

# Across State

Year -7 Issue - 39

Mumbai, Thursday 04-10 July '24

EDITOR IN CHIEF: SANJAY M. BHAIRE

Rs.5/- PAGES- 24

## Congress biggest opponent of Constitution

### PM Modi's scathing attack in Rajya Sabha

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday launched a blistering attack on the Congress party in the Rajya Sabha, accusing it of being "the biggest opponent of the Constitution" and running a "fake narrative" to mislead the public.

During his reply to the debate on the motion of thanks to the President's address, the Prime Minister challenged the opposition's claim that the recent 2024 elections were fought on the issue of "protecting the Constitution".

Reminding the House of the 1977 elections, Modi said it was fought for the protection of the Constitution following the Emergency. It was the first election fought for the protection of the Constitution, he asserted.

"People have more faith in us for the protection of the Constitution. Therefore, they gave us the mandate," Modi said, criticising the Congress for its "hypocrisy" on the constitutional matters.

Modi accused the Congress of committing several constitutional improprieties during its tenure, including extending the Lok Sabha term to seven years during the Emergency and creating the National Advisory Council (NAC) when in power.

He also questioned the



constitutional basis for these actions and criticised the party for prioritising one family over established protocols.

The Prime Minister also called out Congress allies, particularly those representing backward communities, for aligning with a party which he accused of having a poor record on the constitutional matters.

He suggested that these alliances were born out of political opportunism rather than genuine concern for constitutional values.

Modi also said that the Congress, lacking popular support, was resorting to "fake narratives" and "fake videos" to mislead the country.

He criticised the opposition for focusing on a "save corruption campaign"

instead of engaging in discussions on development vision.

Modi's attack on the Congress in the Upper House took an unexpected turn when the Opposition staged a walkout midway through his speech. This prompted sharp reactions from both the Prime Minister and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar.

Modi accused the Opposition of lacking the courage to face the truth and listen to responses to issues they had raised.

"The country is watching -- those who spread lies do not have the courage to listen to the truth," he said, adding that the Opposition was insulting the traditions of the Upper House.

Dhankhar expressed his disappointment, calling the Opposition's behaviour

"painful and indecent". He emphasized that the walkout was not just a rejection of the proceedings, but a disregard for their constitutional oath.

The Prime Minister continued his address, touching upon several sensitive issues. He criticized the Opposition's selective approach to atrocities against women, citing recent incidents in West Bengal.

Modi expressed concerns over the politicisation of such issues and the silence of certain leaders when cases involve their own party or state.

The Prime Minister also accused the Congress of consistently fielding Dalit candidates in elections that they were likely to lose, including recent Speaker elections and the 2022 and 2017 Presidential and Vice Presidential polls.

He suggested this was a pattern of using Dalit and backward community members as scapegoats while protecting the interests of a particular family.

Throughout his speech, Modi maintained that the Opposition's actions stemmed from their inability to accept the mandate given by the people to the NDA government. He reiterated his commitment to serving the nation and providing a detailed account of his government's work.

### Inside...

**Despite BJP's objection, Ajit Pawar takes MLA Nawab Malik on board**

[Read Story On page 2](#)

**Upper age limit to avail Ladki Bahin scheme raised to 65: Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde**

[Read Story On page 3](#)

**After Lonavala waterfall tragedy, prohibitory orders imposed at picnic spots in Maharashtra's Pune**

[Read Story On page 4](#)

**121 killed in stampede at UP's Hathras as disciples vie for their guru's glimpse**

[Read Story On page 7](#)

## Despite BJP's objection, Ajit Pawar takes MLA Nawab Malik on board

### Mumbai

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has taken MLA Nawab Malik into its fold, despite objections from Mahayuti ally BJP. Mumbai MLA Malik, who is out on bail on health grounds after his arrest in a money laundering case, attended a meeting of party legislators called by Pawar Tuesday night.

While the BJP is yet to react to the videos showing Malik emerging from Ajit Pawar's meeting room at his official residence Devgiri, an NCP leader said that Malik remains with the NCP and not a single allegation against him has been proven in court.

The Enforcement Directorate had arrested Malik, a former minister, on February 23, 2022, in a money laundering case registered over the Goawala Compound property in Kurla. At the time, the BJP had even linked Malik to underworld gangsters.

In August 2023, Malik was released from jail after securing bail on health grounds, months after the Ajit Pawar-led

NCP joined hands with the BJP and became part of the state government.

Malik's decision to sit on the treasury benches during the Winter Session of the legislature in Nagpur last year had resulted in Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis writing a strongly worded letter to Ajit Pawar. "We take strong objection to Nawab Malik associating with ruling combine. We urge you not to include him in your party, which is a partner in the coalition government in Maharashtra,"

Fadnavis wrote. "While Malik has the right as an MLA to attend the (Assembly) session, his inclusion in the NCP... cannot be acceptable ... While it is your right to decide who should be part of the NCP, we urge you not to include Malik as he has been set free on bail on health grounds. He has not been absolved of charges against him," he further said.

Following the criticism, Malik's health problems kept him out of the limelight. In the ongoing Monsoon Session of the state legislature, Malik is actively seen with the ruling NCP MLAs.



## MMRC secures Rs 8,000 crore more funding from JICA for underground Metro Line 3

### Mumbai

In the revised total project cost of Rs 37,275.50 crore for the underground Metro Line 3 that will connect Colaba with Bandra SEEPZ, funding from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has increased from Rs 13,235 crore to Rs 21,280.45 crore, an addition of Rs 8,045.45 crore, said a notification issued by the state urban development department on Tuesday adding that the Metro Line is expected to start operations from September this year.

An official from the Mumbai Metro Rail Corporation (MMRC) said JICA funding is provided through pass-through assistance (PTA) via the Government of India.

While previous borrowings have been disbursed, the fourth tranche of additional borrowing of Rs 3,300 crore was delivered in two phases, the agreement for which was signed in March. The fifth tranche of the remaining funds is set to be signed on July 5 and will be disbursed fully by JICA.

Meanwhile, now the state government will cover the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority's (MMRDA) equity share in the increased project cost of Metro Line 3. This change was formalized through the new notification brought out by the state urban development department on Tuesday.

An MMRC official said that since Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development

Authority is involved in several other Metro and mega infrastructure projects, the state will pay the equity of additional Rs 1,163.3 crore to the MMRC. Following the revised project cost, the state's contribution has increased to Rs 3,566 crore from the original Rs 2,402.70 crore. The MMRDA has paid the initial equity share of Rs 2,402.70 crore, now the state will cover the additional Rs 1,163.3 crore.

The notification detailed that the original cost of the Metro 3 project, initially scheduled for completion by December 2021, was Rs 23,136 crore. However, due to geographic and demographic challenges, land acquisition difficulties, and the Aarey carshed land acquisition issue, the cost increased by Rs 10,269.82 crore, raising the total to Rs 33,406 crore. This revised cost was approved on August 25th, 2022. Additional challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and a stay on the Aarey carshed land acquisition have now pushed the project's expected operational date to September this year.

Between 2021 and 2024, the project incurred extra costs, including Rs 520 crore for consultant fees, Rs 700 crore for rehabilitation and resettlement, Rs 1,500 crore for architectural systems, Rs 150 crore for office expenses, and Rs 1,000 crore for agreements. This added Rs 3,870 crore to the project cost, bringing the total to Rs 37,275.50 crore.

## Accused planned to attack Salman at film shoot, say Panvel police; file chargesheet

### Mumbai

Accused involved in the alleged conspiracy to kill Bollywood actor Salman Khan had planned to attack him during a movie shoot, a police official on Tuesday said citing a chargesheet filed in the case.

During an investigation into the case, it came to light that Rs 25 lakh "supari" (contract) was given by jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi to his gang members to attack the actor, he said.

The gang planned to use sophisticated weapons, including AK-47, from Pakistan for the attack, the official said.

The Panvel Town police in Navi Mumbai submitted the 350-page chargesheet before a magistrate court on June 21 against five arrested accused – Dhananjay Tapsing alias Ajay Kashyap (28), Gautam Bhatia (29), Vaspi Mehmood Khan alias China (36), Rizwan Hussain alias Javed Khan (25) and Deepak Hawasing alias John (30), he said.

Jailed gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, his brother Anmol Bishnoi, Sampat Nehra and Goldy Brar have been shown as wanted accused in the case, the official said.

The attack was allegedly planned to be carried out during a movie shoot or while the actor was leaving his Panvel farmhouse, the official said.

The chargesheet mentions the detailed plot, attack and escape route. It contains an analysis of the intelligence gathered, mobile phone records of the accused, their WhatsApp chats, audio and video calls and tower locations, he said.

In April, the Panvel Town police unearthed an alleged plot of the Bishnoi gang members to kill the actor, he said.

The plot was uncovered during their investigation disclosing a video call conversation between Lawrence Bishnoi gang member Ajay Kashyap and another accused.

### Subscribe Today!

Across State

SUBSCRIMEDIAON FORM

अक्रॉस मुंबई

Name : .....

Address : .....

.....

.....

.....

City : ..... State: .....

Phone : ..... E-mail: .....

1 year subscrimediaon of both Across State (English) & Across Mumbai (Marathi+Hindi) – 500/- Rs.

1 year subscrimediaon of Across State (English) 240/- Rs.

1 year subscrimediaon of Across Mumbai (Marathi+ Hindi) 240/- Rs.

Kindly, send the Cheque in favour of  
BHAKTI PRINT MEDIA PRIVATE LIMITED.

Signature

Send Your Subscrimediaon Here:

B wing, 512, Knox Plaza, Mindspace,  
Off. Link Road, Behind Inorbit Mall,  
Malad (W), Mumbai-64.

Contact :  
Mr. Sanjay M. Bhaire  
(9819991194)

# Upper age limit to avail Ladki Bahin scheme raised to 65: Maharashtra CM Eknath Shinde

**Mumbai**

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde Tuesday raised the upper age limit to 65 years for the “Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin” scheme, under which women will get Rs 1,500 per month.

In the budget announcement on June 28, the state government had set the upper age limit at 61 for benefits to be available to women under the scheme.

“The scheme has been implemented from July 1. There are some objections over the deadline to fill the form for this scheme. We will not put any such restriction. We will accept the forms whenever they come, be it July end or August or September.



The beneficiaries will get the money of all months starting from July,” said Shinde.

He was replying to the discussion on Governor’s address in the legislative Assembly.

Earlier in the day, MLAs from all parties had raised the issue of difficulties faced by women in acquiring necessary documents such as income certificate, domicile certificate to avail the

benefits of the scheme.

The MLAs had claimed that at several places, local government employees were demanding money to get the documents. “No such official will be tolerated. We appeal women to complain against such corrupt officials. The government will suspend them and put them in jail,” the CM said.

Under this scheme, women between the age group of 21 to 61 were to get the benefits of the scheme.

Former chief minister and Congress MLA Prithviraj Chavan had raised the demand to increase the age limit. “Women above 60 are in greater need of money. The age limit should increase,”

he had said.

Shinde announced that the age limit for the scheme has been increased to 65.

Raising point of information in the legislative Assembly, MLAs from different parties had raised the issue about overcrowding of women at the registrations centers for the CM Majhi Ladki Bahin scheme and difficulties experienced by the women.

State minister Shambhuraj Desai, who was present in the House, then had assured the MLAs that the government has noticed all the issues and will announce appropriate decisions for the same.

## BMC starts core test of roads being concretised



durability of the road. As part of the process, the BMC is cutting out portions of the concretised roads and sending these samples to government laboratories and IIT Mumbai, where they are being further tested.

“The materials used for concretising the roads are being tested to understand the ratio of homogeneity, quality of materials used and overall durability. If we find out that the work is not being done as per standard, the contractor could be asked to redo the whole work and upgrade the quality of roads they construct,” said an official from the road’s department.

The BMC said that as of now, concretising work is underway in the suburbs of Mumbai, and as per the civic body’s target, 324km of roads will be concretised by 2026.

The BMC recently awarded a work order worth Rs 1,300 crore for concretising roads in the island city. The overall project, pegged at Rs 6,000 crore, is the brainchild of Eknath Shinde, who after becoming the Chief Minister in 2022, had announced making Mumbai roads pothole free by concretising them.

**Mumbai**

To track the quality of road work that is being done in Mumbai, the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) has started a ‘core test’ of the cement and concrete roads that are currently being concretised.

The first batch of samples to be tested were sent for testing to IIT Mumbai on Monday.

“The quality check of roads will assure the contractors to do their work carefully and will increase the level of transparency between the administration and the people,” said Abhijit Bangar, additional municipal commissioner (projects), on Tuesday.

Civic authorities said the core test will focus on tracking the quality of materials used in the concretising works, which eventually determines the

## Uproar over Rahul’s remarks: Opposition leader Danve suspended from Legislative Council over ‘abusive remarks’

**Mumbai**

Leader of Opposition in the Maharashtra Legislative Council Ambadas Danve of Shiv Sena UBT was on Tuesday suspended for five days for allegedly misbehaving and using abusive language in the House, amid heated arguments between the ruling and opposition legislators over remarks by Opposition leader in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, that those who call themselves Hindus are engaged in “violence and hate”.

Deputy Chairperson of the council Neelam Gorhe took action against Danve following the Sena UBT leader’s alleged use of swear words during an uproar in the House on Monday after BJP legislators demanded passing of a resolution condemning Rahul Gandhi and sending it to the Lok Sabha.

Though Shiv Sena UBT chief and Maharashtra former chief minister Uddhav Thackeray termed the suspension “undemocratic”, he also issued an apology in case Danve’s words insulted women.

“Ambadas should have



been given an opportunity to present his side. This would be the first time that without discussion and in a pre-decided manner, an Opposition leader is suspended with a vendetta. The people of Maharashtra are watching the injustice towards the opposition leader who was raising the voice of people in the House... I was not in the house yesterday. If Danve said anything that is insulting to women, then I apologise. But what about their ministers who abuse women? If they do something it is part of the system but if we do it anything, it is crime,” Thackeray said in the Vidhan Sabha.

Thackeray, however, defended Rahul Gandhi’s statement in

Parliament and said, “I do not feel that Rahul Gandhi said anything anti-Hindu. He has said what I have been saying — the BJP does not mean Hindu. We will not tolerate the insult of Hindus but the BJP is wearing a mask of Hindutva. The BJP wanted to bring a resolution in the legislative council on the issue (of Rahul Gandhi’s statement in LS), which was opposed by us.”

Speaking to media, Danve termed the action taken against him as “injustice” and “biased”. Pointing out that he should have been given an opportunity to present his side, Danve said action should have been taken against BJP MLC Prasad Lad who was making gestures at him and also used unparliamentary language in the House.

“The unilateral and arbitrary suspension of the Opposition party leader is a form of suppressing the voice of the Opposition. The Speaker has taken the action in a biased manner by deciding on the resolution without discussion. Due to the brute majority held by the BJP, Opposition leaders have been suspended,” Danve said.

# After Lonavala waterfall tragedy, prohibitory orders imposed at picnic spots in Maharashtra's Pune

**Pune,**

The Pune district administration has imposed prohibitory orders at several popular picnic spots, including Bhushi Dam and the Pavana Dam region, to ensure the safety of tourists during the monsoon season.

The order, effective from July 2 to 31, prohibits gatherings of five or more persons, restricts individuals from entering deep water bodies, and bans taking selfies and creating reels at these sites.

The administration has already outlined a series of safety measures for hazardous tourist locations, which includes identification and demarcation of dangerous areas, the presence of lifeguards and rescue teams, and the installation of warning boards.

The move comes after an incident on Sunday when a woman and four children were swept away at a waterfall near the Bhushi Dam, a well-known picnic spot in the picturesque Lonavala hill station of Maharashtra's Pune district.

According to a notification issued by Pune Collector Suhas Divase on Tuesday, section 163 of the newly implemented Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Disaster Management Act-2005 will be enforced at specific spots across Maval, Mulshi, Ambegaon, Khed, Junnar, Bor, Velha, Indapur, and Haveli tehsils.

Violators will face action under relevant legal provisions.

The prohibitory orders will be enforced at specific sites, including the Bhushi Dam, Bendewadi and Dahuli waterfalls in Maval tehsil, as well as Tiger Point, Lion's Point,



and Rajmachi Point in Khandala, Sahara Bridge, the Pavana Dam region, Tata Dam, and the Ghubad Lake.

In Mulshi tehsil, the orders cover Mulshi Dam, Tamhini Ghat forest area, and Milkybar waterfall.

