



VAJIRAM & RAVI
Institute for IAS Examination

THE BEST COURSES AT THE BEST CIVIL SERVICES COACHING INSTITUTE

GENERAL STUDIES

PRELIMS & MAINS COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMMES

YOUR GO-TO INSTITUTE FOR GENERAL STUDIES PREPARATION

GENERAL STUDIES COMPREHENSIVE COURSE 2027

11 MONTH PROGRAMME
+ 6 Months Free Coaching



COMMENCES: 25TH MAY, 2026

GENERAL STUDIES FLEDGLING COMPREHENSIVE COURSE

2 YEAR PROGRAMME
+ 6 Months Free Coaching



COMMENCES: 29TH MAY, 2026

OPTIONAL SUBJECT COURSE



COMMENCES: JUNE, 2026

OPTIONAL SUBJECTS

- Agriculture
- Political Science & IR
- Geography
- Psychology
- Philosophy
- Commerce & Accountancy
- Anthropology
- Sociology
- Mathematics
- Public Administration
- Economics
- History

THE GENERAL STUDIES COURSE INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING

- 350+ lectures (G.S. + Current Affairs)
- 30+ experienced teachers & 3+ teachers for each subject
- Prelims Test Series with 30 General Studies & Current Affairs Tests
- 900+ hours of teaching for comprehensive coverage of syllabus
- Exclusive content on the Student Portal (vajiramias.com)
- Mains Exam Test Series with mentorship support
- Mentor Support Programme for students to seek guidance
- 6 months Mains Support Programme (MSP) to prepare after classes conclude
- Class lectures are available online to help with revision
- Access to monthly Current Affairs magazine- The Recitals
- Printed study material called Yellow Books designed for Prelims & Mains
- Free Interview Guidance Programme (After qualifying for the Mains Exam)

To enrol: www.vajiramandravi.com

New Delhi Centre: 1/7B, Pusa Road, adjacent to Karol Bagh Metro Station, New Delhi - 110060
Visit our Student Portal: www.vajiramias.com Email: online@vajiramandravi.com

080-6220 6311





VAJIRAM & RAVI

Institute for IAS Examination

THE BEST COURSES AT THE BEST CIVIL SERVICES COACHING INSTITUTE

CSAT PROGRAMME 2027

- 3.5 month complete CSAT coverage
- 2 hour classes, 3 days a week
- Regular tests for practice & clarity
- Concept-based study material with practice
- 5 full-length mock tests



COMMENCES: 18TH MAY, 2026

SURE SHOT MAINS TEST SERIES 2027

- Pre-test PYQ brainstorming session
- 40 tests (20 Subjective Sectional Assessments, 20 FLTs)
- One-on-one mentorship with the rankers & senior mentors
- 10 answer writing enhancement lectures
- Toppers' strategy & value-addition sessions
- Prelims and Mains Smasher books
- Post-test discussion for each test



COMMENCES: 17TH MAY, 2026

STEPUP MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME 2027

- A 4-layered ecosystem for serious UPSC aspirants
- SMART current affairs + Prelims & Mains CAMP with test series
- Weekly tests + PYQ-based revision for continuous improvement
- Essay, CSAT & answer writing training (12+ lectures)
- One-on-one mentorship + Toppers' strategy sessions
- Thematic content, workbooks & one-pager notes



MEDIUM: English | Hindi
COMMENCES: 15TH MAY, 2026

ETHICS MARKS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

- Conceptual clarity covering the entire ethics theory syllabus via 9 concept classes
- 9 mini-tests-cum-answer-writing sessions
- 6 dedicated case study sessions - including concepts, framework and case study based mini-tests
- Value-addition-cum-revision sessions before Mains 2026, to ensure current affairs integration & syllabus consolidation
- One-on-one mentorship with Ms. Sakshi Sundrani
- 3 HLTs and 1 FLT with detailed evaluation for targeted improvement



COMMENCES: 1ST JUNE, 2026

ESSAY PROGRAMME 2026

- 11 classes; 5 tests
- Concise essay handouts - one-stop solution
- Writing drills during class
- Test discussions and individual guidance
- Separate test series for seniors



COMMENCES: 31ST MAY, 2026

SMART CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMME 2026

- Thematic coverage of current affairs
- Interlinkages with static knowledge
- Content with high-use value
- Live in-class answer writing and answer generation templates and practice
- SMART MCQ solving SOPs and skills
- High-yielding value-addition handouts



ADMISSIONS OPEN



Anuj Agnihotri
AIR 1

IGP

1st RANK HOLDERS

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

JOIN OUR GENERAL STUDIES PROGRAMME & ADD YOUR NAME TO THE LIST OF UPSC TOP RANK HOLDERS

To enrol: www.vajiramandravi.com

New Delhi Centre: 1/7B, Pusa Road, adjacent to Karol Bagh Metro Station, New Delhi - 110060
Visit our Student Portal: www.vajiramias.com Email: online@vajiramandravi.com

080-6220 6311





सोमलिङ्गं नरो दृष्ट्वा सर्वपापैः प्रमुच्यते।
लभते फलं मनोवाञ्छितं मृतः स्वर्गसमाश्रयेत्॥

SOMNATH

Virasat Ke 75 Saal

Somnath is a symbol of India's indomitable civilisation. Even after facing destructive attacks for over 1000 years, Somnath continues to stand tall as an embodiment of our pride and courage.

75 years ago, the resolve of the Iron Man Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, paved the way for the modern revival of Somnath.

Today, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, this sacred land proudly heralds India's cultural renaissance.



Be a witness to this golden occasion

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, Prabhas Patan | 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)



Scan here

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



Residents stand atop debris of a damaged police post after a car bombing in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, on Sunday. REUTERS

15 security officials killed in suicide attack in Pakistan

Press Trust of India
Peshawar, May 10

AT LEAST 15 security officials were killed and several were injured in a suicide attack and ambush at a police post in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the police said.

The incident occurred in the northwest district of Bannu where an explosive-laden vehicle approaching a police post was fired at by security personnel, leading to a blast, the officer police said.

The impact of the explosion led to the collapse of the roofs of several houses in the vicinity. The police post building was also razed to the ground, and several security personnel were buried under the rubble.

After the explosion, the police said, a large group of militants launched an attack on the police post, triggering heavy exchange of fire.

A spokesperson of Bannu

police told PTI that 15 security officials were killed in the attack and several were injured.

There is no clarity yet on the number of militants killed in the incident or whether any of them were held.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Muhammad Sohail Afridi condemned the "terrorist attack" and expressed sorrow over the loss of lives.

His office said he has directed the authorities to ensure the best possible medical treatment for the injured.

He termed the attack on the police post as "highly tragic and a cowardly act," adding that such attacks could not undermine the morale of the police and the public. In a similar incident last week, Pakistani security forces gunned down a suspected militant who was approaching a check post in an explosive-laden vehicle in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's South Waziristan region.

UAE SAYS IT INTERCEPTED TWO IRANIAN DRONES; QATAR CONDEMNS DRONE ATTACK THAT HIT A CARGO VESSEL

Iran: Sent response to US peace proposal

Tehran response stresses on end to war: Reports

Reuters

Dubai, Washington, May 10

IRAN HAS sent its response to a US proposal to begin peace talks to end the war, Iranian state media reported on Sunday, as two carriers were allowed to pass through the blockaded Strait of Hormuz.

The response, sent to mediator Pakistan, focused on ending the war on all fronts, especially Lebanon, and on the safety of shipping through the strait, Iranian state TV said, without indicating how or when the vital waterway might reopen.

It followed a US proposal to end fighting before starting talks on more contentious issues, including Iran's nuclear program. There was no immediate US comment on the Iranian response.

After some 48 hours of relative calm following sporadic clashes last week, hostile drones were detected over several Gulf countries on Sunday, underlining the threat still facing region despite a month-old ceasefire.

Still, the QatarEnergy-operated carrier Al Kharaitiyat passed safely through the strait and was heading for Pakistan's Port Qasim, according to data from shipping analytics firm Kpler, the first Qatari vessel carrying liquefied natural gas to cross the strait since US and Israel started war on February 28.



Members of Iranian network in South Korea stage a rally to denounce Iranian government policy near the US Embassy in Seoul, on Sunday. AP

Sources said earlier the transfer, which offered a modicum of relief to Pakistan after a wave of power blackouts caused by a halt to vital gas imports, had been approved by Iran to build confidence with Qatar and Pakistan, both mediators in the war.

In addition, a Panama-flagged bulk carrier bound for Brazil that had previously attempted to transit the strait on May 4, passed through, using a route designated by Iran's armed forces, Iran's semi-official *Tasnim* news agency reported on Sunday.

With US President Donald Trump due to visit China this week, there has been mounting pressure to draw a line under the

war, which has ignited a global energy crisis and poses a growing threat to the world economy.

But, despite diplomatic efforts to break a deadlock between the two sides and the passage of the two vessels, the threat to shipping lanes and the economies of the region remained high.

On Sunday, the United Arab Emirates said it intercepted two drones coming from Iran, while Qatar condemned a drone attack that hit a cargo ship coming from Abu Dhabi in its waters. Kuwait said its air defences had dealt with hostile drones that entered its airspace.

Tehran has largely blocked non-Iranian shipping through

the narrow Strait of Hormuz, which before the war carried one-fifth of the world's oil supply and which has emerged as one of the central pressure points in the war.

Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, who discussed Pakistan's mediation efforts to end the war with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Miami on Saturday, told Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi using the Strait of Hormuz as a "pressure tool" would only deepen the crisis.

He told Araqchi in a phone call that freedom of navigation should not be compromised, the Qatari foreign ministry said on Sunday.

Despite calls to quit, Starmer says his government is a 10-yr project

Reuters

London, May 10

BRITISH PRIME Minister Keir Starmer vowed to fight on and said his government was a "10-year project" despite calls to quit after his party's drubbing in local elections earlier this week.

Starmer's Labour Party recorded the worst losses of a governing party in local polls in more than three decades, prompting a growing number of lawmakers to call for removal.

A former minister in Starmer's government said she would seek the backing of other lawmakers to trigger a leadership contest unless his cabinet took steps to remove him by Monday. Asked by the Observer newspaper in an interview published on Sunday whether he would lead his Labour Party into the next general election and serve a full second term, Starmer responded: "Yes, I will."

He added: "I'm not going to walk away from the job I was



British PM Keir Starmer at a press meet at 10 Downing Street, London, November 28, 2024. FILE

elected to do in July 2024. I'm not going to plunge the country into chaos."

If Starmer is removed in the coming weeks, Britain would end up with its seventh prime minister in the past decade. So far, Starmer's cabinet has stayed loyal to the prime minister, despite Thursday's election losses.

Bridget Phillipson, the education minister, said she was confident the prime minister could turn things around, telling Sky News on Sunday

that Starmer would set out a "fresh direction" for Britain in a speech on Monday.

"We got a real kicking from the voters, there's no escaping that," she said of Labour's performance in the elections. "We have to reflect seriously on that."

Catherine West, who served as a junior foreign minister until Starmer sacked her last year, said she would listen to Starmer's speech on Monday before making a final decision about whether to seek the back-

ing of the 81 members of parliament needed to trigger a leadership contest.

Asked on Sunday if she was likely to get the numbers, West told the BBC: "We will find out."

Starmer must call Britain's next national election by 2029 at the latest. If he were still in office at the end of a second five-year term, he would be the third-longest-serving continuous leader in Britain in the last two centuries after Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair.

BRIEFLY

BRAZIL

SC suspends bill that ordered early release of Bolsonaro



Brazil's former President Jair Bolsonaro during a press meet at Planalto Palace in Brasilia. FILE

BRAZIL'S SUPREME Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes prohibited the implementation of a sharp reduction in the 27-year prison sentence of former President Jair Bolsonaro for plotting a coup after losing the 2022 election, a court document showed on Saturday. Two Brazilian political parties and the press association ABI this week separately challenged the bill, which would have potentially freed Bolsonaro in 2028. Congress overturned President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's veto of the bill, but plaintiffs asked top court to overturn it. REUTERS

INDONESIA

321 foreigners held for banned online gambling

MORE THAN 300 foreign nationals were arrested in a raid on an alleged online gambling operation in the capital of Jakarta, police said, in one of the country's largest crackdowns on digital betting networks. The 321 foreigners, mainly from Vietnam, were arrested at a commercial building near the Chinatown section that investigators described as a hub for more than 70 online gambling websites, targeting players outside Indonesia, based on marketing records and digital evidence collected during the raid. AP

GERMANY

Berlin revives effort to buy US Tomahawks: FT

GERMANY IS reviving efforts to buy Tomahawk cruise missiles from the US, the *Financial Times* reported on Sunday, citing people with knowledge of Berlin's strategy. Berlin hopes to persuade the Trump administration to agree to the sale of the Tomahawks together with their Typhon ground launchers, the newspaper said. The White House, the US Department of Defence and the German Ministry of Defence did not respond to Reuters requests for comment. REUTERS

Latvian Defence Minister resigns after Ukrainian drones hit oil tanks

Reuters

Riga, May 10

LATVIAN DEFENCE Minister Andris Spruds resigned on Sunday, after two Ukrainian drones on Thursday flew in from Russia and hit oil storage facilities.

Earlier on Sunday, Latvian Prime Minister Evika Silina demanded the resignation, saying anti-drone systems had not been deployed fast enough. She appointed Latvian army colonel Raivis Melnis as the new defence minister.

Latvia and Lithuania on Thursday called on NATO to boost air defences in their region after two drones came over the Russian border and exploded at an oil storage facility in Latvia.

Ukrainian defence minister Andrii Sybiha on Sunday said on X that the drones were Ukrainian, and flew into Latvia as a result of "Russian



Emergency personnel work to extinguish a fire following a Russian drone attack in Kharkiv region, Ukraine, on Sunday. REUTERS

electronic warfare deliberately diverting Ukrainian drones from their targets in Russia."

In response to the drone incidents, Ukraine is considering sending experts to help strengthen air security over the Baltic states, Sybiha said Friday.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Sunday that Russia has refrained from massive aerial and missile strikes on

Ukraine since the start of a ceasefire on Saturday but has not stopped attacks along the front line. "It is nice that as of now, today there have been no massive attacks - missile strikes, airstrikes," he said.

"But there has been no peace in the frontline areas, in the communities near the front. The Russians continue their assault activity in areas that are key for them," Zelenskyy said.

Israeli strikes kill 3 in Gaza, testing fragile ceasefire

Reuters

Madrid, May 10

GROUPS OF passengers and crew disembarked from a cruise ship hit by a deadly hantavirus outbreak on Sunday to be evacuated to their home countries where they will isolate according to national protocols to prevent further spread of the disease.

Government planes carrying Spanish and French nationals landed in Madrid and Paris on Sunday afternoon, where the passengers were transported to hospital, according to the two countries' governments.

One of the five French passengers showed symptoms during the repatriation flight, French Prime Minister Sebastian Lecornu said on X.

Planes to Canada, the Netherlands, Turkey, the UK, Ireland, and the United States were due to depart by 2030 local time on Sunday, with the final flights

Evacuation flights depart Spain after Hantavirus-hit ship docks

Reuters

Madrid, May 10

GROUPS OF passengers and crew disembarked from a cruise ship hit by a deadly hantavirus outbreak on Sunday to be evacuated to their home countries where they will isolate according to national protocols to prevent further spread of the disease.

Government planes carrying Spanish and French nationals landed in Madrid and Paris on Sunday afternoon, where the passengers were transported to hospital, according to the two countries' governments.

One of the five French passengers showed symptoms during the repatriation flight, French Prime Minister Sebastian Lecornu said on X.

Planes to Canada, the Netherlands, Turkey, the UK, Ireland, and the United States were due to depart by 2030 local time on Sunday, with the final flights



A passenger of the ship gets disinfected on the tarmac at the Tenerife Sud airport, Canary Islands, Spain, on Sunday. REUTERS

departing on Monday by 1900 local time. The passengers will be tested upon arrival and then either taken to local hospitals or quarantine facilities or transported home for isolation.

The WHO has recommended a 42-day quarantine for all passengers from Sunday, its director of epidemic and pandemic management Maria Van Kerkhove said in a briefing.

THE ANCIENT ULAMA, NEARLY ERASED DURING THE SPANISH CONQUEST, SURVIVED IN REMOTE NORTHWESTERN MEXICO BEFORE EMERGING FROM OBSCURITY IN A MODERN-DAY CULTURAL REVIVAL

Mexico's 3,400-year-old ballgame is fighting to survive in the Modern Age

Maria Verza

Los Llanitos, May 10

ON A dirt field on Mexico's Pacific coast, five cousins between the ages of 8 and 13 strip down and kick off their shoes. Nearby, adults help them fasten pre-Hispanic-style *fajado*, securing loincloths and leather belts that wrap around their hips.

The Osuna children grab the rubber ball, all 3.2 kilograms of it, around 7 pounds or seven times heavier than a soccer ball, and begin playing. Only the hips may touch it, forcing players to leap through the air or dive low when it skims the ground.

As Mexico prepares to co-host the 2026 FIFA World Cup,

the nation is looking back 3,400 years to one of the oldest team sports: the ancient ballgame known as ulama, a ritual practice nearly erased during the Spanish conquest that survived only in the remote pockets of northwestern Mexico before its late 20th-century rebirth.

Today, authorities and its modern players are leveraging the momentum of international soccer to shine a spotlight on the ancient sport once again.

While players acknowledge that tourism fuelled the sport's revival, many worry that projecting an "exotic" image undermines a tradition central to their identity.

"We must rid the game of

the notion that it is a living fossil," said Emilie Carreón, a researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM, and director of a project aimed at studying and practicing the sport.

That's exactly what the Osuna family is trying to do. After ulama player Aurelio Osuna died, his widow, Maria Herrera, 53, continued his legacy, teaching the ballgame to their grandchildren in their small village in Sinaloa, 1,000 kilometers northwest of Mexico City. "This seed will bear fruit someday," she said.

According to the Popol Vuh, the sacred Mayan book, the world was created from a ball-



Children play ulama, a traditional Mesoamerican ballgame, in Los Llanitos on the outskirts of Mazatlan, Mexico. AP

game, where light and darkness clashed to balance life and death and set the universe in motion.

The game, depicted in

codices, stone carvings and sculptures, had many variations and meanings, from fertility or war ceremonies, to political acts

and even sacrifices.

While some players were headed — possibly the losers — Guatemalan archaeologist and anthropologist Carlos Navarrete explained this occurred only during specific periods and in certain regions. The physically demanding game was primarily a big social event, drawing crowds for fun and betting.

Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés was impressed by the spectacle presented by the Aztec emperor Moctezuma but the Spanish ultimately banned ulama and ordered the destruction of its courts, likely viewing the tradition as a form of resistance to Christianity. For the Catholic Church "the ball was

the living devil," Carreón said.

The game, played by hitting the ball with the hip, the forearm or a mallet, survived only on the Mexican northern Pacific coast, where the colonial process led by Jesuit priests was less aggressive and ulama was accepted in Catholic festivities, said Manuel Aguilar Moreno, a professor of art history at California State University.

Luis Aurelio Osuna, 30, Herrera's eldest son, began playing hip ulama after school, just as his father did decades ago in Los Llanitos, a ranch next to the port city of Mazatlan. Now his three children also play.

Osuna and his mother teach the children how to hit the ball

and guide them through the complicated rules, which include a scoring system with points that are won and lost.

They do it out of passion, but also out of pragmatism in a state where organized crime is pervasive. "We need to find a way to keep them entertained with good things," said Osuna.

Hip ulama teams have up to six players and the Osuna family sometimes participates in tournaments or exhibitions. Decades ago, matches were big events tied to religious feasts, sometimes stretching on for an entire week. But those days are gone, as interest waned and rubber balls became hard to get. AP

The Indian EXPRESS

JOURNALISM of COURAGE

NEW DELHI, LATE CITY, 22 PAGES

₹7.00 (₹8 RAIPUR, ₹15 SRINAGAR) • www.indianexpress.com

DAILY FROM: AHMEDABAD, CHANDIGARH, DELHI, JAIPUR, KOLKATA, LUCKNOW, MUMBAI, NAGPUR, PATNA, PUNE, VADODARA

RAHUL ATTENDS CHENNAI EVENT; 9 CABINET MINISTERS ALSO SWORN IN BY GOVERNOR ARLEKAR

Vijay is Tamil Nadu CM: 'Era of real, secular social justice starts'

First 3 decisions: 200 units of free power, force for women's safety, anti-narcotics groups in state

Arun Janardhanan
Chennai, May 10

CHEERED ON by his supporters, Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK) leader C. Joseph Vijay took oath as Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister on Sunday with the pledge that "a new era of real, secular social justice starts now".

While Vijay ushered in the first non-DMK and non-AIADMK government in almost six decades, taking three decisions in his first act as CM, the DMK elected Udhayanidhi Stalin as the Leader of the Opposition. For the first time, the DMK and the AIADMK will sit together in the Assembly, sources said.

Governor Rajendra Arlekar administered the oath of office and secrecy to Vijay and nine Cabinet members — Aadhav Arjuna, N "Bussy" Anand, R Nirmal Kumar, K G Arun Raj, K A Sengottaiyan, Dr T K Prabhu, S Keerthana, P Venkataraman, and Rajmohan Arumugam — at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium here.

The event turned into a movie-style spectacle as the actor-turned-politician went off script immediately after the Governor began administering the oath to him. "I, C. Joseph Vijay, will stay true to the legally established Constitution of India ... as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, I will work honestly and dedicatedly to fulfil my responsibilities. I will adhere to the rule of law, work with honesty, remove hate, and work

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay takes a selfie during his swearing-in ceremony at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai, Sunday. PTI

INSIDE PAGES 7, 9



STRATEGISTS AND INFLUENCERS IN NEW TN CABINET

ASSAM: HIMANTA TO TAKE OATH AS CM TOMORROW

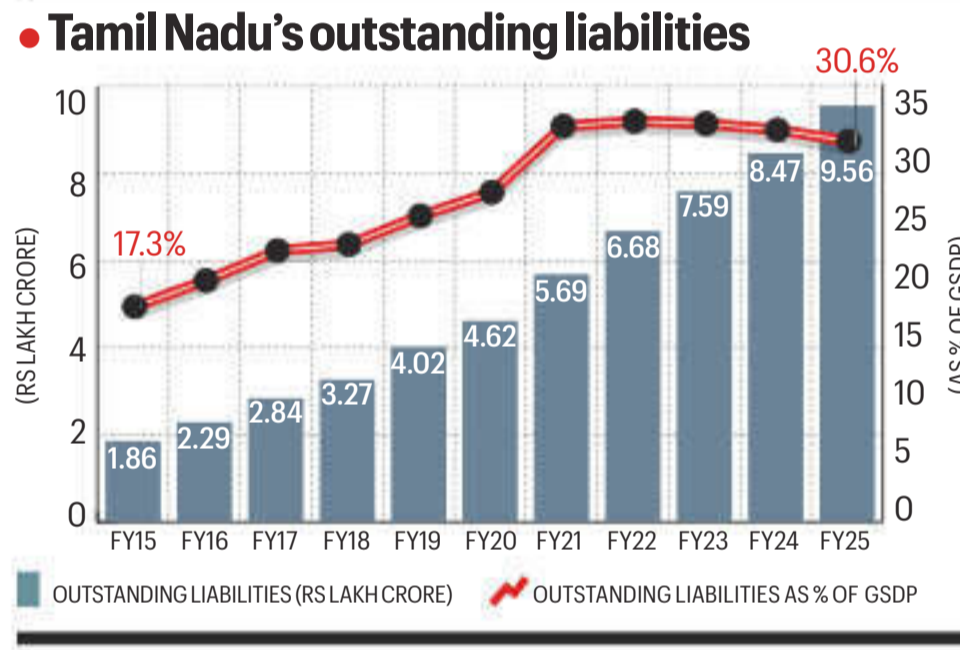
IDEA EXCHANGE
Leaders should discuss future of states. Only then will we be able to come back to power in many states.
VD SATHEESAN
KERALA CONGRESS LEADER
PAGE 15

200 UNITS FREE POWER TO COST EXCHEQUER RS 1,730 CR 'Empty coffers': Vijay flags debt of Rs 10 lakh cr, says white paper soon

Siddharth Upasani
& Arun Janardhanan
New Delhi, Chennai, May 10

IN AUGUST 2021, three months after being sworn in as Finance Minister of Tamil Nadu under the newly elected DMK government, P Thiaga Rajan released a White Paper on the state's finances which said the fiscal situation was "dire" and there were "no buffers left" due to structural flaws in governance. That was after 10 years of AIADMK being in power.

Five years later, after being sworn in as Chief Minister, TVK



founder C. Joseph Vijay on Sunday said he would soon release a White Paper on Tamil Nadu's finances, accusing the DMK of leaving the state "in a bad shape" with a debt of Rs 10 lakh crore. At the same time, Vijay announced

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

PUBLIC MEETING IN TELANGANA

Work from home, skip foreign travel: PM's self-reliance push against West Asia crisis fallout

Suggests ways to reduce use of petroleum goods, conserve foreign exchange reserves

Nikhila Henry
Hyderabad, May 10

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Sunday appealed for collective participation of the people to help the country face global disruptions and challenges, urging measures to reduce the consumption of petroleum products and conserve foreign exchange reserves.

Addressing a public meeting in Hyderabad, the PM asked citizens to use public transport as much as possible, increase the use of electric vehicles (EVs), revive Covid-era measures such as work-from-home arrange-



PM Narendra Modi at a public meeting in Hyderabad, Sunday. PTI

INSIDE PAGE 7
PM SLAMS CONG FOR LEAVING ALLY DMK TO JOIN VIJAY

ments and virtual meetings, avoid non-essential foreign travel and gold purchases for a year, and prioritise local goods, among other measures.

"Use metros wherever met-

ros are available. Use carpooling to go to places, and use the Railways if you have to transport goods. All of this will reduce dependency on petrol and diesel, and thereby cut the dependence on foreign currency," he said.

During a global crisis, such as the one caused by the conflict in West Asia, he said, "We have to take resolutions, keeping the country above all else."

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

AFTER IRAN, UKRAINE CONFLICTS

Govt targets homegrown AI systems for defence sector

Defence ministry in talks with Sarvam AI, BharatGen, say officials: 'Idea is to have Indian version of Palantir soon'

Soumyendra Barik & Anil Sasi
New Delhi, May 10

AS THE Indian defence establishment evaluates the ongoing conflict in West Asia, a compelling need is being felt for the military to have access to domestically-made artificial intelligence (AI) systems, amid a concerted push to decouple from foreign-made technology

in strategic sectors, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

The defence ministry is currently in conversations with Indian companies like Sarvam AI and BharatGen — that have built domestic AI models — on how the technology can be integrated with India's existing defence capabilities, three senior government officials said.

"The idea is to have an Indian version of Palantir as soon

as possible," an official said. To invest in a foundational model of our own has a growing strategic imperative, even if we're behind the curve, another official involved in the broader deliberations said.

The conflicts in Iran and Ukraine, where the defence forces are said to have used AI effectively to take operational decisions, have shown New

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Happening today

WEST BENGAL CM Suwendu Adhikari will hold his first administrative meeting.

TRACK THIS AND MORE ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Business as Usual
By EP UNNY



RBI panel member: Don't need special schemes to raise foreign deposits

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, May 10

AMID TALK of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) considering ways to boost its foreign exchange reserves and shore up the rupee's exchange rate by helping raise bank deposits from foreign sources such as non-residents, among other measures, a member of the central bank's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has said there is no need to take such steps.

According to Ram Singh, Director of the Delhi School of Economics and one of the three external members on the RBI's rate-setting panel, schemes such as the Foreign Currency Non-



Resident (Bank) Deposit swap window of 2013 are not needed. "There could have been a crisis if we insisted the rupee not cross 85 or 90-per-dollar."

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BCCI ADVISORY WARNS OF ACTION

Conduct of IPL owners under scanner: 'Flouting rules, photos near dugout'

Varinder Bhatia & Devendra Pandey
Chandigarh, Mumbai, May 10

THE INDIAN Premier League (IPL) franchise owners have been repeatedly breaching the playing-area protocol by venturing into restricted areas during games. The Indian board's anti-corruption unit (ACU) has flagged this as a major violation of the league's rules to BCCI office-bearers while listing a series of transgressions by players this season.

Not only have owners tried to send messages from their



Fans cheer during the IPL match between RCB and MI in New Raipur, Sunday. REUTERS P 17

boxes to those sitting in the dugout, but there have also been instances of owners physically interacting with their

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

MULE ACCOUNTS USED IN AT LEAST 120 OFFENCES, TRANSACTIONS RANGING FROM RS 2-18 CRORE: POLICE

Rescued from Myanmar cyber scam compound, three men 'regrouped to run fraud racket in India'



The three men from Navi Mumbai, Jalandhar and Darjeeling were arrested by the Pimpri Chinchwad police in Pune in March. EXPRESS

Sushant Kulkarni
Pune, May 10

THREE MEN from Navi Mumbai, Jalandhar and Darjeeling struck up an unlikely friendship inside a notorious cyber scam compound in Myanmar, near the Thailand border, where they were allegedly forced into cyber slavery. In January, they were rescued in an operation conducted by local law enforcement, and sent back to India.

But that is when their story took a darker, crime thriller-like

turn, police officers in Maharashtra told *The Indian Express*.

Instead of leaving the world of cyber fraud behind, the trio allegedly started executing online scams and were planning to set up a full-fledged cyber crime operation from a farmhouse near Mumbai when they were arrested by the Pimpri Chinchwad police in Pune district in March. "They are still behind bars, in judicial custody. We arrested two more persons linked to them who were providing local support," said an officer

who is part of the probe. Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Pimpri Chinchwad police commissioner Vinoy Kumar Choubey, who closely monitored the probe, said: "Our investigation shows how organised cyber fraud networks are on one hand exploiting a large number of Indian youth but on the other hand also creating a pool of trained operatives who can later replicate such criminal models within the country."

The trail that led to the trio, and their unusual story, began at the Cyber Crime police

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

LAL BHADUR SHASTRI INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, DELHI

WE ARE NOW

What separates a good business school from a proven one?

For 110 years, AACSB has asked one question of every school it reviews.

Not how many students you place but what those students go on to do.

To the businesses they run, the communities they shape, the decisions they make when it counts.

In India - 30 institutions hold this mark. Globally, fewer than 6% of business schools.

LBSIM Delhi is now one of them.

"This milestone belongs to our students, faculty, staff, alumni, recruiters and well-wishers whose trust and support continue to inspire us.

Together, we shape future leaders. Together, we create impact.

www.lbsim.ac.in Dwarka Sec-11, Delhi



The 1,200-second test was done in Hyderabad on Sunday following a 700-second one conducted in January. X/@DRDO_INDIA

DRDO tests combustor of new hypersonic cruise missile

New missile capable of exceeding five times the speed of sound

Sushant Kulkarni
Pune, May 10

MARKING A breakthrough in hypersonic missile technology for India, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) achieved a 1,200-second runtime of its actively cooled scramjet full-scale combustor on Saturday. The test was conducted at the Scramjet Connect Pipe Test (SCPT) facility in Hyderabad, building on the successful 700-plus second test carried out in January.

The hypersonic cruise missile is capable of exceeding five times the speed of sound, or over 6,100 km per hour, for extended periods. The speed is achieved through a cutting-edge air-breathing engine, which utilises supersonic combustion to sustain long-duration flight.

The test was conducted at the SCPT facility at the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), Hyderabad-based premier facility of the DRDO, which is responsible for the design and development of state-of-the-art Missile Systems and technologies.

"This successful test positions India at the forefront of advanced aerospace capabilities and continuously emerging war technologies. The remarkable feat is achieved through a cutting-edge supersonic air-breathing engine, which utilises indigenously developed liquid hydrocarbon endothermic fuel, high-temperature thermal barrier coating and advanced manufacturing processes. The ground tests

India signed 8 MoUs with Trinidad and Tobago during Jaishankar's visit

Press Trust of India
Port of Spain, May 10

INDIA AND Trinidad and Tobago have signed eight agreements in sectors including tourism, healthcare, infrastructure and Ayurveda during External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's two-day visit to the Caribbean nation, according to an official statement.

Jaishankar, who visited the Caribbean nation on May 8-9, held talks with Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar and other senior leaders on expanding bilateral cooperation, and reviewed progress on announcements made during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Trinidad and Tobago last year, India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in its statement on Sunday.

"A total of 8 MoUs were signed between the twosides in the areas of tourism, solarisation of T&T's Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs building, vector control, infrastructure upgrade of Nelson Island where the Indian immigrants were stayed initially, and for setting up of an Indian Chair on Ayurveda at the University of the West Indies," it said.

conducted at the SCPT facility have successfully validated the design of an advanced active cooled scramjet combustor as well as the capabilities of a state-of-the-art test facility," the Ministry of Defence (MoD) said in a statement.

Scramjet combustor incorporates an innovative flame stabilisation technique that holds a continuous flame inside the combustor with an air speed of more than 1.5 km per second.

DRDO scientists studied many novel and promising ignition and flame-holding techniques over multiple ground tests before arriving at the scramjet engine configuration. With regard to the specialised fuel for the system, the MoD said an indigenous endothermic scramjet fuel jointly developed for the first time by the DRDL and industry partners is central to the breakthrough.

The fuel offers dual benefits of significant cooling improvement and ease of ignition.

Another key achievement amid the development of hypersonic technologies is the development of Thermal Barrier Coating (TBC), designed to withstand extreme temperatures encountered during hypersonic flight.

A new advanced ceramic TBC having high thermal resistance and capable of operating beyond the melting point of steel has been jointly developed by DRDL and Department of Science and Technology (DST) facilities.

Hypersonic weapons have the potential to beat existing air defence systems available with major military powers across the world and deliver rapid and high-impact strikes.

Several nations, including the US, Russia, India, and China, are actively pursuing hypersonic technology and have demonstrated various levels of development.

In the presence of Persad-Bissessar, Jaishankar handed over the first batch of 2,000 laptops to selected schoolchildren and inaugurated an agro-processing facility for which machinery worth USD 1 million was provided by India last year.

Persad-Bissessar and Jaishankar jointly inaugurated Trinidad and Tobago's National Prosthetics Centre in Penal.

According to the MEA statement, discussions also covered cooperation in infrastructure, security, forensics, healthcare and capacity building. The twosides reaffirmed coordination in regional and multilateral forums, including on issues concerning the Global South.

The MEA said the visit gave "fresh impetus" to India's ties with Trinidad and Tobago.

Jaishankar concluded his visit to Trinidad and Tobago on Saturday.

