

# Across State

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## Your love is my wealth- PM Modi



Latur

PM Modi addressed enthusiastic crowds in Madha, Dharashiv & Latur, Maharashtra, empathizing with farmers' struggles and assuring them of his government's commitment to finding sustainable solutions. He warned against the Opposition's vile intentions, obstructing the path to a 'Viksit Bharat'.

Inaugurating his speech, PM Modi remarked, "Your love is my wealth. In the last decade, Modi has dedicated every particle of his being and every moment of his time to serving you. Today, the people of Maharashtra witness the stark difference between 10 years of Modi government and 60 years of Congress rule. What Congress couldn't achieve in 60 years, Modi has accomplished in 10. While Congress promised to eradicate poverty for 60 years, Modi has lifted 25 crore people out of poverty in just a decade."

Standing in solidarity with the farmers, PM Modi expressed his dismay over Congress's failure to improve their lives, "For years, the people of Vidarbha and Marathwada have suffered from the agonizing scarcity of water. Despite 60 years of Congress rule, basic needs like water remained unmet. In 2014, 99 long-pending irrigation schemes, 26 of which were from Maharashtra, were finally addressed after decades of neglect. Today, out of the 99 irrigation projects initiated by the Congress, 63 projects have been completed.

"Maharashtra, known for its spirit

of cooperation, has seen remarkable contributions from its sugar cooperatives in empowering farmers. PM Modi is dedicated to expanding the cooperative movement across the nation's rural landscape. Recognizing its importance, a separate Ministry for Cooperation was established in 2019, aiming to form 10,000 Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), of which 8,000 are already operational. The government aims to establish 2 lakh cooperative societies in the next 5 years," PM Modi added in confidence.

Reflecting on the plight of farmers before his government and offering hope, PM Modi shared, "Small farmers often struggle due to inadequate storage facilities, forcing them to sell their produce at lower prices. To address this, we've initiated the world's largest grain storage scheme, with cooperative institutions taking the lead. This will allow farmers to sell their produce at their convenience. In the next 5 years, special storage clusters will be established across the country, benefiting onion farmers in Maharashtra."

"Farmers in Maharashtra have received Rs 32,000 crores under various schemes. Our sugar mills faced income tax issues and legal battles since the 90s. Despite efforts during my tenure as Gujarat's CM, the problem persisted until 2014. The NDA government, under Modi's leadership, provided a solution, granting Rs 10,000 crores in relief to cooperative sugar mills, waiving old

income tax demands, and resolving legal matters. This benefited sugarcane farmers immensely." PM Modi further added.

The PM said, "We have also started the Gobar Dhan Yojana. The NDA government is installing Gobar Gas Plants across the country so that electricity can be produced from animal dung, and farmers can also earn from it. The organic fertilizers produced from it are being made available to farmers at a lower cost."

Highlighting the government's initiatives for free electricity, PM Modi stated, "We're helping farmers become solar energy producers through the PM Kusum Yojana, installing small solar plants for pumps on unused land. They get free electricity, with surplus sold to the government. Modi's initiative eliminates electricity bills for all families through the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, installing panels on rooftops and depositing money into bank accounts. Use free electricity, sell surplus to the government - zero bills, earning from electricity, that's Modi's guarantee."

Stressing how Nari Shakti plays a significant role in building a 'Viksit Bharat', PM Modi iterated, "In the past 10 years, we've connected 10 crore sisters to self-help groups. Today, these sisters are boosting the rural economy. Thanks to our efforts, within a short time, a million sisters have become millionaires. And now, Modi guarantees that 3 crore sisters will become 'Lakshpati Didi'. That's why every sister and daughter is saying today - 'Phir Ek Baar, Modi Sarkar'!"

Questioning the opposition for delay in the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, PM Modi said, "Why did it take 75 years for a task that should have been done immediately after independence? The opportunity was there for Congress, but they only created obstacles in this sacred work. One who has faith in Ram could not have delayed such a task. Congress lacks faith in Ram and the courage required for such a task. We have shown the courage needed for this. That's why the 500-year wait has ended. This happens when you have the power of your vote."

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# Accused In Salman Khan House Firing Case Dies By Suicide In Jail

## Mumbai

One of the two arms suppliers in the firing case outside actor Salman Khan's house died by suicide today while in police custody, sources said.

Anuj Thapan, 32, who was arrested from Punjab on April 26, went to a toilet attached to the police lock-up at 11 am and took the extreme step, sources said.

He stayed with 10 other inmates in the lock-up, guarded by four-five policemen.

He and another accused, Sonu Subhash Chander, allegedly gave the weapons used in firing outside the 'Tiger Zinda Hai' actor's Mumbai home on April 14.

What drove Anuj Thapan to suicide is under investigation, sources said.

Former Maharashtra senior police officer PK Jain told NDTV any death in a lock-up is reported as a murder case. "All the policemen in the police station will be questioned by the CID (Criminal Investigation Department)," Mr Jain said.

The former top cop said police usually ensure lock-ups are checked for any object that could be used by a person to die by

suicide. There have been cases when people have died by suicide with a noose made from pajamas inside lock-ups... A policeman always guards the lock-up to ensure inmates don't escape, and also to keep an eye on suicide attempts," Mr Jain told media.



Two others, Vicky Gupta and Sagar Pal who allegedly fired the shots, are also in police custody. Both were seen on CCTV leaving the area on a motorcycle on the night the incident happened.

All the four accused are known to be directly or indirectly connected with jailed gangster

Lawrence Bishnoi, whose main activities according to the anti-terror body National Investigation Agency (NIA) involve kidnapping, murder, extortion for ransom, cross-border smuggling of sophisticated weapons and narcotics, in-land smuggling of contraband, and illegal liquor smuggling.

The Mumbai Crime Branch last month said it had found strong evidence against Lawrence Bishnoi and his brother Anmol Bishnoi, after which the Crime Branch announced both as the most wanted suspects in the case.

# Ex-Mumbai police commissioner Sanjay Pandey drops plans to contest Lok Sabha election: 'I plan to wait'

## Mumbai

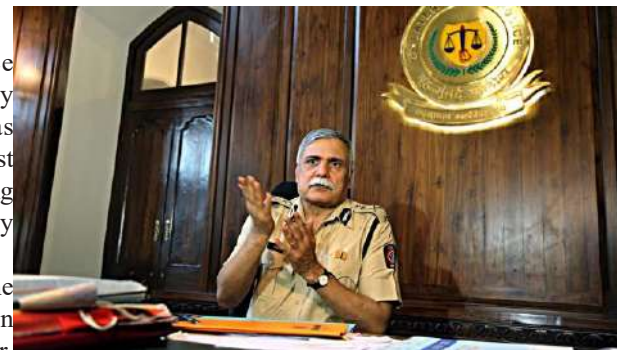
Former Mumbai police commissioner Sanjay Pandey on Wednesday said he has dropped his plans to contest the Lok Sabha election, saying "the system, after all, is only parties".

On Saturday, Pandey, the retired 1986-batch Indian Police Service (IPS) officer,

said he was contemplating contesting the Lok Sabha election 2024 as an Independent candidate from the Mumbai North Central constituency. The BJP has fielded Senior Advocate Ujwal Nikam and Congress has nominated Varsha Gaikwad from this Lok Sabha seat.

Pandey, the former DGP of Maharashtra, said he gave serious thought to contesting the election as many citizens from the area (Mumbai North-West) had been urging him to contest the poll.

However, on Wednesday Pandey posted an open letter on X addressing Mumbaikars. He said, "Some (citizens) said I was on a leash and others spent the night oil to convince how I was spoiling the possible June party. And along side this, herding started and shepherds were alerted. All this was normal, but what has



weighed the most is call by people I regard the most. Calling me early hours, stating their unstinted support, but doubting, if this will not damage me personally. The system, after all, is only parties. Candidates don't matter. So before it hurts either the shepherds or the party goers, I plan to wait."

Considered close to Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, Pandey was appointed the Mumbai police commissioner on February 18, 2022, and retired from service on June 30 of the same year. A month later he was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in July and September 2022, respectively, in connection with the NSE phone tapping case. He spent nearly five months behind bars following his arrest.

# Congress fields Bhushan Patil from Mumbai North to take on Piyush Goyal

## Mumbai

The Congress Tuesday announced party's Mumbai vice-president Bhushan Patil as the candidate from Mumbai North Lok Sabha seat.

He will take on BJP candidate and Union Minister Piyush Goyal.

While Mumbai North is considered as one of the strongholds of the BJP with sizeable Gujarati population, the Congress was also mulling over the option to field a Gujarati candidate from this seat.

However, the party seem to have finalised on Patil's name, who is known to be a loyal Congress worker from the region.

Out of the six assembly seats in Mumbai North — Dahisar, Borivali,



Magathane, Kandivli East, Charkop and Malad West — five are with the ruling alliance while the lone seat of Malad West is with Congress.

As per the seat sharing agreement between the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), Congress is to contest on two out of six seats in Mumbai: Mumbai North Central and



Mumbai North.

The party had delayed the announcement on this seat as it does not have a strong face to counter Goyal.

Two weeks ago, party had even offered Shiv Sena — UBT leader Vinod Ghosalkar to contest from this seat on Congress' symbol, which he declined.

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# Shinde Sena fields MLA Yamini Jadhav from Mumbai South seat



## Mumbai

The Shinde Sena has named Byculla MLA Yamini Jadhav as its candidate for the Mumbai South seat to take on sitting Sena UBT MP Arvind Sawant.

Jadhav has been picked after much deliberations with the party considering various names including Milind Deora, and the BJP too evincing interest in putting up a candidate from the seat.

The names of Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar and that of BJP MLA Mangal Prabhat Lodha were also being touted as prospective candidates in case Shinde acceded to the BJP's demand of handing over the seat.

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Sena had, however, been insistent that it would contest the seat.

Jadhav, 56, is a first-time MLA and is a former corporator. She is the wife of former standing committee chairman of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) Yashwant Jadhav.

A three-time corporator, Yashwant Jadhav was first elected in 1997 from the Mazgaon area. After winning the corporation election for a third time in 2017,

he was elected as the chairman of the standing committee, a key panel which has power to sanction expenditure proposals and approve Budgets.

The couple had faced corruption charges levelled against them by BJP leader Kirit Somaiya.

In February 2022, the Income Tax department had conducted searches at the premises of the Jadhavs over alleged charges of tax evasion. The tax department had earlier found alleged discrepancies in the election affidavit of Jadhav's wife Yamini filed for 2019 Assembly polls. The discrepancy pertained to a few transactions with a Kolkata-based shell company that the tax department suspects was allegedly used to launder money to the tune of Rs 15 crore.

Yashwant Jadhav was probed by the ED in a case of alleged Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) violations.

Prior to the ED action, the Income Tax officials too had attached a flat belonging to the Jadhavs in Bandra and nearly 40 properties linked to Yashwant over the charges of tax evasion.

The two, however, switched sides after the split in the Sena, joining the Shinde camp.

# MLA Ravindra Waikar is Shiv Sena nominee from Mumbai North West

## Mumbai

The Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has nominated MLA Ravindra Waikar as its candidate from the Mumbai North West Lok Sabha constituency.

Waikar, who was facing heat from the Enforcement Directorate (ED), had recently switched over from the Shiv Sena UBT led by Uddhav to the Shiv Sena. He will take on Amol Kirtikar of the Shiv Sena UBT. Waikar replaces sitting Shiv Sena MP Gajanan Kirtikar, father of his electoral rival. The announcement of Waikar's name comes after much deliberation in the Shinde camp over whom to field from the said seat. Waikar is a three-time MLA from Jogeshwari East. He started his political career as a corporator in Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and served four terms. He was also the chairman of the BMC standing committee from 2006 to 2009.

Waikar was a minister in the BJP-Shiv Sena and Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi (MVA) governments in the state. He was a close associate of Uddhav Thackeray and was known to be part of the clan's kitchen cabinet.

Waikar's troubles with central agencies began after the Shiv Sena split. In September 2023, the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Mumbai police booked Waikar and five others on a complaint by BJP leader Kirit Somaiya. The BJP leader alleged that Waikar was involved in a Rs 500-crore scam. He claimed that Waikar fraudulently obtained approval for constructing a five-star hotel on a plot reserved for a garden by using his political influence, causing huge loss to



the BMC.

The ED registered a case of money laundering against Waikar in November 2023, based on the Mumbai police's EOW's FIR. The ED raided seven premises connected to Waikar and questioned him several times.

After the Bombay High Court on September 8, 2023, dismissed his plea against BMC's decision to cancel permission to develop the land to build a five-star hotel on Jogeshwari Vikhroli Link Road (JVLR), Waikar approached the Supreme Court.

Amid talks that Waikar had smoked the peace pipe with Shinde, the BMC informed the Supreme Court on February 26 that it was withdrawing its earlier order that had revoked permission granted to Waikar to build the five-star hotel and submitted that it would reconsider his application.

After the BMC reversed its decision, the ED case weakened, and two weeks later, he joined the Shinde faction. The Eknath Shinde led Shiv Sena is said to have had a difficult time in finding a replacement for outgoing MP Gajanan Kirtikar from the constituency, which consists of the six assembly seats of

Jogeshwari East, Dindoshi, Goregaon, Versova, Andheri East and Andheri West.

After exploring various options, the Sena is said to have chosen a reticent Waikar due to his substantial clout in the area.

"Waikar is synonymous with work. This has become my brand. I have been serving people for 35 years. My campaigning has been on for the last 35 years," Waikar said after this name was announced. When asked if the investigation against him launched by the central agencies were instrumental in him switching sides, Waikar said that he has been absolved of all charges.

"Waikar does not bow down to any pressure. There are no charges against me. All the charges that the BMC has levelled against me have been taken back," Waikar said. His electoral rival Amol Kirtikar is facing Enforcement Directorate investigation for his alleged involvement in the "khichdi" scam related to irregularities in the contracts allotted to companies by the BMC for the preparation and distribution of khichdi food to migrant workers during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

# Day after PM's 'bhatakti aatma' jibe, Pawar says his soul restless for farmers, common man

## Mumbai

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi attacked Sharad Pawar terming him "bhatakti aatma" (wandering soul), the Nationalist Congress Party (SP) chief Tuesday hit back saying that his soul is "restless" thinking of ways to present the plight of farmers and common man.

Speaking at an election campaign rally of party's Shirur candidate Amol Kolhe, Pawar said, "This soul is restless.

It is restless not for selfish goals but thinking of ways to present the plight of farmers. Common citizens are fed up of inflation and facing problems in everyday life and I cannot rest until I voice that unease," said Pawar, without naming Modi.

"But that restlessness is because of people's plight. Maharashtra cannot be helpless. It will never



compromise on pride," Pawar added. In an election campaign rally in Pune on Monday, targeting Pawar, Modi had said, "There is a 'bhatakti atma' (wandering soul) in Maharashtra. If it does not manage to success it spoils others' good work. Maharashtra has been a victim of it."

