

# Across State

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## Maratha and OBC quota: As ruling side seeks answers from Opposition

Mumbai

The Maharashtra Legislative Assembly was adjourned for the day on Wednesday after four adjournments amid sloganeering by ruling members on Maratha and OBC reservation issue, asking the Opposition to make their stand clear instead of playing politics. Even as the Leader of Opposition attempted to speak on the issue, the sloganeering and ruckus forced him to stop. The legislative council too was adjourned for identical reasons.

The treasury bench members in assembly were aggressive in asking the Opposition to clarify whether they are in favour of providing reservation to Maratha community separately or from the OBC quota. The ruling side took strong objection to the Opposition's move to skip the all party meeting convened by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Tuesday evening to discuss quota issues amid ongoing protests and arrive at a consensus for maintaining social harmony.

The ruling party members entered into the well and shouted slogans demanding that the Opposition should clarify its stand. After the Question Hour, BJP legislator Amit Satam said that the all-party meeting was convened on Tuesday to discuss the Maratha-OBC reservation issue, especially amid the ongoing protests from both the communities. "The Opposition is busy doing politics. If pro-Maratha



activists are demanding quota from OBC, what is their fault? The Opposition should make their stand



clear instead of doing politics with an eye on election," he said. Later Satam also demanded an SIT to probe the role of MLAs in allegedly orchestrating caste strife in Maharashtra.

BJP legislator Ashish Shelar questioned the Opposition for announcing at the last minute their

decision to skip the all-party meeting. "On whose call and SMS, the Opposition decided not to attend the meeting, it should be known. The Opposition should speak up and clear its stand on the floor of the house," he demanded. As Shelar was speaking, the treasury bench members started shouting slogans and

some of them entered the well.

After successive adjournments by Speaker Rahul Narwekar, Leader of Opposition Vijay Wadettiwar tried in vain to speak but decided not to do so amid slogan-shouting.

BJP legislator Sanjay Kute demanded that the opposition parties especially the Congress, NCP SP and Shiv Sena UBT should make their stand on the Maratha-OBC reservation issue. He alleged that the Opposition was responsible for dividing the communities and disturbing the social harmony and peace. "The Opposition should clarify whether they are in favour of a separate reservation to the Maratha community or from the OBC quota. The opposition is involved in double speak," he claimed.

Excise minister Shambhuraj Desai accused the Opposition of attempting to disrupt peace in the state through the Maratha-OBC reservation dispute.

As the house continued to face ruckus, the ruling side passed several bills and supplementary demands amid chaos.

Leader of Opposition Vijay Wadettiwar talked to media outside the assembly after the ruling side continued to make speeches demanding answers from the Opposition. Wadettiwar said that the ruling alliance has created a mess of reservation issues.

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## Trainee IAS Officer, Who Used Siren On Private Car, Claimed Mental Disability

### Mumbai

Puja Khedkar - an on-probation Civil Service officer - claimed to be visually and mentally impaired in an affidavit submitted the Union Public Service Commission to avail selection process concessions.

She had refused, six times, to undergo a mandatory medical test to confirm her disabilities. It is unclear how, or why, she was appointed if she, in fact, declined to appear for the examination.

Unconfirmed reports say the first test had been scheduled at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences for April 2022. She skipped this claiming to have tested positive for COVID-19.

Two appointments for the following month were also skipped, as were those in July and August. And she only half-attended a sixth in September; she did not

appear for a MRI test to assess vision loss.

The Commission subsequently challenged her selection and,



in February 2023, a tribunal ruled against her. Nevertheless, somehow she managed to have her civil service appointment confirmed.

There are also questions over Ms Khedkar claiming OBC, or Other Backward Classes, status.

The falsified statements - and allowances so gained - allowed Ms Khedkar to pass the uber-competitive

Civil Services Exam despite scoring a relatively low all-India rank of 841.

Ms Khedkar was transferred from Pune to Washim after her 'exploits' - including the use of a siren on her private vehicle, an Audi luxury sedan - came to light. Pune Collector Suhas

Divase had written to the Chief Secretary of the Maharashtra government to request Puja Khedkar's re-assignment.

"The 2023 batch IAS officer will serve the remaining period of her probation as Supernumerary Assistant Collector in Washim district," the order stated.

Apart from the use of a siren, VIP number plates, and a sticker saying 'Government of Maharashtra'. Ms Khedkar had also been found using Pune Additional Collector Ajay More's office while he was away. She reportedly removed his nameplate and furniture, and even demanded letterheads.

None of these perks are available for junior officers, who are on probation for 24 months. Reports suggest her father, a retired administrative officer, had pushed for her demands to be fulfilled.

## Maratha and OBC quota As ruling side seeks answers from Opposition

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"If the ruling side wants the Opposition to answer on issues then it should resign and quit the government to allow the Opposition to solve the matter," he said. At a time when the legislative session is in progress, it would have been appropriate to hold a discussion inside the house, he added.

Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole said the state government itself has contrasting views on the issue of reservation. "BJP is a ruling party in the state and at the Centre. If it wanted to give reservation to Marathas, it could have given it much earlier," said Patole. Social activist Manoj Jarange-Patil has been demanding Kunbi (OBC) status to Marathas while the OBC organisations are opposing it saying it will reduce their existing share of reservation. The state government has already extended 10 per cent reservation to Marathas under the Socially and Educationally Backward Class category, which has been challenged in the court. During Lok Sabha polls, Jarange-Patil had reportedly given a call to defeat the candidates from the ruling side which has failed to recognise them as OBCs. In a bid to avoid the repeat of it in the upcoming assembly polls, the ruling side is now trying to corner the Opposition on the issue.

While raising the issue in the legislative council, BJP MLC Pravin Darekar said that Sharad Pawar-led NCP, Congress and Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena deliberately did not attend the all-party meeting convened by Chief minister Eknath Shinde and alleged that absence of the leaders from the Opposition shows that they wish to keep the

issue of castes burning for their political benefit.

The ruling and Opposition came face-to-face over the issue and there was a ruckus over it. Deputy Chairperson of the upper house, Nilam Gorhe, then had to adjourn the house proceedings for the day. "Sharad Pawar had advised that the government should take the initiative and find a way regarding reservation and end the caste rift that has arisen. Uddhav Thackeray advocates that Maratha reservation and OBC issues should be resolved. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde had hence organised a meeting of all party leaders at Sahyadri guest house on Tuesday, taking the initiative to make the atmosphere in Maharashtra peaceful. However, Opposition leader Sharad Pawar, Sena UBT chief Uddhav Thackeray and Congress leaders deliberately did not attend the meeting. Their absence showed that the Opposition wants the issue to continue burning and communal conflict should continue in Maharashtra so that they will gain political benefit. Such a despicable thought is in the minds of the leaders of MVA, he said. He further said, "Prakash Ambedkar said in the meeting that the exact role of Opposition parties should be asked in written form, let their true form come before the people of Maharashtra. After that, the Chief Minister decided to ask for a written stand of all these parties. So today we raised this issue in the Legislative Council. Why were Sharad Pawar, Uddhav Thackeray absent in the meeting? Why did the Congress leaders not come? Does this mean that they want this atmosphere to continue burning for their own political benefit?" he asked.

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### 2nd merit list of FYJC admissions

#### Mumbai

The second merit list for First Year Junior College (FYJC, Class 11) admissions in Mumbai was declared on Wednesday. There is a marginal drop in the cut-off scores of popular colleges in the city when compared to the cut-offs in the first merit list declared on June 27. At H R College, which is among those popular for the commerce stream, the cut-off has dropped marginally from 93 per cent to 92.4 per cent in the second merit list. Similarly, at St Xavier's College, which is the most sought-after for Arts, the stream's cut-off in the second merit list is 92.8 per cent which is merely any dip from 93.4 per cent in the first merit list. Whereas, at Ramnivas Ruia Junior College, the cut-off for science is 92.4 per cent in the second merit list which had closed admissions at 93.4 per cent in the first merit list.



# Mihir Shah Called Girlfriend 40 Times After BMW Crash, She May Be Detained

## Mumbai

In a very short span after he rammed a couple on a scooter with his BMW, killing the woman who was riding pillion, Mihir Shah spoke to his girlfriend 40 times before abandoning the car, hailing an auto and heading to her house. Police said the girlfriend may now be detained for questioning.

The 24-year-old son of a Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde faction) leader crashed his BMW into a scooter in Worli in which Pradeep Nakhwa and Kaveri Nakhwa, a fish-seller couple, were returning around 5.30 am on Sunday after buying fish to sell during the day. While Pradeep was flung off the bonnet after the car hit him, Kaveri came under the wheels and was dragged for 1.5 km.

Shah, who was allegedly drunk, then switched seats with his driver, Rajrishi Bidawat, and they reversed the car over Kaveri before speeding away. Shah and the driver then went to Kala Nagar in Bandra, where they



abandoned the car and took off the number plate to avoid being caught.

While all this was happening, an official said, Shah called and spoke to his girlfriend 40 times.

### Evading Arrest

After leaving the car in Kala Nagar, the 24-year-old hailed an auto and went to his girlfriend's house in Goregaon. Police said he "rested" there for two hours while his girlfriend informed

Shah's sister about the accident. His sister went to Goregaon and then took Shah to their house in Borivali.

From there, Shah's mother, Meena, two sisters - Puja and Kinjal - and a friend, Avdeep, left for a resort in Shahpur, nearly 70 km from Mumbai. They hid there while the police kept looking for Shah, having arrested his father Rajesh Shah and the driver, Bidawat.

On Monday night, Shah left for the family's house in Virar and, the next morning, Avdeep turned on his phone for 15 minutes, revealing his location. This led to Shah's arrest.

While Shah was produced in court on Wednesday and sent to police custody till July 16, police said they may also detain his girlfriend to question her. An official said the questions will centre around what information

about the accident was shared with her by Shah, and whether he was drunk when he spoke to her and met her.

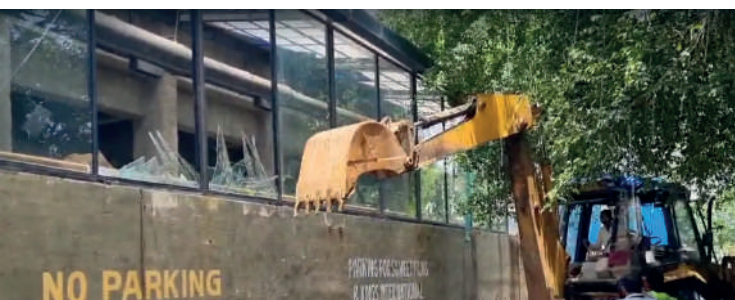
### 'Guilty Won't Be Spared'

The Worli hit-and-run, which came close on the heels of the Pune Porsche accident, has led to questions being asked of the government. While the juvenile is on the Porsche case is on bail after killing two 24-year-old techies, Mihir Shah also managed to evade the police for 72 hours.

In both cases, the opposition has alleged that the accused have links to people in the state government, which is being run by a coalition of the Eknath Shinde faction of the Shiv Sena, the BJP, and the Ajit Pawar-led faction of the NCP.

Chief Minister Eknath Shinde has, however, maintained that the guilty will not be spared and the police will not shield anyone. Rajesh Shah, who was the deputy leader of the Shiv Sena in the Palghar district, was suspended from his post on Wednesday.

## Mumbai BMW Hit-And-Run: Bulldozer Action At Pub Where Accused Spent Hours



## Mumbai

Sections of the bar in Mumbai's Juhu that served alcohol to Mihir Shah, 24, were demolished by city officials Wednesday morning, 24 hours after Excise Department officials sealed the property.

The Vice-Global Tapas Bar sold liquor to Shah - who is 25 years old and below the legal age for drinking - late Saturday and early Sunday, hours ahead of a collision in which a BMW driven by him rammed a two-wheeler,

killing a 45-year-old woman and injuring her husband.

Apart from serving liquor to underage persons, the bar was also sealed for serving alcohol without a proper licence and for illegal construction on the property. These illegal bits were demolished. Action was taken under relevant provisions of the Bombay Foreign Liquor Rules.

The son of politician Rajesh Shah - who is part of Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena - Mihir Shah went on

the run after the horrific incident and was untraceable for over 72 hours. He was arrested, as were his mother and two sisters, yesterday from an apartment in Virar, which is 65 km from Mumbai. The mother and sisters, whom the police believe helped hide Shah, were arrested from Shahpur. Shah's father and the family driver, Rajrishi Bidawat, were arrested on Sunday.

After his arrest sources told Mihir Shah admitted he was driving but said he was not drunk. The husband of the woman killed has downplayed Shah's arrest, pointing out the odds are still stacked against him in his and family's search for justice. "We are poor. Who is there to support us... today, he will be sent to jail. Tomorrow he will be produced in court and then he will get bail," he said.

## Aaditya Thackeray seeks 'bulldozer justice' in BMW hit-and-run case, meets victim's kin

## Mumbai

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Wednesday demanded "bulldozer justice" in the fatal Mumbai BMW hit-and-run case, in which the son of Shiv Sena leader Rajesh Shah is the prime accused.

He sought to know why a bulldozer is not being run on the house of Mihir Shah, the son of Rajesh Shah, as a punitive action in the case.

The former state minister met the family of Kaveri Nakhwa (45), the woman who was killed in the accident on Sunday morning, and insisted her kin do not need monetary help but justice.

A BMW car allegedly driven by Mihir Shah rammed into a two-wheeler in Worli, south-central Mumbai, resulting in

the death of Nakhwa, who was riding pillion, while her husband Pradeep survived with injuries.

"The regime which believes in bulldozer justice must run bulldozer on his house. I would like to see bulldozer justice coming on to Mihir Rajesh Shah's house," said Thackeray, the MLA from Worli.

"Bulldozer justice" refers to demolition of properties of individuals accused of involvement in serious crimes using the powerful motorized machines even before they are pronounced guilty by courts. Several such punitive actions against accused have been reported from BJP-ruled states like Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

## Bhujbal harbours hatred against Maratha community and wants violence, alleges Jarange

### Mumbai

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange on Wednesday accused Maharashtra minister and OBC leader Chhagan Bhujbal of harbouring hatred against the Maratha community, and said that is the reason why he demands cancellation of the Kunbi evidence in the state.

Addressing a rally at Dharashiv in Maharashtra, he warned that road blockades would be held across the state even if a single Kunbi evidence is cancelled.

“While Maharashtra minister Chhagan Bhujbal wants violence, the Maratha community should hold peaceful rallies in the state. The Maratha community should not worry about reservation as we will take it,” Jarange said.

“Bhujbal has hatred for the Maratha community. He brought OBC leaders together and demanded that the Kunbi records, which are centuries old, should be cancelled. But this cannot be done,” he said.

Jarange urged Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to



talk to Bhujbal on the reservation issue.

“If a single evidence of the Marathas is cancelled, your (ruling Mahayuti’s) 288 candidates will be defeated (in the upcoming state assembly polls). They should talk to Bhujbal over the issue as he is a minister in their government,” he said.

The activist appealed to members of the Maratha community to stand with the people if they are in trouble and remain united.

“Rich Maratha leaders may not need reservation, but poor people from the community working in political parties

need quota. Not a single Kunbi evidence should be cancelled. We need to hold road blockades in the state for that,” he said.

