



सोमलिङ्गं नरो दृष्ट्वा सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते।
लभते फलं मनोवाञ्छितं मृतः स्वर्ग समाश्रयेत्॥



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Key Activities

**Kalash Yatra | Bhajan Sandhya | Chanting of the Omkar Mantra
Mantra Writing in the Somnath Booklet
Narration of Stories Associated with Somnath**

Shri Somnath Temple Complex, Prabhavasthi | 8th –11th May 2026

“Somnath is that song of hope which teaches us that the power of creation is far greater than the power of destruction”

– Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi (Chairman, Shri Somnath Trust)



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To contribute to the divinity and grandeur of Somnath, and become a part of its glorious history.

Europe wants a strong NATO, shares US goal of ending Iran war, says Merz

Reuters
Stockholm, May 9

GERMAN CHANCELLOR Friedrich Merz said on Saturday Europe wanted to work to keep the NATO alliance functioning, despite differences with the United States that the Iran war has exposed.

Already high after U.S. criticism of Europe over defence spending and issues like immigration policy, the tensions have increased after Germany and other European countries refused to support the U.S. and Israeli war against Iran that began at the end of February.

"We are really willing to keep this alliance alive for the future," Merz said at a press conference with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. He also said Sweden and Finland had strengthened the European pillar of the alliance.

"We know that there are some differences. We know that we are seeing challenges, all of us, but our final goal is to bring this conflict to an end and to guarantee that Iran is not able to produce nuclear weapons," Merz said.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ CALM AFTER DAYS OF SPORADIC ATTACKS

Iran no closer to ending war as US waits for a response from Tehran

Idrees Ali, Erin Banco & Hatem Maher
Washington, Cairo, May 9

A STATE of relative calm prevailed around the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, after days of sporadic flare-ups, as the US waited for Iran's response to its latest proposals to end more than two months of fighting and begin peace talks.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Friday that Washington expected a response within hours. But a day later, there was no sign of movement from Tehran on the proposal, which would formally end the war before talks on more contentious issues, including Iran's nuclear program.

With US President Donald Trump due to begin a long-awaited visit to China next week, there has been mounting pressure to draw a line under the conflict, which has thrown energy markets into turmoil and posed a growing threat to the world economy. Recent days have seen the biggest flare-ups in fighting in and around the Strait of Hormuz since a ceasefire began a month ago, and the United Arab Emirates came under renewed

EXPANDED AREA IRAN CLAIMS TO CONTROL



attack on Friday.

On Friday, there were sporadic clashes between Iranian forces and US vessels in the strait, Iran's semi-official Fars news agency reported. The Tas-

nim news agency later cited an Iranian military source saying the situation had calmed but warning more clashes were possible. The US military said it struck two Iran-linked vessels

Israeli strikes kill 4 in Beirut, at least 13 in southern Lebanon

Beirut: Three Israeli drone strikes on vehicles just south of Beirut on Saturday killed four people while a series of airstrikes on southern Lebanon killed at least 13, including a man and his 12-year-old daughter, state media and the Health Ministry said.

The three drone strikes south of Beirut marked another escalation since a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah went into effect on April 17. Both Israel and Hezbollah have continued their daily attacks despite the truce. On Wednesday night, Israel's air force carried out an airstrike on

a southern suburb in which Israel said it killed a senior Hezbollah military official. It was the first strike near the capital since the ceasefire was reached.

Two of the strikes on Saturday took place on the highway linking Beirut with the southern port city of Sidon in which several people were wounded, while the third happened on a road leading to Lebanon's Chouf region killing three, the state-run National News Agency said.

An Associated Press journalist at the scene saw a dead body on the highway in the town of Saadiyat. AP

attempting to enter an Iranian port, with a U.S. fighter jet hitting their smokestacks and forcing them to turn back.

Tehran has largely blocked non-Iranian shipping through the strait since the war began with US-Israeli airstrikes across Iran on February 28.

The US imposed a blockade on Iranian vessels last month.

But a CIA assessment indicated Iran would not suffer severe economic pressure from a US blockade of Iranian ports for about another four months, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter, raising questions over Trump's leverage over Tehran in a conflict that has been unpopular with voters and US allies. REUTERS

How China's leader lost faith in his top military generals

Chris Buckley
May 9

THE PURGE China's leader, Xi Jinping, has inflicted on the military elite was plain to see at a recent legislative meeting. A year earlier, state television footage showed around 40 generals in the room. This time, there were only a handful.

Yet Xi indicated that an upheaval that rivaled those of the Mao Zedong era was not over. "The military," he said, "must never have anyone who harbours a divided heart towards the party."

It was a rare public reference by Xi to one of the worst political crises of his 13 years in power: He had lost faith in the military leadership that he had spent a decade remolding.

"When Xi uses the words 'divided heart,' they are heavy with meaning," said Chien-wen Kou, a professor at National Chengchi University in Taiwan. The phrase is found in ancient Chinese treatises that counsel rulers against treacherous generals, including a volume Xi has kept on his bookshelf.

"Even his most trusted and important confidants have fallen," Kou said. "Who else can gain his trust?"

The crisis threatens one of Xi's great feats: the transformation of the Chinese military into a formidable force with new aircraft carriers, hypersonic missiles and an expanding nuclear arsenal. And it comes as China's rivalry with the US has intensified, and as the Trump administration has put American firepower, and its limits, on vivid display in Venezuela and Iran.

China's war readiness may be disrupted for years by the very cleanup that Xi has said is necessary to purify and strengthen the ranks. What once looked like a limited



The military must never have anyone who harbours a divided heart towards the party

XI JINPING
CHINA'S LEADER

crackdown on corruption became a sweeping dismissal of dozens of top officers, and culminated in the downfall early this year of Zhang Youxia, China's top uniformed commander, who had appeared to be a confidant of Xi's.

"This is Xi Jinping's military," said Daniel Mattingly, an associate professor at Yale University who studies China's politics and military. "Why does he break the thing that he built?"

The corruption Xi has been hunting is real. But earlier internal speeches by Xi, not previously reported in detail, reveal another factor: a leader who saw in any sign of disobedience the seed of a political threat to his rule. He became convinced, analysts say, that the commanders he had chosen to modernize the military could no longer be trusted, their loyalty and effectiveness eroded by graft and cronyism.

Analysts say the upheaval has also exposed the tensions between Xi's two imperatives — preparing for combat and enforcing loyalty.

Early on, Xi appeared determined to avoid the fate of his predecessor, Hu Jintao, who was widely seen to have failed to establish his authority over China's military commanders.

Hu's directives to army commanders were "more like suggestions they would consider," said John Culver, a former CIA analyst now at the Brookings Institution. "Basically you had a system that was no longer responsive to the party."

After coming to power in 2012, Xi launched investigations against commanders who had grown wealthy, and overweening, under Hu, including some previously deemed untouchable because of their status.

From his first years in power, Xi also began entrenching a "chairman responsibility system," an overhaul that tightened his control over the military by giving him intelligence and control deep into its ranks. He declared his confidence in his own ability to spot the right commanders for promotion.

By late 2025, the purges were reshaping not just the ranks but the balance of power among remaining commanders. Analysts suggested that as the investigations deepened, there was growing turbulence inside the military elite, including between commanders focused on warfighting goals and officers tasked with enforcing political loyalty.

The final straw came when Xi moved to promote Gen Zhang Shengmin to vice chair of the Central Military Commission, said Christopher K Johnson, a former US government intelligence officer who is now president of China Strategies Group, a consultancy firm. NYT



Russia Celebrates Victory Day

Russian President Vladimir Putin is seen on a screen while delivering a speech during a military parade on Victory Day, marking the 81st anniversary of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II, at Red Square in central Moscow on Saturday. REUTERS

US proposes to hike minimum wages for hiring H1B workers

Press Trust of India
Washington, May 9

THE US has proposed to increase the minimum wages paid to hire an employee under the H1B visa program by 30 per cent over the previously fixed limits, a move the administration claims will help prevent foreigners from undercutting wages of US nationals.

The new rule, proposed by the US Department of Labour on March 27, seeks to increase the minimum wages for four categories from the entry-level to the most-experienced, contending that the existing wage levels were fixed 20 years ago and fail to adequately protect US workers.

Countries prepare to evacuate hantavirus-hit ship passengers

Madrid: Countries prepared to evacuate their citizens from the luxury cruise ship hit by a deadly strain of hantavirus that is due to anchor near Tenerife early on Sunday, as health authorities said the risk of the virus spreading was low.

The WHO briefed member states with nationals on board on Saturday on how to manage the process, advising active monitoring of passengers for a 42-day period from the last point of exposure. "I need you to hear me clearly: this is not another COVID. The current public health risk from hantavirus remains low," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on X earlier on Saturday. REUTERS

INDIAN NAVAL Ship (INS) Sunayna has arrived at Bangladesh's Chattogram Port on a two-day visit as part of the IOS (Indian Ocean Ship) SAGAR 2026 deployment. The visit aims to further strengthen maritime cooperation and professional ties between the Indian Navy and the Bangladesh Navy. "On its second deployment, IOS Sagar is crewed by personnel of IOR partner countries representing 17 nationalities, including Bangladesh; cooperating, training and learning together," the High Commission of India in Bangladesh posted on social media. AP

BRIEFLY



Peter Magyar delivers a speech after becoming Hungary's new Prime Minister in Budapest on Saturday. REUTERS

HUNGARY

Magyar sworn in as Hungary's PM on promises of change

CENTRE-RIGHT LEADER Peter Magyar was sworn in as Hungary's prime minister on Saturday, propelled into office on promises of change after years of economic stagnation and strained ties with key allies under his predecessor Viktor Orban. Magyar defeated nationalist Orban after 16 years in power in an April 12 election landslide, handing his Tiszta party a constitutional majority that will allow him to roll back reforms critics say have weakened democracy. Foreign investors and Hungarians alike have welcomed Magyar's victory, with the forint hitting four-year highs against the euro, bond yields falling and post-election polls showing more voters backing Tiszta. REUTERS

AUSTRALIA

Far-right party wins first lower house seat

AUSTRALIAN FAR-RIGHT populist party Pauline Hanson's One Nation won its first seat in the country's House of Representatives in a by-election on Saturday, a preliminary vote count showed. Britain's ruling Labour party this week suffered a widespread loss of seats at council elections. One Nation's first preference vote in the by-election was 42%, the ABC said, compared to the 6.6% first-preference vote it got at a federal election last May. AP

INDONESIA

Volcano erupts, rescuers find 1 body, 2 missing

RESCUERS ON Saturday recovered the body of an Indonesian woman who was caught in a volcanic eruption at Mount Dukono on Indonesia's remote island of Halmahera a day earlier, as search operations continued to find the bodies of two Singaporeans, officials said. The slain hikers were among 20 who set out to ascend the 1,355-metre volcano in defiance of safety restrictions and became stranded. AP

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

PAKISTAN

Forces kill five militants in Khyber province

FIVE TERRORISTS were killed in operations conducted by security forces in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the army said on Saturday. Based on intelligence, the security forces initiated two separate operations in the Tank and Dera Ismail Khan districts on May 7 and 8, it said in a statement. Four terrorists belonging to the banned TTP were killed in the military engagement in the Tank district, the statement said. In Dera Ismail Khan, another TTP member was killed in an exchange of fire with the security forces. PTI

BANGLADESH

INS Sunayna arrives at Chattogram Port

Blast at Dutch PM's party headquarters, no injuries

The Hague: A bomb that was pushed through a letter slot exploded at the party headquarters of Dutch PM Rob Jetten but didn't injure anyone, and the centrist leader vowed Friday not to be intimidated. Police said they had arrested a suspect late Thursday

at the headquarters of the centrist D66 party, but declined to release any further details including any suspected motive.

The attack took place during a meeting of about 30 members of the party's youth wing, who were startled but unharmed, Jetten said. AP

ANTHONY HOPKINS, AT 88, IS DELIGHTING FANS ON TIKTOK WITH SOME OF PRINCE HAMLET'S 'TO BE, OR NOT TO BE' SOLOILQUY

From Taylor Swift to Oscars, 400-yr-old 'Hamlet' flourishes in the age of TikTok

Mark Kennedy
New York, May 9

HE'S ON screen, onstage, on tour, online and in song. "Hamlet" — William Shakespeare's masterpiece about a moody Danish prince — seems to be having a moment.

A National Theatre production has landed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music starring Hiran Abeysekera. There's a movie version set in London's South Asian community starring Riz Ahmed. Anthony Hopkins, at 88, is delighting fans on TikTok with some of Prince Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy. The movie "Hamnet" — the fictionalized story of

loss that inspired the creation of "Hamlet" — earned Jessie Buckley an Oscar. Taylor Swift's "The Fate of Ophelia" — that's Hamlet's ex — went to No. 1 on the Billboard singles chart. Eddie Izzard is taking her one-person production of the play on a worldwide tour.

Four hundred years on, "Hamlet" — whose seemingly quite modern antihero is endlessly mulling over what to do after his uncle murdered his father and married his mother — is still giving.

Want even more? There's even a "Hamnet" play, adapted from Maggie O'Farrell's original novel, and the Royal Shakespeare Company is taking it on

a U.K. tour. Shakespeare & Company will stage a "Hamlet" this August in the Berkshires. There's a Canadian production of "Hamlet, Sweet Prince," using a queer, contemporary lens. The Acting Company in New York will have a modern-verse version led by a woman, and the Peruvian theater company Teatro La Plaza recently presented a version off-Broadway starring eight Spanish-speaking actors with Down syndrome.

Harvard's Jeffrey R. Wilson, a Shakespeare scholar, says "Hamlet" is perfect for our era, when the crush of bad news has triggered constant, existential check-ins, like: "Hey, how's everyone hanging in there?"



Hiran Abeysekera performs 'Hamlet' at National Theatre, London. AP

The plethora of works are markedly vibrant and fresh, from the Hamlet in Brooklyn who wears a beanie to the one

who enjoys Bollywood-style dances in London. "Great plays survive not because they remain untouched, but because

they can continue to be transformed," says director and playwright Chela De Ferrari, from Teatro La Plaza, whose neurodivergent "Hamlet" is a visceral and urgent call from those often excluded from cultural narratives.

In one of the show's most potent moments, an actor attempts to imitate Laurence Olivier's delivery of Hamlet's "To be, or not to be" soliloquy with an image of the famous actor projected on a screen. It takes on a new urgency when spoken by someone whose very right to be in public or artistic spaces is often questioned.

Shakespeare in BMW
On school trips to see Shake-

speare plays, filmmaker Aneil Karia always felt like they were an arm's length away.

"I felt like I was primarily watching an intellectual experience unfold and I had to use my brain to keep up with the plot and the language and everything like that," he says.

He teamed up with Ahmed and screenwriter Michael Leslie for a stripped-down, modern-day retelling of "Hamlet" that leans into the title character's unease at being complicit in a corrupt business system.

"That feels so pertinent to the moment we're in politically and everything. It feels like the question a lot of people are asking," says Karia. "It feels like

these stories are actually a conversation through time itself."

Hamlet here parties at a neon-drenched nightclub and delivers his soliloquy while hurtling down rain-slicked London streets in a BMW, taking his hands off the wheel as a truck approaches head-on. To be, or not to be, indeed.

"The best best-case scenario here is that it's opening up Shakespeare to audiences who didn't think it was for them, or who struggled with it previously," says Karia, whose film starts streaming Tuesday. "This is a big call, but I feel like Shakespeare would approve. I feel his whole thing was like, 'Take this stuff and do your thing.'" AP



The Sunday EXPRESS

NEW DELHI, MAY 10, 2026
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EYE Learning to Exhale

As The Art of Living, established by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar turns 45, a look at the movement and the holistic living wave that followed in its wake

POINT OF VIEW
Give them roots and wings

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UNION MINISTERS, CMs OF NDA-RULED STATES AT BRIGADE PARADE GROUND EVENT

Suvendu takes charge of Bengal: 'I am everyone's Chief Minister'

Five others sworn in as ministers; TMC wishes them success; PM bows to people of Bengal

Atri Mitra & Ravik Bhattacharya
Kolkata, May 9

FIVE DAYS after the BJP scripted history with a landslide victory in the West Bengal Assembly elections, Suvendu Adhikari, who led the party's ground offensive that ended 15 years of TMC rule, was sworn in Saturday as the state's first BJP Chief Minister.

The oath-taking ceremony, the first by a Chief Minister at Kolkata's iconic Brigade Parade Ground, was attended among others by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, and all NDA and BJP CMs including N Chandrababu Naidu, Yogi Adityanath, Himanta Biswa Sarma and Devendra Fadnavis.

Apart from Adhikari, five ministers — Dilip Ghosh, Agnimitra Paul, Nisith Pramanik, **»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



PM Narendra Modi on the dais as West Bengal Governor R N Ravi administers the oath of office to CM Suvendu Adhikari in Kolkata. PARTHA PAUL

Team Suvendu: Mix of old and new faces; balancing of regions, groups

Ravik Bhattacharya & Atri Mitra
Kolkata, May 9

WEST BENGAL Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari's newly formed Cabinet reflected a mix of old and new faces, with representation for women as well as the Rajbanshi, Matua and tribal communities.

Apart from Adhikari, five ministers took oath of office in Kolkata's Brigade Parade Ground on Saturday, including Dilip Ghosh, Agnimitra Paul, Nitish Pramanik, Khudiram Tudu and Ashok Kirtaniya. Sources said Ghosh and Paul are likely to be named as Deputy Chief Ministers.

E. Dilip Ghosh: BJP veteran Dilip Ghosh, MLA from Kharagpur Sadar, began his political journey as an RSS pracharak and later served as Bengal BJP president twice. He won the Medinipur Lok Sabha seat in 2019 and also served as the party's national **»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

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PM SEEKS BLESSINGS OF MOOKERJEE'S AIDE

KNIVES OUT IN TMC AFTER POLL DEBACLE

Ma tujhe salaam

Amul
Makes mothers happy

Energy security a key priority, UAE stopover added to PM's itinerary

Modi leaves on May 15 for tour of 4 Europe nations

Shubhajt Roy
New Delhi, May 9

AT A time when India is navigating security and economic challenges amidst the instability in West Asia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to visit the UAE on May 15. Sources said Saturday that the UAE, which has a comprehensive strategic partnership with India and is home to a large

Indian diaspora, has been included in the Prime Minister's itinerary at the last minute. The UAE has been one of the main targets of Iranian missile attacks ever since the start of the West Asia war on February 28. Tehran accuses the emirates of providing safe space to American military bases, facilities and personnel. And amid the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz, which has impacted energy supplies to much of the world, including India, the UAE announced it was exiting the OPEC, the bloc of oil-producing exporters headed by Saudi Arabia, and **»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

In finale to high-stakes TN drama, Vijay gets majority, to take oath as CM today

Arun Janardhanan
Chennai, May 9

AFTER NEARLY 24 hours of shifting numbers, resort movements, contentious letters and high-stakes meetings, Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar to stake claim to form the next government in Tamil Nadu, after the VCK and IUML extended unconditional support to his party. The swearing-in ceremony is scheduled to take



Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar hands over a letter appointing Vijay as the new CM, in Chennai, Saturday. PTI

place at Chennai's Nehru Stadium at 10 am Sunday. Arlekar, who formally appointed Vijay as the CM and invited him to form the government, has also asked the actor-turned-politician to prove his majority by May 13. The day began with uncertainty and ended with TVK crossing the majority mark. But not before Vijay, who had earlier started from his Foreshore Estate residence to meet the Governor, returned midway after he was told that no **»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

NATION PAGES 6, 9



KERALA CM RACE: RAHUL LIVID OVER TUSSELE FLARING ON STREETS

PUNJAB MINISTER ARRESTED BY ED; PRESSURE TACTIC TO JOIN BJP: AAP

Vinesh comeback hits a hurdle, WFI bars her from competing until June 26

Wrestling body issues notice, cites violations

Prithish Raj
New Delhi, May 9

THE WRESTLING Federation of India (WFI) has issued a 15-page show-cause notice to wrestler Vinesh Phogat, accusing her of indiscipline, viol-



Vinesh Phogat is aiming a comeback two years after she announced her retirement

ations of anti-doping regulations, and breaches of United

World Wrestling (UWW) rules. The federation has also barred her from competing in domestic events until June 26, effectively delaying her planned return to competitive wrestling. The suspension from domestic competition is also likely to derail her hopes of making a comeback in time for major international events, including the Asian Games cycle leading up to the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. **»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

TECH-DRIVEN APPROACH HAS CONTRIBUTED TO SHARP FALL IN INFILTRATION ATTEMPTS

From ground to the skies: How drones are reshaping operations along borders

OPERATION sindoor
A YEAR LATER

Arun Sharma
Jammu, May 9

IN THE early hours of June 26, 2021, two consecutive blasts rocked the highly fortified Indian Air Force station in Jammu. This was the first terror attack in which drones were used to air-drop bombs on a major security

installation. Though the explosions caused no serious damage, the attack reflected a paradigm shift in the tactics of Pakistan-based terror groups: the threat had moved from the ground to the air, rendering traditional security measures permanently inadequate.

The use of drones, however, had already been a regular feature across the restive Line of Control and International Border in J&K for over a year. One such drone, carrying a US-made M4 semi-automatic carbine, two magazines, 60 rounds



and seven Chinese grenades, was shot down by the BSF near Kathua district's Rathua village

» DRONE SHIELD
KAMIKAZE DRONES deployed during Operation Sindoor
KAVACH LASER system used to detect drone infiltration attempts and send early warnings
JAMMERS deployed to disrupt hostile drone flights, High-Altitude Long-Endurance drones to monitor difficult terrain

on June 20, 2020. The payload was reportedly marked with the **»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

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On alert

Police personnel walk past debris as they keep a vigil during a demolition drive at Dal Mandi area in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, Saturday. PTI

10 DEMOLITIONS IN 10 DAYS

J&K minister slams police for 'bulldozing' houses over 'drug peddling' charges

Bashaarat Masood
Srinagar, May 9

OVER THE last 10 days, the Jammu and Kashmir Police demolished at least 10 residential and commercial properties linked to alleged drug peddlers, saying the action was meant to "send a clear and unequivocal message" that those "involved in narcotics trade will face strict and visible consequences".

However, J&K Health Minister Sakina Itoo on Friday criticised the police action. "Don't target the people making it (drug trafficking) an excuse," Itoo said while talking to reporters. "If you arrest someone, where does he get these drugs from? The Home department should check that drugs don't come here."

The ongoing 100-day "Nasha Mukht Jammu and Kashmir (Drug-free Jammu and Kashmir)" campaign initiated by the Lt Governor has seen several arrests and the demolition of houses and commercial complexes linked to alleged drug peddlers.

Over the last 10 days, police teams and revenue officials have demolished at least 10 houses and residential properties, mostly in south Kashmir.

While in some cases, police said these were built illegally, either on government land or without proper permission, in other cases, they said the structures were demolished as they were "acquired and developed using proceeds generated from narcotics trafficking".

After demolishing a commercial complex comprising 15 shops at Bijbehara in south Kashmir, police had said, "During verification, it surfaced that the shopping complex had been illegally constructed on state land." The property belonged to a "notorious drug peddler", police said, against whom a case is registered under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. "Acting upon due legal process and in coordination with the concerned authorities, the illegal structure was demolished as part of ongoing efforts to dismantle the financial infrastructure of the drug syndicate..." they said.

In another case, police said the house of an alleged drug peddler was demolished in Srinagar because it was "raised illegally on land acquired and developed using proceeds generated from narcotics trafficking". Police further said the "action sends a clear and unequivocal message (that) properties from proceeds of drug trafficking will not be spared and those involved in the narcotics trade will face strict and visible action".

J&K Health Minister Sakina Itoo on Friday criticised the police action. "Don't target the people making it (drug trafficking) an excuse," Itoo said while talking to reporters. "If you arrest someone, where does he get these drugs from? The Home department should check that drugs don't come here."

Itoo warned that "bulldozing the houses, demolishing the property" will have negative consequences and called for its immediate stop. "This is absolutely wrong," she said, adding, "If you recover drugs or something else from someone, you demolish a property that is not even in his name, that is a property of his parents..."

She asked how drugs enter Jammu and Kashmir when the borders are manned by security forces. "You lay your hands on the people who bring it into Kashmir," she said.

Itoo also alleged that while demolitions and seizure of immovable assets are taking place in the Kashmir Valley, the Jammu division is spared.

"I want to ask you one question. Where is drug addiction more, Jammu or Kashmir? As a Health minister, I will give you the figures that it is more in Jammu," she said. "If you want to control addiction, you have to control it in Jammu as well. But in Kashmir, you use it as an excuse to seize the properties, to demolish and bulldoze the houses. It is discrimination," she added.

While there were at least 10 drug-related demolitions in the Valley in the last 10 days, there were at least four demolitions in Jammu last month. Of these, three were carried out in Rajiv Nagar on April 12 and one in Beli-Charana on the outskirts of Jammu on April 18.

'Abducted' amid attack on village near Myanmar border, Manipur woman freed two days later

Sukrita Baruah
Guwahati, May 9

A WOMAN who was allegedly abducted by militants after an attack on villages along the Indo-Myanmar border in Manipur on Thursday was released on Sunday.

According to a security official, Olina Ningshen, who is from the Tangkhul community, had allegedly been abducted by members of the Kuki National Army (Burma) and Village Volunteers Eastern Zone (VVEZ) from Namlee, a border village in Kamjong district. She was released on Sunday at Z. Choro village, which is located close to the border, "under the watch of Assam Rifles, Intelligence and other agencies", a spokesperson for the Ministry of Defence said.

Choro, Namlee and Wanlee, which are Tangkhul villages located along the Indo-Myanmar border in Kamjong

district, had come under attack early on May 7, leading to several people being injured and several houses being set ablaze. Olina Ningshen had been missing since then.

"The woman's husband, the village headman, and CSOs (civil society organisation) were taken...close to the handover location, once own forces had secured the release. After release, the family and CSOs were taken to the unit HQs at Chasrad for formal handing over and documentation," said the spokesperson, adding that the family were subsequently moved to their village, Khangpat Khn.

Manipur Home Minister Govindas Kothoujam also visited Kamjong district on Saturday.

Referring to the situation in the area on May 7, the spokesperson said that the situation was "brought under control... despite challenging conditions".

Suwendu takes charge

Ashok Kirtania, and Kshudiram Tudu — were also administered the oath of office by Governor R N Ravi. Pramanik belongs to the Rajbanshi community, Kirtania is a Matua, and Tudu is from the Adivasi community.

Modi arrived at the venue of the swearing-in ceremony in an open car flanked by Adhikari, wearing a saffron 'kurta' (kurta shirt), and BJP state president Samik Bhattacharya.

About 100 metres from the stage, Modi stepped out of the car and walked towards the dais. Once on the stage, he bowed down with folded hands to thank the people of Bengal.

He greeted Makhanlal Sarkar, 97, who had accompanied Syama Prasad Mookerjee on his last mission to Kashmir, opposing the now-shelved special status of the erstwhile state of J&K.

Soon after taking over as the new CM, Adhikari went to Jorasanko Thakurbari, the birthplace of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore. "Without Rabindranath Tagore, you can't think about Bengali culture. We have started a new era by paying tribute to Tagore on his birth anniversary," he said.

And days after he ratcheted up the rhetoric following his wins in Bhabanipur

(where he defeated TMC leader and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee) and Nandigram when he claimed Muslims had voted for the TMC and the Hindus for him, Adhikari said. "Ami mukhyamantri, ami ekhon sokoler (I am the Chief Minister, I now belong to everyone)."

He later proceeded to the PWD Maidan tent. Sources said he met Chief Secretary Dushyant Narijala, Home Secretary Sanghamitra Ghosh and the police top brass. A major reshuffle of IAS and IPS officers in the state could take place soon, sources said.

Meanwhile, the TMC, in a statement, said, "We congratulate the leaders and wish them success in working with commitment for the interest of the

people of Bengal." It said the party had unanimously decided that Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay would be the Leader of Opposition, Asima Patra and Nayna Bandyopadhyay the Deputy Leaders of Opposition. The TMC Chief Whip would be Firhad Hakim.

Adhikari's parents could not attend the swearing-in ceremony as they were unwell. His father Sisir Adhikari said, "He is the second of my four sons. From childhood, he has shown leadership qualities, and he is Chief Minister material. He is very cool and a very good organiser as well."

Mother Gayatri Devi said, "He is always very calm. I never scolded him, he was never naughty... Suwendu loves fried fish, especially Hilsa."

WFI notice to Vinesh

The notice, issued Saturday, comes nearly two years after Vinesh announced her retirement following the heartbreak of her disqualification on the morning of the 2024 Paris Olympics final.

Earlier this year, the former world championship medalist had indicated her intention to return to the sport and was targeting the National Open Ranking tournament in Gonda in UP, scheduled to begin this Sunday.

Gonda is the home turf of former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a former MP, who was accused of sexual harassment by six women wrestlers. On May 3, Vinesh said she was one of the six who had complained against him.

When contacted, Vinesh did not comment on the allegations against her in the show-cause notice.

According to the WFI, Vinesh failed to comply with the mandatory six-month notice period required under the UWW Anti-Doping Rules for athletes returning from retirement. The federation has asked her to respond to the allegations within 14 days.

A major portion of the notice relates to Vinesh's controversial disqualification from the Paris Olympics, where she competed in the women's 50kg category.

Vinesh had scripted history by becoming the first Indian woman wrestler to reach an Olympic final. However, she

was disqualified ahead of the gold medal bout after failing the second-day weigh-in by 100 grams.

In the notice, WFI alleged that her decision to cut down from her natural weight category and subsequent failure to maintain the required limit caused significant damage to Indian wrestling's reputation.

"Your failure to manage your weight in the highest international competition, after voluntarily opting to drop down to the 50kg category from your usual higher weight category, resulted in the loss of an assured Olympic medal for India and caused lasting reputational damage to Indian wrestling," the federation said in the notice.

The WFI has also sought an explanation from Vinesh for allegedly competing in two different weight categories during the March 2024 Olympics selection trials conducted by the Indian Olympic Association-appointed ad hoc committee.

At the time, the federation's activities had been suspended, and wrestling in India was being overseen by an ad hoc panel constituted by the Indian Olympic Association.

According to the WFI, UWW regulations permit a wrestler to compete in only one weight category corresponding to the athlete's official weigh-in weight. The federation further claimed it had received three separate complaints regarding

UAE visit

the OPEC Plus.

India has walked the diplomatic tightrope between the UAE and Iran, but has repeatedly condemned the attacks on the UAE.

From the UAE, Modi will leave for Europe. He is scheduled to visit the Netherlands (May 15-17), Sweden (May 17), Norway (May 17-19) and Italy (May 19-20).

Sources said the situation in West Asia is one of the reasons why the Prime Minister has decided to meet UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

On May 5, a day after three Indian nationals in the UAE were injured in a blaze following

an Iranian drone strike in the eastern emirate of Fujairah, Modi "strongly condemned the attacks", and said the targeting of civilians and infrastructure was "unacceptable".

The Ministry of External Affairs, in a separate statement, called for the "immediate cessation of these hostilities and the targeting of civilian infrastructure and innocent civilians".

Earlier, in the last week of April, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval travelled to the UAE and met the UAE President in Abu Dhabi. This was a week after he visited Saudi Arabia.

Doval's visit was an important outreach given that he has been coordinating with the Emirati establishment on security and strategic issues, especially on counter-terrorism cooperation. It also laid the

groundwork for Modi's visit.

Trade with the energy-rich UAE has been disrupted due to the Iranian closure of the Strait of Hormuz in the last two months — only 11 Indian ships have been able to transit the strait.

Modi has spoken to leaders of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies in the last two months, and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has also been in touch with his counterparts in these countries.

In April, Jaishankar also met the UAE President. Underlining the robustness of the India-UAE strategic partnership, he said the ongoing dialogue between the two nations remained strong and transparent despite the complex regional environment.

The UAE is home to about 4.7 million Indians, and annual

remittances by the large Indian community in the UAE is one of the highest in the world. The Indian expatriate community is the largest ethnic community in the UAE, constituting about 35 per cent of the country's population.

The India-UAE trade, valued at USD 180 million per annum in the 1970s, reached USD 84 billion in 2023-24 — the UAE became India's third largest trading partner after China and the US.

For the period April 2000-September 2024, FDI inflows from the UAE accounted for nearly USD 22 billion (3.1% of the total inward FDI inflows), making it the seventh largest source of investments. The UAE has committed to invest USD 75 billion in India's infrastructure sector over a period of time.

Indo-Pak border to a great extent."

He described an array of advanced sensors — thermal imagers, underground sensors (UGS), fibre-optic sensors, radar and sonar — that form an invisible electronic barrier even where physical patrolling is impossible, providing round-the-clock real-time monitoring. Drones also help "carry out effective surveillance," reduce troop fatigue from physical domination patrols, enhance reaction capabilities and overcome weather and terrain-related difficulties. Optical fibre cable-based and tethered drones, which are not prone to jamming, provide an added advantage, he said.

Another officer put it starkly: "Everything is different after Op Sindoor. The very nature of military campaigns has changed across the world. I think drones have done to military strategy what cellular phones did to telephone communication. Till recently, physical patrolling was the only way to confront infiltration attempts. It was a tiresome exercise that continued round the year. Now there is additional support to keep watch."

Officials in the security forces and the UT administration say that Pakistan's frequent use of drones has significantly altered security dynamics along both

the International Border and the Line of Control. The technology-driven approach has contributed to a sharp fall in infiltration attempts and a significant decrease in militant skirmishes on the border.

"Earlier, we used to consider only the five-kilometre belt along the borders as crucial for maintaining vigil and accordingly impose dusk-to-dawn curfew restricting all movement there," a senior UT administration official said. "Now, with the advent of drones from Pakistan, joint teams of security forces and police patrol and establish nakas behind this five-kilometre belt as well, to rule out drone droppings near civilian areas." Policing in border areas has been further intensified through the recruitment of Village Defence Guards from local youth, who patrol and keep vigil in their respective areas around the clock.

The shift is evident from the sharp fall in human infiltration bids — from 143 in 2018 to just 34 in 2021. Since that year, contraband, arms, ammunition, explosives and even Indian currency, which earlier came mainly through cross-border land routes and underground tunnels, are being dropped in J&K by Pakistani drones. J&K Police and other security agencies have seized nearly

Old & new

vice-president. Seen as a key organisational figure behind the BJP's rise in Bengal, Ghosh has also often courted controversy over his remarks on various issues.

Agnimitra Paul: A fashion designer-turned-politician Agnimitra Paul, the BJP MLA from Asansol Dakshin, has previously served as the president of the Bengal party unit's Mahila Morcha. Paul is a key woman face in the Cabinet and is expected to focus on various issues concerning women and their progress and empowerment.

"We will have to work round-the-clock as we have a lot of work to do. Whatever we promised, we will have to fulfill it," Paul said after being sworn in as a minister. She added that there was no one better than Adhikari to helm the state.

Nisith Pramanik: Nisith Pramanik, who belongs to the Rajbanshi community, is the BJP MLA from Mathabhanga in Cooch Behar. He won the Cooch Behar Lok Sabha seat in 2019 and later served as Union Minister of State for Home Affairs and Youth Affairs and Sports between 2021 and 2024.

A key figure in North Bengal politics with a background as an assistant teacher, Pramanik's induction ensures representation for both the Rajbanshi community, listed in the Scheduled Caste (SC) category, as well as

the North Bengal region.

North Bengal has continued to remain a BJP stronghold, with the party winning 40 of the region's 54 seats in the recent elections.

Khudiram Tudu: Khudiram Tudu is a first-time BJP MLA from Ranibandh in Bankura, who belongs to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) community.

In 2021, the BJP had fared poorly in the state's tribal region in Jangalmahal, with the TMC winning 24 of the 49 seats. This time, however, the BJP performed strongly in the tribal belts in districts like Bankura, Purulia, Jhargram and Paschim Medinipur, winning 38 of the 40 seats there.

Ashok Kirtania: Re-elected from Bongaon Uttar, Ashok Kirtania is a prominent BJP leader from the Matua community listed in the SC category. Kirtania's inclusion reflects the party's continued outreach to the community, a large section of which migrated to India from Bangladesh.

The implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act had particularly benefited the community, which remains a key support base for the BJP in Bengal.

Kirtania said the Bengal government will work under Modi's guidance. "For my Matua brothers and sisters, I want to tell them that under Modi's leadership, the process of granting citizenship is ongoing and will continue," he added.