The areas in Haveli tehsil include Khadakwasla and Warasgaon dams, and the surroundings of Sinhgad Fort.

In Ambegaon tehsil, the order applies to the Bhimashankar region, Dimbhe Dam region, and Kondhwal waterfall area.

In Junnar tehsil, Malshej Ghat, local dams, the Shivneri Fort region, and Manikdoh are covered.

The prohibitory measures extend to waterfalls around the Bhatghar Dam region and other water bodies and fort areas in Bor and Velha tehsils. Similarly, water bodies and ghat sections in Khed and

Indapur tehsils are included.

Separately, in a joint action by the Lonavala Municipal Council and Central Railway, more than 60 makeshift shops near the Bhushi Dam have been demolished during an anti-encroachment drive.

On Monday, Divase instructed the local administration to take action against unauthorised structures around tourist spots.

Notably, the safety measures at certain locations were outlined amid accidents involving tourists at these locations.

During the monsoon season, a large number of tourists visit the Bhushi and Pavana dams, Lonavala, Sinhgad, Malshej and Tamhini and other places, nestled in the Western Ghats in Pune district, often venturing into unknown and dangerous areas.

The tranquil setting of the Pavana Dam in Lonavala has also been marred by a series of tragic drownings, underscoring the critical importance of implementing enhanced safety measures in the region.

Four persons drowned in the Pavana Dam since January 2024, according to the Lonavala police.

Rescue organisations like the Vanyajeev Rakshak Maval (VRM) reported recovering 27 bodies from various water bodies in Maval tehsil between March and May this year. The district collector had asked officials to identify the dangerous spots at various tourist places, such as dams, waterfalls, lakes, rivers, and cliffs, and mark them as prohibited areas by installing perimeter lines and warning boards, so that tourists do not venture beyond them.

Places which are disaster-prone and where safety measures cannot be taken must be shut for tourists, he said.

Agencies such as revenue, forest, railways, municipal corporations, and the Public Works Department should deploy divers, rescue boats, lifeguards, and life jackets at water bodies frequented by tourists.

Ambulances with first aid facilities should also be deployed, the collector said.

"If required, take action against those who violate the rules and regulations," Divase stated.

He has asked local officials to implement all the measures and prevent loss of life.

## Medha Patkar gets five-month jail in defamation case



**New Delhi**

A court on Monday sentenced activist Medha Patkar to five months of simple imprisonment in a 23-year-old defamation case lodged by Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena when he headed an NGO in Gujarat. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 10 lakh on Patkar. She has been given one month to file an appeal against the order.

## BJP wants Mamata to quit over 'lawlessness'

**New Delhi**

The BJP on Monday sought resignation of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee after a video surfaced of a man administering brutal "justice" to a runaway couple in a West Bengal village.

The video shows a hefty man beating up the couple with a clutch of soft bamboo sticks. A crowd can be seen watching the spectacle by forming a circle around the beating spot. When the woman doubles up and collapses in a corner, she is lifted by her hair by one from the crowd and pushed at the centre again for further assault.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) also took suo motu cognisance of the incident which took



place in Lakshmipur village of Chopra division in Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal.

The NHRC issued notices to the Chief Secretary and Director General of

Police, West Bengal, calling for a detailed report in the matter within one week. It has also decided to send its team to West Bengal for a spot inquiry.

Addressing a press conference here, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia questioned Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's commitment to justice and governance. Bhatia also alleged that the perpetrator was a leader from Banerjee's

Trinamool Congress. "Law and order have collapsed in West Bengal. Mamata Banerjee should resign forthwith as she is unable to ensure the safety and security of citizens," he said.

# 'It was good standup comedy act': Kangana Ranaut attacks Rahul Gandhi for 'insulting' Hindu religion

New Delhi

BJP MP Kangana Ranaut lashed out at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi over his remarks in the Parliament and asked him to apologise for "insulting" the Hindu religion.

This comes after a row erupted over the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi's remarks, wherein he accused the BJP of spreading "violence" and "hatred". Following this, both BJP and Congress have sparred over his remarks.

Speaking to reporters outside the Parliament, Ranaut said, "I have said, Rahul Gandhi did a good standup comedian act because he made all our gods and goddesses, brand ambassador of Congress. He said that the hand raised by Lord Shiva in blessing is the 'hand' of Congress, these are his statements, this was his speech, so we were already laughing...He said those who raise their hands for Allah are also the hands of Congress."

Taking a jibe at Rahul, she said, "His main complaint was that when Raja Beta (Rahul Gandhi) comes, PM Modi doesn't greet him...so you can understand what sort of a standup comedy act it was." The actor-turned-politician demanded the Congress leader to apologise for his remarks.

"He (Rahul Gandhi) even brought the pictures of God and placed it on the desk, while we know it should always be kept inside the temple. He insulted Hindu gods...he even said that the Hindu religion and those who follow it are violent in nature...I think he should apologize for his statements," Ranaut added.

Earlier in the day, during the motion of thanks of the President's address, Rahul Gandhi targeted the BJP-led government and alleged there has been "a systematic attack" on the idea of India.

"There has been a systematic and full-scale assault on the idea of India, the Constitution and on the people who resisted the attack on the Constitution. Many of us were personally attacked. Some of the leaders are still in



jail. Anyone who resisted the idea of concentration of power and wealth, aggression on poor and Dalits and minorities was crushed...I was attacked by the order of the Government of India, by the order of the Prime Minister of India...The most enjoyable part of it was the 55 hours of interrogation by ED..." he alleged.

He also called the Hindu symbol 'Abhayamudra' which gestures fearlessness, reassurance and safety, as the symbol of the Congress party.

"Abhayamudra is the symbol of Congress...The Abhayamudra is the gesture of fearlessness, is the gesture of reassurance and safety, which dispels fear and accords divine protection and bliss in Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism and other Indian religions...All our great men have spoken about non-violence and finishing fear...But, those who call themselves Hindu only talk about violence, hatred, untruth...Aap Hindu ho hi nahi," the Congress leader said.

BJP members took strong objection to Rahul Gandhi's remark and accused Rahul of insulting Hindu religion by connecting it with violence.

Home Minister Amit Shah targeted Rahul Gandhi and said connecting violence with any religion is wrong.

"The Leader of Opposition has categorically said that those who call themselves Hindu talk of violence and do violence. He doesn't know that crores of

people proudly call themselves Hindu. Connecting violence with any religion is wrong. He should apologise," Amit Shah said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hit out at Rahul Gandhi over his remarks and said calling "the entire Hindu community violent is a very serious matter".

In response, Rahul Gandhi hit back stating BJP is "not the entire Hindu society." "Narendra Modi is not entire Hindu society. BJP is not the entire Hindu society, RSS is not the entire society, this is not BJP's contract," he said.

## New criminal laws: Justice within 3 years of FIR; hope for reduction in crime, says Amit Shah

New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Monday that justice would be delivered up to the level of the Supreme Court in all cases within three years of the registration of an FIR under the new criminal laws.

Addressing a press conference after the new criminal laws were implemented, Shah expressed the hope of a reduction in crime in future as 90 per cent conviction was expected under the new laws.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA) came into effect on Monday. The new laws replaced the British-era IPC, CrPC and the Indian Evidence Act, respectively.

"Justice can be received

## Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav says 'people of Ayodhya have given a strong message to PM Modi'

New Delhi

Samajwadi Party chief and Kannauj MP Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, while addressing during the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address.

Yadav labelled the Modi-Yogi administration as a "double engine failure" in delivering on promises made to the people of Uttar Pradesh.

Highlighting the dire state of infrastructure, Yadav remarked, "Boats are plying on the streets of Uttar Pradesh, which showcases the reality of the 'smart city' slogans. I remember the Prime Minister's promises about addressing the issue of stray cattle and clearing pending payments for sugarcane farmers. None of these commitments have been fulfilled."

Yadav pointed out the rampant issue of paper leaks, which has plagued job seekers in the state. "The youth of Uttar Pradesh are suffering due to repeated exam paper leaks. This problem isn't confined to UP alone; even the NEET exam has been compromised. The truth is, this government doesn't want to



provide jobs. What hope can we have from a government that kills the aspirations of its people?"

He also addressed the electorate's growing disillusionment with the current administration. "The people are no longer swayed by empty promises. From now on, only genuine conversations will matter. The victory of 'INDIA' signifies the triumph of the Indian voter."

Referring to victory of SP's Awadesh Pratap in Faizabad (which has the temple town of Ayodhya), who was sitting next to him, Yadav said, "We have brought a message of love from Ayodhya".

He alleged that during the Model Code of Conduct, the government and Election Commission favoured certain individuals.



up to the level of the Supreme Court within three years of the registration of the FIR," he said. The Home Minister said with the implementation of the three criminal laws, India would have the most modern criminal justice system in the world.

Shah rubbished the charge of the Opposition that the legislations were passed by Parliament after hundreds of members were suspended from both Houses, claiming that these were extensively discussed for four years with all stakeholders

and he had personally held 158 meetings before finalising these.

Shah said these laws were discussed in the Lok Sabha for nine hours and 29 minutes in which 34 members participated and gave their views, while in the Rajya Sabha, these were discussed for six hours and 17 minutes in which 40 members participated. He said a lie was being spread that the laws were passed after the expulsion of MPs.

The Home Minister said the "expelled members" still had an option to come to the House and participate in the discussion to express their views. "After 77 years of Independence, the criminal justice system is now completely 'swadeshi' and embedded in Indian ethos," he said.

# Don't behave like LoP Rahul, PM Modi advises NDA MPs



## New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday advised NDA MPs not to behave like how Congress MP and Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi did on Monday when he attacked the Centre on various counts.

The Prime Minister said this while chairing a meeting of the NDA parliamentary party meeting on Tuesday morning.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju told mediapersons after the meeting that Modi said in his address to the NDA MPs, that the Opposition had become restless as an ordinary "tea seller" had managed to achieve the feat of winning three consecutive terms as Prime Minister after Jawaharlal Nehru.

The NDA meeting was held

amid discussions in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on the Motion of Thanks to President Droupadi Murmu's address to a joint sitting of Parliament.

"Today, the Prime Minister gave us an important message. He said that every MP has been elected to the House to serve the nation. Irrespective of the party they belong to, service to the nation is our first responsibility. Every NDA MP has to work by prioritising the country. He also guided us well regarding the conduct of MPs and said every MP should present issues related to his constituency in the House very well as per the rules. He also told us to develop expertise in other major issues of interest," Rijiju said.

# Selective expunction defies logic, expunged remarks be restored: Rahul Gandhi to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla

## New Delhi,

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi has written a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, expressing his concerns over the expunging of significant portions of his speech during the Motion of Thanks on the President's address on Monday.

In the letter, Gandhi expressed his shock and disappointment at the manner in which his remarks were removed from the official proceedings, suggesting that this action undermines the principles of parliamentary democracy and the rights of elected representatives.

Gandhi acknowledged that while the Chair has the authority to expunge certain remarks as per Rule 380 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, he argued that the expunged portions of his speech did not violate this rule.

"I am, however, shocked to note the manner in which considerable portions of my speech have been simply taken

off from the proceedings under the garb of expunction," Gandhi wrote.

He included relevant portions of the uncorrected debates of Lok Sabha dated July 2 to substantiate his claim.

Gandhi emphasised that his

right to raise people's concerns on the floor of the House," he asserted.

He further stated that the removal of his remarks from the records goes against the core principles of parliamentary democracy.

In his letter, Gandhi drew attention to a perceived double standard in the application of expunction rules. He pointed out that BJP MP Anurag Thakur's speech, which contained numerous allegations, had only one word expunged.

"With due respect to your good self, this selective expunction defies logic," he noted, implying a bias in the handling of parliamentary speeches.

He requested Speaker Om Birla to restore the expunged remarks to the official record. "I request that the remarks expunged from the proceedings be restored," he wrote, emphasising the need for fairness and consistency in upholding the rights of MPs to express the concerns of their constituents.



expunged remarks reflected ground realities and factual positions, asserting his right as a member of the House to speak freely as enshrined in Article 105(1) of the Constitution of India.

"Every member of the House who personifies the collective voice of people whom he or she represents has the freedom of speech... It is every member's

# Hindenburg Research gets notice from SEBI, calls it 'intimidation bid'

## New Delhi

India's markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has slapped Hindenburg Research with a show-cause notice for alleged "unfair trade practices" in its 2023 broadside against the Adani Group — a move that the US firm termed as 'nonsense' and an attempt to 'silence and intimidate' those exposing corruption.

The SEBI in the June 26 show-cause notice charged Hindenburg of "deliberately sensationalising and distorting certain facts" in the damning January 2023 report on the Adani group as well as working with a New York hedge fund to make its bet. SEBI has given Hindenburg 21 days to respond to its allegations.

Hindenburg, which published the notice on its website, said it



made just USD 4.1 million from its declared positions on Adani stocks and criticised the regulator for not focusing its investigation into the January 2023 report "providing evidence" of the conglomerate creating "a vast network of offshore shell entities"

and moving billions of dollars "surreptitiously" into and out of Adani public and private entities.

It said while SEBI was seeking to claim jurisdiction over a US-based investor, the regulator's notice "conspicuously failed to name the party that has an

actual tie to India: Kotak Bank", which created and oversaw the offshore fund structure used by Hindenburg's investor partner to bet against Adani. The regulator "masked the 'Kotak' name with the acronym 'KMIL'," it added. KMIL refers to Kotak Mahindra Investments Ltd.

While KMIL stated that Hindenburg was "never" its client, SEBI's show-cause notice said that Hindenburg's client Kingdon Capital Management had invested in KMIL's K-India Opportunities Fund, which created positions in Adani Enterprises prior to the report release and made "a profit of Rs 183.24 crore (\$22.25 mn)" thereafter.

Hindenburg had shared its report with Kingdon Capital prior to the release, which led

to a rout in Adani group stocks, wiping out over USD 150 billion in market value of the 10 listed entities at their lowest point. Adani has repeatedly denied all allegations of wrong doing and most of its stocks have recouped losses since.

"KMIL and KIOF unequivocally state that Hindenburg has never been a client of the firm nor has it ever been an investor in the fund," a KMIL spokesperson said.

Hindenburg said the SEBI's notice "is an attempt to silence and intimidate those who expose corruption and fraud perpetrated by the most powerful individuals in India." Hindenburg said it first received an email from SEBI and later a show-cause notice outlining suspected violations of Indian regulations.

# 121 killed in stampede at UP's Hathras as disciples vie for their guru's glimpse



Rao SDM Ravendra Kumar, the stampede took place when devotees tried to get a glimpse of Bhole Baba as the event ended. They also wanted to collect some soil from around the baba's feet, he said.

'Satsang' participant Sonu Kumar blamed the slippery ground for the stampede. "When Guruji left the place after almost one and half hours, all of a sudden devotees ran behind him to touch his feet," he said. When they turned back, some slipped.

Sikandra Rao police station SHO Ashish Kumar blamed "overcrowding" at the 'satsang'. Another eyewitness, who left the place before the 'satsang' ended, said the arrangements were not adequate, given the number of devotees.

Agra's ADGP and Aligarh Divisional Commissioner were part of a team that would probe the incident, the state government said. The team has been asked to give its report in 24 hours.

Amid his reply to a two-day debate in Parliament on the motion of thanks on the President's Address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the deaths. "In the midst of discussions, I have also been given sad news. It has come to my attention that there have been many tragic deaths in the stampede in Hathras, UP," he said in the Lok Sabha. President Droupadi Murmu said the news was heart-rending. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge expressed sadness.

## Hathras (UP)

A stampede at a religious congregation here killed 121 persons on Tuesday as devotees were suffocated to death and bodies piled atop each other in the worst such tragedy in recent years.

The stampede took place as the devotees, most of them women, headed home from Phulrai village in the district following a 'satsang', conducted by Baba Narayan Hari, also known as Saakar Vishwa Hari Bhole Baba. Some devotees are learnt to have slipped in the slush as they tried to get a glimpse of Bhole Baba as the event ended, which triggered the stampede.

UP Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh said barring seven

## Worst tragedies at religious events

- 340 killed at Mandhardevi temple in Satara (Maha) on Jan 25, 2005
- 250 dead at Jodhpur's Chamunda Devi temple on Sept 30, 2008
- 162 killed at Naina Devi temple in Himachal's Bilaspur on Aug 3, 2008
- 115 killed near Ratangarh temple in MP's Datia on Oct 13, 2013
- 104 Sabarimala devotees killed at Pulmedu in Kerala on Jan 14, 2011
- 63 killed at Ram Janki Temple in UP's Pratapgarh on March 4, 2010
- 39 devotees killed at Kumbh Mela in Nashik on Aug 27, 2003
- 32 dead at Gandhi Maidan in Patna post Dasehra festivity on Oct 3, 2014

children and a man, the deceased were women. The victims, dead or unconscious, were brought to Sikandara Rau Trauma Centre in trucks and 'tempo's. The bodies

lay scattered outside the health centre as people milled around them.

