

**6** WORLD

● After talks, 'close friends' Xi and Putin say China

● US military says Gaza Strip pier project is completed

**8** NATION

● Priyanka's campaign sets up Gandhis' virtual 'grudge match' against Irani in Amethi

● Nearly 67 per cent voter turnout in first four phases of LS polls: EC

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ED has enough evidence to show that Delhi CM demanded ₹100 crore bribe: Additional Solicitor General

## ED to file complaint against Kejriwal shortly, Supreme Court told

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** In potential trouble for Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Enforcement Directorate on Thursday told the Supreme Court it will soon file a prosecution complaint against him and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in a money laundering case related to the alleged excise policy scam.

Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the ED, told a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta that the agency proposed to file a prosecution complaint (charge sheet) against Kejriwal and the AAP. "We will do it shortly. It is in the pipeline," he told the court.

The ED made the statement when the court was hearing Kejriwal's challenge to his arrest in the money laundering case arising from the alleged Delhi excise policy. Raju claimed the probe agency has enough evidence to show that Kejriwal demanded Rs 100 crore bribe which was used by AAP in the Goa assembly poll campaign.

"We have direct evidence that Kejriwal stayed in a seven-star hotel, whose bills were partly paid by an accused in the case," Raju



submitted, adding Kejriwal played a key role in the formulation of the now scrapped Delhi excise policy. He alleged that Kejriwal, as the national convener of the AAP, was vicariously responsible for the alleged scam. Kejriwal, despite being the chief minister, does not hold any departmental portfolio.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who also appeared for the ED, questioned the maintainability of the pe-

case, the materials were seen by the trial court and the high court. The high court had summoned the case files and perused the material. Mini-trial, which this court is called upon to do, is what we are opposing," he submitted.

Mehta said that if this court starts interfering at the remand stage, it will open the doors for powerful people to approach the apex court directly, without following the procedure prescribed under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

"There are certain in-built safeguards provided under section 19 of PMLA, which deals with powers of arrest of ED officer. More rigorous the provision of arrest, the less scrutiny by courts," he said.

The bench, however, did not agree with the submission of Mehta and said that if there is a violation of section 19 conditions, the courts can interfere.

"There are several petitions filed directly in the Supreme Court under Article 32 and this court has nullified arrests or granted bail. Yes, the remedy cannot be excluded (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Nagaland govt urges ENPO to participate in civic body polls

HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, May 16:** The Nagaland government on Thursday appealed to the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) and its constituent bodies to participate in the upcoming urban local body elections in the state, slated for June 26.

Addressing a press conference on the issues of public emergency declared by the ENPO in eastern Nagaland areas and its decision to abstain from central and state elections at the secretariat conference hall in Kohima, Nagaland power and parliamentary affairs KG Kenye said the state cabinet earlier held a meeting to deliberate on the sequence of events that took place and also the organisation's latest statement to abstain from the civic body elections.

The ENPO boycotted the April 19 Lok Sabha elections in the state against the delay by the Centre to settle the offer for creation of Frontier Nagaland Territory before the announcement of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Kenye said no quarters have any misunderstanding or misconception on the issue of ENPO's demand for Frontier Nagaland Territory. He clarified that the state government recommended the case to the Union ministry of home affairs.

Kenye explained that the elections to the urban local



bodies are being conducted at the direction of the Supreme Court after a prolonged legal battle involving the women's reservation in the civic bodies in the state in the larger interest of the public and their welfare. He said the urban local bodies are semi-autonomous bodies for local self-governments to manage their own affairs at their own local levels.

Reiterating the appeal to the ENPO and its constituent bodies to actively participate in the upcoming elections to bring in more funds from the Centre for further develop the town councils, Kenye said the civic body elections are for grassroots-level developments and upliftment of our citizens.

## One held with fake notes in Guwahati

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 16:** In a swift and decisive operation this morning, the Special Task Force (STF) of Assam executed a targeted raid in the Puberun Path area under the jurisdiction of Hatigaon, Guwahati.

"Acting on reliable intelligence regarding the circulation of counterfeit currency, the STF apprehended a suspect and seized significant evidence implicating him in the illicit trade," said an official statement on Thursday.

The prime suspect, identified as Md. Shazarul Islam, aged 30 and hailing from village named Daulatpur of Lakhimpur district, was taken into custody during the operation.

His father's name is Lt. Abdur Rahman.

The raid yielded substantial evidence, including Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN) with a face value of ₹ 1,85,500, consisting of 371 notes of denomination 500. Additionally, two mobile phones were confiscated (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'The concerned department has taken no notice of it so we are doing it' Diphu villagers rally to repair hazardous roads

HT Bureau

**DIPHU, May 16:** In a display of community solidarity and resilience, residents of Rongtharve, Rongbarim, Rongchingdon, and Rongchingri, situated under Ward No. 14 of Diphu town, came together on Wednesday to address a pressing issue plaguing their locality.

The focus of their attention was the stretch of road near Rongbarim Tinali, which had been left riddled with large potholes, posing a hazard to commuters and pedestrians alike. This road, serving as a crucial link to Jawaharlal Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) and Taralango, had long been neglected, prompting the villagers to take matters



into their own hands. Despite being a connecting road of considerable importance, the condition of the thorough-

fare had deteriorated to such an extent that it had become treacherous, particularly during inclement weather. The worn-out surface, compounded by rainwater runoff, had rendered the road dangerously slippery, posing a significant risk to motorists, especially two and three-wheelers.

Faced with the imminent dangers and the lack of action from the concerned authorities, more than 20 villagers, accompanied by their respective headmen, rallied together to initiate repair works. Armed with sand and gravel, they diligently filled the gaping potholes in a bid to alleviate the immediate dangers posed by the dilapidated road conditions. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## This election is to choose PM who can highlight India's strength globally: Modi

**JAUNPUR (UP), May 16:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Thursday that this Lok Sabha election is an opportunity for the country to choose a leader who can run a strong government which "makes the world aware of India's strength".

Modi was addressing an election rally organised at a college ground here in support of BJP candidates Kripashankar Singh from the Jaunpur parliamentary constituency and B P Saroj from the Machhlishahr (reserved) seat.

"This election is an opportunity to choose the prime minister of the country. Such a prime minister who runs a strong government which cannot be dominated by the world but which makes the world aware of India's strength," he said.

"Therefore, when you vote for our Kripashankar ji from Jaunpur, B P Saroj ji from Machhlishahr, your vote forms a strong government. The votes given to them will go directly into Modi's account," the prime minister said. Amid slogans of 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Har Har Modi', the prime minister said, "Your enthusiasm shows that you have made it difficult for the INDI alliance to win even a single seat in Uttar Pradesh."

"We got the Ram temple after a wait of 500 years.

The entire country is happy. Every Indian living across the world is happy. But these parivarvadis (dynasts) are hurling abuses. The shehzade (prince) of the SP and his uncle call the Ram temple useless (bekar)."

Modi was apparently referring to a recent statement of Samajwadi Party (SP) general secretary Ram Gopal Yadav who had said the Ram temple has not been built in a useless manner but not as per 'Vaastu'.

Attacking SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, Modi said, "SP's shehzade also makes fun of Kashi. They are crossing every limit to please their vote bank. I am surprised that it is the 21st century and they are roaming around with the flag of triple talaq."

Accusing the leaders of the INDIA bloc of advocating reservation on the basis of religion, Modi said, "They advocate reservation on the basis of religion. They want to take away the right of reservation of the SCs, STs and OBCs by changing the Constitution of the country."

Modi announced, "As long as I am alive, they will not be able to take away the reservation of the OBCs, SCs and the tribal people. As long as I am alive, I will not let them do this politics." (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

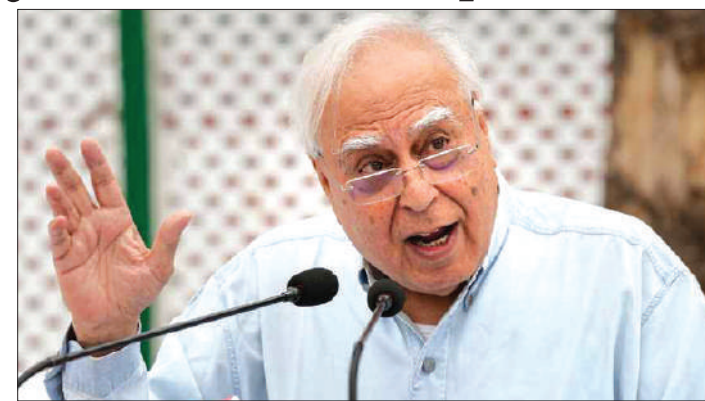


## Shah's statement on bail to Kejriwal 'objectionable': Kapil Sibal

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Thursday hit out at home minister Amit Shah over his reported "special treatment" remarks on the interim bail to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, saying it was an "objectionable statement" that questioned the intention of the Supreme Court judges.

Sibal's remarks came after Shah, while referring to the interim bail granted by the Supreme Court to Kejriwal, reportedly said many in the country believed he was given special treatment. The Supreme Court on Thursday steered clear of the political talk about it having made an exception for Kejriwal in granting him interim bail for campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls but said "critical analysis of the judgement is welcome".

Addressing a press conference in the national capital, Sibal said, "Shah has made an objectionable



statement and questioned the intention of the Supreme Court judges."

Shah has stated very cleverly that many people are saying the Supreme Court's decision to grant interim bail to Kejriwal in the excise policy case is akin to him getting special treatment, he added.

"He (Shah) has said 'people are saying'. If people are saying and

you don't believe in it, then why say it? If people say and you believe it, then only you have made the statement," said Sibal, who is also a senior advocate. Sibal said it is important to spell out the laws in light of the statement.

"If someone is convicted but gets a stay from the court, he or she can file a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## SC directs Union to deport 17 foreigners languishing in Assam detention centre

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Union of India to deport 17 foreigners languishing in an Assam detention centre, noting there is no offence registered against them.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan noted a report submitted by the State Legal Services Authority which stated that there are 17 declared foreigners detained in the detention centre in Assam. "We are of the view that Union of India must take immediate steps for deporting these 17 foreigners as there is no offence registered

against them," the bench said.

Noting that a number of foreigners have been languishing in detention centres for years, the top court in April had asked the State Legal Services Authority of Assam to apprise it about the foreigners detained for more than two years.

It had also directed the legal services authority to constitute a team to visit the detention centres to find out the facilities made available to foreigners. The top court was hearing a plea seeking the release of persons who have completed more than two years in detention centres in the state. (PTI)

## Over 30% Covaxin takers reported adverse events: BHU study

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** Nearly one-third of the individuals who received Bharat Biotech's anti-Covid vaccine Covaxin reported 'adverse events of special interest,' or AESI, according to a one-year follow up study conducted by a team of researchers at BHU.

Nearly 50 per cent of 926 study participants in the study complained of infections during the follow-up period, predominated by viral upper respiratory tract infections.

Serious AESI, which included stroke and Guillain-Barre syndrome, were reported in one per cent of individuals, the study, which looked at long-term safety of the BBV152 vaccine in adolescents and adults, claimed.

Published in the journal Springer Nature, the study comes in the wake of UK pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca admitting its Covid vaccine can cause rare side-effects of

blood clotting and lowering of platelet count in UK court.

"Close to one third of the individuals developed AESIs. New-onset skin and subcutaneous disorders, general disorders, and nervous system disorders were the three most common disorders observed in adolescents after receiving the vaccine," the study, conducted from January 2022 to August 2023, said.

The study involved 635 adolescents and 291 adults, who received the BBV152 vaccine. The participants were interviewed telephonically about long-term adverse events of special interest after 1 year of vaccination.

New-onset skin and subcutaneous disorders (10.5 per cent), general disorders (10.2 per cent), and nervous system disorders (4.7 per cent) were the common AESIs in adolescents. General disorders (8.9), (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Lekha Jain crowned Mrs India, 2024

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 16:** In a dazzling spectacle orchestrated by Roli Tripathi, the spotlight shone brightly on Mrs. Lekha Jain from the picturesque locale of Diphu, nestled in the heart of Karbi Anglong, Assam. Amidst a sea of contenders, Mrs. Jain emerged as the epitome of grace and resilience, clinching the highly coveted title of Mrs. India 2024.

The crowning moment, graced by the esteemed presence of Dr. Aditi Govithkar, a luminary in the realm of wellness, added an extra layer of prestige to Mrs. Jain's achievement. Dr. Govithkar, renowned for her expertise and discerning eye, bestowed the crown upon Mrs. Jain, acknowledging her outstanding dedication to fitness, health, and overall well-being.

Mrs. Jain's journey to the pinnacle of success serves as a beacon of inspiration to women everywhere, proving that with determination and perseverance, any dream is attainable. Through her



platform, Indie Royal Ms and Mrs. India 2024, Mrs. Jain pledges to champion the cause of women's empowerment, urging individuals

to prioritize their health and embrace a fit and fabulous lifestyle. As the nation celebrates Mrs. Lekha Jain's triumph, her victory res-

onates not only as a personal achievement but also as a testament to the indomitable spirit of women across the country.

### HT BRIEFS

#### Missing body

**GUWAHATI:** The Assam Police force mourns the loss of Mintu Roy, a dedicated jawan from the 1st Assam Police Battalion (APBN), whose body was recovered after he went missing during election duty in Bihar. Roy's disappearance occurred on May 14 while he was on duty alongside two fellow jawans, bathing in the River Ganga. Despite valiant efforts from locals, Roy was swept away by the river's powerful currents and could not be saved. The unfortunate incident unfolded when Roy and his colleagues decided to refresh themselves in the river during a break from their duties.

#### Broker held

**GUWAHATI:** The Guwahati Police has taken a significant step towards curbing fraudulent land acquisition by apprehending a land broker from Narengi's Housing Colony. The arrest follows diligent operations conducted by the Narengi Police on Wednesday, prompted by a case filed at the Noonmati Police Station. The individual in question, identified as Jogeshwar Nath (49), stands accused of unlawfully acquiring a plot of land belonging to a political party, CPI. The CPI promptly lodged a complaint with the Noonmati Police Station, leading to Nath's arrest.

#### One dead

**GUWAHATI:** Amidst soaring temperatures in the region, Assam's Cachar district witnessed a tragic incident as one individual succumbed to heat stroke on Thursday. Identified as Chayan Dey, the deceased was a temporary employee at Satya Ranjan College in Cachar, according to reports. Sources indicate that the unfortunate event occurred while Dey was heading home after completing his duties. Overwhelmed by the intense heat, he suddenly collapsed on the road, unable to withstand the effects of heat stroke.

# India to become \$4 trn economy in FY25, surpass Japan by FY26: Sanyal

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** India will be a \$ 4 trillion economy in 2024-25 and surpass Japan by early next fiscal to become the world's fourth largest economy, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) member Sanjeev Sanyal said on Thursday.

Sanyal further said that a 7 per cent economic growth rate will be a 'very good' growth rate for India, given various constraints, including the country's weak exports.

"So, this financial year, we will become a \$4 trillion economy," he said at an event here.

Recently, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that India is expected to overtake Japan and Germany to emerge as the world's third-largest economy by 2027.

Currently, in US dollar terms, India is the fifth largest economy with a size of about \$3.7 trillion in nominal terms.

Sanyal said Japan is now just a little ahead of us at \$4.1 trillion.

"So, either very early next year or even you know this year, we will cross Japan to become the world's fourth largest economy," Sanyal added.

According to him, Germany is a \$4.6 trillion economy and it is not growing, so makes it a static target.

"Maybe in two years, we will go past Germany. So, I think in terms



of becoming the world's third largest economy, we are reasonably now close to the target," he said.

Sanyal argued that the government should not push any fiscal move to accelerate economic growth to 8-9 per cent.

"If you get it, great, but anything around 7 per cent compounded over time is a very good growth rate.

"We shouldn't get too excited about 9 per cent," he said.

Sanyal said compounding of growth is the single most important thing as this will generate jobs and taxes.

While the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Fitch Ratings

have estimated India's growth at 7 per cent, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), S&P Global Ratings and Morgan Stanley projected a 6.8 per cent growth rate for FY25.

"Do not get emotional about trying to hit a very high growth rate in any particular year," he emphasised.

Sanyal pointed out that there are other countries, for example in Southeast Asia, which were in our position in the mid-90s.

"You will remember Indonesia, Thailand and so on, and for a while, they were doing very well. And then it all blew up in the Asian crisis," he said.

Sanyal emphasised that there is

no need to mess around with the financial system trying to support growth.

"Do not mess around with your fiscal system, your monetary system, your current account and so on," he said.

Responding to a question on the internationalisation of the rupee, Sanyal said it is about converting the rupee into a hard currency.

"We only aspire over the next decade or so to become a hard currency like many of the others, we are not attempting to become the world's anchor currency," he added.

Sanyal said India's limited purpose is to convert the rupee into a hard currency over the next decade in terms of its wider usage as the currency in which people trade, in particular, the country's own trade.

"It is a currency in which other governments in the world hold their reserves in terms of being a part of the IMF SDR basket. So, that is a limited objective," he said.

In that context, Sanyal said, the government has done a few things, including an inflation rate targeting mechanism.

"...So that the rupee essentially becomes a commonly used hard currency, at least commonly used for things relating to India," he said. (PTI)

## Sensex jumps 676 pts Nifty closes above 22,400 on global stocks rally

**MUMBAI, May 16:** Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty shot up nearly 1 per cent on Thursday, driven by buying in HDFC Bank and Infosys and a rally in the US and Asian markets.

In a highly volatile trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 676.69 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 73,663.72. During the day, it hit a high of 73,749.47 and a low of 72,529.97.

The NSE Nifty surged 203.30 points or 0.92 per cent to 22,403.85.

"The domestic market experienced a late surge, driven by strong global trends that pointed to lower-than-expected US consumer inflation figures, which suggests at least two interest rate cuts in 2024," Geojit Financial Services Head of Research Vinod Nair said.

Among the Sensex components, Mahindra & Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, Titan, Infosys,

JSW Steel, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the major gainers.

Maruti, State Bank of India, Power Grid, Tata Motors and IndusInd Bank were the laggard.

"The market exhibited volatility during trading hours but managed to gain nearly one per cent, indicating a continuation of its recovery trend. Positive global cues led to a gap-up opening in the Nifty; however, the initial gains diminished quickly as the session progressed.

Subsequently, it witnessed sharp fluctuations on both sides before settling near the day's peak," said Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 1.07 per cent and smallcap index rallied 0.85 per cent.

Among the indices, capital goods jumped 2.05 per cent, fol-

lowed by industrials (1.99 per cent), teck (1.66 per cent), realty (1.59 per cent), IT (1.55 per cent), telecommunication (0.99 per cent) and healthcare (0.70 per cent).

Utilities index emerged as the only laggard.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains. European markets were trading lower. Wall Street ended higher on Wednesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.33 per cent to USD 82.45 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 2,832.83 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Halting its three-day rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 117.58 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 72,987.03 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty dipped 17.30 points or 0.08 per cent to 22,200.55. (PTI)

## POCO becomes #6 Android smartphone brand in India

**GUWAHATI, May 16:** POCO India, renowned for its exponential growth in the smartphone industry, has once again achieved a remarkable feat. Through its unwavering commitment to innovation, POCO has surpassed OnePlus by experiencing an extraordinary year-on-year growth of 72.2% in Q1 2024.

The latest IDC report highlights POCO's impressive growth trajectory during Q1 2024 with a 5.9% market share, positioning it ahead of OnePlus in terms of smartphone shipments. This success is a testament to POCO's effective strategy of targeting the Gen Z demographic, offering a diverse portfolio of high-performance smartphones, and enhancing the overall consumer experience through robust after-sales service

and support networks. The recent IDC report for Q1 2024 reveals a strong growth rate for POCO, propelling it to no. 6 position amongst the top Android smartphone brands in India.

Himanshu Tandon, country head, POCO India, expressed his excitement about the exceptional growth in Q1 2024, stating, "POCO's remarkable progress is a clear reflection of our unwavering dedication to innovation and our deep understanding of our consumers' needs. As we move forward, we are more determined than ever to maintain this momentum and set new benchmarks in the industry. We owe this milestone to the massive support and love that we have received from our POCO family. We believe that 2024 holds great promise for us."

POCO's recent launches, including the highly successful POCO X6 series and POCO C61, have become instant hits due to their exceptional value and performance. On the marketing front, POCO India has successfully forged a strong connection with the Gen Z audience through its disruptive approach.

This includes strategic partnerships that have significantly amplified POCO's visibility. Collaborations with popular reality show BIGG BOSS and renowned food chain Taco Bell have further strengthened POCO's presence across various touchpoints and helped cultivate a loyal fan base. With such a growth charter, POCO India is well-positioned to maintain its dominance in the Indian smartphone market.

## HDFC Bank introduces digital credit cards- PIXEL

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, May 16:** HDFC Bank, India's leading private sector bank, announced the launch of 'PIXEL' – its first end-to-end mobile app-based customisable, DIY digital card range designed for Digital Natives. PIXEL is tailored for a generation characterised by digital fluency, unique preferences, and distinct financial behaviours. PIXEL is a first-of-its-kind range of digital credit card series that offers seamless app-based issuance, completedigital lifecycle management, user engagement and digital servicing.

Furthermore, through PIXEL, the Bank gives the power of customisation and choice to customers, by enabling them to select their preferred categories and favorite merchants/platforms such as Zomato, Myntra, BookMyShow, MakeMyTrip, Amazon and Flipkart, among others. By doing so, customers can earn attractive accelerated cashbacks on their spends from these merchants/platforms. Both current and new customers can apply for PIXEL credit cards through the PayZapp

mobile application of the Bank.

Speaking at the launch ceremony, Parag Rao, country head - payments, liability products, consumer finance & marketing said, "PIXEL represents a pivotal shift in our approach to banking solutions, crafted to resonate with Digital Natives. At HDFC Bank, we are excited to introduce this digital-first credit card that offers flexibility and customisation. With PIXEL, we are not just launching a product, we are shaping the future of digital banking, ensuring our offerings are as dynamic and innovative as the customers we serve."

Sandeep Ghosh, group country manager, India and South Asia said, "We are excited to deepen our partnership with HDFC Bank with the PIXEL credit cards initiative, a testament to our digital-first, customer-centric approach to payment innovation. Backed by the trust consumers place in both HDFC Bank and Visa, this range of cards enhances the banking experience and empowers today's digital consumer with unparalleled flexibility and seamless personalization."

## SBI raises FD rate on select short-term maturity up to 75 bps

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** The country's biggest lender State Bank of India (SBI) has hiked fixed deposit rate on select short-term maturity up to 75 basis points, a move likely to be followed by other lenders. For term deposits of 46-179 days, the rate has been increased by 75 basis points to 5.50 per cent, as against the earlier 4.75 per cent, as per the revised figure

posted on SBI website. There has been a 25 basis point increase in the other two maturity buckets -- 180-210 days and 211 days to less than 1 year, to 6 per cent and 6.25 per cent respectively. The new rates on deposit less than ₹ 2 crore are effective from May 15, 2024. Senior citizens would be eligible for additional 50 basis points on the revised rates as per the norms,

it said. SBI has left interest rates unchanged on other maturity buckets beyond one year.

For fixed deposits above ₹ 2 crore, the bank has increased interest rate on both short-term and long-term maturity. For three maturity periods starting from 7 days till 210 days, the interest rate has been raised between 10 basis points and 25 basis points. (PTI)At

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## ED to file complaint against

and remand court or the high court usually look into these aspects. It is not that we don't have jurisdiction but normally we observe judicial restraint, because there are alternate remedies available. However, we cannot overlook when there is a grave case," the bench told Mehta.

During the nearly day-long hearing, the bench quizzed the Enforcement Directorate on the procedure adopted to arrest Kejriwal and wondered how can investigating officers ignore exculpatory materials favouring him while exercising the power to arrest. "Assuming that the Investigating Officer (IO) has material in possession. On one hand incriminating, on the other exculpatory. There can't be a dispute that IO has to be fair. If he ignores the latter absolutely and says I have reasons, would it not be a ground for bail?" Justice Datta questioned Raju.

"You can't say only one side has to be seen by IO," Justice Datta said, adding there has to be proper application of mind and the IO has to balance his finding with inculpatory and exculpatory material.

Raju contended that the satisfaction of the IO under Section 19 is "purely subjective" and it does not require that all material have to be reflected in the reasons to arrest. Underscoring the importance of exculpatory material, the bench said if this is held from an accused, how will he argue for bail.