Jarange also accused BJP leader Girish Mahajan of hatching a conspiracy against the Marathas, and cited his statement that the ‘sage soyare’ (blood relatives) issue will not sustain in the court.

He said, “I am not well. I need the support of two persons to climb down even four steps. There is no blood in my body, but I will keep fighting for reservation till I am there.”

## 557 farmers ended lives in 6 months this year in Maharashtra’s Amravati division: Govt report

### Mumbai

557 farmers ended lives in 6 months this year in Maharashtra’s Amravati division: Govt report Amravati, Jul 10 (PTI) As many as 557 farmers have committed suicide in five districts under the Amravati administrative division of Maharashtra between January and June this year, an official report said. The five districts in the division are Amravati, Akola, Buldhana, Washim and Yavatmal. A report prepared by the Amravati divisional commissioner said a total of 557 farmers committed suicide in the division from January to June in 2024. Of them, the highest number of 170 suicides were recorded in Amravati district, followed by 150 in Yavatmal, 111 in Buldhana, 92 in Akola and 34 in Washim. The government has provided assistance to the families of the deceased in 53 cases, while 284 cases are pending for inquiry, the report said. Reacting to the figures mentioned in the report, Congress leader Balwant Wankhade, who represents the Amravati Lok Sabha seat, said Maharashtra is one of the states that records highest number of farmer suicides and Amravati tops the state on this count.

“Crop losses, lack of adequate rainfall, existing debt burden and absence of timely farm loan are some of the major reasons that drive farmers towards taking the extreme step....The government should fulfil its assurances of doubling the income of farmers and provide assistance to them,” he said.

Chairperson of state government’s Vasantrao Naik Shetkari Swavlambi Mission, Nilesh Helonde-Patil, said the suicide of farmers was a serious issue and efforts were on to find a solution to stop such deaths.

“The local administration is reaching out to farmers at the gram panchayat level with various government schemes to help them increase their income, and also in the education of their children and the medical cost of the family members. The government is standing behind the them. The Shetkari Swavlambi Mission is also facilitating easy communication between farmers and insurance companies,” he said.

## In 1st landmark case of a sex change, govt permits woman IRS officer to turn man

### Hyderabad

In a landmark move, the government has permitted an IRS officer to officially change name and gender. The woman Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer, serving as the Joint Commissioner in the regional bench of Customs, Excise and Service Tax Appellate Tribunal (CESTAT), Hyderabad, turned a man.

This is said to be the first case of a sex change in the Indian Civil Services.

The Ministry of Finance has accepted the request of M Anusuya for change of her name to M Anukathir Surya and gender from female to male.

“The request of Ms M Anusuya has been considered. Henceforth, the officer will be recognised as ‘Mr M Anukathir Surya’ in all

official records,” reads the order issued by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India on July 9. The 35-year-old officer posted as Joint Commissioner in the office of the Chief Commissioner (Authorised Representative) of CESTAT, had joined his current posting last year.

Surya started his career as an Assistant Commissioner in Chennai in December 2013, and was promoted to the rank of Deputy Commissioner in 2018. He completed his Bachelor’s degree in Electronics and Communication from the Madras Institute of Technology in Chennai. He did PG Diploma in Cyber Law and Cyber Forensics from the National Law Institute University in Bhopal in 2023.

## Minister says BMC blacklisted one contractor of South Mumbai road

### Mumbai

Over six months after the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) terminated the Rs 1,600-crore cement and concrete (CC) road contract given to Roadways Solutions India Infra Limited (RSIIL), industries minister Uday Samant told the legislative council on Wednesday that the BMC terminated the contract after blacklisting the company and a fine of Rs 64 crore has been recovered from the company.

Samant told the house that CC road tenders were floated in 2 phases and the contract for the first phase was awarded. As part of it, RSIIL was given a contract for 212 roads for Rs 1600-crore work, but that was terminated later.

A new tender was later floated for that work but this time 208 roads were included and new contractor NCC was given this

contract.

“The BMC terminated the contract after blacklisting the company and a fine of Rs 64 crore has been recovered from the company. The other four companies—Megha Engineering, NCC Private Limited, Dinesh Chandra Infra Pvt Limited, Eagle Infra Pvt Ltd—were penalised for delaying the contract and a fine of Rs 111 crore has also been recovered from these companies. Before that, Rs 64 crore have also been recovered from the roadways company and after terminating its contract, the NCC Pvt Limited was appointed as the new contractor for the work,” Samant said.

The issue was raised by BJP MLC Prasad Lad in the upper house on Wednesday.

“The government should reveal its stand on the CC roads. Whether the company which was given a contract has been blacklisted? In

the first phase, 20 percent work is also not completed. There is a demand for an ED probe in the CC road work and contracts,” Lad said in the house.

Sena UBT MLC Anil Parab also said the company must be blacklisted across all state government departments and not just in BMC and there should also be inquiry into whether norms were followed by the company while bagging the contract.

After the Eknath Shinde-Devendra Fadnavis government came to power in July 2022, CM Shinde had vowed to make Mumbai roads pothole-free by converting them into CC roads by 2024. Following this, the civic body announced the concretisation of 397 km of roads and floated tenders worth Rs 5,800 crore in August 2022 for Phase 1.



# Attack on Indian soldiers in Kathua won't go unavenged: Govt



## New Delhi

Expressing deep anguish over the death of five Indian soldiers in yesterday's terror attack in Kathua, Jammu and Kashmir, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Tuesday "soldiers are determined to usher in peace and order in the region".

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane, in a rare statement on an operational matter, said "the attack will not go unavenged".

Referring to the deaths of the five soldiers, Aramane said, "Their selfless service to the nation will always be remembered

and their sacrifice will not go unavenged. India will defeat the evil forces behind the attack."

The statement was posted on X by a spokesperson for the Ministry of Defence.

In a post on X, Rajnath expressed "deep anguish" over loss of lives of the five Army soldiers and added that counter-terrorist operations were on. "Our soldiers are determined to usher in peace and order in the region," the minister said a day after an Army truck was ambushed in Kathua. Rajnath posted on X, "Deeply

anguished at the loss of five of our brave Indian Army soldiers in a terrorist attack in Badnota, Kathua (J&K)."

He expressed condolences to the bereaved families and added that the nation stood firm with them in this difficult time. He said he prayed for the speedy recovery of those who injured in the attack. Meanwhile, the NIA will probe last year's terrorist attack on an Army convoy in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch that left five personnel dead, officials said on Tuesday.

# Assam flood situation improves marginally, 17 lakh affected in 26 districts



## Guwahati

The flood situation in Assam improved marginally on Wednesday with water levels of major rivers showing a receding trend, reducing the affected population to 1.7 million across 26 districts, according to an official bulletin.

Vast tracts of land, however, remain inundated with sporadic rainfall reported from several districts.

Seven deaths were reported on Tuesday with two in Cachar and one each in Dhubri, Dhemaji, South Salmara, Nagaon and Sivasagar, according to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA).

The death toll in this year's floods, landslides and storms increased to 92 with 79 people losing their lives to the deluge alone.

An area of 38,870.3 hectares of cropland was still inundated as against 49,014.06 hectares on Monday.

Among the worst-hit districts are Dhubri where 3,54,045 people are affected, Cachar (1,81,545), Sivasagar (1,36,547), Barpeta (1,16,074) and Golaghat (1,09,475).

A total of 48,021 affected people have taken shelter in 507 relief camps while relief materials have been distributed to 104,665 others outside these camps.

Dhubri, Cachar, Kamrup, Goalpara, Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Charaideo, South Salmara, Nalbari, Karimganj, Dhemaji, Morigaon, Nagaon, Sivasagar, Golaghat, Sonitpur, Hailakandi, Biswanath, Barpeta, Darrang, Kamrup (M), Majuli, Jorhat, Kokrajhar, Tinsukia and Chirang are among the affected districts.

Urban flooding was reported from two districts of Kamrup (Metropolitan), Dibrugarh and Karbi Anglong.

Kaziranga National Park has seen its worst floods in recent years, resulting in the death of 159 wild animals due to drowning or during rescue operations, while 133 others have been saved.

# Case Against Karnataka BJP MLA For "Slap Rahul Gandhi" Comment

## Mangaluru

BJP MLA Bharath Shetty has been booked for his alleged comments against Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, police said on Wednesday.

At a press conference here, Mangaluru City Police Commissioner Anupam Agarwal said that an FIR has been filed by the police in Kavour police station over the complaint lodged by K Anil, a Congress corporator of the Mangaluru City Corporation.

In the complaint, the Congress corporator alleged that MLA Bharath Shetty had made a provocative statement taking the name of Rahul Gandhi.

Mr Agarwal said an investigation is on.

Meanwhile, Congress party workers and leaders on Wednesday continued their tirade against Mr Shetty over his remarks against their party leader.

At a gathering in Surathkal on

Sunday, the BJP MLA, who represents Mangaluru City North had stated that Mr Gandhi should be "arrested inside Parliament and slapped". This statement had gone viral, and Congress leaders and workers expressed their displeasure over it in the media and on social media.

Addressing a press conference, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) Working President Manjunath Bhandary took a dig at the BJP MLA asking, "How will he enter Parliament? Will he carry a weapon to attack the Leader of the Opposition? Is Shetty a terrorist?" He further said, "I am certain that Bharath Shetty cannot even talk straight to a common worker of the Congress party, let alone confront Rahul Gandhi."

Mr Bhandary attributed the main cause of BJP leaders' and legislators' outburst at Rahul Gandhi to Prime Minister Narendra Modi referring to the Congress leader as 'balak buddhi' (childish). This term must be expunged, he added.

# Badrinath National Highway Closed Again Due To Massive Landslide In Uttarakhand

## Gopeshwar

A massive landslide near Patalganga between Pipalkoti and Joshimath blocked the Badrinath National highway once again on Wednesday.

The landslide kicked off a huge cloud of rubble, which took some time to settle down.

Around 11:15 am on Wednesday, a large part of the hill slid down in Patalganga without any rain, the district disaster management office here said.

It fell over the mouth of a tunnel along the national highway damaging it in the process as it carried with it lakhs of tonnes of soil, stones and big boulders.

The Badrinath NH has

already been blocked by landslide debris for the past couple of days.

The tunnel was built a few years ago in view of frequent landslides in the area.

The landslide was so powerful that the entire Alaknanda and Patal Ganga valley seemed to tremble for a few seconds, said Vikram Singh of Lanji village, situated on the other side of the Alaknanda river, just opposite the tunnel.

Fear ran through people going to cast their votes in the bypoll to the Badrinath assembly seat but they could not resist the temptation of watching the spectacle of a huge cloud of dust and debris rising in the air in the wake of the landslide.

# Bihar CM Nitish Kumar asks private company official to expedite road project, offers to touch his feet

Patna

A livid Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday asked a representative of a private company to expedite a road project in Patna and even offered to touch his feet to speed it up.

The septuagenarian's awkward gesture came at a function where a stretch of "JP Ganga Path", an expressway along the river that promises to ease traffic congestion in the city, was dedicated to the public.

A presentation was made at the function, attended by dignitaries like Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha and local MP Ravi Shankar Prasad, on the progress of the project.

The longest serving CM, who kept wiping beads of sweat from his face, as he sat in the sultry weather, was visibly unimpressed and asked the company official to ensure that the entire work was completed by the end of the year.

He sprang to his feet, saying: "Kahiye to hum aapka pair chhu lete hain (I shall touch your feet if that is what you want)."

The horrified official scurried back several steps, screaming "Sir please don't do this", even as top government officials and political leaders also got on their feet to



prevent the veteran leader from creating a scene.

The incident came about a week after the chief minister had offered to touch the feet of a high ranking IAS officer, whom he urged to quickly settle land disputes by carrying out extensive surveys since, in Kumar's view, quarrels over holdings were found to be the prime trigger for violent crimes in the state.

Meanwhile, the JP Ganga Path function went off without further ado, but not without creating a buzz on social media and evoking sneers from the opposition.

Leader of the Opposition

Tejashwi Yadav came out with a statement, sharing the video footage and alleging that the Chief Minister was "lachaar" (powerless), a reason why he was "always ready to fall at the feet of all, be they government officials or those from the private sector".

Yadav, who takes pride in the fact that his RJD is the single largest party in Bihar Assembly, also taunted Kumar for heading a party that had only "43 MLAs" in the 243-strong House, and claimed that "a handful of serving and retired bureaucrats" are running the show in the state.

certain "health issues".

The ED is expected to issue a new summons to her soon. The agency had said in a charge-sheet filed in 2022 that the actor was "enjoying valuables, jewellery and costly gifts given by Chandrashekhar despite knowing about his criminal antecedents." Fernandez has been questioned at least five times by the ED in the case earlier. The actor has always said she was innocent and had no knowledge of Chandrashekhar's alleged criminal activities.

former Fortis Healthcare promoter Shivinder Mohan Singh's wife Aditi Singh to the tune of about Rs 200 crore. The ED had alleged that Chandrashekhar used these "proceeds of crime" or illegal money to purchase gifts for Fernandez.

Sources said the agency obtained some "fresh" inputs in the case and hence summoned the actor today to seek answers. The actor did not appear before the agency. Her legal team that met ED officials informed that she was unable to depose due to

**CBI works under Centre; says SC; holds as "maintainable" Bengal Govt's suit against CBI lodging cases despite withdrawal of 'general consent'**



New Delhi

Holding that the CBI worked under the Central Government, the Supreme Court on Wednesday ruled that the West Bengal Government's original suit against the probe agency registering cases despite withdrawal of 'general consent under Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act, 1946 was "maintainable".

"In our considered opinion, the contentions raised by the defendant ((Union of India), do not merit acceptance... The preliminary objection is, therefore, rejected," a Bench Justice BR Gavai and Justice Sandeep Mehta said.

The Bench, however, clarified that the findings were for deciding preliminary objections and will have no bearing on the merits of the suit.

Amid allegations of misuse of central probe agencies against opposition leaders, the Centre had on May 2 asserted before the top court that the CBI was not under its "control" and that it can't supervise the registration of FIRs or probes by the agency

However, after analysing various provisions of the DSPE Act, it said, "We... find that the very establishment, exercise of powers, extension of jurisdiction, the superintendence of the DSPE, all vest with the Government of India."

The top court rejected Solicitor General Tushar Mehta's argument that the CBI was an independent agency. "In our view, the CBI is an organ or a body which is established by and which is under the superintendence of the Government of India in view of the statutory scheme as enacted by the DSPE Act," it said.

"If the powers and jurisdiction of the members of the DSPE are to be extended to any area including railway areas, in a State not being a Union Territory, the same cannot be done unless the

central government passes an order in that regard," it noted.

"We find that the contention of the Solicitor General that even if the CBI, being an independent agency, is considered to be an instrumentality of the State under Article 12 of the Constitution, it cannot be equated to the term Government of India as contemplated under Article 131 of the Constitution, in our view, holds no water," the Bench said.

Holding that the West Bengal Government's plaint disclosed a cause of action, the Bench posted the matter for framing of issues on August 13.

The final outcome of the case is likely to have wider ramifications for Centre-state relations in India.

The West Bengal Government had on November 16, 2018, withdrawn the "general consent" given to the CBI to conduct probes or carry out raids in the state.

