

# THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI MONDAY 27 MAY 2024



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UK's Rishi Sunak promises mandatory national service for 18-year-olds if elected



SPORT | 8

Kolkata Knight Riders crush SRH by 8 wickets to win their 3rd IPL title

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Bipasha Basu ventures into writing, set to pen book on her life's journey



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Payal Kapadia, winner of the Grand Prix award for her film *All We Imagine as Light*, at the 77th Cannes International Film Festival on Saturday. — AP

## Qatar Airways flight to Dublin rocked by turbulence; 12 hurt

London: Twelve people were injured when a Qatar Airways plane flying from Doha to Dublin on Sunday hit turbulence, airport authorities said. Dublin airport said in a statement that the plane landed safely as scheduled before 1 pm. "Upon landing, the aircraft was met by emergency services, including airport police and our fire and rescue department, due to six passengers and six crew...reporting injuries after the aircraft experienced turbulence while airborne over Turkey," the statement said. The airport did not provide details on the severity of the injuries. The incident comes five days after a British man died of a suspected heart attack and dozens of people were injured when a Singapore Airlines flight from London hit severe turbulence. — AP Full report on Page 6

## Noida elderly crushed to death by speeding Audi

Noida: A speeding Audi was seen on CCTV hitting an elderly man in Noida, killing him on the spot. The incident comes days after outrage over the deaths of two techies in Pune after a speeding Porsche driven by a drunk teen rammed them. In the Noida case, the elderly man is seen crossing a road when suddenly the Audi comes from the front and hits him. Full report on Page 2

## COUNTERPOINT



The EC is conducting lucky draw to attract voters!

## WEATHER

Max: 45°C  
Min: 29°C  
RH: 26%  
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Sunny

## ASTROGUIDE

Krodhi: Uttarayana  
Tithi: Vaishakha Bahula Chavithi till 4.51 pm  
Star: Purvashada till 10.11 am  
Varjyam: 5.58 pm to 7.31 pm  
Durmuhurtam: 12.39 pm to 1.31 pm; 3.14 pm to 4.06 pm  
Rahukalam: 7.30 am to 9 am  
SUNSET TODAY 7.12 PM  
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.24 AM  
MOONRISE TOMORROW 11.49 PM  
MOONSET TODAY 8.24 AM

# 'Jihadis supporting Opp.' ■ New journey starts June 4: Modi SP & Cong made Purvanchal mafia land; punish them: PM

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs  
MIRZAPUR/MAU/DEORIA (UP), MAY 26

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday branded the INDIA bloc as "communal and casteist" and accused them of planning to rewrite the Constitution to give reservations to Muslims solely on the basis of religion. Continuing his attack on the Opposition at three rallies in Uttar Pradesh's Purvanchal region, he claimed that the "jihadis" across the border are supporting the Samajwadi Party and the Congress, who are appealing for "vote jihad" in the country. Campaigning ahead of the seventh and last phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, the Prime Minister addressed his first rally in Mirzapur, then in Ghosi (Mau) and his last rally on Sunday in the Purvanchal region in Bangsagan (Deoria). Accusing the SP



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public rally at Bangsagan in UP's Gorakhpur district on Sunday. — PTI

■ CREDITING THE BJP for the development of Purvanchal, the Prime Minister said the region is now known for industries and women's empowerment

and the Congress of pandering to their votebanks, Mr Modi predicted a third term for the BJP-led NDA

of the region and making it a safe haven for the mafia. Crediting the BJP for the development of Purvanchal, the Prime Minister said the region is now known for industries and women's empowerment. Citing the "One District, One Product" scheme and the Vishwakarma scheme, the PM said that the people of the region are now getting training, funds for modern tools and direct assistance from banks. Allying that the Opposition bloc wants to turn the country's majority community into second-class citizens and is planning to rewrite the Constitution to provide reservation on the basis of religion, Mr Modi, while addressing a public meeting in Ghosi, claimed that the INDIA bloc parties will end the reservations given to SCs, STs and OBCs and will give all of them to Muslims. Targeting the SP and the

at the Centre. He reminded the voters that they will not just be voting to elect their representative to Parliament but also the country's Prime Minister. "India will begin a new journey after June 4," he said. In Mirzapur, Mr Modi slammed the previous SP government in the state for tarnishing the image of the region and making it a safe haven for the mafia. Crediting the BJP for the development of Purvanchal, the Prime Minister said the region is now known for industries and women's empowerment. Citing the "One District, One Product" scheme and the Vishwakarma scheme, the PM said that the people of the region are now getting training, funds for modern tools and direct assistance from banks. Allying that the Opposition bloc wants to turn the country's majority community into second-class citizens and is planning to rewrite the Constitution to provide reservation on the basis of religion, Mr Modi, while addressing a public meeting in Ghosi, claimed that the INDIA bloc parties will end the reservations given to SCs, STs and OBCs and will give all of them to Muslims. Targeting the SP and the

## Shah: Will bring in UCC across India after wide consultations

■ Calls it a 'huge reform' ■ Pans Opp. over Muslim quota

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI/KARAKAT/SASARAM, MAY 26

Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday said that the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) for the entire country will be implemented within the next five years after extensive consultations with all stakeholders. Later in the day, he accused the Congress-led Opposition of financial wrongdoings worth ₹12-lakh crores and appeasement politics at back-to-back election rallies in Bihar. Mr Shah asserted that the ongoing general election is a choice



Union home minister and BJP leader Amit Shah during a public meeting in Karakat, Bihar, on Sunday. — PTI

view with PTI, Mr Shah said. "The UCC is a responsibility left to us, our Parliament and the people." Talking about the UCC in a wide-ranging inter-

## Sena's Raut claims Modi-Shah will 'replace' Yogi

BHAGWAN PARAB  
MUMBAI, MAY 26

While the Lok Sabha election campaigning in Uttar Pradesh has reached its peak, senior Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut made a sensational claim that Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath will be "replaced" if the Modi-Shah government returns to power after the elections. He also alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah and Maharashtra deputy

chief minister Devendra Fadnavis had worked for Union minister Nitin Gadkari's defeat in the Lok Sabha elections. "If Amit Shah gets power again, he will finish Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath," wrote Mr Raut in his column "Roththok" (point blank) in the Shiv Sena's mouthpiece *Saamana* on Sunday. Yogi Adityanath's supporters spread the message of "Yogi ko bachana hai toh Modi ko jana hai"

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader says Modi, Shah, Fadnavis had tried to defeat Gadkari in Nagpur (If you have to save Yogi Adityanath, Modi has to go), which will affect the BJP in 30 seats across UP. Yogi supporters have decided to finish off Mr Modi and Mr Shah and its outcome will be seen in the (Lok Sabha election) results on June 4, the Shiv Sena's Rajya Sabha MP added. Mr Raut also alleged that

Mr Modi, Mr Shah and Mr Fadnavis had tried to defeat Mr Gadkari in Nagpur constituency. "Modi, Shah and Fadnavis worked for Gadkari's defeat in Nagpur. Fadnavis unwillingly joined the campaign for Gadkari when he realised that he couldn't be defeated. The RSS people in Nagpur are openly saying Fadnavis helped the Opposition to get Gadkari defeated," he said. The Sena (UBT) leader claimed that Maharashtra

chief minister Eknath Shinde had distributed Rs 25-30 crores in every constituency and his machinery worked to defeat candidates of the NCP led by Ajit Pawar. The BJP has reacted strongly to Mr Raut's allegations, labelling them as "absurd". Senior BJP minister Sudhir Mungantiwar said: "Sanjay Raut has this habit of making sensational statements. But this time he has made ridiculous allegations that are



Policemen outside a children's hospital where a fire broke out on Saturday night at Vivek Vihar in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

## Army Chief gets 1-month extension till June 30

PAWAN BALI  
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

In an unprecedented move, the Appointments Committee of Cabinet on Sunday approved a one-month extension in service of Army Chief Gen. Manoj Pande up to June 30. Gen. Pande was due to retire this week on May 31. The move could disturb the Army's line of succession and comes amidst a lot of speculation in defence circles. Gen. Pande was appointed COAS on April 30, 2022. He was commissioned in December 1982 in the Corps of Engineers (Bombay Sappers). Before taking over as COAS, he was the Army's vice-chief. There was speculation that the government may supersede the Army's vice-chief, Lt. Gen. Upendra Dwivedi, who would be the seniormost after Gen. Pande's retirement. He too will retire on June 30. ■ More on Page 3

## 7 infants dead in huge fire at kids' hospital in Delhi

Owner, duty doc held; probe ordered  
BHASKAR HARI SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

At least seven newborns died after a massive fire engulfed a children's hospital in east Delhi's Vivek Vihar area late on Saturday night. The owner of the baby care centre, Dr Naveen Kishi, who had been on the run since the fire outbreak, along with Dr Akash, who was on duty at the time of the incident, were arrested on Sunday. The Delhi Fire Services (DFS) said the blaze broke out at the Baby Care New Born Hospital at around 11:30 pm on Saturday and soon spread to two other adjacent buildings as the oxygen cylinders kept in the two-storey building exploded, due to which the adjacent buildings were damaged. Sixteen fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the blaze. Twelve newborns were rescued from the facility, but seven of them died, while five babies are undergoing treatment at another hospital and are said to be out of danger. ■ More on Page 4



Family members outside a mortuary where bodies of newborns are kept at a hospital in Delhi. — PTI

■ TWELVE NEWBORNS were rescued from the facility, but seven of them died, while five babies are undergoing treatment at another hospital and are said to be out of danger. Out of the seven infants, one was reportedly dead before the fire broke out. Taking cognizance of the hospital fire, the Delhi government has directed a magisterial inquiry into the incident. Lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena has also directed chief secretary Naresh Kumar to "institute an inquiry" into the

heavy rains lash Bengal, cyclone set to intensify; PM holds review

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, MAY 26

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday chaired a meeting to review response and preparedness for cyclonic storm Remal which is likely to make landfall between Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal coasts around midnight. The severe cyclone has led to heavy rains in the coastal districts of West Bengal and in Kolkata. Posting a video of the meeting BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya stated on X-handle, "Prime Minister Modi chaired the meeting to review the response and preparedness for cyclonic storm Remal which is likely to make landfall between Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal coasts around midnight. The severe cyclone has led to heavy rains in the coastal districts of West Bengal and in Kolkata. Posting a video of the meeting BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya stated on X-handle, "Prime Minister Modi chaired the meeting to review the response and preparedness for cyclonic storm Remal which is likely to make landfall between Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal coasts around midnight. 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SHORT TAKES

**Leh-bound SpiceJet plane suffers bird hit**

**New Delhi:** A Leh-bound SpiceJet aircraft suffered a bird hit on Sunday morning and returned to the national capital, according to the airline. The plane landed back safely and the passengers were deplaned normally. As per a source, the Boeing 737 plane had around 135 people onboard. In a statement, SpiceJet said the aircraft operating SG 123 from Delhi to Leh returned back to the national capital after suffering a bird hit on engine 2. "The aircraft landed back safely in Delhi and passengers were deplaned normally," it said. The airline also said the aircraft made a normal landing and not an emergency landing. Earlier, the source said that a full emergency was declared at the airport and the aircraft, which took off at around 1030 hours, landed safely at about 11 am. The plane returned due to engine vibrations, the source added.

**Experts start drive to stop addiction**

**New Delhi:** In an effort to stop various forms of rising addictions causing disruption in a family and personal lives, a group of public health experts have launched a campaign for doctors to intervene at the initial stage of the addiction. The campaign seeks to empower doctors to play an active role in reducing various forms of addictions by intervening as early as possible at the consultation level. The campaign has been launched under the banner Doctor Against Addiction (DaAD) called 'A prescription for deaddiction'. "At the heart of the campaign lies a powerful symbol - 'HRX.' This symbol represents a prescription for harm reduction, a commitment by doctors to address the harm caused by addiction and harmful behaviours. It serves as a beacon of hope and change.

**'Cancer on rise in younger people'**

**New Delhi:** Twenty per cent of cancer patients who called an NGO-run helpline to seek a second opinion were below 40 years of age, 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 Mukh Bharat Foundation, launched by a group of oncologists. The study showed that 60 per cent of the cancer patients below the age of 40 years were men. It also found that the most prevalent cases were head and neck cancer (26 per cent), closely followed by gastrointestinal cancers (16 per cent), breast cancer (15 per cent) and then blood cancers (9 per cent).

**JAMIA V-C ROW: HC SET TO HEAR PETITION TODAY**

**New Delhi:** Professor Eqbal Hussain has approached the Delhi high court challenging a single judge's order quashing his appointment as the pro vice-chancellor and subsequently as officiating vice-chancellor of the Jamia Millia Islamia. Mr Hussain's appeal is listed for hearing on Monday before a division bench of Justices Rekha Palli and Saurabh Banerjee. The single judge of the high court had on May 22 quashed the appointment of Mr Hussain as the pro V-C and subsequently as officiating V-C of Jamia, holding that the appointments were not made in conformity with the relevant statute. It had, however, directed to ensure that the academic and administrative machinery of the university does not suffer or come to a complete halt and that fresh appointment to the post of officiating V-C be made within one week. The court had also asked the 'Visitor', who is the President of India, to order initiation of the process of appointing a regular V-C in the meantime. "A writ of Quo Warranto is issued quashing the appointment of respondent no.2 (Hussain) at the first instance as pro vice-chancellor by office order dated September 14, 2023 and as officiating V-C by office order dated November 12, 2023. On September 14, 2023, then V-C Prof Najma Akhtar had appointed Mr Hussain as the pro V-C.

NETA'S NATTER



**PUNDITS PREDICT GOOD FORTUNE FOR CONG, BUT NOT SO FOR GEHLOT'S SON**

Many political pundits are predicting that the Congress may improve its seat tally in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls and may even win seven seats in Rajasthan this time. However, the Jalore Sirohi parliamentary seat is proving to be a tough nut to crack for Congress candidate Vaibhav Gehlot, son of former chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. Pundits are saying that BJP candidate Lumba Ram Chaudhry has a better chance than Vaibhav. Even the Phalodi Satta bazar, which is known for accurate poll prediction in many elections, has also indicated a win for the BJP candidate. However, the Congress camp remains hopeful. The BJP had won all 25 seats in the last parliamentary elections.

**Getting rape, death threats: Maliwal; blames AAP, Rathee**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 26

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on Sunday claimed that she has received rape and death threats calls after a campaign of character assassination allegedly orchestrated by her party leaders and volunteers. The situation escalated, she said, when YouTuber Dhruv Rathee posted a one-sided video against her.



Swati Maliwal

"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," Ms Maliwal wrote on X on Sunday.

In her long tweet, former DCW chief accused the party leadership of trying to intimidate her into withdrawing her complaint. She also expressed disappointment with Dhruv Rathee, and said that despite her efforts to contact him and share her side of the story, he ignored her calls and messages. "It is shameful that people like him, who claim to be independent journalists, could act like other AAP spokespersons and victim shame me to the extent that I am now facing extreme abuses and threats," she added in her post on X.

**Elderly man dies after being hit by speeding Audi in Noida**

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, MAY 26

A speeding Audi was seen on CCTV hitting an elderly man in Uttar Pradesh's Noida, killing him on the spot. In the video the elderly man is seen crossing a road when suddenly the Audi comes from the front and hits him. The police said the incident happened near Kanchenganga Apartment in Noida Sector 53. The victim, identified as

Janak Dev Shah, 63, had retired from All India Radio and lived in Sector 53. He was going to buy milk, the police said, adding the force of the impact was such that he was flung several feet in the air. When he did not return home, his family members started looking for him, and found his body on the road. A police case has been filed over the incident. The police said they are searching for the vehicle and owner details.

**SP, Cong made Purvanchal mafia land: Modi**

Continued from Page 1 Congress. Mr Modi said, "The SP and the INDIA bloc are making castes fight among themselves so that they become weak. It is being done to divert people's attention from the real issues... I have come to alert the people of Purvanchal and Ghosi about the big conspiracies of the INDIA bloc." He then listed the Opposition bloc's "three big conspiracies." "First, the people of INDIA bloc will change the Constitution and write in it afresh that reservations should be given on the basis of religion in India. Second, 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," Mr Modi said. He further said, "Another method has been created to circumvent the OBC reservations. They (the Opposition parties) are declaring Muslim castes as OBC overnight. Recently, the Calcutta high court has rejected OBC reservations for 77 Muslim castes." "Today, the SP, the Congress and the INDIA bloc parties want to make the majority community in India second-class citizens," asserted Mr Modi, alleging that the SP kept Purvanchal backward under a conspiracy and that the people of the region will continue to punish them for this. "The dynastic mindset of

Parents might take DNA test to identify kids who died in E. Delhi hosp

**Bereaved families wait for update**

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, MAY 26

The only sound was of the melancholy cries of the parents and relatives of the newborn babies who gathered outside the GTB Hospital on Sunday, anxiously waiting for an update after a tragic fire incident took the life of six kids at a private children hospital in East Delhi's Vivek Vihar area. Apart from the six kids who died, one infant was reportedly dead hours before the fire broke out.

While some parents might go through a DNA test to identify their kids, some have not yet informed the mother of the child as they are still in hospital recuperating from the childbirth.

"The kins of a 17-day-old girl was unable to identify their child and might undergo a DNA test to claim the body.

Arun Kumar, a bread distributor by profession and lives in Ghaziabad UP with his brother, said that they are yet to identify their kid. "Following the incident the kids were shifted to a nearby hospital. Raj Kumar, the father of the child, has identified a kid and said that she looks like his daughter, however the hospital has asked us for a DNA test for clearing the picture. We have reached GTB hospital and will try to find out whether our girl is here or not... She was having a fever and was admitted to this child hospital on Friday. The moment we got to know about the fire we were calling the hospital, but no one attended it. This is the second child death in our house even last year, Raj was blessed with a girl however she died later," Raj's brother Arun said.

This is not the only family, which has lost their second child; families of three kids among the deceased, had lost infants earlier also. Amit Sharma, the uncle of one-day-old infant, said this is the second child the family had lost in a span one year. "The child was born at Lokpriya hospital on Saturday at around 5

am and was later shifted to this child care centre following some issue. Last year, they had a boy who was born dead and earlier, they lost another kid just after conceiving," he said. Father of another five-day-old deceased infant, Masialam, who works as a labourer, said that the hospital staff did not inform him about the incident and he came to know regarding it through news. "I have lost my new born son. What kind of facilities did they had? You can ask the parents who have sold their jewellery or took money on interest for the treatment of their kids. I am a labourer and after finding out that the child had an infection, we admitted him to this hospital. I have a three-year-old daughter and lost a son around five years back," Masialam said.