The bench also said ED cannot rely on post-arrest material to defend an arrest. "We have to put the curtain down at the date of arrest. Material should be sufficient prior to arrest and you can't rely on post-arrest material." It also dealt with Raju's submission that the AAP being a political party, is an association of individuals and the anti-money laundering law can be invoked against it under section 70. The hearing remained inconclusive and would continue on Friday.

The Delhi chief minister was arrested on March 21 in the money laundering case in which the apex court enlarged him on interim bail from May 10 to June 1. It ordered him to surrender on June 2. The court, however, barred him from visiting his office or the Delhi secretariat, and signing official files unless absolutely necessary for obtaining the lieutenant governor's approval. The matter relates to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22, which has now been scrapped. (PTI)

## This election is to choose

The prime minister said, "You must have heard that these Congressmen brought an X-ray machine. One needs to be careful with it. I have been exposing their agenda for a week. It seems that their X-ray machine has broken down." On development, he said, "You have seen in Kashi how a strong government works. We are seeing it happen in Ayodhya."

"Earlier when people used to talk about development, sometimes the discussion was about Delhi and sometimes about Mumbai. Now, the country and the world also talk about Kashi-Ayodhya," Modi added.

"It is my pledge to make a developed India. The growth engine of the developed India will be Purvanchal (eastern India). Modi and Yogi are going to change the picture and fate of Purvanchal in the next five years," he said.

Voting will be held in Jaunpur and Machhlishahr in the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections on May 25. (PTI)

## One held with fake notes

along with a sum of ₹ 65 in cash. Necessary legal formalities are currently underway as the investigation progresses, with authorities determined to unravel the full extent of the suspect's involvement in the illegal trade of counterfeit currency.

## Shah's statement on bail

nomination and get elected. If there is a charge sheet against anyone, a person can campaign and also file a nomination, like Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh is doing," the Rajya Sabha MP said.

"One who just has allegations against him cannot campaign, what kind of a statement is this?" Sibal said, hitting out at Shah. He probably does not have knowledge of the law, otherwise he would not have made the statement, Sibal said. Slamming Shah, Sibal said, "He (Shah) says 'if we win 400 seats, we will take back PoK'. What if you don't get that many seats, won't you take back PoK? We want you to take it back. Firstly, you should take back those 4,000 kilometres that China has taken away..."

Asked about the alleged assault on AAP MP Swati Maliwal at Kejriwal's residence, Sibal said, "Why is he (Shah) worried about this (Maliwal assault case)? It's an internal matter of AAP. You think about Prajwal (Revanna), why don't you give statements on that? That is the internal matter of JD(S), you are silent there and the prime minister is also silent." (PTI)

## Diphu villagers rally to repair

Kiri Teron, the village headman of Rongchingri, voiced the collective sentiment, expressing frustration at the apathy shown by the authorities towards the plight of the villagers. "It has become urgent to repair the road. The concerned department has taken no notice of it. For our own convenience, we are doing it. This is a temporary measure though," Teron remarked.

The efforts received widespread support from various quarters, including auto-rickshaw drivers and owners of private vehicles, who recognized the critical need for immediate action to ensure safe passage along the road. Reddem Taru, an auto-rickshaw driver actively involved in the repair efforts, highlighted the challenges faced by commuters due to the neglected road conditions.

Despite the temporary nature of the repairs, the collective endeavor serves as a poignant reminder of the power of community action and solidarity in tackling pressing issues affecting the locality.

With the repair efforts underway, the hope remains that the concerned authorities will heed the villagers' calls for lasting solutions to address the longstanding issues plaguing the region's roads. Until then, the residents of Rongtharve, Rongbarim, Rongchingdon, and Rongchingri forge ahead, united in their resolve to safeguard the well-being of their community.

## Over 30% Covaxin

musculoskeletal disorders (5.8 per cent), and nervous system disorders (5.5 per cent) were the common AESIs in adults. Menstrual abnormalities were noticed in 4.6 per cent of female participants. Ocular abnormalities and hypothyroidism were observed in 2.7 per cent and 0.6 per cent of participants. Four deaths (three female individuals, one male individual) were reported in adults, the study added.

All four had diabetes, while hypertension in three, and a history of pre-vaccination COVID-19 was present in two of them. Stroke was the main contributor in two deaths and one fatality was due to post-COVID-19 rhinocerebral mucormycosis, which supposedly disseminated after vaccination as reported by the caregivers.

The fourth death happened in a woman with multiple episodes of unconsciousness post-vaccination, the etiology of which remained unidentified till death. In the absence of a definite causality association, no conclusions can be drawn from these events. With the majority of AESIs persisting for a significant period, extended surveillance of COVID-19-vaccinated individuals is warranted to understand the course and outcomes of late-onset AESIs, the study underlined.

Serious AESIs might not be uncommon and necessitate enhanced awareness and larger studies to understand the incidence of immunemediated phenomena post-COVID-19 vaccination. Female individuals, adolescents with pre-vaccination COVID-19, those with co-morbidities, and those with post-vaccination typhoid had respectively 1.6, 2, 2.7, and 3.2 times higher odds of persistent AESIs. Adults with co-morbidities had more than two times higher odds of AESIs and persistent AESIs, the study stated.

Adults receiving three doses and those receiving one dose of BBV152 were respectively at four and two times higher risk of AESIs compared with adults receiving two doses of the Covaxin, the study said. (PTI)

## Wall St hits fresh records on hopes for rate cuts World shares are mixed

**HONG KONG, May 16:** Share opened lower Thursday in Europe after most Asian benchmarks gained, tracking a Wall Street rally driven by hopes that inflation is heading back in the right direction.

The optimism came from a report Wednesday showing US consumers had to pay prices for gasoline, car insurance and everything else in April that were 3.4% higher overall than a year earlier, less than March's inflation rate of 3.5%.

The slowdown was a relief after reports for the consumer price index, or CPI, earlier this year had consistently come in worse than expected. The report built on expectations that the Federal Reserve might cut its main interest rate this year, the major preoccupation for most investors.

In Asian trading, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 index gained 1.4% to 38,920.26, even after the government reported that the Japanese economy contracted at a 2% annual rate in the January-March quarter.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng index rose 1.6% to 19,376.53. The



Shanghai Composite index edged 0.1% higher, to 3,122.40.

In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 advanced 1.7% to 7,881.30 while South Korea's Kospi climbed 0.8% to 2,753.00.

Taiwan's Taieax was up 0.7% and the Sensex in India fell 0.4%.

On Wednesday, the S&P 500 jumped 1.2% to top its prior high set a month and a half earlier, closing at 5,308.15. The Dow Jones Industrial Average added 0.9% to 39,908.00, and the Nasdaq jumped 1.4% to 16,742.39, adding to its

own record set a day earlier.

On the losing end were GameStop and AMC Entertainment, as momentum reversed following their jaw-dropping starts to the week. GameStop fell 18.9%, though it's still up 126.5% for the week so far.

AMC Entertainment sank 20% after it said it will issue nearly 23.3 million shares of its stock to wipe out \$163.9 million in debt.

Another report Wednesday showed no growth in spending at US retailers in April from March.

Economists had expected 0.4% growth.

Slowing retail sales could be seen as a positive for markets, because it could reduce the upward pressure on inflation. But weaker US consumer spending would erode one of the main pillars keeping the economy out of a recession. Pressure has grown particularly high on lower-income households.

Traders are now forecasting a nearly 95% probability that the Fed cuts its main interest rate at least once this year, according to data from CME Group. That's up from just below 90% a day before.

In other trading early Thursday, US benchmark crude oil picked up 27 cents to \$78.90 per barrel in electronic trading on the New York Mercantile Exchange. It gained 61 cents on Wednesday.

Brent crude, the international standard, was up 29 cents at \$83.04 per barrel.

The US dollar fell to 154.75 Japanese yen from 154.88 yen. The euro fell to \$1.0872 from \$1.0885. (AP)

UPPL Women's Wing organises shraddhanjali programme

## Kokrajhar pays homage to social reformer Birubala Rabha



**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, May 16:** A shraddhanjali program on the demise of eminent social reformer Padmashri (Dr) Birubala Rabha was organised at Mahatma Gandhi Park in Kokrajhar town on Wednesday evening. Hundreds of people from different corners of Kokrajhar town and its adjoining areas participated in the shraddhanjali program, which was organised by the Women's Wing of the UPPL party to pay homage to the de-

parted soul of eminent social reformer Birubala Rabha. Notably, Dr Birubala Rabha passed away on May 13 after a prolonged illness at a hospital in Guwahati. She was regarded as a crusader against witch hunting and was instrumental in the Assam government passing the Prevention of and Protection from Witch Hunting Act, 2015. Dr Birubala Rabha was conferred the Padma Shri for social work in 2021. She received the 12th Upendranath

Brahma Soldier of Humanity Award, 2014, and the Sati Sadhani Award in 2017. Rabha was felicitated by Reliance Industries Limited in Mumbai in 2008 under their 3rd edition of Real Heroes — ordinary people, extraordinary service, and was featured in the Switzerland 1,000 Women Peace Project, which celebrates 1,000 peace women advocates from across 150 countries worldwide. Raju Kumar Narzary, UPPL general secretary, Women's Wing

president of UPPL, Pratibha Brahma, several senior party leaders, well-wishers, and citizens thronged at the program and lit candles followed by floral tributes to Birubala Rabha on the occasion. A one-minute silence condolence was also observed to pay respect and honour to the departed soul of Rabha. The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro, has extended his deep condolences and mourning on the demise of Dr Birubala Rabha. He recalled the contributions and dedication of Rabha to humanity welfare services, stating that the society in the state of Assam has lost a great social worker with her demise. He said that Rabha's lifelong crusade for women empowerment, social justice, and upliftment of the underprivileged has left an enduring mark on our society. She will forever remain a shining beacon of inspiration for us.

"In memoriam, on Thursday evening, the UPPL paid solemn tributes to eminent social activist Padmashri Dr Birubala Rabha, at a memorial ceremony organised by UPPL's Women Wing, at the Mahatma Gandhi Park, Kokrajhar. Late Dr Rabha will remain an eternal guiding light for us all, and her memory will always inspire us to work devotedly for the upliftment and empowerment of the underprivileged. I pray to the Almighty to grant eternal peace to her soul," Boro added.

## National Dengue Day spurs awareness campaigns

Health officials and community leaders join forces to educate public on dengue

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, May 16:** In alignment with the nationwide observance, 'National Dengue Day' was observed in Dima Hasao district to raise awareness about dengue, a viral disease spread by mosquitoes. The event was organised by the National Centre for Vector-Borne Diseases Control (NCVBDC), Dima Hasao, and held at the Urban Health Centre (UHC) in Halflong.

Chief medical officer Dr Paban Kumar Ganju provided an overview of dengue symptoms and causes. He also discussed the treatment facilities available in the district to combat the disease. Dr Ganju urged health workers and accredited social health activists (ASHAs) to closely monitor the situation and educate the public on preventive measures against dengue.

Joint director of health services, Dr Duleswar Gogoi, highlighted that a total of 852 dengue cases were reported in the district last year, a significant increase compared to previous years. This underscores the importance of public awareness regarding the causes, symptoms, and prevention of dengue.

The program was attended by NHM district media expert John Aao, district malaria consultant Debajit Saikia, as well as ANMS,



ASHAs, health workers, and medical officials.

**Our Jagirood correspondent adds:** The National Dengue Day was organised on Thursday by the National Centre for Vector-Borne Disease Control, Morigaon, with an awareness meeting at Morigaon HS School on the theme 'Connect with Community, Control Dengue'. The meeting was chaired by Dibyajyoti Tamuli, principal, Morigaon HS School, and was held in the presence of Dr Arun Kr Nath, joint director of health services, Morigaon, Dr Tapan Kr Saikia, additional CM&HO (FW), Supriya Das, DMO, Gunendra Saikia,

DVBDC, and other health officials, teachers, and students of class 9. The objective of the meeting was explained by Supriya Das, district malaria officer. Awareness speeches on dengue, its causes, symptoms, prevention, and control measures were addressed by joint DHS, followed by other officials. Moreover, National Dengue Day was also observed in the entire district by health officers and workers by organising different activities viz. fever surveillance, house-to-house awareness, bed net impregnation camps, miking, and source reduction survey for Aedes mosquito larvae.

## Advocacy group campaign restricted by govt

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, May 16:** Over the past two years, more than 100 NGOs, including Centre for Policy Research (CPR), Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust headed by former Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, and Oxfam India, have lost their Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) licenses on charges of alleged misuse of foreign grants. The Government of India (GOI) has recently placed the US advocacy organisation, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CFTK), under the prior reference category (PRC) - indicating that international donations in India will have to be vetted and approved by the authorities before being utilised. The Union Home Ministry indicated the influence of domestic NGOs against the tobacco industry as one of the main reasons to restrict funding for

CFTK. CFTK is being funded by American philanthropist and former mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg. It provides legal, communication, and research support to governments and non-governmental organisations around the world to assist in promoting, adopting, and implementing tobacco control. It has been recently reported that one of the NGOs associated with CFTK, The Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAD), was found in violation of FCRA, and their license to operate was withdrawn in March this year by the Union Home Ministry. If any donor organisation is put under the 'prior permission category', it is barred from funding any Indian NGO without a nod from the government. In February this year, VHA held a National Conference on Tobacco or Health where discussions ranged from the economics of tobacco production

and control in India, governance in tobacco control, environment, and tobacco control, & digital interventions in tobacco control. In 2017, another powerful US-based Christian donor, Compassion International (CI), was put under the prior permission category. The same year, the US-based NGO founded by Michael Bloomberg, Bloomberg Philanthropies, came under the home ministry's scanner over concerns that the foundation was running an anti-tobacco campaign and aggressively lobbying against the sector. The FCRA license is granted by the home ministry to NGOs and think tanks for five years, and their applications are reviewed based on annual returns and foreign grants received for the purpose it is meant for. Any misuse or diversion of foreign funds by NGOs is considered a violation of the FCRA Act, said officials.

## Train services suspended

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, May 16:** Due to operational exigencies within the Tinsukia division of NF Railway, train services for DEMU train no 07904 (Makum Jn - Dangari) and train no 07905 (Dangari - Makum Jn) will be suspended from May 16 to May 31, 2024.

## Demise of social worker

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, May 16:** Tragedy struck on Wednesday night near Hazarika Petrol Station on NH37 as Tulshi Kumar Das, a beloved social worker hailing from Mathadung GGS Chariali, succumbed to severe injuries in a road accident. His scooter was struck by a speeding vehicle, resulting in his untimely demise.

Tulshi leaves behind his grieving wife and a son, leaving a void in the hearts of his community and loved ones.



**HT Correspondent**

**MANGALDAI, May 16:** The long-awaited 'bhumi puja' ceremony for the permanent offices of Mangaldai Media Circle (MMC) and Crystal Vision was successfully conducted in Mangaldai on Thursday. This significant event marks the realisation of a cher-

ished dream for MMC, a prominent organisation representing media professionals in Darrang district since its establishment in 2007. The ceremony also extended to the NGO Crystal Vision's office complex.

Under the guidance of eminent Pandit Mano Ranjan Sarma, the

traditional vedic rituals were performed at both sites, attended by dignitaries from MMC, Crystal Vision, and the local administration. Nirmali Devi Sarma, chairperson of the Mangaldai Municipality Board, graced the occasion with her presence, adding significance to the auspicious ceremony.

The district administration's allocation of land, with one katha allotted to MMC and two kathas to Crystal Vision near the town's parade ground, reflects their support for the endeavours of both organisations. Notably, Crystal Vision has been at the forefront of promoting voluntary blood donation since 2011, showcasing their commitment to social welfare.

With the Bhumi Puja completed, the groundwork is laid for the construction of the office spaces, heralding a new chapter of growth and service for MMC and Crystal Vision in Mangaldai.

## Cleaners at Morigaon Civil Hospital stage indefinite strike

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAON, May 16:** Cleaners at Morigaon Civil Hospital have taken a stand against the state government's indifference towards their grievances, launching an indefinite strike on Thursday. Their demands include job regularisation, salary increments, and timely payment of wages.

Recruited under the National Health Mission (NHM) in 2017, these cleaners currently receive a monthly salary of ₹ 7,722, which they argue is insufficient to cover their families' expenses. They are adamant about salary adjustments to meet their basic needs and are pressing for the regularisation of their contractual positions, along with consistent payment of salaries.

Despite their repeated appeals, authorities have neglected their requests for essential protective gear like masks, gloves, and sanitisers. Assistant Matron Das has joined in protesting against the mistreatment of the cleaners.

In a concerning development, although Morigaon Civil Hospital has been recognised in the Assam-'Kayakalpa' competition three times, securing the fourth position, the cleaners allege that they have not received their fair share of the prize money. They insist that 25 percent of these funds should be allocated for their welfare facilities, yet they have not seen a single rupee of it.

This disparity has left the striking cleaners questioning the whereabouts of the allocated funds and highlights the urgent need for authorities to address their legitimate concerns.

## Jorhat mourns loss of renowned doctor

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, May 16:** Dr Shankar Jyoti Parashar, a distinguished former assistant professor at Jorhat Medical College and Hospital (JMCH) and a revered physician in Jorhat, passed away unexpectedly at a private hospital in Guwahati on Thursday, succumbing to a sudden illness.

At the age of 52, Dr Parashar leaves behind his grieving wife, daughter, mother, two sisters, and a large circle of relatives. Hailing from the Darangichuk area of Jorhat, he fell ill while attending to patients at a private hospital in the city on Tuesday evening. Despite immediate medical attention, his condition deteriorated rapidly, leading to his transfer to a hospital in Guwahati for specialised care, where he breathed his last on Wednesday.

Dr Parashar was not only renowned for his medical expertise but also actively involved in various socio-cultural activities. Known for his amiable nature and willingness to extend help to those in need, he earned widespread respect and admiration from the community.

His untimely demise has deeply saddened numerous organisations and individuals who benefitted from his dedicated service and compassionate demeanor.

## Diphu marks National Dengue Day

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, May 16:** National Dengue Day (NDD) with the theme 'Connect with the community, control Dengue' was observed to create awareness and intensify preventive measures and preparedness for controlling the viral disease before the transmission season begins.

As part of the program, health workers, including National Health Mission staff, National Centre for Vector-Borne Disease Control (NCVBDC) ASHA workers, etc., joined by ward commissioners of Diphu Municipal Board, took out a procession in Diphu town. They held placards and shouted slogans such as 'Stop spreading Dengue diseases', 'Stop mosquitoes', 'Stop Dengue', 'Stop Malaria', etc. The procession started from the joint director's office and proceeded towards the members' hostel and returned to the starting point.

Speaking at the event, Dr Borsing Rongpi, joint director of health services in Karbi Anglong, said, "We organised National Dengue Day to raise awareness

among the masses. The health department alone cannot combat the dreaded Dengue disease; it requires community participation to stop the virus from spreading. Health workers tirelessly visit households to eliminate Dengue sources. Dengue is caused by the Aedes Aegypti mosquito, which mostly lives in jungles. Following the Dengue outbreak in Karbi Anglong the previous year, 13069 people were tested, with 6047 confirmed positive. In the current year, from January until now (May), only 15 people have tested positive out of 228 tested, whereas by this time last year, it was over 1000."

Dr Rongpi appeals to individuals to cooperate with health workers when they visit their homes and localities to prevent the spread of the Dengue virus to neighboring districts and states.

The program was attended by Rajeshan Terang, secretary in charge of Health & Family Welfare, KAAC; Dr Rupsing Hanse, SDM & HO, Manja PHC; Dr N Rajkhowa, SDM & HO, ward commissioners Sagar Chetri, Diganta Gogoi, Dhiren Tokbi, and others.

## THB College hosts workshop on solid waste management

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, May 16:** A day-long workshop on solid waste management was held on Thursday at Tyagbir Hem Baruah College under the initiatives of the Eco Club and Botany department of the college with the participation of more than one hundred students from the higher secondary and high schools of the greater Naduar area. The program was presided over by Dr Bipul Kumar Borah, president of the Governing Body of the college.

Delivering the welcome address, Dr Ajit Hazarika, principal of the college, said, "The generation of waste materials and lack of proper knowledge of the ways of managing it have caused great damage to our environment. We must adopt ways of generating less quantity of solid waste so that the green environment of the earth may be preserved for future generations."

Dr Chinta Mani Sharma, principal Biswanath College, acting as a resource person, spoke extensively on the topic and explained how the general population is polluting their surroundings and creating a threat to the ecosystem by producing tons of non-degradable waste every day. Another resource person, Bipul Saikia, as-



sistant professor of Chemistry, conducted hands-on training for the students and explained that the problems arising out of the generation of non-biodegradable solid waste are unavoidable, and there is no way out to escape more alarming situations in days to come as man will keep generating waste

until the end of life on this planet. He said that nature has generously bestowed upon us abundant resources for our benefit, yet we, in our ingratitude and short-sightedness, are squandering these gifts. The lack of proper waste management, spanning from inadequate collection systems to inefficient dis-

posal methods, is resulting in air pollution, water contamination, and soil degradation. He emphasised the urgent need for prudent action to halt the ongoing pollution of our planet. Through wise decision-making and the implementation of well-designed solid waste management systems, we can strive to mitigate further environmental contamination and preserve the integrity of our ecosystems.

Dr Tulsi Upadhyaya shed light on the objectives of the workshop, mentioning the Mission Life initiative in Assam aimed at raising awareness about environmental issues. The workshop, organised in collaboration with the Assam Science Technology and Environment Council and sponsored by the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change, Government of India, aimed to educate students about the global garbage crisis and their role in addressing it.

Rupa Kalita, assistant professor in the department of Botany, facilitated the program, ensuring its smooth conduct. Through such initiatives and collective efforts, the workshop aimed to instill a sense of responsibility among the youth towards environmental conservation and sustainable waste management practices.

## Death of daily wage earner sparks speculation

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, May 16:** The sudden demise of Pulin Kalita, a hardworking daily wage earner, under mysterious circumstances, has sent shockwaves through the community of Pabhajan near Gaurisagar. Pulin, who was found deceased in a room within his own residence, has ignited a flurry of speculation among locals. Despite retiring to bed after a day's labor, his lifeless body was discovered in another room the following morning. Amidst whispers of suspicion, the family of the deceased, deeply troubled by the situation, has called for a thorough investigation into the untimely passing of the well-regarded worker. Authorities from the Jaisagar Police department swiftly responded, recovering the body for post-mortem examination, as they endeavour to unravel the truth behind this perplexing incident.

## Veteran journalist passes away

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, May 16:** Senior scribe Boloram Barua (78) of Charing, Sivasagar, died of old age ailments in his residence on Wednesday night. Barua was a local correspondent of the Ajir Batori, Amar Assam, and several other periodicals. He was the coordinator of the Sivasagar District Alcohol Prohibition Committee and an executive member of Sivasagar District Journalists Association and Jila Sahitya Sabha. Barua is survived by his wife, three sons, and their families.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Silence is the sleep that nourishes wisdom.*  
-Francis Bacon

## Russia's Nuclear Energy Strategy

In a world grappling with energy security and environmental concerns, Russia's nuclear energy strategy emerges as a beacon of innovation and efficiency. Anpilogov, a prominent figure in Russia's nuclear sector, recently shed light on Rosatom's approach, emphasizing its unique advantages over competitors in the global market. At the heart of Russia's strategy lies the innovative use of plutonium in the BN-800 reactor to generate electricity, effectively repurposing weapons-grade material from the Cold War era. This approach not only addresses nuclear proliferation concerns but also underscores Russia's commitment to sustainable energy solutions. Central to Rosatom's success is its provision of turnkey solutions, encompassing reactor construction, fuel supply, and spent fuel management.

India's nuclear footprint boasts 24 operational reactors across 7 plants, with a capacity of 8.18 gigawatts. These reactors play a crucial role in curbing carbon emissions, contributing approximately 3.11% to India's total power generation while averting the release of 353 million tons of CO2 equivalent. Despite its significance, India's utilization of nuclear energy remains among the lowest globally, highlighting untapped potential for expansion. With Russia's BN-800 reactor leading the charge in utilizing plutonium for electricity generation, the nation sets a precedent for responsible nuclear stewardship. By repurposing weapons-grade plutonium accumulated during the Cold War, Russia not only addresses security concerns but also demonstrates a commitment to sustainable energy solutions. Rosatom's comprehensive approach to nuclear energy extends beyond reactor construction to encompass fuel supply and spent fuel management. This integrated model not only streamlines operations for electricity producers but also ensures efficient utilization of resources and minimizes environmental impact. Anpilogov's remarks underscore Russia's strategic advantage in the global nuclear market, particularly in comparison to American and French firms. With a focus on tailoring solutions to meet specific national needs, Rosatom positions itself as a preferred partner for countries like India seeking to bolster their energy security while reducing carbon emissions.

