

State Govt sanctions 2,900 new police posts

To bolster cyber security and traffic management

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Government on Thursday approved creation of over 2,900 new posts across the Cyber Crime, Economic Offences and Traffic wings of the police force.

To address the growing threat of cyber and financial crimes, the Governor sanctioned 987 posts for 20 newly-proposed and 14 existing Cyber Crime & Economic Of-

fences (CC&EO) police stations across the State. These appointments aim to strengthen the State's capacity in digital forensics, financial fraud detection and cyber investigations.

Simultaneously, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi cleared creation of 2,000 new posts in the Traffic Wing to enhance road safety and streamline traffic management in both urban and rural areas. Of these, 70 posts have been created at the State level, including one ADGP/IGP, one DIG, two SPs, four DSPs, six Inspectors, eight SIs, eight

ASIs, 22 Constables and 10 Drivers, along with key administrative positions.

At the district level, 1,930 posts were approved, comprising five DSPs, 41 Inspectors, 83 Sub-Inspectors, 83 ASIs, 310 Havildars and 1,408 Constables.

CM Majhi expressed confidence that these measures would significantly reinforce the State's policing framework. He stated that the enhanced manpower would not only improve traffic enforcement but also establish Odisha as a model State in road safety and law enforcement.

In Cuttack

Double encounter: Both accused injured in firing

PNS ■ Cuttack

In a dramatic late-night development, two notorious criminals were injured in a police encounter in the Indranipatna area of Choudwar on Wednesday. A joint operation was carried out by the Choudwar police and the Special Squad targeting individuals with extensive criminal backgrounds.

The accused were identified as Subhrajit Parida alias Jubula and Sangram Rout alias Katas, both of whom have long criminal histories. Police sources said Katas has at least 15 criminal cases registered against him while Jubula is involved in over 50 cases ranging from extortion to armed robbery.

The police had been tracking their movements for some time.



The police raid turned violent when the suspects opened fire at the officers. In retaliation, the police returned fire, during which Katas and Jubula sustained bullet injuries to their legs. They were shifted to the SCB Medical College Hospital.

Police recovered firearms and live ammunitions from the possession of the accused.

Cuttack DCP Rishikesh Khilari stated that a few days back, a robbery had taken

place in the Cantonment Road area of Cuttack city and another in Choudwar. The duo was linked to the case, following which police began a manhunt for them.

"We received reliable inputs, and our team followed the two robbers trying to flee after diverting from NH-55. During the pursuit, they opened fire on our officers. In retaliation, we conducted a control fire and nabbed the duo," he added.

Naveen trains guns on BJP on Biju death anniversary

It's political rhetoric, says Manmohan

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Biju Janata Dal (BJD) president Naveen Patnaik on Thursday launched a veiled attack on the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accusing it of trying to change the course of history.

Naveen Patnaik was speaking on the occasion of the 28th death anniversary of former Chief Minister Biju Patnaik. He stated that the current government should focus on development of Odisha instead of "demeaning the great sons of the soil".

"Attempts are also being made to change history, but they should remember that history reflects the connecting experience of a nation over a period of time. It cannot be



changed at anybody's pleasure," Patnaik remarked.

In response, BJP State president Manmohan Samal dismissed Patnaik's remarks as politically charged and unwelcome from a person of Patnaik's stature. "We hold immense respect for Biju Patnaik, and today is meant for people to offer their tributes to him. His (Naveen's) statements are political rhetoric, and I think it is unbecoming of a former CM to make such remarks," he added.

Samal also questioned the authenticity of Naveen's comments, suggesting that they may not reflect the leader's own sentiments. "Either he is being misinformed by his advisors or he is reading out what others have written for him. He should reconsider his statement," he said.

Naveen files paper for 9th term as BJD chief

Only candidate in fray

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Biju Janata Dal (BJD) supremo Naveen Patnaik on Thursday filed his nomination to continue as the party's State president for a record ninth term. The nomination was submitted at the party headquarters Sankha Bhawan in the presence of BJD State Election Officer Pratap Keshari Deb and several senior party leaders and workers.

With no other contender in the fray, Patnaik is poised to be re-elected unopposed. The official announcement of the president's name will be made on April 19.

This nomination comes amid the party's ongoing organisational restructuring. So far, 18 district presidents have been elected unopposed. The formation of the State Council and Executive Committee is expected to be completed within the next two days.

Patnaik, who has led the BJD since its formation in 1997, continues to command strong support within the party despite the recent electoral setbacks. After ruling the State for 24 years, the BJD is currently in the opposition in Odisha. Patnaik's continued leadership is seen as crucial for reorganising the party and reinforcing its base ahead of future political battles.

Odisha highways to match US standards: Gadkari

Infra push worth Rs 4,137 cr unveiled

NALINI SAHU ■ Bhubaneswar

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari on Thursday declared that Odisha's highways would soon be transformed to match American standards, both in quality and scale.

Addressing a public gathering here at Baramunda, he announced that projects worth over Rs 2 lakh crore are currently underway in Odisha.

Gadkari unveiled and laid foundation-stones for 19 National Highway projects with a combined investment of Rs 4,137 crore, spanning ap-

proximately 154 kilometers.

A major highlight was the announcement of the 110-km Capital Region Ring Road project aimed at decongesting traffic and enhancing intra-State connectivity. The six-lane ring road, from Rameswaram in Khordha to Tangi in Cuttack, has received ministerial approval and is awaiting Union Cabinet clearance. The project is estimated to cost Rs 7,000 crore.

Additionally, Gadkari revealed that his ministry has approved six-laning of the Bhubaneswar-Puri highway at a cost of Rs 1,200 crore.

Among the inaugurated projects were the four-laning of the Talcher-Kamakhyanager stretch on NH-149 and NH-53 built at

a cost of Rs 800 crore and several vehicle underpasses (VUPs) on NH-16 at Balikuda, Sikharpur and Badachana constructed with an investment of Rs 45 crore.

Foundation-stones were also laid for additional VUPs, a new flyover, and a bridge over Gangua Nallah at Palasuni in Bhubaneswar.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, who was present at the event along with Deputy Chief Ministers KV Singh Deo and Pravati Parida and Works Minister Prithviraj Harichandan, lauded the Centre's initiatives. Majhi proposed eight-laning the Bhubaneswar-Puri road with service roads.

Divorced couple found hanging in Khordha

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A young man and a young woman were found hanging from a tree in Goudapatana village under Begunia block of Khordha district on Thursday morning by allegedly using a single dupatta (scarf) to end their lives.

Sources reported that they were believed to be residents of the Sunakhala area, located not far from the village where their bodies were discovered. A scooter was found abandoned by the roadside near the incident site.


Preliminary information suggested that the young man worked at a garage in Sunakhala Bazaar while the woman ran a beauty

parlour in the same market-place. They were linked to each other through an earlier marriage that had ended in divorce. They had since married other people.


The couple had reportedly sought to re-establish connections between them, and a meeting in the presence of family elders was supposed to take place. However, the exact cause that led them to end their lives was not known yet. The deceased are survived by children from their existing marriages.

As of now, the cause of death appeared to be suicide. Police have begun an investigation to uncover the motive behind the incident.

DADLS-15



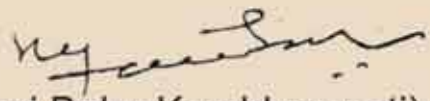
सत्यमेव जयते




MESSAGE OF HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF ODISHA ON THE OCCASION OF GOOD FRIDAY


Good Friday is a solemn holy day commemorating the crucifixion of Lord Jesus Christ who gave the mankind the message of love, sacrifice, brotherhood and forgiveness. His life was dedicated to freeing humanity from miseries.

I along with Christian sisters and brothers of the State participate in the observance of Good Friday with a resolve to move forward on the path of love, compassion and sacrifice shown by Lord Jesus.



