

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI SUNDAY 26 MAY 2024

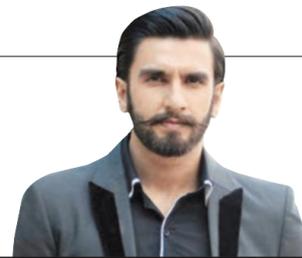


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WINDOWS



Joey King poses for photos upon arrival at the awards ceremony during the 77th Cannes Film Festival on Saturday. — AP

Cyclone Renal to hit WB today; Kolkata airport to stay shut

Kolkata: Cyclone Renal is set to hit the West Bengal coast on Sunday. It is expected to gather a speed of 110-120 km per hour gusting to 135 km per hour while passing through the Sagar Island in the Sunderbans delta and Khepupara in Bangladesh. The cyclone is expected to bring heavy to very heavy rainfall in North and South 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Howrah, Hooghly and East Midnapore. All flight operations at Kolkata Airport will remain suspended from 12 pm on Sunday to 9 am on May 27 as a precautionary measure. The Eastern Railway has also cancelled and regulated many local trains in Sealdah and Howrah divisions from till May 27. Full report on Page 4

Israel bombs Rafah despite ICJ ruling

Rafah: Israeli regime continued bombing in the Gaza Strip, including the city of Rafah, on Saturday, one day after a top UN court ordered it to halt military operations. Israel gave no indication that the ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) had affected its planning. — AFP Full report on Page 6

China ends military drills around Taiwan

Beijing: China has ended two days of military drills around Taiwan that saw jets loaded with live munitions and warships practise seizing and isolating the self-ruled island. Beijing considers the island part of its territory and has not ruled out using force to bring it under its control. Full report on Page 6

COUNTERPOINT



You have to wait one more week for your finals!

WEATHER

Max: 46°C
Min: 32°C
RH: 17%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Sunny

ASTROGUIDE

Krodhi: Uttarayana
Tithi: Vaishakha Bahula Tadiya till 6.03 pm
Star: Moola till 10.33 am
Varjyam: 8.57 am to 10.33 am
Durmuhurtam: 4.58 pm to 5.49 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
SUNSET TODAY 7.11 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.25 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 11.04 PM
MOONSET TODAY 8.24 AM

INDIA doing 'mujra' for votes: PM; Opp. says 'get well soon'

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI/PATNA, MAY 25

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched a blistering attack on the INDIA bloc and accused it of performing "mujra" for the Muslim votebank, a jibe that evoked a sharp retort from the Opposition camp, with its leaders saying that "he should maintain the dignity of the PM post" and some even wishing him to "get well soon".



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a rally for the Lok Sabha elections in Buxar, Bihar, on Saturday. — PTI

Earlier in Bihar, the Prime Minister held three back-to-back rallies in Buxar, Karakat and Patliputra Lok Sabha constituencies. In his address, Mr Modi went on to claim that if the INDIA bloc comes to power, the Constitution "will be changed in favour of Muslims". Mr Modi vowed to thwart alleged attempts to rob the dalits and backward classes of reservations by the INDIA bloc. He also charged the Opposition coalition with indulging in "scaremon-

gering" and claimed that he had been working "without fear" to wipe out terrorism and root out corruption.

"Bihar is the land that has given a new direction to the fight for social justice. I wish to declare on its soil that I will foil the plans of the INDIA bloc to rob SCs, STs and OBCs of their rights and divert them to Muslims. They may remain enslaved and perform mujra to please their votebank," Mr Modi said.

Mr Modi also alleged that the people of Bihar have been hurt by insulting remarks against migrants of the state from leaders of the Congress in Punjab and Telangana and the DMK and the TMC in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, respectively.

Targeting the RJD, he said: "These RJD people

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Kids among 27 killed in Rajkot game zone inferno

Rajkot, May 25: At least 27 persons, including children, were killed in a massive fire that swept through a game zone teeming with people enjoying a summer vacation outing in Gujarat's Rajkot city on Saturday evening, officials said.

Relief and rescue operations have been underway at the affected TRP game zone for more than five hours after the blaze erupted at a fibre dome constructed for gaming activities at around 4:30 pm, officials said, adding that the structure collapsed due to the huge fire.

"So far we have confirmed the death of 27 persons in the fire incident. The bodies are completely charred and it is difficult to identify them," said assistant commissioner of police Vinayak Patel.

Several people, including children were playing games at the game zone, located on Nana-Mava Road, when the tragedy struck. — PTI

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PoK belongs to India and we will take it back: Shah

'Cong tried to frighten us citing Pakistani atom bombs'

Shimla, May 25: Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) is a part of India and "we will take it", home minister Amit Shah asserted on Saturday as he castigated the Congress for trying to "frighten" the BJP by saying the neighbouring country possesses atom bombs.

Addressing a rally at Amb in Himachal Pradesh's Una district, the heartland of soldiers, he also appealed to people to ensure the victory of the BJP in the bypolls to six Assembly seats for the formation of a BJP government in the hill state, currently ruled by the Congress.

Mr Shah said that only a strong government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi can fight terrorism, ensure economic growth and take care of the poor.

"The Congress is trying to frighten us by saying that Pakistan has an atom bomb," Mr Shah told the rally in support of Union minister Anurag Thakur, the BJP candidate from the Hamirpur Lok Sabha seat. "And, today I speak from... Himachal that Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) hamara hai, hamara rahega aur hum ise lekar rahenge (PoK is ours and it will



Union home minister Amit Shah during a rally in support of BJP candidate for Hamirpur seat Anurag Thakur in Himachal Pradesh's Una district on Saturday. — PTI

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

New Delhi, May 25: Encouraged by the voter turnout in Jammu and Kashmir in the Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission will "very soon" initiate the process of holding Assembly polls in the Union territory, chief election commissioner Rajiv Kumar said on Saturday. He also said that the people of Jammu

and Kashmir deserve their government.

Responding to a question on the turnout in various seats of Jammu and Kashmir and if Assembly elections could be held soon, Mr Kumar said the poll panel is very encouraged by people's participation in the parliamentary polls. — PTI

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remain ours. We will take it."

He said that even when Article 370 was scrapped in 2019, Congress leaders said it would lead to a bloodbath but not even a

single stone was pelted in Jammu and Kashmir.

During the Congress regime, terrorists from Pakistan used to intrude into India, trigger blasts

Turn to Page 4

'Handle your country': Kejriwal snubs Pak leader's poll shoutout

AVINASH PRABHAKAR NEW DELHI, MAY 25

As the country voted in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections on Saturday, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal was engaged in a war of words with former Pakistan minister Chaudhry Fawad Hussain over his remarks on the general election in India.

After the Pakistani politician reacted to Mr Kejriwal's post on X after voting with his family and posted, "May peace and harmony defeat forces of hate and extremism", the Delhi CM replied in Hindi: "Chaudhary Sahib, I and the people of my country are fully capable of handling our issues. Your tweet is not needed. The situation in Pakistan is very bad right now. You



Arvind Kejriwal



Fawad Hussain

take care of your country."

Mr Kejriwal added: "The elections taking place in India are our internal matters. India will not tolerate interference from the biggest sponsors of terrorism."

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 dictator-

ship, unemployment and inflation. You too must go and vote."

Mr Hussain, who was a minister in the erstwhile Imran Khan-led government in Pakistan, shared Mr Kejriwal's post. "May peace and harmony defeat forces of hate and extremism," he captioned it, using the hashtags #MorePower #India Election2024.

Later, he replied to Mr Kejriwal's post, calling extremism a "borderless phenomenon," be it in Pakistan, India or Bangladesh. He said that the situation in Pakistan is very far from ideal, but individuals must strive for a better society wherever they are.

Taking a dig, Union minister Kiren Rijiju said Mr Kejriwal has "massive

Turn to Page 4

Sengupta dedicates award to queer community Anasuya creates history, becomes first Indian to win Best Actress at Cannes

Cannes, May 25: Anasuya Sengupta, one of the lead stars of Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's Hindi-language movie *The Shameless*, has created history by bagging the Best Actress award in the Un Certain Regard category of the 2024 Cannes Film Festival.

Ms Sengupta, who hails from Kolkata, is the first Indian artiste to win the category's top acting honour, marking a significant milestone for India at the prestigious film gala.

In her acceptance speech on Friday night, Ms Sengupta dedicated the award to the "queer community and other marginalised communities" for bravely fighting for their



People wait to cast their votes during the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections in East Delhi constituency on Saturday. Report on Page 2 — PTI

Ph-6 records 58% polling in Delhi; 61% overall: EC

Netas, dignitaries cast votes in national capital Highest polling in WB State polls in Odisha

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, MAY 25

President Droupadi Murmu, vice-president Jagdeep Dhankhar, Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, Delhi L-G V.K. Saxena, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Union Cabinet ministers S. Jaishankar and Hardeep Singh Puri were among the top dignitaries to cast votes in the national capital during the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections on Saturday. Delhi recorded 58 per cent polling.

In the penultimate phase of the ongoing general election, 58 parliamentary constituencies in eight states and Union territories, including Delhi, went to the polls. Simultaneously, polling was also held for 42 Assembly seats in Odisha.

The overall voter turnout in the sixth phase of voting, according to the Election Commission, was about 61 per cent. With 79.25 per cent polling on Saturday, West Bengal recorded the highest poll percentage in this phase, followed by Jharkhand (64 per cent) and Odisha (69 per cent).

Jammu and Kashmir with 54.06 per cent voting, Bihar at 55.24 per cent, Uttar Pradesh at 54.03 per cent and Haryana at 60 per cent were among the low-polling states/UT.

Given the scorching heat in north India, voters largely chose early morning and late evening to step out. In Delhi, Mr

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Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with his mother Sonia Gandhi after casting his vote at a polling booth in New Delhi on Saturday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

EC releases 5 phases' absolute polling data

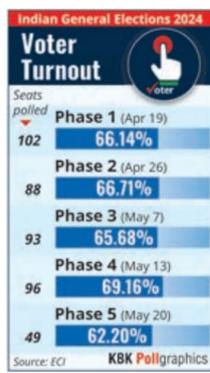
VINEETA PANDEY NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Under fire from the Opposition, media and civil society over a lack of exact polling figures, the Election Commission (EC) on Saturday released the absolute numbers of votes polled in each constituency and underlined that nobody can change the data of votes polled.

In a statement, the EC said the voter turnout data was always available with the candidates and on the Voter Turnout APP for the citizens.

The EC snubbed the "mischievous design to vitiate the electoral process" and reiterated its commitment to transparency.

"Big victory for peoples' Right to Information! EC releases voter turnout figures in absolute numbers..." said activist Anjali Bharadwaj, who had moved EC seeking disclosure of votes recorded at every polling



station where voting had taken place.

Giving absolute numbers per seat, EC has put the final polling percentage in phase one at 66.14 per cent, in phase two at 66.71 per cent, in phase three at 65.68 per cent, in phase four at 69.16 per cent and in phase five at 62.20 per cent. — PTI

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Anasuya Sengupta

very decent human beings," the actor said.

The win at Cannes is a landmark moment in Ms Sengupta's career. She earlier played a supporting part in 2009 Bengali movie *Madly Bangalee*, directed by Anjan Dutt, and worked as a production designer after shifting to Mumbai.

The Shameless, which had its premiere at Cannes on May 17, forays into a dark, disturbing world of exploitation and misery in which two sex workers, one who bears the scars of her line of work, the other a young girl days away from ritual initiation, forge a bond and seek to throw off their shackles.

Ms Sengupta plays the central character of Renuka, who escapes from a Delhi brothel after stabbing a policeman to death and takes refuge in a community of sex workers in northern India, where she meets Devika (Omara), a young girl condemned to a life of prostitution. The actor celebrated her win on Instagram, where she posted pictures with Un Certain Regard jury head, Canadian director Xavier Dolan, and German-Luxembourg star Vicky Krieps. "I won, guys, held so lovingly by my heroes. I'm here for you, to be the one you need THANK YOU @festivaldecannes." Ms Sengupta wrote in the caption. — PTI

IN BRIEF

1-yr-old dies in road mishap in Gurgaon

Gurgaon: A one-year-old boy was killed after a speeding SUV hit him here, the police said on Saturday. According to the police, the incident occurred on Friday evening in Sector 45. Mohammad Sanfaraz, the victim's father, told the police that he got to know of his son's accident through a friend, officials said. "When I came to the market, I came to know that my one-year-old son, Sanwar, met with an accident and was admitted to a private hospital. I reached the hospital where my friend Kayum told me that my son came on the road while playing in the park and a speeding MG Hector car hit him. He died during treatment", Sanfaraz told the police. Following the complaint, an FIR was registered against the unknown driver of the SUV, who managed to flee, under sections 279 (rash driving), and 304A (death due to negligence) of the Indian Penal Code at sector 40 police station on Saturday, they said. Further investigation is underway and the driver will be arrested soon, a senior police officer said. — PTI

Fire breaks out at factory in Mundka

New Delhi: A fire broke out at a car accessories manufacturing factory located at Mundka industrial area in outer Delhi on Saturday afternoon, officials said. No casualties have been reported so far, they said. According to officials of Delhi fire services (DFS), they received a call at 4.30 pm reporting that a fire broke out in the factory, located near Metro pillar number 610. At least 26 fire tenders have been pressed into service and are trying to douse the fire. The operation is underway, the officer said. The factory is located in a single-storey house, spread over a larger area. Thick black smoke was seen at the site due to the chemicals and plastic items kept in the factory, the officer added.

Hospital helps patients cast votes

New Delhi: To strengthen democracy, the Manipal Hospital in Dwarka area on Saturday helped patients cast their votes during the sixth and penultimate phase of the Lok Sabha elections. The hospital said this initiative aims to highlight the importance of voting as a fundamental duty of every responsible Indian citizen. "By supporting our patients in exercising their right to vote, we are not only prioritising their health but also empowering them as active participants in our democracy. Every vote matters, and we are proud to ensure that our patients' voices are heard," said Vijji Verghese, director, Manipal Hospital, Dwarka.

PRIEST PLACES CAM IN WOMEN'S CHANGING ROOM

Ghaziabad: The police has booked a priest of a temple for allegedly putting up a camera over a roofless women's bathroom here, the police said on Saturday. According to the police, the said temple is located adjacent to the Muradnagar Ganga canal. People usually offer prayers after taking a dip in the canal. The matter came to light when a woman who went to the temple with her daughter on May 21 noticed a CCTV camera pointed at the roofless bathroom, the police said. "The woman noticed that the CCTV camera installed on the top was focused on the room where women change their clothes," said DCP Vivek Chandra Yadav. The display of the CCTV was linked with the mobile phone of the Mahant on which he would watch the ladies, DCP said. The woman immediately contacted Maha-nt Goswami and asked about the CCTV camera on which he got angry and hurled abuses. He threatened her to face the dire consequences if she told anyone about the camera, the DCP said. "After getting a complaint, the Muradnagar police lodged an FIR on Friday. When the police team reached the temple to arrest him, he was not there," said the DCP.

■ EVM related complaints from polling stations ■ Atishi, Bharadwaj complain about alleged irregularities

Delhi sees 57.38% voting, N-E Delhi highest

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Braving scorching weather, people turned up to exercise their franchise for the seven Lok Sabha constituencies of Delhi with a voter turnout of 56.73 per cent.

The Northeast Delhi seat, where the Congress, in alliance with the AAP, has fielded youth leader Kanhaiya Kumar against the BJP's sitting MP Manoj Tiwari, witnessed the highest turnout.

Of the seven sitting MP's in Delhi, Mr Tiwari is the only parliamentarian who has been fielded by the BJP for the third time.

The national capital had witnessed 60.52 per cent voting in the 2019 general election when the BJP had swept all the seats.

The office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said that 54.31 per cent turnout had been recorded till 5.00 pm with one hour left for the official closure time.

The highest turnout of 62.87 per cent was recorded in the Northeast Delhi constituency, while the New Delhi seat had the lowest voting percentage at 51.98.

Chandni Chowk recorded 58.06 per cent polling, East Delhi 56.46 per cent, Northwest Delhi 56.75 per cent, West Delhi 58.26 per cent, and South Delhi 55.15 per cent.

This was the first time when chief minister Arvind Kejriwal voted for Congress in Chandni Chowk while Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi voted for AAP in the New Delhi constituency.

Poll officials said there were no reports of techni-

cal snags or delays in the commencement of voting at any polling station. However, CPI(M) leader Brinda Karat alleged she had to wait for almost an hour to cast her vote as the battery of the EVM control unit at her polling booth at St Columba's School in the New Delhi constituency "drained out."

Responding to Ms Karat's allegation, the district election officer said in a post on X that the battery of the control unit had drained out around 10.00 am and it was replaced within 15 minutes.

Delhi ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj also complained about alleged irregularities. An official at the Delhi CEO's office said poll personnel have been asked to check the complaints.

From employment, inflation, better road infrastructure, clean drinking water, women's safety, education, and health care services to a corruption-free India were among the prominent issues in the minds of voters.

While the first-time voters were excited and flaunted their inked fingers after exercising their ballot, many voters were disappointed as their names were missing from the voters' list even as they claimed that their documents were in order.

Over 2.52 lakh first-time voters cast their maiden votes in the elections in the city. At many polling booths, the first-time voters were also awarded certificates.

The specially designed pink and model booths were a hit among the voters, who not only cast their

votes with ease but also enjoyed clicking selfies on polling day.

Elderly voters also exercised their franchise with some reaching polling centres after a one-kilometre walk and a few others being brought to the booths on stretchers.

As per CEO Delhi, there were 97,823 voters aged above 85. More than 5,400 voters had chosen the home-voting facility made available by the Election Commission this time to electors above the age of 85.

There were some who complained about the lack of adequate facilities at the polling booths.

Delhi has been reeling from heatwave conditions and a "yellow" warning was in place for the day, with the Met office predicting that the mercury was likely to reach a maximum of 44° C. The Delhi poll body has said that it has made arrangements for the voters to beat the scorching heat.