The External Affairs Minister was in Port of Spain on the concluding leg of his three-nation tour of Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago, aimed at deepening India's engagement with the Caribbean nations.

[FROM PAGE 1 | FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM]

Vijay is Tamil Nadu CM

honestly for all sections of the people. This I swear on God and take the oath," he said, raising his right hand and clenching his fist when invoking God. After Arlekar intervened and asked him to read out the official oath from the paper provided to him, Vijay sought some clarification from the Governor before complying with his direction.

Later, in his first speech as CM, Vijay delivered the clearest political message of his young administration. "Nobody should even think that now that we have come to power, we can go on a rampage. Do not even keep such ideas in mind. Clear it off. There will be only one power centre, that is me," he said as the crowd roared. For those who could not be present at the stadium, the Greater Chennai Corporation arranged live screenings of the swearing-in ceremony on LED screens at over 20 locations across Chennai.

It was an unusual first day for the CM amid part political transition, part mass spectacle, and part emotional culmination of a decades-long film relationship between him and his audience. And Vijay attempted to present himself as a leader inheriting a damaged state and asking for time to rebuild it. "The state has been left behind in a bad shape," he said, promising a white paper on the state's finances during the previous DMK government. "I will release the white paper first. The previous government has left us with a debt of Rs 10 lakh crore."

Vijay repeatedly framed his victory as an emotional debt to the people of Tamil Nadu rather than merely an electoral triumph. "I entered politics to repay the debt of gratitude I owe to you," he told the crowd at the stadium. He also attempted to draw a sharp distinction between his administration and

the one it replaced, promising "transparent governance." His government would not "loot people's money", Vijay said, and vowed not to make "false promises". At the same time, he signalled continuity with the state's welfare-heavy political culture and also invoked social justice. "This is a new beginning. A new era of real, secular social justice starts now," he declared, dramatically pointing to his watch.

The CM's speech drew from personal memory and sought to connect him to the people of the state. He spoke of growing up as the son of an assistant director, knowing "poverty and hunger" and not coming from a "royal lineage". He reminded the crowd that he had faced humiliation and hardship before entering cinema. "I am like your son, your brother. You gave me a place in your hearts," he said.

Instead of his trademark white shirt and beige trousers, Vijay wore a white shirt, dark trousers, and a blazer to the ceremony. With most of his Cabinet colleagues also wearing shirts and trousers, the dress code of the TVK Cabinet seemed to be a departure from the usual, as white dhoti and white shirt have largely been the norm for male politicians in Tamil Nadu politics.

The swearing-in ceremony was attended by, among others, Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi, who flew in from Delhi, Vijay's parents S A Chandrasekhar and Shobha, and actor Trisha. Later in the day, as congratulatory messages poured in, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the CM spoke on the telephone, and the PM congratulated him, sources said.

First decisions as CM

On his first day in office, Vijay quickly moved to give his new government both an administrative signature and a political

vocabulary, signing orders for 200 units of free electricity for domestic consumers using up to 500 units in a two-month billing cycle, a Singapore-inspired women's rapid action force for public safety, and narcotics prevention units across all municipal corporations and districts. It was a carefully choreographed opening: welfare, women's safety, anti-drug enforcement, law and order, a visit to a Periyar memorial, and a Cabinet that looks nothing like a classical ministry of a Dravidian party.

The first file on free electricity was an unmistakable signal that Vijay's government would not abandon Tamil Nadu's welfare grammar. The second, a special women's rapid action force, framed his administration around urban safety and visible policing. The third, creating units of the Narcotics Prevention Wing across the state, placed law enforcement and youth protection at the heart of his agenda. Later, Vijay chaired a review meeting at the secretariat on the law-and-order situation, underlining that he intends to project himself as an active administrator from Day One.

The day, however, was not just about files. Vijay called on Pro-tem Speaker M V Karuppaiah and visited the Periyar Thidal in Chennai's Vepery neighbourhood, where he met Dravidar Kazhagam president K Veeramani, honoured him with a golden shawl and bouquet, and paid floral tributes at the memorial. For a leader who is personally a believer but has repeatedly invoked Periyar as a guiding light, the visit was symbolically loaded. It was about Vijay placing himself inside the rationalist-social justice tradition even as he tries to create a new political idiom. He also submitted his resignation as MLA from Tiruchirappalli East, a procedural move after assuming office.

All attention will now shift to Vijay having to prove his majority on the floor of the Assembly by May 13.

RS 10-lakh cr debt

200 units of free electricity every two months for domestic consumers — at a cost to the government of Rs 1,730 crore per year, according to an order by the state's Energy department.

Vijay's predecessor M K Stalin responded sharply, rejecting the suggestion that the state treasury had been emptied.

In a pointed line directed at the new Chief Minister, Stalin wrote in a social media post: "You, who came to power saying, 'I will only give promises that are practically feasible,' are now just stepping into government administration. I believe that, just like us, you too will surely learn soon the nuances of how to fulfil the promises made to the people."

Tamil Nadu's finances are far from ideal, according to latest RBI data. The state's outstanding liabilities stood at Rs 9.56 lakh crore at the end of FY25 — the highest of any state. At the same time, Tamil Nadu is the fastest-growing state in the country, posting a real growth rate of 10.8% in FY26 on top of 11.2% in FY25 as per the old GDP series with 2011-12 as the base year.

States that grow faster have room to take on more debt as they have a higher ability to pay back the debt. While Tamil Nadu's outstanding liabilities as a percentage of the state's GDP stood at 30.6% in FY25, they have declined for three years in a row, starting from 32.2% in FY22 after having jumped sharply in FY21 to 31.8% from 26.5% in FY20 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Even the DMK's own White Paper from 2021 had recognised

the precarious situation Tamil Nadu's finances were in, noting that the state had the "dubious distinction" of being the largest borrower from markets among all states.

As such, the Rs 10 lakh crore debt that Vijay spoke of is not the doing of just the previous government but also those that came before. This was seemingly pointed out by the 16th Finance Commission in its recent report: from recording the second-lowest debt-to-Gross State Domestic Product ratio among the non-North Eastern and Hilly states in FY12, the ratio "increased steadily" to 24.7% in FY20 before spiking to 31% in FY21.

A key reason for the state's debt, apart from the Covid-related expenses that pushed up debt ratios for all states as well as the Centre, is its committed expenditure, or money that it must spend every year without failure: salaries, pensions, and interest on past debt.

According to an October 2025 study of state finances by PRS Legislative Research, Tamil Nadu, at 62%, was one of five states that had budgeted in FY26 to spend more than 60% of its revenue receipts on salaries, pension, and interest. The others were Assam (61%), Himachal Pradesh (83%), Kerala (69%), and Punjab (74%). The more a government spends on these committed expenditures, the less it can spend on developmental subjects such as health and education, among others.

Vijay's promise of 200 units of free electricity every two months assumes significance in

PM's self-reliance push

Referring to measures adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic period, Modi said, "We have developed work from home, virtual meetings, video conferencing and many other methods during corona. We got habituated to it. The need of the hour is to resume those methods."

He stressed the need to conserve foreign exchange, and said, "The growing culture of weddings abroad, travelling abroad, and vacationing abroad is becoming prevalent among the middle class. We must decide that during this time of crisis, we should postpone travelling abroad for at least a year..." He urged people to refrain from the practice of buying gold during festivals for a year.

The PM also asked people to

reduce the use of cooking oil. "I have been saying, reduce the use of cooking oil by 10%. This will not only help the nation during these times but also improve the health of your family," Modi said.

Pushing the theme of self-reliance, the PM said, "Make a list of things which you use daily and find out what is foreign." This does not mean that people should throw away foreign goods, he said, adding, "But efforts should be on to build self-reliance as soon as possible." He said that he had raised the "vocal for local" slogan during the Covid-19 pandemic, too.

He also called for reducing the use of chemical fertilisers and promoting natural farming to make the country more self-reliant.

this context.

In 2025-26, Tamil Nadu had budgeted to spend Rs 72,434 crore on subsidies — 16% more than on capital expenditure and 15% of its total expenditure. Latest data shows that by February, the state's subsidy bill stood at Rs 67,936 crore. Meanwhile, the full-year capital expenditure target was missed by 19%.

It's not just free electricity.

The Indian Express reported on May 6 that fulfilling all the promises made in TVK's manifesto — from Rs 2,500 every month to women heads of households to six free LPG cylinders per household every year and, a grant of Rs 4,000 per month for 10 lakh unemployed graduates — would result in the new government's projected annual expenditure on welfare spending alone reaching close to Rs 1 lakh crore. This would mark an increase of over 52% from the Rs 65,000 crore spent by the previous DMK government on welfare schemes and subsidies in 2025-26.

Improving the state's finances is particularly crucial for Tamil Nadu as its population is ageing. The RBI, in its study of states' 2025-26 budgets, had noted earlier this year in January that by 2026, Kerala and Tamil Nadu are expected to enter a so-called 'ageing category' when more than 15% of a state's population is above the age of 60.

"Ageing states are facing high old-age dependency ratios and rising social sector expenditure obligations," the RBI had said, adding that addressing the "mounting fiscal pressures stemming from population ageing and safeguarding public finance sustainability requires a comprehensive policy strategy".

RBI panel

But yielding on that front in itself is a shock absorber... All considered, I don't share the sense of alarm on rupee and forex fronts," Singh told *The Indian Express* in an interview.

The war in West Asia has led to massive foreign capital outflows from India financial markets — \$21.3 billion so far in 2026. In conjunction with weak foreign direct investment inflows and pressure on the trade deficit, the rupee has fallen by almost 4% since the war began in late February. Back in 2013, when the rupee had fallen sharply due to US Federal Reserve's 'taper tantrums', RBI had announced the FCNR(B) deposit swap window for a period of just under three months, under which banks had raised \$26 billion and helped boost the central bank's forex reserves.

Homegrown AI system

Delhi that the technology can be a game changer, not just as a defensive resource, but as an offensive option as well. In the US, systems developed by the likes of Palantir were used in strikes carried out on Iran. The technology has also been used to carry out cyber attacks on digital infrastructure.

China, for instance, is rapidly integrating artificial intelligence into military operations as part of the push by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) towards what's being described as "intelligentised warfare". Chinese military planners are using AI for battlefield decision-making, autonomous drone swarms, surveillance, target recognition and command systems that can process combat data in seconds. Recent studies of PLA procurement documents show strong focus on AI-enabled command-and-control and reconnaissance systems, aimed at speeding up operations and countering US military advantages. China has also showcased AI-powered robotic "wolf pack" combat systems and autonomous drone platforms.

The key question though is whether India should rely on existing AI solutions for warfare, with the government and the country's military establishment believing that domestic options might be the better alternative for strategic sectors such as defence.

"Using American AI models to build products as wrappers on top of them might work in other business fields, but when it comes to strategic sectors, it is clearly being felt that there is a need to have our own technology, at least invest in them and build them, so that we are not reliant on something that we

source from outside," a second official said.

Even if extensively large models like those built in the US may not have been created in India so far, the military sees merit in deploying domestically-made small models for use on the ground. "Such AI can still help guide our autonomous systems for surveillance, reconnaissance and target mapping, and aid in intelligence fusion," a senior government official said.

Intelligence fusion in the military refers to the process of aggregating, analysing and integrating data from multiple sources — such as signals, imagery and human intelligence — to create a unified, actionable and real-time picture of threats. This concept is evolving into Intelligence Fusion Systems, which utilise AI and machine learning to rapidly process data, reducing the time from data collection to decision-making.

"From our conversations with local players, what we have understood so far is that the difference in models that have been built domestically by companies like Sarvam and BharatGen is not that much when compared with Deepseek, or at least the gap can be bridged, even though there might be a lag. But we need our own model, no question about that," another official said.

One of the reasons behind that is also the money involved in building AI models. General purpose large language models such as those built by companies like OpenAI and Anthropic take substantial investments, with computing alone costing close to \$200 million, and data training and annotation costs can take that figure up to \$500 million-\$600 million.

IPL owners' conduct

teams while the game is on, the ACU has said. Based on these inputs, the BCCI has now issued an advisory to the teams asking the owners to stay in their corner, and they have also been made aware of the consequences of crossing the line.

"One of the most worrying aspects has been the behaviour of the team owners. They have been flouting rules and haven't been cooperating. By way of evidence, there are photographs of them near the dugout. Some even carry their phones to the ground. They have been warned but it hasn't helped," an official aware of the league's policing process told *The Indian Express*.

These inputs have been reflected in the May 7 advisory issued by BCCI Secretary Devjit Sakia that reminds the owners to adhere to the IPL's Player and Match Official Access (PMOA) Protocol.

"The BCCI has noted with concern that certain IPL franchise owners have not adhered to the Player and Match Official Access (PMOA) Protocol during the course of matches. Specifically, instances have been observed of IPL franchise owners

attempting to communicate with, approach, hug, or otherwise physically interact with players and team members during live match situations. Such conduct, however well-intentioned, directly contravenes established protocol and may constitute interference with team dynamics and match proceedings," reads the seven-page document reviewed by *The Indian Express*.

Last week, speaking to *The Indian Express*, Sakia had said, "All these norms and all these advisories are already part of the protocol. But people are becoming casual nowadays, so we are reminding them that we will not show any leniency if there's any violation."

The BCCI advisory adds that "franchise owners and their representatives are strictly prohibited from communicating with or physically accessing players or team officials in the dugout, dressing room, or playing area during the course of a match, except through designated and approved channels."

The letter also puts on paper the repercussions for not following the set norms. "Any devi-

Fraud racket in India

dozen mobile phones, Point of Sale machines and 12 seals," the officer said. "Examination of these accounts showed they had been used in at least 120 offences across the country and had seen transactions ranging from Rs 2-18 crore," the officer said.

But the real twist was yet to come. The investigation revealed that the trio had learned the tricks of the trade after falling prey to flashy social media advertisements promising lucrative jobs in Bangkok. After landing in Thailand, they were allegedly taken to the notorious KK Park cyber scam compound in Myanmar's Myawaddy region, along the Myanmar-Thailand border. "The compound is infamous for organised cyber crime operations that exploit thousands of trafficked youths lured with fake overseas job offers," the officer said.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has described these scam centres as a vast criminal ecosystem built on human trafficking and forced online fraud. In reports released since 2023, the UN estimated that hundreds of thousands of people may be trapped in such compounds across Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos, where they are allegedly forced to run investment, cryptocurrency and

romance scams under threats, torture and physical abuse.

"We found out that the three had gone to Bangkok and then to Myanmar in August 2025. At KK Park, they were forced into executing cyber scams on Indian citizens, including share trading frauds, task frauds, romance frauds and digital arrest frauds. While they worked under duress at these massive call centres in the compound, they drew a small pay for their work. It was during this stay that the trio connected with each other and exchanged numbers," the officer said.

According to investigators, the trio returned to India after an extensive joint action by authorities in Myanmar and outside, during which thousands of men and women were rescued and repatriated across December and January.

"The trio regrouped in Nerul and started executing online scams in collaboration with some suspects linked to the racket run from KK Park. They had plans to set up an elaborate cyber crime operation. In the searches conducted as part of the probe, we found that the suspects had purchased domain names to create the facade of legitimate businesses for their cyber crime operations. They also had plans to run their operation from a farmhouse near Mumbai, possibly in the Karjat area, for which they had shortlisted some options," said another officer.

Smaller models which are tuned for specific purposes may be cheaper to build comparatively. Indian firms may also struggle in matching compute access that some of their Western counterparts have, although the government has tried to address that handicap by providing them GPUs at discounted usage rates under the IndiaAI Mission.

Queries sent to the defence ministry and SarvamAI did not elicit a response until publication.

What has also irked New Delhi are comments made by senior US administration officials earlier this year, where they insisted that the US expects that its allies, including India, should build their AI solutions on top of the so-called America AI stack.

To be sure, the Indian armed forces did use AI cloud-based integrated air command and control systems to detect and position any hostile objects in the sky during Operation Sindoor last year, as reported by *The Indian Express*. Also, during the India AI Impact Summit earlier this year, Lt General Dinesh Singh Rana, chief of the Strategic Forces Command, revealed that the Army had deployed AI predictive tools to anticipate and repulse a Chinese attempt along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Yangtze, Arunachal Pradesh.

There is, however, a refrain around India's hardware capabilities in these discussions, officials said. "Even if our start-ups are able to build AI-led systems for military use cases, the underlying hardware that is powering those, including the graphics processing units crucial for computing power, are currently all made by foreign companies. We don't have that level of technology at our disposal yet, but it is something that has to be ensured in the coming years," a senior government official said.

ation shall be treated as a serious violation. Franchise management is responsible for ensuring that IPL franchise owners and their associates are fully briefed on the applicable protocols prior to each match day."

The advisory also mentions some other episodes of indiscipline. "It has been brought to notice that certain team members have demonstrated reluctance in presenting their accreditation cards for verification when requested by authorised security personnel. This behaviour is unacceptable and constitutes a breach of basic event security protocol."

The board also informed the franchise about the risks in inviting unauthorised persons to team hotels. "The BCCI draws the attention of all franchisees to the well-documented risks of targeted compromise and honey-trapping that pervade high-profile sporting environments. The possibility of incidents giving rise to serious legal allegations, including those under applicable laws on sexual misconduct, cannot be discounted..."

Following the advisory, the BCCI had a meeting with the CEOs of all franchisees, where the inputs provided by the ACU were shared.

RWA forum writes to Delhi govt seeking command centre to ensure EV policy alignment

Devansh Mittal
New Delhi, May 10



The government released a draft Delhi EV Policy 2026-2030 on April 11 for feedback. FILE

A REPRESENTATIVE body of Delhiites that speaks for tens of thousands of residents of East Delhi has written to the government to say that a high-level mechanism should be set up to coordinate among various stakeholder agencies for effective implementation of the Capital's new Electric Vehicle (EV) policy.

The Delhi government released the draft Delhi EV Policy 2026-2030 for feedback and suggestions on April 11. The window for sending in the suggestions closes in three days. Once implemented, the policy will be valid till 2030.

The policy provides incentives for the purchase of all kinds of EVs and scrapping of older vehicles, proposes a ban on the registration of petrol two-wheelers after April 2028, and provides for a major expansion of battery charging and swapping infrastructure. The policy does contain a plan to set up a mechanism for coordination among various stakeholders, but its role is not defined in detail.

In a representation to the government, the East Delhi RWAs Joint Front, comprising around 100 residents' welfare associations (RWAs) that is vocal about a range of social and civic issues, has said that a central coordination mechanism or command centre should be established to ensure policy alignment among the Delhi Transport Department, Delhi Transco Limited (DTL), DISCOMs, municipal bodies, and other land-owning agencies in rolling out EV infrastructure.

Land is owned by a multiplicity of government organisations in Delhi. Therefore, a single coordination mechanism will make

depend significantly on institutional coordination, operational clarity, and timely execution.

Under the policy framework, the Transport department has been designated as the primary nodal authority, while DTL has been assigned responsibility for EV charging and battery-swapping infrastructure development.

Implementation responsibilities have been distributed across agencies including the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Delhi Development Authority (DDA), New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), Public Works Department (PWD), Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), Delhi Cantonment Board, Revenue Department, Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), electricity distribution companies (DISCOMs), and other land-owning authorities.

The RWAs' body has argued that the absence of detailed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) across departments represents a major gap. The Transport Department, for example, requires clarity on EV-only enforcement mechanisms, subsidy-disbursement timelines, scrapping linkage, and fleet compliance norms. Also, DISCOMs require standardised procedures for charging station approvals, tariff structures, and grid augmentation planning.

The RWAs have also pointed out that agencies such as MCD, NDMC, DDA, PWD, and Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) need transparent approval frameworks for land allocation, building retrofits, and charging infrastructure permissions.

The representation has called for stronger environmental oversight mechanisms relating to battery disposal, recycling standards, and lifecycle monitoring.

the process of building EV charging infrastructure smoother, according to the Front.

"A single coordination agency will make the implementation of the EV policy easier. If the government is serious about reducing air pollution, the successful implementation of the EV policy is necessary," B S Vohra, president, East Delhi Joint Front, said.

The previous EV policy, which came into force in 2020, had provisions for a Delhi EV Cell, which was a dedicated cell "established within the Transport Department for effective day-to-day implementation of the Delhi EV Policy". The Cell brought various stakeholders together for coordination.

Under the 2026 policy, a High-Powered Committee is proposed to be constituted under the chairmanship of the chief secretary, and comprising representatives from the Departments of Transport, Power, Planning, Environment, Finance, Delhi Transco Limited (DTL), DISCOMs, and any other departments as deemed necessary. But its duties have not been specified.

The representation says that the policy presents a "strong and forward-looking framework" for accelerating electric mobility in the Capital but its success would

Railways nod for two projects in Northwest Delhi to ease congestion

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 10

THE DELHI government on Sunday said that the Indian Railways has approved two key infrastructure projects in North-West Delhi — the widening of the Railway Overbridge (ROB) at Haiderpur-Badli on Outer Ring Road and an elevated loop connecting Shalimar Bagh with Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar — aimed at easing congestion in several areas in northwest Delhi.

The government said that once widened, the ROB at Haiderpur-Badli will reduce congestion at Mukarba Chowk, one of the city's busiest traffic intersections that sees heavy movement of passenger vehicles and goods carriers. The proposed elevated loop, which will cross over the railway tracks, will connect Shalimar Bagh with Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar.

The government said Mukarba Chowk, Outer Ring Road and Sanjay Gandhi Transport Nagar are among the city's busiest transport corridors and have long faced congestion issues due to heavy vehicular movement. Chief Minister Rekha

Gupta said that the Public Works Department had submitted the required plan and technical proposals for both the projects to the Railways. After detailed scrutiny, the Railways found the proposals technically feasible and issued an in-principle No Objection Certificate (NOC) with the approval of the Divisional Railway Manager.

Gupta added that the Railways has mandated that construction work must be carried out under prescribed safety standards and technical supervision to ensure that railway operations and traffic movement are not adversely affected.

She said that the Delhi government is working at a fast pace to identify major traffic bottlenecks across the city and develop long-term solutions. "The Delhi government is committed to developing a modern, safe and uninterrupted transport network across the Capital," Gupta said, adding that the projects are expected to reduce travel time and improve connectivity in the area.

Gupta added that such projects will further pave the way for transforming the capital into a 'Viksit Delhi'.

TORRENT PHARMA

A TORRENT GROUP COMPANY

BEFORE THE NATIONAL COMPANY LAW TRIBUNAL BENCH AT AHMEDABAD
C P (CAA)/21/(AHM) 2026
CONNECTED WITH
C A (CAA)/6/(AHM) 2026

In the matter of the Companies Act, 2013;
 AND
 In the matter of Sections 230 to 232 and other applicable provisions of the Companies Act, 2013;
 AND

In the matter of Scheme of Arrangement in the nature of Amalgamation of J. B. Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Limited with Torrent Pharmaceuticals Limited and their respective shareholders.

J. B. Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Limited
 (CIN L24390GJ1976PLC173077)
 A company incorporated under the Companies Act, 1956 and having its registered office at 302, Iscon Mall, Star India Bazar Building, Opp. Jodhpur BRTS, Satellite, Ahmedabad – 380015 in the State of Gujarat

**Petitioner Transferor Company/
JB Pharma**

Torrent Pharmaceuticals Limited
 (CIN L24230GJ1972PLC002126)
 a company incorporated under the Companies Act, 1956 and having its registered office at "Avirat", Thaltej Shilaj Road, Ahmedabad – 380059, in the State of Gujarat.

**Petitioner Transferee Company/
Torrent Pharma**

NOTICE OF HEARING OF PETITION

NOTICE is hereby given that a Company Petition under Sections 230 and 232 and other applicable provisions of the Companies Act, 2013 for sanctioning the Scheme of Arrangement in the nature of Amalgamation of J. B. Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Limited (the "Petitioner Transferor Company" or "JB Pharma") with Torrent Pharmaceuticals Limited (the "Petitioner Transferee Company" or "Torrent Pharma") and their respective shareholders ("Scheme") presented by the Petitioner Companies on 29th April 2026 was admitted on 7th May 2026 by the Hon'ble National Company Law Tribunal, Ahmedabad Bench ("Hon'ble Tribunal") and in terms of the order dated 7th May, 2026, the said Company Petition is fixed for hearing before the Hon'ble Tribunal on Thursday, 11th June, 2026.

Any person who seeks to support or oppose the Company Petition at the hearing, should submit an affidavit with the grounds of support or opposition in form of representation before Hon'ble Tribunal and give a copy thereof in writing to the Petitioner Companies' Advocate Swati Soparkar at 301, Shivalik- 10, Opp. SBI Zonal Office, Near Old Excise Chowky, S.M. Road, Ambavadi, Ahmedabad – 380 015 and/or swati.soparkar@gmail.com along with a copy addressed to Mr. Sandeep Phadnis, Company Secretary & Compliance Officer of the Petitioner Transferor Company at Neelam Centre, 'B' Wing, 4th floor, Hind Cycle Road, Worli, Mumbai 400030 and/ or investorelations@jbpharma.com and to Mr. Chintan Trivedi, Company Secretary & Compliance Officer of the Petitioner Transferee Company at Avirat, Thaltej Shilaj Road, Ahmedabad – 380 059, Gujarat, India and/ or investorservices@torrentpharma.com, so as to reach not later than two days before the date fixed for the hearing of the Company Petition, and appear in person or by his advocate.

A copy of the Company Petition will be furnished to any person requiring the same on payment of the prescribed charges.

Ahmedabad
Date: 11th May 2026

For, Torrent Pharmaceuticals Ltd

Sd/-
Chintan Trivedi
 Company Secretary & Compliance Officer

For, J.B. Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Ltd.

Sd/-
Sandeep Phadnis
 Company Secretary & Compliance Officer

Nālandā UNIVERSITY

Established by an Act of Parliament of India and holds the status of an Institution of National Importance

Apply Before
June 15th

ADMISSIONS 2026

MA | MSc | MBA | PhD

NEW MASTER'S PROGRAMMES

- **Data Science & Artificial Intelligence**
- **Science & Technology Policy Studies**
- **Sanskrit**

- **Historical Studies**
- **Archaeology**
- **Buddhist Studies, Philosophy and Comparative Religions**
- **Hindu Studies (Sanātana Dharma)**
- **Sustainable Development and Management**
- **World Literature in English**
- **Ecology and Environment Studies**
- **International Relations and Peace Studies**
- **Philosophy**
- **Economics**
- **Mathematics**
- **Hindi**

ADMISSION HELPLINE
 +91- 9031027489 | 7033291552
 Email: admission@nalandauniv.edu.in

MERIT BASED SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

SCAN TO APPLY
www.nalandauniv.edu.in/admissions

CALL FOR ENTRIES 2025

ACKNOWLEDGING ACCURACY, COURAGE, CREDIBILITY & FAIRNESS

EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM AWARDS

SCAN TO APPLY

Log on to: www.rngfoundation.com/awards

JUNE 15 2026
 Last Date to Apply

Elvish gets Rs 10-crore extortion threat, 'sender linked to Lawrence gang'

Express News Service
Gurgaon, May 10

AN INVESTIGATION has been launched after YouTuber Elvish Yadav received an extortion threat of Rs 10 crore last week, officers said on Sunday, adding that the sender allegedly claimed to be associated with the Lawrence Bishnoi gang.

In his complaint, Yadav alleged he had initially missed a WhatsApp call from an international number before receiving threats via text messages on WhatsApp. Yadav and his father, police sources said, allegedly received the messages on May 5. The sender, who ident-

ified himself as Randeep Malik, allegedly demanded the sum within two days and threatened to shoot the 28-year-old if the payment was not made.

Based on the complaint, an FIR was registered Saturday under relevant BNS sections. The probe has been transferred to the Crime Branch, which is working to trace the origin of the international number and verify the authenticity of the threat, said officers.

Yadav's father Ram Avtar told *The Indian Express*, "These calls are not a new thing for him, but I will check on him and ask him about it now that police proceedings have started."

1 more operative linked to Bangladesh-based arms dealer Shahbaz arrested

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 10

IN FRESH crackdown on a transnational arms trafficking and terror network, backed by Pakistan's ISI, Delhi Police's Crime Branch has arrested an allegedly notorious operative, Praveen Kumar alias Tittu, who is a close associate of gangster Rohit Chaudhary of South Delhi and linked to Bangladesh-based arms dealer Shahbaz Ansari, said officers.

The Crime Branch recently said it had arrested over a dozen accused — linked to Shahbaz Ansari network — for allegedly transporting foreign-

made illegal firearms in Delhi-NCR. Praveen was involved in the similar chain of networks as he was providing weapons to Chaudhary, police said. Ansari, who continues to be in Bangladesh, is wanted by security agencies, said an officer.

"A cash reward of Rs 2 lakh reward had previously been declared on Praveen's head," said another officer. Authorities recovered one high-end Italian-made semi-automatic pistol and five live 0.32 bore cartridges from his possession.

Praveen, 45, a resident of South Delhi's Malviya Nagar, worked as a property dealer in Aaya Nagar, said police.

AIM IS TO ENSURE EVERY ADULT GETS TO BUILD SAFE LIFE, SAYS CM

'To build self-reliant future': CM announces aftercare scheme for young adults leaving orphanage

Devansh Mittal
New Delhi, May 10

ASSISTANCE FOR higher education, access to skill development and vocational training programmes are among the highlights of a new government scheme announced by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday for the rehabilitation and support of young people leaving institutional care after turning 18.

Stating that the government's responsibility does not end with providing shelter and protection to orphans and children in child care institutions, the CM said that the 'Aftercare Scheme for Young Persons' — launched on the occasion of Mother's Day — includes monthly stipends, counselling, mentoring, rehabilitation and emergency assistance.

"Mother's Day reminds us that every child deserves protection, care, guidance and the opportunity to move forward in life. The aim is to ensure that every child and young adult gets the opportunity to build a safe, dignified and self-reliant future," Gupta said as she visited the Village Cottage Home in Lajpat Nagar on Sunday and interacted with children at the facility, run by the Women and Child Development Department.

An allocation of Rs 3.5 crore was made in Delhi's budget



Chief Minister Rekha Gupta visited Village Cottage Home in Lajpat Nagar to mark Mother's Day on Sunday. X/GUPTA, REKHA

2026-27, tabled in the Assembly in March.

According to the government, nearly 150 to 200 young people leave child care institutions in Delhi every year after turning 18 and many end up struggling with continuing education, skill development, employment and starting an independent life.

Several of them lack family support or a secure environment, she said. She added that children and young people receiving assistance under sponsorship and foster care programmes also require guidance, education, skill development and rehabilitation support as they enter adulthood.

Gupta said the government's approach goes beyond institutional care and focuses on preparing children for

life ahead.

As part of the scheme, approved under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, the government will also facilitate internships and employment opportunities for beneficiaries. The government said the scheme includes emergency assistance. Beneficiaries will be identified through need-based assessments, and individual care plans will be prepared for each of them.

Delhi, Gupta said, currently has 88 child care institutions, run jointly by the government and NGOs, which provide care, education, rehabilitation and protection to children up to the age of 18.

She added that the city also has two aftercare homes where young adults aged above 18 are

Delhi, Gupta said, currently has 88 child care institutions, run jointly by the government and NGOs

provided accommodation, food and educational support to help them transition towards independent living.

Regular monitoring and review of aftercare services will also be carried out at both the state and district levels. The government said a State Aftercare Committee, headed by the Women and Child Development Secretary will also be constituted to oversee policy-making and monitoring of the scheme. District-level committees, headed by District Magistrates will assess rehabilitation needs and review individual care plans.

The Chief Minister said the Delhi government will continue working with various departments and partner organisations to connect aftercare youth with internships, jobs, skill programmes and livelihood opportunities.

"The Delhi government stands firmly with every child and young person who needs support to build a better future," she said.

• Skywatch



Forecast: May 11, 2026

Cloudy sky. Very light to light rain with thunderstorm, lightning

MAX: 37-39

0.5°C below normal

MIN: 25-27

1.6°C above normal

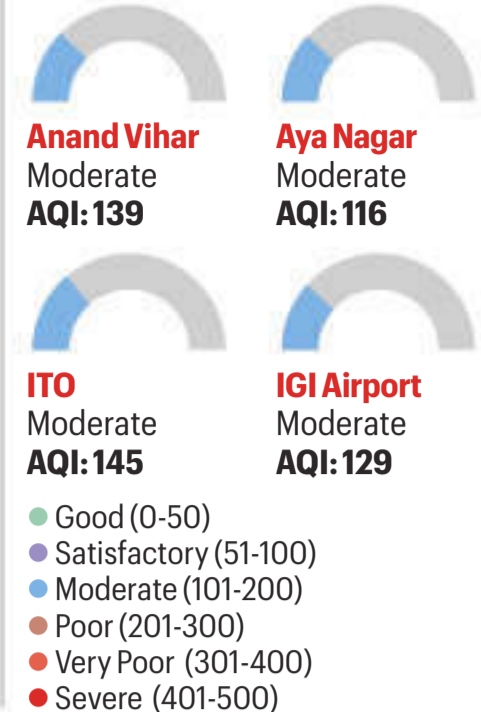
• Sunrise: 5:33 AM (May 12)

• Sunset: 7:02 PM (May 11)

• Moonrise: 2:17 AM (May 12)

• Moonset: 1:22 PM (May 11)

• AQITracker



• BRIEFLY

Rescue drive for destitute persons starts today

THE DELHI government will launch a five-day rescue and service drive for destitute persons from May 11 to 15. Social Welfare Minister Ravinder Indraj Singh Saturday said the campaign will be jointly organised by the Social Welfare department, Apna Ghar Ashram and Seva Bharti Delhi Prant. He said the campaign for needy, helpless and destitute persons, to be held across all 13 districts, aims to rescue destitute individuals and bring them to shelter homes, where arrangements will be made for their treatment, care and rehabilitation. He said 19 vehicles will be deployed for the rescue operation across Delhi, and more than 300 people are expected to receive assistance during the five-day drive. PTI

Follow traffic rules, cooperate with police: LG

DELHI LIEUTENANT Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu Sunday urged people to follow traffic rules and cooperate with the traffic police in ensuring safer and smoother movement on city roads. In a post on X, Sandhu said adherence to traffic regulations is an essential civic responsibility and important for reducing congestion, preventing accidents and lowering pollution caused by vehicles stuck in traffic snarls. "I have directed traffic police to expand its enforcement drive across Delhi. You can also empower this movement by using the 'Traffic Prahari' app to report these violations..." he said. The LG also called upon residents to support the authorities in building a "better capital for all". PTI

ADVERTORIAL | An initiative by **RED**
Read. Engage. Deliver.

