

The Tribune

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

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HAMAS FIRES BARRAGE OF ROCKETS INTO ISRAEL, 1ST STRIKE IN MONTHS **WORLD**



BIG TURNOUT REFLECTS GOVT'S SUCCESSFUL UT POLICY: SHAH J&K



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MONDAY | 27 MAY 2024

Not against Muslims, but Cong's appeasement politics: PM Modi

Says NDA set for historic victory, INDIA bloc to crumble after elections

ADITI TANDON
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MAY 26 Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the ruling BJP-led NDA combine was headed for a historic win in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the Opposition INDIA bloc would disintegrate after the polls.

The Tribune INTERVIEW
FULL COVERAGE INSIDE

In an exclusive interview with *The Tribune* on the eve of the last and seventh phase of the 18th General Election on June 1, the Prime Minister talked about a range of issues, including his "ghus-pethiye" (infiltrators) and "those with more children" remarks, saying these were never aimed at Muslims.

"When I say illegal infiltrators or people with more children, why are you assuming that I was referring to Muslims? When I question the Congress' divisive policies that aim to appease Muslims, I am speaking against the Congress, not against Mus-



lims," he said, emphasising that speaking against appeasement politics was the most pro-Muslim stance one could take because the biggest victims of vote bank politics were Muslims themselves and they too had steadily begun to "see through the Congress game". The Prime Minister pledged the BJP's commitment to bringing the Uniform Civil Code to its logical conclusion "in his third term" and singled the Con-

gress out to say that the opposition party would "repeat its listless performance as in 2014 and 2019". For the BJP, PM Modi, running for a record third term in office, predicted significant gains in the south even as he termed the opposition alliance as "opportunistic and one without any vision or mission".

"In Delhi, they say 'hum saath saath hain'; in Punjab, they say 'hum aapke hain kaun'," said the Prime Min-

Urban Naxals ruling Punjab

Punjab results will stun you. Do remember I told you this first... the decision to part with SAD was well-thought-out. The ruling Punjab leadership mirrors the ideology of urban Naxals and people are worried they may take the state down the wrong path again. **Narendra Modi, PM**

ON AAP-CONG PACT...

Oppn has no agreement on vision or leadership. In Delhi, they say *hum saath saath hain*; in Punjab, they say *hum aapke hain kaun*.

ON ED, CBI RAIDS...

Yes, the corrupt are being targeted. The country saw heaps of cash recovered by the agencies, which shows the ED & CBI are on track.

ister, who listed lifting of 25 crore people out of poverty as the topmost national achievement in 10 years of NDA rule apart from the grant of basic amenities from toilets to gas connections to crores of deprived households.

In other important remarks, the Prime Minister cited the May 24 Calcutta High Court order cancelling OBC certificates granted to 77 communities by West Bengal's Trinamool Congress government since 2010 to

reiterate his accusation that the "Congress-led INDIA bloc had a track record of diluting SC/ST/OBC quota and giving it to the Muslims".

The overwhelming majority of OBC certificates cancelled by the Calcutta HC were the ones awarded to Muslim communities, the Prime Minister pointed out, rejecting the Opposition's charge that the BJP wanted 400-plus Lok Sabha seats to scrap constitutionally mandated quotas.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

7 newborns killed in Delhi hospital fire

Didn't have licence, qualified docs

ANSHITA MEHRA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MAY 26

Seven newborns, six 15 days old and one 25 days old, were killed in a massive fire that broke out at a private children's hospital in east Delhi's Vivek Vihar late Saturday night, officials said on Sunday.

Twelve newborns were admitted to Baby Care Newborn Hospital and the five who survived have been admitted to another facility in the city.

In shocking revelations, the Delhi Police said the hospital was operating despite the expiry of its licence on March 31 and it had no clearance from the fire department and also lacked qualified doctors. "Even the expired licence issued to the hospital allowed only five beds," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Shahdara) Surendra Choudhary said.

Delhi Fire Services officials said the blaze broke out around 11.30 pm and soon spread to two other adjacent buildings. Oxygen cylinders kept in the two-storey building exploded due to which the adjacent buildings were damaged, the officials said.

According to eyewitnesses, locals and members of an



Firefighters attempt to douse the hospital blaze in New Delhi. ANI

RAJKOT GAMING ZONE FIRE TOLL 35, 2 HELD

The police have registered an FIR against six partners of a gaming zone in Gujarat's Rajkot city on charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder and arrested two persons after a fire there killed 35 persons, officials said on Sunday. **BACK PAGE**

NGO, Shaheed Sewa Dal, were the first to rush for help. Some residents are learnt to have climbed the building from the backside and rescued some of the infants. A

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11
EDIT: RAJKOT TRAGEDY

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Army Chief gets extension; to hit seniority line

AJAY BANERJEE
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MAY 26

The government on Sunday announced a one-month extension in service for Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande, who was to superannuate on May 31. This is the first time that the tenure of an Army Chief has been extended since the Indira government gave an extension to Gen SHFJ Manekshaw for his contribution during the 1971 war.

In a statement, the Ministry of Defence said, "The Appointments Committee of Cabinet, which met on May 26, approved the extension in service of Chief of the Army Staff General Manoj C Pande for a period of one month beyond his normal

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11
Today's issue is of 18 pages, including four-page Delhi Tribune.

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MLA's death brings down Saini govt's strength to 42, Opposition may push for floor test again

GEETANJALI GAYATRI
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, MAY 26
With polling over, the troubles for the Nayab Singh Saini-led "minority" government in the state are likely to escalate with their number in the Vidhan Sabha dropping to 42 in the now 87-member House.

Sources said opposition parties were gearing up for a fresh round of "pressure" for a floor test with the BJP down from 43 to 42 following the death of Badshahpur MLA Rakesh Daultabad, an Independent, who was supporting the BJP government.

The BJP has 40 MLAs in the 90-member House, which has a reduced strength of 87. Two members—Manohar Lal Khattar after he was replaced as Chief Minister and named the BJP's Karnal candidate, and Independent MLA Ranjit Singh who joined the BJP and was fielded by the party from Hisar after the Lok Sabha poll was announced—resigned as MLAs. Daultabad died following a heart attack yesterday.

The party now has the sup-



Former Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and CM Nayab Singh Saini in Karnal. FILE PHOTO

WILL NEED 44 MLAs TO PROVE MAJORITY IN 87-MEMBER HOUSE

■ While the BJP needs 45 MLAs to prove its majority in the House of 88 MLAs, it will require 44 MLAs to prove a majority in the 87-member House

■ Sources said Opposition is gearing up for a fresh round of "pressure" for a floor test with the BJP down from 43 to 42 following the death of Badshahpur MLA, who was supporting it

port of one Independent MLA, Nayan Pal Rawat, and the sole MLA of the Haryana Lokhit Party, Gopal Kanda.

On the other hand, the

Congress, with 30 MLAs, has the support of three Independent MLAs—Sombir Sangwan, Randhir Singh Gollen and Dharam-

pal Gonder—who withdrew support from the Saini government a fortnight back and extended support to the Congress.

INLD MLA Abhay Singh Chautala is also a part of the Opposition presently, as is Independent MLA Balraj Kundu. It remains to be seen

which way they will swing if a trust vote is held.

The JJP with 10 MLAs, some of who have rebelled against the leadership, has also offered "outside" support to the Congress. The "rebels" are either in touch with the BJP or the Congress.

In this Lok Sabha election, JJP MLA Ram Kumar Gautam praised PM Narendra Modi and indirectly urged his workers to extend support to the BJP in Hisar, even though JJP leader and former Deputy CM Dushyant Chautala's mother, Naina, was in the fray from this seat.

Another JJP MLA, Devinder Singh Babli's non-government organisation announced its support to Selja, the Congress candidate from Sirsa.

Though Babli maintained that he remained a JJP MLA till his term ended, he had left the future course of action open-ended.

While the BJP needed 45 MLAs to prove its majority in the House of 88 MLAs, it will require 44 MLAs to prove a majority in the 87-member House.

Poll analysts mull impact of low turnout in Rohtak

RAWINDER SAINI
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

ROHTAK, MAY 26

The lower-than-expected turnout in the Lok Sabha elections in the Rohtak parliamentary constituency has not only forced leaders of various parties to find out its impact on their poll prospects, but also kept political analysts busy in discussing the trend and assessing the ground reality. However, leaders and supporters of both main parties—the Congress and BJP—are claiming victory of their candidates.

A total 26 candidates were in the electoral battle here, but there is a direct contest between BJP's Arvind Sharma and Congress's Deepender Hooda. The Rohtak parliamentary constituency had recorded 65.69 per cent voter turnout in the Lok Sabha poll, the voting for which took place on Saturday. The turnout is nearly 5 per cent lesser than the previous elections held in 2019.

"The low voter turnout as compared to the previous elections will affect poll prospects of both parties as the decline has been equally recorded in

both rural and urban areas. The Congress is strong among voters in rural areas while the BJP has a considerable support base among urbanites. The main issue for discussion is that why are the elections losing their charm among the voters? Are they fed up of the leaders or is there any other reason for the low turnout?" asked a political analyst.

A senior Congress leader said the below-expected turnout clearly favoured the Congress as the majority of electors who were fed up with the BJP government had exercised their franchise.

"Besides anti-incumbency, farm and wrestlers' agitations, unemployment, inflation and Agniveer Scheme have emerged as the major issues in the elections, hence keeping in view these factors, it can be easily ascertained that the low turnout is against the BJP," he added. On the other hand, Shamsheer Kharak, a BJP leader, said it was a common perception that low turnout always went in favour of the ruling party and high turnout was considered against it.

CANDIDATES UNWIND A DAY AFTER POLLING

Enjoyed home meal after long, says Tanwar

ANIL KAKKAR

SIRSA, MAY 26

The long and extensive campaign for the Lok Sabha elections came to an end late Saturday evening. On Sunday, the candidates who had been active in the field took the opportunity to rest at home and held meetings with their workers. Previously, the candidates would start campaigning as early as 6 am, but on Sunday, they woke up late.

After nearly a month, they sat down to have breakfast with their families. BJP candidate Ashok Tanwar stayed at his residence in Sector 20. Around 9 am, he had breakfast with his family. After-

wards, he held a meeting with party workers to get updates on the voting. Ashok Tanwar expressed gratitude to the voters of Sirsa, party leaders and workers. When asked about fatigue from the long campaign, Tanwar said, "When one has passion for national interest and are mentally strong, fatigue doesn't become an issue." He said political temperatures were running high and due to intense campaigning, he suffered a heat stroke two days ago. Claiming victory for the BJP on all 10 seats in the state, he announced that he would attend a BJP meeting in Chandigarh on May 27.

Naina-Sunaina take a day off

DEEPENDER DESWAL
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

HISAR, MAY 26

BJP candidate Ranjit Singh visited the BJP office at around 10.30 am for a meeting and then arrived at the election office for another meeting with key poll strategists.

He told *The Tribune* that he was heading for Chandigarh for a meeting with party candidates in the evening. "The next course of action will be decided after the meeting. I am not tired and am ready for any task the party gives me," he said. Congress candidate Jai Prakash stayed at the residence of his brother here today. "I am not exhausted. Party workers have been visiting me since morning," he said.

Dinesh Sheoran, a Congress leader from Narnaund, said they made off-hand calculations of the turnout in different Hisar segments.

Chautala 'bahus' Naina (JJP) and Sunaina (INLD) have taken a break after the long session of campaigning. Party sources said Naina returned to Sirsa yesterday and was likely to return to Hisar in a few days for a meeting with the party workers, said a JJP leader. Sunaina, however, remained at her rented accommodation in Hisar today and did not meet anybody. She is scheduled to hold a workers' meeting in Hisar tomorrow.



Congress nominee Trilochan Singh with party workers.

Trilochan: Met workers, thanked them for efforts

PARVEEN ARORA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

KARNAL, MAY 26

Days after hectic campaigning and elections for the Karnal Lok Sabha and Assembly segment, candidates got a moment of respite and held meetings with party workers to take stock of the situation.

Throughout the day, candidates and their teams analysed data, gauged public sentiment and appreciated the efforts of party workers and supporters.

Former Chief Minister and BJP candidate Manohar Lal Khattar sat with workers at the party's district office here to assess the poll outcomes by gathering feedback

and analysing the voting patterns. He expressed satisfaction with the campaign's progress and remained confident about his victory.

Congress candidate Divyanshu Budhiraja also held meetings with party workers and visited the strongroom to check the security arrangements.

He thanked people of Karnal and Panipat for their support, claiming, "People of Karnal have taken steps to remove Khattar and Saini from Karnal." Congress candidate for the Karnal bypoll, Trilochan Singh, held meetings with his party workers and thanked them.

Haryana soldier, 20 others die of 'heat stroke' in Rajasthan

SUMEDHA SHARMA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

GURUGRAM, MAY 26

At least 21 people, including a soldier hailing from Haryana, died of suspected heat stroke in Rajasthan in the past two days. Sandeep Kumar, who was posted in Bikaner, died at the Mahajan field firing range.

With temperatures touching 49°C in Rajasthan, the authorities have issued an advisory to all residents to stay indoors and take appropriate measures and keep hydrated. Tourists have been advised to avoid travelling to the state.

The mercury surged to 49°C in Rajasthan's Phalodi, the highest temperature recorded in the country this year.

Kirori Lal Meena, Rajasthan's Minister of Disaster Management and Relief, said his government would provide a "relief package" to all victims. "State residents have been asked to follow SOP in case of heatwave.

People should not venture out during noon and afternoon and should stay hydrated.

Senior citizens and children need extra care and should remain indoors. Tourists should abstain from visiting areas record-

HEATWAVE TO GO ON TILL MAY 28

According to IMD, the extreme heat will continue in parts of Delhi, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, west Uttar Pradesh and west Madhya Pradesh until May 28.

ing high temperatures," said an advisory issued by the government.

The state has seen cancellation of around 50 per cent of bookings. Official data shows that at least 23 places in Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh recorded maximum temperatures of 45°C or above yesterday.

According to IMD, the extreme heat will continue in parts of Delhi, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, west Uttar Pradesh and west Madhya Pradesh until May 28. It has suggested "extreme care" for vulnerable people.

Meanwhile, over 300 bats have died suddenly at Menar village of Udaipur district, raising concerns. According to the Forest and Animal Husbandry Department, prima facie the reason appears to be heat stroke.

Five killed in road mishap in Hisar

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

HISAR, MAY 26

Five persons were killed while three others suffered serious injuries after the SUV they were travelling in fell into a deep roadside nullah and overturned on a bypass road in Hisar town today.

The victims, who belonged to same family from Sirsa and Bhatinda districts, were on their way to Hansi when the accident took place.

The SUV overturned, fell into nullah

The deceased have been identified as Satpal, Ravi Singh, Gagar Singh, his wife Madhu and his brother Ranjit Singh.

Three others, including Tarsem Singh, his wife Geetu and another woman Dimple suffered serious injuries. They have been admitted to a private hospital in Hisar. According to information, the accident occurred when the driver of the SUV took a sharp turn in an attempt to avoid a collision with a truck near a turn in Sector 27 on a bypass road here.

The police rushed to the spot and took the victims to the hospital with the help of some locals.



BJP's Ashok Tanwar offers sweets to party workers at his house.

Haryana Diary

Meham MLA remained 'silent' during LS poll

Rohtak: Meham Independent MLA Balraj Kundu, who has attacked the BJP government many a time in the past on different issues, remained inactive throughout the Lok Sabha poll. Kundu neither campaigned for any party/candidate in the Rohtak parliamentary constituency nor did he give any message to his supporters here. Since the Assembly elections are merely five months away, it seems that he is in no mood to take any step which might affect his plan for the Assembly poll. Hence, he chose to remain "silent" in the elections.

RaGa earned brownie points, says analyst

Rohtak: Addressing a rally in the Bhiwani-Mahendragarh Lok Sabha constituency recently, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi promised direct monetary benefits to the women of poor families and unemployed youth, apart from assuring farmers of waiving their loans and making a law to guarantee the provision of minimum support price (MSP). Rahul also promised to scrap the Agniveer Scheme on coming to power. His announcements elicited a rousing response from the gathering. Political observers say the credibility of the Congress leader has improved considerably in the past few years. "People have started to believe in Rahul. However, this was not the case till the 2019 General Election," says Ranbir

Kadiyan, a political analyst.

Ambala voters relaxed, candidates anxious

Yamunanagar: After casting their votes in the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections on May 25, voters are now in a relaxed mood in the state. The counting of votes will take place on June 4. Along with the candidates of the Lok Sabha poll, the prospective candidates for the Assembly elections are also worried about the results of these elections. Political observers say they are anxious as the results of the Lok Sabha poll may impact the Assembly elections, which will be held in the state after a few months.

Congress factionalism comes to fore

Panipat: Factionalism in the Congress party is always at its peak and it was also seen on the polling day in Panipat. The booth management by the Congress has become the talk of the town. Several leaders were on the stage of Priyanka Gandhi's rally in Panipat. The poor management at several polling stations came to light after no one was found sitting at the Congress counters. A party leader attributed the poor management at the polling stations to inefficient organisation by party leaders in the state.

27 yrs & 50 judges later, petitioner gets justice

HC slams sugar corpn for harassing employee, imposes ₹2L costs

SAURABH MALIK
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, MAY 26

It is justice at last for Ramesh Chand Sharma. More than 27 years after his services as a senior training and development officer were terminated, a Division Bench of the Punjab and Haryana High Court has rapped the Indian Sugar and General Engineering Corporation for harassing him while imposing Rs 2 lakh costs on it.

The direction came as the Bench of Acting Chief Justice Gurnmeet Singh Sandhawalia and Justice Lapita Banerji dismissed the corporation's appeal against the "well-reasoned order of a Single Judge" directing the petitioner to be deemed to be reinstated in service from the date of his termination.

"Due to the capricious act and conduct on the part of the appellants in harassing a poor

FRIVOLOUS LITIGATION

“Due to the capricious act and conduct on the part of the appellants in harassing a poor employee for no fault of his own 1996 onwards and embroiling him in frivolous/unnecessary litigation, and wasting precious judicial time, this court dismisses the appeal with costs assessed at ₹2 lakh to be paid to the respondent-employee within two months. HC Bench

employee for no fault of his own 1996 onwards and embroiling him in frivolous/unnecessary litigation, and wasting precious judicial time, this court dismisses the appeal with costs assessed at Rs 2 lakh to be paid to the respondent-employee within two months,” the Bench asserted.

Sharma's plea was admitted on September 30, 1998, with a direction "to be heard in the week commencing January 18, 1999". The case moved from

one court to another and passed through the hands of almost 50 judges before being eventually listed before the Single Bench of Justice Jaishree Thakur.

Taking up the matter, Justice Thakur observed that the petitioner joined the corporation in 1981 as a labour welfare officer (LWO) before being given the additional charge of safety officer vide a letter dated June 13, 1995. He was also made training and safety officer vide an office order dated June 19,

1995. The post was subsequently re-designated as senior training and development officer and another person was transferred as LWO vide an office order dated October 19, 1995. Subsequently, he was handed over a termination letter.

His appeal was rejected on the ground that he accepted the training officer's post in violation of the Punjab Welfare Officers Recruitment and Conditions Service Rules 1953, which did not permit a welfare officer to perform any other duty or hold any other post without the government's prior permission.

The Bench asserted that the appellants not only violated the statutory rules while terminating his service, but also the Punjab Welfare Officer Recruitment and Conditions of Service Rules, 1952, by imposing additional duties on the LWO.

PM anti-farmer, oust him: Priyanka

MANAV/MANDER/AMAN SOOD
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

KHANNA/PATIALA, MAY 26
Priyanka Gandhi today kick-started her Punjab campaign by addressing the Nyay Sankalp rally at the new grain market in Khanna. The Congress general secretary, Priyanka campaigned in favour of Fatehgarh Sahib candidate Dr Amar Singh.

Attired in a Punjabi suit, Priyanka greeted the crowd with "Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki fateg. Sat Sri Akal saareya nu". The crowd was in awe of Priyanka's charisma and everyone stood up from their chairs to catch her glimpse.

Lashing out at the BJP, she said, "It does not understand the jazba (spirit) and emotions of Punjabis. Today I am standing on the land of the Gurus, which is also known as the land of martyrs, and I am the daughter and grand-



Priyanka Gandhi with senior Congress leaders in Khanna on Sunday. HIMANSHU MAHAJAN

daughter of a martyr. PM Modi has never respected farmers, who made the coun-

ty self-sufficient with their sweat and blood. The one who gives us food is a farmer and

one who guards the nation at the border is also a farmer's son", she said.

She said the scenario in the country had changed for the last 10 years and it had become difficult for farmers to survive. The GST had been imposed but the MSP as promised, had not been given to farmers by the government.

Attacking Modi, she said, "Satta ke liye kuch bhi kar dalenge Modi ji" and it had come to limelight during farmers' protest. "He did not care when they were dying and we lost 700 farmers in the year-long protest. It is just before the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections that he repealed the three farm laws. This shows how he can do anything to remain in power but cares not even a bit for them," she said.