Vijay

appointment had been granted. Later, Raj Bhavan said an appointment had been given, the Governor cancelled his scheduled Kerala visit, and Vijay began another journey to Raj Bhavan.

TVK, which won 108 seats, has an effective strength of 107 as Vijay won two seats. With Congress's five MLAs, CPI's two, CPI(M)'s two, VCK's two and IUML's two, the TVK-led bloc eventually managed the support of 120 MLAs-elect — two above the majority mark of 118 in the 234-member Assembly.

The breakthrough came after VCK president Thol Thirumavalavan and IUML national president K M Kader Mohideen issued letters extending unconditional support to TVK by evening. Their letters followed similar ones sent by the Left parties on Friday evening.

Thirumavalavan said the VCK had decided to support TVK to ensure it did not become an obstacle to Vijay forming the government and to prevent President's Rule in Tamil Nadu. He added that the VCK would continue to remain part of the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance and that the decision would not affect its relationship with the DMK.

The IUML's support came after a day of mixed signals. Earlier, Mohideen had said the party remained firmly within the DMK alliance and had not issued any support letter to TVK.

Later, IUML leaders met outgoing Chief Minister M K Stalin before extending support to TVK. Leaders familiar with the talks said the IUML had conveyed that it could not move un-

less the DMK leadership agreed.

The developments marked a dramatic recovery for Vijay after Friday night's confusion. On Friday evening, TVK appeared set for power after the CPI and CPI(M) extended support. But by night, the numbers became uncertain after VCK did not immediately submit its letter.

But by Saturday afternoon, the direction began to change. AIADMK's Edappadi K Palaniswami or EPS issued a statement congratulating the party that would form the government, a move seen as an attempt to cool speculation about an AIADMK-led alternative.

Meanwhile, Stalin said the DMK would be a constructive Opposition and welcomed the stand of allies who backed TVK to avoid a crisis, while saying they would continue in the DMK-led alliance on policy grounds. He also took note of Congress moving away from the alliance after the results.

The Governor's role has also come under legal scrutiny. Two petitions have reached the Supreme Court challenging his earlier refusal to invite Vijay, leader of the single largest party, to form the government and prove majority on the floor of the House.

As the evening progressed, security remained tight outside the Mahabalipuram resort where TVK MLAs were staying. Congress MLAs had been shifted to Hyderabad. AIADMK MLAs returned from the Pudukkottai resort and met EPS in Chennai.

By 6.20 pm, the political traffic moved again — toward Raj Bhavan. After a day in which Vijay left, returned, waited and started again, Tamil Nadu's government formation drama had finally culminated.

68,000 kg of narcotics valued at around Rs 30,000 crore across the UT. Of these, heroin tops the list by value, with more than 539 kg — valued at nearly Rs 3,200 crore — seized by J&K Police in Jammu region alone over the past five years.

Nearly 1,000 weapons, mostly AK rifles, along with over 28,000 rounds of ammunition and 252 detonators, were seized between 2021 and May 2023 across J&K. In the Jammu region, police alone have seized 247 weapons, 182 IEDs, 409 grenades, more than 11 kg of explosives, two packets of RDX, cash worth Rs 2.53 crore and 15,000 US dollars.

Why Pakistan made the switch

Former J&K DGP Kuldeep Khoda said Pakistan turned to drones because border fencing, night vision devices, lasers and other monitoring systems made ground infiltration along both the International Border and LoC near impossible. "As drones were easier to penetrate, it started sending weapons and narcotics through them to keep low-grade terrorism alive in J&K. Through drones, it managed to avoid the human chain used earlier for sending weapons and the hawala network for funding terrorism. Now, drones are dropping weapons for use by terror-

ists and narcotics to fund terrorism through their sale proceeds," he said.

Former DGP S P Vaid described drone use as part of Pakistan's continuously evolving tactics. "Earlier, it sent arms through guides; when India raised fences, they gave militants wire cutters. When India electrified the fence, they used plastic ladders and tunnels. Drones are just the latest tactic to try and destroy India," he said, acknowledging that despite counter-drone measures, some drones continue to get through.

A retired senior Army officer noted that drone introduction has brought a new type of soldier — one who is well-versed in technology and capable of responding to modern warfare. He cautioned that not every drone can be picked up by radar due to factors like coverage area and low-altitude flight, making 24x7 vigilance imperative.

"Earlier, troops were especially alert at night along borders — during the day, everything coming through land routes was visible. Now they have to cover the borders around the clock," he said. He also flagged a tactical concern: Pakistan may be using drones to keep troops occupied watching the sky while pushing terrorists through land routes.

A MILESTONE... MOVE WAS PENDING FOR THREE DECADES, SAYS DELHI CM

Central Ridge gets 'reserved forest' tag

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 9

IN A significant move that gives stronger legal protection to one of the Capital's most important ecological zones, the Delhi government has declared approximately 673.32 hectares of the Central Ridge area — that comes under the Western Forest Division and covers parts around Sardar Patel Marg and the President's Estate — as 'reserved forest' under Section 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927. "The decision would prove to be a milestone in strengthening Delhi's natural heritage, biodiversity, and ecological security," Chief Minister Rekha Gupta was quoted as saying in an official statement by her office on Saturday.

years after Delhi's Ridge areas were first notified under Section 4 of the Indian Forest Act on May 24, 1994. Section 4 is the preliminary notification that starts the process of constituting a reserved forest. Section 20 is the final notification that gives the area its enforceable reserved forest status after the claims and settlement process is completed.

In the statement, the CM was quoted as saying, "The declaration completed an important process that had been pending for more than three decades."

Other Ridge areas of the Capital would also soon be notified as reserved forests under Section 20 and that the process is being expedited, the official statement underlined.

The Central Ridge is one

Key move

- Ridge acts as 'green lungs' for the Capital
- Plays a key role in strengthening groundwater levels, mitigating impact of climate change, urban pollution.
- Ridge areas were first notified under Section 4 of Indian Forest Act on May 24, 1994
- Other Ridge areas would also soon be notified as reserved forests, says govt

part of the larger Delhi Ridge system, which the Forest Department divides into four main segments -- Northern, Central, South-Central and Southern Ridge. Of these, the Southern Ridge is the largest,

while the Central Ridge accounts for about 864 hectares in official records.

According to the statement, an area spanning approximately 4,080.82 hectares of the Southern Ridge was declared 'reserved forest' on October 24 last year. With the present notification of 673.32 hectares, the current government has so far granted the status to 4,754.14 hectares of Ridge areas.

The CM said, "The move would help prevent encroachments, illegal activities, and ecological degradation. It would also strengthen conservation and scientific management initiatives being undertaken by the Forest department in Delhi's Ridge areas."

The notification is significant also because the Central Ridge has historically involved

multiple land-managing agencies. Forest department records list portions under the Forest department, Army, Delhi Development Authority, CPWD, NDMC, MCD, Railways and other agencies. A final reserved forest notification would reduce ambiguity over protection and enforcement.

A reserved forest notification gives the Forest department a firmer basis to regulate the area, prevent encroachment and take action against activities that damage forest land. In a 2021 order, the National Green Tribunal had said there was an "urgent need" to finalise Section 20 notification for Ridge protection and directed that notification be issued within three months for areas where there was no controversy.

In another November 2025 order, the Supreme Court noted that even as more than three decades had passed, only 103.48 hectares had been notified as reserved forest under Section 20 till then.

It also referred to a Central Empowered Committee report, which said 5% of the Ridge area was under encroachment, 4% had been diverted and only 1.33% had been notified under Section 20.

Meanwhile, the Delhi government has also announced that native and environmentally suitable tree species will be planted wherever suitable vacant land is available in Ridge areas declared as reserved forests. Neem, peepal, shisham, jamun, tamarind and mango are among the proposed species.

Skywatch

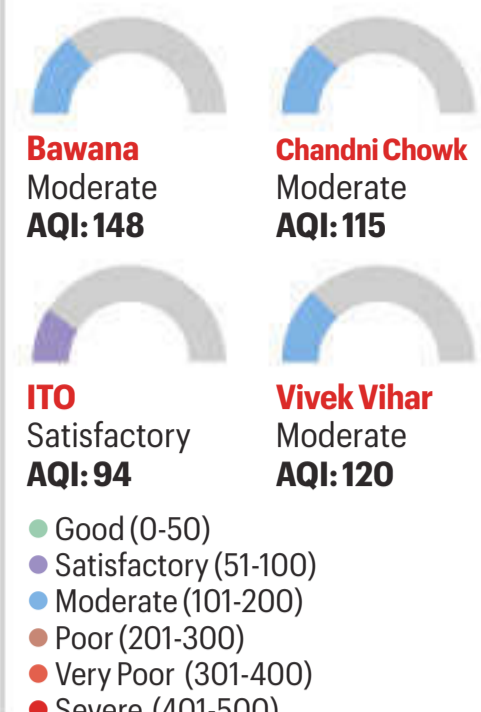


Forecast: May 10, 2026

Mainly clear sky; yellow alert sounded for rain and thunderstorm for tomorrow
MAX: 36-38
 1.3°C below normal
MIN: 23-25
 2.1°C below normal

- Sunrise: 5:33 AM (May 11)
- Sunset: 7:02 PM (May 10)
- Moonrise: 01:47 AM (May 11)
- Moonset: 12:24 PM (May 10)

AQI Tracker



Froth in Yamuna at Kalindi Kunj on Saturday. VIVEK PRAKASH KRISHNA

Water treatment plant output hit as Yamuna ammonia level spikes

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 9

DELHI EARLIER this week witnessed brief disruption in water supply due to "regular receipt of high pollutants (Ammonia-NH3 levels more than 2.8 parts per million)" in the Yamuna at Wazirabad pond, according to the officials of the Delhi Jal Board (DJB).

The water production had come down to 40-50% at Wazirabad and Chandrawal water treatment plants, two of the most important water treatment plants in the city, as of Friday evening, according to officials. Both the plants depend on raw water from the Yamuna at Wazirabad pond. Wazirabad WTP has an installed capacity of about 132 million gallons per

day (MGD), while the Chandrawal water treatment plant has a capacity of around 103 MGD

According to the DJB, water supply was available at low pressure for a few hours on Friday. The situation improved by late evening and Wazirabad Plant-I and Plant-II are now operating normally, while Plant-III had been functioning at 75% capacity and is expected to normalise. While such ammonia spikes are less common in summer compared to winter when lower river flows concentrate pollutants and anaerobic conditions worsen the issue, such an occurrence in May could indicate persistent challenges. Ammonia pollution stems from untreated sewage, industrial effluents, among other sources.

Bomb squads on standby, checks on: Security stepped up after terror alert

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 9

THE DELHI Police is coordinating with intelligence agencies and Central Armed Forces and Bomb Squad have been asked to stay on alert after intelligence inputs suggested the possibility of a terror attack in the Capital, officers said on Saturday.

Random checks are being conducted at important government buildings, political offices, and markets by security agencies, and armed personnel have been deployed with barricades installed in all these areas, officers added. The intelligence inputs hinted at suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) mounted on vehicles, according to sources.

Among the possible targets are BJP headquarters at Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Marg and other crowded areas in Central Delhi, according to sources.

Security has been heightened at BJP headquarters and other government buildings in the Capital, said officers, adding that vigil has been intensified across sensitive locations.

Bomb disposal squads, sniffer dog units and quick reaction teams, including the Delhi Fire Service, have also been asked to stay alert. "Police have been directed to maintain strict vigil on suspicious movements, unattended objects and vehicles parked in sensitive zones," said the source.

All district units of the Delhi Police have been asked to remain alert and maintain close coordination with intelligence agencies and central paramilitary forces, according to officers. Senior officers are continuously monitoring the situation and reviewing security arrangements across the city, said the source. (WITH PTI)

Swing that collapsed, killed cop at Surajkund Mela installed without nod, rights panel told

Abhimanyu Hazarika
Faridabad, May 9

THE 'TSUNAMI' amusement ride that collapsed at the Surajkund International Crafts Mela in Faridabad in February, killing a police inspector and injuring several visitors, was not part of the original list of rides submitted by the contractor during the bidding process for operating swings, according to the report submitted by state's Tourism department to the Haryana Human Rights Commission (HHRC).

The fatal swing also operated without due approval amid hazardous conditions and "poor workmanship", the HHRC was told in another report by State Chief Electrical Inspector SS Sangwan, which exposed a severe lack of safety norms across the fairground.

The rights watchdog, which took on record the reports on April 7, pinpointed "sheer negligence" by three Haryana Tourism Corporation (HTC) officials — Activity Head Nitin Kataria, Executive Engineer Satish Deswal, and Junior Engineer Nishant — in an order made public on Saturday.

The coram of Justice Lalit



The Tsunami swing collapsed at Surajkund fair on February 7. FILE

Batra, judicial member Kuldeep Jain and member Deep Bhatia noted, quoting from compliance reports submitted to it, that three HTC officials have been charged with major penalty under the Haryana Civil Services Rules for dereliction of duty.

The Commission observed that installing the swing amounted to a "grave violation of tender condition and demonstrates unauthorised installation" without due approval.

The State Chief Electrical Inspector's findings, accompanied by site photographs, depicted "hazardous conditions

such as open electrical distribution boxes, exposed and loosely hanging wires, improper jointing and unprotected cables laid in areas accessible to the public". The report stated that these conditions "could have resulted in serious accidents, including electric shock, short-circuit or fire incidents".

The tragedy unfolded on the evening of February 7 when the giant swing snapped from one side while several visitors were sitting on it.

As police personnel rushed to rescue trapped visitors, the structure suddenly broke from the other side, crashing down

on Inspector Jagdish of the Haryana Police. He succumbed to his injuries during treatment at Supreme Hospital, Eros Garden. Several visitors and other police officers also sustained serious injuries.

An FIR was registered at the Surajkund police station against the operator from Himachal Fun Fair Company, Mohammad Shakir, and his staff. A day after the collapse of the swing, the Faridabad Police had arrested Shakir, and Nitesh, his staff member.

However, the HHRC flagged a significant disconnect in the ongoing police probe. While the HTC inquiry indicted its own senior officials for gross negligence, the Commission remarked that the police investigating team currently "has no clue of those delinquents".

A police spokesperson said on Saturday that the owner of the swing, Shubham Gupta, was arrested from Faridabad and sent to judicial custody earlier this week.

Meanwhile, the Commission has directed Faridabad Police Commissioner Satender Kumar Gupta to expedite the investigation and submit an action taken report.

77 water bodies to be rejuvenated in 90 days

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 9

THE DELHI Development Authority (DDA) will immediately take up the rejuvenation of 77 water bodies in the Capital, according to a plan reviewed by Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu, said officials. The plan focuses on the rejuvenation, restoration and long-term conservation of water bodies under the jurisdiction of DDA in the city.

Of the 77, six water bodies are to be restored within 30 days, 48 within 60 days, and the remaining 23 within 90 days. Sandhu has directed officials to roll out the plans on the ground immediately and ensure that committed timelines are strictly followed.

According to DDA officials, the presentation was made after the LG directed DDA officials about a week ago to prepare a

concrete action plan for reviving the city's deteriorating aquatic assets, many of which have suffered because of encroachment and lack of maintenance.

Officials said the first phase will focus on the actual revival of dead or dying water bodies through dredging, excavation and desilting, along with clearing their catchment areas. The stated aim is to ensure "maximum siphoning of rain water" into these sites. In the second phase, DDA will take up strengthening of embankments, plantations, fencing, installation of sewage treatment plants, and decentralised sewage treatment plants, and beautification works.

The first phase is important in restoring the basin's holding capacity and reconnecting it to rainwater. The second phase is meant to secure the site after basic hydrological revival has been achieved.

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WAREHOUSING: Sarabanki

SCHOOL: Hardoi, TGC-Unnao, Barabanki, TDS City-Ghaziabad

GROUP HOUSING: Barabanki, Hamirpur, TGC-Unnao, Prayagraj, TDS City-Ghaziabad

HOTEL: TGC-Unnao, Prayagraj

PETROL PUMP/CNG FILLING STATION CUM SERVICE CENTRE: Prayagraj, TGC-Unnao, Ghazipur

WORKSHOP/SERVICE STATION: Amethi

HOSPITAL/NURSING HOME/ DISPENSARY: Prayagraj, TGC-Unnao, Hamirpur, TDS City-Ghaziabad

COMMUNITY CENTRE: TGC-Unnao

WEIGH BRIDGE: TGC-Unnao

BANQUET HALL/MULTIPURPOSE HALL-2 (BARATGHAR): TGC-Unnao, TDS City Ghaziabad

SHOPPING CENTRE: Hamirpur, Unnao

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FIR REGISTERED BY DELHI POLICE IFSO UNIT ON MARCH 10; DCP SAYS MATTER UNDER INVESTIGATION

Data 'leaked' to China-based firms, Customs officer detained

Sakshi Chand
New Delhi, May 9

A CUSTOMS department official has been detained by the Intelligence Fusion and Strategic Operations (IFSO) unit of Delhi Police for allegedly selling sensitive data to private companies, including firms based in China, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

The case pertains to an FIR registered by the IFSO unit on March 10 under provisions of the Information Technology Act, the Customs Act, and sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including conspiracy, cheating and breach of confidentiality.

Sources said the accused, identified as Rahul Sinha, is currently in police custody and is being questioned.

When contacted, DCP (IFSO) Vinit Kumar confirmed that the matter was under investigation. "The case is under investigation. No further information can be divulged at the moment," he added.

Police said a complaint was filed with the IFSO unit on February 27, alleging the unauthorised access, extraction, disclosure and commercial sale of sensitive customs data from notified protected systems classified as critical information infrastructure. The complaint

was submitted by the Joint Director (Data Centre and Cyber Security), Directorate General of Systems.

The complaint alleged that someone had illegally accessed and sold customs data from government systems. The data, pertaining to trade details and confidential information, may have been extracted by misusing passwords, insider access or third-party access, it added.

The FIR mentioned that the data stolen was important, as it was processed and stored in central government databases, and comprised both personally identifiable and commercially sensitive information.

• THE CASE

COMPLAINT FILED on February 27, alleging illegal access, extraction, disclosure and commercial sale of sensitive customs data from notified protected systems.

THE DATA, pertaining to trade details and confidential information, may have been extracted by misusing passwords, insider access or third-party access

"It includes detailed insights into pricing, sourcing patterns, supplier relationships, trade volumes, logistics

chains and the market positioning of exporters and importers. If accessed and misused unlawfully, such data can act as economic intelligence, allowing competitors or data brokers to analyse transaction-level pricing and undercut businesses by strategically lowering prices," the FIR said.

"This can distort fair market practices, lead to price suppression, reduce export margins, divert orders, and create artificial competitive disadvantages, ultimately affecting foreign exchange inflows. At a larger level, such breaches can undermine confidence in India's digital trade systems,

weaken the global competitiveness of domestic industries, and pose serious risks to revenue, trade policy, and national economic security," it added.

Police said the alleged breach was a serious matter because it affects government systems, business secrets, and national economic security.

According to the FIR, the CERT-In (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, under Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology) has shared a list of around 70 websites allegedly selling the stolen data. A sample of the data was cross-checked with official records

and it was found to be matching, confirming that the leak is genuine, it added.

The document lists many Indian and international companies/websites linked to import-export and trade data services, which are suspected of collecting and selling sensitive government data.

According to the FIR, to verify the allegations, officers conducted a covert test by creating accounts on some of the websites and making payments to access them. After payment, they were given access to download the stolen data that matched official records.

The FIR further said that the

leaked data originated from highly secure government systems. Police suspect insiders or external vendors are involved in the leak.

The complaint refers to evidence, including screenshots, communications, technical logs and official notifications, and seeks a detailed investigation, including tracking how the data was stolen and who was involved.

"The data includes personal information and business details, which should not be publicly available. This confirms that there is unauthorised data leakage and sale," the FIR said.

Killed a man, then two more to cover his tracks: Ex-Navy steward evaded capture for 19 years

Pragnesh
New Delhi, May 9

ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2023, a team of Delhi Police officers knocked at the door at 63-year-old Aman Singh's home in West Delhi's Najafgarh. The two-floor house in Roshan Garden area was known in the neighbourhood for its frequent — and packed — kirtan gatherings, arranged by Aman's 'sister-in-law' Santosh Verma.

Though Aman had no police record, the team had landed at his doorstep following a tip-off — that he was Santosh's husband Balesh Kumar, a former Navy steward wanted in robbery and murder cases.

He was swiftly taken into custody by the police team.

According to the police, 14 days after Balesh was booked in April 2004 for allegedly killing his brother-in-law Khushi Ram, his charred body was said to have been found in a truck in Jodhpur. Balesh had staged his own death, as he was wanted for Khushi Ram's murder, they added.

As per police records, Balesh, hailing from Bagh Kare Khan in Delhi, joined the Navy as a steward in 1981. "In 1983, he married Santosh from Panipat. In 1996, he took voluntary retirement and settled down with his wife and three children in Uttam Nagar and started working as a truck driver," an officer said.

On the night of April 18, 2004, Balesh, his brother Sunder Lal, and brother-in-law Khushi Ram were allegedly drinking alcohol in Bawana when an argument broke out. "Khushi Ram had long suspected that Balesh was having an affair with his wife. He confronted him... Balesh strangled Khushi Ram to death with the help of his brother," a senior officer had said at the time. Both brothers allegedly dumped the body in a field. Within a few days, Sunder Lal was arrested.

In her statement to police, Santosh alleged that Balesh told her there was only one way to escape death in the murder case — "to play dead".

"Balesh said my brother was having an affair with his sister, and that's why they fought," she told police.

Another officer said, "On May 1, 2004, Balesh asked two labourers, Mohit and Manoj, to accompany him to Jodhpur for transporting some stuff in his truck." Balesh allegedly got them drunk as they drove to Jodhpur, parked the truck, and returned with a can of petrol.

"I set the truck on fire. Both of them were burnt to death," Balesh allegedly told police after his arrest in 2023, according to the chargesheet filed in the case.

Santosh later told the police that after the incident, Balesh had instructed to come to Jodhpur, claim one of the bodies as that of her husband, and get a death certificate made to submit to Navy headquarters and insurance companies.

While no DNA test or autopsy was allegedly ordered by the police, she got the death

• How he was caught



1996: Balesh Kumar takes voluntary retirement from Navy

2000: First case against Balesh in Delhi for 'stealing crockery from Navy canteen'

2004: Balesh allegedly kills brother-in-law during a spat. 14 days later, a burnt truck found in Rajasthan with two bodies; wife says one of them is of Balesh

2019: Police gets first tip-off that Balesh was alive

2023: Balesh caught, was living under a false identity with his wife

certificate made with the help of middlemen.

"She got a Rs 3-lakh insurance payout for the truck; and Rs 6 lakh for life insurance. She also started receiving a monthly widow pension of Rs 18,000," said an officer.

"In 2008, Balesh told his wife that he won't be able to live with her in Uttam Nagar, as everyone knew him in the area, and that they needed a new house in Najafgarh. He got a job as a driver in Panipat, and moved to a rented accommodation," the officer added.

In 2010, when the Centre introduced Aadhaar card, Balesh allegedly rushed to get himself a new identity — "Aman Singh, son of Jagjeet Singh".

By 2011, Santosh had sold her flat in Uttam Nagar and got a plot in Roshan Garden.

In 2023, *The Indian Express* reported that Balesh shifted to Roshan Garden as Aman with his family while Santosh continued to play a widow. She told neighbours that 'Aman' was her brother-in-law.

Police had said Santosh also used her "widow status" to file pleas in courts seeking the release of her elder son, Naveen — who was also booked for murder, under the Arms Act and for dacoity — from jail on humanitarian grounds.

Even as police got their first tip-off in 2019 regarding Balesh, they had to wait until 2023 to get exact details. "We checked with the insurance company about the compensation received by his wife. Then, we got Balesh's death certificate from the Jodhpur civic body. We analysed court documents and discovered that his family had used that death certificate to get all court cases against him closed. Raids were conducted and Balesh was arrested," a senior officer said.

Over two years and three bail applications later, the Patiala House court recently set the bail of Balesh at Rs 1 lakh, considering his age, and mandating weekly visits to the Crime Branch office. Santosh has also been out on bail. The case is at a pre-trial stage.

Unstoppable Gurgaon: Between Jan & April, 27 K cr pumped into new real estate projects

Abhimanyu Hazarika
Gurgaon, May 9

GEOLOGICAL TENSIONS in West Asia have begun to ripple into global real estate markets, with even high-flying hubs like Dubai showing early signs of uncertainty. Elsewhere, technology firms are cutting jobs, hiring has slowed, and households are becoming more cautious about big-ticket purchases. But in Gurgaon, developers continue to bet heavily on real estate.

Along stretches such as the Dwarka Expressway and Golf Course Extension Road, new residential towers keep rising as developers commit fresh capital to one of India's most active housing corridors.

In the first four months of 2026 alone, nearly Rs 27,000 crore flowed into new real estate projects in the city, according to Gurugram Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) data until April 30.

The investment push has coincided with Gurgaon continuing to outperform much of the National Capital Region (NCR), supported by infrastructure expansion and a perception that projects are executed faster in the city when compared to nearby markets.

According to a status report submitted by RERA to Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on May 4, the authority has cleared all complaints pending up to 2024, significantly reducing its backlog and streamlining the dispute resolution process for homebuyers. Industry executives said this has helped restore confidence in the market.

"Gurgaon continues to hold a clear edge within NCR. The employment base is strong and infrastructure is catching up at

• How Gurgaon compares with other states?

1057 Gurgaon's total registered projects

1016 projects registered in the rest of Haryana

HARYANA bifurcated its regulatory authority to create a dedicated RERA bench exclusively

GURGAON, while the one at Panchkula takes care of the rest of the state.

IT VASTLY outnumbered the 2.3 lakh units and 1,133.1 lakh square feet being developed in the rest of the state.

a pace that actually moves the needle," said Manik Malik, CEO and president of real estate company BPTP (Business Park Town Planners).

He added that luxury launches across infrastructure-led micro markets were being driven by "real buyers, not just investor activity".

Rishi Raj, CEO of Conscient Infrastructure, said the rise in project approvals and registrations reflected growing confidence among both developers and homebuyers.

Some developers described the current momentum as a sign that Gurgaon's market has matured.

Jitender Yadav, director of Roots Developers, said the scale of investment in just four months indicated that the city was moving beyond its earlier boom-and-bust cycles. He pointed to rising demand for plotted developments alongside high-rise projects, particularly in New Gurgaon and along the Dwarka Expressway.

According to the status report, as of May 1, RERA Guru-



Indiabulls Centrum Park, Sector 103 off Dwarka Expressway

3.48 Lakh

RESIDENTIAL UNITS

3,649 lakh square feet of carpet area

gram has approved 1,057 projects to date, of which 825 are residential. In a statement, the authority noted that the last couple of years have been significant for project registrations in the region.

"To strengthen the project registration process, Gurugram RERA has implemented a series of institutional reforms. These include rigorous scrutiny of information submitted by promoters at the time of registration; mandatory project site inspections by domain experts; and compulsory filing of quarterly progress reports. Additionally, public consultation through the issuance of public notices has been made mandatory for project registration," a spokesperson said.

Yashank Wason, Managing Director of Royal Green Realty said the city's momentum has been building quietly over the last few years, which is showing across multiple corridors.

"You have the Golf Course Extension Road seeing consistent project activity. What's changed is the variety; it is no

longer skewed only towards luxury. There's demand coming in for mid-income homes, plotted developments and some mixed-use formats."

"Across NCR, while other cities are improving, Gurgaon continues to stay ahead because of how closely real estate is tied to its commercial ecosystem. That naturally keeps demand more stable. The Rs 27,000-crore investment number reflects that comfort level among developers," he added.

RERA Gurugram chairperson Arun Kumar said the authority currently has around 1,300 pending cases, most of them less than a year old.

"As to the city's increased investments in the space, it is a red-hot market," Kumar said, citing Gurgaon's proximity to Delhi and the IGI Airport, along with its infrastructure and concentration of large developers.

Abhishek Bhardwaj, founder of Kalpvriksha Realty, however, said clearing complaints is only one side of the story.

"There are over 1 lakh delayed homes in Gurgaon... in many cases, FIRs have been lodged against builders... Still, the same developer can apply for a fresh licence. No automatic legal wall stops it. As RERA registers projects and hears complaints later, these two doors are not welded into one promoter-level filter."

"So, a messy past does not automatically block a fresh application. That is why buyers misunderstand approvals. A fresh licence does not mean clean history. A RERA registration does not erase old complaints. An FIR does not automatically kill the next file. The same people can return through a new approval route," he added.

TWO DIE AS CAR HITS THEIR BIKE Three friends, two IPL passes, and a crash that changed everything

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 9

CHILDHOOD FRIENDS Ajay, Rohit and Hemant had reached the stadium on Friday evening to watch an IPL match, excited for a night of cricket. Rohit, who worked at a tours and travels agency, had arranged the passes. But as they stood at the entry gate, they realised there were only two passes instead of three.

While Rohit and Hemant stayed back to watch the match, Ajay decided to head back home. Hours later, Ajay received a call informing him that Rohit and Hemant had been killed after a car allegedly rammed their motorcycle from behind near Bhajanpura Metro station in Northeast Delhi while they were returning home early Saturday.

Rohit (31) and Hemant (33), both residents of Karawal Nagar, died in the collision. Police said the accused driver, Himanshu (27), has been arrested.

This is the second fatal crash involving IPL spectators in Delhi in the last 12 days, taking the toll in such incidents to four. Police said a team from Khajuri Khas police station rushed to the spot after receiving information about the accident and found a damaged Bullet motorcycle and a Maruti Celerio car involved in the collision.

The two men suffered grievous injuries and were taken to Jag Prवेश Chandra Hospital, where doctors declared them brought dead, they added. A case under sections 281 (rash or negligent driving) and 106 (causing death by negligence) of the BNS has been lodged. The car has been seized, an officer said.



33-year-old Hemant



31-year-old Rohit

Speaking to mediapersons, Ajay said, "We used to watch IPL together. Rohit got the passes for us. When we reached the venue, he realised that there were only two. So, I came returned."

"Around 1 am, I got a call saying that they were involved in an accident," he added.

Ajay said Rohit had bought the motorcycle around six months ago and had recently become a father for the second time. "He has a newborn son and another child who is seven years old. Hemant also has two children, aged three and six. I have always been with them and shared all these moments," he added.

On April 28, cousins Yagya Bhatia (20) and Abhay (15) had lost their lives after their motorcycle was hit by a goods carrier while they were returning home on their motorcycle after watching an IPL match.

• THE TALLEST TOWER, SPIRA, IS DESIGNED TO HAVE 72 FLOORS; AROUND 60 HAVE BEEN CONSTRUCTED SO FAR

'Retirement plan', 'dream home': Noida homebuyers finally see hope for Supertech's Supernova after SC intervention

Drishti Jain
Noida, May 9

SEVERAL HOMEBUYERS who had invested their life savings in Noida's ambitious real-estate project, Supertech's Supernova, are finally hoping their long-awaited homes will materialise following a major decision by the Supreme Court-appointed Empowered Committee earlier this week.

The panel appointed PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) as transaction advisor to manage the process of identifying and onboarding a new developer.

Homebuyer Anil Kundra (62) said, "For us, this is one of the most important developments in years because it gives us hope that the stalled work can finally move ahead."

Last year, the SC had appointed the three-member committee to oversee the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) of Supertech Realtors Pvt Ltd, which is caught in a series of litigations by homebuyers and others over its mixed-use Supernova project in Sector 94.

The project has four components: Spira (a mix-use property), Nova East and West (resi-

dential), and Hypernova mall. The mall connects all three towers. The tallest is Spira. According to officials, it has 72 floors and around 60 have been constructed.

Kundra had invested in a studio apartment on the 38th floor in Spira — his retirement plan. While he got possession in 2022, lack of amenities has been a sticking point.

"... I invested in it because the builder had promised that the studio apartments would be run as part of a hotel-chain model that would generate rental income. But I'm paying Rs 10,000 every month as maintenance despite receiving almost no amenities," he said.

Kundra, one of the founding members of SOTF (Spira Owners Task Force), added, "While some units have been rented out, amenities and fire safety systems are not up to the mark."

He also said homebuyers are yet to receive occupation certificates. "The builder pressured us into taking possession by claiming that the Occupancy Certificate (OC) had already been applied for and would arrive in a few months. Trusting that assurance, we took physical pos-



The Supernova project in Sector 94. EXPRESS

session in 2022."

Anant Rastogi (37) said his 62-year-old mother had put her

floor in Spira in 2018, and was promised possession by 2023.

"When the project stalled, we sent emails, messages and made calls to the builders. They either didn't respond or told us there was a shortage of labour or funds..." he said. "The space was a retirement safety net for my mother."

For Karan Kakkar, this was the best location for his dream house — he and his family live in a 4-BHK in Spira. "... Our location cannot be better than this as the Metro is hardly 100 metres away... my wife used to ask why I moved the family here," he rued.

He said they shifted from Delhi to Noida two years ago but are yet to get amenities such as parking, a club house and a swimming pool. They are awaiting an OC as well.

"The other towers have an Apartment Owners' Association, but we don't have anything. Of a total of 78 flats, only four-five owner families live in Spira, apart from tenants. Currently, we're parking our vehicles near the Hypernova mall... as they have still not constructed the ramp connecting the ground floor to the base-

ment," he said.

He said the project should be re-started as soon as possible. "Construction began in 2012," he said. "Ab toh vanvaas ho gaya hai poor 14 saal ka phir bhi complete nahi hua hai (Now it feels like I've gone into exile — a full 14 years have passed, and it still hasn't ended)."

In its December 16 order last year, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi said it was setting up the panel in exercise of its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution "to do complete justice". The SC panel has also commenced verification of records of 497 homebuyers of Nova East and Nova West through a Registration Requisition Form. After the verification process, details of eligible homebuyers are being forwarded to the Noida Authority to enable the execution of Tripartite Sub-Lease Deeds.

The committee has also initiated a comprehensive structural audit of key buildings, which includes Spira Tower and Hypernova Mall, in consultation with the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), Roorkee.

Misri's proposed Kathmandu visit deferred for now; India invites Nepal for big cat summit

Divyana A & Yubaraj Ghimire
New Delhi, Kathmandu,
May 9

THE PROPOSED visit of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri to Kathmandu next week has been deferred for now. However, India has extended an invite to the Nepalese leadership to visit New Delhi next month for the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) summit.

New Delhi is hosting the IBCA summit on June 1, and leaders of all member states, including Nepal, have been invited. It is likely that Nepalese Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal would make a visit to India although there has been no confirmation yet. The IBCA was launched on April 9, 2023, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the commemoration of 50 years of Project Tiger to create an international platform for the conservation of seven big cats — tiger, lion, leopard, cheetah, snow leopard, puma and jaguar.

Misri's proposed two-day visit, at the invitation of his Nepal counterpart Amrit Bahadur Rai, was meant to understand the priorities of the new Balen Shah government. It was also a follow-up of the meeting between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Khanal in April, on the sidelines of the 9th Indian Ocean Conference in Mauritius. During their meeting, Jaishankar and Khanal had discussed ongoing projects and



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Kathmandu was scheduled for next week

programmes, and explored high-level diplomatic visits in the near future. During his proposed visit to the neighbouring country, Misri was likely to call on Nepal PM Shah and hand over an invitation to him to visit India. As per sources, Shah has conveyed to his inner circle that he will not undertake any foreign visits in the near future.

Shah has been reluctant to meet visiting foreign officials or leaders below the rank of foreign minister, as per reports. Last week, as United special envoy for South and Central Asia Sergio Gor visited Nepal, he met with Khanal and Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle. Earlier, Shah is said to have refused to meet US Assistant Secretary of State S Paul Kapur.

It was expected that Shah would have maintained the same policy during Misri's visit. Traditionally, visiting Indian officials have called upon successive Nepal prime ministers.

Earlier, the Foreign Secretary had met with then-Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in August 2025 to discuss bilateral ties.

The recent statement by the Shah government on Lipulekh, objecting to India and China planning to conduct the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through the pass, has also cast a shadow. India had said that such claims are "neither justified nor based on historical facts and evidence", adding it remains open to "constructive interaction with Nepal".

Meanwhile, the two sides continue to engage on a range of other issues, including water resources, power transmission and developmental projects. Three bilateral meetings have been held between the two sides in the last two weeks. These include the Kosi and Gandak projects Joint committee, the committee on water resources, flood forecasting, and that on power transmission.

