

# Across State

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### Kolkata

Acting on a public interest litigation (PIL) petition, the Calcutta High Court on Wednesday dealt a severe blow to West Bengal's TMC government when it cancelled approximately 5 lakh Other Backward Classes certificates issued under a 2012 Act.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said she would not accept the judgment and that OBC reservation would continue in the state. "They got an order passed today but I don't accept it. When 26,000 people lost their jobs because of the BJP, I had said that I would not accept it. Similarly, I am saying today, I do not accept the order. We won't accept

the BJP's order. OBC reservation will continue. Imagine their audacity. This is a kalankit chapter in the country," she said at an election rally.

"The PM has been talking about how minorities will snatch away Tapashili reservation. How can this ever happen? It would lead to constitutional breakdown. Minorities can never touch the Tapashili or Adivasi reservation. But these mischievous people (BJP) get their work done through agencies," she said. "This (OBC reservation Bill) was passed by the Assembly, and there is a court verdict on the same. They are playing games ahead of elections with these things... Can the

PM ever say that minorities will seize Tapashili reservation? He cannot. This is a constitutional guarantee. They are doing this just for votes."

A division bench of Justices Tapabrata Chakraborty and Rajasekhar Mantha, however, clarified that its order would not affect people who are already in service, have succeeded in any selection process of the state government, or have availed of reservation using the certificates.

The court struck down the OBC certificates issued under the West Bengal Backward Classes (Other than Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) (Reservation of Vacancies in Services and Posts) Act after finding them to be illegal.

The bench said the opinion and advice of the Backward Classes Commission is ordinarily binding on the state legislature under the National Commission for Backward Classes Act 1993. It directed the state Backward Classes Welfare Department, in consultation with the commission, to place a report before the legislature with recommendations for the inclusion of new classes or the exclusion of remaining classes in the state OBC list.

## In order to BJP and Congress, EC says tell star campaigners to follow Model Code

### New Delhi

Almost a month after issuing notices to Bharatiya Janata Party president J P Nadda and Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge over alleged Model Code of Conduct (MCC) violations by their star campaigners, the Election Commission of India on Wednesday directed BJP star campaigners not to make communal speeches and those of the Opposition party to refrain from saying the Constitution may be abolished.

The ECI had broken from norms when it issued notices to the BJP and Congress presidents on April 25 on complaints against Prime Minister Narendra Modi by the Opposition and

against Rahul Gandhi and Kharge by the ruling party. While the EC did not name PM Modi or Rahul Gandhi, it asked Nadda and Kharge for their "comments" on the "star campaigners" alleged MCC violations. In the case of the Prime Minister, the complaint pertained to his speech in Rajasthan's Banswara where he accused the Congress of appeasing Muslims, saying they would hand over wealth to those who have more children and "infiltrators". The BJP's complaint against Gandhi was on his speech alleging PM Modi wanted "one language" in the country.

# High humidity, heat leaves Mumbai in oppressive discomfort

## Mumbai

Mumbai continued to languish under hot and humid conditions on Tuesday amidst the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issuing a fresh yellow warning alert for the city and its neighbours. As per weather experts, with temperatures in the range of 34-35 degrees Celsius, the city is experiencing extreme discomfort due to high humidity levels across the western coast.

On Tuesday, temperatures in suburbs as well as the city hit 35 degrees Celsius, marking a departure of nearly one degree above normal. However, as per meteorologists and experts, owing to high humidity levels, the temperature feels much higher.

Speaking to The Indian Express, Mahesh Palawat from Skymet Weather Services said, "Currently, there are westerly winds in



the region and when they blow from the sea, humidity levels increase. There is a cyclonic circulation over Southwest Bay of Bengal owing to which most of the country's west coasts receive the westerlies."

"The combination of high humidity and high temperatures cause extreme discomfort. Even though the recorded temperature is in the range of 34-35 degrees Celsius, it feels like 41-42 degrees Celsius," said Palawat, adding that the city is expected to reel under similar conditions for

the next 3-4 days at least.

As per the forecast furnished by IMD, the city is expected to remain under a yellow warning of hot and humid conditions on Wednesday, following which no alert has been issued for the city.

As the city swelters, the weather bureau has also sounded a yellow alert over the likelihood of thunderstorms coupled with lightning and gusty winds across Maharashtra. However, rainfall is likely to elude Mumbai, for now.

# Pune Teen Driver's Father Had Elaborate Escape Plan

## Pune

The father of the 17-year-old Pune teen driver, whose late-night drunken Porsche dash left two 24-year-old engineers dead, had made an elaborate escape plan, but the cops tracked him down.

Soon after an FIR was registered against him for letting his teenaged son drive the luxury car, the prominent Pune realtor was on the run. To mislead the cops, he left home in his car and asked the driver to take the road to Mumbai. He told another driver to leave for Goa in his other car. On the way to Mumbai, he got off the car and used a friend's car to proceed towards Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, earlier known as Aurangabad. Multiple cars were involved to confuse the cops on where he was headed, police have said. The realtor also started using a new SIM card so that police cannot track his number, police have said.

When police got information that he was in his friend's car, they started tracking the vehicle through its GPS. A team of the Pune crime branch then identified him using footage from CCTV cameras on the route. Eventually, in a late night raid at a lodge in Sambhajnagar, the cops



arrested the realtor. He will be produced in court today.

The Porsche crash, which took place on Saturday night, has sparked national outrage after the teenager was granted bail within 15 hours on conditions that many have described as flimsy. A local court asked him to write a 300-word essay on accidents, work with traffic police for 15 days and undergo counselling for his drinking habit.

Police have now moved the juvenile justice board for permission to try the teenager -- aged 17 years and eight months -- as an adult. A decision on this plea is also expected today.

Aneesh Awadhiya and Ashwini Koshtha, both from Madhya Pradesh, were returning from a get-together on a bike when the Porsche, reportedly

at a speed of 200 km per hour, hit them from behind. Both IT engineers died on the spot.

Their families have criticised the swift bail granted to the teenaged driver and described this incident as a "murder, not an accident". The teen and his two friends were returning from a pub when the accident took place. Police have also arrested owners of two establishments and a staff for serving alcohol to the minor.

Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar told media that they are making a "watertight case". "We have technical evidence coupled with corroborative evidence to make a watertight case to have this accused punished under the relevant sections of the law," he said.

## Maharashtra HSC board results out; Mumbai continues to hold last spot in terms of pass percentage for 3rd straight year

### Mumbai

The Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education (MSBSHSE) declared the Higher Secondary Certificate (Class 12) result on Tuesday. At 91.95 per cent, the Mumbai division continues to rank lowest in terms of the pass percentage among the nine divisions of the Maharashtra State Board for the third consecutive year.

Last year (2023), the Mumbai division had recorded a pass percentage of 88.13

per cent. This was then considered as a considerable dip in the passing percentage for the division, which stood at 90.91 per cent in 2022.

Among the nine divisions, Konkan topped the chart with a pass percentage of 97.51 per cent followed by Nashik (94.71 per cent), Pune (94.44 per cent), Kolhapur (94.28 per cent), Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (94.08), Amravati (93 per cent), Latur (92.36 per cent), Nagpur (92.12 per cent) and Mumbai (91.95 per cent).

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## ED arrests 5th accused in Rs 263 crore TDS scam, PMLA court sends him to agency's custody till May 27

### Mumbai

The Mumbai unit of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested yet another accused in the Rs 263 crore Income Tax Refund (ITR) fraud, the officials of the central agency said on Wednesday. The ED added that the accused allegedly possessed a part of the proceeds of crime.

The ED had last year arrested former Income Tax (I-T) officer Tanaji Mandal Adhikari in the case. According to the ED, Adhikari allegedly generated fake TDS (Tax Deducted at Source) refunds to the tune of Rs 263.95 crore when he was posted in the I-T's Mumbai office.

The ED officials said that Purshottam Chavan was arrested on Monday under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002. He was produced before a special PMLA court that remanded him to ED's custody till May 27.

Earlier, four accused were arrested in this case — Adhikari, Bhushan Patil and Rajesh Shetty who are in judicial custody and Rajesh Brijlal Batreja, who is in ED custody. Patil, Shetty and Batreja are associates of Adhikari.

The probe has revealed

that Batreja and Chavan were in touch regularly and shared incriminating messages related to hawala transactions and diversion of the proceeds of the crime, the ED said.

The ED also raided the residential premises of Chavan on Sunday in which a number of property documents, foreign currency and mobile phones were seized.

The agency has claimed that Chavan tried to hamper the investigation by destroying evidence which could further lead to tracing of the proceeds of the crime.

The anti-money laundering agency has already seized and attached immovable and movable properties belonging to the accused persons to the tune of Rs 168 crore in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

The ED action is a part of its investigation initiated on the basis of an FIR registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 against Adhikari and the others for fraudulently generating and issuing TDS refunds from the Income Tax Department.

## NHSRCL starts casting concrete segments for bullet train project

### Mumbai

A 21-km tunnel is under construction between the Bandra Kurla Complex and Shilphata for the bullet train project that will connect Mumbai to Ahmedabad. Of the total length, 16 km will

Corporation.

High-strength M70 grade concrete is being used to ensure superior structural integrity and long-term durability. The casting and stacking yard, covering an area of 98,898 sqm (9.9 hectares) in Mahape, Thane district, Maharashtra, is currently being commissioned.

The yard is equipped with various cranes, gantries, and machines to automate and mechanize the casting operations, ensuring high-quality assurance during the casting and stacking of the segments. Additionally, the facility will include casting sheds, a stacking area, a batching plant, and a steam curing area.

## 'Mumbai's infra development to bring about socio-economic transformation': BMC Commissioner

### Mumbai

Commissioner of Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and state appointed administrator Bhushan Gagrani, who completed two months of his tenure this week, said on Tuesday that the visual transformation that Mumbai is witnessing owing to its infrastructure development will result in the maximum city's socio-economic transformation as well.

"Earlier, when the Mumbai-Pune expressway was planned, there were a lot of apprehensions across sectors about this project. However today, Pune has emerged as one of the major IT and automobile hubs in India and the factor contributing behind its growth is the expressway, which has paved the way for development. In a similar way, the infrastructure projects that we are building today is going to bring about socio-economic impact in Mumbai," said Gagrani.



The municipal commissioner was speaking to reporters during a brainstorming session 'Making Mumbai, Liveable, Modern City' at the Mumbai Press Club on Tuesday.

"The coastal road and MTHL will lead to an equilibrium in Mumbai's real estate infrastructure market. Infrastructure projects bring benefits that are not likely to be comprehended immediately at the time of completion but with time, they do bring results," he added.

Gagrani also maintained that issues such as urban planning,

topography and health issues, which Mumbai is experiencing at the moment, is strikingly similar to what cities in the west like London, Manhattan and New York experienced during the 1800s.

Meanwhile, city based architect and panelist P K Das pointed out the importance of increasing the existing green cover of Mumbai and highlighted how rampant construction works have led the maximum city to becoming a heat Island.

"The fact that we are throwing all cushions in the air is a myth. In 1857, when India was fighting its first war of Independence, London was building its first Metro network. Today London's total length of Metro lines is 400km, while in Mumbai, we will be building 300km of Metro lines in just 10 years. These are all public transport network which will benefit all sections of society," Gagrani said.

## 8 more oversized hoardings taken down, steel frames being dismantled

### Mumbai

Days after Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) called for the removal of eight oversized hoardings near Dadar's Tilak Bridge, all of which are owned by the M/s Ego Media, the civic body, over the weekend, went on to pull down the unauthorised structures.

While eight hoardings have been taken down after BMC initiated the work, the civic body is still in the process of dismantling the steel structures on which the hoardings were mounted. As per officials, the entire structure will be dismantled over the next few days.

"While hoardings have been removed, the steel structures are still being dismantled as the work is being done manually because cranes can't be used owing to the busy road adjoining the structure. Furthermore, a portion of the road has also been dug up for bridge related work, which also creates hurdles," an official added.



After the hoarding collapse in Ghatkopar which killed 16 and injured 75 people, the BMC on Friday wrote to GRP asking them to remove eight oversized and unauthorised hoardings near Dadar's Tilak Bridge to prevent further loss to life and property, within three days, failing which the civic body would move in and pull down the structures themselves. Data procured by BMC showed that Ego Media—which also owned the Ghatkopar hoarding — was the advertiser

of all eight illuminated hoardings in Dadar.

To be noted, none of them had been issued permits by BMC, and all hoardings barring one also violated civic norms for outdoor advertisements, with most of them ranging between 30 to 80 feet. BMC policy guidelines, issued in 2008, for outdoor hoardings in Mumbai cap the maximum size of a hoarding at 40 x 40 feet, a dimension determined on the basis of the wind speed in the coastal city.



be excavated using three Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs), while the remaining 5 km will be built using the New Austrian Tunnelling Method (NATM) in the project undertaken by The National High Speed Rail



# Can't have varying sentences for identical crimes, says Supreme Court

New Delhi

As judges award varying sentences to criminals convicted of identical crimes, the Supreme Court has underlined the "crying need for a clear sentencing policy", saying any unwarranted disparity would be against the very concept of a fair trial and justice.

"Unfortunately, we do not have a clear policy or legislation when it comes to sentencing. Over the years, it has become judge-centric and there are admitted disparities in awarding a sentence," a Bench of Justice MM Sundresh and Justice SVN Bhatti said.

The Bench said the decision of a judge in sentencing would vary from person to person and also from stage to stage. "It is controlled by the mind. The environment and the upbringing of a judge would become the ultimate arbiter in deciding the sentence," the Bench said in its May 17 verdict.



The top court directed the Secretary, Ministry of Law and Justice, to respond to its suggestion and file a report in six months. Noting that such an important issue had escaped the Centre's attention, it asked the government to consider introducing a comprehensive policy, possibly by way of getting a report from a duly constituted 'Sentencing Commission'. The

top court refused to interfere with a Patna High Court order for a fresh trial in two criminal cases, including the rape of a minor girl in which the accused was awarded death penalty on January 27, 2022, within days of his arrest on December 12, 2021. The Bench said the accused was denied due opportunity to defend himself as the judge acted in undue haste.

# PM Modi: Not anti-minority, but against 'spl citizens'



New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said the BJP has never been against minorities, believes in equality for all, but is not ready to accept anyone as "special citizens".

"The BJP has never been against minorities. Not just today but never. We want to take everyone along with us. We are not ready to accept anyone as special citizens but consider everyone equal," the PM said speaking to a news agency today. The PM had earlier said his sole purpose was to expose the opposition, which was the one playing "communal and caste politics". "I am going to expose the opposition even if I am tagged with a communal label," he had told a television channel yesterday. The PM, exuding confidence of the NDA combine winning 400 plus seats, said all assessments of the past phases of the election showed the NDA was in pole position, while the Congress, along with its "INDI Alliance", was struggling to even open its account in some states. "We will see more seats from all parts of the country, particularly from the South and East. The NDA is on course to achieving 400 seats," PM said.