Modi had only burdened farmers with the GST while MSP remained only on papers. Not only Punjab farmers, but also apple growers of Himachal

Pradesh had been severely affected by Modi's policies of favouring corporate houses, she added.

Priyanka promised the MSP crop damage compensation within one month and GST waiver on agricultural equipment if the Congress came to power and said, "It's time to show Modi the door who can do anything to remain in power. This is the time to choose the one who holds farmers and their sacrifices as supreme."

She blamed the Modi-led Central Government for ignoring serious issues of women and doing nothing to ensure their development and social security. At the 'Naari Nyay Sammelan' event at a banquet hall in Patiala in support of Congress candidate Dr Dharmavira Gandhi, Priyanka highlighted how the BJP regime had let down women and ignored their issues.

Mann-led govt not to last long: Shah

NITIN JAIN
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

LUDHIANA, MAY 26
Union Home Minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah today termed the CM Bhagwant Mann-led AAP government as "jhola chhaap sarkar", which he said would not last long after the Lok Sabha poll.

Addressing a rally in favour of the BJP's Ludhiana nominee, Ravneet Bittu, Shah said, "I fail to understand if Mann is Arvind Kejriwal's pilot or Punjab's CM. Wherever Kejriwal goes, Mann accompanies him." He lauded Mann for not accompanying Kejriwal to jail.

He said the Punjab Government had used photos of Mann and Kejriwal on bags to deliver ration supplied by the Modi government. "Instead of spending money on bags, they should have contributed in increasing the quantity of the ration," he suggested, while reasoning why he called it a "jhola chhaap sarkar".

The Home Minister said Kejriwal would head to jail on June 2 and Modi would return as the PM following which the AAP government in Punjab would crumble under its own weight.

Come June 6, Rahul will leave country: HM

LUDHIANA, MAY 26

"The counting of votes will conclude on June 4 and on June 6, Rahul Gandhi will leave for Thailand. While Rahul is known for his frequent vacations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had spent Diwali on the border with soldiers, showing his commitment without taking a single day off during his 23-year public service so far," Home Minister Amit Shah said in an exclusive chat with *The Tribune* here on Sunday.

Shah said AAP and the Congress governments had betrayed Punjab and Himachal Pradesh for not paying Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,500 per month to every woman, which they had promised before the poll.

"In the pursuit of AAP supreme Arvind Kejriwal's interests, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has turned Punjab the party's ATM. The AAP is using the hard-earned money of the people for fighting court cases of Kejriwal and elections," he said. — TNS

Pak drone flies 10 km inside Indian territory

RAVI DHALIWAL
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

DHARIWAL (GURDASPUR), MAY 26
A Pakistani drone flew into India at the dead of night, dropped an 11 kg consignment of high-purity heroin and instead of flying back, it travelled 10 km deep into Indian territory, leaving security officers flummoxed.

Normally, state and not-state Pakistani actors send drones carrying payloads of contraband, and in some cases arms and ammunition, which drop consignments in and around villages located near the International Border (IB) before returning. Security officers admit that this was perhaps the first time that a drone from Pakistan has travelled so deep into Indian terrain.

This being election time, top government and opposition leaders have been visiting Gurdaspur district that has gained infamy for the drone-drug disturbance. On May 24, PM Narendra Modi addressed a rally in Dinanagar in the district.

Senior officers are maintaining a stoic silence. "We can't reveal much at this stage.

Midnight crash near Talwandi Virk village



Two drone-dropped packets seized by the BSF on Sunday.

Investigations are still on. However, we admit that the distance to which the drone made its way is really alarming," said an officer engaged in the search operation.

Officers, however, admitted that as drone technology becomes cheaper with every passing day and is more accessible to acquire, the problem is accelerating fast. Normally, the drones seized by the BSF have 'Made-in-China' markings on them.

Today's incident has come as a massive setback to the

security agencies fighting the drone-drug menace.

At around 1.30 am, BSF personnel of 27th Battalion manning the Chandu Wadala Border Outpost heard some unusual noise. They fired at the drone that instead of flying back into Pakistani territory started flying in the opposite direction.

Finally, it crashed near Talwandi Virk village near Dhariwal township, 10 km from where it dropped its consignment. "In all probability, it fell down after its battery got exhausted," said an officer.

Officers said the precise quantity of heroin dropped by the drone was 10.760 kg packed into two yellow coloured nylon packets.

Normally, the heroin pushed into India by Pakistan is of very high quality because it comes from Afghanistan, a country known for producing heroin of the highest standards.

The police said they were investigating the incident. Sources, however, point out to the fact that it was rare that the cops lay hands on the drugs' actual recipients. Heroin packets dropped in villages near the IB are taken to a safe place by 'local carriers'. These carriers then pass on the packets to a person, or persons, who have their faces covered and carry no mobiles for fear of being detected. This operation is usually carried out in small townships, just near from where the shipment is dropped by drones.

The cops often nab the carriers, but it is here where their investigations and trail ends. This is because the carriers do not know the identity of the person to whom they had

passed the heroin packets.

Had the BSF and police not seized today's shipment, in all probability it would have travelled beyond the borders of Gurdaspur into other cities consequently destroying the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of youth. There was also the possibility of the drug being consumed by youngsters in Gurdaspur and nearby cities.

In the Gurdaspur parliamentary seat, the drone-drug issue has taken center-stage in the run up to the General Election. Ex-Dy CM and Congress candidate Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa has gone on record as saying that when he was the Home Minister he had called a meeting of all security agencies, including Punjab Police.

"Officers told me that developing an anti-drone system was an expensive proposition. Until an antidote to the drones is found, it will be difficult to eradicate the menace. I will approach the Defence Research and Development Organisation for help, once I become an MP," he said.

5 youths nabbed with 5 kg heroin

OUR CORRESPONDENT

FAZILKA, MAY 26

Five youths formed a cartel in February this year, contacted drug smugglers and finally fell into the police net.

Baljinder Singh, alias Lovely, Sukhchain Singh, alias Lucky and Solav Singh, all residents of Peer Ke Uttar village; Gurcharan Singh, alias Milkha of Swah Wala village and Kirandeep Singh of Badal Ke village are aged between 19 and 21 years. They came in contact with one another at a stadium in Jalalabad.

They came in contact with Kamaldeep Singh (32) of Kapurthala district, who was facing two cases under the NDPS Act. They also involved one Daljit Singh (23) of border village Mahatam Nagar in Fazilka into the gang.

Fazilka SSP Pragya Jain, addressing a press conference today, said all seven accused were arrested by the police. The Jalalabad police along with BSF personnel, raided the house of Baljinder and nabbed all accused.

State results will stun people: PM

ADITI TANDON
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MAY 26
Less than a week to go for the voting in Punjab, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in an exclusive interview to *The Tribune* on Sunday, said the results in the state would stun everyone and declared that his government was willing to go one step ahead for farmers.

Describing *The Tribune* question on ongoing farm protests along the border of Punjab and Haryana as "very important", the PM said having increased the value and volume of crops under the minimum support price (MSP) regime in 10 years of the NDA rule, his government was "willing to go one step ahead for farmers".

"We want the willing farmers to embrace crop diversification and are ready to give them the necessary monetary and policy security cover. Also, crop diversification is an idea which has been supported by other parties too in the past. They have backtracked on it for political reasons, but the cost of politics should be something other than the future of farmers in Punjab and Haryana. The MSP is not going anywhere," the PM assured the farmers, who have been preventing BJP candidates from campaigning in the state.

On the Punjab election scenario, the PM said, "The results and the mood of the

AAP 'URBAN NAXALS'

PM Modi accuses the ruling Aam Aadmi Party government in the state of "mirroring the ideology of urban naxals". People are worried that this mindset can again take the state down "the wrong path".

ON PACT WITH SAD

The decision to part ways with SAD was "well thought out". Many Akalis had expressed despair over the state of affairs in the party to me. Those who think of the progress of Punjab tried to reform SAD, but failed.

people of Punjab will stun everyone."

"The results will stun you but remember, I told you first that the BJP is rising steadily in Punjab," Modi said. Asked to share his assessment of polls in the state, where the BJP was, in a first, contesting alone after severing ties with the erstwhile ally Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), the PM said, "Excellent."

He said the decision to part ways with SAD was "well thought out" and revealed that many Akali workers had expressed their despair over the state of affairs in the party to him.

"Those who think of the progress of Punjab tried to reform SAD but their efforts failed. It was not possible for our party to remain silent

while the people were unhappy... We took this decision (of separation from SAD) after much thought," said PM Modi.

SAD and the BJP first allied for the Punjab Assembly poll in 1997. The alliance ended after SAD walked out of the NDA in September 2020, protesting the farm laws which were later withdrawn.

Importantly, the PM made a clear distinction between the current SAD leadership and the party's late patriarch Parkash Singh Badal, saying "Badal Sahib's electoral loss in the 2022 Punjab elections was the first development in a series that disappointed Akali workers."

Recalling his association with the late Badal, Modi said as Gujarat CM, he would invite the late Akali stalwart to all events related to agriculture. "Like in all other things, Badal Sahib's insights on agriculture helped me immensely," said PM Modi.

"People are worried and feel it is only the BJP which can not only save Punjab, but also put it firmly on the path of peace, progress and prosperity," he said, hailing the role of Sikhs in nation building.

He accused the AAP government in the state of "mirroring the ideology of urban naxals" and said people of Punjab were worried that this mindset could again take the state down "the wrong path".

People looking for change: Tharoor

NEHA SAINI
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

AMRITSAR, MAY 26
In this election season full of speeches, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor refrained from giving one as he campaigned for Gurjeet Singh Aujla in Amritsar.

Instead, he shared a poem. "Since, I am in Punjab I won't say 'sab change si' or what not, because things are not-so-change. We are witnessing disturbing trends in our country as democracy is being diluted gradually. Over the last few years, the country has not seen Hindutva grow, instead Moditva grow, where we see the picture of the PM on rice bags, his life-size cut-outs at railway stations placed for a selfie and even on Covid-vaccine certificates. This has now become truly embarrassing. People are looking for a change," he said.

While addressing the issues of trade and industry in Amritsar, Tharoor said if the INDIA bloc wins, several trade policies and projects would be reconsidered. "We will ensure that your concerns are heard and promises fulfilled. We had done that during Dr Manmohan Singh's government and we will do it now as well," added Tharoor.

Replying to a question on who would be the PM in case the INDIA bloc wins, Tharoor said, "The decision on PM candidate will be taken unanimously. We are a presidential party that runs on parliamentary system."

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THE GOLD STANDARD OF MILK

AMUL DOODH PEETA HAI INDIA

BJP CANDIDATE HELD FOR VANDALISING EVM

Bhubaneswar: A BJP candidate was arrested in Odisha's Khurda for allegedly vandalising an EVM as he had to wait in queue for long to cast his vote because the machine malfunctioned, officials said on Sunday. Prashant Jagdev, the BJP MLA of Chilika, has been fielded this time from the Khurda Assembly segment. The incident happened on Saturday at booth 114 in Bolagad block's Kauripatna in Begunia Assembly.

MAN USES WEDDING INVITE TO PROTEST EVMs

Latur: Aman from Maharashtra's Latur district has expressed his opposition to the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) through his wedding invite. The wedding invitation card of Deepak Kamble, a resident of Ajansonda (Khurd) in Chakur tehsil, carries the message "Ban EVM; Save Democracy". Kamble, whose wedding is scheduled in Latur city on June 8, said several people want the EC to revert to ballot papers.

WILL DEDICATE VICTORY TO KARUNANIDHI: STALIN

Chennai: Tamil Nadu CM and DMK chief MK Stalin on Sunday said his party would dedicate the INDIA bloc's victory in Lok Sabha polls to late party patriarch M Karunanidhi and celebrate his centenary on June 3 at the national level. When democracy faced crisis, "leaders from North India looked up to Karunanidhi" and it was his "stellar contributions" that ensured the retrieval of democracy, he said.

POLL SNIPPETS

Fearing loss, Modi behaving like dictator, says Kejriwal in Punjab

ANIRUDH GUPTA/SUKHMEET BHASIN/APARNA BANERJI

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

FEROZEPUR/JALANDHAR/BATHINDA, MAY 26
Drawing parallels of his arrest with that of Imran Khan in Pakistan, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal today said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had turned into a dictator.

Kejriwal, who was here to address the 'vyapari milni' in Ferozepur, compared Modi to "what Sheikh Hasina did in Bangladesh and Vladimir Putin in Russia. They either put the leaders in jail or got them killed. Senior AAP leaders and former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren have been put in jail. This is because he fears losing the elections."

While addressing the concerns of local traders, Kejriwal said that since Punjab is a landlocked state, there is a dependence on the Centre for various issues, but the BJP regime was not at all helpful. "We wanted to bring coal from Odisha state-owned mines to generate power in the thermal plants. But the Centre asked us to bring the coal via Sri Lanka and Gujarat to Punjab. Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had to fight with the Centre to allow coal transportation through rail route," he said.

Kejriwal said during the

Farmers upset over raids ahead of Shah's visit

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, MAY 26

Farmer unions are up in arms over the raids by central agencies on their leaders in the wee hours today, ahead of the visit of Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Ludhiana.

Leaders of the Kirti Kisan Union and BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) have condemned the search operations conducted at the residence of Kirti Kisan Union (KKU) president Nirbhay Singh Dhudike by sleuths of the central agencies this morning. The operation was conducted in anticipation of a protest planned for Sunday evening by farm unions under the SKM in Ludhiana.

RAJMEET SINGH

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

ANANDPUR SAHIB, MAY 26

At a nondescript marriage palace near the Chamkaur Sahib-Bela road, Dr Subhash Sharma — a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) old-timer and former 'pracharak' and now BJP's candidate from Anandpur Sahib constituency — greets a small gathering of supporters with Sikh battle cry "Jo Bhole So Nihal Sat Sri Akal" as he accepts a 'siropa' (robe of honour) from Sikh leaders.

Kept at bay by a strong posse of policemen outside the marriage palace, a group of farmers from Bharatiya Kisan Union (Lakhowal) raise the same battle cry, only to register their protest against the saffron party.

Not far away — at Daherpur village in Nurpur Bedi, separated by a distance of 45 km from Chamkaur Sahib — Congress candidate Vijay

'Till I am alive, nobody can dare end reservation given by the Constitution'



Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal holds a roadshow in favour of AAP candidate Raj Kumar Chabbewal in Hoshiarpur on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO

past two years, investment worth Rs 56,000 crore had come to Punjab. Earlier, businessmen were moving to other states including UP, Himachal and Madhya Pradesh but now, giants like Tata Steel and corporates from Germany and Netherlands are setting up their units in the state.

Kejriwal — during a roadshow in support of the party candidate Gurmeet Singh Khuddian in Bathinda — said, "You people remember two

years back when farmers went to Delhi, they were not given entry by installing iron nails and bulldozers. *Kya Dilli inke baap ki hai? Is baare baatan dabana Modi ko bhaga dena*" (Does Delhi belongs to their father? This time, press such a button that will send Modi away).

He also alleged that Rs 8,500 crore of Punjab has been blocked by the Modi government with which rural roads and other welfare works was to be done. This shows Modi's

dictatorial attitude.

Meanwhile at Hoshiarpur, Kejriwal — in a roadshow in support of party candidate Dr Raj Kumar Chabbewal — declared: "Till I am alive, nobody can dare to end reservation given by the Constitution." He said, "This is an election to end dictatorship and save democracy. During the farmers' movement in 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not allow the farmers of Punjab to enter Delhi. In this elec-

tion, you take revenge from Narendra Modi."

He alleged that the PM was being projected as God incarnate. "Some days ago, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said 'Bhagwan Jagannath Modi ji ke bhakt hain' (Lord Jagannath is a devotee of Modi). Modi also said in a recent interview 'Main Bhagwan ka avatar hoon' (I am an avatar of God.). In some days, they will remove God's idol from the temple and put Modi's idol," he said.

Tejashwi INDIA's lone ranger in Bihar

NDA deploys a posse of leaders, including Modi, for campaigning

AKSHEEV THAKUR

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MAY 26

Former Bihar Deputy CM and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, who is on painkillers, has emerged as the lone star campaigner for INDIA bloc candidates during the ongoing Lok Sabha polls in Bihar.

Besides RJD nominees, Congress candidates depend heavily on Tejashwi for canvassing for them in the absence of the Gandhis (Rahul and Priyanka).

The NDA has deployed a posse of leaders, including PM Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, UP CM Yogi Adityanath and Bihar counterpart Nitish Kumar, for campaigning in the



RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav during an election rally in Saran. FILE

state. While Modi has visited Bihar seven times and held 13 poll rallies, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has attended just one. Priyanka is yet to visit the state for campaigning.

Tejashwi has addressed more than 200 poll meetings in Bihar during the Lok Sabha

election. Of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar, the RJD is contesting on 24, Congress on nine, the Left on five and Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP) on two seats.

Lok Sabha polls in the state are stretched across the seven phases. In the first week of

May, Tejashwi developed back pain and was advised bed rest by doctors.

An RJD leader said: "RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav can't campaign as he is unwell. Tejashwi can't take a break as there is no other (prominent) face representing the INDIA bloc in Bihar. Rahul Gandhi has visited the state only once. Left leaders have also come, but the crowd swells in this sweltering heat only when Tejashwi comes. He addresses 7-8 rallies everyday." Congress Lok Sabha candidate for Patna Sahib seat Anshul Avijit was hopeful that Rahul and Priyanka would campaign for him. Patna Sahib seat goes to the polls on June 1.

In Faridkot, sacrilege cases of 2015 lurk in the shadow

RUCHIKA KHANNA

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

BARGARI/BURJ JAWAHARSINGHWALA/BEHBAI KALAN, MAY 26
The "not so new flyover" just before Kotkapura town, that leads towards Bathinda, takes one to these three villages in Faridkot Lok Sabha constituency which have changed the course of Punjab politics forever.

The stealing of Guru Granth Sahib from the gurdwara in Burj Jawahar Singh Wala on June 1, 2015; the scattering of its 'ang' nearly four months later at Bargari; and the firing on those who were protesting against the sacrilege, leading to two deaths at Behbal Kalan, proved to be the biggest undoing for the grand old party of Punjab — Shiromani Akali Dal.

In every election held since then — be it a state election or the General Election — Akali Dal has been tottering.

Nine years down the line, politicians from across the political spectrum have all played their politics around these sacrilege incidents, but justice is still elusive.

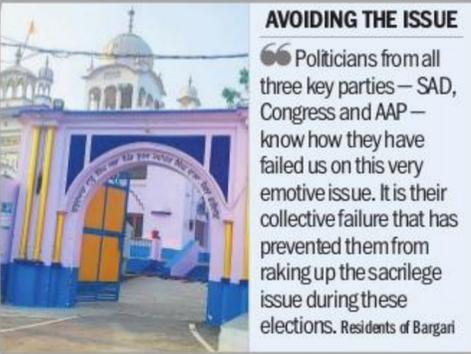
"Politicians from all three parties — SAD, Congress and AAP — know how they have failed us on this very emotive issue. It is their collective failure that has prevented them from raking up the sacrilege issue during this election," says Sohan Singh Gandara, a former panch, and Balbir Singh, a retired junior engineer, both residents of Bargari village.

"Since our disappointment with the politicians is known, they now only speak about their development agenda for Faridkot," adds Parminder Kaur, who runs a small daily needs shop in front of the gurdwara in Burj Jawahar Singh Wala from where the 'bir' was stolen. "Did you see the fields when you came to the village? They are covered with ashes of burnt stubble and water is lying in the fields. That is exactly how residents here are... angry and burnt, many with scars left by extreme police torture, but calm now with time passing by," she says, explaining how many in the village, initially suspected of stealing the 'bir' and subjected to police torture, still find it difficult to perform their tasks because of the physical pain that has lingered on till now.

In these three villages, though elections bring out the politicians in droves, the



Granthi Gora Singh and his wife, and (below) the gurdwara at Burj Jawahar Singh Wala from where the 'bir' was stolen. PHOTOS BY WRITER



AVOIDING THE ISSUE

Politicians from all three key parties — SAD, Congress and AAP — know how they have failed us on this very emotive issue. It is their collective failure that has prevented them from raking up the sacrilege issue during these elections. Residents of Bargari

residents say that with the cases remaining unsolved and accused roaming about freely (some after getting bail), they are unable to get much-needed closure and move on. Though not part of the political campaign this time, the sacrilege issue still lurks in the shadows.

At Burj Jawahar Singh Wala, amidst calls made on the public address system at the gurdwara for getting the MNREGA accounts opened, Granthi Gora Singh of the Burj Jawaharsinghwala village gurdwara, from where the 'bir' was stolen, and his wife Swarnjit Kaur told *The Tribune* that now politicians from all parties have started coming to the village to seek mandate for the LS elections.

"Most of them are careful about not raising the issue. But someone or the other from the village do question them about justice not being delivered. Both of us were brutally tortured by the police as part of their investigation though everyone in the village knew who the real culprits were. For years, politicians of all hues have assured us of justice, but none delivered. Every time the issue is raised, my wife gets panic attacks thinking about that time. The culprits are roaming freely while we

underwent torture," he says rather bitterly.