New Delhi is looking to recalibrate its ties with the Himalayan neighbour, with the stable and full-majority government coming in, in the wake of strain with the previous Oli-led government in the preceding years. Soon after Shah's swearing in on March 27, PM Modi had congratulated him through a post on X, expressing his desire to work closely with Shah to strengthen India-Nepal friendship and deepen cooperation for mutual benefit.

Nadda, Saini in Guwahati for BJP legislature party leader election

Press Trust of India
Guwahati, May 9

UNION MINISTER J P Nadda and Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini arrived in Guwahati on Saturday evening to oversee the election of the leader of the BJP legislature party in the Assam Assembly on May 10, who will also be the next chief minister of the state.

The newly-elected MLAs are scheduled to meet at the state party headquarters Sunday to elect the new leader, a BJP spokesperson said. The BJP-led NDA had swept to a third successive term in the state with a two-thirds majority. The BJP secured 82 seats, while its ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF) won 10 each, in the 126-member House. "The MLAs of the party will meet at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan tomorrow and elect the new leader of the legislature party. Nadda ji and Saini ji will be present as Central observer and co-observer, respectively," he said.

The spokesperson said a meeting of the legislature parties of the NDA partners will be held at the same venue after the BJP MLAs' meeting. The AGP, which already had the meeting of its newly elected MLAs, had proposed the name of Himanta Biswa Sarma for the chief minister's position. The new government will be sworn in at 11 am on May 12, in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Lt Gen Subramani is next CDS

Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, May 9

A SHARP, visionary leader who is technology-savvy and demonstrates professional empathy — that is how officers who know Lieutenant General N S Raja Subramani closely describe him. The decorated officer is set to become India's third Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) at the end of this month, the Ministry of Defence said early Saturday.

In addition to his role as CDS, he will also lead the Department of Military Affairs as secretary in the Ministry of Defence. His appointment as CDS comes nearly three weeks before the current CDS, General Anil Chauhan, completes his tenure on May 30.

An officer familiar with Lt Gen Subramani told *The Indian Express* that he is very sharp and known for his quick decision-making. "No nonsense, no frills, very approachable, and a helpful senior officer. He can integrate academia and industry, and he is a results-oriented person."

Another officer noted that Lt Gen Subramani is recognised for his professional empathy



Lt Gen N S Raja Subramani is set to become the third Chief of Defence Staff in May-end

and takes care of his subordinates' welfare at work. "He is technologically savvy and aspires to create an atmosphere of camaraderie and team spirit."

Former director general of the Defence Intelligence Agency, Lt Gen K J S Dhillon, posted on X that he has known Lt Gen Subramani for decades and can vouch for his leadership, professionalism, commitment, and dedication, adding that he is a thorough gentleman. "He will make a difference."

In his personal life, Lt Gen

Subramani is known to have a keen interest in reading and playing golf. Over a four-decade career, Lt Gen Subramani has held critical appointments in the Army. He has been serving as the military adviser in the National Security Council Secretariat since September 1, 2025. Before that, he had served as the vice chief of the Army staff from July 1, 2024, to July 31, 2025, and as general officer commanding-in-chief, Central Command, from March 2023 to June 2024.

A graduate of the National Defence Academy and the Indian Military Academy, he was commissioned into the 8th Battalion of the Garhwal Rifles on December 14, 1985. He is also an alumnus of the Joint Services Command Staff College, Bracknell (UK), and the National Defence College, New Delhi. He holds a Master of Arts Degree from King's College London and an MPhil in Defence Studies from Madras University. Adding to his expertise of serving across the borders with Pakistan and China, he has commanded 2 Corps, one of the Army's strike corps facing Pakistan. Addi-

tionally, he commanded 16 Garhwal Rifles during counter-insurgency in Assam as part of Operation Rhino, 168 Infantry Brigade in Jammu and Kashmir and 17 Mountain Division in the Central Sector during a challenging operational environment.

He was also the defence attaché in Kazakhstan.

His staff and instructional assignments include colonel general staff (operations) at Headquarters Eastern Command, deputy commander of a Kashmiria Rifles sector in Jammu and Kashmir, deputy director general of military intelligence in the Integrated Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence (Army).

He has also served as brigadier general staff (operations) in the Eastern Command, chief instructor (Army) at Defence Services Staff College, Wellington and Chief of Staff, Headquarters Northern Command. "The General Officer has insightful knowledge and a deep understanding of operational dynamics on both the Western and Northern Borders," the Ministry of Defence said in its statement.

In Hyderabad, Modi to open development projects, attend BJP rally today

Press Trust of India
Hyderabad, May 9

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi is scheduled to inaugurate or lay the foundation stone for development projects worth around Rs 9,500 crore and address a BJP rally in Hyderabad Sunday. This marks his first public rally in Telangana after his 2024 re-poll and historic BJP victories in the West Bengal and Assam Assembly elections.

In a post on X, Modi shared details of his visit to Karnataka and Telangana Sunday. "In the afternoon, I will arrive in Hyderabad, where I will inaugurate or lay the foundation stone for development works worth approximately 9,500 crore rupees. These projects are related to several key sectors, including roads, transportation (logistics), textiles, railways, and fuel."

He will also participate in a programme dedicating Sindhu Hospital to the nation. "In the evening, I will address a BJP gathering in the city. Frustrated by the misrule of the previous BRS and the current Congress government, Telangana is looking toward the BJP. The unprecedented support we are receiving underscores that our party is the top choice for Telangana," he added in the post.

Sources said Modi is likely to visit the residences of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and his deputy Pawan Kalyan in Hyderabad. Kalyan, who underwent a surgical procedure in April after a health complication, is recovering at his home in Hyderabad.

Meanwhile, the Telangana CMO said a Central government official invited Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy to attend Modi's virtual inauguration of development projects at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC) in Hyderabad. The projects to be laid foundation by the PM include four-laning of Hyderabad-Panaji Economic Corridor and Zaheerabad Industrial Area. He will inaugurate sections of Kazipet-Vijayawada multi-tracking project of railways, Greenfield POL (Petroleum, Oil, Lubricants) Terminal in Hyderabad and PM MITRA Park in Warangal.

Telangana BJP chief spokesperson N V Subhash said Saturday that the party sees Telangana as a potential state where it can come to power on its own and that the party's state unit is confident of gaining momentum after the PM's visit. The state BJP unit is making elaborate arrangements for the rally and nearly 2 lakh people are expected to attend the event. The party has undertaken a "wall walking" campaign in the state ahead of the rally.

India tests nuclear-capable Agni missile with MIRV system

Sushant Kulkarni
Pune, May 9

THE MINISTRY of Defence (MoD) announced on Friday that India has conducted the successful flight-trial of an advanced version of the nuclear-capable Agni missile with Multiple Independently Targeted Reentry Vehicle (MIRV) system from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha, Thursday.

Without specifying which variant of the Agni missile was used, the MoD said the missile was flight-tested with multiple payloads, targeted to different targets spatially distributed over a large geographical area in the Indian Ocean Region.

"The telemetry and tracking was carried out by multiple ground and ship-based stations. These systems tracked the entire missile trajectory from lift-off till the impact of all payloads. Flight data confirmed that all mission objectives were met during the trial. With this successful trial, India once again demonstrated the capability to target multiple strategic targets using a single missile system. This missile is developed by DRDO laboratories with the support of industries across the country. The trial was witnessed by senior scientists of DRDO and Indian Army per-



DRDO test-fired the advanced nuclear-capable Agni missile with MIRV system from Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha. ANI

sonnel," the MoD said.

More than two years ago, on March 11, 2024 the MoD had said it had carried out the first successful flight test of the indigenously developed Agni-5 missile with MIRV technology.

While there was no official

confirmation of the range of the missile tested on Thursday, a NOTMAR (Note to Mariners) issued for the window of May 6 to 9 for the Bay of Bengal was to the range of around 3,600 km, suggesting the missile hit targets within this range.

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Vice Admiral Swaminathan next Navy Chief

Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, May 9

VICE ADMIRAL Krishna Swaminathan is set to become the next Chief of the Naval Staff at the end of this month, the Ministry of Defence said Saturday. The announcement comes three weeks before the current Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi, retires from service on May 31.

Vice Admiral Swaminathan has been serving as the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Naval Command since July 31, 2025. Under his leadership, the Navy deployed ships around the Persian Gulf region to escort Indian merchant vessels through the Strait of Hormuz amidst the ongoing conflict between Iran and the US.

His colleagues describe him as a warm and highly knowledgeable individual, well-versed in the complex aspects and regu-



Vice Admiral Swaminathan has been serving as the Western Naval Command's Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief

lations governing maritime affairs. "He is a perfectionist at work and has a keen eye for detail. He is also passionate about fitness and goes for runs regularly," a Navy officer who has worked closely with him, said.

Commissioned into the Navy on July 1, 1987, the decor-

ated officer specialises in Communication and Electronic Warfare. He has held several key operational, staff and training appointments in his naval career, including the Command of missile vessels INS Vidyut and Vinash, missile corvette INS Kullish, guided missile destroyer INS Mysore, and aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya. He served as the Chief Staff Officer (Training) at Headquarters, Southern Naval Command, Kochi and played a key role in the conduct of training across the Navy.

He was also instrumental in raising the Naval Safety Team that oversees operational safety across all verticals of the Navy and subsequently headed the Work Up Organisation of the Navy as the Flag Officer Sea Training, after which he was appointed as the Flag Officer Commanding, Western Fleet. He served as the Flag Officer Offshore Defence Advisory Group

and Advisor, Offshore Security and Defence, to the GoI.

The Flag Officer had served as the Chief of Staff of the Western Naval Command, Controller of Personnel Services and Chief of Personnel at NHQ. Before his current assignment, he served as Vice Chief of the Naval Staff at Naval HQs. He is an alumnus of the NDA, Khadakwasla; Joint Services Command and Staff College, Shrivenham, UK; College of Naval Warfare, Karanja; and US Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island.

He holds a BSc degree from JNU, New Delhi, and a range of other educational degrees, such as an M Sc in Telecommunications from Cochin University of Science and Technology, Kochi; MA in Defence Studies from King's College, London; MPhil in Strategic Studies from Mumbai University; and PhD in International Studies from Mumbai University.

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State Election Commission, Haryana

Cast Your Vote

Date - 10.05.2026 (08:00 AM to 06:00 PM)

MUNICIPAL CORPORATION ELECTIONS : Panchkula, Ambala & Sonapat

MUNICIPAL COUNCIL & COMMITTEE ELECTIONS : Rewari, Dharuhera, Sampla & Uklana

The electors who have not obtained their Elector's Photo Identity card (EPIC) as yet but their names are entered in the present voter list of concerned Corporation/Council/Committee shall have to produce any one of the following as an alternative document for establishing their identity at the polling station:

- I. Aadhar Card issued by UIDAI
- II. Parivar Pehchan Patra (PPP)
- III. Passport
- IV. Driving License
- V. Income Tax Identity (PAN) Card
- VI. Service Identity Card issued to employees by Central/State Government Offices, Public Sector Undertakings, Local Bodies or other public Limited Company
- VII. Passbook of an account, having photograph, opened in a scheduled Bank or Post Office
- VIII. Freedom Fighter Identity Card having photograph
- IX. SC/ST/OBC certificate having photograph, issued by competent authority
- X. Certificate of Physical disability having photograph issued by the Competent Authority
- XI. Arms License having photograph
- XII. Job Cards with photograph issued under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, MGNREGA etc.
- XIII. Property documents with photographs such as Pattas, Registered Deeds etc.
- XIV. Pension Documents such as Ex-Servicemen Pension Book/Pension Payment Order, Ex-Servicemen's Widow/Dependent Certificate, Old Age Pension Order, Widow Pension Order, with photograph
- XV. Health Insurance Scheme Smart Cards with Photograph
- XVI. Ration Cards or any other similar documents establishing the identity of the electors to the satisfaction of the Presiding Officer, having photograph

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FROM HIMANTA BISWA SARMA TO SAMRAT CHOUDHARY

How Suwendu Adhikari joins BJP's CMs club of faces from other parties

Vikas Pathak
New Delhi, May 9

THE ELEVATION of Suwendu Adhikari to the Chief Minister's post in the BJP's first government in West Bengal marks the continuation of a remarkable trend — the party's willingness to reward those who crossed over to it from other parties, especially in states where it has risen to power recently.

While the BJP generally chooses the CM from among its seasoned leaders or workers in its core states, the party has also been open to expanding and reinforcing its organisation in traditionally weak states by inducting leaders from other parties.

In states where it has been well-entrenched too, the BJP ropes in leaders from other parties, but seldom rewards them with the top post, which is generally reserved for long-time insiders — Bihar being an exception in this regard at present.

Suwendu Adhikari

Adhikari, who has taken oath as the West Bengal CM after the BJP's first-ever victory in the large eastern state, was earlier with the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress (TMC), where he was a close aide of Mamata, whom he has now defeated twice in direct contests. In 2007, he played a key role in Nandigram's anti-land acquisition agitation spearheaded by Banerjee — a movement that brought her to power in 2011.

However, by 2020, Mamata's close lieutenant drifted away from the TMC as he felt sidelined, and switched to the BJP. Adhikari went on to defeat Banerjee from Nandigram in the 2021 polls, showing that his hold there was stronger, and has repeated the feat from Bhabanipur in 2026.

In Bengal, the BJP has gone from drawing a blank in the 2011 Assembly polls to winning 207



PM Narendra Modi with West Bengal CM Suwendu Adhikari and his ministers — Dilip Ghosh, Agnimitra Paul, Nisith Pramanik, Ashok Kirtania, and Kshudiram Tudu after they took oath, on Saturday. PARTHA PAUL

seats out of 293 in the recent elections, indicating that the electoral surge in the state has preceded the development of a robust party organisation and leadership at the grassroots level across the state. In such a scenario, the party has chosen Adhikari, an established leader, as the CM despite the fact that he joined it just six years ago.

Himanta Biswa Sarma

Before Adhikari in Bengal, the trend was seen in Assam. The current CM and BJP leader, Himanta Biswa Sarma, had been a prominent Congress leader and minister in the state till 2014. In the 2011 Assembly polls, he defeated Prodyut Bora, a key figure of LK Advani's campaign team for the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, from Jalukbari by a huge margin — Sarma secured 72.1% vote share as against Bora's 12.6% votes.

Sarma finally left the Congress suddenly in 2015 owing to differences with then CM and

party veteran Tarun Gogoi. He had then reportedly even met Rahul Gandhi in a last bid to get a better deal for himself, but claimed to have got upset as Gandhi was apparently "feeding biscuits to a dog" rather than listening to his concerns.

After joining the BJP, he became instrumental in the rise of the party in Assam. The BJP, which was a small player in Assam earlier, came to power in the state for the first time in 2016. At that time, it made Sarbananda Sonowal, who had a background in the AGP, the CM. After its second victory in 2021, the party however appointed Sarma as the CM and shifted Sonowal to the Centre as a Union minister.

While Sonowal was ideologically never the opposite of the BJP — it was on his petition that the Supreme Court had struck down the IMDT Act that put the onus on the state to prove that someone was an illegal immigrant — and just seamlessly merged his "anti-infiltration" position with the BJP's stand,

Sarma was a quintessential Congress leader who is now one of the most strident Hindutva CMs of the party.

Pema Khandu

In Arunachal Pradesh, in 2016, 43 of the 44 Congress MLAs, led by then CM Pema Khandu, joined the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA), an ally of the NDA's North-East Democratic Alliance (NEDA). Two months later, Khandu split the PPA itself, walking away to the BJP with 32 MLAs. While Khandu remained the CM, he was able to switch from a diminished Congress to a formidable BJP ruling at the Centre. In Arunachal Pradesh, the BJP was traditionally a weak force.

N Biren Singh

In Manipur, former CM N Biren Singh was a Congress leader and a minister in its government before he joined the BJP in 2016. In 2017, the BJP formed its government in the state, elevating Singh to the CM's role. Manipur is also a state where the BJP has risen in

the last few years.

Manik Saha

Tripura CM Manik Saha also has a background in the Congress. He switched to the BJP in 2016 and became president of its state unit from 2020 to 2022. After being elected as an MLA in 2022, Saha became CM the same year after party leader Biplob Kumar Deb stepped down from this post. Tripura, which had earlier seen a CPI (M) government for 25 years, saw the BJP storming to power in 2018.

Samrat Choudhary

Samrat Choudhary, the first CM of the BJP-led government in Bihar, joined the BJP only in 2017. Before that, he had a long stint in the RJD and was also with the Janata Dal (United). Thus, despite Bihar being a state where the BJP has had a strong influence for long, it has installed a relatively recent party entrant as the CM.

There are reasons for this. The BJP, traditionally an "upper caste" party in Bihar, seeks to woo the OBCs in large numbers to retain its primacy in the state. The Yadav community has been with the RJD led by Lalu Prasad and his son Tejashwi Yadav. Kurmis have been with the Nitish Kumar-led JD (U), while Upendra Kushwaha has tried to project himself as the leader of the Kushwhas with limited success.

Samrat Choudhary belongs to the Kushwaha/Koeri community, which has made him crucial for the BJP's scheme of things in the state.

Given that Kurmis and Kushwhas, often called the "Luv-Kush" castes, are sometimes perceived as a larger bloc, the BJP is trying to woo these castes in particular and the OBCs in general. After the death of Sushil Kumar Modi, the BJP did not have a heavyweight OBC leader in the state.



Congress's Kerala affairs in-charge Deepa Dasmunshi and senior party leaders VD Satheesan, Ramesh Chennithala, Sunny Joseph and KC Venugopal after meeting party chief Mallikarjun Kharge in New Delhi on Saturday. GAJENDRA YADAV

Cong in catch-22 over Kerala CM pick, Rahul livid over tussle flaring on the streets

Manoj CG

New Delhi, May 9

THE TUSSEL within Congress over its choice of Kerala Chief Minister intensified Saturday, with the party high command failing to arrive at a consensus candidate even after three hours of discussions with the three contenders — outgoing state Leader of the Opposition (LoP) V D Satheesan, AICC general secretary (organisation) K C Venugopal, and former state Congress chief Ramesh Chennithala — at party president Mallikarjun Kharge's residence in Delhi.

The only saving grace for the high command was that it managed to persuade the three leaders to jointly appeal to their supporters to stop taking the chief ministerial race to the streets. Accordingly, all three leaders, along with state Congress president Sunny Joseph, issued a joint appeal against street protests. Satheesan asked party workers to remove all flex boards and banners put up across the state by supporters of the three leaders.

The high command, especially the LoP in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, has taken a stern view of the unprecedented display of Congress factionalism on the streets of Ke-

erala, arguing that it has dimmed the sheen of the UDF's landslide victory in the elections. Rahul was said to be furious over it. He told the three contenders that such pressure tactics should have been avoided, and that the public show of support by their respective camps was an insult to the people who have given the mandate to the Congress.

During the three-hour discussions — held both collectively and individually — with Kharge and Gandhi, all three contenders remained firm in staking their respective claims to the CM's post.

While Venugopal argued that he enjoys the support of a majority in the Congress Legislature Party (CLP), Chennithala reiterated the seniority factor. Satheesan, meanwhile, maintained that he has the support of the United Democratic Front (UDF)'s allies and that public sentiment favours him. He reportedly told the high command that he would not accept any post if denied the chief ministership.

After the meeting, AICC general secretary in charge of Kerala Deepa Dasmunshi said a final decision would be announced "very soon" and "in due time". "For the last two-three days there have been some over-

enthusiastic workers... and some unruly incidents have happened in Kerala... and those unruly incidents are not our Congress culture. So, we are requesting all workers to stop this kind of activity," she said. Dasmunshi, along with AICC observers Ajay Maken and Mukul Wasnik, was part of the discussions.

According to sources, an "overwhelming" majority of the Congress's newly elected MLAs, as well as MPs from the state, told AICC observers Maken and Wasnik that they wanted Venugopal to be named CM. However, both the Chennithala and Satheesan camps have also claimed support from MLAs.

The high command has a difficult task on its hands. While a majority of MLAs appear to have backed Venugopal, Satheesan has emerged as the dominant figure in the public imagination after leading the Congress and the UDF's campaign and spearheading the offensive against the CPI(M)-led government of Pinarayi Vijayan over the last five years as the Opposition leader. Chennithala remains the senior-most among the three contenders.

All the three leaders have left for Kerala, an indication that the process of consultations with them is complete.

Who is Makhanlal Sarkar? The 97-year-old whose feet PM touched at swearing-in event

Sweety Kumari
& Asad Rehman
Kolkata, May 9



Sarkar was an aide of Jan Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee. PARTHA PAUL

IN A moment laden with political symbolism at the swearing-in ceremony of the first BJP government in West Bengal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday touched the feet of 97-year-old party veteran Makhan Lal Sarkar.

Sarkar was an aide of Jan Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee and has been associated with the BJP since its inception in 1980.

In 1952, Sarkar was arrested in Kashmir while accompanying Mookerjee during the movement to hoist the Tricolour in the Valley. Mookerjee's visit to Kashmir was part of a movement led by him to pressure the Centre to

Kashmir hamara hai, wo saare ka saara hai (Where Mookerjee was martyred, that Kashmir is ours; the Kashmir that is ours is the entire Kashmir).

Sarkar served as the coordinator for the erstwhile West Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, and Darjeeling districts. Within a year, he successfully enrolled 10,000 members, laying the groundwork for the party's current dominance in North Bengal.

He served an unprecedented seven terms as the BJP's district unit chief. A resident of Siliguri, he continues to work for the party despite his age. Modi touching Sarkar's feet was seen as a gesture reflecting the BJP's emphasis on recognising the party's old guard.

PM Modi later took to X to pay tribute to Sarkar, describing

him as a "devoted patriot" who represents the foundational roots of the nationalist movement. "Today, as the first BJP government in West Bengal takes oath, it is only natural for all of us to remember Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee," Modi wrote.

"At the swearing-in ceremony... I met Makhanlal Sarkar. A devoted patriot, Sarkar worked closely with Dr Mookerjee and was even arrested alongside him during his journey to Jammu and Kashmir. He has dedicated his life to expanding our party's foundation across West Bengal and inspiring people from all walks of life to join us," Modi posted. "We are proud that our party has such inspirational figures... We will not spare any effort in realising Dr Mookerjee's dream," he added.

Mamata calls for unity among all Opp parties to fight BJP, CPM rebukes her

Atri Mitra
Kolkata, May 9



Former CM Mamata Banerjee pays homage to Rabin Dranath Tagore on his birth anniversary, in Kolkata on Saturday. ANI

ON A day when Suwendu Adhikari took oath as the first ever BJP CM of West Bengal, Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee reached out to all opposition parties, especially the Left, with a call for unity to fight against the BJP.

However, CPIM reacted sharply to her call, saying she only was responsible for BJP's rise in the state. CPIM Central Committee member Sujan Chakraborty said, "She has no credibility of fight against BJP. Earlier, she said, she is eager to form a front with the BJP. During her tenure, RSS strengthened its roots in the state..."

Mamata was speaking at an event at her residence to cel-

ebate the birth anniversary of Rabin Dranath Tagore on Saturday. "The reign of terror has been unleashed. In such a scenario, I would urge all the opposition parties of Bengal, the student organisations and the NGOs to unite against the BJP. A united platform can be created of all parties that are against the BJP. Along with the national parties, I would urge the Leftists and the ultra-Leftists to unite in Bengal as well as in Delhi. If any party wants to speak to me in this regard, I am available... It needs to be remembered that our first enemy is the BJP," she said.

She accused the BJP of bringing people from outside the state to trouble opponents. "Some goons created trouble in front of my house and Abhishek's residence. His daughter is also being

threatened. Her private tutor has been heckled," she said. She also flagged the denial of permission to celebrate Rabin Dranath Tagore's birth anniversary at three places. "We have been observing the birth anniversaries of several visionaries of our country since our childhood. But why has permission been denied this time?"

She said all national leaders of the opposition parties have contacted her. "I have spoken to Sonia ji, Rahul Gandhi, Kharge ji, Uddhav Thackeray & Tejashwi Yadav. Akhilesh Yadav himself came here. I have also spoken to Hemant Soren and Arvind Kejriwal," she said. Meanwhile, TMC's second-in-command Abhishek Banerjee in a post on X alleged wrongdoings in the counting, SIR deletions and intimidation of voters.

Knives out in TMC: Leaders, MLAs call out factionalism, Mamata bid to not quit

Ravik Bhattacharya
& Atri Mitra
Kolkata, May 9

IT'S NOW out in the open. Trinamool Congress (TMC) leaders and legislators who have been toeing the party's line publicly for all these years have now started speaking out on what is wrong in the party, after its humiliating defeat at the hands of BJP in the Assembly elections.

After former Minister of State for Sports and cricketer Manoj Tiwary fired the first salvo, calling the Mamata Banerjee government "corrupt" that "deserved to be cast away", other TMC leaders like MP and actor Dev have started speaking out against the party leadership, with some even blaming general secretary and Mamata's nephew, Abhishek Banerjee, for the electoral debacle.

"Lobbies, lobbies and lobbies. The party is infected with lobby and factionalism," said TMC MLA Niamot Sheikh, who won from Hariharpara in

Murshidabad district. Sheikh, who had attended Wednesday's meeting of TMC Legislature Party meeting at party supremo Mamata Banerjee's Kalighat residence, said the leadership allowed factionalism in the party, which ultimately led to the defeat.

"There are so many factions of the party in Murshidabad itself. I have repeatedly warned the party higher-ups regarding this. I was ignored. They thought it was better not to pay heed to me. The top leadership thought that more the factions, more the competition and better the position. If one raised questions, they would back the other lobby. It is a fact that when one becomes the party's candidate in the polls, the other lobbies will not work for him," Sheikh told *The Indian Express* over the phone without naming anyone in particular.

"Then there was technology," Sheikh said, adding that party leadership placed a lot of emphasis on technology like social media campaigns etc. "They

undermined the human factor," he added.

Sheikh, who defeated Humayun Kabir's nominee by over 12,000 votes, said suspending him just before the elections was not a wise call. "I don't know whose lobby brainwashed our supreme leader (Mamata Banerjee) against Humayun Kabir... In Murshidabad, like in other areas, Muslim vote got divided," he added. Akhruzzaman, the TMC MLA from Raghunathganj in Murshidabad district, also blamed the division in Muslim votes behind the party's defeat in the minority-dominated areas.

Another TMC MLA from Murshidabad district, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said, "Our Muslim vote bank cracked, while the Hindu votes consolidated towards the BJP", adding that the party has changed a lot in the past few years. "Our voices never reached the top. The party was dependent on a professional agency (I-PAC) which acted as



TMC leaders at party supremo Mamata Banerjee's residence in Kolkata on Saturday. EXPRESS

middlemen," the leader said, disagreeing with Mamata's decision to not accept the defeat and refusing to resign as the chief minister. "I believe we should accept defeat, and start rebuilding the party. Not accepting defeat is further tarnishing our image among the people," the TMC MLA said.

TMC MLA from Bagnan in Howrah district, Arunabha Sen, was also critical of Mamata's

decision to not resign. "It is true that we faced hostility during counting. Even after that, I stayed at the counting centre. I have faith that people voted for me, and I will win," said Sen, who defeated BJP's Pramansu Rana.

TMC MLA from Sujapur in Malda district, Sabina Yasmin admitted organisational shortcomings, but refused to add more. "I have full faith and confidence in Mamata Banerjee.

She is our leader... We do have some organisational shortcomings. We can't deny it." Abdur Rahim Boxi, the TMC MLA from Malatipur in Malda, blamed the Election Commission's contentious Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls behind the party's debacle in the poll. TMC MLA from Entally in Kolkata, Sandipan Saha said the party will look into the reasons for its defeat.

Deputy Mayor of Kolkata Municipal Corporation, Atin Ghosh, who lost from Kashipur-Belgachia Assembly constituency cited "three main reasons" for the defeat. "One is religious polarisation. Second is the deletion of voters' names, and third, the huge anti-incumbency." Veteran TMC leader Madan Mitra, who once again got elected from Kamarhati in North 24 Parganas, said, "What is the cause of this defeat, that our leaders will introspect." On Mamata refusing to resign as CM, he said it was "a unanimous decision of the party MLAs".

The TMC on Saturday suspended three of its spokespersons for six years over alleged anti-party remarks made following the poll defeat. According to a statement, spokespersons Kohinoor Majumdar, Riju Dutta and Kartik Ghosh were suspended for allegedly violating party discipline. The action came days after the party issued show-cause notices to five spokespersons over comments critical of the leadership and the party's electoral strategy.

According to a PTI report, the other two leaders who were served notices are Krishnendu Chowdhury and Papiya Ghosh. Majumdar had earlier told the media, "Party leaders had to wait for hours to meet the TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee." TMC leader from Malda, Chowdhury, also criticised Abhishek's way of functioning. Similarly, Papiya Ghosh and Kartik Ghosh also spoke out against the party leadership. Ghosh is the daughter of senior Cooch Behar

TMC leader Rabin Dranath Ghosh, who too criticised Abhishek publicly. Dutta had praised the BJP's measures to curb post-poll violence in a post.

Actor Dev, who won from Ghatil in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and campaigned in this Assembly election, told mediapersons that he refused to "speak lies" about Ghatil masterplan. Referring to his 2024 speech in Parliament that led to speculation of his political future, the actor-politician said he was falsely promised by Mamata and Abhishek that the long-delayed masterplan, the project to mitigate flooding issue in Purba and Paschim Medinipur, would be fast-tracked.

Former cricketer Manoj Tiwary, in a Facebook Live, just two days after BJP's victory, accused Mamata and former sports minister Aroop Biswas of sidelining him in the government. Congratulating the BJP for its "massive win", he said he was "relieved by TMC's exit".

-WITH PTI

“Caring for her is the most meaningful way to celebrate her”

When to Seek Medical Advice



Dr. Madhu Goel
Gynecologist, South Delhi

Women should consult a doctor if they experience heavy bleeding, severe menstrual pain, or frequent urination. These may be signs of Uterine Fibroids. Early diagnosis allows better treatment planning and may reduce the need for invasive procedures. Ignoring symptoms can lead to worsening discomfort and complications. Timely evaluation helps maintain health, prevent anemia, and improve overall quality of life.

You Deserve a Proper Diagnosis



Dr. Meenakshi Ahuja
Gynecologist, South Delhi

Many women are told to “wait and watch” without fully understanding their condition. While small fibroids may not require immediate treatment, persistent symptoms should not be dismissed. You deserve clear information and a proper plan. This Mother's Day, don't settle for uncertainty. A detailed evaluation can help you understand the size, number, and impact of fibroids, allowing for better decision-making.

You Care for Everyone Let Us Care for You

As a mother, your focus is always on your child and family. You manage responsibilities, routines, and emotions every single day. But in doing so, many women overlook their own health concerns. Persistent pelvic pain, heavy bleeding, or unexplained fatigue are not issues to ignore. These



Dr. Sonal Bathla
Gynecologist, Central Delhi

could be signs of endometriosis. This Mother's Day, I want to remind you that your health matters just as much as your family's. You deserve proper attention, care, and relief. Taking a step toward diagnosis and treatment is not self-centered it is essential for maintaining your strength and stability.

Constant Fatigue Isn't Normal



Dr. Auditi Narayan
Gynecologist, West Delhi

Persistent tiredness that does not improve with rest may indicate Iron Deficiency Anemia. This condition occurs when the body lacks sufficient iron to produce hemoglobin, reducing oxygen supply to tissues. Women may experience weakness, dizziness, and reduced stamina. Many ignore these symptoms, assuming they are part of daily stress. A simple blood test can confirm the diagnosis. Early treatment with supplements and dietary changes can restore energy levels and improve daily functioning.

Severe Period Pain Is Not Normal

Many women believe painful periods are a normal part of life, but severe pain that disrupts daily activities may indicate Endometriosis. This condition occurs when tissue similar to the uterine lining grows outside the uterus, causing inflammation, pain, and sometimes fertility issues.



Dr. Rabin Gujral
Gynecologist, West Delhi

If you frequently miss work, rely on strong painkillers, or notice worsening symptoms over time, it is important to seek medical advice. Early diagnosis can significantly improve treatment outcomes, prevent complications, and help maintain better long-term reproductive and overall health.

Paleness and Weakness Are Not Minor Signs

If you notice pale skin, frequent dizziness, headaches, or shortness of breath, don't ignore these signs. They often indicate iron deficiency anemia. Many young mothers overlook these symptoms, assuming they are just part of postpartum recovery or a busy routine. This delay can



Dr. Anita Uniyal
Gynecologist, North Delhi

worsen the condition over time. This Mother's Day, take these signals seriously. Your body is clearly indicating an imbalance. A simple blood test can confirm the diagnosis, and timely treatment can prevent worsening fatigue, reduced immunity, and long-term health complications that affect your daily life.

Common Symptoms to Watch



Dr. Renuka Tyagi
Gynecologist, East Delhi

Symptoms of Iron Deficiency Anemia often develop gradually and may include pale skin, breathlessness, headaches, and poor concentration. Women, especially during pregnancy or postpartum, are at higher risk due to increased iron requirements. Ignoring these signs can worsen the condition. Early diagnosis through a hemoglobin test and appropriate treatment can significantly improve energy levels, immunity, and overall wellbeing.

Being Strong Doesn't Mean Ignoring Pain

I often see young mothers push through pain, believing that enduring it quietly makes them stronger. But ignoring symptoms does not make the problem go away. Endometriosis can gradually worsen if left unaddressed, leading to more complications over time. Strength is not about tolerating suffering it's about recognizing when your



Dr. Ritu Jain
Gynecologist, Gurugram

body needs help. This Mother's Day, I want you to redefine strength. Listening to your body and seeking timely care is a sign of awareness, not weakness. You don't have to live with ongoing pain. Proper evaluation and treatment can significantly improve your quality of life.

Your Health Is Your Child's Foundation



Dr. Anshu Sharma
Gynecologist, West Delhi

Your child depends on you not just physically, but emotionally and mentally as well. Chronic pain caused by conditions like endometriosis can gradually reduce your energy, patience, and overall wellbeing. This can affect how you experience motherhood on a daily basis. Taking care of your health is not separate from caring for your child it is directly connected. This Mother's Day, prioritize your wellbeing without guilt. Addressing your symptoms and seeking proper care can help you stay active, present, and emotionally available. A healthier you creates a stronger, more stable environment for your child to grow.

Heavy Periods Are Not Normal

Heavy or prolonged menstrual bleeding is often ignored, but it may indicate Uterine Fibroids. These non-cancerous growths can lead to excessive bleeding, pelvic discomfort, and fatigue. Women experiencing



Dr. Shakuntla Kumar
Gynecologist, North Delhi

frequent pad changes, passing clots, or feeling weak during periods should seek medical evaluation. If left untreated, fibroids can cause anemia and impact daily life. Early diagnosis through ultrasound allows timely management, helping reduce symptoms and improve overall health and comfort.

You Deserve a Proper Diagnosis



Dr. Pooja Uniyal
Gynecologist, North Delhi

Many women are told to “wait and watch” without fully understanding their condition. While small fibroids may not require immediate treatment, persistent symptoms should not be dismissed. You deserve clear information and a proper plan. This Mother's Day, don't settle for uncertainty. A detailed evaluation can help you understand the size, number, and impact of fibroids, allowing for better decision-making.

Impact on Fertility



Dr. Savithri Sowmya
Gynecologist, South Delhi

Endometriosis can affect fertility by causing inflammation and damage to reproductive organs. While not all women with this condition face infertility, delayed diagnosis may reduce future options. Women planning pregnancy or experiencing difficulty conceiving should consider evaluation if symptoms are present. Early diagnosis and management can help preserve reproductive function and improve outcomes. Addressing symptoms at the right time allows better planning and reduces long-term complications related to reproductive health.

Why Early Diagnosis Matters

Endometriosis is often diagnosed late because many women normalize their symptoms. However, delaying evaluation can lead to worsening pain, disease progression, and possible fertility challenges. Early diagnosis allows timely treatment, including medications or surgery when required,



Dr. Meenu Goyal
Gynecologist, South Delhi

which can effectively control symptoms and improve quality of life. Women experiencing persistent pelvic pain, painful periods, or discomfort during daily activities should not ignore these signs. Consulting a specialist early provides clarity and ensures better long-term physical, emotional, and reproductive health outcomes.

