



- Norway, Ireland and Spain say they are recognizing a Palestinian state
- Iran's supreme leader presides over funeral for president and others killed
- Women make up less than 10 pc of LS poll candidates: ADR
- BJP expels Bhojpuri superstar Pawan Singh for contesting LS polls



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## Mamata compromising national security for sake of vote bank politics: Shah

**KANTHI/GHATAL/PURULIA, May 22:** Union home minister Amit Shah on Wednesday accused West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of compromising national security for the sake of vote bank politics and "committing a sin" by allowing infiltrators to change the demography of the state.

Addressing back-to-back rallies in Kanthi, Ghatal, and Purulia Lok Sabha constituencies, Shah said the TMC will "dis-integrate" and there will be a "farewell of Mamata Banerjee's government" after the BJP wins 30 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

"Bengal has become a safe haven for infiltrators. Due to infiltration,

the state's demography is changing, impacting not only this state, but the entire country. Banerjee is committing a sin by helping to change the demography of Bengal. She is compromising national security for sake of vote bank politics," he said.

Alleging that "infiltrators are the vote bank of the TMC," Shah said Banerjee is opposing the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to appease her vote bank.

"TMC ko ghuspetiyo se pyar aur CAA pe vaar" (TMC has a love for infiltrators and attacks the CAA). The infiltrators are the vote bank of the TMC," he said. Shah criticised (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## No intention of becoming PM: Delhi CM All Oppn leaders will be in jail if BJP retains power, predicts Kejriwal

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said he has no "intention" of becoming the next prime minister of the country if the INDIA bloc wins the Lok Sabha polls, saying his aim was to save the country and democracy from the prevailing "dictatorship".

In an interview to PTI Videos, the AAP national convener also alleged that if the BJP comes back to power, all opposition leaders will be in jail and it will hijack the elections. Kejriwal said the opposition INDIA bloc's prime minister will be decided after the results of the Lok Sabha polls are announced on June 4.

He said he felt the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Al-



liance (INDIA) bloc was gradually inching towards the 300 mark. "It will form the government on its own. The alliance will give a good, stable government," he added.

The AAP convener said he has no intention of becoming the next prime minister of the country. "I have no such intention. We (AAP) are a very small party con-

testing only 22 seats," he said when asked if he considered himself a PM face of the INDIA bloc. Asked if he will accept Rahul Gandhi as prime minister of the country, Kejriwal replied, "There has been no such discussion. It's a theoretical question. We will discuss it when we sit together."

Without naming the BJP, the Delhi chief minister said, "The current Lok Sabha polls were for saving the country and democracy from the prevailing dictatorship."

They will finish democracy if they come back to power, he said. "Elections will not be held and even if it takes place it will happen as in Russia. Putin either sent the entire opposition to jail or finished

them and then held elections and got 87 per cent votes."

Kejriwal also cited the example of Pakistan to drive his point home. In Pakistan, Imran Khan was sent to jail and his party and symbol were snatched, he claimed.

"They (BJP) will also do it... will send AAP (leaders) in jail, Mamata Banerjee in jail. No one will be left out. All will be in jail and then they will keep on winning elections. "The concern of all right now is that they will not spare anyone," he said when asked on the absence of a PM face of the INDIA bloc. The AAP convener asserted that he expected the opposition alliance to sweep Delhi by winning all the seven (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### HT BRIEFS

#### Illegal timber seized

**KHERONI:** In an operation by Forest Protection Force, Hamren in West Karbi Anglong last evening recovered a truck, ML 04 B 5337, loaded with illegally felled timber. The truck loaded with illegal timber was seized from Thaskai on Assam-Meghalaya border in West Karbi Anglong and has an estimated value of D 75,000. However, no arrest was made as the smugglers fled from the spot. The timber was being smuggled to the neighbouring state Meghalaya and Forest department officials suspect the involvement of locals.

#### Truck accident

**BOKAJAN:** A container truck, HR 63 E 6175, ferrying IMFL got off the highway at Amrajan under Bokajan police station and crashed against a tree in the morning. The accident was caused by the driver dozing off on the steering wheel. Later two tow trucks were brought to the site and pulled the container to the road. The driver and handyman escaped with minor injuries.

#### Woman died

**DIPHU:** A woman died and many houses were damaged in a sudden heavy storm at Hidilangve in Karbi Anglong last evening. A 57 year old woman, wife of Lt. Bording Ronghang, died at Hidilangve when a wall of the house collapsed during the storm. Local Member of Autonomous Council and Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), executive member, Fishery Department, Madhuram Lekthe visited the storm affected families and assured to extend possible help from his end.

#### Heroin seized

**KARIMGANJ:** In a significant drug bust, Karimganj Police seized approximately 300 grams of suspected heroin, valued at around ₹ 2 crore, from the Deokuri area of Kaliganj. The operation led to the arrest of a drug trafficker. Acting on a tip-off, the police intercepted a passenger vehicle with the registration number AS/11/CC/3654 in the Deokuri area. Upon searching the vehicle, authorities discovered around 300 grams of suspected heroin, packaged in 25 separate packets.

### MOTHER'S LOVE



A cattle egret is busy feeding its offspring at its nest on a tree in Guwahati on Wednesday. UB photos

## CID confirms Bangladeshi MP's 'murder' but is yet to recover victim's body

**KOLKATA/DHAKA, May 22:** Hours after the Bangladesh government declared on Wednesday that Awami League MP, Md Anwarul Azim Anwar, who went missing from Kolkata on May 13, was "brutally murdered" in the city, the West Bengal police said that investigations into the case of the politician's killing has been taken up by the state CID.

Stating that the police had "reliable inputs" that Anwar "may have been murdered", Akhilesh Chaturvedi, IG, CID, said that the police were yet to recover the victim's body. "We had no prior intimation of the Bangladeshi MP's arrival to this city. We came to know about him after his acquaintance in Kolkata, Gopal Biswas, filed a missing diary on May 18. A Special Investigation Team was formed by the Barrackpore Police Commissionerate to trace the miss-



ing politician. "We were in the middle of that investigation when, on May 20, we received an intimation from the Ministry of External Affairs and today an input that makes us suspect that the victim may have been murdered," Chaturvedi said. Unofficial sources said the police were exploring the possible angle of the body of the victim being dismembered and disposed of.

"Anwar was murdered in a planned manner at a residence in Kolkata. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## JMM alliance silent on conversions by missionaries: Himanta

**BOKARO (JHARKHAND), May 22:** Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday accused the ruling JMM-led alliance in Jharkhand of remaining silent on alleged religious conversions by Christian missionaries in the state and failing to protect Hindu rights.

"I want to tell Rahul Gandhi that simply claiming to not be anti-Hindu is insufficient; you must be a 'Hindu premi'. India is a Hindu civilisation that has been enriched by Hindus for the past 5,000 years," he added.

Sarma made these remarks during an election rally in Bokaro, where he criticised the government for not addressing the issue of alleged religious conversions by Christian (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam: 'Deckiajuli Tea' bags highest price of year at auction

**GUWAHATI, May 22:** A premium CTC tea from Assam's Sonitpur district was Wednesday auctioned for the "highest price" of the year at ₹ 651 per kg, officials said.

'Deckiajuli Tea', a CTC tea owned by Parry Agro Industries, went under the hammer at Guwahati Tea Auction Centre (GTAC), and a line of CTC PF grade of Deckiajuli Tea Estate witnessed a record price of ₹ 651 a kg, followed by another BP grade of the same brand at ₹ 605 per kg, Guwahati Tea Auction Buyers Association secretary Dinesh Bihani said.

Issuing a statement, he said these prices are "the highest for the year 2024 so far".

"GTAC is always considered a hub of quality teas and preferred by both buyers and sellers. These... gardens selling their teas through the auction platform always get best prices for their produce," Bihani said.

Last year, a line of Haroocharai sold at a record price of ₹ 705 per kg and Halmari sold at ₹ 670 per kg, he said. Commenting on the development, Chennai-based Parry Agro Industries senior general manager Joe Louis said Deckiajuli improved its quality from last year, and the company took a policy to manufacture top CTC



quality seeing the premium received from the buyers.

"Deckiajuli continues to be on the same path and has produced consistent top quality. These prices are a recognition of the hard work and good practices followed by the Parry Agro team and support from the buyers and the market," he added. Bihani said that in the GTAC auction, more than 100 lots are selling between ₹ 350-500 per kg, which indicates that quality is always appreciated and remunerated with lucrative prices. "The higher price realisation in the auction will result in better remuneration to small tea growers, who are making good quality leaf," he said. (PTI)



## PM's charge that Cong will run bulldozer on Ram temple 'complete lie': Kharage



**NEW DELHI, May 22:** Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharage has rubbished Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charge that the Congress will run a bulldozer on the Ram temple if it comes to power, saying it is a "complete lie" and the party respects all sects, religions and honours everyone's faith.

He also asserted that the Congress has been in power for 55 years but has never stopped anyone from wor-

shipping anyone or has taken away anyone's mangal-sutra, as claimed by the prime minister.

"This is a complete lie. They talk like this only. No one from our party has spoken like this and neither is it written in the Constitution. We respect all sects and religions and honour everyone's faith," Kharage said in an interview with PTI.

He also said that helping the poor in any community is not appeasement, as alleged by the BJP.

"People were earlier living happily, but the BJP and Modi ji have done the work of dividing people for their votes. They do such things for votes and accuse others of using the bulldozer," Kharage asserted.

He also accused the BJP of creating false propaganda against the Congress every time it came out with schemes to help the poor during the UPA government. He said the prime minister is now accusing them for practising the politics of freebies.

The Congress chief said when the party first brought MGNREGA, Food Security Act, Rural Health mission, the BJP opposed them. He also cited land reforms and nationalisation of banks (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

**MALE, May 22:** The Maldives on Wednesday said both India and China have agreed to cooperate in efforts to pay for imports in their respective countries' currency instead of the US dollar, which is likely to help Male save almost 50 per cent of the annual USD 1.5 million imports bill from the two countries.

Maldives' Economic Development minister Mohamed Saeed said he met with the Indian High Commissioner Munu Mahawar two weeks ago, who in turn, said that New Delhi would support and co-operate in arranging for the settlement of import payments in Indian Rupee.

Similarly, Saeed said, he received a letter from China's Commerce Ministry, two days ago, in which Beijing provided assurance it will cooperate in allowing the option to settle import payments in Yuan, the



Chinese currency, as requested by President Mohamed Muizzu.

Annually, Maldives imports goods worth USD 780 million and USD 720 million from India and China respectively, the minister had said in April when he had first an-

nounced that the Maldives was discussing with India and China if the island nation can make payments for its imports from the country in Maldivian Rufiyaa.

International trade between two countries in local currency is a mu-

tually beneficial mechanism as it helps in saving each other's foreign exchange reserves. Moreover, the move will mark a significant shift away from the dominant use of the US dollar in international transactions. In July 2023, the Government of India declared that Maldives was among the 22 countries that were permitted by the Reserve Bank of India to open Special Rupee Vostro Accounts (SRVAs) as part of efforts to promote bilateral trade in local currencies.

News portal Sun.mv on Wednesday quoted Saeed as speaking with state-run PSM Media: "Maldives imports between USD 600-700 million in commodities from both India and China, each year. Therefore, we import around USD 1.4 billion to USD 1.5 billion in commodities annually, from both markets combined." (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



# Market cap of BSE-listed firms hit USD 5-trillion milestone at close

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** The combined market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies hit the historic USD 5-trillion mark for the first time at the close of trade on Wednesday amid an optimistic trend in equities.

The 30-share Sensex climbed 267.75 points or 0.36 per cent to settle at 74,221.06. During the day, it advanced 354.48 points or 0.47 per cent to 74,307.79.

At the close of trade, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies stood at ₹ 4,15,94,033.72 crore (USD 5 trillion) — its all-time high.

Investor wealth rose for the ninth straight trading session on Wednesday. Investors gained ₹ 22.59 lakh crore on Wednesday.

"Despite weak global cues, markets moved in a range and were positive for most part of the trading session aided by selective buying in IT, FMCG and realty stocks," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd.

The combined market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies hit the USD 5-trillion milestone for the first time in intra-day trade on Tuesday. At the close of trade, the



total valuation of the exchange-listed companies stood at ₹ 4,14,62,306.56 crore (USD 4.97 trillion), the BSE data showed.

"Despite mixed global market sentiments ahead of the US FED minutes, Indian markets exhibited a subtle positive trend. Investors are optimistic about stable Q4 earnings and easing election jitters that had previously increased volatility. Interest in the FMCG sector has risen due to the potential for an early onset of monsoon," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

The combined market valuation of all listed companies on the BSE reached the USD 4 trillion milestone for the first time ever on November 29 last year.

The m-cap of all listed companies on the BSE touched the USD 3 trillion mark on May 24, 2021.

The total valuation of exchange-listed companies went past the USD 1 trillion level on May 28, 2007. The journey from USD 1 trillion to USD 1.5 trillion was covered in 2,566 days, or just over seven years on June 6, 2014.

The m-cap of listed companies

reached USD 2 trillion on July 10, 2017 — taking 1,130 days from the USD 1.5 trillion level. It took ten years for the exchange to reach from USD 1 trillion level to USD 2 trillion in market capitalisation.

From there, it took 1,255 days to go past the USD 2.5-trillion mark on December 16, 2020.

So far this year, the BSE benchmark has climbed 1,980.8 points, or 2.74 per cent. It hit an all-time peak of 75,124.28 on April 9 this year. Among the Sensex firms, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries, Infosys, Asian Paints, ITC and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers on Wednesday. State Bank of India, JSW Steel, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, Tata Steel and Tata Motors were among the laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.18 per cent while midcap index dipped 0.05 per cent.

Among the indices, realty jumped 1.41 per cent, FMCG (1.26 per cent), IT (0.63 per cent), utilities (0.59 per cent), energy (0.58 per cent) and healthcare (0.35 per cent). Commodities, financial services, bankex and metal were the laggards. (PTI)

## Gold falls ₹ 50; silver jumps ₹ 600

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** Gold prices fell ₹ 50 to ₹ 74,600 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid fall in precious metal rates in overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had closed at ₹ 74,650 per 10 grams in the previous session.

However, silver prices jumped ₹ 600 to ₹ 95,100 per kg. It had settled at ₹ 94,500 per kg in the previous session.

In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,417.7 per ounce, down USD 3 from the previous close. "Gold fell further on Wednesday as investors evaluated recent statements from the US Federal Reserve officials that downplayed the timing of interest rate cuts."

"Traders are now closely monitoring US Fed's Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting minutes to be released later on Wednesday, as they could offer fresh perspectives on the US central bank's monetary policy trajectory," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

However, silver was trading higher at USD 31.75 per ounce. In the previous session, it had ended at USD 31.60 per ounce.

Meanwhile, in the futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold declined ₹ 171 to trade at ₹ 73,850 per 10 grams.

The most traded June contract hit an intra-day low of ₹ 73,742 per 10 grams at 1630 hrs. Further, silver contracts for July delivery were also trading lower by ₹ 256, or 0.27 per cent, to ₹ 94,469 per kg on the bourse.

"Gold has experienced minor profit booking since yesterday night as the initial geopolitical tensions from Iran President's helicopter crash have faded. The market's focus has now shifted back to interest rate cut predictions, which are expected in September."

"In India, gold is quoted lower, with major resistance at ₹ 74,500 for the time being. Minor profit booking may continue, potentially bringing prices down towards ₹ 73,000," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

According to Praveen Singh, Associate VP, Fundamental Currencies and Commodities at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said, "Crucial US macro data including, US existing home sales (April) and the UK's CPI (April) data will also be in focus."

"Gold is expected to range trade ahead of the FOMC minutes. Support is at USD 2,400-2,380, whereas resistance is at USD 2,450-2,475 level. The metal may reach USD 2,500 level in the short term." (PTI)

## Sensex rises 267 pts, Nifty gains for 5<sup>th</sup> day on buying in Reliance, Infosys

**MUMBAI, May 22:** Benchmark Sensex advanced 267 points while Nifty closed higher for the fifth day in a row on Wednesday amid buying in bluechips Reliance Industries and Infosys amid mixed cues from global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 267.75 points or 0.36 per cent to settle at 74,221.06. During the day, it jumped 354.48 points or 0.47 per cent to 74,307.79.

Extending gains to the fifth day in a row, the NSE Nifty rose by 68.75 points or 0.31 per cent to finish at 22,597.80. FMCG and realty shares supported the up-trend while banking and metal shares declined.

"Despite mixed global market sentiments ahead of the US Fed minutes, Indian markets exhibited a subtle positive trend. Investors are optimistic about stable Q4 earnings and easing election jitters that had previously increased volatility."

"Interest in the FMCG sector

has risen due to the potential for an early onset of monsoon. Nevertheless, markets may underperform in the short term as they wait for the election outcome, with FIIs staying on the sidelines," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. Among the Sensex firms, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries, Infosys, Asian Paints, ITC and UltraTech Cement were the major gainers.

State Bank of India, JSW Steel, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, Tata Steel and Tata Motors were among the laggards.

"Nifty ended a range-bound session in the positive. Nifty settled higher for the fifth consecutive session and recorded its longest winning streak since April 25," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.18 per cent while midcap index dipped 0.05 per cent.

Among the indices, realty jumped 1.41 per cent, FMCG by 1.26 per cent, IT by 0.63 per cent, utilities by 0.59 per cent, energy by 0.58 per cent and healthcare by 0.35 per cent.

Commodities, financial services, bankex and metal were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Shanghai settled in the positive territory while Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading lower. Wall Street ended in the green on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.84 per cent to USD 82.18 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,874.54 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark declined 52.63 points or 0.07 per cent to settle at 73,953.31 on Tuesday. The Nifty, however, ended higher by 27.05 points or 0.12 per cent to 22,529.05. (PTI)

## HDFC Bank, Pravega Ventures select startups to boost fintech innovation

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, May 22:** HDFC Bank, India's leading private sector bank, in collaboration with venture capital firm Pravega Ventures, has announced the selection of two innovative startups under their Co-Lab initiative. This program aims to identify and nurture startups with the potential to tackle modern banking challenges and propel innovation in the fintech sector.

Launched last year, the Co-Lab program represents a strategic partnership between HDFC Bank and Pravega Ventures, designed to foster collaboration between established financial institutions and emerging fintech startups. The initiative seeks to deliver cutting-edge products and services to customers by leveraging the unique solutions offered by these startups. The selected startups, Grayquest and Epaylater, bring distinct innovations to the fintech landscape:

Grayquest: Specializes in revolutionizing education financing through its innovative platform.

Epaylater: Provides retailers with accessible financing solutions via its platform.

"We are delighted to welcome Grayquest and Epaylater to the Co-Lab program," said Ramesh Lakshminarayanan, Group Head - Information Technology and Chief Information Officer at HDFC Bank. "These startups offer unique solutions that have the potential to significantly transform the fintech sector."

Vinay Menon, Partner at Pravega Ventures, added, "We are excited about the immense potential in fintech-BFSI collaborations. The Co-Lab program offers a tremendous opportunity for these startups to scale new heights."

## Prema Joins Amazon as a Trucking Partner

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, May 22:** Prema, 55, has embarked on a transformative journey as a trucking partner with Amazon, overcoming significant personal challenges following the untimely passing of her husband. Balancing the responsibilities of caring for her daughter and navigating a career shift, Prema demonstrated exceptional determination. Despite her background in finance and marketing, she ventured into the logistics sector, founding Sinar Express Solutions.

With support from Amazon's Trucking Partner Program, Prema successfully expanded her small operation into a thriving trucking business. Her resilience and business acumen enabled her to adapt and excel, even during the pandemic. As a result, Sinar Express Solutions has experienced a 55% revenue growth in recent years.

Prema's story is one of resilience and determination, achieving professional milestones while managing the demands of motherhood. "Prema's story is very inspiring, and a great testament to the hard work mothers put in both at the workplace and at home for their children. Trucking partners such as Prema are a crucial part of our operations, and I would encourage more women and working mothers to consider such opportunities," said Arun Kumar Singh, Director of Amazon Transportation Services in India.

## IHCL partners with Reacha, Tata STRIVE to set up skill training centre in J&K

**MUMBAI, May 22:** Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) on Wednesday said it has partnered with non-profit organisation Reacha along with Tata STRIVE and the Indian Army to set up a skill centre at Baramulla in Jammu and Kashmir for providing youngsters job-oriented training.

The skill centre at Boniyan in Baramulla is well-equipped to train 200 learners annually, IHCL said in a statement.

The job-oriented training programme focuses on holistic professional development, and will provide market-related hospitality training in 'bakery' and 'food and beverage service' with access to employment opportunities for the



youth. In addition to technical skills, the programme will equip participants with valuable life skills. Post

training, learners will be given assistance for employment or entrepreneurship.

"The surge in tourism in Jammu

and Kashmir has created a significant demand for skilled workforce in the hospitality sector. We are delighted to take our existing association with Reacha a step further with this project.

"The programme is in line with our ESG+ framework of Paathya, provides young individuals with industry-relevant skills, enhancing their employability and contributes to the social and economic development of the region," IHCL Executive Vice President - Human Resources, Gaurav Pokhariyal said.

Tata STRIVE is a skill development programme under Tata Community Initiatives Trust (TCIT), a charitable trust by Tata Sons. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Mamata compromising

Banerjee's recent comments against certain monks of Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha, asserting that these socio-religious organisations are being threatened to appease the TMC's vote bank. "Banerjee is attacking the Sangha, but she is not aware that had it not been there, Bengal would have been a part of Bangladesh," he said.

Addressing an election rally in Goghat under Arambagh LS constituency on Saturday, Banerjee had claimed, "Some monks of Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha are working under the influence of BJP leaders in Delhi."

Hitting out at the opposition INDIA bloc, Shah said after five phases of polling, the "INDI alliance has been wiped out across the country." "Voting for the five phases has been completed. In these five phases of elections, Modi ji has crossed 310 seats. Mamata Didi's INDI Alliance has been wiped out. This time in Bengal too, BJP will get 30 seats," he said.

The BJP, in the last Lok Sabha polls, bagged 18 of the 42 seats in Bengal and this time has set the target of winning 30.

"As soon as BJP gets 30 seats in Bengal, TMC will disintegrate and there will be a farewell of Banerjee's government," he said.

On Sandeshkhali, where allegations of sexual abuse against TMC leaders have surfaced, Shah said it is a matter of shame that "Mamata Banerjee, despite being a woman chief minister, tried to protect the culprits."

"For years, heinous crimes were carried out against women on the basis of religion. Mamata was not ready to arrest the criminals as the name of the culprit was Shajahan Sheikh and for her vote bank politics. Even after the high court's order, the investigation was not conducted, and the court handed over the probe to the CBI," the senior BJP leader said.

His remarks come in the backdrop of multiple purported videos of Sandeshkhali women in the public domain, which claim that a local saffron party leader made those women sign blank papers which were later filled up as complaints of sexual assault. Shah, however, didn't directly refer to those videos.

Shah said political violence has "killed democracy in Bengal."

"Panchayat elections were held here, in which more than 200 people were killed. But I want to tell you that this time you should not be afraid because in the five phases of elections, TMC goons could not harm anyone. And we will teach these goons a lesson this time," he said. Referring to the raid on BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari's residence on Tuesday night, Shah said, "The more the TMC tortures Suvendu Adhikari, the more BJP will give him prominence."

Shah said the TMC has turned its slogan of "Maa Mati Manush" into "Mullah, Madrasa, and Mafia" due to appeasement politics.

Referring to the politics of appeasement by the TMC, Shah said invitations for the Ram temple consecration ceremony were sent to both Mamata and her nephew (Abhishek Banerjee), but they chose not to attend it, "as they are afraid that infiltrators, who are TMC's vote bank, might get offended." (PTI)

## All Oppn leaders will

Lok Sabha seats. "There is such a wave of AAP and INDIA bloc that I would not be surprised that the previous records of Vidhan Sabha polls in which we (AAP) won 67 seats (in 2015) and 62 seats (in 2020) are broken this time," he said.

