

The Pioneer TRUSTED SINCE 1865

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GREAT OFFERS!



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PAGE 6 NATION

UDF will accept any Congress leader as CM, says Sreekandan



PAGE 10

LAW & JUSTICE SC to hear PIL on guidelines for issuing Aadhaar today

PAGE 11: BHARAT KI SOCH

Marvels of India



PAGE 12 GLOBAL

EAM arrives in Jamaica on official visit



PAGE 16

SPORTS Not the season, admits Hardik Pandya



All eyes on counting centres

From Bengal to Kerala, high voter turnout set the stage for a dramatic result day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi/Kolkata/Chennai

All the political parties in the fray for the five Assembly elections are waiting with bated breath for the outcome on Monday...



Security personnel stand guard outside a strong room in Kolkata, ahead of the counting of votes for the West Bengal Assembly elections

clearer trends emerging by morning and final results likely by evening...

based Photo Identity Card system through ECINET to prevent unauthorised entry into counting centres.

On paper, the 2026 Assembly elections are straightforward: five regions, 824 seats, and a familiar roster

of parties battling for power. West Bengal (294 seats), Tamil Nadu (234), Kerala (140), Assam (126), and Puducherry (30) together form a significant, but not unprecedented, electoral exercise...

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Infant among 9 dead in Delhi fire as sealed balconies, locked roof turn fatal

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA New Delhi



Firemen at work after a fire broke out in a four-storey residential building at Vivek Vihar area, in New Delhi

A late-night fire at a multi-storied residential building in the Capital on Sunday claimed nine lives, including the life of a one-and-a-half year old. The fire, which was reported at 3.48am on Sunday took over four hours to fully douse...

people were rescued during firefighting operations. Two persons with minor injuries were shifted to Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital (GTB) for treatment.

According to the Delhi Fire Service, one body was recovered from the first floor, five from the second floor, and three from the staircase area near the terrace level.

All nine bodies were brought to GTB Hospital. Dr Praveen Kumar of GTB Hospital, confirmed that the survivor, Naveen Jain, 48, was admitted for treatment. Two other persons were given first aid at the emergency department and later discharged.

"The access to the roof was locked, and because of this, they could not save their lives. If it had not been locked, they might have survived," he said.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

The Bystander



NEPAL OBJECTS TO KAILASH MANSAROVAR YATRA ROUTE

ASHOKE RAJ New Delhi

Nepal has formally objected to the proposed route for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through the Lipulekh Pass, stating that the area falls within its sovereign territory.



Mount Kailash mirroring in Lake Manasarovar WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

of reports the pilgrimage expected to be conducted via Lipulekh Pass involving India and China.

The ministry reiterated Nepal's long-standing position on the territorial status of the region.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Missing footage, EVM fiddling forced Falta re-polls, says ECI

RAJESH KUMAR New Delhi

In a communication to the Chief Electoral Officer of West Bengal, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has "flagged allegations of voter intimidation, use of black tapes over buttons on ballot units to block votes and unauthorised presence inside booths..."

In its communication, the poll body said considering the history of violence and intimidation and the partial/non-availability of footage, there appeared to be deliberate interference with the poll process.



Security personnel patrol on the eve of counting and results of the West Bengal Assembly polls, in Howrah, West Bengal

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Dosanjh confronts Khalistani disruption in Canada concert

ASHOKE RAJ New Delhi

Punjabi singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh briefly halted his live performance in Calgary, Canada, during his ongoing Aura Tour after noticing some audience members waving pro-Khalistan flags.



Diljit Dosanjh WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

within sections of the Punjabi community. Addressing the situation mid-performance, Dosanjh responded to criticism surrounding both the flag display and his past public appearances.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Iran sends fresh peace plans to US

ASSOCIATED PRESS Dubai

Iran's latest proposal to the United States calls for issues between the two countries to be resolved within 30 days and aims to end the war rather than extend the ceasefire, according to Iran's State-linked media.

President Donald Trump said on Saturday that he was reviewing a new Iranian proposal to end the war, but also expressed doubt it would lead to a deal.

Iran's 14-point proposal calls for an end to the war, rather than just an extension of the truce. The proposal, a rebuttal to the US nine-point plan, also calls for the US to lift sanctions on Iran, ending the naval blockade, withdrawing forces from the region, and ceasing all hostilities.



US President Donald Trump on Saturday, May 2

Pakistani intermediary, the news agency reported. Pakistan has hosted previous negotiations between Iran and the United States.

Trump rejected a previous Iranian proposal this week. However, conversations have continued, and the fragile three-week ceasefire appears to be holding.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

NICOBAR PROJECT: RAHUL SPARKS ROW

The Congress on Sunday raised detailed concerns over the proposed Great Nicobar Island development project, citing ecological risks, tribal rights issues, lack of transparency, and security implications, and demanded a parliamentary debate.

Delhi tightens grip on traffic offenders with tech, may cancel licenses

RAJESH KUMAR New Delhi

Vehicle owners in the Capital may soon have their driving licenses cancelled for non-payment of traffic fines. Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday announced that the State Government will soon implement amended Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, which calls for strengthened and digitised traffic enforcement.

"The revised system makes the challan (traffic fines) process more stringent, transparent and technology-driven. Anyone committing five or more traffic violations within a year will be classified as a serious offender. Such cases may lead to suspension or disqualification of the driving licence under the amended

rules," the CM said. She added the new system is designed to be fully digital, time-bound and accountable. "This will ensure better compliance with traffic rules and help reduce road accidents," the CM said, urging citizens to follow traffic norms, settle traffic fines on time and act as responsible road users.

Under the new framework, anyone committing five or more traffic violations in a year will be classified as a serious offender. This could lead to suspension or disqualification of the driver's licence. Once a traffic fine is issued, the violator will have 45 days to either pay it or challenge it before a grievance redressal officer through the online portal, supported by docu-



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

mentary evidence. If no action is taken within this period, the fine will be deemed accepted, and payment must be made within the next 30 days.

If a challenge is rejected, the individual can either pay the fine within 30 days or approach the court after depositing 50 percent of the fine amount. Failure to act within the stipulated time will result in the fine being treated as accepted, with payment required within 15 days thereafter.

Most importantly, violators will not be able to approach courts directly to contest a traffic fine without

first going through the prescribed process.

According to a data, nearly 84 per cent of all traffic fines, including on-the-spot violations and others captured by cameras, issued in the past four years are stuck in limbo. From 2021 till 2024, more than three crore traffic fines were issued, but over 2.5 crore remain to be settled.

Police or authorised officers can issue challans either physically or electronically. In addition, violations captured through cameras and digital surveillance systems will automatically generate challans. If the department has a violator's mobile number, the e-challan will be delivered within three days, while a physical notice will be delivered within 15 days.

CONTINUED ON >> P4



## CM greenlights 7 new metro corridors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday announced that seven new Metro corridors will be taken up under Phase V(B), signalling another major expansion of the capital's rapid transit network as the city pushes to deepen connectivity and reduce dependence on road traffic.

The announcement was made at the 32nd Foundation Day ceremony of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, where the Chief Minister said work on Metro Phase IV and the broader Phase V programme is moving at pace and preparations for the new corridors are now underway.

Calling the Metro the "lifeline" of Delhi, the Chief Minister said the network has moved far beyond being just a transport facility and has become the city's most dependable public system. "Metro has become a benchmark of efficiency, discipline, and public trust. It is difficult to imagine Delhi without it now," she said while address-



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta during an event on the 32nd Foundation Day of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, in New Delhi

**Metro has become a benchmark of efficiency, discipline, and public trust. It is difficult to imagine Delhi without it now**

— REKHA GUPTA, CHIEF MINISTER

ing Metro employees, officers, and senior officials.

The expansion announcement comes at a time when Delhi continues to grapple with road congestion, rising vehicular emissions and mounting pressure on public transport infrastructure. Officials said the proposed seven additional corridors under Phase V(B) are expect-

ed to further widen the reach of the Metro into underserved stretches and strengthen inter-zone movement across the capital.

The Chief Minister also noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had recently inaugurated two new Metro corridors for Delhi and laid foundation stones for three more projects that are

already under construction. Tracing the Metro's rise from an ambitious urban transport plan to the backbone of daily commuting, the Chief Minister said the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, formed in 1995, has built a network of 416 km despite difficult engineering and land challenges.

At present, Delhi Metro runs 343 trains through 303 stations and operates more than 4,500 trips every day, carrying over 6.5 million passengers daily. Officials at the event said the system's nearly 100 km of underground tunnels stand as evidence of the scale of technical planning and execution behind the project.

The Chief Minister credited Metro staff, engineers, station workers, and support personnel for maintaining punctuality, operational discipline, and commuter confidence over three decades. She said the Metro's reputation rests not only on expansion but on the consistency with which it has delivered services.

Linking the Metro's future growth to Delhi's environ-

mental crisis, the Chief Minister said a stronger public transport backbone remains one of the city's most practical responses to pollution.

She said the government's immediate focus is not only on adding new lines and increasing train frequency but also on improving last-mile access so that commuters can move more seamlessly between stations and neighbourhood destinations.

According to officials, Delhi Metro has also generated carbon credits from the United Nations framework and has contributed to reducing more than 6 lakh tonnes of carbon emissions by shifting passengers away from private vehicles.

The Chief Minister said this makes Metro expansion a climate intervention as much as an infrastructure project. She also stressed that investment in Metro construction is being monitored with financial discipline and transparency to ensure long-term durability of the network.

## Delhi Metro begins blueprint for 7 new Phase V(B) corridors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Metro has opened the door to another major expansion, with preparations beginning for seven fresh corridors under Phase V(B) as the Capital's rapid transit system looks to stretch deeper into a city struggling with road congestion and rising commuter load.

The announcement came on Sunday during the 32nd Foundation Day of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, but the larger message was clear: even after three decades of construction, Delhi's busiest public transport network is still far from finished. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said Delhi Metro is moving ahead with Phase IV and Phase V(A) works and has now started planning seven additional corridors under Phase V(B) to further improve city connectivity.

The proposed routes are expected to widen Metro access across more residential and commercial belts, though detailed alignments are yet to be formally released. The fresh expansion plan comes as Delhi increasingly leans on Metro rail to absorb daily passenger movement that roads are no longer able to carry efficiently.

From a modest beginning in 2002, the Delhi Metro today stands as the central spine of urban mobility in the National Capital Region. Officials said the network's continued growth reflects not just commuter demand but the city's structural dependence on rail-based transport.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

PHASE V (B) CORRIDORS (DELHI)			
#	Corridor - Phase V (B)	Length (km)	Station
1	Dhansa Bus Stand (Najafgarh) to Nangloi	11.859	9
2	Central Secretariat to Kishangarh	15.969	10
3	Samaypur Badli to Narela DDA Sports Complex	12.890	8
4	Kirti Nagar to Palam	9.967	6
5	Jor Bagh to Mithapur	16.991	12
6	Mayur Vihar Ph III to Shastrri Park	13.197	8
7	Keshav Puram to Rohini Sec-34	16.285	12
<b>Total</b>		<b>97.158</b>	<b>65</b>

Sunday's event at Bharat Mandapam brought together senior Delhi and Union government officials, including Union Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs Tokhan Sahu, who described the Metro as one of the most trusted public systems in the region.

Senior representatives from the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Embassy of Japan were also present, underlining Japan's long role in funding and supporting Delhi Metro's engineering journey. Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, set up in 1995, has over the years emerged as the model on which several Indian Metro projects were later designed.

## Delhi judge death: Case of abetment to suicide, criminal conspiracy registered

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Delhi Police has registered a case of abetment to suicide and criminal conspiracy in connection with the death of a Delhi Judicial Services officer at his Safdarjung residence, an official said on Sunday.

Based on the complaint by the deceased's father, an FIR was lodged at Safdarjung Enclave police station under Sections 108 (abetment to suicide) and 61(2) (criminal conspiracy) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), they said.

The deceased, identified as Aman Kumar Sharma, 30, is suspected to have died by suicide, with preliminary inquiry indicating death by hanging, police said.

The family has levelled serious allegations, claiming that Sharma had been under distress and had complained of harassment in the days leading up to his death by his



wife and sister-in-law.

Rajesh Sharma, a relative of the deceased, said Aman's father, Prem Sharma, was "crying profusely" after receiving information about the incident around 1.30 am.

Citing Prem Sharma's purported statement to police, he said Aman had called his father around 10 pm on the night of the incident and expressed distress.

"He told his father, 'I am very troubled and it has become difficult for me to live. I've been harassed for two months,'" he claimed.

According to the family, Prem Sharma rushed from Alwar and reached the residence around midnight, where he was told that Aman had a dispute with his wife, who is also a judicial officer. The family also claimed that her sister is an IAS officer posted in Jammu.

Rajesh Sharma alleged that the couple had an

argument. "She was very angry and was shouting, while Aman was crying. Then suddenly everything went quiet," he said.

He further claimed that when Prem Sharma later tried to locate his son, he could not find him in the room. "When he called Aman's phone, the ringtone was heard from inside the bathroom. Despite repeated knocking, there was no response," he said.

Neighbours were then alerted, and a rear window was used to look inside. "Someone broke the glass pane and saw Aman hanging with a dupatta. He was brought down and taken to the hospital," he alleged.

He also claimed that family members faced difficulty in contacting the woman's relatives and that some persons present at the house left abruptly.

According to official records, Sharma had joined the Delhi Judicial Services on June 19, 2021. A law graduate from Symbiosis Law School, Pune, he was serving as Full-Time Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) in the North-East district at Karkardooma Courts since October 2025.

## DDA warns Shakti Apartment committee for flouting norms

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) has issued a strict warning to the Managing Committee of Shakti Apartment in Dwarka for flouting norms laid by the housing authority, which is in complete violation of the rules of the Registrar of Cooperative Society (RCS).

Sources in DDA said that the president of the managing committee of Shakti RWA society in 2017-2021 had decided to sell/allot the area of ground floor which had come out due to the Floor Area Expansion Project as new still parking priced at ₹2,00,000/- per unit.

However, these spaces had no legitimate passage for vehicular movement, as the then president of the RWA apportioned the mandatory green park contrary to the DDA-approved layout and building sanction plan as floor area ratio (FAR).

The then RWA president, Vishal Taneja, allegedly misrepresented a Supreme Court judgement of 1995 to tactfully convince the members. It is now revealed, as reported by *The Pioneer* earlier, that the said 1995 judgement pronounced in



the case of Dr G. N. Khajuria vs DDA actually prohibits

misuse of open areas, including parks, for any other purpose. The notice for allotment of these spaces was issued by Secretary Rajesh Verma of the RWA Managing Committee in 2021. Later on, vehicular movement destroyed the green park, which led to the registration of a police case in the matter.

The team of DDA officials had Shakti Apartments in October 2025 and found violations of Unified Building Bylaws-2016 and Master Plan Delhi-2021. A notice was consequently issued on October 15, 2025, for restoring the green park and submitting a compliance report.

Rajesh Verma, who is now serving as president, submitted his corrective comments to DDA vide letter dated November 02, 2025, assuring that the passage to the newly allotted stilt will be

altered and the park will be restored. He informed DDA that the FAR Project is still going on, though the time limit given by DDA for FAR Project completion expired long back and the society has not applied for a completion certificate till date, informed an RCS official dealing with the matter.

DDA has apparently taken a strong note of the factual documents furnished since some of the residents have written to the authority that the contractor of society has submitted some fake documents, including a fake NOC from the fire department.

Sources in DDA also said that the Structural Audit Report submitted by society to DDA vide letter dated 15.02.2023 is under scrutiny for its genuineness. The structural audit of a building has to be done for the entire structure and not only the stilt area.

Although the Managing Committee charged for external paint and grass laying in Park long back from its members, according to its reply dated 02.11.2025, the FAR Project is still going on. The time permitted by the DDA for FAR completion has expired long back.

## Senior journalist Pradeep Tiwari passes away

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Senior journalist Pradeep Tiwari, former editor of the Delhi edition of *The Pioneer Hindi*, died of a cardiac arrest on Sunday afternoon, bringing to a close a journalistic career that stretched across some of North India's most prominent Hindi newsrooms over more than three decades. He was 57.

Family members said Tiwari collapsed at around 12.30 pm while taking a bath at his residence in Vaishali, Ghaziabad. He was rushed to Paras Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. He was cremated later in the evening at Hindon Moksh Stali at around 5.30 pm. His elder daughter Prakriti Tiwari lit the funeral pyre in the presence of family members, friends and colleagues.

According to relatives, Tiwari had been battling prolonged health complications since the Covid pandemic. In 2021, he was hit by coronavirus infection twice during the devastating second wave period, and the illness caused severe damage to his lungs.

Though he recovered from the immediate infection, family members said he never fully regained stable



Pradeep Tiwari

health and had continued to suffer recurring medical problems over the past several years. Sunday's cardiac arrest, they said, came suddenly.

He began his career in the 1990s with Devgiri, a Hindi newspaper published from Aurangabad in Maharashtra, entering the profession at a time when Hindi print journalism was expanding rapidly beyond traditional political reporting into district, crime and civic beats.

From there, he moved through a series of significant news organisations and built a long editorial presence in Delhi and western Uttar Pradesh. Over the years, he worked with *JVG Times* in Delhi, *Amar Ujala* in Meerut and later Delhi, *Hindustan in Delhi*, and subsequently with *The Pioneer Hindi*, where he served as editor of the Delhi edition.

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
General Public is hereby informed that my client Smt. Shanti Devi W/o Late Sh. Ragpal, R/o J-B-6/58, Welcome, Sasthampur III, Delhi - 53 have served all her relations with her son's namely Roshan Lal, Sanju & Daughter in-law Namely Sunita due to their misbehavior with my client. My above named client has also disowned & Debarred all of them from all her movable & immovable properties. Anybody dealing with them will do so at his/her their own risk and responsibilities and my client will not be responsible for any act, deed or dealing done by all of them.  
Deepak Sehgal (Advocate) Off: 1/6930, Shivaji Park Shahdara Delhi - 32, Mob: +911429409

**पंजाब एण्ड सिंध बैंक Punjab & Sind Bank**  
Branch: ITS Muradnagar, E-mail: m0862@psb.bank.in

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
Notice is hereby given to the general public at large that Sh. Babu Ram S/o Sh. Hari Singh (PAN: BFKPR5804P) and Sh. Vishal Kumar S/o Sh. Babu Ram (PAN: EDEPK7653E) have approached Punjab & Sind Bank, Branch ITS Muradnagar, under RO Noida for grant of loan facility by creating equitable mortgage of their immovable property described hereunder:  
**Property Details:** All that piece and parcel of property bearing Plot No. 25-A, admeasuring 1100 Sq. Yards (83.61 Sq. Mtrs.), forming part of Khasra No. 70 Mi., situated at Santosh Vihar Phase-2, Village Asatnagar, Pargana Jalalabad, Tehsil Modinagar, District Ghaziabad (U.P.). It is informed that the original title deed(s) of the above-mentioned property have been reported lost/misplaced, for which a public notice had been issued earlier by the previous mortgagor/owner.  
Now, the present prospective mortgagors have requested the Bank to accept the said property as security and create mortgage thereon.  
Therefore, any person(s), bank(s), financial institution(s) or any other entity having any claim, objection, charge, lien, interest or dispute with respect to the title, ownership or possession of the above-mentioned property are hereby required to make the same known in writing along with supporting documents to the undersigned at the below mentioned address within a period of 15 (fifteen) days from the date of publication of this notice.  
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The Bank shall not be responsible for any claim(s) received thereafter.  
For Punjab & Sind Bank, Branch: ITS Muradnagar Under: RO Noida Date: 02.05.2026

## Yellow alert warning of thunderstorms, rain issued in city

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The day remained warm in the national capital on Sunday, with the maximum temperature recorded at 36.6 degrees Celsius, even as the India Meteorological Department issued a yellow alert predicting thunderstorms with rain in the coming days. The IMD has forecast thunderstorms with rain on Monday under a yellow alert, which means the residents should stay

updated. A spell of very light to light rain accompanied with thunderstorm and lightning is expected.

Light rainfall was recorded in parts of the city in the last 24 hours, with Safdarjung logging 0.6 mm rain, Palam 0.7 mm and Ridge 0.6 mm, while Lodhi Road and Ayanagar recorded trace rainfall. Among key stations, Safdarjung recorded a maximum temperature of 36.6 degrees Celsius, which was 2.7 degrees below the season's normal and 2



degrees lower than the previous day.

Palam recorded 35.5 degrees Celsius, 4.6 degrees below normal. Lodhi Road recorded 35.1 degrees Celsius, 2.9 degrees below

normal. Ridge recorded 35 degrees Celsius, 5 degrees below normal. Ayanagar recorded 35.8 degrees Celsius, 5 degrees below normal.

The minimum temperature at Safdarjung settled at 24.6 degrees Celsius, 0.1 degrees below normal. Palam recorded 22.4 degrees Celsius, 3.2 degrees below normal; Lodhi Road recorded 23.4 degrees Celsius, 0.4 degrees above normal; Ridge registered 23.5 degrees Celsius, 1.5 degrees below

normal, and Ayanagar logged 23.4 degrees Celsius, 0.2 degrees below normal.

The minimum temperature is expected to hover around 25 degrees Celsius and the maximum around 37 degrees Celsius on Monday. "No heatwave conditions are likely over Delhi during the next few days. Thunderstorm activity with rain and generally cloudy skies is expected to continue till May 6, followed by partly cloudy conditions till May 9," an IMD official said.

**ADMISSION NOTICE**  
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Date of Entrance exam : 7<sup>th</sup> June 2026  
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## NAB launches café run entirely by visually impaired youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

In a major push toward inclusive employment, the National Association for the Blind (NAB) has launched Café Beyond Eyes in R.K. Puram, New Delhi - a café run entirely by visually impaired youth.

The initiative aims to create sustainable livelihood opportunities while challenging conventional perceptions about disability and employment. Building on this effort, NAB, in partnership with the Tatsat Foundation, also announced a food cart programme designed to generate jobs for 500 visually impaired individuals over the next five years.

Renowned chef Ashwani Kumar Singh is spearheading the culinary training for participants. The programme

focuses on sensory-based cooking techniques, emphasising touch, aroma, sound, and taste over visual cues. Trainees are also introduced to the concept of Tasir, a traditional approach that considers the heating and cooling properties of ingredients to create balanced meals.

At the launch event, Chef Singh conducted a live masterclass, demonstrating how professional cooking can be mastered without reliance on sight. "Cooking is driven by passion, discipline, and sensory understanding," he said. "These young chefs are defined not by limitations but by their ability to adapt and excel."

More than just a café, the space functions as a training and empowerment hub. Participants receive structured instruction in food preparation, kitchen opera-



tions, and customer service, preparing them for careers in the food and hospitality sector.

Prashant Verma, General Secretary of NAB, said the initiative reflects a shift from sympathy-driven approaches to opportunity-based inclusion. "With the right training and environment, visually impaired individuals can perform with excellence

and confidence," he noted. Dr Sumi Gupta, Director of Tatsat Foundation, highlighted the importance of combining education with hands-on experience to promote financial independence.

Meanwhile, Sanjay Chaturvedi, Founder and Managing Director of Shubham Housing Development Finance Company, expressed support

for the initiative, calling it a step toward a more inclusive and sustainable society.

The launch event saw strong participation from community members and stakeholders, many of whom experienced the café's operations firsthand. The atmosphere underscored a broader vision of inclusion-one that prioritises dignity, self-reliance, and equal opportunity.

With Café Beyond Eyes now operational and the food cart initiative in the pipeline, NAB and Tatsat Foundation aim to expand similar models across India, creating new pathways for skill development and social integration. The initiative stands as a testament to the idea that true vision lies not in sight, but in determination and the courage to build an independent future.



## Vivek Vihar fire tragedy: Safety grilles turned into deadly walls

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA  
New Delhi

The building at B-13, Vivek Vihar Phase-I, does not look like a site of catastrophe from the front lane on Sunday morning. The facade is largely intact. It is only when you walk around to the rear, past the narrow passage that fire trucks could not enter, that the full picture presents itself: blackened window frames, hollowed-out rooms, balconies stripped of the grilles that once sealed them shut, and the smell of smoke that has soaked into the brick and will not leave.

Nine died here before dawn Sunday: three families, three floors, one building, including a toddler. A resident, here for four decades, watched from his first-floor balcony around 3:30 am. At first, he saw a flicker on the second floor of the next building. In minutes, the fire became intense. "I've never seen flames spread so fast," he said at the entrance hours after the fire. "By the time I understood, the whole back was gone."

The building is approximately seven years old. Most of the eight flats are owned. Over the years, residents had added what people add in dense urban neighbourhoods: metal grilles on balconies to prevent break-ins, plastic netting to keep pigeons away, and extensions to hold flower pots or dry clothes. Each addition made practical sense at the time it was made. Together, they created a sealed structure with a single staircase and a terrace door that was locked from the inside.

When the fire started at the rear second floor and rose, the grilles became barriers. Netting blocked firefighters' hoses. The locked terrace door trapped three victims. With the electricity supply disrupted amid the fire, residents said centrally locked

doors may have become difficult to open, while the lift became unusable. At the rear, thick iron grilles and enclosed balconies further complicated the evacuation and rescue process. "There is one central staircase which serves as both the entry and the exit. The rear side gate was covered with a grill, which we had to cut using tools," a firefighter involved in the operation said. He added that to rescue around 15 people, the team deployed ladders from different sides and used a turntable ladder vehicle.

The resident said he ran for a pipe and aimed water at the flames from his balcony. The heat pushed him back. Others gathered quickly in the lane below, dragging mattresses and positioning them under the windows in case anyone jumped. Rescuers worked with whatever was available. Someone eventually brought a metal-cutting tool from a nearby house. A generator was started after the building's electricity had been cut. Firefighters used the tool to slice through the grille.

"We kept calling out to the people inside. Some responded. Some did not," said a man from the neighbourhood who had joined the rescue effort. He looked at the rear of the building as he spoke. "The ones on the upper floors, we could hear them, but we could not reach them."

A woman who lives two buildings away said she woke up to the sound of screaming. "I thought it was a quarrel at first. Then I smelt the smoke. When I came out, the entire back of the building was orange," she said. She paused. "Those families had lived there for years. Everyone knew everyone."

Another neighbour from the area, who reached the spot around 4 am, said the fire had already reached the third floor and was reaching the fourth by the time he arrived. The rear lane, he said, was too



(Left) Charred remains of outdoor AC units and other items lie in the balcony of the four-storey residential building where a fire killed at least nine people at Vivek Vihar area in New Delhi; (right) A fireman in the four-storey residential building where a fire killed at least nine people at Vivek Vihar area in New Delhi



narrow for fire trucks to enter. Ladders had to be carried in on foot. Hoses had to be repositioned repeatedly. The gap left by the grilles and netting was barely a few inches. "Getting even a water pipe through was almost impossible," he said. "And from the outside, you could see people in there. That is the worst feeling."

He said firefighters eventually managed to cut through one section of the grille and pulled three people out through the opening. But the higher floors had denser layers of netting. The access was simply not there.

A firefighter who was part of the operation confirmed that the rear of the building posed the greatest challenges. The protective structures residents had installed over the years, the very features meant to make the flats safer, had made it nearly impossible to reach those trapped inside. "If the terrace had not been locked, they might have survived," he said.

By Sunday morning, the building's rear portion stood exposed and blackened. The grilles were cut open, and the

rooms were emptied by smoke and fire. Neighbours stood in the lane outside in small clusters, speaking in low voices about what they had seen and what, perhaps, could have been different.

The building had parking space on the ground floor, eight flats above it with four each on the front and back sides, a lift adjacent to the staircase, servant quarters, and a narrow rear gate opening into a cramped back lane lined with adjoining structures and overhead wires.

Describing the rescue efforts, Sanjeev Rana, member of a non-profit disaster management team, said, "We received a call around 6 am. When we went upstairs with the fire department personnel, we first saw one charred body on the second floor, then five bodies on the next floor. After that, we moved to the top floor."