Some of the families have not yet informed the victim infants' mother about their death as they are in hospital. Robin Chaudhary said that his cousin Hritik Chaudhary's son was admitted in the hospital following some complications related to oxygen. "The kid was born on May 17 in Bulandshahr, UP and was shifted to Delhi the next day. "The child's mother is in hospital and we have not informed her about it. We heard that the oxygen cylinder leaked due to which the incident took place. The negligence is on the hospital's part obviously," Robin said, adding that Hritik has a two-year-old daughter.

Sewa Ram, a resident of UP, said that his grandson was also admitted in the hospital who died before the fire broke out. "The kid was born in Shalimar Garden area of UP and was later referred here. He died around 9 pm and we left the hospital around 10.30 pm on the pretext that we will take the body on Sunday morning. The kid was born through an operation and we did not tell the mother about the incident. I have a three-year-old granddaughter," Ram said.



A forensic expert collects samples from site of the fire at the New Born Baby Care Hospital in East Delhi on Sunday. - PTI

**3 die, 1 hurt as fire breaks out in residential building**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 26

In another fire incident, three people died and one was seriously injured after a fire broke out in a four-storey residential building in Krishna Nagar area of East Delhi on Sunday.

Officials said the charred body of a 66-year-old woman, identified as Promila Shad, was recovered from the first floor of the building, while two others, identified as 18-year-old Keshav Sharma and 39-year-old Anju Sharma, were declared brought dead by the doctors.

Five fire tenders were rushed to the spot, they said, adding that 14 vehicles and two bicycles at the spot were reduced to ashes. Chief of Delhi fire services Atul Garg said a call regarding a blaze at a house near the Bank of India, Krishna Nagar, was received at 2.35 am.

"The flames were doused by 7.20 am and it was found that the fire began in 11 two-wheelers in the parking of the house and spread to the first floor.



View of a residential building at Krishna Nagar area in East Delhi on Sunday. - PTI

The building comprises ground (still) plus four floors," he said. Officials said the second, third and fourth floors were affected by heat and smoke.

One charred body was found on the first floor, Mr Garg said. "Station House Officer and other staff reached the spot. Police and firefighters rescued Sonam Sath (24) from the first floor. Karan Raj Bhalla (56), Seema Bhalla (54), Rahul Bhalla (33), Rohit Bhalla (30), Manish Bhalla (25) were rescued from the second floor. Third floor of

the building was vacant," a senior police officer said. "Some of the occupants were rescued from behind the building. Whereas, Devender Sharma (45), Gaurav Sharma (41), Ruchika Sharma (38) and six-year-old Divyansh were rescued from the fourth floor," the officer said. According to the DFS, two persons were declared dead at the GTB Hospital while one person was referred to Max hospital in a serious condition. The police has booked the owner of the building.

**Magisterial probe ordered in Vivek Vihar hosp blaze**

AVINASH PRABHAKAR NEW DELHI, MAY 26

A day after a blaze erupted at the New Born Baby Care Hospital that claimed the lives of seven newborns in Vivek Vihar, the Delhi government on Sunday ordered a magisterial inquiry into the fire tragedy incident to fix out the responsibility. Divisional commissioner Ashwani Kumar in his order has directed the district magistrate of the Shahdara district to inquire into the fire tragedy that occurred on Saturday night. He has asked to submit the inquiry report "as expeditiously as possible".

"District magistrate (Shahdara)/chairman, District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) is hereby directed to inquire into the said fire tragedy so as: To ascertain the circumstances that led to the fire tragedy, to fix the responsibility on the persons responsible for the said incident and to suggest the measures to prevent



Vinod Kumar, father of one of the newborn babies who were admitted at the Baby Care New Born Hospital in New Delhi on Sunday. - PTI

recurrence of such incidents in future," reads the order.

Earlier, in the day, Delhi lieutenant-governor VK Saxena directed the chief secretary Naresh Kumar to "institute an inquiry" into the case. "Have asked the chief secretary to institute an inquiry into the tragic incidents of fire in children's hospital in Delhi. Also instructed the commissioner of police to ensure all that is needed," Mr Saxena said in a post on X. "My heartfelt condo-

lences to bereaved families. I assure all relief and will ensure that guilty are brought to book," he added.

The fire broke out at the Baby Care New Born Hospital in the Vivek Vihar area around 11:30 pm on Saturday and spread to two adjacent buildings. Twelve newborns were rescued from the facility but seven of them died and five are undergoing treatment at the East Delhi Advanced NICU, officials said. The bodies have been shifted to GTB Hospital for post-mortem. They were brought out of the building with the help of locals from a window behind the hospital, a senior police officer said.

Meanwhile, city health minister Saurabh Bharadwaj also directed the chief secretary to ensure a speedy inquiry into the fire incident. Following the incident, Mr Bharadwaj sent directions to health secretary S.B. Deepak Kumar and chief secretary Naresh Kumar.

**Wires, people filming key challenge for firefighters**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 26

From low hanging wires to controlling the public and unavailability of any water source were among the challenges faced by the firefighters during their rescue operation after a blaze erupted at the children's hospital that left seven newborns dead in East Delhi's Vivek Vihar area.

A senior Delhi fire services official said, "Several people had gathered at the spot and were recording videos of the fire. Many of them even came close to those trying to douse the flames." He added that people must avoid coming close to areas where a fire-fighting operation is underway to ensure that those dousing the flames can operate smoothly.

The fire had spread from the hospital to a boutique and a private bank in the next building, and an eyeglass showroom and a shop selling domestic articles in another building. A scooter, an ambulance and a portion of a nearby park had also

caught fire, the official said. "But the locals were standing between the park and the building and recording videos," he added.

Officials said the biggest challenge during such operations is controlling the public. "Another challenge we faced was that there was no water source and low-hanging electrical wires. We are checking if the building had a fire NOC (no-objection certificate)," said the Delhi fire services official.

A senior police officer said the babies were rescued with the help of other people from a window behind the hospital. They were taken to another hospital where six were declared brought dead while one died during treatment. The bodies have been sent to GTB Hospital for post-mortem.

Delhi fire services officials said the blaze broke out at the Baby Care New Born Hospital in the Vivek Vihar area around 11:30 pm on Saturday and spread to two adjacent buildings.

**Man held from Gurgaon for strangling 23-yr-old to death**

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 26

The Delhi police's crime branch has arrested a man for the alleged murder of a 23-year-old youth in the national capital, the police said, adding that the accused, who shockingly had illicit relationships with both the victim and the victim's mother, was nabbed after an intense manhunt. The accused was identified as Virender alias Mota (33), a resident of Sonapat district in Haryana. According to the police, on the morning

of April 13, body of Harsh was found by his roommate in their rental flat at Khirki Extension. The roommate, returning from his night shift job in Gurgaon, immediately alerted the police through a PCR call. "A subsequent postmortem confirmed that Harsh had been strangled, leading to the registration of a murder case at Malviya Nagar police station," said an official. Due to the complex nature of the case, the case was assigned to the crime branch to conduct a parallel investigation alongside the local police.

SHORT TAKES

Eying loss, PM losing confidence: Akhilesh

Ballia, UP: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has lost self-confidence and has been faltering in his speeches upon realising the BJP will not retain power at the Centre, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav claimed on Sunday. He described the BJP's allegation that if the INDIA bloc forms government at the Centre it will put "Babri lock" at the Ram temple as a "dishonour" of the Supreme Court's decision. Asserting that the INDIA bloc will form government after June 4, the day the votes will be counted, Mr Yadav claimed that along with the Union Cabinet, the media will also change. At an election rally Mr Yadav promised that the Agri scheme would be scrapped if the INDIA bloc forms government. Hitting out at PM Modi, Yadav said, "When self-confidence is lost, speech falters. Modi has realised his government is going." — PTI

No progress under BJP govt: Priyanka

Fatehgarh Sahib/Patiala: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday lashed out at the BJP-led Centre, asking why there is no prosperity in the lives of people if the country's economy is growing at a rapid pace. Addressing her first poll rally in Punjab in favour of party candidate from Fatehgarh Sahib seat Amar Singh, she also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "speaking lies and making hollow promises with the public only to capture power". Attacking the Modi government, she said 70 crore youth are unemployed in the country and unemployment is the highest in 45 years. Ms Vadra said 30 lakh posts are vacant in the government sector. "I want to ask if the economy is growing so fast then why there is no progress in your (people) lives." — PTI

Odisha govt sat on panels' reports: BJP

Bhubaneswar: Senior BJP leader Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo on Sunday alleged that the state government has suppressed 24 Commission of Inquiry reports in the last 25 years of its rule. Addressing a press conference here, Mr Deo said the suppression of inquiry reports smacked of the state government's motive to shield the offenders. "In the last 25 years, the Odisha government has instituted 24 Commission of Inquiry, but so far not a single report has been accepted or made public. After forming the government in Odisha, the BJP will make such reports public. Similarly, the inquiry report on Lord Jagannath's Ratna Bhandar report will also be made public within three months of forming its own government in the state," Mr Deo said.

ABHISHEK: BJP GOVT TENURE FOR FEW DAYS MORE

Baduria, WB, May 26: The Trinamul Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Sunday said the Narendra Modi government's tenure is nearing its end, boldly predicting a shift in power dynamics on June 4, when the results of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections will be declared. Addressing a rally under Basirhat Lok Sabha constituency, within which Sandeshkhali is situated, Mr Banerjee claimed that the BJP-led NDA will be voted out of power in the elections. "The BJP government's tenure is for a few days more, change will be ushered in on June 4," Banerjee said. Claiming that the BJP-led NDA government has "deprived and tormented" the people of the country during its rule, he said this election is to give a befitting reply to the saffron party. Mr Banerjee emphasised that amidst the looming threat of severe cyclone Remal, TMC workers stand ready to assist those in distress, ensuring their safety and well-being. They are prepared to transport affected people to relief camps and extend necessary aid during these challenging times, he added. — PTI

'Waived ₹16L-cr loans of 22 rich people in last 10 years' PM couldn't give ₹9K-cr for HP monsoon disaster, says Rahul

Shimla/Nahan/Una, May 26: Prime Minister Narendra Modi waived loans worth ₹16 lakh crores of 22 rich people in the last 10 years but could not give ₹9,000 crore to Himachal Pradesh to deal with the disaster caused by monsoon rains last year, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Saturday. Rather than helping the hill state, Mr Modi attempted to "steal" its elected government, Mr Gandhi alleged and claimed that the Prime Minister "openly announced" at his rallies that he would topple the Congress regime in Himachal Pradesh. The former Congress chief was referring to Mr Modi's speeches in Nahan



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Himachal Pradesh chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu offer prayers at Darbar Baba Sahib Singh Bedi in Una on Sunday. — PTI

and Mandi on Friday, in which the prime minister claimed that the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh would not last long. Mr Modi also alleged wrongful distribution of money and through corruption," Mr Gandhi said, alleging that "stolen" governments were formed in Goa, Arunachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. He was addressing poll rallies at Nahan and Una in Himachal Pradesh to garner support for the Congress candidates from Shimla and Hamirpur Lok Sabha constituencies, Vinod Sultanpuri and Satpal Raizada respectively, besides seeking votes for party candidates Rakesh Kalia and Vivek in the Gagret and Kutlehar Assembly bypolls. He accused Mr Modi of handing over all storage facilities to one person to control the prices of apples, in an apparent reference to industrialist Gautam Adani. — PTI

Sibal hits out at Modi over his 'jail' swipe at Tejashwi

'Confession that probe agencies acting at his behest'

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs NEW DELHI, MAY 26



Kapil Sibal

Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Sunday slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his "mujra" remark and his veiled "jail" swipe at RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, saying this was a "confession" by the PM that the probe agencies were acting at his behest. The PM in his speeches has said that the INDIA bloc would take away water taps, electricity and money from banks, and had also taken "mujra" jibe, the former Union minister said. Mr Sibal slammed Mr Modi for his remark, saying even though this was a violation of the model code of conduct (MCC), but no

one, including the Election Commission, will act as they are "hand in glove" with the PM. "Such statement is a violation of MCC, a confession that agencies act on his bidding and EC will not act. No nation deserves this," Mr Sibal said at a press conference. "He is sitting in a high office that has dignity. If you reduce the dignity of the PM's post to such a level, look at what is being said on social media. It is an insult to women also," Mr Sibal said. "What do you want to say? You are insulting women, you are insulting Opposition leaders. If you are giving this message from top, the same will happen downwards. So you want to create a culture of hate," the independent Rajya Sabha MP said, adding "you cannot build Viksit Bharat like this." "I know the Election Commission will do nothing even though I think this is a violation of the model code of conduct. But nobody would do anything about it because they are hand in glove," Mr Sibal said. He also said that the PM has given the guarantee that when polls end, Tejashwi Yadav will be sent to jail. "How can he send Tejashwi to jail? There is a legal process. This means that law is working on his direction."

Centre extends tenure of Gen. Pande by one month

PAWAN BALI NEW DELHI, MAY 26



Gen. Manoj Pande

In an unprecedented move, the Appointments Committee of Cabinet on Sunday approved one-month extension in the service of Army Chief Gen. Manoj Pande upto June 30.

Gen. Pande was to retire this week on May 31. The move could disturb command of succession in the Indian Army and comes amid a lot of speculation in defence circles. "The appointments committee of Cabinet, approved the extension in service of Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) Gen. Manoj C. Pande, for a period of one month, beyond his normal age of superannuation (May 31, 2024), i.e. up to June 30, 2024, under Rule 16 A (4) of the Army Rules 1954," said a statement issued by government on Sunday.

Gen. Pande was appointed as the COAS on April 30, 2022. He was commissioned in December 1982 in the Corps of Engineers (Bombay Sappers). He held the appointment of vice-chief of the Army before taking over as the COAS. The move comes at a time when there was intense speculation in some circles that the government may supersede the vice-chief of the Army Lt. Gen. Upendra Dwivedi, who would have been the senior most after the retirement of Gen. Pande on May 31. However, sources said that the new

GEN. PANDE was to retire this week on May 31. The move could disturb command of succession in the Indian Army and comes amid a lot of speculation in defence circles.

Army Chief would be appointed by the government to be formed after the results on June 4. Significantly, Lt. Gen. Dwivedi and Lt. Gen. Ajai Kumar Singh — the two senior most officers and in the race to be the new Army Chief — will also retire in June end.

It is significant to note that the government had on April 19 appointed Dinesh K. Tripathi as the new Navy Chief amid the ongoing LS poll campaign. In 2016, the Modi government had appointed Gen. Bipin Rawat as the Army Chief by superseding two senior officers.

Constitution and democracy in danger: Kejriwal

CHANDIGARH, May 26:

Delhi chief minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday attacked the BJP, saying the country's freedom, Constitution and democracy are in danger and calling upon Punjab to once again be at the forefront to save the nation. He said the people of Punjab played a big role in the country's freedom movement. "So many sacrificed their lives for the sake of freedom. Today, country's freedom, Constitution and democracy is in danger," Mr Kejriwal said during a townhall programme with the traders and industrialists in Ferozepur.

Referring to his arrest, the Delhi CM said, "On March 16, the general elections were announced and on March 21, they arrested me." — PTI

Modi's 'mujra' comment an insult to Bihar, says Kharge

Sasaram (Bihar) May 26: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his "mujra" remark against opposition leaders and said that he "insulted Bihar" by making such a comment. Addressing an election rally in favour of Manoj Kumar, Congress leader and Mahagathbandhan nominee for the Sasaram Lok Sabha seat, Mr Kharge said, "Modiji insulted Bihar by using this word... It means mujra happens here. This is an insult to Bihar and its people. This is not how a PM should talk. He should be talking in a statesman-like manner."



Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge along with former Lok Sabha speaker Meira Kumar, party candidate from Patna Sahib constituency Anshul Avijit and CPI(M) general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya during a rally in Patna on Sunday. — PTI

es of reservation by the INDIA bloc, which he accused of being "enslaved" and performing "mujra" for its Muslim vote bank. "Bihar is the land that has given a new direction to the fight for social justice. I wish to declare from this soil that I will foil the plans of the INDIA bloc to rob the SCs, STs and OBC of their rights and divert those to Muslims," the PM had said. — PTI

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HC bench restrained party from issuing ads 'violative of MCC' SC to hear BJP plea on HC ad ruling today

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, MAY 26

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday a plea by the BJP challenging a Calcutta high court order that had refused to interfere with a single-judge verdict restraining the party from issuing advertisements that are allegedly "violative" of the model code of conduct during the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. A vacation bench of

Justices J.K. Maheshwari and K.V. Viswanathan is scheduled to hear the plea, according to the cause list of May 27 uploaded on the apex court website. On May 22, a Calcutta HC division bench refused to interfere with a single-judge order of May 20 in the matter but said the BJP could move the single judge, seeking a review or recall of its order.

Observing that a "Laxman rekha" should be adhered to, the division bench had said there should not be any personal attack on the part of any political party. The BJP had moved the appeal before the division bench, claiming that the single judge passed the order without giving it any hearing. The party's counsel had also stated that the Constitution provided that the Election Commission (EC) was the appropriate authority for redress in case of any dis-

pute during a poll process. On May 20, the HC issued an injunction, restraining the BJP from publishing advertisements that violated the model code of conduct until June 4, the day the Lok Sabha election process ends.

The high court also restrained the BJP from publishing advertisements mentioned by the Trinamul Congress in its petition, claiming unverified allegations against it and its workers.

try to topple a democratically elected government. Its ambitions for success in the Lok Sabha polls will be shattered, as the people's verdict will be with the TMC," she asserted. "My analysis of the last six phases is that the BJP will not cross the 200-seat mark, while the INDIA bloc will come to power in Delhi, in which West Bengal and TMC will play a pivotal part," she said. She claimed that the TMC is solely confronting the BJP in West Bengal, accusing Congress and CPI (M) of clandestinely aligning with the saffron party. — PTI

BJP candidate in Odisha held for vandalising EVM

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR, MAY 26

A BJP candidate was arrested in Odisha's Khurda district for allegedly vandalising an EVM, as he had to wait in queue for a 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 the Begunia assembly segment where he is registered as a voter.

Mr Jagdev went to the booth along with his wife, but as the EVM malfunctioned, he had to wait for some time to cast his vote. Soon, a war of words broke out between him and the presiding officer, amid which he allegedly pulled the EVM from the table, which fell and broke, an official said. Superintendent of police Avinash Kumar said the MLA was held on the basis of a complaint by the presiding officer. A court later sent him to judicial custody, and at present, he is lodged at the Khurda jail, the official said.