Taking Time for Health Is Not Neglect



Dr. Kalpana Aggarwal
Gynecologist, West Delhi

Many mothers feel guilty about taking time for themselves, especially when it comes to medical care. But ignoring your health does not benefit your family it can actually make things more difficult over time. Conditions like endometriosis can worsen if left untreated, leading to more disruption in your daily life. This Mother's Day, shift your perspective. Seeking care is not neglecting your responsibilities it is strengthening them. When you take care of your health, you are better equipped to handle everything else. Prioritizing your wellbeing is a practical and necessary decision.

A Healthier You Is the Best Gift You Can Give

This Mother's Day, while you care for everyone else, take a moment to focus on yourself. If you've been experiencing heavy periods, pelvic pressure, or unexplained fatigue, don't ignore it. Fibroids are common and manageable when addressed early. Seeking medical advice is not a burden it's a step toward a better quality of life. A healthier you allows you to be more present, energetic, and confident in your role as a mother.



Dr. Ranjana Gupta
Gynecologist, South Delhi

Yogi Cabinet expansion today, 6 new ministers likely to take oath

Express News Service Lucknow, May 9

THE MUCH-delayed expansion of the Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh Cabinet will take place on Sunday as the BJP's central leadership is learnt to have given its nod for it, officials in the state government confirmed.

The decision comes after the Assembly elections in four states concluded and oath-taking of the new Bengal chief minister was held on Saturday.

Chief Minister Adityanath met Governor Anandiben Patel on Saturday evening soon after he landed in Lucknow upon his return from Kolkata where he attended the swearing-in ceremony of new CM Suwendu Adhikari earlier in the day.

The list of the new ministers was yet to be finalised and given to the Governor till late Saturday evening, sources in the government said.

According to the provisions given the number of Assembly seats, six more ministers can be added to the state Cabinet which can have a maximum strength of 60. The Cabinet currently has 54 ministers, including the CM. The number of new ministers taking oath on Sunday can be more than six as some of the existing ministers could be dropped from the Cabinet, sources said.

Though the CM has a list of probabilities ready, it is yet to get the final nod from the party's top leadership, sources said, ad-

ding the would-be ministers will get a call either late in the night or early in the morning.

Officials said all ministers have been asked to reach Jan Bhawan at 3 pm to attend the swearing-in and later arrive at Lok Bhawan (CM's office) for a Cabinet meeting to be chaired by Adityanath.

The newly inducted ministers will also attend the meeting, they added.

Among the strong probabilities getting oath on Sunday is former state BJP president Bhopendra Singh Chaudhary, who is likely to get the power portfolio which currently is with AK Sharma, known to be close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The other strong probable candidate in the list is Hansraj Vishwakarma, an MLC hailing from the PM's constituency of Varanasi. Also among the probabilities is Manoj Pandey, an expelled Samajwadi Party MLA from Rae Bareilly, even as some senior BJP leaders and RSS functionaries are strongly opposed to his induction, it is learnt.

The other names doing rounds are of Sitapur MLA Asha Maurya, an OBC face, Aligarh MLA Surendra Diler, a Dalit, MLC Govind Narayan Shukla, a Brahmin, Fatehpur MLA Krishna Paswan, a Dalit, Mathura MLA and former minister Srikanth Sharma, and MLC and former minister Mahendra Singh. Singh is considered close to Adityanath and also to some central BJP leaders.

How Vijay, Rahul chemistry over 17 years proved glue for TVK and Congress alliance

Manoj CG New Delhi, May 9

THE CONGRESS'S decision to back the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) and its chief Vijay after the Tamil Nadu Assembly polls threw up a fractured mandate, has not come as a surprise to many within the party.

The reason: the long-standing equation between the TVK chief and the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, that dates back nearly 17 years, when the latter was relatively new to politics and Vijay was on the cusp of superstardom in Tamil films.

Long before Vijay formally entered politics and launched the TVK in 2024, Congress leaders had already viewed him as ideologically aligned with the party, with early conversations between the actor and Rahul Gandhi in 2009 fuelling speculation about a possible political partnership.

Congress sources recall a meeting Vijay had with Gandhi in August 2009, months after the Congress returned to power in the Lok Sabha elections with an improved mandate from 2004. Was Vijay — who had by then starred in nearly 50 films and earned the moniker "Ilaya Thalapathy" — inclined to join the Congress, or was Gandhi keen to bring him into the party fold? The answer perhaps lies somewhere in between.

Even before his political debut, Cong saw Vijay as ideologically aligned with party



Conversations between the actor and the Congress leader in 2009 had fuelled speculation about a possible political partnership. PTI/ANI

The two have remained in touch intermittently since then. Gandhi telephoned Vijay after the actor formally entered politics in 2024 with the launch of the TVK. Vijay, in turn, called Gandhi to wish him on his birthday last year. The two also spoke after the Karur stampede and again after Vijay's stunning electoral debut in the recent polls.

Congress sources said the 2009 meeting was facilitated by then NSUI national secretary Gopinath Palaniyappan, who lost to the TVK candidate in Erode (East) in this election. Congress leaders say Vijay's father, S A Chandrasekhar, leaned towards the Congress and had accompanied his son to meet Gandhi in Delhi. The meeting had triggered intense speculation in Tamil Nadu over Vijay's political ambitions.

According to Congress leaders, Palaniyappan, who knew Vijay personally, arranged the interaction. Gandhi was then in charge of the Youth Congress and was attempting to democratise the organisation through internal elections. Vijay had already floated the Vijay Makkal Iyakkam, an outfit ostensibly focused on social service but widely seen as an effort to convert his fan base into a political constituency.

What transpired during the meeting, which Vijay later said took place at Gandhi's initiative, has remained a subject of interest. Vijay later recalled that one of his well-wishers had conveyed Gandhi's invitation. "At first I thought it could even be a prank. But it was a good opportunity... not everyone gets such a chance. I am not such a big per-

son for Rahul to meet me. But I felt the opportunity should not be missed. One day I cancelled my shootings, went to Delhi with my father and met him at his residence," Vijay had said in remarks that are now viral.

Vijay said he was struck by the warmth with which Gandhi received him. "He is working hard to bring about change in India. He is focusing on the youth. We all know the steps he took during the recent Parliamentary elections and the results because of that... For such a person to meet me is a matter of pride for me, my fans and the people of Tamil Nadu," he had said. The two reportedly spoke for over an hour about politics, cinema and the Makkal Iyakkam. Congress sources claim Gandhi even offered Vijay the post of Tamil Nadu Youth Congress chief. There were also plans for Vijay to share the stage with Gandhi at a public meeting in Coimbatore in September 2009. Vijay, however, backed out at the last minute and later denied reports that he was planning to join the Congress. Even so, he indicated that he was open to entering politics in the future.

A Congress leader claimed Vijay was then keen to join the party. "He was nearing 35. Rahul instead asked him to contest for the post of Youth Congress president, which he would have easily won. But nothing materi-

alised. There was pressure from the DMK on Vijay not to proceed. The Tamil film industry is controlled by the extended Karunanidhi family," the leader said.

Congress leaders now say the TVK's decision to align with the party is not unexpected, arguing that Vijay's ideological position has long been closer to that of the Congress and that their alliance was a natural progression.

"We had a meeting with Vijay when he was in Delhi in 2009. We discussed the NSUI — what it does and how it differs from the ABVP. I do not remember the entire conversation, but I distinctly recall him saying secularism was one of the strongest pillars of the Constitution. He did not believe in communal politics," recalled Congress leader Ragini Nayak, who had met Vijay at the time.

Nayak was then NSUI general secretary. She met Vijay along with then NSUI president Hibi Eden, NSUI national general secretary Ashok Basoya and Palaniyappan.

Vijay has often cited five reformers as his inspirations — K Kamaraj, Periyar, Velu Nachiyar, Anjalai Ammal and BR Ambedkar. Kamaraj, who became Chief Minister of the erstwhile Madras state in 1954, was among the Congress's tallest leaders in Tamil Nadu, though he later sided with its syndicate faction after Indira Gandhi was expelled from the party in 1969.

BJP rewarding graft, practising washing machine politics in Bengal, says Sanjay Raut

Express News Service Mumbai, May 9

AFTER SENIOR BJP leader Suwendu Adhikari was chosen as the chief minister of West Bengal, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Saturday accused the BJP of "rewarding corruption" and practising "washing machine politics", referring to the 2014 Narada sting operation.

Raut alleged that Adhikari, credited with helping the BJP secure a historic victory in West Bengal and ending Mamata Banerjee's long rule in the state, was among several Trinamool Congress leaders seen allegedly accepting cash on camera in the sting operation conducted by Tehelka journalist Mathew Samuel.

"In the 2016 Bengal elections, the BJP aggressively promoted those videos against the Trinamool Congress. But once Suwendu Adhikari joined the BJP, the party deleted those videos from its official channels," Raut said.

"Today, the same person has become the chief minister, and the BJP is celebrating him. What morality and what ideology is this," he asked.

Raut alleged that the BJP had created a pattern where opposition leaders facing allegations of corruption or central agency action later joined the party and were politically rehabilitated.

'Johnny Johnny Yes Papa' is against Indian culture: UP education minister

Bhopendra Pandey Lucknow, May 9

YOGENDRA UPADHYAY, Uttar Pradesh Minister for Higher Education and Science and Technology, sparked a controversy over his statement that two popular English nursery rhymes — 'Johnny Johnny Yes Papa' and 'Rain Rain Go Away' — sow seeds of dishonesty in the minds of children and are against Indian values and culture.

Upadhyay first spoke about

the rhymes at an event in Agra earlier this week while addressing a gathering of Shiksha Mitras (ad hoc teachers in government primary schools).

He referred to them on Saturday as well while speaking at an event, addressing students and teachers of a prominent private school in Lucknow.

When contacted, Upadhyay explained the reason behind his criticism of the message in the two rhymes.

He said, "What does this rhyme teach (us) — Johnny



Yogendra Upadhyay is currently an MLA from the Agra South

Johnny Yes Papa, Eating Sugar No Papa, Telling Lies No Papa, Open Your Mouth Ha Ha Ha.

These lines teach children to tell lies. No one ever thought about how this rhyme imparts wrong lessons to young children."

The minister added, "Our culture is Sarvajana Hitay, Sarvajana Sukhay' (for the welfare of all, for the happiness of all). But this rhyme 'Rain Rain Go Away, Come Again Another Day, Little Johnny Wants To Play, Rain Rain Go Away' teaches children 'Swantah Sukhay (self happiness)'. This is not our culture."

He further said, "Education teaches us culture. I spoke

about these rhymes recently at an event in Agra... What we are teaching through these rhymes to children of a tender age... I do not have any objection to the language... but we should see that we do not teach anything, even by accident, that cultivates the wrong culture among children. I said the same thing at a school in Lucknow as well today. I will keep speaking about it..."

He added, "I was told today that Akhilesh Yadav (Samajwadi Party chief) has com-

mented on my statement. Akhilesh Yadav cannot think to that extent."

Asked why he didn't raise the matter with the government, he only replied, "I will keep speaking about this intentionally, everywhere..."

"I don't bother being criticised for raising objections to certain lines in these rhymes."

Upadhyay won the UP Assembly elections in 2012, 2017 and 2022 and is currently an MLA from the Agra South seat.

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
 E-Tender No.: JHS-ENGG-C-2026-107 Dated: 06.05.2026
E-TENDERING TENDER NOTICE
 Divisional Railway Manager (Works) N.C. Railway, Jhansi for and behalf of President of India invites sealed "Open Tender" through on Line (E-Tendering) for the following work.
Description of Work: CNB-PRN section: Pumping out of stagnant water at different locations of sub ways (13 Nos.) in ADEN/CNB sub division for 02 years.
Approx Cost: ₹ 6369001.87 **Earnest Money:** ₹ 127400.00
Date of Closing Tender: 01.06.2026 at 15:00 hrs
Date of completion / period from issue acceptance letter: 24 Months.
 • Tender on line can be submitted up to 15:00 hrs. on 01.06.2026.
 • For full details and submission of bid please see the Indian Railways website www.iraps.gov.in. 1016/26(A)
 f North central railways @CPNCR www.ncr.indianrailways.gov.in

BRIDGE

Managing the trump suit has always been an important aspect of dummy play. Often declarer needs to plan ahead to tackle the trump suit the correct way. When the trump holding is tenuous and a bad trump break might spell doom, it generally makes sense to defer playing even one round of trumps. Dealer: South Vulnerable: Both

SOUTH		NORTH	
♠ A 10	♥ 8 5		
♥ A K 6 2	♦ 8 5		
♦ 9	♣ A 8 7		
♠ A 8 5 3	♣ K 7 6 4 2		
SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
4 ♠	pass	3 ♣	pass
3 ♥	pass	4 ♥	pass
pass	pass	pass	pass

West leads the diamond king. Plan the play. The main danger is a 4-1 trump split. In order to take out insurance against such a distribution, declarer should win the diamond ace and immediately ruff a diamond. Then, without touching trumps, he should attack clubs. This can be done by ducking a round completely, or leading towards an honour and, if it wins, continuing the suit. Suppose declarer ducks a club and the defense returns a spade. South now takes one trump and continues clubs, leading to dummy's king. If this holds, declarer ruffs dummy's last diamond, cashes the remaining high heart, and continues clubs. If the club king is ruffed, declarer easily retains control.

THE WEST HAND: ♠ Q874 ♥ 7 ♦ KQJ54 ♣ QJ9
THE EAST HAND: ♠ KJ53 ♥ QJ109 ♦ 10632 ♠ 10

Note that if South plays one round of trumps the defense may get in with a club trick to knock out South's last high trump, then ruff a club to draw another round of trumps, preventing the last diamond ruff. Ducking the first club gains over the more direct attack if clubs are 4-0 and the player with no clubs has only two hearts. It is superior to play high clubs if the player with one club has one trump. Neither of these situations is at all likely. Now for a grand slam. Dealer: South Vulnerable: North/South

NORTH		SOUTH	
♠ A 6 4 2	♥ K Q 7 5 3		
♥ A K 5 3 2	♦ Q		
♦ 5 2	♣ A 8 4		
♠ A 9	♣ K 6 4 2		
SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 ♠	pass	3 ♣	pass
3 ♠	pass	4 ♠	pass
4 NT	pass	pass	pass
4 ♠	pass	pass	pass

West leads the queen of diamonds. Plan the play.

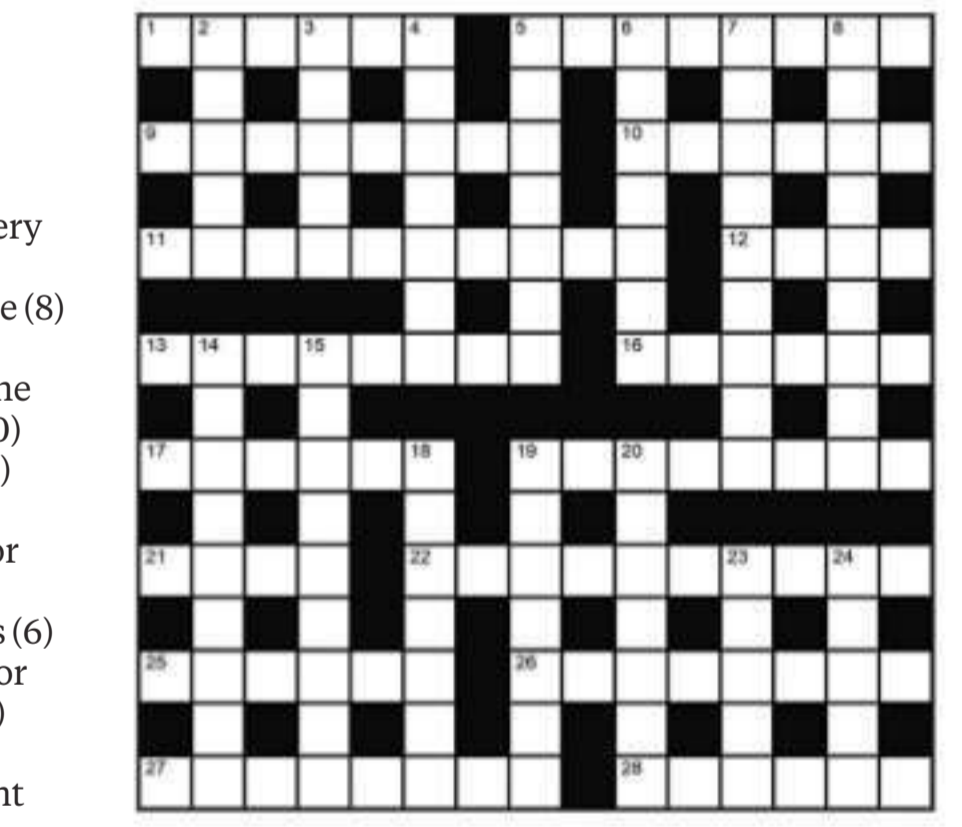
SUNDAY CROSSWORD

QUICK CLUES ACROSS

- Swelling or temperature controller? (3-3)
- Performed surgery (8)
- Bathing costume (8)
- Straw roof (6)
- Change from one state to another (10)
- Not so much (4)
- Gauges (8)
- Comply, obey or surrender (6)
- Women's wraps (6)
- Trusts, credits or assumes as true (8)
- Record (4)
- Irish Parliament (10)
- Harmful intent (6)
- Aided (8)
- Burdened (8)
- Simple person — in the soup? (6)

DOWN

- Crouch in fear (5)
- Mr Irani of Bollywood? (5)
- More garish (7)
- Groups, troupes or companies (7)
- Boundaries — "Tent sex" anagram? (7)
- At hand (9)
- Inordinate (9)
- Disengagement (9)
- Choosing or preferring (9)
- Least fast? (7)



- She works in a pub (7)
- An illicit relationship (7)
- Must (3,2)
- Ring ____ : sound vaguely familiar (1,4)
- King's rival nearly became Avenger (4)
- Lives are disrupted by the putting in of convict settlements (8)
- Key batsman? (6)
- Crossword used to perplex (6)
- Risk a sound effect producing streams of electrons (4,4)
- To go, for example, a bit overboard (4)
- Talent searcher and handsome with it? (4,6)
- On average letters for the queen appear less charitable (6)
- Foots set up with trap good for robbing (8)
27. She is among the stars who build up hidden stores? (8)
28. Consuming desire (6)
29. Washing tool trips up an idiot (5)
30. After surprise Viceroy, Commander returns to find destruction (5)
31. Naming bird on heather (7)
32. Promises to start putting up the shelves (7)
33. A proton, perhaps, takes no charges? (3,1,3)
34. Rue Andrew's appalling bloomers? (9)
35. Gen. Halley lost in Pennsylvania River (9)
36. In, I hear you, and about people with top-leader leading to habituation! (9)
37. Not the most energetic member of the skeleton staff? (9)
38. Pig found in French ravine (7)
39. Has a nibble as one reads desultorily (7)
40. All this is absurd, pretty implausible (7)
41. It makes music with a body part? (5)
42. He goes out with Irene (5)

SOLUTIONS TO 2580 QUICK CLUES ACROSS: 9 Erotica, 10 Acerola, 11 Bandeau, 12 Asinine, 13 Extradite, 15 Logan, 16 Startup, 19 Hot spot, 20 Rhett, 21 Ambergis, 25 Israeli, 26 Got over, 28 Hostile, 29 Earnest **DOWN:** 1 Pebble, 2 Hornet, 3 Dine, 4 Kabuki, 5 Nazareth, 6 Legislator, 7 Coming up, 8 Hazelnut, 14 Antithesis, 16 Straight, 17 Aneurysm, 18 Pharisee, 22 Begged, 23 Revues, 24 Surety, 27 Tort **CRYPTIC CLUES ACROSS:** 9 Ocarina, 10 Coolant, 11 Jilting, 12 Petunia, 13 Mad Hatter, 15 Larch, 16 Astolat, 19 Shotgun, 20 Awash, 21 Expresses, 25 Reposed, 26 Lorelei, 28 Best man, 29 Escheat **DOWN:** 1 Log jam, 2 Walled, 3 Hi-fi, 4 Target, 5 Sceptres, 6 Postal vote, 7 Raindrop, 8 Straw hat, 14 All the same, 16 Anaerobe, 17 Trappist, 18 Treading, 22 Pullet, 23 Salted, 24 Shifty, 27 Race

2581

IF IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY

SUNDAY MAY 10: This is a year of learning and teaching. Take time to reflect and renew your spiritual and religious beliefs. Explore philosophies that give you a better self-awareness.

MONDAY MAY 11: This year you reap the benefits of all your hard work. Expect power and leadership. You might get a promotion, an award or kudos of some kind.

TUESDAY MAY 12: This is the end of a nine-year cycle, making it a time to let go of people, places and the things that hold you back. Do some internal and external housecleaning. Focus on being compassionate and loving.

WEDNESDAY MAY 13: This is a year of new beginnings, adventures and major changes. Keep your eyes open for new opportunities. What you do now will bring great benefit in the future.

THURSDAY MAY 14: This is a slower-paced year. Take time to rejuvenate your energy and outlook on the world. Focus on business and personal relationships.

FRIDAY MAY 15: This year your creativity, zest and desire for life are at a pinnacle. It's time to nurture the happiness and beauty that you have within. Let your guard down and loosen up a bit!

SATURDAY MAY 16: This is a year of building both internally and externally. Simplicity is key. Take charge of your health. Stay grounded and levelheaded and explore yoga or martial arts.

YOUR WEEK AHEAD

ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 20): You might attract money to you or see ways to spend it on real estate or home and family in a way that brings you benefits now and in the future. Think positive! This Week: Hard work boosts wealth.

TAURUS (APR 21 - MAY 21): This is a lovely day! Today you are fortunate because today your luck is better than usual. You will attract money, favour, pleasure and happy thoughts. This Week: Your optimism is contagious!

GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21): This is a feel-good day and you are noticed. (Some know personal details about your private life.) Venus in your sign makes you charming and diplomatic. You feel satisfied, content and appreciated. This Week: Expand your wardrobe.

CANCER (JUNE 22 - JULY 23): Enjoy the company of friends and groups. You'll be in the company of young people. A secret romance is heating up for some. The vibes are pleasant and laid-back, you're ambitious to achieve something. This Week: You're popular.

LEO (JULY 24 - AUG 23): This is a strong day. The Sun is at the top of your chart casting you in a flattering spotlight! People will want to see you and hear what you have to say. They will be impressed with you because you look successful. This Week: You're admired.

VIRGO (AUG 24 - SEP 23): Travel or make travel plans. You're excited about the possibility of expanding your world. You might do this through learning, signing up for a course, watching films or meeting people from different backgrounds. Live it up! This Week: Travel opportunities.

LIBRA (SEP 24 - OCT 23): You might receive an inheritance or someone might give you a gift. You might have an opportunity to travel. Be patient with spouses and close friends. This Week: Wealth and favours come to you.

SCORPIO (OCT 24 - NOV 23): Your closest relationships are warm and rewarding today. Someone you know might introduce you to interesting people, or you might attract chatty people to you. You have energy to burn! This Week: Friends and partners are supportive.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 24 - DEC 22): This is a productive day because you will be included in something larger than yourself. Working with others in a harmonious way will be rewarding. You feel playful, a bit competitive and eager to get things done. This Week: Hard work brings success.

CAPRICORN (DEC 23 - JAN 20): Today is a fortunate day for social outings, playful activities with children, sports events and mingling with groups. Anything that you want to do today will work out as planned. A work-related romance might blossom. This Week: Work hard, party harder.

AQUARIUS (JAN 21 - FEB 19): Family relations are mutually affectionate today. This is a wonderful day for gatherings. You feel sociable and drawn to children's activities. Travel will please you. You will also be convincing in discussions. This Week: Improve home and family.

PISCES (FEB 20 - MAR 20): You're in a positive frame of mind today, which means everything that flows from you will be positive. Get out and enjoy the company of others. Relations with siblings, relatives and neighbours will be upbeat. This Week: You're happy and optimistic.

JUMBLED WORDS

Given below are four jumbled words. Solve the jumbles to make proper words and move them to the respective circles below. Select the letters in the shaded circles and jumble them to get the answer for the given quip.

A man can stand anything except a succession of ____ days - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (8)

BLWAR **DGHIIN**

○●●●○ ○●●●○

THORN **AIMRDY**

○●●●○ ○●●●○

SOLUTIONS: BLWAR - Brawl, North, Hiding, Myriad
DGHIN - A man can stand anything except a succession of ordinary days
THORN - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
AIMRDY - A man can stand anything except a succession of ordinary days

DIFFICULTY LEVEL 55 INSTRUCTIONS

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

DIFFICULTY LEVEL

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

SUDOKU 6314

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

SOLUTION SUDOKU 6313

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



The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has put up boards banning the sale of fish and meat near the airport. EXPRESS

Jail up to 3 months for selling meat near Ahmedabad airport

Ritu Sharma
Ahmedabad, May 9

THE HOLI Chakla area on Civil Hospital Road, where one can see the underbelly of planes taking off from the Ahmedabad airport, is also known for its bustling fish market. Earlier this week, however, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) banned the sale of fish and meat in the Chamapura fish market and the Holi Chakla area in an attempt to tackle an over-decade-old problem. Violations of the ban could attract up to three years' imprisonment and a fine of Rs 10,000.

The move came in reply to repeated safety concerns raised by airport authorities. The concerns were heightened after the Air India crash last year that killed 260 people on June 12, when a Boeing 737 headed to London crashed minutes before take-off. The civic body has directed vendors operating in this temporary fish market, barely 5-7 km from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport, to stop selling fish if they do not want to relocate.

On Thursday, the AMC put up boards in these areas imposing the ban under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, stating, "Fish, chicken and meat attract birds like hawks and vultures which increases chances of bird strikes with airplanes. Since the said area is a plane take-off and landing way, as per Section 25 (2) of The Indian Aviation Act-2024 and Rules 91 of The Aircraft Rules-1937, in order to prevent any disaster from happening here within a radius of 10 km from the aerodrome reference point, it is hereby expressly prohibited to allow vendors and shopkeepers selling fish and meat in the said place."

ED arrests Punjab minister Sanjeev Arora in PMLA case

Kanchan Vasdev
Chandigarh, May 9

THE ENFORCEMENT Directorate (ED) Saturday arrested Punjab Industries Minister Sanjeev Arora after raids in connection with a fresh money laundering probe linked to an alleged Rs100 crore GST fraud, officials said.

Arora, 62, was taken into custody under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) following early morning raids at his official residence, barely a stone's throw away from the chief minister's home, in Chandigarh Sector 2. ED sources said they found incriminating evidence during the searches, and that Arora was "non-cooperative" during the probe. Arora will be taken to Delhi, where the case is registered, and the ED will seek his remand for custodial interrogation, officials said.

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann hit out at the Centre, accusing it of using agencies like the ED and the CBI as "weapons" to scare opposition leaders into joining the BJP. The BJP hit back, saying Kejriwal and his party are rattled as they know that "their days are numbered in Punjab".

Apart from Chandigarh, the ED searched two premises in New Delhi and Hampton Sky Realty Ltd in Udyog Vihar, Gurugram. The raids come just over three weeks after the Central agency on April 17 carried out searches at 13 premises linked to Arora, his son and several others



Punjab Industries Minister Sanjeev Arora will be taken to New Delhi and the ED will seek his remand for interrogation

as part of a probe into Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) violation linked to alleged insider trading and round-tripping of funds from the UAE to India. Following the searches, Arora had said that he would cooperate fully with the investigators and expressed confidence that the truth would prevail.

On April 19, the ED had provisionally attached movable and immovable assets of Hampton Sky Realty Ltd, its director Arora, and entities linked to him for alleged FEMA violation through bogus sales and exports to the tune of Rs157.12 crore. As per ED sources, Saturday's raids came after the central agency registered a fresh case under PMLA's criminal sections, based on inputs that emerged from searches on April 17. ED sources said it detected "a large-scale money laundering operation allegedly carried out through Arora's company involving fake GST purchases of cellphones worth over

Rs100 crore, and exports aimed at round-tripping illegitimate funds from Dubai to India".

Sources alleged multiple fake GST purchase bills were procured from non-existent firms in New Delhi to claim fake input tax credit, GST refunds on export credit, and duty drawback benefits, allegedly causing losses to the exchequer and leading to personal enrichment. Arora was already under probe in a money laundering case, which included an ED raid in 2024, where he and his aides were accused of misusing industrial land for residential developments while he was a Rajya Sabha MP. At that time, the ED searched premises linked to Hampton Sky Realty, formerly known as Ritesh Properties and Industries Ltd, and alleged illegal change of land use, fraudulent bookings and generation of proceeds of crime.

The Hampton Realty has denied wrongdoings, claiming that it is the victim of supplier-side fraud. In a statement, the company said all its cellphone exports were genuine and verified at every stage by government authorities and original equipment manufacturers. It said that it entered the cellphone export business in May 2023 and exported 44,471 branded handsets — 96.7% of them Apple iPhones, 3.2% Samsung handsets, and 0.06% OnePlus handsets.

On the financial side, it said that every rupee of export proceeds was received through proper banking channels. "Nothing was retained, kept off-

shore or round-tripped." On GST concerns, it said it was the victim, not the offender. "The issue relates only to a small percentage of domestic purchases from certain suppliers. The firm approached police and filed a complaint in May 2025 against suppliers — M/S SK Enterprises, M/S Global Traders, and M/S GMG Tradelink Private Limited — under relevant IPC sections. All payments were made through banking channels with GST charged and returns filed regularly," it said. It has deposited the disputed GST amount and is contesting the matter legally.

The ED alleged that firms linked to Arora were under the scanner for booking fake export bills and purchases from non-existent GST entities. The ED action assumes political significance, coming at a time when the AAP government in Punjab has repeatedly accused the BJP-led Centre of using investigative agencies to target Opposition leaders ahead of elections.

Criticising the ED action, Mann said, "The end of this unethical alliance of ED-BJP will begin from Punjab."

In a post on X, Kejriwal alleged, "Modi ji has got daily ED raids started in Punjab soon after the Bengal polls concluded. Modi ji has coerced Punjab in the last few years and ill-treated Punjabis by different means." He said Mittal joined the BJP after raids by the ED at his premises. Arora was also raided, but did not join the BJP; so another raid has been conducted.

BRIEFLY



Union Minister Kiren Rijju with BJP leader George Kurien and Maharashtra Minorities Commission chairman Pyare Zia Khan during a seminar in Mumbai on Saturday. PTI

MAHARASHTRA

Rijju: Govt working to ensure Parsi population doesn't shrink further

UNION MINISTER Kiren Rijju Saturday hailed the Parsis for their stellar contribution in the development of India and asserted that the Government remains committed to preserving the community's heritage. During a seminar titled "Parsis in Modern India: Navigating Cultural and Socio-Economic Pathways" held by the National Commission for Minorities at Yashwantrao Chavan Centre in Mumbai, he elaborated on efforts to rejuvenate the Avestan language and steps to address the declining Parsi population. The Union Minister for Minority Affairs said their numbers stand at around 52,000-55,000 in India. "The Parsis are the smallest minority community in India and the Centre is working to ensure their numbers do not shrink further." PTI

Girl's body found at govt school in Jharkhand 2 minors among 3 dead in Bihar house blaze

THE BODY of a teenage girl was found inside a government school in Jamshedpur Saturday, police said. The identity of the victim, believed to be around 17 years old, is yet to be ascertained, officer-in-charge of local police station Avinash Kumar said. The body has been sent for post-mortem. Asked whether it was a case of rape and murder, Kumar said no signs of sexual assault had been detected so far, though police were probing all possible angles. PTI

THREE PERSONS, including two kids, succumbed to injuries after their house-cum-shop caught fire in Bihar's East Champaran, police said Saturday. It took place Friday night at a general store in Barharwa Fateh Mohammed village. The deceased have been identified as the shopkeeper's 8-year-old son, 12-year-old daughter and a store staffer, Prince Kumar (28), police said. The shopkeeper managed to escape the fire but sustained injuries. PTI

Former IMA Maharashtra president held

IN A crackdown on an illegal sex determination racket, police have arrested Dr Ravindra Kute, former president of the Indian Medical Association's Maharashtra chapter, for his alleged involvement in performing illegal abortions and tests, an official said Saturday. This follows a probe into a racket that allegedly spans Ahilyanagar and Pune, involving a network of agents and doctors violating the PCPNDT Act, the official said. PTI

Kerala: 3 youths arrested with over 1 kg MDMA

POLICE ARRESTED three youngsters and seized over 1 kg of MDMA worth over Rs 30 lakh in Kozhikode Saturday, officers said. Police said the District Anti-Narcotics Special Action Force (DANSAF) detected the possession of MDMA during a routine vehicle inspection at Pantheerankavu around 1 am Saturday. Police suspect the accused procured drugs from another state and were to sell them at higher prices in Kozhikode and Malappuram districts. PTI

Give woman's custody to her husband, orders Gujarat High Court in interfaith marriage case

Aditi Raja
Vadodra, May 9

THE GUJARAT High Court on Friday directed a state home for women to hand over the custody of a 21-year-old woman to her husband, a day after right-wing groups disrupted their interfaith marriage registration and hours after their wedding was solemnised under the Special Marriage Act with the court's intervention.

With the order, the high court closed a habeas corpus proceeding initiated by the husband in March this year. The case had seen weeks of hearings and compelled the state machinery to protect the rights of the interfaith couple against the intimidation by right-wing groups.

After the advocate for the petitioner informed the court that their marriage registration had been disrupted on Thursday due to protests by Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal activists, a special division bench of Justices N S Sanjay Gowda and D M Vyasa spent considerable court time ensuring the marriage was solemnised on Friday. The high court then passed an order directing the state women's home to release the woman into her husband's custody.

A day earlier, right-wing groups had disrupted the inter-

Says the corpus would be entitled to stay with petitioner

faith couple's marriage registration at Ahmedabad's Gheekanta sub-registrar office, forcing the couple to return despite a court directive to have their marriage registered.

The high court order states, "It is reported that the marriage between the corpus and the petitioner has been solemnised under the Special Marriage Act... the corpus would be entitled to stay with the petitioner." The court also made clear that the state's responsibility did not end with the wedding. In a pointed reminder to law enforcement, the bench directed that "the concerned police shall ensure that the marital life of the petitioner and the corpus are in no way harmed by any person".

On Friday, the high court bench orally questioned why two adults needed police protection to get married. After public prosecutor Hardik Dave assured the court that instructions had been conveyed to senior police officials of deputy commissioner of police rank in Ahmedabad, the young couple walked into the marriage registrar's office and solemnised their marriage.

UTTARAKHAND POLICE CLAIMS IT HAS ACHIEVED 'SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGH' IN CASES

2024 Haldwani violence: As SC cancels default bail of 2, a look at other accused and bail orders

Aiswarya Raj
Dehradun, May 9

MORE THAN two years after the demolition of a mosque and a madrasa in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, led to violence and the death of five people in clashes with police, two of the accused may be sent back to jail.

In sweeping arrests following the violence in February 2024, the authorities had picked up 89 people, including women. In August 2024, 50 of them were granted default bail by the Uttarakhand High Court, regretting the "sluggish" pace of the investigation and noting that the chargesheet had not been filed within the 90-day time limit. In other instances, the court questioned the State's inability to establish evidence of conspiracy.

Javed Siddiqui and Arshad Ayub, charged under the UAPA among other Sections, had got default bail, in January 2025, on the same grounds as the other accused. Accused of attempted murder, rioting, dacoity, criminal conspiracy, possession of firearms, and committing a terrorist act, the two contended before the High Court that the investigation into the case was incomplete, and chargesheets had not been filed within the 90-day period.

Giving them bail, the High



In sweeping arrests following the violence in February 2024, the authorities had picked up 89 people, including women. FILE

Court said, "The right to life and liberty is one of the integral parts of the Constitution of India and it is the most sacred Fundamental Right. The custody of people in the name of various enactments and without adhering to the promptness of the investigation... cannot allow the appellants to remain under incarceration." On Wednesday, however, the Supreme Court set aside the default bail of Siddiqui and Ayub, and told them to surrender before the trial court within two weeks.

After the Supreme Court order, the Uttarakhand Police claimed it had achieved "a significant breakthrough" in the cases. "During the incident, rioters launched life-threaten-

ing attacks on police personnel, administrative officials and municipal corporation employees. They also set fire to the police station, government vehicles and other public property, and carried out extensive vandalism," police said.