Kejriwal, who was granted interim bail in a money laundering case by the Supreme Court on May 10, said his arrest and incarceration was a sentimental issue for Delhi voters that will cause losses to the BJP.

There was "tremendous anger" among the people who felt a "good man" was arrested, Kejriwal said.

"We are hearing about dictatorship and people saying that they have to vote against this dictatorship. This sentiment is very strong," he added. He termed his release from jail as a "miracle of god" that has now energised the people. "When I go for campaigning, people have moist eyes." The AAP chief said he was sent to jail by the BJP, which thought it would disintegrate his party but the opposite happened.

"They (BJP) thought after my arrest, the campaign will be affected and our party will disintegrate, MLAs will break away and the government will topple. But the opposite happened. Our party became more unified, our leadership worked like a family and our workers were encouraged to work harder when they saw their leader was in jail," he said. Kejriwal said AAP has plans to expand further in many states but was presently preoccupied with saving democracy. (PTI)

## Assam: Probe ordered

of the strong room following a police complaint lodged by Deka. Deka had on May 10 filed a police complaint that "one unknown person" inside the EVM receipt centre asked her to pay Rs 10 lakh to National Award winning filmmaker Luit Kumar Barman, who has been vocal on social media for the past few months over alleged irregularities committed by the DC. She, in her complaint, claimed that the person, whom she believed to be a poll personnel, had left the premises before she could react.

The receipt counter and strong room have been set up at Government Gurdon Higher Secondary School, and there is only one entry-exit gate of the compound housing both the facilities. Therefore, the receipt counter also enjoyed the heightened security arrangement meant for the strong room.

The police have not been able to identify and nab that person so far, while Barman after appearing at Nalbari Police Station had claimed that the DC made a "completely false and fabricated" case to take "revenge" on him.

Referring to the incident and media reports, Bayan in his complaint to ECI said: "After publishing the same in various electronic and print media as well as in social media, the voters, political parties as well as the candidates strongly suspect that some malpractices, tempering of the EVM machines may have taken place."

He further said that nobody can enter the strong room campus other than contesting candidates and election agents without due authorisation, so the DC's complaint of an unknown person entering the premises to demand money was a serious security breach. (PTI)

## Bengal CID confirm B'deshi

Police forces of both India and Bangladesh are working simultaneously to unearth the motive behind the murder and who the culprits are. We are following all international protocols to get to the bottom of this," Asaduzzaman Khan, Bangladesh home minister, told reporters in Dhaka this morning.

Asked whether the police found blood stains in the apartment of the luxury condominium in New Town in Kolkata's outskirts where the MP's whereabouts were last traced on May 13, Chaturvedi said, "Our forensic team is examining the suspected crime scene. It's too early to speak about that."

The IG confirmed that the apartment was owned by Sanjib Ghosh, an employee of the state excise department, who, in turn, had rented it out to one Akhtaruzzaman, a US national, but refused to divulge further details of the ongoing investigation. "We are doing our best to solve this case," Chaturvedi said.

Anwar, police sources said, was accompanied by two men and a woman when he checked into the apartment. While CCTV footage showed that the unidentified men and woman left the residential complex in phases between May 15 and May 17, the MP could not be traced. (PTI)

## JMM alliance silent on

missionaries in Jharkhand. He accused the government of being complicit in the matter and failing to uphold Hindu rights. "In Jharkhand, Christian missionaries are active in religious conversions but the current government is silent on this. This government has failed to protect Hindu rights," he said. He alleged that the "corrupt" alliance only indulged in politics of appeasement. Sarma claimed that infiltration was altering the country's demographics, starting with Assam, then West Bengal, Bihar, and now Jharkhand. The BJP leader emphasised the importance of upholding Hindu traditions and values, stating that JMM leaders should say 'Jai Shree Ram' if they want to engage in politics in India.

"First Assam, then West Bengal and Bihar; and now infiltration has started in Jharkhand. They are marrying tribal girls and getting settled. Now, JMM leaders do not say Jai Shree Ram, instead they say 'Assalamualaikum'. I want to tell the JMM leaders that they might say whatever they like, but if you want to do politics in India, you have to say Jai Shree Ram," he added.

Sarma also criticised the Congress, stating that they did not follow the Constitution. He expressed the need for 400 Lok Sabha seats to fulfill various objectives, such as constructing the Krishna Janmabhoomi in Mathura and the Gyanvapi temple in Varanasi, merging Pakistan Occupied Kashmir with India, and making the country the world's largest economy. "When you gave 300 seats to Modi ji, he built Ram temple, which was pending for 500 years, abrogated Article 370 and implemented CAA," he said. Sarma said JMM accuses BJP of abusing the ED and the CBI. "Had there been no ED or CBI, Rs 300 crore from premises linked to Congress MP and Rs 37 crore from PA of a Congress minister could have never been recovered."

He said that "Three hundred madrasas have been shut in Assam as the country needs doctors and engineers not Mulla (Muslim priests)". "Muslim men perform three-four marriages causing trauma to Muslim women. We need 400 seats to shut the 'Shadi Ka Dukan' (shop of marriage)," he said. He also mentioned the Assam government's sponsorship of one lakh people to visit the Ram temple in Ayodhya and expressed a desire for the Jharkhand government to take three lakh people to the shrine if BJP comes to power in the state. (PTI)

## PM's charge that Cong

which were opposed by the BJP. "Whenever we introduced schemes for the poor, they criticised them. Now we are talking of giving double ration to the poor," he said. Brushing aside criticism of practising politics of appeasement, the Congress chief said, "Stopping 'anyay' (injustice) on any community is not appeasement. They (the BJP) try to polarise during elections. They try to project anything we do as appeasement. I would only say that the BJP does appeasement politics. By giving the poor something, or giving scholarship to the poor, giving education through special schools for Muslims cannot be termed as appeasement," Kharge noted.

On BJP's attack that the Congress wants to give religion-based quotas and that is why the call for raising the reservation ceiling, he said it is meant to provide reservation for the poor. (PTI)

## India, China have agreed

"We are negotiating with both sides to make arrangements for us so that, for example, for imports from China, the shipping company can bring the invoice and the payment can be settled by converting Maldivian Rufiyaa to their local currency through the banks, instead of US dollar," Saeed said, adding, it will save up to 50 per cent from the annual USD 1.5 million in imports from the two countries.

"If we can arrange up to USD 300 million from each country, that means USD 700 million. This means we can eliminate the reliance on US dollars by that amount in the future. That will reduce the demand for dollars. And the future demand for dollars will continue to fall," Saeed was quoted as saying by Sun.mv.

Saeed blamed the poor state of finances on the former administration and agreed that challenges persist as foreign countries are still skeptical about the Maldives but "it is slowly improving."

The new Maldivian administration has said that the country's economic situation was "alarming", but that the government was implementing strong fiscal reforms to rectify the issue, including stopping printing money.

Earlier in April, during campaigning ahead of the parliamentary polls, Saeed had said that if the ruling party was able to secure a majority in Parliament, they would be able to bring "the dollar rate back down to official market values within approximately two years." President Muizzu-led People's National Congress (PNC) secured a clear majority in the 87-member People's Majlis. (PTI)



## Sonitpur disburses first installment of sponsorship funds

# 'Mission Vatsalya' aid for vulnerable children



**HT Correspondent**  
TEZPUR, May 22: The ceremonial distribution of sponsorship funds under 'Mission Vatsalya' of the Ministry of Women and Child Development of the Government of India was organised on Wednesday by the District Child Protection Unit of Sonitpur in collaboration with the Sonitpur district administration at the conference hall of the District Commissioner's Office, Sonitpur, Tezpur.

Chairing the meeting, district

commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra enumerated the vision and objectives of the mission and ceremoniously handed out cheques amounting to ₹ 48,000 each to two selected beneficiaries for this year. Bikram Chetry, 16 years old from Dhekiajuli, Dhekiajuli, Sonitpur, who had lost both his parents, and Bhaskariyoti Borah, 9 years old from Sologuri village of Jamuguri, Sonitpur, whose father is visually impaired, received the ceremonial cheques on Wednesday. Bikram Chetry has passed

HSLC this year with 80.17 percentage from Don Bosco School, Dhekiajuli, and Bhaskariyoti Borah is a class 4 student. The district commissioner urged all to assist the administration in identifying deserving children who can be covered under the scheme.

It is to be noted that a total of 91 beneficiaries of the district will be receiving the benefits of this scheme in the financial year 2023-24, out of which 40 beneficiaries are rolled over from the financial year 2022-23, and 51 are new ben-

eficiaries. The beneficiaries selected under this scheme will be getting ₹ 4,000 per month directly credited to their bank account for a period of one year, and then based on the scrutiny of eligibility criteria by the District Child Welfare and Protection Committee, it will be tabled for renewal for another year. The scheme covers children up to 18 years of age only.

Mission Vatsalya is a roadmap to prioritise the 'Protection of the Child' and to reach overall development of the child emphasising mainly on 'Rehabilitation of Children in Need of Care & Protection and Children in Conflict with Law'. It lays emphasis on child rights, advocacy, and awareness along with strengthening the juvenile justice care and protection system with the motto to 'leave no child behind'. The scheme is implemented as a centrally sponsored scheme in partnership with state governments and UT administrations to support the states and UTs. Additional district commissioner (WCD) Kabita Kakati Konwar, secretary of District Legal Services Authority, Sonitpur HT Buragohain, assistant commissioners, officials and members of District Child Protection Unit, Sonitpur, superintendent of Snehabandhan Children Home, and other concerned officials and invitees were present at the event.

## Stakeholders convene to design behavioral solutions for complementary feeding

Workshop brings together govt, NGOs, and experts in Guwahati



**HT Correspondent**  
KOKRAJHAR, May 22: A one-day workshop on the topic of designing 'Behavioral Insights Solutions to Complementary Feeding Practices in Assam' was organised on Tuesday in Guwahati. Nearly fifty participants representing different stakeholders, including NGOs, ICDS supervisors, workers, officials from the Social Welfare Department of the government of Assam, representatives from the Bodoland Territorial Region government, Assam Don Bosco University (ADBU), and Ashoka University, participated in the event. The workshop took place at Ratnamouli, Beltola in Guwahati, jointly organised by the Women & Child Development (WCD) Department of the government of Assam, in association with UNICEF Assam, Ashoka University, and Assam Don Bosco University (ADBU), Guwahati.

The workshop involved an in-depth discussion on developing a 'Design Strategy for Behavioral

Insights Solutions to Complementary Feeding Practices in Assam'. Notably, the Women & Child Development Department of the government of Assam, UNICEF, Ashoka University, and ADBU have completed an in-depth study titled 'Insights into Complementary Feeding Practices', which unraveled behavioural patterns in Udaluri district under the Mazbat and Bhargava development blocks of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). The ground initiative report indicates a need to strengthen efforts at the grassroots level to ensure healthy food and overall health for babies.

Partha Pratim Majumdar, secretary to the government of Assam for the Women & Child Development Department, Rahul Chandra Das, director of the Women & Child Development Department & SPD Poshan Abhijan, Dr Maulik Shah, nutrition specialist of UNICEF Assam, Alka Malhotra, social & behavior change specialist of UNICEF India, and Suresh Parmar, social & behaviour change

specialist of UNICEF Assam graced the inaugural session of the program as guests. The resource persons from UNICEF, ADBU, Ashoka University, and officials from the Social Welfare Department emphasised the importance of smooth implementation and strengthening of complementary feeding practices in Assam and the BTR region in particular.

Alka Malhotra, UNICEF India specialist on social & behaviour, highlighted the positive outcomes of implementing complementary feeding practices based on completed field studies in Udaluri district of Bodoland Territorial Region. She mentioned that the field studies involved supervisors, ICDS workers, stakeholder members, and revealed several significant findings, including behavioural and systematic challenges on complementary feeding. She expressed that the workshop was a highly productive session focused on the healthy initiative of implementing complementary feeding practices.

## Haryana girl kidnapped from Nagaon

**HT Correspondent**  
NAGAON, May 22: Jyoti Singh, a girl who arrived in Nagaon with her parents from Haryana to sell ayurvedic medicines, was kidnapped from their temporary shelter at Morikolung Children's Park near Morikolung Police Outpost on Tuesday night by a gang of miscreants traveling in a Bolero car.

Sources claimed that the victim girl had come with her father, Bijendra Singh, to sell ayurvedic medicines in the town and had taken temporary shelter at the park for a few days. The victim's father alleged that earlier, one Birju Singh from their province had attempted to kidnap his daughter, even in Haryana. He informed the local police that she was allegedly kidnapped on Tuesday night by the same Birju Singh along with four other associates, including a female.

Meanwhile, local police have registered a case in this regard and launched a search operation to rescue the victim girl. However, the police have yet to find any clues regarding the whereabouts of the victim girl at the time of filing this report, added sources.

## ICSSR sponsored seminar addresses development challenges in NE India

**HT Correspondent**  
NAGAON, May 22: The department of Economics of Dr BKB College, Puranigudam, organised an ICSSR-sponsored national seminar on 'Emerging Policy Issues with Special Reference to Development of the North-Eastern Region of India' recently on the college premises.

The seminar began with the inaugural program, followed by three technical sessions and the valedictory session.

Retired professor Madhurja Prasad Bezbaruah from Gauhati University, Professor Joydeep Baruah from Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University, Guwahati, and Dr Binoy Goswami from South Asian University, New Delhi, participated in the seminar as resource persons. Over fifty participants from different parts of the nation, including Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Tripura, West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam, took part in the program.

The inaugural program started with the lighting of an earthen

lamp by Pulin Hazarika, president of the governing body of the college.

The welcome address was delivered by Dr Nripen Ch Das, principal of Dr BKB College. Professor MP Bezbaruah delivered the keynote address, enlightening the audience on 'Policy Challenges for Socio-Economic Advancement of Northeast India'. Professor Joydeep Baruah spoke on poverty, inequality, and social sector policies, while Dr Binoy Goswami delivered a speech on 'Agriculture-Led Growth for a Relatively Underdeveloped Economy: Scope, Constraints, and Strategies'.

During the three simultaneous technical sessions, over fifty participants from different parts of the country presented their research papers and shared their views on various development issues of the north-eastern states. During the valedictory session, certificates were distributed among the participants, according to a press note.

The press note also stated that

since independence, the union and state governments of India have initiated various strategies and policies to accelerate the development process in India, including the north-eastern states. These initiatives include the introduction of five-year plans, the Green Revolution, the establishment of the North Eastern Council, and the implementation of the LPG policy.

However, the north-eastern region remains a marginal player in development, facing challenges such as geographical isolation, susceptibility to natural calamities, underutilised natural resources, sensitive borders, disturbed law and order conditions, poor transport and communication facilities, and ethnic and structural diversity. The participation of resource persons, academicians, faculty from different educational institutes, research scholars, and students in the seminar provided valuable insights into the challenges and strategic approaches for the development of the entire region.

## Educational sessions on geography & reading techniques organised

**HT Correspondent**  
GUWAHATI, May 22: The Paresha Baishya Foundation, a trust dedicated to the enrichment of education, organised two educational programs on Tuesday, targeting students from Sualkuchi Adarsha Primary School and Ankur Shishu Sadan, Sualkuchi. The sessions focused on the geography of Sualkuchi village and effective reading strategies.

During the event, Paresha Baishya, managing trustee of the Paresha Baishya Foundation, urged students to gain a thorough understanding of the geography of their respective villages. He provided insights into the resources available in the Sualkuchi area, encouraging students to compile this information into a geography book of Sualkuchi village. Baishya emphasised that such knowledge at the school level could significantly contribute to the geographical understanding of the state or even the nation in the future.

Students responded positively, acknowledging the benefits of Baishya's lecture. Baishya, who retired as principal of Dadara Higher Secondary School and is a veteran journalist from Assam, suggested that students, teachers, and other stakeholders write reports on various subjects or topics. These reports could eventually form a comprehensive book of geography of Sualkuchi village, with the best reports being selected for awards.

Additionally, the foundation organised a program on reading strategies for class 10 students of Ankur Shishu Sadan, Sualkuchi. In his speech, Paresha Baishya shared various reading tips, stating the importance of regular practice and planning. He advised students to make efficient use of their time, limit mobile phone usage, and focus on understanding rather than rote memorisation. Baishya also discussed potential reforms in the upcoming class 10 final examinations under the Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA). Teachers from both schools participated actively in the programs, delivering lectures and expressing appreciation for the efforts of the Paresha Baishya Foundation. The initiative was well-received, highlighting the foundation's commitment to enhancing educational standards and student engagement in Sualkuchi.

## Students sensitised on biodiversity conservation, coexistence with wild elephants



**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, May 22: The region's leading biodiversity conservation organisation, Aaranyak, has recently organised a series of awareness events to engage young students in biodiversity conservation and emphasise the need for coexistence with wild elephants through mitigation of human-elephant conflict (HEC) in the state of Assam.

The conservation sector NGO conducted two outreach events on Monday for students of No 1 Basa Gaon ME School and Ujani Sadiya High School in Tinsukia district. These events aimed to highlight the students' role in biodiversity conservation and its relation to human well-being. The students were educated on the interdependence of various species on the planet and their importance in the ecosystem.

Altogether, 116 students were reached during these events conducted in two different schools. Audio-visual presentations titled

'Species Interdependence' and 'Biodiversity Conservation and Human Well-being' were shown to the students, and a nature game called 'Web of Life' was conducted for them.

Aaranyak partnered with the British Asian Trust and, with support from the Biodiversity Challenge Fund, UK, has adopted multi-pronged approaches to promote human-elephant coexistence. These outreach events were coordinated by Aaranyak's Rimpee Moran, Ejaj Ahmed, Debojit Gogoi, and Tonmoi Priya Gogoi, with support from the teachers of the schools.

Earlier this month, a series of outreach events were conducted in various schools in the Udaluri district, to raise awareness on how to coexist with wild elephants.

A team from Aaranyak conducted the organisation's signature outreach campaign 'Gajah Kotha' using well-illustrated IEC materials at Nunaipara TG LP School, Uttar Sekhar ME School, and No

1 Milanijyoti Amjuli ME School on May 3, 13, and 14, respectively, reaching around 250 students from these three schools.

The Aaranyak team discussed the importance of elephants, their role as ecosystem engineers, and how society needs to proactively work towards protecting the species and its habitat, which is intricately linked with human well-being.

Additionally, the resource persons from Aaranyak highlighted the climate change crisis faced in our daily lives and how small actions can cumulatively combat this crisis.

Aaranyak's team, comprising Rabiya Daimari, Mondeep Basumatari, and Abhijit Saikia, conducted the program with assistance from Bikash Tossa and Pradip Barman. This series of outreach events is part of Aaranyak's initiative, supported by the SBI Foundation, to promote human-elephant coexistence and protect biodiversity.

## Sonitpur DC urges for practical plans on parking, encroachments

**HT Correspondent**  
TEZPUR, May 22: A meeting to discuss the issues of traffic congestion, designated parking places in Tezpur town, and other related issues was held on Wednesday under the chairmanship of district commissioner Deba Kumar Mishra at the Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's Office, Sonitpur, Tezpur.

Welcoming all stakeholders present in the meeting, the district commissioner mentioned the need of the hour to discuss and come up with practical plans to resolve the issues of traffic congestion, curbing roadside encroachments, designating proper parking places for vehicles, e-rickshaw designated routes, no parking and no entry zones, among others. At the very outset of the meeting, the issue of traffic congestion during school opening and closing hours was discussed with the representatives from concerned invited school administrations, and a difference of 15 minutes coordinated among them was suggested during both opening and closing times. The district commissioner directed the concerned authorities to look into the proper structuring of the paid parking system, maintenance of all traffic points and traffic signals,



and informed that the administration is actively working toward identifying new parking spaces for the use of both two-wheelers and four-wheelers.

Speaking in the meeting, superintendent of police Barun Purkayastha urged all stakeholders to cooperate with the police administration in strictly enforcing the no parking and no entry zones. A presentation on proposed no entry points and parking spaces

was shown by the traffic in-charge of Tezpur Police Station. Notably, the representatives from the Tezpur Chamber of Commerce and the E-Rickshaw Association voiced their full support and cooperation to the district administration in this initiative to solve the traffic woes of Tezpur. The meeting was attended by top officials of the district administration and police administration along with all concerned and invited stakeholders.

## Infrastructure development project inaugurated

**HT Correspondent**  
JORHAT, May 22: An infrastructure development project, undertaken by the Russell Tea Division of Russell India Limited, worth Rs 4 lakh, was inaugurated at the Gyanjyoti ME School, Rangajan, Titabar in Jorhat district on Tuesday to commemorate World Tea Day.

A press note from Kharikatia Tea Estate, Titabar, of the Russell Tea (Division of Russell India Limited), stated that the infrastructure en-

hancement of the school was carried out as part of the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiative of the company.

The project comprised the development of school hall infrastructure, paving the floors, and providing 20 pairs of desk benches. The function organised at the school was attended by the vice president of Russell Tea, Jatindra Singh Chahal, along with teachers, students, school management committee members, and parents of the stu-

dents. Chahal, speaking on the occasion, said that the company is committed to the upliftment of future generations and is pleased to be able to address the issues related to the primary education sector, especially in tea plantation areas.

The event was attended by the estate manager of Kharikatia TE, Anbarish Borthakur, and other management executives. On behalf of the school, Ranjit Gogoi, head master, thanked Chahal and other executives for the initiative.

## International Day for Biological Diversity celebrated

**HT Correspondent**  
NAGAON, May 22: The Eco Club unit of Nowgong College (Autonomous), in collaboration with the NSS unit, celebrated the International Day for Biological Diversity with the theme 'Be Part of the Plan' at Nowgong College on Wednesday.

The event was mentored by Dr Bhuban Ch Chutia, coordinator of the Eco Club unit, while Dr Ranjit Kr Mazindar, principal of Nowgong College, delivered the welcome address, urging participants to actively support biodiversity preservation and protection.

The theme 'Be Part of the Plan' was elaborated upon by Dr Raihan Ahmed, assistant professor in the department of Geography, who encouraged active participation in biodiversity initiatives. Pahi Mahanta, an alumna and NSS volunteer of Nowgong College, and a former fellow of the Chief Minister's Climate Resilience Village Fellowship 2023, was present as the resource person at the event. She provided insights into various biodiversity conservation activities conducted through NSS.

To mark the day, a poster-making competition on the theme of biodiversity in Assam was organised among NSS volunteers. Over 200 students and NSS volunteers participated in the competition, as asserted in a press note.

## Dhing College hosts impact lecture series

**HT Correspondent**  
NAGAON, May 22: The Innovation Council (IIC) of Dhing College conducted a series of impact lecture sessions on the theme of start-up, innovation, and entrepreneurship over two separate days recently. The program was sponsored by the MIC, Ministry of Education, Government of India. Nava Kumar Gogoi, an entrepreneur and career counselor, and Prafulla Kumar Saikia, additional director of Industries & Commerce and a motivator for start-up, innovation, and entrepreneurship, attended as resource persons in two separate sessions. Dr Biman Hazarika, principal of the college, inaugurated the sessions. Dr Lakhinanda Bordoloi, president of IIC, Dhing College, moderated the sessions. Over a hundred students and faculty members from the college and outside participated in the sessions, according to a press note.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*When you change your thoughts, remember to also change your world - Norman Vincent Peale*

## Delhi Polls: A High-Stakes Gamble for Modi

As the Lok Sabha election campaign intensifies in Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi faces a significant political challenge. While exuding confidence about securing a decisive victory with 370 seats for the BJP and 400+ for the NDA, Modi is risking a major setback in the capital. The BJP's aggressive maneuvers to undermine AAP's Arvind Kejriwal are evident. The Centre has curtailed Kejriwal's powers, placed administrative officials under the Lieutenant Governor's control, and instigated multiple legal battles against AAP leaders. Despite these tactics, Kejriwal, now out on interim bail, has reinvigorated the opposition, with the INDIA bloc aiming to seize all seven of Delhi's seats, which the BJP secured in 2019. The BJP's narrative that Delhi's issues stem from AAP's governance struggles to resonate. Residents know the Lieutenant Governor, a central government appointee, controls critical areas like land, housing, and law and order. This proxy governance has fueled anti-incumbency sentiment against the BJP, not AAP. The capital's reputation as India's crime hub exacerbates public discontent.

