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COUNTING OF VOTES FOR TAMIL NADU, ASSAM, KERALA, PUDUCHERRY ASSEMBLIES TOO

Results today, all eyes on Bengal

Test of BJP's expansion plans, Opp cohesion

Liz Mathew & Manoj CG
New Delhi, May 3

FOR BOTH the BJP and the Opposition, the election results in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Kerala on Monday carry the potential of causing a churn within the parties themselves as well as reshaping the contours of national politics, with the impact of the verdicts likely to be felt far beyond the boundaries of the states.

If the projections of most of the exit polls prove to be accurate, the BJP is likely to edge past the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal. That will be a big success for the party's attempts to reinforce itself as the most dominant pan-regional force in the East, where it is already in power in Odisha and Bihar. The party is expected to win Assam with a resounding mandate, as per the pollsters, while down South, its attempts to establish itself as a serious force may continue as actor Vijay's TVK is expected to undercut its momentum in Tamil Nadu. In Kerala, the party is navigating a triangular contest dominated by the traditional rivalry between the Left and the Congress-led UDF and may not make much headway, according to the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



TMC's workers and local leaders outside Guru Nanak Institute of Technology, which houses a strongroom, at Panihati in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district Saturday night. PARTHA PAUL. MORE REPORTS, PAGE 6

At strongrooms in Bengal, a long night for TMC: 'May 4 our D-day'

Ravik Bhattacharya & Atri Mitra
Kolkata, Panihati, Howrah, May 3

"WHAT'S YOUR view? It will be Mamata Banerjee... May 4 is our D-day. Let's see what happens."

It is around 11 pm Saturday outside the Netaji Indoor Stadium, and Kamar Ilahi and a group of fellow TMC workers have just finished their shift

"guarding" a strongroom at a counting centre in the heart of Kolkata. After the two-phase Assembly polls in West Bengal ended April 29 with a record 92.47% turnout, all eyes are on these rooms where the EVMS are stored ahead of counting and results on Monday.

Following a video message on Friday, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was stationed till midnight inside Shekhawat

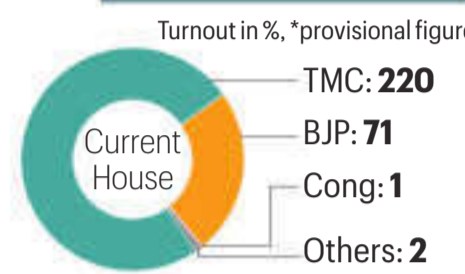
Memorial Girls High School, alleging attempted EVM tampering. Her party's leaders and workers have been standing guard outside strongrooms across the state, day and night. The Election Commission (EC), meanwhile, has virtually turned these rooms into fortresses, with barricades, three-layered security and Central forces on duty.

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DECISION 2026

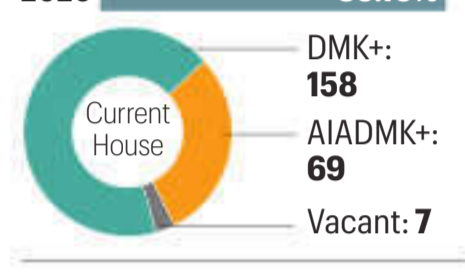
West Bengal (294* seats)

2021 81.56%
2026 92.47%*



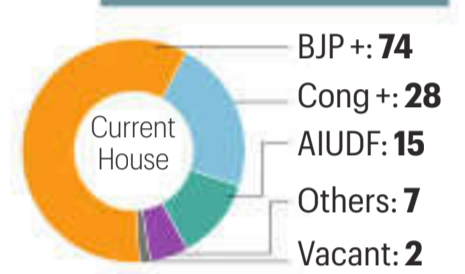
Tamil Nadu (234 seats)

2021 72.73%
2026 85.10%



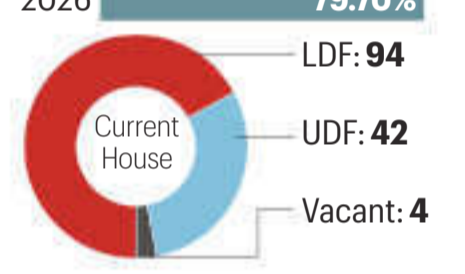
Assam (126 seats)

2021 81.8%
2026 85.96%



Kerala (140 seats)

2021 73.9%
2026 79.70%



*Full repoll will be held in Falta seat on May 21; voter turnout excluding postal ballots; Source: ECI, statistical reports, state Assemblies

One-year-old among nine killed in fire at East Delhi building

Alok Singh & Vidheesha Kuntamalla
New Delhi, May 3

NINE PEOPLE belonging to three different families were killed after a fire broke out in a residential building of eight flats in Vivek Vihar in East Delhi's Shahdara area early on Sunday. All the victims, including a one-year-old boy, were trapped in their flats, which the owners had extended and enclosed within cage-like structures made of iron grills.

The four-storey building in B Block of Vivek Vihar has space for parking on the ground floor, and two four-bedroom

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Grieving relatives and friends at the Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital in New Delhi, Sunday. TASHI TOBYGAL. MORE REPORTS, PAGE 4

I am one of six who filed complaints against Brij Bhushan, says Vinesh

Raises fear of bias at Gonda meet; 'Guarantee' her safety: WFI chief

Nihal Koshie & Mihir Vasavda
New Delhi, Mumbai, May 3

OLYMPIAN VINESH Phogat claimed on Sunday that she was among the victims of sexual



Wrestler Vinesh Phogat

harassment by former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, and was one of the six

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Business as Usual
By EPUNNY

Happening today

• THE UNION HEALTH Ministry will start a pan-India fire safety campaign across healthcare facilities.

• THE SUPREME COURT will hear a PIL seeking to restrict new Aadhaar card issuances exclusively to children up to the age of six years.

TRACK THESE AND MORE ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

BSF constable's 'custodial torture' and death: NCB suspends Major, Sub-Inspector



BSF constable Jaswinder Singh was detained by the NCB's Jammu unit on March 3

Mahender Singh Manral & Arun Sharma
New Delhi, Jammu, May 3

THE NARCOTICS Control Bureau (NCB) is learnt to have suspended two officers — an Army Major who was on deputation with the NCB and a Sub-Inspector posted in Jammu zone — in connection with the alleged custodial torture and death of a Border Security Force (BSF) constable, Jaswinder Singh (30), in March. As reported by *The Indian Express*, the autopsy report had listed 34 injuries on Singh's body.

"The NCB headquarters in Delhi is yet to receive the final conclusive post-mortem report of Singh. Based on initial findings, both officers have been suspended. The case has also been transferred from Amritsar zone to Delhi zone. An inquiry has been initiated, and all details are being collected," said a source.

Singh was on leave from his posting in Tripura when he was detained by the NCB's Jammu unit on March 3, on allegations of having links with Pakistani drug smugglers. The agency claimed that during interrogation, they gathered information about narcotics hidden in Patti area of Tarn Taran district in Punjab.

Singh was picked up from

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Nepal objects to Mansarovar Yatra via Lipulekh; India says unjustified

Shubhrajit Roy & Yubaraj Ghimire
New Delhi, Kathmandu, May 3

THE BALEN Shah-led government in Kathmandu, just over a month old, has objected to India and China planning to conduct the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through the Lipulekh pass.

India said that such claims are "neither justified nor based on historical facts and evidence", and it remains open to "constructive interaction with Nepal".

Govt explores EU-like law to safeguard firms against third countries' sanctions

Anil Sasi
New Delhi, May 3

TO SAFEGUARD against disruption of critical services by foreign companies citing sanctions in other jurisdictions, New Delhi is studying the European Union Blocking Statute, an anti-sanction law that EU countries take recourse to. Introduced by Brussels in 1996, it acts as a potential 'shield' for

IDEA EXCHANGE

"Nepal would like to balance its foreign policy relationship because we need all our friends"

SHANKAR PRASAD SHARMA
OUTGOING AMBASSADOR OF NEPAL TO INDIA
PAGE 15

The Lipulekh pass has been a "contested" territory and

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

E. EXPLAINED

Mansarovar hurdle

On April 30, India announced that the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra is set to take place from June to August this year. Nepal's objection to Lipulekh pass being used for the yatra and India challenging Kathmandu's premise sets a roadblock that needs to be removed before the pilgrims begin their journey.

European companies against sanctions by third countries.

A key trigger that raised concerns in the government was a sudden move by Microsoft last July to suspend IT services of Indo-Russian oil refining and marketing company Nayara Energy. There have also been discussions among concerned ministries about the dependence of Indian companies on vital digital infrastructure

services provided by foreign companies.

"The EU anti-sanctions law is among the options (being looked at). It does offer a template... There is a compelling need to have a mechanism in place and something like this (the EU anti-sanctions law) is among the options on the table," a senior government official told *The Indian Express*.

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

• JOINT SECY UNDERLINED NIOS MANDATE TO EDUCATE 'POOR CHILDREN'; NOW PLAN TO LEASE ONE FLOOR

Despite objections, open school body spent Rs 247 crore on new office — didn't move in

Harikishan Sharma & Abhinaya Harigovind
New Delhi, May 3

DESPITE A senior official's caution against "extravagant expenditure on fancy offices," the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) — mandated to educate underprivileged children — spent Rs 247 crore in 2021 to acquire two floors in NBCC's World Trade Centre in Delhi. It received possession in March 2024 but has never moved in and is now scouting for a tenant, *The Indian Express*



The office was acquired at NBCC's World Trade Centre in Delhi. FILE

has learnt. The sum is striking in context. NIOS receives no budgetary support from the Centre. It funds itself entirely through admission and examination fees.

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

According to its last publicly available annual report, for 2022-23, NIOS generated a total income of Rs 288.65 crore that year, of which Rs 183 crore came from admission and exam fees, against total expenditure of Rs 157.89 crore.

Official records show the proposal to buy 61,000 square feet of commercial space, and relocate NIOS headquarters from its current office in Noida to the capital, was discussed and approved at a Finance Committee meeting of the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Beware of the Promise of 'Assured Returns'!

Some real estate promoters use alluring/misleading advertisements such as 'Assured Returns' or 'Fixed Monthly Rental Income before completion' to attract buyers. Many buyers have suffered financial losses after falling into such traps under Pre-RERA projects.

These offers are often labelled in the following forms

- Subvention schemes offering monthly payment of pre-EMI till possession.
- Fixed monthly rental income before completion.
- Buyback guarantee after a certain period.
- Lease guarantee schemes.
- Investment plans promising fixed ROI or assured returns.
- On-booking offers of Free Car/Gold Coins/Luxury Foreign Trips.

Remember that in the absence of proper legal backing, such 'Offers' may only be promotional tactics designed to influence buyer choices.

✔ An Informed Buyer Must

- ✔ Invest only in RERA registered projects.
- ✔ Verify project registration and other details at www.up-rera.in
- ✔ Carefully read the BBA/AFS document to ascertain that it is in the prescribed format.
- ✔ Make payments in Collection Bank Account of the project given on the website of UPRERA.
- ✔ Verify the project map, the land and completion timeline from the website of UPRERA.
- ✔ Offers like 'assured returns' or 'fixed rental income till completion' have no legal validity.
- ✔ Under UP RERA regulations, payment of assured returns from project bank accounts is prohibited.

✘ The Homebuyers Must NOT

- ✘ Book unit(s) in any project on the basis of advertisements only.
- ✘ Make payments in cash.
- ✘ Rely on verbal promises of the promoter, his team or an agent.
- ✘ Invest in any project which is not registered with RERA.
- ✘ Get influenced by offers such as assured returns, fixed monthly incomes, free gifts or luxury tours.

📢 Remain Alert Today to Safeguard Your Investment Tomorrow

For more information or to file a complaint, visit: www.up-rera.in
Helpline No. - +91 9151602229 (Lucknow), +91 9151672220 (NCR)

U.P. Real Estate Regulatory Authority

Headquarter: Naveen Bhavan, Rajya Niyojan Sansthan, Kala Kankar House, Old Hyderabad, Lucknow-226007
NCR Office: H-169, Gamma-II, Greater Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar-201310

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



Indo-Japan friendship

BJP president Nitin Nabin with a delegation of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

Key accused in Bihar road rage killing shot in police encounter

Himanshu Harsh
Patna, May 3

A RS 25,000 rewarder accused in the road rage killing of a BJP leader's nephew was shot dead in a police encounter in Bihar's Siwan district on Sunday, officials said. The accused, identified as Sonu Yadav, was shot during an exchange of fire with police near Gausiyya village under Barharia police station limits. According to sources, he sustained a bullet injury to the chest during the encounter.

Officials said Sonu Yadav, a resident of Sareya village under Husainganj police station, was among the key accused in the firing incident reported earlier this week. The case involved the killing of 28-year-old Harsh Kumar Singh and serious injuries to his father, Chandan Singh, following a dispute triggered by a minor vehicle collision near the Laxmipur-Andar Dhala overbridge.

Harsh Singh, nephew of former MLC and BJP leader Manoj Kumar Singh, died on the spot after sustaining multiple gunshot wounds,

while his father remains under treatment in Patna. Police said teams were actively searching for those involved and had stepped up pressure.

Acting on specific intelligence inputs that Sonu Yadav was hiding in the Barharia area with associates, a police team launched a search operation and cordoned off the location.

"As the police team moved in, the accused opened fire, prompting retaliatory action," an officer said. In the ensuing exchange, Sonu Yadav was killed. The development comes amid a broader crackdown in the case. Police said another accused, Sunil Yadav, was arrested from Laddi Bazaar under Jamo police station limits over the weekend, and a car was recovered from his possession.

Earlier, another accused, Chhotu Yadav, was injured in a separate encounter during police raids. He sustained bullet injuries to his legs while allegedly attempting to flee after opening fire at the police team. He is undergoing treatment and is reported to be stable.

Govt in damage control mode after Rahul's Nicobar visit: Congress

Nikhil Ghanekar
New Delhi, May 3

THE CONGRESS party on Sunday claimed that the Modi government was "rattled" by Rahul Gandhi's visit to Great Nicobar last week, and was in "damage control mode". The party said this in rebuttal to a lengthy fact-sheet issued by the Union government on the Great Nicobar Island mega infrastructure project, after Rahul attacked the government over serious concerns regarding the project.

The detailed rebuttal, issued by Congress' communications head Jairam Ramesh, centred on the island's ecological concerns, tribal rights, and the project's financial and physical feasibility and transparency. Ramesh said the government press note did not address any of the serious concerns raised on the project by local affected communities, environmentalists, anthropologists, academics and civil society experts and other professionals. The former Union environment minister also said that India's "legitimate security imperatives" should not be linked with "a so-called development project" and that security considerations needed,

at the very least, a debate in Parliamentary forum.

The Centre had issued a lengthy press release on May 1, days after Rahul Gandhi's visit on April 28.

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha had called the project "one of the biggest scams" and "gravest crimes" against natural and tribal heritage after meeting Nicobarese community leaders and settlers from the ex-servicemen community. The Centre claimed in the press note that no tribal will be relocated while underlining the project's strategic and defence purposes.

Raising ecological concerns, Ramesh also questioned the proposed transhipment port in Galathea Bay, a Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) 1A area site where ports are not allowed. Calling the proposal to compensate loss of Nicobar forests in Haryana a "travesty" of ecological principles, Ramesh underscored that a "tree cut in Nicobar can simply not be replaced by two, five or even 10 trees planted elsewhere", especially in Haryana's semi-arid ecosystem. He also slammed the Centre for citing different numbers of trees that are to be cut for the project.

Shots fired outside eatery near Kapil Sharma's cafe in Canada

Express News Service
Chandigarh, May 3

GUNSHOTS WERE reported outside an eatery adjacent to Kapil's Cafe, the Surrey restaurant owned by comedian and television host Kapil Sharma, late on Saturday night, triggering fresh security concerns around Indian-origin businesses in Canada amid claims of responsibility by a social media account linked to the Lawrence Bishnoi gang.

No injuries were reported in the incident, which took place at Chai Sutta Bar on 120 Street in Surrey, directly next to Kapil's Cafe. Videos circulating on social media purportedly show multiple rounds being fired outside the premises while staff

and patrons were inside. The Surrey Police responded to the scene, though an official statement detailing the circumstances of the firing or any arrests was awaited.

Soon after the shooting, a social media post from an account claiming links to the Lawrence Bishnoi syndicate issued a direct warning to both the owner of Chai Sutta Bar and Kapil Sharma, threatening that Kapil's Cafe and comedian's Mumbai residence could be targeted next. The post also warned against mediation and demanded that Sharma "come on the line", a phrase commonly associated with extortion threats. Authorities have not officially verified the authenticity of the claim.

Poll results

projections. Despite many pollsters claiming that the TMC's 15-year rule in Bengal may come to an end, senior BJP leaders are being circumspect as no survey has indicated a clean sweep or massive anti-incumbency, with most projecting a close contest.

Some BJP strategists who were actively involved in electioneering in West Bengal, however, emphasised the party had "turned the corner" in the state. "The party, with our systematic campaign and meticulous planning, has managed to get over the hump. The call for poriborton (change) has taken root in people's minds. The voters have accepted us as the alternative and we could see that on the ground. At the small meetings and roadshows, the expressions on their faces were welcoming. They were no longer passive. It was very clear that we are no

longer viewed as outsiders. We have no doubt that we will be able to inflict deep cracks in (TMC chief) Mamata Banerjee's citadel if not ensure her fall," said one of the party's star campaigners.

A victory will be an affirmation of the BJP's strategy in its quest to be a truly pan-India party and will be the biggest feather in Union Home Minister Amit Shah's cap (he has set a target of winning 170 seats in the 294-member House).

A loss, however, will lead to questions about the party's strategy to take on the TMC and shed the tag of party of "outsiders". It will force the BJP to evaluate if its state leadership is up to the task or if it has to find other faces in future battles against the TMC.

BJP and South

Down South, the BJP may have to hunker down for a much longer journey. In Tamil Nadu, which has alternated between the two Dravidian majors, the DMK is projected to storm back

to power. If the TVK emerges as a significant force, it will threaten the existence of the main Opposition party, AIADMK, and will be bad news for the BJP, which has been struggling to take off in the state despite its acceptability somewhat increasing in recent years.

However, in the likelihood that the TVK has the numbers and a sizable vote share, the BJP will likely make a play to get Viay on its side. A good showing by the TVK could mean that the new party has dented the BJP's support among the youth, women, and the middle class. While the party will have to rethink its strategy in such a scenario, it has also started exploring the possibility of stitching a new coalition in the post-poll scenario.

In Kerala, where many pollsters have given the NDA a maximum of five seats, the party is still likely to remain a marginal player despite the intense campaign. In a state where it had just one MLA a decade

ago, anything more will be progress. However, the party will have to reframe its narrative to expand beyond isolated pockets of support.

Litmus test for Opp

For the Opposition, May 4 is a crucial test for West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee and her Tamil Nadu counterpart M K Stalin, two powerful regional satraps whose win or loss could trigger a churn in the Opposition ranks, now led informally by the Congress. Banerjee, Stalin, and Kerala's Pinarayi Vijayan have been at the forefront of non-Congress CMs who have confronted the BJP-led Centre over decisions they believe affected states directly or indirectly. A defeat for all three will significantly deprive the Opposition of key voices. A victory, on the other hand, could have a bearing on the Opposition space in national politics as Banerjee and Stalin remain the key counterweights to the Congress in the INDIA bloc.

Nepal

Nepal has often questioned moves by India and China to conduct trade and pilgrimages through the pass.

The Nepalese Foreign Ministry said on Sunday, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has drawn the attention of various media outlets to the questions and concerns raised regarding the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, which is said to be conducted between India and China via Nepali territory, Lipulekh."

"The Government of Nepal is completely clear and steadfast in the fact that Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani east of the Mahakali River are integral parts of Nepal since the Sugauli Treaty of 1816," it said.

The ministry asserted that the Government of Nepal has "conveyed its clear stance and concerns to both India and China through diplomatic channels regarding the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra."

"Even before this, the Government of Nepal has been continuously urging the Government of India not to undertake any activities such as road construction or expansion, border trade and pilgrimage in the area," it said.

The Nepalese Foreign Ministry was referring to India and China resuming trade through the Lipulekh pass in August 2025, before the GenZ protests toppled the government in September 2025.

"In addition, it is clarified that the friendly country China has also been officially informed about the fact that the Lipulekh area is Nepali territory," it said.

Responding to the Nepalese statement, the Ministry of External Affairs official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Sunday: "India's position in this regard had been consistent and clear. Lipulekh pass has been a long-standing route for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra since 1954 and the Yatra through this route has been going on for decades. This is not a new development."

"As regards territorial claims, India has consistently maintained that such claims are neither justified nor based on historical facts and evidence. Such unilateral artificial enlargement of territorial claims is untenable. India remains open to a constructive interaction with Nepal on all issues in the bilateral relationship, including on resolving agreed outstanding boundary issues through dialogue and diplomacy," the MEA spokesperson said.

New office

NIOS Society on October 8, 2021, under then Chairperson Prof Saroj Sharma. NIOS is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry's own Joint Secretary and Financial Adviser then had cautioned against the move before that meeting. The Joint Secretary had reportedly highlighted the mandate of NIOS to help educate "un(der)privileged, poor children of the society who could not pursue formal education in schools." And that the revenue earned by NIOS comes mainly from these sections of the society. "It is therefore necessary that NIOS must refrain from making any extravagant expenditure on fancy offices at very costly places," the JS learnt to have said.

Long night

The *Indian Express* spent a night visiting six strong rooms across North 24 Parganas, Howrah and Kolkata. It found TMC workers and leaders thronging the venues, edgy and wary, while their main rivals from the BJP and other Opposition parties were conspicuous by their absence.

"We are not guarding counting centres. That is not necessary. You will find us sufficient numbers during counting on Monday," said Rahul Sinha, BJP Rajya Sabha MP. At APC Ray Polytechnic College in Kolkata's Jadavpur, TMC worker Mohammed Wasim said: "You will not see any BJP worker here because they don't need to guard anything. They have the Central forces."

8.30 PM: 'We don't trust them'
●Guru Nanak Institute of Technology, Panihati (North 24 Parganas)

Over 50 TMC leaders and workers were seen sitting on plastic chairs just opposite the main gate. "It is us versus the EC and Central forces this time. We don't trust them. That's why we are here," said Tandra Ghosh, a leader of the Trinamool Mahila Congress.

EVMs from Khardah, Panihati, Baranagar, Dum Dum, Uttar, Dum Dum and Kamarhati are kept inside the building, where Central forces stand guard, checking identity cards at the gate. Workers were putting up makeshift bamboo-and-tarpaulin shade nearby. TMC candidate from Panihati, Tirthankar Ghosh, was also present, while Sayantika Banerjee, TMC candidate from Baranagar, emerged from the building for a brief chat with workers. "While we stand guard outside, our candidates and their agents are allowed inside," said Prabir Rajbanshi, another TMC leader.

A tea shop owner stationed nearby said she had never been so busy. "Since the polls ended, these people are here throughout the night. Usually, I sell about

150 cups a day. Yesterday, I sold 500 cups," said Mousumi Majumder.

10 pm: 'Keeping an eye on screen'

●Jogesh Chandra Girls School, Howrah
Unlike Panihati, there is no crowd of TMC workers at the gate here. Central forces and officers of the Howrah Police Commissionerate man the entrance. Counting for three constituencies — Bally, Howrah-Uttar and Howrah-Madhyo — will be held here.

"We were not allowed to gather outside the strong room. But since candidates and their agents are allowed inside, we are there," said Mohammed Islam, a TMC election agent. "We are guarding the strong rooms in three shifts. We keep a constant eye on the screen in the room where we sit — it gives a live feed from CCTV cameras inside the strong room..." he said.

11 pm: 'We found people inside'

●Netaji Indoor Stadium, Kolkata

Kamar Ilahi, a TMC minority cell member and poll agent, stood at the gates where large iron barricades had been put up and Central forces stood guard. The fate of Kashiipur-Belgachhia, Shyampur, Manikata, Belehghata, Jorasanko and Entally will be decided here.

"On Friday, while watching the CCTV footage, we found some people inside the strong room. I immediately alerted my seniors. Our party lodged a formal complaint with the EC, too," said Ilahi. The TMC alleged EVM tampering and pointed to footage showing outsiders inside. Protests broke out near the stadium, BJP candidates and workers gathered. The EC clarified it was routine segregation of postal ballots.

The police have since imposed prohibitory orders within 200 metres of strong rooms in Kolkata. "What will happen on May 4? We are confident of Didi's win. My shift started at 11," said Friday Kant Jha.

12 am: 'This is Mamata's constituency'
●Shekhawat Memorial Girls

Constable

Miran Sahib town of Jammu while returning home to Diwanagar village near the international border with Pakistan. He died on March 20, while still in custody.

While Singh's mother and wife alleged he was falsely implicated in the case, dating back to 2024, and tortured in custody, the NCB claimed he died of "cardiac events" while under arrest.

In a statement on March 23, the NCB said Singh was taken for further investigation to Amritsar on March 19, where he developed chest pain and was admitted to a private hospital. However, the autopsy report revealed 34 injuries on his body. It stated that while 24 wounds were found to be approximately two to four days old at the time of his death, nine other injuries were inflicted within 24 hours prior to his death. The medical

High School, Kolkata

This strong room saw Mamata Banerjee seated inside till midnight on Friday, alleging EVM tampering, while TMC and BJP supporters chanted slogans outside. Since then, security has been strengthened and roads leading to the school barricaded. Counting for Bhabanipur, where Banerjee faces BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari, will be held here.

Ashim Basu, a Kolkata Municipal Corporation ward councillor from Bhabanipur, said, "At night, about a hundred workers are here. During the day, the numbers increase to 300-400. This is Mamata Banerjee's constituency. The people love her. We can't tell them, 'Don't come.'"

1.30 am: 'Won't stay away from CCTV'

●APC Ray Polytechnic College, Jadavpur, Kolkata
A group of TMC workers stands outside the main gate alongside Shahjahan Sardar, poll agent of TMC candidate Biman Banerjee (Baruipur-Paschim). Counting for Joy Nagar, Baruipur-Paschim, Baruipur-Purba, Sonarpur-Dakshin, Sonarpur-Uttar and Kulti will be held here — all these seats were won by TMC in 2021.

"I am inside the strong room 24 hours... (Union Home Minister) Amit Shah said BJP will get 177 seats... they will reach that number only if we stay away from this venue," Sardar said.

2 am: 'They don't know Bengal is different'

●Hastings House & Viharilal College, Kolkata

A large contingent of Central forces is stationed here for counting across two adjacent premises for 10 constituencies: Kasba, Behala-Purba and Behala-Paschim (Viharilal College), and Budge Budge, Maheshtala, Satgachhia, Bishnupur, Jadavpur, Tollyganj and Metiaburj (Hastings House).

Seated on a chair, Mohammed Samiruddin said, "The EC deleted the names of genuine voters in SIR. They are doing their best to defeat our party. But they don't know that Bengal is a different place. Bengal never allows such atrocities."

examination, conducted at the Civil Hospital in Amritsar, found that he had suffered blunt force trauma from head to toe.

The Miran Sahib police station, from whose jurisdiction Singh was picked up, had booked a case of "abduction" based on the complaint of Singh's mother, with officers saying NCB kept them in the dark on the arrest. Three others arrested in the case, including Singh's brother, had been discharged by a court in Samba March 7.

that front" during his tenure.

By July last year, NIOS had estimated that actually moving in would require a one-time interior development cost of Rs 37 crore, followed by annual recurring expenses of roughly Rs 2.13 crore for maintenance, and Rs 7 lakh in property tax. Faced with that arithmetic, the institution formed a committee to assess the WTC premises and recommend "optimal utilization."

The committee has since suggested leasing out one floor to reduce the financial burden. When contacted, current NIOS chief Akhilesh Mishra declined to comment. A senior NIOS official, however, said that according to a proposal in the works, one floor will be rented out and the other will be used "as a space for digital schooling, where we will broadcast our classes live, and another part for the 'Learn One More Bharatiya Bhasha' initiative."

EU-like law

Regulation No 2271/96 of this EU statute considers the extra-territorial application of measures such as sanctions imposed by a third country to be in breach of international law.

According to officials, after Nayara Energy made representations to the government, the Finance Ministry pointed to the EU statute example and proposed a similar domestic law or regulation. It can be insisted upon that Indian companies that are customers of global service providers, should sign service contracts or procure products only from subsidiary of a global company in India, the ministry is learnt to have suggested. "The provision should ideally make it 'illegal' for these India-registered vendors to comply with sanctions slapped by the home country of the vendor or any other jurisdiction. All this is still being debated and is at a very early stage," the senior government official quoted above said.

In July 2025, the EU had announced it was sanctioning Nayara Energy, in which Russian oil giant Rosneft holds over 49% stake, as part of its slew of actions to force the Kremlin to end the war in Ukraine. The sanctions meant that Nayara Energy would not be able to export petroleum fuels and products to Europe, and potentially hit its dealings with European companies.

Just days later, Microsoft suspended its tech support to Nayara Energy affecting its employees' Outlook and Teams accounts. This resulted in Microsoft effectively blocking Nayara

Energy's access to its own data, proprietary tools, and products — despite these being acquired under fully paid-up licenses. Shortly thereafter, Nayara Energy sued Microsoft in the Delhi High Court, following which it restored services to the oil refiner.

While the original EU legislation was specifically aimed at American sanctions against Cuba and later Iran, there have been some implementation issues. According to Sven Bates, Julian Godfray and Johanna Asplund of Baker McKenzie, when it comes to doing business with Iran or Cuba, EU companies, and particularly those operating internationally and/or with a presence in the US, have for long been "stuck between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, EU companies engaging in trade relating to Iran and Cuba risk being subject to punitive US extraterritorial sanctions, and a restriction of access to US markets while on the other hand, if EU companies choose to refrain from Iranian and Cuban business to comply with the US measures, they face the threat of breaching the EU Blocking Regulation."

The EU "blocking statute" attempts to shield its people and companies from the extra-territorial application of third-country laws and measures in three broad ways:

- prohibiting compliance with those third-country sanctions
- nullifying the effect in the EU of any non-EU court ruling or administrative decision based on them, and
- allowing EU-based companies or individuals to recover in court damages caused by them.

Vinesh

women wrestlers who have filed complaints against him.

Phogat, now a Congress MLA in Haryana, along with Olympic medalists Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik, was at the forefront of the protests against Brij Bhushan in 2023.

Brij Bhushan, a former BJP MP, is currently facing trial in a Delhi court after some of the country's top women wrestlers accused him of sexual harassment. In June 2023, the Delhi Police filed a chargesheet against him for alleged sexual harassment, assault and stalking.

In a video clip that she posted on her social media platforms on Sunday, Phogat, who is set to return to the mat after nearly 20 months, said she was "forced" to make this admission in the middle of a court case because the WFI decided to conduct a crucial ranking tournament in Gonda, which is Brij Bhushan's stronghold.

Saying that there would be a "lot of mental pressure", Phogat accused the government of being mere "spectators". She also warned that if anything happened to her during the competition, the government would be held responsible.

Responding to her statement, WFI president Sanjay Singh said he would "personally guarantee" her safety, but added that Phogat shouldn't politicise the issue. "I am giving Vinesh my personal guarantee about her protection. As WFI president, I promise her and her team that they will be completely safe in Gonda. I will ensure her safety. Please do come and give your best on the mat," he said, speaking to *The Indian Express*.

"On the other hand, if she wants to play politics, it is her choice. Also, the case is in court, so I won't comment on that. Let

the truth come out," he said.

In the video clip, Phogat, who walked away from the sport after the Paris Olympics heartbreak, said she was preparing to return at the National Open Ranking Tournament — the final chance for wrestlers to qualify for the Asian Games selection trials.

The tournament is scheduled to take place from May 10 to 12 at the Nandinagar Mahavidyalaya in Gonda. Brij Bhushan is the founder of the Nandinagar Mahavidyalaya.

"No one is coming forward to help the players. It's like they (the government) have given a free hand to Brij Bhushan; that you do whatever you want, whether you do something with women wrestlers, whether you do anything with the wrestling world, we are standing with you," Phogat said in the video clip. She said it was "impossible" that the competition would be held fairly, and expressed concern over whether the weigh-in process and the bouts would be compromised.

Responding to this, WFI president Sanjay Singh said: "I can assure her that all the referees chosen will be from the Wrestling Federation of India and the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) panel."

In her video clip, Phogat said: "Three years ago, we also raised our voices against sexual harassment (by Brij Bhushan). There is a case pending in the court related to that. Six women players had complained, and based on that, the hearing is going on. The Supreme Court's guidelines state that no victim's identity should be revealed because it is a matter of their dignity and honour... Today, there are certain things I feel compelled to share. I had stayed silent because the case is still pending in court, and the truth will soon come out before the country. But I want to say this — I am one of the six victims who filed complaints, and our testimonies are ongoing."

Delhi fire

flats — at the front and back — on each floor above.

The fire was confined to the flats at the back of the building, Mukesh Verma, divisional commissioner of the Delhi Fire Service (DFS), said.

The deceased were identified as Arvind Jain (60), Anita Jain (58), Nishant Jain (35), Anchal Jain (33), Akash Jain (1), Shikha Jain (45), Nitin Jain (50), Shailya Jain (48), and Samyank Jain (25). Around 15 other residents of the building were rescued, the Fire Service said.

Police said the fire appeared to have started on the second floor and travelled upward, to the third and fourth floors. Residents of the area reported hearing a loud noise and suspected that an air conditioner had exploded, but this has not been confirmed by the Fire Service or police.

The entire rear of the building had been enclosed within

the iron structures that did not allow residents to exit or rescuers to enter the flats until the grills had been cut to create an opening. "People build these cage-like iron structures usually to extend their living space and to keep out pigeons, monkeys, and thieves," a police officer said. "The residents could not escape to the top of the building either, because the door to the terrace was locked. There is only one entry and exit to the building, which is in the front. There was dense smoke, and the lift had stopped working."

According to the officer, some of the flats had central locking systems, which may have stopped working after the fire broke out and power was cut to the building, trapping the residents.

PM Narendra Modi expressed distress over the incident and announced ex gratia of Rs 2 lakh for the next of kin of the dead. L-G Taranjit Singh Sandhu and CM Rekha Gupta also expressed grief over the incident.

Skywatch

Forecast: May 4, 2026

Generally cloudy sky; very light to light rain with thunderstorm, lightning and strong winds gusting to 70 kmph

MAX: 32-34
5.3°C below normal

MIN: 23-25
1.7°C below normal

• Sunrise: 5:38 AM (May 5)
• Sunset: 6:58 PM (May 4)
• Moonrise: 9:33 PM (May 4)
• Moonset: 7:44 AM (May 5)

NOW, CENTRE'S NOD SOUGHT

7 new Metro corridors spanning 97 km get Delhi govt approval

Devansh Mittal
New Delhi, May 3

SEVEN NEW corridors, 65 stations, spanning nearly 100 km, set to be developed at the cost of approximately Rs 48,204.56 crore — the Delhi government has approved the Delhi Metro's new extension plan under Phase V(B), Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said on Sunday.

