

Meghalaya Police arrests two persons in MP in connection with Raja Raghuvanshi murder case

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**
SHILLONG/INDORE: A special investigation team (SIT) of the Meghalaya Police arrested two persons in Madhya Pradesh in connection with the murder of Indore businessman Raja Raghuvanshi, a senior officer said.

With the fresh apprehensions, the total number of people arrested in the case rose to seven.

The SIT on Saturday night arrested a property dealer for concealing a box belonging to Raghuvanshi's wife Sonam, who hid it in a flat in Indore after the murder last month.

"Meghalaya Police SIT arrested one Silome James from Bhonrasa toll-gate in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh while he was trying to flee to Bhopal around 7.30 pm on Saturday. He is a

property dealer and lessee of a building at Heera Bagh Colony in Indore where Sonam had stayed and kept the jewellery and other items she took with her after the incident," East Khasi Hills district SP Vivek Syiem told PTI.

Later, the SIT nabbed a security guard, identified as Balla Ahirwar, from his native village in Ashok Nagar district of Madhya Pradesh around 2 am on Sunday. He was posted at the property.

The two will be produced before a court in Indore, seeking a transit remand for being taken to Shillong for further investigation, he added.

The box is believed to have contained key evidence linked to the murder, according to sources.

The arrested property deal-

er led the SIT to the place where he had disposed of all the items of the box by burning, the officer said.

A member of the SIT said that Sonam's boyfriend Raj Kushwaha owned a firearm and this was kept at the property along with jewellery and a laptop.

At the site where James had burnt the box, there were no signs of the pistol, laptop or any of the jewellery belonging to Raja, he said, adding that a forensic team had also visited the spot and collected all available evidence.

The flat was rented out to murder co-acused Vishal Chauhan by James, who runs a property management firm in Indore, they said.

On June 13, James told reporters that Chauhan approached him on May 30 and rented the flat for Rs

17,000 per month, signing a formal agreement.

However, when the Meghalaya Police later searched the flat, it was found vacant, as per the sources.

Sonam stayed in the flat for several days on return from Meghalaya, before eventually surrendering to police in UP on June 8, the sources said.

Indore-based transport businessman Raghuvanshi married Sonam on May 11 in Indore and the couple left for their honeymoon in Meghalaya on May 20.

Raghuvanshi went missing on May 23 and his mutilated body was recovered on June 2 from a deep gorge near a waterfall in the Sohra area of East Khasi Hills district.

Raja was hacked to death by three men using two machetes near a secluded

parking lot close to the famous Weisawdong falls in Sohra on May 23, the day the couple was reported missing.

Sonam, accused of conspiring with her alleged lover to kill her husband, surrendered on June 8 before the police in Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur district, while four other accused have been arrested from different locations in MP and UP.

The Meghalaya Police had earlier arrested five persons in connection with the murder -- Sonam, her alleged lover Raj Kushwaha and the latter's three friends Vishal Chauhan, Akash Rajput and Anand Kurmi.

The five are currently in judicial custody and lodged at a jail in Meghalaya.

The case is being probed in detail by the SIT of Meghalaya Police.

Odisha flood: One person missing, 50 villages marooned in Balasore

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**
ODISHA: One person went missing after being swept away by flood water as over 50 villages remained marooned even as the water level of the Subarnarekha river receded below the danger mark on Sunday, officials said.

A young man from Bishnupur gram panchayat at area of Baliapal block in the district is reported missing after being swept away by the floodwaters on Saturday. ODRAF personnel have launched a rescue operation, he said.

At least four blocks - Baliapal, Bhograi, Basta and Jaleswar - were inundated as authorities of Chandil Dam in Jharkhand allegedly released excess water without informing Odisha, Balasore MP Pratap Sarangi alleged terming it

a "criminal misconduct".

The flash flood has affected over 50,000 people in the four blocks of Balasore district. However, the administration hopes that the situation will now improve as the water level of Subarnarekha has started receding. The water level at 10 am on Sunday, was 9.94 metre against the danger mark of 10.36 metre at Rajgaht. The highest water level was above 11 metre on Saturday, officials said.