A video clip showed a woman crying, sitting amid five or six

bodies in a truck. Clips before the stampede showed people in a large 'shamiana' listening to Bhole Baba, who sat before them on a throne-like chair.

District Magistrate Ashish Kumar said the 'satsang' was a private function for which the SDM had granted permission.

The local administration provided security outside the venue while the arrangements inside were made by organisers, he added.

Eyewitness Shakuntala Devi said the stampede took place while people were leaving the venue after the 'satsang', which was a day-long affair. People fell atop each other, she said, and then the bodies were pulled out.

According to Sikandra

## 5 Naxals killed in encounter

### Narayanpur (Chhattisgarh)

Five Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district on Tuesday, the police said.

The gunfight took place in a forest under the Kohkameta police station area in Abujhmad while a joint team of personnel

from different security forces was out on an anti-Naxal operation, a senior police official said.

"Five Naxalites have been killed in the action so far. The search operation is still underway in the area and further details are awaited," he said, adding that security personnel were reported to be safe.

## Stop congregations where conversions take place: High Court

### Prayagraj (UP)

The Allahabad High Court has said that religious congregations where conversions take place should be stopped immediately, or the country's majority population will become a minority one day.

Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal made the observation while rejecting the bail application of one Kailash, who is accused of being involved in the religious conversion of several villagers here.

"The word 'propagation' means to promote, but it does not mean to convert any person from his religion to another religion," the court said.

"In the instant case, there are serious allegations against the applicant by the informant that her

brother, along with several others, were taken from their village to attend a gathering in New Delhi and converted to Christianity. The brother of the informant never returned," it said.

"If this process is allowed to be carried out, the majority population of this country would be in the minority one day. Such religious congregations should be immediately stopped where conversions are taking place," the court said.

"It has come to the notice of this court in several cases that unlawful activity of converting SC/ST people and other castes to Christianity is rampant in UP," it said.

## PM Narendra Modi hurls 'balak buddhi' barb at Rahul Gandhi, terms Congress parasite

New Delhi

A day after Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi launched a frontal attack on the BJP-led NDA government, accusing it of spreading hatred and violence in the name of Hinduism, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday tore into the Congress, calling it a parasitical (parjeevi) party, which depended on its allies to stay politically relevant.

He called Rahul "childish" on whom "even the nation has given up", saying "tumse na ho payega" (you cannot do it).

In his two-hour-long reply to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address in the Lok Sabha, Modi said the Congress "eats into the votes of its allies", and lambasted it for failing to open its account in 13 states in the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections.

He said it was the third consecutive poll in which the Congress failed to reach the 100-seat mark on its own, and got stuck at 99 this time.

Modi's speech was continuously disrupted by the Congress-led Opposition, which stood in the well of the House, raising slogans such as "Give justice to Manipur".

As soon as Modi began his speech, Congress MPs formed a human chain in the well of the House even as Speaker Om Birla warned Rahul not to allow such a conduct in the House.

Two Congress MPs from Manipur — Angomcha Bimol Akoijam and Alfred Arthur — were asked to lead the protest.



Both of them stood with their arms held aloft, holding each other's fists along with Jorhat MP Gaurav Gogoi and raising slogans against the government.

Taking a swipe at Rahul, Modi said a conspiracy was being hatched to level false allegations against Hindus, and claimed that the entire Congress ecosystem was against Hindus. The PM was referring to Rahul's comments on Monday, when he had accused the BJP of spreading "violence, hatred and lies", stating that these were against the tenets of Hinduism.

"It's a serious matter that a conspiracy is being hatched to level false allegations against Hindus," he said, adding there was a well-planned strategy to insult Hindus and their traditions. "Balak buddhi has been crying... this person hit me, that person hit me, I was hit here, I was hit there... this drama is being played to gain sympathy," Modi said. The PM said Rahul was out on bail in a corruption case.

On Rahul displaying a poster

depicting Lord Shiva in the Lok Sabha, Modi said the images of God cannot be used for personal political interests.

On the Congress leader's criticism of the Agniveer scheme, the PM said, "The Congress opposes every reform that strengthens the Army. Outright lies are being spread about the Army recruitment so that the youth do not join the force. We are modernising our armed forces so that they can face any challenge and give a befitting reply. We are bringing about reforms to make our troops battle-ready," Modi said.

On the NEET paper leak, Modi said the government was taking steps to bring the culprits to book.

In the middle of his speech, the PM informed the House about the tragic stampede in Hathras. The Lok Sabha was adjourned sine die after Modi concluded his reply to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address.

## 'Matter sub judice': CJI DY Chandrachud refuses to comment on new criminal laws



New Delhi

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on Tuesday refused to comment on the three new criminal laws, which came into effect on July 1, saying that the issues relating to these laws were pending before the Supreme Court.

"That has nothing to do with the function for which I have come here... These are issues that are sub judice before the SC and possibly other high courts and, therefore, I should not be speaking on anything that is likely to come up before the courts," the CJI said.

The CJI was responding to a question on the new criminal laws at the foundation stone-laying ceremony for the construction of three additional court buildings at Karkardooma, Shastri Park, and Rohini in the national capital.

Earlier, CJI Chandrachud had on April 20 hailed the newly enacted three criminal laws as a "watershed moment", saying

these laws have transitioned India's legal framework on criminal justice into the new age.

Noting that climate change can no longer be ignored, Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud on Tuesday exhorted people to incorporate green lifestyle into their daily lives and reduce carbon emissions.

"This year, Delhi experienced the hottest recorded weather. We have experienced two heatwaves followed by record-breaking rain in a single day. Our infrastructure must reflect the reality we live in — climate change can no longer be ignored. One crucial step is to incorporate a green lifestyle into our daily lives, which includes reducing carbon emissions," the CJI said.

He said, "I was delighted to know that the new buildings will focus on heat island mitigation and reduce environmental footprint."

## Delhi High Court seeks CBI reply on Arvind Kejriwal's plea against arrest

New Delhi

The Delhi HC on Tuesday asked the CBI to respond to a plea by CM Arvind Kejriwal challenging his arrest in a corruption case related to the excise policy "scam". In a notice to the CBI, it asked it to file a reply within seven days. It listed the matter for arguments on July 17. Besides his arrest, Kejriwal has challenged trial court's orders by which he was remanded to three-day CBI custody and then judicial custody till July 12.

## Mallikarjun Kharge, Jagdeep Dhankhar in war of words over 'varna' barb

New Delhi

A sharp exchange of words between Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar and Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge intensified after the former sarcastically asked Congress MP Jairam Ramesh to take the seat of the LoP in an effort to discipline Kharge.

Kharge retorted by urging the chairman not to bring "in the varna (caste) system". The exchange started when Dhankhar asked Congress' Pramod Tiwari not to state unverified facts. To this, Ramesh said it would be authenticated. "The senior leadership (Kharge) is here. I think you (Ramesh)

should replace (Kharge). You are so intelligent, so gifted, so talented, you should immediately come and take the seat in place of Mr Kharge because, by and large, you are doing his job," Dhankhar said.

Kharge stood up and told the chairman to "not bring in the varna system... that is why you are calling Ramesh very intelligent and I am very dull".

Dhankhar said Kharge had "twisted" his remarks: "I was saying that when a person like you (Kharge) is present, one who has experience of 56 years, even he is being helped at each step by Jairam Ramesh with his remarks. You cannot everytime run down the chair."



# President Joe Biden faces doubts from Democrats about his 2024 re-election

## Washington

Some elected Democrats loyal to President Joe Biden raised fresh questions on Tuesday about his 2024 re-election bid, with one calling for him to step aside, a shift after many defended him in the wake of last week's shaky debate performance.

Whether Biden continues his 2024 bid for president after his halting debate performance against Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump is largely his decision, Democrats and political strategists have said.

But Biden is facing pressure. Some donors have called for him to step aside, and other Democrats are worrying openly that he is not equipped to beat Trump in November.

There are 25 Democratic members of the House of Representatives preparing to call for Biden to step aside, according to one House Democratic aide.

A second House Democratic aide said moderate House Democrats in competitive districts - often called "frontliners" - were considering writing a letter to Biden about their concerns after getting hammered with questions in their districts this week.

"It looks like the dam has broken," the source said.

A Reuters/Ipsos poll taken after the debate showed one in three Democrats think Biden should end his re-election bid.

US Representative Lloyd Doggett became the first congressional Democrat to call for Biden to withdraw from the presidential race on Tuesday. He told NBC News in an interview that he hoped other Democratic lawmakers would follow his lead.

Vice President Kamala Harris, asked in a CBS News interview about her response, said: "Look, Joe Biden is our nominee. We beat Trump once and we're gonna beat him. Period." Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi emphasized Biden's multiple legislative accomplishments during an interview with MSNBC but said it was legitimate to ask whether his debate performance was a one-night thing or a broader health problem.

She said Trump should be given the same scrutiny.

"I think it's a legitimate question to say, 'Is this an episode or is this a condition?' And so when people ask that question, it's legitimate, of both candidates," Pelosi said.

After the debate, Pelosi had shown strong support. "Joe Biden's decision to go forward is a decision that we will all embrace because of the record he has and the performance that will come with it," she said then. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said on Tuesday that Biden did not have an "episode," just a bad night.

Biden, speaking at a campaign event in Virginia on Tuesday evening without a teleprompter, acknowledged his debate performance was not the best, but blamed it on a lack of sleep and said his campaign had raised \$38 million since the debate.

"The fact is that you know, I wasn't very smart. I decided to travel around the world a couple times, going through around 100 time zones ... before ... the debate. Didn't listen to my staff and came back



and nearly fell asleep on stage," he said.

"That's no excuse but it is an explanation." Biden's verbal stumbles and occasionally meandering responses during the debate heightened voter concerns that the 81-year-old might not be fit to serve another four-year term.

"He has to be honest with himself," Democratic Representative Mike Quigley, a moderate from Illinois, told CNN on Tuesday. "It's his decision. I just want him to appreciate at this time just how much it impacts, not just his race, but all the other races coming in November."

U.S. Representative Jim Clyburn told MSNBC he would support Vice President Kamala Harris to be the Democratic nominee if Biden stepped aside.

Representative Jared Golden, a Maine Democrat, predicted in an opinion piece published in the Bangor Daily News on Tuesday that Trump would win the election.

The White House said Biden was suffering from a cold on the night of the debate.

The president and his campaign are working to bolster support. Biden will hold a meeting with Democratic governors on Wednesday and speak to lawmakers this week, White House officials said.

The meeting on Wednesday, which will be held at the White House but may be largely virtual with governors attending remotely, will give the president a chance to reassure leaders in his party that he is of sound mind.

Biden will also meet with leaders from Capitol Hill this week as he seeks to shore up support among party stalwarts and tamp down talk that he should step aside, one official said.

One of the House Democratic aides said members were disappointed about the lack of outreach thus far. Doggett told NBC News he had asked the White House to speak personally with Biden about his call for him to drop out, but had not heard back from him.

The meetings are part of a broad effort to stabilize the president's re-election bid after his halting, stumbling display on the Atlanta debate stage. His team held difficult phone calls on Sunday and Monday with important campaign funders who questioned whether Biden should stay in the presidential race. Asked why Biden had not done more media interviews or press conferences after his debate raised questions, Jean-Pierre pointed to his visit to a Waffle House in Atlanta on the evening of the debate and subsequent interactions with supporters.

# Mumbai terror accused Tahawwur Rana extraditable to India under provisions of extradition treaty: US attorney



## Washington

Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman Tahawwur Rana, who is sought in India for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack, is extraditable under the plain provisions of the US-India extradition treaty, a US attorney has told a federal court.

Assistant US Attorney, Criminal Appeals Chief Bram Alden was making a closing argument before the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, where Rana has appealed against the order by a US District Court in California that denied the writ of habeas corpus.

In May, Rana, 63, had filed a writ of habeas corpus challenging the court order, which acceded with the request of the US government that the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks accused be extradited to India.

"Rana is extraditable to India under the plain provisions of the treaty, and India has established probable cause to prosecute him for his role in terrorist attacks that resulted in 166 deaths and 239 injuries," Alden said.

In his deposition before the court on June 5, Alden, who left the position last week, said both India and the United States have agreed on the meaning of the treaty provision, the non-bis provision in Article 6-1.

"Both parties have now stated what they intended, that that provision be interpreted based on the elements of the offence and not based on the conduct underlying those crimes. That is consistent with long-standing Supreme Court double jeopardy precedent," he argued.

Rana, currently lodged in a jail in Los Angeles, faces charges for his role in the Mumbai attacks and is known to be associated

with Pakistani-American terrorist David Coleman Headley, one of the main conspirators of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

Rana has never even attempted to argue that he cannot show that the same elements India seeks to prosecute him for were those he was prosecuted for in Chicago, Alden said.

Representing Rana, attorney John D Cline said there's no competent evidence supporting probable cause.

Alden said the evidence is overwhelming to support probable cause, that low standard that Rana knew about what was going to happen in India between 2006 and 2008.

He met with (David) Headley multiple times. There is documentary evidence that supports Hadley's testimony, including the fake visa applications that were provided so that Hadley could operate a fraudulent business in India in order to conduct surveillance, in order to carry out those terrorist attacks," he said.

"There was a phone call, of course, after the fact where Rana said that he was informed about what was going on by one of their co-conspirators in Pakistan. And his praise for what was carried out in a gruesome terrorist attack that killed 166 people, injured 239 more, and cost India USD 1.5 billion," Alden said.

"It was primarily at the Taj Mahal Hotel, but the terrorists attacked a number of bars, restaurants, and the Chabad House. There were other targets in India that they were attacking in Mumbai. And it was their 9/11," he said.

"It was a devastating attack over the course of multiple days that resulted in 166 deaths, including six Americans," he added.

"That is why India wants to prosecute this case and, under the extradition treaty, has every right to do so," Alden argued.

"The extent he wants to raise humanitarian concerns or even concerns about the process, the acquittal, the fact that he is facing extradition, those all get raised and can be raised to the Secretary of State," he said in response to a question from the judge.

# New criminal laws

THE three new criminal laws came into effect on Monday amid a verbal duel between the ruling BJP and the main Opposition party, the Congress. The former described the laws as a symbol of India's progress and resilience, while the latter accused the government of getting them forcibly passed in Parliament after the suspension of 146 MPs. The Congress has declared that the INDIA bloc will not allow such 'bulldozer justice' to prevail in the parliamentary system. The government has repeatedly stressed that these statutes — Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam — will give priority to providing justice and protecting rights, arguably in contrast to the draconian colonial laws which laid emphasis on penal action. However, the Opposition is not convinced. Nor are some legal experts, who have raised concerns over possible misuse of the laws.

There are also apprehensions about a

surge in litigation in the form of appeals seeking re-evaluation of the existing cases (registered before July 1, 2024) or a review



of the new legal framework. Even as a chaotic rollout is only to be expected, the government will find itself under increasing pressure to pay heed to suggestions made by various stakeholders and consider amendments to fine-tune the laws. Calls to scrap the statutes altogether will also get

shriller.

The push for reforms to replace the British-era Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act seems well-intentioned, but it will be an onerous task for the BJP-led government — now a shadow of its former all-powerful self — to get everyone on board. Implementing the new laws is a huge challenge for law enforcement agencies, judicial officers and legal professionals. Litigants, too, will have to confront new complications. Clarity and transparency hold the key to reducing uncertainty as well as confusion. The powers that be will have to work very hard to prevent the fiasco of the three farm laws, which were repealed after a year-long protest by farmers.

// satyasya paramarñ nidhānam //

We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on [editor.acrossstate@gmail.com](mailto:editor.acrossstate@gmail.com)

*If you look at what you have in life, you'll always have more. If you look at what you don't have in life, you'll never have enough. -Oprah Winfrey*

## New Army Chief

### Gen Dwivedi has his work cut out

A continued focus on modernisation has been listed among the top priorities of Gen Upendra Dwivedi, the 30th Chief of the Army Staff. The Vice Chief since February, he takes over from Gen Manoj Pande, whose tenure, in an unusual move, was extended by a month. Gen Dwivedi has pointed to a faster induction of new technology and greater emphasis on self-reliance, amid the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. Acknowledging the unique security challenges, he has given an assurance of the Army's capability and readiness. As the standoff with China along the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh lingers on, the Army Chief's immediate concern will be to tackle the spike in terror attacks in the Jammu



region. He had, as the Northern Army Commander, effected major deployment changes in the area bordering Pakistan.