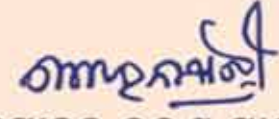
(Hari Babu Kambhampati)





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(ମୋହନ ଚରଣ ମାଝୀ)

ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା

Gadkari, Majhi hail Mahtab as architect of modern Odisha

National convention on 125th birth anniversary held at Ravenshaw

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari and Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday paid glowing tributes to Dr Harekrushna Mahtab, hailing him as the architect of modern Odisha. They were speaking at a national convention held at the Ravenshaw University in Cuttack to mark the 125th birth anniversary of the legendary leader.



Gadkari said Dr Mahtab's foresight, leadership and contribution to Odisha's development remain unparalleled. "He was a visionary who spearheaded key projects such as the Hirakud Dam and the shifting of the State capital from Cuttack to Bhubaneswar. These decisions have shaped the modern identity of Odisha," Gadkari said. Recalling Dr Mahtab's imprisonment during the free-

dom struggle, he said the leader continued to think and write about Odisha's future even while lodged in the Ahmednagar Jail. "He proved that it is not the length of one's life but the intensity of one's commitment that defines greatness," he said. Drawing a parallel with the Vajpayee-era Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Gadkari stressed the need for a balanced development of both

rural and urban areas. "Roads, irrigation, electricity and communication, these four pillars are essential for any region's progress. Just as we aspire for smart cities, we must also build smart villages," he noted. Chief Minister Mohan Majhi described Dr Mahtab as "Sardar Patel of Odisha", referring to his multi-dimensional role as a freedom fighter, statesman, journalist

and institution builder. "He was not just a person but an institution who built the foundation of Odisha's modern political and cultural identity," Majhi said.

He said the State Government would take steps to further institutionalise Dr Mahtab's legacy.

The convention brought together scholars, intellectuals, historians and admirers of Dr Mahtab from across the country. Speakers highlighted his immense contributions as a member of the Constituent Assembly, Chief Minister of Odisha, Union Minister and Governor of Bombay. His establishment of The Prajatantra newspaper and literary writings also found special mention.

IAS, OAS officers to give classes to UPSC aspirants

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The State Government has resolved to extend its free Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) coaching programme for aspiring civil service entrants by another year despite the lack of exemplary results in the past. This decision was reached during a strategic meeting involving vice-chancellors from public universities.

Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj confirmed that although there have been calls to terminate the programme due to its underwhelming performance, the government is set to introduce significant modifica-

tions. The aim is to achieve improved results in the next academic cycle.

From the next session, selected candidates will receive instruction from experienced Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Odisha Administrative Service (OAS) officers from the State.

"We are implementing changes now and will maintain the programme for the 2025-26 session to gauge its efficacy," stated Suraj.

The selection process for candidates remains the same. Each year, 200 aspirants are chosen through a pre-qualifying exam. The allocation is as follows: General (95), Scheduled Tribes (ST) (45), Sched-

uled Castes (SC) (32), Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) (23), and Persons with Disabilities (PwD) (5). The government bears the complete cost of the coaching and provides free hostel accommodation at Centurion University, with classes conducted by a private coaching institute.

Suraj pointed out the existing challenges concerning student aspirations. "While the coaching is high-quality, the primary issue we face is the students' diversion towards Services Selection Board (SSB) examinations," he remarked. This shift in focus is identified as one of the primary obstacles to the programme's success.

Govt hikes new striking force battalions' pay

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Government is set to enhance its Special Striking Force by forming three new battalions, primarily staffed by former military personnel from the Army and Navy, along with members of the Central Armed Police Forces.

Moreover, Chief Minister Mohan Majhi has sanctioned a proposal to increase the monthly pay for these security personnel.

The minimum salary for the Special Striking Force personnel has been hiked from Rs 30,000 to Rs 45,000.

General Duty (GD) constables will now earn Rs 45,000, up from Rs 30,000. For Lance Naik, Naik and

Havildar (GD), pay has been revised to Rs 50,000 from Rs 32,000. Junior Commissioned Officers (GD) and Junior Commissioned Officers (Instructors) will both see their salaries rise to Rs 55,000 from Rs 40,000. In addition, Dinghy Drivers, Sea-Man Mechanics and Khalasis will have their pay increased from Rs 30,000 to Rs 45,000. Sirang and Engine Drivers will receive Rs 50,000, up from Rs 32,000, while Masters will now earn Rs 55,000, a rise from their previous salary of Rs 40,000.

The adjustments come as part of the commitment to fortifying the State's security infrastructure with highly-trained personnel, ensuring that compensation aligns with their skills and experience.

Gadkari lauds World Skill Center

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari on Thursday visited the World Skill Center (WSC) here and praised the State Government for developing a world-class infrastructure dedicated to youth skill enhancement.

Gadkari, who was welcomed by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, took stock of the cutting-edge facilities at the centre, including the Vertical Transportation Lab, Travellator and Escalator Lab, Automation and Basic Robotics Lab and the Centre of Excellence in Welding.

Gadkari interacted with trainees and instructors, en-



quiring about the ways in which the training is shaping their careers and improving employability. He expressed satisfaction at how modern laboratories were contributing to the realisation of stu-

dents' aspirations.

State Skill Development and Technical Education Minister Sampad Chandra Swain said, "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the nation is

witnessing a strong push in skill development. Odisha is aligning with this vision, and the World Skill Center is playing a critical role in preparing youth for global opportunities."

Paramita takes over as State I-T chief

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Senior Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer and celebrated author Paramita Satpathy Tripathy took charge as Odisha's Principal Chief Commissioner of Income Tax (PCCIT) on Wednesday, succeeding Manoranjan Panigrahy.

The 1989-batch IRS officer, renowned for her administrative acumen and literary contributions, steps into the role with over three decades of governance experience.

Notably, Tripathy, who was

empanelled for the PCCIT rank in March 2024 alongside 33 senior IRS officers, has held pivotal roles in Odisha's Income Tax Department. Her career includes a six-year tenure as Director of Finance at the Odisha Power Generation Corporation Limited.

Tripathy is also a luminary in Odia literature. Seven of her short-story collections, including the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning 'Prapti' (2016), explore themes of social consciousness and human resilience.

Guv visits OUAT, stresses on agri self-reliance

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Governor Dr Hari Babu Kambampati on Wednesday visited the Educational Museum of the Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) and reviewed the institution's academic, research and extension activities. Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment Minister and Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo accompanied him.

OUAT Vice-Chancellor Prof Prabhakar Raul presented an overview of the university's progress and its



collaborations with national and international institutions. The Deputy Chief Minister also held discussions with the Governor on the OUAT's development and the State's initiatives for agricultural growth and farmers' welfare.

The Governor emphasised the social responsibility of sci-

entists and researchers and urged the OUAT to play a pivotal role in building a 'Developed Odisha' as part of the national vision of a 'Developed India'. He advised the university to focus on increasing production in key food sectors such as fish, eggs, pulses and oilseeds through

continued research and innovation.

Dr Kambampati expressed satisfaction with the OUAT's contributions to education, research and extension work. He also appreciated the success of its alumni who have excelled in various fields across the country.

Session at IIT BBS 'India's scientific traditions enhanced its global prestige'



PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Continuing its efforts to promote awareness of Indian Knowledge Traditions, Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar organised a session on 'Indian Traditions of Science and Technology: Their Past, Present and Future'.

The session included a talk and interaction by Dr MD Srinivas, Ex-Professor, Madras University and currently working as the Chairman, Centre for Policy Studies.

It may be mentioned that Dr Srinivas has been selected for Padma Shri for the year 2025 in the field of Science and Technology. The session marked the inauguration of the 'Udayagiri Hall of Learning', which is the third state-of-the-art infrastructure available at IIT Bhubaneswar for providing a high standard of teaching-learning experience for the students and faculty members.

Speaking on this occasion, Director, IIT Bhubaneswar

Prof Shreepad Karmalkar said, "A strong foundation in one's cultural roots plays a vital role in shaping thoughtful life decisions. While science and technology are universal, the identity and context of scientists deeply influence how knowledge is pursued. It is, therefore, essential to explore Indian traditions of science and technology, which offer valuable perspectives often absent from mainstream narratives."