The Lieutenant Governor's interference has also disrupted AAP's popular schemes, including those for water supply, electricity, education, and health. These disruptions, seen as BJP-induced, further alienate voters who directly benefit from AAP's initiatives. Electoral behavior in India often hinges on perceived benefits rather than ideological alignment. Consequently, allegations of corruption against Kejriwal seem less impactful among beneficiaries of AAP's schemes. While Modi has pledged to target corrupt INDIA bloc politicians, many dismiss this as hypocritical, viewing BJP as equally tainted. The BJP's reliance on Hindutva and xenophobic rhetoric, effective in 2019, appears less potent now. The 2019 triumph, buoyed by national security issues like the Pulwama attack and surgical strikes, contrasts with declining BJP support in subsequent local elections. In the 2020 Vidhan Sabha and 2022 MCD elections, BJP's vote share significantly dropped, indicating eroding support.

Congress, despite internal defections, remains resilient in its three constituencies — Chandni Chowk, North East Delhi, and North West Delhi. An AAP-Congress alliance strengthens their position, with AAP supporters backing Congress candidates, enhancing their electoral prospects. AAP contests in East Delhi, New Delhi, West Delhi, and South Delhi, maintaining a robust support base. BJP's campaigns to tarnish Kejriwal's image over corruption charges seem ineffective, as AAP's grassroots support endures. The Modi-Shah electoral strategy struggles to sway anti-BJP and undecided voters. Anti-BJP sentiment is likely to benefit the INDIA bloc, not other parties. The contest in all seven constituencies is fiercely competitive, with INDIA bloc poised to dent BJP's 2019 clean sweep. The upcoming Delhi elections represent a critical juncture for the BJP. Despite their attempts to destabilize AAP and capitalize on communal narratives, the ground reality reflects significant challenges. Modi's gamble in the capital might backfire, leading to potential political embarrassment in the very seat of power. As the INDIA bloc consolidates its efforts, the BJP's dominance in Delhi is precariously poised. The Delhi elections are not just a regional contest but a microcosm of national sentiments. The BJP's strategy of undermining AAP through central control and corruption allegations faces significant backlash from a populace benefiting from AAP's initiatives. As anti-incumbency sentiments grow, especially against BJP's proxy governance, the election outcome could signal broader challenges for Modi's administration. The INDIA bloc's resurgence underscores a pivotal moment, potentially reshaping political dynamics in the capital and beyond.

## China emerges as engine and enigma for precious metal

By: K Raveendran

Gold has been hogging headlines with a certain monotonous regularity. In April alone, the precious metal clocked up 4 percent increase in price, despite lower imports by India, a key player in determining gold's behaviour. One of the leading causes of the latest blip, however, is of Chinese origin.

China's economic rise has been nothing short of meteoric. It has been transformed from a regional player to the world's second-largest economy, a manufacturing powerhouse, and a crucial driver of global trade. China's massive production capacity has kept consumer goods affordable for people around the world. It's also a hungry importer, creating jobs and growth in exporting nations. But on the other hand, China's dominance in manufacturing has raised concerns about job displacement in developed economies. Additionally, its breakneck growth has been fuelled by a state-controlled economic model, raising questions about fair competition and intellectual property rights.

The role of gold in a world grappling with geopolitical tensions, inflation, and economic uncertainty cannot be over-emphasised. But the latest blip is the result of a confluence of two key factors: a ravenous appetite for gold from China and a strategic shift by central banks to bolster their reserves. China's fascination with gold is well-documented, deeply rooted in its cultural reverence for the metal and its role as a symbol of wealth and stability. This fascination has translated into action. In recent years, China has been on a gold-buying spree, surpassing all other central banks in its purchases. The People's Bank of China (PBC) has been adding tons to its reserves every month, and Chinese consumers have ramped up their own gold purchases, particularly in the form of jewellery and investment products.

The surge in Chinese demand stems from several factors. The ongoing trade war with the US has fuelled a desire for assets seen as safe havens, and gold perfectly fits that bill. As the global financial system navigates choppy waters, gold offers a sense of security, a hedge against inflation that erodes the value of paper currencies, and a potential diversifier for investment portfolios. Beyond the immediate economic concerns, China's gold hunger also reflects its long-term strategic ambitions. As the country seeks to establish itself as a dominant economic and political power, a robust gold reserve is seen as a pillar of national strength. A strong gold holding signifies financial stability and independence, allowing China to weather economic storms and potentially influence the global financial system.

China's actions aren't happening in isolation. Central banks around the world are also quietly accumulating gold at an unprecedented pace. This renewed interest is a stark contrast to the past few decades, when gold fell out of favour with many central banks. However, the current economic climate has reignited the appeal of the yellow metal.

Central banks are facing a precarious situation. The low-interest-rate environment that followed the 2008 financial crisis has limited their ability to manage inflation and economic fluctuations. In this context, gold offers a reliable and liquid asset that can be used to intervene in markets and support their currencies. Additionally, some central banks, particularly those in emerging economies, see gold as a way to reduce their dependence on the US dollar, the current global reserve currency.

The combined buying power of China and central banks has had a profound impact on the gold market. Increased demand has outstripped supply, pushing prices to record levels. This price surge has further fuelled the buying frenzy, creating a classic feedback loop. Investors, seeing the rising prices, are even more incentivized to buy, further propelling the price upwards. However, the future trajectory of gold prices is not without uncertainties. The global economic outlook remains murky, with factors like inflation, interest rate hikes, and geopolitical tensions all playing a role. If economic conditions stabilize and investor confidence returns, the demand for safe-haven assets like gold could wane, leading to a price correction. Further, a significant slowdown in the Chinese economy could dampen demand for gold, potentially leading to a price drop. (IPA Service)

# The complex US-Iran dynamic and India's strategic balancing act

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent hostage crisis at the US Embassy, Iran has maintained a firm grip on the consciousness of successive American administrations, transcending partisan lines. However, the roots of animosity between the two nations delve even deeper, reaching back to the CIA-backed coup against Prime Minister Mosaddegh in 1953, a wound still keenly felt by Iranians.

While the ideological clash between Ayatollah Khomeini's regime and the 'West' exacerbated tensions, memories of US support for Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war have conveniently faded from American recollection. Despite Iran's efforts against ISIL in Syria and Iraq, the US has often cast suspicions linking Iran to 9/11 and the emergence of Al Qaeda and ISIL, despite lacking substantial evidence. The complex narrative culminated in the killing of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani by American forces, further entrenching the cycle of distrust and hostility.

The unjust vilification of Iran persists amidst the intricate dynamics of sectarianism and geopolitical maneuvering in the Middle East. While Iran and its proxies in Syria, Lebanon, and

Yemen challenge the dominance of American allies like Israel and Arab Sheikdoms, other nations with more significant contributions to religious extremism and terrorism, such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, receive American support. Despite international confirmation of Iran's compliance with the Iran Nuclear Deal, the unilateral withdrawal of the United States and subsequent sanctions have exacerbated tensions. Pressure from Israel and the Sheikdoms has perpetuated the narrative of Iran's culpability for regional turmoil, regardless of its actual involvement.

The allegations linking Iran to the October 7th, 2023 attack lack credible evidence, yet the notion of Iranian involvement persisted. Faced with the loss of senior military officers in Syria, killed by Israeli forces, Iran was compelled to retaliate, a move that allowed its detractors to portray the nation as belligerent and provide justification for further actions against it. In an election year, flexing muscles against the perceived "enemy," Iran, offered political advantages.

President Joe Biden, who had initially pledged to restore the Iran Nuclear Deal abandoned by his predecessor, Donald Trump, has now adopted a more hawkish stance. Instead of reviving the

deal, Biden is seeking to outdo Trump's approach by imposing even harsher sanctions on Iran. The situation has become increasingly tense, with the initial lack of evidence linking Iran to the attack overshadowed by the escalating rhetoric and actions from both sides. As the political landscape shifts, the prospects for a diplomatic resolution grow dimmer, raising concerns about the potential for further conflict and instability in the region.

The recent statement from the White House highlights the severity of Iran's actions, emphasizing the need for accountability. In response to Iran's large-scale missile and drone attack on Israel, the United States, alongside its allies, took swift action to defend Israel and thwart the attack.

Now, sanctions and export controls are being imposed on Iran as a means of holding them accountable for their actions. This development extends beyond the borders of the United States, potentially impacting any country engaging in dealings with Iran, including India. India's recent signing of a 10-year contract to oversee the strategic Chabahar port in Iran is a case in point. This port, serving as a gateway to Afghanistan and the Central

Asian Republics, provides India with a crucial foothold on the other side of Pakistan. It not only bypasses Pakistani land routes but also serves to counterbalance China's influence, particularly through the Gwadar Port in Pakistan. With the Taliban in Afghanistan showing signs of distancing themselves from Pakistan and Iran solidifying its ties through this deal, Delhi sees promising opportunities to strengthen its position in the region. This strategic move holds

significant potential for countering the assertions of China and Pakistan in the theater of regional geopolitics.

While India acknowledges the need to align with the United States to address the growing challenges posed by China, it also prioritizes its regional interests, necessitating a degree of autonomy in its approach to issues concerning Iran.

India's foreign policy stance underscores the importance of strategic independence, as evidenced by its procurement of Russian oil and maintenance of cordial relations with Moscow, while concurrently addressing concerns related to Ukraine. It's worth noting that the United States recognizes India's unique

position and constraints, understanding that India's actions are not intended to undermine US interests but rather to safeguard its own. As such, while there may be ongoing verbal exchanges, there's a level of restraint in actual policy implementation. However, it's essential to grasp the nuances of the Biden administration's rhetoric, particularly regarding Iran, as they may engage in assertive rhetoric to convey their stance, despite underlying strategic considerations.

In light of these circumstances, it's crucial to contextualize the statement made by the US official regarding India's agreement with Iran. The US stance underscores the potential risks associated with engaging in business deals with Iran, emphasizing the possibility of sanctions. However, both the United States and India maintain their respective positions, understanding the complexities of their strategic relationship.

While the Americans express their concerns, India continues to pursue its strategic equation with Iran, mindful of its own interests and objectives. It's important to recognize that India's engagement with Iran is not aimed at undermining US interests but rather serves its own strategic imperatives. (The writer can be reached at [dipakkurmigpld@gmail.com](mailto:dipakkurmigpld@gmail.com))

## Special on Buddha Purnima

# Lord Buddha: The architect of religious and individual evolution

By: Lalit Garg

Gautam Buddha is a beacon of spiritual awakening. His public welfare thinking, and deeds are timeless that have been guiding the society for ages. His birth anniversary is celebrated on Buddha Purnima, and his Nirvana Day also occurred on the day of Buddha Purnima. On this day, Gautam Buddha blossomed in his fullness; he remained engaged in the search for his own perfection, as well as the perfection of human society that became a timeless inspiration and possibility of perfection.

On this Day, Buddha was born, left this world for Heavenly Abode, attained divine knowledge and salvation. Buddha Purnima is an important day not only for the followers of Buddhism, but for the entire human race. Buddha Purnima is the biggest festival day for the followers of Buddhism. A series of celebrations are organized on this day in different fashions. In different countries, celebrations are organized according to their peculiar customs and culture.

For example, Sri Lankans celebrate Buddha Purnima as 'Vesak' festival, which is a corrupt form of the word 'Vaisakha'. On this day, lamps are lit in Buddhist houses, which are decorated with flowers. Buddhist followers from all over the world make pilgrimage to Bodhi Gaya, a city in Bihar, and offer prayers. The Bodhi Tree is worshipped there in this city. Garlands and colourful flags are decorated on its branches. Milk and perfumed water are poured on this Holy Tree's roots. Lamps are lit around the tree. Food and clothes are donated as alms to the poor.

Mahatma Gautam Buddha was the founder of Buddhism. During his life, he always taught people the values of non-violence, love and compassion. Gautam Buddha was born in a royal family in Lumbini, Nepal in 563 BC. Mahatma Buddha is considered to be one of the most important and greatest Indian spiritual thinkers, an accomplished monk, social reformer, and a religious leader. He touched the hearts not only of influential people, but also the common people, and brought

positive changes in their lives.

Hence, he can be called the architect of a religious revolution as well as a personal and ideological revolution. His revolutionary speech is not only indicative of his revolutionary personality, but also a sharp sarcasm on religious, social distortions and superstitions that serves as an inspiration for change, which changed the direction of life of countless people around the globe. Before becoming a monk, Buddha was Prince Siddhartha of Kapilvastu. In search of peace, he left home, family, kingdom etc. at the age of 27.

While travelling, Siddhartha reached Sarnath near Kashi, where his heart changed. Here he did severe penance under the Bodhi tree in Bodhi Gaya. After severe penance, Siddhartha attained enlightenment and became famous as the great monk Gautam Buddha and illuminated the whole world with his knowledge.

When Buddha saw the people of his era surrounded by ignorance regarding religious-social, spiritual and other rituals, and found the common people bogged deep in ignorance in the name of religion, saw women being insulted, saw atrocities against Shudras - then his heart was stirred in sympathy for the people. The Himalayan efforts he made to elevate the life of the people are amazing and astonishing.

According to Buddha, it is better to win over oneself than to win thousands of battles in life. If you win over yourself, then victory will always be yours. No one can snatch it away from you. Gautam Buddha says that a person can never end evil with evil. To end it, a person has to take the help of love. All the big things in the world can be won with love.

According to Buddha, happiness always increases by sharing. It never decreases. One should be afraid of a deceitful and evil friend, rather than a wild animal. A wild animal can harm your body, but a bad friend can harm your intellect. According to Gautam Buddha, three things can never be kept hidden in life. They are- Sun, Moon and Truth.

In reality, the main objective of both governance and religious governance is to

lead the people on the right path. But the dictators of governance are themselves creatures suffering from illusion, so they are not able to be completely successful in the work of social reform. Well, if someone cannot erase something from his own heart, how can he erase it from thousands of other hearts? The foundation of a government is not laid on the ground of love, affection and goodwill; it is usually laid on the foundation of fear, terror and oppression. This is the main reason that a government, even while protecting justice, morality and peace amongst the people, cannot establish a more permanent system.

Whereas a religious government is based on mutual love and goodwill, as a result, it fundamentally changes the heart of the society by showing the path of truth and by removing sinfulness from all sides. It establishes permanent justice, morality and peace. Lord Buddha ultimately came to the conclusion that this incurable disease of India is not going to be cured by ordinary political movements.

For this, the whole life will have to be sacrificed; leaving the attachment to a petty family, the ideal of a 'world family' will have to be adopted. One cannot mingle with the common people by dressing up in royal attire. To reach there, one will have to accept voluntary smallness, that is, one will have to accept monkhood.

The greatest gift of Buddha to humanity is to end discrimination. It is an irony that on this land of Buddha, untouchability and discrimination still exist in some form or the other. At that time, the society was divided into different classes due to untouchability. When Lord Buddha talked about mutual unity by considering everyone as equal, a large number of people started becoming followers of Buddhism. A few decades ago, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar adopted Buddhism along with a large number of his followers so that they could get an equal position in Hindu society. It is very important even today to give practical form to the principle of equality of Buddhism. Basically, Buddhism remained in line with Hinduism, and Mahatma Buddha started a revolutionary and reformist

movement by staying within Hinduism. It is a big expectation of the present era to highlight his contribution in the context of social revolution.

Only by doing this, will we be able to build a healthy society. Buddha preached an egalitarian society. Where there is passion and hatred, inequality flourishes. From this point of view, the source of all problems is attachment and hatred. A person keeps wandering in the corridors of inequality to nourish his selfishness, to display ego, to humiliate others, to grab power and wealth.

Before coming among the people, before sharing his life experiences, before doing severe penance, Buddha made him alone, made him empty. He underwent rigorous penance. He learned the truth of life. Then he said that do not let anything enter inside you which can pollute the inner world. Do not see badly, do not listen to bad, and do not say badly. This message of emptiness is the path to happiness, peace, and samadhi. He said to become your own lamp - be your own lamp. Because day and night being surrounded by resolutions and options, happiness-sadness, joy-sadness, being scorched by the worries of tomorrow, carrying the burden of stress, in such a situation, how and when can the mind be empty? How can it become balanced? How can one become meditative? To achieve these spiritual conditions, the practice of living in the present moment is necessary. Neither the memory of the past, nor the worry of the future - can help you.

One who learns to live today should understand that he has attained the meaning of human life and only a society made up of such people can be balanced, healthy and egalitarian. There is a need to inculcate the teachings of Mahatma Buddha in life for building an advanced and balanced society, and to inculcate Buddha-like qualities in every person. Only by doing this, can we make the society healthy? Do not limit Buddha to mere teachings; rather make Buddha a part of your life, incorporate Buddha in your life. (The author is a journalist, columnist who can be reached at [latitgarg11@gmail.com](mailto:latitgarg11@gmail.com))

# Result time: Who would become India's next PM?

By: Vivek Shukla

As the fifth round of polling for the Lok Sabha poll 2024 took place on last May 20 in various parts of the country, now only two rounds of polling are left. After the final round of polling on June 2, the nation would know who would become the prime minister of India, which political party would emerge as the single largest party and whether NDA or INDIA bloc to get more seats on June 4. That is the day when results of the Lok Sabha poll would be announced.

Of course, people would also be interested to know the results of key seats across the country. When we talk about key seats, we refer to those constituencies where big leaders are in the fray. For instance, seats like Varanasi (Narendra Modi), Rai Bareilly, (Rahul Gandhi), Amethi (Smriti Irani), New Delhi (Bansuri Swaraj), Lucknow (Rajnath Singh), Nagpur (Nitin Gadkari). Unquestionably, they are among the most VIP seats.

As now everyone is forecasting about the possible results of the Lok Sabha poll, Mumbai based acclaimed astrologer, columnist and author Dr. J.P. Trikha has also done deep research on the basis of astrology to find which party is emerging as the single largest party. Says J P Trikha - "My astrological research clearly says that BJP under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is going to win the largest number of seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. There should not be any debate on this matter. Therefore, the president of India would invite Modi to form the government for the third time in a row."

According to Dr. J.P. Trikha, "The moon sign of Mr Narendra Modi is Scorpio. He was born on 17 September, 1950. He is sub-ruled by Mars. Those who are Scorpio are very intelligent and astute people with qualities to lead from the front. They are the born leaders. Modi has proved it time and again." Interestingly Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Joe Biden is also Scorpio. Scorpio leaders are often characterized by their determination and intensity. They are known for their

assertive and strategic leadership style.

Scorpios are known for being passionate, determined, and resourceful. Scorpios are good at handling crises and overcoming challenges. Is June 4, 2024 an ideal date for the BJP in terms of astrology? Will it bring cheers in the faces of all those who are connected with the party? Says Dr. J.P. Trikha, "My study says that the horoscope for June 4, 2024 would be favourable to anybody who is either holding key position in his/her office. I, however, do not see landslide victory for the NDA. I do not think BJP alone or NDA would get 400 plus seats. Further, once new government would take over, it would face plethora of issues to handle. It would not be the cakewalk for the new government. " Will Modi remain prime minister of the country till 2029 or quit his post after reaching the age of 75 years? Recently, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had created a political storm when he claimed that Modi ji would leave his post once he reaches the age of 75 years? Dr. Trikha, who also writes as Pandit J.P. Trikha claims that he does not see Modi leaving the coveted post before 2029. It may be recalled that Jawaharlal Nehru remained prime minister for little less than 17 years and Indira Gandhi remained prime minister for 15 years and 11 months. If Modi is looking forward to surpass Nehru's record, he needs to remain in office till June 2031.

Meanwhile, astrologers are getting so many queries related to general elections results from candidates to their supporters. It is said that during the Lok Sabha election time, astrologers work overtime to answer the queries of people. Indira Gandhi was perhaps the first big time leader to seek the advice of astrologers. Gandhi was widely believed to consult astrologers before making any major move. It is said that once she delayed her swearing-in as prime minister to a day that her astrologer called auspicious. According to noted writer Rashid Kidwai, "A firm believer in astrology, PV Narashimha Rao used to say his 'janam patri' (astrological birth chart) had a roller coaster ride essayed for him. There was a great deal of truth in his belief." In 1991, Rao had packed bags and was shifting to

his birthplace Warangal when destiny signalled that it had something more in store for him. On May 21, 1991, the news of Rajiv Gandhi's gruesome assassination at Sriperumbudur stunned everyone and caused a huge void in the political arena. After the death of Rajiv Gandhi, Rao became the prime minister of India.

In the meantime, a Delhi based BJP leader says that he declined the party ticket for the last Delhi assembly poll after he was told by his astrologer after doing lot of research of his Janampatri that he should better decline the party ticket. If he fights the poll, he would be defeated. He obeys the advice of his astrologer. Meanwhile, a big Real-estate company Chairman says that he starts his projects after consulting his astrologer. Once he gives him the nod, he moves forward. "I am surprised that people from even far-flung areas are calling me to discuss the fate of parties and leaders in respect of Lok Sabha poll. It's like flood of queries. I am sure I would get queries till June 3," said Dr. Trikha. India is perhaps the only country where apart from pollsters, journalists, political experts and common men make predictions for the poll. The predications of astrologers are considered very important. India cannot live without astrological predication.

For a while, let us talk about America. According to a report published in [www.scientificamerican.com](http://www.scientificamerican.com), as many as 70 million Americans read their horoscopes daily. This is a huge number. According to a study done the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 25 percent of Americans believed that the positions of the stars and the planets affect our daily lives.

The General Social Survey found that 34 percent of Americans surveyed consider astrology to be "very" or "sort of scientific" and also reported a decrease from two-thirds to around one-half in the fraction of people who consider astrology "not at all scientific." That's mind-boggling. As results for the Lok Sabha poll would be declared soon, will astrologers like Dr Trikha would also make any predication for the American presidential poll schedule to take place in the month of November?



# Namami Gange: Ten years on, the Ganga still runs dirty, its water undrinkable

By: Aathira Perinchery

“The first time I contested, in 2014... I felt that Mother Ganga had called me here (to Varanasi). But now, after ten years, I feel that... (dramatic pause) Mother Ganga has adopted me.”

“The bond between Kashi (Varanasi) and me is like that between a mother and her son.”

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said these words in an ‘exclusive interview’ he gave to a news house on May 7. A week later, on May 14, he repeated the same words in another interview with yet another news channel. Modi went as far as to say that after he lost his biological mother, river Ganga was his mother now.

Before he filed his nomination papers in Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh that day, Modi performed an elaborate Ganga aarti. The adopted son prayed to his river mother donned in an immaculate white suit, reverently dropping pink flowers into the dark green, algae-ridden waters of a barely flowing Ganga.

“I will do a Ganga aarti and show you that the solution to global warming that the whole world is so worried about lies in nature worship,” he said in one of his exclusive interviews.

But despite the prime minister’s touching devotion for his river-mother, his launch of the much-touted Namami Gange programme in 2014 and pumping in almost Rs 40,000 crore during the course of his ten-year governance, the Ganga still runs dark, its water undrinkable.

The river hasn’t gotten much cleaner, say both locals and experts. Sewage treatment plants that have been installed are not doing an efficient job; many are not even functional even though they exist on paper, per several reports. And activities such as sand mining, dredging and tourism (that continue unregulated), as well as projects in the pipeline such as river-linking, are adversely affecting the river in several ways, experts told The Wire.

## Namami Gange: Ten years on

The Ganga – one of India’s longest rivers, and one that supports a population of around 400 million by one estimate – has been the target of cleaning programmes since the mid 1980s, due to the sewage and industrial effluents that find their way to the river. As per a 2020 government estimate, 2,953 million liters of sewage is generated by 97 towns along the Ganga, and flows into the main stem of the Ganga everyday.

