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PETROL, DIESEL PRICES HAVE REMAINED UNCHANGED FOR OVER FOUR YEARS NOW

## Polls over, energy prices soaring due to West Asia crisis, fuel rate hike on table

**Incurring heavy losses, public sector oil marketing firms push for increase****Sukalp Sharma & Anil Sasi**  
*New Delhi, May 1*

WITH INTERNATIONAL oil and fuel prices persisting at supernormal levels in the international market due to the West Asia crisis and polling in state elections over, a hike in prices of fuels like petrol, diesel and domestic LPG could be in the offing in the coming days or weeks, according to highly placed sources in the government.

companies (OMCs) are incurring heavy losses on the sale of these fuels and have been pushing for price hikes. Petrol and diesel prices have been frozen for over four years now in India. Moreover, the timing of the current global surge in prices, which clashed with Assembly elections in four states and a Union Territory, made it politically fraught for the prices to be hiked. Throughout March and April, the Ministry of Petroleum

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri with Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel in Surat, Friday. Puri said commercial LPG was back to 70% of the pre-crisis level. On fuel price hike, he said if the time comes, the government will take a decision. EXPRESS PAGE 9

## Jet fuel price raised for international flights, domestic untouched

**Commercial LPG up Rs 993 a cylinder****Sukalp Sharma**  
*New Delhi, May 1*

PUBLIC SECTOR oil marketing companies (OMCs) Friday kept the price of aviation turbine fuel (ATF), or jet fuel, unchanged for scheduled do-

mestic flights by airlines, while hiking the price for international flights and other non-scheduled operations.

According to the country's largest OMC Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the move is part of

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## NIA visits Mumbai Press Club over gathering of Bhima Koregaon accused

**Club suspends three members, they deny wrongdoing; agency sought documents related to January meet****Vallabh Ozarkar**  
*Mumbai, May 1*

TWO DAYS after the Mumbai Press Club suspended three members over an event attended by accused persons out on bail in the Bhima Koregaon case, officials of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) visited the club seeking documents related to the gathering, according to a statement issued by the club Friday.

The development pertains to a January 19 event at the Mumbai Press Club that was attended by several accused in the 2018 Bhima Koregaon case — these included Varavara Rao, Vernon

Gonsalves, Arun Ferreira, Gautam Navlakha, Anand Teltumbde, Hany Babu, Rona Wilson and Sudhir Dhawale — all of whom are currently out on bail.

The Press Club said the gathering had taken place in the presence of former office-bearers, including former president Gurbir Singh. The club stated that while granting bail, the Supreme Court and the special NIA court had imposed conditions restricting some of the accused from meeting one another while out on bail. According to the club, the January 19 gathering raised questions about a possible violation of

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Dhaka, Delhi move to resume full-scale visa operations

**Efforts for India-Bangladesh political engagements currently underway**

• Visas for Indians to Bangladesh

|           |             |              |                |                 |
|-----------|-------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <b>E.</b> | <b>2024</b> | Delhi 69,684 | Kolkata 72,265 | Agartala 99,941 |
|           | <b>2025</b> | Delhi 63,380 | Kolkata 43,048 | Agartala 27,946 |
|           | <b>2026</b> | Delhi 5,197  | Kolkata 3,557  | Agartala 9,462  |

SOURCE: BANGLADESH HIGH COMMISSION

**Divya A***New Delhi, May 1*

MOVING TO normalise ties after months of turmoil in the recent past, Delhi and Dhaka are taking the first step forward with full-scale resumption of visa services. While Bangladesh has resumed visas for Indian citizens across all categories, India is aiming at gradual resumption of visa operations over the next few weeks, *The*

*Indian Express* has learnt.

When Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman was in India last month, visa normalisation was among the key points raised by Dhaka. While all Bangladesh visa centres in India, including the High Commission in New Delhi and consular divisions in Kolkata, Agartala, Mumbai and Chennai, are now functional, Dhaka has sought early reciprocation by

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



## Guarding the strong room

Security personnel guard a strong room ahead of the May 4 counting of votes for the West Bengal polls, in Kolkata, Friday. Meanwhile, the Election Commission said repolling will be held Saturday in 15 polling stations where voting was held on April 29 in the second phase of the elections in the state. PTI PAGE 6

## Row in Punjab: Cong claims CM came to House drunk, he hits back

**Speaker rejects Opposition demand for alcohol, dope tests for CM, MLAs****Man Aman Singh Chhina**  
*Chandigarh, May 1*

A DAY-LONG special session of the Punjab Assembly witnessed unruly scenes Friday as the Congress walked out of the House twice, alleging that Chief

Minister Bhagwant Mann was in an inebriated state.

The Opposition party demanded that all MLAs present in the House undergo an alcohol and a doping test, but Speaker Kultar Singh Sandhwan turned

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann in the Assembly in Chandigarh on Friday. PTI

• TOLL RISES TO 9 IN BOAT CAPSIZE AT BARGI DAM, SIX PERSONS STILL MISSING

## In Jabalpur boat wreckage, woman and her child found in death embrace, sharing a single life jacket

**Anand Mohan J**  
*Bhopal, May 1*

THE BODIES were found locked together, mother and child still in an unbroken embrace, sharing a lifejacket. They were recovered from inside the submerged hull of a cruise boat that capsized in the Bargi Dam near Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, on Thursday evening. By Friday, nine bodies had been found. A total of 28 people were rescued.

On the shore, Madhya Pradesh PWD Minister Rakesh Singh broke down upon seeing the bodies of the mother and child. Pradeep Kumar, the grieving husband of 39-year-old Marina and their four-year-old son, said, "We barely had enough time to wear life jackets, which were kept in an inaccessible area. I was distributing the jackets and as soon as I put mine on, the ship capsized. We came here from Delhi for my brother's housewarming ceremony. What happened is to-



Rescue personnel attempt to recover the capsized cruise boat from Bargi Dam near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh, Friday. PTI

tally a result of negligence."

The nine people confirmed to have died in the tragedy included eight women and the four-year-old boy. The tourism department has ordered an inquiry and initiated action against several personnel.

The immediate trigger for the tragedy that took place during the Thursday evening cruise in the Bargi Dam reservoir area on the Narmada was a sudden, violent storm, Jabalpur Collector Raghvendra Singh told *The Indian Express*.

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Happening today

• THE PIPRAHWA RELICS of Lord Buddha will be opened for public veneration at Jivetsal in Leh.

• UNION HOME MINISTER Amit Shah will launch mobile-based disaster communication systems developed to ensure timely dissemination of critical information.

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By EP UNNY

No tension... no pollsters. Perfectly predictable result, Madam.

**Santosh Singh & Maulshree Seth**  
*Patna, Lucknow, May 1*

THE RULE to make Marathi mandatory for auto drivers in Maharashtra, which has now been deferred, has evoked sharp reactions across the political spectrum in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

In Bihar, the BJP's national spokesperson, Guru Prakash Paswan, told *The Indian Express*, "The BJP believes in both national unity and cultural diversity. Respecting the Marathi



CM Devendra Fadnavis with Deputy CM Eknath Shinde on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, Friday. DEEPAK JOSHI PAGE 8

language and Maharashtra's identity is important, but India's spirit also dictates that

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 Director, LBSIM Delhi



## Clearing the path

Army personnel clear snow from the premises of Gurdwara Hemkunt Sahib ahead of its May 23 portal opening ceremony, in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district, Friday. PTI

# Bangladesh Foreign Ministry lodges protest over Assam CM's comments

**Shubhajit Roy**  
*New Delhi, May 1*

AMID THE heat and dust of the elections in Assam, Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry has summoned India's acting High Commissioner Pawan Badhe and lodged a formal protest over comments made by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

Director General (South Asia) Ishrat Jahan conveyed Bangladesh's position to the Indian diplomat on Thursday, an official was quoted by Bangladesh media reports.

In a social media post last week, Sarma said 20 foreign nationals were apprehended in Assam and pushed back to Bangladesh. "Rude people don't understand soft language. We continuously remind ourselves of this prophetic line when we expel infiltrators from Assam who don't leave themselves. For instance, these 20 illegal Bangladeshis who were pushed back last night," Sarma had said.

# Lucknow girl who cannot see or hear tops school with 98.75% in ISC exam

**Manish Sahu**  
*Lucknow, May 1*

A STUDENT'S determination despite towering odds, a family's sacrifice and a school's support — 19-year-old Sarah Moin from Lucknow has scripted a tale of inspiration and grit with her stellar performance in this year's ISC examinations.

Sarah Moin, who cannot hear or see and has trouble speaking, has topped Lucknow's Christ Church College by scoring an outstanding 98.75 per cent in the Class 12 board exams. She has secured the highest marks among 258 students from one of the city's leading institutions.

Sarah was just four when she was diagnosed with sarcoïdosis, a rare disease that gradually took away her eyesight. Another setback followed a couple of years later when she lost her hearing, too. Sarah also has trouble speaking.

"Because of her medical condition, I enrolled her in Christ Church College, which offered special support for students with disabilities. When Sarah scored 95 per cent in Class X, it gave her the confidence to believe that she could do better and compete with everyone else," said father, Moin Ahmed, 56.

Ahmed said he took voluntary retirement in 2020 to support Sarah's journey. A resident of Lucknow's Hussainganj area, he took Sarah to Christ Church College every day, which has a dedicated section and specially trained educators for children with special needs.

"The college arranged separate classes for her because of her visual and hearing challenges. I took voluntary retirement from my job so I could fully care for Sarah. A child facing such difficulties needs constant attention, patience and extraordinary support," he said.

Sarah's mother, Julee Hamid, is a teacher at a government primary school. The couple have two children, Sarah and her elder brother, a lawyer.



Sarah Moin, 19, is a student of Christ Church College

Ahmed said Sarah's path to success was also paved by the exceptional dedication of her teacher, Salman Ali Qazi. "He made extraordinary efforts to help my daughter become the college topper," he said.

Salman Ali said Christ Church College started its section for children with special needs in 2014, and he has been part of the department since then. "Our special education section currently supports 33 visually impaired students, but Sarah's journey has been uniquely challenging because, unlike many others, she can't hear either," said Ali, adding the best available techniques and technology were used to support her.

Ali said they used an Orbit Reader, a Braille-based device, to help Sarah study digitally. "Her books were scanned, converted into Word files, and then connected to the device so she could read through touch. She was given one-to-one classes, where I explained lessons to her using signals and assistive technology," he said.

For examinations, Sarah used a refreshable Braille display linked to a laptop. Her question papers were converted into Braille and her answers were later transformed into regular text for evaluation.

Principal Enosh Chattree said that out of 258 students who appeared for the ISC examinations this year, two were from the institution's special education section.

Abhinandan, another student from the section who is visually impaired, has also performed commendably, scoring 72 per cent in the board exams.

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## Fuel rate hike on table

and Natural Gas (MoPNG) assured consumers that there was no proposal to hike fuel prices.

Now with the voting over, and international oil prices shooting up again, it may not be too long before the government allows OMCs to raise prices, sources indicated.

"It is inevitable. It is only a matter of time before prices (of petrol, diesel, and domestic LPG) are hiked," a senior government official told *The Indian Express*.

On assurances from the MoPNG that prices won't be

hiked, the official said that these were political announcements that came in the middle of the state elections, and are definitely a constraint in raising the prices. The effort has been to hold on to the prices for as long as possible, but with no end in sight to the Strait of Hormuz closure, the status quo on prices cannot continue for long. The official did not elaborate on the timeline for price revisions.

Petrol is currently priced at Rs 94.77 per litre in Delhi, and diesel at Rs 87.67 per litre. Domestic LPG is priced at Rs 913

per 14.2-kg cylinder in the capital. Fuel prices vary across states due to differences in state levies.

Last week, Petroleum Ministry Joint Secretary Sujata Sharma had told a news briefing the OMCs were incurring losses of around Rs 20 per litre on petrol sales and Rs 100 per litre on diesel sales. She also said that there was no proposal to hike petrol and diesel prices. As for domestic LPG, the price was last revised on March 7.

On April 1, the MoPNG had said that the OMCs were incurring an under-recovery of about Rs 380 per 14.2-kg cylinder on LPG sales to households. The fuel retailers are also incurring

under-recoveries on sale of jet fuel for domestic flights.

While the retail prices of petrol and diesel are deregulated, in practice, the government-owned OMCs — with 90% market share in fuel retail — have kept prices steady in consultation with the government. They incur heavy losses when international oil prices surge, and earn hefty profits when the prices slump. Petrol and diesel prices have been more or less frozen since April 2022.

Oil prices have been extremely volatile since the war began, but the petrol and diesel prices have not been hiked to protect the domestic consumer from this volatility.

## Jet fuel

the fuel retailers' effort to insulate domestic consumers from the surge in international oil and fuel prices due to the West Asia war.

OMCs usually revise prices of ATF and some other fuels on the first of every month in line with international prices.

On April 1, the government had announced that the OMCs were hiking the ATF price for scheduled domestic flights only partially — by 25¢ or Rs 15,000 per kilolitre (kl) — to Rs 1,04,927 per kl, at Delhi, the country's largest and busiest airport. However, the full pass-through was announced for international

flights, which translated to a steep hike of about Rs 73,000 per kl.

According to sources, the price of ATF for international flights has now been hiked by \$76.55 per kl to \$1,511.86 per kl from May 1, translating to a little over Rs 7 per litre.

Major Indian airlines had urged the government for changes in the ATF pricing formula by reintroducing "crack spread bands" to limit how much OMCs can charge as margin on jet fuel, and to bring parity between prices for domestic and international flight operations.

While the OMCs' decision to not change ATF prices for domestic flights comes as a relief for Indian carriers, the signifi-

cant price differential between prices for domestic and international flights persists. Usually, ATF accounts for about 40% of Indian airlines' operational costs; the price surge has led to a further increase to 55-60%, according to an Indian airline association.

IOC said that apart from ATF prices for domestic flights, it has also not touched prices of regular petrol and diesel for the general public, domestic LPG cylinders for use by households, and kerosene sold through the public distribution system.

The May price revisions have been limited to select segments — ATF for international and non-scheduled operations, bulk and commercial LPG, and bulk diesel.

According to sources, commercial LPG price has been hiked by a steep Rs 993 per 19-kg cylinder; it now costs Rs 3,071.50 in Delhi.

Commercial LPG accounts for less than 1% of the country's total LPG consumption, and most of the remaining consumption serves demand from households. "Overall, approximately 80% of petroleum products have witnessed no change in prices, ensuring stability for the majority of consumers. Price revisions have been limited to select industrial segments, which constitute a relatively small share of overall consumption and are subject to routine monthly adjustments based on prevailing international prices," IOC said.

## Press Club

those conditions.

Following an internal inquiry based on complaints from two members, the club's managing committee suspended three members — former president Gurbir Singh, senior journalist Bernard D'Mello and Shrikant Modak — stating that they had organised or facilitated the gathering.

In its statement, the club said its inquiry committee reviewed documents, CCTV footage and statements from staff members before concluding that the three had "collectively facilitated a gathering that may have led to violations of bail conditions within the Club premises", exposing the institution to "significant legal and reputational risk". On April 29, the club said, NIA officials approached its office-bearers after learning about the suspensions through media reports and sought documents related to the incident.

"We have been contacted by NIA officials and are extending full cooperation. All relevant documents sought by the agency have been shared and all necessary assistance has been extended in accordance with applicable laws and procedures," the club said in its statement Friday.

Asked if the club leadership had reached out to NIA, a member of the managing committee said, "The NIA on its own approached the club after learning about the incident and Press Club cooperated."

The three suspended members rejected the allegations and questioned the club's action.

Gurbir Singh said he was "merely a participant" in the January 19 discussion and denied organising the event. On the merits of the case, he said, "Irrespective of the above, the Press Club has a rich culture of inviting people of different views and ideology ranging from Zail Singh, L K Advani to Kanhaiya Kumar and Prashant Bhushan.

Many of them have cases against them, but we do not exclude anyone as long as they are not convicted. The club is a platform for discussion and debate, and that is what a press club is for. None of the BK accused were convicted and they were free to go anywhere. I personally do not know of any bail conditions. But bail conditions are something between the courts and the accused. The Press Club or any of its officials or members are not responsible to police their bail terms."

Singh claimed that the suspension was politically motivated and linked to upcoming Press Club elections. "The immediate reason for this abrupt expulsion is fear of the current managing committee of me leading a consolidated Opposition in the coming elections of Mumbai Press Club. Expulsion makes me ineligible to stand," he said.

Bernard D'Mello said he had invited the Bhima Koregaon accused to discuss broader issues surrounding the case and not

the merits of the prosecution. "The accused are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law," he said, adding that the trial had still not begun nearly eight years after the arrests.

D'Mello also denied any role in violating bail conditions, saying he was unaware of the restrictions. "It is the responsibility of the accused, and not a third party, to comply with bail conditions," he said. He maintained that he was denied a fair hearing during the club's inquiry process.

Shrikant Modak too denied wrongdoing and said he was unaware of the bail conditions imposed on the accused.

In its statement, the club said it neither had the authority nor the intent to regulate members' guests, but was duty-bound to act against conduct that could bring the institution into disrepute or implicate it in violations of judicial orders. "If bail conditions imposed by constitutional courts are breached on its premises, the Club cannot remain a passive bystander," it said.

## Punjab

down its request, while the AAP dismissed the accusation.

Mann later told reporters: "They (Congress) don't have any issues to raise. What test needs to be done?"

The session, summoned to discuss a resolution on the revision of wages on the occasion of Labour Day, began on an amiable note earlier in the day, but things took a turn for the worse when Mann objected to Congress MLA Sukhpal Singh Khaira allegedly using a mobile phone while the resolution was being discussed.

Mann said decorum should be followed in the House, where no one is supposed to sit cross-

legged. The Speaker then asked Khaira to maintain order and carefully listen to the resolution. "Why don't you go out and then use it (mobile phone)?" Mann then asked Khaira, to which the Congress MLA said even the CM's wife sat cross-legged at the visitors' gallery during a previous session.

This set off Mann, who said, "She corrected herself. She is not a member of the House. You even target my daughter. *Ae bakwas karda* (he is talking nonsense), Speaker sahib. He should be treated on the Assembly's expenses."

Shortly afterwards, while the debate was in progress, Khaira alleged that the CM was drunk. Leader of Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa supported him and demanded that an alcohol test

be conducted on all the MLAs.

"An honourable member has levelled a very serious charge and that too on the CM of the state. If it is true, then it is a black day in democracy. You are the custodian of the House; my request is, close the doors, and get an alcohol test done on all members present," said Bajwa.

As the Treasury benches rallied behind the CM, Congress MLAs walked out of the House. The proceedings continued in the Congress's absence, with the House unanimously passing a Confidence Motion moved by the CM.

During the lunch break, Bajwa wrote a letter to the Speaker, signed by all 16 of the Congress's MLAs in the 117-member House, demanding an alcometer test and dope testing

of the CM and all the MLAs.

The House was adjourned for 10 minutes after the break as the Congress demanded the Speaker's ruling. Following the adjournment, Sandhwan rejected the demand and the Congress walked out again.

Later, addressing a press conference outside the House, Bajwa and Khaira reiterated their allegation against Mann. Khaira alleged the CM had been intoxicated at several other public events in the past.

Dismissing the Congress's allegations, state Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said, "A few days ago, the government had demarcated the land of Sukhpal Singh Khaira and therefore the Congress cooked up this conspiracy to defame the CM."

## Marathi

every citizen should have equal opportunity anywhere in the country. We are still looking into the matter as it is currently at an evolving stage."

Rajiv Ranjan Prasad, the national spokesperson for BJP ally JD(U), said, "The Maharashtra government's decision might be helpful to local residents, but a large number of non-Marathi people, including taxi drivers, have lived there for years. These taxi drivers must be given adequate time to learn Marathi."

Sanjay Nishad, a minister in the UP government and chief of the NISHAD party, an NDA ally, said, "Knowing a regional language is one thing and making it mandatory is another. If the government wants to bring such rules, then an arrangement should first be made to train them in the regional language. Still, such restrictions are not right. They disturb harmony."

Last month, Maharashtra Transport Minister Pratap Sar-naik had said that starting May 1, Marathi would be compulsory for all licensed auto-rickshaws and taxi drivers. He had warned

that those who are unable to read, write or speak the language might risk losing their licences.

However, the state government last week announced a 100-day verification and enforcement drive for the Marathi mandate, effectively giving operators time to comply before stricter measures are considered.

Opposition parties in both Bihar and UP were more direct in their criticism. Rajya Sabha MP and RJD national spokesperson Manoj Kumar Jha said, "We find these kinds of dictatorial orders very bizarre. Languages do not fight; people doing politics with languages do..."

Bihar Congress unit president Rajesh Kumar said, "The order is against our federal structure and the basic tenets of fundamental rights provided by our Constitution. Such orders only provoke regionalist sentiments. However, BJP has long been engaged in the politics of religion and region."

Leader of Opposition in the UP Assembly and SP leader Mata Prasad Pandey called it an unnecessary imposition that could hurt migrant workers and demanded that it be done away with altogether.

## Visa operations

Delhi on the visa issue.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Bangladesh High Commissioner Riaz Hamidullah said, "After the visa operations at some of our centres had to be held in abeyance in December last year, they were restored in February."

In February, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Dhaka as part of the Indian delegation led by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to attend the swearing-in of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

From the time the new BNP government has taken charge, Delhi and Dhaka have been taking steps to recalibrate ties strained by the hostility of the interim administration led by Muhammad Yunus following the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

Once visa processes on both sides are normalised, Delhi and Dhaka will look at other points of convergence including economic ties and energy connectivity. High-level political engagements, sources said, could also be worked out in the coming weeks.

Recently, India transported diesel to Bangladesh to alleviate its energy shortage in the wake of the West Asia war.

Government sources in New

Delhi said though the visa services for Bangladesh citizens were severely hit in the wake of security concerns that emerged last year, these were never completely shut down. "Considerations were made on a case-to-case basis, especially for those dealing with medical or family emergencies."

Efforts are underway for Indian visa operations to gradually resume, the sources said.

As per estimates, visa services for Bangladeshis national to visit India are presently working at around 15-20% of the pre-December 2025 capacity, and medical/family visas are being prioritised over other categories.

With new Indian High Commissioner Dinesh Trivedi taking over soon, it is expected that full-scale resumption of visa services will be effected soon by India.

According to figures provided by the Bangladesh High Commission to *The Indian Express*, over 13,000 visas have been issued to Indian citizens over the last two months since the operations were resumed around February 20. These include various categories: business, tourism, medical and for those wanting to travel across the border to meet family members.

## Jabalpur

The movement of passengers on the vessel also likely played a part. According to him, many passengers initially gathered on the upper deck, drawn by open space and activity. As turbulence increased, those from the lower deck also moved upward.

"When everyone went upstairs, the centre of gravity fluctuated. The boat began to shake violently. People started running from one side to another to balance themselves. That led to instability," he said, adding that the movement likely caused water to enter the lower sections. Once flooding began, those who had returned or were already on the lower deck got trapped.

The Collector maintained that the cruise had operated within permitted capacity. "It is a 90-seater vessel, and around 40 people were on board. There was no issue of overcapacity," he said. On regulatory questions, he said the applicability of the National Green Tribunal's norms banning cruise ships in wetland bodies of the state "would need examination as the dam is a man-made reservoir".

According to senior officials and rescue personnel, the sequence of events that led to the accident began even before the cruise began. A weather advisory warning of 40–50 kmph winds had been issued a day earlier. Despite this, the cruise, part of a tourism operation running since 2006, began around 4.30 pm. Collector Singh said that as per protocol, the boat was allowed to operate since it could purportedly withstand the impact of the high-speed winds.

By around 6 pm, when the boat got near Khamaria island, weather conditions worsened sharply. High-velocity winds churned the reservoir into rough waters. Eyewitnesses on the banks began shouting and signalling the operator to return. Survivors say those warnings were ignored.

Inside the boat, the situation deteriorated rapidly. Passengers who had moved upstairs during the initial phase were later directed back down as the storm intensified. The lower deck — an enclosed, air-conditioned space where life jackets were stored — soon became a choke point.

"Around 6 pm, the wind became strong and water started entering the boat," recalled survivor Sangeeta Kori. Life jackets, she said, had not been issued in advance. "They were kept somewhere inside. When water started coming in, they (the crew) began distributing them. That led to panic and scuffles," she said. Some survivors alleged that the storage had to be forced open, leading to a last-minute scramble.

Another survivor, Vrinda, said the sequence of instructions added to the confusion. "We had booked seats in the lower cabin, but most tourists went upstairs when they heard music. Then, when the rain and wind began, we were told by the crew to go downstairs," she said. One crew member was already wearing a life jacket, she said, adding, "Someone from our group rushed to get life jackets for us. The crew member then jumped

out. Before we could process what happened, the boat sank in two minutes."

The design of the vessel appears to have compounded the problem. As water entered the lower deck, escape routes narrowed. Preliminary assessments suggested that those on the upper deck or outside had better chances of survival, while those inside the enclosed section were trapped as the boat tilted.

The pilot, Mahesh, said the storm struck suddenly and rendered the vessel uncontrollable. He said he had over a decade of experience and that safety arrangements were in place.

Tourism Minister Dharmendra Lodhi acknowledged that the vessel's design "should not have allowed it to capsize", while ordering a review of all such cruise operations.

Survivor accounts also point to the speed of the collapse. Manoj Sain, whose wife Jyoti died, said, "Three of my children are admitted in the ICU. The whole boat capsized within minutes as my family ran down to the lower deck. We were rescued by locals."

Even the first response reflected a fragmented system. The "golden hour" after the capsizing was largely handled by local villagers and workers, who used ropes and small boats to pull out 15-16 survivors before official rescue teams arrived.

By nightfall, the State Disaster Response Force and police teams had reached the site, navigating darkness, rain and rocky terrain. By Friday morning, the operation escalated into a full-scale, multi-agency effort. Army personnel, NDRF divers and specialised teams were deployed, along with heavy machinery, to stabilise and retrieve the wreck lodged in a rocky stretch nearly 50-60 feet deep.

"By the time we reached, it was dark and raining," said Commandant Neeraj Singh, adding, "Deep diving was not possible then. In the morning, we began coordinated operations with the Army and NDRF. Around 60 to 70 personnel were deployed. The rocky terrain created significant difficulties."

It was during these deep dives that teams finally entered the submerged interiors and began recovering bodies.

By Friday evening, the government had taken action against several personnel. The services of cruise pilot Mahesh Patel, a helper and the ticket counter-in-charge have been terminated. Manager Sunil Maravi of the government-run Maikal Resort and Boat Club, Bargi, was suspended for negligence, and Regional Manager Sanjay Malhotra has been attached to headquarters.

A departmental inquiry has been instituted. It will be carried out by a committee comprising the Director General of Home Guards and Civil Defence, a secretary of the Madhya Pradesh government, and the Commissioner of Jabalpur Division. The committee will examine key aspects such as the causes of the accident, compliance with cruise operation rules, and other relevant factors.

A standard operating procedure for cruise operations will be formulated through the tourism department to avoid such mishaps, the government has said.

‘DOCUMENTS FORGED IN NAMES OF 5 DEAD PERSONS’

## 2 held for multi-crore land fraud linked to Al-Falah founder

Pragynesh  
New Delhi, May 1

TWO PERSONS have been arrested by the Delhi Police for allegedly conniving with Al-Falah University founder, Jawad Ahmad Siddique, to fraudulently acquire land in Southeast Delhi’s Madanpur Khadar by forging documents in the names of five dead people who previously owned the land, sources confirmed.

The two accused, Vinod Kumar and Hari Om, were arrested last month by the Crime Branch. “The arrests were made following a detailed investigation and an analysis of evidence gathered during search action,” an officer said.

Sources said the 1.15-acre of land in Khadar was allegedly transferred by Kumar and his associates to Tarbia Education Foundation — Siddiqui is one of its directors and a major shareholder — in 2013.

The Haryana-based university had come under the



Al-Falah University

scanner after three doctors working with it were identified as suspects in the November 10 Red Fort blast case that left 13 dead. The Centre had subsequently sought a forensic audit of the university’s records.

During the investigation, sources claimed the Enforcement Directorate (ED) examined all financial details and found that forged General Power of Attorney (GPA) was used to sell land in the names of dead owners.

“The probe revealed that

the land in Khasra No. 792, Madanpur Khadar, was acquired through fraud by Tarbia Education Foundation of Jawad Ahmad Siddiqui. The deed records a sale of land in Khasra No. 792 (and related land) in favour of Tarbia Education Foundation, for a consideration of Rs 75,00,000,” a source said.

This was lower than the estimated value of the land, around Rs 7-8 crore. Sources said the ED also found that the GPA was false and fabricated. “The signatures/thumb impressions of the deceased are forged. The land was transferred on the basis of forged GPA and the ultimate beneficiary is Tarbia Education Foundation, which purchased the land on the basis of forged GPA by sellers,” a source claimed.

Police said after examining all the documents, it has been revealed that Kumar held the power of attorney for at least five landowners, who were long dead by the time the power of attorney was registered on Ja-

nuary 7, 2004.

“The ED has found that one landowner, Nathu, died on January 1, 1972; followed by Harbans Singh, who died on April 27, 1991; Harkesh, who died on June 12, 1993; Shiv Dayal, who died on January 22, 1998; and Jay Ram, who died on October 15, 1998. The ED found a common pattern — that the date of GPA registration of all these people in favour of Vinod Kumar was January 7, 2004, and it was later sold to Tarbia on June 27, 2013,” a source claimed, adding that it carried the names and signatures or thumb impressions of the deceased landowners.

“The ED also found that in some instances, persons died much before signing GPA and many were already dead when the GPA was executed in January 2004. A GPA said to be signed by a dead person has no legal authority, but despite this, a registered sale deed dated June 27, 2013, was executed,” the source claimed.

### WEST ASIA CONFLICT

## As commercial LPG becomes costlier, some eateries say ‘will have to hike rates’

Abhimanyu Hazarika  
Gurgaon, May 1

WITH COMMERCIAL LPG cylinder rates hiked by Rs 993, while many restaurants in Delhi as well as neighbouring Noida and Gurgaon said on Friday that they are considering whether to pass on the costs to customers right away, some maintained that it is inevitable that consumers will be charged an increased rate.

Amid rising global energy prices due to the Iran-US war, commercial cylinder prices were hiked by Rs 993 on Friday, effective immediately. The price of a 19-kg commercial cylinder in Delhi and Noida now stands at Rs 3,071.50, while the rate is Rs 3,088 in Gurgaon. Domestic LPG rates remain unchanged.

Vivek Thacker, proprietor of the popular Civil Line Wala chole bhature outlet in Gurgaon said he hopes the hike is temporary. “Definitely, there will be losses, but let us wait and watch. The burden will increase on everyone, from sales to customers, but we will not pass on the hike right now...”

Akshit Behl, growth and investment head at Khadak Singh



At a LPG station in New Delhi on Friday. PRAVEEN KHANNA

Da Dhaba, which has eight outlets in Gurgaon and several across Delhi and Noida, said the price hike will be incremental. “Now, with even prices of raw material increasing, we will have to pass on the costs to the customers, but gradually. As of now, we will start with a 10-12% hike so the customer does not feel the pinch immediately and suddenly... A bigger hike may follow in the coming months.”

Vicky Saluja of Baby Dragon, a multi-cuisine bar and restaurant in Noida, said the rates will be hiked. “It has come as a complete shocker. We will have to in-

crease prices by at least 5%,” he said. A staffer at Zahra restaurant in Shaheen Bagh said they will absorb the costs for now. “All restaurants are opposed to the hike here but what can we do? We will wait for now (for some possible relief) before increasing prices; we have not raised them at all since the war began”, he claimed.

For now, more elite places seem to be shielded. “We run on piped gas so it does not affect us as of now, but when prices of commercial PNG also goes up, we will see,” said Praveen Bhatia, owner of Perch Wine & Co-

fee Bar that has outlets at Khan Market, Greater Kailash and Vasant Vihar in Delhi.

Pranav Rungta, vice-president at the National Restaurants Association of India (NRAI), said it was the highest hike in prices in his memory. “There will naturally be inflationary pressures. But prices also tend to be fluid, so let us see how long the hike holds. For us, gas is not that big a component of overall costs to warrant an immediate steep hike for customers, but it will likely have to be increased in the coming weeks,” he added.

“Other raw materials like dairy will also see price rises, so at some point, there will be a ripple effect on commodity prices. It is an unprecedented situation, but at the same time, increasing prices also has its own costs in terms of reprinting menus. We will wait and watch...,” he added.

Bharat Yadav, president of the Haryana LPG Dealers Association, said he has received at least three calls from customers in Gurgaon since morning asking that their industrial cylinder orders be put on hold. “The industry won’t be able to survive,” he added.

## Commercial flights set to take off from Noida airport on June 15

Express News Service  
Noida, May 1

THE NEWLY inaugurated Noida International Airport (NIA) will begin commercial flights starting from June 15, officials said on Friday.

The inaugural flight from Noida will be by IndiGo, followed by Akasa Air and Air India Express.

According to sources, details on schedules, destinations, and passenger services are under discussion.

“The start of services follows the inauguration of the airport by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the receipt of approval for the Aerodrome Security Program (ASP) from the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, which confirms that the airport’s security framework, systems and operating procedures are in place in line with regulatory requirements, ahead of the launch of commercial services,” said an official.

This announcement comes days after NIA made changes to its leadership structure and appointed its Chief Financial Officer, Nitu Samra, as interim CEO. This was done as the government had refused to grant the requisite security clearance to the expat chief executive — Christoph Schnellmann, the Swiss national who has led the



Noida International Airport. FILE

airport as CEO since August 2020. He will now join the NIA’s board of directors as executive vice chairman.

It was anticipated that after this clearance, the airport, inaugurated by the Prime Minister on March 28, will soon start its operations domestically first, later expanding to operate internationally.

Located in Uttar Pradesh’s Jewar, the NIA will serve as the second airport for Delhi-NCR and parts of western UP. It is set to serve both as a major passenger and a cargo hub.

The airport has one runway and a passenger terminal, with a capacity to serve 12 million passengers annually.

According to officials, the airport’s master plan provides for further development over the duration of the concession to serve over 70 million passengers annually.

### 2018-2019 AAP GOVT SCHEME

## ACB cracks down on coaching centres: 9 held in Rs 37-cr Jai Bhim Yojana ‘fraud’

Express News Service  
New Delhi, May 1

THE ANTI-CORRUPTION Branch (ACB) of the Delhi government on April 29 arrested nine co-owners, directors, and associates of four coaching institutes for allegedly siphoning off around Rs 37.20 crore from the government exchequer under the Jai Bhim Mukhyamantri Pratibha Vikas Yojana 2018-19, which was launched by the previous AAP government, officials said on Friday.

The scheme was one of the ambitious projects of the former AAP government in Delhi to provide free coaching to meritorious students from SC, ST, OBC or EWS categories for competitive exams such as NEET and JEE. Under the scheme, the aspirants also got Rs 2,500. It was launched by the Social Welfare department in 2018.

Officials said the case exposes systemic lapses and government oversight, depriving marginalised students of promised opportunities. “Probe revealed rampant irregularities as institutes flouting mandates to maintain separate bank accounts for funds. Student lists

submitted for reimbursements were fraudulent, listing names across multiple institutes — many students denied multiple enrolments when questioned,” Joint Commissioner of Police (ACB) Vikramjeet Singh said. Further violations included non-disbursal of stipends to students, outsourcing coaching to unqualified local tuition centers, and transfer of stipend to student accounts after an FIR was filed in the matter to cover tracks.

All nine accused were produced before a special court on Thursday, and remanded to 14 days of judicial custody.

The previous AAP government paused the scheme during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021 and it was briefly resumed. But in 2022, the scheme was again halted due to alleged misuse of funds, an official said. The scheme was expanded in 2019-20 to include ST, OBC, and EWS categories, and added 38 more institutes, totaling over 22,000 beneficiaries across different phases. On August 7, 2025, the ACB registered an FIR after an initial probe conducted by a team led by Assistant Commissioner of Police Jarnail Singh.

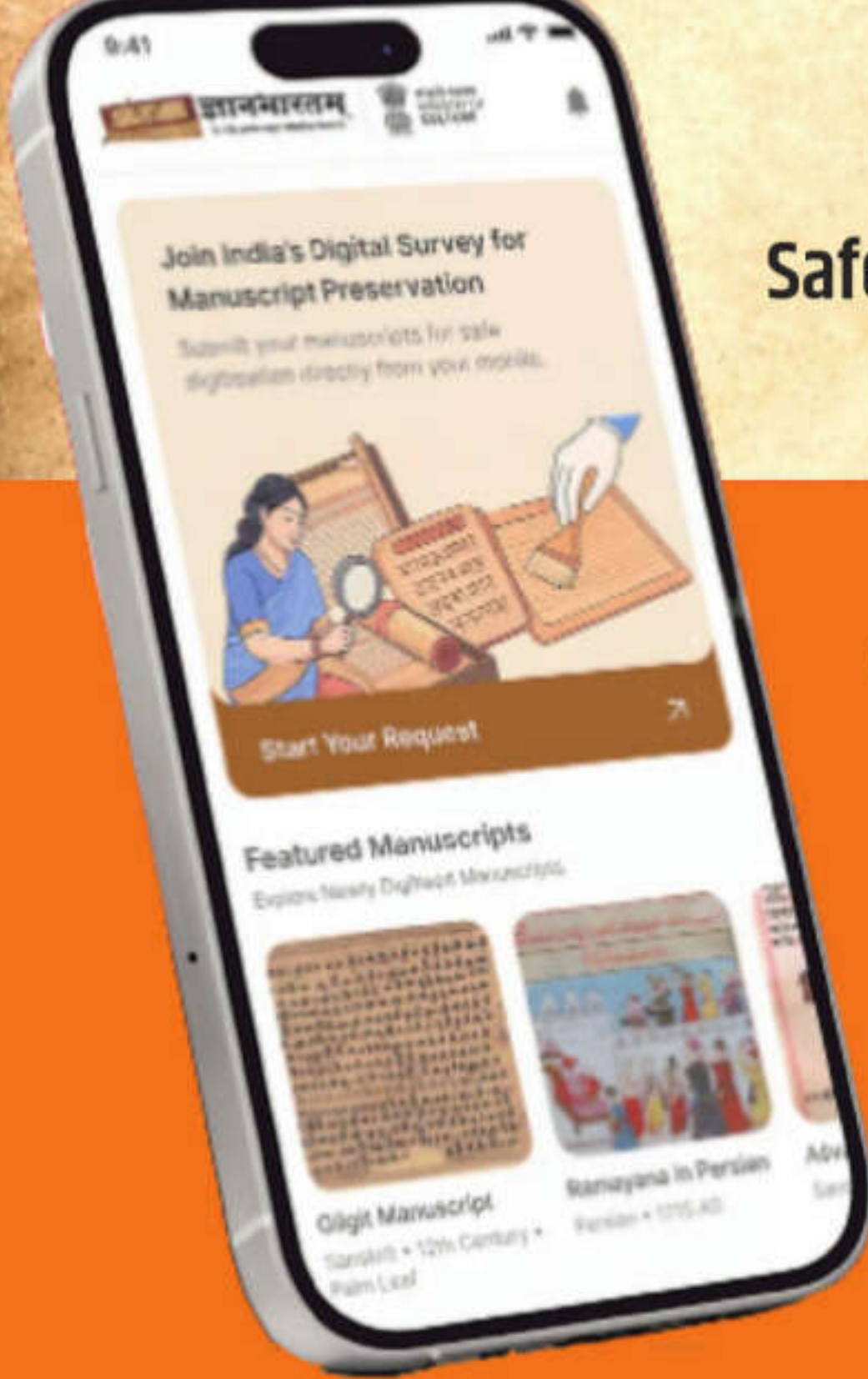


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AFTER GAUR GREEN AVENUE BLAZE, WEEK-LONG DRIVE BEGINS AGAINST IRREGULARITIES

# Nearly 150 residential, commercial units in Gzb get notices for flouting fire norms

Neetika Jha  
Ghaziabad, May 1

TWO DAYS after a blaze at Gaur Green Avenue in Indirapuram gutted flats worth Rs 3-5 crore, exposing gaps in emergency access and fire safety systems, the Fire department on Friday issued notices to at least 150 residential societies and commercial establishments in Ghaziabad, including projects of major developers such as Gaur, Amrapali and Supertech, for flouting fire norms.