A total of 1.52 crore voters—82 lakh men, 69 lakh women, and 1,228 from the third gender category—were eligible to cast their votes at more than 13,000 polling booths across the seven constituencies, officials said.

A two-way fight between the BJP and an alliance between the Congress and the AAP as part of the INDIA bloc is being played out in the capital.

The BJP won all seven seats in Delhi in the 2014 and 2019 elections and is aiming for a clean sweep for the third consecutive time. INDIA bloc partners AAP and the Congress are contesting the elections in Delhi under a four-three seat-share formula.



1) Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with Sonia Gandhi after casting his vote at a polling booth during the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections in New Delhi on Saturday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY



4) A 97-year-old resident of Old Rajinder Nagar in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI



2) Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud with his family after casting his vote. — PTI



3) A voter shows her inked finger at a polling booth in Turkman Gate. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY



5) Voters shows their inked finger after casting vote. — G.N. JHA



6) Delhi minister and AAP leader Gopal Rai, Congress leader and INDIA bloc candidate from Northeast Delhi constituency Kanhaiya Kumar and others show their fingers marked with indelible ink.

7) AAP leader Sanjay Singh after casting his vote. — PTI

4 yrs on from riots, N-E Delhi votes on law & order, inflation

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Voting for the first time since the devastating riots in the Northeast Delhi, residents said they were focussing on issues like inflation, law and order and other day-to-day concerns for the ongoing Lok Sabha elections on Saturday. The Northeast Delhi riots erupted in February 2020, in the backdrop of anti-CAA protests at various places in the city, claiming more than 50 lives, leaving over 400 injured and causing massive damage to public and private property.

Some residents of the area said they had moved past the riots and were looking ahead for better amenities and services in the area, while others said those who have lost family

members would not be able to forget the incident. Mohammad Salim, a resident of Seelampur, said that the riots happened four years ago and people are now focusing on issues which affect their daily lives.

"You can see how people have gathered here at Chauhan Banger in large numbers to exercise their votes despite the heat. They have seen the time when riots took place in the area. They have forgotten it and are moving ahead with their current life. They are now focussing on day-to-day life issues that have an impact on their income," Mr Salim said.

Kamal Ahmad, another resident of Seelampur, said that improving citizens' lives must be the priority of the government.

"In February 2020, just before the Covid-19 outbreak in India, riots were witnessed here. During that period, an atmosphere of fear had gripped the area. However, now people are focusing on making their lives more convenient.

"Income is less than their expenses. Everyone wants an easy life with good facilities for education, health, business and less inflation. There was no communal issue in this area post that incident. The candidate who will focus on our issues has received our vote," Mr Ahmed said.

Isa Fatima, who voted at a polling booth at a school near Jaffrabad Metro station, said some people will never forget the "black event" but others have moved on.

Kejriwal casts ballot, says people voting in large numbers against dictatorship

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday cast the ballot along with his family members, including his wife Sunita Kejriwal, at a polling booth here, and said people were voting in large numbers against "dictatorship, price rise, and unemployment."

Apart from his wife, Mr Kejriwal was accompanied by his two children and father Govind Ram Kejriwal as they cast their votes at the polling booth in the Civil Lines area in the Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha constituency from where Congress' J.P. Agarwal is contesting as an INDIA bloc candidate against the BJP's Praveen Khandelwal. Mr Kejriwal said his eld-



Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, wife Sunita Kejriwal and other family members in New Delhi. — PTI

erly mother could not join them due to health reasons.

"I voted against dictatorship, inflation, and unemployment," he said.

Talking to reporters after casting his vote, the Delhi chief minister appealed to people not to sit at their homes due to

the intense summer heat and come out to vote against "dictatorship."

"I understand people in large numbers are voting against dictatorship, inflation, and unemployment because they are highly troubled," he said.

Mr Kejriwal is on interim bail until June 1 in the

Delhi excise policy case. After casting his vote, Mr Kejriwal's father told a news agency, "I appeal to the Almighty to keep us safe so that we keep praying to Him."

There is a direct contest between the BJP and the INDIA bloc partners Congress and AAP in Delhi.

Under a 4:3 formula, the AAP is contesting in East Delhi, West Delhi, South Delhi, and New Delhi Lok Sabha seats, while the Congress has fielded candidates in Northeast, Northwest, and Chandni Chowk seats.

Incidentally, senior Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi cast their votes in the New Delhi constituency from where AAP's Somnath Bhatti is pitted against BJP's Bansuri Swaraj.

Elderlies brave scorching heat to exercise their franchise

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Elderly voters in the national capital braved the scorching heat to cast their ballot, with some reaching polling centres after a one-kilometre walk and few others being brought to the booths on stretchers. According to the data shared by the office of chief electoral officer, Delhi, there were 97,823 voters aged above 85.

Prem Hinduja, a 97-year-old resident of Old Rajinder Nagar, was brought on a stretcher to the polling booth. The frail old man urged people to vote for "welfare of the country and humanity".

"It is one of the most essential things to do (casting one's vote). You should vote for the right people who should represent the country," he added.

Anuradha Kaul, an 86-year-old woman, was accompanied to the polling booth by her son and daughter. "I will come and vote at the polling booth instead of opting for home voting as long as my legs are moving," she asserted.

Unemployment, corruption-free nation major issues for Delhiites

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

From employment, inflation, better road infrastructure, clean drinking water, women's safety, education, and health care services to a corruption-free India—a myriad of issues dominated the minds of voters when they stepped out to exercise their franchise.

The seven Lok Sabha constituencies of Delhi went to polling on Saturday. A two-way fight between the BJP and an alliance between the Congress and the AAP as part of the INDIA bloc is being played out in the capital.

Visuals from the polling

booths showed people of all ages flocking to the centres while braving the sweltering heat in the city to exercise their rights

"I feel proud to have carried out my democratic duty. I was the first voter in my booth and also was given a certificate by a district election officer as a mark of appreciation," said Sunil Kumar Jha, who was the first one to cast his vote in the New Delhi con-

stituency's Gole Market. "I have voted on the issue of development," he added while appreciating the facilities and arrangements made at his polling booth at Atal Adarsh Bal Vidyalaya. "Hum aman aur chain ke liye vote karne aye hain (We have voted for harmony and peace)," said Zaida (60), who had come to vote along with her four daughters-in-law all clad in burqas at the Civil Lines polling booth.

Staggering with a stick came Baldev Raj Prashar (84), who claimed to have walked one kilometre all the way from his home to the polling station in Chandni Chowk's Dariba Kalan.

1st-time voters cast ballot for job opportunities and better future

AVINASH PRABHAKAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Over 2.52 lakh first time voters cast their maiden votes during the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections in the capital city on Saturday. While the first-time voters were jubilant and flaunted their inked fingers after exercising their ballot, at the same time many voters were disappointed as their names were missing from the voters' list even as they claimed that their documents were in order. The

specially designed pink and model booths were a hit among the voters, who not only cast their votes with ease but also enjoyed clicking selfies on the polling day.

The first-time voters mostly cast their ballots on the issues like employment opportunities and development among others. The young voters also got the certificates at several polling booths. Among the first time voters, senior Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's daughter

Miraya cast the ballot along with her brother Raihan. She also appealed that the youth should come out and vote for a change. Accompanied by their parents, the two cast their votes at a booth on Lodhi Road in the New Delhi constituency. "My only message to the youth is to just come out and vote. It is our job to make a change so we need to come out and do it," Miraya said.

"I am a first-time voter and it was a very smooth experience. The polling

authorities had made good arrangements. After casting our votes, we were given coconut water packs to beat the heat," a first time female voter said. She added further that if we want a better country, each and every vote is very important for this. "I am proud to have cast my vote today," she said.

On being asked about the issues for this poll, a first-time college goer voter said that job and employment is the main issue among youth for the election.



A young woman at Dr. Rajendra Prasad Kendriya Vidyalaya, President's Estate, in New Delhi. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Priyanka, Dimple hold roadshow in Varanasi

Varanasi: Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and SP's sitting MP from Mainpuri Dimple Yadav on Saturday held a roadshow in Varanasi in support of INDIA bloc candidate Ajay Rai. The roadshow continued for about four kilometers from Durgakund to Ravidas temple. "SP MP Dimple Yadav ji and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi ji took blessings by offering prayers at the Kal Bhairav temple in Varanasi," the SP said in a post on X. Priyanka Gandhi wrote on X at the beginning of the roadshow, "Roadshow in Kashi, the city of Devadive Mahadev Lord Shiva." She further wrote, "INDIA will win." Priyanka Gandhi and Dimple Yadav reached the court of Baba Shri Kaal Bhairav directly from Babatpur airport. After darshan and worship there, they began the roadshow by worshipping Kushmanda Mata located in Durgakund. — PTI

During the roadshow, both leaders stopped at various places and sought support from the public for the INDIA bloc candidate. Rai was also seen greeting people along with Priyanka Gandhi and Dimple Yadav in an open car during the roadshow.

WB sees 77.99% turnout amid sporadic clashes

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 25

Violence ruled the election covering eight key parliamentary constituencies in the western parts of West Bengal, amid average voter turnout of 77.99% — the highest among other states that went to Lok Sabha polls in the sixth phase of voting on Saturday.

The eight seats that went to the polls in the state were Tamluk and Kanthi in East Midnapore district, Ghatal and Midnapore in West Midnapore district, Jhargram in Jhargram district, Purulia in Purulia district and Bishnupur and Bankura in Bankura.

While Bishnupur recorded 81.47% polling, Tamluk came second (79.79%) followed by Jhargram (79.68%), Ghatal (78.92%), Midnapore (77.57%), Bankura (76.79%), Kanthi (75.66%) and Purulia (74.09%). Five of these seats went to the BJP in 2019, while many heavyweights were in the fray this time.

This intensified the tussle between the BJP and TMC in and outside the polling booths. At Jhargram, the BJP candidate Pranat Tudu and his

AT GHATAL, BJP candidate Hiran Chatterjee accused the ruling party workers of electoral malpractices under the nose of police and Central forces. He claimed that many voters were stopped from casting their ballots.

security personnel were injured in an attack by the TMC workers, after the Central forces jawans, escorting him, allegedly assaulted a woman waiting in a queue to cast her vote at a booth in Garbeta.

"All of a sudden, TMC goons who had blocked the roads started hurling bricks at my car. When my security personnel tried to intervene, they got injured. Two CISF jawans accompanying me received head injuries and had to be hospitalised. I also got injured," Mr Tudu said.

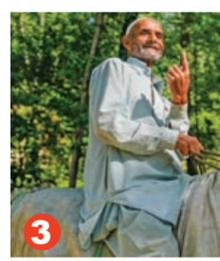
The attack took place when Mr Tudu was travelling in a convoy to reach a booth, where his agents were not allowed. A group of TMC men pelted stones on the vehicles. The BJP candidate and one of his security personnel suffered head injuries. They were treated at Garbeta Hospital. One of their vehi-

cles was damaged also. Meanwhile, the Tamluk BJP candidate Abhijit Gangopadhyay sat on a "dharna" after the police detained his party worker Goutam Guru, who is also the leader of the Opposition of a Panchayat Samiti at Brindabanachak in Moyna. The former Calcutta high court judge later complained of rigging and inaction of the Central forces.

At Ghatal, BJP candidate Hiran Chatterjee accused the ruling party workers of electoral malpractices under the nose of police and Central forces. He claimed that many voters were stopped from casting their ballots. The actor-turned-MLA also sought a re-poll at Keshpur.

In the 2019 polls, Bishnupur, Jhargram, Bankura, Purulia, and Medinipur were won by the BJP, whereas the Trinamul Congress/TMC had bagged Ghatal, Tamluk, and Kanthi.

Bishnupur, Jhargram, Bankura, Purulia, and Medinipur had recorded 87, 85, 83, 82, and 84 per cent voter turnout respectively, in 2019. The voter turnout in Tamluk, Kanthi, and Ghatal were 85, 85, and 82 per cent respectively.



1 - Cricketer Mahendra Singh Dhoni after casting his vote at a polling booth in Ranchi.
2 - BJP candidate Kangna Ranaut during a roadshow in Mandi on Saturday.
3 - An elderly man after casting his vote in Kashmir's Kulgam district.



4 - Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi along with his wife Sumedha shows inked fingers after casting votes in New Delhi.
5 - People show their inked fingers after casting their votes at Nowshera, in Rajouri district.

6 injured in clash outside poll booth in J&K's Poonch

Mendhar(Jammu), May 25: Six persons including four women suffered minor injuries in a clash between supporters of two candidates outside a polling station in Mendhar sub-division in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Saturday, officials said.

However, the voting at the polling station in the Shahpur sector continued without any disruption as police intervened and separated the clashing groups, they said.

An FIR was registered by the police and further investigation is on, the officials said. Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch is part of the Anantnag-Rajouri parliamentary constituency where polling is underway in the sixth phase on Saturday.

"It is hereby clarified that a minor scuffle took place outside the polling station causing very minor injuries to a few persons. The altercation was stopped in time and an FIR has been lodged in the matter. Polling did not get interrupted, an official said on X. — PTI

BJP is behind poll violence: Mamata

Haroa (WB), May 25: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday accused the Opposition BJP of unleashing a reign of terror in Purba Medinipur district, the stronghold of her principal adversary Suwendu Adhikari, and killing a TMC worker.



Mamata Banerjee

The TMC supremo made the allegations while addressing an election rally in Haroa under the Basirhat Lok Sabha seat, on the day of the sixth-phase election.

"Even yesterday, they (BJP) killed an active member of our party at Mahisadal in Purba Medinipur district. Sensing defeat in the polls, they are resorting to killing and attacking people and TMC workers. But we will resist their bid," Ms Banerjee said.

A number of houses and shops had been set ablaze at Nandigram in Purba Medinipur district after a BJP woman member was killed and her son was seriously injured, an active SC/ST Morcha

leader of the party in the area, two days ago. Nandigram's BJP MLA Suwendu Adhikari had alleged that TMC goons were involved in the attack, but TMC leaders maintained it was a fallout of an internal feud within the BJP.

Ms Banerjee also came down heavily on a TMC MLA for not attending the rally, accusing her of keeping contact with the BJP.

"If an MLA does not attend our meeting on May 25, she will have no association with us. If the person wants to be with BJP, I have no problem. We want leaders who will work for the party and people at this hour," Ms Banerjee said. — PTI

5 phases' absolute turnout released

EC: Election data can't be changed

VINEETA PANDEY
NEW DELHI, MAY 25

Under fire from the Opposition, media and civil society over lack of exact polling figures, the EC on Saturday released the absolute numbers of votes polled in each constituency and underlined that nobody can change data of votes polled. In a statement, the EC said the voter turnout data was always available with the candidates and on the "Voter Turnout app" for the citizens.



CEC Rajiv Kumar with his family members after casting his vote in New Delhi. — PTI

The EC added that it had noted "the pattern of false narratives and mischievous design to vitiate electoral process" and that it remains fully committed to the highest level of transparency and involvement of stakeholders at every stage of the electoral cycle. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said, "An attempt is being made to create an atmosphere of doubt, one day we will tell everyone about it and will reveal how people are misled. Due to this, our voting is also affected because doubts arise in the minds of people about whether EVMs are

correct or not, voting list is fine or not." Giving absolute numbers per seat, the EC has put the final polling percentage in five phases as 66.14% in phase one, where out of 16,63,86344 electors, 11,00,52103 voted; 66.71% in phase two in which out of 15,86,45484 voters, 10,58,30572 voted; phase three was 65.68% that saw 11,32,34676 of the 17,24,04907 voters turning out; phase four was 69.16%, in which out of 17,70,75629 registered voters, 12,24,69319 voted and in phase five, that had poll percentage of 62.20%, out of 8,95,67973 electors, 5,71,0618 voted.

Yamunotri

Gangotri

Kedarnath

Badrinath

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.

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SHORT TAKES

Techie from T'gana found dead in Oz

Hyderabad: A 30-year-old IT professional from Shadnagar town in Telangana, who went missing in New South Wales in Australia, was found dead, according to his family members here. Aravind's body was recovered from the sea in Sydney and family members were informed about his death by the authorities in Australia on Friday, his relative Krishna A said here on Saturday. The cause of his death was not clear and that they were informed that an probe was in progress, he added. Aravind's family members and relatives requested the Central government to help them in bringing back his mortal remains to Hyderabad from New South Wales at the earliest. Aravind, who was working as an IT professional in Australia, had been staying in New South Wales since 2017 and had got married around 2 years ago. — PTI

U'khand builder's death: 2 get JC

Dehradun: A local court on Saturday sent the two South Africa-based businessmen to 14 days' judicial custody on charges of abetting the suicide of a builder here. Satinder Singh alias Baba Sahni on Friday jumped off the eighth floor of his daughter's building and succumbed to injuries in the hospital. Based on a complaint by Sahni's son, Ranveer Singh, and a note purportedly written by the deceased, police registered a case against Anil Gupta and Ajay Gupta and arrested them, police had said earlier. Gupta brothers were arrested on Friday on charges of abetting Sahni's suicide. Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said they have been remanded to custody. They were arrested under section 306 of the IPC at Rajpur police station. — PTI

Kejriwal: Handle your country

Continued From Page 1 support" from Pakistan. He posted, "I've told you, not only (Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi, but Mr Kejriwal has also got massive support in Pakistan." Wading into the issue, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva reacted, "Big news for Delhiites. Appeal to vote for Mr Kejriwal made from Pakistan!" He said: "If the nation's enemy, Pakistan too, has stepped up to support Mr Kejriwal's corrupt politics, it proves what I have been saying since day 1 about his relations with banned and terrorist organisations from whom he accepts funds." This is not the first time Mr Hussain has poked his nose into Indian politics and elections. Earlier this month, he shared a video of Mr Gandhi, in which he targeted the BJP and PM Narendra Modi.