Modi's 'mazboot' govt replaced 'majboor aur apang' UPA: Nadda

ARRAH/JEHANABAD, May 26: BJP president J.P. Nadda on Sunday credited his party with providing a "mazboot" (strong) government, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which was capable of penetrating Pakistan's borders to destroy terrorist hide-outs.

He termed the Congress-led UPA government, which was voted out in 2014, as "majboor, kamzor aur apang" (helpless, weak and crippled). Addressing back-to-back election rallies in Bihar's Arrah and Jehanabad constituencies, Mr Nadda mocked the UPA for having sent "dossiers to Pakistan when the nation was rattled by terrorist attacks sponsored from across the border". "When PM Modi took over, Uri and Pulwama happened, our troops penetrated Pakistan's borders to conduct surgical strikes and Balakot air strikes and beat the terrorists inside their homes," he said. Mr Nadda also praised the government for

scrapping Article 370, claiming it "liberated people of Jammu and Kashmir, who had been held hostage by a few political families for years". "In the ongoing polls, Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing a record turnout. The enthusiasm of voters is a testimony to the liberating effect of abrogation of Article 370," he claimed. Training his guns at the RJD, Mr Nadda said the RJD stood for "rish-watkhor" (corruption). — PTI

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'BJP's dream to dislodge TMC govt won't come true'

SONARPUR (West Bengal), May 26: West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday launched a scathing attack on the BJP, asserting that its aspiration to overthrow the democratically elected TMC government after the Lok Sabha polls will remain unfulfilled.

Addressing an election rally in Jadavpur constituency, Ms Banerjee said that 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 will not materialise. "BJP should not dare to

try to topple a democratically elected government. Its ambitions for success in the Lok Sabha polls will be shattered, as the people's verdict will be with the TMC," she asserted. "My analysis of the last six phases is that the BJP will not cross the 200-seat mark, while the INDIA bloc will come to power in Delhi, in which West Bengal and TMC will play a pivotal part," she said. She claimed that the TMC is solely confronting the BJP in West Bengal, accusing Congress and CPI (M) of clandestinely aligning with the saffron party. — PTI

Manipur clash is ethnic in nature, can't be resolved by force, says minister Govt working to remove Meitei-Kuki trust deficit: Shah

New Delhi, May 26: Union home minister Amit Shah has said the government is working on removing the trust deficit between the Meitei and Kuki communities to bring lasting peace in Manipur, and the process will be expedited with utmost priority once the Lok Sabha polls are over. Mr Shah told PTI in an interview on Saturday that the clashes between the Meitei and Kuki com-

munities were ethnic in nature and hence cannot be resolved through force. "This is not an issue of riots or terrorism. This is an issue of ethnic violence. It can't be resolved through force. This is ethnic violence," he said, when asked whether the government needed to take strong action to end the cycle of violence in the northeastern state. The home minister said the violence took place



Amit Shah

due to lack of discussions and lack of trust between the two communities which had happened due to some incidents.

"We have to repair this. This is a time consuming job. We were working on it speedily. But it has been delayed due to the elections. That is quite natural," he said. "Because, leaders of both the communities are talking about the interests of the respective community, or their own political issues. But after the counting, the government will work on it with utmost priority. I believe

there will be no violence in future," he said. Ethnic violence broke out in Manipur on May 3, 2023 after a tribal solidarity march in the hill districts of Manipur to protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for ST status. Since then, over 220 people belonging to both the communities and security personnel have been killed in the continuing violence. — PTI

Heard 1st time 'work from jail': Rajnath takes a dig at Kejriwal

CHANDIGARH, May 26:

Taking a dig at Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, defence minister Rajnath Singh said he had heard about "work from home" but it is for the first time that he is hearing of "work from jail". Addressing an election rally in Khanna for the BJP's Fatehgarh Sahib candidate Gejja Ram Valmiki, Mr Singh said, "Here, the AAP is the ruling party. You don't need to be told much about what kind of work it is doing."

"There is also an AAP government in Delhi. But the AAP leader was jailed in the liquor scam," Mr Singh said referring to Mr Kejriwal's arrest in a money-laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam. The defence minister said he thinks every leader should have the moral courage to resign from their post if they face any allegation until being cleared of the charges. "This is morality," Mr Rajnath added. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

4 labourers killed, 5 hurt in Goa accident

**Panaji:** Four labourers were killed and five others critically injured when a private bus rammed into two roadside shanties at an industrial estate in South Goa district, police said on Sunday. The accident occurred at around 11.30 pm on Saturday at the Verna Industrial Estate when the labourers, engaged in road construction work, were sleeping in the shanties, they said. Deputy superintendent of police Santosh Desai said the bus driver, identified as Bharat Govekar, a resident of the nearby Cartolim village, has been taken into custody and is being questioned. The driver's medical examination confirmed he was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident, he said. A labourer claimed the bus driver threatened the other labourers to kill them if they complained to anyone about the incident. The bus carrying staff of a private company hit two shanties where labourers were sleeping, a police official said. — PTI

Residence of rape accused bulldozed

**Bhopal:** The local administration on Sunday bulldozed the house of the man who had tricked at least seven girls in Sidhi district in Madhya Pradesh to rape them by using voice-changing app and posing as a woman college professor. The house of the accused, identified as Brijesh Prajapati (30), in Panwar village in Sidhi district was demolished by a bulldozer by the local administration. The house was found to be built illegally on government land, a senior district officer said. The houses of the three accomplices of the accused would also be bulldozed very soon, the officer said. According to the police, Brijesh used to lay traps on his victims by luring them with the promise of releasing their scholarship funds. He used a voice-changing app and posed as a woman college professor from an institution in Tikari district while asking them on phone to meet 'her' to complete paperwork to get the scholarship money.

Modi-Shah will 'replace' Yogi: Raut

Continued from Page 1  
not only false but utter nonsense." Maharashtra BJP chief Chandrashekhar Bawankule said: "The BJP is not a party, but a family. People who have always played the politics of factionalism will never understand family bonds. Modi, Shah, Yogi Adityanath, Gadkari and Fadnis are part of the BJP family. We always work on the principle of nation first, then party and last self," he said. Mr Gadkari, Union minister for road transport and highways, is seeking re-election from Nagpur Lok Sabha constituency, where the polling took place in the first phase, on April 19.

Modi chairs 'Remal' readiness meeting; Didi issues advisories

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, MAY 26

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday evening at a meeting took stock of various agencies' preparations for rescue and relief to tackle cyclone Remal, hours before it hit the West Bengal coast around midnight. Posting the video of the meeting BJP IT cell chief Amit Malviya stated on X, "PM Narendra Modi chairs a meeting to review response and preparedness for cyclone Remal, which is likely to make a landfall in West Bengal, around midnight." He added, "NDRF and Navy personnel are already on ground. The Modi government, like always, is standing with the people of West Bengal, particularly the affected districts of 24 North/South Parganas and Greater Kolkata region. But

Navy initiates preparatory actions in wake of cyclone

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

The Navy has initiated preparatory actions to mount a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) response in the aftermath of Cyclone "Remal". The situation is being closely monitored at Naval headquarters, with comprehensive preparatory actions being undertaken by the headquarters, Eastern Naval Command. Cyclone Remal, which is expected to intensify into

a severe cyclone, is forecasted to make landfall between Sagar Island, West Bengal and Khepupara, Bangladesh. In preparation, the Indian Navy has readied two ships equipped with HADR and medical supplies for immediate deployment to ensure the safety and welfare of the affected populace. Additionally, Naval aviation assets, including Sea King and Chetak helicopters as well as Dornier aircrafts, are on standby for rapid response.

Mamata Banerjee is nowhere to be seen. All she wants is power but no accountability." Earlier chief minister

Mamata Banerjee sent out advisories to people to stay alert. "It is raining outside. This will become random after 6 pm and

will continue for a day. Don't feel scared. But take care," Ms Banerjee said. She added, "Electric poles have to be taken care of. If a power cut happens, don't worry. We have arranged generators but repair takes time. Such storms happen every year. When it happens, don't switch on the TV and AC. Except for emergency lights, keep others switched off." Her nephew MP Abhishek Banerjee also directed all Trinamul Congress workers to reach out to the people. He said, "During these hard times, you will find TMC leaders on ground working day & night to help you, taking affected ones to relief camps, providing essential relief materials just like Duare Sarkar camps when TMC workers helped with forms and other necessary requirements."

12 devotees die in UP dist as truck overturns on bus

Shahjahanpur (UP), May 26: Twelve people, including six women and three children, headed to the Purnagiri temple in Uttarakhnad were killed when a gravel-loaded dumper truck overturned on their bus in this district, the police said Sunday. Nine other pilgrims were seriously injured in the Saturday night incident and have been admitted to the Government Medical College here, a senior official said.

5 killed, 8 injured in UP highway mishap

**Lakhimpur Kheri:** Five people, including a child, were killed and eight injured when a speeding van collided with an oncoming Uttar Pradesh roadways bus on Lakhimpur-Bairah highway on Sunday, police said. Lakhimpur DSP Ramesh Kumar Tiwari told mediapersons that the van was on its way from Bairah side to Lakhimpur when it collided near Nakha village with a state roadways bus coming from Lakhimpur. — PTI

eatery on its way to the temple. While some of the devotees had alighted for dinner, others waited inside the bus. Suddenly, the dumper truck carrying gravel lost control, overturned and

fell onto their bus, unloading the content on the waiting pilgrims, the SP said. According to Mr Meena, 10 passengers identified as Sudhanshu (7), Aditya (8), Ajit (15), Rohini (20), Pramod (30), Seema (30), Suman Devi (36), Ramgopal (48), Shiv Shankar (48), and Chutki (50) died on the spot, while Sonavati (45) and Bindra (50) succumbed during treatment. Local police and villagers rescued some of the passengers from inside the bus. The police said that the victims — all residents of Kamlapur in Sitapur district, had hired the bus and started their journey at about 6 pm on Saturday. The incident took place at around 11 pm, the police said. As per eyewitnesses, there was no way left from where victims could be taken outside. — PTI

Remal barrels towards WB; 1L shifted to shelter homes

**Kolkata, May 26:** Severe cyclonic storm "Remal" has intensified and is expected to make landfall between the coasts of Bangladesh and adjoining West Bengal around Sunday midnight, prompting the evacuation of over 1 lakh people from vulnerable areas of the state to safety. Bengal's coastal areas have been put on high alert as the cyclone, accompanied by high-velocity winds, has already triggered rain in several parts of the state. As per an India meteorological department (IMD) bulletin, the "Remal" was centred 160 km south-southeast of Sagar Island at 6pm. The cyclone, which has a maximum sustained wind speed of 100-110 kmph, gusting to 120 kmph, is likely to hit land between Sagar Islands in West Bengal and Khepupara near Mongla port in Bangladesh by Sunday midnight, officials said. By 3 pm, the West Bengal government had evacuated around 1.10 lakh people from coastal and vulnerable areas and shifted them to cyclone shelters, schools, and colleges. State minister Akhil Giri said, "Our experience in tackling cyclone Amphan and cyclone Yaas will be put to good use." West Bengal governor Dr C.V. Ananda Bose said he is closely monitoring the situation and is in constant touch with state and Central experts to ensure a coordinated response to counter it.



Commuters, taking cover under umbrellas, cross a road during rainfall in Kolkata on Sunday, ahead of Cyclone Remal's landfall. — PTI

'Were always friends, now strategically aligned' Oz envoy focusing on closer ties, lauds Indian-origin community

SRIDHAR KUMARASWAMI  
NEW DELHI, MAY 26



Phillip Green

Hailing the "long and happy" India-Australia partnership as "strategically aligned" now, Australian high commissioner to India Philip Green is currently focusing on fostering closer cultural ties as well between the two nations for an in-depth understanding of their respective ancient cultures. Speaking recently at the launch of a digital exhibition in the national capital titled "Walking through a Songline (WTAS)" that celebrates Australia's ancient Aboriginal culture, the Australian high commissioner referred to the strong people-to-people ties between the two

nations when he lavished praise on the "fastest-growing" Indian-origin community in Australia that has "nearly reached one million" in numbers. On the occasion, Mr Green said, "This exhibition is happening at the pinnacle of Australia's long and happy relationship with India. We have always been friends, but now we are strategically aligned. Now we have strong economic and trade activities together. Now we have nearly a million people of Indian origin in Australia, one of the largest communities and fastest-growing in our nation, that have made an enormous contribution." On the WTAS Aboriginal-led "immersive multimedia installation" that makes use of the immersive technology to spectacularly highlight the art and indigenous voices of Australia's indigenous Aboriginal community that has existed on the large island nation for thousands of years, the Australian high commissioner said, "Australia has the unique privilege of being home to the world's oldest continuous culture, and it is an honour to bring WTAS to Delhi in collaboration with the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA). I am proud that through art, we can bring our First Nations stories and knowledge to the people of India."

2 arrested over fire at Rajkot game zone

Facility did not have fire NOC: Cops

**Rajkot, May 26:** 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 27, officials said on Sunday. The police in November 2023 granted a booking license 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. The game zone had fire safety equipment but action taken to control the

blaze was not sufficient, leading to the tragedy on Saturday, he said. Twenty seven, including 4 kids, were killed and 3 others hurt in the fire that swept through the TRP game zone in the Nana Mava locality teeming with people who were enjoying a summer vacation outing, 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 a proper fire fighting equipment and had not obtained the no-objection certificate (NOC) from the local fire department, thereby endangering lives of people despite knowing that a blaze in such a structure could cause mishappening, said the FIR. — PTI

3 miners trapped in illegal rat-hole mine in Tinsukia

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, MAY 26

The state administration on Sunday launched an operation to rescue at least three coal miners, trapped inside an illegal rat-hole mine in the terrains of Patkai hills in Upper Assam's Tinsukia district. Informing that workers were trapped following a landslide, authorities said that incident took place on Sunday in an unauthorised mine. The authorities engaged in rescue operation said

that the mishap took place around 12:30 am at the illicit Tikok West mining site, nestled between Bargolai and Namdang, situated under the Tikok colliery in Ledo. Confirming the incident authorities said, "Three coal miners are trapped inside the illegal rat-hole mine after the landslide in Patkai hills. Among those trapped is Dawa Sherpa from Bhojpur in Nepal and two workers are from Meghalaya, identified as John and Fenaal."

U'khand plans authority to regulate Char Dham crowd

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH  
DEHRADUN, MAY 26

Compelled by an unprecedented surge in pilgrim numbers, the Uttarakhand government is up for commissioning a Char Dham pilgrimage regulatory regime akin to its 2019 Devasthanam management board that was abandoned following protests by the priests. The state government has constituted a special high-level committee to suggest the constitution of a "new authority or institution" to regulate Char Dham and other religious pilgrimages to the state. As per information shared by the senior government officials, the decision to constitute a panel to prepare a report and recommend the formation of another regulatory body for Char Dham was taken in view of the heavy rush of devotees for the past two years, rendering the state administration helpless to manage the crowd on the roads and temples. The state government is also of the opinion that the coming years will be more burdensome for the pilgrims, whose numbers may touch 1 crore, as predicted by the former CM Trivendra Singh Rawat. The high-level committee formed by the Uttarakhand government has been mandated to look into the smooth regulation of the Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand in the future.

7 infants dead in huge fire at kids' hospital in Delhi

Continued from Page 1

Incident. Expressing grief over the Delhi fire tragedy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to X and wrote, "The fire tragedy at a hospital in Delhi is heart-rending. My thoughts are with the bereaved families in this incredibly difficult time. I pray that those injured recover at the earliest." The Prime Minister also announced that an ex gratia of ₹2 lakhs from PMNRF will be given to each of those injured, the PMO said. Condoning the deaths of children, President Droupadi Murmu prayed for strength for the bereaved parents. Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal said those responsible for negligence will not be spared. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi described the incident as "heart-breaking" and prayed for the early recovery of the injured children. Firefighters battled the inferno for three hours, during which time the challenges of locating and rescuing the infants added to the difficulties. DFS chief Atul Garg said, "The initial cause seems to have been an electrical pole igniting, which then set fire to a parked

THE PRIME Minister also announced that an ex gratia of ₹2 lakhs from PMNRF will be given to the next of kin of each deceased. ₹50,000 will be given to each of those injured.

vehicle, eventually causing the oxygen cylinders to catch fire." "Twelve newborn babies were rescued from the hospital with the help of other people," deputy commissioner of police (Shahdara) Surendra Choudhary said in a statement, adding that when they reached the medical centre, seven were dead. The bodies have been shifted to the GTB Hospital for a postmortem. One infant reportedly died hours before the fire broke out. However, the post-mortem will be done to determine the exact reason. Mr Choudhary said the owner has been booked under Sections 336 (act endangering the life or personal safety of others) and 304A (causing death by negligence) at Vivek Vihar police station. It has been learnt that the police might add Section 304 against Dr Kichi, who reportedly owns several other baby care centres as well. The police said the neonatal hospital was operating despite the expiry of its license. It also

did not have qualified doctors and had no clearance from the fire department. Locals and members of an NGO, Shaheed Seva Dal, were the first to rush to help. Some residents climbed the building from the backside and rescued some of the newborns. Neighbours claimed that unauthorised oxygen refilling cylinder work was being carried out in the building. It was also learnt that there was no fire extinguisher installed in the hospital for any emergency in case of a fire. Besides, there was no emergency exit in the hospital in case of any untoward incident. After the incident, district magistrate, Shahdara, Ritisha Gupta, who reached the GTB Hospital, faced the anger of grieving family members who shouted "hume insaaf chahiye" (we need justice). The Delhi government has ordered a magisterial inquiry into the fire tragedy. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPDR) has also initiated a probe into the matter. In a post on X, NCPDR chairperson Priyank Kanoongo said the commission has taken cognizance of the fire incident and the newborns' deaths. An NCPDR team will visit the hospital to investigate the incident.