Ghaziabad Chief Fire Officer Rahul Pal told *The Indian Express* that the establishments were issued notices during a special drive against violation

of safety norms and irregularities in construction. The drive, which began on Friday, will continue for a week.

Among those served notices are Divyansh Fabio Society and Supertech Livingston in Crossings Republik; Supertech Icon, Gaur Green Vista and Amrapali Village in Indirapuram; Parsvnath Regalia and Swarn Residency in Sahibabad; and several industrial and commercial units, including Hotel Utsav, Harso Steels, Kung Forgings, Modi Ilva and Libra Industries.

Around 9 am on Wednesday, when the fire had already been raging for 30-45 minutes at Gaur Green Avenue, fire

## ● NOTICES SERVED

**CROSSINGS REPUBLIK:** High-rises Divyansh Fabio Society and Supertech Livingston Society; commercial building of Panchsheel Square

**NYAY KHAND, INDIRAPURAM:** High-rises Supertech Icon, Gaur Green Vista, Amrapali Village

**SAHIBABAD:** High-rises Parsvnath Regalia Society, Swarn

Residency, Nipun Saffron Valley Society; Hotel Utsav and Party Hall Guest House; commercial building of Harso Steels Private Limited

**MODINAGAR:** High-rise Moti City; commercial buildings of companies Kung Forgings and Modi Ilva

**MURADNAGAR:** Commercial building of Libra Industries

tenders struggled to reach the site due to vehicles parked along the approach road, a garden blocking entry, and balconies enclosed with

PVC sheets.

Pal said that many of the societies that were issued notices had encroachments and poorly maintained fire infrastructure.

“These societies had illegally constructed parks inside the premises; the fire system was dysfunctional, especially the water pipelines system and several balconies were covered with PVC (polyvinyl chloride) sheets to convert balconies into storage spaces,” he added.

He added the notices were issued regarding certain deficiencies identified in the fire safety systems of these establishments, requiring them to rectify these shortcomings and provide confirmation of compliance. “They have been instructed to conduct an audit of the electrical safety system installed within their premises. Directives have also been issued

to all building owners, mandating that they ensure that their fire safety systems are functional... on 'auto mode' at all times... Also, they must ensure that all exit routes remain free of obstructions,” Pal said.

“We are specially checking high-rises and trying to ascertain the shortages that can lead to incidents of fire, including illegal encroachments, obstruction in the movements of fire tenders and covered balconies. We are also trying to train people to keep themselves safe, use the fire safety system already installed inside their premises and follow precautions while operating the equipment,” Pal said.

## ● Skywatch



**Forecast:**  
**May 2, 2026:**  
Partly cloudy sky.

**MAX: 38-40**

**0.7 above normal**

**MIN: 24-26**

**0.7°C below normal**

• **Sunrise:** 5:39 AM (May 3)

• **Sunset:** 6:57 PM (May 2)

• **Moonrise:** 6:45 PM (May 2)

• **Moonset:** 6:14 AM (May 3)

## ● AQI Tracker



**Anand Vihar**  
Moderate  
**AQI: 129**

**Bawana**  
Moderate  
**AQI: 110**



**Mundka**  
Moderate  
**AQI: 108**

**ITO**  
Satisfactory  
**AQI: 91**

- Good (0-50)
- Satisfactory (51-100)
- Moderate (101-200)
- Poor (201-300)
- Very Poor (301-400)
- Severe (401-500)

# Probe case of 2 missing community dogs at IGI Airport again, court orders Delhi Police

Express News Service  
New Delhi, May 1

A DELHI court on Wednesday asked the Joint Commissioner of Police for the Transport Range in Delhi to conduct a fresh probe into an Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport missing dogs' case, terming the earlier police inquiry as "inadequate" and lacking "serious efforts".

The case pertains to two missing community dogs who have remained untraceable for over a month following their alleged relocation from the airport's Terminal 1 and 3.

"...it has been more than one-and-a-half month since the dogs were relocated from their usual feeding area and the police have shown no interest to gather information on whether the dogs are alive and their place of relocation. It is also apparent from the said report that the inquiry officer showed no interest to gather information about the reason for relocation of the dogs..." said Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate (ACJM) Pranav Joshi of Patiala House Courts in

his order dated April 29. The court noted that the police's status reports were "inadequate" and reflected a lack of "serious efforts" to ascertain the dogs' whereabouts.

"...today, the complainant has filed copies of the vaccination, sterilization and feeding data. This court wonders when this information could be gathered by this court in one week, why the police have failed to obtain the same when the complainants have visited the police officers at least 15 times," ACJM Joshi said.

Flagging laxity in the police probe, he added, "Officers have tried to isolate the incident at IGI Airport area from the one which occurred at Terminal 1 solely to make an appearance before the court that the incident which had occurred at IGI Airport did not involve force and hence no action could be taken."

The court observed that the investigating officer failed to get to the root of the matter and instead focused on questioning the complainants.

It will hear the matter next on May 11.



## International Labour Day

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta poses with woman labourers on the occasion of International Labour Day, in New Delhi on Friday. She announced a slew of welfare measures for labourers, including setting up mobile health facilities at labour chowks, holding mass weddings for their daughters and providing them direct financial assistance. Meanwhile, even as manual scavenging is banned, a worker is seen cleaning sewer with bare hands in Mukherjee Nagar, without safety gear. SHREYA SINGHAI

# Children with higher screen time before they turn 1 likely to show autism signs by age 3, says AIIMS study

Ankita Upadhyay  
New Delhi, May 1

IF YOU have been exposing your infant to cartoons on devices, hoping they would be distracted and finish their meals, this screen time could affect their brain. A study by the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Delhi has found that children exposed to higher screen time before the age of one were more likely to show signs of autism by the age of three.

Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) not only showed earlier and more problematic digital media use than peers but also had higher rates of sleep problems and reduced physical activity, the study — currently in the process of publication — said.

ASD is a neurodevelopmental condition affecting brain development, characterised by challenges in social communication, interaction, and restricted or repetitive behaviours. It is considered a "spectrum" because symptoms, severity, and abilities vary widely, ranging from individuals needing significant support to those who are highly independent.

Dr Sheffali Gulati, professor of paediatric neurology at AIIMS Delhi, said, "The findings will help us develop structured, ASD-specific screen-time guidelines and caregiver counselling norms."

"The study clearly shows that exposing infants to screens before 18 months can have consequences. Future research should track people over time, use brain scans and measure hormones like melatonin and dopamine to better understand how biological changes happen," she added. Simultaneously, there should be emphasis on balanced digital exposure and physical activity.

The study was conducted on 250 children in the 3-6 age group, including 150 children with autism and 100 children who have achieved normal development milestones. It found

that children with autism had higher scores for media addiction, lower scores for sleep and physical activity.

Gulati said that previous international research also supports this association. "A large 2022 study in 'JAMA Paediatrics', involving over 84,000 mother-child pairs, found that longer screen time at one year of age was significantly associated with ASD at three years," she added.

Multiple meta-analyses have similarly shown a strong association between early screen exposure (especially in 0-5 age group) and increased likelihood of autism, with longer duration of screen time linked to higher risk.

Gulati said that screen time falls under environmental triggers of autism, alongside genetic and epigenetic or environmental influences. "Autism has a genetic basis with heritability patterns seen in twin studies, but environmental exposures such as pollution, pesticides, parental age, and lifestyle factors also play a role by influencing genes," she added.

Gulati stressed that early identification is crucial. "Signs can be detected even in the first year of life, such as lack of eye contact, not responding to name, delayed speech, or loss of acquired language. Children with autism may also focus on some parts of a toy or item rather than playing with them. The term spectrum means every child is different. Not all children show the same signs, and the severity also varies widely," she said. She argued for early screening and intervention because brain plasticity is highest in the first three years, leading to better outcomes.

Pointing out that the prevalence of autism is rising, Gulati said, "Older Indian data suggested about one in 89 children, but newer international estimates, including recent CDC data, indicate much higher prevalence. The WHO estimates around 1 in 100 globally."



## INDUSTRIAL POCKET THAT SAW VIOLENT UNREST CALM ON LABOUR DAY

# As payday approaches in Noida's factory hub, workers wait for the higher wages Govt fixed

Drishti Jain  
Noida, May 1

IT'S BEEN 20 days since thousands of factory workers in Noida began protests to demand higher wages, and 17 days since their agitation suddenly turned violent on April 13.

On May 1, celebrated as Labour Day, a certain normalcy seemed to have returned to the industrial pockets where factories were attacked, vehicles were smashed, and protesting workers blocked roads leading to massive traffic disruptions across parts of Noida and Delhi.

On Friday, most factories were shut, and workers remained indoors. The Gautam Budhha Nagar Police had imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), banning unlawful assemblies across the district on Thursday. The curbs will remain in place until May 8.

More than 1,700 police personnel had been deployed across the industrial belt, drones were used to carry out surveillance at more than 50 locations, and CCTV feed was being monitored round the clock, officials said. Senior officers



Pinky Devi hopes she receives her revised salary — Rs 16,868 — this month. DRISHTI JAIN

were out on the street accompanying police patrols.

On Friday, groups of police personnel were stationed outside the premises of factories in Noida's Phase 2, the industrial pocket where the April 13 protests peaked. The road leading to Nayagaon, where a large number of factory workers live, was heavily barricaded.

At least some workers seemed to have moved on from the protests. Dinesh Shrivastava (38), whom *The Indian Express* had met a fortnight ago, said on Friday that he now had a different job, where he had been promised a little more

money than before.

On April 14, a day after the violent protests, Shrivastava and his wife Mamta Devi had told *The Indian Express* that they were planning to leave Noida because they feared continued unrest and unemployment. They had said their combined monthly income of Rs 28,000 working as tailors was barely enough to feed the family and educate their 7-year-old daughter, whom they had left with relatives in Faridabad.

On Friday, Shrivastava said that after going without an income for about a week, both his wife and he had found employment in a different factory.

"Finally, on April 21, both of us got tailoring work with a new employer, and we now sit close to each other. We struggled to meet our expenses in the interim, but we will hopefully be a little more comfortable now," Shrivastava said.

On April 14, the Uttar Pradesh government raised minimum monthly wages in Gautam Buddha Nagar and Ghaziabad to Rs 13,690 for unskilled workers, Rs 15,059 for semi-skilled workers, and Rs 16,868 for skilled workers.

On May 6, when he gets his

salary, Shrivastava expects to receive Rs 17,110, including overtime. But there is still a lingering apprehension: "We will get to know if the government's promise is actually followed... What if the companies do not abide by the directive? You cannot be sure until you actually get the money," he said.

Even so, there seems to have been some improvement in the atmosphere at the workplace following the protests.

"Now, if you are nice to the supervisors, they are mostly nice to you. This was not the situation earlier; they would shout arbitrarily, depending on their mood," Shrivastava said.

Another worker, Pinky Devi, who said she belongs to Samastipur and is the sole earning member for her family of three children, also expressed apprehension about whether the revised salaries would ultimately be given.

"Some workers are hopeful, others say it is an old tactic of factory owners and that nothing will change," Pinky said as she stitched a blouse on a sewing machine.

"I have calculated that I should be getting Rs 16,868," she said.

## ● CIVIC BODY EXAMINES 3 PATENTED TECHNOLOGIES, HOW CRRI'S TECHNICAL EXPERTISE CAN BE INCORPORATED IN ITS ROAD PROJECTS

# Oil crisis, pollution in focus, MCD explores new road-building tech to fix potholes

Sophiya Mathew  
New Delhi, May 1

POTHOLE HAVE been a perennial problem on Delhi's roads — they slow traffic, add to killer air pollution due to loose road dust, and sometimes, even cause serious accidents. In the rains, they turn into pools and become bigger hazards.

This year, the MCD is looking for a more effective, scientifically-driven fix to the problem. On its table are three technologies for pothole repair, resurfacing, and road maintenance that have been patented by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research-Central Road Research Institute (CSIR-CRRI), the country's premier R&D organisation on the main-

tenance, construction, and design of roads, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

These are Rejupave Rejuvenator, Modified Mix Seal Surfacing or MSS+ and Ecofix.

Sources said MCD is being provided significant road-repair funding by the Delhi government and the Centre, and it has been suggested in several high-level meetings that the civic body should follow guidelines provided by CRRI. The MCD is examining how CRRI's technical expertise can be incorporated in its road works, officials said. Also, the NDMC has entered into an MoU with the institute for road-related technical work.

Two basic materials are used in road repairs: aggregate, or crushed stone that gives the

road its structure; and binder, the bituminous material that holds the mix together. A key question in road resurfacing is how much of an old road can be reused instead of replacing it with fresh material. CRRI's technologies aim to fill wet potholes quickly, reuse more aggregate and binder from old road surfaces, and reduce heating during road works.

Under the Rejupave Rejuvenator technology, a bituminous surfacing layer is laid over an existing road to improve the riding surface and renew the top layer. It is usually taken up when a road has aged or developed surface distress but does not require full reconstruction. According to CRRI, using a small quantity of Rejupave Re-

## ● THE 3 TECHNOLOGIES

● Ecofix — a ready-to-use steel-slag-based pothole-repair mix

● Rejupave Rejuvenator — a material for dense carpet work and resurfacing of roads

● Modified Mix Seal Surfacing or MSS+ — a cold-mix surfacing technology that reduces the need to heat road material

### THE AIM

● Dust-free roads in line with CAQM's guidelines on air pollution control

● Cut greenhouse emissions

● Increase durability by two years

● Cost efficiency



MCD maintains 12,704 km of roads, the largest network under any civic agency in the Capital

juvenator — 0.5% to 1% of the dense carpet mix — can improve the reusability of aggregate and binder from the current 25% to about 60-70%.

Dr Satish Pandey, Senior Principal Scientist and Head, Flexible Pavement Division, Academy of Scientific & Innovative Research (AcSIR), said, "Every time roads are relaid, bitumen is needed. Due to the global oil crisis, the price of imported bitumen has gone up by 2.2 to 3.3 times. In this scenario, Rejupave, which maximises reutilisation of reclaimed recycled asphalt pavement (RAP) material, is important."

MSS+ allows binder and aggregate to be used at ambient or room temperature, unlike conventional hot-mix road work

where the material has to be heated before it is laid.

Pandey said milling, which is the process of removing the top layer of asphalt, is done on all major roads at 5-10 cm thickness. The road is then overlaid after the aggregate is heated at a hot-mix plant, bitumen mixes are prepared, transported to the site and compacted. This, he said, is a time-consuming process. Conventional methods are carried out at around 150-160°C, while the developed methods require only 120-125°C.

Pandey said the pollution watchdog CAQM's major focus has been dust-free road construction, and these technologies help eliminate greenhouse emissions.

Ecofix, meanwhile, is a

ready-to-use material produced from processed steel slag that can be placed in a damaged part of a road and compacted with a small vibrator or hand rammer. The repaired surface is ready for traffic in about 10 minutes. Officials said it can be applied without using a tack coat and without draining water from the pothole.

On why Ecofix has not been used more widely despite last year's successful pilot on a Delhi Secretariat Road, a senior PWD official said, "This year, we have consciously moved away from the old cycle of just filling potholes. Instead, we are focusing on strengthening roads so that the problem doesn't come back."

"The effort is to fix the root cause, not just the surface. This is a step in that direction."



Former Bihar CM Nitish Kumar moved to his new residence at 7 Circular Road from 1, Aney Marg in Patna on Friday. RAHUL SHARMA

# After two decades at Aney Marg, Nitish turns the page — and the address

Santosh Singh  
Patna, May 1

AMID A huddle of officials, aides and police, former chief minister Nitish Kumar slipped into his waiting white sedan. His belongings had already been sent ahead and, after emotional farewells to staff, Nitish and his son Nishant headed to his new address — 7 Circular Road.

On Friday, the Bihar Chief Minister's official residence at 1, Aney Marg bade its longest-serving occupant goodbye, after Janata Dal (United) president Nitish Kumar vacated it following his move to the Rajya Sabha. For the residence and its staff, the shift marks a significant change: barring the brief nine-month tenure of Jitan Ram Manjhi, Aney Marg has been synonymous with Nitish for nearly two decades.

Nitish first moved into Aney Marg in April 2006, months after becoming chief minister, after his predecessor Rabri Devi vacated it following the "inauspicious" month of Karmas. He briefly left in May 2014 after installing Manjhi as chief minister following JD(U)'s poor general election performance, but returned to the bungalow in February 2015.

It was Lalu Prasad who first earmarked 1 Aney Marg — named after former Bihar governor, Sanskrit scholar and Constituent Assembly member Madhav Srihari Aney — as the official chief minister's resi-

dence after taking office in 1990. Originally two separate houses, one occupied by then Assembly Speaker Radha Nandan Jha, the properties were later merged into the present estate.

During his tenure, Kumar set up a chief minister's secretariat within the premises and conducted most official work from there. While some key bureaucrats from his tenure, including Anupam Kumar, have moved on central deputation, his long-time adviser and retired IAS officer Dipak Kumar remains. The new Circular Road residence lies just behind the old bungalow, but also close to his political rival Lalu Prasad Yadav's home. Nitish will settle into the new house -- and his new role -- with his personal staff and security detail, including close associate Harendra Singh.

Kumar took particular care to move his extensive collection of books, sources said. "We started the process about three weeks ago," a source from the CM House said. "As Nitish Kumar had already lived at 7 Circular Road after his 2014 resignation, the house was readied as per his instructions. A stickler for rules, he had ordered the shift well before he formally resigned."

His successor and new chief minister, Samrat Choudhary -- currently staying at the deputy CM's residence at 5 Deshratna Marg -- is expected to move into the official residence within a month.

# ‘Criticism of Govt essential’: Allahabad HC rejects plea for FIR against Rahul

Criticism or ideological difference with government may not by itself be an offence, says single-judge bench

Bhupendra Pandey  
Lucknow, May 1

THE ALLAHABAD High Court on Friday dismissed a petition seeking an FIR against Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi for his purported statement that his fight was "not only with a political party, but the Indian state", maintaining that "in a parliamentary democracy criticism of government action or policies is not only permitted but is essential".

The petitioner, Simran Gupta, had filed the application before the High Court challenging the orders of the Sambhal special MP/MLA court and the Sambhal additional district and sessions judge rejecting her complaint alleging that Gandhi's remarks made in January 2025 were "anti-national". Dismissing her petition, a single bench of Justice Vikram D Chauhan observed, "In parliamentary democracy, criticism of government action or policies is not only permitted but is essential. Therefore, criticism or ideological difference may not by itself be an offence."

The bench added, "It is an admitted case that opposite party no 2 (Rahul Gandhi) is an elected representative and Member of Parliament. In a democracy, elected representatives serve as the bridge between citizens and government. The principle is rooted in the concept of representative democracy where citizens delegate their voice to elected representatives. In this respect elected representatives may voice their concerns through various mediums. Even otherwise, such elected representatives also have the individual right of freedom of speech and expression."

The petitioner had filed an application on January 23, 2025, in the Sambhal special MP/MLA court (Chandausi) alleging that Gandhi's statement "threatened the sovereignty, integrity and unity of the Indian State and would create instability and a sense of rebellion in the society".

The petitioner in her affidavit filed before in the High Court had stated that Gandhi's statement was being telecast on television on January 15 last year when she watched it at her



LoP Rahul Gandhi. PTI

Sambhal residence.

The Sambhal courts had also rejected the revision appeal of the applicant.

The MP/MLA court, in its observation, had stated that the petitioner did not demonstrate as how Gandhi's statement was a "threat to sovereignty, integrity and unity of the Indian State". The petitioner's allegation that "the statement would create instability and a sense of rebellion is only her suspicion/imagination and no material in this respect has been produced", it had recorded. The additional district and sessions judge's court dismissed the petitioner's appeal finding "no error in MP/MLA court order".

Appearing on behalf of the "State", the Additional Advocate General submitted that the "trial court as well as the revisional court did not appreciate the law in a proper perspective".

After hearing the submissions, the HC quoted a Supreme Court judgement, saying... "Courts, particularly the Constitutional Courts, must be at the forefront to zealously protect the fundamental rights of the citizens. It is the bounden duty of the Courts to ensure that the Constitution and the ideals of the Constitution are not trampled upon. Endeavour of the courts should always be to protect and promote the fundamental rights, including the freedom of speech and expression, which is one of the most cherished rights a citizen can have in a liberal constitutional democracy. The Courts must not be seen to regulate or stifle the freedom of speech and expression."

The bench observed, "In the context of elected representatives, in the natural course of events and conduct, the word 'fight' may signify intense advocacy, persistence or opposition (rather than physical combat), against policy, thought or ideology of opponent or particular person," the court added. The court further said, as per the applicant, the offending speech was broadcast on television.

"The complete extracts of alleged speech made by Rahul Gandhi has not been brought

before this Court nor same were before court of first instance or revisional court. A particular line of speech has been quoted in application preferred by applicant-petitioner before court of first instance which forms basis for prayer made for lodging of First Information Report against Gandhi," it added.

"The objection of the applicant is to the words 'fight with Indian State.'"

"The aforesaid expression is preceded by two words which indicate an independent organization and one political party," it added.

"No circumstances and material particulars have been shown before this Court to indicate that aforesaid speech has resulted in exciting, secession or armed rebellion or subversive activities or encourages feelings of separatist activities or endangers sovereignty or unity and integrity of India. The offending speech is alleged to have been made in January 2025 and even after one year it has not been shown before this Court that the aforesaid speech has resulted in any of the mischief covered by BNS section 152 (acts endangering sovereignty, unity and integrity)," the order read.

The alleged speech "does not explicitly call for any of the mischief provided under BNS section 152".

Ahead of Bengal results, Omar claims votes 'stolen through EC'

Naveed Iqbal  
Srinagar, May 1

DAYS AHEAD of the assembly poll results in four crucial states -- West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam -- Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Friday said that votes are being "stolen through the Election Commission and the Special Intensive Revision of voter rolls."

"Aaj chori EVM ke zariy nahin horahi hai. Aaj chori election commission ke zariy, SIR se kijarahi hai (today votes are not being stolen through EVMs; today they are being stolen through the election commission and SIR)," he said.

Terming the election in West Bengal a "challenge", Omar said, "If this affects results, this will be dangerous for all of us. They have attempted to rig elections by removing voters from voter lists and we have to be careful of this."

After the annual Darbar Move, the seat of government will formally shift from Jammu to Srinagar on Monday. Omar inaugurated a government project at Sempora in Pampore and was speaking on the sidelines of the function at Srinagar.

Commenting on a question about unemployment in J&K, he said the solution is not in the government sector. "No one can deny that unemployment is a big issue in J&K. However, the resolution is not in finding government employment. There is no country or any state in our country that has resolved this problem only through government employment," he said.

He said that efforts are also being made to provide a boost to the agriculture and horticulture sectors among others.

## Shimla: President Murmu visits Army Training Command

Shimla: Before leaving for Delhi, President Droupadi Murmu on Friday exhorted the Army Training Command (ARTAC) to continue to work with fervour to enhance the operational preparedness of the Indian Army.

The President visited the ARTAC headquarters before winding up her five-day visit to Himachal Pradesh. The President was briefed by the GOC-in-C on evolution of ARTAC, the stellar role of ARTAC in providing quality training to Indian Army personnel to enhance operational efficiency as well as on salient initiatives of ARTAC.

President Murmu was scheduled to leave Shimla on May 2 but left for New Delhi a day in advance due to certain reasons including the weather conditions. ENS

# ‘No relocation of tribes’: Centre responds to Rahul’s attack on Great Nicobar project

Nikhil Ghanekar  
New Delhi, May 1

TWO DAYS after Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, called the Rs 81,000-crore Great Nicobar mega infrastructure project as "one of the biggest scams" and "gravest crime" against India's natural and tribal heritage, the Union Government issued a lengthy factsheet on 'environmental impact assessment', tribal welfare, while laying out the project's 'strategic maritime' and 'defence' purpose.

The government also claimed that Nicobarese and Shompen habitations on the island will not be displaced, and 'no relocation' of the communities is proposed.

The government fact-sheet, while not explicitly defending the project against Gandhi's charge, sought to underline that the project has been granted prior environmental clearance after a detailed process, and includes 42 specific conditions on environmental protection.

It said that the project leverages the island's strategic location "to strengthen India's national security, maritime and defence presence in the Indo-Pacific, while simultaneously embedding environmental safeguards and tribal welfare mechanisms."

The mega project will see the construction of a transshipment port, an integrated township, a civil and military use airport, and a 450-MVA gas and solar power-based plant.

It requires a total area of 166.10 sq km, including 35.35 sq km of revenue land and 130.75 sq km of forest land, including felling of a million trees in the tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen forests. The government release said that the estimated number of trees in this (project) area is 18.65 lakh, though the maximum number expected to be felled is 7.11 lakh within 49.86 sq km of forest.

"The tree felling will be carried out in a phased manner in line with the proposed phase-wise development of the key projects. Importantly, 65.99 sq km of land will be preserved as green zones with no tree felling, ensuring ecological balance," the government stated.

Gandhi was on a three-day visit to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and on the third day, April 28, he visited the Great Nicobar Island, and interacted with leaders from the indigenous Nicobarese community and settlers who belong to the ex-servicemen community.

After visiting forests on the Island, Gandhi said in an X post that "Millions of trees are marked for the axe." He added, "This is not development. This is destruction dressed in development's language... what is being done in Great Nicobar is one of the biggest scams and gravest crimes against this country's natural and tribal heritage in our lifetime."

On tribal welfare, the government release said that the project has been "carefully designed" to ensure that the Nicobarese and Shompen tribes are not displaced.

"Out of the 166.10 sq km that is proposed for development projects, 84.10 sq km overlaps with the Tribal Reserve. However, within this portion, 11.032 sq km has already been settled and used as revenue land since 1972. Consequently, the effectively remaining area measuring 73.07 sq. km is being de-notified for project purposes. To compensate, 76.98 sq km is being re-notified as a tribal reserve, resulting in a net addition of 3.912 sq. km to the tribal reserve," the government claimed.

In the Court of Dr. Pankaj Sharma, DJ-02, New Delhi District, Patiala House Court, New Delhi

Case No.: CS/140/2026  
Title: Manasbal Trust Vs. The Sub-Registrar-VII-A & ORS.  
NDHR-27-08-2026

1.MANASBAL TRUST, having its registered office at B-60/61 Naraina Industrial, Phase II, New Delhi- 110028. All the Applicants/Petitioners/Trustee are represented through: The Principal Office of the Trust, Mr. Shivamundar S. Maniyar Rio Amazon Park, C Wing, Flat No. 601, 6th Floor, Opp. Eksar Metro, New Link Road, Borivali (West), Mumbai-400103. ...Petitioner/s

1.THE STATE OF NCT OF DELHI, The Sub-Registrar-VIIA, Dist. New Delhi, Palika Kendra, Sarojini Nagar, New Delhi-110024. 2.INCOME TAX DEPARTMENT, Through: Commissioner of Income Tax (Exemption), Delhi, Civic Centre, Minto Road, New Delhi-110002, Email- delhiect.exmo@income-tax.gov.in. ...Respondents

Notice is hereby given to the general public that a Petition under Section 7 of the Charitable and Religious Trust (CRT) Act, 1920, has been filed by the Manas Bal Trust before this Court. The Petitioner has sought directions/permission to change the name of the 'Manasbal Trust' to the 'Bajaj Heritage Trust' and other consequential reliefs regarding the management and administration of the Trust. Any Person having any objection to the grant of the prayers made in the said petition or having any interest in the affairs of the said Trust may file their objections in the court personally or through counsel on or before the next date of hearing 27.08.2026. Given under my hand and the seal of the court on the 10th day of April 2026. Judge, DJ-02 & Wakf Tribunal (NDT), Patiala House Courts, New Delhi

### ADMISSION NOTICE

| Common Entrance Test-2026<br>For Admission at                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| INSTITUTE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | COURSES                                                                                           |
| <br><b>Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya National Institute for Persons with Physical Disabilities (Divyangjan) (PDUNIPPD)</b><br>4, Vishnu Digamber Marg, New Delhi-110002<br>Website: <a href="https://pdunippd.nic.in">https://pdunippd.nic.in</a> ,<br>E-mail: <a href="mailto:cetpdunippd2026@gmail.com">cetpdunippd2026@gmail.com</a>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● BPT</li><li>● BOT</li><li>● BPO</li></ul>                 |
| <br><b>Swami Vivekanand National Institute of Rehabilitation Training and Research (DIVYANGJAN), Cuttack (SVNIRTAR)</b><br>Olatpur, PO- Bairoi, Cuttack, Odisha - 754010<br>Website: <a href="https://svnirtar.nic.in">https://svnirtar.nic.in</a> , E-mail: <a href="mailto:nirtar@nic.in">nirtar@nic.in</a>                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● BPT</li><li>● BOT</li><li>● BPO</li><li>● BASLP</li></ul> |
| <br><b>National Institute for Locomotor Disabilities (DIVYANGJAN), Kolkata (NILD)</b><br>B.T. Road, Bonhooghly, Kolkata – 700090<br>website : <a href="https://nild.nic.in">https://nild.nic.in</a> , E-mail : <a href="mailto:nild@nic.in">nild@nic.in</a>                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● BPT</li><li>● BOT</li><li>● BPO</li><li>● BASLP</li></ul> |
| <br><b>National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities (DIVYANGJAN), Chennai (NIEPMD)</b><br>East Coast Road, Muttukadu, Kovalam Post Chennai-603112, Website: <a href="http://www.niepmd.tn.nic.in">www.niepmd.tn.nic.in</a> ,<br>E-mail: <a href="mailto:niepmd@gmail.com">niepmd@gmail.com</a>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● BPT</li><li>● BOT</li><li>● BASLP</li></ul>               |
| <br><b>Ali Yavar Jung National Institute of Speech &amp; Hearing Disabilities (Divyangjan), Mumbai (AYJNISHD(D)</b><br>K.C. Marg, Bandra (W) Reclamation Mumbai - 400 050<br>Website: <a href="http://ayjnishd.nic.in">http://ayjnishd.nic.in</a> ,<br>E-mail: <a href="mailto:ayjnishh-mum@nic.in">ayjnishh-mum@nic.in</a>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● BASLP</li></ul>                                           |
| <br><b>Composite Regional Centre, Secundrabad</b><br>Manovikas Nagar, Bowenpally, Secunderabad, Telangana -500009.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● BASLP</li></ul>                                           |
| <br><b>Composite Regional Centre for Skill Development, Rehabilitation &amp; Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, (DIVYANGJAN), Guwahati (CRCSRE)</b><br>Guwahati Medical College Hospital Campus Post Office Indrapur, GMC Hospital Rd, Bhangagarh, Guwahati, Assam-781032 Website: <a href="http://crgguwahati.nic.in">crgguwahati.nic.in</a> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● BASLP</li></ul>                                           |
| <br><b>Composite Regional Centre, Patna Sheikhupura, (Old Dharamshala), Near Nursing College, Patna-800014</b><br>Website: <a href="https://crcpatna.nic.in">https://crcpatna.nic.in</a> , E-mail : <a href="mailto:crcpatna@rediffmail.com">crcpatna@rediffmail.com</a>                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● BPO</li></ul>                                             |

Starting date of online publication of Information Brochure & App  
Closing date of online receipt of Application form  
Date of Entrance Test

All Concerned may please note

Director,  
PDUNIPPD, New Delhi

CBC 38103/12/0001/2627

### निविदा सूचना

केंद्रीय विद्यालय, ए.एफ.एस रजोकरी, दिल्ली, खेलकूद से संबंधित सामग्री की खरीद एवं आपूर्ति हेतु पंजीकृत इच्छुक फर्मों एवं एजेंसियों से निविदा आमंत्रित करते हैं। इच्छुक फर्म 12 दिनों के अंतर्गत विद्यालय कार्यालय से प्रातः 10 बजे से 01 बजे तक निविदा प्राप्त कर सकते हैं।

**प्राचार्य**

### PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform all the registered and respective shop owners of Wave 1st Silver Tower that a General Body Meeting (GBM) will be held on **16<sup>th</sup> of May 2026, 12:00 PM**, at Wave 1st Silver Tower, Plot No. D-6, Sector-18, Noida - 201301 (U.P.), to discuss and initiate the formation and registration of the Wave 1st Silver Tower Shop & Office Owners Association.

All shop and office owners are requested to kindly make it convenient to attend this important meeting, as your participation and suggestions will play a vital role in the formation of the Association.

Your presence is earnestly solicited.

**WAVE 1ST SILVER TOWER PVT. LTD.**  
Plot No. D-6, Sector-18, Noida - 201301  
Call: 9711000632, Email: [ops@waveinfreatch.com](mailto:ops@waveinfreatch.com)

### INVEST UP

2nd, 4th & 6th Floor, A-Block, PICUP Bhawan, Vibhuti Khand Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226 010 (U.P.) 91 522-3129570 & 3117976  
E-mail: [info@investup.org.in](mailto:info@investup.org.in) | Website: <https://invest.up.gov.in/>

**ADVT No.: 78/ Admin/IUP/2025-26 Dated: 01 May, 2026**

**Applications are invited in prescribed format from eligible & experienced candidates for the following posts. Applications will be accepted on Invest UP's website: [www.invest.up.gov.in/career/](http://www.invest.up.gov.in/career/).**

| Sr. No. | Name of Post                                     | No. of Post |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 1       | General Manager (Textile)                        | 01          |
| 2       | Asst. General Manager (Textile)                  | 01          |
| 3       | General Manager (Chemical)                       | 01          |
| 4       | Asst. General Manager (Chemical)                 | 01          |
| 5       | General Manager (Electronic Manufacturing)       | 01          |
| 6       | Asst. General Manager (Electronic Manufacturing) | 01          |
| 7       | General Manager (Automobile)                     | 01          |
| 8       | General Manager (Service Sector)                 | 01          |
| 9       | Asst. General Manager (Service Sector)           | 01          |
| 10      | General Manager (Policy)                         | 01          |

➤ For details of educational/technical qualification, age, eligibility, experience, application format etc. kindly visit Invest UP website <https://invest.up.gov.in/career/>

➤ Only online applications shall be accepted for the above posts

➤ Last date for the submission of online applications is **24.05.2026 by 5:00 PM**

Scan here to apply for Above mentioned Posts

### GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF TRAINING NATIONAL SKILL TRAINING INSTITUTE (WOMEN) D1, SECTOR-1, NOIDA (U.P.) - 201301 Tel: 0120-2535266 email - [nstiwnoida@dtg.gov.in](mailto:nstiwnoida@dtg.gov.in), Website - <https://nstiwnoida.dgt.gov.in>

#### CITS ADMISSION NOTICE-2026-27

Admission to courses under Craft Instructor Training Scheme (CITS) at National Skill Training Institutes NSTI (W), Noida for the academic session 2026-27 will be made through All India Common Entrance Test (AICET) which is scheduled to be held on 31.05.2026. Applications are invited for Computer Based Test (online) on [www.nimionlineadmission.in](http://www.nimionlineadmission.in) from the eligible candidate's w.e.f. from 18.04.2026 to 10.05.2026 to appear in the entrance test at various centers across the country. For more details visit: [www.nimionlin-eadmission.in&Institute's website/mailto:nstinoida.dgt.gov.in](http://www.nimionlin-eadmission.in&Institute's%20website/mailto:nstinoida.dgt.gov.in)

### EXPRESS Careers

#### GUJARAT VIDYAPITH, AHMEDABAD

Ashram Marg, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad-380009  
Employment Notification No. 01/2026-27

**Gujarat Vidyapith invites applications for the following Five years tenure post:**

| Sr. No. | Name of the Post | Pay Scale                             | Educational Qualifications & Experience |
|---------|------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1.      | Finance Officer  | Pay Level - 14 (1,44,200 to 2,18,200) | As per detailed advertisement           |

Last date of online application is **23.05.2026 upto 02:00 PM**.  
Detailed information is available on the website : [www.gujaratvidyapith.org](http://www.gujaratvidyapith.org)

Dt. 01/05/2026 Registrar



## Panel Picks

LOK SABHA Speaker Om Birla on Thursday made several key appointments related to Parliamentary Standing Committees for a yearlong tenure beginning May 1. The appointments were made to committees on Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; Public Undertakings; Estimates; and Public Accounts. Congress general secretary (organisation) K C Venugopal has been named Chairperson of the Committee on Public Accounts. Incidentally, Venugopal is being seen as a probable candidate for the chief minister's post in Kerala where exit polls predict a Congress-led UDF government.

## Batch of Honour

AS MANY as 17 secretaries, all of them from the 1992 batch, posted in New Delhi assembled for a farewell to outgoing MSME Secretary S C L Das on Thursday. Of these 17 IAS officers, 14 are secretaries in different Central government departments, including ministries, while the remaining three occupy the posts of Delhi Chief Secretary, UPSC Secretary, and Inter-State Council Secretary.

## May Day Message

On May Day, associated with workers' rights, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh associated with the RSS offered journalists an interesting interpretation in a personal message. The message said that the workers' day for Indians is actually Vishwakarma Diwas on September 17. It said the May Day tradition draws from the 1886 "class struggle" violence in Chicago in which many workers were killed. The message said that labour and capital have to co-exist as an "audhyogik parivaar" (industrial family) and there should be no ground for clashes.

# SC to hear today TMC plea against EC directive on counting supervisors

Express News Service  
New Delhi, May 1

THE SUPREME Court will hear on Saturday a plea filed by Trinamool Congress (TMC) challenging a Calcutta High Court order that dismissed a petition against the Election Commission of India decision to deploy Central government and PSU employees as counting supervisors and assistants for counting the votes on May 4.