The latest expansion is focused on improving connectivity in densely populated areas in Outer Delhi and rural belt such as Narela, Najafgarh, Nangloi and parts of North Delhi, while also strengthening links across the existing network.

"This project will play a key role in ensuring balanced and inclusive urban development across Delhi," the CM was quoted as saying in a statement by her office as the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) marked its 32nd Foundation Day. The seven corridors, spanning about 97.16 km, are Dhansa Bus Stand-Nangloi, Central Secretariat-Kishangarh, Sa-



At the celebrations of 32nd Metro Foundation Day on Sunday. X/GUPTA_REKHA

maypur Badli-Narela, Kirti Nagar-Palam, Jor Bagh-Mithapur, Shastri Park-Mayur Vihar Phase III and Keshavpuram-Rohini Sector 34. Among these, completion targets for four priority corridors, which are yet to be named by officials, is 2029.

The proposal for the project will now be sent to the Central government for approval. Last December, the Cabinet had approved Phase V (A), a 16-km expansion, which primarily focuses on providing connectivity to the Central Vista corridor.

"The complete length of

Phase V will be around 200 km across Delhi-NCR," DMRC MD Vikas Kumar had told *The Indian Express* earlier this year.

The DMRC will now prepare revised Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for both priority and non-priority corridors before seeking final approvals from the Centre.

The Dhansa Bus Stand-Nangloi corridor, spanning about 11.8 km, will be fully elevated and connect areas such as Najafgarh, Bakkarwala and Nangloi, with existing interchanges.

The Central Secretariat-Kishangarh line, about 16 km long, will have a significant underground stretch and connect key locations including Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Prime Ministers' Museum.

The Samaypur Badli-Narela corridor will extend the existing Yellow Line further north, bringing areas such as Holambi Kalan and Alipur onto the Metro map. The Keshavpuram-Rohini Sector 34 corridor, at over 16 km, will be fully elevated and serve residential and institutional areas in northwest Delhi.

Other corridors will combine elevated and underground sections. The Kirti Nagar-Palam stretch will extend the Green Line and provide interchange points with the Pink and Magenta lines. The Jor Bagh-Mithapur corridor, nearly 17 km long, will connect South and Southeast Delhi with multiple interchanges, while the Shastri Park-Mayur Vihar Phase III Corridor will improve connectivity in East Delhi, including areas such as Trilokpuri.

In new traffic challan system, pay 50% before challenge; face penalties over submission delay

45-day window from the issuance of a challan to either pay or challenge it

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 3

TRAFFIC VIOLATORS in Delhi will now have to deposit 50% of the fine before approaching a court to contest it under a new framework, which introduces a structured and time-bound process for settling challans with an emphasis on digital monitoring and stricter enforcement, a statement from Chief Minister Rekha Gupta's Office said on Saturday.

"Delaying traffic challans will cost dear, and payments must be made within deadlines," the CM was quoted as saying in the statement. It will trigger daily electronic notices.

Continued non-payment will lead to restrictions on vehicle-related services, like tax payments, licence or registration processes. Vehicles may also be

flagged as "not to be transacted" on the portal, blocking further transactions until dues are cleared. In certain cases, subject to court orders, vehicles may even be impounded. Calling the system "fully digital, transparent and accountable," the CM said it is aimed at improving compliance with traffic rules and reducing road accidents.

The government, as per the statement, will also implement amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989. As part of this, individuals committing five or more violations within a year will be classified as "serious offenders" and may face suspension or disqualification of their driving licence.

Under the revised system, officials said, violators will have 45 days from the issuance of a challan to either pay the fine or challenge it before a grievance re-

dressal officer through an online portal.

If no action is taken within this period, the challan will be deemed accepted, and the individual will have 30 additional days to make the payment. If a challenge is rejected, the violator can either pay within 30 days or move court after depositing half the challan amount. Failure to act within these timelines will result in the challan being treated as accepted, with payment required within a further 15 days.

Meanwhile, the issuance of challans will be fully digitised. Authorities will generate e-challans through cameras and surveillance systems, in addition to physical issuance by traffic personnel. E-challans will be sent within three days if a mobile number is available, while physical notices will be delivered within 15 days.

All challans will be recorded on an online portal. Motorists have been advised to update their contact details on driving licences and vehicle registration certificates.

After judge's death, case of abetment against his wife

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 3

A CASE has been registered against the wife of judge Aman Kumar Sharma, who died allegedly by suicide on Saturday afternoon, senior police officers said. The judge was found hanging in the bathroom of his Green Park home.

A case of abetment of suicide under Section 108, and of criminal conspiracy under Section 61 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), has been registered at the Safdarjung Enclave police station, police said. The wife is also a judge, they

said.

"On the complaint of [the] father of [the] deceased judicial officer, a case under Sections of 108/61(2) BNS has been registered at Safdarjung Enclave and investigation taken up," Delhi Police said in a statement.

Sharma was the Full-Time Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) at the Karkardooma court.

As per the North East District Legal Service Authority website, he joined the Delhi Judicial Services on June 19, 2021 after he completed his BALLB from Symbiosis Law School, Pune, in 2018.

Panchkula to Delhi in 86 minutes: Army officer wife's heart lives on in 14-year-old Sudanese boy

Hina Rohtaki
Chandigarh, May 3

A 14-YEAR-OLD boy from Sudan, suffering from end-stage kidney failure, got a new lease of life as an Army officer consented to donating the organs of his brain dead wife, and the donor heart was transported from Command Hospital at Chandimandir in Haryana Panchkula to Indraprastha Apollo Hospital in Delhi in record 86 minutes.

Green corridors were created from Command Hospital to the Chandigarh airport and further from Delhi airport to Indraprastha Apollo Hospital to enable quick transport of the organ.



A private jet was used for the transport of the organ. EXPRESS

The Airports Authority of India in Chandigarh provided priority clearance for a chartered private jet, which took the organ to Delhi in 29 minutes.

This marked the first-ever

airborne organ mission in the northern sector and involved coordination among several agencies including the authorities at the two hospitals, Haryana, Punjab and Delhi traffic police, and aviation officials.

Sources at the Command Hospital said that the 41-year-old wife of a serving Army officer was admitted after suffering a brain haemorrhage. She was declared brain dead on May 2. Her husband and the two young daughters decided to donate her organs. Her heart was allocated to Indraprastha Apollo Hospital where the Sudanese boy was battling a terminal heart ailment.

A special team arranged ur-

gent logistics and flew to Chandigarh on a chartered private jet to retrieve the organ, Indraprastha Apollo said in a statement.

It took the team 34 minutes to travel from Command Hospital to the Chandigarh airport, and another three minutes to board the flight after completing formalities. The flight was airborne at 6.51 pm and touched down at the Delhi airport by 7.20 pm. In Delhi, the traffic police created a green corridor from the airport to the hospital, enabling transport of the organ in about 20 minutes.

Within an hour of landing, the heart was successfully transplanted into the 14-year-old boy. The patient is currently stable

and under close monitoring in the ICU, the Delhi hospital said. "Special recognition was extended to Colonel Anurag Garg of Command Hospital, whose exceptional leadership and coordination ensured the success of the donation and transplant process," it added.

Dr Mukesh Goel, senior consultant in cardiothoracic surgery-heart and lung transplant at Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals, said that the teenager was suffering from end-stage heart failure for over a year and had to be admitted almost every month to stabilise his condition.

"Heart transplant was the only option to save his life," he said.

Salon worker poisons wife, 4 children, then attempts suicide

Gurgaon: A 45-year-old man allegedly killed his wife and four children by poisoning them before attempting to end his own life at their house in Wazirpur village of Gurgaon on Saturday night, said police.

Officers said the accused, Nazim, who works at a salon, is currently undergoing treatment at a local government hospital.

In a statement, Gurgaon police spokesperson Assistant Sub Inspector Sandeep Kumar said a team of officers found the bodies of one woman and 4 children lying on mattresses on the floor of a first-floor room.

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Fire Tragedy

MONDAY, MAY 4, 2026

PHOTOS: ABHINAV SAHA



BUILDING IN VIVEK VIHAR: The four-storey building, B-13 Vivek Vihar, stands on an 800-sq yd plot. There are two fairly expensive 4BHK flats on each floor. At front is Ghazipur drain; beyond that is flyover on Chaudhary Charan Singh Marg.



REAR ENCASED IN GRILLS: The flats at the back have enlarged their living spaces with cage-like extensions. The fire broke out at the back of the building. The strong, tightly packed grills prevented both escape and rescue.



BACK LANE TOO NARROW: The lane behind the building is too narrow for a fire truck to enter. Fire personnel tried to break through the grills to enter the flat. One resident got a mechanised iron cutter, operated with a power generator.

NINE LIVES CUT SHORT

Killer fire broke out in a four-storey building, which has two flats on each floor at the back and front, in Vivek Vihar around 3.30 am on Sunday

FIVE VICTIMS IN THIRD FLOOR BACK FLAT

‘May have survived if they attended kin’s birthday..’

Alok Singh & Vidheesha Kuntamalla
New Delhi, May 3

IT WAS meant to be a birthday morning in Manesar.

Deepak Jain had left a day earlier with his wife and two sons to prepare for his elder son Anant's sixth birthday. Back in Vivek Vihar, his family remained in their third-floor apartment in Building B-13 — his father Arvind Jain, 60; his mother Anita, 58; his brother Nishant, 35; Nishant's wife Anchal, 33; and their one-year-old son Akash.

By Sunday morning, five of them were dead.

A fire that broke out in the early hours of the day swept through the four-storey residential building in east Delhi's Vivek Vihar, trapping residents before they could escape. Nine bodies were recovered from the charred building, fire officials said.

Among the dead were members of the Jain family living on the third floor: Arvind Jain, a retired small-business owner who once ran a speaker shop in Delhi; his wife Anita; their son Nishant, a chartered accountant; Nishant's wife Anchal, a bank manager; and their infant son Akash Jain.

The remaining victims were identified as Shikha Jain, 45; Nitin Jain, 50; Shailey Jain, 48; and Samyank Jain, 25.

By late afternoon on Sunday, the open courtyard outside

the mortuary at Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital had turned into a holding space for grief for family members of the deceased.

Near the mortuary entrance, a woman let out a sudden cry. Two others rushed to steady her, guiding her to a bench. “*Himmat rakho*,” one of them said. Every few minutes, a car would pull into the campus. Before it fully stopped, someone would step out already crying, their voices rising above the subdued murmurs.

Family members said the Jain household had lived in the building for nearly a decade.

It was Deepak who had traveled to Manesar ahead of the planned birthday celebration, making arrangements for his son Anant's sixth birthday. Other family members were expected to join later in the day.

“He had gone for the preparations,” a relative said. “Everyone else was supposed to follow.”

They never did.

By Sunday afternoon, Deepak was at the mortuary, moving from one formality to another — signing papers, confirming names — while the plans he had left behind in Manesar quietly dissolved into grief.

“They were all living happily. I don't know what tragedy struck this family,” Rekha, their domestic help, said, her voice breaking.



Relatives and friends of victims mourn the loss of lives. TASHI TOBGYAL

THREE VICTIMS IN FOURTH FLOOR BACK FLAT

‘How will we run his restaurant now?’

Alok Singh
New Delhi, May 3

“HOW WILL we run the restaurant now? Nitin sir used to handle everything,” said a restaurant employee, standing outside his employer Nitin Jain's house in East Delhi's Vivek Vihar.

Nitin Jain (50), his wife Shailey (48), and their son Samyak Jain (25) were among the nine charred to death after a fire broke out.

Nitin, a franchise owner of a well-known restaurant at Cross

River Mall in Shahdara, lived with his family on the fourth floor of the building. Hours after the incident, a group of staff members, looking visibly shattered, had gathered outside the building. The couple's youngest son, Prasuk Jain (20), is now the sole surviving member of the family. According to Nitin's relatives, Prasuk had travelled to Ujjain over the weekend to offer prayers at Shri Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga temple.

Nitin's brother Ankit Jain, who lives in Rampura on the

other side of the road, said that the entire family had originally planned to travel to Ujjain, but for some reason only Prasuk made the trip. “Both his sons helped Nitin in the food business. Prasuk has been called back from the trip, and we are trying to give him the strength to bear this immense loss, having lost his parents and brother,” said Ankit, who runs a readymade garments business.

According to the employees who had gathered outside the victim's residence, Nitin had

been running the franchise restaurant for the past three years. A family member added that Nitin was also involved in the cardboard manufacturing business. The three bodies, the family member said, were found on the staircase of the building.

“It appears they were trying to reach the terrace, but it was locked. They got trapped due to heavy smoke and later collapsed. I don't know who will take care of their only surviving son now,” the family member added.



At GTB Hospital. TASHI TOBGYAL



ALOK SINGH



• Major fire incidents

MARCH 18, 2026: A blaze at a four-storey house in Palam killed nine members of a family.

JUNE 10, 2025: A fire in a duplex flat on the 10th floor of a residential society in Dwarka Sector 13 killed three people.

FEBRUARY 15, 2024: 11 workers were killed in a fire at a paint factory in Alipur, Outer Delhi.

MAY 26, 2024: Seven newborns died in a fire at Baby Care New Born Hospital in Vivek Vihar.

MAY 13, 2022: A fire at a manufacturing unit in Mundka claimed 27 lives.

DECEMBER 8, 2019: 43 workers died in a fire at a residential building used as a manufacturing unit on Rani Jhansi Road.

FEBRUARY 12, 2019: 17 people died after a fire broke out at Hotel Arpit Palace in Central Delhi.

JANUARY 20, 2018: A fire at a firecracker factory in Outer Delhi's Bawana claimed 17 lives.

CONDOLENCES



“The loss of lives is extremely distressing. Condolences to those who have lost their loved ones. Praying for the speedy recovery of the injured. An ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh from PMNRF would be given to the next of kin of each of those who lost their lives. The injured would be given Rs 50,000.”

NARENDRA MODI,
PRIME MINISTER



“Deeply saddened by the tragic fire incident in Vivek Vihar. My thoughts and prayers are with the families who have lost their loved ones in this devastating tragedy. I pray for the speedy recovery of the injured and strength for the bereaved families...”

TARANJIT SINGH SANDHU,
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF DELHI



“The fire incident in a building in Vivek Vihar is extremely tragic. The loss of 9 lives in this accident has left me deeply distressed... In this hour of grief, my condolences are with the affected families. The Delhi government stands firmly with the affected families in every situation during this difficult time”

REKHA GUPTA,
CHIEF MINISTER OF DELHI

ONE VICTIM IN SECOND FLOOR BACK FLAT

‘She did not jump...lost her life saving others in the family’

Vidheesha Kuntamalla
New Delhi, May 3

“SHE CAME out. She was about to jump. For some reason, just for a second, she went back inside. And she never made it out,” Namit, a family member, recounts 45-year-old Shikha Jain's last moments as he stood outside the burn casualty ward at Safdarjung Hospital.

Shikha was among the nine

who lost their lives.

Meanwhile, Naveen Jain (48), Shikha's husband was admitted inside the ward, bearing 30-40% burn injuries. Outside, his family waited, some standing, others walking impatiently.

“As soon as the fire happened, neighbours placed mattresses on the ground,” said Namit. “People were jumping to save themselves.”

Shikha's body was recovered

from the second floor, the place where the fire appeared to have started. She was among the first owners of the eight-flat building B-13 in Vivek Vihar as she had moved in nine years ago.

At the time of the incident, eight members were present in the flat on the second floor — Shikha, her husband, their two daughters, her elderly parents, and two domestic helps.

As the fire raged on, Shikha

and her family members started shouting and crying for help. By the time other occupants and neighbours could do anything, the fire had spread across the upper portion of the building from the rear side.

She, along with her husband, took charge of the rescue efforts, according to family members.

“With the help of neighbours, she first rescued her

mother, Darshana, and father, Arun, and asked the domestic help to leave immediately. Her mother recently underwent knee treatment,” Suresh, a relative said, adding that Shikha lost her life rescuing others.

“The daughters jumped and were rescued, but Shikha and Naveen were trapped in the fire. Naveen was somehow rescued, but Shikha remained stuck in the flat,” Suresh said.

• RESIDENTS HAD PUT UP NETS, GRILLS AROUND THEIR FLATS

‘No one could go in or come out’: How victims were trapped by cage-like grills

Vidheesha Kuntamalla & Alok Singh
New Delhi, May 3

IN THE lanes of Vivek Vihar in East Delhi, where buildings are packed tightly enough to share both light and shadows, the early hours of Sunday were broken by screams.

From the first-floor balcony of the home where he has lived since 1984, Gurdeep Singh Gill watched the fire begin around 3.30 am. It was a flicker on the second floor of a neighbouring building which, within minutes, turned into something else entirely. “There was no space for people to get out,” Gill said hours later, standing outside the four-storey, seven-year-old building where the tragedy had struck.

Most of the eight flats in the building are owned rather than rented. At the back, where the fire broke out, the balconies had been sealed with metal grills, and some were covered by plastic netting. The stairwells were narrow and enclosed.

When the fire brought flames, smoke and panic, the incremental additions to the structure, to grab space to dry clothes or keep potted plants, became life-and-death barriers.

From his balcony, Gill watched the second floor disappear behind smoke. Within half an hour, he said, the fire had cut off the only escape route for those on the higher floors — the stairs that lead up to the terrace.

The neighbourhood was ringing with voices — the



Families and friends of victims wait outside the mortuary at GTB Hospital, New Delhi, on Sunday. TASHI TOBGYAL

screams of terrified children, wails of traumatised victims, shouted instructions from those who had gathered. Gill said he ran to fetch a pipe and aimed a jet of water upwards from his balcony at the flames.

But the heat pushed him back. “It was so hot,” he said.

Inside the burning building, the panic was rising quickly. Two sisters were trapped on the second floor. Gill said he joined others below to drag mattresses

into position, laying them out in the hope of cushioning the fall, should they choose to jump. Rescuers worked to cut through the grills so that people could slip through. “We managed to cut a part of the metal to make space for people to come out. Three people could be taken out through the opening; two others jumped,” Gill said.

The family of Arvind Jain lived on the second floor. His wife and daughter were caught inside. The wife would not come out; she seemed either too terrified or was incapable, Gill said.

By then, the smoke was so thick that nothing could be seen. “No one on the third floor was visible,” Gill said.

The Fire Brigade had arrived, but the firemen found

their task had been made difficult by the additions that had been made to the building over the years. “The residents were stuck in the back of the building,” Gill said. Firemen had access from the front, but the rear, where the fire was raging, had been blocked by the very features that residents had added over time. “If they weren't there, maybe some lives could have been saved,” Gill said.

Manik Malhotra, an IT professional who lives in the neighbourhood, said he reached the building around 4 am. By then the fire, which had begun on the second floor, had engulfed the third floor and was licking at the fourth. The first floor, Malhotra said, was largely intact.

It was evident that the dense

layers of grills and plastic netting at the back of the building were making the crisis worse. “There was a 4-inch gap,” Malhotra said. “Even getting a pipe through was difficult.”

At one point, three people — including two elderly women — managed to edge out onto a narrow ledge behind the netting, gasping for air as smoke filled their home, witnesses said.

From a neighbouring house, residents brought an angle grinder, a handheld machine meant for cutting metal. The power supply had been cut, so someone started a generator, witnesses said. Firefighters took the tool and began slicing through the grill. Through the opening, three people were pulled out using ladders. But the

higher floors remained sealed behind thicker, denser layers of netting. Ladders had to be carried in by hand; hoses repositioned repeatedly. The rear lane was too narrow for the fire trucks to enter. If it wasn't for this net, the casualties would have been reduced,” Malhotra said. In his assessment, “All of them on the third and fourth floors could have been saved.”

Once the fire was put out, residents of the neighbourhood stood around the blackened building with its hollowed out windows. They spoke about what happened, why, and what could have been.

With flames on the one side and sealed exits on the other, “no one could get out, and no one could go in,” Malhotra said.



TEMPORAL SEAT SUMMONS PUNJAB SPEAKER FOR 'CLAUSE-BY-CLAUSE' DISCUSSION ON THE ACT

Akal Takht Jathedar: Consensus on not accepting anti-sacrilege law

Kamaldeep Singh Brar
Amritsar, May 3

HOLDING THAT an anti-sacrilege law recently notified by the Punjab government could be "misinterpreted" and information shared under it "weaponised" to target rivals, the Akal Takht on Sunday issued summons to Vidhan Sabha Speaker Kuldeep Singh Sandhwan asking him to explain why the Panth (community) was not consulted and the highest temporal body of Sikhs allegedly overlooked during its framing.

Sandhwan has been asked to appear before the Akal Takht Secretariat on May 8 for a "clause-by-clause" discussion on the Act, Jathedar of the Akal Takht, Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj, said. The Punjab government on April 20 notified the Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026, eight days after the Assembly unanimously passed the Bill during a special session on April 13. The new law, which provides life imprisonment and a fine of up to Rs 25 lakh for any act of 'beadbi' against the Guru Granth Sahib, amends the Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar Act, 2008. Addressing reporters after a special meeting Sikh organisa-

tions, scholars and legal experts, Gargaj, said that the new law was framed by the state government without taking either the Akal Takht or the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee into confidence. He said a consensus emerged in the meeting that the law formulated "without the consent of the Khalsa Panth and Sri Akal Takht Sahib should not be accepted".

He asserted that matters related to Sri Guru Granth Sahib are internal religious affairs of the Sikh community, and no government can impose laws on Sikhs in this regard. The government, he said, must clarify why representative Sikh institutions were ignored.

Earlier, during the meeting of at Bhai Gurdas Hall, the Jathedar expressed concern that the new law could be misinterpreted and misused. He also criticised the AAP government for its alleged failure to fulfil promises of justice in connection with the 2015 sacrilege incidents in the state.

Ex-serviceman Gurjit Singh Khalsa, who had been protesting atop a mobile tower since October 2024, demanding a law against sacrilege, was not present in the meeting.

Speaking on behalf of Sikh



Akal Takht Jathedar Kuldeep Singh Gargaj during Sikh bodies' meeting in Amritsar on Sunday. EXPRESS

priests, SGPC member Kiranjot Kaur raised apprehensions over specific clauses in the Act that define the responsibilities of custodians of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

"This law could be misinterpreted to hold priests responsible for sacrilege," she said. "The government has failed to arrest the accused in many sacrilege cases, but under the new law, priests could be prosecuted for negligence if they fail to prevent an incident."

The speakers noted that instead of focusing on punishing those responsible for sacrilege and delivering justice to Sikhs, the law places greater responsibility on Sikh institutions, gurd-

wara managements, the sangat, granthis. It was also observed that such measures could create obstacles in the propagation of the Sikh faith and may alienate the Sikh community from the Guru Sahib, it said.

Gargaj noted that making public information about who has been issued a 'Saroop' (holy scripture) of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib could lead to misuse.

"People could weaponise this information against rivals who have installed a Saroop in their homes," he said. He questioned why the SGPC should disclose such data and how doing so would help stop sacrilege. He emphasised that the failure to curb sacrilege was not due to a lack of online records, but because of the government's inability to arrest and prosecute the actual culprits.

"We want a strong law against sacrilege, but it must be drafted in consultation with top Sikh institutions," he asserted.

The Jathedar said that the 'Khalsa Panth' does not oppose strict laws aimed at punishing those guilty of sacrilege. However, bringing Sikh sentiments, concerns and matters related to Sri Guru Granth Sahib under the ambit of state legislation is unacceptable.

Referring to sacrilege incidents in Punjab, the Jathedar said that despite two successive governments since the incidents began, the "real culprits have not been brought to justice". He pointed out that cases related to the 2015 sacrilege incidents were transferred outside Punjab, and the present government has not made concrete efforts to bring them back.

Addressing a 'Lok Milni' outreach programme at village Ghogra in Hoshiarpur, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said that the law has "closed the chapter" on sacrilege incidents by making them punishable with up to life imprisonment. He alleged that previous governments lacked the intent to bring such a law despite repeated incidents.

"If the opposition had honest intentions, they would have enacted a strict law long ago. We have now ensured that anyone indulging in beadbi (sacrilege) will face the harshest punishment," Mann said.

Earlier, Punjab Police on Thursday had registered its first case under the new law booking unidentified persons after torn pages of a religious scripture were found in a slum area in Malout area of Sri Muktsar Sahib district.



Congress candidate T D Raje Gowda celebrated in Chikkamagaluru on Saturday, claiming the results were in his favour. PTI

Sringeri postal ballot recount: Cong MLA Raje Gowda's tally reduced by 255 votes

ENS & PTI
Chikkamagaluru, May 3

AFTER THE reverification and recount of postal ballots for the Sringeri Assembly constituency, votes polled for Congress MLA T D Raje Gowda were reduced by 255, the returning officer said. A report on the matter has been submitted to the Election Commission for further decision, he said.

Following a Karnataka High Court order on the election petition filed by BJP's defeated candidate D N Jeevaraj challenging Raje Gowda's election, the reverification and recounting took place on Saturday and continued until midnight. Raje Gowda had won the 2023 Assembly polls from Sringeri by 201 votes.

"The High Court on April 6 had ordered reverification and recounting. As per that order, the exercise has been completed. The court order did not direct us to announce the results; it also did not refer to EVM votes. The order was specific only to postal ballots," returning officer Gaurav Kumar Shetty said.

Speaking to reporters late on Saturday night, he said, "During the 2023 vote counting, Jeevaraj had received 692 votes, while Raje Gowda had re-

ceived 569 votes. Now, after reverification and recounting, Jeevaraj has 690 valid votes, which is two votes less than earlier, while Raje Gowda has 314 votes, a difference of 255 votes."

Regarding allegations of vote tampering, he said the allegations are criminal in nature and do not fall under his jurisdiction.

Jeevaraj, speaking to reporters, said, "As per the current count, I have the majority. Officials have said that the Election Commission will make the formal announcement. I will wait for the Commission's order." Raje Gowda expressed doubts about "vote tampering" and demanded a detailed inquiry into Jeevaraj and others.

Later, Sudheer Kumar Muroli, who served as Raje Gowda's counting agent during 2023 assembly polls lodged a complaint at the Chikkamagaluru Town police station, alleging that 255 ballot papers cast in favour of Raje Gowda had been tampered with.

Meanwhile, speaking to reporters, Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress president D K Shivakumar said that Jeevaraj had conspired with some officers and tampered with the postal votes.

"More than 200 postal votes were marked using pens," he said.

First Show

THE CONGRESS on Sunday got its TV panelists and spokespersons together a day ahead of election results in four states and one Union Territory, and prepared them for debates on Monday. Communication in-charge Jairam Ramesh is learnt to have held a briefing, where party leader Pawan Khera made an appearance for the first time since securing anticipatory bail from the Supreme Court in a case lodged in Assam. The gathering also turned into a moment to felicitate Khera and the party's legal team, led by Abhishek Singhvi, for its work leading to Khera's bail. Khera was booked for making allegations against Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife Riniki Bhuyan Sharma.

Change in Air

BJP CIRCLES are abuzz with the likelihood of a change at the helm of three to four of the party's state units, including Delhi, after the Assembly election results are out. Said to be linked to a larger organisational overhaul in its ranks under BJP national president Nitin Nabin, sources said the names of three prominent party leaders from the Capital have been shortlisted for the post.

Talking Point

FORMER CONGRESS MLA Divvyva Mahepal Madernna's attire during a visit to Blavatnik School of Government (University of Oxford) has caught the attention of many in her home state Rajasthan. Sources say that at the last moment, Madernna decided to skip traditional Indian attire and opted for a western dress. She wore it with a British fascinator hat, and a jacket made with the traditional "Pattu" shawl - hand-woven woolen textiles from Rajasthan. The Congress leader delivered a talk at the school on "women, power and public life in India". But it was her choice of attire that became a talking point in not just Oxford, but also back home.

Ladakh Lessons

S P SINGH Baghel, Union Minister of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, visited Ladakh on Saturday and held a review meeting with officials of the newly formed Changthang district. The meeting took place on the banks of Pangong Lake. Senior officials from the Department of Animal Husbandry and other departments focused on regional development and livestock initiatives. During his visit, the minister also interacted with local farmers engaged in rearing Pashmina goats, gaining insights into their challenges and traditional practices.



Nishant Kumar being showered with flowers as he starts the 'Sadbhav Yatra' on Sunday. RAHUL SHARMA

Amid drums, slogans and a nod to his father's legacy, Nishant begins 300-km 'Sadbhav Yatra'

Santosh Singh
Patna, May 3

AS HE got into his waiting yellow bus amid a shower of flower petals and the sound of drums, conches and bugles, Nishant Kumar clearly laid out what it was — a political outreach for the Janata Dal (United) scion.

"Sadbhav means having the same feeling for all, whether rich or poor, backward or forward, Dalits or minorities," Nishant said, standing in front of the yellow luxury bus with a life-size image of his father. "Just as my father used to start all his yatras from West Champaran — the karmabhoomi of Mahatma Gandhi — I'm also doing the same."

On Sunday, Nishant, son of Bihar's longest-serving chief minister Nitish Kumar, embarked on his first political yatra, the Sadbhav Yatra, since

entering politics in March. For the next four months, Nishant will travel a 300-km yatra from Patna to Valmiki Nagar, with stops at Vaishali, Muzaffarpur, Motihari, Lauria, Bettiah and Bagaha — and the key irrigation and border landmark in Champaran, the Gandak Barrage.

Although it technically began Sunday, the real yatra will begin Monday from Bagaha and Bettiah, where he will meet party workers and hear public grievances. Leaders such as JD(U) state president Umesh Kushwaha, party's leader in the Assembly Shrawan Kumar and Islampur MLA Ruhel Ranjan will accompany him during the yatra.

Before he set out, Nishant sought the blessings of his father at his new residence, 7, Circular Road. As he reached the JD(U) office on Patna's Bir Chand Patel Path, chants of "Ni-

shant Kumar zindabad", "Jay Nishant, tay Nishant" and "Nitish Kumar zindabad" met him.

Nishant stopped at several places along the way Sunday. The day also saw a good turnout of women — a core constituency of his father. Speaking from the bus rooftop at Narkatiaganj, he said: "I'm overwhelmed with your love and blessings. We have to work towards the goal of my father's motto of 'Viksit Bihar and Samridh Bihar' (developed and prosperous Bihar)."

Nishant is expected to travel to Vaishali on May 7. JD(U) chief spokesperson Neeraj Kumar said: "He has set out on a yatra to get public feedback, hear people's grievances and carry forward the rich legacy of his father, Nitish Kumar. The crowd response has been overwhelming from the start of the yatra."

'Attended House drunk': BJP seeks Mann's removal

Ludhiana: The BJP's Punjab unit on Sunday submitted a memorandum to Governor Gulab Chand Kataria seeking the removal of Bhagwant Mann as chief minister "in the interest of preserving constitutional integrity and public trust", while alleging that he attended the Vidhan Sabha session on Friday in an "inebriated condition".

Party's state unit chief Sunil Jakhar, who submitted the memorandum, later said he

told the Governor that Mann is not fit to be the CM of any state.

The memorandum read: "It has been widely reported and publicly discussed that CM attended the May 1 session...in an inebriated condition. The way he addressed the Assembly and reporters outside the House, it clearly shows he was drunk."

It said, "Punjab is a sensitive border state... The leadership of such a state demands utmost responsibility, alertness, and discipline..." ENS

TO FAST-TRACK DEPORTATION

Maharashtra to withdraw cases filed against jailed illegal foreign nationals

Mohamed Thaver
Mumbai, May 3

THE MAHARASHTRA government has decided to withdraw criminal cases filed against jailed illegal foreign nationals to fast-track their deportation.

A Government Resolution (GR) over the same, issued on March 25, could impact over 3,500 illegal foreign nationals, a majority of them from Bangladesh.

The GR directs the formation of committees at both the district and state levels to scrutinise cases against illegal foreign nationals and identify those that can be withdrawn to enable de-

portation. Officials said the figure of over 3,500 includes not just those currently in jail but also accused who are absconding after having spent time behind bars. In the past few years, the state has deported around 2,900 Bangladeshi nationals.

While earlier action focused on those working in the state using fake documents, the new move brings prison inmates facing criminal cases under the ambit of deportation measures.

The resolution follows directives issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in November last year, which laid down guidelines for withdrawal of cases that hinder deportation.

Fantasy Buildwell Private Limited
11th Floor, Tower-B, Paras Twin Tower, Golf Course Road, Gurugram - 122002
Website: www.parasbuildtech.com

PUBLIC NOTICE

Whereas, Fantasy Buildwell Private Limited is in the process of undertaking development of a Group Housing Colony in Sector - 2 over an area measuring 14.305625 acres in the revenue estate of Village Goyal Patan, District - Gurugram in accordance with the provision of Income Tax Act, 1961 dated 11.07.2012 and 106 of 2023 dated 12.09.2023 granted by Director General, Town & Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh.

And Whereas, DTCP, which had earlier approved Building plan bearing memo no. ZP-837-V/SD/PPK/2026/14240 dated 15.02.2024 ("Earlier Approved Plan") & has now granted in-principle approval for revised building plan of Phase I, II and III vide Memo bearing no. ZP-837-V/SD/PPK/2026/14240 dated 24.04.2026 ("In principle approved EWS revised building plan").

And whereas, several individuals/persons (hereinafter referred as existing allottees) have made bookings/entered into purchase agreement/ Buyer agreements for allotment and purchase of the units in Phase I, II and III in the said colony till date.

And whereas according to the office of Director General, Town & Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh has required seeking of objections/suggestions against the revision of layout plan as a pre-condition for allowing such revision in the layout plan.

Accordingly, vide this public notice, objections/suggestions, if any, are hereby invited from any of the existing allottees in the said colony on the proposed revision of the building plan for EWS block of the said colony. A copy of the earlier approved Building plan bearing memo no. ZP-837-V/SD/PPK/2026/14240 dated 15.02.2024 & the building plan now proposed to be revised in principle approved bearing Memo No. ZP-837-V/SD/PPK/2026/14240 dated 24.04.2026 is available for perusal of our existing allottees on (a) company website parasbuildtech.com (b) in the office of undersigned at 11th Floor, Tower B, Paras Twin Tower, Golf Course Road, Gurugram (c) at the project site at Sector 2, revenue estate of Village Goyal Patan, District - Gurugram at the project site office (d) at the facility office at Sector 2, revenue estate of Village Goyal Patan, District - Gurugram (e) in the office of Senior Town Planner, ("STP"), Town and Country Planning Department, Haryana, HSNP Complex, Sector 14, Gurugram, Haryana.

Any existing allottee having any objection/suggestion to revised building plan of EWS block of the said colony, may file his/her/their objection/suggestion in the office of STP and in the office of the undersigned within 30 days of the date of publication of this public notice upto 02.06.2026, failing which it shall be assumed that there are no objections to the proposed revision in the layout plan.

