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BJP Ka Sankalp Modi Ki Guarantee Manifesto 2024



Helping the poor

- Free ration will continue for the next 5 years.
- Becoming self-reliant in production of pulses, edible oils and vegetables.
- Clean drinking tap water for every house and reduction of electricity bill to zero through PM Surya Ghar Yojna.



Honouring the farmers

- Continuation of PM Kisan Samman Nidhi and Crop Insurance Scheme.
- Timely increase in MSP. Increasing farmers' income in every aspect.
- Establishment of Shri Ann (Millets) as super food, Expansion of PM Matsya Sampada Yojana and dairy cooperative societies.



Women empowerment

- Three crore rural women will become Lakhpati didis.
- Expansion of piped gas connection to households. Ensuring availability of Hostels and Creches for working women.
- Integrate self help groups with the service sector to increase their income.
- Ensuring representation of women in Lok Sabha and State assemblies by implementing Nari Shakti Vandan Act.



Focus on the middle class

- Home ownership for middle class families.
- Ensuring accessible and affordable healthcare at district hospitals, Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and other secondary healthcare centres.
- Expansion of health services, new educational institutes and improvement of infrastructure for ease of life.



Investment to provide better employment opportunities for youth

- Increase in employment opportunities by investing in infrastructure, investment, manufacturing, high value services and start-ups.
- Loan amount under MUDRA Yojna will be doubled to ₹20 Lakh for encouraging employment/ self employment.
- Government recruitment will become more transparent by implementation of law regarding paper leaks and establishment of new institutions of higher education.



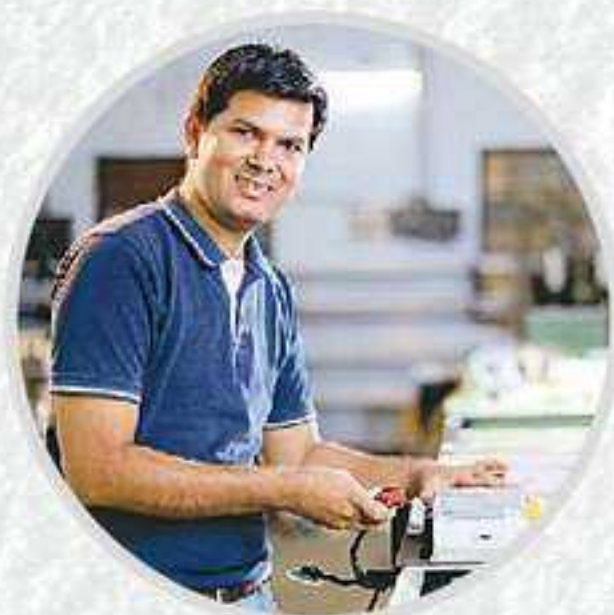
Prosperous India through good governance

- Guaranteed strict action against corruption.
- Implementation of Bharatiya Nyay Samhita.
- Introduction of "One Nation, One Election" and "Common Voter List".
- Implementation of Uniform Civil Code according to Article 44 of Constitution.



For labourers

- New scheme to develop modern facilities for truck drivers on the highways.
- Empowerment of gig workers, domestic workers, street workers and other labourers through the e-Shram portal.



Becoming global hub for manufacturing

- Will make India a global hub for manufacturing, this will create lakhs of jobs.
- Guarantee of increasing manufacturing in steel, cement, aluminium, railway, defence, pharmaceutical, electric vehicle, mobile, semi conductor and other sectors.



Priority to the deprived

- Expansion of PM-SVANidhi and Vishwakarma schemes for expanding employment opportunities for OBC, SC, and ST communities.
- Ensuring scholarships for talented students from marginalised sections.
- Special focus on all things related to fishermen such as boat insurance, fish processing unit, timely information through satellite, etc.



Virasat aur Vikas

- All-round development of Ayodhya city and development of other religious places on the lines of Kashi Vishwanath Corridor.
- Providing training in Yoga, Ayurveda, Indian languages, and classical music by establishing Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centres across the world.



Strengthening economy through infrastructure

- Making India the world's third-largest economy.
- Expanding the expressway network to 15,000 kms and enhancing services of new airports, highways, and water metros.
- Build new rail lines, new Vande Bharat, Amrit Bharat, and Namo Bharat trains, and world-class stations. Minimising the waiting list of rail tickets.
- Dedicated Purvodaya Masterplan for infrastructure development of Eastern India and its coastal and hilly areas.



Senior citizens

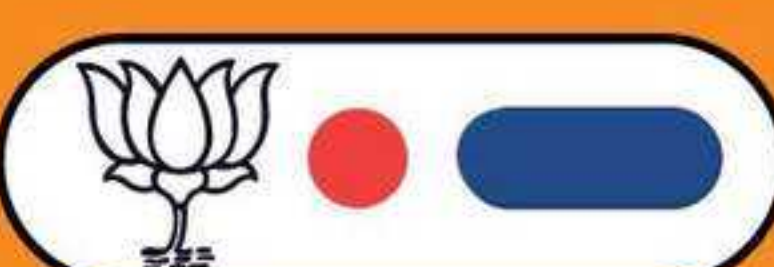
- Free health facilities to senior citizens by including them under Ayushman Bharat.
- Special programme for pilgrimage tours of senior citizens.

Phir Ek Baar



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29 Maoists dead in fierce Chhattisgarh operation

Ritesh Mishra and Prashw Lama
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RAIPUR: Twenty-nine Maoists were killed in a fierce encounter with joint forces of the state police and the Border Security Force (BSF) in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district, officials said on Tuesday, in what is the most significant single-incident blow to the rebels in eight years, and the biggest ever in the state.

Three security personnel were also injured in the exchange of fire, with at least one jawan suffering bullet injuries. They have all been declared "out of immediate danger" and airlifted to Raipur for further medical treatment, the officials added. There was also speculation that senior Maoist leader Shankar Rao was among those killed.

The encounter comes days before the Left Wing Extremism (LWE)-hit constituencies in south Chhattisgarh go to the polls in the first phase of the Lok Sabha elections, with Bastar voting on April 19, and Kanker set to

State's deadliest encounter
The encounter comes days before Chhattisgarh goes to the polls, with Bastar voting on April 19 and Kanker on April 26.

WHAT HAPPENED

MONDAY: BSF officials receive two separate intels about top cadre of North Bastar division of CPI (Maoist) assembling in the area

MONDAY NIGHT: Teams of personnel leave for the location

TUESDAY 1.30pm: 185 personnel reach the jungle; and are fired upon by the rebels

1.30pm to 4.30pm: At least 3 rounds of firings are exchanged between the two sides

29 Maoists killed
This was the most fatal encounter for the rebels in 8 years, and the biggest ever in the state

3 security personnel injured, but all are out of danger

During the encounter, more forces arrive and form a cordon to cut off the Maoists' escape route

cast its ballot in the second phase on April 26.

With dense forests that present operational challenges, low road connectivity that makes accessing remote areas and gathering intelligence cumbersome, and heavily armed insurgents who use guerrilla tactics

to attack and evade, LWE has been a four-decade-long security challenge in Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and western Maharashtra.

It is rare, given these challenges, for such a high casualty figure for the Maoists in a single operation, and experts said this

signifies a critical strengthening in the security apparatus in affected states, and a consequent weakening of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist).

"There are several aspects that need to coexist for such a high figure of casualties. It

ISRAEL'S WAR CABINET WEIGHS RETALIATION AS WORLD WATCHES

JERUSALEM: Tensions remained high in West Asia on Tuesday as Israel's war cabinet mulled on a response to Iran's first-ever direct attack, amid international pressure to avoid further escalating the conflict.

Israeli foreign minister Israel Katz said he was "leading a diplomatic attack", writing to 32 countries to ask them to place sanctions on Iran's missile programme and follow Washington in proscribing its dominant military force, the Revolutionary Guard Corps, as a terrorist group. Meanwhile, the war cabinet was meeting for the third time in three days on Tuesday to decide on the country's next action.

Meanwhile, international pressure continued on Israel to avoid further escalation. Together with European allies, Washington instead strove on Tuesday to toughen economic and political sanctions against Iran in an attempt to dissuade Israel from violent retaliation.

British PM Rishi Sunak told Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu that escalation in the West Asia was in no one's interest in a call after Britain helped Israel repel a direct aerial attack by Iran on Saturday.

Row over Ram Navami ahead of Phase I voting

HT Correspondent
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KOLKATA: Ram Navami celebrations became the centre of a political tussle between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal on Tuesday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi accusing the state government of trying to stall progressions and the state's ruling party alleging that the deity was being politicised.

With three days to go for the first phase of polling for the Lok Sabha elections, Modi took aim at the TMC government and accused it of trying all means and conspiracies to derail the celebrations.

"I know that the TMC, like always, tried all means and hatched conspiracies to stall Ram Navami celebrations in the state. But truth triumphs. The court has given permission. Tomorrow processions will be held with full faith and devotion," Modi said at Balurghat in

Modi, Mamata trade barbs

TARGET ON TMC

"I know that the TMC tried all means to stall Ram Navami celebrations in the state. But the court has given permission. The rallies will be held with full devotion."
- Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

CHALLENGE TO BJP

"They [BJP] will not cross 200 seats. We will win in Bengal. Arvind will win in Punjab. Stalin will win. Akhlesh will win in UP. BJP will end up with 0."
- Mamata Banerjee, West Bengal CM

HIGH COURT ALLOWS PROCESSION
The Calcutta HC on Monday allowed the Ram Navami procession - Shobha Yatra - to proceed, rejecting the govt's request to alter the route in Howrah where communal clashes took place last year.

South Dinajpur district. But hours later, West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee hit back, alleging that the BJP might "create trouble".

"They may create trouble tomorrow. If they start a riot, don't fall for any provocation. Don't fall prey to any instigation," said Banerjee at a rally in

Jalpaiguri district without referring to the celebrations.

Later, she also said the BJP will not cross 200 Lok Sabha seats in the general elections.

"They will not cross 200. We will win in Bengal. Arvind [Kejriwal] will win in Punjab. Stalin will win. Akhlesh [Yadav] will

continued on → 8

Not letting you off the hook yet, apex court tells Ramdev

Utkarsh Anand
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NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Tuesday questioned yoga guru and entrepreneur Ramdev and Patanjali's managing director Bal Krishna on disobeying court orders that forbade Patanjali Ayurved from running misleading advertisements on health cures and sternly warned them against undermining other medical practices. The court pointed out that the two were "not so naive" that they had simply made a mistake, after they offered to issue a public apology

to avoid a contempt charge. While the top court gave Ramdev and Bal Krishna a week to take suitable steps "to redeem themselves" and demonstrate their remorse, it directly inter-acted with the two, telling them their plea of innocence or inadvertence cannot be accepted right away after they chose to flout court orders despite previous judicial warnings.

"We are not saying we will forgive you. We cannot be blind to your earlier history, we will think about your apology... At this moment, we are not saying they're off the hook," it said.

6 die as boat with students overturns in Jhelum river

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SRINAGAR: Six people, including two children, were killed as a boat carrying students to school on Tuesday morning capsized on the Jhelum in Srinagar, even as authorities set off on frantic efforts to locate three missing people in the river's cold and choppy waters.

The Jammu & Kashmir capital has been battered by heavy spells of rain since Saturday, swelling the Jhelum's waters far beyond normal levels and leaving boats in disarray, though authorities had not issued any alerts or warnings.



NDRF rescue operation on the Jhelum in Srinagar. WASEEM ANDRABI/HT

The Union territory's administration identified the dead as Firdousa Fayaz (45), her seven-year-old twins Tahir Fayaz and Mudasar Fayaz, Raziya, who goes by a single name (18), Shabir

Ahmad Bhat (34) as well as the boatman, Gulzar Ahmad Dar (40).

Six people were rescued, said officials, but added that teams

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Can't interfere with criminal cases: EC

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: The Election Commission said on Tuesday it would not have been correct for it to act on "situations involving political persons under active consideration... of court proceedings or criminal investigations", saying such a step could have treaded on legal judicial processes, as it moved to address growing criticism from political parties.

The panel said it had acted on 169 out of 200 Model Code of Conduct complaints received since the poll code took effect a month ago, a disclosure it described as "first of its kind" exercise aimed at transparency so "that misgivings and insinuations at times coming from certain quarters, however small or

THE STATEMENT COMES AMID OPPN PARTIES CALLING ON THE ELECTION PANEL TO ENSURE A 'LEVEL-PLAYING FIELD' AHEAD OF THE POLLS

limited, are addressed and stopped".

"The Commission is by no means obliged, but for the sake of its promised transparency, EC has decided to place in the public domain its enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct during the first month of its operation, along with certain details of action taken," it said in a press note.

CANNOT DO AWAY WITH EVMs, VOTING IN INDIA A HUGE TASK, SC OBSERVES

Utkarsh Anand
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NEW DELHI: The current system of polling through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) cannot be pulled down without there being any substantial issue of propriety in the process, the Supreme Court observed on Tuesday, advocating caution against the perils of reverting to the traditional ballot box system.

A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta cited the sheer size of India's population and the vast number of voters as key factors, as it heard a clutch of petitions demanding 100% cross-verification of votes cast on EVMs with VVPATs.

→ P12

2 SENT TO POLICE CUSTODY OVER SHOOTING OUTSIDE SALMAN'S HOUSE

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MUMBAI: Two people arrested in connection with a shooting outside Bollywood actor Salman Khan's residence in Bandra area of Mumbai were on Tuesday remanded to nine days in police custody by a local court, even as police investigations revealed fresh details about the incident. The two were apprehended from Mata no Madh village in Kutch district of Gujarat on Monday.

Paris 2024 flame is lit



Greek actress Mary Mina, playing the role of High Priestess, lights the flame during the flame lighting ceremony for the Paris Olympics at Ancient Olympia on Tuesday.

MAN KILLS COP, INJURES PASSERBY IN A SHOOTING SPREE ON FLYOVER

Karn Pratap Singh
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NEW DELHI: A 44-year-old man went on a shooting rampage on a flyover near Nand Nagri in northeast Delhi on Tuesday morning, killing a policeman and injuring a passerby, and then attempted to flee the spot in an autorickshaw, before he died by suicide while in the three-wheeler, police said, adding the incident was likely triggered by a financial dispute.

→ P5

IMF: India will be fastest growing economy till '29

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NEW DELHI: India will remain the world's fastest growing major economy till 2029, although the rate of expansion may moderate, the International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday in its latest World Economic Outlook.

The country's gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate is expected to decline to 6.8% in the year to March 2025 from 7.8% in 2023-24 and then stay at 6.5% until 2028-29, the mul-

tilateral organisation predicted. The latest projections upgraded India's growth by 0.3 percentage point compared to the January update.

"Growth in India is projected to remain strong at 6.8 percent in 2024 and 6.5 percent in 2025, with the robustness reflecting continuing strength in domestic demand and a rising working-age population," the IMF said.

At 6.8%, the fund's forecast was slightly lower than the 7% GDP growth estimated by the Reserve Bank of India.

→ P18

AAP LIST OF 'STAR CAMPAIGNERS' FOR GUJARAT NAMES 3 JAILED LEADERS

Alok KN Mishra
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NEW DELHI: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Tuesday named three imprisoned senior party leaders — Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and Satyendra Jain — among its list of 40 "star campaigners" in Gujarat ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

An AAP functionary said the party hopes Kejriwal, Sisodia and Jain will walk out of jail soon, which is why their names have been included.

The list also features Delhi chief minister's wife Sunita Kejriwal.

→ P6

UPSC topper from Lucknow; Miranda House alumna third

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: Aditya Srivastava, an engineer from IIT-Kanpur, has topped the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) examinations, results of which were announced on Tuesday, with Animesh Pradhan and Donuru Ananya Reddy securing second and third ranks, respectively.

According to a statement by the Commission, Srivastava, an electrical engineer, qualified the



Aditya Srivastava, Ananya Reddy

examination with electrical engineering as his optional subject. Pradhan, a graduate (BTEch) in

computer science from National Institute of Technology (NIT) Rourkela, cracked the exam with sociology as his optional subject, and Reddy, who possesses Bachelor of Arts (Hons) geography, from Delhi University's (DU) Miranda House, picked anthropology as her optional subject.

This year, the number of women candidates among the UPSC toppers has reduced, with only two in the top five — last year, women made up the top four ranks.

→ P6

{ NO CANDIDATES NAMED } SONIA, BRIJ BHUSHAN SITTING MPs

Parties wait for 1st move in Rae Bareilly, Kaiserganj

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LUCKNOW: They might be separated by a bumpy 150km drive, but in the high noon of the Lok Sabha elections campaign in India's most-populous state, two high-profile constituencies are in the same boat.

Kaiserganj in northwestern Uttar Pradesh and Rae Bareilly to its east are the only two Lok Sabha seats among the 80 in the state where no major party or alliance has announced any candidate. The reasons are the

same — a high-profile incumbent, uncertainty about the current political scenario, and a cautious approach by the parties that hold the seat.

Both seats go to the polls on May 20. The last date of nomination is May 3.

In Rae Bareilly, a traditional Congress stronghold which was won by its former chief Sonia Gandhi even in the middle of two Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) waves in 2014 and 2019 is waiting for the party to pick her successor.

Gandhi, 77, became a mem-



Sonia Gandhi, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh

ber of the Rajya Sabha last month and there is speculation that a member of her family will contest the pocket borough that



PTI & ANI

has been held by the Congress since 1999, and was the only seat the party won in UP in 2019. Rae Bareilly, along with erstwhile

pocket borough Amethi, are waiting for the party to clear the air. And so, it seems, are other parties.

Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee spokesperson Manish Hindavi said, "The Congress high command will take a call on the issue at an appropriate time. The party has, however, begun preparations for the polls there."

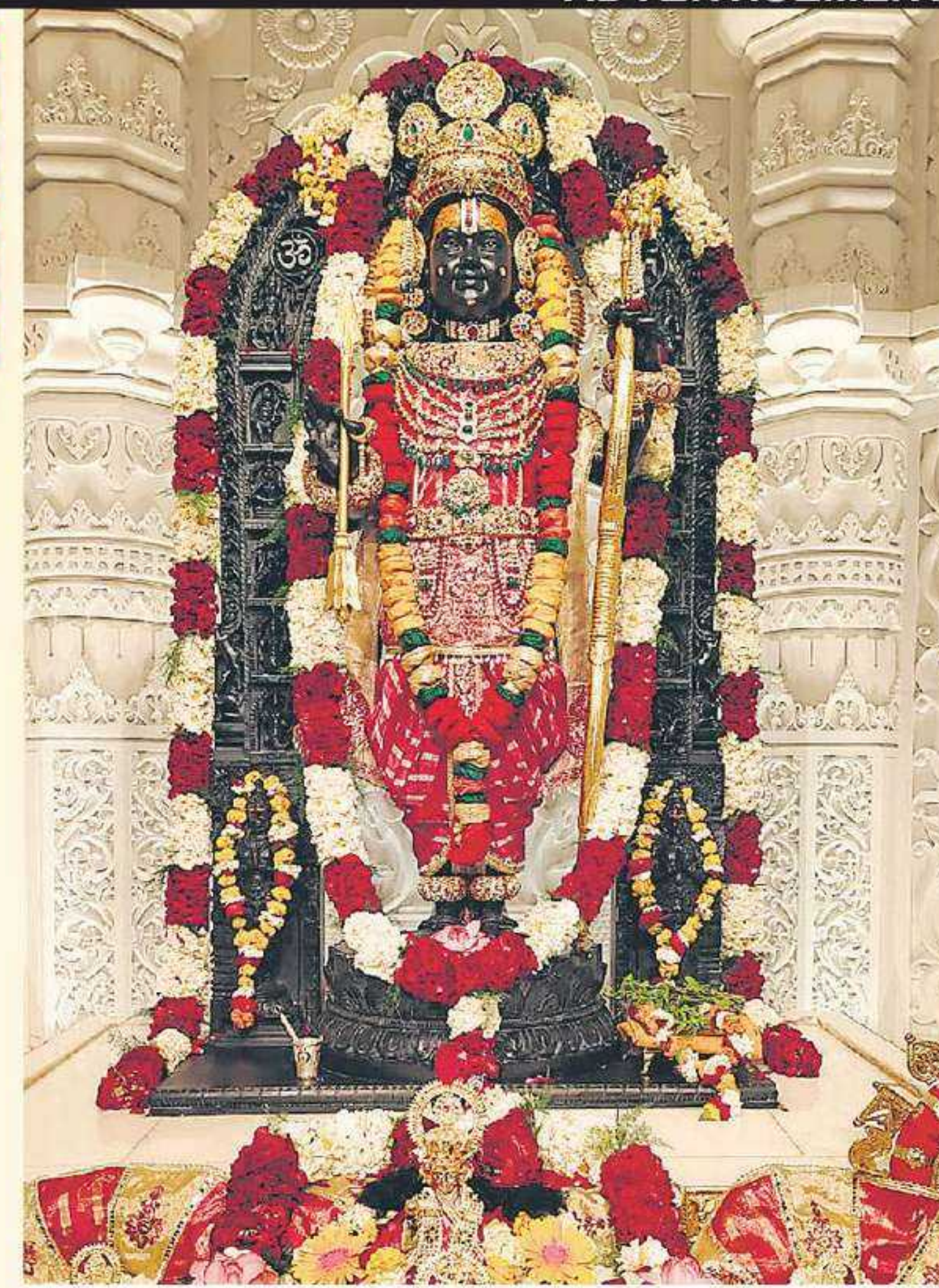
In Kaiserganj, the mood is not one of anticipation but anxiety. The incumbent, BJP leader Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh,

continued on → 8

RAM LALLA'S FIRST RAM NAVAMI

All roads are now leading to Ayodhya

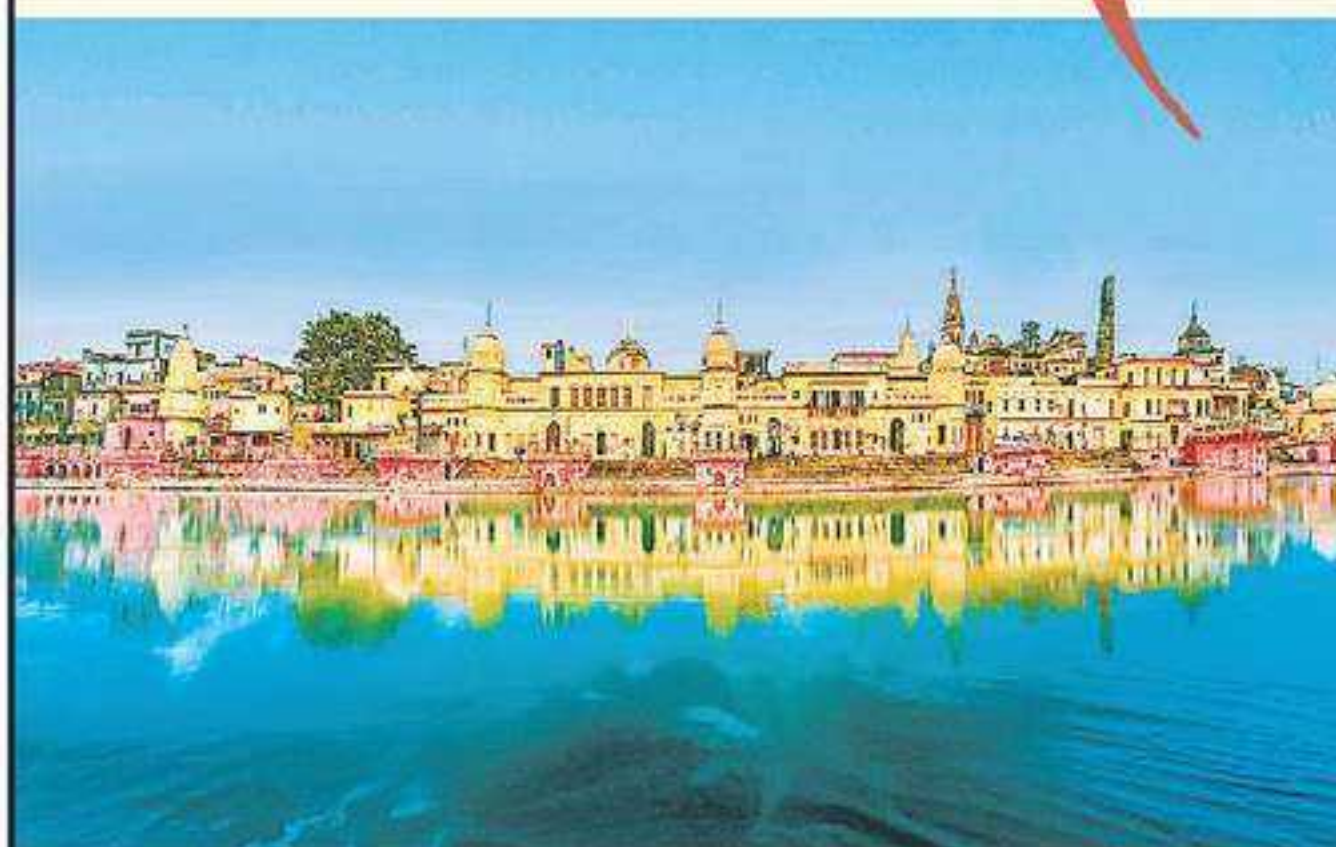
The inauguration of Ram Mandir has spurred an economic boom in Ayodhya with real estate, hotels, railways, and airlines all benefiting from the surge in tourism at the birthplace of Lord Ram



RAM LALLA WILL BE ADORNED WITH THE SURYA TILAK ON RAM NAVAMI IN AYODHYA AFTER 500 YEARS

- 25 lakh devotees are expected to visit the Ram Janmabhoomi on Ram Navami
- Ram Mandir will be open for 19 hours on Ram Navami, with special arrangements for devotees to have darshan of Ram Lalla
- To ensure smooth management, the mela grounds have been divided into seven zones and 39 sectors, while traffic management has been organised into two zones and 11 clusters
- During the celebration, a special arrangement of lenses and mirrors will be installed within the temple premises. This system is designed to focus a beam of sunlight onto the forehead of Ram Lalla, resulting in the revered 'Surya Tilak' symbol, as Ram Lalla belongs to the Suryavansh
- Watch LIVE as the sun rays will fall on Lord Ram Lalla's forehead for about 5 minutes at 12:16 pm

दिव्य



The long-standing dream to inaugurate a temple at the birthplace of Lord Ram finally came true on January 22. The consecration ceremony of Ram Mandir in the vibrant city of Ayodhya garnered attention from across the country and beyond. As the highly anticipated event approached, businesses across various industries began to set their sights on the enchanting temple town. From real estate developers and hoteliers to airline companies and leading corporate houses, all were drawn to the town's potential for growth. Despite having been off the radar just a few years ago, the temple town now presents an exciting opportunity for investors to tap into its burgeoning market and establish a foothold in the area.

AYODHYA RAM MANDIR SEES AROUND 1.5 LAKH PILGRIMS DAILY

The consecration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya took place on January 22 in a ceremony presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The auspicious event was attended by thousands of VVIPs, including politicians, cricketers, industrialists, spiritual leaders etc. More than 1.2 crore pilgrims have visited Ayodhya since temple inauguration. The government is working on a comprehensive 360-degree model to provide top-notch amenities for devotees, including clean drinking water, round-the-clock electricity, extensive network of toilets, robust public transportation, enhanced drainage, and river rejuvenation.

On the construction front, the Ram Mandir complex is expected to be completed by December this year as per Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust.

AYODHYANOMICS

Total Pledged Investment
Rs 1,42,836 CR

Rs 85,000 CR State Government Commitment to Invest

Estimated Creation of
1.02 lakh Jobs in the Next 3 Years

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ongoing development ventures totalling **Rs 20,000 CR by 2024**, transforming Ayodhya into a global city.

This ambitious infrastructure development surpasses even the investment made for the Tokyo Olympics 2020, which cost Rs 80,000 crore.

Rs 12,000 CR investment by NHAI in road construction

Maharishi Valmiki International Airport facilitates International & Domestic connectivity

Elevated Ayodhya Railway terminal near the temple, expecting 3-4 x more daily passengers

- A member of the trust had earlier said that over 3,500 additional workers will be deployed soon to speed up the construction of the remaining two floors of the three-storey temple building.
- To provide a seamless experience for all, the temple trust has also facilitated provision of wheelchairs which are available in the Mandir for the elderly and differently-abled.

CELEBRITIES FROM THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY, CRICKET WORLD, POLITICS, ART AND LITERATURE SEEK RAM LALLA'S BLESSINGS FROM TIME TO TIME. RECENTLY, RENOWNED BOLLYWOOD ACTOR AMITABH BACHCHAN HAS ALSO INVESTED IN A 10,000 SQ FT. PLOT WORTH RS 14.5 CRORE IN "THE SARAYU" PROJECT IN AYODHYA BY THE HOUSE OF ABHINANDAN LODHA*



In the heart of Ayodhya's cultural embrace, I find my home.

Shri Amitabh Bachchan

भव्य

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) reports that the ceremony alone generated business worth more than **Rs 100,000 crore** across the country.

30,000+ programs are organized nationwide. High demand for Shri Ram-themed merchandise is driving economic activities, with over **5 crore models** expected to be sold across the country.

The **Rs 400 crore world-class bus terminus project** in Ayodhya, approved by the Uttar Pradesh government, aims to enhance commuter experience.



THE HOUSE OF ABHINANDAN LODHA AND THE LEELA GROUP PLAN LUXE HOTEL IN AYODHYA

With investment exceeding Rs 450 crore, the company and Brookfield Group-owned The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts have entered a partnership to develop a luxury modern palace hotel in Ayodhya at The Sarayu™, Ayodhya's only 7-star luxury development. This massive 100 rooms hotel aims to infuse a modern luxury experience with the rich traditions and history of iconic location

Expressing his enthusiasm for the project, highlighting the opportunity to contribute significantly to Ayodhya's growth while preserving its deep cultural roots. As India's largest branded land developer, HoABL aims to play a pivotal role in elevating Ayodhya's standing on both the national and international stage.

Abhinandan Lodha,
Chairman, The House of Abhinandan Lodha



To meet the increasing demand for accommodation, the number of hotels in Ayodhya also need to rapidly increase. Consequently, more than 15 hotel project proposals have been approved, promising a massive increase to the current number. The Leela group of hotels and The House of Abhinandan Lodha have already partnered for an ambitious Rs 450 crore project in Ayodhya. Additionally, renowned hotel chains such as Taj, Marriott International, Radisson, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts, and Wyndham Hotels & Resorts have signed deals to establish hotels in Ayodhya. The city's grandeur as a tourist destination will further elevate with the development of hotels, guesthouses, homestays and other accommodation facilities.

In this endeavour, HoABL has partnered up with Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts, a renowned subsidiary of the Brookfield Group.

The centrepiece of this investment is to be a luxury palace hotel in Ayodhya, a five-acre estate nestled along the banks of the Sarayu River. It is said to feature a hundred rooms, with completion expected by March 2028. Leela is charged with the supervision of the clubhouse, serviced villas, and serviced luxury apartments within the hotel complex, ensuring a seamless luxury experience for both guests and residents.

RELIABLE INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY FOR REAL ESTATE

The government of Uttar Pradesh has set a goal to invest Rs 85,000 crore in the redevelopment of Ayodhya. The aim is to transform the temple town into an economic and tourism hub. The redevelopment will be carried out according to the Master Plan 2031 and is expected complete within ten years. Ayodhya is becoming an increasingly attractive destination for investment due to its changing

landscape and potential for urbanisation. The real estate market in Ayodhya, particularly in the residential sector, has seen a significant increase in prices.

The entire region is undergoing development, presenting vast opportunities for future urbanisation. Ayodhya is just one of the tier-2 cities in India that is witnessing property price appreciation that is much higher than the top 10 cities.



नव्य

Government's grand vision to transform Ayodhya into a global city

Ayodhya's transformation into a global city is further evidenced by the enhanced connectivity facilitated by key infrastructure projects



CONNECTIVITY TO THE HOLY CITY OF LORD RAM

The Ayodhya Airport, also known as Maharishi Valmiki International Airport, was inaugurated in December by the Prime Minister. The airport, built over an area of 821 acres of land and estimated to cost Rs 328 crore, is expected to provide a convenient gateway for travellers. All prominent airline companies are introducing flights to Ayodhya on daily basis to enhance the ease of travel. Currently there are 14 operational flights on daily basis to and from Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Pune, Jaipur, Patna, Gwalior, Dehradun, Darbhanga.

The National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) is working on Rs 10,000 crore projects and the UP Government has undertaken 34

projects worth Rs. 7,500 crore. A four-lane road connecting Shri Ram Janmabhoomi from the Gorakhpur-Lucknow Highway is almost complete for Rs 45 crore. Ayodhya has four new pathways inspired by the four Vedas, namely Ram Path, Dharma Path, Bhakti Path, and Janmabhoomi Path.

Furthermore, the inter-state Ayodhya Dham bus station has been constructed to connect Ayodhya with other states. The Ayodhya Dham Railway Station is undergoing a renovation project spanning over five acres and is estimated to cost Rs 430 crore. The new railway station building will consist of three stories and will be equipped with all essential modern features such as lifts, escalators, food plazas, puja shops, cloakrooms, childcare rooms, and waiting halls.

Global spiritual capital to witness the completion of Ram Mandir in Dec 2024

THE MAGNIFICENT VISION OF THE MAJESTIC TEMPLE

As envisaged by the government, Ayodhya Ram Mandir will be completed by December 2024. It is well-positioned to become a symbol of harmony between its glorious history and ambitious future, thanks to concerted efforts towards the city's meticulous planning



The inauguration of the Ram Mandir in January 2024 marked the beginning of a new era for the city, with many exciting developments yet to come. As planned by the government, Vision Ayodhya 2047 aims at developing Ayodhya as the 'global spiritual capital of the world till 2047,' focusing on sustainability, smart city development, environmental friendliness, and global spiritual tourism. Ayodhya's future development is expected to improve its inherent features, such as retail establishments, spiritual tourism, and public administration. To double the present employment rate in the region, initiatives are being made in the medium and small-scale sectors, in knowledge and healthcare innovation, and in cultural and wellness tourism.

The city is currently undergoing a transformation that promises to

THE PLAN INCLUDES THE INSTALLATION OF 10 GATES DEDICATED TO SHREE RAM, UNDERGROUND CABLING, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A RAIN BASERA (NIGHT SHELTER) THAT CAN ACCOMMODATE UP TO 10,000 PEOPLE. TO GUARANTEE WATER MANAGEMENT SELF-SUFFICIENCY, INITIATIVES ARE UNDER MOTION.



enhance its intrinsic elements while simultaneously making it a modern, forward-thinking destination. The government's meticulous planning in transportation and infrastructure will help bring these developments to fruition. There is a dedication to reducing Ayodhya's carbon footprint, which will make it an eco-friendly destination that is in line with global sustainability goals. With these efforts,



THE 8 CONCEPTS OF AYODHYA'S DEVELOPMENT

As per the Uttar Pradesh Government, the development work is happening in Ayodhya based on eight concepts

- 1. Sanskritik Ayodhya:** Ayodhya will become India's cultural capital with plans in place to establish majestic monasteries, temples, and ashrams, construct grand city gates, and create temple museums.
- 2. Saksham Ayodhya:** Ayodhya is being developed for employment through tourism, jobs, religious and cultural activities.
- 3. Adhunik Ayodhya:** Transforming Ayodhya into a Smart City, Safe City, Solar City, and Greenfield Township.
- 4. Sugmay Ayodhya:** The Yogi government is making every effort to make Ayodhya easily accessible via air, road and trains.
- 5. Surnmay Ayodhya:** The initiatives include beautifying ponds, lakes, ancient reservoirs, rejuvenating old gardens, and constructing new ones in Ayodhya.
- 6. Bhavnatmak Ayodhya:** Every aspect of Ayodhya should reflect its connection to Shri Ram, and the city is being culturally enhanced with this goal in mind.
- 7. Swachh Ayodhya:** The city has implemented various strategies to ensure cleanliness, including sanitation campaigns, and the creation of effective drainage and sewer systems.
- 8. Ayusham Ayodhya:** The health infrastructure of Ayodhya has been strengthened to provide convenient and high-quality medical facilities to patients.

Ayodhya is poised to become a symbol of unity between its illustrious past and its aspirational future.

TOURIST-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

The goal of Ayodhya's continuous development is to make the city more welcoming to tourists while also promoting economic expansion, especially in the area of micro, small, and medium-sized businesses. Prioritising transportation, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability are still top priorities. Not all infrastructure development is geared towards creating upscale lodging. Rather, the strategy promotes diversity by welcoming guests from a range of backgrounds. The goal is to foster an atmosphere that appreciates dharamshalas and encourages homestays, giving visitors an immersive experience with residents that will increase visitors' appreciation of the city and serve as an important source of income for the inhabitants.

TURNING AYODHYA INTO A WORLD-CLASS CITY

Around 178 projects, with a total worth of up to Rs 30,500 crore, have been initiated to develop Ayodhya into a world-class city. The plan includes the installation of 10 gates dedicated to Shree Ram, underground cabling, and the construction of a Rain Basera (night shelter) that can accommodate up to 10,000 people. To guarantee water management self-sufficiency, initiatives are under motion. The 108 historically significant kunds (small lakes) of Ayodhya, such as the Bharat Kund and Surya Kund, are the subject of an extensive restoration project. An Inland Waterways Authority in Uttar Pradesh has also been established to boost water transport and promote water tourism.