Rejecting opposition claims that the BJP wanted a massive mandate to change the Constitution and scrap constitutional quotas for SCs, STs and OBCs, the PM said: "This is a laughable proposition that we will do anything to reservations given

by the Constitution."

"Without the Constitution, a person of my socio-economic background could have never made it this far. So, even if you assume I act out of self-interest, my own welfare lies in the welfare of the Constitution," he said.

On BJP's South and East push, the PM said like in 2019 the party would emerge as the single-largest party in the South also. "We will be the single-largest party in southern India and by an even bigger margin than the last time. We have seen a jump in mind share already. We will see a big jump in seat share and vote share across the region," he said, adding the "so-called red corridor will become a saffron corridor" in these elections.

Reiterating his priority to root out corruption, the PM said his war against corruption was a serious one. "This battle against corruption is a serious one and probe agencies must be allowed to do their work without interference," Modi said.

He said his remarks on Adani-Ambani (when he asked Rahul Gandhi whether the two industrialists had sent him tempos full of money) had been validated by senior Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury. "Adhir admitted he will not speak against Adani-Ambani if they send tempo-loads of money," said PM.

On a lighter note, the PM told the agency that the biggest allegation he had ever faced involved owning 250 pairs of clothes.

# Indian-Origin US Scientist Shrinivas R Kulkarni Wins Prestigious Shaw Prize In Astronomy

Hong Kong

Shrinivas R Kulkarni, an Indian-origin professor of astronomy from the US will be bestowed the prestigious Shaw Prize in Astronomy for his ground-breaking discoveries about millisecond pulsars, gamma-ray bursts, supernovae, and other variable or transient astronomical objects.

Apart from Mr Kulkarni, who is the George Ellery Hale Professor of Astronomy and Planetary Science, Division of Physics, Mathematics and Astronomy at the California Institute of Technology, the other Shaw Prize awardees are Swee Lay Thein and Stuart Orkin, both from the US, who received the Shaw Prize in Life Science and Medicine is awarded in equal shares, and Peter Sarnak, another US scientist who received the Shaw Prize in Mathematical Sciences.

"The Shaw Prize in



Astronomy is awarded to Shrinivas R Kulkarni, for his ground-breaking discoveries about millisecond pulsars, gamma-ray bursts, supernovae, and other variable or transient astronomical objects.

His contributions to time-domain astronomy culminated in the conception, construction and leadership of the Palomar Transient Factory and its successor, the Zwicky Transient Facility, which has revolutionised our

understanding of the time-variable optical sky," The Shaw Prize Foundation said on Tuesday here while announcing the Shaw Laureates for 2024.

"The Shaw Prize consists of three annual prizes: Astronomy, Life Science and Medicine, and Mathematical Sciences, each bearing a monetary award of USD 1.2 million. This will be the 21st year that the Prize has been awarded and the presentation ceremony is scheduled for Tuesday, November 12 in Hong Kong," the Foundation said.

According to his bio posted on Caltech's Division of Physics, Mathematics and Astronomy website, Mr Kulkarni did MS from the Indian Institute of Technology in 1978 and followed it with a PhD from the University of California in 1983. Among the many of his achievements, he was also the director of Caltech Optical Observatories from 2006 till 2018.

## UPA I, II completed 2 terms under one PM, Manmohan Singh, Mallikarjun Kharge replies to Modi's remark



### New Delhi

Reacting to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "five PMs in five years" remark, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday said similar things were said even in 2004 but the UPA government completed two full terms under one PM, Manmohan Singh.

Addressing an election rally at Pratapgarh in Uttar Pradesh on May 16, Modi had said the INDIA bloc wanted to make five prime ministers in five years and claimed that it would disintegrate after June 4.

Kharge responded by rejecting Modi's claims.

"In UPA I and UPA II, we were supported by other parties and we completed full term," Kharge told reporters here.

For 10 years, there was one prime minister, a person who came from the land of Punjab, ran the country and changed its economy, he said about former prime minister Manmohan Singh.

Taking a dig at the BJP, he said, "Whereas they did nothing for 10 years."

Accompanied by former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Kharge arrived here after addressing an election rally

in Jagadhri in Haryana.

On being asked that the ruling party leaders often ask who the opposition "PM face" is, Kharge said, after the polls, the INDIA bloc partners would sit and decide this (if opposition wins the election).

He said the BJP has been saying that the Congress or the INDIA bloc does not have a face like Modi. They used to say the same thing in 2004 when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the prime minister, the Congress president said.

"After the polls, alliance partners will sit and decide. Like we ran the UPA government, in a similar manner we will do this," he said.

Replying to a question, Kharge claimed that the INDIA bloc had gained good ground in the ongoing Lok Sabha election.

"Everywhere we are gaining and they are losing. Our alliance will definitely stop the Modi government from coming to power," he said, and added, "The people are fighting against Modi and we are supporting them."

Voting for sixth and seventh phases of elections will be held on May 25 and June 1, respectively.

## Had it not been for Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru wouldn't have agreed to quota: Narendra Modi

### New Delhi

With two phases left for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections to end, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday intensified his attack on the opposition Congress, firing salvos at late prime ministers Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

Invoking BR Ambedkar, the PM, speaking in Bihar's Champaran, said Nehru would not have agreed to reservation had it not been for the Father of the Constitution.

"Had Babasaheb Ambedkar not been there, Nehru would not have allowed reservation for the SCs and STs. He wrote to the chief ministers of the time opposing reservation. The Congress mindset has always been anti-reservation," said the PM, countering the INDIA bloc charge that the BJP was looking for 400 plus seats in the Lok Sabha to "change the Constitution and scrap constitutional quotas". Modi argued that reservation for the SCs, STs and OBCs was safe only under the BJP-led NDA, and cited a letter Nehru wrote to the chief ministers of the time to oppose quotas.

The PM sought votes in the name of the NDA government's "10 years of social justice marked by constitutional status to the National Backward Classes Commission and extension of OBC quota to Sainik Schools among others".

"All PMs of this (Nehru-Gandhi) family — from



Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi to Rajiv Gandhi — opposed OBC quotas. The Congress has always betrayed the deprived. That is why it is now left with only one vote bank," the PM said, repeating his allegation that the Congress wanted to "usurp SC, ST, OBC quota and give it to those who practise vote jihad".

"Now, to appease the only vote bank it has been left with, the Congress wants to snatch SC/ST/OBC reservation and give to those who indulge in vote jihad," said Modi in a stinging attack on the opposition alliance in Bihar.

At another rally in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, the PM said, "Everyone knows who poses the greatest threat to the Constitution."

He was referring to the June 12, 1975, Allahabad High Court judgment which held then PM Indira Gandhi guilty of electoral malpractices and disqualified her

from holding public office for six years.

"In Raebareli, when democracy was throttled by Indira Gandhi, it was the Allahabad High Court that disqualified her from contesting elections," the PM said in Prayagraj, attacking the SP-Congress alliance for attempting to snatch quotas to favour "vote jihad practitioners".

The PM said "a cleanliness drive against the mafia raj is underway in Yogi Adityanath-led UP".

Later, the PM, speaking in his Lok Sabha segment Varanasi, harked back to pro-women agenda, promising to convert women's "shakti into mahashakti" once elected on June 4. Listing government schemes on rural housing, drone didis, subsidised cooking gas and solar panels among others, Modi said, "When a home cannot run without women, how can the country?"

## INDIA bloc inching closer to victory with each poll phase: CM Kejriwal

### New Delhi

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday accused Union Home Minister Amit Shah of referring to the people of Delhi as "Pakistanis" and asserted that they are his family and should not be abused.

Addressing a virtual press conference, Kejriwal said with the completion of each phase of the Lok Sabha polls, it is becoming clearer that the Narendra Modi government is on its way out and the INDIA bloc is coming to power on June

4. He said the INDIA bloc would give a stable government to the country.

On Monday, Shah and Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath addressed public meetings in South Delhi and East Delhi parliamentary constituencies, respectively.

Kejriwal alleged the number of people who attended Shah's rally was less than 500.

"He said the supporters of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are Pakistanis. I want to ask him that the people of Delhi have

formed the government by giving us 62 seats (and) 56 per cent vote share. Are the people of Delhi Pakistanis?"

"The people of Punjab have formed the government by giving us 92 out of 117 seats. Are the people of Punjab Pakistanis? The people of Gujarat gave us 14 per cent votes. Are the people of Gujarat also Pakistanis? The people of Goa gave us love (and) trust. Are the people of Goa also Pakistanis?" Kejriwal questioned.

He said the AAP's panches, sarpanches, mayors and councillors were elected in

many parts of the country in the panchayat and municipal elections.

"Are all the people of this country Pakistanis? What are you saying?" said the Delhi chief minister.

Kejriwal's reaction came in response to a statement made by Shah during his rally a day earlier while seeking votes for his party's candidate in the South Delhi constituency, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri.

"Kejriwal and Rahul (Gandhi) have no support in India. Their supporters are in Pakistan," the home minister had said.



# Delhi High Court dismisses Manish Sisodia's bail pleas

New Delhi

Holding that the possibility of evidence-tampering by him could not be ruled out, the Delhi High Court on Tuesday dismissed bail pleas of former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia in corruption and money laundering cases lodged by the CBI and the ED in connection with the excise policy case. "This court is of the opinion that petitioner has not been able to make out a case for grant of bail in his favour," Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma said, dismissing Sisodia's bail pleas. Pointing out that Sisodia was a powerful and influential person who had the responsibility of 18 ministries, the high court said many witnesses were public servants and had given statements against him and the possibility of the accused trying to influence them could not be ruled out.

The case exemplified grave abuse of public authority and breach of public trust by Sisodia, Justice Sharma said, castigating



him for framing a policy to enrich private persons. The material collected by the probe agencies showed that Sisodia subverted the process of making the excise policy by fabricating public feedback to suit his goal, the HC said.

Sisodia's conduct amounted to "great betrayal of democratic principles", Justice Sharma said, adding that he sought to manipulate the policy formulation and deviated from the report of an expert committee constituted by him.

The high court also rejected his allegations against the probe

agencies and the trial court of delaying the trial even as it said the trial court's observation that there was a concerted effort on part of the accused to delay the trial was not justified. Maintaining that it was not the right stage to grant bail, a Delhi special court had on April 30 dismissed Sisodia's bail pleas in corruption and money laundering cases for alleged irregularities in the formulation and implementation of the excise policy of 2021-22.

A Delhi special court on Tuesday extended Sisodia's judicial custody till May 31.

# Will visit Sandeshkhali after TMC win: Mamata Banerjee

New Delhi

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said she would visit Sandeshkhali soon after her party candidate Haji Nurul wins from Basirhat, the Lok Sabha constituency under which the area comes.

Basirhat is slated to go to the polls in the last phase on June 1. "If Haji wins then I will go to meet the people in Sandeshkhali within a couple of days," said Banerjee, who has not visited the island despite the massive controversy erupting there.

In February, Sandeshkhali — located on the borders of Sundarbans — came under the spotlight when a group of agitators, mostly women, held massive protest marches against the local Trinamool leader Sheikh Shahjahan, accusing him of land



grabbing and sexual exploitation.

The issue subsequently took various turns and twists, triggering a massive political row between the Trinamool Congress and the BJP.

During her first visit today to the Basirhat constituency since the Sandeshkhali unrest, Mamata Banerjee said she was saddened by the plight of women in the area who fell prey to the BJP "manipulation".

Banerjee, who was addressing an election rally at Sangrampur in Basirhat, said the BJP should

not have played with the dignity of women in Sandeshkhali and added that the saffron camp's conspiracy stood exposed in the wake of the revelations by BJP functionary Gangadhar Koyal.

"People would have never realised how the BJP had hatched the conspiracy had the videos not surfaced. The BJP should not play with the dignity of women," Banerjee said, referring to the statement of Koyal, purportedly a BJP mandal president, who was recorded on a spy cam allegedly narrating how BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari instructed party functionaries to frame TMC leaders and get them arrested.

Accusing the PM of taking advantage of the Sandeshkhali controversy, Banerjee said the Modi government had the worst track record in terms of women's safety and security.

# Contours of theatre commands ready, proposal to be sent to govt



New Delhi

The contours of India's biggest military reforms — creating theatre commands having an integrated force with all elements such as cyber, space, land, air and sea — have been given the final shape. Sources said the proposal would now be sent to the government for approval.

The Department of Military Affairs under the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Gen Anil Chauhan, will initiate the move to seek government approval.

This morning, the CDS gave out details of the reform plan kick-started to run in three demarcated timelines till 2047 by incorporating changes in technology, addressing the changing nature of warfare and integrating the abilities of the three armed forces.

"Having theatre commands is just the beginning of a long-term plan aimed at having a future-ready force capable of multi-domain operations," said General Chauhan. He was speaking at the 22nd Maj

Gen Samir Sinha memorial lecture at the United Service Institution, a Ministry of Defence backed think-tank in the Capital.

The reforms would include integration of space and cyber operations with the existing domains of air, land and sea warfare, said the CDS.

He revealed how the service chiefs and he had ironed out difference in opinion on reforms in behind-the-scene brainstorming sessions under code name "Operation Tiranga". The CDS and the three chiefs had 11 meetings each lasting three to four hours.

The plan entails a three-stage process that includes among other things self-reliance, adapting to technology and defining what is integration. Technology was changing the warfare and there was a flux in the world order, the CDS said. Theatre commands could not function without jointness and integration.

# Special court extends ED remand of Jharkhand minister Alamgir Alam for 5 days

Ranchi

The Special PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court here on Wednesday extended the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) remand of Jharkhand Minister Alamgir Alam for five days in an alleged money-laundering

case, lawyers said.

Alam was arrested after two days of grilling by the ED on May 15 at the agency's office here. He was remanded to the custody of the central agency for six days by the PMLA court on May 16, which started from May 17.

## Pune Porsche accident: Decide limit on serving alcohol; if someone highly drunk, make arrangements for stay, court tells pubs



### Pune

A local court hearing the luxury car accident case on Tuesday remanded three accused in police custody till May 24, and directed the pub and bar operators to decide a limit on how much liquor should be served to their customers as the latter use their own vehicles to drive back home afterwards. The court remanded the three accused - an owner and two managers of different restaurants - in police custody in the case of a car accident allegedly involving a 17-year-old boy that claimed the lives of two persons in the early hours of Sunday.

While seeking their custody for seven days, the prosecution told the court that the establishments owned or managed by the accused served liquor to the boy and his friends without confirming his age.

Expressing concern over the loss of two lives in the accident, the judge, while remanding the

three accused into police custody, came down heavily on the pub and bar operators.