In his talk and interaction, Dr. Srinivas offered a selective overview of the evolution of Indian science and technology, tracing its roots to the Vedic period and emphasizing its foundation in core civilisational values and the Indian belief in the interconnectedness of all life. It highlighted how, until the early 19th century, Indian scientific and technological practices were widely taught, innovated upon, and contributed significantly to India's global prestige and economic strength.

SOCIAL CANVAS

Whither Ambedkar's vision of socio-economic justice?

Time we reflected on it as we celebrated his birth anniversary



MANAS JENA

The 134th birth anniversary of Dr Ambedkar was celebrated recently. It is heartening to see the growing popularity of Dr Ambedkar among cross sections of people irrespective of political party affiliations—rightist-leftist and centrist; and in their own way they paid huge tributes to the architect of the Constitution of India. While celebrating his legacy and political ideas of building a nation that has mostly been reflected in the Constitution of modern India, it is time to retrospect and do a critical review of our progress on the path of achieving social and economic justice.

The core understanding of social justice in India is founded on caste as Indian-apartheid. In the context of social and economic justice, the three major social institutions that are largely not free from dis-

crimatory practices are the village Aganwadi Centre, village temple and burial ground.

There are about 71 thousand Aganwadi centres in Odisha started since 1975 that provide employment to rural women and complement to the nutritional need of rural poor children as a major government scheme, but it is very rare to find a Dalit women as a

cook. Even in schools, Dalit women are not employed as mid day meal cook. Rather, the cooks are largely drawn from caste Hindu touchable communities of the village. The social taboo that is backed by religion is still in practice that prevents Dalit women from becoming cooks under a government run programme.

The fate of Dalit children in hamlets is no way different from their family members, as they have to sit in distance and follow the caste rules of the village while enjoying the services provided by upper caste service providers. In spite of guidelines and Supreme Court directives, little or no change has taken place in the lot of the Dalits as the decision makers of the village are mostly drawn from upper caste who cunningly make decisions for themselves and better know how to avoid the anti-discriminatory laws. They continue with the so-called social traditions to segregate Dalit communities with dehumanizing practices.

The denial of dignified employ-

ment because of low caste social identity has been depriving thousands of Dalit women of access to public employment available in their own villages.

The second most discriminating institution in the village is the temple. Almost 99 percent of the village temples in rural Odisha with traditional Brahmin priests have put restrictions over the free access of Hindu Dalit men, women and children to enjoy their right to worship under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution. The Dalits in many villages have their own temple and separate religious functions such as Astaprahari but they are not a part of the larger gathering of the village though they very often contribute to all religious events and render caste based services such as drum beating etc, organized by upper caste people of the village.

In 1948, there was an enactment of temple entry legislation by the then government and later it merged with the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955 (PCR Act) in inde-

pendent India but the enforcement of such protective legislation for untouchable communities to ensure their right to worship with dignity has remained a distant dream.

Currently, when the ruling party and their wider fraternity have been advocating to build a Hindu Rashtra, at the same time they have no social and religious reform agenda for a dignified assimilation of their own Dalit Hindu brothers and sisters with the larger Hindu fraternity.

Unfortunately, Dalits have to write Hindu as their religious identity to get a caste certificate; or else, they are legally debarred from getting it. Odisha has drafted an anti-conversion law in 1967 titled as the Odisha Freedom of Religion Act that prohibits religious conversion to other organised religion and violation of it is a cognizable offense that attracts fine and imprisonment.

The CPI(M) government in Kerala has made a historic change in 2018 by introducing reservation

for OBCs and SCs in appointment of priests to the temples managed under Travancore Devaswom Temple Board. 5 Dalits and OBCs have been appointed as temple priests who are chosen through a written exam and viva voce test conducted by the board.

The third most important place in the Hindu caste villages is cremation ground where the dead bodies have to be cremated. Mostly in the multi caste villages there is specific yard for each caste and the low caste people of the village who are also largely landless and deprived of access to common property resources of the village, have no such demarcated land for rituals.

They have to carry their dead bodies to little far away places on the outskirts of the village for burial. It has been a humiliation to people of Dalit communities since generations that they are denied dignity even after death. Not just the burial ground, the other common space available for fellow villagers such as village forest, water

bodies, play ground, grazing land etc are also in a way restricted to the free and equal access of the Dalits.

The proponents of anti-reservation have never raised the humanitarian issues of Dalit communities that impact them on ground beyond the limit of reservation benefits. This continued social vulnerability of the Dalits, even after the enforcement Constitution, has further pushed them to more distress because there has been no major change in the social conduct of the upper caste towards them. The government, political parties and CSOs must realize the ground reality prevailing in Odisha.

The celebration of Ambedkar's birthday should not be a ritual; rather it should be a day of reflection to carry forward many of our unfinished tasks of social and religious reforms to build an egalitarian society based on values of equality as dreamed of by Ambedkar and many of our forefathers.

(manasbbs15@gmail.com)

In Bhanjanagar Mass exodus from BJD, BJP to Congress

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

A large number of grassroots leaders from the Bhanjanagar Assembly constituency in Ganjam district joined the Congress at a special induction programme held at the Congress Bhawan here on Wednesday in the presence of OPCC president Bhakta Charan Das.

Those who joined included sarpanches, samiti members, ward representatives, naib sarpanches and former elected members from gram panchayats such as Kudutai, Harigada, and Dadarlunda. These leaders, formerly associated with the Biju Janata Dal



(BJD) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), pledged their allegiance to the Congress under the leadership of youth leader and Bhanjanagar Congress candidate Prasant Kumar Bishoyi.

OPCC president Das said the Congress, under the national leadership of Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi and inspired by the sacrifice of Sonia Gandhi, continues to uphold the val-

ues of inclusive politics and social justice.

The new members cited their growing disillusionment with the BJD and the BJP, highlighting issues such as widespread corruption, increasing unemployment, deteriorating law and order, farmer neglect and the plight of women and marginalised communities. They said the Congress offers the right platform to address these pressing concerns.

Notable new entrants included samiti member representative Rabindra Kumar Doshundi, naib sarpanch Debaraj Gouda and youth organiser Pradeepa Nayak.

In Sambalpur CM to hear grievances on Apr 21

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi will hold a public grievance hearing in Sambalpur on April 21. The session will be held at the Sambalpur Municipal Corporation office, where the CM will personally listen to complaints and concerns raised by the public.

As a preparatory step, a grievance submission and verification drive will be conducted on Thursday. Citizens can submit their petitions through the Janasunani Portal or the

Janasunani Mobile Application.

A maximum of 1,000 applicants will be shortlisted for the final hearing. These selected individuals will have the opportunity to present their grievances directly to the Chief Minister from 8 am onwards on April 21.

The session will primarily focus on issues related to general administration and public services. Officials have urged citizens to make the most of this opportunity and submit their grievances through the designated digital platforms in time.

AI to be integrated into Puri Rath Yatra mgmt

High-level meet discusses Akshaya Tiritiya preparations

PNS ■ Puri

In a groundbreaking move, Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be integrated into the management of the world-renowned Puri Rath Yatra this year.

According to sources, state-of-the-art drones equipped with AI capabilities will be deployed to monitor crowds and regulate traffic during the grand religious festival, aiming to ensure smooth and safe proceedings.

As preparations for the annual Rath Yatra gather pace, a high-level review meeting was held under the chairmanship of the district Collector to assess the progress. The meeting focused on various key aspects of the event, including the upcoming Akshaya Tiritiya celebrations on April 30, which marks the beginning of the

chariot construction.

Officials from all concerned departments were instructed to complete their respective tasks by the end of May. The discussions covered a wide range of topics, including ritual schedules at the Jagannath Temple, chariot construction, healthcare and sanitation services, road and infrastructure development, drinking water supply, transportation, and railway services.