On the top floor, three people had tried to save themselves but could not escape because the door leading to the rooftop had a central locking system, he said.

Neighbours said Nitin was involved in the paper trade in

Chawri Bazar and also owned a restaurant in Karkardooma. His younger son, Prasuk, aged around 22, survived as he had travelled to Ujjain with friends.

On the third-floor flat, five members of another family — Arvind Jain (60), his wife Anita Jain (58), their son Nishant Jain (35), daughter-in-law Anchal Jain (33), and their grandchild, Akash Jain — were found dead.

"Arvind and Anita were widely known in the locality because they maintained close ties with everyone," a resident said, adding that their son Nishant worked as a chartered accountant in Connaught Place, while their daughter-in-law was employed in a private bank. The couple had a child after eight years of marriage, neighbours said.

"Naveen came down using the stairs and got burnt. We rushed to the side of the building to rescue their two daughters, aged around 21 and 23, who were standing on the edge of the balcony. We spread mattresses below and used ladders to bring them down," a resident said.

### GRIEF, DISBELIEF GRIP FAMILY AND FRIENDS

New Delhi: Grief and disbelief gripped family and friends of those killed in the devastating fire in east Delhi's Vivek Vihar on Sunday, with several recalling frantic early morning phone calls from the victims, desperate for help.

According to family friends, Nishank Jain, one of the deceased, had tried to reach out to several people as fire spread rapidly through the residential building.

"He tried calling so many people — kept saying, 'Save me, save me,'" a close friend said. Manoj, a family friend and architect who was working on the family's new home, said Nishank made calls to him around 3:50 am and again at 4 am, as the situation inside the building worsened.

"I couldn't pick up the calls. I saw missed calls on my phone in the morning. When I got to know what had happened, I rushed to the hospital," he said. Relatives said Nishank



Family members and relatives of victims mourn after a fire in a four-storey residential building killed at least nine people at the GTB Hospital premises in New Delhi

was supposed to travel to Manesar with his elder brother Deepak Jain (38), a company secretary, to celebrate the latter's son's birthday but did not go at the last moment.

"Nishank did not go, had he gone, he would be alive," a relative lamented.

Friends recalled Nishank as a generous person who would often donate money for social causes.

Family friend Amit Jain said he came to know about

the incident around 8:30 am, hours after the blaze had engulfed the four-storey (G+4) residential building. There was also resentment among relatives over what they described as gaps in rescue. "Had fire services responded quickly, they would have been alive," an acquaintance said.

They also claimed that at least three people attempted to escape through the roof but could not, as the door was locked.

## Political leaders express grief over fire tragedy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and senior leaders across party lines on Sunday expressed grief over the deaths of nine people in the Vivek Vihar building fire. The opposition party Congress demanded a high-level investigation into the cause of the blaze and urged the government to provide financial compensation to the bereaved families without delay.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the incident was extremely tragic and that the loss of nine lives had left her deeply distressed. "Treatment of the injured in the accident is ongoing at the nearest hospital, and I pray for their swift recovery. In this hour of grief, my condolences are with the affected families. I pray to God to grant them the strength to



endure this difficult time," she said. She added that the Delhi government stands firmly with the affected families in every situation during this difficult time and that authorities are closely monitoring the situation and providing all possible assistance.

Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu directed authorities to provide all necessary medical assistance to the injured, along with immediate relief and support for those affected. "My thoughts and prayers are with the families who have lost their loved ones in this devastating tragedy," Sandhu said. He confirmed

that Delhi Fire Service personnel and emergency teams are on the ground and working to manage the situation.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also expressed sorrow over the incident and offered condolences to the bereaved families, praying for the recovery of those injured.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, accompanied by Union Minister of State Harsh Malhotra, local MLA Sanjay Goel, Councillor Pankaj Luthra, and BJP Shahdara district president Deepak Gaba, visited the bereaved families at the site at around 10 am.

Sachdeva called it an irreparable loss. He said a delivery agent who first noticed the fire had told police he spotted sparking in the AC outlet outside the building, suggesting the blaze may have originated from an air conditioning unit. "Such sparking in wires, especially at nighttime when people are sleeping, is a matter for investigation," he said. Malhotra praised the prompt response of the fire brigade and police, saying their timely action led to the rescue of around 20 people.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday declared the Vivek Vihar fire in Shahdara, which killed nine people and left several seriously injured, as tragic and heart-wrenching, and urged the BJP government to draw lessons from recent incidents. An AAP delegation led by MLAs Sanjeev Jha and Kuldeep Kumar visited the injured in hospital and later the site, where they spoke to residents about the blaze.

## RangBaag opens in Delhi park, turns green space into theatre classroom

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Delhi's public parks are being pushed beyond morning walks and weekend picnics. In a first such initiative, the Delhi Development Authority has joined hands with the National School of Drama to launch "RangBaag", a structured theatre training programme for children inside a public park, marking a fresh attempt to turn the capital's green spaces into centres of learning and cultural activity.

The first batch of the programme began on May 2 at the Maya Art Gallery in Indraprastha Park with 21 children in the 12 to 16 age group enrolling for the six-week workshop. The initiative comes as part of a wider push under the directions of Lieutenant Governor of Delhi Taranjit Singh Sandhu to redesign Delhi's public parks as more active community



spaces rather than passive recreational zones. Officials said the idea is to bring education, creativity and neighbourhood participation into parks that are otherwise used largely for leisure.

Delhi Development Authority, one of the city's largest custodians of urban green infrastructure, manages major parks, biodiversity areas and city forests across the capital. While these spaces have traditionally focused on environmen-

tal use, RangBaag marks the authority's first institutional partnership aimed specifically at cultural learning through regular public programming.

The collaboration with the National School of Drama gives the programme a formal theatre education structure rather than a casual hobby workshop. Under trained NSD theatre instructors, the participating children will undergo a production-oriented course that

includes speech and communication exercises, body movement sessions, storytelling, improvisation and basic stagecraft.

Officials said the classes are designed in an interactive and play-based format so that children gradually build confidence while learning to perform in a group setting. Beyond acting skills, the workshop is expected to help participants develop self-expression, teamwork, empathy and greater awareness of their surroundings.

The organisers believe theatre, when moved out of enclosed auditoriums and classrooms and placed inside an open civic setting, can become a stronger community-building tool.

The six-week course will conclude on June 14 with a final public performance in which the children will present what they have learnt before parents, mentors and invited guests.

गृह मंत्रालय  
भारत सरकार  
सत्यमेव जयते

## OUR CENSUS OUR DEVELOPMENT

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

### WHAT IS SELF-ENUMERATION?

Self-Enumeration is an online process in which you fill and submit your household details on the SE portal ([se.census.gov.in](http://se.census.gov.in)) yourself, without waiting for an enumerator

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

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

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

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

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## NEET-UG 2026 held across 551 cities in India, 14 abroad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

The NEET-UG 2026 examination was conducted on Sunday across 551 cities in India and 14 cities abroad.

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan visited the National Testing Agency (NTA) headquarters to assess on-ground readiness for the examination, officials said.

During the visit, the minister oversaw key operational aspects, including examination logistics, coordination with centres, and monitoring systems put in place to conduct the test seamlessly, they said. Officials briefed him on measures taken to handle the large number of candidates and maintain discipline



at examination venues.

The NEET-UG 2026 examination was conducted by the NTA for nearly 23 lakh registered candidates at centres across the country under strict protocols, officials said.

NEET-UG continues to be one of the largest undergraduate entrance examinations in India and serves as the gateway for admission to MBBS, BDS and other allied medical programmes across institutions in the country.

## PM Modi hails India's first OptoSAR probe launch

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday hailed the launch of the world's first OptoSAR satellite Mission Drishti by GalaxEye, calling it a testament to the youth's passion for innovation and nation-building.

Bengaluru-based space start-up GalaxEye's Mission Drishti satellite was launched on Sunday aboard SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket from California.

"Mission Drishti by GalaxEye marks a major achievement in our space journey. The successful launch of the world's first OptoSAR satellite and the largest privately-built satellite in India is a testament to our youth's passion for innovation and nation-building," Modi said in a post on social media. The prime minister

also congratulated the founders and the entire GalaxEye team, extending his best wishes.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh also took note of the Mission Drishti launch, saying the development marked a significant milestone in India's space journey.

In a social media post, the minister said, "The successful launch of the world's first OptoSAR satellite, and the largest privately-built satellite in the country, reflects the immense potential of our young innovators driving nation-building."

Mission Drishti is the world's first OptoSAR satellite, integrating Electro-Optical (EO) and Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) sensors into a single operational platform, according to the company.

While EO sensors capture



high-resolution images during sunlight and clear skies, SAR sensors provide all-weather and all-time images, using radar pulses.

In a statement, Suyash Singh, founder and CEO of GalaxEye, said, "With the satellite (Mission Drishti) now

successfully in orbit, our immediate focus is on completing its commissioning. As we move through this phase, we are already witnessing strong global interest in the differentiated datasets enabled by our OptoSAR payload."

The satellite will help address long-standing limitations of conventional systems and enable more reliable and consistent data acquisition across diverse environmental conditions, the company said.

As a dual-use Earth observation satellite, the mission will support use cases across defence, agriculture, disaster management, maritime monitoring, and infrastructure planning.

The satellite is also expected to complement India's broader initiatives, including the 29 active Earth Observation satellites outlined in ISRO's recent annual report.

The launch came after five years of indigenous research and development, and extensive environmental testing and performance validation of the Mission Drishti. In a statement, Lt General

A K Bhatt (Retired), director general of Indian Space Association (ISPA), said, "GalaxEye has achieved what only a few global players have, which is seamlessly combining optical and SAR capabilities on a single platform to enable persistent, all-weather intelligence."

What stands out is not just the technology, but its broader impact on how downstream applications will increasingly define value in the space economy, particularly in Earth observation, where timely, decision-grade insights are critical," he added. ISPA is the premier industry association of space and satellite companies in the country.

GalaxEye aims to scale up Mission Drishti to a constellation of 10 satellites by 2030, developing a robust and sovereign Earth observation infrastructure for India.

## Skeleton episode in Keonjhar: Jeetu Munda forgives bank officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Bhubaneswar/Keonjhar

Jeetu Munda, who carried the skeleton remains of his sister to a rural bank in Odisha's Keonjhar district as proof of her death to withdraw money from her account, on Sunday, said he does not want any action against bank officials who allegedly harassed him.

Munda (50), a native of Dianali village under Erendi gram panchayat in Patana block in Keonjhar district, said, "I have received money deposited in the name of my

sister after carrying her skeleton remains to the bank. They (bank) have got the proof of my sister's death and released the money immediately. It is a fact that they harassed me. But I do not want any action against them after receiving money. They delivered cash to me at our home."

"What is the point of taking action against officials after getting money?" he said, adding that he was not ashamed of the entire episode.

"Had I not brought the skeleton remains to the bank,



they would not have given our family's money deposited in the name of my sister, who is dead. I have not done

anything wrong," he said. Jeetu, who is a bachelor and stayed with his 56-year-old widowed sister, who died

on January 26, 2026, claimed that he did not have any remorse over digging the skeleton out of the graveyard.

"Now people say that it was a mistake to dig out the remains of a dead person. But I had no alternative but to do so as bank officials wanted the thumb impression of my sister, who had died three months ago," Jeetu, belonging to the Munda tribe, said.

The tribal man had exhumed the skeletal remains of his sister Kalra Munda (56), who died in January. He then walked around 3 km to the Malinosi

branch of the Odisha Grameen Bank and produced it before the official as proof of her death. A video of Munda carrying the skeleton has gone viral on social media.

Jeetu said that he was emotionally attached to his elder sister, Kalra Munda, and both of them stayed at one home while his elder brother Raibu Munda (now dead) and younger brother Shankar Munda lived separately in the village.

"I was cooking and feeding my elder sister when she was bedridden. Her death

was a great blow to me. But she has blessed me. I have received around ₹15 lakh from different people for carrying her skeletal remains," Jeetu told a group of journalists who visited his village on Sunday.

Kalra Munda had deposited ₹19,300 at the Maliposi branch of Odisha Grameen Bank by selling the family's oxen.

"She had married Tadia Munda of Rameikhamar village (Gandia Tahasil) in Dhenkanal district. After the death of her husband, she shifted back to her paternal

native place at Dianali village, 40 years ago, along with her child. Her child also died after some time. Since then, she has been living with her brother Jeetu Munda," the official said.

Asked about the money received from his sister's bank account, Jeetu Munda said that the amount of ₹19,402 (including interest) was divided into three parts. Jeetu got one portion, his elder brother's widow received another portion, and his younger brother Shankar Munda also got an equal share.

## All eyes on counting centres

The poll results in West Bengal wait with bated breath to see whether the TMC manages to hold on to power or the BJP makes a historic breakthrough and claims the State for the first time.

The State recorded turnout close to 91 per cent, among the highest ever. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee-led TMC is hoping to win its fourth consecutive term by overcoming a spirited challenge from the main Opposition the BJP, while the CPI(M) and the Congress are trying to reclaim a foothold following their wipeout in the 2021 polls.

As the EVMs open at 8 am, the CPI(M) and the Congress will be watching with equal keenness, hoping to reclaim a foothold in the State's electoral map after five years in the wilderness, following their wipeout in the 2021 polls. Counting of votes will take place across 77 centres in the state, with elaborate security arrangements and a charged political atmosphere setting the stage for the declaration of results in 293 of the 294-seat House.

The poll body countermanded polls in the entire Falta constituency in South 24 Parganas district, citing "severe electoral offences and subversion of democratic process during polling in a large number of polling stations". The fresh poll in that seat and the counting will take place on May 21 and May 24, respectively. Repolling in 15 booths in South 24 Parganas concluded on Saturday, with around 87 per cent turnout recorded.

The State's political climate bordered on the vicious, even after the conclusion of polls, leading to fervent anticipation ahead of the announcement of results, with both primary contenders TMC and BJP, claiming they were dead certain about their victory prospects. Courtesy the tight security arrangements - with over 2.5 lakh central paramilitary personnel on the ground, besides the presence of a thoroughly reshuffled state police force - electoral violence remained at a minimum, and no deaths were reported for the first time in the state's election history of recent decades. This was also the first election held in the state in 20 years, conducted after an extensive, albeit controversial, SIR exercise that revised the electoral rolls, removing over 9 million voters.

The campaigns recorded the BJP unleashing its full might, with top leaders like Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh launching all-out attacks on the TMC over corruption, law and order, infiltration, women's safety and unemployment, while promising welfare measures.

The TMC's retaliation, with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and party MP Abhishek Banerjee leading the charge, focused on SIR harassment, Bengali persecution and 'outsider' plank, accusing the BJP of failing to deliver on its national commitments and upholding TMC's development report card.

The poll body has scaled down the number of counting centres this year to 77 from 87 announced earlier, and 108 in 2021, while putting in place a multi-layered security grid. The run-up to counting, however, has been marked by high political drama, with TMC leaders, helmed by CM Mamata Banerjee, rushing to strongrooms in Kolkata, apprehending counting malpractice and alleging attempts to tamper with the sealed EVMs.

The EC rejected those allegations, maintaining that all electronic voting machines are kept under strict surveillance with round-the-clock security and CCTV monitoring. Closer to the counting date, security outside strongrooms has been further tightened, with the EC deploying 165 additional counting observers and 77 police

observers to oversee the process and ensure adherence to norms. It has introduced stringent access control measures at the counting centres, including banning mobile phones except for returning officers and observers.

Tamil Nadu has seen turnout in the 85.1 per cent, a notable jump. Assam has recorded close to 86 per cent, Kerala has remained steady around 80 per cent, and Puducherry has touched roughly 90 per cent. These are not numbers that suggest voter fatigue. They point instead to a politically charged electorate, invested in the outcome. High turnout, however, remains an ambiguous signal. It can indicate anti-incumbency, but it can also reflect strong mobilisation by ruling parties.

The assembly polls in Assam will determine whether the BJP-led NDA gets a third term or the Congress wrests power after weeks of wrangling marked by identity politics, welfare delivery and regional aspirations. Among the high-profile candidates whose electoral fate will be decided on Monday are Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Congress' state unit chief Gaurav Gogoi, assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary, Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia, AIUDF Chief Badruddin Ajmal, Rajiv Dal Chief and MP Akhil Gogoi, and Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) chief Lurinjyoti Gogoi. Several cabinet ministers, including the AGP's Atul Bora and Keshav Mahanta, and the BPP's Charan Boro, are also in the fray.

In Tamil Nadu, the incumbent DMK regime has fought big to retain power, and its archrival AIADMK has slogged to win power after five years as the principal opposition party. Actor-politician Vijay-led TVK's entry into the electoral arena has made predictions about the winning prospects tough and the Tamil nationalist Seeman's NTK is another factor in the polls.

A number of exit polls have predicted a win for the DMK-led alliance, a pretty close fight and an impressive electoral debut for Vijay-led TVK. AIADMK chief Edappadi K Palaniswami, leader of opposition in the outgoing Assembly and former CM, has rejected the exit polls and expressed strong confidence of his party forming a Government with majority.

Kerala assembly results are crucial for the ruling LDF, the opposition UDF, and the BJP-led NDA as they seek to strengthen their position in the state's evolving political landscape. With most exit polls predicting a close contest but giving an edge to the UDF, political parties and leaders will be closely watching the results.

For the Congress-led UDF, which has remained out of power since 2016, the election is being viewed as a do-or-die battle. The ruling LDF, however, citing forecasts of a close contest, remains hopeful of retaining power for a third consecutive term.

Though matching its 2021 tally of 99 seats appears unlikely, the front expects to secure around 75-80 seats, claiming that the Government's development initiatives will translate into votes.

In Puducherry, six counting centres have been set up across the Union Territory.

## Dosanjh confronts Khalistani disruption...

In the circulating clips, he is heard defending his choices and reiterating his commitment to highlighting Punjab's issues on global platforms.

"My job is not to do charity. But whichever platform I go on, I always talk about Punjab," he said, referring to his appearance on Kaun Banega Crorepati. "We often say the national media doesn't talk about Punjab enough. I went there for the sake of Punjab and raised its issues. I've also donated generously to my state whenever needed."

## FROM PAGE - 1

Dosanjh clarified that his participation in the show, where he donated his earnings toward Punjab flood relief in 2025, was intended to encourage broader public contributions. "People from all over India can donate to help the poor. That's why I went there," he added. Responding to ongoing criticism, he remarked, "If you still have an issue that I sat across someone on television... then keep waving however many flags you want."

The singer also referenced his recent international appearances, including a feature on The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, where he spoke about Punjab's history and the Komagata Maru incident. Reflecting on the moment, Dosanjh highlighted the symbolic significance of performing in Canada.

"In 1914, when our people came to Canada for the first time, they weren't allowed entry. Today, we're filling stadiums here—that's a big thing for us," he said, referencing the historical journey of Punjabi migrants.

The controversy comes months after the pro-Khalistan group Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) announced plans in October last year to disrupt one of Dosanjh's concerts in Australia. The announcement coincided with Sikh Genocide Remembrance Day, observed by the Akal Takht.

SFJ had criticised Dosanjh for a public gesture involving Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan, alleging it disrespected victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence. The group's general counsel, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, accused the actor of historical complicity and called for a boycott of Dosanjh's performances.

The Akal Takht had, in 2010, officially recognised the 1984 killings as a genocide and designated November 1 as a day of remembrance.

Despite recurring controversies, Dosanjh has continued his international tour, maintaining that his global stage is aimed at amplifying Punjab's cultural identity and historical narratives.

## Nepal Objects to Kailash Mansarovar Yatra Route

Citing the Sugauli Treaty, Nepal emphasised that all areas east of the Mahakali River — including Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh, and Kalapani — belong to Nepal. "Nepal remains clear and firm that, as per the 1816 Sugauli Treaty, areas east of the Mahakali River, including Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh, and Kalapani, belong to Nepal," the statement said.

In response to media queries regarding Nepal's claims, the official spokesperson of India's Ministry of External Affairs said that India's position in this regard had been consistent and clear. Lipulekh Pass has been a long standing route for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra since 1954 and the Yatra through this route has been going on for decades. This is not a new development.

As regards territorial claims, India has consistently maintained that such claims are neither justified nor based on historical facts and evidence. Such unilateral artificial enlargement of territorial claims is untenable.

The issue has once again highlighted ongoing territorial sensitivities in the tri-junction region, where Nepal, India, and China have overlapping strategic and geopolitical interests.

The Sugauli Treaty, signed in 1816 after the Anglo-Nepalese War, defined the Kali River (Mahakali) as Nepal's western boundary. However, the treaty left unresolved a critical question: the river's true source.

Kathmandu has consistently maintained — particularly since the 1990s — that the river originates at Limpiyadhura. Based on this interpretation, all land east of that point, including

Kalapani and Lipulekh, falls within Nepali territory. These areas together form a strategically significant stretch of the western Himalayas at the tri-junction of Nepal, India, and Tibet.

India, however, disputes this claim. New Delhi argues that the Kali River originates further east, near the Lipukhola tributary — an interpretation that places Kalapani and Lipulekh within Indian territory. Following the Sino-Indian War, Indian forces established a presence in the Kalapani valley to monitor the Chinese frontier. Over time, the region shifted from being contested to being effectively administered by India, even as Nepal maintained its claim with relative restraint

## Iran sends fresh peace plans to US

The US president also offered a new plan to reopen the Strait of Hormuz at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, where about a fifth of the world's trade in oil and natural gas typically passes.

Iran's deputy parliament speaker said on Sunday that Iran "will not back down from our position on the Strait of Hormuz, and it will not return to its prewar conditions." Ali Nikzad, who has no decision-making power in parliament, made the comments while on a visit to port facilities on Iran's strategic Larak Island, located close to the narrowest part of the strait.

"The Strait of Hormuz belongs to the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said, adding that the country was working to compensate businesses and property damaged during the war, and that Trump's blockade plan was certain to fail.

Nikzad reiterated Iran's position that any ships not associated with the US or Israel will be able to pass after paying a toll. The US has warned shipping companies they could face sanctions for paying Iran in any form, including digital assets, to pass safely.

Iran effectively closed the strait by attacking and threatening ships after the US and Israel launched a war on Feb. 28. Tehran later offered some ships safe passage via routes closer to its shore, charging fees at times.

The US has responded with a naval blockade of Iranian ports since April 13, depriving Tehran of the oil revenue it needs to shore up its ailing economy.

## Delhi tightens grip on traffic offenders with...

All challans will be recorded sequentially on an online portal to ensure transparency. Motorists have been advised to update their mobile numbers and addresses on their driving licence and vehicle registration certificates to avoid inconvenience.

Continued non-payment will lead to restrictions on all vehicle-related services, including payment of taxes and processing of driving licence or registration-related requests.

The vehicle will be flagged on the portal as 'not to be transacted,' effectively blocking any further transactions until the dues are cleared. In cases where necessary, and subject to court orders, police or authorised officers may also impound vehicles involved in violations. All challans will be issued in the name of the registered vehicle owner, who will be notified via SMS, email or other digital means.

The number of challans issued through cameras are significantly higher than the ones on the spot. From 2021 till 2024, more than 2.3 crore challans were issued via cameras compared to 68 lakh through on-the-spot ones. In 2024, nearly 65 per cent of the pending challans were camera-generated notices.

## Missing footage, EVM fiddling forced Falta...

By 1 pm 58.04 per cent of votes were cast, 74.86 per cent by 3 pm and 86.71 per cent by 5 pm.

The poll body said EVMs in as many as 60 polling stations were found to have been tampered with in the above noted manner. These 60 polling stations amounted to 21 per cent of the total number of polling stations in the constituency.

"The State Observer, West Bengal has issued a direction in terms of Section 20B(2) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 to the Returning Officer for 144-Falta Assembly Constituency to stop counting of votes and has further recommended re-poll in 144-Falta Assembly Constituency," it said.

Election observers and the returning officer confirmed that the tampering and violations had "vitiated the poll," making results unreliable and necessitating a full repoll due to the large-scale impact of the irregularities. Many polling stations saw long gaps in coverage of video feeds, making verification impossible, while storage chips were either empty, contained unrelated election footage or showed systematic gaps during peak voting hours, the report said.

## Infant among 9 dead in Delhi fire as sealed...

Five ladders were deployed from different sides, along with a turntable ladder vehicle, to rescue approximately fifteen people. The fire intensity was significantly higher in the four flats at the rear of the building.

The nine deceased have been identified across three families. On the second floor: Arvind Jain, 60, son of Chotte Lal, resident of B-13 Vivek Vihar; his wife Anita Jain, 58; their son Nishant Jain, 35; daughter-in-law Anchal Jain, 33; and grandson Master Akash Jain, approximately one and a half years old. On the first floor: Shikha Jain, 45, wife of Naveen Jain. On the third floor, an entire family: Nitin Jain, approximately 50; his wife Shailey Jain, approximately 48; and their son Samyak Jain, approximately 25.

The cause of the fire has not been officially established and remains under investigation. Officials suspect a short circuit or a blast in an air conditioning unit on the second floor may have triggered the blaze. A delivery agent who reportedly first noticed the fire told police he had spotted sparking in an AC outlet outside the building.

The building is approximately seven years old. Most of its eight flats are owner-occupied. The rear portion, where casualties were highest, had balconies sealed with metal grilles and plastic netting, which firefighters said severely complicated rescue access.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta expressed distress and said the Government stands with the affected families. Lieutenant Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu directed authorities to provide all necessary medical assistance and immediate relief to those affected. Investigation into the cause of the fire is ongoing.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday condoned the loss of lives in the east Delhi building fire and announced an ex-gratia of Rs 2 lakh to the next of kin of each of those who lost their lives and ₹50,000 to those who were injured.

President Droupadi Murmu too offered condolences to the bereaved families. "The news of the loss of lives due to a fire in Shahdara, Delhi is extremely heartbreaking. I express my deepest condolences to the bereaved families. I pray for the swift recovery of those who have been injured," Murmu said in a post on X in Hindi.



## GRAPEVINE

### The politics of Doon School friends

Once upon a time, Congress heavyweight, former Union Minister and Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Kamal Nath, had been discreetly making attempts to enter Parliament as a Rajya Sabha member. Since another old timer, Digvijay Singh, has refused to continue in the Rajya Sabha at the end of his current tenure, grapevine has it that Kamal Nath has opened a channel to engage with the decision maker of the party, Rahul Gandhi. As Kamal Nath had played in a very suspicious manner before the last Lok Sabha polls, amidst rumours that he may get into the BJP camp, the Congress high command is reluctant to give him a chance, but then he has to 'manage' the numbers. Sources said now Kamal Nath has requested his Doon School mate, former Chief Minister of Odisha, Naveen Patnaik, to veto his candidature from Odisha as a Congress candidate. Patnaik's BJD has 51 MLAs, and Congress has 14, so only one BJD candidate can go to the Rajya Sabha. Kamal Nath has assured Rahul Gandhi that he will get the remaining BJD MLAs to vote in support of the Congress.



### Who is Dubai settled pollster?

Social media is abuzz to know the identity of a Pollster, settled in Dubai after TV journalist Arnab Goswami accused that the persons is parked in Middle East and not landed India for so many years and still doing fake poll predictions. Arnab did not name the person. The pollster was earlier caught in a sting operation to give favourable verdict during 2014 elections. He was caught for providing diverse predictions through his one agency and then rolled out vivid predictions and projections through another agency.



### Migrant voters' sponsorship

Travel patterns linked to West Bengal's polling phase drew unusual and an unprecedented attention this season. Railway authorities, in coordination with Central and State intelligence inputs, kept a close watch on passenger flow heading eastward from Delhi NCR. A spike in last-minute travel demand reportedly led to long waitlists, forcing many travelers without confirmed train tickets to turn to private luxury buses like Volvo destined for districts like Cooch Behar. Meanwhile, the national Capital region reportedly felt the impact, with earlier reports of shortages in domestic help and daily wage labour which ultimately is a case study as how election cycles can ripple far beyond State borders, affecting urban labour or dynamics due to sponsoring of the electorates.