EXPANDING AIR CONNECTIVITY

Phase 1 of a new airport in Ayodhya



has already commenced its operation, with a capacity to handle 10 lakh passengers annually. According to a report, there are plans to expand the airport by adding additional domestic capacity and an international terminal, which is expected to be completed by 2025. The expanded airport will have the capacity to handle 60 lakh passengers. It has also been reported that chopper services will be initiated to Ayodhya from six districts, namely Gorakhpur, Varanasi, Lucknow, Prayagraj, Mathura and Agra. In the second phase, the airport would be opened for international flights with the expansion of the runway to 3,200 metres.

ENHANCED GREEN CONNECTIVITY

Battery-powered carts are now available for devotees who are visiting Ayodhya to offer prayers at the Ram Mandir and Hanuman Garhi temple. As of March, 650 e-carts have been deployed in the first phase. Additionally, approximately 150 electric buses are currently operational on Dharmapath and Ram Path, and their numbers will be increased in the coming phases.

PROMOTING EDUCATION

Ayodhya's Vision for 2047 includes education as a key component, with the goal of educating people worldwide about the life and teachings of Shri Ram. The establishment of these institutions is intended to foster in seekers and learners across the globe a more profound appreciation of Ayodhya's cultural heritage.

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NUMBER THEORY

How the electorate has changed over the years

By Nishant Ranjan

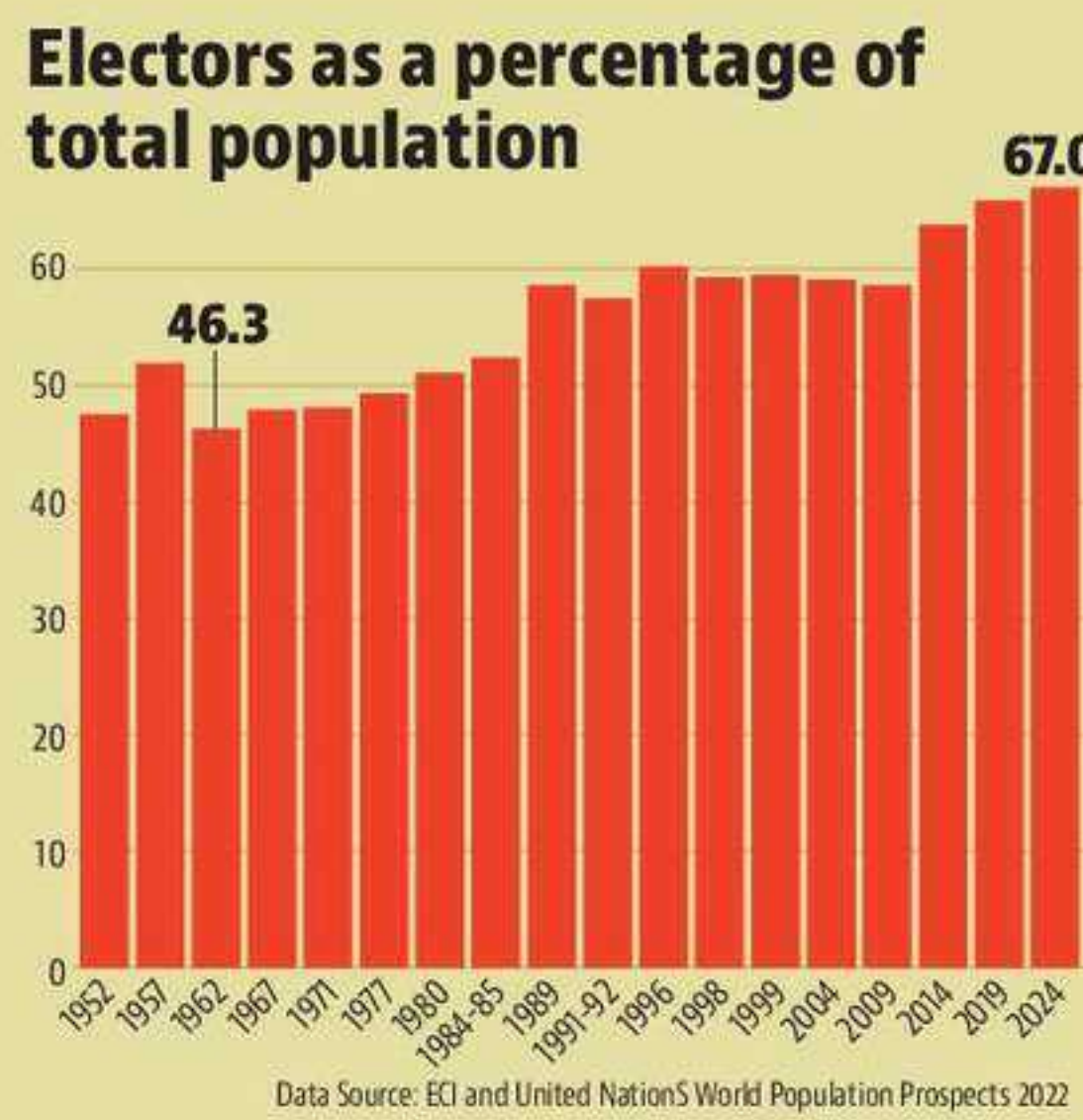
There are 969 million voters on the electoral rolls for the 2024 general elections in India. To be sure, this number could change marginally because the electoral rolls continue to be updated till the last date of filing of nominations in a constituency. The number of voters in 2024 elections is 6.25% more than the 912 million number for the 2019 elections.

Apart from these headline figures, what do we know about characteristics of almost a billion voters who will participate in the 2024 elections? How different is India's pool of voters for the 2024

elections compared to past elections? How many of them are first-time voters? This two-part data journalism series will try and answer some of these questions by using data sourced from the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the government's own surveys to find out broad characteristics of first-time voters in 2024. The first part of this series will look at the broad demographics of the electors and the second part will use the 2022-23 Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) to describe what India's first-time voters do.

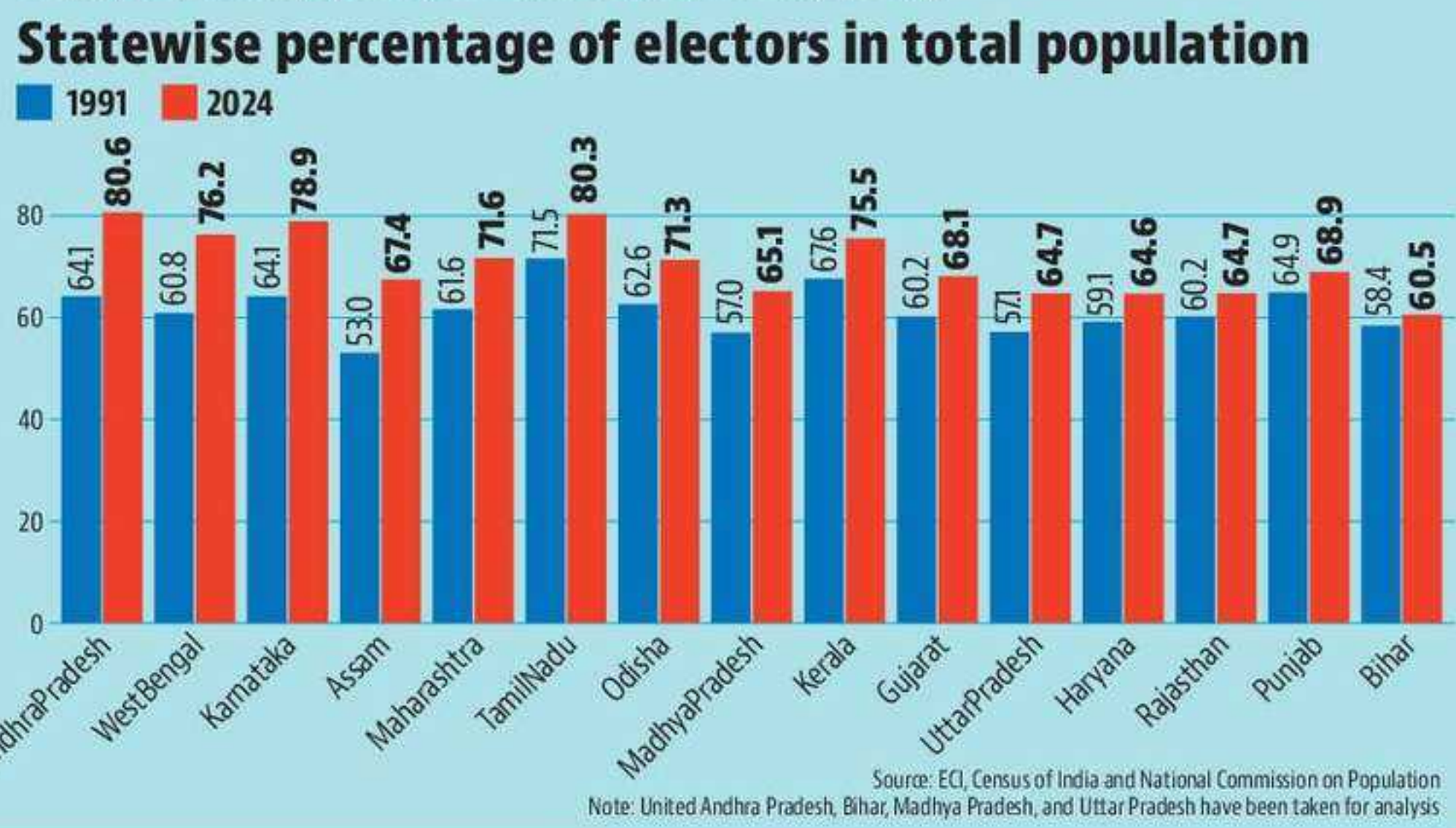
1 The share of voters in total population will be the highest in 2024

Not everybody who lives in a country is eligible or registered to vote. The former is a much more important criterion because of an age limit for voters. According to United Nations World Population Prospects published in 2022, India's population is expected to be 1.44 billion on July 1, 2024. This means that the share of voters in total population is 67%. HT has compared the share of voters in total population in all Lok Sabha elections and the data shows that this number is the highest for 2024 elections. To be sure, this share increased significantly in the 1989 elections when Rajeev Gandhi brought down the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 years. However, the recent increase in this number is a reflection of the fact that the share of people who are less than 18-year-old has been falling in India's total population.



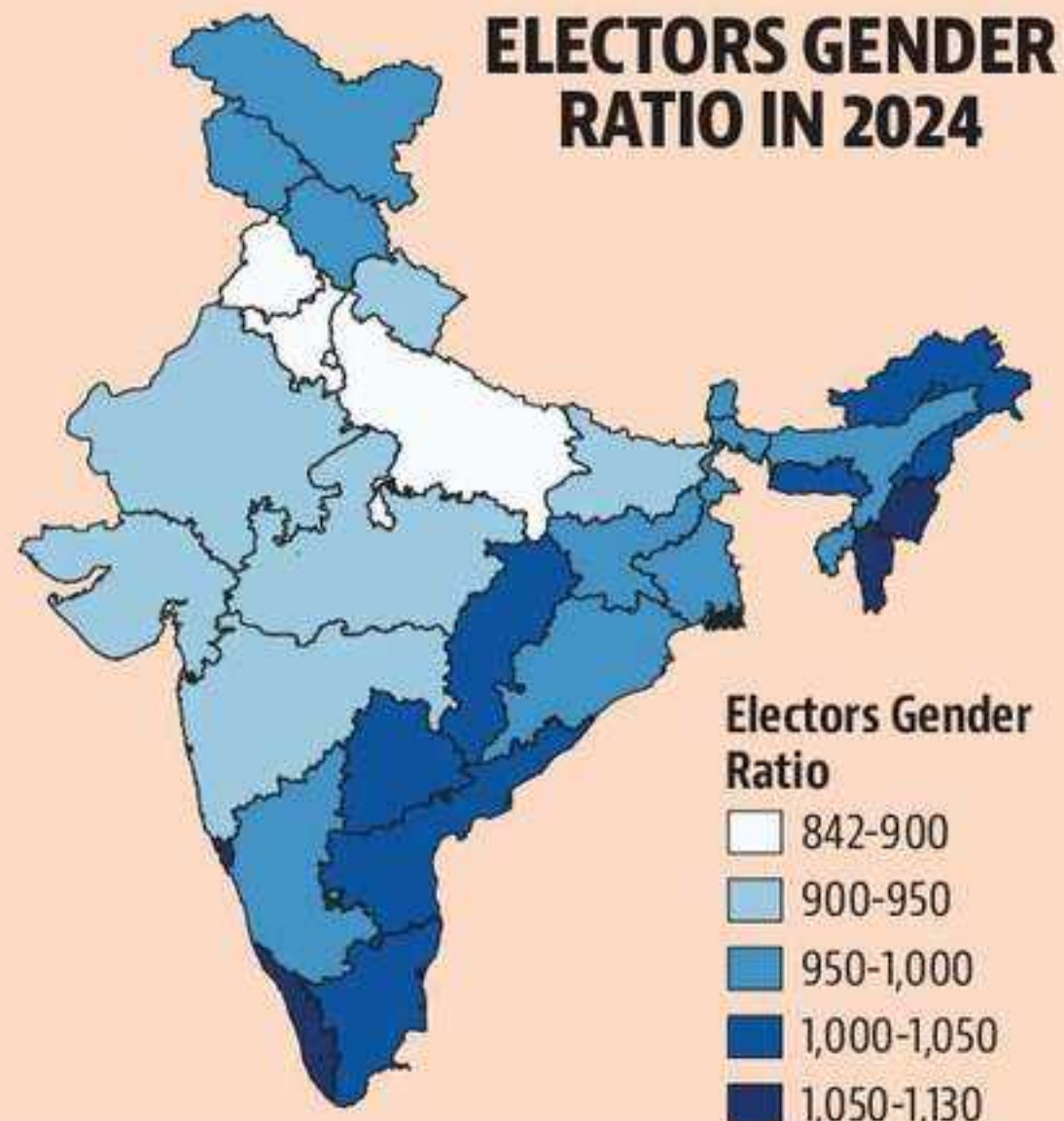
2 The voter-population ratio varies across states

Because of the difference in demographic profile of states, the voter-population ratio shows large interstate variation. How has this changed over time? A comparison of voter-population ratio in states with at least 10 Lok Sabha seats between 1991 and 2024 elections shows that this number has increased across almost all states, but in differing magnitude. Undivided Andhra Pradesh has witnessed maximum increase of 16.5 percentage points followed by West Bengal and Karnataka where percentage points increase is 15.4 and 14.7 respectively. Bihar has seen lowest increase at 2.1 percentage points followed by Punjab (3.9 percentage points) and Rajasthan (4.5 percentage points).

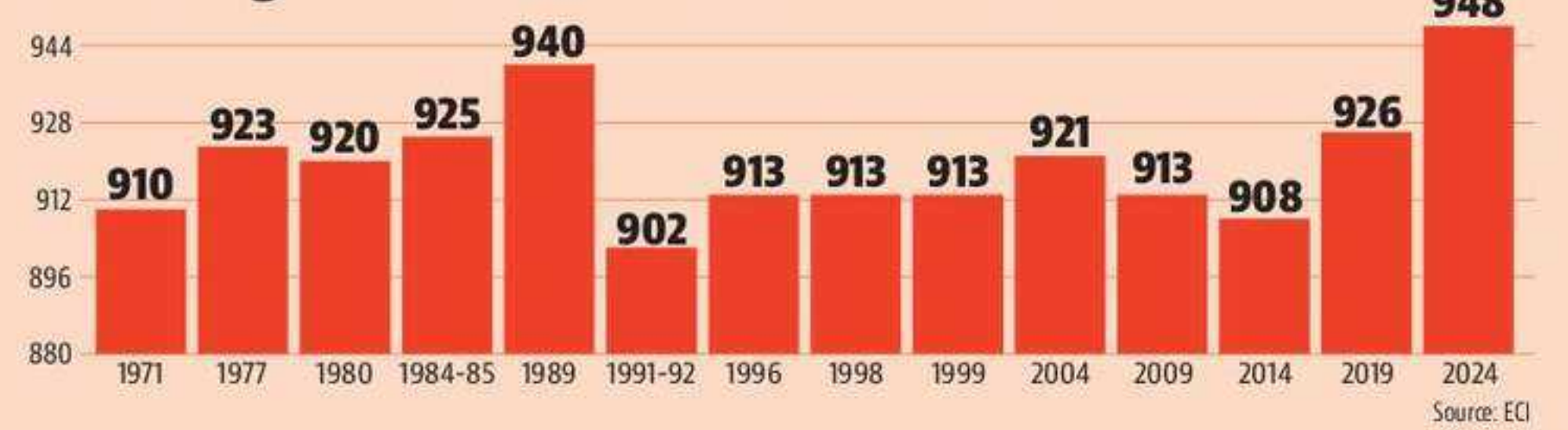


3 2024 elections will see the lowest gender imbalance in the electorate

A comparison of electors gender ratio (EGR) shows this clearly. EGR is defined as the number of registered female electors per 1,000 male electors. Electors gender ratio is available from ECI from 1971 onwards. The elector gender ratio for 2024 is 948, which is the highest since 1971. It was 926 in 2019. To be sure, EGR shows significant variation across states. There are 12 states/UTs with an EGR greater than or equal to 1,000. These include Nagaland, Telangana, Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Mizoram, Kerala, Manipur, and Puducherry. Among the major states, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, and Bihar have the lowest EGR at 877, 883, 900 and 909 respectively. A comparison from 2019 elections shows that EGR has increased in every state between 2019 and 2024.

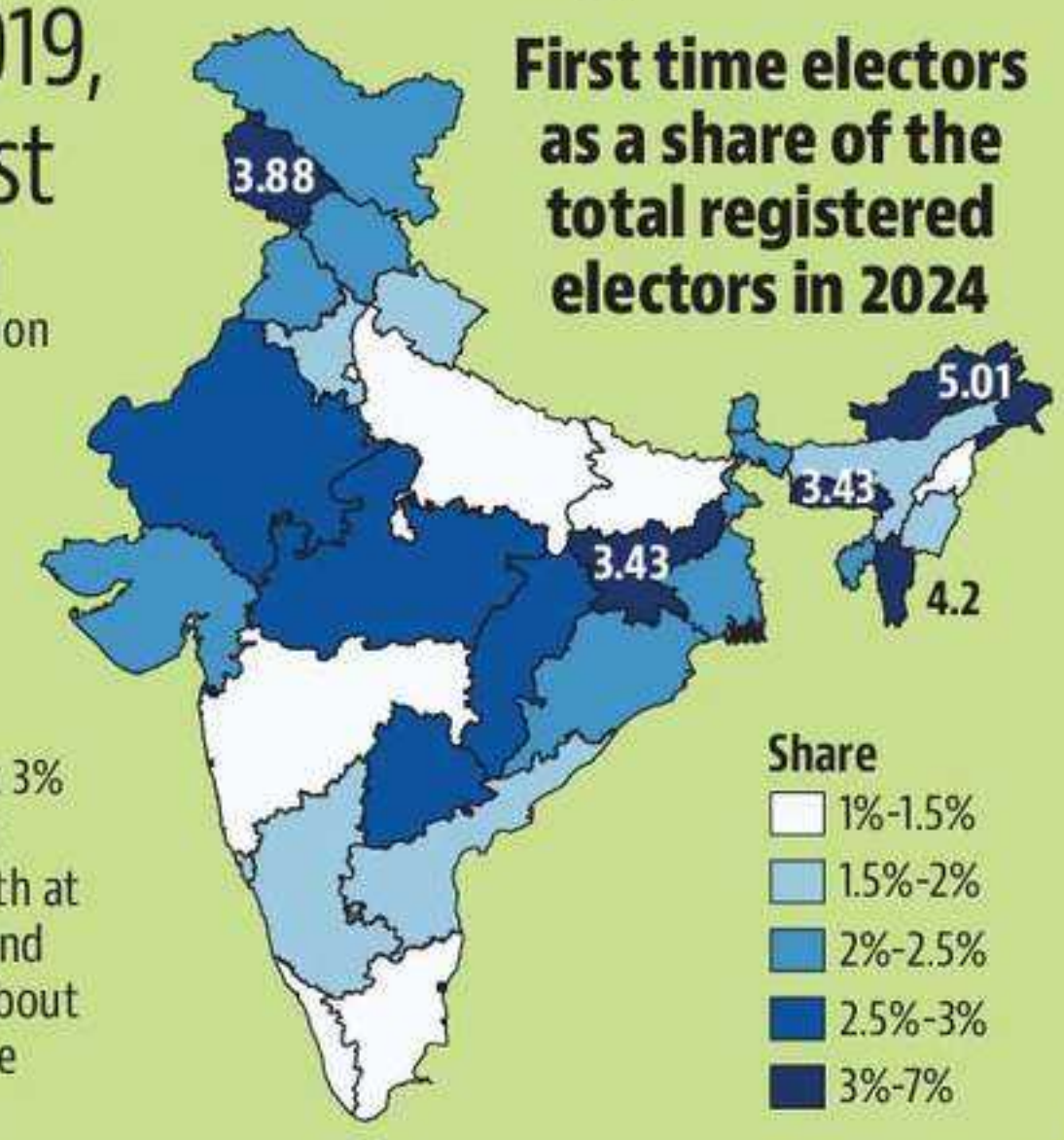


Electors gender ratio in Lok Sabha elections



4 Share of first-time voters in 2024 is higher than what it was in 2019, but it is not the highest

The share of the first-time voters in registered voters is 1.9% in 2024. As per ECI data, 18.2 million first-time voters have been registered so far for the 2024 elections. In 2019, this number was 15.1 million - 1.71% of the total 912 million voters in 2019. However, this number has been higher in the past and was 2.75% in 2014. As is expected, it varies across the states. The percentage of the first-time voters is the highest in Jharkhand at 3% followed by Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh at 2.9% and 2.8% respectively amongst states with at least 10 PCs. This number is lowest for Kerala and Maharashtra at 1.1% each. What do we know about these first-time voters? This is the question the second part of this series will try and answer.



This is the first of a two-part data journalism series on voters in the 2024 general elections. The second-part will look at the economic status of first-time voters in India.

{ MY INDIA } SUPREME COURT SAYS 'Can't be selective in mob lynching cases'



When it comes to mob lynching, one cannot be selective in picking up cases against any religious community or caste, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday as it gave six weeks to states and Union territories to spell out action taken to curb instances of lynching and hate crimes as laid down in a 2018 judgment. The bench noted that the list of cases did not include the murder of a tailor, Kanhaiya Lal, in Rajasthan's Udaipur in 2022. The incident was linked to a hate crime as the two Muslim killers walked into Lal's shop and slit his throat as he supported a social media post profaning Prophet Muhammad.

{ WORLD } CLOUD-SEEDING GONE WRONG? Dubai international airport briefly shut amid heavy rain



Torrential rain flooded roads, homes and malls and briefly halted operations at Dubai's airport as storms lashed the Gulf on Tuesday, after leaving at least 18 dead in Oman. Dubai, West Asia's financial centre, was paralysed by the heavy storms that caused widespread flooding around the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. Dubai airport, the world's busiest international hub measured by passenger traffic, suspended operations for 25 minutes and cancelled more than 50 flights. The heavy rains that caused widespread flooding across the desert nation stemmed partly from cloud seeding operations UAE began in 2002 to address water security issues.

{ MY INDIA } WEST ASIA TENSIONS US NSA visit delayed for 2nd time this year



US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan has postponed a visit to India scheduled for this week due to "ongoing events in the Middle East", the US Embassy in New Delhi said on Tuesday. Fears of a wider conflict in the region have escalated after Iran's missile and drone attack on Israel over the weekend, in retaliation for a suspected Israeli airstrike on its embassy in Syria this month. Sullivan was scheduled to hold talks with Indian counterpart Ajit Doval on the progress in implementation of the US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET), besides other issues.

Inferno devastates historic Copenhagen spire



A massive blaze raged through one of Copenhagen's oldest buildings on Tuesday, causing the collapse of the iconic spire of the 17th-century Old Stock Exchange, or Boersen. The copper roof of the building, which was once Denmark's financial centre, was engulfed in flames on Tuesday. Passersby were seen rushing to help emergency services save priceless historic paintings and artefacts housed there. "It is a national disaster," PM Mette Frederiksen wrote on Instagram, adding that it hurt to see "irreplaceable cultural heritage" and "a piece of Danish history" on fire.



18 million people will vote for the first time in 2024. In a series, HT looks at their issues, hopes, grouses

'We need better policies to address root cause of poor education, unemployment'

Senjuti Sengupta
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KOTA: "Teacher kaun banega (who'll become a teacher)!" Since his childhood, this question has been ricocheting around in Saurabh Raj's mind, watching his father toiling away at a government primary school in Bihar's impoverished Kaimur region. Every day for the past 23 years, Saurabh's father - one of only four teachers in the school for around 250 students across eight classes - struggle to make the best out of broken furniture and airless classrooms, often failing to keep the largely poor pupils from dropping out and joining their parents in the fields or in construction sites to add a few more rupees to the family income.

full citizens of the republic will have implications not just for India's polity but also its society, economic choices and long-term future. They are as diverse as the country they inhabit, and their electoral choices and priorities will shape the course of the nation over the next few decades.



Saurabh Raj, 18
building has 35 students across three floors, around 12 cubbyholes squeezed into each floor. Sitting on a four-foot bed next to a mountain of NCERT books in Kota's Kunhera area, Saurabh only has one companion for his more carefree days in Bihar - his favourite pair of aviators. "I came to Kota considering its suitable study environment. The competition and the stress are sometimes good to perform better. But I don't find it exciting anymore. I miss my school life, friends, and family in Bihar. I want to go back, but can't," he said. "It's a sacrifice that is necessary, he is aware, but painful. "If I had better education and job opportunities in Bihar, I would have never come to Kota. Ye 'chaar-diwar' me kaun rahna chahte hai! Who wants to live in the confines of these four walls?"

has become the focal point for thousands of families from the hinterland who have poured into its narrow lanes and cramped buildings, looking for a ladder that could help their children pull their families out of a maelstrom of poverty and moribund economic opportunity. The cramped rooms that cram hundreds of students from sunrise to sunset, and sometimes even beyond, preparing them for India's highly competitive exams for engineering and medical colleges, are seen as the only viable shot at prosperity and mobility, making parents and families pile on even more pressure on young children to succeed at competitive exams. But the last few years have made it clear that many students are cracking under the pressure. In 2023, 27 students died by suicide, the highest in eight years. Many of these young people came from underprivileged families in the countryside, where a seat at a prestigious engineering or medical college is a golden ticket out of impoverishment. This year, the number is already at six. The government has responded with a list of guidelines - ceiling fans in hostels and paying guest accommodations covered with an "anti-suicide device", a mandatory screening test, alphabetical sorting of students into sections instead of a ranking-based one, limiting admissions to students in Class IX or higher, mandatory gate-keeping training for teachers, institute managers, and hostel wardens among them - but many experts have called them perfunctory and inadequate. Over the past year, Saurabh hasn't seen the guidelines make much headway. "I see neither

coaching centres nor hostel managements follow them. The government also seems inactive. We don't even expect them to do anything in this case... We need better policies and schemes addressing the root cause of poor education, unemployment and fragile economy," said Saurabh. Quelling this string of suicides is the biggest issue for Saurabh - one that will guide his first vote in Lok Sabha elections later this summer. "The problem is it is yet viewed as a mere social issue instead of a political one that can be part of a party's poll agenda. The root cause of suicide, our daily stress, and the growing obsession with JEE and NEET cannot be managed with a guidelines that nobody follows." He wants to vote for a government that will create more industries in Bihar to generate more jobs for young people. "I want the government to immediately fill up the vacant posts in several sectors, recruit more teachers and also develop infrastructure in government schools... Better economic policies instead of building a temple will also ensure lower drop-out in schools and the migration of the youth." The reason for this is simple - Saurabh is aware that the lure of Kota is also the lure of aspiration, which cannot be addressed by piecemeal intervention. "It's so funny how the government keeps blaming the parents of the suicide-victims in Kota for forcing them to pursue JEE and NEET," he fumed. "Did they leave any choice open for people like my father?"

Join the 'My First Vote' mission. See Page 9.

Cop killed, 1 injured as man goes on shooting rampage

Karn Pratap Singh
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NEW DELHI: A 44-year-old man opened fire at a flyover near Nand Nagri in northeast Delhi on Tuesday morning, killing a policeman and injuring a passerby, before he died by suicide while seated in the three-wheeler, police officers said, adding that prima facie, the incident was triggered by a financial dispute between the suspect and the policeman.

The indiscriminate gunfire on the Ashok Nagar-Meet Nagar flyover — police estimate that at least 10 rounds were fired — triggered panic on the busy stretch that connects Wazirabad with Ghaziabad, with many fearing that a terrorist attack was underway. The incident also led to traffic snarls, as many motorists took cover at first, and then gathered around the scene of the crime to try and understand what had happened.

Police identified the suspect by his first name Mukesh, a sanitation worker with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Officers said he had borrowed money from the policeman, identified as assistant sub-inspector Dinesh Sharma, 56. Amit Kumar, 30, who was riding his e-scooter at the time, was shot in the waist and is currently recuperating at AIIMS, police said.

"Our preliminary probe revealed that there was a financial dispute between the policeman and the sanitation worker. Mukesh borrowed ₹5 lakh from Sharma some years ago and was supposed to pay ₹25,000 as an instalment today (Tuesday). We have reason to believe that something happened between the two over the payment, which led to Mukesh arranging for a firearm," an investigator associated with the case said on condition of anonymity. Sharma was in civilian clothes at the time of the incident, police said.

How events unfolded
Deputy commissioner of police (northeast) Joy Tirkey said the police control room received a

Monetary dispute turns fatal

A 44-year-old man fired at least 10 rounds at a flyover near Nand Nagri on Tuesday, causing a traffic snarl as motorists on the busy stretch ran for cover

ILLUSTRATION: ASHISH DASS



Delhi Police assistant sub-inspector Dinesh Sharma meets Mukesh, and the latter sits on the policeman's bike

Sharma stops the bike on the flyover. Moments later, Mukesh shoots the policeman in the chest. A passerby is also hit



Mukesh climbs into an auto and gets the driver to ferry him at gunpoint, but a crowd gathers.

Auto driver jumps off the vehicle, Mukesh shoots himself in the head inside the vehicle.

phone call about shots being fired on the Ashok Nagar-Meet Nagar flyover at 11.42am.

Sharing the sequence of events, as pieced together via CCTV footage and testimony of witnesses, a second investigator said that Mukesh was first seen standing near one end of the flyover, and soon afterwards, Sharma was seen arriving at the spot in his motorcycle.

According to police, Mukesh hopped on the bike, and Sharma drove for 200 metres on the flyover, before stopping to the

side. "We don't know what exactly prompted Sharma to stop the bike. It is assumed that an altercation started between them, during which Mukesh got down from the bike, whipped out a gun, and opened indiscriminate fire. Sharma was hit at least twice in his chest and died," the second investigator said.

Right at that time, police said, Kumar was passing by on his e-scooter when a stray bullet hit him in the waist. In his police complaint,

Kumar, who works with a private company in Gurugram and lives in Karawal Nagar, said that after he was shot, he somehow managed to drive to the other end of the flyover, before collapsing in pain and falling off his two-wheeler.

Autorickshaw driver Mehmood Khan, 35, was also on the flyover at the time. Police said that Mukesh sat in his vehicle.

"We also recorded the statement of the auto driver, who said that when he stopped his vehicle on the flyover, the

attacker forcibly entered his vehicle, pointed a gun at him, and threatened to kill him if he did not drive him away. Khan drove the auto to the other end of the flyover, where a group of people had gathered near Kumar. As Mukesh looked outside to see if he was dead, the driver jumped off and though Mukesh fired a bullet at him, Khan escaped unhurt. After finding himself trapped, Mukesh panicked and shot himself in the head. He died in the auto," the second investigator said.

DCP Tirkey said that soon afterwards, the police team arrived at the scene and rushed Mukesh, Sharma, and Kumar to Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) hospital, where Mukesh and Sharma were declared brought dead. The two bodies were preserved at the hospital's mortuary, where the autopsy will be conducted on Wednesday, police said. Kumar underwent surgery at GTB hospital and was later referred to AIIMS for treatment. He is now out of danger, police said.

What families said

Speaking to the media at the GTB hospital mortuary, Sharma's son Anshu said that he was at home when the police informed him about his father's death.

Sharma, who was posted in the special branch (intelligence unit), is survived by four children. One of his daughters is a head constable in the city police.

Meanwhile Mukesh's wife, Meenu alias Meena, 37, who also goes by one name, said her husband lived with another woman, but visited her twice a month.

"I don't know about his financial dealings with the policeman, who had never visited my house," she said.

A relative of Mukesh's partner, who was taken into custody for questioning, said Sharma often visited her house to collect money.

"I don't know what kind of money dealings he had with her or Mukesh," the relative said.

22-year-old student dead as car falls 15ft off Gurugram flyover

Leena Dhankhar
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GURUGRAM: In a fatal incident of speeding, a 22-year-old student of a private varsity died and two others were injured when the car they were travelling in hit the road divider and fell off the Jharsa flyover, plunging around 15 feet, on the main carriageway of the Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway around 10pm on Monday.

The car was severely mangled, with eyewitnesses saying

that the trio had to be pulled out with great difficulty.

The deceased was identified as Rishab Guleria, who was driving the vehicle and died during treatment early Tuesday. He was a native of Himachal Pradesh, but had been residing in Sector 17 for the past 20 years. The injured duo was identified as Kamal Sehrawat, 23, of Sukhrali, and Naman Gujjar, 18, of Sector 31. The police said the injured persons are being treated at a private hospital in Sector 38.

The trio was heading to Rajeev Chowk after meeting a friend in Sukhrali Sector 17 when the incident took place.

Varun Dahiya, assistant commissioner of police (crime), said: "The car was speeding and the driver lost control, due to which it rrammed into the divider of the flyover and due to the impact, it fell 15 feet. The car overturned before it fell, due to which the three occupants were severely injured and suffered multiple fractures, besides other injuries."

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Man kills woman, makes her 10-year-old son clean up blood

Jignasa Sinha
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NEW DELHI: A 28-year-old man murdered a 30-year-old woman in Dwarka by strangling her and then pushing her down a flight of stairs for talking to "other men" on the phone, Delhi police officials said on Tuesday, adding that the alleged killer then forced the victim's 10-year-old son clean up the blood from the crime scene.

The accused, Sanjay Singh, from Sitapur in Uttar Pradesh, was in an extramarital relationship with the victim, and was at her house in Dwarka's Sector 23 posing as her cousin while her husband was out of town, investigating officers said.

Sanjay was arrested on April 15 and has confessed to the crime, according to senior police officials aware of the investigation.

Deputy commissioner of police Ankit Singh did not respond to repeated calls and texts.

The murder took place early on Saturday, hours after Sanjay had

arrived at her house on Friday. The victim was found lying next to the flight of stairs on Saturday morning by her neighbours and rushed to a hospital, where she was declared brought dead.

On Friday around midnight, police officers cited above said, Sanjay came to the victim's house and they had an argument over the latter talking on the phone with "other men". Sanjay told police officers that he suspected that she was involved in other relationships.

In the ensuing fight, Sanjay strangled the woman and then pushed her down a flight of stairs. The victim's two children — aged 10 years and eight — were sleeping in a room upstairs, according to the first information report (FIR) filed in the case, a copy of which has been seen by HT.

The FIR also states that Sanjay then woke up the woman's 10-year-old son, convincing the boy that his mother tripped down the steps and died. Police said Sanjay took the child to see his

mother's body and then made the child clean the blood.

The boy, the FIR states, was "scared" and believed Sanjay, whom he called "uncle".

"The 10-year-old cleaned the blood near the body and then threw the blood-soaked washcloth in the dustbin," according to the FIR.

Doctors who examined the victim's body saw multiple marks on her head and neck and informed the police, despite claims by Sanjay that the incident was an accident.

Police said the body was then sent for an autopsy and in the meantime, a team was sent to the victim's home.

"We found broken bangles, victim's slippers and other items. Our investigation revealed that someone cleaned the blood from the crime scene. A blood-stained cloth was recovered from the dustbin. Neighbours, tenants and other locals also said that Sanjay often comes to the woman's house to meet her," said an investigator.

The post-mortem report revealed that the woman had "strangulation/ligature marks" on her neck which caused her death. A police team was rushed to the woman's home and Sanjay, who was still staying there, was arrested. He confessed to the murder when quizzed by investigating officers.

"On the night of the incident, he said he went to the woman's house and found her talking on the phone with someone else. When he asked her about her friends, she didn't give him any answer and told him to mind his business. Sanjay also said that he was dating the woman for four years as her husband usually stays out of town for work..." reads the FIR.

Police said during the arguing, he strangled the woman till she died, then he pushed her body down a flight of steps in her house to make it look like an accident.

Police said the 10-year-old will be counselled and then questioned to ascertain the sequence of events.

CM SEEKS COURT NOD TO CONSULT HIS DOCTOR, ED GETS TIME TO REPLY



Arvind Kejriwal

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: A Delhi court granted time to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday to file a reply to an application moved by Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal seeking to consult with his regular doctor through video conference thrice a week.

Advocate Vivek Jain, appearing for Kejriwal, argued that his blood sugar level is fluctuating while being in custody. Thus, he needs to consult his regular doctor through video conferencing thrice a week, he added.

Special public prosecutor Simon Benjamin, appearing for ED, sought time to file a reply to the application.

Special judge Rakesh Syal granted the agency time to file the reply, and listed the matter for April 18 for further arguments on the application.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener was arrested by ED in the Delhi liquor policy case on March 21, hours after the Delhi high court dismissed his request for interim protection from arrest.

Kejriwal is the third AAP leader to be arrested in the case after Delhi's former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh. Since April 1, Kejriwal is in judicial custody, which has been extended by the court till April 23.