Posters of all four main candidates in fray — Karamjit Anmol of AAP, Rajwinder Singh of SAD, Hans Raj Hans of BJP and Amarjit Kaur Sahoke of Congress are pasted on every available wall on the main 'phirni' of these villages. Interestingly, it is here, in these villages, where Panthic sentiments run high, that the voters have found a new hope in Sarbjit Singh Khalsa, son of Indira Gandhi assassin Beant Singh.

"He is our new hope," says Binder Singh, a resident of Behbal Kalan, while Manjit Kaur nods in agreement, explaining how his election programme got the maximum attention, and how he is perceived as one of them — "a sufferer of the system".

While the morcha led by the family of Bhagwan Singh — one of the Sikhs killed in police firing at Behbal Kalan — to seek justice for the incident, having been long lifted and these villages now sporting fast food outlets like Snackers, beauty parlours, an interlocking tile unit and even a Bargari Gold Gur unit, showing that life has moved on, one only hopes for closure for the villagers directly affected by the incidents nine years ago.

Anandpur Sahib voters yet to make up mind in multi-cornered contest

Inder Singla, a Hindu leader hailing from Aggarwal business community, finds instant connect with villagers as he says "Jo Bhole So Nihal Sat Sri Akal". Traversing through villages in Nurpur Bedi that lie nestled on the edge of Shivalik Hills, the former MP from Sangrur, calls Congress the 'asli rakha' (real saviour) of farmers. He also ropes in his father Sant Ram Singla's closeness to former President Gianni Zail Singh to connect to the voters.

Challenged by AAP candidate, Malwinder Singh Kang, two-time president of Punjab University Students Council, and an old timer and former Anandpur Sahib MP and SAD candidate, Prof Prem Singh Chandumajra, Dr Sharma and Singla use every tool in their arsenal to wash their outsider tag and win the confidence of the Sikh voters in the area.



AAP nominee from Anandpur Sahib seat Malwinder Kang (left); and BJP candidate Dr Subhash Sharma during their poll campaign.

As the candidates make every effort to pull the voters out of their homes in the sweltering heat, the political frenzy among the voters seems to be missing, if one goes by their participation in rallies and little presence of posters and hoardings of the candidates in the rural hinterland.

Keeping cards close to his heart, 60 year-old farmer of

Bardian Chalai village in Chamkaur Sahib, Kesar Singh, sums up saying that people are still to make up their mind. "We have supporters of Akalis and Congress here," he quips.

In Nurpur Bedi, Pradeep Sharma, a chemist, is busy discussing the winning prospects of candidates in the constituency. He retorts, "This time, candi-

dates of BJP and AAP have made the contest interesting", as he seems to be in favour of the saffron party.

Stretching from heavily urbanised Mohali to historical shrines in Chamkaur Sahib and Anandpur Sahib, the constituency has modernity and history as the two ends of the spectrum in this south-eastern corner of Punjab.

One of the holiest places of Sikhs, Anandpur Sahib parliamentary segment is home to Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib, one of the five Takhts in Sikhism. The two battles of Chamkaur were fought here between the Mughals and Guru Gobind Singh. Two sons of Guru Gobind Singh — Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh — died in battle at Chamkaur.

KEY SITE IN SIKH HISTORY

- Anandpur Sahib parliamentary segment is home to Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib, one of the five Takhts in Sikhism
- The two battles of Chamkaur Sahib were fought here between the Mughals and Guru Gobind Singh
- Two sons of Guru Gobind Singh — Baba Ajit Singh and Baba Jujhar Singh — died in the battle there

Otherwise littered with several crucial aspects of Sikh history, the constituency profile has a non-Panthic character. It is for this reason that after being delineated from Ropar in 2008, the Anandpur Sahib Lok Sabha seat has been a Congress citadel.

Considered a safe seat by the Congress, the grand old party has been fielding out-

siders from the constituency and still managed to win the seat twice in the three elections held in 2009, 2014 and 2019. Ravneet Bittu was elected in 2009 and Manish Tewari in 2019. In 2014, senior Congress leader Ambika Soni lost to Prem Singh Chandumajra of the SAD.

In BSP's stronghold pockets, the predominantly backward constituency has witnessed a direct contest between the Congress and SAD.

However, the political landscape changed with AAP slowly making inroads and winning seven of the nine seats in the 2022 Assembly elections. Of the remaining two, one went to the BSP and the remaining to the SAD.

With the SAD and BJP parting ways and AAP having a formidable electoral presence, the constituency is all set to witness a multi-cornered contest.

POLL SNIPPETS

PM, SHAH WORKED TO DEFEAT GADKARI: RAUT

Mumbai/Nagpur: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday claimed that PM Modi, Home Minister Shah and Maharashtra Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis worked for Nitin Gadkari's defeat in the elections. "Modi, Shah and Fadnis worked for Gadkari's defeat in Nagpur. Fadnis unwillingly joined the campaign for Gadkari when he realised he couldn't be defeated," he wrote in an article in his party's mouthpiece "Saamna". PTI

BJP CAN'T DISLodge TMC GOVT: MAMATA

Sonarpur (WB): West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said the BJP's aspiration to overthrow the democratically elected TMC government after the Lok Sabha polls would remain unfulfilled. Addressing a rally in Jadavpur, Banerjee said the BJP's speculation that the days of the TMC government were numbered after the Lok Sabha polls was akin to issuing a veiled threat but such ambitions would not materialise. PTI

NITISH'S 'MODI AS CM' FAUX PAS IN BIHAR

Patna: JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar on Sunday wished another term as "Chief Minister" for Narendra Modi, who had ruled Gujarat prior to becoming the Prime Minister. The Bihar CM, who has of late been making news for goof-ups, made the faux pas at an election rally on the outskirts of Patna. "It is my wish that Narendra Modi becomes a Chief Minister again (phir se mukhyamantri banein)," he said. PTI

Oppn wants to make Hindus second-class citizens: Modi

Says jihadis across border offering duas for SP, Cong

AKSHEEV THAKUR
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MAY 26

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the Congress wanted to turn Hindus into second-class citizens. Addressing public meetings in Uttar Pradesh, he alleged that the INDI alliance was planning to rewrite the Constitution to provide reservation on the basis of religion.

The PM also claimed that "jihadis" across the border were supporting the coalition of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress and offering duas (prayers) for their success. Addressing a public meeting in Mirzapur, he said: "First, the people of INDI alliance will change the Constitution and write in it afresh so that reservation can be given on the basis of religion in India. Second, these INDI people will end the reservations given to SCs, STs and OBC. Third, they will give the entire reservation to Muslims on the basis of religion."

Modi claimed that the SP had in its manifesto for the 2012 UP Assembly poll promised to provide reservation to Muslims and to change the Constitution. Hitting out at SP, the PM said the party had an "animosity" with law and order. "People associated with SP have '36 ka ankara' (animosity) with law and order. They used to release terrorists who were nabbed by the police and suspend police officials for catching terrorists," he said.

Modi accused the SP of bringing disgrace to Mirzapur and turning the Purvanchal region into a "safe" hide-out for mafia. "In the SP government, be it life or land, no one knew when it would be snatched. Even government lands were encroached and palatial houses were constructed on them," the Prime Minister said.

At Ghosi, Modi claimed that the INDI alliance was making people of different castes fight among themselves. "Before 2014, the Congress changed the law overnight to declare schools, colleges and universities as minority institutions. They declared thousands of educational institutions as minority institutions. Earlier, the reservation SC, ST and OBC students were getting there was completely ended and Muslims got reservation," he said.

Training his guns at the Opposition, Modi claimed that the INDI alliance also talks about reversing the verdict in the Ram temple case just as it was done in the Shah Bano case.

In Bangaon, Modi said developing the country was not part of the Opposition agenda. "In Pakistan, 'duas' (prayers) are being made for the INDI alliance of SP and Congress. Jihadis across the border are supporting them. This (INDI alliance) group is saying that if they come to power, they will re-impose Article 370 in Kashmir. They will repeal the CAA which gives citizenship to the victims of Partition," he said.



PM Narendra Modi during a public meeting in Gorakhpur on Sunday. PTI

INDIA BLOC WILL END QUOTA

“First, they (INDIA bloc) will change the Constitution. Then, they will end the reservations given to SCs, STs and OBCs. Third, they will give the entire reservation to Muslims on the basis of religion. Narendra Modi, PRIME MINISTER

bringing disgrace to Mirzapur and turning the Purvanchal region into a "safe" hide-out for mafia. "In the SP government, be it life or land, no one knew when it would be snatched. Even government lands were encroached and palatial houses were constructed on them," the Prime Minister said.

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Must save Constitution, BJP wants only Modi's voice to prevail: Rahul

AMBIKA SHARMA
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

SOLAN, MAY 26

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi launched a scathing attack on the BJP while addressing his first election rally at Nahan today. He said, "PM Narendra Modi and BJP senior leaders are attacking the Constitution. For the first time in the history of Independent India, their party leaders have openly said that they will change, scrap and finish the Constitution if they win the elections."

Urging people to vote for Vinod Sultanpuri for the Shimla seat, he said, "Our Constitution is the nation's voice, but the BJP people say they only need Narendra Modi's voice to prevail... We have to safeguard the Constitution put in place by Ambedkar, Nehru and others."

"During the recent disaster in Himachal, we sought support from the PM, but he refused to do so. We had sought Rs 9,000 crore as 22,000 families had suffered in the state," Rahul said.

In a bid to connect personal chord with the masses, he said, "My sister is now in Shimla and we both are your soldiers fighting for your cause in Delhi."

He was unsparing in his attack on the media too. He said, "In Himachal, apple growers fail to get the right price for their produce because of the partnership between Modi, Adani and media. All storage facilities have been given to one person who controls the apple price."



Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi, Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, party's state chief Pratibha Singh and its Shimla Lok Sabha candidate Vinod Sultanpuri during the "Nyay Sankalp Sabha" at Nahan in Sirmour on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO

PM WAIVED LOANS OF THE RICH, DIDN'T HELP HP

“Modi waived ₹16 lakh crore loans of 22 rich persons over the past 10 years... During the recent disaster in Himachal, we sought support from the PM, but he refused to help us out. We had sought ₹9,000 crore as 22,000 families had suffered in the state. Rahul Gandhi, CONGRESS LEADER

"Adani has been given control over seven airports in Mumbai, Lucknow, etc. and all ports for 50 years, though it is the people's property," he said. He mocked at the series of television interviews of Narendra Modi where he claimed to be guided by divine intervention. "The Indian ordinance factory will no longer make arms as these will be produced by Adani. Over the past 10 years, all key projects have been given to 22-25 persons only," he said.

"Modi waived Rs 16 lakh crore loans of 22 rich persons over the past 10 years. This money could have provided National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) wages for 24 years, besides waiving loans of farmers for as many years. Modi terms

this loan waiver as development," he mocked. He asked the media reflected on the plight of the apple growers or poor labourers though they accord extensive coverage to Ambani's wedding function. He also spoke about giving a legal guarantee on minimum support price. "Media maintained stoic silence over government's wrong policies, including demonetisation, faulty implementation of GST," he said. Rahul was unsparing in his attack on Adani. He said, "The prices of Adani's companies will surge as soon as PM Modi is sworn in. The entire nation knows if Modi assumes power, Adani's business will grow exponentially."

Elaborating on Congress' poll promises, he said, "We will make one crore lakhpatis, if voted to power. One women of every poor family will be given Rs 8,500 per month beginning July 5. She will receive that amount every month till the family is alleviated from the below poverty line (BPL) status."

Besides reiterating party's promise of 30 lakh government jobs, Rahul also announced "pehli naukri pukka adhikar" for the youth where they would get assured government job, increase in the National Rural Guarantee Scheme wages from Rs 250 to Rs 400 and doubling the wages of ASHA and anganwari workers.

Priyanka begins HP campaign today — 10 rallies over 4 days

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

SHIMLA, MAY 26

Priyanka Gandhi will hit the campaign trail in Himachal from tomorrow. She is scheduled to hold around 10 rallies and roadshows across the state over the next four days to garner support for the Congress candidates ahead of the June 1 polling in the state.

She will kick-start her campaign with a public meeting in Chamba tomorrow. Through extensive campaigning across the state, the Congress hopes to mitigate the impact that PM Narendra Modi may have left on the voters through his recent rallies in Nahan and Mandi.

Priyanka will not only campaign for the Lok Sabha candidates, but also for candidates contesting the Assembly bypoll. She is scheduled to hold public meetings at Gagret and Kulehar and a road show at Barsar where bye-elections are to be held.

War of words



INDIA bloc candidate for the Chandigarh Lok Sabha seat Manish Tewari and Union ex-minister Pawan Bansal engage in a heated exchange in Priyanka Gandhi's presence in Chandigarh. PHOTO: NITIN MITTAL

Modi's 'mujra' remark insult to Bihar: Kharge

NEW DELHI, MAY 26

Claiming PM Narendra Modi's "mujra" remark as an insult to Bihar, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday accused Modi of hitting a new low with his election speeches. "Mujra, mutton, chicken, mangalsutra... no PM before Modi has spoken like this. He even brought in buffaloes and told in Gujarat that if a farmer was having two buffaloes, the Congress would give one of the two animals to a Muslim peasant," he said. The Congress leader was addressing an election rally in favour of Congress leader and Maha-

gathbandhan nominee Manoj Kumar in the Sasaram Lok Sabha constituency of Bihar.

Kharge said, "The PM used mujra words for Opposition leaders in an election rally in Bihar on Friday... Modi ji insulted Bihar and its electorate by using this word."

Noting that Sasaram is synonymous with Jagjivan Ram, who was a native of that area and won eight times from the constituency, Kharge accused PM Modi of not giving due credit to the late Dalit stalwart while celebrating 50 years of India's victory over Pakistan in the 1971 war. — TNS

Congress seizes on anger against Agnipath scheme; goodwill for OPS

'Confident' BJP does not arrange PM Modi's rally in the constituency won by it with second-highest margin in 2019

CONSTITUENCY WATCH KANGRA

LALIT MOHAN
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

DHARAMSALA, MAY 26

After an almost one-sided contest as the campaigning started, senior Congress leader and former Union Minister Anand Sharma has been slowly building up a contest with his BJP rival Rajiv Bharadwaj in the Kangra Lok Sabha. The constituency is spread across Kangra and Chamba districts of Himachal Pradesh.

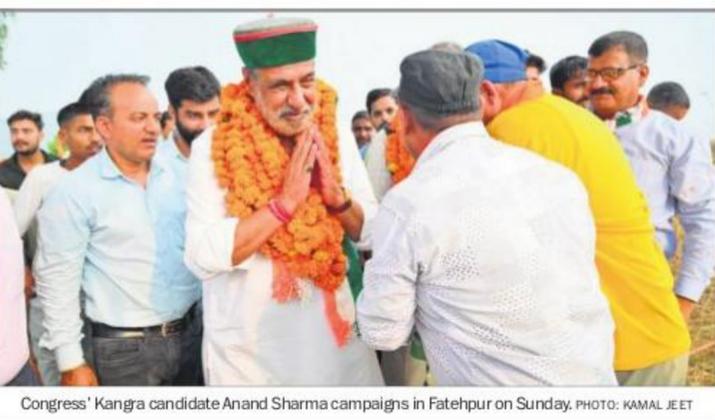
Form losing in 2019 by the second highest margin of 4.77 lakh votes in the country, the Congress is now fancying its chances in Kangra. While the Congress has field-

SHAH CLARIFIES ON ARMY SCHEME

In his campaign, Congress' Anand Sharma has been emphasising that the Agnipath scheme is an "insult" to the soldiers of the country and would be abolished if the Congress was voted to power.

The issue has gained so much prominence that on Saturday, during his visit to Kangra, the BJP got a video statement issued by Home Minister Amit Shah to allay the fears of soldiers regarding the Agnipath scheme. He alleged that the Congress was spreading lies about it.

g, the BJP got a video statement issued from the Home Minister Amit Shah to allay the fears of soldiers regarding Agnipath scheme. He alleged that the Congress was spreading lies regarding the scheme. Besides the Agnipath scheme, the Congress has been relying on government employees to vote for its candidate. During his visit to the Kangra LS seat, Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu has been holding parleys with government employee union leaders and urging them to vote for party that had implemented the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) in the state.



Congress' Kangra candidate Anand Sharma campaigns in Fatehpur on Sunday. PHOTO: KAMAL JEET

Though the Congress has been able to build up its campaign in Kangra after the entry of Anand Sharma, the BJP still seems to be strong in rural areas. A survey of Kangra villages revealed that many people were viewing the Lok Sabha elections as a contest between PM Narendra Modi and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. Many of them opted to prefer Modi over Rahul, exhibiting little knowledge about the contesting candidates and their agenda. In election campaign as well, the BJP candidate has been urging people to vote for him to make Modi PM for third time.

Confident of its victory, the BJP has not planned any rally of PM Modi in Kangra. Only two rallies of its national leaders, including party chief JP

Nadda and Home Minister Amit Shah have been held by the BJP here. There are 17 Assembly constituencies in the Kangra LS seat. The Congress has 12 sitting MLAs in Kangra, while the BJP has just five. Ever since senior Congress leader Anand Sharma has been announced as LS candidate, the party high command has been building pressure on its MLAs to ensure a lead for the party from their respective constituencies.

An MLA says he receives a phone call almost every day from Central leaders for ensuring a lead for the party. Sources here said that threats were also being issued to Congress MLAs that they should ensure lead from their areas if they wanted to retain their positions in the state government.

'Current Punjab leadership Naxals... They may take st

AHEAD of the seventh and final phase of the Lok Sabha elections in eight states and UTs, including Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh, on June 1, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took time off from his hectic campaign schedule to speak to Associate Editor **Aditi Tandon** on a range of issues and narratives dominating the poll landscape. In a candid interview, the Prime Minister fielded questions on the ongoing farmers protests in Punjab and Haryana, the BJP's decision to sever ties with erstwhile ally Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab, the "ghuspathiya" remarks with reference to Muslims he made at the Banswara rally in Rajasthan on April 21, the BJP-led NDA's seat assessment and the state of the opposition INDIA bloc. PM Modi, eyeing a historic third term in office — a first for any prime minister since Jawaharlal Nehru — exuded confidence on the strength of his 10-year record as PM. The Prime Minister spoke of his *Viksit Bharat @ 2047* platform and reiterated the BJP's commitment to taking the Uniform Civil Code forward. He admitted the BJP had not been able to rise to its full potential in Punjab because of its pact with SAD, but with the alliance now having ended, the party would emerge as a strong force in the state. *Excerpts:*

■ You have said you are going to the people with a 10-year record. What in your view is your most abiding legacy after two terms as Prime Minister and your most important achievement?

For decades now, I have lived with the motto of dedicating myself fully for the nation and the welfare of the people. My focus is on bringing a positive transformation in the lives of the people and therefore, things like legacy do not matter to me.

Further, when it comes to achievements, there is nothing that one person or even a government can achieve, without the people's blessings and participation.

So, I can speak of the nation's important achievements in the past 10 years.

At the very top would be the fact that 25 crore people have won the battle against poverty. Because this means, 25 crore people got the ability to dream and opportunity to fulfil dreams. It means 25 crore people could live a better life in the present and also give a better future to their future generations.

Further, whether it is the poor, farmers, women or underprivileged sections of society, they were kept deprived of even the basic human necessities for 60 years.

But we could serve them by taking crores of toilets, tap water connections, electricity connections, LPG and health coverage to them. This not only gave them a better life but also helped them not go through the indignities that a life of deprivation subjects people to.

The fact that crores of people were positively impacted by these initiatives is a big inspiration to us.



After six phases of voting my assessment is that the people of the country are blessing us with a historic, record-breaking win

At the same time, while working on the basics, we have also focused on aspirational goals, like taking optic fibre, mobiles and inexpensive data to even villages, making the country a leader in digital payments, making the country a bigger space power, etc.

The cumulative impact of all of these initiatives — the birth of self-confidence in Indians that our nation is meant for great things — is something that I am greatly enthused by.

■ One of the key issues in the election campaign this time is the Constitution and quota debate. You say Congress will dilute quotas to benefit Muslims; they say you will abolish quotas? Which one is true?

I would request respectable media houses like yours to do a simple fact check.

We have been in power for 10 years at the Centre with massive mandates. Our big mandate helped us do things that were thought to be impossible, such as abrogation of Article 370, outlawing Triple Talaq, etc.

Anyone would tell you that a government that could take such big decisions could do anything it wanted. What did we do? We actually extended reservations for more years.

At the same time, we also ran a government with the maximum number of SC/ST/OBC ministers. Even the number of SC/ST/OBC MPs and MLAs are highest in our party. Further, we gave constitutional status to the OBC Commission, which the Congress never did.

So, our track record of commitment to the welfare of SC/ST/OBC communities is clear.

Now, when it comes to the Congress, we are not just saying they will dilute quotas to benefit their vote banks but we are saying they have already done it in various states when they were in power.