The NCP-SP had reacted sharply saying Pawar is the soul

of Maharashtra.

"He (Modi) does not understand that Sharad Pawar is the soul of Maharashtra. The more he speaks against him, the greater will be the support to him (Pawar)," said NCP-SP state president Jayant Patil.

Former minister and senior party leader Anil Deshmukh, referring to Modi, said, "The restless soul from Gujarat is moving from pillar to post in this summer for the sake of votes because of him (Pawar)."



## Rajnath files nomination from Lucknow, Smriti Amethi



### New Delhi

Seeking his third consecutive term, Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh filed his nomination from the BJP's traditional stronghold Lucknow, while Union minister Smriti Irani filed her nomination for the Amethi Lok Sabha seat in UP on Monday.

Accompanied by Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath and Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami, Rajnath carried out a roadshow through the streets of Lucknow before filing his nomination.

Lucknow, set to vote in the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections on May 20, will witness a heated electoral battle between Rajnath Singh and Samajwadi Party candidate Ravidas Mehrotra for the coveted parliamentary seat.

Prior to filing his nomination, he offered prayers at the Dakshin Mukhi Hanuman Temple and the Hanuman Setu Temple in

### Lucknow.

In Amethi, Smriti Irani has once again entered the electoral fray. Expressing confidence in the electorate, she believes that the people will bless the BJP and PM Narendra Modi in the upcoming elections.



In 2019, Irani had clinched Amethi from the Congress by defeating Rahul Gandhi by 55,000 votes. As of now, the Congress has not declared its candidate from Amethi.

Accompanied by Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav, Irani also participated in a roadshow.

## ISRO delayed Chandrayaan-3 launch by 4 seconds to dodge space debris

### New Delhi

India's Chandrayaan-3 mission, which made a soft-landing near the south pole of the moon, lifted off four seconds late to avoid hitting a piece of space debris, the ISRO said in a recent report.

According to the Indian Situational Space Awareness Report (ISSAR) for 2023, the nominal lift-off of the Launch Vehicle Mark-3, carrying the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft, had to be delayed by four seconds based on the Collision on Launch Avoidance (COLA) analysis.

The delay was necessary to avoid close approaches between a debris object and the injected satellites in their orbital phase due to overlapping operational altitudes, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said.

According to the European Space Agency, more than 60 years of space activities have resulted in some 56,450 tracked objects in orbit, of which about 28,160 remain in space and are regularly tracked by the US Space Surveillance Network (USSSN) and maintained in their catalogue.

## At least 100 schools receive bomb threats in Delhi NCR; found nothing after checks, say police

### New Delhi/Noida

At least 100 schools in the Delhi-NCR area received bomb threats through emails on Wednesday leading to chaos and widespread alarm but "nothing objectionable" was found, officials said, requesting people not to panic.

The schools were evacuated after local police were informed about the threat emails.

According to Delhi Fire Service (DFS), at least 97 calls from different schools have been received till noon on Wednesday. All the calls are being attended diligently, an officer said. Multiple private schools in Noida and Greater Noida also received the bomb threat. The Ministry of Home Affairs said it appears to be a hoax threat and that there is no need to panic. Delhi Police said it had conducted a thorough check of all schools that received the bomb threat but found nothing. "Some schools of Delhi received emails regarding bomb threats. Delhi Police has conducted thorough check of all such schools as per protocol," Delhi Police said in a post on X.

"Nothing objectionable has been found. It appears that these calls seem to be hoax. We request the public not to panic and maintain peace," it said.

According to Delhi police officials, the email is suspected to have been sent from one source to schools in Delhi and adjoining Noida and Greater Noida. Sources said the content of the mail to every school is the same. The Union Home Ministry termed the bomb threat as a "hoax" and asked people not to panic. Police and security agencies are taking necessary steps as per protocol, the ministry said.

"There is no need to panic. Mails appear to be hoax. Delhi Police and security agencies are taking necessary steps as per protocol," a home ministry official said. Noida Police said all such schools that received the emails were thoroughly checked. The bomb threat was found to be a hoax, Additional Commissioner of Police (law and order) Shivhari Meena said. "This morning a threatening email was received by a chain of schools after which police teams responded to the situation immediately," Additional CP Meena said. "All such schools that received the threats were thoroughly checked and sanitised. At no place any such thing (threat) has come to light and it is proved that the email was sent to trigger a rumour," he said. Reacting to the development, Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena wrote on X that he spoke to the police commissioner and sought a detailed report into the bomb threats at schools in Delhi-NCR.

"Directed Delhi Police to carry out a thorough search in school premises, identify the culprits and ensure there are no lapses," he said, requesting parents not to panic and cooperate with the administration in ensuring safety of schools and the children.

"The miscreants and culprits will not be spared," he added.

Delhi Education Minister Atishi also requested parents not to panic and wrote on X, "Some schools have received bomb threats this morning. Students have been evacuated



and those premises are being searched by Delhi Police. So far nothing has been found in any of the schools.

"We are in constant touch with the police and the schools. Would request parents and citizens not to panic. School authorities will be in touch with parents wherever needed," Atishi said.

Visuals from Mayur Vihar's Mother's Mary school showed concerned parents assembling outside the school to pick their children.

The school administration was seen making announcements on the microphone while parents rushed to collect their wards.

"I dropped my child 10-15 minutes ago. Then I received a call from the school to take my child back due to some emergency," Vijay Kumar, a parent, said.

"I had come to drop my children. I saw a lot of people had gathered here and there were shouts of people coming from inside the school. When we inquired, we didn't get any satisfactory response," Manoj Kumar, a local resident and parent of a student studying in the school, said.

Similar visuals were seen outside Chanakyapuri's Sanskriti School where parents were seen rushing to pick their wards. Fire tenders, ambulances and lines of police vehicles were seen on stand-by outside the schools, while bomb detection teams and bomb disposal squads were conducting searches inside the schools. Kirti, another parent, said she dropped her son at BGS International School, Dwarka, and was waiting outside for him to go inside when she saw him return with school staff. "As usual I was waiting outside of the school when I saw my son returning along with all the staff members. I was very worried...When some people shouted that there was a bomb in school, I immediately asked my son to sit on the scooter," she said. Several schools called and sent messages to parents to urgently pick their wards from the school. In Noida too, bomb disposal squads and sniffer dogs were rushed to the schools which received the threat. Overall security was beefed up in the twin cities as a precautionary measure. The threat was sent to branches of Delhi Public School (DPS) in Noida and Greater Noida, and some other schools via emails by an anonymous sender, Noida police officials said. Other schools that did not receive bomb threats were also flooded with queries by parents and guardians who were worried about their wards' safety. According to police officials, initial investigations suggest that mails have been sent to multiple locations since Tuesday, which appear to have the same pattern.



## 66.14% turnout in Ph-I, 66.71% in second: EC



### New Delhi

After facing day-long political brickbats from Opposition leaders for not sharing final polling data for the first two phases of voting for the Lok Sabha elections, the Election Commission of India (ECI) this evening released the much awaited figures, more than 10 days after the first phase of polling on April 19.

According to the ECI, the polling percentage during the first phase (April 19) was 66.14, while the turnout was slightly higher (66.71 per cent) during the second phase (April 26).

In the first phase, West Bengal led with 81.9 per cent turnout (three seats), while Tripura recorded a turnout of 81.4 per cent (one seat) and Sikkim 79.8 per cent (one seat). Bihar recorded the lowest turnout among states in the first phase at 49.2 per cent for four seats. Uttarakhand witnessed a modest turnout of 57.2 per cent (all five seats), and Tamil Nadu 69.7 per cent (all 39 seats).

The seat-wise data showed that Jalpaiguri in West Bengal recorded a turnout of 83.6 per cent, Arunachal East 83.3 per cent, West Bengal's Cooch Behar 82.1 per cent, Chhindwara in Madhya Pradesh 81 per cent and Inner Manipur 79 per cent.

Among the seats that recorded the lowest turnout were Almora in Uttarakhand with 48.7 per cent and Nawada 43.7 per cent.

In the second phase, the sole seat of Outer Manipur witnessed 84.8 per cent

turnout, the highest among states. Other the states that saw high voter turnout in that phase were Assam with 81 per cent (five seats), Tripura 80.3 per cent (single seat), West Bengal 76.5 per cent (three seats) and Chhattisgarh 76.5 per cent (three seats). Uttar Pradesh witnessed the lowest turnout in the second phase at 55.1 per cent.

The seat-wise turnout in Assam's Darrang-Udalguri was 82 per cent, Nagaon 84.9 per cent, Karnataka's Mandya 81 per cent, Kolar 78.2 per cent, Hassan 77.5 per cent, Dakshin Kannada 77.6 per cent, Udupi 77 per cent, Kerala's Kannur 77.2 per cent, Karnataka's Chikkaballapur 77 per cent, Chhattisgarh's Kanker 76 per cent and Balurghat in West Bengal 79 per cent. Madhya Pradesh's Rewa seat recorded a turnout of 49 per cent, Uttar Pradesh's Mathura 49.4 per cent and Ghaziabad 49.8 per cent.

The data's release was preceded by political hollering by Opposition leaders, who raised suspicion over the delay in making the two phases data public. CPM secretary general Sitaram Yechuri called it a disturbing trend. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh termed ECI's attitude as "Quite surprising!" NCP leader Supriya Sule said, "It's time for the Election Commission to withstand undue pressure, assert its authority, ensure transparency."

## BJP will not tolerate any insult to women: Amit Shah on sexual abuse allegations against Prajwal Revanna

### Guwahati

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday condemned the alleged sexual abuse of women involving Lok Sabha MP Prajwal Revanna, asserting that the BJP will not tolerate any insult to women.

Revanna (33) is the BJP-JD(S) alliance candidate for Hassan Lok Sabha constituency, which went to polls on April 26.

Earlier in the day, the JD(S) suspended Revanna from the party with immediate effect.

"The issue regarding Revanna that has been reported in the media is very hurtful and cannot be tolerated in any way," Shah told in a press conference here.

"The BJP's stand is very clear; we will not tolerate any insult to 'matri aur nari shakti' (women empowerment)," he asserted.

Some explicit video clips allegedly involving Prajwal Revanna, the grandson of former prime minister HD Deve Gowda, were circulated in Hassan over



the last few days.

The home minister said Congress has been alleging that an NDA partner's candidate is involved in the incident, "but I just want to ask a small question - whose government is there in that

state (Karnataka)?"

"The Congress is in power in Karnataka, and this matter must have come to their attention. Why has it not taken any action on it so far? We cannot take any action as law and order is a state issue,"

## Popular Bhojpuri actress Amrita Pandey found dead at home

### Bhagalpur

Bhojpuri actress Annapurna, popularly known as Amrita Pandey, was found dead under mysterious circumstances at her residence in Bhagalpur district in Bihar, a senior police officer said on Tuesday.

The actress was found dead at Divyadharma Apartment in Adampur Ship Ghat here on April 27.

It is suspected that the 27-year-old actress might have committed suicide as hours before her death, she had reportedly posted a cryptic note on her WhatsApp status. However, cops have not recovered any suicide note.

As per reports, her WhatsApp status read, 'Do naav mein sawar thi uski zindagi, humne apni naav duba ke uska safar aasaan kar diya (His/her life was sailing on two boats, we drowned our boat to



make his/her path easy').

The actress, who resided in Mumbai, had travelled to Bhagalpur to attend a family function.

On the condition of anonymity, a local police officer told media persons that according to her family members, Amrita's sister went to her room at 3.30 pm. She found her hanging. They took her to the nearest hospital where she

was declared dead.

She is survived by her husband, Chandramani Jhangad, an animation engineer.

Anand Kumar, Senior Superintendent of Police, Bhagalpur said, "The police have already ordered an inquiry into Amrita's death. We have collected all available scientific evidence from the spot. They have been sent for forensic examination. The case is being investigated in a scientific manner under the supervision of a senior police officer of the district. We are also recording statements of the family members of the victim. The exact cause of death can only be known after completion of the inquiry."

Amrita worked in several Bhojpuri movies. She worked with Khesari Lal Yadav in Deewanapan. She also acted in a number of Hindi films and shows.



## Operationally ready to deter rivals: New Indian Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi

New Delhi

The new Navy Chief, Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, today said his singular focus and endeavour would be to ensure that the Navy remained operationally ready to “win a war at sea” when tasked with doing so.

Admiral Tripathi took over as the 26th Navy Chief today following the retirement of Admiral R Hari Kumar.

In his remarks after taking over, Admiral Tripathi said: “The existing and emerging challenges in the maritime domain mandate the Navy to remain operationally ready to deter potential adversaries at sea in peace and to win a war at sea when asked to.”

The Navy Chief said over the years, the Navy had evolved into a combat-ready, cohesive, credible and future-proof force.

The Admiral promised to strengthen the ongoing efforts of



the Navy towards self-reliance in new technologies and becoming an important pillar of the nation's development.

He said his priority would be to upskill the human resources of the Navy and provide them with the best armament, training, professional environment and administrative support. Admiral Tripathi is an alumnus of Sainik School, Rewa, and the National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla.

He was commissioned on July 1, 1985, into the Executive Branch of the Navy. A communication and electronic warfare specialist, he has served on frontline warships of the Navy as Signal Communication Officer and Electronic Warfare Officer and later as the Executive Officer and Principal Warfare Officer of the guided missile destroyer, INS Mumbai.

## Was being forced to expel Congress loyalists, my conscience didn't allow that: Arvinder Singh Lovely

New Delhi

Senior Congress leader Arvinder Singh Lovely, the tallest Sikh leader of the party in the national capital, on Tuesday said he resigned as Delhi Congress president to escape “constant pressure being exerted on him to suspend hardcore Congress men whose generations dedicated their lives for the party and not because of a pre-Lok Sabha poll alliance with AAP”.

Speaking to The Tribune, Lovely attacked Dipak Babaria, AICC general secretary (Delhi and Haryana), saying, “The general secretary wanted me to act against diehard Congress leaders who were upset that two of the only three seats we got in a pre-poll pact with AAP had been handed out to outsiders.”

“Even an ordinary politician would know that on election eve, we need to pacify those who are upset not expel them,” Lovely said as factional wars in state Congress unit surfaced with ex-minister and Congress Working Committee member Ajay Maken-led group scoring in the first round as Maken loyalist Devender Yadav took over as interim Delhi unit chief replacing Lovely.

Lovely said he was taken aback with the speed at which his resignation was accepted.

“The Congress, which is famous for delaying decisions, accepted my four-page resignation letter within hours and general secretary concluded soon thereafter that I had resigned under BJP pressure, a patent lie,” Lovely said, adding that he had hoped to be engaged with Lok Sabha poll looming on May 25.

The ex-Delhi Congress chief also disclosed that Babaria wanted him to act against Raj Kumar Chauhan, PWD minister in the late Sheila Dikshit-led state government for 12 years; Congress district president Surinder Kumar, a former three-time MLA; Sheila Dikshit's son and ex-MP Sandeep Dikshit; besides about 15 block presidents.