On the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, the accused juvenile along with his friends went to the two establishments between 9.30 am and 1 am and allegedly consumed liquor, the police said.

After hearing the arguments of the prosecution and the defence, Additional Sessions Court Judge S P Ponkshe expressed concern over the loss of two lives in the accident, and said, "...If the person is highly drunk, make arrangements for his stay there. What should people walking on the road do? Those who have come to the pub would not go home walking. They will go driving their vehicles. A change has to be there somewhere." She asked the establishments to decide on the limit to serve the liquor to the patrons.

"They must be aware how much should be served. Decide a

limit on it," she said.

Adv S K Jain, the defence counsel representing the three accused, opposed the police custody and said that section 77 of Juvenile Justice Act is non-cognisable, and argued that there is no need of the police custody as the investigation in the case was already done. The prosecution, however, said that the police need to investigate the case and for that they need the custody of the accused.

### 2 liquor serving outlets visited by teen driver sealed

The Maharashtra excise department has sealed two restaurants, where the teen was allegedly served liquor, on orders of the Pune district collectorate.

The two outlets, Cosie restaurant and Hotel Blak Club, were sealed on Tuesday following orders of the district collectorate.

While Cosie is located in Koregaon Park, an area adjacent to Kalyani Nagar, the Blak Club is in Mundhwa.

## 'Assault' case: 'Pressure on AAP leaders to malign me', says Swati Maliwal



### New Delhi

Aam Aadmi Party's Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on Wednesday alleged pressure on party leaders to malign and character assassinate her as she fights the alleged assault case where Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal assistant Bibhav Kumar is the prime accused.

"Yesterday, I got a call from a senior leader of the party. He told me how there is a lot of pressure on everyone, to speak dirty things against Swati, they have to break her morale by leaking her personal photos. It is being said that whoever supports her will be expelled from the party," Maliwal said on X.

She said someone has been given the duty of doing press conferences and someone else has been given the duty of tweeting against her.

"Someone's duty is to call volunteers sitting in America and get something out against me. Some beat reporters close

to the accused have the duty of preparing some fake sting operations.

"You may raise an army of thousands, I will face it alone because the truth is with me," said Maliwal who has alleged assault by Kumar when she went to meet the CM at his Civil Lines residence on May 13.

Maliwal said she was not angry with her colleagues because the accused (Bibhav) is a very powerful man.

"Even the biggest leaders are afraid of him. No one has the courage to take a stand against him. I don't even expect anything from anyone. But I do feel sad that the woman minister of Delhi is smilingly maligning the character of an old female colleague of the party," she lamented.

Maliwal said she has started a fight for my self-respect and will continue to fight until she got justice.

"I am completely alone in this fight but I will not give up!" She said.

## Uttarakhand fires may trigger Himalayan glacial melt: Experts

### New Delhi

Raging forest fire in Uttarakhand could accelerate Himalayan glacial melt, experts said. More than 1,140 hectares of forest cover has been lost owing to over 1,000 wildfire incidents in the Himalayan state since November 2023.

"The temperature rises due to forest fire and this certainly impacts the glaciers. It intensifies heat and emits black carbon. The increase in black carbon concentration triggers melting of glaciers. Even the vegetation in the hilly terrain

gets impacted due to forest fires. The Himalayan glaciers are also under stress due to global warming," Pitamber Singh Negi, a scientist at Himalayan Forest Research Institute, told The Tribune.

According to experts, black carbon is a pollutant emitted from forest fire, diesel engines, coal-fired plants and burning of waste.

Dr R Subramanian, Sector Head (Air Quality), Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy, said: "Black carbon, emitted by fossil fuel and biofuel burning, is

a significant contributor to outdoor and household air pollution, and melts snow and ice in the Arctic and the Himalayas."

In an action taken report tabled in the Lok Sabha in December 2023, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources said: "The Geological Survey of India had not conducted studies on estimated loss of glaciers between 1950 and 2020, and not projected any estimate of loss by the year 2100 in the Himalayan region." World Meteorological Organization

recently warned that accelerated glacier retreat in the Himalayas could heighten risk of glacial lake outburst floods.

Requesting anonymity, an official from the Uttarakhand forest department said: "Glaciers act as mirrors reflecting light and heat. This feature is known as albedo. But when black carbon deposits on glaciers, light and heat are absorbed which results in meltdown. Vegetation around the glaciers should also be protected in order to protect glaciers, but during wildfire these also get impacted."



## Swati Maliwal 'assault': Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar brought back to Delhi from Mumbai

**New Delhi**

The Delhi Police on Wednesday brought back Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar from Mumbai, where he had been taken a day before for the discovery of data from his iPhone, an officer said.

Kumar is in a five-day police custody in connection with the alleged assault on Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal at the Delhi CM's residence.

On Tuesday, Kumar had been taken to Mumbai for the discovery of data from his phone which he had allegedly formatted before his arrest.

Police suspect Kumar formatted his phone after transferring its data to some person or device in Mumbai.

Kumar's phones and laptop, and CCTV recordings from Kejriwal's house have been sent for forensic examination, an officer said.



The officer said as the police custody of Kumar is ending on Thursday, investigators are trying to collect all evidence related to the case.

Meanwhile, Maliwal in a post on X alleged that there is a "lot of pressure" on everyone in the party to malign her.

"Yesterday I got a call from a big leader of the party. They told me how there is a lot of pressure on everyone, they have to say bad things against Swati, they have to break her by leaking her personal photos. It is being said that anyone who supports

her will be expelled from the party." She added, "Someone has got the duty of doing press conference and someone has got the duty of tweeting. It is someone's duty to call the volunteers sitting in America and get something out against me."

## Defence Minister Rajnath Singh bats for 'one nation, one election' at Karnal rally



**Karnal**

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh batted for 'one nation, one election' and said that the BJP has initiated steps in this field and it will implement it. While addressing a gathering at Gharaunda grain market, he accused the AAP and Congress of betraying Anna Hazare and Mahatma Gandhi. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had said that he would not form a party, but he did. Leaders of both the parties are involved in corruption. "Our government has taken steps to eradicate corruption and give powers to the Enforcement Directorate and Central Bureau of Investigation. Previously, these agencies were not permitted to use their power," he said, adding that Kejriwal would go to jail. The Defence Minister praised the former Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar for good governance and assured people that they would choose Khattar rather than an MP.

## 'Be combat ready': Navy Chief Admiral DK Tripathi to officers

**New Delhi**

Three weeks after taking over as Indian Navy Chief, Admiral DK Tripathi on Tuesday evening addressed naval officers at and laid out what was expected of the force, including being combat ready, as maritime threats are rising.

It was Admiral Tripathi's maiden address after taking over as the Navy Chief at the start of this month. He emphasised that as the primary manifestation of India's maritime power is to remain 'combat ready' at all times to safeguard national maritime interests.

That has to be "anytime, anywhere, anyhow" said the Admiral, as he spoke to officers at the newly opened

naval headquarters at the Delhi Cannt.

The Admiral mentioned the security environment and consequent actions required by the Navy.

He reiterated the unwavering commitment of the Indian Navy towards self-reliance on finding in-house solutions. He asked for innovation and need to embrace niche technologies to address the existing and emerging challenges in the maritime domain. Among the audience were middle- and senior-level Navy officers. He asked them to be focused on being "the solution providers" and to "prioritise outcomes" towards becoming a combat ready, credible, cohesive, and future ready Navy.

## NCP (SP) candidate claims person breached security, tried to reach EVMs' godown in Maharashtra's Ahmednagar

**Mumbai**

NCP (SP) candidate from Maharashtra's Ahmednagar Lok Sabha seat, Nilesh Lanke, on Wednesday claimed a person breached the three-tier security and tried to reach a godown where the EVMs were kept after polling in the constituency.

Lanke posted on X a CCTV grab while claiming the person tried tamper the close-circuit camera and reach the godown.

The Nationalist Congress Party (SP) leader raised questions over the security deployed there.

"A person easily breached the three-tier security around one of the godowns where EVMs

are stored. He tried to tamper the CCTV cameras, but my colleagues intervened in time," he claimed in the post on X.

"If my colleagues can catch the person, I wonder how the three-tier security system could not stop the unidentified person. Does it mean the system itself is biased and trying to steal democracy? It looks like the administration is being a mere spectator," he alleged.

Lanke was pitted against BJP's Sujay Vikhe Patil in the Ahmednagar Lok Sabha seat.

Last week, the NCP alleged wrongdoing after CCTV cameras got turned off for 45 minutes

at a godown where the EVMs from the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency were stored in Pune district. The election authorities, however, then clarified that a cable of the cameras had to be removed for a short period during some electrical work on the premises in the morning.

In Baramati, sitting MP Supriya Sule locked horns with her sister-in-law and Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra.

Polling for the 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra was held in five phases from April 19 to May 20. Votes will be counted on June 4.

## NIA begins probe on alleged AAP foreign funding by pro-Khalistani groups: Sources

**New Delhi**

Days after Delhi L-G Vinai Kumar Saxena recommended a National Investigation Agency probe into allegations that the Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party received political funding from pro-Khalistan organisation Sikhs for Justice, a banned terror organisation in India, the central agency is learnt to have commenced investigations.

Top sources said NIA probe has begun on a communication Principal Secretary to the L-G sent to

Union Home Secretary on May 5.

The letter to MHA followed a complaint alleging that AAP had received USD 16 million from extremist Khalistani groups for "aiding the release of 1993 Delhi bomb blast convict Devinder Pal Singh Bhullar and espousing pro-Khalistani sentiments."

The complainant was Ashoo Mongia, national general secretary, World Hindu Federation India.

Saxena recommended that since the complaint was against a sitting Chief Minister and related to political

funding by a banned terrorist organisation, electronic evidences adduced by the complainant required investigation, including forensic examination.

The L-G had also on May 5 referred to Union Home Ministry a letter written by Kejriwal to one Iqbal Singh in January 2014, mentioning that "the AAP Government has already recommended to the President the release of Prof Bhullar and would be working on other issues including formation of SIT, etc sympathetically and in a time-bound manner".



# In a historic move, Norway, Ireland and Spain recognise Palestine as a state

## Barcelona (Spain)

Norway, Ireland and Spain recognised a Palestinian state on Wednesday in a historic move that drew condemnation from Israel and jubilation from the Palestinians. Israel ordered back its ambassadors from Norway and Ireland.

It was a lightning cascade of announcements. First was Norway, whose Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said “there cannot be peace in the Middle East if there is no recognition.”

Gahr Støre said the Scandinavian country will officially recognise a Palestinian state as of May 28. “By recognising a Palestinian state, Norway supports the Arab peace plan,” he said.

Several European Union countries have in the past weeks indicated that they plan to make the recognition, arguing a two-state solution is essential for lasting peace in the region.

Norway, which is not a member of the European Union but mirror its moves, has been an ardent supporter of a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians.

“The terror has been committed by Hamas and militant groups who are not supporters of a two-state solution and the state of Israel,” the Norwegian government leader said. “Palestine has a fundamental right to an independent state.”

The move comes as Israeli forces have led assaults on the northern and southern edges of the Gaza Strip in May, causing a new exodus of hundreds of thousands of people, and sharply restricted the flow of aid, raising the risk of famine.

The Scandinavian country “will therefore regard Palestine as an independent state with all the rights and obligations that entails”, Gahr Støre said.

Norway’s recognition of a Palestine state comes more than 30 years after the first Oslo agreement was signed in 1993. Since then, “the Palestinians have taken important steps towards a two-state solution”, the Norwegian government said.

It said that the World Bank determined that Palestine had met



key criteria to function as a state in 2011, that national institutions have been built up to provide the population with important services.

“The war in Gaza and the constant expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank still mean that the situation in Palestine is more difficult than it has been in decades,” the Norwegian government said.

Also on Wednesday, Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris made his announcement, saying it was a move coordinated with Spain and Norway, “an historic and important day for Ireland and for Palestine”.

He said the move was intended to help move the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to resolution through a two-state solution.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said that his country will recognise Palestine as a state on May 28. Sánchez, Spain’s Socialist leader since 2018, made the expected announcement to the nation’s Parliament on Wednesday.

Sánchez has spent months touring European and Middle Eastern countries to garner support for the recognition of Palestine, as well as a possible ceasefire in Gaza. He has said several times that he was committed to the move.

Earlier this month, Spain’s Foreign Minister José Albares said he had informed US Secretary of State Antony Blinken of his government’s intention of recognising Palestine.

The fast-moving developments drew Israel’s condemnation. Israel’s Foreign Minister Israel Katz ordered

Israel’s ambassadors from Ireland and Norway to immediately return to Israel, as Norway said it would recognize a Palestinian state and Ireland was expected to do the same.

“Ireland and Norway intend to send a message today to the Palestinians and the whole world: terrorism pays,” Katz said.

He said that the recognition could impede efforts to return Israel’s hostages being held in Gaza and makes a cease-fire less likely by “rewarding the jihadists of Hamas and Iran.” He also threatened to recall Israel’s ambassador to Spain if the country takes a similar position.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas welcomed Norway’s recognition of a Palestinian state and called on other countries to follow.

In a statement carried by the official Wafa news agency, he says Norway’s decision, announced Wednesday, will enshrine “the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination” and support efforts to bring about a two-state solution with Israel.

## London

Universities and student groups on Tuesday urgently lobbied British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to safeguard the country’s post-study visa offer, which has been dominated by Indians to gain work experience for around two years at the end of their university degree. Amid reports that Sunak is considering either restricting or ending the Graduate Route to curtail soaring migration statistics ahead of a general election, a group of nearly 30 university vice-chancellors and

# US: Unable to assist Iran in probing Ebrahim Raisi’s copter crash



## Washington

The Iranian government has requested the US to assist in probing the deadly helicopter crash that killed President Ebrahim Raisi, his foreign minister, and six others but Washington won’t assist Tehran largely due to “logistical reasons”, according to a senior American diplomat. Raisi, 63, a possible successor for Iran’s supreme leader, the 85-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, his foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, and six others were found dead on Monday hours after their helicopter crashed in fog, leaving the Islamic Republic without two key leaders as extraordinary tensions grip the wider Middle East. US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller at a press briefing said the US when asked for assistance by the Iranian government made it clear that it was ready to offer assistance, as it would do in response to any request by a foreign government in this sort of situation, but was not able to provide any help.

“I’m not going to get into the details, but we were asked by the Iranian government for assistance. We said that we would be willing to assist. It’s something that we would do with respect to any government in this situation. Ultimately, largely for logistical reasons, we weren’t able to provide that assistance,” Miller said.

In response to a question on the United States extending official condolences and participating in a moment of silence for Raisi at the UN Security Council, Miller said the US had been quite clear that Raisi was a “brutal participant” in the repression of the Iranian people for nearly four decades but Washington regretted any loss of life in a helicopter crash. “We don’t want to see anyone die in a helicopter crash. But that doesn’t change the reality of his record both as a judge and as the president of Iran and the fact that he has blood on his hands,” Miller said.