India's nuclear trajectory reflects a nuanced blend of progress and challenges, highlighting both the potential and the limitations of nuclear energy adoption. While the nation's existing reactors contribute significantly to power generation and emissions reduction, there remains room for expansion and optimization to fully harness the benefits of nuclear technology. In a rapidly evolving energy landscape, Russia's leadership in global innovation promises to shape the future of global energy production. By offering turnkey solutions and leveraging advanced technology, Rosatom paves the way for a cleaner, more sustainable energy future for nations around the world. With its robust infrastructure, technological prowess, and commitment to sustainability, Russia stands poised to play a central role in shaping the future of global energy production for decades to come. Russia's nuclear energy strategy represents a holistic approach to addressing pressing energy and environmental challenges. By leveraging innovative technologies, repurposing nuclear materials, and fostering international cooperation, Russia sets a precedent for responsible and sustainable nuclear energy utilization on a global scale.

## Iran's diplomatic surge in South Asia and its impact on India

Over the span of eight months, Israel has faced significant challenges in its efforts to subdue Hamas and quell unrest among the Palestinian population. Despite receiving strong support from the United States and other influential Western allies such as the United Kingdom and Germany, Israel has been unable to achieve its objectives. This struggle can be attributed in part to the involvement of Iran, a nation often regarded for its unwavering determination.

Notably, Iran has made headlines by launching a direct aerial attack on Israel, a rare occurrence in the region's recent history. This bold move has disrupted Israel's perceived dominance and reinforced Iran's image as a formidable player. Consequently, Israel finds itself cast as the antagonist in the Gulf region, while Iran is portrayed as a heroic figure.

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi recently embarked on a strategic journey to nations neighboring India, a move that carries significant weight given Iran's current strong position on the global stage. Raisi's recent official visits to Pakistan and Sri Lanka hold immense importance for India, and there are two primary reasons behind this.

First and foremost, the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has strained its relations with Iran nearly to the breaking point. This tension stems from the government's decision to prioritize its relationship with Washington over its longstanding alliance with Tehran. A significant aspect of this shift includes halting the import of Iranian oil in an attempt to appease the United States.

While Iran has been deeply wounded by these actions, it has chosen not to voice its grievances publicly. However, behind

closed doors, Iranian officials have reportedly been candid in expressing their discontent, often leaving Indian diplomats, including External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, feeling isolated and embarrassed.

Additionally, India's alignment with Israel since October 7, in accordance with the anti-Muslim, Islamophobic stance of the Bharatiya Janata Party, starkly contrasts with Iran's steadfast view of Israel as its top adversary. This shift is exemplified by the widely publicized telephone conversations between Prime Minister Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu, highlighting the burgeoning alliance between India and Israel.

Consequently, India finds itself in a position where its closest allies, the United States and Israel, are also perceived as Iran's greatest foes. This raises questions about the current state of relations between India and Iran. While New Delhi and Tehran may not yet be considered adversaries, the nature of their friendship appears to be increasingly ambiguous.

Undoubtedly, Raisi's diplomatic overtures towards countries like Pakistan and Sri Lanka carry a significant message for New Delhi, the prominent power in South Asia. While the strained relationship between India and Pakistan is well-known, tensions with Colombo have also escalated. Modi's public accusations against former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi regarding the Katchatheevu island issue have exacerbated the rift between India and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, a social media campaign in Sri Lanka has accused India of encroaching on the island nation's territory, showcasing the growing rift in bilateral relations. Despite



New Delhi's substantial economic aid to Sri Lanka in 2022-23, tensions continue to escalate, highlighting the complexities of regional dynamics.

Positioned within India's sphere of influence, Raisi extended offers of cooperation and assistance to Pakistan and Sri Lanka, both of which are facing economic challenges and seeking support from the International Monetary Fund for financial aid.

During his visit to Islamabad, Raisi extended an olive branch, particularly significant following the cross-border strikes between Pakistan and Iran in January. It's evident that any military tensions between Tehran and Islamabad align with New Delhi's interests, making de-escalation unfavorable for India. Additionally, Raisi's visit has paved the way for Iran and Pakistan to move closer towards a Free Trade Agreement, marking a significant step in their bilateral relations.

During his visit to Colombo, Raisi inked a Memorandum of Understanding for the \$514 million Uma Oya hydropower and irrigation project, vowing to provide technical and engineering support. This marked a sig-

nificant milestone, as it was the first visit by an Iranian president to Sri Lanka in 16 years, since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's visit in 2008. The agreements signed encompassed various areas including the economy, trade, science and technology, as well as culture, media, and tourism. Tehran's eagerness to leverage Sri Lanka's strategic location hints at its intentions to bolster the capabilities of the Iranian navy in the Indian Ocean Region. However, such a move could potentially impact India, particularly if Iran strengthens its ties with Pakistan, leading to increased Iranian influence in the Indian Ocean.

Raisi's recent diplomatic engagements with Pakistan and Sri Lanka are part of a broader outreach strategy that also includes Bangladesh and the Maldives, both neighboring countries of India. About a year ago, he focused on enhancing trade relations with Bangladesh during a phone conversation with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Furthermore, Tehran took significant steps to reestablish diplomatic ties with the Maldives last year, following a seven-year hiatus. This diplomatic thaw came after a period of strained relations between Riyadh and Tehran, which had led the Maldives to sever ties

with Iran when it was closely aligned with Saudi Arabia in 2016.

However, the geopolitical landscape shifted in September 2023 with the détente between Tehran and Riyadh brokered by Beijing, prompting the Maldives to revive its relations with Iran. These developments reflect the evolving strategic dynamics in the Middle East and its ripple effects on regional relationships.

Indeed, Tehran's alignment with Beijing has grown significantly stronger, particularly following a strategic agreement forged in 2021. This close alliance with China means that any increase in Iran's influence in Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bangladesh, as well as its already strong ties with Pakistan under Beijing's influence, will only serve to bolster China's standing in those nations. This development poses challenges for India across short, medium, and long-term perspectives, potentially undermining its strategic interests in the region.

Raisi's assertive rhetoric against Washington and Tel Aviv during his visits to Colombo and Islamabad not only advances Iran's global objectives but also aligns with China's interests. In Islamabad, Raisi even issued a strong warning to Israel, signaling Iran's unwavering stance. As Raisi, alongside Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian, leads Iran's diplomatic initiatives in South Asia and beyond, it becomes imperative for New Delhi to reconsider and rebuild its relationship with Tehran. In the interest of national security, India must find a way to navigate its ties with Iran independently of its relations with Israel and the United States, which have not necessarily served India's best interests.

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## Special on World Hypertension Day

## High Blood Pressure : The curse of modern life

By: Lalit Garg

World Hypertension Day is celebrated every year on 17th May to raise awareness about high blood pressure and encourage its prevention, detection and control. Currently, about one and a half billion people suffer from high blood pressure across the world. An estimated 46 percent of people with high blood pressure worldwide are unaware that they have high blood pressure.

According to WHO, only one in five adults with high blood pressure keeps it under control, meaning 80 percent are at high risk, including heart attack, stroke, palpitations and kidney damage. Under this year's theme, the focus will be on 'Measure your blood pressure accurately, control it and live longer'. The main causes of high blood pressure are obesity, stress, unhealthy lifestyle, lack of regular physical activity, smoking, alcohol; excessive amount of sodium (salt) in the diet and some conditions like diabetes can also cause it. High blood pressure can also occur during pregnancy.

The ambitious youth standing on the threshold of the new century are faced with an endless environment of competition. If he loses in this obstacle race, he gets surrounded by negative tensions, if he wins, then the challenging struggle of new competitions starts again. To keep his victory permanent and to set new records, he resorts to deceit and lies. Scientists say that the more lies have increased in the world, the more the risk of high blood pressure has also increased. The path of lies is never straight. It is rough, crooked and winding.

The thoughts of a crooked person always remain polluted. This pollution of the mind is the root of high blood pressure. Amidst all the risks associated with high blood pressure, the increasing trend of ultra-processed food items is worrying. There is concern because despite knowing the dangers, the availability of such food items has started increasing in the market. A recent study from Har-



vard University states that regularly eating processed foods increases the risk of premature death by four percent, the main one being high blood pressure.

Processed foods are usually ready to use. Packed snacks, canned food, and cold drinks come under this category. Men are more prone to high blood pressure than women. To avoid this, not only is there a need to pay attention to diet and lifestyle, but it is also very important to reduce stress and exercise to keep the body active.

Nowadays people between 18 years to 50 years are more victims of hypertension. Although the risk of high blood pressure is higher in men before the age of sixty, later on the risk is equal in both men and women. It has been observed that people who do not get angry fall ill less. Complaints of high blood pressure, hypertension and severe back pain have been seen in people who get angry a lot. Along with this, such people may also have stomach complaints. World High Blood Pressure Day plays an important role in raising awareness about the importance of prevention and control of high blood pressure.

It encourages people to adopt a healthy lifestyle, including getting regular exercise, eating healthy and balanced diets, and avoiding tobacco, excessive alcohol and smoking. These lifestyle changes can help reduce the risk of high blood pressure and its complications. There is an interrelationship between a person's feelings, thoughts, ideas and habits. Our thoughts influence our thinking and thinking changes our habits. For this you should do regular exercise. A key message of World Hypertension Day is the importance of regular

blood pressure monitoring. High blood pressure is often called the 'silent killer' because it usually has no symptoms until it causes serious complications. Regular blood pressure checking can help in early detection of hypertension and timely intervention to prevent complications. This also includes taking medications prescribed by a health care professional.

The unprecedented progress of medical science has helped beyond imagination in saving humans from this life-threatening disease. Highly sensitive microscopic instruments for disease diagnosis, pharmacology and successful surgery – all these are no less than a lethal element. The surprising thing is that despite all this, the demonic claw of a deadly disease like high blood pressure is out of control. The medical facilities available are inaccessible to the common man. Through this expensive medical care, affluent people may postpone the invitation of death for a period, but who can imagine the miserable condition of the poor? Scientists/doctors of Miami University, America, in their joint release have appealed not to let mental stress dominate you.

In this regard, people should be taught ways to live a healthy life. He believes that people who suffer from constant stress and consume too much greasy food get easily attacked by high blood pressure. By remaining stress-free, the body's immune power remains safe. Various types of research have been revealing that the amount of sugar, fat and salt in such canned foods is very high, while fiber and other nutrients are less. That's why processed food items increase the health problems associated with high blood pressure.

Alluring advertisements are promoting these products. No one can be allowed to play with people's health. It is important that the government not only formulates a strict advertising and marketing policy regarding harmful food items but also implements it strictly. (The author is a journalist, columnist who can be reached at [lalitgarg11@gmail.com](mailto:lalitgarg11@gmail.com))

People are getting attracted towards processed foods without any care. Such food items are especially appealing to the new generation. A report released by the World Health Organization and the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations found that India's processed food market has grown at an annual rate of 13.37 percent from 2011 to 2021.

Although the sector's growth rate declined to 5.50 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a temporary phase. After this, their availability started becoming easy again. Controlled trials in hypertensive patients show that supplemental potassium, fiber, fatty acids, and a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and low in saturated fat reduce blood pressure.

Some population studies show an inverse relationship between dietary protein and blood pressure levels. Drinking coffee regularly increases blood pressure in high blood pressure patients. The role of 'stress' remains mysterious, with 'job stresses' and 'family stresses' being a possible independent risk factor for hypertension.

The concern is that India does not have a strong mechanism to remove food items that are becoming dangerous from the market. There is no concrete policy even to control intoxicants like alcohol and smoking. In fact, there does not seem to be any thought or concern at the government level regarding high blood pressure.

It is true that the Central and State governments have launched many programs for the nutritious diet of the people, but there is no concrete policy to control the items being sold in the market which are harmful for high blood pressure.

Alluring advertisements are promoting these products. No one can be allowed to play with people's health. It is important that the government not only formulates a strict advertising and marketing policy regarding harmful food items but also implements it strictly. (The author is a journalist, columnist who can be reached at [lalitgarg11@gmail.com](mailto:lalitgarg11@gmail.com))

## India and Iran's 10-year deal on Chabahar port development is a strategic gain for Delhi

By: Girish Linganna

On Monday May 13, the Indian government, led by Narendra Modi, announced the signing of a 10-year agreement with Iran to enhance cooperation in the development and operation of the port of Chabahar. This move aims to strengthen India's ties with Iran, an important country in the Middle East.

The Indian government has been actively involved in the development of the Chabahar port, located on Iran's southeastern coast along the Gulf of Oman. The port serves as a crucial transportation route for goods destined for Iran, Afghanistan, and countries in Central Asia. By utilizing the Chabahar port, India can bypass its rival Pakistan's ports of Karachi and Gwadar, facilitating smoother trade and connectivity in the region.

Despite this, the port holds immense importance beyond being a simple link between India and Iran. It serves as a crucial trade route connecting India with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. Sarbananda Sonowal, India's Shipping Minister, emphasized this significance during his visit to Tehran after the agreement was signed.

The establishment of this connection has opened up fresh opportunities for trade and strengthened the resilience of supply chains in the region.

Indian Ports Global Limited (IPGL) and the Port & Maritime Organization of Iran have officially signed a long-term agreement, as confirmed by authorities from both nations.

The partnership between Iran and India regarding the strategic port can be traced back to 2003 when New Delhi agreed to enhance the port's development along with the necessary infrastructure connections during the visit of former President Muhammad Khatami to India. However, the project has faced multiple setbacks over the years and has been hindered by sanctions imposed on Iran.

The agreement, signed in Tehran with the presence of the Indian and Iranian shipping Ministers, has officially replaced the initial framework agreement that was signed back in 2016 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Iran.

According to Mehrdad Bazrpash, the Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development, the agreement entails an investment of approximately \$120 million from IPGL, accompanied by an additional \$250 million in financing. This brings

the total value of the contract to \$370 million.

Under the terms of the agreement, India has committed to acquiring various types of equipment, including Mobile Harbour Cranes (MHCs), Rail-Mounted Quay Cranes (RMQCs), Rubber-Tired Gantry Cranes (RTGCs), Reach Stackers, Forklifts, and Pneumatic Unloaders, for use at Chabahar Port. The statement further mentioned that this agreement sets the stage for increased trade and investment prospects, which have the potential to significantly contribute to India's economic growth and development.

Since assuming control of port in late 2018, IPGL has successfully managed the handling of container traffic exceeding 90,000 TEUs (Twenty Foot Equivalent Unit) and bulk as well as general cargo surpassing 8.4 million tonnes, as stated by an official from the Indian government.

Chabahar's Role in Humanitarian Aid and Regional Connectivity: Chabahar has played a crucial role in providing humanitarian aid, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through the port, a significant amount of aid, including 2.5 million tonnes of wheat and 2,000 tonnes of pulses, has been efficiently transported from India to Afghanistan. Additionally, in 2021, Chabahar facilitated the delivery of 40,000 litres of the pesticide Malathion from India to Iran to combat a locust infestation.

Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar expressed this sentiment during a press conference in Mumbai on Monday, 13th May, emphasizing the positive impact of the port's operations.

According to Jaishankar, India anticipates that the project will enhance its connectivity with an international transport corridor that is being established in collaboration with Iran and Russia. Furthermore, it is expected to strengthen trade relationships with Central Asia.

Located at the entrance of the Gulf of Oman, Chabahar is Iran's first deepwater port, strategically positioning the country on the international maritime trade route. Situated in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan Province, the port is approximately 120 kilometres southwest of Pakistan's Baluchistan Province, where the Gwadar port, funded by China, is located.

Chabahar holds significant strategic value for both Iran and India. For Iran, the port serves as a potential means to mitigate the impact of Western sanctions. Mean-

while, it provides India with an alternative trade route that circumvents Pakistan, which restricts India's land access to trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The Chabahar project comprises two separate ports, namely Shahid Beheshti and Shahid Kalantari terminals. Each of which has five berth facilities. However, India's investment is specifically limited to the Shahid Beheshti port. This information is derived from the research paper titled 'Geopolitics of Chabahar port for Iran, India, and Afghanistan' authored by Ali Omidi and Gauri Noolkar-Oak from the University of Isfahan in Iran.

The contract value, totalling \$370 million, awarded to IPGL, will be solely dedicated to the enhancement and expansion of the Shahid Beheshti terminal.

INSTC: A Vision for Seamless Connectivity: Additionally, Chabahar Port plays a role in the envisioned International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). This project is an extensive transportation network spanning over 7,200 kilometres. It includes sea routes, roads, and railways that connect the cities of Saint Petersburg in Russia and Mumbai in India.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) consists of a total of thirteen member countries. These countries include India, Iran, Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Ukraine, and Syria. Additionally, Bulgaria participates in the INSTC as an Observer Member.

The INSTC project envisions a logistics route that involves transporting goods from Mumbai, India, to Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar, Iran, primarily by sea. From Chabahar, the goods are then transported by road to Bandar-e-Anzali, an Iranian port located on the Caspian Sea.

Subsequently, they are shipped across the Caspian Sea to Astrakhan, a port in the Russian Federation. Finally, the goods are transported from Astrakhan to various regions within Russia and further into Europe using the Russian railway network.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is anticipated to significantly reduce transit time by 40%, resulting in a shorter duration of 25-30 days compared to the current 45-60 days. Moreover, the corridor is expected to reduce freight costs by 30% when compared to the expenses incurred when using the Suez Canal route. (IPA Service)

## Perception matters: How Chinese funding impacts Beijing's image in India

By: Mark Hallerberg, Sahil Deo, Om Marathe & Jayati Sharma

Trade between India and China has never been higher, with last year's figures reaching a record US\$136 billion. India and China are also at loggerheads over a border dispute that claimed at least 20 lives on both sides in 2020, and have held 21 rounds of military negotiations in the period since. Clearly, the diplomat's work on Raisina Hill is challenging: balancing economic cooperation and security concerns poses a complex challenge for both countries, as deeper economic ties may enhance stability, but security implications can threaten long-term harmony, as was seen in Galwan.

A survey under the German Excellence Cluster "Contestations of the Liberal Script", which was conducted by CPC Analytics across India of Indian voters, has some important findings concerning mass opinions about China. The respondents were less likely to approve of a development project when they thought that the money and expertise behind it originated from China, as compared to when they thought that the partner was the United States (US), or if their local government was executing the project alone. Our respondents also had less trust in the project under these conditions.

The CPC analytics team conducted in-person interviews of some 2,500 respondents in four diverse Indian states—Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu—these states were selected because they host development projects financed by both the China-located Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the US-located World Bank. Besides their geographic and cultural differences, the ruling governments in these states are also formed by four different political parties: Bharatiya Janata Party in Madhya Pradesh, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab, Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu.

Less approval, if China tag is attached

tached

The study, conducted in September 2023, started with the intention of finding out Indian voter preferences about who should fund a hypothetical infrastructure project: whether they wanted their local government to fund it alone, or jointly with a multi-lateral development bank like the AIIB or the World Bank. We found that people approved of and trusted a development project the most when it was financed by the local government alone, i.e., without any assistance from either the AIIB or the World Bank, and that they rated a project lowest when they learnt that funding would be derived from the China-located AIIB.

After the local government, the second favourite option was the World Bank, and at the third spot was the same institution when we included the information that its headquarters was in Washington, D.C. Respondents approved of the AIIB about as much when the location of its physical headquarters was not disclosed, but there was a clear drop-off when "Beijing" was included with "AIIB."

Note that the AIIB is a multi-lateral development bank with 109 members, which means that it has many countries as shareholders, not just China. In terms of public perceptions, however, there have been allegations that China, and its ruling party, play an outsized role in the AIIB about as much when the location of its physical headquarters was not disclosed, but there was a clear drop-off when "Beijing" was included with "AIIB."

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In terms of India's role, note that it became one of the AIIB's founding members in 2016. In 2018, it hosted the AIIB's annual summit. Bitterness over the border notwithstanding, India has chosen to remain a dedicated member of the AIIB, fully participating in its funding processes. Currently, India is its largest borrower and second-largest shareholder, owning around 7.5 percent voting power. China is the biggest,

owning over 26.5 percent, and has veto powers. Out of 202 projects approved by the AIIB between 2016 to 2022, India hosts the most (39). To put this in perspective,

Türkiye and Bangladesh are together at the second-highest spot (17 projects each). As per AIIB records, this means that India is bound to receive approved financing to the tune of US\$9 billion, or 23 percent of the institution's total kitty of US\$38.8 billion from the eight-year period.

Nonetheless, even at home, Indian borrowing from the bank has not gone without controversy. It has been flagged that engaging with the AIIB while the northern border remained restive seems incoherent. The country's Foreign Minister has since been walking a tightrope, and in February acknowledged the trickiness of his assignment, saying that it was not possible to "go to the next room" and discuss something else if there was a standoff at the borders.

**What this tells us about Chinese funding, and what it means for politics**

The sentiment that in the survey is not without parallel in other parts of the world. A meta-analysis of Chinese assistance has shown that money flowing from China into the rest of the developing world has led to mixed economic outcomes and has in fact worsened Beijing's image in some host countries while it has raised China's profile in others. To be sure, Western-backed aid, too, has a less-than-inspiring record.

The survey's findings demonstrate that public sentiment is intricately linked to factors such as the implementing institution, its location, and existing beliefs about countries associated with the institution. This effect can be seen as a result of very strong opinions amongst Indians about China, with about two-thirds of the population found to have a negative view of the country. This suggests that preconceived notions about countries and institutions play a significant role in shaping public opinion. (Courtesy: ORF)

been comforting towards India.

However, domestic politics and discourse of competitive partisanship refused to accept the evolved change of China, as opposed to Pakistan as the 'enemy'. It was perhaps for a very practical reason—China as an 'enemy' disallows beating down some of our own, but Pakistan affords the same. Calling some of our own as 'Chinese' or 'Go back China' does not have the same bite, resonance, or acidity, as threatening someone by saying, 'Go back to Pakistan'.

Evolved security threat notwithstanding, Pakistan seemed irreplaceable as the currency of hate, in domestic politics. Even the Indian Left parties are so distant from Chinese aspersions and irrelevance in the modern context, that China cannot be used as an effective bludgeon, even on them. There is however some shrillness in the accusation of 'China-funded', and therefore that accusation is occasionally used. But as far as domestic/electoral politics are concerned, Pakistan still rules!

The ensuing election season has seen the return of 'Pakistan' to its inglorious and inappropriate best. Sadly, it is Pakistan and not China (the real 'enemy number one') that fits the bill for the template of majoritarianism. Any loose and unwarranted comment, even by a former and 'has-been' minister of an ousted party in Pakistan is theatrically showcased as conclusive proof of Pakistan retaining a handle in Indian politics. Words like Razakaars (paramilitary militia in erstwhile Hyderabad State who fought against integration to India),

Vikas-versus-Jihad, etc. are dug out to insinuate what isn't. The bogey of Pakistan-centric allusions still has a powerful impact. Religion seems to be the guiding force in the 2024 Indian elections, as regrettably, it was for the Pakistanis in 1947. Why aren't there enough conversations about China? The only muted and occasionally propped 'agreement' ostensibly signed by an opposition party and the Communist Party of China (CCP) remains confined to social media, with no action from the current dispensation to table the same. Why isn't any challenge facing the nation attributed to China? Why aren't any thunderous announcements to retake lost ground a la Akhand Bharat made? Why is it that an almost failed state surviving on doles is still able to galvanise the public mood, when the threats from the real 'enemy number one' remain obfuscated, undiscussed, and even unnamed—especially when the discourse has reached the specificities and granularity of mangalsutras and the wholly unwarranted analogies from an American of Indian ethnicity? Why don't we love to talk about the Chinese as much as we are made to hate the Pakistanis? (Courtesy: The Quint)

## The trials of law and history in South Asia

By: Vidhya Raveendranathan and Sukhalata Sen

When scholars talk about the relationship between History and Law, Law is usually conceived as a specialised science which only has a passive relationship with historical change. However, as Law actively participates in the construction of History in the courtroom, it is pertinent to ask how these two disciplines interact. What is the notion of fact and evidence in both these disciplines, and do they treat them differently? Is the pursuit of justice and writing of History inherently irreconcilable? It is important to raise these questions because we believe that Law instrumentalises History. This, in turn, creates a dangerous precedent for public reception of meanings of historical events and interpretations. This essay charts the journey of the relationship between Law and History and offers some suggestions in ways both disciplines can learn from each other.

