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58 SEATS: DELHI, HARYANA VOTE TODAY; POLLING ENDS IN J&K

Phase 6 today, last but one



Polling officials wait to receive EVMs and other election material at a distribution centre in New Delhi. Amit Mehra PAGES 12, 13

DECISION 2024	
PHASE 6	
Total seats	Candidates
58	889
11.13 crore (11.50%)	
Voters and share (%) in total	
Seats going to polls and 2019 turnout (%)	
Overall	58 64.73%
States where polling ends	
Haryana	10 69.93%
Delhi	7 60.46%
J&K*	1 N/A
Others	
Uttar Pradesh	14 54.41%
Bihar	8 58.36%
Jharkhand	4 64.39%
Odisha	6 71.35%
West Bengal	8 84.35%

* Anantnag - Rajouri was redrawn after delimitation in 2022. Overall turnout does not include this seat
Data compiled by Anjishnu Das



Killers set up a woman to lure Bangladesh MP, butcher chopped body into pieces: Police probe

SWEETY KUMARI & RAVIK BHATTACHARYA
KOLKATA, MAY 24



A WOMAN was allegedly set up to lure Bangladesh MP Anwarul Azim to a rented flat in New Town area of Kolkata, where he is suspected to have been smothered to death, according to investigators. A butcher then skinned his body, chopped it into small pieces and packed them in polythene bags to dump them at separate places within the city limits, the officers said.

Although the body parts are yet to be recovered, the woman and the butcher have been arrested along with two suspected killers by police in West Bengal and Dhaka, who are conducting parallel probes in the case.

Sources said a CID team from West Bengal will soon be visiting Bangladesh while a team from Dhaka Metropolitan police is expected in Kolkata to exchange findings in the murder of Azim, a three-time MP of the ruling Awami League party in Bangladesh.

The police said Mohammad Akhtaruzzaman, a childhood friend and business partner of Azim, is suspected to be the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BUSINESS AS USUAL

By UNNY



3 'communal' posts by BJP taken down in Chhattisgarh after EC rap

JAYPRAKASH SNAIDU
RAIPUR, MAY 24

THREE "OBJECTIONABLE" posts on the Instagram handle of the BJP's Chhattisgarh unit were pulled down Friday after an intervention by the state's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Chhattisgarh CEO Reena Kangale said a "strong warning" has also been issued to the party against uploading such posts in the future.

The first of these posts, uploaded on May 15, was an animated video purportedly showing a man in a skull cap and green clothes robbing a woman. In the video, when the woman calls for help, a caricature of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi flies down, takes the woman's purse, and gives it to the man. The video received 2,637 likes.

The second post was an image that also featured a caricature of Rahul Gandhi, this time

Polls on, cannot interrupt: SC declines to direct EC to upload Form 17C copies

ANANTHAKRISHNAN G
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

DECLINING TO direct the Election Commission of India to publish booth-wise numbers of voter turnout and upload copies of Form 17C - it reflects the votes polled in each polling station -

on its website within 48 hours of polling, the Supreme Court Friday said it cannot do so in the midst of elections and adjourned hearing on the pleas until after the court's summer recess.

The bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma, which took up

The night before: L-G & AAP accuse each other of moves to trouble voters, hit polls

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

AN INTENSE war of words erupted late Friday night between the office of Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena and leaders of the ruling AAP including Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, each accusing the other of planning moves to trouble people and vitiate the polling process in Delhi



L-G V K Saxena and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal

Saturday when its seven Lok Sabha constituencies vote.

In a post in Hindi on X at 9.47 pm, AAP Minister Atishi said, "Information has been received that the Delhi Lt Governor today ordered Delhi Police to slow down voting in areas where there are a large number of INDIA bloc voters so that people face difficulty in casting their votes. Any such attempt by the administration to make the BJP win is illegal, undemocratic and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

₹1 lakh annual cash transfer to women

30 lakh government jobs

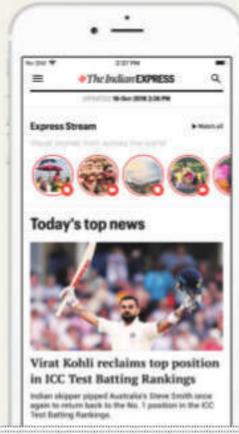
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LOVE AT FIRST VOTE: GEN Z IS NO LONGER APOLITICAL — AND NEITHER DO THEY WANT THEIR PARTNERS TO BE

A new kind of dating currency is emerging for Gen Z in India: political awareness. The message is clear — being engaged in the political process is no longer just a good quality, it's a highly desirable trait

ENTERTAINMENT



ATLAS MOVIE REVIEW

Utterly irredeemable Jennifer Lopez action film marks a new low for Netflix tent-poles



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EXPRESS AUDIO

Porsche crash case, Calcutta HC on OBC certificates, and Thane blast

In 3 Things, we talk about the 17-year-old who while in a drunken state killed two people with his Porsche, Calcutta HC on West Bengal government issuing OBC certificates to 77 Muslim communities, and blast in Thane's chemical company

GUJARAT MSU students protest over fears of reduced quota for locals, varsity says no decision yet

ADITIRAJA VADODARA, MAY 24

EVEN AS protests by students of Maharaja Sayajirao University (MSU) in Vadodara have intensified against the possibility of the 70 per cent quota for local students shrinking to 50 per cent due to the implementation of the Gujarat Common Admission Services (GCAS) platform, the MSU management maintained that it has "taken no decision" on the quota, as the "ball is in the court of the government".

On Friday, members of All Gujarat Students' Union (AGSU) protested at the MSU head office, handing over a representation seeking an increase in the quota for local students from Vadodara from 70 per cent to 90 per cent, vehemently opposing the "rumoured decision" to reduce the quota to 50 per cent.

Pankaj Jaiswal of AGSU said, "The university can have a quota of 90 per cent for local students and 10 per cent for outsiders but if it is thinking of giving 50 per cent quota to outsiders, it will result in a major protest."

Officer on Special Duty and PRO Professor Hitesh Ravaiya said, "No decision has been taken by MSU in the matter of quota so far. If any decision is taken, it will be informed publicly."

On May 15, the state education department had started registration for college admissions through the GCAS portal.

University officials said the MSU management is "awaiting directions" from the state government on its locus standi in deciding the quota. GCAS guidelines state that students applying to universities through the portal will adhere to university rules.

MSU officials said the guidelines don't clarify on the power of universities to decide on the local quota. An official said: "It is not true that MSU has decided to reduce the local quota from 70 to 50 per cent. There is chaos because there is no clear guideline from the state on what power universities affiliated to the state and now under the purview of GCAS have in deciding local quotas."

MOLESTATION ALLEGATION HC stays probe against Bose's OSD accused of restraining woman

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, MAY 24

THE CALCUTTA High Court Friday stayed proceedings of an FIR lodged against a Raj Bhawan officer for allegedly restraining a contractual woman employee, who had accused West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose of sexually harassing her.

The official is posted as an Officer on Special Duty (OSD) to the Bengal Governor.

According to the police, the OSD and two others were named in the FIR for allegedly stopping the woman from leaving Raj Bhawan by wrongfully restraining her on May 2.

After hearing the matter, a single bench of Justice Amrita Sinha said: "The evidence i.e. CCTV footage is already in the custody of the Investigating Officer (IO). The offence for which the petitioner is tried is of wrongful restraint and abetting an offence. It has been mentioned that the petitioner along with a few others tried to take her (the woman employee) back (to the Raj Bhawan) and also snatch her phone but she managed to escape from the room. Whether the ingredients disclosed in the complaint can be treated as wrongful restraint will be decided. At this stage, it does not appear that the probe will suffer in any manner if the same is temporarily stayed till June 17."

FROM PAGE ONE SC declines to direct EC to upload Form 17C copies

FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

an interim application filed by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), said the interim relief being sought was the same as the prayer for final relief in a pending 2019 petition by TMC leader Mahua Moitra, and that giving interim relief would amount to granting final relief.

"Arguments on the interim application were heard. Prima facie, we are not inclined to grant any relief on the interim application at this stage in view of the similarity of prayer A of the interim application with prayer B of writ petition out of which the interim application arises. Grant of such a relief amounts to grant of final relief in the writ petition," the bench said in its order.

It directed that all pleas in this regard be listed before an appropriate bench after the court's summer recess.

Justice Datta said, "Everyone is for free and fair elections... We cannot interrupt something... We are also responsible citizens. Let us trust some authority. We will keep it pending and (it) will be heard along with the writ petition after the elections are over. In between elections, a hands-off attitude has to be there."

Stating that the bench had not gone into the merits of the matter, he said, "It is an election spread over seven phases. Five phases are over. Tomorrow is the sixth... This particular complacency that you are insisting on would require not only manpower but also require the mandamus. It is not possible during this period."

The bench sought to know why the petitioner who moved the court in 2019 had not done anything to pursue the matter and ensure that it was heard in the last five years or before the start of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

"You filed this petition in 2019. For the last five years, leave aside the Covid period, what steps were taken to have this heard? And why did you not come up with this application prior to March 16? Why on 26th April when the process is on?" Justice Datta asked.

Senior Advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Moitra, said it was filed by a person with whom she had a relationship. "He was an advocate. She could not get the files back to move it."

Rejecting attempts to cast doubts on the role of the ECI, Justice Datta also pointed out that when a bench comprising him heard the plea for matching 100 per cent VVPAT slips with EVM votes, there was a controversy about figures being put out by the Voter Turnout app.

"I asked the ECI counsel, are you statutorily obliged to maintain this? He said no, only with the objective of maintaining fairness and transparency, we are doing this," he said.

The bench also questioned the petitioners on the similarity of the prayers in the interim application and the 2019 writ petition.

"Prayer A in your application is the prayer B in your petition. That's the final relief you have prayed for in the writ petition. How can you claim an interim relief? Interim application is based on certain press notes pertaining to the 2024 elections. If subsequent events can be considered by the court to avoid multiplicity of proceedings, what is the procedure for that? Today, if a suit is filed and during the pendency of the suit, there are certain subsequent developments and the court feels that these developments should be taken into consideration for

EXPLAINED The EC objection

OBJECTING TO the pleas for uploading Form 17C on its website, the EC has told the SC that "there is no legal mandate to provide the form to any person other than the candidate or his agent". It has also said that "public posting" can increase the "possibility of the images being morphed" and lead to "mistrust in the entire electoral processes".

avoiding future litigation, what is the procedure that is adopted in the suit? And what follows in a writ petition where the principles of Civil Procedure Code apply?" Justice Datta asked.

"Does the court by way of an order grant interim relief which is in the nature of final relief, keeping the petition pending?" he said.

"This could have given you the ground for filing a fresh petition. Why did you not file a fresh petition? What is the nexus between the 2019 petition and 2024 application? If you say that there is a nexus, you are trapped in one way. You cannot, by an interim application, seek an order. You have to get your writ petition amended... And if you say there is no connection, then a fresh writ petition should have been filed," he said.

Senior Advocate Dushyant Dave, appearing for ADR which filed the application for interim relief, said it was not an adversarial litigation and that he was pained by the ECI treating it so "to damn us".

(The ECI, in its response to the Supreme Court Wednesday, had said "there is no legal mandate to provide Form 17C to any person other than the candidate or his agent" and that "there is a consistent malafide campaign/design/effort to keep raising suspicion and doubt in every possible manner... by misleading assertions and baseless allegations regarding the conduct of elections by the Election Commission of India".)

The bench continued with its questions. "When this is your final relief claimed in the writ petition, which is awaiting a decision, how can you expect an interim order on the same terms?" Justice Datta asked. He said the court can grant such relief, but only in "very exceptional cases where the non-grant of an interim relief which is in the nature of final relief has the effect of rendering the proceedings infructuous".

Dave said the ADR came to the court now because the details of the voter turnout were published now. "Undisputedly, after the two phases, the Election Commission itself revised the percentage of voting. That is why we came. Not for any other reason," he said.

Justice Datta pointed out that the writ petition prayed for issuing an appropriate writ, order or direction to the Election Commission to provide the information in public domain for the 2019 Lok Sabha elections and for all future elections.

"The Supreme Court is yet to decide on your petition and grant this relief. The matter is pending for decision. You want an interim order on the same terms. Under what law?" Justice Datta said.

Dave said that this being a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), the strict rules of procedure,

pleadings, etc do not apply.

Justice Datta said, "We are not strict on PILs if it involves a public cause. But over the years, the public interest litigation jurisdiction... of the matter that we entertain, that comes before us, how many PILs have private interest, publicity interest, paisa interest. So, therefore, it is for us to put a check on frivolous writ petitions from being filed."

"We don't say that on merits you don't have a good case. You may succeed in your 2019 petition. We are trying to say that given the framing of your petition, you may not have approached at the appropriate stage with a proper prayer," he said.

Dave said he understands the court's anguish.

At this, Justice Datta said, "It's not a question of anguish. Everyone is for a free and fair election. If you see the part of my judgment (on petitions seeking 100 per cent verification of VVPAT slips with the EVM votes), you will find whatever improvement is required, has to be done. And that was the point which came from the court itself. It was not pleaded."

The bench, while keeping the application and petition pending till after the elections, said it is concerned that there could be mischievous people taking advantage. "We cannot interrupt something. To take it further, we can do it. We are also responsible citizens. Let us trust some authority," Justice Datta said.

Appearing for the ECI, Senior Advocate Maninder Singh contended the NGO had suppressed the fact the issue of Form 17C was settled by the Supreme Court in its judgment on the EVM-VVPAT matter. He said the application was "only founded on suspicion and apprehension" and urged the court to dismiss it.

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● Chhattisgarh

showing him snatching a woman's mangalsutra and handing it to a man. The post was uploaded on May 20.

The third post, which the Chhattisgarh BJP Instagram handle posted on May 23, was an animated video first posted by the party's Karnataka unit on May 7. This showed Rahul Gandhi placing a large egg labelled 'Muslim' in a nest along with smaller eggs labelled 'SC', 'ST' and 'OBC', and then the hatchling from the 'Muslim' egg growing bigger and pushing the others out of the nest. This post received 1,040 likes.

All three posts were pulled down Friday after the Election Commission verbally reached out to the BJP, and also contacted Instagram's parent company Meta.

"We have taken down the three objectionable posts from the BJP Instagram handle and a stern warning has been given to them not to upload such posts in future," Chief Electoral Officer Kangale said.

The BJP said there was nothing objectionable in the posts and that they were just targeting the Congress's manifesto. "We did not receive any notice from the Election Commission, but we removed it as we are following the election guidelines. There was nothing religious about it... The posts were related to the Congress narrative of inheritance tax and taking away reservation and giving it to Muslims," Somesh Pandey, from the social media cell of the BJP in Chhattisgarh, said.

Sushil Anand Shukla, in charge of the Congress's communication cell in Chhattisgarh, said, "It is an extremely serious issue... The Election Commission should take legal action against the BJP"

● The night before: L-G, AAP accuse each other of moves to trouble voters

unconstitutional. And I hope the Election Commission will take cognizance of this, and stop any such attempt."

Replying to this, Kejriwal, in a post on X at 10.18 pm, said, "This is shocking. EC should ensure smooth voting in Delhi."

Following these posts, the Lt Governor's office, in a statement issued shortly before 11 pm, said that the AAP had drawn up plans to trouble voters on Saturday and blame it on the Centre.

"Information has been received that on the orders of Arvind Kejriwal, who is out on interim bail till June 1, power

and water minister Atishi Marlena has instructed the power companies and Delhi Jal Board to deliberately cut power supply and stop water supply tonight (May 24) and throughout the day tomorrow (May 25) so that the people of Delhi are troubled," the Lt Governor's office stated.

"The LG has directed that these orders of Kejriwal should not be followed. Information has also been received that Kejriwal is doing this so that he can habitually confuse and cheat the people of Delhi by blaming the Central government," it stated.

Later, in a post on X at 12.27 am Saturday, the Lt Governor called Atishi's statement unwarranted and false.

"You have made it a habit, Kejriwal sahab, to keep crying irrespective of the situation you may be in. I have taken a stern view of this unwarranted & false statement on the eve of election against a constitutional authority by a Minister, endorsed by you," Saxena wrote.

Earlier, in a press release issued around 6.30 pm, the Delhi Jal Board said that the water utility was poised to fulfil the needs of all residents.

There has been a tussle between the AAP government and the Lt Governor's office over water supply in the city.

In April, Atishi wrote to the Lt Governor, seeking the suspension of the DJB CEO after a woman was killed in East Delhi, allegedly by her neighbour during an altercation over water filling.

In response, Saxena wrote an open letter to Kejriwal — the CM was in jail following his arrest in the Delhi excise policy case — describing the murder as the government's failure and slamming Atishi for using the incident for "narrow political goals".

● Killers set up woman to lure Bangladesh MP, butcher cut body: Probe

murder mastermind. AUS citizen of Bangladesh origin, Akhtaruzzaman had taken the New Town flat on rent, and hired the woman, identified as Silasti Rehman, the butcher and two others to execute the plan. He is believed to have fled India after Azim's killing on May 13, a day after the MP arrived in India for medical treatment, police said.

With the MP being reported missing since May 13, police in Kolkata said Wednesday that they received inputs that he had been murdered. On the same day, Dhaka Metropolitan Police announced the arrest of Silasti, Simul Bhuiyan alias Amanullah and Tanvir Bhuiyan in Bangladesh.

On the intervening night of Thursday and Friday, the West Bengal CID arrested Jihad Hawaldar, a 24-year-old described as an illegal immigrant who worked as a butcher in Mumbai. The police said Akhtaruzzaman had hired Hawaldar and brought him to Kolkata two months ago. Confirming Hawaldar's arrest, a CID officer said, "He is the butcher

specially brought from Mumbai by the other accused. He is an illegal immigrant living in Mumbai."

CID officers claimed that Hawaldar, a resident of Barakpur under Digholia police station in Bangladesh, has confessed that on the orders of Akhtaruzzaman, he and three other Bangladeshi nationals smothered the MP to death in the flat. Initial investigation reveals that he skinned the body, minced the flesh to destroy the identity and put the pieces in polythene packs. He also cut the bones into small pieces and packed them separately.

"They took the packets out of the flat, used various modes of transport and dumped them within Kolkata limits," said a senior officer.

Hawaldar was produced in a Barasat court Friday. Although the CID sought his longer custody to recover the MP's body and to track other possible accomplices, the court granted 12-day custody.

on Friday. "Simul Bhuiyan alias Amanullah, Silasti Rehman and Tanvir Bhuiyan were remanded in police custody for eight days. Their interrogation will reveal more details. So far it is suspected that the murder conspiracy was hatched by Akhtaruzzaman alias Shahin, an old friend and business partner of the victim," Md Abdus Sattar Dulal, Additional Public Prosecutor, told The Indian Express over phone.

"Akhtaruzzaman conspired and employed the other accused persons to commit the crime. It is suspected that the woman was set up to lure the victim to the flat. Akhtaruzzaman is absconding," said Dulal.

It is learnt that Silasti is a resident of Tangail, while the other two accused are from Khulna. She is also believed to be close to Akhtaruzzaman, the police said, adding that she returned to Bangladesh with Amanullah on May 15. She had been introduced by Akhtaruzzaman to the MP earlier, like the other suspects, except Hawaldar.

sources said MP Azim and Akhtaruzzaman were believed to be business partners in gold. It is suspected that they fell out over money involved in the business.

The MP came to Kolkata on May 12 through Gede border in Nadia district around 2.40 pm and first went to Mondolpara lane in Baranagar to meet his friend Gopal Biswas, a gold trader.

On May 13, he left Biswas's house and met Amanullah — a murder convict who had served 20 years in a Bangladesh jail. Amanullah took the MP to the New Town apartment, where the other accused were waiting, police sources said.

In the afternoon, the MP was murdered. According to the CID, the MP was washing his face near a washbasin when the suspects used chloroform to make him unconscious. They then smothered him to death.

His body was then chopped, put in small packets and packed in a briefcase and a trolley bag. The suspects then went to Krishnamati, 20 km from the flat, and dumped the packets.



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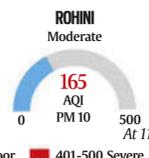
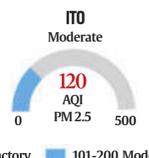


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4 THE CITY



SKYWATCH
May 24
Mainly clear sky. Strong surface winds during the day. Heat wave conditions at isolated places.
MAX: 44 | MIN: 31
1.8°C above normal | 4.3°C above normal

'RELEASE ALL ARRESTED' PM admitted to no proof in excise scam, says Kejriwal

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi has admitted that there is neither proof nor a money trail in the alleged excise scam, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said Friday, hours before the Capital votes in the Lok Sabha polls.



CM Arvind Kejriwal

In a video message, the AAP convener, citing his statement as part of an interview given by the PM a day earlier, said that since this was the case, everyone arrested as part of the 'fake excise policy scam' should be released from prison.

"Over the last two years, they have been screaming 'excise scam in Delhi'; they arrested me, Sanjay Singh, Manish Sisodia, conducted as many as 500 raids throughout the country, who knows how many people they arrested... They say we took kickbacks of Rs 100 crore; a few days ago, they said it is a scam worth Rs 1,100 crore..." Kejriwal said.

"The question that arises is that if this is such a big scam, the money must be kept somewhere? They conducted more than 500 raids but could not find a penny anywhere... Yesterday, the Prime Minister was asked this question — that there is no money or evidence regarding the excise scam... What the PM said will shock you; he said no proof has been recovered because Kejriwal is an experienced thief," he said.

During an interview with India TV on Thursday, while responding to Kejriwal's contention that no "wads of currency notes" related to the alleged excise scam had been recovered from him, the PM had said, "... he has been an officer so

he knows how things work... he who is an experienced thief has it easier. Someone who has served the government as an officer will know the ED will go this way, the CBI that way, just keep a few things in order..."

Kejriwal said the PM had "admitted in front of the entire country" in the interview that "he has no proof of the excise scam" and was trying to "hide" the "wrongful arrests in the fake case" by seeking shelter behind the allegation that the Delhi CM was "an experienced thief".

"It is to hide this fact (that there is no proof) that he said Kejriwal is an experienced thief... so your CBI is good for nothing, all its officers are good for nothing? All your ED officers are good for nothing?" he asked.

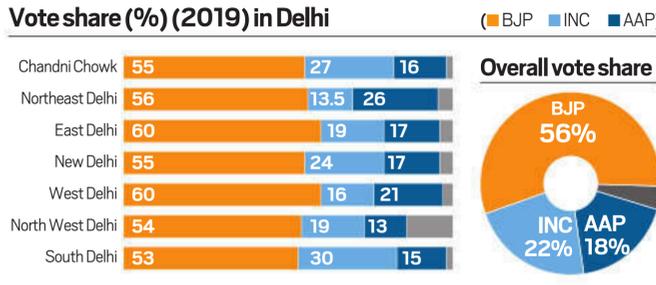
"Pradhan Mantri ji, when you yourself have admitted that the entire excise scam is fake, that you have no proof, no recovery, then let everyone go," he added.

Arrested in the case on March 21, the Delhi CM was released on interim bail by the Supreme Court for the Lok Sabha elections on May 10 and is to surrender and return to judicial custody on June 2.

Who will Delhi choose today?

Candidates in Delhi

Northwest Delhi Udit Raj (INC), Yogendra Chandoliya (BJP)	Northeast Delhi Kanhaiya Kumar (INC), Manoj Tiwari (BJP)
Chandni Chowk JP Agarwal (INC), Praveen Khandelwal (BJP)	East Delhi Kuldeep Kumar (AAP), Harsh Malhotra (BJP)
West Delhi Mahabal Mishra (AAP), Kamaljeet Sehrawat (BJP)	South Delhi Sahiram Pahalwan (AAP), Ramvir Singh Bidhuri (BJP)
New Delhi Somnath Bharti (AAP), Bansuri Swaraj (BJP)	



	Total booths	Sensitive booths	Police deployment
Delhi	13,637*	2,891	78,578
Gurgaon	2,681	—	6,458
Faridabad	2,160	—	—

*and four auxiliary booths

10 Total LS seats

Gurgaon Rao Inderjit Singh (BJP), Raj Babbar (INC), Rahul Yadav (JJP) OVER ALL VOTERS: 24 lakh Male: 12.88 lakh, Female: 11.43 lakh	Faridabad Krishan Pal Gurjar (BJP), Mahendra Pratap (INC), Nalin Hooda (JJP) OVER ALL VOTERS: 23 lakh Male: 12.78 lakh, Female: 10.67 lakh
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DECISION 2024

OVER ALL VOTERS IN DELHI
1.52 crore

Male: 82.12 lakh, Female: 69.87 lakh
Third gender voters: 1,228

CONSTITUENCY WISE VOTERS

Constituency	Total voters	Male	Female	Third gender
NEW DELHI	15.25 lakh	8.30 lakh	6.94 lakh	78
SOUTH DELHI	22.91 lakh	12.67 lakh	10.23 lakh	336
WEST DELHI	25.87 lakh	13.70 lakh	12.17 lakh	131
EAST DELHI	21.20 lakh	11.51 lakh	9.69 lakh	104
NORTHWEST DELHI	25.67 lakh	13.83 lakh	11.83 lakh	262
NORTHEAST DELHI	24.63 lakh	13.26 lakh	11.36 lakh	149
CHANDNI CHOWK	16.45 lakh	8.83 lakh	7.62 lakh	168

'BJP is aiming for a hat-trick, will sweep elections yet again'

SAMAN HUSAIN
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

AROUND 131 major public meetings and roadshows, 2,625 corner meetings and 10,048 padyatras: This is the first time the BJP has held such a long poll campaign, said state unit president Virendra Sachdeva.

Delhi votes in the Lok Sabha election Saturday. "This is the first time that we have held such a long campaign, else we used to campaign for just 10-15 days. This gave our candidates the opportunity to visit so many places in Delhi. Now, the BJP is aiming for a hat-trick by sweeping polls yet again," Sachdeva said in a press conference Friday.

Manoj Tiwari, sitting MP and candidate for the Northeast Delhi constituency, said, "... because we had more time to campaign, we went to alleys where it had not been possible to visit before; it made me realise how Delhi has been wounded due to AAP and Congress' governance of the national capital in the last 25 years... people working in Delhi have now shifted to Meerut and Ghaziabad as they feel that the living conditions are better."

Sharing an election anecdote, Tiwari added, "The kind of trust people have for Narendra Modi ji is wonderful to encounter... I was sitting at a chai shop when its 60-year-old owner told me Modi will come to power again because its in the country's favour."

New Delhi candidate Bansuri Swaraj promised that she would

make a digital portal for *safai karamcharis*, work on building a youth and women-centric startup hub in her constituency which she considers to be her dream project.

"(Majority of) MLAs in New Delhi are from AAP, most councillors are also from AAP... but I have pledged that even if someone would complain to me of an issue that comes under their jurisdiction, I will not shift the blame... I will be their voice and will stand with them," Swaraj said, adding that she felt like her mother, the late Sushma Swaraj, was with her the whole time.

Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, the South Delhi candidate, said: "... the Modi government has provided two world-class convention centres to Delhi — one in Pragati Maidan, another in Dwarka. He has provided Delhi with a world-class police headquarters, the Parliament, and highways for easier travel."

BJP's Chandni Chowk nominee Praveen Khandelwal, West Delhi candidate Kamaljeet Sehrawat, Northwest Delhi candidate Yogendra Chandoliya and East Delhi candidate Harsh Malhotra were also present.

The BJP won all seven seats in Delhi in 2014 and 2019 with huge margins. This year, the party replaced six of its seven sitting MPs, retaining only Tiwari.

"People of Delhi have immense trust in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Viksit Bharat' and the BJP is going to win back all the seven seats with even bigger margins as compared to 2019," said Sachdeva.



Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva with the party's seven Delhi candidates, Friday. Amit Mehra

Statehood for Delhi? AAP demands it, Congress says a committee can look into issue, and BJP remains silent

NEW DELHI, MAY 24

THE SINGLE most important political question in Delhi is its constitutional status. Unlike a full-fledged state or a Union Territory, Delhi is stuck between the two. It is neither a full state nor a Union Territory. This means it has two power centres — an elected Chief Minister and a Centre-appointed Lieutenant Governor who work against each other. It isn't surprising as well because the party in power in this half state of Delhi and the party in power at the Centre and bitter political rivals.

The issue of Delhi's constitutional status hasn't become a central issue during this Lok Sabha election.

SAMAN HUSAIN asked a single question to all three parties in the fray in Delhi: Do you want Delhi to upgrade to a full-fledged state, continue the current arrangement or downgrade to a

THE ISSUE OF STATEHOOD

1988: BJP leader Kalka Dass pitched for a full state. Same year Congress' Mirza Sidiq Ali also called for statehood	prepared under then CM Sahib Singh Verma	2013: At BJP national executive meeting in Goa, BJP supported full statehood for Delhi; the same year, the BJP's Delhi manifesto said it was committed to fight for statehood during Vidhan Sabha polls. Former CM Sheila Dikshit also made a demand for full statehood the same year	2014: During Lok Sabha polls, BJP's Delhi unit came out with a Delhi-specific manifesto promising statehood
1994: Former Delhi CM Madan Lal Khurana explained need for a full state	1998: PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee and BJP manifesto promised full statehood	2015: Congress' Delhi manifesto said full-statehood is essential for effective governance	
1998: Draft Bill for full statehood of Delhi was	2003: Delhi Statehood Bill presented in Parliament by then Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani		

Union Territory and run directly under the Centre?

AAM AADMI PARTY
"A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court had made a judgment that the value of Delhi's votes should be equivalent to that of other states... this has been ignored by the Centre using their usual dictatorial tactics... In its

election manifesto, AAP has promised that Delhi will receive full statehood if an INDIA bloc government is formed at the Centre."
Gopal Rai, AAP Delhi convener

■ When Article 370 was abrogated in Jammu & Kashmir and the state was downgraded to a union territory, AAP had sup-

ported the decision.

CONGRESS
"There has been a long-standing discussion on the status of Delhi's statehood... the BJP made a promise and since the last 10 years, they haven't even started any discussion on the matter... There is no double-thought about the fact that the

Congress has been saying repeatedly that Delhi should receive status of a full state... Though there was a sort of coordination maintained during Sheila Dikshit ji's Chief Ministership in Delhi, even during the time when there was a BJP government at the Centre and a Congress government in Delhi, lately, we have seen a lot of obstacles

come up due to the lack of statehood which has made Delhi suffer... the feasibility can only be looked into after a committee is formed to look into the matter".
Anil Chaudhary, former Delhi Congress president

BJP
Despite multiple attempts, the Delhi BJP refused to respond on the matter.

■ During the 2014 polls, the BJP state unit had come out with a Delhi-specific manifesto where they had promised full statehood along with bringing police, DDA and MCD under one roof.

■ Delhi had become a Union Territory in 1956 after the State Reorganisation Act was passed due to which the post of the CM was removed. The post was then reinstated in 1993 even as Delhi did not receive full statehood.

Brace for heatwave in some areas today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

PARTS OF the Capital are likely to record heatwave conditions on Saturday — the day Delhi goes to polls — going by the IMD forecast.

At the Safdarjung weather station, the city's base observatory, the maximum temperature on Saturday is likely to be around 44 degrees Celsius against the 41.7 degrees Celsius recorded on Friday, which was a notch above the normal. Clear skies and strong surface winds of 25-35 kmph are also expected on Saturday.

On Friday, the highest maximum temperature recorded in the city was 42.5 degrees Celsius in Southwest Delhi's Najafgarh and Northwest Delhi's Mungeshpur.

None of the city's weather stations reported heatwave conditions Friday; IMD records a

HEAT ALERT FOR SATURDAY: 'YELLOW' ALERT — TO 'BE AWARE'

Forecast: Heatwave conditions likely at isolated places

Impact expected: Heat is tolerable for general public but moderate health concern for vulnerable people, like infants, elderly persons, people with chronic diseases

Action suggested: Avoid heat exposure, wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose, cotton clothes. Cover your head using a hat/umbrella/cloth

Source: IMD

heatwave when the maximum temperature is 45 degrees or more.

The minimum temperature is likely to remain at around 31 degree Celsius early Saturday.

VOICES FROM THE GROUND

Lawyer vs Lawyer in New Delhi: What's the buzz in Delhi's courtrooms?

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

IT WAS 2013. Somnath Bharti used to work from his office in Malviya Nagar when he was first given a ticket to contest the Delhi Assembly polls.

At Upasana building on Hailey Road, Bansuri Swaraj has been practising law for the past 17 years. Her practice is spread across New Delhi and she regularly appears for private clients as well as for the State.

Today, the two will face off against each other as the Capital votes in the Lok Sabha election. They are contesting from the

New Delhi constituency — Bharti, a three-time MLA from the AAP, and Swaraj, a first-time contestant, from the BJP.

As the lawyers go head to head, *The Indian Express* spoke to Delhi's advocates and lawyers to gauge what their predictions and issues are for this election.

"I met Bharti ji for the first time during the India Against Corruption campaign," said advocate Rishikesh Kumar, who said he worked closely with Bharti for over a decade. He had first approached Bharti seeking help to file a complaint in the Commonwealth Games "scam". Advocate Dilip Kumar was among 500 lawyers who were

part of a meeting held earlier this month by the BJP's legal cell. "I think Bansuri ji will easily win this election," he said, adding that BJP would comfortably win at the Centre. On May 17, hundreds of lawyers declared their backing for the BJP in the meeting in which Union Law Minister Arjun Meghwal and Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva were present.

The Indian Express also visited multiple court complexes in Delhi to ascertain the mood of lawyers — which was mixed.

Sitting outside the Central Hall of the Patiala House Court complex, Advocate JS Malik, who had been practising law for almost three decades, said, "Free and fair



Lawyers at Patiala House Court. Express

elections are not happening." He was referring to the latest bill which seeks to remove the

CJ and replace him with a Union Cabinet Minister nominated by the PM from a panel which se-

lects Election Commissioners.

Another lawyer came and sat next to him seeking advice regarding a case he was involved in. Advocate HM Mukherjee, a denizen of Mayur Vihar who had been in the profession for 16 years, was profusely sweating courtesy the 40 degrees temperature.

As he adjusted his spectacles, Mukherjee also started speaking on the elections. "I think Bansuri Swaraj will win... but it will be a tough fight," he said.

Advocate Rahul Rai, from South Delhi, also spoke to *The Indian Express*: "People in Delhi are not confused at this point. Earlier, they were confused on whether to vote for AAP or

Congress. The INDIA bloc will benefit from this. A triple contest could've confused the voters."

Advocate KK Sharma, who practices in Delhi's High Court, said anti-incumbency might play a role in this election. "The country has seen BJP's rule for 10 years. Human nature is inclined towards change," he said.

Citing his support for AAP, Advocate Hemant Basla, who practises in the HC, spoke of lawyer-centric schemes introduced by the AAP Delhi government — an insurance scheme for advocates with coverage up to Rs 10 lakh; 200 free electricity units in lawyers' chambers; an AC bus service catering to advocates

which operates between the Supreme Court, HC, and Patiala House Court from 7 am to 11 pm.

New Delhi Bar Association President Jagdeep Vats highlighted the importance of lawyers becoming MPs: "One Bar Council member from each state must have a seat reserved (as an MP)."

While he did not support any party and had no predictions for who was going to win in New Delhi, he spoke about what the elected candidate should do for lawyers. According to him, a provision of stipends for new lawyers is a must. "First-generation lawyers find it difficult to survive in the profession in their initial years," he said.

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12557	12557-SLR-F1-MFP-ANVT-22-1
15203	15203-SLR-F1-BJU-LIN-22-1
11124	11124-SLR-R1-BJU-GWL-22-1
15228	15228-SLR-F1-MFP-YPR-22-1
19054	19054-SLR-R1-MFP-ST-22-1
19052	19052-SLR-F1-MFP-BL-23-1
14523	14523-SLR-R1-BJU-UMB-22-1
11124	11124-SLR-F1-BJU-GWL-22-1
15269	15269-SLR-F1-MFP-SBIB-24-1
13158	13158-SLR-F1-MFP-KOAA-22-1
13158	13158-SLR-R1-MFP-KOAA-22-1
19038	19038-SLR-R1-BJU-BDTS-23-2
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AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2024 (₹ Crore)

Sr. No.	Particulars	STANDALONE		CONSOLIDATED			
		Quarter Ended		Year Ended			
		31.03.2024	31.03.2023	31.03.2024	31.03.2023		
1	Total Income from Operations	13,343.61	10,867.14	48,846.60	39,330.54	49,615.41	39,850.37
2	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	2,061.32	2,133.27	8,067.91	6,554.70	8,432.93	6,801.39
3	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period before Tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	2,061.32	2,133.27	8,067.91	6,554.70	8,432.93	6,801.39
4	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after Tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	1,608.21	2,014.54	6,103.12	5,359.79	6,371.24	5,554.27
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
6	Paid-up share capital	17,080.00	17,080.00	17,080.00	17,080.00	17,080.00	17,080.00
7	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserves)			54,909.64	48,808.52	55,702.28	49,401.23
8	Securities Premium Account	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
9	Net Worth	71,194.77	65,118.87	71,194.77	65,118.87	72,573.40	66,293.38
10	Paid up Debt Capital / Outstanding Debt*	7,89,190.75	6,88,859.02	7,89,190.75	6,88,859.02	7,89,346.59	6,88,909.01
11	Outstanding Redeemable Preference Share	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
12	Debt-Equity Ratio	10.96	10.45	10.96	10.45	10.85	10.36
13	Earnings Per Share (EPS)	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
14	Capital Redemption Reserve	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
15	Debt Redemption Reserve	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
16	Debt Service Coverage Ratio	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
17	Interest Service Coverage Ratio	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

NA = Not Applicable
* Paid up Debt Capital / Outstanding Debt includes Outstanding Deposits, Bonds & Debentures and Borrowing

Notes: 1) The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly/Annual Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 52 of the SEBI (Listing Obligation and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly/Annual Financial Results are available on the Stock Exchange websites (NSE: www.nseindia.com and BSE: www.bseindia.com) and on the bank's website (www.nabard.org).