Flood water has already entered into villages and agricultural fields and it may require around four-five days to recover from the flood situation, officials said.

The state government has deployed boats and teams from Fire Service (5 teams), ODRAF (3) and

one NDRF to help the administration in rescue and relief operations. Boats are the only means of communication now as village roads were submerged in flood water, an official said.

Meanwhile, many people from the affected villages have shifted to the river embankments and are taking shelter under polythene sheets.

Collector & District Magistrate, Balasore in a post on X said, "ASHAs under CHCs & PHCs are actively distributing ORS & Halogen tablets in 11 submerged villages of Bhograi and Dahamunda PHC areas and 17 villages of Ghantua and Jamkunda PHC areas. Health teams on-ground. Essential medicines stocked at PHC, Sub Centres & ASHA level."

PM Modi hails people of Andhra Pradesh for state's Guinness record for yoga event

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**
NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi Sunday complimented the people of Andhra Pradesh for the way they strengthened the movement to make yoga a part of life after the state set a Guinness record for hosting the world's largest yoga session in Visakhapatnam.

Lakhs of people, including Navy personnel aboard warships, participated in the International Yoga Day celebrations on June 21 along the R K Beach in Vizag that was led by Prime Minister Modi.

Guinness World Records said the event showcased the state's commitment to wellness and traditional practices on a global platform.

Congratulating the people, Modi took to X to say, "Yoga brings people together; once again! Compliments to the people of Andhra Pradesh

for the manner in which they have strengthened the movement to make Yoga a part of their lives."

"The #Yogandhra initiative and the programme in Visakhapatnam, which I also took part in, will always motivate several people towards good health and well-being," he said in a post on X.

Earlier on Sunday, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu thanked the people of the state after it entered the Guinness World Records.

The Guinness World Records in a post on X on International Yoga Day said, "Today an incredible 3,00,105 participants took part in the largest yoga lesson ever, in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India -- organised by the Government of Andhra Pradesh to celebrate International Day of Yoga."

Newborn screening, early treatment can cut sickle cell anaemia mortality: ICMR study

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**
NEW DELHI: Post-birth diagnosis resulting in early treatment can substantially improve the quality of life and reduce mortality in patients with sickle cell disease to less than five per cent from the reported 20-30 per cent, according to an ICMR study.

As many as 63,536 newborns were tested over a five year period from 2019- 2024 as part of the study on Newborn Screening for Sickle cell Disease conducted by the National Institute of Immunohaematology in Mumbai under the India Council of Medical Research (ICMR) across seven centres in high prevalence areas of India.

The study is yet to be published.

The newborn screening program helps find out if a

baby is born with Sickle Cell Disease (SCD), a serious inherited blood disorder, soon after birth, explained Dr Manisha Madkaikar, Director of ICMR- Centre for Research Management and Control of Haemoglobinopathies (CRHCM) in Nagpur.

"If not detected early, this disease can cause life-threatening problems like severe infections, anaemia (low blood levels), and even strokes in infants," she stressed.

"Finding the disease early can save lives by allowing doctors to start treatment before problems begin," Dr Prabhakar Kedar, Scientist F, ICMR-NIIH , who is the principal investigator of the study, said.

Babies diagnosed early can be given preventive antibiotics (like penicillin) to avoid

infections and get regular checkups and care from specialists, Dr Madkaikar said.

Early detection also helps in getting important vaccines to protect against serious illnesses while parents can also be taught the signs of danger so they can act quickly.

It also helps families and doctors plan long-term treatment, provides genetic counselling to the family, and increases awareness, reducing the number of future cases, Dr Madkaikar explained.

This screening is especially important in tribal and high-risk areas of India, where many cases go undiagnosed, leading to early childhood deaths, Dr Kedar highlighted.

"With screening, many of these deaths can be prevented," he said.

During the study, 7,275 babies (11.4 per cent) were found to be carriers of the sickle cell gene. This means they don't have the disease but can pass it on to their children, Dr Kedar said, adding, 569 babies (0.9 per cent) were found to have SCD.