**1. History and Law at antagonism**

From the early modern era several attempts have been made to reflect critically on the relationship between law and history. In England jurists employed history to understand the formation of English law. Law was understood to have derived its legitimacy from the collective traditions of society and nation. In the nineteenth century, positivists developed law in terms of abstract definitions and rules. Law was considered to be self-referential and autonomous, divorced from power relations.

In the twentieth century western world, Law's relationship with History was fundamentally about justice and retribution for the victims of the Holocaust. Prosecutors and lawyers involved in Nuremberg trials hailed the Holocaust trials as 'the greatest history seminar ever held in the history of the world which would provide an authoritative and impartial record for future historians'. Here, the fidelity to the past atoned for crimes against humanity and the law's pursuit of justice was perceived to be akin to good historical practice. Trials served the educative function of telling the world about the crimes and allowed society to sit in judgement and provide closure to the victims. But trials were also seen as creating authentic records for future historians. So, there was a double relationship between history, law, and retributive justice: trials served as exposing the history of cruelty to give justice in the present, and also was seen as creating a repository of truth for the future. In opposition to this, the advocates of impartial adjudication argued that criminal trials should not engage in writing history as it would compromise the principles of judicial procedure. For them, the purpose of a criminal trial was to ascertain guilt; any other inquiry would undermine the protocols of legal procedure and make law subject to plural interpretations.

A set of scholars has also pointed to the profound incompatibilities between Law and History when it comes to their approaches towards evidence and facts. For Law, the evidence has to be stable and definitive; for History, evidence can be relative as per their contexts. In a well-known essay, 'History, Memory and the Law-The Historian as Expert Witness', Richard Evans argues that historians, when summoned to act as experts for war crime trials, face tremendous risks due to law's insistence on precision and certainty. Often in such trials, public memory becomes history and historians' testimony about the complexity of historical events gets truncated in the service of propaganda and state power. Law's instrumentalisation of history continues to be an issue. In some of the recent court deliberations on genocide and mass crimes in Rwanda and Balkans, law has been used by war criminals to script a new past for the nation. Even in the case of the ongoing Israeli Palestinian conflict, the language of victimhood has been used by the authoritarian Israeli governments to deny the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

**2. Beyond the binary**

There have been attempts to move beyond this war-informed pronouncements on the trials of both these disciplines and rethink the long-standing antagonistic relationship. Common law is no longer considered by experts as a timeless entity whose authority was solely drawn from the accumulated wisdom of precedent. Legal historians have called for a greater rapprochement between the two disciplines and exhorted historians to not just contextualise and interpret law but instead use law to understand society. The resulting scholarship has gone beyond the formalistic study of texts—statutes and appellate decisions as well as published treatises produced by trained legal professionals—to investigate the experiential life and practice of Law. History and other disciplines of social sciences and humanities have made it clear that Law is not just related to jurists' opinion or processes that take place in the courtrooms alone. Law constitutes a wider arena of social relationship beyond such narrow institutional or expert domains.

Legal historical practice has become a fertile arena for critical race, caste, class, gender, and sexuality

studies as well as for studies of colonialism. Carlo Ginzburg, a renowned historian credited with the development of microhistory approach, argues that both lawyers and historians can think of ways to benefit from the past while at the same time acknowledging that the past could always open new evidence that could upset conclusions of both disciplines. For Ginzburg, 'Evidence like clue or proof is a crucial word for both historians and judges'.

However, these conversations have not dented the lawyers' treatment of History or historical evidence in courts in an instrumental manner. To this, certain historians have responded that often legal actors treat history as precedent and employ 'strained analogies, flexible standards of relevance and strategic citations' to manufacture historical evidence. When courts lack rules governing the use of evidence, judges often exercise discretion in selecting historical facts rather discreetly. Even when historical facts are amassed, they are functionally and instrumentally organised to reveal undisputed truth which the Law could uphold as the unchallenged version of the past. When contrary evidence appears, courts often emphasise the fixity of meaning and lend its authority towards certain historical facts suited to the judicial narrative which they want to pronounce.

**3. History in the Indian courts**

Let us turn to a recent controversy which serves best to outline the problem of Law's engagement with History. In India though legal history has come a long way from explaining the rule of law or colonial origins of law, law in the courtroom still works in silos. Recently a case came before the Madras high court where Udhyanadhithi Stalin, son of M.K. Stalin, had stated that "Sanatana dharma should not be opposed, but should be eradicated like dengue and malaria". The court deliberated over the meaning of 'sanatan dharma' and whether it could be interchanged with the varna system. Justice Sumanth observed that 'sanatan dharma' could be defined as 'high moral values and living'. Referring to studies from Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute, the judgement concluded that there was nothing to suggest that the varna system stood for inequitable distribution of resources. Justice Sumanth further drew the conclusion that the caste system was an invention of British rule and that the 'sanatan dharma' predates such understanding of the caste system. Therefore, the statements made by Udhyanadhithi Stalin were considered to be misleading, violating the spirit of the constitution, and labelled as encouraging divisive tendencies in the country.

While this incident received a lot of attention from the media, what has been overlooked is how the Madras High Court decided to lend its authoritative voice to privilege one understanding of the caste order that narrowly sees it as a product of colonial rule. Enough ink has been spilled by historians to show the pre-colonial origins of the caste. Even if one does not return to the ancient period for the sake of brevity, it has been convincingly shown how between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, caste has been shaped by competing politics fighting over territory, piety, patronage, scholarly networks, and material resources. Untouchability, marginality, and exclusion along caste lines were produced through state laws, administrative practices, moral and ethical treatises, and land, labour, and debt relations. This does not take away the crucial transformations to caste under colonialism on which also scholarship abounds, but for the courts to argue that India was a timeless tabula rasa and the colonial state simply created categories out of thin air is not only bad history, but also performs the function of permanently exorcising the brutalization of the marginalised social groups from public memory.

Rather than inviting historians or referencing their exhaustive scholarship in the decision of the trial, the judgement instrumentalised history through the complacency of the myopic vision of law. The Madras High Court's attitude stands sharply in contrast to the US courts which recently heard cases of caste discrimination of Indian immigrants on American soil. The courts not only looked back at its history of racial discrimination and its tradition of anti-discriminatory laws, but also invited experts from Ambedkar Kings study circle to sit as amicus curiae in this matter. It finally concluded that caste discrimination was a form of racial discrimination and allowed courts to place America as the land of free and fair opportunity once more.

The problem with the verdict of the Madras High Court is not just that law took upon itself to pronounce a version of history, but that it also forecloses future revisions to such histories without the aid of law. Law has lent immense authority to the past to tell us 'who we are' and in turn used this past to speak to the present concerns as well. Such performative aspects of law, where one interpretation of history is pronounced as 'legitimate' lives on beyond the spaces of courtrooms. Most of the high courts in India now have televised proceedings. Legal proceedings which had hitherto

been a world of restricted access, now unfolds like a reality TV show in the living rooms. And the judges are now more than ever acutely conscious of their new found role as guardians of public morality.

As more cases related to monuments, road renaming, etc. come to the Indian public courts, the law plays an increasingly dominant role in reconstituting the past as history. Few patterns emerge in the way law judges the past in such cases. First, this past, unlike the historian's past, is a singular, unproblematic, and authoritative past. It is created through the legal function of precedents. The function of precedent is to create a sequential narrative of change. In the process the richness of historical narrative and interpretation is singularised under judicial narrative.

Second, legal judgements often draw upon outdated texts of history to set up the new precedents. Law seldom interacts with History as historians profess it, that is, treating History as a craft through which contextual and conflictual shifting meanings and practices of social lives are explained. History is reduced to a compendium of facts and if History fails to provide such facts, law moves on to Indology and Sanskrit texts to find that indubitable fact. Legal fact of course builds upon historical facts but in the process also runs the danger of decontextualizing them.

Third, unlike Law, History is not burdened to offer solutions to present problems. Therefore, to utilise History in this manner only creates anachronisms in the legal argument. Currently, most of the disputes in the present have been accommodated in the language of constitutional morality. This manoeuvre allows Law to unpack the 'real' meaning of the constitution through historical precedents in India. In the process it slides into an argument about originalism of the constitution and History gets subverted to the sacrosanct text of the constitution. While there is a great value to the idea of constitutional morality—action guided by the text and spirit of the constitution—for public and political conduct in general, its centrality in evaluating the past can overturn the meaning and function of the discipline of History.

**Where to from here?**

If we cannot completely rely on the pasts constructed through judicial narratives, then how shall historians attempt to write legal histories? It is not enough to claim interdisciplinary research for both Law and History. We also have to begin from the limitations of two disciplines and move beyond their incompatibilities.

Taking cues from the conversations about law and history in the West, courts in India can evolve rules for subjecting historical evidence to rigorous testing and subsequently create an archive of information using standardised research protocols, expert testimony, and discovery mechanisms so that historians are not pressured to compromise their testimony to the requirements of law. Courts can also display 'interpretive modesty' and not profess to mine the past through archaic texts for precise answers or undertake anachronistic readings of the past. While acknowledging the limitations of history as a discipline in not knowing the past in totality, they must be willing to embrace the contingencies of the past and not treat historical evidence as a fetter for closure and certainty but instead treat it as something that can be used to further the interpretation of law.

As Michael L. Smith claims, by employing interpretive modesty law will become cognizant of its limitations and will have modest expectations to construct a narrative of evidence that is 'sincere and non-hallucinatory yet at the same time has some commitment towards objectivity and truth'. Historians should also be prepared to accept the possibilities that the past might not always suit their ideological predilections as opposed to manipulating evidence for establishing the validity of their political positions. To translate this to reality, historians have to be invited as amicus curiae on historical cases under deliberation in the courts.

Strangely, India holds the record of not inviting a single historian for any of its amicus curiae. To have historians draft amicus curiae will prove the benefit of looking back at the problems of the past, the rippling effects of a law upon society, and the historical wrongs which could not be adjusted due to its blinkered vision. Once these conversations and efforts at practical applications are revived, true interdisciplinary studies can emerge. History can move from the general prescription of lessons from the past to an active engagement with the problems of the present. Law can correct its assumptions or tailoring of an even, unproblematic past to work on better laws for the public. At a time when both Law and History are being instrumentally used and made subservient to the state, it might be useful to remember the English historian and jurist FW Maitland's words in 1888, 'When lawyers turn to history... Their aim is to find orthodox dogma in history. If we try to make history the handmaiden of dogma she will soon cease to be history.' (Courtesy: The Wire)

## Why hasn't India's 'enemy number one' changed this election season?

By: (Retd) Lt Gen Bhopinder Singh

Why hasn't the 'enemy number one' changed this election season? 'Enemies' are important for countries and their competing politicians. They legitimise the sovereign underpinning and the justification for the politicians to be the preferred 'person for the job', to protect the country.

The United States, as the purported 'land of the free', naturally militated against the highly centralised and illiberal Soviet Union where 'the state knew what's best for you', making them the perfect ideological 'enemies' during the Cold War. The similar foundational 'enemy' for India with its inclusivist and secular anchorage was in the form of the 'land of the pure' i.e., Pakistan, which was borne out of a supremacist and exclusivist rationality of the 'two-nation theory'.

Further, the fact that the creation of India and Pakistan brought with it a wounded partition (with geographical contiguity), unsettled claims, waging wars at least four times formally (1947-48, 1965, 1971 and 1999) and routinely blaming each other for supporting secessionist insurgencies—'enemysing' each other was easy and logical. India tore Pakistan into two pieces with the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 and Pakistanis swore to "eat grass, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own (Atom Bomb)...". Politicians on both sides kept blowing bugles of war and revenge. Finally, Pakistan did manage to get the bomb (and attempted to bleed India "with a thousand cuts"), though literally leaving them to eat grass if today's socio-economic condition is anything to go by.

**Neighbouring China eventually replaced neighbouring Pakistan as 'enemy number one'**

Relatively speaking, India kept including more relevant and topical enemies to its sovereign imagination e.g., a suffocatingly controlled economy, literacy challenges, over-dependence on the agriculture sector etc., Whereas Pakistan remained steadfastly focused on 'India' and kept that pot boiling, ad nauseum. The resultant fixation had generated so much hate and bigotry within that it started backfiring and began eating into its own vitals.

Today, Pakistan is struggling desperately to extricate itself from the metastasised swamp of religious extremism to such an extent that there are far more deaths from its 'own' across the Durand Line (read, Afghanistan) than from across the Line-of-Control (LoC). Data shows that the total number of Pakistani soldiers killed in all wars with India collectively is far less than the Pakistani soldiers killed by militants from across Afghanistan—the 'enemy number one' for Pakistan

now is indisputably sitting in Afghanistan.

India, after the Kargil War (1999), got busy with its own internal recalibration of the political landscape and impulses. It's focus on Pakistan yo-yoed with many Track-2s, Aman ki Ashas and multiple reneges (e.g., Pathankot, Pulwama etc) with Islamabad still acting incorrigibly. But slowly and steadily, Pakistan was retreating from practical threat perceptions as it underwent an impulsive narrative of its own and has been in the ICU (intensive care unit) owing to its own mismanagement of domestic affairs, leading to real questions about its economic survival.

The summer of 2020 jolted India from over-focusing on internal politics to the sudden arrival of a new 'enemy number one', and that was unmistakably the expansionist—China. Delhi soon readjusted its security oars to cater to the new winds from China, as opposed to those coming in from the side of its erstwhile 'enemy number one' i.e., Pakistan. While Pakistan was busy digging its own grave and diminishing (certainly not disappearing) from Indian security radars, the Indo-Sino borders became the cynosure of principal threats.

But inexplicably the dangers from the new 'enemy number one' i.e., China, remained largely unnamed and unmentioned by the highest executive offices and it was left to the voluble mandarins in the Ministry of External Affairs or the Defence Ministry to posit mealy-mouthed reassurances.

Wordsmithing of replacing 'entered' with 'intrusion' notwithstanding, it was China and not Pakistan that needed to be handled and called out, first and foremost. The Chinese had forced themselves as the 'enemy number one' and Delhi reacted by banning some Chinese sites and platforms, and not much more. The age-old wisdom by the English author and philosopher, GK Chesterton who stated, "The Bible tells us to love our neighbours, and also to love our enemies; probably because generally they are the same people", was still true, as neighbouring China had replaced neighbouring Pakistan.

**Why don't we love to talk about the Chinese as much as we are made to hate the Pakistanis?**

However, the hyper-nationalist times had bred 'muscular' narratives and definitions that neighbours only needed to be firmly 'taken to task' or 'put in their place' and not metaphorically 'loved', which was more speaking than action. The Chinese continued to do trade and increase the imbalance of trade, substantially. Whereas the 'muscular' spiel from Delhi did bear some reactions but not what was intended, or where it should have been directed. Murmurs on the streets of Kathmandu, Dhaka, Colombo, and Male have hardly

# Slovak leader is in serious but stable condition after assassination attempt, hospital says

**BANSKA BYSTRICA, May 16:** Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico was in serious but stable condition on Thursday, a hospital official said, after the populist leader was shot multiple times in an assassination attempt that shook the small country and reverberated across the continent weeks before European elections.

A suspect was in custody, and Interior Minister Matus Sutaj Estok said on Wednesday that an initial investigation found "a clear political motivation" behind the attack on Fico while he was attending a government meeting in a former coal mining town.

The minister did not specify what the motivation was. Fico has long been a divisive figure in Slovakia and beyond and his return to power last year on a pro-Russian, anti-American message led to even greater worries among fellow European Union members that he would abandon his country's pro-Western course.

Outgoing President Zuzana Caputova, a political rival of Fico, said Thursday that the heads of the country's political parties would meet in an effort to bring calm. She said yesterday that the shooting was an "attack on democracy."

The attempt on Fico's life Wednesday came at a time of high polarization in Slovakia, as thousands of demonstrators have repeatedly rallied in the capital and around the country to protest his policies. It also comes just ahead of June elections for the European Parliament.

Fico's government has already halted arms deliveries to Ukraine, and has plans to amend the penal code to eliminate a special anti-graft prosecutor and to take control of public media. His critics worry that he will lead Slovakia — a nation of 5.4 million that belongs to NATO — down a more autocratic path.

Zuzana Eliasova, a resident of the capital Bratislava, said the attack on Fico was a "shock" to the nation and an attack on democracy at a time when political tensions were already running high.

"I believe that a lot of people or even the whole society will look into their conscience, because the polarization here has been huge

among all different parts of society," she said.

Doctors performed a five-hour operation on Fico, who was initially reported to be in life-threatening condition, according to director of the F.D. Roosevelt Hospital in Banska Bystrica, Miriam Lapunikova. He is being treated in an intensive care unit.

Five shots were fired outside a cultural center in the town of Handlova, nearly 140 kilometers (85 miles) northeast of the capital, government officials said.

Slovakia's Security Council was set to meet in the capital of Bratislava on Thursday to discuss the situation, a government official said, adding that a government meeting would follow.

Fico returned to power in Slovakia last year, having previously served twice as prime minister. He and his Smer party have most often been described as left-populist, though he has also been compared to politicians on the right like the nationalist prime minister of neighboring Hungary, Viktor Orbán.

Fico's comeback caused concern among his critics that he and his party — which had long been tainted by scandal — would lead Slovakia away from the Western mainstream. He promised a tough stance against migration and non-governmental organizations and campaigned against LGBTQ+ rights.

Despite the controversy surrounding Fico's leadership, condemnation of the attack came from both his allies and adversaries. On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin sent a message to President Caputova, expressing his support and wishing the prime minister a fast and full recovery.

"This atrocious crime cannot be justified," Putin said in the message released by the Kremlin. "I know Robert Fico as a courageous and strong-willed person. I truly hope these personal qualities will help him overcome this harsh situation."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also denounced the violence against a neighboring country's head of government. "Every effort should be made to ensure that violence does not become the norm in any country, form or sphere," he said. (AP)



# After talks, 'close friends' Xi and Putin say China, Russia ties stabilising factor for world, conducive to peace

**BEIJING, May 16:** Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on Thursday said ties between the two countries have become a stabilising factor for the world and a fine example for other countries, as the two leaders met here amidst mounting pressure over Beijing to scale down support to Moscow over its prolonged war in Ukraine.

Putin arrived here on Thursday on his first foreign visit, days after being re-elected for the fifth term in power in the midst of Russia's raging war with Ukraine. Welcoming Putin on his two-day visit, Xi said celebrating the 75th anniversary of the China-Russia diplomatic ties is a defining theme.

"Having lasted three quarters of a century, China-Russia relations have grown from strength-to-strength despite the ups and downs, and have stood the test of

changing international landscape," he said in his talks with Putin whom he regards as a close friend.

"The relationship has become a fine example for major and neighbouring countries to treat each other with respect and candour, and pursue friendship and mutual benefit," he said, without referring to Russia's Ukraine war over which the US and EU are increasing pressure on Beijing to use its influence over Moscow to halt it.

Xi said he and Putin have met more than 40 times and stayed in close communication, providing strategic guidance that has ensured the sound, steady and smooth development of the relationship.

"The China-Russia relationship today is hard-earned, and the two sides need to cherish and nurture it," Xi said.

"Steady development of China-Russia relations is not



only in the fundamental interests of the two countries and the two peoples but also conducive to peace, stability and prosperity of the region and the world at large," he said.

Calling Xi "my dear friend", Putin in his speech said "it is of fundamental importance that relations between Russia and China are not opportunistic and are not directed against anyone".

"Our cooperation in world affairs today serves as one of the main stabilising factors in the international arena," he said, according to a report by Russian news agency Tass. Putin also said

Russia is open to a dialogue on Ukraine.

"We are open to a dialogue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including ours," Putin was quoted as saying by China's official Xinhua News Agency.

Russia and China are successfully cooperating in the United Nations, BRICS, SCO and G20, Putin said.

"We are determined to further harmonise integration processes in the Eurasian space, to combine the potential of the Eurasian Economic Community and

your, my dear friend, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)," the Russian leader said.

The BRI is a multi-billion-dollar initiative launched by President Xi when he came to power in 2013. It aims to link Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Gulf region, Africa and Europe with a network of land and sea routes.

Putin expressed hope that his current visit would give an additional impetus to the development of the entire complex of bilateral cooperation. "I would like to emphasise: I am very happy to arrive in China and to meet with you," Putin told Xi.

This is Putin's second visit to Beijing since last October.

Soon after Putin arrived at the historic Great Hall of People, the seat of power of the ruling Chinese Communist Party, Xi held a welcome ceremony which included a guard of honour by the People's Liberation

Army (PLA) contingent.

After 15 minutes' ceremony the two leaders, who over the years have become close friends and allies, went in for talks.

Highlighting the significance of Putin's visit, Yury Ushakov, the Russian presidential foreign policy aide, said that China was not randomly chosen for Putin's first foreign trip, but as a response to a similar gesture of friendship made by Xi last year after his election for an unprecedented third term.

Putin has brought a large delegation consisting of five deputy prime ministers, heads of economic, diplomatic and security agencies, as well as heads of the Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation, Russian Railways, Rosatom State Nuclear Energy Corporation and the Roscosmos State Corporation for Space Activities, Russian news agency Tass reported. (PTT)

# US military says Gaza Strip pier project is completed, aid to soon flow as Israel-Hamas war rages on

**WASHINGTON, May 16:** The US military finished installing a floating pier for the Gaza Strip on Thursday, with officials poised to begin ferrying badly needed humanitarian aid into the enclave besieged over seven months of intense fighting in the Israel-Hamas war.

The final, overnight construction sets up a complicated delivery process more than two months after US President Joe Biden ordered it to help Palestinians facing starvation as food and other supplies fail to make it in as Israel recently seized the key Rafah border crossing in its push on that southern city on the Egyptian border.

Fraught with logistical, weather and security challenges, the maritime route is designed to bolster the amount of aid getting into the Gaza Strip, but it is not considered a substitute for far cheaper land-based deliveries that aid agencies say are much more sustainable. The boat loads of aid will be deposited at a port facility built by the Israelis just southwest of Gaza City and then distributed by aid groups.

Heavy fighting between Israeli troops and Palestinian militants on the outskirts of Rafah has displaced some 6,000 people, a quarter of Gaza's population, UN officials say. Another 1,000,000 civilians have fled parts of northern Gaza now that the Israeli military has restarted combat operations there.

Pentagon officials said the fighting in



Gaza wasn't threatening the new shoreline aid distribution area, but they have made it clear that security conditions will be monitored closely and could prompt a shutdown of the maritime route, even just temporarily.

Already, the site has been targeted by mortar fire during its construction and Hamas has threatened to target any foreign forces who "occupy" the Gaza Strip.

"The protection of US forces participating is a top priority. And as such, in the last several weeks, the United States and Israel have developed an integrated security plan to protect all the personnel," said Navy Vice Adm Brad Cooper, a deputy commander at the US military's Central Command. "We are confident in the ability of this security arrangement to protect those involved."

US troops anchored the pier at 7:40 am local time Thursday, the military's Central Command said, stressing that none of its forces entered the Gaza Strip and would not

during the pier's operations.

"Trucks carrying humanitarian assistance are expected to begin moving ashore in the coming days," the command said. "The United Nations will receive the aid and coordinate its distribution into Gaza."

It wasn't immediately clear which UN agency would be involved.

Israeli forces will be in charge of security on the shore, but there are also two US Navy warships near the area in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, the USS Arleigh Burke and the USS Paul Ignatius. Both ships are destroyers equipped with a wide range of weapons and capabilities to protect American troops off shore and allies on the beach.

Aid agencies say they are running out of food in southern Gaza and fuel is dwindling, which will force hospitals to shut down critical operations and halt truck deliveries of aid. The UN and others have warned for weeks that an Israel assault on Rafah would cripple humanitarian operations and cause a disastrous surge in civilian casualties.

More than 1.4 million Palestinians — half of Gaza's population — have been sheltering in Rafah, most after fleeing Israel's offensives elsewhere.

The first cargo ship loaded with 475 pallets of food left Cyprus last week to rendezvous with a US military ship, the Roy P Benavidez, which is off the coast of Gaza. The pallets of aid on the MV Sagamore were moved onto the Benavidez. (AP)

# China and Cambodia begin 15-day military exercises as questions grow about Beijing's influence

**SVAY CHOK, May 16:** Cambodia and China began 15-day military exercises on Thursday as questions grow about Beijing's increasing influence in the Southeast Asian nation.

About 1,315 Cambodian military personnel and 760 Chinese are participating in the regular "Golden Dragon" ground and sea maneuvers, including three Chinese and 11 Cambodian ships.

As the first stage of the exercises got underway at a Cambodian military base with a forested and mountainous training area about 90 kilometers (55 miles) northwest of Phnom Penh, Cambodian army commander in chief Gen Vong Pisen thanked China for providing new equipment and helping to upgrade military facilities, including the Ream Naval Base.