Place: Gurugram
Date: 04.05.2026

For and on behalf of Fantasy Buildwell Private Limited.
Authorized Signatory

OUR CENSUS OUR DEVELOPMENT

(First Phase of Census 2027)
Common queries on Self-Enumeration (SE) and their Answers (Part-2)

WHAT IS SELF-ENUMERATION?
Self-Enumeration is an online process in which you fill and submit your household details on the SE portal (se.census.gov.in) yourself, without waiting for an enumerator

- ❖ **What are the benefits of Self-Enumeration?**
 - Fill details conveniently
 - Ensures privacy
 - Makes the Census process faster and efficient
- ❖ **How to log in to the Self-Enumeration portal?**
 - Select State/UT
 - Enter name of head of the family, mobile number and email (optional)
 - Verify through OTP
 - Start Self-Enumeration
- ❖ **How to mark the correct location of your house?**
 - Select district/PIN code
 - Enter area/landmark
 - Zoom on map and mark location near your house (Do not worry if exact address is not displayed)
 - Correct location marking is necessary
- ❖ **Can I edit my information later?**
 - Yes, you can edit before final submission during State/UT SE period
 - After final submission changes can be done during enumerator's visit
- ❖ **Can SE portal be accessed outside India?**

No, this facility is available only within India's geographical boundaries
- ❖ **What if an error is found after submission?**

Correction can be made when the enumerator visits your house
- ❖ **Can I save and complete the form later?**

Yes, you can save progress and complete the form within the stipulated time

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epaper.indianexpress.com New Delhi

Verdict: 5 factors to watch out for

In West Bengal, TMC hopes to hold fort for fourth time, BJP wants to breach it

Vijay's impact, DMK's margins & AIADMK's fight to stay relevant

Ravik Bhattacharya
Kolkata, May 3

All eyes are on the outcome of the West Bengal Assembly elections, with the counting of votes set to take place on Monday.

The poll results will determine whether the incumbent Trinamool Congress (TMC) chairperson and three-term Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, 71, is able to hold out and retain her post, or the BJP is finally able to breach her fort and take the helm in the crucial eastern state for the first time.

Here are five crucial factors to watch out for in the electoral landscape of Bengal.

SIR shadow

The polls were held against the backdrop of the Election Commission (EC)'s controversial Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, carried out over several months in an exercise that involved deletion of around 91 lakh voters – including over 27 lakh voters following adjudication, whose appeals 19 tribunals would continue to hear for an indefinite period. The exercise in Bengal has been unique on various counts, ranging from deployment of micro observers to the use of "logical discrepancies" criterion, to adjudication and tribunals.

TMC's acid test

TMC insiders say the party is aiming to secure an "absolute



Banners featuring Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, in Kolkata on Sunday. PTI

majority close to 200" to protect itself from the BJP's alleged bids to orchestrate defections.

Make-or-break fight

The face-off is being seen as the "battle of Mamata's life", who has been known for her combative politics and fighting spirit. If she manages to pull off her fourth Assembly poll triumph, it will further enhance her stature among top Opposition leaders at the national level.

This time, in her Bhabanipur constituency in South Kolkata, too, Mamata is facing a stiff challenge from her aide-turned-BJP face and Leader of Opposition (LoP) Suwendu Adhikari. The

constituency saw high drama even on polling day on April 29, with the CM accusing the central security personnel and the EC of "harassment" and "detention" of her party leaders and workers a day earlier.

BJP's challenge

In 2021, when the BJP bagged 77 seats, it emerged as the principal Opposition, elbowing out both the CPI(M) and the Congress. This time, the BJP has gone all out in a bid to not only cross the 100 mark but also secure the magic number. BJP insiders say that a 150-seat haul would consolidate the party's position, claiming that the TMC

would "crumble" afterwards.

Congress, Left eye inroads

Both the Congress and the CPI(M)-led Left had failed to open their accounts in 2021, when they had contested together as part of an alliance. This time, the Congress has gone solo. The party hopes to get some seats in Malda, Murshidabad and Uttar Dinajpur – three Muslim-dominated border districts. The CPI(M) has also made all attempts to regain some ground in the state where it had ruled for 34 years.

Arun Janardhanan
Chennai, May 3

THE STATE'S 234-seat Assembly, long dominated by the alternating rhythms of the DMK and the AIADMK, has rarely gone into a result day without a discernible wave. This time, there is no such tide. Instead, there are signals – uneven, overlapping, sometimes contradictory. As counting trends begin to flicker, five questions will shape the day.

Not who leads – but by how much

When the state swings, it tends to swing decisively, as it did in 2011, when the AIADMK alliance surged, or in 2021, when the DMK-led front secured 159 of 234 seats. But that decisiveness often hides fragility. If the DMK builds a steady lead across regions, it would indicate that incumbency has held firm. If the AIADMK keeps the early gap tight, the contest may stretch into a slower, more uncertain count.

The Vijay variable

The most discussed number in this election is not seats – it is Vijay's vote share. Across party camps, estimates have crept upward through the campaign, with some placing it near 15 to 20 to 25%. But elections are not decided by vote share alone. They are decided by



DMK chief and Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin

how those votes are distributed.

DMK's strength

The DMK's advantage appears structural: welfare delivery, organisational depth, and a leadership that has campaigned at scale. But alliances have their own vulnerabilities.

AIADMK's test

For the AIADMK, this election is not simply about winning but is about proving that it remains competitive in a post-Jayalalithaa landscape.

Chennai faultline

If there is one region to watch for early signals, it is Chennai. The city's electoral history has oscillated sharply. The AIADMK struggled here for decades, winning just one seat in 1977, two in 1980, three in 1984, and none in 1996 before breaking through in 2006 and peaking in 2011. The DMK, in contrast, has often treated Chennai as a stronghold.



A shopkeeper sells powders of various colours, signifying different political parties, ahead of the counting of votes, in Kolkata. ANI

From seeking divine help to gardening, leaders try different ways to beat suspense

Sweetie Kumari, Arun Janardhanan, Shaju Philip & Sukrita Baruah
Kolkata, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Guwahati, May 3

FROM SEEKING divine intervention to staying confined to their natives to visiting party offices, leaders in the four states – West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Kerala – are gearing up for the results on Monday.

West Bengal

Several leaders sought divine intervention ahead of counting day. BJP's Purnima Chakraborty offered prayers in Kolkata, while Ghatal candidate Sital Kapat visited a local temple. In contrast, TMC leaders projected calm confidence. Kolkata mayor Firhad Hakim said the party was preparing for a decisive mandate. In Pandabeswar, TMC's Narendranath Chakraborty kept away from the political buzz, tending to his garden. "People know my work," he said.

The BJP struck a different tone. Arjun Singh, contesting from Noapara, spoke of restrained celebrations, promising "tradition over noise" with sweets instead of loud festivities.

Smaller players like Aam Janata Unnayan Party chief Humayun Kabir claimed they could hold the balance of power.

Tamil Nadu

In Tamil Nadu, Actor-politician Vijay, whose Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK) is seen as a wildcard in this election, made a visit to Velankanni church over the weekend. AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami has retreated to his home base in Salem, a customary move that reflects both political grounding and strategic distance from the capital's immediate pressures.

On the ruling side, Chief Minister M K Stalin has kept engagements minimal, making only a brief visit to the DMK headquarters.

Across parties, there is a noticeable absence of overt celebration or alarm. Instead, the mood is one of measured anticipation.

Kerala

Kerala heads into counting day with familiar political clarity but competing claims of victory. Votes for all 140 Assembly seats will be counted across 140 centres beginning at 8 am. Around 15,000 officials have been deployed to oversee

the process.

The ruling CPI(M)-led LDF is confident of retaining power for a third consecutive term. State secretary M V Govindan described the upcoming verdict as "crucial and historical," expressing confidence in a comfortable majority. The Congress-led UDF, buoyed by exit poll projections, believes it is poised for a comeback after a decade out of power. However, senior leaders have struck a cautious note publicly.

The BJP, which failed to open its account in 2021, is aiming to re-establish itself as a viable third force. Its focus remains on key constituencies like Nemom, alongside hopes of surprise gains elsewhere.

Leaders across parties have outlined their counting-day plans. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will remain at his residence in Kannur, while party and Opposition leaders will monitor developments from state offices and the capital.

Assam

Both the BJP and the Congress kept engagements low-key on Sunday, a day before counting, while stepping up internal coordination and projecting confidence in the outcome.

In the BJP camp, state president Dilip Saikia and CM Himanta Biswa Sarma chaired a virtual meeting with candidates, MPs and district unit heads to review preparedness. The Congress and allies held a similar exercise in Guwahati a day earlier.

Even as public activity remained subdued, leaders across camps reiterated their claims of victory. Saikia said the BJP-led alliance was headed for a "historic mandate". Of the 126 Assembly seats, the BJP contested 90, while its allies, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF), fielded candidates in 26 and 11 seats respectively.

"Based on inputs from our booths, we expect to win over 80 of the 90 seats we contested," Saikia said, adding that the alliance could secure around 20 more seats through its partners.

The Congress, however, dismissed such projections. On Saturday, state president Gaurav Gogoi rejected exit poll predictions of an NDA sweep, arguing that "silent voters" and an "undercurrent" in favour of the Opposition would shape the final outcome.

Can CPI(M) hold on to its last stronghold, or is Congress all set to make a comeback in Kerala?

Shaju Philip
Thiruvananthapuram, May 3

THE RESULTS of the elections to the 140-member Kerala Assembly will determine whether the state is embracing a long-term political stability under the incumbent CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) or see the return of the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF).

The LDF has been ruling the state for the last two terms under CM Pinarayi Vijayan, which in the 2021 elections broke the state's tradition of alternating change of guard between LDF and UDF.

Vijayan factor

CPI(M) stalwart and two-term CM Vijayan has been the face of the LDF's campaign, making this election into a referendum on his leadership and governance record. If the LDF manages to rebound the state's "anti-incumbency" trend and returns to power even with a slim margin, Vijayan will emerge stronger not only within his own party but in the entire Left ranks.

CPI(M)'s chances



The LDF has been ruling the state for the last two terms under CM Pinarayi Vijayan

The CPI(M) had suffered setbacks in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the 2025 local body elections in Kerala. It remains to be seen whether voters have been influenced by "anti-incumbency" in the current Assembly polls. If the Left loses power in Kerala, it would mark the first time since 1977 that there would not be any Communist government in any state in the country.

Congress's prospects

Among the four states and a Union Territory where elections were recently held, Kerala is the only state where the Congress is in pole position while leading an alliance. So, in the event of

the UDF's victory, the grand old party will head the new regime.

High stakes for BJP

The BJP is trying to break the template of bipolar politics in Kerala. The party is looking to pick a few seats and winning back Nemom, which it had lost in 2021 when it had drawn a blank. In the local body elections in December 2025, the BJP pulled off a historic win in the Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation. In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the party had won the Thrissur seat.

Polarisation effect

The outcome will also show whether there has been a consolidation of minority votes in favour of the UDF in the wake of the latter's allegation of a "deal" between the CPI(M) and the BJP to keep the Congress away from power for another term.

In 2021, the CPI(M) had benefited from the rallying of the minorities round the LDF. However after facing a debacle in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the CPI(M) tried to make an outreach to Hindu voters.

The verdict would indicate the degree to which the CPI(M) would hold on to its Hindu vote base.

BJP's bid for a hatrick, Himanta's test, and fate of the three Gogois

Sukrita Baruah
Guwahati, May 3

WITH THE stage set for counting of votes for the Assam Assembly elections on Monday, here are five things that will remain in focus in the state.

BJP's dominance

The exit polls have forecast a decisive mandate for the incumbent BJP led by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. In the event of the NDA's return to power, all eyes will be on the BJP's tally. The party has yet to get a clear majority on its own in the 126-member state Assembly. Both in 2016 and in 2021, the party bagged 60 seats, crossing the majority mark with its allies.

Congress's fate

Notwithstanding the setbacks that it has suffered since 2016, the Congress sought to fight the BJP head-on in this election, putting up its state party president Gaurav Gogoi directly as a challenger to Sarma. The Congress also rejigged its coalition, snapping ties with its former ally, the Badruddin Ajmal-led AIUDF. Instead, the Congress aligned with smaller regional outfits. By contesting under the leadership of a clear face in the form of Gaurav Gogoi, the party has been hoping to improve its 2021 tally of 29 seats. It



Security personnel outside a strong room in Tezpur on Sunday. PTI

remains to be seen whether these changes will bring electoral dividends for the grand old party.

Three Gogois

Observers will be keenly watching the performance of three Gogois in the fray. Gaurav Gogoi is contesting in this Assembly election as a candidate for the first time. The other two Gogois are the Congress's key partners. Akhil Gogoi, the president of the Rajgor Dal and former AASU leader Lurinjyoti Gogoi.

Delimitation factor

Amid the recent political storm over delimitation at the national level, a key question is how the redrawn constituencies

in Assam after the 2023 delimitation would play out in this first Assembly election after the contentious exercise, which is said to have tilted the state's political map in the BJP's favour.

The Western Assam region, known as Lower Assam, in particular saw a drastic redrawing of constituencies. This was a region where the Congress and its then ally AIUDF had registered significant wins in 2021.

Regional outfits

While the BJP and the Congress dominate political discourse, the poll outcome will also have a significant bearing on the fate of several smaller parties which shape Assam politics.

STRONGMAN JAHANGIR KHAN FACES SCRUTINY AFTER EC REPORTS 'SEVERE ELECTORAL OFFENCES' DURING POLLING ON APRIL 29

Behind TMC bastion Falta, set for a full repoll: Abhishek aide who started with CPM

Atri Mitra
Kolkata, May 3

AS VOTES are counted in West Bengal on Monday, voters of Falta in South 24 Parganas district will get to see who has been voted to power. But they themselves have to wait for almost three more weeks to cast their votes again and choose their MLA after the Election Commission (EC) issued a rare order directing that polls be held again in all 285 polling stations in the constituency.

One of the Assembly segments in TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee's Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha constituency, Falta is one of the party's bastions and gave the MP a lead of more than 1.5 lakh votes in the 2024 Lok Sabha constituencies. This time, the EC reported "severe electoral offences and subversion of democratic process during polling" in the Assembly constituency, where TMC candidate

Jahangir Khan wields massive influence. Opposition candidates have alleged that the electoral process was manipulated through the use of "black tape/perfume on ballot unit".

With the TMC since 2011, Falta, which has an almost equal population of Hindus and Muslims, had never witnessed the extended dominance of any one party since 1952. The first election was won by the Communist Party of India, while the next two went to the Congress, before the CPI(M) won the seat in 1967, before the Congress again made a comeback in 1972 and held on to it even amid the Left sweep in 1977. Since then, the constituency kept alternating every two elections between the Congress and the CPI(M), before the TMC's Tamonash Ghosh bagged it in 2001. He lost it in 2006, but made a comeback in 2011 and retained the seat in 2016.

However, with the rise of Abhishek in the party, Tamonash,

among the TMC's earliest leaders, fell out of favour with the party leadership and was replaced.

While TMC and BJP leaders in the area refused to comment on the latest controversy, a CPI(M) district committee member, who wished to remain unnamed, claimed Falta had never seen violence or one-sided elections before the TMC came to power. "Whoever won always bagged the seat by a moderate margin, around 25,000 votes. The elections were always competitive. Then in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the lead from this Assembly segment jumped to around 40,000 and this trend held in the 2021 Assembly polls too. In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the TMC got a lead of more than 1.5 lakh votes. And the main leader behind this is Jahangir Khan."

TMC insiders also credited Khan's efforts for helping Abhishek win the seat by more than



Security personnel deployed in Falta on Sunday. ANI

seven lakh votes. Khan, whose rivals accuse him of maintaining an iron grip in the area through fear, was born in a family of CPI(M) leaders. His father, the late Akbar Khan, and elder brother Salim Khan were known Left leaders in the area. Jahangir too started his political journey with the CPI(M) and later, started

an embroidery business.

Soon afterwards, as the TMC gained strength, he joined the TMC before the 2008 panchayat elections under the leadership of Bhaktaram Mondal. In that election, Khan became the pradhan of the Belsingha-II gram panchayat.

"He was a common leader till

the 2014 Lok Sabha election. After Abhishek Banerjee won the MP in 2014, he gradually became close to him," said a senior district TMC leader. This is when Tamonash was eased out of the party's decision-making process. Khan also sidelined Bhaktaram once he rose through the ranks.

"In 2023, Khan became a Zila Parishad member and is now the person who runs the body," said the TMC leader, adding, "He gradually sidelined all existing TMC leaders like Bhaktaram Mondal and Tamonash Ghosh, who were very close to Mamata Banerjee. Ghosh died during the Covid pandemic and Mondal joined the BJP. Now, Jahangir and his brother-in-law Saiful Islam rule Falta. No one dares to stand up to them."

A local TMC leader accused Khan of taking money from a local bottling plant, brick kilns, and other small factories, many of which have shut shop. "The

police never allowed any complaint to be filed against Jahangir. He has a gang of 50-60 young men. Along with Saiful, he controls this gang that collects money for him from different areas in Falta. Not only Bhaktaram, but every veteran leader in the party has also either been sidelined or has become silent because of Jahangir," said the leader.

Face-off against EC

Ahead of polling, Khan hit the headlines after police observer and senior Uttar Pradesh officer Ajay Pal Sharma, known as an "encounter specialist", conducted searches at his home. When Sharma, known as "Singham (daredevil)" and appointed as a police observer in South 24 Parganas, did not find him, he issued a warning to Khan's family members, which was captured in a video clip that went viral.

"Listen carefully; if there is any mischief, the treatment will

be such that crying later won't help," Sharma was heard saying in front of Khan's home. "Jahangir's family members are here. I am telling them — I hear his men are going around threatening people. Tell him that if this continues, I will take note of everything. I will take such action that even weeping won't save him later."

Later, referring to Bollywood movie Singham and Telugu action film Pushpa, Khan told reporters, "The police observer should inform the local SP if there is any problem. But he visited my home with the Central forces. How can he do that? We only bow to people. We will not bow to him. This is Bengal; if he is 'Singham', I am 'Pushpa'. No amount of threat or coercion by the BJP-appointed police officials from Uttar Pradesh will be allowed in Falta."

Falta will go to the polls again on May 21 and the results will be announced three days later.

Eyes in space: Indian startup launches a first-of-its-kind satellite via SpaceX rocket

Drishti can take synchronous optical and radar images

Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, May 3

A SpaceX rocket launched from California on Sunday carried a unique satellite from Indian start-up GalaxEye that is meant to fill a long-standing gap in earth observation capabilities from space. The satellite, aptly called Drishti, is equipped to take optical as well as radar-generated images of the same place at the same time, something that has not been tried before.

Most earth observation satellites use either optical sensors, which capture reflected sunlight just like a conventional camera, or Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) systems that use microwave signals to generate images. Both of them have limitations. Optical sensors produce clear and intuitive images, just like any normal camera, but are blinded by clouds, smoke or darkness. SAR can make continuous observations because microwave signals effortlessly penetrate



The satellite rode on a Falcon 9 rocket by SpaceX from the Vandenberg Space Force Base in California as one of the 45 payloads on the CAS500-2 mission.

clouds, smoke or darkness, but these images are not like regular photographs and require expertise to interpret, something similar to an X-ray film.

Drishti, which has been built entirely in India, seeks to eliminate this familiar trade-off in satellite imagery. It is the world's first satellite equipped with both optical sensors as well as SAR, and the two have been synchronised to take simultaneous images of the same place on Earth. For this reason, GalaxEye is describing its innovation as OptoSAR technology.

"When the optical sensors are unable to take images because of clouds or darkness or other similar reasons, we will use artificial intelligence to regenerate optical-like images from the SAR," Suyash Singh, one of the founders of GalaxEye, told *The Indian Express* in a recent interview.

Until now this problem used to be solved by attaining datasets from multiple satellites and integrating them. But that had its own problems. SAR and optical datasets were not taken at the same time, and the

E. EXPLAINED

Indian startups make a mark

GALAXEYE IS one among several Indian space startups that are beginning to make their presence felt. Agnikul Cosmos, another start-up from IIT Madras, has built the world's first 3-D printed rocket engine, while Skyroot has tested India's first privately built rocket. Companies like Pixxel, Dhruva Space and Bellatrix have been demonstrating impressing innovations in satellite technologies.

situation on the ground could have changed during the intervals. So, some details would invariably be missed.

"What we are trying to do is to make space imagery available all the time, and understandable to all kinds of users," Singh said.

Drishti is the first satellite of GalaxEye, a company started by alumni of IIT Madras and incubated at the institute. The satellite rode on a Falcon 9

rocket by SpaceX from the Vandenberg Space Force Base in California as one of the 45 payloads on the CAS500-2 mission.

The launch, at 12.30 pm India time on Sunday, invited congratulatory messages from Vice-President C P Radhakrishnan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar among others.

"Mission Drishti by GalaxEye marks a major achievement in our space journey. The successful launch of the world's first OptoSAR satellite and the largest privately built satellite in India is a testament to our youth's passion for innovation and nation-building. Heartiest congratulations and best wishes to the founders and the entire team of GalaxEye," Modi said in a message on X.

The capability of Drishti can be immensely useful in Indian conditions. Singh said one of the reasons no one else built a satellite like Drishti was that clouds and smoke was primarily a problem in the tropical countries. "Most of the satellite companies have traditionally been based in the western countries, and cater to the demands of those countries. Weather is relatively more predictable, and the skies are relatively clearer and clearer. They don't have the

same kind of issues with clouds that we in India face. We are trying to solve for problems in our part of the world," he said.

GalaxEye had to make important technological innovations to ensure that both the imaging sensors are put on the same satellite and operate in sync with each other to produce simultaneous imaging of the same place.

"SAR and optical sensors are designed in different ways. They look at the Earth at different angles. So, if they are placed side by side, for example, the optical sensor might be looking at Bengaluru while SAR is capturing Dubai at that instant. So, we had to come up with a technology stack that synchronises the functionalities of these two technologies, enabling them to look at the same location at the same time. This is our proprietary technology. This does away with the need of the users to manually align and synchronise the datasets from two different satellites which might have taken images of a place at totally different times. The situation on the ground could have changed during this time, so that data from SAR is not entirely translatable into optical data. Drishti will eliminate these complications entirely," Singh said.



An IAF helicopter rescues children stranded atop a water tank in Siddharthnagar, Uttar Pradesh, on Sunday. ANI

Making reel turns fatal: 3 kids fall from water tank, 1 dead

Two critical, IAF chopper rescues 2 stranded minors

Manish Sahu
Lucknow, May 3

ONE CHILD fell to his death, and two sustained grievous injuries as a group of five boys tried to make a reel from an abandoned 50-foot-tall water tank in Siddharthnagar on Saturday. While three fell climbing down the water tank, two remained stranded atop it overnight and were rescued early Sunday in an operation involving an Indian Air Force helicopter.

"Three boys - Siddharth, 13; Golu, 14; and Sunny, 11 - fell from a height of 50 feet. Two other children, who were struggling behind, remained stranded on the top of the water tank and were unable to come down. The injured boys were rushed to the hospital, where Siddharth was

declared dead on arrival. The other two children are undergoing treatment, with doctors describing their condition as critical," said a senior police officer on Sunday.

Drones were deployed to deliver food and water to the two stranded children - Pawan, 17, and Kallu, 16 - who remained trapped atop the water tank. Multiple rescue efforts were launched through the night. Fire brigade teams were called in, and a hydraulic ladder was brought from neighbouring Gorakhpur district, but repeated attempts failed to bring the boys down safely.

After hours of relentless efforts, the rescue was finally carried out in the early hours of Sunday when an Air Force helicopter was deployed, successfully bringing both children to safety. Siddharthnagar DM Shivsharanappa G S said that with the cooperation of the CM's office, an Air Force helicopter was arranged, and the two children were rescued at around 5.30 am on Sunday.

Two years after sacking, Uttarakhand brings back principal accused of casteist harassment

Aiswarya Raj
Dehradun, May 3

TWO YEARS after his services were terminated and orders were issued for salary recovery following charges of casteist harassment, misrepresentation in his CV, and imposing a financial burden on the institute, the former principal of the State Institute of Hotel Management, Catering Technology and Applied Nutrition, New Tehri, Yashpal Singh Negi, has been reinstated by the Uttarakhand government, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

In an order issued on May 28, 2024, the then Tourism Secretary, under whose jurisdiction the institute functions, had ordered his termination, stating that while serving as Director/Principal (contractual), Negi had failed to discharge his official duties and responsibilities with due diligence.

However, in a correspondence dated April 10, 2026, the Tourism Secretary ordered his reinstatement. The correspond-

ence notes that Negi would withdraw the petition through which he had taken the government to court. The former principal had challenged the termination order at the high court, which stayed the order. The department appealed to the SC, after which the HC stay was set aside, but the recovery was stayed until the hearing was completed. The reinstatement has now been initiated after Negi wrote to the government requesting that he be taken back, stating that he would withdraw the petition in accordance with due legal process.

In fact, on January 2, 2026, the meeting of the Board of Governors of the institute under the chairmanship of the tourism secretary had decided that the selection of the principal will be through a regular appointment. The minutes of the meeting show that the board had decided to issue a fresh advertisement for the post.

While Negi declined to comment, UTDB officials did not respond to queries.

From worst-affected by Maoism to highest class 10 pass percentage: The turnaround of Bijapur

Jayprakash S Naidu
Raipur, May 3

BIJAPUR, THE Chhattisgarh district that was the worst-affected by Maoism, has jumped to first place among the state's 33 districts for pass percentage in class 10 board exams and second place in class 12 exams.

Last year, the district stood ninth in class 10 pass percentage and 23rd in class 12 pass percentage. The pass percentage for class 10 boards has increased from 85.40% last year to 96.06% this year, and for class 12 boards, it increased from 80.35% to 95.63%.

The district was once infamous for school students dropping out and allegedly joining Maoist ranks, officials said.

In the last two years, security forces stepped up operations against Maoists in the Bastar region, which includes Bijapur. Since 2024, as many as 234 Maoists have been killed in encounters, while 1,191 have been arrested and another 1,003 have surrendered, severely weakening the rebel movement.

Starting from a survey

Last year, District Collector Sambit Mishra conducted a

survey to find out how many school children were dropping out and why. The survey revealed that nearly 10,000 children had dropped out of school.

Mishra then set out to ensure that of those that remain, the maximum number of students clear the 10th and 12th board exams. "Soon after the results last year (in May), we took a meeting with all school teachers and principals, where we found out the issues. We learnt that faculty members were not present in many instances. We also took a basic test of all children and identified those who were weak in their studies. We learnt that there were learning gaps, due to which personal attention was needed for students. We then took four major steps," he said.

First was finding out which subjects needed more teachers, and we recruited 68 new teachers, called "Shiksha Mitans", using District Monetary Foundation (DMF) funds.

The other three steps taken were conducting pre-board exams every two months with regular performance reviews. The teachers were asked to identify weaker students and take remedial classes and extra



The authorities also worked on ensuring that attendance at schools was over 90 per cent. EXPRESS

teaching sessions. A district-level exam cell prepared blueprint-based question papers for students so they are well-prepared. Another initiative was teaching students Artificial Intelligence prompts, which helped some of them clear their doubts, though several others could not use it due to a lack of mobile network.

The authorities also worked on ensuring that attendance at schools was over 90%.

"District CEO Namrata Choubey's active involvement in monitoring was critical. She used to hold monthly meetings with all subject teachers where students were performing

poorly in pre-boards and our centralised test. This helped us address the gaps and ensure better results," said Mishra.

The education department's assistant programme coordinator, Zakir Khan, said, "We had eight months to prepare students for the exams, and the results were very pleasing. Last year, 3,940 students appeared for SSC (10th) and HSC (12th), of which 3,279 passed. This year, 4,111 students appeared for SSC and HSC, of which 3,942 passed."

It was not only pass percentage, but the number of students securing first-class marks also doubled this year. "This

year, 2,805 students got first-class in SSC and HSC, while last year the number was 1,441. Girls were ahead of boys in both exams," said District Education Officer Lakhlanal Dhanelia.

The results also brought a cheer to the face of Satyanarayan Tokal, 57, who has been teaching in a government school in Pamed, once a Naxal stronghold over 100 km away from Bijapur district headquarters.

"Till last year, there was no proper road to our school, and to go to Bijapur town, we used to travel via Telangana. Until 2008, it was a middle school and then it became a high school. The initiative has made a big impact. In 2012, it became a higher secondary school, and since then, it is the first time that two girls have scored above 80% marks. Archana Gundi scored 82% in HSC science and Sandhya Sabka scored 80% in SSC," said Tokal proudly.

Khan said, "In Tarlaguda porta cabin school near the Telangana border, all 28 children passed. One of them, Divya Micha, got 87.84%. She is from a remote village named Metlacheru, about 16 km from Bhopalpatnam, where there is no electricity or network."

Four die as car collides with truck in Bihar

Muzaffarpur: Four people died on the spot when their car collided head-on with a truck in Bihar's Muzaffarpur district on Sunday, officials said.

The accident occurred near Ratanpur village under the Motipur police station area. According to eyewitnesses, the car, lost control while trying to save a motorcyclist and rammed into an oncoming container truck. PTI

Investigators say all 4 identified passengers on board the vessel have now been accounted for - 28 rescued, 13 dead.

The boat, a two-decade-old vessel operated by the state tourism department, had capsized on Thursday evening after being caught in a sudden storm on the Namada reservoir near Jabalpur.

Since then, the focus has shifted from rescue to accountability. The state government has ordered an inquiry, dismissed key staff, and halted similar cruise operations across Madhya Pradesh.

4 from Tamil Nadu went on holiday, returned in caskets: Survivor of cruise tragedy recounts their final moments

Anand Mohan J
Bhopal, May 3

THE LAST two bodies surfaced on Sunday morning, bringing a three-day search on the waters of the Bargi Dam to a close, and the final toll of the cruise disaster in Jabalpur stood at 13.

Among them were a 9-year-old child, Mayuram, and his uncle, Kamraj, an employee of the ordnance factory in Jabalpur. Kamraj had moved his family from Tiruchy to Jabalpur about a year ago, following work at the city's ordnance factory. His wife, Karkuzhali, thought the school holidays were a good time to have family around. Her relatives had come from Tamil Nadu for the summer; among them were Mayuram and his brother Iniya.

On Thursday, Kamraj took the day off. They left early, first to Bhedaghat, where the children rode the ropeway over the marble gorge, and then drove to the dam resort, arriving in the afternoon. By evening, they were on the



Kamraj had moved his family from Tiruchy to Jabalpur a year ago

water. While Iniya was rescued following the disaster, Mayuram could not be traced. Kamraj's younger son, Tamilventhan, had already been among those confirmed dead, his body flown back to Tamil Nadu. The child's mother, Karkuzhali, also died in the accident.

Puvitharan (10), the sole remaining survivor of the Kamraj family, remembers the beginning as being completely ordinary. The boat moved smoothly. Somewhere on the

upper deck, a group of passengers was celebrating a birthday.

"The weather was completely clear. There was no problem in the beginning. The wind suddenly became very strong. The waves started hitting hard," the boy said. Among his family, he said, only the children had been given life jackets before boarding. When the movement turned violent, the adults began reaching for them too. "But by then," he said, "it was already too late." As the boat

overturned, the boy was thrown into the choppy waters. He was spotted by local workers at the shore. "I raised my hand and one uncle threw the rope at me and I caught it," he said. After his rescue the boy went back to Tamil Nadu with his grandmother, his relatives flown in caskets.

The search had widened steadily over the past two days - divers working 40 to 50 feet below the surface, scanning a radius of nearly five kilometres. More than 200 personnel, including Army divers airlifted from Agra, teams from the NDRF and SDRF, and local rescuers, had worked in shifts, navigating silted waters and low visibility before the final recoveries were made. Jabalpur collector Raghvendra Singh told *The Indian Express*,

"We recovered the last two bodies in this unfortunate incident. The dam is located in a large area which is used for various activities like irrigation, electricity generation. The divers could only go for 15 minutes at a time to look for the submerged bodies. The

SHILPA RAO

STREAMING on youtube.com/@indianexpress

Thousands join J&K L-G Sinha's anti-drug padyatra, 518 peddlers arrested in 22 days



L-G Manoj Sinha at the anti-drug rally in Srinagar on Sunday. ANI

Express News Service
Srinagar, May 3

THOUSANDS OF people, including government employees and students, joined Lt Governor Manoj Sinha in a march against drug abuse as part of the government's 100-day 'nasha mukh' (drug-free) Jammu & Kashmir campaign.

In his speech after the padyatra, Sinha urged people to come together to "build a Jammu and Kashmir where no child is lost to drugs" and "no family is broken by addiction".

On Sunday, a large number of people from across the Kashmir Valley assembled in Srinagar to take part in a two-kilometre padyatra to show their concern over drug abuse. Holding placards against drug abuse and its effects, participants danced to the beat of drums as they marched on the roads.

Besides Sinha, the rally was attended by political leaders, bureaucrats, top police and security officers, and a large number of government employees and school children. The government had asked its employees—especially teachers—and students from some schools to attend the rally.

Earlier last month, Sinha reached out to elected legislators and political leaders, seek-

ing their cooperation in the "Drug-free Jammu and Kashmir" campaign. He wrote to leaders across party lines, saying their participation would "serve as a powerful catalyst" to rid Jammu and Kashmir of the scourge. Speaking at a rally at Srinagar's TRC football ground, Sinha said that thousands marching together against drug abuse had sent a "clear message to defeat drug addiction and narco-terrorism". "People's movement carries a promise of a future where Jammu and Kashmir stands free from the grip of drugs," Sinha said.

"It is also the promise of every teacher who has witnessed talent and potential fade into silence. The determination to uproot drugs is not only a declaration from the administration but a collective resolve of the people, who, after enduring decades of suffering, have risen to say that enough is enough." Sinha said that in the first 22 days of the 100-day campaign, 481 FIRs had been registered in drug abuse cases, while 518 peddlers had been sent to jail. He added that 24 houses belonging to drug peddlers—"proceeds of crime"—had been demolished and property worth crores seized. The government has also recommended cancellation of more than 300 driving licences.

Man held for rape-murder of 3-yr-old in Pune got 'benefit of doubt' in 2015

Chandan Haygunde
Pune, May 3

THE 65-year-old man accused in the rape and murder of a three-year-old girl at a village in Pune district, triggering strong protests, has a prior record of molestation—police are tracing details of the first case from 1998 while records reviewed by The Indian Express show that a judge pointed to tardy investigation in the second case from 2015 before acquitting the man.

In the latest case, involving the three-year-old, a Pune court remanded the accused to police custody till May 7. While seeking custody, police said they wanted to probe further whether he had committed more such offences in the past.

Speaking to reporters about the acquittal in the 2015 case, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis said, "The previous offences against the accused would be checked. It will be seen whether there were any lapses..."

Court records in the 2015 case show that the accused was charged with allegedly molesting a 17-year-old relative under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 354 and 506, and sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. According to the order of a special court dated May 3, 2019,



People stage a protest on the Mumbai-Bangalore Bypass, in Pune, over the rape and murder of the 3-year-old girl. PAVAN KHENGRE

the judge expressed surprise over police not taking "any efforts" to collect documents required to conclusively prove that the victim was a minor at the time of the offence. The court also observed "inconsistencies" in the victim's version about the "point of incident".