They have also openly declared, when they were in power at the Centre, that they intend to bring in reservations on the basis of religion, despite knowing well that is unconstitutional.

Recently, Calcutta High Court scrapped Other Backward Classes (OBCs) certificates awarded to 77 communities since 2010 in West Bengal, an overwhelming majority of whom were Muslim, and called the classification process illegal.

So, they have an actual track record of diluting the quotas meant for SC/ST/OBC communities. Even now, I have challenged Congress leaders multiple times. I have asked them to declare they will not bring in reservations for their vote banks. But they have not uttered a word about it.

So, as a credible media house, now, can you tell me whose side facts are on and who is making false claims?

■ After six phases of voting, what's your assessment? Opposition says low voter turnout signals a no wave election and you won't cross 200 seats.

After six phases of voting, my assessment is that the people of the country are blessing us with a historic, record-breaking win.

Also, it is clear that the Congress is repeating its listless performance like in 2014 and 2019.

Further, due to their abysmal performance, the INDIA bloc, which is an opportunistic group without any vision or mission, will break apart after the elections. Knowing this, even their own cadre is not turning out to vote for them.

Even neutral analysts would be amused about the Opposition's claims that we won't cross 200 seats in the election.



When I question the Congress' divisive policies that aim to appease Muslims and speaking against the Congress, not against Muslims. This much is clear to anyone

Many people are saying that the NDA has already crossed the majority mark in just five phases, let alone the whole election!

■ How would you describe the opposition INDIA alliance?

Congress has accused AAP of orchestrating a liquor scam in Delhi.

The names that AAP people called the Congress in Punjab are the kind of names that even we would not.

AAP has accused the Congress of inflicting violence on Sikhs in Delhi.

Congress has accused AAP of being involved with terrorists in Punjab.

But both the parties are together in fighting elections in Delhi but not in Punjab.

In Delhi, they say 'Hum Saath Saath Hain' and in Punjab they say 'Hum Aapke Hai Kaun'.

This is just the trailer of their supposed alliance. If I start going into the contradictions in Kerala, Bengal, Tamil Nadu and other states, then you will run out of space in your newspaper.

They have no agreement on policies, no consensus on leadership and certainly no vision for the nation beyond somehow gaining power by hook or crook.

Therefore, while the top leaders of these parties are being seen together for the time being, there is no collaboration among them. There is no coordination among their cadre either.

So, the only thing these people can give the country is instability and a weak government.

■ Though 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas' is your motto and government schemes seek to benefit everyone equally, why did you recently speak of Muslims as infiltrators and mention 'children with more kids'?

When I say illegal infiltrators or people with more children, why are you assuming that I was referring to Muslims?

In fact, most of the successful flagship schemes of our government have minorities as a big chunk among the beneficiaries due to our saturation approach.

However, there is one point that needs to be made here. When I question the Congress' divisive policies that aim to appease Muslims and distance them from the societal mainstream, I am speaking against the Congress, not against Muslims. This much is clear to anyone who actually listens to what I am saying.

In fact, speaking against appeasement politics is the most pro-Muslim stance one can take. Because the biggest victims of appeasement politics have been Muslims themselves. Congress got votes in their name, formed governments in their name, but never did anything to actually make their lives better.

Even today, the Congress' politics solely rests on trying to hold Muslim votes hostage by creating a fear psychosis among them that their religion is in danger if Muslims don't vote for the Congress. So, the Congress has no incentive to further education or empowerment among the community.

But steadily and surely, even Muslims are beginning to see through the Congress' game.

■ Several farmers continue to protest for legalisation of MSP on the borders of Haryana and Punjab and are preventing BJP leaders from canvassing in villages. Your comments and message?

Thank you for this very important question. Firstly, it is our government which has implemented MSP in its true letter and spirit.

In the last ten years, my government has increased the value of MSP and the volume of crops procured under MSP. My government started the direct transfer of MSP into the bank accounts of the farmers of Punjab. We understand the needs of the farmers of Punjab and Haryana, and we have always worked with them on the MSP issue. We are willing to go one step ahead. We are not only ensuring MSP on staple crops like paddy and wheat, which are grown extensively in this region, but we are also incentivising farmers to grow pulses that have a strong demand in the market and can help the farmers improve their earnings significantly.

We want the willing farmers to embrace crop diversification and give them the necessary monetary and policy security cover. Also, crop diversification is an idea which has been supported by other parties too in the past. They have backtracked on it for political reasons, but the cost of politics should be something other than the future of the farmers of Punjab and Haryana. The MSP is not going anywhere. Instead, it is being expanded to empower the farmers for the future and safeguard the ecology of the



ENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER

... mirrors ideology of urban ... ate down the wrong path'



distance them from the societal mainstream, I am who actually listens to what I am saying.

region. Our farmers are a critical component of the 'India Growth Story'; therefore, my government wants to enable and empower them for the future, along with catering to their needs in the present.

■ The Akali Dal was your oldest alliance partner and yet you two fell out over the farm laws. Why did this happen? Do you regret this was not handled better?
Over the last few years, a few things happened which has led to a lot of traditional Akali Dal supporters feeling disappointed.

The first was Parkash Singh Badal Sahab's personal electoral defeat, and that too at such a stage of his life.

Subsequently, the passing of Badal Sahab left a void that was irreplaceable.

At the same time, the Akali Dal began to disintegrate, with very experienced leaders either reducing political activity or parting ways with it.

And, add to that the series of electoral routs. All of these happenings have hurt every Akali Dal worker. A lot of them have privately even expressed their despair to me. A lot of people who think of the progress of Punjab tried to reform the Akali Dal and ensure it moves with the times but their efforts failed.

For every Indian, Punjab is a crucial state with a history of rich contribution to national development. Thus, it is not possible for our party to remain silent while the people of the state are unhappy. It is incumbent upon us to work even harder and ensure the people of the state are not unhappy.

The levels of unhappiness will surprise you all. In 2022, the people of Punjab were so disillusioned that they gave a mandate to AAP but they have only made things worse.

In such times, our duty is even more and thus, we are going to the people with our vision and good governance track record. We have taken this decision after much thought and the people are showing immense affection towards us.

We are going to the people with a single aim—the welfare of Punjab. Like our party transformed the growth trajectory of several states, we want to do the same for Punjab, be it in agriculture, industries, services, startups, healthcare, education, technology, transport, railways, environment, culture, tourism and more.

I want to specially highlight agriculture here. As Gujarat CM, whenever we hosted a big programme relating to the sector, I would invite Badal Sahab. He would not only attend but also praise the work we are doing in Gujarat.

Like in all other things, Badal Sahab's insights on agriculture helped me immensely and given the opportunity, we will work to fulfil his vision in this sector as well.

■ What is your assessment of the Punjab Lok Sabha poll, specially as you are contesting alone for the first time?

In one word — excellent!
Whomsoever's heart beats for Punjab and whoever wants a glorious future for Punjab... Such people are joining us and are seeing BJP with great hope. Our cadre is fully energised as well. Our candidates in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls are a great mix of youth, experience, successful professionals and grassroots level leaders.

Today in Punjab we are seeing the following aspects:

Disgust with AAP, due to their abysmal governance and record corruption.

Disillusionment with Congress, due to their inability to look beyond one family, and that too a family which has seldom respected Sikh sentiments.

Disappointment with Akali Dal, for reasons I already mentioned.

A large section of Punjabi society, especially the youth and women, are seeing how the philosophy of the current leadership in Punjab mirrors the ideology of urban Naxals. They feel that Punjab has just about emerged from the shadows of violence and bloodshed, and now again those with an urban Naxal bent of mind will take it on the wrong path. People are worried and feel it is only the BJP which can not only save Punjab, but also put it firmly on the path of peace, progress and prosperity.

■ Why has the BJP, a dominant force in the North, struggled for a foothold in Punjab?

Your question is not fully correct. If you evaluate our performance in the previous Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha elections, we have done well. Last two Lok Sabha polls we won two of the three seats we contested. For the longest time, our MLAs played an important role in the state government. But, despite all this, we remained humble and grounded which is why you feel we have struggled for a foothold. You may have also noted that the Punjabi community was our strongest support base in Delhi.

But yes, due to our alliance in Punjab we were not able to rise to our full potential. Now with the alliance over, we are all set to become an even stronger force in the state. The results and the mood of the people in the coming days will stun you but remember, I told you first that BJP is rising steadily in Punjab.

■ How would you describe your ties with the Sikh community?

I have had a long association with the Sikh community. I have worked extensively in Punjab and have lived there for years.

When a devastating earthquake hit Kutch, a deeply revered Sikh site in Kutch, Lakhpat Sahib Gurdwara, was completely destroyed. It was a place where Guru Nanak Dev Ji had stayed twice during his travels and was an important Sikh pilgrimage site. As CM, I ensured that the Gurdwara is restored to its past glory.

Post 2014, we have taken a number of steps to preserve and promote the rich Sikh heritage and culture. In 2019, the long awaited Kartarpur corridor was opened, which made it possible for Sikh pilgrims from India to visit the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan, where Guru Nanak Dev Ji lived out his final years. In 2021, we ensured safe evacuation of Sikhs from war-torn Afghanistan and also ensured that the sacred Guru Granth Sahib was flown in with absolute reverence and dignity.

We declared December 26 as Veer Bal Diwas to commemorate the martyrdom of the Sahibzadas Zorawar Singh Ji and Fateh Singh Ji, the brave sons of Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. The Sikh community has contributed immensely to nation building.

■ Do you think BJP will open its account in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh? How many seats will you win?



The enthusiasm among first-time voters and the younger generation during my election campaigns inspired me to think of a blueprint for the first 125 days of the youth. Today's youth will ultimately drive India towards Viksit Bharat



Our big mandate helped us do things that were thought to be impossible, such as abrogation of Article 370, outlawing Triple Talaq, etc. Anyone will tell you that a government that can take such big decisions can do anything it wanted... We extended reservations

For decades, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala voters have voted for the same parties. These parties have promised to deliver development every election for decades. And if there is any scope for development, only certain sections were considered for these developmental schemes.

In 1984, when the BJP won two seats in India, one was from South India. So, for us, North and South have never been different.

In the 2019 parliamentary elections, the BJP emerged as the single largest party in the South, boasting the highest number of MPs. This victory is a testament to the voters' choice of development over divisive politics. The people's rejection of the North-South divide narrative is a clear indication of their informed understanding of how countries can develop and progress.

Take a closer look at how the states have been governed under the opposition parties. The leaders who claim to lead based on family ties, have amassed unimaginable wealth. However, the state's finances are in disarray, and the people have come to realise how they are being exploited. They are now resorting to legal action to secure their salaries and pensions for the poor.

In this election, the voters will also send a strong message through their votes. The number of seats will significantly increase this time, and South India will show faith in our abilities.

■ The Enforcement Directorate arrested Delhi Chief Minister and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal just before the elections; the SC gave him an interim bail a few days ago. The Opposition is accusing the ED of being a sword arm of the government...

Don't listen to me or them. Just check what the High Court has said.

The Delhi High Court has highlighted that the evidence reveals a conspiracy orchestrated at the highest levels. It also indicates that the Delhi Chief Minister was personally involved in perpetrating the scam. In a recent order, the Court again denied bail to their co-accused and deputy, noting that the accused was involved in destroying electronic evidence. They even fabricated public opinion on the liquor policy!

These individuals never miss an opportunity to denigrate our institutions. Yet, these are the same institutions that granted them bail. Such hypocrisy is harmful to the nation's well-being.

These agencies are established for law enforcement and tackling financial fraud. They are doing their job in a free and fair manner. Those claiming they are being targeted are

the ones from whom mountains of cash have been seized. Yes, the corrupt are being targeted. The entire country saw the heaps of cash recovered by the agencies, which shows that the ED and the CBI are on the right track. Besides, the accusations are baseless; only 3% of all ED cases pertain to politicians, while the remaining 97% involve bureaucrats or officials. In the last 10 years, the amount seized has exceeded Rs 1.25 lakh crore, with Rs. 17,000 crore already returned to the citizens.

■ Your main poll promises — Ram Mandir, abrogation of Article 370 and commencement of work on UCC — have been fulfilled. What next?

These are not merely core issues of the BJP. These are the issues close to the heart of people and of the entire nation and it is their expectation from us.

People are happy that in a short period, we have managed to clear the path for effectively resolving long-standing issues that have plagued the country for decades. The grand temple of Shri Ram Lalla has become a reality, with crores of devotees visiting Ayodhya for his darshan. After the abrogation of Article 370, a new era of peace, prosperity, and democracy is emerging in Jammu and Kashmir. Our party is also committed to bringing the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) to its logical conclusion.

Now our main driving force is the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047. I have received over 15 lakh suggestions from across the country. Based on this input, we have outlined a vision for 2047, a roadmap for the next five years, and a mission document for the first 125 days of our third term.

■ If re-elected, what will be your top target for the first 125 days?

We are planning for the future; we are planning for 2047. In this long journey, we have to begin with the first step. I have given this direction to my team, and my team has been discussing various aspects.

We were planning for 100 days, but we have now thought to take this to 125 days; the additional 25 days would be for the country's youth. The youth play a critical role in shaping the nation's future. The enthusiasm, especially among first-time voters and the younger generation during my election campaigns, inspired me to think of a blueprint for the first 125 days of the youth. And this is a reality that we need to take the youth into confidence. Today's youth will ultimately drive India towards Viksit Bharat, and hence, we must secure their future and fulfil their aspirations.

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Rajkot tragedy

Laxity in enforcing fire safety norms inexcusable

THE fire at a Rajkot game zone, which left 27 persons dead, and the death of seven newborn babies in a Delhi hospital on Saturday are stark examples of how cheap life is in India. Just over a week ago, nine lives were lost when a bus caught fire with people sleeping inside near Haryana's Nuh district. The Rajkot disaster was waiting to happen. The summervacation had just begun, and the game zone was teeming with families enjoying a weekend outing. According to the police, the place neither had adequate fire-fighting equipment nor had obtained a no-objection certificate from the local fire department. As per the FIR, the owners of the commercial establishment endangered the lives of people despite knowing that a blaze on the premises could cause deaths and injuries. Taking suo motu cognisance of the case, the Gujarat High Court said it was prima facie a 'man-made disaster'. The court observed that such gaming zones and recreational facilities had come up without necessary approvals from competent authorities.

Even as the police have registered a case against six persons operating the game zone, a thorough probe is required to establish criminal negligence that led to the shocking incident. It needs to be ascertained whether any concession or relaxation was given to the owners by local officials. The HC has rightly sought details of the licences and permissions, including the one regarding compliance with fire safety regulations, that were given to various entertainment zones under the territorial jurisdiction of municipal corporations.

It is obvious that fire safety norms are being blatantly given the go-by. Such callous disregard for human life must not go unpunished. Unfortunately, no lessons seem to have been learnt from the Uphaar fire tragedy of 1997. Zero tolerance to violations should be the way forward. A nationwide audit is the need of the hour to rouse the authorities into action across the country.

Muted voices

Young women take a back seat in Haryana polls

WHEN the results of Haryana's 10 Lok Sabha seats that went to the polls on Saturday are out on June 4, they will, sadly, reflect the muffled voices of women voters in the 18-19 age group, drowned out by the louder participation of their male counterparts. For, the data from the Election Commission of India reveals a glaring gender imbalance: only 34 per cent of these first-time voters are women. Of the nearly 4.2 lakh such voters, a staggering 2.8 lakh are men. This disparity highlights the state's patriarchal character and deep-rooted societal biases, where the registration of young women as voters is often postponed until after marriage. Efforts by officials to encourage voter registration among young women face resistance. Many families prioritise marriage over political engagement, reinforcing a cycle of disenfranchisement.

Making matters worse, women's political agency is further limited as men are often seen dictating their choices. Equally skewed is the representation of women in the electoral fray. Of the 223 candidates in the contest in Haryana in the General Election, just 16 are women — including five from mainstream political parties — even though women constitute nearly 47 per cent of the voters. Major parties, despite their claims of supporting women's rights, have failed to field female nominees proportionately.

However, there is a silver lining in certain pockets of the state. Women are beginning to voice their concerns on issues like water supply, electricity and employment; an increased female participation at public meetings has also been witnessed. But a lot remains to be done to bridge the gender divide and dismantle patriarchal structures. Amplifying women's voices is essential for making India a truly transparent and inclusive democracy.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, MAY 27, 1924

Jinnah's presidential address

IN the address delivered by Muhammad Ali Jinnah as President of the 15th Session of the All-India Muslim League, which concluded its deliberations at Lahore on Sunday, he pointed out the great necessity of bringing about Hindu-Mahomedan unity — which is one of the chief items in the Congress programme. But it is disappointing that Jinnah did not attempt any clear diagnosis of the real causes of the present communal mistrust, which stands in the way of progress and the speedy attainment of Swaraj. We sadly miss in the address any constructive proposal to promote unity and remove the root-causes of such estrangement as is seen on certain occasions at present. It would have been particularly useful if Jinnah had explained what in his opinion would lead to a right solution of the problem. In the prefatory portion of his address, he has been at some pains to declare that non-cooperation has failed, that the Khilafat organisation, which he calls "the handmaid of the Indian National Congress", has failed too; and that the boycott of the law courts, the schools, colleges and the councils, have all failed. In fact, there is no mention of any organisation of the people that has been working on right lines to secure the country's freedom. We have not been told either what political purpose a separate communal organisation of the kind Jinnah presided over is designed to serve and what has been the League's net contribution to the country's progress. Jinnah, however, admitted that as "the result of the struggle of the last three years... the ordinary man in the street has found his political consciousness."

Separatist sentiment alive in J&K, but just

Jamaat-e-Islami's pro-election stance marks a momentous new turning point

NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN
SENIOR JOURNALIST

IN 1983, the story goes, Saaduddin Tarabali, the then Amir of the Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu and Kashmir (JeI), travelled to Islamabad for a meeting with Pakistan's then military ruler, Gen Zia-ul-Haq. Puffed up with the importance of a man who was fighting America's war against the Soviet Red Army in Afghanistan, Zia's balloon was punctured by Saaduddin's cold reception to his proposal — that Pakistan would divert funds and men from Afghanistan if the JeI launched an armed uprising in Kashmir.

"Inko zafrani kahwa pilao," Zia said to the amusement of the others present in the room. Saaduddin's *kahwa* is a warming brew. But Saaduddin was hardly persuaded by the joke. He replied that Kashmiris were not afraid to launch an insurrection, but Pakistan did not have the capacity to take it to its logical conclusion. The pro-Pakistan JeI aimed to bring Islamic rule into Jammu & Kashmir but believed it could do this only by participating in elections and getting into positions of power, while retaining its character of being a socio-religious organisation. Saaduddin warned Zia that an armed resistance against India would only result in mayhem. Kashmiri would kill Kashmiri, he predicted.

Until 1987, the JeI would continue to contest elections, including panchayat polls, as it had done since 1963. But anger at the 'stolen' 1987 Assembly election changed the political dynamics of the state. By 1989-90, hundreds of JeI cadres had already joined the Yasin Malik-led Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and were crossing the Line of Control for training in armed militancy by Pakistan's



DECLINE: The Hizbul Mujahideen, led by Syed Salahuddin, seems to have become more or less toothless. AP/PTI

intelligence agency, the ISI. But the JeI also feared for its own existence, that it would be swallowed up by a 'secular' Kashmiri nationalist militant group.

Soon after the 1987 election, the JeI's influential leader Syed Mohammed Yusuf Shah (he had lost to his National Conference opponent) decided to join the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM). Shah took the name Syed Salahuddin. He has since been based in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) as the head of the umbrella grouping of militants called the United Jihad Council. Soon after, the JeI was running the HM.

Four decades later, the wheel has turned full circle. On May 14, the JeI's acting Amir, Ghulam Qadir Wani, made the surprise announcement that the organisation would return to mainstream politics if the government lifted the ban on it. The ban had been imposed in February 2019, in the days after the Pulwama suicide bombing. The JeI is believed to have had no direct role in the attack, but it was proscribed on the grounds that it was in close touch with militant outfits, and supported extremism, militancy and secessionism in J&K. This February, the ban — which has crippled the once-fomidable JeI network of schools, madrasas and mosques and put its leaders and hundreds of cadres in jail — was extended for another five years.

The Jamaat-e-Islami's existential crisis is more severe today than it was in 1989-90.

As J&K went to the polls, logging unusually high voter turnouts in all its constituencies, the JeI did not issue its customary boycott call. Wani himself was spotted queuing up to cast his vote in the Srinagar Lok Sabha election — which recorded a high 38 per cent turnout. Wani told journalists later that JeI had not asked the people to boycott the polls because the organisation had always believed in the democratic process. The JeI *majlis-e-shoora*, Wani added, had decided that the organisation would contest the Assembly election if the ban was lifted.

This is a momentous new turning point, not just for the JeI, but for separatist politics and militancy in J&K. After its takeover of HM put the JKLF in the shade, the JeI had turned into a vehicle for cross-border militancy in Kashmir; its network providing the backup and support Gen Zia had once suggested. When the separatist All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) was formed in 1993, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, an influential Jamaat member,

became one of its founding members. It was also in this period that a state-backed counter-insurgency force rose up. Called the *Ikhwan*, its members were feared by Kashmiris. And they were targeting the JeI systematically.