The United States and others have warned that China's involvement in building a new pier at the Ream base could lead to it becoming a new outpost for the Chinese navy at a strategically important location on the Gulf of Thailand. As the Golden Dragon exercises began, two Chinese warships had been docked at the pier for more than five months, stoking those concerns. Cambodia has insisted, however, that its constitution prohibits the deployment of foreign military forces on its territory, and the Defense Ministry said the two Chinese corvettes were just "testing" the pier and were on hand to participate in the Golden Dragon exercises, whose second phase will include maritime maneuvers near the Ream base.

Vong Pisen, speaking alongside Adm Gao Xiucheng from the Chinese military's Southern Theater Command, underscored Cambodia's official position, saying the country would "not allow any foreign military base on our territory." At the same time, he acknowledged China's contribution to helping Cambodia upgrade its military capabilities and said the exercises would help build deeper cooperation and trust between the forces of the two countries. The two military officers inspected troops and an array of armored fighting vehicles, artillery and other equipment ahead of the start of the maneuvers.

The Golden Dragon exercises have been held on a regular basis since 2016, around the same time that Cambodia canceled similar exercises with the United States known as Angkor Sentinel. Cambodia is China's closest ally in Southeast Asia, while China is Cambodia's most important ally and benefactor, with a strong influence on its economy.

Beyond military projects, China funds numerous others in Cambodia — particularly infrastructure, including airports and roads, but also private projects such as hotels, casinos and property development. More than 40 per cent of Cambodia's USD 10 billion in foreign debt is owed to China. (AP)

# France imposes emergency in Pacific territory of New Caledonia as violent unrest turns deadly

**PARIS, May 16:** France imposed an emergency on Wednesday in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia for at least 12 days, boosting security forces' powers to quell deadly unrest in the archipelago where indigenous people have long sought independence.

Armed clashes and other violence that erupted Monday following protests over voting reforms have left four people dead, including a gendarme, and injured more than 300, French authorities said.

French military forces were being deployed to protect ports and airports, to free up police and security forces battling looting, arson and other violence. Prime Minister Gabriel Attal announced as the emergency measures kicked in at 8 p.m. Paris time, which was 5 a.m. on Thursday in New Caledonia.

"Nothing can ever justify violence," Attal said. "Our absolute priority for the next few hours is the return to order and calm."

The emergency measures give authorities greater powers to tackle the vi-

olence, including the possibility of house detention for people deemed a threat to public order and expanded powers to conduct searches, seize weapons and restrict movements, with possible jail time for violators.

The last time France imposed such measures on one of its overseas territories was in 1985, also in New Caledonia, the Interior Ministry said.

France's government also rushed hundreds of police reinforcements to the island, where pro-independence supporters have long pushed to break free from France. The Interior Ministry said 500 additional officers were expected within hours on the archipelago to bolster 1,800 police and gendarmes already there. There have been more than 130 arrests so far, French authorities said.

Speaking to broadcaster France Info on Wednesday, Anne Clément, a resident of the capital, Noumea, hailed security forces reinforcements because the unrest has morphed into "a real urban guerrilla war".



People have been confined to their homes for two days, terrified by "shooting from all sides", Clement, a nursery director, told the French broadcaster. "We've stopped eating, we've stopped living, we've stopped sleeping," she added.

"I don't see how we could get out of the situation without the state of emergency," she said.

There have been decades of tensions on the archipelago between Indigenous Kanaks seeking independence and descendants of colonisers who want to remain part of France.

After a two-hour security meeting

Wednesday with French President Emmanuel Macron and top ministers, Attal told parliament in Paris that the state of emergency would aim "to restore order in the shortest time possible".

This week's unrest erupted as the French legislature in Paris debated amending the French constitution to make changes to voter lists in New Caledonia. The National Assembly on Wednesday approved a bill that will, among other changes, allow residents who have lived in New Caledonia for 10 years to cast ballots in provincial elections.

Opponents say the measure will benefit pro-France politicians in New Caledonia and further marginalise indigenous Kanak people. They once suffered from strict segregation policies and widespread discrimination. The vast archipelago of about 270,000 people east of Australia is 10 time zones ahead of Paris.

From Macron down, France's government made repeated calls for an end to the violence.

The territory's top French official, High Commissioner Louis Le Franc, warned of the possibility of "many deaths" if calm isn't restored. A police station was among dozens of places that were attacked, with shots fired, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said. Posting on X, he said a gendarme who had been shot was among the dead.

In Paris, Macron emphasised the need for political dialogue. Rival political parties in New Caledonia also jointly called for calm, saying in a statement: "We have to continue to live together."

An overnight curfew in New Caledonia was extended to Thursday. Schools and the main airport remained closed, Le Franc said.

"The situation is not serious, it is very serious," Le Franc said. "We have entered a dangerous spiral, a deadly spiral."

He said some residents in the capital and neighbouring municipalities formed "self-defence groups" to protect their homes and businesses. (AP)

# Top UN court is holding hearings on the Israeli military's incursion into Rafah

**THE HAGUE, May 16:** The United Nations' top court opens two days of hearings on Thursday into a request from South Africa to make sure Israel halts its military operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's population has sought shelter.

It is the fourth time South Africa has asked the International Court of Justice for emergency measures since the nation launched proceedings alleging that Israel's military action in its war with Hamas in Gaza amounts to genocide.

According to the latest request, the previous preliminary orders by The Hague-based court were not sufficient to address "a brutal military attack on the sole remaining refuge for the people of Gaza".

Israel has portrayed Rafah as the last stronghold of the militant group, brushing off warnings from the United States and other allies that any major operation there would be cata-



strophic for civilians.

South Africa has asked the court to order Israel to withdraw from Rafah; to take measures to ensure unimpeded access for UN officials, humanitarian organisations and journalists to the Gaza Strip; and to report back within one week on how it is meeting these demands. During hearings earlier this year, Israel strongly denied committing genocide in Gaza and said it does all it can to spare civilians and is only targeting Hamas militants.

It says Hamas' tactic of embedding in civilian areas makes it difficult to avoid civilian casualties.

In January, judges ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza, but the panel stopped short of ordering an end to the military offensive that has laid waste to the Palestinian enclave. In a second order in March, the court said Israel must take measures to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, including opening more land crossings to allow food, water, fuel and other supplies to enter.

Most of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people have been displaced since fighting began. The war began with a Hamas attack on southern Israel on October 7 in which Palestinian militants killed around 1,200 people and took about 250 hostages. Gaza's Health Ministry says over 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war, without distinguishing between civilians and combatants in its

count.

South Africa initiated proceedings in December 2023 and sees the legal campaign as rooted in issues central to its identity. Its governing party, the African National Congress, has long compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the occupied West Bank to its own history under the apartheid regime of white minority rule, which restricted most Blacks to "homelands." Apartheid ended in 1994.

On Sunday, Egypt announced it plans to join the case. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Israeli military actions "constitute a flagrant violation of international law, humanitarian law, and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 regarding the protection of civilians during wartime."

Several countries have also indicated they plan to intervene, but so far only Libya, Nicaragua and Colombia have filed formal requests to do so. (AP)

# South Korean court rejects effort to block plan that would boost medical school admissions

**SEOUL, May 16:** A South Korean court ruled in favor of the government's contentious plan to drastically boost medical school admissions on Thursday.

A standoff between the government and doctors opposed to the plan has shaken the country's medical system for months. More than 10,000 junior doctors have been on strike since February in protest.

The Seoul High Court rejected a request from striking doctors and other opponents for an injunction to block the plan, which would raise the medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 next year, from the current cap of 3,058.

Lee Byung-chul, a lawyer for the doctors, said he will prepare to appeal the ruling to the Supreme Court, the country's top court. He said he will issue an official statement on Thursday's ruling after reviewing details of the verdict.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo welcomed the decision, saying the government appreciates "the wise ruling by the judicial branch."

He said the government will take steps to finalize medical school admission plans for the 2025 academic year.

The striking doctors represent a fraction of all

doctors in South Korea, estimated to number between 115,000 and 140,000.

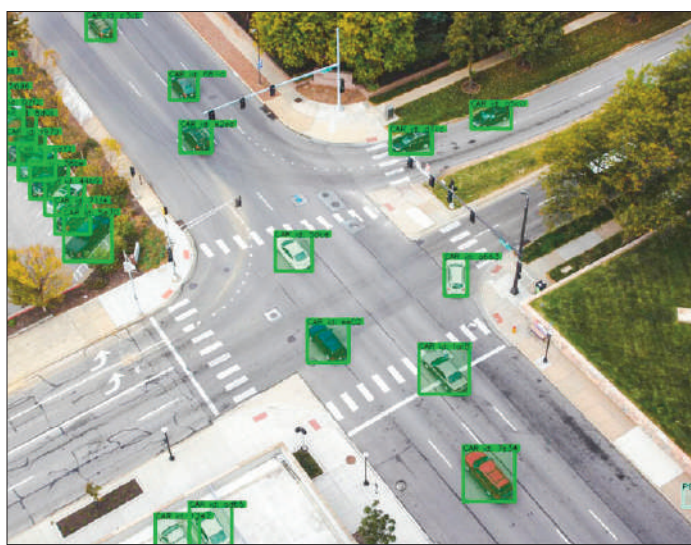
But in some major hospitals, they account for about 30% to 40% of doctors, assisting fully qualified doctors and department chiefs during surgeries and other treatments while training. Their walkouts have caused cancellations to numerous surgeries and other treatments at their hospitals.

Officials say the plan is aimed at adding more doctors, because South Korea has one of the world's fastest-aging populations and its doctor-to-population ratio is among the lowest in the developed world.

Doctors say schools aren't ready to handle an abrupt increase in students and that it would ultimately undermine the country's medical services. They say the government plan would also result in doctors performing unnecessary treatments because of greater competition. But critics argue that many doctors are mainly worried that more competition would lower their incomes.

Government officials earlier threatened to suspend the licenses of the striking doctors but later halted related administrative steps to facilitate dialogue with the strikers. (AP)

## AI-driven traffic management system to go live in Sikkim from May 25



**GANGTOK, May 16:** The Sikkim transport department on Thursday announced the launch of an artificial intelligence-driven traffic management system across the state from May 25.

The system aims to modernise traffic management and improve regulation efficiency by automatically verifying documents and detecting violations.

"With a view to modernise traffic management and enhance the efficiency and accuracy of traffic

regulation, Sikkim government is introducing artificial intelligence-driven traffic management system," the transport department said.

According to a notice by the department, "All vehicle owners (including government vehicles) are therefore informed to keep all their vehicle documents up to date. Any discrepancies arising out of the issue of E-challan may be brought to notice of the SPs/RTOs of the district." (PTI)

## One held in Arunachal's illegal teacher appointment case

**ITANAGAR, May 16:** The Special Investigation Cell (SIC) of the Arunachal Pradesh police has arrested one more person related to the illegal appointments of primary teachers and other staff members within the education department in Lower Siang district.

The arrest was initiated following a case registered by the SIC on February 3 this year, based on a report submitted by the director of elementary education about the illegal appointment of primary teachers and other staff in the Siang education department, a police officer said here on Thursday. The man was arrested after meticulous scrutiny of documents, interrogation of suspects, and technical

analysis, the Superintendent of Police of SIC (Vigilance), Anant Mittal, said.

The arrested individual, identified as Mikjar Ngulom alias June Lendo (32), is a native of New Bomte village in Lower Siang district, he said. At least eight people have been arrested by the SIC so far in the case.

The SIC investigation into the illegal appointments is ongoing, and all facets of the case are being investigated in detail, Mittal added.

Earlier, the SIC arrested a former deputy director of school education (DDSE) over alleged illegal appointments of primary teachers (PRT) and multi-tasking staff (MTS) in the Siang district of the

northeastern state.

The accused, Talem Jamoh, was arrested on May 1 based on a complaint lodged by one Tajing Saroh about the illegal appointment, and after detailed analysis of the documents, interrogation of appointees and other support and technical analysis.

The accused is a native of Napit village in East Siang district.

The Arunachal Pradesh government has so far terminated the services of 256 teachers, clerks and multi-tasking staffers in various districts for producing "forged and fabricated" appointment orders to concerned authorities without maintaining formalities of the education department. (PTI)

## NSCN (IM) commemorates 74th Naga Plebiscite Day at Camp Hebron

**DIMAPUR, May 16:** The NSCN (IM) on Thursday observed the Naga Plebiscite Day at its Naga army general headquarter church at Camp Hebron, around 50 km from here, calling it a historic and red letter day in the Naga people's struggle for freedom.

The day was commemorated in the presence of NSCN (IM) ato kilonser (prime minister) and chief negotiator of Naga talks with the Government of India, Th Muivah, Naga army personnel, leaders of civil society organisations such as the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), Naga Hoho, Naga Mothers Association (NMA), Global Naga Forum and the Naga Students Federation (NSF) among others.

The Naga National Council (NNC) conducted the Naga Plebiscite Day on May 16, 1951, to reaffirm the declaration of the 'Naga independence' on August 14, 1947.

NSCN (IM) vice chairman, Tongmeth Wangnao began his presidential address, saying "Let the historical truth be told to the world why the Naga under the banner of the NNC took the crucial step to conduct the Naga plebiscite. Let us recollect the words of NNC president, AZ Phizo on the Naga Plebiscite Day."

Giving a brief background of the 'Naga nation' and how the declaration of Naga independence took place on August 14, 1947, Wangnao said that from the very beginning, the Nagas were politically a 'distinct nation' with each village existing as a republic with sovereign authority.

"Naturally, the Nagas were against any kind of intrusion/incursions and domination over their sovereign rights," he said.

Asserting that the Naga people's allegiance to the Naga nationhood is the dynamism of the Naga culture, Wangnao said the Nagas' passion for political freedom and independence are intrinsically linked and that this has been the motivating factor that drives the Naga political movement.

In his speech, NSCN (IM) deputy ato kilonser (prime minister) VS Atem said the origin, history and customs of the Nagas are different, adding the Indians and the Nagas had no 'connection'. Naga army general headquarters church choir presented a patriotic song on the occasion.

## BJP will win 32 Lok Sabha seats out of 42 in Bengal: Tripura CM

**AGARTALA, May 16:** Tripura chief minister Manik Saha on Thursday said the BJP will win 32 Lok Sabha seats out of 42 in West Bengal.

"I had the opportunity to join the party's campaign trail in West Bengal during which I saw great enthusiasm among voters for the BJP. I am sure the party will win 32 out of the 42 Lok Sabha constituencies," he told reporters here.



In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP had won 18 seats out of 42 Lok Sabha constituencies, the best show by the saffron party in Bengal so far.

On BJP's prospects, Saha said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set the goal of 400-plus seats for the NDA.

"We all are working to achieve the target. I have already visited West Bengal and campaigned for the party. I will go again to Bengal to canvass for the party. We are confident that the BJP-led NDA will win more than 400 Lok Sabha seats (out of 543 seats)," he said.

The chief minister is scheduled to leave for Kolkata later in the day to join the party's campaign for the last three phases.

He dismissed the opposition's claim that the BJP would secure fewer than 200 seats, stating that it was merely an attempt to rally their party's supporters. (PTI)

## Sikkim became 22nd state of India on May 16, 1975 PM, Guv, CM greet people of Sikkim on 49th Statehood Day

**ANGTOK, May 16:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and chief minister Prem Singh Tamang on Thursday greeted the people of Sikkim on the 49th Statehood Day.

Sikkim became the 22nd state of India on May 16, 1975.

"Greetings to the people of Sikkim on their Statehood Day," Modi wrote on X.

"This state is known for its scenic beauty and hardworking people. Over the years, Sikkim has made a mark in organic farming. Our government will keep working for the welfare of Sikkim in the times to come", Modi said, adding, "I pray that the people of this state are always healthy and prosperous."

Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya also greeted the people of the state on the occasion.

"Today marks Sikkim's completion of 49 years in the democratic system. The journey from voluntary integration into the world's largest democracy on 16 May

## Member of Railway Board inspects ongoing NFR projects

**GUWAHATI, May 16:** Anil Kumar Khandelwal, member of the Infrastructure, Railway Board recently inspected some important on-going railway projects of the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR). The Indian Railways is significantly contributing towards transforming the connectivity scenario of the northeastern states by executing several railway projects under its 'Capital Connectivity' projects and 'Act East Policy' of the central government.

Projects inspected by the member from May 13 to 15 include Bhairabi - Sairang New Line Project, Jiribam - Imphal New Line Project and Agartala - Akhaura International Rail Connectivity Project.

Khandelwal on May 13 inspected the construction work of Bhairabi - Sairang New railway line project which aims to connect the North-eastern state of Mizoram with the rest of the country through stable rail connectivity and at an advance stage of completion. About 93 per cent of the project works have already been completed. The project aims to add 51.38 km of railway track in Mizoram that comprises of 55 major bridges and 87 minor bridges.

The total length of the tunnels in the project is 12853 meters. The project consists of four railway stations. The tallest pier of the bridge number 196 of the project is of 104 meter, which is 42 meter taller than the Qutub Minar.

The member of the board also inspected the construction work of Jiribam - Imphal New Line Project

## Centre not serious about Manipur's ethnic crisis: COCOMI

**IMPHAL, May 16:** Coordination Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), in a statement on Thursday, alleged that Union home minister Amit Shah's whimsical remarks showed that the centre does not take seriously the ongoing ethnic crisis in Manipur. The statement signed by COCOMI media coordinator, Yumkhaibam Surjitkumar Khuman also questioned the intention of the central government in the ongoing violence. It said that the people of the state were surprised when the Union home minister stated in an interview with a national daily on May 9 that the violence in Manipur is not terrorism. (NNN)



1975 until today has been profoundly memorable and meaningful for Sikkim and its people," he said.

"Sikkim has achieved remarkable development in various sectors, including social, economic, cultural, and infrastructure, under the democratic system, setting an example for other states and strengthening democracy," Acharya added.

In a Facebook post, Tamang said, "It marks a pivotal moment in history when Sikkim embraced democracy, embarking on a journey of progress and prosperity that has deeply intertwined its fate with that of our nation. Over the past 49 years, Sikkim has carved out a distinct identity and made remarkable advancements."

Meanwhile, President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday greeted the people of Sikkim on their statehood day and said they have made significant contributions to the country's development through sustainable lifestyle and hard work.

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## Nearly 67 per cent voter turnout in first four phases of LS polls: EC



**NEW DELHI, May 16:** The cumulative turnout in the first four phases of the Lok Sabha elections has been recorded at 66.95 per cent, the Election Commission said on Thursday, adding 45.10 crore of the nearly 97 crore electors have voted so far in the ongoing electoral exercise.

In a statement, the poll panel urged electorate to come out and vote in large numbers in the coming phases.

According to the poll authority, the updated voter turnout in the fourth phase of polling held on May 13 was 69.16 per cent, 3.65 percentage points higher than the corresponding phase in the 2019 parliamentary polls.

The updated voter turnout figures for the third phase of polling in the Lok Sabha election stood at 65.68 per cent. In the third phase of the 2019 general election, the turnout was 68.4 per cent. In the second phase of the election held on April 26, the turnout was recorded at 66.71 per cent as against the 69.64 per cent in the second phase of the 2019 polls.

In the first phase of the ongoing

general elections, a 66.14-per cent turnout was recorded. In the 2019 polls, the turnout in the first phase was 69.43 per cent. The EC said there is enhanced focus on to inform, motivate and facilitate voters in the remaining three phases of the parliamentary polls and state chief electoral officers have been asked to step up measures.

"The Commission strongly believes that partnership and collaboration are essential pillars of voter awareness programme. It's really heartening to see that on Commission's request, different institutions, influencers and celebrities having significant reach are working enthusiastically on pro-bono basis," Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said. A total of 379 seats across 23 states and Union Territories have voted in the first four phases of elections. A high voter turnout, Kumar felt, would be a message from Indian voters to the world about the strength of Indian democracy. He urged voters to cast their ballot in huge numbers, as voting day is not a holiday but a day of pride to participate in the festival of democracy.

The poll panel also listed out outreach efforts undertaken by various private and public bodies to enhance voter participation in the elections.

Banks, post offices, private entities and telecom platforms are using their public interface to encourage registered voters to turn up at the polling stations on various voting days. (PTI)

## Priyanka's campaign sets up Gandhis' virtual 'grudge match' against Irani in Amethi

**AMETHI (UP), May 16:** Elections in Amethi are unfolding like a slow-burn Alfred Hitchcock thriller with BJP's high-profile Smriti Irani and the relatively unknown Kishori Lal Sharma of the Congress locked in a fierce contest heading towards a difficult to predict climax.

What should be a conventional ending has turned out to be a nail biter with Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's spirited campaign for the Congress scripting possible twists and turns in the absorbing electoral battle.

Irani was the quintessential 'outsider', albeit from the BJP powerhouse, in 2019 when she beat former Congress president Rahul Gandhi in the constituency long considered the party's very own. Five years later, Rahul Gandhi has moved to nearby Rae Bareilly and Gandhi family aide Sharma is up against the incumbent BJP MP's star power.

It should be an easy contest but it isn't. As people discuss the Ram temple, Modi factor, the Priyanka Gandhi connect and everyday struggles, that's the word on the street in this constituency where no Gandhi family member is contesting for the first time in 25 years. "If Rahul Gandhi would have



been here it would have been different. This is an unusually silent election. Nobody is divulging who they are supporting and for what reasons but this has been a Gandhi family stronghold," said Ahmed Maqsood, who owns a tailoring shop in the Wahabganj market in Jais on the outskirts of Amethi town.

"The Ram temple has been constructed after 500 years of struggle. Our vote is for Ram temple and the BJP. Candidate does not matter, this is a national election," added Amarnath Sharma, wearing a scarf with Jai Shri Ram embroidered on it, in the town's main market. Though Irani and Sharma are battling it out at the hustings,

the spotlight is on Priyanka Gandhi as she leads her party's charge in her family's electoral fortress breached last time.

The Congress general secretary has been targeting Irani for coming to Amethi with the sole intention of defeating Rahul Gandhi and not for the development of the area or for the people.

The drama and suspense over the Amethi battle began early on. Though Irani was named in the BJP's first list of candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, the question on everyone's mind was whether or not Rahul Gandhi would contest from Amethi again.

The Congress kept everyone guessing till the last minute and

announced Sharma's candidature only hours before nomination filing was to end. That Sharma has been an MP representative for the Gandhis and has worked in the area for over 40 years stands him in good stead.

The initial anticlimax soon wore off among the people as Priyanka Gandhi set shop in Rae Bareilly vowing to win that constituency and wrest the family borough from where the party suffered the 2019 shock loss.

It may not be a direct Irani versus Rahul Gandhi 'grudge match' but it is certainly one that is shaping to be a memorable electoral battle. Many are calling it a "silent election" in which the voters would proverbially make themselves heard on result day on June 4. A Gandhi family member may not be contesting but their shadow looms large and Sharma makes it clear in his speeches that he would be a guardian for the constituency on their behalf.

"If elected I will work as an MP and will keep Gandhi family's 'amanat' safe... amanat mein khayamat nahi karoonga (there will be no breach of trust)," Sharma has said often.

He also says that a win for him would be a win for the Gandhi family, evoking the 103-year-old

bond between the Nehru-Gandhi family, dating back to 1921 when Jawaharlal Nehru visited the area, and the people.

The spotlight firmly on her, Priyanka Gandhi is strategist, orator and mass mobiliser as she drives the campaign in Amethi and nearby Rae Bareilly to maximise her party's chances of victory in the two seats.

Familial ties of the Gandhis with the voters, a latent Ram temple sentiment, the Modi factor, free ration scheme, 'pucca' houses for the poor, stray cattle and the Congress' allegation that the BJP would change the Constitution if they return to power are all part of the election discourse.

A group of people sitting at a shop in a market in Amethi, point out that the Ram temple construction is a major achievement of Modi.

Devinder Singh, who owns a shop in the market, says the Ram temple construction is ingrained in the minds of the people and their vote would be on that basis.

In the Tilo assembly segment close to Amethi town, Amitabh Singh agrees but adds that this time it is about correcting the "mistake" of last time and it is the Gandhi family that has given the seat its identity. (PTI)

## How long should Congress plead for seats: TNCC chief

**CHENNAI, May 16:** The Congress, which has been out of power in Tamil Nadu for over five decades, is attempting to stage a bid to capture power in the state in the 2026 assembly elections.

TNCC chief K Selvaputhagari deplored the present plight of his party in fighting elections in the shadow of the Dravidian majors, and appealed to cadres to strive to capture power in the state. "The Congress has been dependent on alliance partners in obtaining seats at the time of elections for 57 years from 1967," Selvaputhagari told party workers at a meeting in Dharmapuri on Wednesday, without naming the DMK or the AIADMK.