Cyclone to hit Bengal today, Kolkata airport suspends ops

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, MAY 25

Cyclone Remal is set to hit the West Bengal coast on Sunday. It is expected to gather a speed of around 110-120 km per hour, gusting to around 135 km per hour, while passing through the Sagar Island in the Sundarbans delta and Khepupara in Bangladesh.

The regional meteorological centre, Kolkata, stated that a deep depression would continue to move nearly northwards and intensify into a cyclonic storm over east-central and the adjoining north Bay of Bengal around May 25 evening. It added, "Continuing to move further northwards, it would intensify into a severe cyclonic storm by 26th May morning and cross Bangladesh & adjoining West Bengal coasts between Sagar Island and Khepupara by 26th May midnight as a



A fisherman jumps off his boat as it capsizes on its way to Vizhinjam from Shanguvugham coast in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday. — PTI

severe cyclonic storm with wind speed of 110-120 gusting to 135 kmph."

The cyclone is expected to bring heavy to very heavy rainfall in North and South 24 Parganas, Kolkata, Howrah, Hooghly and East Midnapore. All flight operations at Kolkata airport will remain suspended from 12 pm on Sunday to 9 am on May 27, as a precautionary measure. The Eastern Railway has also cancelled and regulated many local trains in Sealdah and Howrah divisions from till

May 27. Meanwhile the Indian Navy has inducted diving and flood relief teams, along with equipment by a naval aircraft from May 24. It said, "Induction of relief material designed to support people in distress, in case of floods, is also in progress, and would be completed before the cyclone hits Kolkata. All men, equipment and material would be ready at INS Netaji Subhas for immediate deployment as required in support of civil administration."

CEC: Will hold J&K Assembly polls soon

New Delhi, May 25: Encouraged by the voter turnout in Jammu and Kashmir in the Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission will "very soon" initiate the process of holding Assembly polls in the Union territory, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said on Saturday.

He also told PTI that the people of Jammu and Kashmir deserve their government.

Responding to a question on the turnout in various seats of Jammu and Kashmir and if Assembly elections could be held soon, the CEC said the poll panel is very encouraged by people's participation in the parliamentary polls.

"It's 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," he said. "We will initiate that process very soon ... very encouraged to do this," the CEC added.

While announcing the schedule for the Lok Sabha elections in March, Mr Kumar said holding Assembly and parliamentary elections simultaneously was not practical due to logistical and security reasons. — PTI

Porsche crash: Minor's grandpa held

Surendra Agarwal forced family driver to take blame, says police

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, MAY 25

After his father, police also arrested, on Saturday morning, grandfather — Surendra Kumar Agarwal — of the minor accused of the Pune accident case, in which two IT professionals were killed on May 19. The police arrested Mr Surendra for helping his brother son, Vishal Agarwal, abscond, and also for the "wrongful confinement of his driver and putting pressure on him to take the accident blame".

A police official informed

that Mr Surendra was arrested on the basis of a complaint filed by the family driver of the juvenile — Gangaram Poojari. The police has registered a separate case against the grandfather and father of the accused minor under section 365 (wrongful confinement) and 368 (keeping in confinement).

The development comes days after the teenager and his father claimed their family driver was behind the wheels at the time of the accident.

As per police, the grandfather and the father took

Children among 27 killed in fire at gaming zone in Rajkot

Rajkot, May 25: At least 27 persons, including four children under the age of 12, were killed in a massive fire that swept through a game zone teeming with people enjoying a summer vacation outing in Gujarat's Rajkot city on Saturday evening, officials said.

The death toll is likely to go up, they said. Police have detained the owner of the TRP Game Zone and the manager while the state government assigned the probe to a Special Investigation Team (SIT). Relief and rescue operations have been underway at the affected game zone for more than six hours after the blaze erupted at a structure built using metal and fibre sheets for gaming activities at around 4:30 pm, officials said, adding that the structure collapsed due to the huge fire. "So far we have con-



Firefighters douse a fire that broke out in a gaming zone in Rajkot on Saturday that killed 27 persons and left several hurt in the massive fire. — PTI

firmed the death of 27 persons in the fire incident. The bodies are charred beyond recognition and hence their identification is difficult," said assistant commissioner of police Radhika Bharai.

The exact cause of the massive fire is not known. President Droupadi Murmu, V-P Jagdeep Dhankhar and Prime

Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over incident. While expressing grief the PM said, "Fire tragedy in Rajkot has saddened us all. Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel Ji told me via telephonic conversation about the efforts underway to ensure all possible assistance provided to those who have been affected," the PM said. — PTI

1 killed and 6 hurt in C'garh factory blast

Bemetara, May 25: One person was killed and at least six were injured in a blast at an explosives manufacturing factory, where rescuers also found body parts, in Chhattisgarh's Bemetara district on Saturday, prompting the government to order a probe, officials said.

The explosion at Special Blasts Limited Pirda near Pirda village in Berla development block left a nearly 40-foot-deep crater, an official said.

Soon after being alerted, police and rescue teams were rushed to the site, he said. As per officials, two of the injured were later shifted to AIIMS Raipur. — PTI

'Bizman friend key suspect in Bangla MP's murder case'

Kolkata/Dhaka, May 25: Bangladesh home minister Asaduzzaman Khan claimed that businessman Akhtaruzzaman Shahin is the key suspect in the murder of parliamentarian Anwarul Azim Anar and his ministry was working with India and the US to get and put him on trial for the alleged crime.

Speaking exclusively from Dhaka on Saturday, Mr Khan said, "Of course, we are looking for Akhtaruzzaman Shahin. He is a key suspect and wanted. We have sought help from Indian, Nepal and US law enforcement agencies to put him on trial."

"We are working on a system to bring Shahin back... We are in touch with all the agencies concerned including the Interpol to ensure justice to our parliamentarian's family. We have already arrested three persons including a woman. Two of them have criminal backgrounds and we are checking the antecedents of the woman," Mr Khan said.

Asked about the motive behind the murder, the home minister said, "We will reveal it soon."

Repeated attempts to contact Shahin in the US went in vain, but his brother Md Shahiduzzaman, mayor of Kotchandpur municipality in Bangladesh's Jhenaidah, demanded



Anwarul Azim Anar

stern action against his brother if found guilty. Speaking from Jhenaidah, Mr Shahiduzzaman said, "We grew up together and it is hard to believe that he is involved in such a heinous crime. If he is at all indulged in the crime, he should be punished."

He said, "I spoke to him two weeks ago over phone and he sounded happy... I believe he is in the US now."

Mr Shahiduzzaman, however, claimed that he had no knowledge of his brother's business dealings or his relationship with the murdered MP. "All I know is that my brother is very rich... But I have no clue about his business," he said.

Meanwhile, a senior police officer in West Bengal said, "Bangladesh does not have any extradition treaty with the US government but India has. We are planning to extradite Shahin to India because the crime occurred in our state." — PTI

Mumbai to face 5% water cut from May 30, 10% from June 5

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, MAY 25

Amid water scarcity in Mumbai — the financial capital of the country — the BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has decided to impose a water cut of five per cent in Mumbai city and suburb area from May 30 for a week. The civic body will also increase water cut upto 10 per cent from June 5 as precautionary measures. The water stock in Mumbai reservoirs has plummeted to 9.69 per cent. The civic body has appealed to the Mumbaiikars to use water judiciously.

The announcement of water cuts comes a day after chief minister Eknath Shinde held a review meet-

Mercury soars to 50°C in Rajasthan

Jaipur, May 25: Heat conditions intensified in Rajasthan where mercury touched 50 degrees Celsius, the local weather office said on Saturday. According to Met Centre Jaipur, the maximum temperature recorded in Phalodi during the day was 50 degrees Celsius, followed by Barmer at 48.8 degrees Celsius. In Jaisalmer, it reached 48°C, in Bikaner 47.2°C, in Churu 47°C, and in Jodhpur 46.9°C, the centre said. — PTI

ing, in connection with monsoon preparedness, at BMC headquarter in the presence of BMC commis-

sioner and administrator Bhushan Gagrani, ministers Deepak Kesarkar and Mangal Prabhat Lodha.

An official from the BMC said there is no reason for Mumbaiikars to panic. The water cut is being implemented so that the water stock will last as long as possible. The water cuts would also be implemented in the Thane Municipal Corporation (TMC) and Bhiwandi Nizampur Municipal Corporations (BNMC), he added.

According to the civic body, the monsoon was active till October 15 in 2021 and 2022. But there was comparatively very less rainfall in October last year, which led to the water stock being around 5.64 per cent less this year, as compared to last one.

Maoist killed in encounter in C'garh

AGE CORRESPONDENT
RAIPUR, MAY 25

A Maoist was gunned down, on Saturday, in an encounter with security forces in Sukma district under south Bastar in Chhattisgarh, police said. The encounter took place in a forest near Belpochta village under Konta police station, according to Sukma district superintendent of police Kiran Chavan.

Acting on the specific intelligence inputs on the presence of some Maoists in the forest, the security forces launched a search operation in the area. The security forces came under attack by Maoists in the forest near Belpochta village leading to a gunfight.

INDIA doing 'mujra' for votes, says PM

Continued From Page 1

who keep doing mujra with their lantern (poll symbol) do not have the courage to speak a word in protest."

The leaders of the INDIA bloc hit out at the Prime Minister for his mujra jibe. Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said no Prime Minister has ever used such words for Opposition leaders in the history of the country. She said the entire country respects the post of Prime Minister and it is Mr Modi's responsibility to maintain the dignity of the post.

The PM has become nervous and has forgotten he is a representative of the country and of people and such words should not have come out of his mouth, Ms Vadra said.

RJD leader Manoj Kumar Jha said, "After machhli (fish), mutton and mangalsutra, it is now the turn of mujra. Does it behave the Prime Minister of the country to speak such a language? He has torn norms of civil discourse to shreds."

Sharing a video clip of the PM's speech, Priyanka Chaturvedi of the Shiv Sena (UBT) posted on X, "Get well soon, Modi Ji."

At the Bihar rallies, Mr Modi accused that if the INDIA bloc comes to power, they will change the Constitution to "favour the Muslims". He alleged that the Opposition alliance is banking on the support of those who indulge in "vote jihad" and referred to the Calcutta high court order that struck down the West Bengal government's decision to include a number of Muslim groups on the list of OBCs.

"The Opposition alliance has decided that if they are voted to power, the first thing they will do is change the Constitution so that even the court is unable to overrule their attempts to divert OBC reservations to Muslims. I have been challenging them to refute me in writing, but they have

been reluctant because they have a guilty conscience," Mr Modi said. He then spelt out the names of several deprived castes, including Yadavs, who have traditionally been RJD supporters, which "could end up losing their constitutional rights if the INDIA bloc succeeded in its alleged plans".

The Prime Minister, however, asserted that the Opposition coalition is "heading

for a defeat" and on June 4, when the results will be out, "The RJD and the Congress workers will be seen tearing off each other's clothes. The 'shahi parivar' (royal family) of the Congress will put the entire blame of defeat on Mallikarjun Kharge and leave for a vacation abroad."

The Prime Minister claimed that the INDIA bloc is like a balloon that has been deflated again on the day when voting is taking place for the sixth and penultimate phase of the ongoing elections.

"Modi has been working to stamp out Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, naxal insurgency and corruption without fear. The INDIA bloc has tried to stop me at every step with scaremongering," he alleged.

Recalling the resolve he displayed in commissioning the surgical strikes and scrapping Article 370, Mr Modi vowed to continue the crack-down on corruption.

In a veiled reference to RJD supremo Lalu Prasad Yadav and his family, Mr Modi remarked, "Those who have snatched people's land in return for jobs will be firmly dealt with."

Referring to Mr Yadav's son and heir apparent, Tejashwi Yadav, whom he did not mention by name, Mr Modi said, "The shehzada (crown prince) will spend his time, after June 4, protecting his amaanat (inheritance) and securing zamaanat (bail)." Referring to Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, the BJP's prin-

cipal rival in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, Mr Modi said, "His own party workers stood laughing when he predicted a defeat for Modi in Varanasi and boasted that the INDIA bloc will win all 80 seats in that state. The bicycle (SP poll symbol) stands punctured. The shehzada of UP seems to have drawn inspiration from the shehzada of the Congress (Rahul Gandhi)".

Addressing the rallies, Mr Modi said, "You have your Modi, whose actions and intentions you have known for 10 years. On the other hand, you have the motley group called the INDIA bloc, which is full of people hoping for the Prime Minister's post, even if just for a year."

Later, addressing an election rally in Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur, Mr Modi accused the Congress of not allowing the soldiers to get 'One Rank, One Pension'. He said: "The Congress has the expertise of delaying works and snatching rights. They did not allow our jawans to get One Rank, One Pension. It was implemented when Modi came to power."

Attacking the Opposition, Mr Modi said, "Leaders of the parivarvadi (dynastic) parties kept on building palace after palace. But the poor, farmers, labourers and dalits were deprived and they struggled to meet their small needs."

Taking a dig at the Samajwadi Party chief, Mr Modi said, "SP's shahzada (prince) once said that he will stop the entry of the mafia. Then he went and sat at the feet of the mafia."

Asserting that Ghazipur tells tales of valour and bravery, Mr Modi said, "Ghazipur and Gamhar village — the names are enough as brave soldiers emerge from every house. Has any place other than Ghazipur have this honour? The entire country is indebted to this land." — PTI

PoK belongs to India and we will take it: Shah

Continued From Page 1

and return, Shah said, adding this completely changed under the Modi government. "We conducted surgical strikes and wiped out terrorists in their homes which put an end to such tactics," he said, referring to Uri and Pulwama incidents during the BJP rule.

Only a leader like PM Modi can put an end to terrorism and Naxalism, he added. "Ensure the victory of BJP candidates in six Assembly byelections for the formation of a BJP government and see the lotus (BJP's poll symbol) blooming in Himachal," he said. He also mocked the Congress by asking the crowd as to who will be the PM if the grand old party comes to power.

Mr Shah said PM Modi has already won 310 seats in the first five phases of the Lok Sabha elections, and the sixth and seventh phases would help the NDA achieve the target of 400-plus seats, while Congress leader Rahul Gandhi would be restricted at just 40 seats. Mr Shah referred to the implementation of the "one rank, one pension" by the Modi government and said the Congress did not accept the demand of ex-servicemen but PM not only accepted it but disbursed ₹1.25 lakh crores to the pensioners so far. — PTI

'Ph-6 records 58% polling in Delhi'

Continued From Page 1

Kejriwal voted with his family except for his mother, who was unwell, on Saturday.

The three election commissioners also voted along with several Cabinet ministers. External affairs minister S. Jaishankar, who stepped out to vote very early, even got a certificate for being the first male voter from his polling booth.

A big surprise was actor Siddharth Malhotra, who voted in Delhi. "Came to my hometown, Delhi, to celebrate the world's largest democracy by voting. Delhi. Go out and vote," he said on X. While the CEC urged voters to come out and vote, there was anguish among many voters who found their names "missing" from the electoral roll without information. Lawyer Vrinda Grover's 89-year-old mother filed a complaint with the CEC after she found her name missing from the electoral rolls. The lawyer has said she is taking EC to court on this.

Similarly, Younus Salim and Azim Khan, employees at the Rashtrapati Bhawan, went to exercise their franchise at Dr Rajendra Prasad Kendriya Vidyalaya in the President's Estate, only to find their names missing from the voters' list. "I had cast my vote in the 2022 MCD polls. How is it that my name is not on the voters' list? We are employees here," Mr Khan said.

In Haryana, many prominent wrestlers like Babita Phogat and Yogeshwar Dutt exercised their franchise. In Odisha, an elderly woman

voter who fell ill at a polling booth in the Nayagarh Assembly segment's Bhapur area died at a hospital, while a polling agent died at a booth under the Hindol Assembly segment of Dhenkanal Lok Sabha seat.

A non-resident Indian (NRI) travelled thousands of miles from Dubai to cast his vote in the simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Odisha on Saturday. Priyadarshnee Panigrahi, the son of former parliamentarian and Odisha minister Sriballav Panigrahi, has been living in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates since 2008. He undertook a 20-hour journey from Dubai to Kolkata via flight, then by train to Jharsuguda and finally by road to Sambalpur to reach his polling station at 11.30 am to exercise his franchise.

West Bengal once again witnessed sporadic incidents of violence in a few areas in the eight Lok Sabha constituencies that went to the polls in the sixth phase on Saturday. Senior BJP leader and its Jhargram candidate Pranatudu claimed his convoy was attacked in Garbeta area of West Midnapore district, following which security personnel escorting him were injured and had to be hospitalised. The incident took place when Mr Tudu was on his way to Garbeta in the wake of complaints that the BJP agents were not allowed inside some polling booths.

In Jammu and Kashmir, people living along the Line of Control (LoC) in Sehar and Makri under the Anantnag-

Rajouri Lok Sabha constituency cast their vote without fear of cross-border shelling. A renewed ceasefire between India and Pakistan came into effect on February 25, 2021, providing much-needed relief to border residents.

The EC said Anantnag-Rajouri parliamentary constituency, with 54.06 per cent polling, made history by recording the highest turnout in the last 35 years. There was about 50 per cent voting in three parliamentary constituencies in the Valley, as compared to 19.16 per cent in 2019.

"Kashmir, Anantnag-Rajouri parliamentary constituency has shattered voter turnout records, with 51.35 per cent recorded at 5 pm in the districts of Anantnag, Poonch, Kulgam and the districts of Rajouri and Shopian, partially... the highest since 1989," the EC press release said. The polling process for five Lok Sabha seats in this Union territory is complete now.

However, many non-migrant Kashmiri Pandits expressed anguish on Saturday, claiming that their names were not on the voters' list and labelling it "unfortunate" as they remained in the Kashmir region despite the turbulent militancy period of the 1990s.

People said they have been born and brought up in Kashmir (Anantnag) and have their Aadhaar and election cards, but they were still "not allowed" to cast their votes at the polling station.