## Mission Drishti to enhance Earth observation: HM



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday congratulated young scientists and engineers at GalaxEye for building Mission Drishti, the world's first OptoSAR satellite combining optical cameras and all-weather radar.

Bengaluru-based space start-up GalaxEye's Mission Drishti satellite was launched on Sunday aboard Falcon 9,

developed by SpaceX, from California (US). In a post on X, Shah said, "Congratulations to our young scientists and engineers at @GalaxEye for building Mission Drishti, the world's first OptoSAR satellite combining optical cameras and all-weather radar."

Mission Drishti is the world's first OptoSAR satellite, integrating electro-optical (EO) and synthetic aperture radar (SAR) sensors into a single operational platform, according to

the company. He said the launch of India's largest privately built satellite would transform how the Earth is observed and highlight the capabilities of the country's youth on the global stage.

"The launch will change how our Earth is observed and emboss the prowess of our youth on the globe, realising Modi Ji's vision of a space-power India. All my best wishes are with you for your future endeavours," he added.

## RBSK 2.0: Child screening to include mental health, NCDs

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Centre has expanded the scope of the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) to include screening for mental health conditions and risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCD) such as diabetes and hypertension under the programme's revised guidelines.

The Union health ministry released the RBSK 2.0 guidelines during the recently concluded National Summit on Good Practices and Innovations in Public Healthcare Service Delivery, marking a major overhaul of the flagship child health screening programme.

Building on more than a decade of implementation, the updated framework broadens the programme's established "4Ds" approach — defects at birth, diseases, deficiencies and developmental delays — while incorporating emerging child health concerns, including behavioural disorders, mental health issues and lifestyle-related diseases.

The revised guidelines introduce a



comprehensive preventive, promotive and curative continuum of care for children from birth to 18 years of age, with a stronger focus on digitalisation and continuity of care.

According to the ministry, the enhanced screening framework aims to ensure early identification and timely intervention for a wider range of health conditions affecting children and adolescents.

Screening services under the programme will continue to be delivered through mobile health teams at anganwadi centres and schools to ensure wider outreach and universal coverage.

The ministry said the new guidelines also seek to strengthen referral pathways from community-level screening to facility-based diagnosis and treatment through a robust referral tracking system aimed at minimising dropouts and ensuring follow-up care.

As part of the Government's digital health push, RBSK 2.0 introduces digital health cards, real-time data systems and integrated platforms for monitoring and service delivery.

"These digital innovations are expected to improve programme efficiency, accountability and evidence-based decision-making," the ministry said.

The guidelines also stress greater convergence among the health, education and women and child development sectors to ensure coordinated service delivery through schools, anganwadi centres and community platforms.

The ministry said the revamped programme is expected to improve child health outcomes by strengthening early detection, referral systems and sustained follow-up care across the country.

## Rahul's visit rattled Govt over Great Nicobar project: Congress

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Congress on Sunday flagged in detail concerns related to ecology, tribal rights, transparency and security, over the Great Nicobar project, and asserted that these considerations must be debated in a parliamentary forum.

The Opposition party claimed that the Modi Government is "rattled" and in damage control mode after the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, visited Great Nicobar last week.

In a statement, Congress general secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The Modi Government, clearly in damage control mode after the hugely impactful visit of the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, to Great Nicobar on April 28, 2026, issued a press note on the Great Nicobar Island Development



Congress general secretary in-charge communications, Jairam Ramesh

Project three days later." This press note does not address any of the serious concerns that have been raised on it by local affected communities, environmentalists, anthropologists, academics, civil society experts and other professionals, Ramesh said.

During his visit to Great Nicobar last week, Rahul Gandhi alleged that the Great Nicobar project at Campbell Bay in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was "one of the biggest scams and gravest crimes against the natural and tribal heritage of the country". The Government, on May 1,

released a detailed statement with answers to FAQs (frequently asked questions).

"The Great Nicobar Project is a strategic initiative to strengthen India's presence in the Andaman Sea. It seeks to balance port-led growth with calibrated environmental safeguards. Protection of indigenous communities remains central to its planning," the Government statement had said.

"The project combines strategic, economic, and ecological priorities. This ensures that development is sustainable, inclusive, and aligned with national interests," it had said.

## Health Ministry launches national framework for child diabetes



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Union Health Ministry on Sunday released a guidance document providing a framework for screening, diagnosis, treatment and long-term management of childhood diabetes.

According to the ministry, the document, for the first time, establishes a structured and standardised national framework, positioning India among a select group of countries that have integrated childhood diabetes care into the public health system.

The "Guidance Document on Diabetes Mellitus in Children" was released at the recently concluded National Summit on Best Practices in Public Healthcare Service Delivery, organised by the ministry.

According to a statement by the ministry, the framework aims to ensure universal screening of all children from birth to 18 years through community and school-based platforms for early identification of diabetes.

Suspected cases will

undergo immediate blood glucose testing and be referred to district-level health facilities for confirmatory diagnosis and treatment, it said.

A key feature of the initiative is the provision of a comprehensive free-of-cost care package at public health facilities, including screening, diagnostic services, lifelong insulin therapy, glucometers, test strips and regular follow-up care. The initiative seeks to reduce the financial burden on families and ensure uninterrupted treatment for children diagnosed with diabetes. The document also lays down an integrated continuum of care linking community-level screening with district hospital-based management and advanced care at medical colleges to ensure seamless follow-up and treatment.

To strengthen early detection, the guidance promotes the "4Ts" awareness framework — Toilet, Thirsty, Tired and Thinner — to help parents, teachers and caregivers recognise early warning signs of type 1 Diabetes.

## Rajnath Singh to inaugurate North Tech Symposium in Prayagraj

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday will inaugurate a North Tech Symposium, on the theme 'Raksha Triveni Sangam — Where Technology, Industry & Soldiering Converge', in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. The three-day event is being jointly organised by the Northern Command and Central Command of the Indian Army and the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM), the defence ministry said on Sunday.

Giving details, officials



said this symposium will serve as a vibrant platform to showcase and integrate state-of-the-art indigenous technologies to overcome operational challenges.

The exhibition will feature an array of participants, including MSMEs, private Defence Tech firms, start-

ups and innovators in uniform from across the country. 284 companies are setting up stalls showcasing their latest innovations and technologies.

The event aims to identify technologies suited for field deployment, maintenance processes and streamline procurement to promote a sustainable and self-reliant defence ecosystem for the Indian Army.

The Indian Army has been highlighting the operational relevance of cutting-edge technologies and the need for continuous innovation to address the evolving security challenges.

## 2 NCB officials suspended over custodial death of BSF constable

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
New Delhi

An investigation officer and an assistant director working under the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) have been suspended following the death of a BSF constable in custody on the night of March 19-20, sources said on Sunday.

According to sources, the "unfortunate incident" involved BSF Constable Jaswinder Singh, who died of cardiac arrest after experiencing two cardiac episodes while receiving treatment at Pulse Hospital, where he was admitted.

Singh was arrested in Jammu by the NCB and was



being transported to Amritsar, Punjab, in connection with an investigation linked to a case registered in Amritsar. A Special NDPS Judge in Jammu had remanded him to custody, highlighting his connection to Punjab in the remand application.

The NCB's investigation indicated that Singh was allegedly in contact with two

virtual numbers associated with operatives from Pakistan, sources said, adding that a relative of Singh, also a BSF constable, has been arrested in two NCB cases and four cases with the Punjab Police concerning narcotics.

While being transported from Jammu, Singh began to experience severe chest pain. After taking some water, his condition temporarily improved. The NCB team arrived in Amritsar on March 19 at around 9.30 pm. At approximately 9.45 pm, however, Singh again experienced chest pain and was admitted to Pulse Hospital at about 10 pm.

## IWPC hosts panel on press freedom amid global challenges



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Indian Women's Press Corps (IWPC) on Saturday organised a panel discussion to mark World Press Freedom Day, bringing together senior journalists and media experts to deliberate on safeguarding press freedom in a rapidly changing global landscape.

Titled "Protecting Press Freedom Amid Global Turmoil," the event opened with IWPC President Sujatha Raghavan highlighting growing challenges such as conflict, political instability, censorship, and digital interference. She stressed that independent and fearless

journalism remains vital for a healthy democracy.

Among the key speakers were CK Naik, Raghavan Srinivasan of the Editors Guild of India, and Vail Awwad. Naik cautioned against tightening regulatory frameworks that could curb journalistic freedom, while Srinivasan underscored the need for credibility and ethical reporting in an era of misinformation.

Awwad drew attention to the risks faced by journalists in conflict zones, calling for stronger global safety mechanisms. The discussion also focused on AI-driven disinformation, online harassment, and the impact of social media.

## War on drugs: LG Manoj Sinha leads foot march in Srinagar

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Jammu

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, currently leading a massive campaign against drug abuse, on Sunday arrived in Srinagar to spread awareness against the nefarious designs of narcotic dealers and terrorists targeting the youth in the valley.

Without naming the neighbouring country, Sinha said the "inimical neighbour" has targeted Jammu and Kashmir's youth by filling the Union territory's streets with drugs, and asserted that the Government

and security forces will foil the designs of the "dangerous enemy".

He also noted that the nexus between narcotic dealers and terrorists had become a challenge for the country's internal security.

"Narco terrorists have targeted our most valuable asset, our youth. They flooded our streets with drugs. We are facing a dangerous enemy, our neighbour (Pakistan), which gave birth to terrorism in the world," Sinha, who led a foot march against drug abuse here, said.

Addressing the participants of the 'Padhyatra' for Nasha Mukta Jammu



J&K LG Manoj Sinha signs on a signature board during a Nasha Mukta Abhiyan to raise awareness about the harmful effects of drugs in Srinagar

and Kashmir. Sinha said the administration has announced a war against drugs in Jammu and Kashmir, and it will rescue and save the youth from drug abuse. "I have visited eight districts of the Jammu region after the launch of this war on drugs on April 11. The people of Jammu have spoken in one voice that they want their kids back, they want their future back. Today I want to tell you here that we take them back at any cost," he said.

The LG said that while the Government, security forces and police were doing their job, the

strongest weapon in the war on drugs is the people's cooperation. "Terrorists and drug dealers share the common goal of disrupting the country's peace, unity, and security. The proceeds of the drug trade are used to fuel terrorism.

"The time to remain silent is over," he added. Speaker of Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly Abdul Rahim Rather, Minister Javed Ahmad Dar, several MLAs, sportspersons and religious leaders participated in the function held at the football stadium at the Tourist Reception Centre in Jammu.

## Indian Army contingent departs for joint exercise in Cambodia

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

An Indian Army contingent on Sunday departed for the second edition of India - Cambodia Bilateral Military Exercise CINBAX-II 2026. The exercise is scheduled to be conducted at Techo Sen Phnom Thom Mreas Prov Royal Cambodian Air Force Training Centre (Camp Basil), Kampong Speu Province, Kingdom of Cambodia, from May 04-17, the defence ministry here said.

Giving details, officials said, as part of India's ongoing Defence Cooperation with friendly foreign



countries, the bilateral exercise CINBAX-II with Cambodia holds significance in the backdrop of evolving global security challenges.

The exercise will be conducted under the framework of Chapter VII of the UN Mandate, showcasing company-level joint training for the

conduct of operations in a sub-conventional environment.

The Indian Army contingent comprises 120 personnel, mainly from a battalion of the Maratha Light Infantry Regiment. The Cambodian contingent comprises 160 personnel from the Royal Cambodian Army.

The joint exercise will be aligned with the current dynamics of Counter-Terrorism operations encountered by the peacekeeping forces during the UN peacekeeping operation. This aim will be achieved through various practical and comprehensive discussions as well as tactical exercises, leading to a com-

prehensive validation exercise. Special skill training, including that of Drone operations, mortar, and sniper tactics, will be practised as part of the exercise. The primary objective is to enhance interoperability, coordination and operational synergy between the contingents of both nations.

The exercise will not only showcase the capability of both nations towards maintaining global peace, but will also facilitate in exchanging best practices and the sharing of operational experiences gained during various operations against hostile forces in a semi-urban environment.



## Modishree vs Joy Bangla: Sweet war before West Bengal count

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Kolkata

Fish, *jhalhuri* and regional identity became unlikely symbols in the TMC-BJP fight for over a month. With Bengal now all agog for the EVMs to open on Monday, the State looks to cap off the bitterly fought battle with sweets drenched in the hues of every political party.

From saffron-coloured "Modishree" and "Joy Bangla" confectionery dyed in the Trinamool Congress' green to rose-flavoured red sweet christened "Lal Salam" of the Left, confectioners across the West Bengal Capital are now ready for brisk business, dishing out desserts that fit the occasion.

Kolkata-based sweetmakers said orders and enquiries from party workers and supporters have already started pouring in as anticipation builds over whether Bengal will witness a change of guard or the incumbent will



Workers prepare green mango *rosogollas* at a sweet factory on the eve of the declaration of West Bengal Assembly election results in Suri, Birbhum district on Sunday

continue to rule. At the iconic KC Das and Nobin Chandra Das sweetmeat outlets, there is frenzied activity, as confectioners race against time to prepare huge quantities of *rosogollas* and *rajbhogs* dyed to the colours of each political party.

"The saffron-coloured kesar-flavoured sandesh has been named 'Modishree', inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi tasting the

sweet during his last visit to Kolkata for an election campaign," Dhiman Das, the director of the firm that runs outlets of both brands, said.

Its green variant with *gondhoraj* (a version of lime) flavour linked to the Trinamool Congress has been christened "Joy Bangla", the rallying cry of the ruling party, he said.

Das said the outlets would largely prepare *rosogolla*

and *rajbhog* varieties, while several other confectioners are preparing customised sandesh carrying party colours and symbols.

"We will restrict ourselves to *rosogolla*. We are initially making around 500 pieces each of green, orange and red velvet *rosogollas*. Supplies would be altered depending on the demand and trend on the counting day," he said.

Confectioners said local political workers have informally spoken to them about the supply of sweets, though the orders would be firm only after the result trends become clearer on Monday.

As such, many have prepared white *rosogollas*, ready to dip them in the colour the State takes following the counting of votes. "We will have white *rosogolla* in our stock and will dip them in the colour as is the trend on the counting day," said the owner of Benapani Sweets in south Kolkata.

## Biryani to laddoos: Parties gear up for Kerala victory

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Thiruvananthapuram

With the Kerala Assembly election results set to be announced on Monday, workers of various political parties across the State have begun preparations for celebrations.

In Pandikkad in Malappuram district, Congress and UDF workers are preparing biryani for around 5,000 people in anticipation of a victory.

According to Congress leaders, a large tent has been erected in the town where the food will be distributed. "We will celebrate the end of 10 years of LDF rule. We welcome everyone, including CPI(M) workers," a Congress worker told the media.

They said 16 large vessels have been arranged to cook biryani, using about 40 kg of rice each. Apart from food, cultural programmes are also being organised as part of the celebrations. "We are confident that the UDF will come

to power. Malappuram district has been a stronghold of the front, and that will continue," a local leader said.

The Congress on Sunday erected a large pandal at Indira Bhavan, the headquarters of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC), ahead of the Assembly election results to be announced on Monday.



Congress leader Manakkad Suresh said sweets had been ordered for distribution after the results were declared.

"As we work among the public, we know their sentiments well. By 12 noon on Monday, the UDF will secure a clear majority and win the election," he told the media.

## States Focus



### GUJARAT: COUNTING AT UMRETH ASSEMBLY TODAY

Counting of votes of the Umreth Assembly bypoll in Gujarat's Anand district will be held on Monday. The bypoll, necessitated by the death of BJP MLA Govind Parmar, took place on April 23, with 59.04 per cent of voters exercising their franchise at 306 polling stations. There were five candidates in the fray, though the main contest is between BJP's Harshad Parmar, who is the son of the late MLA, and Congress' Bhurugurajsinh Chauhan. "The EVMs and VVPATs will be opened on Monday morning. Counting will be held at a college in Vallabh Vidyanagar here amid tight security," an official said on Sunday.



### BJP CANDIDATE BETS ₹1 CR ON HIS WIN IN KERALA

Senior politician and BJP candidate PC George on Sunday said he was confident of a resounding victory from the Poonjar Assembly constituency in Kerala, even offering to place a bet of ₹1 crore to back his claim. "I will win by a massive majority. If anyone has any doubt, they can come forward and bet ₹1 crore," he told a TV channel. George also predicted victory for his son, Shone George, in the neighbouring Pala constituency, saying the upcoming Assembly would witness the father-son duo entering the House together. He further claimed that the BJP would make significant gains in Kerala under the leadership of Rajeev Chandrasekhar and suggested that the election outcome in the State would be a hung Assembly, with no front securing a clear majority.

## Two held for firing outside BJP leader's house in West Bengal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Kolkata

A day before the counting of votes for the West Bengal Assembly elections, two persons were arrested on Sunday for allegedly being involved in a firing incident outside the residence of a BJP leader in North 24 Parganas district, police said.

BJP leader Kundan Singh lodged a police complaint, alleging that a few gunmen fired at his house in the Noapara constituency around Saturday midnight. Based on the CCTV footage, the two accused were apprehended, a senior officer said. BJP's Noapara candidate Arjun Singh, in a post on social media,



CCTV footage of the attack

claimed that around 12.05 am, two armed miscreants arrived on a motorcycle at the residence of Kundan Singh, a BJP functionary and secretary of the Barrackpore organisational district, with an "intent to kill him".

## Kolkata police shift Kalighat OC again before poll results

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Kolkata

The Kolkata Police on Sunday deputed an official of its Bhangar division as the officer in charge (OC) of the Kalighat police station in place of Chameli Mukhopadhyay, who only a day ago replaced Gautam Das, suspended for his controversial social media post.

The matter assumed political significance ahead of the counting of votes in the



hotly contested West Bengal Assembly polls, especially because Kalighat is the backyard of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. According to the order signed by Kolkata Police chief

Ajay Nanda, additional officer in charge, Balai Bag, of the Pulerhat Police Station under the Bhangar Division, has been appointed as the new OC of Kalighat Police Station, and asked to take over the charge immediately.

On the other hand, Chameli Mukhopadhyay has been transferred to the Ultadanga Women Police Station under the Kolkata Police's Eastern Suburban Division with immediate effect, the order showed.

## BJP leaders visit temples on eve of counting in West Bengal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Kolkata

BJP candidates in West Bengal offered prayers at temples in their respective constituencies on Sunday, a day ahead of the counting of votes, seeking victory in the Assembly elections.

Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari performed rituals at Kali and Shiva temples in his home district, Purba Medinipur.

Adhikari is seeking a re-election from Nandigram in Purba Medinipur and taking on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Bhabanipur in Kolkata. Siliguri candidate Shankar Ghosh offered prayers at the Rathakhola Kalibari in the north Bengal



Leader of Opposition Suwendu Adhikari

city. In a social media post, he said he prayed for the BJP's victory and 'poriborton' (change) in West Bengal, which is being governed by the TMC for the last 15 years. Kharagpur Sadar candidate Dilip Ghosh offered puja at a Kali temple in New Town near Kolkata, where he lives. Ghosh said he offered

prayers at the Thakdari Kali Temple for the well-being of the people.

He said he offered 'dhutra' flowers to Lord Shiva and performed 'jalabhishek'.

Kolkata Port candidate Rakesh Singh offered puja at a temple in his area, while Chowringhee nominee Santosh Kumar Pathak visited

a temple in Burrabazar. Baharampur candidate Subrata Maitra also performed rituals at multiple temples in his constituency in Murshidabad district.

A BJP leader said it was decided that all candidates will offer pujas at temples in their respective constituencies for the well-being of the people, besides remembering those killed in post-poll violence in 2021.

"We are Hindus, so it is natural for devout Hindus to pray for the well-being of the people," he said.

Meanwhile, BJP Mahila Morcha workers staged sit-ins outside counting centres in various parts of the State, alleging disruptions by members of the ruling TMC.

## Tight security in place for Karnataka bypoll counting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Bengaluru

Counting of votes for bypolls to two Assembly constituencies in Karnataka — Bagalkot and Davanagere South — will be held on May 4, amid tight security, election officials said Sunday.

The by-elections were held on April 9. The bypolls were necessitated by the deaths of senior Congress MLAs HY Meti (Bagalkot) and Shamanur Shivashankarappa (Davanagere South).

Although the outcome of these by-elections is unlikely to have an imme-



mediate impact on State politics, the contest is seen as a matter of prestige for both the ruling Congress and the Opposition BJP.

While the Congress faces the challenge of retaining both seats, the BJP aims to wrest them and deliver a

setback to the ruling party, which is currently witnessing an "internal power struggle" over leadership. There has been speculation that a decision on leadership change and the much-awaited cabinet reshuffle is likely after the May 4 results.

According to the Election Commission of India (ECI), the voter turnout in Bagalkot was 68.74 per cent, and it was 68.43 per cent in Davanagere South.

Poll officials said the counting of votes would begin at 8 am, and a clear picture may emerge by midday.

## Service ballots push Kerala voter turnout to 79.7 per cent



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Thiruvananthapuram

Kerala's voter turnout in the April 9 Assembly elections has tentatively risen to 79.70 per cent after the inclusion of service voters' postal ballots, CEO Rathan U Kelkar said on Sunday. Addressing a press conference, Kelkar also outlined elaborate arrangements for the counting of votes scheduled for Monday.

He said the polling percentage for the Assembly election was 79.63 per cent, excluding postal ballots of service voters. The chief electoral officer said 53,984 postal ballots had been issued to service voters, of which 20,028 had been received as of May 1. "Service voters can submit postal ballots till before counting begins. We have directed the postal department that postal ballots received from service voters, including on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, should be handed over to the returning officers without delay," he said.

He said the receipt of service voters' postal ballots had increased the polling percentage by 0.07 percentage points.

## UDF will accept any Congress leader as CM, says Sreekandan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Palakkad (Kerala)

MP VK Sreekandan from Palakkad on Sunday said that party workers and the public would accept any Congress leader chosen as CM if the UDF comes to power in Kerala. Elections to the 140 constituencies in the State were held on April 9, and votes will be counted on May 4.

Speaking to reporters amid ongoing discussions over the Congress's CM face ahead of the Assembly election results, Sreekandan said he would welcome any leader chosen by the party for the post.

"There is no doubt that the CM will be from the Congress if the UDF comes to power. Party workers will accept any Congress leader chosen for the position," he said.

Sreekandan said differing opinions on the issue were natural in a democratic party like the Congress.

"There may be individual opinions on the matter because Congress is a democratic entity. Such a thing is not possible in the Communist Party. If anyone expresses an opinion in the Communist Party, one knows what their fate will be," he



said. He said the UDF would convene a meeting after the election results if it secures victory, following which the Congress high command would consult leaders before deciding on the CM.

"We have an established process. The CM will be selected through that mechanism and will have the support of everyone in the party," he said.

Stating that he had no personal preference for the post, Sreekandan said he would support any Congress leader chosen by the party.

Expressing confidence in the UDF's prospects in Palakkad, he said the Congress-led front would perform strongly because of the constituency's secular character.

He also predicted surprise victories for the UDF in several traditional LDF strongholds across the district.

## No CM change, but Kharge next choice, says Rayareddy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Koppal (Karnataka)

Asserting that Siddaramaiah will remain the Chief Minister of Karnataka, his key advisor Basavaraj Rayareddy on Sunday said that in his opinion, AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge should become the CM, in case there is a leadership change.

Rayareddy, a senior Congress MLA and Economic Adviser to the chief minister, told Kharge that the latter should replace Siddaramaiah in case of a leadership change.

The statements come amid speculation within the Congress and political circles about a possible deci-

sion on a leadership change and a cabinet reshuffle after May 4, once the results of Assembly elections in four states and a union territory, along with bypolls to two Assembly constituencies in Karnataka, are announced.

"I met Kharge last week and discussed with him on politics for about 30 minutes, especially on the party and administrative matters in the state. I told him that the prevailing confusion regarding the party should end if the party has to come to power once again," Rayareddy said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "I told him that Siddaramaiah should be the CM and if he has to be removed, the opinion of



the legislators should be taken. I made it clear to him that in my personal opinion, if someone has to match Siddaramaiah, Mallikarjun Kharge should become the CM, if not Siddaramaiah should continue."

Noting that, it needs to be seen who can replace

Siddaramaiah in seniority, if a change has to happen, Rayareddy said, "In terms of seniority, Kharge is there, and there is affection towards him."

"However, Kharge replied, stating, 'If he had to become CM, he should have become one in 2008, but many

seniors in the party, including me (Rayareddy) lost in that poll. After that, he could not become CM because his time was not good, and since Siddaramaiah's time was good, he became the CM," the MLA quoted Kharge as saying.

Replying to Home Minister G Parameashwara's recent statement about Kharge becoming chief minister, the AICC President on Thursday had said, "You (media), he (Parameashwara), and people at the top say that it is better if I become CM. But more than fate, as per my ideology and my service to the party so far, Sonia Gandhi makes decisions regarding me."

## LDF to create history with third consecutive term: Govindan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Thiruvananthapuram

CPI(M) State secretary MV Govindan on Sunday said the LDF would rewrite Kerala's political history by returning to power for a third consecutive term.

He said the LDF had already created history in 2021 by retaining power for a second straight term and would set a new record by securing another majority when the results of the recent Assembly elections are declared on Monday.

"It was a historic victory for the LDF in 2021 when the Government

returned to power for a second consecutive term. Coming to power for a third straight term will be a landmark chapter in Kerala's political history," he said.

Govindan asserted that the LDF was confident of securing a favourable verdict in the Assembly polls.

"Various exit polls have predicted 60-69 seats for us. That means the gap to the majority is only a few seats. But when we analysed the constituencies where they predict us to lose, several seats where we have a clear edge are not included. If those are factored in, we will secure an easy



majority," he told a news channel.

The election for 140 Assembly seats was held on April 9, and votes will be counted on Monday.

Taking a swipe at the Congress over the debate on the UDF's chief ministerial face, Govindan said the Opposition camp was witnessing internal strife rather than discussion.

"Though the Congress leadership has tried to avoid such talk, its leaders are openly fighting over the CM's post. After that, they will begin fighting over other ministerial berths," he said.

The LDF won 99 seats in the 2021 Assembly election, becoming the first front in Kerala to retain power consecutively.

"Nemom, Kazhakoottam and Vattiyoorkavu are constituencies where the LDF will win. The BJP will not secure any seat this time," he said.

On the BJP-led NDA, he said the saffron party and its allies would fail to win any seat in the Assembly polls.

"The LDF won 99 seats in the 2021 Assembly election, becoming the first front in Kerala to retain power consecutively.



## TMC challenges BJP to win Falta after ECI orders repoll

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Kolkata

The TMC on Sunday challenged the BJP to use its full machinery to win the Falta Assembly seat, where fresh voting will be held on May 21 after the Election Commission of India (ECI) countermanded the polls in the constituency, citing "severe electoral offences".

In a social media post, the Mamata Banerjee-led party asked the BJP to bring Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to Falta, and urged the ECI to deploy 50,000 central force personnel, claiming that such measures would not have any effect on the electorate.

The fresh poll was ordered due to "severe electoral

offences and subversion of the democratic process" on April 29, when voting in Falta was held in the second phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections.

"Falta. Diamond Harbour. May 21. Spare no expense. Bring everything you've got. Narendra Modi, Amit Shah, Yogi Adityanath, if you have the spine for it, come yourselves. Deploy 50,000 Central Force personnel. Line every polling booth with armoured vehicles. Fly in every 'Singham' you have at your disposal," the TMC wrote on social media.