"This situation should change. The party should grow to apportion seats to other parties instead of asking for seats. The party workers should work hard to establish late Chief Minister Kamaraj's rule," the TNCC chief on a mission to revive the grand old party's lost glory, said. He urged the Congress cadres to gear up for the state assembly election to be held in two years.

"Should we still be silent? We should not delay further. The party infrastructure should be strengthened. How long will we ask for seats? It is time to grow in stature and give seats to allies," he said at the meeting. Selvaputhagari further claimed that the Congress had "wasted 57 years" without power in Tamil Nadu.

The Congress had ruled the state for 20 years from 1947 and was sent packing home in the 1967 elections, which saw the emergence of the DMK signalling the commencement of Dravidian politics in the state. (PTI)

## Chidambaram slams PM's 'Cong wanted to allocate 15 pc budget to Muslims' remark



**NEW DELHI, May 16:** Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Thursday termed "totally false" Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claim that the previous Congress government wanted to allocate 15 per cent of the budget for Muslims, and said the PM's statements have been "increasingly bizarre".

Chidambaram said the prime minister claimed on Tuesday that if he played the Hindu-Muslim divide, he would not be fit to be in public life but the very next day, "he played his usual game of dividing Hindus and Muslims".

"Hon'ble Prime Minister's statements are increasingly bizarre and show that his speech writers have lost their balance," the Congress leader said in a post on "X".

"The Hon'ble PM's accusation that Dr Manmohan Singh had drawn up a plan to spend 15 per cent of the Union

## UP govt failed to address growing stray cattle menace: Cong

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** The Congress on Thursday claimed the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh has failed to address the growing stray cattle menace and asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to spell out his vision to solve the problem "instead of diverting public discourse".

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh posed questions to Prime Minister Modi as he holds a series of rallies in Uttar Pradesh, including in Bhadohi.

"Why is the Modi Sarkar destroying the Bhadohi carpet industry? Why has the UP Government left farmers to deal with stray cattle themselves? Why are UP's youth unemployed?" Ramesh said.

Elaborating on what he said were "jumla details", Ramesh said that like most MSMEs, Bhadohi's carpet industry has also suffered under the Modi government.

"First, the industry was hit by the complex tax structure and high rates of GST. According to a trade body, 18% GST has been levied on handmade manufacturers and other floor coverings, and 12% has been levied on the sale and purchase of handmade goods," Ramesh said.

Previously, carpet exporters received a 9.2% import drawback which has now been reduced to just 3%, he said and added that even the 7.5% subsidy that the government used to provide has been suddenly removed.

"The families of 20 lakh workers are suffering because of the Modi Sarkar's ill-conceived trade and tax policies. Why has the BJP destroyed Bhadohi's carpet industry?" Ramesh said.

The Congress has promised to rationalize and simplify the GST regime to protect India's small manufacturers in the Congress Nyay Patra, Ramesh said.

What is the BJP's vision to support Bhadohi's carpet manufacturers, he asked.

Ramesh further said that despite repeated promises of action, the UP government has failed to address the growing stray cattle menace.

"The lack of adequate animal shelters has led cattle-rearers to avoid care for them by simply releasing their animals. These cattle have now become a nightmare for farmers - routinely destroying crops, and given their affinity for higher-value crops, even blocking efforts at crop diversification," he said.

"Farmers now have to keep vigil around the clock, and some have even died from bull attacks. Instead of diverting public discourse, can the Prime Minister address the issues that are actually concerning the local people: what is his vision to solve this problem?" Ramesh said.

He said last year, Chief Minister Yogi promised that he would create 2 crore new jobs in the state over the next 3-4 years.

"Remember this is the same promise that the Prime Minister had once made in 2014 before he came to office. We know what followed - years of record unemployment and slow growth," the Congress general secretary said.

The Congress' Yuva Nyay guarantees include the recruitment of 30 lakh government jobs and a guaranteed one year apprenticeship to all graduates and diploma holders, he said.

"What have the Prime Minister and his acolytes done over the last decade to create these promised 2 crore jobs? Why are the PM's acolytes now making the same promises that the PM failed to deliver on? What is the BJP's vision to resolve Uttar Pradesh and India's record unemployment crisis?" Ramesh said.

Earlier, he renewed his attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the BJP giving a Lok Sabha ticket to the son of incumbent MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who is facing charges of sexually harassing women wrestlers, and asked whether women ever be safe in "Modi's India".

Ramesh posed questions to the prime minister ahead of his rallies in Uttar Pradesh.

"Will the Jaunpur medical college ever be completed? Why has the Gomti river been re-branded and not re-rivived? Will women ever be safe in Modi's India?" Ramesh said.

Elaborating on what he said were "jumla details", Ramesh said the foundation stone of the Jaunpur medical college was laid by Akhilesh Yadav in 2015 but nine years later, it is still not complete.

It was meant to be completed in 2017 but when the BJP came to power in Uttar Pradesh, they chose not to prioritise this project, he alleged.

"Despite this, the half-functional college was 'inaugurated' by the outgoing PM and CM Yogi in October 2021. At the end of 2023, only 63% of the college's civil work had been completed and only the OPD was functional," he claimed.

"Why has the 'Double-Engine' government broken down for this essential project? Will the Jaunpur medical college ever be fully functional?" Ramesh said.

He further said that despite the PM's claims of conserving the Gomti river under the National Mission for Clean Ganga, the river is suffering today.

On the BJP giving a ticket to Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's son, Ramesh alleged that the PM Modi has "once again failed India's daughters".

"Rather than punishing MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for his heinous crimes, the BJP has rewarded him with a ticket for his son Karan Bhushan Singh, from the neighbouring Kaiserganj Lok Sabha seat," he said.

This has come as a slap in the face to all the women who put their careers at stake and slept on the streets for days, through sun and rain, in their fight for justice, he said.

"It has become clear that in 'Modi ka Parivar', Nari Shakti is just a slogan that is projected while the Parivar shelters perpetrators of sexual violence, be it Prajwal Revanna or Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. Will women ever be safe in Modi's India? Will the PM's hunger for power always be more important than the safety of India's daughters?" Ramesh said and asked the prime minister to break his "silence" on these issues. (PTI)

## BJP attacks Kejriwal for silence on Maliwal issue



**NEW DELHI, May 16:** The BJP on Thursday hit out at Arvind Kejriwal for maintaining silence at a press conference in Lucknow on the alleged assault on his party MP Swati Maliwal, alleging the Delhi chief minister is behaving more like a "goon".

BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia claimed Kejriwal is the main "criminal" in the complaint that his aide Bibhav Kumar had physically attacked Maliwal at the chief minister's residence, as he cited the telephone call she had made to the Delhi Police to report the matter.

"His (Kejriwal) silence speaks a lot. Out of jail, he is more a 'goonda' than a chief minister," he told reporters, noting that Kumar was seen with the chief minister in Lucknow. Stringent action should be taken against the accused in the case.

Kumar, he noted, was photographed with Kejriwal during his visit to Lucknow.

The Aam Aadmi Party convener did not reply to a question about the incident at a press conference he addressed with Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav. AAP MP Sanjay Singh, who was also there, instead

replied, saying his party has already made it stand clear on the issue.

Singh then went on to cite the incidents of crimes against women in Manipur, women wrestlers' complaint against BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, and the Prajwal Revanna case to hit back at the BJP. One should not play political game over the Maliwal issue as the AAP has made its stand clear, he said.

Singh had earlier admitted to the incident and pledged action. He had also met Maliwal at her residence.

Bhatia noted that Singh had acknowledged that a condemnable incident had occurred against Maliwal, saying that Kejriwal was expected to act in a case involving a party colleague. Instead, the accused is travelling with him like a "twin brother", he said.

"This shows Kejriwal has no commitment to justice for women. While the BJP is fighting for justice for an opposition leader," he said, accusing him of cowardice. He demanded that the AAP leader should break his silence or resign if he is a coward, Bhatia said.

Noting that the woman Rajya Sabha MP has been uncommunicative, the BJP leader asked if she has been kidnapped or forcibly kept away from the public eye.

He also took a swipe at Yadav over his attempt to downplay the incident by claiming that it is not a big issue. Targeting the Samajwadi Party, he recalled later SP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav's controversial defence of some men accused of rape by claiming "they are boys, they at times make mistakes". (PTI)

## According to IMD data heatwave days in April were the highest in 15 years in Gangetic West Bengal and nine years in Odisha Heatwave alert for northwest India; mercury may hit 45 deg C in Delhi



**NEW DELHI, May 16:** Heatwave conditions are expected over northwest India during the next five days, with Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and Delhi predicted to bear the maximum impact, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Thursday.

A fresh heatwave spell will also commence over east and central India from May 18.

The Met office issued an orange alert for Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Delhi, emphasising "high health concern" for vulnerable people, including infants, the elderly, and those

with chronic diseases.

It warned of an increased likelihood of heat-related illnesses in people exposed to the sun for prolonged periods or engaging in heavy work.

"Severe heatwave conditions are very likely in some parts of west Rajasthan during May 17-20 and in Punjab, Haryana and Delhi during May 18-20," the IMD said.

The mercury could soar to 45 degrees Celsius in the national capital by Saturday.

A yellow alert has been issued for east Ra-

jasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal and Odisha.

The Met office had earlier predicted a higher-than-normal number of heatwave days in the northern plains and central India in May.

Normally, the northern plains, central India and adjoining areas of peninsular India experience around three days of heatwaves in May.

April saw record-smashing maximum temperatures in east, northeast and southern peninsular India, prompting health warnings from government agencies and some states to suspend in-person classes in schools.

Several places recorded their highest-ever April day temperatures, with the mercury soaring to 47 degrees Celsius.

At least two people died in Kerala due to suspected heatstroke.

According to IMD data heatwave days in April were the highest in 15 years in Gangetic West Bengal and nine years in Odisha.

Odisha also experienced the longest heatwave spell (16 days) in April since 2016.

On Wednesday, a group of leading climate scientists said similar heatwaves could occur once every 30 years and they have already become about 45 times more likely due to climate change.

The World Weather Attribution (WWA) group emphasised that heatwaves intensified by climate change are making life much tougher for people living in poverty across Asia.

Amid the prevailing but weakening El Niño conditions, the IMD had earlier warned of extreme heat in India during the April-June period, coinciding with the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections which end on June 1. (PTI)

## Alamgir Alam remanded to 6-day ED custody

**RANCHI, May 16:** Jharkhand minister Alamgir Alam, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with its probe into a money laundering case, was on Thursday remanded to the custody of the central agency for six days by a special PMLA court here, lawyers said.

The ED sought a 10-day remand for Alam.

Alam's lawyer Kishlay Prasad said that his six-day remand will start on Friday.

Today, he is in judicial custody. There is no specific allegation against Alam. Everything is vague. Neither they are disclosing the name of the person who has taken money or who has taken proceeds of crime. There is no direct involvement of the minister. Cash was recovered from one Jahangir who has no link with Alamgir Alam," Prasad said.

Alam's counsel also cited the health condition of the 70-year-old minister in the court, while opposing the ED's remand plea.

"He has been suffering from sleep apnea, due to which his oxygen level reduces during the night. Therefore, he needs oxygen support. Such support was even provided by the family of Alam during ED custody on Wednesday night. He is also a hypertension and diabetes patient," Prasad said.

The court stated that the required medical aid will be provided during the remand period, he said. (PTI)



# SC issues criminal contempt notice to DDA VC over tree felling in southern ridge

## Cannot trust the DDA now: Court

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** The Supreme Court on Thursday issued a criminal contempt notice against Delhi Development Authority vice-chairman Subhasish Panda for allowing large-scale felling of trees in the southern Ridge's Sabari area to construct a road from Chhattarpur to Saarc University.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan expressed displeasure over the misleading affidavit filed by the vice chairman and presenting wrong facts in the court. It also directed planting of 100 new trees for each tree felled by the DDA. Voicing strong disapproval of the affidavit filed by the DDA vice-chairman which stated that 642 trees were cut without his knowledge, the top court said it "cannot trust the DDA now".

"I have been a judge in Constitutional courts for over 20 years now and I have never seen a body misrepresenting facts and filing wrong affidavits. There has to be some limit, never before seen," Justice Oka remarked orally.

The top court noted that the felling of trees continued for 10 days and this fact was suppressed by the DDA despite knowing not a single



tree could be touched in the ridge area (according to a 19995 order) without the court's permission.

It also noted the Delhi LG was also misled by the DDA officials by not informing about the correct facts about the felling of trees.

"Such conduct (of DDA VC) and suppression amounts to interference with the due course of court proceedings and administration of justice. We have already issued show cause notice for civil contempt. We therefore issue notice of criminal

contempt," the bench said. The apex court also directed the DDA to stop all further activities for construction of the road.

"We are of the view that 100 new trees for one tree felled have to be planted by the DDA. We, therefore, direct Forest Survey of India, Dehradun, to visit the road stretches to find out how many trees possibly may have been cut and assess damages.

"Entire record of contractor has to be shared. We request FSI team to

submit a preliminary report to this court by June 20," the bench said.

The top court had earlier issued contempt notice to the vice-chairman of Delhi Development Authority (DDA) for the felling of over 1,000 trees for the construction of an approach road.

The apex court on March 4 had refused permission to DDA to fell 1,051 trees saying that their application is very vague.

The top court had said DDA being an instrumentality of the State, it is the duty of the DDA to first make an attempt to protect the environment by requesting for felling of only those trees which are absolutely mandatory.

"They must apply their mind whether alternatives can be examined to save the trees. Moreover, they want to construct the road through a forest. There is no permission obtained under the Forest Act. "We direct the DDA to re-examine the proposal by employing the experts in the field. The exercise to be undertaken by the DDA is necessary for ensuring that while public work is carried out, minimum number of trees are required to be felled," the apex court had said. (PTI)

# Sandeshkhali woman lodges police complaint, alleges abduction



**KOLKATA, May 16:** A woman on Thursday lodged a police complaint, alleging that she was abducted by three persons from outside her residence in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali where allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders have been levelled. In her complaint with the Sandeshkhali Police Station, the woman claimed that she was pressured to tell courts that alleged atrocities on women in the area were "false".

"A complaint was lodged at 2.30 am on Thursday, and a case was filed. The investigation is underway. Three persons have been named in the complaint. No arrests have been made so far," a senior police officer told PTI. In a purported video shared by BJP

leader and lawyer Priyanka Tibrewal on social media, the woman was heard saying that she was gagged and dragged out of her house when she went outside after hearing the barking of dogs. The woman also claimed that she was asked to tell the courts that the alleged incidents of atrocities on women in Sandeshkhali by local TMC leaders were "false".

The authenticity of the video could not be verified by PTI.

In a post on X on Wednesday, Tibrewal stated, "Today I visited Sandeshkhali, where TMC goons are threatening the people to prove Sk. Shahjahan is innocent. One woman named Anwesha Mondal told me about the atrocities of Dilip Mallick

who few days ago abducted a woman. Following this complaint, today evening, TMC goons abducted her, tied her up, and left her beside a pond to die. We took her to the Police Station." A series of purported videos surfaced recently from North 24 Parganas district's Sandeshkhali where TMC leaders were accused of sexual assault and land grab.

In the first such clip, a BJP leader of Sandeshkhali was heard saying that the protests by women were "staged" at the behest of Leader of the Opposition, Suwendu Adhikari, who was behind the "whole conspiracy".

In another video, a section of the women, who had earlier filed rape complaints, claimed that they were made to sign a blank paper by the BJP leaders and coerced to go to the police station. The BJP leader, who was seen in the first video, was also heard saying in a third clip, that over 70 women had received ₹ 2,000 each for taking part in protests against local TMC leaders. PTI did not verify the authenticity of these videos.

On May 12, BJP workers demonstrated against the circulation of purported videos "to malign the image" of saffron party leaders in Sandeshkhali, and allegedly heckled local TMC legislator Sukumar Mahata for spreading "misinformation" over complaints of sexual abuse, lodged by women in the area. (PTI)

# Specially abled Geeta, brought home from Pak, to appear for Class 8 exam

**INDORE, May 16:** Geeta, a hearing and speech impaired woman who returned to India from Pakistan in 2015, is all set to appear for her Class 8 examination to be conducted by the Madhya Pradesh State Open School Education Board, an official said. The application of 33-year-old Geeta has been approved, allowing her to appear for the examination starting next week, the official of the board said on Thursday.

"While approving Geeta's application, we have allowed her to appear for Class 8 examination and she will get her admit card soon." Director of the State Open School Education Board Prabhakar Raj Tiwari told PTI. The Class 8 examination conducted by the State Open School Education Board will begin on May 21 and conclude on May 28, officials said. Anand Service Society, an Indore-based NGO, has been helping Geeta to appear for the Class 8 exams, its secretary Gyanendra Purohit said. Geeta's real name is Radha and she currently lives in Maharashtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district with her mother Meena Pandhare, he said.

After returning to India from Pakistan, Geeta stayed in Indore for nearly five years. She cleared Class 5 exam in 2020, but she could not go ahead with further studies due to the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic and other reasons, Purohit said.

Citing his video call interaction with Geeta using gestures, he said that she wants to become financially independent by studying.

"If Geeta clears Class 8 exam, she can become eligible for government recruitment for Class IV employees under the quota for persons with disability," he said. Geeta is preparing for her Class 8th exam with the help of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar-based NGO Progressive Life Centre, Purohit said. Purohit's wife and sign language expert Monica Purohit is also preparing Geeta for the exam through online classes.

"Geeta is diligently preparing for her Class 8 exams. Though she is facing some difficulties in Hindi and Sanskrit, I am sure she will overcome these difficulties through her perseverance," Monica Purohit said. According to officials, Geeta's age is estimated to be 33 years. She had crossed over to Pakistan nearly 23 years ago after accidentally boarding a train as a child. She was found sitting alone on the Samjhauta Express at the Lahore railway station by Pakistan Rangers.

The deaf and mute girl was adopted by Bilquis Edhi of Pakistan's social organisation named Edhi Foundation and kept with her in Karachi.

It was due to the special efforts of the then external affairs minister late Sushma Swaraj that Geeta could return to India on October 26, 2015. The next day, she was sent to the residential complex of an NGO in Indore. Geeta has been living in Maharashtra after relocating to her family in the state in 2021. (PTI)

# Bodies of ex-GM of ATC, wife retrieved at hoarding crash site; toll at 16, rescue operation ends

**MUMBAI, May 16:** Bodies of a retired GM of Mumbai airport ATC and his wife were retrieved from the wreckage at the crash site of a giant hoarding here, taking the toll to 16 as the rescue operation was called off on Thursday morning with no hopes of finding survivors three days after the tragedy, officials said.

Former general manager (GM) of Mumbai ATC Manoj Chansoria (60) and his wife Anita (59) were missing since Monday evening when they left for Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh from the ATC guest house in western Mumbai in a car.

The bodies of a man and a woman were extricated from a car stuck underneath the collapsed hoarding shortly after midnight on Wednesday and the victims were later identified as Manoj Chansoria and his wife, they said.

A 120 feet x 120 feet billboard, which according to officials was illegally installed, collapsed on a petrol pump in the Chhedra Nagar area of suburban Ghatkopar during a dust storm on Monday



evening, killing 14 people and injuring 75 others.

A Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) official said the bodies of Chansoria and his wife were in a "decomposed state" and taken to the nearby civic-run Rajawadi Hospital around 1 am.

On Tuesday night, Chansoria's mobile phone location was tracked to the petrol pump on which the hoarding had collapsed a day earlier. It is believed Chansoria had stopped at the petrol pump for refuelling his car when

the billboard crashed.

The search and rescue operation at the crash site, which went on for 66 hours, was called off at around 10.30 am on Thursday, an official of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) said.

BMC Commissioner Bhushan Gagrani made an announcement about it after inspecting the site.

Speaking to reporters, Gagrani said 16 people have died in the tragedy and the search and rescue operation was now complete at the site.

The civic chief said they have

thoroughly checked the site to ensure no more person was trapped there.

Now, the work of clearing the debris will continue through the day, he said.

He said agencies like BMC, Mumbai police, BPCL, NDRF, Mumbai fire brigade, and Mahanagar Gas participated in the rescue operation and completed it "maintaining proper coordination".

Action is being taken on a "war footing" to remove illegal hoarding in the metropolis, the IAS officer said.

"There should be no hoardings (in the city) other than those meeting the specifications laid down for them. So it is not a question of who owns them or whose place they are in," Gagrani said.

Gagrani said structural stability of hoardings is mandatory for the ones permitted by the BMC.

Similarly, the Railways has been directed to follow the specifications and remove those hoardings that do not conform to the parameters, he said. (PTI)

# NCBC recommends increase in reservation quota for OBCs in West Bengal, Punjab

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** The National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) has recommended an increase in the reservation quota for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in public employment in Punjab and West Bengal. The Commission's decision comes after a review of the current reservation policies, oral statements, and documentary evidence, aiming to align with the directives laid out by the Supreme Court in the Indra Sawhney case, according to an advisory. Currently, Punjab allocates 25 per cent of public employment positions to Scheduled Castes and 12 per cent to OBCs, totalling 37 per cent reservation. The NCBC has proposed enhancing the OBC quota by an additional 13 per cent, bringing the total OBC reservation in public employment to 25 per cent. This adjustment will adhere to the Supreme Court's ceiling of up to 50 per cent reservation for socially and educationally backward classes.

D K Tiwari, Additional Chief Secretary of the Punjab Govern-

ment, appeared before the NCBC on February 22, expressing the state's commitment to implement the Commission's recommendations. West Bengal's OBC categorisation involves 35 newly included castes/communities.

As on date, 143 communities were included in the state List of OBCs out of which 83 castes/communities belonged to Muslim religion. A total of 179 OBC communities are enlisted in the state list of OBCs in West Bengal. Category 'A' (more backward) contains 81 castes out of which 73 communities belong to Muslim religion and Category 'B' (Backward) contains 98 out of which 45 communities belong to Muslim religion. Reservation for Category 'A' (More Backward) is 10 per cent and Category 'B' (Backward) is seven per cent.

Reservation quota for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes is 22 per cent, six per cent and 17 per cent respectively in respect of services and posts under the control of West Bengal in establishments run or aided by the government. (PTI)

# PEC condemns murder of UP journalist, demands punishment to perpetrators

**HT Correspondent**  
**GENEVA, May 16:** Press Emblem Campaign (PEC), the global safety and media rights body, strongly condemned the murder of Ashutosh Srivastava, an Indian journalist based in Uttar Pradesh, on Monday and demanded a fair probe to identify and punish the perpetrators under the law of the land.

Ashutosh (45), who hails from Jaunpur locality, was associated with nationalist news channel Sudarshan News and he was targeted by miscreants on the outskirts of the city. He was sent to a nearby hospital but the attending doctors declared him dead. Soon after he received threats for a series of reports on illegal cow slaugh-

tering incidents. Ashutosh even urged the local police for protection, but in vain.

"Ashutosh Srivastava is the 46th victim among journalists killed since 1 January this year. We urge the Uttar Pradesh government led by hardliner Hindu nationalist Yogi Adityanath to investigate the murder and book the culprits for legal punishment. PEC also extends the local scribe's body named Jaunpur Patrakar Sangh in its fight for justice to the victim," said Blaise Lempem, president of PEC, adding that the local media organisations have demanded the government in Lucknow to offer Rs 5 million to the bereaved family.

PEC's south Asia representa-

tive Nava Thakuria revealed that five journo-casualties have been reported this year where Pakistan lost three scribes (Maulana Mohammad Siddique Mengal, Jam Saghir Ahmed Lar and Tahira Nosheen Rama) along with one (Ko Myat Thu Tun) in Myanmar.

Last year India witnessed the killing of journalists namely Shashikant Warishe, Abdur Rauf Alamgir and Vimal Kumar Yadav. Monday witnessed the fourth phase of polling under India's general elections to form 18th Lok Sabha and three phases more are waiting for voting, where the counting for votes will take place on 4 June next (results are expected the same day).

# Can't direct CBI to register FIR: Special Court to MMTC on coal import scam

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** A special court has dismissed a plea by the Metals and Minerals Trading Corporation of India (MMTC) seeking the registration of an FIR by the CBI in connection with alleged corruption in the import of coal from an Australian company at inflated rates in 2009, officials said Thursday.

The PSU had sought directions to the CBI to register an FIR in matter which is now being investigated by the central probe agency by registering a preliminary enquiry.