“These leaders agitated outside the Delhi state Congress office against the ticket to outsiders (read Kanhaiya Kumar in North East Delhi and Udit Raj in North West Delhi). They needed to be pacified, not expelled. A disciplinary committee meeting was called at the party office without my knowledge. Messages were sent to me to show cause and suspend them. My conscience did not allow me and I quit,” Lovely said. Delhi Congress leaders had in the past accepted outsider nominees who were party stalwarts, former PM Manmohan Singh, former minister Arjun Singh, ex-CM Sheila Dikshit, late actor Rajesh Khanna among them, he added.

“But this time, we have gone too far with outsider nominees. As state chief, I wasn't even informed who the candidates will be,” Lovely said, adding that the AAP-Congress alliance was not the reason he quit and he “in fact ensured Delhi cadres fell in line with the alliance unlike in Punjab.”

Asked what he would do next amid speculation that the BJP could replace its East Delhi candidate with him, Lovely said, “I have been meeting my supporters. I have not said I am leaving so the Congress need not be scared. But their constant caustic statements targeting me are not helping. They should stop provoking me.”

## Congress fields Raj Babbar from Gurgaon, Anand Sharma Kangra, Satpal Raizada Hamirpur



New Delhi

The Congress today fielded veteran leader and former Union Minister Anand Sharma as its candidate from the Kangra Lok Sabha constituency in Himachal Pradesh and actor-turned-politician Raj Babbar from Gurgaon.

While Sharma (71) will take on BJP veteran and former Chief Minister Shanta Kumar's confidante Rajiv Bhardwaj of the BJP in Kangra, Babbar will contest against Union Minister Rao Inderjit Singh in Gurgaon.

Satpal Raizada, who lost the 2022 Himachal Assembly poll to BJP's Satpal Satti in Una, has been named the Congress candidate against Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur, who is seeking a fifth straight term from Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh.

Anand Sharma's candidature is significant as it comes close on the heels of the party's Rajya Sabha poll loss to the BJP. In that episode, where Congress nominee Abhishek Singhvi lost to BJP's Harsh Mahajan, Anand

Sharma was learnt to be cross with the party leadership for denying his claim to the Rajya Sabha from Himachal. This will be Sharma's first Lok Sabha election. He once contested the Shimla Assembly seat in 1982.

In Kangra, the BJP has dropped incumbent MP Kishan Kapoor, who won by a record margin in 2019, and fielded party's state vice-president Rajiv Bhardwaj.

The Congress had won 11 of Kangra's 17 Assembly constituencies in the Himachal poll in 2022.

The candidature of Raj Babbar, who has remained a member of both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha on two occasions each, was backed by former Haryana Chief Minister and current Leader of Opposition in the Haryana Assembly Bhupinder Singh Hooda.

The Congress also announced Bhushan Patil as its candidate from the Mumbai North parliamentary constituency opposite BJP's Piyush Goyal, who is the Union Commerce and Food Minister.

## BJP wants 400-plus seats to take away poor people's rights: Congress chief

New Delhi

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday said the BJP wants to win more than 400 Lok Sabha seats not for the welfare of the poor, but to take away their rights.

“Modi and his followers keep asking for a 400-plus figure. They are seeking 400-plus seats not for the welfare of the poor, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and backward classes. They are seeking it to take away the poor people's rights by changing the Constitution,” Kharge said.

The Congress president said RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat had to clarify that they were not going to change the Constitution or end reservation because some BJP leaders had mentioned such plans earlier. “The BJP talks about the poor, but helps industrialists Adani and Ambani,” Kharge said.

Speaking at an election rally in Chhattisgarh's Janjgir-Champa district, Kharge sought votes for Shivkumar Dahariya, Congress candidate from the constituency. “This election is being fought to keep India united and save the Constitution and democracy,” Kharge said.



# PM: We target terrorists in their homes, do not send dossiers

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said his government had adopted a bold approach on national security and believed in hitting terrorists by entering their homes instead of sending dossiers on them, which was the practice under the Congress rule.

Speaking at rallies in Madha, Dharashiv and Latur in Maharashtra, the PM painted a contrast with the erstwhile Congress-led UPA which was in power at the time of the 2008 Mumbai terror attack.

“Earlier, India handed dossiers to Pakistan, now it conducts surgical strikes. Under Congress rule, the economy was in shambles, with headlines lamenting falling growth rates



and GDP figures. Every day brought news of a new scam. But now, corrupt individuals are behind bars,” he said.

Later in Telangana, Modi employed the analogy

of blockbuster Telugu film “RRR” to attack the Congress in Telangana and said people of the state were being burdened with the “RR tax”.

Without naming Chief

Minister Revanth Reddy of the Congress, the PM said: “The Telugu film industry has given India blockbuster films like RRR. However, today, the Telangana Congress has burdened the state’s people with RR tax. The film RRR has brought India’s name to the forefront worldwide. But this RR tax is bringing shame to India.”

He added: “There is widespread discussion about this RR tax in Telangana. It is alleged that industrialists and contractors in Telangana are required to pay a certain percentage of RR tax. It is claimed that a significant portion of the total collection here goes to Delhi as RR tax.”

The PM reiterated that the Congress was planning to bring

inheritance tax and reservation for Muslims. “Congress has found a new way to loot you - inheritance tax. Under their rule, 55 per cent of your lifetime earnings won’t go to your children, but to their vote bank supporters. Beware of their dangerous intentions,” said Modi at a rally in Zaheerabad. Amid an attack on the BJP over ally JD (S) MP Prajwal Revanna’s alleged sex tapes, the PM said women’s empowerment and safety were paramount for the party.

The PM’s Telangana push seeks to boost the BJP’s prospects in the state where it currently has four MPs out of 17. The party is hoping to add to its kitty as part of the plans to expand in the south.

## Need to formulate national security policy, says NN Vohra

New Delhi

Former J&K Governor NN Vohra today advocated having a national security policy that has all components of security framework in place. It should address how each component co-relates, what its command structure is, who is answerable and in case of contingency, what the response would be, he said.

He was speaking at the 4th General K Sundarji Memorial Lecture organised by the Mechanised Infantry Centre and School (MIC&S) of the Indian Army and the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS).

General Sundarji wrote something on this in the 1980s, said Vohra, adding that the government never considered it relevant to have such a policy. “In the absence of such a policy, there is a mental hesitation and there exists a vast freedom of making ad hoc decisions,” he added. Vohra, who was a part of the Kargil Review Committee, said the committee suggested having a pool of officers who would spend their entire lives in the security-related ministries such as Defence, Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs, and intelligence agencies.

Vohra, who served in the Ministry of Defence for eight



years, including as the Defence Secretary (March 1990 to April 1993), said: “General Sundarji was a far-sighted Army officer.” During his tenure as the Army Chief (1986-1988), General Sundarji carried out ‘Operation Brasstacks’ and spoke about the gaps in war fighting and rewrote the Army manual.

On history of the armed forces, Vohra said: “I don’t see

any reason why the Henderson Brookes report on the debacle in the 1962 India-China war cannot be sent to all training academies and be de-classified.” There should be no hurry in reducing the number of operational commands from the present 17; the Chief of Defence Staff should take his own time, he said.

Vohra, who has also served

as the Union Home Secretary (April 1993 to May 1994) mentioned “chronic problems” the nation faces. “The North-East is seeing ethnic clashes, some of these are pre-1947 and some are backed by foreign agencies. Second is the demand for Khalistan abetted by Pakistan. Groups are carrying out a subversive propaganda that

the movement is not dead. Pakistan perpetuated terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir; drugs and arms smuggling, fake currency and illegal immigration are among the other problems,” he said.

The Ministry of Home Affairs needed to shed all non-security duties and become the nodal authority for security all over the country, he said. The Central Armed Police Forces should not be called for election duty, said Vohra, warning that long internal security duty for the Army was changing the character of the troops. The Army should step in only in case foreign-backed insurgency was being fomented, he said.

Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande underscored the foresight of General Sundarji and highlighted his vision in the fields of digitisation of the battlefield, information warfare, technology infusion, conventional strategies and force structure, reflected in his work, “Vision 2100”. Lt Gen Subrata Saha (retd), former Deputy Chief of Army and member, National Security Advisory Board, delivered a talk on “Modernising India’s Armed Forces: Lessons from Gen K Sundarji”.



## 'Anupama'-fame actor Rupali Ganguly joins BJP



### New Delhi

Actress Rupali Ganguly, known for her roles in 'Anupama' and 'Sarabhai vs Sarabhai', officially joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the party's headquarters in Delhi on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference, Ganguly expressed her enthusiasm for contributing to the party's development agenda.

"When I see this 'Mahayagya' of development, I feel that I should also take part in this...I need your blessings and support

so that whatever I do, I do it right and good," Ganguly stated.

Earlier in March, Ganguly had met the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an experience she described as unforgettable. Taking to Instagram, she shared her excitement, stating, 'Last Week was special for reasons beyond words and 8th March 2024 will go down as one of the most memorable and cherished days of my life! A day I will not stop reliving in my mind and feel euphoric about.'

Reflecting on her dream coming true, Ganguly expressed gratitude for the opportunity to meet PM Modi, showcasing her admiration for the leader. With her entry into BJP, Ganguly embarks on a new journey in the political realm, seeking support and blessings for her endeavours.

## Supreme Court asks ED to explain timing of Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal's arrest



### New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday questioned the Enforcement Directorate on the timing of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest in a money laundering case linked to the Delhi excise policy scam ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. While hearing Kejriwal's petition challenging the Delhi High Court's April 9 verdict upholding his arrest by the ED, a Bench of Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Dipankar Datta posed five questions to Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, representing the probe agency, raised by the Delhi Chief Minister in his rejoinder affidavit.

The ED had arrested Kejriwal on March 21 after the Delhi High Court refused to grant him protection from coercive action by the probe agency in the money laundering case. The HC had on April 9 dismissed Kejriwal's petition challenging his arrest by the ED, saying there was no violation of law as there was "enough material" that justified his arrest. On Saturday, Kejriwal had told the SC his arrest by the ED in the case was a classic case of a ruling party misusing probe agencies to crush its biggest political opponent — AAP and its leaders — even as the ED described him as "the kingpin and key conspirator of the Delhi excise scam". On behalf of Kejriwal, senior counsel Abhishek Manu Singhvi asserted no trace of proceeds of crime had been found and there was no proof of his direct involvement. "Possession of even unaccounted property acquired by legal means will not constitute proceeds of crime," he submitted.

Noting that life and liberty were exceedingly important, the Bench asked Raju to come prepared with answers to the five

queries, including the one on the timing of the arrest and the gap between initiation of proceedings against him and his arrest. After hearing Singhvi's arguments that termed Kejriwal's arrest illegal, the SC sought to know if without there being adjudicatory proceeding, could the ED initiate criminal proceedings on account of the top court's rulings in 'Pankaj Bansal versus Union of India' and 'Vijay Madanlal versus Union of India' cases. "There are no proceedings of attachment in this case so far, and if there are, then show us how the petitioner is involved," the Bench said. In Madanlal's case, the top court had upheld the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) but that verdict is under review, while in Bansal's case, it ruled the ED must supply in writing the grounds of arrest to PMLA accused. Noting that in co-accused Manish Sisodia's case there were findings in favour and against, the Bench asked the probe agency to explain "where does the Kejriwal case lie?" It also asked the ASG to address it on the argument that the threshold of Section 19 of PMLA, which put onus on the prosecution and not on accused, is fairly high and thus asking for regular bail does not happen as they are confronted with Section 45 and onus shifts on them. "So how do we interpret it? Do we make the threshold much higher and ensure that the standard is the same to find the person who is guilty?" it said. Section 19 of the PMLA empowers authorised ED officials to arrest a person based on the material in their possession, providing a reasonable basis to suspect that the individual concerned has committed an offence punishable under the Act.

Section 45 says an accused can't be released on bail unless the public prosecutor has been given an opportunity to oppose the bail plea and if the public prosecutor opposes the bail application, the court can grant him bail only if it's satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that he is not guilty of such offence and that he is not likely to commit any offence while on bail.

## SC appreciates 'marked improvement' in public apology by Patanjali founder Ramdev

### New Delhi

Appreciating a "marked improvement" in the unconditional public apology published in newspapers by Patanjali Ayurved co-founders Swami Ramdev and Acharya Balkrishna and the company, the Supreme Court on Tuesday granted the duo exemption from personal appearance on the next date of hearing in the 'misleading' advertisement case.

"There has been a marked improvement from the last. Earlier, it was small and there was only Patanjali, no names, now names have come. Language is adequate. It's a marked improvement. We appreciate that. Now, finally they (proposed contemnors) have understood that's the benefit of an intelligent counsel assisting the court," a Bench of Justice Hima Kohli and Justice Amanullah told senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, who represented the proposed contemnors.

The Bench gave another opportunity to them to comply with its order to file the original page of each newspaper in which the public apology was published



and posted the matter for hearing on May 7.

Facing contempt of court proceedings for publication of 'misleading' advertisements, Swami Ramdev and Acharya Balkrishna had on April 16 tendered unconditional apologies in person with folded hands to the Supreme Court which had said they were "not off the hook".

The top court had earlier noted that prima facie the company had violated

the November 21, 2023 undertaking given to the top court. On April 10, the top court had refused to accept their "unconditional" apologies.

The Bench slammed the Uttarakhand State Licensing Authority for its failure to take action against Patanjali Ayurved for years. "It appears from affidavits that authorities got activated to take action only after court order of April 10," the Bench said.



# Covid vaccine can cause rare side-effect, admits AstraZeneca

New Delhi

The British pharmaceutical company, AstraZeneca, has for the first time admitted in court documents that its Covid-19 vaccine can cause Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), a rare side effect associated with blood clotting.

AstraZeneca, in collaboration with the University of Oxford, had developed AZD1222 vaccine after the outbreak of the coronavirus in 2020. In India, it was manufactured and supplied under the name Covishield by Serum Institute of India (SII) through a licence from the university and the Swedish-British drug maker.



However, doctors say that Indians who took the jab should not be worried. Dr Rajeev Jayadevan, Co-Chairman of the National Indian Medical Association, said the side effect of the vaccine was observed only in the first month following the first dose, not afterwards. "All vaccines and medical treatments can have rare side effects. It has been three years since the rollout and there is no cause for concern for those who had taken the vaccine," he told The Tribune.

## Floods kill 45 in central Kenya after dam bursts



MAI MAHIU

Heavy rains in central Kenya killed at least 45 people on Monday when floodwaters swept away houses and cars in the town of Mai Mahiu.

The police said the flooding was caused by a dam that burst, although two local residents said the water had actually broken through a railway embankment after a tunnel that had channeled the water under the tracks was blocked by an earlier landslide. The floodwaters also carried away trees and railway lines.

Road and Transport Minister Kipchumba Murkomen said at least 45 people had been killed, 200 families had been displaced and 150 victims had been rescued. He said he feared the death toll would rise further.