On April 10, the court dismissed his plea seeking to increase his legal meetings from twice a week to five times a week, noting that he has misused the time for legal meetings and passed orders through his counsels.

Family murders woman, her cousin in hate crime, calls up cops to confess

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NEW DELHI: In a familial hate crime incident, a 46-year-old man, along with his 20-year-old son, killed his 22-year-old daughter and a 35-year-old cousin, over suspicion that the two were in a relationship, on Tuesday evening in Delhi's Bhanjapura, police said.

According to the sequence of events shared by police, the father first tied up his daughter's limbs with her chunni, slit the throat of his cousin, and then attacked his daughter with the knife, killing them both. The deceased were identified as

Shaina Qureshi, and Danish Khan, and the accused as Mohd Shahid and his son Kudush Qureshi.

The father and daughter first started fighting when Shahid caught Shaina speaking to Khan on the phone. Shahid and Kudush scolded Shaina and asked her to stop talking to Danish, but she refused to do so. Shaina had come into contact with Danish when he stayed at their home for a few weeks, police said, adding that they were both unmarried.

"All the family members lived in the same house. A day or two ago, Shaina was talking to Khan over the phone when her father

Mohd Shahid caught them. He scolded Shaina and asked her to stop talking to her uncle. As she refused, Shahid planned to kill both Shaina and Danish," a police officer said.

The incident took place around 4.30pm, when Shahid and Kudush called Danish and Shaina to a room on the pretext of discussing their calls and attacked them with a knife.

Joy N Tirkey, deputy commissioner of police (northeast), said: "The accused and the deceased are fruit sellers. Shahid suspected his daughter of having an illicit relationship with her uncle. He and his son first tied up Shaina by her limbs.

The duo slit Khan's throat with a fruit knife. They then slit Shaina's throat."

At 4.40pm, Kudush called the police and informed them that he and his father killed his sister and uncle in a fit of rage. "They told us that they wanted to surrender. A team rushed to the spot and found the young woman with a deep wound to her neck. Her hands and feet were tied with a chunni and lungi. Her uncle's body was lying next to hers. He too had a deep wound on the neck," Tirkey said.

During questioning, Shahid said he was thought Shaina and Danish might clope.

DU leads the way — Miranda House, St Stephen's alumni in top 5 of UPSC

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NEW DELHI: The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) announced the results of the Civil Services Examination 2023 with two Delhi University (DU) alumni among the top five ranks.

Donuru Ananya Reddy of Telangana's Mahabubnagar, who studied at Miranda House, secured the third rank, while Ruhani (goes by one name), a Gurugram resident who attended St Stephen's, ranked fifth. Besides them, in Delhi-NCR, Noida resident Wardah Khan, a graduate of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College, secured the 18th rank.

Meanwhile, Aditya Srivastava of Uttar Pradesh, Animesh Pradhan of Odisha, and PK Sidharth Ramkumar of Kerala secured the first, second, and fourth ranks respectively.

The Civil Services Examination, which recruits officers into the country's premier government positions, such as the Indian Administrative Services (IAS), Indian Foreign Services (IFS), and Indian Police Services (IPS), saw a total of 1,016,850 candidates apply, with 592,141 appearing for the preliminary test, and 1,016 eventually being selected.

For Donuru Ananya Reddy, 22, from the remote village of Ponnekal in Telangana's Mahabubnagar district, this was her first attempt. A graduate in geography



(From left) Donuru Ananya Reddy, a graduate of Miranda House; Ruhani, a graduate of St Stephen's; and Wardah Khan, a graduate of GTB Khalsa College.



from Miranda House, Reddy prepared for the examination from home, only seeking expert coaching for anthropology in Hyderabad.

"Right from my schooling days, my ambition was to become a civil servant and serve the society," she said, expressing her joy at being the first person in her family to enter the Civil Services.

Ruhani, 28, cracked the exam for the third time — she first cracked the Indian Economics Service (IES) in 2020, and was in service for three years before sitting for the test again in 2023, during which she was selected for IPS and posted to Uttar Pradesh. She, however, continued to persevere and appeared this year for what was her sixth and last attempt — and ranked fifth.

A BA (Economics) student from St Stephen's, Ruhani completed her Master's in Economics from the Indira Gandhi National Open University in 2019. "I started pre-

paring in college... I never had fixed hours for studying," said Ruhani.

Break-up of the ranks
This year's examination saw a reduction in the number of women candidates among the top ranks, with only two in the top five, compared to last year, when women made up the top four ranks. The share of women making it to the top 25 ranks also reduced from 14 to 10 this year.

The educational qualifications of the top 25 successful candidates range from engineering, humanities, science, commerce, business administration, architecture, and law, with many hailing from premier institutions such as IITs, IIMs, NITs, University of Delhi, and national law universities.

Of the 1,016 candidates selected in all, 347 are from general category, 303 from other backward classes (OBC) categories, 115 from economically weaker section

(EWS) category, 165 from scheduled castes (SC) and 86 from scheduled tribes (ST) categories, respectively.

There are 180 vacancies for IAS officers, 37 for IPS, 200 for IPS, 613 in group A services and 113 in group B. Group A includes the bulk of the bureaucracy's services — a list that runs into 16 in all — while Group B has six, of which four are Union territory-specific administrative and police services.

Meet the topper
Srivastava, 26, an electrical engineer from IIT-Kanpur, topped the examination on his third attempt. Brought up in Lucknow, Srivastava previously secured the 236th rank in the UPSC 2022 examination and is currently undergoing training as an IPS officer in Hyderabad. "It's a proud moment for the family," said his father, Ajay Kumar Srivastava.

For second rank holder Pradhan, this was his first attempt at

the civil services examinations. The 22-year-old told HT that the arduous preparation was in the midst of caring for his mother, who had cancer and died in January. "My mother was battling cancer till her last moment for me. She wanted to see me crack UPSC, but today, when I made it, she is not here," he said.

Pradhan is a B Tech graduate in Computer Science from NIT Rourkela, remained focused on his goal. "If I can achieve success in an adverse situation, anyone can achieve it," he said, emphasizing the importance of hard work and dedication.

Two from Noida in top 20
Two Noida residents were among the top 20 rankholders in Civil Services Examination.

Swarmed by relatives, well-wishers and mediapersons, Wardah Khan, 24, was beaming with pride and joy after she learnt that she secured the 18th rank.

A BCom (Honours) student from Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Khalsa College, Khan worked in the corporate sector between 2020 and 2021, before quitting her job and starting to prepare for the civil services.

Meanwhile, Akash Verma, 29, a resident of Sector 93, secured the 20th rank. Currently in Leh as part as the training at the National Academy of Defence Financial Management Institute, Verma said this was his fourth attempt.

Alok KN Mishra

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NEW DELHI: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Tuesday named three imprisoned senior party leaders — Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and Satyendar Jain — among its list of 40 "star campaigners" in Gujarat ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

The AAP's list of star campaigners also features Delhi chief minister's wife Sunita Kejriwal — the second name on the list after Arvind Kejriwal, who is also the party's national convener. This is the first time she has been included as a star campaigner in any election the AAP has contested.

An AAP leader said Sunita Kejriwal is likely to be included in the list of star campaigners for Delhi and Haryana as well.

Another AAP functionary said that the party hopes that Kejriwal, Sisodia and Jain will walk out of jail soon, which is why they have been included as star campaigners.

The inclusion of the three incarcerated leaders underscores the party's depleted ranks, which have appeared to thin over the past few weeks, especially since Kejriwal's arrest on March 21. For instance, the AAP also named Rajya Sabha lawmaker Raghav Chadha, a senior leader who has missed all of the party's rallies and protests since he left for the United Kingdom for a surgery.



Arvind Kejriwal



Sunita Kejriwal

To be sure, the Rajya Sabha member from Punjab, considered a close aide of CM Kejriwal who has handled important roles in the party, has been vocal on X about the chief minister's arrest, and has changed his profile photo on the social media platform to that of Kejriwal behind bars, in consonance with the party line.

However, his protracted absence and delayed return to India has fuelled speculation about his political future.

Gujarat, which elects 26 MPs to the Lok Sabha, is scheduled to go to the polls in a single phase on May 7. The AAP will contest two seats in the state — Bharuch and Bhavnagar.

The BJP said the AAP was facing a "shortage of star campaigners".

Other leaders included on the list include Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann; AAP national secretary Pankaj Gupta, parliamentarians Sanjay Singh and Sandeep Pathak; Delhi ministers Atishi, Saurabh Bharadwaj,

Gopal Rai, Kailash Gahlot, and Imran Hussain; Punjab AAP legislator Aman Arora; and Gujarat AAP leaders Isudhan Gadhvi and Gopal Italia.

One noticeable name not on the AAP list is Rajya Sabha member Swati Malviwal, who made a name for herself as a street fighter during her stint as the chief of the Delhi Commission for Women. She left for the United States to attend to her ailing sister and is yet to return.

The AAP functionary quoted above said Malviwal did not feature in the list for Gujarat because she is an MP from Delhi, and has not been active in the western state.

The functionary added that she is, however, likely to feature in the list of star campaigners for Delhi.

BJP leader Arun Singh said, "Every party has the right to name whoever they want as star campaigners. They (AAP) are having a shortage of star campaigners now, so they have to name someone."

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Fresh row brewing between LG, AAP over 'water crisis'

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NEW DELHI: Water supply in Delhi became the latest flashpoint in the ongoing feud between lieutenant governor VK Saxena and the Aam Aadmi Party, with the LG flagging "water scarcity" in the city and attributing it to the "failure" of the state government, while the AAP said the communicate was an "unfortunate missive" that was "intended for optics".

On Saturday, a 15-year-old girl stabbed to death her 34-year-old neighbour in Farsh Bazar, Shahdara following a fight over the order of filling water from a common tap. The following day, AAP leader Atishi wrote to Saxena, demanding the suspension of the Delhi Jal Board CEO and disciplinary action against officials with the water utility.

Weighing in on the matter, Saxena on Tuesday wrote an open letter to chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, holding the Delhi government responsible for a water supply crisis in the Capital. The LG said that the open letter was required since direct communication with Kejriwal — currently lodged in Tihar jail — is

not possible.

"This unfortunate incident is not the only such case in Delhi, but many such incidents over water scarcity have happened in the past primarily due to the failure of the government. Such instances have become a recurrent phenomenon year after year and have been widely reported over the last ten years. Water woes in the Capital, especially in settlements where the poor live, have exacerbated over the last decade," he wrote, calling Atishi's statement about inadequate water supply as the cause of the Farsh Bazar incident "a prima facie admission of guilt, inaction, and inefficiency".

In response, Atishi, the water minister, said the LG's letter was aimed at the "beratement of elected government".

"The LG's letter has come only in response to the demand to suspend an officer who has repeatedly refused to carry out duties which would have averted the crisis the Capital faces this summer. The crisis has been artificially created... LG has the power to change the CEO," she wrote.

DJB officials did not respond to queries for comment.

EXCISE CASE: AAP SAYS NEW STORY FABRICATED AFTER FRESH ED ARREST

NEW DELHI: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Tuesday slammed the BJP, a day after the Enforcement Directorate arrested Chanpreet Singh, an individual who managed AAP's funds for Goa assembly elections 2022 that were allegedly procured through bribes in the Delhi excise policy 2021-22.

"BJP fabricates a new story every day to portray Arvind Kejriwal and AAP as corrupt. Despite this, the people of Delhi and country are not ready to accept that Arvind Kejriwal is involved in corruption. Chanpreet Singh, who was arrested by CBI last year and granted bail, has now been arrested by ED. The court had granted bail due to lack of evidence. ED and CBI do not have evidence on basis of which they can pursue this so-called case further," Bharadwaj said in a press conference at AAP headquarters.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said with every passing day Kejriwal and his government is losing public connect. "His (Bharadwaj's) claim that Chanpreet Singh is innocent is a concocted statement. He has made similar claims after every arrest but every leader has failed to get bail justifying the grounds of arrest," he said. **HTC**

AAP AIMS TO BUILD VOTER CONNECT IN 2ND PHASE OF LOK SABHA CAMPAIGN

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NEW DELHI: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Tuesday marked the start of the second phase of its 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se' campaign from Trilokpuri, which falls under the East Delhi Lok Sabha seat, with AAP Delhi convener Gopal Rai administered oath to the public "to remove dictatorial BJP government".

The meeting on the day was part of the 200 'sankalp sabhas' it plans to hold across the four Lok Sabha constituencies to seek support for jailed Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal.

"The BJP knows that if Arvind Kejriwal is out, the India bloc will win all seven seats in Delhi. That is why PM Narendra Modi has put Kejriwal in jail during the elections. Arvind Kejriwal provided free electricity, water, good schools and hospitals to Delhiites, and now announced to give every woman in Delhi ₹1,000 per month. It is time to not remain silent anymore. Standing with Arvind Kejriwal is the right thing to do," Rai said in his address.

Delhi BJP spokesperson Praveen Shankar Kapoor said that the first 'sankalp sabha' was a flop. "AAP leaders are tired and have lost hope after Arvind Kejriwal was arrested in the excise case because the entire AAP leadership has been exposed. Manish Sisodia has not been given bail since 2023," he said.

JJP shares 5 picks for Hry; rapper to contest Ggm seat

Abhishek Behl

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GURUGRAM: The Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) on Tuesday released a list of five nominees for the Lok Sabha polls in Haryana, and fielded singer and rapper Rahul Yadav, popularly known as Fazilpuria, as the Lok Sabha candidate for the Gurugram parliamentary seat.

Fazilpuria, 34, is from the Fazilpur Jharsa village in Gurugram district and shot to fame for his song in the Bollywood movie, *Kapoor & Sons*. He will face off against Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate and incumbent MP Rao Inderjit Singh.

The Congress is yet to announce its candidate for Gurugram.

Speaking to the media after his name was announced as the JJP nominee for Gurugram, Fazilpuria said, "I dedicate my candidature to the youth of the constituency whom I represent. In politics, I am ready for hard work and struggle."

JJP general secretary Digvijay Chautala said that the JJP candidates will give a tough fight to their opponents. "The five party candidates are connected with the grassroots. All party workers are motivated and are working hard to ensure JJP's victory in the Lok Sabha polls," he added.



Rahul Yadav, aka Fazilpuria

The party has nominated Naina Singh Chautala, the mother of Dushyant Chautala, from Hisar. She is currently an MLA from Badhra assembly.

Ramesh Khatak will be the party candidate from Sirsa Lok Sabha seat. Khatak was MLA from Baroda in 1991, 1996 and 2000. Currently, Khatak is the state president party's Scheduled Caste cell, a party functionary said.

JJP has fielded veteran party leader Rao Bahadur Singh from Bhiwani-Mahendragarh Lok Sabha seat. He was elected as an MLA from Nangal Chaudhary in 2009. In 2014 Lok Sabha elections, he contested from the Bhiwani-Mahendragarh seat and stood second, the party said.

From Faridabad the party has nominated Nalin Hooda as the candidate.

Hooda is the JJP youth president of the Faridabad district unit, the party said.

MCD brings in experts for big Town Hall revamp

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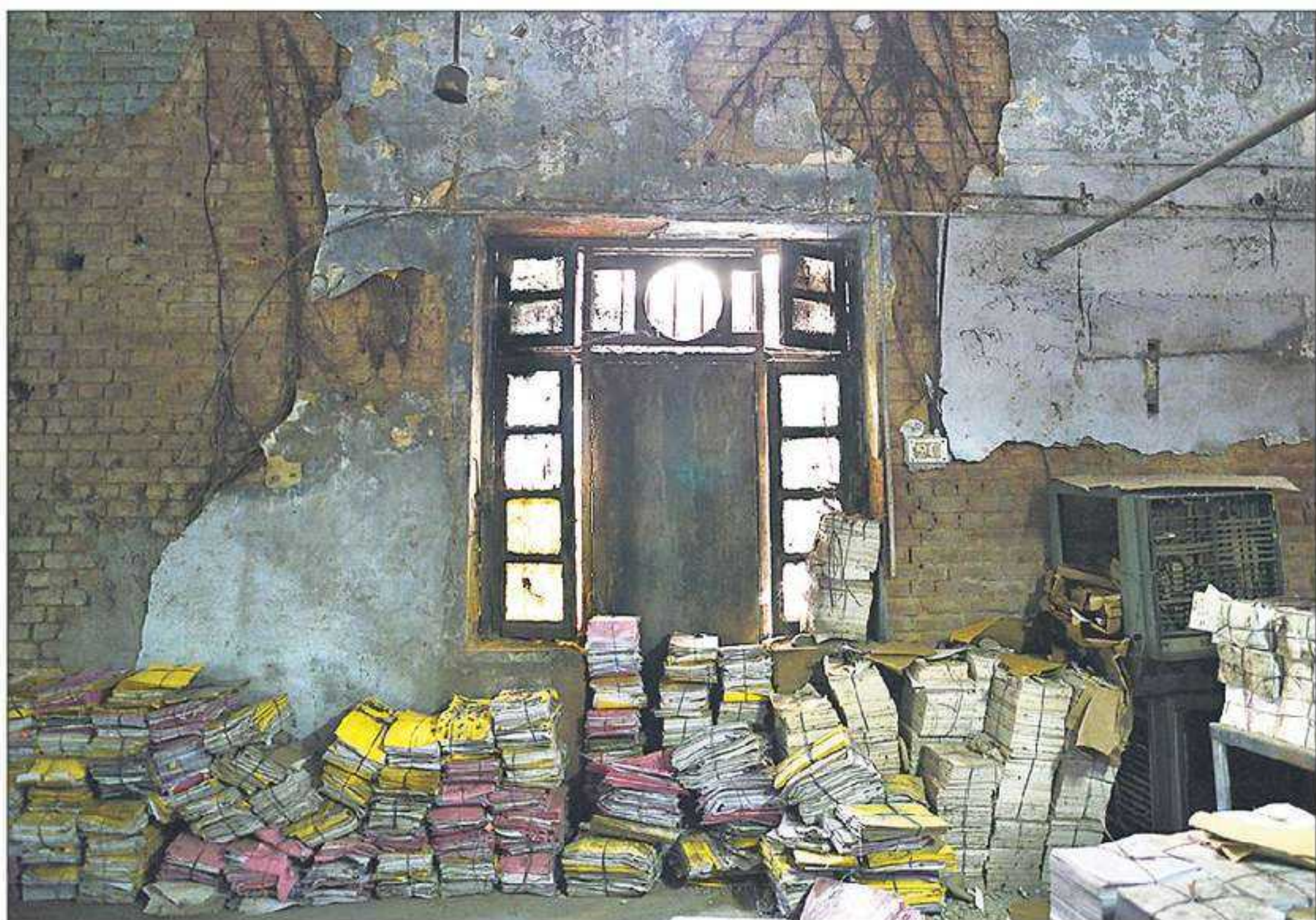
NEW DELHI: The Municipal Corporation of Delhi is collaborating with the Aga Khan Trust to restore of the Town Hall building at Chandni Chowk even as the civic body has roped in the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) to develop a municipal museum and conserve rare documents and artefacts, officials said on Tuesday.

The construction of the Town Hall building at Chandni Chowk was completed in 1866, and the municipality operated from the iconic building for 145 years till 2011-12 before shifting to the new municipal headquarters at the Civic Centre on Minto Road.

The building has since been lying vacant with some portions damaged due to lack of maintenance. Now, officials said, the civic body not only plans to restore the original structure but also develop a municipal museum in the old Press building section of the complex.

A senior MCD official associated with the restoration project said that the work has started on restoration of the Town Hall building as well as conserving rare artefacts that will be displayed in the municipal museum.

"A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed with IGCA for the restoration of artefacts and rare documents which are in MCD's possession for the last 160 years. There are hundreds of artefacts which are in very poor condition, and they have been taken out from storage. IGCA



(Left) The dilapidated old Press building at Town Hall (above). MCD proposes to turn the Press building into a museum where the civic body plans to display rare records and artefacts from its archives.

has the expertise in restoring them as they have carried out similar projects. After restoration, the artefacts will be displayed in the MCD museum," the official who spoke on condition of anonymity added.

Restoration plan
Even as the municipal museum project will be steered by IGCA, a second MOU has been signed for the restoration of the Town hall building complex with the Aga Khan Trust which had also worked on conservation of Humanyu's Tomb and Sunder Nursery and both the projects will proceed simultaneously, a second MCD official said.

This official said that the Aga Khan Trust has carried out the survey of the Town Hall build-

ing to assess the damage, weak portions and scale of strengthening required. "Based on this survey, they will submit a report which will be the basis of the estimate required for executing the restoration project. The Aga Khan Trust will carry out the consultancy and MCD will implement the project," the official added.

MCD says that the survey report is expected to be finalised in 1-2 months, and the overall project may take nine to 10 months to complete. "The heritage buildings need specific interventions. We can't use modern plaster and techniques to restore the building. For instance, we will have to deploy similar lime mixtures which were used during the construction of the building.

The Trust will guide us to execute specialised works," the official added.

To be sure, this is not the first attempt by MCD to restore the Town Hall complex. Several plans have been floated since 2012 to turn the building into a museum, library and hotel. Last year, the civic body planned to seek help from the Union ministry of culture to restore the building. Earlier, the erstwhile North MCD floated tenders to invite private players to turn the heritage structure into a hotel. However, all these plans were never executed.

Ratish Nanda, CEO, Aga Khan Trust for Culture India, said: "We have a longstanding partnership with MCD of almost 20 years. To support

their efforts, we are preparing the conservation plan for the Town Hall building. It will be submitted in two weeks."

Sohail Hashmi, a chronicler of Delhi's history and heritage conservationist, said that the site of Town Hall used to host the caravan sarai of Begum Jahanara, and when the British took over the city, they wanted to remove the symbol of powers belonging to the Mughal empire. "The caravan sarai of Begum Jahanara was razed and the Begum ka Bagh was renamed as Company Bagh. The caravan sarai was replaced by a new building which then housed the Delhi Institute on the ground floor and a club for the Europeans on the first floor. Later, it was named as Town Hall," he said.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi, which was constituted in 1863, bought the building from various people who contributed money for the construction for ₹1.35,457 in 1866, senior officials of the MCD's Heritage Cell said.

Earlier plan
Hashmi said that in 2012, after being approached by MCD, he along with historian Narayani Gupta, conservation activist Anisha Shekhar and food expert Rahul Verma, jointly submitted a proposal to turn sections of Town Hall building into a library, restaurant, cultural centre and a boutique hotel. "The plan was to turn the ground floor into a library focusing on city history with collection of all books published about Delhi and its peo-

ple. The Europeans had a club on first floor so we had proposed restaurants and site for regular food festivals. A space was earmarked for holding public concerts and musical events and the Chowki building in the Town Hall complex was to be turned into a boutique hotel. But the plan was put into the cold storage after the change of government in 2014. The plan would've ensured continuity, with activities that were happening in the building in the early days," he added.

According to the latest proposal, the MCD plans to convert the Old Press building into a municipal museum, tracing the 160 years of evolution of the city and the municipality.

An MCD official said that the corporation has a number of printing presses which were imported from London. "We are working on turning the 'Press building' into the municipal museum of Delhi. Before the Delhi government was set up, the Town Hall complex was used to receive the visiting foreign dignitaries. We have a collection of signatures and messages written by these dignitaries such as Zhou Enlai writing "Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai" in 1956 to messages from Queen Elizabeth's royal tour in 1961," the official added.

MCD's heritage cell is coordinating the setting up of the museum which will have several galleries -- municipal artefacts and souvenirs from other countries, evolution of the municipal press, rare paintings, tickets and banners for public messages ranging from vaccination before 1948 Kumbh Mela to framing guidelines for birth registration.

Rare Walled City sketches to be restored

Senior municipal officials said the "Wilson Papers" are the first tranche of rare municipal documents that have been handed over to the IGCA for restoration, and once ready, will be displayed in the MCD museum. An official associated with the project said that "Wilson Papers" are part of the "Wilson Survey Report" which was commissioned by MCD in 1910-11. The report, according to officials, is a compilation of maps and drawings of the city of Shahjahanabad.

MCD officials said that the "Wilson Report" has 200-odd sketches made by the then British town planner JW Wilson as part of a survey of the Walled City. The survey was commissioned by the MCD and it formed the blueprint for town planning for decades.

"The entire batch of maps and drawings related to the Wilson Papers has been handed over to the IGCA experts for restoration. The sheets were found in our storage. These papers are more than a century old and need extra care," the official added.

Mercury to rise before weekend rainfall

NEW DELHI: The maximum temperature on Tuesday reached 35.8°C — giving way to clear skies after a weekend of overcast conditions and intermittent rain — up from the maximum temperature of 33.2°C recorded a day before.

While Tuesday's temperature was one degree below the normal, it is expected to rise quickly and touch 38°C by

Thursday, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

IMD predicted that the temperature rise will be followed by another western disturbance, bringing light rainfall and gusty winds of up to 40kmph to Delhi-NCR. This spell of rain is likely to once again bring down mercury in Delhi, keeping the maximum to around 34-36°C over

the weekend, IMD said. "The western disturbance will begin to impact northwest India from Thursday and continue till Sunday. However, it will mainly bring rain to the mountains. In the plains, its impact will be limited to just one day, on Friday, and there are chances of light rain. We will see overcast skies and wind speed may touch 40 km per

hour," said Kuldeep Srivastava, scientist at IMD.

So far, Delhi has received 2.9mm of rainfall this month, against the long-period April average of 16.3mm. Last year, Delhi recorded 20.1mm of rainfall in April.

Delhi is yet to cross the 40°C mark this year, which it normally does between the second and third weeks of April. HT

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F.No.2-3(7)/R&P/2024 Dated: 16th April 2024
VACANCY NOTIFICATION

Two (02) contractual positions of Young Professional-1 in the Global CoE on Millets Project is proposed to be filled through walk-in-interview on 08.05.2024 from 10:00 AM onwards. Corrigendum if any will be published/uploaded on the Institute website only. Interested candidates may visit our website www.cirg.res.in for details.

(P.K. Sharma)
In-charge (R&P Cell)

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RECRUITMENT NOTICE

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CORRIGENDUM FOR PURCHASE OF POWER UNDER LONG TERM PROCUREMENT AGAINST TENDER SPECIFICATION No. 12/CE(COMM)/UPCL-12/LTPP/2023

It is to inform that some amendment/modifications have been made by UPCL in tender specification No. 12/CE (COMM)/UPCL-12/LTPP/2023 and the detailed amendment/modifications can be read/studied completely in official website of UPCL i.e. www.upcl.org and website of MSTC India Limited i.e. www.mstc.com/mstc.com. All other terms and conditions shall remain unchanged. No.: 181/EE(CM)/UPCL/A-2, Dated: 16.04.2024 SE(COMMERCIAL)

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पावर ट्रांसमिशन कारपोरेशन ऑफ उत्तराखण्ड लि
(उत्तराखण्ड सरकार का उपकरण)
कार्पोरेट ऑफिस: अजयपुर, 400 के.टी. रोड, पंचकुला, हरियाणा (पी.ओ. 151001)
400 के.टी. रोड, पंचकुला, हरियाणा, पी.ओ.-पंचकुला, पिनकोड (पी.ओ.)-246125
सोर्सिंग नं. : 01988117935, Email: se@upcl.org, www.upcl.org, CIN: U41101UR200205022687

पत्रांक : 310 / अमीय/पि (परिचय/संग्रह) / श्रीनगर/निविदा दिनांक : 15/04/2024
ई-निविदा संशोधन-1

400 के.टी. रोड परिसर एवं अनुसंधान मण्डल कार्यालय, श्रीनगर द्वारा "SHIFTING OF 66 KV KOTHIALSAIN-JOSHIMATH TRANSMISSION LINE NEAR NTPC CAMPUS ANIMATH" कार्य हेतु आमंत्रित ई-निविदा सं-30/SE(O&MS)/2023-24 के जमा करने की तिथि दिनांक 06.05.2024 को 17:00 बजे तक विस्तारित की जाती है जो कि दिनांक 07.05.2024 को 16:00 बजे खोली जायेगी। ई-निविदा सम्बन्धी अन्य नियम व शर्तें यथावत लागू रहेंगी। निविदा से सम्बन्धित विस्तृत जानकारी वेबसाइट www.uktenders.gov.in से प्राप्त की जा सकती है।
अधीक्षण अभियन्ता, परिचय एवं अनु मण्डल, श्रीनगर (ग)
"सम्पत्ति में कर्जा बचाये।"

NORTHERN RAILWAY
OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE

No. 128-W/280/e Tender Notice/NIT/16/2024-25/W-3 Dated: -15.04.2024
The Sr. Divisional Engineer-III, Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites E-Tender for the following work:

1 Name of work	Annual operation and maintenance of track in the section of SSE/Pwaj/SSB under ADENI/Delhi
2 Approx cost of work	Rs. 98,89,479.44/- (Rupees Ninety Eight Lakh Eighty Nine Thousand Four Hundred Seventy Nine and Forty Four Paise only)
3 Earnest Money to be Deposited	Rs. 1,97,800/- (One Lakh Ninety Seven Thousand Eight Hundred Rupees)
4 Cost of tender document	Rs. 0.00/-
5 Date & Time of submission of tender bid and opening of tender	03.05.2024 at 15:00 Hrs.
6 Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in

* The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for participating in the e-tender system. * For all terms and conditions please refer tender document. * No manual offers are acceptable. * Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only.

1137/24
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY
PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON SEE SECTION 82 Cr. PC

Where as complaint has been made before me that accused Vijay @ Vijender S/o Sh. Jai Singh, Age-44 yrs, R/o Village - Devdu, PS+Distt-Sonapat (Haryana), Present Address: Awaragard Footpath Turkmaan Gate, Delhi has committed (or is suspected to has committed) the offence in case CC No. 11/2021 Date 19.07.2021 U/S 3RP(UP) Act at Railway Protection Force Post, Delhi Lahori Gate which is punishable and a warrant of arrest issued there upon has been returned unexecuted stating that the said accused Vijay can not be found and where it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused Vijay has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said Vijay is required to appear before this court to answer the complaint on 27.08.2024.

By order
Shri Chatinder Singh
Metropolitan Magistrate
Tis Hazari Court, Delhi

1143/2024
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE
(Through e-tendering)

Name of work with its location	Comprehensive Annual maintenance Contract of SSDAC of GG Tronics make for three years.
App. Cost of the work (₹)	₹1,82,68,227.24/- only
Bid Security (₹)	₹2,41,300/- only
Address of the office	Senior Divisional Signal & Telecom Engineer-C, Northern Railway, 3 rd Floor, Annex-1, DRM Office, New Delhi-110 055.
Date & Time for upload the tender / closing of tender	Tender uploading 16.04.2024/ closing date & time: 08.05.2024 up to 15.00 hrs.
Website particular & notice board location where complete details of the tender can be seen etc.	See the Northern Railway website www.ireps.gov.in & Notice board at S&T branch, 3 rd Floor, DRM office, State Entry Road, New Delhi-110 055.
Tender No. 558-Sig/16/M/Tender/AMC/084/2024-25 Dated : 16.04.2024	1145/2024

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTHERN RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE

The Dy. Chief Engineer/TMC/Line, Northern Railway, State Entry Road, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India invites Open E-tender under One Packet System for the under noted work:-

- Name of work and location : POH of Track Machines UTV, 2001, 2002, 2004, 3061 and 10072 at TMMD KKDE, LKO and TKD working under Dy.CE/TMC/Line/NR.
- Completion period of the work : 08 Months
- Approx. Cost of work : Rs. 2,38,90,909.88
- Earnest Money amount (to be deposited online) : Rs. 2,69,500.00
- Cost of Tender Document (to be deposited online): Rs. Nil
- Date & Time for submission of E-tender and opening of tender : Tender document remain available on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in from 16.04.2024 upto 15:00 Hrs. on 07.05.2024. Tender Bids may be uploaded from 23.04.2024 & upto 15:00 hrs. on 07.05.2024 on IREPS website. The tender will be opened soon after 15:00 hrs. on 07.05.2024.
- Detailed Tender Notice & Tender Document : The detailed tender document is available on www.ireps.gov.in. Above tender document will be available for online submission of offer on IREPS website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in from 16.04.2024 to 07.05.2024. All other terms and conditions in respect of above tenders are given in tender document. The detailed tender notice also can be seen on the Notice Board of the above office.

No.: 1-W-Dy.CETMCL-UTV-01-24-25 Dated: 16.04.2024 1139/2024
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

NORTH CENTRAL RAILWAY
No. Dy. CE/C/AGC/TN/2024/07 Dated: 15/04/2024
1st Corrigendum

Following modification in above tender notice is made in tender No. Dy. CE/C/AGC/TN/2024/07 dated 12.04.2024. NIT Header-Field Name-Pre-Bid Required-Existing Value: No.Modified Value:Yes, Pre-Bid Query Date Time:Existing Value:---,Modified Value: 22/04/2024 12:00 661/24(DG)

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Public Notice

Notice is hereby given that Glaze Trading India Pvt. Ltd. (CIN: U51909DL2004PTC125198), a company registered under the Companies Act, 1956 having its registered office in New Delhi, is transferring its Galway Business of Direct Selling to its wholly-owned subsidiary company M/s Leadvision Trading (India) Pvt. Ltd. on the going concern basis, with effect from 01/05/2024.

The registration of all direct sellers of Glaze will be transferred to Leadvision Trading (India) Pvt. Ltd. with existing/same ID code, effective from 1st May 2024.

You are requested to please refer to the Company's website www.glazegalway.com for more details. If you have any questions or concerns during this transition, please do not hesitate to contact us within 15 days. Please feel free to contact us at cc@glazegalway.com

Date: 17/04/2024
Place: New Delhi

For Glaze Trading India Pvt. Ltd.
Sd/-
Mr. Sarabjeet Singh Arreja (Director)

भारत निर्वाचन आयोग
Election Commission of India

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CBCE32101/13/0008/2425

PWD seeks police nod for repairs at Sarita Vihar flyover for 2 mnths

HT Correspondent

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Delhi public works department (PWD) plans to shut parts of the Sarita Vihar flyover on Mathura Road in southeast Delhi for repairs early next week for at least two months, with commuters consequently expected to face significant traffic snarls on the crucial stretch, even as the agency has asked the traffic police to make alternative arrangements.

According to a senior Delhi traffic police officer, PWD has said the repairs will be carried out for 60 days over four phases from the first week of May.

However, the no-objection certificate (NoC) will be issued only after PWD notifies a plan for traffic management during the repairs.

"According to PWD officials, it will take 30 days to repair each carriageway. The stretch from Ashram to Badarpur will be repaired in the first and second phases, while the repair work will



The Sarita Vihar flyover is 23 years old.

HT ARCHIVE

be carried out on the stretch from Badarpur to Ashram in third and fourth phases. However, the flyover will never be shut completely as half of a lane of the carriageway would be open for traffic," the traffic policeman said, asking not to be named.

The PWD has been asked to inform the public through media

platforms at least a week before commencing the work, the cop said. The proposed partial closure of the flyover will affect thousands of daily commuters, triggering snarls along the busy Mathura road, besides residents of Badarpur, Jaitpur, Kalindi Kunj and New Friends Colony. Last year, Mathura Road and its adjoining stretches faced traffic

chaos for nearly two months due to work on the Ashram flyover extension.

PWD officials said that the Sarita Vihar flyover was built in 2001, about 23 years ago, by the Delhi Development Authority and is in urgent need of repairs.

"There are seven parallel expansion joints along the flyover that need to be replaced. So, 28 such metal plates will be replaced, seven in each lane. Each carriageway will need to be closed for 25-30 days. After the expansion joints are replaced, there will be a concrete cover and blacktopping, followed by curing that will take about 10 days," a PWD official said.

PWD officials said they have sought approval to begin repairs along this flyover at least twice before in the last one year.

"They said that they adopted the strategy of closing one lane at a given time midway through the repair work along Chirag Delhi flyover, though this did little to alleviate traffic troubles in the area.

HC TO CENTRE: NOTE OBJECTIONS OVER CIRCULAR ON DOG BREEDS

Press Trust of India

letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: The Delhi high court on Tuesday asked the Centre to consider objections raised by stakeholders on a fresh draft notification before imposing a ban on sale and breeding of several dog breeds.

The high court passed the order after the counsel for the central government admitted that except for government bodies, no private entity or stakeholder was heard before the earlier notification was issued.

"Since it is not possible to give an oral hearing to each and every dog owner, this court directs the Union of India to issue a public notice on its official website and one national daily inviting objections to the proposed draft notification/amendment to the rules," a bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora said.

The high court said the objections filed in response to the government's advertisement/notice published on its website and newspaper shall be considered before finalising the notification.

The court passed the order while disposing of a batch of petitions challenging the Centre's March 12 notification on the ground that the ban was imposed on 23 dog breeds without consulting or inviting objections and suggestions from stakeholders.

DJB, MCD indulge in blame game as south Delhi drain raises stink

Jasveer Gandhiok

jasveer.gandhiok@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI: In separate submissions to the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) blamed each other for a lack of improvement in the water quality of south Delhi's Kushak drain.

MCD said it was regularly undertaking de-silting drives to clean up the drain, but an improvement in its quality, including eradicating the foul smell, would only be possible once the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) is able to stop sewage from flowing into the drain. DJB, in a separate submission, said it was the MCD's failure to check expanding unauthorised colonies that was leading to increased sewage flow into the drain. It also said that as MCD had covered the Kushak drain along its course, it was trapping toxic gases and giving out a foul smell.

The two bodies were responding to NGT's order issued last week in which both DJB and MCD were asked why interim compensation should not be imposed on either of the two bodies for failing to perform their duties. NGT said that despite both bodies setting a timeline of March 31, it was still as polluted as ever.

MCD, in its submission on April 12, said it was carrying out

de-silting of all drains, including the Kushak drain, in two phases — the first from January 15 and the second from October 1.