Alleging misuse of the CBI against political opponents and opposition-ruled states, the West Bengal Government has filed an original suit under Article 131 of the Constitution, contending that the cases filed by the CBI in the state after withdrawal of general consent by it were illegal and without jurisdiction.

Article 131 deals with the Supreme Court's original jurisdiction in a dispute between the Centre and one or more states; or a dispute between two or more states.

On behalf of the West Bengal Government, senior counsel Kapil Sibal had submitted that once the state withdrew its consent on November 16, 2018, the Centre could not have allowed the CBI to enter the state for any probe. He contended that continuation of the registration of cases and exercise of powers by the CBI after withdrawal of the consent was "an act of constitutional overreach".

## Jacqueline Fernandez fails to appear before Enforcement Directorate in money laundering case

New Delhi

Actor Jacqueline Fernandez did not appear before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday for a fresh round of questioning in a money laundering case involving alleged conman Sukesh Chandrashekhar, official sources said.

The 38-year-old Sri Lankan-origin Bollywood actor has been questioned by the federal agency in the past in the case that pertains to alleged cheating of high-profile people, including



## Supreme Court collegium recommends appointment of three additional judges of Delhi High Court as permanent judges

New Delhi

The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud has recommended to the Centre the names of three additional judges of the Delhi High Court for appointment as permanent judges.

The collegium, which also comprised Justices Sanjiv Khanna and B R Gavai, recommended that seven additional judges of the Bombay High Court be appointed as permanent judges.

It also recommended that Justices Sanjay Anand Rao Deshmukh and Vrushali Vijay Joshi be appointed as additional judges of the Bombay High Court for a fresh term of one year with effect from October 7, 2024.

"In view of the above, the collegium resolves to recommend that Justices Girish Kathpalia, Manoj Jain and Dharmesh Sharma, additional judges, be appointed as permanent judges of the High Court of Delhi against the existing vacancies," said one of the collegium resolutions of July 9 uploaded on the apex court website.

It noted that on March 12, 2024, the collegium of the Delhi High Court had unanimously recommended the names of these three additional judges for appointment as permanent judges of that high court.



"In terms of the Memorandum of Procedure, the judges of the Supreme Court conversant with the affairs of the High Court of Delhi have been consulted with a view to ascertain the suitability of the abovenamed additional judges for being appointed as permanent judges," it said.

Another resolution uploaded on the apex court website said, "The collegium resolves to recommend that Justices Santosh Govindrao Chapalgaonkar, Milind Manohar Sathaye and Neela Kedar Gokhale, additional judges, be appointed as permanent judges of the High Court of Bombay against the existing vacancies."

It said on May 3 this year, the collegium of the Bombay High Court had unanimously

recommended the names of these additional judges for appointment as permanent judges.

"The Chief Ministers and the Governors of the States of Maharashtra and Goa have concurred with the above recommendation," the resolution said.

A separate resolution said the apex court collegium "resolves to recommend as under: Justices Yashviraj Gopichand Khobragade, Mahendra Wadhimal Chandwani, Abhay Sopanrao Waghware and Ravindra Madhusudan Joshi, additional judges, be appointed as permanent judges of the High Court of Bombay against the existing vacancies".

## Ayodhya land sold to outsiders, alleges Akhilesh Yadav

Lucknow

Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday attacked the BJP government over the alleged sale of land in Ayodhya to outsiders, claiming a land scam of billions of rupees. He also demanded a thorough investigation into these land deals.

Yadav made this comment on X posting a news report 'Arunachal Deputy CM to chief of UP Special Task Force, Brij Bhushan's MP-son to politicians across party

lines: Rush to ride Ayodhya boom' published in The Indian Express.

He said, 'As the land deals in Ayodhya are being exposed, the truth is coming out that under the BJP rule, people from outside Ayodhya have bought and sold land on a large scale to make profits.

'The BJP government not increasing the circle rate for the last seven years is an economic conspiracy against the local people. Due to this, land scams worth billions of rupees have taken place.'

The SP chief further said, 'Here (in Ayodhya), not the 'asthawan' (believers) but the land mafia have bought the land. The people living in Ayodhya-Faizabad and the surrounding areas have not got any benefit from all this.

'Buying land from the poor and farmers at throwaway prices is a kind of land grab. We demand a thorough investigation and review of the 'dhandhli' (discrepancies) and land deals in the name of so-called development in Ayodhya.'

## Sporadic violence reported in Uttarakhand, West Bengal bypolls



New Delhi

Moderate to brisk polling was recorded in 13 assembly constituencies across seven states where bypolls were underway on Wednesday amid sporadic incidents of violence in Uttarakhand and West Bengal.

The electoral exercise, the first since the Lok Sabha polls, will decide the fate of many veterans and some debutantes, including Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu's wife Kamlesh Thakur.

The bypolls are being held against vacancies created either due to deaths or resignation of incumbent members.

Barring Uttarakhand and West Bengal, polling has been peaceful in the rest of the states so far.

In Uttarakhand's Manglaur constituency, four party supporters were injured in a clash between workers of different political parties at a polling booth.

Some reports claimed there was firing at the booth too. However, police denied the reports.

Purported videos of the clash on social media showed Congress candidate and former MLA Qazi Nizamuddin taking a man in bloodstained clothes to the hospital. He accused the BJP of throttling democracy by sowing seeds of hatred.

Another video showed him embracing an injured party worker at the hospital and crying aloud.

Violence erupted at the booth when some people with half their faces covered entered the booth and started stopping people from casting their votes, sources said.

Several Congress leaders, including former chief minister Harish Rawat, Leader of opposition in the state assembly Yashpal Arya and Congress MP from Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh Imran Masood condemned the violence, saying it had never happened in Uttarakhand before.

While 43.88 per cent of the voters exercised their franchise in Manglaur till 1 pm, Badrinath reported 33.08 percent.

The Manglaur bypoll was necessitated by the death of sitting BSP MLA Sarwat Karim Ansari in October last year while the Badrinath seat fell vacant after sitting Congress MLA Rajendra Bhandari resigned and switched to the BJP in March this year.

In West Bengal, violence was reported in Bagdah and Ranaghat Dakshin as the BJP accused TMC activists of assaulting its booth agents and stopping its candidates from visiting some polling stations.

BJP candidates Manoj Kumar Biswas and Binay Kumar Biswas from Ranaghat Dakshin and Badgah respectively claimed they were not allowed to visit some booths. The TMC denied the allegations and dubbed them as "baseless". The BJP has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against these incidents. A voter turnout of 38.28 per cent was recorded till 1 PM in the bypolls to four assembly constituencies in the state. Among the constituencies, Ranaghat Dakshin witnessed the highest turnout at 42.19 per cent, followed by Raiganj at 41.38 per cent, Bagdah at 35.66 per cent and Maniktala at 33.37 per cent.



## Prime Minister receives Russia's highest State Award



Moscow

In a special ceremony in St. Andrew Hall in the Kremlin, President of the Russian Federation, H.E. Mr. Vladimir Putin conferred Russia's highest national award "The Order of St. Andrew the Apostle" on Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for his contribution to fostering India-Russia ties. The award was announced in 2019.

While accepting the award,

Prime Minister dedicated it to the people of India and to the traditional bonds of friendship between India and Russia. He further stated that the recognition illuminates the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between the two countries.

This award was instituted over 300 years ago. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is the first Indian leader to be conferred with this award.

## Prime Minister's visit to Rosatom Pavilion at VDNKh



Moscow

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi accompanied by President H.E. Mr. Vladimir Putin visited the All Russian Exhibition Centre, VDNKh, in Moscow today.

The two leaders toured the Rosatom Pavilion at VDNKh. The Rosatom pavilion, inaugurated in November 2023, is one of the largest exhibitions

on the history of scientific and technological developments. Prime Minister witnessed a photo exhibition dedicated to India-Russia cooperation in the field of civil nuclear energy. Prime Minister was also shown the "Atomic Symphony" – a permanent working model of the VVER-1000 reactor which is the heart of the Kudankulam Nuclear

Power Plant (KKNPP) in India.

At the Pavilion, Prime Minister also interacted with a group of Indian and Russian students. He encouraged them to look at future possibilities in the realm of science and technology which could be harnessed for the benefit of future generations and for the planet.

## In Austria, PM Modi reaffirms that 'this is not time for war'

Vienna

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said he held "fruitful discussions" with Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer during which they discussed in detail the ongoing disputes in the world, including the Ukraine conflict and situation in West Asia, reaffirming that "this is not the time for war".

PM Modi, who arrived here from Moscow after meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday night on a two-day visit - the first by an Indian prime minister in over 40 years, also said India and Austria identified new possibilities to further strengthen bilateral cooperation and prepared a blueprint for cooperation for the coming decade.

"Chancellor Nehammer and I have discussed in detail the ongoing conflicts around the world, whether it is the conflict in Ukraine or the situation in West Asia. I

have said before that this is not a time for war. Problems cannot be solved on the battlefield. The loss of innocent lives, anywhere, is unacceptable," Modi said in a joint press statement along with Chancellor Nehammer after their talks.

He said India and Austria emphasise on dialogue and diplomacy for the earliest possible restoration of peace and stability.

"We are both ready to provide every possible cooperation to achieve this," he said, recalling that the historic Vienna Congress was hosted in the hall where they are standing and that the conference provided direction for peace and stability in Europe.

On his part, Nehammer said India is an influential and credit-worthy country whose role is more than important when it comes to the Russia-Ukraine peace process.

"We had very intensive talks about the Russian

aggression against Ukraine. For me as the Federal Chancellor of Austria, it is particularly important to get to know India's assessment and to understand it and to familiarise India with European concerns and worries," said Nehammer, whose country is an ally of Ukraine.

"Moreover, the conflict in the Middle East was a major topic," he added.

During his talks with Putin, PM Modi told him that a solution to the Ukraine conflict is not possible on the battlefield and peace efforts do not succeed amid bombs and bullets.

Nehammer said as a reliable partner, Austria will be available as a site for dialogue, making use of its unique position as a neutral country, a member of the European Union but not a member of NATO. "As such Austria is willing to act as a bridge builder and to contribute towards the achievement of a peaceful solution," he said.



## Democrats weigh next steps on Biden



### Washington

Democratic US lawmakers huddled behind closed doors on Tuesday amid mounting fears about their prospects in the November 5 election, after President Joe Biden defiantly rejected calls by some in the party to end his campaign.

A half-dozen House of Representatives Democrats have publicly called for the 81-year-old incumbent to step aside and allow someone else to face Republican Donald Trump, and several more have voiced concerns about Biden's chances after a halting debate performance raised fresh questions about his ability to

mount a successful campaign - and to keep up with a gruelling job for another 4-1/2 years.

"He just has to step down. He can't win," US Representative Mike Quigley, one of the six lawmakers who have urged Biden to end his campaign, said on his way into the meeting of Democratic House members on Tuesday. "My colleagues need to recognise that."

But numerous others said they would not abandon their president. "I think he is our best hope to make sure Donald Trump does not get back into office," US Representative Shri Thanedar told reporters.

## Emmanuel Macron refuses French Prime Minister's resignation after chaotic election results

### Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron refused the resignation of the country's prime minister, asking him on Monday to remain temporarily as the head of the government after chaotic election results left the government in limbo.

French voters split the legislature on the left, centre and far-right, leaving no faction even close to the majority needed to form a government. The results from Sunday's vote raised the risk of paralysis for the European Union's second-largest economy.

President Emmanuel Macron gambled that his decision to call snap elections would give France a "moment of clarification," but the outcome showed the opposite, less than three weeks before the start of the Paris Olympics thrusts the country on the international stage.

France's main share index opened with a dip, but quickly



recovered, possibly because markets had feared an outright victory for the far right or the leftist coalition. Prime Minister Gabriel Attal had said he would remain in office if needed but offered his resignation Monday morning. Macron, who named him just seven months ago, immediately asked him to stay on "to ensure the stability of

the country."

Attal on Sunday made clear that he disagreed with Macron's decision to call the surprise elections. The results of two rounds of voting left no obvious path to form a government for either the leftist coalition that came in first, Macron's centrist alliance, or the far right.

## Vatican will prepare a document on the role of women in leadership in Catholic Church

### Vatican City

The Vatican's doctrine office will prepare a document on women in leadership roles in the Catholic Church, in a new initiative to respond to longstanding demands by women to have a greater say in the church's life.

The document will be written by Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith as its contribution to Pope Francis' big church reform process, the Vatican said Tuesday. The process is entering its second main phase with a meeting of bishops in October, known as a synod.

The Vatican announced the details of the doctrinal document shortly after its news conference on the preparatory work for the October meeting, leaving journalists no chance to ask for more details about it.

Cardinal Mario Grech, who is organising the synod, did not mention the

document when asked about the question of female deacons, saying only that the issue had been referred to the doctrine office.

The forthcoming document was instead announced in a list of the members of 10 "study groups" that are looking into some of the thorniest and legally complicated issues that have arisen in the reform process to date, including the role of women and LGBTQ+ Catholics in the life of the church.

Pope Francis called the synod over three years ago as part of his overall efforts to make the church a more welcoming place for marginalised groups, and one where ordinary people would have a greater say. The process, and the two-year canvassing of rank-and-file Catholics that preceded it, sparked both hopes and fears that real change was afoot.

Catholic women do the lion's share of

the church's work in schools and hospitals, and tend to take the lead in passing down the faith to future generations. But they have long complained of second-class status in an institution that reserves the priesthood for men.

Francis has reaffirmed the ban on women priests, but has named several women to high-ranking jobs in the Vatican and encouraged debate on other ways women's voices can be heard. That has included the synod process in which women have had the right to vote on specific proposals — a right previously given only to men. Additionally, during his 11-year pontificate, he responded to demands for ministerial jobs for women by appointing two commissions to study whether women could be ordained deacons. Deacons are ordained ministers but are not priests, though they can perform many of the same functions as priests: preside

at weddings, baptisms and funerals, and preach. They cannot, however, celebrate Mass. The results of the two commissions have never been released and in a recent interview with CBS "60 Minutes," Francis said "no" when asked if women could one day be ordained deacons.

The doctrine office, headed by Francis' close theological adviser Cardinal Victor Manuel Fernandez, will be preparing an "appropriate document" on "theological and canonistic questions around specific ministerial forms" that were raised during the first phase of the synod process last year, the announcement said.

"The in-depth examination of the issues at hand - in particular the question of the necessary participation of women in the life and leadership of the church - has been entrusted to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith," in dialogue with the synod organisers, it said.

# Breaking point

THE revelation that seven police officers of Haryana have sought demotion due to stress-related ailments underscores a profound crisis in the state's law enforcement setup. The applications, detailing struggles with depression, hypertension and other health issues, paint a grim picture of the working conditions of the police personnel. Their plea for relinquishing future claims to seniority and career progression sums up their desperation. The Haryana Police have a sanctioned strength of 70,000 personnel, but there are only around 50,000 cops on duty. This shortfall puts an enormous strain on the force. Cops are expected to perform their duties under tough conditions, conducting investigations, maintaining law and order and fulfilling numerous additional responsibilities. The situation is aggravated by the inadequate pay and the failure to implement the recommended

reforms.

Reports from other states validate this distressing scenario. In Maharashtra, cops have been working extended hours



without adequate rest. In Uttar Pradesh, the police have faced complaints of overwork, with officers reporting burnout and psychological distress. The Indian Police Foundation has highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to address these systemic issues,

emphasising better staffing, improved working conditions and mental health support for personnel.