While the first Ganga Action Plan, which implemented 260 schemes on the main stem of the Ganga, was initiated in 1985, the National Ganga River Basin Authority, under which ‘Mission Clean Ganga’ was initiated came into force in 2009. Its objectives involved addressing wastewater management, solid waste management, industrial pollution, and river front development along the Ganga. The authority was dissolved in 2016, after the Union government constituted the National Ganga Council.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led union government launched the Namami Gange programme in 2014 as part of the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) under the Ministry of Jal Shakti’s Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.

And much money has flowed for Namami Ganga since its inception.

The Minister of State for Jal Shakti, Bishwesar Tudu, told the Lok Sabha in a written reply on February 8 this year that until December 31, 2023, 457 projects had been taken up under the Namami Gange programme at a cost of ₹ 38,438.05 crores. Of these, only 280 have been completed and “made operational”. Most of these projects pertain to construction of sewage infrastructure – such as sewage treatment plants or STPs – the minister said in the statement.

Indeed, as far as the nearly Rs 40,000 crore is concerned this is mostly related to the construction of STPs and sewers and river infrastructure such as river bank ghats and so on, said water activist and expert Himanshu Thakkar, coordinator of the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SAN-DRP).

“The objective of these wasn’t to improve the status of the river, or river flow. It was only to tackle the sewage flowing into the river. Even if you look at that limited objective, the whole emphasis has been on money, infrastructure and some on technology. But nothing addresses the issue of governance,” he told The Wire. “You can put in as much money, technology, or install as much infrastructure as you want to, but if that infrastructure doesn’t work as per its objectives and design, it is not going to help.”

The Ganga has a long history of its STPs not functioning; in fact, nowhere are STPs functioning to their designed

capacities, not even in Modi’s constituency of Varanasi, said Thakkar. Incidentally, Modi won from Varanasi in 2014, and one of his main promises was to clean up the Ganga.

“Varanasi is also in a pretty bad situation even in terms of the limited objective of treatment of sewage,” Thakkar told The Wire.

## No science, no governance

There is also no data which shows that the STPs are actually functioning, Thakkar added. And the information that we do have about the functioning of STPs does not inspire much confidence, he said. “Moreover, smaller and decentralized STPs are a far better option than big, mega-STPs but we are not even considering this option.”

Good governance will ensure that these ideal systems are in place, that they are monitored and that corrective measures are taken whenever necessary, Thakkar said. “Credible, independent, democratic, participatory governance is required at several levels, the STP, city, sub-district, district levels.”

According to him, the government has also not done anything to improve the quantum of flow in the river or its status either; they’ve not even been assessing flow in the river, he told The Wire. All the barrages on the Ganga divert water from the river, and none of them maintain flow in the river.

“The only thing they can claim to have done to maintain weather flow in the Ganga is the October 2018 notification on Ganga e-flows. But it is not based on any science, and not comprehensive.”

To decide on environmental flows based on science, the first thing that needs to be done is define your objective, Thakkar clarified.

“There can be many objectives – to sustain certain social services, environmental services, biodiversity, economic services that the river provides. Then based on those objectives, at different points on the river and in different seasons, you need to estimate how much water is required to achieve this objective. Then you need to ensure that that flow exists. But this has not happened.”

Thakkar accuses that authorities just used a “thumb rule” to decide how much percentage of water should be released from specific projects on the Ganga.

## Ganga aarti for global warming?

The lack of science also echoes in Prime Minister Modi’s recent statement in Varanasi on May 14 that he would “do a Ganga aarti and show to the world that is so concerned about global warming that the solution lies in nature worship”.

Worshipping nature may be important, but along with that should come action – which appears to be lacking now. Even monks know that.

Monks at the Matri Sadan in Haridwar, Uttarakhand, for instance, have gone on multiple hunger strikes to ensure that governments and authorities take action to clean up the Ganga. In 2018 at the age of 86, Swami Gyan Swaroop Sanand (G.D. Agarwal, formerly a professor in civil engineering at IIT Kanpur who later took up monastic life at Matri Sadan) had already gone on several fasts for the Ganga to protest against the lack of efforts being taken by successive governments to clean the river.

As per reports, Agarwal’s fast in 2009 forced the then United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-led government at the Centre to shelve plans for two proposed dams on the Bhagirathi, a tributary of the Ganga in Uttarakhand; his fast in 2016 forced the Haridwar administration to crack down on illegal mining in the area.

Agarwal began his last fast on June 22, 2018, demanding that the government pass a law to save the Ganga and ensure the free flow of the river. He died on the 112th day of his fast.

“The UPA-led government would at least listen to his concerns and implement the measures he wanted but the NDA government completely ignored him,” Thakkar told The Wire. “They let him die.”

## Obstacles interfering with the Ganga’s flow

Though the UN listed the Namami Gange project in 2022 as one of the world’s ten “pioneering” initiatives that are successfully restoring the natural world, experts such as Thakkar were not convinced as The Wire Science reported. Firstly, the UN did not provide details regarding the criteria used to put together the list. Secondly, though huge amounts of taxpayer money has gone into the project, several activities that adversely impact the river and its flow continue unabated, and unregulated.

These include illegal sand mining, riverfront development projects that are being built not to sustain the river but to channelize it and river navigation projects that require dredging the river that further interferes with the

river’s flow, Thakkar told The Wire. The list doesn’t end there: river linking projects such as the Ken-Betwa river linking project will spell doom for the flow of the Ganga because it will reduce water flow in the river, Thakkar said.

Both the Ken and Betwa rivers join the Yamuna along UP-Madhya Pradesh border, which in turn merges with the Ganga at Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh.

Another concern are river tourism projects, Thakkar said, such as the tent cities in Ayodhya. These uber-luxury properties have been built on the floodplains of the river, he added.

“The government is not even assessing the impacts of such activities on the river,” he told The Wire. “The Ganga is possibly the most worshipped river in the world, and mentioned in many Hindu scriptures and is part of culture. Under the governance of a government that celebrates all this, the scriptures and festivals and prayers, the river is getting worse and worse.”

## For a clean Ganga, clean its tributaries too

Experts have also pointed out that the focus on cleaning up the main stem of the river has diverted attention away from the status of the smaller tributaries and streams that drain into the Ganga as it flows through the Gangetic river basin from Uttarakhand, to Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. India’s river cleanup drives have failed because the country has focused on major rivers alone, Venkatesh Dutta, professor, School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow told Down To Earth in 2023. Though NMCG programme officers claim that smaller rivers are also being revived now, the ground realities are the same, the professor said. For instance, the Gomti river in Uttar Pradesh had dangerously low dissolved oxygen levels making it impossible to sustain biodiversity, per a report.

Another case in point is the story of the Tilodki Ganga – a stream that flows into the Sarayu also known as the Ghaghara, a tributary of the Ganga that later flows past the town of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, not far from Varanasi. The brand new Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram International Airport – now renamed as the Maharishi Valmiki International Airport – came up right on the stream and this has caused waterlogging in their village, said Durga Prasad Yadav, a resident of Ganja village near Ayodhya. To make matters worse, a Coca Cola bottling plant discharged untreated effluents into the stream, making it impossible to use its waters anymore for cultivation, reported Down To Earth.

“Farming is our mainstay,” Yadav told The Wire on May 16 this year. “Now we cannot even farm our lands let alone drink the water of the stream.”

In 2019, Yadav filed a case in the National Green Tribunal to fight the pollution of the stream. The green court constituted a Joint Committee to look into the matter. District authorities told the Committee that “steps are being taken to ensure that water flow of the area is not hindered due to extension of the Ayodhya Airport and water flow remains smooth” (as recorded in the NGT order pronounced on November 2023 that The Wire accessed).

The state’s Department of Irrigation said that a drain – at the total cost of around ₹ 5,500 lakh – would be constructed to ensure zero waterlogging, and that this would be constructed before the Airport becomes operational. The Airport is already operational, but the drain is still being built, Yadav told The Wire.

However, the committee declared that there was no river by the name of Tilodki Ganga in Ayodhya district. Yadav is disappointed.

“This was a nadi [river/stream] which was even mentioned in the Puranas, now the government only recognises it as a nala [canal/drain],” Yadav told The Wire. Yadav says he wants to fight for the recognition of the stream but he is facing pressure from several fronts.

Pollution of water, and the lack of clean water to farm and even drink are all election issues in the region, but nothing is being done, Yadav said.

## “What do we do?”

Local activists trying to ensure that governments implement actions to clean the Ganga also know the importance of reviving the Ganga’s tributaries and ensuring they are clean too. V.N. Mishra, president of the Sankat Mochan Foundation (an NGO whose vision is to ensure a clean Ganga), has been vocal about the pollution that the Ganga witnesses, as does its tributaries. On March 6, he tweeted that in most of its segments, the river is “not even fit for bathing”.

As Prime Minister Modi talks of nature worship and Ganga aartis to curb global warming, his river-mother trudges along, wearily along Varanasi, wearing colours that would put his immaculate white suit to shame. A clean, free-flowing Ganga still feels far away and distant, despite funds worth nearly ₹ 40,000 crore being pumped into the river to clean it up over the past ten years: ten years during which a son – who claims that Mother Ganga has adopted him – has been at the helm of the country. (Courtesy: The Wire)

# Climate crisis compass for water management



By: Aparna Roy

The India Meteorological Department’s recent warning on intense heatwave conditions over parts of eastern and peninsular India comes at a time when Bengaluru is already grappling with a severe water crisis. Heatwaves and compound events increase evaporation rates from water bodies and soil, as well as raise water consumption due to a temporary surge in demand under high temperatures – factors likely to threaten the city’s future sustainability.

However, Bengaluru is not alone. Mumbai, Chennai – the list of thirsty metropolises is growing longer by the day, raising concerns about the potential collapse of urban health, safety, and sanitation systems unless urgent action is taken. Indeed, when it comes to extreme heat and other warming-related disasters, India was among the worst-hit nations in 2023, according to a just-released report by the World Meteorological Organization.

Intense heatwaves and El Niño or suppression of monsoons during the summer are not new phenomena for Indian cities. According to a study published in Nature, surface temperatures over India have been rising more frequently due to the climate crisis over the past two decades.

With 600 million Indians already facing high-to-extreme water stress and approximately 200,000 people dying annually due to inadequate access to safe water, the situation is projected to deteriorate further due to the increasing frequency of climate crisis impacts. India’s demand for water is projected to significantly exceed its supply by 2050. It is therefore urgent for the country to devise a comprehensive framework for water management that could significantly reduce socio-economic vulnerabilities by anticipating, preparing for, and adapting to changing climate conditions.

India, however, does not lay any explicit focus on the effective integration of climate concerns in its water management. The focus of national government flagship

schemes such as the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), Jal Shakti Abhiyan, and National Groundwater Management Improvement Scheme, among others, is on providing better service delivery.

While the National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC) mandates local governments to include climate adaptation and mitigation strategies in their development projects, studies reveal that their incorporation has remained cursory, mainly focused on compliance. This approach results in missed opportunities for proactively addressing the impact of the climate crisis on water resources in a comprehensive manner.

An aggressive policy framework to integrate climate concerns in all aspects of water management – from planning, design and infrastructure to operation and maintenance – while addressing the financial, technical and capacity challenges is an immediate imperative.

However, a successful transformation of India’s water management from a security-centric approach to ensuring its sustainability and resilience requires effective implementation on the ground.

Designing efficient climate-adaptive water management systems would require a strong technical capacity for modelling and projection that would inform proactive strategies to address any potential disaster. Such definite risk assessments that include the probability, occurrence, and degree of potential hazard of the climate crisis on water resources are not available to the government.

India should collectively mobilise its existing institutional climate capabilities for predicting water disasters. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) and India Meteorological Department (IMD) can significantly help create a comprehensive approach that could guide the design, planning, and delivery of adaptive water management systems.

Access to knowledge of traditional or local practices of building water resilience and their dissemination, as well as encouraging the adoption of diverse and locally appropriate techniques, would be crucial. Each of these “day zero” events offers opportunities to carry out simulations and analysis of the climate crisis’s impact on water resources.

Lastly, addressing the complex interplay of water-climate crisis and development requires more than just government intervention. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) in implementing challenging climate action projects are emerging as a global model, according to the World Economic Forum. PPP can offer a way for the private sector to complement government efforts, easing budgetary strain and facilitating the sustainable, efficient, and timely implementation of ambitious climate-adaptive water projects.

However, the historical trend of PPPs in India shows that the private sector has limited engagement in water projects. Water management is capital-intensive, with significant fixed costs and returns that accrue over the long term.

Despite the potential benefits, only a small fraction of national projects focus on water supply and treatment PPPs, representing just 0.25% of total project expenditure, according to Department of Economic Affairs data from December 2019.

Various factors have discouraged private sector participation in water PPP projects, including political, regulatory, and financial risks, as well as changes in policy, unrealistic targets, imbalanced transfer of financial risks, and awarding contracts to under-resourced companies. Tariffs set too low for cost recovery have also been a deterrent, barely covering operational and maintenance costs.

To enhance the attractiveness of water PPPs, the government should conduct a thorough review of past successes and failures. Implementing clear legal and regulatory frameworks, establishing supportive institutions, and offering attractive incentives would encourage a steady flow of private finance, knowledge, and capacity to this critical sector.

Bengaluru’s situation serves as a stark reminder of the severe water crisis that cities are likely to face in the future. As weather extremes become the “new normal”, India’s critical water infrastructure must be built to withstand, respond to, and recover rapidly from the disruptions they cause. (Courtesy: ORF)

# Are some routes more prone to air turbulence? Will climate change make it worse?

By Doug Drury

A little bit of turbulence is a common experience for air travellers. Severe incidents are rare – but when they occur they can be deadly.

The recent Singapore Airlines flight SQ321 from London to Singapore shows the danger. An encounter with extreme turbulence during normal flight left one person dead from a presumed heart attack and several others badly injured. The flight diverted to land in Bangkok so the severely injured passengers could receive hospital treatment.

Air turbulence can happen anywhere, but is far more common on some routes than on others.

Climate change is expected to boost the chances of air turbulence, and make it more intense.

In fact, some research indicates turbulence has already worsened over the past few decades.

## Where does turbulence happen?

Nearly every flight experiences turbulence in one form or another.

If an aircraft is taking off or landing behind another aircraft, the wind generated by the engine and wingtips of the lead aircraft can cause “wake turbulence” for the one behind. Close to ground level, there may be turbulence due to strong winds associated with weather patterns moving through the area near an airport.

At higher altitudes, there may be wake turbulence again (if flying close to another aircraft),

or turbulence due to updrafts or downdrafts from a thunderstorm.

Another kind of turbulence that occurs at higher altitudes is harder to predict or avoid. So-called “clear-air turbulence” is invisible, as the name suggests. It is often caused by warmer air rising into cooler air, and is generally expected to get worse due to climate change.

At the most basic level turbulence is the result of two or more wind events colliding and creating eddies, or swirls of disrupted airflow.

It often occurs near mountain ranges, as wind flowing over the terrain accelerates upward.

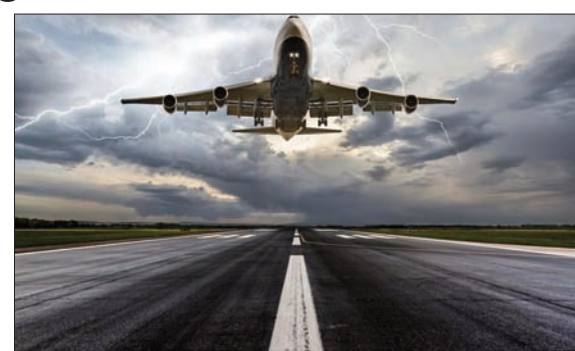
Turbulence also often occurs at the edges of the jet streams. These are narrow bands of strong, high-altitude winds circling the globe.

Aircraft often travel in the jet streams to get a speed boost – but when entering or leaving the jet stream, there may be some turbulence as it crosses the boundary with the slower winds outside.

## What are the most turbulent routes?

It is possible to map turbulence patterns over the whole world. Airlines use these maps to plan in advance for alternate airports or other essential contingencies.

While turbulence changes with weather conditions, some regions and routes are more prone to it than others. As you can see from the list below, the majority of the most turbulent routes travel close to mountains.



In Australia, the highest average turbulence in 2023 occurred on the Brisbane to Sydney route, followed by Melbourne to Sydney and Brisbane to Melbourne.

## Climate change may increase turbulence

How will climate change affect the future of aviation?

A study published last year found evidence of large increases in clear-air turbulence between 1979 and 2020. In some locations severe turbulence increased by as much as 55 per cent.

In 2017, a different study used climate modelling to project that clear-air turbulence may be four times as common as it used to be by 2050, under some climate change scenarios.

## What can be done about turbulence?

What can be done to mitigate turbulence? Technology to detect turbulence is still in the research and development phase, so pilots use the knowledge they have from weather radar to determine the best plan to avoid weather patterns with high levels of moisture directly ahead of their flight path.

Weather radar imagery shows the pilots where the most intense turbulence can be expected, and they work with air traffic control to avoid those areas.

When turbulence is encountered unexpectedly, the pilots immediately turn on the “fasten seatbelt” sign and reduce engine thrust to slow down the plane. They will also be in touch with air traffic control to find better conditions either by climbing or descending to smoother air.

Ground-based meteorological centres can see weather patterns developing with the assistance of satellites. They provide this information to flight crews in real time, so the crew knows the weather to expect throughout their flight. This can also include areas of expected turbulence if storms develop along the intended flight route.

It seems we are heading into more turbulent times. Airlines will do all they can to reduce the impact on planes and passengers. But for the average traveller, the message is simple: when they tell you to fasten your seatbelt, you should listen. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)



Israel summons ambassadors from the 3 European countries, recalls its own ambassadors

## Norway, Ireland and Spain say they are recognizing a Palestinian state, deepening Israel's isolation

**TEL AVIV, May 22:** Norway, Ireland and Spain said on Wednesday they are recognizing a Palestinian state, in a historic but largely symbolic move that deepens Israel's isolation more than seven months into its grinding war against Hamas in Gaza.

The announcements came as the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is seeking arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his defense minister and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is considering allegations of genocide that Israel has strenuously denied.

Palestinians welcomed the announcements as an affirmation of their decades-long quest for statehood in east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — territories Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war and still controls.

Israel recalled its ambassadors to the three countries and summoned their envoys, accusing the Europeans of rewarding the militant Hamas group for its October 7 attack that triggered the war.

Netanyahu's government, which is opposed to Palestinian statehood, says the conflict can only be resolved through direct negotiations, which last collapsed over 15 years ago.

As if to underline the point, Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir paid a provocative visit Wednesday to a



flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem sacred to Jews and Muslims in a move that could escalate tensions across the region.

Ben-Gvir said the visit was a response to the move by the three European countries. "We will not even allow a statement about a Palestinian state," he said.

The Al-Aqsa mosque compound is the third holiest site in Islam, and the hilltop on which it stands is the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount.

With their formal recognition, planned for May 28, the three countries will join some 140 — more than two-thirds of the United Nations — that have recognized the state of Palestine over the years. The United States and Britain, among others, have backed the idea of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel but say it should come as part of a negotiated settlement.

The announcements from Europe came in a swift cascade. Norway, which helped broker the Oslo accords that kicked off the peace process in the 1990s, was the first to announce its decision, with Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store saying "there cannot be peace in the Middle East if there is no recognition."

Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris called it an "historic and important day for Ireland and for Palestine," saying the announcements had been coordinated and that other countries might join "in the weeks ahead."

The international community has long viewed the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel as the only realistic way to resolve the conflict, and in past weeks several European Union countries have indicated they plan to recognize a Palestinian state to further those efforts.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who announced his country's decision before parliament, has spent months touring European and Middle Eastern

countries to garner support for recognition, as well as for a possible cease-fire in Gaza.

"This recognition is not against anyone, it is not against the Israeli people," Sanchez said. "It is an act in favor of peace, justice and moral consistency." He said it was clear that Netanyahu "does not have a project for peace," while acknowledging that "the fight against the terrorist group Hamas is legitimate."

Israel's government harshly condemned the decision taken by the three countries. Foreign Minister Israel Katz recalled Israel's ambassadors and summoned the three countries' envoys in Israel. He said they would watch grisly video footage of the October 7 attack.

"History will remember that Spain, Norway, and Ireland decided to award a gold medal to Hamas murderers and rapists," he said. He also said the announcement would undermine talks aimed at a cease-fire and hostage release in Gaza that came to a standstill earlier this month. President Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, welcomed the moves toward recognition, saying they would contribute to efforts to bring about a two-state solution.

Hamas also welcomed the decisions and called on other nations to "recognize our legitimate

rights and support the struggle of our people for liberation and independence, and ending the Zionist occupation of our land."

Hamas, which Western countries and Israel view as a terrorist group, does not recognize Israel's existence but has indicated it might agree to a state on the 1967 lines, at least on an interim basis.

The announcements are unlikely to have any impact on the ground. Israel annexed east Jerusalem and considers it part of its capital, and in the occupied West Bank it has built scores of Jewish settlements that are now home to over 5,000,000 Israelis. The settlers have Israeli citizenship, while the 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank live under seemingly open-ended Israeli military rule.

In Gaza, the war is still raging, and Netanyahu has said Israel will maintain open-ended security control of the territory even after any defeat of Hamas.

Hugh Lovatt, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said "recognition is a tangible step towards a viable political track leading to Palestinian self-determination."

But in order for it to have an impact, he said, it must come with "tangible steps to counter Israel's annexation and settlement of Palestinian territory — such as banning settlement products and financial services." (AP)

## Russian attacks on Ukraine power grid touch Kyiv with blackouts ahead of peak demand

**KYIV, May 22:** Sustained Russian attacks on Ukraine's power grid in recent weeks have forced leaders of the war-ravaged country to institute nationwide rolling blackouts. Without adequate air defences to counter assaults and allow for repairs, though, the shortages could still worsen as need spikes in late summer and the bitter-cold winter.

The Russian airstrikes targeting the grid since March have meant blackouts have even returned to the capital, Kyiv, which hadn't experienced them since the first year of the war.

Among the strikes were an April barrage that damaged Kyiv's largest thermal power plant and a massive attack on May 8 that targeted power generation and transmission facilities in several regions.

In all, half of Ukraine's energy system was damaged, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said. Entire apartment blocks in the capital went dark. The city's military administration said at least 10 per cent of consumers were disconnected.

For many, it is a taste of what might be in store if Ukraine doesn't find other electricity sources before winter. With no end in sight to the attacks on the power grid and without a way to adequately defend against them, there are no quick fixes to the electricity shortages. Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko explained. Ukraine is appealing to Western allies for more air defence systems and spare parts to fix its Soviet-era plants.

"With each attack we lose additional power generation, so it just goes minus, minus, minus," Halushchenko said on Tuesday while standing outside a coal-fired plant in central Ukraine that was destroyed in an April 11 attack.

Any efforts to repair the plant would be futile until the military can defend it from another attack. "Should we repair (power stations) just for them (Russians) to renew strikes while we are unable to

defend ourselves?" the minister asked.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock's joined him on the plant visit, underscoring Ukraine's desperation to close the power gap as quickly as possible. The first major test of the grid will come in July and August, when consumption can mirror levels in the sub-freezing winter months, the minister said.

By mid-May, Kyiv's residents began to feel the consequences of Russia's attacks. A cold snap drove up consumption, forcing Ukrenergo, the main transmission system operator, to introduce controlled blackouts throughout the country. Ukraine can't generate enough power to cover evening peaks, and the shortage is greater than the country's ability to import electricity from Poland, Slovakia and Romania.

The April 11 attack on the plant destroyed generators, transformers and turbines — every necessary part to generate electricity, said Yevhen Harkavyi, the technical director of Centenergo, which operates the plant.

Five missiles hit the facility that day, and workers were still clearing away rubble on Tuesday as snow-like tufts of poplar cotton fell through a hole in the roof. The plan for winter is to restore power generation as much as possible, said Harkavyi. How that will happen isn't clear, he conceded: "The situation is already too difficult."