"It is pertinent to mention that de-silting of drains is a continuous process and as per policy, desilting is carried out throughout the year. It is submitted that department maintained water flow in drain regularly and checked quantum of silt from time to time. The foul smell or gases emitting from the flowing sewage water cannot be stopped until the DJB traps the entire sewage water from the upstream catchment areas," MCD said.

DJB, in its submission dated April 15, hit back at MCD, listing three primary causes behind pollution in the drain.

"The discharge of sewage is from unauthorised colonies such as Chhatrapur, Mehrauli around Saidulajab, Devli, Khanpur, Sangam Vihar and Dakshin-puri Extension into the storm-water drain, the unauthorised construction for which MCD could not control... "Secondly, improper desilting of drains due to covering of the drain by MCD. The desilting of the drain is the sole responsibility of MCD.

"Moreover, MCD has constructed concrete chambers which are interconnected in the drain in question, therefore, cleaning or de-silting has become difficult," DJB said.

DDA PLANS TO FIX NARELA ROADS AND STREETLIGHTS

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has prepared a plan to start repair of roads and streetlights in the Narela area of north Delhi. Based on recommendations from a consultant, the land-owning agency has started taking steps to improve the civic facilities in Narela, officials aware said on Tuesday.

With the proposed Metro line for the area yet to be approved, DDA is working on other civic infrastructure projects to improve the area's security. "Work was moving at a snail's pace in Narela, but has now picked up. We will ensure that it is completed within the next five to six months," said an official on condition of anonymity.

"The area has not been transformed into a town or city with good facilities. There are hardly any good schools and just one government hospital with bare minimum services," said Pardeep Khatri, a lawyer who lives in Narela. **HTC**

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY E-Tendering Notice No. 20/2024

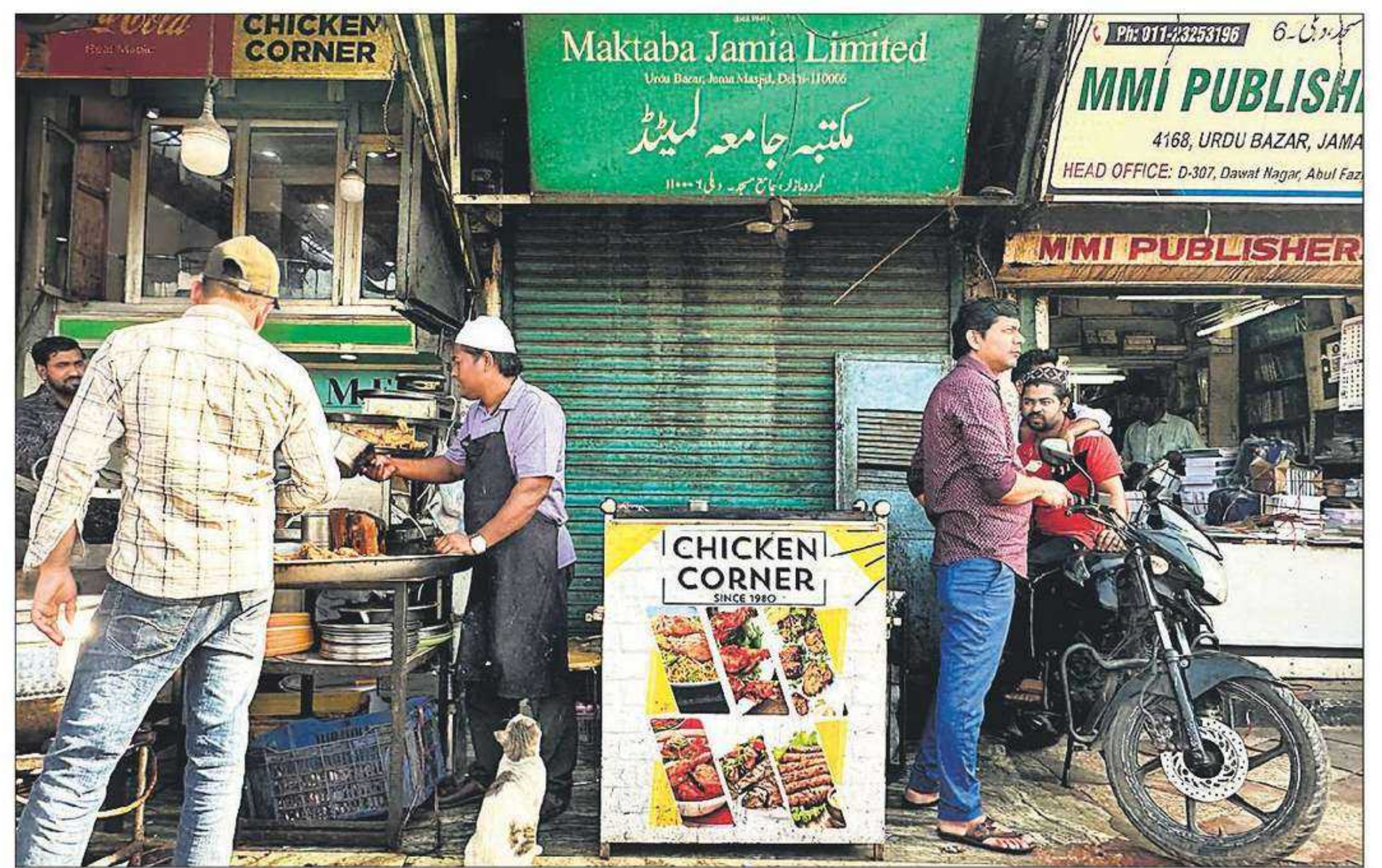
Divisional Railway Manager (Engg.) N.E. Railways Izzatnagar For and on behalf of President of India invites "OPEN" e-tender through Online (E-Tendering) for the following work. **S.No. 1; Description of Work:** Covered shed of size 90x20 meter including foundation at store depo/12N; **Approx. Value(₹):** ₹2,86,35,237.31; **E.M.D. money(₹):** ₹2,93,200/-; **Cost of Tender Forms:** ₹Nil; **Completion time/period from the date of issue of acceptance letter:** 09 Months; **S.No. 2; Description of Work:** Clutterback ganj other than track work for Provision of 600M new stabling line extension of existing stable line and washing line up to 600M and making shunting neck at CBJ end. Under sanction work of Clutterback ganj Provision of 600M new stabling line extension of existing stable line and washing line up to 600M and making shunting neck at CBJ end.; **Approx. Value(₹):** ₹3,47,900/-; **Cost of Tender Forms:** ₹Nil; **Completion time/period from the date of issue of acceptance letter:** 12 Months; **S.No. 3; Description of Work:** CBJ Track work for Provision of 600M new stabling line extension of existing stable line and washing line up to 600M and making shunting neck at CBJ end. Under sanction work Clutterback ganj. Provision of 600M new stabling line extension of existing stable line and washing line up to 600M and making shunting neck at CBJ end.; **Approx. Value(₹):** ₹49,18,934.77; **E.M.D. money(₹):** ₹98,400/-; **Cost of Tender Forms:** ₹Nil; **Completion time/period from the date of issue of acceptance letter:** 09 Months. 1. Online e-tender can be submitted up to 15:00 hrs. of dated 10.05.2024. 2. For full details and submission of bid please see the Indian Railway IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in Divisional Railway Manager (Engg.) CPROW-17 Izzatnagar DO NOT SMOKE BIDI/CIGARETTE IN TRAINS

Delhiwale

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Mayank Austen Soofi



Chicken Corner and a bookstore

In search of landmarks lost

PUBLIC INTEREST

Chicken Corner. Is this what the great bookstore has become? No disrespect to the pavement eatery, but it is right outside the bookstore, blocking the access to the shuttered front (see photo). Maktaba Jamia Limited has been closed for more than a month, since the beginning of the Ramzan, says the eatery cook. The assertion is confirmed by a staffer at the next-door shop.

Founded in 1949, this Old Delhi landmark in Urdu Bazar is governed by a board. Late last year, it triggered waves of chest beating lamentations when it shut down for a few days. Sentimental eulogies even popped up on Facebook. The bookstore reopened following the uproar.

Similarly iconic bookstores elsewhere in the city never re-opened after downing their shutters, permanently replaced by their own metaphorical Chicken Corner.

Take Fact & Fiction at the Basant Lok market. It is now a shoe shop. Opened in 1984, no other place in the Capital offered such a diverse range of thoughtful selections of books in literary fiction, religion, cinema, philosophy, travel, music, science, wild life, cookery, ecology, economics and poetry. Owner Ajit Vikram Singh, a jazz aficionado, was polite to genuine readers and to those who at least knew how

to properly hold a book, but was less patient with others. A notice pasted on the door warned—'No Food or Drink'. The shop closed in 2015.

Or, take The Bookworm at Connaught Place. It is now a clothes showroom. Long ago, it used to be a liquor shop before its jazz-loving owner Anil Arora converted it into a bookstore in 1977, which quickly became CP's cultural landmark. Old timers lovingly recall the spiral staircase that went up to the mezzanine floor's esteemed collection of cinema books. The two shop assistants gladly gave books on credit to regulars, never embarrassing them by payment reminders. The shop closed in 2008.

CP had two more iconic bookstores, next to each other. New Book Depot, founded in 1925 by a French couple, and later passing into Indian ownership, was closed by bookseller Rakesh Chandra in 2012. Galgotia & Sons, opened by Bhagwat Dayal in 1933, was closed by bookseller Radha Krishna Galgotia in 2015. Both the shops are now a single showroom hosting the outlet of a clothing multinational.

Coming back to Maktaba Jamia Limited, its long-time attendant Ali Khuroo Zaidi—a living encyclopaedia of Urdu literature—is a legend in the world of Delhi bookstores. Speaking over the phone from his home in Chand Bagh, the erudite soft-spoken gen, who started manning the Maktaba in 1978, says he quit the job in February. Irrespective of the bookstore's eventual fate, his departure ends an era.



READ: For more stories by Mayank Austen Soofi, scan the QR code

FROM PAGE 1

JHELUM BOAT ACCIDENT

They were looking for three missing people — Farhan Waseem Parry (7), Showkat Ahmad Sheikh (40) and his son Haziz Showkat (9) — deep into Tuesday evening. Parry's mother was among those rescued.

All the children on board study in the Kendriya Vidyalaya in Sonwar across the river.

The boat overturned around 8am as the wooden boat, roughly 15-feet long and seven-feet wide, headed east from Gandabal towards Batwara, with 15 passengers on board, said Srinagar deputy commissioner Bilal Bhat.

Survivors pointed out that the two banks were just 500m apart, but that they were forced to make the treacherous trip across in rickety boats because the nearest bridge is 2km away. They also added that a footbridge, adjacent to the accident spot, has been under construction for eight years.

The small vessel had no motor and its crew propelled it between the riverbanks by pulling a rope fixed at both ends.

Eyewitnesses said the Jhelum's violent currents snapped the rope, pushed the boat into an iron pillar erected in the waters for the bridge, breaking it in two instantly.

Over 70mm of rain has pummelled Kashmir Valley since Saturday, pushing the river's level to 15 feet, close to the warning level of 18 feet. Officials said the river's level is usually far lower than it was on Tuesday morning, throwing boaters off guard.

"Fifteen people were in the boat when it capsized. Six people were rescued and six bodies were retrieved till afternoon. A search is on for three missing people," Bhat said.

Local residents jumped in to save the passengers, said officials, and were soon joined by National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and police teams.

Srinagar senior superintendent of police Ashish Mishra said the river's sharp currents were impeding rescue efforts.

"The water is turbid and there are under- and over-currents, so there are difficulties in finding the missing people," Mishra said. "We have trained personnel to perform such rescue operations and are hopeful of concluding this rescue soon," he added.

The tragedy ripped families apart and left people desperate for answers and accountability. Parry's mother was inconsolable.

"The boat was carrying less than the usual number of people today. I was holding his hand. But

when it hit the pillar, I lost him. It happened so fast, I didn't understand what happened," she said.

"I had called Firdousa in the morning saying the water is high, but she said that we have seen higher waters."

Senior political leaders in Jammu and Kashmir expressed their condolences.

Lieutenant governor Manoj Sinha said: "The administration is providing all possible help to the bereaved families and medical facilities to those injured. Marcos teams have also been alerted. I am constantly monitoring the situation."

"Deeply concerned by reports of a boat capsizing on the Jhelum near Srinagar," said National Conference leader Omar Abdullah.

"Shocked to hear about the tragic accident in Batwara where a boat capsized. Reports coming in of children dead. My deepest condolences to their families. I urge the administration to extend all help possible," said Peoples Democratic Party leader Mehbooba Mufti.

MODI VS MAMATA

win in UP, BJP will end up with a zero," said Banerjee.

The Calcutta high court on Monday granted permission to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Anjani Putra Sena to take out Ram Navami processions in Howrah on April 17 while imposing certain conditions. The state government had sought to stop the procession, proposing an alternative route.

Ram Navami celebrations have turned into a political battleground in recent years with rallies escalating into major political face-offs and even communal riots.

Clashes had erupted in Howrah on March 30 last year and later spread to two other districts, North Dinajpur and Hooghly. Ten people were injured.

On April 27 the Calcutta high court ordered a National Investigation Agency probe into the incident.

"In TMC's Bengal, it is the party's goons and extortionists, and not the law, who decide which things will get permission and which will not. In West Bengal permission is denied to Ram Navami processions," Modi said at a second rally at Raiganj in North Dinajpur district later during the day.

TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee blamed the BJP.

"BJP wants to use Lord Ram and religion for their political benefits while we want people's

support based on our work we do for them. Those who use religion as their shields are politically bankrupt," said Abhishek Banerjee at a rally in Alipurduar.

North Dinajpur, along with Murshidabad and Malda, are the three Muslim-dominated districts in the state.

"Tomorrow the entire country is going to celebrate Ram Navami. This year Ram Navami, Navratri and the Bengali New Year. This is the first Ram Navami after Lord Ram has been enthroned at Ram Mandir in Ayodhya."

While Alipurduar, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri in north Bengal go into polls on April 19 in the first phase, Balurghat, Raiganj and Darjeeling are scheduled to go on polls in the second phase on April 26. The BJP won all six seats in the 2019 polls.

The party made deep inroads in north Bengal in the 2019 general elections and won 18 out of 42 seats in the state, its best showing ever. The TMC won 22 seats.

On Monday, a single-judge bench of justice Jay Sengupta of the Calcutta high court allowed the procession in Howrah, adding that there should not be any sloganeering or hate speech, and capped the number of attendees to 200.

The Mamata Banerjee-run West Bengal government had highlighted unrest during last year's procession, indicating an ongoing NIA investigation into the incident. In light of this, the government proposed an alternative route for the procession, which the organisers contested, leading to their petition in the high court.

But Modi blamed the TMC. "Devotees need to move court to obtain permission for Ram Navami celebrations in West Bengal. The TMC government has given full permission to those who pelt stones at processions during Ram Navami celebrations and Durga Puja," Modi said at Raiganj.

KAISERGANJ, RAE BARELI spent the last two years embroiled in serious charges of sexual harassment levelled by some of India's top wrestlers. Though he lost his sheen as a sports administrator, he still holds considerable influence in the seat he won by 260,000 votes in 2019.

Seemingly unperturbed by the delay in declaring a candidate, Singh has hit the poll track in Kaiserganj, driving a long

cavalcade that has drawn the election commission's ire for taking out a campaign procession, with a cavalcade of 20-25, without taking the panel's permission.

A first information report was lodged against him on April 13 for violating the model code of conduct.

"Brij Bhushan's clout in the region could be gauged by the fact that not only BJP, but the SP and the BSP have also not declared their candidates from Kaiserganj LS seat. They are waiting for the BJP's decision," said advocate and political analyst Kaushendra Singh of Bahraich.

This six-time MP enjoys a good rapport with the Samajwadi Party, whose chief Akhilesh Yadav had refrained from commenting on Singh even as the row dominated national headlines. Singh switched to the SP in 2008 after the BJP expelled him over cross-voting in the Lok Sabha over a no-confidence motion. He again joined the BJP before the 2014 general elections.

"We are waiting for the party to declare a candidate for Kaiserganj. Whoever is the candidate, we will abide by the party's decision," said Ram Harsh Yadav, SP district president, Bahraich.

"The party leadership will decide on this issue," said Yadav.

Brijesh Pandey, the district president of the BJP, asserted that the local unit of the party will abide by the party's decision. "But others pointed to a worry. 'Singh will switch over to the Samajwadi Party again, if the BJP denies him ticket,' said a senior SP leader. "The BJP is in a dilemma. It is neither able to distance itself from Brij Bhushan nor take him along in the Kaiserganj poll battle," he added.

What is weighing against Singh is not just the unsavoury controversy but also the discontent among the Jat community—the wrestlers who alleged he harassed them were Jats—that is dominant in Haryana and western UP, two crucial regions.

"Assembly elections in Haryana are due in October this year and Jats constitute one-fourth of the total electorate there," said a BJP leader, requesting anonymity. "The party also does not want to alienate Jats of western UP who are in sizeable numbers in several districts of the region where polling for Lok Sabha is scheduled on April 19 and 26," he added.

HT Homage

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Late Shree Bhagirath Lal
04.12.1929–15.4.2024

PRAYER MEETING

will be held in memory of our beloved father and grandfather at Shiv Mandir, Green Park, New Delhi on the 18th April from 4:00 PM to 5:00 PM

In Grief:

Sonali, Vikas Kalra
Urvil, Rene Mwangi
Satya Kalra
Kavita, Abhimanyu Singh

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING THE APPEARANCE OF ACCUSED PERSON

(See Section 82 Cr. P.C.)

Whereas complaint has been made before me that accused person namely **Raj Kumar S/o Ratan Kumar R/o H. No. 2251, Gail No. 171, 11/1rd Floor, Khasra No. 20/552/243/1, Ganesh Pura, Tri Nagar, New Delhi** and Also At : M/s Air India Ltd. I.G.I. Airport, International Terminal-3, New Delhi has committed (or is suspected to have committed) the offence in a case vide **Case Reg. No. 534665/16 U/s 138 NI Act** registered at P.S. Rajinder Nagar, Delhi and it has been returned to a warrant of arrest thereupon issued stating that the said **Raj Kumar** could not be found and whereas it has been shown to my satisfaction that the said accused **Raj Kumar** has absconded (or is concealing himself to avoid the service of the said warrant). Proclamation is hereby made that the said accused **Raj Kumar** is required to appear before this court to answer the said complaint on or before **12.07.2024**.

By Order

Ms. Divya Gupta,
Metropolitan Magistrate (NI Act-05) (Central),
Room No. 02, Ground Floor,
Building Annex-I
Tis Hazari Courts, Delhi

DPI/4261/CD/2024
(Court Notice)

SPOTLIGHT ELECTIONS 2024

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, HT looks at some key constituencies across India which encapsulate the issues shaping the elections
Hope and aspiration, in the shadow of vigilantism

Leena Dhankhar
letters@hindustantimes.com

ALWAR: The rally is yet to begin, but the sabzi mandi ground in Alwar is buzzing; men in motorcycles with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) flags tied to their rearview mirrors arrive in raucous droves; organisers mill around the dais, asking the teeming crowd to take their seats; and the occasional slogan rents the air. In that melee of fervour and dust, near the stage, is a wiry man nearing 50, his bushy moustache melting into a thick beard with streaks of white.

He is dressed in a maroon kurta peeking out from behind a bright saffron scarf. Around him is a small cloud of people, clamouring for attention. Some touch his feet; others just stand, hands clasped together, making small talk. His name is Ram Dayal, the Alwar unit president of the Gau Raksha Dal, the local cow-protection group.

By 2pm, the programme begins, and the BJP candidate for Alwar, 54-year-old Bhopender Yadav, ascends the stage. Yadav is a leader with national heft — general secretary of the BJP, Union minister of environment, forests and climate change, and a strategist who has led the party's campaigns in both Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the past. He speaks once the other men have finished their addresses, launching into an attack against the Congress, calling the party a repository of corruption and responsible for crimes against women. He speaks of his commitment to Hindu values, and his plans to attract investment. By the time he is finished, the crowd is frenzied.

Once the dust settles, and people begin to leave, Dayal is surrounded by a group of around 100 young men, all members of the Alwar Gau Raksha Dal. For most of the year, this group of

men, some of them only boys touching 15, have taken it upon themselves to maintain the so-called honour of the revered animal.

They are not alone. Armed with increasingly stringent anti-cow slaughter laws and growing political influence, cow-protection groups — known as gau raksha dals — have mushroomed across north India, their actions considered pious by the faithful, but often veering into vigilantism. And with Lok Sabha elections round the corner, their influence is also spilling into the political arena — limited to rabble rousing in some parts, but also in mobilising the hardliners on ideological issues.

Incidents of vigilantism
In an arc of the border districts of Haryana and Rajasthan where Alwar sits at the centre, multiple allegations of extrajudicial assaults, some resulting in death, have been linked to cow vigilante groupBas. Once night falls, on highways and village roads even in close proximity to the national capital, there is news of high-speed chases of trucks laden with cattle, followed recklessly by armed vigilantes, with or without the police. Alwar has been rolled by some prominent cases of cow vigilante killing in the past.

In April 2017, 55-year-old Pehlu Khan was allegedly attacked by cow vigilantes in Alwar's Behror, when he and five others were transporting cattle from a weekly market in Jaipur to their village in Haryana's Nuh. Khan died in hospital, and six of nine accused were acquitted by the Alwar court in August 2019.

A year later, 28-year-old Rakbar Khan was killed, again in Alwar, when he and a friend were attacked while transporting two cows. Khan was assaulted, and handed over to the local police, but he died, with

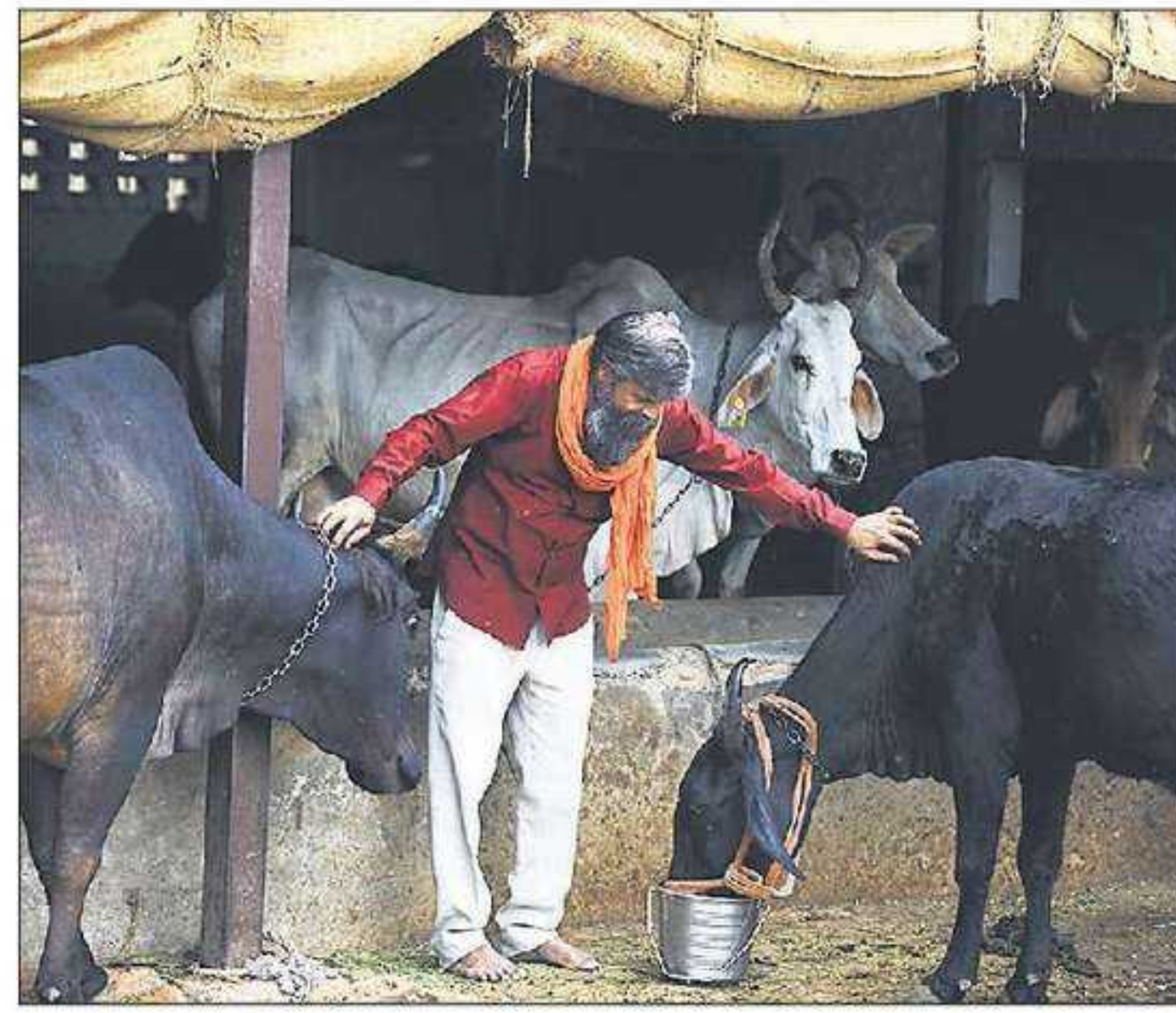
the family accusing the administration of delaying medical attention. In May 2021, an Alwar court held four people guilty of culpable homicide and sentenced them to seven years in prison.

In 2023, the Rajasthan Police booked Monu Manesar or Mohit Yadav, a prominent cow vigilante and a member of the Bajrang Dal who rose to prominence over the last few years, for the alleged murders of Junaid, 35, and Nasir, 27. The bodies of the two Muslim men were found in a charred vehicle in Bhiwani on February 16. Manesar denied his involvement in the deaths.

The Alwar seat
Bordering the communally sensitive Nuh district in Haryana, Alwar has eight assembly segments. The Congress holds five of these, and the BJP three. But in the Lok Sabha elections, it is the latter that has consistently come up on top over the last decade. In 2019 Lok Sabha elections, fuelled by a nationalistic wave after the Balakot strike and the Pulwama attack, Balaknath, the head of the Baba Mastnath Mutt in Haryana, won by over 300,000 votes.

The seat has followed the larger trend in Rajasthan, which usually backs the party dominant at the national level. In 2004 and 2009, the constituency elected Congress members of parliament — Karan Singh Yadav and Jitendra Singh Yadav respectively. In 2014, as the BJP swept to power under the leadership of PM Modi, the BJP wrested Alwar, with Mahant Chandnath — the head of the Mastnath mutt before Balaknath — emerging victorious. He died four years later, but in the 2018 bypolls necessitated by his passing, Alwar switched its loyalty to the Congress, before Balak Nath regained the seat in 2019.

The constituency has a mix of Yadavs, Rajputs, Jats, Gujjars, and Brahmins with a 14.9% population of Muslims. But the largest social group are Yadavs who make up around 15%. This is reflected in the choice



Armed with increasingly stringent anti-cow slaughter laws and growing political influence, cow-protection groups have mushroomed across north India.

PARVEEN KUMAR/HT PHOTO

Constituency watch

INDIA

SEAT: Alwar

ELECTORS: 1,888,524

TURNOUT IN 2019: 67.17%

PREVIOUS MP: Mahant Balaknath (till Dec 2023)

PARTY: BJP

RAJASTHAN

of candidates — the BJP's heavy-weight Bhopender Yadav facing off against the Congress's 35-year-old Lalit Yadav, once from the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) but now the Congress's sitting MLA from Mundawar, one of the eight assembly segments in the constituency.

Despite its proximity to the national capital region and its booming economy, residents in Alwar are dependent on fields of bajra, maize and wheat. Irrigation is a constant source of concern, as is drinking water.

Vikram Yadav, a resident of Alwar city, said that he will vote for whoever assures regular flow of water.

"The candidates are promising development but no one is

giving specific details of what, when and how things will be done. How will they increase the water supply, how much will be increased and what will be the time period to bring this change. What will we do with the infrastructure and industries if we have to pay ₹700 for water tankers every day?" he asked.

Another resident Mahesh Gupta, a businessman in Alwar town, pointed to problems of formal jobs and industry to soak in young people, who are sometimes forced to Delhi and its satellite cities. "The government should work to build good affordable schools so that middle-class people can afford it," he said.

Over the past decade, the BJP

has successfully married caste dynamics to nationalistic fervour, papering over any local discontent with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity. This time, the local unit is clear — the Union minister's candidature is the driving force in the elections. "He is a senior leader who is vastly experienced and people know his commitment to pressing issues of the water crisis and unemployment," party leader Anil Yadav added.

The Congress is hoping that its local candidate Lalit Yadav will be able to capitalise on his ground connect and community affiliations. Former Haryana chief minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda said, "His chances of winning are high because he is a local, and multiple communities are backing him. The people of Alwar know him," he said.

Cogs in the wheel
As this high-profile campaign reaches its crescendo, also working as cogs in the wheel are the hundreds of cow vigilantes who roam the region, blending a mix of faith-based pride and fear to appeal to hardliners. Their influence on the overall results might not be significant — after all, the BJP won by 300,000 votes in 2019 — but their actions on the ground add to the "hawa" around core ideological issues such as gau raksha.

Dayal and others say they are active political volunteers. "I stand in support of the BJP because it is the only party that truly values our Hindu beliefs and traditions," he said.

Every day, when Dayal is not at a rally, he meets his reportedly 500-strong gau raksha dal. They separate into groups, going door-to-door, rallying support for candidates of their choice. There are some, mostly the young under 25, who are in charge of social media — using WhatsApp, Facebook and X, to share posts and mobilise support. There are several dedicated WhatsApp groups of volunteers where members discuss new outreach areas, create and share news articles and videos related

to cow protection that are then disseminated.

The more experienced members have created a calendar of public events. The thrust is always the same; the importance of cow protection in Hinduism, and advocacy for even stricter laws to prevent slaughter. "We organise regular meetings to discuss our strategies, recruit new members, and coordinate their activities. These meetings take place every day, sometimes twice a day, depending on logistics," said 30-year-old Vishvender Singh.

Aftab Ahmed, the Congress MLA from Nuh, said in Alwar, issues of Hindutva and vigilantism are growing in importance. "Alwar has witnessed several incidents of cow vigilantism with some tragic cases such as the lynching of Pehlu Khan. But these incidents also exacerbate existing communal tensions. This always becomes a political issue and addressing these issues is imperative to foster social cohesion," Ahmed said.

The BJP said its campaign is focussed on development. "The BJP has devised comprehensive solutions, having engaged in discussions with the central government. Alwar would undergo a significant transformation post-elections," said Anil Yadav.

Another senior BJP leader, requesting anonymity, acknowledged the support from cow vigilante groups. "While the party does not endorse vigilantism, we recognise the passionate dedication of these groups towards cow protection. Their activism is crucial in mobilising support particularly among conservative voters," he said.

But there is a flip side.

Fear, a factor
In a tiny bylane of Rajgarh tehsil's Manaka village, 46-year-old former sarpanch Jamsheer Khan sits pensively. The village is quiet and narrow — winding roads meander through clusters of modest, earth-toned ramshackle homes. The streets are unkempt, patches of garbage and mounds of upturned earth lining both

sides. Khan points to the squalor around him. As he talks, the subject begins to pivot to fear; a fear that is in their every day, exacerbated by vigilantism and politics. Manaka has around 5,000 residents, a majority of them Muslim. In one home after another, in sheds or open fields, or simply ambling outside homes, are cows.

"Cows have always been a part of our life. They have always helped sustain us. But the situation is such that we cannot buy or sell them, because on the way, we fear we will be waylaid. These vigilantes are basically extortionists, who take money from us, and often seize our cows and sell them somewhere else," Khan said.

In the courtyard is also 46-year-old Mohammad Ilyas. Eight years ago, Ilyas said, he was assaulted when he was returning to the village after purchasing two cows from Jaipur. "I told them I bought the cattle legitimately. I gave them the phone number of my relative who I bought them from. But they didn't listen. Luckily there were people around, and they intervened. Since that day, I have never sold or purchased any livestock," he said.

A third participant, 34-year-old Imran Khan, who runs a small dairy, is shaking with anger. "They are gau gundas (thugs), not gau rakshaks. There are no job opportunities and cow vigilantes have the power to target us and make our lives hell. And now they are campaigning in the elections," Khan said.

Back at Alwar's sabzi mandi, Dayal's supporters are ready to disperse. Before they leave, Dayal has one last word of encouragement, wrapped in caution. Elections are less than a week away, with Alwar going to the polls on April 19. "There is no time to slack," he exhorts them. "This election is for our gau mata."

This is the seventh in a series of election reports from the field that look at national and local issues through an electoral lens.

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SPOTLIGHT ELECTIONS 2024

'Will win hearts': Shah in J&K

Ravi Krishnan Khajuria
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JAMMU: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) believes in winning the hearts of people as it will ultimately lead to the 'lotus', the party's symbol, blooming in Jammu & Kashmir, Union home minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday. Addressing a rally in Jammu's Paloura, Shah said his party is not among those who occupy land by force and assured that assembly polls in the Union territory will be held as per the deadline set by the Supreme Court.

He also said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the "evil shadow of Article 370", which granted special status to J&K, is gone now and that the Tricolour is "touching the skyline" across the region like the rest of the country.

Polling in five Lok Sabha seats in J&K and one in Ladakh will be held in five phases from April 19. The results will be declared on June 4. The BJP is contesting in two (Udhampur and Jammu) Lok Sabha seats in the polls.

"I want to clear the misgivings being created among Kashmiri youngsters that the BJP wants to take the land of Kashmir by force. The BJP is not among those who occupy land by force but believes in winning the hearts of people," Shah said, as he campaigned in support of Jammu MP Jugal Kishore, who is seeking a third term from his constituency. "The BJP is in no haste as it knows that the party's symbol 'lotus' will bloom on its own in the Valley with the love of people," he added.

Shah said that assembly polls in the Union territory will be held according to the timeline set by the Supreme Court, i.e., September 30. "Nobody should have any doubt on this," he said.

On December 11, the top court directed the Election Commission to conduct polls to the J&K legislative assembly by September 30, 2024, and asked the Centre to restore statehood to the region "as soon as possible". The court's directive came as it endorsed the Centre's decision on August 5, 2019 to abrogate Article 370.

At the rally, the Union minister

alleged that the Congress, National Conference (NC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) exploited the youngsters of Kashmir. "These three parties did not allow democracy to grow in Jammu & Kashmir... on the pretext of security, our Kashmiri youngsters were exploited. I want to ask (NC chief) Farooq Abdullah and the PDP, under whose rule most of the fake encounters took place, who fired on the children of Kashmir and handed the gun to them? It is these three parties," he said.

But the BJP, under the leadership of Modi, restored peace and ensured development after the abrogation of Article 370, he said.

The Union minister also took a swipe at PDP president and former J&K chief minister Mehbooba Mufti over her remarks in 2017 that "there will be no one to shoulder the Indian flag in Kashmir" if Article 370 is abrogated.

"Now nobody has the guts to raise slogans for Pakistan. Slogans of 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' can only be heard. PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti had said that if Article 370 is removed, then nobody will be left to give a shoulder to the Tricolour. She needs to understand that this Tricolour is immortal and will always stay. The evil shadow of Article 370 is gone now and the Tricolour is touching the skyline."

Shah also took a swipe at Abdullah over his remark in 2013 on the abrogation of Article 370. "Farooq sahib used to say that even if Modi ji becomes PM 10 times, he will not be able to abrogate Article 370. Farooq sahib, leave aside 10 times, during the second term of PM Modi, Article 370 was done and dusted with."

Hitting back, PDP spokesperson Firdous Tak said: "It's unfortunate that even after five years, the BJP top brass has not been able to understand the basic issues concerning the people of Jammu. Whenever the top BJP leadership is addressing the people in Jammu, it rakes up Kashmir and talks about dynastic politics and Article 370. Speaking on similar lines, Abdullah said: "I can only express regret over Shah's accusations against us and the Congress. I regret the BJP's thinking. The Kashmiris will respond in the ensuing polls."



Union home minister Amit Shah greets the crowd in Jammu on Tuesday.

Union min enters Nath's bastion with massive roadshow days ahead of polls

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BHOPAL: Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday evening held a massive roadshow and participated in a special prayer at a temple in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara Lok Sabha constituency, which is considered a stronghold of former chief minister and senior Congress leader Kamal Nath and the only seat that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lost in 2019 in the state, just two days before the first-phase of polling.

Shah was canvassing for BJP candidate Vivek Bunty Sahu, who is contesting against Nath's son and incumbent Chhindwara lawmaker Nakul Nath of the Congress.

Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav accompanied Shah for the roadshow, which saw a large crowd of BJP supporters



Union minister Amit Shah with Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav.

waving the saffron flag and holding posters of Lord Ram on both sides of the route. A replica of Ayodhya's grand temple was also placed on the route of the roadshow.

Later, Shah also participated in a special puja (prayer) at Badi Mata temple in Chhindwara.

A senior BJP leader aware of the matter said Shah and chief

minister Yadav will halt for the night in Chhindwara and hold meeting with party leaders to strategise for the polling day.

"Shah's presence in the city will definitely boost the morale of BJP booth-level workers. Before the November-December assembly elections last year, Shah's election management strategy helped the party in winning the state," a senior BJP functionary said, requesting anonymity.

Chhindwara Lok Sabha constituency has been represented by Congress leader Kamal Nath or his family members since 1980, except losing the seat once to the BJP in a 1997 bypoll. In the last general elections, the BJP managed to win all but Chhindwara seat in the state and this time, the ruling party is eyeing to win all 29 Lok Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh.