Court records show that on July 24, 2015, the accused, who resided nearby, allegedly called the victim to his house on the pretext of helping him switch on the TV. Once she arrived, he allegedly closed the door, caught her by the stomach and threatened her with a sickle,

records show. The accused allegedly then forced the victim to lie on the floor and sexually assaulted her, the records show. She pushed him away and escaped, which was purportedly witnessed by her aunt, who was standing outside, according to records. The victim ran towards her family members, who were working in a field, and narrated the incident to them, the records show.

An FIR was lodged against the accused at the same police station where he has now been booked again, under BNS and

POCSO, for the rape and murder of the three-year-old on May 1. In the 2015 case, the accused was granted bail in October that year. The prosecution examined five witnesses during the trial, including the victim, her mother, her aunt, a local panchayat member and the investigating officer. The court, however, observed "inconsistencies" in the nature and sequence of the molestation incident as described in the FIR and the victim's deposition. The court also found inconsistencies in the depositions of the victim's mother and aunt "about happening and sequence of the incident".

The prosecution, the court stated, "tried to prove the case through the chain of circumstance i.e. seizure of Sickle from the spot". But the court observed that a sickle is commonly used by agriculturists and freely available in the market, and its recovery was therefore "not an incriminating material".

On the investigation, the court stated: "Surprisingly, police have not taken any efforts to collect the valid and authentic age proof of the victim." The victim had submitted a copy of her school leaving certificate stating her age as "17 years and some 11 months" at the time of the incident.



Sankhadeep Banerjee (left) receives the award in Chennai on Sunday. EXPRESS

Indian Express photographer wins ACJ award

Express News Service
Mumbai, May 3

THE INDIAN Express photographer Sankhadeep Banerjee has won the Photojournalism category of the Asian College of Journalism (ACJ) Journalism Awards 2025, the Ashish Yechury Memorial Award for Photojournalism, for his image titled "Protestors at rest".

The photograph, captured in Mumbai last year, shows a bird's-eye view of hundreds of Maratha quota protesters lying across the floor of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus at midnight, offering a powerful visual of pause amid a prolonged agitation. The award was presented to Banerjee on Sunday, coinciding with World Press Freedom Day, at a ceremony held in Chennai.

The awards recognise excellence across reporting, writing and visual storytelling.

Smart meters, sour politics: Protests against prepaid electricity spread in UP

Maulshree Seth
Lucknow, May 3

IN FATEHPUR, smart meters were dumped at a local power station. In Agra, women threw them onto the streets. In Aligarh, Firozabad and Hathras, people marched to substations with the meters held aloft.

Across districts in Uttar Pradesh, unrest is growing among electricity consumers over "smart" prepaid meters. While authorities present prepaid metering as a nationwide reform to improve billing efficiency and reduce losses, many consumers see it as a coercive shift bringing higher charges and abrupt disconnections without safeguards.

According to sources, the protests gathered pace after automatic disconnections began in March, while conflicting readings of policy—across the Electricity Act, regulatory guidelines and recent statements by Union Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar—have deepened uncertainty, turning a technical transition into a political and public flashpoint across the state.

"In my 25 years of working for electricity consumers, I have never seen protests of this scale," Avadhesh Kumar Verma, chairman of the consumer pressure



A protest against smart meters held by AAP workers at Shakti Bhavan in Lucknow, Sunday. PTI

group Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Consumer Council and a member of Central and State Electricity Advisory committees, told The Indian Express.

The protests have also become a political flashpoint, with the Opposition seeking to corner the Yogi Adityanath government ahead of next year's Assembly election. Samajwadi Party chief and former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav framed the issue as corruption.

"The public is being fleeced under the pretext of installing 'smart meters'. The implementation of smart meters has become a vehicle for large-scale fraud. If such dishonesty is possible with smart meters, how can

Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) be considered secure? Why would it not be possible to manipulate EVMs as well?" he told reporters in Lucknow. While Uttar Pradesh State Electricity Consumer Council alleges that "forced shift to prepaid mode" led to the protest, officials from the power corporation say they are following the directions of the central government.

Amid the escalating situation, power corporation officials worked through Sunday to address grievances and clarify doubts on smart meters and prepaid billing guidelines.

The government has paused new installations in an attempt to contain protests, but demon-

strations have continued. Confusion persists over whether prepaid meters can be made mandatory under the Central Electricity Authority's 2022 guidelines.

In Parliament last month, Khattar clarified that prepaid smart meters are not mandatory for all consumers and are not being forced on households. Verma said this fuelled protests.

"Out of 85 lakh installed smart meters in UP, nearly 75 lakh consumers have shifted to prepaid mode without proper consent — a violation of the Electricity Act, 2003." This week, as criticism grew, UP's Power Minister A K Sharma hit back at the Opposition, accusing them of "doing politics" over smart meters. He also said that electricity supply had "improved drastically" after smart meters were installed. He also dismissed allegations of higher power bills, saying "machines are not biased". According to UPPCL Director (Commercial) Prashant Verma, of the state's 3.6 crore consumers, around 85 lakh smart meters have been installed, with about 5 lakh checked following complaints.

"The issues related to automatic disconnections since March have been taken up, with some relief given to small domestic consumers," he said.

Newborn, health worker die at hospital; probe on

Shubham Tigga
Ranchi, May 3

AN ADIVASI health worker and her newborn son died during delivery at a community health centre in Jharkhand's Seraikela-Kharsawan district, with the procedure allegedly conducted using mobile phone flashlights during a power outage. A probe has been ordered after the family alleged negligence.

The incident occurred at the Community Health Centre in the Rajnagar police station area.

Durgacharan Banra alleged when he had brought his pregnant wife Binita Banra — a community health worker from Hathising village, to the hospital Wednesday, she was "healthy and walking normally". She remained stable through Wednesday night and Thursday, but late at night, when he briefly stepped away, nurses allegedly shifted her to the delivery room, he claimed. "When I returned, a nurse came panicking and asked if I was with the patient. I was with my father's sister and my older paternal aunt. I rushed to the delivery room and saw there was no doctor and no electricity.

"The nurses were forced to conduct the delivery without power. I used my mobile phone flashlight while they were doing

the delivery," he alleged. He claimed that he urged nurses to conduct a surgery, but his requests were ignored. "She kept getting weaker and losing energy. Finally, the baby came out breathless and at the same time, my wife also lost her life," he said.

Banra further alleged that after the deaths, staff shouted at him and asked him to leave. "After some time, I booked a vehicle and took my wife the same night. Despite her deteriorating condition, she was neither given adequate treatment nor referred in time to a higher facility, and demanded strict action," he alleged, adding he would approach the police. The deceased is survived by two daughters. Following the incident, officials reached the hospital and assured an inquiry.

Seraikela-Kharsawan Deputy Commissioner Nitish Kumar Singh said a committee has been formed to probe the incident and a report is expected soon.

"The committee is conducting an investigation, and we will be able to share the findings by tomorrow evening. The woman died due to postpartum haemorrhage. The baby was found entangled in the umbilical cord, leading to choking during the delivery," he said.

Classifieds

PERSONAL

I, Marie Josee Poulin W/o Shri Govindarajan Elangovan R/o D-131, Upkar Apartments, Mayur Vihar Phase-1 Extension, Delhi-110091, inform that Marie Elangovan and Marie Josee Poulin is one and the same person i.e. myself.

0040852472-1

I, MOHD IMRAN, R/o BB-199/15, Bagrian Basti, Nabi Karim, Paharganj New Delhi-55, have changed my name to MD IMRAN for all future purposes.

0040852266-1

I, ANIL AGGARWAL S/O UGGAR SAIN AGGARWAL residing at 2109 Rani Bagh Delhi-34 have changed my name to ANIL KUMAR AGGARWAL vide affidavit

0050288731-1

I, BUSHRA PARVEEN S/O KAMRUDDIN & AZRA (MOTHER) R/O 27/344-345, TRILOKPURI, D-91, HAS CHANGED MY NAME AS BUSHRA

0130064231-1

I, Shabbir Ali S/o Mahub Ali R/o A-92, Vidyaapati Nagar, Mubarak Pur Dabas, Delhi-110081 declare that my name wrongly mentioned in my Daughter's Documents C.B.S.E. record as Shabir Ali instead of Shabbir Ali. But my actual and Correct name is Shabbir Ali for all purpose.

0040852438-1

I, RAJMOHAN RAM S/O RAMJI RAM R/o GHINHU PATTI, DURGAWATI, KAIMUR, BIHAR-821105, have changed the name of my minor daughter Archana Kumari aged 15 year and She shall hereafter be known as ASHA KUMARI

0040849957-1

LOST & FOUND

LOST-Original Sale deeds of Plot-1 (150 Sq.yds), Killa 23, Khureji Khas Area, Abadi of Anarkali, South Extn, Illaqa Shahdara, Delhi 51 in name of Bishamber Dayal, Regd 17.10.1959 & Kashmiri Lal, Regd 19.03.1959. Contact Sanjeev Aggarwal: 9818675645 FIR: 266848/2026/29.04.26

0130064230-1

This is to inform the public that my original diploma in pharmacy certificate issued by gautham college of pharmacy (affiliated to Bangalore university), RT nagar, Bangalore completed in 2005, Register No-1506027, if anyone found pls contact Premchand S/o Shri Brahmpal 9212324909

0040852472-2

SALUTE THE SOLDIER

BORDER SECURITY FORCE

Director General and all Ranks of Border Security Force remember its gallant Jawan Constable Abdul Rehman Sarkhali on his Balidan Diwas. On this day, he sustained fatal injuries while fighting militants in Jagt E-Mehtab, Budgam area, J&K. He sacrificed and made supreme sacrifice in the line of duty. His sacrifice and gallant action have been aptly recognized by GOI by awarding him with PMG (Posthumously).

CENTRAL RESERVE POLICE FORCE

DG and all Ranks of #CRPF pay solemn tribute to Constable Rajesh Kumar of 20 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice in a cowardly attack by militants in Khanyar area, Srinagar, J&K, on 4 May 1990. #CRPF salutes the braveheart and pledges never to let his sacrifice go in vain.

DG and all Ranks of #CRPF pay solemn tribute to Constable Rajesh Kumar of 20 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice after being grievously injured while countering an ambush by insurgents in Karbi Anglong district, Assam on 4 May 2009. #CRPF salutes the braveheart and pledges never to let his sacrifice go in vain.

DG and all Ranks of #CRPF pay solemn tribute to three valiant troopers of 92 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice after being grievously injured in a fierce encounter with militants on 4 May 2020 in Kupwada district, J&K. #CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let their sacrifice go in vain. #CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let their sacrifice go in vain.

DG and all Ranks of #CRPF pay solemn tribute to Constable Rajesh Kumar of 20 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice after being grievously injured while countering an ambush by insurgents in Karbi Anglong district, Assam on 4 May 2009. #CRPF salutes the braveheart and pledges never to let his sacrifice go in vain.

DG and all Ranks of #CRPF pay solemn tribute to three valiant troopers of 92 Bn, who made the supreme sacrifice after being grievously injured in a fierce encounter with militants on 4 May 2020 in Kupwada district, J&K. #CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let their sacrifice go in vain. #CRPF salutes the bravehearts and pledges never to let their sacrifice go in vain.

ITBP salutes its braveheart Inspector Raj Kumar of 19th Battalion, who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty on this day in J&K in 1997.

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Day after 4 kids murdered at home, mother's body found in drain

Manish Sahu
Lucknow, May 3

A DAY after her four minor children were found at their home in Uttar Pradesh's Ambedkar Nagar on Saturday, the 35-year-old woman was found dead in a drain near the home on Sunday. The woman, Ghasia Khatoon, was earlier thought to be a suspect as she

had gone missing. After receiving a complaint, police on Saturday entered the Akbarpur area house, which was locked from inside, and found the bodies lying on a bed. Investigators suspect the children — aged 14, 12, 10 and 8 — may have been drugged before being hit on the head and killed. The police suspected the woman murdered her children and fled through a window

after talking to her husband on Friday night.

Her husband, Niyaz Ahmed lives in Saudi Arabia and has not returned home for four years. Akbarpur police station house officer, Srinivas Pandey said that about a year ago, the woman had travelled to Saudi Arabia and found out her husband had married a Pakistani woman. Since then, she had been deeply distressed.

PTI reported Superintendent of Police Prachi Singh saying on Sunday that they located the woman's body in the drain with the help of CCTV footage while they were searching for her. Her husband confirmed her identity after they sent him a photograph of her face, she said. The woman's body has been sent for post-mortem to ascertain the exact cause of the death, the SP said, while not

ruling out suicide, murder or foul play. During preliminary investigation, police had earlier found that the kids' father had called his brother to check in on his family after repeated phone calls went unanswered on Saturday. The brother then found the house locked from inside.

He then called the police, who scaled the boundary wall to enter the house and found the dead bodies inside.

Office of The Chief Engineer (Bhopal Zone) P.W.D Bhopal (M.P.)

Email:- cepwdcapital@mp.nic.in Telephone/Fax No. 0755-2551403

Tender Notice

NIT No. 07/ G./I/Mis/BpLz./2019 (Year 2026) Bhopal, Date 27-04-2026

Online Tender for mentioned below are being invited. The Tender have been uploaded on the e-Procurement system of Public Works Department on the Portal <https://mptenders.gov.in> Tender details are as below:-

S. No.	Tender No.	District	Nature of work	Name of work	Call No.	Cost of Project (PAC) (Rs. In lack)	Remarks
1	2026_PWD RB_498264_1	Rajgarh	Road	Construction and Widening of Jirapur City Portion Road Total Length-6.40 KM and Providing Pole Shifting and height raising of 33kv, 11kv LT line and DTR Shifting work in Jirapur city portion road	2nd Call	1867.84	EMD/All Document are to be submitted online only.
2	2026_PWD RB_498265_1	Vidisha	Road	Construction of CC road from Pooanapura Link road No. 5 to Ahmaddpur road length 1.50 km., Kagdipura to Hospital road via Gurudwara, Baulbhar Chowk length 1.40 km., Madhavganj Hospital road Ravi Shankar Chouraha Neemtal Chowk length 1.00 km., Neemtal Chowk to Tilak Chowk Mayur News Office to Bada Bazar length 1.10 km. Total Length 5.00 km.	4th Call	977.27	EMD/All Document are to be submitted online only.
3	2026_PWD RB_498266_1	Vidisha	Road	Construction of Ramleela to Gallamandi Chowk via Bajariya Chowk length 1.60 km., NH 86 to Karayakheda road length 2.40 km., Kiri Mohalla to Baraipura Chowraha length 1.20 km. Total Length 5.20 km.	4th Call	979.03	EMD/All Document are to be submitted online only.
4	2026_PWD RB_503472_1	Vidisha	Road	Construction of Vidisha Railway Station Madhav Ganj Chowk Main Road to Padi School, Chanakya road to Bajariya Jhaki Chowk Via Shivaji Chowk length 2.30 km.	8th Call	663.82	EMD/All Document are to be submitted online only.
Total						4487.96	

The document can only be purchased online from the above website after making online payment. The last date & time for purchase of Document on line is Dated 18-05-2026 up to (17:30). Detailed NIT and other details can be viewed on the above mentioned portal. Amendments to NIT, if any, would be published on website only, and not in newspaper.

Sd/-
Chief Engineer (Bhopal Zone)
P.W.D. Bhopal Madhya pradesh

Storm hits floating huts, 30 rescued

New Tehri, Uttarakhand: SDRF personnel rescued 30 tourists from drowning in Dobra-Chanti lake area here after a fierce thunderstorm snapped the axle joints of their floating huts, causing the structures to tilt dangerously.

The incident took place on Saturday evening. A State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) team from Koti Colony launched the rescue operation around 7:45 pm and evacuated all guests to safety as high waves and gale-force winds caused the huts to drift. The incident drew immediate comparison to the Jabalpur cruise tragedy on April 30, where 13 people died after a boat capsized in the Bargi Dam on Narmada river in Madhya Pradesh.

Officials noted that timely intervention by the SDRF in Tehri prevented a repeat of the Jabalpur disaster. PTI



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

• WEST ASIA CONFLICT

Why benchmark oil prices don't show the full picture



SUKALP SHARMA & ANIL SASI

THE WEST Asia war has driven oil prices into a highly volatile phase, with vessel movement effectively halted through the Strait of Hormuz, one of the most critical maritime chokepoints for global energy flows. So far, the price surge appears muted compared with the surge in oil benchmarks triggered by the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022. But that's not the complete picture.

Since the war began, the highest Brent crude — one of the oil benchmarks — has traded at about \$126 per barrel. It ended last week at about \$108 per barrel. But in reality, refiners in various parts of the world have likely been paying a lot more. Reports suggest that barrels have changed hands at even \$150 per barrel, significantly higher than the exchange-traded benchmarks.

Oil price levels generally quoted in reports, seen on television news tickers, and available on commodity exchanges can be significantly different from the actual price that refiners pay for the barrels, particularly during supply crises. And that is because, like other commodity markets, the oil market comprises not one but two markets: a paper market and a physical market.

The two markets

The difference between the paper market and the physical market is largely defined by the timing of delivery and the actual intent to buy and use the oil. The paper market consists of financial front-month futures contracts, which are essentially promises to buy oil at a future date. These contracts are usually for about one-two months hence. And these are the prices quoted most often as benchmark prices.

But are these the prices at which refiners are striking deals today to get oil to feed their refineries over the next few weeks? Absolutely not. The price they pay is based on the supply situation in the physical market, where oil is actually bought and sold for refinery operations, not just for trading.

In effect, the two markets price different things: paper market prices the future expectation, while the physical market prices the immediate demand-supply realities. When all's well with oil supplies globally,



A man stands in the water as ships line the horizon in the Strait of Hormuz off Bandar Abbas in Iran. AP

the prices in the two markets are usually well-aligned. But in times of supply crises — like the unprecedented closure of the Strait of Hormuz — the divergence can be yawning.

The Strait's effective closure has taken millions of barrels of oil a day off the market, marking the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). The Strait of Hormuz accounted for about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) flows. Refiners cannot rely on the paper market, and in times of supply disruptions, move to procure oil even at exorbitant prices as supply security takes precedence over price considerations.

Backwardation

Amid the current supply disruption, the paper market appears to belie the truth somewhat, given that the physical market is really stretched. The dissonance here is somewhat similar to the stock market optimism globally, with the S&P 500 inching back to its pre-war levels despite there being no sign of conflict resolution.

Much of this optimism in the American stock markets could be on account of the AI buildup, even as the oil sector does not have a parallel to justify the hope that prices would come down. The paper market evi-

dently believes that the supply situation is expected to ease significantly in a couple of months, even as the physical market grapples with scarcity. Focusing only on paper market prices can result in complacency about the dynamics of oil flows.

The lower price of paper barrels for future delivery than physical barrels for immediate supply is referred to as "backwardation", which is a market structure in which the commodity's immediate availability is worth a lot more than its availability a few months down the road. Put simply, it means that the market — currently facing supply tightness — doesn't expect the supply disruption and high prices to last too long.

"...the Dated-to-Frontline (DFL) Brent benchmark has reached levels of \$25 per barrel. The DFL represents the premium that Brent physical barrels (Dated Brent) for immediate loading (typically 10-30 days ahead, current May) command over the Brent Futures front month (now pricing June). The explosion from a couple of dollars to an average \$21 per barrel in the first week of April highlights the time value of 'ASAP' (as soon as possible) barrels over future-delivery barrels," Rystad Energy said in an April 20 note.

Notably, when the war began, it was the paper market that got spooked first, with

futures surging, while physical market prices remained stable as there was no immediate impact on oil flows in an oversupplied market. But as the war progressed, the supply tightness became a reality, making immediate barrels much more valuable than futures contracts.

The road ahead

The Strait of Hormuz has been closed for nearly two months now. While Asia is the most impacted so far, oil shortage could hit Europe, and potentially the US if this goes on for long.

Since the physical market is about the current and actual demand-supply scenario, geography plays a key role in real prices paid by refiners, apart from the quality of oil. With supplies to Asia hit the hardest, Asian oil importers are scrambling for barrels and consequently paying higher prices than their peers in some other parts of the world. But as they increasingly compete with the rest of the globe to secure energy supplies, prices elsewhere would also rise further.

While analysts expect some level of backwardation to continue, futures prices could rise significantly if the market stops pricing in a resolution of the war, or at least opening of the Strait of Hormuz, in the near term. If that indeed happens, the delta between prices in the physical market and the paper market would contract. Else, the gap between physical and paper barrels will continue to be at supernormal levels.

"Iran is blocking basically all of the traffic passing through, while letting through some of their own tankers and a few others. But now the US has set up this blockade as well, which is stopping the Iranian tankers leaving too. And so we're essentially at a stalemate here... My hunch is that if these talks do not reach a breakthrough of some sort in the next couple of weeks, this could be a long-drawn affair. That's when reality will hit home. Prices are going to surge and this difference between the spot and futures price will narrow suddenly," an oil industry veteran with experience in the shipping sector told *The Indian Express*.

Even if there's a breakthrough, there are impediments, such as mines that Iran has laid along the Strait. The US military says it could take six months to make sure no mines are left in the Strait of Hormuz. Even if the Strait is reopened but there are still some mines in the sea, one incident of a ship suffering damage due to a mine could again severely cripple vessel flows through the waterway.

Estimates vs reality

The lower price of paper barrels for future delivery than physical barrels for immediate supply is termed backwardation

Put simply, it means that the market doesn't expect the supply disruption and high prices to last too long

• DEFENCE

Why India's new helicopter-launched naval missile 'hits different'

Sushant Kulkarni
Pune, May 3

LAST WEEK, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Navy successfully test-launched a salvo of short-range anti-ship missiles from a helicopter off the Odisha coast. These indigenously developed missiles, called the Naval Anti-Ship Missile Short Range (NASM-SR), are to be deployed from ship-borne helicopters.

This was the platform's first successful salvo test — multiple launches in quick succession — wherein two such missiles were launched from the same chopper. While the Navy already has helicopter-launched missiles, the NASM-SR offers a potential upgrade.

Role of the missiles

A helicopter-launched system, such as NASM-SR, allows a navy to engage hostile vessels from a safe distance.

The Indian Navy already possesses the British-origin Sea Eagle anti-ship missile, which it has equipped its Sea King 42B heli-

copters with. Stationed on ships, these helicopters can take off, strike a target from a relatively close range, and then return to the ship.

The Sea Eagles are 1980s-era missiles, lacking many modern capabilities. One of its key issues was its weight: a single missile weighs around 580 kg.

In the early 2010s, the DRDO began working on a lighter, modern, and home-grown missile that could be carried in higher numbers in helicopters. The NASM-SR's first successful flight test was conducted in May 2022.

Anatomy of the missile

The NASM-SR uses a solid propulsion booster rocket that gives the missile its first thrust and a long-burn sustainer engine that keeps it flying for longer.

One of its key subsystems include the seeker — a sensor that detects and tracks the target. It also has a radio altimeter device that measures height from the ground or sea. Another critical component is a high-bandwidth two-way data link system that allows real-time communication be-

Development partners

• Premier DRDO labs in Hyderabad, Pune, and Chandigarh were part of the development process

• The missiles are being produced by private sector partners with the help of MSMEs, startups, and others



The NASM-MR missile was tested last week. MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

tween the missile and operator sitting in the helicopter, DRDO said.

One missile weighs around 380 kg; 200 kg lighter than the Sea Eagle. Its 55-km range, however, is lower than the Sea Eagle's 110 km. When the NASM-SR missile is within a certain distance of its target, a radio proximity fuse detonates its explosive device.

The hits

Many modern navies have helicopter-launched missiles with two features: "man-in-loop" and "waterline hit".

"Man-in-loop" means that a human operator can change the missile's path even when it's mid-flight. In a crowded maritime environment, this reduces the risk of hitting non-combatants and makes the missile more adaptable. The Navy and DRDO successfully tested this feature in February 2025. In contrast, Sea Eagles are "fire-and-forget" missiles.

A "waterline hit" means the missile strikes a ship at or just above the line where the hull meets the water. One of the ship's most vulnerable parts, damage here can cause water to rapidly flood the vessel and dislodge or sink it. The Sea Eagle has no specific waterline hit capabilities.

The salvo test

Demonstrating a salvo launch shows the ability to overwhelm shipborne defence systems. The missile can maintain a sea-skimming trajectory and accurately lock onto the most vulnerable part of the target.

• TECH

How India's new emergency messaging system works

Bhaskar Sarma
New Delhi, May 3

ON SATURDAY morning, many smartphones across India suddenly played a sharp beeping sound, accompanied by vibrations. A pop-up message flashed on screens in English, Hindi and other languages with the headline "extremely severe alert".

While many may have been taken aback, this was a pan-India test of a mass broadcast system — called cell broadcast — to alert people during natural or manmade disasters. At present, the government issues disaster alerts through SMS, which can be missed by many. The cell broadcast technology is more difficult to miss. While tests have been on for some time now in India, this was the first time this took place on such a scale.

The technology

Cell broadcast is a method of simultaneously sending short messages to multiple mobile phones within a defined geographic area. It can reach a very large number of devices at once, or, in case of hazards that affect only a small area, be sent to just a limited number of handsets, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a UN agency. The system overrides any network congestion, allowing messages to be delivered instantaneously.

It was developed in the early 1990s by the European Telecommunications Standards Institute, with inputs from telecom operators and equipment makers across Europe. First demonstrated in 1997 in Paris, the technology is considered an international best practice and is

now used by more than 30 countries. The alerts are also adaptable to specific requirements, such as a user's language.

For India, the Centre for Development of Telematics under the Department of Telecommunications has developed this technology. A timeline for a complete roll-out is unclear. Currently, India's SMS-based alert system is operational across all states and Union Territories.

• BEST PRACTICE

• Among the first to adopt it was Japan in 2007. In Asia, South Korea and Singapore have also deployed nationwide alert systems over the past decade

• The US rolled out its Wireless Emergency Alerts system in 2012. Across Europe, countries adopted similar systems under the EU-Alert framework, especially after a 2018 directive

How it works

As part of day-to-day network functionality, cell towers communicate with phones within their reach, providing information such as the network it is connected to, according to the GSM Association, a global body that represents network operators. The technology that enables this is known broadly as cell broadcast. Government authorities can harness this one-way communication system to issue emergency alerts.

The system essentially works by sending a single message from a mobile network tower to all phones connected to that tower at the same time, instead of sending individual SMSes. "Visitors to the target area, including from abroad, will also receive alerts, and even in their own language if the system is multi-language enabled," the GSM association says.

Why this system matters

Cell broadcast technology uses no personal data. Mobile phones can receive messages without the need for users to share phone numbers or location data. It needs no app or subscription. The only requirement is that the phone is switched on and configured to accept such messages.

It is much more conspicuous than SMS owing to its distinct alert tones and vibration. This can draw people's attention even in noisy environments. It will override all ongoing tasks on a mobile phone, including calls, and would be delivered even when the device is on silent or do-not-disturb mode.

As climate-related disasters such as flash floods, extreme temperatures, and cyclones become more frequent and severe — including in India — technologies such as cell broadcast become extremely important.

• EDUCATION

The quick answers trap: Is AI in top colleges helping students or adding to stress



EXPERT EXPLAINS
BY RAJEEV KUMAR

FORMER PROFESSOR OF COMPUTER SCIENCE AT IIT KHARAGPUR, IIT KANPUR, BITS PILANI, AND JNU

THE LAUNCH of ChatGPT in November 2022 accelerated the adoption of Generative AI (GenAI) across domains. It is now widely used in education, research, and industry to improve productivity and work quality, and is increasingly treated as an assistive technology. Despite concerns about the impact on jobs, GenAI has quickly become embedded in everyday academic and professional workflows.

In academia, adoption has been particularly rapid in India's premier technical institutions, such as Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) Pilani, and National Institutes of Technology (NITs).

GenAI tools provide on-demand access to explanations, problem-solving support, and coding assistance, effectively functioning as 24x7 tutors at students' fingertips. While this improves access to guidance and reduces dependence on institutional resources, it raises a key question: Is GenAI reducing academic stress or intensifying it? The question is especially relevant given the high number of student suicides reported in these colleges, owing to a variety of factors.

GenAI-driven ecosystem

The recent proliferation of Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning (AI/ML) has penetrated academia more rapidly than the earlier cycles of AI development. While AI has evolved since the late 1950s, its direct

integration into daily life accelerated with the rise of conversational systems such as Google Assistant in the mid-2010s.

A decisive shift followed the public release of ChatGPT in November 2022, marking the widespread adoption of large language models (LLMs). These systems generate text, code, images, and other content from large datasets, and are called GenAI.

Within academia, students rely on tools such as Google Gemini, DeepSeek and GitHub Copilot for tasks including report drafting and assignment preparation. These tools function as assistive technologies, but at the same time, they are shifting learning from deep engagement with problems to effective querying, placing greater emphasis on prompt formulation than on independent reasoning.

LLMs are probabilistic systems and can produce errors, inconsistencies, or misleading outputs. Over-reliance without verification may affect conceptual understanding and academic rigour. This evol-

ving ecosystem brings both efficiency gains and new challenges in education.

Gap in the ecosystem

Traditionally, teaching and learning in premier educational institutes focused on analysis, design, and application of knowledge rather than rote memorisation. Given concepts and mathematical formulations, students were expected to apply them to solve problems. Many examinations were open-book, allowing the use of reference material while assessing analytical and problem-solving ability. Preparation involved selecting relevant material, organising notes, and developing approaches — processes that ensured deep engagement.

With the advent of LLMs, this is changing. The effort invested in reading, organising material, and working independently through problems has declined. Students are increasingly relying on querying AI systems for solutions. As a result, emphasis shifts from internalising concepts to retrieving answers on demand. While this

could be more efficient, it reduces sustained thinking and limits the development of independent analytical skills.

Effects on academic stress

The widespread adoption of GenAI is introducing a set of specific though interlinked stress intensifiers in academic environments:

- **Dependence and reduced confidence:** Frequent reliance on AI-generated solutions shifts competence from self to system, weakening confidence in unaided problem-solving. Over time, this reduces persistence in tackling complex problems independently.
- **AI-driven benchmarking:** Student performance is increasingly measured — directly or indirectly — against AI-generated outputs that are faster, more structured, and often appear near-ideal. It raises evaluation standards, leaves little room for iterative thinking or minor errors, and fosters constant comparison with peers and machine outputs.

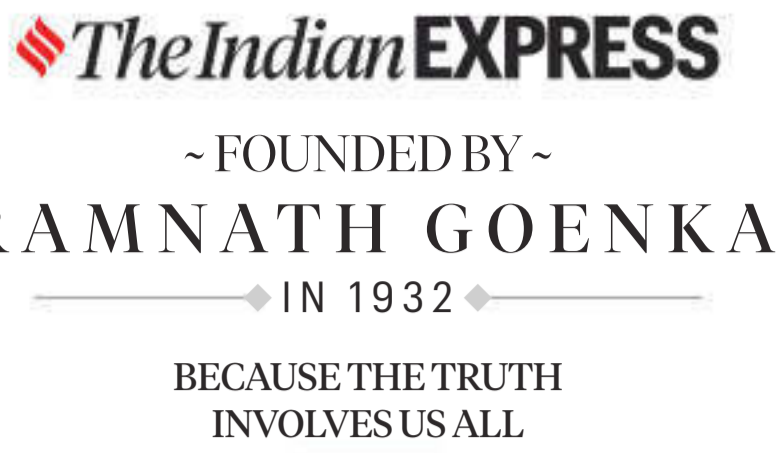
• **Competitive pressure driven by Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):** With all-time access to GenAI, students feel compelled to use these tools to avoid falling behind. It creates a continuous pressure to match AI-augmented productivity, often prioritising speed and output over deep understanding.

• **Learning-evaluation mismatch:** While GenAI is widely used for coursework and preparation, it is typically restricted in examinations and interviews. This creates a dual environment, forcing abrupt shifts to unaided performance, leading to anxiety, self-doubt, and a sense of unpreparedness during high-stakes assessments.

• **Ethics undefined:** The absence of clear norms on acceptable AI use creates uncertainty and internal conflict. Students must constantly decide how much reliance is appropriate, increasing stress while raising concerns about academic integrity.

● **WORDLY WISE**
The decision whether or not to bear a child is central to a woman's life, to her well-being and dignity.
— Ruth Bader Ginsburg

● **WEB EXCLUSIVE**
DMK, AIADMK or TVK? Tamil Nadu's three futures — and one warning.
— By P John J Kennedy
Log on to www.indianexpress.com



After Hormuz disruption, Asia should build an energy security alliance



OVER THE BARREL
VIKRAM S MEHTA

gation passage through the maritime straits in Asia; two, to counter the pricing power of Middle East exporters through the lever of their aggregate purchasing strength; and three, to harness the complementary technical, financial and human assets of members to accelerate the pace of the green energy transition. Such an institution could be called the Asian Energy Collaborative Compact (AECC).

FATHI BIROL, executive director of the International Energy Agency (IEA), said last month that “we are facing the biggest energy security threat in history”, worse than the aggregate impact of the crises sparked by the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the Russia-Ukraine conflict that began in 2022. He should know, as the organisation he heads was established as a result of the Yom Kippur War. The latter triggered the quadrupling of crude oil prices (\$2.90/bbl in October 1973 to \$11.90 in January 1974) and a global recession. In its aftermath in January 1974, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger invited the leaders of the Western world to a conference in Washington, DC. Kissinger's objective was to create a mechanism by which Western countries could counter the cartel of the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) and manage and mitigate future supply disruptions. The IEA was the outcome of this conference.

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has had a dual impact on Asian oil-import-dependent countries. It has led to an energy shortage and highlighted the risks of exposure to maritime chokepoints. The closure has trapped 13 million barrels of petroleum (and its derivatives) in the straits. The bulk of this quantity (approximately 85 per cent) is destined for the Asian markets. As a result, a number of Asian countries are currently facing an energy-supply crisis. The Philippines has declared a national energy emergency; Japan has cut back on ferry and bus services, and India has rationed the supply of LPG to commercial establishments. China has also put the brakes on domestic consumption, although the impact has been buffered by substitute supplies from Russia and a drawdown of stocks from its strategic reserves.

Fifty-two years on, in the wake of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, India should lead a call for the petroleum-importing countries of Asia to create a similar institution, but with a broader threefold purpose. One, to safeguard the rights of individual member countries to free and unencumbered navigation

Beyond this physical constraint, the closure has alerted countries to their vulnerability to other nautical chokepoints. Aside from the Strait of Hormuz, their energy supplies have to cross the Strait of Malacca and, further east, the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. These maritime passages are in the high seas and under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, also referred to as the “con-

stitution of the oceans”, all ships are assured the right of “innocent passage”. The Iranian action has breached this right and created a precedent that compels reflection on the counterfactual. What if the Strait of Malacca (through which 60 per cent of all seaborne trade to and from East Asia passes) were choked? What if the flow of merchandise traffic through the Taiwan Strait and/or the South China Sea were impeded by regulatory restrictions and/or tolls? What pipeline configurations, over land and under water, might enable countries to create supply lines that avoid exposure to such blocks?

