered from gastroenteritis. He was on a drip and was feeling drained," Baliawal said. "For Prime Minister's rally, it was certain that he would be on the stage. But he felt too weak to come and speak.



Former Punjab CM Amarinder Singh and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on stage in 2022. On Thursday, Singh was not present for the PM's first rally in Punjab this poll season. File

He wrote a letter to the PM expressing his inability to attend the rally, which was handed over to PM by Preet Kaur on the rally stage," he added.

The scion of the erstwhile Patiala royal family, Amarinder has been a former Congress heavyweight and two-time CM.

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Her campaign in-charge from Ghanaur, Harwinder Singh Harpalpur, has been booked by the police in this case under Section 304 IPC, following which he has been absconding.

Preet has since been defensive. She told *The Indian Express* that she "misses Captain Sahib (Amarinder)", adding that "he is my biggest support. I hope he will be able to join my campaign".

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In Ghazipur, Ansari's death a factor with his brother in fray



SP MP, Ghazipur nominee Afzal Ansari at a meeting. Express

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Calling Mukhtar's death "unnatural", Mohammad Amir (30), a small business owner, says it is among the election issues in the Ghazipur seat, which will vote in the last phase, on June 1.

"Ten days before he died, he told a court that he was being given poison in jail. Why wasn't he shifted to a better hospital? Why was he shifted straight back to jail?" says Amir.

At 9 pm, Afzal arrives. Nearly an hour into his speech, Afzal brings up Mukhtar's death. "You saw recently *kis behrmi ke saath jail mein in zalimon ne usko zehar diya* (they poisoned him mercilessly in jail). And it was passed off as a heart attack... They stopped people from honouring his grave. There is no such law allowing this. Today, the time has come to punish these oppressors."

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Two months after his death, Mukhtar remains an unavoidable figure in Ghazipur - with some people maintaining he was a "messiah" and others calling him a "dreaded criminal". But there are few who believe the Uttar Pradesh government's claim that there was no foul play in his death.

VOTE SHARE (%)



Party	2014	2019
BSP	24.49	51.11
BJP	31.11	40.33
SP	27.82	-

Source: Election Commission
Note: SP and BSP were allies in 2019

If the supporters of the Ansaris feel the family has been persecuted under the Yogi Adityanath-led BJP government, there is another aspect - a case in the Allahabad High Court that might see Afzal facing disqualification.

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With the matter hanging, Afzal's daughter Nusrat has also filed her nomination from the seat as an Independent - to step in for her father if he can't contest the elections.

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If Afzal is eyeing sympathy votes, Rai is the opposite. He says that after Ansari died, the whole area "breathed a sigh of relief".

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In SC/ST quota debate, Narendra Modi now attacks Jawaharlal Nehru. What was the former PM's stand?

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AT A rally in Bihar on Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened up another front on the topic of reservation.

"The truth is that had there been no Ambedkar, Nehru would not have allowed quota for SC/STs," he said, while going on to allege that the Opposition INDIA bloc wanted to change the Constitution and extend reservations to religious minorities.

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Members including the Congress's Chandrika Ram and Dharam Prakash, one of the first Dalit lawyers in the country and a future Rajya Sabha MP from Uttar Pradesh, respectively, advocated to explicitly include the term "Scheduled Caste" in the place of (or in addition to) the term "backward class" to clarify which groups of people could avail the benefits of reservations.

Members such as Lokanath Misra and Damodar Swarup Seth, who were also part of the Congress, sought deletion of the reservations provided for "backward classes".



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While Nehru did not contribute to the debate in the Constituent Assembly on Articles related to reservations, after he became the PM, he wrote a letter in June 1961 to chief ministers, where he emphasised the need for empowering backward groups.

He wrote: "It is true that we are tied up with certain rules and conventions about helping SCs and STs. They deserve help, but even so, I dislike any kind of reservation, more particularly in service... The only real way to help a backward group is to give opportunities for good education. This includes technical education, which is becoming more and more important. Everything else is provision of some kind of crutches which do not add to the strength or health of the body."

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The Constitution introduced reservations for SCs and STs in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies under Articles 330

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Some members of the Constituent Assembly, including Brajeshwar Prasad and H J Khandekar, argued that reservations were an inadequate measure and would not result in any progress for oppressed communities. Objections were also raised regarding the 10-year time limit for reservations under Article 334 (draft Article 295-A).

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These Articles were eventually adopted with few changes despite a heated debate in the Constituent Assembly. However, Article 334 has been the subject of a host of Constitutional amendments, where the 10-year limit has been extended by an additional 10 years each time.

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8 DECISION 2024



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PRAYAGRAJ, UTTAR PRADESH: A scene from a polling station as a woman casts her vote. ANI

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GURJEET SINGH AULIJA, 51, sitting Amritsar MP, has been fielded by Congress again

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₹3.40 CR (2019)

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Immovable Assets: ₹1.82 cr
Liabilities: ₹1.37 cr
FIRs: None
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Liabilities: ₹16.08 lakh
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Captain Amarinder Singh's absence from campaign rings loud in Punjab

Setback for state BJP, which raises concern; Singh's wife Preet faces heat in home turf of Patiala

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Amarinder was also not with Preet when she had gone to file her nomination papers on May 13.

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"Captain Amarinder Singh was hospitalised for a health issue, when Preet Kaur had gone to file her nomination papers. Later, he was discharged."

We were waiting for him to join the campaign and then he suffered from gastroenteritis. He was on a drip and was feeling drained," Baliawal said. "For Prime Minister's rally, it was certain that he would be on the stage. But he felt too weak to come and speak.



Former Punjab CM Amarinder Singh and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on stage in 2022. On Thursday, Singh was not present for the PM's first rally in Punjab this poll season. File

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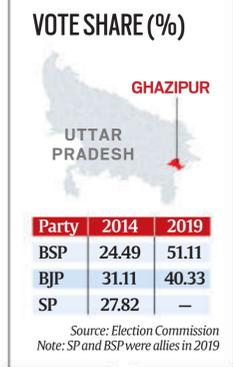
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BHAGWANT MANN FACES PROTESTS IN MANSA, MAUR, GIVES ROADSHOWS A MISS

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At 9 pm, Afzal arrives. Nearly an hour into his speech, Afzal brings up Mukhtar's death. "You saw recently *kis behrmi ke saath jail mein in zalimon ne usko zehar diya* (they poisoned him mercilessly in jail). And it was passed off as a heart attack... They stopped people from honouring his grave. There is no such law allowing this. Today, the time has come to punish these oppressors."

However, Afzal adds, he wants this not because of personal grievance, "but for the fraud they have pulled on the country".

"Inflation and unemployment have gone up," he says, amid slogans of "Takt badal do, taaj badal do. Beimani ka raaj badal do" (Tackle the ruler, overthrow the crown. Change this dishonest government)."

Two months after his death, Mukhtar remains an unavoidable figure in Ghazipur - with some people maintaining he was a "messiah" and others calling him a "dreaded criminal". But there are few who believe the Uttar Pradesh government's claim that there was no foul play in his death.

VOTE SHARE (%)



Party	2014	2019
BSP	24.49	51.11
BJP	31.11	40.33
SP	27.82	-

Source: Election Commission
Note: SP and BSP were allies in 2019

If the supporters of the Ansari feel the family has been persecuted under the Yogi Adityanath-led BJP government, there is another aspect - a case in the Allahabad High Court that might see Afzal facing disqualification.

In April last year, a Ghazipur court sentenced Afzal to four years' imprisonment, leading to his disqualification as an MP.

In December 2023, the Supreme Court suspended his conviction conditionally and directed the Allahabad High Court to resolve his appeal by June 30 of this year.

With the matter hanging, Afzal's daughter Nusrat has also filed her nomination from the seat as an Independent - to step in for her father if he can't contest the elections.

In 2019, Afzal won the seat as from the BSP, which fought the elections in alliance with the SP. He defeated the BJP's Manoj Sinha by 1.19 lakh votes, thus quashing, according to some, Sinha's chief ministerial hopes. (Sinha had won from Ghazipur in 1996 and 2014.) The Lieutenant Governor of Jammu and Kashmir now, Sinha has been visiting Ghazipur regularly to keep an eye on his close aide Parasnath Rai's campaign.

If Afzal is eyeing sympathy votes, Rai is the opposite. He says that after Ansari died, the whole area "breathed a sigh of relief."

DECODE POLITICS

In SC/ST quota debate, Narendra Modi now attacks Jawaharlal Nehru. What was the former PM's stand?

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

AT A rally in Bihar on Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi opened up another front on the topic of reservation.

"The truth is that had there been no Ambedkar, Nehru would not have allowed quota for SC/STs," he said, while going on to allege that the Opposition INDIA bloc wanted to change the Constitution and extend reservations to religious minorities.

We take a look at the Constituent Assembly debates over giving Constitutional status to reservations:

Initial provision

The Constitution, when it first came into force, included provisions to provide reservations in political institutions and public employment for people belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

What is now Article 16 of the Constitution - which allows states to reserve appointments

to state services for "any backward class of citizens which... are not adequately represented" - was initially known as "draft Article 10", when the members of the Constituent Assembly debated it on November 30, 1948.

The phrase "any backward class" in the draft version (and eventually the final version) was a hotly contested subject.

The debates in the Constituent Assembly

Members including the Congress's Chandrika Ram and Dharam Prakash, one of the first Dalit lawyers in the country and a future Rajya Sabha MP from Uttar Pradesh, respectively, advocated to explicitly include the term "Scheduled Caste" in the place of (or in addition to) the term "backward class" to clarify which groups of people could avail the benefits of reservations.

Members such as Lokanath Misra and Damodar Swarup Seth, who were also part of the Congress, sought deletion of the reservations provided for "backward classes".



PM Nehru did not contribute to the Constituent Assembly debate on reservation but wrote on the topic. Express Archive

Ambedkar's opinion

Addressing the debate around the word "backward", Ambedkar acknowledged that it is a "generic principle".

However, to ensure that equality of opportunity was provided to all citizens in the matter of public employment, he argued that the word "backward" was a necessary qualifier to

make sure that the "exception" of reservations provided to oppressed communities did not "eat up" the right to equality of opportunity altogether.

As far as the question of what community would be defined as backward was concerned, Ambedkar said that this would be determined by the respective state or local governments.

Nehru's view

While Nehru did not contribute to the debate in the Constituent Assembly on Articles related to reservations, after he became the PM, he wrote a letter in June 1961 to chief ministers, where he emphasised the need for empowering backward groups.

He wrote: "It is true that we are tied up with certain rules and conventions about helping SCs and STs. They deserve help, but even so, I dislike any kind of reservation, more particularly in service... The only real way to help a backward group is to give opportunities for good education. This includes technical education, which is becoming more and more important. Everything else is provision of some kind of crutches which do not add to the strength or health of the body."

Constitution on quota in legislatures

The Constitution introduced reservations for SCs and STs in the Lok Sabha and state Assemblies under Articles 330

and 332 respectively.

Some members of the Constituent Assembly, including Brajeshwar Prasad and H J Khandekar, argued that reservations were an inadequate measure and would not result in any progress for oppressed communities. Objections were also raised regarding the 10-year time limit for reservations under Article 334 (draft Article 295-A).

Current status of the above Articles

These Articles were eventually adopted with few changes despite a heated debate in the Constituent Assembly. However, Article 334 has been the subject of a host of Constitutional amendments, where the 10-year limit has been extended by an additional 10 years each time.

Most recently, in 2020, following the Constitution (104th) Amendment Act, the time limit for SC and ST reservations in legislatures was extended till 2030.

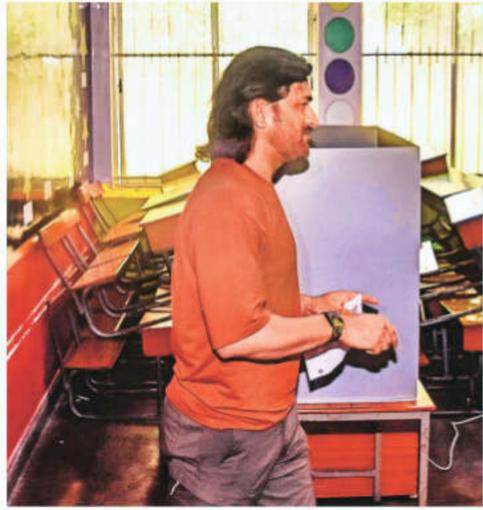
These extensions are now the subject of a pending challenge before the Supreme Court.

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BHAGWANT MANN FACES PROTESTS IN MANSI, MAUR, GIVES ROADSHOWS A MISS

9 DECISION 2024



JHARKHAND: Mahendra Singh Dhoni in Ranchi, Saturday. PTI



WEST BENGAL: Voters queue up outside a polling booth in Nandigram in Purba Medinipur district. Partha Paul



BIHAR: Outside a polling booth in Muzaffarpur district. PTI

Akhilesh, Priyanka hold joint rally in Yogi's home turf

Should've thought about dignity of chair: Priyanka hits out at PM Modi



SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi in Gorakhpur on Saturday. PTI

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
LUCKNOW, MAY 25

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who addressed a joint rally on the home turf of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in Gorakhpur Saturday, avoided making a sharp attack on the UP CM. Priyanka, however, hit out at PM Narendra Modi over his speech in Bihar earlier in the day, saying that no PM has ever used such words for opposition leaders. She said the entire country respects the PM's post and it is his responsibility to maintain the dignity of the post.

"This is a sacred land, the land of Mahatma Buddha, Guru Machhandar Nath and Guru Gorakhnath in her speech. She claimed, "There are 70 crore unemployed youths, the highest in 45 years. For whom are the governments functioning at the Centre and the state. No one has heard of the words 'unemployment' and 'inflation' from PM Narendra Modi."

Priyanka promised a permanent job, Rs 8,500 into the bank account of the eldest woman of each family, increasing the number of man days of ASHA and Aanganwadi workers and those working in mid-day meal.

She also mentioned that GST would be removed from all equipment used in farming, a permanent commission will be formed for waiving off the loan of farmers and they would be given compensation for their crop loss in 30 days. Members of the Nishad community, with nearly 6 lakh voters, have been promised an identity card along with an insurance cover scheme by the Congress leader.

Akhilesh also alleged that papers of over 10 examinations conducted were leaked. "This government uses the bulldozer to raze the houses of poor. But, the bulldozer has never been used against the accused of paper leak cases," he alleged.

Both Akhilesh and Priyanka sought support from people for the SP's Gorakhpur candidate Kala Nishad, and Congress candidate from neighbouring Bangsaon seat, Sasdal Prasad.

Greeting the supporters by saying "Raua sabhe ke Ram-Ram" in Bhojpuri, Priyanka also referred to Gorakhnath Peeth

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Solo in Punjab after 28 yrs, BJP upbeat amid farm stir, eyes '27

MANRAJ GREWAL SHARMA
HOSHIARPUR, BATHINDA, AMRITSAR, MAY 25

IN THE countdown to Lok Sabha polls in Punjab, a conversation icebreaker these days is a question, "Hawa kedi hai? (Which way is the wind blowing?)"

Ahead of the state Assembly polls in February 2022, the answer to such a query used to be an emphatic "Jharoo di (for the broom, the AAP's symbol)". The AAP went on to sweep the polls, winning 92 of the 117 seats.

This time, the answer often comes as a shrug. But at a bus stop at Majaari, in the Anandpur Sahib parliamentary constituency, Baldev Singh, an elderly man from Mojawal village, was quick to say, "Modi di (for PM Narendra Modi)." This triggers a blowback from the shopkeeper behind him and a bunch of onlookers, who say in unison, "Ainwi, ehnu kuchh nahin pata (He doesn't know a thing)." However, Baldev, who had retired from a Sikh light infantry battalion in 1992, and his wife Swaran Kaur stood their ground.

This reflects the poll scene in Punjab, which is witnessing a four-or-even a five-cornered contest for the first time in decades. Many people seem to be either clueless about the candidates or vocal for a certain leader or party.

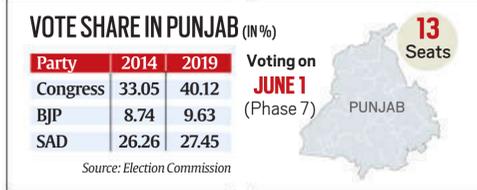
In this backdrop, the BJP, contesting its first Lok Sabha polls in the state since 1996 without its erstwhile ally SAD led by Sukhbir Badal, appears to be upbeat about its prospects despite facing strident protests from the farmer union members, who are "boycotting" its candidates and confronting them in villages.

In the past several LS polls, of the state's 13 seats, BJP has always fought from 3 — Hoshiarpur, where it has won in the last two polls; Gurdaspur, which it has bagged five times since 1998; and Amritsar, where it has lost in the last three elections. The remaining 10 seats had traditionally been contested by the SAD, the BJP's oldest ally which broke up with it in 2020 over farmers' movement against now-repealed 3 farm laws.

State BJP president Sunil Jakhar, who has complained to the EC about his party candidates being allegedly denied



BJP candidate Rana Gurmit Sodhi campaigns in Ferozepur with heavy security. Gurmeet Singh



their right to campaign, says this election is a stepping stone to the 2027 Assembly polls. "The party will vastly improve its vote share this time and sweep the 2027 elections," he claims. Jakhar's hope is echoed by a section of the trading community across the Malwa region, especially in the constituencies like Ludhiana, Bathinda, Sangrur and Patiala.

A group of men having tea at Giani chai stall in Bathinda makes no bones about their support for BJP. "Modi saab has done wonders for the country, the world respects us," says Bharat Jindal, a trader. Another one cites the "fear factor" in the city. "Harjinder Singh Mela was killed in broad daylight while sitting outside his kulcha shop in October last year, but the killers are still at large. We hear of extortion calls. There are industries that are quietly shifting to Bahadurgarh in Haryana. We need Modi ji to prevent the situation from sliding further."

The traders also flag the rise of Amritpal Singh, who despite being in a jail in Assam under the National Security Act (NSA) is contesting as an independent candidate from Khadoor Sahib constituency in the Majha border belt. "Mahaul kharaab ho raha hai," says Rajiv Bajaj, a businessman.

At Barnala, which saw the first-of-its-kind standoff between a farm union and traders earlier

this month, Sunil Bansal, who runs a bustling tire dealership, claims 85% of the voters in the town were rallying behind "Modi ji." This is largely due to the farmer agitation continuing at the Shambhu border between Punjab and Haryana for three months now, he says. "It's increasing our freight charges. A trip to Delhi now takes longer because we can't go through Shambhu," says Bansal, adding that he had supported the farmers during their 2020 stir.

The consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya has also contributed to BJP's popularity in some pockets. "I know people who had never voted for BJP planning to vote for it only because of the Temple," says Manav Goyal, a dealer in JCB spare parts on Barnala-Sirsa road. BJP candidates are hoping that the Temple issue would swing the migrant votes in their favor as well.

"Punjab does not vote along religious lines, and Punjabi Hindus have never done that," says Pramod Kumar, the founder of the think tank, Institute for Development and Communication. Paramjit Judge, a noted sociologist currently with the Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, agrees, pointing out how the SAD, founded as a party for the Sikhs in 1920, would never have gone out of power if Sikhs had voted along religious lines.

At Durgiana Mandir in Amritsar, where the BJP has fielded former ambassador to the US Taranjit Singh Sandhu, Rajesh Pathak, who works in the temple, rues that not everyone here was "grateful" for the Temple. "I have seen that even among our temple workers, half won't vote for the BJP. Back home in Varanasi, everyone has put their finger on the lotus (BJP's symbol)."

But Raj Verma, a trader and regular temple-goer, strikes a discordant note on the question whether the Temple has made a difference. "No, why is Modi claiming Ram ji? BJP is too 'kattar' (rigid) for us, we respect diversity. As long as they (BJP and SAD) had an alliance, they could win, not any longer," he says.

At the posh RB Estate on the outskirts of Amritsar, where a rally for Akali candidate Anil Joshi sees many Hindu traders in attendance, P Kapoor says, "We want development, not religion. I am a Hindu Khatri, but I visit Sheedaan da gurdwara as do most traders here. We want peace, not religious divisions."

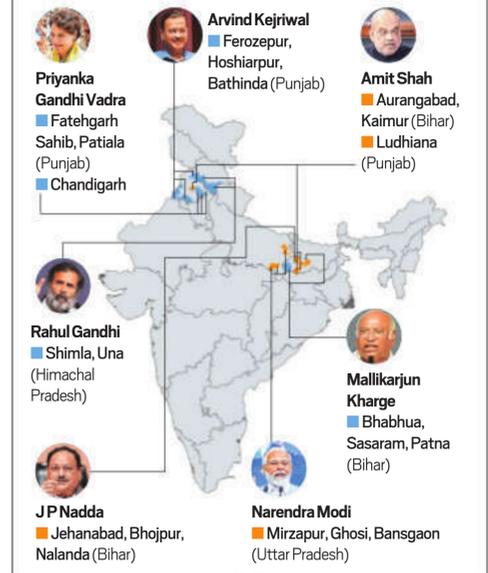
Significantly, PM Modi, who held a rally in Patiala Thursday amid farmers' protests, chose to focus on the Sikh history, the connection of one of the first five baptised Sikhs to Dwarka, and the Veer Bal Divas that he has instituted to mark the martyrdom of Guru Gobind Singh's four sons.