Theaterisation plans and structural reforms, being overseen by the Chief of Defence Staff, remain a

work in progress. Elaborate consultative mechanisms are time-consuming, and so they should be. It is vital to ensure there is no forced acquiescence. The envisaged synergy between the Army, Air Force and the Navy has to be a natural

progression of shared goals and purpose. To actualise it, the role of the Service Chiefs becomes critical. Demands of a higher percentage of Agniveer retention at the end of four years have found resonance in political circles, particularly after it became a major election issue recently. How concerns over the Agnipath recruitment scheme are handled by Gen Dwivedi will be keenly watched.

Gen Dwivedi, who was commissioned into the Jammu and Kashmir Rifles in 1984, is an alumnus of the Sainik School at Rewa, Madhya Pradesh. He and Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh Tripathi studied together. That's a comforting coincidence for the armed forces fraternity.

Printer-Publisher & Editor In Chief

**Sanjay Mangesh Bhaire**  
Allied publication Across Mumbai  
(Marathi & Hindi)

Managing Editor  
**Suchita Bhaire**

Editor  
**Sreeraj N.**

Legal Advisor  
**Adv. Ameet Mehta**

Special Correspondents  
**K V Raman**  
**Vinod Raghavan**  
**Asha Menon**

Chief Designer  
**Vikram Jadav**

Cartoonist  
**Sunil Vinekar**

Photographers  
**Ajit Raut**  
**Bhooshan Koyande**

Contributors and Advertising  
**Satish Shetty**  
**Savita Tiwari**  
**J D Rodrigues**

Circulation Dept.  
**Dinesh Gupta**  
**Suchit Kumar Saytonday**

# Airport roof collapse

## Wake-up call for infra and urban planning

FRIDAY's roof collapse at the busy Delhi airport serves as a reminder of the underlying problems plaguing India's ambitious infrastructure push. The incident, which occurred during the heaviest rainfall recorded in Delhi on a June day in 88 years, caused the death of one person and left several injured. It not only disrupted airport operations but also shook public confidence in the robustness of our

projects lack proper stormwater drains, and many existing ones are repurposed for sewage. Elevated green belts and tiled roadsides obstruct natural drainage, leading to persistent urban flooding — an anthropogenic phenomenon. It calls for a re-evaluation of urban planning.

The Delhi airport incident also underscores the necessity of monitoring major projects. The Modi government has touted infrastructure development as a cornerstone of India's economic policy, with more than

Rs 44 trillion to be invested over the next two years. However, the emphasis on rapid construction has seemingly overshadowed the importance of stringent standards and maintenance. The rush to inaugurate projects, often ahead

of elections, compromises quality, turning these marvels into electoral gimmicks. Regular audits, adherence to international norms and accountability mechanisms are essential to prevent such tragedies. Ultimately, infrastructure is about more than just economic growth; it is about the wellbeing of the people, with their safety being a non-negotiable aspect of development. The roof collapse should catalyse a comprehensive overhaul of infrastructure policies to prioritise long-term safety and sustainability.

infrastructure. The incident is symptomatic of a broader problem as similar lapses have been reported across the country. From the collapse of bridges in Bihar to water leakage in the newly built Ram Temple and the fury unleashed by the monsoon in Himachal Pradesh, such disasters raise questions about planning, execution and maintenance of projects.

The problem isn't merely the rain; it is faulty drainage. As cities expand and green spaces turn to grey concrete, rainwater floods roads. Most new development

PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu's address to Parliament on Thursday coincided with the release of the Reserve Bank of India's Financial Stability Report (FSR). The President mentioned that the government had carried out reforms over the past decade to save India's banking sector, enacting laws such as the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC). She stated that the non-performing assets (NPA) of public sector banks were continuously decreasing. This is borne out by the FSR, which says that the gross NPA ratio of scheduled commercial banks fell to 2.8 per cent and the net NPA ratio decreased to 0.6 per cent at the end of March this year. As per the RBI, the gross bad loan ratio of banks has reached a 12-year low. This significant drop indicates that banks are managing their bad loans in a better way, reducing the risks of defaults.

Non-performing assets are an impediment to the long-term growth

# Worthy champions

## Rohit's men show true character



SPORT is a great leveller. It can be cruel, and magical. The agony of defeat and the joy of victory, the Indian cricket team has experienced it all. After the heartbreak in Ahmedabad comes the redemption in the Caribbean. As Rohit Sharma's men held their nerve to edge past South Africa in a thrilling final and claim the T20 World Cup, the emotions were flowing thick and fast. They had finally got the monkey off their back. The ghosts of the loss to Australia in the 50-over World Cup in November last year lie buried. India won its second T20 World Cup but its first world title in 13 years. The MS Dhoni-led side had won the inaugural T20 event in 2007; he also captained the team to the ODI World Cup victory in 2011. Every win is special, every loss ineradicable. That is sport, rewarding and humbling. The Men in Blue have been exceptional. They have shown true grit and character. Let's savour

the moment. Rohit and Virat Kohli, among India's greatest cricketers of all time, have announced their retirement from T20 International matches, along with all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja. The timing could not have been better. They leave on a high. As does coach Rahul Dravid. The impressive South African captain Aiden Markram, who has taken his side farther than ever before, termed the loss gut-wrenching. The Indian cricketers know the feeling. The Indian fans, wildly passionate and given to bouts of euphoria and meltdown in equal measure, know it too. There can be only one winner — the game of cricket. As we enter July, it's time to shift the gaze to the Paris Olympics. A sporting spectacle that celebrates the best the world has to offer. Like Team India just exhibited. Well done!

# Bad loans

## Drop in NPA ratio augurs well for banks

and stability of the Indian banking sector; their impact on the overall health of the economy cannot be overemphasised. Since its enactment in 2016, the IBC has helped many banks and financial lenders realise their dues by streamlining the process of resolving insolvency cases. This is very important for the world's fastest-growing major economy, which aims to become the go-to destination for global investors. Doubts and apprehensions about India's legal and regulatory framework can



be detrimental to the confidence of investors.

The RBI has noted that with healthier balance sheets, banks and financial institutions are actively supporting economic activities through consistent credit expansion, while the President has claimed that India's

banking sector is one of the strongest in the world. These observations should be reassuring for domestic investors, even as there is room for improvement in terms of making banks more robust and

profitable. Every customer is concerned about the safety of his or her deposits and investments; the banks' ability to handle financial shocks and minimise risks can make a huge difference to their fiscal health.

# Biden stumbles

## Debate performance amplifies age concerns

JOE Biden is 81, his challenger Donald Trump 78. In the first debate between the US presidential candidates, the age gap seemed much larger. The most important job for President Biden was to put to rest concerns about his biggest vulnerability — his fitness for office, given his age. He failed, and badly at that. Trump pressed his case for a second term with limited resistance as Biden meandered and mumbled through answers. For someone who regularly attacks Biden on his age, Trump was restrained, as if allowing own goals. At one point, after Biden trailed off while defending his record on border security, Trump said, ‘I really don’t know what he said at the end of that sentence. I don’t think he knows what he said, either.’



The debate was a setback for the Democrats, who expected Biden to turn the election into a referendum on Trump, reminding voters of the chaotic nature of the latter’s

presidency.

It was the first time a sitting US President and his predecessor had debated. Analysts were quick to point out the contrast from their

meeting four years ago. At that time, Biden had put Trump’s record under the microscope and offered a hopeful vision for the country. This time round, he was largely unable to corner the Republican challenger on his repeated assertions that weren’t supported by facts. The President’s dismal show is sure to lead to a blame game within the party over whether handing him a second nomination with only nominal opposition was the right move. Some may be thinking about how they still could put up a different nominee.

The Biden campaign has two months to calm the waters before the second debate in September. For now, more people will be talking about Biden’s performance in the debate than Trump’s as President.

## Minority report

### US criticism of India can have repercussions

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has flagged a ‘concerning increase’ in anti-conversion laws, hate speech and demolition of homes and places of worship of members of minority communities in India. In his remarks at the release of the US State Department’s 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom, Blinken said Christian groups in India had reported attacks by mobs, allegedly in league with the police, over accusations of ‘conversion activities’. The report claims that Christians and Muslims were arrested under laws banning forced religious conversion. The unusually scathing criticism comes weeks after the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led NDA government began its third successive term. It is bound to cast a shadow on India-US ties, which have made rapid strides in the strategic and defence domains in recent years.

Blinken had also mentioned India in his remarks during the release of the 2021 Report on International Religious Freedom two years ago, expressing concern over rising attacks on people and places of worship in the country.

However, his comments this time may be seen through the prism of the US presidential elections, which are scheduled for November. With Christians accounting for two-thirds of the American population, highlighting alleged atrocities against them in countries such as India could be construed as a vote-catching tactic.

While talking about the minorities in the US, Blinken has confined himself to the observation that reports of hate crimes and other incidents targeting Muslims and Jews have gone up dramatically. America seems more keen to ‘advance religious freedom across the globe’ than to set its own house in order. The Indian government does need to do course correction on the minority front, but it won’t appreciate the US playing the Big Brother. Antagonising a close ally will have repercussions for Washington, especially when the Gurpatwant Singh Pannun case is already testing the strength and maturity of the bilateral relations.

## Poor Class X results

### HP should draw lessons to effect change

IN 30 government schools of Himachal Pradesh, not a single student could clear the Class X examination conducted by the state board of school education this year. In 116 schools, the pass percentage was less than 25 per cent. The standard intervention has been made — an explanation has been sought and teachers will be issued show-cause notices. What next? What is the plan to determine the administrative lapses or inadequacies in the teaching methods? How will the students be motivated to reappear, and those entering Class X have faith in the system? Accountability has to be fixed, whether of the teachers, the principals or those tasked with monitoring the running of schools. Zero in on what went wrong, take action, but don’t stop at that. Channel the embarrassment to effect constructive change.

As an official aptly put it, something is seriously wrong somewhere if not a single student is able to obtain minimum pass

marks. In some schools, the non-availability of teachers could be a major reason for the poor results. That said, schools with adequate staff strength, too, have fared badly. Concerns have been raised over the non-availability of teachers for specific subjects. Repeated below-par scores point to flaws in the teaching methodology. Boosting performance requires a concerted action plan, not a kneejerk reaction or an ad hoc arrangement. The policy of promoting every student up to Class VIII is also up for debate.

Data is being collected to closely examine the Class XII results, too. It’s an appropriate time for a comprehensive audit of all government schools in the state — review their performance on various parameters, including staff and student strength, and make an assessment of the urgent requirements. Consistent feedback and a prompt response mechanism are systemic necessities.

# India's power consumption rose 9% in June amid heat



**New Delhi**

India's power consumption rose by nearly 9 per cent to 152.38 billion units (BU) in June compared to the year-ago period mainly due to scorching heat which forced excessive use of cooling appliances like air conditioners and desert coolers.

In June 2023, the power consumption stood at 140.27 BU, according to official data.

The highest supply in a day (peak power demand met) also rose to 245.41 GW in June 2024 against 223.29 GW in the year-ago month. The peak power demand was recorded at 224.10 GW in June 2023.

The peak power demand touched an all-time high of 250.20GW in May this year. The previous all-time

high peak power demand of 243.27 GW was recorded in September 2023.

Earlier this year, the power ministry projected a peak power demand of 235 GW during daytime and 225 GW during evening hours for May and 240 GW during daytime and 235 GW during evening hours for June 2024.

The ministry also estimated that peak power demand may hit 260 GW this summer.

Experts said the scorching heat and humidity in the later part of June due to the arrival of monsoon rains in many parts of the country forced people to excessively use cooling appliances like air conditioners and desert coolers.

# Election, heatwave hit passenger vehicle sales

**New Delhi**

Passenger vehicle wholesales in June largely remain subdued in the domestic market, on account of high base of last year, the General Election and heatwave. Like previous months, the growth has been led by utility vehicle segment.

Experts believe sales in the passenger vehicle (PV) market are projected to slow down to 3-6 per cent in FY25 on a higher base of three years.

While Maruti's passenger car sales declined by 8 per cent, the utility vehicle segment sales grew by 21 per cent and touched 52,373 units.

Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL), registered total domestic sales of 50,103 units in June 2024, thus registering a growth of 0.20 per cent.

Tata Motors logged total sales of 43,524 units in the



domestic market in June, as against 47,235 units in the corresponding period a year ago.

Shailesh Chandra, Managing Director, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd and Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Ltd, said: "In Q1 FY25, after a boost in demand in the first half of

April, due to festivities in some parts of country, the passenger vehicle industry saw a decline in retails (registrations) in May and June, influenced by the General Election and heat waves."

Also, Toyota Kirloskar Motor said it recorded a growth of 40% in June by selling 27,474 units.

# RBI using AI for real-time data analysis: Governor Das



**Mumbai**

The Reserve Bank of India has ventured into Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) analytics in multiple areas in order to develop cutting-edge systems for high frequency and real-time data monitoring and analysis, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Friday.

In his address at the inauguration of the RBI's 18th

Statistical Day Conference here, Das said: "The focus now is naturally on enhancing capacity in AI and ML techniques and analysing unstructured textual data. While doing so, ethical considerations need to be addressed and biases in algorithms need to be eliminated."

He said this annual event provides an opportunity to reflect on the current and evolving state of the statistical system.

It also helps to take stock of the refinements in the application of statistical methods and technologies in the realm of public policy.

The surge in computing power is being increasingly harnessed in combination with statistical methods to improve efficiency in decision-making and enrich end-user experience in various fields of human knowledge, he added.

# RBI imposes Rs 29.6 lakh penalty on HSBC

**Mumbai**

The RBI on Friday said it has imposed a penalty of Rs 29.6 lakh on The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited (HSBC) for non-compliance with certain directions related to cards.

The penalty has been imposed on HSBC for non-compliance with certain directions issued by Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on 'Credit Card, Debit Card and Rupee Denominated Co-branded Pre-paid Card operations of Banks', the central bank said in a statement.



# Big fat Indian wedding: At Rs 10 lakh crore, expenses second only to food, grocery

**New Delhi**

The Indian wedding industry size of approximately Rs 10 lakh crore (USD 130 billion) is second only to food and grocery, with an average Indian spending twice on marriage ceremony than education, a report said.

India sees 80 lakh to 1 crore weddings annually compared to 70-80 lakh in China and 20-25 lakh in the US. "The Indian wedding industry is nearly double the size of the industry in the US (USD 70 billion), albeit smaller than China (USD 170 billion)," brokerage Jefferies said in a report.

Weddings are the second largest consumption category in India. "Weddings, if they were a category, would rank as the second largest retail category only behind food and grocery (USD 681 billion)," it said.

Weddings in India are elaborate and characterised by a range of ceremonies and spending. The industry spurs consumption in categories like jewellery and apparel and indirectly benefits autos and electronics. Despite political efforts to curb them, luxury weddings at exotic locations continue to showcase Indian opulence.

"With 8 million to 10 million weddings held annually, India is the largest wedding destination globally. Estimated at USD 130 billion in size, according to CAIT, the wedding industry is nearly twice that of the US and is a vital large contributor to key consumption categories," Jefferies said.



Indian weddings are multi-day and multi-event celebrations, ranging from simple to ultra-lavish. The region, religion and economic background play an important role at several levels.

The Hindu calendar, which follows the lunisolar system, adds to the complexity, as weddings solemnise only on auspicious days in specific months, which changes every year, according to the report.

"An otherwise value-conscious society, Indians love to spend on weddings, which could be disproportionate to their level of income or wealth. And this is irrespective of the economic classes, as the tendency to

overspend is seen across.

"The average expenditure on a wedding at USD 15,000, is a multiple of per-cap or household income. Interestingly, an average Indian couple spends 2x on weddings vs education (pre-primary to graduation), in sharp contrast to countries, such as the US, where the spend is less than half vs education," it said.

Exotic domestic and international locations, luxurious accommodations, lavish catering with menus curated by Michelin star chefs and performances by professional artists and celebrities, luxury Indian weddings have to be experienced to

be understood.

"Given the size and scale, weddings are a key growth driver for several categories in India, such as jewellery, apparel, catering, stay and travel, to name a few. For example, over half of the jewellery industry revenues are led by bridal jewellery while 10 per cent of all apparel spends are driven by weddings and celebrations wear," it said.

