



THE SUNDAY STANDARD

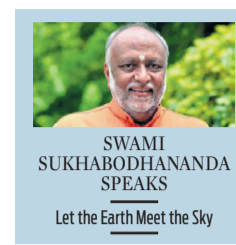


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EXCLUSIVE VOICES

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**KHALISTANI
RADICALS SECURITY
THREAT: CANADA**
The Canadian Security Intelligence Service has flagged Khalistani extremists operating out of Canada as an ongoing national security threat, adding their activities continue to promote a violent agenda | P7

Rare full Falta repoll fiat

Major ECI crackdown after reports of violence following threats by TMC goons to voters

SUBHENDU MAITI @ Kolkata

IN an extraordinary move, the Election Commission (EC) late on Saturday ordered 'fresh' repolling in all 285 polling stations of the Falta assembly seat in West Bengal's South 24 Parganas district on May 21 due to "subversion of democratic process" and "severe electoral offences". Re-election in an entire assembly seat has not been ordered in the recent past.

The fresh poll will take place on Thursday, May 21 and the counting of votes will happen on Sunday, May 24.

The Commission invoked its constitutional powers under Article 324 to annul the earlier polling on April 29, citing serious irregularities that compromised the integrity of the electoral process in a large number of booths.

Earlier in the day, Falta was in the thick of things as it recorded tense moments leading to protests from a large section of voters who staged a protest for over seven hours, alleging they were receiving life threats from TMC workers in the area.

Considering the situation in Falta, the ECI directed registering of FIRs against Israfil Chowkidar, gram panchayat pradhan at Hasimnagar and an associate of Jahangir Khan, Trinamool candidate from Falta, and another TMC worker Sujaudin Sheikh, to restore confidence among voters. Jahangir is a close lieutenant of Abhishek Banerjee, TMC national general secretary and Diamond Harbour MP.

The protesters, many of them women and holding BJP flags, blocked the road in Hasimnagar village. "TMC's Israfil Chowkidar has threatened us that if these people win, they will burn our houses and indulge in bloodshed," they claimed.

The CRPF deputy commandant assured the demonstrators of ensuring their safety. Khan dismissed the allegations and said the women were "deployed" by the BJP. "If the charges are proved, I am ready to face the law," he said.

On Friday, the EC had ordered re-election in 15 polling stations of two Assembly seats in West Bengal — Diamond Harbour and Magarhat Paschim. P8

**Re-poll:
87% voter
turnout**

Repolling in 15 booths of two assembly constituencies in Bengal's South 24-Parganas district concluded at 6 pm on Saturday, with around 87 per cent turnout recorded an hour before the close of voting, an official said. A voter turnout of 86.90 per cent was recorded till 5 pm, with the figure from one booth still awaited, he said.

**Mamata
bullish of
good show**

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee and TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Saturday told counting agents of the party that it will secure over 200 of the 294 assembly seats. The agents were asked to apprise them about the situation at all counting centres.



Local residents stage a protest in Falta, South 24-Parganas, on Saturday after being allegedly threatened and assaulted by a TMC leader | P11

No SC order on TMC appeal over counting

SUCHITRA KALYAN MOHANTY @ New Delhi

A special bench of the Supreme Court on Saturday refused to pass any order on a Trinamool Congress plea challenging the decision of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to appoint only Central government employees and PSU staff as counting day supervisors in West Bengal.

A two-judge bench of justices P S Narasimha and Joyymalya Bagchi observed that the ECI has the liberty to choose the counting personnel it wants to deploy. Besides, the ECI's April 13 circular provides for deployment of state government employees as well, so it cannot be said to be incor-

rect, the court reasoned.

For its part, the ECI assured that the state's nominee will be present during counting.

"No further orders are necessary in this case except to record the statement of Dama Seshadri Naidu that the Election Commission will implement the circular dated 13th April, 2026 in true letter and spirit," the bench said.

The TMC filed the appeal after the Calcutta High Court upheld the ECI's discretion in appointing Central government employees for counting.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for TMC, questioned both the timing and basis of the decision, arguing that the circular was not communicated to stakeholders until April 29.

2 FIRs registered against Pathak, says Punjab BJP

HARPREET BAJWA @ Chandigarh

THE Punjab BJP has alleged that two FIRs on non-bailable offences have been registered by the state police against Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak, who recently switched sides from AAP Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar said on Saturday the action was meant to divert attention from CM Bhagwant Mann's alleged drunk behaviour in the Assembly and smacked of vendetta.

Punjab DGP Garav Yadav and other senior officials have not responded to the development, despite repeated attempts to reach them. Punjab AAP leaders have also not commented on the issue.

Jakhar, however, alleged that individuals who were earlier praised by the AAP leaders are now being targeted by the AAP government after they joined the BJP. He claimed that while BJP MPs are being harassed, the state govern-

ment has extended police protection to its own MLAs who are facing corruption charges. He said that the BJP will raise the matter with Governor Gulab Chand Kataria.

Jakhar said the BJP will oppose any form of "political vendetta", while state BJP working president Ashwani Sharma said the AAP leadership was running scared. "The fear that Bhagwant Mann and Arvind Kejriwal feel has come to the fore. As soon as Sandeep Pathak left AAP and joined the BJP, FIRs were registered against him in Punjab. This clearly indicates that Kejriwal and Mann are using the police as a political weapon," Sharma said.

Security was stepped up outside the Delhi residence of Pathak. In a video on social media he was seen leaving in his car from his Pandara Park residence. A Delhi Police team was stationed at Pathak's residence.