Uttar Pradesh-cadre IPS officer Ajay Pal Sharma, an ECI-appointed police observer, who earned the moniker 'Singham' for his crackdown on criminals, had warned potential troublemakers of



West Bengal CM and Trinamool Congress (TMC) candidate from Bhabanipur constituency Mamata Banerjee is flanked by supporters during a roadshow amid the ongoing State Assembly elections in Kolkata on Sunday

"appropriate treatment" in the constituency if they tried to disrupt the April 29 polling in West Bengal.

The TMC also accused the

BJP of spreading misinformation. "Run your IT Cell ragged with two weeks of nonstop misinformation. Have your paid media unleash as much

'hawabaaazi' (making exaggerated claims) as their lungs will allow. And by all means, bring Gyanesh Kumar to Falta and let him oil every last

gear of your machinery with his own hands," the TMC said. The ruling party claimed that the people of Falta would vote against the BJP.

"Do all of it. We insist. Because when the smoke clears, and the votes are counted, it will be the people of Falta who have the last word. And the people of Falta have already decided. So come prepared. Or better yet, come prepared to lose," the TMC said.

The commission said fresh polling across all the 285 booths in Falta in South 24 Parganas district will be held between 7 am and 6 pm on May 21, under "stringent security arrangements to ensure a free, fair and transparent" exercise. Counting of votes for the constituency will take place on May 24.



## Nishant launches Sadbhav Yatra from Champaran

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Patna

JD(U) leader Nishant Kumar, who is being seen as the political successor to his father Nitish Kumar, on Sunday received a rousing welcome from party workers when he was on his way to West Champaran's Valmiki Nagar, the starting point of "Sadbhav Yatra", his first public outreach programme.

The 45-year-old recluse, who joined the party only recently, days after his father announced the decision to step down as chief minister and move to the Rajya Sabha, is expected to reach the remote locality on the India-Nepal border late in the evening.

The JD(U)'s social media handles, which have been busy building momentum with the catchy slogan "Jay Nishant, tay Nishant" (Nishant's time is bound to come, he shall be victorious), also carried pictures of flower petals being showered on the vehicle of the heir apparent of the supreme leader.

Nishant's open vehicle, which had earlier been used by his father for numerous public outreach programmes, has this time been given the

name "Sadbhav Rath" or a chariot of goodwill, underscoring the message that the young leader wanted to win over the people through sheer goodwill.

Before departing from the party's State headquarters, where he headed after seeking his father's blessings, Nishant told reporters, "My first political journey - Sadbhav Yatra - will begin today. The term 'sadbhav' signifies love and positive feelings. I will take everyone together, leaving no one behind."

West Champaran is the land where Mahatma Gandhi toured and started his Satyagraha in 1917, he said.

"My father also initiated all his important yatras from there. During the yatra, I will hold dialogue with senior JD(U) leaders, meet party workers, and take their feedback on how to strengthen the party organisation," he added.

JD(U) legislature party leader Shrawon Kumar, who accompanied Nishant along with other senior party leaders, said the "message of love, unity, and brotherhood" will be spread through this yatra aimed at "connecting with people at the grassroots level."

## BJP predicts AIADMK-NDA win in TN

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Chennai

Asserting that the AIADMK-led NDA is poised for a "beautiful win" in the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, BJP spokesperson Narayanan Thirupathy on Sunday dismissed any possibility of a hung Assembly and said the DMK was on its way out. Tamil Nadu went to the polls on April 23, and the counting of votes will be held on May 4.

The State witnessed an intense three-cornered contest involving the ruling DMK, its main rival AIADMK, and the new entrant Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, led by actor Vijay.

Thirupathy said the reactions of the DMK and its allies, including the CPM, Congress, and VCK, over the last two days indicated that they were "rattled".

He noted that while the entry of actor Vijay into the electoral fray would likely split anti-establish-



ment votes, the "anti-DMK mood" among the public remained strong, with the primary goal of voting the current Government out of power.

Responding to Opposition protests over the LPG crisis, the BJP leader accused the Congress and DMK of "trying to create panic and mislead the public."

He claimed that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has managed global energy challenges effectively and maintains among the lowest domestic LPG prices in the world.

## UDF narrative will collapse after results: TP Ramakrishnan

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Kozhikode (Kerala)

LDF convenor TP Ramakrishnan on Sunday said the "false narrative" being spread by the UDF that the Left Front was headed for defeat in the Assembly elections would collapse once the results are announced.

The Assembly elections in Kerala were held on April 9, and the results will be declared on May 4.

Speaking to reporters in Kozhikode, Ramakrishnan said a similar campaign had been mounted by the Opposition after the 2021 Assembly polls, when the UDF had claimed that several LDF leaders would



lose, only for the results to prove otherwise.

He said exit poll assessments had gone wrong on several occasions in both national and state-level elections.

"The LDF will secure a decisive victory. The claims made by the

Congress and UDF will end on Monday when the results are announced. We are confident that the CPI(M)-led LDF will retain power," he said.

Ramakrishnan said discussions on victory and defeat within parties after an election were

normal, but alleged that the UDF had gone beyond that by openly debating its chief ministerial candidate even before the results.

"Beyond routine discussions, UDF leaders are now openly debating the chief minister's post. At the same time, the Indian Union Muslim League has said it will accept whatever the Congress decides. Such a situation has not emerged before in Kerala politics," he said.

He alleged that the UDF had projected a narrative of victory out of anxiety over an impending defeat. "The real picture will be clear when the results are announced," he said.

## TN election results: 1.25 lakh personnel deployed for counting

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Chennai

All arrangements are in place, including a comprehensive three-tier security plan, for counting of votes on May 4 at the 62 designated counting centres across the State, Chief Electoral Officer, Tamil Nadu, Archana Patnaik has said. Elections to 234 Assembly segments were held in the State on April 23.

The incumbent DMK regime has fought hard to retain power, and its archrival AIADMK has slogged to win power after five years as the principal Opposition party. Actor-politician Vijay-led TVK's

entry into the electoral arena has made predictions about the winning prospects tough, and the Tamil nationalist Seeman's NTK is another factor in the polls.

The counting of votes will commence at 8 am with the postal ballot counting, and at 8.30 am, counting of votes recorded in EVMs will commence. Approximately 1.25 lakh personnel, which includes officials and micro-observers on vote-counting duty and police, have been deployed.

Polling was held on April 23 in all 75,064 polling stations for the Tamil Nadu Assembly election. For the purpose of counting the votes recorded



in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), 234 counting halls have been arranged.

An additional 240 halls have been designated for the counting of Postal

Ballots and Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballots. (ETPBs). A total of 3,324 counting tables will be used for the counting of polled votes, Chief Electoral Officer Patnaik

said in an official release.

The counting operations will be conducted by the Returning Officers (ROs) with the help of Assistant Returning Officers (AROs). A total of 10,545 counting personnel have been drafted for counting duty, supported by 4,624 micro-observers to ensure transparency and integrity of the counting process.

Police sources said approximately one lakh personnel are being deployed for security on the vote-counting day.

The ECI has deputed 234 Counting Observers, one for each Assembly constituency, to oversee the counting proceedings and ensure strict

compliance with norms. For the counting of postal ballots, one counting table will be provided for every 500 ballots. In this regard, 1,135 additional AROs have been deployed.

A comprehensive three-tier security arrangement has been established at all counting centres to ensure the integrity and smooth conduct of the counting process.

The outer perimeter of 100 meters around each counting centre will be guarded by adequate police personnel. The second tier of security covering the entry gates of the counting premises will be secured by the State Armed

police. The third tier covers the "innermost security layer," including the entrance to counting halls and the EVM strong rooms and here, the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) will have authority.

In addition to the local police and State Armed Police, 65 companies of the CAPF have been deployed at the counting centres to further strengthen security arrangements. Further, as a first-time initiative, the ECI has introduced a QR code-based Photo Identity Card system through ECINET with the objective of preventing unauthorised entry into counting centres.

## LDF, UDF and BJP claim victory ahead of Kerala results

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Thiruvananthapuram

Political leaders and candidates across party lines on Sunday expressed confidence of victory ahead of the Kerala Assembly election results on May 4.

Polling for the 140-member Assembly was held on April 9.

Speaking to reporters, Kerala Minister PA Mohamed Riyas said the situation was favourable for the CPI(M)-led LDF across the State.

Riyas, who is contesting against UDF-backed Independent PV Anvar from Bepore in Kozhikode district, said the front would secure a comfortable victory both in his constituency and statewide.

"There will be a good victory for the LDF in



Bepore as well as across Kerala," he said.

He claimed that the State had witnessed development, welfare measures, clean governance, and internal unity within the front during the LDF's 10-year tenure.

"We did not merely make promises but implemented them. The Government stood with the people on their issues. There were no communal riots. People have realised this and want the LDF to continue," he said.

Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly VD Satheesan, who was present in his constituency (North Paravoor) on Sunday, declined to comment and said he would speak after the results were announced.

Former Union minister and BJP leader V Muraliedharan, contesting from Kazhakoottam constituency, said feedback from voters indicated growing support for the BJP-led NDA.

Muraliedharan is in the fray against CPI(M) sitting MLA Kadakampally Surendran and Congress candidate T Sharath Chandra Prasad.

"Though the contest was initially expected to be triangular, it later turned into a fight between the LDF and NDA. The BJP has a clear

upper hand in the constituency," he said.

However, Surendran asserted that he had earned the confidence of voters and that his victory was assured.

"The BJP deserves to be hopeful after its campaign. It will not be surprising if they spent Rs 10-20 crore. They (the BJP) also ran fake narratives (against the LDF)," he told a news channel.

Senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala said the UDF would emerge victorious in the election.

"Our assessment is that the Congress-led UDF will emerge victorious," he said.

Apu John Joseph, son of Kerala Congress (Joseph) leader PJ Joseph and contesting from Thodupuzha, said the UDF was headed for an easy victory.

## No minority consolidation against LDF: Minister P Rajeev

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Kochi

Kerala Industries Minister P Rajeev on Sunday asserted that there was no scope for any minority consolidation against the ruling LDF in the Assembly polls, dismissing the Congress party's reported expectations on the issue.

He said minorities in Kerala have no grievances against the State Government and noted that the Left administration had taken a firm, uncompromising stand against what he termed the Centre's "excesses of power".

Rajeev further claimed that minorities and people with a secular outlook in the State do not consider the Congress a trustworthy party on such matters, and therefore, such



political assumptions no longer hold relevance.

Expressing confidence in the electoral outcome, he said the LDF would secure a favourable verdict and exuded optimism about his own prospects, stating that he would win from Kalamassery with a comfortable margin.

## Tamil Nadu: Record 443 women contestants seek Assembly entry

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
Chennai

The dust has settled on the polling booths across Tamil Nadu, and the State now holds its breath for May 4, when the winners of an intensely fought election will be declared. While the headlines focus on the clash of political titans and the survival of Dravidian legacies, a quieter but more profound transformation is being measured in the electoral ledgers.

Elections to 234 Assembly constituencies were held on

April 23, and the polled votes will be taken up for counting on Monday.

This year, a record-breaking 443 women stood as contesting candidates - a stark climb from the numbers seen just a decade ago. Yet, as the talk of the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam and the promise of 33 per cent legislative reservation dominate national discourse, Tamil Nadu's own history reveals a journey that has been as much about regression as it has been about progress.



The statistical journey of women in the Tamil Nadu Assembly is a study in contradictions. At its peak, it yielded a 31.37 per cent participation from women, a few percentage points short of 33-mark that India aims at present.

However, perhaps the most startling entry in the Election Commission of India (ECI) archives is the year 1971. In a State that had seen women winners as early as 1951, the 1971 Assembly election recorded zero women contestants. Historians point to a unique political squeeze:

a strategic alliance where the Indira Gandhi-led Congress, which till then had fielded women candidates, focused solely on the Lok Sabha, leaving the Assembly to the DMK and the K Kamaraj-led Congress (O).

In the high-stakes battle between these male-dominated fronts, women were entirely sidelined from the final ballot. It remains the only time the Tamil Nadu Assembly sat without a single female voice.

Twenty years down the line, in 1991, the State saw its

highest-ever representation of women, with 32 members elected to the House of the 171 women nominated, 102 finally ended up contesting, of which 32 won (31.37 per cent). It was a year that felt like a threshold. But history rarely moves in a straight line. By 1996, that number had plummeted to just nine.

As we approach the 2026 results, the central question remains: can the "cradle of social justice" finally break its own 35-year-old record and move toward a truly representative House?



## Editor's TAKE

### US-NATO Rift: A Widening Divide

US-Europe ties now face strain from growing strategic differences, political mistrust, and a shifting geopolitics that is eroding longstanding foundations

World politics is undergoing a change. The alliances that were once considered sacrosanct and unshakable are showing signs of schism, and an unease has set in. The two recent wars – one in Ukraine and the other in West Asia, where the US unilaterally intervened – have shaken NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation that was formed after the world war II in the heydays of the Cold War but continued even after the USSR disintegrated. NATO was formed on April 4, 1949 by 12 countries from Europe and North America to prevent Soviet expansion and provide a military defence alliance, establishing the principle that an attack on one member is an attack on all. The US was the big brother and entrusted with safeguarding the strategic interests of its members and defend them.

That was seven decades back, the geopolitics have changed. The recent decision by the United States to withdraw 5,000 troops from Germany is more than a routine military decision; it signals deepening fissures within the transatlantic alliance. For decades, the US-Europe security compact, institutionalised through NATO, has been the bedrock of Western stability. Today, that foundation appears increasingly strained by diverging strategic priorities, political rhetoric, and mutual distrust.

At the heart is of course, Washington's frustration with European reluctance to back its military and strategic posture – particularly in securing the Strait of Hormuz. The withdrawal order has been framed as a response to Europe's "failure to provide support." On the other side, leaders such as Friedrich Merz, the chancellor Germany, have criticised the US approach as unilateral and poorly coordinated, arguing that Europe was sidelined in critical decisions, including the strikes on Iran.

This is not merely a disagreement over tactics. The Trump administration is vociferous about its world view, which must be endorsed by its allied, no questions asked. Europe, however, is signalling a desire for strategic autonomy – seeking to balance its security commitments with diplomatic caution and economic pragmatism. The result is an unease being reflected in its military decisions vis-à-vis NATO. The implications are far-reaching. Germany has long been the logistical and operational hub of the US military presence in Europe, hosting tens of thousands of troops. A drawdown to pre-Ukraine war levels not only alters the military balance but also suggests a partial disengagement from European security at a time when the continent continues to grapple with the aftershocks of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For Eastern European nations, this could rekindle anxieties about American commitment to collective defence. Beyond security, the spectre of a fragmented alliance also emboldens rival powers, potentially accelerating the emergence of a multipolar world order where Western unity can no longer be taken for granted. If current trends persist, the transatlantic alliance may not collapse, but it will undoubtedly be redefined. NATO could evolve into a loose interest-based coalition rather than a tightly knit security bloc. Europe may accelerate efforts to build independent defence capabilities. The world-order as we know it is changing for sure.

# When Truth Becomes a Target

As the information ecosystem grows more distorted, the threats facing journalism have become both physical and existential, the question is no longer just about protecting press freedom—it is about preserving the very possibility of truth.



WAEIL AWWAD

On World Press Freedom Day, the world will once again speak of freedom of expression as a universal value—something to be defended, celebrated, and upheld. But for many journalists, this day no longer represents an ideal. It represents a contradiction.

I do not speak about press freedom as an abstract principle. I speak about it as someone who has lived its cost.

The memory of covering the Iraq war in 2003 as an embedded journalist—and the captivity that followed—has never left me. It remains present in every conversation I have about the role of the media in conflict. I survived Iraq. I survived Afghanistan. I survived Kargil, where I was fired upon, detained, and held under the threat of execution.

Many of my colleagues did not survive. This is the reality we must confront: journalists today are not merely covering wars. Increasingly, they are part of them not by choice, but by design.

The language we use often masks this truth. We speak of "casualties," of "crossfire," of "unintended consequences." But the reality on the ground tells a different story. Journalists are not only at risk; they are being deliberately targeted by both state and non-state actors.

This is not a marginal trend. It is a structural shift.

In conflict zones across the Middle East and beyond, the targeting of journalists has become a tactic of war. Silencing the messenger is often seen as a strategic advantage. When the narrative can be controlled, the cost of violence becomes easier to obscure.

But the threat no longer ends at the battlefield.

We are entering an era where truth itself is under sustained assault. Artificial intelligence, deep fakes, and algorithmic amplification are no longer distant concerns. They are active forces reshaping how information is produced, distributed, and consumed. They blur the line between fact and fabrication, making it harder for audiences to distinguish reality from manipulation.

In this environment, the risks faced by journalists are both physical and existential.

To be a journalist today is to operate under a dual threat: the danger of being silenced, and the danger of being disbelieved.

This combination is corrosive. It undermines not only the safety of reporters but the



THE INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS HAS, IN MANY CASES, BEEN INSUFFICIENT. CONDEMNATIONS ARE ISSUED, STATEMENTS ARE MADE, BUT ACCOUNTABILITY REMAINS RARE.

very function of journalism in society.

Because when journalists are killed, imprisoned, or discredited, the loss is not confined to the profession. The loss is borne by the public. It is borne by societies that depend on reliable information to make informed decisions. It is borne by systems of accountability that rely on scrutiny to function.

Without journalism, there is no transparency. Without transparency, there is no accountability. And without accountability, power operates unchecked.

This is why the issue at hand is larger than press freedom as a professional concern. It is about the integrity of public discourse. It is about whether truth can still serve as a foundation for collective understanding in an increasingly fragmented world.

The international response to attacks on journalists has, in many cases, been insufficient. Condemnations are issued, statements are made, but accountability remains rare.

This absence of consequence sends a message—one that is heard clearly by those who would seek to suppress information.

It tells them that the cost of targeting journalists is manageable.

That message must change.

Protecting journalists is not about granting special status to a profession. It is about safeguarding a function that is essential to any society that claims to value truth, justice, and democratic governance.

For those of us who have experienced the risks firsthand, this is not a theoretical debate. It is a lived reality.

The question, therefore, is not whether we continue to speak about press freedom. The question is whether the world is prepared to act in its defence.

Because the stakes are no longer confined to individual reporters or isolated incidents.

They extend to the very idea that truth still matters. And if that idea is allowed to erode, the consequences will reach far beyond any single conflict zone.

They will shape the future of how we understand the world—and whether that understanding is grounded in reality at all.

The bottom line: The real question is: Can truth survive in a world where everything can be manipulated, politicised, and contested?

Let me end with this: The biggest danger today is not that journalists are under attack. They always have been. The real danger is that truth is becoming negotiable. And once truth becomes negotiable, freedom becomes fragile.

This is not just a failure of justice—it is a failure of the international system to protect the flow of truth itself. Until accountability is backed by real political will, enforceable mechanisms, and consistent global pressure, the cycle will continue: documentation without justice, condemnation without consequence.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

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## PICTALK



Folk artists during a 'Nasha Mukh Abhiyan' campaign to raise awareness about the harmful effects of drugs, in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir. PHOTO: PTI

# Prasthanam: From journey to awakening



BODDAPATI CHANDRASEKHAR

## 2ND OPINION

Prasthanam means a journey—moving from one place to another. A journey implies a destination. Without a goal, can it truly be called a journey? Life itself is a great journey. This applies not only to the individual but to humanity as a whole. Yet, this journey is not the same for everyone.

It is marked by striking contrasts and rich diversity. Our background, our way of thinking, our perspective, and our attitude—all play a vital role in shaping it. From a primitive, almost animal-like stage, human beings, endowed with extraordinary thinking ability, discovered language and learned to express their thoughts.

They became civilized. In the evolution of human life, this marks a remarkable phase of progress. Among the

many strengths of human beings, observation is one of the greatest.

By keenly observing the world around him, man expanded his knowledge. He recognized the differences between himself and other living beings and came to terms with the harsh truth that birth, growth, and death are inevitable for all life. Then arose a question: how can he give value and meaning to his life? Through higher spiritual inquiry, he came to believe that the union of the individual soul with the Supreme is the noblest path.

Thus, he became a seeker of the Self. This is a significant milestone in the journey of human life. The peace chant from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, often called the Pavamana Mantra—Om, lead me from the unreal to the real, From darkness to light...—reveals the spiritual vision of great sages.

It tells us that beyond the worldly journey, there exists a higher path—one they longed to reach. They urge us, too, to cultivate such thought and direct our lives toward it.

This is the path they have shown humanity. We must hold the essence of this mantra in our hearts. It is a profound prayer. Its meaning kindles the flame of spiritual awareness within us and makes it shine. It calls

us to move from illusion to reality—from the mistaken belief that the world we live in is permanent and the source of lasting happiness—to the realization of the eternal and the Supreme. Ignorance is darkness; a person without knowledge is like one who is blind. To come out of this blindness, we need the light of knowledge. We must become truly enlightened.

Our seers and the seekers of truth aspired to transcend the cycle of birth and death and attain freedom from rebirth.

Thus they attain Nirva—a life is a great Odyssey—endless, ever-changing, and transformative. What lends distinction to an ordinary life is spiritual reflection. Spirituality, at its core, is the flow of noble thoughts within us. Every step a person takes becomes a true journey only when it leads inward, not outward. We should cultivate and practise it. It benefits both individuals and society. We can truly express our gratitude to the rishis—who condensed such vast meaning into this brief prayer—only by walking the path they have shown.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

The writer is a columnist, lecturer and radio presenter. He has given several talks on spirituality, literature and done many literary essays on various issues

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## REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE AND CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

The recent ruling by the Supreme Court of India reaffirming a woman's right to choose, even in the case of a minor, marks a vital moment in the evolution of constitutional freedoms.

By permitting a 15-year-old girl, over seven months pregnant, to undergo abortion, the Court has underscored that reproductive autonomy cannot be overridden by rigid interpretations of law or morality.

The bench rightly observed that forcing a minor to continue an unwanted pregnancy could have lasting consequences on her mental health, education, and social well-being.

In such circumstances, the continuation of pregnancy becomes not just a medical issue but a question of dignity and

future opportunity. The Court's emphasis on "irreparable harm" reflects a humane and rights-based approach. Importantly, the judgment reiterates that reproductive choice is intrinsic to personal liberty and privacy under Article 21.

This is particularly crucial in cases involving minors, where vulnerability is heightened and long-term consequences are profound. While adoption remains an option, it cannot substitute the fundamental right to decide whether to carry a pregnancy.

This ruling sets a progressive precedent, reinforcing that constitutional protections must remain sensitive to individual circumstances, especially for those most vulnerable.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR, MUMBAI

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Outrage, justice, and women's safety

The horrific rape and murder of a three-year-old girl in Pune district has rightly triggered widespread outrage, with protests in Nasrapur and surrounding areas reflecting deep public anger. Such incidents not only shock the conscience but also expose persistent failures in ensuring safety for women and children. The case has reignited debate around the proposed Shakti law in Maharashtra, which seeks time-bound investigations and stringent punishment, including the death penalty, for crimes under the POCSO Act. While harsher penalties may serve as deterrents, the real challenge lies in effective implementation, swift justice, and preventive policing. Rising crime statistics in Pune district—alongside previous cases like the Badlapur incident—highlight a disturbing trend that cannot be ignored. Public anger, while understandable, must not translate into demands for mob justice. The rule of law must prevail, ensuring punishment is delivered through due process, not public retribution. The government, led by Devendra Fadnis, faces legitimate scrutiny over law and order. However, responsibility extends beyond political blame. Strengthening policing, fast-tracking courts, and addressing societal attitudes are equally critical. Justice must be swift, certain, and lawful—only then can faith in the system be restored.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

## LPG price hike and political timing

The sharp ₹993 increase in commercial LPG prices, pushing the 19 kg cylinder beyond ₹3,000, raises as many political questions as economic ones. Its timing—just days after state elections—suggests a pattern where difficult decisions are deferred to avoid electoral backlash. While rising global crude prices justify a correction, the selective shielding of domestic LPG consumers reveals a calculated approach. By placing the burden on the commercial sector, the impact becomes indirect—filtering through higher food prices rather than immediate public reaction. This may soften political fallout, but it does not eliminate the economic strain. Such calibrated decisions risk undermining policy credibility. When economic measures appear aligned with electoral cycles rather than market realities, public trust weakens. The eventual adjustment of domestic LPG and PNG tariffs seems inevitable if global volatility persists, making the current relief temporary. In effect, the burden has not been removed but postponed. Governments may avoid immediate criticism through such timing, but the long-term cost lies in eroding confidence in transparent and consistent policymaking. Economic logic must remain independent of political convenience if credibility is to be sustained.

S PADMANABHAN | KOCHI

## The shadow of political vendetta

The recent developments involving FIRs against Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak, alongside enforcement actions on individuals linked to shifting political loyalties, raise troubling questions about the functioning of democratic institutions. The ongoing exchanges between the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Aam Aadmi Party risk reducing governance to a spectacle of allegations and counter-allegations. A worrying pattern seems to be emerging—investigative agencies appear most active when political affiliations change. Whether this perception is entirely accurate or not, its persistence damages public confidence. Institutions meant to uphold the rule of law must not only be impartial but also be seen as such. When enforcement mechanisms are viewed through a political lens, their credibility erodes. Accountability is essential in any democracy, but it must be transparent, evidence-driven, and free from selective application. The mere perception of bias can weaken institutional integrity and undermine democratic norms. At a time when citizens expect focus on employment, development, and economic stability, such controversies divert attention from pressing issues. Political leadership must recognise that short-term gains achieved through institutional misuse come at the long-term cost of democratic trust.

SANJAY CHOPRA | MOHALI

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## The mythical El Dorado and India's Growth Paradox

Once likened to 'El Dorado' by travellers, India today presents a striking paradox — an economy seen as resource-constrained despite sitting on vast, underutilised wealth. This raises a fundamental question: is India really poor, or simply unable to mobilise its own wealth effectively?



**AMITABH RANJAN**

In medieval times, while there were frantic searches for 'El Dorado' going on, in Latin America, foreign travellers like Tavernier were addressing India as 'El Darado'. India is perhaps the only major economy globally that is branded as poor while sitting pretty on trillions of dollars of underutilised assets and wealth. With a ranking as the world's sixth largest economy, India has a nominal GDP of \$4.15 trillion for 2025 as per the IMF. The moot question is whether India suffers from absolute scarcity or from how its wealth is deployed, perceived and structured.

The problem is not savings, but where they sit. There is a persistent, nagging myth that India is a poor country struggling to find its footing. It is a narrative of scarcity that dominates our economic discourse, leading us to believe that we are perpetually short of resources, funding and capital. The reality is quite different. India is not poor; it is capital-rich.

India holds trillions in household wealth that does not reach credit markets. Idle assets raise the cost of capital. When savings stay in gold, firms pay 150 to 250 basis points more to borrow. Instead of building factories, funding the next wave of startups or expanding businesses to scale, this wealth sits silent and stagnant in velvet-lined boxes and bank lockers across the country. India is not short of money, but of usable money.

Banks lend what they collect. When savings sit in gold and property, deposits remain low, making loans expensive. A business that works at 9% fails at 11%. That gap decides whether a factory is built, whether a shop expands, and whether jobs are created. Growth slows not because ideas are missing but because money is priced too high.

Financial savings are only 11-12% of GDP. China kept this above 20% for years and built faster. The gap shows up as weaker investment and slower scale. This creates a vicious cycle. People save in gold. Banks don't get deposits. Loans become costly. Businesses hold back. Jobs don't grow. The system then misreads this as weak demand and tries to fix the wrong problem. The constraint is not demand but the cost of capital.

This is where the distortion begins. The economy is not failing to generate savings, but to channel them. Why Gold Keeps Winning and The Domino That Actually Matters

Gold is not a mistake. It protects families. Medical shocks still push households into distress spending and insurance payouts are not always reliable. Gold is easy to trust and easy to sell. It carries no counterparty risk. But here also, a common person is



**TAX TREATMENT CREATES UNCERTAINTY. RETURNS OFTEN FAIL TO BEAT THE COST OF HOLDING GOLD. THE ALTERNATIVE-KEEPING GOLD AT HOME-HAS NO FRICTION. NO FORMS, NO DELAYS, NO RISK. PEOPLE CHOOSE WHAT IS EASIER**

An alumnus of NESA, Washington DC, Dr. Amitabh Ranjan is associated with Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi as Registrar.