Place : Mumbai
Date : May 24, 2024
गौरव देश बदे | nabardonline | Taking Rural India << Forward

Mumbai Port Authority
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
Tender No. MEED/EDP/231/2024 is invited for the work of Build, Operate and Maintain Integrated Access Control and Surveillance System of Mumbai Port Authority on Revenue Share Basis for a Period of 10 Years. Details of the tender are available on MbPA's Website <http://www.mumbaiport.gov.in> AND <http://www.eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>
Chief Mechanical Engineer
Mumbai Port Authority

IRCON INTERNATIONAL LIMITED
NAV RATNA COMPANY
(A Govt. of India Undertaking)
Website: www.ircon.org, CIN - L45203DL1970Q0008171

e-Tender Notice
e-Tender No.: IRCON/2018/DFCCIL-CT12/e-Tender/Track tools & equipment's/Lot-3/Part-1/06-488 Dt. 25.05.2024
Tenders in Two Stage bid System are invited from bidders meeting qualifying requirement for the work: "Supply of WDFC/RDSO approved Track tools & equipment's including Installation, Commissioning, Transportation, Loading & Unloading at DFCCIL-CTP-12 Project in b/w Vaitarana - Sachin of Western Dedicated Freight Corridor, Phase-II - (Lot 03) (Part-1)".
Estimated Cost including all taxes & GST Rs. 12.41,360/-
Last Date and Time of Bid Submission 07.06.2024 upto 15:00 Hours
For further details, visit website at <https://www.etenders.gov.in/eprocure/app>. Corrigendum, if any, would be hosted only on the web site. For any clarification, contact the office of Undersigned on following address: General Manager, Plot No. 1/7/2, Vaishnav Nagar, Nr. Ayappa Temple, Atul-Panera Road, Panera, Distt. Valsad, Gujarat-396007, Email: shachish.sinha@ircon.org

FROM THE DESK OF CHAIRMAN, CCMT & CCMN-2024

WITH the implementation of National Education Policy 2020, India's higher education system, particularly in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), is experiencing rapid changes due to adoption of flexible and multidisciplinary approach. The network of a large number of elite technical institutions of the country, including NITs, IIITs and other reputed Institutes, are gearing up to take up this challenge. One of the immediate challenges is to efficiently channelize a large number of graduates in various technical and scientific streams in order to enable them to pursue their dreams of getting the post-graduation studies in their choice of programs at their choice of Institutes. In view of this, it is preferable to have a centralized counselling system to manage admissions into these Institutes in a meritocratic way.

conducted based on the merit in these exams by one of the premium institutes involved in the process. These centralized systems provide common and convenient platform for online counselling wherein the candidates can fill-in a single online application form and apply to all programs in all the participating institutions to which they are eligible. The counselling process for the technology based PG programs is known as CCMT, whereas the one for science based PG programs is known as CCMN. The CCMT was initiated in the year 2012 and subsequently the CCMN was started in 2015. Through CCMT, the prospective candidates can apply for admissions to M.Tech./M.Arch./M.Plan. programs in various participating NITs, IIITs and other reputed Institutions, based on their GATE scores of last three years. Similarly, for admissions to various M.Sc./M.Sc.(Tech.) programs in participating institutions, the prospective candidates may apply through CCMN, based on their JAM score of the current year. These platforms have undergone several changes to make them more students-friendly and include newer institutions under one umbrella. The most attractive part of these programs is the fact that all the admitted students at any of the participating Institute shall get exposure to some of the world-class research facilities and infrastructures and the PG degree from such highly reputed Institution would add a scintillating feather to their academic profiles, which could result in a great boost to the carrier of the candidate. The candidates admitted through CCMT shall also get stipend as per the norms of the Government of India and participating institutes.

of Education, dedicated to higher education and research. The SVNIT has got the status of Institute of National Importance by the NITSER Act -2007. In view of its infrastructural and managerial capabilities, the Ministry of Education, GoI, has entrusted SVNIT Surat with the responsibilities to host

these centralized counselling for both CCMT and CCMN for the year of 2024. Through these counselling processes, the SVNIT will be coordinating to conduct admissions to 12,720 seats in various M.Tech/M.Arch./M.Plan programs across 61 elite technical Institutes of

the country and 2387 seats in various M.Sc./M.Sc. (Tech) programs in 29 premier Institutions. The registration for the counselling process shall begin from Friday, 24th May 2024. The counseling process will comprise of Three Regular rounds, Two Special Rounds and a National Spot Round

for seat allotments. A dedicated team from SVNIT Surat and NIC Delhi will facilitate to all the candidates participating in the counselling process for admissions. Best Wishes.
(Prof. Anupam Shukla)
Director, SVNIT Surat & Chairman, CCMT & CCMN 2024



The PG programs in the areas of the STEM are broadly divided in two major categories; the technology based PG programs and science based PG programs. So in order to assign a common merit and facilitate a centralized admission in these elite institutions, the Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India, organizes two competitive exams, viz. GATE and JAM, at national level for all the prospective students every year. The centralized counselling processes are

This year, the CCMT-2024 and CCMN-2024 are being coordinated by Sardar Vallabhbhai National Institute of Technology (SVNIT), Surat, Gujarat. The SVNIT Surat is one of the premier NITs of the Government of India, under the ambit of the Ministry

Centralized Counselling for PG Admissions in NITs, IIST Shibpur, IIITs, CFTIs and other Participating Institutes
Coordinating Institute:
Sardar Vallabhbhai National Institute of Technology, Surat (Gujarat)

NOTICE FOR CCMT-2024 and CCMN-2024

The Centralized Counselling for Admission to M.Tech./M.Arch./M.Plan. - 2024 (CCMT-2024) and Centralized Counselling for Admission to M.Sc./M.Sc.(Tech)- 2024 (CCMN-2024) are being conducted by the Sardar Vallabhbhai National Institute of Technology (SVNIT), Surat. Admissions into 61 participating institutions (NITs, IIITs and CFTIs and others) to Master of Engineering / Technology / Architecture / Planning Programmes will be through CCMT- 2024 based on the valid GATE scores. Similarly, admissions into 29 participating institutions (NITs, IIITs and CFTIs and others) to M.Sc. / M.Sc.(Tech) Programmes will be through CCMN-2024 based on the valid JAM score. The link for admission is given below:

For Admissions in M.Tech./M.Arch./M.Plan. (CCMT-2024),
Visit: <https://ccmt.admissions.nic.in/>

For Admissions in M.Sc./M.Sc.(Tech) (CCMN-2024),
Visit: <https://ccmn.admissions.nic.in/>

The last date for online registration of regular round is 07th June, 2024 (5:30pm).

Chairman, CCMT & CCMN 2024

Women have 'better right of consideration' for bail: Kavitha

MALAVIKA PRASAD
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

WHILE ARGUING her bail plea in the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probes into the Delhi excise policy case, Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) legislator K Kavitha told the Delhi High Court on Friday that even though women do not have an automatic right of bail under the law, they do have a "better right of consideration" for bail. Kavitha has moved bail pleas before the HC in both the ED and CBI probes into the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy. She has also moved a plea challenging her arrest by the CBI and the trial court's subsequent order remanding her to the agency's custody. Representing Kavitha, senior advocate Vikram Chaudhary told the HC that out of about 50 accused in the case, his client is the "only woman". "Under the statutory law of this country, the procedure which is prescribed is that a woman in CrP Section 437 has been given a different pedestal. I'm not saying that it is an automatic right of bail; but a better right of consideration of bail..."

FARIDABAD BUSINESSMAN BORROWED RS 40 CR: POLICE

Harassment over unpaid loans led family to suicide pact, 1 dead

AISWARYA RAJ
GURGAON, MAY 24

UNTIL A few years ago, Aniruddh Goel was a "successful" businessman, running his company dealing in ghee and milk products from Noida. But then, he started to suffer losses and borrowed money. "He borrowed around Rs 40 crore through hawala," a police officer claimed. The pandemic added to his difficulties, the business could never recover, and soon he went bankrupt. Then began the harassment. Over the years, the men sought their money back, and when Goel failed to repay, the calls turned into threats. Things came to a head on Thursday night, when, around 11 pm, two of them visited his Faridabad home and abducted his guard who would not let them in. Goel, 48, decided that there was only one way out now to escape the cycle of constant humiliation and threats. He gave "pills", police said, to

In his statement, Goel said he has a company in Noida which was running in losses, adding when he could not repay his loan, the lenders started threatening him

his 73-year-old father Shyam, mother Sadhna, wife Nidhi and two teenage sons and then slit their wrists. Then, he slit his own wrist too. It was a suicide pact, the police said. While the rest of the family members survived, Goel's septuagenarian father could not, said police. The incident came to light around 1.30am when Goel's neighbour Himanshu, who was at a birthday party and had not checked his phone for a while, found a few missed calls. Himanshu rushed to Goel's house and rang the bell, only

to find his neighbour with his wrist slashed. "He was drowsy and his speech was slurred," Himanshu said. As he entered the house, Himanshu realised that there was more shock in store for him: The other family members were lying on the floor, bleeding. He rang up the police. "Himanshu called us," Station House Officer, Sarai police station, Kuldeep Dahiya told *The Indian Express*. By this time, the guard had also come back home, after being released by his captors in Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi. As the police arrived at Goel's three-storey house, they found all the family members in a serious condition. "Only Goel and his sons were conscious," said a senior police officer, requesting anonymity. It was not clear what pills the family had consumed and from where they had procured it. While Goel's father Shyam died of blood loss, his wife and mother are in a serious condition at the hospital and hence, unfit

for a statement, said police. "Aniruddh and his two sons, aged 19 and 16, are out of danger now and undergoing treatment at a hospital," police said. Officials said Goel had not lodged any complaint with the police with regard to the harassment. Police said they found a "suicide note" at Goel's house, which stated that the harassment had forced them to take the extreme step. "All the six members had signed it," they added. Based on Goel's statement, police have registered a case against 16 people under Indian Penal Code sections dealing with abetment to suicide, abduction and criminal intimidation, among others. In his police statement, Goel said he has a company in Noida which was running in losses, adding when he could not repay his loan, the lenders started threatening him over the phone and visiting his house. They threatened to kill him if he failed to repay the amount, said police.

CM aide Bibhav sent to 4-day judicial custody; moves bail plea in court

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, MAY 24



Bibhav Kumar was arrested on May 18. Archive

A DELHI court on Friday sent Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar to four-day judicial custody in the alleged assault case of AAP Rajya Sabha member Swati Maliwal. Bibhav, who was earlier in police custody, moved a bail plea before the Tis Hazari Court on Friday. In her complaint, based on which the Delhi Police registered an FIR against Kumar and arrested him, Maliwal alleged that he had slapped her seven-eight times, "kicked on the chest, stomach and pelvis area", and threatened that she would be killed - during her visit to the CM's house on May 13. Maliwal's medical reports stated that she suffered bruises on her left thigh and right cheek, and below the eye. Advocate Rajiv Mohan representing Bibhav opposed the judicial custody, stating that none of the offences allegedly committed by Kumar were such that a detailed investigation was required. Police earlier said that a junior rank officer - who had no access

to the area where CCTV cameras were installed - alleged that video footage that he had found was "blank" for the relevant period. The investigating officer even issued notice to the accused to provide the CCTV footage. Another advocate representing Bibhav, Rajat Bharadwaj, meanwhile, moved a plea before the court to protect CCTV footage of the alleged incident. "CCTV footage supports my case. I have moved a plea to protect the CCTV and bring it before the court," he said. Advocate Karan Sharma also represented Bibhav before the court on Friday. Additional Public Prosecutor Atul Kumar Srivastava told the court that all the issues raised by the accused must be considered during the scrutiny of documents. The court will pass an order on the plea moved by the accused on May 28.

Sarita Vihar: 2 men die cleaning septic tank

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

TWO MEN died while cleaning a septic tank in Old Jasola village in Sarita Vihar on Friday afternoon, said police, adding that it was the second such incident in 10 days. In a similar incident, two men died in Rohini on May 14. The victims - Rajprakash Singh (60) and Ajay (46), who were residents of Molarband - were hired by a resident of Old Jasola village, to clean the septic tank. The duo was cleaning the tank using a sewer cleaning machine, said police, which allegedly stopped working in the third attempt due to a faulty fitting. The duo then entered the tank to clean it, and immediately fell unconscious. Officers reached the spot; a fire tender also arrived to retrieve the men from the tank. The duo was taken to a nearby hospital, where they were declared dead on arrival. "The resident's involvement is being looked into. He's absconding," said a police officer. A case under IPC Section 304A (death by negligence) and relevant sections of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers, their Rehabilitation Act has been registered.

TV journalist 'assault' case at AAP office: Court pulls up Delhi Police

NIRBHAY THAKUR
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

A DELHI court on Friday denied anticipatory bail to AAP's media coordinator Vikas Yogi for allegedly assaulting and intimidating a *Times Now* reporter and the cameraperson accompanying her, and breaking their camera on May 20. "How will you arrest anyone when offences are bailable... is the police bigger than the law?" asked Additional Sessions Judge Ram Lal Meena of Tis Hazari Court, while pulling up the Delhi Police for writing "custodial interrogation required" for bailable offences in their application opposing Yogi's anticipatory bail. The Delhi Police that registered a case against Yogi on May

21, based on a complaint filed by the journalist, told the court that custodial interrogation was a "typo" and that there was no requirement of arrest yet. "Itni badi typo?" asked advocate Rajat Bharadwaj, representing the AAP's media coordinator. "When there is no non-bailable offence, there is no question of anticipatory bail," the judge said, dismissing the application. The incident took place inside the AAP office in Central Delhi's IP Estate on Monday afternoon, when the woman reporter entered the party office to obtain a response from AAP's official spokesperson regarding an Enforcement Directorate (ED) chargesheet, police said. A senior police officer said that an FIR has been registered against Yogi and others under IPC sections pertain-

ing to punishment for voluntarily causing hurt, criminal intimidation, common intention, etc. "My concern is that someone entered the AAP office forcibly and the Delhi Police had not yet registered an FIR on that," argued advocate Bharadwaj. In her complaint, the reporter had alleged that Yogi approached her from the opposite direction and began arguing with her in an intimidating tone. After the reporter told Yogi that the conversation was being broadcast live, he approached the cameraman and pushed the camera away from his face. One of the party workers had then pulled out the back end of the camera wire and struck the cameraperson on his head. The reporter alleged that they were forcibly dragged out of the headquarters, read the complaint.

ACCUSED WAS HER NEIGHBOUR, ARRESTED FROM BUS HEADING TO KANPUR: POLICE

Minor raped, smothered to death, dumped in drain

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

A THREE-YEAR-OLD girl was raped, killed and her body dumped in a drain at the border of Gurgaon after she was kidnapped allegedly by a 34-year-old man, a neighbour, while she was playing outside her house. A day later, police arrested the accused who made a bid to flee custody - he overpowered an officer, grabbed a gun and fired - before being caught after he was hit in the leg in retaliatory firing. DCP (Southwest) Manoj Meena said they got a PCR call at 8.51 pm Wednesday. "The caller said a minor girl was kidnapped by a neighbor from our gali (by-lane). He also described the man - he was wearing a T-shirt, with

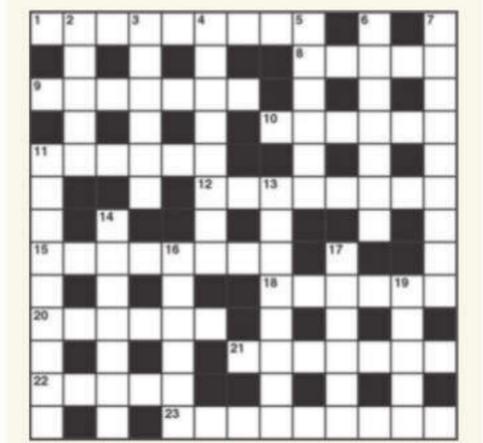
'Shivaji' written on it, and shorts," Meena said. "We dispatched a team immediately to the spot and spoke to the child's mother." Police lodged a case of kidnapping. The mother told police the family has been living in a rented accommodation in the area for five years. "It is a large building where one-room sets with a kitchen and a bathroom have been rented out to families of migrant workers," police said. "The child's family is a small one... Her mother is a housewife, her father is a contractual employee." Around 6 pm on May 22, the mother told police: "I was washing utensils outside... I went inside our room and when I came out, she was gone." After making enquiries, the mother claimed she found out a man living next door in the building had taken her, po-

lice said. The kidnapper, police found out, is a daily-wage construction labourer from Kanpur. Police swung into action and obtained CCTV footage of the entire neighbourhood. "...in one camera, at 7.05 pm, the accused was seen with the girl, going towards the 'ganda nala' (dirty drain). The same camera recorded him returning alone at 7.25 pm," Meena said. Police then found that the accused was "moving towards Sohna in Gurgaon" and followed his trail. They also started checking all vehicles, including buses, to ensure he couldn't escape. "Finally, the accused was caught

at 11.55 pm Thursday from a bus going to Kanpur," the DCP said. During initial questioning, the accused denied any knowledge. "But after sustained questioning, he broke down... He said he killed the girl," police claimed. The accused also led the police team to the spot where he had dumped the body, they said. "We launched a search... scanned the drain which was filled with muck. There were dense bushes and heaps of garbage around too. We finally found the body inside the drain," a police officer part of the search operation told *The Indian Express*. "It took us more than an hour... we had to use floodlights because it was already pitch dark." The accused man was present at the spot. "As soon as the body was found, he suddenly pounced on a policeman and grabbed a

loaded service revolver... and fired a few shots while trying to flee. Three other policemen immediately opened fire at him and a bullet hit his right leg right below the knee. He was overpowered. No policeman was hit when he opened fire," a police officer said. Police took him to a hospital nearby where his condition is stable. The body was sent for an autopsy to AIIMS; the report showed the child had been raped and smothered to death, police said. A relative of the victim told *The Indian Express*: "She was playing outside as she always did... no one could imagine anybody can be this brutal and commit such a heinous crime," he said. The girl, the relative said, was admitted to a nearby anganwadi school recently. "Our child is gone. No one can bring her back now".

CROSSWORD 5373



- ACROSS**
1 An insect's metamorphosis is going on continuously (9)
8 I rose perhaps in the basket-making trade (5)
9 Quite a few part with a pound (7)
10 Water supplies writer's work in short bursts (6)
11 Indeed upset when refused (6)
12 I am conclusively shown to be better (8)
15 Trying to get away by air (2,6)
18 It's sound in diplomacy (6)
20 Natural encores (6)
21 What's in a name? This for a start (7)
22 Compact needs to be settled (5)
23 Homes were rebuilt but the location's vague (9)
- DOWN**
2 Relation of pleasant oriental content (5)
3 A sick benefit prescription? (6)
4 No sedentary status (8)
5 Lethargy produced by boredom - or port (6)
6 Letter from a girl I've got attached to (7)
7 Quiet inmate's high position (9)
11 Business interests? (9)
13 A woman's resignation (8)
14 Not on duty a worker becomes casual (7)
16 Wild kids grow up to be these (6)
17 Result of running repair (6)
19 A rich sort of job for a professor (5)

Solutions Crossword 5372 Across: 1 Madness, 4 Tired, 7 Nest, 8 Filmsoll, 10 Road mender, 12 Cackle, 13 Madrid, 15 Going cheap, 18 Primates, 19 Life, 20 Raise, 21 Damages Down: 1 Minor, 2 Distance, 3 Split, 4 Temperance, 5 Room, 6 Deluged, 9 Ameliorate, 11 Briefing, 12 Creeper, 14 Indeed, 16 Press, 17 Giji

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective squares below. Select the letters in the shaded squares and jumble them to get the answer for the given clue.
___ is the enemy of non-violence and ___ is a monster that swallows it up. - Mahatma Gandhi (5,5)

IRAEE
EIITDN
CIIRR
ELOS GP

SOLUTION: ARIE, ENEMY, GANDHI, MONSTER, SWALLOW, UP.

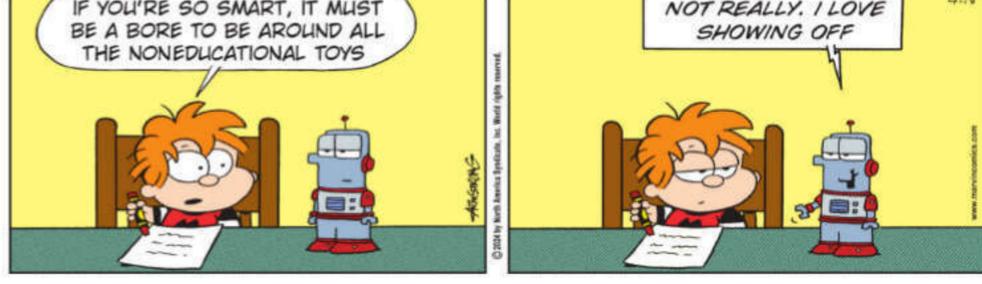
OVER THE HEDGE by Michael Fry & T Lewis



CALVIN & HOBBS by Bill Watterson



MARVIN by Tom Armstrong



SUDOKU 5571

Difficulty Level 5s
Instructions
To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every digit from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes.

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

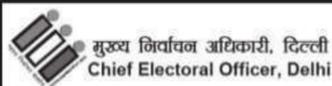
4	9	5	1	6				
1								
		2						
9	1	2	6					
2					9			
6	8	4	7					
		3						
9					2			
3	5	1	8	4				

SOLUTION SUDOKU 5570

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

DAY TODAY BY PETER VIDAL

- ARIES (Mar 21 - Apr 20)**
You should still be enthusiastic about new plans. The supportive alignment of Mercury and Venus guarantees that this is a time to highlight all social contacts, and also to get talking to family members or anyone else you live with.
- TAURUS (Apr 21 - May 21)**
Make up your mind and on no account listen to rumour or conjecture. In spite of your normal down-to-earth attitude, you are now likely to be the ideal victim of a practical joke, so take jests in good part. It's all down to the strange meeting between Venus and Uranus.
- GEMINI (May 22 - June 21)**
Your planetary influences are bright and seldom have you been so forceful and determined to succeed. Yet you must expect partners to respond to your suggestions in an equally forthright manner. You should also be on stand-by for a few surprises.
- CANCER (June 22 - July 23)**
Although you may not care to admit it, for as long as certain planets remain in a tricky attitude to your sign, there is only a little you can do to find a permanent solution to a financial question. Yet today's Lunar patterns indicate that you can set the lead in all personal matters.
- LEO (July 24 - Aug 23)**
Opportunities over the next two days may help you keep your head above water, even if they do appear out of the blue. Yet now that Neptune is so strong, do not expect everything to be clear and above board. Today's Sun-Moon alignment only enhances the air of mystery.
- VIRGO (Aug 24 - Sep 23)**
Nobody is in a position to get the better of you financially. Drop your sentimental inhibitions and go all out to achieve your aims. It is decisive and speedy action which will serve your purposes. Your social stars are strong today, so there's an excellent chance of friendly distractions.
- LIBRA (Sep 24 - Oct 23)**
It's because a partner is in such a demonstrative mood that you may be bowled over by a display of affection. Even when life is out of balance, as it is now, there is still plenty to reassure you that you are loved. You may even find that friends or colleagues look to you to take charge.
- SCORPIO (Oct 24 - Nov 23)**
Now you must face up to situations you have tried to sweep under the carpet. Your attention is being focused on health and financial matters. Perhaps you should allow more time for exercise and improvements in your diet? It's possible that you also need to pick up a new skill or qualification.
- SAGITTARIUS (Nov 24 - Dec 22)**
A conflict of personalities or interests appears to be making this a rather awkward phase. Those of you who manage to combine humour with humility will not be put off by such problems. Use today's Sun-Moon alignment to renew a financial enterprise.
- CAPRICORN (Dec 23 - Jan 20)**
Offers of advice may be irritating, for you are loath to admit that you are imperfect. However, you are in need of practical assistance and there is nothing to be gained from denying this. The assistance you receive could be invaluable.
- AQUARIUS (Jan 21 - Feb 19)**
Now is the time to air complaints and to put your point across without wallowing in emotion or losing touch with the issues. Broadly, though, the world is still moving your way. All in all, it's a day to keep active and focus on what can actually be done to improve the situation.
- PISCES (Feb 20 - Mar 20)**
Rather than risk your reputation for being sensitive and compassionate, you should take pains to avoid all lingering domestic disputes. Instead, try to deal with the fundamental causes of disagreement. Tread carefully and never make assumptions about what people mean.



मुख्य निर्वाचन अधिकारी, दिल्ली
Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi

**OLD ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE BUILDING,
KASHMERE GATE, DELHI-110006.
HELPLINE NO. 1800-111-400, Call Centre No. 1950
Website: www.ceodelhi.gov.in**

**GENERAL ELECTION TO LOK SABHA 2024-NCT OF DELHI
PUBLIC NOTICE**

ATTENTION: VOTERS WITH DISABILITY

Voters with disability have equal rights at par with other voters to come out and vote. Kindly note and avail the facilities / administrative arrangements made to assist you in casting your vote:

1. Voters with disability are to be given priority for entering the polling station, without having to wait in the queue.
2. Seamless access for wheelchairs by providing ramps of adequate slope, wherever required and clear space for movement within the polling room till the voting compartment
3. If due to disability, an elector is unable to vote on his/her own; the Presiding Officer shall permit the elector to take a companion of not less than 18 years of age to the voting compartment (preferably a relative) for recording the vote on his/her behalf and in accordance with his/her wishes. (Reference: Rule 49 N, Conduct of Election Rule, 1961).
4. Staff on Polling duty including Police Personnel are trained & sensitized about the special needs of the voters with disability and for providing necessary support to them.
5. Volunteers are being deployed at polling locations to assist the voters with disability.
6. Wheelchairs are being provided at polling stations for convenience of PWD Electors.
7. Pick & Drop Facility is being provided for PwDs and Senior Citizen (aged more than 85 years) Electors by concerned ROs, upto Polling Station and back.
8. Nodal Officers have been specially appointed in all districts for assisting voter with disability.
9. Details of Nodal Officers for PwD and Pick & Drop facility for Seven (07) Parliamentary Constituencies in NCT of Delhi for General Elections to Lok Sabha 2024 are as under:

PC No.	PC Name	Details of PWD Nodal Officer (Name, Mobile, E-mail)	Details of Pick & Drop Nodal Officer (Name, Mobile)	Pick & Drop Control Room No.
1	CHANDNI CHOWK	Sh. Kapil Kohli 8368079252 nodalofficerpwdpc01@gmail.com	Sh. Kapil Kohli 8368079252	011-20872028
2	NORTH-EAST DELHI	Sh. Suresh Chand 9868282971 pwdpc02@gmail.com	Sh. Suresh Chand 9868282971	011-22132054
3	EAST DELHI	Sh. Sunil Kumar Bhardwaj 9968854845 nodalofficerpwd03@gmail.com	Sh. Sunil Kumar Bhardwaj 9968854845	1800-11-1406
4	NEW DELHI	Ms. Rashmi Manchanda 9911325330 pwd.no.ls2024@gmail.com	Sh. Hom Karan 9015753972	011-22010004
5	NORTH WEST DELHI (SC)	Sh. Rakesh Dahiya 9868810716 nodalofficerpwd05@gmail.com	Sh. Rakesh Dahiya 9868810716	011-23075139
		Sh. Dharmendra Prasad 9818184564 nodalofficerpwd05@gmail.com	Sh. Dharmendra Prasad 9818184564	1800-11-1401 011-20896360
6	WEST DELHI	Sh. Saurabh Kumar 8982595027 nodalofficerpwd06@gmail.com	Sh. Saurabh Kumar 8982595027	011-25107440
5	SOUTH DELHI	Sh. Piyush Kumar Mudgal 9887624255 districtelectionsouth@gmail.com	Sh. Ravi Ekka 9667517334	011-20860811

For any assistance/clarification, please contact above mentioned Nodal officer of your PC KINDLY COME OUT AND CAST YOUR VOTE IN LARGE NUMBERS ON 25.05.2024 (between 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM)

Sd/-
(Mukesh Rajora)
(Joint Chief Electoral Officer - I, Delhi)

For Voting, your name in the Electoral roll is mandatory



DIP/Shabdarth/Classified/0066/24-25

Our Beloved Mother
Smt. Saroj Goenka
attained the Lotus Feet of the Lord
in peace and dignity, just the way she lived.



29 August 1929 - 24 May 2024

ममना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।
मामेवैष्यसि सत्यं ते प्रतिजाने प्रियोऽसि मे ॥
Be aware of Me always, adore Me, make every act an offering to Me, and you shall come to Me; this I promise.

सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज ।
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥
Abandon all supports and look to me for protection. I shall purify you from the sins of the past; do not grieve.

Bhagavad Gita, Verse 65 & 66, Chapter 18

Please join us as we celebrate Amma's life at the prayer meeting on Sunday, 26 May 2024, 2 PM to 4 PM at the Express Estate residence.

Loving daughters Arati, Ritu, Kavita and the whole family.

Please respect the family's privacy. All home visits and calls only at the prayer meeting.

Appeal to Voters of Delhi

Your Vote is Your Power Use it!



Delhi
come out and vote
on **25th May 2024**

Polling Time: 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM

Note: Photo voter slip can be used for guidance but not as an Identity Proof at the polling station.



- DOs**
- Always be in queue and wait for your turn
 - Always maintain peace in and around the polling station
 - Show your photo ID card as prescribed by the Election Commission of India
 - Follow instructions on "How To Vote"
 - Show courtesy to the polling team which is facilitating your vote
 - After casting your vote come out of the polling station quietly

- DONTs**
- Do not accept bribe in favour of your vote. Bribery is an offence.
 - Do not impersonate for someone else. Impersonation is an offence.
 - Do not cause any disturbance in the poll process. You may land up in prison.
 - Do not cause damage/tamper with poll material including EVM/VVPAT. You may land up in prison.
 - Do not obstruct the polling team in performing election duty. You may land up in prison.

Prohibited Items



No Mobile No Smoking No Fire Arms No Camera

Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi

Old St. Stephen's College Building, Kashmere Gate, Delhi - 110006
www.ceodelhi.gov.in

No Voter to be left behind

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8 GOVT & POLITICS



TECH TALK

UNION MINISTER Rajeev Chandrasekhar, who fought a fierce poll battle in Kerala's Thiruvananthapuram in the second phase of Lok Sabha elections, had to return to the national capital just two days after the polling to take part in the BJP's outreach process steered by the party headquarters. Using his reach in the IT sector, Chandrasekhar recently organised a meeting with leaders of tech ecosystem, unicorns, startups and entrepreneurs. Almost all the top tech leaders were in attendance, sharing their experience as entrepreneurs under the Narendra Modi government. Many of them were excited to click pictures at the selfie stations curated with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cutout at the venue.

SENIOR FIRST-TIMER

AMONG THE first-time voters who would queue up to exercise their franchise in the national capital on Saturday there would be at least one septuagenarian who would cast his vote for the first time. This voter is Arvind Panagariya, Chairman, 16th Finance Commission. Panagariya, a Professor at Columbia University, has served as the NITI Aayog vice-chairman also. He will cast his vote at Wonderland Kids School, New Moti Bagh, New Delhi.

CROWD CONTROL

A STAMPEDE-LIKE situation witnessed recently at the rally of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav in Phulpur (Prayagraj) has prompted the organisers to pay special attention to the sturdiness of barricades to be put up for the joint rally of the two leaders in Kushinagar on May 28. On May 19 in Phulpur, Rahul and Akhilesh had to leave without addressing the crowd after some of the spectators climbed on top of the barricades in an attempt to meet the leaders. In Kushinagar, the organisers are focusing on crowd management to ensure the programme is not interrupted when the two leaders come on the stage.

HC gives bail to Azam Khan, wife, son in fake birth certificate case

SP leader and son to remain in jail as several cases pending against them

MANISH SAHU
LUCKNOW, MAY 24

THE ALLAHABAD High Court Friday granted bail to veteran Samajwadi Party leader and former Uttar Pradesh minister Azam Khan, his wife Tanzeen Fatima and son Abdullah Azam Khan in a fake birth certificate case in which they were sentenced to seven years in prison by a court in Rampur district.

The High Court also stayed Azam's conviction but dismissed the petition against the conviction of Fatima and Abdullah.

Though Fatima will walk out of jail, Azam and Abdullah will remain behind bars as several cases are pending against them. Azam's lawyer Nasir Sultan said, Azam is lodged in the Sitapur district jail, while Fatima and Abdullah are serving terms in jails in Rampur and Hardoi districts.

The three had filed individual appeals against their conviction order issued by the Rampur court on October 10 last year.

The case dates back to January 3, 2019, when Akash Saxena (now BJP MLA from Rampur) lodged a case at the Ganj police station alleging that Azam and Tanzeen through a conspiracy got two birth

certificates made for Abdullah — one on June 28, 2012, from the Rampur municipality and the second on January 21, 2015, from the Lucknow civic body.

The first certificate states that he was born in Rampur while the other says he was born in Lucknow. Abdullah was accused of using the first certificate to get issued his passport for travels abroad, and the second one for the purpose of submitting in other government records.

Police had filed a chargesheet in the case against the three after conducting an investigation.

Friday's passed by the bench of Justice Sanjay Kumar Singh read, "...considering the facts and circumstances of the case... nature of allegations... material evidence... submissions, this court is of the view that the application under Section 389(1) CrPC (Code of Criminal Procedure)... for suspension of their sentence dated 18.10.2023... during pendency of above mentioned criminal revisions is liable to be allowed."

The court had reserved its order on May 14.

Since the BJP came to power in Uttar Pradesh in 2017, 81 cases have been registered against Azam. The former MP has been convicted in five cases so far.

Canada on Nijjar case: Indian mission notified on arrests, up to the 4 to speak

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

CANADA'S INTEGRATED Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) has notified the Indian High Commission about the arrest of four Indian nationals in connection with the probe into the killing of Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar last year.

The IHIT has told *The Indian Express* that it is up to the arrested men if they wish to speak to Indian authorities.

An investigating official said it is procedure for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to notify the embassy if their citizens/nationals are arrested. Responding to a questionnaire from *The Indian Express*, David Lee of IHIT's media relations team, said, "IHIT has notified the embassy of the arrest but it is up to the four individuals to

determine/choose to speak to the consulate."

The IHIT declined to comment on how the four men entered Canada. "We can confirm that they are Indian nationals and were in Canada anywhere from three to five years," Lee said.

On May 3, the IHIT arrested 22-year-old Karan Brar, 22-year-old Kamalpreet Singh, and 28-year-old Karanpreet Singh, all living in Edmonton. According to an IHIT statement, they have been charged with first degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder.

Ten days later, a fourth Indian national, 22-year-old Amandeep Singh, was also arrested for his alleged role in the killing of Nijjar. Singh was already in custody for unrelated firearms charges out of Peel Regional Police. He was also charged with similar offences.

On Tuesday, three of the four appeared in person for the first time in a Canadian court with



(Clockwise from top left) Karan Brar, Kamalpreet Singh, Karanpreet Singh and Amandeep Singh

the judge ordering them to have no contact with several people in the community.

While Karan Brar, Kamalpreet Singh and Karanpreet Singh appeared in person at the British

Columbia Provincial Court in Surrey, Amandeep Singh appeared via video link. The IHIT said "they have been provided with legal counsel and have access to lawyers who are trained and educated to deal with matters such as homicide".

"Upon their arrest, the IHIT investigative team takes their rights to counsel very seriously... ensured they had contact with the correct kind of counsel," Lee said. While the charges have been laid, the trial date has not been set yet, the IHIT said.

On being asked if it was imperative for the case file/chargesheet to be shared with the Indian authorities since they were all Indian citizens, the IHIT said, "We do not have to share any information with the Indian authorities. If they request it, it must be from our Department of Justice to their equivalent branch."

Nijjar, 45, was killed outside

EXPLAINED The fallout, the strain

BILATERAL TIES have been under strain ever since Canadian PM Justin Trudeau said in Sept that Canada was "actively pursuing credible allegations" that Indian agents were potentially linked to the killing of Nijjar, a Canadian citizen. India has denied any government role in Nijjar's killing, and has rejected Trudeau's allegations as "absurd and motivated".

gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia on June 18, 2023. The Khalistan separatist was wanted in India on various terror charges.

23 years on, Medha Patkar convicted for 'defaming' V K Saxena



Saxena, now the Delhi L-G, had filed the case against the activist in 2001

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

A DELHI court Friday convicted activist Medha Patkar in a defamation case filed against her in 2001 by now Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena.

In 2000, Saxena had published an advertisement against Patkar's Narmada Bachao Andolan, which opposed construction of dams over the Narmada river. Following this, Patkar had allegedly issued a "press notice" against Saxena.

A defamation suit was filed against Patkar in an Ahmedabad court in 2001. Two years later, on the Supreme Court's directions, the case was transferred to Delhi.

The Court of Metropolitan Magistrate Raghav Sharma, in a judgment passed today, said: "... her decision to label the complainant as a 'coward' and 'not a patriot' was a direct attack on his personal character and loyalty to the nation. Such allegations are particularly grave in the public sphere, where patriotism is highly valued, and questioning someone's courage and national loyalty can cause irreversible damage to their public image and social standing."

Noting that Patkar "harboured a clear intention to defame" Saxena, the court also noted that he was called an agent of the Gujarat government by the accused.

According to the court, the accusations levelled against Saxena by Patkar suggested that he was "engaged in actions detrimental to the state and its citizens thereby framing him as a traitor to public trust and interest." The Court also called the remarks by Patkar inflammatory — it also added that the comments intended to provoke public outrage and diminish Saxena's image in the eyes of the public.

Patkar's counsel argued that there was no proof that the press note was sent to Saxena by her. The counsel also argued that the email through which Saxena stated he received the press note was not brought on record. It was also Patkar's case that the document which is alleged to be a press note was an email — which could have easily been typed and sent to Saxena using the name of the accused.

The next date of hearing in the case is May 30.

Rajasthan govt will review OBC quota to Muslims: Minister

HAMZA KHAN
JAIPUR, MAY 24

THE BJP government in Rajasthan will review the reservation granted to Muslims under the Other Backward Castes category, the state's Cabinet minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Avinash Gehlot, said.

"As part of its appeasement politics, Congress gave reservation to 14 Muslims castes under OBC category between 1997 and 2013. We have all those circulars, and in due time, the department and the government will review it," Gehlot said.

Contending that giving reservation to any caste, community or class on the basis of religion was prohibited under the Constitution, he said, "We have received lots of complaints about it. The department is verifying the complaints."

The Social Justice minister also said that a high-level committee would be constituted to look into the matter.

Overall in Rajasthan, there is 64 per cent reservation — 21 per cent for OBCs, 16 per cent for SCs, 12 per cent for STs, 10 per cent for EWS and 5 per cent for Most Backward Classes.

The development comes in the backdrop of the BJP making reservation for Muslims a poll issue in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. At a poll rally in Rajasthan last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said the Congress often tried to give reservation to Muslims by reducing the reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs, and that it "did not



Social Justice Minister Avinash Gehlot

care" about the Constitution.

"I want to ask Congress, will it announce that it won't reduce the reservation for Dalits, tribals and the backward and distribute it to Muslims? Promise this to the nation," the PM had said at the rally in Tonk-Sawai Madhopur Lok Sabha seat.

Earlier this week, the Calcutta High Court had also cancelled all OBC certificates issued by the West Bengal government since 2010, setting aside the classification of 37 communities as OBC.

Speaking to news agency ANI afterwards, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had said, "The Mamata Banerjee government, without conducting any proper survey or process, gave OBC reservation to 118 Muslim communities. Some went to court against this. The High Court took notice of the matter and cancelled all such certificates issued between 2010 to 2024. Because of her vote bank policy, Mamata Banerjee snatched reservation meant for OBC category and gave it to Muslims. I welcome the court order."

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma had said in Lucknow: "Mamata Banerjee gave reservation to all Muslims by directly including 118 Muslim castes in OBC without conducting any survey..."

Apex court stays Uttarakhand HC order for its relocation from Nainital

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

THE SUPREME Court Friday stayed an Uttarakhand High Court order that asked the state government to find a suitable place to relocate the court from Nainital.

Hearing the appeal by the Uttarakhand High Court Bar Association challenging the May

8 order, a bench of Justices P S Narasimha and Sanjay Karol issued a notice to the state government, seeking its views.

The High Court, while asking the Chief Secretary to complete the exercise within a month, had directed its Registrar General to open a portal where lawyers and the general public could mark 'yes' or 'no' on the move to shift the premises.

Appearing for the state gov-

ernment, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the creation of new benches fall within the prerogative of Parliament and the "High Court decision is like a referendum".

Senior Advocate P B Suresh, who appeared for the bar association, also contended that it was not the High Court but Parliament or Union government which can decide on where to establish a Bench.

HIMACHAL RALLY: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP candidate Kangana Ranaut in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi Lok Sabha constituency on Friday. PTI

Modi in Punjab: AAP leaders are wholesale traders of drugs

ANJU AGNIHOTRI CHABA & KAMALDEEP SINGH
BRAR
JALANDHAR, AMRITSAR, MAY 24

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi Friday accused the Aam Aadmi Party leaders of being "wholesale traders of drugs" and alleged that the Congress allowed the "massacre of Sikhs" in 1984 and protected the rioters.

Canvassing for the BJP Lok Sabha poll candidates in Punjab, Modi, addressing rallies in Jalandhar and Gurdaspur again termed Bhagwant Mann as 'kagzi chief minister' who had to go to Tihar Jail in Delhi to take orders from AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal.

"The AAP had promised to end the drug trade in two months, but today drug dealers have been given a free licence in Punjab. Families after families are getting destroyed," Modi said in Jalandhar. Referring to the money-laundering case linked to the alleged liquor scam in Delhi, Modi said, "Those who committed such a big liquor scam, how can they not be involved in the drug trade in Punjab? The people of Punjab have understood that the 'jharoo' (the poll symbol of the AAP)

party people are themselves wholesale traders of drugs. Punjab is a border state and we must not let it fall into crisis again," he said.

Delhi chief minister Kejriwal was sent to Tihar Jail by a court in the money-laundering case and is currently out on interim bail to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls.

Earlier, in Gurdaspur, Modi said, "Dilli ke darbari" are running Punjab with a remote control. "Punjab CM (Bhagwant Singh Mann) cannot make even one decision on his own. His owner was in jail and the Punjab government came to a standstill. To take orders and run the government, the chief minister had to go to Tihar Jail and present his report card to him (Kejriwal)," Modi said adding, after June 1, the 'kattar bhrashtachari' (referring to Kejriwal) will again go to jail.

"Will the Punjab government again be run from jail? Do you want such a government?" he asked. Training his guns on the Congress and the INDIA bloc, Modi alleged that they inflicted the "most wounds" on Punjab.

"They fuelled separatism in Punjab. They got the massacre of Sikhs done in Delhi. Till the time the Congress was in power at the Centre, it used to protect the rioters," Modi said.

Ahead of PM rallies, some farmer leaders detained, others in house arrest

Jalandhar: Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rallies in Jalandhar and Gurdaspur on Friday, Punjab Police launched a pre-emptive crackdown and detained several farmer leaders and put some others under house arrest on Friday morning. The move comes in response to a call by the farmer leaders to hold black flag protests ahead of Modi's rallies.

Around 100 members farm unions of were also detained in Nawanshahr's Auh police station, it is learnt. In Hoshiarpur's Hariana police station, Kirti Kisan Union (KKU) leader Jagtar Singh Bhinder and Bhpinder Bhunga were detained.