The BJP functionary quoted

above said the party is focusing especially on the 33% tribal voters, who have traditionally been Congress supporters, in Chhindwara.

Kamal Nath is also holding four to five public meetings every day in the constituency, leaving no stone unturned to ensure a second term for his son Nakul. "BJP is going to lose the election and now BJP leaders realised this fact and that's why they have called Union home minister Amit Shah. But nothing will happen. Nakul Nath will win with huge margin," Congress MLA Vijay Chhore said.



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Rahul intensifies attack on Modi over poll bonds

HT Correspondent
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KOCHI: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the electoral bond scheme and accused him of resorting to "intimidatory tactics" to force businessmen to fund the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the Centre.

"There are some people in every small town or village who extort money on the streets by threatening physical harm. In Malayalam, you call this extortion 'kolla adikkal' (loot), but Modi calls it electoral bonds. What a common thief is doing on the streets, the PM is doing at an international level," the Lok Sabha MP said while campaigning in his Wayanad constituency.

The former Congress chief accused the Centre of using sophisticated tactics to threaten targeted businessmen and helping a few rich businessmen in the country.

"At the electoral bond level, the threats are much more sophisticated. The Enforcement Directorate, Central Bureau of Investigation and Income Tax people will come, they will interrogate and at the end of it, they will say why don't you give this (their business) to (businessman) Adani," he said.

he said. In other instances, such "intimidatory tactics" also led to the businessman paying the BJP in electoral bonds, he alleged.

On February 15, the Supreme Court struck down the electoral bond scheme as unconstitutional and asked the State Bank of India and Election Commission of India to disclose all details of bonds purchased and encashed from April 2019.

The verdict came ahead of the Lok Sabha elections and was immediately welcomed by opposition parties and civil society activists.

Gandhi also alleged Modi "does not have the understanding to run the country".

The Congress leader raked up the issue of electoral bonds even in Kozhikode, where he addressed another gathering later in the day.

"This (electoral bonds) is Narendra Modi's master scheme. The whole idea was his. He said the electoral bonds were launched to bring transparency in politics. Then, why were the names kept hidden? Who was stopping the release of data after the Supreme Court asked? This is extortion. On street level, it is known as 'haft-e-bazi'. This is the country's biggest 'haft-e-bazi' scheme conceptualised by the Prime Minister," he said.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Kodyathur, in Kozhikode district of Kerala, on Tuesday.

CONG YET TO CHALK OUT HRY LIST OVER LACK OF CONSENSUS ON BHIWANI, GGM

NEW DELHI: The selection of the Congress Lok Sabha candidates for Haryana has been delayed amid a major showdown between the party's interest groups in the state, according to people aware of the details.

During the last meeting of the Congress's Central Election Committee (CEC) on April 14, party general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala and former MP Kumari Selja vehemently objected to names proposed for Bhiwani and Gurugram.

According to a Congress leader, the names of MLA Rao Dhan Singh and former MP Raj Babbar were proposed for Bhiwani and Gurugram, respectively. "When these names came up, Surjewala and Selja objected, saying former MP Shrutika Choudhry and Captain Ajay Yadav are far better candidates from Bhiwani and Gurugram, respectively," the leader said.

RALLY TRACKER

BJP

- Narendra Modi**, Prime Minister
Bihar: Gaya, Purnia
Bengal: Raiganj, Balurghat
- Amit Shah**, Union home minister
J&K: Jammu
U'khand: Garhwal
MP: Chhindwara
- Rajnath Singh**, Defence minister
Tamil Nadu: Krishnagiri
- Nirmala Sitharaman**, Union finance minister
Rajasthan: Jaipur
"Make promises, mislead the people, take votes, come to power, this is the attitude of Congress. This is the attitude of Congress, not ours."
— NIRMALA SITHARAMAN, UNION MINISTER

TMC

PM Modi says TMC is a corrupt party. He should look in the mirror first. His party is filled with dacoits.
— MAMATA BANERJEE, TMC CHIEF

CONGRESS

- Priyanka Gandhi Vadra**, Congress general secretary
Assam: Jorhat
Tripura: Tripura West
- Rahul Gandhi**, Congress leader
Kerala: Kozhikode, Wayanad

{ NOMINEES FOR FOUR STATES }

BJP releases list of 7 more names

HT Correspondents
letters@hindustantimes.com

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday announced a list of seven candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, fielding Abhijit Das from Diamond Harbour seat in West Bengal against incumbent lawmaker and Trinamool Congress (TMC) national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee.

Besides Das (54), who is popularly known as Bobby, the BJP also announced three candidates from Punjab, two in Uttar Pradesh and one in Maharashtra in its 12th list for the general elections, which begin on April 19.

Das had unsuccessfully contested the Diamond Harbour seat twice in 2009 and 2014, the latter against Banerjee. The constituency will vote in the seventh and final phase on June 1. The BJP has declared its candidates for all 42 West Bengal seats. In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP has

Candidates in fresh list

- MAHARASHTRA**
 - CHHATRAPATI UDAYANRAJE BHONSLE, Satara
- PUNJAB**
 - MANJEET SINGH MANNA MIAWIND, Khadoor Sahib
 - ANITA SOM PARKASH, Hoshiarpur
 - PARAMPAL KAUR SIDHU, Bathinda
- UTTAR PRADESH**
 - THAKUR VISHWADEEP SINGH Firozabad
 - SHASHANK MANI TRIPATHI, Deoria
- WEST BENGAL**
 - ABHIJIT DAS (BOBBY), Diamond Harbour

fielded Shashank Mani Tripathi from Deoria and Thakur Vishwadeep Singh from Firozabad

parliamentary seats.

In Punjab, the BJP replaced Union minister Som Parkash with his wife Anita Som Parkash from Hoshiarpur seat. The party also fielded former IAS officer Parampal Kaur Sidhu from Bathinda and former legislator Manjit Singh Manna Mianwind from Khadoor Sahib seat.

So far, the BJP has declared its candidates for nine of the 13 Lok Sabha seats in Punjab. In Maharashtra, the BJP nominated its Rajya Sabha MP Chhatrapati Udayanraje Bhosale, a descendant of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, from Satara seat against Shashikant Shinde of the NCP(SP).

The BJP also released the names of 21 candidates for the Odisha assembly elections, nominating former Union minister Dilip Ray from Rourkela seat. So far, the saffron party has announced the names of 131 candidates out of 147 assembly segments in the eastern state.

CONGRESS 'EXPERT' IN MISLEADING PUBLIC BY MAKING PROMISES, SAYS FM

HT Correspondent
letters@hindustantimes.com

JAIPUR: Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday targeted the Congress for not including the restoration of the old pension scheme (OPS) that it promised in many states from its election manifesto, saying the opposition party is an "expert" in misleading people to garner votes.

The senior BJP leader also defended the electoral bond scheme, which was recently struck down by the Supreme Court, saying it was a better system as the transfer of money was visible in accounts instead of the earlier practice when cash-filled "sacks" and "suitcases" were given to parties.

"Congress party is expert in making promises just for the sake of elections, misleading the public, taking votes and then forgetting about it," she told reporters in Jaipur.

The Congress party has not included the OPS issue in its manifesto for this Lok Sabha elections, she said. "Make promises, mislead the people, take votes, come to power, this is the attitude of Congress. This is the attitude of Congress, not ours."

On the Opposition's criticism over inflation, she said, "I want to remind that in the 10 years from 2004 to 2014, inflation was in double digits for 22 months, food inflation was around 12 per cent at that time. Just look at the figures of last month, retail inflation is less than four per cent."

She also defended the Centre's electoral bond scheme, saying the system was created by passing a law after discussion in the Parliament and every political party took advantage of it legally. "Before the electoral bonds, there was no structure. You can take sackfuls of cash to political parties, or carry them in suitcases, or give gold or flat. There was no control whatsoever," she said.

"After discussion in Parliament, this solution was found. In this, money flows from 'account to account' from the buyer of the bond to the one who redeems it. This system has come after the legislation was passed in Parliament," she added. After the decision of top court, "one can say anything to create a political twist but every party has taken advantage of it," she said.

Modi invokes Pak to attack Cong-led UPA

Vijay Swaroop
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PATNA: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday took a swipe at the Congress by invoking Pakistan, saying a country that used to strike India and pose a threat to the security of its citizens under the opposition party's decade-long rule is now going around the world with a "begging bowl".

Modi also said it was only his government that had the "guts" and "political will" to do the kind of work previous governments never did and take the country to new heights.

"Under previous governments, terrorists and infiltrators from our neighbouring country routinely crossed over, targeted us and fled. Our soldiers used to fall to enemy bullets on the border almost every day. I am sure you must have experienced helplessness anger back in the day when they would target us. You would have felt like entering their homes and killing them," he said, without specifically naming



Narendra Modi

Pakistan, at an election rally in Purnea district of Bihar.

"Modi obeyed your wishes and the outcome is that the country, which once used to challenge us and put the lives of our people at risk, is now going around the world with a begging bowl," he added, in an oblique reference to the severe economic distress in the neighbouring country.

Hitting back, state Congress spokesperson Anand Madhab said: "There was nothing new in his speech except 'jumlebaazi'. Migration for employment, health, education... neither any industry was established in Bihar nor did Bihar get any special status. Will Modi ji be able to speak on these?"

{ SHORT-TERM ARMY RECRUITMENT SCHEME }

In CDS's U'khand village, murmurs against Agnipath

Amit Bathla
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PAURI GARHWAL: Nitin Kaparwan faces a dilemma — whether to continue his preparation to don the camouflage uniform under the short-term Agnipath recruitment scheme or join his friends in the hotel industry. Though the 19-year-old resident of Gawana village in Uttarakhand's Pauri Garhwal district has a role model in chief of defence staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, whose ancestral village he lives in, he says the army job isn't as attractive for youngsters anymore.

Gawana is around 20km from Srinagar, a major town in Pauri Garhwal district on the Char Dham route. Hit by migration due to the lack of basic facilities, jobs, and poor connectivity, the remote village is inhabited by around 60 people — mostly elderly and women.

"The youngsters don't find the army job charming after the rollout of Agnipath scheme. Those still interested are very few now. It's a drastic change for our state. If eight out of 10 youngsters were



Darshan Singh Chauhan (centre), cousin of chief of defence staff General Anil Chauhan, in Gawana.

interested earlier, it has come down to just two," Nitin said. "My friends who earlier aspired to join the army are now joining the hotel industry. Army was once the first choice for us, and the hotel industry second. Now the choice has reversed."

Introduced by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Union government in June 2022, the Agnipath scheme seeks to recruit soldiers for four years, with a provision to retain 25% of them in the regular cadre for 15 years after another round of screening. Those

recruited are called Agniveers. Nitin's 16-year-old brother Vipin, a Class 9 student, doesn't even want to prepare for the army. "If the scheme is withdrawn, and there is job security as earlier, I can think about preparing for the army," Vipin says.

Darshan Singh Chauhan, 58, recalls the time when his famous cousin, General Anil Chauhan, became the country's second CDS in September 2022, but says his appointment as the senior most defence officer hasn't done any good in bringing back the losing

interest of youngsters in the army. "The trend of preparing for the army has come down over the years and the younger generation prefers to work in the private sector..." he says.

Meena Devi, the sister-in-law of General Chauhan, adds, "Children are not going into the army because of the Agnipath scheme. They say what they will do after four years."

Corroborating that the Agnipath scheme needs a "re-consideration," a retired government employee, requesting anonymity, says he is unsure if it would make an election issue. "There are many issues such as Agniveer, unemployment and broken roads, but the discussion around this election is confined to [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi's name," he says.

Soon after the scheme was introduced, protests erupted in different parts of the state. Uttarakhand, which goes to polls on April 19, is known for its immense contribution to the defence forces.



POLL WATCH

Ganesh Godiyal, the Congress candidate from the seat, took a swipe at the scheme, saying: "The Agniveer scheme has been introduced to retire our youth at the age between 22 and 25. It is cheating..." State BJP leader Ravindra Jugran said: "Defence minister Rajnath Singh has already said that the Centre is open to changing the Agnipath recruitment scheme, if necessary."

SPOTLIGHT ELECTIONS 2024

Amid 'insinuations', EC details poll code action

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NEW DELHI: The Election Commission (EC) said on Tuesday that it would not have been correct for it to act on situations involving "political persons under active consideration...of court proceedings or criminal investigations", saying such a step could have treaded on legal processes, as it moved to address growing criticism from political parties.

The panel said it had acted on 169 out of 200 Model Code of Conduct (MCC) complaints received since the poll code took effect a month ago, a disclosure it described as "first of its kind" exercise aimed at transparency so "that misgivings and insinuations at times coming from certain quarters, however small or limited, are addressed and stopped".

"The Commission is by no means obliged, but for the sake of its promised transparency, EC has decided to place in the public domain its enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct during the first month of its operation, along with certain details of action taken," it said in a press note.

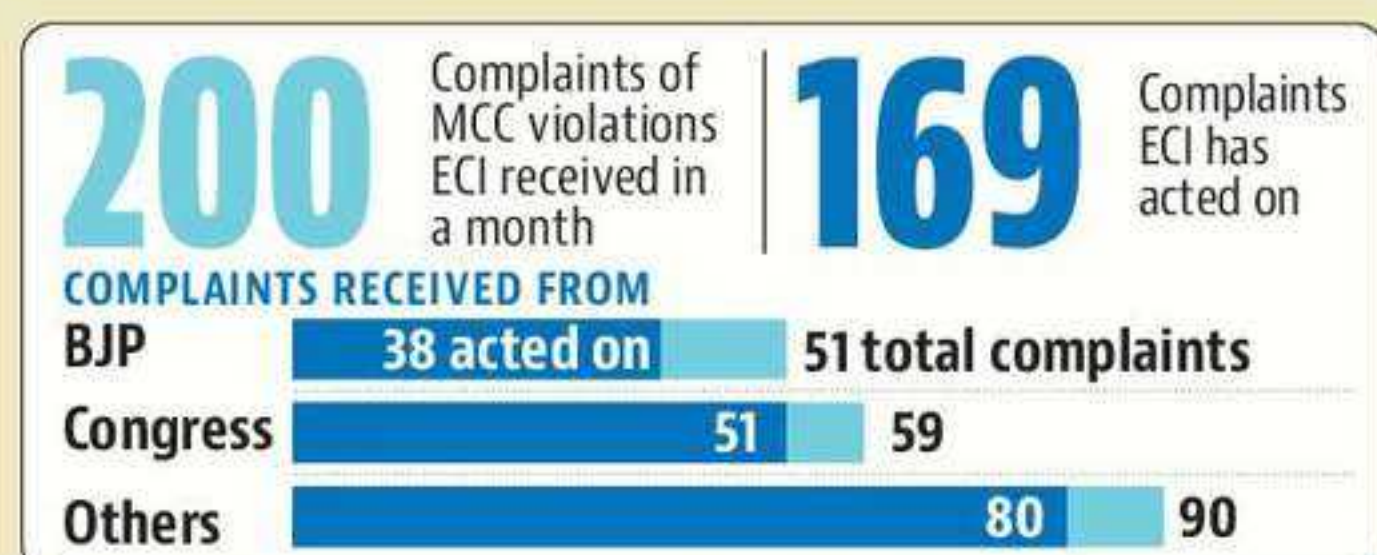
The note carried instances in which the commission acted, such as the action it took against Congress leaders Supriya Shrinete and Randeep Surjewala for their insulting remarks at a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate and the directive to the government to cease a WhatsApp outreach to citizens.

The statement follows the INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) group of parties' demands during their Save Democracy rally on March 31 that accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of creating "undemocratic obstacles", with some of the alliance's constituents holding protests outside the commission's offices, calling on it to ensure a "level playing field".

The protests flared after federal investigating agencies took action against political parties and leaders, especially the Enforcement Directorate (ED)

What poll body said in pre-election note

The Model Code of Conduct came into effect on March 16



'To keep misgivings at bay'

"The Commission is by no means obliged, but for the sake of its promised transparency, EC has decided to place in the public domain its enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct during the first month of its operation, along with certain details of action taken."

Note comes amid Oppn protests

The statement follows the INDIA bloc accusing the BJP of creating "undemocratic obstacles" and some parties calling on EC to ensure a "level-playing field".

Panel flags suo motu action

Removal of officers with dual charges as principal secretaries to CMs in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand.

Removal of the West Bengal DGP "as he was barred from election duty in previous elections as well".

Suo motu transfer of non-cadre officers posted as DMs and SPs in Gujarat, Punjab, Odisha, West Bengal.

Transfer of officers in Punjab, Haryana and Assam because of their association with elected representatives.

verify any mismatch in assets declared by Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar on a Congress complaint, took action against Shrinete and Surjewala for derogatory comments against BJP's Hema Malini, and had a police case registered against BJP's Shobha Karandlaje for her remarks on the Rameshwaram Café blast case.

The total complaints received till Tuesday were 51 from BJP, out of which action was taken in 38 cases; 59 complaints from Congress, of which 51 were acted upon, and 90 complaints from others, of which 80 had been resolved.

Welcoming the poll body's actions, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera said: "We welcome the Election Commission being transparent on the MCC violations but we still have a lot of complaints and we can only hope that the commission considers them seriously."

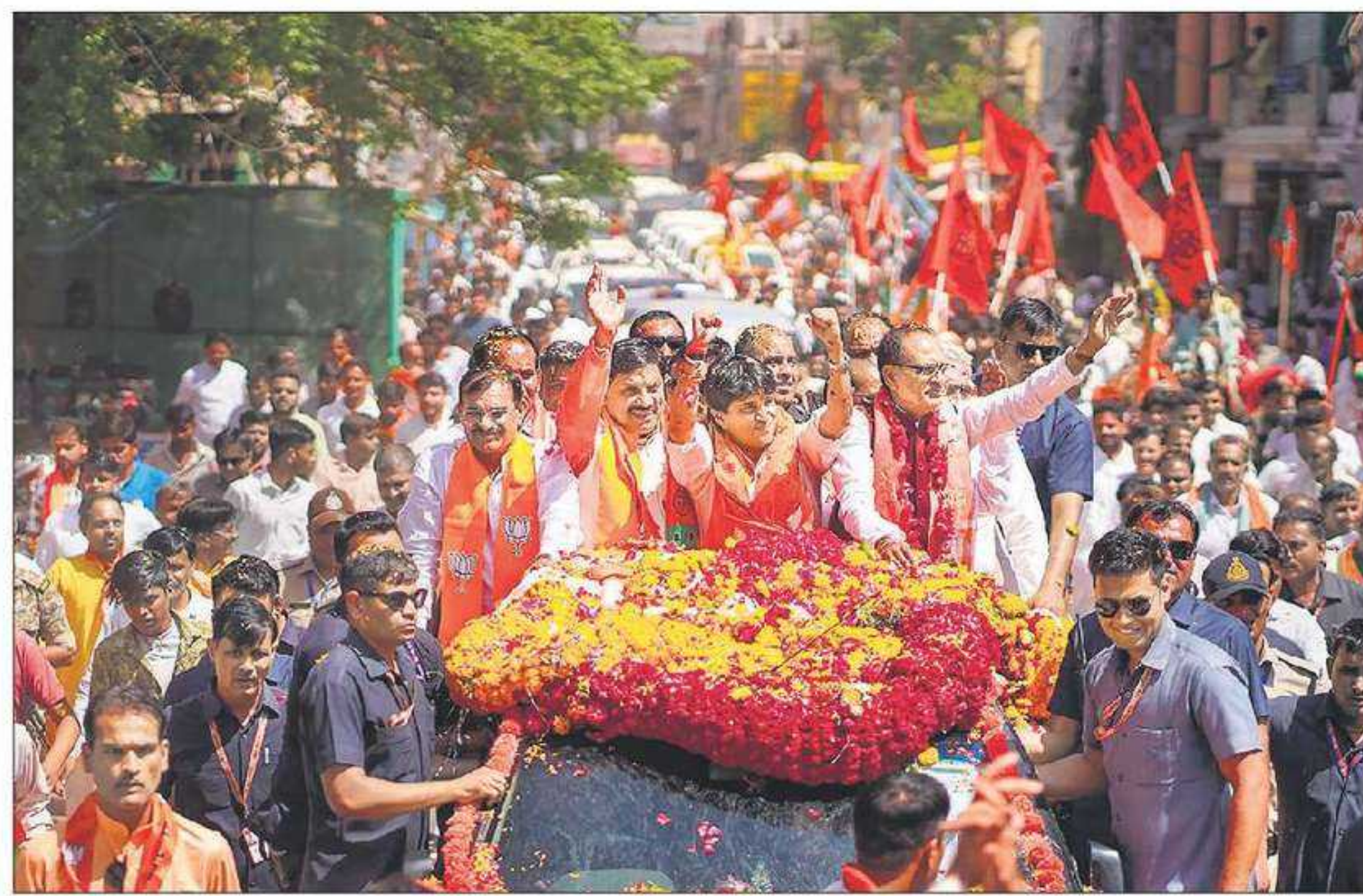
Strict compliance to MCC is must for strengthening democracy, BJP spokesperson Gopal Krishna Agarwal said. "The Election Commission is the nodal agency for conducting free, fair and transparent elections. India is the largest democracy in the world and holds one of the biggest elections across globe. We welcome any actions by the commission to adhere to the process."

The poll body also detailed other actions it had taken on its own, such as removing officials with dual charges as principal secretaries to chief ministers in six states and transferring the DGP of West Bengal from election duty.

The commission reported that out of 268,080 complaints filed on its eVigil portal, action was taken in 267,762 cases, with 92% resolved in less than 100 minutes on average, leading to a "substantial reduction" in violations.

Former chief election commissioner SY Quraishi said: The Election Commission owes it to the citizens to make this information public. It has always been in the public domain and the actions taken have always been announced.

A flurry of nominations



(Clockwise from left) Union minister and BJP's Guna Lok Sabha candidate Jyotiraditya Scindia, with Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav and former chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, during a roadshow in Guna before filing his nomination papers; Union minister of state and BJP's North Goa candidate, Shripad Y Naik files his nomination papers at Panaji; and Samajwadi Party leader Dimple Yadav files her papers from Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh, on Tuesday. PTI/ANI



CONG'S SURJEWALA BARRED FROM CAMPAIGNING FOR 48 HOURS OVER HIS REMARKS ON HEMA

Akshita Kumari
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NEW DELHI: The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Tuesday barred Congress MP Randeep Surjewala from campaigning for 48 hours over his allegedly disparaging remarks against Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP and actor Hema Malini while campaigning in Haryana, calling his comments "sexist, vulgar and unethical".

Surjewala is the first leader across India to be restricted from campaigning during the current Lok Sabha election cycle.

ECI, earlier this month, received a complaint against Surjewala and issued him a show-cause notice for violating Model Code of Conduct provisions. In response, Surjewala claimed the video cited was doctored.

In its notice, ECI said it condemns Surjewala's comments and called Congress leaders "regular offenders" and advised the party and its candidates to refrain from making comments "that may be construed as being repugnant to the honor and dignity of women."

Surjewala lashed out at the BJP and accused its IT cell of "distorting facts and spreading lies".

Sharing a video from the same event, he wrote, "The BJP is anti-women, so it sees everything from its misogynist-tinted glasses and conveniently spreads lies."

'Can't pull down EVMs... voting humongous task'

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NEW DELHI: The current system of polling through Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) cannot be pulled down without there being any substantial issue of propriety in the process, the Supreme Court observed on Tuesday, advocating caution against the perils of reverting to the traditional ballot box system.

A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta cited the sheer size of India's population and the vast number of voters as key factors, as it heard a clutch of petitions demanding 100% cross-verification of votes cast on EVMs with Voter Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs), just days before the first phase of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. At present, the VVPAT-EVM verification is limited to five in each assembly segment of a constituency.

Alternatively, the petitions argued in favour of going back to the ballot box system, contending that several European countries, including Germany, went back to the traditional system of casting votes.

But the bench sounded a word of caution. "What's the population of Germany? And how many people vote in India? There are almost 98 crore voters in India and around 60% vote. At least that many people vote...So, you are saying 60 crore VVPAT should be tallied," it told advocates Prashant Bhushan, and senior counsel Gopal Sankaranarayanan, Anand Grover and Huzefa Ahmadi, who appeared for the bunch of petitioners. The court added that voting in India is a "humongous task" that

[SUPREME COURT]

Machines are manipulated by humans... There's bound to be some instances of mismatch because of human errors

may not even be possible for several European countries. "My home state, West Bengal, has more population than the country (Germany) Mr Bhushan mentioned. We will have to repose trust and confidence in some institution. Of course, they have to be accountable. But don't try to bring down a system like this," justice Datta added.

Setting down the next hearing of the case on Thursday, the bench further remarked that the statistics shown by the petitioners show no discrepancies or irregularities in 99.9% of cases.

"As we said, when there are no human interventions, there are mostly no problems. Machines are manipulated by humans...There's bound to be some instances of mismatch because of human errors," added the court, asking ECI to be ready with statistics and pertinent information on the functioning of EVMs and VVPATs on the next date.

The bench opined that human intervention leads to problems with the fairness of the process. "Then questions regarding human

weaknesses, including biases, will crop up. Machines without human intervention will give you correct results. It will be accurate," it observed.

Addressing the lawyers' contention regarding reverting to the ballot box system, justice Khanna said: "Fortunately, we are not in the 60s when we have all seen what used to happen with ballot papers. I haven't forgotten what the situation at the time was...We have all seen the problems in the past. And we are not only talking about booth capturing. There are other problems too."

It also found no favour with a private survey cited by Bhushan to argue that "majority of voters do not trust EVMs." "So, you want us to go by a private survey to believe that majority of countrymen do not trust EVMs? Let us not reduce it to such a level...This type of argument won't be acceptable," it said.

The petitions, which have stirred significant public and political interest, argue for a more robust mechanism to ensure the accuracy of electronic voting through the VVPAT system.

JJP releases first list of five names for Hry

CHANDIGARH: Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) on Tuesday announced names of five Lok Sabha poll candidates for Haryana, fielding party MLA Naina Singh Chautala from Hisar. According to the JJP's first list of candidates for the coming polls, former MLA Ramesh Khatak will contest from Sirsa Lok Sabha seat. JJP has fielded former MLA Rao Bahadur Singh from Bhiwani-Mahendragar, the party said in a statement. "Famous artiste (singer) Rahul Yadav Fazilpuriya will be the candidate from Gurugram while JJP youth leader Nalin Hooda will contest elections from Faridabad," it said.

BJP unit moves court against Eshwarappa

BENGALURU: Rebel Karnataka BJP leader KS Eshwarappa, who has decided to contest as an independent in Shimoga, on Tuesday said he is an independent and no more with the party to face such disciplinary action, even as the party's district unit moved a local court, seeking an order to restrain him from using Prime Minister Narendra Modi's image while campaigning.

RJD questions Nitish's absence in PM rallies

PATNA: RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Tuesday questioned the absence of Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar from the BJP's election rallies in the state. The former deputy chief minister made the remark while referring to the absence of Kumar, the JD(U) president, from rallies addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Gaya and Purnia earlier in the day. "Where is Nitish Kumar ji? Why is the BJP not inviting him to its rallies? He could not be seen at either rally of the PM on Tuesday. I still have respect for the CM... BJP, which is his current ally, needs to come clean on the matter," Yadav said.

X takes down political posts on EC's orders

NEW DELHI: Social media platform X said on Tuesday it withheld some posts in India containing political speech from elected politicians, political parties, and candidates for office after the Election Commission ordered their takedown. X said it disagreed with the orders. "We call on the Election Commission to publish all of its takedown orders going forward," X said. The attached documents showed the posts were by Telugu Desam Party chief N Chandrababu Naidu, the YSR Congress Party's official handle, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)'s official handle and the account of Bihar Bharatiya Janata Party chief Samrat Choudhary.

BSP fields 11 more in UP, Jamal pitted against PM

HT Correspondent
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LUCKNOW: The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) on Tuesday announced 11 more names for the Lok Sabha elections, fielding party leader Aghar Jamal from the high-profile Varanasi seat, from where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is contesting as a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate.

The Mayawati-led opposition party also announced the candidature of Srikala Singh, wife of former MP Dhananjay Singh who was sentenced to seven years in jail last month in a 2020 case, from Jaunpur.

The BSP changed its candidate from Mainpuri, replacing Gulshan Dev Shykya with Shiv Prasad Yadav, who will be up against the Samajwadi Party (SP)'s Dimple Yadav and the BJP's Jaiveer Singh, a state government minister.

According to the fresh list, Muslim Khan will contest from the Budaun seat, Chhotey Lal Gangwar from Bareilly, Udayraj Verma from Sultanpur, Kranti Pandey from Farrukhabad, Mayank Dwivedi will be the BSP nominee from Banda, Khwaja

Ex-MP's aide shot dead in Jaunpur, probe on: Police

LUCKNOW: Former BSP lawmaker Dhananjay Singh's aide Anish Khan was allegedly shot dead by three unidentified men in Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday evening, police said. The incident took place when Khan was going to a market near his village, Rithi, under Sikrara police station limits. "The motive is yet to be ascertained. A probe is underway," an officer said. **HTC**

Samsuddin from Domariyaganj, Lalan Singh Yadav from Ballia and Umesh Kumar Singh from Ghazipur.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BSP contested the polls along with the SP and the Rashtriya Lok Dal. The BJP had won 62 seats and its ally Apna Dal (S) two seats, brushing aside the challenge of the SP-BSP-RLD alliance.

'BJP was sending feelers... I was clear my future is in Cong'

[INTERVIEW] VIKRAMADITYA SINGH, CONGRESS CANDIDATE FROM MANDI

NEW DELHI: One of the most talked about electoral fights in these Lok Sabha polls is being fought in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi constituency, where Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut is trying to beat Congress minister Vikramaditya Singh, who has stepped in for his mother Pratibha Singh.

What makes the fight interesting is that, earlier this year, both mother and son were ostensibly part of a rebellion against Congress chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, which led to six lawmakers moving to the BJP, party's Rajya Sabha candidate Abhishek Manu Singhvi losing despite having what was seen as a safe margin, and the party having to rush top leaders to keep the flock together. The party is in a precarious position and Vikramaditya Singh's candidature is being seen as its latest gamble. He spoke at Sunetra Choudhury on a range of issues. **Edited excerpts:**

What do you make of your opponent Kangana Rawat?
I respect her as an individual

and the work that she has done in Bollywood, but I doubt that she has done anything for the state of Himachal Pradesh. She has been continuously claiming that she belongs to Mandi and Manali but during the time that disaster struck Himachal (last year's floods), there was no help forthcoming from her. She is a famous Bollywood personality but I would like to ask how many people has she given an opportunity in her production companies. There are other successful women in the state who have done a lot of work in the judiciary, in the civil services, and she's one of them, but nothing more. The Himachal ki Beti narrative is a farce to get emotional votes from the people, and it's not going to cut much ice.

What's your poll pitch going to be?
I won't be mentioning her name at all. For me, we are fighting against the might of the BJP government and organisation. The kind of discrimination the central government did with Himachal Pradesh during the entire

turbulent period that we had in the state (monsoon floods killed 400 in July last year), massive loss of ₹15,000 crores, there was no support from the Centre. We were there constantly in the constituencies, my mother (the sitting MP) was on ground zero with the chief minister. And we have been working 24x7 for the people of the area. That's the pitch that we will be taking forward, along with the work done by successive Congress governments, and my vision for the area in how we will create employment for the people.

Speaking of party, you were in the news as someone who was unhappy with what your party was doing in the state. Six people left the party and they were known to be your supporters. Are things still in turmoil in the party?

Firstly, I want to clarify that the MLAs who have left are senior



It's quite a significant seat. When your mother won the

bypoll here, it was from the sitting chief minister's home turf.

It has an emotional connect with our family and has been a Congress bastion for decades. It was represented by my father (Virbhadr Singh) for three terms, and after that my mother has also represented it three times now. Pandit Sukhram ji, who was the telecom minister, has also represented the area. So yes, we have a good connect with the area and it is my privilege that the party has given me the ticket even though I didn't apply for it. I am a sitting cabinet minister and I wanted to serve the people in a different capacity but now that the party has asked me to, I have never shied away from any responsibility and we will fight it out.

Some people say that you or your mother will not move to the BJP because your father was summoned in 2014 by CBI on the day your sister was getting married?

Definitely, the vindictiveness of the BJP government is for everyone to see. That was the beginning when we faced this way back in 2014. People at that time didn't

imagine that this could happen to a sitting chief minister. Now, it has become a very common thing where two sitting chief ministers are sitting in jail. It's not a big deal now, but yes, this kind of things happen in politics and the kind of witch-hunt that has been unleashed by the current political dispensation astonishes everybody.

At that time, were you tempted to join the BJP?

I would say that the BJP was sending feelers to me and other individuals also. I cannot speak for anybody else, but I was absolutely clear that my future is in the Congress party. Yes, we can have differences and can have different ideologies but we belong to this organisation, we can have ups and downs, but continue to be here and take the party forward.

Aren't people wary of voting for the Congress because some of the leaders eventually join the BJP?
We don't have it in Himachal Pradesh, but yes, the fact that this has been happening nationally is something that the Congress leadership should think about. Why is this exodus happening on such a large scale? We can blame the BJP for what they're doing, their use of agencies and excesses. At the same time, we need to take some corrective measures in our party also because always blaming the other side, isn't the right way. We have to do a lot of introspection and in the long term, build our organisation, and see that leaders who are committed to the ideology are promoted.

TOP COURT DEFERS
HEARING IN LMV
DRIVING LICENCE
CASE TILL JULYAbraham Thomas
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NEW DELHI: A Supreme Court Constitution bench on Tuesday adjourned the hearing in connection with a batch of petitions seeking reversal of a 2017 decision permitting light motor vehicle (LMV) license holders to drive transport vehicles, till July.

The development came after the Centre told the court that it intends to bring changes to the law by introducing two sets of LMV licenses for vehicles having threshold weight of 3,500 and 7500 kilograms. Attorney general R Venkataramani, appearing for the Centre, presented a note to the court containing details of the proposed amendments to the Act which are awaiting the nod of the Parliament soon after the conclusion of general elections. The bench, headed by CJI Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud, deferred the hearing in the case till July 30 allowing sufficient time for the Parliament to take a call on the proposed amendments suggested by the ministry of road transport and highways.

The bench said, "Ultimately whatever the Parliament decides will be before us. We do not know if the proposed amendments will be accepted." The court urged the AG to ask the ministry for taking necessary action and propose an arrangement for those who have obtained license under the 2017 judgment, which continues to hold the field.

The changes intended to be introduced in the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 will be crucial to decide a set of 75 petitions filed in the top court by insurance companies, which have challenged the correctness of the 2017 ruling in Mukund Dewangan vs Oriental Insurance permitting LMV license holders to drive any vehicle with a laden weight of up to 7500 kilograms.

Increased intel and camp
push behind ops' successPrawesh Lama
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IMPHAL: A concerted advance into areas once considered Maoist citadels, clear signalling to the security apparatus that an uptick in operations was imperative, and an ever increasing stream of human intelligence from core areas, are behind a sharp increase in aggression against Maoists in south Chhattisgarh's Bastar in 2024, several officers that work in the area said. Twenty-nine Maoists were killed in an encounter with joint forces of the Chhattisgarh Police and the Border Security Force on Tuesday, in the most significant single-incident blow to Maoists in eight years, and the biggest ever in the state.

Overall, security forces in Chhattisgarh have already killed 79 alleged Maoists in the first three and a half months of 2024 alone, higher than the combined Maoist deaths in 2022 and 2023. In 2022, 30 Maoist cadre were killed, and in 2023, 22 Maoists were killed through the year.

Senior security officials on the ground said these "operational successes" come from an incessant, and consistent push into core Maoist citadels. "For the last decade, if we wanted to get to one point deep inside the forests, we had to operate from camps further away. But we have now finally taken control of those core areas ourselves, or can reach them. Now, more than ever, we are face to face with Maoist groups as a result. They are pushed to a wall and their natural reaction is to respond with gunfire. In the coming days, there will be many such exchanges of fire," an official said.

While officials said that there has been a concerted effort over several years to break new ground

Crackdown on insurgency

● Maoists death



Security personnel during an encounter with Maoists, in Kanker district of Chhattisgarh on Tuesday. PTI

RECENT ATTACKS

February 25

Seven Maoists killed in separate encounters with security personnel in Kanker and Bijapur districts

March 27

Six Maoists killed in a fierce gun battle with security personnel in Bijapur district

April 2

Thirteen Maoists killed in an encounter with security personnel in Bijapur

April 16

Twenty nine Maoists killed in encounter with security forces in Kanker

55 killed in 51 days

I congratulate all the security personnel who made this op successful with their bravery.

AMIT SHAH, Home minister

in the battle against left wing insurgents, which includes setting up new camps, or building new roads — efforts that span several years, the battle against Maoism has been identified as a key focus area by the current state government. In December 2023, the BJP returned to power in the state after a five-year hiatus, and within two months of taking charge, the government ordered the transfer of 25 superintendents of police, includ-

ing those of critical districts such as Bijapur, Kanker and Narayanpur. The message was clear, officials said, to act against Maoists. If Tuesday's encounter took place in the confines of Kanker, the April 2 encounter where 13 cadre were killed, took place in Bijapur.

Officials said that since December 13, 2023, security forces have built at least 17 new camps in "forward operating areas". This meant not only a security presence in areas hitherto inaccessible for the forces, but a source for human intelligence once the confidence of villagers is earned through civilian outreach such as social welfare programmes or health camps. "We already had a steady stream of information from villages where we have established camps for a while. Now, we are getting information from villages in forward areas. We have never had access to this before because for

three decades, they never believed Maoists could ever leave. These places are so dense that some residents have seen a doctor for the first time," a CRPF official said.