'Will bring in UCC after wide consultations'

Continued from Page 1

state legislatures of our country since Independence by the makers of our Constitution." "The guiding principles decided for us by the Constituent Assembly include the Uniform Civil Code. And even at that time, legal scholars like K.M. Munshi, Rajendra Babu (Prasad) and (B.R.) Ambedkar Ji had said that there should not be laws based on religion in a secular country. There should be a Uniform Civil Code," he said. "Noting that the BJP has done an experiment in Uttarakhand, where it has a majority government, Mr Shah said that the UCC has been on the party's agenda since the 1950s and recently it was enacted in the hill state. "I believe that the Uniform Civil Code is a huge social, legal and religious reform. The law made by the Uttarakhand government should undergo social and legal scrutiny. Religious leaders should also be consulted," he said. "What I mean is that there should be an extensive debate on this. And if there is anything to change in the model law made by the Uttarakhand government, it should be done after this extensive debate. Because someone will definitely go to court. The judiciary's opinion will also come." "After that, the state legislatures and Parliament of the country should think seriously about this and a law must be enacted. That is why we have

written in our 'sankalp patra' that the BJP aims to have a Uniform Civil Code for the entire country," he noted. Asked if it can be done within the next five years, Mr Shah said it will be done during this period only. "Five years is a sufficient period," he said. In its manifesto for the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, the BJP has said that Article 44 of the Constitution lists the Uniform Civil Code as one of the Directive Principles of State Policy. "The BJP believes that there cannot be gender equality till such time Bharat adopts a Uniform Civil Code, which protects the rights of all women and the BJP reiterates its stand to draw a Uniform Civil Code, drawing upon the best traditions and harmonising them with modern times," the party manifesto said. Later in the day, launching a blistering attack on the Opposition bloc, particularly the Congress, in the back-to-back election rallies at Bihar's Karakat and Sasaram, the Union home minister asserted that the ongoing Lok Sabha polls is a choice between Mr Modi, who celebrates Diwali among Armymen, and Mr Gandhi, who "rushes abroad for vacations whenever the weather becomes uncomfortable". Dubbing the INDIA bloc as the one comprising "scammers, guilty of financial wrongdoings worth ₹12-lakh crores" Mr Shah asserted that the Opposition bloc

does not stand a chance against Mr Modi, who has "an unblemished record during the 23 years he was the CM (of Gujarat) and then as the PM". Mr Shah said that unlike Mr Gandhi, who was "born with a silver spoon", Mr Modi has worked hard to reach the top, coming from an "ati pichhda varg" (extremely backward class) family. The Union home minister claimed that the INDIA bloc lacks cohesive leadership and that "its prominent figures are looking at one year of prime ministership each. Such an arrangement can never provide a strong government capable of defeating Pakistan-sponsored terrorism". The Union minister attacked the Congress for being "scared of Pakistan's atom bombs" and asserted that his government, which has scrapped Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, is committed to reclaiming Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, "which was ours, is ours and shall remain ours". Mr Shah lambasted parties opposed to the BJP for providing reservations in states ruled by them "to Muslims, cutting into the share of SCs, STs and OBCs" and asserted that Mr Modi has resolved to put an end to this. He charged the Opposition parties with having been opposed to the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, which finally took place with Mr Modi at the

helm. In Karakat, where the NDA partner Upendra Kushwaha has CPI(M), as one of the main challengers, the Union home minister reminded the people of the Naxal violence, which used to keep Bihar in the headlines a few decades back. He warned that a victory for the Left party could lead to a fresh spurt in similar incidents. In Sasaram, a reserved constituency, Mr Shah spoke of budgetary allocation for dalits' welfare rising to ₹1.65-lakh crores under the Modi government, compared to ₹41,000 crores during the previous UPA regime. He also underscored that the PM gave due respect to Babasaheb Ambedkar by organising celebrations in his memory and turning into "teerth sthal" (pilgrimage spots) all the places linked to him. Mr Shah criticised the RJD, the BJP's principal opponent in Bihar, for tying up with "anti-OBC Congress", which sat on the Kaka Kalekar report and opposed the implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations". "In the third term, we will make India the third largest economy of the world," he asserted. Known as the BJP's principal strategist, Mr Saha claimed that the NDA had "notched up 310 seats in the first five phases" of the elections and in the last two legs, it was on course to achieve the target of 400-plus seats.

THE ASIAN AGE

27 MAY 2024

EC disclosure welcome, but why was it so late?

The release of the constituency-wise data of the absolute number of votes cast in the first five phases of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections by the Election Commission of India, along with its assurance that the number, as recorded in Form 17C, can never be changed even by anyone's hypothetical mischief, comes as a reassurance to all those demanding more transparency on the part of the poll body.

This will finally end speculation on whether or not there will be tinkering with the number of votes polled that arose after the EC did not make this data public except in terms of percentages. And, too, the assurance by the EC that voter turnout data has always been available with candidates and on the "Voter Turnout" app for the citizens helps assuage doubts.

The EC's decision comes after the Supreme Court refused to issue an order to the poll body to upload Form 17C which gives the data of votes polled in each booth. The SC had noted that it was not proper for it to intervene with the election process when it is already on.

**The Election Commission should be forthright in making public as much information as possible instead of keeping people guessing about the possibilities of data manipulation**

While the release of the data is welcome, one fails to understand the EC's statement that it had noted "the pattern of false narratives and mischievous design to vitiate electoral process". The constitutional body mandated for the conduct of free and fair elections and "fully committed to the highest level of transparency and involvement of stakeholders at every stage of the electoral cycle" alone can be blamed if people felt that it was less than fully transparent in its conduct of the elections. It all started with an unusual delay of 11 days for the EC to come out with the final percentage of votes polled in the first phase of the election. The EC has not yet given a satisfactory explanation for that yet.

The panel contends that the fully filled and signed Form 17C is available with representatives of the political parties in the booths but it conveniently forgets that data that cannot be processed has little or no meaning. The copies of Form 17C supplied to the booth agents will be of little use as political parties have no mechanism of their own to collate and compare them with the votes in the EVMs when they are opened.

On the other hand, the EC has all the technical wherewithal to make data available to the political parties so that they can verify for discrepancies. Its statement that booth-wise data is available with its app comes too late.

The EC's latest decision makes it apparent for anyone who has watched the developments in the Supreme Court and outside that the poll body was not at all proactive when it came to sharing information. It chose to ignore or sidestep questions raised on the absolute number of votes; now it has come out with answers only with retrospective effect. After forcing civil society organisations to move the apex court, it has now answered the query they had originally raised. Such extreme self-righteousness and descending attitude do not behove the august body.

The Election Commission should be forthright in making public as much information as possible on its own accord instead of keeping people guessing about the possibilities of data manipulation.

A Cannes salute for Indians

There was grand recognition for the creativity of Indian cinema in two prestigious awards won at Cannes, one of the grandest of film festivals around the world. Usually grandiose in its productions that aim at pan-India audiences, Indian cinema is chuffed with acceptance of its creativity and imaginativeness in tackling universal themes with a heavy dose of realism like the one in *All We Imagine as Light* and winning the silver medal as it were in the Grand Prix award, second only to the coveted Palme d'Or.

The joy for Indian cinema was doubled as Anasuya Sengupta won "Best Actress" in the "Un Certain Regard" category for *The Shameless* and dedicated her award "to the entire queer community and other marginalised communities", thus striking a blow for diversity and inclusivity. And charmingly she said that one does not have to be queer to fight for equality, a battle that is a global challenge for those of a different sexuality from the norm or normal.

The daring theme of a noir thriller featuring a sex worker fleeing a Delhi brothel after killing a policeman may have been handled sensitively by a Bulgarian director, but it served to highlight the variety in roles taken on by Indian actresses and shining in them. Given its history, if the Cannes festival is not busy applauding political themes, it is looking to award art cinema that shows empathy for the fight that the fairer sex must wage for their rights, which others simply assume if they are of the dominant gender.

The story of an erotic New York dancer winning the top prize for Sean Baker's *Anora* completed a triple of women themes triumphing this year at the pretty town in the French Riviera. As Payal Kapadia who made history with her debut feature film that was the first ever by an Indian female director to be showcased in the main competition, said about women often being pitted against each other more than thriving in friendship.

There were surprising results as well as predictable ones with Cannes conveying the universal message of cinema as a unifying force, and India's creative filmmakers and artists who have portrayed with merit the fight for equality and justice had a big hand in it.

THE ASIAN AGE

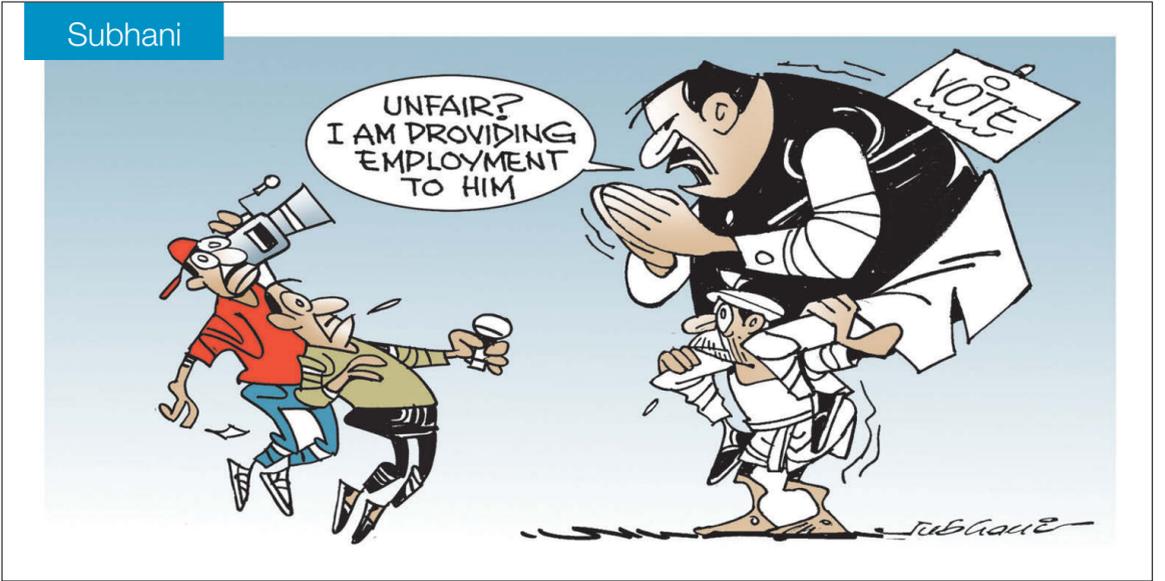
KAUSHIK MITTAR  
Editor

K. SUBHAKAR  
Printer & Publisher

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Subhani



India's good fortune to have had Nehru at the beginning



Mohan Guruswamy

Jawaharlal Nehru died sixty years ago on May 27, 1964. He was seventy-four. He had a stroke that morning at 6.25 am and lost consciousness almost immediately. He died without regaining consciousness, and according to a member of his household, his death was due to "an internal hemorrhage, a paralytic stroke, and a heart attack". He had returned the previous day from Mussoorie, "hale and hearty", but Nehru was clearly ailing. Parliament, which was then in session, and the nation were told about his death at 2.05 pm.

A major event such as this inevitably gives rise to "where were you?" questions. Where were you when John F. Kennedy was assassinated? Where were you when Indra Gandhi was killed? Where were you when the World Trade Centre in New York was brought down? The shock of the event magnifies the immediate around you and imprints it in your mind. I still can vividly recall the day Nehru died and the moment I learnt about it.

I was in Pune (then Poona) studying German at the Goethe Institute, and after class that afternoon I was cycling into town to meet a friend. As I passed a government building, I saw a flag flying at half-mast. I asked and when told a great fear descended over me.

Like many young Indians, I too was unwilling to contemplate India without Nehru, despite having read much speculation about "who next?" The most widely-read book on the subject was by American journalist Welles Hagen *After Nehru Who?* Hagen speculated on a list of personalities, and wrote: "Many people in India who concede that Nehru can now

be replaced have told me that only he could have held the country together in the early days after the Partition of British India." Clearly to many, Nehru had outlived his purpose, particularly after the disastrous India-China war of 1962. Not knowing what was in store next sent me scurrying down back to my hostel, where a radio set was reporting the mourning as only AIR and Melville de Mello's dulcet voice could.

We began discussing the succession, even though Gulzarilal Nanda was appointed the interim PM, few took him seriously as a successor. By late in the night our fears took over. One refrain was that the military would take over. Another was that either the Communists or the CIA would set off a coup. None of this happened. Nehru had built a modern and democratic India to last.

India was fortunate to have his leadership in the formative years of the republic. We took the road less traveled and it made all the difference. Recall Robert Frost who wrote: "I shall be telling this with a sigh/Somewhere ages and ages hence:/Two roads diverged in a wood, and I.../I took the one less traveled by, /And that has made all the difference."

We could have done better but we could also have done worse, like many other countries in our situation did. The India conceptualised by Nehru and the founding fathers still endures, weathering blows from the philistines opposed to the foundational philosophy of modern India.

Nehru was a man with a towering intellect and a long vision. No one who has read his *Discovery of India* will think otherwise. He tried to forge a new all-inclusive nationality for us. I have often tried to

**He tied the economy in the ropes of central planning, which while giving us an industrial base, helped spawn very many undeserving millionaire tycoons. But he had a bigger vision.**

explain this notion in simple terms. This is to make the Meenakshi Temple in Madurai or the Taj Mahal in Agra or the Golden Temple in Amritsar equally our heritage. Every invasion or migratory wave, every musical instrument and kind of music, and every literary form and style that flourished in India was equally ours. The raga and ghazal were ours just as Bhimsen Joshi and Begum Akhtar were our very own.

Nehru made mistakes. When big people make mistakes, they are often monumental. He misunderstood the nature of the dispute with China. He tied the economy in the ropes of central planning, which while giving us an industrial base, helped spawn very many undeserving millionaire tycoons. But he had a bigger vision. He contemplated the new India to be guided by reason and infused with the scientific temper. Instead, we are now increasingly a people driven by dogma and blind faith. Religion and blind faith are our biggest fault lines and the cause of much social friction and breakdown of orderly public behaviour and order.

In recent years, the assault on Nehru's memory has become vicious. It is led by small men, men who don't know history and who confuse Taxila with Patna, Indus with the Ganga, and Alexander with Selucus; who don't know science and think Ganesh was real and not a symbol and who can't tell between a transplant and plastic surgery; who cannot distinguish between history and mythology, science and superstition, and fact and fiction. They are now trying to define

our identity in narrow and divisive terms, and hence excluding the majority.

Our never-ending economic malaises and the seemingly intractable problem of Jammu and Kashmir serve as ready sticks to beat the memory of Nehru. And in the hands of the half knowing and politically vicious politician these become deadly weapons, however false they may in fact be. Then of course there is the myth perpetuated that it was Jawaharlal Nehru's eagerness to become Prime Minister that forced the agreement for the Partition of India. There is a good deal of irony in this for those who seem to castigate him loudest on this are those who hate the Muslims the most.

The attempted deification of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who supposedly disagreed with Nehru on all these and other issues, serves the political purpose of those who having got their day in office, misused it, and now are desperately hoping to get another term. It is sad to see few willing to stand up and take a position in defence of Jawaharlal Nehru these days. In my time I have been a frequent critic of Nehru, yet even I will have little hesitation in stating that he was the greatest statesman this country has known for several centuries. We were fortunate to have had him in the beginning.

Our unique diversity and common perception about ourselves bound by a modern and egalitarian Constitution is now being challenged. India has weathered worse. We are, after all, the people of India, that is Bharat. And we still live in the house that Jawaharlal Nehru built.

*The writer, a policy analyst studying economic and security issues, held senior positions in government and industry*

*Today is the 60th death anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister*

LETTERS

ANASUYA'S TRIUMPH

Kudos to Anasuya Sengupta, one of the lead stars of Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's Hindi movie *The Shameless* and admirably she has created history by bagging the Best Actress award in the *Un Certain Regard* category at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival. Sengupta, who hails from Kolkata, is the first Indian artiste to win the category's top acting honour. Anasuya Sengupta worked hard and spoke to dedicate the award to the queer community and other marginalised folk for bravely fighting for their rights throughout the world. She can be an inspiration for youngsters.

Yugal Kishore Sharma  
Faridabad, Haryana

NO JOBS FOR IITIANS

SOMETHING is seriously wrong with a nation if those passing out from one of the most prestigious institutions in the country is struggling to get a job. A report says that 38 per cent of those passing out from the IIT in 2024 are without a job; up from 20 per cent last year. Mere figures do not tell the story of parents who have sacrificed much for children who, in turn, have put long hours of struggle in order to succeed in one of the toughest courses to pass. They would be wondering if it was worth going through all the trouble. What is the use of building newer IITs if there are no jobs for those who have finished their courses?

Anthony Henriques  
Mumbai

CHANGE UMPIRE

ENSURING SAFETY of visitors against fire hazards in public utilities is the sole responsibility of government officials who have the remit to its oversight, control and prevention. The catastrophic fire in 1997 at Uphaar theatre in Delhi was due to the gross dereliction of duty by the fire department and supervising municipal officials. The recent Rajkot Park incident is similar. Apportioning the entire blame among the owners has been the routine. In so doing the supervisory authority never gets pulled up, only to lead to another tragedy. If games get played unfairly, the umpire is to blame.

R. Narayanan  
Navi Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to R. Narayanan (May 23). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Kishwar Desai  
London Diary



Keir Starmer is the favourite on July 4; J.K. Rowling getting trolled in Edinburgh

So it is official at last. If, after having watched the largest and most complex election in the world, you may want to enjoy a somewhat more polite, quiet and orderly election, fly off to UK and for one day — July 4 you can watch a very unique experience. Only 50 million voters and only about 10 political parties. No EVM either — as votes are counted slip by slip by hand by a group of volunteers sitting up all night. Though you do not have to wait that long for the result.

At 10 pm (on the day of the election), the BBC announces the result based on its calculation of exit vote and it has so far been always accurate. Of course the exit poll in India has also had a high degree of accuracy — but in both countries (India and the UK) the broader result is already known. With a 20-point lead — the next Prime Minister will be Keir Starmer — though the incumbent is determined to give a good fight, and why not? And in India — the outcome is a given. Of course, the margins we expect may differ in both cases.

Thus far the election in the UK promises to be as predictable as the weather. As you may have noticed, Rishi Sunak made the announcement on a rainy day. That is the beauty of the English summer. Entirely pre-

dictable — you always know that you never know when it may rain. I would imagine the outgoing PM had not planned on a wet farewell speech. But then what could be more memorable and British? However, thanks to him, you will enjoy a not very noisy, not very controversial, election. They do not make them like that anymore.

There some other startling, but still predictable news. Spoiler warning — as this is bad news for the monarchy. Our King Charles the Third is not, sadly, the richest person in the land. On the Sunday Times Rich List, King Charles is the 258th richest person. He has only £610 million in net worth. Mind you this is just his personal wealth. As a King, his estate is worth £600 billion. And Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is just ahead of the monarch. He is 245th in the ranking and has £651 million. On the top as always are the Hinduja brothers. Very nice.

Incidentally Paul McCartney is at 165. But then he has just become a billionaire. Most recently Taylor Swift sang one of McCartney's song and put it on the cover. That alone tipped him into being a billionaire.