As the fratricidal war spiralled, the JeI Amir at the time, Ghulam Mohammad Bhat, announced that his organisation was not affiliated to any militant organisation. From then on, relations between the JeI and the pro-armed struggle Geelani were never the same. He formed his own party called the Tehreek-e-Hurriyat, and was the man behind the strikes, agitations and other protests that plunged Kashmir into violence repeatedly from 2007 to 2018. The JeI stayed away from elections. Behind the scenes, though, it became a supporter of Mufti Mohammed Sayeed's PDP formed in 1999, to break the dominance of the National Conference.

Meanwhile, the separatist Hurriyat suffered an internal split in 2005, with Mirwaiz Omar Farooq heading the APHC and Geelani heading his own active and assertive faction. The two, along with Yasin Malik, came together to lead the agitation that erupted after the 2016 killing of militant Burhan Wani. But the Hurriyat's failure to challenge the Modi government's unilateral decision to scrap Article 370 in August 2019, and Geelani's decision to step down as chairman

in July 2020, a year before he passed away in September 2021, were serious setbacks for Kashmir's separatist politics. In early May, Mirwaiz Omar Farooq spoke of "serious alterations on the ground" and "changed circumstances" as the reason why the APHC had decided not to issue a call to boycott the 2024 elections.

The JeI stands to lose far more than Mirwaiz from the changed circumstances. For one, most of its leaders and hundreds of its cadres are in jail. The ban has snuffed out its funding. The party's existential crisis is more severe today than it was in 1989-90. Those in charge blame the organisation's pro-Geelani group for its problems. Pakistan, meanwhile, consumed with its own flailing economy and dysfunctional politics, seems unable to take advantage. A Pakistani observer described the Azad Jammu and Kashmir wing of the JeI as a 'spent bullet' mired in corruption.

As for the HM, it seems to have become more or less toothless. When Abdul Majeed Dar revolted against the Hizb in 2000, he was eliminated. An official Hizb statement from Muzaffarabad, denouncing Wani for his pro-poll comments, seemed for a moment like a Dar rerun. But Wani, instead of backing off, has openly doubled back, saying that the JeI is in touch with New Delhi for lifting the ban.

The question is: what does the Centre gain from lifting the ban on the JeI? A new participant in J&K politics which can better challenge the mainstream political parties than what the J&K Apni Party has been able to do? Maybe.

For now, the National Conference, a sworn enemy of the JeI since its inception, has welcomed the new development. The PDP, which benefited from the JeI's silent support in 2014 but also faced its wrath during the 2016-18 agitation, is yet to react.

Of course, the risks are great, especially if a hardline faction regains control of the organisation. On the whole, though, and for now, it may be safe to say that while the separatist sentiment may still be alive in J&K, it no longer has political patrons.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

In Kashmir, you need utmost cooperation between all centres of authority. —Rajiv Gandhi

An 'elephant' on a moonlit night

BUDDHADEV NANDI

IT was a June evening. My friends Prakash and Soumitra barged into my house and persuaded me to join their expedition to the forest range at Basdevpur village to enjoy a moonlit night. I restrained myself from pouring cold water on their exuberance.

An unused and dilapidated runway of the military airport built by the British, penetrating the forest, bore testimony to World War II. The forest had been in the news because of the regular migration of herds of elephants from the Dalma range of Jharkhand.

When we were deep in the jungle, a small group of people engaged in cutting a big sal tree warned us not to proceed further as a herd led by a tusker had become 'permanent residents' of that part of the jungle. We disregarded their advice, if only to show them that we were not scared.

But fear had already started looming large in our minds. Prakash, seemingly an omniscient person, advised us to run in a zigzag pattern if an elephant made a real charge, as it was not very nimble due to its bulky size. After a long silence, Soumitra gave his expert view, which seemed strange to me. He stated that if we stayed downwind from a charging elephant, it would find it difficult to smell us and detect our position. I suggested that they throw their rucksacks to distract the chasing elephant if it drew nearer.

However, we were so exhausted after a long walk that our hasty steps turned into a trudging stroll. The desire path seemed never-ending. All of a sudden, Soumitra stopped like a beagle catching the scent of a quail, looking at something on the left side. We followed suit. But before I could see or perceive anything, both of them scrambled, clamouring 'elephant, elephant...' like two aircraft chased by enemy planes.

Both Prakash and Soumitra claimed there was a big elephant swinging its trunk a few metres away from the desire path. My heart almost sank in fear imagining the sight of a wild pachyderm nearby. Prakash had already hurled his rucksack on the path. We reached home around 9 pm.

Early next morning, Prakash turned up at my house on a motorcycle to retrieve his rucksack. Luckily, as the desire path perhaps had still not been used by any person, we found the blue bag lying on the narrow passage between dense shrubs. We moved forward a few metres until we reached the spot where we had apparently come across an elephant the night before.

We turned our eyes to the right and were astonished to see, nearly a hundred metres away, a bushy mango tree with creepers hanging down from its boughs — like the trunk of an elephant. The creepers were still swinging in the morning breeze. Both of us burst into laughter.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Modi's bid to win over Punjabis

Apropos of 'Modi in Punjab', the Prime Minister's rallies in Punjab amid the farmers' protests highlight a desperate bid to gain political ground in the state. Modi's attempt to invoke Sikh sentiments by patting himself on the back for the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib corridor in 2019 and his government for reopening files of cases related to the 1984 anti-Sikh riots are of no use as the farmers' grievances remain unresolved. The repeal of the contentious farm laws, a reluctant concession, hasn't addressed the cultivators' core demand of a legal guarantee for MSP. Modi's gestures are unlikely to sway the farmers, who remain sceptical of the BJP's intentions after the prolonged agitation and perceived betrayals. Until substantial policy changes take place, symbolic gestures will fail to mend the fractured trust.

GURDEV SINGH, BY MAIL

Stop treating tillers as anarchists

Refer to the editorial 'Modi in Punjab'; the stir launched by farmers against the enactment of the three contentious farm laws was initially treated by the government with disdain and apathy. The authorities wanted to quell the agitation by deploying all types of heavy-handed measures to scare the cultivators away. But the farming community braved the elements with remarkable resilience and didn't succumb to pressure. The laws were only repealed when it became clear that the protests could not be reined in. More recently, the government attempted to scuttle the Dilli Chalo march. If the ruling regime wants to pacify the irate farmers, it should stop treating them like anarchists. It is not the use of force but dialogue that can help the government mend fences with the farmers.

ROSHAN LAL GOEL, LADWA

Hill state suffers from govt apathy

With reference to the article 'Uttarakhand beset by Char Dham Yatra chaos, forest fires'; the hill state has been reeling under the weight of mismanaged pilgrimages and rampant forest fires. The Char Dham Yatra, a spir-

itual journey, has morphed into a perilous trek, claiming lives because of negligence. Overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure and disregard for safety norms have marred the sacred event. Meanwhile, the state's lungs burn in uncontrolled blazes, an outcome of the government's environmental apathy. The authorities' lackadaisical approach to disaster management and environmental conservation is alarming. It is high time that the officials behind the lapses were held accountable and measures were taken to save lives.

SAHIBPREET SINGH, MOHALI

Try Pune car crash teen as an adult

The Pune Porsche car crash involving a drunken teenager that resulted in two deaths has understandably sparked a nationwide outrage. The incident has once again thrown the spotlight on the flaws in our justice delivery system. The juvenile, who is old enough to know the difference between right and wrong, must be tried as an adult. It is shocking how the boy's family, which happens to be quite influential, tried to frame their driver to save the teenager. The fact that the teen was granted bail within hours of the mishap on some ridiculous conditions, like writing a 300-word essay on accidents and undergoing counselling, is telling. Any juvenile who commits a serious crime should be tried as an adult.

O PRASADA RAO, HYDERABAD

Heatwave hits voter turnout

North India is reeling under a scorching heatwave. Understandably, some polling booths wear a deserted look towards the afternoon. The Election Commission of India (ECI) must have a good explanation for the inordinately long election schedule. Intense heat has robbed many voters of enthusiasm, discouraging them from leaving home and exercising their franchise. Holding elections at the peak of the summer was not a good idea in the first place. But the election authorities must at least make some basic arrangements, like drinking water, for voters at polling stations. The ECI must not take the voters for granted.

RAMESH GUPTA, NARWAN

Support of European trio augurs well for Palestine



UDAY BHASKAR
DIRECTOR, SOCIETY FOR
POLICY STUDIES

PALESTINE'S quest for statehood began in November 1988, when the Palestine Liberation Organisation, then in exile, declared the establishment of the 'state of Palestine'. And it was soon recognised by a number of countries, including Egypt, Jordan and India.

Currently, 143 nations have accorded such recognition, though there is no tangible, consensual territoriality to the state of Palestine. This goal remains the Holy Grail for the oldest inhabitants of the Holy Land, and this is a contested and unresolved claim between Arabs and Zionists. Citizens of the former British-mandated territory, identified as Palestinians, are now dispossessed and on the brink of mass starvation and deprivation, following the disproportionate war of reprisal unleashed by Israel after the dastardly October 7 Hamas terror attack.

The quest for statehood will receive a significant symbolic boost on May 28, when three European nations —

Ireland, Norway and Spain — formally accord recognition to Palestine. Most of the countries that have accorded such recognition are part of the Global South, and not the US and other G7 nations.

Given that the Israel-Palestine matter is a complex and intensely contested political issue, few nations in Europe wanted to antagonise the US, and it was only Sweden that recognised Palestine despite being an EU member. The other seven European nations — Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greek Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia — did so just before joining the EU.

Thus, the addition of three major European nations, albeit symbolic, is significant and will strengthen the Palestinian quest at this critical and tragic juncture. The political symbolism of Ireland, Norway and Spain breaking away from the US/G7 position on recognising Palestine has the potential to be substantive, and this will be shaped by the domestic politics of certain countries, particularly the US, France, Germany and Israel.

Ireland, Norway and Spain are expected to be joined by a few other European nations, and Britain and Malta have indicated that they will do so when the conditions are 'right'.

Ironically, the October 7 Hamas attack has served to focus global attention on the long-neglected issue of state-



IMPACT: The October 7 Hamas attack has served to focus global attention on the long-neglected issue of statehood for Palestine. REUTERS

hood for Palestine. In the last few months, as the scale of destruction in Gaza-Rafah and the number of total deaths have mounted (it is now over 36,000), Israel has become increasingly isolated, even though it continues to receive critical US support by way of weapons and funds.

Israel and its top political leadership are under the scanner of the ICC (International Criminal Court) and the ICJ (International Court of Justice), and the decision of the three European nations will only add to the discomfort of Tel Aviv.

The European trio is to be commended for taking this political decision — and while this one initiative will

If the Palestine issue remains deadlocked in the UN Security Council, the BRICS summit in October could provide a forum for some innovative political rewiring.

not end the violence in Gaza-Rafah anytime soon — it may act as a catalyst to energise the constituencies that are seeking to prevail upon the US and, through it, Israel, to agree to a ceasefire followed by negotiations.

The historical context that has encouraged the three European nations to empathise with Palestine merits recall. Ireland, with its record as an oppressed colony and its experience of the British jackboot, has traditionally been a supporter of the Palestine cause. Since October 7, Irish political leaders have been the most vocal in calling out Israel for its many genocidal transgressions and have reiterated their support for any effort

that would advance the two-state solution. They noted that it was the only means for the two nations (Israel and Palestine) to coexist peacefully and to put a stop to the "generational cycles of violence, retaliation and resentment".

Having emerged from decades of dictatorship (1936-75), Spain is the new convert to the principles of liberal democracy and international law and has a long association with the Arab rulers. The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference supported by the US and Spain laid the foundation for ending the long-festering Arab-Israeli conflict. In the current context, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has asserted that his decision to recognise Palestine was born "out of moral conviction" since it is a 'just cause' and added that this was the 'only way' to achieve peace and security in the region.

Norway, with its history as a successful peace-maker in West Asia (1993 Oslo Accords), is supportive of a two-state solution in the long term. And it is evident that, currently, Oslo, Madrid and Dublin have coordinated their Palestine policy to nudge the rest of Europe to support the call for an immediate ceasefire through concrete political action.

Europe has a very nuanced position on the tangled Palestine issue. Recently, French President Emmanuel

Macron hosted his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, in Paris. They issued a joint statement on Palestine. It noted: "The two heads of state called for a decisive and irreversible relaunch of a political process to concretely implement the two-state solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security, both with Jerusalem as their capital, and the establishment of a viable, independent and sovereign state of Palestine based on the 1967 borders and reaffirmed their commitment to this solution, which is the only way to meet the legitimate aspirations of the Israeli and Palestinian people for lasting peace and security."

China has emerged as an effective interlocutor in West Asia since its 2023 success in enabling an unexpected Saudi Arabia-Iran rapprochement, and this was the result of decades of quiet and sustained diplomacy devoid of any grandstanding. Beijing appointed its first special envoy for West Asia in 2002, and since then, Chinese diplomatic investment in the region has been unbroken. There is a cue here for India.

If the Palestine issue remains deadlocked in the UN Security Council because of a US veto, the BRICS summit being hosted by Russia in October this year could provide a forum for some innovative political rewiring. Case for Madrid 2.0 under BRICS auspices?

Surfeit of dynasts, defectors lays bare leadership vacuum



AMARJIT BHULLAR
EX-PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY
OF NORTHERN BRITISH
COLUMBIA, CANADA

ASIGNIFICANT number of the candidates fielded by mainstream political parties in the current parliamentary elections in Punjab, Haryana and some other states are political dynasts or turncoats or both. The parties are facing a dearth of ideologically committed, competent and electable candidates. Most of them have poached members of other parties to get 'suitable' candidates — for instance, in West Bengal.

Those who are ambitious or feel marginalised in their own parties gladly accept such offers. Immediately after the switchover, they begin a campaign to undermine the party they have left and cheer the top leadership of the party they have joined. They had often criticised the same leadership before joining its ranks.

Yet another way to fill the gap is to bring in film stars or sports persons who have mass appeal. The experi-

ence, so far, shows that few have performed and gained the confidence of people over the years, while many have found the political climate difficult to handle.

Why is there a vacuum in the parties? Why have even 100-year-old parties failed to nurture their young leaders to compete in the political arena?

In fact, a majority of these leaders treat political capital as other forms of capital (like land, gold, etc.) and not as goodwill earned by serving the electorate. Politics, as a profession, allows them to accumulate the political capital, which, unlike other forms of capital, cannot be transferred by a legal will to anyone of their liking. Rather, one must engage in the political process to receive that. In countries like India, power, status and prestige are derivatives of the political standing. So, naturally, there is an incentive to retain political power in the family or in the coterie.

Political leaders utilise some time-tested methods to transfer the political capital within their families/coterie.

In the last few decades, top leaders of political parties, barring a few, have demolished internal party democracy and tried vigorously to establish family control over the party by blocking the entry of



SWITCHING LOYALTIES: Defections are the norm in states such as West Bengal. ISTOCK

young, competent leaders. They have passed their political legacy, which include the brand name as well as the financial, social and human capital advantages, to their progeny to consolidate their dynastic control. The inheritance of political power within families is a common phenomenon across the world and true even in democracies. But the inheritance is not as easy and quick elsewhere as it is in India.

The dynastic political perpetuation limits the 'pool of candidates' who can compete in politics and win elections. In this way, the founders of dynasties cre-

The dynastic perpetuation limits the 'pool of candidates' who can compete in politics and win elections.

ate a situation of political emptiness in their parties so that the heirs may face little competition.

Established leaders of political parties often select their associates on the basis of incompetence. Political scientists call it negative selection. Negative selection, as per *everipedia.org*, a blockchain-based online encyclopaedia, is "a political process that occurs... when a person on the top of the hierarchy, wishing to remain in power forever, chooses his associates with the prime criterion of incompetence — they must not be competent enough

to remove him from power". Resultantly, sycophancy becomes a means to entering a party. It determines one's status and remuneration in the party rather than one's ability to perform for the benefit of the party and the public.

Certainly, the strengthening of dynastic rule and negative selection are a risk for a party, but most leaders consider it a risk worth taking. Economists call it a moral hazard. Moral hazard occurs when a person takes a risk because someone else bears the cost of that risk. So, when a dynasty is established or an incompetent second-rung leadership is formed in the party, the gains, if any, are accrued to the top leaders and if the heirs/second-rung leaders underperform as public representatives, the sufferers (of their underperformance) are the people. "Moral hazard explains 40 per cent of the descendants' underperformance," say Siddharth Eapen George and Dominic Ponattu in their study titled *How Do Political Dynasties Affect Economic Development? Theory and Evidence from India*.

At the time of elections, parties face a self-created shortage of good candidates, forcing them to recoup it by promoting defections. Therefore, the quality of governance and

development processes decreases as members of the legislative and executive bodies are selected from a limited pool.

How does such politics affect optimal governance? Such behaviour disturbs the legitimacy of democracy and worsens the quality of public policies as politicians have motivations to implement policies that will increase their gain and ensure their continuation in power. Politicians place personal interests above public and party interests. It leads to patronage and corruption, which weaken governance institutions. Politicians, while in power, make public investments for their own gains.

Economic development is also hit due to bad governance. "We find that dynastic politics has an overall negative effect on economic development," says the study by George and Ponattu.

Dynastic succession and negative selection are the most significant challenges for political parties in general and the electorate in particular. Most of the parties do not adhere to open, transparent and democratic procedures for their functioning. There are limited opportunities for ordinary members and ideologically committed workers to climb the ladder in the party, while elevators are available for the descendants and their cronies.

QUICK CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- Off the beaten track (3-2-3-3)
- Under perfect conditions (7)
- Be in state of uncertainty (5)
- Expect and desire (4)
- Absolute ruler (8)
- Northern Ireland (6)
- Subtle distinction (6)
- Fillip (8)
- Unconvincing (4)
- Additional (5)
- Tropical cyclone (7)
- Available for purchase (2,3,6)

DOWN

- Consume completely (3,2)
- Unctuous (4)
- Experimental test (3-3)
- Country of northeast Africa (8)
- Unfavourable (7)
- Without previous inspection (5,6)
- Considerable sum of money (6,5)
- To hand down (8)
- Captivated (7)
- Business patronage (6)
- Habitual residence (5)
- To box in practice (4)

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Mumble, 4 Esoteric, 9 Jargon, 10 Primeval, 12 Spin, 13 Corny, 14 Even, 17 In a bad temper, 20 Nothing for it, 23 Avid, 24 Revel, 25 Sham, 28 Dilatory, 29 Ramble, 30 Monarchy, 31 Blithe.

Down: 1 Majestic, 2 Marzipan, 3 Loom, 5 Strong-minded, 6 Tame, 7 Revive, 8 Colony, 11 Cost the earth, 15 Havoc, 16 Deify, 18 Prohibit, 19 Stampede, 21 Random, 22 Violin, 26 Stir, 27 Pall.