These concerns are common to most Asian countries irrespective of their political system, ideology or stage of economic development. They can and should therefore be discussed conjointly. The AECC could provide a forum for such discussions.

The “Asian Premium” (the price differential between the price paid for crude oil by Asian countries to Middle Eastern exporters and the North Sea benchmark price) ranged between \$3 and \$6 per barrel before the start of the conflict. It widened to \$60 per barrel after the start of the bombing. It has come down since, but the initial increase warrants the question: Was the steepness of the hike in prices, freight rates and insurance premiums due entirely to tightening supply and inelastic demand? Or was it also because of asymmetric bargaining, that is, the fact that Asian importers failed to leverage their aggregate purchasing power?

Kissinger convened the leadership of the Western world in January 1974 to counter OAPEC. My suggestion is that AECC should be set up to secure a similar objective. It should develop mechanisms that,

whilst not impeding a country's ability to trade independently, enable the members to negotiate collectively to secure better supply terms and reduced freight and insurance costs. In addition, AECC should provide real-time market intelligence on supply disruptions, infrastructure incidents and geopolitics. This information is currently provided by the IEA, but Asia should have its own bespoke agency. IEA has a Western skew as it works under the OECD's umbrella.

The exit of the UAE from OPEC is further evidence of the fractured relationships amongst the Gulf oil exporters and the terminal volatility of the international petroleum market. It deepens the urgency for Asia to shift away from fossils towards renewables. Most, if not all, Asian countries have a green energy strategy in place, and some have made impressive progress. But no country has successfully scaled up renewables to dominance in its energy consumption basket. The question arises: How can this shift be accelerated? One proposition that *prima facie* seems fanciful would be for Asian countries to leverage their green assets (technology, finance, mineral and metal resources, human talent) to identify and tackle areas of overlapping interests regarding the green transition. The proposition is fanciful because, unlike the IEA, Asian countries do not share a common political ideology or system. But the region does have a common purpose in decarbonisation and energy security. So, in its third role as an energy think tank, AECC should research how best the complementary assets of its members can be combined to generate a positive-sum green outcome.

The writer is chairman and distinguished fellow, CSEP Research Foundation

The closure has alerted countries to their vulnerability to other nautical chokepoints. Aside from the Strait of Hormuz, their energy supplies have to cross the Strait of Malacca, the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea

Don't fall for Mythos hype, India needs its own models



PRANESH PRAKASH

MYTHOS, ANTHROPIC'S proprietary large language model (LLM), has been deemed too dangerous for release because it is said to excel at discovering security vulnerabilities in software. Under Project Glasswing, Anthropic has provided exclusive access to the US government and select American software vendors to uncover vulnerabilities. Some have urged India to “urgently seek participation in Project Glasswing”. Pleading with the US for access concedes digital sovereignty without helping our cyber-defences.

It is true that frontier LLMs upend traditional cybersecurity — but not in the way the Mythos hype suggests. While Mythos has been able to find security problems in important software like Linux, OpenBSD, and Firefox, this took thousands of attempts and a lot of money. Cybersecurity firm Aisle found that it could replicate many of Mythos's findings using a frontier open-source LLM. A single Linux developer running an open-source LLM on a laptop has found several dozen bugs so far. A paper by Hanzhi Liu et al also discovered 10 unknown (“zero-day”) vulnerabilities in Google Chrome using an open-source LLM. The paper concluded that using open-source LLMs locally was not only powerful but the only economically viable option for large-scale deployment.

Finding zero-day vulnerabilities is different from weaponising them at scale. Many vulnerabilities found by Mythos weren't exploitable. Most successful cyberattacks are from known-but-unpatched vulnerabilities along with a lack of defence-in-depth, rather than the zero-day vulnerabilities at the core of the Mythos hype. In the race of modern cybersecurity, access to powerful open-source LLMs that can be run cost-efficiently at scale is far more critical than having the best LLM.

Clement Delangue, Huggingface's CEO, points out that “the Mythos moment” is asymmetrical in its impact: It helps the defenders more when it comes to Free and Open Source Software (FOSS), but attackers more when it comes to proprietary software. FOSS relies on openness for security, captured in the dictum “given enough eyeballs,

all bugs are shallow”. Delangue argues that since LLMs can now read even stripped binaries, legacy proprietary software running in critical information infrastructure (CII) is legible to automated analysis and attacks. But FOSS is better protected since independent developers can use diverse AI toolchains (as long as they aren't regulated away) to find and fix bugs — “given enough eyeballs” evolves into “given enough eyeballs, AI agents and computing power”. As with previous generations of bug-finding automation, we now need to adopt LLMs as well; not doing so will give the attackers a leg up. The hype around LLMs' security implications is largely true; that around Mythos largely isn't.

US officials and Big Tech firms have compared advanced LLMs to digital nukes, hoping to erect regulatory barriers to competition from Chinese and Indian companies, who are mostly working releasing open weights/open-source LLMs. Accepting that would harm our cybersecurity posture by decreasing access to open-source LLMs and slowing innovation and the spread of the benefits of AI.

If India's CII depends on proprietary American LLMs, our cyber-immune system can be revoked by a whim of US foreign policy. But isn't China a potential threat as well? Yes, but this isn't a conflict between US and Chinese tech; it is a battle between dependency and the digital sovereignty that FOSS and open-source AI systems enable — once available under an open licence, code and models can be modified and run locally. Relying on proprietary LLMs (that too, made for a single chip architecture) for national security is a supply-chain risk. The idea that only access to Mythos can secure our infrastructure is the inverse of the truth.

In 2019, OpenAI initially held that GPT-2 was too dangerous to release, though that was clearly false. Now Anthropic is saying the same thing. We should learn to ignore such self-serving hype and urgently push for FOSS and open-source AI model adoption for the sake of our digital sovereignty and security.

The writer is a tech law and policy analyst. Views are personal

May Day is relevant for Gen Z. It has to be made aware



AMIR HYDER KHAN

FOR MANY in Gen Z, International Workers' Day or May Day is little more than a symbolic holiday, detached from its origins in the Haymarket Affair and from the struggles that shaped modern work. This fading memory reflects a deeper transformation. At a moment when AI is redefining labour, a generation entering one of the most uncertain labour regimes in decades is also the least connected to the movements that once secured workers' rights.

The classical imagery of labour — factory floors, textile mills, dockyards — has steadily receded from everyday life. In its place has emerged a digitised, fragmented regime of work. Platforms shaped by companies like OpenAI and Google are restructuring labour. Yet AI has not eliminated labour; it has redistributed it into less visible, more precarious forms — data annotation, content moderation, and gig-based services.

Gen Z's detachment from labour politics is structurally produced. Educational curricula marginalise labour history, while media narratives often frame strikes as disruptions rather than democratic rights. The rise of gig work has further eroded shared workplaces where collective identities once formed. The language of freelancing and entrepreneurship has replaced older notions of class solidarity. Workers are encouraged to see themselves as isolated actors, weakening the possibility of collective bargaining. Algorithmic systems determine wages, visibility, and access to work, while opaque metrics replace negotiation.

The decline of organised labour in India predates AI but has been intensified by it. Economic liberalisation expanded informal work and prioritised flexibility over security. With institutional avenues weakening, protests increasingly appear as isolated eruptions rather than sustained movements. What is often described as disorder is, in many cases, a symptom of organisational vacuum. The crisis of labour politics is also a crisis of the Left. Its historical strength lay in its ability to articulate collective identities and organise around them. Today, that capacity is strained. The Left needs to expand its understanding of labour — digital work, gig work, and data work are central to contemporary capitalism. Ignoring them risks rendering labour politics obsolete.

It must also move beyond traditional organisational forms. Unions tied to specific industries cannot adequately represent a workforce that is dispersed. New models — networked unions, digital collectives — are necessary. The Left must engage with technology as a political terrain. Questions of who controls AI, who owns data, and how algorithms are governed are fundamentally questions of power. The Left must reclaim cultural space. If Gen Z encounters politics primarily through digital platforms, then labour politics must exist there.

The lesson of the Haymarket struggle was not just the demand for an eight-hour workday; it was the principle that workers, when organised, can reshape the conditions of their lives. That principle still holds.

Khan is a researcher in urban planning focusing on labour, housing, and the political economy of contemporary Indian cities

At a moment when AI is redefining labour, a generation entering one of the most uncertain labour regimes is also the least connected to the movements that once secured workers' rights

The next fuel shift: More ethanol in the tank

THE MINISTRY of Road Transport and Highways has issued a draft notification proposing the recognition of 85 per cent ethanol-blended petrol (E85) and even 100 per cent ethanol (E100) as automotive fuels. This is as against the 20 per cent blend (E20) that has already been achieved and made mandatory for all petrol sold in India from April 2026. The draft amendments to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, once approved, will pave the way for the introduction of flex-fuel vehicles that can run on E85, if not 100 per cent ethanol. While the vehicles manufactured since April 2023 are E20-compliant, compatibility with higher blends will require major overhaul of internal combustion engines and auto parts to withstand any potential corrosion from the hygroscopic (moisture-absorbing) property of ethanol.

The timing of the move is significant, coming amid the unprecedented energy supply shock caused by the conflict in West Asia and closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Oil marketing companies (OMCs) are now realising around Rs 75 for every litre of petrol, net of dealer commission and taxes. At this price, they are reportedly losing roughly Rs 14 per litre. The ex-refinery price of petrol, thus, has to be at least Rs 89 per litre for them to absorb the higher cost of imported crude. Compare this to the Rs 60.73-71.86 per litre that distilleries are fetching for the ethanol they are supplying to OMCs. Simply put, ethanol derived from sugarcane, maize and rice is today cheaper than petrol refined from crude oil. It strengthens the case to incentivise the rollout of flex-fuel vehicles along with separate dispensing units in fuel stations for higher ethanol blends.

That said, global crude prices may not sustain at \$110-per-barrel levels beyond a time. The ethanol industry must prioritise long-term cost competitiveness, which means raising cane and grain yields per acre and breeding varieties with higher sugar and starch recoveries. Nor should it expect the government to make available subsidised rice from the Food Corporation of India's godowns. Also, it's not desirable to produce ethanol from water-guzzling rice. More effort is required to promote sweet sorghum, bajra and other millets as sustainable feedstocks for ethanol production, offering fermentation efficiencies comparable to maize or sugarcane. There's no doubt, however, that the current oil shock is an inflection point for biofuels — and for Indian policymakers to think beyond incremental ethanol blending. The time for flex fuels has, indeed, arrived.

Finding zero-day vulnerabilities is different from weaponising them at scale. Many of the vulnerabilities found by Mythos weren't exploitable

FREEZE FRAME

BY EP UNNY



40 YEARS AGO

May 4, 1986



Punjab minister resigns

THE CRISIS in the eight-month-old Barnala ministry deepened further when the Minister of State for Tourism, Suchha Singh Chhotepur, and a number of party functionaries quit their posts in protest over the police entry into the Golden Temple. The Chief Minister, Surjit Singh Barnala, however, announced he had an “overwhelming” majority in the party's legislative wing and alleged that his opponents were trying to sabotage his plans to deal with extremists.

Muslim Women Bill

THE OPPOSITION parties have decided to press for a division when the controversial

Muslim Women (Protection on Divorce) Bill is voted on in the Lok Sabha on Monday. Even though the Bill's fate is a foregone conclusion with the ruling party — which has a two-thirds majority in the House — having issued a whip to all its members to support it, the opposition parties expect to win a moral victory.

Air Lanka plane blast

TWENTY-TWO people were killed and 24 injured when an Air Lanka Tristar aircraft exploded at Colombo international airport in Katunayake, 35 km from the city. The Sri Lankan government said it suspected that an “Eelam terrorist group” was responsible for the blast. A National Security Ministry re-

lease said the explosion occurred as passengers were boarding flight number UL 101 to Malé. There was a loud explosion five minutes before its scheduled takeoff.

Anand routs grandmaster

VLADIMIR TUKMAKOV, the mightiest dragon ever to have invaded the Indian chess circuit, was prostrated at the Bhillwara tournament. His conqueror was a 16-year-old knight in shining armour, Viswanathan Anand. Of such stuff are legends made. Tukmakov's fiery breath had consumed every single opponent in the tournament, except his own compatriots. Even as the Russian manoeuvred his pawns to control the all-important “centre”, Anand fired his first salvo.



● **WHAT THE OTHERS SAY**
Israel's Opposition would do well to remember: There is no democracy without Arabs
—Haaretz, Israel

The fear factor: Why West Bengal's voter turnout shattered records

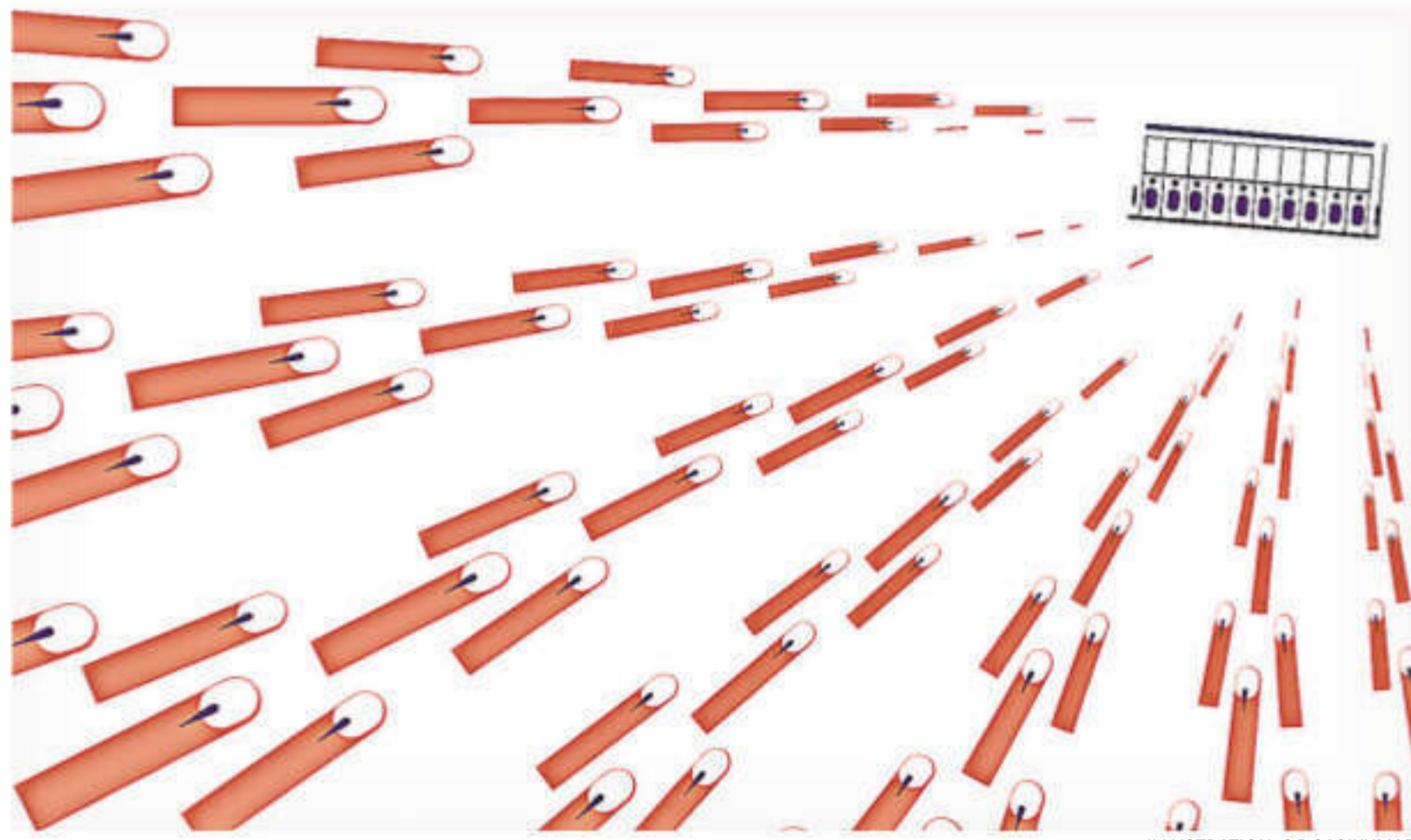


ILLUSTRATION: C.R. SASIKUMAR

with the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation in the late 1980s, and enabled the widening of the nascent Hindutva plank.

By that time, the Assam agitation had run its full course, during which then-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief MD Deoras made a politically indicative assertion: Hindus from Bangladesh must be treated as refugees, while Muslims should be treated as infiltrators. In 1993, during Delhi's first assembly election after being granted partial statehood, the BJP made the repatriation of Bangladeshi "foreigners" a central plank of its successful campaign.

The BJP continued to espouse this issue, although it petered out somewhat after 2004. It was revived during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections with slogans and assertions that are now part of India's political lexicon. Over the past 12 years, this campaign has been ceaseless and become more virulent. As events in the NCR and several northern and western states in recent years show, the situation has become hazardous for even genuine Bengali Muslim citizens if

The TMC's campaign against the SIR worsened the fears of previously uninterested voters. The BJP stoked the fears of those who had faced harassment from the TMC cadre

they live outside the state. Despite accounting for almost 27 per cent of West Bengal's population, they were cast, along with "actual" illegal immigrants, as Bangladeshis. This campaign is neatly coupled with the campaign to "invisibilise" all Muslims, for example, by preventing them — forcefully, and through administrative orders — from offering Friday *namaz* on public grounds.

The opacity, hurriedness and insensitivity with which the SIR was conducted in West Bengal was one of the biggest reasons for the unprecedented turnout in the two phases. The figures spoke for themselves, but ironically, they were of use to both the TMC and the BJP. The entire SIR process and the extraordinary number of deletions — the Supreme Court contributing with its injudicious order not permitting 2.7 million people to vote — were of use primarily to the TMC. The BJP, on the other hand, sought votes on the basis of its "success" in "cleaning up" the rolls by eliminating dead or phantom/ghost voters, those who had multiple votes across different locations in their

names, and of course, those who simply had no right to vote due to being illegal immigrants or "ghuspaithiyas".

The TMC's campaign against the SIR worsened the fears of previously uninterested voters, who concluded that being on the electoral rolls was essential for them to be considered legitimate residents. Migrant workers and professionals based outside the state rushed back at enormous cost, thinking that casting their votes this time was essential to remain on the voters' list — and that this in turn was necessary to remain citizens on paper. From their perspective, neither Aadhaar cards nor passports are enough to claim what is rightfully theirs — only their names on the voters' list will suffice. It is too early for a detailed post-mortem of the SIR in West Bengal. The process was undeniably questionable, especially as it was politically driven, raising worries over the EC's impartiality and whether people can continue to have faith in the electoral process.

The BJP stoked the fears of those who had faced harassment from the TMC's cadre over the past 15 years. The presence of large numbers of central police personnel and polling staff from outside the state allowed these people to vote without having to worry about their safety.

The other major issue that propelled turnout was that of identity, as framed differently by the two parties. The BJP appealed to the exclusivist Hindu identity by claiming it was under threat from Muslims and those appealing them, while the TMC framed the inclusivist Bengali identity as facing a threat from the BJP, led by "outsiders". These two conceptualisations of the Indian nation and nationhood remain just as they were in the late 19th century, but more pronouncedly from 1925, when the RSS was established. Though surviving as different streams within the national discourse, this is the first time the "secular-versus-cultural nationalism" divergence has manifested itself so starkly in an election and boosted electoral turnout in an unprecedented manner.

Mukhopadhyay is the author of Narendra Modi: The Man, The Times and The RSS: Icons of the Indian Right

Jewar airport will give flight to UP's economic ambitions



NACHIKETA TIWARI AND T V MOHANDAS PAI

ON MARCH 28, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated Noida International Airport (NIA) in Jewar, Uttar Pradesh. Built at a cost of around Rs 11,200 crore, the airport will transform the size and character of UP's economy. When fully developed, it will be able to handle 11.6 crore passengers, 7.3 lakh flights and 28 lakh metric tonnes of cargo each year, making it one of India's largest airports and air-logistics hubs.

The airport will be an important piece in UP's infrastructural and economic strategy puzzle, positively impacting the state's economy in four ways: Increasing GSDP, creating a large number of quality jobs, generating new economic opportunities, and deepening the technology and electronics manufacturing sectors in western UP. Let us look at each of these in some detail.

India's aviation market is estimated at Rs 1.6 lakh crore, with six Tier-1 cities accounting for 68 per cent of this market. Amongst the states, Delhi leads the pack with a 20 per cent market share. In contrast, UP's share is barely 4 per cent. NIA will rapidly alter that reality as its annual air-passenger traffic will exceed 3 crore by 2034, more than double the current figure for the entire state of UP. Thus, the airport will enhance UP's GSDP significantly.

Currently, India's aviation sector generates around 3.7 lakh direct and 77 lakh indirect jobs. Given the state's small aviation footprint, not many UP residents benefit from these jobs. NIA's launch changes that story as well, with its developers estimating that over 1 lakh direct jobs — many of them high-quality — and many lakhs of indirect jobs will be created over the airport's development period.

India's air cargo sector is currently dominated by six metro hubs: Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Kolkata. With UP aspiring to become a \$1-trillion economy in the next few years, and with a population of 24 crore, it needs a large air cargo hub of its own. The facility at NIA will fill that gap, with an immediate annual capacity pegged at 2.55 lakh MT, about half

that of BIAL, which will increase to 15 lakh MT over a period of time. Air cargo hubs are economic engines that facilitate over 35 per cent of global trade by value (about \$8 trillion annually). They drive GDP growth, create high-value jobs and play a pivotal role in drawing FDI and generating forex for the country.



The airport is proximal to three important expressways (the Yamuna Expressway, the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, and the Eastern Peripheral Expressway), and two railway-based dedicated freight corridors (EDFC and WDFC). These are arguably Bharat's principal arteries as they transport over 100 million MT of freight each year. A series of multi-modal facilities will ensure seamless and speedy transfer of cargo between these arteries and the airport: An interchange connecting the Yamuna Expressway and the Eastern Peripheral Expressway; a logistics hub that will link industrial zones around the Yamuna Expressway to the Eastern DFC; and a 31-km road to connect the Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, the Eastern Peripheral Expressway, the DFC, and NIA.

Via these interchange systems, we will see the creation of a single efficient goods transport system in UP. This will enhance UP's logistics and economic efficiencies through cost reductions, reduce transit times, improve supply-chain reliability, and enhance capacity. It will also promote green logistics via reductions in carbon footprint, and easier regulatory compliance.

Now that NIA has been inaugurated, it's important for UP's economy managers to ensure that the saturation curve of the airport's utilisation reaches its peak sooner rather than later. They need to ensure the following: Seamless passenger connectivity within a radius of 100 km from the airport; superior passenger experience at the airport; a robust budget hotel industry close to the airport; financial incentives for airlines; an attractive warehousing policy; and the development of land around the airport so that it will be suited to quality living and high-tech industry. This will require a team of experienced and motivated professionals who understand the airline, airport and air cargo businesses and are adept at working with government circles. Such an approach will certainly bring a glorious shine to Jewar and benefit UP and Bharat.

Tiwari is professor at IIT Kanpur and coordinator of UP CM's Economic Advisory Group. Pai is chairman of Aarin Capital and member of UP CM's Economic Advisory Group

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Counting day

IF THE DMK and TMC retain power in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, the BJP will have to concede that the appeal of Hindutva is not overarchingly pan-Indian. In Tamil Nadu, a win by the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance is a foregone conclusion ('DMK, AIADMK or TVK? Tamil Nadu's three futures — and one warning', IE Web, May 2). For all the hype around Vijay's TVK, the whistle is likely to lose its shrillness and fall mute on counting day. As for the BJP, it will be a surprise if it reaches double figures.

David Milton, Maruthancode

Regional differences

THE LANGUAGE controversy has remained at the forefront since the time of Independence ('Language policing is bad politics, bad economics', IE, May 2). Though the move to mandate Marathi for drivers in Maharashtra is rooted in cultural preservation, several challenges exist. In cosmopolitan hubs like Mumbai, a strict Marathi-only expectation can clash with the multilingual reality. Second, as the workforce in transport sectors relies on migrant labour, language compliance can become a barrier to entry, reducing driver availability and increasing wait times and fares.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

THIS IDEA of making taxi and auto drivers learn Marathi is making people worry about their basic rights ('Language policing is bad politics, bad economics', IE, May 2). Sure, it's good to encourage local languages to keep our culture alive, but if we make language a must-have for these jobs, it could shut out thousands of people who come to Mumbai for work and rely on these jobs just to get by. India's Constitution says everyone has the right to move, live, and work anywhere in the country. If policies make it harder for people to use these freedoms, even indirectly, it could set a bad example for other states and just make the regional differences even bigger. After all, the best way to encourage a language is by including people, teaching it, and getting everyone involved — not by forcing it on them.

Hamza Khan, New Delhi



ROOPALI SINHA

THERE WAS a time when, in report cards, class teachers would routinely describe a "good" child as an "obedient" one. Such remarks would be considered a matter of pride for both the child and his or her parents.

We may have moved ahead, but our conventional education system still emphasises discipline, conformity, and "right answers" over open-ended inquiry. Across classrooms, families, workplaces and politics, we often feel uncomfortable with those who question, challenge, or think independently. "Argumentative Indian(s)" are rarely appreciated, even when their questions might lead to deeper understanding or clarity. Take, for instance, recent reports on Delhi University colleges that have cracked down on student protests over a range of issues from the UGC equity regulations to the "defamation" of colleges on social media. Or, the labelling of universities such as JNU and Jadavpur University as "anti-national". Instead of encouraging healthy questioning and critical thinking, instead of engaging in debates and discussions, the tendency is to shut them down by marking the act of dissent as problematic.

Despite all the emphasis on critical thinking, rational inquiry and problem-solving, why does our conditioning still lean strongly toward obedience?

Part of the answer lies in how we understand and practise respect. Respect, in itself, allows for dignity and mutual regard. However, when tied to an unquestioning attachment to authority, it can begin to re-

A society conditioned to obedience becomes easier to govern without accountability. Compliance can be quickly mobilised, while dissent is reframed as disloyalty or disruption

semble obedience as a character trait rather than a conscious choice. Parents teach their children "badon ki baat maano", reinforcing the idea that submission is virtuous. Teachers may favour compliant students, interpreting curiosity as defiance rather than engagement. In workplaces, loyalty to the boss is valued; in families, deference to the head of the household; and in politics, unquestioning support for the supreme leader. Over time, obedience becomes a safer and socially accepted choice. Questions start to feel discomfiting and risky.

Traditions have reinforced this tendency. In the *guru-shishya* tradition, obedience is a norm. Mythology highlights similar instances — when the great scholar Gargi wanted to ask more questions of Yajnavalkya, she was warned that doing so could be dangerous for her. These narratives continue to shape our collective imagination.

What makes this dynamic more complex is how deeply it is internalised. Social hierarchies normalise obedience as both expectation and privilege. While individuals may resist being controlled, they often expect obedience from those below them. Assertion, reasoned disagreement, and self-respect are frequently mistaken for arrogance. As a result, people tend to comply upward while demanding compliance downward, reinforcing hierarchical behaviour. Today, this pattern is more frequently driven — and complicated — by the desire to avoid punishment, conflict, or exclusion. Whether rooted in belief or

fear, excessive obedience limits autonomy, critical thinking, and genuine moral agency. People often feel compelled to plead rather than assert their rights with dignity. Instances of public deference toward authority figures — even in situations of injustice — highlight how deeply ingrained this mindset can be. Recently in Meerut, when local MP Arun Govil, who had played Ram in BR Chopra's *Ramayan*, arrived at a protest site, people who were sitting on *dharna* began singing his praises, performing *aarti*, even breaking down in tears. What was somewhat unsettling was that Govil remained seated, calmly receiving this display of devotion. When rightful anger transforms into submissive reverence, it raises troubling questions about how power is perceived and exercised: Is this merely a remnant of a colonial mindset or does it have deeper cultural roots?

A society conditioned to obedience becomes easier to govern without accountability. Compliance can be quickly mobilised, while dissent is reframed as disloyalty or disruption. Those who question authority may be marginalised, while obedience is equated with good citizenship or patriotism.

Building a healthy and respectful society demands the ability to question authority while upholding responsibility, to assert rights without descending into disorder, and to maintain social norms without suppressing dissent. Without this balance, societies risk producing not engaged citizens, but subjects — and that distinction makes all the difference.

The writer is a Delhi-based schoolteacher

The Indian isn't always argumentative

There's nothing apolitical about fashion

But in between its goopy folds, the film tucked in bits that have defined an entire generation's way of looking at fashion, work culture and success. That's the thing about great films: They permeate your consciousness without the hue and cry.

The Devil Wears Prada achieved its cult status by being an eye-opener of sorts for so many of us who have grown up in a world where fashion is considered inconsequential. That it is "stuff". That those who care about fashion didn't make serious journalists. That fashion is not political. That focussing on what a politician is wearing is digressing from the "real" issues when every power suit, handwoven saree, white kurta or even t-shirt is a carefully curated choice determined by the fashion world.

Meryl Streep's monologue as Miranda

Priestly educated Anne Hathaway's Andy: Her store-bought cerulean sweater was, in fact, a product of the fashion industry that she so proudly spurned. That iconic monologue showed how inconspicuously yet deeply fashion is embedded in our existence. Fashion is more like politics than we care to admit. If being apolitical is a political stance, distancing yourself from "fashion" is also a decision rooted very much in fashion.

The film argued that fashion is not restricted to the big fashion houses or what

'The Devil Wears Prada' achieved cult status by being an eye-opener for many in a world where fashion was considered inconsequential

they put on sleek runways. It is an awareness that what we wear carries meaning in ways that we often don't realise. We think the "jholawala" look embodies a poetic, rebellious and, of course, intellectual aesthetic when it is a meticulously devised "ethical chic" branding that has been serving the "activist types" their favourite look.

It also briefly but impressively conveyed the heft of journalism. The idea that Priestly could make or break a designer's collection made one giddy with excitement. The moment underlined the value of editorial judgement and an understanding of fashion, as both a product and a shaper of society, honed over decades. Returning to that scene feels particularly refreshing today when reviews are determined by PR packages.

The Devil Wears Prada 2 — even if less edgy, sharp and snippy — isn't any less seri-

ous. If the first film showed the power of fashion and journalism, the second centres around the latter's helplessness in an ever-changing world. Fashion is still mainstream, but in a world of AI bots, numbers and advertisers calling the shots, the once-prestigious "book" finds itself in peril. While saving face, and dealing with a dead owner and a nepo-baby who couldn't care less about that warm touch of human creativity, Miranda and Andy do save Runway, but a sense of impending doom prevents the celebration of a happy ending.

How, then, is a film that has redefined a generation's outlook on fashion and, now, its sequel, which captures a reality we are all trying to outrun, merely chick-lit?

The writer is associate editor, The Indian Express. trisha.mukherjee@expressindia.com

Germany's Merz downplays row with Trump after troop drawdown

Reuters
Berlin, May 3

GERMAN CHANCELLOR Friedrich Merz said he must accept that President Donald Trump does not share his opinions in order to work with the United States within NATO, but stressed there was no link between their rift and a planned troop drawdown.

Merz dismissed suggestions that his criticism of US war planning in Iran had sparked Washington's Friday announcement that the US would reduce its military presence in Germany, its largest European base, by 5,000 soldiers, and repeated his commitment to the transatlantic alliance.

Merz had questioned whether Trump had an exit plan for the Middle East and said the US was being "embarrassed" in talks with Iran. Trump later called Merz an "ineffectual" leader.

"I have to accept that the American president has a different view on these issues than we do. But that does not change the fact that I remain convinced that the Americans are important partners for us," Merz told public broadcaster ARD in an interview.

Asked whether US plans to reduce its troop presence in Germany had anything to do with the spat between the two leaders, Merz said, "There is no connection."

REPORTS SAY CARGO SHIP NEAR STRAIT OF HORMUZ ATTACKED BY MULTIPLE SMALL VESSELS

Received US response to our 14-point plan, says Iran; White House is quiet

Trump: Tehran has 'not yet paid a big enough price'

Reuters
Dubai, Florida, May 3

IRAN SAID on Sunday it had received a US response to its latest offer for peace talks, a day after President Donald Trump said he would probably reject Iranian proposal because "they have not paid a big enough price".

Iranian state media reported that Washington had conveyed its response to Iran's 14-point proposal via Pakistan, and that Tehran was now reviewing it. There was no immediate confirmation from Washington or Islamabad of the US response.

"At this stage, we do not have nuclear negotiations," state media quoted Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei as saying, an apparent reference to Iran's proposal to set aside talks on nuclear issues until after the war ends and the foes agree to lift opposing blockades of Gulf shipping.

On Saturday, Trump said that he had yet to review the exact wording of the Iranian peace proposal, but that he was

likely to reject it.

"I will soon be reviewing the plan that Iran has just sent to us, but can't imagine that it would be acceptable in that they have not yet paid a big enough price for what they have done to Humanity, and the World, over the last 47 years," he wrote on social media.

The United States and Israel suspended their bombing campaign against Iran four weeks ago, and US and Iranian officials held one round of talks. But attempts to set up further meetings have so far failed.

Iran handed over its latest proposal on Thursday, and a senior Iranian official confirmed on Saturday that Tehran envisions ending the war and resolving the shipping standoff first, while leaving talks on Iran's nuclear programme for later.

Though Trump initially said on Friday that he was not satisfied with the Iranian proposal, he said on Saturday he was still looking at it. "They told me about the concept of the deal. They're going to give me the exact wording now," he told reporters.

Asked if he might restart strikes on Iran, Trump replied: "I don't want to say that. I mean, I can't tell that to a reporter. If they misbehave, if they do something bad, right now we'll



A billboard with a graphic showing the Strait of Hormuz and sewn lips of US President Donald Trump in a square in downtown Tehran on Saturday. AP

see. But it's a possibility that could happen."

Meanwhile, a cargo ship near the Strait of Hormuz has reported being attacked by multiple small craft, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said Sunday, marking at least two dozen attacks in and around the strait since the Iran war began.

All crew on the unidentified northbound carrier were safe after the attack off Sirik, Iran,

east of the strait, the monitor said. Iranian officials have asserted that they control the strait and that ships not affiliated with the United States or Israel can pass if they pay a toll.

The proposal to delay talks on nuclear issues until a later phase would appear at odds with Washington's repeated demand that Iran accept stringent restrictions on its nuclear programme before the war can end.

There was no immediate

claim of responsibility for the attack, the first reported in the area since April 22, when a cargo ship reported being fired upon, the monitor said.

Iranian patrol boats, some powered only by twin outboard motors, are small, nimble and hard to detect and have attacked several ships.

President Donald Trump last month ordered the US military to "shoot and kill" small Iranian boats that deploy mines in the strait.

How an insurgency threatens US mining ambitions in Pak

Elian Peltier, Zia ur-Rehman, Christiana Triebert & Pablo Robles
Quetta, May 3

STANDING IN the Oval Office in September, Pakistan's Army chief gave President Trump a wooden box filled with minerals and gems — a nod to the lucrative deals US companies could make in Pakistan, where mining has long been dominated by China. "A very great guy," Trump said of the Pakistani commander, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir.