## 'Regularly working' with India in probe on alleged plot to kill Sikh separatist leader: US

Washington

The United States is "regularly working" with India in its investigation into the allegations related to the plot to assassinate Sikh separatist leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a US State Department official has said.

The remarks by US State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel came after The Washington Post, citing unnamed sources, named a Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) officer in connection with the alleged plot to kill Pannun on American soil last year.

India on Tuesday strongly rejected the claims, saying the report made "unwarranted and unsubstantiated" imputations on a serious matter and that an investigation into the case was under way.

Addressing his daily news conference on Tuesday, Patel said, "We continue to expect accountability from the Government of India based on the results of the the Indian inquiry committee's work, and we are regularly working with them and enquiring for additional updates."

"We'll also continue to raise our concerns directly with the Indian Government at senior levels, but beyond that, I'm not going to parse into this further and will defer to the Department of Justice," Patel said when asked about The Washington



Post report, which identified the RAW officer as Vikram Yadav and alleged that he was involved in the plot to assassinate Pannun.

External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal on Tuesday slammed the report by the US daily.

"The report in question makes unwarranted and unsubstantiated imputations on a serious matter," he said in New Delhi.

Jaiswal said a high-level inquiry committee set up by New Delhi to look into inputs provided by the US on the alleged plot was still probing the case.

"There is an ongoing investigation of the high-level committee set up by the Government of India to look into the security concerns shared by the US government on networks of organised criminals, terrorists and others," he said.

"Speculative and irresponsible comments on it are not helpful," Jaiswal added.

In November last year, US federal prosecutors charged Indian national Nikhil Gupta

with working with an Indian government employee in the foiled plot to kill Pannun.

Pannun, wanted in India on terror charges, holds dual citizenship of the US and Canada. He has been designated as a terrorist by the Union home ministry under the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

The allegations about the failed plot to kill Pannun came to the fore weeks after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau claimed in September last year of a "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar on June 18 in British Columbia.

India had strongly rejected the charges.

On December 7, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said in Parliament that India instituted an inquiry committee to look into the inputs received from the US in the Pannun case as the matter had a bearing on national security.

## Putin likely didn't order death of Russian opposition leader Navalny, US official says

Washington

The US intelligence officials have determined that Russian President Vladimir Putin likely didn't order the death of imprisoned opposition leader Alexei Navalny in February, according to an official familiar with the determination.

While US officials believe Putin was ultimately responsible for the death of Navalny, who endured brutal conditions during his confinement, the intelligence community has found "no smoking gun" that Putin was aware of the timing of Navalny's death — which came soon before the Russian president's reelection — or directly ordered it, according to the official.

The official spoke on the condition of

anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter.

Soon after Navalny's death, US President Joe Biden said Putin was ultimately responsible but did not accuse the Russian president of directly ordering it.

At the time, Biden said the US did not know exactly what had happened to Navalny but that "there is no doubt" that his death "was the consequence of something that Putin and his thugs did".

Navalny, 47, Russia's best-known opposition politician and Putin's most persistent foe, died February 16 in a remote penal colony above the Arctic Circle while serving a 19-year sentence on extremism charges that he rejected as politically motivated.



# China's trade edge

IN its 2024 election manifesto, the BJP has stated that the Make in India programme, which was launched in September 2014, has contributed significantly to increasing manufacturing activity in the country. The ruling party has promised to make India a 'trusted global manufacturing hub'. However, a report by economic think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) suggests that the country has a long way to go before it can achieve the grand goal of atmanirbharta (self-reliance). According to the report, India's imports from China jumped from about \$70 billion in 2018-19 to over \$101 billion in 2023-24, resulting in a cumulative trade deficit exceeding \$387 billion over a five-year period. Beijing's share in New Delhi's imports of industrial goods — telecom, machinery and electronics — has risen to 30 per cent from 21 per cent in the past 15 years, underlining India's increasing

dependence on the Dragon for these items. No less dismal is the fact that



India's exports to China have stagnated at around \$16 billion annually from 2019 to 2024.

Even as India has stood firm against China on the diplomatic and military fronts after the Galwan clash of June 2020, it has not been able to stall the Chinese march in the economic arena. China continues to have the upper hand

in bilateral trade despite India's repeated insistence that the resolution of the boundary dispute is a prerequisite for the restoration of normal relations. It is apparent that Beijing's ploy of delinking the border standoff from trade and business ties is paying rich dividends.

Ominously, the GTRI has estimated that Chinese imports will rise in the coming years. The huge trade deficit has strategic, economic and geopolitical implications for India. New Delhi needs to plug the gaps in the Make in India programme in order to make the manufacturing sector more productive and resilient. The dream of becoming a global manufacturing hub will remain just a dream unless India manages to shake off China's overbearing presence.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on editor.acrossstate@gmail.com

*Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.*

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

## EVMs get SC backing

### Room for improvement to make them tamper-proof

THE Supreme Court has rejected all petitions seeking 100 per cent verification of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) votes with their Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips, even as it has ruled out a return to the paper ballot voting system. The court has rightly observed that blindly distrusting any aspect of the system can breed unwarranted scepticism. 'Instead, a critical yet constructive approach guided by evidence and reason should be followed... to ensure the system's credibility and effectiveness,' said Justice Dipankar Datta.

The court has given candidates the option of making a request for an inspection of 5

per cent of the EVMs per Assembly segment in each parliamentary constituency within

though Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar asserted last month that EVMs were



seven days of the declaration of the result. The expenses for conducting the exercise are to be borne by the candidates themselves; in case any EVM is found to be tampered with, they will get a refund. Even

100 per cent safe, doubts persist about their robustness and reliability.

The court has done well to turn down the demand for tallying all VVPAT slips with EVM votes as this is a potentially cumbersome

and time-consuming process that could inordinately delay the poll result. The need of the hour is to ensure that the machines have inbuilt safeguards to make them tamper-proof. It is worrisome that polling was impacted in Marathwada and Vidarbha districts of Maharashtra on Friday due to technical snags in EVMs. Such glitches, though rare, raise doubts about the functioning of the machines and spark allegations of foul play. Electronic voting has been an unqualified success in India. The key now is to improve the efficacy of EVMs through suitable technological interventions.

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## UK's Rwanda plan

### A temporary solution to a festering problem

LAST week, the British House of Lords approved a plan, first proposed by then PM Boris Johnson in 2022, to send refugees to Rwanda. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak reckons that the first flight to Kigali will take off in June. An air bridge is being set up to deport 75,000 refugees who had fled for their lives from war, famine and



injustice in their countries. Rwanda has swallowed its pride and accepted £50 million for accommodating the UK's 'undesirables'. Whether all or some of the refugees finally get deported remains to be seen. The Safety of Rwanda (Asylum and Immigration) Act, 2024, however, could be a useful diversionary tactic in the upcoming local polls in Britain, with Sunak battling unemployment and rising inflation.

The British plan is not only

presumptuous but also small-minded. In contrast, some Third World countries have been large-hearted. Colombia, Uganda and Pakistan figured among the top refugee-hosting countries in 2022, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Arguably the only Western country that has proved to be compassionate during the ongoing migration crisis is Germany. A bigger question is the safety of the people being sent to Rwanda, which is not exactly a beacon of hope when it comes to the protection of human rights.

The fundamental issue is that 10 crore people worldwide have fled to safer shores due to food insecurity, the climate crisis and wars. People's desperation is making the situation worse — around one lakh Indians trying to enter the US illegally were caught or expelled in 2023 alone. Foreign ministers of European nations have privately expressed concern over the huge influx of undocumented Indians. Instead of a quick fix, the UK should lead the international community in finding a permanent and unbiased solution to the migrant problem.

The latest data from the Central Water Commission paints a stark picture of India's water crisis, with reservoirs across the country registering an alarming decline in their levels. As of April 25, the water available in major reservoirs has plummeted to a mere 30 per cent of their storage capacity. This represents a significant drop compared to the previous year. Insufficient rainfall, compounded by the El Nino phenomenon, has resulted in drought-like conditions. The prolonged dry spell has depleted water reserves, leaving many regions parched and vulnerable.

The eastern and southern regions are bearing the brunt of this crisis as the rapid fall in water levels is exacerbated by a relentless heatwave. The consequences are dire, particularly for Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, where water shortage has assumed critical proportions. Bengaluru is grappling with severe water scarcity, which is impacting everyday life and agricultural activities. The ramifications extend beyond the immediate

concerns. Agriculture, a cornerstone of India's economy, is facing major disruptions, with an adverse effect on various crops. With nearly half of India's arable land dependent on monsoon rain, the upcoming rainy season can play a key role in alleviating the situation.

The forecast of above-normal rainfall offers only cautious optimism. Water conservation efforts must be intensified at all levels, from households to agricultural practices and industrial operations. Investments in water infrastructure and

## Reviewing NOTA

### Need to make it a potent option for voters

THE electoral no-show in Surat, where BJP candidate Mukesh Dalal was declared the winner unopposed, has reignited the debate on the NOTA (none of the above) option for the voters. The episode underscores the need for reforms to ensure that the fundamental right of citizens to choose



their representatives is not violated or denied. The introduction of NOTA in 2013 on the directions of the Supreme Court was a landmark step aimed at empowering voters and holding political parties accountable.

However, the Surat fiasco highlights the limitations of NOTA in its current form. Lacking teeth, it has repeatedly failed to influence the poll result. The latest outcome has raised questions about the integrity of the electoral process and the centrality of voters in a democratic exercise. Should

a candidate be declared victorious without having faced any opposition? Should NOTA necessitate a repoll if it gets more votes than any contestant?

The apex court has issued a notice to the Election Commission of India (ECI) on a plea seeking a repoll in constituencies where NOTA receives the majority of the votes. This calls for a re-evaluation of NOTA's role in the electoral process. While NOTA serves as a symbolic gesture of dissent — a negative vote — its true potential lies in catalysing systemic change and deterring parties from fielding unsuitable candidates. Countries like Indonesia mandate a repoll

if NOTA emerges 'victorious', thus ensuring that citizens' dissatisfaction is addressed comprehensively. The ECI must explore ways to enhance NOTA's effectiveness, including considering proposals to annul the elections in constituencies where it bags the highest number of votes. This will compel political parties to nominate candidates with an unblemished reputation. Promoting NOTA — or the right to reject — as a 'fictional' nominee can make it a potent tool of democratic expression.

consumption and enhance resilience to droughts. Awareness campaigns to promote water conservation practices and prudent use of this precious resource must be

## Water crisis worsens

### Reservoir levels plummet to alarming extent



management systems are urgently needed to improve storage and distribution efficiency. Sustainable agricultural practices and crop diversification can help reduce water

stepped up. Swift and decisive action must be taken to avert a looming catastrophe and ensure a secure future for all.



# Tech-savvy soldiers

## Modernisation vital for enhancing defence skills

In an era defined by rapid technological advancements and evolving security challenges, the Army's proactive shift towards technology absorption marks a pivotal moment in its modernisation journey. Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande's announcement on Wednesday underscores the imperative need for equipping soldiers with the skills to leverage emerging technologies effectively. The integration of simulation and virtual reality training modules into the Army's curriculum signifies a departure from traditional methodologies towards immersive, tech-driven learning experiences. This move not only enhances the technical acumen of soldiers but also cultivates a culture of innovation and adaptability within the ranks. Additionally, the



incorporation of cyber specialists and linguists into the Territorial Army underscores the recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of modern warfare. As cyber threats become increasingly all-pervasive, empowering soldiers with expertise

in this domain is crucial to safeguarding national security interests.

Amidst geopolitical tensions, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on the eve of Independence Day last year, asserted that world-class

equipment and training would be provided to the armed forces. The emphasis on modernisation and innovation resonates with the Army's strategic goal of countering emerging threats.

Significantly, the Army is embracing cutting-edge technologies which not only enhance operational efficiency but also enable it to counter hybrid threats and grey-zone aggression. However, this transition entails several challenges. Investment in training holds the key to a seamless integration of technology into the existing operational framework. Its success depends on the Army's ability to stay true to its core principles of courage, integrity and dedication to national defence even as it embraces modern warfare techniques.

## Heroin seizure

### Stem the tide of maritime drug trafficking

THE seizure of 86-kg heroin worth Rs 600 crore from a Pakistani vessel is a reminder of the scourge of the international drug trade. It is not an isolated incident but part of a larger pattern of narco-terrorism that threatens national security. Last May,

including charas and methamphetamine, off the Porbandar coast. These incidents emphasise the scale and complexity of the challenge. The source of these narcotics is often traced to Afghanistan, a major hub of opium and heroin production. The surge in

methamphetamine production in the region was highlighted by a report of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime last year. The developments underscore the gravity of the situation and the urgent need for comprehensive measures to combat drug trafficking in the maritime domain. The persistent menace of drug trafficking necessitates enhanced coordination among law enforcement agencies, efficient

intelligence-sharing mechanisms and robust maritime surveillance by the Navy, Coast Guard, Anti-Terrorist Squad and the NCB to effectively rein in the drug cartels. Addressing the demand side is equally crucial. Investments in drug prevention and rehabilitation programmes, coupled with awareness initiatives, are essential to steer individuals away from the path of addiction.



the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and the Navy had seized a staggering 2,500 kg of methamphetamine off the Kerala coast. Valued at around Rs 15,000 crore, this haul was the largest of its kind in the country. Last month, a boat carrying 60 packets of drugs was intercepted off the Gujarat coast and its six Pakistani crew members were arrested. In February, five foreign nationals were nabbed with 3,300 kg of narcotics,

## RBI cracks the whip

### Kotak bank told to put its house in order

IN a significant development having implications for the entire banking sector, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has directed Kotak Mahindra Bank Limited to stop the onboarding of new customers through online and mobile banking with immediate effect and also barred it from issuing credit cards henceforth. The RBI has noted with concern that in the absence of 'a robust IT infrastructure and IT risk management framework, the bank's core banking system and its online and digital banking channels have suffered frequent outages in the past two years... resulting in serious customer inconvenience'. One such major service disruption occurred on April 15. The bank was found deficient in building operational resilience, even as the RBI clarified that there were no curbs on providing services to existing customers, including those using credit cards.

In October 2023, the RBI had imposed a penalty on the bank to the tune of Rs 3.95 crore over non-compliance issues with regard to

the code of conduct for outsourcing of financial services, customer service, recovery agents, loans and advances. Finding itself on the back foot again, the bank has stated that it would commission a comprehensive audit of its IT systems under the 'approval and supervision' of the RBI. It is laudable that India's central bank has taken pre-emptive action in the interest of customers. This is a stern reminder to all banks that they cannot afford to be complacent about their digital banking and payment systems.

With the financial ecosystem dominated by digital transactions, banks need to invest heavily in tech infrastructure to ensure that their customers' money remains safe. Fraudsters are always on the lookout for chinks in the banking armour. The resilience of tech platforms is being put to the test on a daily basis. Banks must be proactive in addressing the glitches, failing which public trust in the banking system will be hit hard.