In Jalandhar and Kapurthala, several district-level farmer leaders, including Santokh Singh Sandhu and Balwinder Singh Bhullar of KKKU were detained. Raids were also conducted at the residence of Tarsem Singh Bannamal, whose wife died on Thursday.

As Dhanbad votes today, why several villages have decided to boycott elections

ABHISHEK ANGAD
DHANBAD, MAY 24

AS THE Lok Sabha election season rolls towards its denouement, a group of villagers in Gopinathpur, more than 60 km from Dhanbad city in Jharkhand, are busy discussing what led them to issue a poll boycott call. Lack of drinking water, they say in unison.

For a village surrounded by four collieries, constant mining has led to the depletion of groundwater. There is a solar-operated water pump — but there is nothing to pump. Piped water supply also does not reach the

majority of the 5,500 residents of the village. The village's deputy mukhiya, Vishwanath Bawri, says they depends on an abandoned mine more than a kilometre away to meet drinking water needs. "It is dangerous and the water is not clean, but we have no option. Despite several requests, our pleas have fallen on deaf ears. We are not voting this time," Bawri says, adding that villagers have informed the local Egarkund Block Development Officer about their issues and boycott decision.

Gopinathpur is not an isolated case. In the Dhanbad Lok Sabha constituency that votes Saturday, at least a dozen villages

have issued poll boycott calls to attract the attention of administrators and politicians to their problems — from a lack of drinking water and roads to problems with rehabilitation connected to development projects.

Dhanbad is witnessing a battle between BJP's Dhulu Mahato — who has replaced three-time MP Pashupati Nath Singh, who won by 4.86 lakh votes in 2019 — and the Congress's Anupama Singh. Though villagers are talking about not voting, Jharkhand's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) K Ravi Kumar tells *The Indian Express*, "Our officers have spoken to them. There seems to be no problem. We've appealed to them to vote."



A resident of Gopinathpur village, which has no drinking water access, collects water from an abandoned British-era mine.

Around 4 km from Dhanbad, residents in Dudhiapani village have also submitted a letter calling for a boy-

cott of the election. Rinku Devi who married into a family here 10 years ago says not a day has passed since moving here that she has not worried about fetching water early in the morning. "We get iron-heavy water from the hand pump which is not fit for drinking. We have to beg for water in nearby hard coke factories or find it from somewhere else. The water tower is not functional. What do we do if not boycott polls? How will the government hear us?" she asks.

Both Gopinathpur and Dudhiapani come under the Nirsas Assembly segment of Dhanbad. Its former MLA Arup Chatterjee of the Marxist

Coordination Committee tells *The Indian Express*: "These two areas are dry zones. So despite deep borings, there is no water. A permanent solution in the form of the Nirsas-Gobindpur water supply scheme is being implemented, which should be completed in another three years."

Around 50 km away in the Sindri Basti area of Jharia, locals are boycotting the polls because of the failure of successive governments to rehabilitate and resettle those whose land was acquired for the Sindri fertiliser plant, which was inaugurated by PM Narendra Modi on March 1.

More than 80% of Sindri Basti's 7,000 residents belong to

the SC, ST, and OBC communities and have been protesting since last week. Jharia Circle Officer Ram Suman Prasad who visited the area to speak to the residents on May 19 says, "Theirs is a legacy problem and complaints of lack of resettlement and rehabilitation in view of the land acquisition 75 years ago. I tried to resolve their immediate problems such as issuing caste and income certificates."

While government sources say that the original residents were compensated when the land was acquired, locals dispute the claim.

FULL REPORT ON
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9 EXPRESS NETWORK

5 HELD SO FAR

Cafe blast: NIA arrests terror case ex-convict

Shoib Ahmed Mirza introduced key blast accused to handler based abroad

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE BENGALURU, MAY 24

A FORMER convict in a 2012 terror conspiracy case has been arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) over the March 1 Rameshwaram Cafe blast in Bengaluru.

The agency said this person acted as the link between a key suspect arrested for the blast and a handler suspected to be based abroad. The NIA identified the suspect held Friday as Hubballi resident Shoib Ahmed Mirza, 35, who was released from prison in 2017 after serving five years for his involvement in a Lashkar-e-Taiba-linked terror conspiracy detected in Bengaluru in 2012.

Mirza, a computer applications graduate employed with a private firm, is the fifth person named by the NIA over the blast that injured nine people.

The agency arrested the suspected bomb planter — 30-year-old Mussavir Hussain Shazib — and the alleged main conspirator — Abdul Matheen Taha, 30 — in West Bengal on April 12. Before that, the NIA arrested two people — Maaz Muneer Ahmed, 25, an undertrial prisoner at the Bengaluru central jail, and Muzammil Sharief, 30, an employee of a Bengaluru restaurant — saying they provided logistics support to the main conspirators.

On Friday, the NIA said the fifth accused, Mirza, “befriended and introduced” Taha to an online handler “suspected to be abroad” in 2018, shortly after his release from prison.

“Mirza had further provided an e-mail ID for encrypted communication between the handler and Abdul Matheen Taha...” the NIA said. “Further investigations into the role of handler and larger conspiracy behind the blast, which left several injured and caused extensive damage to property are continuing,” the NIA said.

Sources said Mirza connected Taha to a handler — suspected to be a missing accused from the 2012 case — after he came into contact with Taha through a roommate in Bengaluru.

On May 21, the NIA had conducted searches at locations connected to 11 people in four states to “uncover the entire conspiracy behind the Rameshwaram Cafe Blast Case and to identify the other conspirators involved in handling the accused from abroad.”

The premises searched by the NIA included the home of Shoib Mirza, the son of a retired railway employee, in Hubballi.

The NIA probe has revealed that a person who identified himself as “Bhai” and “Colonel” in encrypted chats was handling Taha and others linked to a Thirthahalli module owing allegiance to Islamic State.

Among the missing persons from the 2012 LeT conspiracy case in Bengaluru is Mohammed Shahid Faisal alias Ustad, 38, an engineer from Bengaluru and Farhatullah Ghoori, 57, the father-in-law of Shahid Faisal.

Sources said the searches were conducted earlier this week to gather information on the alleged handlers of the perpetrators of the Rameshwaram Cafe blast since the NIA probe revealed some links between the accused from the 2012 LeT conspiracy case and the perpetrators of the cafe blast case.

Stepfather gets death penalty for murder of actor Laila, 5 of family

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE MUMBAI, MAY 24

A SESSIONS court in Mumbai on Friday sentenced Parvez Tak to death for the murder of his step daughter and actor Laila Khan, her mother and four of her siblings in 2011. Another accused in the case is still on the run.

The court in its judgement observed that the case was in the category of “rarest of the rare cases”. “The case showcases a totally barbaric act of a human being in modern civilised society... In the present case, the accused has committed a total of six murders. Literally the whole family of Shelina Patel is killed,” court said.

Earlier, additional sessions judge Sachin Pawar had convicted Tak of murder and destruction of evidence. Calling the case “rarest of the rare,” police last week sought death penalty for Tak.

In 2011, Khan, who had appeared in a few films, went missing, along with her mother Shelina Patel and four of her siblings. A complaint was filed at the Oshiwara police station by Laila's father Nadir Patel, who in-

formed the police that his entire family was missing. Apart from Laila, her mother Shelina, elder sister Azmina, twin siblings Zara and Imran and cousin Reshma, had gone missing.

A year later, the Mumbai police claimed to have recovered their bodies from a farmhouse and arrested Tak.

The prosecution was led by Special Public Prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam till the court reserved the case for judgment last month. Last month, Nikam withdrew from all cases to contest LS elections for the BJP from Mumbai's North Central constituency.

The judge observed, “Undoubtedly, the offence proved against the accused is of high magnitude and enormity as it involves multiple murders... The murders are committed in an extremely grotesque and revolting manner. The five women victims were vulnerable and the accused took its disadvantage. The execution of the act indicates these were cold blooded murders, after commission of which the accused cold heartedly and meticulously planned screening of evidence.”

HC seeks Govt's stand on Amol Palekar's plea over IT rules for OTT

Delhi: The Delhi HC Friday sought the Centre's stand on a public interest litigation plea moved by actor-director Amol Palekar challenging the constitutional validity of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 governing OTT platforms. The PIL also seeks the IT Rules 2021 be declared “ultra-vires” of the Constitution and the IT Act.

A division bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora issued notice to the Centre and listed the matter for hearing on August 14.

‘Without giving (money), nobody will help’: WhatsApp voice note on Kerala bar owners’ group lands govt in soup

Cong calls on excise minister to resign, he says ‘such things won’t be allowed’

SHAJU PHILIP THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, MAY 24

A PURPORTED voice note from a Kerala hotel owners’ association office bearer, sent to a bar owners’ WhatsApp group, has landed the CPI(M)-led state government in a soup.

“Dry day (on the first day of every month) will be lifted... If we want to get things done, we need to do what must be done.

In high-profile Phulpur seat, caste math keeps BJP ahead but will simmering Agnipath anger be a factor?

Youth complain about lack of jobs and Army recruitment scheme; BJP hopes Kurmis’ numerical strength will be enough

SHYAMLAL YADAV PRAYAGRAJ, MAY 24

WHILE CASTE is one of the major drivers of the electoral discourse and voting patterns in India, for several youngsters in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj district unemployment and the Agnipath recruitment scheme are at the top of their agenda. This is apparent in the Phulpur Lok Sabha seat, which won on Saturday, and comprises five of the 12 Assembly segments in Prayagraj district: Allahabad North, Allahabad West, Soraon, Phaphamau, and Phulpur.

Phulpur is a high-profile Lok Sabha constituency that has been represented by stalwarts such as Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru, and former Prime Minister V P Singh. In recent years, among those who have represented it in the recent past are gangster Atiq Ahmed (won in 2004 on a Samajwadi Party ticket), who was shot dead last year while being taken to a court-mandated medical check-up, and current Uttar Pradesh Deputy CM Keshav Maurya who won in 2014. Five years ago, the

BJP's Kesari Devi Patel clinched the seat by 1.71 lakh votes.

To maintain its hold on the seat this time, the BJP has fielded Phulpur MLA Praveen Patel who is from the dominant Kurmi community. Of the 20 lakh voters in Phulpur, the most are Kurmis at 3 lakh, followed by around 2.5 lakh Muslims, two lakh each of Yadavs and Brahmins, and approximately 3.5 lakh Dalits divided into two subgroups, and around 1.5 lakh Mauryas. Other communities such as Vaishyas and Bindis also play a decisive role here.

To counter the BJP's Kurmi play, the SP has fielded Amarnath Singh Maurya from the Maurya community, and the BSP's Jagannath Pal is from the shepherd community. All three candidates are OBCs, giving the decisive vote to upper castes such as Brahmins, Thakurs, and Kayasthas. This gives the BJP the edge as far as caste combinations are concerned.

But the Opposition will be hoping that the caste arithmetic is trumped by the issues that concern the more than 35,000 students in Prayagraj, most of whom come to the city from different



In 2022, dozens of youths were seen practicing for the Army entrance at the Soraon ground. On Wednesday, there were few. Shyamlal Yadav

corners of Uttar Pradesh to prepare for competitive exams. While several are voters in Phulpur, many, even if they are not, are important in the sense that the issues that concern them may end up determining the poll narrative in their hometowns or villages.

In the villages around Prayagraj city, the youth flag issues with the Agnipath scheme. During the 2022 Assembly polls, before the Agnipath scheme was

rolled out, The Indian Express visited the villages of Kotwa and Soraon to observe young men training for Army recruitment. But now both the villages bear a deserted look.

In Kotwa, Akash Singh, 21, a Rajput, was selected as an Airman in the Air Force. However, before the call letter was issued, the Agnipath scheme was introduced. Akash says there are an estimated 27,000 voters in sur-

NOAA predicts ‘above-normal’ hurricanes over Atlantic this yr

ANJALI MARAR BENGALURU, MAY 24

THE NATIONAL Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has warned of above normal hurricane activity during June and November this year.

“There is an 85% chance of an above-normal hurricane season,” NOAA said Thursday.

This comes ahead of the onset of the La Nina conditions over the central and equatorial Pacific Ocean, which is expected later this year. Multiple global weather models, including India's, have suggested cooler-than-average sea surface temperatures — indicating La Nina conditions — to emerge by August this year.

Converse to La Nina is El Nino, wherein warmer-than-average sea surface temperatures are recorded over the equatorial Pacific Ocean.

El Nino and La Nina and the warmer and cooler phases, respectively, of the naturally occurring El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phenomenon which also has a neutral phase.

“ENSO has a huge impact on hurricane activity over the Atlantic Ocean. Generally, El Nino reduces hurricane activity while La Nina tends to increase the activity over the Atlantic Ocean,” M Rajeevan, former secretary, Ministry of Earth Sciences, told *The Indian Express*.

For instance during the 2021 La Nina, the Atlantic Ocean churned out a record 30 storms.

At present, El Nino conditions persist but these have been weakening since December last year. The current El Nino had commenced in June last year. Soon, ENSO neutral conditions are likely to emerge, the weather models have forecast.

On Thursday, NOAA has released the hurricane names for this season and some of these include Oscar, Rafael, Patty, Isaac, Helene, William among others.



CYCLONE PREPARATIONS

West Bengal Disaster Management personnel conduct announcements as part of precautionary measures ahead of the landfall of cyclone ‘Remal’, in South 24 Parganas district on Friday. The cyclone is expected to make landfall by Sunday midnight. PTI

Chemical unit blast: 10 missing cases filed, 5 bags of body parts reach hospital for DNA testing

VIJAY KUMAR YADAV & SIDDHANT KONDUSKAR MUMBAI, MAY 24

PRATIKSHA PAUDWAL, 32, a Badlapur resident, was concerned on Thursday when her husband Vishal Paudwal 39, who worked in a company in Dombivli MIDC, did not reach home around 9.30pm — the usual time he returns from work. Finding his phone switched off, she called a friend of Vishal, working in the same place, who then told her about the blast.

Since then, Pratiksha along with her eight-year-old son Yug, has been trying to trace her husband at hospitals in Dombivli.

Like her, at least 10 families have approached the Manpada police station in Dombivli reporting that their family members working at the blast site are missing since Thursday.

Vijay Kadbane, senior inspec-

tor of the Manpada police station, said, “Ten missing persons complaints have been filed since Thursday evening and we are trying to trace them.”

After taking details of the families and the missing persons, police have been sending them to Shastri Nagar hospital in Dombivli (West), where unidentified bodies are sent for postmortem.

“Since bodies of deceased persons were badly disfigured, we are collecting their DNA samples to match with their family members to ascertain the identity of the deceased persons. Five bags of body parts were brought to the Bai Rukminibai Hospital, Kalyan. From the teeth, hair or long bones, we are securing DNA samples to ascertain the identity of the missing people,” said Purushottam Tikke, chief medical officer, Bai Rukminibai Hospital.

Vishal Paudwal was working with Cosmos company as graphic designer for the past six

months, before which he was with Andheri-based Star Auto. His wife Pratiksha said that he had joined the Dombivli-based company to cut down the long commute to Andheri.

Not finding him anywhere, she lodged a missing person's complaint at the Manpada police station from where police sent them to Shastri Nagar hospital to give DNA sample.

Bhiwandi resident Hridaynarayan Rajbhar, along with his relatives Dinesh Kumar, have lodged a missing person's complaint with the Manpada police station and reached Shastri Nagar hospital trying to get information about his missing brother Satyanarayan Rajbhar, 38.

Satyanarayan, used to work as housekeeping staff at the office of owners of Amudan Chemical Pvt Ltd. He used to live with his wife Rekha, four daughters and a son in Sonarpada, Dombivli area.

rounding villages who come to train at the village ground.

“You can see the practice ground is empty because they have the least interest in becoming Agniveers. Few have joined from here but they are not happy. We are going to vote for Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav only due to their promise of abolishing Agnipath and giving employment,” he says.

Ajay Maurya from Kotwa echoes Akash. “Before Agnipath, around 200 people used to train here. They used to come from villages such as Malkhanpur, Baraipur, Jamunipur, Dalapur, Lilapur Kalan, Lilapur Khurd, and Katwaripur,” he says, adding that six of his friends were selected as Agniveers but are “unhappy”.

Others like Kushal Yadav, 24, who are “disappointed” with the scheme say many have left for Mumbai and other cities to work in private factories. With the Army no longer the desired route, many are appearing for other competitive exams. Kushal, who was also training others at the ground, appeared in the police constable recruitment exam this February but it

was rescheduled after the question papers were believed to have been leaked.

After finishing his run at the Soraon ground, Ravi Kumar Pal says, “We are disturbed about unemployment. The least these governments can do is to hold fair examinations on time. No one in my village will vote for the BJP this time.”

Swagat Patel, a civil engineer in his twenties exercising at the ground, says, “Everyone here is against the BJP. We have forgotten caste. Our community voted for the BJP last time. This time we will not vote for them.”

But 26-year-old Sandeep Kumar who runs a mobile shop in Soraon differs with the others. Despite the resentment, caste will ultimately decide votes. “The youth here are very angry with the present government. But everyone's family is going to vote based on their caste. Kurmis will vote for the BJP as the candidate is a Kurmi. Pals will vote for the SP as it has appointed Pal as its state president. Yadavs will vote for the SP and Vaishyas and other upper castes will vote for the BJP,” he says.



NSA Ajit Doval at the 21st BSF Investiture Ceremony and Rustamji Memorial Lecture, in New Delhi on Friday. Amit Mehru

More secure borders would have boosted India progress: Doval

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, MAY 24

INDIA WOULD have progressed at a much faster pace if its borders had been more secure, defined and not in adversarial disposition, NSA Ajit Doval said on Friday, underlining that the country's power has grown immensely in the last 10 years.

Delivering the Rustamji Memorial Lecture organised by the BSF on its 21st investiture ceremony, Doval said India's economic progress would have been much faster if “we had more secure borders”.

“In the foreseeable future I don't think that our borders are going to be as secure as we will require for fast economic growth. So, the responsibility on the border guarding forces becomes very heavy. They have got to see our national interest,” he said.

“Borders are important because that is the limit which defines our sovereignty. *Zameen par jo kabza hai wo apna hai, baki to sab adalat aur kachehri ka kaam hai, usse farak nahi padta* (The land which is in our possession is ours, the rest is the mat-

ter of courts and that is immaterial),” Doval said.

He said India will have one of the largest workforces and will be a hub of high-technology AI, semiconductors, quantum computing and other areas of defence manufacturing. “... We are very confident that at the rate at which we are building our capabilities, we will emerge as a big military power. We are going indigenous on our dependence on hardware, military weapons and equipment. The country, which was an importer of arms, exported USD 2.5 billion worth of arms until March 31 because of the government's policy of self-reliance and Atmanirbhar Bharat,” he said.

Doval advised that various CAPFs should have jointness and interoperability among themselves like the ongoing plan for the defence forces. “Should we think about the jointness in our CPOs (central police organisations). Jointness where we can have interoperability in weapons and other things... We have also got the same type of duties at many places whether it's a question of procurement, communication training standardisation,” he said.

Saroj Goenka, RNG's daughter-in-law, dies

ARUN JANARDHANAN CHENNAI, MAY 24

SAROJ GOENKA, wife of the late Bhagwan Das Goenka, son of Express group's founder Rammath Goenka, passed away in Chennai Friday morning. She was 94.

Saroj Goenka's father, Shreyans Prasad Jain, was a prominent businessman and Rajya Sabha member, after whom Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan's SPJIMR (Shreyans Prasad Jain Institute of Management and Research) is named.

She became a director of Express Infrastructure Limited, overseeing the development of landmark projects like Chennai's Express Mall, E Residences, E Hotel, and EA Chambers. She also served as the Managing



Saroj Goenka was 94

Director of Express Publications (Madurai) Limited.

She was a philanthropist. In 1998, she gifted a 10-acre property for the Swami Dayananda Krupa Home, which cares for the differently-abled. During the floods in Chennai in December 2015, she handed over a cheque for Rs 1 crore to then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalithaa to aid in relief efforts. Saroj Goenka is survived by her three daughters, Arati Agarwal, Ritu Goenka, and Kavita Singhania, all of whom are directors of Express Infrastructure Limited.

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Target on her back

EC took action against Abhijit Ganguly for his comments on Mamata Banerjee. But that's not enough



SAGARIKA GHOSE

WHEN A LEADER is a woman, entrenched big-wigs are deeply threatened. When she is powerful, patriarchs shriek in outrage. Mamata Banerjee is the self-made leader of a political start-up, the All-India Trinamool Congress. She's a three-time chief minister, four-time Union minister and seven-time Member of Parliament. She's never baulked in the face of the relentless abuse which has been hurled at her all through her public life.

In a rare and rather belated act of censoring misogyny, the Election Commission has acted against the latest politician to abuse Banerjee. The EC has barred Abhijit Ganguly, the BJP's Tamluk candidate and former judge of the Calcutta High Court from campaigning for 24 hours for his foul language about India's only woman chief minister.

In a campaign speech on May 15, Ganguly sneered: "Mamata Banerjee, what is your price? Is she (Banerjee) even a woman?" Pronouncing the ban on Ganguly, the EC observed: "Ganguly has brought damage and disrespect to Bengal which has a distinguished tradition of respect for women."

Ganguly, a former "jurist", was recently seen on TV, infamously weighing moral options between Mahatma Gandhi and his murderer Nathuram Godse, apparently undecided about who, the Father of the Nation or his hate-filled assassin, offered a better ideological choice. That Ganguly thinks it acceptable to ask a senior woman leader what-is-your-price in public, is not surprising. After all, a woman politician like Banerjee, who has never needed to be propped up by family or a male mentor, sets off seismic shocks of wrath and envy not only among politicians but also in the media. Whether caricaturing Mayawati's choice of clothes or directing racist slurs at Sonia Gandhi's background or deriding Banerjee's speeches, India's chauvinist media takes delicious pleasure in treating women politicians with satirical disdain.

Hypocrisy about women lies at the heart of the ruling BJP. Its slogans of "Nari Shakti" are meaningless. Saffron traditionalists are cast into shuddering fury by modern exceptional women. Visible women upset the power balance. The BJP despises them. During Bengal's 2021 polls, Narendra Modi cat-called Mamata Banerjee with his "Didi oh Didi" taunt drawn out in insulting tones. He likened

Congress leader Renuka Chowdhury's laugh to a demon's cackle. As Gujarat CM, Modi said Sonia Gandhi was a "jersey cow," and "pasta-ben." The BJP's Bengal leader Dilip Ghosh has questioned Banerjee's parentage. "Decide who is your father," he heckled Mamata Banerjee in public. Ghosh's remarks only received a mild rap from the EC. Modi has never been censured.

In September 2023, the Modi government passed the Women's Reservation Bill with great fanfare, providing for 33 per cent representation to women in state legislatures and Parliament. Modi announced that "God has chosen me for this sacred work to empower women." But what about the BJP's treatment of women? In these Lok Sabha polls, the BJP has given less than 15 per cent tickets to women, the Trinamool Congress has given almost 30 per cent. The two high-profile women ministers in the Modi government, Nirmala Sitharaman and Smriti Irani, are hardly in decision-making roles either in party or government. Sitharaman is an unelected appointee, Irani is confined to her role as the Gandhi family challenger. Neither is projected as a future chief ministerial candidate. Vasundhara Raje is a two-time Rajasthan CM and the Rajasthan BJP's most recognisable face. The BJP unceremoniously cut her to size by denying her the CM's post after the party won in Rajasthan in 2023.

The formidably eloquent Sushma Swaraj outperformed her male colleagues in Parliament but was never considered a prime ministerial candidate. Swaraj was sent into hopeless battles such as against Sheila Dikshit in 1998 in Delhi and against Sonia Gandhi in 1999 in Bellary, ever the scapegoat and fall girl. Modi appointed Swaraj as Foreign Minister but reduced her to a Twitter (X) minister, taking all the big foreign policy calls himself, demoting Swaraj to tracking lost passports on X. The fiery Uma Bharti led her party to a big win in Madhya Pradesh 2003 only to be shunted from the CM's post and dubbed a "rebel." "Empower women", "Nari Shakti", blusters the BJP. Empty words. There's not a single woman state leader in today's BJP. The saffron entity won't act against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, charged with serious sexual harassment. Women leaders in the saffron camp must remain confined within a lakshman

rekha. Shine, but as supporting cast to the male leadership. Toil in tough battles redolent in sandoor and mangalsutra but stay content in a secondary enclave. Be a showpiece, not a player. Stay colourfully stormy, don't try to share real power.

Politically mature Bengal has created a remarkable woman leader and a party committed to women. Banerjee's story is far more compelling than Modi's. Modi, cocooned, groomed and promoted by the RSS and Sangh Parivar with its vast network and resources both in India and overseas, could count on this hydra-headed Sangh support system to enable his rise. Banerjee, by comparison, had no one. No support from any secret networks, no male mentors. She had nothing except her own fighting spirit. That she has succeeded in creating a highly successful party, defeating the 30-year rule of the Left Front and winning three consecutive elections on her own, is an achievement that makes Modi's Sangh Parivar-facilitated rise pale in comparison.

Nor does she market her life story or her grassroots credentials. Banerjee is not a well packaged glitzy marketed product projecting her personal journey via 24x7 multimedia platforms, one day a "chaiwallah", next day a "fakir." Instead, she's a rooted leader of people, perpetually rushing to those in need and remaining by their side. Pollsters may underestimate her, pundits may refuse to acknowledge her political nous, but Banerjee is one of a fast-disappearing breed — the last of India's great mass leaders. In fact, Banerjee has a far greater claim to be prime minister than Narendra Modi.

When a woman strides, she strikes fear. When she fearlessly stands as a true leader of people, she upsets the fussy little stratagems of the BJP's divide-and-rule plotters and connivers. Will the EC's ban on Ganguly deter others from using similar language against women? Will the insults stop? No, they won't. Yet with each election a new force is making itself heard with more determination than ever before: The woman voter. Today, the woman voter has become the heart of elections. But women politicians remain victims of vicious misogyny.

The writer is Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, All India Trinamool Congress

AFTER THE BLAZE

Explosion in Thane chemical unit should draw attention to frequent industrial accidents, need to plug regulatory deficits

THE MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT has ordered an investigation into Thursday's chemical factory blaze which killed at least 11 people in an industrial complex in Thane and injured more than 60 others. By all accounts, the food colouring factory used highly reactive chemicals. Maharashtra's Industry and Labour Department has said that the unit's boiler was not registered under the Indian Boiler Act, 1950. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has promised "strict action" against those at fault. Culpability for the incident should, of course, be fixed. But safety-related concerns about the Thane industrial complex are not new. In 2016, a fire accident at the complex claimed five lives. Explosions have been reported from the area in 2018, 2020 and 2023 as well. CM Shinde has said that the highly hazardous units would either be shut down or "given the option to shift to another location". That's a knee-jerk reaction. Shutting down industries or relocating them causes economic disruption and livelihood losses. The Maharashtra government should nudge these factories to follow industrial safety and environmental rules.

India is among the top six chemical manufacturing countries in the world. Diverse industries — pharmaceuticals, pesticides, fertilisers, paints and petrochemicals — collectively account for more than 70,000 of the products that are made from chemicals. The sector contributes about 11 per cent of India's exports and employs more than two million people. Although the country has 15 Acts and 19 rules governing different aspects of the chemical industry, none of them deals exclusively with the sector. At the same time, the overlapping jurisdictions of different ministries work to the detriment of effective regulation. Monitoring and inspection are weak and most often, these exercises involve imposing fines on erring units — which, by all accounts, breeds corruption. The NDMA website shines a light on the chemical industry's regulatory deficits. The industry, it says, comprises "1,861 major accident hazard (MAH) units" and "thousands of registered hazardous factories (below the MAH criteria)". The agency's figures do not include factories in the unorganised sector.

NDMA estimates that the country reported 130 chemical accidents in the last decade, which claimed more than 250 lives. It, however, gives no details of these accidents. Studies with smaller sample sizes — such as that conducted by scientists from IIT Kanpur's Department of Industrial and Management Engineering in 2023 — conclude that industrial accidents result from inadequate regulation, a lack of awareness of how to act when a mishap occurs and poor investment in worker safety. However, the country lacks a comprehensive database of chemicals used by industry and the risks associated with them. The horrors of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy in 1984 did lead to a rethinking on industrial safety, but accidents have not been followed by serious stock-taking — these include the Jaipur oil depot fire of 2009, Thane explosion of 2016, Visakhapatnam gas leak of 2020 and the blaze at a natural gas well in Tinsukia in 2020. A rapidly-industrialising country cannot afford such a knowledge deficit.

POWER PLAY IN THE SEA

China's military exercises around Taiwan are about power projection. Those with stakes in region must watch the space

ON THE FACE of it, the message from China's military exercise — which included units from the People's Liberation Army, the PLA-Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard — is unambiguous. According to China's defence ministry, the drills around Taiwan's main island are meant to test the military's ability to "seize power" in key areas — in essence, facilitate an annexation. The drills, which began suddenly on Thursday, also conducted mock missile strikes targeting key offshore islands as well as strategically and commercially important sea lanes. The provocation is the election of Lai Ching-Te — who assumed office on May 20 — as President of Taiwan. Lai is from the pro-sovereignty Democratic Progressive Party, which Beijing considers a "separatist" group.

It is easy to view the current exercise as a part of the uneasy equilibrium around Taiwan. In fact, similar drills were conducted by China in 2022 and 2023. Beijing keeps rattling the cage to intimidate the significant section of Taiwan's leadership that is, at least in principle, committed to independence. Taiwan's leadership has stopped short of forcing a change in the status quo as well. After all, it has functional de facto autonomy even though China keeps making a de jure claim to its territory. In fact, the military escalation that would inevitably follow any attempt at annexation is bound to inform Beijing's strategic calculus. Two factors in the current moment, however, complicate this picture and are cause for caution.

It may be that China's power projection is not merely about intimidation. President Xi Jinping has repeated on numerous occasions that the "re-unification" of China and Taiwan is on his agenda, a likely component of his legacy. He has also refused to rule out the use of force. Even if such a maximalist position is political rhetoric, meant as much for domestic audiences as Taipei and Western capitals, it does not bode well. Second, military drills and Chinese navy and coast guard patrols do not just project power, they try to assert it. There is little doubt that an expansionist China has been "slicing" territory from its neighbours and trying to expand its zone of influence in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific as a whole. This has caused much alarm in littoral states, many of which have deep economic ties with the aggressor. It is in this context of intimidation and expansion that the drills are taking place. Great and middle powers with stakes in the region must keep a close watch.

AND KAFKA LAUGHED

A new exhibition seeks to give context to the writer's darkness, display his hidden humorous side

FOR ENTIRE GENERATIONS, Gregor Samsa has put the Kafkaesque into existential dread. The protagonist in Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis*, who wakes up to find that he has been transformed into a giant insect, has been the biggest advocate of his creator's predilection for urban angst. But turns out, Kafka might not have been as given to solemnity as his writings make him out to be. A new exhibition, "Kafka: Making of an Icon", that opens at Oxford's Bodleian Library on May 30 to mark the Austrian writer's death centenary in 2024, hopes to give his image a makeover by showing that there's more to Kafka than gloom and doom. And that, for someone who died at 40 and suffered from a debilitating bout of tuberculosis in the last few years, a degree of pessimism was not entirely out of place.

A touch of the earnest marks Kafka's humour: Among the papers that will go on display, there is a letter to his superior at the insurance company where he worked around 1912. It is an application for a sick leave, only Kafka had not been gallivanting in the time he played truant — he had pulled an all-nighter working on his story, "The Judgment". In another document, his friend and literary executor Max Brod writes of a man given to bouts of hysterical laughter during reading sessions. It is an intimate picture of one of the 20th century's most influential writers as an individual — he had left explicit instructions to Brod to destroy all his papers after his death, Brod overrode the request.

Later-day readings of Kafka have contended that the nightmarish tenor of alienation that has come to characterise his works might possibly have been a matter of overinterpretation. Perhaps there is some truth to it. After all, who can deny the thread of absurdity that comes from a man giving in to self-pity and imagining himself to have turned into a "monstrous vermin"?



ALOK THAKAR

I WATCH THE Indian Premier League (IPL) every few days — especially to follow the fortunes of the Delhi Capitals. What strikes me is what happens between overs. The IPL has a huge viewership. The advertisements can be afforded only by firms and products with a pan-India reach and high sales. They are dominated by either gambling apps or "elaichi" and "masala" products. What does that say about our consumption patterns?

Gambling apps are at least followed by a rapid, half-understood disclaimer. The entertainment and sporting icons who glamourise the use of elaichi/masala pouches do not need a similar disclaimer because they are supposedly advertising a non-harmful and non-addictive substance. But is it not obvious that this is a form of surrogate advertisement for oral tobacco? It may be legal, but is it ethical?

Much of the conversation on tobacco has focused on smoking and, recently, on "vapes". But tobacco consumption in India is mainly through smokeless tobacco (oral tobacco). The Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS 2017) revealed that 29 per cent of people over 15 in India consume tobacco. There are twice as many oral tobacco consumers (21 per cent) as those who smoke tobacco (10.7 per cent).

We are global leaders in oral tobacco consumption and the only region with prevalence rates exceeding 20 per cent. Is it any surprise that we are also the region with the highest prevalence of mouth cancer? The rates of

BETWEEN IPL OVERS, A MESSAGE

Surrogate advertisement for oral tobacco may be legal. Is it ethical?

Tobacco cannot be eradicated by bans. Nicotine, one of the active alkaloids in it, is among the most addictive products consumed. Once addicted, people need to feed their cravings. The GATS survey informs us that 92 per cent of consumers of tobacco are well informed of its harmful effects. Many wish to discontinue — but cannot. Once consumed regularly for a few months, nicotine dependence necessitates further consumption.

these cancers are estimated to be increasing at a compound annual growth rate of 23 per cent. This increase has paralleled the rising use of pouched tobacco.

The Indian state has proactively moved against tobacco. The ban on smoking in public spaces and regular increases in the price of cigarettes did decrease smoking — but led to the shift of the consumer towards oral tobacco. Since 2011, a ban on the production and sale of gutka (masala mixed with tobacco) has been legislated by most Indian states. These bans are, however, not easily enforced and have also been challenged in court — with occasional success.

Tobacco cannot be eradicated by bans. Nicotine, one of the active alkaloids in it, is among the most addictive products. Once addicted, people need to feed their cravings. The GATS survey informs us that 92 per cent of consumers of tobacco are well informed of its harmful effects. Many wish to discontinue — but cannot. Once consumed regularly for a few months, nicotine dependence necessitates further consumption. At the level of the street corner retailer, it is usual for the masala/flavoured mouth freshener to be sold with a small quantity of low-priced or free oral tobacco (colloquially called "chhotu").

Victims of tobacco continue to invite heart disease, strokes, lung disease, oral cancer, lung cancer, bladder cancer, esophageal and gastric cancer. Their chemical dependence on

nicotine makes it difficult for them to quit tobacco even if they wish to.

The real hope for reducing tobacco use lies in education and prevention of nicotine addiction. There has been a modest decrease in tobacco consumption in India between the two GATS surveys of 2010 and 2017. The percentage of the adult population consuming tobacco has decreased from 34.6 per cent to 28.6 per cent. This decrease is very marked in the younger ages (15-17 years), but minimal in older age groups. This further confirms that moving people already dependent on nicotine away from it is difficult. It is easier to dissuade the young from adopting tobacco. Education is key. The endorsement of masala by our icons flies in the face of these efforts.

Tobacco devastates families and consumers. Fifty per cent of users die of a tobacco-related illness. It can decrease lifespans by a decade. In India, tobacco-related cancers represent 42 per cent of male and 18 per cent of female cancer deaths at ages 30-69 years. It is the largest contributor to premature death.

We cannot let the next generation follow the previous ones. Our idols need to join us to spread the very opposite message — that tobacco is addictive and the greatest long-term threat to young people's health.

The writer is Professor, Head-Neck Oncology & Head of the National Cancer Institute at AIIMS, New Delhi



MAY 25, 1984, FORTY YEARS AGO

SIKKIM MLAS QUIT

IN A DRAMATIC development, 15 Sikkim MLAs, led by the former chief minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari, quit the Congress (I) and announced the formation of a new regional party, the Sikkim Sangram Parishad. With Bhandari and his sympathisers' exit, the fortnight-old government of B B Gurung is reduced to a minority.

ZIA'S PEACE OFFENSIVE

THE PAKISTAN PRESIDENT, Gen Ziaul Haq, has said that establishing lasting peace and friendship between India and Pakistan will

be "peanuts", given the political will on both sides. "If there is political will which, it seems, is there on both sides, I am sure we will be able to achieve much better results in the forthcoming months", Gen Zia said. "We are going all out with the peace offensive, taking all measures on the media, on the television, greater exchange of delegations, journalists, intellectuals, educationists."

8 KILLED IN PUNJAB

TERRORISTS SHOT DEAD at least eight persons travelling in a car near Tehri village in Ludhiana district in Punjab. Official reports said that the car was stopped by three

unidentified persons on a motorcycle who sprayed bullets on the passengers. Of the nine occupants seven died on the spot while the eighth succumbed to injuries in a hospital. The ninth occupant is seriously injured. The victims were commission agents.

PM ON AKALI THREAT

PRIME MINISTER INDIRA Gandhi said that the Akali threat of grain blockade far from helping to solve the Punjab problem will complicate it. Mrs Gandhi said that it was the duty of every citizen to isolate the terrorists. She added that the morale of the police was now high and they were capturing the terrorists.

11 THE IDEAS PAGE

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Since 2019, they [Tories] as individuals and the government system that they created around themselves have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. Good riddance to them all. But Britain deserves so much better."

— THE GUARDIAN

Uber-cool Girish, glowing Smita

That night I could reach out and touch them again. For me, the high point of Cannes festival was seeing 'Manthan' again in a theatre after decades

Election in the time of deep fakes

Battle for integrity of electoral systems has now been taken into the digital world



NASEERUDDIN SHAH

SEVERAL MONTHS HAD elapsed since Shyam Benegal's *Nishant* (1975, my first film as an actor) had been released to widespread acclaim and success which had touched everyone in it — Shabana's standing as a star got consolidated, Smita (Patil) went into orbit, Girish (Karnad) started playing lead parts in commercial movies, Amrishi (Puri) became the much loved Heavy, Kulbhushan (Kharbanda), Mohan Agashe all benefitted. All, that is, except yours truly!

During that seemingly endless phase, on one of the many visits I made to Shyam's office in the historic Jyoti Studio to seek consolation, Dayal Nihalani gave me the news that a new film was being planned. He showed me a file titled "GCMMF" which sounded like an exclamation from Don Martin comics. I was told nothing else, and the file remained closed but I would have been blind not to see the look of "I know something you don't know bro" in Dayal's eyes. This epiphany occurred at a time when I was somewhat low and beginning to feel that my patience was being too sorely tested. Shyam wasn't in that day, but in my jubilation, I bought a first-class ticket on the local back from Grant Road to Khar where I lived then.

In good time, I learnt that the unpronounceable title stood for "Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation" which was going to sponsor this film and I was to be in it! Shyam later confirmed what I had fervently hoped for, narrated the part to me, told me how much I would be paid, told me to stop shaving and be "full of beans!" So, with some money in my pocket, unshaven and full of beans, I left with the others by air to Rajkot — only the second time I was flying.

The next day was the costume trial and I didn't change the kedia-chorna I put on that day through the 30-odd days of shooting. There is a canard doing the rounds that Shyam instructed us all not to bathe — pure conjecture, bathing or not was left to us and I can't speak for anyone else, but I must confess I bathed considerably less than I usually do. Luckily, the film was not being made in Smell-O-Rama! I learnt, not too well, how to tie a turban and attempted in vain to make the Bharwads' magnificent body language my own. Singed as my pride was after the seeming universal rejection of my work in *Nishant*, I decided to throw everything, including the kitchen sink, into my performance this time. Compared to the namby-pamby I played in *Nishant*, this was a bravura part and I finally saw some light at the end of my career tunnel. At some point early on, Shyam remarked that my face had the aggression needed for the part but my eyes were too mild. I was determined to set that right and perhaps went too far in that direction, but Shyam's observation shone a light on how important the eyes are in performance.



CR Sasikumar

The shooting went by in a blur for me and before I knew it, the film was done leaving me with a lingering sense of incompleteness because of the one fly in the ointment — the penultimate scene where I berate my fellow Dalits for coming back to the villainous Mishra (good old Amrishi). My performance that day was haywire and I wasted several yards of precious celluloid messing up take after take (18, if I remember right). Finally, a still patient Shyam called for a wrap and said we'd do the scene the next day. I spent that night in a fever of guilt and nervousness, completely at a loss as to what was going wrong. Next morning, Shyam took me aside just before the shoot and held my shoulders reassuringly, "You're trying too hard, just take it easy. Relax! Don't be so concerned with giving a brilliant performance, just try and get across to the people you're talking to in the scene." The wisdom of this advice kicked in several years later, but at that time, I was in a fervour of excitement and couldn't really deliver except in transmitting the uncontrollable energy I felt. I did manage the scene finally, but not to my complete satisfaction, nor, I still suspect, to Shyam's.