The progress of the action plan adopted during the previous preparatory meeting was also thoroughly reviewed. Additionally, a key coordination meeting of Chhatisa Nijoga has been scheduled for April 19, during which the final schedule for Akshaya Tiritiya will be finalised.

"We are hopeful that all necessary works including drain cleaning and road repair work will end by May," assured Puri Collector, Siddharth Shankar Swain.

Breakthrough of Tunnel T-4 achieved

Marks major progress in Khurda Rd-Balangir rail project

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Khurda Road-Balangir New Rail Line project has achieved the successful breakthrough of Tunnel T-4, the longest railway tunnel in Odisha measuring 4,185 meters. The tunnel, located between Adenigarh and Charichhak stations in Boudh district, was day-lighted on Wednesday, marking a crucial step in the completion of the long-awaited rail corridor.

The Tunnel T-4 is the longest among the seven tunnels being constructed in the 301-km-long rail line project. Its breakthrough not only demonstrates engineering prowess but also paves the way for faster execution of the remain-



ing stretch.

So far, 226 km of the rail line has been commissioned from Khurda Road up to Daspalla on one side and from Balangir to Purnakatak on the other. The remaining 75-km section, which includes the tunnel zone between Daspalla and Purnakatak, is progressing steadily.

The completion of Tunnel T-4 is expected to significantly accelerate construction and help realise the project's ob-

jective of linking Odisha's coastal belt with its western hinterland. Once operational, the rail line will boost regional integration, promote economic development and provide seamless transportation across districts.

The breakthrough is being viewed as a major leap forward in a project that has long been awaited by the people of Odisha, especially in the central and western regions of the State.

CM unveils Univ Sports competitions at DDU



PNS ■ Keonjhar

CM Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday inaugurated the Odisha Inter-University Sports Competitions: Games & Sports 2024 - 25 organised by DD University (DDU), Keonjhar.

During his address to the gathering comprising more than 1,200 participants from 13 universities, students, local people, the CM appreci-

ated the efforts of DD University which has been just newly formed in the year 2023.

He further said in ancient India sports were primarily seen as tools for physical development and military preparedness but now situation has changed where organised sports as a career is providing numerous opportunities to young boys and girls.

MP Ananta Charan Naik, who joined as guest of honour,

told the participants to show their best.

Others who were present on the occasion were Champua MLA Santatan Mahakud, Telkoi MLA Dr Fakir Mohan Naik, Patna MLA Akhila Chandra Naik, Collector Vishal Singh, SP Nitin Kushaleswar, DFO Dhanraj HD and university Registrar Dr Sashikant Jena. OSD PK Mohanty presided over the programme.

Jajpur youth gets 20 yrs in jail for raping minor

PNS ■ Jajpur

A Special POCSCO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act) Court in Jajpur district sentenced a youth to 20 years of imprisonment in connection with his involvement in the rape of a 15-year-old girl two years back.

The court also imposed a fine of Rs 20,000 on the convict. Special POCSCO Court Judge Abhijit Palei also directed the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) to give Rs 2 lakh compensation to the survivor.

According to Public Prosecutor Rajib Mohanty, the accused youth Ganeswar Jedy had lured the minor, a Class 9 student at the time of crime, into a relationship in Dharmasala in 2023. After convincing her to elope with him on the false assurance of

marriage, Ganeswar had taken the minor to a friend's place in Jagatpur and raped her multiple times by holding her multiple times by holding her. Unable to find her, her family had filed a missing complaint with Dharmasala police. After initiating a probe into the matter and following cues, a Childline team managed to nab Ganeswar and rescue the girl at Bhubaneswar railway station while he was taking her from Jagatpur to Hyderabad, he told mediapersons.

Mohanty added that Dharmasala police later reached the place and the minor was handed over to the family while the accused youth was arrested. After investigation and subsequent trial, he was convicted for the offence of rape. The judgment was pronounced on the basis of evidence and examination of 16 witnesses.

Staines murder: Hembram released after 25 yrs in jail

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Mahendra Hembram, one of the convicts in the sensational Graham Staines murder case, was released on Wednesday from the Keonjhar jail after 25 years. His release followed a recommendation based on good conduct during his time in prison.

The gruesome incident took place on the night of January 22-23, 1999 in Manoharpur village of Keonjhar district, where Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two minor sons Philip (11) and Timothy (8) were burnt alive while sleeping in a vehicle. The attack was carried out by a mob allegedly incensed over alleged religious conversions.

Staines had devoted over three decades to serving lep-



rosy patients and working for the welfare of tribal communities in Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts. His work, mostly associated with Christian missionary organisations, had drawn both appreciation and criticism from various sections of society.

Dara Singh, alias Rabindra Singh, was named the prime

accused with Mahendra Hembram and others identified as his accomplices. In 2003, a CBI court in Bhubaneswar sentenced Dara Singh to death and awarded life imprisonment to Hembram and 11 others. However, in 2005, the Orissa High Court commuted Dara's sentence to life imprisonment while upholding

Hembram's sentence. The Supreme Court upheld the High Court's verdict in 2011.

The brutal murder drew nationwide outrage and led to a high-level investigation. The DP Wadhwa Commission, appointed to probe the incident, confirmed Dara's involvement and linked him to extremist elements.

Relevance of Ambedkar's thoughts underscored



As CUO observes his 134th birth anniversary

PNS ■ Koraput

The Central University of Odisha (CUO) solemnly observed the 134th birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Dr BR Ambedkar at its Sunabeda campus on Monday. The commemorative event was led by Vice-Chancellor Prof

Chakradhar Tripathi, alongside faculty members, officers, and students.

The ceremony began with the lighting of the lamp and floral tributes to Dr Ambedkar's portrait, symbolizing reverence for the architect of the Indian Constitution. Addressing the gathering, Prof Tripathi emphasized the enduring relevance of Dr Ambedkar's thoughts, ideals, and vision in shaping contemporary India.

Prof. Tripathi also announced the establishment of an Ambedkar Study Centre at CUO to promote research and understanding of his life, vision, and contributions. He appealed to the university community for financial support to help build a corpus fund for the centre.

In his address, Prof. Rathikant Kumbhar, HoD, Department of Economics lauded Dr Ambedkar's pivotal role in

women's empowerment through the Hindu Code Bill.

Dr. Kapila Khemundu, Associate Professor and HoD, Dept. of Sociology reflected on Dr Ambedkar's contributions to social inclusiveness, fraternity, governance, public policy, and democracy.

Dr Rhulia Nukhu, Asst. Professor, Department of Business Management elaborated on Dr Ambedkar's vision for a modern democratic India.

'Horseshoe crabs face extinction in B'swar coast'

Immediate action needed to protect ecologically important species

PNS ■ Baleswar

The horseshoe crabs, which are crucial to the coastal ecology and have a lot of biomedical importance, found largely in the Baleswar coast of Bay of Bengal, are facing an extinction threat.

The Center for Research and Conservation of Indian Horseshoe Crabs (CRCIHSC), Fakir Mohan University, Baleswar, in consultation with local community members, conducted a ground-level survey to assess the severity of the situation and found that unregulated fishing practices have taken a toll on the population sizes of horseshoe crabs.

The CRCIHSC research team found a total of 179



horseshoe crabs trapped in five abandoned fishing nets, out of which five (three males and two gravid females) were found alive and successfully rescued. The survey also documented 28 freshly dead horseshoe crabs, while the others were found in various stages of decomposition. Moreover, the six-month survey report of CRCIHSC (covering key habitats such as 'Khandia

Muhana', 'Mahisali Muhana', and 'Balaramgadi estuary') confirms survival threats with a sharp decline in numbers due to fishing net/ghost net entanglement and other anthropogenic disturbances caused by humans.

While at 'Mahisali Muhana', a large number of individuals were found dead due to bycatch/ghost net/loose stone packing, at 'Khandia

Muhana', the population showed fluctuations with improved mortality. Balaramgadi Estuary, once a known habitat, reported no horseshoe crabs, and hence faces a potential local extinction. Other habitats surveyed during the cycle reported active mating pairs, but severe habitat disturbances doubt for a successful reproduction strategy.