D S Patni, who represented Siddiqui and Ayub in the High Court, said they would move for regular bail as well as "a 482 petition" against the three FIRs against Siddiqui and Ayub. A petition under Section 482 of the CrPC is filed to quash criminal proceedings. "The High Court has granted regular bail to the other accused in the case, citing the lack of evidence for police claims," Patni said.

Following the February 8,

2024, violence in Haldwani, three FIRs had been registered, with many of the accused charged under the UAPA. The alleged main "conspirators", Abdul Malik and his son Moied, are out on bail. Malik's advocate Sanpreet Singh Ajmani — who also represents Moied and another accused, Raeez — told *The Indian Express* that Malik, who had been behind bars since February 2024, got bail "on merits" in April 2026, and not default bail like the others.

While the prosecution alleges that Malik and Moied were the "main conspirators" and a meeting was conducted at Malik's house on January 31, 2024, a week before the Haldwani violence, Ajmani contended before the High Court that Malik was not even in Uttarakhand on February 8, 2024. "He was in Noida and Delhi. There is no direct evidence regarding the alleged conspiracy. The entire allegations against the appellant do not inspire confidence, and the possibility of false implication cannot be completely ruled out..." the advocate told the court. Ajmani also argued that chargesheets had already been filed in the three FIRs. The court ruled in favour of bail for Malik, if he was not wanted in any other criminal case.

In Moied's case, Ajmani

pointed out that no specific role had been assigned to him regarding the crime. It was also argued that Moied was in Dehradun only to meet a friend at the Secretariat on the day of the incident, and was not initially named in two of the three FIRs against him. In its order granting bail to Moied in November 2025, the High Court said: "... there is no direct evidence even of conspiracy against the applicant. The prosecution could not tell us as to who has named or identified the applicant. It is also in the mind of this Court (that) the applicant has already spent more than one year and eight months in custody in connection with the alleged FIR."

In another case, against Abdul Rehman — who was accused of arson, rioting, and hurling petrol bombs at police, and was in custody since February 20, 2024 — the prosecution argued that criminal activities carried out by him fell within the definition of "terrorist attack" as these were meant to create terror. Granting him bail, the HC said Rehman had spent two years in jail, and that there was no direct evidence even of conspiracy against the applicant. "The prosecution could not tell us as to who has named or identified the applicant," the High Court said on March 20, 2026.

USING A CELLPHONE & A LIVE NEWS BROADCAST, HE CRACKED OPEN A POTENTIALLY YEARS-LONG BREACH

Damoh collector's solo operation reveals who bugged his office

Anand Mohan J
Bhopal, May 9

IT WAS supposed to be a routine morning inside the Collectorate of Damoh, one of Madhya Pradesh's quieter administrative districts. Collector Pratap Narayan Yadav had allegedly just settled into his chamber and was huddled with a small circle of officers, planning a surprise inspection of a government department. The doors were shut, and the conversation restricted to his inner circle.

Within minutes, however, the collector got a phone call from the very department he was preparing to inspect. "The callers said, 'Sir, we heard you are coming to inspect the department. I did not divulge this to anyone. How could they know about a conversation that hasn't

left the room?" Yadav said. "That immediately raised red flags."

Yadav, who had been posted to Damoh only recently, realised his office was being bugged. His first thought was that it was an informant, but he also suspected something wired into the walls of his own office. For Madhya Pradesh's bureaucracy, the case was more than a local embarrassment.

Since the Collector's chamber is, by design, the most secure and confidential space in district administration, the case belied the foundational assumption that those walls keep secrets. He didn't panic, call a meeting or issue a memo. What followed was an operation conceived and executed by the Collector himself, using nothing more than a mobile phone and a news channel.



Collector Pratap Narayan Yadav had suspected someone was listening to his conversations

"I turned up the volume on a live news broadcast playing on my phone, placed it inside the chamber, and walked out. Then I made my way to the adjacent PA room, the small ante-

room staffed by personal assistants and office attendants that sits just outside every senior officer's chamber in India's district administration."

There, Yadav allegedly picked up a telephone receiver on the desk and could clearly hear the news broadcast — suggesting that the telephone line between the two rooms had been tampered with to listen in on every conversation inside the Collector's private chamber. "The same audio could be heard through the receiver in the next room," a senior official confirmed. "It strongly suggested that conversations were being intercepted and monitored."

The most chilling detail in this case, according to officials, is the timeline. Yadav believes this covert interception had

been running for years, long before he arrived. Staff members in the PA room, it is alleged, had been routinely listening in on confidential meetings, sensitive phone calls and administrative decisions, then quietly passing the information to outside parties, potentially including the very officials being inspected.

"Some employees were sharing confidential information for personal gain or to curry favour with senior officials," Yadav alleged.

What followed was swift. An Assistant Grade-3 employee, believed to be central to the operation, was suspended with immediate effect. A clerk, who had been posted at the Collectorate for an unusually long period, was transferred back to his parent department, the

Sarva Shiksha Kendra, officials said. An office attendant was similarly removed and sent back to his original posting.

Both telephone sets found in the office have been seized and sent for forensic and technical examination to determine precisely how the interception was configured, how long it had been in place and, critically, who else may have been listening at the other end.

The investigation is also examining whether the leak network extended beyond the three employees already in action, and whether information was being passed to specific individuals with vested interests in avoiding administrative scrutiny. "This is being treated as a serious breach of government confidentiality," said a senior official familiar with the case.

As BJP expands across states, Muslim MLA numbers drop

From 339 in 2013 to 255 now; steepest fall in Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Bihar

Zeeshan Shaikh
Mumbai, May 9

THE BJP's rise to dominance in the country since 2014—reinforced by its recent electoral successes in West Bengal and Assam—has reshaped India's political landscape, with one visible outcome being a sharp decline in Muslim representation in state assemblies.

The number of Muslim MLAs has dropped from around 339 in 2013 to about 255 now.

The steepest decline is in large states. In Uttar Pradesh, Muslim MLAs have nearly halved from 63 to 31. In West Bengal, the number has fallen from 59 to 37, while in Bihar the number has dropped from 19 to 11. Rajasthan too has seen a fall from 11 to 6.

These declines stand out because these states account for a large share of the country's Muslim population. In Uttar Pradesh, Muslims make up about 19% of the population but now hold less than 8% of seats. In West Bengal, the share is about 12.6% of MLAs against a population of roughly 27%. In Bihar, it is about 4.5% compared to nearly 17% of the population.

A similar gap is visible in other states. In Assam, Muslims form over a third of the

population but have roughly 17% of seats. In Maharashtra and Karnataka, the share of Muslim MLAs is around 3-4%, far below their population share of over 10%.

Even states with relatively higher representation have seen a dip. Kerala has gone from 36 to 34 Muslim MLAs, and Karnataka from 11 to 9. In Gujarat, the number has fallen from two to one, while Chhattisgarh now has none.

Seven states—Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Chhattisgarh—currently have no Muslim MLAs.

However, there are a few exceptions. Tamil Nadu has seen a slight increase from 8 to 9 Muslim MLAs, while Madhya Pradesh and Meghalaya have recorded small gains.

Even Jammu and Kashmir, which still has one of the highest numbers of Muslim MLAs, has seen a drop from 58 to 51.

With regard to the parties that the Muslim MLAs represent, the highest are from the Congress at 61, followed by the National Conference at 39, the Trinamool Congress and the Samajwadi Party with 34 each.

Incidentally, the BJP has two Muslim MLAs Achab Uddin from Manipur and Taffajal Hossain from Tripura.

• MUSLIM MLAs: BEFORE BJP RISE (2013) VS NOW

In Maharashtra, share of Muslim MLAs is 3-4% far below population share

Legend: Increase (orange), Decrease (green), No Change (grey)

No.	State	Before 2014	Now
1	J&K	58	51
2	West Bengal	59	37
3	Uttar Pradesh	63	31
4	Kerala	36	34
5	Assam	25	22
6	Bihar	19	11
7	Maharashtra	10	10
8	Karnataka	11	9
9	Tamil Nadu	8	9
10	Telangana	0	7
11	Rajasthan	11	6
12	Haryana	5	5
13	Jharkhand	5	4
14	Delhi	5	4
15	Andhra Pradesh	11	3
16	Manipur	3	3
17	Madhya Pradesh	1	2



No.	State	Before 2014	Now
18	Meghalaya	1	2
19	Tripura	2	2
20	Punjab	2	1
21	Gujarat	2	1
22	Odisha	0	1
23	Arunachal Pradesh	0	0
24	Goa	0	0
25	Himachal Pradesh	0	0
26	Mizoram	0	0
27	Nagaland	0	0
28	Sikkim	0	0
29	Chhattisgarh	2	0

MATERNAL CARE CRISIS AT KOTA MEDICAL COLLEGE

2 more women develop kidney issues, moved to pvt hospital

Parul Kulshrestha
Jaipur, May 9

A WOMAN who is five months pregnant and another who recently gave birth were the latest to experience kidney-related issues after being admitted to Kota's New Medical College and Hospital in Rajasthan, where two other women died earlier this week following post-delivery complications.

The women were moved from the government facility to a private hospital and have been put on ventilator support. On Friday night, District Collector Peeyush Samariya visited the private hospital and enquired about the condition of the women.

Azaz Khan, a relative of the 20-year-old woman who is five months pregnant, told The Indian Express that she had gone to the Kota medical college hospital, the second largest government medical facility in Rajasthan, after doctors said she needed to undergo a procedure.

"According to the doctors, she needed stitches in her uterus. On May 6, she received stitches, after which we got her home in the evening. On the morning of May 7, she complained of anxiety and chest pain, and she started bleeding... We called the doctor, who said she is fine, and that this happens sometimes. But her condition worsened, so we took her to the hospital, where she was admitted, but by evening, her urine stopped, and the body started swelling up," said Azaz.

That evening, doctors at the Kota government hospital asked the patient's relatives to

The Kota hospital has come under the spotlight this week after six women who underwent C-section deliveries on Monday developed serious complications, leading to the death of two of them

move her to a private hospital. "They told us that there is an infection in her body, and the medicines at the hospital are not working. We are not very educated. One of my cousins consulted a doctor at a private hospital in Kota, and we went to meet him. Within 20 minutes, I got a call from my family members from the government hospital that doctors suddenly moved her to an ambulance and asked the husband to move her to a private clinic. All because they wanted to hide our daughter's condition from the media. At present, she is on ventilator support at a private hospital in Kota and her dialysis is ongoing," said Azaz.

Another woman, who delivered her baby at the government hospital, has also been moved to a private hospital and is currently on ventilator support. The Kota government hospital has come under the spotlight this week after six women who underwent C-section deliveries on Monday developed serious complications, leading to the death of two of them.

Doctor, 2 nurses suspended, HoD served showcause notice

Parul Kulshrestha
Jaipur, May 9

A DOCTOR and two senior members of the nursing staff were suspended, and a show-cause notice was issued to the head of the Gynaecology and Obstetrics department following the deaths of two women after a total of six new mothers developed complications linked to undergoing C-section procedures at New Medical College Hospital in Kota.

As per orders issued late on Friday night, Dr Navneet Kumar, associate professor in the department of General Surgery at the hospital, and two senior nursing staff, Gurjit Kaur and Nimish Verma, were suspended following an inquiry into alleged negligence in the treatment of pregnant women admitted on May 3 and 4.

Meanwhile, a showcause notice has been issued to Dr BL Patidar, professor and unit head of the department of Gynaecology and Obstetrics, seeking his explanation regarding the incident.

The Rajasthan government has directed all hospitals in the state to ensure strict compliance with treatment protocols and warned them of stringent action in case of any negligence, officials said on Saturday.

DELAY IN NOTIFYING RECRUITMENT EXAM

Day after clash with police, 4 arrested TRE aspirants sent to jail, 5,000 protesters booked

Himanshu Harsh
Patna, May 9

POLICE HAVE booked around 5,000 unidentified Teacher Recruitment Examination (TRE)-4 aspirants and arrested four individuals, including student leader Dilip Kumar, following clashes during a protest in Patna on Friday over delay in the release of notification for the phase-4 teacher recruitment by Bihar Public Service Commission's (BPS). The FIR was lodged at Gandhi Maidan police station on the basis of a magistrate's statement after Friday's demonstration by candidates demanding the release of the TRE-4 advertisement. Police said that protesters



Police try to stop BPS TRE 4 teacher candidates as they protest, in Patna on Friday. ANI

disrupted traffic, breached barricades, disturbed public order and misbehaved with personnel deployed on duty.

The protest had begun with aspirants marching from Patna College towards the BPS office, seeking immediate is-

suance of the recruitment notification. Police had erected barricades near JP Golambart to stop the procession.

On Saturday, student leader Dilip Kumar was taken into custody, brought to Gardani-bagh Hospital for a medical test, and later sent to Beur Jail along with three other accused after being produced before a court in Patna.

Patna City SP (Central) Diksha said: "In yesterday's protest, some students initially became aggressive and tried to break barricades, leading to a confrontation with the police. During the incident, there was pushing and mild lathicharge... Some police personnel were also injured."

"An FIR has been registered against around 5,000 unidentified persons. Traffic remained disrupted for a considerable period, making legal action necessary. Cases have also been registered over breaking barricades and clashes with police personnel," she said.

Meanwhile, newly appointed Bihar Education Minister Mithilesh Tiwari appealed to aspirants to remain patient and said the government was committed to resolving their concerns.

"It is possible there has been some delay in TRE-4, and I accept that. But seeing future teachers on the streets and police chasing them is a painful sight for me," Tiwari said.

HC quashes FIR against Betul teacher for uploading poem recital as WhatsApp status

Express News Service
Bhopal, May 9

THE MADHYA Pradesh High Court has quashed an FIR against a government school teacher from Betul who was booked for uploading a video containing the recitation of a Urdu poem as his WhatsApp status. The court said that there was nothing on record to indicate intent to spread hatred or communal hostility and that the poem "is a satirical and thought-pro-

voicing commentary on the issue of human rights violations against women".

Justice B P Sharma observed that "criminal liability for speech-related offences cannot be imposed merely on the basis of subjective perceptions or speculative apprehensions, but must be founded on clear and proximate evidence of incitement or tendency to disrupt public order."

The case pertained to petitioner Faizan Ansari, a govern-

ment school teacher against whom an FIR was registered at Chicholi police station in Betul district under Section 353(2) of the BNS after he uploaded on his WhatsApp status a video containing a recitation of the Urdu nazm 'Be-haya', authored by poet Shoaib Kiani.

In its order, the court said, "The act of the petitioner in sharing a poetic recitation, without any additional commentary or intent to incite, cannot be construed as promoting

enmity or public mischief because, the Urdu poem written by Shoaib Kiani which was uploaded on the WhatsApp status (DP) by the petitioner and poem relates to the condition and sarcastic take on human rights, abuse of the women in Pakistan or any other country."

The court further noted that the poem was shared by thousands of people on social media and lauded by literary doyens at various national and international events.



Waiting for her day

Komal Gaikwad, 25, who has been driving an autorickshaw in Kalyan for one-and-a-half years, takes her three-year-old daughter Tejaswi along with her. The little girl quietly sits inside the safe enclosure made for her while her mother navigates busy roads. Mother's Day is celebrated on Sunday. DEEPAK JOSHI

Centre verifying cause of fire that capsized vessel near Hormuz, killing Dwarka sailor

Express News Service
Ahmedabad, May 9

THE CARGO vessel on which a sailor from Devbhumi Dwarka died Friday had capsized after a fire near the Strait of Hormuz, a source in the Union government confirmed to The Indian Express Saturday. The source said that four other Indians sustained burn injuries and the government was ascertaining the "exact cause of fire".

Altaf Talab Ker, who belongs to Jam Salaya town in Dwarka, was killed aboard the

vessel Al Faize Noor Suleimani that had set out for Yemen from Dubai on Wednesday with 18 sailors on board. A passing vessel rescued the survivors, who have now been granted consular access, sources said.

"A wooden dhow, carrying general cargo, with 18 Indian crew members, capsized yesterday (Friday) close to the Strait of Hormuz after it caught fire. The exact cause of the fire is being ascertained. The crew members were rescued by a passing vessel. One Indian crew member died and four were in-

jured," the source told this paper on Saturday.

"The injured are receiving medical treatment in Dubai and are safe. Our officials from the Indian Consulate met the rescued Indian nationals last night (Friday)," the government source added.

The Indian consulate in Dubai has sent the injured for medical treatment and is in touch with the dhow owner, "rendering all possible assistance in this matter on priority," the consulate said in a post on X on Saturday.

UPPER CASTE MEN WAYLAID DALIT WOMAN'S PRE-WEDDING PROCESSION, HURLED CASTEIST ABUSES AND PELTED GUESTS WITH STONES

Pulled off mare, Dalit bride returns in defiant bindoli through Udaipur

Hamza Khan
Jaipur, May 9

ON APRIL 29, Pooja Meghwal's bindoli procession in Udaipur was waylaid by some men and women, who allegedly objected to her riding a mare 'despite' being a Dalit, and for taking the procession outside their house, eventually pulling her down from the mare.

The assault left several persons injured and led to an FIR. However, the lasting image was yet to come; eight days later, a symbolic bindoli saw Pooja riding a white mare, a turquoise blue poshak flowing around her, a red and golden umbrella above her, and, most importantly, a photo of Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule gently resting in her hands.

journey from Udaipur's Town Hall to Collectorate was a sea of people, including her family members, most of them wearing shades of white on their torso, a blue scarf around their necks, and a blue flag or a blue placard in their hands. While the flags had photos of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, the placards had slogans on rights of the marginalised communities, including Dalits, and 'Jai Bhim' written on them.

"We wanted to show that we are also humans, that we are also residents of Bharat just like you. It is almost 80 years since Independence yet some people's mentality regarding untouchability is still there," Pooja's father Bhairulal Meghwal told *The Indian Express*. The May 7 procession was led by Bhim Army which was

joined by some other caste organisations.

"The upper castes here don't want us to sit on a mare, just because we are Dalits. It keeps happening with Dalits in the Mewar region. So, we submitted a memorandum to the administration," Meghwal said.

Roshan Meghwal, the senior vice president of Bhim Army, Udaipur, and a key figure in the Pooja's symbolic march, said that it was the effort of figures like Savitribai Phule due to which "women now have equal rights in every sector. Then why are women still being stopped from riding a mare?"

"We wanted to tell the government and the country that when it comes to honour and respect, there is no need to hesitate or be scared. The country is celebrating 'Amrit Kaal' but Da-



Pooja rides a white mare in a symbolic bindoli procession led by members of the Bhim Army in Udaipur. EXPRESS

lits are being stopped and pulled down from riding a mare. This a democratic country and everyone has an equal right to live," he said.

Meghwal said that such cases keep happening in the region, "There was a case in Chittorgarh just a couple of days ago. In Tadawara, Rajasmand, three bin-

dolis had to be taken out under police protection last year. We want the government to eradicate this casteist mindset."

As per the FIR lodged by the Pooja's father Bhairulal, her bindoli procession was passing through the main road of Dhira Talai in Hariyav, under Dabok police station limits, when the procession was waylaid on April 29.

He alleged that casteist abuses were hurled at the procession, threatening them to remove the procession from outside their house "else there will be bloodshed."

"A fight broke out. The DJ was stopped and the bride was pulled down from the horse and the guests were also pelted with stones. The women and children of the (other) family too threw stones and the pro-

cession was attacked with sticks, rods and swords," Meghwal alleged.

He said that in the ensuing chaos, mangalsutra of at least two women was snatched away, apart from people losing their other valuables, including jewelry and watches, and several of them sustaining injuries.

The FIR was lodged under BNS sections for voluntarily causing hurt, wrongful restraint, unlawful assembly, as well as several sections of the SCST Act. It was lodged against siblings Laxman Singh, Madhu Singh, Kishan Singh, Uday Singh, and Arjun Singh, as well as Takhat Singh, Fateh Singh, Vikram Singh and Manju Kunwar.

At the end of the symbolic procession, the memorandum by Bhim Army said, "only four persons have been arrested so

far." They also claimed that since Takhat Singh attacked with a sword, sections of the Arms Act should also be added to the FIR, while mentioning the names of several other men and women who were allegedly involved in the attack but have not been named in the FIR.

Demanding an impartial investigation, they said, "In all districts of Rajasthan, the Scheduled Castes, especially the Meghwal community, face discrimination on a daily basis, including prohibition from collecting drinking water, barbers not cutting their hair, prohibitions on their entry in temples and public places, and discrimination even at the time of cremation after their death. All this should be stopped and strict enforcement of the law should be ensured."

Churn and change in three states



ACROSS THE AISLE
BY P CHIDAMBARAM

THE ASSEMBLY elections in five states have brought about a dramatic change in three states — Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. Assam and Puducherry have voted for the *status quo*.

It is not possible to write a single narrative on the elections. Each state has produced a distinct narrative. **Kerala** is a straightforward story. The UDF and the LDF have alternated in ruling the state for several decades. The sequence was broken in 2021 when the LDF, under Mr Pinarayi Vijayan, was re-elected for a second term. The Congress put in place a new leadership (PCC and CLP) and the party has functioned in the last 5 years as a true Opposition with renewed vigour. The payoff is visible. The UDF has an obligation to govern and deliver results that will keep the UDF partners together, and advance secularism, economic progress and prosperity, and federalism.

Unexpected Results

The **Tamil Nadu** story is complex. The DMK, supported by the Congress and other

secular parties, was elected in 2021 with a solid majority. It undoubtedly delivered on two fronts — *economic growth* and *welfare measures*. Apparently, there were other factors that weighed with the electorate. The unknown factor was the entry of Mr Joseph Vijay, a film hero who has a legion of fans, especially among the youth and women. Since the announcement of the calendar of the elections, a wind started blowing; it gathered speed and turned into a storm in the last 10 days before the polling date; swept across 108 constituencies; but did not go further. It was a spectacular debut for a two-year-old political party. Most candidates were unknown names and faces, and few campaigned. The candidate was 'Vijay' everywhere. Mr Vijay's few short speeches, video memes and many film songs constituted the 'campaign'. TVK was 11 short of a simple majority but, in order to forestall *President's Rule* and avoid *another election*, Congress (5), CPI (2), CPI(M) (2) and VCK (2) have decided to offer support.

West Bengal is the real story that has the potential to alter the direction of the country. The secular parties in West Bengal — Congress, Trinamool Congress and CPI(M) — fought separately against the BJP that had strengthened itself over the last 10 years. Besides, S.I.R. in West Bengal erased a large number of voters and left a deep scar on democracy. There are numerous instances where the son/daughter was a voter but the father/mother was not. Families were divided into voters and non-voters. The judiciary and make-shift judicial remedies let down millions of voters and

The Opposition parties must firmly push back. BJP will be the conservative pole. Other political choices and alternatives must be preserved for India to remain a democratic, federal and secular country

thousands were disenfranchised. Besides S.I.R., the weight of three terms was a huge millstone around the neck of the Trinamool Congress.

BJP's Dominance

The defeat of Trinamool Congress, portends grave developments: The BJP is the sole party or in coalition governments ruling the **West** (Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa), much of the **Hindi heartland** (except Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand), the **East** and the **North East**. Figuratively, the Vindhya mountain range is a barrier to the BJP's entry into the five Southern states. Its Herculean efforts to enter Kerala and Tamil Nadu were firmly rebuffed by the electorate (leaving the BJP with 3 and 1 seats, respectively). However, its control over the rest of India is nearly complete.

Despite winning only 240 seats in the Lok Sabha in 2024, the BJP has passed the following contentious Bills in Parliament: The Wakf (Amendment) Act, 2025; Jammu & Kashmir Local Bodies (Amendment) Act, 2025; Taxation Laws (Amendment) Act, 2025; and National Sports Governance Act, 2025.

Other controversial Bills are in the offing, including the anti-democratic 'One Nation One Election' Bill. Despite lacking the numbers, the BJP introduced the controversial Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to *repeal and re-enact* a Bill for women's reservation that had been passed in September 2023. The new Bill's real purpose was to push delimitation and alter the

Political governors are dangerous



FIFTH COLUMN
BY TAVLEEN SINGH

AT THE outset let me make clear that I have long believed that the post of Governor should be abolished. It is a colonial leftover from that time when our British rulers felt handing full democracy to us natives was dangerous and unwise. And so was created a spying post to serve the interests of the Raj. It is hard to understand why Narendra Modi has not noticed that the ugliest legacy of colonial times is colonial governance. There is no point in tearing down British monuments and replacing them with Indian ones if inside these edifices people continue to rule like our colonial masters. Why has Modi whose stated mission is to remove 'all signs of India's servitude' not made governance less colonial? Has he succumbed to the urge in all political leaders to control everything, everywhere all the time?

Judging by the drama playing out in Tamil Nadu, it seems that way. The mandate in that vital southern state was so emphatically against the two Dravidian parties that for them to even consider coming together to stitch up an unwanted government is disgraceful. It should have been the Governor's duty to give Vijay the chance he deserved to form a government and then allow him to prove his majority in the legislative assembly. Why did he take so much time that political uncertainty spread? The joy of seeing a political novice defeat two of the most entrenched and entitled political parties in India was allowed to fade before a decision was finally made. Why?

Now I shall explain why I have an aversion to governors. I see them as ugly symbols of colonial rule and object to us taxpayers paying for them to live like grandees. But my real aversion began from first-hand experience. I happened to cover Indira Gandhi's toppling of Ferooz Abdullah's government in the summer of 1984. It was a bad decision because in my view our current Kashmir problem began with this dismissal of a legitimate government by an ill-advised and despotic prime minister. Ferooz won that election fair and square as it was the first election in the former state of Jammu & Kashmir after Sheikh Abdullah's death. I spent three weeks in the Valley covering the election and saw no sign of cheating. But a powerful lobby of Kashmiri Pandits told Mrs. Gandhi that there had been cheating and she believed them.

So, she decided in less than a year of Ferooz Abdullah becoming chief minister that she had to get rid of him. For this she needed the complicity of an obedient governor. But the man in residence in Srinagar's spectacularly situated Raj Bhavan was her uncle B K Nehru who warned her that destabilizing Kashmir was dangerous and reckless. He refused completely to cooperate and so this gracious and wise man was replaced by a factotum of Sanjay Gandhi called Jagmohan. He was sent to Srinagar with the specific purpose of removing Ferooz and he did this by organising a split in the National Conference and installing as chief minister Ghulam Mohammad (Gul) Shah, husband of Ferooz's sister.

Shah's credibility among ordinary Kashmiris was so low that he ruled by imposing curfew every time there was a disturbance. The Kashmir Valley spent so many days under curfew in the twenty months that Gul Shah ruled that he came to be mocked as Gul-e-curfew. The curfew flower. It was in those twenty months of turbulence and anger that in my view our current Kashmir problem was born. It has almost nothing to do with our historical Kashmir problem. That old problem in my view died after the creation of Bangladesh and the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. In the three weeks that I spent travelling around the Kashmir Valley in 1983, every Kashmiri I spoke to said that they were participating in the election as Indians.

All this changed because of the dirty political game that a Governor played at the behest of New Delhi. The sledgehammer strategy that the Modi government has employed to solve the Kashmir problem has brought a measure of peace and prosperity but, as we saw, it took just one act of terrorism in Pahalgam for happy days to end.

In Tamil Nadu, it should have been the primary duty of the Governor to give the man with the largest number of seats in the assembly the first shot at forming a government. Instead, he chose, perhaps on the orders of Delhi, to play his own game of dice. It is hard to say where it will all end but the damage already done is considerable. As for me personally, a question I find myself asking more and more often is why the BJP, our proudly nationalist party whose leaders never stop reminding us about their great love for 'Ma Bharati', now walks slowly but firmly down the same road that the Congress Party trod for decades.

It was mistakes Congress made while walking on that road which created the biggest political problems that we still face. If the BJP carries on making the same mistakes, they will end up causing even more damage because with the whole world in flux, we cannot afford any mistakes. Those who play political games in these times will find it hard at some point down the road to be seen as patriots and nationalists. They could even be called anti-India.

This Met Gala, almost everyone failed the theme



TRISHA MUKHERJEE

A RECREATION OF the *Veiled Woman*. A 'live' *Madame X*. Claude Monet's lilies on a gown. This year's theme for the Met Gala was "Fashion is art". But neither fashion nor art got the memo. The one criterion for something to be called a "work of art" is originality of thought. Most of the Gala was anything but.

Announcing the theme, Andrew Bolton, the head curator of the museum's Costume Institute, had expressed concerns that it may be interpreted "too literally". Bolton's fears materialised on the iconic steps when celebrities served looks that recalled works of art — ancient, modern and contemporary — and too conspicuously.

Lauren Sanchez Bezos, the honorary chair, turned up at the event as *Madame X* from Singer Sargent's iconic 1884 portrait. The look was a replica, barring the hairdo. Bezos let her hair down as she did what could have been a nuanced theme. Then, there was Jessica Kayll. In perhaps one of the laziest interpretations, Kayll painted Monet's lilies on her gown. The fact that she is a designer and a textile artist makes the costume that much more unventive.

Raja Ravi Varma is the flavour of the season in India — his *Yashoda and Krishna* (1890) is now India's most expensive painting after it fetched Rs 167.2 crore at a Saffronart auction in March this year — and Karan Johar wore the modernist on his sleeves. The filmmaker's Manish Malhotra ensemble, titled, *Framed in Eternity*, included an oversized ornate cape featuring five of Ravi Varma's paintings — *Hansa Damayanti*, *Lady with a Lemon*, *Kadambari*, *Arjuna and Subhadra* and *There Comes Papa*.

Heidi Klum's *Veiled Vestal*, undoubtedly, brings the marble sculpture to life in exceptional detail, but that was never the point.

The theme was: Fashion "is" art, not "as" art. It wanted the body to be transformed into a canvas and exemplify what fashion could create, not recreate. The fact that so many attendees chose to rely on "art" as we know it — paintings, sculptures — to fit the theme only shows how little faith they have in fashion as an independent art form; it is a medium of expression and cultural commentary. What could have been an affirming moment for fashion turned out to be a case against it — its imagination, derivative; its fame, borrowed.

Not everyone disappointed, though. Malhotra might have taken the 'inspired' route to dress Johar but with his own outfit, he was on point — original, innovative and imaginative. Using traditional Indian weaves such as *dori*, *zardozi*, *chikankari*, and *kasab*, he gave his cape a sculptural quality through recreations of Mumbai landmarks. It also bore signatures of the over 50 artisans who worked on it as a celebration of the fraternity that helps translate a vision into reality.

Equally stunning was stylist and entrepreneur Diya Mehta Jatia in her metallic Kanjivaram gown. It was layered with an intricately carved bodice and panel fashioned out of sholapith, an endangered craft from Bengal. The couture look by Mayyur Girotra was a specimen in how fashion can become a bridge between "art" and "craft".

Not as impressive but an apt example of how the theme could have been interpreted in relation to art history, was Blake Lively's voluminous Versace gown with a cloud-like trail of pink, purple and yellow tulle. It was inspired by 18th-century Venetian Rococo paintings in its choice of pastel hues; its dramatic 13-foot train and its four "bays" at the hip that evoke Baroque architectural sensibilities.

Sarah Paulson's outfit included a dollar bill blindfold that took a dig at the richest "one per cent", including Jeff Bezos who contributed heavily to this year's Met Gala. It showed that fashion is art in the way it can do more than just be pretty. But such looks were only far and few.

Some of the Met Gala themes over the years include "Superfine: Tailoring Black Style", "Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion" and "Karl Lagerfeld: A Line of Beauty". While about fashion, they were restricted by time, personalities and nationalities. This year was a rare opportunity for the fashion industry to embrace both its method and madness and come into its own, but it chose to follow, not lead.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Indian Express*

When Bihar's Assembly was dissolved before it could speak



HISTORY HEADLINE
BY SHUBHAM KUMAR

IN 2000, Nitish Kumar became Bihar's Chief Minister for the first time. The term lasted only seven days. As leader of the Samata Party, he took oath but resigned soon after when it became clear that he could not prove a majority in the Assembly. Five years later, he would return to Patna's highest office. Between these two moments lay one of the most dramatic constitutional episodes in India's history of hung Assemblies.

The February 2005 Bihar election did not give anyone a clear mandate. It gave everyone a claim. The RJD emerged as the single largest party with 75 seats, Nitish Kumar's JD(U) had 55, BJP 37, Ram Vilas Paswan's LJP 29, and 17 Independents held the balance. In a House of 243, the majority mark was 122.

The Governor was Buta Singh, a Congress veteran who had won eight general elections, served under four Prime Ministers, and knew Bihar's principal leaders from Parliament. He had taken charge only months earlier, after losing the 2004 Lok Sabha election from Jalore in Rajasthan. In a hung House, his task was constitutionally sensitive but conceptually simple: find out who could form a government and require that person to prove majority on the floor.

The signals before him were messy. Paswan's LJP said it would support neither the RJD nor the BJP. The BJP urged the Governor not to invite the RJD. The RJD staked a claim but did not have 122 MLAs. Smaller parties refused to support either camp. Six Independents claimed they could form a government. Bihar was placed under President's Rule on March 7, with the Assembly kept in suspended animation.

In later reports to President Kalam, Buta Singh alleged that the JD(U)-BJP combine was trying to secure a majority by winning over LJP MLAs and splitting the Congress.



Nitish Kumar's JD(U) won 55 seats in February 2005

In his final report, he claimed that 17-18 LJP MLAs were moving towards the JD(U), and that this would "distort the verdict of the people". He therefore recommended dissolution of the Assembly.

This was the constitutional turn. The Governor did not merely assess whether a claimant had numbers. He assessed the morality of how numbers might be assembled. Before MLAs could vote, their possible movement was treated as a reason to end the House itself.

The file reached Delhi on May 22, 2005, and moved with exceptional speed. The Union Cabinet met late at night and accepted the recommendation. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called President Kalam, who was in Moscow, to apprise him of the decision. A second call followed at 3:30 am Delhi time — 1 am in Moscow — to answer Kalam's questions. Soon after, from Moscow, Kalam approved the dissolution of an Assembly that had not held a single sitting.

The NDA marched to Rashtrapati Bhavan in protest. Its memorandum claimed that 22 LJP MLAs had decided to merge with the JD(U). Nitish and Jaitley raised the issue repeatedly in Parliament. Lalu Prasad reportedly remarked that it was not in Nitish's fate to become Chief Minister.

The matter reached the Supreme Court. In October 2005, roughly three weeks before Bihar began voting again, a five-judge bench constitution bench headed by Justice YK Sabharwal held the dissolution unconstitutional. It did not restore the Assembly because fresh elections had already been notified. But the principle it laid down was enduring: a Governor cannot use apprehensions of horse-trading to prevent a possible majority from being tested in the House.

The judgment also left a personal mark on Kalam. He later wrote that after the adverse verdict, he prepared his resignation letter, signed it, and kept it ready to be sent to Vice-President Bhaichand Singh Shekhawat. He first tried to reach the Vice-President, who was away. When the Prime Minister came to see him for an unrelated discussion, Kalam raised the matter, showed him the letter, and said he was waiting for Shekhawat to return. The Prime Minister was startled and pleaded with him not to act, warning that the furore could bring down the Government itself. Kalam called the scene "touching" and chose not to describe it further.

That moment showed how heavy the decision had been. What looked like a formal constitutional step had serious consequences. A Governor's report had travelled through the Cabinet, received presidential assent, and still been found constitutionally wrong. By then, Bihar's political course had already changed.

In the second election, voters gave the NDA a clear mandate. The JD(U) rose from 55 to 88 seats, the BJP from 37 to 55, while the RJD fell to 54 and the LJP to 10. In November 2005, Nitish Kumar became Chief Minister and began his first full tenure. But the later mandate did not cure the earlier wrong: an Assembly had been dissolved before it was allowed to decide who commanded its confidence.

That is why Bihar 2005 still matters whenever a Governor faces a hung House, including in the present Tamil Nadu debate. A Governor may examine claims and form a prima facie view, but political certainty cannot be demanded inside Raj Bhavan. The proper constitutional forum is the Assembly, and the proper method is a time-bound floor test.

The author is a lawyer with a specialisation in public law

What we measure, what we miss



SHE SAID
BY SANGEETA KAMPANI

IN CONVERSATIONS on women's progress, numbers often lead while meaning trails behind. Before asking how much progress has been made, we must ask what, exactly, we are measuring — and whether our words are equal to the lives they seek to describe. In cities like Delhi, where women's educational attainment has steadily risen, the persistent gap between education and employment offers a telling contradiction — one that exposes the limits of how we read progress.