Security officials, however, are wary of a Maoist counter-attack and said that they were preparing both themselves, and the villages. "They might respond and even attack civilians to plug their leaks. But with the work we have done, we are hopeful the villagers will continue to work with us," the same CRPF official said.

Meanwhile, Union home minister Amit Shah congratulated security forces for the successful operation. "Today, a large number of Naxalites have been killed... I congratulate all the security personnel who made this operation successful with their bravery and wish for the speedy recovery of the brave policemen who have been injured," he wrote on X in Hindi.

After SC rap, Patanjali offers a public apology

Utkarsh Anand
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NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Tuesday questioned yoga guru and entrepreneur Ramdev and Patanjali's managing director Balkrishna on disobeying court orders that forbade Patanjali Ayurved from running misleading advertisements on health cures and sternly warned them against undermining other medical practices. The court pointed out that the two were "not so naive" that they had simply made a mistake, after they offered to issue a public apology to avoid a contempt charge.

While the top court gave Ramdev and Balkrishna a week to take suitable steps "to redeem themselves" and demonstrate their remorse, it directly interacted with the two, telling them their plea of innocence or inadvertence cannot be accepted right away after they chose to flout court orders despite previous judicial warnings.

The court, however, told them that it was still to make up its mind on whether to accept their apology or not.

Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah asked pointed questions as Ramdev and Balkrishna appeared in person to answer charges of contempt of court, stemming from a series of advertisements that claimed Patanjali products could cure various diseases — a clear violation of top court's earlier directives and an undertaking given by Patanjali in this regard.

As soon as the proceedings commenced, senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi, representing the leaders of the Patanjali Ayurved empire, offered to issue a public apology but the bench called upon the two for an interaction. It began by asking Ramdev why he and Patanjali would run down any other form of medicine in a country that has a rich and diverse medical heritage, dating back thousands of years, with the practice of multiple systems of medicine that have developed and evolved over centuries. The court interacted with Ramdev and Balkrishna in Hindi. "Why would you say any other system is not good?" it asked Ramdev, who started by expressing his "unqualified and unconditional apology" for his



Yoga guru Ramdev

conduct that riled the court.

Never meant to denigrate any medicine: Ramdev

Ramdev said he has never sought to denigrate any other form of medicine, including modern medicine — it is often referred to as allopathy in India — and that a press conference, which was conducted in November last year, a day after Patanjali rendered its assurance to the court against issuing any misleading advertisement of contentious statements, aimed at bringing clinical evidence and real-life testimonies to notice of people.

"Whatever you do, it has to be within the four corners of the law... You cannot denigrate or shoot down other systems to promote your system. We won't allow that. You are before us because you have apparently committed contempt... There are incurable diseases, and no advertisements are allowed in respect of them. Law is equal for everyone. And if you think your system has a cure, prove it before the government panel first," the bench told him. "This country and its people have hopes from you. You should not have done all this... You cannot degrade allopathy. Don't denigrate any other system," it said.

Cutting a sorry figure, Ramdev said: "The court is right. I will be extremely careful in future so that there is no defiance of a court order, or my position becomes delicate because of my mistakes. It happened because of my zeal-ousness to tell the world about our discoveries and research. But we should have been more careful." Balkrishna supported this stance, highlighting their respect for the court's concerns and their commitment to more responsible advertising.

Court flags repeated violations by Patanjali

The court told them that it was

still to make up its mind on whether to accept their apology or not. "At times, it does not appear that the apology is from the heart when you try to justify what you did. There has been a violation of not one but three court orders. Today, we are not saying 'we condone you'. We are still deciding whether to accept your apology. You cannot be considered as ignorant as you could defy three court orders," the bench told them.

Turning to Rohatgi, the bench said Ramdev and Balkrishna were free to take measures that they deem appropriate for redeeming themselves, adding the court would take up the matter against on April 27.

"Personality does not matter... You are part of the system. You and I understand but there are some people who don't. Institutions matter, personalities don't. The majesty of the institution and the Constitution are supreme... that is above us and that is important," it told Rohatgi, who assured the bench that he would advise the two as an officer of the court.

In a series of hearings on the Indian Medical Association's petition complaining against Ramdev's contentious comments about modern medicine and allegedly misleading advertisements about Patanjali products, the Supreme Court expressed grave concern and emphasised the need for responsible discourse, especially during a pandemic like Covid-19.

The court admonished Patanjali for spreading misinformation that could undermine public trust in the health care system and had recorded an undertaking by the company in November 2023 that it would stop running any misleading advertisements and issuing disparaging statements against modern or any other form of medicine. However, the medical association came back to the bench with a video clip of a press conference held by Ramdev and Patanjali advertisements in national media merely a day after their undertaking in the court on November 21. Additionally, the association produced a series of advertisements branding Patanjali products as cure for several ailments, including hypertension and diabetes.

Sullivan calls off India trip amid W Asia crisis

Rezaul H Laskar
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NEW DELHI: US National Security Adviser (NSA) Jake Sullivan has called off a planned visit to India this week because of spiralling tensions between Iran and Israel, the second time he has put off a trip to New Delhi this year.

Sullivan was expected to be in New Delhi for a meeting with his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval on April 18 to review the India-US initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (ICET), people familiar with the matter said on condition of anonymity. The visit was earlier planned for February and was called off at that time because of Sullivan's pressing commitments.

Tensions between Tehran and Tel Aviv hit a fresh high after Iran launched scores of drones and missiles at Israel on April 13 in retaliation to an Israeli air strike on an Iranian diplomatic complex in Syria on April 1 that killed seven people, including a senior general of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). "Due to ongoing events in the Middle East, NSA Sullivan has postponed his trip to India this week," a US embassy spokesperson said.

Sullivan looks forward to holding the ICET annual review meeting at the "next earliest possible



Jake Sullivan

date and remains personally committed to advancing our deeply consequential and multi-faceted partnership with India", the spokesperson said.

"Similarly, [US President Joe Biden] looks forward to the next meeting of the Quad leaders and continue our efforts with India to deliver results for the American and Indian people, as well as our partners, in support of our shared vision for a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific," the spokesperson said.

India had invited Biden to be the chief guest at the annual Republic Day celebrations on January 26 and there were plans to hold a Quad Leaders' Summit the following day. With Biden unable to take up the invitation, the Quad Summit is not expected to be held before November, the people said. Sullivan's visit had not been formally announced by both countries and he was expected to be accompanied by US deputy secretary of state Kurt Campbell.

Let us not go by religion or caste: Top court on mob lynching cases

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NEW DELHI: When it comes to mob lynching, one cannot be selective in picking up cases against any religious community or caste, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday as it gave six weeks to states and Union territories to spell out action taken to curb instances of lynching and hate crimes as laid down in a 2018 judgment.

Hearing a petition filed by the National Federation of Indian Women, which specified nearly 50 hate crimes since the passing of the 2018 judgment in Tehseen Poonawalla case, where state action was either absent or inadequate, a bench led by justice BR Gavai noted that the list of cases did not include the brutal murder of a tailor, Kanhaiya Lal, in Rajasthan's Udaipur in 2022.

The incident was linked to a hate crime as the two Muslim killers walked into Lal's shop and slit his throat as he had supported a social media post profaning Prophet Muhammad.

"What about that tailor Kanhaiya Lal in Rajasthan who was lynched? Have you highlighted it in your petition?" asked the bench that also comprised justices Arvind Kumar and Sandeep Mehta.



The apex court was hearing a petition filed by the National Federation of Indian Women.

Advocate Nizam Pasha, appearing for the petitioner, admitted that the petition did not contain the incident and agreed to examine that incident as well. Senior advocate Archana Pathak Dave, appearing for the Gujarat government, said the petition only talked about hate crimes against Muslims and this explained why the Kanhaiya Lal incident was not mentioned.

"Let us not go by religion or caste," the bench remarked. "It is only an allegation of mob lynching and what action has been taken by states." Pasha told the court that his petition highlighted a statistical fact that most hate crimes have been directed against Muslims.

However, the petition filed by him did not seek any specific relief against any particular community but citizens in general.

Dave pointed out a statement made in the petition claiming there is a rise of hate crimes against Muslims. "If he has only noticed mob lynching incidents of persons belonging to a particular community, is there any harm in bringing it to our notice? You tell us the incidents where Hindu persons have been lynched," the court told Dave. "Why do you want to raise this issue when it is not being argued? You can put this in your response." "You have taken all states into consideration. We want to be sure you are not selective. You have to espouse a larger cause," the court said. Pasha presented a chart to the court showing how the 50 instances that took place in 14 states have not been specifically addressed by them in their responses. Only two states — Madhya Pradesh and Haryana — referred to the specific hate crime cases, denying occurrence of any mob lynching or hate crime.

"It is expected of states to at least respond and state what action has been taken in the instances specified in the petition," the court said. Granting six weeks to all states to file responses explaining the action taken on the hate crimes highlighted by the petitioner, the court adjourned the matter to July.

LEH: PROTESTING GROUPS CALL OFF MARCH TO BORDER

LEH: The groups agitating to press for Sixth Schedule status to Ladakh have called off their proposed march to China border for second time this month due to "non-cooperation" of local administration, said activist Sonam Wangchuk, who is also part of the agitation.

Leh Apex Body (LAB), an amalgam of social and religious groups, along with the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) had planned to start their march on Wednesday.

Wangchuk said the motive behind the march was only to know whether pastures in the region were being taken over for setting up projects by big industrialists and if any Indian land was taken away by China. "We have decided to call off the Pashmina March for the second time due to over-reaction by the administration," he told reporters.

The groups have been agitating to demand statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

Centre forms panel on LGBTQ+ welfare

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NEW DELHI: The Union government has formed a committee to address issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community, following a Supreme Court directive in the Supriyo vs Union of India case.

The committee's mandate includes recommending measures to eliminate discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in accessing goods and services, ensuring their safety, preventing involuntary medical treatments or surgeries, and addressing discrimination in social welfare entitlements.

The committee may also address any other issues deemed necessary for the protection and well-being of the LGBTQ+ community.

The social justice ministry did not respond to requests for a comment.

The six-member committee, announced in a law ministry order on Tuesday, will be chaired by cabinet secretary

Rajiv Gauba, with social justice and empowerment secretary Saurabh Garg serving as the convener. Secretaries from the home affairs, women and child development, health and family welfare, and law and justice ministries will also be part of the committee, which has the authority to co-opt experts and officers as needed.

In May 2023, the Centre informed the Supreme Court of its intention to form this committee to address "human concerns" of same-sex couples without legally recognising their relationships as marriages.

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MUMBAI: Two people arrested in connection with a shooting outside Bollywood actor Salman Khan's residence in Bandra area of Mumbai were on Tuesday remanded in nine-day police custody by a magistrate court, even as police investigations revealed fresh details about the incident.

The two men, identified as Vicky Gupta (24) and Sagar Pal (21), both residents of Bihar, who had been on the run after the incident were apprehended from Mata no Madh village in Kutch district of Gujarat on Monday night. The accused were produced on Tuesday in Mumbai's Killa Court.

The Mumbai crime branch sought 14-day custody of the two men on the grounds that they had opened fire outside Khan's residence with "an intention to kill him" and custodial interrogation was required to ascertain the details of the conspir-



Salman Khan

acy. "The two accused opened fire outside Salman Khan's house in an attempt to kill the actor. Custodial interrogation is required to identify the mastermind and to also ascertain the motive," the police remand note said.

Additional chief metropolitan magistrate LS Paden remanded the two accused in police custody till April 25.

According to police, around 4.55am on Sunday, two people fired five to six rounds outside Galaxy Apartments — where Khan lives — in Bandra and fled. No one was hurt, but hours later, Bishnoi's brother Anmol Bishnoi claimed responsibility for the

attack in a social media post. The accused have been booked under Indian Penal Code Sections 307 (attempt to murder), 120-B (criminal conspiracy) and 34 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of a common intention) and provisions of the Arms Act, police said. The Mumbai Police have also registered a case against Anmol Bishnoi for his social media post.

According to preliminary investigations, Gupta was the one who was riding the motorcycle and Pal, who was riding pillion, was the one who fired the shots at the actor's house. Police were able to establish their identities with the original Aadhaar cards that they had submitted for a rent agreement and bike purchase documents.

Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde on Tuesday visited Khan's residence.

"I have assured Salman Khan that the government stands behind him and his safety is the government's responsibility," he said.

Centre closes arguments in industrial alcohol case

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NEW DELHI: The Union government on Tuesday told the Supreme Court that framers of the Constitution intended to give the Centre complete control over any industry through enactment of Industrial (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951 in "public interest".

Concluding his arguments before a nine-judge bench headed by chief justice of India (CJI) Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud, solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said: "After the year 1991 when new industrial policy was declared which was a liberalised policy, the Parliament has chosen not to either repeal IDRA or delete any of the scheduled industries though some of them are delicensed. This clearly shows that the intention is to continue with the regime so as to exercise the power as and when the situation so demands."

Citing the example of Covid, the law officer said the government

can utilise its regulatory power in national interest as it did during the outbreak by issuing orders to ensure availability of ethanol at a notified price for manufacturing sanitisers.

"Suppose the Union government required during Covid that entire quantity of industrial alcohol should be used for manufacturing sanitisers, then the government can utilise its regulatory power," Mehta told the constitution bench, also comprising Justices Hrishikesh Roy, Abhay S Oka, B V Nagarathna, J B Pardiwala, Manoj Misra, Ujjal Bhuyan, Satish Chandra Sharma and Augustine George Masih.

The nine-judge bench is hearing a batch of 30 appeals referred to it by a five-judge bench in December 2010 doubting the correctness of a 1990 judgment that took away state's power in relation to industrial alcohol under Entry 33 of the Concurrent List. This entry provides for trade and commerce in production, supply and distribution of certain industrial products.

NAVY SEIZES 940KG DRUGS IN THE ARABIAN SEA

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NEW DELHI: INS Talwar seized 940 kg of drugs in the Arabian Sea on April 13, the Indian Navy's first interdiction of illicit narcotics as a member of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), a 42-nation naval partnership, the CMF said in a statement on Tuesday.

The warship, operating in support of the Canadian-led Combined Task Force (CTF) 150, seized 453 kg of methamphetamines, 416 kg of hash and 71 kg of heroin from a dhow as part of Focused Operation Crimson Baracuda, it said.

The Indian Navy joined CMF last November. "I commend the crew of INS Talwar for their efforts throughout this Focused Operation and their hard work has paid off with this seizure of 940 kg of drugs," said Royal Canadian Navy Captain Colin Matthews, commander, CTF 150. "This seizure, the fourth of this Focused Operation, demonstrates the effectiveness and professionalism of CMF, and of the Indian Navy, in deterring and disrupting criminal and terrorist activities at sea."

THIS WAS INDIAN NAVY'S FIRST INTERDICTION OF ILLICIT NARCOTICS AS A MEMBER OF THE COMBINED MARITIME FORCES

{ ALONG THE 3,488 KM LAC }

India not in infra race with China: BRO chief

Rahul Singh
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NEW DELHI: India is not competing with China to develop its forward infrastructure along the 3,488 km Line of Actual Control (LAC) and is driven solely by its long-term strategic goals, the military's requirements and economic aspirations of people living in the country's farthest frontiers, Border Roads Organisation chief Lieutenant General Raghu Srinivasan said on Tuesday.

"Drawing a comparison with China is an argument that doesn't hold merit the way we look at things," he said in an interview. "Infrastructure development is not a head-to-head contest and India's overarching plan for its border areas is based on a clear strategic vision."

The BRO chief's comments are significant as he has sought to decouple India's forward infrastructure push from the Chinese thrust on developing its border areas at a time when the two countries are locked in a dragging military standoff in eastern Ladakh. Both nations have ploughed billions into building infrastructure to strengthen their military capabilities since the LAC row erupted almost four years ago.

India's infrastructure push must meet its needs and the Chinese approach is irrelevant as the requirements of both countries are different, Srinivasan



Lt Gen Raghu Srinivasan

said. "As far as infrastructure development goes, it's not the same as the scale of deployment of men and weaponry in that theatre. If he (China) has 100 battalions, do I also have 100, or if he has deployed 100 tanks, am I matching that number? That (question) is not for me as I must focus on building infrastructure that meets my needs. He will do what he has to do based on his needs," he said.

Srinivasan distanced himself from frequent attempts from several quarters to compare the strides taken by both countries towards building border infrastructure as a necessary enabler of stronger military posture, and declare China far ahead in the race. Due to the geography, it is much easier to construct infrastructure on the Tibetan side of LAC, said military affairs expert Lieutenant General DS Hooda (retd). "...if we make direct comparisons, it will appear that we are playing catch-up. We must focus on building infrastructure that supports our operational requirements," Hooda said.

OLDEST RETD IAF FIGHTER PILOT PASSES AWAY AT 103 IN U'KHAND

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NEW DELHI: Squadron Leader DS Majithia, the Indian Air Force's oldest retired fighter pilot, passed away in Rudrapur of Uttarakhand on Tuesday, people familiar with the matter said. He was 103.

Born in Shimla on July 27, 1920, Majithia's passion for aviation led him to join the air force volunteer reserve in 1940 during the tumultuous years of World War II. His exceptional talent was evident early on, earning him the prestigious best pilot trophy during his training at the Initial Training School in Walton, Lahore, Indian Air Force officials said.

Majithia flew a variety of aircraft, including the Gypsy Moth, Wapiti, Hart, Audax, and Atlanta. Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tribute to Majithia in a post on X, saying: "Squadron Leader Dalip Singh Majithia Ji's exemplary career and valour exemplify the highest ideals of service and dedication to our country..."

Affectionately known as Maji, Majithia's tenure as the flight commander of the legendary No. 4 Squadron, 'The Fighting Orials', from 1942 to 1943 at Burma remains etched in the annals of history, the officials said.

With over 1100 flying hours, including missions in aircraft like Hurricanes and Spitfires, Majithia's contribution to the IAF was immense, said another official.

'Arrest part of well-orchestrated conspiracy': Hemant Soren moves bail plea in Ranch court

RANCHI: Former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren moved a bail petition before a special court in Ranchi on Tuesday, alleging that his arrest by the ED was politically motivated and part of a well-orchestrated conspiracy to coerce him to join the BJP. The special PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court fixed April 23 as the next date of hearing after the Enforcement Directorate sought time to file a reply to it. Soren is at present in judicial custody and lodged at the Birsa Munda Central Jail.

32-year-old Military Engineer Services worker electrocuted inside army camp in Rajouri distt

RAJOURI/JAMMU: A 32-year-old man working in the Military Engineer Services (MES) was electrocuted inside an army camp in Jammu & Kashmir's Rajouri district on Tuesday, officials said. The death of Amrit Singh (32), a resident of Raipur-Kamila, inside the camp at Nowshera sector sparked protests by the relatives who blocked the Jammu-Poonch national highway for over four hours demanding an inquiry and adequate compensation to the deceased, the officials said.

Govt asks traders to speed up pulses import from Myanmar using forex

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NEW DELHI: India and Myanmar have set up a new forex payment mechanism via the Punjab National Bank to ease cross-border movement of goods, especially pulses, which Indian importers are being encouraged to use to avoid logjams, a top official said.

Consumer affairs secretary Nidhi Khare last week reviewed trade arrangements between the two countries to speed up import of pulses from the conflict-ridden country, which is a major supplier of pigeon pea (tur) and black gram (urad) to India.

Last year, the government found that importers of pigeon pea and black gram were hoarding their purchases in Myanmar by not bringing them to India immediately.

This had created artificial scarcity and stoked prices. The consumer affairs minis-



Output of pulses dipped to 23.4 million tonne in 2023-24 from 26.1 million tonne year ago.

try cracked down on hoarding by asking stockholding entities like supermarkets, millers and wholesalers to declare pulses inventories held by them on a weekly basis effective April 15.

The top bureaucrat in the consumer affairs virtually discussed with the Indian mission in Yangon issues related to pulses imports from Myanmar.

Revised exchange rates had created a hurdle in seamless payments while stocks of pulses held by Indian importers in Myanmar have in the past cre-

ated artificial scarcity.

The Indian mission apprised Khare that a rupee/kyat settlement mechanism had been operationalised in January to ease trade. The Central Bank of Myanmar has released guidelines for payment procedures under a special rupee vostro account. A vostro account is one in which a foreign bank provides financial services on behalf of a domestic bank, making transactions easier.

Retail inflation in pulses remains high, although it slowed to 17.7% in March compared to a rise of 18.9% in February, according to official data. Holding the repurchase rate steady, the Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy committee on April 6 highlighted how food price pressures "have been interrupting the ongoing disinflation process, posing challenges for the final descent of inflation to the target of 4%".

India's output of pulses dipped to 23.4 million tonne in

2023-24 from 26.1 million tonne a year ago, the agriculture ministry estimated.

"The new mechanism will apply for both sea and border trade and for trade in goods as well as services. Adoption of the mechanism by traders will reduce costs associated with currency conversions and eliminate complexities related to exchange rates by eliminating the need for multiple currency conversations," an official said, declining to be named.

The consumer affairs ministry is undertaking a campaign to disseminate information about the new payment mechanisms among pulses importers, who can now use rupee/kyat direct payment system using the vostro account through the Punjab National Bank.

To keep prices stable, the Centre has put in a mechanism to closely monitor stock disclosures of pulses importers, traders and millers to check hoarding, which could stoke prices.

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{ OUR TAKE }

Why monsoon rainfall matters

Normal rains, spread out evenly, will boost key sectors of the Indian economy

The India Meteorological Department (IMD), the country's national weather bureau, has predicted an above-normal monsoon season with a potential boost to the world's fifth-largest economy. Plentiful June-September rains not only bring respite from a scorching summer, but they are also the lifeblood of the country. The rains are critical for three reasons. One, they drive agricultural output and growth, with farming still the largest source of employment. Two, nearly half of the country's net-sown area does not have access to irrigation and therefore, depends on the rains to grow a number of crops vital for food security. Three, robust farm output helps to put a lid on food prices, which have remained above the central bank's comfort level.

According to IMD's forecast for the 2024 southwest monsoon, rainfall is expected at 106% of its long-period average or LPA, with a model error of ±5%. Rainfall between 96% and 104% of the 50-year average of 87 cm for the four-month rainy season is considered normal. The monsoon, which delivers 70% of the country's annual rainfall, also replenishes 89 nationally important water reservoirs critical for irrigation, drinking and power generation. Most of these are currently depleted by nearly half of their usual capacity, according to official data.

Hopes of a robust monsoon became brighter in recent months with a weakening El Niño, a weather anomaly marked by higher Pacific Ocean surface temperatures. Its effects ripple around the globe: An El Niño is usually associated with hot, dry weather in India. Weather conditions are set to enter a so-called neutral stage by the time the monsoon sets in, usually in the first week of June. The neutral phase is expected to give way to a La Niña phase, which increases rainfall in summer in India.

A good spell of showers will potentially boost key sectors of the economy. When farm growth increases, rural spending goes up too, spurring demand in the economy. For instance, in a normal-monsoon year, nearly half of all motorcycles are sold in the countryside and semi-urban centres. The cautionary tale in all of this, however, is that the rains need to be evenly spread, across regions and the season. A second IMD forecast due in a month will deliver a more granular picture of how the rains will fare in terms of distribution.

Shrinking footprint of the Congress party

The upcoming general elections are a watershed moment for the Congress. The party is set to contest in less than or around 300 Lok Sabha seats, its lowest ever tally since 1952. The lowest so far has been 417 in 2004. This is not surprising as the party has lost its pole position in national politics to the BJP. The fall in tally also suggests that the party has finally admitted to its decline and recognises the need to have pre-poll alliances to force a contest with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

The Congress is not new to pre-poll alliances: In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the party has had allies for close to 50 years. Post the 1980s, the Congress lost ground in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and accepted the role of a junior partner to the Mandal parties. The formation of the INDIA bloc, however, has provided a pan-Indian template for a pre-poll alliance, which forced the Congress to cede space to allies, including relatively new outfits. So, in Maharashtra, the Congress has walked the extra mile to meet the demands of Shiv Sena-UBT and the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar), and in the process, letting go of even its traditional seats. In West Bengal, it is a junior partner to the CPI(M)-led Left Front. In the five big states of UP, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Bihar and Tamil Nadu, which have a total of 249 constituencies, Congress candidates are in the fray in just 65. Besides, the party has tied up with the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi, Gujarat and Haryana, allotted seats for the CPI(M), the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party and the Bharatiya Adivasi Party in Rajasthan and left a seat for the Samajwadi Party in Madhya Pradesh.

Two questions remain though: One, can the Congress and its allies resolve the contradictions among them and make the INDIA bloc work? Two, will the party be able to guard its turf, including from partners, and recoup post-elections? The party's future will be shaped by how it responds to these challenges.

{ OVER THE HORIZON }

Arunabha Ghosh



Heat is on, be ready for the consequences

A warming world demands holistic solutions that span robust heat action strategies, climate-resilient agriculture, urban planning, and economic foresight

As the sun climbs higher in the Indian sky, so does concern over rising temperatures and the impact of heatwaves. Recent forecasts from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warn of above-normal temperatures in April, May, and June, and heatwaves lasting as long as 10-20 days in some parts, compared to a normal of 4-8 days. Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Telangana have already seen searing temperatures. And if 2023 was anything to go by, we are looking at a hot year again. As we now know from the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) recent State of the Global Climate report, 2023 broke all records — for being the hottest year, for the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and for ocean heat content. We can point to El Niño cycles and be alarmed by headline numbers, but heatwaves don't merely register as uncomfortable spikes on the thermometer; they reverberate through every

facet of public health and the economy. Against this, the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) decision to maintain the repo rate at 6.5% for the seventh consecutive time shows its recognition of the macroeconomic impacts of the climate crisis. Agriculture, which sustains a significant portion of the population, stands particularly vulnerable. Prolonged heat spells can disrupt crop cycles, reduce yields, and imperil food security — adding to food inflation and affecting rural consumer demand. For instance, early and prolonged heatwaves in 2022 reportedly led to a 10% to 35% reduction in crop yields in Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh. The urban landscape faces a different set of hurdles. Rising temperatures strain energy grids as demand for cooling escalates. The health sector braces for heat-related illnesses and businesses contend with reduced worker efficiency and higher operational costs. The International Labour Organization projects a productivity loss equivalent to 34 million full-time jobs in India due to heat stress by 2030.

The interplay of climate and finance adds a layer of complexity to this. As temperatures soar, banks face heightened risks associated with agricultural lending and business continuity. The fiscal health of institutions and their ability to weather climatic shocks will play a pivotal role in determining India's economic resilience. And it's not just the heat, the monsoon impacts price volatility and inflation rates too. A recent study by the Council on Energy,

Environment and Water (CEEW) shows that while 11% of Indian *tehsils* (subdivisions) have seen a decrease in southwest monsoon rainfall in the last decade compared to the previous three, they are located in the agriculturally vital Indo-Gangetic plain.

What India does to tackle extreme weather will have lessons for other emerging economies facing increased climate vulnerability. A warming world demands solutions that span heat action strategies, urban planning, economic foresight and climate-resilient agriculture.

First, make Heat Action Plans (HAPs) more robust. India's first generation of HAPs — made at the city, district and state levels — have shown results and helped reduce public health risks. As of 2023, nearly 23 states and 130-plus cities in India have developed their HAPs. In February, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) organised a first-of-its-kind national workshop to assess heatwave preparedness. Similarly, NDMA and IMD have been conducting monthly meetings with states to assess HAP implementation. But these HAPs currently focus more on response than preparedness. Many lack granular vulnerability assessments, crucial for identifying at-risk populations before heatwaves occur. Further, not just temperatures, the second generation of HAPs need to account for other variables such as humidity. For example, Thane's first HAP, created by the city's municipal corporation in collaboration



Heatwaves don't merely register as spikes on the thermometer; they reverberate through every facet of public health and the economy HT PHOTO

with CEEW, adopts a "when, where, who and how" framework for heat action strategies. It considers "felt heat" (temperature plus humidity), which can actually be 3-4°C higher than dry heat, warm nights, and socioeconomic factors at a ward level.

Second, enhancing climate resilience in agriculture is paramount. The climate crisis will result in significant economic losses for Indian agriculture — production losses in rice, wheat and maize could reach \$208 billion in 2050 (in 2010 US dollar prices). So, promoting drought-resistant crops, expanding sustainable irrigation facilities, and fostering climate-smart farming practices that involve communities are important. Agricultural insurance mechanisms must be bolstered to safeguard farmers against climate-induced losses or can be nudged towards harder crops. Public awareness campaigns delivered in vernacular languages can help farmers be better prepared.

Third, urban planning must pivot towards climate-sensitive infrastructure. Investments in green spaces, sustainable cooling systems, and resilient urban design can reduce the impacts of heat waves and enhance livability in cities. For instance, not everyone can afford an air conditioner. Here district cooling and super-efficient fans can help. The annual market for super-efficient fans in India was \$1.64 billion in

2022 alone — and could be as large as \$20 billion. Further, district cooling helps cool down buildings without everyone having to buy air conditioners.

Finally, financial institutions must integrate climate risk assessments into their lending practices. RBI's oversight can catalyse this shift by incentivising banks to adopt sustainable financing principles and promote investments in climate-resilient projects. Earlier this year, RBI presented draft guidelines on the Disclosure Framework on Climate-related Financial Risks 2024 (currently open for comments). These disclosures could help stakeholders — from customers to investors — assess market risks and opportunities.

Extreme weather is a collective vulnerability. India — a continent-sized country — needs granular data for informed decisions, dynamic heat indices and locally salient interventions. If nine of the last 10 years have been the hottest on record and extreme weather events have led to ₹5.60 lakh crore in damages in recent decades, then climate action must move from the margins of our consciousness to the mainstream of India's economic discourse. Starting this summer.

Arunabha Ghosh is the CEO of the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW). The views expressed are personal

Questions to the Congress on wealth redistribution

The Indian National Congress is promising to redistribute India's wealth. At an election rally, the former president of the Congress party, Rahul Gandhi, according to newspaper reports, said that after a caste census, a financial and institutional survey will be conducted, following which a distribution of India's wealth according to the population share will be undertaken. Many questions arise from this statement. It must be that the Congress has worked out the details ahead of such an ambitious promise — as elections are almost here and the plans must be fully cooked. I will just raise the questions here hoping to get an answer, ideally before the elections, so that the vote can be cast with full information on this historic move.

First, will the redistribution that is to be considered in the survey be of income or wealth? If it is income then this would mean that anybody earning more than the average per capita income of India of ₹1.69 lakh, would need to give up the extra over this number so that those below can be made at par. Will this extend to pensions as well? And since the data for income will certainly come from the tax records, leading to the question — will it only be the income-tax paying Indian whose income will be up for redistribution?

If it is a wealth redistribution, then will it be all assets or just financial assets? All assets would include land, gold and cash. The party must have worked out a way to survey the private possessions of these physical assets and found a way to value them. This would mean that land that belongs to wealthy farmers, for example, or private trusts or religious institutions will also be up for survey ahead of the redistribution. The land banks of some religious groups make up a good percentage of the total land bank of India. If so, will this survey extend to all communities, or will the minorities get an exemption from their land and other assets being mapped? For example, will a tiny but asset-rich community be exempt or will its assets be up for redistribution as well? I ask this since another part of

the manifesto is very certain that minority rights must be protected. If indeed, the minorities are exempt, will it be the assets only of the majority community that will be in the pot for redistribution?

Will assets of all sections of the population be up for redistribution? For example, will the assets of judges, teachers, doctors, lawyers, the armed forces and rich farmers be redistributed or there will be carve-outs for certain sections of the well-off Indians? What about ancestral real estate and wealth — will that be included or it is only self-earned assets that are up for distribution? The answer will help the now vibrant startup community in India to decide where they would like to house their asset creation in the future.

Will assets such as residential real estate be a part of the redistribution? I ask in the interest of a person who might have a six-bedroom house in a Delhi suburb and lives alone. Will he, for example, have to sell and move to a cheaper one BHK or allow in co-owners who will now occupy the rest of the empty bedrooms? This part needs more clarity for sure.

Will this be a one-time exercise or one that repeats periodically? Studies have shown that many lottery winners tend to be bankrupt a few years down the line. Post redistribution, India will have equal wealth for the first year. What if, after five years, there are segments of the population who are in debt and have regressed into poverty again? Will this redistribution exercise repeat — maybe ahead of every general election? It would help the citizens to know this so that they can take the cues from the incentive structure and be permanently in debt.

There can be several tools to carry out this exercise. One is taxation. Assets (if they can be mapped) above a certain threshold can be taxed at very high rates. There is not much evidence that very high rates of taxation result in an increase in the tax-GDP ratio. Data for the US, for example, shows that even when tax rates were as high as 94% on taxable income in 1944, the tax-GDP ratio hovered around 20% — not very different from the time when the tax rate fell to a much lower 37% in the past decade.

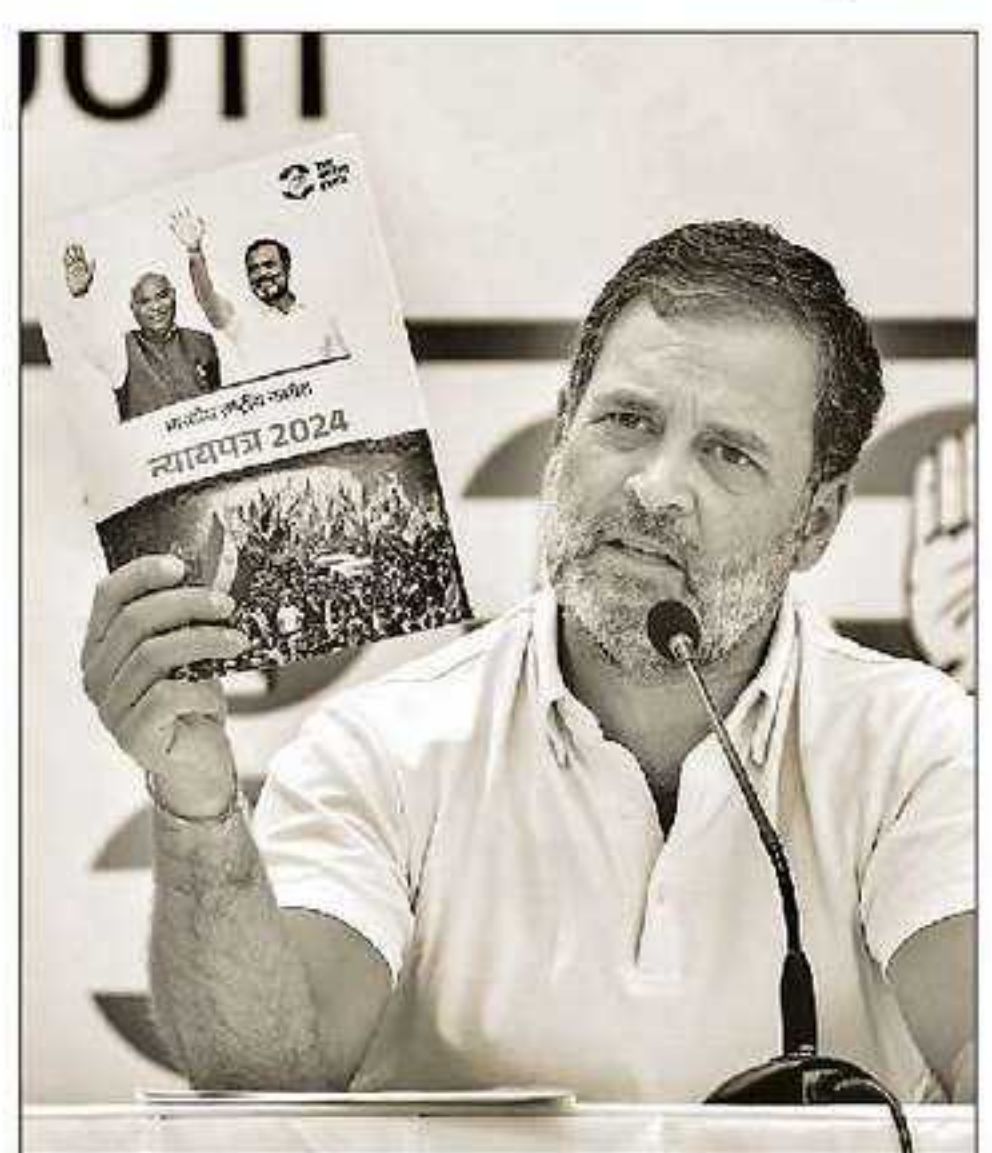
If the high tax route is found to be ineffective, the other road is through the appropriation of assets over a certain threshold by the State. This would mean relying on an army of government officials who would do the survey and map the wealth of the people. But we run into the problem of graft on this route. The incentive to bribe the official to understate assets will be very large. Other than a small set of revolution-minded, clear-eyed honest officials, many will succumb to the lure of easy money. Then the question arises, will those ill-gotten gains also be subject to redistribution?

A mass redistribution of assets in a subcontinent-sized country with 1.4 billion people will need huge government capacity to carry out the exercise. It is unlikely that such a massive game-changing idea will be just a half-baked election promise and answers to these questions will be given soon.

Monika Halan is the author of the best-selling book *Let's Talk Money*. The views expressed are personal



Monika Halan



Rahul Gandhi reportedly said that a financial and institutional survey will be conducted, following which a distribution of India's wealth will be undertaken PTI

{ RUCHIRA KAMBOJ } INDIA'S PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE TO UN

India is in favour of the expansion of UN Security Council membership, as this is the only way to achieve genuine reform in the Council and make it representative, responsive and effective



ASEAN must coordinate better on the Indo-Pacific

There is growing concern within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that its Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) is not keeping pace with the times. It means the questions about the centrality of ASEAN, which AOIP was meant to buttress, would have to be discussed afresh. There is awareness among ASEAN countries that the declining trust among countries and increasing geopolitical rivalries in the Indo-Pacific require AOIP to be developed into a more effective mechanism. This should be able to transform competition into cooperation and deficits of trust into mutual confidence, keeping in view the values and ambitions of ASEAN.