Ukraine is hoping to acquire parts from long-decommissioned German plants. Harkavyi said Ukrainian teams recently went to Germany to evaluate the equipment, which was taken offline because it doesn't meet European Union environmental standards. It remains to be seen how willing European allies will be to invest in Ukraine's coal-fuelled energy sector given their own greener goals. (AP)

## 4 Indians accused of killing Khalistan separatist Nijjar appear before Canadian court

**OTTAWA, May 22:** Four Indian nationals accused of killing Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar last year in Surrey were ordered by a Canadian court to have no contact with several people in the community, as they made their first joint appearance before it in the case that has severely strained ties between India and Canada.

Three of the four suspects — Karan Brar (22), Kamalpreet Singh (22) and 28-year-old Karanpreet Singh — appeared in person for the first time in B.C. Provincial Court in Surrey. The fourth suspect — Amandeep Singh, 22, — appeared by video link.

Amandeep Singh remains in custody in Ontario where he was facing unrelated weapons offences before being arrested on May 10 for Nijjar's killing. Judge Mark Jette spoke to the men through an interpreter as he placed them under a no-contact order, before adjourning until the suspects' next appearance on June 25, CBC News reported.

Prosecutor Marcel Daigle said the time until the next hearing will allow the Crown to fulfil its evidentiary disclosure obligations to the suspects' lawyers. Those appearing in person wore red prison sweatsuits as they entered the courtroom.

Richard Fowler, the lawyer representing Karan Brar, told the Vancouver Sun, "it's completely understandable given the context why there is an enormous amount of community interest in this case. That level of community interest makes me...to ensure that those charged with these offences have a fair trial."

Attendees at the latest hearing for the men were searched before entering the courthouse, while the supporters of Nijjar held a protest outside.

Sheriffs at the hearing placed peoples' phones in plastic zipper bags and kept them outside the courtroom in plastic bins, with the judge warning observers that recording audio and taking pictures was prohibited, the report added. Nijjar, 45, was killed outside Guru Nanak Sikh Gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia on June 18, 2023.

The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in September last year of the "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Nijjar. (PTI)

## Singapore Airlines cooperating with authorities in probing severe flight turbulence incident

**SINGAPORE, May 22:** Singapore Airlines on Wednesday said it is fully cooperating with relevant authorities in the investigation into the London to Singapore flight which encountered severe turbulence, leading to the death of one passenger and injuring 30 others.

Geoffrey Kitchen, a 73-year-old British passenger, died likely due to a heart attack on the Singapore Airlines (SIA) flight SQ321, operating from London (Heathrow) to Singapore on Tuesday, said Kittipong Kittikachorn, general manager of Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok, to where the flight was diverted under emergency.

As many as 30 passengers were injured after the flight on May 21 encountered "sudden extreme turbulence over the Irrawaddy Basin at 37,000 feet about 10 hours after departure". The carrier said the remaining passengers aboard the Boeing 777-300ER aircraft carrying 229 people were examined and treated at the airport. SIA is fully cooperating with the relevant authorities in probing this incident, SIA Chief Executive Officer Goh Chien Phong said.

As many as 131 passengers and 12 crew members, who earlier arrived in Singapore via a relief flight on May 22, were received at

Changi Airport by Goh.

Transportation to their homes or hotel accommodation has been arranged for passengers travelling to Singapore. The SIA in its latest update confirmed an additional five passengers on board the SQ321 flight will return to Singapore on Wednesday. Another 74 passengers and six crew members, including those receiving medical care, as well as, their family members and loved ones who were on the flight, were still in Bangkok.

The airline confirmed that one crew member is scheduled to return to Singapore on May 23.

"For passengers with onward connections, we have rebooked them on alternative flights. We have also arranged hotel accommodation or lounge access for them to rest until their next flight," Singapore's flag carrier said.

"On behalf of the Singapore Airlines Board, I extend my deepest condolences to the family and loved ones of our passenger who passed away on May 21, 2024, in the SQ321 incident. I assure all passengers and crew members who were on board the aircraft that we are committed to supporting them during this difficult time," said Peter Seah, Chairman of Singapore Airlines. (PTI)



## Iran's supreme leader presides over funeral for president and others killed in helicopter crash

**DUBAI, May 22:** Iran's supreme leader presided over a funeral on Wednesday for the country's late president, foreign minister and others killed in a helicopter crash, as tens of thousands later followed a procession of their caskets through the capital, Tehran.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei held the service at Tehran University, the caskets of the dead draped in Iranian flags with their pictures on them. On the late President Ebrahim Raisi's coffin sat a black turban — signifying him as a direct descendant of Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

"Oh Allah, we didn't see anything but good from him," Khamenei said in the standard prayer for the dead in Arabic, the language of Islam's holy book, the Quran. He soon left and the crowd inside rushed to the front, reaching out to touch the coffins. Iran's acting president, Mohammad Mokhber, stood nearby and openly wept during the service.

People then carried the coffins out on their shoulders, with chants outside of "Death to America!" They loaded them onto a semi-truck trailer for a procession through downtown Tehran to Azadi, or "Freedom," Square, where Raisi gave speeches in the past. People threw scarves and other items up for attendants on the truck to touch to the coffins for a blessing.

In attendance were top leaders of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, one of the country's major power centres. Also on hand was Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas, the militant group that Iran has armed and supported during the ongoing Israel-Hamas war raging in the Gaza Strip. Before the funeral, Haniyeh spoke and an emcee led the crowd in the chant: "Death to Israel!"

"I come in the name of the Palestinian people, in the name of the resistance factions of Gaza ... to express our condolences," Haniyeh told those gathered.



He also recounted meeting Raisi in Tehran during Ramadan, the holy Muslim fasting month, and heard the president say the Palestinian issue remains the key one of the Muslim world.

The Muslim world "must fulfil their obligations to the Palestinians to liberate their land," Haniyeh said, recounting Raisi's words. He also described Raisi calling the October 7 attack that sparked the war, which saw 1,200 people killed and 250 others taken hostage, an "earthquake in the heart of the Zionist entity." The war since has seen 35,000 Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip and hundreds of others in the West Bank in Israeli operations.

Also expected to attend services in Tehran were Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and a delegation from the Taliban of Afghanistan, including their Foreign Minister Amir Khan Mutaqqi. Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani also flew in for the ceremony, along with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Even Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry travelled to Tehran, despite diplomatic relations between the countries being severed after the 1979 revolution. Egypt and Iran have recently discussed reestablishing ties. But notably, none of Iran's living past presidents — other than Khamenei — could be seen in state television footage of the

prayers. They include reformist Mohammad Khatami, hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and relative moderate Hassan Rouhani — all individuals who maintain some political cachet within Iran's tightly controlled political system.

Authorities offered no explanation for their absence from the event, which comes weeks ahead of a planned June 28 presidential election. As of now, there's no clear favourite for the position among Iran's political elite — particularly no one who is a Shiite cleric, like Raisi.

Iran's theocracy declared five days of mourning over Sunday's crash, encouraging people to attend the public mourning sessions. Typically, government employees and schoolchildren attend such events en masse, while others take part out of patriotism, curiosity or to witness historic events.

For Iran's Shiite theocracy, mass demonstrations have been crucial to demonstrating the legitimacy of their leadership since millions thronged the streets of Tehran to welcome Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution, and also attended his funeral 10 years later.

An estimated 1 million turned out in 2020 for processions for the late Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was slain in a US drone strike in Baghdad. In that ceremony, Khamenei openly wept over Soleimani's casket alongside Raisi. On Wednesday, Khamenei appeared composed, though he later hugged family members of the dead on his way out.

Whether Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and others draw the same crowd remains in question, particularly as Raisi died in a helicopter crash, won his office in the lowest-turnout presidential election in the country's history and presided over sweeping crackdowns on all dissent. (AP)

## Vietnam's top security official To Lam confirmed as prez

**BANGKOK, May 22:** Vietnam's top security official To Lam was confirmed on Wednesday as the nation's new president. He oversaw police and intelligence operations over a period when rights groups say basic liberties have been systematically suppressed, and its secret service was accused of violating international law.

Lam was confirmed by Vietnam's National Assembly after his predecessor resigned amid an ongoing anti-corruption campaign that has shaken the country's political establishment and business elites and has resulted in multiple top-level changes in government.

Vietnam's presidency is largely ceremonial, but his new role as head of state puts the 66-year-old in a "very strong position" to become the next Communist Party general secretary, the most important political position in the country, said Nguyen Khac Giang, an analyst at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong was elected to a third term in 2021, but at age 80, he may not seek another term after 2026.

Trong is an ideologue who views corruption as the gravest threat facing the party.

As Vietnam's top security official, Lam has led Trong's sweeping anti-graft campaign.

Lam spent more than four decades in the Ministry of Public Security before becoming the minister in 2016. His rise took place while Vietnam's politburo lost of six of its 18 members amid the expanding anti-graft campaign, including two former presidents and Vietnam's parliamentary head.

Lam was behind many of the investigations into high-profile politicians, said Giang. Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh is seen as the other major contender to possibly succeed Trong, Giang said.

The current vice-speaker of Vietnam's parliament was confirmed on Monday as the National Assembly speaker after his predecessor, Vuong Dinh Hue, resigned amid the anti-graft campaign. (AP)

## Bangladesh MP who went missing in India, found murdered in Kolkata

**DHAKA, May 22:** Veteran Bangladeshi MP Anwarul Azim Anar, who went missing in India, was found murdered in Kolkata and three people have been arrested, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan announced here on Wednesday.

"Awami League MP Anwarul Azim Anar, who went missing in India, was murdered at a Kolkata flat," Khan told reporters. "So far, we have come to know that all the killers involved are Bangladeshis. It was a planned murder," he said. The minister said that Bangladesh Police have arrested three persons in connection with the murder of the 56-year-old lawmaker. The Daily Star reported.

Asked about the whereabouts of the body, he said that they were yet to know about it. "We will soon inform you about the motive," the minister said, adding that Indian police are cooperating with the case.

The three-time MP and president of Kaliganj upazila unit Awami League went to India on May 12 on a personal visit to receive treatment. A general diary report about his disappearance was filed at Baranagar Police Station in North Kolkata on May 18, the report said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expressed deep shock and sorrow at the death of Azim, the portal said quoting the United News of Bangladesh news agency.

Azim was the AL lawmaker from the Jhenaidah-4 constituency.

"Jhenaidah is a bordering area known for its high crime rate. Azim was the local lawmaker there. The incident took place after went to India for treatment. According to what we currently know, he was killed there," the home minister said. (PTI)

Rita reached the 8,849-meter (29,032-foot) summit at 7:49 a.m.

## Sherpa guide Kami Rita climbs Mount Everest for his record 30th time, his 2<sup>nd</sup> one this month

**KATHMANDU, May 22:** Renowned Sherpa mountain guide Kami Rita scaled Mount Everest for a record 30th time on Wednesday, completing his second climb this month to the top of the world.

Rita reached the 8,849-meter (29,032-foot) summit at 7:49 a.m., according to Khim Lal Gautam, a government official at the base camp.

His first ascent of this year's climbing season was on May 12 guiding foreign clients.

"He is in good health and happy to have achieved this record," said Mingma Sherpa of the expedition Seven Summits Treks, which organized the expedition.

They were able to briefly speak to him while he was on the summit and was in good health condition, Mingma said.

Rita was still descending to the lower camps on the mountain, and Mingma confirmed Rita would not be climbing again this season and likely would travel home in the next few days.

He also climbed Mount Everest twice last year, setting the record for most climbs of the world's highest mountain on the first and extending it



less than a week later.

His closest competitor for the most climbs of Mount Everest is fellow Sherpa guide Pasang Dawa, who has 27 successful ascents of the mountain.

Rita first climbed Everest in 1994 and has been making the trip nearly every year since.

He is one of many Sherpa guides whose expertise and skills are vital to the safety and success each year of foreign climbers who seek to stand on top of the mountain.

His father was among the first Sherpa guides. In addition to his Everest climbs, Kami Rita has scaled several other peaks that are among the world's highest, including K2, Cho Oyu, Manaslu and Lhotse.

Officials said more than 450

climbers have already scaled Mount Everest from the Nepali side of the peak in the south this climbing season, which ends in a few days. Most climbing of Everest and nearby Himalayan peaks is done in April and May when weather conditions are most favorable.

Nepalese authorities issued hundreds of climbing permits to foreign climbers this season, and at least as many local Sherpa guides were accompanying them.

The mountain can also be climbed from China. The official Xinhua news agency reported 70-year-old Wang Jian reached the summit Tuesday, becoming the oldest Chinese person to do so.

Everest was first climbed in 1953 by New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Nepali Sherpa Tenzing Norgay. (AP)



# Exercise is classified in targeted places where there are substantial numbers of pathological people

## Integrated health campaign for at-risk population in 2 dists launched



### HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, May 22:** The Nagaland State AIDS Control Society (NSACS) launched a two-month-long integrated health campaign in Chumoukedima and Niuland districts on Wednesday as part of its programme to provide free health services to at-risk population in priority districts in the state.

The campaign launched at Chumoukedima and Niuland DC's offices will also cover all pockets of adjoining districts.

The NSACS will provide packages of services in counselling, screening of TB, HIV, syphilis, HBV, HCV testing, diagnosis of diabetes, hypertension, anaemia and any other services as per local needs.

Speaking at the launching programme at Chumoukedima, ADC Dr Kuzonyi Wideo said Chumoukedima, being a new district, needs an institution-based set-up of the chief medical officer's office to carry out implementation of the campaign.

He requested civil societies, NGOs and tribal councils to disseminate the information to the local people and create awareness campaign, as most of the people are unaware of the facilities.

During his keynote address, NSACS project director Dr Adu Sekhose pointed out that though the campaign is a tailored strategy for all the states in India, it is basically targeted in the Northeast.

"This exercise is classified in targeted places where there are substantial numbers of pathological people," he said.

Launching the programme in her office, Niuland deputy commissioner Sara S Jamir said if society and nation are to grow, it needs healthy citizens and to have healthy citizens, proper healthcare facilities are needed.

She said Niuland, being a newly created district, does not have a district hospital. The DC requested the stakeholders, especially medical officials, to reach out to the unreached pockets of the district, saying only then the objective of the campaign will be successful.

On HIV/AIDS and TB problems, Jamir said stigma and discrimination are more harmful than the disease. She urged the department concerned to conduct an intensive awareness camp in the district.

## Directives for car drivers and bike riders in Sikkim



**GANGTOK, May 22:** The Sikkim government made it mandatory for the drivers of vehicles to use seat belts and motorbike riders to wear helmets in the state with effect from June 1, according to an official order issued on Wednesday.

The order was issued to mitigate the number of accidents and to safeguard the well-being of all road users, Transport Commissioner-cum-Secretary Raj Yadav said.

Non-compliance with the rule will invite penal action, he said.

Whoever drives a motor vehicle without wearing a safety belt or carries passengers not wearing seat

belts shall be punishable under Section 194 B (1) of the Central Motor Vehicle Act 1988, the Transport Commissioner-cum-Secretary Raj Yadav said in an order issued on Wednesday.

The wearing of seat belts shall be applicable for light motor vehicles (LMV), transport vehicles (Taxis & Commercial) and non-transport vehicles (private and government), he said.

Similarly, every person riding two-wheelers shall wear protective headgear conforming to the standards of the Bureau of Indian Standards as per section 129 of CMV ACT 1988, Yadav said.

Whoever rides a motorcycle or causes or allows a motorcycle to be driven in contravention of the provisions of section 129 or the rules or regulations made thereunder shall be punishable under section 194 C of the CMV Act, the transport official said.

The order will come into force with effect from June 1, the transport secretary said. (PTI)

## RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat to arrive in Tripura on May 23



**AGARTALA, May 22:** Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat is scheduled to arrive in Tripura on May 23 on a six-day visit to the northeastern state, a RSS leader said on Wednesday.

During the visit, Bhagwat will join a training camp at Seva Dam, RSS state headquarters in West Tripura's Khayrpur.

"RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat is scheduled to arrive here on Thursday to join a training programme for RSS pracharaks from different northeastern states. He will have a separate session with the pracharaks," RSS's state publicity in-charge, Tapas Roy told PTI.

Altogether 112 pracharaks from different northeastern states are participating in a 20-day training programme, he said.

Bhagwat is slated to leave the state on May 28. (PTI)

## Three militants arrested in Manipur

**IMPHAL, May 22:** Security forces arrested three militants of the banned outfit Kangleipak Communist Party (Taibanganba) in Manipur's Thoubal district, police said.

"In a coordinated operation based on reliable intelligence, a joint team comprising state police, personnel from Gorkha Rifles, and Assam Rifles successfully apprehended three cadres of the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) faction led by Taibanganba near the Tekcham Lamkhai area at Khongjom Bazar of Thoubal district on Tuesday," they said.

Two country-made 9mm pistols with magazines, fourteen 9mm live rounds, five 7.62mm live rounds, four demand letters, three mobile handsets and one car were seized from the possession of three arrested militants, police said. (PTI)

## Sparkling lake has been engulfed by water hyacinths

### Tripura to undertake cleaning drive of Rudrasagar lake

**AGARTALA, May 22:** The Tripura government is set to undertake a major cleaning drive in Rudrasagar lake to restore boat service there in Sepahijala district to attract tourists, an official said on Wednesday.

The sparkling lake has been engulfed by water hyacinths causing the suspension of boat rides on the wetland, a Ramsar site.

Hundreds of boatmen who used to carry tourists on their boats have lost their livelihood because of the situation. Tourism minister Sushanta Chowdhury visited Rudra Sagar on Tuesday, the director of the Tourism department Tapan Kumar Das said.

After visiting the lake, the minister held meetings with the officials of the forest department, sub-division and the Melaghar Municipal Council to discuss how to clean the lake.



"A major cleaning drive will begin to clear the hyacinths from the lake to restore the lake's glory. The tourism department will provide funds to Melaghar Municipal Council to execute the plan," he said.

According to him, the Ramsar

site (Rudrasagar) has been engulfed by hyacinths as there is a bar on development works due to the Parliamentary elections but the government will soon clear the lake so that the tourists can enjoy the boat ride on the lake.

"The Neermahal, a wetland of

national importance, is the only lake palace in Eastern India. We want to upkeep it properly as it is the pride of the state. Not only in the country, Neermahal and Rudra Sagar, are favourite tourist destinations for the people of foreign nations too," he said. (PTI)

## Army's eastern command chief discusses border security with Mizoram Gov & CM

### HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 22:** Lt Gen RC Tiwari, chief of the Indian Army's eastern command, conducted high-level meetings on Tuesday (May 21) with Mizoram governor Hari Babu Kambhampati and chief minister Lalduhoma to address the security situation along the borders with Myanmar and the operational preparedness of the Assam Rifles.

A Mizoram government official reported that Lt Gen Tiwari, accompanied by senior Army officers, met with governor Kambhampati at the Raj Bhawan.

They discussed the prevailing security concerns along the India-Myanmar border in Mizoram and the readiness of the Assam Rifles to handle these challenges.

"The Army officers briefed the governor on the Assam Rifles' operational preparedness to address the challenges along the frontiers," the official stated.

Lt Gen Tiwari also met with Mizoram chief minister Lalduhoma at the civil secretariat, where they discussed border security and related issues.

The Mizoram chief minister later stated: "Today, I met Lt Gen RC Tiwari, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Command. We discussed increas-



ing local use of the AR ground, developing the Zokhawang bypass road for farmers, and addressing drug-related activities, among other topics, to improve coordination."

Mizoram shares a 510 km border with Myanmar and a 318 km border with Bangladesh.

The Assam Rifles guard the Myanmar border, while the Border Security Force (BSF) secures the Bangladesh border.

Since the military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, over 34,350 refugees from Myanmar's Chin state have fled to Mizoram.

Additionally, due to ethnic conflicts in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, 1433 tribals have

sought refuge in Mizoram since November 2022.

The smuggling of drugs and other contraband remains rampant along the India-Myanmar border.

In response to the vulnerability of these borders across Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram, the Central government has decided to fence the frontiers to eliminate the Free Movement Regime (FMR).

This move has been met with strong opposition from the Mizoram and Nagaland governments, along with various political parties and organizations.

The situation continues to develop as local and national authorities seek solutions to these complex security challenges.

## Northeast Startup Catalyst prog launched in Kohima

### HT Correspondent

**DIMAPUR, May 22:** The Northeast Startup Catalyst Programme was launched at National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT) auditorium in Kohima on Wednesday with the objective of fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in the Northeast region.

Altogether, 16 start-ups and 23 participants from Aizawl, Kohima, Guwahati and Imphal are participating in the programme.

Speaking at the launching programme as the special guest, Nagaland industries and commerce department director P Tokugha Sema said this initiative not only supports start-ups, but also strengthens the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Nagaland and the entire Northeast region.

He informed that currently, Nagaland has five incubators empaneled under start-up Nagaland, and NIELET is also one of the five incubators making positive changes



in the ecosystem, each playing a crucial role in nurturing start-ups by providing necessary resources, platforms, and mentorship.

Sema urged all the decision-makers, leaders, and resourceful individuals to actively support and guide start-ups and added that their assistance can make a significant difference in transforming innovative ideas into successful businesses.

He called upon the gathering to

work together to create an environment where entrepreneurship thrives, leading to economic growth and development in Nagaland and the Northeast region.

He expressed gratitude to NIELIT for organising the impactful programme and added that through everyone's collective effort, many start-ups will be successful and it will contribute to the socio-economic development of the region.

## MPCC observes 'Anti-Terrorism day'



**IMPHAL, May 22:** Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) recently observed "Anti-Terrorism Day" to commemorate the 33rd death anniversary of former Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi in Imphal.

Offering of floral tributes to the portrait of the former Prime Minister led by MPCC leaders marked the observance held at Imphal Congress Bhavan.

Talking to reporters on the sideline of the occasion, former chief minister O Ibobi Singh maintained that terrorism is against the society and it has no positive impact in any area.

He also said that everyone should join hands to eliminate terrorism and it was the vision of the late Prime Minister who ended his life in the hands of terrorists.

The former chief minister remembered the contribution of the former Prime Minister towards strengthening democracy in the country.

"Brutal assassination of such a great leader is a great loss not only for the Congress party but for the nation", Ibobi also said. Rajiv Gandhi was a leader who had a great dream of maintaining India's good relationships with its neighboring countries, Ibobi added.

To realize his dream, Rajiv initiated many good foreign policies. His assassination by terrorists must be condemned by all sections of the society irrespective of differences in political ideology, Ibobi added.

The former chief minister also recalled "Rajiv Gandhi's selfless contributions to the nation and his efforts towards development of the nation".

Ibobi reiterated the Congress party's stance against terrorism.

As part of the observance, Congress leaders and workers took pledge to stand united against terrorism. Besides, MPCC president K Meghachandra, senior leaders and members of the party attended the occasion. (NNN)

## Meitei, Kuki-Zo community members meet in Guwahati

**IMPHAL, MAY 22:** In an interesting development, some delegates of the Kuki-Zo community and some delegates of the Meitei community came together at a table in Guwahati recently along with some Naga leaders and Tamil delegates of Moreh town to find ways for the restoration of peace in Manipur, according to some delegates who participated in the meeting.

They informed Newmai News Network tonight that the meeting was held on May 17 at Bosco Reach Out Guest House, Alubari in Guwahati. The delegates also informed that the meeting was organized by All Manipur Christian Organisation (AMCO). They further informed that six delegates from the Kuki-Zo community and six delegates from the Meitei community participated in the meeting.

According to the delegates, five Naga leaders including the convener of the United Naga Council (UNC) Peace Committee and eight delegates from the Tamil community of Moreh town and others also participated in the meeting. The meeting had three sessions.

"This is the first open meeting of Meitei-Kuki-Zo delegates after several discreet meetings and efforts put by so many concerned leaders and peace activists for the restoration of peace in Manipur after the May 3, 2023, violence between the Meitei/Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities," the delegates further informed. (NNN)

## 18 cadres of different outfits arrested since May 16 in Manipur

### HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 22:** In the last week 18 cadres of different underground outfits were arrested as the central and state forces intensified counter-insurgency campaigns in the valley districts of this sensitive border state. Several arms, ammunition, and ₹ 2.22 lakh in cash have also been recovered in the operations during this period, officials said on Wednesday.