A bench of Justices PV Narasimha and Joydip Bagchi will hear the TMC appeal challenging the April 30 Calcutta High Court order.

The party had challenged a communication issued by the additional chief electoral officer on April 30 mandating that at least one among the counting supervisors or counting assistants at each counting table be a Central government or Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) employee.

The TMC had argued that it was issued without any jurisdiction. The party also contended that the Election Commission has not made any such arrangement in four other states which also went to polls along with Bengal.

Rejecting the TMC plea, the HC had said: "It is the pre-



Police and security personnel stand guard outside a strong room in Kolkata's Bhabanipur on Friday. PTI

rogative of the office of the Election Commission of India to appoint the counting supervisor and counting assistant either from the state government or the Central government. This court does not find any illegality..."

The High Court noted that counting is conducted under CCTV surveillance and that apart from the counting supervisor and the counting assistant, micro-observers, counting agents of the candidates contesting the elec-

tion and counting personnel will also be in the counting room.

"Only the counting supervisor and the counting assistants will not be in the counting room. Micro-observers, counting agents of the candidates who are contesting the election and counting personnel will also be in the counting room. Thus, it is impossible to believe the allegation made by the petitioner," the HC said.

It, however, made it clear that if any malpractice occurs

during the counting, the petitioner would be at liberty to challenge the same in an election petition.

"If the petitioner finds that during the counting, the Central government employees who have been appointed as counting supervisors and counting assistants favoured the candidate of the BJP..., the petitioner has the liberty to challenge the same in an election petition," the HC had said.

Polling for the 294-member Bengal Assembly was held in two phases on April 23 and April 29, with the counting of votes scheduled for May 4.

## Repolling today in 15 booths of two seats

Atri Mitra  
Kolkata, May 1

THE ELECTION Commission of India (ECI) has ordered repolling at 15 booths in South 24 Parganas' constituencies of Magrahat-Paschim and Diamond Harbour on Saturday. The decision was taken on the basis of reports submitted by presiding officers.

ECI Secretary Sujeet Kumar Misra wrote to West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Aggarwal, stating, "I am directed to state that on the basis of reports received from the concerned Returning Officers and the Observers... and after taking all material circumstances into account, the Commission hereby declares... that the poll taken on 29 April, 2026 for the aforesaid election at the following Polling Stations to be void and appoints May 2, 2026 as the date."

The letter listed 15 booths, of which 11 are in Magrahat-Paschim and four in Diamond Harbour.

# As Bengal clocks highest-ever turnout, women continue to outnumber men at polling booths

Ravik Bhattacharya  
& Atri Mitra  
Kolkata, May 1

AS WEST Bengal recorded its highest-ever voter turnout in the just-concluded Assembly elections, the rising participation of women voters is among the major trends. Since 2011, women have turned out to vote in greater numbers than men across Assembly and Lok Sabha elections.

This year, as per an Election Commission statement, the overall turnout in Bengal hit 92.47%, the highest ever in any Assembly or Lok Sabha election. Women's turnout rose to 93.24%, while men's turnout increased to 91.74%.

Before the 2026 Assembly polls, the highest overall turnout was recorded in 2011 at 84.72%. That year, women had voted at a then-record 84.45%, while men's turnout stood at 84.22%. Notably, the 2011 Assembly elections marked the end of 34 years of Left rule with the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress (TMC) coming to power for the first time in Bengal.

However, the 2014 Lok

Sabha polls marked the only election since 2011 when women's turnout dipped below that of men in Bengal. While the overall turnout was 82.22% in Bengal, women's turnout was 81.96% and men's was 82.19%. In the 2016 Assembly polls, while the overall turnout was 83.02%, women's turnout rose to 83.13% and men's 82.23%. The 2019 Lok Sabha polls saw a similar trend. Overall turnout was 81.76%, with women turning out to vote at a rate of 81.79% and men at 81.35%. In the 2021 Assembly elections, the overall turnout was 82.3%. While women's turnout was 81.75%, men's was 81.37%. In the 2024 Lok Sabha, the gap widened. Overall turnout stood at 79.55%, with women's turnout at 80.16% and men's at 78.2%.

In the current Assembly elections in Bengal, the two phases of voting were marked by long queues at polling booths, with both women and men voters lining up across the state.

Women voters have played a key role in scripting the TMC's successive wins since 2011. The

three-term CM Mamata cultivated women as a distinctive constituency for her party, rolling out various welfare schemes, including cash assistance, for them. After assuming power for the first term, she started the Kanyashree scheme for girl children to incentivise their education. She also launched the Rupashree scheme for girls to give Rs 25,000 each to their parents for their marriage. In 2021, Mamata launched the Lakshmi Bhandar scheme to provide Rs 500 to all women per month, which

has now been increased to Rs 1,500.

But the rising turnout among women is not a phenomenon unique to Bengal. Across India in the last few Lok Sabha polls, women have not only begun to outnumber men in the overall electorate, but have also turned out to vote in greater numbers. An analysis of the data for the 2009, 2014 and 2019 general elections shows that the share of women in the total electorate increased from 47.73% in 2009 to 48.09% in 2019.

## Historical data

In Bengal, an analysis of gender-wise turnout data shows that between the 1962 Assembly polls and the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, women's turnout consistently lagged men's turnout. In 1962, the overall turnout was 55%, and while men's turnout was 61.77%, women's turnout trailed at 47.43%. By 2009, overall turnout had risen to 81.42%, and women's turnout at 80.25% had nearly caught up to men's turnout at 82.29%.

"Since 1978, during the Left Front regime, reservation was started in panchayats for women. Slowly, women became more and more politically conscious and engaged in participatory politics in Bengal. Their political rights as equal to men were ensured," said Sujan Chakraborty, CPI(M) Central Committee member.

"But also important is that after 2011, women's turnout is more than men's because of migration. Many youths went out of the state for jobs. A huge number of youths are working in different states because there are no job opportunities in Bengal.

In election after election, a section of these men never came to vote, while women voted. However, this time there was a rush to return and vote," Chakraborty added.

TMC spokesperson Arup Chakraborty said, "People from the 'cow-belt' of India will never win West Bengal because of this trend of more women voters turning up to polling stations. This is because this state always talked about women's empowerment right from (pre-Independence reformers) Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Raja Rammohan Roy. Because of this, the BJP leadership thought it was necessary to stop women from voting in Bengal. In the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), after Muslim, a large number of women voters were deleted from the electoral rolls."

BJP Rajya Sabha MP Rahul Sinha said, "During the Mamata Banerjee regime, women were mostly humiliated. Not only that, atrocities against women also increased during the TMC regime. Naturally, women came out and voted against TMC in this election."

## AHEAD OF KHARIF SEASON

# IFFCO, IPL fertilisers meant for rabi season found 'non-standard' in Chouhan's Vidisha

Harikishan Sharma  
New Delhi, May 1

AS THE government rushes to stockpile fertilisers ahead of the ensuing kharif season amid global supply and shipping disruptions caused by the West Asia conflict, it now faces another major challenge — the sale of substandard inputs. Fertiliser samples were found "non-standard" in Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's constituency, Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh, during the current rabi season (2025-26), shows the documents accessed by *The Indian Express*.

The documents show that samples of Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Ammonium Phosphate Sulphate (APS), both manufactured by the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO), were found "non-standard" in Vidisha in January this year. Following this, the authorities ordered the IFFCO to "immediately" stop the sale of the said batch.

The DAP (18-46-0), which consists of granular nitrogen (18%) and phosphorus (46%), is widely used by farmers at the time of sowing as it helps in germination of seeds. At the time of sowing for the current rabi season, district officials in Vidisha collected a sample of IFFCO's DAP from Ganj Basoda on December 20, 2025, and sent it for chemical analysis to Fertiliser Quality Control Laboratory in Bhopal.

"The sample is not according to specification & found non standard and fail...", remarked the Assistant Chemical Specialist at the Bhopal laboratory in his report dated January 12, 2026.

As per the report, the IFFCO's DAP sample contained only 16.73% nitrogen against the norm of 18% and 42.17 per cent phosphorus against the specified 46%.

Days after the testing report came, Vidisha's Deputy Director Agriculture K S Khapedia issued an order on January 21 to immediately stop the sale and distribution of the DAP lot (batch 01/Nov 2025).

Not only DAP, a sample of IFFCO's APS (20-20-0:13), which contains nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and sulphur (S), was also found non-standard. Farmers use the APS for crops like oilseeds, pulses, sugarcane, paddy and cotton. The officials collected a sample of APS from Vidisha block on December 1 last year and sent it for examination



In recent months, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed concerns over sale of substandard inputs

to the fertiliser Quality Control Lab in Gwalior. In its report, the laboratory noted that the available content of phosphorus was lower (18.34%) against the specified value of 20%. Similarly, the content of sulphur was also found lower (11.43%) against the specified 13%.

IFFCO did not respond to an email seeking its comments on the development.

The documents also show that a sample of Triple Super Phosphate (TSP), manufactured by Indian Potash Limited (IPL), was also found non-standard. The TSP, which contains 46% phosphate, promotes rapid root development, flowering and fruiting. The analysis of the TSP sample collected on December 24 from Sironj block in Vidisha recorded only 40.13% phosphorus against the specified 46%. The officials issued an order in January to stop the sale of the said lot.

Responding to a query from *The Indian Express*, an IPL official accepted that the company's sample was "declared non-standard due to deficiency in P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> content" and it has submitted an application for second reference analysis. "As per the telephonic discussion held with you regarding the failed TSP sample, we have submitted an application for second referee analysis on 27/01/2026 in accordance with the provisions of the Fertilizer Control Order (FCO), based on the lab report and the DDA letter dated 21/01/2026... Based on the second reference analysis report, we will inform you accordingly," the official said.

In recent months, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has expressed concerns over sale of substandard agricultural inputs and the ministry has asked farmers to immediately report such issues to the helpline Centre (1800-180-1551).

# CJI declares Sikkim to be first paperless state judiciary in country

Press Trust of India  
Gangtok, May 1

CHIEF JUSTICE of India Surya Kant on Friday said integrating technology into judicial processes dismantles geographical barriers to help litigants overcome problems of terrain, finance and distance.

Addressing the inaugural session of the two-day National Conclave on Technology and Judicial Education here, the CJI also said the Indian legal landscape has moved away from the era of the paper trail, where vital records languished in physical storage, to a vibrant digital ecosystem.

He also declared Sikkim to be the first paperless state judiciary in the nation. "When we speak of integrating technology into judicial processes across the country, we are, in effect, addressing the dismantling of geographical constraints, whether they arise from difficult terrain, financial barriers, or sheer distance," he said. The journey to a courtroom was often measured as a test of endurance, the Chief Justice of India said.

"The mighty Himalayas, magnificent as they are, make movement slow and uncertain. If we look at the scenario just a decade or so ago, for a Sikkimese



CJI Surya Kant said digital reform is not a matter of theory, but a practical necessity for sustaining the rule of law

litigant seeking justice, distance was not measured in kilometres but in days of travel across narrow paths and unpredictable weather," he said.

The CJI said digital reform is not a matter of theory, but a practical necessity for sustaining the rule of law.

"We have moved away from the era of the paper trail, where vital records languished in physical storage, to a vibrant digital ecosystem. The e-Courts project has rewritten the relationship between the litigant and the law," he said.

What once required physical presence and toilsome inquiry is now available through a simple digital interface, CJI Kant said.

## SC GRANTS ANTICIPATORY BAIL TO PAWAN KHERA

# Criminal process must be applied with objectivity and circumspection, says SC

## High Court's observation appears to be erroneous, in particular shifting burden on the accused, says top court

Express News Service  
New Delhi, May 1

THE SUPREME Court has granted anticipatory bail to Congress leader Pawan Khera in the case lodged against him in connection with accusing Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife, Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, of holding multiple passports.

A bench of Justices J K Maheshwari and Atul Chandurkar, which took note of the statements by Khera and Himanta Biswa Sarma, said in its April 30 order, which was uploaded on Friday, that the "allegations and counter-allegations... prima facie, appear to be politically motivated..." and that "criminal process must be applied with objectivity and circumspection so as to ensure that individual liberty is not imperilled by proceedings that may be coloured by political rivalry."

The court further said, "We are of the opinion that while adjudicating an application for anticipatory bail, a careful balance

must be struck between the State's interest in ensuring a fair investigation and the individual's fundamental right to personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution of India... The right to personal liberty is a cherished fundamental right, and any deprivation thereof must be justified on a higher threshold, particularly where the surrounding circumstances may indicate the presence of political overtones."

Khera had approached the Supreme Court challenging the April 24 order of the Gauhati High Court denying him anticipatory bail in the case. His plea, filed through Advocate Priyansha Sharma, questioned the need for custodial interrogation in the case. Appearing for him, Senior Advocate A M Singhvi objected to some of the remarks allegedly made by the CM in connection with Khera's charges and stated that he was speaking like a "Constitutional cowboy or a Constitutional Rambo."

In its order, the Supreme Court said, "In our view, the ob-



Khera had approached the SC challenging a Gauhati High Court order denying him anticipatory bail

servations as made by the High Court in the order impugned is not based on correct appreciation of all the material which has been placed on record and appears to be erroneous, in particular shifting the burden on the accused." The top court noted that even though the offence under Section 339 (possessing forged documents or electronic records) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita was not mentioned in the FIR, based on the statement of the Advocate General, the high court order recorded that Khera's case may fall under the provision. "General, observations made regarding Section 339 of BNS do not appear to be correct", the Supreme Court said.

The bench, which perused the allegations by Khera as well as Himanta Biswa Sarma, said, "We are of the view that the allegations and counter-allegations have been made by the Appellant (Khera) as well as by the husband (Himanta Biswa Sarma) of the complainant (Riniki Bhuyan). Learned Solicitor General has not defended any of such statements during the course of hearing, nor is the veracity of the same questioned."

"It primarily appears that merely to gain some political momentum in favour of his party, this statement has been made by the Appellant (Khera)."

The court added, "albeit, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the Chief Minister of the State, who is also husband of the complainant, has made certain unparliamentary remarks against the Appellant in various press statements..." The SC said, "At this stage, we are cognizant of the fact that personal liberty of an individual enshrined under Article 21 of the Constitution of India cannot be put to jeopardy lightly. But at the same time, we are also of the view that for any offences alleged in the FIR, the investigation should be completed with integrity and in full swing with the co-operation of the Appellant."

# Cong welcomes order; Singhvi exchanges barbs with Himanta

Express News Service  
New Delhi, May 1

AS CONGRESS leader Pawan Khera was granted anticipatory bail in a defamation case over his remarks against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, the Congress praised the Supreme Court order saying the law stands above all, no matter how powerful one may be.

Addressing a press conference, Congress Rajya Sabha member Abhishek Singhvi said the SC verdict reminds all that when personal liberty is at stake, the courts remain our ultimate bedrock of hope.

Singhvi also urged Sarma to reconsider whether it is befitting of a person holding a constitutional post to use "such language" against Khera, and express regret.

Sarma reacted to Singhvi's remarks and said that he doesn't "need lessons on democracy, public discourse or decency from anyone, especially" from Singhvi.

Singhvi said the case against Khera reminds us that when reputational damage is an issue, arrest should not be the

first but the last resort. In this case, he alleged, the clear intention was to humiliate and harass Khera for the allegations he made against the [Assam] chief minister during the poll process.

"I would urge the Hon'ble Assam CM to reconsider his stand, irrespective of Monday's outcome, especially in light of the remarks quoted in the judgment. The Supreme Court has cited several of his public statements, many of which are deeply inappropriate and lower the standards of our democracy," Singhvi said.

Meanwhile, Sarma, reacted to Singhvi's remarks, saying that "decency and him (Singhvi) can never be in the same room". "The real issue here pertains to a woman who has nothing to do with politics... her character assassinated on national television using forged documents from other countries," said Sarma.

"I am confident the courts will take note of this, sooner or later and the guilty will be punished for his brazen act of maligning a woman's character using false documents to influence electoral outcomes," added Sarma.



## Lawrence Of Punjab row: HC seeks reply from Centre, Punjab over plea by Zee

Jagpreet Singh Sandhu  
Chandigarh, May 1

THE PUNJAB and Haryana HC hassought reply from the Centre and Punjab over a petition filed by the Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd challenging communications from the Centre, whereby it has been advised not to release the documentary titled — *Lawrence Of Punjab*.

The docuseries, based on alleged gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, was scheduled for release on April 27, 2026, on OTT platform, Zee5. The matter came up for hearing before the Bench of Justice Jagmohan Bansal, which Friday impleaded Punjab, as respondent in the case. Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd argued that the impugned communications — dated April 23, 2026, and April 24, 2026 — issued by the respondent, seek to restrain the release of the docuseries without statutory backing and following due process. The counsel for the Centre and Punjab sought time to file reply. The next hearing is set for May 11.

## Punjab pollution board raids Trident, company moves HC: ‘Targeted over Gupta’s BJP switch’

Manraj Grewal Sharma  
Chandigarh, May 1

THE PUNJAB and Haryana High Court Friday recorded the Punjab government’s statement that no coercive action would be taken against Trident Group till Monday, after the company moved the court alleging political vendetta behind a late evening raid by the Punjab Pollution Control Board (PPCB) at its industrial unit on Thursday. The matter came up before a division bench of Chief Justice Sheel Nagu and Justice Sanjiv Berry.

Appearing for Trident, senior advocate Manisha Gandhi argued the company was being targeted after its founder and Rajya Sabha member Rajinder Gupta quit the AAP along with six other Upper House members and joined BJP on April 24. Gandhi told the bench Gupta, now chairman emeritus of the company with no day-to-day operational role, had stepped away from active management in 2022 and was presently in the US undergoing treatment, including a third open-heart surgery.

She submitted that Trident, a listed company employing around 15,000 people, had been compliant with environmental norms under the Air Act and Water Act and had regularly secured statutory consents. She further told the court that in proceedings before the NGT, the company had set up a Rs 5 crore environmental corpus, of which Rs 2.29 crore had already been utilised under the supervision of the PPCB, the Central Pollution Control Board and the district administration.

# 349 kg cocaine hidden in gloves, pads: NCB busts drug syndicate in Mumbai

Mahender Singh Manral & Mohamed Thaver  
New Delhi, Mumbai, May 1

PACKETS OF cocaine concealed under cricket pads and gloves, contraband smuggled into India inside cavities of imported machinery from the Ecuador, drugs stored inside warehouses: The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has claimed to have dismantled a transnational cocaine syndicate, seizing 349 kilograms of high-grade substance valued at nearly Rs 1,745 crore, from Mumbai and the adjoining logistics corridor.

The NCB said that the operation, codenamed ‘WhiteStrike’, involved over six months of intelligence gathering and surveillance, culminating in coordinated raids in the Kalamboli-Bhiwandi corridor spanning Navi Mumbai and Thane district. Acting on inputs, multiple teams launched coordinated strikes in the Kalamboli-Bhiwandi corridor (Navi Mumbai-Thane region), exposing a highly organised transnational drug supply network using ware-



A transnational drug supply ring using warehouse infrastructure and concealed transport mechanisms has been busted, say cops. EXPRESS

house infrastructure and concealed transport mechanisms.

The official said that it was a two-staged operation. “During the first strike, NCB teams inter-

cepted a Maruti Suzuki Super Carry near KWC Warehousing complex in Kalamboli. Some 136 one-kg packets were found in cartons wherein cocaine was

concealed using cricket pads and gloves. They have detained a suspect from the spot,” an NCB spokesperson said.

Later, they arrested one Nitin Pandhharitha Shingari. On sustained interrogation and follow-up action, the accused revealed the existence of another concealed consignment stored in Bhiwandi, a major warehousing hub. A raid was conducted at a warehouse in Laxman Compound, Rehnal Gaon, Bhiwandi, yielding another 213 one-kg packets — pushing the total haul to 349 kg. “Preliminary probe revealed that the cocaine was smuggled inside imported machinery cavities, each packet wrapped in nine layers of polythene, including a black greasy coating. The use of Bhiwandi’s warehousing ecosystem points to a structured logistics chain involving import of machinery with concealed cocaine, storage and retrieval of cocaine packets in warehouses and downstream supply of narcotics.”

“Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi and guidance of HM Amit Shah, the successful

operation reflects the government’s zero tolerance policy against narcotics trafficking,” the NCB spokesperson said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah hailed the bust on X, stating, “We are resolved to ruthlessly crush the narcotics cartel. The NCB has cracked down on a major international narcotics ring seizing 349 kg of high-grade cocaine worth Rs 1,745 crore in Mumbai. This is a trail-blazing example of bottom to top approach where the agency traced back a smaller consignment to net a massive network. Congratulations to Team NCB for this monumental success.”

NCB is now hunting for the kingpin, handlers, financiers, and buyers, with probes intensifying by the day. “Intensive probe is underway to apprehend the kingpin, handlers, financiers, and intended receivers of the consignment,” the spokesperson said. The seizure is significant because about 200-300 kg of cocaine is usually seized in India every year on an average while in this single case, 349 kg of cocaine has been seized.

## BRIEFLY



Rescue operation underway at the bridge collapse site on Friday. ANI

### JAMMU AND KASHMIR

## 1 dead as portion of bridge collapses in Jammu; several feared trapped

A MAN (50), who worked as a labourer, was killed late Friday after he got trapped under the debris of a collapsed bridge in Thathar in Bantala area near Jammu. While the identity of the deceased has not yet been ascertained, the injured man, rescued during an operation and admitted at the Government Medical College Hospital, was identified as Tarsem Lal (55). Rescue operations are underway as 2-3 more workers were feared trapped under the debris. ENS

## Hyderabad: 6 die in road accident

SIX PERSONS, including a woman and three children, were killed after a speeding car hit a stationary lorry on Outer Ring Road in Hyderabad Friday, police said. The car crashed into rear side of the lorry — stopped on the roadside to tighten the ropes securing goods being transported — killing the six persons, among the total seven travelling in the car, on the spot, police said. PTI

## Pune: 3 drown in dam backwaters

AN OUTING by six friends from Pune’s Bhosari turned tragic Friday when three of them drowned in the backwaters of a dam, allegedly while trying to take a selfie, police said. It happened at around 3 pm at Jadhavwadi dam near Navalakh Umbre village, Maval tehsil, of the western Maharashtra district. They were identified as Ajay Garude, Santosh Edke and Aniket Pawar. PTI

### 14 HELD FOR ‘DISPOSING OF LEFTOVER CHICKEN BIRYANI INTO GANGA’

## UP iftar row: 45 days after arrest, cops wait for ‘forensic report’, video details

Manish Sahu  
Lucknow, May 1

NEARLY TWO months after 14 youths were held for allegedly disposing of leftover chicken biryani into the Ganga at Varanasi on March 17, police say they are still waiting for a “forensic report”, without sharing details. Sources said a report is also awaited from Instagram on the account from which the video of the 14 purportedly caught in the act was uploaded.

With police yet to file a chargesheet, the bail hearing of the 14 Muslim youths — accused of “hurting religious sentiments”, “defiling” a place of worship and “extortion”, as well as of charges under the pollution Act — is scheduled for May 5 before the Allahabad High Court. Three hearings have happened in the court, with their bail application earlier rejected by a lower court and a Sessions Court.

In the time since, only one similar incident has led to police action off the Varanasi ghats, after two youths were allegedly caught drinking beer on the Ganga. The Assi Ghat Police Outpost In-Charge, Sub-Inspector Ranjeet Kumar, said Arjun Rajbhar was arrested in the case in the first week of April, after which Lal Sahani, also a resident and in his 20s, was held based on “video proof”. In this case too, police are yet to file a chargesheet. Both Rajbhar and Sahani, charged under Sections of breach of peace and criminal intimidation, are out on bail.

The state government, which transferred the authority



With police yet to file a chargesheet, the bail hearing of the 14 jailed youths has been scheduled for May 5. EXPRESS FILE

to register boats plying on the Ganga in Varanasi from the Municipal Corporation to the Transport Department, before the iftar biryani row, is yet to put into motion a portal that was meant to streamline regulation and the process.

Boat owners (1,217 boats are officially registered with the Municipal Corporation) are meant to upload details of their vessels on the portal, with licences to be issued after verification and certification by government-appointed surveyors, who would ensure compliance with prescribed safety norms. As they await the portal, boat operators are tightening oversight on their own, to prevent being caught in another such row.

Pramod Majhi, president of the Maa Ganga Nishad Raj Sewa Niyas, an organisation representing boat operators in Varanasi, says, “Previously, there was no clearly defined code of conduct governing activities on boats. The controversy has compelled us to introduce safeguards to uphold the

sanctity of the Ganga while also protecting it from pollution.”

The new set of guidelines, as per Majhi, include a strict ban on carrying or consuming non-vegetarian food, alcohol, intoxicants and narcotic substances on board. Boat operators have been instructed to ensure that passengers do not throw plastic bottles, food wrappers or any other waste into the river, and are being encouraged to install cameras on their vessels. Besides this, the display of firearms is now expressly forbidden, while operators have been told to stick to the vessel’s approved capacity of passengers, and to watch out for any brawls. “Violators will face action by the association, and will have complaints filed against them to the authorities concerned,” says Majhi.

On food, Shambhu Nishad, the Maa Ganga Nishad Raj Sewa Niyas’s organising secretary, whose family operates 16 boats in Varanasi, says while vegetarian fare is “generally permitted”, passengers do carry items along. There is no provision to check

their bags. Some small boats also operate as floating kiosks, selling tea and biscuits to tourists.

Assistant Commissioner of Police, Varanasi, Atul Anjaan Tripathi says that with all boats operating on the Ganga privately owned, the government’s role is largely confined to overseeing safety and security regulations.

Raghvendra Singh, Regional Transport Officer, Varanasi, promises that the portal for registration of boats will “begin soon”. “We are currently framing the necessary rules and regulations,” he says, adding that the registrations would have to be renewed annually.

Naina Sahani, daughter of Kashi Sahani, the owner of the boat on which the 14 accused men held the iftar party, says the vessel is back on the water. “But we are now taking extra precautions. We avoid renting the boat to groups of young men, and prefer families, especially those with women and children.” Sahani says her family members were questioned twice after the FIR against the 14 was filed, but have not been called by police for a statement since.

The families of the arrested youths say they have been held on false charges without gathering proper evidence, and that they had not thrown any bones or leftovers into the river. Mohammad Shameem, whose sons Mohammad Tahseem and Azad Ali are among the 14 in Varanasi District Jail, says: “All the families regularly visit them. Our sons are getting frustrated as time goes by and they remain in jail... We pray God will help us.”

## Indian realtor in Canada gets 18 months in jail for luring 9-year-old into car

Express News Service  
Chandigarh, May 1

AN INDIAN-ORIGIN real estate agent in Canada has been sentenced to 18 months in prison for abducting a nine-year-old boy, with an Ontario judge firmly rejecting the defence claim that the incident stemmed from a “cultural misunderstanding” rooted in his Indian background.

Justice Michael N Varpio of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice said Manoj Govindbalunikam, 37, a permanent resident, had lived in Canada long enough to understand its social norms and could not use culture as an explanation for taking a child without parental consent. Govindbalunikam, a resident of Brampton, Ontario, pleaded guilty in May 2025 to one count of abducting a person under the age of 14. The offence took place on August 15, 2023, in Thessalon, a small community near Sault Ste Marie. According to court records, Govindbalunikam was driving his yellow 2011 Chevrolet Camaro with black racing stripes while scouting properties for his real estate business when he approached the boy, who was fishing alone at the mouth of the Thessalon River. He struck up a conversa-

tion, offered the child a fidget spinner toy, handed him his business card identifying himself as a realtor, and took photos. Later, he allegedly met the boy again near the local curling club, offered him a ride home, and asked him to leave behind his bicycle and fishing gear, saying there was “no room” in the sports car. Instead of taking him home, Govindbalunikam allegedly drove the child to the Sinton Tavern, bought him ice cream, and was seen there with him.

Two local patrons who recognised the boy, but not the driver, grew suspicious and alerted the child’s parents. Although the boy gave his address, Govindbalunikam allegedly drove past the residence without stopping. The child’s father eventually spotted the car, reached into the vehicle, confronted Govindbalunikam, and rescued his son. The boy was unharmed physically and returned home with his father, as per court records.

Ontario Provincial Police located Govindbalunikam the next day in Sault Ste Marie. His cellphone, seized during the investigation, allegedly contained photographs of the boy eating ice cream in the Camaro and of the two together by the river.

FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

# A school dropout at 15, this woman from Saharanpur made it to the Silicon Valley

Vidheesha Kuntamalla  
New Delhi, May 1

IT WAS 2016. In Saharanpur, a small city in western Uttar Pradesh, known for its sheesham woodwork and paper mills, an unusual American dream unfolded quietly behind a closed bedroom door. Inside, 15-year-old Harshita Arora was glued to her laptop. She had stopped going to school. She had refused to attend family functions, go on trips, and even turned down visits to her grandparents.

Years later, what she created inside her room, spending hours and hours behind a screen, would lead her to Silicon Valley. Harshita, now 24, is among the youngest General Partners at Y Combinator, the storied startup accelerator that has backed some of the world’s most influential technology companies.

Indians making it big in tech — like Sundar Pichai of Google or Satya Nadella of Microsoft — are numerous, going on to become household tales for aspiring parents dreaming the

American dream for their children. Harshita’s journey, though, didn’t follow any of the familiar routes — school, college degrees, predictable milestones. This is her unique story.

### A life-altering decision

Harshita was born to Ravinder Singh Arora, who works in property investment, and Jasvinder Kaur Arora, a homemaker, in 2002. She is their only child. “Our daughter was a simple (child) and a very good student. Always first in the class,” Ravinder says. “Her teachers were very happy with her performance. When she was in primary school, a teacher told her mother that this child will do something different.” The shift happened in 2016, when Harshita was in Class 9 at Pinewood School in Saharanpur. “She said she didn’t want to go to school anymore,” her father says. “She told us she didn’t want to study. She was interested in computers.”

The family says she initially complained of discomfort, diz-

ziness during assembly, unease in classrooms, which soon turned into flat out refusal. “We were very tense,” Jasvinder recalls. “It was a very strange situation.” Ravinder remembers how unsettled he was. “... a 15-year-old child had said she doesn’t want to go to school anymore. Anybody would have been shocked.” They negotiated with her: finish Class 10, try a few more months, reduce subjects. She refused. “I don’t want to study SST, Hindi, Sanskrit,” she told them.

Eventually, her parents relented. “I didn’t have any option,” her father remembers. “She didn’t listen.” Looking back, Harshita says that moment was not rebellion but rejection. “A lot of what happens in Indian schools is rote memorisation. It felt pointless to me.” The family tried to make arrangements to home-school her but failed. “She wouldn’t want to step out of her room. She would literally lock herself inside,” Ravinder says. “We could do nothing. She was adamant.”



Harshita Arora with her parents. EXPRESS

In her early teens, Harshita discovered programming. A Computer Science teacher introduced her to tools like Scratch and MIT App Inventor — and she was hooked. “I started programming when I was 13,” she recalls. “I also read essays by Paul Graham, whose writing on startups and building companies appealed to my creative spirit”. She also watched The Social Network, the popular biopic on how Facebook was founded. “It

changed what I wanted in life,” Harshita remembers. “I decided I was going to be a founder.” Soon, Harshita came up with another plan. “She told us she has been accepted for a programme in Bangalore and she needs to attend the course,” Ravinder says. “We let her go.”

For the next few months in 2016, she attended a one-month training programme at Salesforce in Bengaluru, gaining exposure to enterprise soft-

ware environments and develop ecosystems. In 2017, she was selected for LaunchX, a highly selective entrepreneurship programme hosted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “They select only around 70 students,” her father says. “The fee was very high, but she got financial support and we paid only about \$1,000.”

She was in the US for several weeks on a visitor’s visa, working on startup ideas with peers from around the world. For the first time, she was in an environment that mirrored the world she had been building for herself online. When she returned to India in August of that year, the tension at home remained. “Westill didn’t understand what she would do next,” her father says. “There was no fixed path”. Ravinder says that the family was extremely worried about her situation. “My life was very simple,” he says. “My father is an advocate, who practices tax law, my brother is also a lawyer and I do property investments. We are a traditional middle class family

and we have had a very straightforward life.”

Over the next six months, Harshita again withdrew into her room and into a life that operated on a different clock. “I didn’t go out. I was just coding, reading, learning,” she says. “It was extremely YOLO. My father kept asking for a plan and I said, ‘I don’t have one. I’ll figure it out.’” Then, in February 2018, Ravinder says Harshita asked him to check the next day’s newspaper. “She said there was something about her in it.” Until then, he had little idea what she had been doing. Then he saw it — she had built an app, a cryptocurrency portfolio tracker. It was live on Apple’s app store as a paid product, ranking among the top apps in its category. “I was shocked,” he says. Harshita remembers his shock vividly: “He said what I made in years, you made in months. His mind was blown.” The app was acquired.

### Doors begin to open

The same year, she received the ‘Woman of the year’ award at

HC backs DCGI's action against unauthorised combination drugs

**Sohini Ghosh**  
*New Delhi, May 1*

THE DELHI High Court has paved the way for the revocation of licences to manufacture, sell, market and distribute fixed-dose combination (FDC) drugs that have not been approved based on safety and efficacy studies. The court upheld an order passed by India's central drug regulator in 2025 prohibiting the sale of unapproved FDC drugs.

Such "unapproved FDCs compromise patient safety and may lead to adverse drug reactions and cause other health hazards due to the absence of scientific validation", the court said in its order passed on April 21. An FDC drug is a medicine that contains two or more active pharmaceutical ingredients — chemical compounds in medicines that have an effect on the body — in a single pill, capsule, or shot. FDCs can reduce the number of pills a patient needs to take each day. At the same time, an FDC could mean that a patient ends up taking a drug they may not need.

The government has been putting combination drugs under scrutiny from time to time. In August 2024, a batch of 156 FDCs were banned for being "irrational", bringing no therapeutic benefit. In earlier challenges by pharma companies to the Drug Controller General of India's (DCGI) action against the sale of unapproved FDC drugs, the court had, as an interim measure, directed that no coercive steps be taken against the companies pending final disposal of the cases. The dismissal of the petitions by the court on April 21 without granting such interim relief marks a departure from this trend. Several generic pharma firms including Maxford Healthcare, Ajanta Pharma, Rica Enterprises, and Dolphin Life Sciences had moved the HC in 2025 asking that the DCGI's communication on the licensing of unapproved FDC drugs by state authorities be set aside.

On April 11, 2025, DCGI had asked drug regulatory bodies in states and UTs to ensure that unapproved FDCs are not allowed to be sold, marketed and distributed. It also asked drug controllers in the states to conduct a probe and take action.

**कार्यालय परियोजना प्रबन्धक, युनिट-49, कन्सल्टेशन एण्ड डिजाइन सर्विसेज, उत्तर प्रदेश जल निगम (नगरीय) (उपग्रह सरकार का उपक्रम), ई-6, प्रियदर्शनी नगर, निकट बीडीपीएच आफिस, बरेली-243122**  
निविदा सूचना सं: 609 / कार्य-15 / 113  
दिनांक 30.04.2026  
**ई-निविदा सूचना**  
उत्तर प्रदेश जल निगम की ओर से जनपद न्यायालय बरेली परिसर में अवरहिस (पानी की टंकी) एवं पम्प हाउस का निर्माण कार्य, अनुमानित लागत रु 195.12 लाख (जीएचएचडी रोड रीहट एवं लेबर सेस सहित) हेतु सीओएण्ड सीएचएचडी में यथोचित श्रेणी में बयन कार्य हेतु पंजीकृत उम्मेदवारों से विनांक 21.05.2026 को 15:00 बजे तक ई-निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती हैं। उक्त कार्य हेतु ई-निविदा प्रपत्र दिनांक 30.04.2026 से विनांक 21.05.2026 के मध्य उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार की e-procurement वेबसाइट <https://etender.up.nic.in> से डाउनलोड किये जा सकते हैं तथा ई-निविदा विनांक 21.05.2026 को अपराह्न 17:00 बजे सीओएण्ड सीओएचडी, युनिट-49 उद्घाटन जल निगम (नगरीय) बरेली में निविदा खोली जायेगी।  
निविदा से सम्बंधित विस्तृत विवरण विनांक की वेबसाइट [www.cdsupjn.org](http://www.cdsupjn.org) एवं प्रोजेक्ट/रेफरेंस पोर्टल <https://etender.up.nic.in> पर उपलब्ध हैं। समस्त शुद्धि पत्र (Corrigendum) <https://etender.up.nic.in> पर ही अपलोड किये जायेंगे, इनका पृथक से कोई प्रकाशन नहीं किया जायेगा। निविदादाताओं को सलाह दी जाती है कि वे उक्त वेबसाइट का समय-समय पर अवलोकन कर सकें।

**कार्यालय परियोजना प्रबन्धक, युनिट-49, कन्सल्टेशन एण्ड डिजाइन सर्विसेज, उत्तर प्रदेश जल निगम (नगरीय) (उपग्रह सरकार का उपक्रम), ई-6, प्रियदर्शनी नगर, निकट बीडीपीएच आफिस, बरेली-243122**  
निविदा सूचना सं: 617 / कार्य-15 / 115  
दिनांक 01.05.2026  
**ई-निविदा सूचना**  
उत्तर प्रदेश जल निगम (नगरीय) की ओर से नगर निगम, बरेली के अन्तर्गत पीलीभीत बाईपास रोड पर विष्णु चौखंड से नकदिया नदी तक आरसीसीओ स्ट्राम वाटर ड्रेनेज सम्बन्धी कार्य अनुमानित लागत रु 2203.10 लाख (जीओएचडी रोड रीहट एवं लेबर सेस सहित) हेतु सीओएण्ड सीओएचडी में यथोचित श्रेणी में पंजीकृत उम्मेदवारों से विनांक 28.05.2026 के अपराह्न 17:00 बजे तक ई-निविदाएं आमंत्रित की जाती हैं। उक्त कार्य हेतु ई-निविदा प्रपत्र दिनांक 01.05.2026 से विनांक 28.05.2026 के मध्य उत्तर प्रदेश सरकार की e-procurement वेबसाइट <https://etender.up.nic.in> से डाउनलोड किये जा सकते हैं तथा ई-निविदा विनांक 29.05.2026 को अपराह्न 15:00 बजे सीओएण्ड सीओएचडी, युनिट-49 उद्घाटन जल निगम (नगरीय) बरेली में निविदा खोली जायेगी। ई-निविदा प्रपत्र का मूल्य रु 20000.00 + GST (18%) अतिरिक्त देय होगा।  
निविदा से सम्बंधित विस्तृत विवरण विनांक की वेबसाइट [www.cdsupjn.org](http://www.cdsupjn.org) एवं प्रोजेक्ट/रेफरेंस पोर्टल <https://etender.up.nic.in> पर उपलब्ध हैं। समस्त शुद्धि पत्र (Corrigendum) <https://etender.up.nic.in> पर ही अपलोड किये जायेंगे, इनका पृथक से कोई प्रकाशन नहीं किया जायेगा। निविदादाताओं को सलाह दी जाती है कि वे उक्त वेबसाइट का समय-समय पर अवलोकन कर सकें।

# Ladakh living land of dharma: Shah on Buddha relics return to UT after 75 yrs

**Upasika Singhal**  
*Leh, May 1*

UNION HOME Minister Amit Shah on Friday described the return of sacred relics of Gautama Buddha to Ladakh after 75 years, coinciding with the Buddha Purnima, as a historic reunion.