On the third day of its release, nervous curiosity took me to Gemini in Bandra to see it. I bought a ticket expecting to see a half empty house. The film had started and as I entered, I heard a roar of laughter. It was a laughter of acceptance not mockery, and as

On the third day of its release, I bought a ticket expecting to see a half empty house. As I entered, I heard a roar of laughter. It was a laughter of acceptance not mockery, and as I sat through the film among an approving audience, with no one recognising me, all the predictions of the naysayers, "Who's going to see this film?" "Who is interested in doodhwalas, yaar?" "It won't run for a day", etc. kept playing in my head. I must say, I gloated.

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For me, at Cannes, the red carpet and the attendant glitz and the non-stop smiling into cameras tested my patience a tad. Deeply affected as I was by the passion and love for movies of the several thousand cine goers there, I must say I felt a bit out of place. I'm not a great fan of film festivals, I don't enjoy running from one theatre to another, and though I like to watch a film which I know nothing about, I need time to digest the one I have just seen. So, for me, the absolute high point of the festival was seeing *Manthan* again in a theatre after decades. It was like revisiting that day in Gemini except that the gloating had been replaced by fond nostalgia. The Grim Reaper may have taken away many who made the film possible but that night I could reach out and touch them all again. Uber-cool Girish, glowing, gorgeous, bronze Smita, formidable but highly huggable Amrishi, Sadhu Meher, Mandeep, Kalpana — so many. Their presence was palpable and shall remain. Three cheers for Shyam and Govind Nihalani will be far from enough.

Shah is an actor, playwright, poet and author

OPENING ARGUMENT BY MENAKA GURUSWAMY

WHAT DO PRIME Minister Narendra Modi, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi, singer Taylor Swift and actor Anil Kapoor have in common? They have all been victims of "deep fake" videos, generated using artificial intelligence (AI).

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a "deep fake" as an image or recording that has been convincingly altered and manipulated to misrepresent someone as doing or saying something that he or she was not actually doing or said. And real life has already begun to mimic art when it comes to AI. Recently, the actor Scarlett Johansson alleged that her voice from the 2013 film *Her* was used without her consent by Open AI for the voice known as 'Sky' in its chatbot. *Her's* protagonist falls in love with his phone's AI, voiced by Johansson. In 2024, fiction has transformed into reality, with some changes to the plot line. When it comes to artists and deep fakes, the causes and consequences in law revolve around the ownership of proprietary material — one's reputation, fame, voice and person being used without permission or for malicious reasons.

However, given that this is election season in India and Delhi goes to the polls today, I would like to focus on the consequences — or lack thereof — of "deep fakes" for elections. The security and integrity of the electoral process has traditionally been premised on the integrity of the ballot box, the independence of the Election Commission of India (ECI) and accurate counting of every vote cast. Since 1951-52, when India held its first general election, this has been the focus of efforts to keep the process pristine. Now there is an additional challenge — the use of AI to influence the outcome. One facet of the use of AI is this phenomenon of "deep fakes".

On May 6, the ECI issued an advisory to political parties on the "responsible and ethical use of social media in election campaigning". It asked political parties to remove fake content within three hours of it coming to their notice.

The legal provisions available to address such deployment of deep fakes includes the Information Technology Act, 2000, the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 and the Indian Penal Code, 1860.

Let us start with the oldest of these legal instruments — The Indian Penal Code, which provides three traditional remedies. One is Section 468, which deals with the forgery of a document or electronic record for the purposes of cheating. Another is Section 505, pertaining to the making, publishing and circulation of any statement, rumour or report with the intent to cause fear or alarm to the public. Both provisions were used to deal with

alleged deep fakes purporting to be the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath. Further, Section 416 of the Code criminalises cheating by personation, such as when an individual pretends to be some other person or knowingly substitutes one person for another or represents that he or any other person is a person other than who he is.

The Information Technology Act, 2000 has the potential to provide some redressal against deep fakes. Section 66 (c) provides that the sending of any electronic mail or message for the purpose of causing annoyance or deceiving or misleading the recipient will be punished with a term of up to three years in prison. Further, the Act, via sections 66 and 67, also punishes cheating by personation, the violation of privacy and the transmission of visual images or publication of images of a "private area" with imprisonment of up to three years. These legal provisions, while useful, do not necessarily provide comprehensive protection against the use of AI to generate misinformation, including deep fakes.

The existing legal regime also provides no remedy for attempts by hostile countries to influence electoral outcomes. In 2024, over half the planet is going to polls, including major democracies like India, the US and the UK. *The Independent* reports that British Home Secretary James Cleverly had warned in February that adversaries like Iran or Russia could generate content to sway voters in the elections that are scheduled to be held later in this year in Britain. He said that "increasingly, the battle of ideas and policies takes place in the ever changing and expanding digital sphere... The landscape it is inserted into needs its rules, transparency and safeguards for its users."

In April, just before the commencement of the Indian general elections, the Microsoft Threat Analysis Centre (MTAC) had warned that China will "at a minimum, create, and amplify AI-generated content to benefit its interests" in elections in India, South Korea and the US. Last week, Forbes reported that Russia is looking to influence US opinion against Ukraine and NATO. It relies on MTAC analysis that found "at least 70 Russian actors using both traditional media and social media to spread Ukraine-related disinformation over the last two months" as a prelude to the upcoming presidential elections in the US. This AI-related campaign includes the use of deep fake videos.

The battle for the integrity of electoral systems and the formulation of informed public opinion has now been taken into the "virtual" world. This will necessarily entail a new legal understanding of what amounts to impersonation and misinformation. Europe's Artificial Intelligence Act, 2024, which will come into force in June (discussed earlier in 'A penal code for AI', IE, March 16), offers some ideas on how to think about a new legal regime to address offences that include the generation of deep fakes whose goal is to "manipulate human behaviour". Law reformers in India need to use the existing legal regime as a foundation to thoughtfully craft new laws that will address AI and deep fakes that look to influence electoral outcomes.

The writer is a Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court



RAM RAJYA BY RAM MADHAV

The kite-flying about RSS

It is committed to nation building. Why drag it into electoral politics?

BUDDHISTS AND HINDUS recently celebrated Buddha Purnima, the birth anniversary of the spiritual leader and social reformer born some three millennia ago. "Imagine there were a man struck by an arrow that was smeared thickly with poison," said Buddha, "the man might not say 'I will not draw out this arrow so long as I do not know whether the man by whom I was struck was a Brahmin or a Kshatriya or a Vaishya or a Shudra, or whether he was black, brown or light-skinned'. Buddha was making the point that when in a battle for a higher cause, such enquiries are superfluous and not relevant "to the spiritual life".

When there is a higher purpose in life, smaller questions become irrelevant. That is how an average RSS activist reacts when confronted with the kind of debates happening today. It is customary for political parties and media in the country and abroad to drag the RSS into irrelevant debates every time elections occur. A new myth has now been brought into circulation in this election that not all is well between the BJP and the RSS. "Sangh aur BJP me ghamasan," a video post on social media declared. "BJP decided to cut its umbilical cord," said an article in an online publication.

All this gossip and kite-flying may be a part of political expediency. But the RSS decided long ago, after prudent consideration, that, as an organisation committed to building social unity, it should keep a distance from the day-to-day, and especially from, electoral politics. Article 4 (B) of the consti-

tution of the RSS categorically states that "the Sangh, as such, has no politics". It does allow swayamsevaks to join any political party "except such parties as believe in or resort to violent or secret methods".

There were occasions in the past when efforts were made from within and without to pull the RSS into active politics. First such attempt was made by Sardar Patel in the wake of the controversy over Mahatma Gandhi's murder. In a letter to the RSS chief MS Golwalkar on September 11, 1948, Patel suggested that "in the delicate hour, there is no place for party conflicts and old quarrels. I am thoroughly convinced that the RSS men can carry on their patriotic endeavour only by joining the Congress". When Golwalkar did not yield, he was arrested on November 15 and flown to a jail in Nagpur.

Patel continued his efforts and the Congress Working Committee ruled on October 7, 1949, that the RSS members will be permitted to join the Congress Party. Incensed, Jawahar Lal Nehru got it amended to state that the RSS members can enter Congress only upon relinquishing their membership of the organisation. As the RSS influence grew, there was a worry in Congress that it might either don a political avatar or support another party.

But the RSS had never felt the need to deviate from its constitutional position of staying away from active politics. Not that there was no debate over it within, especially after the illegitimate efforts to oppress it using Gandhi's murder as an excuse.

Golwalkar himself had alluded to it once, saying that "swayamsevaks can, if they like, convert the Sangh into a political body. That is the democratic way. I am not a dictator. Personally, I am outside politics".

When some RSS members like Balraj Madhok encouraged Shyama Prasad Mookerjee to start the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1951, Golwalkar agreed to send some 200 members of the organisation to work in that party, but insisted on keeping the RSS independent of it. In the early days, the RSS and Jana Sangh used to be compared to the two rails of a railway track that will never meet, but can never go apart either.

For more than seven decades now, this relationship has seen multiple phases. There are occasional disagreements, like when Gandhian socialism became the leitmotif of the BJP, with some in the RSS insisting that the organisation was "not wedded to any political party". But, largely, the RSS stayed away from active politics.

There were exceptions twice though. The first was in 1977 when democracy was to be saved from the draconian dictatorship of Indira Gandhi during the Emergency. The RSS too faced a ban for the second time. The RSS cadre actively canvassed for the newly formed Janata Party. After that historic responsibility was delivered, the RSS returned to its normal chores and didn't bother to turn political. This is in spite of the fact that the BJP was formed in 1980 solely because some Janata Party leaders objected to others like A B Vajpayee and L K Advani continuing their

association with the RSS. Its aloofness prompted some to speculate that the RSS had supported Congress in the 1984 elections resulting in a disastrous performance by the BJP. While the speculation was wrong, it was a fact that the organisation didn't entertain any idea of active participation during that election.

The second exception was in 2014 when the RSS leadership felt the need to play an active role in ensuring the defeat of forces that were destroying the national fabric through corruption and blatant minorityism. In the process, they even sought to create a false terror equivalent, inventing the bogey of "Hindu terror". Once those forces were defeated, the RSS returned to its nation-building activities.

It may also be pertinent to point out that the RSS doesn't consider politics as unimportant or untouchable. It views politics as an integral part of the social life of this nation. It believes that the imperative for a good society is to have good politics. Motivating people towards building good politics and good governance using electoral and other means is thus very much a part of the RSS work.

"But why should people drag us into politics? We are happy with them as politicians and ourselves as swayamsevaks," Golwalkar once said, summing up the RSS's sentimental reticence for politics.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the RSS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

LITTLE TOO LATE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Model code and context' (IE, May 24). The ECI asking political parties, in particular the two national parties, to desist from raising divisive issues has come a bit too late. With the election winding down, the important guideline would not meet its true objective and purpose. Most politicians and parties are seasoned campaigners, the MCC notwithstanding, but one wonders whether this has been adhered to this time. There has been mudslinging and blame games, with each side believing itself to be a paragon. It is unfortunate that courts are stepping in to do the EC's job as it fails in even egregious cases.

SS Paul, Nadia

A BROKEN SYSTEM

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Crime in Pune' (IE, May 24). Across India, there's sufficient evidence that the criminal justice system — police, judiciary, legal aid and prisons, is all but broken. If the process followed by the police is infirm, it will weaken prosecution. The biggest error is that it took the police eight hours to collect the blood sample of the minor driving the car. There are two challenges the criminal justice system faces. One, manpower shortage. Two, the credibility problem. If not for public outrage, the course of the Pune Porsche case could have been different.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

RBI AND THE STATE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A wind-fall gain' (IE, May 24). The magnitude of the RBI's dividend surpassing the Union government's budgeted amount from the public sector, is a significant development. RBI came into this windfall because of high interest rates in advanced economies, which may persist before an eventual cyclical inversion. The strength of India's recovery from the pandemic also contributed to the RBI surplus, and monetary policy would be inclined to pursue this course by easing interest rates ahead of the pack.

Khokan Das, Kolkata



LS POLLS PHASE 6: 58 SEATS IN 8 STATES, UTs AT STAKE

In 2019, Cong did not win a single one of 58 seats voting today, BJP bagged 40

NDA got 51.36% of vote share last time compared to the 28.66% for INDIA bloc parties

ANJISHNU DAS
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

WITH THE finish line of the Lok Sabha polls in sight, the sixth and penultimate phase will see 58 seats across eight states and Union Territories (UTs) vote on Saturday. By the end of this phase, a total of 486 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats will have completed polling, with just 57 seats left for the seventh phase. On Saturday, all 10 seats in Haryana, the seven seats in Delhi and the final of the five seats in Jammu and Kashmir (voting in Anantnag-Rajouri) was moved from the third to the sixth phase will finish voting.

In 2019, the parties constituting the Opposition INDIA bloc and the ruling NDA won five and 45 of these 58 seats, respectively. The BJP alone won 40 of these constituencies. While the Congress did not win a single of these seats, the Trinamool Congress (TMC), National Conference (NC) and Samajwadi Party (SP), now in the INDIA bloc, were among the winners, apart from the unaligned Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Biju Janata Dal (BJD).

In terms of vote share, the parties that constitute NDA received 51.36% of the votes compared to the 28.66% vote share of the INDIA bloc parties.

CANDIDATE BREAKDOWN

- 343 (38.6%) **CREOPATI CANDIDATES**
- 94 (10.6%) **WOMEN CANDIDATES**
- 48 **AVERAGE AGE**
- ₹6.12 cr **AVERAGE ASSETS**

20.6% (183 candidates) Share of candidates with criminal cases. There are 141 (16%) candidates with serious cases

Candidates who are graduates and above **495**

Share of graduates **55.7%**

After Phase 6, a total of 702 women will have contested across all the phases so far.

In 2014, 8 women won from the Phase 6 seats and in 2019, 11 women won.

At 7, the BJP has the most women candidates in Phase 6, followed by the Bengal-based SUCI(C) at 6 and the Congress at 5.

PHASE 6 SEATS: RESULTS IN 2019

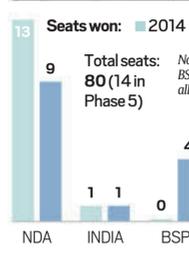
NDA: **45** INDIA: **5** OTHERS: **8** (BJD and BSP 4 seats each)

In 2014, the NDA won 39 of these seats and the INDIA bloc parties 11, with eight going to other parties.

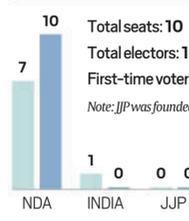
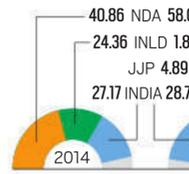
KEY BATTLEGROUND

UTTAR PRADESH

Vote share in %

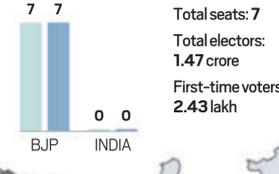
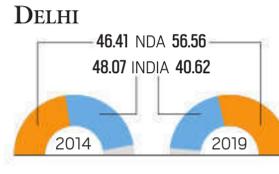
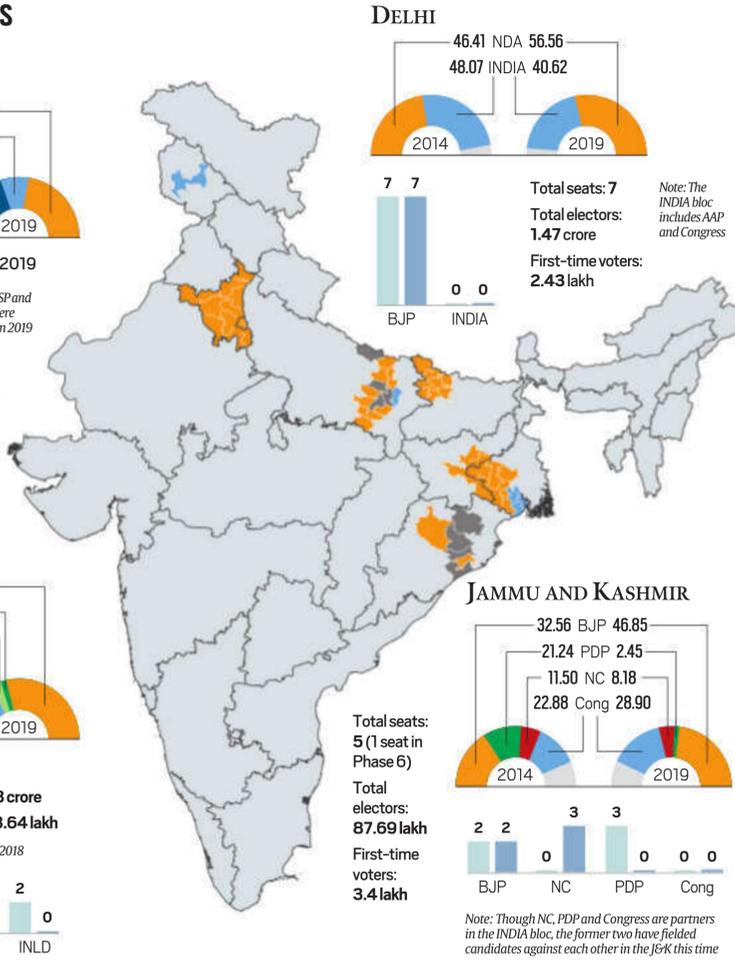


HARYANA

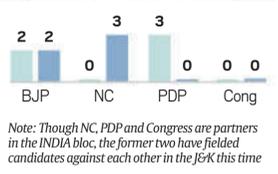
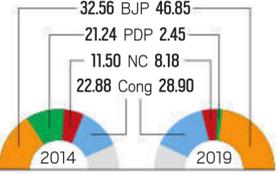


889 CANDIDATES IN THE FRAY ON SATURDAY.

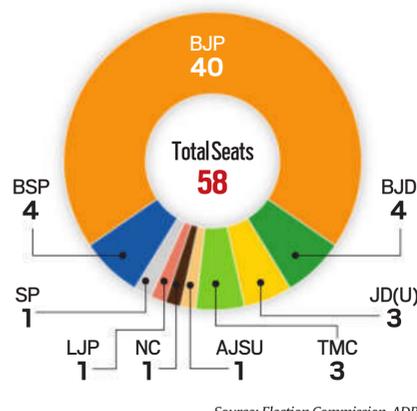
Among the major parties, the BSP has the most candidates at 54, followed by the BJP at 51, and the Congress at 25. With all 10 seats in Haryana and seven seats in Delhi voting, they have the most candidates at 223 and 162, respectively.



JAMMU AND KASHMIR



PARTY-WISE SEATS WON IN 2019

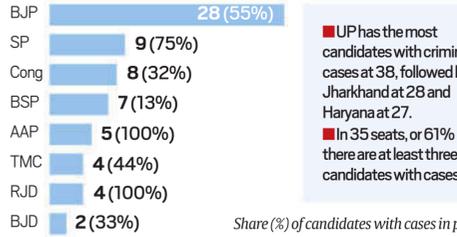


OTHER MAJOR STATES GOING TO POLLS

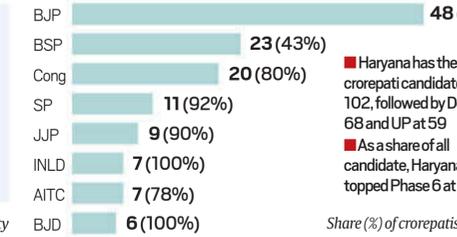
- BIHAR: 8 SEATS** Gopalganj, Maharajganj, Paschim Champaran, Purvi Champaran, Sheohar, Siwan, Vaishali, Valmiki Nagar
- JHARKHAND: 4 SEATS** Dhanbad, Giridih, Jamshedpur, Ranchi
- ODISHA: 6 SEATS** Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Puri, Sambalpur
- WEST BENGAL: 8 SEATS** Bankura, Bishnupur, Ghatal, Jhargram, Karthi, Medinipur, Purulia, Tamluk

In 2014, the BJP alone had won 37 of the 58 Phase 6 seats, followed by the Trinamool Congress (TMC) at 8, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) at 6 and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) at 2. The Congress had won just 1 seat - Rohtak in Haryana

PARTY-WISE CANDIDATES WITH CRIMINAL CASES



PARTY-WISE CREOPATI CANDIDATES



7 Number of seats reserved for Scheduled Castes.

2 Number of seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes.

Women candidates Delhi has the most women candidates at 24, followed by Haryana and Uttar Pradesh at 16 each, and Jharkhand at 10. There are no women candidates in 12 of 58 Phase 6 seats.

Seats with most candidates Ranchi in Jharkhand received the most nominations at 70, followed by North East Delhi at 69. On average, each seat in this phase has 15 candidates.

Delayed polling Voting in J&K's Anantnag-Rajouri was pushed by the EC from Phase 3 to 6 due to "inclement weather".

STATE OF PLAY

Cong banks on anger against BJP in Haryana, but can it bridge 30% vote gap?

VARINDER BHATIA
CHANDIGARH, MAY 24

FIVE YEARS ago, the BJP swept Haryana, winning all 10 Lok Sabha seats, including eight with huge margins. But come Saturday, the party is likely to face an uphill task maintaining its tally - or worse, minimising its losses - due to multiple events since 2019.

If the Congress does manage to cause a dent, it would be a big achievement given there was approximately a 30% vote-share gap between the two parties in 2019 - the BJP's 58.02% vote share to the Congress's 28.42%. The other parties barely registered, with the Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) getting 4.9% and the INLD 1.89%.

The May 25 polling is expected to remain similarly bipolar, between the Congress and BJP, in nine seats. In Kurukshetra, where the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) candidate is the INDIA nominee, the field is opened up with the entry of the INLD's Abhay Chautala.

One of the most significant developments since 2019 that will impact voting is the 2020-21 farmer protest against the Prime Minister Narendra Modi government's since-repealed farmer laws. With over 65% of the state living in rural areas, the issue has deep resonance in Haryana.

Another ongoing protest by Punjab's farmers on the Shambhu border also caught attention here. There have been near-constant protests against BJP candidates in

the state through the campaign.

The second big factor has been the anger over the Modi government's treatment of women Olympian wrestlers who accused senior BJP leader Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh of sexual harassment. Many of the wrestlers originate from the state's rural belt.

The third factor is anti-incumbency against the BJP, ruling at the Centre and in the state. Months before the polls, the BJP changed the Chief Minister and Cabinet in a surprise move, replacing Manohar Lal Khattar with Nayab Singh Saini as the CM. Khattar is now the BJP candidate from Karnal, while Saini is seeking an Assembly bypoll win from the Karnal Assembly seat. The BJP also replaced six of its sitting MPs.



BJP supporters at a rally in the Bhiwani-Mahendragarh seat. PTI

Apart from tapping into the anger over the farmer and wrestler issues, the Congress campaigned on issues such as price rise, unemployment, law and order, as well as the discontent over the Army's Agnipath recruitment scheme. Since Haryana sends large numbers to the armed forces, it is another potent issue.

RICHEST CANDIDATES

NAVEEN JINDAL (BJP), contesting from Haryana's Kurukshetra
Assets: ₹1,241.48 cr

SANTRUPT MISRA (BJD), contesting from Odisha's Cuttack
Assets: ₹482.21 cr

SUSHIL GUPTA (AAP), contesting from Haryana's Kurukshetra
Assets: ₹169.58 cr

YOUNGEST AND OLDEST

YOUNGEST: 5 candidates aged 25, including 1 each from the SP and BSP

OLDEST: Two 79-year-old Congress candidates, **MAHENDER PRATAP SINGH** in Haryana's Faridabad and **JAI PRAKASH AGARWAL** in Delhi's Chandni Chowk

5 CONTESTS TO WATCH OUT FOR

1 ANANTNAG-RAJOURI, J&K: Former CM and PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti vs former MLA Mian Altaf Ahmad (NC) vs Apni Party vice president Zafar Iqbal Khan Manhas

2 KARNAL, HARYANA: Former CM Manohar Lal Khattar (BJP) vs youth leader Divyanshu Budhiraja (Cong) vs Devender Kadian (JJP)

3 SULTANPUR, UP: Sitting MP and former Union minister Maneka Gandhi (BJP) vs former MLA Ram Bhual Nishad (SP) vs Udraj Verma (BSP)

4 TAMLUK, WEST BENGAL: Former Calcutta High Court judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay vs TMC spokesperson Debangshu Bhattacharya vs lawyer Sayan Banerjee (CPM)

5 NEW DELHI: Lawyer and late Union Minister Sushma Swaraj's daughter Bansuri Swaraj (BJP) vs lawyer and MLA Somnath Bharti (AAP)



An NC rally in Budgam. In 2019, the party had won all three seats in the Valley, where the BJP is not contesting this time. PTI

In Ladakh, Kashmir, Jammu, issues differed, but Article 370 at heart

BASHAARAT MASOOD & ARUN SHARMA
SRINAGAR, JAMMU, MAY 24

AS JAMMU and Kashmir plus Ladakh wrap up voting for the Lok Sabha elections on Saturday - the first significant polls in the state since the abrogation of Article 370 - the three regions saw distinct polls issues. But one was common - insecurity over jobs and land, in the wake of the scrapping of the special status of the erstwhile state.

In the Valley, voters spoke about the loss of J&K's "identity" and expressed concern over "changed demographics". For Jammu, where there is more support for the Centre's unilateral decision on Article 370, issues such as the jobs promised following the move not fruitifying, apart from the inaccessibility of the incumbent BJP MPs, were the main issues. For Ladakh too, the main poll subject flowed from the changes following the removal of Article 370, with voters seeking the autonomy offered by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

In Jammu, the Congress - the main opponent of the BJP in the province's two Lok Sabha seats of Jammu and Udhampur-Doda - questioned the Centre over job and land security for local residents, now that the protections offered by Article 370 no longer exist. Union Minister of State, PMO, Jitendra Singh, who courtesy his portfolio is a prominent presence at the Centre, is one of the contenders here, facing a tough fight in Udhampur-Doda against BJP-turned-Congress leader Choudhary Lal Singh.

In Kashmir, the BJP surprisingly kept out after Prime Minister Narendra Modi dropped in for his first public meeting post-Article 370 abrogation, suggesting an early campaign launch for the party. Sources said the BJP did not want to take the risk of a likely loss in all of the Valley's three seats - Srinagar, Baramulla and Anantnag-Rajouri - and the impact it could have on its Article 370 plank in the Assembly elections to be held in J&K soon.

Smaller parties in the Valley race, however, continued to be dogged by accusations of being proxies of the BJP - particularly the Apni Party and People's Conference which, in turn, reached an "understanding" between themselves.

With the Congress leaving the field for INDIA ally National Conference, the PDP got isolated and has the most riding on the results now. Top leaders of both the NC and PDP are in the race themselves - NC vice-president Omar Abdullah from Baramulla, and PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti from Anantnag-Rajouri. In Srinagar, it is a contest between two youth icons - the NC's Aga Ruhullah Mehdi and PDP youth president Waheed ur Rehman Para.

Not surprisingly, for all parties, Article 370 and its impact remained the main talking point, with the NC and PDP arguing that while development was important, their focus should be on "political rights" first.

With both polling in Srinagar and Baramulla seeing new highs, different sides interpreted it differently, including the BJP. While the Valley parties called it a vote against the Centre, saying the people had grabbed the first opportunity to raise their voice, the BJP said the enthusiastic participation of the voters showed that J&K had turned a corner, to a post-Article 370 era.

Anantnag-Rajouri, which votes on Saturday, is expected to show the spillover effect. Besides, as a parliamentary constituency in Kashmir includes regions from Jammu for the first time, the extent of the turnout in the respective areas could determine Mufti's fortunes.

The political calculations in the seat have been upset by the BJP's outreach to the Paharis, who are in large numbers on the Jammu side.

Ladakh, with a lone parliamentary seat, may not have garnered as much attention in the identity debate, but the extent to which it has been brewing was evident in the polls. The demand for Sixth Schedule to safeguard their land and job rights remained almost the only issue, though the Kargil-Ladakh divide flared up again over the INDIA candidate.

rowly lost in 2019 to the BJP.

The balancing of caste equations in their candidate lists by both the Congress and BJP means that in a majority of the seats, candidates of the same castes are locked in battle.

Before 2019, the Congress had faced a wipeout in Haryana in the Lok Sabha polls twice - the post-Emergency 1977 elections and 1999. The Congress's best years were 2004 and 2009, when it won nine out of the 10 seats.

Kumari Selja, one of Hooda's detractors but seen as placated with a Lok Sabha ticket, said there is no way the BJP will see a repeat. "There is no factor like the Balakot air strikes this time. People are questioning the BJP on promises that it did not fulfill," she said.

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• IN WEST BENGAL

BACKS TO WALL, LEFT, CONG CLOSE RANKS DOWN TO GRASSROOTS



Over 26,000 Kashmiri Pandit migrants to vote in special booths

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE JAMMU, MAY 24

NEARLY 26,000 KASHMIRI Pandit migrants will be eligible to vote in Anantnag-Rajouri parliamentary constituency which is going to polls Saturday.

Disclosing this, election officials told The Indian Express that of the nearly 36,000 voters registered with them, a total of 25,225 have been mapped in Jammu and 614 in Udhampur.

While the details of those mapped in Delhi were not available, officials said the number of migrant voters mapped this time was higher than those found in Srinagar parliamentary seat which voted on May 13.

Of the 52,100 migrant voters in Srinagar parliamentary seat, only 16,338 could be mapped by the authorities and of them, only 38.73% had voted at special polling stations in Jammu. However, even this figure was three times the nearly 2,500 migrant voters who voted in Srinagar LS seat during the 2019 polls.

Officials attributed the increased mapping of voters in Anantnag parliamentary seat to deferring of polls from May 7 to May 25, giving more time to migrant voters to approach election officials.

Meanwhile, officials have set up 26 special polling stations (34 polling booths including 4 in NCR Delhi and one in Udhampur) to enable Kashmiri migrants vote in Anantnag parliamentary seat from their present places of stay elsewhere in country. Of 29 booths set up in Jammu, 8 will be auxiliary booths, officials said, adding there, in addition to other facilities, will also have CCTV coverage.

In Bengal, it's Mamata who's facing anti-incumbency more than Modi

SHUBHAJIT ROY SINGUR, KHARAGPUR, MAY 24

A FARMER IN his 60s, Ziyarul Haq is sitting this hot May afternoon at Beraberi in Singur, reading the Bengali-language Left mouthpiece newspaper Ganashakti. "Aamra ekhane shilpo chai (We want industry here)," he looks up to say. "My son went for a job interview near Howrah, and the moment they saw in his biodata that he belonged to Singur, they asked him to leave... That has become our reputation, our curse."

About half-a-kilometre away, another farmer, Rabindra Sadra, echoes Haq, "If there was industry, that would have meant jobs for our children."

Singur, of course, was to be the site of the Tata Nano plant, which never came to be thanks to an agitation led by Mamata Banerjee, who rode the movement's momentum to power. While the site lies bare now, there is a chemical factory just opposite.

Across Hooghly, West Medinipur and Bankura districts in West Bengal, this absence of jobs has framed the Lok Sabha elections as an interesting battle: that between Mamata Banerjee's 13-year-rule vs Narendra Modi's 10 years. And while it is a Lok Sabha election, the burden of incumbency is on Mamata's Trinamool Congress government in the state — and not Modi's at the Centre.

There are the positives, such as the TMC's marquee 'Lakshmi Bhandar' scheme — involving Rs 1,000 to 1,200 monthly pay-



Mamata Banerjee campaigns in South 24 Parganas, Friday. ANI

ments to women above 25 years of age in the state — which has all-round support. Rupsa, a teacher at the Anandapur Boys' Primary School in Medinipur, says, "Earlier, women had to ask for money from their husbands, now they can spend it pretty much the way they like."

However, the shadow of corruption permeates all aspects of the TMC government, which has been hit by a series of embarrassing scandals. The party has dubbed them witch-hunting by the Centre.

Monica Soren, a student of BSc in Zoology at a college in Midnapore, flags the scam involving recruitment of about 26,000 teachers in state government-run schools. Just earlier this month, the Supreme Court gave relief to teachers and non-teaching staff whose appointments were cancelled by a Calcutta High Court order in April.

"There should be transparency in recruitments," Monica says, calling it a big issue for youths of the state.

The common belief, in both

rural and urban areas, is that TMC leaders have benefited from the scam, with many pointing to the arrest of former education minister Partha Chatterjee. "TMC-r netara phoole-phenpegeche (the TMC leaders have prospered)... This is something people can see," says Rudro Gul, a businessman in Bankura's Sarenga.

Maurya, 18, who is preparing for IIT entrance, says such scams are worrying given the paucity of employment opportunities already. "We are anxious about our future... What will happen to us?"

Even supporters of Mamata admit that corruption has weighed down her government. "As the leader, she can't say she did not know... considering how centralised her party structure is," a local Trinamool leader in Medinipur admits, saying the teacher scam has left a "gobhir daag (deep stain)" on Mamata.

The BJP, in this context, is seen as filling that growing gap of youth aspirations. Rudro Gul, a businessman in Bankura's Sarenga, says, "We had the Left for more

than 30 years, and we then brought in the TMC. After 13 years, the TMC is seen as no different from the Left. So let us try the others, like the BJP. If they too do not perform, we can vote them out."

This sentiment is potentially bad news for the TMC, which was shaken by the BJP's 2019 performance in the state, winning 18 Lok Sabha seats, compared to its 22. While the TMC halted the BJP march in the 2021 Assembly polls, its tally of 77 seats was still remarkable for a party that was used to be non-existent in the state.

The sense is that if the BJP gains a few more seats in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, the momentum may shift towards it, ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections, which are more crucial for the TMC. Mamata, who has always had her ear to the ground, understands the stakes, and the alarm can be seen in how the state police machinery is allegedly being used to double down against the BJP.

The EC, which has a tough balancing act, removed the West Medinipur SP this week.

Mamata has also softened her stance towards the INDIA coalition, which she had unceremoniously snubbed by refusing to share Lok Sabha seats. Recently, she said she was very much a part of the Opposition coalition that "I helped form". TMC general secretary Tanmoy Ghosh puts his hope in TMC schemes "which have touched the lives of the people". "The BJP is using communalism as a tool to garner votes," he says.

However, the BJP's trump card, apart from the promise of change, is also welfare schemes. A radio

jingle that plays on loop on FM puts Modi front and centre of many of them.

BJP Purulia district president Vivek Ranga says the party is confident of bettering its 2019 performance. "People of Bengal have seen the scams and corruption in TMC rule, which were not there the last time. And they have seen the impact of PM Modi's schemes."

Asked why he calls Modi "one of India's best PMs", Rabindra Sadra, the farmer in Singur, says, "Biswa Bharoter dike cheye achhe, eta hoyechhe Modji'r jommo (the world is looking at us because of Modi)."

At a Kendriya Vidyalaya in Kharagpur, Principal Sudip Mondol proudly shows around the upcoming new block which will replace the ramshackle school building next door. On the board of the Central government-run school, bulletin boards talk about "G-20 and India's presidency" and "corruption-free India".

Arindam Bhunia, a school teacher in a Muslim-dominated pocket in Medinipur, however, is worried about the BJP playing on Hindu-Muslim divisions in Bengal, which has a high minority population. "Modi is a popular figure, no doubt. But the BJP at the local level is trying to create rifts in society," Bhunia says.

The TMC too hopes to drive this point in. As one drives around southern Bengal, the party's hoardings and posters, with Mamata's face, declare: "Jonogoner Gorjon, Bangla Birodhider bisorjon (People's roar calls for destruction of those against Bengal)."

Amid West Asia conflict, Jind youths leave home to look for jobs in Israel

AISWARYA RAJ JIND, MAY 24

IN JANUARY, following the Haryana government's advertisement for the recruitment of labourers for construction jobs in Israel, hundreds from Jind had queued up at a camp in Rohtak.

In February, the government selected 26 youths from the district, which had the most number of registered unemployed people in the state, to be taken to Israel. They are expected to earn around Rs 1 lakh a month. In total, 219 were selected across districts, and 23 have already started working in Israel, including two from Jind.

Despite Israel's war on Gaza and resulting tensions in West Asia, the common refrain during a group video call involving 24 of those selected was: "We cannot stay here, there are no jobs".

When flights to Israel had been affected by rising tensions last month, participants of video call shared their apprehensions. "When will they restart flight operations?" one of them asked, "Why can't they reroute the flights?" asked another.

Sajan Kumar (38), a mason and resident of Jind's Mohanpur village, said, "Forget permanent jobs, we cannot even get contractual construction work here. If we are lucky, some of us may get 15 days of work, but that would mean next to nothing for family." He and his 4 brothers had not found work in past 3 months.

A labourer in their area gets Rs 500 a day and a supervisor gets Rs 800, translating to Rs 10,000 and Rs 16,000 respectively for 20 days of work. Kumar says that while his 18-member family's expenses have increased, wages have not.

"We get free rations, but it runs out in 10 days... I am the family's oldest member and I have no choice but to leave," he said. He has paid Rs 68,000 for his ticket to Israel, which he borrowed from a village money lender. His wife, Sunita (34), his brothers, and their wives have registered for the NRECA, but have got fewer than 10 days of work each.

While Haryana has the highest wages under the scheme — at



Amardeep, a trained mason, drives a tractor trolley due to lack of jobs. Express

Rs 374 per day — beneficiaries claim lack of enough work days means total amount earned is not significant. Haryana votes on May 25. The Jind Assembly segment falls under Sonapat LS seat. Uchana Kalan and Narwana Assembly segments, also under Jind district, come under Hisar and Sirsa LS seats respectively.

Kumar says, "I voted for Modi in 2014 and 2019, but I don't have the same view anymore. He has not done anything for us over past few years... the Congress is no better. They have ruled Haryana for years, but what have we got?"

In August last year, the Haryana government said over 5.4 lakh unemployed youth had registered with various employment exchanges across 22 districts. Jind ranked first with 52,089 registrations.

A resident of Jiwannpur in Jind, Amardeep, 26, is a trained mason, but with no jobs, he has taken up driving a tractor trolley, for which he gets Rs 4,000 a day, of which he spends half on fuel. But the job is only available for 15 days in a year.

"... It also means no work for the rest of the month," he says. He is now waiting for a contract with a private firm in Israel. "I was late in uploading documents for the position, but I expect it to come in a week," he said.

He does not blame the ruling BJP for lack of jobs. "The condition is bad everywhere," he says, adding, "I will vote for Modi... Modi has made Ram Mandir." On the situation in Israel, he said, "I have talked to workers in Israel, and they say everything is normal."

In Vaishali, RJD wagers on eroding NDA's Bhumihar base

SANTOSH SINGH VAISHALI, MAY 24

BELIEVED TO be the first republic in the world, Vaishali is in the middle of a hard-fought electoral battle between a strongman politician fielded by the RJD and the sitting MP from the LJP (Ram Vilas) whose husband is an influential local leader said to be close to CM Nitish Kumar.

Vaishali — dominated by Yadavs, Rajputs and Bhumihars, followed by Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) and SCs — votes Saturday. The constituency has been known for upending the caste table of political players, with RJD's Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, an upper-caste Rajput, and not someone from its core Muslim-Yadav constituency representing the seat five times from 1996 to 2009. Much of that had to do with the popularity of Singh, known as the MNREGA man of Bihar. Singh, who died in 2020, lost the polls in 2014 and 2019.

This election, the RJD has fielded Independent MLA Vijay Kumar Shukla, popularly known as Munna Shukla, an upper caste Bhumihar to create fissures in the BJP-led NDA traditional vote bank. Shukla and his family have dominated the politics in Vaishali, particularly in Lalganj, for two decades. The 55-year-old, RJD's last-minute choice in the constituency, has been directly addressing his community on hustings.

VOTE SHARE (%)

Party	2014	2019
LJP	32.99	52.87
RJD	22.27	31.04
JD(U)	15.68	--

Note: LJP and JD(U) were both in NDA in 2019
Source: EC

Singh, appear divided. A Vaishali resident and local businessman, Mandhata Singh, said, "We have a tough choice. If we think locally, Munna Shukla is from our area. But if we think on a bigger scale, there is Narendra Modi."

In Paru, Master's degree student Rajeev Kumar said, "We consider Raghuvansh babu as our credible MP. He had appeal across castes and religions. Since 2014, we have only filled the gaps. We are still in search of a good candidate. While Munna Shukla has moved from one party to another, Veena Devi is more of a shadow of her husband. We are not greatly enthused with the choice of candidates by both camps."