However, the mistrust against the BJP remains, especially in rural belts. A professor of Punjabi University, Patiala, Lakhwinder Singh, says it is due to the "uncharitable remarks PM Modi made about farmers in Parliament during the 2020 agitation". "The name-calling that followed, dubbing them as 'Andoleejevi', and worse, as 'Khalistanis', continues to rankle," he says.

But there are a few voices even in villages that favour Modi. In Sehna village near Barnala, Gurmel Singh, who owns 1.5 acre land and runs a shop, says he cannot understand why farm leaders are angry with the PM. "Everyone benefits from PM Kisan Samman Nidhi. If these unions don't like the PM, they should say no to the scheme." Sunil Singla, BJP's Bathinda office in-charge, says party is seeing "green shoots of its recovery in villages". **FULL REPORT ON** www.indianexpress.com

THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Who will be where: Sunday, May 26



Will initiate process to hold J&K Assembly polls very soon: CEC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

THE ELECTION Commission will initiate the process of conducting Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir very soon, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar told PTI Saturday.

Speaking on the encouraging voter turnouts in different constituencies of the Union Territory, Kumar said, "It is music to (my) ears. People — youth, women — are happily turning out in large numbers (to vote). The roots of democracy are being further strengthened; people are participating. They deserve their government. We will initiate that process very soon...very encouraged to do this," the CEC said.

Poling for the penultimate phase of Lok Sabha elections took place Saturday and Kumar spoke to PTI after casting his vote.

Anantnag-Rajouri went to polls Saturday. Voting in this parliamentary seat was deferred from the third phase to sixth phase after various political parties made representations on issues of connectivity, logistics and



CEC Rajiv Kumar in New Delhi, Saturday. PTI

poor weather. There are five seats in the Union Territory and Anantnag-Rajouri was the last parliamentary seat to go to polls from the UT.

J&K assembly elections were last held in November-December 2014. Polls have not been held since the August 2019 abrogation of Article 370. The Supreme Court had in December 2023 ordered the EC to hold polls in the UT by September 30.

Earlier this week, after a record turnout of 56.73% in Baramulla in phase five, Kumar told *The Indian Express* that "the highly successful conduct of polls with impressive turnout in Srinagar and Baramulla gives the Election Commission the confidence to hold assembly polls in J&K the earliest."

After Srinagar, Baramulla, now Anantnag-Rajouri sees robust turnout

NAVEEDIQBAL & BASHAARAT MASOOD
ANANTNAG, KULGAM, SHOPIAN, MAY 25

IN THE final phase of polling for J&K, the newly redrawn Anantnag-Rajouri constituency saw a healthy turnout, in line with the trends of the two other constituencies in Kashmir — Srinagar and Baramulla.

In the 2019 elections, the erstwhile Anantnag seat saw a meagre turnout of 8.9%. However, with the boundaries of the constituency extended across the Pir Panjal to include Jammu's Rajouri and Poonch, polling percentages stood at 54.3% by late Saturday night.

At polling booths across peripheries of Anantnag, voters queued up with future of youth in

mind. In the Shangus area, "troubles of the young people, such as arrests and detentions", drew Mohammad Ibrahim (40) to the polling booth. He said while there is a marked difference in the everyday lives of the people, there is also "despair among the youth who are struggling to find jobs".

Voters also voiced dissatisfaction with the way delimitation of the seat took place. Fayaz Ahmad Bhat (53) said this is a bigger challenge for the people of Rajouri and Poonch "since the important political figures contesting are from Kashmir. And since this is essentially an NC-PDP contest, both are likely to prioritise Kashmir".

The parliamentary seat spans five districts — Anantnag, Kulgam and parts of Shopian districts in Kashmir, and Poonch and parts of Rajouri district in Jammu. At Dooru, 45-year-old Shakeela

also highlighted the plea of the young people in her family. "There is nothing for them to do. They go to college, get their degrees and then just wait for a job," she said.

Outside the polling station in Larkipora, Ali Mohammad Mir (60) said, "This election is important as it is about what we need collectively, and that is statehood and protections like we had under Article 370."

These concerns were echoed by Afaaq Mir, who received his M.Phil in 2021 and is still waiting to land a job. "If you ask me what the biggest fear of my generation is, it is jail. It is being implicated in some case... We need to empower a vocal leader who can speak for us in Parliament."

Meanwhile, as PDP alleged slow polling and detention of its workers, with Mufti and her party



At a polling station in Daksum in Anantnag district, Saturday. Shuaib Masoodi

workers holding a sit-in outside the Bijbehara police station, CEO J&K, Pandurang Pole issued a

statement denying this. "The speed of EVMs is the same everywhere. Polling staff are working diligently. As per ECI rules, if there are voters at the close of poll time, that is 6 pm, voting will continue till voting of all those standing in queue is completed," the CEO said.

In the evening, Mufti thanked the people for coming out to vote despite the "harassment and intimidation" of party workers. "This is tactical rigging like 1987," she alleged. "Why were hundreds of our workers picked up? If this is not rigging, what is?"

In a tweet later, the police said that very few people have been detained for being OGWs or over-ground workers for militants. Mufti, however, named a few of the detained youth as the party's youth general secretary Najmus Saqib and district youth president Adil Dukroo.

In Topa Pir, where 3 died 'during army questioning', almost all cast their vote

ARUN SHARMA
JAMMU, MAY 25

WAZIR HUSSAIN along with his son Mohammad Farooq walked nearly 8 km from Topa Pir to vote at the Government Middle School at Danar Sawni near Buffliaz in Anantnag-Rajouri parliamentary constituency's border Poonch district.

Farooq, his elder brother Riyaz and cousin Israel were among the 8 men picked up by the security forces for questioning following the killing of four soldiers in a militant attack on the Dehra Ki Gali (DKG) — Buffliaz road on December 21. While three of the

8 men allegedly died during questioning, Farooq was among five who underwent treatment for severe torture injuries at an army medical facility at Potha for the next over 20 days.

Wazir Hussain said he has cast his vote for a government that takes everybody along on the path of development and justice. "Some army personnel picking up local villagers including his two sons and subsequently torturing them is an altogether different matter and the wrong doers will be answerable before the Allah," he said, adding almost all in Topa Pir barring one or two have voted.

In nearby Thanamandi, where five other civilians were picked up

by the troops for questioning over the attack on army vehicles and later hospitalised at Government District Hospital in Rajouri, polling was brisk.

Noor Ahmed, a BSF head constable, whose brother Safer Ahmed died during alleged torture, too cast his vote at a polling station in Thanamandi in adjoining Rajouri district, which too forms part of the Anantnag parliamentary constituency. "This is the biggest festival of democracy and all Indians shall wholeheartedly participate in it," he said, adding that one shall not blame the entire nation or the entire army for the wrongdoings of a few personnel.

Across THE AISLE



PCHIDAMBARAM

Website: pchidambaram.in
Twitter: @Pchidambaram_IN

THERE ARE things that we see but do not notice. There are things that we read but they do not register. There are things that make us flinch but we shrug them off. That is the reality of existence (we call it living) of Indians, a substantial number poor, fighting prejudice and discrimination, fiercely competitive, and driven by conflicting aspirations.

Drive down near midnight on Kolkata's Central Avenue: few will notice the number of people sleeping on the roadside or ask why these people do not have a shelter at night? Drive through any junction of roads in Delhi: the number of children who beg or sell flowers or towels or pirated books will not trigger the obvious question, why are these children not in school? Drive through the parched, dry lands in many parts of India, there is no sign of water, nothing seems to grow on the land, yet thousands of people live on the land, and few will wonder what is their source of livelihood?

Congress' manifesto LS 2024 acknowledged that, over the years, especially in the last three decades, India's economy has grown. The growth manifested itself in the burgeoning middle class, abundance of consumer goods, a mobile phone in every hand, good interstate roads, and the spanking malls, cinemas and pubs that have become the 'town squares' of urban India. However, the picture of 'shining India', cannot hide the ugly truths that are at once a reminder of our failures and an opportunity to correct our course.

ECONOMY MIRRORS

The guiding principle of the new government that will be elected in June 2024 must be 'pivot to the poor and the excluded'. Congress' manifesto acknowledged this obligation; hence it became the 'talking point' throughout the country. The BJP spent most of its lung power and money power denouncing the Congress' manifesto or, rather, the imaginary version

Two markers: caste and inequality

SOCIETY

UNDP drew the poverty line at earnings per person per month of Rs 1286 (urban) and Rs 1089 (rural), and estimated the *number of poor persons* in India at 22.8 crore. If anything, it is a gross underestimate. According to the World Inequality Lab, the bottom 50 per cent of the people (71 crore) own 3 per cent of the national wealth and earn 13 per cent of the national income. The government's Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCSE) estimates the *household consumption per month* of the bottom 50 percent as Rs 3094 (rural) and Rs 2001 (urban). It does not require great mathematical skills to estimate the consumption expenditure of the bottom 20 per cent of the people. They practically own nothing, earn little and, as a household, consume barely enough to exist on this earth. On the Global Hunger Index, India's rank is 111 out of 125 countries.

Of the poor, according to the HCSE, the OBC are near the average level and the SC and ST are the poorest. It is no surprise that the *economic* hierarchy mirrors the *social* hierarchy that has been entrenched in the country for thousands of years, and the *social* hierarchy is based on *caste*. The very poor and the very oppressed do hard scabrous manual work at the bare minimum wage. 15.4 crore persons are active, registered workers under MGNREGA. They are given work, on average, for 50 days a year.

Meanwhile, at the other end, the top 10 per cent of the population earn 57.7 per cent of the national income. The

share of just 9223 individuals is 2.1 per cent and the share of just 92,234 individuals is 4.3 per cent. Carrying a price tag per car of between Rs 3.22 crore and Rs 8.89 crore, 103 Labhorginis were sold in India in 2023. The rich showed their gratitude when, apart from corporates, 362 individuals bought the infamous electoral bonds worth Rs 757 crore and 'donated' the sum to political parties. All political parties are beholden to their donors.

Have *achche din* arrived? Has India or have Indians become *Atmanirbhar*? India's trade deficit with China alone (yes, the country whose troops have occupied Indian territory and barred patrolling by Indian troops) was USD 100 billion in 2023-24. Is this the dawn of *Amrit Kaal*? For how long will the people be deceived and lied to?

THE TWO MARKERS

Unless political parties acknowledge that the two markers of Indian polity and economy are *caste* and *inequality*, we cannot strike at the root of poverty, discrimination and oppression. Congress' manifesto drew attention to the dark side of the BJP's narrative of 'development' and made a few simple promises to key stakeholders:

To the SC, ST & OBC

■ To conduct a nation-wide socio-economic and caste census and collect the data that will strengthen the agenda for affirmative action.

■ To lift the 50 per cent cap on reservations for SC, ST and OBC.

■ To fill all the backlog vacancies in posts reserved for SC, ST and OBC within one year.

To the Youth

■ To pass a Right to Apprenticeship Act, guarantee a one-year apprenticeship and a stipend of Rs 100,000 a year, and provide jobs.

■ To fill the nearly 30 lakh vacancies in the central government.

■ To waive outstanding education loans and unpaid interest.

To Women

■ To launch the *Mahalakshmi* scheme and provide Rs 100,000 a year to the poorest families.

■ To raise the minimum wage for MGNREGA work to Rs 400 per day.

■ To reserve 50 per cent of central government jobs for women.

PIVOT TO THE POOR

The guiding principle of the new government that will be elected in June 2024 must be 'pivot to the poor and the excluded'. Congress' manifesto acknowledged this obligation; hence it became the 'talking point' throughout the country. The BJP spent most of its lung power and money power denouncing the Congress' manifesto or, rather, the imaginary version.

As the election rolled through the seven phases, the battle was joined between those determined to *protect* the status quo and those determined to *disrupt* the status quo. Keep your fingers crossed until June 4.

Fifth COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

Twitter: @tavleen_singh



Modi's dog whistles have hurt his campaign

SOMETHING THAT has been said often during this endless election campaign is that Narendra Modi's biggest asset is Rahul Gandhi. What is said less is that in this Lok Sabha campaign the opposite could also be true. When our Imperial Dynasty's heir first talked of how he had opened a shop of love in a bazaar of hatred, I dismissed it as a line that sounded as if it had been borrowed from a B-grade Bollywood film. But in recent days, as the Prime Minister's dog whistles against Muslims have become louder and more absurd, I have found myself thinking hard about how I would have voted (I did yesterday) if I were Muslim. I did not need to think too hard. I would have voted for any candidate who could defeat the BJP. The Prime Minister has made it clear that he does not need Muslims to vote for him.

The question that puzzles me is why a politician as skilled as Modi has not noticed how much this has helped the man he sneeringly describes as a prince. He deliberately uses the Urdu word *Shahzada* instead of the Hindi word *Rajkumar*, so it becomes another dog whistle. He has also said many outrageous, untrue things stooping lower than expected of a man who is Prime Minister of the world's largest democracy. He described the Congress Party manifesto as being one that the Muslim League would have produced. It is not. He said Hindu wealth would be stolen by a Congress government and distributed among 'infiltrators' who had "too many children". And for no valid reason has said in more than one interview that he would dedicate his life to prevent reservations based on religion. These assertions are based on so little evidence that it is not just Muslims he has alienated but millions of Hindus who do not believe that ethnic and communal tensions will help India.

The odd thing is that in whipping up this hysteria he has distracted from the real case he can make against Rahul Gandhi. This is that his economic ideas are terrifying. As my friend, Sadanand Dhume, wrote last week, they would turn India into "Venezuela on the Ganges". In a recent speech Rahul said he was born in "the system" and knew it well. He reminded us (unnecessary reminder) that he was born and had lived most of his life in the Prime Minister's house. It was this that had taught him that "the system" is against the poor and those of low caste. He does not explain why if he knew all this, he did not persuade Granny, Daddy or Mummy to change the system.

What he outlined instead were plans for what he will do if he gets a chance to become India's leader. He will change "the system" by redistributing wealth and by reserving jobs at the highest levels of government and even in government contracts for those who come from deprived castes. It brought back for me memories of another prime minister with similar ideas. Vishwanath Pratap Singh wanted even doctors to be chosen based on their caste. Remember?

Then when he developed kidney problems, he spent long summer months in London, at taxpayers' expense, because he said that not only were doctors better but the water for his dialysis was cleaner. It was a shocking admission and never got the attention it deserved. It is to Modi's credit that he has pointed out, after Rahul's recent diatribe against "the system" that caste cannot be the basis for handing out government contracts because this would mean that bridges would be designed by those without the skills to build a bridge.

As someone who has spoken out clearly against reservations, his words had a special resonance for me. At the risk of facing fresh demands for my arrest, I shall repeat that we need less reservations, not more. What we need urgently are many more institutions that teach skills. Unemployment has emerged in this election, as it has in most elections, as the most troubling issue for young people but the real problem is not unemployment but unemployability.

Millions of our graduates are sadly people who do not find jobs, except in government through caste reservations, because their education has been so third rate that it would not be considered an education anywhere else in the world. If there is a vital problem that Modi has not addressed in this past decade, it is this. Hopefully, if he wins a third term, he will put this at the top of the agenda he has already laid out for his first hundred days. In my ever-humble opinion, a third term was a certainty when the election campaign began. If Rahul Gandhi says today that he can put down in writing that Narendra Modi will not become India's next prime minister it is because his "shop of love in the bazaar of hatred" has a definite appeal for Muslim voters.

Let me repeat that if I were Muslim I would not be voting for the BJP. Modi has said often that his idea of secularism is that his welfare schemes do not distinguish beneficiaries by their religion. Clearly there is much for him to learn about real secularism and how much it has benefited India. May I suggest a few conversations with the Khan Market gang whom he so reviles.

Graduate degrees, skills don't mean job stability

Dalitality

SURAJ YENGDE

Twitter: @Surajyengde



MY COUSIN Ravi Paikrao, a talented young man from Pusa, Maharashtra, was a topper in primary and high school. He was an inspiration for all parents in the family. His name would also be used to shame those who were not doing well enough. Ravi was also humble and would not flaunt it in our face. After high school, he pursued an engineering degree. Since he had bigger plans, he went to New Delhi to prepare for the civil services exam. Years later, calling it a "false universe", Ravi returned to Hingoli, a backward district in Maharashtra.

In Hingoli, he tried his hand at marketing, a job that paid him a commission-based salary. However, that didn't work out well in the long-term. Since he was fast approaching his mid-30s, his parents got him married. A responsible family man, Ravi went to Pune to work as a network engineer.

Despite an annual salary of over Rs 3 lakh, he only takes home Rs 15,000 per month. The rest goes into his provident fund and other charges. Ravi said a recruitment company that placed him as a contractual employee with his current firm takes a slice of his salary as commission.

Motivated by the PM's promises in 2014, Ravi voted for Narendra Modi. He recalls the speech where Modi promised to end the contract labour system. But multiple states moved to amend the rules under the Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970 in 2018, allowing contracting across industries. This was rationalised as a move to generate employment and provide steady growth to India's economy by allowing firms to hire or fire labourers as they saw fit. After the termination of their contract, workers are not entitled to notice pay. The government was desperate to improve the rate of unemployment.

This government does not understand the relationship between basic poverty and unemployment. If unemployment keeps spiralling you down into poverty, the contract labour system keeps workers engaged in professions that reproduce poverty and

not out of it.

Ravi's salary is the same as that of graduates and despite being an engineer, he cannot take his wife out for leisure or on vacations. He cannot do more than merely pay rent and put the food on the table. He worries about not being able to help his parents financially in their old age. Living paycheck to paycheck, his job is not a guarantee for self-sufficiency. He blames underdevelopment in Marathwada region. Every graduate from his district and Nanded usually wants to go to Mumbai or Pune but resources in these distant places are saturated.

A student leader from Hyderabad university, Sreerag, whom I had mentored, got a scholarship and went to study in London. He returned home after completing his degree but messages me every month to enquire about job opportunities. He has a job with a political consultancy, earning around Rs 60,000 per month. However, the uncertainty of working in a field such as his has made him vulnerable. He cannot buy a house or join the stream of regular work life.

He was awarded a supportive Government of Kerala scholarship to study abroad, but the money wasn't enough. So he had to take out a loan that he is struggling to repay. Sreerag's experience is mirrored by others like him, who have to keep looking for jobs despite their flashy degrees from abroad. He is now considering leaving India for employment opportunities.

His graduate degree and skills have failed to provide him with stability. As a taxpayer, his talents have not been fully utilised to ensure his stay in India. He wants to contribute to the nation, but cannot. Frustrated, he is taking a step that will keep him away from his family. He has experience working abroad, which qualifies him for a good job, but the contractual uncertainty has made him worry about his future.

Ravi or Sreerag do not see a change taking place any time soon. India ranked 164 in ILO data of regular employees in the workforce. Less than 25% of them are seen as regular employees. Ravi, who never missed voting, did not cast his vote this year. He was sick and 100 km away from the voting booth. Sreerag is working on a project, hoping to get his client into the government.

Suraj Yengde, author of 'Caste Matters', curates Dalitality, has returned to Harvard University

history

HEADLINE

SHUBHRA GUPTA



WHILE SHOOTING *Manthan* on location in the tiny Gujarat village Sanganva, Shyam Benegal directed his cast to wear the same clothes for the 40-45 days duration. "You see, people in that very dry area went for days without bathing because they had so little water, so I told Naseer (Naseeruddin Shah), Smita (Patil), Girish (Karnad), Amrishi (Puri), and the others to not change," says Benegal. "If they stank, they would stink jointly!"

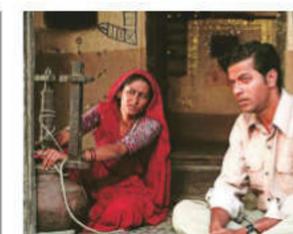
There's something poetically apt about a film shot in blistering heat being showcased at this 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival (May 14-25), which has come as close to an Indian summer as can be, with a record number of Indian films showcased in different sections. Shah, whose first Cannes foray this was, did the mandatory red carpet walk, along with his wife, Ratna Pathak. But what was truly special was the long standing ovation after the screening. "I was very moved," he tells me.

The Benegal classic was India's first crowd-funded film: each farmer of Gujarat's Kheda district contributed Rs 2, and the opening credit read, "Produced by 500,000 farmers". *Manthan*, Benegal's third film (fourth if you count *Charandas Chor*), after the ground-breaking *Ankur* and *Nishant*, is a lightly-fictionalised account of India's most successful co-operative movement which revolutionised the collection and production of milk.

The feature was commissioned by Verghese Kurien, the pioneer who set up Amul, the nodal agency which connected dairy farmers directly with consumers: so massive was the impact of this radical move, with its illustrious linkages going back to Sardar Patel and his close associate Tribhuvandas Patel, that it facilitated what became known as Operation Flood and the 'White Revolution', fulfilling India's founding fathers' dream of making potable milk easily available in every home.

The 1976 film, written by Benegal and Vijay Tendulkar, came after two documentaries on the same subject. "Kurien felt that the story of Amul and the tremendous work done on the ground by the farmers' co-operative needed a feature film to spread the good word, and that's how *Manthan* was made," says Benegal, 89. It won National

How Kurien's idea led to the making of Manthan



A still from Shyam Benegal's *Manthan*. Film Heritage Foundation

Awards for the Best Feature Film, and Best Screenplay (for Vijay Tendulkar) in 1977, and was India's Oscar submission that year.