These babies were followed up for the confirmation of diagnosis, parents were counselled about SCD, preventive measures to be taken for or to avoid complications, and informed about prenatal diagnosis to avoid any further births of affected children in the family.

"The babies were given comprehensive care, including penicillin prophylaxis, folic acid supplementation, appropriate vaccinations and hydroxyurea therapy, as indicated. This resulted in reduction in mortality in

these children to less than 5 per cent from the earlier reported mortality of 20-30 per cent," Dr Kedar said.

This study shows that newborn screening works and can save lives, especially in places with a high number of cases like tribal areas, Dr Kedar said.

This study was coordinated by Dr Harpreet Kaur, senior scientists at ICMR, Delhi.

"By detecting Sickle Cell Disease early, babies can get timely care, live healthier lives, and families can be better prepared," Dr Kedar said.

The seven centres which participated in the study are National Institute For Implementation Research on Non-Communicable Diseases in Jodhpur, Society for Education, Welfare and Action-Rural (SEWA - Rural) in Gujarat, the

Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA), Tamil Nadu, ICMR- National Institute for Research in Reproductive Health in Mumbai, ICMR-National Institute of Research in Tribal Health (NIRTH) in Jabalpur, ICMR-Regional Medical Research Centre, Bhubaneswar and ICMR-Centre for Research Management and Control of Haemoglobinopathies (CRHCM) in Chandrapur.

Of the total 63,536 newborns tested, 57 per cent belonged to tribal parents and rest from others, Dr Kedar informed.

The aim of the study was also to understand the regional variability and role of genetic modifiers in sickle cell disease as well as to identify barriers for newborn screening implementation, he explained.

Blocking of Strait of Hormuz will impact India's energy procurement: Experts

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**
NEW DELHI: Any blocking or disruption of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz -- a narrow passage connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea -- will have significant global and regional impact including for India's energy security, strategic affairs experts said on Sunday.

Following the US bombing of three major Iranian nuclear sites this morning, Tehran has indicated that closing the Strait of Hormuz for shipping is one of the options on the table to pressure its adversaries.

Nearly 30 per cent of global oil and a third of the world's LNG (liquefied natural gas) passes through the Strait daily and its closure would immediately reduce global supplies triggering a spike in prices, they said.

The shutting down of the

narrow passage would have significant global repercussions across energy markets and it will impact India's energy security as well, said Dr Laxman Kumar Behera, Associate Professor at Special Centre for National Security Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Behera said any disruption in the critical shipping lane, which is a geopolitical flash-point, will majorly impact India's crude oil import from Iraq and to an extent from Saudi Arabia.

Captain D K Sharma (retd), a former Indian Navy spokesperson who closely follows developments in the Gulf region, too said Iran's threat to block the Strait of Hormuz could lead to significant disruptions in global oil trade.

Any disruption in shipping traffic could impact insur-

ance premiums, causing costlier rerouting of oil shipments, he said.

"Oil prices are expected to surge due to increased tensions in the region, with some analysts predicting prices to reach USD 80- USD 90 per barrel or even USD 100 per barrel if Iran responds with retaliatory measures," he noted.

Sharma also said that the currencies of countries in the region may experience significant volatility, and investors may look for other stable markets that could impact the region's economic growth.

According to a recent analysis by the International Energy Agency, even a brief disruption of passage through the Strait of Hormuz will have a significant impact on oil markets.

"With geopolitical and economic uncertainties affect-

ing oil producers and consumers alike, oil supply security remains high on the international energy policy agenda," it said.

The US on Sunday morning bombed three major nuclear sites -- Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan -- in Iran, bringing itself into the Israel-Iran conflict. Later, US President Donald Trump said the Iranian nuclear sites were "totally obliterated".

On its part, Iran warned that the US strikes will have "everlasting consequences".

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghehi said the US has committed a "grave violation" of the UN Charter, international law and the nuclear non-proliferation treaty by attacking Iran's "peaceful nuclear installations".

"The events this morning are outrageous and will have

everlasting consequences," he said.

Behera said Iran will also face economic consequences if it shuts down the Hormuz Strait as such a move will severely cripple Tehran's exports.