Several EBC and SC voters The Indian Express spoke to were still on the fence. Prakash Mandal, an electrician from Baruraj, said, "I have come from Delhi to cast my vote. We generally watch which way wind is blowing as we need security and safety." Mandal said the Nitish government had built good roads and provided 24-hour power supply. "But we are still forced to migrate in absence of industrial growth. Even a daily wage gets Rs 700-Rs 100 outside Bihar as against Rs 300-Rs 500 per day wages in Bihar," he added.

Among SC women, there is support for Modi's schemes. Rubi Devi, a resident of Sahebganj, said, "At least, we are getting 5 kg of free ration. We have little to do with Ram Mandir and other issues. We need bread and education."



SHOW OF STRENGTH: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Jharkhand CM Champai Soren, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav and others in Jharkhand's Deoghar, Friday. PTI

I am in very good health: Naveen

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE BHUBANESWAR, MAY 24

ODISHA CHIEF Minister Naveen Patnaik on Friday said he is in "very good health", rejecting the claims of BJP leaders about his health condition as "lies".

"There is a limit to the amount of lies the Bharatiya Janata Party can tell. As you see I am in very good health and I have been campaigning for around a month all over the state," Patnaik told news agency ANI.

Patnaik visited Mayurbhanj on Friday to campaign for party candidates. Mayurbhanj will go to

polls in the final phase on June 1. The CM's statement came a day after BJP leader and his Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma, while campaigning in Sambalpur on Thursday, said that Patnaik was in a "hostage situation". Sarma also urged some senior citizens and eminent personalities of the state to "speak to Naveen Babu to ascertain how he is".

BJP's former state unit president Samir Mohanty has also written to Odisha Director General of Police urging him to "free the Chief Minister from the clutches of former IAS officer and Patnaik's close aide VK Pandian"

and to facilitate the opportunity for his (Patnaik's) interaction with the media".

Mohanty, in his letter, said the people of Odisha have the right to know about the condition of the Chief Minister to take action on the sensitive issue considering the larger interests of the state.

Reacting to the BJP's claims, Pandian said the allegations are "below the belt".

"I only hope the BJP comes up with innovative ideas instead of talking about something which is non-existent. You are all watching the CM. It's (BJP's) allegations very unfortunate, below the belt," said Pandian while talking to ANI.



PM says he would've 'taken' Kartarpur gurdwara in '71. Could India have?

MAN AMAN SINGH CHHINA CHANDIGARH, MAY 24

ADDRESSING AN election rally in Patiala in Punjab Thursday, PM Narendra Modi said he had been around, he would have ensured that Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara in Pakistan was "taken" by India before releasing the 90,000 Pakistani Prisoners of War after the 1971 battle.

What could the PM be talking about?

During the 1971 Indo-Pak War, a pitched battle took place between Indian and Pakistani armies in the Dera Baba Nanak sector in Punjab, a short distance from Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara in Pakistan. The gurdwara, associated with Guru Nanak Dev, is located barely 2.46 km from the

international border. However, the action in the Dera Baba Nanak sector was restricted to capturing a Pakistani enclave near the gurdwara and denying the Pakistani Army access to a rail-cum-road bridge over the Ravi River which would provide them direct access to Dera Baba Nanak town in the Indian sector.

The battle in Dera Baba Nanak sector The Army's Jalandhar-headquartered 11 Corps was responsible for the defence of the area, right from Dera Baba Nanak enclave in the North to south of Anupgarh in Rajasthan. The Amritsar-headquartered 15 Division was responsible for the defence of Dera Baba Nanak en-

clave, and 86 Infantry Brigade was deployed in the area.

The task for 86 Infantry Brigade was to contain any Pakistani threat from Kassowal enclave, a portion of Indian territory across the Ravi River which could provide a ready launchpad to Pakistan Army to attack Indian defences in the area. Also, the brigade was to hit Pakistani defences in Jassar enclave to protect the rail-cum-road bridge and defeat any potential Pakistani threat.

Was capture of Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara part of plans?

There is no literature on battle available which suggests that capture of the historic gurdwara was a military objective for the Dera



Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Patiala. File

Baba Nanak Brigade, which was focused on the two strategically important enclaves north and south of the Ravi, belonging to India and Pakistan respectively.

The Indian Army was able to overwhelm the Pakistanis in the

Jassar enclave, which was defended by troops of the paramilitary force Pakistan Rangers. Their commander was not present at company headquarters when Indian troops launched their attack on the intervening

night of December 5-6, 1971.

Brig Gauri Shanker, the Commander of 86 Infantry Brigade, responsible for operations in the area, was ordered to eliminate the Pakistani Jassar/Dera Baba Nanak enclave by the morning of December 6.

This task was accomplished by troops of 10 Dogra and 1/9 Gorkha Rifles, supported by tanks from 71 Armoured Regiment and Artillery.

No attempt was made by the brigade to continue beyond the capture of the enclave to take the Kartarpur Sahib Gurdwara, which was well within the grasp of the Indian troops.

Writing on the battle in Indian Defence Review, Maj Gen Sukhwant Singh (ret'd) noted, "On the face of it, this operation seems to have been one of 'crushing a peanut with a sledge hammer', but in view of the

strategic importance of the enclave, the Indian planners could not take a chance". He too made no mention of any intention to capture the gurdwara.

What would capturing the gurdwara have entailed?

Given the fact that the Indian forces had eliminated the Pakistani threat from the enclave near the gurdwara, it was just a matter of moving ahead by 1 km or so to capture the shrine. There existed no Pakistani forces between the gurdwara and the captured enclave. But operational plans only dealt with capturing the enclave.

The capture of the gurdwara could most likely have extended the war. India did not retain any territory of Pakistan it captured during the war, except some disputed areas in J&K.

How and why did the gurdwara end up on the Pakistan side in Partition?

The Punjab Boundary Commission, which drew the border between India and Pakistan during Partition, divided the four tehsils of the then Gurdaspur district between the two countries on the basis of Hindu/Sikh and Muslim populations. The Shakargarh Tehsil in which the gurdwara fell was awarded to Pakistan while Gurdaspur, Batala and Pathankot tehsils were awarded to India. The Congress made a representation before Punjab Boundary Commission and demanded the inclusion of Kartarpur in Punjab, along with Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, and Sacha Sauda, another gurdwara associated with Guru Nanak, in Sheikhupura. However, this demand was disregarded by boundary commission.

14 EXPRESS NETWORK

TN former DGP arrested after estranged wife complains he 'assaulted' guard

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, MAY 24

THE KELAMBAKKAM police in Chennai city suburbs have arrested former DGP Rajesh Das, following a complaint filed by his estranged wife and TN Energy Secretary Beela Venkatesan. She accused Das and 10 others of forcibly entering her residence in Thaiyur village and assaulting her security guard.

According to Beela's complaint, Das and his associates allegedly broke into her house, assaulted security guard Gopi, and subjected him to severe harassment, including making him clean toilets before eventually chasing him away. The alleged incident on May 18 has brought renewed scrutiny on Das, who was previously convicted in a sexual harassment case involving a woman IPS officer. Beela has provided a purported voice recording of guard's account as evidence. The complaint further alleged that the group, led by Das, snatched Gopi's phone and held him captive for nearly six hours.

Das had earlier claimed Beela had cut off electricity supply to the bungalow through TN Generation and Distribution Corporation (Tangedco). She filed complaint on May 20, and the Kelambakkam police lodged a case against Das under IPC sections.

A senior police officer said Das was arrested from his Panaiyur residence.

21 organisations write to CJI to speedily resolve Adani coal imports case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

AT LEAST 21 international organisations have written to Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and requested the Supreme Court to speedily resolve the pending case filed by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, investigating Adani Group firms for alleged overvaluation of Indonesian coal imports. The letter comes after a report by the *Financial Times* citing documents from George Soros-backed Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project alluded to a "fraud" by the Adani Group by selling low-grade coal as high-value fuel in 2013. Contending that they stand firmly against the continued use of fossil fuels, the organisations said the *Financial Times* report provided detailed evidence of Adani group's passing off of "low-quality coal as far more expensive cleaner fuel" in transactions with Tamil Nadu's Tangedco.

A spokesperson for the group said the quality of coal was independently tested at point of loading and discharge, as well as by customs authorities and TN Generation and Distribution Company (Tangedco) officials. "Moreover, the payment is dependent on the quality of coal supplied, which is determined through the testing process," he said.

Why complaint shouldn't be filed in court against you for forest laws 'violation': Ministry to Assam officer

NIKHIL GHANEKAR
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

THE ENVIRONMENT Ministry's regional office in Shillong has issued a notice to Assam government's Special Additional Chief Secretary (Forest) M K Yadava, asking him to show cause as to why it should not file a complaint against him in court for violation of forest conservation laws.

The notice pertains to the Assam government's construction of the 2nd Commando Battalion Camp on 44 hectares of forest land in Hailakandi district, which the Environment Ministry had earlier deemed to be in contravention of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980.

The notice, sent on May 14, stated that Yadava was "deemed guilty" under the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan)

Serious allegation against son Prajwal, not him: Why MLA Revanna was granted bail

APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

TWO BENGALURU courts, which granted bail to JD(S) legislator H D Revanna in two separate cases of abduction and sexual harassment, underlined one crucial aspect in their orders — that the serious offences are not prima facie against Revanna but his son and Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, accused of sexually assaulting several women.

Essentially, the orders make bringing a case against Prajwal key to ensuring the custody of Revanna for the protection of victims. The prosecution had contested Revanna's bail plea on the grounds that he could intimidate the victims and tamper with evidence.

"Though a serious allegation is levelled against the petitioner's son, the same cannot be a ground to reject the bail petition (of Revanna) unless it is pointed out that he would be a menace to the society," a special MP/MLA court had said on May 13, while granting bail in the case of alleged abduction and illegal detention of a woman. The woman had figured in one of the leaked videos where she was allegedly seen being raped by Prajwal.

Porsche crash: 2 police officers suspended for mishandling probe

CHANDAN HAYGUNDE
PUNE, MAY 24

THE PUNE Police suspended two of its officers attached to Yerwada Police Station Friday for dereliction of duty in the initial response to the Porsche crash case that killed two engineers on May 19. "A police inspector and an assistant police inspector have been suspended pending inquiry for dereliction of duty," a senior police officer of Pune Police said. Police Inspector Rahul Jagdale and Assistant Police Inspector Vishwanath Todkari mishandled the investigation and failed to inform the wireless control room about the incident in time, the officer added.

Earlier in the day, Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar had hinted at punitive action against officials involved in the early stage of the crash case. He had said that the internal inquiry conducted by an ACP has prima facie found there was "some negligence" on the officers' part.

"There was some negligence by officers concerned and appropriate action will be taken," Kumar said Friday when asked about status of internal inquiry being done by Pune City Police.

Kumar said that the FIR was lodged against the minor boy around 8 am on Sunday. He was then taken to Sassoon General hospital for medical examination. "Here his blood samples were taken around 11 am. There is a lapse in time of collection of sam-

Adhiniyam, 1980, and was liable for punishment as per provisions of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Rules, 2023. Under Section 2 of the Adhiniyam, 1980, no state government or authority can issue any order directing the use of forest land for non-forestry purposes without prior permission of the Central government.

Under the provisions of the 2023 Rules of the Adhiniyam, the Deputy Director General of Forest, Shillong, Imtiena Ao, has sought an explanation from Yadava. In case Yadava fails to respond to the notice within 60 days, the ministry will proceed with action, the notice said.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Yadava said, "I do not want to comment on the ministry's show-cause notice. But I would like to say the issue here is encroachment of forests in Assam by miscreants from



Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna. File

"Apart from the stray allegation in the complaint that the accused (Revanna) had insisted the victim at the say of the petitioner, no materials are forthcoming," the court said.

In the complaint, the victim's son had alleged that a man named Satish Babanna took his mother from their house saying Revanna wanted to meet her. The woman was a former house help at Revanna's farmhouse.

In the second order granting bail to Revanna on May 20 in a sexual assault case, another special court underlined that the serious offence of rape under

Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code can only be made out against Prajwal.

"It once again endorses that the accused No 1 (Revanna) is not charged with the alleged offence under Section 376 of IPC, it is only the accused No 2 (Prajwal). It also endorses that the victim in her statement has stated that it is the accused No 2 who allegedly committed the offence under section 376 of the IPC and

not accused No 1," the court held. "Basically, at this point, Revanna is getting the benefit of doubt at the cost of his son. Once the case against Prajwal is brought, their (Revanna's) legal strategy will have to change," an official involved in the case told *The Indian Express*.

Sources said in the absence of a common charge of conspiracy under Section 120B of the IPC between Revanna and his son, both their cases will have to be dealt with separately.

In the sexual assault case against Revanna, the rape charge was added after he moved for bail. At the time of filing of his bail application, only charges of sexual harassment were made out against him under Section 354 of IPC, which are bailable offences.

In both the bail cases, the prosecution lawyers also argued at length that Revanna could intimidate witnesses and highlighted the allegations of corrupt practices aided by Revanna in Prajwal's election in 2019 as Hassan MP.

The Karnataka High Court ruling in September 2023 had set aside the election, disqualifying Prajwal for making false disclosures in his election affidavit. However, the SC stayed the effect of the disqualification while the HC ruling itself continues to hold.

Did Prajwal go abroad without telling his family: Siddaramaiah

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, MAY 24

A DAY after former PM H D Deve Gowda wrote an open letter to his grandson and JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing sexual abuse allegations, to return to India and surrender, Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah Friday alleged that Gowda's family was aware of the Prajwal's plans to leave the country.

"According to me it was he (Deve Gowda) who sent him away, all this (the letter) is for public consumption. Did Prajwal Revanna leave the country without the knowledge of his family. Did he leave without telling anyone?" Siddaramaiah said Friday.

Ahead of polling in Hassan on April 26, sex videos, allegedly involving Prajwal, the JD(S) and BJP Hassan coalition candidate, emerged. The Karnataka government formed a SIT on April 28 to investigate the sexual abuse allegations. The SIT had lodged three FIRs, invoking charges of rape against Prajwal after the officers

located the victims, who were allegedly seen in the videos.

On Thursday, Siddaramaiah had written a second letter to PM Narendra Modi, requesting that the diplomatic passport issued to Prajwal be cancelled.

"It is not important who circulated the video. The major offence is rape. In an attempt to dilute the case, Kumaraswamy is speaking on other things. He is accusing (Deputy CM) D K Shivakumar and others (of leaking the videos). They have to respect the law of the land," Siddaramaiah said. The CM said he is hopeful that he will get a response from Modi after his two letters. "I have not got a response from the PM after the first letter. We have to see if there is a reply to the second letter," Siddaramaiah said. "I have sought the cancellation of the diplomatic passport."

On Thursday, Gowda, JD(S) national president, wrote in the letter titled 'My warning to Prajwal Revanna', "If he does not heed to this warning, he will have to face my anger and anger of all his family members."



PASSING OUT PARADE

Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Pandey during the 146th Course Passing Out Parade at the National Defence Academy in Pune. Speaking after reviewing the parade, General Pandey highlighted the rapidly changing nature of warfare, driven by technological advancements in space, cyber and information domains. Pavan Khengre

Bengaluru teen in custody for BBA student's murder

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, MAY 24

A 16-YEAR-old was apprehended and taken into custody by the Bengaluru South Police in connection with the murder of a 20-year-old BBA student at her house on May 15, which was initially attempted to be passed off as suicide.

The police had found three death notes, with one of them reading, "Sorry Amma" (sorry mother), but investigation revealed it was not the handwriting of the victim Prabhuddha, a

fourth-semester student. Police sources said that the juvenile is the son of a bar owner and an acquaintance of the victim. According to a senior officer in the Bengaluru South Division police, the juvenile had damaged the spectacles of a friend and the friend was demanding that the spectacles be repaired. The juvenile had allegedly stolen Rs 2,000 from the victim's purse, and when confronted by Prabhuddha, a fight ensued. The victim was pushed by the juvenile and she fell unconscious, the police said.

Presuming that Prabhuddha was dead, the juvenile and a friend

slashed her wrist and throat to stage it as a suicide, police said.

Police have found that the accused tried to wash off the blood in the bathroom, resulting in the water tanks being emptied. Sources said that police have found the CCTV footage showing the juvenile entering the house, which could become a key evidence in the case.

When Prabhuddha's mother, Soumya KR returned home in Brindavan Layout in Padmanabhanagar, she found that the door was locked from inside. With the help of neighbours, the door was broken

down and her daughter's body was found in the bathroom. Soumya shifted her daughter to a nearby hospital, where she was declared brought dead.

"When I returned home after work, I saw my daughter's body in the bathroom. Everyday after returning from college, my daughter used to text me saying she was home but on that day, she did not send any text," Soumya said. Soumya suspected that an unknown person had entered the house through a back door and murdered her daughter. In her complaint, she alleged that the accused escaped with her daughter's mobile phone. In her statement, Soumya said Prabhuddha had told her in the afternoon that she was with her friends.

Police had initially lodged a case of unnatural death. On May 18, a case of murder was registered.

"She never turned a blind eye if any student faced injustice in the education system. There are several points which indicate my daughter was murdered. The back door, which we seldom used, was open and I suspected that someone entered (through that door) and killed my daughter," Soumya said.

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NewsClick case: Summons to Neville, 4 others

Delhi Police wants them to join probe

MAHENDER SINGH MANRAL
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

THE DELHI Police Special Cell has sent a notice to five persons, including US-based businessman Neville Roy Singham, asking them to join its investigation into a terror case against news portal NewsClick and its founder-editor Prabir Purkayastha.

The others who have received the notice are Singham's business partner Jason Pletcher, think tank Tricontinental's executive director Vijay Prashad and two NewsClick journalists, Anand Mangnale and Pawan Kulkarni.

On April 30, a Delhi court took cognizance of the supplementary chargesheet filed by the Delhi Police in the terror case. The case is listed for May 31. NewsClick has called the allegations "bogus", and said it will "contest these statements" in court.

After the SC on May 15 invalidated Purkayastha's arrest, a Delhi court granted him bail in a case where he is alleged to have received money for carrying out "pro-China propaganda".

A source said the IO of New Delhi Range of Special Cell has sent notices under Section 43 of CrPc to all five persons last month, asking them to join the probe. "We are waiting for them to respond, and have received responses from Anand and Pawan," the source said.

In its chargesheet, Delhi Police said Singham and Purkayastha prepared a "service agreement" with Tricontinental Ltd.

The chargesheet said: "...Email communications between Singham, Vijay Prashad, Prabir and their associates established that Singham was actively pursuing the China line on Covid-19, despite mounting criticism of the same from the international community. Singham is seen clearly nudging Prabir and the PPK NewsClick team to peddle the Chinese version."

In the chargesheet, Delhi Police said, Singham, along with his associate Pletcher and partner Jodi Evans, created an obfuscated web of organisations — Worldwide Media Holdings, Justice & Education Fund, Inc. and People's Support Foundation — to infuse funds into NewsClick, owned by

Purkayastha.

"The incorporations of the offshore legal entities is indicative of the deepening bond between Singham and Prabir and the felt need to infuse greater funds into India with the progressive expansion of their unlawful agenda which included stoking and sustaining recent Delhi Riots, disinformation campaign on Covid-19, stoking farmer's protest and outright terror funding of banned LWE and Paks sponsored Kashmiri terrorist organizations," police alleged in their chargesheet.

In his statement, NewsClick's HR head Amit Chakraborty, who turned approver, claimed, "Prabir gave money to Anand Mangnale with the direction to give it further to Sharjeel Imam for inciting the Delhi Riots of 2020... Some amounts from the funds was also given to SFI activist Pawan Kulkarni to instigate protestors and create violence during CAANRC protests."

When contacted, Manglane said: "The Special Cell sent me a notice on April 10, over WhatsApp, saying that I was named in an FIR and directed me to be present at their office the next day. I informed them in writing that I am out of the country for work and will inform them when I am back. Meanwhile, I offered to respond to their questions over a VC or call at a time and date convenient for them. I also requested them for a copy of the FIR. I am still waiting to hear back from them."

Manglane also called Chakraborty's claims laughable. "This is nonsense. Delhi Police is painting doing normal jobs as a criminal conspiracy. As a citizen of India, I was against the divisive anti-CAA law & opposed it, and as a consultant with NewsClick, I was helping reporters from NewsClick to cover protests. Prabir giving me money to give to Sharjeel Imam and pushing riots and all is not only complete fabrication but also laughable. It sounds like a third-grade crime drama."

Pawan did not respond to attempts to contact him.



US-based businessman Neville Roy Singham

Purkayastha.

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ASI: Pavilion restoration at Hampi's Virupaksha temple to begin soon

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, MAY 24

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will soon begin the restoration work of the collapsed saalu mantapa or the pavilion of the Virupaksha temple in Hampi, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The ASI had drawn the ire of conservationists and activists after the pavilion consisting of three portions or line pillars collapsed following heavy rains on Tuesday night.

Conservationists noted that the pavilion which is 750 meters in length and 77.7 meters in width has always been fragile and activists had asked ASI officials and the deputy commissioner of Vijayanagara to take up restoration work on priority.

An ASI official said the restoration of pavilion was on the cards but it collapsed after the



The pavilion collapsed after heavy rain on Tuesday night

torrential rains Tuesday night.

"The restoration work will begin soon after completely dismantling the pavilion by tomorrow. The same dismantled stones will be used to restore pavilion on priority. The restoration work for the temple is underway in 3 phases (across the north and south sides) and we have already completed two phases. The cost required to

restore the collapsed pavilion is yet to be estimated," said a senior ASI official. "We are facing challenges in terms of funding and human resources," the official added. "We are making all efforts to protect monuments as per guidelines. As per ASI officials, work has started on Virupaksha temple premises," Deputy Commissioner of Vijayanagara MS Divakar said.

Religion as sole factor: Why HC quashed OBC quota for Muslims

AJOY SINHA KARPURAM
 NEW DELHI, MAY 24

THE CALCUTTA High Court has struck down a series of orders passed by the West Bengal government between March 2010 and May 2012 by which 77 communities (classes), 75 of which were Muslim, were given reservation under the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category.

A division Bench of Justices Tapabrata Chakraborty and Rajasekhar Mantha found that religion had been the "sole" basis for the West Bengal Backward Classes Commission and the state government to provide reservation, which is prohibited by the Constitution and court orders.

The HC's order happens to come in the middle of an election campaign in which reservation for Muslims has been a hot-button issue. The BJP, led by the Prime Minister,

has accused the opposition of seeking to take away reservation and other benefits from Hindus and giving them to Muslims.

Forty-two beneficiary classes, including 41 Muslim classes, were identified by West Bengal's previous Left Front government in 2010; the remaining 35, including 34 Muslim classes, were given reservation in 2012, after the Trinamool Congress came to power (in 2011).

Facts of the case

In its judgment delivered on May 22, the High Court noted that between March 5 and September 24, 2010, the West Bengal government issued several similarly-worded notifications, including "42 classes, of which 41 were from the Muslim community, as OBCs, entitling them to reservation and representation in Government Employment under Article 16(4) of the Constitution..."

Also, on September 24 of that year, an order was issued sub-categorising the 108

identified OBCs in the state (66 pre-existing and 42 newly identified) into 56 "OBC-A (more Backward)" and 52 "OBC-B (Backward)" categories.

The first challenge in the HC was filed in 2011 on the ground that "the declaration of 42 classes as OBCs was...based purely on religion", that "the categorisation is not based on any acceptable data, and that the survey conducted by the Commission was unscientific, and a prefabricated hat was made to fit the head".

In May 2012, the Mamata Banerjee government classified another 35 classes as OBC, 34 of which were from the Muslim community. This too was challenged in the HC.

In March 2013, the West Bengal Backward Classes (Other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) (Reservation of vacancies and posts) Act, 2012, was notified. All 77 (42+35) new OBCs were included

in Schedule I of the Act. Two petitions were filed challenging the Act.

Not solely religion

As with most cases where reservations have been challenged, the HC relied heavily on the Supreme Court's judgment in *Indra Sawhney v Union of India* (Mandal judgment).

A nine-judge Bench had held in 1992 that OBCs cannot be identified and given reservation only on the basis of religion. The SC also held that all states must establish a Backward Classes Commission to identify and recommend classes of citizens for inclusion and exclusion in the state OBC list.

In the present case, both the Commission and the government submitted that the Commission had identified the 77 classes based on applications received from citizens, and then recommended their inclusion to

the government.

The HC noted that the Commission's recommendation had been made with "lightning speed" after the then Chief Minister publicly announced a quota for Muslims (in February 2010), without using any "objective criteria" to determine the backwardness of these classes.

"Religion indeed appears to have been the sole criterion for declaring these communities as OBCs", and the reports that the Commission submitted were meant only to "curtain and hide such religion specific recommendations", the court said.

"This court's mind is not free from doubt that the said community has been treated as a commodity for political ends", and that the 77 classes identified were being treated as a "vote bank", it said.

Sub-classification of OBCs

The court also struck down portions of

West Bengal's 2012 Act, including (i) the provision that allowed the state government to "sub-classify" OBC reservations into OBC-A and OBC-B categories for "more backward" and "backward" classes respectively, and (ii) the provision allowing the state to amend the Schedule of the 2012 Act to add to the list of OBCs.

The Commission conceded that the government did not consult it before creating the sub-classification within OBC reservations — but argued that such an action was outside its "purview".

The court held that the state government must consult the Commission to make a fair and impartial classification, including sub-classification.

Sub-classification is meant to address the different levels of deprivation faced by different communities, which the court held could only be done by referring to material collected by the Commission.

EXPLAINED AI

WHAT ARE AI AGENTS AND HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT FROM LLMs?

BIJIN JOSE
 NEW DELHI, MAY 24

THE newly-launched GPT-4o by OpenAI and Google's Project Astra have one thing in common: both can process the real world through audio and visual inputs, and provide intelligent responses. Simply put, they can have instant real-time conversations with a user.

Known as 'AI agents', GPT-4o and Project Astra have been billed as far superior to conventional voice assistants such as Alexa, Siri, and Google Assistant.



Human-like chats are possible with an AI agent. Representational image

What are AI agents?

AI agents are sophisticated AI systems that can engage in real-time, multi-modal (text, image, or voice) interactions with humans. Unlike conventional language models, which solely work on text-based inputs and outputs, AI agents can process and respond to a wide variety of inputs including voice, images, and even input from their surroundings.

"You're not typing into a text box, waiting for a response, and then reading the output. You're actually interacting with the AI through voice just as you would with a human," Google CEO Sundar Pichai said during the launch of Project Astra.

AI agents perceive their environment via sensors, then process the information using algorithms or AI models, and subsequently take actions. Currently, they are being used in fields such as gaming, robotics, virtual assistants, autonomous vehicles, etc.

How are they different from LLMs?

While large language models (LLMs) like GPT-3 and GPT-4 can only generate human-like text, AI agents make interactions more natural and immersive with the help of voice, vision, and environmental sensors. Unlike LLMs, AI agents are designed for instantaneous, real-time conversations with responses that are similar to humans.

AI agents can also understand and learn from the context of interactions, allowing them to provide more relevant

and personalised responses. They can perform complex tasks autonomously such as coding, data analysis, etc. When integrated with robotic systems, AI agents can even perform physical actions.

What are their potential uses?

AI agents can serve as intelligent and capable assistants. They can handle an array of tasks, from offering personalised recommendations to scheduling appointments. Reports suggest that AI agents can be ideal for customer service as they can offer seamless natural interactions, and resolve queries instantly without actually the need for human interventions.

In the field of education and training, AI agents can act as personal tutors, customise themselves based on a student's learning styles, and may even offer a tailored set of instructions. In healthcare, they can assist medical professionals by providing real-time analysis, diagnostic support, and even monitoring patients.

What are the risks and challenges?

Privacy and security are a key area of concern as AI agents gain access to more personal data and environmental information. Just like any AI model, AI agents can carry forward biases from their training data or algorithms, leading to harmful outcomes. As these systems become more common, appropriate regulations and governance frameworks need to be laid out to ensure their responsible deployment.

EXPLAINED ECONOMICS

What jobs data show

Joblessness has hurt all religious communities and caste groups over the last eight years; none is better off in 2023-24 than in 2016-17. Among Hindus, employment rate for OBCs and SCs fell most sharply

UDIT MISRA
 NEW DELHI, MAY 24

IN APRIL, the research organisation Lokniti-CSDS published the results of a pre-election survey, which identified unemployment as the most important issue for voters. As many as 29% of respondents said jobs would be the biggest factor in the election.

Respective of how people may have actually voted (or may vote in the last two phases on May 25 and June 1), ground reports during the campaign have indicated significant concern over the employment situation. Data from the independent think tank Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) for the years 2016-17 to 2023-24 provide a good understanding of which social groups have been the worst hit by the scarcity or quality of jobs.

Basic concepts

The data tables alongside provide information on four variables. Only the main religions and castes have been considered.

■ **Working-age population:** This is the total population ages 15 and above.

■ **Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR):** This is the percentage of the working-age population that is demanding a job. It excludes for example, individuals like a 35-year-old married woman who is not actively looking for a job, or a 22-year-old who is still studying, or a 65-year-old who no longer wants to work. The LFPR represents the demand for jobs in an economy.

■ **Unemployment Rate (UER):** This is the percentage of people who are looking for a job but have not got one yet. UER is expressed as a percentage of the labour force.

All over the world, UER is often the most widely used metric to assess the health of the labour market. However, in India, it can give misleading results because India's LFPR has been falling. This can happen if people who have been unemployed for long decide to stop looking for/demanding a job. In such a case, the UER falls not because the economy has created more jobs, but because fewer people are demanding them.

As such, it is the best to read the movement in UER in conjunction with the movement in LFPR.

■ **Employment Rate (ER):** This is often considered the best metric to assess the health of employment in the Indian context. That's because it is the ratio of the total number of employed people to the working-age population. By definition, it circumvents the problem posed by reading UER in an economy where the LFPR rises or falls substantially over time. The ER provides a single number that best captures the health of employment in an economy.

TABLE 1
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY RELIGION, ALL INDIA

Year	All religions	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh	Buddhist
2016-17	7.42	7.28	8.79	8.00	6.4	8.35
2017-18	4.69	4.53	5.31	5.91	7.27	5.80
2018-19	6.25	6.22	6.17	4.78	8.86	6.13
2019-20	7.45	7.40	7.68	5.39	10.04	7.43
2020-21	8.75	8.73	9.22	7.16	9.09	7.25
2021-22	7.65	7.61	8.53	5.36	8.28	4.68
2022-23	7.55	7.59	7.67	4.4	8.53	4.47
2023-24	8.03	8.07	8.00	4.06	8.94	6.34
% point change	0.61	0.79	-0.79	-3.94	2.54	-2.01

TABLE 2
EMPLOYMENT RATE BY RELIGION, ALL INDIA

Year	All religions	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Sikh
2016-17	42.79	43.21	39.95	40.91	41.6
2017-18	41.66	41.93	39.66	42.53	40
2018-19	40.17	40.35	38.72	40.97	39.14
2019-20	39.5	39.68	37.85	40.56	38.68
2020-21	36.53	36.67	34.99	36.47	36.16
2021-22	37.02	37.21	34.74	38.13	36.58
2022-23	36.49	36.64	34.42	38.19	36.83
2023-24	37.18	37.26	35.5	40.43	37.4
% point change	-5.61	-5.95	-4.45	-0.48	-4.2

TABLE 3
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE BY CASTE, ALL INDIA

Year	All castes	Upper caste	Intermediate caste	OBC	SC	ST
2016-17	7.42	8.62	7.19	7.74	6.54	4.66
2017-18	4.69	5.68	4.64	4.5	4.29	3.51
2018-19	6.25	8.31	6.1	5.92	5.63	4.31
2019-20	7.45	9.83	7.16	7.02	6.94	4.87
2020-21	8.75	9.47	7.85	8.25	9.98	6.15
2021-22	7.65	9.24	7.83	7.05	8.04	5.01
2022-23	7.55	9.09	8.31	7.16	7.39	4.64
2023-24	8.03	9.83	9.6	7.38	7.62	5.6
% point change	0.61	1.21	2.41	-0.36	1.08	0.94

TABLE 4
EMPLOYMENT RATE BY CASTE, ALL INDIA

Year	All castes	Upper caste	Intermediate caste	OBC	SC	ST
2016-17	42.79	38.7	42.23	42.79	45.2	49.12
2017-18	41.66	38.08	40.63	41.36	44.12	48.21
2018-19	40.17	37.15	39.22	39.83	42.50	46.11
2019-20	39.5	36.64	38.78	39.04	41.58	46.35
2020-21	36.53	34.44	36.34	36.18	37.32	44.20
2021-22	37.02	34.11	36.47	36.63	38.40	45.55
2022-23	36.49	33.83	35.84	35.72	38.08	46.06
2023-24	37.18	34.49	36.55	36.43	38.84	46.24
% point change	-5.61	-4.21	-5.68	-6.36	-6.36	-2.88

All figures in per cent, All data from CMIE

omy. If it is rising, it implies that more people (as a percentage of the working-age population) are getting jobs; if it is falling, it shows that the percentage of people with jobs is falling.

LFPR by religion

For a developing economy such as India, a higher LFPR is typically considered better than a lower LFPR. It is also better if the LFPR shows a rising, rather than a falling trend over time.

The data are disappointing on both counts. At 46.22%, India's overall LFPR was already low in 2016-17, and declined by 5.8 percentage points over the past eight years. All major religions saw a decline.

UER by religion

Given that LFPR is falling, unemployment rate could be expected to fall, too. That's because a smaller proportion of the working-age population is demanding jobs. But as Table 1 shows, the overall unemployment rate in 2023-24 (8.03%) was higher than in 2016-17 (7.42%). Sikhs were the worst affected.

ER by religion

Table 2 shows that India's overall Employment Rate fell by 5.6 percentage points over the past eight years. The ER fell the most among Hindus — almost 6 percentage points to 37.26% in 2023-24.

Jobs data by caste

Which castes among the Hindus have seen the most job losses? Tables 3 and 4 provide some answers. In these tables, the "Intermediate castes" refer to castes such as Marathas, Jats, Gujjars, and others who often aspire to be included in the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category, to benefit from reservation.

LFPR by caste

The LFPR has fallen for all castes. But the data show that upper-caste Hindus have the lowest LFPR. In terms of the percentage decline in LFPR, OBCs and Scheduled Castes (SCs) — the two biggest working-age population groups — have seen the sharpest fall.

Unemployment Rate by caste

Ideally, when LFPR falls, the unemployment rate should fall, too. As Table 3 shows, this has happened for OBCs, where the UER has fallen from 7.7% in 2016-17 to 7.4% in 2023-24. However, this relationship does not hold true for other caste groups. The UER among upper castes, for instance, almost touched double digits in 2023-24.

Employment Rate by caste

ERs have fallen across the board, as the data in Table 4 show. OBCs and SCs, who had a much higher ER compared to upper castes in 2016-17, have been the worst affected. ERs in 2023-24 were lower by 6.36 percentage points for both categories, compared with a 4.21 percentage point decline for the upper castes.

Upper caste Hindus had the lowest employment rate in 2016-17, and this story has continued, albeit at a lower level.

LONGER VERSION ON indianexpress.com/explained

What Norway, Ireland, Spain's recognition of Palestine as a State means

RISHIKA SINGH
 NEW DELHI, MAY 24

NORWAY, IRELAND, and Spain said on Wednesday that they would recognise a State of Palestine on May 28, marking the first time a Western European country has committed to such recognition.

Being recognised as a "State" by other countries can support a region's aspiration to be seen as a legitimate political entity by the international community.

Espen Barth Eide, Norway's Minister of Foreign Affairs, said in a post on X: "At this critical juncture, our recognition comes in support of the work towards a comprehensive plan for regional peace."

Israel has said the recognition amounts to an attack on its sovereignty, and has recalled its ambassadors from all three countries.

What does it mean to be recognised as a State?

The Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States (1933), identified four conditions of a State: "a permanent population, defined territory, government, capacity to enter into relations with other states".

Statehood, according to *The Cambridge Companion to International Law*, "has long been the central organising idea in the international system". While several regions and peoples have over the years sought to declare themselves

as independent States, formal recognition depends on the view the rest of the world takes.

Article 4 of the United Nations Charter states: "Membership in the United Nations is open to all other peace-loving States which accept the obligations contained in the present Charter and, in the judgment of the Organization, are able and willing to carry out these obligations."



A Palestine flag at a students' protest camp in Barcelona, Spain. Reuters

Procedurally, admission to the UN as a Member State is granted by a two-thirds majority vote in the UN General Assembly. However, the UNGA takes up the candidature only upon the recommendation of the UN Security Council.

The UNSC comprises five permanent

members — the US, the UK, Russia, China, and France — and 10 temporary member countries chosen on a rotational basis. For the UNSC recommendation to pass there must be a vote, with at least nine members in favour and no permanent members using their veto. Essentially, it is the P5 who determine the fate of an issue in the UNSC.

What is Palestine's status at the UN?

Palestine is a "Permanent Observer State" — and not a "Member State" — at the UN. There is one other Permanent Observer State in the UN — the Holy See.

Palestine is allowed to "participate in all of the Organization's proceedings, except for voting on draft resolutions and decisions in its main organs and bodies, from the Security Council to the General Assembly and its six main committees".

Palestine graduated to the status of "non-member Permanent Observer State" from having Observer status in 2012. Mahmud

Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, had then hoped for the exercise to "breathe new life" into the peace process.

Palestine has attempted to secure membership in the UN as a State in the past, most recently in April this year. At the UNSC, the United States, Israel's staunchest ally, had vetoed its admission.

143 of the UN's 193 members already recognise Palestine as a State. Most of these countries are in Asia, Africa, and South America. India accorded recognition in 1988.

What is the significance of the move?

Recognition as a State lies at the heart of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, and to decide their political future and government. The move by Norway and the other countries puts some extra pressure on Western nations who have backed a "two-state" solution to the conflict. However, it is not likely to bring any real change in the situation of Palestinians in West Bank or Gaza.

When a state recognises another, it usually leads to the setting up of an embassy and posting of diplomatic officials in that country. The Norwegian Foreign Minister has said that its representative office to the Palestinian Authority, which was opened in the West Bank in 1999, would become an embassy.

The move marks a breaking of the ranks in the West's backing of Israel in the Gaza war, which has divided peoples and countries around the world.

Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has said he has taken the decision "out of moral conviction, for a just cause and because it is the only way that the two states, Israel and Palestine, can live together in peace". He has said that while "fighting the terrorist group Hamas is legitimate and necessary", Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "is creating so much pain and so much destruction and so much rancour in Gaza and the rest of Palestine that the two-state solution is in danger".

16 REVIEWS

CINEMA & MUSIC



Damp Squib

BHAIYYA JI

Director: Apoorv Singh Karki
Cast: Manoj Bajpayee, Suvinder Vicky, Zoya Hussain, Akash Makhija, Bhagratni Bai Kadam, Jatin Goswami

SHALINI LANGER

EXACTLY TO the date a year ago, director Apoorv Singh Karki and actor Manoj Bajpayee came together in a film called *Sif Ek Banda Kaafi Hai*. That was Bajpayee playing a lawyer helping a victim of self-styled godman's Asaram Bapu's sex assault. This time, Karki and Bajpayee have gone literal — there is *sif ek banda* in *Bhaiyya Ji*, and *kaafi* or not, that is all there is. In a rare marvel of filmmaking, Karki, director and co-writer, has made a film that you can drop into at any time — and not bother whether it is the start, middle or end. For, after a reasonably nice beginning when Bhaiyya Ji (Bajpayee), in the midst of his wedding festivities somewhere in Bihar, is worrying winsomely over younger brother Vedant (Makhija) who is coming over by train from Delhi, and then growing increasingly frantic as Vedant goes missing, the film's record is stuck.

Revenge has to be had, particularly when the killer of Vedant is the no-good and blood-thirsty son, Abhimanyu (Goswami), of a remarkably sense-free ganglord, Chandrabhan Singh (played by Suvinder Vicky, who impressed in *Kohra*).

But how to wreak that revenge, and how many times? And we are not even sure whether Bhaiyya Ji, who apparently gave up violence for some wedded bliss with Mithali (Hussain) or for some other reason that is mumbled through by way of an explanation at super-double speed, has actually gone down a pacifist path, which he will now abandon.

But thanks to some very crude and cruel prodding by Vedant's mother, and his stepmother (Kadam), Bhaiyya Ji is left with little choice but to proceed to Chandrabhan's palatial mansion somewhere in Delhi and demand "justice". Before that happens, a medallion encasing a lion's face amidst sun's rays is brought out of a box with much fanfare, and makes its way around Bihar, causing people to literally piss in their pants. Such is the lore of this ganglord who wreaks justice with a shovel, with much allegorical dust flying about — all the better to establish Bhaiyya Ji's subaltern origins, maybe, compared to Chandrabhan's palace and his velvet waistcoats?