An AOIP vision group of individuals from all ASEAN countries and its dialogue partners recently met in Bali and recognised that efforts to mainstream the AOIP have been slow so far. A cleavage between its strategic goals and the reality of its implementation requires ASEAN to build a more strategic approach to implement the goals of AOIP. ASEAN enunciated the AOIP in June 2019, led by Indonesia. However, since it is an ASEAN outlook, it is bound by the ASEAN consensus-based system to move forward. This is where ASEAN seems to be struggling whereas events in the Indo-Pacific have been precipitating rapidly.

The reality is that China and ASEAN are nowhere near concluding the code of conduct, which has been pending for more than two decades. China's aggressive intent in the South China Sea has not abated; the impacted countries are reacting differently. Indonesia, under its chairmanship in 2023, held an ASEAN maritime exercise but not in the South China Sea. Vietnam, despite having major disputes with China, has a growing economic partnership with Beijing. While Malaysia and Brunei, the two other impacted countries, are rather quiet, the Philippines, under the new government of Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr, is closely aligned with the US and Japan to defend their interests from Chinese intrusions. So, it is not as if every ASEAN country is still taking its strategic goals on a common outlook.

Many of the ASEAN partners want the body to engage with them so that the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific remain free from China's hegemonic control.

The conference brought clarity to a few issues. AOIP restated traditional ASEAN goals, keeping in view the developments in the Indo-Pacific. It is the role of ASEAN partners that has

changed. ASEAN sees all partners as having legitimate interests in the area. Its own ability to influence the achievement of those interests remains subdued. The discussions at the conference showed there are many more miles to be covered if AOIP is to become effective.

ASEAN recognises that the Indo-Pacific is not an ASEAN construct. ASEAN always used the term, Asia-Pacific. However, ASEAN was an early adherent to the Indo-Pacific, even though the Chinese were critical of the term. Further, ASEAN seeks inclusive partnerships using AOIP with all its dialogue partners. AOIP has become part of ASEAN lore in which it engages with its dialogue partners and has agreements with most of them. ASEAN believes that AOIP has facilitated willing partners from the region, which could help it succeed. It believes that though only four areas are mentioned in AOIP, there is a confluence of interest in these, and therefore, implementation should be easier.

How is ASEAN going to develop this further? Indonesia, under its chairmanship in 2023, held the first ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum (AIPF). Indonesian President Joko Widodo succeeded in getting eight other ASEAN leaders (Myanmar was not invited) to participate in the launch of AIPF, but it was largely an Indonesian effort. Now that Laos is the chairman, followed by Malaysia in 2025, it is unclear whether AIPF, which is seen as an implementing instrument of AOIP, would actually be carried by the subsequent chairs. A suggestion was that Indonesia should be encouraged, with the help of its partners, to continue AIPF and host it annually either in association with the chair or if facing reluctance, to do so by itself. Several partners may be ready to work on this with Indonesia.

India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) was seen as relevant. Now India and ASEAN have an AOIP-IPOI joint statement; Singapore and Indonesia have already agreed to collaborate with pillars of the IPOI while the Philippines and Vietnam are considering it. India is not nudging ASEAN to rush towards IPOI, but engaging them individually. This is perhaps the way for other partners, particularly Japan, Australia and India — to coordinate on how to deal with particular ASEAN countries on aspects of the AOIP pillars.

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Gurjit Singh

Historic Trump trial shifts to grilling of potential jurors

Agence France-Presse
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NEW YORK: Prosecutors began grilling prospective jurors in Donald Trump's historic criminal trial on Tuesday, kicking off a gruelling process in which both sides will look to weed out biased panelists.

No other US ex-president has faced a criminal trial and the pressure is high on defence attorneys and prosecutors to get a dozen jurors able to sit in judgement on a man running to return to the White House this November.

After a preliminary phase in which prospective jurors could opt out if they felt unable to be impartial, the prosecution began detailed questioning of an initial panel of 12, with Trump's defence team to follow.

The high bar in a criminal trial means that to convict Trump of his alleged fraud in a scheme to cover up an embarrassing alleged extramarital encounter with a porn star will require a unanimous jury. Even one dissenting voice would see him walk free.

The painstaking process was expected to take as long as two weeks before arguments can even begin, eating deep into the presidential campaign.

Trump, 77, has been ordered by Judge Juan Merchan to attend daily and on arrival on Tuesday for the second day the Republican was fuming.

"I should be right now in Pennsylvania and Florida — in many other states, North Carolina, Georgia — campaigning," Trump said, calling Merchan, "Trump-hating".

Meanwhile, Biden was due to tout his economic policies in a visit to his birthplace in Scranton, Pennsylvania on Tuesday — a key swing state Biden narrowly carried in the 2020 election.

Trump 'undeterable'
Merchan has warned Trump against repeating his frequent past attempts to turn hearings into impromptu campaign appearances with outbursts at witnesses and staff, as well tirades on social media.

The judge has already scheduled a hearing next week to consider whether Trump should be held in contempt for violating a partial gag order restricting him from attacking individuals connected to the case.

"Trump is probably largely undeterable because he believes he is advancing his

political agenda and will gain votes," Columbia Law School professor John Coffee told AFP.

Illustrating the extraordinary tension, potential jurors have been told they will remain anonymous to the public throughout. Merchan said this is to protect them from possible bribery or physical harm.

But selecting 12 ordinary citizens to judge one of the most famous — and controversial — figures in the country is no easy matter. Of the first batch of 96 prospective panelists sworn in for screening on Monday, at least 50 were quickly excused after they said they could not be fair and impartial.

Nine others were allowed to leave after stating there were compelling reasons they could not serve, while remaining prospective jurors were grilled

about their education, hobbies and news consumption.

Trump faces three other criminal cases centered on his hoarding of top-secret documents after leaving office and his unprecedented attempts to overturn his 2020 election loss to Biden.

Those trials are arguably weightier in content, but Trump has succeeded in forcing continued delays, meaning they may not start before the November 5 election.

In New York, the Republican is accused of falsifying business records while covering up an alleged extramarital sexual encounter with adult film actress Stormy Daniels to shield his first election campaign, in 2016, from last-minute upheaval.

Although the case is on relatively minor charges, the legal and political peril is all too real.



Former president Donald Trump sits in the courtroom with his attorneys on the second day of his trial at Manhattan Criminal Court, New York City, US, on Tuesday. REUTERS

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Salman Rushdie recounts stabbing in new memoir

NEW YORK: *Knife*, a memoir by Salman Rushdie released on Tuesday, recounts the near-fatal stabbing at a public event in 2022 that left him blind in one eye and his journey to healing. The Indian-born author, a British and naturalised American based in New York, has faced death threats since his 1988 novel *The Satanic Verses* was declared blasphemous by Iran's supreme leader, making Rushdie a global symbol of free speech.

Scholz urges China to help end Ukraine war

BEIJING: German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Tuesday he had urged Xi Jinping to press ally Russia to end its "senseless" war in Ukraine and that the Chinese president had agreed to back a peace conference in Switzerland. Scholz said after a meeting with Xi at Beijing's Diaoyutai State Guesthouse on Tuesday that "China's word carries weight in Russia". China says it is a neutral party in the Ukraine conflict.

Italian PM sues again for defamation

ROME: An Italian court gave the green light on Tuesday to a fresh defamation case brought by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, this time against a historian who called the far-right leader a "neo-Nazi at heart". Left-wing classicist Luciano Canfora, 81, made the comments during a school debate in Bari, southern Italy, in April 2022 — six months before the Brothers of Italy leader took office following a historic election win. The trial is set to open on October 7, with Italian premier seeking \$21,260 in damages.

Israel's response to Iran attack awaited amid appeals for restraint

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JERUSALEM: Israel's war cabinet met for the third time in three days on Tuesday, an official said, to decide on a response to Iran's first-ever direct attack, amid international pressure to avoid further escalating Middle East conflicts.

Military chief of staff Herzi Halevi had promised that on Saturday night's launch of more than 300 missiles, cruise missiles and drones from Iran at Israeli territory "will be met with a response", but gave no details.

While the attack caused no deaths and little damage, thanks to the air defences and countermeasures of Israel and its allies, it has increased fears that violence rooted in the Gaza war is spreading, with the risk of open war between long-time foes Iran and Israel.

Iran launched the attack in retaliation for an airstrike on its embassy compound in Damascus on April 1 attributed to Israel, but signalled that it did not seek further escalation.

President Joe Biden told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the weekend that the United States, Israel's main protector, would not participate in an Israeli counter-strike.

Together with European allies, Washington instead strove on Tuesday to toughen economic and political sanctions against Iran in an attempt to dissuade Israel from violent retaliation.



Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (centre) during a war cabinet meeting at the Kirya in Tel Aviv, on Sunday. AFP

Disrupting Iran's destabilising activity

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Katz said he was "leading a diplomatic attack", writing to 32 countries to ask them to place sanctions on Iran's missile programme and follow Washington in proscribing its dominant military force, the Revolutionary Guard Corps, as a terrorist group.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the US would use

sanctions, and work with allies, to keep disrupting Iran's "malign and destabilising activity".

European Union foreign ministers scheduled a video meeting on the Middle East for Tuesday.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on Monday the Group of Seven major democracies was working on a package of measures against Iran; Italy, which has the G7 presidency, suggested any new sanctions would target individuals.

Iran promises response 'in seconds'

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani had told state TV on Monday night that Tehran's response to any Israeli counter attack would come in "a matter of seconds, as Iran will not wait for another 12 days to respond".

The prospect of Israeli retaliation has alarmed many Iranians already enduring economic pain and tighter social and political

controls since major protests in 2022-23.

However, White House national security spokesman John Kirby declined on Monday to say whether Biden had urged Netanyahu in talks on Saturday to exercise restraint in responding to Iran. "We don't want to see a war with Iran. We don't want to see a regional conflict," Kirby told a briefing, adding that it was for Israel to decide "whether and how they'll respond".

Australia's Met: El Nino has ended, not sure about La Nina

Agencies
letters@hindustantimes.com

CANBERRA: An El Nino weather event has ended, Australian weather authorities said on Tuesday, adding that they were uncertain if a La Nina phenomenon would form later this year, as other forecasters have predicted.

The cycle between the two is hugely important for farmers worldwide. El Nino generally brings hotter, drier weather to eastern Australia and Southeast Asia and wetter conditions to the Americas, while a La Nina has the opposite effect.

"El Nino has ended," Australia's Bureau of Meteorology said, after the weather phenomenon had formed in the middle of last year following three years of La Nina.

Warmer sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific cause El Nino and cooler temperatures lead to La Nina, which a US government weather forecaster this month gave a 60% chance of emerging in the second half of 2024.

The sea surface has been cooling since December and oceanic and atmospheric indicators now show the El Nino Southern Oscillation has returned to neutral, the Australian weather bureau added.

"Climate models indicate ENSO will likely continue to be neutral until at least July 2024," it said, using the formal name, the El Nino Southern Oscillation, that describes the switch

between the two phases.

While some climate models predict a flip to La Nina later this year, the bureau said it was uncertain whether this would happen and urged caution about such forecasts.

Global sea level jumped due to El Nino: Nasa

Global average sea level rose by about 0.76 centimetres from 2022 to 2023 — nearly four times the increase of the previous year — Nasa said in March, attributing the "significant jump" to a strong El Nino and a warming climate.

The Nasa-led analysis is based on more than 30 years of satellite observations, with the initial satellite launching in 1992 and the latest in 2020.

Overall, sea levels have risen by around four inches since 1993. The rate of increase has also accelerated, over doubling from 0.07 inches per year in 1993, to the current rate of 0.17 inches per year.

That would be double the amount of change in the next three decades compared to the previous century, she said, creating a future where flooding is far more frequent and catastrophic than today.

The immediate cause of the spike is the El Nino weather effect, which replaced the La Nina from 2021 to 2022, when the sea level rose around 0.08 inches.

El Nino involves warmer-than-average ocean temperatures in the equatorial Pacific.

Salvage crews clear huge chunks of key US bridge

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SPARROWS POINT: Nearly three weeks since Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge collapsed under the impact of a wayward cargo ship, crews are using the largest crane on the Eastern Seaboard to haul the wreckage to a nearby salvage yard.

The heaviest section so far weighed about 450 tonnes (408 metric tonnes).

In the salvage yard, on Monday morning, workers disassembled the metal trusses by attacking them with propane torches and a pair of giant shears that sliced them into

more manageable pieces.

Rising from the water nearby was the Chesapeake 1000, a floating crane with a storied history that includes helping the CIA retrieve part of a sunken Soviet submarine.

The Key Bridge took five years to construct in the 1970s. Now, it's a race against the clock to dismantle the remnants of a fallen Baltimore landmark.

On March 26, six construction workers plunged to their deaths in the collapse. Four bodies have since been recovered.

Salvage crews are hoping to recover the two remaining bodies once more of the debris has

been removed. They're also working towards their goal of opening a temporary channel later this month that would allow more commercial traffic to resume through the Port of Baltimore, which has remained largely closed since the March 26 collapse. Officials plan to reopen the port's main channel by the end of May.

So far, over 1,000 tonnes (907 metric tonnes) of steel have been removed from the waterway. But the work is tedious, dangerous and incredibly complex, leaders of the operation said on Monday during a visit to the salvage yard at Tradeport Atlantic, the only maritime

shipping terminal currently operating in the Port of Baltimore. The facility, which occupies the site of a former Bethlehem Steel plant northeast of Baltimore, has ramped up operations to accommodate some of the ships originally scheduled to dock at the port's other terminals.

Before removing any pieces of the bridge, divers are tasked with surveying the murky underwater wreckage and assessing how to safely extract the various parts.

Coming up with a road map is among the biggest challenges, said Robyn Bianchi, an assistant salvage master on the project.

Dubai flooded



Torrential rains across the United Arab Emirates prompted flight cancellations, forced schools to shut and brought traffic to a standstill. The heavy rains that caused widespread flooding across the desert nation stemmed partly from cloud seeding. REUTERS

'SYDNEY KNIFE ATTACK AGAINST BISHOP, PRIEST BEING TREATED AS TERRORISM'

Associated Press
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SYDNEY: Australian police say a knife attack in Sydney that wounded a bishop and a priest during a church service as horrified worshippers watched online and in person, and sparked a riot was an act of terrorism.

Police arrested a 16-year-old boy on Tuesday after the stabbing at Christ the Good Shepherd Church that injured Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel and a priest. Both are expected to survive.

New South Wales Police Commissioner Karen Webb said the suspect's comments pointed to a religious motive for the attack.

"We'll allege there's a degree of premeditation on the basis that this person has travelled to that location, which is not near his residential address, he has travelled with a knife and subsequently the bishop and the priest have been stabbed," Webb said. "They're lucky to be alive." The teenager was known to police but was not on a terror watch list, Webb said.

The Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), the nation's main domestic spy agency, and Australian Federal Police had joined state police in a counter-terrorism task force to investigate who else was potentially involved. ASIO director-general Mike Burgess said, "It does appear to be religiously motivated." But currently no one else in the community, associated with the attacker, seem to harbour similar intentions, he explained.

{ MARTIAN ROCKS EXPLORATION } \$11 BILLION COST TOO EXPENSIVE

Nasa seeks faster, cheaper way for retrieving Mars rocks



Ingenuity helicopter flies over Mars in an undated illustration by Nasa's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California. REUTERS

Agence France-Presse
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WASHINGTON: Nasa said on Monday it was looking for ways to bring Martian rocks collected by the Perseverance rover back to Earth earlier and at a lower cost than planned after facing criticism for going massively over budget.

The effort comes as China is making progress towards a simpler "grab-and-go" sample return mission to the red planet "around 2030", according to state media, which would make it the first nation to achieve the feat.

"The bottom line is that \$11 billion is too expensive, and not returning samples until 2040 is unacceptably too long," the US space agency's chief Bill Nelson told reporters on a call.

Nasa and the European Space Agency (ESA) had planned to

land a vessel around the Jezero Crater, where the Perseverance rover has spent years searching for signs of ancient microbial life that may have existed billions of years ago when Mars was warmer and wetter than today.

Thirty sample tubes collected by the rover would be loaded onto a small rocket and launched into orbit, where another spacecraft would capture them and bring them home.

But a recent audit of Nasa's plans by an independent review board said the Mars Sample Return mission was established "with unrealistic budget and schedule expectations from the beginning" and that it had a "near zero" chance of keeping to planned launch dates.

The outside experts also found the overall costs could potentially balloon to \$11 billion, nearly double what Nasa had stated. As a result, Nasa plans to

solicit new proposals from the space industry that would part back some of the mission's ambitions.

"In order to do things faster, we may have to lower the scope of the number of samples," Nasa's Nicky Fox told reporters, without specifying what the new number would be.

Nelson said the agency's hand was also forced by budgetary constraints imposed by Congress which led Nasa to request over \$2 billion less than it had hoped for 2025.

China plans to launch its Tianwen-3 Mars sample return mission by 2030, according to state media.

Though China's mission is simpler and would only take samples from the immediate vicinity of its landing site, being the first to return rocks from another world would still be a huge geopolitical win.

Agence France-Presse
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LONDON: The UK government announced on Tuesday that it will legislate to criminalise the creation of sexually-explicit "deepfake" images.

Anyone found guilty of creating fake sexual images of people without their consent will face a criminal record, an unlimited fine and even jail if the image is widely shared, according to the government.

"It is another example of ways in which certain people seek to

degrade and dehumanise others — especially women," said Minister for Victims and Safeguarding Laura Farris. "It has the capacity to cause catastrophic consequences if the material is shared more widely. This government will not tolerate it. Making this material is immoral, often misogynistic, and a crime," she added.

Yvette Cooper of the opposition Labour Party welcomes the move, emphasising that superimposing someone's image onto sexually explicit content is a severe breach of privacy.

IMF ups India FY25 GDP growth outlook to 6.8%

At 6.8%, the forecast was slightly lower than the 7% growth estimated by the RBI

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NEW DELHI: India will remain the world's fastest growing major economy till 2029, although the rate of expansion may moderate, the International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday in its latest World Economic Outlook.

The country's gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate is expected to decline to 6.8% in 2024 and 6.5 percent in 2025, from 7.8% in 2023-24 and then stay at 6.5% until 2028-29, the multilateral organisation predicted.

The latest projections upgraded India's growth by 0.3 percentage point compared to the January update.

"Growth in India is projected to remain strong at 6.8 percent in 2024 and 6.5 percent in 2025, with the robustness reflecting continuing strength in domestic demand and a rising working-age population," the IMF said.



The latest projections upgraded India's growth by 0.3 percentage point compared to the January update. REUTERS

At 6.8%, the fund's forecast was slightly lower than the 7% GDP growth estimated by the Reserve Bank of India.

As far as the world economy is concerned, a soft landing looks more likely although overall growth momentum will continue to be weak by historical standards, the IMF said. Global GDP growth is likely to remain at 3.2% in 2024 and 2025, it said.

"The pace of expansion is low by historical standards, owing to both near-term factors, such as still-high borrowing costs and

withdrawal of fiscal support, and longer-term effects from the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine; weak growth in productivity; and increasing geo-economic fragmentation," the WEO report said. "The latest forecast for global growth five years from now - at 3.1% - is at its lowest in decades. The pace of convergence toward higher living standards for middle- and lower-income countries has slowed, implying a persistence in global economic disparities."

Among other major economies, growth in the US is expected to increase from 2.5% in 2023 to 2.7% in 2024 before slipping to 1.9% in 2025. While the US will continue to perform better than advanced economies as a whole, the latter's growth is expected to increase from 1.7% to 1.8% between 2024 and 2025.

China, which delivered a positive surprise with a growth of 5.3% in the March quarter, is expected to expand at 4.6% and 4.1% in 2024 and 2025, respectively, compared to 5.2% in 2023. Emerging markets will grow at 4.2% in 2024 and 2025 compared to 4.3% in 2023, the IMF said.

The outlook was cautiously optimistic on whether the global economy was out of the woods as far as navigating the pandemic and post-pandemic inflation shocks were concerned. "Economic activity was surprisingly resilient through the global disinflation of 2022-23. As global inflation descended from its mid-2022 peak, economic activity grew steadily, defying warnings of stagflation and global recession," the fund said, underlining the need for caution in both monetary and fiscal policies.

Airport privatisation 3.0 to lift off after polls

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NEW DELHI: An increasing number of airports in India will sport private-sector owners, as their state-owned operator prepares to privatise 13 more airports in the coming months. The plan will also include the sale of its residual stake in the bigger airports of Bengaluru and Hyderabad, according to two senior officials aware of the matter.

Airports Authority of India (AAI) plans to kick off the third phase of airport privatisation after the general elections, beginning with sale of its remaining 13% stake in Bangalore International Airport Ltd (BIAL) this year, the officials said on condition of anonymity. "The plan is to be implemented after the new government takes over in June," one of the officials said. "Along with Bengaluru, AAI will look to sell its stake in Hyderabad airport as well."

Currently, financial investor Fairfax (Fairfax India Holdings Corp) owns around 64% of BIAL, which operates the Bengaluru airport.

Siemens Project Ventures GmbH holds 10%, while AAI and Karnataka State Industrial and Infrastructure Development



AAI plans to invite bids for operation, management and development of 13 other airports in PPP mode. HT

Corp. hold 13% each. GMR Hyderabad International Airport Ltd, 74% owned by the GMR group, operates the Hyderabad airport. The Telangana government and Airports Authority of India own 13% each.

Queries sent to AAI, Bengaluru airport and Hyderabad airport remained unanswered till press time.

As part of airport privatisation 3.0, AAI plans to invite bids for operation, management and development of 13 other airports in public-private-partner-

ship mode, the officials added.

Among these are six airports—Bhubaneswar, Trichy, Indore, Raipur, Amritsar and Varanasi—that are among the top 20 airports operated by AAI in terms of passenger traffic.

These six will be clubbed with seven loss-making small airports—Kushinagar (in Uttar Pradesh), Gaya (Bihar), Hubballi (Karnataka), Aurangabad (Maharashtra), Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh), Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh) and Kangra (Himachal Pradesh). The plan is to target infrastructure growth across both major and minor airports, one of the officials said.

"Under the first step, AAI is likely to float a request for proposal and invite bids for leasing 13 airports for a period of 50 years," the official added. "The plans for divestment of stake and public-private partnerships have been in the pipeline for some time now, but we expect the implementation this year."

"Given that Indian airports have huge growth potential for non-aero revenues when compared to their global counterparts, and given the high growth in passengers and spend per passenger, we expect the growth to remain strong," said Vinay Kumar G., vice president & sector head - corporate ratings, Icrta Ltd.

Oil cos' marketing margins may face West Asia heat

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NEW DELHI: An escalation in West Asia could ignite crude oil prices and hurt marketing margins of India's oil marketing companies (OMC), given their limited space to raise fuel prices in an election season. With crude prices crossing \$90 per barrel last week and fears that it could go beyond \$100 if the conflict flares up, concerns have grown in the energy market.

High oil prices and little likelihood of higher retail prices will squeeze the marketing margins of state-owned OMCs, experts said. Marketing margin is the difference between the cost of the refined product, say petrol or diesel, and the retail sale price.

"Although the situation has not escalated so far, in case there is a major disruption on the Strait of Hormuz, even \$100 per barrel looks less. Prices may surge further as the Strait handles transport of about 25% of the global oil consumption. And a surge in crude price is negative for OMCs. Marketing margin on sale of diesel is hardly about a rupee and that on petrol is around ₹5 per litre," said Swarnendu Bhushan, co-head of research at Prabhudas Lilladher Pvt. Ltd.

Shares of OMCs have been volatile over the past week; however, in the last one month, they have seen an uptrend. IOCL shares have increased about 5% to ₹169.05, while those of BPCL and HPCL increased nearly 2% to ₹592.65 and ₹469 respectively.

"The under-recovery on diesel is about a rupee, while in the case of petrol, they making handsome profits of about ₹3.2 per litre. However, if crude prices surge, OMCs may return to under-recoveries in petrol sales," Bhushan added.

Under-recovery is the notional loss or difference between the retail price of the fuel and the



High oil prices, little chances of higher retail prices will squeeze OMCs' margins. REUTERS

international price.

An increase of \$1 per barrel of crude necessitates a 50 paise increase in petrol price, Bhushan said, adding in case of a \$6 increase, OMCs may witness under-recoveries.

Prashant Vasisht, senior vice-president and co-group head, corporate ratings, Icrta, said, "Marketing margins have declined in April 2024 with the rise in oil prices along with reduction in retail selling prices from 15 March. ICRA estimates that the OMCs' net realisation is higher by ₹2 per litre for petrol and marginal loss for diesel vis-à-vis international product prices in April 2024."

OMCs had cut prices of both petrol and diesel by about ₹2 last month, just before the start of the model code of conduct for the general election from 19 April to 1 June.

Queries sent to the Indian Oil Corp. Ltd, Hindustan Petroleum Corp. Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corp. Ltd remained unanswered till press time.

Vasisht of Icrta, however, added that the impact on marketing margins may be offset by healthy refining margins. He noted that OMCs have reported robust refining margins and are expected to continue the momentum.

India story spurs Sweden's EQT to commit \$5bn in '24

Ranjani Raghavan & Sneha Shah
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MUMBAI: Swedish private equity firm EQT is lining up deals that could lead to \$5 billion worth of investments in India this year. The investment spree continues last year's trend when the firm had pumped in about \$2 billion into the country.

EQT got its first taste of India in October 2022 when it acquired Baring Private Equity Asia, which once owned Hexaware Technologies Ltd, and has

EQT GOT ITS FIRST TASTE OF INDIA IN OCTOBER 2022 WHEN IT ACQUIRED BARING PRIVATE EQUITY ASIA

since signalled a strong investment appetite for the country. "At the moment, I have to say that our pipeline is as active as I've ever seen it," Jean Eric Salata, chairman of EQT Asia and the firm's head of private capital

for Asia, said in an interview. "We currently have \$5 billion worth of pipeline in advanced stages of final negotiation for investment (in India) this year. That shows the kind of activity level we are seeing," added Salata, who had started UK-based Baring's Asia PE investments before leading a management buyout of the programme in 2000.

EQT, which has over \$250 billion of assets under management globally, is among the largest private equity firms in Asia.

India's economic growth at 7-8% a year makes the country a

compelling investment destination for firms like EQT, Salata said. Further, the firm's expansion in the country is also because it is now looking at multiple sectors such as healthcare and financial services in addition to its historic preference for IT services, where it has struck gold multiple times earlier.

Last year in June, EQT (then known as BPEA EQT) acquired a 60% stake in in-vitro fertilisation chain Indira IVF in a deal valuing the business at about \$1.1 billion. A month later, EQT and India-based PE firm Chrysalis Capital announced the acquisition of

a 90% stake in Credila Financial Services from HDFC, valuing the business at ₹10,300 crore, or \$1.2 billion. Then, in December, it bought a majority stake in IT services company Indium Software for an undisclosed sum.

The PE firm (including BPEA's record) has invested about \$8 billion in India over the previous five years. "Our average equity cheque now is probably around \$1 billion," Salata said, adding that the firm's sweet spot lay in identifying deals where companies could be sized at around \$1 billion-\$2 billion in enterprise valuation.

Max to invest in UP, develop hospitals

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NEW DELHI: Max Healthcare Institute Ltd (MHIL), a Delhi-based private hospital chain, on Tuesday announced its plans to invest ₹2,500 crore to develop hospitals in Lucknow and strengthen its footprint in Uttar Pradesh (UP).

In a statement, the company said that the investment will include the development of a new 500-bed hospital and expanding the capacity of the recently-acquired Max Super Specialty Hospital in Lucknow. "This gives us an opportunity to participate in the development of Uttar Pradesh as it marches towards becoming a \$1 trillion economy by 2027," said Abhay Sohi, chairman and managing director, Max Healthcare.

The group earlier announced its acquisition of the 550-bed Sahara Hospital on a slump sale basis from Sahara India Medical Institute Limited at an enterprise value of ₹940 crore and renamed it as Max Super Specialty Hospital. After this acquisition, the hospital group has around 700 beds in UP.

These investments are part of the company's plan to invest



The healthcare major plans to invest ₹2,500 cr in UP. REUTERS

₹5,000 crore to double its capacity across its network of hospitals by adding 4,200 beds in the next four to five years. The group currently has 4,000 beds and plans to raise it to 8,200.

MHIL expects to create employment opportunities for over 10,000 people through these investments in the state. "We are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead and remain committed to providing cutting-edge healthcare services to our patients," Sohi added.

The investment will help bring in cutting-edge medical technologies; robotics, radiation therapy in oncology, transplants, and provide greater focus and impetus to nursing education.

REGULATORS PLAN PANEL TO WEIGH DERIVATIVES RISK

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MUMBAI: India's top financial regulators will form a committee to assess stability risks emerging from a surge in derivatives markets and suggest policy changes if required, two sources familiar with the matter said.

Options trading in India has soared in the last five years, fuelled mainly by retail investors. The notional value of index options traded more than doubled in 2023-24 to \$907.09 trillion from \$447.69 trillion a year ago, exchange operator NSE says. The panel will be set up by the Financial Stability Development Council, which includes the finance minister, the central bank governor and the market regulator, the sources said.

Its members and reporting timeline will be finalised in coming months, added the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity, as they were not authorised to speak to media.

The plan to set up a panel has not been previously reported. Finance ministry, the central bank, the Reserve Bank of India and the regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India, did not immediately respond to queries about the plan.

Is the worst over for smartphone sales in India?

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NEW DELHI: Pandemic lockdowns and remote work sparked a scramble for smartphones in India, a tide that ebbed as the world returned to normal. After a two-year slump that followed, sales appear to have turned the corner in the March quarter, promising cheer for phone makers in the world's second-largest smartphone market.

Smartphone shipments in the March quarter rose 5% from a year earlier to 32.5-35 million units, data gathered from four industry analysts showed.

Smartphone sales peaked in the March quarter of 2021 with 38 million units, according to data from International Data Corp. (IDC) India. Shipments

have fallen since then, dropping 3% year-on-year in Q1 of 2022 and a further 16% in Q1 of 2023.

"We're expecting to see smartphone shipments (for the March quarter) to be anywhere between 33 and 35 million, which signals a good, healthy start to the year. This growth is coming despite the fact that average selling prices have not reduced in the past three years," said Upasana Joshi, research manager at IDC India.

A revival is critical for Samsung, Xiaomi and Vivo, which collectively sold devices worth about \$38.8 billion in India last year. This figure has remained stagnant since 2021, when it grew nearly 29% to hit \$38.4 billion. In 2022, both value and volume of the overall smartphone industry declined.

Industry experts said that while the resilience of the value



Smartphone shipments in the March quarter rose 5% from a year earlier. REUTERS

of the India smartphone market is a good sign, this cannot sustain in the long run—thereby making a revival of consumer demand leading to higher shipments critical for the country's most popular brands.

To be sure, these estimates

are based on preliminary market data. Detailed reports from Counterpoint India and IDC India are expected in the next three weeks.

Xiaomi, which led India's smartphone market for five years until the September quarter of 2022, is using the momentum to change its product strategy. "Our Redmi Note 13 series of affordable smartphones generated ₹2,000 crore in revenue within just one month of launch in this quarter. The nationwide 5G rollout and our premiumization push has stimulated demand," a company spokesperson said. "We are also expanding our ecosystem offerings and expect a significant increase in average selling prices through this year."

Samsung, India's top smartphone brand by market share at the end of 2023, declined to

comment. Although the increase is modest, it comes as good news for phone makers, since device prices have gone up, fetching more sales revenue.

"Consumers are likely showing signs of adapting to the new market norms, where buyers are spending around \$250 (₹21,000) for a device, as against \$150 (₹13,000) from around five years ago," Joshi of IDC India said.

For instance, although shipment volume in Q1 2024 was similar to that of Q1 2020, the average selling price has risen to \$255 (₹21,000) from \$199 (₹16,000). Consequently, the first quarter of 2024 generated about \$8.3 billion in market value, a 28% increase in four years, which analysts consider significant amid weak consumer sentiment.

CHINA'S ECONOMY GREW 5.3% IN 1ST QUARTER OF 2024

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HONG KONG: China's economy grew faster than expected in the first quarter of the year with help from policies and stronger demand, though signs of weakness in the troubled housing market persisted.

The world's second-largest economy expanded at a 5.3% annual pace in January-March, beating analysts' forecasts of about 4.8%, data released Tuesday showed. Compared to the previous quarter, the economy grew 1.6%.

China's economy has struggled to bounce back from the COVID-19 pandemic but gained momentum late last year as government policies to help the housing market and boost investment took effect.

However, Tuesday's better-than-expected data came days after China reported its exports sank 7.5% in March compared to the year before, while imports also weakened. Inflation cooled, reflecting deflationary pressures resulting from slack demand amid a crisis in the property sector.

Investment in property developments fell 9.5% from a year earlier in January-March, compared with a decline of 9% in the previous quarter.

"The investment and sales of real estate in the first quarter are indeed not very optimistic. The real estate market is still in a process of adjustment," Sheng Layun, deputy commissioner of the National Bureau of Statistics, told reporters in Beijing.

Sheng also acknowledged that while growth was stronger than anticipated, it was uneven. Investment in infrastructure such as roads and bridges rose 6.5% year-on-year after a 6% increase in the previous quarter.

Fixed investment, in factories and equipment, grew 4.5% compared to the same period a year earlier, up from 4.2% in the previous quarter.

China's leaders have been trying to recalibrate growth away from investment spending and toward a greater reliance on consumer demand, similar to other major economies.

{ THE CROSSWORDS }

CRYPTIC CLUES

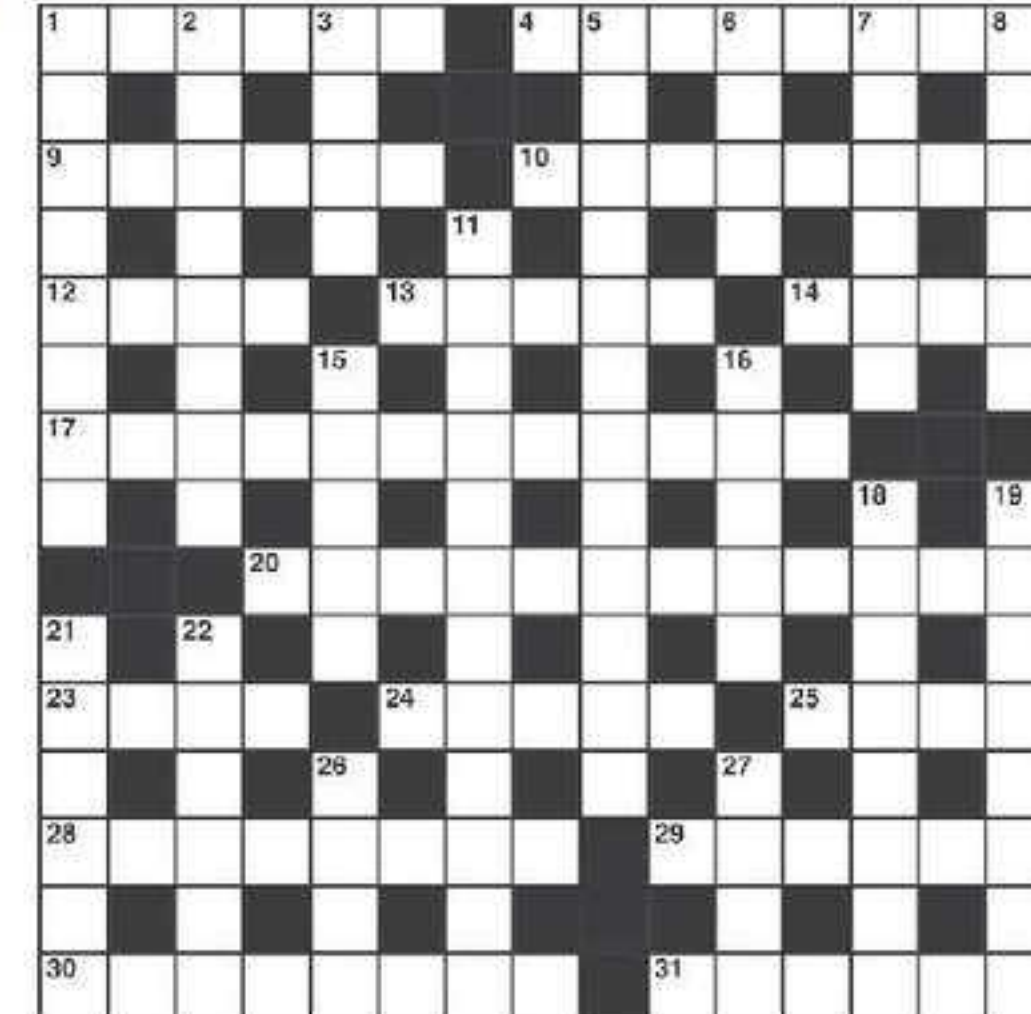
ACROSS

- Cortes becomes a loyal companion (6)
- Biscuits or nuts (8)
- Bill returns to boxing, being concerned (6)
- Show forbearance (8)
- A call to New York Times? It will be expensive (4)
- Poet takes orders (5)
- Plastic container of wine (4)
- Reason for a barrier to give affront (5,7)
- Play rehearsal? (8,4)
- Chestnuts in the granary (4)
- Correct definition of noon (5)
- Cattle without water (4)
- Does some spelling? (8)
- It has row upon row of rowers (6)
- Time to start another day (8)
- Revising his set subject (6)

DOWN

- Intrude by chance or accident (8)
- Do remove the sit-in demonstrator (5,3)
- Offensive row (4)
- Weather prophets and drivers must be able to (4,3,5)
- Slice the approach shot (4)
- Hemingway and Sterne novel (6)
- Singular kind of money (6)
- An ideal marriage immediately comes to light (7,5)
- He has the skill and courage (5)
- Cares for some land (5)
- Thoughtless advice to those who are too anxious? (8)
- Swapping presents - the impudence! (8)
- Funny thing, it's way above what is the best (6)
- Doubly strengthened (6)
- Vehicle could be an imposition on one (4)
- A record for being drunk (4)

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QUICK CLUES

ACROSS

- Italian island (6)
- Increase fast in intensity (8)
- On fire (6)
- Voluntary choice (4,4)
- Shakespearean king (4)
- Ungrainily (5)
- Brutal ruffian (4)
- Understand the procedure (4,3,5)
- Scholar (3,7)
- Appearance (4)
- Subsequently (5)
- Central US state (4)
- Leadership (8)
- River sacred to Hindus (6)
- Eternal (8)
- A state of Swiss republic (6)

DOWN

- Tchaikovsky ballet (4,4)
- An apple brandy (8)
- Indolent (4)
- Unforeseen timely event (6,2,4)
- So be it (4)
- Dismount from horse (6)
- High praise (6)
- Dismantle (4,2,6)
- Move surreptitiously (5)
- Trivial (5)
- Implanted (8)
- Politically motivated killer (8)
- Unfortunate state (6)
- Conductor's dais (6)
- Lose power (4)
- Festive occasion (4)

MONDAY'S SOLUTIONS (16835)

CRYPTIC
S P A R E U N D E R G O
I N X N F I
S A I G T H R A S H O U T
R I P T H R E E
E N S L A V E R O U S E
R T L V S
S Q U A L L M E T H O D
R I P E R
B L A Z E A L B E R T A
R D R A E G
E C O N O M I S T A N
W V W S H T E
S T A U N C H E V E N T

QUICK
S L I C K H A N D O U T
U M M A G A D
R I P T H R E E
P A U K H
A B S O L V E T O A D Y
S S Y H N
S K I M P Y W A N T E D
V A T I E
W R E S T O N T O P O F
A I R I A E
G U I N E A P I G T O N
E L N I H H C
R E L A T E D T H Y M E

{ SUDOKU } DIFFICULTY LEVEL ★★★★★

5	3		1		8			
				6	1			
	1			5		2		
	2	9	1					
	5	6		3	9			
8	1			2		5		

Fill in all the squares in the grid so that each row, column and each of the 9x9 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

{ WEATHER }

TEMPERATURE HIGH = LOW

WEDNESDAY
Strong surface winds during day time
35°C | 22°C

THURSDAY
Strong surface winds during day time
38°C | 23°C

FRIDAY
Generally cloudy sky with light rain or drizzle
34°C | 24°C

ALMANAC

Today is 17th April 2024
7 Shawwal, 1445
24 Chaitra, Shukla Paksha, 09
Sunset: Wednesday at 06:48 p.m.
Sunrise: Thursday at 05:52 a.m.
Moonrise: Wednesday at 01:04 p.m.
Moonset: Thursday at 02:58 a.m.