The cops, who dedicate themselves to public safety, deserve better support, fair compensation and a work environment that safeguards their wellbeing. State governments and police authorities must address these issues promptly. Implementing the Supreme Court's directives and police commissions' recommendations for reforms is essential. The recruitment process must be expedited to relieve the pressure on the staff. Ignoring the cries for help will further demoralise the force. Those whose job is to protect us must be protected from debilitating stress and strain.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

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

*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.*

-Martin Luther King Jr.

## Labour all the way

### UK votes for change as Conservatives suffer rout

BRITAIN's Conservative Party had it coming. A strong anti-incumbency sentiment brought its tumultuous 14-year rule to an end as the Labour Party recorded a thumping victory in the parliamentary elections. Economic woes, political scandals, intra-party discord and glaring lapses in delivering public services prompted angry voters to throw out the Conservatives. Defence minister Grant Shapps, who was among the prominent losers, put it bluntly: 'We've tried the patience of traditional Conservative voters with a propensity to create an endless political soap opera out of internal rivalries and divisions.'

Infighting apart, the ruling party came a cropper on every front in the past five years or so, with Boris



Johnson's tenure as PM (2019-22) being especially disastrous. The parties held at 10 Downing Street during Covid lockdowns shocked the entire nation. Johnson's successor Liz Truss had the ignominy of being the UK's shortest-serving PM. And then came Indian-origin technocrat Rishi Sunak, raising hopes

of a turnaround. However, it soon became evident that too much damage had already been done and it was too late for him to stem the rot.

Sunak has graciously accepted defeat and apologised to his party. While the Conservatives lick their wounds after the rout and go back to the drawing board, Keir Starmer and his

Labour Party have little time to celebrate their landslide triumph. Britain is facing a slew of daunting challenges, and the path to national renewal will be inevitably rocky. The nation's tax burden is set to touch its highest since just after World War II, while the net debt is almost equivalent to the annual economic output. With so many problems at home, the new UK government may struggle to maintain continuity in foreign policy, such as offering unequivocal support to Ukraine in the war against Russia. Even as 28 Indian-origin candidates won, the real point of interest for India is the Free Trade Agreement, which has been in the works for quite some time. Delhi hopes that this pact will be finalised and sealed this year without major hitches.

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## MSP promise unmet

### Punjab undermines moong diversification

THE Punjab Government's failure to procure moong dal this year has left farmers in the lurch, compelling them to sell their produce to private players at rates below the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of Rs 8,555 per quintal. This disheartening pattern has been generally evident since 2022, when CM Bhagwant Mann promised MSP-backed government procurement of the green pulse. His announcement

dominate the market and putting financial strain on farmers. Moong is crucial for Punjab as the state produces only 15 per cent of the pulses it consumes. Its promotion through procurement under MSP and Price Support Scheme would also help the Central Government meet its target of making the country self-sufficient in pulses by 2027. But without government intervention, the cultivators are unlikely to overcome the challenges.

The situation calls for a more reliable procurement scheme to protect farmers' interests and ensure the success of crop diversification initiatives in Punjab. Establishing more purchase centres and accredited warehouses could reduce distress sales by peasants. Introducing a deficiency price payment system could bridge the gap between the market price and MSP. Notably, in

July 2022, Mann had announced that the state would bear the gap of up to Rs 1,000 per quintal for the moong crop sold below MSP. Promoting FPOs (farmer producer organisations) could improve farmers' bargaining power and market access. Targeted interventions are necessary to give the citizens the much-needed nutritious food security.

had led to a record 77 per cent jump in sowing acreage that year. It was touted as a significant step in conserving groundwater and improving soil health through crop diversification. The legume crop is also believed to benefit the soil by fixing its nitrogen level, which is conducive to better paddy yield.

However, the scheme has not materialised, leaving private players to

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi have agreed to 'redouble efforts' through diplomatic and military channels for an early resolution of the remaining issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). It is tempting to regard this declaration as a breakthrough, but the problem is that many such averments have been made in recent years amid the prolonged standoff in eastern Ladakh. The two leaders, who met on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in Kazakhstan, are also apparently in agreement on the need to stabilise and rebuild bilateral relations. Yet again, peace and tranquillity are the buzzwords, but there is little inclination to go beyond the platitudes and make tangible progress on the ground.

The trust deficit is exemplified by the competitive development of border villages. India has reportedly decided

to set up villages or habitations in Arunachal Pradesh 'closer to the LAC' in a bid to match China's efforts. The Chinese have established over 600 'prosperous villages' (Xiaokang) along the LAC to bolster their territorial claims and enhance their military readiness. India's counter is the Vibrant Villages Programme, which was launched last year. The ambitious project aims to cover around 3,000 villages in Arunachal, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Ladakh and

## Learn from tragedies

### Like Naina Devi, ensure safer gatherings

IN the wake of yet another stampede in the country — at Hathras this time, where over 120 lives were tragically lost during a religious congregation — the spotlight falls on the sad fact that we rarely learn from past mistakes. Such tragedies are usually followed by a knee-jerk reaction comprising a patch-up job — thereafter, it's business as usual. Till another tragedy

certain other recommendations made by the committee set up for the purpose then have either not been implemented, or are a work in progress even 16 years down the line.

Meanwhile, Rahul Gandhi's meeting with families of some Hathras victims and his call for timely and substantial compensation highlight two crucial aspects

of leadership in times of crisis — empathy and accountability. Regardless of political affiliations, the demand for a thorough investigation into the lapses by the administration is a necessary step towards ensuring justice and preventing similar mishaps.

The authorities must adopt robust crowd management strategies, including adherence to venue capacity limits, effective emergency response plans, adequate deployment of security and medical personnel and real-time monitoring through CCTV cameras and effective communication channels. We owe it to the victims of stampedes that their deaths are not in vain but rather catalysts for lasting improvements in crowd safety protocols nationwide.



strikes. The urgency of bringing into effect stringent long-term measures and proactive planning to prevent such avoidable disasters is missing in our policies. A case in point is the 2008 Naina Devi temple stampede, in which the lives of 146 devotees were lost due to panic triggered by the rumour of a landslide. It led to some improvements in crowd control, with the implementation of batch-wise movement of pilgrims and enhanced facilities for their comfort and safety. However, all is not hunky-dory as

and troop buildup, the periodic talks at the diplomatic and military levels have often been inconclusive. A summit-level interaction between Prime Minister

## LAC imbroglio

### India-China talks making no headway



Sikkim. The focus on improving road and telecom connectivity, housing and tourism facilities has a larger objective — to encourage more and more villagers to become the eyes and ears of the soldiers in border areas.

Amid this all-out infrastructural push

Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping has remained elusive. As Asia's largest powers, it is in the interests of both countries to engage in dialogue and address the thorny issues, including China's unwillingness to exchange maps of the LAC.



# On road to equity

## Inject capital in free bus rides for women

THE free bus travel scheme for women in non-AC, intra-state buses across Punjab, initiated by the state government in 2021, has significantly empowered women by enhancing their mobility and providing them substantial financial relief. Serving as a lifeline, it enables girls and women to commute to better educational institutes and workplaces and even visit their family members without the burden of travel costs or dependence on others.

The success of the scheme is evident from official data: in April 2021, around 61 lakh women benefited from this scheme every day in the state. By November 2022, this figure had nearly doubled. However, the state-run Pepsu Road Transport Corporation (PRTC) is facing a resource crunch, with the government



owing the PRTC over Rs 250 crore in reimbursement for the free travel provided to women. The delay in clearing these dues has left the PRTC struggling to release salaries and pensions. The government must explore other avenues to address

concerns over the sustainability of this service. A cross-subsidy mechanism is a viable option to mitigate financial losses. By slightly increasing fares for other passengers or introducing additional charges on premium services, the government

can offset the costs of the scheme. Public-private partnerships as part of corporate social responsibility and targeted subsidies could also provide some financial support.

The free bus service has undeniably improved the lives of women in Punjab, enabling greater equity and participation in education, work and family activities. Ensuring the scheme's long-term sustainability is crucial as it is bound to foster socioeconomic growth in the state. Promoting women's empowerment is a crucial developmental objective as they tend to invest more in their children's education, health and nutrition, which, in turn, boosts economic growth. Social capital is recognised as one of the pathways through which empowerment can be achieved.

## France's left turn

### Voters stall the march of the far right

LESS than three weeks before the Paris Olympics, the French snap election has thrown up a fractured verdict. Political instability is the last thing France wanted ahead of the showpiece international event, even as its allies in Europe and beyond are relieved that the far-right's strong bid to wrest power has been thwarted. President Emmanuel Macron might have succeeded in keeping Marine Le Pen's National Rally at bay, but the impressive performance of the leftist New Popular Front (NFP) has weakened his position and that of his centrist alliance. With no group securing a majority, the prospect of an NFP-led minority government or a broad, uneasy coalition is looming large.

A fragmented parliament is likely to undermine France's stature in the European Union. The Euro Zone's second-largest economy is set to witness a struggle to build consensus on a common minimum domestic agenda. The message to Macron is clear: his reforms have not endeared

him to many sections of the electorate. The Left's economic programme envisages public spending of tens of billions of euros, partly financed by taxes on wealth. However, the NFP is expected to be weighed down by the pulls and pressures exerted by its prospective allies.

The silver lining for now is that France has stalled the march of the far right. A country founded on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity has shown the way to the world. The French voter has done well to safeguard the country's democratic credentials. On the geopolitical front, a majority for Le Pen's party would have been a big blow to the West amid the Ukraine war. Possible reduction of France's military support to Kyiv and a softer stance towards Moscow would have made things tougher for the US-led NATO. All that seems to have been averted, but what Paris still needs is a stable government. That would be in the best interests not only of France but also of Europe and the world at large.

## Koo's shutdown

### A lesson in startup realities

KOO, once celebrated as India's alternative to Twitter, is closing down after enduring a 'prolonged funding winter'. Founded by Aprameya Radhakrishna and Mayank Bidawatka, it was envisaged as a platform for Indians to communicate in native languages, challenging Twitter's dominance in the Indian market. Despite a promising start, with 2.1 million daily active users at its peak, Koo's journey has been riddled with challenges.

Launched in 2020, Koo quickly became a symbol of India's push for digital self-reliance. It gained traction during the government's clash with Twitter over content regulation, attracting high-profile users, including government officials and celebrities. The platform's vision of a hyper-local, multilingual social media space resonated with many. However, Koo's close ties with the ruling BJP and subsequent political controversies limited its appeal. The platform faced criticism for becoming a haven for right-wing

discourse, which alienated potential users. Additionally, Koo's heavy reliance on external funding proved problematic. The prolonged funding drought and failed partnership discussions with major Internet companies severely hampered its ability to sustain operations. Despite raising \$30 million in a funding round led by Tiger Global, Koo struggled to maintain its growth trajectory. The platform's technical advantages and user-centric approach were insufficient to draw users in numbers enough to cover the costs of running a social media platform. This, coupled with harsh market conditions, ultimately led to its downfall.

Koo's shutdown serves as a cautionary tale for startups. Its failure highlights the importance of sustainable funding, market adaptability and the difficulty of challenging established players. As Radhakrishna and Bidawatka bid farewell, Koo's story will be remembered as a bold yet sobering chapter in India's digital evolution.



# India Inc demands relief for taxpayers in Budget

New Delhi

The upcoming Union Budget should focus on offering relief to taxpayers, especially in the lower income brackets, to stimulate consumption, industry players suggested.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the full Budget for fiscal 2024-25 on July 23 that will be the first major policy document of the new government.

The industry also urged the finance minister to lower corporate tax, phase out tax exemptions, and broaden tax base to boost economic growth.

“Rationalise and simplify the tax system to improve compliance and promote investment. Consider measures such as reducing corporate tax rates, phasing out tax exemptions, and broadening the tax base to make the tax regime more efficient and equitable,” ASSOCHAM said.

Mayank Gupta, co-founder and COO of Zopper Insurtech, said the Budget was expected to focus on policies to promote economic growth and offer relief especially for the lower income brackets to stimulate consumption.



“From the point of view of insurance, we suggest amending section 80C of the Income Tax Act to permit a greater limit on insurance premium payments, thereby encouraging more individuals to buy insurance products. Additionally, there should also be an allowance of deduction for term life insurance under the new tax regime,” he said.

Rumki Majumdar, economist, Deloitte India, suggested that the government must expand the scope of PLI schemes, especially

for sectors that can create more jobs, such as textiles, handicraft and leather. The schemes must continue in sectors that have seen success, such as electronics, auto and semiconductors, Majumdar added.

Pankaj Sharma, CEO of Religare Finvest, expects measures to reduce financing cost through interest rate subsidy, ease access to credit, especially for new to entrepreneurs and comprehensive tax relief for the MSME sector.

## Nirmala to table record seventh Budget on July 23

New Delhi

The Budget Session of Parliament will commence on July 22 with Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman set to present her seventh straight Budget on July 23.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju announced on Saturday the Budget Session would be held between July 22 and August 12. Sitharaman will surpass the record of presenting six straight Budgets, which she shares with former Prime Minister Morarji Desai. Sitharaman had equalled the late PM's record when she presented the Interim Budget on February 1 this year.

The Union Budget 2024-25 will be the first of the BJP-led NDA government after PM Narendra Modi won a third consecutive term.

An Interim Budget was presented in February in view of the Lok Sabha polls held in April-June in which no changes were introduced in the income tax slabs under both old and new regimes.

The Union Budget will need to be passed by July 31 because the Interim Budget had authorised government spending for four months i.e. from April until July.

“Hon'ble President of India, on the recommendation of Government of India, has approved the proposal for

summoning of both Houses of Parliament for the Budget Session-2024 from July 22 to August 12, 2024, (subject to exigencies of parliamentary business),” the Parliamentary Affairs Minister posted on X.

This will be the first full session of Parliament after the newly elected members took oath in the inaugural session of the 18th Lok Sabha held between June 24 and July 2. In her address to a joint sitting of Parliament, President Droupadi Murmu had asserted the Budget would see “historic” steps, as major social and economic decisions would be its highlights. In the run-up to the Budget presentation, Sitharaman has been meeting with economists, finance and capital market experts, industry bodies and representatives of various organisations for pre-Budget consultations. Sitharaman also met with finance ministers of various states and UTs last month to take suggestions.

All eyes will be on special financial assistance to Andhra Pradesh and Bihar where BJP allies TDP and JD (U) are seeking major aid, if not special category status. The PM would need to keep allies happy as they provided his government the numerical strength after the BJP fell short of a majority on its own.

## Time to push divestment of state-owned banks: SBI report

New Delhi

The government should go ahead with disinvestment of public sector banks (PSBs) as they are in good condition, SBI said in its research report on Monday.

The report also pitched for the consolidation of existing government-owned banks. “As banks are in good condition, the government should take stance on disinvestment of PSBs,” the report titled ‘Prelude to Union Budget 2024-25’ said.

With regard to the privatisation of IDBI Bank, it said the government and Life Insurance Corporation of India are selling an almost 61 per cent stake in the lender.