Months later, the Trump administration announced \$1.3 billion in investments in the

Balochistan Province of Pakistan, home to large reserves of gold and copper. After partnerships in counterterrorism and crypto, Pakistani officials have successfully wooed the Trump administration with cooperation on mining.

In recent weeks, Pakistan has also inserted itself as a peacemaker between the United States and Iran.

But the US bet in Pakistan is on a collision course with one of South Asia's most lethal militant groups: the Baloch Liberation Army, or BLA, the flag-bearer of a separatist insurgency in the region straddling western Pakistan, eastern Iran and southern

Afghanistan.

The fight for an independent Balochistan is as old as Pakistan, and has motivated separatist attacks for decades.

But over the past few years, the BLA has carried out hundreds of increasingly sophisticated attacks, culminating on January 31 in a coordinated assault by 500 militants who struck at least 18 targets in 12 separate areas and killed at least 58 people.

Pakistani officials have played down the attacks, but videos verified by *The New York Times* show it was the most expansive attack by the BLA in years, and one that included

E. EXPLAINED

Balochistan's resource war

Pakistan's effort to transform Balochistan's vast gold and copper reserves into a strategic economic hub is under growing threat from the BLA insurgency. Rising militant attacks, disrupted supply lines and deep local grievances are making resource extraction inseparable from security and political stability.

not only military and police targets — escalating the group's challenge to the Pakistani state.

"This kind of attack requires some type of public support, territorial control and firepower," said Abdul Basit, a Singapore-based expert on South Asian militancy.

"To pull this off in broad daylight without these components isn't possible," Basit added.

The attacks included several on the road to Balochistan's largest mining site, Reko Diq, and disrupted operations at the site — one of the world's largest untapped copper and gold reserves. It is poised to become

the flagship asset of the US-Pakistani mining partnership, according to Gracelin Baskaran, the lead expert on critical minerals at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"The BLA is not a peripheral challenge," Baskaran said. "It is a primary, project-defining risk."

The US-Israeli war in neighboring Iran is adding another challenge: Pakistani officials fear that any power vacuum in Iran's east could allow groups like the BLA to replenish their ranks, move even more freely over the porous border and attack convoys carrying minerals, equipment and mining operators.

Nepal govt set to cancel nearly 1,600 'politically motivated' appointments

Yubaraj Ghimire
Kathmandu, May 3

AROUND 1,600 political appointees holding constitutional positions and heading government boards and corporations are set to lose their jobs en masse through a sweeping ordinance issued by President Ramchandra Paudel, local media reported.

The move aims to target politically motivated appointments made by previous governments, including the Sushila Karki-led interim government formed after the 'Gen Z' movement, according to the reports.

The termination of service ordinance, approved by President Poudel, is expected to come into effect at any moment, rendering 1,594 people jobless.

Those affected will include vice-chancellors, rectors and deans of universities; chiefs and commissioners of all constitutional bodies; heads of government media; and chiefs and board members of government authorities.

Once implemented, the ordinance will amend 110 laws and affect the functioning of as many bodies.

The impact is expected to be particularly noticeable in sectors such as education, healthcare and public service delivery. And, in many cases, routine operations are likely to be disrupted due to the absence of authorised signatories, the media reports suggest. The Balendra Shah led government has yet to spell out a clear timeline or mechanism for fresh appointments.

Officer at media dinner was shot by suspect Allen, says US Attorney

Washington: US Attorney Jeanine Pirro said Sunday the government has evidence a federal agent was shot by the suspect in custody during an alleged attempt to assassinate President Donald Trump at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner last weekend.

"We now can establish that a pellet that came from the buckshot from the defendant's Mossberg pump-action shotgun was intertwined with the fiber of the vest of the Secret Service officer," Pirro said during an appearance on CNN. "It is definitively his bullet," Pirro said.

Cole Tomas Allen is accused of storming a security checkpoint and firing a shotgun in the foyer leading to the White House Correspondents' Dinner on April 25.



The King & The President

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te meets King Mswati III at Mandvulo Grand Hall near Manzini, Eswatini, on Saturday, during a surprise visit that Taipei said Beijing tried to block. Lai told the King that Taiwan has the right to engage with the world and that no country can prevent it from contributing internationally. REUTERS

Ukrainian drones strike Russian port, oil tankers

Associated Press
Kyiv, May 3

UKRAINE ON Sunday launched a wave of strikes against Russian oil targets, hitting a key loading port on the Baltic Sea and two tankers that Ukraine alleges were illegally used to transport Russian crude.

A nighttime drone strike sparked a blaze at Russia's largest oil exporting port on the Baltic Sea, the port of Primorsk, according to Russian regional Gov Alexander Drozdenko.

The port, operated by Russia's state oil firm Transneft, is capable of handling hundreds of thousands of barrels per day. Primorsk, which was targeted multiple times in March, lies over 1,000 kilometers from Ukraine, between the Russian-Finnish border and Russia's second-largest city of St Petersburg. Local Governor Drozdenko

• BRIEFLY



Shakira during her free concert in Copacabana beach, Brazil. REUTERS

BRAZIL

Shakira draws two million to a free Copacabana concert

COLOMBIAN SUPERSTAR Shakira gave a free concert on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro on Saturday night, an event that the city's mayor said drew 2 million people to one of the world's most iconic waterfronts. The performance followed similar shows by Madonna in 2024 and Lady Gaga last year, which also were attended by huge crowds that danced on the sprawling sands. For Shakira, it was part of her *Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran*, or *Women No Longer Cry*, world tour named after her 2024 album. AP

FRANCE

2 dead, 16 hurt in Channel crossing attempt to UK

A SMALL boat carrying migrants trying to cross the English Channel ran aground on a beach in northern France, leaving two dead and 16 people injured, authorities said Sunday. The vessel, carrying 82 people started to drift away due to an engine failure, Christophe Marx, secretary-general of the Pas-de-Calais prefecture said. AP

SUDAN

Paramilitary drone strike near capital kills five

SUDAN'S PARAMILITARY group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), killed at least five people in a drone attack that hit a civilian vehicle on the outskirts of Khartoum, a local Sudanese rights group said. The attack on Saturday morning hit a vehicle that was travelling from the White Nile province to Omdurman, a rights group tracking violence said. AP

• NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

SRI LANKA

Over 130 foreign nationals held for cyber fraud

MORE THAN 130 foreign nationals were arrested in Sri Lanka for cybercrime operations over the last two days, police said. The police actions are part of a wider crackdown on cross-border online fraud networks operating. In a raid on Saturday Sri Lankan police arrested 37 Chinese nationals. PTI

PAKISTAN

2 from minority community to join civil service

TWO WOMEN from the minority Hindu community are set to join the federal civil service of Pakistan, where representation of such groups is historically low. Jeevan Rebari and Khem Chand Jandora, both from Sindh province, were among the 170 candidates qualified to join the Central Superior Services. PTI

• MOST OF THE ILLEGAL OPERATORS ARE FROM CHINA; SO ARE RISING NUMBERS OF TOURISTS, SOME OF WHOM ARE GETTING SCAMMED

Norway's Northern Lights nightmare: Illegal guides behind tourism explosion

Lynsey Chutel & Louise Kräger
Tromso, May 3

FOLLOWING IN an unmarked car, the police took immediate interest in a dark gray minivan with foreign license plates. The stop-start driving was suspicious. So was the driver's frantic texting on his cellphone.

When he finally drove up to the sludge-clogged terminal entrance of Tromso airport in Norway, he picked up two passengers. "As soon as they started driving, we activated the blue lights," Superintendent Lars Holtedahl said, recalling the February operation. "They were caught completely off guard."

The crime? Working as an unlicensed Northern Lights tour guide. The offence might seem minor to outsiders, but to the people of Tromso, a small Norwegian city above the Arctic Circle, such guides have become virtually Public Enemy No 1.

Unregulated tour operators have created havoc in Tromso, which is perfectly perched on the fjords between snow-capped mountains to view the aurora borealis, the color-streaked light display over the North Pole.

Much of the year, Tromso is a quiet university town of about 80,000 residents. In recent years, the number of visitors has exploded, mostly because of social media. During high

season, from September through April, tourists can outnumber locals three to one.

In February alone, more than 137,000 visitors passed through the recently expanded international terminal of the Tromso airport, according to the Norwegian airports company Avinor.

This unregulated industry, local officials say, has sown chaos on the streets and undercuts licensed tour operators, as well as the local tax base.

Most of the illegal operators are from China. So are rising numbers of tourists, some of whom are getting scammed. Many of the illegal guides arrive from outside Norway, working



A cross-country skiing tour in Tromso, Norway. NYT

without proper permits and taking their profits with them.

"We don't see an increase in income in the municipality, we

only see the expenses," said Helga Bardsdatter Kristiansen, the city's first sustainability officer, pointing to a strain on the

city's roads and services. Nearly half of tour operators in Tromso are illegitimate, she added.

This season, the police impounded about 10 vehicles a month and arrested more than a dozen people for illegally transporting tourists, deporting the illegal guides who were not Norwegian.

The driver arrested in February in the operation described by Superintendent Holtedahl was a Chinese national in his 40s and expelled. When he was pulled over, he lied and said he was transporting family, the police said. Messages on his phone revealed he had sold a five-day tour for 31,000 yuan, or more than \$4,500.

"It's a big industry," Superintendent Holtedahl said. "There is a lot of money being made, the honest way and the dishonest way."

A typical tour starts at \$115 per person and can be stop-and-start, with drivers checking aurora tracking apps, driving as far as the Finnish border, 100 miles away, chasing the lights.

"You need to know where to go, and you need the car," said Kurt Kolvereid Jacobsen, who is one of the heads of a special team, called the A-Crime unit, which was formed last year to focus on the northern lights industry. In Tromso, the local A-Crime unit sets off at dusk, when buses clog up the streets, waiting to load tourists.

Dressed in neon overalls, they search cars for illegal guides.

The illegal operators are often one step ahead.

Officials working with the A-Crime unit said they had uncovered a chat-group where illegal guides swapped tips to evade checks. Pretending their clients were family members was a common tactic.

On Red Note, the Chinese social media app, there are hundreds of posts complaining about scams. One user, a woman from Chengdu, in southern China, said only thing she saw on her tour was the inside of a police station, after the illegal guide who picked her up was arrested. NYT

SHANTI ACT PAVES WAY FOR PRIVATE PLAYERS TO ENTER CIVIL NUCLEAR POWER SECTOR

DAE, Power Ministry at odds over civil nuclear projects' supervision

Concerns over conflict of interest due to DAE's full control over supply chain led to calls for a separate ministry to oversee private projects

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, May 3

AS INDIA moves to expand the civil nuclear power sector by allowing private participation through the recently passed SHANTI Act, there are two divergent views within the top levels of the government over the jurisdictional administration of this strategic sector.

The question is this: whether to continue with the Department of Atomic Energy's (DAE) overall control over the nuclear sector or tangentially allow the Ministry of Power the authority to supervise certain types of new civil nuclear projects.

Currently, the DAE, under the Prime Minister's Office, is the administrative authority for matters that are related to nuclear power.

However, there is an emerging view that new civil nuclear projects developed by private players should be brought within the ambit of the Ministry of Power, even as legacy nuclear power projects will continue to remain under the

administrative control of DAE, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

The view to entrust administration of private nuclear power projects to a separate ministry emerged from rising concern over potential conflict of interest due to DAE's full control over the entire nuclear power supply chain — from research and development to fuel supply and spent fuel management.

Even the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), responsible for carrying out all regulatory functions, was dependent on DAE for its budget and administration until it was accorded a statutory status under the SHANTI Act.

In 2012, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) had also pointed out a conflict of responsibilities and interest as the chairperson of AERB was subordinated to the chairperson of the Atomic Energy Commission, who is also the secretary of the DAE.

As the SHANTI Act fixes this, AERB is expected to play a larger role in regulating nuclear power plants developed and

SECTOR OVERHAUL UNDER THE ACT

SHANTI ACT will allow the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board to play a larger role in regulating nuclear power plants. Earlier, the board depended on DAE for its budget and administration until the act accorded it with statutory status



KEY LIABILITY clause which previously exposed nuclear equipment vendors to long-term and uncertain liability risk during a nuclear accident was omitted under the act passed in December

DAE WILL be the nodal agency, as per the Shanti Act. An official said nuclear power requires technical institutional knowledge, and DAE and its other bodies have that expertise and know-how

operated by both DAE — through Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) — and other private players.

According to senior officials aware of the matter, private players who would develop nuclear power based on imported technology, such as light water reactors (LWR) or pressurised water reactors (PWR), could likely come under the administrative control of the Ministry of Power, while the ones built using the legacy pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs) technology could remain under DAE, as the latter has technological expertise on this type of reactor.

A senior DAE official said

the role of DAE has been clearly mentioned in the SHANTI Act, which says DAE will be the nodal agency.

"Nuclear power is not like a thermal power plant. It requires technical institutional knowledge... DAE and its other bodies have that expertise and the technical know-how," the official added.

Queries emailed to the Ministry of Power and the DAE remained unanswered till the time of filing this story.

India aims to achieve 100 GW of nuclear power by 2047, with more than of this capacity to be developed by NPCIL.

Of the rest, around 30% is expected to be developed by

NTPC, a public sector enterprise under the Ministry of Power, and the rest would be developed by private players.

In December, the parliament passed the SHANTI Act, paving way for private players to enter the strictly regulated civil nuclear power sector.

The Act also omitted a key liability clause which had previously exposed nuclear equipment vendors to long-term and uncertain liability risk in the event of a nuclear accident.

However, it retains exclusive central government control over certain critical and sensitive activities, including the enrichment and isotopic separation of radioactive substances, the management and reprocessing of spent fuel and high-level radioactive waste, and the production and upgradation of heavy water, among others.

Currently, India's installed nuclear power capacity stands at 8.7 gigawatt electrical (GWe), constituting merely 1.65% of total installed capacity. In 2025-26, it added 700 megawatt electric (MWe) nuclear power till January this year.

Meanwhile, 6,600 MWe of Nuclear Capacity is presently under construction and is targeted to be completed by 2031-32.

Additionally, 7,000 MWe of Nuclear Capacity is under various stages of planning and approval.

GAZETTE NOTIFICATION FOR SOUTH COAST RAILWAY SOON

How the newest rail zone came into being; ops likely to commence from June 1

Dheeraj Mishra
New Delhi, May 3

MINISTER FOR Railways Ashwini Vaishnav last Tuesday (April 28) announced in Visakhapatnam that the gazette notification for the creation of South Coast Railway Zone (SCoR) will be issued soon, with operations expected to commence from June 1, 2026.

The minister was addressing the gathering after the ground-breaking ceremony of Google Cloud India AI Hub in the city, saying that the new zone will mark a significant step toward strengthening the Railway Administration in Andhra Pradesh.

SCoR is the newest and 18th zone of Indian Railways. It is headquartered in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

The foundation of the zone lies in the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act of 2014, which led to the formation of Telangana.

Since then, there has been a continuous demand for a separate railway zone in the state. However, it was fulfilled only after the 2024 general election when the state and the Centre came on the same page.

Andhra Pradesh's ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) is part of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre.

On February 7, 2025, the Union Cabinet gave ex post facto approval for the creation of the new South Coast Railway Zone. The zone connects to the area rich in minerals and natural resources with the important ports on the eastern coast, including Visakhapatnam port.

That is why it is set to become one of the important zones for freight loading in Railways.

How was it created?

The new zone covers the major portion of Andhra Pradesh, and parts of Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

It is divided into four divisions, namely Guntakal, Guntur, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam (erstwhile Waltair).

It was created after carving out the areas of two adjacent



Vaishnav said the zone will be a major step toward strengthening Railway Administration in Andhra Pradesh.

zones, East Coast Railway (ECoR) and South Central Railway (SCR).

For the 18th zone, Railways divided the erstwhile Waltair division of ECoR into two parts. Around 410 km was assigned to the Visakhapatnam division, while the remaining 680 km was renamed as the Rayagada division, replacing the colonial-era name.

Further, the other two divisions, Vijayawada and Guntur, were created from South Central Railway.

What is the status of the zone?

The zone has yet to begin operations.

In January 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the SCoR's headquarters in Visakhapatnam.

A total of 52.2 acres of land at Mudasarlova has been earmarked for the headquarters, which the State Government handed over to Railways in August 2024.

Officials said that Rs. 184 crore has been sanctioned for the setting up of the South Coast Railway headquarters.

Along the same lines, the construction of the zonal headquarters office building has also been taken up.

The general manager of SCoR was appointed within months of construction work.

The new zone also gains importance given the fact that the railway projects worth approximately Rs 1,06,000 crore are currently underway in Andhra Pradesh.

But why is there opposition?

While SCoR is being touted as an important requirement for the Railways, there has been opposition from Odisha's political parties, alleging that ECoR's revenue-making portion has been given to the new zone.

In fact, the transfer of the 50-km Palasa-Ichchapuram section from ECoR to SCoR united the ruling BJP and the opposition BJD earlier this month.

The parties demanded that the decision be repealed as it will affect the revenue of ECoR, which covers almost the entire state of Odisha, and is headquartered in Bhubaneswar.

However, the Railway Board said that none of the seven stations in the Palasa-Ichchapuram section is located within Odisha, and these are small to mid-sized stations that primarily handle passenger traffic.

The Board also stated that none of them is a major freight loading point. So far, ECoR has remained one of the most freight-revenue-generating divisions of Indian Railways.

In the last financial year, 2025-26, the zone transported 286 million tonnes of freight, accounting for over 17% of the Railways' total freight loading during the period.

While nearly 65% of Indian Railways' revenue comes from freight, the share of goods revenue in ECoR is more than 90%. The zone stretches along a long coastal line rich in minerals and natural resources.

India-bound LPG tanker sails past Hormuz, to reach Vizag on May 13

New Delhi: A tanker carrying liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) for India has sailed out of the Strait of Hormuz and is now headed towards the country, an official statement said Sunday.

The Marshall Islands-flagged LPG carrier MT Sarv Shakti, loaded with 46,313 tonnes of LPG and staffed by 20 crew, including 18 Indians, cleared the key shipping chokepoint on May 2 and is expected to reach Visakhapatnam on May 13, it said.

The cargo, enough to meet half a day's requirement of the country, will partly tide over supply constraints being faced since the start of the West Asia conflict more than two months back.

Ship-tracking data showed its position in Oman Gulf on Sunday evening. The very large gas carrier has previously made runs between the Persian Gulf and Indian ports, has been chartered by state-owned Indian Oil Corporation.

Sarv Shakti is the first India-linked tanker to cross the war zone since a weeks-old US blockade of ships tied to Iran began, pushing transits through Hormuz back down to almost zero.

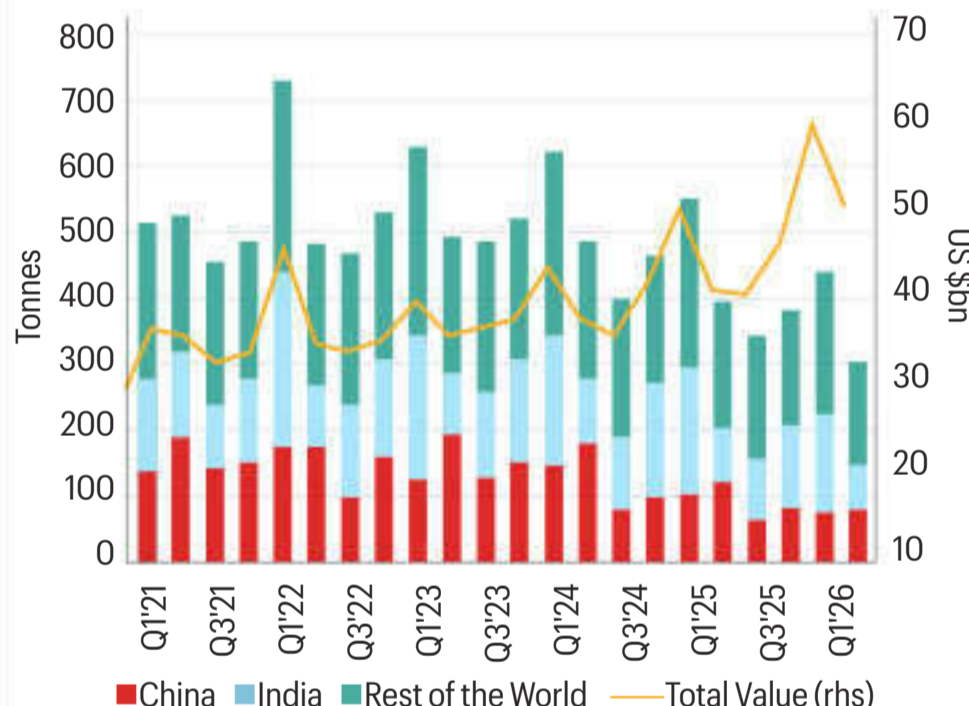
The statement said no incident involving Indian-flagged vessels has been reported in the past 24 hours.

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways is working closely with the Ministry of External Affairs, Indian missions and maritime stakeholders to ensure crew welfare and uninterrupted operations. PTI

GOLD PRICE SURGE HIT Q1 JEWELLERY DEMAND, BUT CONSUMERS KEPT SPENDING

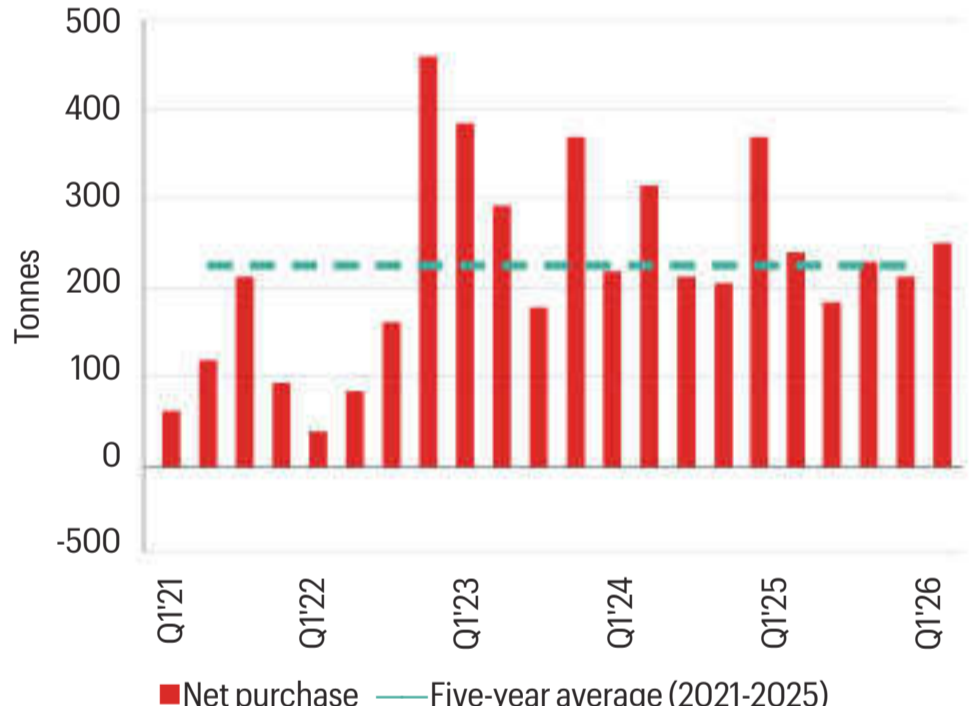
Gold prices hit record highs in January. Despite the subsequent moderation, prices remained elevated, hurting demand for jewellery — which in January-March slumped to its lowest in a quarter in volume terms since Covid, according to the World Gold Council. However, in value terms, gold jewellery demand was up 31% year-on-year at \$47 billion — the highest ever for the first quarter of a calendar year. Central banks, too, kept buying gold, with net purchases in the first three months of 2026 at 244 tonnes, higher than the quarterly average in the last five years.

Quarterly jewellery consumption, tonnes



(SOURCE: ICE BENCHMARK ADMINISTRATION, METALS FOCUS, WORLD GOLD COUNCIL)

Quarterly central bank net purchases, tonnes



(SOURCE: METALS FOCUS, WORLD GOLD COUNCIL)

Centre meets 98% of FY26 capex target, led by Railways & NHAI

Prasanta Sahu
New Delhi, May 3

THE CENTRE achieved around Rs 10.75 lakh crore, or 98%, of its revised capital expenditure target of Rs 10.96 lakh crore for FY26, a senior official said.

In the Budget presented on February 1, the government had revised downward the FY26 capex target to Rs 10.96 lakh crore from the budget estimate of Rs 11.21 lakh crore.

"The capex achievement is very good," the official said, adding that the momentum in

asset-creating expenditure continued.

The Centre's capex push was led by the Railway Board and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), which together accounted for 47% of total capital expenditure in FY26. The Railway Board invested Rs 2.6 lakh crore, while NHAI spent Rs 2.4 lakh crore.

The Centre also nearly fully utilised the Rs 1.5 lakh crore earmarked for 50-year interest-free capex loans to states for FY26.

In FY25, it achieved capital expenditure of Rs 10.52 lakh

crore against the revised estimate of Rs 10.18 lakh crore and the budget estimate of Rs 11.11 lakh crore.

For the past two years, the Centre's capex has remained around 3% of the GDP, considered an ideal level under fiscal management norms, lending support to economic growth.

For FY27, the Centre has budgeted capital expenditure to rise 11.5% to Rs 12.2 lakh crore. Effective capital expenditure, which includes grants-in-aid to states for asset creation, is projected to grow 22.1% to Rs 17.1 lakh crore. FE

Maruti Suzuki market share up 42% in FY27

New Delhi: The country's largest carmaker, Maruti Suzuki India, has started the new fiscal FY27 with a 42% market share, increasing from 39% in the previous fiscal.

As per industry estimates, the company, which posted a record domestic sales of 1,91,122 units in April, gained nearly 3 percentage points in market share the month.

Maruti Suzuki India Senior Executive Officer, Marketing and Sales, Partho Banerjee, said that although the company's increase in market share has been led by its passenger cars, SUVs have also made a significant

contribution.

"We started the new fiscal with a bang in April with record sales and also gained market share," he said. Its previous highest domestic sales were recorded at 1,82,165 units in December 2025.

As for the sales of small cars comprising models Alto, S-Presso, Celerio and WagonR, he said, "We have grown by 74.4%." Carmakers had started the new fiscal on a strong note with an estimated 4.5 lakh units of passenger vehicles sold in April, up 27% as compared to 3.54 lakh units in April last year. PTI

MOST MEMBERS CANNOT MEET TARGETS DUE TO THE STRAIT'S CLOSURE: QUOTA INCREASE REMOVES UAE SHARE AFTER IT LEFT OPEC+ AND OPEC ON MAY 1

OPEC+ agrees 3rd oil output quota hike since Hormuz closure

Reuters
London, May 3

OPEC+ AGREED on Sunday a modest oil output hike for June, an increase that will remain largely on paper as long as the Iran war continues to disrupt Gulf oil supplies through the Strait of Hormuz.

Seven OPEC+ countries will raise oil output targets by 188,000 barrels per day in June, the third consecutive monthly increase, OPEC+ said in a statement after an online meeting.

The increase is the same as that agreed for May minus the share of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which left the group on May 1.

The move is designed to show the group is ready to raise supplies once the war stops and signals that OPEC+ is pressing on with a business-as-usual approach despite the departure of the UAE from OPEC+. OPEC+ sources and analysts said.

"OPEC+ is sending a two-layer message to the market: continuity despite the UAE's exit, and control despite limited physical impact," said Jorge Leon, an analyst at Rystad and former OPEC official.

"While output is increasing on paper, the real impact on physical supply remains very limited given the Strait of Hormuz constraints. This is less about adding barrels and more



The seven members who met include Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Russia, and others.

REUTERS FILE

about signalling that OPEC+ still calls the shots."

Top OPEC+ producer Saudi Arabia's quota will rise to 10.291 million bpd in June under the

agreement, far above actual production. The kingdom reported actual production of 7.76 million bpd to OPEC in March. The seven members who

met on Sunday were Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Algeria, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Oman.

With the UAE leaving, OPEC+ includes 21 members including Iran. But in recent years only the seven nations plus the UAE have been involved in monthly production decisions.

The Iran war, which began on February 28, and the resulting closure of the Hormuz Strait have throttled exports from OPEC+ members Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Kuwait, as well as from the UAE. Before the conflict, these producers were the only countries in the group able to raise production. Even when shipping through the Strait of Hormuz reopens, it will take

several weeks if not months for flows to normalise, oil executives from the Gulf and global oil traders have said.

The supply disruption has propelled oil prices to a four-year high above \$125 per barrel as analysts begin to predict widespread jet fuel shortages in one to two months and a spike in global inflation. The crude oil output from all OPEC+ members averaged 35.06 million bpd in March, down 7.70 million bpd from February, OPEC said in a report last month, with Iraq and Saudi Arabia making the biggest cuts due to constrained exports.

The seven OPEC+ members will meet again on June 7, the statement said.

Leather, footwear industry seeks duty exemptions

New Delhi: The leather and footwear industry has sought duty exemptions on a number of critical inputs such as synthetic leather, metal accessories, machinery, threads, moulds, and certain chemicals as the ongoing West Asia crisis has pushed input costs up by up to 60%, an official said. The industry has recently flagged the matter with the commerce and industry ministry. PTI

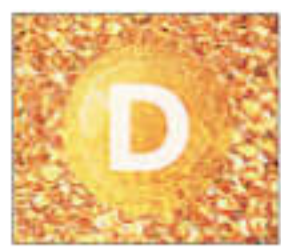
'Gold, silver may be range-bound next week'

New Delhi: Precious metal prices are expected to witness mixed movement next week as investors track developments in the US-Iran conflict, string of global economic data releases, and domestic political cues, analysts said. Traders will monitor PMI readings from major economies, followed by US labour market indicators and non-farm payroll data for fresh cues on monetary policy and bullion demand, they added. PTI

WEEKLY CAPSULE

Vitamin D boosts chemo success

A daily vitamin D supplement may quietly supercharge chemotherapy. In a small study, carried out at the Botucatu School of Medicine at São Paulo State University (FMB-UNESP), women who took low doses alongside treatment were far more likely to see their cancer vanish than those who didn't. Since vitamin D also supports immune function — and many patients are deficient — it could be playing a bigger role than expected. Scientists say this affordable approach deserves investigation. Many previous studies examining vitamin D and cancer have focused on much higher doses than those used in this research.



Fish oil may be hurting your brain

Fish oil has long been praised as brain-boosting, but new research suggests the story may be more complicated. Scientists from the Medical University of South Carolina found that in people with repeated mild head injuries, a key Omega-3 fatty acid in fish oil — EPA — may actually interfere with the brain's ability to repair itself. Instead of helping recovery, it appears to weaken blood vessel stability, disrupt healing signals and even contribute to harmful protein buildup linked to cognitive decline. These supplements are now appearing not only in capsules but also in drinks, dairy alternatives and snacks.



Why superagers beat dementia

A rare group of adults over 80, known as superagers, are rewriting what we thought was possible for the ageing brain. With memory abilities comparable to people decades younger, their brains either resist or withstand the damage typically linked to Alzheimer's disease. Over decades of research, scientists have noticed some lifestyle and personality traits that set superagers apart from their peers, including being highly social and outgoing. Scientists at Northwestern University believe these insights could pave the way for new strategies to delay or even prevent dementia.



Polluted water riskier for children

A troubling new study from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) reveals that a common environmental contaminant, NDMA — found in polluted water, certain medications, and even processed foods — may pose a far greater cancer risk to children than adults. In experiments with mice, young animals exposed to the chemical developed significantly more DNA damage and cancer, despite experiencing the same initial exposure as adults. The key difference lies in how rapidly children's cells divide, which turns early DNA damage into dangerous mutations much more easily.



How killer T cells destroy cancer

The body's "killer" T cells don't just attack — they strike with astonishing precision, forming a tiny, highly organised contact zone that lets them destroy dangerous cells without harming their neighbours. Now, scientists from the University of Geneva (UNIGE) and the Lausanne University Hospital (CHUV) have managed to visualise these mechanisms in three dimensions under near-native conditions. They have captured this process in unprecedented detail, revealing a hidden world of molecular choreography. These insights could help refine treatments, especially in immuno-oncology.



HEALING TOUCH

DR ROMMEL TICKOO

DIRECTOR, INTERNAL MEDICINE, MAX HEALTHCARE



Sodium regulates the movement of water into and out of cells

Why drinking water isn't enough, you need electrolytes

Drinking 5 litres of water in a day landed patient in ICU. Here's why

THIS 25-YEAR-OLD marketing executive mostly spends his day criss-crossing the city on his motorcycle, moving from one client meeting to another, braving the furnace-like midday heat. Like many young professionals, he believed he was doing the right thing by drinking water constantly. He stopped frequently to refill his bottle, consuming nearly five litres through the day. What he did not do was eat. He consumed no fruit, no electrolyte drink, no oral rehydration solution — only plain water. That proved costly.

By evening, he began to feel strangely light-headed. Nausea followed. He dismissed it as exhaustion. He pushed on, determined to finish his final appointments. Within hours, his speech became sluggish. He grew unusually drowsy and disoriented. Alarmed colleagues rushed him to our emergency department. Blood investigations revealed that his sodium level had plummeted to 124 mEq/L, far below the normal range of 135 to 145 mEq/L. The diagnosis was acute hyponatremia — a dangerous fall in blood sodium caused by excessive salt loss through sweating, worsened by overconsumption of plain water that diluted it further. His case is far from isolated. Across India, where summer temperatures are now routinely touching 44-47 degrees Celsius, hospitals are seeing a rise in heat-related electrolyte disturbances.

Drinking too little water is as dangerous as drinking large amounts without electrolytes

Sweating is the body's primary cooling mechanism. As sweat evaporates from the skin, it dissipates heat and helps regulate body temperature. Yet sweat is not merely water. It carries with it sodium, chloride, potassium and other essential electrolytes — charged minerals that regulate nerve impulses, muscle contractions, fluid balance and heart rhythm. Under normal conditions, these losses are modest and easily replenished through regular food and drink. But under prolonged exposure to extreme heat, particularly when coupled with physical exertion, the losses can be significant.

In India, the common advice during summer is to "drink a lot of water." But water alone cannot replace the electrolytes lost. In fact, when consumed excessively without adequate salt intake, it can dilute sodium levels in the bloodstream, creating precisely the kind of dangerous imbalance seen in the young executive's case. You need electrolyte-infused water. Sodium regulates the movement of water into and out of cells, particularly in the brain. When sodium levels drop too low, water shifts into cells, causing them to swell. In the brain, where the skull leaves no room for expansion, this swelling can rapidly become life-threatening. The earliest symptoms are often deceptively mild — headache, fatigue, dizziness, nausea and confusion. As sodium levels continue to fall, drowsiness deepens into altered consciousness. Seizures may occur. In severe cases, patients can slip into coma. What makes hyponatremia especially dangerous during Indian summers is that it often affects the young. Outdoor workers, delivery personnel, field executives, traffic police officers and construction workers are particularly vulnerable.