India will emerge as number one military power: Rajnath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday here said India is not only securing its borders but also positioning itself as a key player in the international defence ecosystem. "The day is not far when India will not only emerge as a developed country, but our Military Power will also emerge as the number one in the world," he said.

Making these assertions at a defence conclave, he reiterated that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the revival and strengthening of the defence sector is one of the biggest priorities for the government.

He further stated that the government's first and foremost challenge was to change the mindset that India would simply import to meet its defence needs. "India will reduce its dependency on imports and create a defence industrial complex that will not only meet India's needs but will also strengthen the potential of defence exports," the Defence Minister emphasised.

"Today, while India's Defence sector is moving ahead on the path of self-reliance, it is also ready to play a very important role in making global supply chains resilient," he said. Rajnath Singh underlined that India's growing Defence capability is not meant to provoke conflict. "Our Defence capabilities are like a credible deterrence, to maintain peace and tranquillity. Peace is possible only when we remain strong," he added.

On the evolving nature of warfare, he underscored that in the coming days, conflicts and wars will be more violent and unpredictable. The Cyber and Space Domains are rapidly emerging as new battlefields and along with this, a war of narrative and perception is also being fought all over the world. To address these challenges, he mentioned that the focus is on



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh addressing at The Week Defence Conclave in New Delhi

holistic capacity building and continuous reforms. The defence minister also announced that Ministry of Defence had declared 2025 as the 'Year of Reforms'.

He also outlined the government's indigenisation drive, noting the release of five positive indigenisation lists by the Armed Forces and five by Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs).

"The total number of defence equipment, weapon systems and platforms included in the list of the Services is 509. These will now be produced in India. Similarly, the total number of items included in the DPSU lists is 5,012 including strategically important Line Replacement Units, sub-systems, spares and components," he said.

Rajnath Singh also underlined the fact that the government has reserved 75 per cent of the Defence Budget for procure-

ment from domestic companies. He pointed out that defence production in India has risen from ₹40,000 crore in 2014 to over ₹1.27 lakh crore today. "This year, Defence production should cross ₹1.60 lakh crore, while our target is to produce Defence equipment worth ₹3 lakh crore by the year 2029," he added.

On Defence exports, Rajnath Singh underscored that the figures had surged from ₹686 crore in 2013-14 to ₹23,622 crore in 2024-25.

Highlighting India's growing strategic capabilities, the Defence Minister mentioned that the country now stands shoulder to shoulder with developed nations in critical areas such as missile technology (Agni, BrahMos), submarines (INS Arihant), aircraft carriers (INS Vikrant), artificial intelligence, drones, cyber defence and hypersonic systems. A

BJP cites digital campaign for anger against Mamata's rule

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The BJP on Thursday cited a digital campaign against the Mamata Banerjee-led government in West Bengal as a spontaneous expression of people's anger.

"The people of West Bengal are finally raising their voices against the unimaginable atrocities, lawlessness, and rampant crimes under Mamata Banerjee's rule," BJP's co-in-charge for the state Amit Malviya said.

He was referring to what BJP leaders described as a citizen-driven campaign through a website www.Soibenaarbangla.Com (Bengal will no longer tolerate it) against the alleged corruption and lawlessness in the state. The campaign urges people not to vote for the ruling Trinamool Congress to save Bengal, asking them to rise above fear and patronage and seeking their support with musical campaign material. It alleges that Hindus have been at the receiving end of the state government's "biased" conduct.

Malviya claimed, "Incidents like the Murshidabad riots, the SSC (school recruitment) scam, the rape and murder of a woman doctor at RG Kar Medical College, and the sexual violence against women in Sandeshkhali have devastated the state and shaken its conscience."

Though critical of the TMC, the campaign does not endorse any party.

The TMC has accused the BJP of driving a smear campaign against its government, with the political battle between the two parties rising in intensity and acrimony as the assembly elections scheduled for the next year approach.

WB recruitment: SC extends tenure of untainted teachers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a major relief, the Supreme Court on Thursday extended till December 31 the services of terminated teachers found untainted by the CBI. A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar considered West Bengal's submissions that the terminations adversely impacted teaching in various state-run and aided schools. The order came on the pleas of the State Government, which moved court after the April 3 verdict.

The top court judgment invalidated the appointment of 25,753 teachers and staffers in various schools, calling the entire selection process "vitiated and tainted". On Thursday, it also took note of the State Government saying fresh recruitment would take time. Several districts in the state witnessed widespread protests as a section of teachers and non-teaching staffers, rendered unemployed post the Supreme Court verdict, clashed with the police. Taking note of the submissions, the top court said it will grant extension of service to untainted teachers only but it won't apply to Grade C and D employees of the state government run and aided schools.

"We are inclined to accept the prayer in the present application in so far as it relates to the assistant teachers for classes 9-10th and 11-12th subject to certain conditions," the CJI said.

Listing out the conditions, the CJI said the advertisement for fresh recruitment will be published on or before May 31 and the entire process including the examination will be completed by December 31 this year. "This order will not accord any special rights or advantage to the aforesaid teachers in so far as fresh recruitment is concerned," the CJI added. The court asked the state government and its West Bengal School Service Commission to file a compliance affidavit

on the initiation of the recruitment process on or before May 31. On April 3, the top court while annulling the appointments, upheld a Calcutta High Court verdict of April 22, 2024, and said the tainted candidates should refund their "salaries/payments received".



"This is a case wherein the entire selection process has been vitiated and tainted beyond resolution. Manipulations and frauds on a large scale, coupled with the attempted cover-up, have dented the selection process beyond repair and partial redemption. The credibility and legitimacy of the selection are denuded," the bench had said.

The case stemmed from the alleged irregularities in the 2016 recruitment process conducted by the West Bengal SSC in which 23 lakh candidates appeared for 24,640 posts and a total of 25,753 appointment letters were issued. The apex court had called it a "systemic fraud".

Former West Bengal Education Minister Partha Chatterjee and Trinamool Congress MLAs Manik Bhattacharya and Jiban Krishna Saha are among the accused being probed in the recruitment scam.

CCPA advises coaching centres to strictly adhere to Consumer Protection Act 2019

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has advised coaching centres to strictly adhere to the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and Guidelines for the Prevention of Misleading Advertisements in the Coaching Sector, 2024, according to Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution statement on Thursday. It also said notices were sent to some coaching centres for not adhering to the guidelines.

The notices pertained to issues like guaranteed placement/selection, assurance of rank in JEE/NEET, violation of consumer rights and misleading advertisement. Also, unfair trade practices including promised services not provided, admission cancelled but fee not refunded, deficiency in service, non/partial refund of fees.

These claims and practices appear to be violating various provisions of the Act including Section-2(28) and 2 (47) of Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisement in Coaching Sector, 2024.

The authority clearly outlines that it is essential their representations are accurate, clear, and free from misleading claims or the concealment of important information

from consumers. Additionally, coaching centres should avoid making assurances of guaranteed success. Coaching centres must clearly disclose key details in their advertisements, including the student's name, rank, course type and whether the course was paid. Disclaimers must be prominently displayed in the same font size as other important information to ensure consumers are not misled.

Following the recent declaration of results for examinations such as IIT-JEE and NEET, the Central Consumer Protection Authority observed that coaching centres are not adhering to the guidelines for the prevention of misleading advertisements in the coaching sector, 2024. The Guidelines for the Prevention of Misleading Advertisements in the Coaching Sector, 2024, were issued on November 13, 2024.

These guidelines prohibit coaching centres from making false or misleading claims/advertisements to promote their services and from engaging in deceptive or unfair practices.

These guidelines represent a vital step toward preventing the exploitation of students and ensuring that they are not misled by false promises or compelled into unfair contracts.

The guidelines are framed to enhance

transparency and fairness in the sector, helping students and their families make informed decisions based on accurate and truthful information.