The film acquired a post-release life, and its landmark nation-building status, by becoming a visual handbook to popularise the idea behind the milk co-operative movement, by far the most successful in the country. With last week's screening in the Classics Section of the festival, in a sparkling restored version, *Manthan* got the grand revival it deserved. The restored print in 4K is a beauty, the vibrant colours of Gujarat gleam, and everything — the faces, the landscape — is crystal clear.

Benegal tells me over the phone from Mumbai how "absolutely delighted" he was at *Manthan*'s second coming. "This restored version looks like the film I wanted to shoot," he said.

The film's cinematographer Govind Nihalani, Benegal's constant collaborator, is equally satisfied. "The negative was in a terrible condition when we got it in 2014 from Shyam Babu asking if we could do something with it," says Shivendra Dungarpur, who has restored the 35 mm print beset by green mould and fading flicker problems.

He explains that the print was grainy and not complete, and there was no sound negative. "We had to do a lot of searching and matching to synch everything. It has been one and a half years of a crazy journey, and we are very proud of what we have managed. The film was shot in different stock, and Govind was very unhappy when he saw the original print; now both of them

(Benegal and Nihalani) are ecstatic."

Dungarpur, whose Film Heritage Foundation works tirelessly to discover and preserve forgotten prints of old classics, may safely be dubbed as India's Cannes darling. *Manthan* was his third outing on the Croisette the third year running (*Thamp* and *Ishanou* were screened respectively 2022 and 2023 in the Classics section; his first foray was with *Kalpana* in 2012).

Health reasons prevented Benegal from being in Cannes. But present at the screening, radiating a quiet pride, was Pateik Babbar, the late Smita Patil's son, as well as her sisters Anita and Manya. As was Nirmala Kurien, Kurien's daughter, who has very clear memories of "watching the film's first cut" as a little girl.

"My father was such a stickler for discipline, so he couldn't understand the lax ways of these film folks," laughs the Chennai-based Nirmala, 66. She remembers a "shy, unassuming, dusky" young woman in "tom jeans" standing quietly by herself on the day of that first cut, and then discovering what a powerhouse performer Smita Patil was, unforgettable as the feisty village woman Bindu, who persuades the other womenfolk to become part of the collective. Nirmala was resplendent in her silk sari at the Cannes premiere, "basking in the reflected glory of my father, who really was the man who saw tomorrow", she says.

For someone who claims he doesn't remember much — the film was made nearly 50 years back — Benegal has great memories of the shoot. The cast stayed in the only circuit house, "whitewashed the walls, cleaned up the place, and created toilet blocks (the villagers went into the fields in the morning)". The cooks they had brought along from Bombay didn't last long, so "it all was a bit rough, but I loved it," laughs Benegal. "Amrishi Puri would wake up at 5.30 and make everyone do PT. So we stayed in good health. And everyone became part of the village. And now I can sit back as an old man, and say we did that."

Over the next weekend (June 1 and 2), the Film Heritage Foundation and the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd are getting together to release the film in 50 cities in 100 PVR Inox cinemas. Mark your calendar.

She SAID

SUKHMANI MALIK



AT ABOUT 15 years old, lying bare-stomached with a scope pressed down on my abdomen, and multiple cysts in my ovaries on display on a screen in front of me, I had two things: a diagnosis and a major worry confirmed. The diagnosis was polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS). The worry? That I, like my aunts (who were made fun of for their hairy backs and necks) and my women classmates, was going to be ugly.

As someone who grew up until that point with "pretty privilege" (and can still swing it, provided my hairy neck is covered by hair or made hairless with bi-weekly salon appointments), being condemned to a fate of sympathetic tut-tuts and taunting snickers, felt like a nightmare come to life.

Let's talk body hair — and my health

While the doctor rambled about how it was my fault and showed concern for no other symptom than infertility, in my head sirens were sounding out danger. The question of how this affects me, not how I am perceived, took years to crop up for me.

At this point, most who keep up with the news know of Prachi Nigam, who was at the centre of a trolling campaign because of her facial hair. She is also the UP state board Class 10 topper this year, but that, we made sure, was not the point. The obviously gendered and beauty-obsessed comments that stirred the controversy aside, what fascinated me was the response from many who showed "concern" for her health.

The Internet was quick to diagnose her with hirsutism (the growth of excessive male-pattern hair in women after puberty) and PCOS, because god forbid a woman, nay a child, simply have facial hair. One com-

ment read, "It's distasteful to mock this young girl... over her facial hair which may be due to hormonal imbalance."

It is interesting that one of the most visible public conversations we have seen in India — where one in five women and people assigned female at birth have the condition — was triggered by "excess hair" on somebody who found herself in the lime-light. And went no further than "don't troll her for it, she can't help it".

A 2022 National Centre for Biotechnology Information study noted that 64% of Indians/Indian-origin people with PCOS across the world suffer one or more comorbidities. Anxiety and depression top the list. The *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism* noted how those with PCOS are twice as likely to be hospitalised for heart disease, diabetes, mental-health conditions, reproductive dis-

orders and cancer of the uterine lining.

PCOS is known in the medical community as a "mystery". Originally thought of as a cosmetic and reproductive condition, with time, it has come to be understood as a chronic health condition. In a world where women and gender non-conforming people fear stepping into a doctor's office for fear of not being believed, or worse, shamed, why does the conversation start or stop at beauty? None of us are strangers to the overwhelming pressures women face to look appealing. Beauty is essential when your career prospects, romantic prospects and value as a person are measured against how "attractive" you are.

Slowed down by constant fatigue, body aches, irregular and gut-wrenchingly painful periods, and several mental health diagnoses, today, I wonder why my quality of life and health were never the point. Not

for me, but also not for my parents (who I had to drag to the doctor's office for a diagnosis), not my doctor (not beyond concerns of infertility), and not for anybody who noticed the hirsutism and decided to inquire.

A 2019 *New York Times* essay reads, "When I was younger, I wanted to be beautiful so badly that I could taste it... What I wanted was to be undeniable, to be all clean lines, to not be debatable." This is what the obsession with beauty for a lot of people (much more so, women) boils down to. To not be debatable. So that you can move beyond the beauty and not have your experience be a subject of "debate".

Sadly, I am not sure if anybody would be bothered with PCOS or many who exhibit symptoms of it if we were to brew a magic potion to cure hirsutism. Who would care about Nigam's health if her photo reflected a clean-shaven neck and a glowing face?

ECONOMY

BRIEFLY

Power demand hits season's new high

New Delhi: India's peak power demand hit the season's new high of 239.96 GW on Friday, due to soaring mercury levels in various parts of the country, which compelled excessive use of cooling appliances like air conditioners and coolers. As per power ministry data, the peak power demand met or the highest supply in the day, was recorded at 239.96 GW on Friday, which is the maximum so far in the summer season this year. On Thursday, it was 236.59 GW, while on Wednesday, the peak power demand was at 235.06 GW, as per power ministry data. **PTI**

Reliance Power reports ₹397-crore loss in Q4

New Delhi: Reliance Power Ltd on Saturday reported a consolidated loss of Rs 397.66 crore during the March quarter, on account of increased cost of fuel consumed. It had posted Rs 321.79 crore profit in the year-ago period, the company said in a filing. Total income, increased to Rs 2,193.85 crore from Rs 1,853.32 crore a year ago. Among expenses, cost of fuel consumed rose to Rs 953.67 crore during Q4 from Rs 823.47 crore in the January-March period in 2022-23. The company has close to 6,000 MW of operational power generation assets. **PTI**

G7 reaffirms warning against FX volatility

New Delhi: Finance leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) advanced nations on Saturday reaffirmed their commitment to warn against excessively volatile currency moves, language Japan sees as a green light to intervene in the market to arrest falls in yen. **REUTERS**

AS AI PROMISES TO MAKE APPLE VS MICROSOFT INTERESTING AGAIN

Microsoft's new hard sell: GenAI that lives inside laptops than in the cloud

AI PCs come at a time when the sharp ramp up in post-Covid demand for new laptops and desktops, and accompanying software, is petering out after a nearly four-year run

ANIL SASI
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

JUST AHEAD of its three-day 'Build' annual conference that took place earlier this week in Seattle, Microsoft kicked off a new campaign for its new 'Copilot+ PC'. Launched in partnership with ecosystem players such as Qualcomm, Intel and AMD, alongside downstream OEM partners including Dell, HP and Samsung, Microsoft has promised that its OpenAI GPT-4o-powered PC will be "20x more powerful and up to 100x as efficient for running AI workloads and deliver industry-leading AI acceleration," and capable of "outperforming Apple's MacBook Air 15-inch by up to 58 percent in sustained multithreaded performance, all while delivering all-day battery life."

Microsoft's Windows-based PCs have been consistently edged out by Apple's devices for years, a trend that has become more pronounced since the launch of the first M1 chip for MacBooks in 2020, which helped Apple devices claim superior battery life and optimised performance. But Apple seems to be seriously behind Microsoft in the AI race. With its new AI PCs (powered by Qualcomm's new Snapdragon X Elite chip), the Redmond-based software major is confident that the new launch could finally tip the scales back in its favour.

AI inside a PC

AI PCs are essentially personal computers that incorporate specialised processors or accelerators called neural processing units or NPUs, which are optimised to run AI apps locally on the device rather than relying on cloud-based services such as ChatGPT or a Gemini. The AI PC push aims to capture the sustained AI build-up over the last 24 months. More importantly, it comes at a time when the sharp ramp up in post-Covid demand for new hardware, and accompanying software, is



CEO Satya Nadella speaks at Microsoft's annual developer conference; New Surface Pro and Surface Laptop. Reuters/Microsoft

petering out after a nearly four year run. Something new had to be on offer to push the next PC wave, as most of the systems bought by consumers in the post-Covid phase are now up for an upgrade.

With the latest version of Windows, a dedicated Copilot key, and an NPU capable of over 40 trillion operations per second, consumers can run Microsoft Copilot locally on a personal device or machine such as a laptop or a desktop. Unlike traditional GPUs (graphic processing units such as the ones made by Nvidia) or traditional CPUs (central processing units), an NPU is almost entirely optimised for AI computation at the hardware level to improve performance and energy efficiency.

According to Jensen Huang, the co-founder, president and CEO of Nvidia, the concept of "on prem" is becoming cool again. The "on device" model is simply taking the "on prem" model a step further.

AI models: From training to inference, cloud to edge

The development comes at a time when there is talk of a slow pivot in machine learning (ML) and AI models from 'training', or

the first phase for an AI model, to what is called 'inference'. Training entails a process of trial and error, or a process of acquainting the AI model with examples of the desired inputs and outputs, or both. That is what foundational models such as OpenAI's Chat GPT, Google's Gemini, and Meta's Llama, have done. Inference is the process that follows AI training, where a trained model is then fine-tuned for practical, and sometimes more specific, use and new applications are built on it.

Traditionally, training models only ran on powerful servers in the cloud, or a network of data centres, given the huge volume of data that needs to be chomped on for simply training the algorithm. For this cloud infrastructure, or public cloud solutions, have provided the base for enterprise computing. Public cloud solutions are fully managed by third-party providers, relieving IT teams of the need to purchase, install, manage and upgrade technology on site. On-premise (or on prem) infrastructure is more like a private cloud environment that is available for use only by one client. On-device ML is when the consumer performs inference with models directly on a device using a mobile app or web browser. AI processing that happens right on a user's computer,

EXPLAINED

On-device machine learning

ON-DEVICE machine learning happens when the user performs AI inference with models directly on a device using a mobile app or web browser. The advantages include lower latency, since there is no round trip to the server and back, along with greater privacy as the data processing is happening on the user's device itself.

which is also sometimes called edge computing.

With edge computing, the ML model processes input data—like images, text, or audio—on a device, rather than sending that data to an external server. That really is the new frontier, which hardware and software makers in the personal computing space are pushing. Big improvements in compute power (CPU, GPU processing power, and through dedicated ML accelerator blocks such as NPUs) have enabled bringing on-device performance close to what could be achieved on dedicated servers.

The advantages of on-device ML includes lower latency, since there is no round trip to the server and back, and that there is much greater privacy, since the data processing is happening on the user's device itself. Disadvantages include on-device models needing to be much smaller than their server counterparts.

'Total' Recall

Microsoft is touting the advantage of both the lower latency and privacy gains in its Copilot+ PCs, which the Redmond-based company's Executive Vice President, Consumer Chief Marketing Officer, Yusuf Mehdi called "the fastest, most intelligent Windows PCs ever built".

CRUDE WATCH

OIL POSTS WEEKLY LOSS

Houston: Oil prices rose about 1% on Friday, but fell for the week on worries that strong US economic data would keep interest rates elevated for a longer period, curbing fuel demand. **REUTERS**

ENSURE COMPLIANCE BY JUNE 30: IRDAI

Corporate governance for insurers: Regulator lists new guidelines

HITESH VYAS
MUMBAI, MAY 25

THE INSURANCE Regulatory and Development Authority (Irdai) has directed insurance companies to take prior approval for the appointment of board chairperson.

The regulator said the present board chairperson can continue up to March 31, 2026 or till they complete their current tenure. To promote checks and balances, it is good practice for the chair of the board to be a non-executive board member and not serve as chair of any board committee, Irdai added.

In a master circular on corporate governance for insurers, issued on May 22, Irdai said the board in consultation with the key management persons need to ensure that the overall direction of the business of the insurance company, policies and strategies should shape the level of risk adoption, standards of business conduct and ethical behaviour of the insurer at the macro level. "While laying down the projections, the Board must address the expectations of the shareholders and the policyholders," the guidelines said.

It said that the chief executive officer should be responsible for the conduct of the insurer's affairs in a manner which is not detrimental to the interests of policyholders.

The board of the insurance companies should monitor and manage potential conflicts of interest of policyholders, management, members of the board of directors and shareholders, including misuse of corporate assets and abuse in related party transactions. They should also ensure fair treatment of policyholders and employees.

The insurer should also ensure independence of control functions including compliance, risk, audit, actuarial and secretarial function, it said.

For insurers within a group, appropriate and effective group-wide risk control systems need to be adopted in addition to the control systems at the level of the insurer.

"In the case of insurance cover given by the insurer to its group companies, price/ premium

IRDAI'S REVISED GUIDELINES

■ Applicable to all insurers except foreign company engaged in re-insurance business

■ Board must address the expectations of the shareholders and the policyholders

■ The CEO should be responsible for the conduct of the insurer's affairs

quoted by the insurers under the applicable product filing regulations/ circular should be considered at arm's length," the guidelines said.

The Irdai said that the board of every insurer should set up an Investment Committee comprising at least two Non-Executive Directors, the Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Investment Officer, Chief Risk Officer and the Appointed Actuary. The audit committee of insurers should be directly responsible for the recommendation of the appointment, remuneration, performance and oversight of the work of the auditors.

Commenting on the guidelines, Nangia & Co LLP's Partner - Audit & Assurance, Jaspreet Bedi, said that the new corporate governance guidelines address the allocation and regulation of power and accountabilities within an insurer and avoids undue concentration of authority and power.

"The auditor refresh policy is to promote independence, impartiality, and integrity in the audit process. It enhances transparency and accountability by introducing new auditors at regular intervals of four years, preventing complacency, and maintaining rigorous financial reporting standards," Bedi said.

The master circular is applicable to all insurers except foreign company engaged in re-insurance business through a branch established in India. Irdai has given insurers time up to June 30, 2024 to ensure compliance with the provisions.

Brazil, Canada, EU urge India to submit timely notifications on sugar subsidies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

A GROUP of WTO member countries, including Brazil, Canada and the European Union, have urged India to submit timely notifications on sugar subsidies in the World Trade Organisation, an official said.

The issue came up for discussion during the meeting of the WTO's agriculture committee on May 23-24 in Geneva.

These countries are also major sugar exporters like India and they allege that support measures by India distort global sugar trade.

Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Paraguay, New Zealand, the EU, and Guatemala have "urged India to submit timely notifications on the subsidies", the Geneva-based official said. India has stated that the Indian central and state governments neither paid for nor procured sugarcane from farmers, as all purchases were made by private sugar mills, hence, this information was not included in its notifications of domestic support.

The discussion assumes significance as in 2022, India has appealed against a ruling of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) trade dispute settlement panel which ruled that the country's domestic support measures for sugar and sugarcane are inconsistent with global trade norms.

The appeal was filed by India in the WTO's Appellate Body, which is the final authority on such trade disputes and is not functioning.

Brazil, Australia, and Guatemala had filed the cases against India on these support measures. In its appeal, India has



File

stated that the WTO's dispute panel ruling has made certain "erroneous" findings about domestic schemes to support sugarcane producers and exports and the findings of the panel are completely "unacceptable" to it. The US and Australia have also presented a joint counter notification regarding India's sugar subsidies.

According to their study, over the four-year period from 2018-19 to 2021-22, India has provided market price support on sugarcane in excess of the limits set out in the Agreement on Agriculture (10 per cent of the total value of sugarcane production) by a margin of 92-101 per cent. They claimed that India failed to report any of these subsidies in its past notifications since 1995, the official said.

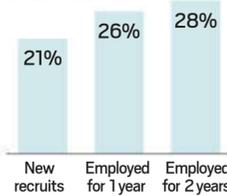
Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Paraguay, New Zealand, the EU, and Guatemala voiced support for the counter notification.

India has said it refused to consider the methodology used in the 2018 dispute as the basis for discussion, given that India has appealed the case to the appellate body. New Delhi has also questioned why Australia and the US insisted on using the Indian rupee for calculations, given that the currency was heavily impacted by inflation.

'Attrition rates continue to remain high for MBA graduates'

Attrition rates is an area of concern, especially in entry-level jobs, as per a Deloitte India study

PAN-INDIA ATTRITION RATES IN TOP-TIER CAMPUSES



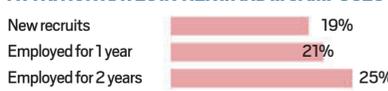
■ 4 of every 5 executives favour decisions on hiring, pay, promotions, among others, based on skills over job history or network

■ Year-on-year compensation has declined for the first time in 5 years across tiers of MBA talent and in the top 10 tiers for

M.Tech and B.Tech ■ Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai: Top location preferences for engineering graduates

■ Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai: Top three preferred locations for students pursuing management degrees

ATTRITION RATES IN TIER II AND III CAMPUSES



Source: Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu India LLP/PTI

Reliance Industries seeks CCI nod for Viacom18-Star India merger

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

BILLIONAIRE MUKESH Ambani-promoted Reliance Industries has sought approval from fair trade regulator Competition Commission of India (CCI) for the \$8.5-billion merger of Viacom18 and Star India Pvt Ltd (SIPL).

"The proposed transaction aims to combine the entertainment businesses (along with certain other identified businesses) of Viacom18, part of Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) group and SIPL, wholly-owned by The Walt Disney Company (TWDC).

"As a result of the transaction, SIPL, currently a wholly-owned entity of TWDC through its subsidiaries, will become a joint venture (JV) which will be jointly held by RIL, Viacom18 and existing TWDC subsidiaries," a notice filed with the CCI said on Friday.



The proposed transaction will not cause any appreciable adverse effect on competition in India, RIL said in the notice.

However, to facilitate the CCI's assessment, they have identified several key markets where horizontal overlaps were significant such as licensing of audio visual content rights, distribution of broadcast TV channels, provision of audio visual (AV) content, and supply of advertising space in India.

SIPL is engaged in a range of media activities, including TV broadcasting, motion pictures and operation of an OTT platform. It is a wholly-owned entity of US-based The Walt Disney Company (TWDC).

Viacom18 is engaged in the business of broadcasting of television (TV) channels, operation of an over-the-top (OTT) platform, in India and worldwide. It is also engaged in the business of production and distribution

of motion pictures.

In February this year, global media giant Walt Disney Co and Reliance Industries announced signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India to create a Rs 70,000 crore (USD 8.5 billion) behemoth.

After the successful completion of the deal, it would create the biggest firm in the Indian media and entertainment sector, with over 100 channels in several languages, two leading OTT platforms and a viewer base of 750 million across the country. Nita Ambani, wife of Reliance Industries Chairman Mukesh Ambani, will chair the joint venture, while Uday Shankar will be the Vice Chairperson.

Reliance and its affiliates will hold 63.16 per cent stake in the combined entity, while Disney will have the remaining 36.84 per cent shareholding. Reliance has also agreed to invest around Rs 11,500 crore into the joint venture to grow the OTT business.

I-T dept notifies cost inflation index for current fiscal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

THE INCOME tax department has notified the Cost Inflation Index for the current fiscal beginning April 2024, for calculating long-term capital gains arising from sale of immovable property, securities and jewellery.

The Cost Inflation Index (CII) is used by taxpayers to compute gains arising out of sale of capital assets after adjusting inflation.

The CII for financial year 2024-25, relevant to assessment year 2025-26, stood at 363, as per a notification of the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).

The CII number for last fiscal

was 348 and for 2022-23 financial year it was 331.

Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said the CII reflects the inflation in the economy, which causes the prices of goods and services to increase over time. For the financial year 2023-24, the CII was set at 348.

The index for the following financial year, 2024-25, has been updated to 363, marking an increase of 15 points, which corresponds to an annual inflation rate of approximately 4.3 per cent.

"This is consistent with the retail inflation rate of 4.83 per cent recorded in April 2024. Taxpayers usually prefer a higher CII as it allows them to claim larger tax rebates," Mohan said.