Addressing a gathering at Jivetsal in Leh during the 2569th Buddha Purnima celebrations, Shah said Ladakh has been a "living land of dharma" that preserved and nurtured Buddhist knowledge for centuries.

"Last time when these relics came to Leh, very few could pay their respects due to the lack of connectivity. Today, after 75 years, people from Ladakh, Kargil and even followers of other religions will be able to draw spiritual inspiration from them," he said.

The relics had been brought to Leh in 1950 for an exhibition, after Ngawang Lobzang Thupstan Chognor (popularly known as the 19th Kushok Bakula Rinpoche) requested then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to send the relics to Leh to raise the spiritual morale of the people. Shah said the region



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the inauguration of a holy relics exposition of Lord Buddha in Ladakh on Friday. PTI

has, for centuries, remained a centre of spirituality and preservation of Buddhist knowledge. "This land is not merely geographical, but a vibrant laboratory of culture and compassion," he said while referring to the Dalai Lama.

Highlighting Ladakh's role in the transmission of Buddhist thought, Shah said the region served as a key corridor through which teachings originating in India spread to China

and beyond. He noted that Kashmir, too, was once a major centre of Buddhist learning, particularly of Mahayana philosophy and art, and facilitated Ladakh's early engagement with Buddhism. He also referred to the role of Emperor Ashoka's envoys and the Silk Route in disseminating Buddhist thought.

"The presence of these relics in Ladakh reminds us that India's civilisation, for

thousands of years, has been built on the foundations of peace and coexistence," he said, adding, "Amid conflict and unrest, only the path of peace and compassion can provide solutions."

Shah urged the Ladakh administration to ensure smooth arrangements for visitors of all faiths to pay obeisance to the relics.

Echoing the significance of the occasion, Tsering Dorjay Lakrook, president of the Ladakh Buddhist Association, said Buddha Purnima marks the birth, enlightenment and parinirvana (passing away) of the Buddha, making it one of the holiest days for Buddhists.

Referring to the return of the relics, Lakrook said they had come back to Ladakh after over seven decades. "In 1950, venerable Bakula Rinpoche brought these relics here, but at that time very few people could see them as there were barely any roads or connectivity. This time, with improved connectivity, residents across Ladakh will be able to visit and pay their respects ... Today even the mountains bless the arrival of the relics. Despite being so cloudy, the skies cleared and

the sun shone down on us. When the relics arrived in Leh, we saw a rainbow above the Spituk monastery. It goes on to show how auspicious the arrival of these relics are," he said.

The relics will be put on exhibition for 15 days and villagers from across Leh will be visiting the relics in a staggered manner, district administration officials said.

Stanizing Tashi, a college student from Spituk village, said he got to know of the news of the relics' arrival a week ago. Standing in colourful traditional attire and carrying an incense holder, he said, "I am very excited to see the relics. I will take blessings for me, my family and for the land of Ladakh."

Khenpo Tsumtsum, a monk from Lama Yuri Monastery in Ladakh's Sham Valley, explained the history behind the relics. "When Buddha passed away, he was cremated in his ancestral place. After his cremation, eight factions laid claim over the remains ... a Brahmin named Drona intervened and divided the ashes into eight parts. Each of these parts were stored under a stupa," Tsumtsum said.

## ED: Assets attached in money laundering cases rose 23-fold between 2005-14 and 2014-24

**Mahender Singh Manral**  
*New Delhi, May 1*

THE ED has sent 353 Mutual Legal Assistance Requests (MLARs) or Letters Rogatory (LRs) to foreign jurisdictions to seek evidence, trace money trails and pursue extradition-related assistance in cases involving fugitive economic offenders. The top six destinations were the United Arab Emirates (69), Singapore (55), the United Kingdom (39), Hong Kong (36), the United States (26) and Switzerland (23).

The ED's annual report, released on Friday, states that these formal requests facilitate international cooperation, including gathering evidence admissible in judicial proceedings, tracing money trails, and examining suspects, accused persons or witnesses abroad.

The report comes as the agency marks the 70th year since its establishment on May 1, 1956. "The volume of LR and MLARs sought by the ED has grown considerably in recent years. Till March 31 this year, 353 such requests remain pending," the report noted.

Of the total pending requests sent by the ED, 15 were sent to Mauritius, eight to Australia, six each to China and the Isle of Man, five to the British Virgin Islands, and 65 to other countries.

The report also said the ED had received 246 similar requests from other countries by March 31. Of these, 79 came from the UK, 33 from Singapore, 3 from the US, seven from France, six from Australia and 89 from other countries. Only 19 of the requests received by the agency remained unexecuted.

ED Director Rahul Navin said attachments under the PMLA have risen sharply over the years. In the first decade after the law came into force, from 2005 to 2014, total attachments stood at Rs 5,171.32 crore, averaging about Rs 574.6 crore annually. In the following decade, from 2014 to 2024, this rose to Rs 1,19,386.25 crore — a 23-fold rise.

"In 2024-25, the ED attached properties worth Rs 30,036.41 crore, while in 2025-26 the figure rose to Rs 81,422.63 crore. Attachments in a single financial year are now more than fifteen times the cumulative total of the Act's first decade," Navin said.

### CM FADNAVIS APOLOGISES TO MOTORISTS STUCK IN TRAFFIC JAM

## After years of delay, 'Missing Link' on Mumbai-Pune expressway inaugurated

**Sabah Virani & Alister Augustine**  
*Mumbai, May 1*

AFTER NEARLY a decade of construction, delays and engineering challenges, the much-awaited Missing Link on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway was finally inaugurated on Friday only for its opening day to be marred by hours of traffic jams that left thousands of commuters stranded across the Khandala ghat.

At around 1 pm, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, along with Deputy Chief Ministers Eknath Shinde and Sunetra Pawar, inaugurated the 13.3-km corridor built by the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation (MSRDC). Within hours, the Pune-bound arm was opened to traffic, while the Mumbai-bound stretch remained temporarily shut till evening for dismantling of event infrastructure.

Envisaged as a permanent solution to the bottleneck-heavy and accident-prone ghat section, the Missing Link project traces its origins back to the mid-1990s, with renewed momentum after state approval in 2017. Construction began around 2018-19 but was pushed back repeatedly due to land clearances, complex terrain, monsoon disruptions and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Rs 6,695-crore project replaces a 19.8-km stretch of winding ghat roads with a 13.3-km high-speed alignment comprising viaducts, a 650-metre cable-stayed bridge over Tiger Valley, and twin tunnels stretching



The 'Missing Link' project includes two tunnels, two viaducts and a cable-stayed bridge over Tiger Valley. DEEPAK JOSHI

nearly 9 km through the Sahyadri hills. It is expected to reduce travel distance by 6 km and cut the journey time by at least 30 minutes, while also improving safety on a corridor notorious for accidents.

"This is not a missing link anymore, but a connecting link," Fadnavis said at the inauguration. Acknowledging the chaos through the day, he added, "I apologise to motorists who were stuck in traffic today... soon this will be a thing of the past."

The promise of smoother travel, however, contrasted sharply with the experience of commuters on Friday.

With the new route kept closed until the formal inauguration, all vehicles were forced onto the old ghat section during peak morning hours on the first day of a long weekend — a stretch already infamous for bottlenecks. The situation worsened as a lane on the expressway was shut for the event, squeezing road capacity further.

The result: traffic queues stretching several kilometres, vehicles crawling or standing still for hours, and multiple breakdowns reported amid intense heat.

Several commuters said they were stuck for over five hours, stretching up to nine hours. Families travelling out for the long weekend ran out of water, vehicles overheated, and several missed flights, functions and personal commitments.

The convergence of holiday traffic, VIP movement and restricted road space created a near-gridlock across sections of the expressway.

Even Opposition leaders, including Supriya Sule, were caught in the jam. People reported running out of drinking water, lack of clean washrooms, and the oppressive heat.

Ironically, the Missing Link is designed to eliminate such choke points by bypassing the steep, winding ghat stretch where traffic from multiple lanes merges and slows down.

Once fully operational in both directions, officials say it will significantly ease congestion and improve reliability on one of Maharashtra's busiest corridors.

### World's widest tunnel

Touted as an "engineering marvel," the project's scale was brandished in the inauguration. A global effort had come together to make the project possible, said Fadnavis, recounting the expertise and brains behind it had come from Copenhagen, Austria, Singapore, Canada, Taiwan, and more.

The tunnels received the stamp of the Guinness World Record, certifying them as the world's widest underground tunnels at 22.3 metres wide, thanks to the solid rock strata in the Sahyadri's. The excavation of the tunnels — 1.6km long and 8.9km long — required the construction of temporary adits, excavation of over 85 lakh tonnes of rock, 7,600 tonnes of steel, and 3.3 lakh cubic metres of concrete. The tunnels took nine million manhours to build, said officials from Navayuga, the contractor behind the tunnels.

The cable-stayed bridge over the Tiger Valley, claimed to be India's tallest, stretches 182 metres at its highest and is able to withstand violent winds of 240 km/hr, tested against the force of cyclones. Narrow ridges giving little room for heavy machinery, chaotic wind speeds swaying from one extreme to another, intense monsoons resulting in water cascading and sudden bouts of fog, were some of the challenges faced by Afcons Infrastructure in building the bridges.

**Pavneet Singh Chadha**  
*Panaji, May 1*

A BANGLADESH-LINKED gang allegedly behind two high-profile Goa dacoities last year — and wanted in multiple cases across states — is said to have used a "strike-and-vanish" playbook: entering India to commit crimes before quickly slipping back across the border to evade police.

Six accused — Suman Hauldhar (35), Saifull Islam (31), Sohail Sheikh (35), Md Nasir (48), Noor Islam (56) and Zakir Haldar (40), all from Bangladesh — were arrested by the Delhi Police Crime Branch on the intervening night of April 14–15 after an exchange of fire. Five were brought to Goa on transfer warrants and produced before a judicial magistrate first class in Panaji on Thursday, which remanded them to 11 days' police custody. In October 2025, six-armed alleged robbers broke into a doctor's home in North Goa's Mapusa, tied up occupants for over two hours and fled with jewellery, cash and a car. In a similar incident in April last year, armed robbers allegedly targeted an elderly couple from a business family in Dona Paula, decamping with gold and cash after tying them up. During the probe, Goa Police teams conducted raids across Belgaum, Bijapur, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Delhi, Guwahati, Tripura and Meghalaya. The suspects were identified and their details shared with police forces in other states.

One accused, Noor Islam, was earlier lodged in Goa's Colvale jail and is alleged to have facilitated the gang's entry into



Police conducted raids across Belgaum, Bijapur, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Delhi, Guwahati, Tripura and Meghalaya. FILE

Goa. Police said he met a man identified as Mahmood there between 2023 and 2024; Mahmood, from Uttar Pradesh, allegedly provided logistical support for the Dona Paula dacoity. Another accused, Saifull Islam, was allegedly sheltered by Raju B and Safikul. Noor Islam, Saifull Islam and Mahmood have been arrested.

### How they pulled it off

Goa Police said their interrogation suggests the group crossed into India via the Meghalaya border. Rahul Gupta, SP (Crime Branch), said some members allegedly conducted reconnaissance in residential areas, camping in nearby secluded patches for a day or two to study routines, sleeping patterns and entry points. "They would split into smaller groups to avoid attention, regrouping at pre-designated points like busstands, railway stations and beaches, and avoiding technical communication to reduce detection," he said.

Police alleged the group used rods and knives to threaten victims and counter resistance. "After entering bungalows, they assessed layouts, identified

locked and unlocked rooms and selectively targeted accessible areas. Family members were assaulted, tied up, and the accused then fled with gold and other valuables," Gupta said. In an April 15 statement, Delhi Police alleged the gang infiltrated India through clandestine networks, paying large sums. Operating masked and armed, they allegedly followed a 'hit-run-hide' pattern — targeting isolated, affluent elderly residents, committing dacoities and, in some cases, assaulting those who resisted before escaping across the border.

Police further alleged the group relied on a covert network of relatives in India to identify homes with significant gold and cash, planned armed break-ins, and then quickly retreated toward the border. "Their local network also allegedly supplied arms and logistics. They paid human smugglers to facilitate return to Bangladesh and avoided mobile phones to stay off the grid," the statement said.

Authorities said the gang is allegedly linked to cases of robbery, murder and dacoity registered across Goa, Karnataka, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi.

## When main charges fail, ED should not stop investigating case, says top government lawyer

**Deeptiman Tiwary**  
*New Delhi, May 1*

WHEN COURTS acquit or discharge accused in predicate offences, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) should not treat such outcomes as the end of the road, Additional Solicitor General (ASG) S V Raju said on Thursday, outlining a strategy that includes fresh probes, legal challenges, and intervention against possible collusion.

Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary suggested that the long-standing principle of prioritising the liberty of the accused may no longer hold primacy in the current legal framework.

Both were speaking on the occasion of ED Day, celebrated at Bharat Mandapam where Chaudhary was the chief guest.

Invoking a recent Supreme Court observation on victims' rights, Chaudhary said the top court had stressed according



Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary and ASG S V Raju at the ED Day celebrations in New Delhi on Friday. EXPRESS

equal importance to victims of crime, and described as outdated a two-decade judicial thinking that placed primacy on the accused's right to a fair and speedy trial and on shielding them from incarceration. The formulation effectively pushes back against the classical presumption-of-innocence framework, recasting the bal-

ance in favour of a more victim-centric approach — a shift with significant implications for stringent laws such as the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Chaudhary coupled this with a forceful defence of the ED's expanding remit, framing opposition to its actions as part of an "ecosystem" resistant to

anti-corruption efforts. The agency's powers, he suggested, are calibrated to tackle financial crimes, and not to target individuals. He described financial crimes as akin to a "cancer" that cannot be treated "with a sweet pill".

The issues outlined by ASG Raju resonate with ongoing high-profile cases, including the alleged irregularities in the Delhi excise policy, where Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal is among the accused. The case has seen parallel proceedings in predicate offences and under the PMLA, with legal debates centring on how developments in one affect the other.

On February 27, a Delhi trial court discharged former CM Kejriwal, AAP leader Manish Sisodia, and 21 others in the Delhi excise policy case, citing lack of evidence. However, the Delhi High Court found these

findings "prima facie erroneous", with a CBI challenge scheduled for hearing on May 4.

ASG Raju framed the problem through a series of scenarios: Acquittal of all accused, discharge at the pre-trial stage, and even refusal by courts to take cognizance of a charge-sheet. Each, he argued, required a calibrated response rather than an automatic closure of proceedings under the PMLA.

"We always say money laundering is a standalone offence... Why does it fall when the predicate offence falls?" Raju asked, before answering it himself: "The law, as it stands, ties the offence to the existence of 'proceeds of crime,' which, in turn, depends on a scheduled — or predicate — offence. "It is the umbilical cord," he said, explaining that without a scheduled offence, "there cannot be money laundering."

OPERATIONS BECOMING UNVIALE: HOTEL ASSOCIATION

# Commercial LPG price hike spells double whammy for eateries

Owners looking at 5-20% price hike in menu items; closures, job losses feared, say stakeholders

Heena Khandelwal  
Mumbai, May 1

THE RS933 hike in commercial LPG prices has come as a shocker for both small eateries and prominent restaurants with owners in Mumbai mulling a five to 20% hike in prices of menu items, and at least one stakeholder expressing fears that the move would result in closures and job losses.

“Nobody expected Rs 993,” said Pranav Rungra, Vice President of the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI). “This is the highest ever hike. It is unfortunate, but nothing can be done about it — it is all tied to the geopolitical situation. The government is absorbing the cost attached to domestic supply and passing it down to commercial establishments.”

The hike has come as a double whammy for restaurants still navigating the aftershocks of a cylinder shortage that had already forced shortened menus and alternative fuels. “It’s a new shock every day,” said Kaustubh Tambe of Aram Vada Pav, CSMT, who runs his kitchen on a mix of induction and gas. At 2.25 cylinders a day, the new pricing translates to roughly Rs 70,000 in additional monthly expense, he said. He had already increased his prices last week: Vada pav from Rs 25 to Rs 30, thali peeth from Rs 90 to Rs 100. “Can’t keep hiking the price again and again,” he said.

Ankit Gupta of Burma Burma, which runs around 15 restaurants across Delhi-NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, and Hyderabad, said he needs 350 cylinders a month across five of the outlets while the rest operate on LPG or PNG pipelines. At Rs 1,000 more per cylinder, his company would have to bear an additional cost of Rs 3.5 lakh a month, or roughly Rs 42 lakh a year. “That is a significant cost,” he said. “When gas prices increase, the whole ecosystem moves with it — packaging, stoneware, ceramics. We are also dealing with a labour shortage. Everything adds up.”



Customers at Bandra’s 88-year-old Lucky Restaurant, which had partially switched to coal to manage the LPG shortage. FILE

Burma Burma, which introduced a marginal price increase in April, is holding for now. “We do not want the price to become a deterrent for people coming to us,” said Gupta.

For Vijay Shetty, president of the Indian Hotel & Restaurant Association (AHAR) and owner of Udupi Shree Krishna in Lower Parel, patience has run out. “When cylinder price rose from Rs 1,800 to Rs 2,000, we absorbed it without much fuss. But this is not possible to absorb,” said Vijay, who is looking at a minimum 20% hike on his menu.

Pradeep Shetty, spokesperson for Hotel And Restaurant Association (Western India), said the latest LPG price hike will further strain margins and make operations increasingly unsustainable. Pradeep, who is also the vice-president of the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), said the move could accelerate closures and job losses.

“The impact extends beyond individual businesses. Rising fuel costs inevitably affect employment, food pricing, events and banqueting operations, tourism-linked services and the broader supply chain connected to hospitality,” he said.

At 108-year-old Olympia Coffee House in Colaba, third-generation custodian Amir Choudhary said, “We will have to increase the prices; every dish will see a 5 to 10% hike.”

At Bandra’s 88-year-old Lucky Restaurant, which had partially switched to coal to manage the ongoing shortage, owner S Mohsen said he would have to increase prices by 5 to 7%. “The timing makes it worse. It is summer, and the staff are already keen to head home. A few members have even left. The others are com-

plaining about having to work with coal,” he said.

In Bengaluru, Arun Adiga, managing partner at Vidyarthi Bhavan, said, “Bigger players can sustain this, but for smaller ones it is very difficult.” Adiga, who has invested significantly to switch to induction and electric cooking, cutting his LPG usage by one to two cylinders a day, said, “Not everybody has that convenience.”

Tambe, for now, is hoping the government moves faster with PNG connections.

Stating that he is not surprised that the increase was announced after elections, Sagar Daryani, President of NRAI, said, “The prices went up by 10% about a month ago when LPG availability was an issue. Now 50% more... So, that’s technically a 60% jump from the base in March... This is definitely not a good start to the new financial year.”

Daryani, who is also the founder and CEO of Wow! Momo, which has outlets across the country, said, “The industry is anyway battling low demand over the past few months and larger shift in consumer habits to convenience has led to increase in overall food delivery business, which comes at huge commissions and marketing costs, offering deep discounts in summers — low traction months for the industry... A price rise is the only option to keep the business viable.”

Urging the government to roll back the hike, FHRAI’s Shetty said, “A 10 to 15% hike in menu prices is imminent. But even that may not be enough to absorb the impact... Without immediate relief, the hospitality industry, a key employment generator, faces an existential crisis.”

# Govt has shielded people from global fuel price shocks: Puri

Express News Service  
Ahmedabad, May 1

UNION MINISTER for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri on Friday said that the Centre has kept the consumer “shielded” and did not revise retail prices of petrol and diesel even when crude import prices went up after the West Asia conflict.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference in Surat, hours after the oil companies announced the commercial LPG rate hike by Rs 993, Puri rejected claims that the Modi government did not increase prices due to the Assembly elections in some states. Despite 60 days into energy supply disruption due to the West Asian crisis, India stands strong, he said, adding that the country absorbed the global shock at the fiscal level instead of passing it on to consumers, supported by long-term planning.

“During the period of February 28 (when the Strait of Hormuz was shut) and April 23, there has been zero increase in energy prices at the retail point. Many of our colleagues in the world’s largest and most vibrant democratic system will say we kept prices under control because we have an election... We have had many elections in the last four years... If the time comes, the government will take the necessary decisions,” he said. Stating that he had been “actively monitoring” the supply situation of crude, LPG,

“When a global supply chain faces disruption of 20-30 per cent on important routes and products, no country can be insulated from the shock. Yet, 60 days into the disruption, India is standing strong”  
HARDEEP PURI,  
UNION PETROLEUM MINISTER

LNG, petrol, diesel, and aviation fuel since the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, Puri said, “the first responsibility in terms of the objectives set out by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was to keep India supplied.”

“When a global supply chain faces disruption of 20-30 per cent on important routes and products, no country can be insulated from the shock — freight costs rise, insurance costs rise, cargoes are delayed and every important country is forced to make hard choices. Yet, 60 days into the disruption, India is standing strong,” Puri said, adding that the government did not revise petrol and diesel prices to allow “panic to become policy”. “For the last four years (since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war) despite volatility in the global crude and product market Indian consumers have been shielded at the retail pump. For 60 days in this crisis while crude import costs rose



Union Ministers Hardeep Singh Puri and C R Patil during the Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference in Surat, Friday. PTI

sharply and the region faced severe disruption, that shielding has continued,” said Puri.

Puri also noted that fuel prices have gone up significantly across Europe. “In the

UK, diesel prices went up by 26 per cent and petrol prices 11 per cent. In Germany and Western Europe, fuel prices have shot up by 19.8 per cent, while overall EU diesel prices rose by 19.1 per cent and petrol 10.6 per cent,” Puri said.

According to him, the Centre “absorbed the shock at the fiscal system” rather than passing it on to the consumers. He attributed this to the country diversifying its crude sources from 27 to 41 countries over the last decade, adding the US, Norway and Algeria to the list apart from the Middle East. He said that orders were issued to “maximise LPG yield at refineries,” complemented by the fact that the maximum number of LPG-carrying Indian vessels exited the Strait of Hormuz. “Today commercial LPG is about 70% of pre-crisis levels with priority to steel automobile, textiles, dyeing chemicals and plastics, precisely the labour-intensive sectors that south Gujarat depends on,” said Puri adding that the ceramic industry of Morbi, after facing “fuel-based challenges,” was now back to “full steam.”

Puri also said domestic production of LPG went up by 60% — from 36,000 metric tonnes per day to 54,000 MT/day — and daily consumption went down from 90,000 MT to 80,000 MT, partly because the government incentivised the shifting from LPG to natural gas. “...We had prioritised the domestic consumer over the commercial and industrial... household kitchens came first,” said the minister.

## ‘Poll bill’: Opp targets govt over commercial LPG hike

Asad Rehman  
New Delhi, May 1

AS THE prices of commercial LPG cylinders were hiked by Rs 993 on Friday morning amid the global crisis, the Opposition, led by its leader in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, hit out at the government, calling it the “election bill” and alleging that while the first strike was on gas, the next one will be on petrol and diesel.

Opposition parties pointed out that the increase in gas prices comes just two days after polling in Assembly elections in five states, including West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam.

Gandhi said that he had already stated that “the heat of inflation would come after the elections”. “Today, a commercial gas cylinder is Rs 993 more expensive. The biggest increase in a single day. This is the election bill. From February till now: Rs 1,380 increase — a

whopping 81 per cent jump in just 3 months,” said the Congress leader.

In a post on X, Gandhi added that from tea stalls to dhabas to hotels to bakeries to sweet shops, “the burden on everyone’s kitchen has increased”. “And this will affect your plate too. First strike on gas, next strike on petrol-diesel,” said Gandhi.

Congress general secretary (organization) KC Venugopal also reacted to the hike and said that “as the election cycle concluded, the Modi government wasted no time to increase prices of LPG cylinders”. “A whopping increase of nearly Rs 1000 on commercial cylinders will affect crores of Indians who rely on food from small eateries for sustenance. Similarly, crores of small food businesses will have to bear the burden of this hike,” said the Congress MP.

He added that the BJP’s “regard for the common Indian’s

suffering is limited to election gimmicks, after which they’re left to their own devices”. “In the three months since the Iran war began, the government should have prepared a solid plan to shield ordinary Indians from the price shocks, instead of passing on the financial burden,” said Venugopal.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said that cylinders won’t get expensive, but the roti-thali will. “This is known only by the one who buys and eats it themselves, not by the one who goes and eats at others’ places or steals from others’ plates. If they had to make the cylinder expensive, they should have just made it 1,000 rupees costlier outright. By reducing 7 rupees, who are these BJP folks doing a favour to?” he said in a post on X.

The former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister asked when the BJP will bring a “censure motion on “inflation, unem-

ployment, joblessness, and recession”. Trinamool Congress’s Deputy Leader in Rajya Sabha Sagarika Ghose said that the Modi government “has again exposed its cynical anti-people mindset where the moment elections are over, it has hit the pocket of the small businesses”.

“When global oil was cheap, the benefit was never passed to consumers but petrol earnings are used by the government to fund its insatiable cash gobbling election machine,” Ghose told *The Indian Express*.

“Now, when global prices are skyrocketing, citizens are bearing the brunt. Instead of misusing central forces and agencies in Bengal, the prime minister and home minister should be more worried about the massive oil shocks ahead due to the West Asia conflict,” she said.

CPI leader in Rajya Sabha P Sandosh Kumar said that the “unprecedented” hike “is a di-

rect consequence of Modi’s hug-lomatic foreign policy, which has failed to secure India’s national interest in a volatile global energy environment”. “Instead of ensuring stability in fuel supplies and prices, this approach has left the country exposed, and the burden is now being dumped on restaurants, dhabas, small eateries, hostels, PG accommodations and small establishments across the country,” Kumar told *The Indian Express*.

Kumar said that the “immediate fallout will be higher food costs and living expenses, hitting ordinary people the hardest”. “Coming just a day after voting, this vindicates what the CPI had warned: that LPG and other fuel prices would be hiked once elections were over, because the Modi government’s sole concern is electoral optics, not people’s welfare,” he added.

## Evangelist missing & a guarded pit: Double murder unravels Kerala family’s dark secrets

Shaju Philip  
Thiruvananthapuram, May 1

IN PACHADY, a spice-growing hamlet in Kerala’s Idukki district, 54-year-old Reji was the visible anchor of the Ponnootil family household. He lived with his younger brother Saji, 43, and their ailing mother Mary, 71. Since their father, Mathew, an evangelist, went missing in 2018, Reji had handled most errands and dealings for the family.

Early this month, an auto-rickshaw driver in the village noticed a change. Saji had begun doing the chores Reji usually did, and Reji himself had not been seen outdoors since the first week of April. The driver’s unease reached the police.

On Monday, officers searching the Ponnootil property found the decomposed bodies of Reji and Mary dumped in a cow dung pit in the backyard. On Tuesday, police arrested Saji for the murders. Investigators are now looking into whether he played a role in his father’s disappearance eight years ago.

Idukki district Superintendent of Police Sabu Mathew said multiple factors appeared to have driven the crime.

“There was a dispute between the brothers over the division of family property (around an acre of land). Saji also believed Reji was creating obstacles to his marriage. He was also angered by Reji allegedly teasing and questioning him over issues related to par-



Idukki resident Saji has been held for allegedly murdering his mother and brother

enthood,” the officer said. Both brothers were unmarried, and local residents said Saji had plans to tie the knot soon.

The SP said the case relied largely on forensic and circumstantial evidence. “There are no eyewitnesses. We will seek custody of the accused for detailed questioning. The father’s missing case is also being probed in the wake of these murders,” he said. According to police, the murders took place in the first week of April. The exact date has not yet been established. Local political workers who visited the house seeking votes had seen Mary and Reji. But on April 9, polling day, only Saji turned up to vote.

Police said that on the day of the murder, Saji, allegedly under the influence of alcohol, quarrelled with Reji. “During the altercation, he assaulted his brother and smothered him. He then turned on his mother, who had recently suffered a stroke, and repeatedly hit her head

against a wall, leaving her unconscious,” an officer alleged.

Saji allegedly kept the bodies inside the house overnight. The next day, he dragged them to the pit, dumped them in, and covered the spot with loose soil. The family owned an aggressive dog; police claimed Saji tied it to a pole near the pit, apparently to keep people away.

Mathew, the brothers’ father and a Pentecostal pastor, had gone missing in 2018. A missing person case was registered, but the investigation had not progressed.

Reji worked with a light-and-sound equipment rental agency in Nedumkandam. Saji did occasional agricultural labour. Their sister, Sini, is married and lives in Anakkara. Neighbours said the family kept largely to themselves.

Recounting how the crime came to light, Sini said Saji had long been abusive when drunk. “Last year, when I questioned his behaviour, especially how he treated my mother, he threatened to kill me if I returned home. After that, I stopped visiting, but stayed in touch with people in the area,” she said.

She said the auto-rickshaw driver’s observations triggered the chain of events. “He noticed Saji carrying cardamom for sale — something Reji usually did. He also realised Reji had not called him for two weeks, not even to take our mother to the hospital. He alerted a relative, who called me. When I asked Saji, he could not clearly say where my mother was. He

claimed she had gone to a medical college in Theni (in neighbouring Tamil Nadu). I realised he was lying. We filed a complaint at the Nedumkandam police station on Sunday,” Sini said.

Police searched the house the next day and exhumed the bodies. Saji fled and hid overnight in a nearby cardamom plantation. On Tuesday, however, as police intensified the search and alerted border checkpoints towards Tamil Nadu, Saji appeared at a local shop in the village and allegedly confessed. He was taken into custody.

Panchayat member Manu Joseph said Saji had appeared briefly at the polling booth on April 9. “He had a bandage on his body and told people he had fallen in the washroom,” Joseph said. Another resident, Linimol Joseph, said Saji had told neighbours he was to be married on April 30. “He had invited people, saying he had been in love for years and that his elder brother had agreed to the marriage. A few days ago, he said the wedding was postponed,” she said.

The twin murders have now prompted police to revisit Mathew’s disappearance. Sini recalled the day he went missing. “He often travelled for religious conventions. One day in 2018, he told our mother he was going to Nedumkandam. In a hurry to catch the bus, he forgot to take his mobile phone. We have not heard from him since. We hope this case will finally bring answers,” she said.

Aditi Raja  
Vadodara, May 1

A MODULE on ‘Modi Tattva’, lessons on RSS fieldwork and a return to Indian knowledge systems — Maharaja Sayajirao (MS) University of Baroda has introduced a new curriculum that is set to study Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s leadership as a concept, integrate indigenous knowledge systems, Hindu religion studies and nationalism in three major courses. These will now be part of the 10 papers of the fourth year of the BA Sociology course as well as the first year of the two-year Masters in Sociology programme.

The modules, ‘Sociology of Bharat’, ‘Hindu Sociology’ and ‘Sociology of Patriotism’, are courses of four credits each, which form part of the restructuring of sociology education at MSU from the forthcoming academic year starting in June, designed to “align academic framework with India’s civilisational knowledge, contemporary governance and lived social realities”.

Conceptualised by the university’s Sociology Department head Dr Virendra Singh, who is chairperson of the Board of Studies of MSU as well as a part of Niti Aayog Project for monitoring public policies and a member of the district administration’s ‘Vadodara 2047’ plan, the approach seeks to build what he called a “practice-oriented, inquiry-driven sociology, rooted in both historical depth and present-day relevance.”



Maharaja Sayajirao (MS) University of Baroda. EXPRESS

Singh told *The Indian Express* on Friday that ‘Modi Tattva’ — a part of the Sociology of Patriotism course — is a study of the leadership of the Prime Minister, drawing from German sociologist Max Weber’s concept of “charismatic authority”.

“Modi Tattva” treats a contemporary political figure — PM Narendra Modi — as a case study in charismatic leadership, policy perception and mass connect, within a sociological framework. PM Modi has become an unavoidable figure in national and global political discourse — like it or not, he is present in the conversation. Instead of discussing his leadership after 50 years, we are aiming to have the generation study it now,” he said.

Singh said the idea of looking into the RSS as part of the course

came up on the basis of fieldwork in remote Gujarat villages, where students unexpectedly encountered grassroots activities linked to the organisation.

“It was observed that the RSS does not fit neatly into typical categories, such as a government body or NGO, yet its presence and influence were visible on the ground... These observations led to a sociological inquiry into how such an organisation operates, mobilises people and builds social networks. The course frames RSS not as an ideology alone, but as a case study in grassroots organisation, social outreach and models of inclusion and dialogue. The RSS runs on the principle that one can have matbhed (difference of opinion) but should not have

manbhed (distance of the minds),” he said.

Singh claimed that the RSS, “due to its values of inclusivity” has also “embraced Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as its own, making the stalwart Congress leader an influential name within the BJP today”.

The course will also include a major module on Sayajirao Gaekwad III (Maharaja of Baroda from 1875 to 1939) for his “progressive, welfare-oriented leadership”. Beyond the common perception that he only donated land for the university, Singh said Gaekwad had introduced compulsory education for girls and also cited the fine imposed on families that did not send girls to school.

“Maharaja Sayajirao III’s model of early social reform, inclusive policy-making and ethical leadership has left behind a legacy that continues to live today in MSU... I see the fine on families for not sending girls to school as ‘positive taxation’... The module will also study Sardar Patel and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar as well as (Maratha warrior king) Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and his vision to reach out to the rulers of Mewar to unite to fight external forces. In the present day too, internal unity is a must in fighting off external pressures...” Singh said.

Part of the Bharatiya Knowledge System (BKS) framework, the course on Sociology of Bharat will examine India’s traditional knowledge in the areas of medicine, technology, and social systems.

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## Language policing is bad politics, bad economics

**D**AYS AFTER announcing its ill-conceived decision to make basic Marathi-language proficiency mandatory for all auto and taxi drivers from May 1, the Maharashtra government extended the deadline to August 15. The move is a minor concession, coming after auto and taxi unions objected to the arbitrariness of the announcement. It does little to undo the irrationality and constitutionally tenuous grounds of the original decision, which, if implemented, would see the licences of a large number of non-compliant drivers cancelled. At a time when public transport is plagued by more pressing issues such as affordability and accessibility, the easy resort to narrow linguistic politics is troubling.

In conditioning livelihoods on Marathi-language proficiency, the Maharashtra government's decision erects an informal barrier against internal migrants — the very people who sustain urban economies like Mumbai's. Such measures weaken the idea of the nation as a shared civic space and undermine the constitutional promise of freedom of mobility, which gives citizens the right to reside and settle in any part of India and practise any profession or occupation there. It is also bad economics, subverting the spirit of a unified market, where labour mobility is essential for efficiency and growth. Urban transport systems, moreover, depend on flexibility, scale, and the willingness of workers to migrate where opportunities exist. A driver from Uttar Pradesh or Bihar should not find their dignity or employability contingent on linguistic assimilation.

Maharashtra has a long history of language being weaponised for narrow political ends. Over the last year, for example, following the Devendra Fadnavis administration's oscillation on the three-language policy — first making Hindi mandatory at the primary-school level, then making it optional — the Shiv Sena and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena raised the pitch on the "imposition" of Hindi and cast themselves as the protectors of Marathi pride. The tactics used by the Raj Thackeray-led MNS — slapping bank officials for not offering services in Marathi, for instance — have underlined how easily parochialism can slip into violence. The language mandate to auto and taxi drivers may come with the state's imprimatur, but the same insular impulse drives both. Those most vulnerable to the violence of the hooligan and the capriciousness of the state are inevitably the ones with the least social and economic protections, such as migrant workers. The choice before policymakers is stark: Pursue inclusive growth anchored in constitutional freedoms, or indulge parochial impulses that subvert that purpose. Maharashtra's language mandate, in both principle and effect, leans dangerously toward the latter.

## Climate vows, now for delivery

**I**N THE last week of April, representatives from more than 50 countries gathered at Santa Marta in Colombia for a climate conference born of frustration with the UN-administered negotiations. The deliberations ended on Wednesday with a call for participating countries to develop national roadmaps to end the use of fossil fuels — in fact, France pledged to phase out oil and gas use between 2030 and 2050. The UNFCCC's CoPs have almost always come unstuck on the issue of fossil fuels. By operating outside the consensus-bound framework, the Colombia conference gave itself the leeway to advance faster than CoPs. However, the very feature that imparted dynamism to Colombia also limited its potency. Three of the highest GHG emitters — the US, China and India — were not represented at Santa Marta.

It would, however, be wrong to dismiss the meet as inconsequential. The participating countries represented nearly 50 per cent of the global GDP. They agreed to align their trade and finance policies with green transition plans, potentially creating momentum towards faster decarbonisation. But beyond the combined economic weight of its participants, the conference was significant in bringing countries representing different economic segments onto the same page. While UN climate meets have often been riven by discord between developed countries, emerging economies, developing countries and small island states, it was heartening that representatives of France, Germany and Spain worked together with delegates from Brazil, Nigeria, Nepal and several other countries with varying economic clout at Santa Marta. UN meetings have not avoided reconciling different climate realities. However, that has only meant postponement of difficult decisions. The Colombia meet could be the first step towards challenging the ambiguity that has allowed countries to pledge climate action while continuing fossil fuel expansion.

That said, the Santa Mara meet should not be seen as a parallel to the UN processes. Climate change is too complicated to be left to one global agency. It requires building alliances at several levels — between like-minded countries, among civil-society groups and business organisations. Climate delegates showed rare maturity in the past week. The participating countries will now need to translate roadmaps into actual policy and develop financial mechanisms to support transitions in poorer nations — that's where most UNFCCC meetings have faltered.

## Spare a thought for the IPL bowler

**E**VERY THIRD innings this IPL season has produced a total in excess of 200; every third 200-plus target, including 264, has been hunted down. A six or four has been struck every eighth ball. A 300-plus score does not appear distant, and a batsman could crack the format's first 200. The primacy of bat over the ball has never been as pronounced.

The stands have been filled to the rafters, and the audience has been entertained. But in the middle, there's an imbalance — between bowler and batsman. Bowlers are confronted with an existential crisis that requires them to come up with variations, lest one evening they be replaced by bowling machines. Even the most successful bowler in the sport (in Tests and ODIs), Muttiah Muralitharan, believes in the absolute supremacy of the willow.