These guidelines supplement existing regulations and further strengthen the regulatory framework governing advertisements in the coaching sector. In a significant move to protect consumer rights and ensure transparency in the coaching sector, the Central Consumer Protection Authority has, over the past three years, taken action against misleading advertisements, unfair trade practices, and violations of consumer rights by coaching centres.

In this regard, the Central Consumer Protection Authority has issued 49 notices and imposed a total penalty of ₹77.60 lakh on 24 coaching centres and directed them to discontinue misleading advertisements and unfair trade practices.

The Central Consumer Protection Authority had earlier taken action against coaching centres offering services for competitive exams including UPSC CSE, IIT-JEE, NEET, RBI, NABARD, among others, reaffirming its commitment to ensuring that no false or misleading advertisements are made in contravention of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

Possibility of resumption of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra soon, says India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India on Thursday said there is a possibility of resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra soon and preparations for it are underway.

India and China have been looking at resuming the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra as part of efforts to improve ties after the two countries completed disengagement of troops at the two remaining friction points of Demchok and Depsang under the framework of a pact sealed in October last year.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said both India and China have agreed in-principle to resume flight services between the two sides as well and that relevant modalities are being worked out.

The move to resume the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and flight services is part of efforts by India and China to repair the ties hit by the over four-year military standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

"We will soon issue a public notice on the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and there is a possibility of resumption of the Yatra soon," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"The Yatra will happen this year and we

are making preparations. More information will be put out for the public soon," he added.

The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra has not taken place since 2020.

On resumption of flight services, Jaiswal said: "In principle, both countries have agreed that flight operations will resume."

"The technical teams on both sides are looking into the technical arrangements for the flight services to resume. The two civil aviation authorities have met and are discussing the relevant modalities, including the updated framework," he said.

Last month, India and China explored ways to rebuild ties and agreed to initiate efforts to promote people-to-people exchanges, including arrangements for resumption of direct flights as well as Kailash Mansarovar Yatra this year.

In a meeting in Beijing, the two sides also discussed resumption of dialogue mechanisms in a "step-by-step" manner to utilize them to address each other's priority areas of interest and concern and move the relations on to a "more stable and predictable path".

The relations between the two countries came under severe strain following the Galwan Valley clashes in 2020.

The meeting in Beijing was held

between Gourangalal Das, the joint secretary in the MEA's East Asia division, and Liu Jinsong, the director general at the Chinese foreign ministry's department of Asian affairs.

There have been series of meetings between India and China following the disengagement of troops in Depsang and Demchok.

In December, NSA Doval travelled to Beijing and held talks with Foreign Minister Wang Yi under the framework of Special Representatives (SR) dialogue on the boundary question.

The decision to revive the SR mechanism and other such dialogue formats was taken at a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Kazan on October 23 last year.

The Modi-Xi meeting came two days after India and China firmed up a disengagement pact for Depsang and Demchok, the last two friction points in eastern Ladakh.

In January, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Beijing and held talks with his Chinese counterpart Sun Weidong.

In the meeting, the two sides decided to resume the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and agreed to take certain people-centric steps to "stabilise and rebuild" ties.

BJP Government 'oppressing' MGNREGA workers: Kharage



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday alleged that the "anti-poor" Modi Government is bent on "oppressing" MGNREGA workers and reiterated the party's demands that their minimum wage per day be fixed at ₹400 and that they be provided at least 150 days of work in a year.

Kharge shared on social media, a media report which claimed that the government is unlikely to raise the daily floor wage under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) substantially, on top of the usual annual hike, despite recommendations by two panels.

"It seems that the anti-people Modi government has refused to increase MGNREGA wages. This is like attacking the rights of MGNREGA workers," Kharge said in a post in Hindi on X.

He pointed out that recently, the Joint Parliamentary Committee had recom-

mended increasing the daily wage of MGNREGA workers to ₹400 per day.

"Amarjeet Sinha's High Level Committee formed in 2023 had also suggested increasing wages and increasing the budget of MGNREGA. But the anti-poor Modi government is bent on oppressing MGNREGA workers," the Congress chief said. Be it excluding nearly seven crore registered workers from MGNREGA by imposing the condition of Aadhaar-based payment, or allocating the lowest MGNREGA budget in the last 10 years as compared to the total budget, the Modi government has been negatively impacting MGNREGA, he said.

"MGNREGA — Employment guarantee scheme was brought by the Congress Party for the poorest families of our country. We are firm on our two demands — Minimum wage of ₹400 per day should be fixed for MGNREGA workers and at least 150 days of work in a year be provided to them," Kharge said.

No entry fee at monuments on World Heritage Day, says ASI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on Thursday announced that on the occasion of 'International Day for Monuments and Sites', celebrated globally on April 18, no fee shall be charged on visiting Archaeological Survey of India monuments across India, Ministry of Culture said here in a statement.

This initiative aims to encourage visitors to explore India's rich cultural heritage. With 3,698 monuments and sites under its protection, ASI is offering this opportunity to reconnect with the country's historical legacy and architectural marvels.

This year's theme for 'International Day for Monuments and Sites' is 'Heritage under threat from disaster and conflicts' where awareness is being spread on safeguarding the heritage sites from natural or man-made disasters, threats or conflicts.

By waiving off entry fee, Archaeological Survey of India hope to promote greater public engagement around the importance of conservation and management of our built heritage and how can citizens play active role in keeping our heritage preserved.

After all, as per the Fundamental Duties laid down in our Constitution, it is our collective responsibility to protect these invaluable heritage sites and do our bit to protect them.

US Vice President visit to boost ties: MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India on Thursday said it is "very positive" that the upcoming visit of US Vice President JD Vance will give "further boost" to the India-US bilateral ties and "all relevant issues" will be on the table. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal made the comments while indicating that issues relating to trade and tariff will figure during Vance's talks with Indian leaders.

Vance is scheduled to pay a four-day visit to India beginning April 21 during which he will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi that are expected to focus on an early finalisation of the proposed bilateral trade pact.

Vance will be accompanied by his wife, Usha, their three young children — Ewan, Vivek and Mirabel — and senior members of the US administration.

"This is an official visit. He will be meeting the prime minister. With the US, we have a comprehensive strategic global partnership. When you have that level of partnership with any country, obviously, you will discuss all relevant issues," Jaiswal said. "And with the US, our relationship is such that we are doing anything that is part of human endeavour," he added.

"All the bilateral issues will be discussed and we are very positive that the visit will give further boost to our bilateral ties," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing in response to a question.

Vance is travelling to India amid rising global concerns over US President Donald Trump's tariff tussle and both sides are likely to deliberate on firming up the proposed trade deal that is aimed at addressing issues relating to levies, market access and supply chains. Soon after their arrival



MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal addressing a press conference in Delhi on Thursday

on Monday in New Delhi, Vance and his family are expected to visit the Red Fort, people familiar with the matter said.

In the afternoon, Vance will meet National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president JP Nadda, they said.

Modi will interact with Vance and his family and host them for a formal dinner in the evening, the people said.

The Vances will travel to Jaipur on April 22 and visit key tourist sites and have some engagements, they added.

They will travel to Agra the next day to visit the Taj Mahal, the people said.

The US vice president is travelling to India against the backdrop of Trump's policy on tariffs that has triggered massive

trade disruptions and fears of a global economic recession.

Days after his reciprocal tariff kicked in this month, Trump announced a 90-day pause on it on all countries, except China, as countries around the world wilted under the impact of the seismic action. Vance's visit will take place weeks after US Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Tulsi Gabbard's trip to India. The DNI held separate meetings with Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Jaishankar and Doval.

The US president's tariff tussle has stoked fears of a global trade war.

Following talks between Modi and Trump in Washington DC in February, the two sides announced to negotiate the first tranche of the BTA by the fall of 2025.