Closer to liquidation: EaseMyTrip CEO Pitti withdraws Go First bid

ROHIT VAID
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

IN A development that might push bankrupt airline Go First closer to liquidation, EaseMyTrip's chief executive officer Nishant Pitti on Saturday announced he has decided to withdraw his bid for the airline.

"We have decided to withdraw from GoAir bid to concentrate on our core areas of strength. Our focus remains on leveraging our expertise and resources to achieve sustainable growth and success," Pitti said in a post on X.

The move comes after Delhi High Court's order last month, allowing lessors to deregister

and take possession of 54 Go First planes. This made it tough for bidders to attempt a takeover, and also dashed hopes of lenders to the airline to get good value in the bids. Pitti's bid was through Busy Bee Aviation (BBAPL), a joint venture with SpiceJet MD Ajay Singh.

Pitti's decision also coincides with his online travel firm posting a Rs 15-crore net loss during the January-March quarter against a Rs 31-crore net profit in the same quarter of the previous year. Pitti attributed the one-time loss to write-offs associated with Go First's dues. In total,

Rs 74 crore has been written off that Go First owed the venture, he added. **FE**

BRIDGE

Dealer: North Vulnerable: Both

WEST	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠ 863	1H	dbl	2H	2S
♥ A942	pass	pass	3H	3S
♦ K6	pass	pass	pass	
♣ QT109				

What should West be thinking about on opening lead?

You have four choices; one of them really appetizing and two of them not so friendly and one definitely awful. Your options are a trump, the ace of hearts, the king of diamonds or the queen of clubs. It is easy to reject the trump lead. Dummy is not expected to have a ruffing value so leading a trump is not to help declarer draw trump and give him time. The queen of clubs is the obvious lead there is no fault to anyone who finds that lead. It could well be correct. The king of diamonds has obvious potential but it has obvious risks too. Finally, the ace of hearts goes against one of the strongest rules for leads which is that leading aces or underleading aces is a bad idea against a suit contract.

I can see merits in all these leads except for a trump. The reason this hand is shown is that the bidding gives you more to think about. On this hand a club lead gives the show away. The ace of hearts or the king of diamonds will work. I lean toward the ace of hearts because when you see the dummy, it may become apparent what to do next. A club may be the winning switch, a diamond could be called for, and it is possible that leading more hearts is best. One thing you should be aware of is that leading the ace of hearts is less likely than normal to set up a trick for declarer's king.

On this hand the dummy will shout that switching to the king of diamonds is your best chance. That will get you two diamond tricks and a ruff.

The North hand: S-4 H-K76 D-J94 C-AK652
The East hand: S-JH-10853 D-AB752 C-743
The South hand: S-AKQ109752 H-QJD-Q103C-

There are a lot of little nuances to this hand, the big one being that when an opponent opens with a high level preempt, leading an ace is worth considering, something that you would normally not do.

Dealer: West Vulnerable: None

NORTH	EAST
♠ J32	♥ Q76
♥ J108	♦ Q32
♦ A874	♦ KQ109
♣ 1053	♣ 764

West	North	East	South
1S	pass	2S	3H
pass	pass	pass	

West leads the king of clubs, which wins. He continues with the jack, taken by South's ace. South draws three rounds of hearts, ending in dummy. West showing up with a small singleton, and leads the four of diamonds towards this hand. East wins this, of course. What should East play now?

SUNDAY CROSSWORD 2479

QUICK CLUES

ACROSS

- Stops functioning (5,2)
- Asylum seeker? (7)
- Make a face (5)
- A naval officer (9)
- Purposefully (13)
- Gizmo (6)
- Adroit (8)
- Rear curtain of a stage (8)
- Ridicules or derides (6)
- Having four sides (13)
- Bride's clothes (9)
- Coniferous evergreen forest (5)
- Agreeableness (7)
- Tributes (7)

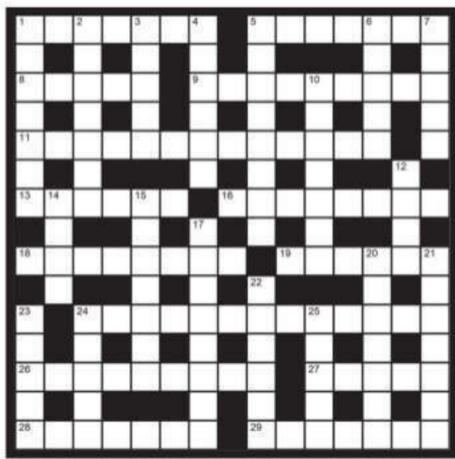
DOWN

- Ambitious (7)
- Made or produced (7)
- Air-raid warning (5)
- An outdoor social gathering (6)
- Brought to mind; suggested to? (8)
- Ridiculous (5)
- Foe (5)
- Like limestone (7)
- A ludicrously false statement (4)
- Dutch football club (4)
- Makes beloved? (7)
- Polite behavior (8)
- Fashioning or shaping (7)
- Muslim sovereigns (7)
- Detective (6)
- Four as a prefix (5)
- Cite from a literary saying (5)
- Tribal emblem (5)

CRYPTIC CLUES

ACROSS

- Almost all around me running after the vehicle - it's really sweet! (7)
- Act before parliament opens with bad temper (3-4)
- College skull found below? (1-4)
- May be fired though exceptionally bright (4-5)
- Military protection needed after nudism on the farm? (5,8)
- Disagreement about raising the deposit? (4,2)
- Our aim: let us try to fake! (8)
- Ice-casts as recast for very austere persons (8)
- Double about to get lawyer back? Take another look at it! (6)
- Sarah Dight ate out right in front (8,5)
- Cash holders for the rich man? (5-4)
- Record one conversation starting



- Stage performer who doesn't say, "I'm in French waters"? (5)
- Despatches terminate in a ship (5)
- A man of much gallantry (5)

DOWN

- Are, in short, tenters perhaps the cause of the disturbance? (7)
- Friend David initially married (5)
- They don't like gooseberries (6)
- Harbour reputed to be one in the Middle East (4,4)
- Great figure, a master to his mate (5)
- Carried the measure concerning median credit (5)
- Garland certain to appeal to the work-weary? (7)
- Boy it's encouragement at first for Indian flour (4)
- In America, the heartless teacher used to be behind the iron curtain (4)
- Completely in accordance with what you say? (7)
- Get things moving and evict that old airline (8)
- Green damaged after record stand (7)
- Takes off the pipes? (7)
- Engraves hunting scenes? (6)

Solutions to 2478

QUICK CLUES Across: 1 Sips, 3 Ballistics, 10 Morocco, 11 Clothes, 12 Lighter, 13 Scrubs, 15 Cynic, 16 Protested, 18 Terminate, 21 Drawl, 23 Enacts, 25 Bottles, 27 Seminal, 28 Office, 29 Addressing, 30 Went
Down: 1 Simplicity, 2 Paragon, 4 Apocrypha, 5 Locus, 6 Scourge, 7 Inhibit, 8 Sais, 9 Acetic, 14 Adolescent, 17 Overblown, 19 Renamed, 20 Incense, 21 Detail, 22 All-time, 24 Sells, 26 Ossa
CRYPTIC CLUES Across: 1 Tear, 3 Party-walks, 10 Netball, 11 Stotical, 12 Numeral, 13 Sewers, 15 Fists, 16 Carbonari, 18 Record sum, 21 Digit, 23 Quacks, 25 Sabbath, 27 Outdoor, 28 Insider, 29 Second-hand, 30 Levy
Down: 1 Tuning fork, 2 Attimes, 4 All Blacks, 5 Tests, 6 Who's Who, 7 Laertes, 8 Salt, 9 Tears, 14 Dry Harry, 17 Remission, 19 Caustic, 20 Raccoon, 21 Debase, 22 Grandee, 24 Sarah, 26 Mobs.

If it's your Birthday

Sunday May 26

Your planetary movements are imaginative and confident on the one hand, down-to-earth and practical on the other. And I'd say that's a pretty good combination.

Monday May 27

You are ready and willing to make the most of next year's offers and opportunities. Be prepared for sudden changes of plan and possible emotional challenges.

Tuesday May 28

You should be in your element today, happy that the world is on your side, and that your sensitivity and intuition are qualities to be admired.

Wednesday May 29

Look to the future with hope in your heart. The Moon begins a new pattern very soon, continuing its sensitive role in your life.

Thursday May 30

You'll be happiest when you're active and even if you're taking time off you'll want to pursue worthwhile activities, the sort which add to your experience.

Friday May 31

Partners have to have their say. But to look at it from the other side, it could be positively to your advantage if partners are permitted to express themselves.

Saturday June 1

You can make small decisions and make minor choices, but whether you are really ready to make a substantial long-term commitment is a moot point.

YOUR WEEK AHEAD

ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)

There's an intriguing social dimension in your horoscope, so it could well be worth your while setting aside extra time for friends. At work, you will have to pay more attention to colleagues' wishes and ideas. In love, your demands are increasing - but don't push a loved one into a corner.

TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)

By the end of the week you will be in a rather more ambitious mood, and this will favour those of you with professional goals to pursue. Face up to awkward discussions at home, no matter how difficult. A financial loss should be recovered, which could be good news.

GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)

The stars are definitely on your side, and serious discussions are now necessary. Those of you particularly singled out for special treatment are considering a further course of study. The other main factor in your chart indicates the possibility of many short journeys.

CANCER (June 22 - July 23)

Financial prospects now seem to be in the forefront. You may even be involved in some sort of business venture, one which could be quite a departure from the past, and take you in some surprising new directions. In love, it is time to sit down and make plans.

LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)

You're at a minor crossroads and you have some choice as to which path you should take. It is more than likely that you'll meet some sort of opposition to your plans. You may find, for example, it is possible that partners will raise difficulties concerning a shortage of money or some other problem.

VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)

You should be rights more busier than usual, and a feature of the current time could be a number of secret discussions and meetings. Listen to your intuitions, for a hunch could point you in exactly the right direction. A romantic encounter may lay the basis for a new long friendship.

LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)

Which way should you turn? You have some deep thinking to do and, in all honesty, it is probably personal affairs which should dominate your time, rather than concerns to do with work or social obligations. You may be dreaming of life in another place or with other people.

SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)

Why not allow yourself a little moment to pause and take stock. You have certainly done well in the past, though perhaps not as well as you could have wished. The best way to put yourself forward is to be sensible, wise, responsible and in command of all the facts.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 23)

You are facing some intriguing questions, and there are no easy answers, but one way to go about your life today is to talk to people at every turn. Volunteer your own opinions, ask them what they think, listen carefully and try to pick up pointers for future action.

CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)

Your stars are in a practical mood, so swing into materialistic mode and deal with important matters such as shopping, investments and savings. You must also begin to face certain practical questions, and plan for the future, rather than the present. A stranger might become the most important person in your life.

AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)

As time progresses, you will begin to feel more in control, and less subject to the whims of fate. Although you have the practical sense, it looks very much as if other people have the best ideas. A new collaboration will be extremely fruitful, but you may have to wait up to six months for the best results.

PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)

You must step back and let other people say their piece. It could well be that what they have to contribute helps shed new light on your secret fears. You may even discover exactly how you have been holding yourself back in recent times. What you need now is much more confidence.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

_____ is a negotiator's greatest weapon. - Victor Kiam (11)

DIADOR



EISNNT



DMIIIO



ALNUFM



SOLUTION: INTIMIDATION is a negotiator's greatest weapon. - Victor Kiam

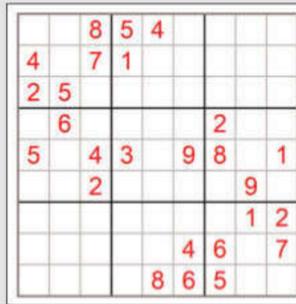
SUDOKU 5572

Difficulty Level 5s

Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

Difficulty Level

1s = Very easy; 2s = Easy; 3s = Medium; 4s = Hard; 5s = Very Hard; 6s = Genius



SOLUTION SUDOKU 5571



Classifieds

I, Haseen Begum W/o Siraj, R/o C-25, Street No.-3, North Ghonda, Delhi-110053, have changed my name to Haseen Begum to Haseen, for all future purposes.

0040730396-3

I, Suman W/o Ashok, R/o House No 166, Sector 3, Pocket-D, DSIDC, Bawana, Delhi-110039 have changed my name to Suman Lata for all future purposes.

0040730451-2

I, Neetu W/o Kush Bhatija, R/o-3/14 Subhash Nagar, New Delhi-110027, have changed my name to Neetu Bhatija for all purposes.

0040730396-4

In my father's Army record, my name is wrongly mentioned as Hariram Bhati and date of birth is 04.07.1978, which is wrong. Whereas my real name is Hariram and correct date of birth is 08.04.1978. Hariram, S/o Nk. Shival (Army No 2951265 P), R/o village Maycha, tehsil Dadri, Gautam Buddha Nagar.

0070904877-1

I, Rajesh Kumar S/o Gurbachan Dass, R/o-WZ-1853, Multani-Mohalla, Rani Bagh, Delhi-110034, have changed my name to Rajeev Kumar Mutreja, Permanently.

0040730438-2

I, RAMYA DEEPTHA KOVVURI D/o SATYANARAYANA RAJU R/O 52/7, GALI NO-7, AMBEDKAR NAGAR, HAIDERPUR, SHALIMAR BAGH, DELHI-88, I have changed my name to RAMYA DEEPTHI.

0070904840-1

I, Prashant S/o Ashok, R/o Flat No 531, 2nd Floor, Block-GH, Pocket-1, Sector-29 Rohini, Delhi-110042, have changed my name to Prashant Singhal for all future purposes

0070904846-1

I, Parmod Kumar Bansal S/o Hari Ram Bansal R/o I-372, Beta-2, Greater Noida U.P have changed my name to Parmod Kumar Bansal for all future purposes.

0070904891-1

I, Parmet Singh S/o Amarjeet Singh R/o H.No. R-10/84, Raj Nagar, Ghaziabad, UP-201001, have changed my daughters name from Sahaj Kaur to Sahej Kaur for all future purposes.

0070904845-1

I, Sandhya Tyagi W/o Nikunj Tyagi R/o Nagla order, PO: Sardhana, Distt. Meerut, UP-250342 declare that I have changed my name from Sandhya Tyagi (old name) to Sandhya Tyagi (new name).

0020476192-2

I, LUCKY, D/O PRABHU NATH SINGH, R/O HOUSE NO-866, FLAT NO-G-4, GREEN STREET, SECTOR-5VAISHALI, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH-201010, have changed my name to LUCKY SINGH.

0040730451-3

I, Siraj Khan S/o Qadir, R/o C-25, Street No.-3, North Ghonda, Delhi-110053 have changed my name from Siraj Khan to Siraj for all future purposes.

0040730451-1

I, Sanjay Kumar, S/O-Ved Prakash Tomar, R/O-A-53, sector-15, Noida, Have Changed My Name to Sanjay Tomar For All Purposes.

0040730396-2

I, PRABHU NATH, S/O RAM NARESH SINGH, R/O HOUSE NO-866, FLAT NO-G-4, GREEN STREET, SECTOR-5, VAISHALI, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH-201010, have changed my name to PRABHU NATH SINGH.

0040730451-7

I, MAHESH, S/O-VEER SINGH, R/O H.No. 1076/1, Dayanand Colony Gaon, Gurgaon (Haryana)-122001, have changed my name to Mahesh Kumar, for all Purposes.

0040730451-8

I, LUCKY, D/O PRABHU NATH SINGH, R/O HOUSE NO-866, FLAT NO-G-4, GREEN STREET, SECTOR-5VAISHALI, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH-201010, have changed my name to LUCKY SINGH.

0040730451-6

I, Kush Kumar, S/o-Mohan Lal, R/o-3/14, Subhash Nagar, New Delhi-110027, have changed my name to Kush Bhatija for all purposes.

0040730396-3

I, Kailash Kumar, S/o Khushi Ram, R/o 1C/85 NH-1, Faridabad-121001, Haryana, have changed my name to Kailash Bhatia, for all future purposes.

0040730396-7

I, Jagdish Chandra, S/o Mahadev Prasad Mishra, R/o E-117, Sushant-Lok Phase-1, Next to Boom Plaza, Sector-57, Gurgaon, Haryana-122003, have changed my name to Jagdish Prasad Mishra.

0040730451-4

I, Braj Bhushan S/o Ram Jinish Tiwari R/o S-2, Plot No.81, Indrapuram, Ghaziabad, UP have changed my name to Braj Bhushan Tiwari.

0040730451-5

I, Vineet Kumar S/o Nawal Kishor Mandal, H.No.1805, Gali no.10, Sanjay colony, Narela, Delhi-110040 have changed my name to Binit Kumar for all purposes.

0070904841-1

I, Sunil Kumar Jha, S/O-Upendra Nath Jha, R/O-D-68, Gali No.6, Niti Vihar, Kirari Suleman Nagar, Delhi-110086, have changed my minor son name from Abhinav Kumar to Abhinav Kumar Jha.

0040730396-5

I, Paras Ram, S/o Teja Ram, R/O-146-C, SFS DDA Flat Gulabi bagh, New Delhi 110007, have changed my name to Paras Ram Kala, for all future purposes.

0040730396-6

I, RAMYA DEEPTHA KOVVURI D/o SATYANARAYANA RAJU R/O 52/7, GALI NO-7, AMBEDKAR NAGAR, HAIDERPUR, SHALIMAR BAGH, DELHI-88, I have changed my name to RAMYA DEEPTHI.

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0020476192-2

I, LUCKY, D/O PRABHU NATH SINGH, R/O HOUSE NO-866, FLAT NO-G-4, GREEN STREET, SECTOR-5VAISHALI, GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH-201010, have changed my name to LUCKY SINGH.

0040730451-6

RECRUITMENT

SITUATION VACANT

OTHERS

Job: B - Com Graduates with 3-4 years of experience in accounts, TDS, GST, and Income tax. Salary negotiable. Location: C A Firm, Ambernath (E). Email: deepaahire2009@gmail.com <mailto:deepaahire2009@gm ail.com>.

0050242623-1

MATRIMONIAL



BENGALI

33+, 5'3", Engineer, 14 LPA, Bangalore, looking for well-educated, teetotal, working grooms. Contact: 7487846659

0050242484-1

LOST & FOUND

I, SONIA VERMA D/O ROSHAN LAL BARARIA, R/O C-40 KAKROLA MORE PATEL GARDEN N.S.T., DWARKA SOUTH-WEST DELHI-110076, HAVE LOST MY PROPERTY DOCUMENT F-200 .2ND-FLOOR, LAXMI NAGAR, DELHI-110092, LOST ORIGINAL PROPERTY DOCUMENT (CERTIFICATE REGISTRATION NO-19,182 BOOK NO-1.VOL.NO.5852) & (CERTIFICATE REGISTRATION NO.-8,323, BOOK NO-4 VOL NO 3889) FINDER PLEASE CONTACT ON ABOVE ADDRESS. SONIA VERMA.

0040730451-11

I, Ms. Bhawana Chug D/o Late Shri Girish Chander Chug., owner of Flat No.11-C, 3rd floor

IPL 2024 FINAL: PREVIEW

Clash of the new-age teams

Kolkata and Hyderabad have binned the conventional approach to embrace a style in which T20s are ought to be played

FINAL MATCH UPS

Can Chakravarthy fox Klaasen?

SRH skipper Pat Cummins' variations can also make it difficult for his KKR counterpart Shreyas Iyer to break the shackles in the final.

Cummins vs Iyer

Iyer has been the counter-attacking batsman in the middle overs, repelling pressure. Cummins has the goods to trouble him though, and it won't be a surprise if he doesn't just rely on short balls in slow conditions in Chepauk. He has the fast nipbacker, the straightener that can pitch on off and hit off stump, the slower bouncer. Iyer is a batsman who likes to pre-empt and manoeuvre when at the crease. Cummins excels in reading minds, and lays traps not just with the obvious deliveries like those listed above. He even fools batsmen into thinking he is bowling to their strengths. Like he did against Rohit Sharma and KL Rahul, with back-of-length kickers seemingly on middle and leg, but those that just about straighten on that line. Both batsmen went instinctively for the swat-pull but the late straightening allied with bounce induced top-edges.

Starc vs Head



Travis Head showed in the last game that he is now ready to be careful in the first 10 deliveries. If ego or the occasion doesn't get to his head, he is likely to do the same against **Mitch Starc**. Starc isn't a kind of bowler to try something different from what has worked and the safe assumption is that he will gun for Head with his away-curlers on a good length around middle and off. That ball has knocked out Head even in domestic cricket even when he hasn't been trying to smash them. He has made technical changes recently, with the angle of his bat-pick-up — it used to almost veer to leg and middle and open up towards the off. Now he brings the bat much straighter so he isn't chasing away from the body and this has made him more compact. Still, that Starc's pacy curler has hurt him.

Klaasen vs Chakravarthy

Two players who attack by keeping things unique but simple. **Heinrich Klaasen** doesn't let his feet get in the way, relying on the knee-flex, body-positioning and the willingness to wait for the ball to come to him. Varun Chakravarthy has worked hard to ensure his release position is almost the same for googly and the legbreak, that he has started to bowl more than before in the last two years. He has also increased his pace, raised his release position, which had fallen down a couple of years in his then pursuit of adding more deliveries. Both have embraced minimalism and rediscovered success. Expect the leg break away from the off stump before the quickish slider rasps in on the middle stump to try to make Klaasen miscue.