Consider the ease with which we invoke the term "independent". It appears definitive, even celebratory. On closer scrutiny, however, it is less a destination than a comparison. A woman is often described as independent not in absolute terms, but in relation to others who are more constrained — more homebound, more economically deprived, less visible in the public sphere. The label does not capture autonomy so much as it ranks positions along a continuum of constraint. It is, in this sense, a

trouser-term: tailored and presentable, but cut from the fabric of relativity.

This relativity is not merely semantic; it shapes how success is recorded and rewarded. When independence is framed comparatively, even modest shifts can appear significant. A woman entering the workforce may be counted as a marker of empowerment, regardless of the conditions under which she works or the degree of control she exercises over her earnings.

This ambiguity has consequences for policy design and evaluation. We rely on indicators such as income, mobility, and participation in decision-making, treating them as markers of empowerment. They matter, but they are, at best, partial proxies. Income does not necessarily imply control over earnings; mobility may coexist with surveillance or limited choice; participation in decisions may mask deeper asymmetries of power. The metrics register movement, but not always a shift in the structures that shape that movement.

The limits of these measures are evident in the widely noted gap between education and employment for women in Delhi. Even as educational attainment has improved, this has not translated into commensurate workforce participation. Such divergence unsettles linear assumptions of progress. It suggests that while capabilities may expand, the ability to exercise them remains mediated by social norms, safety concerns, care responsibilities, and structural barriers in the labour market. Measuring education alone, therefore, risks overstating empowerment.

This gap also invites a deeper question about what we consider an "outcome". Is it the acquisition of skills and credentials, or the capacity to deploy them in ways that alter one's life choices? If a woman is educated but unable to work due to constraints within the household or the absence of safe and dignified employment opportunities, can we reasonably claim success?

If outcomes are to be meaningful, they

must move beyond surface indicators to capture substantive freedoms: the ability to make choices without coercion, to access and control resources, and to act without fear of sanction. This requires attention not only to what women do, but to the conditions under which they do it — whether choices are real or merely nominal, whether participation is enabled or negotiated within narrow bounds.

Such an approach calls for a more layered methodology, one that combines quantitative measures with qualitative insights into norms, relationships, and intra-household dynamics. Numbers are indispensable, but they must be read with humility — aware of what they illuminate and what they leave in shadow. For in the end, what we measure shapes what we see — and what we miss.

The writer retired as Commissioner of Income Tax, Delhi Editor (Planning & Projects) Shalini Langer curates the fortnightly 'She Said' column

MICRO ENTERPRISES MAKE UP 99.94% OF INDIA'S INFORMAL ESTABLISHMENTS

India's informal sector becoming less indebted, also investing less

Unincorporated, non-agricultural enterprises account for a sizable portion of the economy

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, May 9

INDIA'S INFORMAL sector is becoming less indebted, with the interest they paid as well as the amount of loans they need to repay falling sharply, according to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) full report on its Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) conducted in 2025.

An analysis of the MoSPI report data released earlier this week showed annual interest payable per unincorporated establishment — or an informal business unit — reduced by 16% on average compared to the previous annual survey, conducted between October 2023 and September 2024.

Similarly, outstanding loans per establishment fell 20% in the 2025 survey period compared to 2023-24 (October-September) to Rs 42,776, indicating new loans were outstripped by repayments.

The reduction in outstanding loans coincided with a fall in investments, with each establishment's net addition to fixed assets declining 14% in the 2025 survey from 2023-24.

In 2023-24, the annual interest payable and outstanding loans per establishment had risen by 7%, while net addition to fixed assets was just over 3% higher than in the 2022-23 survey.

India's unincorporated, non-agricultural enterprises — covered by the ASUSE survey — make up a sizable portion of

THE STATE OF INDIA'S INFORMAL SECTOR

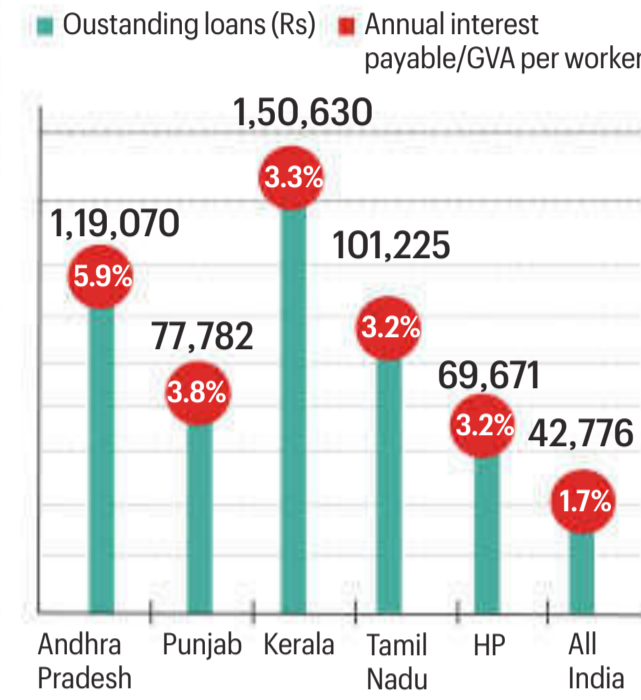


HOW INDIA'S INFORMAL SECTOR BORROWED AND INVESTED

	2023-24	2025
Outstanding loans	53,710	42,776
Net addition to fixed assets	12,770	10,946

NOTE: NUMBERS ARE IN RUPEES PER ESTABLISHMENT; YEARS REFER TO SURVEY PERIOD. SOURCE: MOSPI

STATES WHOSE INFORMAL ESTABLISHMENTS' ANNUAL INTEREST PAYMENTS AS % OF PER WORKER GVA IS HIGHEST



NOTE: FIGURES ARE PER ESTABLISHMENT SOURCE: MOSPI

the economy and include the likes of small manufacturers, service providers, and trading units. In fact, the 2025 survey estimates the total gross value added (GVA) of the unincorporated sector at Rs 20 lakh crore — or 6.4% of the entire country's GVA in 2025-26.

Signs of weakness

However, the 2025 ASUSE survey revealed signs of some weakness in the unorganised sector. As reported by The Indian Express on March 24, when the 'factsheet' of the survey was released, pay in the informal sector rose by just 3.9% — a third of the 13% increase re-

ported in the 2023-24 survey. Further, the number of establishments increased by 58.5 lakh as against 83.5 lakh in 2023-24, resulting in the creation of fewer jobs: 74.5 lakh in 2025 compared to 1.1 crore in the 12 months ended September 2024.

All but 12 of the estimated 7.92 crore unincorporated enterprises in the 2025 survey were Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, with micro enterprises making up 99.94% of the estimated number.

The total number of establishments actually surveyed in 2025 was 6.7 lakh — 2.94 lakh in

rural areas and 3.76 lakh in urban areas. Interestingly, outstanding loans of informal enterprises reduced sharply even though bank credit to micro and small enterprises has been rising rapidly.

As per latest Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, loans to 'micro and small' industry were up 33% year-on-year as on March 31. This suggests that most bank loans are going to 'small' enterprises.

According to ASUSE 2025, 81% of unincorporated establishments' outstanding loans were owed to institutional sources such as banks and government schemes.

Investment concerns

The smaller net addition to fixed assets, as per the latest ASUSE report, is part of a broader trend that has policymakers worried. Earlier this month, Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran criticised the Indian private sector for being reluctant to invest, saying that even though profits of India's top 500 companies had grown 31% every year since Covid, their capital formation rate had been "disappointing".

While the informal sector saw a decline in net addition to fixed assets at an all-India level, there were large differences between states. For instance, among large states, establishments in Punjab more than doubled their investments, with their outstanding loans rising nearly four-fold.

On the other hand, per establishment investment fell in Telangana (down 63%), Gujarat (down 48%), and Maharashtra (down 35%), although they also reported large reductions in outstanding loans.

At the same time, Uttar Pradesh-based informal establishments invested 30% less as per the 2025 survey even though their outstanding loans were only 3% lower than the 2023-24 survey. Meanwhile, outstanding loans per establishment in Bihar doubled to Rs 8,568, but investments were 3% lower. The opposite occurred in Goa and Chhattisgarh: a big reduction in indebtedness, but investments rising sharply.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

FLOOR WAGE TO BE FIXED IN CONSULTATION WITH STATES

Rules for all four Labour Codes notified, minimum wage criteria dropped

Normal working day of 8 hrs, weekly cap of 48 working hrs

Aanchal Magazine
New Delhi, May 9

GIVING EFFECT to the new Labour Codes in full after having brought them in November 2025, the central government has now notified final rules for all four codes after a four-month gap from draft rules.

As per the rules, a national floor wage will be decided by the Centre in consultation with an advisory board and states; a normal working day will be of eight hours with a weekly cap of 48 working hours; employers need to issue mandatory wage slips. A social security fund will also be created for unorganised sector and gig workers. States will follow suit with their rules.

In a critical omission from the draft rules published in December-end, the Centre has dropped the criteria for calculating minimum wage in the final Code on Wages (Central) Rules, 2025, stating that the criteria will be "separately specified by the Central government by special or general order".

This is likely to result in lower minimum wages and higher wage disparities for the same worker category across states, experts said.

The draft rules in January had included the earlier formula for calculation of minimum wage which was linked to net intake of 2,700 calories per day per consumption unit; 66 meters of clothing per year per standard working class family comprising the worker, a spouse and two children; and housing rent expenditure of 10% of food and clothing expenditure apart from fuel,

'Pay contract workers on time or face blacklisting'

ENS Economic Bureau
New Delhi, May 9

THE GOVERNMENT has come out with revised instructions to ensure timely payment of wages to contractual workers engaged in central ministries, departments, autonomous bodies and Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs).

The instructions, which are in line with the four new Labour Codes effective November 2025 and their rules notified on Friday, specify procurement-linked compliance measures and introduction penalties including debar-

ment and blacklisting of firms if contractors fail to pay workers on time.

Wage payments are required to be made only through bank transfer or electronic mode. The May 8 order directed all central ministries, departments, statutory, autonomous bodies and CPSEs to strictly ensure that contractors pay wages within the prescribed timelines: end of the shift for daily wages; before weekly holiday for weekly work; within two days of end of fortnight for fortnightly work; and within seven days of next month for monthly work.

electricity and other miscellaneous expenses as 20% of minimum wage; and 25% of minimum wage as expense for children education, medical, recreation and contingencies.

This formula had evolved in line with the landmark 1991-Supreme Court judgement in the Reptakos Brett case and recommendations of the 15th Indian Labour Conference (ILC) in 1957. The removal of the formula for fixing the minimum wage from the final version of the rules for Code on Wages is likely to result in lower-than-potential wages for workers as wages play a key role in collective bargaining, said K R Shyam Sundar, labour economist and former professor at XLR.

"The consequence of the removal of the criteria for fixing minimum wage from the rules is that it will lead to unscientific and inconsistent criteria for calculation of minimum wages across states. This will exacerbate the differential in wages for the same category of worker, say, unskilled worker. Otherwise, wages for an unskilled worker used to be similar across the states," Sundar said.

Separately, the new wage rules state that a floor wage will be fixed by the central government taking into account "the minimum living standard clothing, housing and any other factor considered appropriate by the central government from time to time". Under Section 9 of the Code on Wages, 2019, the central government has the power to fix the floor wage taking into account minimum living standards of a worker, provided that different floor wages may be fixed for different geographical areas. FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

AHEAD OF TRUMP'S VISIT

China Apr exports rebound, trade surplus widens

Reuters
London, Beijing, May 9

CHINA'S EXPORT growth gathered pace in April as factories raced to meet a wave of orders from AI-related industries and other buyers seeking to stockpile components amid fears the Iran war could push global input costs even higher.

That export strength, which has seen China's trade surplus with the US widen to \$87.7 billion so far this year, will be in focus next week as President Donald Trump travels to Beijing for a leaders' summit expected to extend last year's trade truce.

While Chinese exporters have so far weathered the fall-out from the West Asia conflict economists warn that the longer the war drags on and energy prices rise, the greater the risk that external demand fades away — leaving sluggish domestic consumption unable to plug the gap.

For now economists are watching the pace of the AI manufacturing boom and

whether shipments of related equipment can keep the Chinese export engine purring.

"The conflict in the Middle East pushed up demand for global manufacturing inventory replenishment, and under the upward cycle of semiconductors, imports and exports maintained a boom," according to Xing Zhaopeng, senior China strategist at ANZ.

"There is still room for expansion in this round of manufacturing cycle driven by AI, and it is expected that the annual export growth rate will be about 10%."

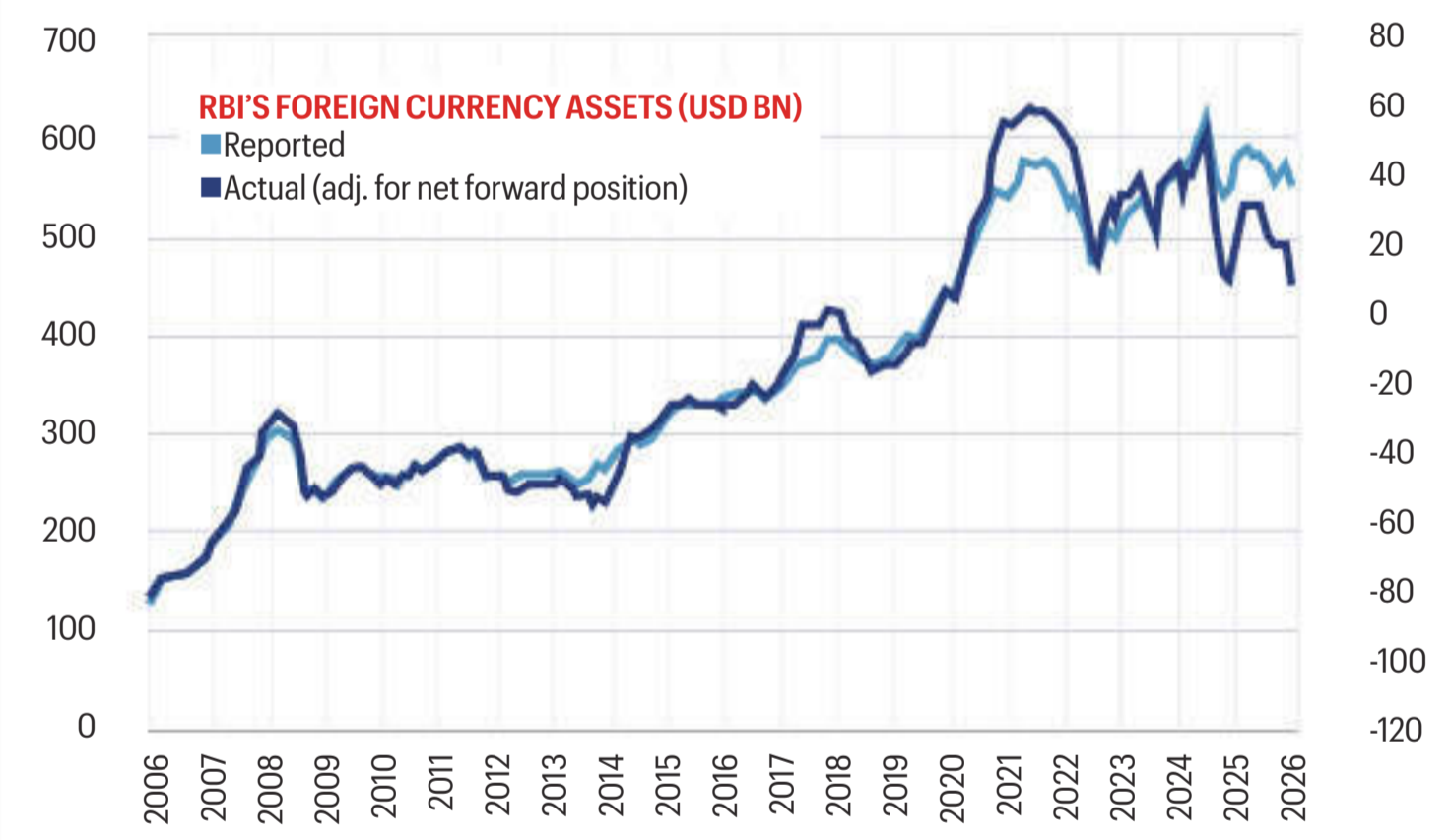
Exports expanded 14.1% from a year earlier in U.S. dollar value terms, customs data showed on Saturday, outpacing the 2.5% gain in March and a 7.9% rise tipped by economists.

New export orders rose to their highest level in two years, separate factory activity data for April showed last month.

Imports notched another strong month, climbing 25.3% versus 27.8% in March.

India's forex reserves adequate, but comfort 'thinning'

At \$691 billion, India's forex reserves are not far from their peak of \$728 billion, reached just before the West Asia war began. But elevated crude oil prices and a sharp fall in the rupee since late February have led to questions being asked about the adequacy of the reserves. According to economists at QuantEco Research, while they are adequate, the comfort is "thinning" if one considers the RBI's net short forward book of \$103 billion — dollars the central bank has sold in the 'forwards' market and must deliver in the future.



EU-India partnership limitless: Envoy

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, May 9

THE EUROPEAN Union-India partnership is "limitless, ambitious and progressive" and both sides have elevated the relationship to a "totally new level" in both qualitative and strategic terms, EU Ambassador Herve Delphin has said.

In an address at an event, the

envoy also noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "not an era of war" message "deeply resonates" with Europe's values and identity, and called the EU "fundamentally a peace project".

Characterising the EU-India summit held three and a half months ago as a milestone, Delphin said the confluence of symbolism, substance and strategic significance resulted in

"momentous outcomes".

"We have placed our relationship to a totally new level, in qualitative and strategic terms. The EU-India partnership is limitless, ambitious and progressive," he said.

"These achievements would not have been possible without the political conviction and trust shared by our leaders," the envoy said.

Liquor giant Pernod Ricard's dealings with retailers under CCI lens

Reuters
New Delhi, May 9

INDIA'S ANTITRUST watchdog has ordered an investigation into French liquor group Pernod Ricard over alleged exclusive deals with retailers to promote its brands at the expense of rivals, a regulatory order showed.

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has been reviewing allegations since 2024 that Pernod, whose brands include Chivas Regal and Absolut vodka, colluded with retailers in New Delhi to boost its market share. The complaint alleges that Pernod provided \$24 million in corporate guarantees to

its bankers in 2021 to help city retailers secure loans, with retailers in turn ensuring 35% of the stock in their shops comprised Pernod brands.

The CCI said it found merit in the allegations, noting in its order that "the non-dealing in the product of the competitors ... is likely to result in distortion of demand by way of moving retail demand away from the competing brands."

In a statement on Saturday, Pernod told Reuters it "unequivocally denies any wrongdoing" and will cooperate with the CCI if the authorities contact the company. "We operate to the highest standards of compliance," it said.

M&M closes gap with JSW MG for second spot in EV race

Vikram Chaudhary
New Delhi, May 9

THIS YEAR is set to be of a big upheaval in the electric car space. While Tata Motors continues to enjoy a massive lead, the battle for the second place has gotten interesting, with JSW MG Motor India gradually losing its position to Mahindra.

According to data sourced from the Vahan retail sales portal, JSW MG was at the second position in January and February, but Mahindra overtook it in March and April, and with the latter's sales rising thanks to new EV models, the lead will only increase.

In 2025, JSW MG (51,387 units) led Mahindra (33,513) by

almost 18,000 units, but with the launch of the XEV 9S and XUV 3XO EV, the latter has reduced the lead.

In the first four months of the year, the gap between the two was reduced to just about a thousand units — JSW MG sold 18,726 units and Mahindra has sold 17,795 units.

Automotive analysts told FE that Mahindra's ascent to the second spot in March and April is driven by a multiproduct offensive. While JSW MG remains heavily reliant on the Windsor EV (as seen from its flat sales of 4,858 units in January to 5,006 units in April), Mahindra's diversified portfolio across key SUV segments has allowed it to capture a wider



JSW MG was at the second spot in January and February, but Mahindra overtook it in March and April. REUTERS

audience, helping it to grow by 42% just this year (from 3,817 units in January to 5,412 units in April), and therefore it is well-positioned to leverage its

superior production scale and brand loyalty to outpace JSW MG in 2026.

Gaurav Vangaal, associate director, light vehicle forecast-

ing, S&P Global Mobility, said that the Indian mass-market EV segment is entering a decisive phase.

"Mahindra's portfolio expansion demonstrates confidence in long-term category growth, creating multiple customer touchpoints. Conversely, MG's focused strategy has proven effective — the Windsor EV's success shows that niche dominance can outpace diversification. If MG's next vehicle performs as strongly, they're positioned to lead. This competition ultimately benefits consumers through choice and innovation. The outcome remains genuinely open, and that's healthy for the market."

Another analyst added that while the Windsor EV has been attracting a customer looking for an EV in the lucrative Rs 10-20 lakh space — and that's why the Windsor EV still is India's largest selling electric car — Mahindra has been attracting entry-level customers with the 3XO EV, midsize SUV customers with the BE 6, and luxury and family customers with the XEV 9e and 9S.

But despite Mahindra's rising sales, overtaking Tata Motors will be a big task, which launched the new Punch EV in February, and is set to drive in the Sierra EV this month, followed by the Safari EV, and the dedicated luxury EV brand Avinya possibly next year. FE

Classifieds

PERSONAL

I, Ayush S/o Brahm Dutt, R/o House No.165/11, 8-Biswa, Gurgaon Village, Gurgaon, (Haryana)- 122001, have changed my name to Ayush Sharma, for all Purposes. 0040853633-7

I, HEMANT KUMAR BHARDWAJ S/o BHIM SAIN R/o House No-56, Kakrola Village, Delhi-110078, have changed my name to HEMANT KUMAR. 0040853633-5

I, KOMAL SETH d/o SOMNATH R/o G-13, 2nd Floor, Sham Nagar, Tilak Nagar, Delhi-110018 have changed my minor son's name from TANISH to TANISH ARORA permanently. 0040853586-1

GENERAL VB'Ful Fair Slim Edu LLB (47/55 cm) Maratha- Issuess Divorcee, Looking for a Groom, Cast No Bar Contact- 9152736238. 007103279-1

TELANGANA GIRIJAN COOPERATIVE CORPORATION LTD., HYDERABAD DIVISIONAL OFFICE: TGCC LTD., UNTOOR, ADILABAD DISTRICT, TELANGANA, PIN: 50411. TENDER NOTICE: CUM OPEN AUCTION

SALUTE THE SOLDIER 2ND BATTALION THE RAJPUTANA RIFLES LT UMMER FAYAZ Nine years ago, on the fateful night of 09-10 May 2017, while on leave, Lt Ummer Fayaz, resident of Village-Sursona, District-Kulgam (J&K) was abducted at gunpoint and was killed by militants.

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INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Gill, Rashid star as ruthless GT make short work of RR

One batted with quiet authority, the other bowled with enough tricks up his sleeve as Gujarat win by 77 runs

SYNOPSIS: Shubman Gill's 84 powers GT to 229/4, before Rashid Khan weaves his magic with figures of 4/33.

Sriram Veera
Mumbai, May 9

GUJARAT TITANS beat Rajasthan Royals by 77 runs in Jaipur on Friday night to move to second spot on the IPL table but equal with leaders Sunrisers Hyderabad on points — both on 14 points. Rajasthan's stand-in captain Yashasvi Jaiswal won the toss and chose to bowl. GT gave him 229 to chase. Shubman Gill made 84. Rashid Khan took four wickets. Washington Sundar's unbeaten 37 off 20 pushed the total from 185 to 229. Rajasthan, missing Riyvan Parag with a hamstring injury, were never in the chase — bundled out for 152 in 16.3 overs. For RR, a fifth defeat in their last six leaves them fifth on the table, their playoffs place no longer secure.

Gill, unhurried

Shubman Gill scored one run off his first five balls. Sai Sudharsan was already in flow at the other end, and Gill watched. When Archer came back in the fourth over, Gill punched him through cover for four, then lofted one back over long-off, holding the pose. Fifteen off the over. Then fifteen more off Archer's next. In the eighth, scrambling for a run, he landed awkwardly on his left ankle. The physio came on, spray applied, and he batted on. When his fifty arrived in the

● IPL table

Teams	M	W	L	PTS
SRH	11	7	4	14
GT	11	7	4	14
PBKS	10	6	3	13
RCB	10	6	4	12
RR	11	6	5	12
CSK	10	5	5	10
KKR	10	4	5	9
DC	11	4	7	8
MI	10	3	7	6
LSG	10	3	7	6

M: MATCH; W: WIN; L: LOSS; PTS: POINTS

tenth over — knocked gently to long-on — there was no celebration. Just a glove change. Their sixth century opening stand came and went, equalling Warner-Dhawan and Head-Abhishek for the most in IPL history. When Jadeja returned in the eleventh, Gill danced down and carved one over extra cover, then got down on one knee and hacked the next to deep mid-wicket, where Shimron Hetmyer palmed it over the fence. He went for 84 off 44, trying to scoop Brijesh over short fine leg — the timing gone, Tushar running back to take it cleanly over his shoulder. Washington Sundar finished what Gill had started — 37 off 20 in the final overs, GT from 185 to 229.

Short-ball effective

Gujarat Titans had posted 229. Rajasthan Royals needed to chase at pace. Vaibhav Sooryavanshi gave them exactly that — 36 off 16 balls, striking at 225. Then Siraj bowled him a short ball head-high at 146.6kph, climbing through from middle-



Rashid Khan (C) celebrates after taking a wicket against Rajasthan Royals on Saturday. ROHIT PARAS JAIN

stump line. Sooryavanshi couldn't free his arms, the top edge went straight up, Arshad Khan took it at short fine.

Three balls later, Rabada — 152.1kph, angling across Jaiswal's body, chest-high. Jaiswal spliced it, Sindhu ran in from extra cover. Two wickets, two short balls, inside five overs. Jurel had watched both dismissals and arrived with a plan — pulled the first short ball for six, sliced the next through cover for four. 22 off seven balls. Rabada came back for Hetmyer with something different — under 130kph, slower, cutting away.

Hetmyer miscued, Holder waited at mid-on. The short ball had done two. The slower one did another. Rabada had options. Asked afterwards about bowling to a 14-year-old Vaibhav striking at 225, he laughed first. Then: "I guess what worked for 11 years will continue to work, right? Loads of hard work before the game, bit of analysis — but otherwise it's

same old, same old."

Rashid's four

Rashid came into this IPL having spent the off-season asking himself a question. "Like, okay, what's wrong now? What's the thing I'm missing?" The answer, he found, was rhythm — the ability to modulate pace, to bowl with full energy from start to finish. His back, operated on in 2023, had made him cautious. "When I came back, I was very, very careful with my back. That affected my bowling action and release and everything." So he took two months, focused on his core, rebuilt. "I gave myself a couple of months after the last IPL and focused on my fitness. That's something which can improve and does allow my body to bowl with the full rhythm."

On Friday evening in Jaipur, the rhythm was back. Dhruv Jurel had made 24 off ten balls, Siraj's short-ball plan dismantled in one over. Then the strategic timeout came and Ra-

shid came on. First ball to Jurel: a googly. Jurel backed away to cut, missed, off-stump disturbed. Two balls later, Rashid bowled Donovan Ferreira with a leg-break that spun the other way — forward, expecting turn in, beaten by turn away, middle and off flattened. Two wickets in three balls, two entirely different deliveries.

He wasn't done. Shubham Dubey swung at a full ball on leg, lost shape, leg-break sneaked back in, off-stump gone. Then Jadeja swept him for six — down on one knee, read the toss perfectly. Next ball, the straighter one, dinking in just enough. Jadeja's bat came outside the line. Plumb. Holder mopped up the tail — Shanaka, Archer, Deshpande — with 3/12 from 2.3 overs. RR were all out for 152.

BRIEF SCORES: GT 229/4 in 20 overs (Shubman 84, Sudharsan 55; Brijesh 2/47) beat RR 152 all out in 16.2 overs (Jadeja 38, Vaibhav 36; Rashid 4/33, Holder 3/12) by 77 runs

Who let them in? The mystery around the strangers who sneaked into IPL's dugout

Sandeep Dwivedi

"IF YOUR b*#@&s can't join their two hands, then what can I do?" This was the South African captain Hansie Cronje explaining to bookie Sanjeev Chawla why he couldn't deliver on their match-fixing deal after a game in the infamous 2000 India-South Africa series. It was that ODI where Herschelle Gibbs was to score below 20 but ended up hitting much more.

Hansie, to save face, was blaming the Indian fielders for dropping catches. He was implying that Gibbs had done his bit and had he been caught, the match would take the course the syndicate had decided. Neither knew Delhi Police were tapping their phones.

More than two decades later, retired cop Pradeep Srivastava — who worked the Cronje case as a young DCP — repeats the line and chuckles at "b*#@& ds".

This was a few years back, when a group of Express reporters, working on Chawla's profile after he was forced to return to India from London, had been invited by Srivastava to his home. It was early evening.

The frame of the relaxed ex-cop, sitting in the living room that had some signs of a child's recent birthday, was endearing. Bright lights, balloons and bunting weren't the ideal backdrop for a chat about cricket's ugly chapter.

His words would get embedded in the mind. In the years to come, it would be a seed of doubt that would instantly germinate at the sight of a pro-fielder dropping a catch that even an amateur could hold blindfolded.

Worrying signs

This season, the IPL has presented that worrying sight way too often. Dropped catches are as old as the game, even the sharpest spill sitters. But when the BCCI secretary flags the presence of unauthorised persons in team hotels, franchise buses and even the dugout, the memories of the evening with Mr Srivastava are refreshed.

"There are unauthorised persons travelling in the team bus. There are unauthorised persons in team hotels, and there are some unauthorised persons in the dugout area... Some people have been spotted in places where they are not supposed to be," BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia told this newspaper.

He added that norms have been in place since 2008 but "people are becoming casual" and there will be no leniency for violations.

The IPL has reached the business end, the play-offs are round the corner.

How long have these illegal trespassers been around? Why were they allowed and what were they up to? Such ques-



Fans during the 2026 Indian Premier League match. CREIMAS FOR BCCI

In these days of no-holds-barred batting and throwing caution to the wind, a thin line separates the sublime from the stupid and also the scandalous.

tions aren't healthy for a reputed league, the IPL — world cricket's biggest show and the crown jewel of Indian cricket.

Small margins

Cricket in general and IPL specifically is a sport of small margins, many uncertainties and countless possibilities. Here a genuine error can easily be confused for some grand dubious design. Exasperation, disbelief, instant derision, a smirk and a quick comment on the integrity of the game, and the players follow. More so when an official says that the house rules have not been followed.

In these days of no-holds-barred batting and throwing caution to the wind, a thin line separates the sublime from the stupid and also the scandalous. One minute you could be the batsman with the high backlift, graceful swing and immaculate timing. The next moment, if you miss the ball, you could be a wildly swinging careless batsman prone to throwing the wicket. More so, when you know the league hasn't been squeaky clean.

Bowlers too have it tough. It's a few millimetres that distinguish the perfect wide outside off yorker dot ball and a glaring wide. Missing this tight target more than once starts the whispers.

Again, more so when you know that the gate-keepers have been lax and teams have been too casual in following the norm and guidelines.

Every major cricket controversy that brought serious disrepute to the game has had the role of those who snuck into the

forbidden zones. The 2013 spot-fixing IPL scandal had bookies sharing the hotel room with the players. This is from the police chargesheet.

Mixed company

Back in the day, the teammates of those facing fixing charges spoke of them regularly in mixed company at odd hours. Most would look the other way or be cynical about the state of affairs.

Some would even be in awe of their playboy image. The whip didn't crack, till it was too late. And within a few years, it was once again an open house. Businessmen and women, agents and hangers-on were back in the hotel lobby. There were luxury cars waiting outside, ready to take to the temptations with possible booby traps. A few years back, the ICC made Zimbabwe's Brendan Taylor's hearing about his match-fixing case public. The story goes that Taylor would meet an Indian businessman, who would offer him the world.

A place in the Afghanistan league and subsequently \$15,000 for fixing games.

A month later, the businessman funded Taylor's three nights and four days trip to India. This time he wanted Taylor to do what they wanted in a T20 tournament. The Zimbabwean player said he had initially said no to the offer but what made him change his mind was a compromising video of him that the businessman had shot. He also mentions an evening of cocaine consumption.

The rare BCCI acknowledgement of undeserving and unaccredited persons strolling around the dugout is serious. Hansie's 'If your b*#@&s can't join their two hands, then what can I do?' is a loaded line.

It is an indictment of those greasy palms but not fair on those with genuine butter fingers. Such doubts aren't good for the IPL — it is optics and perception that decide the reputation and legacy of an event.

As DC slip further, Axar focuses on next year's reboot

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 9

WITH THEIR fourth loss in a row, an eight-wicket drubbing at the hands of Kolkata Knight Riders, Delhi Capitals now find themselves in eighth place on the points table with as many points from 11 matches. With only a mathematical chance of qualifying for the playoffs, relying on other results and permutations to go their way, Delhi is staring at a deeply disappointing IPL campaign.

Captain Axar Patel admitted that the team has a long journey ahead and said they would begin thinking about plans for next year, including what changes can be made.

"For now, we'll go back and

think about the mistakes we made. After that, obviously there's still a long journey ahead, and next year will come too. So we'll think about what plans we can make for next year and what approach we should take. Based on that, we can also look at the players sitting on the bench and decide who can be given opportunities and what changes we can make," Patel said in the post-match presentation.

At the start of the IPL season, Delhi Capitals had three wins from their first five games, but the Axar Patel-led side has managed only one win in their last six matches. The team, which was bundled out for 75 runs against Royal Challengers Bengaluru last month, has since lost



DC skipper Axar Patel is having a poor season. CREIMAS FOR BCCI

to Chennai Super Kings while batting first before Friday's defeat and once again lost batting first against Kolkata Knight

Riders.

Skipper Axar Patel has so far scored only 44 runs in 11 matches while taking ten wickets at an average of 29.10. Former Indian all-rounder Irfan Pathan had earlier spoken about Patel holding himself back with the ball, suggesting the all-rounder could bowl more in the powerplay.

"Look, when the performances don't happen, you always look towards the captain, right? Axar Patel, who has been leading the side this season, is in a similar boat. One thing I have felt is that sometimes while leading the side, he is holding himself back with the ball. He is the kind of bowler who can regularly bowl in the powerplay," Pathan had said.

On Friday, Delhi could only post 142 for 8 after batting first. Kolkata Knight Riders chased down the target in 14.2 overs. Patel admitted that both batting and bowling let the team down.

"I think the runs were definitely below par, and at the same time, the spinners made quite a few mistakes. Looking at the way the pitch behaved, I feel the spinners did make errors. But at the same time, if you notice, we lost five wickets in two or three overs, and I think that's where the momentum slipped away from us. That's probably something we need to think about because the same thing happened against CSK. We started well, and then suddenly wickets kept falling," Patel said in the post-match presentation.

● CSK'S SPIN MAESTRO

Dhoni, Sriram and fixing Noor's broken wrist spin

Venkata Krishna B
Chennai, May 9

WHEN NOOR Ahmad runs in to bowl during CSK's net sessions at Chepauk, MS Dhoni steps out of the dressing room. He walks to the back of the nets, stands there, watches. A word here and there — the same quiet presence he maintains in the middle of matches, standing up to the stumps, making small adjustments with his hands. For Noor, it has been a constant these past weeks. It has also been necessary.

Noor arrived in Chennai not in the best of form. He had gone nearly three months without a wicket. The problem had a name — the same problem that had surfaced in 2021, when an arm injury forced him to rely excessively on his googly because bowling leg-breaks caused pain.

Five years on, the injury was gone but the habit had stayed. Over-exposure to T20 cricket through a year of globe-trotting had done the same damage more slowly. The googly had become the stock delivery. And when the googly is your stock delivery, you stop attacking the



Noor Ahmad has taken eleven wickets in ten matches for CSK. CREIMAS

stumps. You offer width. Batsmen find the arc and swing through it.

In Noor's first three IPL matches, that is exactly what happened. Wicketless, expensive, searching. It was Dhoni and bowling coach Srisharan Sriram who began the repair. "MS had a long chat with him in one of the practice sessions, getting his leg-break to go. I think it was very helpful for him," Sriram said. But a chat was not going to be enough. The leg-break had to become a muscle mem-

ory again. The run-up had to be sorted. The revs on the ball had to come back.