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always a loser as there are so many haircuts like 20-25% making charges, jewellers' cuts sometimes 30-40 % etc.

Moreover, it creates a system cost. Gold in a locker does nothing for the economy. It cannot fund a loan unless it is inside the system. That requires testing, paperwork and trust in institutions. Most people avoid it as status quoism is easier. The result is a quiet freeze. Wealth exists, but it does not move.

When savings sit in lockers, banks don't get deposits. With fewer deposits, they lend less and charge more. Those extra 150-250 basis points are enough to kill marginal projects. A factory that works at 9% does not work at 11%. Expansion is delayed, hiring slows, and growth underperforms. Nothing here is abstract. The cost shows up in cancelled investments, not in headlines.

Over time, this compounds. Fewer projects today mean fewer jobs tomorrow and weaker demand later. The economy slows not in a sudden shock, but through a steady loss of momentum.

The External Bill Makes It Visible  
India imports 700-900 tonnes of gold in strong years. That costs \$40-50 billion and widens the current account deficit by up to 1-1.5% of GDP. With domestic gold sitting idle, demand growing, imports rise to fill the gap. The deficit widens. Financial conditions tighten. Borrowing costs stay high. What begins as a household choice ends as a national constraint. The invisible price is the investment that never happens.

Policy Asked for Change, But Didn't Pay for It  
Government schemes tried to move households away from physical gold. Few shifted. The reason is not culture but incentives.

The process to convert gold is slow. Tax treatment creates uncertainty. Returns often fail to beat the cost of holding gold. The alternative-keeping gold at home-has no friction. No forms, no delays, no risk. People choose what is easier. Policy asked for a change without making it worth the switch.

As long as the easier option remains outside the system, savings will stay outside the system.

Fix the Incentives-or Keep Paying the Price  
Making this shift will cost money. To pull even 10% of gold-about 3,000 tonnes-into the system, the government will have to remove tax on conversion and offer returns that beat the cost of holding gold. The bill could reach 0.5-0.8% of GDP. That cost is visible and politically difficult. The alternative is less visible but larger over time. India will keep importing \$40-50 billion of gold each year, keeping pressure on the current account. Interest rates will stay 150-250 basis points higher than they should. Firms will keep dropping projects that only work at lower borrowing costs.

The fix is not abstract. It sits at the jewellery counter and the bank branch. Let trusted jewellers test gold on the spot and credit value the same day into bank accounts. Remove tax risk so households are not penalised for switching. Pay a return that makes the shift worth it. Miss any one of these, and nothing moves because doing nothing is easier.

Until that changes, the outcome is the same. Households will keep their gold. Banks will keep charging more. An economy with \$5 trillion in savings will keep behaving as if it does not have enough money.

Let this 'Sone ki Chidiya' unshackle and fly high; even the sky is not the limit for this bird.

## Rethinking 'settled law' in a Changing India



**VIVEK KUMAR SINGH**

The law is often described as a living organism, evolving with society and responding to emerging challenges. Yet, many of its "settled principles" remain frozen in time, shaped by contexts that no longer exist. The danger lies not in having solid doctrines, but in treating them as immutable truths. In a rapidly transforming India, marked by disruptive technologies, complex markets and heightened rights consciousness, several fundamental assumptions in civil law, merit a careful relook.

For example, deeply entrenched - and seldom examined - is the assumption that title suits are inherently complex, while mutation proceedings are simple, summary exercises. In practice, both forums often grapple with the same triad, viz., competing parties, overlapping documents and contested possession. Both rely on similar evidentiary materials such as sale deeds, revenue records, possession claims, etc., and both are expected to adhere to principles of natural justice. Yet, the system conventionally perceives title adjudication as a prolonged, technical and resource-intensive exercise, while pronouncing mutation as a shallow fiscal settlement. This dichotomy has significant adverse consequences. It delays the recognition of legitimate claims, clogs civil courts and sidelines administrative forums that are closest to the ground reality of land ownership. In a digital ecosystem, where land records can be updated in near real time and corroborated through spatial technologies, the sharp divide between "complex title" and "simple mutation" appears increasingly artificial. There is a compelling case for reimagining mutation proceedings as more than mere revenue entries: as structured, quasi-adjudicatory processes capable of resolving a defined class of title disputes, especially those grounded in clear documentation and possession. With appropriate procedural safeguards, reasoned orders and appellate oversight, such a shift could significantly reduce the burden on civil courts while enhancing expediency on the ground.

Courts have consistently held that mutation is merely for fiscal purposes, not ownership. While palpably sound in a colonial revenue framework, this position appears increasingly disconnected from ground realities. For millions of landholders, mutation records are the most updated and accessible indicators of ownership and possession. They reflect the latest transaction, the correct recorded possession and, often, the only official recognition of both. Ignoring them creates a chasm between legal theory and lived experience. A more nuanced approach — recognising mutation as strong evidence of current title may better serve contemporary needs. The doctrine of adverse possession is yet another deeply anchored belief which needs to be revisited. Rooted in the idea that long, uninterrupted possession can ripen into ownership, it once served a pragmatic purpose in a world of uncertain titles and weak documentation. Today, however, it sits uneasily with modern notions of property rights and constitutional fairness. The spectacle of the State itself invoking adverse possession against its citizens-criticised sharply in judicial pronouncements-raises a fundamental question: should the law reward encroachment or penalise administrative failure? In an era of computerised land records and satellite mapping, the doctrine appears less like a necessity and more like an anachronism. The doctrine of caveat emptor, or "buyer beware", also sits uneasily with modern economic realities. In traditional markets, where transactions were local and information relatively symmetrical, placing the burden on the buyer was defensible. But in today's environment, marked by complex real estate transactions, layered ownership structures and asymmetry of information, such an expectation is unrealistic. Buyers often lack the means to verify title histories stretching back decades. The shift towards caveat venditor, which places a greater obligation on sellers to disclose defects and ensure clarity of title, is both logical and necessary. Similarly, the doctrine of privity of contract, which restricts contractual rights and obligations to the parties involved, struggles to keep pace with modern commercial realities. In an interconnected economy, characterised by insurance arrangements, development agreements and platform-based services, third-party interests are often central to the transaction. A rigid application of privity can exclude legitimate claimants and defeat commercial expectations. While courts have carved out exceptions, a more principled and explicit recognition of third-party rights would bring coherence to this evolving area.

Transparency in judicial proceedings is a cornerstone of democracy, ensuring accountability and public confidence. However, in the age of real-time reporting, social media amplification, and digital streaming, unfiltered openness can sometimes compromise privacy and distort public perception. The challenge lies in designing mechanisms that preserve transparency while safeguarding fairness and dignity. Territorial jurisdiction, another basic concept, is increasingly strained in a borderless digital world. Cybercrimes, online contracts, and cross-border transactions defy neat geographical boundaries, rendering traditional jurisdictional rules inadequate. Finally, the principle of finality of litigation, embodied in maxims like res judicata faces new dilemmas in the age of advanced forensic technologies. DNA evidence, digital trails, and data analytics can reveal truths that were previously inaccessible. While endless litigation must be avoided, a rigid insistence on finality can perpetuate injustice. Limited, carefully designed avenues for reopening cases in light of compelling new evidence may be necessary. What may emerge from this analysis is not a call to abandon settled law, but to recalibrate it. Many of these doctrines were designed for a low-information, paper-based, and territorially bounded State. Today's India is none of these. It is increasingly digital, data-rich, and interconnected. Legal principles that once provided certainty may now generate friction, inefficiency, or even injustice. The task, therefore, is one of intelligent reform. Courts must move from rigid adherence to contextual application, while legislatures must step in to contemporise maxims where judicial innovation alone is insufficient. Importantly, reforms must be guided by a clear normative vision, balancing certainty with fairness, liberty with security, and tradition with innovation. In the end, the legitimacy of law lies not in its antiquity, but in its relevance. A doctrine becomes truly "settled" not when it resists change, but when it proves capable of evolving with the society it seeks to govern. India's legal system must embrace that evolution, not reluctantly, but with conviction.



## Strong polling, split Signals: Bengal opens to a competitive race



**SAYAN CHATTERJEE**

West Bengal's election has begun on a familiar note—high turnout, long queues, and a visible seriousness among voters. The first phase has recorded polling in the mid-to-high 70 per cent range, consistent with the state's long-standing trend of strong participation. But beyond the numbers, the early signals from the ground suggest something more nuanced is taking shape.

The day largely remained peaceful, with central forces maintaining a strong presence across sensitive booths. Voting progressed steadily, with only scattered, localised disruptions. One clear trend stood out—women voters turning up in significant numbers, in some pockets even outpacing men. Rural turnout, once again, was higher than in urban centres, reinforcing a pattern that has held across multiple elections in the state.

The contest continues to revolve around Mamata Banerjee and the All India Trinamool Congress, which still retains a strong grassroots connect. Welfare delivery and

booth-level organisation appear to be working in its favour, particularly in rural and semi-urban belts where beneficiary networks remain intact and visible.

Yet, the contest is far from one-sided. The Bharatiya Janata Party has managed to stay firmly in the race. Its campaign, especially in this phase, appears more focused—less about sweeping narratives and more about consolidating gains in specific constituencies. On the ground, this is translating into tighter contests in several seats that were previously seen as comfortable.

What stands out most is the absence of a uniform trend. In some areas, there are signs of consolidation in favour of the ruling party. In others, the fight appears evenly balanced. Bengal, once again, seems to be voting locally—where candidate credibility, community equations, and micro-level issues are shaping outcomes more than broad narratives.

The space for smaller parties continues to narrow. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Congress remain present, but largely on the margins. In most constituencies, the contest has effectively become bipolar, which raises the stakes for even marginal vote shifts.

There are also smaller, telling observations. Early morning queues were dominated by older voters—often a sign of committed voting bases—while turnout



broadened across age groups as the day progressed. Urban participation remained relatively lower compared to rural areas, a trend that continues to hold.

Voter sentiment, however, is not moving in one clear direction. Welfare schemes continue to carry weight, particularly among

women and economically weaker sections. At the same time, conversations around employment, local corruption, and governance are becoming more visible. It is neither a wave of discontent nor a clear endorsement—it sits somewhere in between.

Even external factors are quietly influencing the mood. Rising fuel prices, linked in part to tensions around the Strait of Hormuz, are adding to everyday cost concerns, though they are not dominating the electoral narrative.

So what does the first phase really indicate? At this stage, it does not point to a decisive wave. The ruling party appears to retain an advantage, but the opposition has done enough to keep the contest competitive. This is shaping up to be an election where outcomes may be decided seat by seat, rather than through any sweeping trend.

More importantly, it reflects a certain maturity in voter behavior. There is no visible rush for change, but neither is there unquestioned continuity. Voters appear to be weighing their choices carefully—balancing what they have received with what they expect going forward.

That makes this election harder to predict—but also more telling. Because when an election is decided not by momentum, but by measured choices, the final verdict often reveals far more than the headlines leading up to it.

The writer is an educationist and senior columnist

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### Order Order

## Uncle, brother of Hamirpur BJP MLA get bail in illegal mining case

The sessions court in Himachal Pradesh's Hamirpur has granted regular bail to the uncle and brother local BJP MLA Ashish Kumar in an illegal mining case, officials said on Saturday.

Accordingly, the MLA's brother Umesh Sharma and uncle Praveen Sharma walked out of jail after spending 17 days in judicial custody.

The two accused had surrendered on April 15, after which the local court had remanded both to judicial custody.

The case dates back to August 13, 2025, when police raided the Mahalaxmi Stone Crusher in Pungkh Khad under the Sunjanpur police station limits, in which Praveen and Umesh were partners.

During the raid, police seized stones, gravel, machinery and other items and registered a case of illegal mining.

Police also booked two employees of the stone crusher, both of whom were granted anticipatory bail by the Supreme Court on March 19, 2026, while similar pleas by Praveen and Umesh were rejected.



# SC to hear PIL on guidelines for issuing Aadhaar today

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea seeking a direction to the Unique Identification Authority of India to issue new Aadhaar cards only to citizens up to the age of six years, and frame stringent guidelines for its issuance to adolescents and adults to stop infiltrators from masquerading as Indian citizens.

As per the apex court's causerlist of May 4, the plea would come up for hearing before a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Jyotsna Singh.

The Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by lawyer Ashwini Upadhyay has also sought a direction to the authorities to install display boards at common service centres stating that the 12-digit unique identifica-



tion number is only a "proof of identity" and not a proof of citizenship, address or date of birth.

Besides all the states and Union Territories, the plea has made the UIDAI — which is the authority that

issues Aadhaar — and the Union ministries of home, law and justice, and electronics and information technology as parties.

The plea, filed through advocate Ashwani Dubey, said Aadhaar,

originally intended as a proof of identity, has increasingly become a "foundational document" enabling individuals to obtain other identification documents, such as ration cards, domicile certificates and voter identity cards.

"The UIDAI has issued 144 crore Aadhaar and 99 per cent Indians have been enrolled. Therefore, the petitioner is filing this writ petition as a PIL under Article 32, seeking a direction to UIDAI to issue new Aadhaar to children only and frame new stringent guidelines for adolescents and adults, so as to stop infiltrators from getting it and masquerading as Indian citizens," the plea said.

It said the need to file the plea arose when the petitioner came to know the manner in which infiltrators are able to procure Aadhaar through a verification process that

is weak and can be easily manipulated.

"Foreigners apply for Aadhaar under the 'foreign' category. But infiltrators apply for Aadhaar under the 'Indian citizen' category and get it easily made. Thereafter, they obtain a ration card, birth and domicile certificate, driving licence, et cetera, essentially becoming indistinguishable from Indian citizens," it said.

Besides seeking other directions, the plea has raised legal questions, including whether the Aadhaar Act 2016 has become "temporarily unreasonable" for failing to keep up with the legislative intent of distinguishing foreigners from Indian citizens.

It said the alleged misuse of Aadhaar undermines targeted welfare delivery and leads to diversion of public resources.

## NIA court to complete framing of charges against 2010 hand-chopping case accused on May 15

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Kochi

A special court here will complete proceedings for framing charges against the prime accused in the 2010 hand-chopping case involving professor T J Joseph, in which PFI activists were accused of attacking him at Muvattupuzha.

Ernakulam Special Court for NIA cases judge PK Mohandas, on April 30, heard the arguments of counsel for accused Savad and Shafeer C and decided to proceed with framing charges against the

duo. A group chopped off Thodupuzha Newman College professor Joseph's right hand in July 2010, accusing him of religious blasphemy in a question paper he had prepared.

The case, later taken over by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), resulted in the conviction of 19 accused.

The first accused, Savad, who allegedly chopped off Joseph's palm, was arrested in Berram in Mattannur, Kannur, in January 2024, where he had allegedly been hiding under the pseudonym Shajahan. The NIA also arrested Shafeer, who allegedly

arranged shelter and provided logistical support to Savad at Chakkad and Mattannur in Kannur since 2020.

On April 30, the court heard the counsel for the accused and the NIA prosecutor on framing charges against the duo. "On going through the



documents and evidence in the case and on hearing the counsel for the accused and the prosecutor, I am of the opinion that there are grounds for presuming that the first accused has committed offences punishable under provisions of the IPC, the Explosive Substances Act and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, and that the second accused has committed offences punishable under the IPC and the UAPA, and there are materials for framing charges under these provisions against the accused," the court said.

The court was dealing with her husband's petition challenging an order of the Central Information Commissioner (CIC) directing the income tax authorities to reveal his details of his next taxable income for financial years 2007-2008 on an RTI application by his estranged wife.

Setting aside the CIC order passed in 2021 for being "unsustainable in law," the High Court in the

judgement passed on April 28 said the information sought by the wife was undoubtedly the petitioner's 'personal information,' which cannot be directed to be disclosed because it did not fall under the exception of "larger public interest."

The court said the RTI Act was enacted to promote transparency in the working of public authorities and the intent of the legislature could not have been to allow disclosure of individuals' personal information that has no bearing on the public at large.

The wife argued that the disclosure of the petitioner's income details under the RTI Act was necessary for the proper adjudication of her maintenance claim.

The court was dealing with her husband's petition challenging an order of the Central Information Commissioner (CIC) directing the income tax authorities to reveal his details of his next taxable income for financial years 2007-2008 on an RTI application by his estranged wife.

Setting aside the CIC order passed in 2021 for being "unsustainable in law," the High Court in the

## Can't seek spouse's income details under RTI Act: HC

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

An individual cannot obtain details of their spouse's income from authorities by filing an application under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, the Delhi High Court has ruled after a wife claimed the information was necessary for the proper adjudication of her maintenance claim.

Personal information, unless related to public interest, is exempted from disclosure under Section 8 (1)(j) of the Act, and as per the Supreme Court, an individual's income tax returns fall within that category, Justice Purushendra Kumar Kaurav said.

The court was dealing with her husband's petition challenging an order of the Central Information Commissioner (CIC) directing the income tax authorities to reveal his details of his next taxable income for financial years 2007-2008 on an RTI application by his estranged wife.

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The wife argued that the disclosure of the petitioner's income details under the RTI Act was necessary for the proper adjudication of her maintenance claim.

## Delhi court denies bail to Al Falah University group chairman in money laundering case

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

A Delhi court on Saturday rejected the regular bail application filed by the Al Falah University group chairman Jawad Ahmed Siddiqui in a money laundering case.

Additional Sessions Judge Sheetal Chaudhary Pradhan made the decision after hearing arguments from both Siddiqui and the Enforcement Directorate (ED). A detailed order is pending. The ED opposed the bail plea, citing the seriousness of the



allegations and the stage of the investigation.

Siddique was arrested for his involvement in a money laundering case linked to the alleged generation of illicit funds from the fees paid by students at his educational institution in Faridabad. He is accused of misrepresenting the accreditation and recognition of his institutions. He was arrested by the ED in November 2025 and is in judicial custody.

Siddique is facing prosecution in a charge sheet already filed by the

ED, while a separate charge sheet has also been filed against him by the Delhi Police Crime Branch.

The agency also informed the court that another money laundering probe involving Siddiqui is underway.

On February 7, the trial court granted Siddiqui interim bail for two weeks on humanitarian grounds to care for his wife, who is undergoing cancer treatment. The ED challenged this temporary relief in the Delhi High Court, resulting in the trial court reconsidering the matter.

## Jaipur court grants divorce to man citing wife's conduct as mental cruelty



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Jaipur

A family court here has granted a divorce to a man on the grounds of mental cruelty from his wife, including her conduct on social media and her behaviour during the marriage. According to the husband's counsel, DS Shekhawat, the petitioner sought divorce alleging mental cruelty, claiming that his wife's actions had hurt his dignity and social standing.

The court observed that sharing photographs with another man on social media in a manner that goes beyond normal relations can amount to mental cruelty towards the husband. "The court noted that content shared on social media has a public impact and individuals must act responsibly. It also took into account allegations that the wife used abusive language and pressured the husband to live separately from his parents, observing that such conduct could amount to mental harassment," he said.

The court observed that mutual respect and dignity are essential in marital relationships, and repeated disrespectful behaviour can be treated as cruelty.

In an order passed on April 17, the court said that such conduct of maintaining relations with another man, whether a relative or a friend, beyond normal limits and displaying them on social media in this manner, is not only harmful to marital relations but also falls within the category of cruelty.

## LeT operative sentenced to 7-year RI in Bengaluru prison radicalisation case: NIA

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

Another key operative of Pakistan-based terrorist organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) has been convicted and sentenced by an NIA special court in the 2023 Bengaluru prison radicalisation case.

The Bengaluru special court has sentenced Vikram Kumar alias Chota Usman to seven years' rigorous imprisonment (RI), a statement issued by the NIA on Saturday said.

Vikram is the eighth accused to be convicted and sentenced in the case.

The court had last month sentenced seven other accused, including mastermind and LeT member T



Naseer, who had hatched the radicalisation plot while being an undertrial in the Parapanna Agrahara Central Prisons in the 2008 Bengaluru serial blast case.

The NIA investigation revealed that accused Vikram Kumar was radicalised and recruited by Naseer and co-accused Junaid Ahmed

while lodged in the Bengaluru prison.

He had stayed in touch with Naseer and Junaid after his release. In May 2023, Vikram had collected a dead drop of hand grenades and walkie-talkies from Ambala in Haryana and handed them to a co-accused in Bengaluru, the probe agency said.

Vikram, who was funded by Junaid, was also involved in the larger conspiracy to facilitate the escape of Naseer while he was being taken to a court from prison, as part of LeT's agenda to promote terror activities in India and damage national security and sovereignty, the NIA probe revealed.

The case was originally registered by the Bengaluru Central Crime Branch (CCB) in July 2023 following the seizure of arms, ammunition and digital devices from habitual offenders, who had planned to unleash a series of terrorist attacks in Bengaluru to further the nefarious schemes of the Pakistan-based terror organisation.

## Court raps Delhi police for arresting murder accused from Bihar without transit remand

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

A court here expressed shock over Delhi Police arresting a murder accused from Bihar without obtaining transit remand, saying the procedure adopted appeared to be an attempt to circumvent legal safeguards.

Judicial Magistrate Apoorv Bhardhwaj was hearing an application filed by Delhi Police seeking two days of custody remand of Mukesh, who was arrested from Darbhanga in Bihar, and Anil in the murder case.

"I am deeply shocked at the procedure adopted by the investigating agency. Seems that the accused was apprehended in Bihar and his arrest was delayed till he was brought to Delhi only to circumvent the procedure of obtaining transit remand," the judicial magistrate said.



Noting that Mukesh was apprehended in Darbhanga and brought to Delhi, the court asked the investigating officer (IO) to explain through the concerned DCP why the accused was not formally arrested in Bihar and why transit remand was not obtained before bringing him to the national capital.

"Prima facie this conduct only amounts to tweaking the law to suit the investigating agency's convenience. The Hon'ble High Court of Delhi has laid down comprehensive guidelines to be followed in the (case of) inter-

state (arrest)," the court said.

The case pertains to the murder of a man following a dispute on April 26. According to police, the accused persons were allegedly involved in the concealment of evidence and related offences.

Mukesh was remanded to judicial custody for one day, while the plea seeking his police custody for recovery of the weapon of offence remained pending.

In the case of Anil, who was represented by advocate Pardeep Khatri, the court said the offences invoked against him were bailable.

It noted that the prosecution did not attribute any direct role to Anil in the murder. It stated that according to the case records, he was not present at the spot and had only asked that the injured be taken to the hospital.

## Firing at Salman Khan's house was attempt to kill him: Actor's bodyguard tells court

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Mumbai

The personal bodyguard of Bollywood actor Salman Khan has told a special court here that the April 2024 shooting incident at the superstar's residence in Mumbai was an attempt to kill him. The trial in the case began last month with the deposition of the bodyguard as the first witness.

On April 14, 2024, two motorcycle-borne men opened fire outside Khan's Bandra residence, Galaxy Apartments.

Recounting the incident, the bodyguard, also the complainant in the case, last month testified that he reported for his regular night shift at 7 pm on April 13, 2024.

He told the court that the actor's security at that time had been heightened due to threats from gangster Lawrence Bishnoi.

As per his deposition, at around 4 am on April 14, the security team heard sounds resembling firecrackers. "I looked at the CCTV screen. I saw that there were two persons on a bike, wearing helmets and firing towards the building," the witness stated.

He further told the court the



assailants fired four to five times. "Therefore, I and other guards present there, immediately went outside from the main gate," the witness said.

He added that both the motorcyclists fled to the right side towards "I Love Bandra" point and from there they went towards Mehboob Studios Road.

The prosecution, represented by special public prosecutor Mahesh Mule, presented CCTV footage in the court, which showed a motorcycle arriving in front of the gate. The

witness identified the details from the video. The bodyguard clarified that at the time of the attack, Khan was in his bedroom on the first floor.

He asserted that "the firing was an attempt to kill the actor".

During his cross-examination, the witness, while responding to a question of defence advocate Viral Babar, confirmed that he was in the security cabin when he heard the noise.

He, however, had no "personal knowledge" of the specific threats issued to the actor, the bodyguard said, while responding to another query.

Another witness, a police guard, testified before the court on Saturday. He said he was sitting in the lobby and did not see the incident and only saw the bullet shells near the spot.

Bike-borne individuals-Vicky Gupta and Sagar Pal had carried out the firing incident outside Salman's Galaxy Apartment.

As per police, Mohammed Rafiq Sardar Chaudhari had reced Galaxy Apartments two days before the firing, had shot a video of the area and sent it to Anmol Bishnoi, a wanted accused in the case.

## The Enduring Relevance of the Apad (आपद) Dharma Principle

The theory of apad dharma, or duty in times of emergency, adversity or distress constitutes one of the most refined contributions of ancient Indian thought to the ubiquitous issue of governance under extraordinary circumstances. It represents a framework of adaptive governance where rigid norms are temporarily relaxed to preserve life, stability and social order. This principle of conditional flexibility can be observed across domains, from social organisation to fiscal policy in ancient texts such as the Dharmashastras, Arthashastra and the Mahabharata. In contemporary governance, similar principles are reflected in emergency provisions, market interventions and crisis-driven welfare policies. Apad dharma implies reciprocal obligation between the leader and the people, where while the leader strove through different measures to ensure the well being of the people, the latter with their participation and cooperation aided the state in times of crisis.

The articulation of the modalities of governance in periods of crisis assumes special significance in the post COVID world. India's response to COVID-19 reflected decisive leadership, citizen participation and the administration of over 2.2 billion free vaccines in record time. The incredible spirit of cooperation and resilience demonstrated by determined Indians proved to be an exemplary model for the entire globe. A thread of continuity can be traced from the apad dharma concept of ancient times to the modern constitutional emergency provisions. Its importance also lies in the fact that it aligns with our fundamental duty to serve the country whenever called upon in times of emergency.

The Mahabharata's Shanti Parva tells the story of sage Vishvamitra's struggle during a period of extreme adversity. Referring to apad dharma, it illustrates how even the most righteous may be forced to transcend conventional norms to survive. Faced with the desperation of a twelve-year famine, Vishvamitra argued that the preservation of life was the ultimate priority.

जीवितं मरणच्छ्रेयो जीवन् धर्ममवाप्नुयात् ।  
तस्माज्जीवितमन्विच्छन् न विहन्येत कर्मणा ॥  
(Shanti Parva, 141.64)



**RK PACHNANDA**  
FORMER CHAIRMAN,  
HARYANA PUBLIC SERVICE  
COMMISSION; FORMER  
CHAIRMAN, HARYANA  
ELECTRICITY REGULATORY  
COMMISSION; FORMER  
DG-ITBP; FORMER  
DG-NDRF; COMMISSIONER  
OF POLICE, KOLKATA;  
DIRECTOR, BHARAT  
KI SOCH



**DR PRACHI SHARMA**  
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BHARAT KI SOCH

*Life is superior to death. By living, one can eventually attain dharma. Therefore, one who desires life should not be discouraged by the (temporary) nature of their actions.*

Besides the social sphere, apad dharma also applied to the economic domain. Since Kautilya considered Artha (material wellbeing) as the foundation of prosperity and the most important of all the purusharthas or goals of life, the treasury (kosha) was the most crucial element for the state.