TEMPERATURE IN FOUR METROS

Delhi 35°C | 22°C
Mumbai 37°C | 25°C
Kolkata 39°C | 28°C
Chennai 37°C | 27°C

Buttler steals Narine show in IPL's highest run chase

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KOLKATA: No one could have engineered this turnaround but Jos Buttler. To lift an innings from 12/6, when 46 runs were still left after Rovman Powell—the last specialist batter in an exceptionally deep Rajasthan Royals batting line-up—was almost impossible. The heat was sapping every ounce of energy Buttler had in him. But he still kept going, finding a new gear when all seemed lost, scoring 18 runs in the 18th over and 19 in the 19th to pull off a heist as Royals took down Kolkata Knight Riders' 223 in a sensational chase, the highest in IPL.

A second century this season for Buttler still doesn't give the right context of his innings. No other Royals batter had reached even 40 in this innings. By the time Buttler had reached the final overs, he was literally struggling to run as wickets kept falling around him. But he kept clearing his front leg, teeing off into towering sixes till the required run rate had dropped from 16 to just nine off the last six balls. He sealed a 60-ball 107 with a last-ball single to seal the victory at Eden Gardens.

No one could have seen a hundred coming for Sunil Narine as well, even though he had already hammered a 22-ball 47 against Royal Challengers Bangalore and a 39-ball 85 against Delhi Capitals this season. They still didn't build up the anticipation that Narine could actually go the distance, primarily because pinch hitters aren't expected to make it that far. But this is where possibly everyone barring Gautam Gambhir read Narine wrong. Giving a clean striker of the ball the licence to break loose is something, nudging him to think of himself as a proper opening batter is something else. Now he is the third highest scorer of this IPL. "I would have taken it as a joke because I haven't opened in a long time or did much with the bat in the years past," said Narine after entertaining Eden with a 56-ball 109. "With GG (Gambhir) coming back, he gave me the confidence and his assurance that I'll open the batting."

Result of that plucky call was a proper carnage. On a two-



RR's Jos Buttler hits a six in the last over to help his team chase down a target of 224 against KKR. **ICC**

paced pitch, the best bowling attack of this IPL conceded 12.87 runs per over, the highest in an IPL innings for Royals with at least five overs of spin. Avesh Khan and Trent Boult were the only bowlers to concede less than 10 an over. Kuldeep Sen averaged 11.5, Ravichandran Ashwin 12.25 and Yuzvendra Chahal 13.5 in his most expensive—4-0-54-1—IPL spell ever. Angkrish Raghuvanshi teased with an 18-ball 30, Rinku Singh again chipped in with a blustering nine-ball 20-run cameo. But holding ground, climbing into the Royals bowling attack and tearing into the most formidable spin duo in this IPL was Narine with an innings that was predictable yet effective.

The brief to Narine was always simple. "The job is just to go out there and try to give a good start," said Narine. "Whatever the situation is, still keep going because if you try to face dot balls in the powerplay, it could hurt you in the backend. So just go there and try to give your team a good start." Not allowing Narine to swing his arms is key to curtailing the slogs that are such an inherent feature of his batting. But with Royals erring repeatedly, Narine kept swinging, taking his chances.

Not often does Ashwin concede 49 runs in four overs. More abnormal is Chahal leaking more than 13 per over, looking all over the place in his final over when Narine got rid of his hel-

met. First ball was a huge slog sweep but he didn't connect. Andre Russell calmly dabbed the next ball for a single. Third ball, Narine skipped down the pitch to take legbreak on the full and clobber it for a six. Next ball, Narine rocked back and whacked it straight over the bowler for a four. A wide only stalled for a ball a massive six and another four as Chahal leaked 23 runs in that over to give KKR's score a massive boost. **Brief scores:** KKR 223/6 (S Narine 109, A Raghuvanshi 30; A Khan 2/35, K Sen 2/46). RR 224/8 (J Buttler 107, R Parag 34, R Powell 26; H Rana 2/45, S Narine 2/30, V Chakravarthy 2/36). **RR won by 2 wkts.**

Explosive Sunrisers have set T20s' hitting standard

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MUMBAI: It happened in ODIs when Eoin Morgan and Co. in the lead-up to England's successful 2019 World Cup, showed us that 400+ totals were achievable on a consistent basis.

Over the past couple of years, Ben Stokes' England have also tried to normalise an all-guns-blazing approach in Tests. So, it was only a matter of time before the T20s saw a revolution too. And in this IPL, Sunrisers Hyderabad have pushed the envelope.

Before IPL 2024 began, Royal Challengers Bengaluru's 263 against Pune Warriors in 2013 was the highest total. Since they set the mark, only one team had crossed 250—Lucknow Super Giants made 257/5 against Punjab Kings last year. But over the past month, 260 has been breached four times. It is SRH who are leading the way.

It began with their match against Mumbai Indians, when SRH slammed a record-breaking 277/3. A week later, Kolkata Knight Riders got 272/7 against Delhi Capitals. On Monday, SRH bettered their record by posting 287/3. RCB went all out and replied with 262/7.

SRH never took the foot off the pedal against RCB. After opener Travis Head (102 off 41 balls) and Abhishek Sharma brought up a 100-run stand in 7.1 overs, SRH promoted Heinrich Klaasen, arguably the most devastating batter in world cricket at the moment, to ensure the momentum didn't drop. Aiden Markram and Abdul

Samad then batted in the same vein in the death overs.

"It was proper batting," said Head, who hit a 39-ball century—the fourth fastest in IPL. "We wanted to take the game on, maximise the powerplay and keep going. We've got some power through the middle and wanted to just keep putting the foot down. Pat (skipper Cummins) and Dan (coach Vettori) put pressure on the batting line-up to make sure we kept going."

What works well for SRH is that they have batters who have a similar approach. Be it Head, Abhishek, Klaasen, Markram or Samad, they're all ultra-aggressive. The icing on the cake is the clarity provided by the team management, which gives them the confidence to keep going for their shots no matter the game situation. They ended up hitting a staggering 22 sixes against RCB—most in an IPL innings.

"Everyone is in good form," said the Australian opener. "But you've seen the way the team has been set up; there have been some changes since the first game to try to mirror up who's in the best form and who can maximise it for us. We spoke about it in our team meeting today, each guy has had his moment in the tournament. We're all complementing each other really, really well."

While small grounds and fast outfields continue to tilt the scales in favour of batters, there's no doubt the Impact Player rule has also made life a lot harder for bowlers. It has given teams that extra cushion while batting and

allowed SRH to enforce a relentless approach.

"With the Impact Player rule, you've got power even at No.7 and 8," said Head. "So, you can bat longer, just keep going, take more risks, and push the boundaries a little bit more. We've tried to use the rule to try and maximise the power we've got and put pressure on their bowling groups."

After the RCB game, Cummins threw down the challenge to the rivals. "I will keep saying, you'll hear from us all the time—that's how we want to play. It's not going to work every game but I can tell you, everyone's terrified when they come up against us and we're going to blow some teams out of the water before they have even walked out on the field."

So far this season, SRH have had the joint highest scoring rate (11.00) in powerplay, and the second highest (12.53) at the death. More importantly though, they have by far the highest run rate (9.79) between overs 7 and 15. Often, we see teams slowing down after a strong start, but SRH have shown that the process of consolidating after powerplay can be done away with. With required rates of around 15 being achieved consistently in the final overs, it seems no total is safe. SRH, with their belligerence, are offering a glimpse of what the approach by teams batting first could be.

It remains to be seen how they adapt as the pitches become slower into the summer. But as Head suggested, it won't be a surprise if SRH get to the 300-mark first.



GLENN MAXWELL TAKES INDEFINITE 'MENTAL AND PHYSICAL' BREAK

Agencies
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BENGALURU: Australia's Glenn Maxwell will take an indefinite "mental and physical break" from IPL after struggling for form with RCB. The big-hitting all-rounder has scored just 32 in six games and skipped the defeat on Monday in a record run-fest against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

It was Bengaluru's sixth defeat in seven matches and Faf du Plessis's side are bottom of the 10-team table. "I think now is actually a good time for me to give myself a bit of a mental and physical break, get my body right," the 35-year-old Maxwell said after playing no part in his side's 25-run defeat. "If I'm required to get in during the tournament, I can hopefully get back into a really solid mental and physical space where I can still have an impact."

Maxwell, who will be key for Australia at the T20 World Cup in June, was one of the first cricketers to recognise mental health issues and took a break from international cricket in 2019. He said on Monday it was "a pretty easy decision" to step aside for the time being.

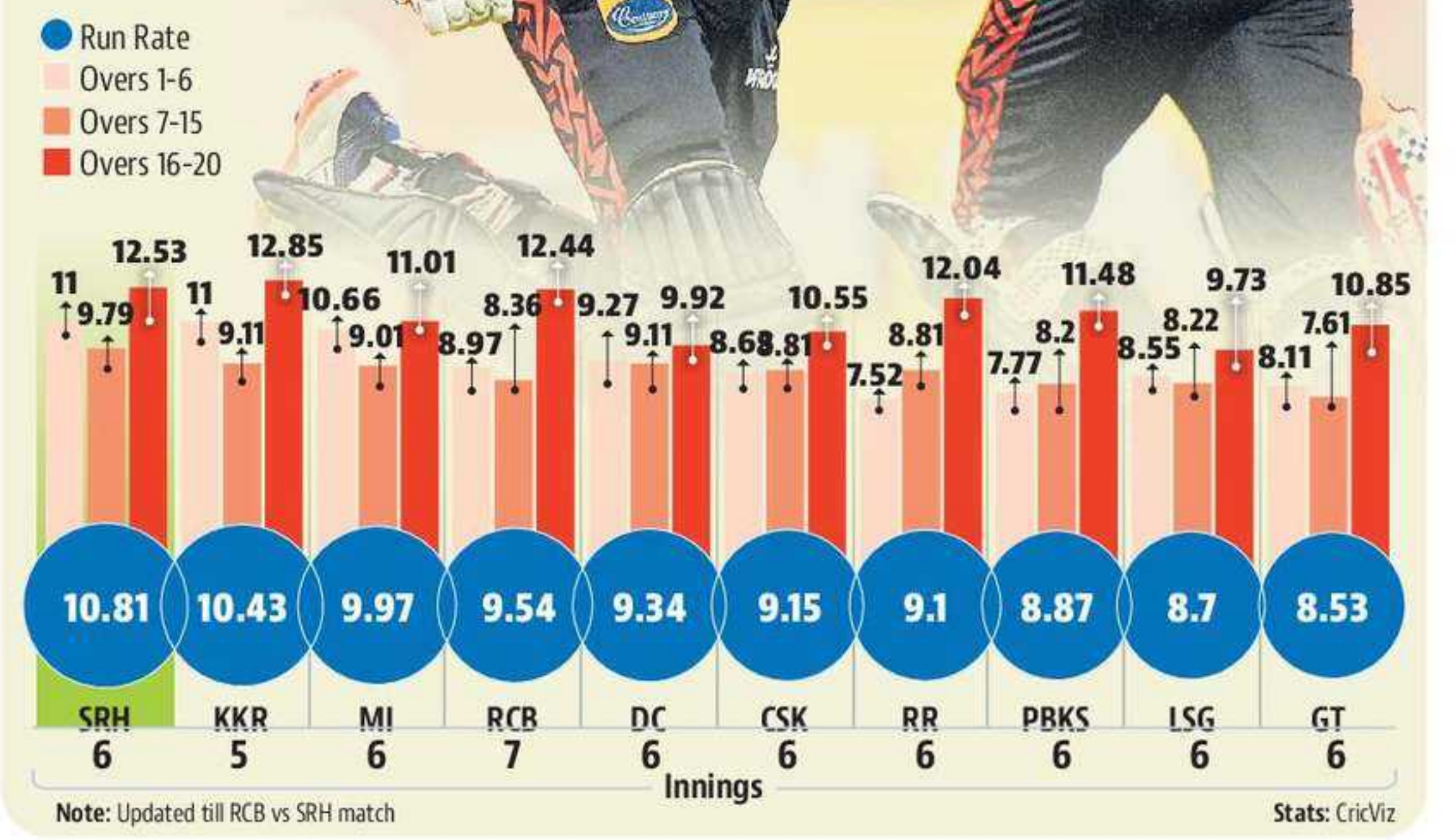
"I went to Faf and the coaches after the last game and said I felt it was probably time we tried someone else," he said. "I have been in this situation in the past where you can keep playing and get yourself deeper into a hole."

Maxwell added: "I take a lot of pride in my performance, and I put in a lot of hard work behind the scenes to get my body right for every game. And it has been a pretty tough struggle, given my body is on the wrong side of 30. I think that physical and mental toll probably just wore me down a little bit."

"For someone like Glenn in that team (RCB), he being one of the 'Big Dogs' along with Virat, a lot of pressure comes on couple of players," Delhi Capitals' coach Ricky Ponting said. "If you see what they have done so far, pressure builds up on individual player as well. Every individual is different. Some guys would want to get going and push through that and get some runs that will change their way of how they think about the game and some guys need to step back and have a break."

SRH batters on fire

Having posted IPL's two highest-ever totals in six matches so far, SRH have already set the benchmark in T20 batting. Here's a look at how their scoring phases compare with other teams



TODAY'S MATCH
GT vs DC
WHERE: AHMEDABAD WHEN: 7:30 PM
HEAD-TO-HEAD
2 GT WON
3 MATCHES PLAYED
1 DC WON
PREVIOUS MATCH
GT: Beat RR by 3 wkts | DC: Beat LSG by 6 wkts

Team	P	Won	Lost	NRR	Pts
1 Rajasthan Royals	7	6	1	0.677	12
2 Kolkata Knight Riders	6	4	2	1.399	8
3 Chennai Super Kings	6	4	2	0.726	8
4 Sunrisers Hyderabad	6	4	2	0.502	8
5 Lucknow Super Giants	6	3	3	0.038	6
6 Gujarat Titans	6	3	3	-0.637	6
7 Punjab Kings	6	2	4	-0.218	4
8 Mumbai Indians	6	2	4	-0.234	4
9 Delhi Capitals	6	2	4	-0.975	4
10 Royal Challengers	7	1	6	-1.185	2

Trials by fire for India's Olympic hopefuls

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MUMBAI: On the opening day of the first of two training camps leading into shooting's Olympic Selection Trials (OST), national rifle coach Suma Shirur noticed something slightly divergent in the body language of shooters who had assembled in Bhopal. Indian shooters are accustomed to checking into national camps regularly, especially ahead of major competitions. This time, though, Shirur figured they were "a little bit on the edge".

"Each one had their own set of questions: Should they prepare specially for an event like this (OST)? Or take it like just another day? Should the preparation be different? Or treat this like any other competition?" Shirur said. "From then to the time we finished in Delhi, I can see a good shift in terms of having that clarity."

The concept of trials isn't novel in Indian shooting. The OST, a near month-long exercise spread across four sets of trials in New Delhi and Bhopal starting this week to firm up India's representation in rifle and pistol events at the Paris Olympics, though is a first of its kind. Indian shooters have pocketed all quotas on offer in rifle and pistol — among the record 20 overall — and five shooters in each event will vie for Paris spots through a scoring system that will factor in a shooter's best



India's Manu Bhaker (L) has bagged the Paris Olympics quota in 25m women's pistol. **SANJEEV VERMA/HT**

three scores from the trials (quota winners get bonus points).

As shooters line up on the lanes seeking high quality scores amid stiff competition in these trials that will require them to peak a couple of months before the real deal, the daunting fact that their Olympic spot is on the line would quietly linger.

"They have to reach their peak twice. They cannot take a chance. In rifle especially, there's so much competition and great bench strength," Deepali Deshpande, the former rifle shooter turned coach who has six of her trainees in these trials, said.

"They cannot take it easy, and they know that."

Right approach, planning

The approach to these high-pressure trials, therefore, becomes crucial. The anxiety of making the Olympics team, especially for the younger crop of shooters, can be just as unnerving as excelling there. Shirur felt undercurrents of those nerves in the camp. The national coaching and high performance team tried to address that through routine discussions with shooters, interactive sessions with the likes of Abhinav Bindra and other Olympians, adding a layer of fun to the rou-

tine — pasting a leisurely game of snake and ladder on the white board for shooters to aim at, for example — and reiterating the attitude to be taken into the trials.

"These camps were especially to prepare the shooters to develop strategies in handling what's coming," Shirur, who made the 10m air rifle final at the 2004 Games, said. "The trials are an important stepping stone towards the main aim, the Olympics. So the preparation for the trials and the Olympics have common themes: keeping a mindset of growth, the ability to stay in the moment and develop-

ing ways to do that. It's easier said than done, but this is the path they have to walk steering through the trials."

For Deshpande, the 2004 Olympian who trains quota winners Swapnil Kusale, Akhil Sheoran, Shriyanka Sadangi, Sift Kaur Samra, Arjun Babuta apart from Anjum Moudgil, the key to the right approach to trials lay in the planning. It involved using all events in 2023, including the Asian Games and World Championships, for "confidence building" and ensuring quotas had been secured till year end.

"By February, they had to be ready, technically and equipment wise. And then deliver in April-May," Deshpande said. "You treat the trials as dress rehearsal for the Olympics. They will be under pressure, because their participation is at stake. But given their preparation, they are confident."

Two of her trainees, Shriyanka and Babuta, have been through the disappointment of trials while missing out on the Hangzhou Asian Games. Deshpande however believes the two, richer by experience, skill and quotas since, will carry no baggage from that into the OST.

Peaking twice

Still, can the trials, especially of the Olympic kind, carry the risk of shooters laying almost too much emphasis on it, to the point that it may have a hangover effect on the real deal to follow? "Could be," Deshpande

said. "But I told my shooters that we're selecting the team to win a medal at the Olympics, so two months before you should be ready for that level of performance."

And be ready two months later too. The shooters who eventually take the cut would have to peak twice in around three months in the final stages of the periodization cycle for the Olympics. The answer to that challenge, and partly also to the question above, is a downtime phase immediately after the trials.

"Between two high-pressure performances, there has to be a decent break for recovery. After these trials, shooters will need to take a good break, get back to the basics, and then again climb towards peaking in Paris," Deshpande said.

Shooters are used to competing in multiple World Cups within three months, so peaking twice in this phase is "doable", said Shirur. That shooting — unlike sports like wrestling and weightlifting — doesn't require physical peaks means the focus will entirely be on mental peaking, which would be very individual-specific.

"In our post-trials plans, we will ensure that everyone has enough rest and recovery period before redirecting their energies into the Olympics. That's going to be a challenge, but we are prepared," Shirur said. "The goal is to get every selected shooter well rested and hungry to perform at the Olympics."

Will neither recognise nor provide support to WFI: Sports ministry

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NEW DELHI: The Union sports ministry has stood firm on its decision to suspend the Sanjay Singhal executive committee (EC) of WFI, telling the Delhi high court that it might review the suspension only after there is visible improvement in WFI governance. The ministry, in the affidavit filed through standing counsel Anil Soni on Tuesday, added that it would neither recognise nor provide any support to WFI's activities and would rather treat any national championships or competitions organised by the current EC as unsanctioned and unrecognised events.

The affidavit said, "It is further submitted that the Ministry is continuously monitoring the governance of WFI and at present does not deem it appropriate at this stage to review its decision dated 24/12/2023. Any review will be undertaken only after marked and visible improvement in its governance, demonstration of compliance of UWW's order and IOA's order dated 18.03.2024 and steps taken with regard to its democratic functioning, adherence to govt guidelines aiming towards good governance practices including grievance redressal mechanism and safety of wrestlers." While the sports ministry has

stood by its December 24 decision abstaining WFI's elected EC from carrying out any activities pertaining to managing and administering day to day activities, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) in its affidavit filed earlier this month had stated that it was imperative to disband WFI's ad hoc committee because it would have been a direct conflict with the Olympic Charter and United World Wrestling (UWW) rules.

To be sure, IOA had dissolved WFI's ad hoc committee on March 18 after the UWW had lifted WFI's ban saying that there was no further need to run it.

The Centre's response has been filed after the court on April 10 conceded over formulation of an ad hoc committee for running WFI but granted the ministry another opportunity to specify its stand on managing the federation's affairs after the dissolution of the IOA ad hoc committee.

On April 9, a coordinate bench had also sought sports ministry's response in federation's plea challenging ministry's December 24 order. The ministry's 52-page affidavit has been filed in the application filed by the four wrestlers including Bajrang Punia seeking directions to the Centre to not revoke its suspension during the pendency of their petition seeking to declare federation's December 21, 2023 elections as illegal.

How Gukesh sprang a knight surprise on Nepomniachtchi

The 17-year-old has been unflappable and comfortably aced his Rd 10 test with black against the two-time Candidates winner

Susan Ninan

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BENGALURU: At just 17, D Gukesh is remarkably unflappable. Over the past fortnight in the biggest tournament of his young career, he's rarely tripped up in form or judgement. The Indian teen's Round 10 match-up against co-leader Ian Nepomniachtchi was supposed to be his stiffest test. The winner would be seen as potentially the clear favourite to win the tournament. Gukesh chose to take the fight to the two-time Candidates winner by uncorking a surprise on the fourth move. It ended up earning him a comfortable draw with Black, keeping him in the shared lead with four rounds remaining.

Gukesh picked what's known as the Cozio Defense with 4...Nge7, an unorthodox response to Ruy Lopez, to throw his opponent off. His knight galloped from the g-file to the e7 square. Almost in reflex, the Russian raised his eyebrows, took a beat for a sip of water, pressed his palms together and looked away from the board.

"The big question is did Ian anticipate Nge7 to appear in the Candidates or has he been taken by surprise?" Peter Leko wondered, "It's not easy. You start asking yourself what's happening in this position? It's such a different one...because you never really see the trade of knights and the knight from g8 heading to c6."

"The computer shows Black has more resources in the variation," said five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand, "and people are looking for every little act of provocative opening they can find."

Turns out Nepo was pretty surprised by Gukesh's opening idea. "I didn't know this Nge7 became trendy recently and it's not as simple as it might seem," he said after the game, "I had this d4 idea

RESULTS FROM ROUND 10

OPEN

HIKARU NAKAMURA	1-0	Nijat Abasov
Fabiano Caruana	1-0	Alireza Firouzja
Ian Nepomniachtchi	0.5-0.5	Gukesh D
R Praggnanandhaa	0.5-0.5	Vidit Gujrathi

WOMEN

Kateryna Lagno	0.5-0.5	Anna Muzychuk
Tan Zhongyi	0.5-0.5	Koneru Humpy
Aleksandra Goryachkina	0-1	Lei Tingjie
Nurgyul Salimova	0-1	R Vaishali

STANDINGS

1-2	1-2	3-5	3-5
Ian Nepomniachtchi (6)	D Gukesh (6)	R Praggnanandhaa (5.5)	Fabiano Caruana (5.5)
3-5	6	7	8
Hikaru Nakamura (5.5)	Vidit Gujrathi (5)	Alireza Firouzja (3.5)	Nijat Abasov (3)

ROUND 11 PAIRINGS

- Praggnanandhaa vs Nakamura
- Vidit vs Nepomniachtchi
- Gukesh vs Caruana
- Humpy vs Salimova
- Vaishali vs Goryachkina

but I wasn't sure what my notes were like afterwards...I wanted to put some pressure but he came up with an interesting choice in the opening...It's hard to be ready for every line in chess."

Nepo, who can be dangerous with White, found himself constricted by his opponent's rare opening choice. The Russian has won World Championship games against Ding Liren in the Ruy Lopez but this line wasn't something he perhaps has looked at recently. It promised to lead to complex and unexplored positions so he had to hold off on needless risks or a full-throttle press. It was perhaps the sensible thing to do. GM Simon Williams who has authored a course on the Cozio Defense as a repertoire option observed that White is

often unprepared for this move and it's not a playable variation from a practical point of view. "It is entirely objectively playable and there are very few lines where White can claim a clear edge and these almost certainly need to be known beforehand."

Gukesh perhaps had a hint of ambition since he had access to the only open file on the board twenty-plus moves into the game. The Black rook was positioned to enter down the e-file. Nepo chose to stick to a solid game. The Queens were traded off, followed by the minor pieces and the game petered down to a draw. Nepo pushed his pawn to h4 and extended his hand in a draw offer in an equal rook endgame. Gukesh moved his pawn to g6 before shaking hands and

reminding his opponent that they hadn't reached the mandatory 40-move mark earlier.

The Candidates tournament in Toronto has thrown up a nice mix of opening surprises. Praggnanandhaa employed the f5 idea earlier with the Black pieces in the Ruy Lopez in his win against fellow Indian Vidit Gujrathi. Unleashing an opening surprise not only conveys preparation and the will to battle but should the opponent be sufficiently surprised, it also hands an immediate psychological advantage.

"It's (Nge7) an interesting line and has been known for quite some time but I thought it would be nice to surprise him in the opening...and yeah he was surprised," Gukesh said afterwards, breaking into a smile.

Nepo might not be too pleased with himself for letting an opportunity to strike with White and take the sole lead in the tournament slip. For Gukesh, this one-up over the two-time World Championship challenger and holding a draw with the Black pieces must almost feel like a mini-victory.

Four more rounds remain and with three players - Fabiano Caruana, Hikaru Nakamura and R Praggnanandhaa - now placed half a point behind the leaders, the possibility of the tournament spilling into playoffs cannot be ruled out. Play will resume after a rest day and as things stand Gukesh - who had less than 7 per cent initial odds - has put himself in great reckoning to go all the way.

Bagan's high, Hyderabad blues and other ISL trends

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KOLKATA: Mohun Bagan Super Giant winning the league shield in the 10th season of Indian Super League (ISL) on the day they won the National Football League in 2002 was a coincidence. Like then, Mohun Bagan had to wait till the last round to see if they would be able to best the rest of India.

But that was an away game in Goa. What made the 2-1 win against Mumbai City FC rare - apart from it being Mohun Bagan's first in eight attempts - was 61,177 at Salt Lake stadium. Such turnouts are usually for the India team or the Mohun Bagan-East Bengal clash. Monday changed that.

"This is what we want every game and not just special occasions. The supporters were great and helped Mohun Bagan today," said Mumbai City FC coach Peter Kratky.

Equally rare, unique even, was the case of Hyderabad FC. In nearly three decades of all-India leagues - the National League, I-League and this - never has a club had to release so many players because salaries were not paid. Gurmeet Singh, Mohammed Yasir, Nikhil Pojary, Sahil Tavora, Chinglensana Singh, Hitesh Sharma, Nim Dorjee, and this list is by no means complete, started 23-24 with the champions of 21-22 but ended at other clubs because they weren't paid on time and wanted to move.

A two-transfer window ban means rebuilding will be difficult even if money comes in. It is a blot the season that saw

ISL LEAGUE SHIELD

TEAM	P	W	D	L	GD	Pts
Bagan	22	15	3	4	21	48
Mumbai	22	14	5	3	23	47
Goa	22	13	6	3	1	45

TOP HONOURS

Top scorer	13
Diamantakos (Blasters)	
Most assists	10
M Talal (Punjab)	
Chances created	57
M Talal (Punjab)	
Most goals	47
Mohun Bagan	
Most clean sheets	09
FC Goa	

Juan Ferrando who had won the ISL trophy. When Mohun Bagan faltered in AFC Cup and brought that form into ISL, they swapped Ferrando for Habas. Barring the sucker-punch from Chennaiyin FC, Mohun Bagan didn't lose in 12 games under Habas.

Crucial to that was the Spaniard asking for a fit-again Joni Kauko to be registered in place of Hugo Boumous. Kauko filled the hole in midfield Mohun Bagan had struggled with after Carl McHugh left but it is fitting that owners who have been the most consistent spenders in ISL wouldn't balk at benching a player of Boumous' calibre with full wages.

Also returning were former ISL winners Sergio Lobera and Carles Cudrat. Lobera took Odisha FC to fourth, their best-ever finish, and Cudrat gave East Bengal a trophy (Super Cup) and a berth in Asia, and is building a roster for next term.

Goals, an Indian problem

Including eight Indians, 14 players scored Mohun Bagan's 47 goals this season. But 28 of them came from the trio of Dimitri Petratos, Jason Cummings and Armando Sadiku. Petratos had 16 goal contributions this term and his 22 goals and 13 assists over two seasons have fetched his team an ISL trophy and the league shield.

No Indian in the top 10 of the scorers' list continues to be bad news for the national team - Lallianzuala Chhangte and Vikram Partap Singh are best with seven - as is Manvir Singh and Liston Colaco playing wing-backs.

coaches making a successful comeback and the lack of Indian goalscorers as trends will have to live with.

Coaches comeback

"We were nine points behind Goa before the second leg started. But I remember what coach said... if you trust me in my work, we will win the championship. Look where we are now," said Manuel Cascallana, Mohun Bagan's assistant-coach on Monday.

Cascallana was referring to Antonio Lopez Habas. ISL's most successful coach had unfinished business in the competition - not having won the league shield being denied by Mumbai City in 20-21. Months later, and not long after a 1-5 loss to the same team, Habas was sacked.

This term, Habas was appointed technical director to

Palmer scores four in 6-0 win over Everton

LONDON: Cole Palmer put on an unstoppable display with a perfect first-half hat-trick and a 4th in the second half as Chelsea demolished Everton 6-0 in the Premier League. Palmer scored with his left foot, head and right foot (13th, 19th and 29th minutes). He became the first Chelsea player to score in 7 home games in a row.

HC seeks NRAI stand on shooter Kaushik

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court sought the stand of the Centre and NRAI on a petition by shooter Manini Kaushik to allow her to participate in the trials for the Olympics. Justice Tushar Rao Gedela asked authorities to seek instructions by next week on the issue of allowing in the 50m rifle 3 Position shooter.

Babar back as captain as Pakistan face NZ

KARACHI: Babar Azam makes his return as Pakistan captain in a five-match T20 series starting Thursday against an understrength New Zealand with the World Cup weeks away. Azam regained the captaincy last month in a shock U-turn that ended the short-lived reign of fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi.

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Who is the youngest player to score an IPL century?


A. Sanju Samson	B. Manish Pandey
C. Prithvi Shaw	D. Ishan Kishan

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PAST WINNER
15th April Indu Vij



16th APRIL ANSWER
Who took a wicket off the first and last balls of Gujarat Titans' 2022 winning campaign?
A. Mohammed Shami

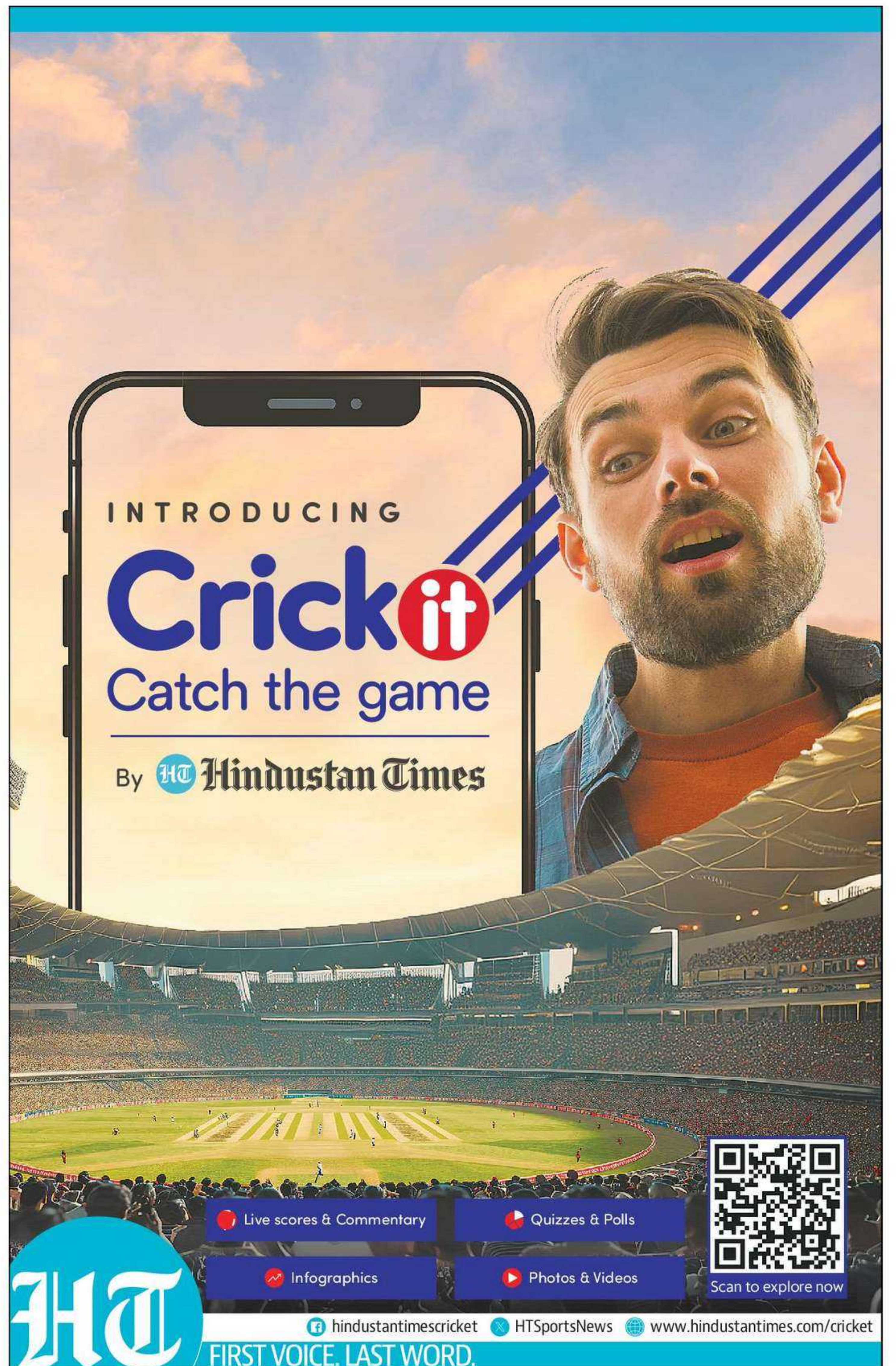


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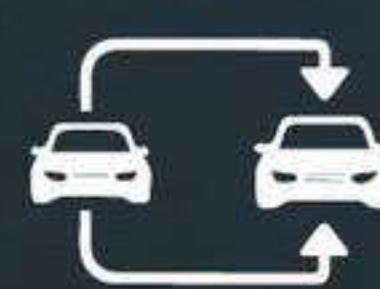
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