Delhi Police and other security personnel stand guard outside Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak's residence in New Delhi on Saturday | PARVEEN NEGI

PRASOON JOSHI NAMED PRASAR BHARATI CHIEF

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

LYRICIST and poet Prasoon Joshi has been appointed as the chairman of the Prasar Bharati, the I&B ministry said on Saturday. The post was vacant since retired bureaucrat Navneet Kumar Sehgal resigned in December. Joshi is a creative professional with his contributions spanning across literature, advertising, cinema and public communication.

I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said, "My heartfelt congratulations to Prasoon Joshi on his appointment as Chairman of the Prasar Bharati Board. Prasoos ji is a rare creative spirit celebrated across the world in advertising, literature, art and cinema, yet his heart beats unmistakably for India. His words



carry the fragrance of our soil and his vision reflects the timeless essence of our culture. Under his stewardship, Prasar Bharati will find renewed energy, deeper purpose and a fresh creative voice."

Earlier, Joshi was Chairperson of the Central Board of Film Certification, CEO of McCann World Group India and chairman of McCann World Group Asia Pacific. He is also one of the trustees of Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts since 2016.

₹9 crore compensation awarded to family in Kozhikode accident case

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Kozhikode

THE Kozhikode Motor Accidents Claims Tribunal (MACT) has awarded a compensation of ₹9,01,67,500 to the family of an expatriate killed in a road accident. Delivered by Principal Judge K Rakesh on April 25, the verdict directs the New India Assurance Company to pay the sum, marking one of the highest compensation amounts ever granted by a tribunal in Kerala.

The victim, Shijin, from Thiruvangoor, was employed as a senior operator for Abu Dhabi Polymers in the UAE. The incident occurred on March 28, 2023, at Malikkadavu, Kozhikode, while Shijin was home on leave. He was travelling on his motorcycle around 1 am when he was hit by a lorry that was reportedly

being driven in a rash and negligent manner. Though he was rushed to Kozhikode Medical College Hospital, his life could not be saved.

The compensation petition was filed by Shijin's wife, Nikhila Karunakaran, their two children, Ishan and Parthiv, and his mother, Radha. In determining the historic settlement, the tribunal factored in Shijin's high overseas salary, his age at the time of death, and the financial dependency of his young family.

Legal experts said that the court considered the loss of international allowances, such as educational support for his children and free accommodation provided by his employer in Abu Dhabi.

Shijin's family's advocate Ramesh Babu said, "The family of the victim deserves the compensation."

Army launches sovereign swarm capability push, seeks design partner

JAVARIA RANA @ New Delhi

THE Indian Army is looking to build its own sovereign swarm warfare capability and has begun search for a joint development partner to develop an indigenous swarm algorithm that could eventually provide it with a unified command and control framework for networked drone operations.

Top sources told this paper that the Army has invited bids for the project and will hold a pre-bid meeting in the second week of May. "This is far bigger than simply acquiring another swarm capability," a source said. "What the Army is trying to do is build a common architecture of its own, so swarm operations are no longer tied to individual vendors or proprietary systems."

The project comes at a time

Indigenous control

The stress on indigenous control comes amid persistent security concerns over Chinese components in drone systems after past vulnerability scares triggered tighter scrutiny of military drone supply chains

when contemporary conflicts have underscored the operational value of networked drone swarms across surveillance, logistics, payload delivery and adaptive combat roles.

The project is structured in two phases over six months, beginning with an initial two-month stage focused on developing an indigenous ground control station and software integration framework.

"The focus is on creating a secure common control layer

over existing drone assets, with fully offline capability built in from the outset," the source said.

The second phase, spanning four months, expands the model from centralised control to decentralised swarm autonomy, with onboard computing, indigenous software stacks and greater battlefield resilience.

"The objective is to test whether these prototypes can continue functioning in tougher, more realistic operational conditions, rather than only in controlled environments," the source said.

It will test adaptive formations, task reassignment, collision avoidance and the swarm's ability to sustain operations even when communications are disrupted, drones are lost or navigation systems come under strain.

IPL FINAL

Bengaluru's turn per protocol but BCCI yet to finalise venue

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

IN March 2026, the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) had said that Bengaluru would host the final and a playoff match of this year's edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL). However, with the schedule for the play-off and final yet to be announced, Devajit Saikia, board secretary, refused to confirm whether Bengaluru retains the right to host the final as defending

champions.

"We are working on which can be the appropriate venue for the IPL playoff and the final," he told reporters on the sidelines of the Indian squad announcement for the women's T20 World Cup. "You keep on guessing, but I am not going to give a reply. We are taking a call in two days."

Usually, the defending champions host the final and a play-off game. That practice, however, was not followed in 2025 when the final was moved from



Kolkata to Ahmedabad (the BCCI had cited the threat of rain) and the Royal Challengers Bengaluru won the title. It remains to be seen whether the board allots one of the year's marquee clashes to Ahmeda-

bad this year as well.

Action against RR

Meanwhile, days after Rajasthan Royals captain Riyan Parag was fined 25 per cent of his match fee for vaping in the dressing room, Saikia confirmed that the board is exploring options to take stringent action against the franchise. "We are exploring some other options on how to rein in the teams which are violating the norms," he said. "We will be taking some action. We are

looking at the various terms and conditions and protocols of IPL on how the teams should behave. It is not only the players or the officials. As a team, they have to maintain certain decorum so that the image of IPL is never adversely affected. To ensure that, we have to take a call and we will be taking some action," he said. Parag, who was caught vaping in the dressing room during the match against Punjab Kings in New Chandigarh, had also accumulated one Demerit Point.