₹ 1.9 lakh in cash has been recovered from three active members of the proscribed PREPAK organization who were arrested in an operation in Thangal Bazar on May 17. Moreover, ₹ 30, 000 extorted from general people has also been recovered when three cadres of the proscribed KCP (Taibanganba) were arrested from a hideout in the Khongjom area of Thoubal district on May 21. A total of ₹ 2, 500 in cash was also confis-

cated from an activist of the proscribed outfit KCP (Taibanganba) in his arrest on May 16.

As per police report, the proscribed outfit RPF/PLA suffered a blow when its six activists were arrested from the Lamsang area in Imphal West on May 21.

Proscribed outfit KCP (People War Group) also suffered a bit setback when its four cadres were nabbed in the operation in Thoubal district on May 16.

During this period, one cadre of UNLF (P) was also arrested in his extortion drive.

Interestingly, the UNLF (P) is under peace talks with the government of India currently. The police said that the situation in the state was under control.

Search operations and area domination were conducted by security forces in the fringe and vulnerable areas of hill and valley districts.



# Women make up less than 10 pc of LS poll candidates: ADR

**Ongoing elections are first to be held since passage of women's reservation bill to reserve one-third of seats in Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women**

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** Less than 10 per cent of the candidates contesting in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections are women, according to an analysis of data shared by the poll rights body Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

Of the 8,337 candidates analysed, only 797 are women, representing a mere 9.5 per cent of the total candidates contesting across the seven phases of the elections.

This is the first election since the passage of the women's reservation bill to reserve one-third of seats in Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women, reviving a bill pending for 27 years for want of consensus among parties. The bill is yet to come into effect.

During the first phase of the elections, out of 1,618 candidates, only 135 were women.

This pattern continued in the subsequent phases, with women candidates remaining a small fraction of the total.

Phase 2 saw 1,192 candidates of which affidavits of 1,198 candidates were analysed and as many as 100 were women.

Phase 3 had 1,352 candidates, including 123 women and 244 with criminal cases.



In phase 4, affidavits of 1,710 out of 1,717 candidates were analysed and 170 were women.

Phase 5 had the fewest candidates at 695, with 82 women, while in phase 6, affidavits of 866 out of 869 candidates were analysed, and there were 92 women.

In phase 7, there will be 904 candidates candidates, with only 95 women.

This significant gender imbalance has sparked criticism from political analysts and activists, who question why political parties are waiting for the women's reservation bill to be implemented instead of proactively issuing tickets

to women. Dr. Sushila Ramaswamy, Professor at Delhi University's Jesus and Mary College, has emphasised that political parties should take concrete steps to promote women's candidacy.

"Political parties should have been more proactive and fielded more women candidates," she said, highlighting the effectiveness of seat reservations for women within party structures, as seen in Britain's Labour Party.

With women constituting nearly half of India's electorate, their under-representation in the candidate pool raises broader questions about the barriers hindering

women's full participation in the political sphere. Iftekhar Ahmad Ansari, associate professor at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), said.

Beyond symbolic gestures and promises, he stressed the importance of structural reforms to ensure equal opportunities for women in politics, underscoring the critical role of party leadership in promoting gender diversity.

"Political parties must prioritise gender inclusion in candidate selection and provide adequate support to women aspirants," he emphasised.

The issue of women's political representation extends beyond numerical quotas to encompass systemic changes in party dynamics and electoral processes, noted Farhat Jahan, a retired faculty member at Abdullah Women's College at AMU.

Mohammad Aftab Alam from the political science department at AMU pointed out the challenges women often face in forming independent political opinions amidst societal influences.

"Even those elected are often relegated to symbolic roles," he said, highlighting broader issues of token representation. (PTI)

# BJP expels Bhojpuri superstar Pawan Singh for contesting LS polls

**PATNA, May 22:** Bhojpuri superstar Pawan Singh was on Wednesday expelled from the BJP for "tarnishing the party's image" by contesting Lok Sabha poll "against an authorized NDA candidate".



Singh has entered the fray, as an Independent, in Karakat seat of Bihar, queering the pitch for ex-Union minister Upendra Kushwaha, an NDA partner who is contesting on the symbol of his Rashtriya Lok Morcha.

According to a communication issued by Arvind Sharma, the BJP's Bihar headquarters in charge, Singh, who is a member of the party's district executive committee in Bhojpur, has been expelled upon the directions of state president Samrat Choudhary.

In the letter of expulsion, Singh has been charged with "anti-party activities" and "indiscipline" and reprimanded for "tarnishing the party's reputation by contesting against the NDA's authorized candidate (adhikrit pratyashi).

Singh, who appeared to take the development on the chin, came out with several cryptic posts on social media platform X.

In one of the posts, he likened himself to the Mahabharata character Abhimanyu, who was "slain by demons, despite Lord Krishna and Pandavas being on his side, after getting caught alone inside a labyrinth on the battlefield (chakravayuh)".

"In today's battle, Abhimanyu is

once again alone but he enjoys the backing of the people", said Singh, who spoke of "building a new Karakat" and came out with a "vachan patra" (charter of promises) in a couple of other posts.

The belated action, from the party, comes with just over a week left before voting takes place in Karakat on June 1.

Notably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to hold three rallies in Bihar on May 25 as many constituencies going to polls in the final phase and one of these has been proposed in Karakat constituency.

Singh, who has been a BJP member for several years, had about a month ago turned down a party ticket from Asansol in West Bengal where fellow Bihari, actor turned politician Shatrughan Sinha, is seeking re-election as the candidate of Trinamool Congress.

Singh is understood to have chickened out after a massive controversy broke out over a number of his songs with lyrics that were allegedly misogynistic and denigrated Bengalis.

The actor-singer is understood to

have lobbied hard with the party for a ticket from Ara, named after the town where his home district of Bhojpur is headquartered.

He was, however, reportedly told by the party that it would not drop RK Singh, the Union minister who is now in the fray seeking a third consecutive term.

Finally, Singh threw his hat in the ring from adjoining Karakat, amid speculations that he may have been receiving the backing from a section of the state BJP which feels that by promoting leaders like Kushwaha, the party ran the risk of diluting its own OBC outreach.

Recently, when journalists sought Kushwaha's views about Singh, the NDA partner claimed that he suspected that the singer-actor had been propped by the RJD, the main opposition party.

RJD sources, however, rubbished the charge, pointing out that they were firmly backing ally CPI(M) Liberation's candidate Raja Ram, while admitting that if Singh cut into the votes of his Rajput community, traditionally supporters of the BJP, it will be to the INDIA bloc's advantage.

Although large crowds had turned up when the Bhojpuri superstar filed his nomination papers, and all his public meetings have been well attended so far, Singh initially appeared to be having second thoughts, as was evident from his mother Pratima Devi also entering the fray as an Independent. (PTI)

## Security beefed up in Delhi ahead of PM's Dwarka rally

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** Security has been beefed up in parts of the national capital ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally in southwest Delhi's Dwarka, police on Wednesday said.

The Delhi Police has issued an advisory informing the public about traffic diversions and asking commuters to avoid certain roads.

A heavy deployment of force has been made to maintain law and order. "Deployment of police force along with paramilitary forces will be there. As Dwarka area also shares its boundaries with Haryana, there will be strict vigil and extra checking points to ensure smooth functioning," a senior police officer said.

According to the advisory, the PM will visit the DDA Park in Dwarka's Sector-14, opposite Vegas Mall, at 6 pm to address a rally.

A large number of people are expected to turn up to see him, which may affect traffic on surrounding roads, it said.

Traffic will be diverted from ISKCON Chowk, Om Apartment Chowk, DXR T-point on Golf Course Road, Dwarka Mor, Kargil Chowk, and Rajouri crossing, among other places, the advisory said.

It asked people to avoid Dwarka road number 201, NSUT T-point to Vegas Mall, up to Peepal Chowk, Road number 205 and Road number 210. All seven Lok Sabha seats of the national capital will go to polls on May 25. (PTI)

## No lapses on govt's part in handling Prajwal sexual abuse cases: Parameshwara

**BENGALURU, May 22:** Karnataka home minister G Parameshwara has asserted there were no lapses on the part of the government in handling cases relating to the alleged sexual abuse of women by Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna and that the Special Investigation Team was probing them from all angles.

He also rubbished the opposition parties' allegations about the collapse of law and order in Karnataka and defended the state police, saying they have "done well."

"The SIT is seriously looking into this case (Prajwal Revanna) from all angles and they are quite competent. As soon as we got to know about this case, we first handed it to the CID and then formed the SIT looking at the gravity of the situation. There were no lapses on the part of the government. If the intelligence has failed here in Karnataka, the Central Intelligence has also failed because they let him fly out of the country," Parameshwara said. (PTI)

## BJP's Harsh Malhotra, AAP and INDIA bloc candidate Kuldeep Kumar in direct contest in East Delhi constituency

## Ghazipur landfill, parking major issues in East Delhi constituency, say voters

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** Inadequate parking space, unauthorised colonies and Ghazipur landfill are among the key issues for residents of the East Delhi Lok Sabha constituency, which may play a role in deciding the fate of the candidates in the polls.

Crime in some of the areas is also a concern for the voters in the constituency.

BJP's Harsh Malhotra and AAP and INDIA bloc candidate Kuldeep Kumar are in a direct contest in the constituency, which has 21,20,584 voters.

Vimal Singh, a resident of Kondli, said that parking and water are key issues which the people of the area are facing.

"Parking is a main problem of the area. We do not have a proper parking space here. Water supply also gets affected in the area on a regular basis. Besides, our area does not have clean parks where kids can play.

"During monsoon, the roads get filled with water creating troubles for commuters. Heavy traffic near Kalyanpuri is also an issue where commuters get stuck during peak hours," Singh said.

Suraj Kumar, a resident of Ghazipur, said that they want their MP to work for giving them relief from the smell and pollution caused due to the landfill site.

"We want relief from this landfill. The foul smell continuously emanating from the site is irritating. The supplied water also stinks several times. The smell and pollu-



tion increase due to the nearby meat markets," Kumar stated.

The East Delhi constituency has big marketplaces like Lajpat Nagar, Laxmi Nagar, Gandhi Nagar, Shahdara, and Krishna Nagar, as well as residential areas such as Vivek Vihar, Mayur Vihar, Mandawali, Surajmal Vihar, Preet Vihar, and Trilokpuri.

Federation of Lajpat Nagar Traders' Association general secretary Kuldeep Kumar said that the lack of basic facilities is a major concern for shoppers in the market.

"A number of women come from different parts of the city and also from neighbouring towns for shopping. The market does not have clean washrooms for them. The electricity wires are hanging.

"This area was earlier part of the New Delhi constituency. However, it has now become part of the East Delhi constituency. We demand that our marketplace should be

shifted to the New Delhi constituency again," Kumar said.

The seat saw a three-way fight in 2019 polls when Gautam Gambhir was fielded by the BJP, Arvinder Singh Lovely by the Congress, and Atishi by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Gambhir won the seat by getting over 55 per cent votes.

In 2014, BJP's Maheish Giri became the MP from the seat, while AAP's Rajmohan Gandhi was the runners up and former Delhi CM Sheila Dixit's son Sandeep Dixit was at the third position.

While pollution is a problem for the Anand Vihar and Ghazipur areas, the residents of Kalyanpuri, Trilokpuri, and Mandawali areas are more concerned about crime.

Mayur Vihar resident Rohini Kaul said, "The maintenance of parks in the area should be done in a regular manner. The drains are also not covered well here."

The constituency also has some unauthorised colonies. Residents of such colonies said that everyone talks about getting their colonies regularised, but nobody works for the betterment of such settlements.

"We want basic amenities, including water and clean streets. The issues of slum dwellers always remain on top priorities for the politicians during the polls. However, nobody works for us after winning the elections," Mohammad Asad, a resident of an unauthorised colony, said.

In his priorities, INDIA bloc candidate

## Want fair probe, justice in Maliwal assault case: Kejriwal

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** In his first reaction on AAP MP Swati Maliwal's alleged assault at his official residence, Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said he expects a fair investigation into the matter and justice should be served.

Maliwal has alleged she was "assaulted" by Kejriwal's personal assistant Bibhav Kumar when she went to meet the chief minister on May 13. The police have registered a case and arrested Kumar in connection with it.

In an interview to PTI, the chief minister said the matter is currently "sub-judice" and his comment might affect the proceedings.

"But I expect there will be a fair investigation. Justice should be served. There are two versions of the event. Police should investigate both versions fairly and justice should be done," Kejriwal said.

His aide Kumar is currently in five-day police custody in connection with the case.

Earlier Wednesday, Maliwal alleged that there is a "lot of pressure" on everyone in the party to malign her.

"Yesterday I got a call from a big leader of the party. They told me how there is a lot of pressure on everyone, they have to say bad things against Swati, they have to break her by leaking her personal photos. It is being said that any-



one who supports her will be expelled from the party," the Rajya Sabha MP said in a post on X.

"Someone has got the duty of doing press conference and someone has got the duty of tweeting. It is someone's duty to call the volunteers sitting in America and get something out against me," she added.

On Tuesday, Kumar was taken to Mumbai for the discovery of data from his phone which he had allegedly formatted before his arrest.

Police suspect Kumar formatted his phone after transferring its data to some person or device in Mumbai.

Kumar's phones and laptop as well as CCTV recordings from Kejriwal's house have been sent for forensic examination, an officer said. As Kumar's police custody is ending on Thursday, investigators are trying to collect all evidence related to the case, he said. (PTI)

**ANANTNAG, May 22:** Polling in four of the five parliamentary seats in Jammu and Kashmir having ended peacefully, the focus has now shifted to the reshaped Anantnag-Rajouri constituency which witnessed four terror attacks in the last 30 days.

The constituency spread on either side of the mighty Pir Panjal was originally scheduled to go to polls on May 7 but it was deferred to May 25 due to adverse weather conditions on the request of several parties, including the BJP, Apni party and the DPAP.

The parties also cited the closure of the Mughal road – an alternative link connecting Jammu with Kashmir.

Over 18.30 lakh eligible voters, including 8.99 lakh women and over 81,000 first-timers, will decide the fate of 20 contestants, including former chief minister and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti, in the fray for the prestigious seat.

The Anantnag-Rajouri constituency was reshaped on the recommendations of the Delimitation Commission in 2022, excluding Pulwama and some segments of Shopian and bringing in most of Rajouri and Poonch districts.

Mehbooba faces a tough challenge from National Conference candidate and influential Gujjar leader Mian Altaf and the Apni Party's Zafar Iqbal Khan Manhas, who has the BJP's backing.

Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) leader Mohamad Saleem Parry and 10 Independents are also in the fray.

Although the terror attacks left three people, including an Indian Air Force (IAF) corporal and a former sarpanch of the BJP, dead and several more injured, campaigning by political parties and individual contestants continued without any disruption.

The campaigning has now gathered steam especially after the Srinagar and Baramulla Lok Sabha seats witnessed record-breaking turnout on May 13 and 20, respectively, as voters put behind separatist-sponsored boycott calls of the past.

While the Srinagar constituency recorded nearly 38 per cent polling -- its second-highest in the past three decades -- Baramulla registered its all-time high voter turnout of 58.17 per cent.

National Conference vice president and former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah contested from the Baramulla seat.

The Udhampur Lok Sabha constituency in Jammu province was the first in the Union territory to go to polls on April 19 and it registered a 68 per cent turnout in the first major electoral battle in the Union territory since the abrogation of Article 370, sealing the fate of Union minister Jitendra Singh, seeking a third term from the seat.

The polling in the Jammu parliamentary constituency in the second phase of the Lok Sabha election on April 26 recorded a turnout of 69.01 per cent, the highest so far in Jammu and Kashmir in this election.

Spread across 18 assembly segments – seven in Anantnag district, four in Rajouri, three each in Kulgam and Poonch and one in



Shopian – the Anantnag-Rajouri constituency is witnessing a high-pitched campaign with leaders such as National Conference president Farooq Abdullah, his son Omar, Mehbooba Mufti, DPAP chairman Ghulam Nabi Azad and Apni Party president Altaf Bukhari making all-out efforts to garner support.

Prominent CPI(M) leader M Y Tarigami, who is backing INDIA bloc candidate Mian Altaf, reached out to voters in Shopian, while Omar was seen canvassing for him in Anantnag on Wednesday.

Mehbooba has been camping in Rajouri-Poonch for the past two days.

Officials said there has been just one untoward incident so far that happened during an election rally of the National Conference in which three of its workers suffered injuries in a knife attack in the Mendhar area of Poonch on Sunday.

They said a total of 2,338 polling stations, 2,113 in rural areas and 225 in urban areas, are being set up across the constituency. Campaigning is scheduled to end Thursday evening.

Multi-layered security arrangements have been put in place in the poll-bound districts, the officials said, expressing confidence that the trend of record-breaking voting set by central and north Kashmir will continue in south Kashmir as well.

Terrorists struck Kunda Top in Rajouri's Shahdara area on April 22 and shot dead a government employee, Mohd Razaq. This was followed by an ambush on an IAF convoy moving towards Sanai Top in the Surankote area of Poonch on May 4, resulting in the death of one soldier and injuries to four others.

The border districts of Rajouri and Poonch have witnessed some of the major terrorist attacks over the past two years, resulting in the loss of lives of both security personnel and civilians.

The attacks have also signalled the return of terrorism to the region, which remained peaceful between 2003 and 2021.

In two more back-to-back attacks on Saturday night, terrorists shot dead former sarpanch of the BJP Adaj Ahmad Sheikh in Shopian and injured a tourist couple from Jaipur in the Pahalgam area of Anantnag district.

The terrorists behind all the four attacks are still at large and efforts are on to bring them to book, the officials added. (PTI)



## Case registered against teenager's father under sections 75 and 77 of the Juvenile Justice Act

### Car accident in Pune: Juvenile's father, two pub employees sent to police custody

**PUNE, May 22:** A sessions court here on Wednesday remanded the father of a 17-year-old juvenile allegedly involved in a car accident and two employees of a pub in police custody till May 24.

The teenage boy's father, a real estate developer, and employees of Black Club pub Nitish Shevani and Jayesh Gavkar, were produced before additional sessions judge S P Ponshe.

The boy, before the accident, had allegedly consumed alcohol at the pub.

Police registered a case against the teenager's father under sections 75 and 77 of the Juvenile Justice Act, and against the owner and employees of two bars which the boy had visited before Sunday's accident for 'serving alcohol to an underage person.'

Section 75 deals with "willful neglect of a child, or exposing a child to mental or physical illnesses," while section 77 deals with supplying a child with intoxicating liquor or drugs.

According to the FIR, the real



estate developer gave his son the car despite knowing that the boy did not have a driving license, thus endangering his life, and allowed him to party even while knowing that he drinks alcohol.

A group of friends were returning on motorbikes around 3.15 am on Sunday after a party when the speeding Porsche allegedly driven by the boy hit one of the motorcyclists at Kalyani Nagar junction,

estate developer gave his son the car despite knowing that the boy did not have a driving license, thus endangering his life, and allowed him to party even while knowing that he drinks alcohol.

While the boy is out on bail, the father was arrested from Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar.

The prosecution demanded police custody of seven days for the father and the other two, stating that the police wanted to investigate why the father allowed his son to drive the car which did not have a number plate.

They also need to investigate why the man absconded after a case was registered against the son. He had in his possession a simple no-frills mobile phone when arrested, and "the police need to investigate where are his other phones," said the public prosecutor.

Seeking police custody for Jayesh Gavkar, employee at Hotel Black Club, the prosecution said they wanted to find out against whose membership the juvenile and his friends were given entry.

The driver of the Porsche who was with the juvenile at the time of the accident had offered to drive, but the boy declined the offer, the prosecution claimed.

After hearing arguments, the judge remanded the three accused in police custody till May 24.

Elsewhere, the Juvenile Justice Board has issued a notice to the boy, asking him to appear before it on Wednesday, after police approached the board with a petition to review its bail order. (PTI)

## BMC sets up expert panel to frame guidelines for billboards in Mumbai

**MUMBAI, May 22:** The Mumbai civic body has set up an eight-member panel that includes experts from IIT Bombay for developing comprehensive guidelines concerning billboards and outdoor advertising in the city, an official said on Wednesday.

The guidelines will balance the "aesthetic, economic, and regulatory aspects" of outdoor advertising in Mumbai, said the official from the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, citing a BMC notification of May 8 concerning the committee.

On May 13, a giant illegal hoarding in the city's Ghatkopar area fell on a petrol pump during gusty winds and unseasonal rains, leaving 17 dead so far and over 70 injured.

Rakesh Kumar, an ex-employee of National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), is the environmental expert on the panel, while IIT Bombay's Prof. Ajit Maji, Prof. Nagendra Rao Velaga, besides Prof. Shree Kumar from the department of Industrial Design, are other members.

BMC Additional Commissioner (City) Ashwini Joshi will head the panel, which also has Joint Police Commissioner (Traffic) Anil Kumbhare, BMC's Deputy Commissioner (Special) Kiran Dighavkar and Superintendent of Licence Anil Kate as members, the official said.

"The emergence of digital hoardings with high-resolution animations brings forth a new set of challenges. It necessitates a comprehensive assessment of associated risks, such as driver distraction on expressways, health implications of placement in residential areas, and environmental impacts like light pollution," reads the BMC notification.

A multi-disciplinary committee "will delve into the environmental, health, and traffic safety implications of granting permissions" of digital hoardings, it further states.

According to BMC officials, the panel is expected to submit a report in one or two months.



In the wake of the Ghatkopar tragedy, the BMC has announced several steps to avoid such incidents.

Civic chief Bhushan Gagrani met all stakeholder agencies on May 16 wherein he stressed that compliance with the standards prescribed by BMC and Mumbai traffic police was mandatory for everyone irrespective of whether advertisement hoardings are on government or private land.

The 120 feet x 120 feet Ghatkopar hoarding had come up on land belonging to the Government Railway Police (GRP) in the Chhedra Nagar locality.

In a release issued the same day, BMC said that the civic chief had asked the Central Railway and Western Railway to remove oversized hoardings from their premises.

Gagrani also said that no new billboard would be allowed in Mumbai until a new hoarding policy was in place, as per the release.

During the meeting the civic chief, traffic officials had also raised concerns over digital advertising billboards, saying these hoardings distract citizens and motorists, especially in the dark. (PTI)

## Nursing college bribery 'scam': Arrested CBI inspector terminated from service



**NEW DELHI, May 22:** The CBI has terminated the services of its inspector Rahul Raj, who was arrested by the agency while allegedly taking a bribe of ₹ 10 lakh from the chairman of a Madhya Pradesh-based nursing college, officials said on Wednesday.

Following its policy of "zero tolerance towards corruption", the agency sacked Raj under Article 311 of the Constitution that allows termination of services of government employees, they said.

Raj was caught "red-handed" on Sunday while allegedly accepting an illegal gratification of Rs 10 lakh from Malay College of Nursing chairman Anil Bhaskaran and his wife Suma Anil, an official alleged. The couple has also been arrested.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has also attached its Deputy Superintendent of Police Ashish Prasad to the headquarters. He was named in the FIR in the case.

Sushil Kumar Majoka and Rishi Kant Asathe, both on attachment with the CBI from the Madhya Pradesh Police, will be repatriated to the state police soon as their alleged role in the bribery racket has surfaced.

The CBI swung into action after inputs and surveillance by its internal vigilance unit indicated that one of the support teams constituted on the orders of the Madhya Pradesh High Court to examine infrastructure in nursing colleges in the state was indulging in corruption.

"CBI, ACB, Bhopal, had constituted seven core teams and three-to-four support teams, comprising officials from CBI, those nominated by nursing colleges in Madhya Pradesh and patwaris, in compliance of the directions of the high court for conducting statewide inspections to ascertain whether nursing colleges satisfied the laid down norms and standards for nursing colleges in respect of infrastructural facilities and faculty," CBI spokesperson said.

The agency said during monitoring of inspections being carried out by the various teams, officials of one of the support teams, including Raj, were found to be indulging in corruption.