NATIONAL TECHNOLOGY DAY

Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies-Technical Campus VIPS-TC Emerges as a Cutting-Edge Hub for Computer Science Education

The Vivekananda School of Engineering and Technology (VSET), under the aegis of VIPS-TC, is fast emerging as a state-of-the-art centre for computer science education, reflecting

the vision of Dr SC Vats, founder of the Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies (VIPS)-Technical Campus. Built on a legacy of academic excellence since 2000, VSET aims to blend

Indian values with global technological standards. Equipped with advanced infrastructure such as the NVIDIA Data Center and a Quantum Computing Lab, VSET provides students with hands-on ex-

VIVEKANANDA INSTITUTE OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES-TECHNICAL CAMPUS
Grade A++ Accredited Institution by NAAC
Affiliated to GGSIP University, Delhi; Recognized by Bar Council of India and AICTE;
NBA Accredited for MCA Programme; Recognized under Section 2(f) by UGC;
An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Institution

SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY

Dr SC Vats, Founder-Chairman, VIPS-TC

COURSES OFFERED B.TECH PROGRAMMES

- ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE & DATA SCIENCE (AI&DS)
- ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE & MACHINE LEARNING (AI&ML)
- INDUSTRIAL INTERNET OF THINGS (IIOT)
- COMPUTER SCIENCE & ENGINEERING (CSE)
- ELECTRONICS ENGINEERING (VLSI DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY)
- COMPUTER SCIENCE & ENGINEERING (CYBER SECURITY)
- COMPUTER SCIENCE & APPLIED MATHEMATICS

SHAPING FUTURE READY INNOVATORS

Key Highlights:

- Most of the faculty members hold doctoral degrees from reputed Government and State universities and have strong research publications and patents
- Two High-Power Computing Centres supporting advanced simulations, big data processing, and AI development
- Cutting-Edge Labs dedicated to VLSI Design Lab, Industrial IIOT (IIoT), Artificial Intelligence & Data Science, Applied Mathematics, and Cyber Security, nurturing inter-disciplinary learning and innovation.
- AICTE Drone Lab and AICTE IDEA Lab, igniting creativity and practical problem-solving through hands-on projects and prototyping.
- Strategic MoUs with IITs, NIT, top-tier Institutions and industries, ensuring robust faculty development, student internships, and collaborative research.
- Dedicated Career Development Centre (CDC) focussed on career readiness, skill enhancement, internships, and campus placements.
- Excellent Placement Record, with students excelling in top-notch national and multinational organizations across emerging technology sectors.

All admissions for the session 2026-27 would be as per the GGSIP University guidelines (refer University's website www.ipu.ac.in)

AU-Block (Outer Ring Road), Pitampura, Delhi-110034
Close to Haiderpur Village Metro Station, Haiderpur Badli Mor Metro Station (0.5 Km) and Madhuban Chowk Metro Station (1 Km)
Landline : +91 (11) 27341019 | 27343404 | 02 | 03
Mobile : +91 9773773584 | 9319299512 | 9319299513 | 9319299515

@DelhiVIPS @delhivips @VIPS_Delhi
school/vivekananda-institute-of-professional-studies

www.vips.edu

India's Journey Towards Global Technological Leadership

From Pokhran's historic breakthrough to an AI-driven future, the country accelerates its journey toward global technological leadership.

India observes National Technology Day annually on 11 May, reflecting the country's technological ambition and evolving innovation ecosystem. What began as a tribute to a defining scientific milestone has now evolved into a broader celebration of India's journey from technological dependency to increasing self-reliance and global competitiveness.

From rural innovation hubs to cutting-edge research labs, India's technology landscape continues to expand in both scale and sophistication. The day highlights the collaborative efforts of academia, industry, and government in driving innovation and supporting the nation's technological growth.

A day rooted in scientific achievement
National Technology Day traces its origin to 11 May 1998, when India conducted the Pokhran nuclear tests under Operation Shakti, establishing itself as a nuclear power. Declared officially in 1999 by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the day honours scientists, engineers, and innovators who contributed to India's technological progress. It also commemorates the successful test flight of the indigenous Hansa-3 aircraft and the launch of the Trishul missile, marking a broader technological leap.

Over the years, the day has become more than a remembrance of past achievements. It now serves as a platform to encourage research, innovation, and technological advancement across sectors, reflecting India's aspiration to emerge as a global innovation leader.

Driving innovation-led growth
This year's National Technology Day theme focuses on responsible innovation and inclusive growth, emphasising ethical and sustainable use of technology. It highlights the need to bridge digital gaps between rural and urban India while encouraging progress in Artificial Intelligence, semiconductors, and clean energy. In recent years, the emphasis has increasingly shifted toward sustainability, digital transformation, and indigenous innovation, aligning technological advancement with India's economic and environmental priorities.

Building India's innovation ecosystem
While premier institutes such as IITs often dominate headlines, private engineering colleges have also emerged as important contributors to India's innovation ecosystem. Institutions across the country are investing in incubation centres, industry collaborations, research labs, and hands-on learning environments that encourage students to move beyond theory into



Celebrated on 11 May, National Technology Day reflects India's technological ambition and evolving innovation ecosystem. From fintech to clean energy, startups are driving innovation and strengthening India's position as a global technology powerhouse.

problem-solving and product development.

Their role is especially significant in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, where they help nurture local talent and bridge regional disparities in access to technology education. By aligning curricula with emerging fields such as data science, robotics, and cybersecurity, these institutions are preparing students for the demands of future industries.

India's rise as a global technology powerhouse
India's startup ecosystem has grown rapidly over the past decade, becoming one of the largest in the world. From fintech and edtech to clean energy, startups are driving innovation across sectors and creating technology-led solutions to complex societal challenges.

Government initiatives, incubators, and rising venture capital investments have created a favourable environment for entrepreneurship. According to industry projections, India's technology sector could reach \$500 billion in revenue by 2030, supported by a growing workforce and strong startup pipeline.

Hackathons, innovation summits, and startup com-

petitions continue to encourage experimentation and scalable solutions in areas such as healthcare, finance, and digital governance, fostering a culture of innovation and risk-taking.

Emerging technologies shaping the future
Artificial Intelligence and other emerging technologies are redefining innovation in India. Across healthcare, agriculture, governance, and financial services, AI is enabling transformative change and improving efficiency.

India's policy framework increasingly reflects this shift, with educational reforms integrating AI and computational thinking into curricula to prepare students for a technology-driven future. Alongside AI, technologies such as blockchain, quantum computing, and the Internet of Things (IIoT) are also gaining traction.

At the same time, rapid technological advancement raises important concerns around ethics, data privacy, and workforce adaptation. Addressing these challenges will be essential to ensuring that innovation remains inclusive and sustainable.

The road ahead
National Technology Day marks an important milestone in India's journey toward becoming a global technology leader. From the achievements of 1998 to today's focus on AI-driven innovation, the day reflects both national pride and future potential.

As educational institutions nurture talent, startups push boundaries, and emerging technologies redefine possibilities, India's innovation ecosystem appears poised for sustained growth. The challenge now lies in ensuring that this progress translates into inclusive development and global competitiveness. National Technology Day is therefore not only a celebration of past achievements, but also a call to shape the future responsibly.



Sharda University

Decoding the Future Language of Technology

Sharda University has emerged as one of India's most future-focused institutions, building an ecosystem where research, artificial intelligence, industry collaboration, and innovation converge to shape the next generation of technology leaders. Ranked among India's top 100 universities in the NIRF 2025 rankings and ranked #17 in India by 'THE University Rankings 2026', the university today hosts students from over 95 countries and is steadily strengthening its position as a truly AI-enabled campus aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat

Building a Strong Research Ecosystem

At the heart of Sharda University's growth lies a strong research culture. The university has produced over 9,300 Scopus-indexed publications, including more than 6,000 linked to Sustainable Development Goals, while maintaining a Scopus H Index of 110. More than half of its recent publications have appeared in Q1 and Q2 journals, reflecting the quality and impact of its academic output. Outstanding faculty members are ranked among the world's top 2% scientists, particularly in fields such as Computer Science, Artificial Intelligence, and Image Processing.

Significant government funding from agencies including ISRO, DRDO, DST, DBT, ICMR, CSIR, and ICSSR supports the university's research momentum. This support has enabled the development of advanced laboratories, high-end instrumentation, interdisciplinary research centres, and a thriving innovation ecosystem.



Mr. John T. Chambers, former Executive Chairman and CEO of Cisco Systems, felicitated by Mr. P. K. Gupta, Chancellor, during the 8th Convocation of Sharda University.



Professor Emeritus, Seyed E. Hasnain, Padmashri renowned for his work in DNA fingerprinting and TB speaking at TEDx talks



emerging areas including Artificial Intelligence and Knowledge Graph technologies.

On the industry side, the university's partnership with Ulptra provides students with structured access to internships and placement pathways in advanced AI applications, especially around Knowledge Graph technologies. Collaboration with the XFR Group takes this further, enabling students to contribute to specialised AI consulting and solution delivery for enterprises in regions including Central and Latin America.

Student Innovation & Future Technologies

Innovation and problem-solving are deeply embedded within campus culture. Events such as the Technovation Hackathon expose students to real-world challenges across AI, robotics, and emerging technologies. Students are encouraged to build practical solutions through interdisciplinary collaboration, resulting in projects such as humanoid robots, electric mobility solutions, hybrid solar-electric vehicles, and smart environmental systems.

As India moves towards a research-driven and technology-powered economy, Sharda University is positioning itself not just as an educational institution, but as a hub of innovation, industry collaboration, and future-ready talent development.



Innovation, Patents & Entrepreneurship

Through its Research and Development Cell (RDC) and Intellectual Property Facilitation Centre (IPFC), Sharda actively supports patent awareness, filing, protection, and commercialisation.

"Among India's top universities with the highest patent success rate (including IITs & NITs). 912 patents published & 234 awarded (an impressive 26% success rate)"

Research at Sharda University extends beyond academic publication into entrepreneurship and startup development. Through Sharda Launchpad, a DST-supported incubation centre, the university has supported more than 100 startups with mentoring, infrastructure, seed funding opportunities, and industry partnerships.

Supercomputing & AI-Driven Research

One of the university's most significant technological assets is its fourth-generation NVIDIA DGX H100 supercomputer, placing it among a select group of private universities in India with advanced supercomputing capabilities. The system enables large-scale AI model training, high-performance computation, and advanced simulations across disciplines.

Supporting this infrastructure is the Centre for Artificial Intelligence in Medicine, Imaging and Forensics (CAIMIF), which focuses on applying AI and machine learning to healthcare, imaging, and forensic sciences. AI applications at Sharda span areas such as speech forensics, quantum machine learning, geospatial systems, knowledge graphs, digital twins, and large language models.

"Sharda University's Drone Centre of Excellence trains students in UAV technologies

for applications in agriculture, logistics, disaster management, and defence."

AI-Powered Healthcare, Dental Innovation & Biotechnology Research

Sharda University integrates advanced healthcare infrastructure with AI-driven research across medicine, dental sciences, and biotechnology. Its on-campus hospitals - Sharda Hospital and ShardaCare - Healthcity support real-time clinical research through digital healthcare systems, advanced diagnostics, and AI-enabled patient care. The School of Dental Sciences (SDS) further strengthens this ecosystem with CBCT imaging, CAD/CAM laboratories, regenerative dentistry, and research in AI-assisted diagnostics and maxillofacial radiology.

The Sharda School of Bio-Science and Technology advances research in Molecular Biology, Immunology, Cancer Biology, Agricultural Biotechnology, and drug delivery

systems, supported by major government-funded initiatives.

Excellence in Virology & Immunology Research

The Centre of Excellence in Virology & Immunology is actively engaged in pioneering research across critical areas including respiratory viruses such as SARS-CoV-2, Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) and Hepatocellular Carcinoma, Epstein-Barr Virus, Dengue Virus, Breast Cancer and Autoimmune Diseases.

Global Collaborations & Industry Partnerships

The university's international collaborations strengthen its research ecosystem through partnerships with institutions from U.S., Germany, France & Mexico. These collaborations enable joint research, faculty exchange, and academic cooperation in

THE SHARDA VISION: THREE DECADES OF TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

A Legacy Rooted in Service, Realized Through Excellence



"The next 25 years belong to India, driven by Critical Thinkers, Empathetic Leaders and Creative Entrepreneurs."

Shri P.K. Gupta
Founder, Sharda Group
Chancellor, Sharda University

Established in 1995, the Sharda Group emerged not merely as an educational enterprise, but as a consecration to a higher purpose: the democratization of world-class education and the cultivation of global citizens rooted in Indian values. What began as an aspiration to deliver internationally benchmarked learning-spanning Education, Healthcare, Information Technology, Management, Hospitality, Engineering, and beyond - has evolved into one of India's most distinguished multi-disciplinary educational conglomerates.

The Founder's Vision

Every institution carries within it the imprint of its founder's values. The Sharda Group's journey - from a modest beginning in Agra to a multinational presence - reflects a singular commitment: education is not a privilege to be rationed, but a right to be expanded.

The founder's journey through:

- The establishment of one of the first private engineering colleges in Uttar Pradesh, preventing the talent drain that once plagued the region
- The creation of a globally recognized university that now serves as a model for private higher education in India
- The construction of a healthcare ecosystem that places patient care and medical education in inseparable alignment
- The founding of an international school that redefines excellence in K-12 education

...is a narrative of relentless institution-building, guided by the belief that quality education transforms not just individuals, but entire societies.

Sharda University, Greater Noida

Founded in 2009 through an Act of the Uttar Pradesh Legislature, Sharda University represents the maturation of a dream that began in the corridors of the Historical City of Taj Mahal. Sharda University today hosts students from 95+ countries, creating a vibrant tapestry of cultures, perspectives and aspirations.

Sharda University, Agra

Established through an act of the Uttar Pradesh State Legislature in 2024, Sharda University Agra is both an homage to the founder's birthplace and a strategic intervention in a region of immense cultural significance but limited educational infrastructure.

Sharda Hospital, Sharda School of Medical Sciences & Sharda Care-Healthcity

Sharda Hospital is a 1200+ bedded NABH-accredited super speciality hospital. Established in 2006, the hospital is committed to delivering affordable healthcare while advancing excellence in medical research and education. Sharda Care - Healthcity is a state-of-the-art 600+ bedded NABH-accredited healthcare facility where compassion meets clinical excellence. Spread across over one million sq. ft., it offers seamless care, powered by advanced medical technology and highly experienced doctors.

Sharda World School

Sharda World School, established as India's first international school co-located with a university campus, represents a pioneering model of K-12 education. By exposing young learners to university-level resources and global standards, Sharda World School does not merely prepare students for the future - it invites them to shape it.

Sharda University, Uzbekistan

In 2019, Sharda University became the first independent Indian private university established in Central Asia, specifically in Uzbekistan. This was not an act of institutional expansion alone, but a fulfillment of India's soft-power mandate and a recognition of Sharda's capacity to export its educational model.

The Path Forward

By 2040, Sharda University aims to be recognized not merely as one of India's top institutions, but as a global reference point for excellence in multidisciplinary education, research-driven innovation, and values-centered leadership development.

TOP RECOGNITIONS

87th nirf University Category 2025 Rank in

301-350 THE World University Rankings 2026 Asia University Ranking

NBA B.Tech - CSE | Civil | ME Biotech | EEE | ECE MBA | Pharmacy NATIONAL BOARD OF ACCREDITATION

3rd Ranked in North India for Engineering (2025) ENGINEERING

401-500 THE World University Rankings 2026 Engineering Ranking

UG/PG/ Ph.D. PROGRAMMES OFFERED

Engineering • Management • Medical • Dental Biotechnology • Computer Applications Genetic Engineering • Stem Cell & Tissue Engg. Commerce • Food Science & Tech. • Nursing Animation, VFX & Gaming Design • Languages Film, TV & OTT Production • Physiotherapy Journalism & Mass Comm. • Paramedical Humanities & Social Sciences • Pharmacy

UPTO 100% SCHOLARSHIP FOR MERITORIOUS STUDENTS



Sharda University, Greater Noida



Sharda University, Agra



Sharda University, Uzbekistan



Sharda Care - Health City



Sharda World School



Campus: Plot No. 32, 34, Knowledge Park-III, Greater Noida (Delhi-NCR)



0120-4570000



www.sharda.ac.in

ELDERLY SEEK SECURITY IN THE PROMISE OF SPECIALISED CARE

Greying NCR fuels senior living boom in Gurgaon

Abhimanyu Hazarika & Devansh Mittal
Gurgaon, May 10

WHEN 72-YEAR-OLD Deepak Chatterjee told his daughters he planned to move into a dedicated senior living project, they had only one question: Why?

To which Chatterjee, a former MD and CEO of SBI Mutual Funds and currently chairperson of the UTI Asset Management board, had only one answer: Peace of mind, for both generations.

This story, in short, of the Chatterjees, who currently live in Vasant Kunj in South Delhi, is illustrative of a growing niche among the upper middle class of Delhi-NCR seeking specialised housing in their senior years.

An increasing elderly population and the nuclearisation of families, with both spouses working, has made such dedicated residences an increasingly attractive market, one that is only set to grow, say developers and real estate consultants.

The Indian Express spoke to real estate developers, senior citizens who have invested in dedicated living spaces, and government officials in the National Capital Region (NCR), and found several options catering to this growing trend – from independent residences and care homes to integrated intergenerational communities.

Market studies show that Gurgaon has emerged as the epicentre of this growing industry, boosted by a wealthier catchment group, favourable regulations, and the availability of real estate. A recent benchmarking study by Savills found that approximately

Gurgaon has emerged as the epicentre of the growing senior living industry in Delhi-NCR, boosted by a wealthier catchment group, favourable regulations, and the relatively easy availability of real estate.



Clockwise (from top): Deepak Chatterjee and his wife have purchased a 2 BHK flat at Advait at Nirvana Country; Advait senior living homes by Pioneer Urban and its interiors; Epoch Elder Care home (titled Gustav) at Mayfield Garden, which specialises in care of dementia patients. EXPRESS

Real estate major DLF formally announced its first dedicated senior living project in Gurgaon at the start of this year

8% of Gurgaon's population is in the 60-plus age bracket. More significantly for the luxury housing segment, 37% of the city's population earns more than Rs 10 lakh annually, making those who fall under both categories natural candidates for premium senior or assisted living.

Real estate major DLF formally announced its first dedicated senior living project in Gurgaon at the start of this year.

But, first the numbers on why this trend is trending.

The market and the regulations

Mordor Intelligence's 2026 framework values India's senior living market at roughly \$4.47 billion this year, projecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 26% through 2031. Outright sale, or freehold models, remain the preferred approach, accounting for more than 62% of market share, as buyers treat units as appreciating assets.

CBRE's Residential Market Outlook 2026, released in March, flags senior living as a primary growth theme for institutional capital, noting that a "flight-to-quality" trend is pushing affluent buyers, particularly NRIs securing homes for aging parents, to demand global service and healthcare benchmarks.

Regulation, too, is catching up.

At the end of 2024, the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) introduced a separate accreditation for operational senior care homes with quarterly key performance indicators to be submitted over a four-year cycle. The key focus: facility management and safety; health, hygiene and infection control; resident engagement.

Last month, the Haryana government raised the maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR; the ratio of a building's total constructed floor area to the size of the land plot on which it is built) for senior living colonies from 2.25 to 3.0. The revision allows builders to dedicate more space to medical and holistic care facilities without sacrificing sellable residential area, making senior living a more commercially viable asset.

Independent residences: 'Location, facilities'

The Chatterjees wanted a space that would be conducive for older people. "What was on our mind is how do we take care of ourselves at our old age. We have two daughters; life is different. Those who are working often find it difficult to take care of aging parents," the former finance specialist said. The couple first considered an Ashiana senior living project at Bhiwadi, south of Gurgaon in Rajasthan, which is part of Delhi-NCR. "Through a friend's reference, we booked it just before the pandemic, took delivery in 2021, and put the unit on rent," Chatterjee said. Subsequently, the couple saw an ad for Advait, a project by Pioneer

KEY FACTS

BIG PICTURE: India's senior living market is valued at \$4.47 billion in 2026, projected to grow at 26% annually through 2031

POTENTIAL: Around 8% of Gurgaon's population is aged 60 and above; 37% earn over Rs 10 lakh annually

COSTS: Assisted living in Gurgaon could cost between Rs 85,000 and Rs 2 lakh per person per month, independent senior living units priced between Rs 3.5 crore and Rs 4 crore

Urban at Nirvana Country in Gurgaon. Its location in the heart of the city, close to major hospitals, presented an important advantage. They purchased a unit in 2024, and expect possession formalities to begin in December this year.

Spread across 2.6 acres in Sector 50, Advait features 164 two-bedroom residences across four 18-storey towers, each priced between Rs 3.5 crore and Rs 4 crore. The project has a Haryana RERA senior living licence, which mandates safety and accessibility features. Apartments are designed with anti-skid flooring, wider doors, and adequate wheelchair-turning radius. Homes are fitted with panic alarms, two-way switches, and electrical controls at accessible heights. Washrooms have grab bars, rounded corners, raised seat heights, and heat pumps for instant hot water. A specialised air filtration system, officials claim, maintains indoor AQI between 40 and 70 even during the peak pollution months.

The property hosts a Fortis medical centre with a pharmacy, physiotherapy room, and consultation spaces, along with 24-hour nursing, on-site doctors, nutritionists, and priority homecare services. A

35,000-sq-foot clubhouse includes an acupuncture path, meditation garden, hydrotherapy area, and wellness centre.

Although they are currently fit and active, the Chatterjees said their decision was made easier by the promise of specialised life care.

"We told our daughters that we do not want you to worry and instead live life comfortably. End-of-life care is also getting specialised. Our friends live all over Delhi-NCR. If we had stronger connections around our (current) home, maybe that would have delayed our decision," Chatterjee said.

Care homes: 'Better than our home'

Not every care-home model involves purchasing property, according to developers. There is an option for elders who need consistent medical attention that is more than a family can typically provide but not so much that hospitalisation would be needed. So, residents check in for the long term, receive round-the-clock medical supervision, and pay a monthly rent.

Epoch currently operates four such assisted living homes in Gurgaon, with a focus

on specialised senior care, particularly for those with dementia. Gustav, its Mayfield Garden facility that was set up in 2024, is a four-storey property with 38 beds, located close to CK Birla Hospital. There is a reading room and cognitive activity spaces in the basement. Tariffs average Rs 1.3 lakh per person per month, starting at Rs 85,000 for twin-sharing and going up to Rs 2 lakh depending on the level of personalised care required. The facility holds a medico-assisted living licence from the Town and Country Planning Department.

Epoch CEO Neha Sinha acknowledged that these facilities are often the last resort for families that have exhausted other options. "We like to do long-term stays, so we have started offering trials. About 45% of our elders are from NRI families, from the US and UK, as of now. Unlike the other models that are hospitality, ours is about care," Sinha said, adding that 95% of move-in agreements are for life, with the remainder being post-surgical short stays.

Asked what typically brings a family to the facility, she said, "It is mostly the adult child that brings the elders in, after trying home care and resident nurses. It is typically the primary caregiver who comes, and in some cases the spouse – very rarely do elders admit themselves. In an old-age home, you will not get person-centric care. Here, I can tailor-make plans. About 70% of our elders have chronic neurodegenerative conditions."

One resident, Dr D C Sinha (83), who has been a professor at medical colleges in Rajasthan and in Australia, said: "We moved

There is also an option for elders who need consistent medical attention, more than a family can provide but less than hospitalisation

here after one of my sons moved abroad. *Ya-haangharse bhi achchha hai.* (This is better than our home.) There was no problem adjusting. I get my meals and watch TV as per my time and take part in activities."

Integrated communities: 'Want young people nearby'

There are some who are not yet convinced the model can keep scaling.

"In our country, people still believe in living with and taking care of parents, and parents too want to be around healthy people, not with those who are sick. This kind of space will work only with strong integration with medical players and in locations close to hospitals. And the properties will not have much resale value as an investment since they can only be bought by seniors. Why would a family living in a 3 or 4 BHK then want to keep their parents elsewhere?" Abhishek Bhardwaj, founder of Kalpvriksha Realty, said.

Such concerns have shaped the approach of at least one developer. Antara, the senior living arm of the Max Group, has launched Estate 360, an intergenerational community on the Dwarka Expressway.

"We were getting a lot of feedback from seniors that they don't want to see just old people around themselves. They also want younger people nearby. So we launched an intergenerational project in which Max Estates is building some towers, while we are building some," said Rajit Mehta, MD and CEO of Antara Senior Living.

Antara has launched 1,400 units, of which 1,000 have been offered for sale and 950 have been sold. The company also operates around 200 care home beds across Gurgaon and Noida.

WANTED BY SECURITY AGENCIES IN INDIA FOR TERROR-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Radicalising, recruiting youth: Pak gangster 'trying to expand network in India'

Alok Singh
New Delhi, May 10

IN MARCH 2024, Shahzad Bhatti, a gangster from Pakistan who is now suspected to be in Dubai, was allegedly involved in orchestrating a grenade attack near the residence of YouTuber Rozer Sandhu in Punjab's Jalandhar. Since then, he has been linked to several major cases in India, including the murder of NCP leader Baba Siddique in 2024 in Mumbai – he allegedly helped key conspirator Zeeshan Akhtar flee India.

Over the last five months, Indian government agencies and authorities have found that Bhatti, believed to be linked to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), has been attempting to expand his network in India by radicalising unemployed youth and offering money to encourage terror activities in the country, said sources.

More than a dozen FIRs have been registered against Bhatti, aged around 45, in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttarakhand for allegedly recruiting youths to carry out terror activities. Against the backdrop of his expanding network in India, the National Investigation

Agency (NIA) has also registered two FIRs against him, *The Indian Express* has learnt. A majority of these FIRs are having the sections of the BNS including Section 152 (acts endangering sovereignty, unity and integrity of India).

Investigators suspect that Bhatti, who is a resident of Lahore, is operating from Dubai, but he keeps shuttling between different countries in the Middle East and Pakistan, said sources, adding that he is wanted by the security agencies in India. "However, Bhatti is neither an Indian citizen nor has he ever visited India. For extradition, agencies can coordinate with their counterparts in the countries from where he is operating through diplomatic channels to bring him to India, as was done in the cases of Tahawwur Rana and David Coleman Headley for their roles in the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks," said an officer.

Another officer said, "To control his activities of recruiting Indian youth through social media, agencies have taken down his accounts and other accounts linked to him. However, several new social media accounts keep mushrooming, continuing to lure young people."

Security ops related to Bhatti

NOVEMBER 30, 2025:

Hargunpreet arrested from Punjab's Ferozepur, Vikas Prajapati from Datia in Madhya Pradesh and Arif from Bijinor, UP, by Delhi Police's Special Cell. The accused were involved in throwing hand grenade at Punjab's Gurdaspur Police Station.

JANUARY 25: Raman Kumar alias Golu arrested for having links with Bhatti from Jammu by Punjab Police.

MARCH 20: Azim Rana and his nephew Azad Rajput were arrested from Hapur for



Shahzad Bhatti

doing recce of temples in National Capital Region and sending videos to Bhatti.

APRIL 8: Sunil arrested from Hanumangarh by Rajasthan Police.

APRIL 23: Habibulla Ali Khan from Meerut and Sameer Khan from Delhi's Seemapuri arrested for having links with Bhatti by UP STF.

MAY 7: Daniyal Aasray from Barabanki and Krishna Mishra from Kushi Nagar arrested by Uttar Pradesh's Anti Terrorist Squad.

Among the most recent cases linked to him, two young men were arrested from Madhya Pradesh in April. They were allegedly tasked to carry out grenade attack and firing outside the famous restaurants and

crowded places in Delhi-NCR. Recently, the Delhi Police's Special Cell arrested nine people from UP, MP, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Gujarat for alleged links with him. They were reportedly planning attacks

on a historic temple in the Capital, a well-known eatery on the Delhi-Sonapat highway, and a military camp in Haryana, sources said.

All these arrests have taken place through interstate coordination between various state police forces. Bhatti, said officers, has claimed in his social media videos that he has a gang of 200–300 youths spread across 16–17 countries around the world.

Sources said he may also be allegedly involved in two low-intensity blasts near BSF headquarters and Amritsar Cantt on May 5. The Delhi Police said Bhatti and his associates target young Indians through social media. They select potential recruits by scanning their social media profiles and lure them with money.

Handlers remotely control the entire operation, including reconnaissance, cash payments, logistics, and target selection. The structured terror module allegedly relies on monetary incentives, remote instructions, and disposable foot soldiers to carry out grenade attacks in public places in India, according to sources.

Police said the 2024 Gurdaspur attack was allegedly executed on Bhatti's direc-

tions, who coordinates using encrypted communication platforms.

Social media posts allegedly put up by him or related to him have also been scrutinised as part of the probes. In 2024, a purported 19-second video surfaced on social media that showed Lawrence Bishnoi speaking to him on the occasion of Eid. In March, the same year, he posted a video on Instagram, claiming responsibility at the residence of YouTuber Rozer Sandhu in Jalandhar.

In records available with Indian security agencies, he is said to have links to Rawalpindi-based politician and businessman Farukh Khokhar. Officials said that both Bhatti and Khokhar are very active on social media and often speak about their religion and make anti-India comments.

The relationship between Bhatti and Lawrence, however, allegedly soured after the Pahalgam terror attack in April, sources said.

Meanwhile, officers said Bhatti has also allegedly been involved in criminal activities, including bomb-making and the supply of illegal arms and ammunition to India, Dubai, US, and Canada.



Team Vijay: Strategists, loyalists & influencers in TN's new Cabinet

Arun Janardhanan
Chennai, May 10

THE NEW Tamil Nadu Cabinet sworn in alongside Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay on Sunday reflects the unusual architecture of the Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK).

First in the order is N "Bussy" Anand, Vijay's closest political organiser and TVK's general secretary. A former Puducherry legislator from the Bussy seat, he is the bridge between Vijay's fan-club universe and electoral politics. He converted welfare associations, blood donation networks and fan clubs into a political machine.

Aadhav Arjuna, the son-in-law of lottery baron Santiago Martin and a former DMK and VCK leader, represents the TVK's campaign machinery. He brings a mix of elite political access, booth-level management, youth mobilisation and social justice vocabulary.

Dr K G Arun Raj gives the ministry its technocratic face — a doctor who later joined the IRS and served in the I-T Department before taking voluntary retirement.

K A Sengottaiyan brings what the young party lacks: decades of legislative and ministerial experience in AIADMK, since the MGR era. The former AIADMK veteran gives Vijay's Cabinet administrative memory and a link to Tamil Nadu's older governance culture.

P Venkataraman is among Vijay's long-trusted institutional hands. Known within the Vijay ecosystem as a steady administrator who worked with him long before the TVK's formal launch, he represents continuity between Vijay Makkal Iyakkam — Vijay's social organisation — and the new government.

R Nirmal Kumar, a former BJP digital operator who later moved to the AIADMK before joining the TVK, embodies the party's post-TV politics. His contribution lies in turning fandom

Sri Lanka President congratulates CM

Colombo: President Anura Kumara Dissanayake Sunday congratulated TVK chief C. Joseph Vijay on being sworn in as the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister. In a social media post, he said Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu are "connected through history, enterprise, culture, and enduring people-to-people ties across generations". "Our future holds immense economic promise and opportunity as Sri Lanka and India continue to build ever closer ties and a stronger partnership," he said. PTI

into algorithms of building a disciplined digital campaign force.

Rajmohan Arumugam brings satire, screens and internet-era communication into government. He represents a new Tamil political grammar: less slogan, more meme; less platform speech, more conversational outrage and humour.

Dr T K Prabhu, a dentist-politician from Karaikudi, adds another professional face to the Cabinet. His rise from local organisation to ministerial office shows TVK's attempt to project educated, managerial credibility beyond cinema charisma.

The youngest and most striking entrant into the Cabinet is S Keerthana. At 29, the Sivakasi MLA brings generational change, gender representation and media fluency. Her ascent as a young woman minister from a politically masculine industrial belt gives Vijay's first ministry one of its sharpest visual messages.

By evening, the shape of the new government was clear: a Cabinet built from the strange new chemistry of Tamil Nadu politics — fan clubs, influencers, defectors, professionals and old warriors gathered around one actor-turned-CM.



(Anti-clockwise from above) Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and others applaud as newly elected CM C. Joseph Vijay signs documents at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Chennai on Sunday; Vijay chairs a review meeting after assuming office; his parents S A Chandrasekhar and Shoba Chandrasekhar at the swearing-in ceremony; actor Trisha Krishnan and others at the venue. PTI



'Parasitic party': Modi targets Cong for leaving ally DMK to join Vijay

Express News Service
Bengaluru, Hyderabad,
May 10

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi on Sunday labelled the Congress a "parasitic party" that betrays its allies at the first opportunity, in a reference to it breaking away from the DMK-led alliance in Tamil Nadu to support Vijay's TVK in forming a government in the state.

Speaking at a rally in Bengaluru, Modi used the collapse of the Congress-DMK alliance in Tamil Nadu to warn other regional parties. "The Congress's identity has now become one of a parasitic party. The first chance they get, they betray their allies," he said. He said the DMK had been a pillar of stability for the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre for 10 years. "The DMK worked every minute for the benefit of the Congress, helping them out of trouble several times," he said. "But what happened now? As soon as power shifted, the power-hungry Congress stabbed the DMK in the back at the first chance it got."

Modi alleged the Congress's new alignment with Vijay's TVK is a repeat of its "parasitic behaviour". The Congress is simply looking for a new "back to latch onto" to remain relevant in Tamil Nadu. He also mocked the

Congress's track record of anti-incumbency. "BJP governments are returning to power across India, but Congress can never retain a state. Within months, people realise their 'guarantees' are lies. They only know how to betray the public's trust."

He also took a dig at the rumoured friction over power-sharing within the Karnataka government. He said rather than addressing the public's grievances, the government spent most of its time resolving its own differences. "They are yet to decide how many days the current CM will stay. They have left the second person hanging, undecided whether to give him an opportunity or not," he said.

Later in the day, the PM reached Hyderabad, where he said the need of the hour was to use petroleum products with restraint. He said that over the past few years, India has been among the top nations globally in terms of solar power, and added that unprecedented work had been done in ethanol blending in petrol. Referring to the conflict in West Asia, Modi said, "Today, the need of the hour is to use petrol, gas, diesel and such things with great restraint. We have to use imported petro products as per need. This will not only save foreign exchange but reduce the adverse impact of war."