SRIRAM VEERA

VENKATA KRISHNA B
CHENNAI, MAY 25

ONA humid Saturday afternoon, Shreyas Iyer and Pat Cummins, headed to Chennai's Marina beach for the official photo-shoot before the IPL final. With the vast Bay of Bengal in the background, they settled on top of a catamaran.

It's perhaps the only time since the IPL hooter went off at MA Chidambaram Stadium on March 23, they appeared out of place. After two months as the IPL comes back to where it began, there is no doubt that the two best teams of the tournament — Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad — have made it to the final.

In contrasting ways, under a new captain and support staff, Kolkata and Hyderabad have put all the conventional stereotypes to the bin and have embraced a style in which T20s are ought to be played. Humongous totals became the norm. Out of six 200-plus totals that Hyderabad made, three of them were in excess of 250. Like Hyderabad, Kolkata too have six 200-plus totals. Invariably before the pitches started getting slower, the matches involving them turned into a six-hitting contest. No team has hit as many sixes as Hyderabad's 175. And Kolkata are fourth in the list with 135.

But on and off the field, they are polar opposite. Shreyas' Kolkata, with Gautam Gambhir as their mentor, are meticulous. There is an orderly feel to everything they do. In a season, where IPL teams have relied less on all-rounders and instead relied on specialists, Kolkata are still banking on Sunil Narine and Andre Russell.

Like Chennai Super Kings in 2011 or Mumbai Indians in 2020, Kolkata are showing no real weakness in their ranks. Two aggressive openers who set the tone followed by a middle-order that is as destructive, two mystery spinners, and a fiery pacer to go with promising young prospects, they are as rounded as a team can get.

They have been predictable in terms of what to expect but therein lies their strength. They have suffered only three losses in the entire league stage, the first team to do so after Rajasthan Royals (2008) and Punjab Kings (2014) in an era where the gap between the teams have narrowed.

For every question that the opposition throws up, they have had answers to it, thanks to the meticulous planning. In a format where consistency is hard to find, it has been the hallmark of this side. Unless the conditions force, they have seldom tinkered the XI.

Hyderabad, on the other hand, has embraced chaos to get here. At the end of the auctions, they appeared a strong team on paper, but doubts still persisted as to whether all of it would show on the field. Having finished bottom of the table in two of the last three seasons, this has been a year of revival as wished by the actor Rajnikanth. During his Jaileer movie launch, with Hyderabad owner Kavya Maran in the audience, the actor made a pitch to her father Kalanidhi Maran.

"My only request for Kala Sir (Kalanidhi Maran) is to get good players for Sunrisers. Every time I see Kavya's expressions during the Sunrisers match, my blood pressure shoots up," Rajnikanth said.

And after acquiring Pat Cummins and Travis Head at the auctions, they have appeared a totally different side.

They have been unpredictable, even dropping players they ought to have struck with. But somehow, they have managed to put all of it aside and stand a worthy opponent to challenge Kolkata for the title.

Their roads to finals have been contrasting, but there are common elements too. Both are prepared to win games with the bat, fully prepared for their bowlers to play sec-



Shreyas Iyer (L) and Pat Cummins during a captains' photoshoot at the Marina Beach, Chennai, on the eve of the IPL final. Sportzpics/BCCI

Out of six 200-plus totals that Hyderabad made, three of them were in excess of 250. Like Hyderabad, Kolkata too have six 200-plus totals.

VENKATA KRISHNA B
CHENNAI, MAY 25

ond fiddle. The Orange Caps and Purple Caps are considered out-dated concepts with strike-rate and dot-balls taking precedence. These are two evenly matched sides, playing with the liberty and freedom that would make for a neutral to enjoy their attempts to break the glass ceiling. On the eve of the match, neither Shreyas nor Cummins found a reason to change their styles that has gotten them this far.

Pitch with bounce and pace

On Sunday, they will lock horns on a red-soil pitch — which offers good bounce and pace. With rain around, dew is unlikely to make an impact. If the pitch offers turn like it did in Qualifier II, both teams have spinners to fall back as well, with Kolkata having a slight edge on that front.

But as Shreyas said, all of it would come down to the mindset. Before the IPL began, Cummins didn't know what to expect at the IPL. But he has shown by now that lack of experience in leading a team in a fast-paced format isn't that important. He used last year's ODI World Cup to crack the code in Indian conditions. One can even stretch the final of that 50-over event to describe Cummins' attitude.

India were the most dominant side then, he deflated them in the grand final. Kolkata have had a similar dominating run in this IPL, if any team can stop them it would be Cummins' SRH.

Like Australia, Hyderabad have been the mentality monsters, always stepping up when the need arises. After Ahmedabad in that world cup final, Cummins gets another opportunity to humble an Indian captain.

Between high-flying openers and finishers, two Iyers play perfect foil

VENKATA KRISHNA B
CHENNAI, MAY 25

ON THE eve of the IPL final, Shreyas Iyer was asked whether he is a less celebrated captain. Dating back to his stint with Delhi Capitals, this is the second time in the last four years where Shreyas is captaining his side in an IPL final. After missing the entire last season with Kolkata Knight Riders due to an injury, he is a key figure in their turnaround this season. But it is Kolkata's mentor Gautam Gambhir, who is being celebrated for the remarkable season they are looking to cap off with a title win on Sunday.

Shreyas didn't waste much time to respond to the question of leadership. "See, the hype is definitely created by you guys (media). I mean, where I stand is definitely upon you," Shreyas said. "But talking about Gautam, I feel that he has got immense knowledge about how the game is played. He has won two titles previously with KKR and his strategies have been spot-on in terms of what execution we have to make against the opponents. So, yeah, he adds on a lot of cream to the team," he added. Shreyas didn't speak about his own captaincy style, but few would disagree he has led from the front when it comes to buying into Gambhir's ideas and translating to success in the middle.

Not long back, Shreyas has also had to endure questions over his commitment to playing domestic cricket and longer format. "I was definitely struggling after the (ODI) World Cup, in the longer format. When I raised my concerns (on his back issues), no one were agreeing to it. But at the same time, the competition is with myself. When I came, the IPL was approaching. All I wanted was to



Venkatesh Iyer (L) and Shreyas Iyer added 97 in an unbeaten partnership for the third wicket during the chase against SRH in Qualifier 1. Sportzpics/BCCI

put my best foot forward. Whatever planning and strategising we did before it, if we could execute it to the best of our abilities, we would have been in the great spot. And that's where we are right now."

In a season where all the focus has been on their openers Sunil Narine and Phil Salt and their finishers Andre Russell, Mandeep Singh and Rinku, the two Iyers — Shreyas and Venkatesh — have flown under the radar.

Lifeline of batting unit

They are the lifeline to the batting unit, bridging the top and the lower-order. And they do so by ensuring the high notes hit by their openers doesn't come down. They play the ideal interlude in the middle order. Teams

in the past have let their No 4s and 5s to tread cautiously in the middle overs so that their finishers don't come in early. But Kolkata have binned that approach with Shreyas and Venkatesh ensuring the pedal is not taken off in the middle-overs. It means, both the batsmen have had to bat a lot quicker than they usually do. Shreyas T20 strike-rate stands at 131.25 and Venkatesh's 138.31. But this IPL, they have scored at 146.18 and 153.62 respectively to ensure that the finishers don't have the added pressure to up the scoring rate.

The two have just five fifties between them this season, but have played the cameos that have ensured the starts given by Narine and Salt don't go waste. Mostly batting in the middle overs Shreyas has hit 33 boundaries and 14 sixes. And Venkatesh 31 fours and 16 sixes.

That they also happen to be a left-right duo has made for a good pairing. That the two also happen to be effective players against spinners has ensured no real holes in their batting front. If Venkatesh had to slightly adjust to a different role, to bat in the middle-order, especially after showing what is capable of as an opener in 2021, Shreyas has to do so as a captain. Despite being fully aware of what optics could do especially when big individual scores are lacking, Shreyas hasn't let it cloud his mind. Instead, he has taken it on himself to show the intent so that the likes of Angkrish Raghuvanshi and Ramandeep get some breathing space.

For the younger lot to embrace their brand of cricket, it was important for Shreyas to do so, just like what Rohit Sharma did in last year's ODI World Cup. From the highs of the World Cup, he ended-up missing out on national contract. He won the Ranji Trophy and now gets a chance to win an IPL title as captain.

MAKING KKR GREAT

Why star-obsessed Indian cricket needs commoner coach Gambhir

SANDEEP DWIVEDI
MAY 25

BACK IN 2012, Kolkata Knight Riders, like this season, was in Chennai for their first IPL final. On the eve of meeting defending champions CSK in their den, Gautam Gambhir, the coach now and captain then, needed to take one very difficult call. He was keen to have Manvindra Bisla as his opening partner but for that he needed to keep Brendon McCullum out. Who drops the original Bazballer, IPL's first brand ambassador for an uncapped out-of-form 20-something Jat boy from Hisar for the final? Well, Gambhir does.

It wasn't a popular decision, even McCullum had expectedly sulked. Opinions and the mood would change by late evening when Bisla was in the middle of the innings of his life. Years later, Bisla, now a part of IPL's Haryana commentary panel, still gets asked about his match-winning 48-ball 89 which had five sixes that helped KKR win the first title. Others in the box, Indian and foreign TV pundits, while hyping the play-off frenzy, have been talking about Gambhir's courage to treat stars as commoners and how this very non-Indian mindset has played a role in making KKR great again.

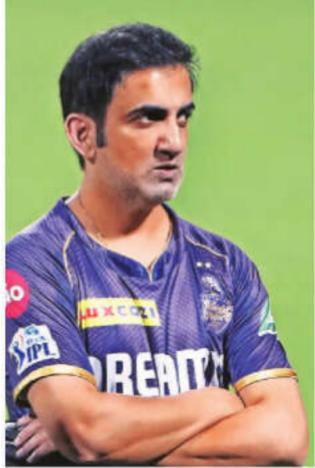
He has also done something more significant. Read on.

Some years back, historian Ramachandra Guha, while quitting the court-appointed Committee of Administrators that temporarily governed BCCI, had written a scathing resignation letter. Probably the first outsider to get a peek into the inner workings of the Indian board, Guha had mentioned how "superstar syndrome had distorted the system". He had also questioned how Dhoni despite his Test retirement got a Grade A contract and even hinted at the veto that senior players (read Virat Kohli), enjoyed in deciding coach Anil Kumble's coaching tenure.

Not exactly on these issues but Gambhir too has been a committed crusader relentlessly red-flagging Indian cricket's ever-growing cult of personality. He keeps saying how he doesn't understand why Dhoni gets all the due for finishing the 2011 World Cup final and why Zaheer Khan who started it all hardly gets talked about.

Even while being on the commentary panel, he has been against the broadcaster's TRP-driven, star-obsessed 24x7 hagiographical programming.

A couple of years back, at the *The Indian Express Idea Exchange Q&A*, Gambhir was asked if TV's unflinching focus on only Dhoni



Gambhir abhors hero-worshipping of cricketers and won't be averse to taking tough calls in the larger interest of the Indian team. Sportzpics/BCCI

and Kohli choked the pipeline that produces stars. "India needs to come out of this hero worship. Whether it's Indian cricket, whether it's politics, whether it's Delhi cricket. We have to stop worshipping heroes. The only thing that we need to worship is Indian cricket, or for that matter Delhi or India," he said.

Gambhir hasn't yet applied for the post of India coach and those close to him say that he hasn't even got any feelers from BCCI. Not that Indian cricket is bothered by such boring formalities when it comes to making important appointments. Like all spectacular IPL success stories, the miraculous transformation of Kolkata Knight Riders under Gambhir too could well have the usual ending — call to be the coach of the Indian team.

Potential transformative move

In case Gambhir does get the top job, Indian cricket would possibly be in for interesting times and probably a transformative change. India hasn't had a Gambhir-like coach ever. At 42, he could be India's youngest coach and the first to have successfully played and triumphantly strategized T20 cricket. Like his many predecessors — Rahul Dravid, Anil Kumble, Ravi Shastri, Kapil Dev — he has neither been an India captain

nor a superstar. He wasn't among the Fab Four, he didn't win an Audi or lead a World Cup winning team.

Big-match player in heyday

Gambhir is no royalty but a cricketing plebeian with leadership traits and results to show. He might not be high on India's all-time run-getters list but India knows he could be trusted on a big day.

98 in 2011 World Cup, 75 in World T20 2007 — in both winning finals he scored the most, he didn't have the stage-fright. Unlike cricketers of this generation, he wasn't in the habit of messing up big ICC games.

But what about those who perceive him as a bitter ex-cricketer who resents the fame of others. Tracing Gambhir's journey will help to understand him better. Born in Delhi, his initiation into cricket was with the notoriously corrupt DDCA, where one slip-up would mean stagnation as a club cricketer for life. Consistent runs at age-group cricket first got him a call for u-16 and u-19 World Cup camps. But at both times he narrowly missed out on being in teams that were crowned world champions. On his first-class debut, he was a non-Sonnet Club member in a dressing room that was crowded by players from Delhi's most influential club.

His struggle to get into the Indian team was epic. He kept getting picked and dropped. Once he cemented his place in the national side, he carved a corner for himself. He wasn't part of any cliques. In his playing days, one could never see him snuggling up to the seniors at the nets or being the hanger-on to their group in the evenings. Having lived the life of a foot-soilder, Gambhir understands the psyche and importance of the team's rank and file. Gambhir had his own small group. Gambhir, Virender Sehwag, Ishant Sharma, Munaf Patel and later a young Virat Kohli — they were like a house on fire when together.

Going by their public spats on cricket fields, can Gambhir and Kohli be part of the same team now? They said the same about Rohit and Kohli some time back but they remain the team's two main pillars. In Indian cricket, change of power means change of equations. In Delhi, those who know them say, they go back a long way and the on-field confrontations that horrify the world are everyday happenings at Kotla. Most fights on the field end with a shared plate of *chhole bhature*. A dash of Gambhir to this talented side could well be Team India's missing secret sauce. With him India has a chance to make cricket a team sport again.

Can anyone stop Swiatek at Roland Garros?

NAMIT KUMAR
MAY 25

BOTH NOVAK Djokovic and Iga Swiatek come into the French Open as top seeds attempting to defend their crowns in Paris, yet their preparations could not be more contradictory.

While Djokovic's year has seen him go into something of a slump, with a poor 14-6 win-loss record and no finals made, Swiatek has gone from strength to strength, peaking in time to dominate on her preferred surface of clay, where she won titles in Madrid and Rome, the two biggest tournaments on the red dirt prior to Roland Garros.

This may yet be the most open French Open men's draw in recent memory with Djokovic's form, the injury troubles of Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner, and the tentativeness on the big stage of the likes of Alexander Zverev, Daniil Medvedev and Stefanos Tsitsipas making it hard to pick a favourite.

But in the women's draw, Swiatek leads, front and centre, setting the standard before a ball has even been hit. There is an argument to be made that with four Majors, a career win percentage of 81%, and spending over 100 weeks as the World No. 1 already puts her in rarefied air, but a fourth crown in Paris, for which she is the overwhelming favourite, will establish her place among the claycourt greats of the game. The last player to win three consecutive Roland Garros titles was Justine Henin in 2007; and only four women — Henin (4), Chris Evert (7), and Steffi Graf (6) — have won four French Open crowns in the Open Era. Only Serena Williams has ever done the Madrid-Rome-Paris treble.

Each of Swiatek's tour-leading attributes are accentuated on clay. A pure ball striker, she has a monstrous, spin-heavy forehand she can use to dominate baseline exchanges which break away from the mould of flat-hitters that have usually done best on the women's tour in the past. Swiatek's athleticism defines her game. Her lateral movement, the small side-to-side steps needed to adjust to big groundstrokes, is always on point and clay allows her to slide into position to use her strengths and dwarf the court for her opponents even more.

There is a potentially tricky route to the title, with the likes of Naomi Osaka and the surging Danielle Collins lurking on her side of a draw. There may also be a final faceoff against Sabalenka or World No. 4 Elena Rybakina, who has made Swiatek struggle in the past and is the last player to defeat her on clay. But just as a certain Spaniard, now on his way out, has in the past, Swiatek has begun to look ominous on clay. Few look capable of stopping her as she chases a third straight French Open title.

May not be my last French Open: Nadal

FOURTEEN-TIME French Open champion Rafa Nadal said there was still a chance this year's tournament in Paris may not be his last, in comments ahead of his tough opener against fourth seed Alexander Zverev. "If I have to tell you it's 100% my last Roland Garros, sorry but I will not, because I cannot predict what's going on. I hope you understand," Nadal told a packed press conference. "I don't want to close 100% the door, because it's a very simple thing. First, I'm enjoying playing tennis," he said, adding that he was "more or less healthy... and playing without limitation". "Maybe in one month and a half I'll say 'OK, it's enough, I can't keep going.'" **REUTERS**

LONG READ

The lone ranger

Sumit Nagal, 26, has been flying the flag for Indian singles tennis and is set to make his French Open debut. A great mover on clay courts, his strong defence, steady game from the baseline and ability to relentlessly retrieve make him a capable dirtballer, a rarity for a player from the subcontinent

NAMIT KUMAR
MAY 25

IN OCTOBER 2022, bogged down by injuries and struggling to put wins together while grinding it out on the lower-rung Challenger Tour, Sumit Nagal's ranking had slipped outside the top 500.

This week, shortly after a first-round defeat at the ATP event in Geneva, 26-year-old Nagal, now a top 100 player at the peak of his powers preparing for his first appearance at the French Open — the only Major that takes place on his preferred surface of clay — was contacted by Novak Djokovic's team for a practice session.

Nagal's year-and-a-half-long journey from injury-induced obscurity and uncertainty, to being sought out by the greatest player in the history of his sport for a training session, illustrates both the revival of his once-promising career, and the lonely battle he continues to wage as the only consistent Indian presence in top-level singles tennis.

Prior to his injury trouble, Nagal's promise as a young player coming through the ranks was evident in his previous appearances at the Majors (even winning a set off Roger Federer at the 2019 US Open). Meanwhile, during his slump, no Indian player even qualified for the main draw at a Grand Slam singles tournament for three years until he recovered and did so himself, at this year's Australian Open, where he seized a rare chance to make national headlines by becoming the first Indian to beat a seeded player at a Major since Ramesh Krishnan did so in 1989.

Since then, Nagal has been on the up, winning a Challenger event in Chennai and then making main draws of top tournaments — recently even becoming the first Indian to win a main draw match of a Masters 1000 event on clay in Monte Carlo, where he took World No. 13 Holger Rune to three tough sets.

During the years Nagal spent on the sidelines, he needed to believe he would return to competing in the biggest tournaments in the world to keep going. "I knew this (time) would come," he tells *The Indian Express*. "This was my biggest motivation because when you are injured, you have to look towards (a goal) and have some vision otherwise it gets too hard."

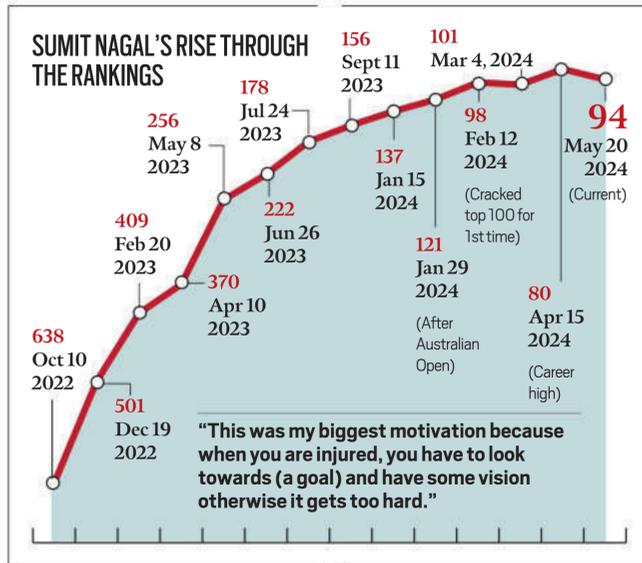
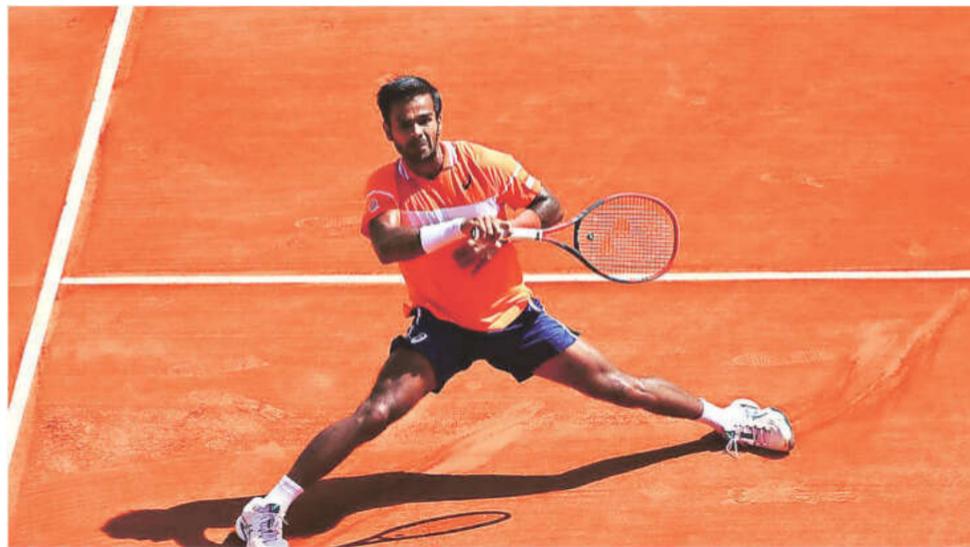
Nagal goes into the French Open, starting Sunday, and Wimbledon next month, confident and in good form, hoping to put a run together.