CRPF backbone of anti-Naxal mission: HM Amit Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Neemuch

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said that Naxalism, which is confined to just four districts in India, will be eliminated by March 31 next year, and the CRPF is the “backbone” of this mission. He was addressing the Central Reserve Police Force’s (CRPF) 86th Raising Day function in Madhya Pradesh’s Neemuch district.

“Naxalism has been confined to just four districts in India. The menace will end in the country by March 31, 2026, as stated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) and the CRPF, especially its CoBRA battalion, are playing a major role in eliminating Naxalism from the country,” he said.

The Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) is a specialised unit of the CRPF, known for its proficiency in guerrilla and jungle warfare, particularly in combating the Naxal menace.

“The CRPF has set up over 400 forward

operating bases in Naxal (affected) areas. Because of this, violence in these regions has come down by more than 70 per cent and we are now close to ending it,” Shah said.

He said the CRPF’s contribution to national security is unparalleled, whether it is fighting terrorists in the Kashmir valley, ensuring peace in the Northeast, or confining hardened Naxalites to just four districts today.

“In all these achievements, the CRPF jawans have played a major role. No number of books can do justice to their bravery, sense of duty and courage,” he said.

One of the greatest achievements of the CRPF is its massive contribution in eliminating Naxalism, the minister said.

Today, even the most dreaded Naxalites tremble when they hear about CoBRA commandos approaching, he said. “The CoBRA battalion has become a symbol of valour. I congratulate all CoBRA jawans on the 86th (Raising Day) parade and thank them for their courage,” Shah said.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the Central Reserve Police Force's Raising Day parade in Neemuch on Thursday

“Under your leadership, the CRPF jawans have made remarkable strides in eradicating Naxalism. And today, I announce that by March 31, 2026, Naxalism will be completely wiped out from India. This is a pledge the nation has taken and the CRPF is the backbone of this mission,” he added.

The CRPF has always made the ultimate sacrifice to maintain the unity and integrity of the country, Shah noted. “That’s why, whenever there is unrest anywhere in the country and, as home minister, I get to know that CRPF jawans are deployed there, I can focus on my other duties without worry because I have faith that if the CRPF is present, victory is assured,” he said.

Shah further said, “2,264 among you have sacrificed their lives. I want to say to families of all the martyrs that as the nation moves forward towards becoming the supreme power by 2047, your families’ contribution is immense.”

When the golden history of India’s independence is written, the saga of “our

immortal martyrs’ sacrifice will be written in golden letters. I am fully confident of this,” he said. The event here was part of the 86th Raising Day celebrations of the CRPF, an official release said.

The CRPF Day is celebrated every year on March 19, as it was on this day in 1950 that the flag was presented to the force by the then Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. This year, the parade was held on April 17 as part of extended celebrations. Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav also attended the event.

It was in Neemuch on July 27, 1939, that the ‘Crown Representative Police’ was established during British rule, which was renamed as Central Reserve Police Force by Home Minister Patel on December 28, 1949.

The CRPF has played a strong role in many fronts, ranging from the integration of princely states to internal security, counter-insurgency-terrorism operations, international peace-keeping, VIP security and disaster management.

RSS to launch nationwide outreach ahead of centenary celebrations

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Kanpur

As the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) approaches its centenary on Vijayadashami in October this year, the organisation is set to launch a massive nationwide outreach programme to unite people of all castes under the broader Hindu identity. The initiative, being described as one of the largest grassroots campaigns by the Sangh, aims to reach every Hindu household in the country.

RSS Sarsangchalak Mohan Bhagwat has given a clarion call to swayamsevaks to intensify their efforts at the local level and ensure the presence of RSS shakhas in every mohalla, street, village, town and city. The campaign is envisioned as a vehicle to spread the Sangh’s message of cultural unity and national identity.

Speaking to volunteers, Bhagwat emphasised the need for deeper engagement with society. “Every segment of society must be introduced to the RSS—children, youth, adults, and elders alike. It is not enough to hold a few meetings or shakhas; we must ensure that the values

Bhagwat pointed out that rampant deforestation, drop in groundwater levels, increasing presence of adulterated food products, and shrinking flow of rivers in India are issues that need intervention

of the Sangh resonate in every household,” he said.

He added that the time had come for the organisation to dedicate itself more vigorously to uniting Hindus beyond caste and community lines. “We must build a swayamsevak in every home, someone who will work not just for personal gain, but for the betterment of society. This is not only the responsibility of the RSS but of every conscious citizen and public representative,” he said.

Bhagwat said that societal thinking, cultural expression, and emotional spirit must converge towards a common goal. “We must align our thoughts and emotions to build a cohesive society. Unity in diversity should not just be a slogan—it must

become our lived experience,” he added.

Alongside the centenary campaign, the Sangh is also placing renewed emphasis on environmental conservation, viewing it as a moral and national responsibility. Bhagwat expressed deep concern over the deteriorating ecological balance and its harmful impact on human life.

He pointed out that rampant deforestation, the alarming drop in groundwater levels, the increasing presence of adulterated food products, and the shrinking flow of rivers are issues that need immediate intervention. “If corrective steps are not taken now, the future generations will face unimaginable hardships. Environmental degradation is not a distant threat—it is already affecting our lives,” Bhagwat warned.

He proposed a six-point strategy to address the crisis, stressing the importance of integrating environmental consciousness into every aspect of public life. He called for partnerships with educational institutions, religious bodies, women’s groups, and civil society organisations to build a broad-based movement for change.

Karbi Anglong moving towards development: Assam CM Himanta

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that Karbi Anglong, once a hotbed of insurgent activities, has witnessed a transformation over the last few years following the signing of the peace accord with six outfits in 2021. The once troubled district has embarked on a journey of peace and development with a particular focus on the reintegration of former militants into society, the Chief Minister said on the first day of his two-day visit to the hill district of Karbi Anglong.

The Chief Minister also met with representatives of the six outfits that had signed the peace accord and reviewed the terms of the settlement. “From guns to groundnuts and extremism to entrepreneurship, Karbi Anglong has seen a massive turnaround in recent years,” Sarma posted on X. “Met ex-cadres of various armed groups who gave up violence to help build a prosperous society. Through our various reintegration programs, many have become fishery and agricultural entrepreneurs as well as job creators,” he said.



“On the occasion, I also reviewed the Terms of Settlement with the ex-cadres of the 6 erstwhile groups,” Sarma added. The representatives from all the six Karbi out-

fits, Karbi Longri NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF), People’s Democratic Council of Karbi Longri (PDCK), three factions of Karbi People’s Liberation Tiger (KPLT) and United People’s Liberation Army (UPLA), had signed the accord in September 2021 after the chief minister assumed office the same year in May.

Inappropriate behaviour on sets, alleges Malayalam actor

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Kochi

An upcoming star Vincy Aloshious has declared that it was not possible to work in Malayalam films because of the influence wielded by some of the actors who are addicted to drugs.

She made a formal complaint to various film bodies like AMMA (Association of Malayalam Movie Artists), producers association and the Internal Complaints Committee of the film.

In a complaint filed with AMMA and Film Chamber, 30-year-old Aloshious alleged that Shine Tom Chacko (42) misbehaved with her in the sets of Soothravakyam, a film under production. In a sudden development on Wednesday night, the anti-drug wing of Kerala Police raided the hotel where Chacko had been put up but the actor escaped from his room in the third-floor by jumping into the swimming pool beneath the room where he was staying and he was taken away in a car waiting downstairs.

“We suspect he got the information about the raid from someone in the hotel itself and a probe is on how he managed to vanish,” said a member of the team.

In an e-mail sent to the trade bodies,

Aloshious alleged that the behavior of Chacko was unbecoming of a star. “He spoke to me in an inappropriate manner and had consumed some drugs. I saw some kind of white powder coming out of his mouth. When I told him to leave me he insisted that he would help me to fix up the dress which was not appropriate,” said Aloshious. Saji Nanthiatt and Jayan Cherthala, office bearers of Film Chamber and AMMA respectively said that the organisations stand with Aloshious in this hour of crisis and stringent action would be taken against Shine Tom Chacko once the probe is completed.