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy in Hyderabad on Sunday. PTI

Investment 'dhandapani'

LEADER OF Opposition Rahul Gandhi had a witty comeback to a social media post by his investment adviser, Muthukrishnan Dhandapani, praising the Congress leader for respecting professional relationships despite political differences. Dhandapani, who has been handling Gandhi's investments since 2013, said he has been a "strong supporter" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi "from 2014 to 2024" but that has not affected their working relationship. Responding to him, Gandhi quipped, "Muthu ji, your political views are your own — but please do speed up the returns on my investments."

Promises to Keep

AT THE launch of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta's books "The Bench, the Bar and the Bizarre" and "The Lawful and Awful" on Sunday, Union Home Minister Amit Shah was candid enough to admit that though the books were sent to him 25 days ago, he could not read them in detail as he was busy campaigning for the Assembly polls. Attorney General R Venkataramani, who spoke next, started his address with the declaration that he had read the books. Backing his claim with proof, he even held the books up to show the flags he had placed in between the pages.

Meet the Martins, embedded across parties in TN, Puducherry

Arun Janardhanan
Chennai, May 10

ON THE stage in Chennai where C. Joseph Vijay took oath as Tamil Nadu Chief Minister on Saturday, one of the new ministers who drew attention was Aadhav Arjuna, the ambitious political operator who had travelled through the DMK, the VCK, and finally the TVK, before landing at the centre of the state's new ruling arrangement.

Watching from the audience was his father-in-law, and lottery baron, Santiago Martin, mother-in-law Leema Rose Martin, and wife Daisy. Elsewhere in the political map sat another layer of the same family: Leema, now an AIADMK MLA in Tamil Nadu and Arjuna's brother-in-law Jose Charles Martin, founder of BJP ally Latchiya Jananayaga Katchi (LJK) and a newly elected legislator in Puducherry and likely, a minister soon. Few business families in South India today appear as politically diversified as the Martins. In Tamil Nadu and Puducherry's rapidly shifting post-poll landscape, members of the family are now spread across rival parties, rival alliances and, potentially, rival governments, a

distribution that increasingly resembles a carefully hedged political portfolio.

At the centre of Tamil Nadu's new power structure is Arjuna, who has emerged as one of the TVK's most visible organisers and strategists. Once a close aide within the DMK ecosystem and of M K Stalin's son-in-law Sabaresan, and later assuming a senior post in Thol Thirumavalavan's VCK, Arjuna joined Vijay after a bitter fallout with Thirumavalavan. Inside the TVK, he became central to campaign management, alliance outreach and booth-level operations.

A fast rise

Arjuna's rise has been unusually fast, even by Tamil Nadu standards. A former gym trainer who married into the Martin family, he gradually moved through business and political networks before positioning himself inside one of the state's most disruptive political movements. But while Arjuna now occupies office in a Vijay-led government, his extended family remains politically distributed elsewhere. Leema only recently entered the AIADMK after quitting the Indhiya Jananayaga



Katchi (LJK), where she spent 14 years. During the power-sharing negotiations last week, she unexpectedly became a central public figure after openly acknowledging talks between the TVK and the AIADMK over possible government formation.

Those talks, initiated partly through Arjuna's channels, briefly fuelled speculation that sections of the AIADMK could eventually support Vijay. Even now, political circles continue to discuss the possibility of a split in the AIADMK, maybe



TVK leader Aadhav Arjuna takes oath as minister in Chennai on Sunday; a videograb of Santiago Martin at the event; file photo of AIADMK MLA Leema Rose Martin

within a week, Leema could become one of the legislators drifting closer toward the TVK.

Meanwhile, in Puducherry, Jose has taken a sharply different route. The 37-year-old businessman founded the LJK and aligned it with the BJP-backed NDA alliance in Puducherry, where he won his first Assembly poll. Jose speaks more like a corporate strategist than a politician. During the campaigns, he spoke openly to *The Indian Express* about transforming Puducherry into "Singapore, Dubai

and Hong Kong", attracting foreign investment, and using business-style management to govern. "Our turnover is around Rs24,000 crore," he had said, referring to the broader family business network. "When we contribute so much to society, why can't we transform things?"

The Martin empire

The Martin family's political reach can't be separated from its business empire. Led by Santiago through Future Gaming and Hotel Services, the family built one of India's largest lottery operations, with ED filings previously estimating lottery-related turnover in the tens of thousands of crores. The firm also emerged as the single-largest purchaser of electoral bonds in India, buying bonds worth about Rs 1,368 crore between 2019 and 2024. That financial scale has long translated into political access across parties.

In Kerala, former CM V S Achuthanandan was the only leader who had targeted him as a symbol of the nexus between wealth and political influence. Yet the Martin network continued expanding. Now, instead of proximity to one party alone,

the family increasingly appears embedded across centres of power simultaneously.

Rift in the family

The arrangement has inevitably produced friction within the family too. Jose Charles Martin has publicly criticised Arjuna in unusually blunt language, accusing him of seeking power aggressively and trying to dominate family affairs. "He is desperate for power," he told *The Indian Express* in the interview. "We have seen money, we have seen power. But his approach is different."

On Sunday, hours after Vijay's swearing-in, Jose Charles again targeted his brother-in-law, publicly warning Chief Minister Vijay that he should remain cautious about corruption in his own circle. "Vijay should be watchful and not let Arjuna loot money or take commissions from the government," he said.

The remark revealed both the family tensions and the unusual nature of the Martin family's political reach: one relative attacking another even while occupying different ruling formations. If one door closes, another remains open.

'Better if you join me': PM jokes with Revanth

Nikhila Henry
Hyderabad, May 10

DURING PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's speech in Hyderabad as he inaugurated six development projects worth Rs 9,400 crore, he turned to Telangana Chief Minister and Congress leader A Revanth Reddy and joked that it would be "better if you join me".

"Whatever, the Central government (under former PM Manmohan Singh) gave Gujarat in 10 years (when Modi was Gujarat CM), I'm ready to give you... But the state will then be left with half of what it is securing from the Centre, and you won't be able to achieve your goals. That's why, it's better you join with me," Modi said with a smile, referring to a request made by Reddy in the latter's speech earlier that the Modi government should support Telangana like the Manmohan Singh government supported Gujarat.

"Revanthji had said that he would not make political statements. So, I also won't do that..."

The Railway Budget of undivided Andhra Pradesh was Rs 1,000 crore. But now, for Telangana alone, the Budget is over Rs 5,500 crore," he said.

In his speech held at HICC in Hyderabad, Modi said that Telangana greatly benefited from Central government projects and that the state would develop along with the country. The projects will help create thousands of jobs and also improve the connectivity of Telangana, he said. "The country is going on the 'reform express', and today's India is also manufacturing advanced infrastructure."

Reddy, meanwhile, referred to various development projects of the Centre and said that Telangana would contribute 10% of the \$3 trillion economy that the PM envisages. "For Telangana's development, please spend two hours, so that we can present our development proposals to you," Reddy told the PM. "Modiji is known for his big heart. I request him to turn towards Telangana and support our development projects."

BJP HAS ALWAYS CRITICISED 'DIVISIVE REGIONALISM'; DMK, TMC DEFEATS WILL FURTHER MUTE ANY CONTRARY VOICES

Not just 'Congress-mukt' Bharat, how state poll results fulfil another BJP objective

CAPITAL CONTEXT

BY LIZ MATHEW

A WEEKLY LOOK AT POLITICS IN A STATE FROM THE VANTAGE POINT OF NEW DELHI

WHILE THE BJP has long projected its aim of a "Congress-mukt Bharat", the party has also been on a political project to curtail the influence of regional parties. If many of these parties stood in the way of the BJP breaching frontiers that have eluded it, challenging its dominance, it is also an ideological battle, with regional forces, in the party's view, undermining national unity.

The BJP is significantly closer to realising this objective after the rout of the Trinamool Congress in the recent West Bengal elections. While the TMC faces a big challenge recovering from it, the polls also dealt a blow to another Opposition titan, the DMK, while the Left — reduced to a regional force after successive poll defeats — is now without power anywhere.

Their overthrow from positions of dominance follows the weakening of the RJD and BRS in, respectively, Bihar and Telangana. Even the JD(U) is now a pale shadow of what it was, clinging to the BJP in Bihar. Another regional force, the TDP, is happy being in the NDA

fold, as are small parties in the Northeast. The Farooq Abdullah-led National Conference is in power in Jammu and Kashmir, but knows better than to offend the Centre, while the BJD is struggling to keep its house together in Odisha.

In Maharashtra, the BJP has successfully chipped away at both the Shiv Sena and NCP, with splits leaving them dependent on the bigger partner. The BSP is little more than a cipher now, while the Samajwadi Party (SP) did get a bump in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls but has a mountain to climb in the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. After a debilitating split, the Aam Aadmi Party has a similar



Regional parties like the DMK have been the BJP's most vocal opponents, projecting the fight as defence of federal structure

uphill task in Punjab next year, even as the Akali Dal has failed to stem its slide.

Emphasising on 'One Nation', the BJP's top leaders in their informal interactions al-

ways express their disapproval at what they term "divisive regionalism", saying regional parties tend to prioritise local interests and caste-based and dynastic politics. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly targeted the RJD, DMK, SP and BRS, apart from the Congress, asking voters whether they want "the welfare of sons and daughters" by these parties, or vote for an organisation-first party like the BJP.

Over the next months, with the Assembly poll results getting reflected in Rajya Sabha arithmetics, the Left parties, DMK and TMC are set to lose further influence, with their voices diminished in Parliament.

As the Congress's footprint shrunk nationally in the past 11 years of the Modi-Shah-led BJP's rise, it is these powerful regional and smaller parties that had been the BJP's most strident opponents, projecting the fight as defence of federal structure to that of identities. The share of resources to states decided by the Finance Commission, the GST framework, the role of governors, the use of Central agencies, all helped them mount the charge that the Centre was concentrating power under the NDA government.

Recently, southern states ruled by the Congress and regional parties tapped into fears that the proposed delimitation

exercise would further limit their influence in a politics dominated by the north.

During the Budget Session of Parliament, regional parties hand in hand with the Congress moved a no-confidence motion against Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, accusing him of being partisan. The Opposition has also moved a motion seeking removal of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, for a second time, for alleged "proven misbehaviour" and partisan conduct.

These gestures were more about putting moral pressure than any numerical threat. After the poll losses, that moral plank is also dented.

Odisha: 4 cops suspended for failing to prevent lynching of GRP constable

Press Trust of India
Bhubaneswar, May 10

AT LEAST four policemen were suspended and two home guards were disengaged from service on Sunday within hours of Odisha Police's crime branch beginning a probe into the lynching of a Government Railway Police (GRP) constable near Bhubaneswar on May 7, officials said.

In addition, inspector-in-charge of Baliaanta police station Anil Kumar Parida has been attached to Bhubaneswar headquarters, officials said.

After a review meeting, Police Commissioner S Dev Datta Singh told reporters, "The four police personnel and two home guards have been taken to task because they failed to protect the life of a man from the mob, even as they reached the spot on time. The Crime Branch has been probing the case."

GRP constable Soumya Ranjan Swain was lynched by a mob on May 7 after a woman accused him of attempted rape. Police said 11 people have been arrested so far in connection with the incident.

DGP Y B Khurania said the meeting reviewed recent incidents in Baliaanta and Balipatna police station areas. "How such incidents took place and what needs to be done to restore a sense of security was discussed," he said.

SOLICITOR GENERAL TUSHAR MEHTA'S BOOK LAUNCH

Strength of democracy lies in institutional balance, says Shah

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 10

UNION HOME Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the strength of democracy comes not from confrontation between institutions, but from institutional balance and mutual respect for constitutional propriety.

Speaking at the launch of two books — "The Bench, the Bar and the Bizarre" and "The Lawful and Awful" — authored by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, Shah said: "The beauty of our democracy lies in the fact that the Constitution created institutions not to oppose one another, but to maintain balance among themselves."

He said, "This spirit must be understood in its true sense. The executive takes decisions, while the judiciary conducts a constitutional review of those decisions."

Shah said the makers of our Constitution drafted it with a spirit that carefully preserved dialogue, propriety and balance. "In 76 years, perhaps very few countries would have advanced while upholding all these constitutional conventions and values," he said.

"It is a matter of great satisfaction for all of us that, by and large, these conventions have remained intact in our country, and we have further



Chief Justice of India Surya Kant (second from left), Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Attorney General R Venkataramani at the book launch of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta (right), in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

strengthened them through traditions," the Union Minister said.

He said when he speaks of mutual propriety among institutions, "the spirit of the Constitution itself recognises and upholds it at several places", and added that everyone "should work together to further strengthen the well-balanced relationship between the executive and the judiciary that has evolved the last 76 years".

Shah said earlier he had refrained from making any comments on the domain of law, "but I have decided that in the near future I will certainly put forth my views in some forum".

"In the 76-year journey of our Constitution, we have deeply strengthened the roots of our democracy... We have certainly reinforced our multiparty democratic parliamentary system, and every change brought about through Parli-

ment and state legislatures in the country since 1947 has been accepted," said the Home Minister. This, he added, reflects the deep roots of our democracy, in which our Constitution, the people of the country, and our judiciary have made a significant contribution.

Shah said the people of the country have faith that if any injustice is done to them, the Constitution is alive and vigilant. "If their rights are violated,

the doors of justice remain open, and whenever the voice of a weak individual or a weaker viewpoint is suppressed, it will certainly be heard in the courts".

He said it is on the basis of these three fundamental pillars that our democracy has become strong, and broadly speaking, the common citizen's hope for justice is an important reflection of both social balance and the character of the nation.

MEA makes a new push for database on students abroad

Divya A
New Delhi, May 10

IN AN effort to build a comprehensive database of Indian students abroad, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has initiated awareness campaigns, asking students to register with the respective embassies and high commissions.

The move comes in the wake of the recent Russia-Ukraine and US-Iran conflicts, when a large number of Indian students reached out to the missions and had to be evacuated to safety.

While over a million Indians are estimated to be studying abroad, the government has no specific database, mostly depending on foreign countries which release their student visa numbers at the end of each year and Indian missions which collate data to arrive at its estimates.

In 2015, the MEA had launched the MADAD portal to serve as a consular grievance redressal platform, where Indian students were asked to register voluntarily. But it hasn't gained much traction — only 41,000 students have registered so far, according to the ministry's website.

The ministry is now planning to overhaul the portal or launch a new website for In-

dians going abroad for jobs and education.

According to sources, the awareness campaign is especially focussed on countries where Indian students comprise a large part of the international student population — like the United States, China, Malaysia, Germany and Canada — as well as in upcoming destinations which are emerging as new hubs for cheaper medical education, like Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

In Georgia, which has an estimated 23,000 Indian nationals — mostly medical students studying in and around Tbilisi — India recently appointed Amit Mishra as its first full-time ambassador. The Indian mission there has started an outreach to educational institutions and student groups to understand the issues they are facing, as also to advise them. "We have held several meetings and sessions with student groups and educational institutions over the past one month," Mishra told *The Indian Express* from Tbilisi.

Some students miss deadlines for their visas and other paperwork, there have also been cases of students engaging in petty crimes, leading to their disqualification from universities or action by authorities, he said.

Family searches for answers as 20-yr-old breadwinner falls to lure of terror money

ATS has said that Pakistan-based radical groups are using social media platforms to brainwash the youth

Manish Sahu
Lucknow, May 10

KRISHNA MISHRA was a troubled 20-year-old, says his family, struggling with drinking issues and forced to become the breadwinner at a young age. However, the allegations against him, leading to his arrest, have left the family based in Kushinagar on the Nepal border in shock.

The Uttar Pradesh Police have accused Krishna of links with Pakistani gangster Shahzad Bhatti, in a suspected plot to carry out terror attacks across the state. They arrested him from Gorakhpur last week, and Daniyal Ashraf, 23, of Barabanki the day after. As per police, the lure of easy money, apart from "glamour" was what drew the 20-year-old — who is unlettered and did odd jobs in Delhi — to the alleged terror network.

Officials said Mishra and Ashraf have told police that they first got in touch with Bhatti and other Pakistani key figures on Instagram, and that Bhatti promised to make them "heroes" in India if they fol-

lowed his directions. The ATS claims to have recovered a country-made 9mm pistol and cartridges from Ashraf, and a .315 bore country-made pistol with cartridges from Krishna.

The family said Krishna had to start working after his father Chotte Lal Mishra, 52, had to be admitted to a de-addiction centre, first in Gorakhpur and then Deoria due to his alcohol dependence. He has been at home in Belwa Misir area of Kushinagar since Krishna's arrest.

What Krishna earned helped support the family, including his mother Lali Devi and his elder sister Saloni, 25.

Lali said her husband had previously worked as an e-rickshaw driver, but worsening alcohol dependency left him incapable to continue. "After he was admitted to a de-addiction centre, we became dependent on Krishna's earnings." He sent Rs 5,000-Rs 6,000 home every month, with the rental income from a portion of the house that the family let out helping eke out a living, said Lali.

Neighbours said they saw Krishna "change" before their



The UP Police have accused Krishna of links with Pakistani gangster Shahzad Bhatti

eyes. Bittu Mishra said he mostly lived in Delhi, but whenever he was back for an occasional visit, he seemed to often be drunk.

Lali said that when Krishna was very young, all of them lived in Delhi and she did odd jobs to like her husband, taking the young boy along to work. Once Krishna grew older, he began working at a tea stall.

However, then came the Covid pandemic, and the family returned to Belwa Misir, selling their ancestral property to buy land and build a house in the village. "The family purchased land in Belwa Misir around eight years ago," said local corporator Babloo Kharwar.

Soon after the Covid restrictions were lifted, Krishna went back to Delhi in search of work. Lali said he spent around two to

three years working as a security guard at a public park, before he fell ill and returned to the village in January this year. After about a month, he went back to Delhi and, as per Lali, called to say he had not gone back to his security job but had taken up "private employment" in Delhi.

The Uttar Pradesh Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) is doing the groundwork before approaching the court to take police custody of Krishna and co-accused Ashraf for further interrogation in connection with the case.

The ATS has said that intelligence suggests that Pakistan-based terror groups are using social media platforms, including Instagram, to influence youth, recruit them as sleeper cells, and radicalise them for terror activities. Bhatti and his network, accused of being part of the plot, are ISI proxies, as per the ATS.

The agency says Krishna and Ashraf were in contact with Bhatti and his aide Abid Jatt, and were part of the plan to target key institutions, police stations, and outposts in Uttar Pradesh and other cities.

ATS officials claim to have found proof of "suspicious" activity tracking Bhatti's phone numbers, social media contacts, video call recordings, voice notes, and WhatsApp group calls.

• BRIEFLY



A damaged vehicle at the accident site in Hazaribagh on Sunday. PTI

JHARKHAND

Five killed, 20 injured in separate accidents in Hazaribagh, Garhwa

FIVE PERSONS were killed and over 20 injured in separate accidents in Jharkhand's Hazaribagh and Garhwa districts on Sunday, police said. Two drivers were killed and three persons injured in accidents that took place in quick succession within Gorha police station limits in Hazaribagh district, officials said. Barhi sub-divisional police officer Ajit Kumar Vimal said a pick-up van carrying tomatoes first hit a road divider and overturned near Gorha. In another accident in Garhwa district, three persons were killed and around 18 injured after a van collided with an autorickshaw near Dahe-riya on Shri Bansidhar-Bhavnathpur road, police said. SDPO Satyendra Narayan Singh said the accident happened when an auto was hit by a van from the opposite direction. PTI

IIT Bhubaneswar PhD scholar dies in hostel after fall

A PHD scholar at IIT Bhubaneswar has died after allegedly falling from the sixth floor of a hostel building on the campus, police said on Sunday. The deceased has been identified as Tanikonda Nishant Kumar, a research scholar in the department of electrical engineering and a native of Andhra Pradesh, they said. The incident occurred around 3.30 pm on Saturday when Kumar was found unconscious on the ground below the sixth-floor balcony of his room in A block of Brahmaputra Hall, according to an official statement. PTI

Karnataka: Boy killed in leopard attack, probe on

A 10-YEAR-OLD boy died in a leopard attack in Chamrajanagar district on Sunday, officials said. The deceased was identified as Harshith, a resident of Bengaluru, they said. The incident occurred near Nagamale in the Cauvery wildlife division, close to the Male Mahadeshwara Hills in Chamrajanagar district, officials said. According to forest officials, the boy had visited the Male Mahadeshwara temple at MM Hills with his family on Saturday. Forest department teams are trying to identify and track the leopard involved in the attack using thermal drones. PTI

Two Indians aboard ship with hantavirus cases evacuated to Netherlands

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 10

TWO INDIAN crew members on board the MV Hondius, which was at the centre of a hantavirus outbreak, have been evacuated to the Netherlands where they will be quarantined, according to the Indian embassy in Madrid. All the individuals on-board the ship reached Spain on Sunday.

"The passengers onboard disembarked from the ship, in accordance with the protocol established by the WHO and Spanish authorities.... As informed by the Spanish National Centre for Emergency Monitoring and Coordination (CENEM), the two Indian nationals who were travelling as crew members, have been evacuated to the Netherlands where they will be quarantined," the communication from the Indian Embassy in Spain said.

According to the current information available from the WHO, shared by health ministry officials, there were eight suspected cases of the infection on the vessel. Of these, five have been confirmed with laboratory tests. And, three deaths have been reported so far. The WHO was notified about the incident in the first week of this month.

Those who died included an adult male who developed fever, headache, and mild diarrhoea on April 6. He developed respiratory distress by April 7 and died the same day. An adult female, who was a close contact of the first person, developed gastrointestinal symptoms after disembarking at Saint Helena on April 24. Her health deteriorated during a flight to Johannesburg and died on April 26. An adult female, who got a fever and started feeling unwell on April 28, died with pneumonia on May 2.

TISS should move from 'Tata mode' to 'govt framework', says Vice-Chancellor

Pallavi Smart & Ritika Chopra
Mumbai, May 10

TATA INSTITUTE of Social Sciences (TISS) must now transition from a "Tata mode" of functioning to a "government-institution framework", said its Vice-Chancellor (V-C) Professor Badri Narayan Tiwari, who took over in 2025, while insisting that academic freedom and debate on campus would continue.

In an interview to *The Indian Express*, Tiwari, who is the first V-C appointed under the Centre's revised governance framework after the 2023 regulations expanded the government's role in TISS, said the institute had been unfairly stereotyped over the years as an "anti-government" campus despite its long history of working with governments across political dispensations on research, policy and social development. "There are a lot of stereo-

types about TISS, starting from how this is home to a particular ideology, everybody is a pro-tester here, everyone is anti-government. But this is all untrue," he said.

"TISS has always worked with the establishments... There are so many professors in the institute working on various policies, its implementations and process of social change, and they are working in those sectors for 20-30 years. All for poor, marginal and vulnerable sections of the society. This cannot be seen in any other university," added the V-C.

According to Tiwari, the institute's public image was shaped by a few highly visible incidents and individuals stereotyped over the years as an "anti-government" campus despite its long history of working with governments across political dispensations on research, policy and social development. "There are a lot of stereo-

types about TISS, starting from how this is home to a particular ideology, everybody is a pro-tester here, everyone is anti-government. But this is all untrue," he said.

Similarly, he said, "a certain section of professors having a particular ideological inclination got much more visibility", eventually shaping media and political narratives around TISS.

He also argued that "criticism should come with suggestions, not just opposition for its own sake" and that universities should primarily function as spaces for "academic engagement and research", not "political sloganeering".

Tiwari, a social scientist whose work has focused on folklore, marginalised communities and grassroots politics, previously headed the Govind Ballabh Pant Social Science Institute in Prayagraj.



PROF BADRI NARAYAN TIWARI
 VICE-CHANCELLOR, TISS

cluding concerns over autonomy, Tiwari said, "In many ways, TISS continues to function in what I call a 'Tata mode'... Many professors here are deeply committed to the institution and still want it to function in that earlier framework. But gradually we are moving towards a more government-institution model. I do not

mean that negatively. I mean bringing in greater accountability in the use of time and institutional resources."

According to Tiwari, the shift does not mean creating a "surveillance culture", but recognising that institutions funded by the government must function with greater accountability.

"Earlier, there was far greater flexibility, especially around external work and consultancies. That was more possible under the Tata Trust model. But when salaries come from government funding, there has to be greater accountability to institutional responsibilities as well," he said. "At the same time, I do not want to create a surveillance culture. We are not trying to police people. We want systems to function better."

On concerns that greater government involvement could eventually affect academic freedom and alter the nature of debate on campus, Tiwari insisted there had been "no instruction" to faculty members on what they could or could not teach. "Academic freedom will continue as it is. The same professors are teaching the same subjects as before," he said.

Responding to criticism that discussions and debates on campus had declined, Tiwari said,

"When I met PhD students within two months of joining, I asked them to submit proposals on the seminars they wanted to organise and the scholars they wanted to invite. We assured them of institutional support, but no proposal has come so far."

At the same time, Tiwari said TISS earlier had "a certain intellectual culture" with "a particular kind of discourse and invited speakers". "My attempt is not to stop that. Different kinds of people and ideas should continue coming to campus."

However, when asked whether criticism of the government itself was increasingly being viewed with suspicion inside institutions, Tiwari argued that criticism in universities should be "serious, constructive and suggestive". "If you say the government is doing something wrong, then you should also explain what exactly is wrong and what can be done differently. Policies should be

discussed seriously," he said.

"An academician should speak as an academician, not as an activist. I feel institutions should prioritise people who engage seriously with issues in an academic way. For instance, Prabhat Patnaik in JNU is a Left scholar, but he speaks as a scholar rather than as an activist. There are others who always speak in an activist mode... If you want to discuss policy, then invite people who have seriously researched that policy. But if someone only wants to use the campus as a political space, it becomes problematic," he added.

He also said universities should not become spaces for partisan politics. "If someone only wants to use the campus as a political space, then that becomes problematic," he said, adding that "social sciences are a difficult domain because people quickly

DON'T TURN PUNJAB INTO BENGAL: JAKHAR TO KEJRIWAL

AAP and BJP workers clash over Punjab minister's arrest

Raakhi Jagga Ludhiana, May 10

TENSION PREVAILED in several parts of Punjab Sunday as clashes and confrontations broke out between workers of the ruling AAP and the BJP during the former's protests against the ED arrest of minister Sanjeev Arora.



Police confront AAP and BJP workers during AAP's protest in Ludhiana on Sunday, GURMEET SINGH

At Balachaur in Nawanshahr, an argument erupted outside the BJP office when AAP workers arrived to protest. The situation escalated after Banga MLA Sukhwinder Kumar Sukhi, who had joined the AAP from the SAD in March 2025, along with AAP supporters, entered the BJP office where BJP district president Rajwinder Singh Lucky was present.

While BJP workers raised slogans demanding Arora's resignation, AAP workers countered with slogans against PM Narendra Modi and accused the BJP of misusing the ED as a political tool against opposition parties.

During the altercation, Lucky was heard telling police officers, "Take your MLA out of our office or later you will complain that the MLA has been beaten up by BJP workers. Everyone has the right to protest, but no one has the right to enter someone's office and in-

dulge in hooliganism." Punjab BJP working state president Ashwani Sharma later reached Nawanshahr, where he met party workers and approached the SSP seeking action against the MLA in the incident. In Bathinda, tension flared outside the BJP office after AAP workers, accompanied by MLAs Jagroop Singh Gill, Sukhveer Singh Maiserkhana and Balkar Sidhu, reached the spot to protest. BJP workers, led by district president Sarup Chand Singla, also gathered outside the office.

In Abohar, AAP workers, along with MLAs Jagdeep Singh Goldy Kamboj and Narinder Sawna, protested outside the residence of state BJP president Sunil Jakhar. Reacting strongly to the incidents, Jakhar warned AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal against "turning Punjab into Bengal", adding that action against "corrupt people looting Punjab" would continue.

hiana district president, alleged that BJP leaders and workers had gathered outside the office after receiving information that AAP workers were heading there to protest. Dhiman said that AAP MLAs Ashok Prashar Pappi, Kulwant Sidhu, Hardeep Singh Mundian, and Daljeet Singh Bhola, along with the Ludhiana mayor and other AAP leaders, were also present. "AAP workers had tried to enter our office two or three times before as well, and police failed to control them. On Sunday as well, police were protecting them. We will protest outside the office of the police commissioner on Monday."

It also underscored that committees required under FRA were constituted only two months before the Gram Sabhas were held, and 14 years after the FRA came into force.

GREAT NICOBAR PROJECT: PLEA CHALLENGING FOREST RIGHTS COMPLIANCE BEFORE CALCUTTA HC

'Identical words, common signatures': Gram Sabha resolutions questioned

Nikhil Ghanekar New Delhi, May 10

THREE GRAM Sabha resolutions cited by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration as proof of tribal consent to divert 166.10 sq km of forests for Great Nicobar project had consent of settlers rather than Nicobarese and Shompen tribes, and signatures of at least 60 persons were found on at least two of the three resolutions.

These submissions were made before the Calcutta High Court's Port Blair bench by the petitioner, former union government secretary Meena Gupta, who has filed a PIL alleging illegalities in the islands administration's order claiming compliance of Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 for the mega project. In an order that was made public on Friday, the Calcutta High Court division bench headed by Chief Justice Sujoy Paul overruled the Centre's objections on the maintainability of this and two other petitions, and agreed to hear them.

In her counter-affidavit rebutting the Andaman and Nicobar administration's supplementary affidavit, the petitioner has called into question the entire process followed to convene these Gram Sabhas as well as the constitution of the sud-divisional level committee (SDLC) which examines resolutions passed by Gram Sabhas.

It also underscored that committees required under FRA were constituted only two months before the Gram Sabhas

E. EXPLAINED

The Great Nicobar development project

AS PART of the Rs 81,000-crore project, the Union government wants to build an integrated township, a trans-shipment container port, solar and gas-based power plant and a greenfield military and civilian use airport.

were held, and 14 years after the FRA came into force.

The islands' administration had submitted in an April 9 affidavit that it had followed due procedure under the Forest Rights Act and obtained tribal consent. It submitted the minutes of three Gram Sabha resolutions held at Campbell Bay, Govind Nagar and Laxmi Nagar on the same day, August 12, 2022.

However, the petitioner has pointed out that the participants of these Gram Sabha meetings were settlers who had no rights or role under the Forest Rights Act. Settlers refer to citizens from the mainland, predominantly servicemen and ex-servicemen, who have lived on the islands.

The former union secretary provided a table in the counter-affidavit, based upon the administration's own submissions, which revealed that at least 60 names and signatures appeared in two or more of the three gram sabha proceedings. Three names, in fact, appeared twice in

the same resolution. These proceedings were held at different venues at 10.30 am (Campbell Bay), 11 am (Govind Nagar), and 11.30 am (Laxmi Nagar) on the same date, August 12, 2022.

The language of these resolutions also read identical with a unanimous decision to divert 166.10 sq kms of forests for the "holistic development" of Great Nicobar Island.

"The respondent has also failed to disclose that the same persons have signed the three resolutions. At least 60 names are repeated. It is submitted that the respondent's attempt to justify these illegal, irrelevant gram sabha resolutions ought to be deprecated. It does not behove a statutory authority to support a blatant violation of the law," the affidavit said.

The petitioner has also called the composition of SDLC illegal, as it did not include two members from the ST community as mandated under FRA, 2006. "It is reiterated that the settlers have no role/rights under the FRA...the composition of the SDLC is statutorily mandated and the respondent cannot choose to change it as they deem fit," the counter-affidavit stated.

The petitioner also sought to rebut the claim by the administration that the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti represented the interest of Shompen tribes in key meetings, calling it factually incorrect. It was pointed out that no person or organisation could claim to represent an indigenous tribe let alone consent on behalf of the community.

Release high-powered panel report on project: Ramesh to minister

Express News Service New Delhi, May 10



Jairam Ramesh

RAJYA SABHA MP Jairam Ramesh wrote to Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupendra Yadav on Sunday demanding that the report of the NGT-mandated High-Powered Committee (HPC), which was tasked with revisiting the Great Nicobar Project's environmental clearances, be made public.

Ramesh alleged that the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) conducted for the project fell short of legal requirements.

The former environment minister's letter comes on the back of a detailed statement issued by the Union government last week, in which it claimed that the ecological impacts of the project had been "comprehensively identified, assessed" and were being managed through a detailed environmental management plan.

Ramesh said, "These reports are an insult to science and make a mockery of the EIA process. All my efforts to locate the 'comprehensive studies, detailed assessments and robust EIA and EMP' relied on in the FAQs (issued by government) have failed."

The Congress leader underscored that the final EIA report

in March 2022 was based on a single winter season study spanning December 2020 to February 2021. He noted that the quick primary survey of ecology and biodiversity was conducted in just nine days, and the primary survey of leatherback turtles was conducted in just seven days.

The Congress leader reiterated his earlier demand that the HPC report, which revisited the project's statutory environmental clearances, be made public. The Centre had repeatedly submitted to the NGT that the HPC report was confidential.

Ramesh asked Yadav that when the environmental clearance appraisal process and EIA reports, of the proposed airport in Nicobar were public, what was the basis to contend that the HPC report was confidential. He urged the minister to "pause, reflect, and revisit the project in its present design and detail."

Yogi inducts 6 ministers with big bets on OBC, Dalits & Brahmins ahead of elections

Maulshree Seth Lucknow, May 9

A YEAR ahead of the Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, six new ministers — two of Cabinet rank and four Ministers of State (MoS) — were inducted into the BJP government in the state. The second expansion of the Yogi Adityanath Cabinet focused on non-Yadav OBC and SC, while the party also reached out to the Brahmin community.

Former state BJP chief Bhupendra Chaudhary and SP rebel leader Manoj Pandey were inducted as Cabinet ministers. The four MoS included Krishna Paswan, a four-term MLA from the SC community in Fatehpur; BJP Varanasi district unit chief Hansraj Vishwakarma, Lodh leader from Kannauj; Kailash Singh Rajput, and youth leader from Aligarh Surendra Diler.

Along with them, two incumbent MoS were promoted to MoS with Independent charge. They included Ajit Singh Pal, a two-term BJP MLA from Sikandra seat in Kanpur Dehat, and Somendra Tomar, a Gujarat leader from Meerut. While Pal holds the portfolio of MoS for IT



Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath, Governor Anandiben Patel and Deputy CMs with the six new ministers in Lucknow on Sunday, PTI

and Electronics, Tomar is MoS for Alternative Energy. Governor Anandiben Patel administered the oath of office to the newly inducted ministers at Jan Bhavan in Lucknow. CM Adityanath and his two deputies — Keshav Prasad Maurya and Brajesh Pathak — were also in attendance.