Whether T20s in extreme batting-friendly conditions are killing the sport is debatable, but they are taking several skills out of the game. One game on slightly seaming conditions exposed the susceptibility of batsmen to the moving ball. Teams could face a similar fate on turning tracks. It's not surprising that several batsmen freeze in longer formats. That's why the tribe of all-format cricketers is dwindling. The argument that people flock to watch sixes and fours more than a wicket is not without merit, but spare a thought for the bowler. A semblance of parity between bat and ball will make the IPL more watchable and enduring.

# Pakistan has often betrayed the West. But the US cannot abandon it

**P**AKISTAN AND Iran exchanged missiles between January 16 and 18, 2024, killing 11 people. Pakistan has repeatedly betrayed the US since entering its security orbit in the 1950s with the Manila Pact and the Baghdad Pact. Yet Pakistan is the interlocutor of choice between Iran and the US. The question is, why? On that "why" hangs a tale of collusive perfidy and chicanery as also convergences and shared interests.

On August 19, 1953, the CIA and MI6 in a joint operation overthrew Mohammad Mossaddegh, the democratically elected nationalist Prime Minister of Iran, to protect and preserve their hydrocarbon interests. This was the Anglo-American response to the nationalisation of Iran's oil industry by Mossaddegh. The coup d'état paved the way for Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to take an executive role.

In 1957, as part of the Atoms for Peace programme, President Dwight D Eisenhower greenlit the supply of US nuclear technology to Iran under the aegis of a civil nuclear agreement. In 1967, a five-megawatt research reactor granted by the US to Iran went critical, fuelled by highly enriched — at 93 per cent, weapons grade — uranium. But the Shah had more ambitious objectives, and by the 1970s, plans were underway for a massive expansion of the nuclear power programme.

The Shah was toppled in the 1979 Islamic Revolution and Saddam Hussein, the dictator of Iraq, invaded Iran the following year. Over the next eight years, a generation of Iranian strategic thinkers internalised an important doctrinal lesson as the West supplied weapons to Iraq and global organisations like

the UN looked away when Hussein used chemical weapons on Iranian troops and civilians. The lesson was that as long as Iran lacked nuclear weapons, any dictator in the neighbourhood could infringe its sovereignty. Thus began a clandestine nuclear weapons programme to acquire that strategic autonomy. Ukraine is learning this the hard way after forsaking nuclear weapons under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum.

This is where the Pakistan connection comes in. A Q Khan, who operated the "Walmart of Nuclear Proliferation", had reportedly visited the Iranian nuclear reactor at Bushehr in February 1986 and again in January 1987. Between 1989 and 1995, Khan is believed to have shipped over 2,000 components and sub-assemblies for centrifuges to Iran. Khan believed in breaking the monopoly of established powers on nuclear weapons. He famously stated, "I want to question the bl\*\*\*\*y holier-than-thou attitude of the Americans and the British. Are these b\*\*\*\*\*s God-appointed guardians of the world?" when asked to justify his international network aimed at providing clandestine nuclear technology to Iran, Libya and North Korea.

Iran approached Pakistan's military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq, for nuclear cooperation — a fact publicly confirmed by former Iranian president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in 2015. The Pakistani military kept successive civilian governments in the dark about Khan's clandestine activities. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto stumbled upon this by sheer accident when



MANISH TEWARI

**It misappropriated weaponry, funds and other logistics during the Afghan Jihad from 1980 to 1989. It propped up the Taliban in 1996. It sheltered Osama Bin Laden and Taliban figures during the alleged War on Terror. All was forgiven**

## Learning outcomes and child health are linked



SOUMYA SWAMINATHAN AND DRISHTI SHARMA

**A**S INDIA observed POSHAN Pakhwada last month, attention was focused on improving nutrition outcomes for women and children. This year's emphasis on early brain development is especially timely. Global evidence suggests that investments in early-childhood development can generate significant economic returns — through higher future earnings, better learning outcomes, and reduced social costs — often exceeding returns from those made later in life. Advances in neuroscience show that early childhood represents a once-in-a-lifetime window, when nutrition, health, stimulation, and responsive caregiving together shape the developing brain.

Over the past two decades, India has laid a solid foundation. The National Food Security Act, POSHAN Abhiyaan, ICDS, maternity benefits, and school meals reflect sustained policy commitment. The National Education Policy, 2020 recognises Early Childhood Care and Education as a crucial "foundational stage", with the goal of universal, quality pre-primary education by 2030. At the same time, national surveys continue to report high levels of stunting, wasting, and anaemia, as well as learning gaps.

In early childhood, nutrition and development outcomes depend critically on the quality of care children receive. Delivering its full spectrum requires convergence across the sectors responsible for health, nutrition, childcare, and early learning.

The anganwadi network has been a cornerstone of service delivery, providing nutrition, health, and early learning support at scale. In practice, however, different systems prioritise different objectives. Anganwadis largely focus on food supplementation; health systems emphasise survival and disease control; and childcare and early learning receive comparatively less attention until children reach school age, particularly for those under three. These gaps are most visible for working families in agriculture, construction, domestic work, and other informal occupations. When childcare is hard to access, families are forced into difficult choices, affecting both children's development and women's ability to work.

All this underscores the need for stronger structural support. Several initiatives point the way forward. Karnataka's Koonsina Mane demonstrates how community-based childcare, supported through converged funding and panchayat leadership, can benefit both children and working

mothers. Mobile Creches has shown the feasibility of providing childcare near work-sites in urban informal settings. The Centre's Palna initiative, which strengthens anganwadi-cum-crèches for children of working parents, reflects growing recognition of the need to integrate childcare within existing service platforms.

Building on these experiences, India can strengthen early brain-development outcomes through three practical administrative priorities. First, make care a defined function of existing frontline platforms. Anganwadi centres and primary health services already reach families during pregnancy and early childhood. Clear instructions can enable these platforms to integrate counselling on responsive caregiving and maternal well-being alongside nutrition services. Structured caregiving messages can be incorporated into routine antenatal visits, immunisation days, and home-based care schedules. Where feasible, anganwadi activities can be adjusted to better serve younger children and working caregivers.

Second, link childcare provision more deliberately with livelihoods and social protection programmes, with an enabling role for the private sector. This requires clearer guidance allowing local governments to use converged funds for community-based childcare, particularly in high-migration and informal-work settings. Simple measures — such as locating childcare centres near work-sites, markets, or villages with high female labour participation — can significantly reduce care-work trade-offs.

Third, strengthen programme reviews by tracking child development outcomes alongside service delivery. While nutrition programmes are closely monitored, reviews often focus on inputs such as rations distributed or beneficiaries reached. Routine reviews should also consider a small set of child development indicators, service-quality measures, and equity markers. Better use of existing data systems across sectors can support local planning and accountability without adding undue reporting burdens.

The timing is right. As India invests in human capital and advances towards the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, ensuring that children not only survive but thrive is central to inclusive growth.

Swaminathan is chairperson, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation and former chief scientist, WHO. Sharma is principal scientist (grade II), Health and Nutrition Policy, MSSRF



SNEHA BHAGAT

## A pact for deeper integration into Indo-Pacific value chains

**T**HE INDIA-New Zealand FTA signed this week is part of a defensive architecture against a fragmenting global order. As Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal officially noted, the treaty "marks a defining milestone in India's engagement with the developed world". It marks a definitive evolution in New Delhi's economic statecraft. Anchored by a binding \$20-billion FDI commitment over the next 15 years, this capital mandate indicates that India is fundamentally rewriting its terms of global integration. It is abandoning the traditional liberal trade consensus, which prioritised the reciprocal reduction of tariffs for marginal export gains, in favour of a highly calculated, defensive economic posture.

India is using its primary geopolitical asset: Its massive demographic scale and domestic demand. Rather than yielding market access merely to consume imported goods, New Delhi is treating this access as a sovereign premium. The explicit demand for long-term capital infusion demonstrates a strategy aimed not just at participating in global value chains, but at forcing the relocation of capital, technology, and industrial capacity to Indian territory.

This insistence on capital localisation clarifies India's broader geopolitical trajectory over the past several years. When New Delhi formally withdrew from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the decision was widely, and incorrectly, categorised by Western analysts as a retreat into protectionism. The withdrawal from RCEP was a deliberate rejection of an architecture that carried the threat of asymmetric industrial dumping from state-subsidised manufacturing hubs. Sprawling, multilateral mega-blocs often enforce a hierarchical dependency on a single regional hegemon. India, however, is systematically constructing a network of bilateral agreements across the Indo-Pacific, designed to bypass adversarial industrial overcapacity while locking in resilient partnerships with trusted nations.

Historically reliant on Beijing to absorb the vast majority of its agricultural and forestry exports, New Zealand faces extreme export overexposure to a single dominant market. This vulnerability necessitates an urgent diversification of its economic dependencies. India, conversely, requires deep integration into Indo-Pacific value chains to fuel its industrial transition. But it must do so without succumbing to the asymmetric technological or economic dominance dictated by either Washington or Beijing.

Rather than relying on vertical relationships with super-powers, middle and rising powers are altering their trade geometries. They are linking their economies to create alternative pathways for capital and goods. These bilateral pacts function as strategic shock absorbers. They provide insulation against the volatility of great power competition while securing the specific technological and financial inputs required for domestic growth.

Further, India's success in securing this massive FDI commitment while simultaneously shielding its highly sensitive agricultural and dairy sectors reflects a mature foreign policy. The rules of trade today are dictated by leverage rather than multilateral goodwill. India is utilising the geopolitical anxieties of the Global North and the necessity of supply chain diversification to dictate terms that protect its domestic political economy while funding its industrial base. Sovereignty in the 21st century requires shaping the topology of the global economy, rather than merely reacting to it.

The writer is assistant professor, JNU

**Bilateral pacts like the India-New Zealand FTA signed this week function as strategic shock absorbers**

### Operation at Temple ends

THE 14-hour Operation Search at the Golden Temple complex undertaken by the Punjab Police, the paramilitary forces and some commandos came to an end. One person was killed, two injured and 300 others including Bhai Gurdev Singh, the "acting jathedar" of the Akal Takht were rounded up in the action to clear the Temple complex of militants.

### Khalistan council banned

THE GOVERNMENT has for the second time

declared two secessionist organisations — Dal Khalsa and the national council of Khalistan — unlawful organisations with immediate effect through two separate notifications issued by the Home Ministry. The action has been taken under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.

### Changes in education policy

FOLLOWING SUGGESTIONS made by the state chief ministers at the National Development Council meeting, the Union government is including in its policy document on

education a firm commitment to achieve universal enrolment at the elementary level by 1990 and at the middle-school level by 1995. With regard to the controversial question of education being on the concurrent list, no change is being proposed.

### Chernobyl reactor shut down

THE REACTOR of the Soviet Union's disabled Chernobyl nuclear plant in the Ukraine has been shut down and the chain reaction of nuclear fusion has been halted, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said.

### 40 YEARS AGO

May 2, 1986





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## Through Raghu Rai's lens: There is always drama in Bengal, in faces and in nature



ABHIJIT V BANERJEE

**W**RITING ABOUT the place where you grew up is a bit like writing about your mum. If you are too effusive, people shake their heads: "The boy loves his mother". If you try and be more objective, they again shake their heads: "There's obviously some issue there".

What does it mean to photograph Bengal? What makes Bengal Bengal? There are, of course, answers. A land that stretches from the high mountains to the sea. A land of poets. Of romantics, of rebels. A land of festivals, *baro mashe tero parbon*, as we say in Bangla. Dignity amidst decay. Decay amidst great beauty. Like most clichés, there's a nugget of truth in each.

It's true that many of us wrote poetry at some point in our lives, with mixed success — or unmixed unsuccessful. It's true that many of us flirted with revolutionary ideologies, sometimes without being able to separate between our desire for change in the world and a yearning for redemption from the deadening mundaneness of our lives. So did our parents, and their parents. Before the peasant revolution, there was the fight against the British; before that, there was Young Bengal and the fight against traditional social mores. Beef bones were thrown into homes of the conservatives; guns were fired, not always at the right British official; *Gandhiji* had to use all of his moral authority to keep Bengal from straying off his non-violent path to independence, and it did not always work. When I was a child, young men from middle-class families went underground; one heard rumours of them showing up at midnight, disguised as a *sadhu*, to be blessed by their mother before disappearing again into the dark. Along with poetry, violence is all too often part of our tradition.

At the same time, it is also true that we seem to live from festival to festival: From Saraswati Puja to *dol*, from *poila boishakh* to Durga Puja, from Kali Puja to Christmas, with many more in between.

And it is true that there is a lot of decay.



ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

At least in the years when I was growing up, the debris of British rule was everywhere. Calcutta was the first city of the Empire; it was where the colonists built their shops and factories, their swankiest mansions, snootiest clubs. When they left, first to the new capital in Delhi and especially after Independence, all that started to unravel. Decay comes fast in wet and tropical Bengal.

At the same time, the small minority of Indians favoured by the colonists, the zamindars, the box-wallahs, and their many hangers-on, was drowning in the rising tide of new people and new pressures unleashed by Independence. Their sinking fortunes set off skirmishes over what remained.

But there was heroism, too. Men from these families seemed, all too often, totally unable to react to what was happening to them, beyond shouting, screaming and drinking too much. It was their wives and sisters who fought back, determined to never give up their dignity and to protect their families at all cost. That, too, I remember.

Much art, photography, music and literature in Bengal's recent past was inspired by one or more of these narratives. And some of it is wonderful. But Raghu Rai, who knows Bengal well — he worked for *The Statesman* and then for *Sunday* — was never entirely seduced by any of them.

I was an admirer of Raghuji's work since I happened on his photographs in *Sunday*, sometime in the 1970s. His book on Kolkata made me nostalgic; his book on Bangladesh haunted me for years. One impression that stayed with me from these photographs is that of common people displaying uncommon strength. Not so much the muscle strength of the boatman's taut body — though there is that too — but more the inner strength of people who have kept going in the face of extreme adversity. People escaping the Bangladesh war, pushing those who can no longer move on their own, carrying them if needed. A man looking out from his home inside a sewer pipe; women gathered to mourn the dead in Bhopal; grieving fathers carrying their children.

What stands out in these pictures is the gaze of the subjects. There are, of course, those who could not care less whether they are being photographed are not. But then there are the many whom Raghuji photographs looking straight at the camera. What is striking is their expression, which goes from the stoical to the dismissive or even contemptuous — never the usual smile of gratitude or the pride in being chosen. Who are you to come asking about my tragedy, what can you understand about the depth of my pain, they seem to be

**We seem to live from festival to festival: From Saraswati Puja to 'dol', 'poila boishakh' to Durga Puja, Kali Puja to Christmas, with many more in between**

asking. Raghuji does not shy away from that challenge. He captures it so often that it is clear that it is something he values, a part of the photographer's duty as he sees it, perhaps as a way to get us to deepen our empathy, to transcend the Pavlovian reward system of grateful smiles and bowing acceptance. We need to do things for the world because of our inner compulsion for justice, we need to admire those in pain for the strength that allows them to bear it.

It is perhaps not accidental that another of Rai's great interests is in trees. Trees are strong, trees do not crave admiration. Rai is one of the great photographers of trees, which is also a favourite subject of the great Ansel Adams as well as of one of my other favourites, Tokihiro Sato.

In this sense, while Bengal featured often in Rai's past work, Bengal was less the subject and more a site where people were confronted with extraordinary tragedies that provided the backdrop for the display of strength that is his main subject, much like there are locations where his trees live, but he is less interested in them than in the trees themselves. His new book is more clearly about Bengal, in its diversity, in its many moods. It is today's (pre-Covid) more prosperous Bengal, with its shopping malls and cellphones, shiny billboards and skyscrapers, its new anxieties, its changing aspirations. The roof on the Ganges where, many years ago, he had filmed a group of bodybuilders, is still there, but there is just one bodybuilder in the recent photo. Is this a comment on our busier times?

Most importantly, however, this book is about searching for the appropriate palette for Bengal, and it is very clear what Rai's answer is: Bengal is green and grey, with accents of pink, red and orange. The green shades from almost blue all the way to a brazen yellow, while the grey goes from the brilliant off-white of a post-rain cloud to the brooding steel-blue of a monsoon sky.

There is always drama in Bengal, Rai seems to be implying: Sometimes it is in people's faces, but sometimes it is mother nature herself who delivers it.

*The writer, an economist, is a Nobel laureate*

*In 2020, at Raghu Rai's request, Banerjee wrote this as a preface for the photographer's proposed book on West Bengal. That book was not published. Rai passed away on April 26. Edited excerpts*

## The Buddhist trail can be a civilisational highway



HARSH VARDHAN SHRINGLA

ON BUDDHA Purnima, India invoked the Buddha as a teacher of compassion and peace. While that is fitting, it may not be sufficient. For a civilisation that holds Bodhi Gaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar within its sacred geography, India still treats much of its Buddhist inheritance as a set of isolated stops rather than a single national mission.

Buddhism is, at its core, a tradition that places direct experience above inherited doctrine. Take the Kalama Sutta's injunction to test all teachings against personal reason and observation. When a pilgrim walks the ground where that teaching first rang, it is an act of civilisational memory. India has the responsibility to honour that fully, not only for its cultural significance but for the economic opportunity. India recorded 99.5 lakh foreign tourist arrivals in 2024. Tourism ministry data show that in 2023, the average foreign tourist spent about Rs 2.9 lakh in India, excluding international transport. Tourism supported an estimated 84.63 lakh jobs and accounted for 5.22 per cent of GDP. The ministry has also said Buddhist sites were drawing roughly 6 per cent of foreign tourist arrivals. Even if one treats that share as a broad yardstick, it points to a substantial base that India is still underserving.

In 2024, India received 7.3 lakh

**The government has already used Buddhist relic diplomacy and heritage exhibitions to deepen ties with Asian partners. But symbolism must now be matched by plumbing, paving, guide training and humane visitor support**

tourists from four Buddhist-linked Asian countries: Sri Lanka, Japan, Thailand, and South Korea. For Japanese pilgrims, Bodhi Gaya is associated with Zen and Pure Land traditions. For Sri Lankans, the connection runs through the *Mahavamsa* and the sacred gift of the Bodhi tree sapling, brought by Ashoka's daughter, Sanghamitta, to Anuradhapura. For Thai pilgrims, India is the source of Theravada traditions. Globally, Buddhists number in the hundreds of millions. If even a small share of that community chose to make an India pilgrimage, the numbers would be transformational.

To be fair, the state has not been idle. The Centre has sanctioned Buddhist projects for years under Swadesh Darshan and allied schemes. The Union Budget 2026-27 announced a Buddhist circuit scheme for the Northeast and training for 10,000 tour guides. Yet the Buddhist heartland needs a sharper institutional instrument. With a BJP government in UP and an NDA government in Bihar, there is a political window for joint execution. This is the moment to create a Buddhist Heritage and Pilgrimage Development Authority that can work across the Centre and states.

The first test is access. Gaya Airport, the gateway to Bodhi Gaya, still

has a capacity constraint. The Airports Authority of India says another 100 acres is to be acquired for runway expansion, while the existing terminal can handle only 250 incoming and 250 outgoing passengers. Bodhi Gaya needs a genuine international airport ecosystem and luxury and mid-range hotels. The second test is ease. India needs a specialised Buddhist pilgrim visa, or a dedicated fast-track window, for group pilgrimages, monastic delegations and elderly devotees.

The government has used Buddhist relic diplomacy and heritage exhibitions to deepen ties with Asian partners; when holy relics travelled to Thailand, more than 4 million people paid their respects. But symbolism must now be matched by plumbing, paving, guide training and humane visitor support. Buddhist heritage goes beyond UP and Bihar; states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, and MP offer much. Darjeeling's Observatory Hill, where the Mahakal temple stands on a site once associated with the Bhutia Busty monastery, remind us that India's civilisational message is strongest when it is layered, confident and hospitable. India's Buddhist circuit, at its best, can be the place where all these traditions come home simultaneously. That is not a tourism pitch. It is a civilisational reunion.

*The writer is an MP and former foreign secretary*



puts enormous pressure on US companies with Indian employees. Even the people-to-people relationship, a key pillar, is undergoing considerable stress due to migration-related debates in the US. Incidents of intimidation, both online and in person, are growing, causing concern to the Indian diaspora.

Given these challenges, I suggested "three mutuals" to improve bilateral ties — mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interest. Ironically, these were the points India made to Chinese officials a couple of years ago. Mutual respect is a key missing element in the relationship at present. Comments like "hellhole", "gangsters with laptops", coming from the highest offices, vitiate the atmosphere. Mutual sensitivity, too, is important. When India talked about strategic autonomy, it was ridiculed or reviled. But the US wants to engage with any country for its own interest without bothering about others' sensitivities. Finally, we need to redefine what is in our mutual interest as two long-time friends.

None of what I said was tantamount to surrender. On the contrary, it was a clear assertion that a reset is needed in the relationship. It is in the long-term interest of a peaceful world that the two countries have huge stakes in the relationship.

There is a visible dearth of a good Indian hand in the US administration today. Fortunately, that gap can be filled by the dynamic US ambassador to India, Sergio Gorr. After John Kenneth Galbraith in the early 1960s, who had a close relationship with President John F Kennedy and Robert Blackwill in the early 2000s, who was close to President George Bush, it is Ambassador Gorr who has great proximity to the White House. That helps. In just a few months, Gorr has made his presence felt by actively engaging with different stakeholders.

India has important relationships with several major powers. The relationship with the US stands out as the most significant. In the current climate of uncertainty, India maintained a principled and well-thought-out "strategic restraint". The Opposition should appreciate that and come out of its "surrender" politics.

*The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP*



ROHIT BAGAI

THE INDIA Meteorological Department has warned that the summer of 2026 could be particularly intense, with many parts of the country likely to experience an above-normal number of heatwave days. Heatwaves are unlike sudden disasters such as cyclones or flash floods. They unfold slowly, often building over days or weeks. This means they require sustained planning rather than only emergency response.

Recognising this, many Indian cities, districts and states have developed Heat Action Plans (HAPs). These plans play an important role in coordinating responses among government departments through

early warning systems, public advisories, and emergency measures. In several cities, they have helped reduce heat-related mortality and illness.

However, as temperatures continue to rise, India now needs to move beyond short-term responses and begin investing in long-term strategies to cool cities in a sustainable way. In this context, the recent recommendation of the 16th Finance Commission to include heatwaves in the list of nationally notified disasters could be a turning point. By recommending their inclusion, the Commission acknowledges that climate change has fundamentally altered India's disaster landscape.

This reclassification changes the financial and institutional support available to states. Until now, states could use up to 10 per cent of their State Disaster Response Fund

(SDRF) to provide immediate relief for local disasters, including heatwaves, provided they had notified them as state-specific disasters. With heatwaves recommended for inclusion under the Disaster Management Act, states would now be able to seek support from the larger National Disaster Risk Management Fund as well as their State Disaster Risk Management Funds (SDRMF). This expands fiscal space not only for relief measures but also for financing longer-term

**The NDMA must lead the development of comprehensive frameworks that move beyond relief to support investments in heat mitigation and resilience**

resilience and mitigation initiatives.

While the new classification opens up financial resources, the current policy framework remains limited. This is where the real challenge lies. Most Heat Action Plans continue to focus primarily on short-term measures such as alerts, awareness campaigns and emergency response. They do little to address the structural drivers of heat vulnerability — poor urban design, heat-absorbing construction materials, declining green cover, inefficient cooling systems, and unequal access to thermal comfort.

To utilise the available funds effectively, India must strengthen its policy frameworks and provide cities and states with clearer guidance on long-term heat resilience strategies. The National Disaster Management Authority must lead the development of

comprehensive frameworks that move beyond relief to support investments in heat mitigation and resilience, such as climate-sensitive planning, expansion of urban green and blue infrastructure, improved building design, infrastructure resilience and sustainable cooling solutions.

Equally important is building institutional capacity that enables local governments to design and implement projects that reduce heat risks over time. Stronger coordination between urban planning and disaster management institutions, and better technical support for cities, will be critical to ensure that funds are effectively utilised.

The funds are now on the table. What India needs next is a policy vision for cooler, safer and more resilient cities.

*The writer is programme associate, iFOREST*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Buddha's counsel

VICE PRESIDENT C P Radhakrishnan's Buddha Purnima reflection arrives at a moment when the world desperately needs its message ("Buddha Purnima lessons for a troubled world", *IE*, May 1). His reminder that monasteries once offered free medical care and education without discrimination feels almost radical against today's fractured public discourse. Most striking, however, is the quiet urgency beneath his words, that is, the Buddha's counsel to "not retreat in fear during difficult times".

*Vedicaa Sawal, Jammu*

### Heat emergency

HEAT ADVISORIES without legal backing are just good intentions in print. The IMD warns of early, prolonged heat, yet our disaster framework still treats heatwaves as a state-specific nuisance, not a national emergency ("Plan for early summer, extreme heat", *IE*, May 1). The 16th Finance Commission's call for national-level recognition is pragmatic: It unlocks central funds and forces accountability. Let's shift from reactive memos to cool-roof mandates, inter-departmental heat cells, and labour laws that treat 42°C like a cyclone. Climate science must rewrite our response manuals, not just weather bulletins.

*K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru*

OVER A few decades, summer and its impact on people and the physical environment have changed greatly ("Plan for early summer, extreme heat", *IE*, May 1). I clearly remember my childhood days when summer holidays were not so intolerable in their heat and adverse influence on the infrastructure. In those days, human life was much aligned with nature, whereas houses, commercial structures etc. were climate-resilient, by default. Now, an abundance of heat-generating constructions and interventions has added to our miseries.

*Jiji Panicker K, Alappuzha*

IRAN FOREIGN MINISTER ARAGHCHI CALLS REGIONAL COUNTERPARTS TO BRIEF THEM ON INITIATIVES TO END WAR

# Trump says he’s ‘not satisfied’ with Iran’s latest proposal to end the war

Tehran leadership ‘very disjointed’, says US President

Associated Press  
Dubai, Washington, May 1

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said Friday he was “not satisfied” with Iran’s latest proposal in negotiations to end the war between the countries, rejecting the plan almost as soon as it was delivered. Iran handed over its latest proposal for negotiations to mediators in Pakistan on Thursday night, Iran’s state-run IRNA news agency reported.

“They want to make a deal. I’m not satisfied with it, so we’ll see what happen,” Trump told reporters Friday at the White House. The shaky three-week ceasefire between the US and Iran appears to still be holding though both countries have traded accusations of violations.

Trump did not elaborate on what he saw as the latest proposal’s shortcomings. “They’re ask-



Smoke rises in Habboush in southern Lebanon following Israeli strikes on Friday. REUTERS

ing for things I can’t agree to,” he said. Negotiations have continued by phone after Trump called off his envoys’ trip to Pakistan last week, the president said. He expressed frustration with Iran’s leadership, describing it as fractured. “It’s a very disjointed leadership,” he said. “They all want to make a deal, but they’re all messed up.”

While the ceasefire has

largely halted fighting in Iran, the US and Iran are locked in a standoff over the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world’s traded oil and gas passes in peacetime.

A US Navy blockade stopping Iran’s tankers from getting out to sea has Iran’s economy reeling. The world economy is also under pressure as Iran maintains its chokehold on the strait.

Trump this week floated a new plan to reopen the critical passageway used by America’s Gulf allies to export their oil and gas. Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held a flurry of calls on Friday with many of his regional counterparts, including from Turkey, Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Azerbaijan, to brief them on his country’s latest initiatives to end the war.

## Israeli strikes kill 10 in Lebanon; Hezbollah drone wounds 2 soldiers

Associated Press  
Tyre, May 1

ISRAEL CARRIED out several airstrikes Friday on southern Lebanon that killed at least 10 people, while the militant Hezbollah group said it fired rockets and drones at northern Israel where two soldiers were wounded. Israel’s military and Hezbollah kept up their attacks despite a ceasefire in place since April 17.

Israel’s military on Friday afternoon urged residents of the Lebanese village of Habboush near the southern city of Nabatiyeh to evacuate, warning that those close to Hezbollah’s facilities would be in danger. An airstrike on Habboush that occurred around the time of the warning killed six people, including a woman and

a child, and wounded eight, the Health Ministry said.

The state-run National News Agency reported that four people were killed in strikes on three other southern villages. By Friday afternoon, Hezbollah had issued six statements saying it launched drones and rockets at Israeli military positions.

The Israeli military confirmed that Hezbollah launched an explosive drone that fell in northern Israel near the border with Lebanon. Israeli media reported that a drone strike near Margaliot in northern Israel caused a fire, and that two soldiers were lightly wounded in a separate Hezbollah drone impact in the area.

Despite the war, residents have continued to return to homes in southern Lebanon after being displaced for weeks.

# IRGC used Iran’s biggest crypto exchange to transfer millions abroad

Reuters  
London, May 1

THE SONS of a powerful family close to Iran’s new supreme leader control the country’s largest cryptocurrency exchange, turning it into a conduit used by state institutions and ordinary citizens alike.

Since Nobitex was founded by the two brothers under an alternative family name, it has processed millions of dollars in transactions linked to sanctioned groups including Iran’s central bank and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a Reuters investigation has found.

The brothers are members of the Kharrazi family, one of the most influential dynasties in Iran. Corporate records show that when the exchange started,

they were listed under a surname rarely used by family members.

Nobitex quickly became embedded in Iran’s economy. The company says it has 11 million users, more than 10% of the population across the country. Locked out of international banking and facing a devalued rial and rampant inflation, ordinary Iranians use the exchange to buy and hold cryptocurrency.

Although Iran is sanctioned, Nobitex has avoided designation by the US and its allies. Reuters found no indication that anyone in the Kharrazi family has been sanctioned, and could not determine why the exchange escaped penalties imposed on other major Iranian players.

The revelation comes at a critical moment for Iran and the

● **Kharrazi family behind Iran’s crypto giant**  
A powerful political dynasty with close ties to Tehran’s leadership built Nobitex, the country’s biggest crypto exchange.

- The Kharrazi family is one of Iran’s most powerful dynasties.
- It has close ties to Iran’s supreme leadership.
- The family has served the Islamic Republic for decades.
- Kharrazis have advised supreme leaders across generations.
- Family members have held senior political and diplomatic roles.
- The clan is linked by marriage to all three supreme leaders.



Ali Kharrazi  
Mohammad Kharrazi  
● Ali and Mohammad Kharrazi founded Nobitex under the name Aghamir.  
● No member of the family appears to have been sanctioned by the West. REUTERS

IRGC. The IRGC has tightened its control over Iran’s economy and security apparatus since the

killing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in a deadly February airstrike at the start of the US and

Israeli war in Iran.

The brothers are the third Kharrazi generation at the heart of Iran’s ruling establishment. Kharrazis have advised supreme leaders and held political, diplomatic and religious posts. The clan is related by marriage to all three supreme leaders of the Islamic Republic: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the late Khamenei and Khamenei’s son, Mojtaba.

Ali and Mohammad Kharrazi — using the family surname Aghamir — built Nobitex into the country’s dominant cryptocurrency provider. It handles an estimated 70% of Iran’s crypto transactions. The brothers appear to be the only ones in their immediate family to routinely distance themselves from their bloodline.

Nobitex serves as a bridge to global crypto markets and a node in a parallel financial system used to move funds beyond the reach of Western sanctions, Reuters found. Blockchain analysis by crypto-analytic firm Crystal Intelligence, along with interviews with four private financial investigators and nine Iranians who have worked for or with Nobitex, indicated that state funds subject to sanctions passed through the exchange.

Nobitex denied direct government ties or assistance to the state, and said, “Nobitex is a private and independent business. It has never been an arm of the government and has never had any relationship, arrangement, agreement, or contract with Central Bank of Iran, the IRGC, or any other governmental body.”

## Riots erupt outside Australia hospital treating suspect in minor girl’s killing

Associated Press  
Adelaide, May 1

HUNDREDS of protesters clashed with Australian emergency services workers in a remote town following the arrest of a man suspected of murdering a 5-year-old Indigenous girl, police said on Friday.

Australia’s Prime Minister, the Northern Territory’s police commissioner and a spokesperson for the victim’s family all appealed for calm after an angry crowd of roughly 400 Indigenous people gathered on Thursday night at the hospital where the suspect was taken after being beaten unconscious by locals.

Footage of the protests from public broadcaster ABC showed members of the crowd calling for payback, which refers to traditional, mostly physical, punishment in Aboriginal societies.

They threw projectiles and lit fires, injuring a number of police officers and medical workers, while also damaging



A police vehicle is set on fire outside the Alice Springs Hospital where a man suspected of killing a five-year-old girl is under police protection in Alice Springs, Australia on Friday. REUTERS

police vehicles, ambulances and fire trucks. Police used tear gas to disperse the protesters.

Jefferson Lewis, a 47-year-old man who police say they believe abducted and killed the girl, presented himself to one of the town camps in Alice Springs, Northern Territory Police Commissioner Martin Dole said at a news conference.

“As a result of presenting himself, members of that town

camp decided to inflict vigilante justice upon Jefferson,” he said.

The girl, now referred to by her family as Kumanjayi Little Baby in line with Indigenous customs, went missing from her home on the outskirts of Alice Springs late on Saturday.

Lewis, who was identified as a suspect by police earlier in the week, has past convictions for physical assaults and was recently released from prison.

Trump says he will raise tariffs on EU autos to 25%

Reuters  
Washington, May 1

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said on Friday he would increase tariffs on cars and trucks from European Union to 25%, saying the bloc had not complied with its trade deal with Washington.

“Based on the fact European Union is not complying with our fully agreed to Trade Deal, next week I will be increasing Tariffs charged to the European Union for Cars and Trucks coming into United States,” he wrote on Truth Social.

Trump said the higher tariff would force European car makers to move their factory production to the US more quickly. “We have a trade deal with the EU. They were not adhering to it. So I raised the tariffs on cars and trucks to 25%, that’s billions of dollars coming into the United States, and it forces them to move their factory production much faster”

## Kyiv eyes Japanese weapons as Tokyo eases export rules

Reuters  
Tokyo, May 1

JAPAN’S RELAXATION of its weapons-export rules opens a path for talks that could one day lead to Tokyo supplying military equipment to help Ukraine resist Russia’s invasion. Kyiv’s ambassador to Japan told Reuters.

“This allows us to talk,” Yuriy Lutsenko said in an interview at Ukraine’s embassy. “Theoretically, it’s a very big step forward.”

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi’s move last week to ease export rules - Japan’s latest shift away from a strict postwar pacifist stance - has sparked broad interest as conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East strain Western arms production.

While the overhaul maintains controls on exports to

conflict zones, it allows exceptions that serve Tokyo’s security interests, a caveat Kyiv hopes to benefit from.

Japan has linked Ukraine’s fate to its own security as it faces China’s growing military power. With Japanese territory stretching to within 110 km of Taiwan, Tokyo worries that any attempt by Beijing to seize the island could draw it into a conflict.

Soon after Russia launched the war against its smaller neighbour in 2022, Japan’s then-prime minister, Fumio Kishida, warned that “Ukraine today could be East Asia tomorrow.” He approved Japan’s biggest military buildup since World War Two, a plan Takaichi has accelerated since taking office in October.

“If Ukraine falls, it’s going to be a big domino effect,” Ambassador Lutsenko said.

### ● BRIEFLY

#### UNITED STATES

### US to issue commemorative passports with Trump portrait



The passport featuring an image and signature of Donald Trump. REUTERS

THE US State Department said it would produce a limited number of commemorative passports bearing a portrait of Donald Trump, the latest example of the administration attaching the president’s likeness or name to official property. The passports will be released as part of celebrations for the 250th anniversary of the US Declaration of Independence in July, State Department spokesperson Tommy Pigott said in a statement, which did not mention that the passports would contain Trump’s image. REUTERS

#### ITALY

### 3,000 evacuated as winds drive Tuscany wildfire

ITALIAN FIREFIGHTERS were on Friday battling to put out a large forest fire in Tuscany that has burned for days fanned by strong winds, forcing evacuation of around 3,000 people. The fire, active since Tuesday, has spread over 800 hectares on Mount Faeta, straddling provinces of Lucca and Pisa, the mayor of a neighbouring town, San Giuliano Terme, said. REUTERS

#### ISRAEL

### Police arrest man suspected of attacking a nun

ISRAELI POLICE said Friday that they arrested a 36-year-old caught on video attacking a nun in the latest incident targeting Christians near Jerusalem’s Old City. Police said the unnamed man was arrested after the attack near David’s Tomb, a holy site outside Zion’s Gate on southern side of the Old City “on suspicion of a racially motivated attack,” and remained in custody. AP

### ● NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

#### PAKISTAN

### 13 militants killed in Afghan border region near KPK

AT LEAST 13 terrorists have been killed by Pakistani security forces along the Afghanistan border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military’s media wing said on Friday. The terrorists, belonging to Fitna al-Khawarij, were killed in Mohmand and North Waziristan districts on April 28 and 29, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said. Fitna al-Khawarij is a term the state uses to refer to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). PTI

#### SRI LANKA

### Panel formed to conduct autopsy of govt official

SRI LANKA on Friday appointed a four-member foreign experts panel to conduct an autopsy of a senior government official who was found dead at his residence weeks after he was suspended from his job. According to the police, the official, Rangana Nishantha Rajapaksa, 48, is suspected to have committed suicide in his house at Kuliyapitiya in the northwest region. Rajapaksa’s body was found with cut injuries in backyard of his house, police said. PTI



## Banksy Strikes London

A statue depicting a person stepping off the plinth while carrying a flag covering his face, by British street artist Banksy, in London on Friday. Banksy’s representatives said the statue was installed early Wednesday. The artist later posted a video of the statue and its apparent installation on his Instagram account on Thursday. REUTERS

● CAFES AND COFFEE SHOPS GIVE IRANIANS AFFORDABLE PLACES TO TALK ABOUT THEIR HOPES, FEARS AND THE COST OF LIVING AS WELL AS TO SEEK COMPANY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

# In Iran, cafes offer a fragile escape as war, fear and economic strain linger

Farnaz Fassihi  
Tehran, May 1

THREE WEEKS into a fragile cease-fire with the United States, Iranians are seeking to reclaim fragments of normal life. For many eager to connect with one another, cafes have emerged as the focal point of social gatherings in Tehran and many other Iranian cities.

Men and women, young and old, pack the coffee shops that dot the sprawling capital. Friends, families and colleagues crowd at tables and bar stools that spill onto the sidewalks. They gather at all hours of the day and late into the night. They sip espressos, cappucc-

inos and Persian tea infused with cardamom. Sometimes they share a piece of cake. These are tough economic times and many people have been laid off.

Many say they are running through their savings as they struggle with a collapsing currency and rampant inflation.

But a cup of coffee is still affordable and cafes provide escape, if only for a few fleeting hours, said a dozen Iranians who frequent them. Cafes allow Iranians a place to collectively process the five weeks of war with the United States and Israel and the wreckage in its wake. “Cafes are the place I feel connected to society,” said Nassim,

a 40-year-old writer, in an interview over the telephone from Tehran. “Everyone is trying to get through the day and not think too far ahead,” she added.