“They invited bids from buyers in October 2022. In January 2023, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management received several expressions of interest for the IDBI Bank stake on offer. We expect the government to clarify this in the Budget,” it said.

At present, the government owns over 45 per cent stake in IDBI Bank, and LIC has a 49.24 per cent shareholding.

## Tea prices soar as extreme weather slashes output

Mumbai

India's tea prices have been soaring and are expected to stay high as heatwaves and floods during the peak harvesting season slash output in key producing regions.

India's tea production in May plunged more than 30% from a year earlier to 90.92 million kg, its lowest for that month in more than a decade, hurt by excessive heat and scant rainfall. In the last week of June, average tea prices surged to Rs 217.53 per kg, marking 20% increase from a year before.

## Bajaj unveils world's first CNG-powered motorbike

PUNE

Two-wheeler major Bajaj Auto on Friday launched the

and Compressed Natural Gas powertrains.

The CNG motorcycle was unveiled by Rajiv Bajaj, MD of Bajaj Auto, in the presence of Union Minister for Road Transport & Highways, Nitin Gadkari, in Pune.

The CNG tank will be placed under the seat and have a capacity of two kilograms. It will be coupled with a two-litre petrol tank and will have a range of 330 km, the company claimed.

“With Bajaj Freedom, riders can reduce their operational costs by 50 per cent,” Bajaj said.



world's first CNG motorcycle — Freedom 125, in three variants. Starting at Rs 95,000 (ex-showroom), the bike is powered by a 125 CC engine, with the ability to toggle between petrol

# India, UK to hold next round of talks on proposed trade agreement this month

## New Delhi

With the new government taking charge in Britain, senior officials of India and the UK will hold the next round of talks this month for the proposed free trade agreement to resolve the pending issues and close the negotiations, an official said.

The India-UK talks for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) began in January 2022. The 14th round of talks stalled as the two nations stepped into their general election cycles.

The official said the two sides are in touch, and the next round would start this month only.

Britain's newly elected Prime Minister Keir Starmer spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday and said he stood ready to conclude an FTA that worked for both sides.

The two leaders agreed to work towards the early conclusion of a mutually beneficial India-UK FTA.

There are pending issues in both the goods and services sectors.

The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and healthcare in the



UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty.

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

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

The two countries are also negotiating a bilateral investment treaty (BIT).

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

The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to USD 21.34 billion in 2023-24 from 20.36 billion in 2022-23.

The Labour Party's election manifesto for the recent polls also committed to clinching the deal.

The new Starmer-led government's

new Foreign Secretary David Lammy is also on the record saying that he wants to finish the job on the FTA and plans to visit India within the first month of being elected.

According to the think tank GTRI (Global Trade Research Initiative), the agreement is nearly finalised and with a few minor adjustments like curtailing the number of visas for Indian professionals, the Labour Party is likely to give its approval.

It has suggested that India should focus on two issues -- Carbon Border Adjustment Measure (CBAM) and non-traditional subjects like labour, environment, gender, and intellectual property rights -- in the pact.

Historically, India has resisted incorporating these topics into FTAs as they often require domestic policy changes.

The GTRI report has stated that even if the UK agrees to eliminate tariffs on sectors like textiles, Indian exports might still need to meet stringent UK sustainability requirements, and this could adversely affect Indian exports, especially in labour-intensive sectors.

## Average housing prices appreciate nearly 50 per cent in Delhi-NCR, Mumbai region over past 5 years: Anarock

## New Delhi

Average housing prices in Delhi-NCR and Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) have risen by nearly 50 per cent in the last five years, driven by higher demand, according to Anarock.

Real estate consultant Anarock's data show that the average rate of residential properties in Delhi-NCR has risen by 49 per cent to Rs 6,800 per square foot in January-June 2024 from Rs 4,565 per square foot in the same period of the 2019 calendar year.

Similarly, in the MMR, the average housing prices grew 48 per cent to Rs 15,650 per square foot from Rs 10,610 per square foot during the period under review.

Anarock has attributed the rise in prices to steep hikes in construction costs and healthy sales.

Prices in both regions had maintained the status quo from late

2016 to 2019, it pointed out.

"The Covid-19 pandemic was a boon for these two residential markets, causing demand to soar to new heights. Initially, developers induced sales with offers and freebies, but with demand heading north, they gradually increased average prices," Anarock said.

Listed realty firm TARC Ltd MD and CEO Amar Sarin said, "The major rise in housing prices in the NCR region over the past five years reflects a robust demand driven by infrastructural developments and enhanced connectivity. This trend underscores the region's potential for sustainable growth and investment opportunities."

Gurugram-based property brokerage firm VS Realtors (I) Pvt Ltd founder and CEO Vijay Harsh Jha said, "There has been a significant increase in demand for residential properties in NCR

since the pandemic. People are prioritising having more spacious homes."

NCR's status as a major economic hub is also attracting investors in the Delhi-NCR property market, Jha added.

Royal Green Realty Managing Director Yashank Wason said the surge in housing prices in Delhi-NCR is driven by high demand, improved connectivity, infrastructure development and strategic urban planning.

He noted that all major locations in and around Delhi-NCR, including Bahadurgarh, have witnessed a sharp appreciation in housing prices.

Wason said the development of road infrastructure has been one of the major factors for this rise in property prices in Delhi-NCR and adjoining cities.

## Surjewala flays hike in telecom tariff; says move to put additional annual burden of Rs 34,824 crore on common man

## New Delhi

Congress leader Randeep Surjewala has criticised the recent tariff hike by private cellular companies, stating that the move is set to burden the common man with an additional annual expense of Rs 34,824 crore. Surjewala highlighted that from July 3, 2024, Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, and Vodafone Idea, which collectively hold a 91.6% market share, have raised their tariffs by an average of 15 per cent. This hike will affect 109 crore out of the 119 crore cellphone users in the country.

According to Surjewala, the tariff increase reflects the ongoing trend of corporate profiteering under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term, labelling it as "crony capitalism."

He alleged that the Reliance Jio tariffs were raised by 12% to 27%, with an average increase of 20 per cent. The most popular plan, previously priced at Rs 155 per month, has been hiked by 22 Rs to Rs 189 per month.

Bharti Airtel tariffs were increased by 11% to 21%, with an average hike of 16 per cent.

Also Vodafone Idea. The tariffs saw an increase of 10% to 24%, averaging a 16% hike.

He said the increased tariffs mean that Jio users alone will be paying an additional Rs 12,568 crore annually. On an average, Indian cellphone users, who spend Rs 152.55 per month on their bills, will now face significantly higher charges. This hike has sparked concerns about the monopolistic control of the market by a few major players.



# India's mobile data consumption grows four times in past 5 years

## New Delhi

Mobile data consumption per individual in the country has grown four times in the past five years, and has been surging further. From 5 GB per individual per month, five years ago, it is now over 20 GB per individual.

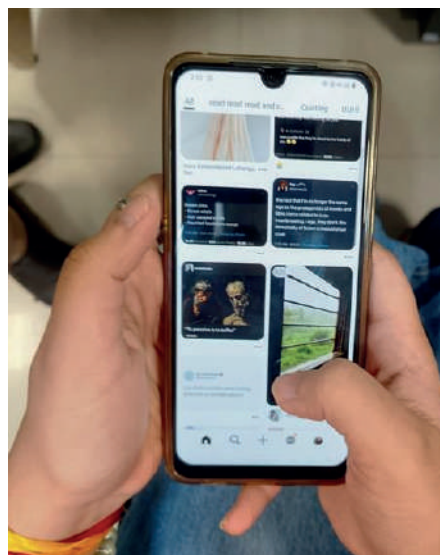
The consumption is largely driven by factors such as proliferation of content, network expansion, affordability of data plan and availability of a wide range of affordable devices. Currently, India has more than 830 million active internet users, with over half of them from rural areas.

"Internet consumption is at an all-time high as against a 5 GB data being consumed five years ago per individual per month, an average mobile user now consumes as much as 20 GB of internet every month," said Abhijit Kishore, COO,

Vodafone Idea in an interaction with The Tribune here. He said the internet was full of contents, including regional, which led to increase in consumption.

Amit Marwah, Nokia India head of marketing and corporate affairs, said: "The data consumption in India has increased 20 per cent year-on-year to 17.4 exabytes per month. It is one of the highest data consumption in the world. On average, an individual subscriber is consuming 24 GB of data per month. This shows the appetite for data consumption in India is too high."

As per industry sources, other factors included the growth of OTT platforms which was aided by the availability of affordable data. Growth of online gaming and live streaming of big events like cricket World Cup, football World Cup and events like Oscars have also boosted data consumption.



The industry insiders said data tariffs in India were the lowest in the world and introduction of per day pre-paid plans

has acted as game changer to boost the consumption as one can buy one GB data for just Rs 22.

Additionally, network expansion and performance, coupled with the availability of a wide range of affordable devices, as well as the introduction of new data-intensive apps and services, and accelerated the data consumption.

The insiders mentioned that a smartphone used to cost Rs 20,000 five years ago. Now, one can have much better smartphone anywhere between Rs 3,000 and Rs 4,000.

For example, there has been a 2.4x increase in annual data traffic on Reliance Jio over the past three years and per capita monthly data usage has increased to 28.7 GB vs 13.3 GB three years ago, as per a report on Reliance Jio's last Quarter Financial Results for 2023-24.

## Vodafone Idea plans to invest over Rs 50,000 cr to boost 4G, 5G rollout

### New Delhi

Country's third-largest telecom operator Vodafone Idea (Vi) plans to invest over Rs 50,000 crore over the next three years to ramp up 4G coverage, enhancing data capacity and 5G rollout. The company has already raised Rs 18,000 crore from follow-on public offer (FPO) and Rs 2,000 crore from promoters.

"We are planning to raise Rs 25,000-30,000 through mix of debt and equity. We are exploring the possibilities and we are hopeful that it would be materialised soon. Since, we have already raised Rs 18,000 crore through FPO and Rs 2,000 crore from promoters, the total investment will be to the tune of over Rs 50,000 crore. The proceeds will be used in strengthening the network capacity and of course 5G rollout," Abhijit Kishore, Vodafone Idea COO, said in an interaction with The Tribune here.

The funding was part of Vi's strategy to compete with telecom rivals Reliance Jio and Airtel by enhancing its 4G coverage and 5G rollout. Already, Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel have deployed pan India 5G networks, but Vi is yet to roll



out its 5G network.

"Our goal is to provide customers with the best network experience by investing in the expansion of 4G coverage and enhancing data capacity. Additionally, as customers demand better choices, we have built a digital ecosystem with our partners to offer a differentiated experience. The Vi App serves as a multi-utility platform, offering games, entertainment, cloud gaming, utility bill payments and more," said Kishore. The mobile player is also considering rolling out 5G on a large scale over the next six months. Kishore emphasised that while 5G rollout was important, the telecom's "topmost priority" was to expand and strengthen 4G coverage. The company shared that it would first focus

on adding L 900 and L 2100 spectrum aimed at enhancing indoor network experiences for telecom users. This deployment of spectrum will improve coverage and connectivity in urban areas with dense building infrastructure, as well as in suburban and rural areas where signal penetration can be difficult. It will enhance voice call quality, support better messaging and improve data browsing (internet) experience indoors. On being asked about the plans for Punjab and Haryana, he said: "We are going to strengthen our network connectivity and experiences in Punjab and Haryana. We will prioritise these circles in the ongoing network enhancement initiatives after successfully raising Rs 18,000 crore in an FPO."

## Discussions around AI regulations ongoing; political consensus required, says Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw



### New Delhi

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Wednesday said discussions on AI regulations are on and a political consensus would be required.

The Minister for IT and Electronics further said all sections of society must fully understand the threats and potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

"...only then we should approach legal action," he told reporters on the sidelines of 'Global India AI Summit'.

Asked about the timelines for India to carve out regulation and guardrails on AI, the minister said while discussions are ongoing, political consensus would be needed.

"Discussions are on... it

requires political consensus," he said.

Speaking at the event, Minister of State for Electronics and IT Jitin Prasada asserted that India stands ready at the forefront of AI innovation.

"As the council chair of Global Partnership on AI, India has been reinforcing its commitment to furthering and democratising AI, and its associated benefits, ethically and responsibly," he said.

Prasada said that India's vision is to "make AI in India" and "make AI work for India".

He called for collaborative efforts to develop solutions for AI to solve problems and challenges in key sectors such as healthcare, agriculture and education.

# The Global Governance of the Energy Transition: Lessons for the Indo-Pacific and Latin America

The countries in the Indo-Pacific region face many challenges, including those related to their energy needs. In a world characterised by disruptive crises, such as the ongoing war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring a secure and steady supply of energy to meet development goals will require concentrated efforts by each country and the international community.

The Indo-Pacific is a vast geographical area that encompasses the Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Ocean, and the seas connecting them, including the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Andaman Sea. The construct has gained increasing importance in recent years amid evolving geopolitical and strategic dynamics in Asia, bringing to the fore a complex multilateral framework concerning trade, investment, infrastructure, and security concerns. Although this geographical and geopolitical construct is relatively new, it is important to acknowledge the importance of governance mechanisms that have been evolving within it, particularly in the energy transition domain and how they can serve as examples for Latin America.

The Indo-Pacific and Latin American regions share certain similarities, synergies, and common interests regarding energy transition, which can be conducive for joint positions in new mechanisms of governance. Although the regional mix of energy supply in the Indo-Pacific remains tilted toward low-efficiency and carbon-intensive options, the region also has lessons for Latin America in terms of building up a governance model anchored in a geopolitical concept that relates to energy transition.

Both regions are home to developing countries with large populations, although Latin America has a smaller one. There is potential for harnessing renewable sources although, at

present, they rely on carbon-intensive economic structures, and a number of countries in both regions are large exporters of carbon-emitting commodities. Both regions have important clean-energy projects but the imperative is to increase investments. Furthermore, the two regions must overcome, among other pressing issues, poverty and unequal income distribution. The green transition could provide both regions with avenues for economic development based on the use of sustainable resources and poverty alleviation. The proper mechanism for financing these transitions requires an institutional setting that bridges the global and domestic realms.

This report addresses some of these obstacles from the perspective of the global/regional governance of the environmental and energy transitions, comparing two regional architectures, the Indo-Pacific and Latin America. It describes the institutional mechanisms where countries of these regions are involved, mainly the G20 and the BRICS, and analyses how a political-strategic regional configuration, such as the Indo-Pacific, may provide lessons for Latin America on the issue of financing energy transition. It defines concepts of governance, discusses the competing political economy of governance mechanisms in which both regions are involved, and delves into the question of bridging the international and domestic gaps in financing energy transition.

Current Global Governance Frameworks

Globalisation has transformed collective action in domestic and international politics, diminishing the space for states to act autonomously. This was the policy consensus during the last decades of the 20th century: the provision of public goods (for instance, a clean atmosphere or the carbon sequestration by tropical

forests) involved the mediation of new actors, both above and below the level of the nation state. Due to structural constraints, such as fiscal crises, national governments in developing countries were not able to carry out policies to tackle environmental externalities derived from carbon dioxide emissions.,,

The concern with public governance influenced debates after the 1980s' liberal reforms that sought to reorganise society and government in accordance with the principles and values of private markets. Governance became a primary concern of

## Part I

the Washington Consensus, a liberal-orthodox policy framework adopted in Latin America. Good governance should address market failures and ensure institutional reforms capable of making markets work better. In this globalised policy context, although local (communities) and international (financial organisations/donor agencies) stakeholders were able to discuss environmental matters and policies, faulty public institutions and debt burdens in Latin America were a hindrance to the continuity of public policies that could tackle the challenges of environmental and energy transitions.