"The wedding industry also indirectly fuels various sectors, such as automobiles, consumer electronics, paints etc. These industries witness a spike in demand around the wedding season, and while difficult to quantify the full impact, industry players meticulously track wedding dates to align marketing strategies and inventory management."

Jefferies said wedding planning generally begins 6-12 months in advance, and the most elaborate wedding celebrations have seen as many as 50,000 guests.

Bridal lehengas in the luxury segment include heavy intricate work and can even weigh 10 kg in some cases. Italian Luxury Brand Bvlgari (part of the LVMH Group) launched its first India-only jewellery piece, Mangalsutra, in 2021.

"Decor is the most underestimated cost in an Indian wedding," it said.

"Most offbeat food requests include chocolate pani puri, waffle dosa and pineapple-flavoured paneer."

## Financial Services Institutions Bureau recommends C S Setty as SBI Chairman

**New Delhi**

The Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB) on Saturday selected SBI's senior-most Managing Director C. S. Setty for the post of SBI Chairman.

Setty is currently the Managing Director of SBI, looking after International Banking, Global Markets and Technology verticals.

He will succeed Dinesh Kumar Khara, who will be superannuating on August 28, when he turns 63, the upper age limit for the position of SBI chairman.

FSIB, the headhunter for directors of state-owned banks and financial institutions, interviewed 3 candidates on June 29, 2024 for the position.

"Keeping in view their performance in the interface, their overall experience and the extant parameters, the Bureau recommends Challa Sreenivasulu Setty for the position of Chairman in

SBI," FSIB said in a statement.

As per the convention, the chairman is appointed from a pool of serving managing directors of SBI. FSIB will recommend the name to the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) which will take the final decision in this regard. ACC is headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

FSIB is headed by Bhanu Pratap Sharma, former secretary of Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT).

The members of the bureau include Financial Services Secretary, Department of Public Enterprises Secretary and an RBI Deputy Governor.

Other members are Animesh Chauhan, former chairman and MD of erstwhile Oriental Bank of Commerce, RBI's ex-executive director Deepak Singhal, and Shailendra Bhandari, former MD of erstwhile ING Vysya Bank.



## Sebi raises basic demat account limit to Rs 10 lakh

**New Delhi**

To boost participation of small investors in the securities market, Sebi on Friday increased the

guidelines will come into force from September 1, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a circular.



Increasing the limit of securities' value held in the Basic Services Demat Account (BSDA) will encourage small investors to trade in the stock market and ensure their financial inclusion.

threshold for the basic service demat account to Rs 10 lakh from the current Rs 2 lakh. The new

A basic service demat account, or BSDA, is a more basic version of a regular demat account.

## After Jio, Airtel increases tariff across all categories



### Mumbai

Brace to more for your mobile bills as a day after Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel on Friday announced a hike in mobile tariffs by up to 21% effective July 3. With the hike, the plans will become dearer by 10-21 per cent across the prepaid and postpaid segments. On Thursday, Jio announced hike in tariffs by 12-27 per cent effective from July 3.

In the latest tariff increase announced by Airtel, the Rs 179 plan, which offers 2 GB data along with unlimited voice calling, has gone up 11 per cent, making it to Rs 199.

In a statement, Bharti Airtel stated that the mobile Average Revenue Per User (ARPU) needs to be upwards of Rs 300 to enable a financially healthy business model for telcos in India. "We believe that this level of ARPU will enable the substantial investments required in network technology and spectrum and offer a modest return on capital.

"In this light, we welcome the announcements in the

industry to repair tariffs. Airtel will also revise its mobile tariffs as indicated below, from July 3. We have ensured that there is a very modest price increase (less than 70p per day) on the entry level plans, in order to eliminate any burden on budget challenged consumers," the statement stated. These prices will be applicable to all circles.

The latest move is in line with industry expectations of a tariff hike after the General Election. According to rating agency ICRA, the latest tariff hikes announced by telcos can yield additional operating profits of around Rs 20,000 crore for the industry once they were fully absorbed.

With an improved financial metrics, the industry will have the headroom to undertake deleveraging as well as fund capex for the technology upgrade, and network expansion, Ankit Jain, vice president and sector head of Corporate Ratings, ICRA said. ICRA expects the industry revenues to grow by 12-14 per cent in FY2025.

## UltraTech to acquire 23% stake in India Cements



### New Delhi

The country's leading cement maker UltraTech on Thursday said it will acquire a 23 per cent stake in its Chennai-based rival India Cements Ltd for over Rs 1,900 crore in two tranches.

UltraTech Cement has acquired 6,02,48,983 equity shares of India Cements, aggregating to 19.44% stake at a price of up to Rs 267 per share, the Aditya Birla Group flagship firm said in a regulatory filing. The value of the first transaction at the share price of Rs 267 per share is pegged at Rs 1,608.64 crore.

## Key infra sectors' growth slows to 6.3% in May, against 6.7% in April

### New Delhi

The eight key infrastructure sectors' growth rose by 6.3 per cent in May on healthy expansion in the production of coal, natural gas, and electricity, though the growth rate is lower than in April, according to official data released on Friday.

The production of the eight sectors grew 6.7 per cent in April. The growth of these core sectors — coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertiliser, steel, cement and electricity — was 5.2 per cent in May 2023.

The official data showed that fertiliser, crude oil, and cement output recorded negative growth in May. During April-May this fiscal, the output of these sectors was up 6.5 per cent against 4.9 per cent in the same period last fiscal.

The production growth of coal, natural gas and electricity rose by 10.2 per cent, 7.5 per cent and 12.8 per cent, respectively, against 7.2 per cent, (-) 0.3 per cent and 0.8 per cent in May 2023. The growth rate in the production of refinery products and steel



slowed down to 0.5 per cent and 7.6 per cent during the month under review.

The eight core sectors contribute 40.27 per cent to the country's Index of Industrial Production (IIP). Commenting on the data, Icria Ltd Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said that while the core sector growth sustained above 6 per cent for the fourth consecutive month, it eased slightly in May.

A combination of factors,

including the heatwave over parts of the country and the phased parliamentary elections could have curtailed activity and execution in some sectors, she added.

"At the same time, the heatwave boosted demand for power, which translated into a rise in the growth of coal and electricity in May 2024 compared to the previous month. We expect IIP growth print at 4-5 per cent in May 2024," she added.

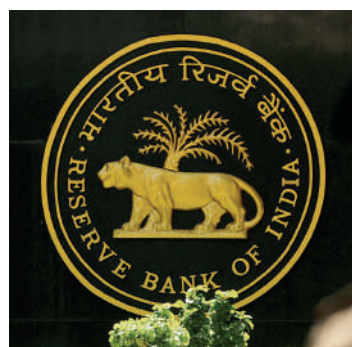
## Bad loans declining to 12-year low: RBI report

### Mumbai

The decline in bad assets of banks to a 12-year low of 2.8 per cent and strong GDP numbers will help in sustaining the growth momentum and withstanding global shocks, said the Reserve Bank's Financial Stability Report (FSR) released on Thursday.

The real gross domestic product (GDP) rose by 8.2 per cent in 2023-24 against 7 per cent in the preceding fiscal, despite muted private and government consumption and external demand conditions acting as a drag.

The FSR report showed that the gross non-performing assets



(GNPA) ratio of scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) fell to 2.8 per cent and the net non-performing assets (NNPA) ratio to 0.6 per cent at the end of March 2024. The GNPA ratio of all SCBs may improve to 2.5 per cent by March 2025, the report noted.

The FSR said there are several positives for

the near-term economic outlook, including robust domestic demand conditions, high business optimism, the government's sustained focus on capital expenditure (which should crowd in more private investment through multiplier effects), firms utilising high profits to augment investible resources, and real estate activity gathering pace.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday asked financial system stakeholders to assign "highest priority" to governance. "Today, the matrix of financial stability is perhaps at its best, but the real challenge is to maintain it and improve upon it further," Das noted.

# The Dark Web as Enabler of Terrorist Activities



access, and e-wallets. Data breaches have a palpable economic toll, costing US\$9.44 million per incident. Cybercriminals capitalise on the anonymity of the dark web by offering credit card details with substantial balances for a mere US\$110. Simultaneously, malware and Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks trade briskly, with 1,000 threat installations fetching US\$1,800.

Demographically, the dark web's population is predominantly male (84.7 percent). Among these users, the majority fall within the age bracket of 36-45 and include malicious insiders, hackers, and nation-state actors perpetuating cyber threats at a global scale.

Despite efforts to dismantle marketplaces like Silk Road and Alpha Bay, the dark web has witnessed the mushrooming of successors such as In The Box, Genesis Market, and 2Easy, which offer illicit wares ranging from cryptocurrency accounts to forged identities and contraband substances. The anonymity around these transactions presents formidable challenges for law enforcement agencies.

## Dark Web and Terrorism

Technological innovations such as Tor, Bitcoin, and cryptocurrencies enable criminals to operate anonymously, which fuels the expansion of the dark web. Dark web activities are divided into four main categories: network security; cybercrime; machine learning; and drug trafficking.

Terrorist entities leverage cyberspace for propaganda dissemination, engaging in information warfare on social media. The use of the internet to disseminate violent extremism exploits the medium for terrorist propaganda dissemination and recruitment, as seen in the case of the Christchurch shooting.

Terrorist propaganda distribution involves publicly accessible anonymous proxy servers, anonymising services like Tor, and cryptocurrencies to

perform financial transactions, all of which pose challenges to online surveillance and digital forensics. Secure mobile devices and encrypted communication applications like Telegram or Signal also provide terrorists with secure platforms for coordination, allowing them to evade detection.

The use of the dark web by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for the purposes of propaganda dissemination and operational coordination highlights the platform's appeal to terrorist groups. Notably, manuals such as "How to Survive in the West: A Mujahid Guide" provide instructions on internet privacy and the use of Tor, demonstrating terrorists' adaptability to technological advancements. The group's media outlet, Al Hayat Media Centre, posts links and instructions on accessing their dark web site on forums associated with ISIS and distributes the information via their Telegram channel.

In addition to establishing their online platforms, terrorists leverage interactive tools such as chatrooms, instant messengers, blogs, video-sharing sites, and social media networks like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube for training and instruction. The dark web is actively used for disseminating extremist content and facilitating illicit activities, thus facilitating terrorist communication and coordination. For example, the Turkish-language dark web forum, Turkish Dark Web, circulated manuals on building explosives and weapons and how to use a biological weapon, fostering discussions on their efficacy and potential applications. Moreover, volunteers are trained to use the dark web to communicate with a global network of terrorists.

## Covert Use of the Dark Web

The use of the dark web for terrorist activities has evolved in the 21st century. Marc Sageman, author of the book *Understanding Terror Networks*, argues that the dark web creates a habitat for

interaction and uses chat rooms to build ideological relationships—a vital tool in radicalising young people. Terrorist organisations employ online platforms to establish communication channels, facilitating interactions among members, followers, media outlets, and the broader public. Terrorist groups perceive the dark web and similar channels as the most secure means of communication. ISIS, for example, despite intense scrutiny, has demonstrated significant adaptability by resorting to lesser-known social media platforms like Diaspora and VKontakte, Russia's largest social network.

Recent trends reveal that ISIS and other jihadist factions have embraced novel online applications, enabling users to disseminate messages to an extensive audience through encrypted mobile applications like Telegram. Groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah use Telegram for different reasons, such as finding new members, raising money, encouraging violence, and planning attacks. ISIS also uses social media to disseminate propaganda material and has also created a list of communication applications.

In 2015, the Islamic State issued a tech tutorial to its followers, guiding them on how to keep themselves secure from the government surveillance system. It gave a list of applications ranked based on the level of encryption of chat applications. The list ranked apps like SilentCircle, Redphone, and Signal as the 'safest'; Telegram, Wickr, Threema, and Surespot as 'safe'; and WeChat, WhatsApp, Hike, Viber, and Imo.im as 'unsafe'.

Terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL), Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), and Jaysh al-Islam in Syria also use the dark web through similar means. Terrorist activities on the dark web primarily encompass the following categories:

- **Internal communication and external propagation:** The dark web provides terrorists with secure channels for internal communication, facilitating covert information exchange and broader connectivity for planning, organising, deploying, and executing terrorist operations. Terrorist organisations also leverage the dark web to disseminate extremist ideologies.

- **Recruitment and training:** Terrorist groups recruit new members via the dark web and provide training to followers worldwide, including courses on bomb-making and executing terrorist attacks, mainly targeting "lone wolf" attackers. The anonymity afforded by the dark web complicates efforts by

counterterrorism agencies to identify and thwart radicalised individuals.

- **Fundraising and financial transactions:** In addition to conventional methods such as oil sales, smuggling, and kidnapping, terrorist organisations are increasingly utilising digital cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and the dark web for fundraising, including Bitcoin donations, online extortion, human trafficking, and organ trafficking. For example, a deep web page called 'Fund the Islamic Struggle without Leaving a Trace' uses a dark wallet app to receive donations through Bitcoin. Recently, Islamic State Khorasan Province, through its magazine *Voice of Khorasan*, asked followers and sympathisers to make donations in cryptocurrencies like Monero (XMR) via the dark web. Between 2020 and 2023, Hamas received around US\$41 million in cryptocurrency, while the Palestine Islamic Jihad received about US\$93 million in the same period.

- **Procurement of weapons:** The dark web is a marketplace for terrorists to procure firearms and ammunition, with illegal trading sites like Silk Road facilitating transactions. For instance, EuroGuns is an online platform that sells weapons. There is also a threat of terrorists acquiring dual-use elements like chemicals and biological medicines, which they could use for improvising and making biological weapons. Additionally, on sites like AlphaBay, terrorists can buy books like the *Terrorist's Handbook* and *Explosives Guide*. They can also procure fake documents and passports from services like the *Fake Documents Service*. Terrorist organisations could also acquire uranium, plutonium, and other nuclear materials via the dark web.

- **Purchase of illicit drugs:** Among the range of illicit trade in dark web markets, also known as crypto markets, drug trafficking is being carried out frequently through dark web platforms. According to the 2023 annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), South Asia has 39 percent of the global opiate consumer base, with India emerging as a focal point for opiate distribution.

- **Use of AI and dark web:** Terrorists are using the dark web to create deepfakes, which can increase the reach of their propaganda dissemination. Tools like Google Gemini and ChatGPT allow easy access to manuals on making bombs at home. AI programs like 'Lavender' and 'Where is Daddy?' are also enabling more refined and sophisticated warfare methods.

Evolving terrorist tactics reflect a pragmatic adaptation to available resources and technological advancements. The vulnerability landscape is thus continually evolving, characterised not merely by conventional power differentials but by the emergence of novel susceptibilities.

The proliferation of the internet has exacerbated this trend, facilitating the recruitment and radicalisation of tech-savvy, self-radicalised individuals. The dark web, in particular, has become a hotbed for cybercrime by non-state actors. Terrorist groups have expanded their cyber capabilities, using the dark web for recruitment drives, fundraising, and operational planning, facilitated by social media and emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). The dark web has progressed in the virtual space and is used for circulating disinformation, as in the ongoing Hamas-Israel conflict.

Technology has given these organisations unparalleled opportunities for their communications outreach. Terror groups are using innovative methods and platforms for swift messaging amongst their cadre, volunteers, and recruits. In addition to their own websites, e-magazines, and publishing houses, some groups are active on platforms such as Telegram, Facebook, Signal, and other chatrooms and forums, which enable them to recruit sympathisers and supporters and disseminate propaganda.

Traditional and cyber methods converge in contemporary terrorism, with technology being both a force multiplier and a double-edged sword. As such, counterterrorism efforts need to extend their focus beyond thwarting physical assaults to countering the narrative warfare propagated in the digital domain.

This brief discusses the ways in which terror organisations are exploiting the dark web for recruitment, radicalisation, and disinformation. Drawing insights from a case study, it offers policy recommendations for how India can adopt best practices to secure the country from the impact of the dark web.

## Dark Web in the Cyberspace

The dark web and the deep web together constitute a significant part of cyberspace, spanning over 96 percent of the internet. In 2023, the dark web had an average of 2.5 million daily visitors via Tor. In September 2023, Germany became the country with the highest user base for Tor, displacing the United States (US). Other countries with the highest numbers of Tor users are Finland, India, and Russia.

Illicit content dominates the dark web, at 57 percent, including crypto accounts, online banking



# Macron's risky gamble

Just as one high-stakes election concluded in Europe, campaigning is in full swing in France.