The spokesperson said it was observed that they were giving favourable inspection reports in lieu of bribes collected through conduits. The CBI has arrested 13 people, including Raj, for giving favourable inspection reports to nursing colleges in Madhya Pradesh in exchange for bribes collected through conduits, the officials said.

"A case registered by the CBI reinforces its zero-tolerance policy towards corruption and shows that the CBI does not spare its own officials if found deviating from core values of the organisation," the spokesperson said.

The CBI probe into the nursing college scam case in Madhya Pradesh has revealed that its officers were allegedly collecting ₹ 2 to ₹ 10 lakh from each institute to give favourable reports after inspection, the central probe agency said. (PTI)

## JPC to be set up after INDIA bloc govt formation to probe 'Adani scam': Congress

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** The Congress on Wednesday attacked the Modi government over a media report that claimed that the Adani Group passed off low-quality coal as far more expensive cleaner fuel in transactions with a Tamil Nadu PSU, and said that a JPC will be set up within one month of an INDIA bloc government taking office to probe such allegations.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi claimed that a "huge coal scam" has come to light under the BJP government and through this "scam", "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's favourite friend Adani" has looted thousands of crores of rupees by selling low-grade coal at three times the price, which the common people have paid from their pockets in expensive electricity bills.

There was no immediate reaction from the Adani group but in the past, the conglomerate has rejected all such allegations.

Financial Times, citing documents secured by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), reported that Adani Group passed off low-quality coal as far more expensive cleaner fuel in transactions with the public sector Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (TANGEDCO).

In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi said, "Will the Prime Minister tell how many tempos were used to keep ED, CBI, and IT quiet on this open corruption? After June 4, an INDIA bloc government will investigate this mega scam and account for every penny looted from the public."

An investigation by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), reported by the Financial Times newspaper, has found that dozens of shipments of low-quality, high-ash coal bought cheaply by Adani from Indonesia in 2014 were sold fraudulently at three times the price to the public sector Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (TANGEDCO) as high-quality, low-ash coal," Ramesh said.

Adani made excess profits of ₹ 3,000 crore from this while the common person was made to suffer overpriced electricity and elevated air pollution, Ramesh alleged. "This is yet another example of the impunity with which the PM's close friends have enriched themselves in the past decade by violating the law and exploiting the most vulnerable Indians as they are left to struggle for basic needs like cheap electricity and clean air," he said.

## Kanhaiya Kumar assault case: Court grants bail to accused

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** A court here has granted bail to the 41-year-old man arrested for allegedly assaulting and splashing Congress Lok Sabha candidate Kanhaiya Kumar with ink, saying it has to balance the state's interest of maintaining public order with the accused's right to personal liberty. On May 17, when Kumar, the Congress candidate for the North East Delhi seat, was coming out of ally Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) office in New Usmanpur after a meeting with local Councillor Chhaya Sharma, a group of people attacked him. The Delhi Police arrested one of the accused, Ajay Kumar, on Tuesday morning. Metropolitan Magistrate Arushi Parwal heard the city police's application seeking Ajay Kumar's judicial custody for 14 days on Tuesday. The investigating

officer (IO) said it was necessary to prevent him from committing similar offences. Ajay Kumar's counsel, however, vehemently opposed the plea and sought bail for his client. The magistrate noted that the offences alleged included criminal intimidation, assaulting a woman with the intent of outraging her modesty and causing hurt, all of which carried the maximum punishment of up to seven years imprisonment. She said, "At the time of deciding bail application, the court has to balance two conflicting interests -- on one hand, the presumption of the accused's innocence and his right to personal liberty and on the other hand, the state's interest in the maintenance of public order and protecting the integrity of the investigation." (PTI)

A red alert indicates heavy to extremely heavy rain of over 20 cm in 24 hours, while an orange alert means very heavy rain of 11 cm to 20 cm, and a yellow alert means heavy rainfall between 6 cm and 11 cm.

Meanwhile, in the wake of the incessant heavy rains, a state control room has been opened in the Health Department Directorate here as part of efforts to strengthen epidemic prevention activities, Health Minister Veena George said.

A state-level rapid response team had already been formed by the department for epidemic prevention, she said in a statement. The control room has been launched with the objective of coordinating various activities under the Health Department and clearing the doubts of health workers and the general public, the minister added. (PTI)



Kasaragod until Thursday night, authorities added.

## Minor raped by autorickshaw driver in MP; accused held

**BARWANI, May 22:** An 11-year-old girl was allegedly raped by an autorickshaw driver in Sendhwa town of Madhya Pradesh's Barwani district, an official said on Wednesday. The incident occurred on Tuesday night and the police have arrested the 35-year-old accused, he said.

The episode triggered protests with people demanding strict action against the accused.

"The victim had accompanied her mother to a city hotel, where the latter works. After completing her tasks, when the woman stepped out, she could not find her daughter there. She finally approached the police after her daughter was nowhere to be found," Superintendent of Police Puneet Gehlot said.

The police then launched a search operation and later found the girl on the premises of a local fort, he said, adding that her medical examination confirmed that she has been raped.

On the basis of evidence and information provided by the girl, the police arrested the accused, he said.

After the information about the incident of rape spread across the city, a group of people staged a road blockade and closed the market demanding action against the accused.

Some organisations also held protests at a local police station demanding that the house of the accused be pulled down as a mark of punishment.

Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Abhishek Saraf said he assured the protesters of strict action against the accused. (PTI)

## Nagapattinam oil spill: NGT orders CPCL to pay penalty of ₹ 5 crore

**CHENNAI, May 22:** The National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Wednesday penalised CPCL over an oil spill in Tamil Nadu's Nagapattinam last year, and levied a penalty of ₹ 5 crore on the IOCL group company.

"Whether the damage is man-made or natural, the hazards of it are known in crude oil transportation and such incidents underscore the justification for imposing no-fault liability," the NGT's Southern Zone Bench of Justice Pushpa Sathyanarayana, Judicial Member Dr Satyagopal Korlapati, an expert member, said.

The bench had taken up the matter on its own, based a media report.

"The leak was from a 9km-long 20-inch diameter pipeline from the Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited (CPCL) Cauvery Basin Refinery (CBR) crude storage tanks at Nagapattinam to Karaikal Port," it was reported.

The NGT said that though it noted the stand of the Indian Coast Guard and the CPCL that there was not much damage to seawater due to the oil spillage, the bench felt it appropriate to direct an investigation to ascertain whether any remedial measures were required.

Therefore, a joint committee comprising the Central Pollution Control Board, Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board, District Magistrate of Nagapattinam, Indian

National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) and National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSM) was constituted.

Based on the reports of the various experts, the committee noted that no crude oil spill was observed, the visual observation of the shoreline was clean and no fish deaths were reported due to the incident, the NGT bench said.

The counsel appearing for TNPCB stated that as per the spill pattern, 10,000 litres of oil had leaked, whereas only 9,000 litres were removed or recovered.

"The CPCL has not accounted for 1,200 litres which has either mixed with the seawater or sand. These kinds of incidents/accidents are prone to occur in future also. Merely because the reports of the various institutions have given a no-impact report, the CPCL cannot be absolved of its liability. Even though the leakage in the pipeline happened not because of the negligence or mistake of the CPCL, but only due to an external force, the CPCL is liable," the bench noted.

The environmental law has seen a significant shift from fault-based to no-fault liability principles. This transition aims to address inherent challenges in holding polluters accountable for certain exceptions relating to reasonable case, third party risks, and victim negligence, the bench said. (PTI)

## IIT alumnus sentenced to life imprisonment

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** A special CBI court in Lucknow on Wednesday sentenced an IIT alumnus to life imprisonment in the murder of Mumbai-based fashion designer Adesh Bajpai in 2008.

The probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) showed that Bajpai had come to Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh on August 10, 2008, to meet his friend Rahul Verma, the accused in the case.

Bajpai had come to Lucknow from Mumbai on August 4 and had then gone to Kanpur on August 10 from where he was reported missing, according to the probe.

"The deceased Adesh Bajpai and the accused Rahul Verma were members of a group. Adesh Bajpai went with accused Rahul Verma on the night of August 10, 2008, from Moolganj Chauraha, Kanpur," the CBI spokesperson said on Wednesday. (PTI)

## Red alert in Kerala's Idukki, Pathanamthitta as IMD predicts extremely heavy rainfall

**High waves in range of 0.4 to 3.3 metres, sea incursions forecast along Kerala coast from southern Vizhinjam to northern Kasaragod**

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, May 22:** Amidst widespread rains continuing to lash several parts of Kerala, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued a red alert on Wednesday for Idukki and Pathanamthitta districts, predicting extremely heavy rainfall there.

An orange alert was already in place in these districts, which have been receiving intense heavy rains for the past few days.

While an orange alert was sounded on Wednesday in nine districts, including Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Malappuram, Kozhikode, and Wayanad, a yellow alert was issued for Kannur and Kasaragod, IMD said.

High waves in the range of 0.4 to 3.3 metres and sea incursions are forecast along the coast of Kerala from southern Vizhinjam to northern



**NEW DELHI, May 22:** Dancing with a 10-kg vest, 99 takes for a shot never used and the danger her small role would go unnoticed in an ensemble cast. The memories were many and so was the risk, and it all paid off, says Richa Chadha about her role as Lajjo in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's lavishly-mounted "Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar".

Chadha said she was initially worried her role as the lovelorn courtesan, who features in only the first two of the eight-episode series, would get lost. But she has always believed in "quality over quantity" and that didn't bother her.

"I'm really happy that the risk paid off because it was a risky part to play. It's so small and there's always a risk that it'll get lost in the eight episodes with all the actors that are there. Big star cast and other people are also getting a lot of love. So for that reason, I was afraid a little bit that it might get lost, but I'm really glad it hasn't," Chadha told PTI in an interview.

The 37-year-old star went through a rigorous process to bring out the tragedy of a courtesan, who dreams of a

romantic future while drowning out her reality in alcohol.

"Women like Lajjo are all around us. I think that's why there's so much love for this character even though she is from the 1940s and we are in 2024 now... There is this feeling of sympathy because everyone's had their heart broken in some way at some point. I'm yet to meet someone who hasn't liked the role because everyone can relate to a wounded soul," she said.

The actor said she was confident people would connect to the feeling of heartbreak, but did not expect the praise to be "so unanimous" and come from not just critics and fans but also from the industry peers.

"I also wanted to drive the point home that the industry tends to pigeonhole you. After a point, it's up to the actor to break that. Had I done another character in the show, it's possible that I would have been throughout the eight episodes and I would have still brought something new to it, but there would have been no element of surprise."

The challenges along the way were many.

The actor, who learned

## Richa Chadha on 'Heeramandi' role: Risk that it'll get lost in eight episodes, glad it didn't

kathak from a young age, rehearsed with a weighted vest of almost 10 kg for her final dance where, at one point, she is just whirling.

"I had to ensure that my feet don't drop the autopilot of the dance because she's having an emotional breakdown, she's not going to stop dancing. She has learnt it from a young age and it shows that someone who knows dance is doing this. It was important to not miss the beat, the footwork and to match the emotional turmoil with the camera movement."

Chadha remembers giving 99 takes for a shot that wasn't even used in the series. Bhansali wanted the "sehra" that she's wearing during her dance to fall on her face in a certain way and they kept working on it for take after take before he decided to drop it.

"This is the thrill of working with a di-



rector like Sanjay Leela Bhansali. In the moment, he is so alive that he doesn't remember who he is or who you are. He wants that memorable shot and he'll go to any length to have it. So between the both of us, we were able to bring our emotions to that moment and hold it till we got the perfect shot."

The actor is happy to have worked with Bhansali again after "Ramleela".

"Heeramandi", which marks Bhansali's streaming debut, premiered on Netflix on May 1.

Chadha is expecting her first child with husband Ali Fazal and is planning to take "a well-deserved break" after promoting "Heeramandi" to prepare for the next phase in her life.

"When I first heard of the release date, I was a little concerned about just sitting for interviews or travelling for promotions but I guess life has its own plans. So this is what it is. I just go with the flow. And, of course, I'm about to enter a very exciting phase. I think I deserve a well earned rest and focus on my health."

Other than acting, Chadha and Fazal have turned producers. Their first project "Girls Will Be Girls" has already won two awards in Sundance Film Festival and is now slated to be screened under the Cannes Écrans Juniors at the 2024 edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

The actor, who made her debut with "Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!" and has featured in films such as "Gangs of Wasseypur", "Masaan" and "Sarabjit", said she and Fazal are striving to "make small changes" in the industry to make it more inclusive.

"When we enter the industry, we know what it's about. Questions about a level playing field don't bother me... There is no level playing field in life and the industry is nothing but a microcosm of that. I don't think we've consciously tried to do anything extra or be an evangelist for any kind of change."

"We've just taken from our own experiences things we wished were different about the business and we've tried to see if we can make those small changes." (PTI)

## Sharib Hashmi's 'Malhar' to release in theatres on June 7

**MUMBAI, May 22:** Sharib Hashmi-starrer "Malhar" is set to release in theatres on June 7, the makers announced Wednesday.

The upcoming drama film is directed by Vishal Kumbhar and produced by Praful Pasad under the banner of V Motion Pictures.

Set in rural Kutch, "Malhar" is touted as a heartwarming exploration into three intertwined tales of love, struggle, and resilience. Hashmi, best known for his work in "The Family Man" series, "Filmistaan", and "Tarla", said it was a fulfilling experience to be working on "Malhar".

"Stepping into this powerful narrative is incredibly fulfilling as an actor. Working with Vishal on this film has been a privilege. The project itself is a rich tapestry, giving a platform to diverse voices. 'Malhar' is a wonderful confluence of three stories taking place in Kutch," the actor said in a statement. Kumbhar said "Malhar" is a love letter to the vibrant culture and resilience of Kutch. "Through these three interwoven stories, we celebrate the human spirit's ability to find joy and connection even amidst life's challenges. The film is a delightful blend of humor, heart, and a touch of the unexpected, leaving audiences with a smile and a sense of hope," the director said.

"Malhar" also features Anjali Patil of "Newton" fame, Rishi Saxena, Shrinivas Pokale, Vinayak Potdar, Mohammad Sanad and Akshata Acharya, among others. (PTI)

## Audiences eager to see serious biographical narratives: author Kai Bird on success of 'Oppenheimer'

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** Author Kai Bird, who co-wrote the biography of J Robert Oppenheimer that went on to inspire the Oscar winning film, says he visited the sets and excitedly went "Dr Oppenheimer, Dr Oppenheimer" when he met actor Cillian Murphy, dressed in character in a baggy brown suit and hat. The 72-year-old confessed that his visit to the sets of the movie, which went on to win seven Oscars, including best picture and best actor, was a little boring.

The same scenes and dialogues were repeated and shot "like 15 times" from different angles but then came that encounter with the reel life Oppenheimer, considered father of the atom bomb. "As he came over to me dressed in a baggy brown suit that looked like 1940s, in a silver belt buckle

from New Mexico, the Oppenheimer hat. I jokingly cried out 'Dr Oppenheimer, Dr Oppenheimer, I have been waiting to meet you for decades', and he laughed," Bird told PTI. Bird, who wrote the Pulitzer Prize winning 2005 work along with the late Martin Sherwin, hopes the massive success of the film by Christopher Nolan sends a message to Hollywood and Bollywood filmmakers.

"I'm gratified by the Oscars, but I hope this sends a message to Hollywood and Bollywood that audiences are eager to see filmmakers tackle serious historical and biographical narratives. I was very pleased with the film myself. I think it is an artistic achievement," he said.

Oppenheimer was a leading scientist on the Manhattan Project, a code name for the US government research project formed to produce

the atomic weapon during World War II. Bird and Sherwin were among the first in the long list of people that Nolan, who also wrote the script of the movie, thanked while receiving his maiden Oscar.

Sherwin, who died in 2021, worked on the book from 1980 until its publication in 2005. Bird joined as his writing partner in 2000 after a great deal of persuasion. "Marty was persistent and kept coming back. He knew I was looking for a new book to write... and I didn't have a job in mind. He said, 'If you do not join me, my gravestone, my tombstone is going to read: He took it with him'. He was very witty," recalled Bird.

The blockbuster success of the movie has rubbed off on the readership of the book, which Bird said has been on the New York Times bestsellers list for six months. (PTI)



## Don't like to be confined to a box while choosing acting roles: Manoj Bajpayee

**INDORE, May 22:** Actor Manoj Bajpayee on Tuesday said that he does not like to be confined to a box while choosing acting roles, adding that he is not affected by what others think of his choices.

Bajpayee was in Indore to promote



his upcoming film 'Bhaiyaji' — the 100th film of his career.

"My future films will be different from the ones I have done because I don't like to remain confined in a box. I get bored of playing the same kind of characters," Bajpayee told reporters.

"I like to constantly change myself (as an actor) by facing new challenges. I am more focused on whether I am

developing as an actor or not? I think a little less about what people will say, or to be honest, I don't think about it at all." When asked whether the audience will return to theatres for films centred on family and social issues, Bajpayee said, "In today's

times, the most important thing is that the audience should return to the theatres and watch films together like before and have fun. This is the biggest responsibility of every filmmaker and every artiste today." He said, "I believe that every aspect of a film can be fully enjoyed only by sitting in a big screen theatre with 100-150 people, no matter what kind of film it is." On the increasing importance of OTT platforms in the entertainment world, Bajpayee said that these days people are

watching films on mobile phones also, but it is not possible to fully enjoy every artistic aspect of a film on the phone.

On the possibility of him entering politics, Bajpayee said he does not understand the world of politics, but he definitely fulfils his responsibility of voting every five years, and after that, he gets back to his work in the enter-

## Sushmita Sen celebrates 30 years of Miss Universe title: What an honour

**MUMBAI, May 22:** Sushmita Sen on Tuesday celebrated the 30th anniversary of winning the Miss Universe pageant, saying it is an honour that she will cherish forever.

Sen was just 18 years old when she became the first Indian woman to win the coveted beauty pageant.

In a post on Instagram, Sen shared a throwback photo of her holding a baby from an orphanage that she visited post her win. "This little girl, who I met in an orphanage, taught an 18 yr old me, life's most innocent yet profound lessons, ones that I live by to this day. This captured moment is 30 yrs old today as is India's first ever victory at Miss Universe!!!"

"What a journey it's been & continues to be... Thank you India for always being my greatest identity & strength!! Thank you Philippines for the unending love & belonging... Three decades & counting!!" the 48-year-old actor wrote in the caption. Sen also remembered Colombia's Carolina Gomez, who was the first runner-up at the pageant.

"I remember & celebrate your grace my beautiful @caro-gomezfilm," she added.

Sen further thanked her fans for their constant support. "To all my loved fans, friends, family & well wishers around the world... know that, each one of you has made a difference to my life & inspired me in ways you may never know!! I feel the love!! Thank you!!! WHAT AN HONOUR!!! Here's to the next #30," she said.

After winning the title, Sen ventured into the film industry and made her debut with "Dastak" in 1996. She went on to work in several projects including "Zor", "Main Hoon Na", "Biwi No 1", "Aankhen", "Maine Pyaar Kyun Kiya" and "Dulha Mil Gaya".

She recently appeared in Disney+ Hotstar's series "Aarya", where she essayed the lead role of Aarya Sareen. (PTI)



tainment world. (PTI)



# Playing Carlsen in his home turf not a challenge for me: Praggnanandhaa

**STAVANGER (NORWAY), May 22:** Having beaten Magnus Carlsen several times in the last couple of years, young Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa feels he will be under no pressure when he takes on the multiple-time world champion in his home turf during the Norway Chess tournament, which gets underway here on May 27.

Praggnanandhaa last beat the 33-year-old Carlsen in the Superbet rapid and blitz tournament, a part of the Grand Chess Tour, in Warsaw earlier this month.

"I don't think playing Magnus in his home turf is a challenge for me. Usually, it matters to the player playing in his home but it won't matter so much for me," said Praggnanandhaa, who will also have his sister R. Vaishali playing the Norway Chess Women's Tournament for the first time. The 11-day tournament will see a very strong field including the likes of world champion Ding Liren and Hikaru Nakamura besides home favourite Carlsen.

Reflecting on his contest with Carlsen at last year's FIDE World Cup where Praggnanandhaa gave the Norwegian a tough challenge, the Indian GM said the experience here would help him in future competitions.

"I always enjoy a good challenge. After the World Cup last year, this will be my first classical game with him. I am quite excited to play him and equally excited to play the others. No doubt the ex-



perience here will help me in future tournaments," said Praggnanandhaa in a Norway Chess release.

"I am very happy and excited to play in Norway Chess. The field is extremely strong. This is perhaps the strongest field I have played and I see this as an opportunity and a challenge to give my best. 'I am also looking forward to play in this time control which I have not played anywhere else,' added the 18-year-old.

The tournament will be played in a double round-robin format

with a time control of 120 minutes. The teenaged Indian GM also expressed happiness with the growth of chess worldwide.

"It is a busy schedule this year. After the Norway Chess, we move to Budapest for the Chess Olympiad and I will also be playing the Global Chess League later this year. It is really good to have such an exciting league which I think will definitely help grow the game. 'As a chess fan, I'm happy to see this league grow. For now, my focus is on Norway Chess and I am

physically and mentally well-prepared to do my best there."

With sister Vaishali competing in the women's category, Praggnanandhaa said he will also be tracking her progress in the tournament.

"I am happy to see an exclusive women's tournament being introduced in Norway Chess. It is a very good initiative because there are not many tournaments for women. This will encourage other organizations to come up with women's tournaments too. 'My sister also will be playing

there. I am looking forward to see how she will do," he said.

List of participants at Norway Chess: Men's section: Magnus Carlsen (Norway), Fabiano Caruana (USA), Hikaru Nakamura (USA), Ding Liren (China), 5. Alireza Firouzja (France), R. Praggnanandhaa Rameshbabu (India).

Women's section: Koneru Humpy (India), Lei Tingjie (China), Ju Wenjun (China), Anna Muzychuk (Ukraine), R. Vaishali (India), Pia Cramling (Sweden). (PTI)

## SRH will continue to play aggressive brand of cricket, says Helmot



**AHMEDABAD, May 22:** Sunrisers Hyderabad will continue to play their aggressive brand of cricket despite the crushing loss against Kolkata Knight Riders to earn a place in the IPL final, said SRH assistant coach Simon Helmot.

SRH suffered an eight-wicket hammering from a rampant Kolkata Knight Riders, who marched into the final for the fourth time after chasing a paltry total of 160 with more than six overs to spare in Qualifier 1 on Tuesday.

"Look, take nothing away from us. We're still going to play our brand of cricket and tonight wasn't our night. That happens," Helmot told the media here on Tuesday.

"We're going to put this game aside very, very quickly because we have to move on in a couple of days' time and play in Chennai obviously against RCB or Rajasthan."

SRH will get another chance to secure a spot in the final in Qualifier 2 when they take on the winner of the Eliminator between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Rajasthan Royals on May 24 in Chennai.

One of the reasons for SRH's failure was Travis Head's early dismissal. Head was removed for a second consecutive duck by fellow Australian Mitchell Starc, but Helmot said the ultra-aggressive opener will be ready for a fight in Qualifier 2.

"There's two heavyweight fighters. Travis Head, who likes to score quickly and be aggressive

and obviously Mitchell Starc, who is a really aggressive bowler. At times there's only one winner," said Helmot.

"We've seen over the season, Travis has been on top of the bowlers, so we want Travis to continue to play his positive and aggressive way," he said.

"Him and Abbie (Abhishek Sharma) have been a tremendous partnership up the top for us so onwards and upwards we don't concern ourselves about the dismissals. Obviously he wants to score runs and I know that Travis will be back bigger and better on the 24th," he said.

Historically, teams have won five games while chasing at the Narendra Modi stadium and only twice have teams, who batted first, could successfully defend totals.

SRH skipper Pat Cummins opted to bat and in hindsight the decision proved wrong since Starc utilised early evening conditions on a placid wicket to strike three inside the powerplay and set up KKR's win.

"Definitely, not anything to do with the toss. Unfortunately, today wasn't our day. They bowled very well up front. This ground has shown that you can score big in the first innings and put pressure on the opposition. It just wasn't our day," Helmot said.