Best on clay

While impossible to speculate, perhaps Nagal may not have been sought out by Djokovic's team had the French Open not been coming up. The Indian's best surface is clay, which allows him to nullify some of the weaknesses that come with his short stature, not allowing him to launch big first serves or generate easy power.

Instead, it is his fast movement and solid defence, where Nagal excels as primarily a baseliner. Clay does not reward the power game as much as hard courts and grass, and allows Nagal to slide around and give him that extra time to get balls back into play.

"He's a great mover," Sania Mirza says during a media interaction. "Usually, as people from the subcontinent, that has not been our forte. Clay has not been the favourite sur-



face of the players that come out of this region. But his movement, his style of play, his defence make him the toughest to face on clay. He's the most comfortable moving on that surface."

Each of Sumit's three Challenger titles outside of India have been on clay. Naturally then, after making a breakthrough in Monte Carlo in April, Nagal was expected to ride the momentum and improve his ranking even further, but instead had to take another break to nurse injury concerns.

Somdev Devvarman, a former top 70 player, has worked with Nagal as a mentor and coach. He explains how the 26-year-old's playing style — of relentless defensive grind from the baseline — helps him on clay, but also tends to make him injury prone.

"These kinds of (injury) cycles will continue with a player like Sumit simply because he has to work incredibly hard to win points," Devvarman tells *The Indian Express*. "He's a

smaller guy on the tour. So he has to work incredibly hard to win points. When he's feeling great, he's very, very tough to play. When he's a little off, sometimes players feel like they can get on top of him, maybe get on top of his serve."

Crucial top 100 spot

Nagal's injury prone streak has often stopped him from sustaining momentum and surging up the rankings to take the next step in his career. One of the many peculiarities of tennis is the importance of the ruthless 12-month-long rolling rankings system, determining everything from playing and prize money opportunities to chances of sponsorships and exposure.

While his Australian Open run garnered the most attention, what has been most impressive about Nagal's 2024 season so far is his consistency — doing well in Challengers and qualifying for ATP tournaments in order



Sumit Nagal with World no. 1 Novak Djokovic after a practice session ahead of the French Open. *Reuters/@nagalsumit*

to crack the top 100 in the rankings and momentarily stay there.

Being in the top 100 carries heavy significance because it ensures qualification to the main draw of the four Majors that present earning opportunities that can sustain players for an entire year. Even if Nagal loses his first-round match at Roland Garros this week, he would have earned Rs 1.6 crore just through his run at the Australian Open and in Paris. For a player who complained of having only Rs 80,000 in his bank account last October, that's a huge number.

But being in and around the top 100 spots is one thing, making up a permanent place there is a lot trickier.

"The margin between making, say, \$200,000 and \$50,000 is very small. It's just based on rankings and, you know, you play two slams and you've made \$100,000. And you've lost two final rounds of qualifying and you've made 50," Devvarman says.

"A lot of it is timing based, luck based on injuries and things like that. It's a very fine line between being World No.55 and World No.95. In terms of staying in the top 100, ultimately, it always comes down to what your level is. What are the things that are pushing your level? What are the things that you're improving every day? And the next time you step on the court, can you bring that level back?"

Devvarman also insists that, while doing well at lower-level tournaments can maintain the desired ranking, all players dream bigger. "I think for all of our tennis players, yeah, we want to win Challengers and all of that, but ultimately you want to do well at the biggest events in the world," he says.

Doing so at the French Open will be a tall order, and represents the next big hurdle. Unseeded players are at the mercy of the draw at tennis tournaments, and Nagal has been placed to face 18th seed and last year's quarterfinalist Karen Khachanov in the first round this week.

But for Nagal to take the next step, his coach believes he must get these crucial wins and go on a run in one of these tournaments, and that "if you look at his results from last year, you still think that he is in a great spot to make a run pretty much any time now."

Don't expect a pattern

Nagal's recent achievements, modest but encouraging, may not have been of a world-beating standard, but they have been celebrated by fans of a substantially popular sport, longing to watch it through an Indian lens.

While Nagal's 2024 season has ended a long, drawn-out period of apathy among Indian tennis fans, there are no indications that it will light a spark for up-and-coming players with the deeper malaise in Indian tennis persisting.

Nagal's is a truly unique case. Born in Jhajar to a schoolteacher, he was spotted and supported in his early years by former Indian veteran Mahesh Bhupathi. He spent his formative years training in Canada, then moved to Germany where he is currently based, training at his coach Sascha Nensel's academy.

Good timing, generous benefactors and peaking at the right time as a junior all enabled Nagal's development, and even though he has faced significant financial strife. Not everyone will get the same chances.

"The first advice you would give a good kid that's from India, would be to put yourself in a better environment," Devvarman says. "The system in India is a joke, right? It's just not conducive to player development. And because it's not conditioned to player development, it's the reason why every player wants to leave."

"Sadly, the right people that young players in this country will be looking for are not in the right places. So right now, if a promising young kid and their family are really looking for advice or help, they've got to do it the way everybody else has done it — on their own. Figure it out themselves."

With the current systems in place, there remains little hope for India to produce players that will play on the same stage as consistently as Sumit has been recently. So hope, then, will be transferred to the 26-year-old to make the best of those chances.

(*The French Open starts on Sunday, May 26, live on the Sony Sports Network*)

Sindhu on verge of first title in two years

VINAYAKK MOHANARANGAN
MAY 25

IT IS a rivalry, so to speak, that extends as far back as 2012 but Busanan Ongbamrunphan has never really managed to crack the code against PV Sindhu. Before Saturday, the Thai shuttler had faced Sindhu 18 times and lost 17 of those matches. But in the semifinal of the Malaysia Masters, she came out firing, almost playing with a lightness of feet that comes with a nothing-to-lose attitude.

Sindhu might have dominated this Head-to-Head over the last 12 years, but a measure of the difficulties she faced in Kuala Lumpur could be summed up with this stat: it was only in the 49th point of the match that the Indian managed to string together three straight points.

But, once she did that to take an 8-7 lead in Game 2 after dropping the opener, Sindhu didn't look back. As it turned out, that point is when the momentum swung. Sindhu wouldn't trail for a single point after that, as she won an epic semifinal that lasted 88 minutes 13-21, 21-16, 21-12 to reach her first final on the BWF World Tour since April 2023.

Sindhu has won more matches against Busanan than anyone else in her career, but from the moment they walked out on court, there was a sense of something different. Sindhu, usually quite cheerful before a match, seemed subdued. Busanan, always a character on court, walked out with a beaming smile. Without ascribing too much importance to body language, that contrast reflected in the



PV Sindhu beat Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan 13-21 21-16 21-12 in the semifinals. *BWF/Badminton Photo*

early passage of play as Sindhu played with a heaviness that comes with pressure. The Thai world No.20 on the other hand, opted for flair.

In what was a sign of things to come, the match began with a 31-shot rally that Busanan won with some deft touches at the net before getting the length spot on with her forehand clear. Sindhu would continue to struggle with her judgment of where the shuttle was landing in the opening game but stayed in touching distance when the Thai was predominantly trying to keep Sindhu pinned to the backcourt.

The momentum truly started to swing when Busanan brought out the acute cross-court flicks at the net with both her fore-

hand and backhand. It threw Sindhu off as she dropped the opening game rather comprehensively.

But the point at 7-7 in the second game would give Sindhu the foundation to build her comeback. Apart from being the first time she managed to string together three straight points, it gave her the antidote to neutralise Busanan. She mixed up her punch clears to the backcourt before drawing Busanan forward with a tight spinning net shot, and off the defensive lift, she got the height to put away a smash down-the-line. That 1-2 punch from Sindhu would pop up more often from that moment on.

Decisive rally

In what was another decisive rally in the match, Sindhu needed that combination more than once, as Busanan tried to hang in on defence at 14-17 down. And importantly, Sindhu started reading Busanan's cross court shots at the net better, getting good height on her defensive lifts.

It not only gave Sindhu the chance to force the decider but also to impose herself on the match at the start of Game 3.

As she had done against top seed Han Yue in the quarterfinal, Sindhu appeared fitter, sharper and hungrier at the start of the decider. She put the foot on the pedal to race to an 8-2 lead, roaring and fist-pumping every chance she got. From not being able to impose sustained pressure, she wasn't allowing Busanan to breathe easy, even though there were a few long rallies.

Sindhu told BWF later that the 17-1 HZH

coming into the match didn't matter because they were playing after a while, and both their games have changed. "There were really long rallies. Until the last minute, we were not leaving the shuttle," she said with a chuckle. "I was just keeping the shuttle in the court in however many rallies we were playing. Losing the first game and winning the second game was very important for me to maintain that lead. In the third game it was important for me to go from the first point itself. Maintaining that lead definitely made a difference," the former world champ said.

The semifinal win takes Sindhu one step closer to ending a title drought that extends back to July 2022, when she won the Singapore Open and Commonwealth Games gold back-to-back. She came close in Madrid last year but was blown away in the final after a good week. On Sunday, it will be tough against China's Wang Zhi Yi, the reigning Asian champion.

Sindhu leads the H2H 2-1 but Wang won the last time they met at the Arctic Open semifinal in 2023. "It's not over yet. There's one more match to go. When I win that, maybe I'll be much happier," Sindhu said, adding that more than the result she's hoping to put in a good performance tactically.

It won't be easy, but for the second time this week, Sindhu gets a chance to take on one of the top Chinese shuttlers in the world and show she is close. After all, talking on Chinese shuttlers is how Sindhu won most of her major medals. This ain't a major tournament — there's only one of those in 2024 — but it would present a significant milestone for Sindhu.

India produce a fighting response against Belgium

MIHIRVASAVDA
MAY 25

INDIA DID almost everything Craig Fulton asked for. Before the pushback, the chief coach hoped his players would be more efficient in the attacking third, which they weren't in the opening two matches of the current leg of the Pro League. At half-time, he demanded a little better defensive show. By full-time, Fulton left the field grinning.

It wasn't a win. But less than 48 hours after a 4-1 drubbing against Belgium, India responded by holding the Olympic champions to a 2-2 draw, before missing out on a bonus point in the penalty shootout.

India had two very well-taken field goals, created — but failed to convert — penalty corners, at times displayed the same old mistakes but also showcased something different, if not new: intent inside Belgium's 'D'. For far too long, India's strikers have been guilty of being shy of taking a shot at goal. They'd miss-trap, look for a foot or simply look for a teammate to pass the ball — do everything but shoot. On Saturday, they were brave and creative, taking minimum touches to pass the ball, smartly using deflections and being unafraid to have a go at goal.

It resulted in two beautiful field goals. The first came in the 11th minute. Hardik Singh played a floating pass over the midfield that

found **Sukhjeet Singh** at the byline. Sukhjeet controlled it well and instead of taking an ambitious reverse hit, which could have been blocked by the Belgian goalkeeper Vincent Vanasch, he turned and swerved past a defender, brought the ball on his forehand and drilled in a low, dangerous ball across the face of the goal. Aarajeev Singh Hundal, the tall striker who was drafted into the playing squad on Saturday, went down on his knees and tapped it past the goalie.

This piece of brilliance was soon followed by a brain fade. At the half-hour mark, a Belgium attacker played a seemingly harmless pass towards India's 'D' that took a deflection off an Indian stick. Harmanpreet Singh, one of the calmest defenders, surprisingly closed his eyes and showed his back to the attacker. The ball hit his foot, Belgium earned a penalty corner and Felix Denayer scored. Belgium took the lead off another PC rebound in the fourth quarter.

Harmanpreet, however, made amends late on, playing upfield. He received the ball, swivelled to make space, and crossed into the 'D', splitting the defence. Sukhjeet, who created the first goal, was in the right position this time to deflect the ball into the goal. The 57th-minute strike helped India cancel out Florent van Aubel's goal in the 50th minute to salvage a draw on a day India produced a much-improved performance.

THE SUNDAY EXPRESS MAGAZINE

eye



EXPRESS PHOTO BY RAVI KANUJA

Rinku Ghosh

Mamma mia, here I go again
My, my, how can I resist you?

Here He Goes Again

A few months ago he was in hospital in a critical condition. Now, designer Rohit Bal is back where he belongs — amongst artisans, designing a new collection for summer

HERE'S SOMETHING comfortingly reassuring about this Abba hit as you enter the workspace of fashion designer Rohit Bal at his store in Delhi's Defence Colony. That the chorus should play just before we are to meet is nothing short of a metaphor for the artist's brush with life and death over the last few years as he battled heart disease and kept going in and out of hospitals. But my, my, how can the *enfant terrible* of Indian fashion resist life itself? And so, clad in his trademark black T-shirt and blue jeans, he hums, "Hey, here I go again," with a fist bump.

There was a time last November — Bal was admitted in ICU in a critical condition and put on ventilator for a longish spell — when doctors were a worried lot. He already had a compromised heart after an angioplasty in 2010 and other complications. Recovery seemed a distant prospect, but Gudda, as he is lovingly called by fashion industry peers, walked out of hospital, pale and frail, but more determined to leave his stamp on the world. Some colleagues had written him off, but at 63, white-haired and much wizened, the man has never been more in control of his life and legacy as he announced his return with a gratitude post on Instagram. "Let's not talk about my hospital days, it has been four months, I have left them far behind, I'm here in the now," he says.

He's just come back from his unit in Noida, where he's working with his design team and *kaarigars* on his new collection of summer florals. "I am doing things on my own, even Insta posts," says Bal, his eyes sparkling as he gives instructions to the sales team and guides a young bride and groom. These days, he gets quickly exhausted, settling into a recliner and needing cups of green tea. The old recklessness is gone, he's more measured, patient and cleaned up but that's only to keep his passion alive in a healthy body. "That's what shows in my work, that's what people remember you by, not by how much you lived," he says. Now he's given up alcohol, smoking and red meat, fasts once a week, doesn't miss his physio sessions and goes for the ayurvedic cleansing ritual of *panchkarma* in Kerala.

Bal is a survivor, having begun in 1991 and having multi-generational families as his loyal customers, many of them corporate bigwigs and top names of Bollywood. That's because he has contoured an identity for Indian fashion as it is today. If Rohit Khosla can be credited for shaping couture in India with his first label in the late 1980s, then Rohit Bal, who took up history at St Stephen's before he was drawn to NIFT (National Institute of Fashion Technology), should be credited for carrying it forward after Khosla's death in his 30s. Unconsciously enough, he gave the luxury tag to Indian wear, accommodating the richest of our craftsmanship and heritage fabrics into a Western silhouette and its subtle grammar.

As a student of fashion history, he effortlessly marries tradition with his individual talent and wearability. Fashion to him is an artistic tool, like a bird in flight, extending his wingspan and showing off his plumes. On one side are the billowing crepe layers under full-



BACK IN FASHION

(Above) Bal doing his step at the Indian Fashion Week finale in 2015; (middle, L to R) Aditi Rao Hydari, Ranveer Singh and Sonam Kapoor in his latest creations; (below) Bal at a cafe last week

sleeved royal English coats, ruffled collars and some puffed elf sleeves. On the other, there's the simplicity of white, simple cuts, and the clean lines of the sherwani and the sari. And then there are the embroidered motifs in stunning colour combinations in between. "An original does not change and I am here from 1992. My soul is Indian, so I am going to put my weavers and craftsmen first. My dream is to have a huge *karkhaana* (factory) of craftsmen, so that our creative legacy can be preserved," says Bal, as he plans to travel to Banaras for a session with his weavers.

"For over 30 years now, I keep going back to Banaras, just to see weavers finish three inches of a saree border in 24 hours on their wooden looms in almost 50-degree heat. The loom fills up his quarter and the weaver wraps his life around it, worshipping it almost. Sipping tea and sharing food with them were my real student years of understanding India's hand-made traditions. The carpet weaver takes months and years to finish a piece and then lugs all 40 kg of it on his cycle, going door-to-door, hoping somebody will buy it. The shahtoosh, which used to be made from the underfur of the Chiru (Tibetan antelope) had to be pieced together manually, sometimes over a year. Human hair is about 70 microns, and the fur is somewhere between 13-19 microns. That's how delicate it is. Only young weavers could work on them with their nimble fingers, keeping the fabric on their knees. Imagine their dedication to something that

might not have given them instant income. It's a labour of love," says Bal, who doesn't display the most expensive Italian crystalware he's been gifted but puts the smallest hand-crafted box from Dilli Haat on his shelf.

That's why he gets upset when anybody disrespects the unconditional love that any artist has for his work. He recalls how he had burnt the shawl a woman was wearing at a winter bonfire simply because she was bragging about its hefty price tag. "She thought it was a collectible because it was expensive, she did not value the shawl maker. I just took it off her and threw it into the fire," he says.

As the third cup of green tea warms him up, the no-holds-barred Gudda comes to the fore, the one who broke the stiffness of an exclusionary elitism. "Couture is the price of skill and artistry but that doesn't mean that skill

cannot be all-encompassing. I look at a person, see what they are wearing and know what their comfort and flair are about, where they are coming from. My job is to express that language through my works," he explains. That's the reason he's stayed away from the familiar terrain of Bollywood endorsements despite being one of the first designers to do outfits for *Kaun Banega Crorepati*. And he did dress up Deepika Padukone for her debut Cannes outing in an elegant ivory white sari in 2010. But he never overplayed this card.

That's why Bal is a man of several firsts. He elevated menswear and was one of the movers behind the Men's Fashion Week. Then came the embroidered patches — long-tailed parrots, elephants, cockatoos, horses, flowers and leaves — in sherwani jacket corners, pleats, lapels, borders, cuffs and on churidaars,

lending a touch of casual extravagance and metrosexuality. He was the first mainstream designer to put out a pret line of khadi shirts for men at Rs 400. He was first among peers to patent and copyright his collections. Instead of French fashion houses, he collaborated with Indian brands like HiDesign, Titan and Biba for pret collections, his own pret line, Balance, coming many years later. And way back in 2004, he knew that post-millennials would be aspirational from their growing up years and conceived the brand Bal Bachche, with bandhgals for boys and mini lehenga-gowns for girls. It was launched in 2021.

His critics say that for all his pioneering work, he is a monopolist and is losing out to younger designers, who have entered into smart tie-ups with corporates like the Aditya Birla group and Reliance, and are growing their business and international footprint. To Bal, that's about taking shortcuts and insecurity. "When you sell out to corporates, you are at their beck and call. They want ROI (return on investment) and will keep you in a chokehold. That stifles creativity. I don't want to wake up at 7 am with a phone call, reminding me about bottomlines. I command my time and get value for it, on my terms. I don't want to be a 49 per cent owner," he says.

In fact, Bal is known to have turned down such corporate offers on the phone itself. He would rather they endorsed weaver collectives instead of buying designer labels. That's why he disapproves of the latest obsession

with chintz. "Didn't calico printmakers already do this? Why not push our block prints instead? Look within, not without," he says, circling his fingers around his heart. "Fashion has to be ethical to survive," he adds.

Corporatisation, he believes, has taken the charm out of fashion shows. "I did watch a couple of fashion shows and the retail boom means that every designer is creating almost similar pieces. There was a time when we had to get to work months before a showing, submit at least six samples for the collection to go on the ramp. Now anybody gets a showcase without the rigour," he says.

An avid surfer of the goings-on in the fashion industry, he is acerbic about how the Met Gala has sounded the death knell of aesthetics and become a soulless parade of trophy art masquerading as esoterism. "The models couldn't breathe and would have tripped over a bellowing 15-metre trail had they not been helped or lifted by their staff. That's called imposing fashion, not owning it. Why do Indian labels have to follow that same look? You want regalese, just adapt what women wore in the Chola and Pallava dynasties. Such richness in their individualistic looks, from coiffure, kohl, to jewellery and drapes. And they were functioning women. Did they need a trail? But then you can adapt only when you know history, don't you," counter-questions the man known for his smart silhouettes and not hiding behind volume or drapes.

He has a problem with outlandish concepts because of their percolation at the mass level. "Suddenly you will see a surfeit of bling, metal and beads, so overdone that you cannot even hug the wearer for fear of hurting yourself," he says, laughing out loud. "Over-the-top embellishment and drama are simply bad fashion. Good design is about knowing when to stop," says Bal, who never allows an extra tendril or bud in his floral motif if it doesn't sync with the symmetry of design.

It is because of this curatorial eye that Bal sees no threat from Artificial Intelligence. "You can feed AI 40 designs of mine and it will give you nth number of permutations and combinations. But it won't give you the 41st that is still in my head or the 401st that I have not thought about yet," says Bal, who, despite marketing advice, refuses to open stores abroad. "I want the world to come to me here. I want my people to buy their clothes here, feel and respect the garment," adds the designer who is now planning to fan out in Tier 2 cities, beginning with Nagpur and Hyderabad, an "elegant city" in his words.

This clarity of vision to know when to change course is what has kept his brand alive in a saturated market. That's why he is secure, happy to root for fellow designers from the sidelines, standing like any other guest or cameraman at their shows. For all the people he groomed, not many have hung around to see him through his illnesses but he has no grudge. "I can give all of this up and sit under the chin tree, watch the falling leaves for hours and try to catch them in my imagination... such is the art of doing nothing," he says. And so he does, choosing to create when he wants to, not because he has to.