# Protect post-study visa offer: Students to Rishi Sunak

the National Indian Students and Alumni Association (NISAU) UK have issued detailed letters of appeal to 10 Downing Street. Their appeal comes a week after the influential Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) advised the government to let the scheme continue as it found no abuse of this post-study work offer. It also confirmed that Indians topped its tally, accounting for 89,200 visas between 2021 and 2023, or 42 per cent of the overall grants, and were likely to be “most affected by any restriction on the Graduate Route”.



# Iran after Raisi

THE death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi (63), a hardliner who was perceived to be a strong contender to succeed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has brought to an abrupt end an eventful tenure marked by a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests, besides frantic but futile efforts to revitalise Iran's economy in the face of Western sanctions. Even though Khamenei has the final say on foreign policy and Iran's nuclear programme, age is not on his side. At 85, he direly needs younger leaders to stabilise the Iranian ship. Raisi's death comes weeks after Iran and Israel were involved in a direct confrontation with a tit-for-tat exchange of drone and missile strikes. Iran has also been in the crosshairs of Israel over its support to Hamas, whose October 7 attack prompted a fierce Israeli retaliation that has ravaged Gaza. Even as Khamenei has tried to

reassure Iranians that there would be no disruption to state affairs and has named First Vice-President Mohammad



Mokhber as the interim President, the potential power struggle within Iran will be keenly watched by the West and other stakeholders, including India. It was only last week that New Delhi and Tehran signed a 10-year contract for

the operation of the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar, which was regarded as one of Raisi's pet projects. Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the Chabahar pact as an important milestone that would facilitate trade connectivity to the landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asian region. Even the threat of American sanctions has not deterred India from strengthening its bonds with Iran.

Raisi had developed a close rapport with PM Modi, whose help he had sought to expedite the process of admitting Iran to the BRICS bloc; eventually, it did enter the grouping that originally included Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. India will hope to forge a similar relationship with Raisi's successor.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

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

*"Do one thing every day that scares you."*  
- Eleanor Roosevelt

## Spice crisis

### Contamination hits India's global market

THE recent ban on Indian spices, imposed by Singapore, Hong Kong, Maldives, Australia, and Nepal due to alleged contamination of ethylene oxide (ETO) in products of popular brands MDH and Everest, could potentially reduce spice exports by up to 40 per cent, as warned by the Federation of Indian Spice Stakeholders. The presence of ETO, a toxic chemical, beyond permissible limits in spice mixes poses severe health risks, including cancer. This alarming development underscores the urgent need for India to enhance its food safety protocols and restore global confidence in its spice exports.

India's pre-eminence as the world's largest producer, consumer and exporter of spices is at stake. The

country exports over \$4 billion worth of spices annually, and its domestic

spices like chili and curry powder. The US FDA has rejected 14.5 per cent of



market is valued at \$10 billion. Yet, recurring quality concerns have dented this reputation, jeopardising a sector that significantly contributes to the economy. In 2014, lead was found in the food colouring used in

MDH spice shipments since 2021 due to bacterial contamination. Last month, authorities in Gujarat seized over 60,000 kg of adulterated spices.

Considering the serious health risks, it cannot be

business as usual in the spice industry. The Indian government has responded with stricter quality controls, expanding inspections across manufacturing units. However, these steps must translate into tangible results and mitigation of further damage, for food quality affects everybody. People need reassurance that the spices they consume are safe. Nobody can be allowed to play with their health. Surprisingly, the government has failed to send out a message to consumers that the companies at fault are being scrutinised. They are left wondering whether they should consume spices. Transparent operations and proactive communication with international regulators are essential to safeguard our spice legacy.

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## Terror attacks in Valley

Centre must ensure that people vote without fear

TERRORISTS targeted a former sarpanch in Shopian and a tourist couple from Rajasthan in Anantnag on Saturday night ahead of polling for the Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency. The attacks, which claimed ex-sarpanch Aijaz Sheikh's life and left the visiting duo injured, remind us again of the fact that the security forces

constituency last week — way above the 14.4 per cent recorded in the 2019 General Election — has raised hopes of a similarly good response from voters in Baramulla and Anantnag-Rajouri constituencies. It is imperative for the Centre to beef up security in these areas and prevent terrorists from attacking local residents, tourists

and migrant workers. People should be encouraged to vote without fear so as to send out a strong message that J&K is on the road to normalcy. Candidates and other political leaders have a big role to play in reassuring voters.

The terror attacks should not be allowed to eclipse the fascinating poll battles in Kashmir. While the Baramulla contest is primarily between former CM and NC nominee

Omar Abdullah and People's Conference chief Sajad Gani Lone, wild-card entrant Sheikh Abdul Rashid is keeping both of them on their toes. Popularly known as 'Engineer Rashid', he was arrested in the run-up to the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 and is still behind bars. The post-delimitation Anantnag-Rajouri seat is also witnessing a multi-cornered contest, with PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti pitted against the NC's Mian Altaf Ahmad and the BJP-backed Apni Party's Zafar Iqbal Manhas.

cannot afford to let their guard down. The violence is clearly an attempt to disrupt the electoral process in Kashmir. Baramulla goes to the polls today, while voting for the Anantnag-Rajouri seat will take place on May 25.

Major political parties, including the National Conference (NC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the BJP, have condemned the attacks. Notably, Sheikh was associated with the BJP, which is not in the poll fray in the Valley. The encouraging turnout (36 per cent) in the Srinagar

IN a victory for justice, civil liberties and the integrity of the legal process, the Supreme Court has ordered, in two separate cases, the release of Prabir Purkayastha, founder and editor-in-chief of NewsClick, and Gautam Navlakha, a human rights activist. The SC declared their arrests under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) illegal, underscoring the importance of adherence to lawful arrest procedures and safeguarding individual rights. The two cases had raised concerns about the misuse of anti-terror laws to stifle dissent and target people. Purkayastha was held in connection with alleged foreign funding and anti-national activities and Navlakha in connection with the Bhima Koregaon case. Both arrests were criticised for lacking irrefutable evidence and procedural adherence, prompting an outcry from civil society and global observers.

While reiterating the protection of individual freedom against arbitrary state action, the SC has frequently emphasised that bail should be the norm and jail an exception. In Purkayastha's case, it highlighted the absence of direct evidence linking him to any unlawful activity and criticised the authorities for overstepping legal boundaries in their eagerness to arrest him. In Navlakha's case, it pointed out procedural lapses and emphasised the need for strict adherence to legal

## Assault on Maliwal

Case a test for political ethos on gender justice



THE disturbing allegations against Bibhav Kumar, an aide of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, have turned a harsh spotlight on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and its commitment to women's safety and justice. The alleged assault on Swati Maliwal, an AAP MP, at the CM's residence has put the party in a spot. Her harrowing account of being slapped, kicked and verbally abused by Kumar, as detailed in her FIR, is troubling. Unverified videos targeting Maliwal have further muddled the waters. Such tactics are not new in Indian politics, where perception often eclipses reality.

Amid the Lok Sabha elections, the incident has become a flashpoint for rival parties to challenge the moral high ground taken by AAP. Its political implications are profound. Kejriwal, who has been a vocal advocate for women's rights, is being accused of hypocrisy. His silence on the issue speaks louder than party leader Sanjay Singh's defence. Singh's emphasis

on strict action against Kumar also appears insufficient in the backdrop of political manoeuvring. This case brings to the fore the fact that when it comes to harassment of women, no political party is unblemished. This is borne out by the allegations of sex abuse against Prajwal Revanna, the JD(S) candidate from Karnataka. BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a former president of the Wrestling Federation of India, is accused of molesting female wrestlers. These cases represent an alarming trend, exposing the deeply masculinised nature of power. Political considerations seem to trump the welfare of the victims. Even as the National Commission for Women has taken suo motu notice of Maliwal's case, the Delhi Police must probe the matter in a free and fair manner. How Kejriwal handles this crisis will determine whether AAP can salvage its credibility on gender justice. It will also be a litmus test for the Indian political ethos on women's safety.

## Rule of law prevails

SC orders release of Prabir, Navlakha



norms in arresting individuals under severe charges. The overturning of their arrests reinforces the principle that activism and dissent are not crimes, but essential elements of a vibrant democracy. These cases highlight the need

for reform in the implementation of the UAPA and similar laws. While national security is paramount, the misuse of such laws for political

purposes erodes public trust in the justice delivery system and violates fundamental rights. Lawmakers and law enforcement authorities must heed the court's message and work towards building a system that truly protects the rights and freedoms of all citizens.

# Deadly oversight

## Billboard collapse calls for liability, reform

THE collapse of a massive illegal billboard following a storm in Mumbai that claimed the lives of 16 people and injured 75 — all passersby — has exposed a troubling nexus between negligence, corruption and regulatory failure. The disaster underscores the human cost of systemic oversight and dereliction of duty.

The billboard, weighing 250 tonnes and far exceeding permitted dimensions, was erected in blatant violation of civic guidelines. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) had raised concerns about the hoarding two years ago, yet no substantial action was taken to address the hazard. The failure to enforce regulations or dismantle the illegal structure exemplifies the dangerous complacency and possible corruption



in municipal circles. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Last June, a huge hoarding on a highway near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu collapsed, killing three workers on the spot. The police said it had been

installed without authorisation by the civic body. In 2019, a young woman died in Chennai when an illegal banner fell on her. Such incidents point to a pattern of negligence and

regulatory lapses that put lives at risk.

Culpability extends beyond the advertising agency behind the billboard. The BMC, which

allowed this violation to persist despite knowledge and prior warnings, bears significant responsibility. The filing of a culpable homicide case against the advertising agency owner, Bhavesh Bhinde, is a necessary but insufficient step. Accountability must be comprehensive, holding all parties responsible for this preventable tragedy. The announcement of compensation by CM Eknath Shinde does not suffice to address the underlying regulatory rot. This mishap should prompt an overhaul of regulations governing outdoor advertising and other hazardous structures. Robust safety audits, stringent enforcement of guidelines and zero tolerance to violations are needed to ensure citizens' safety across the country.

## ED in the dock

### Court curbs agency's powers under PMLA

THE country is in the midst of the General Election, but it's the ED (Enforcement Directorate) which is far more in the news than the EC (Election Commission). The Supreme Court ruled on Thursday that the ED could not arrest an accused under Section 19 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) after a special court had taken cognisance of the complaint of money laundering. The Bench stated that when an accused appeared before a judge in pursuance of a summons, the agency would have to apply to the court concerned to obtain his or her custody. According to the court, such an accused is not required to apply for bail as he or she would not be treated as being in custody.

The ruling is another setback to the ED, which has been under intense judicial scrutiny in recent months and repeatedly accused by Opposition parties of overreach. These parties, especially AAP, have claimed that their leaders are being targeted by

Central probe agencies at the behest of the ruling party. The ED's allegedly unbridled powers under the PMLA have been the subject of a heated debate since 2017, when a Division Bench struck down the Act's Section 45(1), which imposed additional conditions for grant of bail to the accused.

However, this decision had been overruled by a July 2022 judgment of another SC Bench.

Meanwhile, the SC has asserted that no exception was made in granting interim bail to Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering case. 'We said in our order what we felt was justified,' the Bench said, adding that a critical analysis of the verdict was welcome. These observations have come two weeks after the court questioned the ED about the timing of Kejriwal's arrest — in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections. Clearly, the ED has a lot of explaining to do in one case after another.



## Anti-BJP protests

### Candidates facing farmers' ire in Punjab

THE crackdown on protesting farmers at the Shambhu border in February is casting a shadow on the BJP's poll campaign in Punjab. Party leaders and candidates are being shown black flags and stopped from entering villages, particularly in Malwa and Majha. These disruptions prompted state BJP chief Sunil Jakhar to lodge a complaint with the state's Chief Electoral Officer last week, alleging that the AAP government had failed to ensure a level playing field for all candidates. The Punjab Police have claimed that they are taking steps to ensure the safety of the contestants, including those belonging to the BJP, but the latter is not convinced.

Farmers from the state had launched the Dilli Chalo agitation earlier this year, seeking a legal guarantee for the minimum support price (MSP). However, they were prevented from reaching the Capital by the authorities in BJP-ruled Haryana, which resorted to a heavy-handed

approach. The MSP issue has remained unresolved despite a series of talks between the Centre and some farm unions.

The BJP has its task cut out in the state, where it is going solo after its efforts to mend fences with its old ally, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), proved futile. The SAD had parted ways with the NDA in 2021 amid the farmers' agitation over the contentious farm laws enacted by the Centre. Even the repeal of the laws did not help the BJP win over the state's farming community, as seen in January 2022, when protesters forced PM Modi to go back without addressing a poll rally in Ferozepur. With its nominees also facing the heat in parts of rural Haryana, the saffron party can't afford to ignore the anger and anguish of the region's farmers. At the same time, the alleged infringement of the candidates' right to campaign needs to be probed and accountability fixed for the lapses.



# Uber gets licence to run buses in Delhi

New Delhi

Ride hailing app Uber has received an aggregator licence by the Delhi Transport Department



to operate buses in the national capital under the Delhi premium Bus Scheme, the company said in a statement.

Delhi becomes the first state to award a licence for bus operations and Uber becomes the first aggregator to be granted a licence under the Delhi Premium Bus scheme, the statement said.

“Following a successful pilot programme, where we witnessed significant demand for buses, we are thrilled to introduce the convenience of Uber rides to buses in Delhi,” Uber Shuttle India head Amit Deshpande said. Customers will be able to pre-book seats on their preferred route by choosing the option on Uber app.

## Serum Institute of India ships first batch of malaria vaccine to Africa

Pune

Vaccine manufacturer Serum Institute of India (SII) on Monday said it has started exports of malaria vaccine to Africa as part of the global fight against the disease.

In total, 1,63,800 doses of the ‘R21/Matrix-M’ malaria vaccine have been specifically allocated for the CAR region, of which first batch of 43,200 doses has been dispatched from SII’s facility in Pune.

# Region sees 19% rise in new firms’ incorporation

New Delhi

The incorporation of new companies witnessed a 19 per cent increase across the region in the just concluded financial year (FY2023-24) when compared to FY2022-23 and FY2021-22.

The incorporation of a company is a statutory requirement to commence a new business. It also shows the intent of an entrepreneur to invest. However, it does not mean that the investment has been made on the ground; economic and other factors play a crucial role before the companies take a final call on the actual investment plans.

Nationally, a record 1,85,312 companies were incorporated in FY24, against 1,59,294 a year ago (FY 23), an increase of 16.33 per cent.