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MEDIUM

FORECAST

SUNSET: 19:16 HRS
SUNRISE: 05:23 HRS

| CITY | MONDAY MAX | TUESDAY MIN |
|------------|---------------|----------------|
| Chandigarh | 45 | 27 |
| New Delhi | 46 | 28 |
| Amritsar | 45 | 27 |
| Bathinda | 45 | 26 |
| Jalandhar | 43 | 25 |
| Ludhiana | 44 | 26 |
| Bhiwani | 45 | 30 |
| Hisar | 46 | 26 |
| Sirsa | 47 | 29 |
| Dharamsala | 35 | 23 |
| Manali | 28 | 15 |
| Shimla | 30 | 19 |
| Srinagar | 32 | 16 |
| Jammu | 42 | 25 |
| Kargil | 27 | 11 |
| Leh | 23 | 08 |
| Dehradun | 39 | 25 |
| Mussoorie | 25 | 17 |

TEMPERATURE IN °C

SATURDAY'S SOLUTION

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| 7 | 4 | 1 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 6 |
| 2 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 9 | 3 |
| 1 | 3 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | 2 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 9 |
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CALENDAR

MAY 27TH 2024, MONDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1946
- Jyeshtha Shaka 6
- Jyeshtha Parvishite 14
- Hijari 1445
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 4, up to 4.54 pm
- Shubha Yoga up to 6.37 am
- Shukla Yoga up to 4.28 am
- Purvashadha Nakshatra up to 10.14 am
- Moon enters Capricorn sing 4.05 pm

CLASSIFIEDS

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Jesus Saviour's School, Shamsher Nagar, Sirhind Distt. Fatehgarh Sahib (Punjab). Affiliated to CBSE. Requires well qualified & experienced B.Ed. Teachers. PGTs- (Maths, Science, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Economics, Business Studies, Accountancy, Hindi, Social Studies, English & Physical Education). Mail your resume on: jss.sirhind@gmail.com or WhatsApp: 77195-31942, 91157-31942 Walk-in-Interview: 27.05.2024 & 28.05.2024 (9:30 am-12:30 pm) at School's Premises. (CL24018030)

Job opening at SGTB Institute of Management and IT Samura (Bhogpur), Jalandhar. Assistant Professors for B.Voc Beauty Therapy, Child Care giver, B.Com. (Hons), Master's Degree required. Experienced preferred. Pay as norms. Apply within 10 days. Principal: 88725-27400, sgtbmit@gmail.com (CL24019364)

Required Counsellors for study visa/tourist visa PR, Marketing Executives, Field Officers, Digital Media Executives, Office Assistant, Telecallers. (Accommodation facility). Contact: Caanwings - 465-7, New Jawahar Nagar, Jalandhar. 78498-78498, 77018-87676 (Licence 301). (CL24019382)

IMMIGRATION CONSULTANCY

If you are under 30 years you can go abroad legally. 1 to 2 years work permit legally. No IELTS, no work experience required. CAANWINGS (The Australia Specialist) 329, New Jawahar Nagar, Jalandhar. 78498-78498, 77018-87676 (Licence 301). (CL24019382)

PROPERTY FOR SALE CHANDIGARH

2 kanal corner moderate built one kanal new triple duplex Chandigarh. Jeet Associates. 96468-09090. (CL24017273)

7½ marla Sector 22-B/ 10M B-Road 20. Booth 34, 37, 40 Chandigarh. Jeet Associates. 96468-09090. (CL24017275)

PUBLIC NOTICES

I, Raju son of Sh. Makodu, resident of Village Kathari, Post Office Bohli, Tehsil-District Solan, Himachal Pradesh, declare that my son Army No. 15214915N Hav Vinod Kumar 15 Field Regiment C/o 56, APO my name Raj Kumar and my date of birth 1.7.1961 is wrongly entered in the service records. My correct name Raju and date of birth is 1.7.1960. All concerned please may note. (CL24019363)

I, Sumit Dahiya S/o Sh. Narain Singh Dahiya R/o 477, G/31, Ashok Vihar, Mehiana Road, Sonapat, have changed my minor daughter's name from Avani to Avani Dahiya for all future purposes. (CL24019379)

I, Number 149245597Y, Rank Ex-Hav. Raghubir Singh, son of Balbir Singh, Village Gaggar, PO Dalkati, Tehsil Jawali, District Kangra (HP) declare that my daughter's name in my Army record has wrongly entered Kangan instead of correct name Kangan Blowria. Concerned note. (CL24019381)

COURT NOTICE

NDH-15.06.2024

High Court of Himachal Pradesh at Shimla-171001. In the matter of Omp 319 of 2024 in Ex. Pet. No. 13 of 2022-C

Raj Lakshmi Chemical Industries

...Plaintiff.

Versus

Pamvi Tissues Ltd.

...Defendants

Notice to:- JD1. Pamvi Tissues Limited, Company registered under Companies Act 1956, having its registered Office at Arya Compound, Building No. A-3 Gala No. 1 Amjur Phate, Anjur Road, Bhindwandi Mumbai Maharashtra. Having Place of work, Industrial Estate Barotiwala 174103, District Solan H.P. Having administrative office at S.C.O. 55, Sector 26-D, Madhya Marg Chandigarh 160026.

Prem Goyal s/o Suraj Bhan Goyal, House No. 2342, Sector 23-C, Chandigarh U.T. Judgement Debtor

Whereas in the above noted case, it has been proved to the satisfaction of this Court that above named defendants can not be served in an ordinary way.

Therefore, the proclamation under Order 5 Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure is hereby issued against him/them that they should appear in this Court either personally or through some duly authorized agent/pleader on 15th June, 2024 (15.06.2024) failing which ex parte proceedings will be taken against him/them.

Given under my hand and seal of the Court this 24th day of May, 2024.

Sd/-

Section Officer (Judicial),

High Court of H.P.

Shimla.

COURT NOTICES

(U/O 5 Rule 20 CPC)

In the Court of Ms. Mehima Bhuler Civil Judge (Jr. Division), Khanna

Ranjit Kaur Benipal

Vs.

General Public

CNR No.

PBLDA0-000552-2023

Next Date: 01.08.2024

Publication issued to:

General Public

In above titled case, the defendant(s)/respondent(s) could not be served. It is ordered that defendant(s)/respondent(s) should appear in person or through counsel on 01.08.2024 at 10.00 a.m.

For details logon to

https://highcourtchd.gov.in/?trs=district_notice&district=ludhiana

Dated, this day of 22.05.2024.

Sd/- Civil Judge

(Junior Division),

CL24013276 Khanna

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(U/O 5 Rule 20 CPC)

(Succession Case)

In the Court of Sh. Sachin Yadav Addl. Civil Judge (Sr. Division), Chandigarh

Anupama Bains

Vs.

General Public

CNR No.

CHCH02-001548-2024

Next Date: 23.07.2024

Petition U/S 372 of India

Succession Act

Notice to:

General Public

:- Chandigarh

In above titled case, the defendant(s)/respondent(s) could not be served. It is ordered that defendant(s)/respondent(s) should appear in person or through counsel on 23.07.2024 at 10.00 a.m.

For details logon to

https://highcourtchd.gov.in/?trs=district_notice&district=chandigarh

Dated, this day of 10.05.2024.

Sd/- Addl. Civil Judge

(Senior Division),

CL24017941 Chandigarh

(U/O 5 Rule 20 CPC)

In the Court of

Sh. Abhimanyu Rajput

Civil Judge (Jr. Division),

Chandigarh

Rajbir Singh Grewal r/o

House No. 1257, Sector 18-C,

Chandigarh

Vs.

General Public

CNR No.

CHCH02-001414-2024

Next Date: 05.07.2024

Publication issued to:

General Public

:- Chandigarh

In above titled case, the defendant(s)/respondent(s) could not be served. It is ordered that defendant(s)/respondent(s) should appear in person or through counsel on 05.07.2024 at 10.00 a.m.

For details logon to

https://highcourtchd.gov.in/?trs=district_notice&district=chandigarh

Dated, this day of 15.05.2024.

Sd/- Civil Judge

(Junior Division),

CL24019134 Chandigarh

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INDIA alliance promises 'right to first job' to every graduate: Rahul

Says PM has benefited only 22 wealthy individuals by waiving their loans worth ₹ 16 lakh cr

OUR CORRESPONDENT

UNA, MAY 26

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi today said that the INDIA Alliance government would give 'Right to first job' to every college graduate and diploma holder in the country. Addressing a public rally at the Police Lines ground here in support of party candidates for the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, he said educated youth would be given one-year training in government institutions to open doors for entry into the job market, adding that a monthly stipend of Rs 8,500 summing up to Rs 1 lakh will be paid to the trainees.

Rahul said during the last one decade, PM Narendra Modi had benefited only 22 rich persons by waiving off loans amounting to Rs 16 lakh crore. He said while mega projects in solar and wind power, airports and sea ports, fruit and hospitality sectors have gone to PM's close friends, the unemployed youth is shooed away by banks when they seek loans for starting businesses.

The former Congress president said 700 farmers had sacrificed their lives during protests for MSP, adding that BJP leaders in Punjab and Haryana were being chased away by farmers. He added



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi along with other state leaders at a public meeting in Una on Sunday.

that he was not allowed to speak on the farmer's woes in Parliament, but said that the Congress government had given guarantee on MSP on agriculture produce to farmers, promised to increase daily wages under MNREGA from Rs 250 to Rs 400 and double the honorarium being paid to ASHA and Anganwari workers.

Blaming the Prime Minister for loss of human lives during the pandemic, Rahul said Narendra Modi threw tantrums like beating 'thali and taali' besides switching on the lights of mobile phones to chase away corona

Talks of 'lakh patis', aid to women

- Rahul said in the next five years of INDI Alliance rule, crores of families will become 'lakh patis'
- Economically poor families will be identified and in the bank account of one woman from each of these families, a sum of Rs 8,500 will be credited every month till the family rises above the poverty level.
- He said 30 lakh jobs lying vacant in the Central government will be filled.
- 'Agniveer' will become a scheme of the past.

virus. He questioned whether a PM should do such things instead of bolstering health infrastructure, providing shelter to the migrants and arranging transportation.

Rahul said in the next five

years of INDI Alliance rule, crores of families will become 'lakh patis'. Economically poor families will be identified and in the bank account of one woman from each of these families, a sum of Rs

8,500 will be credited every month till the family rises above the poverty level. He said 30 lakh jobs are lying vacant in the Central government and all these will be filled as soon as they come to power.

The Congress leader said the day their alliance comes to power, 'Agniveer' will become a scheme of the past. He said 'Army opposed the scheme and it was only the PM who pushed for it', adding that the scheme creates two different layers of people in the Armed forces, thereby weakening the morale of Agniveers.

Jai Ram: Conspiracies underway to disrupt my public meetings



Former CM Jai Ram Thakur at a rally in Mandi. JAI KUMAR

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

MANDI, MAY 26

Leader of Opposition Jai Ram Thakur has levelled serious allegations against the state government led by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu. After holding election rally at Nahan in Mandi, Thakur said that various conspiracies were underway to disrupt his public meetings.

"Such tactics are being used by the Congress against us. If candidates from my party stop at a hotel

to have tea, it is raided. If I stop at a hotel in Dalhousie, it is raided four days later. Our party worker has his own business and he is a BJP official. Raids are conducted there too. It's a very low level of politics," Thakur alleged.

Jai Ram said that Congress was unnerved after Narendra Modi's rally in Mandi. Such a big rally is beyond their reach. So despite booking, Thakur said, they were unable to hold rallies in Mandi.

Six office-bearers of BJP expelled in Lahaul-Spiti

SHIMLA, MAY 26

BJP state president Rajeev Bindal today expelled six party office-bearers for six years in the district of Lahaul and Spiti for indulging in anti-party activities. Bindal took the action on the recommendation of the president of the Lahaul and Spiti district. While expelling the office bearers, Bindal said that anti-party activities and indiscipline would not be tolerated.

As for the elections, Bindal said the rallies conducted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah had filled the BJP workers with new zeal and enthusiasm. "People turned out in big numbers to listen to Modi and Shah, indicating that people had made up their mind to vote the BJP to victory for the third consecutive time," he said.

He further said that the top Congress leaders were now rushing to the state, but they should tell people what happened to the tall promises they had made to the people before the Assembly elections in 2022. "They gave several false guarantees to the people of the state, and now the people would seek answers from them," he said. —TNS



Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu addresses an election meeting at Kathiana in Barsar constituency on Sunday.

Okayed development works, but local MLA shifted loyalties: CM

OUR CORRESPONDENT

HAMIRPUR, MAY 26

Barsar should vote for honesty and reject the corrupt to strengthen democracy, said Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu while addressing public meetings in Barsar Assembly constituency near here today. He said Barsar had supported Congress candidate in Assembly election and send him to Vidhan Sabha, but he betrayed people of the constituency and tried to destabilise the government along with BJP leaders.

He said Barsar was a constituency of his home district and it was his responsibility to bring development to the area. He said he had approved development works of over Rs 400 crore for the constituency still local MLA shifted his localities. He was now seeking shelter in opposition camp.

He added Rs 136-crore water supply scheme was proposed for this area that would ensure surplus water to this area that was facing water crisis since long. Sukhu urged people to vote for Congress candidates Subhash Chand Dhatwalia for Assembly election and Satpal Singh Raizada for Lok Sabha election. He said that the BJP-led government at the Centre had introduced various anti-people schemes like Agniveer that would spoil the future of youth.

11 yrs on, Kiratpur-Manali NH still incomplete

POLL ISSUE

DIPENDER MANTA

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

MANDI, MAY 26

The poor condition of the Kiratpur-Manali highway between Mandi, Kullu and Manali is a key issue, particularly for tourism stakeholders in the Mandi parliamentary constituency. The highway is lifeline of the tourism industry of Kullu and Manali and Lahaul and Spiti. Those associated with the tourism industry say that the candidates should talk about such public issues instead of vilifying each other.

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) started the work on widening of this highway in 2013 but it is yet to be completed. The NHAI had divided the project

in five sections — Kiratpur-Nerchowk, Nerchowk-Pandoh, Pandoh-Takoli, Takoli-Kullu and Kullu-Manali — for the construction purpose. Of the five sections, the NHAI had completed construction on three sections — Kiratpur-Nerchowk, Takoli-Kullu and Kullu-Manali — last year, while the work on the Nerchowk-Pandoh and the Pandoh-Takoli sections was underway.

The people associated with the tourism industry in Mandi, Kullu-Manali and Lahaul and Spiti are happy over the completion of the three sections of this highway as it will reduce the travelling time considerably between Chandigarh and Manali.

They are awaiting the completion of the work on the remaining two sections as,

when completed, the highway will help facilitate tourist arrival to the popular tourist destinations. Last year, the monsoon fury had wreaked havoc in Mandi, Kullu and Manali and damaged this highway badly between Mandi and Manali. The Mandi-Pandoh road stretch of this highway remained blocked for months. This year, the NHAI restored the highway temporarily for traffic to resume, but it is still in a bad condition at many places between Mandi and Manali.

Recently, for the maintenance of this highway between Mandi and Pandoh, the district administration had announced that it would remain closed for a few hours every day for almost a week. Budhi Prakash, a hotelier in Manali, says that this road is

the lifeline of the tourism industry but unfortunately it is still incomplete. The blockage on the highway during the tourist season will have an adverse impact at a time when the tourism industry had already suffered huge losses in the past. The candidates of both BJP and Congress should discuss this issue, he demanded.

Anup Thakur, president of the Kullu-Manali Paryatak Vikas Mandal, and Gajender Thakur, state president of the Federation of Himachal Hotels and Restaurant Association, say that the poor condition of the Kiratpur-Manali road is a major public issue. The BJP and Congress candidates should clear their stand on what they will do to get this road project completed in a time-bound manner.

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Secretary, ICAI

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As LS elections end, BJP aims for '50 paar' in J&K Assembly

OUR CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, MAY 26
A day after the Lok Sabha elections ended in Kashmir, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Kashmir launched a new slogan — "50 paar" — for the upcoming Assembly elections.

As per the final delimitation order of May 5, 2022, J&K seats were extended to 90. Of the 90 Assembly constituencies in the region, 43 will be part of Jammu region and 47 of Kashmir. Nine Assembly seats have been reserved for STs, of which six are in Jammu and three in the Valley.

Big turnout reflects govt's successful J&K policy, next step statehood: Shah

NEW DELHI, MAY 26
Union Home Minister Amit Shah has said the Modi government's Kashmir policy has been vindicated by the successful polling in Jammu and Kashmir, where even separatists have voted "overwhelmingly", as he assured that the Assembly elections in the region will be held before September 30.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses a rally in New Delhi. FILE

the Lok Sabha elections in the Kashmir Valley, he said the party was still working on strengthening its organisation in the Valley. "We will definitely put up our candidates in future. Our organisation is getting expanded and our organisation is under process of strengthening," he added.

Asked about the possibility of merger of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) with Jammu and Kashmir, Shah said it is his personal belief that PoK could have been part of India in 1947-48, but it got away because of what he said was premature ceasefire by the Jawaharlal Nehru government in the first war with Pakistan over the region. "Had the ceasefire been declared four days later, PoK would have been with us," he said, adding that the possible merger of PoK with Jammu Kashmir can only be decided after lots of serious discussions.



BJP general secretary Ashok Koul in south Kashmir's Anantnag on Sunday. TRIBUNE PHOTO

"I have said in Parliament that we will give the statehood after the Assembly elections," he said, adding that everything is going according to plan, such as the surveys of the Backward Classes and delimitation exercise of the Assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies.

Some people used to say that people of the valley do not believe in the Indian Constitution. But this election was held under the Indian Constitution because Kashmir's Constitution is no longer there. It was scrapped. Election was held under the Indian Constitution. People who sought a separate country, even they cast their votes overwhelmingly, both at the organisation level as well as individual people," he said.

Shah said, "It was a very big victory for the democracy and a big success of the Narendra Modi government's Kashmir policy, which it has been pursuing for the last 10 years."

The three seats in the Kashmir — Srinagar (38.49 per cent), Baramulla (59.1 per cent) and Anantnag-Rajouri (53 per cent) — have recorded the highest voter turnout "in many decades", the Election Commission said on Saturday.

3 weeks on, no breakthrough in Poonch terror attack case

ARJUN SHARMA

JAMMU, MAY 26
The J&K Police and Army officials are yet to make an arrest even after three weeks of terrorist attack on an Indian Air Force (IAF) convoy in the Shaistar area of Poonch district, in which an IAF corporal was killed in the line of duty and four others were injured.



Security personnel during a cordon and search operation in Poonch district. FILE

three similar attacks on security forces in Poonch district since past one year in which similar tactics were used by terrorists. "In all three attacks which

waited for the convoy of soldiers before attacking them. The attacks were pre-planned for which internal inquiries were also conducted. However, it is still not known as to how the ultras were able to manage to get information about the movement of these convoys," said intelligence sources.

The forces had heightened security measures ahead of the elections in Rajouri and Poonch on Saturday. Both the districts are in Anantnag constituency. It is believed that the terrorists involved in the IAF convoy attack also included a sniper who was firing from the two vehicles from inside the forest cover while two ultras came out in open. The Tribune had earlier reported that one of the three terrorists was an ex-Pakistan Army regular who had received training in jungle warfare and techniques to sustain in forest areas.

Army Chief gets extension; to hit..

FROM PAGE 1
age of superannuation (May 31, 2024) up to June 30, 2024." The MoD cited Rule 16 A (4) of the Army Rules 1954 for the extension. While the chiefs of all three services retire at 62, Lt General-rank officers and their equivalent in the IAF and Navy retire at 60.

who took over on May 1, was appointed after the model code of conduct came into force. This one-month extension would affect the next two senior-most officers, Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi and Lt Gen Ajai Kumar Singh, who will also retire on June 30. However, past records show Air Chief Marshal RKS Bhaduria took over as the IAF Chief on the last day of his service i.e. September 30, 2019, and served for two years.

PM Modi: Not against Muslims, but Congress' appeasement politics

FROM PAGE 1
"We have been in power for 10 years with massive mandates, which helped us do things such as the abrogation of Article 370 which were thought to be impossible... A government that could take such big decisions could do anything it wanted. What did we do? We extended SC/ST/OBC reservations for more years," the Prime Minister said ahead of the June 1 elections in eight states and UTs, including Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Chandigarh, UP,

Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal and Jharkhand. On the frequent Opposition refrain that central probe agencies were being used to target BJP's political rivals, Modi said those claiming to be targeted were the ones from whom mountains of cash had been seized. "Yes, the corrupt are being targeted. The entire country saw heaps of cash recovered by the agencies, which shows that the ED and the CBI are on the right track," said the Prime Minister.

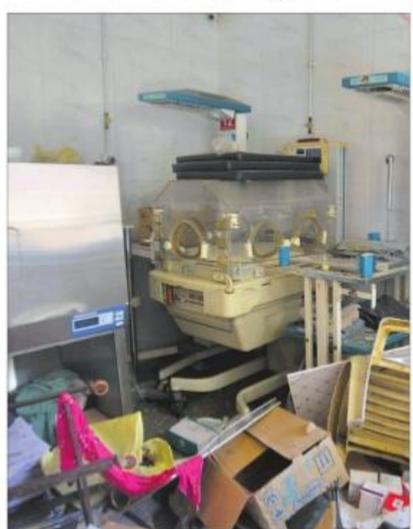
7 newborns killed in Delhi hospital fire

FROM PAGE 1
resident, Mukesh Bansal, alleged that an unauthorised oxygen refilling cylinder work was being carried out in the building. "We had complained about it to the local councillor as well, but nothing was done. It was all happening under the nose of the police," he alleged. Bansal also said that he used to live next to the hospital but due to the illegal work of refilling cylinders, he shifted to the next lane.

The police have arrested the owner of the centre, Naveen Khichi, who had earlier absconded, apart from one doctor (Dr Akash) who was on duty at the time of the fire. The owner has been booked under Section 336 (endangering personal safety of others) and Section 304A (causing death by negligence) at the Vivek Vihar police station. District Magistrate Shahdara Rishita Gupta, in her preliminary report, said the hospital had 12 neonatal admissions at the time of the fire. The report said the fire raged for 81 minutes before it

was brought under control. "One died on the spot. The 11 others were taken to a nearby hospital where six were declared dead upon arrival," the report said. Fire department officials said 16 fire tenders were pressed into service to control the blaze. They said the rescue efforts were affected due to a single staircase and no fire escape.

The front portion of the hospital was completely engulfed in flames and the staff rushed out from the rear side after the fire erupted. Eyewitnesses said the staff had to break a window in the rear of the building to escape and rescue the infants. Condoling the deaths, President Droupadi Murmu prayed for strength to the bereaved parents. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the tragedy "heart-rending" and announced an ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh for the next of kin of each deceased. Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said those responsible for negligence would not be spared.