Nassim said she goes to cafes in central Tehran at least three times a week to meet with friends. She lives at home with her parents, like many adult Iranians who can’t afford to live on their own, and seeing friends at cafes, she said, gives a sense of independence.

As everyone interviewed for this story, Nassim asked that her surname not be published out of fear of retribution for talking to foreign media.

Nassim said the conversations she is having and over-



With few other options to gather, Iranians have taken to visiting cafes to either escape or discuss the war for a few hours. NYT

hearing are almost all about the war. “You hear people talking about not having hope, and about struggling financially be-

cause they have lost their jobs.”

Iranians don’t know if the US and Israeli airstrikes are over for good or if more are on

the horizon. They don’t know whether the cease-fire will lead to a permanent peace. It’s also unclear whether the country’s new hard-line Revolutionary Guard leaders can reach a deal with the United States or whether sanctions and, now, a sea blockade will cause even more economic hardship.

The government has restricted internet access since the start of the war, and for the many Iranians who used to pass the time scrolling through social media, that diversion too has been disrupted.

Mehran, a 37-year-old businessman, said he meets his friends at a cafe every night after dinner with his wife and son.

“Going to the cafe every night has become my coping mechanism, it’s the place I can let loose from all the pressures,” Mehran said in a telephone interview.

Options for casual gatherings are limited. There are no bars because alcohol is banned. Restaurants are expensive. And hosting at home has become too pricey as a culture that expects maximum hospitality confronts inflation hovering at 60 percent.

Cafes, with their casual vibe, and low-cost options, have become all the rage. In leafy upscale neighbourhoods in northern Tehran, coffee is served amid colourful modern sculptures and art pieces hanging on the walls. In central Tehran,

small cafes line the streets with stools and tables on the sidewalks. In downtown, tables are set in the gardens of old historical homes under fruit trees.

Cafe culture’s popularity transcends political, economic and social demographics. Hassan, 28, is a loyal supporter of Islamic Republic government. He has attended rallies in support of the war, waving flags and chanting slogans. But almost always, before and after the rallies, he and his friends end up in a cafe.

“I go to the cafes all the time, after work you want to meet friends and drink something and chat,” said Hassan in an interview. “Where else are we going to go?” NYT

FDI INFLOWS, REMITTANCES, SERVICES EXPORTS INHERENT STRENGTHS: RBI DG POONAM GUPTA

# ‘Not worried about remittances, confident of India’s BoP situation’

Gulf countries’ share in India’s overall remittances declined to 38% in 2023-24 from 47% in 2016-17

**Siddharth Upasani**  
New Delhi, May 1

DISMISSING CONCERNS about the impact of the West Asia war on the flow of remittances into India, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Deputy Governor Poonam Gupta on Friday said she is “not worried at all” and that the “numbers for March were better than before”.

Speaking at Ashoka University’s Second Annual Isaac Centre for Public Policy Growth Conference, Gupta said a variety of factors meant that remittances had become a “very, very stable form of inflows” for India.

These include the pool of Indian migrants diversifying across geographies such that the share of those in West Asia has declined to around 40%. The same migrant pool also works across a variety of sectors such as IT, hospitality, health, education, and construction and have different skill sets, so even if a couple of sectors are cyclically impacted, other sectors remain.

“...how West Asia is likely to

impact remittances, the numbers for March were better than before. Some people are projecting...that perhaps it was a wealth effect that migrants who have returned brought their accumulated savings. It’s possible some of it is that,” Gupta said.

“But I would also like to believe now that the conflict is more narrowed down to a stalemate in the Strait of Hormuz and the rest of the region is not being targeted or impacted, migrants if they have not already returned or would return back sooner. And as reconstruction efforts start, they will be employed more than before.”

“One lesson is also drawn from COVID, when there was revenge spending. All of this means that I’m not worried at all about remittances continuing to do well,” the central banker added.

According to RBI data, India received \$132 billion of remittances in 2024-25, with the figure standing at \$108 billion in the first three quarters of 2025-26. Data for the final quarter — whose last month coincided



Remittances are a key source of foreign exchange for India as it helps offset some part of the country’s trade deficit. FILE

with the start of the war — will be released by the end of June.

According to findings from the RBI’s latest survey on remittances, inflows from the Gulf countries of UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain had declined to 38% of the overall figure in 2023-24 from 47% in 2016-17.

Meanwhile, money being sent to India has risen from advanced countries such as the US and the UK.

Remittances are a key source of foreign exchange for India as it helps offset some part of the country’s trade defi-

cit, which is under pressure due to a sharp rise in global energy prices and the rapid depreciation of the rupee.

While India suffers from a large trade deficit (\$119 billion in 2025-26), foreign direct investment (FDI) and remittances help it to usually post a surplus in its overall Balance of Payments (BoP).

However, economists have warned that the BoP could be in negative zone for the third year in a row in 2026-27 due to the ongoing war’s energy supply shock, which has led to massive outflows from Indian markets

and hurt the rupee.

On Thursday, the rupee hit a new all-time low of 95.34-per-dollar after fresh concerns about the war in West Asia propelled global crude oil prices to a four-year high. The rupee is now down more than 4% since the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, with Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) having dumped \$20.2 billion of Indian debt and stocks in the first four months of 2026 — almost double the \$11.8 billion they sold in all of 2025.

However, Gupta on Friday expressed confidence about India’s BoP situation, saying it has “inherent strengths” in the form of stable and rising remittances, well-performing services exports, and FDI inflows.

“These are not cyclical strengths; these are structural strengths. Which means shocks may happen, but these strengths would be there.

“But yes, portfolio flows have been weaker than in the past, which have been countered by other parts of the Balance of Payments. So, I remain actually, for most part, quite confident that there might have been a year which seemed more challenging, but sooner or later, it will go back to the strengths it has exhibited in the past because of the structural nature of it,” Gupta said.

## Fiscal stress a reality, focus to stay on capex: Expenditure Secretary

**Aanchal Magazine**  
New Delhi, May 1

FISCAL STRESS is “very much a reality” and there could be lots of stress points going ahead amid the ongoing West Asia conflict, but the government is focused on spending on priority sectors and capital expenditure, which will continue to be at the budgeted level of Rs 12.2 lakh crore, Expenditure Secretary Vumlungmang Vualnam said on Friday.

Stating that the LPG crisis has been a “challenging situation” with India importing about 60% of its requirement, of which 90% comes through Strait of Hormuz that has been impacted by the disturbance, Vualnam said the government has been proactive in tackling these situations.

However, there are also “systemic constraints” where one cannot really tackle off or wipe away all the impacts which are there, the Secretary said. For instance, beyond LPG, the cut in excise duties will also have a fiscal impact, he said.

“So, the fiscal stress is indeed very much a reality. But at the same time, the priority sectors, for example, the capex could really be a priority item, which we would like to preserve and ensure that it continues at the budgeted level of Rs 12 lakh crore,” he said as part of a panel discussion at the Ashoka Univer-



Expenditure Secretary Vumlungmang Vualnam. EXPRESS

sity’s ICPG Growth Conference.

The capex focus will continue to be in the infrastructure sectors, he said. “It (capex) is an item, in spite of the savings, which is happily utilised by the concerned sectors...we would like to preserve and protect that, see that the highway sector, the railway sector...the shipping port sector, the urban sector make full use of that.

“We will on our part be committed to see that the required funds are provided in spite of all the stress points that may come up,” he said. When asked by former Finance Commission Chairman NK Singh whether India is still in a Goldilocks phase — characterised by sustained growth, low inflation and low unemployment — Vualnam said the situation has changed.

The Secretary pointed out

there is a big question about how the buoyancy of gross tax receipts will be in the coming months in this changed scenario. He stressed that the government will focus on the quality of expenditure and government jobs.

“The quality of the manpower pool that we have, government is a big employer. In the central government itself we have over 50 lakh employees who are regular full-time employees, so the quality of our employees, their performance, the output-outcome measurements, which the government has been focused over the last decade, how to sharpen it. And on the expenditure side, the priority items,” he said.

Besides capex, Vualnam said the government is focused on enhancing spending for research and development. “As a country, public and private combined, you spend too little on R&D, somewhere around just 0.6% of GDP, which is too less for a country to progress, for industry to progress and for development to happen.

So, R&D investments, not just in providing the resources, but also in the way of doing business has been modified,” he said, adding that the government is fully focused on streamlining the procedures and reduction of regulatory restrictions for ease of doing business. **FULL REPORT ON**

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## For 3rd year in a row, RBI got over 100 tn of gold to India in FY26

**Siddharth Upasani**  
New Delhi, May 1

THE RESERVE Bank of India (RBI) brought over 100 metric tonne (MT) of its gold to India in 2025-26 — the third year in a row it has done so.

According to data released late Thursday, the second half of 2025-26 saw the Indian central bank bring 104.23 MT of its gold from abroad — held with the Bank of England and the Bank for International Settlements — to Indian shores, adding to the 63.83 MT it had brought home in the first half of the year.

In total, the RBI brought 168.06 MT of gold to India in 2025-26, up from 107.21 MT in 2023-24 and 103.68 MT in 2024-25. As a result of the latest transfer, the RBI now holds 77% of its 880.52 MT of gold holdings — which were worth \$122 billion as on April 17 — domestically. This is sharply higher than 38% as recently as March 2023. The RBI’s ongoing move to hold increasingly more gold domestically is part of a new trend that took shape in the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The attacks led to the US freezing Russia’s dollar-denominated foreign exchange reserves, which sparked a shift by central banks around the



The RBI brought 168.06 MT of gold to India in 2025-26. REUTERS

world towards holding more non-dollar denominated foreign currency assets.

According to the World Gold Council’s Central Bank of Gold Reserves Survey 2025, released in June last year, 59% of central bankers picked ‘domestic storage’ for where they currently vault at least part of their gold reserves, up from 35% in 2023 and 28% in 2019.

“Looking forward to the next 12 months...7% (of respondents) indicated they would increase their domestic storage; slightly more than the previous year (2%),” the World Gold Council said.

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## Reject Tata Sons plea to shed its CIC status: In Govern suggests RBI

**George Mathew**  
Mumbai, May 1

PROXY ADVISORY firm In Govern Research Services has recommended that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) should issue an explicit, formal rejection of the application of Tata Sons for deregistration as a core investment company (CIC), thereby upholding the sanctity of the Scale-based Regulatory (SBR) framework and protecting the interests of over 1.2 crore public shareholders invested in the Tata ecosystem.

In Govern said, in a report released Friday, that the attempt to circumvent mandatory listing obligations under the SBR framework is incompatible with the current standards of financial oversight.

Transitioning to a listed entity triggers the Securities and Exchange Board of India’s (SEBI) Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements (LODR). “For a holding company controlling Rs 1.75 lakh crore in assets (including systemic listed companies like TCS, Tata Motors and Tata Power), SEBI’s LODR is essential to govern Related Party Transactions (RPTs) and ensure that group level capital allocation is transparent to the broader market,” In Govern said in a report.

In March 2024, Tata Sons, the holding company of the

*If the RBI rejects the application of Tata Sons, it will have to go for an IPO and list the shares on the stock exchanges*

Tata Group, filed an application to surrender its registration as a CIC. This strategic move was perceived as an attempt to sidestep the mandatory listing obligations imposed by the RBI’s Scale-Based Regulatory (SBR) framework, In Govern alleged.

“By aggressively repaying over Rs 20,000 crore in standalone debt, the company claimed to have renounced its access to public funds, thereby seeking to move from a ‘Registered CIC’ to an ‘Unregistered/Exempt’ entity,” it said.

Tata Sons has not responded to a mail from *The Indian Express* on the In Govern report.

If the RBI rejects the application of Tata Sons, it will have to go for an IPO and list the shares on the stock exchanges.

After listing it will have to follow the SEBI rules, especially board composition, declaration of quarterly results and more public scrutiny. It will also give an exit route for the SP group which holds 18.3% stake in Tata Sons. Tata Trusts hold 66. According to the RBI’s ‘List of NBFCs and ARCs’ released on

April 10, 2026, Tata Sons is explicitly categorised as an Upper Layer (UL) NBFC (Reference: Entry 8129, Page 278). With reported assets exceeding Rs 1.75 lakh crore, the company vastly exceeds the Rs 1,000 crore threshold established by the new 2026 Amendment Directions for voluntary deregistration. The April 10 circular establishes a threshold of Rs 1 lakh crore for the Upper Layer, irrespective of ownership.

The removal of previous exemptions — which once shielded government or specific private-owned structures — leaves no room for discretionary interpretation, it said.

“Because approximately 12% to 14% of Tata Sons is held by Tata Group entities, including many listed companies — all of which rely on public debt and equity — the structural linkage to public funds is permanent,” the report said.

The doctrine of “indirect receipt of public funds” is designed to capture this exact scenario of systemic interconnectedness.

The standalone debt repayment does not sever this fundamental, structural integration, it said. The structural cross-holding of approximately 13%-14% by group entities in Tata Sons creates a definitive regulatory ‘Look-Through’ loop, In Govern said.

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## GST collections hit new record in April

**Press Trust of India**  
New Delhi, May 1

GROSS GST collection rose 8.7% to a record of Rs 2.43 lakh crore in April as growth in import-led revenues outpaced domestic transactions, government data showed on Friday.

The previous all-time high collection from Central GST, State GST and Integrated GST was recorded in April last year at over Rs 2.23 lakh crore.

Gross revenues from domestic transactions were up 4.3% to over Rs 1.85 lakh crore, while GST mop-up from imports rose by a massive 25.8% to Rs 57,580 crore in April 2026. Total gross CGST and SGST collection in April stood at Rs 52,140 crore and Rs 61,331 crore, respectively. IGST mop-up during the month stood at over Rs 1.29 lakh crore. Refunds were up 19.3% to Rs 31,793 crore during April. After adjusting refunds, net Goods and Services Tax (GST) mop-up was up 7.3% to about Rs 2.11 lakh crore.

Price Waterhouse & Co LLP Partner Pratik Jain said post GST 2.0, a steady 7-8% monthly growth seems to be emerging as the norm, which is broadly in line with budget estimates.

“Notably, growth in import-led revenues continues to outpace domestic transactions,

which could indicate some softness in consumption, possibly reflecting a moderation in discretionary spending amid ongoing geopolitical uncertainties,” Jain said.

GST collections have continued to increase after the initial dip post the implementation of GST 2.0 from September 2025, in which tax rates on about 375 items were slashed.

Also, four tax slabs of 5%, 12%, 18% and 28% were merged into two of 5% and 18%. Deloitte India Partner & Indirect Tax Leader Mahesh Jaising said a notable feature of April GST number is the nearly 26% year-on-year growth in import-linked GST, reflecting sustained trade flows even in a volatile external environment.

“Equally important is the steady performance of domestic GST revenues, which suggests that GST-2.0 led rate rationalisation and simplification measures are beginning to support consumption and demand without materially eroding the tax base,” Jaising said. Taken together, the FY26 collections underscore a maturing GST framework — where policy adjustments, technology-led administration and economic resilience are working in tandem to deliver stable revenue outcomes, he added. PTI

## Maruti Suzuki India’s sales rise 33% in April

**New Delhi:** Car market leader Maruti Suzuki India on Friday reported a record total sales of 2,39,646 units in April, a 33.29% year-on-year growth, making a strong start to the new financial year with its small cars showing robust growth.

The company had sold a total of 1,79,791 units in the same month last year, Maruti Suzuki India said. Domestic sales also reached an all-time high of 1,91,122 units in April compared to 1,42,053 units in the year-ago month.

“We are starting this year with a big bang. Small cars have contributed significantly to this growth,” Maruti Suzuki India Senior Executive Officer, Marketing & Sales, Partho Banerjee told PTI.

The previous highest domestic sales registered by the company were in December 2025 at 1,82,165 units, he added.

Banerjee said the company’s mini vertical has witnessed a strong growth in April, dispelling doubts over the future of the segment that many people have. “With 153% growth, it clearly shows that there is demand in the market and we are selling it,” Banerjee said, adding that the segment would continue to grow unless there is a hike in petrol prices due to the West Asia war. PTI

• MULTI-LANE FREE FLOW BARRIER-LESS TOLLING SYSTEM BECOMES OPERATIONAL AT GUJARAT’S CHORYASI TOLL PLAZA NEAR SURAT; 18 MORE TO FOLLOW

## India’s 1st barrier-less toll booth opens: How will it speed up ride

**Dheeraj Mishra**  
New Delhi, May 1

IN A significant move, National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) Friday operationalised India’s first Multi-Lane Free Flow (MLFF) barrier-less tolling system at the Choryasi toll plaza on the Surat-Bharuch section of NH-48 in Gujarat.

This marks a major milestone in the electronic toll collection (ETC) infrastructure of the country, which was started in 2014.

Under the existing tolling system, vehicles have to stop at the fee plaza to pay the user fee. The MLFF system removes the need for a boom barriers and stopping of vehicles for toll collection. In this advanced system, the toll is collected after high-performance Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) readers and Automatic Number Plate Recognition

(ANPR) cameras read the FASTag and Vehicle registration Number (VRN).

The new system is expected to reduce travel time, decongest highways (especially near toll plazas), improve fuel efficiency and lower vehicular emissions.

### Road to MLFF

NHAI took a series of decisions which created an enabling platform for the rollout of MLFF. This was done to create a robust legal framework so that the road users do not find loopholes to avoid toll charges as MLFF has minimum human interventions to cross-check the errors.

One of the earliest decision was mandating the use of High Security Registration Plates (HSRP). This was done to ensure that specially designed ANPR cameras can read number plates, even in MLFF



The MLFF system works without a boom barrier and vehicles are not supposed to stop for toll payment. EXPRESS

system. The other key decision was ‘One Vehicle, One FASTag’.

It stopped the usage of single FASTag for multiple vehicles or linking multiple FASTags to a particular vehicle.

The NHAI and Ministry of

Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) recently took two key decisions in run-up to the implementation of MLFF in Choryasi. In March, MoRTH issued new National Highway Fee rules to deal with the unpaid

user fee cases, meaning that the vehicle passing at the toll gate are recorded but the toll is not paid. It says that in such cases, commuters will have to pay double the applicable toll amount at the respective toll plaza. However, if it is paid within 72 hours, only the original user fee will apply.

An e-notice will be issued with the vehicle details, the date and location of occurrence and the user fee payable.

The rules also paved the way for integrating the National Electronic Toll Collection system with the National Vehicle Registry for enforcement measures and the realisation of unpaid user fees.

Apart from this, last month, NHAI issued direction to all FASTag-issuing banks to immediately validate Vehicle Registration Numbers (VRNs) or license plate numbers linked to the FASTags they have issued.

The agency also directed banks to blacklist FASTags found linked to incorrect or invalid VRNs. The direction was issued because in the absence of human intervention in toll deduction system in MLFF at the toll gate, a mismatch in the VRN linked to the FASTag could see commuters pass without paying the fee.

### MLFF to come at other plazas too

IHMCL has awarded the contract for MLFF at 18 toll plazas. A senior IHMCL official said that the government has planned to implement MLFF at over 200 toll plazas every year. “There are around 800 public funded toll plazas. Our priority is to first implement the system at these places. Now the tenders are also being awarded in bundles,” he said.

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• BRIEFLY

### Adani unveils internal overhaul

**New Delhi:** Billionaire Gautam Adani on Friday outlined a sweeping internal transformation plan for the Adani Group, centred on faster decision-making, stronger contractor partnerships and large-scale workforce skilling, as he linked the conglomerate’s growth to India’s broader development ambitions. Speaking to employees on International Labour Day, Adani said the group would adopt a “three-layer model” to flatten hierarchies and accelerate execution. “We want decisions that currently take three days...to be made in just three hours,” the Adani group chairman said. PTI

### Excited about India, hit double digit growth, says Apple CEO

**New Delhi:** iPhone maker Apple CEO Tim Cook on Friday said he is delighted and excited about India as the company continues to record double-digit growth in the country. During Apple’s earnings call for the second quarter of financial year 2026, which ended March 28, Cook said India is the second-largest smartphone market in the world, and the third-largest PC market, and despite doing very well, Apple still has a modest share, which speaks about the opportunity the country has. “I’m over the moon excited about India,” Cook said in response to an analyst’s question on India. PTI



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• POLITICS

## Journey of EVMs between polling and counting

**Damini Nath**  
*New Delhi, May 1*

A DAY after polling concluded in the West Bengal Assembly election, Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress (TMC) chairperson Mamata Banerjee on Thursday night hit out at the Election Commission (EC) and the BJP. She alleged that there had been an attempt to tamper with the electronic voting machines (EVMs) stored at a strongroom till counting of votes on May 4.

West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Agarwal denied the charge, saying the EC's statutory procedure was followed. According to the EC, a video released by the TMC alleging tampering actually showed the segregation of postal ballots being carried out at a strongroom after informing all candidates. The TMC had alleged that EC officials and BJP workers were tampering with postal ballots.

### What the procedure says

The EC's procedure for handling EVMs before, during and after polling is laid out in its Manual on Electronic Voting Machines, 2023. Before the election, EVMs are stored in a warehouse under the control of the District Election Officer (DEO), who is the District Magistrate. Once elections are underway, the EVMs are randomised in the presence of representatives of national and state-recognised parties and sent to the respective strongrooms in each Assembly constituency.

The process is to be conducted under 24x7 CCTV coverage, the manual says. The strongrooms have armed security. It is from these strongrooms that the EVMs are dispatched to the polling booths. After polls close on voting day, the EVMs are to be sealed and escorted back to the strongrooms by the poll officials and security personnel. Candidates and their polling agents usually follow the vehicles carrying the polled EVMs from the booths to the strongrooms. The manual says all polled EVMs should be stored in one strongroom and unused EVMs in a separate strongroom marked "reserve EVM".

### Specifications for strongrooms

The manual lays out specifications of the strongroom, starting with dimensions of the shelves on which EVMs are to be placed (6 feet by 2 feet). The strongrooms must have a single entry/exit point, with all other doors and windows to be sealed. This door needs a double lock system. The key of the first lock are to be kept with the Returning Officer (RO), and that of the second with the Assistant RO. At least one platoon of armed police must be deployed 24x7.

Apart from CCTV cameras with an uninterrupted power supply, the time of the opening and closing of the strongrooms has to be videographed. The manual says separate log books should be maintained for entry/exit of security personnel and other authorised officials (EC's observers, DEOs or Superintendents of Police). "No entry for any vehicle including VIPs & officials," the manual says. The protocol for the polled EVMs includes informing all candidates 24 hours in advance so that they can depute representatives to keep a watch on the security arrangements. The RO is to visit the storage campus, till the inner-most perimeter, twice a day to check the log book and video feeds, and to send a daily report to the DEO.

It is from these strongrooms that EVMs are taken to counting centres, usually one per district, for counting. Again, the process is to be conducted under videography and with the knowledge of candidates' representatives.

In case of postal ballots, the RO is supposed to keep all postal ballots received by the post office in separate envelopes for each day. These are to be kept in a strongroom for postal ballots at the RO headquarters.

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• CULTURE

## Devil Wears Prada predicted fast fashion: How ramp goes to retail in 3 weeks

**Rinku Ghosh**  
*New Delhi, May 1*

"THAT SWEATER is not just blue, it's not turquoise, it's not lapis, it's actually cerulean." Two decades later, Miranda Priestly's monologue in *The Devil Wears Prada* continues to be the best example of how style travels from runway to retail store and becomes a pop-culture shorthand at affordable prices. In the film, Meryl Streep's character talks about how designer Oscar de la Renta's 2002 collection of cerulean gowns was reinterpreted as military jackets, and adapted by more designers, before filtering down to the department store. The process may be the same, except the journey is now dramatically faster.

### The fast-fashion pathway

"Any garment can make its way from the runway to a fast-fashion retailer in as little as two to three weeks," says designer Samant Chauhan. The answer lies in a hyper-efficient ecosystem of trend scouts, forecasters, buying teams, design engineers,

textile specialists and legal guardrails that allow fashion to move from catwalk to checkout counter.

Some designers enter the business of fashion with trend scouts working for major retail brands. "They travel to fashion weeks globally. They are not runway copycats but trend adapters, who are going for the big ideas. They borrow the direction of a trend, say oversized tailoring, sculptural draping or detailing. But they modify specifics enough to avoid intellectual property infringement," says Chauhan.

Scouts constantly study colour, the back-story of the garment, lace, stripes, trims, embroideries, cuts, silhouette and even the themes of the designer collections. "Then they analyse high-street brands across cities. For example, Japanese streetwear is huge right now. Stores in London and Dover Street Market are watched closely for new designers and inspirations. They analyse trends, including algorithms on social media, pick up elements that work and pass it on to the design and buying teams for an



Meryl Streep in 'The Devil Wears Prada' 2.

assembly line rollout," adds Chauhan.

A designer like him may take a few months to move his collection from ramp to store. But the trend scout may have adapted his colour, moodboard, fabric or cut and put the first, small batch on the racks in two to four weeks. "That's how fast it is," adds the designer, who is quite im-

pressed by the detailing that retail brands are offering much cheaper.

### Surveillance behind style

Long before you spot a sharply-tailored blazer at a high-street retailer, teams have already decoded its DNA. According to Subhash Singh Rajput, a NIFT graduate and head of India wear at Landmark Group, which operates brands such as Lifestyle and Max, the process begins with relentless observation. "Trend scouts are the inputs. Then design and buying teams study everything — product type, colour, design, fabric, texture. The challenge is translating that into something suited to specific customer budgets and demand," he says. That means the same aesthetic language gets recalibrated across price points. "What you get at Westside for Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000 may be Rs 1,400 to Rs 1,900 at Pantaloons, Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,400 at Max, and around Rs 700 at D-Mart," says Rajput.

The silhouette may remain recognisable but the economics changes through fabric

substitutions, simplified stitching and trims, and scaled up manufacturing. "A premium denim silhouette selling for Rs 5,000 to Rs 6,000 under a global label like Levi's may visually resemble a Rs 600 version at value retailers. On social media reels, you cannot tell the difference immediately. But the quality of cotton, the stitching precision, the fabric blend is where the real distinction lies," Rajput says. The buying team gives inputs before clearing a garment for production. "They are into design re-engineering too. A low-cut neckline may be made more modest, given the cultural comfort of consumers and a see-through fabric may be made opaque," he explains.

### India's aspiration economy

The acceleration of runway-inspired retail in India is being driven as much by aspirational demand as by supply chains. "A person earning Rs 10,000 today has the same trend visibility as someone earning Rs 1 lakh. That creates aspiration," says Rajput. A shopper may browse Uniqlo or Zara, absorb

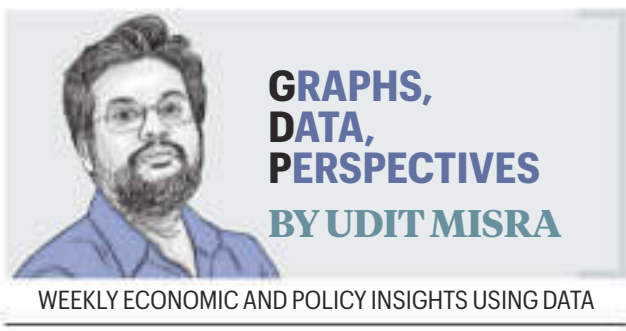
a silhouette or styling idea, then look for similar garments at Max, Zudio or local organised retailers. Discount culture has amplified this democratisation. "Consumers now wait for end-of-season sales and stack coupons to even buy a top brand," explains Rajput.

The irony is that as fast fashion perfects imitation, retail brands are now integrating with top designers. Zara, the fastest converter, has just roped in designer John Galiano for a creative partnership. Designers Sabyasachi and Anamika Khanna have done it with H&M. Chauhan himself tied up with House of Indya for an affordable silk collection. That reflects a shift from top-down design to a bottom-up approach.

The growth of organised retail has further changed expectations. "Earlier, shopping was in fragmented mom-and-pop stores. Now consumers experience glass-fronted stores, high-street aesthetics and visual merchandising that mirrors global retail. This visibility shortens the psychological distance between luxury and mass-market fashion," says Rajput.

• ECONOMY

## Is the rupee back to the 'fragile five' days of 2013?



THE INDIAN rupee hit an all-time low of 95.33 to a dollar on Thursday. This means that when trading international currencies, buying a single US dollar requires Rs 95.33.

At the start of 2026, a dollar could be exchanged for Rs 90, and a year ago for less than Rs 85. In other words, the rupee's value has fallen 12% against the dollar in the last 12 months. For perspective, the rupee usually only declines by about 3-4% against the dollar over a 12-month period.

Such a sharp decline is reminiscent of September 2013, when the rupee lost 12% of its value against the dollar between just January and September.

The exchange rate between any two currencies is determined by the relative demand of the currencies in question.

### What were the 'fragile five'?

In 2013, Morgan Stanley, a leading global investment firm, had dubbed the Indian rupee (or INR) one of the fragile five currencies in emerging markets. The other four were:

- The Indonesian rupiah or IDR (which had fallen 15.4% against the dollar)
- The Brazilian real or BRL (fell 7.6%),
- The South African rand or ZAR (which fell 14.4%), and
- The Turkish lira or TRY (slid 99%).

These currencies were losing value because the US central bank had signalled a rollback of its quantitative easing (QE) policy.

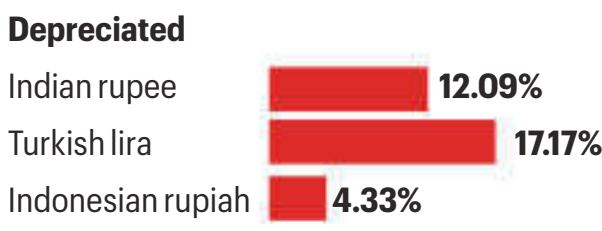
QE essentially means money can be borrowed cheaply because a central bank prints lots of it. When investors can borrow in US dollars at almost zero interest rates, it makes sense for them to borrow in dollars and invest in economies across the world that promise high growth and returns. When the policy stopped, it signalled that interest rates in the US were set to rise because the money printing tap had been turned off.

Most investors pulled back money from emerging markets to invest in US bonds. Investing in a US bond is essentially loaning money to the US government, and thus works as the most risk-free investment.

But India, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa and Turkey were the worst affected for another key reason: these economies already ran a current account deficit. This

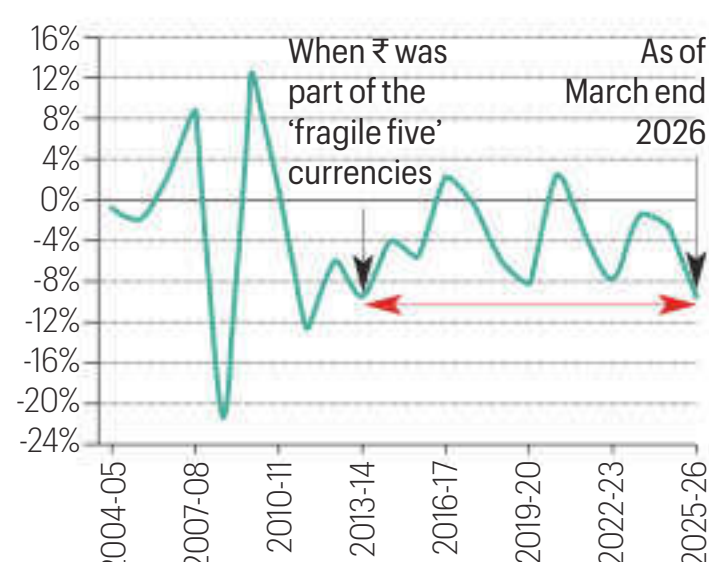
### • THE WEAKNESS IN THE RUPEE

**Chart 1: How 'fragile 5' from 2013 have performed against US dollar (over the last 12 months)**



GOOGLE FINANCE

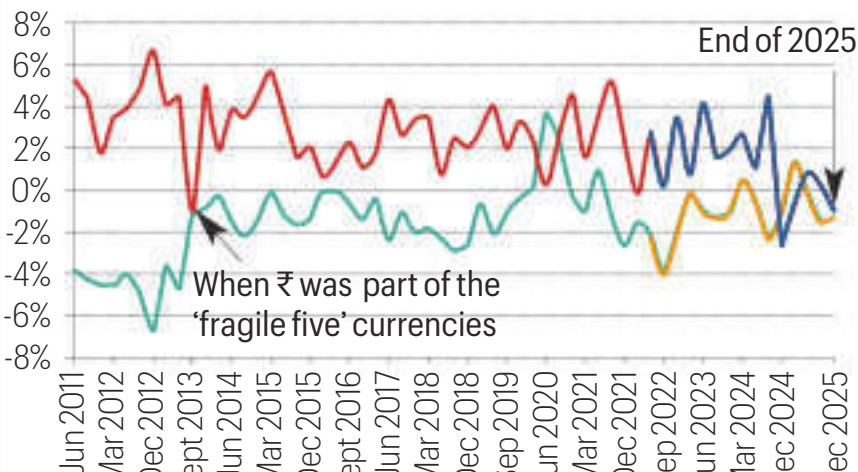
**Chart 2: % change in ₹ exchange rate vs \$**



SOURCE: CENTRE FOR MONITORING INDIAN ECONOMY

**CHART 3: India's Balance of Payments situation**

Current Account total: ● Base Year 2011-12 ● Base Year 2022-23  
Capital Account total: ● Base Year 2011-12 ● Base Year 2022-23



SOURCE: CMIE. NOTE: FIGURES ARE NET INFLOWS AS A % OF GDP

lost 17% of its value against the dollar. The lira's slide, in fact, has been dramatic for much longer; it lost over 1000% in value since May 2018.

### How does the rupee slide in 2026 compare with the slide in 2013?

Chart 2 shows the percentage change in the rupee's exchange rate against the dollar at the end of each financial year. As can be seen, the rupee ended financial year 2013-14 down 9.5% against the dollar and ended FY 2025-26 (which ended in March) down 9.6%.

But while FY26 may have been as bad as FY14, the big difference was that the fall in the rupee's exchange rate in FY14 came on the back of sharp falls in the two preceding years. It was on top of a 6% slide in FY13 and an almost 13% slide in FY12. The fall in the last financial year was preceded by fairly modest levels of weakness.

In terms of the factors that led to the recent slide, the story is again similar to what happened to the economy's Balance of Payment (the net effect of current and capital accounts) in 2013-14.

The rupee can lose value against the dollar only through two routes:

- Either India's import bill of goods and services is bigger than its export earnings (this is called a Current Account Deficit)
- Or financial investments by foreigners into India fall drastically or even turn negative, suggesting Indians invest outside more than foreigners invest in India (this is called a Capital Account Deficit)

For most of India's recent past, it has had a current account deficit but a capital account surplus. But in 2013, it suffered a deficit on both the accounts.

### Sharp fall

While the rupee loses value to the dollar every year, the slide is usually only about 3% to 4% over 12 months.

But over the last 12 months, the rupee has fallen 12% against the US dollar.

• HISTORY

## How the Komagata Maru incident of 1914 threw light on racism

**Suanshu Khurana**  
*New Delhi, May 1*

IN A recent appearance on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, popstar Diljit Dosanjh spoke about the 1914 Komagata Maru incident, where 376 Indian passengers were denied entry into Canada owing to racist immigration rules. The passengers had to stay on the ship for nearly two months, even though they were desperate for food, water and medical attention, before being sent back to India.

Dosanjh, who recently had a sold-out show in Vancouver's BC Place stadium, said: "When our people came for the first time to Canada, they didn't allow us... and that stadium is just 2 km from that part... You didn't allow us to come, now we are here."

### What brought the Komagata Maru to Vancouver?

The Komagata Maru, also called the Guru Nanaka Jahaz, was a Japanese steamship chartered in Hong Kong by Gurdit Singh. It sailed to Vancouver in 1914 with

376 Indians (340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims and 12 Hindus). These men — mostly farmers, former soldiers and labourers, all dressed in western suits to fit in in Canada — were driven by hopes of better wages to support their families in the dire conditions back home. The vessel left Hong Kong on April 4 and reached Vancouver on May 23.

### What happened in Vancouver?

After the vessel reached the Burrard Inlet, only 24 passengers were allowed to disembark. Canadian authorities created a blockade for those aboard and denied food, water and medical help. By mid-July, the standoff became increasingly tense. On July 19, more than hundred policemen and officials tried to force entry into the ship, but the passengers fought back with iron pipes and by hurling coal. The local South Asian community created a 'Shore Committee', led by Husain Rahim. They managed to raise \$20,000, enough to retain control of the ship's charter and continue fighting the authorities legally. However, the ship was eventually sent to India.

### Ill-fated voyage

● Komagata Maru was a Japanese steamship chartered in Hong Kong by Gurdit Singh.

● It sailed to Vancouver in April 1914 with 376 Indians. But they were denied entry under Canada's exclusionary immigration rules.

● Ultimately forced to return to India, the ship reached Bengal in September 1914. There, police fired upon its passengers, killing 20.

### Why were passengers denied entry?

Since both India and Canada were under British rule, the passengers considered themselves British subjects and held that they had the right to settle within British territories. However, a few years before this, in 1908, Canada had introduced the "continuous journey regulation".

This regulation prevented entry to those who did not "come from the country of their birth or citizenship by a continuous journey and or through tickets purchased before leaving the country of their birth or nationality". The regulation was thus for ships that began their journey from countries so far from Canada that a stopover would be necessary.

This regulation came after the Vancouver anti-Asian riots of 1907, fueled by the Asiatic Exclusion League to 'keep Canada white'. This mainly targeted Chinese and Japanese immigrants but Indians were also affected.

### What happened on the ship's return?

After being forced out of Vancouver, the ship was denied entry at other ports, includ-

ing Hong Kong and Singapore, as World War I had begun and British authorities were wary of the anti-colonial sentiment.

When the vessel reached Budge Budge, on the eastern bank of the Hooghly, the authorities tried to put the passengers on a special train to Punjab. They refused and began to march into Kolkata. The troops opened fire, killing 20 and injuring many. Gurdit Singh escaped but surrendered after Mahatma Gandhi asked him to do so as a patriot. He was imprisoned for five years.

### How did the incident affect the freedom movement?

The plight of the passengers, first humiliated in Canada and then fired upon after returning to their homeland, highlighted Indians' conditional rights and racist treatment under the British empire.

It intensified calls for complete independence rather than asking for rights under the colonial rule. The incident also became a mobilising force for the Ghadar Party, which had already begun to call for armed struggle against the British rule.

Shalini Langer

ALL THOSE wearing the 2006 film on their sleeves, you can keep your shirt on. The devil wears thin, but not Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep). And so, how can Prada?

Streep doesn't miss a beat as she reprises her role from 20 years ago as the imperious, icy, terrifying editor-in-chief of fashion magazine *Runway*. However, times have changed, and so her Miranda must weigh her words more carefully. "Body positive" is one description she gags on, as her vigilant assistant Amari (Ashley) dutifully reminds her what can now no longer be said – or even gestured.