According to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), Haryana saw the maximum incorporations (9,512) followed by Punjab (3,081) and Jammu & Kashmir (1,433). The data



further reveals that service sector continues to account for the maximum share of new companies followed by industry and agriculture. Himachal Pradesh also witnessed significant increase in incorporations, while the Union Territory of Chandigarh

witnessed a growth of 10 per cent.

According to insiders, besides economic uptick, the major reasons behind the sharp growth were the progression of smaller firms, less availability of suitable jobs and the new start-up culture.

# India’s GDP likely to grow 6.7 per cent in Q4; 7 per cent in FY’24: Ind-RA

New Delhi

India Ratings and Research expects the country’s GDP growth rate for the March quarter at 6.7 per cent and around 6.9-7 per cent for the 2023-24 fiscal, its principal economist Sunil Kumar Sinha said.

The GDP numbers for the fourth quarter (January-March 2024) and the provisional estimates for the 2023-24 fiscal are scheduled to be released by the government on May 31.

The Indian economy grew 8.2 per cent in the June quarter, 8.1 per cent in the September quarter and 8.4 per cent in the December quarter of 2023-24.

“We are expecting the fourth quarter growth to be 6.7 per cent and the overall GDP growth for FY24 to be around 6.9-7 per cent,” Sinha told PTI Videos in an interview.

He said the growth rate in the first two quarters benefited from a low base, though the 8.4 per cent growth rate in

the third (October-December 2023) quarter was surprising.

“When we analyse the data, then what is visible is the wedge between the GVA and GDP. A large impetus to Q3 GDP has come from higher tax



collection, but this phenomenon is unlikely to be repeated in the fourth quarter. The wedge between the GDP and GVA is unlikely to be repeated in the fourth quarter,” he noted.

While the gross value added (GVA) was 6.5 per cent in the third quarter, the GDP growth rate stood at 8.4 per cent.

This wedge is on account of higher taxes collected during the quarter.

In the first quarter, the GVA and GDP growth was 8.2 per cent, while in the second quarter, the GVA was 7.7 per cent and GDP 8.1 per cent.

GDP is the total value of goods and services produced in a given period. GVA is GDP minus net taxes (gross tax collection minus subsidy).

The Reserve Bank, in its monetary policy review in April, projected GDP growth for 2023-24 at 7 per cent.

As regards the economic growth in the current fiscal, Sinha said the GDP is expected to expand at 7.1 per cent.

“Even if we set aside the tax component, the momentum witnessed in the first and second quarters has continued in the subsequent quarters, and the likelihood is that momentum will continue in FY25,” he added.

The services sector, he said, will continue the momentum, led by

construction and electricity, while mining and industrial output will be laggard.

“The prediction of above normal monsoon (by the Indian Meteorological Department), if it turns out to be true, will see some revival in rural demand, which will support consumption demand, and make it broad-based, instead of skewed currently,” Sinha said.

The Finance Ministry, in its monthly economic review, said resilient growth, robust economic activity indicators, price stability, and steady external sector performance continue to support India’s promising economic performance amid uncertain global conditions.

Overall, India continues to be the fastest-growing major economy, with positive assessments of the growth outlook for the current financial year by international organisations and the RBI, the ministry noted.



## Dr Reddy's, Sun Pharma, Aurobindo recall products in US

**New Delhi**

Drug makers Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Sun Pharma and Aurobindo Pharma are recalling products in the US market due to manufacturing issues, as per the latest Enforcement Report of the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA).

yellow spots on tablets", USFDA stated.

The company initiated the Class II recall on April 24 this year.

The USFDA stated that another drug firm FDC Ltd is recalling 3,82,104 units of Timolol Maleate Ophthalmic



Dr Reddy's Laboratories is recalling close to 20,000 cartons of a medication used to control blood phenylalanine levels in adults and children.

Princeton (New Jersey) based Dr Reddy's Laboratories, Inc, is recalling Javygtor (sapropterin dihydrochloride) Powder for Oral Solution (100mg) due to it being a "Sub-potent Drug", USFDA stated.

The company is also recalling another lot of sapropterin dihydrochloride for the same reason, it added. The USFDA said the drug maker initiated the Class I recall in the US on April 8 this year.

As per the US health regulator, a Class-I recall pertains to defective products that can cause serious health problems.

The USFDA said Sun Pharma is recalling 11,016 vials of Amphotericin B Liposome for Injection, used to treat fungal infections, in the US market.

The company's US-based arm initiated the Class II recall on April 19 this year due to "Out of specification for assay", the USFDA stated.

Similarly, "Aurobindo Pharma is recalling 13,605 bottles of Clorazepate Dipotassium Tablets (3.75 mg and 7.5 mg), used to treat anxiety, in the American market. The company's US-based arm is recalling the affected lot due to "Discoloration: Dotted and

Solution, used to treat glaucoma, in the American market.

The Aurangabad (Maharashtra)-based drug firm is recalling the affected lot due to "Defective Container".

As per the USFDA, a Class II recall is initiated in a situation in which use of, or exposure to, a violative product may cause temporary or medically reversible adverse health consequences or where the probability of serious adverse health consequences is remote.

The US generic drug market, estimated to be around USD 115.2 billion in 2019, is the largest market for pharmaceutical products.

## India, UK reaffirm FTA commitment at Strategic Dialogue

**London**

India and Britain have reaffirmed their commitment to conclude a mutually beneficial free trade agreement (FTA) at the annual UK-India Strategic Dialogue here, as the two sides reflected the "good progress" on the 2030 Roadmap since the last review.

Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra, who is on a visit to the UK, held discussions with his counterpart, Sir Philip Barton, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) on Friday.

After their meeting, the FCDO said the two leaders reviewed the progress made on the UK-India 2030 Roadmap since the last strategic dialogue in January last year and looked ahead to the next phase of bilateral cooperation.

"The two reflected on good progress on the 2030 Roadmap since the last review, noting key areas where the UK and India have worked together to tackle some of the world's biggest challenges," the FCDO said in a statement.

"This included collaborating on the world's first malaria vaccine, working closely on India's successful G20 Presidency and increasing opportunities for students and entrepreneurs under the Migration and Mobility Partnership," the statement said.

"Alongside celebrating the milestones since the last review, this year's dialogue included the ongoing commitment to negotiate a mutually beneficial free trade agreement (FTA) and enhance defence cooperation," it added.

Earlier, the High Commission of India in London said Kwatra

health," he added.

The 2030 Roadmap was clinched between India and the UK in 2021 and includes commitments to deepen cooperation on health, climate, trade, education, science and technology, and defence by 2030.

India and the UK have held 13 rounds of talks on the FTA. The 14th round started in January.

There are 26 chapters in the agreement, including goods, services, investments, and intellectual property rights.

The Indian industry is demanding greater access

for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty.

On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, electric vehicles, lamb meat, chocolates, and certain confectionary items.

Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services (banking and insurance).

The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to USD 20.36 billion in 2022-23 from USD 17.5 billion in 2021-22.



also had a "fruitful meeting" with UK Minister of State for Defence Procurement James Cartledge, during which they discussed ongoing India-UK defence capability cooperation initiatives and avenues for future collaboration.

"We are delighted to host Indian Foreign Secretary Kwatra in London to underline the UK's commitment to deepening cooperation with India," said Lord Tariq Ahmad, FCDO Minister for South Asia, after his meeting with the Foreign Secretary, which his office said covered the FTA, migration and the Commonwealth.

"I look forward to our relationship going from strength to strength, working together on trade, defence, climate, and

## India should sign more FTAs, cut tariffs: Niti CEO

**New Delhi**

India needs to sign many more free trade agreements (FTAs) with other countries and reduce tariffs to compete with the rest of the world, Niti Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam said on Friday.

Addressing the captains of the Indian industry at a CII Annual Business Summit, Subrahmanyam said the government should not protect any sector from competition. "I think we should be very, very confident about our capabilities about India actually being able to be competitive with the rest



of the world," he said.

Subrahmanyam also noted that there has to be a concerted effort to make India part of global value chains. "To get into global value chains means a fundamental change in a lot of things. It means low tariffs, low procedures and no protectionism," he said.

Highlighting the need for reforms in financial services, he

said India needs its own JP Morgans and Citibanks and that requires a very, very forward-looking thinking.

"We need much bigger banks, we need much more global players and we need a financial sector which has the muscle to service firms not just in India but across the world," he said. Pointing out the industrial transformation unleashed after the 1991 economic reforms, he said 90 per cent of the companies that exist today are here in their size because of what happened then.



## UN raises India's GDP forecast for FY24 to 6.9%

New Delhi

The United Nations has revised upwards India's growth projections for 2024, a month

per cent due to strong growth in the manufacturing and services sectors.

However, the revised



after the World Bank did so. However, the UN's revised GDP projection is a more modest 6.9 per cent for 23-24 as compared to 7.5 per cent by the World Bank last month.

In January, the UN had anticipated the Indian GDP growth for 2023-24 at 6.2

growth projections attribute the expansion to a lower-than-anticipated inflation rate of 4.5 per cent in 2023-24 as against 5.6 per cent in 2022-23. The UN also saw lower inflation rate as well as slight moderation in food prices for South Asia.

## Automakers make hay as car leasing gains momentum

New Delhi

The passenger vehicle subscription and leasing models are gradually gaining momentum in the country. To cash in on the growing demand, Kia India is the latest to join the bandwagon after Maruti Suzuki, Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra and MG Motor.

These models offer customers the convenience of driving a new car without the burden of ownership, insurance, maintenance and other associated costs. The customer also has an option to buy the car after the use. The monthly lease rent varies based on usage period and mileage option selected.

Myung-sik Sohn, Chief Sales Officer, Kia India, said, "The leasing model is a global mega



trend which is gaining momentum in India too. With projections of cent per cent growth over the next 4-5 years, we anticipate our leasing service to outpace the

industry growth."

In March, Maruti Suzuki celebrated a milestone of 10,000 new car subscriptions since its inception in July 2020.

## BHEL Q4 net profit falls 25% to Rs 484 crore, declares dividend

New Delhi

State-owned Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) on May 21 reported 25 percent decline in net profit at Rs 484.36 crore for the quarter ended March 31, 2024 amid higher expenses by the company. It reported net profit of Rs 645.13 crore in the year-ago period.

Sequentially, net profit soared multi-fold for Q4 as the company posted profit of Rs 46.31 crore in the December quarter. The PSU firm's revenue from operations rose marginally to Rs 8,260.25 crore in Q4FY24 as against Rs 8,227.99 crore in the year-ago period. The company's earnings before interest, tax, depreciation

and amortisation (EBITDA) stood at Rs 892.78 crore in the fourth quarter, as against Rs 1,160.6 crore last year.

The firm declared final dividend of 25 paise for equity share of Rs 2 face value for FY24.

On May 21, BHEL's shares closed trading 2.7 percent higher at Rs 318.8 apiece.

## SBI raises fixed deposit rate on select short-term maturity up to 75 bps

New Delhi

The country's biggest lender State Bank of India (SBI) has hiked fixed deposit rate on select short-term maturity up to 75 basis points, a move likely to be

The new rates on deposit less than Rs 2 crore are effective from May 15.

Senior citizens would be eligible for additional 50 basis points on the revised rates as per



followed by other lenders.

For term deposits of 46-179 days, the rate has been increased by 75 basis points to 5.5 per cent, as against the earlier 4.75 per cent, as per the revised figure posted on SBI website.

There has been a 25 basis point increase in the other two maturity buckets -- 180-210 days and 211 days to less than 1 year, to 6 per cent and 6.25 per cent respectively.

the norms, it said.

The SBI has left interest rates unchanged on other maturity buckets beyond one year.

For fixed deposits above Rs 2 crore, the bank has increased interest rate on both short-term and long-term maturity.

For three maturity periods starting from 7 days till 210 days, the interest rate has been raised between 10 basis points and 25 basis points.

## Markets may turn red if BJP fails to win 370 seats, says Prashant Kishor

New Delhi

Bharatiya Janata Party's failure to secure its own target of 370 seats in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections may reflect investors' disappointment in the stock markets, said poll strategist Prashant Kishor during an interview with NDTV.

Drawing an analogy with the corporate world, Kishor said that if a company fails to achieve its stated goals, the stock market is likely to punish it even if the performance is not too bad. Similarly, if BJP wins less than 370 seats in the

election, it might become a talking point and the markets may reflect the failure, he said during the interview.



However, the poll strategist credited the saffron party for shifting the election narrative to winning 370 seats in the general polls, from crossing the half-way mark, calling it a "smart move". He said in the past few months, the debates have moved to if the ruling party will be able to secure

370 or more seats and not if Modi will win or lose the election.



# What next for Iran?

Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

Domestic implications aside, Iran's foreign policy is likely to remain consistent. While there may be some tactical adjustments in response to changing circumstances, the fundamental principles guiding Iran's foreign policy are unlikely to change significantly in the near future. Strategic decisions are set by the Supreme Leader and the National Security Council, not the president's office. The Islamic Republic will continue to fully support Resistance groups, more specifically Hamas and Hezbollah, that are fighting against Israel. This means that the country's regional policies, supporting allied groups in the region, and nuclear programme strategies may not undergo significant shifts even with a new president in place.

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As the US presidential election approaches, Israel may intensify the ongoing hostilities between the two countries, potentially leading to a more overt confrontation. This situation underscores the complex and volatile dynamics in the wider Middle East, where geopolitical rivalries and security concerns often manifest in covert actions and retaliatory measures. While the Netanyahu administration still hopes to drag the US into war with Iran, it seems that the US is not seeking direct conflict with Tehran. Following the confirmation of President Raisi's death, despite the historically strained relationship between the US and Iran, the US government extended official condolences to Iran upon the passing of its president. Although the President and foreign minister are not the main decision-makers in Iran's foreign policy, an empty position at this level could have an adverse impact on Tehran's regional diplomatic activities surrounding Gaza and it could lose the golden opportunity to engage with the Biden administration before the US election. Unfavourably, this can strengthen Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hand in influencing US policy in the Middle East.



Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian were found dead on 20 May, a day after their helicopter crashed in the mountains of northwestern Iran, leaving the country facing an uncertain future. Raisi's sudden death, who was elected as President in June 2021, comes at a critical time for a country that plays a crucial role in the shifting geopolitics of the wider Middle East (West Asia), with questions arising about who will succeed him and what direction the country will take in its foreign policy.

During the Raisi tenure, relations have continued to deteriorate with the United States (US) as the two countries faced off on various fronts, particularly in the ongoing conflicts in the Ukraine, Gaza, and Iran's nuclear programme. The US, as well, goes into elections in November.

Under Article 131 of Iran's Constitution, the First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber temporarily took office with Supreme Leader Ayatollah

Khamenei's approval.

Despite how it might appear, President Raisi's death would not have any significant short-term impact on Iran's political stability. Constitutional procedures and strong security mechanisms guarantee a smooth transition to the next president. Under Article 131 of Iran's Constitution, the First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber temporarily took office with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's approval. According to the initial announcement of the country's Guardian Council, the presidential election will be held on 28 June 2024.