With the latest inductions, the strength of the UP Council of Ministers has risen to 60, thereby reaching its ceiling limit. Chaudhary is a Jat leader from west UP, and has been active in politics since the Ram Temple movement in the early 1990s. In 2017, when the BJP government came

to power with a full majority, Chaudhary was appointed as minister with Independent charge for the Panchayat Raj Department. The BJP later assigned him an organisational role, and in August 2022, he became the state president.

Manoj Kumar Pandey was expelled from the SP in 2025 after cross-voting in the Rajya Sabha polls. He served three terms as the SP MLA from the Unchahar Assembly seat and was once considered close to SP chief Akhilesh Yadav. During Yadav's regime from 2012-2017, Pandey was appointed a min-

ister and later became the Assembly's chief whip.

Krishna Paswan, the sole woman among the six new ministers, was first elected as a BJP MLA from the Kisunpur Assembly seat in 2007, when the BSP government came to power in the state.

Hansraj Vishwakarma belongs to an OBC community and is one of the most trusted party cadre leaders in Varanasi, the parliamentary constituency of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His reliability is underscored by his serving his third term as the district president of Varanasi.

Kailash Singh Rajput is a second-term BJP MLA representing the Tirwa Assembly seat in Kannauj, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's Lok Sabha seat. Kailash belongs to the OBC Lodh Rajput community, to which former CM Kalyan Singh belonged.

Surendra Diler, the 33-year-old BJP MLA from Khair Assembly seat in Aligarh, told the media before the swearing-in ceremony, "This is a learning period for me... I feel confident that I will learn quickly and be able to fulfil my duties effectively."

Himanta to take oath as CM tomorrow

Express News Service Guwahati, May 10

HIMANTA BISWA Sarma is set to take charge as Assam's Chief Minister for a second term after he was elected the leader of the BJP and the NDA legislature party on Sunday. He is set to take oath, along with the new Council of Ministers, on May 12.

A meeting of the BJP legislature party was held Sunday, in which Union Minister J P Nadda and Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini — who were appointed the party's co-observers — were also present. Nadda announced after the meeting that Sarma was unanimously elected leader of the legislature party after his name was proposed by eight MLAs-elect.

Sarma then met Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya at the Lok Bhavan to stake claim to form the government. He claimed to have the support of 102 NDA MLAs. Apart from Nadda and Saini, Sarma was also accompanied by BJP leaders and former cabinet members Pijush Hazarika, Ajanta Neog and Ranjeet Dass, all of whom have been re-elected. Former Union minister and MLA-elect Rameshwar Teli, and alliance partner AGP's



BJP leader Himanta Biswa Sarma meets Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya in Guwahati on Sunday, ANI

MLA-elect Atul Bora and BPF's MLA-elect Rihon Daimary were also present.

This paves the way for Sarma to be appointed as the state Chief Minister for a second time. While the BJP did not formally declare a CM face before the polls, Sarma has been the face of the party's election campaign in the state. This time, the BJP and its allies have seen their biggest win in the state so far, with the BJP winning 82 seats, and its allies AGP and BPF winning 10 each in the 126-member Assam Assembly. Among opposition parties, the Congress has won 19 seats, the Rajiv Dal and AIUDF two each, and the Trinamool Congress has bagged one seat.

Notice for Empanelment of Book Suppliers. Director, Motilal Nehru National Institute of Technology Allahabad, Prayagraj invites application for the empanelment of deserving book suppliers for the supply of print books for the financial year 2026-27 to 2028-29 in Central Library of the Institute.

Centre for Contemporary Studies Prime Ministers Museum and Library. Cordially invites you to Panel Discussion on the book City, Marginality and Education: Tribal Migrants in Kolkata. Authored by Dr. Ruchira Das.

FEDBANK FINANCIAL SERVICES LTD. AUCTION NOTICE. This is to inform the public at large that FEDBANK FINANCIAL SERVICES LTD. has decided to conduct Auction of Gold ornaments belonging to accounts (mentioned below) which are NPA (Non-performing Asset) or margin breach account/s or any account/s falling into the loan recall clause as specified in the terms & condition of the Loan. The Auction would be held as per the schedule provided below.

The Indian EXPRESS
~ FOUNDED BY ~
RAMNATH GOENKA
IN 1932
BECAUSE THE TRUTH
INVOLVES US ALL

Bengal CM's first task: Take everyone along



FROM PLATE TO PLOUGH
BY ASHOK GULATI
AND BIDISHA CHANDA

THE RECENT round of state elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puduchery has clearly shown that Indian democracy is very much alive and kicking. It has redrawn India's political map with the BJP now staking a stronger claim from the west to the east. While the BJP has won a third term in Assam, its maiden victory in West Bengal (WB) is particularly noteworthy. Mamata Banerjee not gracefully resigning from the chief minister's post after having lost elections is unbecoming of the democratic traditions of India. As for how and why the Trinamool Congress (TMC) lost its 15-year hold on the state, there are as many explanations as there are experts. We will leave that crowded space aside and focus instead on the more pressing question of *revdi* vs development. The challenge before the new government in WB is straightforward: Can it move the state from its current 16th rank in per capita income to the levels of Haryana (third) and Gujarat (fifth), where it already has the advantage of longer governance experience?

During Banerjee's tenure from 2011-12 to 2025-26, WB recorded an average annual

GDP growth rate of just 5 per cent — the lowest amongst all major states and also lower than India's 6.1 per cent (at constant 2011-12 prices). But this is not merely a story of one government's tenure. Over the last 25 years (2000-01 to 2025-26), WB's GDP growth averaged 5.6 per cent, against the national average of 6.3 per cent. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the state's ranking in PCI terms has slid from 11th to 16th over this period.

That could well be one reason the BJP managed to win Bengal. But another factor widely discussed was the lack of good governance, which dissuades private-sector investments. Yet another factor could be the Special Intensive Revision (SIR). However, the debate has not focussed much on the issue of freebies (*revdis*), which we feel could have played a critical role in the BJP's victory in WB. Freebies have now become a standard electoral weapon; across states, competitive populist transfers are becoming the norm.

Take Tamil Nadu (TN). The state has pioneered two trends. First, it witnessed the rise of yet another film star entering politics — continuing its long tradition of cinema icons transitioning into mass political leaders, this time with actor Joseph Vijay. Second, and perhaps more consequentially, TN institutionalised the culture of freebies in Indian politics. What began as a developmental intervention through the mid-day meal scheme for school children eventually evolved into a broader electoral strategy: Give citizens freebies, and votes will follow. Is this a bribe for votes or welfarism?

Vijay's promised welfare bill in TN, if implemented, would cost the

state exchequer roughly Rs 0.99 lakh crore, against a total budget of Rs 3.93 lakh crore. And this *revdi* culture exists even when TN recorded the sixth-highest GDP growth at 7.4 per cent between FY01 and FY26. One could argue that GDP growth bypasses the masses, who live more on welfare schemes. But there is more politics for votes in these freebies than true welfarism.

WB's case is no different. The BJP manifesto did not really introduce a new freebie model; it merely scaled up what the TMC had already put in place. The existing transfers of Rs 1,500 per month for general category women and Rs 1,700 for reserved category women were proposed to be doubled to Rs 3,000 per month for all women, irrespective of caste. Of the state's population of roughly 100 million, about 49.3 million are women, of whom nearly 35.8 million are above the age of 20 (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2019). Even if one takes this as a rough eligibility benchmark, the annual cost of such a scheme would be in the vicinity of Rs 1.29 lakh crore. Against a total state budget of Rs 3.96 lakh crore for 2026-27, this single promise could absorb almost one-third of total expenditure. If the government decides to go ahead with this bold scheme, the obvious question is: How does it plan to finance such a commitment without squeezing developmental expenditures? Will that not slow down the pace of development even further?

It must also be acknowledged that the BJP can build on some of WB's existing opportunities. WB's multidimensional poverty head-

count ratio declined sharply from 58 per cent in 2005-06 to just 9 per cent in 2022-23 (NITI Aayog, 2024). Despite this substantial reduction in poverty, the state's PCI ranking has remained persistently among the lower tier of states. This suggests that poverty reduction has been achieved more by *revdi* distribution than an accelerated growth model. This may not create ample jobs. No wonder the BJP promised Rs 3,000 per month to unemployed youth in its party manifesto. But such social security measures can only be meaningful in the short run. In due course, actual jobs need to be created. And that inevitably requires creating an environment where private investors are willing not just to enter, but also to stay. Before any government can seriously pursue such ambitions, however, it must first confront the condition of the state's finances. WB is currently the second-most indebted major state in India, with total outstanding liabilities estimated at 38.9 per cent of GSDP in 2026, second only to Punjab's 46.4 per cent, and well above the national average of 29.2 per cent (State Finances, 2025-26). This is where the new government's real challenge begins: Balancing welfare commitments with the developmental expenditures, to place the state on a higher growth trajectory.

The lotus has bloomed, no doubt, in the east. But if this victory is based on *revdi* promises rather than development, it may not be a real and sustainable change (*poriborton*). The test of that will begin now with the new government.

Gulati is distinguished professor and Chanda a research associate at ICRIER. Views are personal

The challenge before the new government in WB is straightforward: Can it move the state from its current 16th rank in per capita income to the levels of Haryana (third) and Gujarat (fifth)?

AI isn't disrupting education. It's diagnosing what's wrong



SUBHASHIS BANERJEE

THE ARRIVAL of powerful AI systems in higher education has triggered a familiar cycle of excitement and anxiety. Students can now generate essays, solve problem sets, write code, and even summarise entire bodies of literature in minutes. Predictably, concerns about plagiarism, assessment integrity, and the declining value of education have followed.

But this framing misses the deeper point. AI does not fundamentally threaten higher education. Instead, it exposes an uncomfortable truth: Much of what we have been measuring and rewarding in education was never central to it. At its core, higher education has never been about producing answers or imparting job skills. It has been about cultivating judgement — learning how to reason, justify claims, recognise the limits of one's knowledge, and decide what can be trusted. If AI appears to disrupt education, it is only because we have conflated learning with its proxies — outputs, surface-level coherence, and measurable performance.

Consider computer science. AI can generate moderately complex code with ease. However, this does not render the study of algorithms redundant. The central issue was never merely whether a program works, but understanding why it works, the assumptions under which it is valid, and whether one can provide a convincing proof of its correctness. A program without clearly specified preconditions and invariants is not just incomplete; it is untrustworthy. AI can produce code, but cannot certify its correctness through disciplined reasoning. As Edsger W Dijkstra famously observed, "Program testing can be used to show the presence of bugs, but never to show their absence."

The same distinction applies across disciplines. A student can produce an essay on history, but can they distinguish between competing explanations and defend their interpretation? A model can report "95 per cent accuracy", but does the student understand what that number means in context? These are not narrow skills; they are habits of mind — forms of intellectual discipline and epistemic rigour that cannot be outsourced.

AI systems are extremely good at producing the "artefacts" we treat as evidence of ability, such as coherent essays, functional code, and sophisticated-looking analyses. In

doing so, they destabilise the proxies we rely on. When outputs become cheap and abundant, they cease to be reliable indicators of understanding. The "assessment crisis" is not simply that students can cheat more easily. It is that our methods — take-home assignments and coding exercises without personal interaction — were always imperfect measures of learning. AI has simply made their limitations impossible to ignore.

AI tools can summarise large literatures and generate plausible syntheses, but can also fabricate citations and produce misleading conclusions. This raises a question of epistemic trust: If we cannot distinguish well-founded knowledge from plausible-sounding fabrication, the integrity of scholarly communication is at stake.

The appropriate response then is not to retreat from AI or increase surveillance, but to re-centre education on its original purpose. This has several implications: First, the shift from outputs to reasoning. It is no longer sufficient to ask for answers; we must ask for justification. Oral examinations and iterative problem-solving that probe understanding become essential.

Second, we must prioritise verification. Students must be trained to question claims, interrogate metrics, and identify assumptions. In an information-rich environment, the ability to decide what to trust is foundational. Third, intellectual maturity involves an awareness of uncertainty. A student who recognises the limits of an argument demonstrates deeper understanding than one who confidently presents a machine-generated answer. Finally, institutional leadership must resist framing AI as a mere technological upgrade. The challenge is aligning these tools with educational purpose rather than reinforcing failing proxies.

AI is not a disruption but a diagnostic. It reveals where we have substituted measurable outputs for meaningful learning and mistaken fluency for understanding. When answers are cheap, judgement is the scarce resource. Higher education must decide whether it is in the business of producing the former or cultivating the latter.

The writer is professor of Computer Science (also associated with the Centre for Digitalisation, AI, and Society) at Ashoka University. Views are personal

What to expect from our cities when you are expecting



EKTA CHAUHAN

AS SOON as I found out I was pregnant, my first instinct was to redesign my life. Should we move to a house with a bigger balcony? Rearrange furniture to make space for a crib? Install anti-slip mats in the bathroom?

As a faculty member in a design school, I am now trained to notice how design shapes behaviour. Pregnancy sharpened that instinct. Every corner of my home suddenly felt like a decision — about safety, comfort, care. But as I adjusted my interiors, a more unsettling question emerged: What about the city outside? Was it designed to accommodate pregnancy, or early childcare? Both experience and evidence suggested the answer is no.

The challenges begin each morning with my commute. Despite owning a car, I spend nearly 90 minutes navigating potholes, uneven roads, unplanned speed breakers, and frequent water-logging. Potholes, we are often told, are an inconvenience. But they are also deadly. Government data show that 9,438 lives were lost in pothole-related accidents between 2020 and 2024. Not just pregnant women, the national capital's roads are unsafe for all vulnerable bodies, including children, the elderly, the unwell.

And then comes the second challenge: On my route, there is not a single reliable, safe, and clean public toilet. The only options are at petrol pumps, often locked, poorly lit, or lacking water. As pregnancy progresses, so does the need for frequent urination — and with it, the risk of urinary tract infections. Even as the city ranks high on municipal cleanliness, data from Praja Foundation (2024) reveal the scale of the problem: One toilet seat for nearly 10,000 people in Indian cities. It is telling that the most practical solution suggested to me recently was a personal workaround — wearing adult diapers. This is how urban India manages — by pushing individuals to privately solve what are public failures.

If weekdays are consumed by navigating the city, weekends are spent planning the birth. I was delivered at home by a *da*, whose skilled hands brought most of the children in our neighbourhood into the world. Midwifery, once a trained and respected practice, has been steadily absorbed into institutional healthcare since the 1970s. Auxiliary nurse midwives have been redirected toward immunisation and family planning. India has made remarkable progress in maternal health. Over three decades, maternal deaths have declined by 86 per cent. These achievements conceal a complex shift: Childbirth has become increasingly medicalised. In 2008-09, caesarean births accounted for just 6.4 per cent of institutional births in India. By 2024-25, that number had crossed 27 per cent. The World Health Organisation recommends an optimal rate of 10-15 per cent. In private hospitals, the average now stands at 47.4 per cent.

Pregnancy, I am beginning to realise, is not just a personal journey. It is a way of reading the city differently — through vulnerability, dependence, and care. It makes visible what cities are designed to ignore. That care is treated as private, that vulnerability is seen as an inconvenience, and that survival often depends on personal *jugaad* rather than public systems.

The writer is assistant professor, Jindal School of Design and Architecture, OP Jindal Global University

As a faculty member in a design school, I am now trained to notice how design shapes behaviour. Pregnancy sharpened that instinct

Judicial reform shouldn't stop at SC

THE UNION Cabinet's decision to approve a Bill increasing the Supreme Court's strength from 34 to 38 judges (including the Chief Justice of India) is a welcome step towards easing the backlog of cases before the apex court. However, without structural reforms, the judicial hours that the four new judges may contribute could be absorbed by the ever-expanding docket. According to the National Judicial Data Grid, as of May 7, the Supreme Court is burdened with over 93,000 pending cases — more than a 50 per cent increase since 2019, when the number of SC judges was last raised.

Pendency before the SC accounts for only about 0.14 per cent of total case pendency across all courts. This is negligible compared to around 12 per cent in the high courts and 88 per cent in the district courts. The SC mostly functions at or close to its sanctioned strength. SC judges dispose of roughly 90 per cent of the cases instituted each year. Additional judges or better calendar management may marginally ease the pressure on individual benches, but they cannot address the underlying reasons for mounting pendency: The Court's expanding jurisdiction and the volume of litigation generated by the state, the country's biggest litigant. Last year, Supreme Court Justice BV Nagarathna underscored this concern. She stressed the need for the government to "litigate with restraint and be a model litigator".

Courts must keep pace with the rising volume of disputes accompanying population growth and expanding economic activity. At the apex court — the court of last resort — it is especially important to ensure that access to justice is given real meaning; prolonged incarceration of undertrials due to delays undermines this right. However, given the overwhelming volume of cases in district courts, a purely top-down approach to reform is unsustainable. Trial courts account for over 4.92 crore pending cases. Successive Law Commission reports have highlighted that India's judge-population ratio, at roughly 19 judges per million people, remains far below that of countries such as the US and China, where the figure is about 150 per million. The move to increase the number of SC judges must therefore form part of a comprehensive plan to reduce pendency across the judicial system.

It reveals where we have substituted measurable outputs for meaningful learning and mistaken fluency for understanding. When answers are cheap, judgement is the scarce resource

FREEZE FRAME

BY EP UNNY



40 YEARS AGO

May 11, 1986



Maharashtra violence

SEVEN PERSONS were killed, five in police firing and two in stabbing incidents, and several others were injured, as three towns in Maharashtra came under curfew following arson and violence. Shiv Jayanti celebrations in the state concluded on a tense note, at least in the towns of Nashik, Nanded and Panvel where alleged stone-throwing at processions set the pace for violence to follow, state police control in Bombay said.

BJP's Gandhian Socialism

THE BJP adopted an 11-page economic policy statement formulated by its national executive. The second plenary session of the party

adopted some minor amendments to the policy, which is based on Gandhian Socialism and the Integral Humanism of former Jana Sangh president Deendayal Upadhyaya. The prime thrust of the economic programme is to provide full employment and removal of poverty by strengthening the agro-rural base and inculcating the spirit of Swadeshi.

Bangladesh vote count

THE BANGLADESH Election Commission at last resumed tallying the votes in its violent and chaotic parliamentary elections, breaking a deadlock created following the suspension of results in 116 seats. It now appears that the Jatiya Party will get a simple majority but not the two-thirds majority required to en-

dorse the actions of President Ershad's four-year-old military rule. Meanwhile, Khaleda Zia, who was put under house arrest two days before the results, was released.

NCF(MLAs) to quit en masse

PRESIDENT OF the National Conference and former chief minister Farooq Abdullah said he would seek the resignation of all 32 members of the assembly of his party and present them to state Governor Jagmohan. He did not disclose when he would submit these resignations. He indicated that he feared the Congress (I) would stake a claim for the formation of a government with the help of 14 Independent members of the assembly.



EVs in India have moved on subsidies. Delhi policy shows clearer path



AMITABH KANT

INDIA'S TRANSITION to clean mobility has reached a decisive moment. Within the span of a week, two critical policy developments unfolded. The Government of Delhi released its draft EV Policy 2.0 for public consultation, and the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) circulated a revised draft of the CAFE-3 norms to industry stakeholders. Each of these is significant. The next few months will determine whether India can move from incremental progress to large-scale transformation.

Delhi has once again set the pace. Historically, the capital has often incubated urban transport innovation. Its early adoption of metro rail created a template for the country. Its transition to modern bus systems reshaped public transport expectations. In electric mobility, Delhi's first EV policy in 2020 became a benchmark for other states. The new draft builds on that legacy, but more importantly, it marks a shift in approach.

The most important element of the policy is the proposed phase-out of internal combustion engine vehicles in key segments. The plan to stop new registrations of ICE three-wheelers from January 2027 and two-wheelers from April 2027 is an ambitious and strategic intervention as the segment constitutes almost three-fourths of motor vehicle sales in Delhi. It moves beyond incentives and establishes a clear regulatory direction. This distinction is critical.

India's EV journey so far has relied heavily on subsidies. While these have played an important role in market creation, they have not delivered scale on their own. What drives sustained adoption is certainty. When the industry knows that a transition is inevitable, it invests accordingly in manufacturing, supply chains, and innovation. Consumers, in turn, respond to falling costs and improved availability. Global experience reinforces this. Jurisdictions that have achieved rapid EV adoption have done so by



ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

combining incentives with clear phase-out timelines. India has been cautious in embracing this approach. Delhi's draft policy signals a departure from that caution. It is a step in the right direction, and one that other states would do well to study closely.

At the national level, the revised CAFE-3 draft is equally important. Passenger cars are a weak link in India's electrification story, with EV penetration at only around 4 per cent. CAFE norms are the principal regulatory tool available to influence this segment.

The latest draft reflects some positive changes. The earlier provisions that disproportionately favoured small petrol vehicles have been tightened. The introduction of mechanisms such as credit pooling and the option to purchase compliance credits introduces flexibility while ensuring accountability. These are pragmatic features that can ease the transition for manufacturers while maintaining pressure to improve efficiency.

However, important concerns remain. The continued use of super-credit multipliers for hybrid technologies is one such issue. Strong hybrids, plug-in hybrids, and fuel-flex vehicles are not zero-emission solutions. While they may serve as transitional technologies, offering them generous com-

While subsidies have played an important role in EV market creation, they have not delivered scale on their own. India has been cautious in embracing policies that give incentives while clear phase out timelines

pliance credits risks diluting the signal to invest in full electrification. If we get locked into intermediate hybrid technology, we will lose two decades. We need to technologically pole vault as we did in digital public infrastructure and mobile telephony. If the objective is to accelerate the shift to zero-emission vehicles, the regulatory framework must reflect that priority clearly and consistently.

Equally important is the issue of timing. CAFE-3 has been under discussion for more than three years. Multiple drafts have been circulated, and extensive consultations have taken place. Yet, the standard remains unfinalised. This delay has tangible consequences. In the absence of regulatory clarity, manufacturers defer investment decisions, supply chains evolve more slowly, and the broader ecosystem remains uncertain.

Policy ambition must be matched by timely execution. Finalising CAFE-3 is no longer a matter of refinement. It is a matter of urgency. Trucks account for only 3 per cent of India's vehicle fleet, yet they contribute around 44 per cent of transport emissions. This imbalance makes freight one of the most critical sectors for decarbonisation. And yet, it remains largely outside the current policy focus. India's existing framework for

heavy-duty vehicles is based on model-specific fuel efficiency standards. While this represents a starting point, it does not create the kind of systemic pressure needed to drive transformation. There is no fleet-average mechanism and no meaningful incentive for manufacturers to introduce zero-emission trucks. As a result, the regulatory signal to invest in electric or hydrogen-based freight solutions remains weak. What is needed is a more comprehensive approach, a framework similar in spirit to CAFE but tailored to the realities of the commercial vehicle sector. This should be based on fleet-average performance, differentiated by payload categories, and designed to reward the adoption of zero-emission technologies. Without this, even well-intentioned schemes to promote electric trucks like the Ministry of Heavy Industries e-Truck initiative will struggle to achieve scale. The absence of a robust regulatory push in the freight sector is a gap India can ill afford.

India imports close to 90 per cent of its oil. The vulnerability is structural, and the answer, electrification of transport, is known. What has been missing is coordinated policy execution. Delhi has now shown what that looks like for two- and three-wheelers. The draft policy deserves strong public support during the 30-day comment period and should be strengthened, not diluted, before notification.

The BEE also needs to function more decisively as a regulator rather than a consultative agency. It has spent more than three years on CAFE and fuel efficiency regulations for medium- and heavy-duty trucks. This must come to an end. BEE must finalise CAFE-3, and set an ambitious EV trajectory for passenger cars. It must then move urgently on a fleet-average framework for trucks through fuel efficiency regulations.

We have a renewable energy revolution underway. We have the manufacturing base. We have the domestic market. What we need is for the Bureau of Energy Efficiency to match the ambition of the moment and finish the job it started three years ago.

The writer is chairman and chancellor, NIIT University and chairman, Fairfax Centre for Free Enterprises. He was India's G20 sherpa and CEO, NITI Aayog. Views are personal

On hate speech, SC verdict narrows the law's scope



BRINDA KARAT

THE SUPREME COURT'S (SC) judgment holding that Anurag Thakur, then a Minister of State in the Finance Ministry, and Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma, MP, did not commit a cognisable offence of hate speech in January 2020 is both surprising and deeply disappointing. We often hear that the process itself becomes the punishment. This case raises the opposite concern: Can the process be such as to lead to no punishment at all — especially when those involved occupy positions of power?

On January 30, 2020, the Election Commission debarred Thakur and Verma from campaigning for violating the MCC and the Representation of the People Act. Thakur, attacking the anti-CAA protests, described the movement as anti-national and ended with the slogan: "Desh ke gaddaron ko, goli maaro saalon ko." Verma, referring to the same protest, warned that "they will abduct and rape your daughters". In criminal-law terms, the speeches fall squarely within the ambit of Sections 153A, 153B, 295A and 505 of the IPC.

Yet, the Delhi Police saw no offence. They took no action on the joint complaint filed by my late colleague KM Tewari and myself — even before the EC's order — forcing us to approach the trial court. The court sought an action taken report from the Delhi Police, which set up an inquiry under the Crime Branch. Its report was extraordinary: "The connotation/meaning of 'gaddar' is traitor and as such does not refer to any community. Thus, it does not amount to any cognisable offence." Further, "qua allegations regarding Mr Verma, it is stated that the speaker has only expressed his position on the ongoing protest in Shaheen Bagh and not targeted any specific community or its members".

This reasoning defies both logic and law. Speech cannot be divorced from context. This was a highly communalised campaign by the ruling party and its supporters against the anti-CAA protests that portrayed the protesters — centred at Shaheen Bagh and led largely by Muslim women — as anti-national and the participants as traitors. In such a charged environment, the identity of the "gaddar" or those "who will abduct and rape your daughters" was neither abstract nor ambiguous. A public call to "shoot traitors" carries a foreseeable risk of real-world harm, as subsequent violent events against protest sites demonstrated. For the police to argue that hate speech exists only when a community is explicitly named is to empty the law of meaning. It legitimises a form of coded incitement and opens up a new and dangerous path of legal sanction for the proponents of hate speech.



The trial court heard detailed submissions challenging the police report. After reserving judgment, it finally dismissed the petition on technical grounds: That prior sanction was required even to file an FIR. But if sanction was indeed the threshold issue, why not decide it at the outset? Why call for a police inquiry? Why hear arguments?

The High Court's judgment on appeal affirmed that prior sanction was necessary and insisted that the "only" issue before it was deciding on this technical requirement. Yet it went further, recording the police conclusion that no cognisable offence was made out — something even the trial court had not done. If the matter was confined to a technical question, why enter the merits at all? Notably, while the police report found place in the judgment, the submissions challenging it did not. Such a selective process raises a further set of questions.

And then finally the SC. The appeal was first heard in April 2023. The two-member bench issued notice to the Delhi Police. In the course of the hearing, Justice KM Joseph remarked, "gaddar means traitor, I believe? Certainly here 'goli maaro' was not in terms of a medical prescription," meaning thereby it is not a pill Thakur was referring to but a bullet. Justice Joseph retired in June that year, the case shifted to another bench, and the judgment came three years later.

The SC rejected as wrong the technical argument that prior sanction was required to file even an FIR. This welcome clarification untethers the hands of courts dealing with hate-speech complaints. But without following up on the notice issued earlier to the police, without hearing the petitioners' arguments, it pronounced judgment. Thus a process which stated categorically that it was not dealing with the merits of the case at various levels concludes with a judgment precisely on the merits of the substantive issue without hearing arguments. The exoneration of Thakur and Verma is on the basis of a flawed Delhi Police report. At no stage have the arguments challenging that report been answered. No court has set out why the speeches should not be treated as hate speech. For that absence, the conclusion and the process need reconsideration.

The writer is a senior CPI(M) leader

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Challenge for states

THE ELECTION outcomes in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala highlight a shared economic concern that transcends politics ("Four states, one economic challenge", *IE*, May 9). While Assam shows promise, the other states struggle with sluggish growth and mounting debt. Borrowing to fund salaries and cash transfers instead of productive assets weakens long-term stability. Governments must redirect spending toward infrastructure, industry, and skill development. These mandates offer a chance to reset priorities — toward disciplined finances, innovation, and inclusive progress.

K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Eroding trust

THE RECURRING friction between elected mandates and gubernatorial discretion reflects a deeper constitutional imbalance in India's federal structure. ("Lok Bhavan needs to respect lok's mandate", *IE*, May 9). Offices meant to function as neutral constitutional safeguards are increasingly perceived through partisan lenses, weakening public trust in institutions. In Tamil Nadu, the hesitation over inviting the single-largest alliance revived concerns previously seen in Karnataka and Maharashtra. The Supreme Court has repeatedly upheld the floor test as the only democratic measure of majority.

Muskan Kumari, Patiala

Climate inaction

ASA Gen Z myself, the writer's analysis was thought-provoking ("For Gen Z, climate awareness isn't turning into action", *IE*, May 9). The main concern here is the lack of impactful action despite being fully aware of the situation. This ignorance exists among both decision-makers and citizens. Although environmental protection finds its place in the Constitution under Article 21 (Part III), its implementation remains limited. Leaders should be at the forefront of bringing change, accompanied by citizens, to create real impact.

Mayookha Manoj, Delhi



G S BAJPAI

THE UNION Home Ministry's decision to convene a multi-stakeholder conference to review the reforms required for the consistently failing system of plea bargaining in India is laudable. Plea bargaining is a pre-trial, negotiated agreement in which the accused admits to a lesser charge or accepts a reduced sentence. It applies to offences with penalties of less than seven years.

In several countries, this system is a major means of decongesting the criminal justice system. While India uses plea bargaining at very low levels, of less than 1 per cent, in the US, approximately 90-95 per cent of criminal cases are resolved through plea bargaining. In Canada, the figure is around 85-90 per cent. In Australia, about 80-90 per cent of cases end in such pleas.

Plea bargaining was introduced via the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2005, into the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). But it was soon evident that parties were not inclined towards it.

Addressing the non-implementation of, and indifference, to plea bargaining is crucial, as the courts have almost exhausted their capacity — 58.8 million cases are in pendency. The move to identify reform areas is important, more so because the new criminal laws lost the opportunity to reform plea bargaining.

One reason for this failure pertains to the stigma of conviction. A successful plea bargain under Section 294 of the Bharatiya Na-

Plea bargaining, a reform new criminal laws missed

garik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) yields a formal conviction. As per NCRB data for 2023, of the 1.65 crore criminal cases tried, only 35,889 were resolved through plea bargaining, resulting in a disposal rate of 0.216 per cent. Plea bargaining does not result in a straight acquittal, as the accused must undergo a reduced sentence.

In contrast, BNSS's section 359 provides for the "compounding" of offences, allowing victims and accused parties to settle specific minor offences to avoid trial. Compounding acts as a formal settlement, resulting in the accused's acquittal. Compounding has, therefore, dealt a blow to the prospects of plea bargaining. Prosecutors have not done enough to actualise the idea of plea bargaining. Rather, their indifference and lack of training and expertise have significantly undermined the plea-bargaining system.

The proposed conference can make the applications of plea bargaining slightly more stringent by establishing compliance systems and accountability among the officials responsible. There is a need to reconcile the conflicting situation in cases of compounding and plea bargaining. There is a perception that plea bargaining is less attractive given that compounding results in acquittal. Guidelines must be developed in this respect. A guided process will ensure that the choices don't conflict.

A negotiating prosecutor, inter-

ested in effective and quality disposition of plea-bargaining cases — and not high conviction rates — is preferable. The Canadian model is a good example. Mandatory training for legal aid lawyers, who represent the majority of undertrials, must accompany this reform. All this requires complete judicial evaluation, even when parties have agreed on a disposition, with the judge monitoring the agreed charges, ensuring the relevant facts are proved, and imposing a sentence within the sentencing range.

A direction from a high court can ensure implementation of all this without a legislative amendment. A high court-mandated data dashboard requiring monthly district-level reporting, disaggregated by offence category, outcome, and time-to-resolution, would create the accountability mechanism currently absent in plea bargaining. Further, district courts require a standalone plea-bargaining mediation cell with a trained facilitator, legal aid officer, and victim liaison.

Plea bargaining can be made more attractive by two measures. One, the attached punishment in plea bargaining can be made stigma-free by removing any disqualification arising from the effects of imprisonment. Second, acquittal can be introduced as one of the outcomes of the negotiated plea. Prisoners coming through plea bargaining may be favourably considered for measures like parole, remission, and aftercare.

The writer is vice chancellor, National Law University Delhi. Views are personal

One reason for this failure pertains to the stigma of conviction. A successful plea bargain under Section 294 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) yields a formal conviction



VIVEK BHARADWAJ AND ANDREA M WOJNAR

PUSPANJALI BHUYAN, a woman sarpanch, had a plan. Before the gram sabha, the village assembly, met in Namanguda, a village of nearly 5,000 people in Odisha, she gathered the women together. In that earlier meeting of the mahila sabha, they discussed what concerned them most: Violence women faced behind closed doors and in public spaces that felt unsafe, girls who had stopped going to school, and women shut out of economic opportunity. By the time the larger village council convened, the women arrived with a unified voice and a deliberated agenda. The gram sabha passed a resolution

declaring zero tolerance for violence. A women's help desk was established. A village conversation became an act of governance.

Puspanjali is one of more than 1.4 million women serving as elected representatives across India's Panchayat Raj system. What she did in Namanguda is a glimpse of what becomes possible when women are empowered to shape outcomes.

This ambition is at the heart of the Women-Friendly Gram Panchayat initiative, developed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to localise the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 5 on gender equality, with technical support from UNFPA. The premise is simple: Global targets are only as meaningful as the village-level systems built to deliver them. Gender equality must be at the heart of governance, embedded in budgeting, planning, and every local service.

Piloted in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, the model has expanded to one gram panchayat in every district. On International Women's Day 2025, 770 panchayats formally resolved to adopt it. The evidence is already striking. In Nongarh panchayat in Bihar's Lakhisarai district, child marriage has been eradicated. Cycle banks keep girls in school whose only barrier was distance. A peer-reviewed study across 163 villages in

The Sashakt Panchayat-Netri Abhiyaan is bringing structured training to women representatives. Mentorship structures formalise knowledge transfer between experienced and newer sarpanches

12 states found that women's political reservation increased participation in employment schemes by over 50 per cent and doubled the rate at which women opened bank accounts. These effects persisted long after the reservation period ended.

Sustaining this requires deliberate action. Gender-responsive budgeting must become a binding component of the gram panchayat. The Panchayat Advancement Index, a national scorecard tracking how well panchayats are delivering on development outcomes, must more rigorously measure progress on gender equality at the village level. Deeper devolution of functions and finances would further amplify what women leaders are already achieving.