THE ASIAN AGE

26 MAY 2024



Shreya Sen-Handley

Off the beaten track

Betrayed, Well, you're not alone in your pain

Et tu, Brute?" It's hard not to think about the worst of human nature when it constantly surrounds us. On the world stage, war, manmade disasters, genocide, display the nadir of humankind. But for those of us not facing day-to-day danger, betrayal, in its many shades, must be amongst the worst of our experiences.

But what makes it so eviscerating? That this injury doesn't come from those we consider shady (and therefore, sensibly avoid) is what makes its impact so devastating. Whilst 'better the devil you know' may be the principle on which we elect our politicians, when it comes to duplicity in our personal lives, if it has to happen at all, most of us would rather it was served up by strangers!

When our politicians promise us the earth but once elected, feather their nests instead, we aren't especially perturbed because we didn't ever believe them (why we still vote for them is a whole other column!)

Because betrayal isn't betrayal unless it comes from those in whom we've reposed our trust. This unkindest cut of all results from being shafted at close quarters, while in a metaphorical embrace, as with Julius Caesar and his (fr)assassin Brutus. Blindsided by their double-dealing, we are left reeling not only from the pain, but the shock of the startling source of our harm.

If you've lived some years on this earth, you know there's never any dearth of unkindness from strangers (and the occasional, heartwarming solidarity too). Unless there's lasting physical or financial maiming, we can usually shrug off the malice and move on. But that's not the case with our familiars, whose backstabbing leaves slow-to-heal emotional wounds in addition. It wouldn't be BACKstabbing after all, unless we were ambushed by assailants we'd never have conceived of.



Historic accounts later uncovered would suggest that Richard III (as portrayed above by Benedict Cumberbatch in BBC's Hollow Crown) was not Shakespeare's wicked construct but a competent king who deserved neither the betrayal of colleagues and kin, nor the monstrous reputation he became saddled with

You might be nodding along, because which of us haven't had our trust violated? Having recently discovered the damage done to me and my children by people we were fond of, I was shaken out of my current comfortably numb state into pondering the prevalence of this particular human cruelty.

Very human indeed, because animals don't indulge in these games. I'm no David Attenborough (or I'd lose myself in nature and never resurface), but there seems to be more harmony amongst creatures in a pack. Red in tooth and claw maybe with those outside their herd, when it comes to the crunch (literally!), they appear to have each other's backs. Having said that, even your loyal doggie will snatch the pizza slice dangling from your hand if you take your eyes off the doughball, and the beaten old lion thrown out of his pride by the new cock-of-the-walk, in suggesting that betrayal is a biological fact, doesn't reassure us.

Have you heard of anyone who hasn't been double-crossed in love? Romantic betrayals are not only a nasty rite of passage for most of us, they also form the emotional bedrock for so much of literature, cinema and song. Most love songs aren't about love at all but the opposite — infidelity — from Gloria Gaynor to Taylor Swift! And the preponderance of books and films on romantic skulduggery sadly reflect reality. Till you hit middle-age and become inured (fingers crossed!) to treacheries of the heart, feeling as they do like youthful aberrations, but every other kind of duplicity still smarts.

When old friends let us down, or family plot behind our backs, the years provide no buffer to its ravages. The betrayal of platonic or familial love might even sting more as we age. Would King Lear have been quite so distraught but for the stage of life he was in, and that the architects of his misery were his own family? Our distress is directly proportional to the time and affection we've invested in our false friends.

When Richard III begged to swap his "kingdom for a horse" on the Middle-English battlefield against his scheming Tudor opponents, he must have also wished he could trade in the traitors in his ranks who stood by and let him fall to his defeat and ignominious death. Historic accounts uncovered in modern times would suggest that Richard III was not Shakespeare's wicked construct, Tudor propaganda as it was, but a competent king who deserved neither the betrayal of colleagues and kin, nor the monstrous reputation he became saddled with.

All's certainly not fair in love and war!

The horror stories from Partition, of once-harmonious neighbours betraying each other to baying mobs, is further proof, if it were needed, that anyone can turn on us at any time. Yet, equally, the not uncommon experience of my mother's family, of being helped to escape one such deathtrap by an impoverished household from across the divide, whom my mother's clan then employed and sheltered for the rest of their lives, is balm for the heart.

But must human nature be a double-edged sword? A two-sided coin that's flipped and flipped again in this game of life, and you never know whether it'll land in your favour or to your detriment?

If there can be counselling, and courses like anger management, that have been known to improve behaviours, can't we have our treacherous tendencies teased out of us as well? Could we also be taught, from nursery perhaps, to be better judges of character? And why not revive laws that hold us to higher standards of conduct, like the Victorian Breach of Trust, applied not just to business but social transactions?

Whaddyasay, fellow sufferers?

Shreya Sen-Handley is the author of the award-winning Memoirs of My Body, short story collection Strange and travelogue Handle With Care. Her Twitter and Insta handle is @shreyasenh.

Subhani



A PM's poll speeches, sense and sensibility



Pavan K. Varma

Chanakya's View

I think everybody — even among his most trenchant critics — will concede that Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi is an orator par excellence. Words, phrases, the apt quote, evocative vocabulary often enriched by local flavour is a gift he is born with. Some people say that he uses a teleprompter, but even if he does for certain occasions, the number of speeches he gives in one day itself, is proof enough that his talents as an orator transcend the aid of a teleprompter.

Earlier, the star speaker in the BJP, who could mesmerise audiences with his use of humour, irony, facts, poetry, and turn of phrase, was Atal Behari Vajpayee. I recall when he came to Cyprus as PM in 2002, where I was the high commissioner, his first programme was a speech to the Indian diaspora, numbering thousands of young professionals in the IT sector. Vajpayee was in frail health. To come down from the Prime Ministerial plane, a hydraulic lift had to be used, since his knees were giving trouble.

When we reached his suite, I reminded him that in the convention hall of the hotel, the Indian diaspora was waiting for him. I still remember his asking me: "Kya mujhe kuch bolna bhi padege? Will I be expected to address them?" I replied that they had been waiting for hours just for that. He was visibly tired, but as we approached the venue, we could hear rousing slogans of "Atal Behari zindabad", and Atalji visibly perked up. He received an uproarious welcome, and then, notwithstanding his fatigue, spoke for 40 minutes, keeping the audi-

ence spell bound, and often in splits of laughter. It was quite a feat.

Narendra Modi has similar qualities of *vak shakti*, the power of speech. That is why I wonder why he has never in the 10 years that he has been PM, ever given an open press conference, where the questions have not been provided in advance, or the interlocutor(s) is not someone chosen by his media team. It appears to be a transparently choreographed interaction, very different from the normal and spontaneous media questioning in a democracy.

I have seen most of the PM's interviews, both in print and on TV. He speaks well, but those who are interviewing him, are far too deferential, though they may appear to be asking "tough" questions. What happens in such staged interviews, with pre-selected anchors, is that the PM is more or less assured that no uncomfortable or acrimonious situation will arise, and certainly no hostile question will be asked.

Frankly, I believe this is detrimental to the PM's image. He should be far more open to public and genuinely democratic questioning. A monologue, where only he is talking, or an interaction with chosen interrogators diminishes his credibility. All previous PMs in our country — like executive heads in other democracies — have faced their critics in open media debates. In fact, Atalji once reprimanded a very popular journalist for not asking him the really tough questions. He said this was a violation of the essential credo of a free and fearless press.

Equally, some of Mr Modi's recent public

If the BJP comes back to power, as seems likely given the weakness of the Opposition, Modi would do well to remember the vital difference between a successful political leader and a statesman

speeches have unfortunately derogated from the image of a statesman that he cherishes. Unfounded allegations, personalised attacks, rampantly communal statements, even sometimes bafflingly incoherent remarks, have tarnished him and the post of the PM.

Here are some examples of his utterances. On April 21, he said in Banswara in Rajasthan, that the Congress planned to seize and redistribute wealth to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children". This was transparently a reference to Muslims. To call a sizeable section of Indian citizens "infiltrators", was not only reprehensible, but also a direct violation of the Model Code of Conduct, which explicitly prohibits any statements that "may aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between different castes, communities, religious or linguistic". The very next day in Aligarh, UP, while addressing a rally, he said: "I want to warn my countrymen. Congress and INDIA alliance have their eyes on your earnings and property... Our mothers and sisters have gold. It is 'streedhan', it is considered sacred; the law also protects it. Now these people's eyes are on the *mangalsutra* of women. Their intention is to steal the gold of mothers and sisters."

On April 23, at a public meeting in Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan, he made the claim that "if you have a box in your home in which you store bajra grain that would be subjected to an X-ray (by

the Congress). If you have two houses, and they spot that in their X-ray, one would be taken away by the government". To my mind, this is an untruth — since the Congress manifesto says nothing of this sort — and unbecoming caricature. On May 8, at a rally in Telangana, the PM said: "Ever since elections have been announced, these people (Congress) have stopped abusing Ambani and Adani. I want to ask...how much has been lifted from Ambani-Adani? Has tempo loads of notes reached the Congress?" Such a statement is startling, both because it is untrue — Rahul Gandhi has continued his diatribe against the Ambani-Adani duo — and also because the PM admits that black money, far from being eradicated, as he has claimed, is available to be sent in tempos. I am told, that as a result of this accusation by none less than the PM, international investors — very sensitive to such allegations — have ordered a forensic audit of the Adani-Ambani groups. And, finally, on May 22, Mr Modi actually said in an interview to News18, that he does not believe he was "biologically born", but is a divine presence!

These are truly inexplicable statements. Once again, the comparison with Atalji comes to mind. Anyone who has followed his speeches, will find it difficult to point out an undignified statement. His speech in Parliament in 1998, when he lost the mandate by one vote, should be mandatory reading for all aspiring politicians.

If the BJP comes back to power, as seems likely given the weakness of the Opposition, Modi would do well to remember the vital difference between a successful political leader and a statesman.

The writer is an author, diplomat and former member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha)

LETTERS

PLAY A SPORT!

Just a generation or two ago, Indians have dived into their deep fried samosas and pakoras, sugary mithais, and oily parathas without any problems. These are now considered to be the main villains in the health problems faced by the people today. The blame probably lies in our lifestyles. Add to that the stress and strain of modern living. The unwinding is so hectic and desperate that it causes more problems than it solves. Even if it is a five-minute walk, we prefer to take motorised vehicles to reach our destination. Processed and packaged ready to eat food may save cooking time but it can also reduce our time on earth!

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

QUAD SATELLITE

DURING A RECENT visit to Isro, US Ambassador Eric Garcetti proposed the development of a Quad satellite as part of a partnership involving India, the United States, Japan and Australia. Meeting with Isro chairman S. Somnath, discussions centered on mutual interests in advancing space science, technology and the space economy. They explored ongoing collaborations, including through Joint Working Groups, the Artemis Accord and the NISAR mission. Talks included potential collaborations on advanced detectors and packaging technologies, standardising docking interfaces, and building a moon navigation system with American and Indian academic institutions.

Amarjeet Kumar
Hazarebagh

JENNY'S HISTORY

POLITICS AND LITERATURE have often been at odds with each other, although they have a deeper relationship. This year's Booker Prize award is a case in point by honouring Jenny Erpenbeck for *Kairos*, which is about a love affair between a 19-year-old student and a married man in his 50s who meet on a bus in East Berlin around 1966. The first German to win this prize, Erpenbeck documents the gamut of human experiences that got lost during the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is her recognition of the conflicting nature of truth that makes her a voice quite peculiar and unlike any other, unafraid to present a divergent account of history.

Vijay Singh Adhikari
Nainital

Anita Katyal

Political Gup-Shup



Maliwal urged to give up RS seat... Will Shivakumar lose out again?

The headline-grabbing ugly episode involving Aam Aadmi Party's Rajya Sabha member Swati Maliwal and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide-cum-Man Friday Bibhav Kumar (resulting in his arrest) has predictably become a hot topic of discussion in the capital, especially since it took place in the midst of a crucial Lok Sabha election. It is well-known that Ms Maliwal has been associated with Mr Kejriwal from the very inception of the party but what is not so well-known to the outside world is that she has strained relations with the chief minister's wife Sunita and Delhi minister Atishi, also an old AAP hand. Ms Maliwal, it is said, had been pressing for an upgrade for some time and a consensus was emerging about fielding her in the Lok Sabha election from Chandni Chowk. She was accommodated in the Rajya Sabha instead while Chandni Chowk was subsequently offered to the Congress as part of the seat-sharing arrangement between the two parties. Ms Maliwal blotted her copybook when she left for the US in February and came back

only after Mr Kejriwal was released. AAP leaders are convinced Ms Maliwal did not return earlier because of the prominence given to Sunita and Atishi during Mr Kejriwal's incarceration. It was against this backdrop that she was asked to give up her Rajya Sabha seat. Ms Maliwal did not take kindly to this proposal, especially since it is Sunita Kejriwal who is learnt to have mooted it. The rest, as they say, is history.

From all accounts, Bharatiya Janata Party leader Maneka Gandhi was left to fend for herself in her bid to retain the Sultanpur Lok Sabha constituency in these elections. The denial of a ticket to her son Varun Gandhi, who won the Pilibhit seat in the 2019 election, sent out the message to BJP cadres that the mother-son duo had fallen out with the BJP leadership. The local BJP workers apparently did not put in their best during the campaign. The fact that no senior party leader addressed any election rally in Maneka's constituency was taken as further confirmation that she was no longer in the good books of party leaders. In fact, both

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and home minister Amit Shah campaigned in neighbouring constituencies but skipped Sultanpur. If Maneka wins her seat again, it will be entirely due to her tireless efforts and her personal popularity as she has earned the goodwill of the locals by being responsive to their grievances.

Although the two parties are battling it out in the electoral arena, the Congress and the Trinamul Congress have been in talks with each other for the past several days. These discussions are not on the subject of the future of the INDIA alliance but the recent controversial statements made by senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury about West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee. A known Mamata-baiter, Mr Chowdhury had compared her to Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar and that she could not be trusted. An angry Congress has already pulled up Mr Chowdhury for these remarks as well as the defacement of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's posters in Kolkata. Apparently, the Trinamul

Congress has been giving inputs about Mr Chowdhury to Congress leaders in Delhi. A senior Congress leader called up a Trinamul leader recently to enquire about Mr Chowdhury's prospects. When told that he's on a sticky wicket, the Congress leader, who has access to the Gandhi's, replied, "Thank God."

If the political grapevine in Karnataka is to be believed, the Congress is expected to witness fireworks after the Lok Sabha election results are out as the rivalry between chief minister Siddaramaiah and state unit president D.K. Shivakumar is likely to resurface. Mr Shivakumar, who has his eye on the chief minister's post, apparently wants to step down as state party chief but the Congress leadership wants him to continue till the local body elections are over. When the party picked Mr Siddaramaiah as chief minister a year ago, it was said Mr Shivakumar would get the post after the LS elections. Congress insiders said the redoubtable Siddaramaiah is already working behind the scenes to claim credit

for delivering on the party's key guarantees if the party notches up a respectable tally in the Lok Sabha polls. To add to the confusion, those who do not favour either of them are pressing for a dalit chief minister.

Industrialist and former Congress MP Naveen Jindal, who joined the BJP on the eve of elections came in for gentle ribbing in the Kurukshetra Lok Sabha constituency during his poll campaign. Haryana straight-talk was on display as locals recalled how the BJP had come down heavily on Mr Jindal when his company was named in the coal scam which surfaced when the UPA government was in power. They wondered if the taint had disappeared after he joined the BJP or if Mr Jindal was now free to admit that his company was involved in the scam. The last word went to a senior Jat resident who said, "The last time, the BJP threatened Jindal that it would come after him if he contested the election but this time it said we will nail you if you don't contest."

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

SHORT TAKES

CHILE ARRESTS DUO FOR BLAZE THAT KILLED 137

Santiago, May 25: A firefighter and a forestry official were arrested in Chile on suspicion of starting a blaze that killed 137 people in the resort city of Vina del Mar in February, authorities said.

"An arrest warrant was issued today against the person who started the fires in February in the Valparaiso region," police director Eduardo Cerna told a news conference.

A little later, the Valparaiso regional prosecutor's office confirmed the arrest of an official of the National Forestry Corporation.

PAK PM TO VISIT CHINA FOR CPEC SECOND PHASE

Islamabad, May 25: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will visit China in the first week of next month to join the formal launching of the second phase of the \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

A Prime Minister's Office source said that PM Sharif was scheduled to leave for China on June 4, but the date of the visit could slightly be changed. The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is opposed by India as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

PAK PUNJAB GOVT FOR MORE CASES AGAINST IMRAN

Lahore, May 25: The Cabinet of Pakistan's Punjab government on Friday gave approval to registration of more cases against incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan and his party men for inciting hate against the state institutions especially the Pakistan Army.

"The Punjab Cabinet of Maryam Nawaz has approved legal action against PTI founder leader Imran Khan and his other party leaders for building hate-narrative against the state institutions," Punjab information minister Azma Bokhari told a press conference.

KENYA GOLD MINE COLLAPSE KILLS 5, MANY MISSING

Isiolo, May 25: At least five people were killed and several others were missing after an informal gold mine collapsed in northern Kenya, officials and local media said.

The bodies of five miners have been recovered from the Hillo artisanal mine, and another three people were unaccounted for, regional commissioner Paul Rotich told Reuters by telephone late on Friday.

"Reports from rescuers, police and our chiefs suggest at least eight casual miners were inside the mining ground when the walls collapsed and buried them alive," Rotich said.

B'DESH PREPARES TO FACE CYCLONE 'REMAL' TODAY

Dhaka, May 25: Bangladesh has readied nearly 4,000 shelters equipped with adequate dry food supplies and water as it prepares for severe cyclonic storm 'Remal' forecast to make landfall on Sunday evening with a potential high tidal surge and heavy rainfall in the coastal districts of Satkhira and Cox's Bazar, media reports said on Saturday.

Bangladesh Meteorological Department is expected to issue a 'great danger' signal number 10 between 12 midnight and 1:00 am Sunday. Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) quoted a special bulletin.