The upcoming election in Iran may potentially create an opportunity for more traditional conservative candidates to make a bid for the presidency. Raisi was seen as a conservative president with close ties to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. With his passing, there may be a shift in the political landscape, allowing other conservative figures to step forward and compete for the

presidency. Now the question of who will succeed Raisi has been making the rounds in Iran's public spheres. There are some possible candidates—Interim President Mohammad Mokhber; Ali Shamkhani, former head of the National Security Council; Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, Speaker of the Parliament; and Ali Larijani, former Speaker of the Parliament of Iran, who is mostly affiliated to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The establishment is currently dominated by the conservative axis, particularly those aligned with the Supreme Leader and the powerful IRGC. With reformists out of the picture, potential power struggles are expected to be primarily within the conservative camp. In a conservative-only race, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf could be a strong contender to replace Raisi as he holds a solid base of support within the conservative establishment.

With his passing, there may be a shift in the political landscape, allowing other conservative figures to step forward and compete for the

presidency.

Despite the long-standing rhetoric, largely in the Western media, that the Islamic Republic is in a struggle for its long-term survival, it has indeed proven to be a durable system of governance, with its theocratic structure remaining intact for over four decades. While there may be power struggles within the top ranks during the transition to the next leadership, the basic governing institutions in Iran appear to be stable and show no signs of fracturing. Ayatollah Khamenei's leadership has provided continuity and stability to the regime, and the system will likely maintain itself under his guidance. Despite external pressures and internal challenges, the Islamic Republic has demonstrated resilience and the ability to weather various storms throughout its history. For decades, in Western narratives, the Islamic Republic was to easily collapse and be overthrown via a public movement. Despite all speculation, it is especially significant to note that President Raisi was not a major candidate as a successor to Supreme



# India's 'true gesture of goodwill' towards Maldives

Within days after his return from New Delhi after the 9 May meeting with Indian counterpart Dr S Jaishankar, Maldivian Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer posted his thanks for India's 'true gesture of goodwill' on his request for a debt rollover. The Indian Foreign Office had obviously fast-tracked the process as US\$ 50 million of the debt owed to State Bank of India (SBI) on a past agreement between the two governments was due for repayment on 15 May, and another US\$ 50 million in September.

Weeks earlier, New Delhi had increased the export quotas of essential commodities, including rice, wheat flour, sugar, potatoes and eggs, and also construction materials like river sand and stone aggregates required in Maldives' mainstay construction industry. Already, New Delhi had played along without inhibitions or protest, when President Muizzu followed up on his poll-time demand for India to withdraw military personnel operating and maintaining the three aerial platforms gifted to Maldives for medical evacuation and aerial surveillance of the nation's EEZ. The day Zameer left New Delhi, on 10 May, the last of the three batches of Indian military personnel, totalling 76 men, returned home, to be replaced by civilian pilots and technicians from public sector HAL.

New Delhi had increased the export quotas of essential commodities, including rice, wheat flour, sugar, potatoes and eggs, and also construction materials like river sand and stone aggregates required in Maldives' mainstay construction industry.

Without reference to the change of elected government in Maldives, New Delhi has been continuing with the multiple infrastructure projects, including the prestigious Thilamalé sea-bridge, and any number of high-impact development schemes in very many islands in the country. To his credit, on assuming office, Muizzu continued with India's infra investments without break or without linking to his demand for the withdrawal of military personnel. He also visited the sea-bridge work site in the early days of his presidency to inspect the progress of the work, and called for fast-tracking the works that were delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

One-off affair, but...

Yet, questions remain,

particularly regarding the Indian concerns, which are limited mostly to defence and security matters, especially centred on an adversarial Chinese presence in the region. An intervening irritant in the matter flowed from permission for Chinese research/spy vessel 'Xiang Yang Hong 03', to berth in a Maldivian port twice in as many months and reports of the ship hovering around the Maldivian EEZ for three. That the Chinese vessel's visit came after Muizzu's meeting with President Xi Jinping in Beijing, and also his decision not to renew the joint oceanographic survey with India beyond the existing June deadline



raised eyebrows in Indian circles.

Then there is the question of the 'Boycott Maldives' social media calls that were made after three Maldivian deputy ministers had posted derogatory remarks against India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It happened after Modi visited Lakshadweep and promoted the island-group as a tourist destination. In an interview with the Indian news agency ANI in New Delhi, Minister Zameer 'apologised' for the past, pointed to the immediate suspension of the three ministers, and reiterated that their views were personal and was not the stand of the government.

Incidentally, Muizzu's 14 January news conference will be remembered for things that no head of state, including China's Xi Jinping, had said. Mouthing the lines of Chinese academics in uniform through the past decade but without naming India, he said that Maldives was 'nobody's backyard' and 'nobody has the licence to bully us'. He also spoke about his official visit to Türkiye earlier, from where he said Maldives was procuring drones to ensure 'self-reliance' in aerial surveillance—and the

first two of them arrived less than two months later. Likewise, the President also declared his decision to import all essentials like rice, flour and sugar on an annual basis, to end 'over-dependence on a single source'.

Mouthing the lines of Chinese academics in uniform through the past decade but without naming India, he said that Maldives was 'nobody's backyard' and 'nobody has the licence to bully us'.

Muizzu did not have to name India, but successive developments showed how in the following months India cleared higher import-quotas of these staples and more, after high-cost

incumbent. New Delhi seemed to have understood that the withdrawal of Indian military personnel was an inherited/hijacked 'legacy issue' for Muizzu even though the election was otherwise fought and won only on domestic politics and personalities.

The same applied to Muizzu's PNC-PPM coalition acquiring a 'super-majority' in last month's parliamentary polls after the President appealed mainly for a cooperative/collaborative Parliament. It was after the Opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) of predecessor Ibrahim Solih, with its higher numbers in the outgoing Parliament, began threatening Muizzu with imminent impeachment, even before the new President and his team had settled down until the Maldivian Supreme Court quashed their amended procedure.

The continued division of votes between the MDP and breakaway Democrats also helped, and so did the failure of Yameen's new party, the People's National Front (PNF), though without a common symbol for parliamentary elections. With a super-majority in Parliament, trouble for Muizzu, if any, may now have to come from within, as happened to predecessor Solih. Yet, after the sweeping parliamentary poll victory, which is his own, he should be able to predict, hence handle, any revival of Yameen's failed and forgotten 'India Out' campaign in the months and years to come.

New-generation leader

At 45, Muizzu is a new-generation political leader, cut off from the prevailing democracy-centric electoral rivals who date it all back to the birth of the multi-party Constitution in 2008. So are the new generation of aspiration-tinged voters who are even more cut off from the past. For this reason, Muizzu is also a non-quantifiable, in his handling of domestic politics, governance, and foreign and security policies.

From an Indian perspective, it remains to be seen how the Muizzu dispensation moves from here on bilateral issues, particularly in matters of security cooperation. This has to be read in the context of Maldives and China deciding to 'elevate strategic cooperation'

during Muizzu's January visit, and also signing into China's 'Global Security Initiative' (GSI) along with 'Global Civilisation Initiative' (GCI).

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Even while seeking the time-bound withdrawal of Indian military personnel, the Maldivian government hosted the Dosti-16 Coast Guard exercises, where Indian soldiers were present along with counterparts from common neighbour Sri Lanka. In May 2024, the nation hosted American soldiers in the 'Black Marlin' joint exercises. A visiting British minister also held security-related talks while on a visit to Malé, recently. As if to expand economic outreach, the Maldivian minister concerned has since held talks in London to deepen trade and investments ties with the United Kingdom (UK).

Digging deeper

All these have raised questions about the Muizzu administration's approach to bilateral defence and security cooperation with the Indian neighbour. Addressing a joint news conference with Foreign Minister Zameer on his return from India, Defence Minister Ghassan Maumoon, acknowledged that all Indian soldiers had returned and there were also no Indian military personnel on the Uthuru Thila-Falhu (UTF) Island, where work on an India-funded Coast Guard jetty was on.

Minister Ghassan, son of former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, also clarified that the Maldivian military personnel were not capable of flying the three aerial platforms gifted by India. This may imply that the government may deploy Indian civilian pilots and technicians like their military counterparts earlier. While arguments remain about how the Indian Dornier 'out-performed' the Turkish drones, EAM Jaishankar at a Delhi conclave offered to 'train Maldivian pilots', if urged.

# HOUSEHOLD SAVINGS HAVEN'T FALLEN

Media has been reporting on the decline in net financial assets of Indian households! It does not end there — this decline has also been interpreted as an indication of households' financial distress. Both are far from reality.

According to media reports (May 7), net financial household savings declined sharply by ₹9-lakh crore to ₹14.16-lakh crore in three years to 2022-23 (and 17 per cent below FY22), on the basis of National Accounts Statistics data, a five-year low. This is bound to raise a few eyebrows, if the data is not understood and interpreted correctly. In sum, there has been a shift from financial to physical savings, with an overall increase in gross savings. While it was the net financial savings which went down by ₹9 lakh crore in three years, the aggregate household saving (net of debt) has gone up by ₹4 lakh crore during the same period owing to a significant rise in physical assets (Fig 3).

According to the RBI data, the flow of net financial assets in 2022-23 was 5.1 per cent of GDP (5.25 per cent of the revised GDP estimates), down from 11.5 per cent in 2020-21 and 7.2 per cent in 2021-22.

The decline was driven by both a 0.2 percentage point reduction in net financial assets and a 2.0 percentage point rise in net financial liabilities of households. Despite the steep rise in liabilities, they stood at only 5.8 per cent of GDP during the year.

A stock figure cumulated over years cannot be compared to one-year flow data! Rather, the debt numbers are dwarfed in front of the cumulated financial asset numbers that stand at a staggering 103.1 per cent of the GDP.

However, a conceptual error occurred while juxtaposing the cumulated stock of household debt of 37.6 per cent as of March 2023 with the additional net flow of financial assets in the financial year. A stock figure cumulated over years cannot be compared to one-year flow data! Rather, the debt numbers are dwarfed in front of the cumulated financial asset numbers that stand at a staggering 103.1 per cent of the GDP.

In absolute terms, a year-on-year comparison shows an increase in both financial assets and liabilities, but a steeper rise in liabilities. This would have been concerning if it implied that aggregate household savings had slowed down, posing a threat to economic growth.

However, is not the case for two major reasons.

First, households continue to be the powerhouse behind fixed capital formation, commanding over 60 per cent of gross national savings, according to recent NSO figures. The apparent disconnect between financial savings and overall savings is clarified once we examine the various

gradual decrease. This shift is partly due to stronger financial positions of non-financial corporations and healthier public finances post-pandemic. Yet, the lingering question is the direction of household financial flows. Where is the household spending? When investment-friendly conditions foster wealth accumulation, consumption typically slows, a trend that redistributes wealth — such a phenomenon is partly evident in the Indian economy. The propensity to consume

household debt as families stretch financially to embrace the real estate boom.

This is where the latest MOSPI estimates are also being grossly misinterpreted, causing widespread confusion in the media. The claim that 'net financial savings' have gone down is not just inaccurate but a testament to how blatantly statistics are misused to sway public opinion.

To further simplify the conundrum

The aspirational Indian household is increasingly investing in real estate, signifying the major role it is playing in gross capital formation

net household savings can be expressed as the sum of net financial savings, physical savings and bullion savings (Fig. 3). The MOSPI data shows a clear growing trend in net household savings even after adjusting for their debt.

While orthodox neo-Keynesian and neoclassical macroeconomic theories might relate a slowdown in savings growth as a precursor to GDP growth slowdown, this needs to be looked at as a structural inflexion point towards higher domestic savings in the context of a more diversified savings portfolio.

The MOSPI data shows a clear growing trend in net household savings even after adjusting for their debt.



savings avenues — ranging from financial instruments to physical assets, and even gold and silver ornaments. This variety suggests that a decrease in financial savings doesn't necessarily signal a drop in total savings; it could instead indicate a shift in household preferences, risk tolerance, and confidence in the country's economic future.

Secondly, while the Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) growth rate has slowed to 6.7 per cent (FY23, real terms), below the GDP growth rate, this moderation in consumption likely translates into increased savings amid rising national income.

The principles of national income accounting assure us that gross savings remain robust, potentially setting the stage for a higher domestic savings rate and a move toward investment-driven growth.

Despite households maintaining their status as key contributors to domestic savings and showing growth in absolute terms, their proportion of total savings has seen a

declines with increasing incomes and wealth.

Despite households maintaining their status as key contributors to domestic savings and showing growth in absolute terms, their proportion of total savings has seen a gradual decrease.

Concurrently, the aspirational Indian household is increasingly investing in real estate, as evidenced by the growing share of physical assets in household savings for 2022-23 (Fig. 2). In fact, gross household savings saw a notable increase of 4.65 per cent from FY21 to FY22. This doesn't mean the money has left the household sphere; rather, it's simply shifting from one pocket to another!

This dynamic is echoed in the substantial role households play in gross capital formation, financing over 40 per cent of domestic investments, predominantly in real estate such as homes, buildings, and other structures. This desire to secure a personal roof is driving a significant surge of savings into the market, but it's also ballooning

The entire problem lies with the nomenclature and definition of savings, investment and consumption. Household savings directed towards real estate of any form (residences and dwellings) are accounted as investment, and not private consumption.

That is why one might note a departure in the consumption-driven growth phenomenon in the last quarter, where consumption growth has comparatively slowed down, despite a high GDP growth and better growth performances of gross capital formation.

Apart from real estate, the sustained surge in bullion markets, coupled with an increase in savings through ornaments, suggests that Indian households favour tangible assets over financial ones, which carry a higher risk premium. This trend reflects the changing consumer preference over time and in the economic future.



# Undersea chokepoints: The Red Sea cable disruptions

Months after the Houthi assaults on commercial sea-faring vessels traversing the Red Sea, the rebels exacerbated pressures on the Western governments by damaging critical sub-sea optic fibre cables near the Yemeni coast. Sub-sea cables are essential global telecommunications infrastructure and carry 99 percent of global internet traffic. The Red Sea hosts more than 15 such sub-sea cables responsible for connecting Europe and Asia, carrying 80 percent of Asia's westward traffic. Globally, that is equivalent to 17 percent of data traffic.

The persisting damage to four cables—SEACOM, TGN, AAE-1 and EIG—has disrupted 25 percent of telecommunications traffic in West Asia and North Africa (WANA) and had ripple effects as far as South Africa, where even basic software/cloud-based services such as Office 365, a Microsoft-owned cloud-powered productivity platform, were impacted. With geopolitical contestation and conflicts shifting beneath the waves, the criticality of sub-sea telecommunications assets has acquired renewed significance. This article assesses the geopolitical and geo-economic implications of the sub-sea disruption in the Red Sea in the aftermath of the attack.