The institutional architecture is taking shape. The Sashakt Panchayat-Netri Abhiyaan is bringing structured training to

newly elected women representatives nationwide. Mentorship structures formalise the transfer of knowledge between experienced and newer sarpanches. The Panchayat to Parliament initiative is building a corridor from village governance upward.

Through South-South cooperation, nations across Asia and Africa are taking note of how India's blueprint might be adapted to their own contexts. India is at a moment when Nari Shakti and Viksit Bharat carry real operational meaning. As India reflects on women's representation in Parliament, its panchayats offer a clear message: The foundation for inclusive leadership has been laid. Now is the time to scale up the model.

Bharadwaj is Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Wojnar is UNFPA India Representative

Former Maharashtra president of IMA, 11 others arrested in sex determination racket

Cop poses as pregnant client, busts ring; huge equipment haul

Express News Service
Pune, May 10

AHILYANAGAR DISTRICT police in Maharashtra busted a major prenatal sex determination racket and arrested 12 persons in this case, including Dr Ravindra Kute, the former state president of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Thursday. Dr Swati Pawar, health superintendent at Rural Hospital at Loni in Ahilyanagar, lodged the first information report (FIR) in this case at Loni police station, on April 30, 2025.

After receiving information that sex determination tests were being conducted for Rs 10,000 at a room near Nilwande canal in Pimpri Nirmal in Rahata taluka of Ahilyanagar, a woman police constable Manisha Giri went to the spot as a decoy customer on April 29.

Posing as a pregnant woman, she paid Rs 10,000 to racketeers at the spot for her prenatal sex determination test. She then gave a missed call to her senior, Yuvraj Athare, assistant police inspector of Loni police station, as a signal of the crime's confirmation. A police team along with Dr Swati Pawar and other government officials raided the spot around 9 pm. Police arrested a doctor,

Rahul Abasaheb Bhanage (34) of Newasa in Ahilyanagar, for allegedly conducting sex determination tests. Police also arrested a local resident Akash Ramrao Nawale (30) and an agent Abhijit Dilip Bhusal (30) of Shikharwadi in Beed district, at the spot. During the raid, police found eight pregnant women who had paid money for their sex determination tests. Husbands of seven women were placed under arrest, while the eighth one managed to escape, police said.

All accused were booked under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita section 223 and sections of the Maharashtra Medical Practitioners Act and the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act 1994. Police seized a portable so-

nography machine, monitors, battery-operated power supply system, ultrasound gel, three cars, cell phones, some money and other material, all worth Rs 24.09 lakhs, from the illegal sex determination centre.

Police said the agents collected money from pregnant women and then secretly took them to the doctors for foetal sex determination tests.

Additional Superintendent of Police Somanth Waghchoure, who led the operation said, "Probe revealed that after illegal sex determination tests, some women bearing girl child underwent abortions at Dr Kute's hospital in Shirampur. Kute was then arrested with two more agents identified as Pradip Bhausaheb Dhage (32) and Nilesh Bhavar (42), on May 7..."

"So far we have arrested 12 persons and search is on for three more. The accused did not maintain any records of the women who approached them for illegal sex determination tests. But so far we have got names of about 70 such women, including some who also performed their abortions. Statements of a few women have been recorded," said Waghmare. He added, "Accused Dr Bhanage is known to be conducting the illegal sex determination tests for the last few months, but Dr Kute is found to be involved in the racket for a long time."

Police said Dr Kute is a well known surgeon, operating the hospital for many years. The IMA on Saturday suspended the membership of Dr Kute.

PERSONAL

I, Vikas Gupta S/O Kailash Chand Gupta R/O E-1001, Palm Court, Plot No.3, Sector-19B, Dwarka Sector-6, New Delhi-110075, have changed the name of my minor daughter Mishthi Gupta alias Avantika Gupta aged 14-years and she shall hereafter be known as Avantika Agarwal.

0040853680-3

I, hitherto known as KAMAL DEEP SARNA S/O HARPAL SINGH RESIDENT OF HOUSE NO-1558, F/F BLOCK-D, CHITTRANJAN PARK, SOUTH DELHI, DELHI-110019, have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as KAMAL DEEP SINGH. And KAMAL DEEP SARNA Both the same Person.

0040853680-2

I, AMTUL W/O MOHD TAHIR, residing at H.No.D-130, Gali NO-20 Old Mustafabad Delhi-110094, have changed my name to AMTUL BEGAM

0050289116-1

PROPERTY

BUSINESS PREMISES

AVAILABLE FOR LONG LEASE / SALE

Entire Floor Plate 30,000 sq.ft., Super with 30 car parking at Assotech Business Cresterra IT Park, Sector 135, Noida. Ready to move, plug & play. Available from 1st June, 2026. Presently occupied by US Multinational.

Contact
K.S. Gupta:
8779518297 / 9820366129,
S.R. Godbole : 9823112308

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

Open Tender Notice
No.: NER-BSBOS-OT-23-2026
"Open Tenders" through Online (E-Tendering) are invited by Divisional Railway Manager (Signal & Telecomm) Varanasi/ N. E. Railway for and behalf of the President of India for the following works: S.N. 1, Tender Notice No. and Description of Work: Tender Closing NER-BSBOS-OT-23-2026:- Name of work: Provision of one dock goods shed running line, shunting neck, Shunt signal in place of stop board for L/3 & UP starter for line no.4 to make it common line at Nandganj station of BSB division. Details: Approx. Value: Rs. 24739161.26. Earnest Money: Rs. 494800.00 J. Cost of Tender Form: Rs. 00.00 /- Completion period: 12 Months. Tender Closing date & Time: 03.06.2026 up to 15.00 Hrs. 1. Tender Online will be submitted up to 15:00 Hrs on date 03.06.2026. 2. For full details and submission of bid kindly visit the Official website of Indian railways i.e. www.ireps.gov.in.

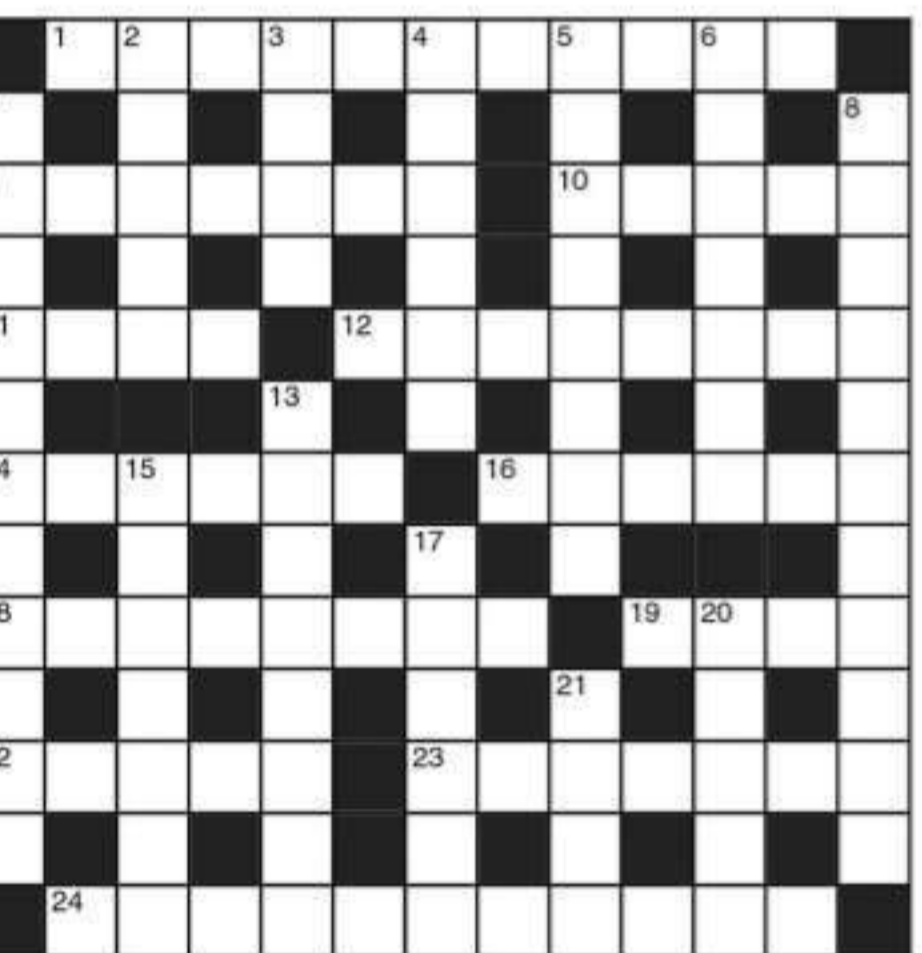
Divl. Rly. Manager (S&T) N.E. Railway, Varanasi

Do Not Smoke Bidi/Cigarette in train

CROSSWORD

5985

OVER THE HEDGE



ACROSS
1 Thoughtful form of desecration! (11)
9 Refuse to dress on time (7)
10 His victims lose heart (5)
11 This month in Westminster (4)
12 Go over new art and poetry (8)
14 Escort round the district (6)
16 New union members are required to move debris (6)
18 He may act well but he paints badly (8)
19 Leading actor of performing arts (4)
22 Classical customs more to the point (5)
23 His true array is shaggy naturally (7)
24 Groups that promote diversionary activities (6,5)

DOWN
2 Giants hiding in the gorse (5)
3 Type of opera that evokes flattery (4)
4 Doctor has a bad year and becomes dismal (6)
5 Hope for the lost and sick (8)
6 Came to the point throwing out red tape (7)
7 The seconds are important in such a fight (7,4)
8 Advisers are represented on opposite sides (11)
13 He works so that others may play (8)
15 Solve a mystery and become brighter (5,2)
17 Emotion shown by love in little ways (6)
20 It's quite rough and ready as a rule (5)
21 Dentist's examination? (4)

SOLUTIONS CROSSWORD 5984 ACROSS: 1 Relate, 4 Estimate, 9 Income, 10 Preclude, 12 Dour, 13 Brain, 14 Hebe, 17 One jump ahead, 20 Silent comedy, 23 Orbit, 24 Folly, 25 Disc, 28 Talk down, 29 Carnal, 30 Disarmed, 31 Hebrew
DOWN: 1 Raindrop, 2 Lectures, 3 Tome, 5 Straight talk, 6 Inca, 7 Amulet, 8 Eleven, 11 Prophet of woe, 15 Audio, 16 Baron, 18 Beginner, 19 Lynch law, 21 Bolted, 22 Aisles, 26 Oder, 27 Mate

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.

All truths are easy to _____ once they are discovered; the point is to discover them - Galileo (10)

TWAER AGOTNU
●●●●● ●●●●●

ANTSY DEEWDD
●●●●● ●●●●●

point is to discover them - Galileo

ANSWER: All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them - Galileo

CALVIN & HOBBS



MARVIN

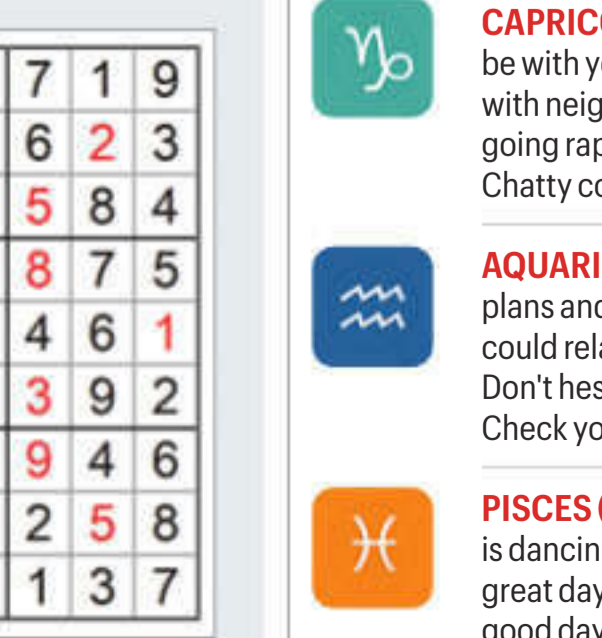


DIFFICULTY LEVEL 5s INSTRUCTIONS

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

DIFFICULTY LEVEL

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



SOLUTION SUDOKU 6314

J&K anti-drug drive: 444 arrests in one month, bulldozer threat

Bashaarat Masood
Srinagar, May 10

FROM SERMONS in mosques warning against the dangers of drug abuse to bulldozers tearing down residential and commercial buildings linked to alleged drug peddlers and the publication of "rogue galleries" featuring the photos and names of "traffickers", the Jammu and Kashmir administration's 100-day Nasha Mukht Jammu and Kashmir (Drug-free Jammu and Kashmir) campaign has had an eventful first 30 days.

These 30 days, the J&K Police arrested hundreds of alleged drug peddlers and registered as many cases. According to numbers released by the Kashmir Divisional Commissioner, since the launch of the campaign on April 11, the J&K Police arrested 444 alleged drug peddlers in the Kashmir Valley and registered 441 FIRs under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act in the same period. The figures further revealed that 378 kg of contraband sub-



Police search the residence of a suspected drug kingpin in Anantnag on Sunday. PTI

stances have been recovered in the Valley in the first 30 days of the campaign. The government also said it destroyed poppy cultivation in over 165 kanals (a little over 20 acres) of land in the Valley. The highest number of NDPS cases, 108, were registered in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, where police have also seized 22 vehicles and cancelled eight driving licences and vehicle registrations.

"People's fight against narcotics in Kashmir is being strengthened through coordi-

nated enforcement and community action..." the Divisional Commissioner said in a post on X, adding, "Kashmir has spoken (that) drugs have no place in our society."

Over the last 10 days, the J&K government has demolished at least 10 residential and commercial buildings of alleged drug traffickers. Police have also seized assets worth crores.

For the first time, the government roped in religious leaders and institutions like mosques to create social awareness against the danger of drug use. Officials said that since April 11, over 4,000 mosques and religious institutions, including shrines, madrasas and seminaries, have been involved in the awareness and outreach campaign. The campaign was also attended by around 1,000 religious leaders.

J&K Health Minister Sakina Itoo has openly criticised police for the demolitions, saying that they are being selectively carried out in the Valley "under the guise" of cracking down on the drug menace.

ROYAL STARS

BY GEORGIA NICOLS

ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 20): The vibes are positive today, and they're great for doing research. Dig deep if you want answers to questions that concern you. Issues related to cash flow, money and purchases also might be on your mind. Tonight: Enjoy solitude.

TAURUS (APR 21 - MAY 21): Get out and enjoy the company of others. It's a great day to interact with groups, clubs and organisations. You might buy something attractive for yourself and loved ones. Tonight: Friendships.

GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21): Today, people will notice you more than usual, you might take this opportunity to speak up about something. You might want to encourage others to work together or cooperate to achieve a goal. Tonight: Show respect.

CANCER (JUNE 22 - JULY 23): Do something different today. Travel or a chance to learn something new about where you live — something different and interesting — will please you. You also might talk to people who have interesting stories to tell. Tonight: Explore and learn.

LEO (JULY 24 - AUG 23): This is a good day for discussions about shared property, taxes, debt and financial matters. If someone owes you money, this is a good day to ask for it because your reputation is solid. People will listen to what you have to say. Tonight: Check your finances.

VIRGO (AUG 24 - SEP 23): You make a great impression on bosses, parents and VIPs today. Some of you might strike up a flirtation or a romance with someone in a position of authority. Meet your spouses, partners and close friends halfway. Tonight: Cooperate.

LIBRA (SEP 24 - OCT 23): This is an excellent day to do project planning. Ask for increased resources, an increased budget or extra help. Be patient with partners and friends. Tonight: Get better organised.

SCORPIO (OCT 24 - NOV 23): You're ready to work and get stuff done. It's also the perfect day to socialise with others because people are friendly. Social outings, sports events and fun times with kids will appeal. Tonight: Play and socialise.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 24 - DEC 22): Your privacy matters to you today, which is why you might want to relax at home and play things low-key. Nevertheless, you will still be productive at some point because you're full of clever ideas. Competitive sports will appeal. Tonight: Relax at home.

CAPRICORN (DEC 23 - JAN 20): This is the perfect day to be with your friends and people you love. Enjoy good times with neighbours, relatives and siblings. You'll have an easy-going rapport with everyone. Stock the fridge. Tonight: Chatty conversations.

AQUARIUS (JAN 21 - FEB 19): Financial plans, budget plans and project planning might appeal to you today. This could relate to your job, home and family, or real estate. Don't hesitate to speak up about what you want. Tonight: Check your belongings.

PISCES (FEB 20 - MAR 20): Today the Moon in your sign is dancing beautifully with chatty Mercury, making this a great day to talk to friends and acquaintances. It's also a good day to share news through letters, phone calls, messages or texts. Keep scrolling. Tonight: You win.



@ieExplained

#ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

• ONE YEAR OF IWT IN ABEYANCE

India boosts its capacity, as Pak internationalises issue

India has focused on completing projects long delayed due to Pakistan's perverse use of Indus Waters Treaty provisions



AMITABH SINHA

IT'S BEEN more than a year since India, in response to the terrorist attack in Pahalgam last April, decided to keep the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) with Pakistan "in abeyance". That decision means India does not consider itself bound by the provisions of the 1960 Treaty that has, thus far, governed the sharing of waters of six major transboundary rivers — Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas — flowing through the two countries.

India's decision has resulted in the disruption of normal flows reaching Pakistan. In the past year, this has been the most thorny issue in the already-troubled bilateral relationship.

Pakistan has spent the last year making efforts to build an international legal case against India on the IWT and seeking the intervention of the UN, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the World Bank, and other third-party agencies. Serving as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) since last January, Pakistan has made good use of this office to repeatedly raise this issue and direct international attention to the matter.

India, on the other hand, has focused its energies on completing the unfinished projects on these rivers that have long been delayed due to Pakistan's perverse use of treaty provisions. It has raised repeated objections to anything that India tried to build on its side of the rivers.

The issue is likely to escalate into a major legal or diplomatic confrontation at some point — even an armed conflict, as Pakistan has threatened. Last week, the Ministry of External Affairs reiterated that the IWT would continue to be held in abeyance till Pakistan "credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism".

Pakistan's attempts

Being the downstream state, Pakistan is badly affected by India's decision. The



(L-R) Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Pakistani President Mohammed Ayub Khan, and World Bank vice president William Liff during the signing of the Treaty on September 19, 1960. WORLD BANK

bulk of its irrigation requirements — more than 70% — is fulfilled by the Indus river system. Regular meetings of the countries' Indus Waters Commissioners and the data-sharing mechanisms have been disrupted, injecting uncertainties in the volumes of water flowing into Pakistan.

That has affected Pakistan's ability to plan for the usage of water and prepare for flood or drought risks.

Unable to unilaterally change the situation, Pakistan has been very active internationally to put pressure on India. Its core legal argument is that there is nothing in the treaty that allows either country to keep it "in abeyance". Only a dispute resolution mechanism can be invoked.

It has raised this issue at every available opportunity, including during discussions on entirely unrelated subjects.

For example, the UNSC last month held deliberations on energy, critical minerals, and international security. Pakistan said natural resources must aid economic development and shared prosperity, not coercion or conflict, then added the same

principle applied to water resources, thus bringing up the IWT.

Pakistan badly hit

Over 70% of Pakistan's irrigation requirements are fulfilled by the Indus river system

A lack of meetings and data sharing has led to uncertainties about the water flowing into Pakistan

Security framing

Pakistan has been framing the Indus Waters issue as a matter that threatens regional peace and security, something that is a direct concern of the UNSC. It is also framing it as a human rights issue and has got its NGOs and proxies to petition the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Its efforts bore some fruit when the UN Special Rapporteur, operating under the UNHRC's Special Procedures system, sent a communication to India seeking clarifications on its decision.

India, which has maintained that the treaty was essentially a bilateral arrangement with only the World Bank (acting as the facilitator) as the third party in a procedural role, ignored the communication.

Pakistan claimed another victory when the Court of Arbitration, constituted under the IWT mechanism to resolve some disputes raised by Pakistan, ruled that India's decision did not deprive the court of its

competence to proceed with matters it was already seized with. Pakistan said this was evidence that India's decision was bad in international law.

India, of course, had objected to the very formation of this Court of Arbitration, arguing that a parallel dispute resolution mechanism, through a World Bank-appointed neutral expert, was already operational, and rejected its rulings.

Pakistan's larger objective is to get the UNSC to pass a resolution against India on this matter, or somehow get the issue referred to the ICJ. These are unlikely scenarios, but Pakistan's effort has been to create as many documentary references in UN records as possible.

Building infrastructure

While India has countered Pakistan at international forums, it has primarily focused on creating the infrastructure that will allow it to make full use of the waters it is entitled to under the treaty provisions.

India can make limited, non-consumptive use of even waters of the western rivers — Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab — awarded to Pakistan. For the three eastern rivers — Ravi, Sutlej, and Beas — the IWT allows India unrestricted access and usage.

But these provisions have not been efficiently utilised by India. Its efforts to create necessary infrastructure have always triggered objections from Pakistan, whose primary objective has been to delay these projects and raise their costs.

And, while Pahalgam was the immediate trigger, New Delhi has other reasons for arguing that the treaty needs to be renegotiated or replaced.

According to India, the situation on the ground has changed substantially over the last 65 years, and the treaty is unsuited for these new realities. The population has increased significantly, climate change has injected new uncertainties in water availability and river flows, the development and energy needs of the people of Jammu and Kashmir are now vastly different, and new technologies make some of the constraints in the provisions of the treaty redundant.

A committee of experts has been quietly working to strengthen India's techno-legal case with new data and evidence.

• POLICY

Who counts India's road accident deaths, why data see discrepancies

Dheeraj Mishra
New Delhi, May 10

INDIA HAS among the highest number of road accident deaths globally, but there is a mismatch in the fatality data being compiled by different agencies.

Data on road accidents and fatalities are released every year by two central agencies — the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) and the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). But there has been a mismatch in these figures for many years.

The MoRTH report for 2024 says that a total of 1.77 lakh people died in road accidents across the country. The NCRB's 'Accidental deaths & suicide in India' report, released online on Wednesday (May 6), says that 1.75 lakh people died during the period. 'Crime in India', another report by the NCRB, which records deaths due to negligence relating to road accidents, shows that 1.81 lakh people lost their lives in road crashes in 2024.

An analysis of the last five years of data shows that, barring 2023, the number of road fatalities varied across reports. This trend has continued even when the road transport ministry rolled out its ambitious Electronic Detailed Accident Report (e-DAR)/Integrated Road Accident Database (IRAD) system in 2021-22, with the intent of collecting real-time data entered by the police.

What are the data sources for accidents?

In an accident, the policeman, who is typically the first responder, is regarded as the best source of primary data. One may also rely on data from hospitals and state transport departments.

The Transport Research Wing (TRW), a division of MoRTH, collects accident data from the state police in formats provided by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. It collects 21 types of data, including accident identification, details of the road, the vehicle and its driver. This data is used in four important publications, including 'Road Accidents in India'. However, the report is often late due to delays in data sharing by the states, with the 2023 report being the latest available. Thus, the ministry has shifted to eDAR/IRAD data.

• eDAR SYSTEM

In the eDAR system, police personnel enter details about the accident and geotag them with photos in the app.

However, there is a possibility of under-reporting fatalities by the police if deaths take place after 30 days and go unreported.

The NCRB, on the other hand, collects data from State Crime Record Bureaus (SCRBs). The SCRBs collect data from District Crime Record Bureaus (DCRBs), which in turn get the data from police stations. The source of both departments' data, thus, is the same. In case of death by negligence due to an accident, the police FIR would register the crime under section 304-A of the Indian Penal Code, now under section 106 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

According to the WHO's global status report, even internationally, around 50% of reporting countries rely on police data, 7% on health departments, and another 11% on transport departments.

What could explain the disparity?

A senior official of MoRTH explained the reason. "While the source of road accident data is the police, the difference is in the proactiveness in supplying the data. Since the police are under the Home Ministry, they have to give them (NCRB) the data in any case. We are a different authority; we have to reach them through multiple channels. Also, the data reported by the police is often limited to the questions asked by TRW," said the official.

The official further said that to resolve these issues, the iRAD/eDAR system was created, but some states continue not to report properly. "In every system, there will be some discrepancy. The difference has gone down by a lot, less than 5%. In eDAR, hospitals are also linked, but not all yet. Soon we will be able to match both the hospital and police data," said the official.

• DEFENCE

How new DRDO system helps air missiles fly longer, strike better

Sushant Kulkarni
Pune, May 10

THE DEFENCE Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Air Force (IAF) last week successfully carried out the first flight trial of a system that can transform an unguided missile into a guided one.

The homegrown Tactical Advanced Range Augmentation (TARA) system is essentially a kit that can be attached to a conventional missile. This helps the missile glide over long distances, and accurately strike a target.

How it works

The TARA glide weapon system is primarily a modular kit that can be attached to a conventional unguided warhead. DRDO scientists say it can be fired from multiple fighter jets in the IAF's service.

Once released from an aircraft at a certain altitude and speed, foldable wings and aerodynamic surfaces come into play, allowing the weapon to glide over long distances instead of falling directly onto the target. An on-board navigation and guidance system corrects the missile's flight

path to improve its accuracy.

The speed at which the aircraft is moving at the time of the launch is a key factor in this system's operation. It uses a combination of inertial navigation and satellite-based positioning to steer the missile towards the target.

The TARA system glides, rather than relying on a rocket motor. This makes it lightweight and cost-effective while still extending the missile's range. Its modular design also means the kit can potentially be integrated with different classes of warheads depending on requirements.

Strategic and logistic significance

Strategically, TARA is significant because it enhances the IAF's stand-off strike capability. This means an aircraft can hit targets from a distance that puts it out of the reach of air defence systems.

In a battlespace, the capability to accurately strike a target from a distance can increase the chances of a fighter jet's survival and lend it greater flexibility.

Unguided bombs, which are referred to as gravity bombs or dumb bombs, can thus be upgraded to smart bombs, or precision-



TARA is India's first indigenous glide weapon system to convert unguided warheads into precision guided missiles. X/@DRDO_INDIA

'Smart' bombs

Using TARA, unguided bombs can be upgraded to precision-guided munitions with relatively low effort

This can lower costs by reducing the need to develop new missile systems

guided munitions, with relatively low effort. This can reduce the need to develop entirely new missile systems. This approach can substantially reduce costs while allowing rapid scaling of precision strike inventory. The use of indigenous low-cost systems and its production by Indian industry partners will also reduce import dependence.

It is learnt that three TARA versions, with different weight variants, are being produced, to be used with warheads of weights ranging from 250 to 500 kg.

Path to development

The TARA system was tested from an IAF fighter off the coast of Odisha.

TARA has been designed and developed by the Hyderabad-based DRDO facility Research Centre Imarat in collaboration with other DRDO laboratories and industry partners.

The successful flight trial is a critical milestone in the weapon's development. This will pave the way for a series of developmental, validation and user trials before induction into the service. All these trials will evaluate the system's guidance accuracy, range, reliability, performance from different platforms, and effectiveness under varied operational conditions.

"It is the first glide weapon to utilise state-of-the-art low-cost systems. The development of the kit has been undertaken with Development cum Production Partners (DCPPs) and other Indian industries, which have already started the production activity," the Defence Ministry said Friday.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh described the flight-trial as a significant development in advancing India's indigenous defence capabilities.

• POLITICS

'In West Bengal, political violence is structural... it is an everyday phenomenon'



EXPERT EXPLAINS
BISWANATH CHAKRABORTY

PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AT RABINDRA BHARATI UNIVERSITY, KOLKATA

THE KILLING of a close aide of new West Bengal Chief Minister and BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari near Kolkata last week was the latest chapter in the decades-long cycle of political violence in the state. Biswanath Chakraborty spoke to Abhinav Chakraborty about why West Bengal's brand of violence differs from other states.

Political violence is not unique to West Bengal. But what makes it different from other states?

In other states, we often notice that caste violence, religious violence, (and) identity involvement are there, and politics

comes later on. But here, it starts from political rivalry and nowadays, it has started turning into identity politics.

In West Bengal, political violence is structural and it is everyday violence, unlike other states. Political violence was basically ideological during the 1950s and 1960s. But during the Left regime of 34 years, political violence was used strategically to ensure party dominance against the opposition.

During Trinamool Congress (TMC) rule, it became a structural phenomenon, and secondly, it turned from ideological and political orientation to economic orientation. So, TMC uses political violence to control local resources.

How do you define political violence in West Bengal?

Whatever violence is related with politics, or when political leaders and cadres are involved in different forms of conflict, is called political violence. It has different forms and categories: sometimes, mental violence, physical torture, and political murder also comes under political violence.

Rape has also been allegedly used to

suppress the opposition. Verbal violence, too: if you attend any political rally in West Bengal, particularly during elections, you will find that political leaders use violent language directed against opponents.

What are its roots and how has it evolved over time?

During the colonial period in West Bengal, the Anushilan Samiti, Jugantar Samiti, and other organisations wanted to overthrow British rule through violence. Even Subhas Chandra Bose wanted to overthrow British rule using a counter-military organisation.

After independence, Congress was in power and the [undivided] Communist Party of India (CPI) was the principal opposition party. Up to 1955, the CPI believed in armed struggle and wanted to overthrow the government through armed struggle.

Even after they accepted parliamentary democracy, they still believed violence had a role in politics. The way they organised mass movements against the Congress government in the 1950s and 1960s involved violence. The Congress also used counter-violence through the police administration and party workers.

During the 1970s, there was the extreme Left group known as the Naxals. They started the Naxalite movement against landlords, intellectuals, and what they called bourgeois classes, and openly declared armed struggle. Mass killings started. As Chief Minister, [Congress leader] Siddhartha Shankar Ray also used police force against the Naxals.

But electoral political violence started during the 1972 Assembly elections, when rigged elections first began in the state. In 1977, there was a genuine election, but after five years of Left rule they also started using rigging and election violence.

TMC later expanded this violence to an unbelievable scale. If you look at the last three panchayat elections (2013, 2018, and 2023), a large number of people died. Opposition candidates were denied the right to file nominations. Voters' rights were denied. Even after the 2021 Assembly election, there was post-election violence.

How does it manifest in Bengal's everyday life?

In the form of extraction of money. Local politicians use their boys to extract money from shopkeepers, street vendors,

and rickshaw pullers. If the opposition organises any programme, immediately the ruling party disrupts it.

If there is any conflict between two families, political parties intervene and create a kind of kangaroo court to decide who is right or wrong. Through these, they earn money from both conflicting parties.

There are different forms: beating opponents, giving verbal threats, threatening to kill someone, throwing bombs. The administration often remains silent.

Whoever comes to power politicises the administration at a very high level. Politics and administration have become so mixed that it is very difficult for opponents or anyone outside the ruling party to get justice if they are victimised.

Even if you go to court, ruling party cadres may come to your home and threaten you.

Another reason is that execution of court orders is very weak in West Bengal. A large section of the media is not free to raise violence-related issues.

There is also social tolerance of violence. People often believe the ruling party has the right to exercise violence over the opposition.

What needs to change for this to end?

First, you have to establish the rule of law. This has been absent in West Bengal for a long period.

Second, depoliticisation of the administration is necessary. Politics and administration should work together at the upper level, but at the grassroots level — municipalities, wards, local governance — everything is determined by politics. Why should that be the case?

Third, we need jobs. Why are people getting involved in violence? Because many people have no work and depend on political leaders for livelihood.

You also need to build public trust that this vicious cycle of violence can end. So, the ruling party must show political commitment and that it is against violence.

Bengal has not seen mob lynching or bulldozing of houses as much as other states. Has it been successful in curbing another kind of violence?

For the time being. But not as a method to change the minds of people (in terms of social tolerance of violence).

LONGER VERSION ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

'OUR FOREX RESERVES TODAY AROUND THREE TIMES COMPARED TO 2013'

Don't share sense of alarm on rupee, forex: MPC's Ram Singh

WHILE HIGHER crude oil prices are a vulnerability for India, the country does not face a crisis on the external front, according to **Ram Singh**, an external member on the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee. "All considered, I don't share the sense of alarm on rupee and forex fronts," Singh, also the Director of Delhi School of Economics, told **Siddharth Upasani** in an interview.

On the monetary policy front, Singh is of the view that talk of interest rate hikes are "not justified" at the current juncture, with headline retail inflation seen "comfortably within" the central bank's 2-6% tolerance band in FY27. Edited excerpts:

The war is the latest in a series of shocks we have faced this decade. Are these repeated shocks impacting India's potential growth?

They are, but they also help us improve. If we respond to the current situation by making the transition towards renewable energy consumption, by reducing our asymmetric dependence on the rest of the world for energy and other key inputs such as critical minerals and metals, build on the use of digital infrastructure to improve penetration of institutional credit, and prepare our-

selves to adopt AI applications, we can expect significant productivity increases and a commensurate increase in our growth potential.

The high-growth phase of 2002-2012 saw high retail inflation of 5-11% and overleveraged corporate balance sheets, leading to the twin balance-sheet problem. This, in turn, induced the bad loan crisis. Today, we have slightly lower growth rates, but very low inflation and very healthy corporate balance sheets. This shows our potential growth rate is at least 8%, as 7%-plus is being achieved without heating the economy. And we know why that might be the case: infrastructure upgrades have brought down logistics costs, and the use of IT in governance and the private sector, for example, have led to improved productivity and growth potential. This shock can make us even stronger if we respond well to this by fixing some of the structural issues.

What do you make of the speculation about the need to raise capital from abroad?

The situation today is vastly different from 2013 when the RBI had introduced the special swap window for FCNR(B) deposits. In 2013, US interest rates were near 0% whereas today US yields are significantly higher at 4.4%, making it costly for us



RAM SINGH
EXTERNAL MEMBER, MPC;
DIRECTOR, DSE

to raise capital from abroad. As such, in my view, there is no need for such measures.

Our forex reserves today are around three times compared to 2013. We can look forward to reaping the benefits of FTAs that have been signed. There are indications that service sector exports will continue to do well. The conditions for foreign investment in corporate bonds and foreign exchange management regulations have been rationalised; we will see their impact on foreign portfolio inflows in the coming quarters. So, I do not see the need for a scheme like the FCNR(B) one of 2013.

There could have been a crisis if we insisted the rupee not cross 85 or 90-per-dollar. But yielding on that front in itself is shock absorber. The one weak point is our vulnerability to in-

As of now, it (rate hike talks) is over the top. Whether you look at the latest price data or the projected inflation trajectory, rate hike concerns are not justified, in my view

crease in crude oil prices. We saw this week on May 6 that a fall in crude oil prices led to rupee strengthening significantly by 60-70 paise. This suggests that post West-Asia conflict, we can expect the rupee to strengthen. All considered, I don't share the sense of alarm on rupee and forex fronts.