Supporters down their shutters and join Bhaiyya Ji's fight at the sight of the medallion, held aloft as a signal, and Bhaiyya Ji lands in Delhi with at least his entire village in tow. There is a glimmer of hope that Karki is suggesting a Bihari sub-network that runs through cities such as Delhi that people like us see and not see — and that this could be Bhaiyya Ji's biggest strength. Nope. We have clashes, more clashes, yet more clashes, and then some more. There is a Lord Shiva procession as a backdrop for one of them, for no reason at all, and unending chatter about the *bhakti aatma* of Vedant because the ritualistic crown hasn't eaten the offering after his death.

Then Mithali, a nicely well-rounded Hussain — giving us another hope that Karki is embracing a body type more natural to an older woman — drops in to lend a hand and her sniper-shooter skills. Her parents at one time appear to warn her about hanging around with a man of violence like Bhaiyya Ji. As Mithali unleashes the sheer range of her killing skills, it is clear they know as little as we do.

One wishes one can say that Bajpayee does his role credit. But, before that, he has to give himself some credit. And here, he just doesn't.

Punch to the Gut

JAGGI

★★★★

Director: Anmol Sidhu
Cast: Ramnish Chaudhary, Harmandeep Singh, Gaurav Kumar
Streaming on: MUBI

ROHAN NAAHAR

A BULLIED young man is held to the toxic standards of masculinity in *Jaggi*, an uncompromising film set in a Punjab that often resembles a post-apocalyptic wasteland. Directed by Anmol Sidhu and featuring a groundbreaking performance by Ramnish Chaudhary, Jaggi functions as a distressing companion piece to Lukas Dhont's *Close*, the Belgian drama that dealt with similar themes.

Stitched together with a series of searing sequences that Sidhu films with an unbroken gaze, as if he's actively repairing the raggedy remains of his titular protagonist's soul, the movie opens with a flashy shot that immediately sets the tone for what's to follow. Jaggi is sitting by himself in an aban-

FURIOSA: A MAD MAX SAGA

★

Director: George Miller
Cast: Anna Taylor-Joy, Chris Hemsworth, Tom Burke, Lachy Hulme, Charlee Fraser

SHUBHRA GUPTA

IN *MAD Max: Fury Road*, Charlize Theron comprehensively busted the myth that a big-budget actioner couldn't be helmed by a woman, and gave us a hero for the ages. Operating without an arm, fleeing across a post-apocalyptic desert with a group of women, she towered over the sand-blasted landscape, and the movie — the fourth in the Mad Max franchise.

Being a huge fan of the 2015 film, I'd been waiting breathlessly for the prequel — *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga*, which premiered in Cannes last week. The backstory of a favourite character is always an exciting proposition, especially after George Miller had created such a propulsive yet felt blockbuster, a tough combination to pull off, and even more so with humans having to compete against giant vehicles — one of the signature tracks of the Mad Max franchise — racing through large vistas.



But sadly, this new *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* is a colossal bore. All of the crashing and banging, the fleet of odd-bods, including masked creatures wearing strange uniforms, the convoys crisscrossing the desert pockmarked with caves and cliffs, is just a lot of noise, signifying less than nothing. We are back in the familiar post-apoca-

lyptic world where water and gas are scarce and law and order have completely disintegrated. Gangs roam about freely, and battles keep breaking out. There is one oasis called the Green Place, where a young Furiosa is being raised by her mother (Fraser) amidst peace and quiet. Things kick into high gear when young

Furiosa is abducted, and driven full-tilt into the camp lorded over by the wild-eyed Dementus (Hemsworth) who stomps about in a cape adorned by a tiny teddy bear. With Hemsworth hamming it up for all he's worth, you think there will be some fun and games to be had, but things plummet soon and keep going south.

For one, Taylor-Joy's doe-eyed Furiosa takes time to get into her stride. An interminable hour goes by before we see the girl who is the reason for the new film. Before that, we have Dementus and his gang going up against the fearsome warlord Immortan Joe (Hulme) and his Citadel, flush with food and water. A great deal of uninteresting scurrying and scuffling takes place in this fortress-like structure, and when Furiosa does break free, hooking up with Praetorian Jack (Burke), you again feel a glimmer of hope. But no, the film goes right back into the grinding and groaning of an endless line of vehicles. Poor Taylor-Joy, for all her huffing and puffing, never does catch enough breaks.

For another, it's hard to get the fabulous Theron out of our heads. As a hero of mythic proportions — woman-saviour-fighter, a fount of feminine energy — you can't get better. Nothing in this pale prequel matches up, despite all its pedal-to-the-metal forays, and it comes off as a monumental dud.

Crowning Glory

A GENTLEMAN IN MOSCOW

★★★★

Director: Ben Vanstone
Cast: Ewan McGregor, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Fehinti Balogun, Johnny Harris, Alexa Goodall, Beau Gadsdon, Björn Hlynur Haraldsson, Leah Harvey, John Heffernan
Streaming On: Prime Video



ROHAN NAAHAR

IN SHOWTIME'S *A Gentleman in Moscow*, Ewan McGregor plays Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov, a charming aristocrat who is sentenced to life for the crime of being born into nobility. He is stripped of his titles, and summarily shipped off to spend the rest of his days at the grand Hotel Metropol in the middle of Moscow.

The year is 1921; the Bolsheviks have just staged a successful revolution against the Tsarist regime, making people like Alexander enemies of the state. While other noblemen are lined up against a wall and shot, Alexander is allowed to live because of a cruel twist of fate: he once wrote a poem that was appropriated by the Communists. It's like Bhagat Singh inadvertently inspiring the RSS with *Khayalan Ki Bijli*.

And so, as a 20-something who hasn't worked a day in his life — "It is not the business of a gentleman to have an occupation," he scoffs at the tribunal during his sentencing hearing — Alexander is stuffed into cramped servant's quarters in the attic of the hotel, with the assurance that meals would be provided to him by the state on the condition that he doesn't leave Metropol's premises. It's a tough deal but even though he

never explicitly mentions it, it is obvious that Alexander is grateful for not having been sent to the Gulag instead.

Based on the acclaimed 2016 novel by Amor Towles, *A Gentleman in Moscow* is about as perfect as prestige TV dramas can get — a bittersweet, life-affirming tale of triumph in the face of insurmountable odds. Alexander's aristocratic background and general air of superiority don't exactly make him an instantly appealing character, especially when he's surrounded by members of the working class who've suddenly been elevated in the eyes of Mother Russia. But that's where McGregor's performance comes in. Broader complications of playing someone across several decades aside, McGregor instills in Alexander an unwavering dignity, a twinkling sincerity and endless empathy for others.

A Gentleman in Moscow doesn't let him wallow, although it allows him a bout of sadness when he needs it. In his entrapment, he finds emancipation.

To penetrate the protagonist's mind with such clarity would be difficult for any show to accomplish, but it is especially admirable here, because Towles' towering novel would make frequent detours into the inner landscape of its protagonist's psyche. Creator Ben Vanstone and his team strike a fine balance

between the cruel irony of Alexander's predicament and his ability to make the most of his surroundings — he lives in relative luxury, while the world outside witnesses upheaval.

A natural charmer — Alexander is well-versed in virtually all matters under the sun, including gastronomy, literature, and, somewhat significantly, apples — he makes friends everywhere he goes. And before long, he begins to view the hotel's staff — the receptionist Vasily, the head waiter Andre, the barman Audrius, the seamstress Marina, and the chef Emile — as his family. Over time, they become equals, a transformation that the show symbolically communicates in a scene where thousands of wine bottles in the hotel's cellar have their labels removed by the newly empowered proletariat. In the eyes of an aesthete like Alexander, it is an act of vandalism akin to Tchaikovsky being performed on a Casio keyboard.

But it is only when he befriends an unsupervised little girl named Nina — a long-term resident of the hotel like himself — that Alexander truly evolves as a person. And in episode three — every episode functions as a self-contained story in itself — Alexander enters into a romance with a silent film star named Anna Urbanova, played by Mary Elizabeth Winstead. What begins as a brief

fling turns into an epic love story. We never follow Ana outside Metropol's four walls, but like every supporting character in the show — a glowering 'villain' named Osip gets perhaps the most resonant arc — she emerges as a fully fleshed-out person by the time Alexander is ready to make more active choices, following a lifetime of passively adjusting to whatever googly was hurled at him.

A Gentleman in Moscow is unflinching in its affection for its hero, rarely making the mistake to suggest that he is in any way at peace. Alexander might have adapted to his surroundings, but crucially, he hasn't become acclimatised to them. Artfully filmed flashbacks project him as a more complicated man than we'd been led to believe, and McGregor grabs every opportunity he gets to milk his melancholia. On the outside, Hitler's forces make inroads across Europe; some years later, they are defeated. A few decades later, Stalin dies. But Alexander's existence revolves not around the petty politics of man, but his found family.

Watching *A Gentleman in Moscow* isn't unlike watching *The Shawshank Redemption* for the first time. It's the kind of show that can, with a well-placed wail of a cello, or a perfectly timed close-up, sweep you off your feet with its unique blend of old world charm and immersive thrills.



two people he lashes out against are those that he considers, in a way, inferior to himself. Effects of his own conditioning.

Word of Jaggi's impotence spreads like wildfire around school after his classmates cruelly declare that he's gay. It doesn't take too long for the predators to start prowling; a teacher corners him in the washroom, and two seniors lure him under a bridge with the promise of giving him some local remedy for his medical condition. They proceed to rape

him. Sidhu shoots this scene like the controversial subway sequence in Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible*. The abuse intensifies to the point that Jaggi cannot set foot outside his house without being targeted. He drops out of school and devotes his days to farming — tending to and destroying the land that can give and take in equal measure.

Jaggi's story is also the story of Punjab, of a land and a people trapped in a perpetual state of disrepair, abused by invader after in-

vader across centuries, before deciding that self-destruction is the only escape. Every year, in order to keep its fertility intact, the landscape is razed by its own people. This sustained cultural horror has been manifesting in extreme ways recently. While the mainstream does what traumatised Punjabis have been doing for years — putting a big smile on their face and pretending everything is *changa*, independent filmmakers have been rebelling against this narrative. *Jaggi* is about the masks that people wear in public, but often, about those that they pull over their eyes.

Jaggi's abusers are noticeably belting out a Chamkila song in one scene, as they sneak up on him. Jaggi's tormentors certainly didn't attack him because they listen to music that celebrates hyper-masculinity, but they were certainly encouraged by it.

Jaggi is an act of cinematic assault. Not everybody will be able to tolerate it; fewer will be able to forgive it. Nor should they. It's provocative, nihilistic, and ultimately uninterested in catharsis. But after over an hour and a half of bleak brutality, the movie ends on a rather baffling note, choosing to position an act of retribution as a noble self-sacrifice, and undermining the sheer ugliness of its earlier creative choices by tacking on a voiceover that wouldn't feel out of place in a timid Ayyushmann Khurrana film.

STREAMING WATCH LIST

BY ALAKA SAHANI



CREW

NETFLIX

One of this year's much talked-about movies, *Crew* is a heist comedy with a twist. Headlined by Kareena Kapoor Khan, Tabu and Kriti Sanon, it follows the adventures three air hostesses of an airlines company on the verge of bankruptcy. However, not everything is to be taken on face value. With charm, wit, and a little turbulence, the leading ladies turn their in-flight service into a golden opportunity. The film is directed by Rajesh A Krishnan and dives deep into female friendships and resilience.



WANTED MAN

LIONSGATE PLAY

In the hope of saving his job, Travis Johansen, an aging detective makes his way across the Mexican border to extradite a woman who witnessed the murder of two DEA agents. Starring Dolph Lundgren, this edge-of-the-seat action thriller sees Travis walk the invisible string of trust as he realizes his own are conniving against him.

ANGRY BIRDS: MYSTERY ISLAND ... A HATCHLINGS ADVENTURE S1

PRIME VIDEO

This dialogue-free animated original series follows the lives of three new hatchlings — Mia, Rosie, and Buddy — and a foreign-exchange piglet named Hamylton, who are on their all-expenses-paid island getaway and are introduced in *Angry Birds Mystery Island*. Left to explore the exotic sights of their new environment without any adults around, they find themselves mistakenly catapulted onto an uncharted island.



RATHNAM

PRIME VIDEO

Tamil film *Rathnam*, featuring Vishal, follows a fiery young man, who grapples with a turbulent past and struggles to control his violent instincts, especially against those who mistreat women. A trusted aide to an MLA, Rathnam's life takes a dramatic turn when he meets Mallika, a nurse who strikingly resembles his mother. What unfolds is a gripping tale of Rathnam's struggle to protect her while confronting his inner demons.



MULIGANS 2

NETFLIX

This animated comedy series is about Matty Mulligan — the everyman who becomes president after Earth is destroyed by aliens. The first season left off with our motley group of survivors (who believed themselves to be the last people on Earth), discovering they're not alone when a cruise ship full of sunburned strangers washes up on the Potomac River. In the new season, Matty and his constituents realise that this group of booze-cruisers hasn't been surviving the same way they have.

17 SPORT

BCCI denies approaching Aussies for India coach role

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

A DAY after Justin Langer said that he had turned down the chance to coach the Indian men's cricket team after being approached, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Jay Shah clarified that no one from BCCI had approached "any former Australian cricketer with a coaching offer". Not just Langer, who is currently working with the Lucknow SuperGiants, former Australian captain Ricky Ponting, who with the Delhi Capitals, also revealed that he had been sounded out about a possible coaching role with the Indian team, but had refused.



"Neither I nor the BCCI have approached any former Australian cricketer with a coaching offer. The reports circulating in certain media sections are completely incorrect," BCCI secretary Jay Shah said in a statement. "Finding the right coach for our national team is a meticulous and thorough process. We are focused on identifying individuals who possess a deep understanding of the Indian cricket structure and have risen through the ranks. It's crucial that our coach has an in-depth knowledge of our domestic cricket framework to truly elevate Team India to the next level."

Langer had told BBC's Stumped podcast that a chat with LSG skipper KL Rahul had led to him declining India offer.

"I was talking to KL Rahul (the captain at Lucknow Super Giants, where Langer is the head coach) and he said, 'You know, if you think there's pressure and politics in an IPL team, multiply that by a thousand, (that's) coaching India. That was a good bit of advice, I guess,'" Langer shared. Meanwhile, Ponting had told ICC Review that he had turned down the India offer because it did not "fit into his lifestyle right now".

"Normally these things pop up on social media before you even know about them, but there were a few little one-on-one conversations during the IPL, just to get a level of interest from me as to whether I would do it."

SpinRisers Hyderabad

Left-armed spinners Shahbaz (3/23) and Abhishek (2/24) play major roles as SRH beat RR by 36 runs

SYNOPSIS

Sunrisers Hyderabad's attack steps up to eliminate Rajasthan Royals and book final date with KKR.

VENKATA KRISHNA B
CHENNAI, MAY 24

Twist in the tale

On a humid day, expecting the dew to play a big role in the second half of the match, Rajasthan Royals chose to bowl after winning the toss. With a series of slow bouncers and cutters, RR kept the big-hitting Sunrisers Hyderabad batsmen in check. But the dew stayed away and SRH bowlers choked the run flow and went one up to win by 36 runs and book a place in the final.

In the IPL league stage, spinners had taken just five wickets at Chepauk. Once a venue with slow wickets that aided spinners, the current strips have no traces of the past. After having restricted Hyderabad to 175/9, it appeared to be RR's game to lose. Hyderabad were yet to defend a total less than 180 this IPL and at Chennai, they have had just one win in 10 matches.

But the stats didn't matter on the big night. The Hyderabad attack showed the right sort of discipline that was needed, the pitch played its part too. The degree of turn on offer in the first innings when Rajasthan bowled was 1.8. But when Hyderabad's spinners ran through the Rajasthan's line-up, they found 3.3 degrees of turn. In a season where matches involving Hyderabad have turned into six-hitting contests, on Friday it were the dot balls that swung the result their way.

Having consumed 41 dot balls when they batted, Hyderabad's bowlers bowled 55 dots. For Rajasthan to sneak ahead, they needed a good powerplay. Since May, their form has been on a downward spiral. After arresting it in the Eliminator, they weren't at their best in Qualifier II. After making only 24 runs off the first four overs, they did well to make 51 in the powerplay, losing only Tom Kohler-Cadmore.

But thereafter, spinners Shahbaz Ahmed and Abhishek Sharma would take full control of the proceedings, picking up five wickets between them as Rajasthan's batting combusted under pressure. With the pitch offering enough assistance, the two spinners didn't do anything extraordinary but stuck to the basics and combined to bowl 8 overs and concede just 47 runs. It was an outstanding performance on a night where Rajasthan's experienced spinners R Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal went wicketless — going for 77 runs in their eight overs.



Shahbaz Ahmed was the star performer for SRH on Friday. Sportzpics

Hyderabad's Plan B

Despite all the high scores that MA Chidambaram Stadium has seen this season, it still remains a venue where batting units

have to shift gears at different points. For Hyderabad, who have played only in top gear during most of the season, this was a test of character.

With the Qualifier II being played on a new strip (pitch No.7), they had short dimensions on one side (61 metres) to make full use of. But for that to work, they needed one of their two openers — who happened to be the only left-handers in the top-6 — to play an outstanding innings. With just five bowling options, using R Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal, with short boundaries on one side, was a big risk. Rajasthan were tactically good with the ball though. Fast bowler Trent Boult began the night by removing Abhishek Sharma in

RAUF NAMED IN PAK T20 WC SQUAD

Dubai: Having recovered from an injury, experienced pacer Haris Rauf was on Friday named in Pakistan's 15-member squad, which will be led by star batter Babar Azam during next month's ICC T20 World Cup to be held in the Americas from June 2.

PTI

FIH PRO LEAGUE

India no match for Belgium's tiki-taka

MIHIR VASAVDA
MAY 24

OFTEN playing the role of a player-coach on the field, PR Sreejesh flailed his arms and, from underneath his helmet, yelled at his teammates to let them know how exactly he was feeling about their performance. The microphones couldn't exactly capture his tirade. But the goalkeeper's body language suggested he must not have had pleasant things to say. India's Pro League match against Belgium was only 14 minutes old when that happened. But if Sreejesh was trying to wake up the rest of the team, his hollering didn't have the desired effect.

India went on to lose 4-1. The scoreline, however, wasn't the worst thing about the feeble submission to Belgium on Thursday. The result in matches like these in the build-up to the Olympics always come with an asterisk — although for how long India's under-performance can be seen as an 'experiment' or 'holding the cards close to their chest' can be debated. The worrying bits for India would be the collapse in the face of Belgium's subjugation and the fact that for the second overseas tour in a row, after Australia last month, India have been slow off the blocks. Their start to the Belgium leg of the Pro League has been similar. India haven't yet gotten going in their two matches so far, against Argentina and the hosts. At the Paris Olympics, they will not have the luxury to ease in. If India drop points in any of their early matches — one of them will be against Argentina — they will have a lot of catching up to do later on and that might be tough given they end their group-stage commitments against Belgium and Australia, the two teams against whom they have consistently struggled.

Craig Fulton's side looked overawed by the Olympic champions' tiki-taka hockey. Despite an identical starting XI from the previous day, there were times in the match when it felt like they were playing with each other for the first time. The Indian players were left to chase shadows as Belgium moved the ball around from stick to stick at dizzying speed. The relentless pressing meant India kept on losing possession cheaply. The 1-4 scoreline could have been worse. In the first quarter alone, Tanguy Cosyns had three golden chances to score, each arising from a defensive mistake. A lot of India's mistakes were forced because of Belgium's aggressive pressing. But on the rare occasion when India pressed high, the way Fulton wanted, Belgium would steal the ball and counterattack so quickly that it would catch India off guard.

That's how Belgium scored the first goal in the 22nd minute. Mandeep Singh attempted to block Oliver Biekens' pass and behind him, the rest of India's players covered the other channels. But Belgium deceived India by faking passes, showing one way and going the other, and with sublime one-touch play they bypassed the midfield and entered the 'D'. Sreejesh didn't decisively block the initial attempt on goal, which kept the ball in play. His half-hearted save fell at the stick of Felix Denayer, who was completely unmarked and simply had to tap the ball into the goal of an out-of-position Sreejesh.

It was a rare off day for Sreejesh, who was outstanding against Argentina. He let the ball slip between his legs to concede the second goal from a penalty corner. It didn't help that none of his teammates, save for Manpreet Singh who was better than most, put their hand up and took responsibility. The young Abhishek raised some hopes with a finely-taken tomahawk that beat the Belgian goalkeeper and reduced India's deficit in the 55th minute. But that was a mere consolation on a night when India were far from their best.

Dissecting Klaasen's forearm-powered takedown of Chahal

SANDIP G
MAY 24

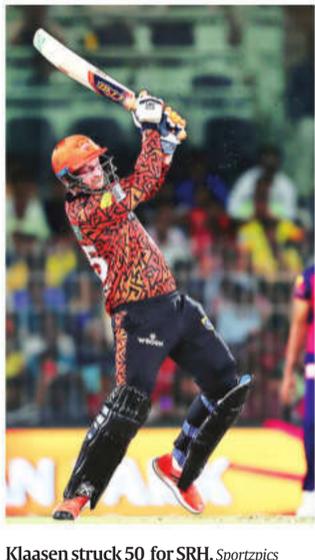
A NEW entry is knocking to enter the cricketering lexicon. The Klaasen thump. Or in more detail, the Klaasen thump off spinners. Or more specifically, the Klaasen thump off leg-spinners over extra cover. A phalanx of leg-spinners could offer testimonials. All of Imran Tahir, his ex-international colleague, Adam Zampa, Wanindu Hasaranga and, least of all, Yuzvendra Chahal, have felt the ruthless brunt of his lashing blade. It's like the Greenidge cut; or the Ponting pull, or the Tendulkar straight drive. Known by the second name, distinctive and defining.

The Rajasthan Royals leg-spinner has seen and endured it in the past. Six years ago in Centurion, the South African ransacked 42 runs off 12 balls in a T20 in Cuttack, he smeared him for three sixes in a shellacking 81 off 46 balls. The chess player-turned-leg-spinner might pore through countless videos of Heinrich Klaasen and plot numerous moves, apart from first-hand experience. Yet, he could not prevent the inevitable.

It all begins with the spinner dropping

the ball a fraction short. Not short in half-tracker range, not even back-of-length, but just a trifle shorter than good length, so as to hurry the batsman, a flipper gone slightly wrong, or an endeavour to over-spin and create bounce, or a mere change of length. The Chepauk surface did whip up some bounce, more spongy than a trampoline. It's all that Klaasen wants. A wee bit of space. He makes half a stride backwards. It's where he differs from most batsmen, who shuffle towards the leg side to manufacture room for the fluent swing of the blade, to generate the impetus for the stroke to soar over the ropes over extra cover.

But Klaasen stands still. He does not need the swing of the blade to generate power. A flex of the forearms suffices. If there is an all-forearm player — like an all-hands batsman — he would be the one. The stroke bursts from nothingness. It's as though he were going to punch the ball off the back foot through covers, for a single or two. But he then takes the front foot away, opens up his guard, spreads his chest like an angry bouncer in a bar, gets on top of the bounce and clumps it over extra cover with a brisk upward thrusting of arms. Chahal smiled wryly. He knew Klaasen would play the shot,



Klaasen struck 50 for SRH. Sportzpics

and he knew he wouldn't stop it.

It was all forearms fury — more than hand-eye coordination. An excited Ravi Shastri, on air, would gush: "You need to be a strong man to play that shot, really strong." Colleague Matthew Hayden warned the potential impersonators: "Don't try this at home." It comes strictly with a parental guidance label.

Bends his upper body

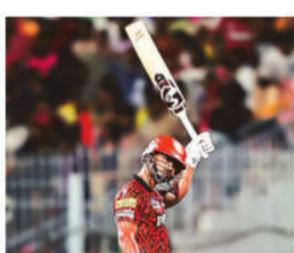
A side-on frame shows how he bends his upper body really back, the entire weight on his backfoot, functioning as the axis of his body, as he powers the ball over extra cover. The visual effect is such that he seems to have mistimed it — less powerful batsmen do end up mistiming — but it invariably reaches the stands. "I try and keep it simple; the focus has been to have my head and hands dead still. Sometimes when you go searching for the ball, the up and down movement of the hands cause some inconsistency. The trick is to have hands and head as dead and still as possible," he once explained about his batting.

Batsmen clearing the extra cover is not a rare sight, but often they dance down the track, as Virat Kohli does, or Herschelle Gibbs used to. Gibbs too was a ruthless destroyer of spin

bowling, like Klaasen. This stroke though was more reminiscent of Lance Klusener, in the sheer fury of the forearms and how he wields those to generate power and elevation, hitting the ball to those parts of the ground perceived difficult to hit off the back foot.

Fearing the shot, bowlers stray onto his body, which is another strength of his. He hangs on the back foot, and when they err slightly on the shorter side, he would merely pounce on them. Like the two pulls he employed off who else, but Chahal, who he insists is a good friend of his. Neither ball was too short begging to be hit, neither had much width for a free swing but he went back, swayed his body a bit and unleashed those massive forearms. In the process, he neutralized one of Royals' trump card too, besides sustaining momentum that the top-order had infused.

In the past he has spoken about his love for leg-spinners and duels with Chahal. "I fancy him quite a lot. Especially when I was in amateur cricket, there were a couple of quality leg-spinners in that time when I started my career. I faced (leg-spinner) Shaun von Berg at the Titans (Klaasen's domestic team) a lot as well. We always joke that I need to finish the other leg-spinners' career so he can go up!" Beware the Klaasen Thump. The wrath of his forearms.



Touch too good for himself

RAHUL TRIPATHI was aghast at himself when he ramped a slow bouncer straight to the hands of the short third man. But only after he had played one of the most breathtaking cameos of the season. A no-look whip over the fine-leg fence would barge into the sixes reel of the tournament. But he reserved his real mastery against R Ashwin. By picking the ball from the stumps and moving across, he straightaway unsettled the off-spinner. After being swept for four, Ashwin dug into his variations. But Tripathi crunched the carrom ball over cover, he resorted to the reverse carrom, which he delectably cut with velvet hands of his. A no-look six and a fierce cut ensued. But he was in such irresistible touch that he could not but ramp the slow bouncer to short third. His touch, in the end, was too good for himself.

Head, balance of mind and body

TRAVIS HEAD was in no hurry. After zeroes in his previous two outings, he was understandably watchful. It was not until the tenth ball that he struck his first four, which just about took his strike rate past 100. He has been leathering the ball at 200. But he would reap the rewards for the more orthodox methods. Eyes set, feet moving fluently, he unspooled a variety of strokes. None as compelling as the pick-up pull on one leg off Avesh Khan. The commentators likened it to Brian Lara's identical stroke. Perhaps, without that mystical pre-delivery shuffle or the lassolike bat-swing. But he exuded a similar grace (an attribute you wouldn't often attribute to him), playing the ball right under his eyes and flicking more than pulling the ball at the most ideal time. The balance was imperious and he struck the pose in his follow-through for an eternity.



EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER

HOT HEADS, CALM MINDS AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN AT THE GAME



Trent Boult has been like Thanos for RR with the new ball. Sportzpics

Boult, inevitable

TRAVIS HEAD came into the match on the back of two first-over ducks, bowled by left-arm pacers. So there was a lot of intrigue around the first ball as Trent Boult came steaming in. But unlike his usual accuracy, Boult gave Head a nice little short ball around the hips and he nervily tucked it away for a quick single to get off strike. Abhishek Sharma then teed off as he has been doing all season. A six over midwicket was so sweetly timed it made you wonder if this was just the first over of the match. Then a four down the ground. Advantage SRH again? Na, Boult in the powerplay is like Thanos...he's inevitable. A short-of-length ball bounced extra on a fresh pitch, and it hurried Abhishek, who skied one to point. One half of the 'Travishek Express' was seen off early as Boult did Boult things.

A nod, then a response

YUZVENDRA CHAHAL vs Heinrich Klaasen... it was a chess-like battle. Chahal knows a thing or two about that. Against one of the fiercest strikers against spin in the world right now, Chahal had to put his thinking cap on. After bowling a dot ball on his pads, Chahal knew Klaasen would try to give himself room. Next ball, the leggie saw Klaasen back away and fired a wide yorker in that would have made the likes of Avesh Khan and Sandeep Sharma proud. Klaasen was beaten, and he nodded in approval. Two balls later, he'd show his class though. The South African has a stunning ability to pick length early, and hit sixes off backfoot even when the ball is not that full. So he rocked back, and merely lifted a drive-punch over extra cover for six. A truly extraordinary shot on a night when the SRH run-machine wasn't quite free-flowing.



Tom and dreary

DURING THE IPL playoffs, there is an initiative to plant a certain number of saplings for every dot ball bowled. The way Tom Kohler-Cadmore went in RR's run-chase in the punishing heat and humidity of Chepauk, it seemed he was batting for a better environment. The Englishman struggled for any sort of momentum as he played out 10 dot balls in a powerplay that RR would have wanted to maximise. Kevin Pietersen on air almost sounded exasperated about how the batter was losing his shape. Coming in as the replacement for Jos Buttler is no easy task, but TKC seemed to be trying extra hard to justify that role. Eventually, his struggles came to an end as he skied a length ball from Pat Cummins to be caught out. A 16-ball 10 was a nightmare that he would be hoping to wake up from some time.

'Gukesh is calculation-based, Pragg is more intuitive, Arjun is complete mad man'

Ahead of Norway Chess, Magnus Carlsen says the current generation of Indians is the strongest and most dangerous to emerge from the country

AMIT KAMATH

FORMER FIVE-TIME World Champion Magnus Carlsen found himself in uncharted territory recently. The man who was earmarked for chess greatness before he was even a teenager was recently competing at an event in Poland where he was the oldest player in the event. On top of that, the 10-man field had three Indians. Both those things were a sign of things to come in the sport, but Carlsen thinks it is "refreshing".

Ahead of the Norway Chess tournament in his home country, the five-time world champion sat down with *The Indian Express* in an exclusive interview where he spoke about why he's happy about India's chess revolution; what's the common thread between Indian GMs like Viswanathan Anand and new-gen stars like D Gukesh and R Praggnanandhaa; weighed in on Elon Musk's comment that chess could be fully solved in 10 years and a lot more. Excerpts:

We recently saw you competing at the Casablanca Chess event. Before that you were at the Freestyle G.O.A.T Chess event. What do you find appealing about these events?

I found the Casablanca event interesting for sure. I definitely enjoyed the Freestyle Chess event that we had in February even more because it was held in a Classical time control and I think that when you're playing positions that are unfamiliar to the players from the start, it's good to have a bit of extra time. I enjoyed that event for sure and I think it's quite useful.

If you see at the youth levels, Indians are absolutely dominating. Also in terms of sheer numbers of youth players, there is no match. I'm thoroughly impressed by the chess revolution that has happened in India.

Do you see these events as the future of chess and maybe something that will interest you a lot more than traditional chess going forward?

I generally feel that faster chess is a huge part of the future. But I also hope that variants can be something that you can play at longer time controls.

Elon Musk recently said that chess is close to being fully solved in 10 years. Do you agree with that?

I'm not a mathematician. I have no idea. From what I have heard we now have seven-pieces databases and you would need 32 pieces for it to be solved fully. For chess to be solved in 10 years, it could only be in a few specific variations. I'm sure that chess is solved in the sense that the correct result is a draw. There is very little doubt about that. But apart from that, I don't really know. I think chess is so complicated that its viability will certainly continue for a long time.



Magnus Carlsen has played against different generations of Indian chess players. FIDE

At the SuperBet Rapid and Blitz tournament, you were the oldest player in the field. And out of 10 players, there were three Indians. Do you see that as a sign of things to come?

I found it very refreshing to be the oldest player. I have been the second oldest player at tournaments before — maybe even the oldest one. I know this is the future. I hope I will be (the oldest player in future events), because that will mean that I have continued to be good for a long time. As for the Indians, it's happened for years now that I expect to face Indians in every super tournament there is. If you see at the youth levels, Indians are absolutely dominating. Also in terms of sheer numbers of youth players, there is no match. I'm thoroughly impressed by the chess revolution that has happened in India. All the

kids that I am facing are great kids as well. I'm really happy for Indian chess and I will try and fight the kids as long as I can (smiles).

In your career you've fought multiple generations of Indians, from Viswanathan Anand to Vidit (Gujrathi) to now the teenagers like Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa. Are there similarities between these different generations of Indian players or even something that's different?

I feel like most of the Indian players have been taught in the same way in the sense that most players have supreme calculation skills. First look at Anand, who has incredible knowledge about the game. But the first thing you noticed about him and the first thing you noticed about Gukesh in particu-

lar besides the other kids is (that they're calculation based). The other kids who are coached by RB Ramesh are also very calculation-based. I'm not sure if other coaches in India are so calculation based, but I think that's a key characteristic that combines the generations of Indian players that I have played. What I do know is that the current generation of Indians is certainly the strongest and most dangerous. I mean this generation as a whole.

Do you mean that only as a generation to come out of India, or any generation to come from anywhere in the world?

I mean only in India. Even though the current crop of players — I guess a lot of them are Indians — but the players born from 2003 and 2006 are certainly the strongest generation of players we have had since the 90s kids, which I obviously maintain is the strongest of all time (smiles).

At the recent Candidates, did you find yourself rooting for others like Fabiano Caruana or Ian Nepomniachtchi because they're from the same generation as you?

Not necessarily. I have been competing for so many years with these guys that even though I have the generation thing in common there, they're all rivals so I rarely wish them anything extra even though I'm on decently good terms with all of them.

How different is it to face a Gukesh as compared to a Pragg?

They're a little bit different. Gukesh is a very calculation-based player. Pragg also calculates well but he's a little more intuitive. He's more of a sort of player, in the sense that he's more of a gamer. Arjun is just a complete mad man at the board. He wants to kill you in every single game. Has crazy preparation and plays extremely ambitiously and that's what makes him very dangerous.

Is there one player between these three that you love playing against or hate playing against?

I've had a lot of great duels against Pragg already. I really enjoyed that. I like playing against the kids in general.

In the Global Chess League, all of you guys were on the same team. What was the equation like since Gukesh, Pragg and Arjun were in your team. Were they asking you for advice or trying to pick your brain?

We were talking in the team like equals. We would be discussing chess, playing a few training games. Generally it was quite enjoyable.

Now that Gukesh is heading into the World Chess Championship, what is the one thing that you think he should know about competing in that showpiece event?

The one mistake I made competing against Anand (in 2013) is that I was a little bit intimidated. I had this impression that players playing in the World Chess Championship elevate their game to a level that they haven't been at before. My experience from playing at five World Championship matches is that yes players do have better preparation but when people come under pressure they make the same mistakes as they generally make (in other events). That would be my best advice: Don't be intimidated and don't build your opponent up in your mind into something that he's not.

When you were coming up as a kid, you used to love reading a lot of chess books. Do you see that the current generation is maybe not too much into reading books to learn about the sport?

I kinda used the tools that I had in my younger days. I see that the younger generation may not read as much but I also see that they're always doing something chess-related. And that's the most important thing.

SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS

BRIEFLY

Barcelona axe Xavi after season of turmoil

Madrid: Barcelona sacked manager Xavi Hernandez on Friday, four weeks after confirming their former midfielder would honour the last year of his contract and lead them through next season. The decision ended months of arguments between Barca and Xavi who made 767 appearances for the club over 17 seasons and helped them win 25 major trophies. Barcelona will finish second in LaLiga, at least nine points behind champions Real Madrid.

Deepika in Archery WC semis again

Yecheon: Jyothi Surekha Vennam and Priyansh advanced to the compound mixed team final, confirming India's second medal, while Deepika Kumari brightened the country's gloomy recurve campaign, reaching her second successive Archery World Cup semifinals after her comeback in the Stage 2 of the event, here on Friday. The compound women's team of Jyothi, Parmeet Kaur and Aditi Swami had assured India's first medal by making the final on Wednesday. Young compound archer Prathamesh Fuge is also eyeing a medal as he advanced to the semifinal in the individual category.

Boxing Oly qualifiers: Siwach wins Rd 1

Bangkok: National champion Sachin Siwach (57kg) produced an attacking display to register a dominant win over Alex Mukuka of New Zealand in the opening round of the 2nd Boxing World Qualifiers for the Paris Olympics here on Friday. Siwach kept up the pressure over his opponent throughout the bout, ensuring a unanimous 5-0 verdict.

Two Indians in QF of Doha squash tourney

Doha: India's Velavan Senthilkumar and Abhay Singh entered the quarter-finals of the prestigious USD 53,500 QSF 3 squash tournament with stunning second-round wins over seeded opponents here. Reigning national champion Senthilkumar defeated Egyptian seventh seed Omar Mosaad, a former world No. 3, 13-11 11-39-3 after the latter retired in 30 minutes due to an injury. Asian Games medalist Abhay then beat sixth-seeded Frenchman Auguste Dussourd 11-7-5-11 10-12 11-59-3.

REUTERS, PTI

Sindhu accelerates in decider to beat World No.6 Han Yue

SHIVANI NAIK
MAY 24

WINNING THE quarterfinals 21-13, 14-21, 21-12 at the Malaysia Masters Super 500 against Chinese World No.6 Han Yue, ended a long spell of shed and unshed tears for PV Sindhu. A Top 10 snare is the only currency of legit good form on the badminton circuit, and those marquee wins had vamoored for Sindhu the last few seasons after the heady days of first being a giant-killer, and then a genuine giant. To understand what a rare Top 6 ranked scalp means to Sindhu, consider the time that's elapsed since she last won one of those matches. It's been 2,156 days since she beat Carolina Marin, 1,736 days since she could defeat Tai Tzu Ying and 1,735 days since she scored a win over now Olympic champion, Chen Yu Fei who was twice denied a Worlds final by the Indian in the heydays of 2017-19. Sindhu last beat Akane Yamaguchi 735 days ago, and other former Top 5 regulars Ratchanok Intanon and He Bingjiao last in 2018 and 2022 respectively. She has never beaten Korean An Se Young.

The Han Yue win two months out from the Paris Games, was hugely necessary to restore her confidence, and remind her she is capable of these hunts, though a couple more of such will reassure her she truly still belongs.

Moreover, it was the manner of the victory that will please Sindhu. This wasn't a scrap, against China's current No.2 in rankings, a hugely consistent and steady player who knows how to find a way out. Sindhu crowded her and marauded her gameplans and gave her no time to regroup. There were more than traces of the old-Sindhu where she steamrolls over big-name rivals in passages of play, and finishes with an assertive stomp. Even if she was taken to a decider by the wildly drift conditions which favoured her in the first and Han in the second, it was in the decider that Sindhu went on a vintage offensive — and also had the fuel in the tank to fire till the finish.

Pivotal to this kind of game is the ability to achieve high hand speeds in deciders, shots hit at top pace with power to build pressure in a rally.

Accelerating in the third

Accelerating in the third set is tough. Players get tired. She could do that today.

For most part in the opener, Sindhu employed the flick and drops to the midcourt after parking her formidable presence at the net. Once she could control the rallies from the front court, smartly moving the shuttle around, she wasn't too fussed about the few times that Han sent the shuttle over her head.

Crucially, twice at 12-6 up and at 20-13, Sindhu's challenge reviews came good on the lines, a confidence booster at all times. Her flank defense across the body when Han went down the line close to the side lane, remains shabby. But such is the efficacy of her confident attack-



Sindhu will face Thailand's Busanan in the semis on Saturday. BWF/Badminton Photo

ing game that her not being able to labour over picking every shuttle, didn't matter at all.

The offense made up for the few that slipped past, when she committed herself to the net, and Han hit deep behind. Dropping the second also was no matter really, even as she trailed 0-5 and 4-16 before clambering up to 14-21. A 5-point surge from 8-17 to 13-17 sufficiently rattled Han, who was doing all the hard work, but getting no returns as Sindhu needed just two shots — the setup and the kill to bully her in every rally. Playing from the favourable side at the start of the third, really was reminiscent of Sindhu's best attacking days.

Her reach in foot strides or chasing shuttles on the flanks is well known, but Sindhu truly makes her height count when she simply strikes the shuttle at the highest point, reducing the available reaction time for opponents. On Friday, the 28-year-old pounced proactively on every shuttle sending it back in double quick time, and simply criss-crossed her placements to yo-yo Han. When the Chinese was hurried and disoriented enough in bruising paced rallies, Sindhu would finally go for the power kills to bury the shuttle into the floor.