As domestic structural reforms were carried out, several national governments were able to acquire policy expertise to deal with the management of global public goods. Policies toward energy transition and decarbonisation were implemented and institutionalised with the creation of Ministries for Environmental Affairs, for example.,

At the international level, a multipolar order evolved, bringing to the fore discussions on emerging issues, such as global warming, beyond the group of a few highly developed countries. For

example, the G20 and BRICS are actively discussing global challenges, offering alternative forms of governance to global problems that require the mediation of the Global South.

The international landscape has continued to change in the 21st century. Recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing Ukraine War, and the subprime financial crisis, have highlighted the importance of keeping the focus of the policy-building process on the nation state. This, even as new forms of global governance are needed to tackle common threats, such as global warming. But what is 'global governance'?

Global governance is the exercise of authority and the establishment of norms and rules across national borders and beyond the nation state. It encompasses a wide range of institutions and actors, including intergovernmental organisations, transnational networks, and private arrangements that work jointly to address global issues and challenges. It also encompasses a process of international institution-building. Global governance is constantly evolving; it is a contested process, the subject of much debate and analysis in international relations and international political economy theory.

Meanwhile, environmental and energy governance can be defined as the exercise of authority and norms across national borders in the management and regulation of global resources and systems. Again, it includes the role of intergovernmental organisations, transnational networks, and private arrangements in shaping energy and environmental policies and practices. Energy governance also encompasses the contestation and politicisation of these institutions and their legitimacy in addressing global and transnational energy challenges, and discussions on global environmental

damages. While energy governance has clear security and strategic components, especially when dealing with oil or gas extraction, environmental governance has a less obvious geopolitical implication. However, both realms are progressively mixing and are currently closely related, as global environmental threats require improved energy efficiency and the transition to renewable sources.

Criticisms of current frameworks of global governance focus on the lack of legitimacy and transparency, particularly regarding how countries that had already reached a level of economic development would limit the options of developing countries. The recent backlash against globalisation and the spread of populist politics has heightened this contestation of global governance by certain political groups, seen in discussions on trade issues at the World Trade Organization and the phenomenon of climate change denial.

The inclusion of Global South countries in global governance efforts will allow such legitimacy deficits to be overcome. While the creation of new multilateral groups that bring together developing and developed countries to discuss financing the energy transition is not a panacea, it may prove to be a feasible solution to the legitimacy problem and may broaden the interests and positions proposed therein. In this context, the Sustainable Finance in the Indo-Pacific (SUFIP) Development Network is one group that gathers experts and stakeholders from the Indo-Pacific region and Europe as a knowledge bank. SUFIP aims to provide an alternative multilateral governance approach in the energy, infrastructure, and environmental transition.

*To Be Contd.*



# The PGII consolidates Western connectivity initiatives

From 13-15 June, Italy held the 2024 Group of Seven (G7) Leaders' Summit in Apulia, hosting leaders from across the G7 countries, and observer nations such as India, Algeria, South Africa, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Holy See, among others. The Leaders' Summit was held in the backdrop of Russia's escalating offensive in Ukraine, the intensifying United States (US)-China geoeconomic competition and the war in Gaza—issues that the grouping has been grappling with since the 2022 G7 Summit in Germany.

Another global issue that the G7 has taken up is the problem of development finance, infrastructure development, and connectivity. At the 2022 Summit, the G7 partners launched the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), under the leadership of the US, and pledged US\$ 600 billion in private and public sector investments from the G7 countries. Under the aegis of the PGII, the European Commission's Global Gateway, the EU's global connectivity and infrastructure development initiative, pledged US\$ 450 billion as part of the US\$ 600 billion promised by the PGII partners. The Global Gateway was launched in 2021 and consolidated under the PGII in 2022, in Germany. Since then, the two initiatives have built multiple projects across the developing world in the energy, renewables, transport, education and social infrastructure sectors. In 2024, the PGII added to its initiatives, Italy's Mattei Plan for Africa (MPA)—a US\$8.2 billion fund aimed at bolstering economic growth in Africa's education and training, agriculture, health, infrastructure, water, and energy sectors.

At the 2022 Summit, the G7 partners launched the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), under the leadership of the US, and pledged US\$ 600 billion in private and public sector investments from the G7 countries.

This article analyses the consolidation of Western

connectivity initiatives under the G7's consolidated PGII since 2022 and evaluates the current status of its flagship projects launched in 2022 and 2023.

Assessing the PGII's progress  
A consortium of companies and public organisations from

billion. These projects include three intercontinental digital cables in Africa and the South Pacific, being built by US tech giants Google and Microsoft, four MCC projects for renewable energy infrastructure in Africa, and four mega-railway projects

training, agriculture, health, water, infrastructure and energy sectors to bolster economic growth.

The Global Gateway and PGII's geographic reach in Africa is largely limited to Sub-Saharan Africa, omitting the Maghreb

multiple CRM African mines, necessary for the green transition and EV supply chains. China has an edge over the West because of its domestic non-interference, aid-without-reform, and quick finance disbursement policies in addition to its first-mover advantage in the continent.

While the G7 and the Western powers were late to infrastructure diplomacy in the developing world, between 2021 and 2024, the West consolidated its initiatives under the PGII, by promoting green-field and sustainable projects based on good governance principles and global best practices, aimed at benefiting the local economy. These policy directives build on the criticism of China's BRI projects which are mired with corruption, overhead costs, opaque loan terms, and non-disclosure agreements. The West aims to position itself as the preferred development partner in the developing world.

Beijing imports nearly one-third of its oil and gas supply through Africa and has stakes in multiple CRM African mines, necessary for the green transition and EV supply chains.

## Conclusion

However, criticisms abound for the Western connectivity initiatives as well. Critics argue that the West mimics China's investment partnership playbook, establishes corridors for traditional extractivism from Africa to the West and competes rather than complementing the BRI, which negates the developmental impact of projects from both sides, to an extent.

Yet, the G7's PGII initiative has the potential to become a key player in financing developmental projects across the developing world. PGII's emphasis on good governance and sustainability, learning from the BRI's fallacies and massive deployment of private finance positions it as a credible alternative for developing nations. The coming years will reveal how effectively PGII competes with China's BRI for influence in the developing world.



the G7 partners, Africa and Southeast Asia, including the US Export-Import Bank, Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), Microsoft, Google, Blackrock, Global Investment Fund, the World Bank Group, the Africa Green Industrialisation Initiative, Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, Climate Finance Partnership, Africa Finance Corporation, Private Export Funding Corporation, and Standard Chartered Bank have mobilised close to US\$60 billion between 2022 and 2024, to execute over 120 projects across 38 countries in the developing world. These projects also include the Lobito Economic Corridor in Africa, the Luzon Economic Corridor in the Indo-Pacific, the India-Middle East Economic Corridor in Eurasia, the Middle Corridor in Asia and the South-North Africa-Europe corridor proposed by Italy.

Currently, the PGII is undertaking 20 major connectivity (digital and transport) and energy infrastructure projects across 29 countries to the tune of US\$ 16.6

in Angola, Zambia, Kazakhstan, and the DRC.

Complementing these PGII projects, the EU's Global Gateway is building connectivity infrastructure, upgrading roads, laying undersea and terrestrial optic fibre cables and enhancing port infrastructure across 29 countries in Africa. Some of these major projects include—the critical raw minerals supply chain development partnership with Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, the 10,000 kilometres 6-country optic fibre cable with the DRC, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique, and multiple renewable energy projects across 21 countries which will add 15.5GW of renewable energy capacity by 2027. The Global Gateway and PGII's geographic reach in Africa is largely limited to Sub-Saharan Africa, omitting the Maghreb from these investments and partnerships. This is where Italy stepped up in 2024 through its Mattei Plan for Africa, which will infuse investments, loans and equity worth US\$8.2 billion in Africa in the education and

from these investments and partnerships.

The G7's connectivity and energy development outreach hinges on securing energy supplies from Africa and Central Asia as well as securing critical raw minerals from Africa, where China, its geopolitical rival, is already ahead in the development game, through its signature Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Countering China's Belt and Road

In Africa, China's BRI has loaned over US\$ 185 billion and invested close to US\$ 60 billion across critical economic sectors such as gas, oil, renewables, transport, port infrastructure, coal, power, electricity grids, hydroelectric power plants, roads, railways and social infrastructure. China also has wide-ranging Free Trade Agreements with 12 African nations and is the continent's largest trade partner. Africa is also critical to Beijing for its energy security and global value chains. Beijing imports nearly one-third of its oil and gas supply through Africa and has stakes in



# Why Modi's in Moscow

When Modi and Putin sit for dinner in Putin's Moscow dacha tonight, they will chew on a geopolitical and bilateral context that has changed dramatically since they broke roti together in Delhi in 2021. The Ukraine war that began in February 2022 not only delayed their meeting but has also thrown up unprecedented challenges and opportunities.

Both leaders are veterans of the annual bilateral summit, which sits at the apex of a multi-layered diplomatic architecture. Putin has attended most of the 21 summit meetings since 2000, when he signed a strategic partnership agreement with then PM Vajpayee. The adjectives 'special and privileged' were added in 2010 to describe ties, to reassure Russia of its continuing relevance for India in the wake of the Indo-US civil nuclear deal. For Modi, this is the eighth straight summit with Putin. Both leaders realise that given the nature of bureaucratic structures on both sides, their annual meeting is vital for troubleshooting problems and generating fresh thinking. With the gap of three years, several crucial issues have piled up on the high table.

Putin has attended most of the 21 summit meetings since 2000, when he signed a strategic partnership agreement with then PM Vajpayee.

While the 'time-tested' and largely state-driven relationship has robust strategic pillars—defence, nuclear, space—trade had lagged. In 2014, at their first summit meeting, Modi and Putin released a joint statement outlining their vision for strengthening ties over a decade. With trade numbers hovering under USD 10 billion then, they set an ambitious target for 2025 of USD 30 billion of trade and USD 50 billion of bilateral investment. Trade has surged in the last couple of years to more than double the target, achieving an all-time high of around USD 66 billion (with India's imports around USD 62 billion) in fiscal 2024, thanks to imports of discounted petroleum, fertilizers and coal. With this problem of plenty, the leaders will need to discuss ways of fixing the skewed trade balance. They will seek pathways for Russian companies to navigate western sanctions and use local currencies to invest surpluses in India, to try and reach the target of USD 50 billion of bilateral investments, from the current level of USD 33 billion.

The import of discounted petroleum deepens an energy partnership that includes the Kudankulam nuclear park, already supplying 2000 MW of energy, with 4000 MW of reactor capacity in the pipeline. Russia is the only external partner delivering nuclear energy on the ground and will offer more reactors.

The defence relationship remains crucial as India's dependence on Russia for platforms and munitions continues. Despite the steady diversification to other defence partners like US, France, South Korea and Israel, coupled with an ambitious domestic manufacturing program. Russia still offers a competitive



edge in several niches of critical defence technology. It will remain an important partner for a few more decades, given India's purchase of platforms like the S400 air defence system, newer frigates, joint production of Brahmos missiles, a nuclear submarine programme and the requirement of spare parts for older acquisitions.

for a 'legacy factor', they are essential to sustain defence preparedness, to ensure an alternate source for energy and technology, and even to serve as a geopolitical hedge in a world between orders.

Putin met Xi twice in the last two months and, with bilateral trade over USD

geopolitics will not be checked at the door. The world has changed critically since the last summit. Russia is at war, another dangerous conflict is on in Gaza, while Chinese belligerence has not lessened. Putin met Xi twice in the last two months and, with bilateral trade over USD 240 billion, exulted that Russia-China 'no limits' ties were experiencing their 'best period in history.'

For India, the single most critical strategic challenge is China's expansionism at its borders. It will tend to look at all its relationships through that prism. The China factor makes for an additional driver for India's engagement not just with China's strongest global competitor, the US, but also with its closest ally, Russia. Both India and Russia recognise the other's interest in engaging a geopolitical adversary. Russia acknowledges that the US may be a closer partner for India, just as India sees Russia's compulsions in its tight embrace of China. Yet, India would hope that Russian influence would modulate Chinese behaviour.

The endgame of the Ukraine war will no doubt figure in the conversation, particularly in the context of Putin's recent offer of a conditional ceasefire timed to the Swiss-Ukrainian summit which Modi did not attend. Putin has an upper hand in the war and might await Trump in the White House to push through a ceasefire deal on his own terms. And India may be the only major west-friendly democracy that can encourage, if not facilitate, Putin on the path to dialogue.

Modi and Putin have an excellent personal chemistry, growing since their first summit a decade ago. This will fuel their engagement at the start of their



For Delhi, Moscow will remain an important strategic, defence and energy partner. India's historical investments in the Russia relationship do not just make

240 billion, exulted that Russia-China 'no limits' ties were experiencing their 'best period in history.'

Indeed, while the bilateral plate is full,

new terms. The Moscow meetings will be an opportunity to reaffirm faith in this enduring relationship, as Modi 3.0 navigates the complexities of a world in flux.



# A new era in Britain bodes well for India-UK Ties

As was being speculated, the British electorate has spoken decisively in favour of the Labour Party and has booted out the Conservatives after a long 14 year span. Britain will have its fourth prime minister in under two years in Sir Keir Starmer. But if there was one theme of this election, it was a wholesale rejection of the Tories and a strong determination to bring in the opponents – be it the Labour, the Liberal Democrats or even the newly minted Reform UK of Nigel Farage. Labour's vote share may not have expanded in line with its "Tsunami" in Westminster but for the moment it is the Tory drubbing that will continue to resonate. The Conservatives who had long prided on being "the natural party of governance" were unable to get a grip on the economy and on immigration. The internal factionalism of a scandal riven party was just too much for the British voter to stomach.

Labour's vote share may not have expanded in line with its "Tsunami" in Westminster but for the moment it is the Tory drubbing that will continue to resonate.

Despite this dramatic shift in the British domestic political landscape, the foreign policy priorities are unlikely to change. The broad trend of India-UK ties has been unsatisfactory, especially when compared to India's relations with Britain's neighbour France that have been a consistent bright spot in India's foreign policy. Under regular strain from either the Pakistan question or some other legacy issue, the India-UK partnership has remained bogged down by irritants. Under the leadership of Keir Starmer, the Labour Party abandoned its traditional left-wing posture in favour of a more centrist ideology and greater pragmatism. The outcome of the British election, amidst Labour's vows to improve ties with India, is a positive development for the India-UK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed in 2022.

**Crossing the FTA finish line**

The first task for the newly elected Indian and British governments is to get the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, long hijacked by years of tumultuous British politics, back on track. Despite the conclusion of 14 out of 26 chapters, contentious demands on both sides still need addressing. These include a reduction of Indian tariffs on British whiskies and cars, while India seeks lower tariffs on labour-intensive goods such as textiles. These currently face high



competition from British concessions offered to Bangladeshi products based on the latter's Least Developed Country (LDC) status. The good news is that India's desire for a more liberalised British visa regime for its professionals will face lesser pushback under a Labour government, whose politics is not attached to anti-immigration rhetoric.