## Govt weighs Bombay High Court ban on banks issuing circulars to defaulters

## Ola Mobility CEO quits, firm to cut 10-15% staff

New Delhi

Ride-hailing company Ola Mobility CEO Hemant Bakshi has resigned from the company within four months of joining it, according to sources privy to the development.

Sources also said the company is planning to lay off 10-15 per cent employees. "Hemant Bakshi has resigned from the company with immediate effect. Ola Cabs division might lay off 10-15 per cent employees," a source said. Bakshi had joined the company in January, 2024.

Another source said the company had around 900 people in the Ola Cabs division in



January and the lay-off might impact 90-140 people.

When contacted, Ola declined to offer any comment on the information. Ola Mobility, the

ride-hailing division, had reported a narrowing of loss to Rs 1,082.56 crore in financial year 2023. It had a loss of Rs 3,082.42 crore in fiscal year 2021-22.

New Delhi

The Finance Ministry is studying the recent Bombay High Court order banning public sector banks from seeking the issuance of look out circulars, or LOCs, against wilful defaulters, sources said.

Quashing the powers granted by the Union government to public sector banks (PSBs) to act against wilful defaulters, the High Court said it is arbitrary and violative of a person's fundamental rights.

The Finance Ministry is aware of the April 26 judgement and will make a detailed assessment of the order, sources said, adding that the next course of action will be decided after studying the order.

A Division Bench on April 23 held as unconstitutional the clause of an office memorandum issued by the Central Government empowering the Chairman, Managing Directors and Chief

Executive Officers of public sector banks to seek issuance of LOCs against default borrowers or even persons who stood guarantee for such borrowers. In its 289-page judgement made available on April 26, the Bench said an executive function cannot substitute a statute and the executive cannot in any event contravene the Constitution.

Commenting on the Bombay High Court order, former Financial Services Secretary D K Mittal said it is not proper on behalf of banks to seek issuance of LOC against a defaulter as it is not done after thorough investigation and that is why the High Court has termed it arbitrary. However, he said, investigative agencies like the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) do it after proper investigation in any matter and there are only a few wilful borrowers whose intention is not to pay.

## Centre to auction 20 critical mineral blocks by June-end

New Delhi

The government will put on sale around 20 critical mineral blocks in the fourth round of auction by the end of June, mines secretary V L Kantha Rao said on Monday.

Rao further said the auction process for seven critical mineral blocks put on sale in the first round is almost complete and the result would be declared in a month's time.

Critical minerals such as copper, lithium, nickel, cobalt and rare earth elements are essential components in many of today's rapidly growing clean energy technologies.

Rao said, "We have put 38 blocks on auction... we are going to come up with the next auction in June-end," the secretary explained. Over 100 critical mineral blocks are on the table for taking up for auction.



## Sebi bans eight entities from securities markets

New Delhi

Markets regulator Sebi on Friday barred eight entities from the securities markets and seized "unlawful gains" of Rs 1.3 crore earned by them from front-running activities.

The eight entities are Ashok Maheshwari, Darshan Bakul Shah, Khusboo Darshan Shah, Darshan Bakul Shah, Benzer Department Stores Pvt Ltd, CHL Stock Concepts Pvt Ltd, Chirag Mahendra Shah, and Mihir Dhirajalal Savla.

Front-running refers to an illegal practice in

the stock market where an entity trades based on advance information from a broker or analyst before the information has been made available to its clients. In its 77-page order, Sebi found that Ashok Maheshwari was instrumental in supplying the information about the impending trades of the Big Client to Darshan Bakul Shah and such information was utilised to execute front running trades. By indulging in such trades, the entities violated the provision of Prohibition of Fraudulent and Unfair Trade Practices norms, it said.

## 3 Russian firms to provide insurance cover to oil tankers

New Delhi

Three Russian companies have received approval from India to provide marine insurance cover to tankers, according to a Directorate General of Shipping order.

The three Russian companies are Alfastrakhovanie PCL, Sogaz Insurance and VSK Insurance. Earlier,



Russia's fourth largest insurer Ingosstrakh had received approval from the government to provide marine insurance cover to oil tankers. The approval will facilitate tankers carrying Russian crude oil to India.



## Uttarakhand suspends licences of 14 products made by Ramdev's pharmaceutical companies



### New Delhi

Uttarakhand drug regulator has suspended manufacturing licences of 14 products made by pharmaceutical companies of yoga guru Ramdev for repeatedly publishing misleading advertisements about their efficacy, a government order showed.

The order is the latest setback for Ramdev whose TV shows,

yoga cures and traditional medicine offerings for diseases have made him popular in India and other nations.

The Supreme Court has in recent weeks repeatedly criticised Ramdev for not complying with its directives in an ongoing lawsuit to stop misleading advertisements of some of his traditional ayurvedic medicines.

The manufacturing permits

of Ramdev's companies were suspended in an April 15 order by the drug regulator of traditional medicines in Uttarakhand. Reuters is the first to report the order which is not public.

The list of 14 products whose licences were suspended included Ramdev's traditional medicines for asthma, bronchitis and diabetes.

The manufacturing permits are "suspended with immediate effect", Mithilesh Kumar of the state regulator wrote in his order.

A spokesperson for Ramdev said he did not have any immediate comment on the matter.

The case against Ramdev in the Supreme Court relates to the Indian Medical Association's allegations that his firm, Patanjali, disparages conventional medicines and continued publishing misleading ads despite a court directive to stop them.

Ramdev has said his actions were a lapse and his company has taken out newspaper ads apologising to the public. In recent weeks, he has appeared before judges at the top court dressed in his trademark saffron-coloured robe to ask forgiveness, but the judges have so far not accepted his apology.

The judges are considering whether to press contempt charges against Ramdev or not.

## Expectations of future monetary policy impact stock markets more than rate announcements: RBI paper



### Mumbai

Equity markets are impacted more by the expectations of future monetary policy than the policy rate surprises on the day of announcement of the policy by the Reserve Bank, said an analysis.

According to a working paper prepared by RBI officials, the regulatory and development measures which are announced along with the monetary policy too impact the stock markets.

"...equity markets are affected more by the changes in the market's expectations of future monetary policy (path factor) than the policy rate surprise (target factor) which is in agreement with the conventional thinking that equity markets are forward-looking," the paper said.

The volatility in equity markets on the day of policy announcement, it said, "is affected by both target and path factors, as markets digest the policy announcements and traders adjust their portfolios throughout the day". RBI Working Paper on 'Equity Markets and Monetary Policy Surprises' is prepared by Mayank Gupta, Amit Pawar, Satyam Kumar, Abhinandan Borad and Subrat Kumar Seet from Department of Economic and Policy Research, Reserve Bank of India.

The paper analyses the impact of monetary policy

announcements on the returns and volatility in the BSE Sensex by decomposing changes in Overnight Indexed Swap (OIS) rates on policy announcement days into target and path factors. The target factor captures the surprise component in central bank policy rate action, while the path factor captures the impact of central bank's communication on market expectations regarding the future path of monetary policy.

While the short duration windows are aimed at controlling for other potential drivers of equity prices, it may be noted that the monetary policy announcements are accompanied by regulatory and developmental measures which can also impact markets, the paper said.

The sparse trading on occasions in the OIS markets as well as other domestic and global developments during the narrow window can also impact the analysis, it added.

The analysis covers the period starting with the implicit adoption of a flexible inflation targeting regime in India (January 2014) and ends in July 2022.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) introduced the RBI Working Papers series in March 2011. The central bank said the views expressed in the paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the institution(s) to which they belong.

## Setback for Go First, High Court allows petitions to deregister 54 jets

### New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday directed the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to forthwith process the applications filed by several lessors for deregistration of their 54 planes so that they could take them back from the crisis-hit Go First airline.

Justice Tara Vitasta Ganju also restrained the resolution professional (RP) appointed under the insolvency law to manage the airline, and its directors from moving or taking away the planes or spare parts, documents, records and any other material.

"DGCA shall forthwith and not later than five working days process the deregistration applications filed by the 54 aircraft," the court said.

The high court said the DGCA, AAI and its authorised representatives shall aid and assist the petitioner lessors and grant them access to the airports. It said the lessors are permitted to export the aircraft as per the applicable rules and laws. "DGCA shall facilitate export of aircraft by providing export certificates and all other documents," it said. The court pronounced the judgement on petitions by several lessors seeking de-registration of their planes by aviation regulator DGCA so that they could take them back from the airline.

After pronouncement of the verdict, the counsel for some of the respondents urged the court to keep its directions in abeyance for a week. However, the judge refused to do so and said "you find another court to put my directions in abeyance".



# Riding on record sales, Maruti's Q4 profit jumps 48% to Rs 3,878 cr

## CHANDIGARH

The country's largest passenger carmaker Maruti Suzuki India Limited on Friday reported the highest-ever net profit of Rs 3,878 crore for the quarter ending March 31, 2024, which was up by 48 per cent year-on-year (YoY) from Rs 2,624 crore reported in the same period in 2022-23. This was on account of higher sales volume, favourable commodity prices, cost reduction efforts and higher non-operating income. During the quarter, the company registered net sales of Rs 36,697.5 crore against Rs 30,821.8 crore in the same period of the previous financial year. The carmaker sold a total of 5,84,031 vehicles, including exports during the quarter, higher by 13.4 per cent compared to the same period previous year.

For the entire fiscal (2023-24), the



automaker achieved a net profit of Rs 13,209.4 crore, 64 per cent higher than the net profit of Rs 8,049.2 crore in FY2022-23.

The company registered net sales of Rs 1,34,937.80 crore in FY2023-24, a growth of 19.9 per cent over the net sales of Rs 1,12,500.8 crore in FY2022-23.

Overall, the company sold a total of 21,35,323 vehicles during the year, a growth of 8.6 per cent over that in FY2022-23. For the first time, the company surpassed annual total sales milestone of 20 lakh units in FY2023-24. The company continued to be the top exporter for the third consecutive year, now contributing 41.8 per cent of total passenger vehicle exports from India. The company has announced the highest-ever dividend of Rs 125 per share.

## Nabard, RBI wing join hands over farm loans

### New Delhi

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Nabard) has partnered with Reserve Bank



Innovation Hub (RBIH) to put in place a system which will enable faster processing of agricultural loans.

The collaboration between Nabard and RBIH, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the RBI, will streamline the lending process

and reduce the turnaround time for loans from three to four weeks to just five minutes for India's 120 million farmers. The initiative will significantly reduce operational overheads for lenders while deepening access to credit, thereby fostering a more inclusive and efficient rural financial ecosystem.

For the purpose, Nabard will integrate its e-KCC loan origination system portal with the Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit (PTPFC) of RBIH. The PTPFC has seen the participation of over 10 states in making digital land records available to facilitate the seamless flow of credible information for lenders. "The digitisation of agricultural lending will ensure instant doorstep delivery of credit to farmers," Shaji KV, Chairman, Nabard, said.

## ICICI Bank maps 17k credit cards to wrong users

### Mumbai

ICICI Bank on Thursday said nearly 17,000 credit cards issued recently have been erroneously mapped to the wrong users in digital channels. The second largest private sector lender, however, said that no instances of any misuse have been reported

because of the error, and also promised to compensate users for any financial loss. "It has come to our notice that about 17,000 new credit cards, which were issued in the past few days were erroneously mapped in our digital channels to the wrong users," a bank spokesperson said.

## RIL, JSW & 5 others submit bids to set up battery-making units

### New Delhi

The government on Tuesday said it received bids from seven companies, including Reliance Industries and JSW Neo Energy, for production-linked incentives to set up battery manufacturing facilities of 10 GWh capacity with an outlay of Rs 3,620 crore.

The other bidders on the list included ACME Cleantech Solutions Private Limited, Amara Raja Advanced Cell Technologies Private Limited, Anvi Power Industries Private Limited, Lucas TVS Limited, and Waaree Energies Limited.

The bids for manufacturing facilities with a cumulative capacity of 70 GWh came in



response to a global tender issued by the Heavy Industries Ministry on January 24 this year. "The scheme received an overwhelming response from industry as bids received is seven times the manufacturing capacity

of 10 GWh to be awarded," the ministry stated.

The ministry had announced the re-bidding of Production Linked Incentives (PLI) for 10 GWh advanced chemistry cell (ACC) manufacturing.

## Weather events, geo-political tensions risk to inflation: RBI

### Mumbai

Conditions are shaping up for an extension of a trend upshift in real GDP growth in India, though extreme weather events along with prolonged geo-political tensions may pose a risk to inflation, said the RBI's April Bulletin released on Tuesday.

The retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) factors for its monetary policy, eased to 4.9 per cent in March after remaining at 5.1 per

cent during the two preceding months.

"There is a sizzle in the spring of 2024," said an article on 'State of the Economy' published in the Bulletin. Global weather agencies are in agreement that March 2024 was the warmest March since record-keeping began in 1850 – the global surface temperature was at 1.6 degrees Celsius (3.01°F) above the 1880-1899 period. Careful monitoring during the summer is warranted as overlapping food

price shocks play out, before an above-normal Southwest monsoon this year, as projected by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), enabling an easing of food price pressures, said the article authored by a team lead by RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra.

"In the near term, however, extreme weather events may pose a risk to inflation along with prolonged geopolitical tensions that could keep crude oil prices volatile," it said.



# The Chinese discourse on the ongoing West Asia crisis

In the last few weeks as Iran and Israel fell into a 'retaliation cycle', marking a dangerous new phase in the Israel-Palestine conflict, China kept a close eye on the developments in the region. Chinese media ran almost daily commentaries, either championing the Palestinian cause, cheering for Iran and its "Axis of Resistance" or highlighting how the relations between Israel and the US is faltering, and how it can spell doom for Israel.

What is interesting to note is that most Chinese analysis on West Asia is through the prism of how the developments in the region may adversely impact the United States' (US) interests and thereby, indirectly benefit China, rather than what role China can play in proactively shaping the affairs of the region.

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To start with, as the 7 October Hamas attack on Israel took place, commentaries in the Chinese media cheered at the prospect of the US and Israel falling into an endless war of attrition, providing yet another lifeline (after the Russia-Ukraine war) to China's continued rise. It is fair to say that a section of China's strategic community was rather pleased to see how the new round of Palestinian-Israeli conflict triggered serious divisions among different sections within the US society—how there was chaos and division in the streets, on the campuses, and even in the political circles of Washington and how the powerful US media fumbled and was unable to produce a consistent discourse for global consumption like in the case of Russia-Ukraine conflict. The most significant win for

Beijing has been the internal strife and divisions within the ruling Democratic Party and President Biden's agonising dilemma of choosing between his Jewish donors and young "progressive" voters, as he seeks re-election. Discussions in Chinese public forums at

red lines" on the Gaza refugee issue; Iraqi militia groups only carried out symbolic attacks on Israeli targets.