Han was hustled, hassled and properly harried by the pace. And at 11-19 down, sent a tired lollipop high serve that Sindhu gleefully sent travelling for a perfect half smash. Finally, Han would send a despondent, imbalanced, uncontrolled return wide to give the Indian her first Top 6 victory in months.

She was back to score-settling with biggies finally. "The third game was crucial for both of us. From the first rally, I made sure I was in the game focused and didn't give away easy points. I was in control and I was confident of winning. I'm happy with how I played because I lost our last match. It's a shame as I was leading, but this is like a sweet revenge," Sindhu told BWF.

Just like in February, it has looked clear that Sindhu needs a sizable training block just before she hits the ground running to peak for a solitary event. After the Indonesia Open she is expected to go into a huddle at a training base in Germany. "It's nice (to be back in a semifinal). I've got a good training block as well. Mentally and physically I'm 100 percent. Now it's time to get that confidence back. I'm getting there but there's still a lot more inside. I need to get all of that out," she warned, sounding low-key ominous.

THE WEST ASIA CRISIS: WAY FORWARD IN A CRUCIAL REGION

Navtej Sarna
Former Ambassador of India to US, UK and Israel

Shubhajit Roy
Diplomatic Editor, The Indian Express

The Hamas attack on Israel triggered merciless retaliation. Gaza is on the brink of famine, and Israel's leader could face an arrest warrant for war crimes. Israel-Iran tensions have risen dramatically; Israel-US relations have seen unusual dissonance.

What's the endgame for the war in Gaza?

Could Israel-Iran tensions explode into war?

What should India do in the wake in this period of uncertainty?

How could the Iranian President's death impact the regional situation?

What are India's concerns and opportunities in this time of uncertainty?

For answers and perspective, listen to Ambassador Navtej Sarna, one of India's foremost experts on the West Asian region, at the next edition of The Indian Express explained.Live

29 May 2024

06:00 PM

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Confirmation SMS will be your registration

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JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

TOP OF THE WORLD



Carlo Acutis lies in state ahead of being beatified in 2020. AP

VATICAN CITY

Pope paves way to canonize first millennial saint

Rome: Pope Francis paved the way for the canonization of the first saint of the millennial generation on Thursday, attributing a second miracle to a 15-year-old Italian computer whiz who died of leukemia in 2006. Carlo Acutis, born on May 3, 1991, in London and then moved with his Italian parents to Milan as a child, was the youngest contemporary person to be beatified by Francis in 2020. Touted as the "patron saint of the internet," Acutis used his natural tech talent to create a website to catalog miracles and took care of websites for Catholic organizations. AP

SOMALIA

EU anti-piracy force frees ship off Somalia

Nairobi: The European Union's anti-piracy force in the Indian Ocean and Red Sea said on Friday the Liberian-flagged merchant vessel Basilisk had been freed from suspected pirates off the coast of Somalia and its 17 crew members were safe. The ship was attacked by suspected pirates on Thursday around 380 nautical miles east of Somalia's capital Mogadishu while sailing north, the EU Naval Force said in a statement. REUTERS

HAITI

3 missionaries from US-based group killed

THREE CHRISTIAN missionaries from Missions in Haiti were shot and killed in an ambush by a gang in Haiti, the Oklahoma-based group said on Friday. The missionaries were taking shelter in a house when gang members began shooting at the residence at about 9 p.m. CDT (0200 GMT) Thursday, the group said in two Facebook posts. Missouri State Representative Ben Baker said his daughter Natalie Lloyd and son-in-law Davy Lloyd were killed while working as full-time missionaries. REUTERS



Israeli and American pro-Palestine activists being detained by Israeli police outside the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, Friday. Reuters

SEEKS ACCESS FOR INVESTIGATORS, REPORT IN A MONTH

ICJ orders Israel to immediately halt assault on Rafah, let in aid

CIA, Mossad chiefs to meet Qatar PM for truce, hostage deal talks: Report

REUTERS DUBAI, THE HAGUE, MAY 24

JUDGES AT the top United Nations court ordered Israel on Friday to halt its military assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

Meanwhile, the heads of the US's CIA and Israel's Mossad will meet in Paris Friday with Qatari Prime Minister in an attempt to revive talks for a Gaza ceasefire and hostage deal, Axios reported, citing an unnamed US official. Reading out the ruling, World Court president Nawaf Salam said the situation in the Palestinian enclave had deteriorated since the court last ordered Israel to take steps to improve it, and conditions had been met for a new emergency order.

"The state of Israel shall... immediately halt its military offensive, and any other action in the Rafah governorate, which may inflict on the Palestinian group in Gaza conditions of life that could bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part," he said. Israel had not explained how it would keep the population safe during an evacuation of Rafah, or

FOOD BOUND FOR GAZA ROTS AS EGYPT'S RAFAH CROSSING STAYS SHUT

Cairo: Food supplies waiting to enter the Gaza Strip from Egypt have begun to rot as the Rafah border crossing remains shut to aid deliveries for a third week and people inside Gaza face worsening hunger. Egyptian officials said aid operations are at risk from military activity and that Israel needs to hand the crossing back to Palestinians. REUTERS

provide food and other supplies for the 800,000 Palestinians who had already fled the city, he said.

The ICJ ordered Israel to open the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza to let in aid. Israel, it added, must provide access for investigators and report back on its progress within one month. On Friday, Israeli army said that bodies of three more hostages killed on October 7 were recovered from Gaza. The army said they were killed on the day of the attack and their bodies were taken to Gaza.

In 'show of support', Netanyahu to address US Congress: Speaker

REUTERS WASHINGTON, MAY 24

REPUBLICAN US House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Thursday Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would soon address a joint meeting of Congress amid heightened tension with President Joe Biden over the Israeli leader's handling of the Gaza war.

Delivering a keynote speech at the Israeli embassy's annual Independence Day reception, Johnson said it would be "a strong show of support for the Israeli government in their time of greatest need." Such a speech is sure to further anger progressive Democrats critical of Israel's Gaza offensive Biden's support for it.

The diplomatic gathering in Washington comes amid strains between Biden and Netanyahu over a U.S. push for Israel to do more to protect Palestinian civilians in the war against Hamas militants in Gaza.



Mike Johnson; Benjamin Netanyahu

Veiled swipe at Biden

Johnson took a veiled swipe at Biden, saying "some leaders" have sought to withhold "vital weapons" from Israel. Biden has paused one shipment of bombs and warned he could delay others if Netanyahu carries out an all-out ground offensive in the refugee-packed city of Rafah in south Gaza.

But the flow of weapons has mostly continued. Security was tight around the National Building Museum where the reception was held. A small group of pro-Palestinian protesters shouted "shame on you" at guests exiting the event.

PRELIMINARY REPORT BY IRAN MILITARY

'No foul play in Raisi's chopper crash'

A PRELIMINARY report by Iran's military said no evidence of foul play or attack had been found so far during investigations into the helicopter crash that killed President Ebrahim Raisi, state media reported Friday. More details would be released as the investigation advanced, the report said. REUTERS

PREPARED TO FIGHT IF KYIV & WEST DO NOT RESPOND, SAY SOURCES

Putin ready for ceasefire in Ukraine war on current frontlines: Russian officials

Kremlin chief believes gains so far enough for a victory

REUTERS MOSCOW, LONDON, MAY 24

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin is ready to halt the war in Ukraine with a negotiated ceasefire that recognises the current battlefield lines, four Russian sources told Reuters, saying he is prepared to fight on if Kyiv and the West do not respond.

Three of the sources, familiar with discussions in Putin's entourage, said the veteran Russian leader had expressed frustration to a small group of advisers about what he views as Western-backed attempts to stymie negotiations and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's decision to rule out talks.

"Putin can fight for as long as it takes, but Putin is also ready for a ceasefire - to freeze the war," said another of the four, a senior Russian source who has worked with Putin and has knowledge of top level conversations in the Kremlin. He, like the other sources, spoke on condition of anonymity given the matter's sensitivity.

For this account, Reuters spoke to a total of five people who work with or have worked with Putin at a senior level in the political and business worlds. The fifth source



Journalists reporting after a Russian strike in Kharkiv, Friday

did not comment on freezing the war at the current frontlines.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov, in response to a request for comment, said the Kremlin chief had repeatedly made clear Russia was open to dialogue to achieve its goals, saying the country did not want "eternal war."

Ukraine's foreign and defence ministries did not respond to questions. Based on their knowledge of conversations in the upper ranks of the Kremlin, two of the sources said Putin was of the view that gains in the war so far were enough to sell a victory to the Russian people.

HUNGARY WILL SEEK TO OPT OUT OF NATO BID TO HELP UKRAINE: ORBAN

Budapest: Hungary will seek to opt out of any NATO operations to support Ukraine, Prime Minister Viktor Orban said Friday, suggesting that NATO and the European Union were moving toward a more direct conflict with Russia. Orban said Hungary opposes a plan NATO is weighing to provide more predictable military support to Ukraine. AP

MARCH 26 SUICIDE BOMBING

Pak to pay \$2.58 mn to families of 5 Chinese men killed in attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ISLAMABAD, MAY 24

PAKISTAN HAS decided to pay USD 2.58 million to the families of five Chinese nationals killed in March when a suicide bomber targeted their vehicle in the troubled northwestern province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, according to a media report on Friday.

The five Chinese and their Pakistani driver were killed when a suicide attacker rammed his explosive-laden car into a vehicle in the Bisham area of the restive Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on March 26 when they were be-



The suicide bombing site in KPK province's Shangla. File

ing driven to a construction site of Dasu Hydroelectric power station in Kohistan district of the same province.

The Economic Coordination

Committee (ECC) of Pakistan's Cabinet on Thursday decided to pay USD 2.58 million to the families of Chinese workers slain in the attack, the Dawn newspaper said.

The approval of compensation for five Chinese workers of China Gezhouba Group (contractor) was approved at the rate of USD 5,16,000 per head, as a goodwill gesture, the report said.

"The amount would be transferred immediately to the account of the Pakistani embassy in Beijing for onward payments to the families of the deceased Chinese nationals through appropriate channels," the newspaper quoted a top finance ministry official as saying.

Day after Macron visit, man shot dead by police in New Caledonia

REUTERS PARIS, MAY 24

POLICE SHOT dead a man in riot-hit New Caledonia on Friday evening, a day after President Emmanuel Macron visited to the French-ruled Pacific island to try to calm tensions, local media said, citing the local prosecutor's office.

The police officer used his gun as he and a colleague were attacked by a group of around 15 people before the shot was fired, NC La 1ere broadcaster quoted the prosecutor as saying.

The death of the 48-year-old man brought to seven the number killed in 12 days of upheaval trig-



Emmanuel Macron in New Caledonia on Thursday. Reuters

gered by a contested electoral reform and fuelled by sharp economic disparities. Macron, on a one-day visit on Thursday, hit the

pause button on the reform, which would allow thousands more French residents who lived in New Caledonia for 10 years to vote.

China sends second glacial water shipment from Tibet to Maldives

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA MALE, MAY 24

CHINA HAS gifted 1,500 tonnes of water from the Tibetan glaciers to Maldives, the second such donation in less than two months, a media report said on Friday.

This is the latest in the multiple grants and aid that China has promised the Maldives, especially since pro-China Mohamed Muizzu took over as the President in November 2023.

Not just that, Maldives and China are also collaborating to enhance weather monitoring systems in this small island na-

tion that bears the brunt of changing climate, including challenges such as sea level rise.

According to a report in the news portal Sun.mv, China's Xizang Autonomous Region gifted 1,500 tonnes of mineral water to the Maldives government on Thursday. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the donated water will be distributed to island communities, for use during times of drinking shortage.

Earlier on March 27, the Maldives government had announced that it had received a similar consignment of 1,500 tonnes of water from China. Foreign Minister Moosa

Zameer, while speaking at a ceremony where Wang Lixin, the Chinese Ambassador to the Maldives, handed over the donation, said that China remains a "good friend to the Maldives".

The minister also expressed his gratitude to the people of Xinjiang Autonomous Region for the kind gesture and to the government and the people of China for their continued support and goodwill.

The Maldives has 26 atolls and its 1,192 islands are mostly composed of coral reefs and sandbars, a combination that makes groundwater and freshwater extremely scarce.

Second straight day of drills as Beijing tests ability to 'seize' Taiwan areas



Taiwan Air Force aircraft at Hsinchu Air Base, Friday

REUTERS BEIJING, TAIPEI, MAY 24

CHINA STAGED mock missile strikes and dispatched fighter jets carrying live missiles along with bombers on Friday, state broadcaster CCTV said, as part of exercises Beijing has said were launched to punish Taiwan's new president, Lai Ching-te.

The bombers set up several attack formations in waters east of Taiwan, carrying out mock attacks in co-ordination with naval vessels, it added, as China tested its ability to "seize power" and control key areas of Taiwan.

The two days of drills in the Taiwan Strait and around groups of Taiwan-controlled islands near the Chinese coast, which a Taiwanese official said also included the mock bombing of foreign vessels, started just three days after Lai took office Monday. Taiwan has condemned China's actions. China denounces Lai as a "separatist". It criticised his inauguration speech, in which he urged Beijing to stop its threats and said two sides of the strait were "not subordinate to each other".

In Cannes, Kani Kusruti makes a Gaza statement with her bag



EXPRESS AT CANNES

SHUBHRA GUPTA CANNES, MAY 24

GOING BY the insistent buzz that refuses to die down, it would appear that never has a bag garnered so much attention on any red carpet as Kani Kusruti's dinky little number at the premiere of All We Imagine As Light. The watermelon pouch, a version of which Kusruti

flaunted proudly on the red carpet, is the symbol of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation.

"I wanted something in the shape of Gaza," she says. "I collaborated with my friend who is a designer to figure out whether it would be embroidery or a brooch in the same colours (red, green, black and white, of the Palestinian flag). And then we hit upon the idea of the clutch." The bag was designed by Kochi-based designer Diya John.

The image of the actor, in her white dress and holding aloft the clutch, spread like wildfire.

In a country where celebrities are not just loath to take a stand but actively shy away from politics, Kusruti's gesture has gained significance.

Australian actor Cate



(From left) Chhaya Kadam, Kani Kusruti, director Payal Kapadia, Divya Prabha and Hridhu Haroon at the premiere of the film All We Imagine As Light on Thursday. Reuters

Blanchett's gown with a robe in the Palestinian colours has also been seen as a mark of solidarity, something she has been outspoken about. But up until now, no Indian has been seen or heard sharing their views about the on-going conflict, for fear of obvious backlash.

It is an act of courage, and it is quite appropriate that it is Kusruti who came up with it. It matches the kind of full-tilt bravery with which she embraces her roles, especially in Payal Kapadia's debut feature - where she plays a Malayali nurse in Mumbai, battling loneliness and a loss of identity. It is a part that requires a delicate balance of sadness and hope, and Kusruti pulls it off beautifully.

"It doesn't happen very often for an actor like me to get this

kind of script," she says. "It was many years back when Payal reached out to me for the role, and since then I've been thinking about it."

As it often happens, both the director and the actor got busy with other things, but Kusruti, who wanted very much to be part of the film, kept circling back to Kapadia.

And as the buzz surrounding the Indian entry to this edition of Cannes grows - it got an eight-minute standing ovation and has turned overnight into a critics' darling - it has become a hot favourite for the Palme D'Or, the top prize at Cannes.

"What are you thinking?" I ask her. "Well, not very much, honestly. It is just such a privilege to be here with all these other fantastic films," she says.

CORPORATE BRIEFS

EDUCATION

CONVOCATION—GL BAJAJ
The GL Bajaj Institute hosted a significant convocation ceremony for the PGDM batch of 2021-23. Esteemed guests graced the occasion, adding to the aura of celebration. Professor Anil Sahasrabudde, Chairman of NETF and Dr. Rajkumar Upadhyay, CEO of C-DOT, was the guest of honor. Along with them, joining the stage was Professor John Walls, Associate Dean of International College Kirk University Thailand.

EVENT—SOUTH ASIAN UNIVERISTY
H.E. Md. Golam Sarwar, Secy. General of the SAARC, visited the South Asian University recently. He was warmly received by SAU officials, and students from across South Asian Countries. H. E Md Golam Sarwar, Secretary General met the President, Prof. K. K. Aggarwal, who briefed him about the journey of the University, the new programmes introduced and avenues for future development.

EVENT—VIT
Founder & Chancellor of VIT Dr. G. Viswanathan received the State University of New York Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree during Binghamton University's convocation ceremony in the USA recently. The honorary doctorate was conferred on Dr. G. Viswanathan by Binghamton University President Harvey Stenger. Dr. G. Viswanathan has been conferred the honorary doctorate for his contributions.

AWARD—ICFAI GROUP
The "CK Prahalad Chair for Marketing Award" was conferred on Sudhakar Rao, Director, Branding ICFAI Group, Hyderabad. The Award was constituted by MIT ADT University, Pune which was presented by their ED Prof. (Dr.) Sunita M Karad, in a glittering ceremony organized recently. While receiving the Award, Sudhakar Rao said, I am truly privileged to be the recipient of the "CK Prahalad Chair Award for Marketing 2024".

MOU—SWAMI VIVEKANANDA SUBHARTI UNIVERSITY
Swami Vivekanand Subharti University, Meerut and Indo Korea Business Culture Center set a historic milestone by formalizing a MOU with the aim of promoting international collaboration and enhancing academic excellence. The MoU signing ceremony was presided over by Dr. G.K. Thapliyal, VC of Subharti University and on this occasion he underlined the profound importance of the collaborative effort and emphasized on the mutual benefits for both the institutions. He signed the MoU between Subharti University and IKBCC.

EVENT—KIET
The CSE Dept & E-Cell of KIET Group of Institutions, Ghaziabad, recently organized Sprint Hacks & Endeavor'24 respectively. The inaugural ceremony of the program began with lamp lighting. Dr. KLA Khan (Dean - Innovation and Entrepreneurship Council) said that Endeavor'24 promotes entrepreneurship and innovation by organizing exciting competitions & insightful discussions on entrepreneurships.

CONFERENCE—JAMIA HAMDARD
The Department of CS & Engineering, SEST, Jamia Hamdard successfully organized its two-day 4th International Conference on ICT for Digital, Smart, and Sustainable Development recently. The main purpose to organize this conference was to bring together researchers, academics, industrialist experts, and engineers from various institutions to discuss their latest research findings.

EVENT—SGT UNIVERSITY
Two-day media festival 'MEDIAMAZE- 2024' organized by the Faculty of Mass Communication & Media Technology, SGT University concluded recently. In this media festival, apart from SGT University, students of various universities & colleges of Delhi-NCR participated in many competitions. Prizes & certificates were given to the winning students in photography, anchor hunt, ad making, short film, mono act, reel making, dance, group dance & etc.

ACHEIVEMENT—JIT
Jasmeet Kaur, MSc Biotechnology alumni from Jaypee University of Information Technology, Solan, Himachal Pradesh was selected through Foreign Students' Exchange Program of JIT and now working as Graduate Research Assistant in the Department of Chemistry, Biology, and Health Sciences, SD Mines, SD, USA. She is recently awarded with the prestigious Lawrence J. Mazlack Fellowship in USA. She is working with Prof Rajesh Sani of SD Mines, USA.

SALUTE THE SOLDIER
INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE (ITBP) 25 May 2024
ITBP salutes its braveheart Constable Mohd. Ashraf Shah of 24th Battalion, who made supreme sacrifice in the line of duty on this day in Jammu & Kashmir in 1996.

INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE (ITBP) 25 May 2024
ITBP salutes its braveheart Head Constable Asha Ram of 11th Battalion, who made supreme sacrifice in the line of duty on this day in Jammu & Kashmir in 2002.

WESTERN RAILWAY - VADODARA DIVISION
ELECTRIC LOCO SHED VADODARA
Tender Notice No. EL/TRS/BRC/2024-25/1 Dtd. 21/05/2024
Tender No. ELTRSBRC2425TFPCONV1
i) Name of the work with its location: Conversion of 7475 KVA Transformer to 7775 KVA transformer for 3 Phase locomotive with hotel load winding. (Electric Loco Shed, Vadodara, W. RLY). ii) Approx. cost of Works: ₹ 2,53,29,408/- iii) Bid Security to be Deposited: ₹ 2,76,600/- iv) Date & Time for submission of tender & opening of tender: Tender submission through Electronically up to 15:00 Hrs. on 18.06.2024 & open after at 15:30 Hrs. on 18.06.2024. v) Web site particulars, Notice board location where complete details of tender can be seen & address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased: <https://www.ireps.gov.in>. Electric Loco Shed, Nava yard, Vadodara Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (TRS), Electric Loco Shed, Navayard, Vadodara - 390 002 Gujarat
Like us on: [facebook.com/WesternRly](https://www.facebook.com/WesternRly)

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON
(SEE SECTION 82 Cr.P.C.)
Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person(s) Kalicharan S/o Nawab Singh R/o A-106, Ekta Gali, Johripur, Delhi has committed (or are suspected to have committed) the offence in case FIR No. 510/2017, U/s 406/467/468/471/34 IPC, PS Gokalpur, Distt. North-East, Delhi and it has been returned to a Warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused person(s) Kalicharan can not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused person(s) Kalicharan has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation are hereby made that the said accused person(s) Kalicharan of FIR No. 510/2017, U/s 406/467/468/471/34 IPC, PS Gokalpur, Distt. North-East, Delhi are required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before dated 18.07.2024 at 10:00 AM.
By Order
Sh. Sukhjeet Singh
Metropolitan Magistrate-03
Room No. 22, North-East
Karkardooma Courts, Delhi
DP/6047/NE/2024
(Court Matter)

E-AUCTION NOTICE
The e-auction schedule for Sale of Scrap Lot through e-auction under the jurisdiction of Dy. CMM/Pandu (as Auction Conducting Officer) for the month of June/2024 has been fixed as per following details.

SN	Month/Year	Auction Schedule No.	Auction Start Date/Time
1	June/2024	GSDPNO22N23079	13-06-2024 / 10:30
2	June/2024	GSDPNO22N23080	26-06-2024 / 10:30

Interested Bidder are advised to bid through IREPS website (www.ireps.gov.in) for registration, training, participation in e-auction.
Dy. CMM/Pandu
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

INDIAN RAILWAYS
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (BHARAT SARKAR)
MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAIL MANTRALAYA)
(RAILWAY BOARD)
No. 2023/Track-III/MC/5 New Delhi, dated: 24.05.2024
CORRIGENDUM-VII
Subject :- E-Tender No. TM-2303 for procurement of Rail Borne Maintenance Vehicle "RBMV" for Indian Railways to be opened on 28.06.2024
The date of opening of above mentioned tender due on 30.05.2024 has been postponed to 28.06.2024.
All other terms and conditions of the subject tender remain unchanged.
(Vijay Singh)
Executive Director/Track (M&C)
Railway Board
Tele: No. 011-47845531
E-mail: vijay.singh.2017@gov.in
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

बिहार विद्यालय परीक्षा समिति शिक्षा विभाग, बिहार सरकार
JEE/NEET की कोचिंग हेतु Physics, Chemistry, Maths and Biology विषय के शिक्षकों (Teachers) की आवश्यकता

बिहार विद्यालय परीक्षा समिति द्वारा राज्य के 09 प्रमण्डलीय मुख्यालयों में अवस्थित शिक्षण संस्थानों में मेधावी छात्र/छात्राओं को इंजीनियरिंग (JEE) तथा मेडिकल (NEET) प्रतियोगिता परीक्षाओं की तैयारी के लिए Full Time basis पर शिक्षण (Coaching) हेतु योग्य एवं अनुभवी शिक्षकों की सेवाएँ प्राप्त करने के संबंध में (पूर्व में प्रकाशित विज्ञापित संख्या-पी०आर० 248/ 2023 दिनांक- 19.08.2023 को रद्द करते हुए) आवश्यक सूचना

एतद् द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि राज्य के 09 (नौ) प्रमण्डलीय जिला मुख्यालयों में 10वीं उर्तीण मेधावी छात्र/छात्राओं के लिए मेडिकल (NEET) एवं इंजीनियरिंग (JEE) प्रवेश परीक्षा की तैयारी हेतु प्रस्तावित निःशुल्क शिक्षण कार्यक्रम के तहत योग्य एवं अनुभवी शिक्षकों की सेवाएँ प्राप्त करने हेतु पूर्व में प्रकाशित विज्ञापित संख्या-पी०आर० 248/ 2023 दिनांक- 19.08.2023 को रद्द करते हुए वार्षिक माध्यमिक परीक्षा, 2024 के कुछ मेधावी छात्र/छात्राओं (सीमित संख्या में) को उनकी रूचि के अनुसार 2026 में आयोजित किए जाने वाले इंजीनियरिंग (JEE) तथा मेडिकल (NEET) प्रतियोगिता परीक्षा की तैयारी के लिए बिहार विद्यालय परीक्षा समिति द्वारा दो वर्षीय कोचिंग प्रोग्राम राज्य के 09 प्रमण्डलीय मुख्यालयों में स्थित निम्नवत् शिक्षण संस्थानों में निःशुल्क दिए जाने हेतु कार्यवाही की जा रही है:-

Table-1

जिला	शिक्षण संस्थान का नाम एवं पता
पटना	राजकीय बालक उच्च माध्यमिक विद्यालय, लाल बहादुर शास्त्री नगर, पटना-800023
मुजफ्फरपुर	बी० बी० कॉलेजिएट, मोतीझील, मुजफ्फरपुर- 842001
छपरा	विश्वेश्वर सेमिनरी उच्च माध्यमिक विद्यालय, म्यूनिसिपल चौक, श्री नंदन पथ, छपरा-841301
दरभंगा	जिला स्कूल, (नाका नं० 06 के समीप), लहेरियासराय, दरभंगा- 846003
सहरसा	जिला स्कूल, समाहरणालय रोड, (सदर अस्पताल के पूरब), सहरसा-852201
पूर्णिया	जिला स्कूल, नियर मट्टा बाजार, पूर्णिया- 854301
भागलपुर	जगलाल उच्च विद्यालय, कंपनीबाग, पोस्ट- भागलपुर सिटी, भागलपुर- 812002
मुंगेर	जिला स्कूल, छोटी केलावाडी, मुंगेर- 811201
गया	हरिदास सेमिनरी +2 स्कूल, सरकारी बस स्टैंड के समीप, थाना- सिविल लेन, पोस्ट- जी०पी०ओ०, गया- 823001

2. तदनुसार भौतिकी (Physics), रसायन शास्त्र (Chemistry), गणित (Mathematics) एवं जीव विज्ञान (Biology) विषयों में Full Time basis पर शिक्षण हेतु योग्य एवं अनुभवी शिक्षकों/विषय विशेषज्ञों से निम्नरूपेण आवेदन आमंत्रित किये जाते हैं :-
(i) आवेदक ई-मेल आई.डी.-facultybseb@gmail.com पर आवेदन के साथ अपने अनुभव प्रमाण-पत्र (Experience Certificate) एवं अद्यतन Salary Slip की Scanned Copy PDF में तैयार कर दिनांक- 25.05.2024 से दिनांक- 03.06.2024 की रात्रि 11:30 बजे तक ई-मेल करेंगे अथवा वेबसाइट coaching.biharboardonline.com पर दिये गये लिंक "Teachers for 09 Divisional Headquarters (Full Time)" पर क्लिक कर अपना ऑनलाईन आवेदन दिनांक 26.05.2024 के पूर्वाह्न से दिनांक 03.06.2024 की रात्रि 11:30 बजे तक भर सकेंगे, जिसके लिए निम्न बिन्दु महत्वपूर्ण हैं :-

- (i) Dynamic and flexible payment structure के तहत अधिकतम 02 लाख रुपये तक प्रति माह (Upto Rs. 2,00,000/- per month) Professional Fees के रूप में भुगतान किया जा सकेगा।
 - (ii) शिक्षकों के मानदेय में उनके Performance के आधार पर न्यूनतम 5 प्रतिशत से अधिकतम 10 प्रतिशत तक की वार्षिक वृद्धि की जा सकेगी।
 - (iii) प्रथम बार दो वर्षों के लिए (For Two Years) कार्यदेश दिया जाएगा। दो वर्षों के पश्चात् संतोषप्रद कार्य तथा आवश्यकता के आधार पर प्रत्येक बार दो-दो वर्षों के लिए अवधि विस्तार किया जा सकेगा।
- अनुभव :
- (i) किसी प्रतिष्ठित कोचिंग संस्थान में अपने विषय का JEE अथवा NEET से संबंधित अध्यापन का कम से कम 05 वर्ष का अनुभव अनिवार्य।
 - (ii) आवेदक को पिछले पाँच वर्षों में किसी भी एक वर्ष में JEE/NEET के किसी Reputed कोचिंग संस्थान में न्यूनतम 1 लाख रुपये प्रति माह अथवा 12 लाख रुपये प्रति वर्ष का भुगतान प्राप्त होना चाहिए। (जिस अर्थपूर्ण का अंतिम रूप से चयन (Final Selection) होगा, उनके योगदान (Joining) के पहले उपरोक्त किसी भी एक वर्ष में 12 लाख रुपये प्राप्त होने के इस बिन्दु का सत्यापन Bank Statement/ITR से कराया जा सकेगा।)

(ii) ऑनलाईन आवेदन के क्रम में अर्थपूर्ण कडिका 1 के Table-1 में अंकित प्रमण्डलीय मुख्यालयों में अवस्थित शिक्षण संस्थानों के विकल्प (Choice) का भी अपनी सुविधानुसार चयन कर अपने आवेदन में अंकित करेंगे, ताकि उनका चयन उसी प्रमण्डल अवस्थित शिक्षण संस्थान के लिए किया जाय, जिसका चयन उनके द्वारा किया गया है। आवेदक जिले के विकल्प (Choice) में साक्षात्कार के दिन (दिनांक 08.06.2024 को) भी परिवर्तन कर सकते हैं- किसी भी परिस्थिति में किसी अर्थपूर्ण को उनकी सहमति (Consent) के बिना उक्त नौ में से किसी जिले में पदस्थापित नहीं किया जाएगा, अर्थात् उनकी सहमति (Consent) से ही उनका पदस्थापन उपर्युक्त 09 में से किसी जिले में किया जाएगा।

(iii) अर्थपूर्ण द्वारा ऑनलाईन आवेदन करने के क्रम में कोचिंग संस्थानों में उन्हें प्राप्त मासिक मानदेय (Remuneration) का उल्लेख भी अंकित किया जायेगा। इसके साथ ही उन्हें संस्थानों के किसी एक वर्ष का Salary Slip लगाया जाना होगा तथा Salary Slip की अनुपलब्धता की स्थिति में किसी एक वर्ष का Income Tax Return की प्रति संलग्न करना होगा। Full time basis पर शिक्षकों/विषय-विशेषज्ञों की सेवा समिति में Outsourcing के आधार पर ली जाएगी।

3. इस प्रयोजन हेतु अर्थपूर्ण का साक्षात्कार (Interview) दिनांक 08.06.2024 को बिहार विद्यालय परीक्षा समिति, सिन्हा लाईब्रेरी रोड, पटना-800017 में पूर्वाह्न 11:00 बजे से लिया जाएगा। उक्त तिथि में परिवर्तन होने की स्थिति में सूचना अर्थपूर्ण को उनके मोबाईल/ई-मेल पर दी जाएगी। आवेदकों द्वारा दी गई सूचना की गोपनीयता (full confidentiality) अक्षुण्ण रखी जाएगी।

4. इन्टरव्यू में पटना के बाहर से आने वाले अर्थपूर्ण को आने-जाने (To and Fro) के लिए वायुयान यात्रा के लिए Economy Class एवं रेल यात्रा के लिए AC के Actual Fare की 60% राशि इन्टरव्यू के दिन ही दी जाएगी, जिसके लिए उन्हें एयर टिकट/रेल टिकट की फोटोकॉपी जमा करनी होगी।

विज्ञापित संख्या - पी.आर. 195/2024 सचिव

APPOINTMENT OF AUTHORITY ENGINEER FOR PROVIDING PROJECT MANAGEMENT SERVICES
Tender Notice No. COM/2024/MAY/05; Dated: 15-05-2024. Open tender through e-tendering system is invited from experienced and reputed contractor(s)/firm(s) for the following works. Tender No. CE/COM/DMV/PMS/2024/04. Name of work: Request for Proposal (RFP) for appointment of Authority Engineer for providing project management services for Redevelopment of Dimapur Railway Station through Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Contract. Approximate Value: ₹ 79,21,036.14. E-tender will be closed at 14:30 hrs. on 25-06-2024 and opened at 15:30 hrs. on 25-06-2024. For details of Tender and any Corrigendum, please visit www.ireps.gov.in.
Chief Engineer/Conl
Northeast Frontier Railway
(Construction Organisation)
"Serving Customers with a smile"

बिहार विद्यालय परीक्षा समिति शिक्षा विभाग, बिहार सरकार
JEE/NEET की कोचिंग हेतु Physical Chemistry विषय के शिक्षकों की आवश्यकता

बिहार विद्यालय परीक्षा समिति द्वारा इंजीनियरिंग तथा मेडिकल (JEE/NEET) प्रतियोगिता परीक्षा की तैयारी के लिए पटना में संचालित आवासीय शिक्षण (Residential Teaching) हेतु Full Time basis पर Physical Chemistry विषय के लिए योग्य एवं अनुभवी शिक्षकों की सेवाएँ प्राप्त करने हेतु (पूर्व में प्रकाशित विज्ञापित संख्या- पी०आर० 197/2023 दिनांक- 20.07.2023 के क्रम में) आवश्यक सूचना

एतद् द्वारा सूचित किया जाता है कि पूर्व में प्रकाशित विज्ञापित संख्या- पी०आर० 197/2023 दिनांक- 20.07.2023 के क्रम में बिहार विद्यालय परीक्षा समिति द्वारा राज्य के मेधावी छात्र/छात्राओं को इंजीनियरिंग तथा मेडिकल (JEE/NEET) प्रतियोगिता परीक्षाओं की तैयारी के उद्देश्य से आवासीय शिक्षण (Residential Teaching) की व्यवस्था की गई है, जिसके लिए Full Time basis पर Physical Chemistry विषय में शिक्षण देने के लिए योग्य, समर्पित एवं अनुभवी शिक्षकों का चयन किया जाना है।
2. तदनुसार Physical Chemistry विषय में Full Time basis पर शिक्षण हेतु योग्य एवं अनुभवी शिक्षकों/विषय विशेषज्ञों से निम्नरूपेण आवेदन आमंत्रित किये जाते हैं :-
(a) आवेदक दिनांक- 25.05.2024 से दिनांक- 03.06.2024 की रात्रि 11:30 बजे तक ई-मेल आई.डी.-computercellbseb@gmail.com पर आवेदन के साथ अपने अनुभव प्रमाण-पत्र (Experience Certificate) एवं Salary Slip की Scanned Copy PDF में तैयार कर ई-मेल कर सकते हैं या वेबसाइट coaching.biharboardonline.com पर दिये गये लिंक "Teacher (Full Time)" पर क्लिक कर अपना ऑनलाईन आवेदन दिनांक 26.05.2024 के पूर्वाह्न से दिनांक 03.06.2024 की रात्रि 11:30 बजे तक भर सकेंगे, जिसके लिए निम्न बिन्दु महत्वपूर्ण हैं :-

- (i) Dynamic and flexible payment structure के तहत अधिकतम तीन लाख रुपये तक प्रति माह (Upto Rs. 3,00,000/- per month) Professional Fees के रूप में भुगतान किया जा सकेगा।
 - (ii) शिक्षकों के मानदेय में उनके Performance के आधार पर न्यूनतम 5 प्रतिशत से अधिकतम 10 प्रतिशत तक की वार्षिक वृद्धि की जा सकेगी।
 - (iii) जिस अर्थपूर्ण का अंतिम रूप से चयन (Final Selection) होगा, उनके योगदान (Joining) के पहले पूर्व का सैलरी सत्यापन Bank Statement/ITR से कराया जा सकेगा।
- अनुभव
- किसी प्रतिष्ठित कोचिंग संस्थान में अपने विषय का JEE अथवा NEET से संबंधित अध्यापन का कम से कम 08 वर्ष का अनुभव अनिवार्य। आवेदक को पिछले पाँच वर्षों में किसी भी एक वर्ष में JEE/NEET के किसी भी कोचिंग संस्थान में न्यूनतम 02 लाख रुपये प्रति माह अथवा 24 लाख रुपये प्रति वर्ष का भुगतान प्राप्त होना चाहिए।

कार्य की अवधि (Period of Engagement)

- (i) प्रथम बार दो वर्षों के लिए (For Two Years) कार्यदेश दिया जाएगा।
- (ii) दो वर्षों के पश्चात् संतोषप्रद कार्य तथा आवश्यकता के आधार पर प्रत्येक बार दो-दो वर्षों के लिए अगले आदेश तक अवधि विस्तार किया जा सकेगा।

(b) ऑनलाईन आवेदन भरने के क्रम में उन कोचिंग संस्थानों में उन्हें प्राप्त मासिक मानदेय (Remuneration) का उल्लेख भी आवेदन में अंकित किया जायेगा। इसके साथ ही उन्हें संस्थानों के कम से कम दो अलग-अलग वर्षों का Salary Slip लगाना होगा। Salary Slip की अनुपलब्धता की स्थिति में कम से कम दो वर्ष के Income Tax Return की प्रति संलग्न करना अनिवार्य होगा। Full time basis पर शिक्षकों/विषय-विशेषज्ञों की सेवा समिति में Outsourcing के आधार पर ली जाएगी।

3. इस प्रयोजन हेतु अर्थपूर्ण का साक्षात्कार (Interview) दिनांक 08.06.2024 को बिहार विद्यालय परीक्षा समिति, सिन्हा लाईब्रेरी रोड, पटना-800017 में पूर्वाह्न 11:30 बजे से लिया जाएगा। आवेदकों के द्वारा दी गई सूचनाओं की गोपनीयता (full confidentiality) अक्षुण्ण रखी जाएगी।

4. इन्टरव्यू में पटना के बाहर से आने वाले अर्थपूर्ण को आने-जाने (To and Fro) के लिए वायुयान यात्रा के लिए Economy Class एवं रेल यात्रा के लिए AC के Actual Fare की 60% राशि इन्टरव्यू के दिन ही दी जाएगी, जिसके लिए उन्हें एयर टिकट/रेल टिकट की फोटोकॉपी जमा करनी होगी।

विज्ञापित संख्या - पी.आर. 194/2024 सचिव

Appeal for Identification

General public is hereby informed that one male person Namely: Unknown, S/o: Unknown, R/o: Unknown, Age: About 30 Yrs., Height: 5'6", Sex: Male, Face: Round, Built: Medium, Complexion: Wheatish, Wearing: White T Shirt and Blue Pant, Place of Recovery: App Prince Hotel Fatehpuri Red Light SPM Marg Delhi.
The dead body has been preserved in Subzi mandi, Delhi in Mortuary for 72 Hrs for Mortuary for identification.
In this regard DD No. 9A Date: 23.05.2024 has been lodged at Police Station: Lahori Gate, Delhi. Any clue come to notice please inform undersign.