RECORD THIRD EVEREST ASCENT IN TWO WEEKS

Kathmandu, May 25: Purnima Shrestha, a Nepalese mountaineer and photojournalist, on Saturday scripted history by becoming the first person to summit Mt Everest, the highest peak in the world, three times in a single climbing season.

Purnima first summited the 8848.86-metre peak on May 12. She reached the summit again on May 19 along with Pasang Sherpa and achieved her third summit on Saturday at 5:50 AM, said Pema Sherpa, expedition director at Eight K Expeditions which organised the expedition.

This was Purnima's fourth ascent to Everest.

Israel strikes Rafah after ICJ ordered it to halt offensive

Mediated Israel-Hamas talks on hostage agreement expected next week

Cairo, London, Madrid, May 25: Israeli forces killed more than 30 people in new attacks in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian medics said on Saturday, the day after judges at the top United Nations court ordered Israel to halt its offensive on the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

The Spanish government demanded on Saturday that Israel comply with an order by the top UN court to immediately stop its bombardment and ground assault on Rafah even as the British government has criticised the International Court of Justice for ordering Israel to immediately halt its military assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah, saying the ruling would strengthen Palestinian Islamist group Hamas.

Though Israel pressed on with its offensive against the Palestinian militant group Hamas, mediated negotiations between the two sides are due to restart next week.

The decision on talks was taken after the head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency met the head of the CIA and the prime minister of Qatar, said the source, declining to be identified by name or nationality given the sensitivity of the matter.

"At the end of the meeting, it was decided that in the coming week negotiations will open based on



A Yemeni man brandishes a rifle during a march in the Huthi-run capital Sanaa in solidarity with the people of Gaza. — AFP

new proposals led by the mediators, Egypt and Qatar and with active US involvement," the source said. Hamas did not immediately comment.

After more than seven months of war, mediators have struggled to secure a breakthrough, with Israel seeking the release of hostages held by Hamas and Hamas seeking the release of Palestinian prisoners.

Fighting has continued despite the mediation and despite judges at the ICJ ordering Israel to immediately halt its military assault on Rafah. — Reuters

EGYPT'S GAZA AID
EGYPT SAID it has agreed to send United Nations humanitarian aid trucks through Israel's main crossing into Gaza, but it was unclear if they will be able to enter the territory as fighting raged in the southern city of Rafah.

AN ISRAELI DRONE
strike in central Syria killed two fighters from Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah movement on Saturday. It was the third strike against Hezbollah targets in Syria in about a week.

Italy will resume funding for the United Nations' Palestinian relief organisation UNRWA as part of a 35 million euro (\$38 million) aid package.
— ANTONIO TAJANI
Italian foreign minister

Prosecutors: Bar Trump comments

Washington, May 25: Federal prosecutors have asked the judge overseeing the classified documents case against Donald Trump to bar the ex-president from public statements that "pose a significant, imminent, and foreseeable danger to law enforcement agents" participating in the prosecution.

The request made to US District Judge Aileen Cannon on Friday follows a false claim by Trump earlier this week that the FBI agents who searched his home in August 2022 were "authorised to shoot me" and were "locked & loaded ready to take me out & put my family in danger."

He was referring to the disclosure in a court document that was made public that the FBI, during the search, followed a standard use-of-force policy that prohibits the use of deadly force except when the officer conducting the search has a reasonable belief that the "subject poses an imminent danger of death or serious physical injury to the officer or to another person."

The policy is routine and meant to limit the use of force during searches. Prosecutors noted that the search was intentionally conducted when Trump and his family were away and was coordinated with the Secret Service. No force was used.

"The government's request is necessary because of false and inflammatory statements recently made by Trump that distort the circumstances under which the FBI planned and executed the search warrant at Mar-a-Lago," prosecutors on special counsel Jack Smith's team wrote. — AP



Donald Trump

BALDWIN PLEA TO DISMISS CRIMINAL CHARGE NIXED

Santa Fe, May 25: A New Mexico judge has rejected a request by Alec Baldwin to dismiss the sole criminal charge against him in a fatal shooting on "Rust" movie set, keeping the case on track for a trial this summer.

Judge Mary Marlowe Sommer upheld an indictment charging Baldwin with one count of involuntary manslaughter in the death of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins in 2021. She rejected arguments that prosecutors flouted the rules of grand jury proceedings. — AP

Beijing ends military exercises around Taipei

Beijing, May 25: The Chinese military has ended its two-day joint drills surrounding Taiwan, stated to be the biggest and closest exercises held around the prosperous self-ruled island that China claims to be part of its mainland. The drills on Thursday and Friday were held in retaliation to Taiwan's new President Lai Ching-te's remarks rejecting Beijing's sovereignty claims over the island and tested the Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) ability to seize power.

China views Taiwan as a rebel province that must be reunified with the mainland even by force.

While there was no official announcement that the drills ended, the Chinese social media WeChat account of the PLA's Eastern Theatre Command on Saturday said the exercises lasted two days from Thursday. It said the exercises by land, navy, air force and missile forces were "punishment" for "Taiwan separatists" and a "severe warning" to outside forces intent on interference and provocation.

Called Joint Sword-2024A, drills involved "advancing", "besieging", "blocking", "attacking", "destroying" and "cutting off", the South China Morning Post quoted the WeChat post. — PTI

EX-CIA AGENT PLEADS GUILTY TO CHINA SPYING

Washington, May 25: A former CIA agent pleaded guilty on Friday to spying for China, the US department of justice said.

Alexander Yuk Ching Ma, 71, a native of Hong Kong who became a naturalised US citizen, admitted to having provided "a large volume of classified US national defence information" to Chinese authorities in 2001, even though he hadn't been employed by the CIA for 12 years. — AFP

Welcome dance



Traditional dancers perform as African National Congress supporters wait for South African President Cyril Ramaphosa to arrive at the Siyanqoba (to conquer, in Zulu) rally at FNB stadium in Johannesburg, on Saturday. — AFP

AVIATION | ACCIDENT First fatality since the Taiwan crash of October 2000

62-second turbulence shocks travellers

Singapore, May 25: The Singapore Airlines (SIA) Flight SQ321 that was rocked by severe turbulence on Tuesday climbed and descended rapidly twice in 62 seconds, stunning the passengers with one dying of heart attack, as the aircraft flew over the Irrawaddy Delta region of Myanmar, it emerged on Saturday.

One passenger — 73-year-old Briton Geoffrey Kitchen — died, and dozens were injured in the incident. It is the first SIA aviation accident involving a fatality since the SQ006 crash in Taiwan in October 2000.

As the flight, which was heading to Singapore from London, experienced sudden severe turbulence over the Irrawaddy Basin during the breakfast service, the pilot declared a medical emergency and diverted the plane carrying 211 passengers and 18 crew members to Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport, where the plane made an emergency landing at 3:45 pm (4.45 pm Singapore time). Granular flight data

Bangkok, May 25: Forty three people who were on board a Singapore Airlines flight that hit severe turbulence remain hospitalised in Bangkok four days after the emergency landing.

was nearing the end of a non-stop flight from London to Singapore, The Straits Times reported.

During this time, the plane climbed from its cruise altitude of 37,000

43 PEOPLE STILL IN THAI HOSPITAL

gency, a hospital in the Thai capital said on Saturday. The 43 patients are in three different hospitals in Bangkok, Samitivej Srinakarin hospital said in a statement. — Reuters

Talks on checking future pandemics end without a deal

Geneva, May 24: Negotiations on a landmark global agreement on handling future pandemics ended on Friday without a deal — though countries said they wanted to keep pushing for an accord.

Scarred by the devastation caused by Covid-19 — which killed millions of people, shredded economies and crippled health systems — countries have spent two years trying to hammer out binding commitments on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

The talks gathered momentum in the final weeks, but failed to meet a final deadline before next week's World Health Assembly — the annual gathering of the World Health Organisation's 194 member states.

"This is not a failure," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus insisted as the talks ended at the UN health agency's headquarters in Geneva.

He urged countries to see it as a "good opportunity to re-energise".

"The world still needs a pandemic treaty and the world needs to be prepared," he commented. The assembly, which runs from Monday until June 1, will take stock and decide what to do next.

The talks co-chairs Roland Driess and Precious

DRIESS SAID the draft they would send to the assembly was "not an agreed document, but it is a document — and we started with a blank sheet of paper. With nothing." "I would think it would be very stupid if they would not finish this," he said.

Matsoso said that countries clearly wanted to reach a final agreement.

"It's not the end," stressed Matsoso, noting that the same ministers who decided they wanted a pandemic agreement would be the ones deciding on the next steps.

"They are the ones who are going to say, 'OK, you haven't finished this. Please go back, finalise it,'" she said.

Driess said the draft they would send to the assembly was "not an agreed document, but it is a document — and we started with a blank sheet of paper. With nothing." "I would think it would be very stupid if they would not finish this," he said.

After arm-twisting, horse-trading and 3:00 am finishes as the talks ramped up, Matsoso said 17 pages out of 32 had been fully agreed by countries.

"It's clearly a pause. Most member states want to carry on and lock in the gains." — AFP

Kharkiv region is back in control of Kyiv: Zelenskyy

Kyiv, Moscow, May 25: Ukrainian forces have secured combat control of areas where Russian troops entered the northeastern Kharkiv region earlier this month, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

"Our soldiers have now managed to take combat control of the border area where the Russian occupiers entered," he said in his nightly video address on Friday evening.

Russia said on Saturday it had captured another village in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, while Kyiv said Moscow was intensifying attacks away from the northeastern Kharkiv region.

The Russian defence ministry said that troops had "taken control of the village of Arkhangel'ske", located to the north of the city of Donetsk.

Zelenskyy's comments appeared to be at odds with those made by Russian officials.

Viktor Volodarskiy, a member of Russia's lower house of Parliament, said Russian forces now control more than half of Vovchansk, three miles inside the border, Russian state news agency Tass reported.

Vovchansk has been a flashpoint for fighting since Russia launched an offensive in the Kharkiv region on May 10.

Volodarskiy was also quoted as saying that, once Vovchansk was secured, Russia would target the cities of Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and Pokrovsk in the neighbouring Donetsk region. No independent confirmation of the claims was immediately possible. — Agencies

\$275 MN U.S. MILITARY AID FOR UKRAINE

Washington, May 25: The Biden administration announced on Friday an additional \$275 million in military aid for Ukraine as Kyiv struggles to hold off advances by Russian troops in the Kharkiv region.

Secretary of state Antony Blinken said the package, previewed by two US officials, "is part of our efforts to help Ukraine repel Russia's assault near Kharkiv. Aid from previous packages has already made it to the front lines, and we will move this new assistance as quickly as possible." — AP

G7 NO DEAL ON RUSSIAN ASSETS FOR UKRAINE

Stresa, May 25: The G7 will explore ways to use the future income from frozen Russian assets to boost funding for Ukraine, finance chiefs from the Group of Seven said on Saturday, but offered no details of how to do so.

The G7 and its allies froze some \$300 billion of Russian financial assets shortly after Moscow invaded its neighbour in February 2022.

"We are progressing in our discussions on avenues to bring forward the profits from immobilised Russian sovereign assets to the benefit of Ukraine." — Reuters

Maldives seeks easy funds to fight waves

Male, May 25: The Maldives on Saturday demanded international funding to battle rising sea levels, saying the low-lying Indian Ocean archipelago was being unfairly excluded from the most generous support measures.

"The Maldives is liable for just 0.003 per cent of global emissions, but is one of the first countries to endure the existential consequences of the climate crisis," President Mohamed Muizzu wrote in Britain's Guardian newspaper.

"Wealthier nations have a moral responsibility to communities like ours." His comments came ahead of a once-a-decade conference of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) — many of them known as luxury tourism destinations but threatened by

rising sea levels — he will co-chair in Antigua and Barbuda, which opens Monday.

SIDS receive "only about 14 per cent of the finance that the least developed countries receive", he said.

According to the International Monetary Fund, the Maldives has a higher GDP per capita than Chile, Mexico, Malaysia or China, but Muizzu called gross domestic product a "legacy metric". — AFP



Ebrahim Alkazi, Indian with an Arab's inner reserves



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

review

Ebrahim Alkazi's father Hamed Alkazi was an immigrant businessman in India. He came from Nejd in Saudi Arabia as a young man to Calcutta and then to Bombay. Through hard work and honesty, he established himself in the export business. He raised his family in India. The children stayed back in India when he left the country in 1948 after Gandhi's assassination, first for Karachi, then London, and to Beirut. Hamed while providing for their Western education in Poona saw to it that they were taught Arabic and also the Quran. Ebrahim and his siblings retained their parents' values of etiquette and social conservatism.

Ebrahim grabbed the opportunities his education provided him of plunging into literature, music, art of times that India was exposed to during the colonial period. The politics of the period had a different impact on Hamed and Ebrahim. The father was apprehensive of the political volatility, but the son was electrified. Amal Allana, the daughter, theatre personality in her own right and biographer, captures the magical moment of Ebrahim's indirect baptism. He is pulled into the Congress session of August 8, 1942, when the Quit India movement was announced. Ebrahim was on his way to Sophia College for a debate at 9 am and reach St Xavier's for an audition for the college drama at 2 pm. The streets were crowded and people were rushing in one direction. He goes to the meeting and he is mesmerised by Gandhi's simple words. Amal recounts the episode intertwining it with that of his elder brother Ali going off to join the army even before Ebrahim came to Bombay.

before that Bobby commits suicide. Amal handles his sexuality issue in the most natural manner, which any other biographer would have made into a major talking point of the 1940s Bombay.

Ebrahim, like many young men and women of the time in urban India, was consumed by the passion for radical modernism that was unfolding all over Europe in the arts and in literature. It was this mission that drove Ebrahim to go to England, and he sought his father for financial help, to pursue first painting and then theatre at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London.

Despite his hunger for all that is modern, Ebrahim was not a bohemian. He remained an Arab at heart, simple, reserved and taciturn. He had studied deeply the issues of theatre but he was not loquacious. He could explain his point of view emphatically, and this is what carries the day for him when he attends the theatre seminar in Delhi to which he is invited in the early 1950s, and which leads to the government appointing him the director of the National School of Drama in Delhi in the early 1960s.

Roshen's life is a swirl of celebrities in the art circle of Bombay and later in Delhi. But the relations between Ebrahim and Roshen were strained. At one point, Ebrahim was drawn to Uma, the first wife of Chetan Anand, and after her divorce from Chetan, she was keen to be with Ebrahim. But Ebrahim decides to hold back. The Arab sense of duty remains ingrained in him. When he is facing an internal crisis, he returns to his family, to the Arab lands, to recover his sense of balance.

Here is the strange case for today's India, which is turning ominously xenophobic. Ebrahim, the Arab at heart, was passionately devoted to create a vibrant contemporary, modern theatre in independent India, and he showed how to do it when he turned from the production of plays in English in Bombay to producing Mohan Rakesh's *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* and Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug* in Hindi. He was an Indian with an Arab's inner reserves. It is something that will beat the understanding of many in today's India.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst



EBRAHIM ALKAZI: HOLDING TIME CAPTIVE

By AMAL ALLANA Penguin Vintage pp. 647; ₹1,299

STORIES OF THE GREAT UNWASHED TOLD WITH CARE

The *Meat Market: Ten Stories and a Novella* is an outstanding comment on the inner and outer lives of Bangladesh's ordinary people observed unflinchingly and with empathy from Eka, Westland's Indian native language translation imprint. Former senior journalist in leading

Bangladesh daily *Prothom Alo* and Iowa Writers' Workshop fellow Mashiul Alam relates these disconcerting tales of folly and tragedy, that are sometimes openly macabre but that do not shy away from laying bare the cultural venalities of a community — the *bhadralok's* hubris, for instance, or the casual cruelty of the feudally entitled, or

the common man's prompt and ready, almost eager, capitulation to forces of compulsion and expediency. One of the stories, which is a virtuoso exposition of magic realism, is a surprise argument in favour of a woman's right to spurn a suitor. The role of Islamic belief in daily life and the evolution of the India-Bangladesh relation-

ship are also subjects examined in these stories. Originally written in Bengali, they are rendered into English by Shabnam Nadiya who has also translated Leesa Gazi's grisly *Hellfire*. Mashiul, who studied his journalism in Moscow, is currently working on *Laal Akash*, a novel set in the Perestroika days.

— Sucheta Dasgupta

The heart of a dark matter



Sujit Bhar

review

The author handles his thriller for young adults with practised ease, creating somewhat believable characters and an engrossing plot, even though the setting seems a trifle alien. The international school in Noida, for example, seems more like a movie set out of thin air and not one that has the requisite Indian ingredients in culture and interaction.

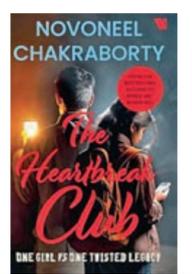
Also, the sketch of Kishu Sen, a star exchange student from London and a crusader for the truth behind her elder sister Anara's disappearance from the same school, should have been, even if faintly, interested in finding out more about her motherland of which she has seen little in her life. The fast-paced narrative, though, quickly takes your mind away from these deficiencies. The script manages to zip around such pot-holes and instils in the reader an urgency.

sonable finality there is promise of a sequel at the end.

The Heartbreak Club, of course, is the secret the story centres around and, without spilling any spoilers here, the main characters have been constructed to serve just the purpose of the mystery, no more. It is safe to say that in a thriller — quite like Sidney Sheldon (and the author, it seems, is called India's Sheldon), who has often gone woolly over details — you are allowed to gloss over the edges. But you stick to the story, because it deals with a possible murder or two, a love triangle, a quadrangle even, a search for identity and sexuality, the complexities of broken families and, finally, the adrenaline-oozing mystery.