The investment story is already robust. At least 850 Indian companies have operations in Britain, while the latter is amongst India's top global investors. In recent years, British investments in India have expanded to include critical sectors such as semiconductors and investments to support India's transition to green energy.

The good news is that India's desire for a more liberalised British visa regime for its professionals will face lesser pushback under a Labour government, whose politics is not attached to anti-immigration rhetoric.

The FTA aims to increase bilateral trade with India, while providing impetus to India's ambitions to increase exports on its path to becoming a \$5 trillion economy, and helping Britain's battered economy, which had a trade deficit of £7.3 billion with India in 2023, to get back on its feet.

The negotiations, which commenced in 2022 under a Conservative-led government, have greater chance of now yielding a trade deal through a stable Labour majority in the British Parliament, free from the messiness of coalition politics. In India, despite a return to coalition governance, the BJP's hold on foreign and trade policy is poised to continue given its partners are regional

parties with a greater interest in regional domestic concerns.

**Ramping up security and defence cooperation**

The criticality of the Indo-Pacific region for the UK's commercial and security interests yielded an "Indo-Pacific tilt" articulated in the country's Integrated Review Refresh strategy. The approach aims for greater cooperation with likeminded nations such as India to ensure a stable regional order through maritime and other modes of cooperation. Bridging previous gaps on China with its reference to Beijing as an "epoch defining" challenge, India and Britain's respective memberships of the QUAD and AUKUS have complementary goals of countering Beijing's influence. Yet Labour's mixed signals with regards to its Indo-Pacific approach has resulted in skepticism of Britain's future commitment to the region. This is coupled with pre-existing questions regarding Britain's resources and ability to project influence in both the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic theatres, amidst commitments to NATO. However, with its QUAD partners more focused on the Pacific, Britain has the potential to fill in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) vacuum, where India's strategic interests lie, and where London has at least seven permanent bases. Recognising constraints on both sides and developing realistic ambition is key.

Both countries have also signed an Electric Propulsion Capability Partnership aimed at equipping Indian naval vessels with electric propulsion.

Prospects for collaboration in defence are bright, particularly as India seeks to

diversify its defence suppliers beyond Russia. A number of big-ticket defence deals including the co-production of VSHORAD missiles and fighter jet engines are in the works, accelerated by the 2+2 mechanism and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's London visit early this year. Both countries have also signed an Electric Propulsion Capability Partnership aimed at equipping Indian naval vessels with electric propulsion. Besides traditional security, cyber security is another key area of cooperation. On tech, the two sides have an ongoing "Emerging Tech Exchange Programme" aimed at pioneering R&D in sectors such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Many of these initiatives are poised to continue under a reinvented Labour Party, with its promise of rectifying mistakes committed under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership that indulged in rampant criticism of New Delhi's Kashmir policy. A Starmer-led British government is likely to be more mindful of India's sensitivities and security compulsions. Yet the composition of the new British Parliament, including the number of minority MPs that may continue to harp on the K-word, may pose challenges.

Differences on the Russia-Ukraine war have not resulted in backlash, with both countries preferring to focus on complementarities rather than divergences. With both countries beginning new government tenures and the Roadmap 2030 strategy guiding bilateral ties, moving on with this collaborative attitude and setting aside historical baggage is the need of the hour.

## Ananya Panday's cousin Alanna Panday welcomes her first child



### Mumbai

Ananya Panday's cousin Alanna Panday welcomed her first child with husband Ivor McCray, the couple announced on Monday.

The duo shared a joint Instagram post which featured them holding their baby boy. The post was captioned, 'Our little angel is here.'

Ananya, 25, congratulated the couple as she re-shared the video on her Instagram story with a caption, 'My beautiful baby boy nephew is here.'

They announced the pregnancy in February this year.

Alanna, 28, and McCray, 32, dated for several years before tying the knot in a grand wedding in March 2023 which was attended by several Bollywood celebrities including superstar Shah Rukh

Khan, wife Gauri Khan and singer Kanika Kapoor to name a few.

Alanna is the daughter of Chikki Panday, who is the brother of Ananya's father Chunky Panday. Her mother Deanne Pandey is a coach and an author.

Alanna also has a younger brother Ahaan Panday, who is set to make his acting debut with filmmaker Mohit Suri's upcoming young love story. The film will be produced by Aditya Chopra's Yash Raj Films.

Alanna, who has over 1.6 million followers on Instagram, will make her screen debut in Prime Video India's reality show 'The Tribe'. To be produced by Karan Johar's Dharmatic Entertainment, the show will revolve around the lives of India's top social media influencers.

## Khurrana's bahu presents Sharmajee Ki Beti

If Tahira Kashyap Khurrana still reads the other half of superstar Ayushmann Khurrana, take a break. Once more, this Chandigarh ki beti is basking in the glory very much of her own making. As her debut feature film Sharmajee Ki Beti streams on Amazon Prime Video and opens to favourable responses, she shares her best/worst critic is her family, also her biggest cheerleaders. When Ayushmann, who has been part of the process and despite having read all of her drafts, saw the first edit of the film, smiled, laughed and had tears in his eyes too, she knew, "I am in safe zone."

But if you think being a star wife has made her journey any less arduous, you couldn't be more wrong. For one she doesn't know, what are the qualifications for being a member of the star wives club? Had she taken a piggyback ride on her husband's stardom or opted for the short-cut to success, the film, which she wrote seven years ago, would have been made long ago. And by now, she would have had several feature films to her credit.

Going back in time when she pitched her film, she was inundated by several suggestions; throw in a romantic track, have A-list actors, song sequence and much more. But she stuck to her guns and when



Applause Entertainment came on board, they didn't change a thing. Precisely why her characters remain all so relatable in this slice-of-life film. Indeed, as is with all first-time directors, her story came from a personal experiential space. Not that the film is biographical or a memoir. Rather there are bits and pieces of both herself and her family.

When Sakshi Tanwar as Jyoti talks about how women need not be apologetic about their ambitions, it's not just Tahira talking. Rather it's her observations, especially what she saw in her nuclear family where both her parents worked and divided roles and responsibilities equally. Look at Divya Dutta's character, a woman from Patiala, adjusting to the fast pace of Mumbai. Tahira recalls how she too was blown away by the frantic tempo of Mumbai, where not even one square foot of space is empty and even a dog, cat, a rat and human being can

coexist in the same place! Today, she is very much in sync with this city of dreams. As a dialogue in the film goes.. there is a thin line between dreams and reality, isn't that a rose-tinted view of life? She says, "We all come from our own perspectives, shaped by our experiences. Life is as complex as you make it."

And she would rather take a light-hearted approach to life and cinema too. Thus, while addressing the taboo subject of menstrual cycle, she turns the whole issue around in a humorous fashion. One of her young teenage characters, Swati, yearns for her periods to begin. Through this piquant obsession of Swati, the writer-director in Tahira wanted to break down the hush-hush around menstruation. She shares how there was a huge debate between the stakeholders of the film — whether they should show the blood stain or not. Tahira prevailed.

## Justin Bieber shares unseen photos, videos from Anant Ambani, Radhika Merchant's pre-wedding festivities; poses with couple

Pop star Justin Bieber has shared a series of never-before-seen pictures and videos of his special concert at the high-profile pre-wedding festivities of Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant.

The Canadian singer set the stage on fire with his performance at the couple's sangeet ceremony, which was held here at the Jio Convention Centre on Friday night.

Bieber performed his hit songs, such as 'Baby', 'Peaches', 'Love Yourself' and 'Sorry', at the grand celebration.

The 30-year-old, who returned to Miami soon after he wrapped his stage act, posted photographs and videos from his show on Instagram on Saturday night.

Bieber shared the glimpses of the pictures of his arrival in India, his scintillating performance as well as of the audience members cheering and singing along with him.

In a photo, the two-time Grammy winner was all smiles as he posed with Anant and Radhika. In another, he could be seen sharing a laugh with the other members of the Ambani family—Anant Ambani, Shloka Ambani,



Isha Ambani and Anand Piramal.

The singer also shared a picture in which he could

be seen obliging the chauffeur of his car with a selfie. There were also snaps from his hotel room, pre-show sound-check sessions, and his airplane before he jetted off with his team to the US.

Actor and dancer Jaaved Jafferri's daughter Alavia Jaffrey also shared a video from the celebration night where she can be seen giving a hug to Bieber as he performed. She captioned the video as, '13-year-old self is screaming'.

According to media reports, Bieber, who is expecting his first child with model wife Hailey Bieber, was paid USD 10 million for his performance at the function.

Anant and Radhika's sangeet ceremony was attended by the who's who of the entertainment industry and sports arena, including Salman Khan, Alia Bhatt, Ranbir Kapoor, Ranveer Singh, Deepika Padukone, Arjun Kapoor and Janhvi Kapoor as well as cricket stars MS Dhoni and members of the T20 Cricket World Cup winning team Rohit Sharma, Hardik Pandya and Surya Kumar Yadav.



## Court denies interim relief to man booked for making deepfake videos of Amitabh Bachchan



A court here on Saturday denied interim protection from arrest to the owner of a Uttarakhand-based Ayurveda firm booked for allegedly creating and posting a deepfake video of actor Amitabh Bachchan.

Sessions judge V M Pathade denied interim protection from arrest to Abhijit Patil, who runs an Ayurveda firm in Rishikesh.

Bachchan registered a case with the cyber police in May after coming across several deepfake videos on social media, which showed him promoting products of Patil's company.

The accused had allegedly created and posted obscene deepfake videos of the actor to promote products for sexual health. Fearing arrest, the accused had moved anticipatory bail before a sessions court and sought interim relief till his plea was decided. The police, in its written response to Patil's plea, underlined that persons accused of cyber crimes were under the impression that they would get bail even in cases where they steal the identity of celebrities and actors to make obscene videos.

Special public prosecutor, appearing for police, Iqbal Solkar, submitted that the investigation would be hampered if the accused is granted relief.

The police also argued that the accused had cheated the public and the actor's fans "by creating a deepfake and using obscene

language". The matter has been adjourned for hearing on the pre-arrest bail plea of the accused.

According to the police, they recorded statements from Patil's employees, who revealed that the accused had created the videos and posted them on social media.

A notice was sent to Patil to appear before the cyber police on July 4, but despite coming to the city, he didn't appear before the police, they said.

## 'Mirzapur', 'Masaan' made me want to tell stories that investigate humanity: Shweta Tripathi Sharma

Actor Shweta Tripathi Sharma says she wanted to be a conventional big-screen heroine who would dress up in a yellow salwar-suit and run across a farm, until she became a part of acclaimed films such as "Masaan", "Haraamkhor", and popular web series "Mirzapur".

Shweta said she found "joy" in doing projects that gave her an opportunity to investigate humanity through different characters and stories.

Before she tasted nationwide fame as Gajagami 'Golu' Gupta, her "Mirzapur" character, the 38-year-old had also made a name for herself with acting credits in "Haraamkhor", "The Trip" and "Suite Life of Karan and Kabir".

"It is important to remember why you wanted to act... I wanted to become a heroine wearing a yellow suit and dupatta in a farm because I didn't know that this kind of world

## Zeena Aman dressed as 'a 70+ schoolgirl' reminisces about her youth

Veteran Bollywood star Zeena Aman took a stroll down memory lane, recalling her school days after posting a picture of herself dressed as a '70+ schoolgirl'.

Zeena took to Instagram and shared a picture of herself in a long black cotton dress paired with a white full-sleeve shirt.

The actress completed her look with sunglasses, black socks and Mary Jane heels.

For the caption, Zeena shared an anecdote from her school days.

'A friend of mine likes to joke that a wonderful childhood only sets you up for disappointment later in life. They're being silly, of course, but there is a grain of truth in the statement. If those early years are filled with love, insulated from cruelty, and soaked in camaraderie, the inevitable realities of adulthood can come as a shock!'

The actress added that, despite being separated from her school days by many decades, the memories remain clear.

'Don't we all know someone who was the very best version of themselves in school, and then struggled uncharacteristically later on? I am separated from my schooldays by so many decades, but the memories remain sublime.'

The 72-year-old star reminisced about playing hockey, picking strawberries, and being called to the parlour.



'Playing hockey on tableland (I was usually the goalie), strawberry-picking field trips to Mahabaleshwar, clandestine midnight feasts in our dorm, the thrill of being called to the "parlour" because I had a visitor (usually mummy and uncle Heinz, laden with tuck)... there must have been squabbles and gossip too, but truth be told I can't remember a single slight from those years,' she said.

She praised her school's

routine and discipline.

'St. Joseph's was run by the Daughters of the Cross and they were wonderful, compassionate and firm mentors. Routine and discipline were paramount and this rigour advised my work ethic till date.'

The actress talked about growing innocently wayward in her teens.

'In my teens, when I grew innocently wayward - sneaking out of campus to go to town with my friends and other such antics - they countered in the most delightful way. Instead of punishing me, they gave me more respect and responsibility! It was an invite to rise that I happily accepted.'

Zeena also spoke about making international friends at her school.

'My school friends came from an international milieu. Girls from India, Australia, the Middle East... I've lost touch with them all, but such a diverse crowd taught me so much about respecting differences and finding commonalities.'

She concluded, 'So! Here I am dressed as a 70+ schoolgirl, and asking to hear your defining boarding school memories.'

('Mirzapur') exists, I was interested in acting. Thankfully, when 'Masaan' or 'Haraamkhor' happened to me, I realised that there's a joy in doing these kinds of films.

"When I did those films, I realised this is what I want to do, I want to do cinema that tells stories where the perspective and heart (of a film) is emotions... Investigating humanity through characters and stories, and getting to know and understanding their pain, loss and happiness, but we don't talk about all these emotions (often)," Shweta said in an interview here.

The drama and getting into the skin of her character is a major draw for her.

"You'll have to break stereotypes and it is not easy because people love to put actors in boxes as we don't want to imagine (different things). What's amazing is the casting of Rasika (Dugal) for the role of Beena or Divyendu as

Munna, so this casting is a testament that as actors we should keep trying (to do different things).

"As actors, you have to keep at it no matter what, there are days when you are frustrated and crying, and you feel, 'When will I get that work that I want to do'. But I realised that this journey is long and projects will be coming in, what we have to do is keep trying (to do different things)", she added.

Over the two seasons of the gangster drama, Shweta's Golu has undergone a major arc shift from an intelligent college student, who advocates non-violence, to a woman seeking to avenge the murder of her loved ones.

"I haven't seen a character like this before and this has nothing to do with gender. But someone's graph is such because of the situation and events that have happened in her life. Her dreams are snatched away, she wanted to get into a different direction but now it is survival of the fittest.



# Suryakumar Yadav retains second spot in T20I batting rankings

Dubai

Star batter Suryakumar Yadav stayed put on second position in the latest ICC Men's T20I batting rankings, which also features Ruturaj Gaikwad, who made significant progress following his exploits in the ongoing away series against Zimbabwe.

Suryakumar is placed second with 821 rating points behind Australia's Travis Head, who has 844 rating points.

Phil Salt of England is paced third with 797 points, ahead of Pakistan skipper Babar Azam (755), Mohammad Rizwan (746) and Jos Buttler (716).