यः विपदि सम्पदि च  
स्वामिनस्त्रन्त्राम्युदयं कोषयति  
= संश्लेषयति इति कोषः ।  
(Nitivakyamrita: 21/1)  
That which accumulates and preserves the resources of the master in both adversity and prosperity is called a treasury (kosha)

A state facing great financial difficulty that may have been caused by famine, drought, or an expensive operation like a war could collect additional revenue through special taxes which could be levied on all occupational groups within the population. If enough resources were not garnered by the above means, the rich could also be asked to make voluntary donations of gold. Honours and status symbols were bestowed on them in return for gold. Bhisma, in his advice to Yudhishtira on good governance, emphasises that taxation should not be a 'uniform across the board' policy. A virtuous government must adapt its demands based on three critical factors- place (desha), time (kala) and capacity (bala) guided by dharma and public welfare. Apad dharma justifies exceptional fiscal measures for state survival. However, such emergency extractions were transient and conditional, bound with the obligation of later remission.

In addition to special levies, the Kautilyan state actively regulated grain markets to prevent hoarding, black-marketing and artificial scarcity. Price controls ensured that the poor continued to afford food. The state supervised markets through officials like the panyadyaksha (superintendent of trade). Merchants who sought higher profit margins, for every additional 5 per cent, the penalty was 200 panas. If the merchants were found conspiring to hoard food grains with the aim of selling at a higher

price, they were to pay a fine of 1000 panas. If brokers and middlemen were caught accumulating stock in excessive quantities authorised by the chief controller, the excess was to be seized. These norms in the Arthashastra are similar to the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 which shields the consumers from dishonest traders by empowering the Government to control or prohibit the production, supply, and distribution of essential commodities. In the ancient period, famines hugely burdened the state economy. Kautilya viewed famine as a major calamity of the state and prescribed proactive state intervention. He suggested that the state should grant relief to the subjects by distributing seeds and food.

दुर्भिक्षे राजा बीजमकोपग्रहणानुग्रहं कुर्यात् ।  
(Arthashastra: 4.3.17)

In phases marked by an acute shortage of food, besides distribution of seeds and grains, food-for-work projects such as building forts or irrigation works were initiated. The PM's Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, which has been distributing free food grains to over 800 million needy Indians, began as an emergency welfare measure at the time of the pandemic. The main objective of this scheme is to provide food security and protect the most vulnerable sections of society during economic adversity.

As implied earlier, the principles underlying apad dharma are not confined to ancient texts. They find continued relevance in contemporary governance, particularly in the way state responds to crises through regulatory flexibility and targeted intervention. A case in point is the conflict in the Middle East. India happens to be the world's second largest importer of LPG, almost 90 per cent of which is sourced from the Middle East. As a response to the disturbance in the global energy supply networks caused due to the conflict, the Government invoked emergency powers under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 and promulgated measures for equitable distribution in order to prevent shortage of domestic cooking gas supplies for over 33 crore households that are dependent on LPG. The Government also ordered all oil refiners across the country to maximize LPG production prioritising domestic consumption. This is the theory of apad dharma in practice.

The theory of apad dharma offers a conceptually rich and ethical framework for governance in times of crisis. While the state takes the required steps to support its citizens, the people also must willingly accept necessary restrictions, treating it as a part of their duty to cooperate in national interest. Our fundamental duty enshrined in the constitution, which refers to the duty of every citizen to defend the country and render national service when called upon, truly reflects the principle of apad dharma.

### Fable with Moral

## The Bird with two Heads

(Panchatantra)



Once upon a time, there was a huge banyan tree beside a river where lived a rare bird. It had two heads, but only one stomach.

One day while flying high in the sky it saw a shiny, red object on the river side. The bird flew down quickly and picked it up. It was a beautiful fruit. The bird had never seen such a wonderful fruit. It began eating it and realized that it was the most delicious fruit the bird had ever eaten.

The second head on seeing this demanded to taste a part of that fruit. It argued that since it was the twin head, the fruit should have been also shared with him. The first head silenced it by saying, "Why are you making it a big deal? We are twin heads, but don't you know that we've the same stomach? Whichever head eats it, the fruit will go to the same stomach. Moreover, I'm the one who discovered this fruit. Thus, it's my right to have it."

The second head on hearing this was very hurt. It kept quiet at that time, but grew anxious because of the greedy behavior exhibited by the first head. One day the second head saw a tree laden with fruits. The bird quickly flew towards the tree. It plucked one fruit and as soon as he was about to eat it, the first head shouted, "STOP!"

The first head barring the second head from eating the fruit, remarked, "Don't you know this tree bears the poisonous fruits? If you eat this fruit, both of us will die instantly."

The second head looking at the fruit pretended as if it was not paying attention.

The first head pleaded again to dissuade him from consuming the toxic fruit. To which, the second reacted with anger and said, "As I've seen and plucked this fruit, I've every right to eat it. Nothing would change my mind."

The first head kept requesting but the other head did not listen to his twin head. He wanted to take revenge. He ate that poisonous fruit causing the twin-headed bird's death.

### Moral of the Fable

Ego destroys teamwork and leads to ruin.

### Did you know?

In the Arthashastra, Kautilya offers one of the world's earliest and most detailed analysis of embezzlement. He identifies multiple ways officials could siphon state funds-such as falsifying accounts, delaying revenue deposits, or misusing public resources-and treats these as serious threats to the kingdom. Rather than assuming honesty, he argues that officials are naturally prone to corruption and must be constantly monitored. His solutions include strict audits, cross-checking records, and even using informants, who were rewarded for exposing fraud. Punishments were severe: fines could be up to twelve times the stolen amount, and in extreme cases, even death. Kautilya's approach shows a remarkably modern understanding of financial accountability and anti-corruption systems in governance.



amount, and in extreme cases, even death. Kautilya's approach shows a remarkably modern understanding of financial accountability and anti-corruption systems in governance.

### Wisdom Word Search

Y A A N A B A P H I K A W  
A Y E E W A A R O L A N A  
T L K Q O H I K J D Q K Y  
H H E A S N Y P I L K I E  
A P O D N J P A O D A M L  
N L J U T G T Q P I O J G  
G E T X D U L G I Y T K W  
L I M W T A I O S K P S A  
S N T P O M N I N O L H A  
T G L Q P Q A G L S D X R  
I A G W A Y E T L O I L O  
X K Y Z J I D F K T I W L

### WORDS TO FIND

Ayee Waarol, Kanglon, Leingak, Paodam, Thoudang, Waarol, Wayel, Waayetloi, Yaanaba, Yathang.

- AYEE WAAROL** - Memorandum; a formally submitted written communication.
- KANGLON** - Principle; a foundational idea guiding action or policy.
- LEINGAK** - Government; the system or authority that administers the state.
- PAODAM** - Report; an official account or record of events and findings.
- THOUDANG** - Duty; an assigned responsibility.
- WAAROL** - Statement; a formal declaration or expression.
- WAYEL** - Trial; a judicial proceeding for examination and judgment.
- WAAYETLOI** - Counsel; advice or guidance offered in deliberation.
- YAANABA** - Agreement; mutual consent or accord between parties.
- YATHANG** - Direction; an order or authoritative instruction.

Note: These governance terms are drawn from Manipuri, one of India's 22 Scheduled Languages, reflecting the region's rich administrative and linguistic heritage.

## Marvels of India

ASHTA PRADHAN

**A Pinnacle of Indian Governance**  
The Ashta Pradhan council, instituted by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in the 17th century, represented a masterful administrative framework that powered the rise of the Maratha empire by blending efficiency, specialisation and accountability.



**Composition**  
This eight-member body included the Peshwa (Prime Minister handling executive duties), Amatya (Finance Minister managing revenue), Sachiv (Correspondence Superintendent), Sumant (Foreign Secretary), Senapati (Military Commander), Panditrao (Religious Affairs Head), Nyayadhish (Chief Justice) and Mantri (Intelligence and Royal Correspondence). They reported directly to Shivaji to prevent power concentration and ensure swift execution.

**Governance Efficiency**  
The system enabled parallel handling of diplomacy, finance, justice, military strategy and internal security, sustaining expansion across diverse terrains during conflicts with the Mughals. Rooted in principles from ancient texts such as the Arthashastra, it emphasised merit over birthright, fostering loyalty and competence.

**Legacy for Contemporary Bharat**  
Formalised around Shivaji's 1674 coronation, the Ashta Pradhan symbolised self-governance resilience, outmaneuvering larger empires through a structured yet flexible administration: principles that echo in Bharat's democratic institutions today.

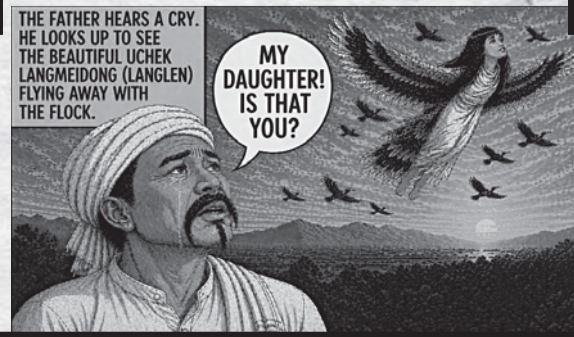
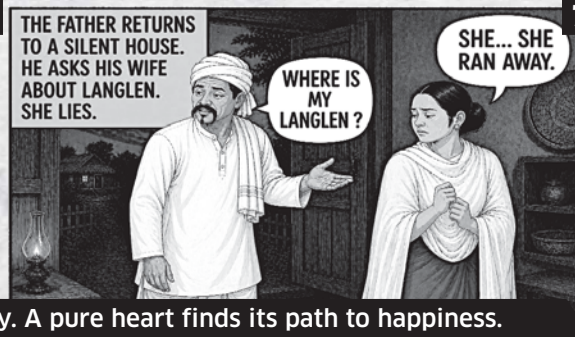
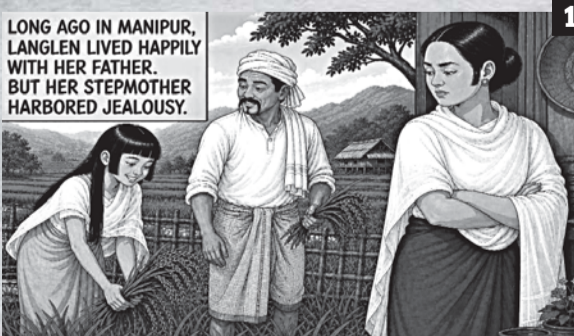
### QUIZ Governance

Questions	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
1. "No living being may be slaughtered for sacrifice" - This is depicted in one of the Rock Edicts of King Ashoka. Which of the current 11 Fundamental Duties enshrined in the Constitution of India illustrates the need to abjure violence?	51A(h)	51A(i)	51A(j)	51A(k)
2. By which community is killing an insect considered as Violence?	Lokayatas	Buddhists	Jains	Ajivikas
3. "Karmasu Kaushalam" (Excellence in Action) - Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 2, Verse 50): Which Constitutional Fundamental Duty advocates a similar version of this?	51A(a)	51A(e)	51A(f)	51A(j)
4. In which Kural number by Thiruvalluvar lies the following: "The worthy work and earn wealth in order to help others"?	211	212	213	214
5. Our ancient Indian texts repeatedly advocate reverence towards the environment and living beings. Which Prajadharma/Fundamental Duty aptly fits this reverence?	51A(b)	51A(c)	51A(e)	51A(g)

Answers: 1 - B, 2 - B, 3 - C, 4 - B, 5 - D

## Uchek Langmeidong

A Meitei folktale of Manipur



MORAL OF THE STORY: Cruelty does not pay. A pure heart finds its path to happiness.

FROM THE WORLD

MOROCCO  
Two US troops missing

Two US service members are missing in southwestern Morocco after taking part in annual multinational military exercises in the North African country, the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) said Sunday. The US, Morocco and other countries participating in the African Lion exercise have launched a search and rescue operation, AFRICOM said. "The incident remains under investigation, and the search is ongoing," it said in a statement. The incident happened on May 2 near the Cap Draa Training Area near Tan Tan, close to the Atlantic Ocean. The war games exercise started in April and runs across four countries, including Tunisia, Ghana and Senegal. It is scheduled to end in early May. African Lion, which has been running since 2004, is the largest US annual joint military exercise on the continent and usually features high-ranking military officials from the US and its top African allies.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ  
Bulk carrier attacked: Britain

A bulk carrier near the Strait of Hormuz has reported being attacked by multiple small craft, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said Sunday, marking at least two dozen attacks in and around the strait since the Iran war began. All crew aboard the unidentified carrier were safe after the attack off Sirik, Iran. The report warns vessels to transit with caution. Iranian officials have asserted that they continue to control the strait and that ships not affiliated with the United States or Israel can pass if they pay a toll. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack. The fragile three-week ceasefire appears to be holding, though President Donald Trump on Saturday told journalists that further strikes remained a possibility.

# Khalistan extremists a national security threat: Canada

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Ottawa

Canada's intelligence agency has declared Khalistani extremists a "national security threat", adding that the group uses institutions to promote its "violent extremist agenda" in the country. Canadian Security Intelligence Service, in its 2025 Public Report, highlighted that involvement of Canada-based Khalistani extremist (CBKE) in violent activities "continues to pose a national security threat to Canada and to Canadian interests." "Some CBKEs are well connected to Canadian citizens who leverage Canadian institutions to promote their

violent extremist agenda and collect funds from unsuspecting community members that are then diverted toward violent activities," the report issued on Canadian Government's website on Friday said. Khalistani extremist groups demand the creation of a sovereign state within India and are designated as terrorist organisations by New Delhi because of their involvement in separatist activities. The report comes a year after the 40th anniversary of the bombing of Air India Flight 182, whose suspects were members of the CBKE groups. "It remains to this day the deadliest terrorist attack in

Canadian history, with 329 people killed, most of them Canadians," it said. The report, however, said that non-violent advocacy for the creation of a state of Khalistan is not considered extremism, and some Canadians participate in legitimate and peaceful campaigning to support the Khalistan separatist movement. "Only a small group of individuals who use Canada as a base to promote, fundraise, or plan violence primarily in India are considered Khalistani extremists," it said. The India-Canada relations hit rock bottom in 2023 when then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged a potential Indian



link to the killing of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada. India rejected the charges. Under Prime Minister Mark Carney, who took charge last year, India and Canada have sought to rebuild their bilateral ties. Meanwhile, the commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Royal Mike Duheme, endorsed parts of the assessment but said there is no evidence linking threats to India. However, references to pro-Khalistan extremism had been absent from reports since 2018, when Justin Trudeau was the Prime Minister of Canada. "The Canadian threat landscape is constantly evolving. In reviewing CSIS activities in 2025, the report

serves as an important tool for all Canadians to better understand the threats we face together. It should also serve as a reminder of the work we must do together to counter these threats and keep our country safe," said Dan Rogers, Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service. Relations between India and Canada have been tense, particularly after allegations surrounding the 2023 killing of NIA-designated terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a gurdwara. India has strongly denied any involvement, calling the accusations politically motivated and criticizing Canada for what it sees as leniency towards separatist elements.

## Paramilitary forces drone strike kills 5 near Sudan capital: Rights group

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Cairo

Sudan's paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), killed at least five people in a drone attack that hit a civilian vehicle on the outskirts of Khartoum, a local Sudanese rights group said. The attack on Saturday morning hit a vehicle that was travelling from the White Nile province to Omdurman, the sister city of the capital, Emergency Lawyers, a rights group tracking violence against civilians, said in a statement. It added that the attack reflects continued targeting of civilians on public roads and in populated areas. Khartoum has largely been spared attacks by the RSF since it was recaptured by the Sudanese Armed Forces last year, but the capital has recently seen sporadic strikes. The Rapid Support Forces, which have been at war with the Sudanese Army for over three years, did not immediately claim the attack. Emergency Lawyers condemned the attack



and held the RSF responsible. "What happened was a brazen violation of international humanitarian law," it said. At least 59,000 people have been killed in the war that broke out in April 2023, according to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, an independent conflict-monitoring body. Aid groups, however, say the true toll could be much higher, as access to areas of fighting across the vast country remains limited.

## Trump's approval ratings dip ahead of midterms in November

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Washington

Ahead of the midterm elections in November, US President Donald Trump's overall approval ratings have dipped to 37 per cent, and 66 per cent Americans do not appreciate his handling of economic issues, a poll has found. The US President gets his best ratings for handling immigration at the US-Mexico border with 45 per cent approving of his policies, while 54 per cent expressed disapproval, according to the Washington Post-ABC News-Ipsos poll. Large numbers of Americans say they trust "neither" political party to handle major issues, including 23 per cent who say this about immigration, 27 per cent on the economy, 28 per cent on crime and 33 per cent on inflation. A slight majority (51 per cent) trusts neither Republicans nor Democrats to handle artificial intelligence. The Iran war has dented



the confidence of Americans in Trump's handling of economic issues, which were crucial to his political comeback in 2024. Americans disapprove of his handling of the situation with Iran by 66 per cent to 33 per cent. His rating on the economy has declined by

seven points, to 34 per cent, as gas prices have spiked. His approval rating on inflation has fallen five points in that time to 27 per cent and his lowest rating comes on perceptions of his handling of the general cost of living, with 23 per cent approving vs. 76 per cent disapproving. "Trump's overall approval now stands at 37 per cent, largely the same as the 39 per cent figure in February. But his disapproval has reached 62 per cent, the highest of his two terms in office," the Washington Post said. However, Trump holds sway among Republicans with approval ratings of 85 per cent. His ratings among Republican-leaning independents have reached a new low of 56 per cent.

## ADB launches \$70 billion push to connect Asia's power grids, digital networks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Samarkand (Uzbekistan)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Sunday said it will back \$70 billion in new energy and digital infrastructure initiatives across Asia and the Pacific by 2035, aimed at strengthening cross-border connectivity and expanding access to electricity and broadband. Energy and digital access will play a defining role in shaping the region's future, adding that the initiatives seek to link power grids and digital networks to lower costs and expand opportunities, ADB President Masato Kanda said while speaking to the media at the 59th annual meeting of the bank here.



The bank announced two major programmes — the Pan-Asia Power Grid Initiative and the Asia-Pacific Digital Highway — with proposed investments of USD 50 billion and USD 20 billion, respectively. "These two initiatives build the systems Asia and the Pacific need to grow, compete, and connect. By linking power grids and digital networks across

borders, we can lower costs, expand opportunity, and bring reliable power and digital access to hundreds of millions of people," he said. Under the Pan-Asia Power Grid Initiative, ADB will work with governments and private stakeholders to develop cross-border electricity infrastructure, including transmission lines, substations, storage systems and grid modernisation. The programme aims to integrate around 20 gigawatts of renewable energy, build 22,000 circuit-km of transmission lines, and improve electricity access for 200 million people by 2035. The initiative is also expected to create about 840,000 jobs and reduce

regional power sector emissions by 15 per cent, ADB said, adding that it will finance nearly half of the programme from its own resources while mobilising the rest through co-financing. ADB said the plan marks a shift towards a more integrated regional approach to energy trade, building on existing cooperation frameworks such as the ASEAN power grid and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation energy strategy. The Asia-Pacific Digital Highway initiative will focus on expanding digital connectivity through investments in fibre networks, satellite links and data centres, alongside policy support and skills development.

## EAM arrives in Jamaica on first official visit



Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar being received by his Jamaican counterpart Kamina J Smith upon his arrival in Kingston

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Kingston

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has arrived in Jamaica on his first visit to the Caribbean nation to boost bilateral relations between the two countries. Jaishankar arrived in Kingston on Saturday evening on the first leg of his nine-day tour of Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago to further bolster India's strategic and cultural ties with the Caribbean nations. "Pleased to arrive in Kingston for my first visit to Jamaica. Touched by the warm welcome extended by Foreign Minister @kaminaj-smith," Jaishankar posted on social media. He was welcomed by Jamaica's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Kamina J Smith, on his arrival in Kingston. "Look forward to engaging with the Jamaican leadership, business community, and members of the Indian

diaspora over the next two days," he said. "Looking forward to welcoming Minister S Jaishankar to Kingston as his first stop in the Caribbean, and the first Bilateral visit of an Indian External Affairs Minister to Jamaica. The work continues as we strengthen cooperation between our countries at the bilateral, hemispheric and multilateral levels," Smith had posted on social media before Jaishankar's arrival. Jaishankar is expected to have bilateral engagements and interactions with prominent business leaders and members of the Indian community in Jamaica. During his nine-day tour, Jaishankar will meet with the leadership of the three countries and hold talks with his counterparts covering the entire gamut of bilateral relations as well as regional and global issues of mutual interest, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement ahead of his visit.

## 2 men from minority Hindu community in Pak set to join federal civil service

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Islamabad

Two men from the minority Hindu community have qualified to join the federal civil service of Pakistan, where representation of such groups in government jobs is historically low. Jeevan Rebari and Khem Chand Jandora, both from Sindh province, were among the 170 candidates qualified to join the Central Superior Services (CSS) following the declaration of results by the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) on Thursday. With a total population of 3.8 million, Hindus are the largest minority community in Pakistan, mostly residing

in Sindh province, according to the 2023 population census. Minority representation in Pakistan's CSS is historically low, prompting the government to launch initiatives like the special training programme in 2025 to increase inclusion. According to the FPSC, 12,792 people across the country appeared in the written examinations, out of which 355 passed, and the total number of selected candidates stood at 170 after further rounds. According to the official data, 123 seats reserved for minorities are vacant, which further highlights the importance of these men making it to the top list.



Khem Chand's parents had to take loans at high interest rates and sell jewellery for their son's education, while Jeevan, due to a lack of resources, took shelter in a gurdwara and fulfilled his needs from langar, according to a BBC report. Khem Chand belongs to the 'Jandora community', it added. Jandora, the Sindhi community derives their name from "Jand", which refers to the heavy stone mill. The

community used to run this mill to grind wheat and sell the flour they made. Khem Chand's father was the first "revolutionary" of this community because pursuing education was considered rebellion and betrayal of the ancestral work. He said that to meet the expenses of his education, his mother sold her jewellery, and his father took loans from private banks at high interest rates. Jeevan Rebari's success is also special because he did not resort to the minority quota, but achieved success on general merit for higher studies. Hailing from a community which historically was meant to raise livestock and

wander from village to village for fodder and water, he received his education up to university from government institutions. He did his LLB from the Law Department of Sindh University in 2021 and then went to Lahore to prepare for the competitive exam. Jeevan gave his first shot in 2023. CSS has 12 groups from the Foreign Service to the Postal Service, and Rajendra Menghwar became the first Hindu PSP (Police Service of Pakistan) officer after the 2022 results. The success of Rajendra, who became the first PSP officer in 2021, further encouraged him to join this field and be an example for others.

## New Indian envoy to China arrives in Beijing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Beijing

India's Ambassador-designate to China Vikram Doraiswami on Sunday arrived in Beijing to take up his new assignment, and was accorded a warm welcome by senior Chinese and Indian officials. Deputy Director, Asia Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry Li Jianbo and Charge d'Affairs of the Indian Embassy Angeline Premalatha, along with senior officials of the Indian mission, received Doraiswami when he arrived from Shanghai, officials said. Doraiswami reached Shanghai on Saturday to take



India's Ambassador to China-designate Vikram Doraiswami, left, is welcomed by Li Jianbo, Deputy Director of the Asia Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, on his arrival, in Beijing, China

up his posting amid expectations that his appointment will add momentum to the current normalisation process of Sino-India relations. Doraiswami, a 1992-batch Indian Foreign Service officer, succeeds Pradeep Kumar Rawat. Before his posting to Beijing, Doraiswami served as India's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. The 56-year-old diplomat's appointment in March this year evoked considerable interest in the Chinese official media and the Chinese strategic community. Doraiswami's Chinese name, "Wei Jiameng", which means "one who forms an excellent alliance", carries diplomatic significance in the

present context of India-China relations, according to Chinese scholars. Doraiswami, a Mandarin speaker, had served at both the Hong Kong and Beijing diplomatic missions early in his career. He was posted as Third Secretary in Hong Kong, where he earned an elective diploma in Chinese from the New Asia Yale-in-Asia Language School before moving to Beijing in September 1996 for a four-year tenure. Doraiswami's appointment comes amid efforts by India and China to rebuild relations that came under severe strain following the military standoff in eastern Ladakh in April 2020, which stretched on for four years.

## Sergio Gor concludes Nepal visit

SHIRISH B PRADHAN  
Kathmandu

US President Donald Trump's special envoy for South and Central Asia, Sergio Gor, concluded his "highly productive" visit to Nepal after holding a series of high-level meetings with political leaders and Government officials. Gor concluded his three-day visit to Nepal on Saturday. "The United States leads in innovation, and we are glad to partner with local Nepali companies to bring cutting-edge technology to Nepal," said Gor, who concluded his "highly productive" visit to Nepal. "We are hopeful that Nepal's new Government will



work to increase the fruitful partnership between our two nations," said Gor, according to a press release issued by the US Embassy, Kathmandu. During his visit, he held high-level meetings with the chairman of the ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party, Rabi Lamichhane, Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal, and Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle. He also engaged in productive discussions with Nepali business leaders during the official visit. The visit "focused on deepening the US-Nepal partnership and expanding commercial ties, including new US business opportunities in Nepal's dynamic technology sector." (PTI)

## Reviewing Iran proposal, can strike if provoked: Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Washington

US President Donald Trump said military strikes against Iran could resume "if they misbehave" even as he said that he was reviewing a fresh proposal from Tehran to end the now paused war.

Trump, on his way to Miami from Palm Beach, said he was reviewing a fresh proposal from Iran to end the war, but was sceptical about reaching a deal, contending that Tehran had not yet paid a big enough price for what they have done to humanity and the world over the past 47 years.

"If they misbehave, if they do something bad, but right now, we will see. It's a pos-

sibility that could happen, certainly," Trump said at the Palm Beach airport after a round of golf and an appointment with his local dentist.

The US President said he was looking at the new proposal sent by Iran on the plane and would talk to the media in Miami.

"I'm looking at it (on the plane). I'll let you know about it later... They told me about the concept of the deal. They're going to give me the exact wording now," Trump said.

Later, an aide to the president said there would be no press conference in Miami.

Trump posted on social media about the new proposal, saying he "can't imagine that it would be



acceptable in that they have not yet paid a big enough price for what they have done to Humanity, and the World, over the last 47 years". No details were immedi-

ately available about the new proposal that Trump was examining.

Axios reported quoting two sources that the proposal, sent on Thursday, set a

one-month deadline for negotiations on a deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, end the US naval blockade and permanently end the war in Iran and in Lebanon.

As per the Iranian proposal, only after such a deal is reached, another month of negotiations would be launched to try and reach a deal on the nuclear programme, Axios reported, quoting two sources.

Trump rejected a previous Iranian proposal this week, saying he was not satisfied with it. However, conversations have continued, and the three-week ceasefire appears to be holding.

Trump was also briefed on Thursday by CENTCOM commander Adm. Brad Cooper

about new plans for military strikes against Iran. Cooper then left for the region and on Saturday met soldiers on the USS Tripoli in the Arabian Sea. The US President is also facing pressure from the high gas prices that have shot up to USD 4.39 per gallon, an increase of 47 per cent since the war with Iran began on February 28.

This week, price pressures worsened as President Donald Trump said that he wants to maintain the blockade on Iranian ports, which the US Navy has been enforcing since April 13.

"Now gasoline is high. As soon as the war ends, the gasoline prices will come down," Trump told reporters on Friday.

## 2 dead, 16 injured in France-UK channel crossing bid



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Paris

A small boat carrying migrants trying to cross the English Channel ran aground on a beach in northern France, leaving two dead and 16 people injured, including three with serious burns, authorities said Sunday.

The vessel, carrying 82 people, set out overnight from Hardelet beach, a few kilometres (miles) south of the port of Boulogne-sur-Mer, but the engine failed and it began to drift, Christophe Marx, secretary-general of the Pas-de-Calais prefecture, told reporters.

A French maritime gendarmerie vessel rescued 17 people and brought them to Boulogne-sur-Mer, while the makeshift boat ran

aground with 65 others still on board.

Two women were found dead, most likely from suffocation, Marx said. They are believed to have been "crushed or asphyxiated, as unfortunately often happens on boats... where too many people are packed in," he said.