"He (Starc) bowled very well. He bowled fast. He was managing to move the ball. He has been a quality player for a long time and that is why he was a sought-after player in the auction in the first place." (PTI)

## Archery WC Stage 2: Compound women's team in final, men miss bronze medal

**YECHAEON (SOUTH KOREA), May 22:** World Number one Indian women's compound archery team stormed into the final to remain in the hunt for a successive World Cup gold medal here on Wednesday.

The World No. 1 men's compound team, however, failed to live up to expectation and continued their below-par show to miss out on a bronze medal at the World Cup Stage 2.

The women's trio of Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Parneet Kaur and Aditi Swami,

who clinched the gold in Shanghai Stage 1 leg last month, ousted world no. 4 USA 233-229 in the semi-final.

They will take on world no. 7 Turkey in the women's compound team gold medal clash here on Saturday.

Turkey pipped top-seed and local favourites South Korea 234-233 in the other semi-final.

It was an overall easy sailing for the Indian women's team, who got a bye into the quarters after finishing second in the qualifying round. They eliminated Italy 236-

234 in the last-eight.

The men's team of Priyansh, Prathamesh Fuge and veteran Abhishek Verma, who had slipped to fourth in the qualifying round on Tuesday, lost to lowly-ranked Australia 133-133 (10-10\*) in a shoot-off.

The Aussies, who are world ranked 21st, took the Indian trio by surprise starting with a 59 by dropping just one point.

Aussies team of Bailey Wildman, Brandon Hawes and Jonathon Milne continued their fine run and overcame a one-point

deficit after second round, to make it 233-all after the regulation four ended.

The two teams were 30-all in the ensuing shoot-off but the Aussies edged out the inconsistent Indians by shooting two Xs (arrows closer to centre) to secure the bronze medal.

Having started their campaign with an easy 235-212 win over lowly-ranked Vietnam, India overcame tough competition from Denmark and top seed USA, winning both the matches in shoot-off. (PTI)

## Sachin Khilari defends gold at World Para Athletics, India surpasses best-ever tally

**KOBE (JAPAN), May 22:** India's Sachin Sarjearo Khilari defended his gold medal in the men's shot put F46 category with an Asian record at the World Para Athletics Championship as the country surpassed its best-ever haul in the global competition here on Wednesday.

India, now have 11 medals, five of them gold. They bettered their previous best tally of 10 (3 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze) in the 2023 edition in Paris.

Sachin heaved the iron ball to a distance of 16.30 metres, bettering his own Asian record of 16.21 metres set during the World Para Athletics Championship in Paris last year.

The F46 category in para athletics events is for those with moderately affected movement in one or both arms or the absence of limbs. These athletes have to transmit power from hips and legs into the throw.

In the case of Sachin, who hails from Karagani village in Maharashtra's Sangli district, he suffered a mishap during his school days leading to disability in his left hand.

The stocky 34-year-old lost his muscles from the elbow due to gangrene and despite multiple surgeries, his arm never recovered.

On Tuesday, India had reaped a rich haul of five medals to swell its tally to 10 (4 gold, 4 silver, 2 bronze). China is currently leading the medals tally followed by Brazil.

The Hangzhou Asian Games gold-medallist thrower told PTI that he was confident of taking the top podium spot.

"I was expecting the gold here and I am happy. I have also qual-

ified for Paris Olympics and hope to win gold there also," Sachin said from Kobe.

With three more days still to go, India are in with a chance of winning a few more medals including gold and head coach Satyanarayan said he was quite optimistic.

"We are expecting two more gold medals and hoping to touch the 17-medal mark," said Satyanarayan.

On Tuesday, Reigning Paralympics champion Sumit Antil had defended his F64 javelin throw world title, while Thangavelu Mariyappan and Ekta Bhyan also grabbed gold medals in their respective events as India jumped to third place in the World Para Athletics Championships here.

Antil, who had won gold medals in the Tokyo Paralympics and 2023 World Para Athletics Championships, sent his spear to a distance of 69.50m to stand on top of the podium.

The 25-year-old Haryana athlete thus continued his global domination in the F64 javelin event. He is the current world record holder also, courtesy his massive 73.29m throw while winning gold in the Para Asian Games in Hangzhou, China last year.

He also holds the World Para Athletics Championships record of 70.83m which he had produced while winning the gold in the last edition in Paris in 2023.

Compatriot Sandeep won the bronze medal in the same event with a throw of 60.41m. Sri Lanka's Dulan Kodithuwakku took the silver with a throw of 66.49m. (PTI)

## India suffer shock 0-5 defeat to Argentina in FIH Women's Pro League

**ANTWERP (BELGIUM), May 22:** India suffered a humiliating 0-5 defeat to Argentina to begin their European leg of the FIH Women's Pro League campaign on a disappointing note here on Wednesday.

Julietta Jankunas (53rd, 59th minutes) struck a brace, while Agustina Gorzelany (13th), Valentina Raposo (24th) and Victoria Miranda (41st) were the other goal getters for the Argentines.

The Indian women, who were playing their first match under new coach Harendra Singh, looked out of sorts and failed to create any threatening circle

penetrations in the first two quarters.

In a surprising development, former India captain and veteran goalkeeper Savita Punia was omitted from the Indian team lineup despite being named in the squad as Bichu Devi Kharibam guarded the goalpost.

Argentina looked far more creative and threatening, securing as many as seven penalty corners in the first two quarters.

Argentina got their first penalty corner in the fourth minute followed by another a minute later but failed to find

the net.

They kept up the pressure on the Indian defence with relentless attacks, entering the opponent circle on consistent basis.

The Argentines secured two more penalty corners in the first quarter and the second opportunity was put into use by Gorzelany with a flick to the left of India custodian Bichu.

The Indians looked a bit more confident in the second quarter but it was Argentina who controlled the proceedings.

Argentina wasted a penalty corner in the 19th min before Bichu made two fine saves.

Argentina were not to be de-

nied for long as they scored their second goal in the 24th minute from their fifth penalty corner through a variation strike from Raposo.

The Indian defence looked in disarray as Argentina secured two more penalty corners before halftime and their eighth just two minutes into the third quarter but to no use.

The Indians, on the other hand, looked better in the third quarter and played with much more speed and intent to make some bright circle penetrations but the finishing touch was lacking.

The Argentines, however, ex-

tended their lead in the 41st minute through a reverse hit goal from Miranda, which Bichu had no clue.

Minutes later Argentina secured their ninth penalty corner but wasted the chance.

In the 47th minute, Deepika's reverse hit from Udita's pass was saved by Argentina goalkeeper Cristina Cosentino.

Jankunas then came to the party and scored two beautiful field goals within a span of six minutes to seal the issue for Argentina.

The Indian women will next play hosts Belgium on Thursday. (PTI)

## It's hard to leave ailing mother in hospital but KKR is family too, says Gurbaz

**AHMEDABAD, May 22:** Afghanistan wicketkeeper-batter Rahmanullah Gurbaz has revealed that he made the difficult choice of leaving his ailing mother in hospital when his IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders sought his services ahead of the playoff clash against Sunrisers Hyderabad here as the team is also his "family".

Gurbaz, in his maiden game of the season, played a vital role in KKR's win over SRH by taking two vital catches and giving his side a blazing start with a 14-ball 23 on Tuesday.

He replaced Englishman Phil Salt at the top and hit the ground running to help the two-time champions enter the IPL final with their comfortable eight-wicket victory here on Tuesday.

"As a cricketer, you (should) know, what to do. (In) League cricket, only a few players can play. If there is opportunity for you, you should do best. If there's no opportunity for you, you should be prepared, well prepared for the opportunity," Gur-

baz told the media here after the match.

"My mom is still sick. I went (back) there and the call from here was (that) Phil Salt was leaving. They called and they messaged me that 'Gurbaz, we need you, and what is your feedback for us?', he revealed.

"I said, 'yes, I will come'. My mom is still in hospital, and I'm always talking to her, but this is also my family. I should manage both of that, my mom and my KKR family. It's hard, it's tough, but still, I need to manage it," he added.

SRH skipper Pat Cummins' decision to bat first backfired. Gurbaz said KKR had planned to bowl first had they won the toss.

"We all (had) decided that we should go and we should bowl first, because in this kind of moment, and team likes Sunrisers that have a strong batting side and you should know what (is) the total and then you go for it," he said.

"We bowled really well, actually. (To get a) team likes Sunris-



ers all out on 160, that was bowling effort. And then once we come to the batting end, we also not just try to, we should win the circle (powerplay).

"(In) my mind was (the) only (thought) that I should win the circle, because sometime in low total like this, you need to have a good circle, otherwise, match can be difficult in the end."

Gurbaz said it was the best he had seen KKR pacer Mitchell

Starc bowl after the left-arm pacer took three wickets in the powerplay to set up the game for his side.

"He was just unbelievable. The way he bowled today, he's one of the best, he has a lot of experience, he knows how to manage the big games. I saw him today totally different than other games," he said.

Gurbaz said Afghanistan players are preparing well for the T20

World Cup next month. He said franchise cricket is something that comes second and doing well for their country is always their priority.

"It's all about hard work. It doesn't mean that you come from Afghanistan, you come from India, you come from Australia, whatever. It's all about hard work, I think. If you work hard, if you know what to do, and it's help you in every situation.

"Afghanistan is not the same Afghanistan. We know what to do and how can we represent our country. Everything is good for cricket there, and we played really well, the last World Cup, and from the last six-seven years, Afghanistan is doing great," he said.

"Our mindset (is) not (just) to play for league cricket, our mindset is always to do something better for our country, and then come the leagues. If you do good for your country, all leagues will pick you, and that's the point that we play all the leagues," he added. (PTI)



# RCB score 172/8 against RR in Eliminator

**AHMEDABAD, May 22:** Royal Challengers Bengaluru scored 172/8 against Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League Eliminator here on Wednesday.

Sent into bat, Rajat Patidar top-scored for RCB with 34 off 22 balls.

In-form opener Virat Kohli made 33 off 24 balls before falling to wily leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal, while Mahipal Lomror chipped in with a brisk 17-ball 32.

Senior India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin bowled beautifully to finish with excellent figures of 2/19 in four overs while taking the wickets of Cameron Green and Glenn Maxwell off successive balls. Avesh Khan took 3/44 in his four overs.

## Brief scores:

**Royal Challengers Bengaluru:** 172/8 in 20 overs (Rajat Patidar 34; Ravichandran Ashwin 2/19, Avesh Khan 3/44). (PTI)



## Till I play Tests, I'll limit franchise appearances to only two events a year: Travis Head

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** Travis Head might have taken this year's IPL by storm but Test cricket remains his top priority and till the time he is playing the format, the Australian big-hitter would like to limit his participation in T20 leagues to just two events per year.

Head, who has enjoyed an incredible last 10 months, has been a nemesis for India with centuries in both the World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup finals. Currently, He has blazed to 533 runs for Sunrisers Hyderabad, forging a fabulous opening partnership with uncapped Indian Abhishek Sharma.

Needless to say he is sought after and asked how he plans to manage the lucrative T20 offers with his commitment for the 'Baggy Green', Head said it's a no brainer.

"This has been the first year in IPL for me in quite a while (since 2017). I would put all my eggs in Test basket for the moment, I will

IPL. Be home for two-three days and make the trip to the West Indies with family and start all over again.

"Look, we are very fortunate to do what we do and I am not going to do it forever. So try and make the most of it as we can, we are lucky that we are well looked after."

He then tried to put things in perspective.

"I know in a few years, I can retire and do nothing. I will have plenty of time to look back and wish I was back on tour, I would like to be in the moment, keep batting through and stay in the moment, enjoying the moment."

The performance that Head has delivered over the past few months, he believes that the seeds of it were sown early in 2023 when he came with the Test team, a hard-fought series that Australia lost 1-2.

"I think a lot of that has come from the Test tour last year, spending time here and working on things and also being a bit older, under-



continue to do that," Head told PTI during an exclusive interview organised by Prime Video ahead of their upcoming docu-series, 'The Test Season 3', featuring the Australian team's tour of England last year.

"After Tests, I will pick formats, and see in which different ways I am available for selection."

T20 events have mushroomed across the world with some like West Indies' Andre Russell and Sunil Narine appearing in multiple events, adding up to more than five a year. Having had a great run for the 'Orange Army' this season, Head is keen on coming back to IPL next year too.

"At this stage, I would like to be back here in IPL next year. Like I will play Major League Cricket (MLC in USA) this year right after the World T20 but next year might just look a lot different."

"Each year, you prioritise what you can and can't do. Next year, Test cricket is around, we tour the West Indies and probably I will not feature in many other franchises," the 30-year-old was categorical.

"Look, in few years when I am finished with Test cricket, then probably there will be few more opportunities to play a bit more franchise cricket. But at this time, I would try to limit it to a couple of franchise may be, and (focus on) Test cricket."

The last 10 months have been very hectic for Head starting with the WTC final, followed by the Ashes and then the World Cup where he came in during the second half after recovering from a hand injury. Right now, more than two months of IPL will be followed by World T20 in the Americas.

But the southpaw doesn't want to make a big deal about workload management.

"I will be home in a couple of days' time once we are done with

standing my game and its blueprint and how you want to go about it and being content and my family being around, all those things," he explained.

"In IPL, I have evolved continuously while getting better but I still have some work to do," he seemed confident.

His national team skipper Pat Cummins has been his SRH skipper and he says they have developed a chemistry where both know what to expect of each other.

"We are just close friends and just enjoy each other's company. Not too much game stuff and over time when you build relationships, he now knows how I will go about it (my job)..." he said.

"...if I need anything, I talk to him but he lets me do what I need to in order to perform. He backs me." SRH lost the first qualifier on Tuesday to Kolkata Knight Riders but will have another shot at qualifying for finals in the second qualifier in Chennai on May 24.

Asked if a documentary like the 'The Test Season 3' can be intrusive and possibly catch players when they are at their most vulnerable and want to privately get over a low phase, Head

"Every moment has its time and they understand and pick the right moments and it is never in your face. It's not like we go out in change room and there is a camera following us around."

"It's not intrusive in what we are doing and we are all quite used to lot of camera and lot of media," he concluded.

The 'Test Season 3' follows the Australian team's tour of England for the World Test Final against India followed by the Ashes.

Players such as Cummins, Usman Khawaja, Nathan Lyon, and Alex Carey will reflect on key moments of the tour with their families. (PTI)

## Yuvraj prefers Pant over Samson, says Hardik will produce something 'special' in T20 WC



**DUBAI, May 22:** Former India cricketer Yuvraj Singh has picked Rishabh Pant over Sanju Samson for the wicket-keeper's role in the playing XI and also backed under-fire Hardik Pandya to produce something "special" in the T20 World Cup despite enduring a torrid form.

India have named a strong 15-member contingent and four travelling reserves to be led by Rohit Sharma for T20I cricket's showpiece event, which will be held in the West Indies and the USA starting June 1.

Sticking to his preference for a left-right batting combination throughout the line-up, Yuvraj has leaned towards Pant over Samson for the vital wicket-keeper's role.

"I'd probably go for Rishabh. Obviously Sanju is also in great form, but Rishabh (is a) left-hander, and I believe that Rishabh has massive potential to win games for India, which he has done in the past," Yuvraj, an ambassador of the upcoming T20 World Cup, told ICC.

"Lot more in Test cricket, and he's someone who I feel can be a match-winner on the big stage."

While both Pant and Samson have been in sensational form in the IPL, India vice-captain Hardik has struggled to find his batting rhythm but Yuvraj remains optimistic about the all-rounder's im-

pact in the T20 World Cup.

"Well, the good thing is that the selection has been made. (Selectors see) how players have performed at international cricket and then they look at IPL form. Just not the IPL form," said Yuvraj, who was part of India's 2007 World Cup winning team.

"Because if you look at the IPL form, Hardik's not done well. Looking at his background for India, what he's done for India, it is important that he's in the squad. I think his bowling is going to be important, and his fitness is going to be important. And I think he might do something really special in this World Cup."

Talking about India's batting-order, Yuvraj wants Rohit and Yashasvi Jaiswal at the top followed by Virat Kohli.

"I think Rohit (Sharma) and (Yashasvi) Jaiswal should definitely open," Yuvraj said.

"Virat (Kohli) has been batting at No.3 and that's his position. And then you get Surya (Yadav) at four, and then you got a couple of big options."

"I'd like to see a couple of left-hand, right-hand combinations because it is harder to bowl at two combinations all the time."

Yuvraj also felt that Shivam Dube has secured his place in the squad rightfully, but felt bad for Rinku Singh and Shubman Gill,

## Sindhu sails to Malaysia Masters second round

**KUALA LUMPUR, May 22:** Returning from a break, two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu progressed to the women's singles second round with a straight-game win over Scotland's Kirsty Gilmour at the Malaysia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

World No. 15 Sindhu, who had skipped the Uber Cup and Thailand Open, notched up a 21-17 21-16 win over Gilmour, who is ranked 22nd, in the opening-round match that lasted 46 minutes.

The fifth-seeded Indian, who last won a title in 2022 Singapore Open, will next face Korea's Sim Yu Jin.

Ashmita Chaliha also progressed to the second round of women's singles with 21-17 21-16 win over qualifier Sih Yun Lin of Chinese Taipei.

Ashmita will next face third seed Beiwen Zhang of USA.

But it was curtains for Unnati Hooda and Aakasshi Kashyap as they bowed out in the opening round of women's singles. (PTI)

## Sunrisers Hyderabad batting approach was puzzling: Gavaskar



**AHMEDABAD, May 22:** (PTI) Legendary Sunil Gavaskar has questioned the "puzzling" batting approach of Sunrisers Hyderabad during the powerplay in the first IPL Qualifier, suggesting their reckless strategy may have cost them the match against Kolkata Knight Riders.

Having cleaned up his fellow Australian Travis Head with a peach of a delivery with his second ball, Mitchell Starc blew away the SRH top-order in his opening spell of 3-0-22-3.

SRH lost four wickets inside the powerplay to be dismissed for a paltry 159, a target KKR shot down in 13.4 overs to storm into the Sunday's summit clash in Chennai.

"It was a terrific performance, no question. Such an impressive display with both the bat and the ball. They took four wickets in the power play, and that's where the Sunrisers were pushed onto the back foot, really on the ropes. They couldn't recover from that," the former Indian captain told Star Sports Cricket Live.

"There was a partnership of sorts, but to me, the approach of the SRH batters in those first six overs was puzzling."

With Vaibhav Arora dismissing the in-form Abhishek Sharma in the next over, SRH's explosive opening pair were out for 13 runs.

Gavaskar said after losing two

key wickets. SRH's batters should have played more cautiously. Instead, they continued to play aggressively, which led to further losses and ultimately cost them the match.

"When you've lost two wickets and the two who have been scoring runs for you, a certain amount of caution is required. Sure, don't miss out on scoring opportunities, but don't look to throw your bat at everything. That's what we saw."

"They lost those four wickets, and losing four top batters means you can't really expect numbers five, six, seven, eight, and nine to get you to 200. So, that is where they may have lost it. But full credit to Kolkata for the way they attacked and took advantage of that pitch as well," Gavaskar said.

The former India opener was all praise for Venkatesh Iyer and emphasised his value as a versatile player, a top left-handed batter and a capable medium-pace bowler, even if he hasn't bowled much recently.

Venkatesh struck a 28-ball 51 not out in an unbroken partnership with his skipper Shreyas Iyer (58 not out; 24b) to seal their eight-wicket win with 38 balls to spare.

"He's been a very good player for such a long time. His first season, a couple of seasons ago, was outstanding. Then, as it happens to everybody, the second season is harder because opponents have a better idea of how to bowl to you," Gavaskar said.

"But Venkatesh is the kind of cricketer you want in your team. He's a top batter, a left-handed batter, and he can bowl medium pace. We haven't seen him bowl much recently, but he's a very good medium-pace bowler. He might not always pick up wickets, but he can bowl those few overs that can make a significant difference," he added.

## Virat is most impactful at No 3: AB de Villiers

**NEW DELHI, May 22:** Virat Kohli has had roaring success as opener in the IPL including the current season but his good friend AB de Villiers reckons the Indian superstar is best suited to bat at number three in the upcoming T20 World Cup in the USA and Caribbean.

Kohli has amassed 708 runs for Royal Challengers Bangalore in the season thus far at a 150 plus strike rate, shutting the critics who questioned his intent against spinners in the middle overs earlier in the tournament.

Rohit Sharma and Yashasvi Jaiswal make for a potent right-left opening combination but to accommodate Suryakumar Yadav at number three, Kohli could be asked to open at the expense of Jaiswal in the ICC event beginning June 1.

However, De Villiers feels the former India captain opening is not a good idea.

"I feel he's a number three batsman and that's where he's most impactful. He's almost like the captain of the batting team everywhere he goes. He keeps the calmness and the composure within the batting unit," the South African great told PTI in a select media interaction arranged by JioCinema on Wednesday.

"I know Virat himself really enjoys opening, which is great. You've got to respect that from a man who's played the game for many years. He understands his game really well and he understands what he wants out of the game as well."

"But if I was playing a TV game, Xbox, he would come in at number three in my team. I feel there's too much risk in those first couple of overs to go and ask Virat to take the game on, to hit the ball in the air. All I want him to do is to bat between overs 4 and 16-17, somewhere there."

"I feel that's where he's best in the world by a country mile and that's where he's most impactful," he asserted. (PTI)

## People in India try to find reason not to pick Kohli, he's my first pick: Ponting



**BENGALURU, May 22:** Legendary Australian cricketer Ricky Ponting is perplexed why people in India try to "find reasons" to not pick Virat Kohli in the national side and said the charismatic former skipper would be his "first pick" for the T20 World Cup

in the Americas.

Kohli's sublime form in the ongoing IPL has seen him leading the run-chart with 708 runs from 14 innings, though questions keep cropping up about his strike rate at the top of the order.

"He (Kohli) is the first pick

for me for India. So, class and experience like that, you can't replace."

"It's funny with Virat. I think people in India just always try to find a reason not to pick him or a reason why he's maybe not as good as some of these other guys in the T20 game," the former Australian captain and Delhi Capitals head coach told ICC.

Ponting feels Kohli should open the innings with captain Rohit Sharma at next month's T20 World Cup in the West Indies and USA, as Suryakumar Yadav and the likes are quite capable of prepping up the run rate later in the innings.

"They (selectors) have still got a decision to make (on the opening pair) because (Yashasvi) Jaiswal is in that squad and one thing they haven't got a lot in their team is left-hand batters."

"So they've got a decision to make with Jaiswal (batting position), but I'm pretty sure that they'll go with Kohli and Rohit

Sharma (as openers)," added Ponting.

"He can play his role at the top. And if you've got the right guys around him scoring (like) Suryakumar (Yadav)... Rohit Sharma's going to have a high strike rate. These other guys can go in there and play their way."

Kohli has scored a century, his eighth overall, this IPL season and five half-tons, a feat that has helped PCB make a dramatic turnaround to make the playoffs with six straight wins.

Despite all the talk about Kohli's strike rate of 155.60 this season, it has been his best in the 17 years that he has played for RCB, an indicator that he is improvising and trying his best to better it further.

Ponting, the three-time World Cup winner, said strike rates might have taken precedence over averages in recent times, but Kohli's utility to the Indian team can never be underestimated.

"The mantra I think for the

teams three or four years ago, was making sure that someone at the top of the order made 80 or 100, even if it took them 60 balls, it didn't really matter."

"I think it's sort of shifting now to be more of a strike rate based game where you can have a massive impact on a game with a 40 off 15 balls rather than getting an 80 off 55 balls sort of thing," added Ponting.

Kohli played a pivotal role in India's campaign in the 2022 T20 World Cup in Australia, scoring an unbeaten 82 against Pakistan and a half-century against England in the semi-finals, and Ponting said the stalwart was the most dependable player in crunch situations.

"I remember having this chat and some other chats I did for the ICC about there's some talk about Virat not being in their team only last year, but what happened when the big games come around, he was one of the guys who got the job done." (PTI)