Incidentally, Taylor Swift sang in Paris recently at a giant concert. But the French

fans are cross as most tickets were bought by Americans who thought Taylor in Paris was a bargain what with the ticket price and trans-Atlantic fares being so cheap. The French realised how poor their country has become compared to the Americans. So what is new?

All good literary festival come packaged with controversy. And so while the Hay festival is facing some walkouts over Palestine — it is the Edinburgh Festival this year that has a play about an erstwhile heroine-author. J.K. Rowling who transformed the way children read books — and became the recipient of worldwide adulation — is being ruthlessly trolled by those who feel she has a bias against transwomen. The question is: Are you a woman based on your biology at birth or by how you "feel"? The world is being divided on this issue. Not J.K. — who has insisted that gender allocation depends entirely on your biology. Transgroups are angry with her.

Thus, there is a special event inspired by J.K. Rowling's battle about "who can be called a woman?" The young actors who had starred in the Harry Potter films have denounced her for she insists biological women are different from transwomen. So

Joshua Kaplan has written a play around this battle which promises to be a hit item at Edinburgh. The play is called *TERF* (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist that is how JK is described). Should be a riot... ummm... hopefully, only metaphorically speaking.

Another spoiler alert — a big wedding on the horizon may steal away publicity from the elections! King Charles' godson is getting married but he cannot go because of his cancer. Neither will Kate, as she has cancer, too. But the Prince of Wales has stepped into the breach. William knows Hugh in any case. Hugh Grosvenor, the groom, holds one of the richest titles in the land. Hugh has 140,000 acres of land in his possession and a family estate of 11,000 acres. He is marrying Olivia Henson at the Chester Cathedral followed by a vast celebration at Eaton Hall. It will not be the same without Kate or the King... but this is the new reality we live with, still dominated by the "Emperor of Maladies", which triumphs kings and commoners.

Kishwar Desai is an award winning author and columnist. She is also the Chair of the Partition Museums in Amritsar and Delhi.

SHORT TAKES

**FRENCH ISLAND'S SECOND PERSON DIES OF CHOLERA**

**Mamoudzou, May 26:** A 62-year-old woman has died of cholera in Mayotte, bringing to two the death toll from the epidemic on the French island in the Indian Ocean, health authorities said on Sunday.

The woman died on Saturday at her home in Mamoudzou, the ARS health authority said.

"Response teams went to the scene to disinfect the home and take care of the deceased's family and friends." In May, the disease claimed its first life on the island when a three-year-old girl from the commune of Kounkou died.

**NEW CALEDONIA AIRPORT CLOSED TILL JUNE 2**

**Paris, May 26:** New Caledonia's international airport will remain closed until at least next Sunday, its operator said, nearly two weeks after rioting erupted on the French-ruled Pacific island over a contested electoral reform. Seven people have died in the riots, in which cars and businesses have been torched and shops looted.

French President Emmanuel Macron, who visited the island on Thursday to try and ease tensions, has hit pause on the reform, but fallen short of pro-independence parties' demands that it be shelved altogether.

**ULTRAS TORTURE PASSENGERS, BURN DOWN BUS**

**Peshawar, May 26:** Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists burnt down a bus and tortured its passengers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The incident happened on Saturday when the bus enroute to Dera Ismail Khan from Drazinda was intercepted by the TTP terrorists in Daraban Tehsil and the passengers were forcibly disembarked. "The terrorists burnt to ashes the passenger bus after disembarking them. They first tortured the passengers and later threatened them for supporting government," a senior police official said.

**5 TERRORISTS 2 SOLDIERS KILLED IN PAKISTAN**

**Peshawar, May 26:** At least five terrorists were killed while two Pakistani Army soldiers, including a Captain, lost their lives during a military operation against the militants in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday.

The incident happened when the security officials launched an intelligence based operation in the province's Hassan Khel area, some 35 kms west of the Peshawar district. "The operation was conducted in Hassan Khel area, 35 km west of Peshawar district. The troops 'engaged' with the terrorists and killed five of them.

**2 WEEKS' FIGHT KILLS 100 IN A SUDANESE CITY**

**Cairo, May 26:** More than two weeks of fighting between Sudan's military and a notorious paramilitary group over a major city in the western Darfur region killed at least 123 people, an international aid group said on Sunday.

The fighting in el-Fasher, the provincial capital of North Darfur province, also wounded more than 930 people in the same period, Doctors without Borders said.

"This is a sign of the violent intensity of the fighting," the group said. "We urge the warring parties to do more to protect civilians."

**RAJAPAKSAS EYE COMEBACK BID IN LANKA POLITICS**

**Colombo, May 26:** Sri Lanka's powerful Rajapaksa clan, which suffered political battering due to the country's worst economic crisis in 2022, will launch its political comeback bid on Sunday by targeting the impending elections.

Former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, ex-prime minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and former finance minister Basil Rajapaksa were ousted from power during anti-government protests following the crippling financial and political crisis in 2022. The ruling Sri Lanka People's Front of the Rajapakas will hold a public rally later in the day.

**Hamas missiles at Tel Aviv elicit first sirens in months**

**Hamas claims Israeli soldier taken 'prisoner' in ambush but Israel denies**

**Cairo, Jerusalem, Rafah, Palestinian Territories, May 26:** Hamas said that it had launched missiles at Tel Aviv on Sunday, prompting sirens to sound in the Israeli city for the first time in four months as the Palestinian group sought to show military strength despite Israel's Gaza offensive.

The armed wing of Hamas said it had taken "prisoner" at least one Israeli soldier in an ambush on Saturday in the Gaza Strip, a claim Israel denied.

The Palestinian militant group targeted Israeli forces in a tunnel in the Jabalia camp and "all their members were killed, wounded or taken prisoner," said Abu Obeida, spokesman for the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades. In a statement on Telegram, the Israeli army said it "clarifies that there is no incident in which a soldier was abducted".

The Israeli military said eight projectiles were identified crossing from the area of Rafah, the southern tip of the Gaza Strip where Israel kept up operations despite a ruling by the top UN court ordering it to stop attacking the city.

The Israeli military said a number of the projectiles were intercepted. Israeli emergency services said they had received no reports of casualties.

In a statement on its Telegram channel, the Hamas al-Qassam Brigades said the rockets were launched in response to "Zionist massacres against



Holding signs and pictures of hostages, demonstrators burn fire at a protest against Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's government while calling for the release of hostages held in the Gaza Strip by the Hamas militant group, in Tel Aviv, on Sunday. — AP

civilians". Hamas-affiliated Al-Aqsa TV said the rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip.

Rafah is located about 100 km (60 miles) south of Tel Aviv.

Israel says it wants to root out Hamas fighters holed up in Rafah and rescue hostages it says are being held in the area, but its assault has worsened the plight of civilians and caused an international outcry. On Sunday, Israeli strikes killed at least five Palestinians in Rafah, according to local medical services.

Israeli tanks have probed around the edges of the city, close to the main southern crossing point into Egypt, but have not yet entered the city in force. — Agencies

**Gaza ceasefire talks could soon resume**

**Cairo, May 26:** Prospects for a resumption of mediated Gaza ceasefire talks grew on Saturday although Israel carried out new attacks in which Palestinian medics said more than 40 people were killed.

An official with knowledge of the matter said a decision had been taken to resume the talks next week after the chief of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency met the CIA head and the Qatari PM.

The source, who declined to be identified, said it had been decided that "in the coming week negotiations will open based on new proposals led by the mediators, Egypt and Qatar and with active US involvement."

A Hamas official later denied Israeli media reports that the talks would resume in Cairo on Tuesday, telling Reuters: "There is no date". After more than seven months of war, the mediators have struggled to secure a breakthrough, with Israel seeking the release of hostages held by Hamas and Hamas seeking an end to the war and a release of Palestinian prisoners. — Reuters

**AID TRUCKS ENTER GAZA FROM S. ISRAEL**

**Deir Al-Balah, May 26:** Aid trucks entered Gaza from southern Israel on Sunday through a new deal 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 in 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, now in its eighth month, has killed nearly 36,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials. Around 80 per cent of the population's 2.3 million people have fled their homes, severe hunger is widespread and UN officials say parts of the territory are experiencing famine. — AP

**12 injured after flight to Dublin hits turbulence**

**Dublin, May 26:** Twelve people travelling on a Qatar Airways flight from Doha to Ireland were injured during a bout of turbulence, Dublin Airport said on Sunday, adding that the plane landed safely and as scheduled.

Flight QR017, a Boeing 787 Dreamliner, landed shortly before 1 p.m. Dublin time (1200 GMT), the airport said.

"Upon landing, the aircraft was met by emergency services, including Airport Police and our Fire and Rescue department, due to 6 passengers and 6 crew (12 total) on board reporting injuries after the aircraft experienced turbulence while airborne over Turkey," Dublin Airport said in a statement.

Irish broadcaster RTE, citing passengers at Dublin Airport, said the incident lasted less than 20 seconds and occurred during food and drinks service.

Qatar Airways did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

The incident took place five days after a Singapore Airlines flight from London to Singapore was forced to land in Bangkok due to severe turbulence, which killed a 73-year-old British man and left 20 others in intensive care.

Turbulence-related airline accidents are the most common type, according to a 2021 study by the US National Transportation Safety Board.

From 2009 through 2018, the US agency found that turbulence accounted for a third of airline accidents and injuries, but no aircraft damage. — Reuters

**IRISH BROADCASTER RTE, citing passengers arriving at Dublin Airport, said the incident lasted less than 20 seconds and occurred during food and drinks service.**

**Sunak poll vow: Binding National Service for youth**

**London, May 26:** In one of his first major election pledge announcements on Sunday, British PM Rishi Sunak said he will introduce a "bold new" form of mandatory National Service for young people if the Conservatives win another five-year term in the July 4 polls.

The British Indian leader said his plan would see 18-year-olds given the choice of a full-time military placement for 12 months or a scheme to volunteer for one weekend a month for a year.

The military placement would be selective, with tests used to decide eligibility, and involve working with the armed forces or in cyber defence.

"We have so much to be proud of in Britain but one of the problems in our society is that we have generations of young people who don't have the opportunities they deserve," he said in a campaign video to announce this new Tory proposal. "UK today faces a future that is more dangerous and more divided. There's no doubt how democratic values are under threat; that is why we will introduce a bold new model of National Service for 18 year olds to be spent either in a competitive full-time military commission over 12 months or with one weekend per month volunteering in roles in the community, like delivering prescriptions and food to infirm people or in search, rescue." — PTI



Rishi Sunak

**S. KOREA, JAPAN, CHINA DISCUSS NORTH KOREA**

**Seoul, May 26:** South Korea's President reportedly called for a greater Chinese role in addressing concerns about North Korean nuclear threats during a meeting with the visiting Chinese premier on Sunday on the eve of a trilateral meeting involving Japan's leader.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held rounds of bilateral talks on Sunday to discuss ways to enhance cooperation and other issues. They were set to meet on Monday for a trilateral session, the first in more than four years.

No major announcement is expected from Monday's three-way gathering. Observers say that resuming their highest-level talks is a good sign and suggests the three Asian neighbours are intent on improving relations. — AP

**3 WINS SCRIPT BEST CANNES YEAR FOR INDIA**

**Cannes, May 26:** It was a triple feat for Indian talent at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival with Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine As Light", "Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know" by FTII student Chidananda S. Naik, and Anasuya Sengupta of "The Shameless" fame winning major awards in each of the three competitive sections of the prestigious gala.

Kapadia, an alumna of the Film & Television Institute of India, charted history by becoming the first Indian filmmaker to win the Grand Prix award for "All We Imagine as Light".

PM Narendra Modi said India is "proud" of Kapadia for her historic feat.

Production designer Sengupta, who starred in a key featuring role in Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's "The Shameless", became the first Indian to win the best actress prize in Un Certain Regard.

The third La Cinef prize went to India-born Mansi Maheshwari's animation film "Bunn-nyhood". — PTI



Logan Johnson carries a sign he recovered from his destroyed home in Powderly, Texas, on Saturday. — AP

**AT LEAST ELEVEN PEOPLE DEAD AFTER SEVERE STORMS IN U.S.**

**Valley View, May 26:** Powerful storms killed at least 11 people and left a wide trail of destruction on Sunday across Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas after obliterating homes and destroying a truck stop where drivers took shelter during the latest deadly weather to strike the central US.

Seven deaths were reported in Cooke County, Texas, near the Oklahoma border. — AP



Villagers search through a landslide in Pogera village, in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, on Sunday, following a landslide. — AP

**MORE THAN 670 FEARED KILLED IN DEADLY PNG LANDSLIDE**

**Port Moresby, Sydney, May 26:** Nearby tribal violence has complicated recovery efforts at a catastrophic landslide in Papua New Guinea, aid workers said on Sunday, as the search continued for hundreds feared dead under the rubble.

More than 670 people are assumed to have died in Papua New Guinea's massive landslide, the United Nations migration agency estimated on Sunday. Media in the South Pacific nation had previously estimated Friday's landslide had buried more than 300 people. —



Flash floods following heavy rains inundate a locality in Nangarhar province of eastern Afghanistan. — AP

**RENEWED FLASH FLOODS KILL 15 PEOPLE IN AFGHANISTAN**

**Islamabad, May 26:** Renewed heavy rains have triggered more flash floods in Afghanistan, killing at least 15 people, including 10 members of the same family in the northeast, officials said on Sunday.

The unusually heavy seasonal rains have been wreaking havoc on multiple parts of the country, killing hundreds of people and destroying property and crops. — AP

**Mexico City roasts at 34.7° C**

**Mexico City, May 26:** Mexico City recorded its highest-ever temperature on Saturday when thermometers hit 34.7 degrees Celsius (94.46 degrees Fahrenheit) as a deadly heatwave scorches the country.

The "highest temperature since records have been kept" was recorded on Saturday afternoon at the Tacubaya observatory, the National Meteorological Service said. The previous record of 34.4 degrees Celsius was observed the day before at the same station in the capital, the weather service added.

Mexico has recorded 48 deaths due to intense heat waves hitting the country since March, the government said on Friday. More than 950 people have suffered various health effects over the same period, as of May 21, according to the health ministry.

The eastern coastal state of Veracruz recorded the highest number of deaths, with 14, followed by Tabasco, San Luis Potosi and Tamaulipas with eight each. Last year, Mexico reported a record 419 heat-related deaths in the hot season, which runs from March to October, in a country of 129 million people.

It is not just humans that

are suffering — in southern Mexico dozens of howler monkeys have dropped dead, apparently due to the heat.

Scientists from the National Autonomous University of Mexico warned on Wednesday that in the next two weeks intensifying heat could bring new record temperatures to the capital.

This year is on course to be "the warmest year in history," Francisco Estrada, coordinator of the university's Climate Change Research Program, said at a press conference.

Mexico City, which sits at 2,240 metres (7,350 feet) above sea level, has traditionally enjoyed a temperate climate and few homes have air conditioning.

But the capital has repeatedly seen fresh high-temperature records this hot season, with the mercury reaching then-records of 34.3 C on May 9 and 34.2 C on April 15.

The intense heat combined with the scarce wind, has triggered pollution in the megacity. — AFP

● **MEXICO HAS recorded 48 deaths due to intense heatwaves hitting the country since March, the government said.**

**xAI | STARTUP Tech mogul's AI venture expected to be functional by 2025 Musk plans largest-ever supercomputer**

**Washington, May 26:** Billionaire tech mogul Elon Musk has told investors he plans to build a supercomputer dubbed "gigafactory of compute" to support the development of his artificial intelligence startup xAI, an industry news outlet reported.

Musk wants the supercomputer — which will string together 1,00,000 Nvidia chips — operational by fall 2025, and "will hold himself personally responsible for delivering it on time," The Information said.

The planned supercomputer would be "at least four times the size of the biggest GPU clusters that exist today," such as those used by Meta to train its AI models, Musk was quoted as saying during a presentation to investors.

Since OpenAI's generative AI tool ChatGPT exploded on the scene in 2022, the technology has been

an area of fierce competition between tech giants Microsoft and Google, as well as Meta and start-ups like Anthropic and Stability AI.

Musk is one of the world's few investors with deep enough pockets to compete with OpenAI, Google or Meta on AI.

xAI is developing a chatbot named Grok, which can access social media platform X, the former Twitter which is also owned by Musk, in real time.

Musk cofounded OpenAI in 2015 but left in 2018,

later saying he was uncomfortable with the profit-driven direction the company was taking under the stewardship of CEO Sam Altman.

He filed a lawsuit against the company in March, accusing it of breaking its original non-profit mission to make AI research available to all.

OpenAI argues that Musk's lawsuit, as well as his embrace of open source development, is little more than a case of sour grapes after leaving the company. — AFP



The planned supercomputer would be at least four times the size of the biggest GPU clusters that exist today, such as those used by Meta to train its AI models. — ELON MUSK Tech mogul

**Russia's strike on Kharkiv kills 14**

**Kharkiv, 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 morning, the death toll rising as the country's second-largest city reeled from two attacks a day earlier.

Two guided bombs hit the Epicentr 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

**JOIN PEACE MEET, ZELENSKY URGES BIDEN, JINPING**

**Kyiv, May 26:** President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appealed to US President Joe Biden and Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Sunday to attend his peace summit as Ukraine struggles to stave off attacks.

Ukraine hopes to host as many countries as possible at Kyiv-led talks in Switzerland next month aimed at uniting global opinion on how to halt the war. — Reuters

hardware store when the bombs struck. "The attack targeted the shopping centre, where there were many people — this is clearly terrorism," Terekhov said. — Reuters

**CHINA DRILLS: GOODWILL FROM TAIWAN PREZ**

**Taipei, May 26:** Taiwan President Lai Ching-te extended goodwill towards and offered cooperation with China on Sunday following two days of Chinese war games, as a group of US lawmakers arrived in Taipei.

China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory, carried out the military drills on Thursday and Friday, calling them "punishment" after his inauguration speech on Monday which Beijing called another push for the island's formal independence. — Reuters

## quick BITES

| INDICATORS             | %               |
|------------------------|-----------------|
| Sensex                 | 75,410.39 -0.01 |
| Nifty 50               | 22,957.10 -0.05 |
| S&P 500*               | 5,304.72 0.70   |
| Dollar (₹)             | 83.09 0.24      |
| Pound Sterling (₹)     | 105.61 0.33     |
| Euro (₹)               | 89.98 0.36      |
| Gold (10gm)* (₹)       | 71,279*298 0.42 |
| Brent crude (\$/bbl)*  | 81.83 81.83     |
| IN 10-Yr bond yield    | 7.000 0.004     |
| US 10-Yr T-bill yield* | 4.479 4.479     |

### CCI extends date for AI study bids till June 18

Fair trade regulator competition commission of India (CCI) has issued clarifications on the bidding for conducting the study on artificial intelligence (AI) and its impact on competition, and has extended the deadline for submission of bids till June 18. Earlier, the deadline for the bids was June 3. Among other eligibility requirements, the minimum annual turnover of ₹50 crore has been retained for the bidders.