Gaikwad has gained 13 places to climb to the seventh spot in the rankings on the back of a stellar 77 not out off 47 balls in a comprehensive 100-run win for India in the second T20I against Zimbabwe.

With most of India's ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024-winning squad rested for the Zimbabwe tour, the five-game series has allowed India's back-up players to showcase their talent, and with the retirement of stalwarts Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja, the upcoming players can make a good case for a regular place in the side.

Apart from Gaikwad, Rinku Singh and Abhishek Sharma also made solid gains among the India batters.

Rinku, who was among the reserves for the T20 World Cup, jumped four places to reach the 39th spot on the back of an attacking 48 not out from 22 balls in the second T20I.

And after a duck in the first game, all-rounder Abhishek smashed a stunning 100 from



just 47 balls in the second game. With this spectacular knock, he entered the rankings for the first time at 75th spot.

Zimbabwe's Brian Bennett gained 25 places to finish at the 96th position courtesy of his two attacking cameos, making 22 off 15 and 26 off nine in the two matches.

In the bowlers' T20I chart, left-arm spinner Axar Patel dropped two places to be the lone Indian in top-10 at the ninth position with 644 rating points.

Fellow left-arm spinner Kuldeep Yadav also dropped three places to the 11th spot, while T20 World Cup's player-of-the-tournament Jasprit Bumrah also slid two rungs to 14th position.

Besides, there were some movements in the top 10 positions of the bowling rankings, with Adam Zampa

(7th), Fazalhaq Farooqi (8th), and Maheesh Theekshana (10th) gaining positions.

India's Ravi Bishnoi, with his six scalps in the first two games against Zimbabwe, jumped eight places to move to the 14th spot.

Blessing Muzarabani also gained eight positions after the first two matches, up to 55th, with his spell of 1/17 instrumental in Zimbabwe winning the first T20I.

India vice-captain Hardik Pandya, meanwhile, dropped a place to the second position in the T20I all-rounders' rankings.

Wanindu Hasaranga of Sri Lanka moved to pole position.

India's Washington Sundar entered the top 50 on the back of his quickfire 27 in the first game, as well as his three wickets in two outings.

Axar is placed 12th in the all-rounders' rankings.

# Wishes pour in for Sunil Gavaskar on 75th birthday

New Delhi

As Sunil Gavaskar touched another significant milestone in his life, turning 75 on Wednesday, there was an outpouring of good wishes for him on social media where his legendary exploits with the bat were recalled with reverence.

Considered one of the greatest batters to have played the game, the Mumbaikar was the first to reach the 10,000-run mark in Test cricket.

'Happy Birthday, Sunil Gavaskar! Your batting technique was so perfect that you could play aggressively and defensively with equal ease. Best wishes for everything and have a wonderful year ahead!' wrote BCCI secretary Jay Shah on X.

Gavaskar became a widely-respected commentator after the end of his illustrious cricketing career, narrating the nuances of the sport and giving his critical analysis one series after another through his syndicated columns and TV appearances.

Congratulating Gavaskar on the milestone, IPL side Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) said the batting great set the platform for India's success on the international stage.

'The Little Master turns 75 today. Wishing Sunil Gavaskar, the man who paved the way for Team India's batting revolution, a very happy birthday,' wrote RCB on X.

Gavaskar, who faced the most fearsome bowlers in the world but shunned the helmet,



preferring to play with a padded floppy hat instead.

He was given an apt tribute by IPL franchise Delhi Capitals, which said on its social media post, 'We tip our Hats to you, Legend. Happy Birthday to the man who brought Sunny Days to Indian Cricket.'

Former India pace bowler Munaf Patel wished Gavaskar many more years of health.

'Happy Birthday Suni (sic) Sir. Wishing you a healthy life ahead,' wrote Munaf.

Born in 1949, Gavaskar had a trial by fire on debut when he faced the fearsome West Indies bowlers in 1971.

He played his last Test against Pakistan in 1987 and was a member of 'Kapil's Devils' squad which lifted the 1983 World Cup trophy in England, defeating a star-studded West Indies in the final.

# Gautam Gambhir yet to ink salary deal, first big 'Test' would be 'Down Under'

New Delhi

The financial nitty-gritties of Gautam Gambhir's appointment as India's head coach are yet to be worked out but that's the "last of his concerns" right now as he is focussed on getting a support staff of choice to prepare for the enormous challenges that await him during the three-year stint.

On Tuesday, BCCI secretary Jay Shah officially announced Gambhir's appointment, which was on cards for a long time. However, it is learnt that his salary is yet to be finalised although it is expected to be in the same bracket as that of his predecessors Rahul Dravid and Ravi Shastri.

"For Gautam, it was important that he took charge and salary and other stuff can be worked out as it's not going anywhere. It is similar to the case of Ravi Shastri in 2014 when he was first made Director of Cricket over head coach Duncan Fletcher," a BCCI source told PTI.

"The day Ravi joined, he didn't even have a contract and things worked out. In case of Gautam also, some finer details are being worked out. The salary will be in the same range of Rahul Dravid," he added.

It is understood that Gambhir will be given his own team to work with, who will also closely co-ordinate with the NCA (National Cricket Academy) coaches, who look

after the pathways teams (India A and U-19) as well as the targeted players.

"I look forward to working closely with the BCCI, Head of Cricket – Mr VVS Laxman, the support staff, and, most importantly, the players, as we work towards achieving success in the upcoming tournaments," Gambhir had said.

Laxman is currently in Zimbabwe with the young T20 team, but it is expected that once he is back, the NCA head, along with the new head coach and chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar, the two captains Rohit Sharma and Hardik Pandya will have a discussion on the road ahead.



## Fab 4 for Pooja Vastrakar, India win

Chennai

Pacer Pooja Vastrakar ran riot with a career-best bowling show of 4/13 before Smriti Mandhana shone with the bat with an unbeaten half-century as India thrashed South Africa by 10 wickets in the third and final women's T20 International to level the series 1-1 here today.

Left-arm spinner Radha Yadav (3/6) also chipped in with a fine performance of from her three overs to help India shoot South Africa out for a mere 84 in 17.1 overs after opting to bowl.

India easily chased down the small target of 85 with 55 balls to spare and without losing a wicket with opening batters Mandhana and Shafali Verma remaining not out on 54 and 27, respectively.

Mandhana hit the winning runs — a six off Nadine de Klerk

— as India reached 88/0 in 10.5 overs. This was India's biggest victory over South Africa in this format, both in terms of wickets (10) and balls to spare (55).

Mandhana, who was at her magnificent best towards the end of the run chase, hit a six in the 10th over and followed it up with two fours and a sixer in the next to end the contest quickly. This was her 24th T20I half-century.

The opening duo played smart cricket, managing 40 for no loss at the end of the powerplay, with the visitors using five different bowlers in this phase but without any success Mandhana and Verma later went for the big shots to end the contest quickly. In all, Mandhana struck eight fours and two sixes from the 40 balls she faced while Verma scored three fours from 25 balls.

## James Anderson keen to finish on a high

London

It doesn't matter if James Anderson takes a bunch of West Indies wickets for England in the first Test at Lord's starting tomorrow.

The series opener will be Anderson's 188th and last Test and he will transition into England's fast-bowling mentor.

He was pensioned off by England managing director Rob Key, coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes. They met him at a Manchester hotel in April to say he wasn't in their plans for the 2025-26 Ashes in Australia.

This was a month after Anderson returned from India, where he took 10 wickets at an average of 33.50. That series was lost 1-4 but on the last morning of the last Test in Dharamsala, Anderson became the first seamer in history to take 700 wickets.

He spoke then of being in the best shape, liking where his game



was at, and being really excited for this summer, when he will turn 42 at the end of this month.

This week, he said he was surprised at how calmly he took the news from Key, McCullum and Stokes. He understood their decision, adding, "I've sort of made peace with that."

Anderson warmed up for his

last Test by showing his class last week in his first English County appearance for Lancashire. He took 7/35, the best figures in the championship.

His 21-year Test career comes full circle at Lord's, where he made his Test debut in 2003 against Zimbabwe.

## Novak Djokovic gets into it with Wimbledon fans after reaching quarterfinals

London

Maybe the Centre Court spectators were saluting Novak Djokovic's opponent by saying his name. Maybe they were booing Djokovic, trying to rattle him. The 24-time Grand Slam champion was sure it was the latter — and he let everyone know he was not happy about it.

Djokovic easily beat 15th-seeded Holger Rune 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 in just over two hours Monday night to reach the Wimbledon quarterfinals, then made sure to get a message across to those fans he thought were against him.

Rune's supporters at various tournaments often will stretch out his last name, saying, "Ruuuuuune!" — which sounds rather similar to "Boooooo!" — and that happened again Monday.

During his on-court postmatch interview, Djokovic spoke briefly about the match, but then veered into a discussion about the people in the stands.

"To all the fans that have respect and that stayed here tonight: Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart. I appreciate it. And to all those people that have chosen to disrespect the player — in this case, me — have a gooooooood night. Goooooood night. Goooooood night. Very gooooooood night," he said, stretching out the "Os" in "good" so they sounded like



"boo."

The interviewer tried to dissuade Djokovic from thinking anyone was trying to taunt him.

"They were. They were. They were. I don't accept it. I know they were cheering for Rune. But that's an excuse to also boo," Djokovic said.

"Listen, I've been on the tour for more than 20 years. So trust me, I know all the tricks. I know how it works. It's fine. It's fine. It's OK. I focus on the respectful people, that have respect, that paid (for)

a ticket to watch tonight — and love tennis. And love tennis. And appreciate the players and the effort that the players put in here."

At his news conference later, Djokovic was asked whether he thinks the All England Club should do something to curb rowdy fan behaviour.

"Look, I don't know what Wimbledon can really do about it. I mean, in those particular moments when it happens, the crowd paid their tickets. They have the right to be there and cheer the way they

want to cheer. That's absolutely something they choose — how they behave or how they choose to support the player is really up to them," Djokovic responded.

"Yes, you could argue maybe a chair umpire or whoever can step in in certain moments and calm them down, but there's not much you can do. You're not going to take out the whole section of the crowd or stadium because they're misbehaving or showing disrespect."

Rune — who got off to a terrible start in the match, dropping the first 12 points — didn't make much of it all.

"If you don't know what was happening, probably it sounded like boo," he said.

"He was just better than me today," Rune said. "Whether the crowd was this or that, I think it was great support for both players, to be honest."

When the match ended, Djokovic gestured as if he were playing a violin, maybe mockingly indicating he felt bad for anyone in the arena that he had saddened by winning and getting to the quarterfinals at the All England Club for the 15th time.

He has won the championship at Wimbledon seven times and was the runner-up to Carlos Alcaraz last year.

"I played in much more hostile environments, trust me," Djokovic said. "You guys can't touch me."



# Two-time medallist Sindhu named flag bearer

## Set for 5th Games, Kamal feels best yet to come



### New Delhi

London Olympics bronze medallist shooter Gagan Narang today replaced Mary Kom as India's Chef-de-Mission for the Paris Olympics where ace shuttler PV Sindhu will be the female flag bearer during the opening ceremony.

London Olympics medallist Gagan Narang has replaced MC Mary Kom as India's Chef-de-Mission for the Paris Games. File Indian Olympic Association (IOA) president PT Usha said the 41-year-old Narang's elevation from deputy CDM's position was an automatic choice in the wake of Mary Kom's resignation.

"I was looking for an Olympic

medallist to lead our contingent and my young colleague is an apt replacement for Mary Kom," PT Usha said in a press release.

Six-time world champion Mary Kom had resigned from the position in April, saying she was left with no choice but to step down owing to compelling personal reasons. She was named CDM by the IOA in March this year.

Chef-de-Mission is an important administrative post responsible for ensuring the welfare of the participating athletes, taking care of their needs and liaising with the organising committee.

Interestingly, Narang was

tasked with overseeing India's operations at the shooting range, which is very far from the main venues. India will field its largest-ever shooting contingent with as many as 21 qualifying for the Games. Now that Narang has been selected for CDM's role, the IOA will have to find his replacement at the shooting range.

IOA also announced that Sindhu, India's only woman athlete to win back-to-back Olympics medals, will be the flag bearer of the Indian contingent during the opening ceremony on July 26, alongside ace table tennis player Achanta Sharath Kamal.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC), in 2020, had changed its protocol to allow one female and one male athlete of each NOC to bear the flag jointly during the opening ceremony of the Summer Games.

Mary Kom and former hockey skipper Manpreet Singh were the flag bearers at the Tokyo Olympics.

More than 100 athletes have qualified for the Paris Games, starting July 26. "I am confident that our athletes are well prepared to deliver the best results for India," Usha said.



### Chennai

Set for his fifth Olympics appearance in Paris, Indian flag bearer Achanta Sharath Kamal believes his "best is yet to come". The 41-year-old turned the clock back to win three gold medals, including one in men's singles, at the Commonwealth Games in 2022. He returned empty-handed at last year's Asian Games, but helped the men's team clinch a historic Paris Olympics quota via world rankings following their last-16 finish at the World Table Tennis Championships in February.

"I am happy that I'm scaling new heights with each passing

year, besides improving both physically and mentally. I hope the best is yet to come," the top-ranked Indian said.

"To highlight one particular achievement from my career would not do justice to my other achievements. The Asian Games bronze (Jakarta 2018) and Commonwealth Games gold are two of the highs of my career," said Sharath, who boasts of 13 CWG medals in his cabinet. "I'm pretty sure I haven't left any stone unturned. I have done everything possible from my side, and I hope the results will follow," added Sharath, who has climbed from being world No. 88 to 34 in ITTF rankings.

## Rohit Sharma pens heartfelt note for 'work wife' Rahul Dravid: 'My confidant, my coach and my friend'

### Mumbai

As Rahul Dravid bids farewell to Team India with a glorious T20 World Cup triumph last month, skipper Rohit Sharma penned a heartfelt note for him on Tuesday, "to properly express his feelings".

Taking to Instagram, Rohit described how he adored Dravid since childhood days and looked up to the 'stalwart' of the game. He also called Dravid his "confidant, coach and friend".

"Since my childhood days I have looked up to you just like billions of others but I was lucky enough to get to work with you this closely", said Rohit.

"You are an absolute stalwart of this game but you left all of your accolades and achievements at the door and walked

in as our coach and came on a level where we all felt comfortable enough to say just about anything to you. That is your gift, your humility and your love for this game even after all this time," said the 'Hitman', in what he termed as an attempt to express his feelings to 'The Wall'.

he India skipper further revealed that his wife referred Dravid as "work wife" to him.

"I have learnt so much from you and every memory will be cherished. My wife refers to you as my work wife and I'm lucky to get to call you that too", Rohit said in the post.

Talking about the T20 World Cup glory, Rohit said, "This was the only



thing missing from your arsenal and I'm so happy that we got to achieve it together."

"Rahul bhai it has been an absolute privilege to get to call you my confidant, my coach and my friend", concluded Rohit.

Dravid had recently said that during his tenure as head coach, he abhorred chopping and changing the side too much and always tried to be a foil for skipper Rohit Sharma so that he could devise his own winning strategies.

Dravid also said had he not received a phone call from Rohit Sharma, requesting him to continue after the ODI World Cup final defeat against Australia, he wouldn't have been a part of history.