Good rhythm

Sriram describes what changed. "His rhythm is pretty good. He's sorted his run-up yards. He's more consistent with his run-up speeds. He's putting more revs on the ball and he's bowling more percentage of leg-spins. He has made some minor adjustments and that's something working for him really well. And he's attack-

ing the stumps a lot more."

Watch the run-up and the adjustments become visible. Noor starts his approach at a diagonal, so that by the time he reaches the crease his hip has already rotated into the delivery — not just the shoulders doing the work, but the hips too, which is where wrist-spinners find their revs. The leg-break is turning more than it was. The ball is asking questions it wasn't asking in those first three matches.

Since picking up his first wicket of the season against Delhi Capitals in CSK's second home fixture, Noor has taken nine wickets in six matches. Chennai have won four of those. In the middle overs, his four-over spells have been the choke — against Mumbai Indians and Delhi in the last match, he squeezed both innings to the point where recovery became impossible.

Top wicket-taker

He is now back in the top ten wicket-takers in the tournament, alongside his compatriot Allah Ghazanfar and his idol Rashid Khan — the bowler whose action Noor has spent

years mirroring, left-hand version. Like Rashid, he is quick through the air, altering his pace subtly enough that variations become difficult to decode until the ball has already left the hand. "Whenever I have questions, or want to chat, or need to share with someone, Rashid is the first person for me to go to," Noor has said in the past. "I try not to think too much about bowling, but whenever I have something that I must share, I share with him." Paired with Akeal Hosenin — a contrasting spinner, slower through the air — the two give CSK something different in each hand.

CSK need to win at least three of their four remaining fixtures to make the playoffs. The surfaces are tiring, scoring rates are dipping, conditions are shifting. On Sunday at Chepauk, under covers after unseasonal rain, they face Lucknow Super Giants. The pitch will do something.

Dhoni will stand behind the nets one more time before the game. Noor will run in at a diagonal, hips rotating, leg-break loaded. He knows what to do with it now.

Pakistan claw back after Abbas's fifer

Associated Press
Dhaka, May 9

PAKISTAN CLAWED back into the first cricket test against Bangladesh on stellar performances by pacer Mohammad Abbas and opener Azan Awaiz.

Bangladesh began Day 2 at 301-4 and tried to extend its domination, but Abbas' sensational 5-92 dismissed the hosts for 413. Azan, who made his international debut with this match, hit an unbeaten 85 to steer Pakistan to 179-1 at stumps on Saturday. Fellow debutant Abdullah Fazal was on 37.

Azan and his senior opening partner Imam-ul-Haq showed resolve in negating the early threat of Bangladesh pacers and put on a century stand. Offspinner Mehidy Hasan gave Bangladesh its only success by trapping Imam-ul-Haq leg-before for 45, ending the 106-run opening stand. Fazal, also playing first international match, initially struggled against the pacers.

But when he broke the deadlock in 19th delivery, his first scoring shot was a bound-

ary through a fierce cut over point region.

He then negotiated Bangladesh bowlers with ease. But Taskin Ahmed created a chance when Fazal poked a wide delivery to gully where Shadman Islam failed to hold onto the catch. Abbas was instrumental in denying Bangladesh's control, bowling relentlessly outside the off stump to induce mistakes early in the morning session.

Mushfiqur Rahim, who began the day at 48, nudged Shaheen Shah Afridi for a single in the third over of the morning to raise his fifty from 114 balls. The milestone marked his 42nd fifty-plus score in tests, the most by a Bangladeshi batter, surpassing Tamim Iqbal's tally of 41.

He and Litton Das appeared set to take Bangladesh in strong position before Abbas produced a beauty to dismiss the latter for 33, ending 62-run third wicket stand.

BRIEF SCORES: Pakistan 179/1 in 46 overs (Awaiz 85 not out, Miraz 1/37) trail Bangladesh 413 all-out (Shanto 101, Mominul 91; Abbas 5/92, Afridi 3/113) by 234 runs

Pole vault controversy pushes Railways to draft equipment policy

Sports Ministry intervenes, athletes may soon get smoother train transit

Dheeraj Mishra & Nihal Koshie
New Delhi, May 9

RECOGNISING THE hardships faced by sportspeople during train travel, the Indian Railways will set a sports equipment policy that spells out how sports goods can be transported, The Indian Express understands.

Following last week's incident at Rajahmundry station, where poles tied to the window grill were offloaded as pole vault athletes were travelling from Bhubaneswar to Salem after a competition, the railways have asked ticket-checking staff to be mindful of the plight of sportspeople on trains.

In a letter dated May 8, Shivrj Manasपुरa, a senior Divisional Commercial manager of

the Central Railway, advised ticket-checking staff to adopt a 'considerate approach' towards sportspeople and their equipment, asking them to be 'polite and courteous'.

The Railway Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) and the Indian Railway Traffic Department, which oversees freight and passenger movement, have been in talks with the sports ministry over the past two months to understand the extent of the issue and the type and dimensions of the equipment, including poles that measure up to 5.20 metres, arrows used in archery and rowing equipment, among others.

In January this year, former national record holder Dev Meena and his coach were fined for carrying pole vaults before boarding the train at the

Panvel railway station. Meena was travelling with the current national record holder, Kuldeep Kumar, after participating in the Inter-University Championships in Mangaluru.

The Indian Express understands that sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya, taking note of Meena and Kumar's ordeal, reached out to the Ministry of Railways to highlight the need for a policy on transporting sports equipment. "Following an earlier incident at the start of the year, of pole vault athletes having difficulty in boarding a train with their equipment, the sports ministry had asked the railway ministry to find a solution. The sports ministry is hopeful that rules for transporting sports equipment will be notified soon," a sports ministry source told The Indian Express on Saturday.

A railway official confirmed that they were working closely with the sports ministry. "The issue of carrying sports equipment has come to the attention



Kavinraja, the U20 Federation Cup champion, with his poles at a railway station. EXPRESS

of the railway administration. Proactive action is being taken. Because it is a sports-related issue, the railways are in touch with the sports ministry to address policy issues and had to get details like the equipment size, what kind of equipment, etc," a railway official said.

The latest episode of tension between pole vaulters and railway staff occurred in Rajahmundry. Five athletes were travelling with eight poles when the Railway Police Force personnel cut the ropes secur-

ing the poles to the window grill. Kavinraja, the reigning U20 Federation Cup, had to jump off the moving train to pick up the poles, which cost Rs 1 lakh each.

The Athletics Federation of India spokesperson and World Athletics vice president Adille Sumariwalla said the federation was in touch with the sports ministry and the Sports Authority of India (SAI) about sports equipment and rail travel for athletes. "Yes, we are working on it through the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs and the Sports Authority of India. All equipment, including throwing equipment," Sumariwalla told this paper on Saturday.

Manasपुरa, the senior Divisional Commercial manager of the Central Railway, said in a letter dated May 8 that ticket-checking staff must adopt a 'considerate approach' when it comes to sportspeople and their equipment.

"It has been observed that

sportspeople frequently travel by train while carrying sports equipment of large size and dimensions, such as kits, bags, poles, specialised gear etc., for participation in National and state level championships. In this regard, all are advised to maintain a polite, courteous and considerate approach while dealing with such passengers. Their equipment, though bulky, is essential for participation in the competitions and should be handled with understanding. While ensuring compliance with railway rules regarding luggage, staff must avoid rude behaviour or harassment. Special care should be taken to uphold the image of Indian Railways as a passenger-friendly organisation," the letter mentioned.

In March, the Ministry of Civil Aviation issued a circular which mentioned that 'carriage of sports equipment and musical instruments are to be facilitated in a transparent and passenger-friendly manner'.

Bank account frozen, Odisha chess body fails to pay prize money

Mayank Chaudhary
New Delhi, May 9



Not just Abhijeet Gupta's Rs 5.5 lakh, but the entire Rs 45 lakh prize fund is unpaid. EXPRESS

ARJUNA AWARDEE Grandmaster Abhijeet Gupta has expressed frustration over unpaid prize money for the Odisha Open title he won earlier this year. The 16th International Grandmaster Chess Festival, organised by the All Odisha Chess Association (AOCA), was held in Bhubaneswar from January 16 to 24.

The five-time Commonwealth gold medalist won the Category 'A' event with a score of 8.0/10, which carried a promised prize of Rs 5.5 lakh.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Gupta said: "The event got over around 24th-25th January. As the winner of the tournament, I was assured by the organiser that the transfer of the prize money would be done within a couple of weeks. When that didn't happen, I tried to chase them. They asked for some more time, and afterwards, they completely stopped responding altogether," he added.

The Indian Express has learnt that not only Gupta's Rs 5.5 lakh prize money, but the entire Rs 45 lakh prize fund of the Odisha Open remains unpaid by the organisers. Additionally, volunteers, arbiters and caterers are yet to be paid, as are appearance fees for a select few top Grandmasters.

The AOCA is currently going through an internal dispute, with the federation president and secretary turning against each other.

Chief organiser of the Odisha Open and General Secretary of AOCA, Debabrata Bhatta, has blamed federation president Satya Ranjan Pattnaik for the crisis. According to Bhatta, the association's bank account has been frozen by Pattnaik, which resulted in the non-payment of prize money. Bhatta has been accused by Pattnaik of financial wrongdoings.

"I am trying to resolve this issue but my hands are tied as the case is ongoing in the Odisha High Court. Till the accounts are frozen, I can't do anything," Bhatta told The Indian Express.

Pattnaik, however, claimed that it was Bhatta's mistakes and ignorance which led to the entire mess.

"There was no fund to organise this event. Even after repeated warnings from me, they didn't listen and went on to conduct this tournament with lack of enough funds. Bhatta said he will give from his own pocket and created ruckus," Pattnaik told this newspaper.

Pattnaik, as AOCA president, initiated an inquiry and passed an order to suspend Bhatta in February 2026 during the Executive Committee Meeting for his failure to provide audited reports for the financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26. According to Pattnaik, Bhatta ignored the suspension and went on to conduct a General Body meeting in March

where he had Pattnaik removed from his position of president. Pattnaik also claimed that if he unfreezes the association account, Bhatta will not pay the players their due prize money. Instead, he said, Bhatta would take the money for his own use.

Gupta also expressed disappointment with the All India Chess Federation (AICF), which he blamed for being ignorant and failing to step in at the right time. "So they have been having some problems in the state association for a while. But it was there beforehand itself. It was not like some association problem was happening during the tournament or after the event," he said. "But my point is, if AICF is affiliating this tournament, then they should check it beforehand. They should have certain legal documents stating whether they have a financial guarantee or not."

No support

Gupta said he did reach out to the AICF for help, but after multiple failed attempts to get any support, he was forced to seek intervention from the Sports Ministry.

"I kindly request the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to look into this matter and help ensure that players receive their rightful prize money with transparency and accountability," the 36-year-old wrote on X. "This is not just about one unpaid prize. It is about protecting the dignity and trust of every chess player in India."

Following Gupta's outburst, AICF president Nitin Narang reached out to him and assured him that necessary action would be taken. Speaking to this newspaper, Narang said he has spoken with Gupta and that the matter will be resolved as soon as possible. While Gupta acknowledged that the unpaid prize money is still manageable for him personally, he noted that many other families, especially parents of young chess players, have reached out to him over similar issues.

Apart from competing at top-level events, Gupta also trains several up-and-coming players. He revealed that the parent of a 10-year-old student, who was also owed prize money from the same Odisha Open, recently called him to ask if there had been any update. "If a young boy or a girl win a prize, and even that is not being paid, it actually feels painful. Why would anybody take up such a sport if things like this happen?"

Liverpool settles for 1-1 draw with Chelsea amid boos at Anfield

Reuters
Liverpool, May 9

ENZO FERNANDEZ'S free kick secured Chelsea a 1-1 draw against Liverpool at Anfield on Saturday, ending the visitors' six-game losing run in the Premier League and earning caretaker manager Calum MacFarlane a first point in charge.

Liverpool remained fourth in the table with 59 points from 36 games, a step closer to Champions League qualification, while Chelsea are in ninth with 49 points from the same number of matches.

Liverpool took the lead with a wonderful strike from the edge of the box by Ryan Gravenberch, but Chelsea improved on their recent limp performances and equalised when Fernandez's set-piece eluded everyone and nestled in the bottom corner.

There were boos in the air at fulltime from the Anfield faithful, as well as midway through the second half when manager Arne Slot took off lively 17-year-old Rio Ngunmoh, replacing him with Alexander Isak in a move that proved unpopular.

Liverpool started the brighter and took the lead thanks to a fantastic strike from Gravenberch, who cut inside from the left and curled his shot into the net. Van Dijk should have doubled the advantage when he blazed over unchallenged from eight meters, before Chelsea took control and equalised before halftime.

Fernandez swung in a low free kick from the right and the ball ended up in the far corner of the net, Liverpool goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili seemingly put off by a fresh air shot from Chelsea defender Wesley Fofana as the latter went for the ball but missed.

GRAND CHESS TOUR 2026

Flashes of promise but Gukesh endures another middling outing

The youngest world champion showed improvement in rapid chess, though recurring blitz troubles denied him a stronger finish

Mayank Chaudhary
New Delhi, May 9

THE LIFE of a world champion is hardly straightforward. Having achieved the ultimate glory once, there is a perennial need to match that standard, with the world's eyes watching every move and noting every mistake. D Gukesh, the youngest world chess champion, knows this feeling all too well.

Nearly 17 months into his World Championship triumph over China's Ding Liren, the 18-year-old is still searching for his first tournament win since that high of Singapore. Not that it directly defines his calibre, but Saturday marked the end of another event where a chance slipped by, as Gukesh delivered yet another middling performance to finish in the middle of the pack. The first event of the Grand Chess Tour 2026, Super Rapid & Blitz Poland, saw Gukesh end his campaign in sixth place with 17 combined points from nine rounds of rapid and 18 gruelling blitz rounds.

While shorter time controls have never been his strongest suit, the performance in Warsaw certainly signals Gukesh's desire to shed that tag and evolve into a more well-rounded player. After a creditable tied-fourth finish following the rapid portion, where he secured nine points from three wins, three losses and as many draws, things expectedly be-

came harder for Gukesh to navigate in the shortest format. He won six games, drew four and lost eight in 18 blitz rounds to accumulate eight points, finishing sixth among 10 players.

Gukesh's second day of the blitz event was as identical as it could be to his first. Just as the opening nine blitz rounds saw him win three, draw two and lose four, the final nine blitz games produced the exact same results.

He also completed doubles over eventual champion Hans Niemann, Wesley So and Jan-Krzysztof Duda, having beaten the same players on Friday.

As far as his battle against his challenger to the throne, Javokhir Sindarov, is concerned, Gukesh handed the edge to the Uzbek after losing to him again in the reverse blitz match-up. Having beaten him in the rapid section, which prompted an uncharacteristic fist-pumping celebration from Gukesh, he then lost both blitz games to his rival. It was a slow death for Gukesh's ideas against Sindarov in the Ruy Lopez game, where the Indian was wielding the white pieces.

Cramped for space in the middlegame and facing a severe time crunch, Gukesh allowed an exchange of queens before making an array of questionable moves under mounting time pressure. This resulted in him losing a pawn first, then another, before



D Gukesh finished the Super Rapid & Blitz, Poland, in sixth place with 17 points. LENNART OOTES/GCT

Having beaten him (Sindarov) in the rapid section, which prompted an uncharacteristic celebration from Gukesh, he then lost both blitz games to his rival

eventually resigning from a hopeless position.

Advantage Sindarov?

While points-wise, Gukesh and Sindarov are tied at two wins each at this event, given that a rapid win gives double the points of a blitz win, but on face value, Sindarov has gained the upper hand over the Indian.

Sindarov has made one thing clear: he is not here to

make a new friend, and he certainly does not want to think too far ahead, especially with his upcoming world championship game in mind.

When pressed hard by the organisers to speak about his feelings on playing Gukesh at the event, Sindarov said, "I don't want to think a lot that I am playing against a World Champion. I'm just trying to focus on every game and to play against world's best players and I will try to play good chess and don't think about everything because you can go crazy if you think of this a lot of stuff."

When asked if he considers Gukesh a friend, Sindarov replied, "Have a lot of friends. I'm a very friendly guy, but I have never spoken with Gukesh. I have friends from India... Arjun (Erigaisi), Nihal (Sarin)... I mean, I'm very good friends

with them, but I have never spoken with Gukesh. We only have talked about the game, not too much," he said to the official broadcasters.

For Niemann, his chess finally "spoke for itself." The flamboyant American marginally defeated compatriot Fabiano Caruana and Wesley So to clinch the title. Caruana chased him ferociously, remaining unbeaten in the last eight rounds and winning six of those to gain seven points in that period. He constantly kept Niemann on his toes, bringing out the best in his competitor.

Niemann delivered under pressure, winning his final two rounds against local players Duda and Radoslaw Wojtaszek to seal the title by the barest of margins. He finished with 22.5 points, half a point ahead of Caruana, to win his maiden Grand Chess Tour event.

COACH UNDERPLAYS INCIDENT

Clasico tonight, Real reels from players' fight aftermath

Associated Press
Barcelona, May 9

REAL MADRID coach Alvaro Arbeloa has defended players Federico Valverde and Aurelien Tchouameni on the eve of the Clasico, saying their apologies for having scuffled were enough to settle the incident that led the club to fine both of them a whopping 500,000 euros (\$590,000).

"My players recognized their mistake, expressed their remorse and asked for forgiveness," Arbeloa told reporters in Madrid on Saturday in his first public appearance since the fight. "That is enough for me," he said. "What I am not going to do is burn them on a pyre in a town square, because they don't deserve that. It is time to turn the page."

The tussle by the two midfielders when Madrid practiced on Thursday ended with Valverde at the hospital to treat a head wound. Valverde said he had hit his head on a table, calling the incident "a meaningless fight." Madrid said both players apologized to one



Federico Valverde (R) and Aurelien Tchouameni were involved in a fight during a training session ahead of Sunday's El Clasico. AP

another the next day when they met with club officials investigating the incident. They also apologized to their teammates, coaching staff and fans.

The 15-time European champion, however, found the spat a serious enough breach of team discipline to slap the players with fines that bite even the bank account of a top soccer player.

Arbeloa said he was satisfied with how the club had handled the situation, while also adding that he had seen

worse behavior in his playing career as a defender, which included Madrid, Liverpool, West Ham and Spain's national team.

"I had a teammate that hit another with a golf club," he said, without giving any more detail. "Situations like this have always happened, but I am not justifying them." During Arbeloa's playing days at Liverpool, teammate Craig Bellamy and John Arnes Riise were involved in an incident in which Bellamy hit Riise with a golf club

The tussle by the two midfielders when Madrid practiced on Thursday ended with Valverde at the hospital to treat a head wound.

prior to a Champions League game at Barcelona in 2007.

Arbeloa's harshest words were not for Valverde and Tchouameni, but rather for whoever it was who told the media about the fight. It was first reported by Spanish sports daily Marca. "That what happens in the changing room ends up being filtered (to the media) for me is a betrayal of Real Madrid," he said. "These things must stay in the changing room."

Madrid is facing a second straight season without a major trophy, despite having France star Kylian Mbappe on the squad. The 43-year-old Arbeloa has only been in charge since January when he was promoted from Madrid's reserve

team to substitute the fired Xabi Alonso. It would be a major shock if he is not replaced after the season given the inconsistent play of his star-studded side.

Arbeloa now has the difficult task of rallying his players for a game at fierce rival Barcelona on Sunday. Only a win by Madrid can stop Barcelona from clinching a second straight La Liga title, and even then it would likely just delay a title celebration by Barcelona with the Catalan club 11 points ahead of Madrid with four games left. "There is no doubt I have to take the responsibility for the fact that we have not risen to the challenge this season," Arbeloa said. "It is clear that feelings of frustration and anger can push you into situations that you don't desire. But now we must focus on (Sunday's) game." Tchouameni will be in Madrid's squad for the clasico, Arbeloa said, while Valverde is on medical leave recovering from his head injury.

Barcelona vs Real Madrid, 12.30 am (Mon), Live on Fancode

BRIEFLY



Sahil Jadhav defeated Denmark's Martin Damsbo. WORLD ARCHERY

Archer Jadhav wins maiden World Cup medal, a bronze

REIGNING WORLD University Games champion Sahil Jadhav clinched his maiden Archery World Cup medal in only his second appearance on the global circuit, winning a bronze in the compound men's event of the Stage 2. The 25-year-old defeated Denmark veteran player-cum-coach Martin Damsbo 147-144 in the bronze medal playoff to secure India's first medal of

the tournament. It also marked India's final medal in the compound section after none of his fellow mates reached the medal rounds. India, traditionally a powerhouse in compound team events, had endured a disappointing campaign as all their teams bowed out early. India will now look to add two more medals on the concluding day on Sunday in the recurve section. PTI

Bagan hold Goa to a draw in ISL

FC GOA and Mohun Bagan Super Giant played out a fiercely contested 1-1 draw in their Indian Super League match here on Saturday. Jamie MacLaren (55th minute) opened the scoring for the visitors early in the second half, but substitute Ronney Willson Kharbordon (67th) struck back shortly after to rescue a crucial point for the Gaurs. PTI

30 countries for Asian lifting

ATHLETES FROM 30 countries, including several world and Olympic medalists, will participate in the 2026 Asian Senior Weightlifting Championships to be held in Gandhinagar from May 11 to 17, Indian Weightlifting Federation president Sahdev Yadav said on Saturday. India's star weightlifter and Olympic silver medalist Saikhom Mirabai Chanu, however, will miss the event due to injury, he said. PTI

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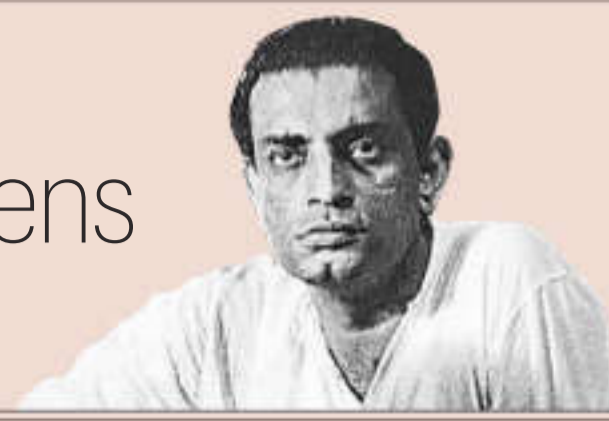
MAY 10, 2026



Give them roots and wings

Motherhood may not give you awards but it certainly gives you battle scars and memories to last a lifetime

Ray through the lens of Nimai Ghosh



Rinku Ghosh

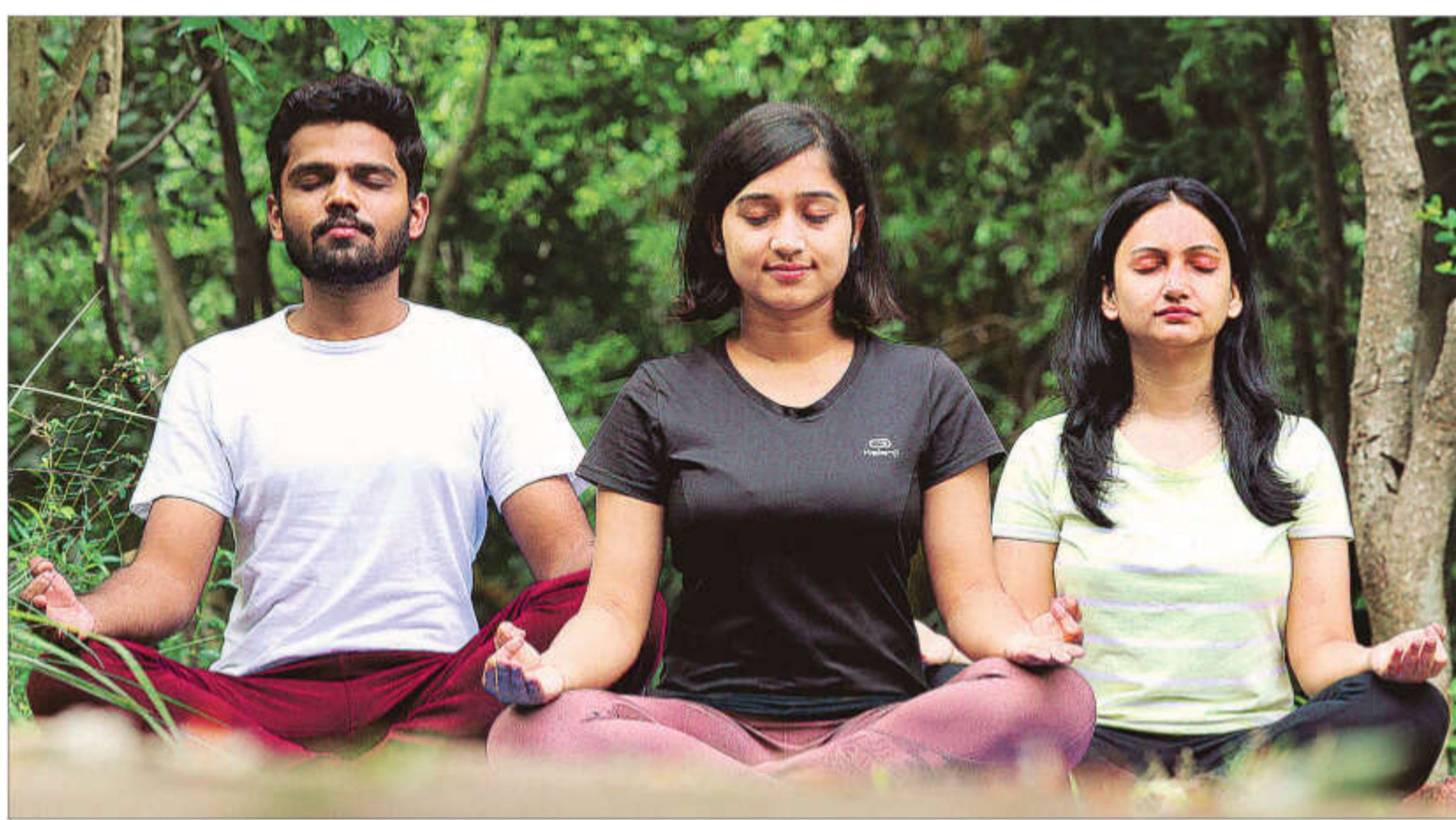
AS THE song *Hoshiyar rehna ne nagar mein chor aavega* (stay alert or a thief could enter the city) drifts through the Panchagiri Hills outside Bengaluru, Karthik K explains why Kabir's doha always grounds him. "The city is a metaphor for the human body and mind, and the 'thief' represents all that robs a person of awareness — ego, desire, anger, greed, illusion, pride, distraction, even time and death itself," says the 22-year-old tech professional, swaying gently before returning to stillness. For Karthik, Kabir's centuries-old verse holds a mirror to his own restlessness.

Seated around him are content creators and influencers, a young farmer, students, an IIM graduate, foreign students on a gap-year tour of India, retirees and solo women travellers. Together, they form the evening *satsang* at the Art of Living (AOL) ashram, spread across 80 acres off Kanakapura Road. It slips out unrecognised from Google maps and opens on to a forested community of its founder Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, who has advocated holistic living for 45 years, much before wellness became a concept. And at a time when public life is increasingly messed up by noise, stress, conflict and ideological rigidity, this retreat offers a pause button to refocus, reset and keep the bounce.

Founded in 1981, the movement anticipated a modern crisis before anybody talked about burnout, mindfulness and wellness.

LEARNING TO EXHALE

Long before burnout, mindfulness and wellness became buzzwords, a movement grew on the fringes of Bengaluru that anticipated a modern crisis. As *The Art of Living*, established by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar turns 45, a look at the movement and the holistic living wave that followed in its wake



COURTESY: THE ART OF LIVING



cabulary of human values, inner equilibrium and collective well-being. "In times of perpetual outrage and hyper-connectivity, this is a space without dogma and allows me to breathe in a community without confrontation, engage in dialogue," says Sheila Desai, 55, who volunteers six months a year. At the amphitheatre, Sri Sri, seated

PRESS PAUSE (Clockwise from top) A Sudarshan Kriya session, a *satsang* and the Art of Living centre, near Bengaluru

under strobe lights beaded with droplets from a late afternoon rain, encourages young people to ask questions. "I am constantly chasing goals and I keep changing them. What to do?" asks a college student. "You have an obsession not passion. Passion is like breathing in fresh air but you also need dispassion, which is like breathing out, let-

ting go. But don't doubt your goals, that's what leads to worry," he says. A young man wonders if he should marry or not, a college student wonders if she should comply with her opinionated family. Sri Sri, who turns 70 on May 13, gives practical advice: "Don't be a football of other people's opinions."

One of the most popular practices taught

at the ashram is intuitive meditation. "It calms the nervous system and prepares the mind to settle naturally," says Beena Manoj, an intuitive processing teacher. "You don't force thoughts away. You simply allow the mind to clear, like muddy water settling in a glass. You have mental clarity, illusion dissolves and you have pure intelligence."

Research on intuitive meditation has suggested benefits, including improved attention span, emotional regulation and lower stress markers, particularly among younger practitioners. "Consistent meditation acts like a muscle builder for the brain, reducing the size and activity of the amygdala (stress centre) and increasing the capacity of the prefrontal cortex (logical thinking, emotional control)," adds Manoj. Little wonder then that high achievers like cricketer Dinesh Karthik, boxer Lovlina Borgohain and table tennis champion Manika Batra are practitioners. After a difficult phase post the 2024 Olympics, Borgohain says how "re-disciplining her mind helped her become a sports coach for children." For Batra, it has helped develop "positive attitude and calmness in a split second."

Inside the campus, Nitya Patel, 17, from Bengaluru says she once hid behind her mother's *pallu*. "I now have confidence to speak to you, am not gender conscious and have a clarity of purpose," says the international relations student at St. Joseph's University, Bengaluru, where Sri Sri himself graduated with physics at age 17. She believes she can be a skilled negotiator in con-

Sri Sri's movement anticipated a modern crisis before anybody talked about burnouts or mindfulness. Its appeal lies in presenting spirituality as a survival toolkit

flict resolution. Bhawani Dinesh, also 17, can see objects blindfolded, allowing her intuition to fill in visual information.

Aprameya Nair, 18, from Kochi has beaten exam stress, bettered his math scores and ranked 91 in the admission exam at the National Law School of India University. "It's an easy process, just a 20-minute session every day. It's not all breathwork but a fun, interactive format like solving puzzles and mind games," says the teen who chose law as his career so that he can ensure social equity and justice. All three can self-regulate their screen time. "I know when to stop scrolling, how to filter toxic content," says Nair who loves horse riding as does Dinesh.

From science to spirituality, students are exposed to an arc of real world experiences. Sri Sri, who could recite the Gita by age four, always had a scientific temperament. This he partly inherited from his father, RS Venkat Ratnam, a mechanical engineer and Vedic scholar who dreamt of making India's first indigenous car. As Sri Sri travelled with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in his early years, he approached spirituality not as abstract belief, but as a practical system grounded in observable, cause-and-effect outcomes.

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

In times of perpetual outrage and hyper-connectivity, this is a space without dogma and allows me to breathe in a community without confrontation, engage in healthy conversations

Its appeal lies not in sermonising but in presenting spirituality as a lived experience — part survival toolkit, part self-development practice. At the centre of this is Sudarshan Kriya (*su* meaning good, *darshan* meaning vision): a guided breathing practice that combines rhythmic breathwork with meditation. And it is accessible to believers and non-believers alike.

"In short, it is about taking a good look at yourself. When people are calmer and more self-aware, they become less reactive and more capable of dialogue," says Veena P, an electrical engineer, who left a high-pressure life in the US to become an Art of Living teacher. "Material saturation makes you empty, you are still seeking purpose," she reasons. It isn't just about teaching meditation; the foundation runs regular schools with mainstream courses. "Our foundational discipline is of helping children align with nature, be conscientious and build an inclusive community," adds Veena. While city schools are not free, around 1,350 of them in remote areas are.

Education is also the basis of The Art of Living's carefully cultivated identity as apolitical and non-sectarian. While rooted in Indian spiritual traditions, it does not insist on religious conformity or ideological allegiance, choosing instead the softer vo-

'Spirituality is a path of exploration'

Sri Sri Ravi Shankar talks to Rinku Ghosh on holistic living, why spiritual gurus are good mediators in conflicts and how spirituality and science co-exist

You started The Art of Living as a holistic life philosophy. Would you say that people understand it better almost five decades later?

When we started it in 1981, there was a lot of prejudice about meditation and yoga, not only outside but within our own society. It was not the 'in thing' to do, certainly not for younger people. So, I gave these disciplines a new name, The Art of Living, to spark some curiosity. Once visitors experienced Sudarshan Kriya, pranayama and meditation, they found it transforming. Their lives changed, their attitudes changed and they became much happier.

That's why we called our self-development programme the Happiness Programme. Then to go into a deeper level, we took people to five-day silent retreats. As you know, silence is the mother of all creativity. We brought people of various communities together in the spirit of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the world is one family). We had programmes for all age groups and strata of society — from prison inmates to executives and decision-makers — telling them about the wisdom to suit their profession and their life as such. Then the movement became very popular.

Of course, there were challenges, resistance and prejudice. Traditionalists didn't like it because we were not quoting or teaching any scriptures or asking

people to follow any rituals. Atheists had their own bias. Now it's catching up; we have programmes in 182 countries.

You have helped with conflict resolution as a mediator. Should spiritual leaders be a part of political interventions?

One of the main reasons for conflicts is breakdown of communication. First, people just get stuck on one position and are not ready to listen to others. Second is trust deficiency. Spiritual leaders carry a lot of trust with them. It's not just in the dollar bill that you say, 'We trust in God.' Spiritual leaders really trust in God, trust in the oneness of humanity, love, compassion and human values. People know and recognise that. Therefore, they are more likely to listen to a spiritual leader compared to someone who is a political leader or is driven by self-interest.

Another issue today is the lack of a broader vision about humanity. Ego and egotism have caused pain and suffering in the world. War is the worst act of reason. When there is a war, you talk to either side, they both will have reasons. They are right because it's based only on their logic. They lack the broader and long-time perspective of issues.

Recently, a lot of spiritual leaders have been appearing at political events. Should there be a line



THE ART OF CONVERSATION It is important to resolve conflicts as they have a big impact on young people

between moral guidance and political intervention?

The spiritual leader's job is to transform individuals. Through individuals, they reach out to groups, communities and society at large. And the community and society are an area of interest for political leaders. But spiritual leaders don't go by their interest, they jump in when there is a crisis or catastrophe, sometimes in institutions and before governments, to bring relief and solace to people.

Today, conflicts are going so deep into individual and family life. Depression and mental health are big issues. So, it is important to resolve conflicts as they have a big impact on young people. When

they adopt spiritual practices of meditation, develop an attitude of service, that inculcates a value in everybody's life.

We live in a digital era where attention span itself has become a commodity. Has modern technology altered human consciousness?

When children become dependent on gadgets and screen time, their creativity goes down, they are unable to focus or listen and their perception level drops. That's why they need digital detox and at least a few hours of deep rest. So, meditation becomes relevant. Ideally, I would say 20 minutes to half-an-hour a day should be enough. Consider it a mental exercise like your physical exercise.

Can science and spirituality co-exist?

It depends on how spirituality is understood. Broadly, there are two approaches — oriental and occidental. Oriental spirituality aligns naturally with science because it encourages questioning, logic and direct inquiry. It moves from the material to the ethereal, from matter to consciousness, seeing them as part of the same continuum rather than separate domains. This is why traditions like ayurveda, yoga, and astronomy have long been integrated into every day and spiritual life. Occidental spirituality, by contrast, has often placed greater emphasis on belief first — the idea that faith precedes experience. Spirituality is approached as a path of exploration and experience rather than unquestioning belief.

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Motherhood may not give you awards but it certainly gives you battle scars and memories

Vatsala Mamgain

MY DAUGHTER is four and learning phonetics in school. The teacher writes out sounds and asks for words beginning with the sound. My daughter is extremely verbal and eager to volunteer answers. I am summoned to school a few weeks later. I'm quietly smug knowing that her vocabulary is excellent for her age. Maybe they will ask me what I have done to make her the genius she so clearly is. I show up in school and her contributions in class are shared with me. P "says" puh and she has volunteered "Pissed off". B "says" buh and she shouted out "Bloody Mary"! S "says" suh and she was, "Oh, I know a good one, Sigarette!"