Throwing her coats and bags on assistants' desks is also a no-go, and in onescene, Miranda has to catch her breath after the task of hanging her coat on a hook.

Anne Hathaway is again the "good, striving journalist" Andy, this time an award-winning one, who is again out of work and, hence, again at Miranda's doors for a turnaround in her fortunes. Andy has been hired back to "restore the credibility" of *Runway* after a poorly judged editorial choice by Miranda, which puts the two of them on a more equal footing – or so she thinks.

Emily Blunt's Emily has moved on from *Runway* and become the head of luxury retail at Dior, a job she clearly cherishes. Plus, she has tech bro Barnes (Theroux), a barely disguised Jeff Bezos, for a boyfriend. Barnes's ex-wife Sasha (a wasted Liu), meanwhile, is this reclusive philanthropist who is ready to donate all the money she got as alimony to a good cause.

Stanley Tucci also returns, to his role of Miranda's faithful stylist Nigel, toiling away patiently in the background while still keeping his godfatherly eye out for Andy.

So how do you have all of the same and still make it different?

*The Devil Wears Prada* was based on a book by a former assistant of *Vogue* Editor Anna Wintour – the inspiration for Miranda, which can be openly said now as the sequel has Wintour's blessing – and it softened the novel's harsh edges to make a film that was more high street than haute couture. It was also morally shaky, teetering



often as the good Andy skittered, literally, in her stilettos between sneering at fashion and gawking at it. It wanted to convince you that brain and Birkins could co-exist, but yeah, its heroine was Andy, who goes with brains, after having a good run with Birkins.

For a film with a whole scene about how one blue differs from another blue (cerulean), *The Devil Wears Prada* also was pretty broad-stroked about its familiar clichés – be it ugly duckling turned swan, or bad, amorous men vs good, loyal boyfriends, or girls with a heart of gold.

*The Devil Wears Prada 2*, with an original screenplay by Aline Brosh McKenna (who was the scriptwriter of the first film), is on firmer ground here as far as the plotline goes. *Runway*, like all print media of

**THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA 2**  
★★★★  
**DIRECTOR:** David Frankel  
**CAST:** Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, Emily Blunt, Stanley Tucci, Simone Ashley, Justine Theroux, Kenneth Branagh, B J Novak, Lucy Liu

our times, is struggling against dwindling reader interest, wandering eyeballs, digital onslaught, etc etc, and is being measured by metrics devised by "management consultants", against which almost all journalism falls short.

It's the closure of her former esteemed publication that brings Andy to *Runway*, and once she realises that the same may happen at the fashion mag, she decides to take matters into her own hands. If Barnes makes one end of the moneybags running the world, while talking Artificial Intelligence, the other is "performance synthetics (heavens!)"-clad Jay, the son of *Runway* magazine owner Irv (played by B J Novak), with no interest in or patience with the family business.

For those in journalism, all this will sound familiar – though Andy's runaway success is one of those fairy tales no journalist will buy.

For those looking for more, there is still a lot to go around, including fabulous Milan. If Streep's jerk of blazer-bedecked shoulders at a new indignity and her whispery insults still draw blood, Blunt remains as funnily acerbic in her portrayal of the ever-striving Emily. More of Blunt, and less of the inconsequential men – whether Andy's ridiculously uncharming suitor or Miranda's saintly supportive husband (Kenneth Branagh) – would have done marvels for *The Devil Wears Prada 2*.

Like Miranda would say, and still does – if you hear closely – "That's all."

## Punching below its weight

**GLORY**  
★★  
**DIRECTORS:** Karan Anshuman, Kanishk Varma  
**CAST:** Pulkit Samrat, Divyenndu, Suvinder Vicky, Ashutosh Rana, Sikander Kher, Sayani Gupta, Kashmira Pardeshi, Vishal Vashishtha  
**STREAMING ON:** Netflix  
**Shubhra Gupta**

SOMEWHERE IN Haryana, there are two brothers with a conflicted relationship with their father, circling around sweaty boxing rings, mustachioed *khap* leaders, 'honour killings': familiar elements in a seven-episode show called *Glory*, whose meaning is explained to us as Love, Sacrifice and Pain, in as many words.

That little jerk you get every time a character with a strong Haryanvi accent says 'glory' never leaves us: it's almost like the writers of the show want to convince themselves, as well as us, of the title they chose, because it never once sounds like a word that would come naturally to the key dramatis personae in Shaktigarh, the fictional town where *Glory* is set.

And that faint unease never goes away completely, even when we do come upon parts of the show which feel like they could have emerged from the ground, rather than a show constructed in a writer's room. And one following the dictum which all shows these days faithfully hew to: there shall be a fatality in the first ten minutes. Spoiler alert: it takes about nine minutes into the show to come up with not one, but two bodies.

Raghubir Singh (Suvinder Vicky) is a rough-hewn boxing coach whose hard-nosed training ways have driven away his sons Dev (Divyenndu) and Ravi (Pulkit Samrat): the two come together when trouble befalls their younger sister (Jannat Zubair Rahmani) back home, and find themselves at the short end of the stick when it comes to complicit cops, rival boxing club satraps, maniacal baddies and *femme fatales* hiding in plain sight.

The best parts are wrapped around, no surprises here, Suvinder Vicky as a well-respected boxing coach, whose driving ambition for Olympic glory puts into motion the events that kick-start the



violence, which runs as a constant streak, some of it earned (two boxers pummelling each other to bloody bits in a ring is a natural outcome of the sport), and some of it completely out of the left flank, gratuitously inserted just to jolt the viewers periodically: grinning goons, dressed in a black jackets, shooting people at close range, cranes dropping heavy stone slabs on humans, splitting them in two. Animals aren't spared either.

Some of the boxing portions are well-executed too, with an ill-tempered Malayali coach butting in whenever the script finds time for him. And it's never a pain to watch Divyenndu mooch about, gripping about his daddy issues; Pulkit too gets to drop his pretty boy image and throw his fists about satisfactorily during the bouts.

But every time the plot veers towards something we can wrap our heads around, the writers have off and start throwing stuff at us – an investigative journalist (Sayani Gupta) asking uncomfortable questions is an eye-roll (it's not the actor's fault, but a female reporter floating about in this insouciant fashion in a Haryana town over-run by bristling machismo?); a *khap* leader (Yashpal Sharma, one of the few people in the show who can actually rock a perfect accent) whose love for his star buffalo coming off as a superfluous add-on; a rival boxing ring owner (Ashutosh Rana) being made to alternately crow and glower; and Sikandar Kher strutting about in dark mines blowing heads off: you crack a smile at his apt name, Kookie Yadav, but what exactly is he doing in this show?

How to add more women in this all-male show? Answer: bung in a good-looking creature (Kashmira Pardeshi) whose blatant come-hither airs are matched by the obliviousness of her husband (Vishal Vashishtha), a rare cop who wants to do the right thing. Add a girl whose romance with a talented boxer comes in the cross-hairs of those who keep a sharp eye on such things. Closeted homosexuals pop up too. As do human trafficking rings, and gangs running prostitution rackets. Phew.



## Where's the Spark?

**Shubhra Gupta**

IF GOOD intentions were to be the bedrock of all good love-stories, *Ek Din* would have scaled the peak. Movie romances are designed to make us moon and sigh, because they give us a pair of lovers who will wither and die if they do not end up together.

Just on that single metric, *Ek Din*, a remake of Thai film *One Day*, struggles to score, because neither Dino (Junaid Khan) nor Meera (Sai Pallavi) look as if they will perish if they part: it's more like they will find a prosaic proverb for it, and go their separate ways.

Dinesh Kumar Srivastava aka Dino has a

**EK DIN**  
★★  
**DIRECTOR:** Sunil Pandey  
**CAST:** Sai Pallavi, Junaid Khan, Kunal Kapoor, Kevin Dave, Pragati Mishra

solo superpower. He is the self-confessed ultimate invisible man, beaver away at the IT department at a faceless Noida corporation. It's the kind of company where the boss (Kunal Kapoor, in an extended cameo) is busy two-timing his wife, while getting it on with a pretty co-worker, carrying on the dalliance when he carts his excited staff to an offsite in picture-perfect Japan.

Japan? Yes, indeedy, that very faraway country, decided upon just because Meera loves all things Japanese and knows all kinds of dinky details about it, working off a wish-list which has tourist-friendly snow festivals and cute Snow Miku dolls, making for a change from the frowny Labubu ones.

## By the Sword

**Shubhra Gupta**

THESE DAYS, the disclaimer becomes more telling than the movie itself. Raja Shivaji, directed by Riteish Deshmukh, with himself playing the titular character, is neither a documentary nor a history lesson, we are told: which basically is a warning that what is about to unfold is going to be lore, myth and current beliefs, all rolled into one.

For all that, Deshmukh manages to create a big screen experience firmly in the ultra-colourful *Amar Chitra Katha* aesthetic: those with long memories may be swiftly taken back to the impressive figure of the Maratha warrior astride his horse, brandishing a sword, fighting off hordes of Mughal invaders.

The film makes no attempt to sully its black-and-white universe with any moral complexities: Marathas good, Mughals, and others of their ilk – Nizamshahi and Adilshahi – terrible, and there endeth the story. The child marriage, shown between a young Shivaji and a younger Sai, is turned into a cutesy strand; the constant switching of loyalties between the Hindu rulers of the time is glossed over, and the

idea of *swaraj*, which came much later, becomes the rallying cry of Shivaji, as it did in the 2025 *Chhaava*.

But once you know the tone the film is going for, all you are interested in is whether it will hold your attention for its duration. To that end, Deshmukh spends 3.15 hours filling his canvas with the undulating landscapes of Ahmednagar, Bijapur, Pune and other Deccan areas, overrun by the several warring principalities. An unending stream of bristling battles, flayed limbs, bloody bodies ensues, to the point where you are left numb: how many arms and legs can you watch being severed, and heads cleaved off torsos? About the only thing that breaks the array is a smartly choreographed battle scene inside a fort.

The first half, complete with a childhood backstory, stays fairly fast-paced, keeping in mind short audience attention spans. Shah Jahan has dispatched Aurangzeb (Fardeen Khan) to manage the internecine Dakkhani warfare, himself staying put in faraway North: Mughal armies are rampaging through the countryside, ravaging homes and desecrating temples. Elephants fight each other, allowing for lots of CGI, not very cleverly hidden, adding to the



**RAJA SHIVAJI**  
★★★★  
**DIRECTOR:** Riteish Deshmukh  
**CAST:** Riteish Deshmukh, Sanjay Dutt, Abhishek Bachchan

comic-book effect.

Perfect time for our hero to rise to the occasion, and set about consolidating the scattered Maratha rulers, under the *bhagwa dhwaj*, with the rousing cry of *Har Har Mahadev*. Deshmukh plays the role with sincerity, carrying the weight of a figure deeply revered through Maharashtra, all the while depending upon his ensemble to carry the

story forward in the infrequent sequences when he's not striding across the screen. Or putting his *wagh nakh* to good use, which is the only time the too-stretched, repetitive second half, springs to life.

As to that, let me put the record straight: the reveal of the storied Shivaji weapon during the climactic tussle between him and the treacherous Afzal Khan (Sanjay Dutt) is perfectly timed, and the controversy – did he or did he not show his hand before he had to – is needless. It has to be said that some of the most enjoyable bits of the film belong to Dutt in full *Khalnayak* mode, who chews the scenery, ratcheting his smirking villainy with every scene. Amole Gupte, playing an indolent Mughal ruler, more in love with his pigeons than his scheming, heavily-kohl-eyed begum (Vidya Balan, terrific) is quite a lot of fun, too.

Abhishek Bachchan leaves a mark as Sambhaji Raju, Shivaji's older brother, as does Sachin Khedekar as Shahaji Bhonsle, the boys' father, who is shown initially as someone who accepts Mughal rule, but then breaks free. Bhagyashree as the boys' mother adds to the softer portions of the film, showing a steeliness only when she commands her son to get her the 'head' of her elder son's killer. And the entire movie is nearly stolen by Salman Khan in a tiny cameo: quite appropriately, *bhai* becomes *bhau* in the credits.

### •STREAMING WATCHLIST



#### The House of the Spirits

PRIME VIDEO

BASED ON the 1982 novel by Isabel Allende, *The House of the Spirits* is an eight-episode family saga that follows the lives of revolutionary and resilient women – Clara, the grandmother; Blanca, the daughter; and Alba, the granddaughter – over half a century in a remote, conservative South American country shaped by disaster, class conflict, and magic. The series is directed by Francisca Alegria and Andrés Wood. The first episode is available for streaming and a new episode will be added on Wednesday.



#### Sapne vs Everyone Season 2

PRIME VIDEO

SET AGAINST the backdrop of the two different worlds of Mumbai's film industry and real estate, picks up from last season's cliffhanger. *Sapne vs Everyone* Season 2 follows Prashant. He continues to struggle to establish himself as an actor in the highly competitive world of entertainment, even as Jimmy, known as the 'Sales God,' sinks deeper into the world of real estate and politics. Written and directed by Ambrish Verma and produced by The Viral Fever, the five-episode series returns with Verma, Paramvir Singh Cheema, and Vijayant Kohli in lead roles.



#### Swapped

NETFLIX

MICHAEL B JORDAN and Juno Temple star in the animated film *Swapped*, a Freaky Friday-like adventure set in the wild. Deep inside the animal kingdom, where a tiny woodland creature (voiced by Jordan) and a regal bird (voiced by Temple) find themselves in a body swap mishap. The two sworn enemies are forced to walk in each other's feathers and fur as they embark on a wild journey together. Directed by Nathan Greno (*Tangled*), the story is scripted by John Whittington (*The Lego Batman Movie*).



#### Under the Stars

LIONSGATE PLAY

IAN IS a romance novelist who has run out of romance. Creatively blocked and stuck in a relationship that has stopped working, his life is upended when he discovers his girlfriend has been unfaithful. On the advice of his aunt, he trades London for the sunlit countryside of Puglia, Italy, checking into an olive farm run by a man named Giacomo and his daughter Arianna. What begins as a search for inspiration becomes something far more personal. The film is directed by Michelle Danner.

ALAKA SAHANI

# The Big Picture

SATURDAY, MAY 2, 2026

## AFTER THE FIRE, AN EMPTY SKY



An explosion ahead of a temple festival killed 16 people in a Kerala village. Among them, Satheesh, a 46-year-old who was the licensed operator of the unit that stored and assembled the fireworks. NIDHEESH M K on how tradition and modernity, local economics and regulatory loops came together to form a combustible mix



THE FIRST thing you notice walking into the house that Satheesh P built is what he didn't. The bedroom is finished. So are the living room and verandah. The kitchen, halfway done. Beyond that are cement walls left bare, floors that have never been tiled, another bedroom that exists only as an outline. He had been working on the house for years.

On the wall of the bedroom that he did finish is a pencil scrawl, "Soregam". A child's spelling for "swargam" or heaven, written with the kind of confidence children have before they begin to doubt themselves. She had written it on the wall her father's shirts hang. Her father, Satheesh, died after fireworks assembled in a field for a temple festival exploded in Mundathicode village, Thrissur, on April 21, killing him and 15 others.

The cause of the explosion, one of the deadliest fireworks tragedies in the state's history, is still under investigation.

Every April, on a single night in the central Kerala town of Thrissur, two rival temple committees stage what is widely considered India's loudest, most extravagant fireworks display, the climax of a centuries-old festival called Pooram, held on the grounds of the Vadakkunnathan temple, around 15 km from Mundathicode. The competition between the two committees, Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu, is the engine of the spectacle.

Each side hires its own contractor to prepare the show, and the contest is settled in the sky and on the ground at dawn, judged by a crowd of lakhs and litigated for months afterwards on television and in WhatsApp groups. The fireworks have to be loud enough to make your ribs vibrate, the sky-flowers wide enough to remember. Satheesh, 46, was Thiruvambady's licensed contractor. The standard he was working towards has its own phrase in Thrissur: *garbham kalakki*, crackers loud enough to make a pregnant woman's womb convulse.

### The gentle man who played with fire

Satheesh, by every account, was a gentle man. The kind, his wife said, who could not hurt a fly. He drank a bit at night, which in these parts is not more unusual than drinking tea. When he was preparing a show, he took a *vrutham*, the oath men take before doing something religious — no alcohol, right conduct. "For him, it was like a *puja*," said a veteran Thrissur fireworks contractor who knew him, requesting that he not be named.

Joshiy lived next to the unused rice field that doubled as Satheesh's makeshift manufacturing unit in Mundathicode. He heard what felt like an earthquake, knew what it was, and ran. Sangeeth, a JCB operator working in a neighbouring field, waited for the secondary explosions to subside, then drove his machine towards the smoke and used the bucket to carve a path wide enough for fire engines to follow.

By then, Joshiy found Satheesh. "When I tried to lift him....," he said, and could not continue. His hands had touched what fire had done to the body and had no words to describe it. Joshiy and the others drove the living, or the barely living, to hospital. One man was conscious enough to beg for his life. By the time the rescue teams arrived, there was nothing left to do but walk the ground. A hand here, a torso somewhere else.

Satheesh's house, within a few kilometres of the field, felt the tremor. Praji, his wife, was at home resting after a long day of cooking for the workers. The unit's economics were tight, and the meals came from the contractor's family kitchen, prepared by the women, who often worked till midnight or 1 am. "I ran out and saw the smoke in the sky," she said. "I knew immediately it was all over."

The family rushed to Thrissur Medical College, where they were briefed by Dr Padmakumar. He told them that Satheesh had been brought in with burns that had affected even his internal organs. His right knee was mangled, his left leg fractured. Praji was advised not to see her husband in the condition he was in. He died four days later.

Praji, who works as a helper at a ration shop in the neighbourhood, spent most of this week lying on a yellow mat against the living room wall, a brass lamp lit beside her, two plastic bottles of lamp oil at her feet. Tradition asks this of the woman of the house in the five days before *sanchayanam*, the post-funeral gathering of the ashes.

The photograph of Satheesh's father hangs high on the living room wall, garlanded, decorated with a small electric flame. Kamalakshi, Satheesh's mother, silver-haired and in a white sari, sat in a corner. Asked how long the trade had been running in the family, the mother looked up at the photo and said, "a long time". Satheesh's father had done this work, his grandfather too. The elderly woman and her brother Subramaniyan worked it out together and arrived at 45 years as a number that felt about right.

The family had lost other members to the trade. Subramaniyan recounted how an uncle had once gone to inspect an *amittu*, a sky-flower charge, that had failed to explode. It went off just then and took his head. Another, weighed down by debt, was said to have laid himself down on top of one as it went off.

When guests arrive, Praji sits up. She is, if anything, more composed than the men in the room, who keep returning to the question of tradition and money in a way that suggests they cannot stress the first enough or quite believe how little the second amounts to.

Following the Puttingal disaster of April 2016, in which an unauthorised display at a temple in Kollam killed more than a hundred people, the state cracked down on contractors across Kerala. Satheesh lost his licence and was out of work for eight years.

"Even when he was jobless, he didn't really go for anything else," Praji said. He got the licence back only three years ago, and was making steady progress to finish the house.

Festival contractors like Satheesh are paid only at the end, the

fireworks veteran in Thrissur said, unlike a band set or a drama troupe, who take most of their money upfront. To fund each show, Satheesh borrowed. Praji pointed at the gold chain around her neck and the ring on her finger: "except these, everything else is pawned."

### Who builds the spectacle, and for whom

V S Sunilkumar, CPI(M) leader and a former minister from Thrissur who has spent years close to Pooram and the men who build it, said, "These contractors are not engineers, they are artists. They work from knowledge handed down. Some of it, they say, is written on palm leaf manuscripts."

The grammar of these displays is very



(From top) A photograph of Satheesh on his brother-in-law's phone; Satheesh's wife Praji in mourning; the field in Mundathicode where fireworks assembled in a field exploded on April 21. NIDHEESH M K

localised. Those from Thrissur, for instance, like crackers that sound loud rather than burn bright. "*Kuzhi minnal, dynamite, gund*, these are all items unique to this place. They are not made in Sivakasi," he said, referring to the Tamil Nadu town that supplies most of India's fireworks. While much of it is made in Mundathicode, some are assembled from raw material brought in from Sivakasi, with workers cutting, filling and fusing the components by hand.

The *amittu*, the sky-flower, has to be perfected at the manufacturing stage itself, the design arranged on the ground in the exact way it should bloom in the sky.

Sunilkumar said Satheesh was paid in a

different currency: "*Janakoottam nalathu parayanam. Committee kaar nalathu parayanam.*" The crowd should say it was good. The committee should say it was good. That is what matters.

Except, when things go wrong, people like Satheesh end up paying.

Migrant workers from poorer northern states, lumped together locally as "Bengalis", are not hired for the work in Mundathicode. Subramaniyan said the work is too technical, too wrapped in local ritual to feel like menial labour.

The wages are around Rs 800 a day, lower than what construction work pays, the risk higher by any measure. Yet, getting hired is harder than the wages would suggest, with entry by recommendation from someone already inside.

So who qualifies? Elderly women, mostly, who would otherwise go for NREGA work and find this slightly better paid and seasonal enough to fit around the rest of their lives. They sit and roll wicks and stick stickers the way an earlier generation rolled beedis, exchanging gossip, eating the meals provided. For elderly women, this is a means of livelihood. For those much older, it is their way of life.

And then there are the young men. To understand why they show up, it helps to understand where they show up from. Mundathicode is less than a hundred kilometres from Kochi by road, but they could be different countries.

Kochi is where the state's aspirations have settled. Drugs are seized in quantities measured by mothership size; billionaires fly in by helicopter; traffic chokes roads because there is always money to spend.

Mundathicode is where Malayalam cinema can still credibly stage the older Kerala of rice fields and cow-dung cakes drying against compound walls. Eating at a restaurant is a labourer's habit; everyone else cooks at home. Many of the men who used

to live here are now in the Gulf, or coming back, or going back again.

This is not, in the standard Indian sense, terrible poverty. There is a school and a hospital. But the wealth has come unevenly, and Mundathicode sits at the uneven end. Kochi is two hours away by bus, close enough for the village to know exactly what it does not have. The same phone that plays Pooram footage back to the village that built the fireworks also pipes in reels of Kochi's nightlife.

For most of the year, the village watches the city. On Pooram night, the city watches back. Pooram is the one thing the deep interior produces that Kochi stops to look at. The men who build it — the contractor, the crew in his shed — are for those hours inside the only spectacle the city cannot stage for itself.

"Rajesh, Vishnu, Manikandan, Hari," Sunilkumar said, listing the dead. "They were not coming for the money." One was the makeup man for a leading actress, another was a councillor's brother. Asked why they came to work in Mundathicode, Sunilkumar recalled Giri, the councillor, saying, "*povathirikan patila chetta*". Couldn't stay away.

Sunilkumar said the architecture of Thrissur's inner life rests on a handful of obsessions: *aana kambam, padakkam, puli kall, pooram* (elephants, fireworks, dancers dressed as tigers, the festival itself). The young men have grown up watching the festival. Now, WhatsApp statuses and reels keeping the noise going all year. Somewhere along the way, the watching became wanting, and the wanting became showing up. Some end up in fields like the one in Mundathicode.

### Spectacle vanishes, the festival moves on

In the days after the explosion, the spectacle they had given their lives to was being negotiated behind closed doors. The festival went ahead on April 26. It has been held since the 18th century and 15 deaths did not change that, except in scale. The Kudamatam, the competitive umbrella display between the two temple sides, was reduced from an hour to 15 minutes.

The fireworks were a more complicated matter. Each temple trust holds a licensed magazine permitting 2,000 kilograms of explosives per display. Investigators say Satheesh's unit had been storing well above permitted quantities when it exploded. The day after, the Paramekkavu operator was issued a stop memo for the same reason. So there were no fireworks to display. A crowd of lakhs still came, and assembled in front of an empty sky.

That over-storage is the regulatory fact at the heart of the case, and it complicates the portrait. The same man Praji described as gentle, the man the veteran said did his job as if it were "*puja*", was also a man working past the limits printed on his licence. The investigation will assign blame in its own time. What is already clear is that the ceiling was set at one number and the show being asked of him required another.

There were plans, at some point, to bring the fireworks industry under a central manufacturing facility, the kind of institutional support that might have changed what happened in Mundathicode.

Satheesh's uncle Subramaniyan, in the meantime, has been receiving calls from banks to clear his debts totalling, as far as he knew, Rs 8 lakh. The state has announced Rs 14 lakh in compensation. Pledges have come from public figures based in Thrissur. None of it has reached the house yet.

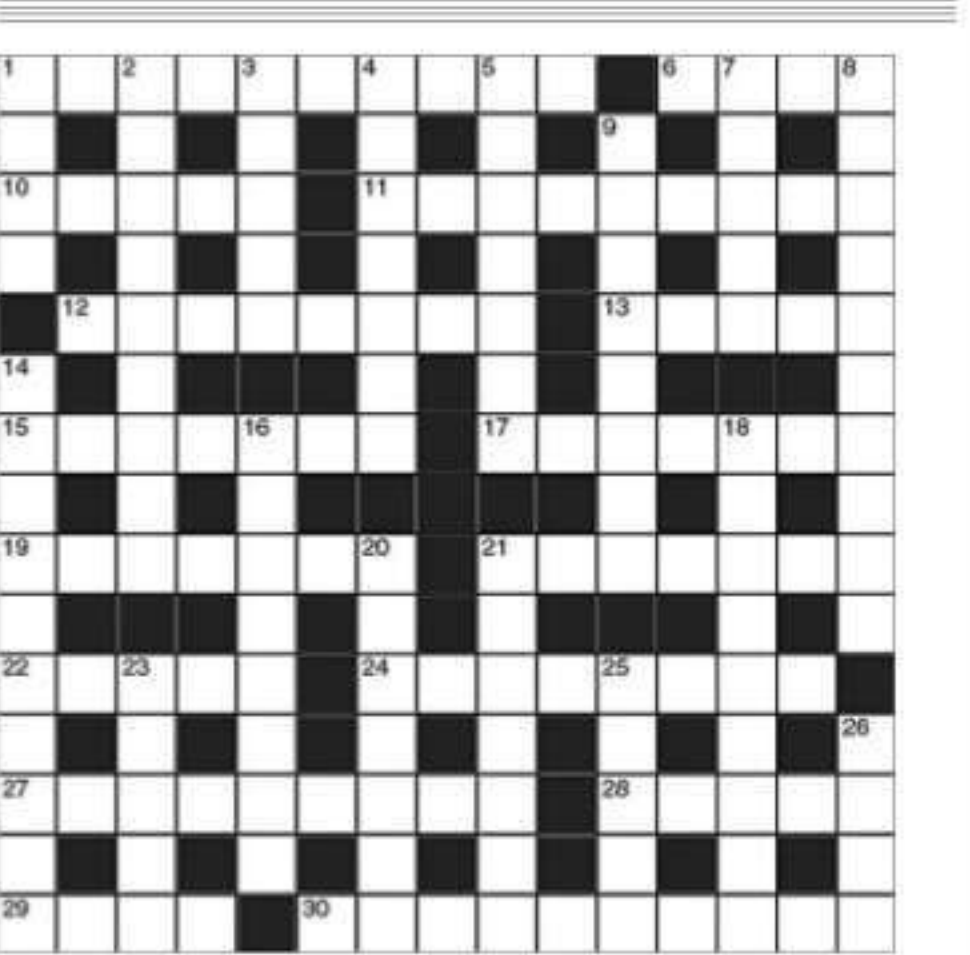
Praji plans to get back to her work at the ration shop soon. She

does not know whether the temple committee had a formal contract with her late husband, or what it entailed. The family grew apologetic when the subject of compensation was raised, almost embarrassed, noting that the temple, after all, did not get the show it had been promised.

What the family has instead is the validation. Subramaniyan said he counted 35 garlands on his nephew's body when it was displayed at the village school. Ministers, MLAs, the who's who of the town came, in queues that lasted three hours. The mother and the uncle spoke about it with something like pride, the way you would speak about a son who had finally been recognised in the field he had given his life to. The recognition was the only part of the bargain that arrived on time.



CROSSWORD



**ACROSS**  
1 New hotel suite in outline (10)  
6 In it one may keep Spanish red wine (4)  
10 Naturally they raise awkward points (5)  
11 Doubly a matter of chance (9)  
12 Standard weapon in a manner of speaking (8)  
13 An air of simplicity (5)  
15 Further distribution of various university series (7)  
17 Yelled out in the hangar (7)  
19 Increase the rate (5,2)  
21 Church Times is ordered by the scientist (7)  
22 State electricity? (5)  
24 Bill for example that is unusually desirable (8)  
27 I'm in a race — got! (9)  
28 The French hold strike for beast of burden (5)  
29 The choice offers a sound return (4)  
30 Rare design for the Guards (10)

**DOWN**  
1 Boot back (4)  
2 Though a pound short victualler may be making a profit (9)  
3 Window giving a different view of the Loire (5)  
4 There are two points he can possibly raise (7)  
5 Showing off a chest without a lid (7)  
7 Precise instruction to enforce payment (5)  
8 Current appointment changes at midnight (6,4)  
9 It provides a base for road makers (4,4)  
14 Sign of a professional man ready to do business (5,5)  
16 Team with genuine line-up of stars (8)  
18 Test match? Yes and no (5,4)  
20 PM has about a thousand in support (7)  
21 Maybe nigh on a hundred can be worn in the hair (7)  
23 Sound way to consider carefully (5)  
25 I'd acted as a guide yet didn't do any work (5)  
26 Intervals quietly employed in empty talk (4)

SOLUTIONS CROSSWORD 5977 ACROSS: 1 Receipt, 5 Climb, 8 Container, 9 Lid, 10 Dais, 12 Antelope, 14 Bridal, 15 Permit, 17 Free hand, 18 Onus, 21 Eta, 22 Unanimity, 24 Style, 25 Tar baby DOWN: 1 Raced, 2 Can, 3 Ivan, 4 Tenant, 5 Cornered, 6 Isle of man, 7 Bad debt, 11 Itinerary, 13 Bath cube, 14 Buffers, 16 Infant, 19 Slyly, 20 Bier, 23 Ida

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.

If people never did silly things, nothing \_\_\_\_ would ever get done.  
- Ludwig Wittgenstein (11)

LTEEI

ACOLLN

GHITT

DIISGN

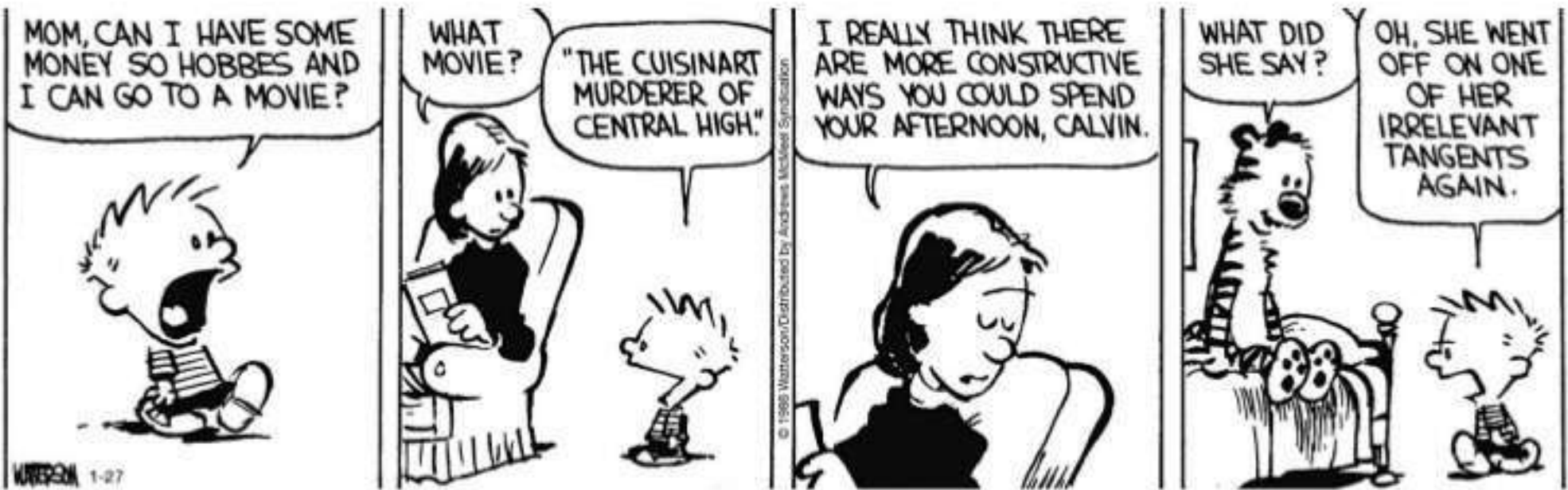
SOLUTIONS: Eltre, Tighr, Clonal, Stiding

done. - Ludwig Wittgenstein

OVER THE HEDGE



CALVIN & HOBBS



MARVIN



DIFFICULTY LEVEL  
4s 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.

1

8

5

3

7

4

8

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3

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3

9

1

9

4

8

6

8

4

3

2

SOLUTION SUDOKU 6305

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(See Section 82 Cr. P.C./84 BNSS)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that the accused **Gaurav @Nikki** S/o Lt. Kishor Kumar R/o H. No. C-51, Gokulpuri, Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in **FIR No. 181/2024 U/s 25 ARMS ACT, PS Gokal Puri, Delhi** and it has been returned to warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said accused **Gaurav @Nikki** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Gaurav @ Nikki** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that **Gaurav @Nikki** in **FIR No. 181/2024 U/s 25 ARMS ACT, PS Gokal Puri, Delhi** is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **05.06.2026**.

By order  
**Ms Shruti Saraswat**  
Judicial Magistrate First Class-03  
North East  
Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

DP/5101/NE/2026

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 84 Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita-2023

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Arjun, S/o Om Prakash, R/o B-6/113, Nand Nagri, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 1021/2023, U/s 380/457/411 IPC, P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said **Arjun** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said **Arjun** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Arjun** accused of **FIR No. 1021/2023, U/s 380/457/411 IPC, P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi** is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **08.06.2026**.

By Order - Ms. Deepakshi Rana  
Judicial Magistrate First Class-03  
Shahdara District, Room No. 19, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

DP/5581/NE/2026

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(See Section 82 Cr. P.C./84 BNSS)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that the accused **Anurag@Annu** S/o Om Prakash R/o H. No. N-17/F/2/25 JJ Colony, Wazirpur Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in **E-FIR No. 022616/2023 U/s 379/411 IPC, PS Sarai Rohilla, Delhi** and it has been returned to warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said accused **Anurag@Annu** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Anurag@ Annu** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that **Anurag@Annu** in **E-FIR No. 022616/2023 U/s 379/411 IPC, PS Sarai Rohilla, Delhi** is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **01.06.2026**.

By order  
**Sh. Ranget Ghirra LD**  
Metropolitan Magistrate-04  
Room No. 37  
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

DP/5748/N/2026

ROYAL STARS

ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 20): Today you'll find it easy to be generous to others. Choose today for financial negotiations, especially related to real estate and family matters. You'll be laughing all the way to the bank. Tonight: Check your finances.

TAURUS (APR 21 - MAY 21): This is a wonderful day! You have to go more than halfway when dealing with others. People want to help each other and share good times. Tonight: Cooperate and listen.

GEMINI (MAY 22 - JUNE 21): Relations with co-workers will flow smoothly today. In fact, listen to conversations around you, because you can boost your income or your assets today. Tonight: Get organised.

CANCER (JUNE 22 - JULY 23): Accept invitations to chat. This is a delightful day to enjoy everyone's company. Sports events, the theater, the arts and playful activities with children will delight you. It's also a wonderful day for a romantic date. Live it up! Tonight: Socialise.

LEO (JULY 24 - AUG 23): Stock the fridge and entertain at home today. People feel warm and friendly. Conversations might turn to metaphysical issues or charitable activities. Tonight: Relax at home.

VIRGO (AUG 24 - SEP 23): Today you feel warmhearted toward others, which is why you're keen to talk to people and share your ideas. Bosses and people in authority find you attractive. Your interest in travel as well as foreign countries is strong. You might seek to help someone. Tonight: Interesting discussions.

LIBRA (SEP 24 - OCT 23): Financial discussions will favour you today. Trust your money making ideas. Don't hesitate to follow up on your plans and listen to the advice of others, which might benefit you. Travel if you can. Tonight: Check your money.

SCORPIO (OCT 24 - NOV 23): Today you will create a warm, benevolent and generous situation around you. They will also be generous to you! Travel plans look exciting. Include partners, spouses and close friends in your day. Tonight: You're in charge.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 24 - DEC 22): Today you're keen to work hard and accomplish something. You might be more involved than usual with a pet. Some will explore ways to get healthier. Feelings of compassion for those who are less fortunate will be strong. Tonight: Enjoy privacy.

CAPRICORN (DEC 23 - JAN 20): It's a popular day! Get out and chat with others. The arts, the entertainment world, sports events and fun activities with kids will delight you. People are friendly and supportive to each other today. This is bighearted day! Tonight: Warm friendships.

AQUARIUS (JAN 21 - FEB 19): You're high-vis today, which means people notice you more than usual. Beware that some will know private details about your personal life. Work-related travel might be necessary for some of you. Tonight: You're admired.

PISCES (FEB 20 - MAR 20): Shake things up a little and do something different. Travel if possible. Talk to people from different backgrounds. Look for ways to be helpful, because people are generous today — and so are you. A short trip will please you. Tonight: Explore and learn.

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(SEE SECTION 82(2) (ii) Cr.P.C.)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person(s) **Pradeep Kumar Sharma S/o Sh. Shiya Ram Sharma R/o H. No. S-94, Sunder Block, Shakarpur East, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 22855/2021, PS Mandawali, Delhi** and it has been returned to a Warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused person(s) **Pradeep Kumar Sharma** can not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused person(s) **Pradeep Kumar Sharma** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused person(s) **Pradeep Kumar Sharma** of case **FIR No. 22855/2021, PS Mandawali, Delhi** is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before dated **05.06.2026**.

By Order  
**Sachin Kumar**  
Judicial Magistrate First Class-03  
Room No. 16  
Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

DP/5598/ED/2026  
(Court Matter)

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(See Section 82 Cr. P.C./84 BNSS)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that the accused **Mohsin S/o Hemat Jaan R/o H. No. F-2-119-120, 2nd Floor, Sunder Nagri** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in **FIR No. 752/2014 U/s 324/341/34 IPC, PS Nand Nagri, Delhi** and it has been returned to warrant of arrest there upon issued that the said accused **Mohsin** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Mohsin** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that **Mohsin** in **FIR No. 752/2014 U/s 324/341/34 IPC, PS Nand Nagri, Delhi** is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **08.06.2026**.

By order  
**Ms. Deepakshi Rana**  
Judicial Magistrate First Class  
Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

DP/5588/NE/2026

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr.P.C.