**Criticality of the Red Sea cables**

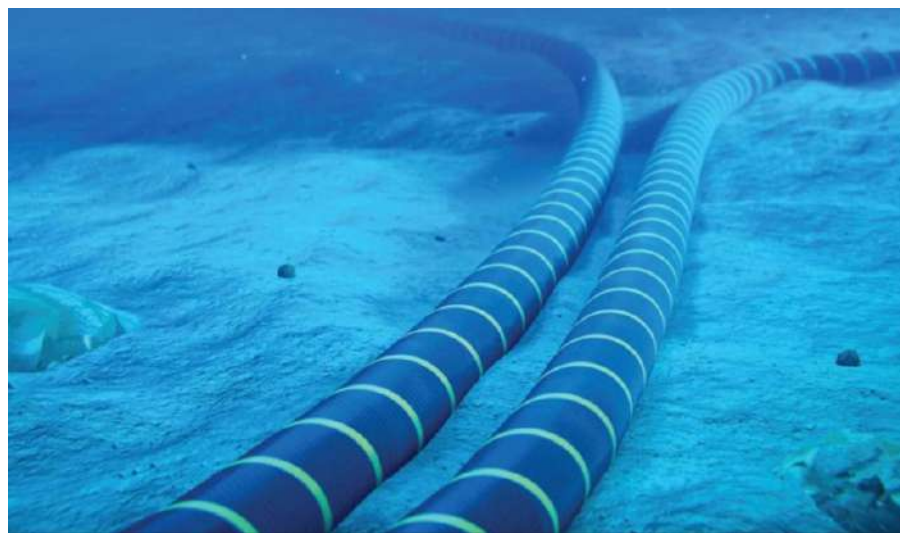
On 22 February 2024, Houthi missiles sank a British bulk carrier, the *Rubymar*, that was carrying 41,000 tons of inflammable fertiliser. Its sinking caused a 38 km wide oil spill but more interestingly, the Houthis (and several media reports) noted the ship's anchor dragging across the seabed damaging four undersea cables. Of the 28 participant countries in the four damaged subsea cables, 17 are African, which faced problems in digital connectivity. Approximately 100 million people in over a dozen West and North African countries were negatively impacted, with Ghana, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire experiencing internet outages between seven to ten days.

The United Nations-recognised Yemenese government indicated in February 2024, that the Houthi rebels lack equipment to target deep-sea digital infrastructure assets, nonetheless, they have demonstrated their intentions of causing damage to the cables. In December 2023, a Telegram channel affiliated with the Houthi rebels shared a map of networks of submarine cables in the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Persian Gulf. Moreover, the relatively shallow waters in the Red Sea make the cables susceptible to acts of subversion and collateral damage.

Yet this susceptibility hasn't stopped telecom companies' interest in the region.

Between 2000 and 2024, over 30 telecom companies including Huawei, SubCom, Orange, Jio Infocomm, Tata Technologies, Amazon, Google, NEC and Alcatel Lucent invested US\$ 10.43 billion in laying 18 undersea cables in the Red Sea, which transmits data from Asia to Europe. NEC (Japan), SubCom (USA), HMN Tech (China) and Alcatel Lucent (France) collectively hold 82 percent of the market share in laying, maintaining and repairing undersea cables.

The Houthi attacks disrupted data traffic by damaging the SEACOM, TGN, AAE-1 and EIG undersea cables, worth



approximately US\$ 3.5 billion. The damage impacted nearly a quarter of the total regional data traffic and exacerbated pressures on the telecommunications industry, whose private players are mostly responsible for maintaining data flows in the WANA region. Companies such as SubCom, Ogero, Orange, Bayobab, Google, Meta, and Vodafone mitigated the disruptive effects by rerouting data traffic over land-based routes and through other cables—PEACE, 2AFRICA, FALCON, IEX, Equiano, WACS, etc.—connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Conflict in critical digital infrastructure chokepoints such as the Red Sea further exacerbates security concerns.

While the impact of the damage is more or less contained, it opens a new chapter in the geopolitical contestation, where such a subsea network can become a pawn in the larger conflict among the adversaries. It poses a real challenge to global telecom infrastructure and exposes the risks due to a lack of global security infrastructure and laws surrounding subsea cables. The sheer expanse of the web of subsea cables makes ensuring their protection difficult. Conflict in critical digital infrastructure chokepoints such as the Red Sea further exacerbates security concerns. Moreover, given the Red Sea's strategic location, exploring alternative

routes to it is difficult. Unlike the shipping industry — which has been able to absorb the shock due to its versatile, resilient supply chains and leveraged its vessel overcapacity to make the Cape of Good Hope route somewhat financially feasible — the undersea cables private companies can ill afford to re-route or rebuild the optic fibre cables through land or alternative sea routes (such as Cape of Good Hope, or Arctic Sea) because of associated exacerbated costs.

## Mitigating the crisis

Governments have historically responded to acts of terrorism against

coverage of the alternate cable providing redundancy. Simply put, the alternate cable should carry additional data without compromising its overall performance and connect all relevant locations. While the latter requirement seems to be in place, the former presents a challenge for the US\$ 30 billion industry. There are also financial considerations. Data rerouting can exacerbate overall data transmission costs through the capacity lease agreements required for leasing capacity on other cables.

Rerouting depends on capacity, bandwidth, and geographical coverage of the alternate cable providing redundancy.

Multistakeholder collaboration is essential for protecting this critical subsea network. For most of these impacted nations, the damaged cables constitute critical and foundational digital connectivity infrastructure. While ensuring these cables' security is a difficult task, distributing traffic by diversifying digital cable systems and multilaterally recognising subsea cables as critical infrastructure are essential first steps.

## Conclusion

With 17 submarine cables coming in from all over the world and up to 14 distinct cable landing stations in 5 different cities, India has mostly diversified its digital traffic routes. The Red Sea Crisis has shown this resilience, wherein India has landing stations in all four affected cables (two of them are partially owned by Tata Communications), yet its digital connectivity remains unaffected. Similarly, European nations such as the United Kingdom (UK), Spain, France, and Portugal simply diverted their traffic to alternative routes.

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However, disruptions like these expose the challenges of securing this vast underwater web, particularly in conflict zones. While rerouting and certain redundancy measures can offer temporary relief, the high cost of building new cables or utilising alternative routes makes long-term solutions complex. The crisis has served as a wake-up call for governments and the telecommunications industry to focus on increased international cooperation on monitoring, protection, and diversification of subsea cable systems. Recognising these cables as critical infrastructure and establishing clear legal frameworks for their security are crucial steps in a more resilient future for the global digital economy.

subsea assets such as the Nord Stream bombing in 2022 by enhanced monitoring. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), since the Nord Stream incident, has been monitoring seabeds and has surveyed the underwater domain through drones as well as increased naval presence. Similarly, since the Red Sea incident, several governments, especially from the African continent, have expressed concern over the fragility of subsea assets. The worst affected country was Ghana where the incident caused an internet blackout lasting almost 10 days. Consequently, it joined hands with Nigeria to initiate cooperation and consultation processes with the International Telecommunications Union to protect regional subsea digital infrastructure. Major companies present in West and North Africa—Orange, Angola cables, Bayobab, ACE and MainOne—have rerouted their data traffic to prevent massive regional disruptions while citing concerns about the fragile security of subsea cables. Ghanaian, Nigerian, and Egyptian telecom regulatory authorities have stated that repairs will go well beyond into the next quarter, given the scale of conflict in the Red Sea.

While the situation seems under control in the short-term scenario, data rerouting is a temporary solution. Rerouting depends on capacity, bandwidth, and geographical



## AR Rahman to perform in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur



Music composer AR Rahman will be returning to Singapore in August with his first concert performance in the country in 10 years.

The Oscar and Grammy-winning musician will perform at National Stadium on August 31.

Maestro Productions, the company behind the singer-songwriter-musician's upcoming concert titled 'A Rahman Rhapsody', shared the announcement on social media on Monday.

"Singapore! It's been a decade! We look forward to performing again in our favourite city! Join us on the 31st of August at the National Stadium," the company posted.

The 57-year-old musician had last played here in 2014 at Gardens by the Bay.

Before coming to Singapore, Rahman will hold a concert on

July 27 at Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia.

Rahman's Malaysia gig is organised by Star Planet, the country's premier entertainment company, a press release said.

"The concert presents a unique opportunity for fans to immerse themselves in AR Rahman's timeless classics, including chart-topping hits from his acclaimed films. With a setlist that promises to evoke nostalgia and stir emotions, attendees can expect an unforgettable evening filled with musical brilliance and unparalleled entertainment," it added.

Tickets for the Kuala Lumpur concert are now available on BookMyShow, using BigTix, the company's revolutionary SaaS ticketing platform for Southeast Asian entertainment.

## Kalki Koechlin posts video about her new movie, titled Her Song



Kalki Koechlin will play the role of American writer Olivia in the US novelist John Keller's debut comedy feature film, Her Song.

"Been a fan of Keller's books, Know Your Baker, Abracadabrantescue and Johnny Allan. He has a quirky and witty intelligence that is so reminiscent of New York and its diversity and Her Song is both funny and unpredictably heartening." Taking to Instagram, she made an announcement about the film in a video. "Hi, my name is Kalki. I am a very famous actress in India. Everybody knows me here. Nobody knows me in France. I have 1 million followers on Instagram, but that still hasn't got us money to make the film."

## What happened when Akshay Kumar collided with Bangkok RTO's bike

Akshay Kumar recounted his accident story in Thailand, sharing how the incident taught him the significance of humility.

Akshay, who was the first guest on the talk show 'Dhawan Kareng' hosted by cricketer Shikhar Dhawan, reminisced about a memorable incident from his visit to the exotic destination of Bangkok.

He shared, "My father realised my disinterest in studies and helped me move to Bangkok at an early age. I really liked the country. Right from the minute you leave the plane, you find everyone bowing down to you with their hands joined. It feels very nice and beautiful especially when you realise that it's actually taken from our culture and followed so politely there."

"I remember an incident that taught me the significance of humility and bowing down. When you humble yourself, you gain the resilience to navigate through any challenge or obstacle. Once, while driving, I accidentally collided with the



bike of an RTO officer while making a turn, causing both of us to fall. Scared, I immediately apologised, bowing to him. The

officer assisted me in getting my bike and helmet up and calmly advised me to drive slowly and carefully," added Akshay.

## Kiara Advani attends 'Women In Cinema Gala' in Cannes, shares pictures



edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

Advani was one of the six women to be felicitated at the dinner, hosted by the Red Sea International Film Festival and Vanity Fair Europe on Saturday on the sidelines of the ongoing extravaganza in France.

For the event, she opted for an off-shoulder pink and black gown with a bow on the back and black lace gloves. She tied her hair in a high bun, and completed her look with an ornate neckpiece and a ring.

The "Satyaprem Ki Katha" actor shared a series of photos on her Instagram page on Sunday. "A night to remember," Advani captioned her post.

According to Red Sea International Film Festival's X page, the Women In Cinema Gala honoured six women who are "fiercely redefining what is possible for future generations of female storytellers".

Besides Advani, the honourees were Saudi Arabian singer-actor Aseel Omran, Saudi Arabian actor Adhwa Fahad, Senegalese director-screenwriter Ramata-Toulaye Sy, Thai actor-model Sarocha Chankimha aka Freen, and Egyptian actor-model Salma Abu Deif.

It was "a night to remember", said actor Kiara Advani, who was honoured at the Women In Cinema Gala, which was held alongside the 77th



# Ink & inspiration: Bollywood celebs came out in numbers in Mumbai on Monday to cast their votes during the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections

A swarm of cameras followed Bollywood's beloved veteran star and former Lok Sabha MP from Bikaner, Dharmendra, as he gently made his way to the polling booth to cast his vote in Mumbai on Monday morning. At another polling booth, Hema Malini, who's in the race for her third term as MP from Mathura, cast her vote. She came along with her daughter, actress Esha Deol.

Bollywood icon Amitabh Bachchan braved Mumbai's searing sun and cast his vote on Monday afternoon along with his wife Jaya, who is also a Rajya Sabha MP. His daughter-in-law Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, who has returned from the Cannes Film Festival, also cast her vote at the same polling station, although she arrived separately to fulfil her civic duty.

Actor Hrithik Roshan not only cast his vote on Monday during the fifth part of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections, but also urged everyone to become a well-informed voter. After casting his vote at a polling booth in Mumbai, the Fighter star briefly spoke with the media and sent out an important message. "Study the candidates before you vote, know what you are voting for," he said. Hrithik arrived at the polling booth with his father and director Rakesh Roshan, mother Pinkie Roshan and his sister Sunaina.

Actor Anil Kapoor also stepped out and cast his vote. "All citizens of India should vote," he said.

After casting his vote in Mumbai, actor Randeep Hooda said with the power of the vote, it is the people who decide the future of the country. "In a democracy, through voting you have the right to decide your future and that of your country. You must vote...Participate in this festival of democracy and vote," Randeep said.

Parents-to-be Deepika Padukone and Ranveer Singh



stepped out to cast their votes too. The Bollywood power couple, twinning in white, radiated joy as they arrived at the polling booth in Mumbai.

Shah Rukh Khan, along with his wife Gauri Khan, elder son Aryan Khan and his manager Pooja Dadlani cast their vote in Mumbai too. Earlier, taking to X, he wrote, "As responsible

Indian citizens we must exercise our right to vote this Monday in Maharashtra. Let's carry out our duty as Indians and vote keeping our country's best interests in mind."

Among the others who cast their vote were actors Varun Dhawan, Manoj Bajpayee, Vidya Balan, R. Madhavan, Anupam Kher and more.



## Starc reality



### Ahmedabad

Powered by Mitchell Starc, Kolkata Knight Riders stormed into the IPL final as the two-time champions produced a ruthless performance against Sunrisers Hyderabad for an eight-wicket win in Qualifier 1 here.

Starc produced a stunning opening burst of three wickets in the powerplay to break the back of SRH's dangerous batting. Starc reaped the benefits of utilising his core skill of bowling quick and swinging the ball. He rattled the stumps of SRH marauder Travis Head off the second ball of the contest to set the tone in KKR's favour.

Starc also bounced out Nitish Reddy (9) and had Shahbaz Ahmed (0) chopping one onto his wickets to put KKR in firm control inside the powerplay.

They were eventually shot out for a mere 159 in 19.3 overs with Rahul Tripathi scoring a vital 55 while Heinrich Klaasen (32) and Pat Cummins (30) also fought hard.

On a benign wicket in steaming hot conditions, SRH's fight petered out as KKR knocked off the innocuous 160-run target in a mere 13.4 overs with skipper

Shreyas Iyer (58 not out off 24) and Venkatesh Iyer (51 not out off 28) taking them over the line.