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My son goes to school with kids who seem like normal children but are clearly saints in school uniform because all the other mothers talk breathlessly about their children's glowing hearts. Every year before the school year starts, parents are invited to school to meet with the class teacher and write a card to their child which will be pinned up on the class board. The other mums live for these orientations, they have a captive audience for the stories and then they write cards of over 10,000 words to welcome their child to the new grade. Being a considerably more impatient, less dotting and way less conscientious mother, I skip orientation entirely. On his first day of the new grade, my son finds the board cluttered with loving messages meant for everyone in the class except himself. He is back home and upset, and I have major guilt pangs, perhaps I should have endured listening to the collected stories of Everyone's Sainted Children. But just when I feel I am the worst mother on earth, I remember to bring out the big guns of motherhood — extra TV privileges. The next day, my extremely happy son writes himself a note saying, 'Dear Son, have fun in your new class, I love you, Mom' and sticks it on the board.

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Being impatient, I skip the school orientation... When I feel I am the worst mother on earth, I bring out the big guns of motherhood — extra TV privileges

My friend is nursing her newborn. Her three-year-old comes up to her and asks if she can nurse too. "Oh honey, I nursed you when you were little", she says, "but I can't do it anymore. You have teeth now and so it's not possible. I'm sorry." The little girl shrugs and wanders off. My friend tortures herself over whether she handled that interaction correctly. Will her daughter be forever traumatised that she was denied the breast when she specifically asked for it? Will this impact the relationship she has with her sibling? She is overwrought. Over dinner that night, her little girl suddenly turns to her grandfather. You should ask mama if you can nurse, *Dadu*, she says loudly. Mama WILL allow you, since you, like the baby, have no teeth.

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I'm sitting in the doctor's waiting room with my daughter. He's a very Important Prestigious Doctor and I have been coming to him for her allergies. But she doesn't seem to be getting much better. I see an old college friend who has just come into the waiting room with her kids in tow. "How is she", she asks me. "I feel so guilty being the allergy queen I am, for having passed these on to her." I confess. "She has no respite. Should I try alternate treatments? Everyone says this doctor is the best but perhaps I should try another doctor? I'm exhausted, but I'm thinking let me give him one last chance." We wring hands and commiserate. At long last, it's our turn to see the doctor. How are you doing? The doctor asks my daughter jauntily. "I'm okay," she says tipping her head to one side, "but I think YOU'RE not. My mama was just telling her friend that she's giving you one last chance. Otherwise..." And here, like Donald Trump when he was host of his own reality show, *The Apprentice*, she clicks her little fingers and says triumphantly, "... you're fired!"

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There are many moments that make up motherhood. Some have schmaltzy greeting cards to commemorate them. My own experience of motherhood has been lived almost exclusively on the "no cards to cover this eventuality" path. Motherhood may be many things, but this I know for certain — "puh" for pissed off, "buh" for Bloody Mary and "luh" for living to fight another day should definitely be in the instruction manual for it. Infuriating, exhausting, tortured, hilarious, significant, embarrassing, deeply meaningful, life altering — motherhood gives you no awards but gives you battle scars and memories to last a lifetime.

To everyone who mothers, Happy Mother's Day. Anytime you are wringing your hands wondering if your actions will scar your kids for life — no matter what you do, yes, they will.

Meanwhile always remember. Your kids may or may not be lost without you. But their socks? They most definitely will.

Vatsala Mamgain loves food, cooking, running, dogs, trees, books and telling long winded stories



MOTHER'S DAY SPECIAL

Giving them Roots and Wings

What matters is we show how we're individuals before being mothers, while showing up for them

Vaishali Shroff

I WAS RAISED to be a doctor but I became an engineer and then turned into an author. Weird story but the point is no one raises their daughters to be mothers (or no one is ever raised to be a parent) as much as they are expected to develop maternal feelings at the sight of anything that looks like a baby.

Call a mother *mātru* in Sanskrit or *mater* in Latin or *mitēra* in Greek. Call a mother by any word in any language and she's this epitome of sacrifice who puts (or is expected to put) everything and everyone else before her own self.

I have two sons: a pre-teen and a teen short of turning into an adult. And if the experiences of my mother raising me and my sisters are anything to go by, I won't be surprised if I renounce motherhood soon because genes don't lie. The last 17 years of being a mother have taught me many things and I'm going to do a mommy thing to share that with you — like it or not, a list.



I've waited endlessly outside their rooms because I know that soon the door will open and a pair of reluctant arms will wrap around me — that weight feels good

1. Not a day goes by when I don't tell myself I have failed as a mother. Did I overreact? Was I supposed to say yes or no or not say anything at all? Should I have kept my insanely good advice to myself? Am I ever right? The worst bit about this is you're always encountering new challenges as a mother, which means you never know what's the most appropriate thing to do. The "you'll know how it feels when you'll have your own child" you heard a million times from your parents comes and bites you in the rear and you know you are seeing a mirror image of your younger stupid self. But I tell myself: hang in there, it must get better.

2. But does it? The slamming of doors, the high-pitched conversations, the 'I want to leave this mad house' reverberating through the house like a raga, make one feel like a sore loser. You tell yourself, 'You got this. Breathe.'

Breathe some more. All bad things come to an end. 'Until they happen again and most times, they end in 'I shouldn't have said what I said or done what I did,' or chocolates and hugs. There's promises made to self that this will never happen again. I know better now.

3. But do we? Are we better moms after all this? What does a better mom look like? One who exclusively nurses their baby till they're walking and talking? Cooks high-protein meals? Plans amazing birthday parties and sleepovers? Reads books to them from the time they are a foetus and then even write for them (that's legit, okay)? Or then are we those who don't know whether it's day or night or those who have forgotten how to dress when they step out of the house or who can't think beyond their kids?

4. But then should we think beyond them? Of all the things I remember about my mom in my growing-up years is her trying to squeeze in small businesses while still being the relentless mother that she was. Of how she made that switch from being in her nightgown to an elegant saree. Of doing her own facial when the family was asleep. Of that tiny bit of looking after herself while always looking out for us. I remember how it totally threw me off when my son once told me that only dads go to office because they had never seen me sweat for 18 hours in an office daily.

I know we always carry this guilt that we don't do enough for our children and deal with the pressure of raising perfect kids in this crazy world. For better or for worse, I feel what matters is we show how we are individuals before being mothers, while showing up for them — when they need us and especially when they don't need us.

I've waited endlessly outside their rooms because I know that soon the door will open and a pair of reluctant arms will wrap around me — that weight feels good, like you're carrying once again. They're not you, but they're the best part of you. They may shove their armpits into your nose and laugh (boys do that) but only because they know you're their safe place, your arms their safety net—it's one pair of arms that will never ever push them away.

It's a privilege to be a mother and I'm not going to take that lightly. And even though I may not be the recipient of the 'Mom of the Year' trophy, I'll always find comfort in knowing that I'm trying the best I can. And that best is good enough.

Vaishali Shroff is a children's author



DOWN IN JUNGLELAND

BY RANJIT LAL
AUTHOR, ENVIRONMENTALIST AND BIRD WATCHER

Mamma Mia!

From elephants to crocodiles, eagles to spiders, how mothers help their little ones graduate, from under their wings and into the wild

IT IS A cardinal rule of nature: You do not come between a mother and her offspring, unless you want your head taken off. From elephants to crocodiles, eagles to spiders, moms ensure the safety of their brood, ready to fight till death, if necessary. In many cases, they have a hard time because roving males, who are not the fathers of their current brood, will search out and kill the young so that they can have their own progeny by the bereaved mother. Sensitive dudes, aren't they?

Tiger moms will resort to subterfuge, cunningly leading on the panting suitor away from her cubs, or let him seduce her, or simply fight ferociously, while signalling her cubs to vanish. And yes, they



do love their cubs, judging by the loving way they groom them and play with them and the distress they display when a litter is destroyed by a marauder. Watch a gigantic crocodile mom take her newly hatched offspring to water in those jaws and it makes you scratch your head — Is that mother-love or just instinct?

Many years ago, while watching a black kite family with two chicks, I was dive-bombed by the irate mother. The nest was, maybe a hundred metres away, on a peepul tree, at eye level with the veranda. The mom would slip off the nest, go around the building, gain height and then scream down at me, talons out, passing by so close, I could feel the wind through her wings. And once the babies

left home (well, one chick ate its younger sibling!), she reverted to normal behaviour and posed no threat. And no, there was no remonstrance when the chick ate its sibling. And alas, with us? If you dare whack your younger brother or sister, see what your mom does to you.

But all this cossetting soon makes way for school. The young, no matter how spoilt, have to learn to stand on their own two feet, to hunt and kill and to find food and there is usually a time cap for this: usually around 1.5 to 2 years for female tiger cubs, less for their brothers. It's amazing how obedient most young are (of course, there are rebels in every brood too). They obey the subtlest of commands: a low call, a flick of the tail.

MUM'S THE WORD
A tiger mom with her cubs

Try training your puppy by wagging your fingers. They learn by observation and imitation. With tigers and lions, there is that final graduation lesson, where a mom brings an incapacitated victim — a gazelle fawn, say — and lets her brood finish the job. Once she is confident that her cubs can look after themselves, she simply leaves, without looking back, while the cubs watch in dismay. But soon her sons will leave, seeking out their own territories far away, while the daughters will carve out their own places nearer by, and, if mamma does a really good job, will one day, challenge her for her territory and even drive her out. With some species of spiders, mom will zealously guard her nest case and her hundreds of spiderlings but if she is too hungry, she will cannibalise them. Or there is the opposite extreme, in times of hardship, she will offer herself up as a meal.

With elephants, it's a little different: Here each family is ruled by a matriarch and a baby girl enjoys thorough spoiling by its mom, sisters, aunts and grandmother. Young hellion bulls are asked to leave the herd when they begin to throw their weight around. With orangutans, graduation may take seven years, and for us, 21, if not forever.

Baby birds simply leave the nest once they are able to fly, while some like sparrows and other passerines (perching birds) need 24x7 feeding and cleaning, others, like waders and waterfowl are able to feed themselves soon after hatching and only need their moms (and dads) for protection.

Then, there are moms who never see their babies at all: turtles that swim the vast oceans, and return to the same beaches they were born on, laboriously lay their eggs in the sand and return to the ocean with nary a look behind. But then, only one in a thousand of the babies survive to adulthood, and that could be heart-wrenching for any mom. Insect moms may lay thousands of eggs and well, looking after one baby is hard enough, but thousands? The lady king cobra will leave her nest as soon as her eggs hatch — because she is cannibalistic — and they might end up being on her menu.

And then, mamma-mia, there are those moms, who modern moms must love: They leave all the mothering to the dads. The most famous among these are the seahorses, where the mom deposits her eggs into her husband's tummy pouch and lets him get on with the pregnancy and birth while she looks on, or maybe swims away. A lady jacana will lay her eggs and make her husband sit on them and hatch them while she goes looking for more gentlemanly company, fighting other ladies for the handsomest hunk. There is one species of frog, where the eggs are laid on leaves lying low over water and zealously guarded until they hatch by the kick-boxing father. In some species of fish, again the mom simply lays her eggs, and lets the dad do all the feeding and protecting needed; in one case he hides his babies in his mouth. Spit us out dad, we want mom, you have terrible breath!

'I'm still scared like I was when I first entered a studio. I want to retain that feeling'

Playback singer Shilpa Rao on navigating the algorithm-driven music industry, performing with British popstar Ed Sheeran and how her National-Award winning *Chaleya* is not an easy song. The conversation was moderated by Suanshu Khurana and Suvir Saran

Suvir Saran: What is your day off like?

My work doesn't feel like work. I believe you need to really love what you do. If you're not in love with it, then it feels like a chore.

Suvir Saran: Do you work out, cook, read, travel?

All of that. You travel because it makes everything better. You have so many ideas when you travel. And you need other art forms to inspire you. A ballet recital can inspire you to do music. I think everything starts with good food and good company.

Suvir Saran: What's the last thing you read that stayed with you?

The Vegetarian by Han Kang.

Suvir Saran: Is there a song that's haunted you?

Gulomein rangbhare, baad-e-naubahar chale... It has the most beautiful couplets. When things are stressful, I just put Mehdi saab's music and do a slow-cook mutton.

Suvir Saran: You grew up in Jamshedpur.

Yes, Jamshedpur, the Tata hub, it's cosmopolitan. The flex of parents there is that my son or daughter got this rank at IIT or got into XLRI. It's not about money or anything.

Suanshu Khurana: You complete two decades in the industry next year. When you look at your journey, how do you compare your 22-year-old self —

an applied statistics student who walked into composer Mithun's studio to record *Tose naina* (*Anwar*, 2007) —

to the confident musician you've become today? Has your approach to playback music changed?

I'm not confident at all. I'm still scared like I was as a 22-year-old and I want to retain that feeling. It just makes you a more alert musician. I always have a fear that I may not be able to sing a song. It's a good fear that you're still bothered by doing a bad job. I don't think I would want to change it. I also try to retain the person who went in for that first song.

Suanshu Khurana: In an ecosystem so driven by virality, where a song is now reverse-engineered to suit audience tastes, how has this altered the film song, the soundtrack to our lives that could once dig into the nation's consciousness? Does it bother you?

Well, I do believe that your reality is your reality and you can't be bothered by others'. So as long as you're not gullible, you're fine. I know there are numbers, I know there are algorithms but then, there is magic in what one person can do in that moment and change the next second. So, if I can forget everything, the algorithm, the numbers, everything, and just do something with that line which sparkles, you can change what comes next.

Suanshu Khurana: Is that why you always prefer the composer in the studio with you?

Definitely. I don't believe in remote recordings. The energy matters. Like, Pritam being there, Vishal Shekhar being there, Rahman sir... I know there's a lot of technology but then you need people.

Suanshu Khurana: Composer AR Rahman recently spoke of a power shift in the industry... that non-creative people were now in charge. Arijit Singh retired from the film industry. These two incidents made us look a little harder at the industry. What is happening? There are murmurs of labels controlling too much.

Like I said, if you can abstain as much as



(From left) Chef and columnist Suvir Saran; Suanshu Khurana, Senior Assistant Editor, *The Indian Express*; singer Shilpa Rao



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possible from being gullible and from listening to a narrative and believing it, that's a good thing. Even if someone is making those decisions, you might lose a project or two or let go of a song or two in the commute.

Suanshu Khurana: Have you lost projects?

Yes. It happens all the time. But the bigger picture is whether you can project yourself as yourself. For example, if I have to choose

between doing a run-of-the-mill kind of a song and playing it safe or choosing from an in-your-face kind of a song, I will choose the second option. Even if it fails, at least I did what is me.

Suanshu Khurana: *Asha ji* (Bhosle) passed away last month. Even in the male-dominated structures, *Asha ji* and *Lata ji*'s songs were quite central. Recently, there have been talks of gender inequality in the industry, with women often getting two lines in a duet. How has the woman's playback voice evolved?

If you hear Begum Akhtar *ji*, Surender Kaur *ji*, MSSubbalakshmi *ji*, Farida Khanam *ji*, Ella Fitzgerald, Edith Piaf, Julie London, the list is endless... they sounded like themselves. You have one life, please sound like yourself. That's what *Asha ji* did. That's why there's nobody, exactly, like her. It's necessary to have parallels. If I'm working, and there are other singers, it's nice to have those colleagues because we are pushing each other.

Suvir Saran: Who are your network of people in the industry whom you rely on?

It's a long list. There's Vishal, Shekhar, Pritam, Amitabh (Bhattacharya), Vishal Bhardwaj. There is Rahman sir. We usually converse on emails.

Suvir Saran: And are there Urdu or Hindi poets that feed your soul?

Faiz *sahib*, Momin Khan Momin, Mir *sahib*, Mirza Ghalib, Ahmed Faraz.

Suvir Saran: Your Hindustani is very clean. Did you learn to write Urdu or just Hindi?

I did learn Urdu. I was 14 when I started. My father, who is a very difficult teacher... his morning would start with a recording of Amir Khan *sahib*. I heard it and loved it. My first education was in music; academics later.

Suvir Saran: So your dad taught you?

My dad was my first guru. In fact, I didn't want to become a singer. I love music but I didn't think I was good enough to sing. I hear

these kids who sing on reality shows and they are so talented. I was not even close to that. But my father never gave up. He taught me everything he could — Hindustani classical, Carnatic music, Urdu. And finally, I realised this is what I want to do. And now we get along very well but we used to fight a lot when I was a kid.

Suanshu Khurana: I believe he tore off posters in your room when you did not practise for a few days.

He has done all that. His face is like a GPS map. He would say, 'You didn't catch the tune, there's less involvement here.' He's like Amir Khan in *Dangal*.

Suvir Saran: What is Faiz Ahmed Faiz for you? A poet, a street activist or a person who looks at history with a mirror's gaze?

All of it. It's not an either-or situation. When you understand poetry well, you'll protest and be critical.

Suvir Saran: What is Carnatic music to you as a Hindustani singer?

Both are different. And if you want to do a form of music, it takes a whole lifetime. Not just to learn, to even be and live with it.

Suanshu Khurana: In terms of domination of film music, does it take away space for alternate music?

We are doing so many things here. We're not even discussing the independent music being done in the South, which is so powerful. I listen to so many musicians from the Malayalam film industry and the indie industry, and it's a splash of cold water on your face. I can't even begin to imagine what kind of radical ideas they have. You don't understand the language and you don't need to. But it evokes something that is so beautiful. There's so much happening in Bengali indie music. There's not one sound that comes from India. We have so much.

I DIDN'T WANT TO BECOME A SINGER. I LOVE MUSIC BUT I DIDN'T THINK I WAS GOOD ENOUGH TO SING. I HEAR THESE KIDS WHO SING ON REALITY SHOWS AND THEY ARE SO TALENTED. I WAS NOT EVEN CLOSE TO THAT



Suanshu Khurana: You listened to every kind of voice as a child without a framework of what one should listen to. But the industry you are a part of defined voices in a box for a long time. Thin voices were considered suitable for female leads. You have a different bass voice that has worked really well...

I don't have a different voice. This is my voice. I don't like this term — you have a different face, different voice, different dressing style or a different point of view. You don't. That's your point of view.

Suanshu Khurana: Different for the audiences who were once used to thin, syrupy voices.

I don't think the industry defines us. It is actually a mirror to all of you guys. Whatever you listen to, we make it. Sometimes we think, 'Let's leave a *udta teer*,' and you catch it, make it mainstream. So, it's all you guys who break that mould every single time.

Suanshu Khurana: In 20 years, you have had some beautiful songs, but a relatively simple, breezy number, *Chaleya*, got you your first National Award. How did you interpret this?

It's not an easy song at all. It sounds breezy because there's a lot of effort that goes into sounding effortless. The first time I got onto the microphone in Mumbai, I took three to four hours and couldn't crack its shuffle rhythm structure. You have to sing in pockets and it has to be quantised. I gave up and went to Chennai. Energy matters. Anirudh was there, and we finished the recording in 20 minutes. So every song that you do, your entire life experience goes into it, and sometimes that's still not enough. So, a National award, of course, isn't something in our control but you can sing the song. So, I'm happy and grateful for all that comes my way.

Suvir Saran: Was there a song you sang more truthfully than the story that presented it?

So far, it hasn't really happened because they acted very truthfully. I don't think there was any mismatch with anything.

Suvir Saran: Do you teach anyone?

I'm still learning myself. I'm really bad at teaching. I have zero patience. Dad is a patient man. So, when we sit down, and say there is a ghazal by Mehdi Hasan *saab*, I would listen to it over and over when I want to learn it, so I can absorb it subconsciously.

Suanshu Khurana: What do you enjoy more: the thrill of live music or recording in a studio?

A live performance involves a lot of preparation. We have 25 to 30 people. It's all about having the right team to make us sound good and give you that experience. You are moving a lot on stage. So, you need to balance the physical part with singing. For studio, you've done your homework all your life. But it's something new. It's like a man doesn't step into the same river twice. It's not the same river nor the same man. In the studio, it's a new day, a new person. And you've got to deal with that. You've got to make friends with that person. And there's always a fight until you build that friendship. Then you fly together. After the recording, you also wonder, 'Did I really have that person inside me?' You get to learn new things about yourself.

Suanshu Khurana: How was it working with Ed Sheeran?

We thought of doing a lot of things since *Shape of You* has been done so many times. Then my husband Ritesh came up with the idea of doing *Chuttamalle* (*Devara: Part 1*). He picked it up in a few minutes and we had a great time singing it on stage.

Fields of hope and despair

Filmmakers Jasmine Kaur Roy and Avinash Roy on chronicling the impact of modernisation in Punjab, and balancing despair and hope in *Room at the Farm*

Alaka Sahani

A COUPLE of years ago, National Award-winning filmmakers Jasmine Kaur Roy and Avinash Roy visited Punjab to research for a documentary film. The context was the large-scale migration from the state and they wanted to explore the idea of 'home'. During the visit, they met a young man who vehemently rejected the idea of leaving his village and his generational occupation of farming. "There was a sense of helplessness, yet he sounded hopeful," recall the filmmakers. That prompted them to develop *Room at the*

Farm (*Khooh Waala Ghar*), a short film that recently won the Grand Jury Prize at Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles (IFFLA).

Set in rural Punjab, *Room at the Farm* examines the impact of rampant industrialisation and unsustainable modernisation on Indian farming. The film focuses on newlywed Nihal (Guru Bamrah), who must pay off mounting debts even as the farmlands around him make way for factories. His young wife, Reet (Vrinda Malhotra), craves his company but he ends up spending time in the little room at the farm, prioritising his crop over his wife. Making a departure from



BEYOND THE FOG
Jasmine Kaur Roy and Avinash Roy while shooting *Room at the Farm*

a romanticised gaze at rural Punjab, the film captures its wintry desolation and despair.

The film was shot at Jasmine's ancestral village, Sarai Khas in Jalandhar. "In fact, the dilapidated room at the farm, along with the

farm itself, is all part of my family's ancestral land. So for me, it was a nostalgic process. We used to visit these farms as kids — when these homes were full with the extended family and cousins all living together. But

now, all that's left are locked homes, almost everyone having moved abroad," she recalls.

Even though it's a 23-minute-long film, the pre-production took close to five months. "Before finalising the location, we did an extensive recce across Punjab with our DOP Sachin Gadankush. Then the film's colour palette and visual language were designed. The shoot was planned over three days, towards the end of December. We chose the dates based on weather data to get the wet, gloomy conditions we wanted," says Avinash.

To cast for the roles of Nihal and Reet, the filmmakers conducted auditions in Chandigarh and Delhi before zeroing on Guru and Vrinda, who were able to internalise the characters and bring their own interpretations to the screen. Jasmine wanted to make sure that the actors maintained the authenticity of the language and the accent. "Punjabi being my mother tongue, I could not compromise on that," she says, adding that she wanted the language to be specific to the Doaba region. While Guru had lived in rural Punjab, Vrinda, who came from Delhi, worked on it during workshops.

Jasmine and Avinash are both graduates of the Film & Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune. Avinash was a film editing student, while Jasmine specialised in direction.

"He edited our diploma film, *Saanjh*, which went on to win our first National Award. Soon after FTII, we decided to work independently and formed our own banner, *Wanderlust Films*. We complement each other in our strengths and weaknesses and function like a well-oiled machinery," says Jasmine. They received a National Film Award also for *Amoli* (2018) while a number of their documentaries and shorts have been screened at film festivals across the world. "These were commissioned by international NGOs and UN organisations. They gave us the opportunity to explore varied issues and perspectives, and offered insight into subjects that lie outside the mainstream," says Jasmine.

Though the tone and texture of *Room at the Farm* are "intentionally dark and ominous", the muffler that Reet knits for Nihal is yellow, the colour of mustard flowers. That reflects how they see the situation as filmmakers. "Small farmers everywhere are struggling to stay afloat. Farming is no longer considered a viable option by many young people, and indiscriminate industrialisation is damaging the environment. Yet, all is not lost. There is always something to hold on to, and hope and love can help us tide over adversity," they say and hope this is what the audience takes away from the film.

Vandana Kalra

DESCRIBED BY French humanist photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson as Satyajit Ray's "photo-biographer", Nemaï Ghosh first met the filmmaker in 1968 during the making of *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* in the unassuming city of Rampurhat in West Bengal. "We clicked immediately," Ghosh recalls in the preface to the publication, *Faces and Facets: Satyajit Ray in Colour*. "The way he walked, talked and handled his cast, crew and equipment — in fact everything about him — intrigued me. I was so mesmerised by the man that I forgot to take any photographs of the shooting. My two rolls of black-and-white film were finished in no time. Manik da never said a word to me; he just kept watching from the corner of his eye. But that was all the encouragement I needed."

That instinctive connection became the foundation of a remarkable visual archive that now forms the core of the new DAG exhibition and publication. It unfolds like an intimate portrait of Ray where he is seen not only as the globally celebrated auteur but also the more private and deeply disciplined master who Ghosh followed "like his shadow" for over two decades. Ghosh, who passed away in 2020, has been quoted in the publication, stating: "I was crazy about capturing him in my camera every moment... My fascination for Manik da was like that — unbridled, unreasonable."

Some of the most lingering photographs therefore, perhaps, emerge from quieter moments, including the time spent at home and with family. In a 1982 image, for instance, he sits on a chair in his sprawling Calcutta study, surrounded by books and papers. The room probably is where he wrote his scripts and illustrated his stories, as an accompanying note reads, "I don't feel very creative when I'm abroad somehow. I need to be in my chair in Calcutta!" Another 1986 photograph from the same room shows him completing an illustration for one of his *Feluda* stories, and in a rather reflective 1990 image, he is seen pacing the verandah at his home after his heart attacks. "It's a bit of a bore but it has to be done," Ray remarked of the walks. "And I can think while I am doing it; ideas do come."

The domestic intimacy continues through the annual anniversary portraits that Ghosh began taking of Ray and his wife Bijoya in 1973. In another warm 1991 frame that brings together three generations of the Ray family — Satyajit, Bijoya, son Sandip, daughter-in-law Lalita and infant grandson Souradip — we see his more familial side.

Yet, the exhibition never lets viewers forget the scale of Ray's artistic presence, with

Shadowing Ray

From film sets to his home study, Nemaï Ghosh's photographs of Satyajit Ray, frame an intimate portrait of the auteur



COURTESY: DAG



IN BETWEEN (Clockwise from above) Nemaï Ghosh; Smita Patil takes a photo of Ray; by his synthesiser at home; in Lucknow

several of the memorable photographs also emerging from the sets of some of his iconic films. If in a 1972 image from the making of *Ashani Sanket* (1973), the filmmaker is seen bending down to help cinematographer Soumendu Roy pull his foot free from mud while shooting in Dangapara (Murshidabad, West Bengal), in a 1980 frame he is seen standing in a balcony to brief filmmaker and actor Aparna Sen in Calcutta. We are also introduced to his *kherokhata*, the sturdy red notebook that was central to his filmmaking process. A 1974 photograph shows him referring to it during the making of *Sonar Kella* in Rajasthan. The accompanying text reveals that these notebooks contained everything: dialogue, shot divisions, background re-



Learning to Exhale

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"Most mistakes are not born out of malice... every so-called culprit is a victim of ignorance, stress, or lack of awareness. Most crimes in the world are a result of people becoming victims of their own emotions," he says.

This willingness to understand the circumstances of those whom the world tends to hate-shame is the reason that Sri Sri is called upon as a global negotiator. Having been part of peace initiatives in Iraq, Sri Lanka, Venezuela and Myanmar, he has worked on Ayodhya dispute resolution, rehabilitated former militants and prisoners through trauma-relief programmes, and held campaigns against drug addiction in Kashmir.

One of the boys from Srinagar, Aariz (name changed), 22, says the skill training at the ashram has helped him understand tourism models. "We learnt how homestays and experiential tourism are high value, low-cost and can work for us," he says. In today's hurried world, many from across the culture barrier have found anchorage. One of them is Delhi documentary filmmaker Arshia Raza. "What we get in these sessions are positive feelings of self-worth. The cloud of misperception dissipates," she says.

Meanwhile, in faraway Guntur, 26-year-old Kamalkant, a child of Naxal parents who grew up in the ashram, has picked up conversational English. "I can face any complexity in my life, I have that capacity. But I won't choose wrongs," says the newly-turned father who is working as a company supervisor.

The Art of Living has democratised spirituality by promoting the "celebration" of life rather than seeking detachment or renunciation. Wellness has now been formally integrated into the health ministry through Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres. And in boardrooms and schools, yoga hours are supercharging consciousness.

To admirers, the ashram offers emotional and social healing. To critics, it represents the depoliticised packaging of spirituality for the urban middle class. But to a visitor, it is about a pause to find Kabir's "thief" within.

search, set designs, music ideas, names of potential actors and even doodles. "Only the film's budget, by an amusing irony, is absent," notes author Andrew Robinson, who has written the text for the publication.

The photographs also repeatedly reveal how completely Ray immersed himself in every department of filmmaking. If in one image related to *Shatranj Ke Khilari* (1977) he is at home designing Wajid Ali Shah's crown, in another he rehearses a chess sequence with actors Saeed Jaffrey and Sanjeev Kumar. On the piano, he is seen composing music during the making of *The Inner Eye* (1972), a documentary on Benode Behari Mukherjee, his favourite teacher when he was studying art in Santiniketan.

A meticulous perfectionist, he breaks into laughter seeing actor Kamu Mukherjee mimicking Ghosh on the sets of *Joi Baba Felunath* in 1978, and the observer also becomes the observed when actor Smita Patil turns the camera towards him during the filming of *Sadgati* (1981).

There are also moments of public recognition, including Ray receiving the Legion of Honour from French President François Mitterrand in 1989.

What, perhaps, distinguishes *Faces and Facets* is the perceptiveness with which it reveals how Ghosh was not merely documenting a distant genius but also unravels the warm relationship shared between the two. "As I became more and more involved with Manik da, I ventured not only into his shooting spaces but also into his personal space. I visited his house as often as I liked, at any hour. If I did not turn up for a day or two, there would be a phone call asking why I was absent," writes Ghosh in the preface.

The show closes on June 4

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design. It could be a charger left behind, a jacket that didn't make it into the bag, or something more essential like medication or documents. These are the kinds of gaps that don't show up at home, but become very visible once the journey begins.

Airports, hotel lobbies, and even local markets around the world quietly serve this category of traveller every day. People buying things they already own, just because they didn't bring them along. Sometimes it's a minor inconvenience. Other times, it disrupts the flow of the trip more than expected.

What makes this interesting is that it is not always about experience. Even frequent travellers fall into this pattern, especially when they are rushing or trying to pack at the last minute. There is also a mindset behind it. A willingness to adapt, to solve problems as they come up, to rely on the destination rather than preparation. In some cases, that adds a sense of spontaneity to the trip. But it also comes with trade-offs. Time spent searching for essentials in a new place. Paying more for something you already had at home. Adjusting plans because something small was overlooked.

What's Your Type?

So, what type of traveller are you? There's no right answer here. Most of us are a mix of these, shaped by our experiences, the kind of trips we take, and even the stage of life we're in.

But it's an interesting question to sit with. And the next time you pack your bag, would you do it differently? Let me leave you with that today, see you next time.

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The Bags We Carry



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I travel a lot, and I have started doing something slightly strange at airports. Instead of looking at departure boards or checking my phone while I wait, I watch the check-in queue.

And over time, I have realised something interesting. The moment someone lifts their bag onto the weighing scale, you learn something about them. The hesitation, the confidence, the quick unzip to redistribute weight, it tells you more about how a person travels than almost anything else. No two bags look the same, and more importantly, no two approaches to travel feel the same.

I have come to see that this moment at the check-in counter is where travel styles quietly reveal themselves. You don't need to know where someone is going. Just looking at how they have packed is enough to understand how they like to move, how much they plan, and what they prioritise when they're on the road.

And once you start noticing it, you can't unsee it. I have started grouping what I see into types. Not to judge, every style has its logic, and I have been most of these at different points in my life. But the patterns are real. And the first one? You have definitely seen them. You may even be one.

'Just in Case' Traveller

You will find them at almost every check-in counter. Their suitcase goes up on the scale, and there is a brief pause. They are watching the numbers closely. If it crosses the limit, there is a quick unzip, a jacket comes out, maybe a pair of shoes gets shifted into the cabin bag. Sometimes it's just a matter of a few hundred grams, but it becomes a full exercise in redistribution.

This is one of the most common travel patterns in the world, packing for possibilities. Extra outfits in case plans change. A second pair of shoes in case one gets uncomfortable. Medicines for situations that may never come up.

There is logic to all of it. Travel comes with uncertainty, and packing more feels like a way to stay prepared. What is interesting is that most of these "just in case" items rarely get used. Frequent travellers often say they end up wearing the same few clothes on repeat, no matter how much they carry. Yet, the instinct to pack more doesn't go away easily.

And it has a real impact on how the trip unfolds. Heavier bags mean slower movement, especially in places where you are walking more than usual. Think cobbled streets in Europe, train stations with stairs, or even just navigating a crowded airport. It also adds small but constant friction: waiting longer at baggage claim, worrying about weight limits on the return journey, or deciding what to leave behind when you have shopped a little too much.

And yet, this way of packing continues, because it offers a sense of control. When you have more with you, it feels like you are ready for anything. At the check-in counter, though, that preparation often shows up as hesitation, watching the weighing scale, adjusting the zip, hoping everything fits within the limit. It's a familiar scene. And for many travellers, it's how every journey begins.

Minimalist

Just a few steps away from the "just in case" traveller, there is usually someone who approaches the same counter very differently.

One bag. Sometimes a small suitcase, sometimes just a backpack. It goes up on the scale, well within limits, and within seconds, they are done. No rearranging, no second-guessing, no concern about weight.

What is interesting is that this isn't always about travelling less. It's about travelling differently. Frequent travellers often move toward this approach over time. Mainly because they have learned what actually gets used on a trip and what doesn't. After a few journeys, patterns start to emerge: certain clothes never leave the suitcase, certain items are always repacked untouched, and slowly, the list becomes sharper. The biggest shift, though, is what happens during the trip.

With fewer bags, movement becomes easier. You get off a flight and walk straight out without waiting at the belt. You move through train stations without needing lifts or trolleys. Even small things, like changing hotels or



navigating busy streets, feel simpler.

There is also a time advantage that people don't always think about. Baggage claim alone can add 20-40 minutes to a journey, depending on the airport. Over a multi-city trip, that time adds up quickly. Travellers who skip checked baggage often gain hours back without planning for it. Of course, this approach comes with its own discipline. It requires planning outfits more carefully, reusing what you carry, and being comfortable with not having a backup for everything. But for many, that trade-off feels worth it.

I saw this up close recently when I travelled with my friend Sumit, one of India's most prominent bankers. Watching him move through an airport is almost instructive. One bag, always within limits, never checked in, the baggage carousel simply isn't part of his journey. Any friction, a queue, a wait, an unnecessary step, visibly bothers him. Not in a dramatic way, but you can tell. He has made a quiet decision that his time and energy are not going to be spent managing luggage. In all the time I have known him, I don't think I have ever seen him check in a bag. He is, without question, the purest version of the minimalist traveller I have ever met.

Parent Traveller

And then there's a completely different category of traveller, one that you understand only after you experience it.

The first time I travelled with Raya, the definition of packing changed

entirely. At the check-in counter, our bags looked like everyone else's, suitcases, cabin bags, maybe a stroller. But what was inside them was very different. Every item had a purpose. Extra clothes, backup food, familiar snacks, medicines, small things to keep her engaged during the journey. Nothing felt optional. Because when you are travelling with a child, you are not just packing for a trip. You are preparing for situations you can't predict, in places you may not be familiar with.

If a solo traveller forgets something, it's usually an inconvenience. You can buy it, manage without it, or adjust your plans. With a child, that margin for error is much smaller. A missed item can quickly turn into a disruption, at an airport, during a transfer, or even in the middle of the night in a different country. That's why, if you observe closely, parents are often among the most methodical packers in the queue. Bags are organised by function. Essentials are within reach. There's a system, even if it looks like a lot from the outside. It also changes how you move.

You are not just thinking about weight limits or convenience anymore. You are thinking about access, what needs to be available immediately, what can go into check-in, what stays with you at all times. Even the decision of which bag goes where becomes important. At the check-in counter, this shows up in small ways. A quick check before sending the bag in. A pause to confirm