### Largest container ship MSC Anna calls at Mundra

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) on Sunday said its Mundra Port has created yet another record by welcoming the largest container ship to call at an Indian port. MSC Anna is a huge vessel with an overall length of 399.98 metres and a staggering capacity of 19,200 twenty-foot equivalent units, which makes it the largest container ship by capacity to ever visit an Indian port, APSEZ said.

### Sameera to set up 1,000 senior living homes

Real estate developer Sameera Group has earmarked ₹500 crore as investments over the next five years to set up 1,000 senior living homes across South India, the company said. For developing the senior living homes, Chennai-based Sameera Group has signed a memorandum of understanding with Vedaanta Senior Living that aims to create high-quality senior living communities, a company said.

### EFC takes office space on lease in Pune, Noida

Coworking firm EFC (I) India has taken 3.6 lakh sq ft office space on lease in Pune and Noida to expand its business. The company has added 1,10,000 sq ft in Noida and another 2,50,000 sq ft in Pune, EFC (I) said. The company is set to add close to 10,000 seats across these two locations by Sept. this year. The company has expanded its capacity to nearly 50,000 seats at present.

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## Robust economic growth fuels surge in IPO activity 120 cos. raise ₹51,100 cr via IPOs so far this year

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD  
MUMBAI, MAY 26

The primary markets saw 31 main board IPO/FPOs and 89 SME IPOs on BSE SME and NSE Emerge platforms till the penultimate week of May this year.

In total these 120 companies have raised ₹51,107.4 crore (cr) funds through their public offerings compared to ₹30,161.20 crore raised in the corresponding period in 2023.

In the same Jan.-May period last year (2023) only seven main board IPOs/FPOs were able to gather 29,024.46 cr while 51 SME IPOs had managed to raise ₹1,136.74 cr.

In 2024, Vodafone Idea's ₹18,000 crore follow-on public offer (FPO) was the biggest FPO while Bharti Hexacom (₹4,275 crore), Aadhar Housing Finance (₹3,000 cr), Go Digit Gene-



● **IPO MARKET** has seen a significant boost, with large corporate houses and new - age businesses like Tata Capital, Hexaware, Ola Electric, and Swiggy gearing up for their public market debuts in 2024-25.

ral Insurance (₹2,614 cr), Indegene (₹1,842 crore), Juniper Hotels (₹1,800 cr) were among the bigger IPOs so far during the first half of 2024.

Unique businesses have been listed in the past five months like Indegene, a global healthcare advisory firm, Awfis Space Solution, a coworking office space provider, which closes on May 27 and has been fully subscribed, Popular Vehicles & Services, a Cochin based automobile dealer and service provider,

among others. "The surge in initial public offering (IPO) activity is fuelled by soaring Indian stocks, robust economic growth, and corporate earnings consistently outpacing expectations, inspiring more companies to go public. As a result, IPO market has seen a significant boost, with large corporate houses and new - age businesses like Tata Capital, Hexaware, Ola Electric, and Swiggy gearing up for their public market debuts in 2024-25," said Mahavir

Lunawat, managing director, Pantomath Capital Advisors.

In 2023 primary market sentiments took a hit after Adani Enterprises ₹20,000 crore further public offer was withdrawn and money was returned to investors even after it was fully subscribed, due to sharp price fall in the secondary market as US based Hindenburg Research accused Adani Group of stock manipulation and accounting fraud.

This led to a temporary lull in the primary market and sentiments for main board IPOs improved only from June 2024 onwards, though SME IPOs were not impacted so much.

Due to ongoing general elections, the primary market may see lesser activity till the new government formation, according to merchant bankers.

## Global cues, FII activity to drive stock markets

New Delhi, May 26: Equity markets may witness a gradual up-move this week with some volatility as both election and earnings season are nearing their end, analysts said, adding that global trends and trading activity of foreign investors would hold significant influence in dictating investors' sentiment.

Benchmark indices, which had a record-breaking rally last week, would also track global oil Brent crude and rupee-dollar

trend. The monthly derivatives expiry on Thursday may also fuel volatility in markets.

"We have reached the final curtain for Q4 earnings season. Many companies, including names like Tata Steel, will release their financial results this week. Positive earnings from the final quarter could provide strength to the market to continue its bullish momentum.

"We are very close to the election results, and the

● **BENCHMARK INDICES**, which had a record-breaking rally last week, would also track global oil Brent crude and rupee-dollar trend.

election verdict will give a boost to FII flows," said Praveesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd. On the global front, the upcoming economic data

from Japan and the US, along with movement in the global currency market, will also be factors to consider, he added.

This week, attention will remain on elections, global cues, and the final phase of the earnings season, Ajit Mishra, SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

On the March quarter results front, LIC, NMDC, IRCTC, and MMTC will announce their earnings this week. —PTI

## JLR hopes to double business in 3 years

New Delhi, May 26: Tata Motors owned Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) expects to grow faster than the luxury car segment this fiscal, as it bolsters localisation and expands product range, according to a top company executive.

The company, which is set to start local assembly of Range Rover and Range Rover Sport in India, witnessed a sales growth of 81 per cent in 2023-24 fiscal year at 4,436 units, as compared to FY23.

The automaker aims to double its business in India over the next three years. "The luxury car segment grew in the range of 20-25 per cent last fiscal. We expect that the growth rate will remain in this range for the next couple of years. And we anticipate to beat this growth rate," JLR managing director Rajan Amba said.

Initiatives like enhanced localisation of products, which would lead to reduction in prices and expansion of sales network in the country would help the company in growing faster than the industry, he added.

Citing reports, Amba noted that the number of high net-worth individuals (HNIs) is expected to double between 2023 and 2027 and thus there's so



much headroom for growth of the premium-end car segment, he stated.

He noted that in five years time, the domestic luxury car segment should double from the current size of 48,000 units per annum. "So as we build up and put more and more cars on the road and get more and more visibility for our cars, that will add to the desirability and in the growth of the brand," Amba said.

It is a sequential process as the automaker continues to create various experiences like the Range Rover House and expands its sales network, he said. "And as we grow bigger in size, we also then start to get new allocations (from HQ)," he said.

Amba noted that the company plans to keep introducing both internal combustion engine and battery electric vehicles to cater to the customer demand. —PTI

## Govt asks telcos to block int'l spoof calls

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO  
NEW DELHI, MAY 26

The government on Sunday again directed all telecom service providers (TSPs) to block the incoming international spoofed calls which display Indian mobile numbers.

"It has been reported that fraudsters are making international spoofed

calls displaying Indian mobile numbers to Indian citizens and committing cyber-crime and financial frauds. These calls appear to be originating within India but being made by the cyber-criminals from abroad by manipulating the calling line identity. Such international spoofed calls have been misused in recent cases of

● **THE DOT** has issued directives to the telecom operators to carry out immediate re-verification of 6.80 lakh mobile numbers within 60 days.

fake digital arrests, FedEx scams, drugs/narcotics in courier, impersonation as the government and police

officials, disconnections of mobile numbers by DoT/Trai officials, etc," the ministry of communications said.

Last week, the DoT had issued directives to the telecom operators to carry out immediate re-verification of 6.80 lakh mobile numbers within 60 days that are suspected to have been obtained using

invalid, non-existent, or fake documents. DoT has flagged mobile connections as fraudulent after advanced AI-driven analysis. "Therefore, the DoT and TSPs have devised a system to identify and block such incoming international spoofed calls from reaching any Indian telecom subscriber," the ministry said.

## Local steel industry hopeful of global trade picking up

SANGEETHA G  
CHENNAI, MAY 26

The steel industry is hopeful that global trade will pick up and India's engineering exports will also get some boost in the coming months, said an industry body official.

"The industry is hopeful that global trade will pick up and India's engineering exports will also get some boost in the coming months," Arun Kumar Garodia, chairman, engineering export promotion council of India, said.

Meanwhile, the increasing shipments of cheaper Chinese steel hit exports from India apart from the Red Sea crisis in April. After a steady growth in



the last four months, India's engineering exports declined in April by 3.2 per cent primarily due to lower shipments of metals, especially iron and steel, and copper. Lower shipment of steel was mainly saw in Italy, Nepal, UAE, Netherlands, USA, China, and South Korea among others.

Excluding the export of iron and steel, engineer-

ing exports recorded a growth of 2.61 per cent in April 2024. A substantial 36.41 per cent decline in exports of iron and steel therefore was the single most important reason behind the year-on-year decline in overall engineering exports during April 2024.

"There is a significant decline in Chinese steel demand which is encouraging Chinese exports at a much more competitive price compared to India," said Garodia.

The decline in steel exports can also be attributed to low international demand in major markets and an increasing trend of near-shoring amongst developed markets.

## BharatPe, PhonePe settle trademark issue

New Delhi, May 26: Fintech unicorns BharatPe Group and PhonePe Group have amicably settled all long-standing legal disputes pertaining to the use of the trademark with the suffix 'Pe', both companies said in a joint statement.

BharatPe and PhonePe had been involved in long-drawn legal disputes across multiple courts, over the course of the last five years. The settlement will put an end to all open judicial proceedings, the statement said.

As a next step, parties

have already taken steps to withdraw all opposition against each other in the trademark registry, which will help them to proceed with the registration of their respective trademarks, the statement said.

"I am glad that we have reached an amicable resolution in this matter. This outcome will benefit both companies to move forward and focus our collective energy on growing the Indian fintech industry as a whole," PhonePe, founder and chief executive officer, Sameer Nigam said. —PTI

## BACKPACK Industry sources estimate 40% increase in summer travel this year

## Hospitality demand up as leisure travel rises

New Delhi, May 26: As Indian travellers pack their bags to escape the scorching heat, there has been a 40 per cent on-year increase in summer travel this year, with hospitality and travel services providers noticing buoyant demand.

Although the ongoing general elections have had a minor impact on corporate and meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) business, hotels are finding increased retail business with beach destinations still fighting it out with hill stations for the

favoured holiday site.

"Those in the Northern part of the country head to hills to escape the heat. There is also movement from the cities to nearby tourist or leisure destinations. Industry sources estimate a 30 to 40 per cent increase in the summer travel this year as compared to last year," Hotel Association of India, president and Radisson Hotel Group chairman-South Asia, KB Kachru, said.

MakeMyTrip co-founder and Group chief executive officer Rajesh Magow said, "Summer is always one of the biggest quar-



● **IN TERMS** of most booked holiday packages this summer, destinations with mountain terrains are the top picks with Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir, Goa, Kerala and the North East emerging as most sought after places.

ters of the year in terms of travel intent, and this year too, the buoyancy in the sector continues. We are observing a healthy growth in searches over those recorded last year at this time." According to

MakeMyTrip's summer travel trends, the family travel segment has grown by 20 per cent this year, as compared to the summer of 2023, while solo travel grew by 10 per cent over last year's numbers. In terms of most booked

holiday packages this summer, destinations with mountain terrains are the top picks with Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir, Goa, Kerala and the North East emerging as most sought after places.

On the other hand, hospitality and travel-tech firm OYO said as per its bookings for May and June, beach destinations are seeing a higher preference among travellers compared to mountains this summer. "The early trends for June indicate that mountains will take over beaches," OYO spokesperson said. —PTI

## SFBs foster financial inclusivity: Official

New Delhi, May 26:

Highlighting the importance of small finance banks (SFBs) in fostering financial inclusion, former financial services secretary D K Mittal said most of them would not clamour to become universal banks if some restrictions are eased by the RBI.

Last month, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) invited applications from SFBs meeting specified criteria, including a minimum net worth of ₹1,000 crore, for becoming regular banks.

"While issuing guidelines for small finance banks to become universal banks, it would be in the larger national interest of financial inclusion



if RBI lifts some of the restrictions imposed on such SFBs including tag of SFBs," he said.

Mittal said, the RBI should consider allowing co-lending, pass through certificate and securitisation, and setting up of subsidiaries. Idea should be to make them at par with commercial banks except for three basic principles of priority sector; below 25 lakh and Basel II for capital, he said. —PTI

# BLITZCRICK



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

| ORANGE                  |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Virat Kohli, RCB        | 741 |
| Ruturaj Gaikwad, CSK    | 583 |
| Riyan Parag, RR         | 573 |
| PURPLE                  |     |
| Harshal Patel, PBKS     | 24  |
| Varun Chakravarthy, KKR | 21  |
| Jasprit Bumrah, MI      | 20  |

### Short take

## Rohit lands in NY; Hardik, Kohli to join team later

Skipper Rohit Sharma was among the 10 India squad members that landed here on Sunday 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.

Rohit, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel were among the players who arrived here. Reserve players Shubman Gill and Khaleel Ahmed were also with them.

Kohli, who played the IPL Eliminator in Ahmedabad on Wednesday, will link up with the rest of the squad later and likewise for Hardik, who had gone to the UK after the completion of the IPL league stage. In his first year as Mumbai Indians captain, the five-time champions failed to make the play-offs.

As Rajasthan Royals were involved with Qualifier 2 in Chennai on Friday night, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Sanju Samson, Yuzvendra Chahal and Avesh Khan (reserve) will leave for New York on Monday.

India will play their only World Cup warm-up against Bangladesh at the brand new Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, where they play three leagues games including the blockbuster clash against Pakistan on June 9.

As they play bulk of their league games at the same venue, India would want to make most of the warm-up game and get an idea of the conditions. —PTI



Kolkata Knight Riders players celebrate after winning the IPL final against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Chennai on Sunday. KKR won by eight wickets. — SANJAY KISHORE

### SCORECARD

**Sunrisers Hyderabad:** Abhishek Sharma b Starc 2, Travis Head c Gurbaz b Vaibhav Arora 0, Rahul Tripathi c Ramandeep Singh b Starc 9, Aiden Markram c Starc b Russell 20, Nitish Reddy c Gurbaz b Harshit Rana 13, Heinrich Klaasen b Harshit Rana 16, Shahbaz Ahmed c Narine b Chakaravathy 8, Abdul Samad c Gurbaz b Russell 4, Pat Cummins c Starc b Russell 24, Jaydev Unadkat lbw b Narine 4, Bhuvneshwar Kumar not out 0. Extras (b-5, lb-2, w-6) 13. Total (all out in 18.3 overs) 113.

**Fall of wickets:** 1-2, 2-6, 3-21, 4-47, 5-62, 6-71, 7-77, 8-90, 9-113.

**Bowling:** Mitchell Starc 3-0-14-2, Vaibhav Arora 3-0-24-1, Harshit Rana 4-1-24-2, Sunil Narine 4-0-16-1, Andre Russell 2.3-0-19-3, Varun Chakaravathy 2-0-9-1.

**Kolkata Knight Riders:** Rahmanullah Gurbaz lbw b Shahbaz Ahmed 39, Sunil Narine c Shahbaz Ahmed b Cummins 6, Venkatesh Iyer not out 52, Shreyas Iyer not out 6. Extras (b-4, lb-2, w-5) 11. Total (For 2 wickets in 10.3 overs) 114.

**Fall of wickets:** 1-11, 2-102.

**Bowling:** Bhuvneshwar Kumar 2-0-25-0, Pat Cummins 2-0-18-1, T. Natarajan 2-0-29-0, Shahbaz Ahmed 2.3-0-22-1, Jaydev Unadkat 1-0-9-0, Aiden Markram 1-0-5-0.

# PURPLE REIGN

## Kolkata Knights shut out Sun for IPL crown

C. SANTHOSH KUMAR CHENNAI, MAY 26

The M.A. Chidambaram Stadium proved to be a happy hunting ground for Kolkata Knight Riders as they humbled Sunrisers Hyderabad by eight wickets to clinch their third IPL crown on Sunday.

Knight Riders, who had won their maiden title at the same venue in 2012 under the captaincy of Gautam Gambhir, capped off their stupendous season with a dominant performance in the final. It also ended KKR's 10-year title drought and fittingly came after Gambhir's return to the franchise as a mentor.

The showdown between the Knights and Sunrisers was billed as a fitting finale as both teams had raised the bar in T20 cricket with a string of batting records in the league

stage. However, it turned out to be one of the most lopsided finals in IPL history. Except for winning the toss, everything went against Sunrisers. They were bundled out for the lowest total in the final, and the chase of 113 was achieved with 57 balls to spare.

The contrasting emotions summed up the contest. While Gambhir grinned ear to ear, a dejected Sunrisers owner Kayva Maran had to wipe her tears, turning her back to camera.

The superb bowling performances of Mitchell Starc (2/14), Andre Russell (3/19) and Harshit Rana (2/24) were well complemented by Venkatesh Iyer's unbeaten 52 off 26.

Starc, the most expensive auction buy (₹24.75 crore), set the tone for the final by bamboozling opener Abhishek Sharma in the



KKR's Vaibhav Arora (second from left) celebrates after dismissing Sunrisers Hyderabad opener Travis Head for a duck in the final on Sunday. — SANJAY KISHORE

first over. The peach of a delivery from the left-arm pacer was pitched in the middle and beat the bat-

ter's defence before hitting the top of the off-stump. The start turned out to be a disaster for the

Sunrisers as they lost their other opener, Travis Head, in the next over. Head was caught behind

off Vaibhav Arora for his third duck in four innings.

Starc continued to breathe fire as he demolished Sunrisers' top order. Rahul Tripathi top-edged a flick to leave them three down for 21 in 4.2 overs. When the Sunrisers badly needed a partnership to arrest the slide, Aiden Markram and Nitish Kumar Reddy looked set to alleviate some pressure. They finished the power-play with a 17-run over. However, Nitish departed soon after, caught behind, paving the way for Heinrich Klaasen's early arrival to the middle.

The Sunrisers' meltdown continued. Russell ended Markram's 23-ball stay and Varun Chakaravathy accounted for Shahbaz Ahmed, forcing Sunrisers to use their Impact Player, Abdul Samad, in the first innings itself. The strategy, however, flopped.

## ON A HIGH-NOTE, STARC ROCKS AT THE RIGHT TIME

Chennai, May 26: Mitchell Starc is unlikely to have seen the reel which went viral on Instagram a month ago when he was being clobbered for sixes across stadiums by unheralded Indian batters.

In that reel, Starc's voice was replaced by a coarse Haryanvi dubbed version where he says 'maaje hi maaje' (only enjoyment, no work), making fun of his whopping IPL auction price of ₹24.75 crore.

But the maker of that reel forgot that Starc enjoyed a big pay day at the auctions because he is a man for big days, big games.