A preliminary enquiry is the first step by the agency to ascertain if there is prima facie enough material in the allegations to warrant a full-fledged investigation through an FIR or a regular case, they said.

The plea was dismissed by the special court which said it does not have power to direct the CBI to register an FIR and investigate the case.

Citing orders of the Supreme Court and high courts, the special court said the powers to issue directions to the CBI to register an FIR lie with the Supreme Court and high courts only. The public sector undertaking had approached the special court with a plea it had submitted two complaints with the CBI -- September 2, 2022 dated November 23, 2022 -- seeking the registration of the FIR in the matter as the complaints were disclosing the commission of the

cognisable offences, but no action was taken by CBI. The central probe agency had registered a preliminary enquiry last year.

The case pertains to a long-term agreement signed between MMTC and Anglo American Metallurgical Coal Pty. Ltd on March 7, 2007 for the purchase of freshly-mined and washed cooking coal.

It is alleged MMTC officials proposed and sanctioned USD 300 per metric tonne rate for the fifth delivery period between July 01, 2008 to July 30, 2009 despite being fully aware that the price of cooking coal had drastically fallen in the wake of Lehman Brothers collapse, and purchasing coal at USD 300 PMT would cause a huge loss, they said.

The complaint said that on November 20, 2008, the prices of coal were low and the Sale Purchase Committee of Directors should have satisfied itself for agreeing to a price of coal at USD 300 PMT as opposed to price which was USD 96.40 PMT for the previous delivery period.

"It is alleged that the facts of the case constituted a clear case of conspiracy i.e. official of the complainant with the official of the Anglo Coal in order to gain pecuniary advantage to Anglo Coal by abusing their positions and to defraud the exchequer of this country," the MMTC told the court. (PTI)

# Kin of man who died in Oman protest outside AISATS office over cancelled flight, seek damages

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 16:** The family of a man who died in Oman recently protested with his body outside the AISATS office here on Thursday, seeking compensation, stating that had Air India Express not cancelled flights, his wife would have been by his side and he may not have died.

The family members of the deceased said his wife was unable to go and see him due to the AI Express cabin crew strike, which led to repeated flight cancellations -- and he died in that Gulf nation with no one to take care of him.

The man's father-in-law claimed that had the wife been provided a ticket to travel, maybe the death could have been prevented.

The body of the man was brought to Kerala in the morning, and his relatives went with it directly to the office of Air India SATS Airport Services Pvt Limited (AISATS) -- which provides gateway services that include ground handling, passenger assistance and air cargo handling.

The relatives kept the body in front of the steps of the building housing the AISATS office and silently stood around it, according to visuals shown on TV channels.

The father-in-law blamed the death on the airline's indifference.

Later, he went and sat outside the main doors of the AISATS office and said he would not budge from there until Air India Express took a decision with regard to what happened.

"Let the last rites and rituals be held, but I will not



leave here till they make a decision. This should not happen to anyone else in the future.

"They have to take care of my grandkids and my daughter. They need to compensate us for the loss. Till they take a decision on that, I will not go from here," he said.

He said that those working at the AISATS office were claiming that they have nothing to do with AI Express. He questioned, "But why is Air India written in big letters on the board here?"

He also claimed that, till now, the airline has not even refunded the cancelled ticket amount. "But refunds are not our main concern," he added.

Subsequently, AI Express officials arrived there and

held a discussion with the family members, including the woman's father, in the presence of police.

After the discussions, the protest was called off, and the body was taken home to perform the last rites. Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly V D Satheesan sought immediate intervention by the airline as well as the central and state governments in the matter.

He too said that had the wife, Amrita, been able to go to Oman, perhaps her husband's life could have been saved.

"She could not complete that crucial journey in her life, and Air India Express cannot escape its responsibility," Satheesan said.

He said that besides Amrita, there were many others who were also affected by the AI Express flight cancellations. "There are those who lost their jobs or could not rejoin work in time," he pointed out.

Amrita's husband was hospitalised in Muscat, Oman due to heart problems and was in the ICU, leading to her decision to book tickets on an AI Express flight for May 8.

However, she, along with hundreds of other passengers, were in for a rude shock when they reached airports across the state when they were informed that all flights were cancelled.

Her protest at the airport earned her a ticket for the next day on another Air India Express flight, but unfortunately that too was cancelled and she had to abandon her travel plans altogether.

On May 13, her husband died in Muscat.

Amrita's family had said it was unfair that she could not see her husband for one last time.

They said that they had begged the airline to accommodate her on some other flight so that she could see him for one last time, but AI Express did not do anything.

Her husband was hospitalised following a massive heart attack.

Air India Express had cancelled "scores of flights" last week due to a shortage of cabin crew members, as a section of them reported sick to protest against alleged mismanagement at the Tata Group-owned airline.

Discontent has been brewing among a section of the cabin crew at the low-cost carrier for some time now, especially after the process began for the merger of AIX Connect, formerly AirAsia India, with Air India Express.

Later, on May 10, the strike by a section of the cabin crew was called off and the airline also withdrew termination letters issued to 25 striking cabin crew.

From May 8 to May 10, Air India Express had to cancel over 260 flights due to cabin crew shortage, an airline source said.

On May 12, the airline had said that it was slowly restoring its flights and stabilising the network and that full normalcy was expected by Tuesday. The same day, the cabin crew union had said that all members who had reported sick had joined duty by May 11. (PTI)

# 11 killed in lightning strikes in Bengal's Malda

**MALDA (WB), May 16:** At least 11 people were killed on Thursday afternoon after being struck by lightning in different places across Malda district of West Bengal, a government official said. The district administration has announced a compensation of Rs 2 lakh each for the families of the deceased, he said.

"So far, 11 people have been killed due to lightning strikes. A number of injured people are being treated at various hospitals. Some of the injured are in critical condition," the official told PTI.

Three persons -- Chandan Sahani (40), Raj Mridha (16) and Manajit Mandal (21) -- were killed in Malda's Sahapur area, while another person identified as Asit Saha (19) died in Gajol after he was struck by lightning while working in a mango orchard, he said. Eight-year-old Rana Sheikh in Manickchak's Mohammed Tola and a couple, Nayan Roy (23) and Priyanka Singha (20) of Harishchandrapur, also lost their lives due to lightning, the official added.

In Haddatola, lightning killed Atul Mandal (65) and Sheikh Sabrul (11) while Sumitra Mandal (45) lost her life in Mirdadpur, he said. (PTI)



## This is a beautiful moment in my life: Chhaya Kadam on her journey from 'Laapataa Ladies' to Cannes

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** Growing up, she wanted to be a Kabbadi player and then the dream shifted to opening a gym. Chhaya Kadam, who is winning hearts with her stellar performances as Manju Mai in "Laapataa Ladies" and gangster Kanchan Kombdi in "Madgaon Express", says she came to acting late and by chance.

Kadam is now looking forward to attending the 77th Cannes Film Festival for the premiere of Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine As Light", which is part of the main competition. She is also excited about "Sister Midnight", a film to be screened in the film gala's sidebar section Director's Fortnight.

"I am very happy. This is a beautiful moment in my life and I am enjoying it without thinking too much about what's next," she said about the audience appreciation for "Laapataa Ladies" and

"Madgaon Express" as well as the Cannes selection of her two movies.

Kadam said she grew up in a Mumbai suburb called Kalina in a housing board colony and had different dreams at different points of time.

"I was a state-level Kabbadi player, so I thought about going in that direction. After some time, it shifted to owning a gym or joining the police force because I had the physique... People start their journeys in schools and college by doing theatre, but I entered the profession quite late," Kadam told PTI in an interview. The actor credits a workshop she did with theatre veteran and former National School of Drama director Waman Kendre in 2001 for changing the course of her life.

"I started enjoying the process while doing the workshop. That was the beginning for me. People

think it is easy to break into acting but it took me six years to do my first play. It wasn't easy even after that but whatever came my way, I worked on it with complete honesty."

After becoming an actor, Kadam said she dreamed about getting a National Film Award and featuring in a variety of roles but a festival like Cannes was not even on her wish list.

Manju Mai, a fiercely independent teaseer with a soft corner for one of the two heroines who gets lost in Kiran Rao's "Laapataa Ladies", has become something of a social media sensation with viewers sharing screenshots and dialogues on X and in reels on Instagram.

Kadam said she is surprised the character has resonated with not just the youth but also women of different age groups. "I recently spoke to Sneha Desai, the writer of 'Laapataa Ladies', when the film released on OTT. She asked me, 'Kaisa lag raha hai? (how do you feel?)' I told her that whenever I receive any praise, she comes to my mind because Manju Mai's thoughts were shaped by her and Kiran," she added.

Rao had seen Kadam in Nagraj Manjule's 2013 film "Fandry" and the director remembered her during 'Laapataa Ladies'. Similarly, "Madgaon Express" director Kunal Kemmu spotted Kadam in a role in the 2022 Marathi film "Kaun Pravin Tambe?" starring Shreyas Talpade.

"Kiran really liked 'Fandry' and wanted to work with me. Kunal told me that when he saw me in 'Pravin Tambe', he felt he had found his Kanchan Kombdi. He reached out to Shreyas Talpade to ask about

me. I am grateful to both the directors because people are connecting to these roles."

While Manju Mai was a well-formed character, Kadam said Rao left it on her actors to improvise and bring something of their own to the characters. Kadam said she picked up one of the character traits of Manju Mai from a Uttar Pradesh woman who lived next door.

"Characters come ready-made to an actor. You have a sense of costume, status and nature by the script but you have to find its soul. It is easy but also difficult because you have to put yourself in their shoes and at the same time, make it truthful to the audience," said the actor, who has also featured in films such as "Andhadhun" and "Gangubai Kathiawadi".

Manju Mai from "Laapataa Ladies" and her first major role in "Fandry", a film on caste discrimination, are characters that left a mark on her, said Kadam.

"Sometimes, I feel Manju Mai was written for me. I have that woman inside me. I didn't marry, somehow never got around to it and now I am enjoying living on my own. I felt Manju Mai was also teaching me. I receive so many calls from women who were confused but now feel inspired by Manju Mai.

"Similarly, 'Fandry' was a film that shook me from inside and gave me a sense of what's right and wrong," she said. Kanchan Kombdi, a scorned wife who one-ups her gangster husband by running a bigger, all-women smuggling cartel in Goa, was, however, the other end of the spectrum and fun to play, she said. (PTI)

## Hansal Mehta announces third chapter of 'Scam' series on Subrata Roy

**MUMBAI, May 16:** Filmmaker Hansal Mehta on Thursday announced the third edition of his smash hit series "Scam", titled "Scam 2010 - The Subrata Roy Saga", which will be based on the life of businessman Subrata Roy.

Based on the book, "Sahara: The Untold Story by Tamal Bandyopadhyay", the Sony LIV series will be produced by Applause Entertainment, in association with Studio Next and helmed by Mehta.

"Scam 2010" is the dust-to-diamonds story of Roy. In the early 2000s, Roy was caught in a whirlwind of accusations ranging from chit-fund manipulations to fake investors, ultimately leading to his arrest in 2014. With approximately Rs 25,000 crore still lying unclaimed with government authorities, the repercussions of the scam continue to reverberate even today," according to the press release issued by the makers. "Scam is not just a franchise for me. It is a chronicling of our times. I'm thrilled to collaborate again with Applause and Sony LIV to bring this larger-than-life story alive," Hansal Mehta said in a statement. Sameer Nair, Managing Director, Applause Entertainment, said, "Scam series has become a pop cultural phenomenon.

"With Scam 2010: The Subrata Roy Saga, we are poised to raise the bar even higher, offering audiences an immersive journey into the life and times of one of the most audacious and ambitious minds in Indian business history," Nair said.

Danish Khan, SonyLIV, said they are delighted to collaborate with Mehta and Applause Entertainment for the next Scam series. "The series has consistently been the most viewed franchise on Sony LIV and we are confident that the third edition will create newer benchmarks in compelling storytelling," he said. (PTI)



## Netflix renews '3 Body Problem' for additional episodes, series to end

**LOS ANGELES, May 16:** Netflix has greenlit additional episodes of sci-fi series "3 Body Problem" to conclude the story, created, executive produced and written by David Benioff, D B Weiss and Alexander Woo. Based on the Hugo Award-winning Chinese novel "The Three-Body Problem" by Liu Cixin, the first season of the show premiered on the streamer in March.

Returning creators Benioff, Weiss, and Woo in a joint statement said they are looking forward to telling the story through to its "epic conclusion".

"Three Body Problem has been renewed! We're thrilled that we get to tell this story through to its epic conclusion.

"Ever since we read the last page of Cixin Liu's magnificent trilogy, we hoped we'd be able to



bring the audience to the end of the universe with us. Here we go!" the trio said in a statement shared on Netflix's official X page. "The extraordinary '3 Body

Problem', brought to life with the deft hands of Benioff, Weiss and Woo, will soar to never-before-seen heights as they tackle the rest of the mind-blowing journey through Death's End. Their brilliant vision as storytellers is matched by their amazing partnership — and, just like the fans, we can't wait to see what they have in store," added Peter Friedlander, vice president of scripted series at Netflix.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, "Game of Thrones" creators Benioff and Weiss have renewed their overall deal with the streamer to write, produce and direct new series and films. Besides the continuation of "3 Body Problem", the duo are working on "Death by Lightning" series. (PTI)

## Kavita Krishnamurthy conferred with Lifetime Achievement Award in UK

**LONDON, May 16:** Well-known playback and classical singer Kavita Krishnamurthy has been conferred with a Lifetime Achievement Award for her contribution to music by the annual UK Asian Film Festival (UKAFF) in London. The 66-year-old singer behind several Bollywood box-office hits from films like 'Mr India' and 'Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam' received the Golden Flame Lifetime Achievement Award at a glittering ceremony over the weekend, followed by a celebration event on Monday.

She was honoured for her achievements over a career spanning four decades, having recorded over 50,000 songs in nearly 45 Indian languages.

"I was always very clear that any film song that my brother or mother would feel embarrassed listening to, I would not be singing," Krishnamurthy said during a special Rendezvous interaction at London's Taj Hotel.

It followed the closing gala of UKAFF 2024 where the singer was felicitated for her dedication to Indian music through concerts worldwide and the Subramaniam Academy of Performing Arts in Bengaluru, which she founded with her celebrated violinist husband L. Subramaniam.

"We are thrilled to have had the opportunity to honour her extraordinary career journey at the UK Asian Film Festival. Her talent and dedication have left an indelible mark on the industry," said UKAFF Founder and Director Dr Pushpinder Chowdhry. (PTI)

## If you give me right roles and right directors, I can do magic: Sonakshi Sinha

**MUMBAI, May 16:** Actor Sonakshi Sinha says she decided to change her career trajectory almost a decade ago to focus on roles that challenged her and that's what has led her to projects like "Dahaad" and now "Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar".

While she played no-nonsense small town cop in Keema Kagi's critically-acclaimed "Dahaad", Sonakshi is being praised for her turn as the vengeful Fareedan in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's pre-Partition era Lahore-set drama about courtesans. The actor said it was not easy to pull off dual roles of mother-daughter Rehanna and Fareedan in the eight-part Netflix series but she managed it thanks to Bhansali's trust in her capabilities. Bhansali had earlier produced Sonakshi's 2012 movie "Rowdy Rathore". "If you give me the right roles and right directors, I can do magic," Sonakshi told PTI in an interview. The actor also credits former col-

laborators Kagi, Vikramaditya Motwane ("Lootera") and "Akira" director A R Murugadoss for imagining her in a different light. "I'm just looking for parts that truly challenge me and help me reach my potential... Once I changed my trajectory into doing the kind of roles that really challenged me, I ended up becoming a better actor. And all those experiences have brought me to where I am today," she added.

Sonakshi, who made her debut with "Dabangg" opposite Salman Khan in 2010 and featured in many films opposite Akshay Kumar and Ajay Devgn before taking on roles in "Lootera", "Akira", "Happy Phir Bhag Jayegi" and "Khandaani Shafakhana", is happy that films led by women are doing well commercially. Citing the example of "Crew", the actor said she called up its lead actors Tabu, Kareena Kapoor Khan and Kriti Sanon to congratulate them for making a "super cool" film.

"I've been choosing movies that are led by a female protagonist for a while now and I'm really enjoying them. The success and failure of those movies haven't really set me back in any way. It's been about seven-eight years since I've been doing that so I haven't stopped. "I'm going to keep trying until it works... The time is right for movies like that. It's amazing to be a part of an industry which is finally coming around to you, projecting and showcasing women-led films in this manner. I enjoy being the hero of my own films," she added.

Sonakshi, 36, said directors such as Imtiaz Ali, Rajkumar Hirani, Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Ashutosh Gowariker, Rohit Shetty and Priyadarshan are now on her wish list. "I want to be that actor which a filmmaker can cast in any genre, and in any role... I can play a police officer from rural Rajasthan (in 'Dahaad') and I can also play a court-

san from Lahore (in 'Heeramandi'), who's exquisite in every way.

"I can also play an action role as 'Akira' or play a hopeless lover like I did in 'Lootera', or do the song and dance as in 'Rowdy Rathore', 'Dabangg' or 'Son of Sardar', I can do all of that. I don't want to put myself in any box." While Sonakshi's role has earned her acclaim, the show has received polarising reviews.

Addressing the varied reactions of viewers and critics, the actor said, "Everybody's entitled to their opinion and you can't please everyone. I got to learn that early in my career that there will always be someone who will have a different taste. So, that's fine, you can't hold that against anyone. We are very happy to focus on the positives. On Instagram, it's all about 'Heeramandi', the girls are imitating fashion, makeup, jewellery and making reels on the songs." (PTI)



# CRICKET IS IN MY BLOOD, T20 IS PERFECT FORM: USAIN BOLT

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** Usain Bolt knows all about life in fast lane and it wasn't a surprise when he picked T20 as his favourite form of cricket, a sport that's in his "blood" thanks to a passionate follower in his father.

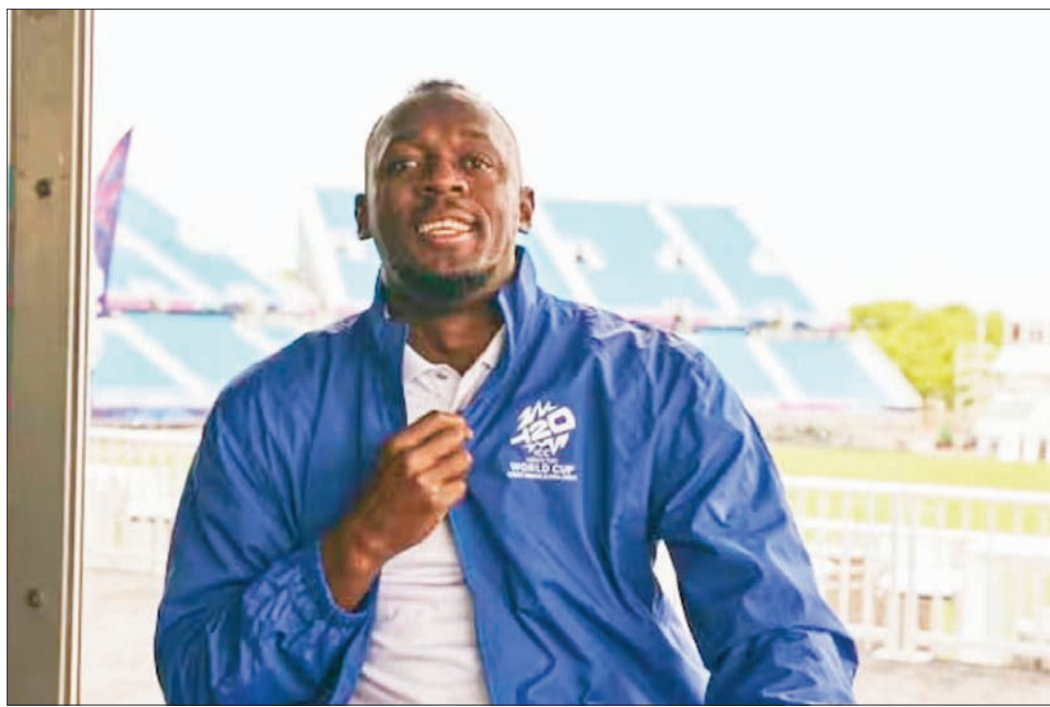
Bolt, one of the greatest athletes of all time with eight Olympic gold medals to his credit, wanted to become a fast bowler growing up in Jamaica and now as the ambassador for next month's ICC T20 World Cup, he is finally getting to live a cricket dream.

"I grew up on cricket. My dad was a massive cricket fan and still is. It is something that I have always in my blood. To actually get to be a part of cricket again as an ambassador, it is wonderful. I never got to live my dream of being a cricketer so to be ambassador of T20 World Cup is wonderful," Bolt told PTI in a telephonic interview from New York on Wednesday night.

The world record holder in the marquee 100m and 200m called time on his unmatched career in 2017 and seven years on, his charisma too remains unmatched.

One could sense a child-like excitement in him while talking about cricket as he headed towards the makeshift cricket stadium in New York, one of three T20 World Cup venues in American mainland and host to the India-Pakistan clash on June 9.

He has spent the last few months travelling the world for



music and football among other things and therefore, he has not got the time to watch live cricket on TV, including the ongoing IPL. "I have not been able to watch as much as I would like to but when I get time I try to catch up on T20s," said the 'Lightning Bolt'. Speed continues to excite Bolt the most and no wonder he calls T20 the best format of the game.

"T20s for sure... When they started it was a great idea and still is. It compresses the game be-

cause you have to be strong and quick but also be strategic, set a field and get things done quick. To me it combines Test match and one-day together to create the perfect game."

Bolt is not the only one in the Caribbean who is attracted to the shortest format. The same goes for its elite cricketers who are now admired more for their exploits in T20 leagues than what they do in West Indian colours.

Amid the T20 boom, Test

cricket faces a grave threat in the region and Bolt agrees that the future belongs to the slam-bang format.

"I think the T20s and one-dayers (ODIs) are still massive in the Caribbean. People actually don't enjoy Test cricket that much. It is all about the speed of the game, big hitters like Andre Russell, so for me that is the direction that is going in (game is going in the Caribbean).

"It will bring more people to watch the sport. Because people

love excitement. That is the key," he said.

USA is hosting a global cricket event for the first time and despite being a sport that is played by South Asian and Caribbean expats at the moment, Bolt believes the local American community will get involved with the game eventually.

"I surely think the game can grow in USA. When you have presence in a country people start gravitating towards it and want to know more about."

Bolt may not have a lot of free time at his disposal but growing up in Jamaica, he watched plenty of cricket with his father. Visuals of Wasim Akram casting the batters with his in-swinging yorkers remain fresh in his memory.

"Over the years, one of my favourites growing up was Wasim Akram because of the in-swinging yorker that he had. Of course, Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose, all these guys that I admired over the years, they were so dominant in their space."

Did he like anyone in the Indian team?

"Like my father, I always support the West Indies (laughs). But yes, I have also been a Sachin Tendulkar fan. He and Brian Lara were part of my life growing up. It was a great rivalry," he said referring to the two legendary batters. Among the current lot, Bolt says "Kohli is the standout one for sure". (PTI)

## Happy to get some reward after a challenging tournament: Nathan Ellis

**GUWAHATI, May 16:** Punjab Kings pacer Nathan Ellis was relieved to see his team register a much-needed win, against second-placed Rajasthan Royals, after what has been a very difficult IPL season for them. Already out of playoff contention, PBKS are currently placed in the ninth place with 10 points after five wins and eight losses in 13 matches, while RR, who have stuttered after an excellent start, maintain their second position despite a run of four defeats in recent times.

"The wicket was a little bit slower than

expected, but I still think it was a pretty good wicket. Really happy for the guys to get some reward as it has been a bit of a challenging tournament for us," Ellis said at the post-match press conference here on Wednesday. Batting first, RR were restricted to 144 for nine in the stipulated 20 overs and then, PBKS chased down the target of 145 for the loss of five wickets, with seven balls to spare. "We were playing for pride today and trying to put in the best performance we can. Collectively, it was one of our better performances, adapted to conditions,

bowled in partnerships. It was probably a complete performance," Ellis said of the win. Skipper Sam Curran's unbeaten 63 off 41 balls anchored the PBKS innings, and he received support from Jitesh Sharma, who made 22 off 20 balls, as the duo combined for a 63-run partnership for the fifth wicket to earn the team's fifth win of the season.

Playing his first game in this edition of the IPL, Ellis bowled tidily to finish with miserly figures of 1/24 from his full quota of four overs. He also took the all-important wicket of Sanju Samson.