Will we see him on the ramp again? "My shows are like a theatre production. Maybe in September, with *havelis* and music," And he would never care for bravos, as long as he had created a magic moment. "That's it," he would say, dancing in the dark.



I look at a person, see what they are wearing and know what their comfort and flair are about, where they are coming from. My job is to express that language through my works

DOWN IN JUNGLELAND

RANJIT LAL Author, environmentalist and bird watcher



MONKEY BUSINESS

An orangutan from Indonesia was observed chewing leaves of a vine called *Fibraea tinctoria* and applying the paste to an open facial wound

The Doctor's Out

In the forest, there are no hospitals. So animals and birds resort to time-tested ways of treating ailments

WHEN CREATURES living in jungleland fall ill or get injured, they cannot, alas, run hotfoot to the nearest vet. Nor can they yell too much (with the exception of some members of the canine family!), because drawing attention to themselves will only attract the attention of predators. So perforce, they suffer in silence, and many of them do what no doctor will advise us to do: self-medicate. Scientists have given this phenomenon one hell of a mouthful of a name: zoopharmacognosy.

As they have no pharmacies, animals and birds turn to mother nature's resources: leaves, roots, soils and insects with medicinal properties. Just recently, an orangutan called Rakus from Sumatra, Indonesia was observed chewing leaves of a vine called *Fibraea tinctoria* and applying the paste to an open facial wound. The leaves have anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory, anti-fungal, anti-oxidant and anti-carcinogenic

As they have no pharmacies, animals and birds turn to leaves, roots, soils and insects with medicinal properties

genic properties and its application healed the wound. What boggles the mind is how this knowledge first came about: who was the first orangutan who discovered this: Was it by sheer accident? He or she must have passed the knowledge down to family and friends.

Animals and birds self-medicate for two reasons: to prevent infections or get rid of them when symptoms appear.

Among primates, deworming is a big issue, especially in the rainy season. Chimpanzees will roll the leaves of a plant, *Aspilla*, active against nematode parasites, in their mouths, make capsules of them and then swallow. The parasites attach themselves to these, and laxative action does the rest. Smaller primates like tamarins eat fruit with large seeds which are swallowed whole, which consequently dislodge parasites lodged in the intestines. Brown bears take laxatives before hibernating to ensure their innards are parasite-free. African elephants eat the leaves of a tree of the borage clan to induce labour. Women in Kenya are said to make tea from those leaves for the same reason. Indian wild boars dig up and eat the roots of the pigweed, a plant acting as a vermicide — getting rid of parasites

without harming the host. The same happens when dogs and cats eat grass after gobbling half-a-kilo of stolen butter or cream: the silica-edged leaves irritate the stomach lining and they throw up.

To prevent the effect of toxic substances, parrots, chimpanzees, forest elephants and mountain gorillas eat kaolin, a clay mineral, which absorbs these toxins, acts as an antacid, neutralises endoparasites like tapeworm and supplies essential minerals and iron. It amazes me how animals know when their electrolyte levels are low!

Skincare is of utmost importance for most animals — who, like us, may be plagued by mosquitoes and other biting flies. Natural insect-repellents may come in diverse forms — from chewed-up leaves to rubbed-on millipedes. Brown bears are known to make a paste of *Osha* (*Ligusticum porteri*) leaves and saliva and apply it on their fur for this purpose. Many primates massage themselves with rolled up millipedes, which secrete benzoquinones that violently repel insects and have a wonderful side-effect: they give the monkeys a blissful high!

You may have seen birds squirming on the top of an anthill, wings outspread in an exercise called 'anting'. Some ants

spray formic acid which is a repellent to parasites like feather lice. Birds have plenty of these in their plumage. As many as 200 species of songbirds do this and some pick up ants and rub them deliberately down the shafts of their feathers to get rid of parasites. House sparrows use neem leaves to keep their nests bug-free but astonishingly, according to one source, switch to the leaves of the Krishna chura (*Delonix regia*) tree, which is rich in quinine during outbreaks of malaria.

There are many more examples of the denizens of jungleland helping themselves to mother nature's pharmacy but sourpuss scientists still loathe to give them credit for their successes. Most of the evidence, they sniff, has not been proved by the scientific method of laboratory testing, blah-blah. But really, who are we to talk? Some of the most 'intelligent' among us firmly believe that rhino horn can make girls swoon over guys, crushed tiger bones can cure every known disease, pangolin scales can help in lactation issues and with arthritis, 'sacred' ash dispensed by *babas* can cure heart ailments. We have put the lives of so many species in peril because of these ludicrous beliefs. Certainly, the animals seem to know better!



THE CHANGEMAKERS

Schools have the power to change our children's lives, humanity's future and so much more

Reimagining our schools as hubs of change

Children can be subversive change-makers who can help us grow and become a more ecologically conscious and just society

IMAGINE

SHELJASEN



Shelja Sen is a narrative and family therapist, writer, co-founder of Children First. In this column she curates the know-how of the children and youth she has the honour of working with. Email her at shelja.sen@childrenfirstindia.com

WE HAVE changed so much after the pandemic." This comment by 15-year-old Sana drew my attention. She elaborated, "We are trying so desperately to keep up with the beauty standards or being cool that we have stopped being kids. Friendships are fragile, groups are constantly changing every few months as everyone is looking for better opportunities to climb the social ladder. We are so fake to each other as we do not know how others will use our vulnerabilities against us." When I wondered whether it has really changed or is it part of the middle and senior school experience, she said, "When you were in school and you had a fight with a friend, both of you would leave the fight there and maybe come back the next day having forgotten about it. Pre-pandemic there would be some WhatsApp exchanges. However, if there is a fallout now, it spirals out of control on social media and when we return to the school the next day, battle lines are drawn and people are choosing sides — camera, action, drama! Is it a surprise that we are so depressed and anxious?"

Sana has an interesting way with words so there might be an inclination to dismiss it as a hyperbole. But her words resonated so much with some very unsettling conversations I have had with so many young people. They are all talking about the pressure they are experiencing with the demands of "beauty standards," "being cool," "hanging out with the popular crowd" etc. Yes, these pressures were always there but it seems they have been notched up to another level altogether. As the mental health struggles and suicide rates in young continue to rise, I wonder if they are trying to survive as metaphorical frogs in slowly cranked-up water that has

reached boiling point. We are all pointing fingers at them for not being resilient enough or strong enough to take the heat but staying oblivious to the questions — What are they trying to survive? What threat is it posing to their mental health?

Sana had requested to meet a therapist as she was struggling with "anxiety, constant dread and sense of worthlessness." Any person meeting her in a different context would be surprised as she was excelling in her studies, was popular and known as a brilliant debater. As she explained to me, "I am 15 years old and I am already feeling burnt-out. I feel I am leading someone else's life — trying to please everyone, be the best at everything, and stay on top of the game. Otherwise, I will be thrown out like rubbish."

Often, I am asked, "What can we do as a society to support our children with the mental health crisis that they are going through?" My answer inevitably is, "We have to go to schools." It will take nothing less than a movement to bring about a social change and what better place than schools to start that?

A while back there was an incident in a school when some Class IX girls took a stand on how the boys in the class commented on their bodies. The wise teacher decided to bring the conversation to the class circle time and built a safe space for girls to talk openly about the humiliation they had to face every day. The teacher later shared with me that what was remarkable was that despite the intensity and pain, there was no blame, and the boys apologised. Together they started talking about what they could do to make the class a safer and more respectful space for the girls and what steps could be taken if there was a transgression. This conversation created ripples of resistance as the girls were called to speak in the school assembly, and other classes started having conversations on gender politics and diversity too.

What if this could happen throughout their school life rather than just one-off class — where issues of gender, sexuality, consent,

disability, body types, caste, class and religion could be discussed in safe spaces without judgement or shaming? What if schools could become spaces where conversations on the impact of social media on mental health were part of the curriculum? Where there could be open discussions on power, privilege and patriarchy? What if we could include various stakeholders, including parents, educators, children, youth, government agencies, non-government sector, health organisations, media and changemakers in these deliberations? Do you think it might open up possibilities for collaborative and innovative solutions where youth get a platform to share their voice?

Their voices are not being heard as right now they are too stuck, or I should say, all of us are stuck as those metaphorical frogs in the boiling water and have accepted this as inevitable. The multibillion-dollar social media tech giants are exploiting this by the constant illusion of connection when in real life, we are more lonely and isolated than ever before.

Children who start school this year — 2024 — will be ready to start work in 18 years' time (on average), which will be 2042. What do we know about what the world would be like at that time, whether it would be suitable for life, what jobs would be available for humans and which ones would be taken over by AI? If given a chance, children can be subversive change-makers who can help us grow and become a more ecologically conscious and just society. They question, they challenge and they dig us out of the lethargic stupor that we have let ourselves slip into. If you think about it, children feel much more strongly about their world. It could be about protecting their environment, becoming sustainable, preserving our wildlife or tackling problems like poverty, gender-based violence, politics that incite hatred and violence — issues that we are struggling with as a human race.

Suppose Sana's school could build safe spaces facilitated by trained teachers or counsellors where children could have these conversations and take action. Where Sana could talk freely about her sense of loneliness and exhaustion about all that went into "staying on top of the game." Where there could be discussions on what would make children feel safer, and more connected and give them a sense of purpose which goes beyond "climbing the social ladder" and "being popular".

I believe schools are hubs that can bring us together for a collective action. They have the power to change our children's lives, humanity's future and so much more. So yes, count me in. What about you?

Children question, challenge and dig us out of the lethargic stupor that we have let ourselves slip into. They feel much more strongly about their world

Green chilli ice cream, anyone?

The quintessential 'ingredient forward' food, ice cream offers a canvas for flavours. Naturals cracked the code

Pooja Pillai

THE FIRST time I tasted strawberries was in an ice cream. This was in the early 2000s, when a Naturals Ice Cream outlet, one of the first outside Mumbai, opened in Ahmedabad at Mithakali Six Roads, cheek-by-jowl with a bookstore that my family frequented. Soon, it became our weekend ritual: Buy a new book, then go have an ice cream. I ate a lot of strawberry, of course, as also mango and tender coconut, but the standout, for me, was *anjeer* (dried fig), its taste rich with the dried fruit's caramel notes and its texture gritty with seeds. This was real ice cream, made with real fruit — a far cry from the cones and candies of my '90s childhood that tasted, to me, like sweetened cough syrup, and left a sticky coating in the mouth. Naturals, on the other hand, went down the gullet smoothly, leaving no unpleasant residue, only a feeling of satiation.

The death last week of Raghunandan Kamath, who founded Naturals Ice Cream in Mumbai in 1984, brought back memories of those Sunday book-buying trips, which also marked my conversion to the religion of ice

cream. Growing up indifferent to ice cream — even actively disliking certain varieties — in a city that is the country's number one consumer of the frozen treat, was a lonely experience. It was also baffling: Why, I would sometimes wonder, is this over-sweet confection, which causes sinus headaches to boot, the object of such fanaticism? Part of the reason, of course, is the unforgiving heat of an Ahmedabad summer — ice cream offers sweet relief. Another reason is the wide availability of excellent ice cream — not sold by the big brands, but small, home-run enterprises with single outlets — that would today be bestowed with the title "artisanal". Big national and international chains, recognising the Amdavadi passion for ice cream, have long since changed the city's dessert landscape. But back then, after dinner, most families would make a beeline for hundreds of these small shops that dotted the city.

Years after I left Ahmedabad, I discovered an even more ritualised devotion to ice cream in Rajkot: Here, after dinner, families would troop out to the Race Course Grounds, lay out picnic blankets and, Hobbit-like, have a second dinner featuring all manner of



SWEET TOOTH

Ice cream perhaps is the only food that Indians have always been open to experimenting with

street food, topped off with ice cream. Waiters from the numerous ice cream parlours nearby flitted back and forth between patrons and shops, with cardboard menus and trays filled with such flavours as *kaju-draksh* (cashew-raisin), *kesar-badam* (saffron-almond), rose and even paan. It was like

the Royal Ascot, but without the hats and horses, and with way more ice cream.

My (relatively) late-in-life conversion convinced me, however, that it was not just the sweetness and coldness of the ice cream that lay behind its massive appeal. In the years since that first taste of an ice cream that

not only tasted of actual fruit but was filled with chunks of it, I have come across creations that push the very idea of ice cream to its limits. Putting real fruit into ice cream makes perfect sense, as Kamath, the son of a mango vendor from Mangalore realised, not least because this was a return to its roots — according to *The Science of Ice Cream* by "ice cream scientist" Chris Clarke, the origins of our most popular sweet treat are in the sharbats of 13th century West Asia, which combined ice with fruit pulp.

But what about something like the green chilli ice cream made by Bachelorr's in Mumbai's Girgaum Chowpatty? Or the panipuri sorbet, featuring bits of crunchy puri, created by another Mumbai chain, Apsara Ice Creams? From seaweed to marigold, pav bhaji to paan, ice cream offers a canvas for any number of flavours and flavour combinations, allowing them to develop and shine. It is the quintessential "ingredient forward" food.

One might even say that ice cream may be the only food that Indians, still notoriously hidebound in matters culinary, have always been open to experimenting with. For expanding our palates, then, a tip of the toque to Raghunandan Kamath and others like him who wondered, "Why not add this to ice cream?". The tribe of ice cream lovers awaits your next creation.

Levers of Growth

Are Indian states ready to embark on a journey to being *viksit*?
Economist Karthik Muralidharan seeks to answer the question in his new book

Partha Mukhopadhyay

IS THE Indian state, or rather, are Indian states, ready to embark on the journey to being *viksit*? If not, how can they prepare themselves? This is the question author Karthik Muralidharan seeks to answer in his magnum opus, *Accelerating India's Development*. With 130 pages of endnotes and 60 pages of references, to supplement 600 pages of text, there is certainly much in this book.

The book is worth reading for the first half of most chapters alone — they are richly researched, lucidly written and are a very accessible introduction to the state of developmental policy in India, with global cross-references. The sweep is broad, from politicians, bureaucrats and businesspersons to civil and talent management, from taxation and choosing between the Union and the states to the tussle between the state and market. Of course, the ingredients of development — health, education, security, jobs and the economy, as well as safety nets and trampolines — are all there. It enables a practitioner to quickly get a lay of the land, and helps a researcher put literature into context.

However, the author is not writing a textbook. The first half of chapters is just the motivation for the second half that outlines many evidence-based ideas for implementation — on how states can accelerate development.

Reading the book, one is frequently reminded of the author's quote from Rukmini Banerji — *asliyat se lagao* — and the analogous Chinese proverb popularised by Deng Xiaoping — seeking truth from facts. Muralidharan consistently advocates for systems that generate validated data and argues for processes that draw upon data, even suggesting linking compensation to outcomes measured by district surveys.

Another feature of this book is that ideas are directed at state governments, not the Union government, except to suggest more freedom for states that are delivering good outcomes, e.g., by providing more flexibility in central schemes or accessing data from states through APIs, rather than mandating multiple apps, which gobble frontline time. The focus on states creates multiple sites for ideas to be adopted; a revenue-raising idea here, a health-improving idea there, and so on. Muralidharan is not expecting that the adoption will be top-down, with states in lock-step. Instead, the reliance is on a process of (hopefully rapid) diffusion, in a manner that is in sync with the political culture of a state.

The third characteristic is a claim that “there is often no trade-off between equity and efficiency”, because few, if any, of our states operate on the frontier where such a trade-off is necessary. Instead, it's argued that there are many actions that can improve both. However, the examples provided, e.g., replacing free electricity to farmers with “income transfers... up to a landholding cap” can

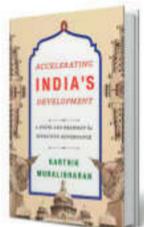


ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

Mohalla Clinics in Delhi have transformed people's relationship with the healthcare system

face resistance from elites, and, as Muralidharan notes, there is “a pattern of elite bias in every sector discussed in this book”. The book is unclear as to how to overcome this bias. Without that we will get outcomes such as much smaller income transfers, along with free electricity. Other ideas, for example, offering a choice between direct benefit transfers (DBT) or grain from PDS, may be more implementable, though, if the DBT option catches on, could FCI procurement as a mechanism to back minimum support prices continue?

For the most part, Muralidharan's reform ideas are not just substantive, but also radical. A running theme in the book is the practicum model, which perhaps builds on the author's own research experience with the cost-effectiveness of additional temporary teachers in schools. Practicum involves mixing classroom instruction with concurrent training in a government department, with some preference in future recruitment to its graduates. This



ACCELERATING INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT BY KARTHIK MURALIDHARAN Penguin 832 pages ₹1,299

model is fleshed out in degrees of detail for administration, education, health, judiciary, and even the police. Implementing it would, of course, entail a wholesale change in staffing and recruitment practices, adding to above-mentioned changes in compensation policy.

At a recent event in Delhi, the author said: “Real power comes not from sharing solutions but distributing agency” — an insight that is hard to appreciate and harder to implement. Not all the reform ideas in the book may pass this test, but many do, though they remain hard to implement. Some green shoots are, however, visible. Tamil Nadu recently established a Human Resources Reforms Committee, which has since submitted its report. Andhra Pradesh has established an in-house data analysis unit serving multiple departments, and recruited over 1,00,000 contractual (recently regularised) frontline workers. It will be interesting to see if Telangana's district level KPI surveys survives the change in political regime. All these

are in alignment with some of the author's reform ideas. Others, such as changing voting systems, are certainly not for the faint-hearted, but maybe one can visualise starting with local elections in one state, the drumbeat towards ‘one nation, one election’ notwithstanding.

Throughout the book, the author seems to hope that the reform path will be lit at many places by someone, somewhere, trying some idea, and that successful initiatives will be rapidly replicated. Time will tell if that will happen, but if the lucidity of analysis and provocativeness of the book's ideas combine to inspire enough states to experiment, the author should consider the labour well-recompensed. Nonetheless, regardless of what happens, the book remains an engaging and thought-provoking read, deserving its place on the shelf.

The writer is a senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi

The Power of a Play

Critic Jonathan Gil Harris on the revolutionary potential of Isabella Hammad's Women's Prize-shortlisted novel, *Enter Ghost*

Udbhav Seth

OUR PLAY needed the protests, but the protests did not need our play. This line flits through Sonia's head as she rides away from a demonstration against Israeli soldiers in Jerusalem. Born in London to a Palestinian father, she's an actor and the protagonist of Isabella Hammad's 2023 novel *Enter Ghost*, returning to the Israeli city of Haifa to visit her sister. But she gets roped into a production of *Hamlet* and finds herself plunged into political tensions she escaped as a child, realising that guilt about doing art while bombs and insurgencies ravage lives isn't new — it's what her director and acting troupe have lived with for years in this part of the world, trying to convince themselves that art, even at a time like this, a place like this, matters.

Hammad's novel made it to the Women's Prize for Fiction 2024 shortlist as Gaza suffered relentless Israeli bombing. To explore fiction's role in humanising a distant horror, we spoke to critic Jonathan Gil Harris about how *Hamlet* evokes the history of the Palestinian liberation movement, why Shakespeare is endlessly adaptable and the possibility of revolution in the practice of art.

The most famous line of the play, ‘To be or not to be’, uttered by a suicidal Hamlet investigating if his uncle murdered his father, is central to the novel's exploration of Palestine as a land in limbo, embattled in conflicting definitions and borders. “Sonia wasn't born in Haifa, a city traditionally Palestinian but now Israeli. Her sister lives and teaches there. Palestine itself is and isn't a country. It's not been officially recognised by the United Nations. It is occupied by Israel and is subject to Israeli law, some specially made by Israel for the Palestinians,” says Harris.

On the bidding of his father's ghost, Hamlet stages a play about a king murdered by his brother and seats his uncle, Claudius, in the audience to confirm his suspicions. This echoes one of *Enter Ghost*'s most powerful scenes, when Israeli soldiers storm the troupe's stage but, inexplicably, don't stop the performance. “Hamlet is exhorting his audience to justice of a kind, just as his father's ghost exhorted him. Do the Israeli soldiers recognise themselves in this production as the oppressive Claudius figure, the murderer?” says Harris.

A 17th century British play resonates in the modern-day Middle East partly because, according to Harris, Shakespeare became a global icon after the British Empire used him to culturally influence their territories. Also, the playwright's audience comprised many classes, religions, genders and migrants, forcing him to “speak in many voices”, making him popular. Just like Hammad uses *Hamlet* to explore colonialism in a land ripped by British bureaucracy in the early 20th century, director Vishal Bhardwaj used it to explore Kashmir's relationship with India in *Haider* (2014), with Shahid Kapoor essaying the line ‘Hum hain ki hum nahin?’.

Shakespeare also found a fan in 20th century playwright Bertolt Brecht, whose alienation effect — a theory that the audience must be repeatedly reminded of the fictiveness of a play so as to not forget its political subtext — is referred to by Sonia's director while debating the point of art with such bleakness in the world. On a recent visit to Haifa, Harris was touched by a sign of solidarity that cut across identity politics: a married couple, a Palestinian poet and Romanian Jew, living in the same house. He says, “There has to be conversation, but also (a recognition that the current conversation) is not between equals. There are massive power asymmetries that affect the extent to which people have access to a microphone.”

Harris considers ‘Our play needed the protests, but the protests did not need our play’ to be one of the most profound lines in the novel, adding, “It would be easy to conclude from it that art is simply parasitic on lived experience, adds nothing of value... To be a playgoer means to have access to literacy and wealth. It seems like an elite pleasure that allows one to masquerade as a revolutionary while the real world is happening elsewhere.”