Now that Israel and Iran have shifted from "covert war to overt war", the key question doing the rounds among Chinese strategic circles is whether

avoid risks by repairing ties with China, and the ASEAN countries will further move closer to China.

On the other hand, if it chooses to play down the issue of Iran's direct attack on Israel and continues with the process of withdrawing from

realm.

From the perspective of great power competition, Chinese observers argue, that although the region is significant for Chinese foreign policy, however, it is better for China to stay low for now, else it may cost China more and make it a direct target of the US' confrontational policies in the region. China may "roar" a few times over the Middle East conflict or the Russia-Ukraine conflict, however, ultimately it should let the US take the lead in these issues and thereby let it get passively drawn into these region's complex politics. This, they believe, will force the US to divert more energy from its Indo-Pacific theatre, and the pressure on China will diminish. China can also take advantage of the US preoccupation to intensify its global outreach, particularly in Africa, ASEAN, South America, and other regions. This, they say, is much in sync with China's tried and tested "roundabout combat strategy"—a circuitous military tactic, where it does not face the enemy directly, but bypasses the enemy's front and launches an attack from the flank or rear—and combat method of "concentrating superior forces to fight a war of annihilation"—focusing on forming local advantages and winning local wars. From the perspective of great power competition, Chinese observers argue, that although the region is significant for Chinese foreign policy, however, it is better for China to stay low for now, else it may cost China more and make it a direct target of the US' confrontational policies in the region.

What India needs to watch out for is how China uses platforms like BRICS to mobilise the newly added Islamic member nations including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Iran to make a political statement on West Asia, thus tilting the great power competition in China's favour.



that time included ideas like uniting the Arab-Islamic world and the entire Global South over the Palestine issue, to usher in de-dollarisation, the fall of the current world order, amongst others

Six months down the lane, the Chinese assessment is that "Israel is still in control". Although regional countries have opposed Israel in diplomatic terms and continued to intensify its diplomatic isolation, however, the regional Arab countries, be it Türkiye, or Iran, they have not been able to form a unified anti-Israel front, and pose a substantial threat to Israel. Even those Arab countries that have established diplomatic ties with Israel have not severed them. The conflict in Gaza did activate other conflicts in the region but their impact has so far been limited. For example, armed groups like Hezbollah seem unwilling to get involved in the battlefield head-on; the Houthi armed forces in Yemen is somewhat losing the initiative in the Red Sea region; Jordan and Egypt "drew

or not, the current churn will finally drag the US directly into the battlefield and torpedo its Indo-Pacific plans. Or, it will again remain limited to lower-intensity attacks or precision strikes between Iran and Israel.

Now that Israel and Iran have shifted from "covert war to overt war", the key question doing the rounds among Chinese strategic circles is whether or not, the current churn will finally drag the US directly into the battlefield and torpedo its Indo-Pacific plans.

Some Chinese West Asia observers like Liu Yanting, state that no matter what the US does in West Asia, whether it chooses greater engagement or continues its retreat, it will have to pay a heavy price and thereby, having some positive implications for China. For example, if the US eventually gets involved in a new wave of wars in the Middle East, no matter what gains it makes in the region, its much-hyped Indo-Pacific Strategy will fizzle out. Japan, Australia, and the Philippines may then try to

the region, Iran will get further emboldened, and the traditional US allies in the region, in their effort to reduce risk, may strive for more strategic autonomy, including moving closer to China. Some Chinese scholars, on the disagreements between Biden and Netanyahu administrations, argue that if the US could sacrifice Israel, when it is under attack from a hostile power, what use would it be to other Asian allies in their fight against China?

However, despite the rhetoric in the Chinese media, deep down, there seems to be a greater realisation within Chinese strategic circles that although the US disengagement from West Asia in the past years has created opportunities for China and strengthened its presence in the region, even then, the influence of the US in the West Asia is still somewhat "unshakable" and should not be underestimated. In addition to having a large number of troops stationed, it still has leading advantages in the economic, political, and technological



# Foreign Policy Contestation and Indian Democracy

As India's global imprint continues to grow, it has become difficult for political parties to ignore the external dimensions of the nation's rise. It is reflected in the way both major political parties have outlined their foreign policy agenda in their manifestos.

Characteristically, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) manifesto sees foreign policy as a tool to advance India's civilisational legacy abroad. It promises to promote yoga, Ayurveda, and classical language training; restore heritage sites; and build a global Ramayana circuit. It positions India as a responsible stakeholder in global governance bodies, claiming the leadership mantle for the Global South. In contrast to the European populist parties' parochial opposition to internationalism, the BJP's confident nationalism partly gains its legitimacy from India's status-seeking exercise as a rising power in the global arena.

To tackle the dovish image on national security, it promises to come up with a National Security Strategy and a National Economic Security Board.

In contrast, the Congress's manifesto sees the Chinese incursion as a major national security setback. To tackle the dovish image on national security, it promises to come up with a National Security Strategy and a National Economic Security Board. After being left behind by the BJP in shaping higher defence reorganisation, the Congress is also keen to underscore democratic accountability for security policy by institutionalising the Chief of Defence Staff appointment and enacting parliamentary committee oversight over the National Security Advisor and the National Security Council. In a partisan snipe, though, its manifesto refers to a supposed consensus on foreign policy since Independence. The BJP government is held responsible for breaking away from this consensus in its Israel policy. This ignores India's careful recalibration of its Israel/Gaza policy and suffers from amnesia on the PV Narasimha Rao government's role in strengthening the India-Israel ties.

More substantively, this notion of foreign policy consensus

elides the rich history of debates and contestation. While there is a grain of truth in the consensus narrative, the revisionist literature on the history of India's foreign policy presents more nuanced and politically charged pathways to the making of foreign policy. Argumentative Indians have been debating the country's approach to the world and have been at it

the guidepost in this period. However, scrutiny of records reveals the involvement of a wide array of actors in foreign policy debates.

As India won Independence in the shadow of the bipolar great power contest, the issue of the diplomatic positioning of a nascent postcolonial Asian democracy gained salience.

continued membership in the Commonwealth, Nehru's visit to the United States (US), and his handling of the Korean War fuelled Communist suspicions, which were allayed in the mid-1950s following the exchange visits between Nehru and Soviet leaders. In a clear demonstration of an ideological tilt, even after the

The Hindu nationalists, by and large, favoured a stronger approach with calls for higher military spending, defence indigenisation, and the development of the nuclear bomb.

In the unipolar decades, India's rise as a significant actor on the global stage was marked by a continuation



for a while.

Beset with the material and psychological scars of colonial subjugation, the 19th century, when a national consciousness was developing, saw native thinkers grappling with India's place in the world. They were concerned with justice and peace, the deleterious effects of imperial subjugation, defence spending priorities, and economic development, appropriate strategy in the Great Game, and the Khilafat question. India's participation in World War II bitterly divided the nationalist leadership.

As India won Independence in the shadow of the bipolar great power contest, the issue of the diplomatic positioning of a nascent postcolonial Asian democracy gained salience. For many, the charismatic personality and keen personal interest of an avowedly internationalist Prime Minister meant a personalised and centralised approach to foreign policy: Jawaharlal Nehru's vision and deft diplomacy served as

The initial years of the Indian Republic were exemplified by the one-party domination of the Congress system. The Congress's numerical advantage in Parliament would give the executive under Nehru a wide berth to implement his vision. Even though the Opposition was not in a strong position to shape the government policy and the notion of national interest warranted a degree of consensus, this did not prevent Opposition leaders from debating and critiquing foreign policy decisions. Remarkably for a polity conventionally characterised as lacking in ideological cleavages, these foreign policy debates were rooted in ideologically charged ways of looking at the post-World War II world order and India's place therein.

Pro-Soviet Union in its tilt, the Communist Party of India (CPI) was initially suspicious of Nehru's non-alignment; the CPI thought it was a cover for his preference for the Anglo-American bloc. India's

1962 Sino-Indian border war, the CPI wanted resolution through peaceful means.

In stark contrast, C Rajagopalachari and Minoo Masani's conservative Swatantra Party wanted to build an alliance of Asian democracies with the US backing against the "menace" of Chinese Communist aggression. Swatantra's stance on nuclear weapons and Pakistan earned it the Jana Sangh's criticism, though. The Hindu nationalists, by and large, favoured a stronger approach with calls for higher military spending, defence indigenisation, and the development of the nuclear bomb. The Jana Sangh, Swatantra Party, and various socialist parties also deviated from the official policy towards the recognition of Israel. Anti-Communist in their approach, the socialists also looked at China with apprehension and waged a moral campaign in favour of the Tibet cause.

of fractious debate and an illusory consensus. The extent of economic openness, tenets of nuclear doctrine, appropriate strategy towards China, alignment with the US, handling of cross-border terrorism, policy towards Afghanistan, and approach in global governance bodies have been issues where the Indian polity differed markedly.

While matters of foreign policy and national security are deemed too important to be considered partisan, there are good reasons for politics not to stop at the water's edge. A nation's position in anarchic international politics and the ruling elite's perception of national interest considerations are too uncertain and dynamic variables not to be debated in a democratic setup. As a rising India engages the world with confidence in an increasingly challenging environment, informed contestations on foreign policy should be the norm.



# BUILDING A REGIONAL DISASTER RELIEF STRATEGY FOR THE BAY OF BENGAL REGION

The Bay of Bengal (BOB) region is marred by devastating cyclones, routine flooding and erosion, and water insecurity. Four of the countries in this region—India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand—rank in the top 10 countries most vulnerable globally to natural disasters. The drastic variabilities in ecological cycles tend to have consequences for both the environmental and security outcomes in this neighbourhood. As the climate conditions worsen, domestic instability in any state threatens to spill across borders, destabilising the region on the whole.

While, over the last two decades, the littoral states of the BOB have made significant strides in their disaster preparedness, their efficacy has been limited. The region lacks a dedicated security agenda that recognises the shared plight of natural disasters. This stems from the currently missing understanding that the burden of natural disasters—across the littoral states—arises from a core source of contention, i.e., disturbances in the environmental balance. Shared burdens require a shared response and thus a comprehensive multi-state disaster relief authority and task force is the need of the hour.

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## Understanding the landscape

Due to the geomorphology of the region, the most intensive cyclonic storms appear here as compared to any other place in the world. As the West Bengal Disaster Management Department reported, over the past 200 years, 20 out of the 23 major cyclone disasters that have occurred globally, have occurred over this region. Other associated disasters plaguing the region are recurrent floods and droughts, Himalayan landslides, coastal erosion and mangrove loss. These are not new problems, however, anthropogenic stressors and the long-term effects of climate change are further intensifying the plight felt in the region. This includes issues of rising sea levels and temperatures, increased intensity of heat waves, ocean acidification, and decline in ocean productivity.

Adding to the casualties is the high population density—which means greater loss of life and physical damage to infrastructure, as the housing structures are often fragile constructions. Natural disasters also disrupt communication lines—which

hinder rescue operations. They can also contaminate water supplies and upset the crop cycle while destroying fertile lands—all of which has a grave impact on the food security of the region. Unfortunately, any region-wide attempt to address such issues suffers from major institutional deficits.

## Institutional responses

One of the major relevant multi-regional bodies operational in this region is the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Since its inception in 1997,



there have been two Disaster Management Exercises in 2017 and 2020, both of which have been spearheaded and hosted by India. These exercises aim to strengthen regional responses and improve coordination amongst member countries.

However, the regional body suffers from some striking shortcomings. Due to an absence of financial commitments, BIMSTEC's natural disaster response remained largely dormant till 2014, with progress in this sphere being limited to developing early warning systems. Given that BIMSTEC is the only organisation with all BOB littoral states as members, the lack of proactive engagements is holding it back from sufficiently addressing the spectre of natural disasters for the region.

Given that BIMSTEC is the only organisation with all BOB littoral states as members, the lack of proactive engagements is holding it back from sufficiently addressing the spectre of natural disasters for the region.

A report published by the Council on Foreign Relations' Centre for Preventive Action found that positive outcomes in the BOB hinge on international cooperation and initiatives taken by "bigger states". It further highlights a vacuum in multi-state dialogue over climate cooperation and resilience building in the region. This can be evidenced by the fact that no BIMSTEC- or SAARC-wide delegations have been deployed during natural calamities.

The bulk of Human Assistance and

Disaster Relief (HADR) engagements for the BOB are undertaken by India, given its economic and political preponderance. However, most of this aid is provided through bilateral channels, as India's multilateral HADR contribution is significantly lesser than the bilateral assistance provided.

## India's approach

Within the BOB and beyond, India has been decisive in its role as the 'first responder' to disaster management. Some examples of this commitment include the critical relief and assistance provided in

foreign developmental aid was over 5,000 crores for this fiscal year. Another reason points to India's concern for its own image, and wanting to be seen as the ultimate provider of aid and protection in the region, rather than a passive recipient or mere collaborator. Whatever the reasons behind New Delhi's approach may be, it is clear that the looming threat of climate change makes pursuing a bilateral approach costlier than a multilateral one—where the costs and obligation can be shared. The rising burden of unilaterally heading the HADR campaign can be seen in the reduced budget set aside for India's neighbouring countries for the previous financial year and the plateauing in India's humanitarian contribution over the years.

This is not to disparage the serious and significant strides made by the Indian government and associated bodies in the HADR domain. Yet, a bilateral framework is ultimately disadvantageous to India's intentions. In line with India's ambition of being the net security provider, it should formalise its security agenda in the region. Thinking beyond its military doctrine, India could spearhead the environmental security dialogue for the region, working alongside all the stakeholders. Such an approach can have many benefits.

Firstly, it can help institute a standard operating procedure while tackling the shared impact of natural disasters. Currently, within India, HADR decision-making is largely ad-hoc with several agencies needing to coordinate their disaster response. This can lead to delays in implementing help and also limits the policy imaginary of natural disasters.

Disasters do not respect borders. It affects coastal populations alike, across geographies. This is why it should not be New Delhi, Dhaka, or Colombo that unilaterally drives HADR policy and undertakings in the region. Instead, a common authority that can warn coastal communities, coordinate their localised response, and utilise indigenous knowledge to formulate disaster relief policy can be more effective in responding to and mitigating environmental perils.

Moreover, by meaningfully engaging with smaller littoral states in forums which equalise their positions, India can demonstrate its willingness to work together. It can be seen as a partner and not the regional hegemon. This can help build mutual trust, which can have an immense impact on the security dynamics and enduring peace in the region.

Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Nepal. These efforts are coordinated by the National Disaster Management Authority, and the National Disaster Response Force. Crucial rescue and relief services are also provided by the Indian Army and Navy in this regard.

Such interventions help strengthen India's soft power in the region and are reflective of its diplomatic commitments to its 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East Policy' strategies. Further shaping India's approach to disaster management is its maritime doctrine—Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). Under this, as Defense Minister Rajnath Singh explained, India aims to strengthen multilateral partnerships to tackle common threats, such as natural disasters, through regional mechanisms.