There are some predictions that the repo rate could be increased in 2026.

As of now, it (rate hike talks) is over the top. Whether you look at the latest price data or the projected inflation trajectory, rate hike concerns are not justified, in my view. CPI inflation is forecast at 4.6% for FY27, comfortably within the tolerance band. These concerns are also misplaced because of two sets of developments on the ex-

ternal front.

One: the West Asia conflict prolonging is not in the interest of any country, including the nations involved in the conflict. In the US, for instance, retail gasoline prices and airfares have gone up, 10-year bond yields have spiked to 4.4% from 3.97% on February 27.

These factors, along with political economy considerations, should encourage the countries involved to work out a deal sooner rather than later.

Two: even today, when our resilience is being stress-tested, forex reserves of \$691 billion are not far from the all-time high of \$728 billion. Moreover, pressure on the rupee will not be there absent this crisis because we have worked out FTAs with 37 countries whose benefits will accrue in the coming months through trade and investment channels.

Absent crude oil and its short-term consequences, we are in a good position.

How would you rate the economy if GDP growth in FY27 is, say 6.5%, and inflation averages under 5%?

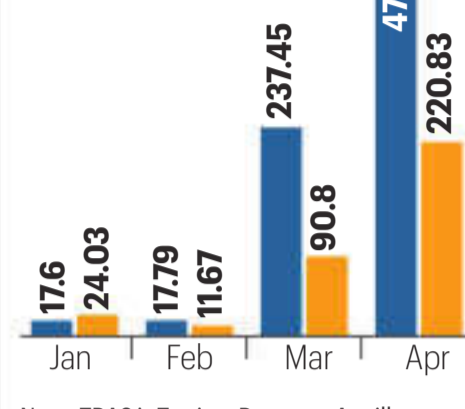
Given the supply-side shock, that's very much acceptable. We will still be the fastest growing major economy with limited increase in prices.

FULL INTERVIEW ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Electricity grid struggles to absorb surplus solar power despite record demand

POWER SYSTEM UNDER STRESS

● Emergency TRAS down
● Solar curtailment due to grid constraints (in GWh)



Note: TRAS is Tertiary Reserves Ancillary Services; Source: Grid India



April solar curtailment surged nearly 74% over the combined curtailment recorded in January-March.

REUTERS

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, May 10

EVEN AS the electricity demand touched record highs in April amid an early summer heatwave, the country's grid curtailed an average 23 gigawatt-hours (GWh) of solar power every day — enough to meet around one-fourth of New Delhi's needs for a day.

Curtailment refers to instances when grid operators ask renewable energy plants to reduce generation to maintain system stability. Data from Grid Controller of India (Grid India) shows April solar curtailment surged nearly 74% over the combined curtailment recorded during January-March, underscoring growing stress on the power system despite rising daytime demand.

At least 693.81 GWh of solar power was curtailed in April, compared to 399.34 GWh during the first three months of the year combined, according to Grid India data. Earlier, a report by think tank Ember also found that a total of 2,300 GWh of solar power curtailed under a mechanism called Emergency Tertiary Reserves Ancillary Services (TRAS) — down between late May, when reporting started and December 2025, with 900 GWh in October alone.

The curtailment came despite no reported shortages during daytime peak hours, underlining both the crucial role solar played in meeting daytime demand and the scale of surplus generation that still went unused. The glut of daytime solar generation was also reflected in power markets. Spot prices on the Indian Energy Exchange in April repeatedly hit the regula-

tory ceiling of Rs 10 per unit during night-time hours, before crashing to around Rs 1.5 per unit during the day — highlighting the widening gap between abundant daytime solar supply and tighter evening demand conditions.

Curtailment due to grid concerns

While renewable energy sources, like solar, enjoy "must-run" status in India, they can still be backed down on grounds of grid security and system safety. One such mechanism is Emergency TRAS, under which the National Load Dispatch Centre can direct inter-state transmission system (ISTS)-connected renewable energy projects to reduce generation during system-wide emergency conditions to maintain grid stability. It acts as the third layer of grid control after primary and secondary reserve responses. It is triggered when additional intervention is required to prevent instability.

Since renewable energy plants can rapidly reduce output, they are frequently used for down regulation under Emergency TRAS. Unlike other forms of curtailment, generators backed down under this mechanism get financial compensation for loss of generation. Analysis of Grid India data shows curtailment under Emergency TRAS averaged 15.76 GWh/day in April. On April 5 alone, solar curtailment under the mechanism touched 80.5 GWh — enough electricity to meet daily needs of hilly states like Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Overall, curtailment in April was about 73.5% higher than the combined curtailment recorded January to

March, highlighting the growing stress on the grid amid rising renewable energy penetration.

Technical constraint

Apart from emergency TRAS-down events, data from Grid India also shows significant renewable energy curtailment in solar-rich states like Rajasthan and Gujarat due to technical and transmission constraints, including transmission overloading and heavy underdraw.

In April, an average of 7.36 GWh of solar power was curtailed every day due to such technical reasons, compared to a combined daily average of 1.4 GWh during January, February and March — an increase of nearly 75%. A major share of it was linked to heavy under-draw in Gujarat, as per Grid India.

In Rajasthan, the operator cited overloading of interconnecting transformers as a key factor behind the backing down of renewable energy generation. "The under-draw problem can happen due to a sudden dip in demand, which is generally seen during unseasonal rainfall events or when manufacturing activity slows. However, this is usually a short-term phenomenon unless such conditions persist for a longer duration," a senior official aware of the matter told *The Indian Express*.

The official also underlined the need to accelerate transmission infrastructure to minimise renewable energy curtailment. "The Ministry of Power and the Central Transmission Utility are working in this direction," the official said.

Queries sent to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy remained unanswered till the time of filing this report.

FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

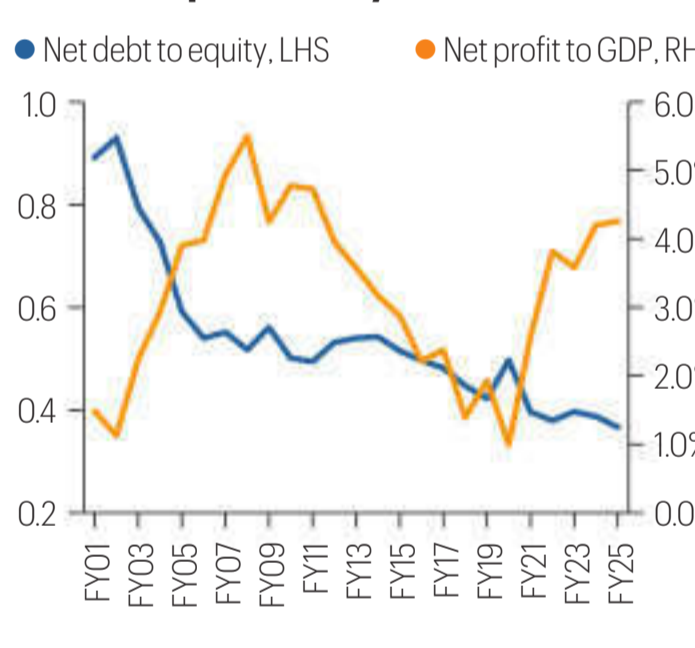
CORPORATE INDIA'S CAPEX RECOVERY REMAINS UNEVEN

Private sector capex, a key driver of the country's investment cycle, continues to lag. While listed corporate capex showed signs of recovery in the post pandemic period, the rebound has been concentrated within a narrow segment of corporate India.

● Private corporate capex is expected to remain cautious in FY27, amid elevated geopolitical uncertainty, according to the report.

● Pressure from China's offloading of excess industrial capacity, which is weighing on pricing power and investment appetite will further dampen sentiment.

Corporates have deleveraged with increased profitability



Source: UBS India Economic Perspectives Report

China's rising export competitiveness could hinder India's capex cycle recovery



Pvt capex jumps 67% to Rs 7.7 lakh cr: CII

ENS Economic Bureau
New Delhi, May 10

INDIA'S PRIVATE capital expenditure surged 67% year-on-year to Rs 7.7 lakh crore in September 2025, signalling a decisive revival in the investment cycle, industry body Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) said, urging firms to step up support measures to help the economy navigate the ongoing West Asia crisis.

CII's analysis of nearly 1,200 companies from the CMIE Prowess database showed private sector investment — measured through annual changes in net fixed assets and capital work in progress — rising sharply from Rs 4.6 lakh crore in September 2024 to Rs 7.7 lakh

crore a year later.

Manufacturing accounted for nearly half the investment at Rs 3.8 lakh crore, led by metals, automobiles and chemicals, while services contributed Rs 3.1 lakh crore, driven by trading, communications and IT/ITeS sectors. "The 67% jump in private capex to Rs 7.7 lakh crore is the most important signal yet that India's investment cycle has decisively turned," said CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee.

He said the scale and spread of investments across sectors were unlike anything seen in more than a decade.

Supporting indicators also pointed to strengthening corporate activity. FE

India, Oman to decide FTA timeline soon; both sides to meet in Delhi

Mukesh Jagota
New Delhi, May 10

INDIA AND Oman will start talks from Monday to sort out remaining irritants and finalise the date for making their Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) operational, an official has said. Earlier, both sides were aiming for June 1 for the Entry into Force of CEPA that was signed on 18th December last year.

Also on Monday, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile Francisco Perez Mackenna will hold talks in New Delhi on trade and related matters as both sides are actively working on concluding negotiations on a FTA.

In Chile, international trade negotiations are led by an office under the foreign ministry and Mackenna arrived in New Delhi on Sunday. The negotiations on CEPA between India and Oman that started in November 2023 and concluded in December 2025 with the signing of the agreement. The agreement was ratified by Oman through a Royal decree in February.

Foreign Minister and Deputy Trade Minister Paula Estevez Weinstein of Chile are also being accompanied by a business delegation. With Chile negotiations on CEPA were launched on April 1, 2025 and so far four rounds of negotiations have been held. The last round of talks were held

between December 1-5 2025. The CEPA opens up zero-duty access on 98.08% of the tariff lines, covering 99.38% of India's exports to Oman. In return, India will open up 77% of its tariff lines for Oman that will cover 94% of its total exports to India. While the tariffs on most products will straight away drop in zero, petrochemicals will see the reduction in a phased manner.

While being a regular trade agreement on most fronts, the FTA with Chile also differs from them as both sides have decided to include a chapter on critical minerals in the agreement. With Chile, India has already developed a bilateral mechanism on critical minerals. FE

RBI, ECB sign MoU on banking

George Mathew
Mumbai, May 10

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) and the European Central Bank (ECB) on Sunday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the field of central banking.

The MoU, which updates the previous MoU of 2015, provides a framework for a regular exchange of information, policy dialogue and technical cooperation between the two institutions in areas of mutual interest in the field of central banking.

It was signed by Sanjay Malhotra, RBI Governor and Christine Lagarde, President of the ECB. The signing took place on the margins of the Bank for In-



RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra and ECB President Christine Lagarde signed the MoU on Sunday.

ternational Settlements meetings in Basel. "It is important that we sustain global cooperation, and I am pleased to sign

this MoU together with Governor Malhotra as a sign of our continued dialogue with the RBI," Lagarde said.

Special tax drive launched as revenues slow

Prasanta Sahu
New Delhi, May 10

WITH FISCAL pressures mounting due to rising committed expenditure and a slowdown in revenue growth, the government has stepped up the tax recovery drive.

As per official sources, the Income Tax Department has directed field officers to intensify the recovery of confirmed and undisputed tax demands, strengthen monitoring of large non-compliant taxpayers and improve demand management.

Under the project termed the Central Action Plan for 2026-27, the department has specifically asked officers to

prioritise recovering Rs 2.57 lakh crore in demands upheld by the Commissioner of Income Tax (Appeals) in FY26. Special teams are being set up to pursue top arrear cases and analyse tax trends sectorally. The tax officers also have to ensure prompt refunds and better taxpayer outreach to improve compliance and minimise revenue leakages.

The Centre has set a direct tax collections target of Rs 26.97 lakh crore in FY27, an increase of more than 15% over the actual receipts of Rs 23.4 lakh crore in FY26. In FY26, direct tax receipts fell short of the revised estimates of Rs 24.21 lakh crore by Rs 80,594 crore. The West

Asia conflict has cast a shadow on fiscal maths, and weaker revenues could further complicate the situation in FY27. A major concern for the department is the weak pace of cash recovery despite a substantial reduction in outstanding arrears.

During 2025-26, the department achieved 150% of its target for reduction of arrear demand — Rs 12.33 lakh crore against a target of Rs 8.24 lakh crore — largely through rectifications and appellate orders. However, actual cash collection stood at only Rs 85,000 crore against a target of Rs 5.04 lakh crore, translating into an achievement of just 17%. To improve recoveries, the depart-

ment directed all assessing officers to classify the top 1,000 unclassified arrear demand entries into "Net Collectible Demand" and "Demand Difficult to Recover" by July 15.

The scale of pending unclassified demand remains massive. As of March 31, 2026, unclassified tax demands above Rs 50 lakh stood at Rs 7.88 lakh crore across 1.24 lakh demand entries, while smaller demand entries accounted for another Rs 1.33 lakh crore. Mumbai alone accounted for Rs 1.65 lakh crore of large unclassified demands, followed by Delhi at Rs 1.21 lakh crore. The action plan has also expanded monitoring of large defaulters. FE

Markets to track West Asia war; may remain volatile

New Delhi: Markets are expected to remain sensitive to geopolitical developments this week, with investor attention firmly focused on events surrounding the ongoing US-Iran situation and crude oil prices, analysts said.

Besides, the rupee-dollar trend and trading activity of foreign investors would influence trading in the markets, they noted. "Markets this week are expected to remain highly volatile and largely driven by geopolitical headlines, with investor attention firmly focused on developments surrounding the

ongoing US-Iran situation," Ponnudi R, CEO, Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. Brent crude oil will remain a critical macro variable for market direction, he said.

Inflation data announcements during the week would also guide markets' movement, an expert said.

Siddhartha Khemka, Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said, "Indian equities are expected to remain highly sensitive to geopolitical developments in the near term, with markets likely to trade within a broader range. PTI

ADB CHIEF ECONOMIST

'Crude oil prices likely to stay higher for longer'

New Delhi: Crude oil prices are likely to stay higher for longer due to the disruption caused by the longer-than-expected West Asia crisis, according to Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Chief Economist Albert Park.

"With a higher oil price expectation, we actually have it as \$96 per barrel as average for 2026 as per the new reference scenario. It should stay elevated at \$80 per barrel in 2027. So, our idea is that the oil prices are likely to stay higher for longer," the chief economist said.

Future prices are showing higher prices farther out into next year than they did before, he said.

Speaking about the impact of the ongoing West Asia crisis on India, Park said it is going to shave off 0.6% from the GDP growth, bringing it to 6.3%, and stoke inflation significantly in the current financial year.

The ADB in April projected the country's GDP growth to remain "robust" at 6.9% in the current fiscal, and rise to 7.3% in the next fiscal.

With regard to inflation, ADB had projected 4.5% for the current fiscal.

For India, Park said, "We do find that growth would be lower by 0.6% (FY27). This is based on our model scenario. But it would not negatively affect growth next year. India would kind of bounce back next." Inflation would increase by 2.4% this year to 6.9%, he said. PTI

Aramco CEO warns 1 bn barrels lost will slow oil market recovery

Dubai: The world has lost about 1 billion barrels of oil over the past two months and energy markets will take time to stabilise even if flows resume, Saudi Aramco's Chief Executive Officer said on Sunday, as shipping disruptions choke traffic through the Strait of Hormuz.

"Our objective is simple: keep energy flowing, even when the system is under strain," Amin Nasser told *Reuters* in a statement after Aramco reported a 25% jump in net profit in its first-quarter.

Global energy supplies have been sharply squeezed by Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, which has curtailed shipping and driven prices higher following the US-Israeli war.

"Reopening routes is not the same as normalizing a market that has been deprived of about one billion barrels of oil," Nasser said, adding that years of underinvestment have compounded the strain on already-low global inventories.

Despite shifts in shipping routes, Nasser reiterated that Asia remained a key priority for the company and was central to global demand. REUTERS

Creatine's hidden powers

Creatine might be famous in the gym, but its real story is far more interesting, according to Dr Mehdi Broujerdi, a pharmaceutical researcher. Naturally produced in the body, it helps power cells by rapidly regenerating ATP — the fuel that keeps muscles, the brain and the heart running during intense activity. Supplementing with creatine can boost short bursts of physical performance and may even support memory, mood and cognitive speed, especially in people with lower baseline levels. Researchers are also exploring creatine's role in Parkinson's disease, depression and menopause related muscle and bone loss.



How coffee impacts gut, brain

Coffee doesn't just energise; it actively reshapes the gut and mind. Researchers at University College Cork-National University of Ireland, found that both caffeinated and decaf coffee altered gut bacteria in ways linked to better mood and lower stress. Decaf even improved learning and memory, while caffeine boosted focus and reduced anxiety. Together, they show coffee works through multiple pathways beyond just caffeine. Regularly drinking both caffeinated and decaffeinated coffee can shape the gut microbiome and influence mood and stress.



A sup for Alzheimer's

A new study suggests a surprisingly simple compound could help fight Alzheimer's disease. Researchers at Kindai University, Japan, have found that arginine — an inexpensive amino acid already considered safe — can reduce the buildup of toxic amyloid proteins in the brain, a hallmark of the disease. In animal models, oral arginine not only lowered harmful protein deposits but also improved behaviour and reduced brain inflammation. Researchers found that arginine reduced the activity of genes linked to pro-inflammatory cytokines, which are associated with neuroinflammation, a feature of Alzheimer's disease.



Best exercise for arthritis

A major review of 217 trials, published in *BMJ*, shows that aerobic exercise is the most effective option for managing knee osteoarthritis. Activities like walking, cycling, and swimming outperformed other exercise types in reducing pain and improving movement. While alternatives like strength training and mind-body exercises help, they are best used alongside aerobic workouts. The findings also confirm that exercise is a safe and essential part of treatment. Aerobic exercise reduced pain in both the short and mid-term. It also improved physical function across short-term, mid-term and long-term timeframes.



New Trojan Horse obesity drug

Researchers led by metabolism expert Prof Timo D. Müller at Helmholtz Munich have developed a new strategy to treat obesity and Type 2 diabetes. Their approach uses a specially designed hybrid molecule that takes advantage of the well-known GLP-1/GIP signalling pathway as a kind of entry point into cells. Once inside, it delivers an additional metabolic compound directly where it is needed. In laboratory tests, mice treated with this compound ate less food, lost more weight and showed better blood-glucose control than those given standard comparison treatments.



SUGAR-FREE LIFE

DR MOHAN

CHAIRMAN, DR MOHAN'S DIABETES SPECIALITIES CENTRE, CHENNAI



Cigarette smoke affects multiple systems in the body

He smoked for 15 years. Then he had severe diabetes

What's the link between cigarettes, insulin resistance and blood sugar?

FOR YEARS, 45-year-old Chennai resident Ramesh (name changed) considered himself reasonably healthy. He had a desk job, long work hours and a smoking habit he had picked up in his late 20s — a pack every couple of days, sometimes more during stressful weeks. Like many smokers, he associated cigarettes with risks such as lung and heart disease, but never once considered that smoking could quietly be increasing his chances of developing diabetes. When he began feeling unusually tired, he blamed it on deadlines. The constant thirst and frequent trips to the restroom were dismissed as side effects of too much coffee and too little sleep. It was only during a routine health screening camp organised at his workplace that tests revealed the real problem: his blood sugar levels were dangerously high. He was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. Further medical evaluation showed that years of smoking had likely accelerated insulin resistance, one of the key mechanisms behind Type 2 diabetes. Ramesh's case is far from rare. While smoking is widely recognised as a leading cause of cancer and respiratory illness, its role in triggering metabolic disorders such as diabetes often receives far less attention. Yet growing evidence shows that smoking is a significant and often underestimated risk factor for the disease.

The link between smoking and diabetes is not merely indirect. Cigarette smoke affects multiple systems in the body that regulate blood sugar and metabolism. Nicotine interferes with the body's ability to use insulin effectively. Insulin is the hormone responsible for helping glucose move from the bloodstream into the body's cells, where it is used for energy. When nicotine disrupts this process, cells become less responsive to insulin, forcing the pancreas to work harder to compensate. Over time, this can lead to persistently high blood sugar levels and eventually Type 2 diabetes. Smoking also triggers chronic low-grade inflammation throughout the body. This inflammatory state damages blood vessels and worsens metabolic dysfunction, creating conditions that make diabetes more likely to develop.

Another key factor is fat distribution. Contrary to the common perception that smokers are leaner, many long-term smokers tend to accumulate visceral fat — the dangerous abdominal fat wrapped around internal organs. This type of fat is strongly associated with insulin resistance. The chemicals in cigarettes can disrupt hormones that regulate appetite, metabolism and stress responses, making it harder for the body to maintain stable glucose control.

The risks do not stop at diagnosis. For people already living with diabetes, smoking can complicate its management. Smokers struggle more to maintain stable blood sugar levels despite medication. Smoking narrows blood vessels and reduces circulation, which compounds the damage diabetes can already inflict on the cardiovascular system. This sharply raises the risk of heart attacks and stroke.

Poor circulation increases the likelihood of foot ulcers and infections, among the most serious complications of uncontrolled diabetes. In clinical practice, smokers with diabetes often require more intensive treatment and closer monitoring, yet outcomes remain poorer compared to non-smokers. One reason this link remains under-recognised is that public health messaging around smoking has traditionally focused on its respiratory consequences. Far fewer realise that cigarettes can quietly damage metabolic health long before respiratory symptoms appear. The early warning signs of diabetes — fatigue, excessive thirst, frequent urination, blurred vision — are also easy to dismiss. They are often mistaken for stress, ageing, dehydration or overwork. As in Ramesh's case, diagnosis frequently comes only after routine screening or once blood sugar levels have risen enough to cause more serious complications.

The relationship between smoking and diabetes is serious but not irreversible. Research shows that quitting smoking can gradually improve insulin sensitivity. The body begins repairing itself soon after cessation. Regular blood sugar screening is particularly important for smokers, especially those over 40 or with other risk factors.

Milind Soman is not outrunning his age. He is redefining what disciplined ageing looks

Rinku Ghosh

WHEN ACTOR and fitness enthusiast Milind Soman emerged from the cold waters of the Strait of Gibraltar on May 1, Indian flag in hand, after completing the 15-km crossing from Tarifa in Spain to the Moroccan coast, the internet reacted with collective disbelief. "How is this man 60?" was the top comment.

Soman completed the crossing in under five hours with three other Indians, all in their 30s. Speaking to *The Indian Express*, he says, "The Gibraltar crossing is one of the world's most demanding open-water challenges, shaped by strong and shifting currents, rapidly changing tides, dense international shipping traffic and water temperatures that can dip to a punishing 15°C. This is where the Atlantic crashes into the Mediterranean, creating unpredictable and often brutal conditions. Although accomplished endurance swimmers train specifically for it, decades of disciplined consistency rather than the last-minute push saw me through."

A challenge that took a decade

The swim had been in the works since 2017, when Soman first applied to the Gibraltar Swimming Association. "Getting a slot is no easy feat. The strait is one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world, with only one support boat permitted per swimmer each day. Clearances depend heavily on weather and marine traffic. There is a queue. I applied in 2017 and forgot about it," he says. Then the pandemic happened.

Years later, the opportunity resurfaced through a friend, and the long-delayed crossing was finally back on. By then, his body was already prepared. All he needed was to swim for half-an-hour for a week continuously in the strait to acclimatise his body to the water.

The body was built over 25 years

Soman insists no miracle training was behind this feat. "Ran marathons for 25 years — my body was fit. I kept to my swim rituals a couple of times a month," he says.

His endurance journey began in the pool. Long before becoming one of India's most recognisable public figures, Soman was a competitive swimmer who represented India at the national level in the 100m and 200m breaststroke. Running en-



If fitness is maintained year-round, the body becomes capable

tered his life much later. In fact, he found it boring at one time. It was only after making an appearance at the Mumbai Half Marathon that he discovered its appeal as the simplest form of cardiovascular training.

He began with 10-km runs, steadily increasing distance over the years, eventually pushing himself to 100-km ultramarathons. At 47, he completed his now-iconic 1,500-km run from Delhi to Mumbai over 30 days. Then he started the Pinkathon for women.

TRUE grit

The science of endurance after 60

SOMAN'S CROSSING underscores a larger truth about ageing and athleticism. According to holistic health and functional medicine expert, Dr Mickey Mehta, endurance at 60 is fundamentally different from endurance at 25.

"THE GOAL shifts from maximising performance to avoiding excessive fatigue or injury — and recovering well. This is where many people misunderstand later-life fitness. Endurance after 60 is not about aggression. It is about calibration. The pace and intensity should challenge you, not kill you," says Dr Mehta.

AT THIS stage of life, endurance becomes a process of measured stress on the body — enough to challenge the heart, lungs, bones, muscles and agility systems but not enough to overwhelm recovery. "Ageing naturally reduces aerobic capacity (VO₂ max), muscle mass, joint mobility and recovery efficiency. But these declines are not a reason to stop. They are a reason to train smarter. When ap-

proached scientifically and progressively, endurance training after 60 can improve cardiovascular efficiency, muscular endurance, mobility, balance, immunity and overall vitality," says Dr Mehta.

HE STRESSES that before beginning serious endurance work, individuals — particularly those with hypertension, diabetes, osteoarthritis or sedentary lifestyles — should assess cardiovascular health, gait mechanics, joint range, previous injuries and baseline tolerance.

TRAINING SHOULD become more consistent, not more extreme. "That means beginning with body weight work and gradually progressing to resistance, agility drills and cardiovascular exercise such as brisk walking, cycling, swimming and structured functional conditioning. Monitoring exertion, breathlessness and recovery response is critical. So is integrating breath regulation, mobility work, cooling down and stretching," he adds.

WHEN PERSONALISED appropriately, says Dr Mehta, endurance training after 60 is one of the most effective tools for preserving independence, reducing frailty risk and supporting healthy ageing.

How he prepared for Gibraltar

Contrary to what many would expect, Soman did not spend months obsessively training for the sea crossing. "I had already completed several long sea swims in Goa earlier this year, including distances approaching 20 km. Recently, I completed my first Ironman (a premier long-distance endurance event consisting of a 3.86 km swim, 180.25 km bike ride and a 42.2 km marathon run). I didn't overtrain or prepare specifically for the event, I maintained a consistent baseline," he says.

His philosophy is simple: if fitness is maintained year-round, the body can remain remarkably capable. His daily routine reflects that belief. Not one for gyms and fad diets, Soman's mornings begin with sit-ups and leg raises in bed, followed by planks, four or five rounds of Surya Namaskar, and push-ups — sometimes 20, sometimes 40. "Nothing elaborate. No extreme protocols. Just repetition of the same drill," says Soman.

His nutrition is equally pragmatic. He avoids fad diets, preferring local, seasonal, home-cooked food, fibrous fruits and whole grains while steering clear of heavily processed packaged products.

The real battle was the cold

Soman didn't complain about fatigue. "The only challenge was keeping the core body temperature up." At 15°C, prolonged exposure becomes a physiological battle. Hydration during the crossing was carefully managed by the support crew. Open-water rules prohibit touching the boat, so every 45 minutes the team passed him nutrition bottles during one-minute feeding breaks.

"My fluids included electrolytes, isotonic salts, carbohydrate gels and hot coffee to help counter the cold. Besides, I had to synchronise pace with all my co-swimmers, including a helicopter pilot, an IAS officer and an entrepreneur from Bengaluru. If you're not swimming at your own pace, you can get colder. If you are out of sync, you could miss your feeds," he explains. Soman rejects the idea that age itself is the obstacle. "The real obstacle is neglect. If you live your life a certain way, life can keep getting bigger." He cites the example of two participants from his Pinkathon event. "We had women aged 68 and 76. The first began serious fitness journeys only six years ago. Any time is a good time to start moving. Real endurance is not a feat, but taking the first step and building yourself up," says Soman.

DECODING A STUDY

With low HPV vaccine cover, India may miss targets

While high income countries may eliminate cervical cancer by 2050, Indian women will be at risk: Lancet

Anuradha Mascarenhas

HIGH-INCOME countries could eliminate cervical cancer by 2048 but without expanded efforts in vaccination and screening, many women in lower- and middle-income regions, including India, will still face high risks of cervical cancer. According to a new modelling study in *The Lancet*, reaching the World Health Organization's (WHO) goals — vaccinating 90 per cent girls, screening 70 per cent women and treating 90 per cent of pre-cancer and cancer cases — is crucial to eliminating cervical cancer globally and saving millions of lives.

Achieving these goals could avert 37 million cervical cancer cases over the next century and accelerate progress toward elimination. "For India, reaching these targets would avert over 10 million cervical cancer cases over the next century, accelerate prog-

ress toward elimination and reduce inequalities with high income countries," said Prof Marc Brisson, Canada Research Chair in Mathematical Modelling and Health Economics Related to Infectious Diseases and lead author of the study.

Using current national cervical cancer vaccination and screening efforts, researchers estimated that high-income countries are on track to eliminate cervical cancer by 2048, while low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) will see only slight reductions over the next century. As a result, the gap between regions will widen dramatically, with women in poorer countries facing much higher rates of this preventable disease. For India, according to Prof Brisson, a low HPV vaccination coverage would mean that the incidence rate would increase from two times more than high income countries to 12 times more by the end of the century.



Till April 10, only 10.63% of the 1.15 crore eligible girls got their shots



SCAN THE QR CODE TO READ MORE HEALTH SPECIAL STORIES

"However, if India reaches 90 per cent vaccination coverage of girls, elimination would be possible by 2085, preventing six million cervical cancer cases over the next century," he said.

The study authors also said that recent advancements, such as lower-cost and single-dose vaccines, expanded screening programmes, Multi-age cohort vaccinations and efforts to include boys in vaccination campaigns can help make cervical cancer elimination feasible worldwide but require global, coordinated efforts from governments and international health agencies.

India accounts for a fifth of all cervical cancer cases in the world, with it being the second most common form of cancer among women. It reports over 1.2 lakh cases and 80,000 deaths each year. So, the HPV vaccination campaign for all 14-year-olds rolled out on February 28 this year was a welcome move.

"It is true that the uptake of HPV vaccination is very slow/low in India. There are multiple factors such as the timing of HPV vaccination launch just before the final examinations, with majority of schools on summer break in April and May. There was not enough awareness generation or demand generation from the public, no strong messages on social media. In fact negative messages, videos went viral," Dr Smita Joshi, senior scientist at the public health platform, Prayas, said. Data from GoI's central digital platform U-WIN portal suggests that till April 10 this year, only 10.63 per cent of the 1.15 crore girls eligible for vaccination got their shots.

Cervical cancer screening coverage is also very low in India with less than two per cent of women getting screened, she said.

Pant struggling under pressure? 'Need to ask him,' says Moody



In 11 matches this season, Rishabh Pant has scored 251 runs with one 50+ score. CREIMAS

Express News Service
Chennai, May 10

LUCKNOW SUPER Giants' hopes of making the play-offs have been dashed, and their misfiring batting needs to take a lot of the blame. On a day they made 203 and still lost the game, it eventually boiled down to the 20 runs they failed to score on a flat pitch.

Having got off to a strong start thanks to Josh Inglis' 85 off 33 deliveries, Lucknow were on course for a total close to 250. From 112/2 at the end of the ninth over, they found themselves at 154/6 by the end of the 15th. As their middle order endured another collapse, captain Rishabh Pant's performance through the season came under further scrutiny. Acquired for a record Rs 27 crore at the big auction ahead of the 2025 season, the wicketkeeper has managed only 251 runs in 11 outings to go with the 268 runs he tallied in 14 matches last year.

Coming in at No.4 on Sunday, Pant had an opportunity to take the game further away from CSK, but chopped on a hard-length delivery from Jamie Overton with a loose poke. Head down, he dragged himself off, as his white-ball career continued to nosedive.

Before the start of the season, when Lucknow were here for a pre-season camp, all eyes were on Pant and how he would redeem himself to have a shot at the wicketkeeper's slot in India's white-ball set-up. Instead, he continues to be all over the place with questions repeatedly cropping about the price tag and the expectation to deliver.

"That's a question you need to ask him. I can't speak for him on how he's feeling about the expectation," Tom Moody, LSG's director of cricket, said. "Every player, particularly profile players - so whether it's Rishabh Pant or anyone that's either captain or senior player in the side that has got decorated careers at that point - they're under pressure and that's the beauty of the IPL. It's whether you can embrace that pressure and rise or you find it difficult to get traction."

"If we look at our season from a broad lens, our batting has let us down, particularly our middle order hasn't fired and shown the consistency that's required," Moody added.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Patel goes ballistic as Chennai stay alive in the playoff race

27-year-old hits joint-fastest fifty in IPL history as Josh Inglis' innings goes in vain due to inadequate support

SYNOPSIS: Urvil Patel's blistering knock piles more misery on Lucknow, keeps Chennai hopes alive.

Venkata Krishna B
Chennai, May 10

LUCKNOW AND Chennai innings mirrored each other. Take away Josh Inglis' 85 off 33 balls, and their middle order crumbled again. The story would repeat in the chase as after Urvil Patel's 65 off 23, Chennai lost their way spectacularly before Shivam Dube's two sixes in the final over took them home to keep them in the race for the playoffs.

Inglis lessons

The Lucknow Super Giants innings was all about Inglis, the Australian batsman, born and raised in Leeds before he moved to Perth. There was help from Shahbaz Ahmed in the end, whose 43 off 25 (3x4, 3x6) carried them past the 200-run mark which looked unlikely at one stage. But until Inglis was in the middle, Lucknow looked on their way to a 230-plus total as his carnage had left Chepauk stunned.

The diminutive Aussie is known for his explosive starts. Short and stocky, and growing up playing cricket in Perth, he has developed Australian qualities. Inglis is strong square of the wicket, with the pull shot being his favourite. It is a shot he picked up after repeatedly watching Ricky Ponting nail it.

•IPL table

Teams	M	W	L	PTS
RCB	11	7	4	14
SRH	11	7	4	14
GT	11	7	4	14
PBKS	10	6	3	13
CSK	11	6	5	12
RR	11	6	5	12
KKR	10	4	5	9
DC	11	4	7	8
MI	11	3	8	6
LSG	11	3	8	6

M: MATCH; W: WIN; L: LOSS; PTS: POINTS;

There are traces of the great's influence when Inglis brings it out. It isn't just the pull, there is a whiplash in his batting. But more than the pull shot, what did the most damage to CSK in the Powerplay were the reverse-ramps, which got Inglis two sixes and a boundary.