Returning to IPL fold after eight years, the left-arm pacer had only seven wickets in his first nine games before the Wankhede match against Mumbai Indians gave a glimpse of the trailer before he unleashed a full film in two parts. Two matches in the play-offs — a virtual semifinal and then the final — and Starc was ready to be KKR's last action hero. —PTI

## OSAKA, ALCARAZ OFF TO WINNING STARTS AT ROLAND GARROS

Paris, May 26: Naomi Osaka swept to her first victory at the French Open in three years on Sunday, setting up a potential showdown with Iga Swiatek, as Carlos Alcaraz maintained his record of never losing in the first round of a Grand Slam.

Osaka, a four-time major winner who has yet to get past the third round in Paris, needed three sets to defeat Italy's 48th-ranked Lucia Bronzetti in the showpiece Court Philippe Chatrier, 6-1, 4-6, 7-5.

The 26-year-old fired 31 winners, including six aces, and 45 unforced errors in a match where she gave up a 4-0 lead in the decider before finding herself 5-4 down.

However, she rallied strongly to register her first win at a Grand Slam since the 2022 Australian Open.

The Japanese star, a former world number one now at 134 in the rankings, has endured a bitter-sweet relationship with the French capital.

In 2021, she was fined for opting out of mandatory media commitments before withdrawing from the tournament in order to protect her mental health.

World number three and reigning Wimbledon champion Alcaraz eased to a 6-1, 6-2, 6-1 win over America's J.J. Wolf, the 107th-ranked player who entered the main draw as a 'lucky loser' from qualifying.

Alcaraz showed no sign of suffering from the right arm injury which sidelined him from the Rome Open as he coasted to victory on the back of 27 winners and nine breaks of serve. —AFP

## Dipa fetches historic gold

Tashkent, May 26: Top gymnast Dipa Karmakar on Sunday 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 in Uzbekistan's capital city. North Koreans Kim Son Hyang (13.466) and Jo Kyong Byol (12.966) grabbed the silver and bronze medals respectively.

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 2015 Asian Championships. Pranati Nayak had also bagged a bronze each in the vault event in the 2019 and 2022 editions.

"History created at The Asian Gymnastics Championship. Inspirational, Dipa! Congratulations on the #Gold," Sports Authority of India tweeted.

The gymnast from Tripura has also achieved

### ASIAN | GYMANASTICS



Dipa Karmakar

another rare feat, a gold medal in vault at the 2018 FIG World Cup in Mersin, Turkiye, becoming the first Indian to ever win a yellow metal at a global gymnastics event.

However, Dipa, who returned to action last year after a 21-month sus-

pension for a doping offence, is out of contention for the upcoming Paris Olympics. She finished 16th in the all-round category with a score of 46.166 here on Friday.

The Asian Championship here is the final Olympic qualifier.

She had finished fourth in the vault final at the FIG Apparatus World Cup in Doha in April.

Earlier, she had skipped the World Cup in Cottbus, Germany (February 22 to 25) after finishing fifth in Cairo (February 15 to 18) World Cup. —PTI

## Sindhu ends runner-up after close loss in Malaysia event

Kuala Lumpur, May 26: Star Indian shuttler P. V. Sindhu blew away a massive 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 on Sunday.

The trophy was well within her reach but world number 15 Sindhu suffered a shocking meltdown after the final change of ends to go down 21-16, 5-21, 16-21 against the Chinese world number seven in 79 minutes.

Fifth seed Sindhu, a double Olympic medallist, last won the Singapore Open and Commonwealth Games gold in 2022 and finished runner-up at the Madrid Spain Masters in 2023. The title would have been 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 was her first final appearance on the BWF World Tour after more than a year. "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," said Sindhu.

"I am happy that I at least came to the finals. I played well. These matches will definitely give me a lot of confidence, but I could have won that. It's just not one of those days."

Sindhu used a combination of poise and power to dominate the proceedings against the reigning Asian champion Wang for most part of the match but all fell apart after the break in the decider as the trophy slipped out of her hands. —PTI

## WITHDRAWAL FROM GOLDEN SPIKE MEET PRECAUTIONARY MOVE, NEERAJ CLARIFIES

New Delhi, May 26: Star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra on Sunday 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" on his adductor muscles during a recent training session.

Chopra said he would not want to risk injury in an Olympic year and hence decided to skip the prestigious competi-

tion. 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," Chopra wrote on his Instagram.

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. —PTI

Bipasha Basu to pen book on life journey, self-discovery

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# delhi THE AGE

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Fitness with fun: Sanya Malhotra

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# Indian models on global runways

THEY'RE SETTING THE STAGE ABLAZE... ON RUNWAYS AND WITH COLLABORATIONS WITH TOP BRANDS

POOJA PRABHAN SRIJITH

India's growing presence in the global fashion scene has led to an influx of South Asian talent, who're clearing pushing the envelope with global collaborations, and international runway appearances. Be it designers like Rahul Mishra, Falguni Shane Peacock, and Gaurav Gupta or names like Lakshmi Menon and Ananti Nagrath, the international fashion scene is peppered with Indian multi-hyphenates who're leading the way, and changing stereotypes, and narratives — one global collaboration at a time.

Here are the top South Asian faces to keep an eye out on.

AVANTI NAGRATH

This Delhi girl's claim to fame goes a long way back before her striking presence at the Paris Fashion Week 2024. From owning the ramp at the *Ferragamo Spring/Summer 2023* fashion show to being the first Indian model in history to walk for the luxury fashion house Versace, at Milan Fashion Week, Nagrath's known for snagging some of the biggest collaborations — she's also worked with Bottega Veneta, Swarovski and Alaïa — and turning everything she touches to gold.

As someone who's equally sensational on the home shores, Nagrath's quite an Indian designer's darling and has walked for renowned names like Manish Malhotra, Ritu Kumar, Shivan and Naresh and the like.



NEELAM KAUR GILL

Most recognised for being the first Indian model to be featured in a Burberry campaign — besides the time when international rumour mills were working overtime and linking her with Leonardo DiCaprio — Neelam Kaur Gill is a force to reckon with. Having walked one of the buzziest of fashion events last year—*Dior SS23* in Mumbai—it doesn't take much to ascertain that this British-Punjabi icon is the golden girl with a plan to take the fashion scene by storm. She's graced the covers of pioneering magazines like *Maire Claire*, *Elle*, *Vogue India* and *Harrods Magazine*, and is a global voice for the Sikh community.



INDIA, A HOT SPOT FOR GLOBAL FASHION

“Personally, I love and am truly inspired by the works of Avanti Nagrath, Neelam Gill, and Madhulika Sharma. Fashion trends and technology change rapidly. Staying versatile and continuously learning is crucial. The best shoots come from strong collaboration with like-minded designers, models, makeup artists, and stylists. I also believe India's booming middle class, growing fashion awareness, and young, trendy population make it a hotspot for luxury fashion... Global brands are jumping in, customising their products for local tastes and using online platforms to connect with tech-savvy shoppers.”

PICS CREDIT: ALL MODEL IMAGES FROM THEIR OFFICIAL INSTAGRAM HANDLES



MADHULIKA SHARMA

The Guwahati beauty had the world look up and take notice of her when Kim Kardashian's shapewear brand SKIM's first IG drop from the campaign was her solo shot. There's been no looking back ever since. Sharma has associated with designer Prabal Gurung, Anju Modi, Raw Mango, and beauty giant La Mer in the past.



SHONALI SINGH

If you've been active on Instagram and well-updated with what's happening on the fashion front, there's no way you'd miss Shonali Singh's enigmatic aura — clearly evidenced in her work for names like Sabyasachi, Hazoorilal Legacy Jewellers, Manish Malhotra, Calvin Klein, Good Earth and the like. Quite a best-seller even as a cover girl, Shonali's been on the cover of *Bazaar India* and the editorials of *Vogue Arabia* and *Elle UK*.

BHUMIKA ARORA

Touted as one of the leading faces in the international runway in 2024, Arora's got an enviable portfolio of fashion designers — Stella McCartney, Fendi, Jean Paul Gaultier, Balmain, Alexander Wang and Marc Jacobs — under her kitty, in addition to naturally striking looks that make her a designer's favourite for obvious reasons. So, when *Vogue India* labelled her as "The Model of the Year", fashion insiders couldn't agree more. The lissom Indian origin model has also walked on shows for Bottega Veneta, The Row and Palm Angels.



NIDHI SUNIL

The South Asian talent has got several big moments if one takes a closer look at her career. But, the highlights include making a splash at *The Cannes Film Festival* in 2021, besides having been the global ambassador of L'Oréal Paris, being awarded the *Vogue India's Model of the Year* award in 2021, and having walked for one of India's buzziest fashion events last year—*Dior's Gateway To India*.



— SASHA JAIRAM, Celebrity Photographer



ESHA LOHIA

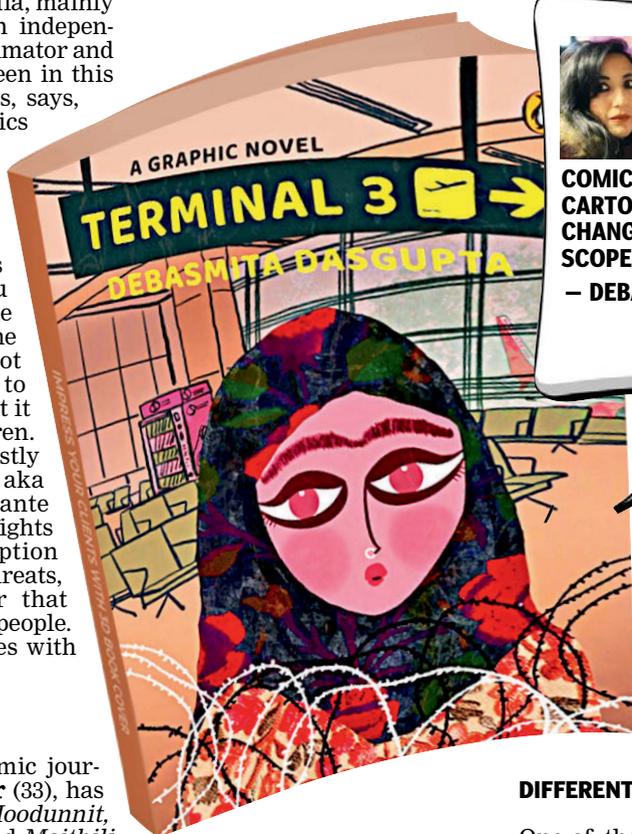
# Playing By The Book Comically

Indian comic books are experimenting with different themes and stories that can bring about awareness of various social issues and bring about change in society

Comics cater to a broad audience from wide-eyed youngsters to seasoned comic book enthusiasts. While there is no concrete answer to what is the most suitable theme for all-ages comics, the stories often explore relatable themes. The visual storytelling format allows readers to grasp the narrative easily. Illustrations, pictures and dialogue boxes offer adventures for everyone, young and old. *Angry Maushi* by Abhijeet Kini is a delightful tale set in contemporary India taking a satirical stance on the socio-political culture of India, mainly Mumbai. Kini (42), an independent comic creator, animator and illustrator, who has been in this profession for 24 years, says, "The medium of comics is a sequential art and stories told in pictures. It is not a requisite that only one audience can consume it. The pictures probably show you more than what prose would have shown. The age bracket does not matter. It is unfair to make assumptions that it is only read by children. This perception is mostly in India." Maushi aka Lakshmi turns vigilante (or vigil-aunty) who fights against local corruption and environmental threats, exhibiting the power that lies within ordinary people. This message resonates with readers of all ages.

## ALLURE OF COMICS

Writer, editor, and comic journalist, CG Salamander (33), has written books like *Moodunni*, *Puu*, *City of Rubble* and *Maithili* and the *Minotaur* series to name a few. He says, "My work is mostly based on folklore and mythology. It may appear that it deals with a specific issue but it is coincidental." The graphic novel *Maithili and Minotaur: Forest of Forgotten Fears* is a folklore from the real-life Mathikettan Solai of Tamil Nadu. It is to say that if you enter this forest, you will forget everything about yourself, and you'll be left wandering the woods till you die. This myth is the background of this book where the characters



“THE EARLIER IDEA OF COMIC BOOKS TO ONLY BE COMICAL AND CARTOONISH IS NOW CHANGED WITH WIDER SCOPE OF THEME.”  
— DEBASMITA DASGUPTA, author, illustrator and film producer

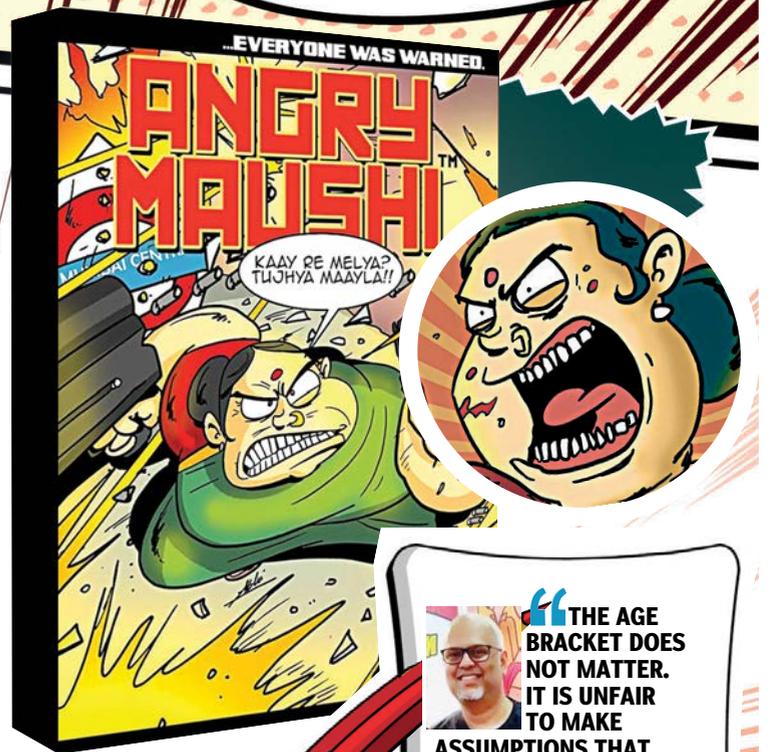
are lost in this forest and are confronted by their fears. He says, "It also plays as a metaphor for deforestation that you (humans) are not meant to enter the forest and deforest it as you like."

## DIFFERENT THEMES

One of the biggest shifts among young adults' interest in comic books is the evolution in themes. Debasmita Dasgupta (44), an author, illustrator and film producer says, "The earlier idea of comic books to be comical and cartoonish is now changed. People now know that it is visual storytelling that can be done with different and difficult topics." *Terminal:3* by Debasmita Dasgupta is an inspiration taken from the real-life story of a Kashmiri kickboxer, Tajamul Islam and many other sportswomen like her in Kashmir. Set in August 2019, Khwab Nazir (the protagon-

“MY IDEA IS TO CREATE A COMIC BOOK THAT CAN BE READ MULTIPLE TIMES AND PEOPLE WOULD WANT TO RETURN TO EVEN AFTER YEARS.”

— CG SALAMANDER, Writer and graphic novelist



“THE AGE BRACKET DOES NOT MATTER. IT IS UNFAIR TO MAKE ASSUMPTIONS THAT IT IS ONLY READ BY CHILDREN.”

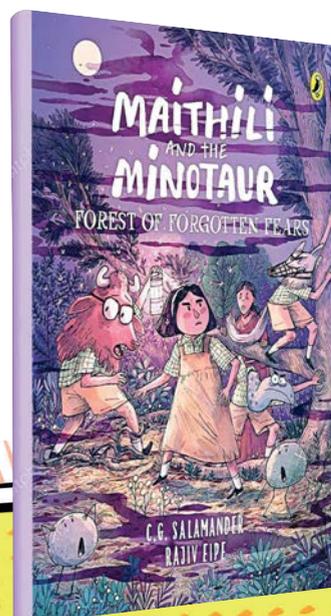
— ABHIJEET KINI, independent comic creator, animator and illustrator

nist) is waiting to board the plane at Terminal 3 of New Delhi International Airport in August 2019 when Kashmir was under a strict lockdown due to the revocation of Article 370. Set to represent India at an international jiu-jitsu tournament, Khwab nervously looks towards her unknown future. The story mirrors the struggles of everyday people striving to fulfill their dreams in the Valley. Debasmita feels that the current generation is far more evolved and exposed to different formats. They can handle different kinds of reality.

## ROAD TO CONNECTIVITY

From the creator's mind to the readers, the road to connectivity is often an exploration and not a destined route. Talking about the *Angry Maushi* series, Abhijeet says, "I was aware that I will be catering to a mature audience. The story is set in Mumbai filled with local settings and slang. So, when it was showcased in international comic con festivals, people were curious to see an Indian

Nauvari vigilante taking charge and not set within the stereotyped body image." The story of *Puu* by CG Salamander creates awareness of manual scavenging. He says that the metaphors keep you engaged in the world building of the book. It adds another layer with extra information. *Puu*, a Tamil word for flowers, is a story on manual scavenging. Salamander addresses it subtly by using flowers to tell the story. He says, "A topic like manual scavenging might be too serious for some and is even likely to escape a child's mind but the same book can be interpreted from the lens of the girl being bullied and that can be relatable for someone." India is advancing towards consuming multicultural content. Salamander, who is inspired by *One Piece* manga and considers it a masterclass, aspires to create a comic book that can be read multiple times and people would want to return to it even after years. As publishers look favourably towards this market, several parents also want their children to read books instead of watching or scrolling mindlessly on their phones. The habit of reading comic books is a fantastical entry into the world of reading for all age groups alike.



## WHEN DHONI TRAVELLED ECONOMY CLASS



The renowned cricketer's well-known humility was once again on display during a scheduled flight to Ranchi

✚ IPL franchise Chennai Super Kings (CSK) may have left fans heartbroken by crashing out of the tournament's 2024 edition when they lost to Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), but they continue to win hearts – particularly their star player, the immensely popular MS Dhoni.

While the injury-ridden player's decision to take a break after his team failed to qualify for the IPL playoffs, and head to his hometown Ranchi, came as no surprise, what was surprising was that he chose to travel economy class on the flight.

In a video captured by a fellow passenger that has been circulating widely on social media, the celebrated player is seen like an ordinary traveller, and stowing his luggage away in the overhead cabin before taking his allotted seat.

Dhoni's co-passengers acknowledged his humility with a round of applause.

One user put it simply — 'Man of simplicity'.

Another envied the people of Ranchi because they potentially had the chance of being seated next to the legendary player in a flight.