KKR will play their fourth IPL final in Chennai on Sunday. "The rejuvenation was important for us. When you travel so much. It's important to stay in the present. Today was the day we had to maximise, we did it and that's what we thrive on," said Shreyas.

"The way every bowler stood up on this occasion, the way they came in and took wickets, that was imperative. The attitude and approach of all bowlers was to take wickets and they did," he added.

SRH, who had pipped Rajasthan Royals on the final day of the league stage to finish second in the points table, will now proceed to Chennai to have another crack at making the summit clash with Qualifier 2 to be played on May 24.

"You have these days in T20 cricket, when it doesn't work out. We had few starts but didn't go on with the bat. Not good with the ball. We all have played enough cricket, and going to a new venue (Chennai) helps us as well, so we got to keep this behind and move on," SRH skipper Cummins said.

### New Delhi

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) today expectedly announced that it will not hold any trials to select the Paris Olympics team. The selection committee met at the WFI office and decided unanimously after speaking to both the men's and women's chief coaches.

The WFI also clarified that the exemption was a one-time "exception" in the "current peculiar circumstances". "...

but this decision will not be applicable for any other future selection criteria," read the minutes of the meeting.

The decision means the end of the road for reigning silver medallist Ravi Dahiya, who will not get a chance to challenge Aman Sehrawat in the freestyle 57kg division. Speaking to The Tribune, WFI president Sanjay Singh said that all members agreed with the coaches' view that holding trials was not in the best

## BJP MP Brij Bhushan pleads not guilty to sexual harassment charges

### New Delhi

BJP MP and former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Singh pleaded not guilty to the charges of sexual harassment framed against him in a criminal case filed by five women wrestlers and claimed trial on Tuesday.

Earlier this month, Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) Priyanka Rajpoot of Rouse Avenue Courts had framed the charges against him.

Brij Bhushan along with former assistant secretary of the WFI and co-accused Vinod Tomar are currently out on bail. "Charges have been framed and they will have to prove these in the court. I have all evidence to prove my innocence...All these are false cases, the Delhi Police have to show what evidence they have against me...," he told reporters.

The court asked Brij Bhushan if he pleaded guilty to the charges, to this he responded, "Why will I plead guilty when I am not guilty?"

## Dhoni keeps cards close to chest; CSK official says he asked management...: Big revelation on Thala's retirement

### New Delhi

As Dhoni's retirement from the IPL is one of the biggest talking points in cricket circles, the former India skipper, however, has kept his cards close to his chest; with speculation doing the rounds that the 42-year-old Chennai Super Kings star might have played his last game this season.

CSK got eliminated from the playoffs race of the IPL 2024 after a heart-wrenching defeat to Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) in



The court had found sufficient material on the record to frame charges against Brij Bhushan under Sections 354 (outraging modesty of woman) and 354A (sexual harassment) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The Judge posted the matter for further proceedings on June 1.

It had also found sufficient material to frame charges against Brij Bhushan for offences under Section 506 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC in

connection with two of the five victims. The court, however, discharged Brij Bhushan in a complaint filed by one of the six women wrestlers, citing lack of sufficient evidence to back her claim.

A six-time MP from Uttar Pradesh, Brij Bhushan was denied BJP ticket from Kaiserganj Lok Sabha seat in the wake of the sexual harassment allegations levelled against him.

a do-or-die match on Saturday.

According to a Times of India report, a CSK official revealed that Dhoni hasn't yet communicated to the franchise about his retirement.

The report, quoting a source, stated that Dhoni has informed the CSK management to wait for a couple of months before he takes a final call. According to CSK sources, Dhoni, who landed in Ranchi on Sunday, is planning a visit to London for treatment of a muscle tear injury and will take a call on his future course of action

post-recovery.

"Dhoni might head to London for his muscle tear surgery which saw him struggling during the IPL. He is not fully fit but wants to continue to play cricket and he will decide about his future after treatment which will take him five to six months to recover," sources told IANS. Despite finishing the campaign with 14 points, the same as RCB in the league stage, CSK failed to seal the berth due to the latter's superior net run-rate.

## No Olympics trials: WFI makes it official



interest of the team. "Both the coaches (Jagminder Singh and Virender Singh) suggested not holding the trials as it would be difficult to maintain the weight and it is important to protect them from injuries. The committee agreed with them," Sanjay said. Vinesh Phogat (50kg), Antim Panghal (53kg), Anshu Malik (57kg), Nisha Dahiya (68kg) and Reetika Hooda (76kg) are the other wrestlers who have qualified for Paris.



# Para World championships: Deepthi shatters world record, wins 400m gold

Kobe (Japan)

India's Deepthi Jeevanji clinched the gold medal with a world record time of 55.07 seconds in the women's 400m T20 category at the World Para Athletics Championships here today. Para Asian Games gold medallist Deepthi smashed American Breanna Clark's earlier world record of 55.12 seconds set during last year's edition of the championships in Paris. She also qualified for the upcoming Paris Paralympics.

Aysel Onder of Turkey was second in 55.19 seconds while Lizanshela Angulo of Ecuador was third in 56.68 seconds on the fourth day of competitions.

The 20-year-old Deepthi had qualified for the final after winning her heat in an Asian record time of 56.18 seconds on Sunday.

The T20 category is meant for athletes with intellectual impairment. Deepthi had won the 400m T20 gold in the Hangzhou Para Asian Games last year with the then Asian record of 56.69 seconds.

Interestingly, Deepthi has won several medals at the junior level while competing with able-bodied athletes. She had competed in the 2022 National Inter-State Championships in Chennai, running the 100m and 200m races.

Yogesh Kathuniya added a silver medal in the men's F56 category discus throw with an effort of 41.80 metres. The F56 category is meant for athletes who compete in field events from a



seated position.

Bhagyashri Jadhav picked up a silver medal in the women's shot put F34 class with a throw of 7.56m. The F34 category is for field athletes with movement affected to a low degree in the trunk and arms with highly affected legs. India's tally has now swelled to five medals — 1 gold, 2 silver and 2 bronze. — PTI

Taunted once, Deepthi is now feted in village

New Delhi: For a long time, Deepthi Jeevanji's parents were taunted by fellow villagers for having a "mentally impaired" child. But now they are counting the compliments as the same bunch converged at their modest house at Kalleda hamlet to celebrate her record-breaking effort. "Deepthi's parents were daily wage labourers and they were struggling to run the family. On top of that they faced constant taunts from the villagers that a mentally impaired girl cannot get married," Deepthi's coach Nagpuri Ramesh said. "After

Deepthi won gold in the Asian Para Games last year, the scenario changed. Now, the same villagers are praising them. They told me even the district collector and politicians of the area visited their house, which was a shock to them," he added.

Deepthi's father J Yadagiri and mother J Dhanalaxmi were so poor that they did not even have money to afford the bus fare to send their child from Warangal to Hyderabad when Ramesh wanted to train her at the Sports Authority of India centre. "She was spotted in a school meet by a PET teacher. When I told them to send Deepthi, they said they didn't have money for the bus fare. I told the bus conductor that I will pay the fare when she reaches Hyderabad," he said.

Ramesh said Deepthi's parents had earlier sold their half-acre land due to financial difficulties but they bought an identical piece of land with the Rs 30 lakh reward she got for winning the Para Asian Games gold.

# With Djokovic awaiting the winner, Murray trails Hanfmann at rain-hit Geneva Open



Geneva

Needing a win to face Novak Djokovic next at the Geneva Open, Andy Murray was saved by a heavy rainstorm when he trailed unseeded Yannick Hanfmann 7-5, 4-1 in a first-round match on Monday.

Murray and top-ranked Djokovic both got wild cards to enter the last clay-court event to prepare for the French Open, and were drawn to meet in the second round. They have not faced each other on tour since February 2017.

Ranked No. 75, Murray began to struggle in his first tour match in two months when heavy rain and strong winds swept across the stadium court in a lakeside park. The 85th-ranked Hanfmann broke Murray's service twice in a row to lead 4-1 with his service game to come when play was suspended.

In the opening set, Murray found some big serves to get out of trouble in the ninth game when he saved two break points.

It was just a respite, as Murray was broken to love in his next service game, sealed by a Hanfmann forehand service return winner.

The German served out the set taking his first chance at 40-0. The serve pushed Murray wide to his backhand and he netted the return.

The winner is expected to play Djokovic on Wednesday, the 37th birthday for the record 24-time Grand Slam singles champion. Murray, who has a 2-5 career record against Djokovic in Grand Slam finals, turned 37 last Wednesday.

The Geneva Open final is scheduled for Saturday, one day before main draw play starts at Roland Garros where Djokovic is the defending champion.

# I hope IPL is not a shortcut to play for India, says Gautam Gambhir

Chennai

Former India opener Gautam Gambhir loves the IPL, and the quality of cricket it produces, but doesn't want the franchise-based T20 league to become the pathway to the Indian team for youngsters.

Speaking on Ravichandran Ashwin's YouTube show, 'Kutti Stories with Ash', Gambhir said, "The bigger concern that arises is about how many youngsters want to play Test cricket for India. I hope the IPL is not a shortcut to play for India." The Kolkata Knight Riders team mentor also

asserted that the IPL has benefitted the Indian domestic cricketers.



"Today, when I look at international T20 sides, apart from 2-3 teams, I don't see enough competition when it comes to playing for India," he said.

"Not many teams can match the quality that India has. So, I feel that in today's day and age, IPL has become far more competitive than international T20 cricket.

"Just the quality of the domestic players has changed, the way domestic players want to play in the IPL and the way they work around T20 cricket

-- I think most of their focus is on playing T20 cricket."

**Fans come to see my team win**

Gambhir, who helped India win the ODI World Cup final in 2011 alongside MS Dhoni and led KKR to twin Indian Premier League titles in 2012 and 2014, returned to the side as the team mentor this season.

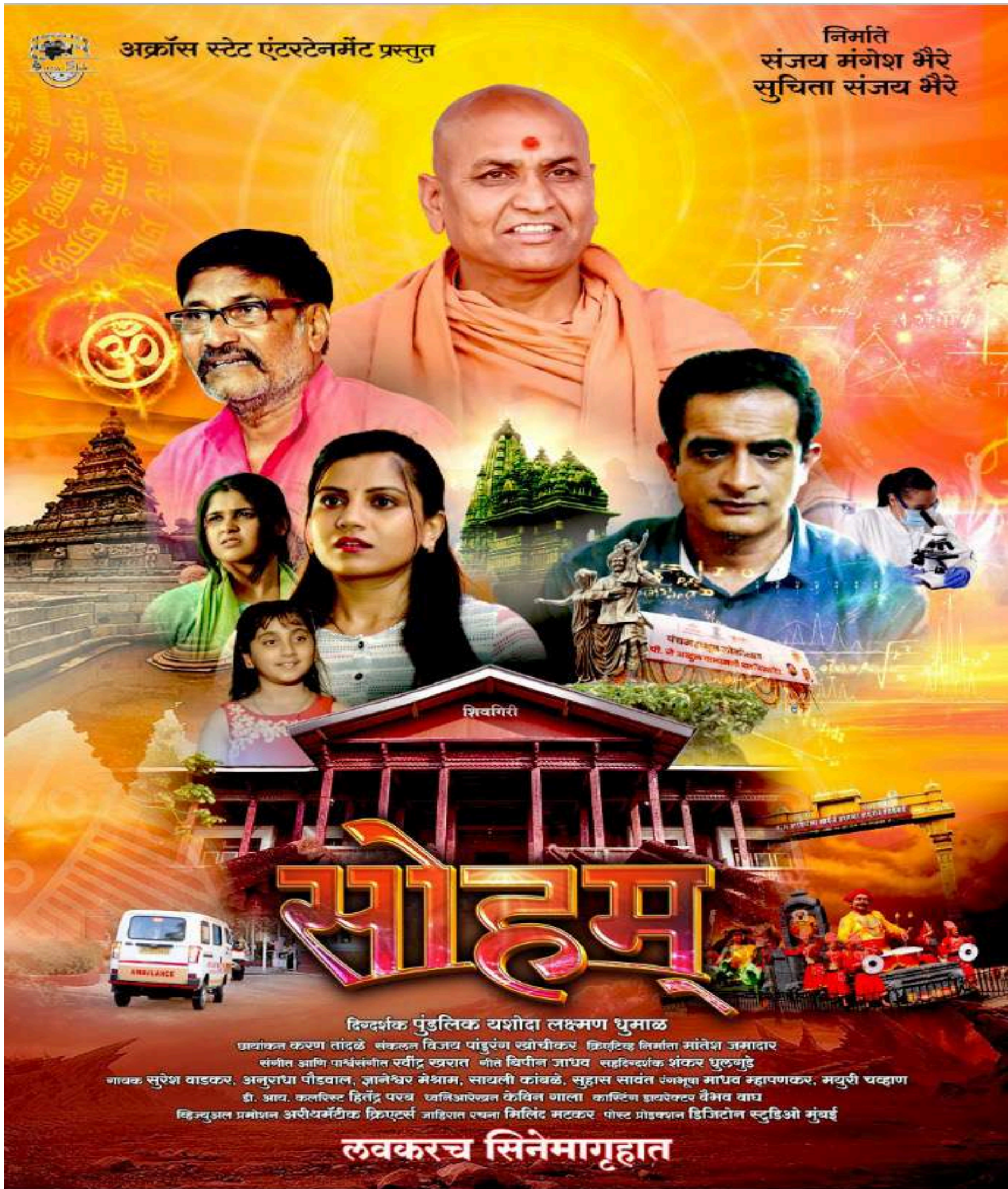
The 42-year-old is known for his outspoken attitude and serious demeanour.

Speaking on the same, Gambhir said, "I'm not breaking any rules. I want to be as aggressive as I can be. And what's wrong with that?

"That's my nature. That's my characteristic because, for me, winning, it's an obsession, and I'm obsessed with winning. That's the problem I have."



अक्रॉस स्टेट एंटरटेनमेंट प्रस्तुत

निर्माते  
संजय मंगेश भैरे  
सुचिता संजय भैरे

दिग्दर्शक पुंडलिक यशोदा लक्ष्मण धुमाळ

छायांकन करण तांदळे संकलन विजय पांडुरंग खोचीकर क्विक्ट्व निर्माता मांदेश जमादार

संगीत आणि पार्श्वसंगीत रवींद्र खरात नीत विपीन जाधव सहदिग्दर्शक शंकर धुलगुडे

गायक सुरेश वाडकर, अनुसाधा पौडवाल, ज्ञानेश्वर मेश्राम, सायली कांबळे, सुहास सावंत संगभूषा माधव म्हापणकर, मयुरी चव्हाण

डॉ. आय. कलरिस्ट हितेंद्र परच घनिआरेखन केविन गाला कालिंद झयरेक्टर वैभव वाघ

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