On 9 June, French President Emmanuel Macron dissolved the country's National Assembly, in line with Article 12 of the French Constitution which can be evoked in times of political crises or deadlock, and called a snap election. The shock move was inspired by Macron's crushing defeat to the French far-right in the European Parliament (EP) elections that took place from 6-9 June. The far-right Rassemblement National or National Rally (RN) garnered 31.4 percent of the vote share (30 seats), while Macron's coalition and his Renaissance party, part of the liberal Renew Europe group that is still the third largest in the EP, gained only 14.6 percent of the French vote (13 seats). The French snap election, taking place three years before the next presidential election in 2027

when Macron cannot seek a third term according to the French Constitution, is scheduled for 30 June, with a second round on 7 July. The European Parliament elections are often viewed as a wider referendum on national politics and voter sentiment in member states. The European Parliament elections are often viewed as a wider referendum on national politics and voter sentiment in member states. According to projections and opinion polls, the RN, led by Marine Le Pen and her prime ministerial candidate Jordan Bardella, are currently in the lead with 37 percent support. The President of the centre-right Les Républicains party, Eric Ciotti, has already agreed to ally with National Rally. On the other hand, Macron's co-opting of the far-right's talking points on contentious issues such as immigration rendered him deeply unpopular with France's political left. Accompanied by fears of the right's ascendance, this has enabled the formation of the left-wing New Popular Front (NFP), comprising Green, Socialist and Communist parties and the far-left La France Insoumise (LFI). With their goal "to construct an alternative to Emmanuel Macron

and combat the racist project of the extreme right", the now-united left fares second in the polls with 28 percent support. Trailing behind in third place is Macron's centrist Ensemble

National Rally does win, Macron likely hopes that its ineptness in governance will be exposed in advance of the 2027 presidential election. Moreover, the loss of the parliamentary majority

have implications for France's relationship with the EU as well as the functioning of the EU itself and deeper EU integration. Both Le Pen and Bardella have had close ties with Russian President

inflation, social security, and public services are some key issues, many of which have been politically exploited by the far-right.

Whether Le Pen can seize the momentum from the European elections and gain a far-right majority remains to be seen. While Macron would continue to remain president until 2027 since these are parliamentary, not presidential elections, a far-right victory would create a "cohabitation" situation and force Macron to govern with a politician of a different political camp in the form of a far-right prime minister, presumably the 28-year-old Bardella. In this power-sharing arrangement, the president would remain in charge of the nation's foreign policy and defence, while the prime minister would take control of domestic and economic matters. One way or another, the outcome of the elections is likely to result in a seismic shift in the French government and make way for unstable politics and decision-making. There have been five instances of presidents dissolving the National Assembly in the Fifth Republic's political history. The last such case was in 1997 when centre-right former president Jacques Chirac called for snap elections, which paved the way for an unexpected Socialist majority and resulted in a 'cohabitation' situation, during which France's famous 35-hour working week reform was passed. On the other hand, France has had three "cohabitation" periods since the founding of the Fifth Republic in 1958.

As French voters head to the polls to choose between the far-right's Eurosceptic nationalist agenda or the president's staunchly pro-European ambitions, the globe's seventh-largest economy stands at an existential crossroads.

A majority for the National Rally would result in France's first far-right prime minister since the Second World War and a step closer to winning the bigger prize of the 2027 presidential election. As progressive and centrist politicians across Europe grimace at the prospect, one leader that's sure to grin away is Putin.



coalition, which includes his Renaissance Party, and the Modem and Horizons parties, with 18 percent support, despite Macron's warnings that a far-right or far-left victory, with their divisive policies, could speak a civil war.

What was Macron thinking?

Ample speculation has transpired with regards to the calculations behind Macron's decision to call a snap election, which he has a high chance of losing. Some analysts postulate that his goal is to prohibit the far-right from further advancement, while others rationalise the European elections as more of a "protest vote" to express "wider discontent rather than actual electoral intent". An article in Le Monde refers to Macron's decision as "a choice to play France at poker".

The President himself has described his decision as a "serious and heavy" one, but an "act of trust" in the French voter "to make the best choice for themselves and future generations". The snap election is a way for Macron to demonstrate that he cares about popular sentiment and voter concerns while forcing citizens to think carefully about how they want their country governed. If the

in the 2022 election that had Macron return to power with his Ensemble coalition winning 250 seats but short of the 289 seats needed for an absolute majority forced the President to controversially override the Parliament to pass reforms and laws on contentious issues like immigration and pension reform. Foreseeing increasing governing troubles and more no-confidence votes (Macron has already survived 28 such motions since re-assuming power in 2022), Macron's snap election puts the decision and its timing back into his own hands.

The President himself has described his decision as a "serious and heavy" one, but an "act of trust" in the French voter "to make the best choice for themselves and future generations". Crucially, in line with an overall low turnout for European elections, French voter turnout in the 2024 European election was barely 52 percent, revealing that the outcome may not serve as an accurate predictor for national parliamentary elections. An Ipsos survey predicts a turnout rate of 60-64 percent for the snap election.

France at a crossroads

A potentially far-right French government is likely to

Vladimir Putin, and unlike Macron and his transatlantic posture, the fact that neither of the two particularly supports NATO poses consequences for the future of global security given France's key role. The far-right at the French helm would also raise questions about the ongoing support for Ukraine and dampen its prospects of joining the EU or NATO. Even while generating controversy, events such as the Russia-Ukraine war and the uncertainties of American politics vindicated Macron's ideas of European strategic autonomy that have provided a vision for the EU in dark times. Yet losses in the upcoming election may dent Macron's credibility and legacy.

In the current French lower house of Parliament which has a total of 577 seats, Macron's Renaissance party has 169 seats, while National Rally has 88. For French voters, immigration, inflation, social security, and public services are some key issues, many of which have been politically exploited by the far-right.

In the current French lower house of Parliament which has a total of 577 seats, Macron's Renaissance party has 169 seats, while National Rally has 88. For French voters, immigration,

# Early childhood biometrics: A tool to improve healthcare delivery

The biometrics underpinning the Aadhaar system have enabled it to become the foundational tool for identity verification in India, leading to it becoming increasingly integrated into the delivery of healthcare services by the government. Yet, the biometric system still does not cover anyone under the age of 5 due to the (once considered) insurmountable challenge of accurately detecting early childhood fingerprints. However, recent technological advances have meant that India should now actively consider early childhood (ages 1-5) biometrics to buttress healthcare delivery, especially for the underserved.

Fingerprints as a stable marker of identity

It has been demonstrated that the fingerprints of children, even newborns, do not deviate substantially from their fingerprints as adults. Moreover, superficial damage to the epidermis cannot change fingerprint patterns—although intense manual labour can (temporarily) wear away the patterns while deep, permanent scars can disrupt them. Consequently, capturing the fingerprints of young children and newborns has been a heavily researched area due to the benefits it offers as a stable marker of identity, especially in developing countries where individuals may lack other forms of documentation.

Hurdles in capturing the fingerprints of young children

Nevertheless, in practice, capturing the fingerprints of children younger than age 5 has been a major challenge due to the issues encountered with inadequate technology and infant behaviour.

Firstly, while the basic patterns of a child's fingerprints do not change over time, from an imaging perspective, large changes are seen. Given that each fingerprint consists of ridges and valleys that form this unique pattern, as the child grows, the spaces between the ridges enlarge non-uniformly, making it harder for technology to match the new fingerprint pattern with the original pattern recorded. This challenge is exacerbated by the tendency of quick skin peeling seen in newborns in the weeks after birth.

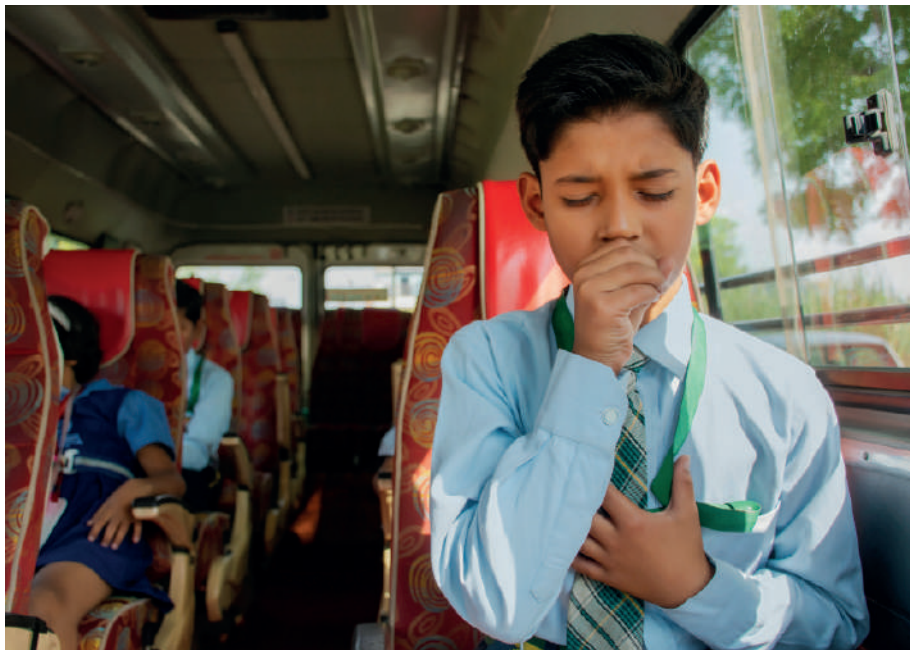
Secondly, existing fingerprint recognition technology for adults generally uses a 'platen' (the glass surface against which the fingers are pressed). This is problematic for young children because pressing their fingers against the hard glass surface can obscure some of the patterns due to their soft, malleable skin and poorly-defined ridges.

Finally, behaviourally, it can be a challenge to get a young child to keep their finger on the plate long enough and with the appropriate orientation and level of pressure to get a usable fingerprint scan. Reportedly, in infants, this is exacerbated by the early childhood grasp reflex (where they grasp objects that they are in contact with) which further distorts the pattern seen on the platen.

Early childhood fingerprint technology: Making its way to mass market

Consequently, over the years, much technological innovation has gone into developing systems that can accurately capture childhood fingerprints, especially for children below age five. For instance, a much higher resolution scanner (>1000 PPI vs 500 PPI for adults) must be used for younger children as they have smaller and more poorly-defined fingerprints vis-à-vis adults. This is sometimes used alongside software that will correct for print distortion (such as smudging or inappropriate finger position).

Alternatively, to deal with the issue of 'platen'-linked distortion, emerging technologies have sought to use non-contact imaging where an image of the



fingerprint is captured without having to press it against a solid surface. These methods have, in research settings, demonstrated that accurate early childhood fingerprint detection is achievable with current technology.

Alternatively, to deal with the issue of 'platen'-linked distortion, emerging technologies have sought to use non-contact imaging where an image of the fingerprint is captured without having to press it against a solid surface.

More recently, the Japanese corporation NEC, a British startup (Simprints) and GAVI collaboratively developed a system that uses a high-resolution fingerprint scanner with software correction, with a self-reported 99 percent accuracy. In September 2022, a trial was initiated for 4,000 children (aged 1-5) in Bangladesh. The fact that large development organisations are now initiating trials should be a strong indication that this technology is beginning to mature (with costs potentially coming down) and should spur a relook from the policymakers.

Baal Aadhaar and healthcare delivery  
In the Indian context, the Baal Aadhaar (Aadhaar for minors) currently mandatorily requires the registration of fingerprints at

age 5 and subsequently, an update at the age of 15. It is now time for the government to actively consider collecting biometrics for children older than six months or a year—either by licensing existing technology (such as via GAVI) or by actively developing this in-house through partnerships with Indian technology firms. This would not only ensure that the Aadhaar biometric scheme remains at the forefront of identity verification but also have major benefits for healthcare delivery.

It is now time for the government to actively consider collecting biometrics for children older than six months or a year—either by licensing existing technology (such as via GAVI) or by

actively developing this in-house through partnerships with Indian technology firms.

Currently, the healthcare infrastructure in India (as in many countries), is extremely decentralised: healthcare records for a patient cannot be transferred when treatment is sought at a different site. Consequently, for the ~600 million internal migrants in India, many from poor, rural backgrounds who have moved to urban/industrial/agricultural hubs for work, paper records for their children can often be lost, damaged, or incomplete.

Additionally, parents/caregivers may not have the medical literacy to explain their child's medical history in full (previous tests, diagnoses, prescriptions) which hinders medical management. For example, in the 2022 measles outbreak in Mumbai/Thane which primarily affected the urban poor and migrant population, the loss of paper vaccination records by parents greatly impeded municipal authorities in identifying zero-/missed-dose children, with one study estimating that ~75 percent of under-five cases did not have vaccination cards available.

Some of these issues may be resolved to some extent with the ongoing gradual rollout of the U-WIN portal that aims

to store all UIP vaccination records on one platform, linked to an ID proof. Similarly, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) is creating a dedicated architecture for the sharing of medical records between healthcare facilities.

Nevertheless, these systems would be enhanced with the addition of fingerprint-based identity verification, which delivers better outcomes for children than Electronic Medical Records (EMR) or document-based identity verification alone. For instance, parents may not be aware that their child has a U-WIN ID and may register them with a different document each time (or may accidentally or fraudulently have generated multiple Baal Aadhaars), leading to a complex web of incomplete records. This problem can be exacerbated by the fact that individuals (and especially children) may have different name spellings in different documents, which is a common issue observed in the Indian context. With biometric identification, matching of healthcare records (e.g. treatment/vaccination records) to child beneficiaries can be done with greater accuracy, enabling the provision of appropriate care.

Nevertheless, these systems would be enhanced with the addition of fingerprint-based identity verification, which delivers better outcomes for children than Electronic Medical Records (EMR) or document-based identity verification alone.

Further, documentary proof of identity risks inadvertently excluding certain groups within society such as children given up for adoption/abandoned, those who are homeless and those who come from families that tend to move very frequently—as many of these individuals might lose medical documents/vaccination cards and face difficulties acquiring identification like Aadhaar cards.

The way forward

Capturing biometrics for children (aged 1-5), including in the Baal Aadhaar, will aid the process of achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by providing greater access and continuity of healthcare to children from vulnerable populations, whilst also aiding healthcare providers/authorities who face challenges in collecting comprehensive medical histories and identifying zero-/missed-dose children.

This will also have longer-term benefits, with the government being able to identify and target child beneficiaries better (with less leakage) for welfare schemes, as is currently done for adults. Moreover, this will be a further building block towards the eventual goal of capturing infant (ages 0-1) fingerprints within days of birth that will allow the government to substantially improve the accuracy of birth registries and maintain better population data—with concomitant benefits to public health policy planning.

# God, guns, and the ballot box: The decline of religio-political parties in Pakistan

The February 2024 general elections in Pakistan witnessed a notable surge in the participation of religio-political parties, with 23 out of the 175 registered parties identifying as such, compared to only 12 in 2018. However, this increment doesn't necessarily translate into electoral success, as the vote share of many sectarian parties, especially smaller ones, has been consistently declining since 2013.

In Pakistan, the military establishment, often referred to as the 'deep state', has played a crucial role in shaping who takes control of the government.

In Pakistan, the military establishment, often referred to as the 'deep state', has played a crucial role in shaping who takes control of the government.

Without its patronage, securing a strong mandate on the ballot is not enough to seize the reins. Although political parties devised a strategy to harness the 'electables' to bolster their prospects, leadership from sectarian parties, despite their roots in the 'biradari system' and ties with the military, has failed to climb to the highest echelons of the government.