The women were believed to be in their 20s and to have come from Sudan, he said, adding that an investigation was underway. Three of the injured were in very serious condition with burns caused by fuel at the bottom of the boat, he added.

It was the third deadly incident involving migrants trying to make the perilous crossing to the UK in just over a month.

## US to cut Germany troops 'a lot further' than 5,000: Donald Trump



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
West Palm Beach

President Donald Trump said on Saturday that the US will significantly reduce its troop presence in Germany, escalating a dispute with Chancellor Friedrich Merz as he seeks to scale back America's commitment to European security.

The Pentagon on Friday had initially announced it would pull some 5,000 troops out of Germany, but when asked Saturday about the reason for the move, Trump didn't offer an explanation and said an even bigger reduction was coming. "We're going to cut way down. And we're cutting a lot further than 5,000," Trump told reporters in Florida.

Earlier on Saturday, Germany's defence minister appeared to take in stride the news that 5,000 US troops would be leaving his country.

Boris Pistorius said the drawdown, which Trump

has threatened for years, was expected, and he said European nations needed to take on more responsibility for their own defence. But he also emphasised that security cooperation benefited both sides of the trans-Atlantic partnership.

"The presence of American soldiers in Europe, and especially in Germany, is in our interest and in the interest of the US," Pistorius told the German news agency dpa.

The plan faces bipartisan resistance

The planned withdrawal faced bipartisan resistance in Washington, with swift criticism from Democrats and concern from Republicans that it would send the "wrong signal" to Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose full-scale invasion of Ukraine recently entered its fifth year.

Trump's decision comes as he seethes at European allies over their unwillingness to join his campaign with Israel against Iran.

## Nepal President Paudel returns constitutional council related ordinance for reconsideration

SHIRISH B PRADHAN  
Kathmandu

Nepal President Ram Chandra Paudel on Sunday returned for reconsideration the constitutional council-related ordinance, which, if endorsed, paves the way for the Government to appoint heads of constitutional bodies.

The Constitutional Council (relating to the functions, duties, powers and procedures of the council) First Amendment Ordinance 2026 was recommended by the Balendra Shah-led Government through a cabinet decision on April 27.



According to a statement issued by the president's office, Paudel decided to send the ordinance back after determining that its contents required further

review and reconsideration by the Government. The ordinance had sparked criticism from Opposition parties.

If endorsed by the presi-

dent, it paves the way for the Government to make appointments at key constitutional positions, such as the Chief Justice, that have remained vacant.

The Nepali Congress has said that its attention was drawn to the Government's move to introduce the ordinance by suspending the Parliament session.

Last week, the Cabinet recommended that the President summon a session of the federal parliament scheduled for April 30.

However, later, the Government recommended the postponement of the session.

## Mexican governor, mayor indicted by US for drug trafficking step down

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Mexico City

Two members of Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum's party in the northwestern Sinaloa state said they would temporarily step down from their posts after the United States charged them and eight other politicians and security officers with drug trafficking in a bombshell indictment that has shaken Mexico's political establishment.

In a short video announcement at midnight Friday, Gov Ruben Rocha Moya, the highest-ranking official named in the indictment, denied accusations that he protected the Sinaloa cartel and helped it smuggle drugs into the US in exchange for millions of dollars in bribes.



"My conscience is clear," said Rocha, 76, a longtime ally of influential former President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. "To my people and to my family, I can look you in the eye because I have never betrayed you, and I never will."

But he said he would take a tempo-

rary leave of absence from the position he has held for six years to defend himself against what he called the "false and malicious" allegations and cooperate with the Mexican Government's investigation.

Juan de Dios Gamez Mendivil, the mayor of the Sinaloa state capital Culiacan named in the indictment, also said he would take leave and denied the charges.

Another defendant and member of the ruling Morena party, Sen. Enrique Inzunza, said he would continue serving in the Senate while defending himself from the accusations.

In a special vote Saturday, the state's local congress appointed as interim governor Yeraldine Bonilla Valverde, an ally of Rocha who previously served as the state's secretary of Government.

## Over 130 foreign nationals arrested in Sri Lanka for cyber fraud

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Colombo

More than 130 foreign nationals were arrested in Sri Lanka for alleged cyber-crime operations over the last two days, police said.

The police actions are part of a wider crackdown on cross-border online fraud networks operating from the island nation.

In a raid in Thalangama, a suburb of Colombo, the police arrested 37 Chinese nationals on Saturday.

One of them was a woman, two of them did not have valid visas, and one did not possess a passport, according to the police.



All of them were aged between 24 and 44.

In a separate raid on Sunday, more than 100 people were arrested in Rajagiriya, another Colombo suburb.

Those arrested in the second raid were from different countries that include China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Madagascar, the Philippines,

Thailand and Cambodia. They were operating from a rented apartment, the police said.

Those arrested in the raids have been booked under the Computer Crimes Act — Sri Lanka's main law to counter cybercrime, hacking, and data misuse among other things.

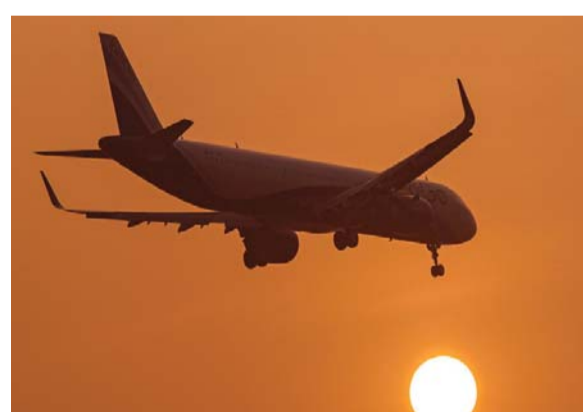
## UK sets out fuel contingency plans for flights amid US-Iran conflict

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
London

Airlines will be expected to consolidate schedules on certain routes with multiple flights to the same destination on the same day as part of contingency measures the UK Government announced on Sunday.

The Department for Transport (DfT) issued a series of temporary plans amid ongoing jet fuel supply issues caused by the US-Iran conflict and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz.

It stressed that while UK airlines say they are not currently facing supply issues, the Government is stepping in to protect travellers from the likelihood of last-minute flight cancellations over the



upcoming summer holiday period in the event of significant disruption caused by the conflict.

"Since the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the Government has been monitoring jet fuel supplies daily

and working with airlines, airports and fuel suppliers to stay ahead of any problems," said UK Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander.

"There are no immediate supply issues, but we're preparing now to give fami-

lies long-term certainty and avoid unnecessary disruption at the departure gate this summer. "This legislation will give airlines the tools to adjust flights in good time if they need to, which helps protect passengers and businesses," she said.

Alexander said that the UK "will do everything we can to insulate" the country from the impact of the situation in West Asia. The contingency plans are designed to enable airlines to plan realistically and lock in schedules earlier so that people are less likely to be affected by short notice changes at the airport.

Instead of cancelling flights at the last minute, the temporary measures would help move passengers onto similar services, prevent

running flights which have not sold a significant proportion of tickets and reduce wasted fuel from flying near-empty planes.

DfT said it will be consulting with the aviation industry in order to act quickly and before any travel disruption is allowed to take hold.

The measures will allow airlines to proactively hand back a limited proportion of their allocated take-off and landing slots without losing the right to operate them the following season.

Such "Hand backs" would help airlines build realistic schedules and avoid last-minute cancellations rather than flying empty "ghost flights" or cancelling at short notice, putting passengers' plans at risk, DfT stated.

## Weaker dollar quietly driving up US costs for vacations and groceries

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ New York

A hidden force is quietly pushing up costs for everything from your summer vacation to your weekly grocery bills: a weaker US Dollar.

The dollar has fallen about 10 per cent against other major currencies since President Donald Trump returned to the White House, a pullback potentially playing a role in Americans' concerns about affordability.

"It's kind of a hidden tax," says economist Thomas Savidge of the conservative-leaning American Institute for Economic Research. "What your dollar is going to be able to buy is going to shrink."

A look at where the dollar stands and what it means for you: Historic dollar decline The US Dollar Index, which measures the greenback against other major currencies, logged its steepest six-month drop in more than 50 years in the first half of 2025. Though the decline hasn't deepened, the dollar index is still about 10 per cent lower than at the start of Trump's term.

A strong dollar makes imports cheaper and can help keep inflation in check. A weak one can increase prices on foreign goods but boost American exports.

US presidents have long voiced support for a strong dollar even as they pursued policies that, at times, pushed

the currency lower. Trump has suggested a strong dollar puts the US at a disadvantage and that a weak dollar helps American industry. And as with most things with Trump, he's been blunter in his messaging.

"You make a hell of a lot more money with a weaker dollar," he said last year, one of a number of public statements showing his preference for seeing the dollar decline.

Big multinationals benefit Trump isn't alone in seeing the benefits of a weaker buck.

In recent months, corporate earnings calls have been peppered with talk of how a weaker dollar has helped companies from Philip Morris to Coca-Cola, with execu-



tives pulling out C-suite phrases like "favourable currency impact" to note how the dip brought tailwinds outside the US that added to

bottom lines.

"In many cases, we've got a weaker dollar, which is not unhelpful," Elie Maalouf, the CEO of InterContinental

Hotels, said on a February call as the company announced higher profits and revenues.

For big multinational companies that do business over-

seas, a weaker dollar can spur sales for products that suddenly become cheaper. But the vast majority of US businesses are not operating beyond the border. For those catering to domestic customers, it's a different story, particularly if they are reliant on importing goods.

Travis Madeira, a fourth-generation lobsterman who founded the lobster-shipping business LobsterBoys with his brother, makes about 80 per cent of his sales to Americans, unlike some competitors who primarily export.

"The exporters are gonna have the advantage when it comes to the dollar weakening," says Madeira, who is paying more to import bait

and buy Canadian lobsters. "These guys are gonna have a little bit of a lever on us."

Smaller companies hurt Even among companies that do have a presence outside the US, the dollar's fall can have an impact. While many big companies hedge currency to try to insulate themselves or push more sales overseas, smaller businesses are often more susceptible to the turbulence.

David Navazio, CEO of Pennsylvania-based Gentell, which makes bandages and other medical supplies, operates plants in Brazil, Paraguay, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. In each location, the dollar has fallen, increasing Gentell's costs.



## PROSPECT

### Punjab & Sind Bank aims to cross total business milestone of ₹3 lakh crore in FY27

State-owned lender Punjab & Sind Bank intends to achieve a milestone total business of ₹3 lakh crore by end of the ongoing financial year helped by loan growth. "We have achieved total business of ₹2.63 lakh crore in FY26, registering a growth of 15 per cent and hope to cross ₹3 lakh crore during the current financial year," Punjab & Sind Bank MD and CEO Swarup Kumar Saha told media.

The bank is expecting a credit growth of 16-18 per cent and deposit expansion of 13-14 per cent in the ongoing financial year, he said. With this kind of credit and deposit growth, he said, the bank can surpass ₹3 lakh crore business mix, which is total of advances and deposits. To meet the credit expansion, the bank is also planning to raise resources from both equity and debt.

Punjab & Sind Bank is eyeing to mobilise up to ₹3,000 crore via share sale on a private placement basis in a bid to meet the minimum public shareholding (MPS) norms of market regulator Sebi. As per Sebi norms, listed entities are required to have at least 25 per cent public shareholding. Currently, the Government of India holds a 93.85 per cent stake in Punjab & Sind Bank.



"We have got board approval for raising up to ₹3,000 crore from Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) or other means (in FY27). We are in discussion with merchant bankers. We will soon start roadshows to engage with investors for proposed stake dilution," Saha said.

However, he said, timing and exact quantum would depend on market conditions, which are not very conducive at present. Besides, he said, the board has also approved ₹3,000 crore infrastructure bonds and ₹2,000 crore from Tier I and Tier II bonds to fund credit growth. The bank had done a maiden issuance of infrastructure bonds in December 2024. Saha said the bank has fully deployed the funds raised from its first infra bonds. Domestic investors have shown a lot of interest in such bond issuance by banks, and many lenders have exercised this option for raising resources in the recent past. The advantage of infrastructure bonds is that they are exempt from regulatory reserve requirements such as the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) and Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR).

### New building norms to ease infra constraints, improve access to healthcare: NATHEALTH

Healthcare industry body NATHEALTH on Sunday said the Government's move to ease height restrictions for hospitals subject to enhanced fire safety provisions is expected to address structural constraints, including limited bed capacity, and underutilisation of existing infrastructure, particularly in urban centres.

Welcoming the Government's notification of the National Building Construction Standards (NBCS) 2026, NATHEALTH said it eases long-standing height restrictions for hospitals and permits Intensive Care Units (ICUs) beyond 45 metres, subject to enhanced fire safety provisions.

"The move is expected to address structural constraints such as high land costs, limited bed capacity, and underutilisation of existing infrastructure, particularly in urban centres," NATHEALTH said in a statement.

The new NBCS 2026 rules mark a significant and timely step towards enabling future-ready healthcare infrastructure in India, NATHEALTH President Sangita Reddy said.

# Heat wave: Measures brought in for gig workers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

As brutal heatwaves sweep across large parts of India, pushing temperatures well above 40 degrees Celsius, the spotlight has once again turned to the millions of gig workers who form the backbone of the country's booming e-commerce and quick-commerce sectors.

For delivery partners navigating congested city traffic on two-wheelers, the summer months bring a heightened risk of severe dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heatstroke.

Bound by algorithmic targets and the pressure of rapid delivery windows, these workers often spend peak afternoon hours exposed to extreme weather conditions, with little to no access to clean drinking water or shaded resting spots on their routes.

Facing mounting scrutiny over the occupational hazards associated with the gig economy, major food delivery, quick commerce, and e-commerce platforms are now rolling out a slew of mitigation measures. From specialised cooling gear to air-conditioned rest hubs, companies are attempting to buffer their frontline workforce against the harsh realities of the Indian summer.

E-commerce major Amazon, which also operates its quick commerce service Amazon Now, has introduced 'Project Ashray', a network of 100 air-conditioned rest stops across major cities offering seating, washrooms, and first aid, which the company says is accessible even to delivery partners outside its own network.

"These facilities provide comfortable seating, clean washrooms, drinking water, charging stations, and first-aid support, serving more than 150,000 delivery partners every month, including those outside Amazon's network. We are also organising free health check-ups



through nationwide medical camps to provide preventive health screenings, where doctors advise delivery partners on staying hydrated, recognising early signs of heat exhaustion, and managing health while on the road," Amazon said in a statement.

Similarly, Zomato has tied up with restaurant partners, TVS, and Shell to create over 5,000 rest points offering shade and water, which are also open to the broader gig economy.

Zomato and Blinkit delivery partners are covered under a broader health insurance programme that includes OPD and IPD/hospitalisation and day care coverage.

"We have designated rest areas across our store to support delivery partners during the summer period. These areas provide seating, ventilation, and access to drinking water.

We are providing summer support supplies at stores, including hydration products such as electrolyte powders, beverages, and similar essentials, based on local operating requirements," Aashutosh Tapparai, National Head LMD (Last Mile

Delivery), bigbasket, said.

Quick-commerce player Zepto is upgrading its existing dark stores and hubs, equipping them with air coolers and heat-reflective roof coatings to provide temporary respite for riders waiting for orders.

"Every store has a dedicated indoor resting space with access to drinking water and washrooms - now equipped with additional coolers for the summer. We've also added shaded areas outside dark stores and applied heat-reflective roof coatings at select locations.

Electrolytes are available for both riders and store teams. Our insurance covers hospitalisation for heatstroke, dehydration, and other heat-related illnesses. And our on-ground teams remain ready to step in wherever needed," Zepto Chief Operating Officer Vikas Sharma said.

Platforms are also experimenting with wearable relief. Eternal (parent company of Zomato and Blinkit) and Swiggy have introduced cooling vests. Swiggy's low-cost, antimicrobial jackets utilise evaporative cooling technology, which the company claims can reduce body temperature by 6 to 7 degrees Celsius for a few hours when soaked in water.

Zomato is offering subsidised lightweight sunscreen jackets, while companies across the board are distributing summer kits containing ORS, glucose sachets, and electrolyte powders.

Flipkart has activated a "Doctor on Call" service for its 'wishmasters' and their families, while Blinkit is expanding its free 'Doctor@Store' consultation service. Amazon has also set up a dedicated no-cost ambulance support line for emergencies.

"We also provide specific training on the ground to our Wishmasters and frontline employees on early identification and responding to heat-related health issues," a Flipkart spokesperson said.

### Public sector banks looks to scale up IT spend in view of cyber threat posed by Anthropic Mythos

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Public sector banks are bracing up to increase IT spending in order to secure their systems, safeguard customer data, and protect monetary resources amid global concerns over Anthropic's Claude Mythos AI tool and its potential implications for financial data security.

Mythos' advanced coding capabilities give it an unprecedented potential to detect cybersecurity weaknesses and develop methods to exploit them, sparking concerns that it could be used to disrupt banking systems.

In view of this new challenge, banks have to definitely increase their investments in IT to make their system more robust and reduce vulnerabilities with regard to cyber attacks, Punjab & Sind Bank MD and CEO Swarup Kumar Saha told media.

He said the bank is going to increase its IT spending this financial year to meet the challenges posed by new technology.



Besides, UCO Bank MD and CEO Ashwani Kumar said the bank's IT spending is going to be higher than last financial year, and a major part would go towards cyber security.

These statements assume significance in view of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman urging banks to take all necessary pre-emptive measures to secure their IT systems after Mythos exhibited its capability to find weaknesses in their operating system and launch a potential cyber attack.

"Banks in India are now entering a phase where they

have to see IT spend from a 'cost of running' to a 'cost of surviving' spend. Frontier AI systems, especially the unreleased models like Anthropic's Claude Mythos, do not create a new category of risk; they collapse the timelines of every existing one," said Srinivas L, Joint MD & Joint CEO, 63SATS Cybertech Limited, a subsidiary of 63 moons technologies limited.

The window between a public/platform disclosure and its weaponisation has compressed from 19 days in 2023 to under 72 hours today.

On the other hand, banks are still operating on patching and response cycles designed for a 2019 threat surface, so they are basically defending 2026 attacks with 2019 SOPs, Srinivas said, adding that the common instinct has been to add more tools.

To deal with such challenges, the Government has formed a panel under SBI Chairman CS Setty to assess risks emanating from the AI platform Mythos and come up with mitigating measures.

There will be a lot of interaction among banks over the next few weeks to understand the threats and also look at the areas where additional investments will be required, Sitharaman said last week. Mythos has raised alarm bells among regulators, who see it as a significant challenge to the banking sector and its legacy technology systems.

Banks and financial institutions are most vulnerable as there is high interconnectivity (payments, markets, clearing systems) and dependence on legacy IT systems operating in real-time.

### Indian Army marks Buddha Purnima with community outreach at Menchuka



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Itanagar

On the auspicious occasion of Buddha Purnima, the Spearhead Gunners, under the aegis of Spear Corps, organised a meaningful community outreach programme at Menchuka, reinforcing the Indian Army's commitment towards fostering harmony, environmental stewardship and civil-military synergy.

As part of the initiative, a tree plantation drive was conducted in collaboration with Gaon Budhas (village elders), symbolising collective responsibility towards environmental conservation. The activity drew active participation from the local community and reflected the timeless teachings of Lord Buddha on peace, balance and respect for nature.

In a gesture of reverence towards the region's rich spiritual heritage, gifts were presented to the 500-year-old Samten Yangchak Monastery, a revered centre dedicated to Lord Buddha. The offering underscored the Army's respect for local traditions and its commitment to promoting the values of peace, compassion and social harmony.

The event was well received by the local populace and further strengthened the bond between the Indian Army and the people of the region. Such initiatives continue to play a vital role in enhancing community connect while inspiring collective efforts towards nation-building.

## DAILY SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★☆

#### HOW TO SOLVE IT

Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9x9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3x3 box, using elimination and logical deduction - no maths involved.



#### SOLUTION (02.05.26)

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

## DOUBLE CROSSWORD

MONDAY | MAY 04, 2026

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48

#### ACROSS

- 8 Maintained I had got myself dressed to go out (7)
- 9 Understands guns won't shoot with them (7,2)
- 13 Should you say anything (5)
- 14 The object is to get the spare key (5)
- 15 Not one of the big bands popular in the Shirley Temple era (7)
- 16 Regard as a business (7)
- 17 How many, about, will be in the container? (5)
- 18 Late - or earlier (5)
- 20 Drinks to go with the pies I put out (5)
- 22 And snapped capturing the outlaw (6)
- 23 Though sent off, kept informed about (6)
- 25 Managed to get the wine you are searching for (7)
- 27 What luck and a lottery ticket may get you (7)
- 30 Annoyed at being given an anaesthetic (3)
- 31 The face shows a woman's date of birth (6)
- 32 Talk of erasing us from the records (5)
- 35 To change the heading would be simple (5)
- 36 A promontory we haven't yet come to (6)

#### DOWN

- 1 The bottle and tart, leave inside (6)
- 2 Upright but lacking drive (8)
- 3 Wreaking vengeance, or recovering (7,4)
- 4 What Comte Dracula ordered on a hot day, with aplomb? (4-5)
- 5 Very embarrassed, clumsily alters a figure in it (7)
- 6 Only a person involved in Chinese cooking will use it (4,6)
- 7 Take in the dessert (4)
- 10 It works like a charm and the boy goes up to bed (6)
- 11 Isn't at work the day before - far from it (7)
- 19 Means the tin is defective, one concludes (7)
- 21 Talk while there's time left to talk about (7)
- 24 Experienced, had looked at, one by one (4,7)
- 26 Plenty to eat at the Piazza Restaurant? (6,4)
- 28 A carnivorous plant? (5,4)
- 29 Order, for the fellow, fruit (7)
- 30 A good many stand by the gun (6)
- 32 Very sorry, but it's uninhabited (8)
- 33 Poetry is kid stuff! (6)
- 34 Starts slicing a meat loaf found in the kitchen (7)
- 16 Lie (6)
- 18 D-kessel (6)
- 20 Actor (6)
- 21 Mod (6)
- 22 Rip (6)
- 23 Payola (6)
- 25 R-UN (6)
- 28 Tes-ty (6)
- 30 Nair-N (6)
- 31 Stock (6)
- 32 War-d (6)
- 33 Gate (6)

#### SOLUTION (02.05.26)

ACROSS	23, Poke	DOWN	16, Lie
4, All-Overs	24, Lint	1, M-P-egg-y	18, D-kessel
7, Openings	26, Lad	2, Leg-At	20, Actor
8, To-rba-y	27, Step	3, Bias	21, Mod
13, Rend	29, On-US	4, Aster	22, Rip
14, Yell(-ow)	32, Wee-D	5, Lard	23, Payola
15, P-Ure	33, Gran-T	6, We-asel	25, R-UN
16, L-e-g	34, Local	11, Rep	28, Tes-ty
17, Edam	35, Tartar-ic	12, B-leak	30, Nair-N
19, Ma-I-L	36, Mayday	13, Ru-MB-led	31, Stock
21, Mainbrace		15, Pan	32, War-d
			33, Gate

### Seasoned corporate communication leaders take charge at PR Society, Delhi

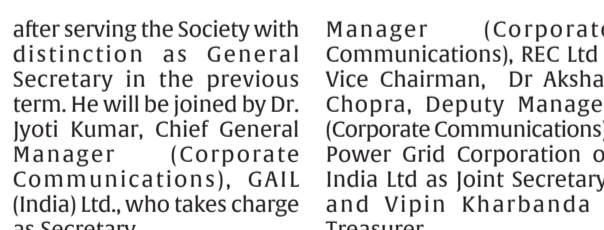
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Public Relations Society, Delhi (PRSD), the Capital's premier forum for PR, Corporate Communication, and Media Professionals, ushered in its new Governing Board during the National Public Relations Day celebrations held at the Press Club of India.

The entire Executive Committee for the year 2026-2028 term was declared elected unopposed. The results were formally announced by the Returning Officer before a distinguished gathering of industry leaders, senior communicators, veterans, and young professionals.

The new team will be led by GS Bawa as Chairman.

A veteran communication strategist, Bawa has been elevated to the apex role



after serving the Society with distinction as General Secretary in the previous term. He will be joined by Dr. Jyoti Kumar, Chief General Manager (Corporate Communications), GAIL (India) Ltd., who takes charge as Secretary.

The core leadership team is further strengthened by Rama Vijay, former General

Manager (Corporate Communications), REC Ltd - Vice Chairman, Dr Akshat Chopra, Deputy Manager (Corporate Communications), Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd as Joint Secretary, and Vipin Kharbanda - Treasurer.

The team brings together decades of cross-sectoral corporate expertise, policy advo-

### Cabinet to soon approve ₹37,500 cr incentive scheme to promote coal gasification projects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Cabinet is likely to approve soon a ₹37,500 crore incentive scheme to promote coal gasification projects, aimed at boosting clean energy production and reducing import dependence, sources said.

The coal ministry has already prepared a Cabinet note on the scheme to promote coal gasification projects, with a financial outlay of ₹37,500 crore, they said.

The proposed scheme is



aimed at accelerating surface coal and lignite gasification projects across the country, promoting self reliance by reducing import dependence on critical commodities such as LNG, urea, ammonium nitrate, ammonia, coking coal

via DRI, methanol and DME, while enabling enhanced utilisation of domestic coal and lignite resources for fuels and chemicals production, and supporting the national target of 100 million tonnes coal gasification capacity by 2030.

This is a unified scheme with no categories, and the maximum financial assistance for a single project is Rs 3,000 crore, they said. In the earlier financial incentive scheme for gasification projects the Government has provided financial under

three categories which included the maximum incentive of ₹1,000 crore per project for the private sector and ₹1,350 crore per project for the PSUs, sources said.

According to an industry analyst, the Government's renewed push for coal gasification comes in the wake of recent West Asia tensions that have exposed the country's vulnerability to disruptions in LNG, LPG and other hydrocarbon supplies, underscoring the need to diversify energy feedstock sources.



## BRIEFLY

### Napoli held 0-0 at Champions League



Defending champion Napoli was held to a 0-0 draw at Champions League-chasing Como on Saturday – a result that could help Inter Milan clinch the Serie A title. Napoli narrowly missed two late chances, first with Scott McTominay's effort going wide and then with Matteo Politano hitting the post. Second-place Napoli was left nine points behind Inter, which hosts Parma on Sunday. Only three rounds remain after this weekend. Fifth-place Como was left two points behind fourth-place Juventus, which hosts Hellas Verona on Sunday. The top four finishers qualify for the Champions League. Also, Atalanta and Genoa drew 0-0 and Udinese beat Torino 2-0 with goals from Kingsley Ehibizue and Thomas Kristensen.

# Antonelli storms to Miami Grand Prix pole

JENNA FRYER  
■ Miami Gardens (USA)

Kimi Antonelli helped Mercedes rebound from a disappointing showing in the Saturday sprint race at the Miami Grand Prix by winning the pole in qualifying just a few hours later.

It's the third consecutive pole for the current Formula One championship leader, who blocked Max Verstappen from taking the top starting spot at Miami International Autodrome for a third straight year.

Mercedes has dominated the competition this season, with George Russell winning from the pole in the season-opening race, then Antonelli winning from the pole in the two grands prix that followed. F1 then had a five-week break when a pair of races in the Middle East were

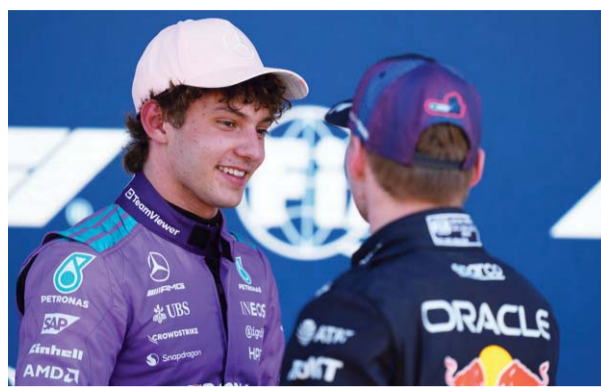
anceled because of the war in Iran.