Then there is hypernatremia, which develops when water loss exceeds replacement. This typically occurs when someone exposed to intense heat sweats profusely but fails to drink enough fluids. As body water content drops, sodium becomes increasingly concentrated in the blood. It causes cells to shrink as water is drawn out of them. Intense thirst and dryness of the mouth progress to irritability, restlessness, muscle twitching, confusion and seizures. In severe cases, hypernatremia can cause permanent neurological damage.

Thus, summer heat presents a paradoxical challenge: drinking too little water can be dangerous but drinking large amounts of plain water without electrolyte replacement can be equally hazardous.

The semaglutide boom is here. So is self-medication

Experts caution that improper dosing and poor patient selection could turn a breakthrough drug into a health hazard

Anonna Dutt

FIFTY-FIVE YEAR-OLD Gujarat resident Ravi Parikh* had heard of the weight-loss properties of semaglutide, a diabetes regulating drug with spin-off effects on obesity. While he found it difficult to take the injectable drug, he bought oral pills over-the-counter from a local pharmacy. Several months later, he decided to go to Dr Anoop Misra's clinic to get evaluated, worried about the side effects he had read about.

While undergoing tests, he was diagnosed with medullary thyroid cancer. In fact, he had a family history of this type of cancer, and, therefore, belongs to a group of patients unsuited for new-age weight loss drugs. Some animal studies have linked an increase in the risk of this type of cancer with the use of GLP-1 drugs such as semaglutide. "Those with a family history of this type of cancer should not be prescribed semaglutide — the drug comes with a warning. This is why we need to carefully select patients who are given any GLP-1 drug. It should not be prescribed by anyone other than diabetologists, internal medicine specialists, or in some cases, cardiologists. And, it should definitely not be taken without the advice of a doctor," says Dr Anoop Misra, chairman, Fortis C-Doc, Diabetes and Allied Sciences, New Delhi.

While this was a very prominent case where the patient should not have received the drug at all, Dr Misra is worried about many self-medicators, taking both oral and injectable versions on their own. This number has increased to one case every 10 days at his clinic since the injectable drugs became available in India last year. "These numbers are likely to go up further with cheaper generic versions of semaglutide now available in the market," he says.

As for side effects, he has seen patients come in with gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea or vomiting or in some cases other more severe symptoms such as pancreatic pain. "These drugs can lead to substantial weight loss and improve blood sugar control, making them attractive options for obesity and diabetes management. But the protocol has to be customised according to the patient's profile."

Who should not take the drug?

Thyroid Cancer Risk: Individuals with a personal or family history of Medullary Thyroid Carcinoma (MTC) or Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia syndrome type 2 (MEN2) should avoid these medications.

Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: GLP-1 agonists are not safe during pregnancy (should stop two months before conception) or while breastfeeding.

Pancreatitis: A history of pancreatitis is a contraindication as these drugs can increase the risk of inflammation.

Severe Gastrointestinal Disease: Those with severe gastrointestinal issues, particularly gastroparesis (slow stomach emptying), should not use these drugs.

WHO NEEDS VIGIL
Diabetic Retinopathy: Individuals with vision damage from diabetes should consult a doctor as rapid blood sugar improvement can paradoxically worsen this condition.

Mental Health Conditions: A history of eating disorders or depression requires careful evaluation.

Kidney Impairment: People with an eGFR below 30. Patients with advanced kidney disease require monitoring because nausea, vomiting and dehydration can worsen renal function.

The correct dosage

Selecting the correct dose and scaling it up slowly is the right way to ensure weight loss drugs do their job, according to Dr V Mohan, chairperson of Dr Mohan's Diabetes Specialities Centre in Chennai. "This is the reason why the medicine should always be taken under the guidance of a doctor," he adds. The drug is meant for people with a body mass index over 30 or between 27 and 30 if they have other obesity-related conditions such as diabetes or hypertension.

CUTTING EDGE

Dengue is spreading fast: Can science outsmart it at last?

From AI-driven research to vaccines, scientists are racing to decode why dengue turns deadly

Anuradha Mascarenhas

FROM DECODING the virus cell by cell to predicting severe illness before symptoms escalate, scientists are deploying breakthrough technologies to study dengue like never before. Tools such as single-cell sequencing — akin to a microscopic detective tracking what happens inside each infected cell — and advanced protein biomarker analysis, which scans thousands of biological signals in a single blood test, are set to transform how dengue is understood, diagnosed and treated.

As climate change reshapes the global dengue landscape, COMBAT, an Indo-EU research alliance, is taking on the most complex challenges thrown up by the disease. Bringing together leading scientists from India and Europe, the initiative focusses on decoding the underlying mechanisms of dengue infection to improve vaccine development and transform treatment strategies.

The European arm of the programme is funded by the European Union's HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions while India's contribution is supported by the Department of Biotechnology under the Min-

istry of Science and Technology.

According to Prof Ujjwal Neogi, who leads the global team at Karolinska Institute, Sweden, COMBAT will help strengthen public health infrastructure and surveillance strategies to tackle the growing risk of dengue outbreaks in both endemic and non-endemic regions. The Indian arm is led by Prof Arindam Maitra, along with Dr Sagar Sengupta and Dr Anup Mazumder from BRIC — National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBMG), Kalyani. Prof Maitra explains that NIBMG studies how a person's genes influence their risk of infections and how diseases develop. "Using advanced tools, the team will try to understand why dengue becomes severe in some people by closely studying genes, body responses and biological markers," he says.

High-resolution microscopy will allow scientists to observe the virus attacking cells in real time, almost like watching a live film of infection. AI will be integrated into biological pipelines, enabling systems to learn from dengue data and rapidly adapt insights to other emerging pathogens. Researchers are also developing organ-on-chip models, which recreate miniature versions of



FROM THE OPD

GETTYIMAGES

Take the case of 50 year-old Chennai resident Sangeeta* who took a very high dose for her first shot. She mistakenly dialled a high 1mg instead of 0.1mg on her pre-filled pen. She ended up in a hospital with severe vomiting, which took doctors nearly two days and several saline drips to control properly. "Most patients experience nausea and vomiting initially, some may also experience diarrhoea. But every patient reacts differently. Some experience the symptoms initially even with the smallest doses but don't experience it later with the higher doses once they have adjusted to it. Others might experience such symptoms only on higher doses and thus have to be maintained on a lower one. Some may need to continue with the lower dose longer than the recommended four weeks before scaling up or they may need to skip a week in between. This is the reason they have to be constantly followed up," says Dr Mohan.

This dose adjustment, other than selection of the patient, also plays an important role in safe use of the drug. Dr Mohan adds, "Even before the generic versions entered the market, there were some unscrupulous gym trainers, beauticians, and wellness studios who were prescribing the drug to people. That's how the trend of Mounjaro brides began, where women take the drug before their wedding to shed the extra kilos. While most patients experience just gastrointestinal symptoms, the drugs also have some serious side effects."

The GLP-1 drugs have been linked with an increased risk of thyroid cancer, pancreatitis, stomach paralysis and even a specific type of blindness. "The drugs have now been linked to depression. If anything happens to a person, who will take care of the symptoms, who will be responsible? If a doctor prescribes the medicine, they would be responsible for managing the side effects as well," says Dr Mohan.

Increased prescription

With cheaper generic versions costing up to 90 per cent lower than the innovator molecule, their prescription has increased. "There has certainly been an increase in prescription of the GLP-1 drugs with the generic versions becoming available and the innovators dropping prices. What this essentially means is that people, for whom the price might have been a barrier earlier, are now considering using the drugs," says Dr Amrith Mithal, chairman and head of endocrinology and diabetes at Max Healthcare.

While he hasn't seen patients landing up with acute side effects in his clinic yet, he does see patients who have started taking the drug without consultation but later reach out to him after family or friends advise against it.

"While there are strict guidelines as to who should be prescribing the medicine, enforcing it can be a challenge. Some doctors may also prescribe it because they know if they don't, someone else will. But it should definitely be given only to those it is meant for. When appropriately prescribed and monitored, GLP-1 drugs remain safe and effective for many patients," says Dr Mithal.

*Names changed to protect privacy



GETTYIMAGES

Using advanced tools, the team will try to understand why dengue becomes severe in some people

human organs to safely study infection without testing on people. These insights were not possible just a few years ago. Some of these technologies are also expected to be installed in Indian institutes.

Alongside research efforts, progress in vaccine development is gaining momentum. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), in collaboration with Panacea Biotec, is currently conducting a Phase III trial of DengiAll, a single-dose recombinant dengue vaccine. "The trial spans 20 sites across 19 states and Union Territories and has enrolled more than 10,300 participants," says Dr Naveen Kumar, Director of ICMR-NIV (National Institute of Virology) Pune. At the same time, Takeda's tetravalent dengue vaccine TAK-003, known as



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NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

WHY SHANKAR PRASAD SHARMA

Shankar Prasad Sharma has been the ambassador of Nepal to India for the last four years. A top academic and one of Nepal's foremost economists, he was the Vice Chairman of Nepal's Planning Commission and also served as Nepal's ambassador to the US during the Obama administration. While he has been stationed in Delhi since 2022, Nepal has seen five prime ministers and the Gen Z protests. The bilateral ties with India also witnessed ups and downs during this period. This makes him best placed to explain the challenging political atmosphere in Nepal as well as turbulence in ties with India.

Shubhajt Roy: In September last year, Nepal experienced violent, nationwide protests known as the Gen Z uprising. What were the political, social and economic reasons that led to it?

In many developing and the LDC (Least Developed Countries) countries, the unemployment rate is very high. Nepal is no exception, the youth unemployment rate is above 20 per cent. The growth rate in Nepal is around four to five per cent per annum. We have not been able to exceed this for decades. There has been a low growth rate and lack of job opportunities, especially in the formal sector. And now people are more educated, they have gone out, seen the world and seen the development there. That's the second reason. And the third is the corruption that exists in the country because it was like a musical chair between three parties to elect the prime minister. There have been many accusations that many of these political party leaders, including the (then) prime minister, were involved in corruption, that they favoured people of their political party in political appointments. It was a combination of all these things that gave rise to the Gen Z movement and they were able to topple the government.

Shubhajt Roy: For the first time since 1999, a political party won such a huge and absolute majority in the last elections. (The Rastriya Swatantra Party, led by Balendra 'Balen' Shah won 182 seats in the 275-seat parliament). Is the era of the traditional political parties and the political elite over for now?

Definitely, it is over for people in Nepal, of a certain age, no doubt. But other political parties can also revive, provided they go to the villages, to the constituency and convince people that they can do a better job. But at this point of time, it's a very difficult task. People forget very easily about whom they voted for and why they voted if they don't see development or any significant change in their lives.

Shubhajt Roy: We have seen in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, a similar Gen Z revolution that ousted the incumbent government. Do you see similarities or differences between these two countries?

There were similar challenges in Bangladesh but after the election, things are moving in the right direction. Although people question the participation of political parties. Sri Lanka, too, has made some changes in the political arena and in terms of development activities, they are also catching up. We still have to see that for Nepal. This government would like to do a big bang approach in governance, service delivery as well as reduce corruption. In that perspective, the government had submitted eight ordinances a few days ago. These are all related to the improvement of governance. Which means that, although our parliament session of the budget session is coming soon, the government is saying that they would like to do it as quickly as possible, especially in appointing the right people in the right place. The spirit is very high and the approach is big bang.

Shubhajt Roy: There's criticism in the Nepalese media and the civil society on ruling by ordinances, and circumventing the parliamentary due process is being questioned.

What the government and the ruling party is saying is that because we have two houses — the lower house and the national assembly — it will take time to pass the Act because it has to be passed by the lower house, the parliament, and it has to be submitted to the national assembly. What the government and the party is saying is that we cannot wait until then. We would like to start the work right now and show the results. So, that's the reason why we have these ordinances and in the meantime we'll submit them to the parliament.

Shubhajt Roy: There is an anti-corruption commission that has been set up. Do you think this could lead to witch hunting or political vendetta?

The investigation of the property — of the undersecretary and above and the political appointees — was done by the government of Nepal once, a long time ago. This is the second time they are doing it. If you cannot show the sources of your property, then you'll have a problem. But I don't think there is any kind of vendetta.

Shubhajt Roy: You have spent four years here in India. From that time, how do you see the arc of the India-Nepal bilateral relationship?

In terms of output and outcome, there has been tremendous progress. I am comparing the last 20 years with how much we have achieved in two or three years and it's remarkable. I will give you one or two examples. One is specifically in the area of energy. In 2022, a memorandum of understanding joint vision statement on power sector cooperation was signed between the two governments. And, in 2022, we started exporting about 39 megawatt. But now we are exporting about 1300 megawatt. Next year, hopefully, that will increase by another 40 per cent. We are getting a sig-



ON THE LIPULEKH PASS DISPUTE

Regarding trade between India and China, the Nepal government has already protested, stating we must be involved. That is our land and there should be negotiations and they should be addressed trilaterally



ON THE END OF THE POLITICAL ELITE

It is over for people in Nepal, of a certain age. Other political parties can revive, provided they go to the villages, to the constituency and convince people that they can do a better job. But, it's a difficult task

'Nepal would like to balance its foreign policy relationship because we need all our friends'

Shankar Prasad Sharma, outgoing Ambassador of Nepal to India, on the churn in Nepal and what led to the Gen Z uprising, Nepal's bilateral ties with India, and navigating the politics of water and boundaries. The session was moderated by Shubhajt Roy, Diplomatic Editor, *The Indian Express*



Shankar Prasad Sharma, outgoing Ambassador of Nepal to India (right), in conversation with Shubhajt Roy, Diplomatic Editor, *The Indian Express*, at the Noida office ABHINAV SAHA

nificant amount of revenue out of this electricity. In the initial stage, there were also restrictions. Nepali sales were slightly discriminated against the domestic sales and the investors. But now, we are on par with Indian investors.

Second, there has been a tripartite agreement between Nepal, India and Bangladesh to sell electricity from Nepal to Bangladesh via India. Though the spare transmission capacity between Bangladesh and India is very little, about 60 or 40 megawatt, we have been continuously exporting to Bangladesh without any interruptions from India. Then there are the petroleum products. There has been one cross-border pipeline but that was inaugurated before 2022. Two more pipelines are being built in Nepal with the support of India. There has been continuity in supply, except that the prices have gone up. There has been some shortage in LPG but that is happening even in India.

Then there is this integrated check post, three were completed recently — Birganj/Raxaul, Nepalgunj/Rupaidiha, and Biratnagar/Jogbari — and are in operation. Two more are being built. We have also started UPI which benefited many Indian traders and tourists going to Nepal. There are so many other connectivity projects. Even if we look at the number of bilateral meetings that had happened in 2025, it's more than 12 in one year. I think there has been continuity in all these areas despite the political ups and downs in Nepal. But there are also issues and challenges.

Rakesh Sinha: My question is about the Lipulekh Pass boundary issue, which peaked during the rule of the Oli government. Will it test Prime Minister Shah as he resets ties with India? Secondly, India and China are set to resume trade via Lipulekh Pass next month and the Mansarovar pilgrims will also be using that pass, what are your comments?

Firstly, once an issue like the boundary is included in the constitution, nobody can

take it out so easily, regardless of the government. During the first meeting when I arrived in 2022, there was a high-level discussion about this. It was agreed that the existing bilateral mechanism would start a dialogue. That is the best way, through dialogue and diplomacy. Regarding trade between India and China, the Nepal government has already protested, stating we must be involved. There should be negotiations as that is our land and it should be addressed trilaterally.

Divya A: In the last two years, there have been cartographic disputes, be it about currency notes or the airlines. How is that affecting dialogue?

Regarding the airlines, that was total negligence. These days, one can Google and find many things, and nobody cared; we suspected that was what happened and it was immediately corrected. Regarding the currency note, we already had the map on the current note but now we have a new map following the new constitution. It was a substitution of the map, according to officials,

it will not impact the relationship between the two countries, but sometimes the media hypes these things, causing concern.

Shubhajt Roy: Following up on the new map, it was passed by parliament under Prime Minister Oli and it has taken a political messaging that underlines Nepal's territorial integrity. However, from the Indian perspective, it challenges India's territorial integrity and sovereignty. How did you address this issue in bilateral conversations with Indian officials?

This was already raised at the Prime Minister level. Nepal's Prime Minister raised this issue with the Prime Minister of India in 2022. The embassy and I facilitate instructions from our headquarters because the matter has already reached the highest levels. In any bilateral relationship, if there are certain unpleasant things happening, we should move on, which is what we are trying to do and address challenges diplomatically.

ON MAINTAINING TIES WITH INDIA

Nepal is a developing country with a difficult terrain, so we need a lot of money for infrastructure. The focus of this new government is on governance, IT, service delivery. We need support from all the countries



Amitabh Sinha: Many Nepalese youth are moving to the Middle East for work. Can you give us a sense of the numbers and how it compares to those coming to India for work?

More than four million people work outside Nepal, excluding India. Previously, job opportunities were mainly in India, then in the second phase, it moved to the Middle East and Malaysia. Now, there are long lines in Nepal, for police reports, to go to Spain, Portugal, Croatia, Romania and Japan. In Japan, the largest diaspora of workers is from Nepal. In Australia, there are more than 200,000; you might meet a Nepali person every day on the metro or in a taxi. This demographic change has become an opportunity for some. Some European companies specifically prefer Nepali workers. In Japan, too. While this is not a permanent solution — we need to create jobs domestically — it provides an opportunity for the country to diversify our economy because our foreign exchange can now cover 21 months of imports in today's standards. We have a trade deficit with India and pay in dollars but the economy should eventually move toward more domestic production and development.

Nikhil Ghanekar: How does Nepal want to approach the issue with regards to the Kosi river?

When we talk about any water project, it becomes political in Nepal. We talk about Pancheshwar (project), this was signed so long ago, we still have not resolved it. About Koshi and Gandak, Nepali people would like to reflect on the history of the earlier agreement between Nepal and India. Although the water is flowing, we are losing time, we are losing money. We should have some good negotiation.

People are saying that now things have changed. The Nepalese, too, have become capable, they can also hire experts and India has also learned many things. If they have made mistakes in the past, they don't want to repeat it. Now is probably a good time to

have negotiations on some of these issues.

Flora Swain: With the new Balen Shah government, how do you see the foreign policy evolving, especially with respect to India?

Nepal is a developing country with a growth rate between four to five percent. It has difficult terrain, so we need a lot of money for infrastructure and economic development, and because the focus of this new government is on governance, IT, service delivery, we need support from all the countries. Having said that, we have almost every sector of Nepal linked with Indian activities. So, if India is growing at a rate of seven-eight per cent, we could also grow parallelly. It may not happen similarly with other countries. But Nepal would like to balance its foreign policy relationship because we need all our friends.

Monojit Majumdar: Why exactly has the democratic experiment been so fragile in Nepal? What are the fundamental reasons for instability?

First of all, the constitution itself. When we included the proportional system of representation in the parliament, 60-40, that created this uncertainty and a coalition government all the time. Although, many are now saying that it is not true because the RSP got almost two-third. The second issue is that our governance has been quite weak. That's the reason why the service delivery part has been affected adversely.

The third part is, we also definitely need to have a higher growth rate. The dilemma in Nepal is that the poverty reduction is substantial, but there is no substantial economic growth.

The manufacturing sector which can create jobs has not become that feasible in Nepal. It has declined from 10 per cent in early 2000 to now 5 per cent plus. When India opened up, when India becomes competitive, when Chinese goods are so cheap, then it's extremely difficult for Nepal to develop manufacturing. There is an open border between India and Nepal, so whatever you do, there will be smuggling. These are some of the reasons that had repercussions on the economy of Nepal. So Nepal needs to seriously work towards structural transformation of the economy.

Shubhajt Roy: There have been these concerns in Delhi on China's increasing footprint in Nepal, especially when Prime Minister Oli was there. How do you assuage these concerns?

There are probably two types of concerns. One is Chinese activities which can directly affect India, short term or even medium term. That is reasonable. But if we look at it statistically, China's presence in Nepal is not so strong. Our export to India is 80 per cent but to China is only one per cent. Imports from India is 61 per cent, China is 18 per cent. China is competitive globally, so Chinese goods are everywhere.

I went to the last investment summit in Kathmandu, there were two speakers, one from India and another from China. Both were saying that we are the largest investor in Nepal, but China was saying in terms of commitment, India was saying in terms of stock of investment. Both were right but if we see the real investment in Nepal, it's 35 per cent from India and only 12 per cent from China. Then if we see the number of people working or staying officially in Nepal, there are 7,000 Chinese and 700,000 Indians. And you don't know how many have not registered in the Indian embassy because of the open border. Every plumber, electrician, and house worker in Kathmandu, they come from India. They are cheaper and they work hard, just like what Nepalese do here.

Neerja Chowdhury: In recent years, uncertainties have crept into Indo-Nepal ties. Where do you think the turning point actually came?

Economic and development partnership between the two countries have enhanced. Once in a while, political issues erupt.

But what I feel is that given the people-to-people relation, open borders between the two countries, it is not just the integration of markets and development partnership, the existing social integration, cultural and spiritual integration between the two countries will always cement our ties. That's the foundation and that will always strengthen the relationship between the two countries, whatever happens in the government.

Shubhajt Roy: There has been a focus on religious tourism between India and Nepal. Do you think that has moved forward?

There has been some improvement but it all depends on infrastructure development also. There is a proposal that we should build Raxaul-Kathmandu railway with the support of the Indian government. There is also an expressway from the southern part of Nepal, Nijgadh to Kathmandu, which will be completed soon. We are talking officially about the Buddhist and the Ramayana circuit and twin city concepts, on ayurveda and the Janakpur railway but the progress has been slow probably because of the instability of the government. Hopefully now it will speed up. They are important.

CROSSWORD

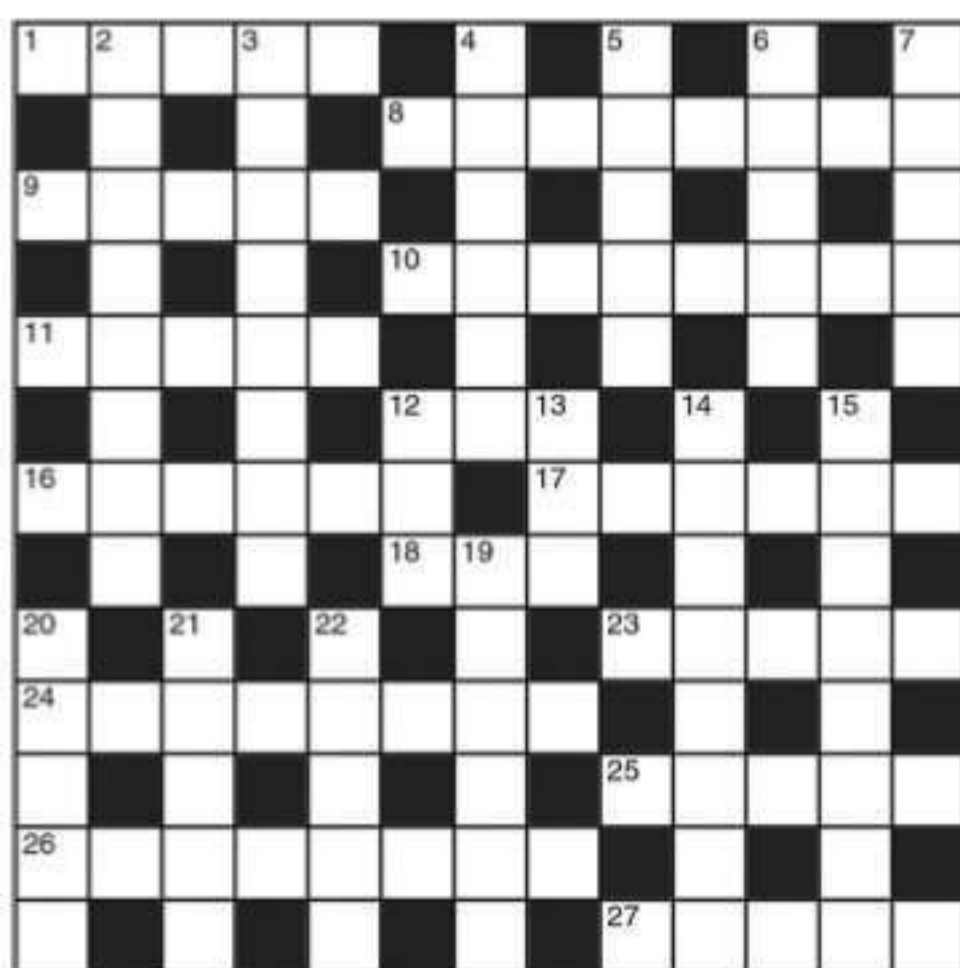
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OVER THE HEDGE

BY MICHAEL FRY & T LEWIS

ROYAL STARS

BY GEORGIA NICOLS



ACROSS: 1 Fall out of love and languish (5) 8 Dreadfully poor rate for machinist (8) 9 New star around the East grows radiantly (5) 10 Sue acted badly but improves (8) 11 School procession (5) 12 The age in which Chaucer achieved fame (3) 16 Animal that can't fly with odd one that can (6) 17 Cease to be a consumer (6) 18 An inclination to be a pickpocket (3) 23 Love to have a party again (5) 24 Engaging suggestion? (8) 25 Approach a junction — there's a long tailback (5) 26 They may be said to be highly complimentary (8) 27 African animal that goes round in bands (5) DOWN: 2 Check the breakwater (8) 3 Prejudiced? Oddly, indeed so (3-5) 4 It makes a fine trap (6) 5 Standing order from Crete (5) 6 A test devised for the government (5) 7 Fresh scrip issue (5) 12 Stop a goal (3) 13 As quiet as a glider (3) 14 Generous applause goes to a few (8) 15 Accidentally catch something perhaps (8) 19 Spoil the games figuratively speaking (6) 20 Some people investigating enemy secrets initially (5) 21 Desserts for kids (5) 22 Tail to disappear out of sight (5)

SOLUTIONS CROSSWORD 5978 ACROSS: 1 Silhouette, 10 Cacti, 11 Haphazard, 12 Parlance, 13 Ditty, 15 Reissue, 17 Shouted, 19 Speed up, 21 Chemist, 22 Power, 24 Eligible, 27 Animation, 28 Llama, 29 Echo, 30 Grenadiers. DOWN: 1 Sack, 2 Lucrative, 3 Oriol, 4 Enhance, 5 Topless, 7 Exact, 8 Today's date, 9 Hard core, 14 Brass plate, 16 Sidereal, 18 Trial game, 20 Premier, 21 Chignon, 23 Weigh, 25 Idled, 26 Caps

JUMBLED WORDS

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

A good marriage is one which allows for ___ and ___ in the individuals and in the way they express their love. — Pearl S. Buck (6,6)

CAGER CRUCHH THORN EILGGW

SOLUTIONS: CAGER: Grace, North, Church, Wrigley THORN: Individuals and in the way they express their love. — Pearl S. Buck

CALVIN & HOBBS

BY BILL WATTERSON



MARVIN

BY TOM ARMSTRONG



DIFFICULTY LEVEL 5s INSTRUCTIONS

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

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

SUDOKU 6308 and SOLUTION SUDOKU 6307 grids with numbers.



CONVOCATION Swami Vivekanand Subharti University held its 11th Convocation Ceremony at the Maangalya Auditorium, where over 2,500 degrees were awarded to students. Acharya Devrat attended as Chief Guest...



DFCCIL Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India Limited carried out a detailed inspection of the Western Dedicated Freight Corridor section from New Dadr to New Sri Madhopur on April 24, 2026...



DAV Sarla Chopra DAV School organised a counselling session on "Making Friends and Building Relationships" for students. The session was conducted by Swati Jain under the guidance of Principal Upasana Sharma...



HURL Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Limited launched Project "SAKSHAM" in Gorakhpur to empower youth through skill development. Siba Prasad Mohanty inaugurated the initiative in the presence of the Vice Chancellor of Deen Dayal Upadhyay University...



IOCL Indian Oil Corporation Limited Refineries Headquarters hosted a special session in New Delhi during Public Sector Month celebrations. The programme was led by Arvind Kumar and featured former Ambassador Deepak Vohra...



EYE CAMP Sight Savers India and Dr. Ramalinga Reddy Maxivision Super Speciality Eye Hospitals have strengthened access to eye care in Hyderabad through the Urban Eye Health Programme during April 2025 to March 2026...



IIT Jodhpur Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur scientists have developed smart theranostic platforms that combine diagnosis and treatment for next-generation precision healthcare. Led by Raviraj Vankayala, researchers are using advanced nanomaterials such as MXenes, MOFs, Black Phosphorus...

REC Limited has reported its highest-ever annual net profit of Rs. 16,282 crore for FY 2025-26, reflecting strong operational performance, improved asset quality and robust demand in the power sector. The company's total loan book rose to an all-time high of Rs. 5.84 lakh crore as on March 31, 2026...

BHEL Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited has reported a provisional turnover of around Rs 32,350 crore for FY 2025-26, registering 18 per cent growth over the previous year. The company also secured total order inflows worth Rs 75,000 crore during the year...

CORPORATE BRIEFS

INDIAN COAST GUARD Paramesh Sivamani inaugurated the new OTM Administrative Complex of Indian Coast Guard District Headquarters No. 13 on April 25, 2026, marking a major boost to India's maritime security infrastructure.

LECTURE Lal Bahadur Shastri National Memorial Trust, in collaboration with National Museum, organised the 32nd Lal Bahadur Shastri Memorial Lecture, delivered by Dhananjaya Y. Chandrachud on "Ethics of Public Life in an Age of Technology."

EXHIBITION exhibition Neelam Shami Rao inaugurated the first edition of Heritage Designer Collection "Soul Threads by Cottage" on April 24, 2026 at Jawahar Vyapar Bhawan.

SAIL Dilip Kumar has assumed charge as Chief Vigilance Officer of Steel Authority of India Limited on April 27, 2026. A senior officer of the Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers, he brings more than two decades of experience in train operations, rolling stock maintenance and human resource management.

GMC Ghaziabad Municipal Corporation has started installing green shade nets at major traffic signals to provide relief to commuters amid rising temperatures. Following directions of Vikramaditya Singh Malik, the Construction Department set up permanent green nets at Hapur Chungi red light...

GDA Ghaziabad Development Authority's One-Time Settlement (OTS) scheme is receiving an encouraging public response, with nearly 300 allottees applying so far to clear their pending dues. Introduced in line with the Government of Uttar Pradesh vision, the scheme enables allottees to settle outstanding land and housing installments...

IRCTC Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has launched the "Bharat-Bhutan Mystic Mountain Tour" aboard the Bharat Gaurav Deluxe AC Tourist Train, offering a premium 13 nights and 14 days rail-cum-road journey through India and Bhutan.

SCOPE Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE) and International Coaching Federation have launched a first-of-its-kind comprehensive study titled "State of Coaching in Indian PSEs" to assess the current coaching landscape and organisational culture in Indian public sector enterprises.

Department of Fertilizers has stated that India's fertilizer security remains strong, stable and efficiently managed, with availability consistently higher than requirement across all major fertilisers. During the recently concluded Rabi 2025-26 season, urea availability stood at 257.59 LMT against a requirement of 196.06 LMT...



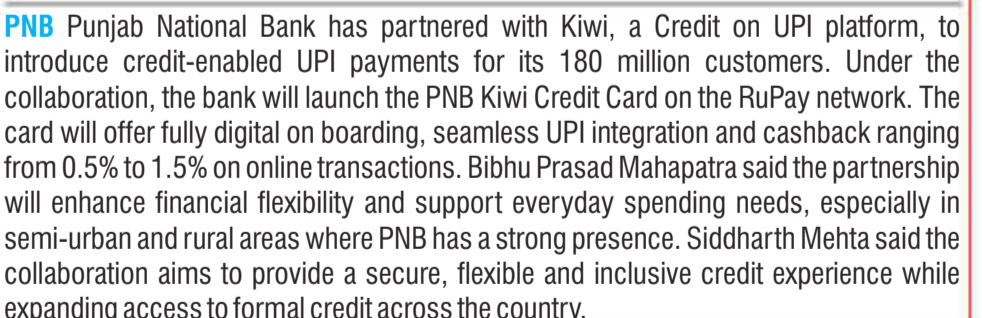
Kartavya. The event was inaugurated by A. S. Kiran Kumar in the presence of institute leaders. The mural portrays Krishna and Arjuna, symbolizing duty, wisdom, and ethical leadership...



INauguration Maulana Azad Institute of Dental Sciences has inaugurated an Advanced Cone Beam Computed Tomography (CBCT) Imaging Facility, becoming the first such unit in the Delhi Government healthcare sector.



PNB Punjab National Bank has added 12 Tata Nexon EV vehicles to its official fleet to promote sustainability and reduce carbon emissions. The EV fleet was flagged off by Ashok Chandra along with senior executives.



Amity International School, Pusthp Vihar, Delhi Team Infinity Speeders from Amity International School had the privilege of meeting Shreyansh Jain, Director of Sperry Group. The team shared insights on the STEM F1 in Schools project and explored innovative ways to effectively use recycled materials.

PNB Punjab National Bank has partnered with Kiwi, a Credit on UPI platform, to introduce credit-enabled UPI payments for its 180 million customers. Under the collaboration, the bank will launch the PNB Kiwi Credit Card on the RuPay network.

IRICO The Rajasthan Government has introduced the Rajasthan Industrial Park Promotion Policy-2026 to accelerate industrial growth, strengthen infrastructure, and create a favorable environment for investors. The policy aims to establish modern industrial parks across the state through the participation of private developers...

Billionaires Mittal, Poonawala buy stake in RR in Rs 15,660 Cr deal

Venkata Krishna B
Chennai, May 3

UK-BASED Indian billionaire Lakshmi Mittal, along with Adar Poonawala of the Serum Institute of India, has acquired a stake in the IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals in a deal worth \$1.65 billion, approximately Rs 15,660 crore. The Mittal family, Poonawala and Manoj Badale, the current principal owner of RR, have formed a new consortium that will own Paarl Royals and Barbados Royals, two other franchises that are part of the SA20 and the Caribbean Premier League respectively.

RR, one of the eight franchises that has been part of the IPL since 2008, was bought by Badale for \$67 million. The Mittals have presence in other sporting ventures like the NBA's Boston Celtics as well as English football club Queens

Park Rangers.

The deal, announced on Sunday, comes after months of uncertainty over RR's ownership. In March, reports suggested that the franchise had a new owner - a consortium led by Arizona-based tech entrepreneur Kal Somani. But that was not to be, and now the new Mittal-Poonawala deal awaits the approval of the BCCI and the Competition Commission of India.