**D e b i l i t a t i n g**  
performance in 2024  
elections

The performance of religious parties peaked in 2002 when the six-party conglomerate Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) became the third-largest political force in the country. This coalition had evolved in response to General Musharraf's crackdown on religious militant organisations to project cooperation to the US' "War on Terror" policy and its political underpinnings in Afghanistan. In 2018, some semblance of religious parties gaining electoral traction was observed, however, this year, their entanglement in the crossfire of pro and anti-establishment mood within Pakistan minimalised their electoral impact). They could only garner about 12 percent of the votes nationwide, a significant decline from their combined vote share doubling to 10 percent in 2018 from just 5 percent in 2013. This is despite, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) fielding the second and third most number of candidates respectively, superseding two of the prominent mainstream parties—the PPP and PML-N.

electoral debut of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a Barelvi-ultra right party. It emerged as the fifth-largest party, sparking speculations about its alleged military backing to degenerate Nawaz Sharif's party by invoking the finality of prophethood. As seen in 2018, in 2024, its overall vote share remained stagnant despite joining hands with Sunni Tehreek (ST)—a Barelvi party that accuses India of sponsoring Deobandi Jihadi leaders. Parties like Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) failed to win a single seat in the national assembly; its emir—Sairajul Haq, as a result, opted for abdication.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) clinching only three National Assembly seats



evokes unfulfilled memories of the 1997 elections where the Taliban's inroads in Afghanistan were expected to influence Pakistan's political landscape, triggering the establishment of a conservative government, especially in Balochistan.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) clinching only three National Assembly seats evokes unfulfilled memories of the 1997 elections where the Taliban's inroads in Afghanistan were expected to influence Pakistan's political landscape, triggering the establishment of a conservative government, especially in Balochistan. However, its supremo—Maulana Fazlur Rehman who exploited his friendship with the regime to strike a deal with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to avoid disrupting Pakistani elections, managed to secure a National Assembly seat from the Baloch border district of Pishin. Conceding to the JUI-F's populist credentials and progressive coalition history which earned it the moniker 'da thekeydaro dala' (the party of contractors) due to active alignments with left and liberal parties in the past and the anti-government alliances

like the People's Democratic Movement (PDM) in the present, its performance in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) was purportedly disappointing. Moreover, the established parties' internal faltering allowed its Deobandi madrassah network to blend with Sindhi nationalism, saving its face in Sindh.

Deconstructing the pursuit of mainstream appeal

Upending tradition, the religious parties, this time around, appeared to manoeuvre towards the mainstream politics. This repositioning is evidenced by attempts to shed their conservative image by focusing on women's rights, a key concern for a significant portion of the electorate. Upon closer scrutiny of their commitments, particularly regarding gender-based segregation of schools, desks, and public transportation, amongst others, it became apparent that such promises are merely tokenistic. Creating safe spaces for women is crucial, but 'segregation' can quickly become 'seclusion,' hindering assimilation and reinforcing gender stereotypes. This pattern extends to social media usage too, in Pakistan. Gendered segregation of polling booths into binary (male and female) was even a

factor behind the gender discrimination encountered by transgender community in exercising their electoral right in the February polls, precluding their access to the electoral process.

Riding on the back of 'Islam, Pakistan aur Awam' the TLP tried to project itself as a mainstream political party by undertaking an inclusive manifesto, although the terminology remained vague. In 2023, it ran a three-week-long march to protest against the sudden surge in petrol prices and inflation. The party also mobilised women and fielded women candidates for general seats this time and vowed for the establishment of a special institution to protect women's rights, ensuring their legal and Sharia rights in inheritance and other matters.

Jamaat-e-Islami, the first party to announce its manifesto back in 2023 promised women rights as enshrined in the Quran and Hadith. The manifesto read: "Immediate steps will be taken to give women the share of property from her father or husband's property, to provide a safe working environment delineating

age relaxation for widows and divorced women in government jobs and maternity & child rearing leaves". It announced legal measures to financially empower women by promoting yellow industries. Its core claim revolved around reforming legal frameworks to address issues like dowry and honour killings and other significant roadblocks to women's full rights in society.

The manifesto also stressed over barring candidates who do not give their female family members their due inheritance from contesting in elections as well as from travelling abroad—quite a radical stance. All in all, the proposal to establish family institutes for the stability and protection of the family system aligning with the traditional values takes us back to square one since a traditional family system operates on unequal power dynamics, gendered division of labour and propagation of violence against women. It also misaligns with an inclusive understanding of the family system, acknowledging extended and single families in its definition, that these parties claimed to espouse.

The manifesto also stressed over barring candidates who do not give their female family members their due inheritance from contesting in elections as well as from travelling abroad—quite a radical stance.

Religious parties' obsessive mainstream signalling underpins their overemphasis on optics, which is likely to hamper their long-term political legitimacy. The TLP's vote-grabbing strategy in Punjab and Sindh fractured the Barelvi parties' base, weakening their bargaining power with established parties. In the process, they also confuse and alienate their existing voter base, take for example the TLP's initial claim to fame was capturing the conservative flank of mainstream parties, while for JUI-F, it was old-school Islamism (Sharia imposition). Their serious attempts at mainstream appropriation through post-Islamist politics (democratic values) can potentially eat a significant portion of their voter pie, which is conservative.

Similarly, their harboured ideological constraints shall resist political expediency, exemplified by the instance of their inability to co-opt the transgenders—a demographic counted within the gender minorities term and which finds its mention in the manifestos of PPP, PML-N, PTI and ANP.

## Kalki 2898 AD collects Rs 625 crore globally



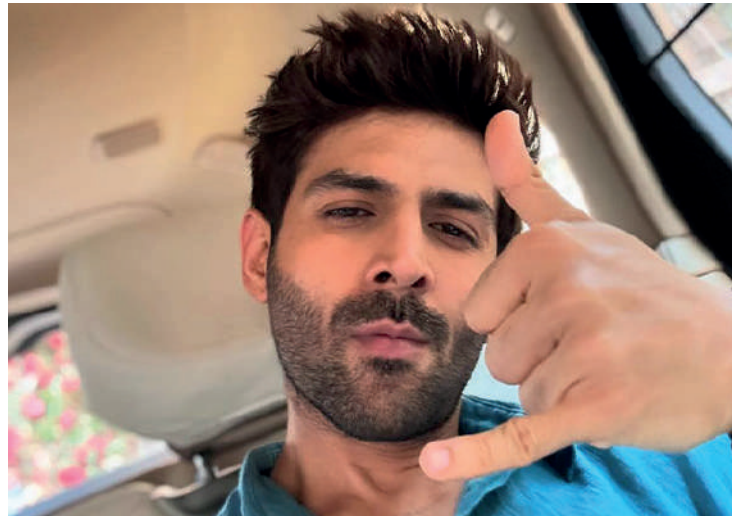
The recently released dystopian sci-fi epic film Kalki 2898 AD is moving on the box-office like a raging bull. The film features an illustrious star cast, including Amitabh Bachchan, Kamal Haasan, Prabhas, and Deepika Padukone.

It crossed the Rs 600 crore mark at the worldwide box-office on Monday, having collected as many as Rs 625 crore globally.

The film's India net collections stand at Rs 343.6 crore, with Telugu-speaking regions contributing a major chunk of the collections. The film has collected Rs 182 crore in the Telugu states. The Hindi circuit is the second-largest market, with collections amounting to Rs 128 crore.

The film is set to become the year's first blockbuster once it reaches Rs 800 crore!

## Kartik Aaryan back to 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3' mode after 'Chandu Champion' release



Kartik Aaryan, who is currently basking in the success of his recent release 'Chandu Champion', is back to 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3' mode.

Taking to Instagram on Monday, Kartik shared a throwback video from 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2'.

The clip features his dance on

the title track of 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2'.

Sharing the video, he wrote, 'Back to Bhool Bhulaiyaa Mode #BhoolBhulaiyaa3.'

As soon as the video was shared, fans chimed in the comment section. One of the users wrote, 'Finally after 33 days 15 hours 24 mins ... Rooh Baba is back....' Another user commented, 'Rooh baba is coming to rule once again!'

On Monday, Kartik and Triptii Dimri were snapped at Mumbai airport as they headed for the next schedule of 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3'.

Helmed by Anees Bazmee, the third part of the hit franchise also stars Vidya Balan in the lead role and is all set to hit the theatres on the occasion of Diwali 2024.

## Actor Abhay Verma talks about how shooting for his latest movie, Munjya, was an experience worth cherishing

In the world of Indian cinema, where dreams meet celluloid and talent is a rare gem, Abhay Verma emerges as a promising new face. From his humble beginnings to his recent stint in the much-talked-about movie Munjya, Abhay's journey reflects passion, perseverance and a pursuit of artistic excellence.

"Everything for me has started with the first beautiful process called auditioning. There are some films where once you audition for them, you feel there is something special. And I felt this will be a film where experiments were going to happen," Abhay talks about his entry into Munjya. It's a film that marked several firsts, including his debut as the lead in a theatrical film. "In the Hindi film industry, this was the first time we got a character straight out of CGI. So, this was a trendsetter film from where I have started my theatrical journey, and it was one-of-a-kind."

Artistic passion

Playing the lead role in Munjya was a milestone for Abhay, who reflects on the support and validation he received from Maddock Films, the production house behind the project. Navigating the uncertainties of the film industry, Abhay shares his philosophy on focusing more on the process than the outcome. "If you think



of the result, you divert from the purest intent of just entertaining people," he observes, highlighting the delicate balance between artistic passion and commercial success.

Reflecting on his co-stars in Munjya, Abhay speaks warmly of the camaraderie and support he received on the sets. "I had a great time working with Mona (Singh) ma'am, Sharvari (Wagh), Suhas Joshi ji

and Ajay Purkar. Working together, we created a family-like atmosphere on the sets," he recalls fondly.

Abhay's journey into acting began with humble aspirations in his hometown of Panipat, Haryana. "I dreamt of becoming an actor 13 years ago, it all started with watching the annual Ram Leela performances," he recalls. Despite pursuing a degree in BBA as per societal expectations, his heart was always set on the silver screen.

Challenges in Mumbai

Moving to Mumbai in 2018 wasn't so rosy. "At the initial stage, this city can really scare you. It doesn't accept everyone and you are kind of living in a matchbox." But, thankfully, Abhay's transition was supported by his elder brother, who had already paved his way in the television industry. "If you have a roof over your head in Mumbai on the first day, it's a luxury," he acknowledges, reflecting on the challenges faced by newcomers in the city of dreams. "When an actor gives his best to a project and that's not received well, it can be quite crushing. The highs in this city are very high and the lows very low. The love and validation constitute those special moments, but it's a very expensive city to live in for any newcomer. Also, uncertainty is a constant

companion, it must be so for every artiste, big and small, because the search begins after every project."

From playing a transgender in Safed to a terrorist in Family Man and a patriotic character in Ae Watan Mere Watan, Abhay's choices showcase his willingness to push boundaries and explore varied characters. "My mother and brother told me not to do Safed so early in my career. They were really concerned but I told myself if I could represent a sidelined community through my work, then I will not step back from doing my bit in uplifting them."

And that movie took him to a platform like the Cannes Film Festival, which didn't mean glitz and glamour for this young actor, but a responsibility. "When I went to Cannes, it was about representing my country and that was a big thing for me," he says, cherishing the global recognition his work has garnered.

Organic approach

There has been no formal training, Abhay's approach to acting is organic and life is the teacher. "I couldn't have afforded those acting schools; I don't come from a background where I could pay in lakhs to take classes. Whatever acting I know, it is the result of observing and learning from people and life."

# 'I refuse to bow down': Hina Khan diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer

Diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer, actor Hina Khan on Monday got emotional as she shared a video from her first chemotherapy session.

Hina spoke on how she came to know about breast cancer.

Sharing a video on Instagram, Hina says "All glam is gone and I'm ready for my first chemo in the hospital. Let's get better."

Sharing the video, she wrote, "This award night, I knew about my cancer diagnosis, but I made a conscious choice to normalise it - not just for myself, but for all of us. This was the day that changed everything, it marked the beginning of one of the most challenging phases of my life. So Let's do some affirmations."

She continued, "We become what we believe in and I have decided to take this challenge as an opportunity to reinvent myself, again. I have decided to keep the spirit of positivity as the first tool in my toolkit. I choose to Normalise this experience for me and I have consciously decided to manifest the outcome I desire. For me, my work commitments matter. For me my motivation, passion and art matters. I refuse to bow down. This award that I received right before my first chemo was not my motivation alone, in fact I attended this event to reassure my self that I am living up to the benchmark, I have set up for myself. MIND OVER MATTER." Encouraging fans with her never-give-up attitude, Hina continued, "I attended the event and went straight up to the hospital for my first chemo. I humbly urge everyone out there too to first Normalise the challenges of your lives then set goals for yourself and try to live up to them all along the way. No matter how hard. Never back down. Never give up." As soon



as the video was shared, fans and industry members chimed in the comment section.

Dalljiet Kaur wrote, "Inspired by your spirit Hina. Suddenly everything I am going through seems so stupidly small. Yes normalising the journey is very important. You have and always will be inspiring in so many ways. YOU WILL GET PERFECTLY FINE AND WILL BE BACK TO AN AWARD SHOW ACCEPTING MORE SUCH AWARDS VERY SOON."

Ektaa Kapoor commented, "Ur a star beyond stars! U shine d brightest." Mouni Roy posted, "In awe of your strength and courage." Hina's boyfriend Rocky Jaiswal wrote, "My fighter." Hina, on June 28, confirmed that she has been diagnosed with stage three breast cancer.

The 'Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai' actor shared that she has started treatment and is "doing well" and "fully committed" to overcoming the disease.

Hina posted on her Instagram, "Hello Everyone, to address the recent rumour, I want to share some important news with all the Hinaholics and everyone who loves and cares for me. I

have been diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. Despite this challenging diagnosis, I wish to reassure everyone that I am doing well. I am strong, determined and fully committed to overcoming this disease. My treatment has already begun and I am ready to do everything necessary to emerge from this even stronger."

"I kindly ask for your respect and privacy during this time. I deeply appreciate your love, strength and blessings. Your personal experiences, anecdotes and supportive suggestions would mean the world to me as I navigate this journey. I, along with my family and loved ones, remain focused, determined and positive. With the grace of the almighty, we believe I will overcome this challenge and will be completely healthy. Please send your prayers blessings and love," she added.

Meanwhile, on work front, the actor gained a lot of recognition for her role 'Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai'. She is also known for her negative character Komolika in 'Kasautii Zindagii Kay'.

She was recently seen in Shinda Shinda No Papa and Ritam Shrivastava's directorial comedy-drama series 'Namacool'.

# Bollywood film producer Vashu Bhagnani owes over Rs 65 lakh to crew members, says Federation of Western India Cine Employees



Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) president BN Tiwari has said veteran film producer Vashu Bhagnani owes over Rs 65 lakh to crew members who worked on three of his films 'Mission Raniganj', 'Ganapath' and 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan'.

Bhagnani's company Pooja Entertainment owes Rs 33.13 lakh to director Tinu Desai, who helmed their 2023 film, 'Mission Raniganj', Tiwari said on Friday. The movie was headlined by Akshay Kumar.

The production house owes Rs 31.78 lakh to over 250 set workers who worked on movies like 'Mission Raniganj', Tiger Shroff's 'Ganpath' (2023), and Akshay Kumar and Shroff's 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan' (2024), Tiwari added.

Bhagnani remained unavailable for comment.

In a complaint filed on March 19 to Indian Film & Television Director's Association (IFTDA), Desai said he worked on 'Mission Raniganj' from February 2022 to October 6, 2023 (the release date of the film). The amount to

be received as per the contract was Rs 4,03,50,000. He has only received Rs 3,70,36,092 so far.

"A written complaint was filed by the director of 'Mission Raniganj' regarding non-payment of his dues of Rs 33.13 lakh from Bhagnani last year in March. We've been following up with Pooja Entertainment but still they haven't made the payment. The company have said they will clear the dues in July," Tiwari told PTI.

Desai declined to comment when contacted by PTI.

According to FWICE president, IFTDA has written multiple letters to Pooja Entertainment but they kept delaying the payment.

"In February, they sought time to pay citing Jackky Bhagnani's wedding via an email dated February 20, 2024 to IFTDA. Later, they didn't reply. After FWICE wrote them a letter in March 2024, Pooja Entertainment again sought time to make the payment saying they would do so after the release of their film 'Bade Miyan Chote Miyan'. Again that has not happened," Tiwari said.

# Sonu Nigam prays at Kedarnath



*Singer Sonu Nigam visited the Lord Kedarnath temple on Wednesday morning. He arrived at Shri Kedarnath Dham by helicopter. Nigam received a grand welcome.*

# Anushka Sharma to Virat Kohli post T20 World Cup win: 'So grateful to call you my home'

Actor Anushka Sharma penned a heartwarming post for her husband Virat Kohli after India's second T20 World Cup victory since 2007, calling the star batter 'my home'. Kohli, who was part of the 2011 ODI World Cup triumph, made his first fifty of this tournament in Saturday's final against South Africa—a 76 off 59 balls with six fours and two sixes that carried India to a competitive 176 for seven. He also announced his retirement from T20 Internationals after guiding the Men in Blue to their second T20 World Cup win and being adjudged player of the match in Bridgetown, Barbados.