Since the start of Iran's hostilities with Israel, Iranian officials have spoken about the possibility of shutting the Strait.

Mohammad Javad Hosseini, the deputy chief of mission at the Iranian embassy, on Friday said closing the Strait of Hormuz is an option.

"We have many things on the table, but it doesn't mean that we are going to do it now. It depends on the situation and how the other players want to go. If they want to solve the problem, definitely some of these things will be put aside," he said.

ED raids Himachal Assistant Drug Controller, linked persons in PMLA probe

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**
NEW DELHI/SHIMLA: The Enforcement Directorate on Sunday conducted searches against a Himachal Pradesh-based Assistant Drug Controller (ADC), his family members and some others as part of a money laundering investigation linked to charges of bribery and "political patronage", official sources said.

The action has been taken against Nishant Sareen, currently posted as ADC Dharamshala, his father-in-law Ramesh Kumar Gupta and an alleged associate Komal Khanna apart from some others, they said.

Five residential and commercial premises in Himachal Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab were

searched. The probe relates to "misuse" of official position by the officer when he was earlier posted as ADC in Baddi (Solan district) as well as during his current tenure, ED sources said.

The central agency, according to the sources, is also investigating the alleged generation of proceeds of crime in this case apart from charges of "political patronage and complaints of extortion and bribe" against Sareen.

The officer or his legal representatives could not be contacted immediately for a comment on the charges made by the ED.

The office of the drug controller is part of the directorate of health safety and regulation of the HP government.

The money laundering

case filed under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) stems from an August, 2019 FIR registered by the State Vigilance and Anti-corruption Bureau (SV&ACB) of Himachal Pradesh Police against Sareen while he was posted as ADC in Baddi.

The SV&ACB arrested him in September, 2019 and later chargesheeted him along with Khanna. Sareen was released on bail in October that year and was posted as ADC, Dharamshala in 2024, the sources said.

Sareen, during the Himachal Police investigation, faced charges of receiving bribe from pharmaceutical companies based in Baddi, a pharma hub in the state.

Afghan national held for illegally staying in Odisha by forging documents

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**
BHUBANESWAR: Odisha Police with the help of immigration officials have arrested an Afghanistan national on charge of staying in India illegally since 2018 by forging documents and doing business in Cuttack city.

The man identified as Mohammad Yousaf alias Yaha Khan, aged about 54 years, son of Mohammad Nasim Khan of Kabul in Afghanistan was arrested on Saturday, police said.

However, he forged his name and identified himself as Yaha Khan, son of Moti Khan, at Peyton Sahi, under Badambadi police station in Cuttack city, police said.

"Md Yousaf was nabbed based on the written complaint by Samapika Pattnaik, DSP, Immigration at Biju Patnaik International Airport. A case was registered and an investigation was initiated. He was arrested and forwarded to court," the Commissionerate of Police,

Bhubaneswar-Cuttack, said.

It said that the accused had arrived at Biju Patnaik International Airport, Bhubaneswar from Dubai (UAE) on June 20 and presented a forged Indian passport. During immigration clearance, on suspicion, the staff conducted detailed verification and found that a discreet LOC (lookout circular) was issued from Kolkata Airport against him.

Subsequent system verification confirmed that the person was Mohammad Yousaf, an Afghan national, who had illegally entered India in 2018 and assumed a fake Indian identity, police said.

During the investigation, it was also revealed that the accused had fraudulently procured Indian identity documents including Aadhaar, PAN card, Voter ID, driving license and passport using forged details, and had been residing in Cuttack, Odisha while con-

cealing his true identity. He also misused the forged passport for travelling beyond the state, the police said.

The police also said that the accused has confessed to his real identity as Mohammad Yousaf @ Yaha Khan of Kabul, Afghanistan and admitted to forging and using false identity documents to reside and conduct business in India.

Based on his disclosure, multiple fake Indian documents and personal belongings were seized from his possession and house. The investigation also led to the seizure of various Indian and foreign currencies, forged identity cards, a mobile phone, two gold earrings, and Rs 30,000 in cash from his possession, police said.