And herein lies the problem. What can explain India's hesitation to contribute multilaterally, despite its self-acknowledgment that HADR preparedness hinges on integrated action by all concerned parties and nations? One possible reason could be the lack of financial and infrastructural support that multilateral organisations provide. For example, BIMSTEC Secretariat is significantly understaffed—with only 10 employees, armed with a lean budget of only US 200,000. With such glaring shortfalls, it cannot come near matching India's disaster relief deployments or aid grants. To put it in perspective, India's



# Weather Modification and Geo-Engineering Will Increase Environmental Problems, Not Reduce Them

At the time of the recent Dubai floods there was initial over-emphasis by some on cloud-seeding as being the main factor, which was later corrected to say that climate change induced concentration of very heavy rain over a wide area of UAE, Oman (where nearly 18 persons including some schoolchildren lost their life in the perilous floods) and other neighboring countries was the main factor. Concentration of rainfall normally spread over 18 months in just a single day is a very serious matter which would create problems anywhere,

et al published in 'Water' journal in November 2021 in the context of Sharjah.

There are several other references for disasters being caused by cloud seeding in other parts of world. The New Scientist published a report titled 'Rain making linked to killer flood' by Andre Graves (2001) which mentioned an English village being more or less wiped out in 1952 in Lynmouth, Devon, and as many as 36 people being drowned as a result of secretive cloud seeding done by the Royal Air force which was probably

hand, a country with more advanced technological capacity for large-scale cloud seeding may even use this to deliberately deprive a hostile country of much-needed rains.

In fact once militarization possibilities come in, then all sorts of sinister uses of weather modification can be visualized, including efforts to divert destructive storms and sea-storms in other directions. Considering that technologies are far from perfect, some of these efforts can also prove to be self-destructive.

based on reductionist science, and do not even try to envisage the chain of impacts caused by their activities, an approach that is responsible for causing the serious environmental crisis in the first place. Some of these may be prompted by hurried considerations of selling carbon credits on dubious basis, instead of making real gains in terms of environment protection.

Once scaled up, some of these efforts themselves are a big threat to environment. This is particularly true of the situation in China where weather



although drainage inadequacies, which are increasingly seen in hurried urban developments, too played an important role in aggravating the situation.

This having been said, the role of cloud seeding should not be altogether ignored. If adverse weather and stormy conditions had been predicted by weather forecasts and people had been advised to work from home, as has been stated in some reports, what was the relevance of still carrying out cloud seeding as a routine sort of activity, keeping in view several risks of this?

After all the link between cloud seeding to induce rain and unwanted heavy floods has been reported in the past not just generally but even in the context of UAE specifically, something that was generally missed in the immediate debate. Such a link has been clearly mentioned in a paper by Khalid B. Almheiri, Rabee Rustum

researching for possible military applications of cloud seeding, such as drowning an enemy force.

The Wall Street Journal published a report by J. Dean on November 16 2009 relating to a blizzard in China being caused or aggravated by China's efforts to induce artificial snowfall.

On the other hand, serious concern has also been expressed that inducing rain from clouds in one place may be at the cost of denying rain to another place where the clouds would have caused rain if left undisturbed. Thus there may be no net gain from all the effort and expenditure. What is more, discord may arise between the people of two places, particularly if the place denied rain is already suffering from drought conditions. If the two places are in different countries, then even a serious conflict situation may arise on the basis of mere suspicions alone. On the other

Weather modification, moreover, is only one aspect of several types of highly dubious geo-engineering steps being already taken up and considered seriously, not just at national level but even by corporate entities on their own, increasing risks. These are being taken up so often in the context of highly suspect proposals to check climate change that geo-engineering is often considered in the context of climate change only. Various proposals include setting up giant mirrors in select locations to reflect sunlight back to space, huge quantities of glass being dropped on polar ice to reflect sunlight back (regardless of impact of this on already endangered polar wildlife species), injecting sulfur droplets into stratosphere, even spraying iron particles on oceans to try to get algal blooms which it is hoped will capture carbon, as well as several other ways of capturing carbon. Most of these are

modification is planned on a very vast scale regardless of impacts on other parts of the country or in neighboring countries. As such a highly technocratic approach can very rapidly spread here in the absence of adequate critical voices from within the authoritarian system, this is something that should cause widespread concern and international efforts to check and regulate this should be made, as well as to introduce greater transparency and wider consultation in this. Of course the geo-engineering and weather modification efforts being made in all other countries, at the military or civilian level, particularly by the big powers like the USA, should also be carefully regulated and checked whenever these are found to be too risky. On the whole there is little doubt on the basis of present trends that weather modification and geo-engineering are fast emerging as a destructive rather than a protective force.



## New York Indian Film Festival to celebrate Shabana Azmi's 50 years in cinema

The landmark 50-year cinematic journey of veteran Indian actor Shabana Azmi will be celebrated here next month at the New York Indian Film Festival (NYIFF), the annual celebration of features and documentaries from the Indian subcontinent.

The 24th edition of the NYIFF, considered North America's longest running and most prestigious Indian film festival, will run from May 31-June 2 and showcase 49



narratives, documentaries and short films starring some of the biggest names in cinema, including Amitabh Bachchan and Naseeruddin Shah.

With the year 2024 marking Azmi's five decades in Indian and international cinema, the gala will celebrate this landmark anniversary with a special event that will include the screening of her 1996 film 'Fire', directed by Deepa Mehta.

"I have been associated with the NYIFF since its inception. I am heartened by the progress it has made over the years in leaps and bounds. I am happy that my 50th year is being celebrated here and I look forward to it," a NYIFF statement quoted Azmi as saying.

Azmi, 73, who will attend this year's NYIFF, will delve into her "remarkable journey, from her groundbreaking debut in Shyam Benegal's 'Ankur', to her trailblazing roles that have earned her five National

Film Awards and international accolades," the statement said.

It added that beyond her cinematic achievements, Azmi's "dedication to social activism, particularly for the rights of women and the underprivileged, is truly inspiring."

The Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan awardee has starred in over 140 Hindi films and 12 international productions such as Mehta's 'Midnight's Children', Mira Nair's 'The Reluctant Fundamentalist' and Ismail Merchant's 'In Custody'.

"From her gripping portrayal in 'Ankur' to her recent roles in 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani' and 'Ghoomer', her collaborations transcend borders, with projects including Shekhar Kapur's 'What's Love Got to Do with It?' and Steven Spielberg's prestigious mini-series 'Halo'.

"Azmi's repertoire is a testament to her unparalleled skill and diverse roles. As Shabana Azmi continues to illuminate screens and stages alike with her presence, her legacy as a trailblazer in Indian cinema remains unparalleled," the statement said.

The festival, presented by the Indo-American Arts Council (IAAC), will open with the film 'Dear Jassi', directed by Indian-American filmmaker Tarsem Singh, who has made films with Jennifer Lopez and Julia Roberts, besides directing videos for music legends like the bands REM and Lady Gaga. Closing the festival will be the Sanya Malhotra-starrer 'Mrs', directed by Arati Kadav.

Highlights of this year's festival include the Bachchan and Vivek Gomber starrer 'The Umesh Chronicles' by filmmaker Pooja Kaul; Naseeruddin Shah in the short film 'Khidki', documentary 'Merchant Ivory', and Tannishtha Chatterjee in American filmmaker Wendy Bednarz's debut film 'Yellow Bus'.

## Richa Chadha, who plays Lajjo in Heeramandi, hopes that after watching the Netflix series people associate the word tawaif with dignity

A 'nurturing and good looking' life partner, a baby on the way and 'baby steps' into the world of production and icing on the happiness cake, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's magnum opus Heeramandi in which she plays a key part is ready to stream on Netflix.... Touch wood! Even before the talented actress Richa Chadha can utter the word, we echo similar thoughts.

Though she has proved her mettle in more than one film, Bhansali's Heeramandi is a special one. It's the first time she plays a dancer and had to reconnect with Kathak, a dance form she had learnt in early formative years. As she calls her part of courtesan Lajjo, 'female Devdas,' we wonder whether her reference points were reel Devdas' Dilip Kumar and Shah Rukh Khan or the ultimate tragedy queen Meena Kumari.

She shares that it's indeed the late actress who herself played the part of tawaif to perfection in Pakeezah. Richa not only had Meena Kumari's onscreen performances in her mind but also off-screen heartbreaks, her struggles with addiction and more. "It's Mr Bhansali's and my tribute to her."

Bhansali, with whom she has worked previously too in Goliyon Ki Raasleela Ram-Leela, is undeniably a tough taskmaster but 'not aimlessly tough'. Since he would not settle for anything less than perfect, Richa adds, "I would not mind doing 100 re-takes for him." Guess what, for a particular scene of dance in Heeramandi she came rather close — 99 retakes.

Interestingly, Bhansali's presence on the sets also ensures that despite an ensemble cast of so many actresses, including Manisha Koirala and Sonakshi Sinha, there is no rivalry. She chuckles, "When you have such an alpha as the captain of the ship, there is no room for women to have an ego or bicker among themselves. Anyway, he makes his women old, young, those who have small or major parts, look beautiful, for visual aesthetics is so important to him. Moreover,

so high are his standards that invariably parts in his films also end up being actors' most memorable ones."

For Richa, it was a conscious choice to play this hopeless romantic Lajjo as against other

elements of culture survived "Their contribution to poetry, music (Thumris) and dance (Kathak) can't be overlooked," she says.

How challenging was it for a contemporary woman like her



grey characters in the series. Breaking away from stereotypes is something that she has consciously worked upon. Indeed, there is more than one Richa in this Bholi Punjaban of Fukrey franchise and Nagma Khatoun of Gangs of Wasseyapur.

She reasons, "If I were to play similar characters in film after film, I would be bored and so would my audiences. It's an actor's job to create something new. There should be an element of surprise for the audience, otherwise why would they put in their time and money?"

The million dollar question — why should they invest in eight-episode Heeramandi, a tale of courtesans, far removed from their reality of today? She says, "It's shared history of our subcontinent. If you don't know your context, you are lost." She was well-clued in to the fact that there was a place in Lahore called Heeramandi where courtesans had so much sway over society. The series, she so hopes, would make people realise how these courtesans were not just nautch-girls but ones because of whom so many

to step back in time and become an authentic and integral part of 1940s? Director's vision and writing help, but she insists, "You have to do your own research." In the same breath, she also reminds, "No one does period cinema like Mr Bhansali."

As she and her husband Ali Fazal have started a production house and are winning accolades for their film Girls Will Be Girls, would this Punjaban care to promote Punjabi cinema and talent from her home state? She nods, "Punjabi cinema is at a very interesting phase today almost where Marathi cinema was, say, 10 years ago."

She, who has recently seen Chamkila and is a self-confessed Diljit Dosanjh fan, would not only care to produce a Punjabi film but also love to act in a coming-of-age Punjabi film. Her Punjabi as of now is more Delhi-wasi kind... but she will brush up this 'sweet beautiful' language if the role demands. After all, the biggest takeaway from her exacting director Bhansali has been 'absolute insistence on quality.'



## Kareena Kapoor Khan can't wait for The Buckingham Murders magic to unfold for her and Hansal Mehta

On Hansal Mehta's birthday on Monday, Kareena Kapoor Khan extended her wishes to the filmmaker and shared that she could not wait for the magic of their upcoming film *The Buckingham Murders* to unfold for the two of them.

Kareena took to her Instagram stories and shared a monochrome picture featuring herself and the filmmaker engaged in conversation.

"Happy birthday @hansalmehta. Can't wait for the Buckingham magic to unfold for us," she wrote in the caption.

*The Buckingham Murders* is a crime thriller film in which the actress portrays a British-Indian detective assigned to investigate the case of a murdered child in Buckinghamshire. The movie premiered at the 67th BFI London Film Festival in October 2023.

## Tamannaah Bhatia seeks time to respond to ED summons in Mahadev App case

Amidst the unfolding legal saga surrounding the Mahadev Betting App case, actor Tamannaah Bhatia has requested time from the Maharashtra Cyber department to appear before it due to her absence from Mumbai.

The case pertains to the alleged unauthorised broadcasting of the 2023 Indian Premier League on the Fairplay app, a subsidiary of Mahadev's online gaming and betting platform.

Previously, rapper and singer Badshah faced questioning in connection with the same case. Actor Sanjay Dutt was also summoned but has sought time to appear before authorities.

In recent developments, actor Sahil Khan, was arrested on Sunday and remanded to two-day police custody by a Mumbai court starting April 29.

Khan, detained by the



Mumbai Crime Branch's Special Investigative Team (SIT) after being apprehended from Chhattisgarh, was produced before the Shindewadi-Dadar court.

Khan's lawyer, Mujahid Ansari, claimed his client's innocence, stating, "He has been

framed in the matter and been accused of promoting the app."

Mumbai Police has seized Khan's passport as part of ongoing legal proceedings.

The actor stands accused of involvement in running a betting site and promoting illegal betting activities.

The Mahadev Betting App case involves over 38 individuals, including Khan, with an estimated scam size of Rs 15,000 crore. Among those implicated are individuals like Mustakim, brother of underworld don Dawood Ibrahim, and chief accused Ravi Uppal, detained in Dubai last year.

Sahil Khan, known for his roles in films like 'Style' and 'Excuse Me', has transitioned into the fitness industry in recent years.

## Aamir Khan understood the power of 'namaste' during 'Dangal' shoot

of 'Dangal', it was a small village we were shooting in. We shot for more than two months in that location and house."

"You won't believe it, but when I used to arrive there around 5 or 6 in the morning, as my car entered, people would stand outside their homes just to welcome me with folded hands and 'Sat Sri Akaal'. They never disturbed me or stopped my car. After my pack-up, when I would return, they would again be standing outside their homes and greet me 'Good Night'," he said. Aamir said, "I belong to a Muslim family. I am not used to folding my hands in 'namaste.' I'm used to raising my hand (gesturing adaab, the way Muslims greet each other) and bowing my head. After spending those two and a half months in Punjab, I understood the power of 'namaste'. It's such a wonderful emotion. People in Punjab have so much respect for everyone and do not discriminate based on stature."

didn't perform well at the box office.

During the conversation, he also reflected on being raised in a Muslim family and how he learned about the cultural significance of 'namaste'.

Recalling a memorable experience, he first mentioned shooting for 'Rang de Basanti' in Punjab.

The actor said in Hindi, "The people and the Punjabi culture is full of love. So, when we went for the shoot

## Actor Sahil Khan arrested in Mahadev betting app case

The Mumbai cyber cell's SIT on Sunday arrested actor Sahil Khan in connection with the Mahadev betting app case, a police official said. Later, a court here remanded Khan in police custody till May 1.

The actor was apprehended from Jagdalpur in Chhattisgarh on Saturday after the Bombay High Court rejected his pre-arrest bail plea.

Khan was brought to Mumbai, placed under arrest and produced in a magistrate court in Dadar. The Mumbai cyber cell's SIT sought his remand saying he was not cooperating in the investigation.