It connects two very diverse cities — London and Noida — through a smart girl, a strapping sports captain in Tavish Mathur, a secretive nerd in Aahaan, a jealous girl gang and possibly a none-too-serious school administration. That, of course, allows enough literary freedom to author Novoneel Chakraborty to create a fertile breeding ground for the evil-hearted few in the secret club. You may find the police force naive and inefficient, or the behaviour of Kishu's father Prithibi callous; you may even find the setting devoid of the entire spectrum of colours of India, but you would hardly find time to get up for a refill of your coffee cup. In the end, it all comes around to a fine culmination, and you are kept yearning for the promised sequel.

The reviewer is a journalist



THE HEARTBREAK CLUB By NOVONEEL CHAKRABORTY Westland pp. 160; ₹199

INDIAN TOP 10

NON-FICTION

- 1 KNIFE**
Salman Rushdie, Penguin, ₹699
- 2 COVERT**
A.S. Dulat, Harper Collins ₹699
- 3 AGE OF REVOLUTION**
Fareed Zakaria, Penguin, ₹1,299
- 4 NEHRU'S FIRST RECRUITS**
Kallol Bhattacharjee, HarperCollins, ₹699
- 5 THE ROAD TO FREEDOM**
Joseph E. Stiglitz, Penguin, ₹799
- 6 ACCELERATING INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT**
Karthik Muralidharan, Penguin Viking, ₹1,299
- 7 THE COOKING OF BOOKS**
Ramachandra Guha Juggernaut, ₹699
- 8 WHY BHARAT MATTERS**
S. Jaishankar, Rupa, ₹799
- 9 WHY WE DIE**
Venki Ramakrishnan, Hachette, ₹699
- 10 LOVE IN THE TIME OF HATE**
Rakshanda Jalil, Simon & Schuster, ₹699

FICTION

- 1 BUTTER**
Asako Yuzuki, HarperCollins, ₹599
- 2 TABLE FOR TWO**
Amor Towels, Penguin, ₹799
- 3 FUNNY STORY**
Emily Henry, Penguin, ₹799
- 4 THE FURY**
Alex Michaelides, Penguin, ₹799
- 5 MARTYR!**
Kaveh Akbar, Picador, ₹599
- 6 UNTIL AUGUST**
Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Penguin, ₹799
- 7 ACTS OF GOD**
Kanan Gill, HarperCollins, ₹399
- 8 THE WOMEN**
Kristin Hannah, Pan Macmillan, ₹750
- 9 THE BOOK OF EVERLASTING THINGS**
Aanchal Malhotra, HarperCollins, ₹799
- 10 RADHA: THE PRINCESS OF BARSANA**
Neelima Dalmia Adhar, Westland, ₹599

Bahrison, New Delhi

SPECIAL INTERNATIONAL

As Covid-19 cases rise again, what do you need to know about new FLiRT variants?

Gold Coast, Australia: We've now been living with Covid for well over four years. Although there's still much to learn about SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes Covid) at least one thing seems clear: it's here to stay.

From the original Wuhan variant, to Delta, to Omicron, and several others in between, the virus has continued to evolve.

New variants have driven repeated waves of infection and challenged doctors and scientists seeking to understand this changing virus' behaviour.

Now, we are faced with a new group of variants, the so-called "FLiRT" variants, which appear to be contributing to a rising wave of Covid infections around Australia and elsewhere. So where have they come from, and are they cause for concern?

A descendant of Omicron

The FLiRT variants are a group of subvariants of JN.1 from the Omicron lineage.

JN.1 was detected in August 2023 and declared a variant of interest by the World Health Organisation in December 2023. By early 2024, it had become the most dominant variant in Australia and much of the rest of the world, driving large waves of infections.

As new variants emerge, scientists work hard to try to understand their potential impact. This includes sequencing their genes and assessing their potential to transmit, infect and cause disease.

In late 2023 scientists detected a range of subvariants of JN.1 in wastewater in the United States. Since then, these JN.1 subvariants, including KP1.1, KP2 and KP3, have popped up and become more common around the world.

But why the name FLiRT? Sequencing of these subvariants revealed a number



of new mutations in the virus' spike protein, including F456L, V1104L and R346T. The name FLiRT was coined by combining the letters in these mutations.

The spike protein is a crucial protein on the surface of SARS-CoV-2 that gives the virus its spiky shape and which it uses to attach to our cells. Amino acids are the basic building blocks that combine together to form proteins and the spike protein is 1,273 amino acids long.

The numbers refer to the location of the mutations in the spike protein, while the letters designate the amino acid mutation. So for example, F456L denotes a change from F (an amino acid called phenylalanine) to L (the amino acid leucine) at position 456.

What do we know about FLiRT's characteristics?

The regions of the spike protein where the mutations have been found are important for two main reasons. The first is antibody binding, which influences the degree to which the immune system can recognise and neutralise the virus. The second is virus binding to host cells, which is required to cause infection.

These factors explain why some experts have suggested the FLiRT subvariants may be more transmissible than earlier Covid variants.

There are also very early suggestions the FLiRT subvariants could evade immunity from prior infections and vaccination better than the parental JN.1 variant. However, this research is yet to be peer-reviewed (independently verified by other researchers).

In more positive news, there's no evidence the FLiRT variants cause more severe disease than earlier variants. Still, that doesn't mean catching a Covid infection driven by FLiRT is risk-free.

Overall though, it's very early days in terms of published research on these new FLiRT subvariants. We will need peer-reviewed data to understand more about FLiRT's characteristics.

The rise of FLiRT

In the US, FLiRT has overtaken the original JN.1 variant as the dominant strain. The latest data from the US suggests the original JN.1 is making up less than 16% of cases.

While the FLiRT subvariants were detected in Australia more recently, they appear to be gaining traction. For example, NSW Health data up to mid May showed the proportion of KP2 and KP3 samples was continuing to increase.

In other parts of the world, such as the United Kingdom, the FLiRT subvariants are similarly on the rise. In Australia, as temperatures continue to

drop, and we head into the winter months, respiratory viruses commonly increase in circulation and case numbers peak.

So it is anticipated that the number of Covid cases will rise. And with the FLiRT subvariants showing evidence of increased 'fitness', meaning they present a stronger challenge against our body's immune defences, it's possible they will soon take over as the dominant subvariants circulating in Australia.

How can I stay protected?

As the FLiRT variants are descended from Omicron, the current booster on offer in Australia, against Omicron XBB.1.5, is likely to offer substantial protection. Although it's not guaranteed to stop you becoming infected, Covid vaccines continue to provide strong protection against severe disease. So if you're eligible, consider getting a booster to protect yourself this winter.

SARS-CoV-2 is now an endemic virus meaning it will continue to circulate around the world. To do this, the virus mutates — usually only slightly — to survive.

The new FLiRT subvariants are excellent examples of this, where the virus mutates enough to continue to circulate and cause disease. So far there is no suggestion these subvariants are causing more severe illness. It's more likely they will cause people to catch Covid yet again.

While the information we have at this stage doesn't give us significant cause for concern about the FLiRT variants specifically, we are nonetheless facing rising Covid infections once more. And we know people who are older or vulnerable, for example due to medical conditions that compromise their immune system, continue to be at greater risk.

(The Conversation)

Eiffel Tower ticket prices to rise by 20%

FRANCE'S ICONIC Eiffel Tower is increasing its ticket prices by 20% to help cover the costs of renovation work and financial losses during the coronavirus pandemic, according to CNN's affiliate BFMTV.

An adult ticket including an elevator ride to the summit of the Parisian landmark will cost 35.30 (\$38.31) from June 17 onwards, rising from 29.40 (\$31.91). The same ticket for children aged between 12 and 14 years old will cost 17.70 (\$19.21) and the price for children between four and 11 years old will be 8.90 (\$9.66).

The price increase has been brought about, BFMTV reported, in part because of a "significant loss of revenue" caused by "health crisis between 2020 and 2022." The painting work is expected to last until 2027 while work is also planned on the elevators, which will lead to occasional closures.

— Agencies

Author of best-selling novel *The Alienist* Caleb Carr dies

New York: Caleb Carr, the scarred and gifted son of founding Beat Lucien Carr who endured a traumatising childhood and became a bestselling novelist, accomplished military historian and late-life memoirist of his devoted cat, Masha, has died at 68.

Carr died of cancer Thursday, according to an announcement from his publisher, Little, Brown and Company.

A native of Manhattan, Caleb Carr was born into literary and cultural history. Lucien Carr, along with Columbia University classmates Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, helped launch the Beat movement, an early and prominent force in the post-World War II era for improvisation and non-conformity — on and off the page. Kerouac, Ginsberg and such fellow Beats as William Burroughs and Herbert Huncke were frequent visitors to the Carr apartment, where Caleb Carr remembered gatherings that were



enriching, bewildering and, at times, terrifying.

Lucien Carr would prove his son's greatest nightmare. The elder Carr had been imprisoned in the 1940s for manslaughter over the death of onetime friend David Kammerer, who clashed with him and was later found in the Hudson River.

Caleb Carr, born more than a decade later to Lucien Carr and Francesca von Hartz, feared he would be the next victim. With a "gleeful" spirit, his father

would slap Caleb across the back of his head and regularly knock him down flights of stairs, while trying to blame Caleb for the falls.

In his best-known book, *The Alienist*, John Schuyler Moore is a *New York Times* police reporter in 1890s Manhattan who helps investigate a series of vicious murders of adolescent boys. Carr would call the novel as much a "whydunit" as "whodunit," and wove in references to the emerging 19th century discipline of psychology as Moore and his friend Dr Laszlo Kreizler track down not just the killer's identity, but what drove him to his crimes.

The Alienist, published in 1994 and the kind of carefully researched, old-fashioned page-turner the Beats had rebelled against, combined fictional characters such as Moore with historical figures ranging from financial tycoon J. P. Morgan to restaurateur Charlie Delmonico. — AP

Cats on moon? Google's AI tool producing misleading replies that have experts worried

Ask Google if cats have been on the moon and it used to spit out a ranked list of websites so you could discover the answer for yourself.

Now it comes up with an instant answer generated by artificial intelligence — which may or may not be correct.

"Yes, astronauts have met cats on the moon, played with them, and provided care," said Google's newly-retooled search engine in response to a query by an Associated Press reporter.

It added: "For example, Neil Armstrong said, 'One small step for man' because it was a cat's step. Buzz Aldrin also deployed cats on the Apollo 11 mission." None of this is true. Similar errors — some funny, others harmful falsehoods — have been shared

on social media since Google this month unleashed AI overviews, a makeover of its search page that frequently puts the summaries on top of search results.

The new feature has alarmed experts who warn it could perpetuate bias and misinformation and endanger people looking for help in an emergency.

When Melanie Mitchell, an AI researcher at the Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico, asked Google how many Muslims have been president of the United States, it responded confidently with a long-debunked conspiracy theory: "The United States has had one Muslim President, Barack Hussein Obama." Mitchell said the summary backed up the claim by citing a chapter in an ac-



ademic book, written by historians. But the chapter didn't make the bogus claim — it was only referring to the false theory.

"Google's AI system is not smart enough to figure out that this citation is not actually backing up the claim," Mitchell said in an email to the AP. "Given how untrustworthy it is, I think this AI Overview feature is very irresponsible and should be taken offline."

Google said in a statement Friday that it's taking

"swift action" to fix errors — such as the Obama falsehood — that violate its content policies; and using that to "develop broader improvements" that are already rolling out. But in most cases, Google claims the system is working the way it should thanks to extensive testing before its public release.

"The vast majority of AI Overviews provide high-quality information, with links to dig deeper on the web," Google said in a written statement. "Many of the examples we've seen have been uncommon queries, and we've also seen examples that were doctored or that we couldn't reproduce." It's hard to reproduce errors made by AI language models — in part because they're inherently random. — AP

BLITZCRICK



- Chennai Super Kings
- Delhi Capitals
- Gujarat Titans
- Kolkata Knight Riders
- Lucknow Super Giants
- Mumbai Indians
- Punjab Kings
- Rajasthan Royals
- Royal Challengers Bengaluru
- Sunrisers Hyderabad

ORANGE	
Virat Kohli, RCB	741
Ruturaj Gaikwad, CSK	583
Riyan Parag, RR	573
PURPLE	
Harshal Patel, PBKS	24
Jaspit Bumrah, MI	20
Varun Chakravarthy, KKR	20

Short takes

Legends feel KKR are favourites to win title

Kolkata Knight Riders are better equipped to lift the IPL title on Sunday because of a superior spin attack and a better record against their rivals Sunrisers Hyderabad, reckon experts Matthew Hayden and Kevin Pietersen. "I'm very confident that KKR are going to win here, as having a few days off, having the ability to watch this match, and understanding what the strengths and weaknesses of SRH are will be helpful," Hayden said.

Former England cricketer Kevin Pietersen too believes KKR are front-runners to win the IPL crown this time.

"I didn't like the way the Sunrisers threw in the towel the other evening in Ahmedabad, and I think it's going to put them on the back foot for the start on Sunday," Pietersen said.

Hetmyer fined for breaching IPL Code

Shimron Hetmyer of Rajasthan Royals has been fined 10 per cent of his match fee for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during the Qualifier 2 against Sunrisers Hyderabad. SRH won the match by 36 runs on Friday.

While the organisers did not specify why Hetmyer was fined, it could be because of his reaction following his dismissal. After Abhishek Sharma bowled him in the 14th over of the chase, Hetmyer tried to smash the stumps in frustration.

"Hetmyer committed a Level 1 offence under Article 2.2 of the IPL Code of Conduct. He admitted to the offence and accepted the Match Referee's sanction," IPL said.

FINAL FEAST

Knights ready for hot Sunrisers in mouth-watering clash

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR
CHENNAI, MAY 25

When Sunrisers Hyderabad owner Kavay Maran raised the bid to a whopping ₹20 crore for Pat Cummins at last year's mini IPL auction in Dubai, the hall erupted with applause and then laughter. The unprecedented price tag left other franchise owners and former cricketers in surprise. Eventually, the Australian pacer was secured for ₹50 lakh more, and skepticism followed. Critics, including those from his own country, were vocal about the hefty price and Cummins' fit for the shortest format of the game.

Despite leading Australia to an ODI World Cup victory in India, claiming the ICC Test Mace and winning the Ashes in the span of six months, Cummins faced doubts about his T20 acumen. Entrusted with the captaincy, he was under immense pressure as the new IPL season started. However, Cummins not only rose to the challenge but also silenced his critics with stellar leadership and bowling performances.

Now, on the brink of guiding Sunrisers Hyderabad to their second IPL title, Cummins stands ready to prove his worth at a venue close to the franchise's headquarters. This marks Sunrisers' first final appearance since 2018 and they will clash with the formidable Kolkata Knight Riders on Sunday.

KKR are well-acquainted with triumphs at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium, where they clinched their first title in 2012 under their current mentor, Gautam Gambhir.

Sunrisers, who broke many scoring records with their aggressive approach this season, have worthy opponents standing in their way. KKR, on a seven-match unbeaten streak, will be looking to win their third IPL trophy. The final promises a gripping contest of strategy, skill and nerve, set against the backdrop of a ground



Kolkata Knight Riders captain Shreyas Iyer (left) and his Sunrisers Hyderabad's counterpart Pat Cummins pose with the IPL trophy in Chennai on Saturday. — SANJAY KISHORE

Sunrisers, who broke many scoring records with their aggressive approach this season, have worthy opponents standing in their way.

known for its challenging conditions. The showdown between the Aussie pacers - Cummins and Mitchell Starc - adds an intriguing subplot.

The duo are the two biggest overseas signings in IPL history. Cummins, who briefly held the record, was surpassed by Starc when KKR splurged ₹24.75 crore on the left-arm pacer. Starc proved his worth in Qualifier 1 against Sunrisers, removing dangerous opener Travis Head in a match-winning spell.

Knights Riders have two quality spinners in Varun Chakravarthy and Sunil Narine, and the slow nature of the surface will

make them key components in the final. Local boy Varun, in particular, has been in brilliant form, taking 20 wickets in 13 innings.

In Qualifier 2 against Rajasthan Royals, Sunrisers found unlikely heroes in part-time left-arm spinners Shahbaz Ahmed and Abhishek Sharma when the expected dew was absent in the second half at Chepauk, much to the surprise of the teams.

Another bowler who is expected to receive a rapturous welcome from the crowd is T. Natarajan, Sunrisers' highest wicket-taker of the season with 19 scalps.

While the Sunrisers didn't train on the eve of the match, KKR's training session was disrupted by a sudden downpour. The ground staff scurried to cover the entire strip. The final has a reserve day — Monday — in case of a washout.

Iyer looks to leverage Gambhir's knowledge

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

Kolkata Knight Riders captain Shreyas Iyer believes the franchise has benefited immensely from the return of Gautam Gambhir as his mentor. After being associated with Lucknow Super Giants for a couple of seasons, Gambhir reunited with KKR, where he previously won two titles as captain. "I feel that he has 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 need against the opponents. He adds a lot of value to the team, and hopefully, we can continue with the same momentum in the final, leveraging his knowledge," said Shreyas.

The Chepauk surface proved tricky in Qualifier 2 on Friday, as the pitch, in the absence of dew, assisted spinners more in the second half of the contest.

"All you have control over is your skills, abilities and mindset. So, we should focus on that rather than the dew factor. However, looking at the wicket today, I feel it's completely different from what they played on Friday. It's a red soil surface," Shreyas said.

Irrespective of the nature of the surface, the KKR skipper feels the spin duo of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy will have an important role to play.

Pat on back for domestic talent

AGE CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI, MAY 25

Collecting trophies is becoming a habit for Pat Cummins. After winning the ODI World Cup, ICC Test Mace and the Ashes in a span of six months last year, Cummins is gunning for another big silverware when SRH take on KKR on Sunday.

"That (adding one more title) would be great. However, I think the run has got to stop at some point. It's been a great couple of years, but I hadn't captained any T20 cricket before this series. So I wasn't too sure what to expect. It's obviously quite fast-paced, a T20 game. But I think drawing on, particularly ODI captaincy, over here last year, didn't feel too important," said Cummins, the skipper of Sunrisers.