Interior of the Baby Care Hospital; and (right) kin of victims attack Dr Akash as police bring him to the hospital. MANAS RANJAN BHUI & PTI

Cop involved in drug trafficking dismissed

JAMMU, MAY 26
A police constable booked last year under the NDPS Act was dismissed from service in Reasi district, an official said on Sunday. Reasi SSP Mohita Sharma ordered the dismissal of selection grade constable Tariq Hussain Shah for his prolonged unauthorised absence from duties and alleged involvement in drug trafficking,

a police spokesperson said. Shah was booked under sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act at Jammu's Bakshi Nagar police station last year. The delinquent official was issued multiple notices but he failed to report back. Final show cause notice to him was issued by the Reasi district police headquarters on April 5, 2023. — OC

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Applications are invited for admission to the 121st, 14-week Postgraduate Certificate in the Teaching of English (PGCTE), a blended teacher-training programme commencing on 15 July 2024. It will conclude on 19 October 2024. The 9-week face to face component (15.07.2024 to 13.09.2024) of the programme will be conducted at RIE - Sector 32, Chandigarh. The 5-week online component of the programme (16.09.2024 to 19.10.2024) will be conducted online and the participants will return to their place of work for the online mode. The course is also open for teacher aspirants. The application form is available on the institute's website i.e. www.rieni.org. The filled form must be emailed to the institute by 12 July 2024. The details of the website link for application form and email ID are given below.

Link on the Website: 121 PGCTE Admission Form
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Note For Teachers aspirants:

- Prospectus and application forms are available at the institute's website from 1 June 2024 and also at the office counter during the institute hours from Monday to Friday. The applicants can pay the application fee of Rs. 200/- online (Bank details are available on the website)
- Fee : Rs. 3000/- (non-refundable) only for teachers aspirants
- The course fee and the form fee are to be deposited in the Bank Account of this institute. The proof of payment must be submitted to this office via email/Whatsapp No. 7696678395/post. The original receipt is to be submitted to the institute on joining the programme.

Sd/- Director
Regional Institute of English
Chandigarh Administration

Hamas launches barrage of rockets into Israel in first strike in months

DEIRAL-BALAH (GAZA), MAY 26
Rocket sirens sounded across central Israel, including in Tel Aviv, for the first time in months on Sunday, as Hamas claimed to have fired a barrage of rockets from Gaza.

The militants have continued to fire projectiles at communities around Gaza more than seven months into the war but have not fired longer-range rockets in months. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage from the latest barrage.

Earlier on Sunday, aid trucks entered Gaza from southern Israel through a new agreement to bypass the Rafah crossing with Egypt after Israeli forces seized the Palestinian side of it earlier this month. But was unclear if humanitarian groups would be able to access the aid because of ongoing fighting in the area.

Egypt refuses to reopen its side of the Rafah crossing until control of the Gaza side is handed back to Palestinians. It agreed to temporarily divert traffic through Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing, Gaza's main cargo terminal, after a call between US President Joe Biden and Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi. But that crossing has been largely inaccessible because of fighting linked to Israel's offensive in the nearby city of Rafah. Israel says it has allowed hundreds of trucks to enter, but UN agencies say it is usually too dangerous to retrieve the aid on the other side.

The war between Israel and Hamas, now in its eighth month, has killed nearly 36,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials. Around 80% of the population's 2.3 million people have fled their homes, severe hunger is widespread and UN



Debris in a room that was damaged after rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip towards Herzliya in Israel on Sunday. REUTERS

NORWAY FORMALLY RECOGNISES PALESTINE

Brussels: Norway on Sunday handed over diplomatic papers to the Palestinian PM in the latest step toward recognising a Palestinian state, a largely symbolic move that has infuriated Israel. Ireland and Spain made a concerted pledge with Norway to recognise a Palestinian state, a historic move that increases Israel's isolation more than seven months into its war against Hamas.

officials say parts of the territory are experiencing famine.

Hamas triggered the war with its Oct 7 attack into Israel, in which Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and seized some 250 hostages. Hamas is still holding some 100 hostages and the remains of around 30 others after most of the rest were released during a cease-fire last year.

Hamas claimed to have captured an Israeli soldier during fighting in northern Gaza and released video late Saturday showing a wounded man

being dragged through a tunnel. The Israeli military denied any of its soldiers had been captured, and Hamas did not provide any other evidence to substantiate its claim.

In a separate development, the Israeli military said it had detained a suspect over a widely circulated video in which a man dressed as an Israeli soldier threatens mutiny. In the video, the man said tens of thousands of soldiers were ready to disobey Defence Minister Yoav Gallant over his suggestion that Palestinians should govern Gaza

after the war and pledged loyalty to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu alone.

It was not clear if the man was on active duty, or when or where the video was made. Yair Netanyahu, the prime minister's son, had shared the video on social media, sparking criticism from political opponents. The prime minister's office released a brief statement condemning all forms of military subordination.

Norway on Sunday handed over diplomatic papers to the Palestinian prime minister in the latest step toward recog-

nising a Palestinian state, a largely symbolic move that has infuriated Israel.

Ireland and Spain made a concerted pledge with Norway to recognise a Palestinian state, a historic move that increases Israel's isolation more than seven months into its grinding war against Hamas in Gaza. The handover of papers by Norwegian FM Espen Barth Eide to the prime minister was made in Brussels, where Mohammad Mustafa is meeting with foreign ministers of EU nations. —AP

AID TRUCKS BEGIN ENTERING GAZA

Cairo: Aid trucks entered Gaza from southern Israel on Sunday through a deal to bypass the Rafah crossing with Egypt after Israeli forces seized the Palestinian side of it this month. Aound 200 aid trucks would enter Gaza through Kerem Shalom at the southeastern edge of the Palestinian enclave, bypassing the main Rafah crossing.

Russian attack on crowded Kharkiv store kills 14, hurts 43

KHARKIV (UKRAINE), MAY 26

A Russian strike on a crowded DIY hardware store in Kharkiv killed 14 people and wounded dozens more, Ukrainian officials said on Sunday, the death toll rising as the country's second-largest city reeled from two attacks a day earlier.

Two guided bombs hit the Epicentre DIY hypermarket in a residential area of the city on Saturday afternoon, Regional Governor Oleh Syniehubov said on national television.

The strikes caused a massive fire which sent a column of thick, black smoke billowing hundreds of metres into the air. Forty-three people were injured, the local prosecutors' office said, adding that ten of the twelve dead had still not been identified.

Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov said about 120 people had been in the hardware store when the bombs struck. "The attack targeted the shopping centre, where there were many people — this is clearly terrorism," Terekhov said.

In a post on the Telegram app, Ukraine's Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said 16 people were still missing after

Zelenskyy denounces strike as Moscow's 'madness'



A shopping mall that was hit by a Russian missile in Kharkiv. REUTERS

the strike. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy issued a plea to Ukraine's Western allies to help boost air defences to keep the country's cities safe. French President Emmanuel Macron, writing on social media platform X, denounced the attack on the store as "unacceptable".

A separate early evening missile strike hit a residential building in the centre of the city of 1.3 million. The number

of people wounded by that strike had climbed to 25 by Sunday morning. The missile left a crater several metres deep in the pavement at the foot of the building, which also housed a post office, a beauty salon and a cafe.

Zelenskyy, in his nightly video address, denounced the strike as "yet another example of Russian madness. There is no other way to describe it". — Reuters

Delhi-born Pak actor Talat Hussain dies at 83

KARACHI, MAY 26

Talat Hussain, one of Pakistan's most accomplished and celebrated actors, died on Sunday at a private hospital here following a prolonged illness. He was 83.

A radio, TV, theatre, and cinema veteran, Hussain was known for serials such as "Bandish", "Karwaan", "Hawain" and "Parchaiyan" as well as movies "Chiragh Jalta Raha", and Indian film "Sauten Ki Beti". Arts Council of Pakistan

Karachi president Ahmed Shah confirmed the news of Hussain's death, adding that the actor had long been undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Karachi.

Delhi-born Hussain was famous for his baritone voice and unique acting style.

"His services to the Pakistani television, theatre, film and radio will always be remembered. The vacuum left by his death can never be fulfilled," said Pakistan PM Shahbaz Sharif. —PTI

Macron lands in Germany in rare state visit

BERLIN, MAY 26

President Emmanuel Macron arrived in Germany on Sunday for the first state visit by a French head of state in 24 years, a three-day trip meant to underline the strong ties between the leading powers.

Macron and his wife, Brigitte, are being hosted by Germany's president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Jacques Chirac was the last French President to visit Germany in 2000. — AP

INFOCUS AGRICULTURE

PRECISION FARMING

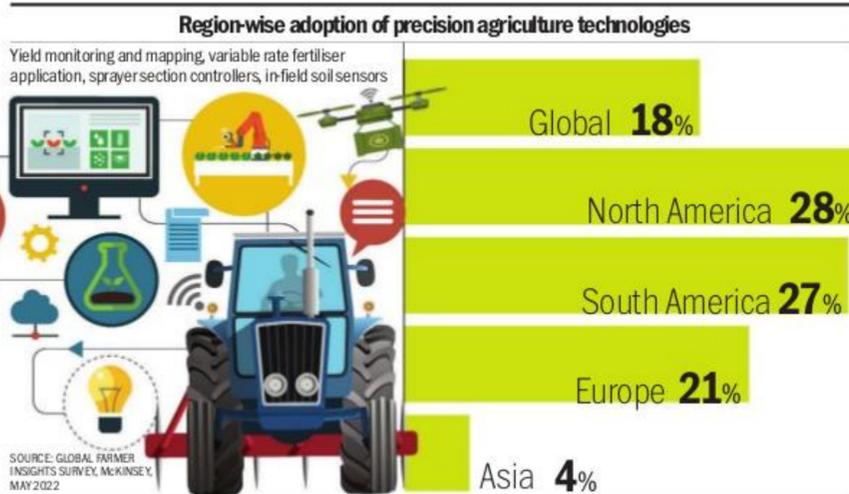
What farmers precisely need to raise their income

A. AMARENDER REDDY AND TULSI LINGAREDDY

INDIA'S food production requirement is expanding due to the rising demand from the growing population. The remarkable growth in food-grain production from about 50 million tonnes in 1950-51 to a record 330 million tonnes in 2022-23 was largely input-driven, along with significant expansion in the area under irrigation. The irrigated crop area rose from about 18 per cent to over 55 per cent during the past 60 years, as per estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture. However, the scope for further expansion in the area under cultivation as well as irrigation is limited. Hence, the existing land and water resources need to be utilised more efficiently and sustainably.

In addition, the use of chemical fertilisers has increased manifold from about 2 kg per hectare in the early 1960s to about 141 kg per hectare in 2022-23 on an average across the country, according to the Fertiliser Association of India. Further, the use of fertilisers is much more than 200 kg per hectare in major crop-producing states like Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana. Moreover, there is a growing imbalance in nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium (NPK) fertilisers' use. The NPK application ratio deteriorated to 11.8:4.6:1 in 2022-23 at the all-India level against the recommended ratio of 4:2:1. At the state level, the NPK ratio widened to 104.9:39.2:1 in Rajasthan, 50.8:12.6:1 in Punjab and 43.5:12:1 in Haryana in 2022-23.

Innovative farming technologies like precision farming appear to be a promising solution



VARIOUS PRECISION FARMING TECHNOLOGIES

- Remote sensing**
 - Real-time information on soil moisture, nutrient levels, crop health, and insect infestations is provided through drones, satellite and aerial photography, ground-based sensors, etc. Farmers can use this information to decide when to use irrigation, fertilisers & pest control.
- Variable rate technology (VRT)**
 - Based on data-driven recommendations, VRT systems modify application of inputs, including fertilisers, herbicides and water. By preventing waste and reducing usage, this helps the environment and saves money.
- IoT and sensors**
 - Internet of Things (IoT) technology connects sensors implanted in machinery and equipment; monitors and controls farming activities in real time. Data on temperature, humidity, soil conditions and other variables is gathered by these sensors.
- Data analytics and machine learning**
 - To produce useful insights, sophisticated algorithms analyse the enormous amounts of data gathered from many sources. Crop yields, disease outbreaks and the best dates to grow a crop can all be predicted using machine learning algorithms.
- Geospatial technology**
 - Geospatial technology helps in generating maps and analysing spatial data. This helps farmers better understand their land, plan irrigation systems and optimise planting patterns based on soil variability and topography.

for enhancing crop production sustainably and reducing the cost of cultivation with efficient use of input resources, thereby fetching better returns for farmers.

Precision farming, also known as precision agriculture, is a new method of crop production using the latest advances in agricultural technology and practices for precise application of inputs for

enhancing the quality and quantity of the output. It is a data- and technology-driven crop production management for maximising yields with optimal use of inputs. It involves collection, maintenance and analysis of data from multiple sources on various aspects of farming, such as soil characteristics, weather patterns, crop growth perform-

ance, pest infestations, etc. It employs remote sensing, variable rate technology, the Internet of Things, global positioning system, drones, sensors, etc. Furthermore, the fast-paced advances in machine learning and artificial intelligence are also finding potential applications in precision farming for predicting pest outbreaks and automation

of farm practices like irrigation.

An important and crucial benefit of precision farming is that it can potentially reduce the excessive use of input resources with accurate application as per the requirement. This, in turn, will help in improving the incomes and profitability of farmers by reducing input costs. Controlled application of chemical inputs and water will also help in reducing environmental pollution and conserving natural resources. A report by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water indicated that precision farming helped in increasing yield by 30-200 per cent across various crops using irrigation-cum-fertiliser application (fertigation) systems. In a pilot project conducted in Telangana, there was 21 per cent increase in yield per acre, 9 per cent reduction in pesticide use, 5 per cent drop in fertiliser usage and 8 per cent improvement in output prices due to enhanced quality.

A major challenge for the widespread adoption of precision farming is its high economic cost. It requires substantial amount of data covering soil moisture levels, soil nutrient status, crop health, pest infestation, weather patterns, etc. A substantial amount of capital is required, apart from machinery and equipment for remote sensing, real-time measurement of soil fertility and moisture. Scalability and custom-fitting to the small farm size is another uphill task.

Creating awareness and disseminating technical knowhow among farmers are a must. Simple precision farming practices like micro irrigation and fertigation may be feasible for farmers to learn and use with initial training. But, advanced technologies like the use of remote sensing, drones, sensors

measuring real-time soil fertility and moisture require special training and dedicated personnel.

Globally, precision farming is gaining popularity, particularly for variable fertiliser application and yield mapping following a significant rise in the cost of inputs and labour.

In India, the National Committee on Precision Agriculture & Horticulture under the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare promotes precision agriculture through Precision Farming Development Centres (PFDCs). At present, there are 22 PFDCs located in all agro-climatic zones across the country, providing training, transfer of technology, trials and demonstrations on the crops specific to the cultivated region. Nevertheless, the progress in the adoption of precision farming is largely confined to micro-irrigation and largely for horticultural crops.

Thus, in view of the limited scope for expanding cultivated land, the dwindling water resources, rising input costs and the growing demand for food production, precision farming can be a potential solution for ensuring sustainable agricultural production and raising farm incomes. Agricultural technology (agtech) startups can play a crucial role by providing technological infrastructure and services to farmers at reasonable costs. There is a need to create widespread awareness among farmers by strengthening the agricultural extension system.

Reddy is Joint Director, School of Crop Health Policy Support Research, ICAR-National Institute of Biotic Stress Management, Raipur; Lingareddy is a senior economist (sustainable finance & agriculture), Mumbai. Views are personal

KKR crush SRH to win third IPL title

CHENNAI, MAY 26 Mitchell Starc was magical. Andre Russell was mesmerising. Gautam Gambhir remained stoic. Shah Rukh Khan hid his emotions behind a mask. Those contrasting pictures vividly conveyed Kolkata Knight Riders' annihilation of Sunrisers Hyderabad in a lopsided final to bag their third Indian Premier League title here today.

In a season of start-to-finish domination, KKR's bowling unit was inch-perfect, leaving Sunrisers in a shambles while bowling them out for a paltry 113 in 18.3 overs. It was the lowest ever score in the tournament's summit clash.

Venkatesh Iyer (52 not out off 26 balls, with 4 fours and 3 sixes), a forgotten India all-rounder, then helped KKR complete the formalities in just 10.3 overs.

He also ensured that fellow Iyer — skipper Shreyas — had a 'Knight' to remember after enduring a harrowing last four months.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz (39) was useful with the bat after being effective behind the stumps with three catches. It was a perfect night for him too as he had to leave in the middle of the tournament to attend his ailing mother who is admitted in a Kabul hospital. He came back after Englishman Phil Salt had to report back for national duty.

The match was one-sided, the victory was clinical and it smelt of one thing — Team Spirit. Everyone had an enticing back story as they got together to become the third team after CSK and MI to win three IPL titles.

In 2012, at this very

KNIGHTS BECOME KINGS



KKR'S PLAYERS CELEBRATE THEIR VICTORY IN THE IPL FINAL AGAINST SUNRISERS HYDERABAD IN CHENNAI ON SUNDAY. PTI

ground, Gambhir had stamped his credentials as an astute skipper leading KKR to their maiden title. A dozen years later, Gambhir, the tactician behind the scenes, ensured that when the T20 World Cup ends next month, the Indian cricket board will be able to convince him to change the colour of his jersey and the dug-out for the next three and a half years.

There is head coach Chandrakant Pandit, whose leg-end in Indian cricket continues to grow. 'Chandu Sir'

always knew how to win Ranji Trophies but that feeling of being a coach of an IPL-winning team would taste equally sweet.

In the past few years, Sunil Narine (488 runs and 17 wickets) had lost his mojo as a batter and he rediscovered it this year. Boy! That's a story for another day.

Just like the qualified architect that he is, Varun Chakravarthy (21 wickets), who was panned for being unfit when he played briefly for India three seasons back, made a crafty comeback.

BRIEF SCORES

■ SRH: 113 all out in 18.3 overs (Cummins 24; Russell 3/19, Starc 2/14, Harshit 2/24) vs KKR: 114/2 in 10.3 overs (Venkatesh 52*, Gurbaz 39)

The story of two unheralded pacers — Harshit Rana and Vaibhav Arora — showing what fearlessness and big heart mean at the big stage too would remain rosette.

And then there was man for all seasons Andre Russell, muscling those sixes and

slipping in those fast deliveries to make all the difference.

When skipper Shreyas came in, the 'Chak De India' song started blaring from the speakers and by the time it ended, Shah Rukh, still recovering from a bout of dehydration, went down to join his boys in celebration.

But it all started with Starc (2/14) justifying his eye-popping auction billing of Rs 24.75 crore with a magical delivery. Starc, who peaked at the right time after a disappointing

league phase, made full use of overcast conditions as the league's break-out youngster Abhishek Sharma (2) got one that swung late, drawing him forward. The delivery eluded the outside edge of Abhishek's bat and clipped the off-bail.

The delivery could have got any batter out and it was just that the unfortunate Abhishek's name was written on it on the day. It was the kind of ball that would always send shivers down the spine of those sitting in the dug-out. — PTI

Injury scare for Neeraj, pulls out of Golden Spike

NEW DELHI, MAY 26 Olympics champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra today clarified that he is not injured but has pulled out of the Ostrava Golden Spike meet in Czech Republic on May 28 as a precautionary measure after he felt "something" with his adductor muscles during a recent training session.

Chopra said he would not want to risk injury in an Olympics year and hence decided to skip the prestigious meet. "Following a recent throwing session, I decided not to compete in Ostrava as I felt something in my adductor. I have had problems with it in the past and pushing it at this stage can lead to injury," Chopra posted online. "Just to clarify, I am

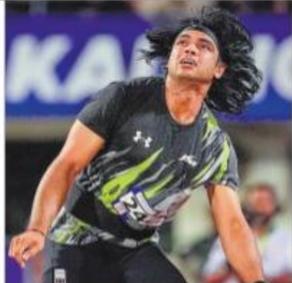
not injured but I don't want to take any risk during the Olympic year so had to take this decision. Once I feel it's fully recovered, I will get back to competitions," he added.

Chopra's clarification came just hours after the organisers of the prestigious meet said he has decided to skip the event due to an injury he sustained while training two weeks ago. "Due to an injury that he sustained in training two weeks ago (adductor muscle) he will not be able to throw in Ostrava, but he will arrive at the event as a guest," the organisers of Golden Spike said earlier in the day.

This was to be Chopra's first foray at the meet, which is a World Athletics Continental Tour Gold event. — PTI

Precaution

Following a recent throwing session, I decided not to compete in Ostrava as I felt something in my adductor. I have had problems with it in the past and pushing it at this stage can lead to injury. Neeraj Chopra



Race walk added to Inter-State meet

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MAY 26 The Athletics Federation of India (AFI) will add the race walk event to the list of competitions at the National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships, which will be the last chance for Indian athletes to make the grade for the Paris Olympics.

The AFI had dropped race walk from the part of the programme in its May circular to announce the event, to be held in Panchkula on June 27-30. However, with Servin Sebastian and Arshpreet Singh dropping out of the list of athletes who have achieved the Paris qualifying mark and the race walking team facing difficulty to participate in Europe, the AFI has had a change of heart.