"Coming to the ground, we didn't know what we wanted to do -- bat or bowl. Later, I think we also decided on batting first. Losing the toss wasn't the desired outcome. But I was happy. We bowled first, which gave us the chance to set the tone for the day," Ellis said. On how the surface played at the ACA Stadium in Guwahati, Ellis said: "The wicket was a little bit slower than expected, but it was still a pretty good wicket. In the powerplay, was where the game could have been won or lost and we both lost wickets there." (PTI)

## Hussey hopes Dhoni will carry on for two more years

**BENGALURU, May 16:** Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey is hoping that charismatic Mahendra Singh Dhoni would continue with the team for a couple of years more, saying the former skipper was still batting well.

The 42-year-old Dhoni surprised everyone by stepping aside as captain of the team just a day before the start of the 2024 season. Rituraj Gaikwad was handed the reins of the side.

"We are hoping he does keep going. He is still batting so well. He does prepare well - he gets into the camp very early and hits a lot of balls. He has been in good touch all season really," Hussey said on ESPN's Around the Wicket show.

"I guess we just got to try to manage him from the body side of things. He had a knee surgery after the last season. So, he has been managing that from the initial stage of the tournament."

"I hope he keeps going for another couple of years. But we will just have to wait and see. He is the only one who will make that call. And, he likes to sort of build the drama a little bit as well. So, I wouldn't expect a decision anytime soon."

Dhoni, who led the side to record five IPL titles, has been batting quite down the order this season, sometimes at number eight, and faces only a handful of deliveries.

Hussey said that Dhoni's workload is being managed appropriately, given that he had undergone knee surgery.

"That [knee surgery] is why we have had to manage him a little bit, and he only comes in at the back end. But, there has been no one better in being able to come in and hit the ball so cleanly from ball one than MS. He has been phenomenal," he added.

The Australian was Dhoni wanted to stick around in the transition phase as Gaikwad was handed the captaincy.

"MS sort of announced that he was not going to be attending the pre-tournament captains' meeting. And we're like, 'Oh, no. What's going on?' He said Rituraj was going to be captain from then on."

"So, it was a little bit of a shock to start with, but it has been managed really well. We have sort of known for a little while that he was the right man to take over the job when MS decided to step aside."

"He wanted to still be here while the new captain took over, to try to help him along the way and sort of mentor him a little bit," said Hussey.

Under Gaikwad's leadership, CSK has fared decently. The team is placed third on the points table and is likely to make the play-offs.

"He has done a great job. He has been really calm and measured on the field. He will just get better and better. The more he does it and the more support we keep around him. The pleasing thing is, it has not affected his batting at all either," Hussey was effusive in his praise for Gaikwad. (PTI)

## T20WC broadcasters announce special feed for hearing and visually impaired fans

**MUMBAI, May 16:** Hearing and visually-impaired cricket fans can look forward to an Indian Sign Language (ISL) and audio descriptive feed during next month's T20 World Cup in the Americas with official broadcasters Disney+ Hotstar and Star Sports Network announcing special telecast arrangements.

This will be applicable for 10 matches including all the India games, semi-finals and finals.

The broadcaster said that this is the first time that the T20 World Cup will be telecast with sign language and descriptive

commentary making "cricket more immersive for its deaf, hard-of-hearing and visually-impaired users."

Minister of Information and Broadcasting and Youth Affairs and Sports, Anurag Thakur, welcomed the move.

"The Government of India is committed to creating an inclusive society and I strongly believe that this initiative will enhance the viewing experience for millions of differently-abled sports enthusiasts," he said in a press release.

With this, Disney+ Hotstar

also becomes the first OTT platform to make ISL available for live cricket.

Sajith Sivanandan, Head, Disney+ Hotstar India, said, "This underscores our commitment to promote inclusivity and serve all users. With these enhancements, we aim to ensure that the excitement of cricket knows no bounds."

Sanjog Gupta, Head of Disney Star (Sports), said the innovation has got good response in the ongoing IPL.

"Our mission of serving sports fans is powered by such pioneer-

ing initiatives which seek to remove barriers of access and engagement for fans from all walks of life. The initiative also serves to present a more inclusive picture of India's favourite sport and is of immense pride for the sporting fraternity," he said.

The ISL feed will provide a ball-by-ball update through the presence of a translator on the live stream. The audio descriptive feed will be complemented by voice-over technology for specific pages, which can render text and images into a speech output.

Alok Kejriwal, Founder and CEO, India Signing Hands, a non-profit organisation that advocates for equal opportunities for the deaf, described it as an excellent move.

"I am confident that it will open doors to the exciting world of cricket to many more people from the Deaf and Visually Impaired communities," he said.

According to the World Health Organization, there is an estimated 6.3 crore community of deaf and four crore visually impaired individuals in India. (PTI)

## Sunil Chhetri: The backbencher and prankster who will finish on top of the list

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** Football was not very close to Sunil Chhetri's heart during his days as a bubbly teenager with proclivity for pranks. He was only looking to use the sport as a vehicle to gain entry to a reputed college and continue his education.

Coming from a family with a background in football, Sunil was not aware that he was destined for greater things in the beautiful game, but his armyman father Kharga Chhetri had an inkling.

As Chhetri senior nursed a dream to see his son become a professional footballer and achieve what he couldn't, Sunil's career started to take shape in the national capital as he represented City Club Delhi from 2001-02.

Then came the big break as Indian club football heavyweights Mohun Bagan, enamoured by his skills with the ball, signed him in 2002. The rest, as they say, is history that deserves to be revisited on a day he declared that he would call time on his glorious, two-decade international career after the

World Cup qualifying match against Kuwait next month.

The end to his international career as the country's most-capped (150 matches) and most productive (94 goals) would be fittingly at Indian football's spiritual home, Kolkata.

He stayed at the city's famed Maidan till 2005 and scored eight goals in 18 matches for Mohun Bagan, paving the way for his entry into the Indian U-20 side and then to the senior national team. And while he was delighted at the developments, Kharga was anxious when Sunil left for the fortified Pakistani town of Quetta for his international debut way back in 2005.

Thoughts of how his son would fare in the match crossed his mind but Chhetri senior was more worried about the security arrangements in place for the Indian team in the Balochistan province. At 20, he was still the baby of the family. While he expressed his concerns over phone, Sunil calmed his father with the assurance that they were being looked after well by the organisers.

A little more than 19 years later, Kharga was relieved again, this time after his son had achieved everything he had to in the sport, fulfilling all of his dreams which he carried while crisscrossing the country with his family while serving the Indian Army. During those days of frequently moving from one place to another, Chhetri senior was hopeful that his son would one day make it big in football, despite the lack of passion that is required to become a professional footballer.

What boosted Kharga's belief was that Sunil, with his skills, was excelling in football for every school he played.

Born in Secunderabad, Andhra Pradesh on August 3, 1984, football ran in Sunil's family as his father represented the Indian Army and his mother, Sushila, played for the Nepal's national team along with her twin sisters. While he remained a prankster and a "backbencher" even after cementing his place in the Indian team, things changed for Sunil when he was handed the captain's armband

by then head coach Bob Houghton after Bhaichung Bhutia's retirement from international football following the Asian Cup in 2011.

His role was not restricted to finding the back of the net anymore. Despite increasing expectations and the pressure to deliver every time he took to the field, Sunil performed his job with aplomb, often without enough support from his colleagues in top international tournaments such as the Asian Cup, AFC Challenge Cup, the World Cup Qualifiers and the friendlies.

While he had people like Bhutia to help him in the early part of his India career, Sunil has mostly been on his own since the departure of the "Sikkimese Sniper" from the scene. There is no doubt a few talented players emerged in the intervening years but they were no Sunil Chhetri, no Bhaichung Bhutia. For more than a decade, Sunil's fortunes have been synonymous with those of the national team.

"The day I was given the arm-

## FIFA members to vote on the host of the 2027 Women's World Cup

**LAUSANNE, May 16:** The FIFA Congress will pick from a winnowed field of two candidates to host the 2027 Women's World Cup at its meeting in Bangkok this week.

A joint bid by the United States and Mexico was pulled late last month, and South Africa withdrew its candidacy in November. That left only two bids standing for Friday's vote: A joint proposal from Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, and another from Brazil. It's the first time that all 211 of FIFA's members associations will have the opportunity weigh in on the host of the women's tournament. Previously, it was decided by the FIFA Council, the governing body's decision-making committee.

Brazil is favored to win the contest, particularly after ranking higher in a FIFA evaluation report last week.

"The document shows Brazil has fulfilled with excellence all the rigid demands of the bidding process," Brazilian soccer confederation president Ednaldo Rodrigues said.

Brazil's bid, titled "As Natural as Football," emphasizes an event that will inspire women and girls, as well raise awareness of such issues as sustainability, social responsibility and inclusion. Brazil was also in the running for the 2023 Women's World Cup, but dropped out citing lingering hardship from the COVID-19 pandemic. Japan also withdrew late in that process. When the bids were ultimately considered, there were only two, Colombia and the joint submission from Australia and New Zealand, which ultimately won with 63% of the council's vote.

Brazil has hosted two men's World Cups, in 1950 and 2014, and the 2016 Olympics. A South American country has never hosted a Women's World Cup and fellow CONMEBOL nations are likely to support the effort.

"The results published by FIFA add to our strength so we can work

harder in this final sprint," Rodrigues said. "We will work more so we can get the biggest number of votes possible. We want everyone's support."

Germany hosted the Women's World Cup in 2011 and the Netherlands hosted the 2017 Women's European Championship. Among the advantages of the "BNG" proposal: There are 13 possible host cities that are accessible by train.

Their bid — titled "Breaking New Ground," using the countries' initials — marks the first time the three traditional rivals have collaborated as prospective hosts. Belgium and the Netherlands co-hosted the men's European Championship in 2000.

"There's a fantastic combination of knowledge from organizing those big tournaments together, with some new ideas," German soccer federation secretary general Heike Ulrich told The Associated Press. "One very important thing for us was when it comes to organizing a tournament is that it's compact ... so local but global' is one slogan. The longest distance between two venues is 300 kilometers (185 miles), which means for teams and fans, they can just find their base camp and from there they can go from A to B."

The evaluation report flagged risks within the legal "contractual framework" that FIFA requires to host the event in the BNG proposal. Ulrich countered that any complications from working with three different governments would be ironed out, and that something like transport, for example, is only arranged after a successful bid. Germany will host the men's European Championship this year, when ticket holders will have free local transport to games and discounted long-distance services. "It's just a question of timing, and when we take these steps," Ulrich said. "Of course we will match everything FIFA needs to have a FIFA Women's World Cup." (AP)

# Stalwart Chhetri announces retirement, WC qualifier on June 6 to be his last game

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** The iconic Sunil Chhetri on Thursday announced his decision to retire from international football after the FIFA World Cup qualifying match against Kuwait on June 6, bringing the curtains down on a career that is unparalleled in Indian football for its longevity and consistency.

The long-serving national team captain announced his decision via a video he posted on his social media accounts.

Chhetri, who made his debut in 2005, has scored 94 goals for the country. He will leave the scene as India's all-time top scorer and most-capped player.

He is also third in the list of goal scorers among active players behind Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi and currently sits as the fourth in the all-time list of international goal-scorers as well.

Chhetri, 39, will walk into international sunset after rendering yeoman service for nearly two decades, 19 years to be precise, to a team that was heavily reliant on the 5'7" forward to deliver the goods every time he wore the blue jersey.

"The match Against Kuwait is the last," Chhetri said while announcing his decision.

Chhetri's final match will be played at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata, and it is appropriate that he will end his journey in a city, where he has played a lot of his football while evolving into a potent striker.

India are currently second in Group A with four points, behind leaders Qatar.



Chhetri had made his 150th national appearance in March and scored on the occasion against Afghanistan in Guwahati. India, though, stunningly lost that game 1-2.

On his international debut against Pakistan way back in 2005, Chhetri, who would go on to become one of the game's most lethal strikers, scored, and he rated it as his best moment.

"There is one day that I never forget and remember it quite often is the first time I played for my country man, it was unbelievable.

"But the day before, morning of the day, Sukhi sir (Sukhwinder Singh), my first national team coach, in the morning he came to me and he's like, you're going to

start? I can't tell you how I was feeling man," Chhetri recalled.

He added, "I took my jersey, I sprayed some perfume on it, I have no idea why. So that day, everything that happened, once he told me, from breakfast to lunch and to the game and to my first goal in my debut, to conceding late in the 80th minute, that day is probably that I will never forget and is one of the best days of my national team journey."

Speaking on the future of Indian football, Chhetri said that it was time for the country to find the next 9. He felt the team is currently handicapped as none of the current lot of players play as the main striker for their respective clubs and sees the massive hole in the

current national team.

In recent times, Chhetri said he could sense that he was heading towards the end of his glorious journey.

"You know the feeling that I recollect in the last 19 years is a very nice combination between duty, pressure and immense joy. I never thought individually, these are the many games that I've played for the country, this is what I've done, good or bad, but now I did it.

"This last one and a half, two months, I did it and it was very strange. I did it because probably I was going towards the decision that this game, this next game is going to be my last."

The moment he had arrived at the decision, memories came flooding back to his mind.

"And the moment I told myself first, that yes, this is the game that is going to be my last, is when I started recollecting everything.

"It was so strange, I started thinking about this game, that game, this coach, that coach, that team, that member, that ground, that away match, this good game, that bad game, all my individual performances, everything came, all the flashes came. So when I did decide that this is it, this is going to be my last game."

His family members reacted differently to his big decision.

"I told my mom, my dad and my wife, my family first, my dad was...he was normal, he was relieved, happy, everything, but my mom and my wife started crying," he said.

"...they couldn't express to me

as to why they burst into tears. It's not that I was feeling tired, it's not that I was feeling this or that, when the instinct came that this should be my last game, then I thought about it a lot."

Among major successes, Chhetri helped India win the Nehru Cup (2007, 2009, 2012) as well as the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship (2011, 2015, 2021).

He also played a part in India's 2008 AFC Challenge Cup win, which helped them qualify for the first AFC Asian Cup (2011) in 27 years.

The Secunderabad-born footballer, who made his club debut for Mohun Bagan in 2002, went on to play for USA's Major League Soccer team Kansas City Wizards in 2010 as well as for the reserve team of the Sporting CP in the Portuguese football league back in 2012.

The seven-time AIFF Player of the Year winner has also represented major Indian clubs like East Bengal (2008-2009), Dempo (2009-2010), and Indian Super League sides Mumbai City FC (2015-2016) and Bengaluru FC.

In club football, he has tasted most success at Bengaluru FC, winning major trophies like the I-League (2014 and 2016), ISL (2019), Super Cup (2018). He also led Bengaluru FC to the AFC Cup final in 2016.

Chhetri was felicitated ahead of his 150th outing for the Blue Tigers in the World Cup qualifier against Afghanistan in Guwahati. (PTI)

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## Once I'm done, I'll be gone; you won't see me for a while: Kohli



**BENGALURU, May 16:** Well aware that he "can't keep going forever", Indian batting superstar Virat Kohli wants to give everything he has to his cricket career because he once he is done, he says he would be "gone" and won't be seen "for a while."

Kohli's appetite for runs and centuries has already got him a record eighth ton in the IPL this season and he continues to lead the scoring charts with a mind-boggling 661 runs from 13 games for Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

In a video posted by RCB on social media, the 35-year-old said the desire to live a regret-free life keeps him going.

"So, it's just about not leaving any undone business behind and not having any regrets later, which I'm very sure of I won't. Once I'm done, I'll be gone; you won't see me for a while."

"So, I want to give it everything I have till the time I play and that's the only thing that keeps me going," said Kohli when asked what keeps him hungry.

Kohli was picked by RCB soon after he led India to title triumph in the 2008 Under-19 World Cup and he has continued to be with the franchise ever since.

"I think, as sportsmen, we do have an end date to our careers, so I'm just working backwards. I don't want to finish my career thinking what if I had done this on that particular day because I can't keep going on and on forever," he added.

The former India captain is part of the Indian squad for the T20 World Cup in the USA and West Indies beginning next month.

Former India spinner Harbhajan Singh had recently opined that RCB should think about giving back the team's captaincy to Kohli, saying he has an ideal combination of intent, commitment and aggression to take the side forward from the next season.

South African Faf du Plessis is currently leading RCB.

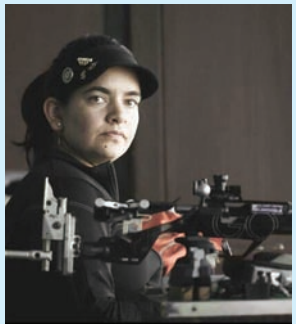
Kohli has featured in 113 Tests, 292 ODIs, and 117 T20Is. He has amassed over 26,000 international runs across formats.

Kohli holds the record for most runs in the history of T20 World Cups with 1141 to his credit.

India are placed in Group A of the tournament, alongside arch-foes Pakistan, Ireland, Canada and co-hosts USA.

They will begin their campaign on June 5 against Ireland at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium in New York before taking on Pakistan on June 9. (PTI)

## Anjum, Swapnil post first wins in Olympic Selection Trials



**BHOPAL, May 16:** Olympian Anjum Moudgil and Paris Olympic Games quota winner Swapnil Kusale posted their maiden victories in the ongoing Olympic Selection Trials (OST), winning the women's and men's 50m rifle 3-positions here on Thursday.

In men's 50m rifle 3P final, Swapnil, who had finished second in the qualification round on Wednesday with a score of 587, shot 463.7 to beat the challenge of Akhil Sheoran, who finished second with 461.6.

Local lad and qualifications topper Aishwary Tomar shot 451.9 to finish third, being eliminated after the 44th shot of the 45-shot final.

In women's 3P final, Anjum shot 463.9 to leave India No. 1 Sift Kaur Samra 1.9 points behind in second place.

Ashi Chouksey, took the third spot with 447.3 points in OST (Olympic Selection Trial) T3.

In women's 10m air pistol OST T3 qualification, Olympian Manu Bhaker was placed on top with a score of 577, followed by Palak (576), Esha Singh (576), Surbhi Rao (574) and Rhythm Sangwan (573).

**Other scores:**  
**Men's 10m air pistol OST T3 qualification:** 1. Arjun Singh Cheema (583), 2. Ravinder Singh (581), 3. Sarbjot Singh (581), 4. Naveen (579), 5. Varun Tomar (577).

**Women's 10m air rifle OST T3 qualification:** 1. Elavenil Valarivan (634.4), 2. Tilottama Sen (632.4), 3. Ramita (630.8), 4. Nancy (629.4), 5. Mehuli Ghosh (628.4).

**Men's 10m air rifle OST T3 qualification:** 1. Arjun Babuta (632.2), 2. Rudranksh Patil (632.0), 3. Sandeep Singh (631.6), 4. Divyansh Singh Panwar (631.4), 5. Sri Karthik Sabari Raj (630.5). (PTI)

## Mumbai Indians, Lucknow Super Giants look to end dismal IPL campaigns with win

**MUMBAI, May 16:** Out of reckoning from the IPL playoffs, Mumbai Indians and Lucknow Super Giants will look to end their campaign on a winning note when they clash at the Wankhede Stadium here on Friday.

While Mumbai Indians were knocked out of the playoffs race long ago, Lucknow Super Giant's chances of making the last-four are extremely bleak even if they win their last IPL game here by a huge margin.

Three consecutive defeats have not only denied LSG crucial points, they have also battered their net run rate.

A 98-run loss to KKR was followed by a 10-wicket hammering by Sunrisers Hyderabad with a 19-run defeat to Delhi Capitals all but ending their chances of getting into the playoffs after making the final-four in the previous edition.

The seventh-placed LSG's NRR of -0.787 will not improve significantly for them to get back into contention, as Royal Challengers Bengaluru, at No. 6, are much better placed with a NRR of 0.387.

Five-time IPL champions Mumbai Indians were the first team to be knocked out of the race for the playoffs this year as they endured a horror first season under new skipper Hardik Pandya.

With only four wins from 13 matches so far, Mumbai Indians can at best finish with 10 points if they win on Friday, something that can possibly help them avoid a last-place finish.

For Mumbai Indians, a pre-season change of leadership, with Pandya replacing Rohit Sharma as captain, set off angry reactions from fans, which seem to have marred their campaign to a large extent.

As a team, MI failed to get behind their captain. While their batting failed collectively, Jasprit Bumrah's individual brilliance with the ball (20 wickets in 13 matches), could not inspire the other bowlers to come together.

The focus of the match would be on the likes of T20 World Cup-bound players such as Pandya, Rohit Sharma, Bumrah and Suryakumar Yadav given that they would be pivotal to



India's hopes of bringing back the elusive trophy.

Rohit is enduring a horror run with the bat with his best being 19 in the last six outings for MI, while Pandya too has not been able to inspire confidence in his all-round role.

Suryakumar, though, has regained confidence with a strong showing in the IPL following three fifties and a century.

For LSG, the lack of firepower and failure to capitalise on key moments has led to their plight even though skipper KL Rahul has had a successful run with the bat, scoring three half-centuries in his 465 runs this season at an average of 136.36.

His strike rate, however, remained a topic of debate throughout even as the other batters failed to pull their weight.

While Nicholas Pooran (424 runs at 168.92) provided the late impetus, the collective failure of LSG's bowlers has also remained an area of concern.

**Teams:**

**Mumbai Indians:** Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwen Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai (wk), Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.

**Lucknow Super Giants:** Quinton de Kock, KL Rahul (c & wk), Deepak Hooda, Ayush Badoni, Marcus Stoinis, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Krunal Pandya, Ravi Bishnoi, Mohsin Khan, Shamar Joseph, Yash Thakur, Manimaran Siddharth, Prerak Mankad, Arshad Khan, Krishnappa Gowtham, Amit Mishra, Kyle Mayers, Ashton Turner, Matt Henry, Naveen-ul-Haq, Devdutt Padikkal, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Mayank Yadav, Arshin Kulkarni.

Match starts at 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

## Real legend of the game: Sports world pays tribute to Chhetri

**NEW DELHI, May 16:** Batting maestro Virat Kohli, 2011 World Cup hero Yuvraj Singh and former star footballer Bhaichung Bhutia were among the leading sports personalities who lauded Sunil Chhetri's achievements after the iconic India striker on Thursday announced his decision to retire from international football.

Chhetri, the long-serving national team captain announced his decision to call it a day after the FIFA World Cup qualifying match against Kuwait in Kolkata on June 6. Commenting on Chhetri's video post on Instagram, Kohli wrote for his good friend: "My brother. Proud."

Yuvraj called him a legend, saying the legacy of the 39-year-old veteran of 150 national appearances will remain for a very long time.

"A real legend of the game who took Indian football onto the global stage. Your passion has inspired a generation to take up the game... your legacy in Indian

sports will be remembered forever... you can look back with pride as you get set for your final game, thank you legend," wrote Yuvraj in an Instagram story.

Chhetri, who made his international debut in 2005, has scored 94 goals for the country. He will leave the scene as India's all-time top scorer and most-capped player.

Legendary India forward Bhutia, who Chhetri succeeded as captain, told PTI that it was a great loss for Indian football.

"Sunil, no doubt, will go down as one of the greatest players India had ever produced. His contribution to Indian football is immense. It's a great loss for Indian football," said Bhutia, the former India captain.

"I am fortunate to have played with him as senior player. When I came in (I M) Vijayan was senior to me, after that Sunil (Chhetri) came. I am fortunate to have served Indian football in between two stalwarts of Indian football," added Bhutia.



Cricketer Yuzvendra Chahal, member of the India squad for the T20 World Cup, wished Chhetri a "happy retirement".

"What a run you have had! Congratulations on an amazing career," wrote Chahal on 'X', while Chhetri's Bengaluru FC and India team-mate, goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, wished he could change his compatriot's mind.

"Never wanted to see this hap-



pen. I wish I could do something to change your mind but I also understand why it is happening bhai. The whole country needs to celebrate your international career on the 6th of June the way you do-

serve. My Captain," Sandhu wrote on 'X'.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) said Chhetri will continue to motivate the coming generations.

"Your legacy on and off-the-field will always be remembered! You have always been and will continue to inspire us. Thank you." BCCI termed Chhetri a "phenomenal icon", saying his "career has been nothing short of extraordinary and you have been a phenomenal icon for Indian football and Indian sports," while India spinner Kuldeep Yadav congratulated the legend on a "fantastic career".

IPL franchise Royal Challengers Bengaluru saluted the No. 11 jersey, saying, "What a ride this has been, skipper! 94 international goals, so many laurels, an unbroken conviction and you've inspired so many young Indians to dream big. Happy farewell to the No.11 (No.9) but India's 1," wrote RCB on 'X'. (PTI)