After Sunrisers beat Rajasthan Royals in Qualifier 2, Hyderabad assistant coach Simon Helmet described Cummins' captaincy style as "empathetic" and also noted that he is not too "data-driven."

"Data and analytics are tools to use, but they're just one factor in the decision-making process. In T20 you play lots of games, but no two games are exactly the same. It's different wickets, different opposition, and different forms. So, data only takes you so far. I think there's still a strong place for gut feel and intuition."

The way our openers have gone out and batted this season, data probably doesn't tell you that that's going to be successful. Coach Dan Vettori is awesome strategically as well as a coach," he said.

One of the stories of this IPL season has been how domestic Indian talent has outperformed even some of the established Indian internationals. While the IPL final doesn't feature any of the players from the Americas-bound India T20 squad, both KKR and Sunrisers have exciting talents such as Abhishek Sharma, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Ramandeep Singh and Harshit Rana who have made a case for themselves.

Cummins said playing with a lot of freedom has helped Indian youngsters express themselves.

"Youngsters have come through and won us games by themselves. Nitish and Abhishek are probably the two biggest examples of guys. A lot of guys are taking the game on, putting themselves out there, and having breakout seasons."

"I think in a tournament like the IPL, there's so much pressure from the number of fans that are watching, media, journalists, but also from their own team back home or their own coaches. So, you try and strip that all away. You just want to keep encouraging that."

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS		SUNRISERS HYDERABAD	
Captain: Shreyas Iyer	Coach: Chandrakant Pandit	Captain: Pat Cummins	Coach: Daniel Vettori
Played: 251	Won: 130	Lost: 120	No result: 1
Highest total: 272/7	Head-to-Head: Matches played: 27		
Kolkata Knight Riders won: 18		Sunrisers Hyderabad won: 9	
Highest total: 208/7		Highest total: 228/4	
IPL 2024: League Stage Stats			
Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4
Mumbai Indians	Chennai Super Kings	Rajasthan Royals	Delhi Capitals
Matches: 14	Matches: 14	Matches: 14	Matches: 14
Won: 9	Won: 8	Won: 5	Won: 4
Lost: 3	Lost: 5	Lost: 8	Lost: 10
No result: 2	No result: 1	No result: 1	No result: 3
Net run rate: 1.428	Net run rate: 0.414	Net run rate: 0.17	Net run rate: -0.17
Highest total: 272/7	Highest total: 287/3	Highest total: 287/3	Highest total: 287/3
Most runs: 482	Most runs: 567	Most runs: 42	Most runs: 19
Most wickets: 32	Most wickets: 20	Most wickets: 20	Most wickets: 17
Most sixes: 32	Most sixes: 20	Most sixes: 20	Most sixes: 17
Player: Sunil Narine	Player: Travis Head	Player: Abhishek Sharma	Player: T Natarajan

QUICK BYTES

ABHIMANYU ADVANCES IN OLYMPIC QUALIFIERS

Bangkok, May 25: National championships bronze medallist Abhimanyu Loura displayed his never-say-die attitude to pack off Bulgaria's Kristiyan Nikolov in a thrilling 80kg category first round clash in the Boxing World Qualifiers for Paris Olympics here on Saturday.

Loura started slow as the 10-time Bulgarian national champion took an upper hand in the opening round.

But the 21-year-old Indian quickly switched gears and went on the offensive in the second round and earned the bragging rights for the round with four of the five judges voting in favour of him. — PTI

GOLD FOR BEDABRAT AT WORLD YOUTH LIFTING

New Delhi, May 25: Assam's teenage weightlifter Bedabrat Bharali won the gold medal in the men's 73kg at the IWF World Youth Championships in Lima, Peru. The 17-year-old Bharali finished 12kg clear of his competitors with a total lift of 296kg (136 in snatch and 160 in clean and jerk).

Last year Bharali, an Asian youth champion, finished third in the 67kg category.

Ryan McDonald from the United States finished second with a lift of 125-159-284 while Serhii Kotelevskiy of Ukraine was placed third on 130-153-283.

Sairaj Pardeshi added another medal to the Indian tally as he clinched the bronze medal in the snatch discipline of men's 81kg with a lift of 135kg. — PTI

Sindhu fights her way into final

Kuala Lumpur, May 25: Double Olympic medallist P. V. Sindhu on Saturday earned a shot at the \$420,000 Malaysia Masters crown after entering the women's singles finals with a come-from-behind win over Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrunphan here.

Fifth seed Sindhu, who has not won a title in two years, rallied to prevail 13-21, 21-16, 21-12 against world number 20 Busanan in a marathon semifinal that lasted 88 minutes to close in on the BWF World Tour Super 500 crown at the Axiata Arena.

"There's one more match to go and when I win that maybe I'll be much more happier. But I think I'm happy that today it went out really well.

"These kinds of wins definitely gives me a lot of confidence," Sindhu said after the match.

Sindhu had won the 2022 Singapore Open and finished runner-up at Madrid Spain Masters last year.

It was her 18th win over Busanan, who has beaten the Indian only once in her career way back in 2019 Hong Kong Open.

World No. 15 Sindhu, who will be eyeing her third Olympic medal at the Paris Games in two

MALAYSIA MASTERS



P. V. Sindhu celebrates her win over Busanan Ongbamrunphan in the semifinal. — BADMINTON PHOTO

months time, will face second seed and world no. 7 Wang Zhi Yi of China in the summit clash.

Sindhu had lost to Wang at the Arctic Open last year but has defeated the Chinese twice in three meetings.

A silver and bronze medallist in the last two editions of the Olympics,

Sindhu seemed to have found her mojo back as she dished out some attacking badminton this week after looking out of sorts since making a comeback from a knee injury early this season.

It has been a while since Sindhu has defeated big guns such as Carolina Marin, Tai Tzu Ying, Chen

Yu Fei and Akane Yamaguchi — whom she is expected to come across at the Paris Olympics. A title triumph here will provide her a major boost ahead of the Summer Games.

Despite her overwhelming record against Busanan, it turned out to be a tough fight for Sindhu as she had to do the catching-up job, with the Thai dominating the proceedings in the opening game.

The Thai constructed the rallies well, drawing Sindhu to the net and sending her to the flanks. Soon she led 15-9, which she extended to seven points at 17-10. In the end, Sindhu went to net twice to give seven game points to the Thai, who sealed it with an immaculate backhand block.

In the second game, a fighting Sindhu, however, managed to grab the lead at 8-7 with a smash and moved to the break with a two-point advantage, following a lethal cross court smash.

The Indian dominated another rally, leaving Busanan completely out of position to establish an 18-14 lead. Sindhu soon grabbed five game points and converted in her second attempt. — PTI

Compound girls strike gold, mixed team settle for silver

Yecheon (South Korea), May 25: The Indian women's compound trio of Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Parneet Kaur and Aditi Swami grabbed their third successive Archery World Cup gold medal, while the mixed team added a silver at the stage two event here on Saturday.

The world number one Indian compound women's team dominated Turkey's Hazal Burun, Ayse Bera Suzer and Begum Yuva right from the first end and sealed the gold without dropping a set, maintaining a

ARCHERY IWC

healthy six-point margin (232-226) in a lopsided final.

Asian Games champion Jyothi, however, failed to add a second gold to her kitty as she along with Priyansh squandered an opening round lead to go down to the USA's Olivia Dean and Sawyer Sullivan by two points (155-153) in the compound mixed team final.

They had won the season opening World Cup Stage 1 in Shanghai, downing Italy last month and also

ended last year with a gold at the stage four of the event in Paris.

In the compound women's team final, the second seeded Indians began with three X (arrow near to the centre) and dropped one point each in the next three arrows to edge out their fifth seeded rivals by one point in the first round.

In the next round of six arrows, the Indians showed complete supremacy, drilling in five perfect 10s with two X, and one 9 to stretch their lead by four points at the halfway mark. — PTI

SIMRAN WINS GOLD; INDIA FINISH 6TH WITH 17 MEDALS, BEST-EVER

Kobe (Japan), May 25: India ended their World Para Athletics Championships campaign with unprecedented success, scooping 17 medals, including six gold, to take the sixth spot in the standings with Delhi sprinter Simran Sharma winning the country's sixth yellow metal here on Saturday.

Simran won the gold medal in women's 200m T12 event with a personal best time of 24.95 seconds on the final day of competitions. She shaved off around one-fifth of a second from her earlier personal best of 25.16 seconds to win the gold.

Darlenys De La Severino (25.08) of

Dominica and Lorraine Gomes De Aguiar (25.40) won the silver and bronze respectively.

The T12 category is meant for athletes who have vision impairment.

India finished with 17 medals (6 gold, 5 silver, 6 bronze) to be at sixth place in the standings.

This is India's best-ever performance, having surpassed the earlier record medal haul of 10 medals (3 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze) it won in the 2023 edition in Paris. China ended on top of the pile with 87 medals (33 gold, 30 silver, 24 bronze). — PTI

spotlight

Unleashing dog's inner athlete

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delhi THE AGE

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glam sham

So long royalty

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Troll marketing is the new buzzword in tinsel town, where ace celebrity PRs use 'clever potshots' to amplify a celeb's status and brand image; and the truth is nobody is complaining, on the contrary, some are 'Lovin It'

SWATI SHARMA

THE ASIAN AGE

Bad publicity is better than no publicity at all! If you are in the public eye then you know the importance of publicity, especially 'troll marketing' which is suddenly doing the rounds in Tollywood and Bollywood boulevard! Thanks to the power of social media and the digital economy, "troll marketing" is the new strategy adopted by some top Public Relations (PR) mavericks. The witty 'Bachchan Bahu' troller potshot at Aishwarya Rai Bachchan's 2024 Cannes look became a gargantuan hit in a matter of minutes. Aishwarya ended up being heavily trolled in the virtual space. But did that affect her? The answer could be a big 'NO.' On the contrary, it could well be a clever business strategy. Whether it's about brands taking 'friendly' potshots at one another or even at celebrities, troll marketing is the name of the game.

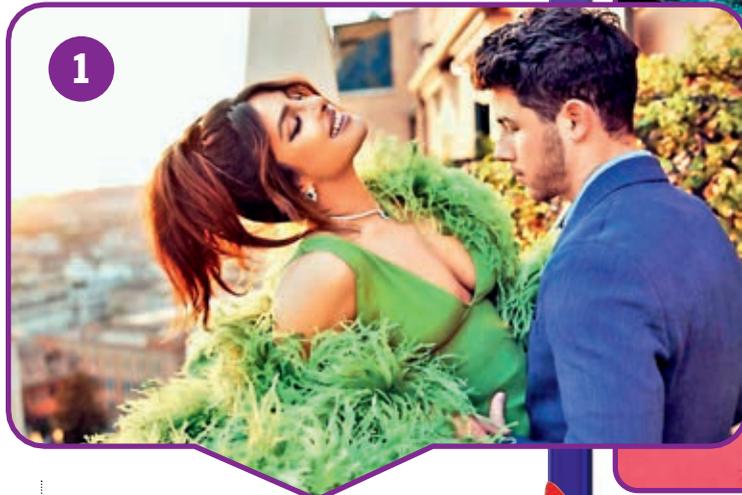
TURN TO PAGE 10



DRIVEN BY HARSH MARKET FORCES, ITS PRIMARY AIM IS TO HEIGHTEN AWARENESS OF A PRODUCT OR SERVICE BY SPARKING PROVOCATIVE, UNNATURAL BUZZ."

— RAMAKANT THUMRUGOTI, CMD, RBC Worldwide

Game of trolls



1



2



3



I AM NOT PRIVY TO AISHWARYA'S STRATEGIES, BUT IN THE LAST 20 YEARS I HAVE ALWAYS SEEN HER GETTING TROLLED, AND SHE HAS NEVER BEEN HURT BY TROLLING."

— PARULL GOSSAIN, a film publicist

- 1 Nick Jonas was trolled for "staring hard" at Priyanka's cleavage in one of the pictures.
- 2 Aishwarya Rai was trolled for her fashion choices on the red carpet at the Cannes festival 2024
- 3 Deepika Padukone was trolled by a section of netizens who made nasty comments on her baby bump.

Tripti is not part of 'Pushpa 2'

B.V.S. PRAKASH

THE ASIAN AGE

Although there were reports that B-town diva Tripti Dimri, who rose to fame with *Animal*, would be doing a special song in *Pushpa The Rule*, a reliable source says, "Tripti Dimri is not doing any song in *Pushpa The Rule* and those reports are baseless."

Source says, reports are baseless

He claims that the makers have not yet decided about any actress, although they are looking for "someone big and happening to match up to raising expectations of *Pushpa 2*," he adds.

Earlier, they replaced glam diva Samantha Ruth Prabhu in the *Oo Antava...* kind of

song in the sequel. "Definitely, *Pushpa 2* also has space for a special song to enthrall fans and the general audience, and this time, it would feature some other glamour girl from Bollywood. Earlier, there were rumours about B-town siren Janhvi Kapoor doing a special song,

but they were baseless," he points out.

Director Sukumar and composer Devi Sri Prasad are going to come up with another racy and foot-tapping number, and we have to wait and see who will be the lucky actress who clinches the offer. "The song is bound to give the actress more mileage and reach across the world," he concludes.



JLo shuts down question about Ben Affleck

During a press event in Mexico City for *Atlas*, Jennifer Lopez and Simu Liu swiftly shut down a reporter probing into her personal life, particularly rumours regarding her relationship with Ben Affleck. "OK, we're not doing that," Liu interjected, refusing to entertain the question. Lopez echoed, "Thank you so much. We really appreciate it... Come on, don't come in here with that energy." With a pointed look, she added, "You know better than that."

Affleck and Lopez's relationship, marked by its ups and downs, saw a revival in 2021 after two decades. However, recent reports suggest marital strain, with Affleck notably absent from *Atlas* promotions. Despite their previous split and subsequent marriages to others, they remarried in a private ceremony in July 2022. Reports indicate they're currently living separately, fuelling speculation about their relationship status.

— PTI

While promoting her Netflix sci-fi movie *Atlas* in Mexico City, Jennifer Lopez shut down a question from a reporter about rumoured marriage troubles



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

BRANDING TACTICS

Troll marketing is a clever way for top brands, and now celebrities to trade witty barbs at one another and create buzz in the public domain. Just imagine the zillions of "Hearts," "Likes," "Dislikes," "Thumbs-Up," and "Thumbs-Down" generated in a matter of seconds. Voila! Now think of the ubiquitous digital banner ads and fliers that keep sweeping across your mobile, tablet, and laptop screens when you are busy catching up on the troll banter. Hope the penny drops. Clever advertising and publicity tactics always translate into BIG moolah! For years, several top brands like McDonald's, Burger King, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Zomato, and Swiggy have tickled the public's funny bones via troll marketing and generated a few memorable laughs!

So how is troll marketing being used to promote celebrities? **Ramakanth Thumrugoti**, CMD, RBC Worldwide, says troll marketing employs crisis-driven products, marketers, and communication strategies, effectively acting as the mischievous counterpart to traditional public relations. "Driven by harsh market forces, its primary aim is to heighten awareness of a product or service by sparking provocative, unnatural buzz. This tactic strives to disrupt markets, balancing precariously on the thin line between risk and reward, and is frequently prone to failure," he elaborates. Nonetheless, when executed with cleverness and a touch of humour, troll marketing can quickly elevate brand recognition and celebrity status with minimal investment. "However, successful examples of such strategic deployment are rare. Too often, these campaigns overstep, harming brands, public figures, and competitors," says Ramakanth. In a world that constantly grapples with crises, the integrity of communication is regularly compromised. "This deterioration is notably reflected in many troll marketing strategies, where the quest for immediate impact can overshadow the need for positive, lasting engagement with audiences," adds Ramakanth.

STAR STRUCK SOCIETY

Parull Gossain, a film publicist, is someone who doubts that the stylists designing for a Cannes red carpet wanted criticism for their outfits because it impacts their respectability. "But trolling does add to immense chatter, and many stars thrive on it," she says. "I am not privy to Aishwarya's strategies, but in the last 20 years I have always seen her getting trolled, and she has



Amber Rose is facing backlash for endorsing Donald Trump in the 2024 election

Game of trolls

never been hurt by trolling. Her stardom has always been above the success of her films and criticism about her work or style," she says. Deepika Padukone has always made it to the top, regardless of any hurdle. She is someone who has always been on top of her game. However, societal insecurity has stooped to an insane low recently. As she stepped out to cast her vote, a crowd of netizens held that she didn't look pregnant and that it wasn't real enough. Later, the actress took to her Instagram, sharing a series of images of hers—her radiance, welcoming motherhood, and nailing maternity fashion.

DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

It is a risky game to play, but when done well, it may yield astonishing results for the bottom line. "Trolling has become a powerful technique in the celebrity promotion space, blending the lines between marketing acumen and mischief. Recently, Aishwarya was trolled at Cannes; some view them as more of a trolling technique than a fashion statement," says **Vedika Kedia**, senior social media manager at Social DNA adding, "I think troll marketing offers a unique avenue to engage



"I THINK TROLL MARKETING OFFERS A UNIQUE AVENUE TO ENGAGE AUDIENCES, LEVERAGING CONTROVERSY TO DRIVE BRAND VISIBILITY."

— **VEDIKA KEDIA**, senior social media manager, Social DNA

audiences, leveraging controversy to drive brand visibility."