The statement released by the three parties gave the specifics about RR's new ownership. "Following completion, the Mittal Family will own approximately 75% of Rajasthan Royals, with Adar Poonawala holding approximately 18%. The remaining approximately 7% will be held by approved existing investors, including Manoj Badale. Mr Badale will continue to support Rajasthan



Rajasthan Royals, one of the eight teams that have been in the IPL since its inception, were sold for \$6 million in 2008. ANI

Royals, acting as a bridge between the past and the present, and bringing his deep knowledge and experience of cricket to the franchise," the press re-

lease said. It is understood that Lakshmi Mittal's son Aditya is likely to be the new face of the franchise. The 50-year-old,

who is the CEO of Arcelor Mittal, made his entry into the NBA in 2025 by investing \$1 billion into the Bolton Celtics. Mittal Sr, in 2007, had bought a 33 per cent stake in Queens Park Rangers, a London-based club that has been a part of the English Premier League.

"I love cricket and my family is from Rajasthan, so there is no IPL team that I would rather be part of than the Rajasthan Royals," Lakshmi Mittal said. "I first played cricket as a schoolboy, and since then I have been an avid fan of the sport. Many great players have worn the Rajasthan Royals shirts, including Indian icons of the sport who have been an inspiration for the younger talent. I look forward to being part of this great team, and cannot wait to join all the fans on the pitch-side to cheer on our future success."

According to the statement, Badale would continue to be part of RR, acting as a bridge between the past and the present. "It has been the privilege of a lifetime to be involved with the Rajasthan Royals from inception, and to have played a small part in building what has become the world's most exciting and successful cricket league. We are delighted to welcome the Mittal Family and Adar Poonawala as the new owners of the Rajasthan Royals. Their passion for cricket, their connection to Rajasthan and India, and their long-term ambition for the franchise make them ideal custodians of the next chapter. I very much look forward to working alongside them, and to supporting our extraordinary team and its loyal fans as the Royals continue to grow," Badale said.

Varun get revenge as KKR breeze past SRH



Varun Chakaravarty reacts after taking the crucial wicket of Travis Head on Sunday. CREIMAS FOR BCCI

SYNOPSIS: After a slow start to the tournament, KKR win third consecutive game, injecting momentum into their campaign with their spinners coming into rhythm.

room. Though the Aussie picked up the length, he was surprised by the pace, and the catch was taken at square-leg.

Then Smaran Ravichandran got an orthodox Chakaravarty delivery on the stumps. The Karnataka batter on his debut premeditated the next ball and charged down the track, showing his cards early. Chakaravarty pulled his length back, moved away from the stumps, and threw it outside off-stump. The southpaw did not adjust and misused the shot.

For Aniket Verma's wicket, Rahane deployed a slip, and Chakaravarty tossed up deliveries trying to flight the ball in the 14th over. One came in, one went away. Aniket did not know what to expect from the third ball he bowled: a wild slog that ran for a boundary after taking the edge. Aniket tried the same again on the following delivery, but it failed this time because Chakaravarty further slowed down his pace. Aniket could only hit the ball as far as a fielder within the 30-yard circle.

Suitable template

Chasing 166 runs, Kolkata knew exactly the template. When the ball comes nicely onto the bat in the powerplay, make the most of it, and after that, play some sensible cricket to get over the line. That is exactly what the visitors did. Finn Allen made his comeback into the side and slapped 29 runs from just 13 deliveries. He delivered the killer blow by attacking SRH's bowling leader, Cummins, for 27 runs in the fourth over. Although Cummins had redemption by picking Allen, the tone was set for the rest of the essay. Knight Riders got 71 from the power play.

Rahane partnered with Angkrish Raghuvanshi and sensibly scored 84 runs off 66 balls. This duo has been questioned this tournament regarding their tempo, but on Sunday, there were no such worries. All they had to do was stick to their styles and wait for the errors made by SRH bowlers trying too hard to push for a wicket. The way Allen attacked strike bowler Cummins, Raghuvanshi took a liking to Eshan Malunga.

Rahane at the other end played his part by chipping in with a 36-ball 43, supporting Raghuvanshi.

BRIEF SCORES: Sunrisers Hyderabad 165 all out in 19 overs (Head 61, Kishan 42; Varun 3/36) lost to Kolkata Knight Riders 169/3 in 18.2 overs (Raghuvanshi 59, Rahane 43) by seven wickets.

Tanishq Vaddi
Hyderabad, May 3

KOLKATA KNIGHT Riders' spin attack choked the powerful Sunrisers Hyderabad, ending their five-match winning streak with a seven-wicket victory on Sunday. The Kolkata spinners Varun Chakaravarty, Sunil Narine and Anukul Roy applied the squeeze in the middle overs, picking up 6/75 from nine overs as Travis Head played a lone hand for the hosts, blitzing a 28-ball 61-run innings.

Architect demolishes

It was during the T20 World Cup game against South Africa in Ahmedabad when David Miller and Dewald Brevis cracked Chakaravarty's code. The mystery spinner's primary weapon was to stay stump-to-stump and vary his pace by bowling at a good length. Miller and Brevis stayed on the back foot and started pulling everything through square boundaries on either side, and Chakaravarty did not have many answers then. This started a string of poor games for Chakaravarty in the World Cup, which carried into the IPL, with batters setting up for his quicker deliveries and waiting to pull. When these two sides met earlier this season, SRH batters employed a similar plan to counter Chakaravarty, who looked a shadow of himself, finishing with figures of 0/31 from 2 overs.

However, the tables turned on Sunday. Chakaravarty has shown that he has learned his lessons, demonstrating greater diversity in line and length. Chakaravarty's first scalp in the afternoon was Travis Head. The Aussie turns into a raging bull when given room outside the off-stump, letting Head free his hands. A dot followed a six now that the trap was set, as Head was comfortable. On the final delivery, Chakaravarty bowled flatter and quicker on the leg-stump, cramping Head for

Very difficult to replace Amanjot, says India coach Muzumdar

Press Trust of India
Mumbai, May 3

INDIA WOMEN'S head coach Amol Muzumdar on Sunday said it will be difficult for his side to replace all-rounder Amanjot Kaur but added the team is on the right track for next month's T20 World Cup in England with a preparatory camp in Bengaluru.

The Indian team is scheduled to prepare at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru from May 10-16 before flying out to England for a long haul, which includes three T20s against the hosts before the T20 World Cup.

India will also play a one-off Test against England after the mega event. "She is injured and it is very difficult to replace somebody like Amanjot. She has been doing consistently well for India," Muzumdar told reporters here on the sidelines of the IISM Degree Distribution Ceremony 2026.

"We will miss her for sure, but injuries are part of the game and she has had a bad one and she will be out of cricket for at least 4-5 months. I hope she recovers well and comes back stronger. She is difficult to replace but that is the way it goes," he added.

Muzumdar said the team is on the right track as far as preparations are concerned.

"It (having a camp) has always been an integral part of this team. We believe in preparing well for every challenge that is in front of us. I believe this team is on the right track and we would be hoping to have a very good camp before we set off for the World Cup," he said.

"Travelling to England is always a challenge but this set of players is ready for it." "We had a very good series last year, we went on to win against England and that was the first time in history we had beaten England in England in a T20 series. The experience and confidence is there, all we need to do is travel well and do well there," the head coach added.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Classical pacers and composed Washington see GT over the line

Siraj, Rabada, Holder put together glorious spell of Test quality; Punjab fought back but Sundar kept his cool

SYNOPSIS: GT's three horsemen of apocalypse set up a victorious cat and mouse chase over table-toppers PBKS.

Sandip G
New Delhi, May 3

A CHASE of slow-burning thrills and twists met its befitting end when Washington Sundar swirled Marcus Stoinis's penultimate ball of the final over on one knee over fine leg. The pursuit of 163 wasn't to be this suspenseful, but for Punjab Kings' persistence and panic setting into the Gujarat Titans' middle-order.

Cat and mouse chase

It was perhaps the most important stroke of Washington's start-stop T20 career, a stroke he might look back on and say it saved his shortest-format career. The shot and the knock (40 off 23 not out) had redemptive powers. Almost everyone, including himself, seemed to be confused about his role. He has offered clarity. He could be a middle-order finisher with icy veins and calm manners to guide a tricky chase. Maybe not for wild-goose chases, but ones that require hearts that don't flutter in crisis. For, whenever Gujarat Titans seemed to tighten their grip over the contest, Punjab would strike. After Shubman Gill's exit for 16, Sai Sudharsan and Jos Buttler, with a 51-run stand, allayed Titans' fears of a power-play wobble. But Buttler's exit, with the total score on 69, triggered panic. Nishant Sindhu flayed the nerves of a debutant and eked out only

15 runs off 11 balls. But Sudharsan offered peace and calm. Post timeout, with the requirement shooting to an uncomfortable 61 off 42 balls, Sudharsan slashed the equation by pummelling Yuzvendra Chahal for a couple of fours. Sundar's lofted-driven four of Vijayakumar Vyshak reduced the gap further, but in tune with the cat-and-mouse nature of the chase, Vyshak ejected Sudharsan with a shortish ball, exposing his locked shoulders that hinder the uncluttered flow of the bat.

A four-run over from Xavier Bartlett put the match on a knife-edge, only for Washington to reclaim Titans' supremacy with back-to-back fours off Marco Jansen. But Punjab kept fighting back. Jansen's short-ball removed Rahul Tewatia, the Impact Sub. Suddenly, the match was on an even keel, with 17 wanted from 12 balls. But Punjab's best bowlers had exhausted their quota. Jason Holder and Washington knew this, and without fuss gathered five runs off the first four balls. Then ambition seized Holder, he aimed Arshdeep Singh over mid-wicket, but mistimed the shot to Cooper Connolly. But Washington kept more twists away.

Triumvirate

The skid and swerve of Mohammed Siraj; the pace and spunk of Kagiso Rabada; the bounce and late deviations of Jason Holder—Gujarat Titans have torn the staple blueprints of franchises and have rattled batsmen through the orthodox paths of unleashing classical Test bowlers and their frightening red-ball lengths.

All they need is a smidgeon



Washington Sundar got Gujarat Titans over the line in a nervy last-over finish on Sunday. CREIMAS FOR BCCI

IPL table

Teams	M	W	L	PTS
PBKS	9	6	2	13
RCB	9	6	3	12
SRH	9	6	3	12
RR	10	6	4	12
GT	10	6	4	12
CSK	9	4	5	8
DC	9	4	5	8
KKR	8	2	5	5
MI	9	2	7	4
LSG	8	2	6	4

M: MATCH; W: WIN; L: LOSS; PTS: POINTS.

of assistance from the surface. The Motera surface usually conspires seam movement with the new ball. Siraj obliged gleefully. But before his fuller length made batsmen flail this way and that, he deceived Priyansh Arya with a clever deployment of the hard-length ball. He hustled him into a top-edged pull that evaded the rushing Buttler, but the next ball, on a similar length, pitched wider and had him flaying. An ounce of movement

away from his and the left-hander feebly slices the ball to the lunging hands of Nishant Sindhu at backward point.

His next ball was designed in fast bowling heaven. The good-length ball to the left-handed Cooper Connolly seemed to slant away, before it came back a wee bit to kiss the inside edge of his bat. He had both Shreyas Iyer and Prabhsimran Singh stab unconconvincingly outside the off-stump, but they survived his seam onslaught. Not for too long, though.

The swing from the surface seemed to wane. Shreyas and Prabhsimran crunched themselves to four-splashed stars. But with the second ball of the last powerplay over, Rabada stung with his heavy ball. The hard-length ball crashed into Prabhsimran's bat, which was halfway through a cover drive. But the ball trembled off the splice to the cover fielder. The speed gun read 152 kph. A similar heat-seeker nailed Suryansh Shedge, the top scorer with a punchy 57. Shedge, fresh from plundering 26 runs from a Manav Suthar over, tried to

glide his short ball through third man, but for the extra bounce to defeat his purpose and edge to the keeper.

Punjab had Shedge, Marcus Stoinis and their 73-run stand for a rearguard. They united when they were quivering at 47 for 5 after Holder had removed Nehal Wadhra and figurehead Iyer. The latter chopped on, a typical Holder dismissal. Batsmen often gauge the bounce from an almost seven-feet-high release. But they discount his subtle, late seam movement. The ball came in a tad, making it too close for Iyer to run it down the third man. He undid Wadhra with a late away-nibbler.

The triumvirate made for a glorious sight, each different from the other, each with common as well as unique traits. Good things, they say, don't often come in three. But for the Titans, it does.

BRIEF SCORES: Punjab Kings 163/9 in 20 overs (Shedge 57, Stoinis 40; Holder 4/24) lost to Gujarat Titans 167/6 in 19.5 overs (Sudharsan 57, Washington 40 not out; Arshdeep 2/24) by four wickets.

Surya will find rhythm soon: Jayawardene

Express News Service
Chennai, May 3

DURING MUMBAI Indians' eight-wicket thrashing at the hands of the Chennai Super Kings on Saturday, Suryakumar Yadav showed familiar issues. As he picked Dewad Brevi at 12 off 12 deliveries off Ramakrishna Ghosh, it was the seventh instance of him falling to pacers this IPL season. While there hasn't been a particular trend in terms of his struggles during this lean patch which has carried on from India colours, his repeated dismissals to pacers - one of his strongest suits - has thrown open a question whether opposition have found a way to expose his weakness.

But Mumbai Indians head coach Mahela Jayawadene has refused to get into it, and rather believed only a few scores away from finding the rhythm again. "Not really, I think if he gets a

few scores together, I think he'll find that rhythm, he batted really well today for that period, really took on the bowlers in that phase," Jayawardene said.

In a season where Suryakumar has struggled for tempo in his knocks, on Saturday his arrival provided Mumbai Indians a much-needed momentum in the middle-overs. His three boundaries and the lone six he hit, showed signs of discovering his old-self, but against the run of play, went for another expansive shot that found Brevi.

"I think another couple of overs he could have been off for a really good score, I think sometimes when things are not going your way, it doesn't fall in place, I think it was a pretty good shot going straight to the fielder. It's one of those things, I played enough cricket to understand that... So I think that's how we need to look at it," the former Sri Lanka captain said.

BATTLE OF LAGGARDS

Contest between LSG's pace power and MI's fading galacticos

Shankar Narayan
Mumbai, May 3

LUCKNOW SUPER Giants (LSG) may be at the bottom of the IPL 2026 points table with only two wins in eight matches, but amid the defeats, one bright spot has been their pace attack, comprising Prince Yadav, Mohsin Khan and Mohammed Shami.

LSG's batting has not clicked in a tournament where teams have scored quickly, and big totals have become common. Captain Rishabh Pant has made 189 runs in eight innings at a strike rate of 126.84, while Mitchell Marsh leads the side with 212 runs, and Aiden Markram has 193. No batter has taken charge consistently, which has often left the bowlers with too much to do.

Their quick bowlers, though, have kept them in the fight. Prince has emerged as one of the breakout uncapped seamers of the season. The 24-year-old has taken 13 wickets in eight matches at an average of 18.61,

with an economy rate of 8.06. In an IPL where run-rates have climbed sharply, those are elite returns for a young seamer still establishing himself. He has offered LSG hard lengths, composure under pressure and a willingness to attack the stumps. More than that, Prince has shown courage in pressure moments, bowling yorkers and trusting his strengths.

Mohsin Khan has been even better in fewer matches. In four games, the left-arm quick has taken nine wickets at an average of 11.33 and an economy of 6.37, including a best of 5/23 against KKR, where, taking the new ball, he ripped the heart out of the opposition, reducing them to 31/4.

He has given LSG something different with his left-arm angle, bounce and skid, and has looked like a genuine wicket-taking option whenever used. His ability to break partnerships has given LSG a route back into games that seemed to be slipping away.

Then there is Shami, whose



Struggling Suryakumar Yadav (L) and his teammates face a resurgent Mohammed Shami in Monday's encounter. CREIMAS FOR BCCI



numbers are more modest but whose value goes beyond statistics. The experienced pacer has taken seven wickets in eight matches at an economy of 8.06. He may not have dominated like in past seasons, but he has brought calmness, control and know-how. For younger bowlers like Prince, that experience can be just as important. In a strug-

gling campaign, having a senior bowler who can steady things matters.

Together, the trio have taken 29 wickets. For a team that has struggled for batting consistency, that return has been crucial. It has kept games alive and ensured defeats have rarely become complete collapses.

Their impact has come

across different stages of the innings. Prince has found wickets early and through the middle overs. Mohsin has broken partnerships and troubled set batters. Shami has provided discipline at the start and helped guide the attack through difficult periods. That variety has helped LSG compete even when totals have looked below par, as was the case against the Delhi Capitals, where they reduced the visitors to 26/4 in their 141-run defence.

That has mattered because LSG's batting has often given the bowlers little margin for error. When totals are below par or starts are slow, bowling attacks can quickly come under pressure. Instead, LSG's pacers have repeatedly dragged the side back into contests. Despite sitting at the bottom of the table, their pace attack has given them reason to believe that they can put together a string of victories, if the batting complements them more often.

What has also helped the pace trio is working with former India bowling coach Bharat Arun, who said that his role was to empower the bowlers and keep challenging them to focus on their execution during the match.

"Shami is very well experienced, and also it is about the bowlers understanding their strengths, and where my role comes in is to keep reminding them about their strengths, the feedback, and constantly challenging them to execute what they are supposed to do again," Arun said in the pre-match press conference on Sunday.

With Mumbai Indians (MI) next, LSG will once again look towards their seamers for early momentum. MI's batting has enough power to punish loose spells, which means Prince, Mohsin and Shami will again carry a major responsibility. But if they can strike early and keep the scoring in check, LSG will believe they can stay in the contest.

Sinner thrashes Zverev in Madrid to claim record 5th consecutive title



Jannik Sinner defeated Alexander Zverev. REUTERS

Reuters
Madrid, May 3

WORLD NUMBER one Jannik Sinner became the first man to win five successive Masters 1000 titles after he produced a breathtaking display to crush Alexander Zverev 6-16-2 in just 57 minutes in the Madrid Open final on Sunday.

The 24-year-old Italian underlined his authority on the men's tour by becoming the first man to claim the season's opening four Masters events, extending a run that has spanned hardcourts and clay.

Unbeatable force

Following his Paris triumph late last season, Sinner has proved to be an unbeatable force at Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo and now Madrid.

It was Sinner's 10th win in 14 meetings with Zverev and his ninth in a row since the German last beat him at the 2023 U.S. Open. Across that nine-match sequence, Zverev has managed only two sets.

Sinner raced through the Madrid final, turning a marquee contest into a one-sided affair and leaving little doubt about the current balance of power at the top of the sport. "Please consider taking a break so you can leave something for us mortals," Zverev said during the trophy ceremony.

"Playing against Sinner right now is just so hard. He leaves us no chance."

Sinner set the tone immediately, opening the match with an ace and two unreturnable serves. He broke Zverev in the second game and surged to a 3-0 lead, striking the ball cleanly off the clay as the German struggled to find his rhythm.

After breaking serve again to lead 4-0, Sinner had conceded just five points through the opening five games. Zverev briefly held to make it 5-1, but Sinner closed out the set with an ace after 25 minutes.

The second set offered only fleeting resistance. After both players held serve early on, Sinner broke in the third game following another Zverev unforced error and never looked back.

He moved comfortably to 4-2 before breaking again and then served out the match without difficulty to complete the rout.

CHESS PRODIGY

Dying laptop, flickering candle: 8-year-old upsets World No 7

Playing with 48% battery on his laptop, Tamizh Amudhan took down Vincent Keymer in a blitz game

Amit Kamath
Mumbai, May 3

SIVAKASI, THE city known for being the firecracker capital of India, jolted the chess world with an almighty bang on Friday night. Tamizh Amudhan, an eight-year-old boy from the Tamil Nadu city, took down Vincent Keymer, the 21-year-old German grandmaster currently ranked seventh in the world, in an online blitz game in the Freestyle Friday tournament.

What was even more remarkable was a photo of Tamizh at the event: the boy can be seen sitting on the floor of his Thiruthangal house (a suburb of Sivakasi), legs outstretched, laptop propped on a pillow, and the room lit only by the feeble flicker of a candle. Due to thunderstorms in the city, power in the area went out. So Tamizh played on a laptop with around 48 per cent battery powered by his mother's cell phone's one-GB-per-day data pack being expended via hotspot to propel the little one's internet exploits. The laptop's battery eventually gave way an hour into the tournament, which means Tamizh could play just four games.

Sathish Arumugam, Tamizh's father, tried to initially convince his son that he should skip the event altogether since the laptop battery wouldn't hold, and there was no guarantee when the power would return. But the eight-year-old was in no mood to relent.

Before the start of the tournament, Sathish clicked a photo of his son sitting on the floor, facing a laptop with the

candle in a corner. Then, he tucked away his phone, hoping to conserve battery and data so that it could take the place of his wife's phone if it gave way. Sathish thought it would be a good photo for the future when Tamizh does something big. Little did he know that his son was in the mood to blitz his way through long-term goals.

"When I took that photo, I thought it would be useful in a few years," Sathish tells *The Indian Express*. "I was sure he would achieve something big in the future, and then I would use this photo to motivate others by showing how, once upon a time, he played even on a dark night. I didn't think it would be useful in a few minutes."

When he talks about his son's exploits, Sathish cannot help but think back to his father, who, about three decades ago, went to Saudi Arabia to work as a labourer in the desert so that his sons could make something of themselves. Back in the day, with the family having no phone, the father would relay messages of his well-being from a country thousands of kilometres away using audio-recorded cassettes. These cassettes would be sent back home through anyone who was travelling to a neighbouring village, a process that could take months before the family heard his voice.

These days, his son's exploits on the board ring out in the Gulf in the space of hours.

"My father couldn't study a lot. But he did what he had to for the family. He sacrificed his life in the Gulf. My son also has not been to school in a year to



Tamizh Amudhan's father tried to convince him to skip the event due to the power cut. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

pursue what he wants to," says an emotional Sathish, who works as an officer with the Tamil Nadu government.

Candle for fairplay

Sathish explains that he used the candle to light up his room — and more importantly — Tamizh's face so that he could pass the muster on the tournament organiser Chess.com's stringent fairplay requirements. The Freestyle Fridays tournament is an online blitz event powered by Chess.com, where titled players can compete in the Chess960 variant (where pieces on the back ranks don't start in the usual positions).

His father has plenty of tales of his son coming back from tournaments with rating gains of over 100 ELO. These gains propelled him to become the youngest player to cross the

2000 rating mark and become one of the youngest Candidate Masters in the world. He recently even won a Maruti Suzuki car for his performance at a tournament.

But what his son did against one of the strongest players of this generation is a sight to behold. By the 22nd move of the three-minute game, Keymer, playing with white pieces, was scrambling for his king's life. After the queens were traded on move 31, both of Tamizh's rooks chased Keymer's king around. In 44 moves, the game was over as Keymer resigned.

Sathish admits that he usually doesn't know what the calibre of his son's opponents is. So when Tamizh announced he had defeated Keymer, his question to his son was: "FIDE master? Candidate Master, International Master or GM?"

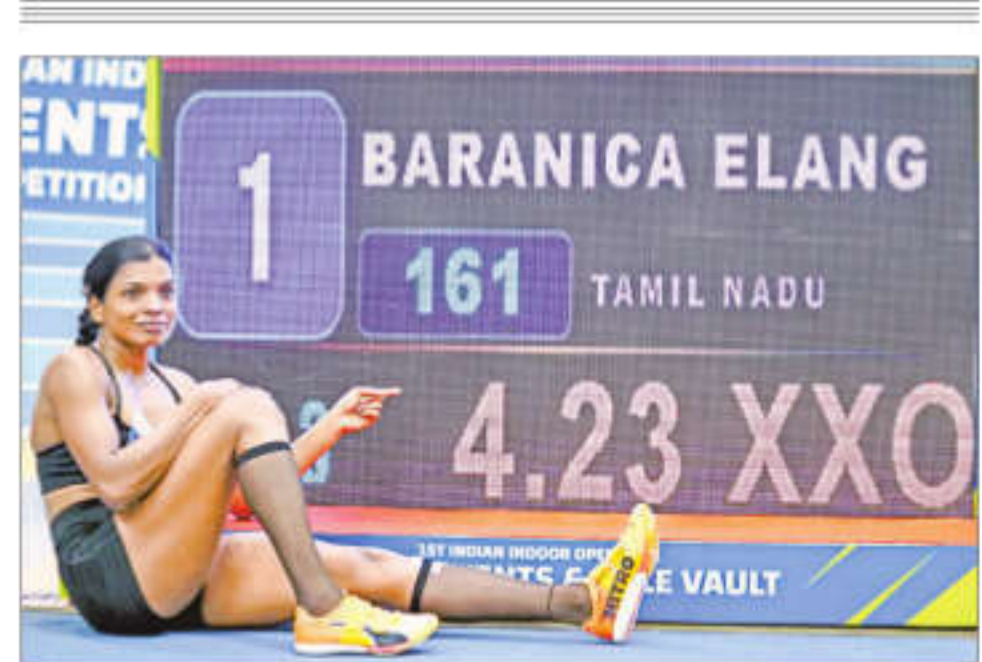
Plenty of Tamizh's early

chess was played on online portals like Chess.com and Lichess. It was only just over a year back that his father wrote to Hatsun Chess Academy, a premier residential chess training centre near Sivakasi, to apply for their program. Grandmaster Vishnu Prasanna, who was the man who shaped Gukesh, the youngest world champion in history, coaches at Hatsun.

Once Tamizh was accepted, the family had to make a tough call. He and his mother, Uma, moved to Sivakasi while Sathish and his daughter live in their native place in Kallakurichi, about 300 kilometres away from Sivakasi. The family meets over weekends, if at all.

Sathish knows all these sacrifices will be worth it. His eight-year-old son, who barged his way into the global spotlight even in the middle of a power cut, will make sure of it.

BRIEFLY



Baranica Elangovan broke her previous national record. AFP

ATHLETICS

Baranica improves her pole vault national record with 4.23m mark

TAMIL NADU pole vaulter Baranica Elangovan has found a new happy hunting ground at the Kalinga Indoor Athletics Stadium as she improved her five-week-old own national record during the inaugural Indian Indoor Open Combined Events and Pole Vault Competition on Sunday. Baranica cleared 4.23m to better her own previous national record of 4.22m set at the inaugural edition of National Indoor Championships held in the last week of March at the same venue. The 29-year-old crossed 4.23m on her third attempt. "It was another good day for me," said Baranica who has shifted base from Tamil Nadu to Bhubaneswar to deal with post surgery pain. ENS

Manas finishes runner up at ATP Challenger

INDIA'S TEENAGE sensation Manas Dhamne fell short of a title finish in his maiden ATP Challenger singles final, going down to Belgium's Buvaysar Gadamauri in a closely-fought summit clash in Shymkent, Kazakhstan on Sunday. The 18-year-old Dhamne put up a spirited fight before losing 6-7(8), 4-6 in a contest that lasted over two hours and hinged on fine margins. Dhamne showed nerves of steel in the opening set, stretching his more experienced opponent to a tie-break and even holding set points before Gadamauri edged ahead 10-8 before the narrow loss. PTI

Man United great Sir Alex taken to hospital

MANCHESTER UNITED great Alex Ferguson was taken to the hospital after feeling unwell ahead of his former team's Premier League game against Liverpool on Sunday. The iconic former United manager was at Old Trafford for the match, but left before kick-off. A person with knowledge of the situation said the 84-year-old Ferguson was taken to the hospital as a precaution and was "okay." The person spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly. In 2018 Ferguson suffered a brain hemorrhage and underwent emergency surgery, before making a recovery. He frequently attends home matches at Old Trafford. AP

Bruzon set to leave EBFC by the end of ISL

OSCAR BRUZON on Sunday announced that he will step down as the head coach of East Bengal at the end of the current Indian Super League season, citing the absence of long-term planning and clarity over the club's future. As things stand now, May 31 is set to be his final day in charge of East Bengal, who are in title contention. Speaking ahead of EB's away fixture against Mumbai City FC, Bruzon said, "We have four matches remaining in the current ISL campaign. I will not be staying on after these four matches. May 31st will be my final day as the coach of East Bengal." PTI

India end messy World Relays with DNF, DQ

AMOJ JACOB and Ragul Kumar got injured during the men's 4x400m and 4x100 races respectively as India ended their World Athletics Relays campaign in disappointment on the second day of competitions. The Indian camp had high hopes of making the 2027 World Championships in the men's 4x400m relay but the team did not finish (DNF) the race as Jacob suffered cramps and pulled out of the race after taking the baton from the first leg runner Dharamveer Choudhary. Rajesh Ramesh and Vishal TK were to run in the third and fourth legs. India will now have to try and qualify for the World Championships 2027 through the Top Lists of the World Athletics. PTI

Man United confirm European berth with Mainoo's winner

Reuters
Manchester, May 3

MANCHESTER UNITED'S Kobbie Mainoo struck late to seal a dramatic 3-2 Premier League victory over rivals Liverpool on Sunday as the home side secured their return to the Champions League next season after a two-year absence. Dominik Szoboszlai and Cody Gakpo had hauled Liverpool level in the second half after costly United errors, but Mainoo had the final say with a strike from the edge of the 18-yard box in the 77th minute to send Old Trafford into raptures.

The win moved third-placed United onto 64 points with three games remaining, while fourth-placed Liverpool still have work to do to clinch a place among Europe's elite next season and are level on 58

points with fifth-placed Aston Villa, who host Tottenham Hotspur later on Sunday.

Great start

United got off to a great start, with Matheus Cunha scoring in the sixth minute and Benjamin Sesko doubling their lead eight minutes later. Cunha's goal came after a clearance fell at his feet, and the Brazilian scored with a hard low shot that glanced off Alexis Mac Allister.

Sesko scored after Liverpool's stand-in goalkeeper Freddie Woodman pushed Bruno Fernandes' header off Sesko's body. The goal was awarded after VAR determined the ball did not come off Sesko's hand. While Fernandes, who is one assist away from equalling the Premier League season record, was heavily involved in the



Kobbie Mainoo struck late to seal a 3-2 win for Man United. REUTERS

goal, he was denied the assist as his header was parried by Woodman.

The two goals inside 14 minutes marked the earliest Liverpool had gone 2-0 down in a Premier League game since February 2023 against Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Szoboszlai pulled one back in the 47th minute after Amad Diallo gave the ball away on the halfway line. Szoboszlai ran unchallenged, sprinting past Harry Maguire before slotting the ball home through defender Diogo Dalot's legs. Gakpo levelled nine min-

utes later when Senne Lammens passed the ball straight to Mac Allister, and Gakpo slotted into the open net, setting up a nervy ending punctuated by Mainoo's heroics.

Mainoo's winner came three days after the 21-year-old United academy graduate signed a new five-year deal with the club after being marginalised earlier in the season under former manager Ruben Amorim. The midfielder has started 13 of 14 league matches since interim boss Michael Carrick took charge, missing one game due to injury. "I've not been around the goals too much but I'm happy to be around it on such a massive occasion," Mainoo said. United had almost gone 3-0 up late in the first half when Fernandes latched onto a ball from Mbeumo, but he fired wide.

HOME COOKED FOOD AND MOTIVATION FOR SHUTTLERS

India's 2022 Thomas Cup victory and the unsung hero behind it

Shivani Naik
Mumbai, May 3

ANDERS ANTONSEN was furious. Denmark had just lost to India 3-2 in the 2022 Thomas Cup semifinals in Bangkok, and as he walked past, the world number two pulled off his sweat-soaked jersey and flung it at Vijaydeep Singh's face. Not a gesture of sportsmanship. Pure, unfiltered rage.

Peace was eventually brokered in the washroom. The Danish head coach and Mathias Boe mediated. Antonsen apologised, profusely. They hugged it out.

"I understood why," Vijaydeep says. "India winning was troubling the storied powerhouses that much."

That moment — a Danish star's disbelief expressed through a sweaty jersey — told Vijaydeep everything he needed to know. Indian badminton had not just won a match. It had become a threat.

Vijaydeep comes to badminton through blood. His father, Pritam Singh, was India's first badminton head coach at NIS Patiala. Growing up on that cam-

pus, Vijaydeep dabbled in swimming, even trained in cricket alongside Navjot Singh Sidhu under Col. CK Nayudu. But badminton pulled harder. Multiple national titles in doubles followed, as did Thomas Cup appearances in the early 90s, including the Delhi edition.

"India was never considered a contender back then. We were nowhere on the Thomas Cup radar," he recalls.

He went on to become a doubles coach, leaving his family in Ludhiana to settle in Hyderabad. By 2022, he was in Bangkok, watching the sport he had given his life to finally arrive on the world stage.

What the outside world didn't know was the condition in which India had arrived. Lakshya Sen had landed in Thailand with food poisoning. For fifties, right through to the final, he turned up and absorbed losses — deliberately, strategically — so that Srikanth and Prannoy could line up at MS2 and MS3 in betters shape. By the time he faced Anthony Ginting, he was strong and hungry in every sense.

"Mentally he is very strong,"



Vijaydeep Singh (centre of back row) made sure that the Indian shuttlers dal get a homely dinner while away from home. FILE

Vijaydeep says. "His attitude is — Marr jao lekin shuttle nai chhodunga." Within the team, the unity was total. Prannoy handled players. Srikanth, the senior, was a sounding board. Satwik and Chirag were filling Indian badminton's biggest gap of fifty years — a doubles pair of genuine world class. The days, meal times, even downtime in

hotel rooms, were filled with strategy, matchups, analysis.

"One was they got into a flow, second was they really wanted this win," Vijaydeep says.

Then there was the small matter of feeding them. Vijaydeep travels with rice cookers. Plural. He can manage anything during the day, but dinner means dal chawal, non-negoti-

able. And for players drawn to the last two matches of the evening — matches stretching to midnight — hotel kitchens were long closed by the time they came off court.

"These players were told: take a shower and head to my room for dinner. Don't sleep hungry." He learnt to make a yellow dal that his South Indian players would enjoy. Small detail. Not a small thing.

His father was known across the global badminton circuit as Guruji, and that name carried weight. When the Namdhari community in Bangkok learned it was the Indian team in town, packets of fresh food began arriving every day. The Indian embassy started coordinating, officials turning up from the Ambassador down.

But diplomats in prim suits cannot create a din.

Playing Malaysia and Indonesia in Southeast Asian arenas is an exercise in sensory warfare. Their fans bring noise — instruments, voices, frequencies that fill the hall and get inside the opposition's heads. Vijaydeep got the Bangkok Namdharis into a huddle.

He told them about the noise problem. They told him not to worry. "They said, 'Humaare 20 log unke 500 ke baraabar honge.'" They brought dhols.

Malaysia, on their disappointed return after losing to India in the quarterfinals, called the win a fluke. Said India weren't that strong. Wouldn't go far. Chinese Taipei and Malaysia quietly stopped accepting Indian requests to spar. "Hum khatraa ban chuke the," Vijaydeep says, with a chuckle. Losing to India had been unthinkable. Now they were being cautious.

Friday's quarterfinal win over Chinese Taipei in Horsens has brought that 2022 feeling back. The players who were youngsters then — Lakshya, Satwik, Chirag — are now the experienced core. Ayush is the new Lakshya, the youngster carrying quiet belief into a tournament the world didn't expect India to own. "I'm getting a feeling we will do excellent again," Vijaydeep says.

India finished with a bronze medal at the Thomas Cup 2026 after France cruised past them in the semifinals.