The police said it had recovered more than 2,000 SIM cards and had details of 1,700 bank accounts, all of which needed verification. His advocate Mujahid Ansari told the court Khan was cooperating with the investigation and had submitted documents as well bank statements. The actor, known for films like 'Style' and 'Excuse Me' and who has now become a fitness expert, is the second person to be arrested by Mumbai police in the betting app case.

The Mumbai cyber cell's SIT has been probing alleged illegal transactions between some financial and real estate firms in Maharashtra and the promoters of the Mahadev betting app. The size of the scam is about Rs 15,000 crore, as per the first information report (FIR) registered at Matunga police station in Mumbai. While the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is investigating the money laundering angle in the Mahadev betting app case, Mumbai police has registered a separate case against Sahil Khan and 31 others. The ED has arrested nine persons so far as part of its probe in the money laundering case.

Notably, Chhattisgarh's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB)/Economic Offence Wing (EOW) on April 24 said it has arrested two persons from New Delhi and Goa in connection with the alleged illegal operations of the Mahadev online gaming and betting application.



Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan, who was last seen in 'Laal Singh Chaddha', shared that he understood the power of 'namaste' while shooting for his 2016 blockbuster 'Dangal' in Punjab.

Aamir recently appeared on the streaming comedy show 'The Great Indian Kapil Show' and spoke with Kapil about various topics, including his last two films, 'Laal Singh Chaddha' and 'Thugs of Hindostan', which



# India's T20 World Cup squad: KL Rahul omitted, Hardik Pandya named vice-captain

Wicketkeeper-batter Sanju Samson and spinner Yuzvendra Chahal were on Tuesday named in India's provisional squad for the T20 World Cup in the Americas but star batter Shubman Gill and the big-hitting Rinku Singh found themselves relegated to the reserves group.

The BCCI announced the Rohit Sharma-led squad after a meeting between secretary Jay Shah and chief selector Ajit Agarkar in Ahmedabad.

All-rounder Hardik Pandya was retained as vice-captain despite his poor recent form after taking over Mumbai Indians' leadership in the ongoing IPL.

Samson, who has had a good IPL both as a batter and captain for Rajasthan Royals, was included as the second wicketkeeper-batter behind Rishabh Pant, pipping the likes of KL Rahul and Ishan Kishan.

Hard-hitting batter Shivam Dube also made the cut on the back of a strong IPL showing.

Leg-spinner Chahal, who last played for India in August 2023, is the second wrist spinner in the team alongside Kuldeep Yadav.

However, Gill, who is enjoying a good run in the IPL as Gujarat Titans captain, found himself among the standbys along with Kolkata Knight Riders' big-hitter Rinku Singh.

The selectors decided to show faith in Yashasvi Jaiswal, who had a slow start in the IPL but regained his touch recently for Rajasthan Royals.



The T20 World cup begins on June 2 in the US and the Caribbean. India will open their campaign against Ireland on June 5 in New York.

## Indian Squad for T20 World Cup:

Rohit Sharma (Captain), Hardik Pandya (Vice Captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant (WK), Sanju Samson (WK), Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohd Siraj.

Reserves: Shubman Gill, Rinku Singh, Khaleel Ahmed and Avesh Khan.

## Mumbai court issues summons to cricketer Prithvi Shaw on social media influencer's plea

### Mumbai

A sessions court here on Tuesday issued summons to Prithvi Shaw on a plea filed by social media influencer Sapna Gill, challenging orders of a magistrate in connection with her complaint against the cricketer.

A metropolitan court in Andheri earlier this month ordered a police enquiry on Gill's plea seeking an FIR against Shaw for allegedly molesting her at a pub.

It had, however, rejected another plea of Gill seeking action against police for failing to register a case on her complaint against Shaw and his friend.

Aggrieved with both the orders, the social media influencer filed a review application before a sessions court in Malad here.

The order passed by the metropolitan magistrate on April 3 is irregular and illegal and that court has "gravely erred"



in passing it, claimed Gill's review application, filed through advocate Ali Kaashif Khan.

On Tuesday, additional sessions judge D G Dhoble issued summons to Shaw.

The court also issued summons to the airport police here, who did not register a case when Gill had first approached them.

The matter will be next heard on June 6.

Gill was arrested in February 2023 along with some others in connection with an attack on Shaw following an argument over clicking selfies at a suburban hotel. She is currently out on bail.

After being granted bail in the case, Gill had approached the airport police station in Andheri with a complaint of molestation against Shaw, his friend Ashish Yadav and others.

She later moved the magistrate court after the police did not register a case against the cricketer.

In her complaint, Gill had sought registration of an FIR under Indian Penal Code sections 354 (molestation), 509 (word, gesture or act intended to insult the modesty of a woman) and 324 (voluntarily causing hurt by dangerous weapons or means) against Shaw and his friend Ashish Yadav for allegedly assaulting her with a bat.

## Rafael Nadal tested in 3-hour win over Cachin at Madrid; Swiatek reaches women's quarterfinals

After spending more than three hours on the court and earning a hard-fought victory, Rafael Nadal was feeling optimistic again.

Nadal's body withstood its toughest test yet at this Madrid Open in a 6-1, 6-7 (5), 6-3 win over 91st-ranked Pedro Cachin on Monday.

He didn't show any signs of physical limitations in a victory that earned him a spot in the round of 16 at the clay-court tournament where he is the record five-time champion.

"It's positive, now I don't feel that something went wrong on my body, but I need to wait until tomorrow, being 100% honest," he said.

"I am trying my best to keep dreaming. Tomorrow is another day to keep dreaming. To keep playing in front of this amazing crowd and, to me, that means everything."

Nadal will next face 31st-ranked Jiri Lehecka. He said he needs "to find a way to be able to play days in a row and still be competitive."

"I don't know if I am in that moment yet," the 22-time Grand Slam champion said. "Let's see what can happen tomorrow."

The 37-year-old Nadal is trying to get in shape for next month's French Open. Since his latest injury layoff, he's had two matches in Barcelona and was pessimistic about his physical condition after arriving in Madrid. But he's won three more times in the capital.

Nadal again looked comfortable early on against Cachin. The Argentine rallied in the second but was broken twice while serving for the set before eventually prevailing in the tiebreaker.

Nadal didn't look as loose in the final set, but did look tired. He wasn't as consistent with his shots but picked up three breaks to seal the victory to the delight of the local crowd in the Caja Magica.

"I took more risks in the third set, but it's hard after so many months without competing," Nadal said.

"I hadn't played a match like this in a long time. I don't know

how I'm going to wake up. But I'm already happy for having won three matches in a row."

Cachin asked for Nadal's shirt after congratulating him at the net, and received the gift moments later.

Top-seeded Jannik Sinner was not at his best but had enough to defeat Pavel Kotov 6-2, 7-5. Sinner, who has been dealing with a hip issue, will face 16th-seeded Karen Khachanov.

"I have been struggling a little bit with my right hip," Sinner said. "We're trying to find a solution and I don't think it's anything serious. Sometimes I feel it more like today and some days are a little bit better."

Third-seeded Daniil Medvedev was two points from defeat before he rallied to beat Sebastian Korda 5-7, 7-6 (4), 6-3. Fifth-seeded Casper Ruud beat Cameron Norrie 6-2, 6-4.

### Swiatek Advances



Top-ranked Iga Swiatek remained on track for a first Madrid title with a 6-1, 6-0 win over Sara Sorribes Tormo.

Swiatek dropped just five points in the second set en route to the quarterfinals of the only high-profile European clay tournament she is yet to win.

The 27th-ranked Sorribes Tormo was the last Spanish woman in the draw.

Swiatek, who lost last year's Madrid final to Aryna Sabalenka, will next face 11th-seeded Beatriz Haddad Maia, who defeated fifth-seeded Maria Sakkari 6-4, 6-4.

Sabalenka, the champion in Madrid in 2021 and 2023, advanced by beating No. 15 Danielle Collins 4-6, 6-4, 6-3. The result ended Collins' 15-match winning streak, and sent Sabalenka into her first WTA 1000 quarterfinal of the season.



## Pakistan Cricket Board finalises Lahore, Karachi, Rawalpindi as venues for Champions Trophy

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has earmarked Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi as venues for next year's Champions Trophy, continuing to insist that the tournament will stay in the country despite speculation of a 'hybrid model' being under consideration to ensure India's participation. The Champions Trophy, which was last held in England in 2017, is expected to be held tentatively in February-March next year.

India have not yet confirmed participation and there is speculation that the ICC could use the 'Hybrid Model' and hold the country's matches at a neutral venue if the team does not get government clearance to travel. The ICC has already made it clear that it will not ask any member nation to defy government policy.

"We've sent the schedule for the matches in Pakistan for the ICC Champions Trophy," PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi said at a press conference in Lahore.

"The ICC's security team came and we had a very good meeting. They looked at arrangements here and we'll also share stadium upgrade plans with them.

"We are trying to ensure we host a very good tournament in Pakistan," Naqvi informed.

The PCB has been steadfast in insisting that the tournament will not be altered in any way to accommodate India.

The 'Hybrid Model' of hosting was used in the Asia Cup last year. The Asian Cricket Council, headed by BCCI secretary Jay Shah, held India's matches in Sri Lanka even though Pakistan was the official host of the tournament.

Naqvi also conceded that condition of all three proposed venues is currently sub-standard in terms of hosting international games of cricket.

"If you look at Gaddafi (here), it is good but the viewing experience is not great for cricket. Football maybe, not cricket," Naqvi said.

"We need to improve facilities in the stadiums, where there are some old problems. Karachi is in bad shape. So on May 7, we will finalise bids from international companies who will come and help us design.

"We are already late but we need to do these upgrades in four-five months. It will be a very tough test but we can do it," Naqvi concluded.

## Rachin Ravindra, Matt Henry first-timers in Williamson-led New Zealand squad for T20 World Cup

Kane Williamson will lead New Zealand in the T20 World Cup for the fourth time while opener Devon Conway, recovering from a thumb injury, has also been named in the 15-man provisional squad for the ICC event in the US and Caribbean in June.

The squad led by Williamson was named on Monday at the ANZ Centre here.

Conway was ruled out of the ongoing IPL due to a thumb injury he suffered in February.

Bowler Matt Henry and batting all-rounder Rachin Ravindra are the only two members of the 15 without T20 World Cup experience.

This will be Williamson's sixth appearance in a T20 World Cup squad. His experience is bettered only by Tim Southee, who has earned selection in his seventh T20 World Cup squad and currently sits as the leading wicket-taker in the history of T20 Internationals.

Seasoned Trent Boult, who opted out of an NZC central contract, has been selected in his fifth T20 World Cup squad.

The squad also boasts significant recent experience in the conditions with 13 of the 15-man group featuring in the team's last tour to the West Indies in 2022.

As well as that, six of the squad members have also featured in the Caribbean Premier League



T20 competition.

Alongside the 15 players selected in the tournament squad, pace bowler Ben Sears will travel and train with the team as an injury cover.

Adam Milne was ruled out following surgery to repair an ankle injury, and Kyle Jamieson was also unavailable for selection as he continues to rehabilitate his back injury.

"I'd like to congratulate everyone named today. It's a special time representing your country at a world tournament," said Blackcaps head coach Gary Stead.

"We expect the venues in the West Indies to offer quite varied conditions and feel we've selected a squad with the scope to adapt to those conditions."

Stead said he was delighted to name two first timers in Henry and Ravindra.

"Matt has worked exceptionally hard on his skills across the phases of a T20 game to come back into selection consideration," he said.

"Rachin has made every post a winner in the past 12 months and it was exciting to see him continue that trajectory over the summer in the T20 format against Australia."

Squad: Kane Williamson (c), Finn Allen, Trent Boult, Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Daryl Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee.

## India beat Bangladesh by 44 runs in first women's T20I

Pace duo of Renuka Singh and Pooja Vastrakar shared five wickets as India produced a clinical bowling display to outclass Bangladesh by 44 runs in the opening women's T20I here on Sunday. Opting to bat, skipper Harmanpreet Kaur and Yastika Bhatia provided solidity in the middle order but India missed the late flourish to manage 145 for seven. The hosts must have fancied their chances of chasing down the total but Indian bowlers led by Renuka delivered the goods to limit Bangladesh to 101 for 8. Skipper Nigar Sultana waged a lonely battle with a 51 off 48 but didn't get any support from the other end.

For India, Renuka was the leader of the bowling unit as she trapped Dilara Akter (4) in her third ball before cleaning up Sobhana Mostary (6) in 5th over. Experienced spinner Deepti Sharma then removed Murshida Khatun (13) LBW, while Vastrakar rapped Fahima Khatun (1) on the pads in 7th over to leave the hosts at 30 for 4. Radha Yadav too tossed one up to



deceive Shorna Akter (11), while Renuka returned to get rid of Rabeya Khan (2). Shreyanka Patil too joined the party, sending back Nahida Akter (9), before Sultana fell to Vastrakar in the final over. Earlier, opener Smriti Mandhana departed for just nine runs but Shafali Verma put up a gritty display to score a 22-ball 31. Bhatia (36 off 29 balls) and Harmappreet (30 off 22) then came up with a 45-run partnership, as India batters overcame the challenges on a slow wicket. Bangladesh leg-spinner Rabeya Khan was the most successful bowler for the hosts, returning figures of 3/23 in four overs. Mandhana started in right earnest dispatching Sultan Khatun's consecutive deliveries in the second over to the ropes. The India vice-captain first danced down the track to heave the ball over the extra cover fielder before swatting a short-pitched delivery through the square leg region. But Mandhana's stay was cut short as she tried to play a Fariha Trisna (1/23) ball across the line, only to find a thick inside edge uprooting

her leg stump. That blow kept the Indian batters silent for a good one over before Shafali declared her intention by heaving a tossed up delivery over the long on fence for a big six off Khatun. Shafali and Yastika continued to score at a reasonable rate, picking up loose deliveries from Fariha and Nahida Akter to hit boundaries. But Shafali departed in the ninth over, trying to play a Rabeya Khan delivery across the line only to end up giving an easy catch to Fahima at extra cover. With Harmanpreet joining Yastika at the crease, runs came freely. She chose Rabiya for special treatment in the 11th over, scoring 13 runs with the help of two boundaries. Yastika too showed superb technique and timing, playing some exquisite boundaries off left-arm pacer Fariha Trisna in the 13th over as India crossed the 100-run mark. But both the well-set batters departed in quick succession, with Harmanpreet declared plumb leg-before in front off a Fahima delivery in the 14th over and Rabeya getting the prized wicket of Yastika, caught in the point region by Sultana. Earlier, Harmanpreet won the toss and elected to bat. The five-match T20I series is a dress rehearsal for the upcoming T20I World Cup slated in Bangladesh later this year.



अक्रॉस स्टेट एंटरटेनमेंट प्रस्तुत

निर्माते  
संजय मंगेश भैरे  
सुचिता संजय भैरे

शिवगिरी

# सोहम

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