## KOHLI, DEEPIKA SHOWER PRAISE ON DINESH KARTHIK

RCB gives retiring teammate a guard of honour

✚ Dinesh Karthik, Royal Challengers Bengaluru's wicket keeper-batsman, who bid goodbye to the IPL after the RCB lost the eliminator match to the Rajasthan Royals, not only got a guard of honour from his teammates, but also some heartfelt praise from former RCB and Team India captain Virat Kohli, and also from his wife Deepika Pallikal.

The RCB has put out a video of the interviews with Kohli and Deepika. In the video, Kohli showers praise on the veteran player, recalling his earliest association with him, and the times when Karthik helped him when he hit a rough patch as a player. "Outstanding talent, brilliant batter to watch," said Kohli. He praised Dinesh's honesty and courage, saying, "in 2022, when I did not have a great IPL season, I was really struggling for confidence, he sat me down a couple of times and gave me a very honest explanation of how he is seeing things and maybe I am not able to see them myself... that I think is the most special thing I have always cherished about him. That's why we get along really well."



Virat Kohli, teary eyed Deepika Pallikal

Kohli showered praise on the veteran player, recalling his earliest association with him, and the times when Karthik helped him when he hit a rough patch as a player. "Outstanding talent, brilliant batter to watch," said Kohli.

## Singing in the pandemic

Lady Gaga's revelation that she had performed live with COVID has caused a social media uproar

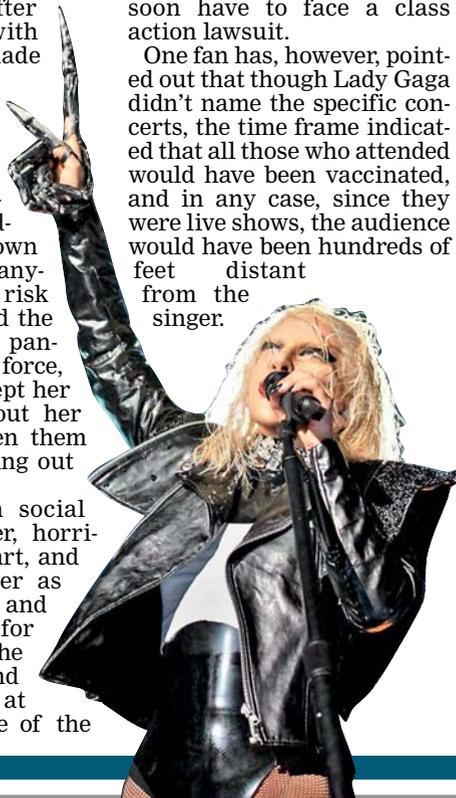
✚ Lady Gaga's immense popularity may have taken a serious dent with the singer confessing that she had performed five live concerts after being diagnosed with COVID-19. She made this disclosure at a live Q & A session in Los Angeles on May 23.

Lady Gaga defended her decision, saying she hadn't wanted to let down her fans, who were anyway taking a huge risk by coming to attend the concert while the pandemic was still in force, and that she had kept her crew informed about her diagnosis, and given them the option of backing out of the shows.

Her followers on social media are, however, horrified for the most part, and have denounced her as "so irresponsible" and "a disgrace" for putting not only the lives of her crew and their loved ones at risk, but also those of the

thousands of people who attended the concerts. One Netizen said, "She should be in prison," while another predicted that the singer would soon have to face a class action lawsuit.

One fan has, however, pointed out that though Lady Gaga didn't name the specific concerts, the time frame indicated that all those who attended would have been vaccinated, and in any case, since they were live shows, the audience would have been hundreds of feet distant from the singer.



Sanya took to social media to share pictures of her workout sessions

## Fitness with fun

Sanya Malhotra takes up tennis

✚ Bollywood actress and fitness enthusiast Sanya Malhotra has added a new skill to her repertoire – tennis! The talented dancer, who has already mastered less-known martial art forms like the *Muai Thai* from Thailand, has posted a video of herself slamming a ball around the tennis court. 'Learning a new skill in your 30s' is the caption of the post.

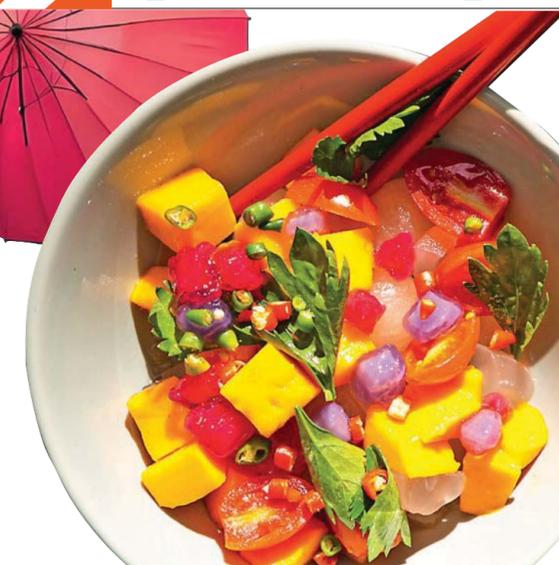
The actress looks stylish in an all-black tennis outfit.

In earlier videos, Sanya has given glimpses of her dance routines, *Muai Thai* workouts, and also gym sessions where she combines serious weightlifting with dancing to popular tunes.

The actress is setting some serious fitness goals, which are also totally fun.



# palate pleasure



**THAI SUMMER SALAD — ICE APPLE AND TROPICAL FRUIT SALAD**  
 Courtesy: Somporn Chaisuntorn, Thai head chef, Muro

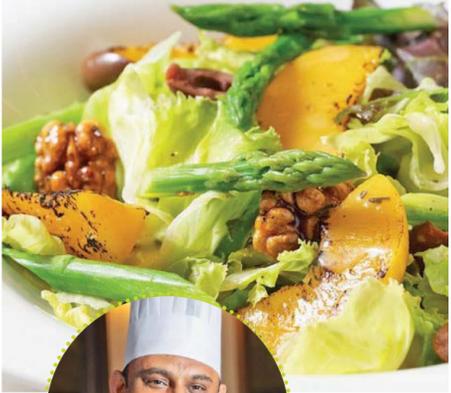
The Ice Apple and Tropical Fruit Salad is made with a very traditional Thai recipe, making it extremely refreshing for the summer. Salads in Thailand usually include meat or seafood, however the chef in Muro has kept the vegans and vegetarians in mind while creating this recipe. While the authenticity is maintained with a traditional dressing, he's used his creativity in composing a salad with tropical summery fruits and flavours.

- INGREDIENTS**
- Peruvian asparagus 250 grams
  - Peach 150 grams
  - Iceberg lettuce 70 grams
  - Lollo rosso lettuce 70 grams
  - Walnut 25 grams
  - Salt 5 grams
  - Pepper 5 grams
  - Lemon juice 15 ml
  - Olive oil 45 ml
  - Mustard 5 grams
  - Honey 5 grams
  - Kalamata olives 10 grams
  - Sugar 15 grams
  - Cinnamon stick 2 grams

- METHOD**
- Take a heavy bottomed pan, add water, cinnamon stick, and sugar.
  - Once the liquid starts boiling, add peach wedges and cook for 15-20 minutes till soft in texture.
  - Remove from the liquid, once cooled down, grill to give charred marks and keep aside.
  - Take a heavy bottomed pan, add honey and walnuts, splash some water, and stir till the walnuts get a coating, cool and keep aside.
  - Blanch asparagus spears, cool and keep aside.

## ASPARAGUS, GRILLED PEACH, AND CARAMELISED WALNUT SALAD

Courtesy: Owais Ahmed, junior sous chef, The Oberoi, Bengaluru



For making the dressing, mix olive oil, mustard, lemon juice, salt, and pepper in a bowl. Dress the lettuce, asparagus, and peaches separately. Arrange neatly in a salad bowl/plate, garnish with candied walnuts and kalamata olives.

**INGREDIENTS**

- Ripe mango 10 small cubes
- Raw mango 4 small cubes
- Celery 4 leaves
- Cherry tomato 3 pcs
- Ice apple 4 knobs
- Lychee 4 pcs
- Rambutan 4 pcs
- Bird eye chilli 2 pcs
- Kaffir lime 1 leaf

**For the dressing**

- Lemon grass 40 grams
- Palm sugar 20 grams
- Tamarind paste 10 grams
- Lemon juice 2 grams
- Salt 4 grams

**METHOD**

- Cut all tropical fruits into one-inch cubes and put them in cold water.
- Finely chop bird eye chilli, celery and kaffir lime leaf.
- To make the dressing, make a paste, double strain, and keep aside.
- Boil the lemon grass water with palm sugar until it all melts.
- Then add tamarind paste, lemon juice and salt. Add sliced chillies.
- Finally in a large bowl, add all cut ingredients, chopped chilli, kaffir lime leaf and pour the dressing on top, toss well serve chilled.



# Summer SALADS



## MANGO AND AVOCADO SUMMER SALAD

Courtesy: Akshraj Jodha, executive chef, ITC Grand Bharat

This vibrant Mango Avocado Summer Salad, where fresh ingredients and a delightful fusion of flavours unite, making your summer healthy and refreshingly delicious. It will also be a perfect complement to the warm days and vibrant sunshine. Whether enjoyed as a light lunch or a refreshing starter, our Mango Avocado Salad is sure to transport you to a tropical paradise with every bite. It's a celebration of seasonal produce and culinary creativity, designed to delight discerning palates and leave a lasting impression.

**INGREDIENTS**

- For the dressing**
- 3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice
  - ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
  - 2 tablespoons honey
  - Salt and pepper to taste

**For the salad**

- A handful of arugula leaves
- 1 ripe mango, peeled and diced
- 1 avocado, peeled, cored, diced
- ¼ cup red onions, thinly sliced
- ½ cup pine nuts, toasted

**METHOD**

- In a medium bowl or mason jar, mix some lime juice, olive oil, honey, salt, and pepper until well combined.
- In a large serving bowl, combine arugula, diced mango, diced avocado, and sliced red onions.
- Drizzle the salad with the dressing (using as much as desired) and toss gently to coat.
- Top the salad with toasted pine nuts.
- Season with additional salt and pepper if needed, according to taste preferences.
- Enjoy this refreshing mango avocado salad with a zesty lime dressing.



## WATERMELON AND SHISO LEAF GAZPACHO

Courtesy: Chef Kashika, ITC Gardenia

**INGREDIENTS**

- Watermelon cubes 2 cm diced 250 grams
- English cucumber 1 cm diced 40 grams
- Tomato diced 1 cm diced 60 grams
- Red bell pepper 1 cm diced 30 grams
- Spring onion green chopped 20 grams
- Garlic cloves minced 1 tsp
- Extra virgin olive oil 10 ml
- Black pepper crushed to taste
- Salt to taste
- Jalapeno chopped 5 grams
- Gari (pickled young ginger) 10 grams
- Shiso leaf 4 sprigs (one leaf for garnish) (alternative basil leaves)
- Water melon sliced 40 grams

**METHOD**

- Add the watermelon, cucumber, tomatoes, red bell pepper and green onions to a bowl along with garlic, gari, olive oil, jalapeno, mix it together and season with salt and pepper. Let it macerate for at least 3-4 hours or overnight this process ensures the flavour enhances.
- Blend all the ingredients together in a blender.
- Sieve the mixture and drizzle with olive oil.
- Heat pan and drizzle olive oil and grill the melon slices.
- Pour the gazpacho in a clean bowl and garnish with a chiffonade of shiso leaves and grilled watermelon.



**PRO TIP:** Best served chilled along with ciabatta bread.

## TANGY MANGO AND PINEAPPLE SALAD

Courtesy: Raghuvar Singh, chef de partie, Club Florence

As summer rolls in, so do the juicy and cooling treats from nature. All of us are on the lookout for something that will tingle our taste buds and ease our efforts. This tantalising mango and pineapple salad is one such easy and quick recipe, perfect to complement your summer spread.

**INGREDIENTS**

- Raw mango 50 grams
- Ripe mango 50 grams
- Pineapple 50 grams
- Cherry tomato 2
- Honey 2 tea-spoons
- Lemon juice 1 teaspoon
- Mint leaves 2 bunch
- Black pepper ½ tea-spoon
- Salt to taste

**METHOD**

- Dice the ripe mango, raw mango, and pineapple.
- Prepare a dressing by mixing honey, salt, and pepper.
- Gently toss the diced fruits with the dressing prepared.
- Garnish with mint and sliced cherry tomatoes.



While the heat may have relented a little, the hot season is still on and salads featuring the best local and fresh ingredients will do you a world of good

BINDU GOPAL RAO

With their ability to be light and easy to eat, salads are always a winner. The best part is that when made the right way, they also pack a punch of good health. We speak to experts to share their summer salad recipes.

## WATERMELON LABNEH

Courtesy: Altaf Patel, corporate chef at Geist Brewing Co, Bhartiya Mall of Bengaluru

The Watermelon Labneh at Geist Brewing Co. is a refreshing dish that perfectly captures the nostalgic flavours of summer. It is inspired by the popular street snack of chaat masala and black salt dusted watermelon wedges. The fresh watermelon salad is accompanied by creamy homemade labneh, an in-house chaat-jaggery dressing, and a sprinkle of assorted mesclun mix seeds.

**INGREDIENTS**

- Green lettuce 50 grams
- Lollo Rosso lettuce 50 grams
- Black salt 5 grams
- Pomegranate 10 grams
- Watermelon 380 grams
- Labneh 50 grams
- Radish 15 grams
- Mint leaf 10 grams
- Coriander leaf 10 grams
- Carrot julienne 10 grams
- Cucumber slices 10 grams
- White sesame chikki 20 grams

**Jaggery dressing**

- Liquid jaggery 200 ml
- Salad oil 50 ml
- Mint 10 grams
- Chaat masala 15 grams
- Lemon juice 20 ml
- Sugar 20 grams

**METHOD**

- Cut the watermelon into cubes and mix with jaggery dressing and plate in the centre of a

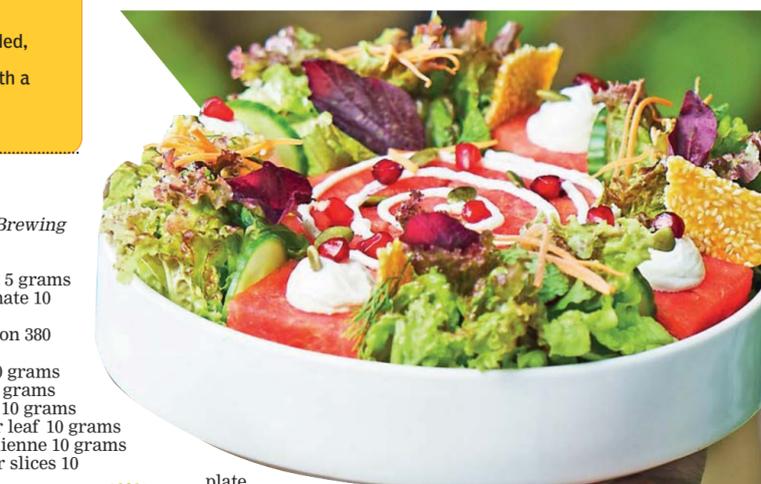


plate.

- Pipe the labneh over that.
- Toss both the lettuce with jaggery dressing and plate around the watermelon.
- Sprinkle pomegranate and pumpkin seed over the labneh.
- Arrange the mint leaf, coriander leaf, carrot julienne, cucumber slices over the lettuce.
- Garnish the salad with white sesame chikki.

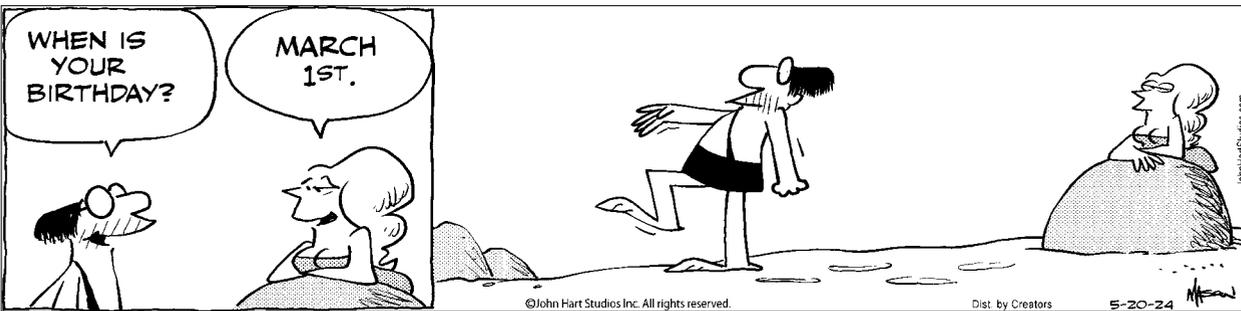
**CALVIN AND HOBBS** | Bill Watterson



**DOONESBURY** | Garry Trudeau



**B.C.** | Johnny Hart



**UP AND RUNNING** | Gray and Shack



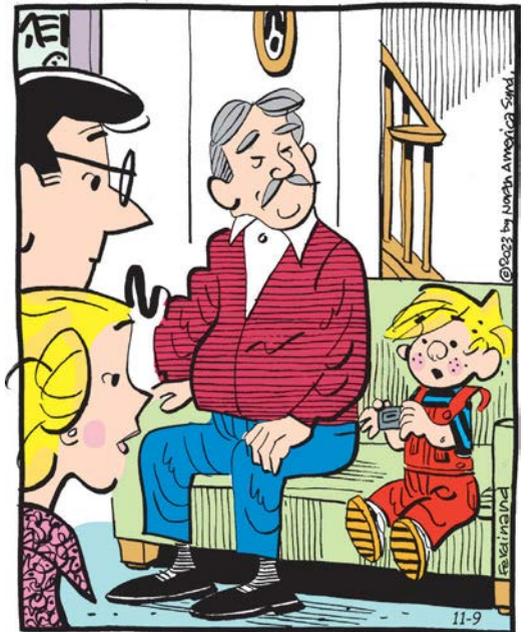
**BLONDIE** | Dean Young and John Marshall



**ANDY CAPP** | Reg Smythe



**Dennis the Menace**



**hocus focus**



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Bag is smaller. 2. Arm is longer. 3. Window is different. 4. Dog is smaller. 5. Hair is moved. 6. Coat collar is different.

**jumble**

CRATT  
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 SOMEO  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 DUIEMM  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 PNAHEP  
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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)  
 Saturday's Jumbles: SWIFT CRAZE FOURTH OPOSE  
 Answer: For the people gathered to view the total eclipse, the Sun was the — STAR OF THE SHOW