SHO
P.S.: Lahori Gate, Delhi
Phone: 011-23953776, 23958234
DP/6182/N/2024 Mob.: +91 87508 70122

SEARCH FOR MISSING

General Public is hereby informed that one Girl (depicted in the photo) namely NISHA D/o Manoj Kumar Aged-15 Years has been reported missing since 16.05.2024 at 1.30 PM from her Residence vide FIR No. 179/2024 Dated 17.05.2024 registered at Police Station Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi. Her physical description is as under:

Complexion: Shallow, Height: About 5'1" Face: Oval, Built: Thin, Hair: Normal Long Black Clothing: Red Top & Green Colour Lower and Slipper in her Feet.
Any person having any information/Clue about this missing Girl, may inform SHO, Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi at website: <http://cbi.nic.in>
Sd/-
SHO,
Police Station
DP/6188/SD/2024 Kotla Mubarakpur, New Delhi

NORTHERN RAILWAY
Invitation of Tenders through E-Procurement system
Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items:-

S. No	Tender No	Brief Description	Qty.	Closing Date
01	09242218A	BRAKE CYLINDER 355 MM	499 NOS	19-06-24
02	09242535	CAST STEEL BOLSTER	186 NOS	20-06-24
03	09242383	CENTRE PIVOT RING	4177 NOS	10-07-24

NOTE -1. Vendors may visit the IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for details. 2. No Manual offer will be entertained.
Tender Notice No. 17/2024-2025 Dated : 24.05.2024 1564/2024
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

21 ECONOMY

GOLD	USD RATE	OIL	SILVER
₹72,650	₹83.11	\$82.38	₹92,100

Note: Gold, silver rates at Delhi spot market, gold per 10g, silver per 1 kg; Crude oil (Indian basket) as of May 23

SENSEX: 75,410.39 ▼ 765 (0.01%) NIFTY: 22,957.10 ▼ 10.55 (0.05%) NIKKEI: 38,646.11 ▼ 457.11 HANG SENG: 18,608.94 ▼ 259.77 FTSE: 8,306.54 ▼ 32.69 DAX: 18,619.93 ▼ 71.39

International market data till 1900 IST

BRIEFLY

NCLAT upholds NCLT order on Jaypee Infra

New Delhi: Insolvency appellate tribunal NCLAT on Friday upheld Suraksha Realty's bid to acquire debt-ridden Jaypee Infra but asked it to pay an additional Rs 1,334 crore as farmers' compensation -- a development expected to bring relief for over 20,000 homebuyers stuck in various real estate projects. Upholding the National Company Law Tribunal's (NCLT) decision of March 2023, the NCLAT said the decision was to avoid any delay in the implementation of the resolution and also to take care of the interests of all stakeholders, including home buyers and claim of Yamuna Express development authority for additional compensation of the farmers. **PTI**

India bond yields slip for fifth straight week

Mumbai: The government bond yields declined on Friday, with the benchmark 10-year bond yield logging its fifth straight weekly fall, as record surplus transfer by the central bank is expected to aid the government's fiscal position. The benchmark 10-year yield ended at 6.9988 per cent, following its previous close of 6.9919 per cent. The yield has eased by an aggregate of 23 basis points over the last five weeks. **REUTERS**

'ChatGPT not meeting EU data compliance'

Brussels: OpenAI's efforts to produce less factually false output from its ChatGPT chatbot are not enough to ensure full compliance with European Union data rules, a task force at the EU's privacy watchdog said. "Although the measures taken in order to comply with the transparency principle are beneficial to avoid misinterpretation of the output of ChatGPT, they are not sufficient to comply with the data accuracy principle," the task force said in a report released on Friday. **REUTERS**

Hindalco Q4 net profit rises 32% to ₹3,174 cr

New Delhi: Aditya Birla Group's metal flagship Hindalco Industries on Friday reported a 31.6 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at Rs 3,174 crore for the March quarter, on the back of stronger margins and volumes. **PTI**

ISSUE TAKEN UP AT WTO PANEL MEET

Japan, China question India's laptop import monitoring policy

RAVIDUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

JAPAN AND China have formally raised concern over India's laptop import licensing measure which was announced in August last year but was soon reversed, a statement released by World Trade Organization's (WTO) Committee on Import Licensing (CIL) that met on May 21 showed.

India's move to restrict laptop imports had earlier too gathered attention particularly from the US as United States Trade Representative (USTR) Ambassador Katherine Tai raised the issue during the G20 meet in India. Tai had urged India to ensure that the end-to-end online system currently in operation and related policies do not restrict trade going forward.

However, a senior government official told *The Indian Express* that questions raised by countries have no merit since there is no restriction on laptop and tablet imports in the country. He said that since India is a large market for laptops, countries keep raising questions in committee meetings. "There are far more important concerns that global trade is impacted by such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) launched by the



A senior Indian government official said that questions raised by countries have no merit since there is no restriction on laptop and tablet imports in the country. **File**

European Union and US but there is no movement on that front in the WTO. But India is being questioned for a policy that is imposing no restriction on laptop imports at all," the official stated.

This came as the regime could have impacted the exports of laptops and tablets manufactured by American companies in China as nearly 90 per cent of the laptops and personal computers (PCs) imported by India came from China. However, other countries that eye fast growing domestic market for laptops are increasingly questioning any move made by India that resembles a restriction.

Notably, the WTO licensing committee had gathered last week to discuss ways to improve the transparency of import licens-

ing regimes among WTO members and to encourage members to make use of the WTO's Import Licensing Notification Portal launched on October 31 last year.

The committee addressed three trade concerns in relation to India during the meeting, the statement said. While China and Japan raised concern over India's measures on personal computers, tablets and other electronic products, Indonesia questioned India's import monitoring on viscose staple fiber (VSF), Chinese Taipei and Thailand sought to discuss India's import monitoring for pneumatic tyres. Earlier, India in its reply to the questions raised by the US in the WTO said that the present system has been put in place to "manage and monitor import" of

specified IT hardware Goods to ensure supply chain resilience and address national security concerns. New Delhi in its reply on December 12 last year also said that the issuance of license will be "automatic in nature" and that India has no plans to expand the use of import management system beyond the listed products as of date.

India had come up with the regime to limit import of laptop and tablets largely to cut reliance on China which is the largest exporter of the item. However, unlike in the case of mobile phones, a WTO commitment prevents India from raising tariffs to shore up manufacturing within the country. As per the commitment made under the Information Technology Agreement in 1997 at the WTO, India cannot increase the duty on laptops, PCs and similar IT products, which currently come into the country at zero duty. Limiting laptops import is also crucial for India since the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for IT hardware goods is moving in the slow lane, despite the Union Information Technology Ministry modifying the plan to increase budgetary outlay last May, and clearing 27 entities, including Acer, Asus, Dell, HP and Lenovo, under the scheme. **FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com**

FIRST ADANI GROUP FIRM TO BE INCLUDED IN THE SENSEX

Adani Ports to enter Sensex from Jun 24; Wipro to move out

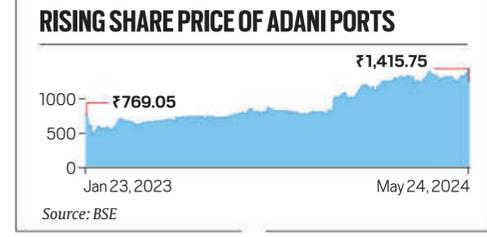
ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
MUMBAI, MAY 24

SIXTEEN MONTHS after the release of Hindenburg Research Report, which led to a sharp fall in the stock prices of all Adani Group companies, one of the key firms of the group -- Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) has now made into the coveted list of 30 companies that form the BSE Sensex.

The company is the first Adani Group firm to be included in the Sensex ever. However, the group's flagship firm Adani Enterprises and Adani Ports have been part of the NSE's Nifty 50 for the past many months. As per the reconstitution of S&P BSE indices, announced by Asia Index Pvt Ltd (AIPL) on Friday, APSEZ will replace Wipro in the 30-share Sensex with effect from June 24.

This announcement to include Adani Ports to Sensex comes days after Norges Bank, the central bank of Norway, excluded Adani Ports from its Government Pension Fund Global, over the 'unacceptable risk' it contributes to human rights violations during the times of war and conflicts.

In January 2023, the US-based Hindenburg Research accused the Gautam Adani led ports-to-energy conglomerate of stock manipulation and accounting fraud, which the company has denied. The report re-



On Friday, shares of Adani Ports traded nearly 84% above the January 23, 2023, a day before the release of Hindenburg report

sulted in a massive fall in the market capitalization of listed companies of the group. Their share prices also tanked in the 20-80 per cent range a month after the release of the Hindenburg report.

However, the stock prices of all the Adani Group companies have now erased losses caused by the Hindenburg report. For instance, on Friday shares of Adani Ports traded nearly 84 per cent above the January 23, 2023 level, a day prior to the release of Hindenburg report.

BSE has laid down certain norms for inclusion of companies into S&P BSE SENSEX. They are being included among the top 75 companies based on their

average three-month float or total market cap. The Sensex constituents should have a minimum free-float market cap of 0.50 per cent after market cap and liquidity criteria are met. The Sensex undergoes a biannual reconstitution in June and December each year.

As per the rejig announced by Asia Index Pvt Ltd, REC Ltd, HDFC Asset Management Ltd, Canara Bank, Cummins India and Punjab National Bank will replace Page Industries Ltd, SBI Cards and Payment Services Ltd, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, Jubilant FoodWorks Ltd and Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd in S&P BSE 100.

Divi's Laboratories Ltd will be dropped from S&P BSE Sensex 50 and Trent Ltd will be added to the index.

AU Small Finance Bank and IDFC First Bank will be replaced by Yes Bank and Canara Bank in S&P BSE BANKEX.

Asia Index is a 50-50 partnership between S&P Dow Jones Indices LLC and BSE Ltd.

MONTHLY ECONOMIC REVIEW FOR APRIL

Normal monsoon seen easing food price pressure; economic momentum to continue: Finance Ministry

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

THE INDUSTRIAL and service sectors of the Indian economy are performing well, backed by "brisk domestic demand and partially by tentative external demand" and early indications suggest a continuation of the economic momentum during the first quarter of the ongoing financial year 2024-25, Ministry of Finance said on Friday. Though ongoing geopolitical tensions could potentially drive up international commodity prices and disrupt supply chains, the Ministry in its latest monthly economic review for April said the forecast of a normal southwest monsoon could alleviate price pressure on food items and augurs well for food production. "The Indian economy closed FY24 strongly with its growth surpassing market expectations, despite strong external headwinds. Early indications suggest a continuation of the economic momentum during the first

quarter of FY25. The emerging robust trends in important high frequency indicators of growth like the GST collections, e-way bills, electronic toll collections, sale of vehicles, purchasing managers' indices and the value and number of digital transactions attest to the growing strength of the economy," the review said.

While the Ministry listed "multi-frontal challenges" from geopolitical tensions, it said India has strong macroeconomic buffers built during the post-Covid period. "The unrelenting geopolitical tensions and volatility in global commodity prices, especially of petroleum products, present substantial multi-frontal challenges. Nonetheless, the expectation is that the macro-economic buffers nurtured and strengthened during the post-Covid management of the economy will help the Indian economy navigate these challenges reasonably smoothly," it said.

Industrial activity in India is gaining momentum as is reflected from the improving in-

EXPLAINED

Navigating challenges

THE FINANCE Ministry sees unrelenting geopolitical tensions and volatility in global commodity prices, especially of petroleum products, as substantial multi-frontal challenges. But it stressed that the macroeconomic buffers nurtured and strengthened during the post-Covid management of the economy will help the Indian economy navigate these challenges reasonably smoothly.

dustrial capacity utilisation and volume indicators like the Index of Industrial Production and Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for manufacturing, the Ministry said. Also, fixed investment is gathering pace on the back of the government's focus

on capital spending and the resultant crowding in of private investment. Organisations in the US and Europe are focusing on reindustrialisation and this could benefit India's manufacturing firms as part of the China Plus One strategy, it said.

"Domestic manufacturing will likely receive stronger external support in the upcoming months. Modestly improved economic activity and consumer sentiment in Europe and a steady US economy have aided India's exports in April. There are reports that show that the number of organisations in the US and Europe that are focusing on reindustrialisation has increased. The majority of these organisations are focussing on enhancing supply chain resilience. This can benefit India's manufacturing firms as part of the China Plus One strategy.

The review also highlighted that the job market trends are reassuring. While the urban unemployment rate declined year-on-year during the January-March quarter this year, the labour force

participation rate and worker-to-population ratio have improved.

On other macroeconomic indicators apart from growth and employment, the Ministry said price dynamics in essential food commodities over the past two months reveal that the moderation in prices has been broad-based in March and April this year except for seasonal uptick in some vegetables and persistent pressure in certain pulses.

Among cereals, wheat price is expected to cool down by the current wheat procurement, it said. Retail inflation eased to an 11-month low of 4.83 per cent in April, but food inflation had risen, remaining above the 8 per cent mark for the sixth month in a row.

"Going forward, the inflation trajectory will be influenced by several factors. Government initiatives, including the open market sales, monitoring of stocks, import of pulses, and export restrictions, are expected to help stabilise food prices," it said.

FULL REPORT ON www.indianexpress.com

Google to pick up minority stake in Flipkart for \$36 bn

AYANTI BERA
BENGALURU, MAY 24

TECH MAJOR Google is investing around \$350 million to pick up a minority stake in Walmart-owned e-commerce major Flipkart, in the latest funding round led by its US parent. According to sources, this latest round of investment valued Flipkart at \$36 billion compared to the earlier \$33 billion.

Sources said with this Flipkart has closed its \$1 billion fund raise plan, initiated in December 2023, wherein Walmart had pumped in \$600 million in the company. Flipkart had then said that a few external investors will be putting in the balance \$400 million.

Flipkart will use the money to expand operations, strengthen its supply chain and bolster tech capabilities.

While Flipkart announced in a statement on Friday about the latest funding round led by Walmart, and coming on board of Google as a minority investor, it did not disclose any financial details. The company said that the

investment proposal is subject to receipt of regulatory and other customary approvals by both parties.

"Google's proposed investment and its cloud collaboration will help Flipkart expand its business and advance the modernisation of its digital infrastructure to serve customers across the country," the statement said.

Google has been making strategic investments in a number of Indian firms operating in the tech field.

In 2022, it had made a strategic investment of \$1 billion in telecom major Bharti Airtel, where \$700 million was spent to acquire a 1.28 per cent stake in the firm, and the rest \$300 million was intended for multi-year investments related to making more affordable mobile devices, boosting cloud adoption and other programmes around digital inclusion.

Earlier this month, Google entered into a partnership with Airtel to offer cloud and generative artificial intelligence (AI) solutions to businesses in the country. **FE**

Need tax package for ultra-wealthy, redistributive policies for poor, lower & middle class: Report

AANCHAL MAGAZINE
NEW DELHI, MAY 24

A TAX package for the ultra-wealthy in India including an annual wealth tax and an inheritance tax for those with net wealth exceeding Rs 10 crore accompanied by redistributive policies to support the poor, lower castes, and middle classes has been proposed by a report of the World Inequality Lab.

Economists Nitin Kumar Bharti, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, and Anmol Somnani in a note released Friday said the tax package proposal can help tackle the massive concentration at the very top of the wealth distribution and create fiscal space for crucial social sector investments. This note follows up on an earlier paper, co-authored by the same economists and released by World Inequality Lab in March, which had stated that India's top 1 per cent income and wealth shares have reached historical highs and are among the very highest in the world.

The report proposes an annual wealth tax and an inheritance tax for those with net wealth exceeding Rs 10 crore, equivalent to the top 0.04 per cent of the adult pop-

TAX JUSTICE PROPOSALS FOR INDIA			
	Baseline	Moderate	Ambitious
Wealth Tax	2% on net wealth > 10 cr	2% on net wealth > 10 cr 4% on net wealth > 100 cr	3% on net wealth > 10 cr 5% on net wealth > 100 cr
Inheritance Tax	33% on estates > 10 cr	33% on estates > 10 cr 45% on estates > 100 cr	45% on estates > 10 cr 55% on estates > 100 cr
Adults Affected	Top 0.04%	Top 0.04%	Top 0.04%
Annual Tax Revenues as a % of GDP (2022-23)			
Wealth Tax	2.45	4.23	5.46
Inheritance Tax	0.28	0.36	0.62
Total Package	2.73	4.59	6.08

Note: Average wealth in 2022-23 was Rs 13.5 lakh. Source: World Inequality Lab

ulation (370,000 adults), who currently hold over a quarter of the total wealth. It suggests raising phenomenally large tax revenues while leaving 99.96 per cent of the adults unaffected by the tax. Outlining a baseline scenario, the report said, a 2 per cent annual tax on net wealth exceeding Rs 10 crore and a 33 per cent inheritance tax on estates exceeding Rs 10 crore in valuation would generate a 2.73 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in revenues. "To fight these growing in-

equalities and create fiscal space for crucial social sector investments, we propose a tax justice package comprising an annual wealth tax and an inheritance tax. Much has been written about the possible pros and cons of such taxes and the debate must continue. Given the extreme concentration of wealth at the very top, coupled with deeply rooted caste inequities, we believe such policies would be an important step towards a more equitable growth path for India," the report said.

An inheritance tax would directly tackle the unfair advantage that unearned dynastic wealth renders to individuals solely based on the accident of birth, which is only exacerbated by the caste system, it said. However, the report noted that since the inheritance tax comes into force when wealth is bequeathed (i.e. upon the death of the dynast), hence, it delivers relatively small tax revenues on an annual basis. On the other hand, a small wealth tax would deliver significant annual revenues (given the larger base) while also dampening accumulation at the very top, it said.

The tax package needs to be accompanied by redistributive policies to support the poor, lower castes, and middle classes. The report cited an example of how the baseline scenario would allow doubling the current public spending on education, which has stagnated at 2.9 per cent of GDP over the past 15 years.

"It needs to be extensively debated, with a consensus on specific details of the design emerging from a broader democratic debate on tax justice and wealth redistribution in India," the report said. According to the earlier paper released in March, India's top 1 per cent income and wealth

shares have reached historical highs and are among the very highest in the world. The paper titled "Income and Wealth Inequality in India, 1922-2023: The Rise of the Billionaire Raj" had stated that the "Billionaire Raj" headed by "India's modern bourgeoisie" is now more unequal than the British Raj headed by the colonialist forces. It had pointed out there is evidence to suggest the Indian tax system might be "regressive when viewed from the lens of net wealth". A restructuring of the tax code is needed, it had said, suggesting that a levy of a "super tax" of 2 per cent on the net wealth of 167 wealthiest families would yield 0.5 per cent of national income in revenues and create space for investments.

Recently, the debate on inheritance tax had picked up after Sam Pitroda, a former adviser to Rajiv Gandhi and an associate of Rahul Gandhi, described the inheritance tax in the US as an "interesting law". Prime Minister Narendra Modi had then stated that the Congress would snatch property left behind by people for their children -- the party's mantra, he said, was to "loot", "zindagi ke saath bhi, zindagi ke baad bhi (both when you are alive and when you are dead)".

Sebi brings Audio-visual representation of disclosures in offer docs

New Delhi: Markets watchdog

Sebi on Friday decided to introduce audio-visual (AV) representation of disclosures made by companies in their offer documents for public issues, a move that will help investors have an easier understanding about the key features of an offer.

Such AV will be prepared and placed in the public domain for all main board public issues. The same will initially be in bilingual format -- English and Hindi.

This framework will be applicable to all DRHP filed with Sebi on or after July 1 on voluntary basis and from October 1 onwards on mandatory basis, the regulator said in a circular. It is expected that the AV will provide ease in understanding the salient features and reference to various disclosures of the proposed public issue. "It has been decided that salient disclosures made in the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP), Red Herring Prospectus (RHP) and Price Band Advertisement for public issues shall also be made available in Audio Visual format (AV) for ease in understanding the features of public issues." Sebi said. **PTI**

MODERN COACH FACTORY, RAEBARELI Auction notice for allotment of shops in township area of MCF/RBL. Dated: 18.05.2024

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (A Statutory Body of Government of India) Notice Applications are invited for filling up 01(one) post of Executive Director in Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India on deputation basis.

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY E-Tendering Notice Sr. Divisional Material Manager, N.E. Railway, Varanasi for and on behalf of the President of India, invites Tender through E-Procurement system "Open Tender" for the supply of the following item.

Metro Railway, Kolkata Tender Notice for e-tendering is invited by Principal Chief Engineer, Metro Railway for the following work: Name of Work: "Zone 05 i.e. Zonal Contract for Zonal maintenance & Up-Keep of track and track bed of both Up & Dn line from Km. 0/0 to 07/14 between Dum Dum to Central (incl.) including "Y" siding at Girish Park of Metro Railway, Kolkata".

North Eastern Railway Open E-Tender Notice No. IZN/Elect/OT/06/2024 Dt. 22.05.2024 E-Tenders are invited by Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (G)/N.E. Railway/Izatanagar for & on behalf of the President of India for the following work:

TORRENT PHARMACEUTICALS LIMITED Registered Office: Torrent House, Off Ashram Road, Ahmedabad - 380 009, Gujarat, India.

Extract of Consolidated Financial Results for the Quarter and Year ended March 31, 2024

Table with 4 columns: Particulars, Quarter Ended March 31, 2024, Year Ended March 31, 2024, Quarter Ended March 31, 2023. Rows include Total Income from operations, Net Profit, etc.

* Other Equity excluding Revaluation Reserve as on March 31, 2023 was ₹ 6029 crores.

Table with 4 columns: Particulars, Quarter Ended March 31, 2024, Year Ended March 31, 2024, Quarter Ended March 31, 2023. Rows include Net income from operations, Profit before tax, etc.

2 Figures for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 and March 31, 2023 represents the difference between the audited figures in respect to the full financial year and the published figures of nine months ended December 31, 2023 and December 31, 2022 (as restated as per note 3) respectively, which were subjected to limited review.

3 The Company acquired 100% shares in Curatio Health Care (I) Private Limited ("Curatio"), including its two subsidiaries, on October 14, 2022, for a total consideration of ₹ 2,000 crores.

4 The Board of Directors in their meeting held on May 24, 2024, proposed a final equity dividend of ₹ 6 per equity share.

5 The above is an extract of the detailed format of Financial Results for the quarter and year ended March 31, 2024 filed with Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015.

EIH Associated Hotels Limited A MEMBER OF THE OBEROI GROUP CIN : L92490TN1983PLC009903 Registered Office: 1/24, G.S.T. Road, Meenambakkam, Chennai - 600 027

EXTRACT OF AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND YEAR ENDED ON MARCH 31, 2024

Table with 4 columns: Particulars, 3 months ended 31.03.2024 UNAUDITED, 12 months ended 31.03.2024 AUDITED, 3 months ended 31.03.2023 UNAUDITED. Rows include Total Income from operations, Net Profit, etc.

Notes: 1 The above is an extract of the detailed format of the Quarterly/Annual Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015.

New Delhi May 24, 2024 VIKRAMJIT SINGH OBEROI MANAGING DIRECTOR DIN : 00052014

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY E-AUCTION NOTICE No. IZN/Cle-Auction/2024/01 Date: 24.05.2024 The bids are invited for registered entities on IREPS by Sr.DCM/IZN (ACO) through e-Auction for award NFR, Advertisement, Parking and Pay & Use contracts.

Z-2816/19/2024-PMSSY-IV Government of India Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (PMSSY Division) Room No.201-D, Nirman Bhawan, New Delhi-110011 Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (PMSSY Division) invites applications from eligible candidates for filling up the post of Deputy Director (Administration) in Level-13 (Rs.123100-215900) (as per 7th CPC) on transfer on deputation basis in each of Vijaypur (Samba) (Jammu & Kashmir) and Guwahati (Assam).

(Dinesh Kumar) Joint Director Tele: 011-23061730

IISER INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH BERHAMPUR An Autonomous Institution of the Ministry of Education, Govt. of India Recruitment Notice for Non-Teaching Positions Dated :29.04.2024

Canara Bank RECOVERY & LEGAL SECTION, REGIONAL OFFICE Dumri Road, Gobarsahi, Muzaffarpur, Dist- Muzaffarpur, Bihar- 842002, Mob: 7260812024 PROPERTY FOR E-AUCTION E-AUCTION Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with provision to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE, DATE: 20.05.2024 E-tender is invited from reputed and experienced contractor by the undersigned for and on behalf of the President of India, for the following: Tender No.: ELECT-GEN-BPL-T-20-2024, Name of work: Part(A)-Harda-Augmentation and shifting of Goods shed from DN side to UP side for placement of rakes in one spur. Part(B)- Bhopal-Provision of additional electric work in under construction new building on PF No. 1 (Electrical Work), Completion Period: 3 Months, Estimated cost in Rs.: 5449033.67/-, Earnest Money in Rs.: 109000.00/-, Date and Time for closing of tender: 06/06/2024 11:00.

Union Bank of India REGIONAL OFFICE PATNA: Nasheman Bhawan, 1st Floor, Mazharol Haque Path, Frazer Road, Patna Contact: 8887829751, 9102403814, 7349052850 Email: cmcfdropatna@unionbankofindia.bank NOTICE TO THE BORROWER INFORMING ABOUT SALE (30 DAYS NOTICE) RULE 6 (2)/8 (6) OF SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES 2002

उ.प्र. पावर ट्रांसमिशन कारपोरेशन लिमिटेड ई-निविदा सूचना अनुभवी निर्माता/कार्यकर्ता फॉर्म से निम्नलिखित ई-निविदा दो भागों में निश्चित तिथि को 12:00 बजे तक आमंत्रित की जाती है जो उसी दिन 15:00 बजे खोली जाएगी। विस्तृत विवरण समाचार पत्रों में प्रकाशन के उपरान्त ई-पेण्डर को वेबसाइट www.ctender.up.nic.in पर उपलब्ध रहेगा तथा अन्य किसी भी प्रकार के संशोधन/तिथि विस्तार हेतु निविदा खुलने की तिथि तक लागू नहीं करें।

24 BIG PICTURE

WHO AFTER Naveen Patnaik in Odisha? "Naveen *babu* is fine for us," smiles Suraj Behera, who works for a private telecom operator in Sambalpur. But after him? His long-time aide V K Pandian? "No, Pandian is not Odia... After Naveen *babu*... I don't know. I cannot think of anyone else as of now."

In this routine election conversation that *The Indian Express* had at a marketplace in Kadligarh, in Sambalpur district, during one of the many pit stops across the state, lies Odisha's present political reality and its challenge for the future. It's a challenge that both the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Odisha's ruling party that has had an uninterrupted 24-year rule in the state with Patnaik at the helm, and the principal Opposition party in the state, the BJP, will have to grapple with.

But at least for now, with Odisha in the midst of a long-drawn election stretching across four phases between May 13 and June 1, Patnaik's personal appeal could be the BJD's biggest advantage as he seeks a record sixth term in office. The state is voting in simultaneous elections to both the Assembly (147 seats) and Lok Sabha (21 seats).

On the other hand, the BJP, off to a delayed start after the alliance talks with the BJD sputtered to a stop, hasn't been able to find a face that can be protected as its alternative to Patnaik. Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has already visited the state thrice since the elections were announced, has not projected a particular leader, or a group of leaders, as the party's face in the state.

Patnaik's personal pull

At her home in Paikapada village, in Kabisuryanagar Assembly constituency, Ganjam district, Pratima Bisoiy, 47, is attending a meeting of the women's self-help group (SHG). She earns Rs 4,000 a month as a member of the SHG that has been given the contract of managing mandis in the panchayat through the Patnaik government's Shakti scheme. Launched in 2001, the scheme, with an annual budget of Rs 2,761 crore, ensures bank loans to SHGs to take up various economic and livelihood activities.

"I never thought I would earn for myself. At least I don't have to depend on my husband for money," says Pratima, adding that the Patnaik government's other scheme, Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana, is a "blessing". The scheme entitles women to free treatment for up to Rs 10 lakh a year, double of what men are entitled to.

Like Pratima, women often talk of Patnaik as a "protector" of their interests. And Patnaik has rarely failed them. Under him, the party has built a committed vote bank of women voters. Much before the Centre launched a scheme for pregnant women, the Odisha government launched 'Mamata', under which it provides Rs 5,000 to pregnant and lactating women.

In December 2022, when the BJD celebrated its silver jubilee, Patnaik reminded his partymen that the party would "survive another century" if women's empowerment remained central to its programme. During the 16th Lok Sabha, BJD MPs met leaders of other political parties to rally support for the Women's Reservation Bill. The party has walked the talk by fielding 33% women for the Lok Sabha elections, both in 2019 and this time.

"Ever since Patnaik launched Mission Shakti, he has never had to try too hard to seek the support of women in the state. In turn, Odisha's women have not given up on him," Sandeep Sahu, a Bhubaneswar-based political analyst, told *The Indian Express*.

The 77-year-old Patnaik's personal appeal, however, rides on more than just his targeted welfare schemes. His acceptance and credibility is largely in part due to his "clean" image. In his 24 years in power, Patnaik has kept away from scams and irregularities and has publicly cracked down on his colleagues when they faced corruption allegations.

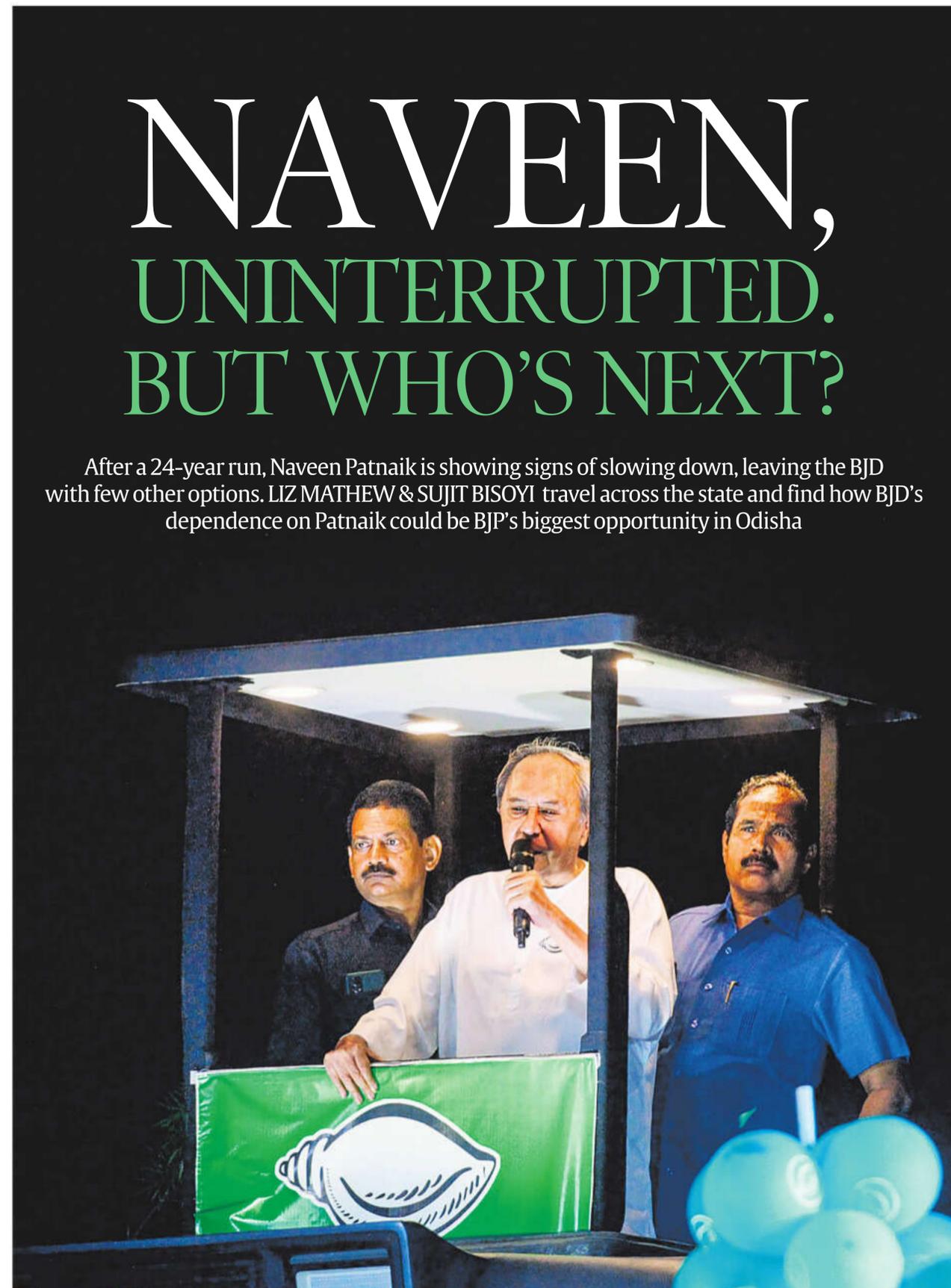
But now, with the BJP snapping at the BJD's heels, Patnaik has fallen back on a tried and tested formula: tapping into Odia aspirations.

"The BJD is a creation of the people of the state who have consistently rejected national parties. Patnaik formed the BJD by breaking away from the Janata Dal to capitalise on Odia pride. It's true that national parties have come in between but they got rejected whenever there was a regional alternative," said Tathagata Satpathy, a former BJD MP and editor of the Odia daily *Dharitri*.

Despite being an accidental politician, Patnaik, an alumnus of Doon School and Delhi's St Stephen's College, understood this about the state. Odisha was the first state to be born of linguistic pride. And so, unlike many other regional leaders, Patnaik never tried to expand his party beyond the borders of the state.

For someone who is still not fluent in Odia – political observers claim this has only added to his enigma – in his communications with the party cadre and voters, mostly done via recorded video messages, Patnaik has called for the "national party" (read BJP) to be rejected to protect the "unique identity" of the state.

Party leaders, however, admit to a major chink in this strategy: the emergence of the Tamil-origin Pandian in the BJD power circles. In mid-February, after he took voluntary retirement from the IAS, Pandian, a 2000-batch officer of the Odisha cadre, was appointed



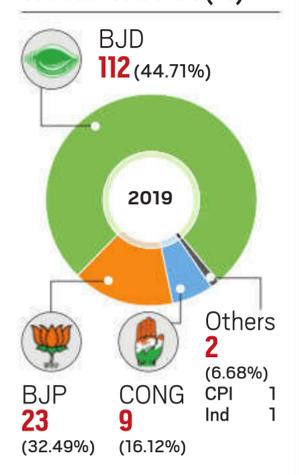
(Clockwise from top) Naveen Patnaik at a roadshow in Bhubaneswar on May 22; Pandian and the BJP's Dharmendra Pradhan at election meetings. *Express*

NAVEEN, UNINTERRUPTED. BUT WHO'S NEXT?

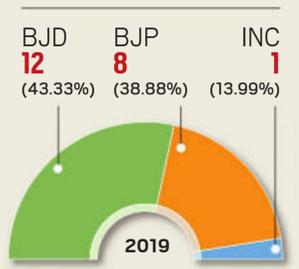
After a 24-year run, Naveen Patnaik is showing signs of slowing down, leaving the BJD with few other options. LIZ MATHEW & SUJIT BISOYI travel across the state and find how BJD's dependence on Patnaik could be BJP's biggest opportunity in Odisha

ODISHA ASSEMBLY POLLS

Seats and vote share (%)



LOK SABHA POLLS



on the ground were enthusiastic about fighting the incumbent BJD government in Odisha, something our central leadership failed to see in the past five years. Had the party taken a call on the alliance earlier, the situation would have been different now. The BJP lost a golden opportunity in Odisha," says a senior BJP leader, adding, "The PM's popularity and rhetoric alone cannot win you elections – that was proven during the 2014 and 2019 elections." (In 2014, despite the Modi wave, the BJD won 20 of the total 21 Lok Sabha seats; BJP won just one. In 2019, the BJP increased its tally to eight but still fell short of the BJD's 12 seats.)

After being in alliance for nine years, in 2009, the BJD and its junior ally, the BJP, parted ways over a range of issues, including an unsuccessful seat sharing formula in the elections that year.

The BJP sensed a strong undercurrent in its favour in the 2017 panchayat polls, when it won 297 of the total 846 zilla parishad seats, a sharp jump from the 36 seats it won in the 2012 polls. The BJP also replaced the Congress as the main Opposition in the Assembly, winning 23 seats. The party also steadily improved its vote share – from 15.1% and six Assembly seats in 2009 to 18.2% and 10 seats in 2014 and 32.8% and 23 seats in 2019. The party is expected to further improve its vote share this election, though it may not be adequate to project the BJD from power in the state.

The BJP's rise, though, has been at the expense of the Congress while the BJD continued to increase its vote share – from 38.9% in 2009 to 45.2% in the 2019 Assembly polls.

Despite not being allies, the two parties continued to project the "good rapport" shared by the top leadership.

The camaraderie between Modi and Patnaik during the second term of the NDA government at the Centre led to the 2019 appointment of the mild-mannered Pradipta Naik as Leader of Opposition, a decision that went against the choice of the majority of the MLAs who preferred Jaya Narayan Mishra, known to be a hardliner and a vocal critic of the BJD and Patnaik.

Though Mishra replaced Naik in July 2022, the central leadership of both parties continued to send mixed signals. Until his recent visits, PM Modi had not held a single political rally from 2019 to 2024. In February 2022, speaking in Parliament, the PM praised the Odisha government for undertaking reforms in the mining sector.

During Amit Shah's visit to Odisha in August 2023, the Union Home Minister praised Patnaik and met Pandian at a city hotel. The meeting with Pandian, at a time when the BJP had started questioning the IAS officer's growing influence in the state, had left the state leadership red-faced.

The BJD returned the favour and, despite not being a part of the NDA, Patnaik's MPs in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha extended their support to the BJP on crucial occasions, including the 2022 presidential election of Droupadi Murmu, the Citizenship Amendment Act and the abrogation of Article 370.

Many say this ambiguity in the ties may have led to the state BJP becoming "lacklustre" and "timid". They point to the 2022 panchayat polls, which the BJD swept while the BJP's performance dropped to 42 out of 852 seats. The only silver lining for the party was that it managed to secure a vote share of 30.07% (close to its 2019 Assembly poll percentage).

Though the BJP is now going all out against the Patnaik dispensation, with PM Modi himself leading the charge, party leaders admit they have not been able to project a convincing leadership alternative for the state. However, what gives the BJP hope is that the BJD doesn't have an alternative to Patnaik either.

Party leaders believe a call for *paribartan* (change), feeble as it may now be, has the prospect of growing stronger, even if Patnaik returns to power in the state for now. And if he does – which BJD leaders insist he will, even if with a lower tally – Patnaik will earn the honour of being the longest serving chief minister in the country.

chairman of the government's flagship Nabin Odisha and Vision 5T, with the rank of Cabinet minister. A month later, he joined the BJD.

The Pandian factor

With Patnaik arguably matching Modi in popularity and acceptance among the voters, the BJP has latched onto 'Odiya Asmita (Odia pride)', hoping to capitalise on the perceived disquiet over Pandian's rise in the party. From Sambalpur to Bhubaneswar, Nabarangpur to Mayurbanj, most voters, even among BJD supporters, baulk at the idea of Pandian succeeding Patnaik.

"We have been choosing Naveen *babu*... He is fine... But we cannot accept Pandian, he is from Tamil Nadu. There should be an Odia," says Suraj Behera, who works in Sambalpur. "Sankha people (*sankha* or the conch, referring to the BJD's symbol) have already become arrogant and in some places, their musclemen run the party. If Pandian takes charge, it will be worse."

The strategist that he is, Pandian has deftly made it a point to focus the campaign on Patnaik. "Do not look at who's your candidate... Vote for Naveen *babu*," he tells vot-

ers. The BJD's narrative – apparently Pandian's brainchild – that the voters could lose the benefits of the social welfare schemes in the event of the BJP coming to power seems to have stuck.

Though many in the party as well as BJD voters reject the possibility of Pandian succeeding Patnaik, others concede the former IAS officer has his strengths. According to party insiders, Pandian enjoys tremendous goodwill among the 70-lakh-strong women SHGs under Mission Shakti. Pandian's roadshows also attract a sizable crowd of youth and student leaders affiliated to the BJD. Pandian has also attempted to reach out to rural voters by touring the 147 Assembly constituencies at least thrice over the last year.

But Pandian's rapid rise and his positioning as the only link between the party and Patnaik has ruffled feathers in the BJD too. "Who says Pandian will be the successor? His role is to see that Naveen *babu*'s decisions are implemented. Nothing more than that," says an office bearer of the BJD. Another said the matter of succession will come up in the party once the elections are over. Pandian knows only too well that his sur-

vival in the party depends on Patnaik being around and that the knives will be out if the party fares poorly.

Its exigencies such as these, sources in the party say, that led to Pandian taking the initiative to forge an alliance with the BJP. Sources in the BJD say the failure of the talks is said to have irked Patnaik who "expressed his displeasure" in one of the rare meetings of the party held at his official residence.

With Patnaik's failing health an open secret, the Opposition's allegation of him being the CM in absentia has begun to stick.

"Naveen *babu* is old now. He has done his bit. But in Odisha, everything is *daan* (donation or freebies). Youngsters are becoming lazy," says Jitendra Kumar Behra, a cab driver in Sambalpur.

Padmalochan Meher, a shopkeeper in the town, says, "Odias are still not in a mood to change Patnaik. But a change will happen eventually."

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan told *The Indian Express*, "Where is Naveen Patnaik? He is only in videos... The chief secretary and the DGP have probably not met the Chief Minister in a year. Neither are the

secretaries or the ministers allowed to meet the CM. How is the state run?"

For BJP, a lost chance?

An ageing Patnaik, a sense of fatigue over the BJD's long reign and the disquiet over Pandian's elevation in the party – if the BJP had to strike, it had to do so now. Yet, as even those within the BJP admit, the party may have squandered its "golden chance" to strengthen its base and expand its electoral strength. The party had its surest foot in the door in Odisha, yet, this time, too, like earlier, it's unlikely to walk right through.

BJP leaders blame the ennui on the confusion in the party over its relationship with the BJD. "There was always an ambiguity in the party's approach to the BJD. The central leadership did not give a clear signal that we had to go all out against Naveen Patnaik," said a BJP leader from the state.

On March 22, after the BJP's Odisha unit announced that the party would go it alone in the elections, celebrations by BJP workers broke out across the state. But by then, the party had already wasted much time. "The celebrations showed that workers