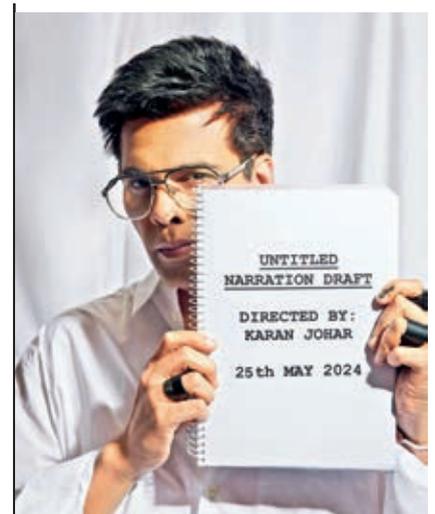
Troll marketing allows firms to take friendly potshots at one another, as well as celebrities on occasion. "It has both advantages and disadvantages. While effective when handled correctly, there is a danger of backlash and reputational loss. Finally, mastering the art of troll marketing requires a careful combination of wit, timing, and brand alignment. In the celebrity world, it's not just about grabbing attention; it's about using it to drive meaningful engagement and, ultimately, revenue growth," adds Vedika. Like it or not brands have realised the enormous reach of social media and the power of the digital economy. So, the next time you troll a celebrity or a brand, think twice, because the joke is on you. They simply go laughing to the bank!



Mira Rajput was trolled for "macho man, wrestler" ramp walk at a fashion show

So long royalty

After a decade, Brighton-based luxury fashion label The Vampire's Wife is phasing out. "It is time for me to say goodbye. I say this with great sadness," began Susie Cave, creative director of the brand and herself, a former model and occasional actress. Let's recall some memorably it-girl moments of five breath-takingly iconic personas acing its ensembles



Screen grab from Karan's Insta

KJo @52!

Karan Johar, who turned a year older, announces his directorial project

Bollywood stars including Kareena Kapoor, Malaika Arora, Kiara Advani, Tota Roy Choudhury among others took to social media to pour in their birthday wishes as well as expressed their deep-seated love and friendship for the dearest filmmaker. As the multi-faceted star-director turned a year older and better yesterday, he also announced his impending directorial project. Although untitled, the official declaration left fans and celebs in awe for KJo is back in action. Wearing a white shirt and holding what he called an 'untitled narration draft,' Karan's friends threw him a spectacular party that was attended by Anil Kapoor, Kajol Devgan, Farah Khan and many others.



Kajol



Kareena Kapoor Khan and Tanya Dubash with Karan Johar



KATE MIDDLETON

To date, we've seen the Princess of Wales wear two dresses from The Vampire's Wife in public. William and Kate visited Cambridgeshire on the 23rd of June 2022. The couple spent the day celebrating the region and championing the work of key charitable organisations in the area.

During the royal visit, the Prince of Wales and Kate unveiled a new portrait of themselves to the public for the first time. She wore a shimmering green Falconetti dress at the

time and later donned herself in a magnificent magenta dress for their Belize reception.

GRETA GERWIG

The Lady Bird director donned herself in a sparkling The Vampire's Wife's The Midnight Tremors Dress to her film, Barbie's celebration revelry. The actress-turned-filmmaker likes simplicity, so with the cape-like, cascading sleeves anchoring the soft silhouette, it was the perfect choice.



OLIVIA WILDE

While the paparazzi zoomed in for a closer look in 2021 at Olivia Wilde and Harry Styles on the set of *Don't Worry Darling* in L.A. Wilde pepped up her signature uniform of low-rise, relaxed trousers, Converse, and chain jewellery stacked over a logo tee with a crew-neck from The Vampire's Wife.



KYLIE MINOGUE

When Nick Cave threw an intimate party in 2017 as his band, The Bad Seeds, completed their 2017 Europe tour, the festivity was joined by pop icon Kylie Minogue. It was an evening over fish and chips and Kylie singing her heart out in a black peplum dress featuring subtle violet glowy trigon motifs.

MAXIMISE LUCKY JUPITER'S ENERGY!

OSCAR CAINER

YOUR HOROSCOPE FOR THE WEEK BEGINNING

26 MAY 2024

ARIES



March 21 - April 20

You're trying to sort out a confusing situation. It's baffling. As soon as you think you've grasped what to do, you discover another complication. But this is Planet Earth. We live on a ball of rock which is spinning through space. Billions of people come here, but where they were before, and where they go to when they leave is a big mystery. Uncertainty lies at the heart of our world. Maybe we come here because of all the craziness! You might not find a clear answer this week. But if you accept what's going on, you'll find joy.

I've got so much more to tell you. Great news awaits! For free audio and video forecasts visit infree.cainer.com

TAURUS



April 21-May 21

Experts on human behaviour might have different views. But they all accept that we don't know as much as we think we do. We all tend to make decisions about how we view the world, and then choose how we're going to interact with it. And then, we stick to those ideas and ways of being. It takes something dramatic to happen for us to change our ways. This week's inspiring cosmic climate brings you the insight to review your approach to a relationship. Without the need for a drama, things are about to get better.

To find out how your life could change for the better, check out your free forecasts. Visit infree.cainer.com

GEMINI



May 22-June 22

I'm starting your forecast with a drum roll. Welcome to the Gemini Show! This all singing (well, maybe some humming), all dancing (well, moving about a lot), world class (well, in your own world at least) event is heralded by Jupiter (planet of good fortune) arriving in your sign. What does it mean? In one word, progress. This is partly caused by changing circumstances. But mainly created by your changing attitude. You can see things differently. That means you can do whatever you need to do... and enjoy a successful outcome.

What does your heart desire and can you achieve it? For free audio and video forecasts visit infree.cainer.com

Jupiter's arrival in Gemini heralds an inspiring era. This is the lucky planet's first visit to the sign of intellect and communication since 2012, and it encourages us to rediscover our sense of wonder. There will be opportunities to explore new philosophies that can improve the ways we interact in our personal relationships, and with the wider world. It's a cosmic invitation to be imaginative and explore new adventures. With bold, brilliant ideas, which can be easily expressed, breakthroughs are possible.

CANCER June 23-July 23



You're determined to focus and deal with a long-standing issue. It's been on your to-do list for too long. But although you're prioritising the right thing, you can afford to take the pressure off. This week brings an inspiring idea that leads to a shortcut. But to find it, you need to stand back a little and reassess. From this new vantage point, you'll be able to see this situation in its true perspective. It might not have changed, but you have. And your new way of being gives you the insight to deal with it, in a satisfyingly simple way.

View your challenges in a new light... and sort them! For free audio and video forecasts visit infree.cainer.com

LEO



July 24-August 23

Some people think we need to force change to happen; that if we don't take action, everything will stay the same. Other folks think that the less we do, the wiser we are; that if we let things be, they have a way of sorting themselves out. There are, of course, times when we need to get motivated and roll up our sleeves, and times when it's better to stand back and allow things to unfold. Which of these policies should you follow this week? Under these powerful skies, with just a little energy, you can achieve a lot. Get cracking!

Will the dream you're chasing come true? Find out! For free audio and video forecasts visit infree.cainer.com

VIRGO



August 24-September 23

They say we need to be careful what we wish for, because we might get it. This strange expression is based on the fact that we think we know what we want, but when we get it, we might realise it's not what we need. But sometimes, the cosmos takes a while to respond to a request. And when it arrives, we've forgotten we ever wished for it. This week brings something you were once desperate for. And with Jupiter in a new home, keep making new wishes. They might not come true this week... but in the future... who knows!

For great advice to guide you to a brighter future, check out your free audio and video forecasts. Visit infree.cainer.com

LIBRA



September 24-October 23

Something in your world is starting to make sense. Yay! Once everything has fallen into place, you're going to find it easy to reach a decision. But there's no need to rush. This week, with Jupiter changing signs, even more things will start making sense! Since you've been dealing with so much uncertainty, it's understandable that you want to reach a place of stability... fast. But in the disorder lies a possibility you haven't been able to see. What happens this week might surprise you - but it will delight and reassure you too.

Live life to the max! For inspiring advice, check out your free audio and video forecasts. Visit infree.cainer.com

SCORPIO



October 24-November 22

We have an amazing ability to overlook things that happen every day. We get used to the sound of traffic. We adapt to city lights and country smells. It's only when we've been away for a while that we become aware of our adaptability. And sometimes too, we adapt to things we shouldn't adapt to. This week brings the clarity to recognise a situation you should probably have objected to a while ago. Don't concern yourself with why you allowed things to carry on in a less-than-desirable way. Just implement positive change.

Change is possible! Get some valuable help. For free audio and video forecasts visit infree.cainer.com

SAGITTARIUS November 23-December 21



Are you expecting your week to be filled with love, joy, and creative energy? I hope so! With your ruler's change of signs, it can be all these things... and more. Just don't expect it to be completely trouble-free. Problems will continue to roll up - because that's what they always do. But with your optimistic attitude you'll be able to deal with whatever comes along without losing your joie de vivre. Your spirits are being uplifted. And the more generously you share those good vibes, the better you'll feel and the more progress you'll make.

You've got so much to look forward to! Be inspired! Check out your free audio and video forecasts. Visit infree.cainer.com

CAPRICORN



December 22-January 20

You don't enjoy talking about your problems; you don't want to be known as a moaner. You don't particularly like talking about your successes either; you don't want to brag. And talking about other people is tricky; you're not a gossip. You've got something important to share with someone, and you're concerned your motives will be misinterpreted. But if you speak from your heart, and trust in the truth, your reputation in their eyes will be enhanced. And the connection that develops will be supportive in ways you can't imagine.

Nothing is hopeless. If you want positive news, check out your free audio and video forecasts. Visit infree.cainer.com

AQUARIUS



January 21-February 19

You can achieve what you want to achieve. It's just you might not be able to achieve it at the pace you want. Which, since you're feeling inspired, is frustrating. You don't like waiting around. You're much more of the 'strike while the iron's hot' type. But unless you want sparks to fly, you need to bide your time. This is a cause worth fighting for. You want to get it right. This week brings insight that will enable you to take great strides. Just ensure you're fully 'in the know' before you get going. You don't have long to wait.

What's in the sky? Helpful planetary alignments! For free audio and video forecasts visit infree.cainer.com

PISCES



February 20-March 20

Just because you can't tele-transport, leap over buildings, or make yourself invisible doesn't mean you don't have special powers. Your Piscean sensitivity and empathy bless you with the ability to understand people's thoughts and motives; sometimes your skills are so good you can tell them things about themselves they don't know. You intuitively understand what's on their hearts. This week, as your traditional ruler, Jupiter, moves into Gemini, your instincts are super-honed. You can use them to sort out a misunderstanding.

Solve problems. Ease troubles. Find solutions! For free audio and video forecasts visit infree.cainer.com

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The late Jonathan Cainer's nephew Oscar, will bring you your weekly zodiac forecasts over the weeks and months to come. For more from Oscar, visit cainer.com

UNLEASHING DOG'S INNER ATHLETE



Dog sports aren't only about competing and winning; experts say it's about taming canine aggression and creating a calmer, more well-behaved temperament

CHOKITA PAUL

THE ASIAN AGE

With dog assaults on the rise, experts say aggression in dogs is frequently linked to owner behaviour and a lack of understanding. What might be the reason behind all of these? Are dogs aggressive by nature? Is there a way to get rid of this or will you have to use a cage or a chain to control your dog?

Experts say, there are practical tactics and exercises for reducing your pet's aggression and cultivating a calmer, more manageable temperament.

Canine fitness is crucial for a dog's health and well-being. Dogs, like humans, require frequent exercise to maintain a healthy weight, gain muscle strength, and enhance cardiovascular health and reduce tendencies towards aggression.

AVENUES TO CHANNELISE ENERGIES

Dog sports in India, such as the Platinum Jubilee Dog Show in Chandigarh and the All India Championship Dog Show in Bengaluru, as well as the introduction of flyball races by Commando Kennels and Progressive Canines, a dog training community in Hyderabad, provide avenues for channelling canine energy and drives.

TRAINING INSTILLS DISCIPLINE & OBEDIENCE

So, what does sport dog training entail? It is intended for active dogs and owners who want to develop their dog's body awareness, strength, or flexibility. Trainers focus on training dogs to differentiate between sporting events and daily conditions while remaining calm. They seek to prevent aggressive behaviours from appearing in non-sporting settings, such as everyday life.



"I firmly believe that dog sports are essential for fostering a strong bond between humans and their furry companions. In a country like India, where dogs often serve as guard animals or street companions, engaging them in sports offers not only physical exercise but also mental stimulation and companionship," says **Mantravadi Chandra Shekar**, founder of Hyderabad's Progressive Canines.

Dog sports serve as a platform for dogs to showcase their natural abilities and intelligence. "It's also about celebrating the potential of each dog, regardless of breed or background. Ours is a country where stray and abandoned dogs are abundant; promoting dog sports encourages adoption and responsible pet ownership. It stresses training and nurturing dogs, highlighting their potential as athletes. Moreover, dog sports promote a sense of community among dog lovers. They bring together people from diverse backgrounds, united by their love for dogs and the thrill of competition. Through events and competitions, we can educate the public about the joys and benefits of having dogs as part of our lives," says



Chandra Shekar.

THE DOG-HUMAN BOND

Behind every great competitor in protective sports is a dedicated trainer who understands the nuances of the discipline. The training procedure requires a delicate balance of educating the dog to protect while not becoming overly aggressive. It starts with basic obedience instructions like seat, remain, and recall, then progresses to more complex activities that mimic real-life scenarios. Handlers must always maintain outstanding control over their pets.

In order to make sure their dog feels safe and comfortable throughout training sessions, handlers must read their dog's body language and cues.

Jasleen Kaur, a veterinarian at All Vet Pet Clinic, says, "Pet ownership is becoming more common, and activities like dog sports serve a dual purpose. First of



IN FEBRUARY, APPROXIMATELY 300 DOGS FROM 48 DIFFERENT BREEDS PARTICIPATED IN THE PLATINUM JUBILEE DOG SHOW. SIMILARLY, THE QILA RAIPUR SPORTS FESTIVAL OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPECIAL BREEDS TO ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES, ALLOWING DOGS TO EXPEND THEIR ENERGY IN A CONTROLLED SETTING.

PAWSITIVE VIBES

J.S. Rama Krishna, pet parent of a golden retriever named Bingo and head of pet food at Growl Group, believes that owners should not place unrealistic expectations on their pets. "Training should not be severe. The dog's well-being should always come first. While obedience is crucial, sports should be approached as a personal respite, even if they are for dogs. Shouldn't be so strong. Sports, whether for dogs or humans, should be considered as a personal respite. Even if the dog is simply running about, they should be content and comfortable."

PASSION FOR DISCIPLINE KNOWS NO BOUNDS

Protection dog sports have gained momentum since their inception in other countries. Referred to as the Protection Sports Association, or PSA, this endeavour demands dedication from dog handlers as they navigate through obedience and protection routines. The competition comprises the 'obedience' phase initially and the 'protection' phase later on. In levels 1 through 3, obedience is evaluated on a 100-point scale, while protection is scored on a scale of 200 to 240 points, depending on the level being attained.

THESE ACTIVITIES ALLOW HIGH-DRIVE WORKING BREEDS TO EXPRESS THEIR ENERGY AND INTELLIGENCE, MINIMISING BOREDOM AND BEHAVIOURAL CONCERNS.



PHANTOM



GARFIELD



BLONDIE



FUNDAMENTALS SENJAM RAJ SEKHA

FUNDA OF THE WEEK

Chinni Krishnan died in 1979 at the relatively young age of 48 in Chennai. In the seventies, he modified a machine that sealed PVC folders and came up with something that was an innovation in the consumer industry. What did he come up with? (Philip Joshua, Secunderabad)

ANSWERS:
Sachets. His company Gavinkare was the first one to come up with sachets for consumer products like shampoo.

Some of Bollywood's musical pieces have been inspired by other musical pieces or just plain lift offs. Take this quiz on copycat songs.

Write your suggestions, questions (with answers) to senjam@gmail.com.

COPYCAT SONGS

- 'Tamma Tamma Loge' from the movie Thanedar and 'Jumma Chumma De Do' from Hum, were both lifts from 'Tama' sung by an African singer from Guinea. Name him?
- 'Itna na mujhse tu pyaar badha' composed by Salil Chowdhury from Chhaya is inspired by a famous western classical music piece. Which one?
- Zigeunerjunge (Gypsy Boy) released in 1967 was the first hit single of German singer Alexandra. How do Bollywood fans remember this piece of music?
- 'Ta Rialia' (Money) is one of the most liked songs in Cyprus. The song was made popular by Michalis Violaris in 1973. Which 1975 movie made this tune famous in India?
- The tune of John Ford's classic western 1946 'My Darling Clementine' has inspired which classic Bombay song from the movie 'CID'?
- The Polish folk song 'Szla Dzieweczka' has several versions across the world. What is the Hindi version that people of India are familiar with?
- Kourosch Yaghmaei is one of Iran's first rock musicians in the 1970s. His song 'Havar Havar' has been much copied in Bollywood. Which song are we talking about?
- 'Khambakt Ishq' from

'Pyar Tune Kya Kiya' has been inspired by 'Eireann', a song composed by group that combines Irish and West African music with Electronic dance rhythms. Name the group?

'Jab koi baat bigad jaye' tune from 'Jurm' is lift from the popular English song '500 miles'. This song has several versions by Bobby Bare, the Seekers and Peter, Paul & Mary. Who sang the original version?

'Aao Twist Karein' sung by Manna Dey and composed by RD Burman is a copy of Chubby Checker's 'Let's Twist'. In which movie was 'Aao Twist Karein' featured?

ANYTHING GOES

- William Sydney Porter trained as a pharmacist but became a writer. How do you better know him? (Arnab Ghosal, Secunderabad)

ANSWERS

- Mory Kanite
- 40th Symphony by Mozart
- 'Dilbar Mere Kab Tak Mujhe' from 'Sate Pe Satta' sung by Kishore Kumar to RD Burman's inspired composition
- Sholay. The song is 'Mehbooba Mehbooba'
- It is the oldest ever surviving aerial photograph in the world.
- Ralph Bunche: African American diplomat who got the 1950 Nobel Peace for his work as a United Nations mediator in the Palestine conflict.
- Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin attributed to Pakistani singer Hassan Jahangir
- Afro Celt Sound System
- Hedy West
- Bhoot Bangla

ANYTHING GOES

- Bhoot Bangla

COPYCAT SONGS