## VVS Laxman-coached India leave for Zimbabwe



### Mumbai

A young Indian team under National Cricket Academy head coach VVS Laxman left for Zimbabwe to play a five-match T20I series starting in Harare on July 6.

The team will be led by Shubman Gill while the likes of youngsters Riyan Parag and Abhishek Sharma have been rewarded for their exploits in the last IPL with maiden

India call-ups.

Meanwhile, the trio of Sai Sudharsan, Jitesh Sharma and Harshit Rana was named as replacements for Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube and Yashasvi Jaiswal. Dube, Samson and Jaiswal, all part of the T20 World Cup-winning squad, were slated to join the Zimbabwe-bound group but are stranded in Barbados due to hurricane Beryl.

## 'Thanks Rohit for that call in November': Rahul Dravid reveals how India skipper stopped him from quitting after ODI WC heartbreak

Bridgetown (Barbados)

Had he not received a phone call from India skipper Rohit Sharma, requesting him to continue after the ODI World Cup final defeat, Rahul Dravid wouldn't have been a part of history, the outgoing head coach revealed in his farewell speech to the team after it was crowned T20 world champion here.

Dravid's tenure had ended with the ODI World Cup after India lost to Australia in the final despite a 10-match winning run, but the coaching staff got an extension till the end of the T20 World Cup that concluded on Saturday last. While Dravid has not reapplied for the role after India's second T20 World Cup win, he mentioned Rohit's role in urging him to continue as the coach during his speech in the Kensington Oval dressing room after the team's seven-run win in the final against South Africa on Saturday. "Ro, thank you very much for making that call to me November and asking to continue," Dravid said in a video shared by BCCI on Tuesday.

"I think it's been such a privilege and a pleasure to work with each and everyone of you, but Ro, also thanks for the time... there is a lot of time we have



to chat, we have to discuss, we have to agree, we have to disagree at times, but thank you so very much," Dravid said as Rohit laughed. Dravid praised the players for putting up collectively solid performances through the tournament and urged them to celebrate the achievement as much as they would like.

"All of you will remember these moments. We always say, it is not about the runs, it is not about the wickets, you never remember your career but you remember moments like this, so let's really enjoy," Dravid said.

"I could not be more proud of you guys, to come back the way you did, the way you fought, the way we worked as a team...the resilience. There has been some disappointment over the years where we have come close, we have never been able to cross the line," he said.

With BCCI secretary Jay Shah in attendance, Dravid also spoke about the sacrifices that people close to each and every player made in order to allow them the spotlight they are now enjoying.

"So many sacrifices that each and everyone of you make, to see your families here today enjoying it, so many of your families back home, just think about all the sacrifices, each and everyone of them has made since the time you were kids, for you to be here in the dressing room," Dravid said.

"Today, your parents, your wives, your children, your brother, your coaches, so many people have made so many sacrifices and worked so hard with you for you to enjoy this memory in this moment... really, really proud to have being a part of this memory with you guys," he continued.

Usually articulate, Dravid admitted he was falling short of words but praised the team for their respect towards the outgoing coaching staff. "I'm not usually short of words but on a day like today, for me to be part of this, I could not be more grateful for the respect, for the kindness, for the effort that each and everyone of you are shown to me, to my coaching staff to my support staff," he conceded.

## A call that changed everything

Bridgetown (Barbados)

Had he not received a phone call from India skipper Rohit Sharma requesting him to continue after the ODI World Cup final defeat, Rahul Dravid wouldn't have been a part of history, the outgoing head coach revealed in his farewell speech to the team.

Dravid's tenure had ended with the ODI World Cup after India lost to Australia in the final despite a 10-match winning run, but the coaching staff got an extension till the end of the T20 World Cup that concluded on Saturday.

While Dravid has not reapplied for the role after India's second T20 World Cup win, he mentioned Rohit's role in urging him to continue as the coach during his speech in the Kensington Oval dressing room after the team's seven-run win



in the final against South Africa.

"Ro, thank you very much for making that call to me in November and asking to continue," Dravid said in a video shared by BCCI today.

"I think it's been such a privilege and a pleasure to work with each and every one of you,

but Ro, also thanks for the time... there is a lot of time we have to chat, we have to discuss, we have to agree, we have to disagree at times, but thank you so very much," Dravid said as Rohit laughed.

Dravid praised the players for putting up solid collective

performances throughout the tournament and urged them to celebrate the achievement as much as they would like.

"All of you will remember these moments. We always say, it is not about the runs, it is not about the wickets, you never remember your career but you remember moments like this, so let's really enjoy," Dravid said.

I could not be more proud of you guys, to come back the way you did, the way you fought, the way we worked as a team...the resilience. There has been some disappointment over the years where we have come close, we have never been able to cross the line," he said.

Like a baby

Rohit held the trophy like a new-born baby as he walked towards the beach here for the triumphant captain's post-tournament photoshoot, a serene

smile refusing to leave his face and the feeling of being a world champion yet to fully sink in.

He couldn't be faulted for being a bit dazed. After all, a jinx that lasted over a decade had been broken. "It's surreal. It feels like a dream. It feels like it hasn't happened," Rohit told BCCI.TV.

The coastal city of Bridgetown is battling a hurricane. The same could also be said about the Indian captain, only that his is a battle to control a gamut of emotions threatening to overwhelm him like a huge sea wave every now and then.

"We had a good time, we had a blast with the teammates till the early morning," he couldn't stop grinning, adding, "I didn't sleep properly but that's absolutely fine. There is a lot of time for me to go back and sleep."

## Assess yourself every moment: Abhinav Bindra to Paris-bound athletes



### New Delhi

Beijing Olympics gold medallist in shooting Abhinav Bindra today motivated members of the Indian athletics contingent for the Paris Olympics.

At an event organised by a private bank to felicitate the Paris-bound athletes, Bindra said he didn't want them to try his 'tactics' on handling the pressure. In an old interview, the shooter had admitted taking the miniatures of a famous Tennessee whiskey a night before he won gold for India. "A big no to this," said Bindra while laughing.

When asked how he would like to motivate the athletes, he said, "We did very well in the Tokyo Olympics and I have a lot of hopes for the coming event. Things have changed now and our athletes are performing well. We are going to have the largest contingent in athletics, which is another milestone for us."

While sharing his experience with the athletes, Bindra claimed the Olympics is a 'funny' experience which is to be lived seriously. "I remember, during the 2000 Sydney Olympics, I was having lunch with my roommate Anwer Sultan when we saw Willam sisters (Serena and Venus) at the same spot. We wanted to have a memorable picture with them but we didn't have a camera. We requested them to wait and rushed towards our room to bring the camera. As we stood together, Sultan realised that there's no film in the camera. It was the most embarrassing moment of my life. Nevertheless, stubbornly, we again requested them. Sultan finally managed to bring a new film, and the 30-minute hassle came to an end," shared Bindra.

"In Olympics village, you (the athletes) are going to witness some unexpected moments. However, you have to stay strong,

aim better and assess yourself every moment," he said.

The event was attended by officials of the Athletics Federation of India. Adille J Sumariwalla, president, Athletics Federation of India, said "The journey to Paris is a result of collective efforts and hard work. We are confident that our athletes will bring home laurels. The Indian athletes have raised their standards and it is clearly visible in the number of our athletes qualifying for the Paris Olympics."

Top athletes, including Parul Chaudhary (track and field), Annu Rani (javelin), Jyothi Yarraji (hurdles), Jeswin Aldrin (long jump), Praveen Chithravel (triple jump), Tajinderpal Singh Toor (shot put), Kishore Jena (javelin thrower) and others were present at the event.

## Amoj Jacob backs team to secure medal in Paris



### New Delhi

While most athletes were mingling amongst themselves and with friends and families, the members of the Indian men's 4x400m relay team were standing in one corner, busy discussing the previous evening's mixed relay final in the National Championship in Panchkula.

The India A quartet of Muhammad Anas, Jyothika Sri Dandi, Muhammad Ajmal and Kiran Pahal had won gold while breaking the national record. However, the effort was not enough for India to book a spot at the Paris Olympics.

"We didn't run well. It was not as expected. Some members of the team had upset stomachs and the race was tiring," said Amoj Jacob, who was part of the India B team alongside T Santhosh Kumar, R Vithya Ramraj and

### Subha Venkatesan.

While the mixed team missed out, the men's relay team will be carrying the hopes of the nation at the Paris Olympics. India, silver medallists at the Asian Games, had obtained the Paris quota at the World Athletics Relays in Bahamas in May. The quartet of Muhammed Anas Yahiya, Muhammed Ajmal, Arokia Rajiv and Jacob had clocked a season's best 3:03.23 to finish behind USA in the Olympics Qualifying Round 2. "We have a month to prepare for the Paris Olympics," said Jacob. "Being under pressure always pushes us to perform well and win medals. The competition will surely be tough and we are carrying high medal hopes. As a group, we are very well prepared. If we enter the final, we are surely bring an Olympics medal home," he added.

## India overcome resilient South Africa to win one-off Women's Test by 10 wickets

### Chennai

India were made to wait a tad longer for the winning moment by centurion Laura Wolvaardt, but they eventually went past the line convincingly by 10 wickets on the fourth and final day of the one-off women's Test against South Africa here on Monday.

India were required to chase a modest 37 after bowling out South Africa for 373 in their second innings and the hosts accomplished the task in 9.2 overs without losing a wicket. India had declared their first innings closed at 603 for six.

The opening duo of Shubha Sathesh (13 not out) and Shafali Verma (24 not out) steered their side home comfortably.

This is India's second 10-wicket triumph in Tests after a scoring a similar win over the Proteas at Paarl in 2002.

After getting bundled out 266 in their first innings, South Africa fought well through hundred-makers Wolvaardt (122, 314b, 16x4) and Sune Luus (109, 203b, 18x4) in the second innings.

However, South Africa could only delay the inevitable. Resuming at the overnight 232 for two, and trailing



India by 105 runs, Wolvaardt and Marizanne Kapp appeared to be in good touch.

The former brought up her maiden Test century, also becoming the first woman batter to score a Test, ODI and T20I ton in the same year.

However, Kapp was soon trapped leg-before by Deepti Sharma for 31, while Sneha Rana ousted Delmi Tucker for a duck as the tourists slipped to 266 for four.

With still work to be done for the South Africans to take the lead, Wolvaardt tried to anchor the innings but was dismissed for 122 when Rajeshwari Gayakwad trapped her in front to reduce the visitors 281 for five.

But the Proteas marched on and went past the 300-run

mark, their highest team total in Tests against the Indians. The previous best was the 266 that made in their opening innings here.

South Africa needed less than 50 runs to take the lead at this stage. Nadine de Klerk and Sinalo Jafta stuck together until the lunch break and South Africa were 302 for five then.

However, in the post-lunch session, Jafta retired hurt due to cramps, as the visitors sent Anne Dercksen to join De Klerk.

But Dercksen departed for five, falling to Pooja Vastrakar with SA trailing by 27 runs.

Meanwhile, the tourists went past 316 to register their highest score in Test cricket, going past the 315 they made against England at Shenley in 2003.

Although South Africans closed in on a lead they struggled to get the partnerships going.

The next stand was worth 14 runs between De Klerk and Tumi Sekhukhune before the latter was run out for six.

Jafta returned to bat, but she could add just nine more runs and departed for 15 and they went to tea at 336 for eight.

# MLC polls: Sena UBT wins Mumbai graduates, teachers seats, BJP wins Konkan graduates seat



## Mumbai

The Shiv Sena (UBT) won the Mumbai graduates' and teachers' constituencies while the BJP retained the Konkan graduates' seat in the biennial elections to four Maharashtra Legislative Council (MLC) seats.

The Sena (UBT) retained the Mumbai graduates' seat, which it has held since 1985. While Sena (UBT)'s Anil Parab won from

the Mumbai graduates' seat by defeating BJP's Kiran Shelar, in Konkan graduates' seat Niranjana Davakhare emerged victorious by defeating Ramesh Keer of the Congress. In the Mumbai teachers' seat, Sena UBT's J M Abhyankar won by defeating Subhash More of Shikshak Bharti.

The result of Nashik teachers' constituency was yet to come in till late Monday night.

The polling for the biennial elections to the four MLC seats took place on June 26 and the counting took place on Monday.

While there was a straight fight between Parab and Shelar in Mumbai graduates' constituency, for the Mumbai teachers' constituency the contest was between Abhyankar, Shivajirao Nalawade (NCP), BJP's Shivnath Darade and Shinde-led Sena-backed Shivaji Shendge.

In Nashik the fight was between Sandeep Gulave of the Sena UBT, Kishor Darade (Shiv Sena), Mahendra Bhavsar (NCP) and Vivek Kolhe (Independent).

The Konkan graduates' seat, however, witnessed a straight fight between Keer and Davakhare.

The maximum voting took place in Nashik which was around 93 per cent, followed by Mumbai teachers' constituency with 75 per cent, Konkan graduates' constituency with 63 per cent and Mumbai graduates' constituency with 56 per cent.

## Social engineering at work: Among BJP's 5 picks for MLC polls, 3 OBCs, Maratha and Dalit faces



## Mumbai

BJP's central leadership Monday announced five candidates, including party's national secretary Pankaja Munde, for the legislative council elections in Maharashtra to be held on July 12.

The BJP, which faced a debacle in the state in the recently held Lok Sabha elections, focussed on social engineering while choosing the candidates for the Maharashtra Legislative Council (MLC), where the party hopes to get five seats based on its strength in the state Assembly.

Out of the five candidates, three of them — Pankaja, Parinay Phuke and Yogesh Tilekar — represent the Other Backward Caste (OBC), whereas the two others Amit Gorkhe and Sadabhau Khot belong to the Matang (Dalit) and Maratha communities respectively.

The political strategists in BJP revealed, "While shortlisting the five candidates, the party took utmost care to give extra push to OBC candidates and also striking a balance by accommodating one candidate each from the Dalit and Maratha communities."

A senior BJP functionary, on condition of anonymity, said, "With Assembly polls in October 2024, we had to take into account the caste and regional composition while choosing candidates for the five seats."

According to sources in the BJP, the party is being cautious to consolidate its vote base among different communities in the wake of the sharp polarisation between the Marathas and OBCs over the issue of reservation.

Pankaja, who lost the 2024 Lok Sabha elections from her home constituency Beed in Marathwada region, was considered on priority by the party.

The BJP's plan to give Pankaja, the eldest of the three daughters of late Gopinath Munde and a prominent OBC leader, a stake in state politics comes ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls in the state.

Phuke, who is a former minister, also belong to the OBC community and hails from Bhandara in Vidarbha region.

A close confidante of Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, Phuke lost the 2019 Assembly elections from Sakoli in Bhandara to Congress chief Nana Patole.

He has earlier served as MLC and had contested as an independent corporator for Nagpur Municipal Corporation.

The third OBC face among the candidates, Yogesh Tilekar, was a former MLA from Hadapsar and former mayor of Pune Municipal Corporation.

Tilekar, who has worked in the party's youth wing Yuva Morcha, is currently the chief of BJP OBC morcha.

Meanwhile, choosing Amit Gorkhe, an active leader from the Matang community, is seen as an attempt by the BJP to send a positive message to Dalits.

The move comes in the wake the party admitting the opposition's narrative on Constitution and reservation had led to Dalits drifting away from BJP in favour of opposition parties in Maharashtra.

## Maharashtra to introduce law against paper leaks in Assembly's Monsoon Session : Fadnavis

## Mumbai

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday announced that the government will introduce a law against paper leaks in competitive exams during the ongoing Monsoon Session of the state legislature, similar to the laws at the national level. He also said certain groups and individuals are spreading a "false narrative" about paper leaks.

"This government, in its span of only two years, has successfully undertaken the recruitment to one lakh posts. This is a continuous process and it will continue in future

as well. Certain groups and individuals are spreading a fake narrative about paper leaks. It is important to take action against them, as it demotivates thousands of students who honestly prepare for the exams," said Fadnavis while replying to queries raised by the opposition during the question hour session. The Monsoon Session began on June 27 and will be held until July 12.

According to Fadnavis, the only FIR related to 'talathi' (revenue department officials responsible for maintaining village accounts) recruitment in Maharashtra was about

setting wrong answers and not any leak.

Opposition Nationalist Congress Party (NCP-SP) MLA Rohit Pawar asked whether the government was planning to introduce a law against paper leaks in Maharashtra. Replying to it, Fadnavis said, "We said in the Winter Session that we would bring in the act. The delegations of students have also met us and the chief minister is also positive about it. While the Centre's law will also be used in Maharashtra, the state government will also bring its own act against the paper leak in this session."