As of now, Akshdeep Singh, Suraj Panwar, Ram Baboo, Vikash Singh and Paramjeet Singh Bisht have all achieved the qualifying mark of 1 hour, 20 minutes, 10 seconds. Each national federation can send a maximum of three athletes. The Zahoracka Dvadsiatka

in Slovakia was to be a trial, with the top three Indian finishers were to be selected for the Paris Olympics.

In the World Athletics Race Walking Tour silver event in Slovakia, Akshdeep clocked 1:20:52 to finish third. Servin and Arshpreet finished seventh and 15th, respectively. The team travelled to Slovakia without their coach Tatiana Sibileva.

"The AFI will issue a fresh circular that will add race walk to the list of competitions. It was discussed that since the inter-state championship was the last event for qualification, it should be the same for the race walkers as well," said a source. "We are expecting the new circular to be out by Monday," he added.

This will be music to the ears of Servin and Arshpreet, who had made the qualifying standards at the National Open Race Walking Competition in Chandigarh in January. However, due to faulty reading, a few complaints and suspicion of manipulation, a few of the results were revised later.

BRIEFLY

NEW YORK

Rohit reaches NYC, Kohli, Hardik to join team later

Skipper Rohit Sharma was among the 10 India squad members that landed here in the morning for the T20 World Cup with Virat Kohli and vice-captain Hardik Pandya being the notable absentees in the first batch of arrivals. Also part of the travelling party was head coach Rahul Dravid and the rest of the support staff. Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel were the other players to arrive. Reserve players Shubman Gill and Khaleel Ahmed were also with them.

NEW DELHI

Swimmer Srihari wins silver in Mare Nostrum

Indian swimmer Srihari Nataraj clinched the silver medal in the 50m backstroke event at the 30th Mare Nostrum swimming tour at Canelet-Roussillon in France. Nataraj, who competed at the Tokyo Olympics, clocked 25.50 seconds. Nataraj's personal best is 25.11. The 50m backstroke is a non-Olympics event. No Indian swimmer has made the cut for the Paris Games till now.

ANTWERP

Women's hockey team loses to Argentina in Pro League

The Indian women's hockey team continued its winless streak in the Belgium leg of the FIH Pro League, slumping to 0-3 defeat against Argentina here today. The Indian team will now take on Germany in its next match in London on June 1.

BENTON HARBOR (US)

Atwal climbs to T-29 at Senior PGA Championships

Indian golfer Arjun Atwal rose to T-29 with a card of 68 in the third round of the Senior PGA Championship here. Atwal is 1-under for three rounds. Ernie Els birdied his final hole for a 2-under 69, giving him a share of the lead with Greg Chalmers. AGENCIES

TODAY ON TV FRENCH OPEN SONY SPORTS 2:30PM

Sindhu loses in final after late meltdown

MALAYSIA MASTERS

KUALA LUMPUR, MAY 26

PV Sindhu blew away an 11-3 lead in the deciding game of the Malaysia Masters final against Wang Zhi Yi, missing out on a great opportunity to end her title drought here today. The trophy was well within her reach but the world No. 15 suffered a meltdown after the final change of ends to go down 21-16 5-21 16-21 against the Chinese world No. 7 in 79 minutes.

Fifth seed Sindhu's last wins came at the Singapore Open and the Commonwealth Games in 2022. She finished runner-up at the Madrid Spain Masters last year. Interestingly, Sindhu had defeated Wang in the Singapore Open final. The title would have been



PV Sindhu lost 21-16 5-21 16-21 to Wang Zhi Yi. AP/PTI

the icing on the cake but her impressive run to the final will still give her a lot of confidence as Sindhu looks to put the finishing touches ahead of the Paris Olympics.

"It's sad that I didn't get the result that I had expected. I should have pulled it off, maintaining the lead, but there were really good rallies," Sindhu said.

"Overall, I can say that it's been a very good match. It's

a bit disappointing, but a lot of positives to take from this match and the whole tournament as well. I am happy that I reached the finals. I played well. These matches will definitely give me a lot of confi-

It's sad that I didn't get the result that I had expected. I should have pulled it off. ...but a lot of positives to take from this match and the whole tournament as well. PV Sindhu

dence," she added. Sindhu used a combination of poise and power to dominate the proceedings against the reigning Asian champion for most part of the match but it all fell apart after the break in the decider as the trophy slipped out of her hands. Sindhu she fell into a pool of errors as Wang won 18 of the next 23 points to seal the trophy. — PTI

Dipa makes history

First Indian gymnast to win gold in Asian Championships



Dipa won the vault gold. FILE

TASHKENT, MAY 26

Top gymnast Dipa Karmakar today became the first Indian to win a gold medal in the Asian Senior Championships as she clinched the yellow metal in the women's vault event here. The 30-year-old Dipa secured an average of 13.566 in the vault final on the last day of competitions.

Dipa, who had finished fourth in the vault final at the 2016 Rio Olympics, had won a bronze medal in the same event in the 2015 edition. Ashish Kumar had won a bronze medal in individual floor exercise in the 2015 edition. Pranati Nayak had also bagged bronze

medals in the vault event in the 2019 and 2022 editions. However, Dipa, who returned to action last year after a 21-month suspension for a doping offence, is out of contention for the Paris Olympics. She finished 16th in the all-round category with a score of 46.166. The Asian Championship was the final Olympics qualifier. — PTI

Deepika returns empty-handed from World Cup

YECHEON (SOUTH KOREA): Deepika Kumari fell short of a successive World Cup medal in her international comeback after becoming a mother, losing to world No. 2 Lim Sihyeon and No. 3 Alejandra Valencia here today. Indian archers returned empty-handed in the recurve category, while securing two medals (one gold and one silver) in the compound section of the World Cup Stage 2. South Korea's Lim prevailed 28-26, 28-28, 28-27, 27-27 in the semifinal. Fighting for bronze, Deepika lost to Mexico's Valencia 26-29, 26-28, 28-25, 27-25, 26-29. PTI

Boxers Dev, Jamwal get easy wins

OLYMPICS QUALIFIERS

BANGKOK, MAY 26

Indian boxers continued their dominant run on Day 3 of the second world qualifiers for the Paris Olympics as Abhinash Jamwal (63.5kg) and Nishant Dev (71kg) comfortably won their bouts here today.

Jamwal, who has replaced Olympian Shiva Thapa in the second qualifiers, was at his best against Andriejus Lavrenovas of Lithuania in his first-round bout. The Himachal Pradesh boxer was clinical with his punches in the opening round and dominated the ring as the bout went on to earn a 5-0 verdict.

World Championships bronze medalist Dev also secured a 5-0 win over Armando Bighafa of Guinea-Bissau. Dev never looked under any kind of pressure as he controlled the bout from the first minute and continued with his flurry of punches in the second round to put the opponent completely on the back foot. — PTI

Alcaraz hits the ground running

Spaniard shows no sign of discomfort in comeback from forearm injury

PARIS, MAY 26

Carlos Alcaraz laid down an early statement to his rivals at Roland Garros, where the third seed cruised to an opening victory against JJ Wolf.

Alcaraz wrapped a 6-1 6-2 6-1 triumph in just one hour, 51 minutes on Court Philippe-Chatrier. The Spaniard's routine win at the clay-court Major will be a confidence booster for a player who had not competed for more than three weeks due to a right forearm injury.

"I'm really happy to be back, to be back here in Paris, to be back competing again," said Alcaraz. "It's been a really difficult month for me. I love competing, I love playing tennis, and to stay away from that was hurtful for me. I tried everything I could do to be at my 100 per cent here in Paris, to show my best tennis, and I think I did it today."

Alcaraz said he was forced to hold back on his forehand during his quarter-final run in Madrid at the



Carlos Alcaraz cruised to a 6-1 6-2 6-1 victory against JJ Wolf. REUTERS

start of the month, and he later withdrew from another ATP Masters 1000 event in Rome due to the arm injury. Against Wolf, however, Alcaraz most definitely did not hold back with his groundstrokes, and he

deployed his trademark heavy forehand to great effect throughout the pair's maiden meeting. "I would have loved to have played more matches (this month), but I don't think I need too many matches to get to 100 per cent," said Alcaraz.

Osaka's hard-fought win

Naomi Osaka marked her seventh appearance in Paris with a 1-6 6-4 7-5 first-round victory over Lucia Bronzetti. "There were moments I played pretty well, but I was nervous and got really tight," Osaka said. — Agencies

Rajkot gaming zone fire toll 35; 2 held

FIR against all six partners | Facility didn't have fire NOC, proper safety equipment, say police

RAJKOT, MAY 26

The police have registered an FIR against six partners of a game zone in Gujarat's Rajkot city on charges of culpable homicide not amounting to murder and arrested two persons after a fire there killed 35 persons (as per IANS), officials said on Sunday.

The local police in November 2023 granted a booking licence to the gaming zone, which was renewed for the period from January 1 to December 31, 2024, Rajkot Police Commissioner Raju Bhargava told reporters.

"The game zone had received permissions from the roads and buildings department. It had also submitted a proof of fire safety equipment to obtain the fire NOC which was under process and not yet completed," the official said.

Thirty-five persons, including children, were killed and three others injured in the massive fire that swept through the TRP game zone in the Nana Mava locality teeming with people who were enjoying a summer vacation outing on Saturday evening, officials earlier said.

As per the FIR, the accused persons erected a 50-metre-wide and 60-metre-long structure with the height of around two-three storey building using metal sheet fabrication to create a game zone.

They did not have proper fire fighting equipment and had not obtained the no-objection certificate (NOC) from the local fire department, thereby endangering the lives of people despite knowing that a blaze in such a structure could cause deaths and injuries, said the FIR.

Yuvrajsinh Solanki, a partner in the Raceway Enter-



Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel with others at the fire site in Rajkot; and (below) a relative of a victim outside a morgue. PTI/REUTERS

PM ANNOUNCES ₹2L EX-GRATIA COMPENSATION

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced an ex-gratia compensation of ₹2 lakh from the PM's National Relief Fund for the next of kin of each deceased. The injured persons would be given ₹50,000, the Prime Minister's Office said on X. The Gujarat Government has also announced an ex-gratia compensation of Rs 4 lakh to kin of each deceased and Rs 50,000 to the injured persons.

FAMILY LOSES FIVE MEMBERS IN INFERNO

A fun weekend outing turned tragic for the Jadeja family, which lost five of its members in the massive fire. Of the five members of the family who are missing or presumed dead, three are children in the age group of 10-15 years. Meanwhile, the DNA samples of the bodies and victims' relatives have been collected for the identification of the deceased, said officials on Sunday. PTI

prise, which operated the TRP game zone, and the entertainment facility's manager Nitin Jain have so far been arrested, Rajkot Deputy

Commissioner of Police (crime) Parthrajsinh Gohil said. The six persons against whom the case was registered by the Rajkot taluka police in

the wee hours of Sunday are Dhaval Corporation proprietor Dhaval Thakkar, Raceway Enterprise partners Ashoksinh Jadeja, Kiritsinh

Jadeja, Prakashchand Hiran, Yuvrajsinh Solanki and Rahul Rathod, as per the FIR. The Gujarat Government has also formed a five-

member SIT headed by state Additional Director General of Police Subhash Trivedi to investigate the incident. — PTI/Agencies

Man-made disaster: Gujarat HC takes suo motu note of fire

AHMEDABAD, MAY 26

A Special Bench of the Gujarat High Court on Sunday took suo motu cognisance of the fire incident at a game zone in Rajkot which left 35 persons dead and said it was prima facie a 'man-made disaster'.

Such gaming zones and recreational facilities have come up without the necessary approvals from competent authorities, the Bench of Justices Biren Vaishnav and Devan Desai observed.

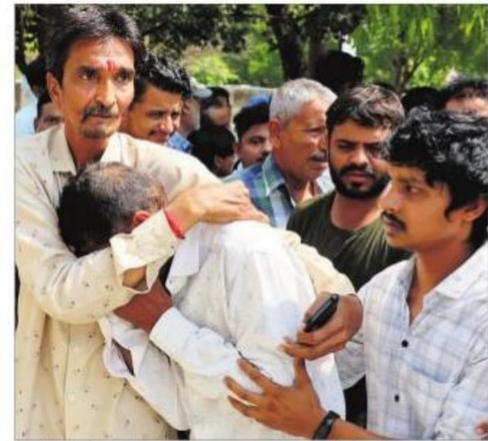
The Bench directed advocates of the Ahmedabad, Vadodra, Surat and Rajkot municipal corporations to appear before it on Monday with instructions as to under what provisions of law the authorities led these units to be set up or continue to operate under their jurisdiction.

Children were among the 35 persons killed and three others injured in the massive fire that swept through the game zone in Rajkot teeming with people enjoying a summer vacation outing on Saturday

evening, as per the officials.

Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel visited the incident site at Nana-Mava road on Sunday morning and a hospital where the injured persons were admitted.

"We are shocked to read newspaper reports which indicate that the gaming zone at Rajkot appears to have taken advantage of the loopholes in the Gujarat Comprehensive General Development Control Regulations (GDCR). These entertainment zones, as newspapers suggest, have come up without the necessary approvals from the competent authorities," the court observed. The HC also wanted to know from the state government and the municipal corporations "whether such licences, including the licences to its use and compliance of fire safety regulations" were given to these respective (entertainment) zones that are in territorial jurisdiction of these corporations. — PTI/Agencies



A relative of a victim breaks down at a hospital in Rajkot. REUTERS

12 hours after Qatar Airways plane hits turbulence

LONDON, MAY 26

Twelve persons were injured when a Qatar Airways plane flying from Doha to Dublin on Sunday hit turbulence, airport authorities said.

The Dublin airport said in a statement that flight QR017, a Boeing 787 Dreamliner, landed safely as scheduled before 1 pm (1200 GMT).

It said that upon landing the aircraft was met by emergency services, including airport police and the fire and rescue department, "due to six passengers and six crew... reporting injuries after the aircraft experienced turbulence while airborne over Turkey."

Qatar Airways said in a statement that "a small number of passengers and crew sustained minor injuries and are now receiving medical attention".

The incident comes five days after a UK man died of a suspected heart attack and several others were injured when a Singapore Airlines flight from London hit severe turbulence. — AP

Receiving threats after YouTuber's one-sided video, claims Maliwal

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, MAY 26

AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on Sunday alleged she had been getting rape and death threats following a "character assassination orchestrated" by her party leaders and volunteers.

In a post on X, Maliwal expressed her distress, claiming the situation escalated after a "one-sided" video by YouTuber Dhruv Rathee against her. "After the leaders and volunteers of my party i.e. AAP orchestrated a campaign of character assassination, victim shaming and fanning of emotions against me, I have been getting rape and death threats. This got further exacerbated when YouTuber @Dhruv Rathee posted a one-sided video against me," Maliwal wrote on X.

Accusing the party leadership of trying to intimidate her into withdrawing her complaint, Maliwal

voiced her disappointment with Rathee, saying despite her attempts to contact him and share her side of the story, he ignored her calls and messages.

"The manner in which the entire party machinery and its supporters have attempted to vilify and shame me speaks volumes about their stand on women's issues. I am reporting these rape and death threats to the Delhi Police. I hope they take strong action against the perpetrators," Maliwal added.

Maliwal listed several points that she felt were overlooked in Rathee's a little over two-minute video, including the AAP's "U-turn after acknowledging the incident, findings from an MLC report revealing her injuries, selective release of video footage followed by formatting of accused's phone and circumstances surrounding the accused's arrest from the crime scene".

Cyclone 'Remal' hits Bengal, Bangladesh

NEW DELHI, MAY 26

The landfall of severe cyclonic storm 'Remal' commenced on Sunday evening between West Bengal and Bangladesh coasts with an intensity of 110 to 120 kmph, gusting to 135 kmph, the Met office said.

"The landfall process of severe cyclonic storm Remal commenced over the adjacent coasts of West Bengal and Bangladesh between Sagar Island and Khepupara close to



People move their belongings away from the seashore amid rain in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal on Sunday. PTI

1 LAKH MOVED TO SAFETY

- More than one lakh people in vulnerable areas shifted
- PM chairs meeting to review preparedness for cyclone
- Air, rail, road traffic affected; red alert in four Tripura districts

the southwest of Monglaim in the neighbouring country," the Met said. Gale wind speed reaching 110 to 120 kmph, gusting to 135 kmph, was prevailing along and off West Bengal and Bangladesh coasts and north Bay of Bengal and is likely to continue for the next

six hours and decrease thereafter, the Met added.

The Navy has initiated preparatory actions and is following standard operating procedures to start a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) response in the aftermath of the cyclone. The situa-

tion is being closely monitored at the Naval Headquarters, with comprehensive preparatory actions being undertaken by the Eastern Naval Command Headquarters, the Navy said.

It has readied two ships equipped with relief and medical supplies for immediate deployment. Additionally, naval aviation assets, including Sea King, Chetak helicopters and Dornier aircraft, are on standby. — TNS/Agencies

SC to hear BJP's plea against HC order on poll ads

NEW DELHI, MAY 26

The Supreme Court will take up on Monday the BJP's petition challenging a Calcutta High Court order restraining the saffron party from publishing alleged derogatory advertisements against the TMC and its leaders during the ongoing Lok Sabha poll as they violated the model code of conduct.

The BJP's petition is listed before a Vacation Bench of Justice JK Maheshwari and Justice KV Viswanathan on May 27.

The top court had on Friday agreed to consider the BJP's petition after it was mentioned before a Vacation Bench led by Justice Bela M Trivedi for urgent listing.

A Division Bench of the Calcutta High Court had on May 22 refused to interfere with a single-judge order restraining the BJP from publishing 'derogatory' advertisements against the TMC and its leaders, saying "Lakshman Rekha" should not be crossed and there should not be any personal attacks. — TNS

11 killed as gravel-loaded truck overturns on bus in UP

SHAHJAHANPUR (UP), MAY 26

Eleven pilgrims headed to the Purnagiri temple in Uttar Pradesh were killed when a gravel-loaded dumper truck overturned on their bus, a senior official said on Sunday.

Ten other pilgrims were seriously injured in the Saturday night incident and have been admitted to Government

Medical College here, the official said. Shahjahanpur Superintendent of Police Ashok Kumar Meena said the incident occurred at Hajiyapur village under the Khutar police station area when the privately owned bus had halted at a roadside eatery on its way to the temple in Uttar Pradesh's Tanakpur. — PTI

Cancer cases rising among people below 40, says study

NEW DELHI, MAY 26

Twenty per cent of cancer patients who called an NGO-run helpline to seek a second opinion were below 40 years, indicating a rise of cancer incidences amongst younger people, data from the organisation stated.

There were 1,368 callers between March 1 and May 15, according to the Cancer Mukta Bharat Foundation, launched by a group of oncologists.

The study showed that 60 per cent of the cancer patients below the age of 40 were men. It also found that the most prevalent cases were head and neck cancer (26 per cent), closely fol-

lowed by gastrointestinal cancers (16 per cent), breast cancer (15 per cent) and then blood cancers (9 per cent).

The most number of calls were from Hyderabad, followed by Meerut, Mumbai and New Delhi, a statement by the NGO said.

The helpline number (93-555-20202) was launched for the patients to seek second opinion free of cost. It is operational from 10 am to 5 pm from Monday to Saturday.

Cancer patients can call the helpline number to speak to leading oncologists directly or even do a video call to discuss their cancer treatment.

Dr Ashish Gupta, principal

60% RESPONDENTS MEN

- The Cancer Mukta Bharat Foundation, launched by a group of oncologists, has found in its study that 60 per cent of cancer patients below the age of 40 are men
- It also found that the most cancer cases were of head and neck (26%), closely followed by gastrointestinal (16%), breast (15%) and blood (9%)

investigator and senior oncologist who is heading the Cancer Mukta Bharat Campaign, said since the launch of the helpline number, it had proven to be a support system for cancer patients across India and almost hundreds of calls were received daily.

"This study helps us make a more targeted cancer approach towards treatment

and make India 'Cancer Mukta'. We found head and neck cancer was most prevalent which is nearly entirely preventable by lifestyle modification, vaccinations and screening strategies. Breast and colon cancers have very effective screening strategies for finding cancer in the early stages. Unfortunately, as is repre-

sentative of the population at large in India, we found nearly two-thirds of cancers were detected late likely due to low adoption of proper screening," Dr Gupta said.

The study also found that 27 per cent of cases diagnosed in India are in stages 1 and 2 of cancer whereas 63 per cent are in stage 3 or 4 cancer. The most common question of the cancer patients was for a second opinion and to confirm whether their cancer treatment was correct and up to date. Some also check the availability of the latest treatment or medicine to treat their respective cancer as in cancer treatment as new

medicines are approved almost every week, he said.

The second most common question we found was patients asking what stage their cancer was in, indicating the importance of education to cancer patients and thirdly patients commonly asked regarding their family members, what they can do to prevent cancer highlighting the importance of cancer screening and awareness, he said.

The Cancer Mukta Bharat campaign aims to reduce the incidence and impact of cancer on individuals and communities through education and early detection, Dr Gupta said. — PTI