By the time the Powerplay was done, Inglis had 77 off 25 deliveries with nine boundaries and half a dozen sixes. Lucknow, with enough firepower left in the tank, had their eyes on a tall total.

But there have been question marks over the ability of Nicholas Pooran, Rishabh Pant and Aiden Markram to strike big this season. The arrival of Noor Ahmad had already pulled back the scoring rate, but for Chennai to stop Lucknow from running away with the game, they needed wickets. And delivering those crucial blows was Jamie Overton.

In his first three overs, the England pacer removed Inglis,



Urvil Patel hit 65 from 23 balls to power Chennai Super Kings' successful run chase. CREIMAS FOR BCCI

Pant and Akshat Raghuvanshi with Dewald Brevis' direct hit from the deep catching Markram short of the crease. That collapse meant Lucknow had lost six wickets inside 15 overs before Shahbaz rescued them.

Urvil storm

They may have regained the intent in their batting and scores of 200 may have been touched consistently. But since the 2018 final, CSK haven't chased down a target of 200 or more. They needed to tick that box to stay in contention.

But to overhaul the total of 203, they needed a collective show. This has been a batting line-up heavily dependent on Sanju Samson. On Sunday, he perished after making 28 off 14, but there was a lot left to be done in the Powerplay.

That's when Urvil walked in and decided to own the stage.

Until Ayush Mhatre was injured, he had been warming the bench. "He has been itching to get an opportunity," coach Stephen Fleming had said.

But in his three outings prior to Sunday, Urvil has seldom looked the part. The intent was there, but not the all-round game to back it up; more of a hit-or-miss option at No 3.

Against Lucknow, he barely missed. He started with a single before the carnage unfolded against Avesh Khan. A length ball disappeared over mid-wicket. It is Urvil's favourite pocket. The second was slower, but again in the same arc and six. Then another slower ball, this one going the distance in the same region.

Then came Digvesh Rathi. His first two to Urvil landed on the leg-stump line and disappeared over mid-wicket. The

third went for a boundary over cover with Urvil's disappointed reaction - conveying that he was chasing six sixes in a row.

Off the next delivery, normal service was restored as Chennai plundered 50 runs in two overs. A joint-fastest fifty in the IPL (off 13 balls) followed and by the time he was finished, Urvil had 65 off 23 (2x4, 8x6).

Like Lucknow's, Chennai's innings lost its way in the middle. From 126/2 in 9.2 overs, they lost three wickets to enter the final over needing 10 to win. They got home, but could have finished it much earlier.

BRIEF SCORES: Lucknow Super Giants 203/8 in 20 overs (Inglis 85, Shahbaz Ahmed 43 not out; Overton 3/36) lost to Chennai Super Kings 208/5 in 19.2 overs (Urvil 65, Gaikwad 42; Shahbaz 2/30) by five wickets.

6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 4, 6: Urvil onslaught turns tide, repays faith

Venkata Krishna B
Chennai, May 10

WHEN URVIL Patel walked into the middle in the fourth over, Lucknow Super Giants would have breathed easy. With 203 to defend, they had seen the back of Sanju Samson early. In a season when Chennai Super Kings have blown hot and cold, they are an outfit that has been over-reliant on Samson for the heavy lifting.

Here, in a must-win match, they needed a collective effort from the batting unit to chase what would be their first 200-plus chase since the 2018 final. The stakes were high and the Powerplay needed to be maximised.

The firepower that CSK needed was provided by Urvil, the wicketkeeper-batsman who had been waiting in the

wings at the start of the season and hadn't made full use of the opportunities he had been offered so far.

Off the first ball, he took a single. Off the next seven deliveries, he hit six sixes and one four. After clobbering pacer Avesh Khan for three successive maximums in the fifth over, in the next over bowled by leg-spinner Digvesh Rathi, he hit two consecutive sixes before hitting a boundary over cover and pulled his head back in disappointment. The next delivery disappeared into the stands. Urvil's 50 came off 13 deliveries as Chennai were off to a flier in the chase.

Those sixes had a pattern. Urvil's range is limited. When he is in the middle, he seems reckless rather than full of conviction. But there is one



Urvil Patel celebrates his 13-ball half century, the joint-quickest in IPL history. ANI

shot in his playbook that he plays with total authority - take the front leg out of the way and smack the ball to-

wards the mid-wicket region. It is where each of those six sixes disappeared.

The bowling was listless. They kept feeding him in his swinging arc and he happily obliged. Chepauk was on its feet. The whistles were back.

Strong domestic record

Hailing from Palanpur in Gujarat, a town known for its diamonds, Urvil owns the record for the fastest T20 century by an Indian, off 28 deliveries, in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy. It is the second-fastest in the world too. He has a 41-ball century in the Vijay Hazare Trophy. So aggressive batting is all that Urvil knows.

"My game is more suited for white-ball cricket," he had told *The Indian Express* before. "Playing attacking cricket comes naturally to me. When

you are opening, you have the licence to play freely.

"And as a batsman, you ought to put a lower price on your wicket and play high-risk cricket. It liberates my game as well. My intention has always been to go on the attack."

Last season, despite his aggressive display, Urvil had not found any takers at the big player auction before CSK signed him up as a replacement player. Since then, he has hardly looked back.

"I really want to be part of India's T20 side. Just looking at how they are playing, I feel it just suits my style."

"I've had the chance to speak to Hardik (Pandya) bhैया... and he was also telling me how a batsman should approach a T20 game. That's what I'm doing these days," he adds.

RCB on top after Bhuvi masterclass, Krunal rearguard



Krunal Pandya scored 73 runs from 46 balls on Sunday. CREIMAS

SYNOPSIS: Krunal Pandya's superlative 73 and Bhuvneshwar Kumar's 4/23 lead RCB to last over win over MI.

Shankar Narayan
Mumbai, May 10

ROYAL CHALLENGERS Bengaluru (RCB) and Mumbai Indians (MI) came to Raipur with contrasting ambitions in mind. The defending champions knew a win would take them closer to sealing a top-two spot. The latter needed a win to stay alive. And it was RCB who nudged past the five-time champions to go on top of the points table, eliminating them from the playoff qualification race.

Krunal's rescue act

RCB have relied heavily on Virat Kohli and Devdutt Padikkal for most of IPL 2026. But in Raipur on Sunday, both fell cheaply, as did captain Rajat Patidar, leaving them 39/3 in the sixth over. That was when Krunal Pandya was forced into a role he has not often had to play this season.

The all-rounder had not had much time in the middle with the bat this season, but with RCB in early trouble, his experience suddenly became vital. Alongside Jacob Bethell, he began the recovery on a surface where strokeplay was not easy.

He took time to settle in, picking up singles against spin and absorbing pressure from the seamers. His first real release shot came against Corbin Bosch, helping a short ball over deep square leg for six. From there, the left-hander slowly began to grow into his innings. Against spin, he used his feet smartly and looked to target anything over-pitched. A powerful sweep off Will Jacks fetched him another boundary before he took on Allah Ghanzafar with a straight boundary and a six over long-on.

While Bethell kept the scoreboard moving at the other end, Krunal quietly ensured RCB did not lose further control of the innings. Even after the Englishman fell and then Jitesh Sharma departed after a crucial cameo, Krunal continued to hold one end. By the time he reached his

half-century in the 15th over, the recovery was complete. The left-hander acknowledged the applause and then pushed through cramps in the closing overs. He could barely run between the wickets but still found the strength to play the big shots.

In the 18th over, he launched Ghazanfar for two sixes over long-on. One attempted big hit in the same over nearly went the distance too, only for Tilak Varma to time his jump perfectly near the rope.

Krunal eventually fell for 73 off 46 balls, but not before producing one of RCB's most important rescue acts of the season.

Bhuvi's early strikes

Coming into Sunday's clash, the MI opening pair of Rohit Sharma and Ryan Rickelton had built a reputation for setting the tone at the top. Although they had opened together only three times this season, two of those stands had crossed the 100-run mark and laid the platform for commanding wins.

That made the early battle with the new ball crucial for RCB. Enter Bhuvneshwar Kumar, the master of Powerplay bowling in the IPL.

The veteran seamer wasted little time in making an impact. In the first over, he removed Rickelton to hand RCB the perfect start.

Using the surface cleverly, the 36-year-old kept the ball short of length and forced batsmen into manufacturing shots. The left-hander attempted to loft his drive, but the extra bounce did him in, the ball ballooning straight to Rajat Patidar at mid-off. MI were 4/1.

In the third over, he outfoxed Rohit with a superb knuckleball. Bowled at just 116.6 kph, the slower delivery forced the former MI captain into the shot too early, resulting in a thick edge behind to wicketkeeper Jitesh. It left MI at 28/2.

Things worsened with the very next delivery. Stand-in captain Suryakumar Yadav fell for a first-ball duck, edging a fuller delivery to first slip where Kohli completed a low catch diving to his right.

BRIEF SCORES: Mumbai Indians 166/7 in 20 overs (Tilak 57, Naman 47; Bhuvneshwar 4/23) lost to Royal Challengers Bengaluru 167/8 in 20 overs (Krunal 73; Bosch 4/26) by two wickets.

SEVENTH PLAYER TO BECOME GM BEFORE TURNING 13

'Messi of Chess' becomes 2nd youngest GM ever

Mayank Chaudhary
New Delhi, May 10

FOR MUCH of his pre-teen years, the clock was the Argentinian prodigy's fiercest rival. Every tournament, every move, every half-chance missed and every hard-fought win was a race against time to break the sport's most coveted age record: becoming the youngest Grandmaster in chess history. For Faustino Oro, that record remained agonisingly out of reach, but he emerged with a consolation that is itself a slice of history on Sunday. At 12 years, 6 months and 26 days old, he became the second-youngest player ever to earn the Grandmaster title.

The historic moment arrived at the Sardinia World Chess Festival in Italy, where Oro officially clinched his third and final GM norm. With that, his name was etched into the record books right behind American Abhimanyu Mishra, who had claimed the highest title in chess at 12 years, four months, and 25 days in July 2021. Nicknamed 'Messi of Chess',



Faustino Oro, 12, missed the record of becoming the youngest GM in history by less than two months. HARRY GIELEN/TATA STEEL CHESS

Oro is just the seventh player to accomplish this feat before turning 13, joining an elite list that includes Mishra, Sergey Karjakin, D Gukesh, Yagiz Kaan Erdogmus, Javokhir Sindarov, and R Praggnanandhaa.

In March earlier this year, Oro came within just one win of making chess history, until Russian teenager Aleksey Grebnev played the villain in the Argentinian's fairytale run.

Heading into the final round of the 2026 Aeroflot Open in Moscow, a victory over

Grebnev would have secured Oro his third and final GM norm. That would have made him a Grandmaster at 12 years, 4 months, and 19 days, just six days younger than the record holder, Abhimanyu Mishra.

Some things are simply not meant to be. Explaining that to an ordinary 12-year-old would have been a difficult task. But Oro is no ordinary 12-year-old. Far more mature than his age suggests, Oro took that heart-breaking loss in his stride and promised he would become a

Grandmaster "soon."

"I didn't play badly overall, but today I didn't play a good game. In fact, I played quite a bad game," he had said after the defeat that shattered his dream.

"The good thing is that I will probably get the norm soon. Without the record, but I will become a Grandmaster soon," Oro had said with a bubble of energy and enthusiasm, speaking to the Spanish international news agency EFE.

The boy from Buenos Aires holds the record as the first under-12 in chess history to be rated 2500-plus. He had previously broken the record for the world's youngest International Master in June 2024, achieving his final norm at the age of 10 years, 8 months, and 16 days. However, his IM record has since been surpassed by 10-year-old Roman Shogdzhev from Russia, who achieved the feat at just 10 years, 3 months, and 21 days, a full five months younger.

Behind Oro's record-breaking spree lies a remarkably calm head. He may be blessed with immense talent, but there is a method to his madness.

"I'm a positional player, but with tactics," Oro had told *The Indian Express*. "I like tactics, and I believe I am a tactical player too. But I believe I'm not dynamic. I don't try to checkmate my opponent in 20 moves. I try to play good chess and focus on winning the game."

Oro's talent has already earned the stamp of approval from the greatest player of this generation, Magnus Carlsen.

"He's a great player. He has a wonderful positional feeling for chess, which is quite rare among such young players," Carlsen said in an interview with *Take Take Take*. "He seems to really love chess."

"He's on an incredible path. So just enjoy it, and the pieces will fall where they may." The record that once seemed destined for his name may belong to another, but Oro has something far more valuable than his name in the history books. He has time, years of it. For now, the boy from Argentina can stand tall among the giants of the game. And as Carlsen had said, the pieces have fallen where they may.

BRIEFLY



Mehidy Hasan took five wickets on the third day of the Test. AP

Mehidy gets five-for as B'desh take control of first Test

MEHIDY HASAN claimed five wickets with his crafty off-spin as Bangladesh fought to regain control of the first Test against Pakistan on Sunday. Mehidy finished with 5-102 to help Bangladesh dismiss Pakistan for 386 and take a 27-run first-innings lead on a rain-affected third day. Bangladesh then moved to 7 for no loss, stretching the overall lead to 34, before bad light forced an early close of play.

Opener Azeem Khan hit 103 on his debut to lead Pakistan's batsmen. Three other batters - debutant Abdullah Fazal, Salman Agha and Mohammad Rizwan - hit half-centuries to complement him, but Mehidy ensured Bangladesh took the lead. AP **BRIEF SCORES:** Bangladesh 413 and 7/0 in 1.5 overs lead Pakistan 386 all out (Azeem 103, Fazal 60, Mehidy 5-102, Taijul 2-46) by 34 runs.

Deepak storms into 92kg final at National Open

ASIAN GAMES silver medalist Deepak Punia underlined his class with a commanding run into the 92kg final without conceding a point even as massive participation and logistical challenges stretched the opening day of the National Open Ranking Tournament on Sunday. The tournament attracted around 1,400 entries, the second-highest participation in the event's history after the Chandigarh edition in 2022, which had recorded 1,800 wrestlers. With only four weighing scales available and a huge turnout to handle, weigh-ins could not be completed on time and bouts started only at 11:30am, nearly two hours behind schedule. Among the biggest attractions of the day was 2019 World Championship medalist Deepak, who looked far too strong and experienced for the field in the 56-wrestler 92kg division. PTI

Sabalenka exits Italian Open struggling with injury concerns



Aryna Sabalenka suffered an injury during her loss at the Italian Open. REUTERS

Reuters
Rome, May 10

ARYNA SABALENKA'S French Open preparations suffered a setback following a third-round defeat by Sorana Cirstea at the Italian Open, with the world No. 1 now looking to shake off an injury ahead of the Grand Slam that begins this month.

Sabalenka needed treatment late in her meeting with Cirstea on Saturday before she fell 2-6 6-3 7-5 for her second defeat in three matches after a quarterfinal loss to Hailey Baptiste at the Madrid Open last month.

"I feel like I didn't play well from the beginning till the end. I started really well, but I dropped the level," four-time Grand Slam champion Sabalenka said in Rome. "I felt like my body was limiting me from performing at the highest level. "She stepped in and played incredible tennis. She didn't really give me many opportunities. "That was a tough one. But I guess we never lose; we only learn, so it's okay."

Sabalenka's disappointing claycourt swing follows a stellar run on hardcourts, during which she captured the Brisbane title, reached the Australian Open final and claimed back-to-back trophies in Indian Wells and Miami.

Quick recovery

The Belarusian said she now hoped to recover her fitness in time for the French Open, which gets underway in Paris on May 24, after losing last year's final against Coco Gauff. "I'd say that probably it's like my lower back, connected to the hip, which limited my full rotation," the 28-year-old added. "I guess we're just going to have some days off. We're going to spend it on recovery. That's the plan for now."

The 36-year-old Romanian, who will retire later this year, beat a world number one for the first time. "I'm very happy with the win. I thought I played really well today. I'm working really hard. It's nice to have this result as payoff," Cirstea said.

It was Cirstea's second victory over Sabalenka in four meetings, having also prevailed in Miami in 2023, the first time they played each other. "Maybe if I win the tournament, I promise I will think about (not retiring)," joked Cirstea, who owns four singles WTA titles.

ARCHERY WORLD CUP STAGE 2

Indian archers stay calm in windy conditions to win gold

India needed 8 to win the shoot-off, and Deepika hit a 9 to claim their first World Cup gold medal since 2021

Nitin Sharma
Chandigarh, May 10

A TOTAL of 15 scores of 8 and three scores of 7 were shot by Indian and Chinese archers in the final in windy conditions, at the Archery World Cup Shanghai Stage 2 on Sunday.

Eight of those 8s and two 7s came from Indian arrows. Yet, the Indian recurve women's team of Deepika Kumari, Anikita Bhakat and Kumkum Mohod ensured it was India who won their first women's team gold at the Archery World Cup Shanghai Stage 2 medal on Sunday, the first since 2021.

It was the first medal since 2023 in world cups with a 5-4 win via shoot-off (28-26) over the Chinese team of Zhu Jingyi, Huang Yuwei and Yu Qi. The win came days after the Indian women's recurve team had edged out the Korean team of Kang Chaeyoung, Oh Yejin and Lee Yunji in the semifinals and the gold meant that Deepika took her World Cup medal count to 39.

"Team ne last tak fight kya aur gold jeeta. (The team fought till the end and won the gold)," shared Kumari while speaking with *The Indian Express* from Shanghai. "We had been losing in the first or second round in team competitions in World Cups for the last 1-2 years, but this gold medal came at the right time for us. To win the gold medal with a win over last World Cup champions China in the final, and a win over the Korean team in the semis is a boost for each one of us," she added.

7 and string of 8s, then

shoot-off comeback

With the final being played in different conditions than the semi-final and qualification, which was played inside the Athletics Stadium, it meant that the wind was not just swirling but directly gusting from opposite end. India started with Bhakat shooting an 8 followed by Mohod and Kumari shooting 10s. Then Bhakat and Mohod shot 8s. With the Chinese ending the set with a score of 53, Deepika needed to hit a 10 to win the first set for India. The four-time Olympian struck 10 to make it 2-0 for India.

With the Chinese team shooting 55 in the second set, the Indian team needed a 10 off the last shot by Deepika to tie the set before Deepika hit a 7. The Chinese then shot a 57 in the third set with Deepika needing a 10 off the last shot to tie the set with her hitting a 7.

The third set was initially tied at 56 each with Deepika hitting an 8 off the last shot before Qi's second shot was upgraded to 9 from an 8 with China taking a 4-2 lead. "There was a bit of confusion early as the wind was a bit awkward. The flags on both the targets were flowing in different directions and it was a bit difficult to judge. And that resulted in arrows going a bit off. But we were trying to improve and the focus was on how to get the shot better," added Deepika.

At the midway stage in the fourth set, China were trailing 25-27. India finished with a total of 53 points with Bhakat hitting a 10 followed by Mohod's 7 and Deepika's 10. With the Chinese needing only a 9 to tie the set



Indian women's recurve archery team won a gold medal at World Cup stage 2 after five years. WORLD ARCHERY

and win the match, Qi hit an 8 to hand the two points to India with the match going into the shoot-off. For once the 8 came from the Chinese.

With China shooting first and Jingyi hitting an 8, Bhakat hit a 9 followed by Yuwei hitting a 9. Mohod hit a 10 to make it 19-17 in India's favour. With Qi hitting a 9, India needed an 8 to win the shoot-off. Deepika hit a 9 to help India make their head to head win against China 18-7. "All of us knew that the low scores are past in the match and we have to aim afresh. We knew China needed a 9 to win the match in the fourth set, but when she hit an 8, once again we told each other that shoot-off is like a fresh start for us. Anikita and Kumkum too handled the pressure well in the shoot-off," added Deepika.

Deepika had a shot average of 9.22 in the final with Bhakat having an average of 8.66 and Mohod too with an average of 9.22 in the final, Indian team's recurve women coach Prafull

There was a bit of confusion early as the wind was a bit awkward. The flags on both the targets were flowing in different directions and it was a bit difficult to judge."

DEEPIKA KUMARI
ON WINDY CONDITIONS

Dange remembered the conversation he had with the trio amid the tense final. "The talk was focussing on the process rather than thinking about the wind. It can happen initially that the arrows are a bit wayward as one tries to aim to adjust to wind. Deepika knows how to come back and when Anikita too made a comeback, I knew the angry Anikita had returned. Kumkum was a bit

nervous like any youngster ahead of the final but then the coaching staff spent time with her to calm her nerves. She held her nerves amid the wind especially hitting a 10 in the shoot-off," said Dange.

All the Indian archers including Simranjeet Kaur, who finished fourth in the women's recurve individual post her semi-final loss against world number one Kang Chaeyoung of Korea and bronze medal loss against Korea's Jang Minhee, will be competing in the trial stages for the Asian Games this week.

With the qualification for the LA Olympics starting with next year's World Championships, Deepika knows the importance of hitting peak form individually as well as in a team. "The talk has been how this medal will motivate each one of us in the trials. And then of course, our aim will be to repeat this gold in the team event in Asian Games too before the road to the LA Olympics begins," signed off Deepika.

Vivaan, Neeru strike bronze in mixed trap at ISSF WC

Nitin Sharma
Chandigarh, May 10

IN WHAT was a daunting qualification followed by a rainy spell in the final, the Indian trap mixed team of Vivaan Kapoor and Neeru Dhandha claimed the country's second medal in the event in an ISSF World Cup since the event was reintroduced in Olympics with the bronze medal in the ISSF World Cup Shotgun at Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The Indian pair, which had finished second in qualification, won the bronze medal in a field including the Italian team of Paris Olympics silver medalist Silvana Stanco and two-time Olympian and 2022 mixed team world champion Mauro De Filippis and 2022 world championships mixed team runner-up Kun-Pi Yang and Wan-Yu Liu of Chinese Taipei.

With London Olympics double trap champion and now Indian foreign coach Peter Wil-



Neeru Dhandha and Vivaan Kapoor with bronze. NRAI

son watching from the coaches' corner, the Indian pair gave a tough fight.

"In the qualification as well as final, both me and Neeru were focussing on our process. We were not thinking about whom we were competing

against. Yes, some of them are legends in the sport but I personally thought of shooting to my strength and not worrying about whom I am competing against. We shot our best," shared Kapoor while speaking with *The Indian Express* from Almaty.

After the second round in qualification, Kapoor, 2024 World Cup final silver medalist, and Dhandha, the reigning Asian champion, were tied fifth along with three other teams. With only four spots available for the final under the new format, the Indian pair shot a perfect round of 25 each in the last round to qualify at the second spot behind Filippis/Stanco and ahead of Yang/Liu and China's Kunming Bai and Xinyue Fan.

"The final was not a true representation of the conditions. What the teams had been through the second and third round in qualification was almost of biblical rain propor-

tions (catastrophic). It meant that both Vivaan and Neeru had to grit their teeth and get on with the shooting. Here the bar was very high and to score a perfect round defined the competition for me and it also shows that they both are perfectly capable to go toe to toe with the best," shared Wilson while talking with *The Indian Express*.

Kapoor hit all his five targets and Dhandha hit four to end on nine points, one point behind leaders Yang/Liu after the first round.

Kapoor again hit all the five targets with Dhandha missing two as they ended on 17 points behind Yang/Liu's score of 19 with Filippis/Stanco hit 14 points and Bai/Fan eliminated at the fourth spot with 13 points.

With Filippis/Stanco hitting all the ten targets in the third round, the Indian pair hit seven targets with Kapoor missing one and Dhandha two. The In-

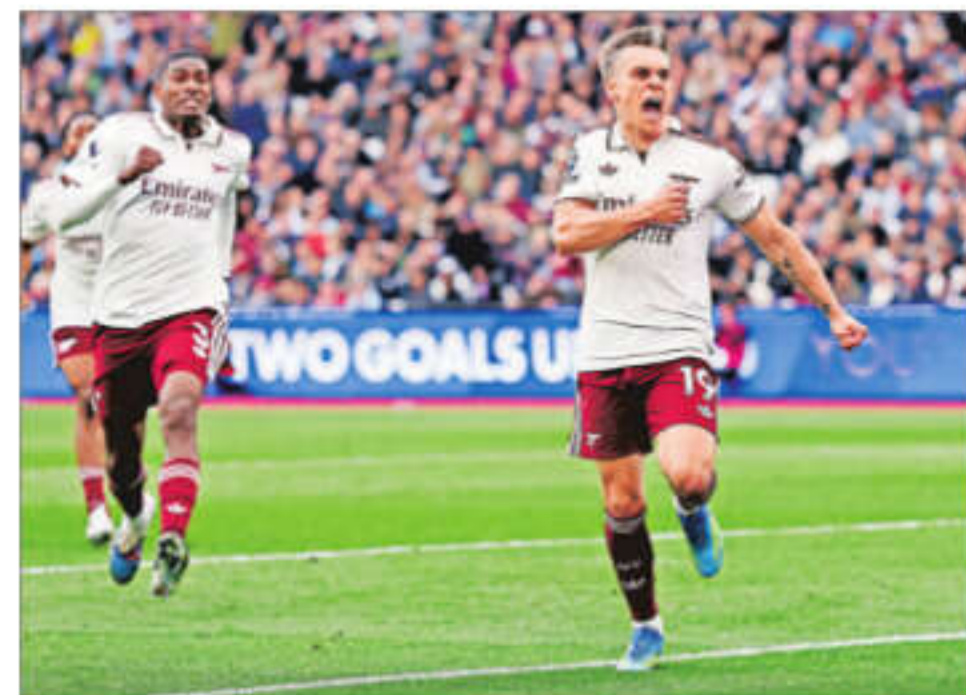
dian pair was tied with the Italians but bowed out due to the lower bib number.

"Spending time with a legend like Peter Wilson in the camp has meant that he shares his vast knowledge of range conditions as well the different angles. Due to the US Iran war, I had not been training with my personal coach Khaled Almhudhaf of Kuwait but I kept sharing training videos with him," added Kapoor.

Target LA

With the trap mixed team event returning to the LA Olympics, the focus will be on earning the quota places. "I hope we use this medal as a springboard for success towards the back end of the year, when LA Olympics individual quotas are available. So the focus has to be individual as well mixed team events to earn the individual quotas as well keeping the mixed team form consistent," added Wilson.

Arsenal beat West Ham to take big step towards EPL crown



Leandro Trossard scored the only goal in the 83rd minute. REUTERS

Reuters
London, May 10

ARSENAL CLEARED arguably the most dangerous remaining obstacle in their path to the Premier League title by the skin of their teeth as Leandro Trossard's late goal secured a dramatic 1-0 win at West Ham United to restore their five-point lead on Sunday.

The visitors were living dangerously at the London Stadium but Trossard guided home a low shot from Martin Odegaard's pass in the 83rd minute to spark delirium amongst the Arsenal fans and despair in the home ranks.

Huge scare

Arsenal rode their luck and survived a huge scare deep in stoppage time as West Ham substitute Callum Wilson had an equaliser ruled out for a foul after a long VAR review.

Victory put Arsenal a step closer to a first Premier League title since 2004 and they will be crowned champions if they win their last two games at home to Burnley and away to Crystal Palace on the final day.

Arsenal have 79 points from 36 games with Manchester City, who have a game in hand, on 74. For West Ham it was a bitter pill to swallow as defeat left them staring at relegation and they could find themselves four points from the safety zone with two games left if Tottenham Hotspur beat Leeds United on Monday.

If Arsenal do go on to lift the title, the incident in stoppage time described by Sky Sports pundit Gary Neville as the "biggest VAR call in the history of the Premier League" will be just a detail in a season-long slog with Manchester City.

But it could have serious implications for West Ham who would have deserved a point for a gritty display.

With time almost up and even West Ham keeper Mads Hernansen up for a corner, the ball broke for Wilson who slammed a shot through a forest of legs and over the line.

West Ham fans went wild and Manchester City's probably did too. Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta looked agast but when the VAR instructed referee Chris Kavanagh to look at a possible foul by West Ham substitute Pablo on Arsenal keeper David Raya in the build-up, the stadium fell silent.

He returned to announce that the goal was disallowed and Arsenal could breathe a huge sigh of relief.

Rarely can a London derby have carried such high stakes, with a web of permutations involving not only West Ham and Arsenal but also their common London rivals Tottenham Hotspur.

Closer to glory

Arsenal fans knew victory at West Ham would move them a step closer to glory, yet that result would also hand Tottenham a gift in their fight to stay above West Ham and avoid a first relegation since 1977.

Tottenham's fans would have faced similarly conflicted emotions as they watched from afar while West Ham's were just focussed on extending the club's 14-season stay in the top flight and piling further pressure on Tottenham.

Arsenal set about their task with real authority. Trossard was twice denied -- first by an outstanding save from Hermansen and then by the woodwork -- during a dominant opening spell. Riccardo Calafiori was also thwarted by a goal-saving block from Konstantinos Mavropanos.

West Ham continued to ride their luck, William Saliba's close-range touch cleared off the line. There were some jittery moments for the visitors too with West Ham almost snatching the lead just before halftime when Valentin Castellanos threw himself at a deep cross and his header was saved at full stretch by Raya.

Arsenal did suffer a blow in the first half with right back Ben White hobbling off injured and Declan Rice initially covering before Arteta re-shuffled at halftime.

Cristhian Mosquera came off the bench to play at right back with Calafiori surprisingly substituted and Myles Lewis-Skelly switching from midfield to left back.

Arsenal struggled to make headway in a tense second period and it was West Ham who grew in belief. Mateus Fernandes spurned a huge chance for the hosts when he played a one-two with Pablo and looked set to score but Raya made a crucial reflex save. Almost immediately Arsenal struck as Odegaard played in Trossard and the Belgian fired home.

India face China with U17 WC dream on line

Press Trust of India
Suzhou, May 10

THE INDIAN women's U17 players will step into the biggest match of their young careers when they face hosts China in the quarter-finals of the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup here on Monday, with a World Cup spot at stake.

No Indian women's team has ever stood one win away from qualifying for a FIFA World Cup on merit.

Victory for the Young Tigresses will seal their place in the 2026 FIFA U17 Women's World Cup in Morocco. Though India have played the U17 men's and women's World Cups as hosts in 2017 and 2022, respectively, the nation has never reached the world's biggest stage through qualification.

Head coach Pamela Conti made it clear that the team's focus remains firmly on the next step. "We are approaching this match in the same way we approached the entire tourna-

ment, with excitement and with the desire to win," said the Italian.

"We know we are facing a very strong team, but we will do everything possible to give this happiness to the country."

India reached the quarter-finals after a commanding 4-0 victory against Lebanon in their final group-stage match, securing the country's first-ever knockout stage appearance at the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup.

The Young Tigresses also became the first Indian women's side to reach the knockout stage of any Asian Cup competition since the 2004 AFC U19 Women's Championship, which was also held in China.

China is one of the favourites in the competition, having topped Group A with three wins from three matches against Myanmar (6-0), Vietnam (3-0) and Thailand (6-0).

This is a match that could take us to glory," said Conti.

● HARBOURING LA 2028 DREAMS

Missed Olympics becomes catalyst for women's rowing in India

Amit Kamath
Bellary, May 10

DEEP IN her heart, Narengbam Lakshmi Devi carries the pain of missing out on the 2012 London Olympics. By an agonisingly slim margin.

Competing in the Asian Continental Olympic qualification regatta in South Korea's Chungju, Lakshmi had finished fourth in the single sculls semi-final. Had she finished just one better, she would have been on the flight to the British capital, a historic first for an Indian female rower.

Fourteen years from that near-miss, India has still not had a female rower making the cut for the Olympics. Lakshmi, now working as an assistant coach with the women's team under national coach Ratheesh DB, is trying her best to change that. As she stands at a vantage point overlooking the 18 girls testing their will and endurance against the serene blue waters of the RWP-3 waterbody at Bellary, she can see them

going where she couldn't.

"When our female rowers qualify for the 2028 or 2032 Olympics, only then will our goal be achieved," she says with a smile.

The sport in India has forever been the preserve of male rowers, all of them polished at the Army Rowing Node. Female rowers, meanwhile, trained at centres like Aleppey or Hyderabad and came together only during national camps for a few months before dispersing to the training centres of their home states. That made finalising a team combination in boats and getting the camaraderie right tough.

But a couple of months back, the Inspire Institute of Sport (IIS) joined hands with the Rowing Federation of India to train the national group at Bellary all year round with the goal of breaking into the Olympics.

Big things are already expected of the women's group at this year's Asian Games, especially after they won two



Narengbam Lakshmi Devi overseeing training in Bellary. IIS

medals last year at the Asian Rowing Championship after 12 years - a silver in the lightweight women's pair and a bronze in the women's eight. Currently, two women's boats have already made the cut for the Aichi-Nagoya Games, with the coach confident that one more will make it.

Lakshmi, the daughter of a fisherman, sheepishly admits that when she started rowing in

2009, it was only to get a government job. But soon, she found herself breaking into the national camp.

"I didn't have a coach back in Manipur even when I broke into the national set-up. Instead, I had a physical education teacher who taught me," she says.

The early days in the national camp was a steep learning curve: she learnt about all

the rookie errors she was making, including the fact that she was gripping her oars wrong.

Soon after her near-miss at making it to the Olympics, Lakshmi pivoted to coaching, getting a diploma from the National Institute of Sports. She was determined that the next-gen's rookie mistakes should be fixed a lot earlier than hers were. At the Loktak Lake, a freshwater body in Moirang in Manipur, she started shaping the next generation of female rowers in her home state with a tiny club.

Those early days, when she would try to scout girls to get them into rowing, Lakshmi would face some hard practical questions from parents: "What will you give them? Will they get hostels to stay in? Will they be given a stipend to train and compete?"

"I didn't have the courage after a while (to approach parents)! They would ask about facilities. We didn't have any," she recalls.

Despite that, at the tiny club

she ran on Loktak Lake, over 40 girls have trained under Lakshmi over the years. She also unearthed talents like Priya Devi, Tendenthoi and Bharati Oinam Devi, who are all national campers today. In fact, the trio is among the four Manipuri girls in the 18-strong female rowing programme at IIS's Bellary facility.

Manipur isn't the first place that comes to mind when one thinks of rowing. But over the last few years, the tiny northeastern state is quietly becoming a force. The early indicator of this came at the National Games in Gujarat four years ago when rowers from Manipur ended with a surprise haul of a gold and a bronze. It was surprising because rowers from the state had just one boat available per category to train on, and those were at least 15 years old. Moreover, the state's rowers had just six pairs of oars available in total.

(The writer is in Bellary on invitation of Inspire Institute of Sport)