All teams made upgrades to their cars during the break, but after Russell was fourth and Antonelli sixth in Saturday's sprint race, Mercedes boss Toto Wolff acknowledged "we are a little out of sync with our upgrades compared to other teams."

Antonelli recovered by qualifying and turned a lap at 1 minute, 28.653 seconds to beat Verstappen of Red Bull for the pole.

"Obviously a difficult start of the day with the sprint where it didn't go our way, but super happy with the recovery," Antonelli said. "We will do our best this week and obviously it's been a little bit more difficult for us."

Verstappen earned his best starting spot of the season as Red Bull has seemingly improved with its car



upgrades. The four-time world champion - a two-time winner at Miami - had qualified sixth in Australia, eighth in China and 11th in Japan.

His best finish of the season so far was sixth in the Australia season opener, and the Dutchman has been so frustrated with the current car regulations that he's talked about potentially

leaving F1.

He was all smiles after his qualifying result.

"For sure the car has not been great in the previous races and from my side I never felt comfortable with the layout of the car," Verstappen said. "I think over the those last few weeks the team has been pushing to try to bring upgrades to the car

and making me feel more comfortable with a lot of things in the car and it really pays off.

"I feel more in control of the car again and I can push a bit more. To be on the front row is way better than I expected heading into the weekend."

Charles Leclerc, who was third in the sprint race, qualified third for Ferrari. Lando Norris, the reigning world champion and defending Miami Grand Prix winner, qualified fourth for McLaren after winning the sprint race from the pole.

Russell was fifth, Lewis Hamilton of Ferrari was sixth and Oscar Piastri of McLaren was seventh after finishing second in the sprint race.

Both of the Cadillac drivers failed to advance out of the first round in the team's first race in the United States.

Despite major upgrades made to the new car during the five-week break between the Japanese Grand Prix on March 29 and Miami, Valtteri Bottas qualified 20th and Sergio Perez was 21st.

Only Gabriel Bortoletto qualified below them, last in 22nd, because of an issue that caused his Audi to catch fire.

F1 and the FIA governing body moved the start time of Sunday's race up by 3 hours to 1 pm EDT because of heavy rain expected in Miami. Most of the drivers have been concerned since Thursday about the forecast, which calls for thunderstorms. The race must be paused if there's lightning in the area because conditions must be clear enough for a medical helicopter to operate when cars are on the track. (AP)

# Nelly Korda builds 3-shot lead in Mexico

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Playa Del Carmen (Mexico)

Nelly Korda capped off a strong finish with a big drive and an 8-iron to 18 inches for eagle on the final hole Saturday, giving her another 5-under 67 that stretched her lead to three shots in the Riviera Maya Open at Mayakoba.

At stake for the No. 1 player in women's golf is chance to win back-to-back on the LPGA and become the first player since Annika Sorenstam in 2001 to start a season with six consecutive tournaments finishing no worse than runner-

up. She has played in the final group in all six of her tournaments this year.

Equally impressive is that Korda is coming off a win at major championship, going wire-to-wire in The Chevron Championship at Memorial Park, a big course for big hitters. El Camaleon is tight with trouble on both sides, and she's navigating that just fine.

"Even though I'm coming off a major win, I took Monday off to relax. From there, I'm here to work. I'm not on vacation," Korda said with a smile. "It's a tough golf course. Most important for



me is mentally, being relaxed. I'd be lying if I said my energy level was 100%."

Korda was at 14-under 202.

Her finish included a 9-iron into a right-to-left wind to 2 feet on the par-3 15th hole, where the green is

exposed to the wind of the Caribbean Sea. This was her second straight bogey-free round - her only bogey of the tournament was on her 11th hole Thursday.

Three shots behind was Arpichaya Yubol of Thailand, whose birdie-birdie finish gave her a 66 and a spot in the final group.

"I never play with her before," Yubol said. "Nelly Korda, Lydia Ko, they both kind of like my idol because they play very good. And if I have to play with her tomorrow it's just like my dream is come true. So my life is complete right now."

# Young leads Cadillac Championship

TIM REYNOLDS  
■ Doral (USA)

Cameron Young didn't have as easy a time in the third round of the Cadillac Championship as he did while building a big lead Thursday and Friday.

It didn't seem to matter, either.

Young is still in full control at Trump National Doral, after his round of 2-under 70 on Saturday got him to 15 under for the week. He had a six-shot lead over a group that includes top-ranked Scottie Scheffler into a potentially rainy final round Sunday.

"No lead is safe out here," Young said. "I'm going to go try to execute my plan as if I'm right around the lead or just trying to have a good day out there, not necessarily with any thought toward where I'm at in the tournament."

Young had four birdies and two bogeys on Saturday.

"The tournament's in his hands right now," said Scheffler, who shot a 3-under 69 to get to 9 under - but hasn't been able to close the gap on Young. "I can go out and have a really good round, and if he has another really good round he's going to be a tough guy to catch. All I can do is go out and try and have a great round and see where that leaves me."

Si Woo Kim (69) and Kristoffer Reitan (69) also were 9 under. Ben Griffin (68), Nick Taylor (72) and Matt McCarty (69) were 8 under. Catching Young will be



tough in any conditions.

And nobody knows what awaits players Sunday at Doral. A lot of rain is expected on Sunday - more than an inch, according to some forecasts, with heavy downpours predicted for the afternoon - the tournament moved up its schedule for the final round in an effort to beat the worst of the weather.

Scheffler beat Young by five shots in that final round at the Masters. He'll need to do better than that at Doral if he's going to win on Sunday.

But the way he finished Saturday might have made his comeback chances a bit of a boost. The 18th at Doral basically is two different holes - a brutal par 4 for those who don't have enough distance for a 300-plus-yard carry over water and into a wider portion of the fairway, and a slightly less brutal par 4 for those who can get it out there. Scheffler is one of those who don't have problems reaching the better spots of that fairway, and he took full advantage of that on Saturday. (AP)

# Barcelona on cusp of La Liga title



JOSEPH WILSON ■ Barcelona

Robert Lewandowski and Ferran Torres scored late in Barcelona's 2-1 win at Osasuna on Saturday that set up a chance for Hansi Flick's side to be crowned Spanish league champions this weekend.

Barcelona opened a 14-point gap over Real Madrid with four rounds left after this weekend. Madrid must win at Espanyol on Sunday to stop Barcelona from clinching a second straight La Liga crown. A victory by Madrid would prolong the title fight another week, when Barcelona hosts Madrid in a "clasico" match.

Substitute Marcus Rashford picked out a run by Lewandowski and placed a cross for the striker to thump in with a powerful header in the 81st minute.

That sparked a flurry of goals in the final minutes. Torres added a second goal five minutes later, and Raul Garcia headed in one for Osasuna in the 89th. Atletico wins before Arsenal clash.

Atletico Madrid rested most of its starters but got goals from two debutants as it won 2-0 at Valencia before it faces Arsenal for a place in

the Champions League final. Julian Alvarez, Alexander Sorloth and Giuliano Simeone, who all finished Wednesday's 1-1 draw with Arsenal with niggles, were among those players left off Atletico's squad for the Spanish league game.

Atletico travels to London for the second leg of their Champions League semifinal on Tuesday.

Diego Simeone called up nine youth team players for the visit to Valencia, with Iker Luque and Miguel Cubo coming on in the second half and scoring in the 73rd and 82nd for the win at Mestalla Stadium. Atletico defender Nahuel Molina almost scored one of the goals of the season when he let rip a powerful strike from near the midfield circle that smacked the corner of the goal frame in the first half. Atletico remained in fourth place and on course for another Champions League berth next season. Valencia was 13th and still in danger of falling into a relegation battle.

**Coaching milestones:** The game at Valencia was Simeone's 1,000th as a coach, Atletico said, with 795 at the Spanish club where he has been in charge since 2011. (AP)

# Justin Leonard, Stewart Cink to be assistant captains at Ryder Cup

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Louisville (USA)

US Ryder Cup captain Jim Furyk said Saturday that Justin Leonard and Stewart Cink will be two of his assistants for the 2027 matches at Adare Manor in Ireland.

Furyk announced the selections at the Kentucky Derby. Both were under consideration as captain, and their appointments could indicate a future captaincy.

Leonard played in three Ryder Cups - two of them US victories - and is best known for his 45-foot birdie putt at The Country Club in 1999 that clinched the Americans' comeback



against Europe.

This is Leonard's first time as a Ryder Cup assistant. He was an assistant under Furyk at the 2024 Presidents Cup and Furyk referred to him as "my right-hand man."

"The most organized, meticulous person I know," Furyk said. "So when I got this job, the first guy I called was Justin Leonard."

Cink played on five consecutive US teams, including part of the 2008 U.S. victory at Valhalla. He was an assistant captain to Zach Johnson in Italy in 2023, a resounding European victory.

Europe has won the last two times. Luke Donald returns as captain and will try to be the first to win three straight in the Ryder Cup.

Furyk played in his first Ryder Cup in 1997 and has been part of every team as a player, assistant or captain since then. This will be his second time as U.S. captain, having been on the losing side in Paris in 2018. The Americans have not won the Ryder Cup away from home since 1993.

# PSG drops points but Lens fails to take advantage

JEROME PUGMIRE ■ Paris

Defending champion Paris Saint-Germain was held 2-2 at home by Lorient but Ligue 1 title rival Lens failed to take advantage as it drew 1-1 at Nice later on Saturday.

A win for second-place Lens would have cut PSG's lead to four points - with Lens hosting PSG on May 13 - but the gap remains six points with three rounds remaining.

Left winger Allan Saint-Maximin put Lens ahead in the 61st minute against his former club, latching on to Adrien Thomasson's fine pass from deep and netting with a composed finish.

But after Lens defender Saud Abdulhamid was sent off in the 81st, Nice equalized moments later when defender Ali Abdi turned in Sofiane

Diop's deflected free kick.

**Key players rested:** PSG beat Bayern Munich 5-4 earlier this week in a pulsating Champions League semifinal match, and coach Luis Enrique rested goalkeeper Matvei Safonov, midfielder Vitinha and defender Nuno Mendes ahead of Wednesday's return leg in Germany. Star forward Ousmane Dembele was on the bench with midfielders Joao Neves and Warren Zaire-Emery.

Teenage forward Ibrahim Mbeye put PSG ahead from close range in the sixth minute when goalkeeper Yvon Mvogo fumbled a cross straight onto him. Poor defending allowed Pablo Patis to equalize six minutes later with a neat volley past 19-year-old backup goalie Renato Marin.



Zaire-Emery scored immediately after coming in the 62nd with a slightly deflected strike from 20 meters. PSG academy striker Pierre Mounguengue then came on for his first-team debut only to give the ball away with a back pass. It was

intercepted by Benin striker Aiyegun Tosin, who raced clear and scored with a low shot in off the post in the 77th.

**Marseille's slump continues:** Marseille's chaotic season continued with a 3-0 loss at next-to-last Nantes. A fourth

defeat in six games dented Marseille's chances of qualifying for next season's Champions League, with only the top three advancing directly.

The day got even worse for Marseille, which dropped to seventh after Monaco won at

2-1 last-place Metz, which is relegated.

Paul Pogba was picked in midfield for Monaco, giving the former France star his first league start since 2023 with Juventus. He lasted one hour.

American forward Folarin Balogun and former Barcelona prodigy Ansu Fati got Monaco's goals.

**Thin hope:** Nantes kept alive its slim hopes of avoiding being relegated for the first time since 2009. Victory moved Nantes two points behind Auxerre in 16th position, which is the relegation-promotion spot with the side finishing third in Ligue 2.

The Nantes forward line clicked as Ignatius Ganago, former Marseille winger Remy Cabella and Matthis Abline all scored. (AP)

# Diksha Dagar in contention in Mauritius as Hitaashee, Tvesa also make cut

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Port Louis (Mauritius)

Indian golfer Diksha Dagar played a solid bogey-free 3-under 69 to move into title contention at the MCB Ladies Classic - Mauritius on the Ladies European Tour here.

The two-time winner on the LET, Diksha shot 68 in the first round and moved to 7-under for two rounds. She is Tied-fourth and just two behind the co-leaders, Denmark's Smilla Tarning Soenderby, Germany's Celina Sattelkau and South Africa's Casandra Alexander. They were all at a total of nine-under-par.



Three of the four Indians in the field this week made the cut. Joining Diksha for the final round were Hitaashee Bakshi (71-69) and Tvesa Malik (70-71). Hitaashee was T-19 and Tvesa was T-26. Vani Kapoor (78-77) missed the cut.

Diksha, who was T-37 in Women's South African Open last week, is looking to peak in time for her Hero Women's Indian Open. She birdied the sixth, 10th and the 12th and dropped no bogeys.

Hitaashee had five birdies, including three in a row from the third, but also dropped shots on the 12th

and the 13th.

Tvesa Malik, playing through her membership on Sunshine Ladies Tour, had three birdies against two bogeys.

Smilla Tarning Soenderby was 6-under through the front nine at the Legend Course at the Constance Belle Mare Plage. However, the Dane struggled on her back nine as she made two birdies, three bogeys and a double bogey to sign for a 69 (-3). Germany's Sattelkau opened with a 68 (-4) on day one and followed up with a 67 (-5) with birdies on the first, fourth, 11th, 13th and 18th holes.

# Dhamne ends runner up in Shymkent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

India's teenage sensation Manas Dhamne fell short of a title finish in his maiden ATP Challenger singles final, going down to Belgium's Buvaysar Gadamauri in a closely-fought summit clash in Shymkent, Kazakhstan on Sunday.

The 18-year-old Dhamne put up a spirited fight before losing 6-7(8), 4-6 in a contest that lasted over two hours and hinged on fine margins. Dhamne showed nerves of steel in the opening set, stretching his more experienced opponent to a tie-break and even holding set points before Gadamauri edged ahead 10-8.

The narrow loss appeared to take some wind out of the Indian's sails as the Belgian capitalised with a decisive break in the second set to seal the title.



Despite the defeat, it has been a breakthrough week for Dhamne, who is set to break into the top-400 for the first time, most likely achieving a career-high mark of 384 when the new rankings are issued on Monday.



# KKR snap SRH's 5-match winning streak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Hyderabad

A resurgent Varun Chakravarty and milestone man Sunil Narine were instrumental in Kolkata Knight Riders' comprehensive seven-wicket victory that snapped Sunriser Hyderabad's five-match winning streak in the Indian Premier League, here on Sunday.

After Chakravarty (3/36) and Narine (2/31) played major roles in bowling out SRH for 165 in 19 overs, KKR chased down the target with 10 balls to spare to notch their third win on the trot.

This was leg-spinner Chakravarty's fourth successive match in which he took



at least two wickets while veteran off-spinner Narine joined an exclusive three-member 200-wicket club in

the IPL. Playing his 197th match, Narine, who also opened KKR's bowling, joined pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar

(215 from 199 matches) and spinner Yuzvendra Chahal (228 from 182 matches) in the elite group.

Chasing a small target, KKR lost Impact Sub Finn Allen in the fourth over for a quick-fire 39 off 13 balls when the team score was 49 but captain Ajinkya Rahane (43 off 36 balls) and Angkrish Raghuvanshi (59 off 47 balls) held the innings together with a second wicket stand of 84 runs from 11 overs.

Rahane, who scored just one half century in previous eighth matches at the top of the order, hit four boundaries and a six, while Raghuvanshi struck five boundaries and two sixes.

Rinku Singh struck the winning runs—a four—as he remained not out on 22 off 11 balls. Earlier, opting to bat, SRH were in their usual men-

acing batting form, reaching 77 for 1 after powerplay and 107 for 2 at the halfway mark, courtesy Travis Head's (61 off 28 balls) second consecutive half century.

But they collapsed spectacularly in the second half of their innings, losing nine wickets in 10 overs for the addition of 60 runs.

This was the first time SRH were bowled out in the IPL 2026. Kartik Tyagi chipped in with 2/30.

Head's innings was laced with nine fours and three sixes, and he was well supported by Ishan Kishan (42 off 29 balls). This was the third successive match SRH had scored more than 100 runs inside first 10 overs.



# Focus on Pandya, SKY as MI take on LSG

DEVARCHIT VARMA ■ Mumbai

Struggling former champions Mumbai Indians (MI) will hope their embattled stars Hardik Pandya and Suryakumar Yadav come good in a clash against bottom-ranked Lucknow Super Giants even though the chances of qualifying for the play-offs in this edition of IPL has evaporated for good.

Pandya (146 runs and 4 wickets) and Suryakumar (186) have had forgettable campaigns so far, which has hampered MI's journey, more so in the absence of former skipper Rohit Sharma, who remains on a comeback trail after a hamstring injury earlier this season.

Only two wins in nine matches have consigned the five-time IPL winners Mumbai Indians to the penultimate spot in the points table.

While their hopes to remain in contention for the IPL play-offs are all but over, there still remains an outside chance of qualification.

But before all that, MI will have to have their Indian stars doing the heavy lifting, which has not been the case so far.

Pandya's leadership has

come into focus as MI have endured a tough campaign. Tactically he has been way off the mark.

The batters have collectively misfired, and so have their bowlers, but in between have been Pandya's ordinary performances both with the bat and the ball, combined with certain calls on the field which did not yield desired results.

With the ball, Pandya has been on and off in terms of execution, but his batting leaves a lot to be desired, especially when he carries a lot of responsibility in that heavily depleted lower order from the past.

Suryakumar has not been able to convert starts while being caught off his trademark strokes, which has indeed been a growing concern as he no longer dominates bowling like he used to.

The Indian T20I captain, who had started the year 2026 with a string of high scores after a forgettable 2025, is once again going through a lean phase where he has neither looked completely out of form nor has he had a long stay in the middle to produce a knock of composure. (PTI)



Gujarat Titans Sai Sudharsan plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2026 T20 cricket match between Gujarat Titans and Punjab Kings, in Ahmedabad

# Sudharsan, pacers lift GT to four-wicket win over PBKS

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Ahmedabad

Sai Sudharsan's cool-headed 57 alongside the storm kicked up by pacers Mohammed Siraj, Jason Holder and Kagiso Rabada carried Gujarat Titans to a last over four-wicket victory over Punjab Kings in their IPL match here on Sunday.

On a slightly slow pitch, the Titans needed a level-headed chase of 164, and Sudharsan did precisely during his 41-ball knock.

A similar innings from debutant Suryansh Shedge's energetic 57 had helped PBKS to post 163 for nine despite Siraj (2/28) and Holder (4/24) reducing them to 47 for five in 8.4 overs.

But it was Sudharsan's turn to stand on the winners' podium in the battle of half-centurions on the night. The result meant that GT stayed at five in the table but their

points tally swelled to 12, while PBKS also maintained their top spot with 13 points for now.

After skipper Shubman Gill fell early to Arshdeep Singh, Sudharsan took control of the chase and added 53 runs for the second wicket with Jos Buttler.

Buttler (25) was the more dominant partner, dismissing Marco Jansen and Xavier Bartlett for a six each, the second one being an audacious scoop over the wicketkeeper.

But the England batter could not clear the infield off Vyshak Vijayakumar, giving a catch to Shreyas Iyer.

But Sudharsan continued undeterred and reached his third fifty of this IPL season off 37 balls.

The left-hander celebrated that with a couple of fours off Yuzvendra Chahal but could not impart distance to a pull off Vysakh, getting caught on the ropes by Bartlett.

# Not the season, admits Hardik Pandya

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Chennai

Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya did not hold back, admitting their IPL 2026 campaign never really got off the ground after the five-time champions slumped to yet another heavy defeat—an eight-wicket thrashing by Chennai Super Kings here on Saturday.

Mumbai Indians failed to post a challenging total, managing just 159 for 7 with Naman Dhir emerging as the lone standout batter, scoring 57. In reply, CSK chased down the target in 18.1 overs to move to eight points from nine games and keep their playoff hopes alive.

Mumbai Indians, though not mathematically out of



contention, face a steep climb, languishing on four points after seven defeats in nine matches and sitting ninth on the table.

"Not the season," conceded Pandya after the match, as neither their batting nor bowling showed any real spark.

"They (CSK) played better, they bowled better, they fielded better, they batted better," he added.

He added that a total in the 180-190 range might have given them a better chance, admitting Chennai Super Kings were superior with both bat and ball on the day.

"(A score of) 180-190 should have been a good total. We couldn't get the momentum. It was more about playing calculative cricket. Overall, as a bowling unit, they were better and as a batting unit, we weren't better. The bowling options which we had, we went with it," he said.

Asked if his bowlers needed to be more aggressive defending a modest total, he said, "I don't know what aggressive we would have been. I think we would have had to throw some fireballs to get them out. But, yeah, it was, the bowling option which we had, we went with it and they just played smart cricket. And yeah, they were better."

# Haven't seen anyone else like him: Ashwin hails Dhoni's keeping to spinners

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

Ravichandran Ashwin has rated MS Dhoni's wicketkeeping as the finest he has experienced, saying he hasn't seen "anyone else" operate like the former India captain behind the stumps to spinners.

Having shared a long association in the Indian team and at Chennai Super Kings, Ashwin recalled how Dhoni's glove work and clarity of thought stood out beyond his celebrated leadership.

"His glove work has always amazed me. People talk a lot about his captaincy, and rightly so, the titles speak for themselves," Ashwin said on JioStar's "The Ravichandran Ashwin Experience". "But for me, two things stand out—one, how good a middle-order batter he was, someone who could take the game deep and finish it.

"And the second is his keeping against spinners. I haven't seen anyone else like him." Ashwin also highlighted Dhoni's hands-off approach that empowered bowlers.

"He never set the field for me. I would set my own field, and he would just say, 'Don't double-guess. Don't pre-empt. If you get hit, it's fine. If someone takes a risk, let it be. Just bowl to your field.' He trusted that."

The veteran off-spinner fondly remembered dismissing Chris Gayle for a three-ball duck in the 2011 IPL final, crediting Dhoni for a sharp take behind the stumps.



"You can talk about the set-up and the dismissal, but how well MS took that catch. It wasn't easy." "Only regret": With 187 wickets across 221 matches in

a long IPL career (2009-25) spanning five franchises, Ashwin admitted he couldn't quite make Punjab Kings his own despite leading them in 2018-19, but described his

time at Rajasthan Royals as the most fulfilling.

"When Punjab picked me in 2018, I knew I was moving on—I spent two years there and honestly gave it everything."

"But I have a slight feeling that I couldn't make that team my own. At an auction, you get the chance to build your team!; the team couldn't quite be built around me. I may not have achieved much as a Captain, but the learnings were immense."

On his Rajasthan stint, he added: "I spent three years there, and that stint helped me make a comeback to the Indian team. The way RR utilised me was first-class, and I enjoyed my cricket there like nowhere else. "My only small regret is

that I couldn't win a title with RR—that was one small regret."

**Not ashamed:** Ashwin also revisited the much-debated non-striker run-out of Jos Buttler during his Punjab captaincy, maintaining he did nothing wrong.

"If the ICC felt this was an honesty problem, they wouldn't keep it in the rules. If you need two runs off one ball and you start running early, whose fault is it?"

"People say I did it to win. Of course, I did it to win. What is there to be ashamed of? "After I ran him out, I told the team... 'don't worry about the reaction, I will handle the media, we just have to win.' And we won. So, there is no issue of character in this."

# India go down to France in Thomas Cup semis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Horsens (Denmark)

India's hopes of reclaiming the title ended in disappointment as they went down 0-3 to France in the semifinals of the Thomas Cup Finals, settling for a bronze medal here on Saturday.

The absence of Lakshya Sen proved costly as HS Prannoy joined Ayush Shetty and Kidambi Srikanth in defeat, losing 19-21, 16-21 to world No. 17 Toma Junior Popov, as India failed to win a single game in a completely one-sided



contest. India, champions in 2022, had already assured themselves of a medal by reaching the semifinals, adding to their bronze finishes in 1952, 1955 and 1979.

With the win, France became only the second European nation to reach the final after Denmark's

# Mittal family buys 75% stake in Rajasthan Royals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Renowned industrialist Lakshmi N. Mittal and his son Aditya Mittal, along with Adar Poonawalla, have acquired a majority stake in Rajasthan Royals with a bid of \$1.65 billion (approximately ₹15,600 crore) after the Kal Somani-Rob Walton-Sheila Ford Hamp consortium pulled out of the race. The transaction consideration (\$1.65 billion) represents the enterprise value of Rajasthan Royals' men's franchise, Paarl Royals and Barbados Royals.

Completion is subject to customary closing conditions, including approvals from the BCCI, the CCI, the IPL Governing Council and other applicable regulatory authorities.

The deal is expected to close in third quarter (Q3) of 2026. Earlier, the US-based consortium led by Somani had offered \$1.63



billion but as per sources it didn't pass due diligence due to multiple issues. "Lakshmi N. Mittal and Aditya Mittal today announce that a definitive agreement has been reached to acquire the Rajasthan Royals, in partnership with Adar Poonawalla,

from Manoj Badale and consortium," a press release issued by Mittal family stated.

As per the release, the Mittal family will own approximately 75 per cent of Rajasthan Royals, with Adar Poonawalla holding

around 18 per cent.

The remaining approximately 7 per cent will be held by approved existing investors, including Manoj Badale. The restructured Rajasthan Royals board will comprise Lakshmi N. Mittal, Aditya Mittal, Vanisha Mittal-Bhatia, Adar Poonawalla and Badale.

"Badale will continue to support Rajasthan Royals, acting as a bridge between the past and the present, and bringing his deep knowledge and experience of cricket to the franchise," the release stated.

In addition to the IPL team, Rajasthan Royals also owns Paarl Royals in South Africa and Barbados Royals in the Caribbean.

Lakshmi N. Mittal, who was born in Sadulpur in North of Rajasthan, said, "I love cricket and my family is from Rajasthan, so there is no IPL team that I would rather be part of than the Rajasthan Royals."

# Difficult to replace Amanjot Kaur: Amol Muzumdar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Mumbai

India Women's head coach Amol Muzumdar on Sunday said it will be difficult for his side to replace all-rounder Amanjot Kaur but added the team is on the right track for next month's T20 World Cup in England with a preparatory camp in Bengaluru.

The Indian team is scheduled to prepare at the Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru from May 10-16 before flying



out to England for a long haul, which includes three T20Is against the hosts before the T20 World Cup.

India will also play a one-off Test against England after the mega event.

"She is injured and it is very difficult to replace somebody like Amanjot. She has been doing consistently well for India," Muzumdar told reporters here on the sidelines of the IISM Degree Distribution Ceremony 2026.

"We will miss her for sure, but injuries are part of the game and she has had a bad one and she will be out of cricket for at least 4-5 months. I hope she recovers well and comes back stronger. She is difficult to replace but that is the way it goes," he added.

Muzumdar said the team is on the right track as far as preparations are concerned. "It (having a camp) has always been an integral part of this team.

# Mahela on Surya: When things aren't going your way, nothing falls in place

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Suryakumar Yadav is going through a phase in his career where nothing is working for him but he has no option but to keep working harder, Mumbai Indians head coach Mahela Jayawardene said, firmly backing the senior batter.

Suryakumar, who scored 700 plus runs during the 2025 season, is enduring a rough patch despite leading the country to T20 World Cup triumph. He has so far totalled 183 runs in nine knocks with a single fifty in Delhi and most of his scores hovered around 20 with hard length deliveries on the body posing challenge for him.

"If he (Surya) gets a few scores together, I think he will find that rhythm. I think sometimes when things are not going your way, it doesn't fall in place," Jayawardene was empathetic while judging Surya's poor show so far.

"I think it was a pretty good shot (his dismissal off Ramakrishna Ghosh) that went straight to the fielder. I mean it's one of those things I mean I played enough cricket to understand," the former Sri Lankan skipper said.

Jayawardene believes that Surya is in a "good space" but then most of his well-timed shots have been caught by fielders stationed at the boundary.