But that conclusion would ignore Hamlet's belief in art holding up a mirror to nature and Hammad's argument that artistry is an inevitably guilt-ridden enterprise in a violent world. Harris says, “There are moments of urgency, but we also need moments of slowness to pause and reflect. Art can give us a space in which to do that... If theatre interrupts what we assume about the world, then, as the saying goes, the flapping of a butterfly's wing somewhere can produce a hurricane in another part of the world.”



ENTER GHOST BY ISABELLA HAMMAD Penguin 336 pages ₹699

HOT OFF THE PRESS

ELECTIONS, PARTIES, AND COALITIONS IN INDIA

ESWARAN SRIDHARAN (ORIENT BLACKSWAN, ₹1,095)

Veteran political scientist Eswaran Sridharan takes on voting patterns and recent vicissitudes of coalition politics in India in his new book. Tracking how the Congress's appeal waned after 1989 and grew after 2004, the book has 10 essays which also explore the Bharatiya Janata Party's larger-than-life stature in national politics.

HINDUTVA AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

BRINDA KARAT (SPEAKING TIGER, ₹450)

Activist Brinda Karat explores how Hindutva's dominance on the national stage after 2014 has changed the language of political leaders, police departments and courts in tackling cases of violence against women belonging to religious



minorities and oppressed castes. Referring to incidents like the cremation of the Hathras rape victim without her family's knowledge, the lionisation of Bilkis Bano's rapists and the murder of Kukli women in Manipur, she sheds light on the language of violence in New India.

DREAMING A PARADISE

CHITVAN GILL (SEAGULL, ₹599)

In this book, journalist Chitvan Gill tells the story of Buland Masjid, an unauthorised colony on the banks of the Yamuna that has been abandoned by Delhi in its mad rush for industry and expansion. The residents recycle scrap, repair machines, run schools and sell food — all in an attempt to keep hope alive for the have-nots while the haves speed overhead along highways.

THE EARTH QUAKES: LATE ANTI-STORIES

SUBIMAL MISRA (HARPERCOLLINS, ₹599)

This is a collection of fiction written by Subimal Misra in the last two decades of his life, the 1990s and early 2000s, translated from Bengali by V Ramaswamy. In a style that defies institutions, forms and even the act of writing, these stories are iconoclastic to the core, about everyone from a musician who's devoted to his muse to politicians who don't know how to politick.

SANATAN SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE (PENGUIN, ₹599)

First published in 2018, this work has been translated from Marathi by Paromita Sengupta and tells a multi-generational story of Bhimnak Mahar, a man battling caste prejudice. The narrative starts in his youth be-



fore Independence and ends with his grandson decades later. For this novel, the critically acclaimed Dalit writer from Maharashtra received the literary award Saraswati Samman in 2021, leading to some Dalit writers challenging his acceptance of the award for its association with Hinduism.

PONNIYIN SELVAN BOOK 3

KALKI (WESTLAND, ₹399)

Translated from Tamil by Nandini Krishnan, this is the third in a new series of translations of the iconic novel. Now split into several instalments to accommodate the mammoth text, the epic about the Chola empire was first published in the 1950s and transformed the critical status of its writer and the magazine it was serialised in. UDBHAV SETH

A lost time, a lost place

Amor Towles' new collection of short fiction is a hat tip to nostalgia, betrayal and the writer's angst

Leher Kala

TO CREATE a moody atmosphere that immerses one into the illusions of a bygone era is a lot harder in a short story than the familiar tropes employed in film noir. Writer Amor Towles skillfully used the same essential elements — of dark alleyways where shadows play tricks and *femme fatales* rule — in my favourite of his previous novels, *A Gentleman in Moscow*. A charming book about a count's heroic exploits while imprisoned in a hotel during Stalin's reign, it was a subtle examination of the brutality of gulags and collectives, conveyed with an optimistic air.

Similarly, Towles's latest offering, *Table for Two: Fictions*, is a collection of seven stories re-

flecting some of the unwieldy periods and cultural signposts of the 20th century. The title alludes to romance; the stylish black-and-white cover features the profile of a well-dressed couple, deep in conversation. Towles has been a keen observer of the desires of the rich whose plush existence allows them to indulge their ennui but doesn't quite guarantee happiness. Interior lives, alas, are seldom well-ordered. These stories are less about the sparkle of rose-tinted love and more about the compromises required to hold on to it.

In the first section set in New York, its distinct characters, some wealthy, some strivers, bring historical settings to life in elegant prose. ‘I Will Survive’ surveys the uncomfortable situation that arises post a wife's intense suspicions when she discovers her husband is ly-

ing about attending his weekly squash game. Consumed by an overarching fury, a sense that her entire life was one giant lie, she internalised the many painful facets leading to her two marriages and divorce: “She felt cheated by the implicit promises of her youth. Cheated by institutions like Smith College, the Episcopal Church, and Jane Austen, each of which openly celebrated the sacrament of marriage. Ultimately, cheated by Life, which had forced her to endure the scandal, the loneliness, the indignities of marital collapse—even as less-deserving women all around her exuded a sense of moral superiority secured by an untarnished union.” Despite having everything, her world fell apart. The mood switched suddenly, like a thunderous black cloud drifting onto an azure blue sky.

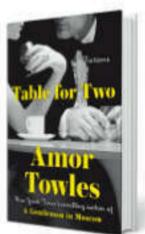


TABLE FOR TWO: FICTIONS BY AMOR TOWLES Penguin 464 pages ₹599

Choices and consequences are never straightforward, likely to reveal themselves slowly and most unexpectedly, as displayed in ‘The Ballad of Timothy Touchett’. A young, well-educated man determined to make it as a celebrated novelist moves to New York and gears up for inspiration to strike. Towles gets into the head of a writer expertly, detailing the agonising self-doubt and the fear all writers have that's almost too terrible to bear—that they have no story to tell. In a few delightful paragraphs, the problem of being born to the proverbial silver spoon is thoughtfully considered. Would Dostoevsky have written *Crime and Punishment* if he hadn't been sent to Siberia for his political views? “How could one expect to craft a novel of grace and significance when one's greatest inconveniences had included the mowing of lawns in spring, the raking of leaves in autumn, and the shoveling of snow in winter?” Indeed, it was Marcel Proust who noted, Happiness is beneficial for the body but it is grief that develops the powers of the mind. Perhaps, a lucky few are blessed with JK Rowling's imagination, otherwise the best narratives emerge from hardship and surreal experiences. And ambition thwarted by

talent (or lack of) can play havoc with our value systems. It's an all-too-realistic premise that failed storyteller Touchett, held back by his cushioned childhood, takes to forging legendary authors' signatures instead.

In the latter half of the book, the big city intrigue shifts to Los Angeles. ‘Eve in Hollywood’ follows the fearless Evelyn Ross, a character from Towles' *Rules of Civility* on her escapades with an eclectic crew of people she befriends along the way. Slim and blonde, she sashays through nightclubs, holding her own amid a band of villains, one of whom is a former cop with a clever plan for a double cross. This narrative isn't as neatly woven as the rest; elaborate backstories are suddenly introduced to clear up plot confusion. When nude images of Olivia de Havilland go missing, the reader knows Towles is enjoying himself immensely, referencing films from the Golden Age of Hollywood, noir classics like *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. For these long, blazing days of an endless summer *Table for Two* delivers, by bringing that lost time back to glorious life.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films



INTERPRETATIONS OF MALADY

DR SURANJIT CHATTERJEE

Avoid these mistakes while going outdoors

Stay hydrated to maintain physical and cognitive function with electrolyte-rich fluids

A HARSH heatwave is upon us and exposes each one of us to health complications as a result. However, if we can avoid a few mistakes and be mindful about simple measures, we can avoid heat stroke and exhaustion.

The elderly, infants and individuals with chronic medical conditions are particularly susceptible to heat-related illnesses due to their impaired thermoregulation. These groups may not perceive or respond to heat stress effectively.

GIVE UP DIURETIC BEVERAGES: One of the primary reasons for a heat stroke is inadequate hydration. Instead of consuming sufficient water, many of us opt for diuretic beverages like coffee, tea, soda and alcohol, which exacerbate dehydration. Proper hydration is crucial for maintaining the body's ability to regulate temperature and prevent conditions such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Dehydration can impair cognitive and physical function. Apart from water, make sure you have electrolyte-replenishing fluids.

Have a glass of water before heading out, so that you don't dehydrate easily. Avoid alcohol as it will dehydrate you much faster. If at all you drink alcohol, keep a glass of water next to you.

As you age, your body doesn't demand water like it used to in your younger years. So you may not feel thirsty enough though your body may still need fluids to function. So not drinking enough water puts you in danger of dehydration.

PRESERVE FOOD PROPERLY:

Another critical issue is improper food preservation. High temperatures accelerate the growth of bacteria, spoiling the food faster and increasing the risk of food-borne illnesses. To prevent this, it is essential to maintain proper food storage temperatures, keeping refrigerators below 40°F (4°C) and freezers at 0°F (-18°C). Perishable foods should not be left out for extended periods, beyond an hour to be precise, and leftovers should be promptly refrigerated. Otherwise, you can get food poisoning, characterised by mild gastrointestinal distress to severe systemic infections.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT CLOTHING:

Inappropriate clothing choices con-

tribute to the risk of heat-related illnesses. Wearing heavy, non-breathable fabrics can hinder the body's natural cooling mechanisms, such as sweating and evaporation. Wear lightweight, loose-fitting and light-coloured clothing made from breathable materials like cotton that enable heat dissipation.

ACCLIMATISE YOURSELF TO TEMPERATURE SHIFTS: The sudden transition between a hot outdoor environment and cold air-conditioned spaces is another common mistake. Rapid changes in temperature can cause thermal stress, leading to respiratory issues, muscle cramps and cardiovascular stress.

After being outdoors, one should enter an air-conditioned space slowly, allowing the body to adjust gradually. Similarly, go to a shaded area before stepping outdoors to condition your body. The body starts to sweat sooner at a lower body temperature and at a greater rate. Also, blood flow to the skin improves, which has the effect of cooling you down. Your thirst increases, so you're less likely to get dehydrated.

DO NOT OVEREXERT YOURSELF: Overexertion during peak heat periods is another mistake that can lead to seri-

ous health issues. Engaging in strenuous physical activities when temperatures are highest can result in heat exhaustion or heat stroke. It is advisable to schedule physical activities for cooler parts of the day, such as early morning or late evening, and to take frequent breaks in shaded or air-conditioned areas.

DO NOT DRINK ICE-COLD WATER: Finally, the misuse of cooling methods can be detrimental. Drinking ice-cold water or taking very cold showers might seem refreshing but they can cause constriction of blood vessels and lead to thermal shock.

A better approach is to use tepid water for showers and gradually cool the body down. Applying cool, damp cloths to the skin and using fans can help reduce body temperature safely and effectively.

Dr Chatterjee is senior consultant, internal medicine, Apollo Hospitals, New Delhi



NEED TO KNOW

Drinking ice-cold water or taking very cold showers might seem refreshing but they can cause constriction of blood vessels and lead to thermal shock

Different Strokes

This is the story of a 26-year-old artist with autism, whose paintings are now being printed on scarves and stoles. All because his parents never gave up

Anuradha Mascarenhas

THE NEXT stole or scarf with abstract prints that catches your attention at a store might be the printed work of 26-year-old artist Hrishikesh Vispute. Perhaps his strong lines and vibrant cubes would draw your attention at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) in New Delhi. What you would not know is that this budding talent from Navi Mumbai has autism, a neurological and developmental disorder. But it is because his parents sought intervention early enough and signed him up for art therapy that he is now among the most promising young artists in India.

His mother, Swati, knew something was amiss when as a two-and-a-half-year-old, Hrishikesh was fixated on playing with kitchen utensils and clanging them continuously. While the noise irritated everybody, he would sit calm. Yet he couldn't tolerate the sound of an autorickshaw horn. Hrishikesh's father Vijay recalls how his son was hyperactive and could only sleep an hour or two at night. "He did not have cerebral palsy, was not mentally or physically challenged. Yet there were some repetitive patterns and extreme behaviours. Then I came across a pamphlet from the New Delhi-based Action for Autism. The symptoms matched," says Swati, who was then a laboratory technician at Sion Hospital, Mumbai. A series of tests, including a CT scan, showed that Hrishikesh had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD).

WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

Explains occupational therapist Anjali Joshi, "This is a developmental disorder that affects social communication and behaviour. About one in 100 children have autism, according to WHO. However every autistic child need not be intellectually impaired. They are just not communicative and cannot easily express their needs. What can make a huge difference is when schools accommodate these special children, adjust and adapt to their concerns." Early diagnosis, intervention and creating opportunities for their mainstream participation help children with this disorder lead fairly normal lives. "From our experience, we know that parents of autistic children are the most important caregivers," says Swati.

In fact, autism is seen not as an illness but as a neurodiverse experience, where the affected have a different way of processing their environment. Children with ASD have difficulty picking up cues to sustain conversation or play, have narrow areas of interest and may have difficulty focussing on tasks that they have no interest in. "In ADHD, the child has difficulty in focussing on tasks that need sustained attention but at least have the intent to communicate," says Dr Archana Kadam, consultant developmental paediatrician, KEM, Jehangir Hospital and Hope and Health Clinic, Pune.

HOW TO DEAL WITH AUTISTIC BEHAVIOUR

Each child has a unique strength that parents need to



NARENDRA VASKAR

work on, says Joshi. Swati noticed how her son would sketch the sun, flowers and butterflies on the walls of their home from his kindergarten years. Vijay observed that he was a visual learner with a very sharp memory. Vijay would intentionally change the spelling of a word and Hrishikesh would quickly correct it even though he was not aware of the meaning of the word.

Dr Kadam advises parents to look out for tell-tale signs like speech delay, inability of the kid to gesture or express what they need, respond to their name or maintain eye contact. "Such kids may play by themselves but not with others, may fuss over food and clothes and flap their limbs about," she says.

Hrishikesh had communication issues. "A child with mild ASD (incidence 40-45 per cent) may have lesser difficulties in social skills and can communicate their needs, may have less sensory processing issues but can be taught rules of social behaviour. They may have unusual strengths in skills like music,

drawing, memory (in 10 per cent children) and can read the intent of others," says Dr Kadam. While both parents decided to enroll Hrishikesh in Fr. Agnel Multipurpose School in Navi Mumbai, where teachers focussed on inclusive education and ensured he had a buddy partner to travel with him in the school bus, Swati was still anxious. "Our son would not look at us or respond to our calls," she recalls. She gave up her job so that she could accompany Hrishikesh for speech and occupational therapy sessions.

"Other interventions include behavioural therapy, sensory integration, physiotherapy, social skills intervention. Each child is unique, hence every child's need for therapy is different and needs

Tips For Parents

- If you work early and regularly, your child will do better
- Create a need for your child to communicate. Let him or her ask, show and share things with you
- Don't focus on academics only. Your child needs to learn self-help like eating, dressing, toilet training and communication
- Create opportunities for play and interaction with peers
- Identify strengths and use them to overcome their weaknesses
- Don't compare him or her with anybody. Each child is unique

to be reviewed periodically," says Dr Kadam.

When a child has challenging behaviour, parents are taught to work on consequences by ignoring or distracting the child. "Every tantrum has a purpose, so parents are taught to analyse the cause and modify it to prevent repeat behaviour. They are also taught to only change those behaviours that are socially unacceptable or harmful to the child or others," says Dr Kadam. For Swati and Vijay, there was a new learning at every stage of their child's growing up years.

HOW ART THERAPY WORKS

Swati understood that art therapy would help her son and organised painting workshops to encourage children in her society, hoping Hrishikesh would bond with them. Soon paintings became his way of expressing himself. With a flair for abstract paintings, he completed his diploma in fine arts at Rishikesh Kala Mahavidyalaya, Panvel, which is affiliated with Sir JJ School of Arts, Mumbai. Swati got Kiran Gunjkar as an art tutor for

Hrishikesh. "Earlier it was difficult to make him sit still. But then he learnt to focus on his lines and calm down in the process," he recalls. In fact, Swati and Vijay were able to mainstream their son because they followed a cumulative approach. As Dr Kadam advises, "Parents, therapists, doctors, and teachers need to work together to help every child with ASD achieve his or her optimal functional outcome."

Gradually, Hrishikesh and his work won several awards and was featured among the works of neurodiverse artists at NGMA. Says its curator, Dr Shashi Bala, "The repetitive patterns in Hrishikesh's art highlight his unwavering focus while the bright bold colours reflect the freshness and clarity of his thought process."

HANDLING A CRISIS

Everything seemed to be going well except occasional bouts of epilepsy that Hrishikesh suffered as a side effect of medication. But nothing had prepared the family for Swati's cancer diagnosis during the pandemic. She underwent a series of targeted therapies and surgery. "The situation was challenging as I had to take care of myself and Hrishikesh would often gaze at my bald head," Swati recalls.

However, not once did she and her husband leave their son alone and ensured that he was surrounded by family when they had medical appointments. "The only time I realised how deeply affected my child was when I was not home for three days," Swati says. Hrishikesh went quiet during that period, not moving too.

"When I returned home, he did not show any emotion but simply told me 'Mama, please don't die,' she adds. While others shed tears at this emotional moment, Swati could never have been happier. This was proof of how dedicated and loving support enabled her autistic son to express his feelings in words for the very first time.

LIFE POSITIVE



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Why smoking has gone up two-fold among girls

The India Tobacco Control report shows disturbing trends that can push up India's disease burden as younger women are exposed to risks

Anonna Dutt

WHILE OVERALL tobacco consumption has gone down across the country, smoking has gone up more than two-fold in teen girls, according to data presented in the latest India Tobacco Control report released by the Union Health Ministry. Disturbingly, smoking is rising among adolescents even as it's going down among older women.

THE SMOKE SPIRAL IN GIRLS

There has been an increase in smoking among adolescents over a decade but the increase has been sharpest for girls, according to the Union Health Ministry report. Smoking in girls went up by 3.8 percentage points between 2009 and 2019, increasing to 6.2 per cent. Comparatively, smoking among boys increased by 2.3 percentage points. This comes at a time when there was a decline in smoking among adults, reducing by 2.2 percentage points in men and 0.4 percentage point in women. Not only that, prevalence of smoking in girls (6.2 per cent in 2019) was much higher than the women (1.5 per cent in 2017), showing that the next generation is getting hooked.

WHY IS SMOKING INCREASING IN GIRLS?

One of the reasons that teenage girls are smoking more is that they are maturing fast and, like boys, are taking to cigarettes to get

rid of their angst and appear cool.

"When it comes to smoking, women have largely been an untapped demography for tobacco companies. This is the reason girls have become a prominent target, with images of smoking as fashionable and a sign of women empowerment. Another factor is showcasing of smoking in films and television. Since the regulation to issue warning when scenes of smoking appear on screen in 2012, we saw a decline in smoking onscreen. However, with OTT platforms, where content without warning was uploaded, there was an increase in onscreen smoking. This is the reason the ministry brought in the new rules to regulate these platforms," says Prof Monica Arora, one of the editors of the report and public health scientist at Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI).

"There is also a worrisome trend of influences teaching the youth how to use e-cigarettes that continue to be available on some online portals or in the grey market and are sold without verifying the consumer's age, completely in violation of the laws," she adds.

THE GENDER GAP IS CLOSING

While there is a huge gap between the number of men and women tobacco users, it is narrowing down among adolescents. In 2017, 14.2 per cent women and 42.4 per cent men were tobacco users, both smoking or smokeless. By 2019, 7.4 per cent girls and 9.4 per cent boys were tobacco users. If interven-



Tobacco use in adolescents	BOYS		GIRLS		TOTAL	
	2009	2019	2009	2019	2009	2019
Current tobacco use (all types)	19.0	9.4	8.3	7.4	14.6	8.4
Current smokers	5.8	8.1	2.4	6.2	4.4	7.2
Current smokeless tobacco users	11.1	4.5	6.0	3.4	9.0	4.0

GETTY IMAGES

tions to get the youth to quit are not made, we might have more smokers in the future. That's why the report has attached a 2040 vision document which advocates how those born after 2022 should not be exposed to tobacco advertising or promotion, where new tobacco products should be banned and the packaging would return to being plain.

WHAT ARE RISKS?

Smoking increases the risk of respiratory diseases, lung cancer and cardiovascular issues such as heart attack and stroke. It is known to impact fertility in both men and women. However, women have the additional risk of having smaller foetuses, premature births or babies with damaged lungs and birth defects. Smoking may cause excessive bleeding during delivery. There are longer lasting impacts too. Research has found that women who smoke have a 43 per cent increased risk of experiencing menopause before the age of 50 compared to non-smokers. Now researchers are also studying how the effects of smoking are passed on to the next generation.

According to a 2019 study in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, women under the age of 50 who smoke have a higher risk of having a specific type of serious heart attack compared to men. This difference may be due to the interaction of estrogen with the chemicals found in cigarettes. Many researchers have correlated tobacco usage to damage in the DNA cells of the cervix which contributes to the development of cancer. The American Cancer Society study showed how smokers had a higher risk of mortality from breast cancer than non-smokers.

FACT OF THE MATTER

Women have an additional risk of having smaller foetuses, premature births or babies born with damaged lungs and birth defects. Smoking may also lead to excessive bleeding during delivery