A house search led to the seizure of bank documents in the name of Yaha Khan for which he could not provide satisfactory explanation, the police said.

Two held on charges of espionage in Punjab

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**
CHANDIGARH: Two persons have been arrested for allegedly being involved in espionage activities linked to Pakistan's spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), a top Punjab Police officer on Sunday.

The accused have been identified as Gurpreet Singh alias Gopy Foji and Sahil Masih alias Shali, Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav said.

"In a major intelligence-based operation, Amritsar Rural Police apprehended two persons suspected of espionage activities linked to #Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)," he said in a post on X.

Preliminary investigation revealed that Singh was in direct contact with operatives of Pakistan's ISI and was suspected of sharing sensitive and confidential information via pen drives, he said.

"The key ISI handler involved in the case has been identified as Rana Javed," Yadav said.

Counting for Ludhiana West assembly bypoll today; AAP, Cong wait in bated breath

■ **STATE TIMES NEWS**
LUDHIANA: The counting of votes for the Ludhiana West assembly bypoll will be taken up on Monday after a fierce electoral fight that Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann described as a battle between "humility" and "arrogance".

The June 19 bypoll has been regarded as a litmus test for the ruling AAP as it seeks to maintain its hold over Punjab, while the Congress looks to regain its foothold over the urban constituency which it held six times in the past.

The Aam Aadmi Party field-ed Sanjeev Arora (61), a Rajya Sabha member and Ludhiana-based industrialist who is also known for his social welfare work, for the bypoll. On the other hand, the opposition Congress placed its bet on former minister and Punjab Congress working president Bharat Bhushan Ashu (51).

The BJP field senior leader Jivan Gupta, a member of the core committee of the party's Punjab unit, while the SAD

named Parupkar Singh Ghuman, a lawyer and the former president of Ludhiana Bar Association, as its candidate.

While the main contest is between the AAP and Congress, the bypoll outcome will also shed light on how the BJP performs among urban voters in Punjab. It is also going to be a test of the leadership of SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal as his party looks to resurrect itself after a series of crushing electoral losses.

The bypoll, necessitated following the death of AAP MLA Gurpreet Bassi Gogi in January, registered 51.33 per cent polling, a sharp drop from the 64 per cent voting registered in the 2022 Assembly polls. There were 14 candidates in the fray for the bypoll.

A foolproof security arrangement has been put in place at the Khalsa College for Women which will serve as the counting centre, an official said on Sunday.

A victory will be important for the Arvind Kejriwal-led

AAP, which faced a debacle in the Delhi Assembly elections earlier this year. In November last year, the AAP won three out of four assembly bypolls.

Before that, the party faced a drubbing in the Lok Sabha polls in which it could win only three of 13 parliamentary constituencies. During poll campaigning, the AAP leadership urged voters to vote for Arora with party supremo Arvind Kejriwal announcing that the AAP candidate would be made the cabinet minister if he is elected in the bypoll. Mann had described the election as a battle between "humility" and "arrogance" while highlighting that Arora represents 'simplicity' while the Congress nominee is known for "arrogance."

Stakes are also high for the Congress, the main opposition party that has won the seat six times in the past. He had lost the seat to AAP's Gogi by a margin of 7,512 votes in the 2022 Assembly polls.

Prestige is also at stake for the BJP in the bypoll as well. In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls,

the BJP's Ravneet Singh Bittu led from the Ludhiana West assembly segment, which is part of the Ludhiana parliamentary seat. However, he lost to Congress nominee Amrinder Singh Raja Warring.

The Ludhiana West bypoll is also seen as a test of the leadership of Sukhbir Singh Badal, president of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), which is looking to resurrect itself after a series of crushing electoral losses.

Badal, who was elected again as party president in April after he resigned following being declared 'tankhaiya' (guilty of religious misconduct) by the Akal Takht last year, led his party's poll campaign for the party nominee Ghuman.

In the 117-member Punjab assembly, the AAP has 94 legislators, the Congress has 16 MLAs, the Shiromani Akali Dal has three, the BJP two, and the Bahujan Samaj Party one. One seat is held by an Independent.