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person, namely, **Sh. Sunder Khan, S/o Ashok R/o WZ-22, Village Jawla Heri, Paschim Vihar, Delhi-63, Also At: Sanjay Gandhi Hospital, Emergency OT, Mangolpuri, Delhi-86,** (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in **CC NI Act: 12067/16, U/s: 138 NI Act**, registered at **P.S.: Paschim Vihar East, Delhi**, and the warrant has been returned writing upon that the said accused person, **Sh. Sunder Khan**, cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused person, **Sh. Sunder Khan**, has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said, accused person, **Sh. Sunder Khan, FIR No.: CC NI Act: 12067/16, U/s: 138 NI Act**, registered at **P.S.: Paschim Vihar East, Delhi**, is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **02.06.2026**.

By Order  
**Ms. Poonam Singh,**  
Judicial Magistrate First Class (NI-Act)-04,  
West District, Room No. 04 (ANNEX-I),  
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

DP/5712/OD/2026  
(Court Matter)

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF A PERSON ACCUSED

See Section 82 Cr. P.C. / 84 BNSS

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person **Neeraj Kumar S/o Ratan Lal R/o H. No. 352, Phase-I, Manglapuri, Palam, New Delhi** has Committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 263/2025 U/s 115(1)/118(1)/126(2)/3(5) BNS & 6 PCOSO Act, P.S. Palam Village, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused **Neeraj Kumar** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Neeraj Kumar** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Neeraj Kumar** of case **FIR No. 263/2025 U/s 115(1)/118(1)/126(2)/3(5) BNS & 6 PCOSO Act, P.S. Palam Village, Delhi** is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **06.06.2026**.

By Order  
**Sh. Santosh Kumar Singh**  
Additional Session Judge (FTSC) (PCOSO)-02  
Court No. 510, Fifth Floor  
Dwarka Courts, Delhi

DP/5624/SW/2026 (Court Matter)

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 84 Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused **Saleem @ Gulbahar, S/o: Shakil, R/o: Abrar Ka Makan, Gali No. 3, near Lal Mandir, Harsh Vihar, Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 803/2021 U/s 356/379/411 IPC, P.S.: Nand Nagri, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused **Saleem @ Gulbahar** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Saleem @ Gulbahar** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said **Saleem @ Gulbahar** accused of offence in case **FIR No. 803/2021 U/s 356/379/411 IPC, P.S.: Nand Nagri, Delhi** and is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **05.06.2026**.

By Order  
**Ms. Deepakshi Rana**  
Judicial Magistrate First Class-03  
Shahdara, Room No. 19  
Karkardooma Court, Delhi

DP/5591/NE/2026  
(Court Matter)

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(SEE SECTION 82 Cr.P.C.)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person(s) **Nagraj S/o Mekulal R/o H. No. N-82/196, Cigerate Walla Bagh, Pumbari Road, Model Town-2, New Delhi** has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in Case **FIR No. 28/2019, U/s 457/380/411/201/34 IPC, PS Dwarka North, New Delhi** and it has been returned to a Warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said accused person(s) **Nagraj** can not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused person(s) **Nagraj** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused person(s) **Nagraj** of Case **FIR No. 28/2019, U/s 457/380/411/201/34 IPC, PS Dwarka North, New Delhi** is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before dated **05.06.2026**.

By Order  
**Rahul Katare**  
Judicial Magistrate First Class-06  
Court No. 514  
Dwarka Court, New Delhi

DP/5465/DW/2026  
(Court Matter)

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 82 Cr.PC./ 84 BNSS

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person, namely, **Naman, S/o Bai Kishan R/o G-125, Mohan Baba Nagar, Badarpur, Delhi,** (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in **FIR No.: 205/2025, U/s: 304(2)/317(2)/3(5) Bhartiya Nyay Sanhita**, registered at **P.S.: Okhla Industrial Area, Delhi**, and the warrant has been returned writing upon that the said accused person, **Naman**, cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused person, **Naman**, has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said, accused person, **Naman, FIR No.: 205/2025, U/s: 304(2)/317(2)/3(5) Bhartiya Nyay Sanhita**, registered at **P.S.: Okhla Industrial Area, Delhi**, is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **04.06.2026**.

By Order  
**Ms. Akansha Gautam**  
Judicial Magistrate First Class-02  
Room No. 513, South East District,  
Saket Courts, Delhi

DP/5696/SE/2026  
(Court Matter)

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

See Section 84 Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita-2023

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused 1) **Saddam Hussain, S/o Salauddin, 2) Anwar Hussain, S/o Saludin, R/o E-5/53, Nand Nagri, Delhi** has committed (or are suspected to have committed) the offence in case **FIR No. 80/2017, U/s 380/411/34 IPC, P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi** and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued that the said 1) **Saddam Hussain, 2) Anwar Hussain** cannot be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said 1) **Saddam Hussain, 2) Anwar Hussain** has absconded (or are concealing themselves to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said 1) **Saddam Hussain, 2) Anwar Hussain** accused of **FIR No. 80/2017, U/s 380/411/34 IPC, P.S. Nand Nagri, Delhi** is required to appear before this Court to answer the said complaint on or before **03.06.2026**.

By Order - Ms. Deepakshi Rana  
Judicial Magistrate First Class-03  
Shahdara District, Room No. 19, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

DP/5709/NE/2026

DC BOUNCE BACK

# Rahul, Nissanka star as Delhi chase down Rajasthan’s 225

Opening duo’s 110-run stand powers DC to seven-wicket win over RR, reviving their fading campaign

**SYNOPSIS:** Royal Rahul and rumbling Nissanka crash Parag’s redemption party.

**Sandip G**  
*New Delhi, May 1*

TWO BIZARRE tailspins later, once posting 264 and then crumbling to 75, Delhi Capitals resuscitated their drowning season with an emphatic victory over Rajasthan Royals. Openers KL Rahul and Pathum Nissanka, with their 110-run stand, were the chief architects. The finishing act of Ashutosh Sharma and Tristan Stubbs, chomping on the toothless Royals’ bowling attack, for 49 runs from 24 balls, was equally significant in their successful pursuit of 226.

Royal Rahul

The biggest gift of Rahul is his biggest curse too. His game is risk-free, percentage-shots reliant, dictated by orthodoxies; his game is largely muscle-free. So much so that he is horribly misconstrued as an oddball opener in the era of unabashed hitters. But this season, he has been rollicking at a strike rate of 185.83. Add the average of 54.12, and he becomes a fearsome proposition.

Resolved by failures and steeled by experience, he stripped the chase to its nuts and bolts and devised the ideal method. When his partner Parthum Nissanka went berserk, he calmly played the supporting role (though when gift-beckoned, he took full toll). When Nissanka got tired, Rahul punched to keep the moment alive. When the Sri Lankan exited, he took the chase by the scruff of its neck, ensuring that his side, prone to implosions, didn’t freeze.

Any knock of Rahul is replete with splendrous stroke-play, those that don’t look out of place in any format. Like the pulled six of Jofra Archer in the third over,

or the on-the-rise, on-his-toes cover drive off Nande Burger. It’s a folly Royals’ seamers committed against both openers, as both are merciless square off the wicket. If seamers fail to dislodge him early in the piece, he makes teams pay with his expertise in demolishing spinners. So he did, thumping Bishnoi for three sixes and a four, in his 40-ball 75.

Rumbling Nissanka

Three scores of 40s and three low scores later, the IPL world smelled the frictionless daring of Nissanka, a throwback to Sri Lanka’s exuberant days. The distant days when their cricketing coffers brimmed with stroke-makers with a charming smile and a gleaming array of strokes. Blow by blow, he punctured the Royals’ hopes of topping the league. He filed the early portents. He swirled his rubbery wrists over an Archer scorcher into his legs over fine leg. It was an insouciant stroke that induced fear among Royals that 225 might not be defensible.

Archer skinned, he crushed him four a pair of sixes, he relished the hard length balls of left-arm seamer Burger, who he carved for a brace of sixes. By the fourth over, Capitals had already bristled to 49.

In the last ball of the sixth over, he swivel-pulled Brijesh Sharma for a four to complete a half-century, off his 23rd ball, taking the team score to 70. By the time he perished for 62 (33 balls), the chase was set up.

His ejection did spoil the moment. Rahul rampaged with Nitish Rana. When both floundered, Ashutosh and Stubbs steered them home.

Parag’s redemption

The world was falling apart for Riyan Parag. “The Rajasthan Royals captain was as much out of depth as out of touch, his discretion and judgement as cap-tain scrutinised, the off-fielders’ misdemeanours splashed across the social media walls, and his commitment and work ethic de-



KL Rahul made 75 from 40 balls and added 110 runs for the first wicket with Pathum Nissanka. ANI

● IPL table

| Teams | M  | W | L | PTS |
|-------|----|---|---|-----|
| PBKS  | 8  | 6 | 1 | 13  |
| RCB   | 9  | 6 | 3 | 12  |
| SRH   | 9  | 6 | 3 | 12  |
| RR    | 10 | 6 | 4 | 12  |
| GT    | 9  | 5 | 4 | 10  |
| DC    | 9  | 4 | 5 | 8   |
| CSK   | 8  | 3 | 5 | 6   |
| KKR   | 8  | 2 | 5 | 5   |
| MI    | 8  | 2 | 6 | 4   |
| LSG   | 8  | 2 | 6 | 4   |

M: MATCH; W: WIN; L: LOSS; PTS: POINTS;

**Any knock of Rahul is replete with splendrous stroke-play, those that don’t look out of place in any format.**

sprang back.

His side wobbling, with the hasty departures of Vaibhav Sooryavanshi and Yashasvi Jaiswal, Royals faced a familiar crisis. Five watchful dot balls later, he cuffed Mitchell Starc through deep midwicket for a four. The stroke changed his mood and form. The hands were going through the swing freely, the feet were moving precisely, and the eyes were judging the lengths sharply.

The awkwardly tall Kyle Jamieson, who had blasted Vaibhav’s stumps with a vicious yorker, bore the early brunt.

He was swung over deep mid-wicket, one of his staple

strokes. His whole set-up, the front-foot clearing up, facilitates an easy swing and imparts power off his body tilted for the big leg-sides swipes. So Jamieson went wide, and Parag creamed him over extra cover. The leg-side expeditions waited until Axar Patel came. He clobbered him for successive sixes, one through long-on and the other over mid-wicket.

He and Jurel, largely playing the support role, stitched up 102 runs in 59 balls.

Royals sustained the impetus through Parag and Ravindra Jadeja with a 53-run tango. But then both to the wits of Starc, ageing like fine wine. The Capitals seemed to stall the Royals’ march, but entered Donovan Ferreira, whose 14-ball 47 not out powered them to 225.

**BRIEF SCORES: RR 225/6** (Parag 90, Ferreira 47, Jurel 42; Starc 3/40) **lost to DC** 226/3 in 19.1 ovs (Rahul 75, Nissanka 62), Rana 33) by seven wickets.

# From spin-hitter to finisher: Dube struggles in an unfamiliar role

**Venkata Krishna B**  
*Chennai, May 1*

IN THIS season of the IPL, there has been a rather unfamiliar but regular sight when Chennai Super Kings (CSK) have put up the nets and started their batting drills. Shivam Dube, who reinvented his career since joining the franchise in 2022 as a spin-hitter and has gone on to replicate the role successfully with India in consecutive T20 World Cup triumphs, is now prepping up for the role of a finisher — one which he couldn’t master during his stints with Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Rajasthan Royals, but one he has done admirably well in India colours.

But in yellow, it has so far resulted in the *Aaru Saamy* disappearing from the scene this season, with just 6 sixes to show in 8 outings. The new role has meant a change in his training methods. These days, Dube doesn’t milk spinners in the nets. He gets down to facing the pacers, who throw different challenges.

That evolution in his batting meant Dube has been able to throw the match-ups to the bin, with opposition captains turning towards pacers no longer granted success. Spin or pace, the sixes kept coming. But this season, with MS Dhoni not around as a finisher, and their batting unit being top-heavy and lacking experience, they have put Dube back in a role that is out of his comfort zone.

In eight innings so far, Dube has batted at No 4 three thrice. Twice the top-order had taken up the majority of overs, and he was needed only to provide impetus. The other occasion came against Mumbai Indians – their opponents on Saturday – at the Wankhede, where his entry point was ideal.

With Sanju Samson holding the other end strong, and spinners operating, he was sent in at No 4 to take on Allah Ghazanfar. What one got to see was an uncharacteristic Dube, who just swung through the line without being anywhere close to the reach of the ball and saw the stumps shattered.

Brevis impact

The presence of Dewald Brevis, too, has played a role when it comes to CSK holding back Dube. It is a team that has way too many top-order batsmen. Having relied on Dube to provide the firepower in the middle-overs, this season that role has been passed onto Brevis, another batsman who has an incredible match-up against spin and provides more intent than Dube and has an all-round game. The issue with Brevis is that his stays have all been brief, with the 29 deliveries he faced against Kolkata Knight Riders being the most he has faced.

It followed a session here at Chepaunk before the painstaking 22 off 17 against Gujarat Titans at No 6. It was an innings where Dube was dropped thrice. On the eve of the game, his struggles showed no end. At times, he appeared to try way



CSK’s Dewald Brevis (L) and Shivam Dube during a training session at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Friday. PTI

**These days, Dube doesn’t milk spinners in the nets. He gets down to facing the pacers, who throw different challenges.**

too hard to beat the rut, but seldom succeeded. For a team that is struggling to keep pace with the crowded pack in the middle, Dube’s form is turning into a huge concern.

“We like Brevis and Dube coming in the middle overs, and that’s when they can be most dominant,” CSK batting coach Mike Hussey said.

“In some matches, it hasn’t probably worked out how we would like get them in at the exactly the right time, and we’ve sort of certainly flirted with the idea of, do we just try and get them in a bit earlier and let them get some time to get in and then they can accelerate from there. And then other times we’ve tried to hold them back because we’ve lost early wickets and we just want to try and get through a little bit longer with the new ball before then bringing them in. So we probably haven’t quite got it right with those two just yet. So, moving forward, I think we’d like to settle them into one particular role,” he added.

With CSK sixth in the table, for them to be in contention for play-offs, they are in a position where they have to win 5 of their remaining six matches. Given they have repeatedly lost way in the middle-overs, in particular against Sunrisers Hyderabad and Gujarat Titans – the two defeats which could come back to bite them hard in the end, perhaps putting Dube at No 4 and Brevis as a finisher could well provide a flip.

Rohit progressing well, call on inclusion today

**Express News Service**  
*Chennai, May 1*

WITH EVERY game from now on being a must-win situation that would put them back into the contention for play-offs, Mumbai Indians head coach Mahela Jayawardene has said this is not the time to experiment. With just two wins from 8 matches, the five-time champions are ninth in the points table and face Chennai Super Kings at Chepaunk on Saturday. Thanks to injuries and in attempts to arrest the slide, Mumbai have so far used as many as 22 players in the first-half of the season. For a team, which has in the past relied on a settled squad, it has been a merry-go-round of sorts in search of a winning combination.

“It’s not the time for us to experiment,” Jayawardene said. “We’ve had issues with our injuries, and availability of players and all that. We’ve already played, I think, 20 players in the season. So we’ve not done that for many years. Our maximum has been 16, even with the impact where we’ve had 16 or 17 was our maximum. So due to those circumstances, we’ve anyway have gone to the bench, deeper into the bench. And these are quality players as well, especially our foreigners have been good quality options. So we kept on changing combinations to suit that as well. But for us, it’s about trusting that process of correcting and playing good cricket,” he added.

Despite stacking up huge totals on board, Mumbai Indians haven’t been able to close out games with the ball.

# Bhuvi on Purple Cap: You want awards when you are young

**Express News Service**  
*Mumbai, May 1*

ROYAL CHALLENGERS Bengaluru pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar said team success now outweighed personal milestones after moving to the top of the IPL 2026 wicket charts, while also pointing to chasing conditions and bowling decisions following RCB’s four-wicket defeat to the Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad.

Bhuvneshwar returned with figures of 3/28 against GT, taking his tally to 17 wickets from nine matches and regaining the Purple Cap as the tournament’s leading wicket-taker. But the veteran seamer said his priorities had now shifted from

individual awards to contributing to the team’s campaign.

“It’s good that I got the Purple Cap. But I think I have come out of that time where I want to achieve something individually,” Bhuvneshwar said after the match on Thursday.

“Of course, I want to achieve something, but now it’s more of a team. I’m not young anymore. Of course, when you’re young, you want to win those awards, and it comes when you do well.

“But when you want to work towards the team’s goal, and you get an individual award or reward, you feel good. But honestly, I’m just trying my best. Getting confidence from the management. That’s all I can say,” he added.



Bhuvneshwar tops the bowling charts with 17 wickets. AP

The 36-year-old has been one of RCB’s most reliable bowlers this season, using his experience and control to deliver, especially in the power-play. His spell against GT again

kept RCB competitive, but it was not enough to prevent defeat. He admitted that chasing totals had become easier across grounds in this year’s IPL, citing the nature of surfaces and dew later in the evening.

“If you look at this IPL, chasing is a bit easier in any ground because the way wicket behaves and dew comes. So, yes, it could be different,” he said. “But yeah, we didn’t win the toss. We were asked to bat first. We tried our best in bowling. So now the result is that we lost. That’s all.”

When asked about the limited use of leg-spinner Suyash Sharma during the game, he said RCB opted for seam-heavy tactics because the

pitch offered assistance to pace bowlers and the side needed wickets to stay in the contest.

“Good question, but if you look at the scenario, there was some help for seamers, and we had Romario, third seamer. So, we wanted to take a chance,” he said. “And Suyash is someone who is not easy to pick. So, we wanted to get wickets as quick as possible. So, that’s the reason he didn’t bowl. “We couldn’t have won the match by defending runs. We could have won by taking wickets, and the bowlers who bowled were the best bowlers to get those wickets,” he added.

RCB next take on Lucknow Super Giants in Lucknow on May 7.

● SHOWING PROMISE

# NZ’s rising all-rounder Abbas: Born in Pakistan, living his Black Caps dream

**Shankar Narayan**  
*Mumbai, May 1*

MUHAMMAD ABBAS was barely a year old when his life moved across continents. So early that there are no memories, no images of Pakistan left in his mind from that first journey to New Zealand. Yet both countries continue to shape who he is — one through blood, the other through upbringing, and cricket through identity.

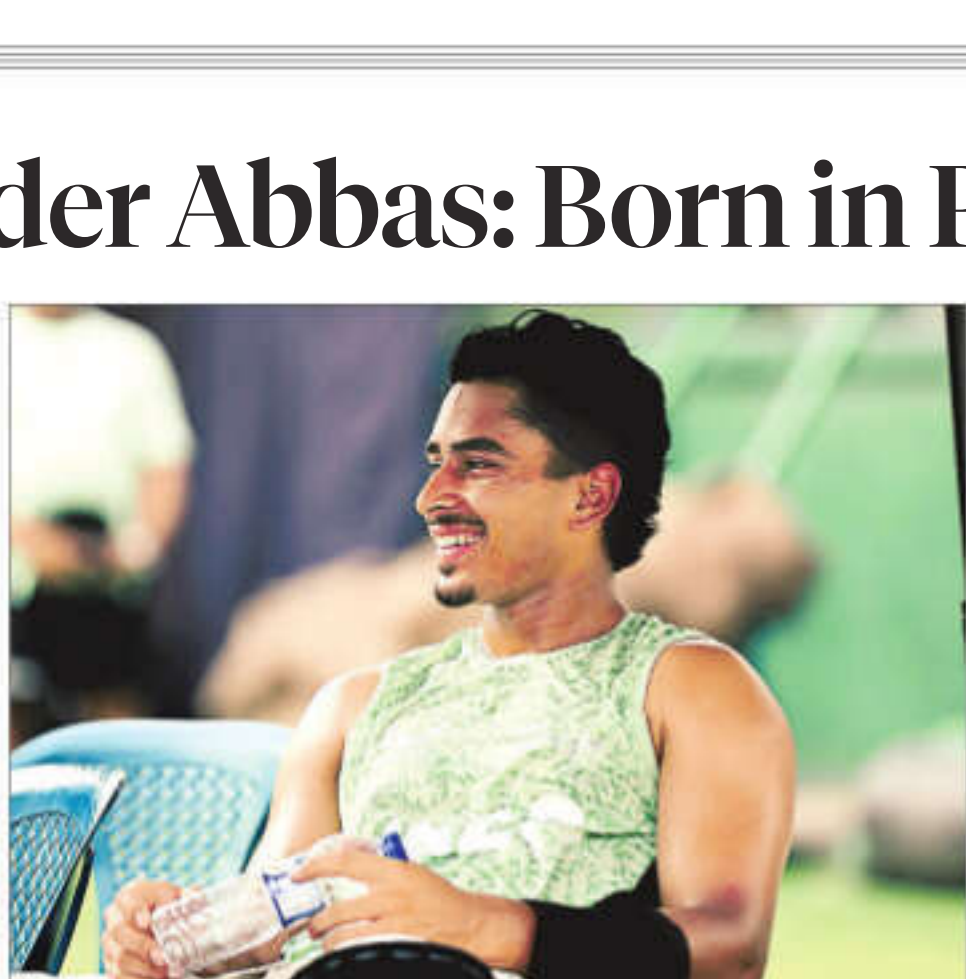
“We came to Auckland with him when I was maybe one,” Abbas told *The Indian Express*. “I actually don’t have a lot of memory or any recollection of that because I was too young. But I’ve grown up most of my life in New Zealand.”

That sentence carries a quiet duality. Born in Lahore, raised in New Zealand, and

now wearing the Black Caps cap in ODIs, the 22-year-old’s journey has been shaped as much by geography as by emotion. But long before selection calls or international caps, there was one constant in his cricketing life — his father.

“Definitely my dad,” he says without hesitation. “He’s a bowling coach, and I’ve done all my training with him growing up. He introduced cricket to me, coached me, and we did everything together. He’s probably been the most influential on my game.”

Those early years were built on repetition, discipline and shared time, shaping instincts long before professional cricket arrived. “I used to watch a little bit of cricket with my dad growing up,” he recalls. “He was definitely a Pakistan and New Zealand fan.”



Abbas scored the fastest ODI fifty by a debutant. FANCODE

From those evenings came his first heroes. “I loved watching Wasim Akram when I was very young. I didn’t see much of his career because it was the back end, but my dad would al-

ways speak about him.”

Closer to home, his role models became Kane Williamson and Trent Boult. “Kane’s world-class, and Trent being our finest left-arm bowler. They

were the two I looked up to.”

Life, though, demanded a major decision a few years ago. “There was a bit of a period a couple of years ago, obviously going through a little bit of personal stuff,” he says. “My dad had gotten a job back in Wellington as a bowling coach, and I had to decide whether I wanted to stay in Auckland or

move down with the family. It was a bit of a split decision. In the end, I decided to move down.”

The move became a turning point.

“Going into a new environment, unsure of what to expect. When I moved down, I was welcomed openly by Wellington, and they gave me an opportunity, and it all felt like dominoes from there.”

What began as a family transition became a career shift that placed him on the path to international cricket. That path reached its biggest moment in March 2025, when he was handed his ODI debut against Pakistan — the country of his birth — in Napier.

“It was pretty unexpected,” he says. “I wasn’t expecting to play, and then I got the call, and all of a sudden I was in the play-

ing XI. Playing against Pakistan and being born there was a bit of an awkward feeling. I wasn’t sure. But being presented with my cap is a huge honour and a dream come true.”

**Debut to remember**

The debut became memorable. Batting at No.6, Abbas struck 52 off 26 balls, bringing up the fastest ODI fifty on debut.

“I didn’t actually realise it was a record at the time,” he says. “I got told after the innings. It still hasn’t sunk in.”

What stays with him most is the feeling. “You have these imaginary things when you’re a kid — crowds chanting, big games, finals. That day felt like one of those. I was on around 48, the crowd was loud. It was pretty cool.”

Now part of the Black Caps

setup, he finds himself sharing dressing rooms with players he once watched on television.

“It feels pretty surreal,” he says. “You’ve got guys like Tom Latham, people you’ve grown up watching. And now you’re sharing a dressing room, a hotel, a team bus. The inner kid in you just looks around like — this is pretty cool.”

His ties to Pakistan, meanwhile, remain strong. “Absolutely. I’ve got a lot of family back in Pakistan, and I used to visit regularly until 2018,” he says. “Since then, I haven’t been able to go due to cricket commitments, but I have a very deep connection with both Pakistan and New Zealand.”

■ Watch Bangladesh vs New Zealand LIVE from Dhaka, starting 1:30 PM, on FanCode.

Russian Athletics announces India tie-up, AFI denies signing any MoU

Express News Service  
New Delhi, May 1

RUSSIAN ATHLETICS Federation (RusAF) on Friday announced a 'long-term cooperation' plan with the Athletics Federation of India (AFI); however, AFI officials said that there hasn't been a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed yet.

RusAF took to Instagram to announce the collaboration after Executive Director Boris Yaryshevsky and General Secretary Alexander Georgadze visited India and met AFI officials. "Russian athletes will be able to compete in national competitions in India, while Indian athletes in several disciplines will have the opportunity to train in Russia. Coaches, in turn, will be able to exchange experience," RusAF said.

"We are laying the foundation for long-term cooperation. We have agreed on mutual participation of Russian and Indian athletes in competitions, the organisation of joint training camps in Russia, and strengthening efforts to develop grassroots sport," President Yaryshevsky was quoted in the same post.

However, an AFI official said there was no specific arrangement. "There is No MOU with AFI. We are part of BRICS. It's a larger partnership arrangement. The doping-related ban was lifted in 2022, and the present ban is due to the war against Ukraine. For which Indian has taken a neutral stand at the UN. AFI is bound and guided by our Government's policies. India took part in BRICS Games 2024 in Kazan, sending a 142-member delegation and won 29 medals, including three bronze medals in athletics," an AFI official said.

RusAF was banned by World Athletics in 2015 November due to evidence of widespread, systematic and state-sponsored doping. Yesterday, the World Anti-Doping Agency announced that its 'Operation LIMS' probe has resulted in 302 sanctions against 291 Russian athletes, with 11 athletes receiving two sanctions each for separate violations. The investigation was based on data and samples retrieved from the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) of the Moscow Anti-Doping Laboratory in 2019. While World Athletics lifted the ban in 2023, the athletes are still excluded from international competitions because of a separate ban over the invasion of Ukraine.

**“Russian athletes will be able to compete in national competitions in India, while Indian athletes will have the opportunity to train in Russia,” RusAF said in a post.**

● ROAD TO U-17 FIFA WORLD CUP

## Coach Bibiano’s secret formula faces test at U-17 Asian Cup

Rohit Mundayur  
New Delhi, May 1

'SIMPLE' IS a word that crops up quite a few times when talking football with Bibiano Fernandes, head coach of the Indian men's U17 football team. But what he will try to do over the next week or so can be called anything but simple. He takes his wards to the AFC U17 Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia, with India facing Australia in their first game on May 6, followed by Uzbekistan on May 10.

The Indians were originally scheduled to face North Korea on May 13 before they pulled out of the tournament due to the conflict in West Asia.

With the top two teams in each group sealing an automatic berth in the FIFA U17 World Cup in Qatar in November, the stakes are high, and one positive result can go a long way towards that destination. Fernandes says that his players are well aware of the situation but he has asked them to focus on the basics.

"There is a ball, there is an opponent, there is a goal. Foot-

NEW STAR'S GIANT STRIDE

# How India rode Ayush wave to enter Thomas Cup semifinals

Beats All England champ Lin Chun-Yi of Chinese Taipei with maturity and composure to take team into last four

Shivani Naik  
Mumbai, May 1

IT WOULD seem all of India invested into the Thomas Cup quarterfinals was on the edge - hoping, dreading, praying, pleading, that Ayush Shetty would defeat All England champion Lin Chun-Yi. All, except Ayush himself who went on to win 21-16, 21-17 sending India into semifinals as 3-0 winners over Chinese Taipei.

"I was more nervous watching Lakshya's (Sen) match than when playing my own," he told BWF. Sen's fightback from two match points down - 18-20 to 22-20 in the second game, going on to put India 1-0 up, had fired up the whole team.

Ayush has grown from 6'1" to 6'4" in the four years since India won their maiden Thomas Cup. Strap on the aura of 2022, and inheriting India's reputation as Thomas Cup heavyweights, having cheered that triumph on TV then, he was now watching the magic unfold in front of him at the Horsens Arena.

"We believe we can go all the way. It's always been like this. We have a solid team. Everyone believes we can do it," Ayush would say, supremely assured. All those watching were biting their nails because India has seen far too many heartbreaks in badminton. But the young giant strode onto the court, relaxed and ready.

Chun-Yi started belting down smashes, as is his wont, and Ayush was boggled for a

bit. The smashes from the world's most attacking shuttle kept coming till 7-10. That's when Ayush switched his game around swiftly. The making of India's next badminton star happened in the next 10 minutes. Ayush stopped giving the shuttle altitude, started keeping it low, to deny Chun-Yi the freedom to hit. At 6-foot-4, everyone talks about his attack, but it was his composed, mature defence that gave Ayush the opening into the first game.

He played a rally for the ages to level the score at 12-12, and never looked back. It was not a sensational, acrobatic or dazzling rally in that sense, but simply an understanding of badminton's geometry, and a wise read on Chun-Yi's psychology - it was deception, in plain sight. Imagine bowling nine in-swingers one after another to temporarily hack a Test batsman's muscle memory.

Ayush wanted to pin the Taiwanese to a mid-court spot, making him play a backhand return across his ribs. Of the 16 strokes Ayush played in that 66-second, 31-shot rally, nine were mid-court floaters, pushes and even three kinds of half smashes - backhand, straight, round-the-head drop, all aimed at only that spot. He would put in a diving defence in the middle of it all, recover to resume that spot-pinning. The last two of those were merely to make Chun-Yi expect the shuttle to go there again, like hypnosis using a ball and a thread. No matter what, Chun



Ayush Shetty beat Lin Chun-Yi 21-15, 21-17 in India's 3-0 win over Chinese Taipei. BWF/BADMINTON PHOTO

Number Plate

4/4

● Ayush Shetty has won all his matches in his Thomas Cup debut. Before Friday, he beat Canada's B Yang, followed by a win over Australia's S Dhand. He then beat China's Weng HY.

Yi was forced to defend across his body, on an awkward backhand height. And then came the twist.

Right after a cheeky drop that made Chun-Yi wait - the ninth stroke to the spot, Ayush would open his arms and send a forehand flick to the opposite side of the net with great hand skills. Chun-Yi, in a backhand trance, was too slow to reach for a return that demanded a forehand extension. The out-

swinger, after nine coming in, as the hobby cricket bowler Ayush would say.

From there, Ayush took five points in a row to wrap up the opening game 21-16. In the second, he was a prancing horse on his way to the seaside paddock of Horsens, winning 21-17.

This was far from Slam bang attack of a 6'4". This was Viktor Axelsen wisdom, ingrained into the Indian.

Playing defence doesn't create attacking openings easily even if one has a power attack. But Ayush defended, then charged the net and counter-attacked with tight dribbles - a peak offence gauntlet. He wasn't lifting to the back to get out of a tough pickle - he was shape-shifting to attack, with elite shot selection at the net.

Ayush defended body smashes, then quickly got to the net, not lifting, but playing

pushes and flicks, and even dribbles. The block followed by an injection of pace to reach the net, and attack, was outstanding defence-to-offence transition, something that elite basketball players would be proud of. When he was pushed back, he didn't rush, but simply used defence to create opportunities to attack. As India's new star is born this Thomas Cup, Ayush promises to not merely win, but draw a billion into the intricacies of badminton's skills. The giant's strength is a cover for deeper sorcery.

He was asked by a journalist if there was pressure on him to get "rowdy" in celebrations as Chirag Shetty charged the court and got Ayush into a roaring frenzy, and the youngster simply said, "They keep pushing me to shout more. I don't shout much. Now I've started shouting a bit more."

RESULTS

|                                                |
|------------------------------------------------|
| L Sen bt Chou TC 18-21, 22-20, 21-17           |
| Satwik-Chirag bt Chiu-Wang 23-21, 19-21, 21-12 |
| A Shetty by Lin CY 21-16, 21-17                |

kind of pressure. I started thinking too much. But the coach told me 'You are not looking too confident. Stop thinking too much and just play.' I tried to do that," he would say.

A similar switch would get turned on, for Satwik-Chirag, trailing 18-20 in the first game against Olympic champion Wang Chi Lin, paired with Chiu Hsiang Chieh.

For a while now, daunted by injuries, fear of recurrence, and scarred by failure to win titles, Satwik-Chirag had been tipping-toeing. Their improved defence, counter-intuitively made things worse, because they started thinking they could rely on it, and deferring attack. This year, multiple

coaches have reminded them that no matter how sturdy it gets, defence ain't their weapon; attack is.

The thought kicked in at 17-19 down, Satwik told BWF. "At 19-17, we decided to play full court, open up the court, and said let's see how it goes."

It was them taking the initiative and not waiting for the opponents' mistakes. The strategy was in place, they just needed to stay calm. Controlling the length and denying the Taiwanese height to hit, the Indians went on the attack themselves, liberating themselves from being dictated. The nervous energy was reined in, and used to explode as they would go on to win 23-21, 19-21, 21-12.

The Thomas Cup title from 2022 had made anything less than a final seem underwhelming. The core of the group, backed up by Ayush, were back to relive that happiness again. India are in the semifinal. Feeling not invincible exactly, but looking forward to the battle.

● BRIEFLY



Jannik Sinner has won his last 22 matches. AP

## Sinner cruises past Fils to reach Madrid Open final

WORLD NUMBER one Jannik Sinner powered into the Madrid Open final with a 6-2 6-4 victory over Arthur Fils on Friday, keeping alive his bid for a record fifth successive ATP Masters 1000 title. The 24-year-old claimed his 27th win at Masters 1000 level, having lifted trophies in Paris last year and at Indian Wells, Miami and Monte Carlo in 2026. Sinner also became only the fourth player to reach the final of all nine ATP Masters 1000 tournaments - after Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic, and Rafael Nadal - and the youngest to achieve the feat. "Very happy about the general performance today," Sinner said during his on-court interview. REUTERS

## Haryana reign supreme in U-17 wrestling

HARYANA STAMPED their authority at the U17 National Wrestling Championships 2026, topping both women's Wrestling and Freestyle events. Haryana secured the Women's Wrestling title with 215 points and added the Freestyle crown with 205 points. The SSCB, dominated Greco-Roman, finishing on top with 136 points in the meet held at the Chhatrapati Sambhajji Nagar (Aurangabad). PTI

## Salah out against Man Utd but not for season

LIVERPOOL FORWARD Mohamed Salah will miss Sunday's Premier League clash against rivals Manchester United due to a muscle injury, but manager Arne Slot confirmed on Friday that he was expected to return before the end of the season. Salah was forced off during Liverpool's 3-1 win over Crystal Palace last week with a hamstring concern. REUTERS

## Iran will be at World Cup, says FIFA boss

FIFA PRESIDENT Gianni Infantino opened his address at FIFA Congress by affirming that Iran will participate in the World Cup and that the team will play in the US despite the conflict between the two nations. "And the reason for that is very simple, dear friends, is because we have to unite. We have to bring people together. It is my responsibility. It is our responsibility." REUTERS

## 5 Indian teams vie for World C'ships berths

FIVE INDIAN quartets, who qualified in the bottom half of the teams in each events, will be competing in the World Athletics Relays beginning on Saturday, looking to book berths for next year's World Championships. The 21-member Indian team, led by star sprinter Animesh Kujur, has eight women in it. In the qualifying round one, India will compete with United States, Belgium, Spain, China, France, Poland and Paraguay. PTI

## ISL: Jamshedpur beat Goa, go top of the table

JAMSHEDPUR FC rode on late goals by Mohammed Sanand and Madih Talal to secure a 2-0 victory against FC Goa in the Indian Super League. Sanan (83rd) broke the deadlock before Madih Talal sealed the win deep into stoppage time (90+6th). This was sixth win in 11 games for Jamshedpur, who move to the top of the standings, one point clear of Mohun Bagan. PTI

## Leclerc fastest in Miami practice, Max second

FERRARI'S CHARLES Leclerc was fastest in sole practice for the Miami Grand Prix sprint weekend on Friday. The Monegasque lapped the Hard Rock Stadium track with a best time of one minute and 29.310 seconds on a hot day. Red Bull's four-times world champion Max Verstappen was second fastest, 0.297 off the pace, with Oscar Piastri third for champions McLaren. REUTERS

# Arteta urges Arsenal to focus on EPL title push

Reuters  
London, May 1

ARSENAL MANAGER Mikel Arteta has urged his players to refocus on their Premier League title push as they prepare to host Fulham on Saturday, days after being held to a 1-1 draw by Atletico Madrid in the Champions League.

Arsenal's pursuit of a first Premier League title in more than two decades has entered a tense final stretch, with Arteta's side attempting to end a drought that dates back to their unbeaten 'Invincibles' campaign of 2003-04.

"Focus on Fulham. And hunger. Hunger to play, hunger to compete, hunger to win, hunger to be closer to achieve our dream," he said. "We are playing to win the Premier League. It's exactly where we wanted to be. Four games to go. It's game two. Ready to go."

Having led the standings for much of the campaign, Arsenal's occasional dropped points have allowed defending champions Manchester City to

close the gap, with Pep Guardiola's side applying pressure by stringing together a sequence of late-season victories.

The gap between leaders Arsenal and second-placed Man City is three points, with City having a game in hand.

"We have only four games to play now and everything is at stake, so it doesn't get better than that," Arteta said.

No Havertz

The Spaniard confirmed attacker Kai Havertz and centre back Jurrien Timber will miss the Fulham clash. Havertz has been sidelined since picking up an injury against Newcastle United last weekend, while Timber has been out since March. Arteta added that Havertz could be back for the second leg fixture against Atletico.

"He's (Havertz) been a huge miss. We're talking about one of the most important attacking players that we have and he's been out for seven or eight months," Arteta said. "He cannot do this game but hopefully for Atletico he will be available."



India U-17, coached by Bibiano Fernandes, will take on Australia and Uzbekistan in group stage, starting May 6. FILE

more than a distant possibility.

That victory also maintained Fernandes's 100 percent record with regards to qualification for the Asian Cup. Since he took over for the first time in 2017, the only occasion when India failed to qualify for the U17 Asian Cup was when he had stepped away and worked with Bengaluru FC as a reserves coach.

Secret recipe

Consistency with regards to qualification for big tourna-

ments is rare in Indian football, so what is his secret?

"I heard someone comment once, 'He must've got some formula' (laughs). There is no formula there."

Well, the answer is disarmingly... "simple".

Fernandes says that the courses he undertook for acquiring his coaching licences early on, and those that he still does, have helped him understand the sport.

"It's very simple for a coach when you know what football