Chacko, known as ‘trouble-maker’ because of his actions in the past. Many stars have charged that he was a drug addict and an enfant terrible in the industry. Chacko himself has been alleged by co-stars for his misuse of drugs. Many drug pushers including high society women have been held by the police in the recent past in connection with supply of narcotics in film sets.

Though former chief of the excise department Rishi Raj Singh had cautioned about this development, it goes unchecked and the number of artists falling into drug-traps are shooting up by the day.

BJP scouting new Uttar Pradesh chief ahead of 2027 polls

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

With the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections looming, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is recalibrating its organisational machinery, setting in motion the selection of a new state unit president. This decision, party insiders say, will be guided not just by political experience but by social arithmetic, with caste equations at the heart of the process.

Having completed appointments in 70 of its 98 district and city units — a crucial prerequisite before naming a state chief — the BJP is now zeroing in on a candidate who can rebuild its support base among key caste groups, particularly the non-Yadav OBCs, and counter the opposition’s growing appeal through caste-based alliances.

The frontrunner for the post is expected to be from the Other Backward Classes (OBC), with a strong preference for someone from eastern Uttar Pradesh (Purvanchal) — a region where the BJP suffered major setbacks in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Of the 24 seats in Purvanchal, the Samajwadi Party (SP) walked away with 14, while the BJP and its ally Apna Dal (Soneylal) could only muster 10.

“There is growing urgency within the BJP to contain the damage in eastern UP before 2027,” said senior journalist R N Bajpayee. “The leadership is veering toward an OBC face from this belt to re-establish links with the party’s traditional non-Yadav OBC base.”

Bhupendra Singh Chaudhary, the current state president and a Jat leader from western UP, was appointed in 2022, succeeding Kurmi leader Swatantra Dev Singh. The party’s current thinking suggests a shift is needed — one that aligns with the state’s evolving social and electoral realities.

“The OBC support base has long been central to the BJP’s rise in UP, especially the backing from non-Yadav groups,” said a senior BJP leader. “While the party still lacks a clear Dalit face in the state, an OBC leader offers wider traction, particularly to counter the SP-led PDA (Pichhda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak) narrative.”

Political analyst Manoj Bhadra echoed the sentiment, saying the new BJP president will need to do more than manage the organisation. “This will be a strategic appointment. The leader must neutralise the PDA pitch while keeping the BJP’s internal caste coalition intact,” he said. “The social identity of the new chief will be central to how the party performs in 2027.”

Among those in contention are

Having completed appointments in 70 of its 98 district and city units the BJP is now zeroing in on a candidate who can rebuild its support base among key caste groups, particularly the non-Yadav OBCs

Minister Dharmpal Singh, Union Minister B.L. Verma, and Rajya Sabha MP Baburam Nishad — all OBC leaders with deep regional roots. Both Dharmpal and Verma hail from the Lodh community, which has remained a BJP stronghold since the days of former Chief Minister Kalyan Singh.

While the search is focused on OBCs, the BJP is also said to be considering Dalit leaders such as former MPs Ram Shankar Katheria, Vinod Sonkar, and Neelam Sonkar, as well as former MLC Vidya Sagar Sonkar. Their inclusion reflects the party’s recognition of growing competition for Dalit votes — a space that opposition parties are aggressively trying to occupy. Though names of a few Brahmin leaders — including Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Sharma and former MP Harish Dwivedi — have surfaced in discus-

sions, senior party functionaries downplay the likelihood of another upper-caste leader taking charge. With Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath already representing the Thakur community, party strategists believe a backward caste candidate would bring better caste balance and electoral utility.

The incoming state president will also have the challenging task of strengthening coordination with regional allies like Apna Dal (S), the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP), the Nishad Party, and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD). These parties represent influential OBC sub-groups such as Kurmis, Rajbhars, Mauriyas, Kushwahas, and Nishads — crucial players in the BJP’s broader caste coalition.

The 2024 general election results exposed vulnerabilities in BJP’s outreach among non-Yadav OBCs and Dalits — gaps the opposition is trying to exploit through targeted caste narratives. The next BJP chief in UP will be expected to reverse these trends and restore lost ground, particularly in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

For the BJP, this leadership transition goes far beyond filling a vacant post. It is a strategic exercise to prepare for the fierce caste-driven battle that lies ahead in 2027 — a test that will demand not just political agility, but a nuanced understanding of the state’s complex social landscape.

Woman’s ruse on spouse’s murder fails, held

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a shocking incident in Uttar Pradesh’s Meerut district, a woman and her lover allegedly strangled her husband to death and tried to pass it off as a snakebite by placing a venomous snake near his body, police said on Thursday.

The crime came to light after the post-mortem report revealed that the victim, Amit Kashyap (30), also known as Mickey, died due to asphyxiation and not a snakebite, as initially believed.

According to Circle Officer Abhishek Kumar Patel, the murder took place in Akbarpur Sadat village under the jurisdiction of Behsuma police station. “On Sunday morning, Amit was found dead in his home with a venomous snake lying next to his bed, prompting assumptions of a snakebite death,” Patel said.

However, the post-mortem findings contradicted this theory, prompting a deeper investigation. During questioning, Amit’s wife Ravita (30) and her lover Amardeep (20), who was also a close friend of the deceased, confessed to the crime, police said.

“The duo admitted to strangling Amit while he was asleep. To mislead investigators, they placed a live snake under his body. The snake bit Amit’s corpse multiple times, which initially supported the false narrative of a snakebite death,” the



Police escorting the accused woman, accused of killing her husband with the help of her lover, after producing them in a court in Meerut

officer said.

Investigations further revealed that Amardeep, a resident of the same village, was having an affair with Ravita. Amit had recently discovered the relationship, which

led to frequent disputes between the couple.

Both Ravita and Amardeep have been arrested, and further legal action is being taken, police said.

Yogi flays Opposition on Murshidabad issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Thursday, launched a sharp attack on the opposition, criticising their silence over recent incidents in Murshidabad and Bangladesh. He said their lack of response has completely exposed their double standards in front of the public.

The Chief Minister criticised the opposition for insulting national heroes like Shivaji, Maharana Pratap, and Rana Sanga, while glorifying figures like Aurangzeb, Babar, and Jinnah, who he said were against the idea of India. He accused opposition leaders of spreading propaganda and hatred in society for vote-bank politics.

He said, “To build a prosperous Uttar Pradesh and a self-reliant, developed India, it is important to respect our national heroes. This is also one of the pledges of the Prime Minister’s ‘Panch Pran’ vision.”

The CM further highlighted the importance of all four pillars of democracy—legislature, executive, judiciary, and media—respecting their own limits. He said that along with rights, it is equally important to understand our responsibilities in a democracy. “India’s democracy is strong because each pillar follows its own ‘Lakshman Rekha,’” he said.

The UP Chief Minister mentioned that ‘samvad’ (dialogue) is the greatest strength of democracy. ‘Even the toughest problems can be solved through conversation. When dialogue ends, conflict begins,’ he added

The Chief Minister mentioned that ‘samvad’ (dialogue) is the greatest strength of democracy. “Even the toughest problems can be solved through conversation. When dialogue ends, conflict begins. That’s why it’s important to always choose the path of discussion,” he added.

The CM, while speaking at an event titled “Uttar Pradesh: Towards a Glorious Century” organised by a major media group, strongly criticised the opposition parties holding them responsible for deep-rooted issues like corruption, casteism, and mafia rule during previous regimes. “The same people who were involved in scams and built hotels in London using public money are the ones who looted the state and divided people along caste lines,” he said.

He remarked: “Those who built their political empires on corruption, casteism,

mafia power, and dynastic politics are now silent on incidents like Murshidabad.”

The Chief Minister shared the progress made under his leadership in Uttar Pradesh, highlighting the development of infrastructure and the elimination of mafia rule. He said that his government has turned the state into a safer and more peaceful place.

“In the past, mafias used to control entire districts,” he said. “They took over government contracts, caused riots, and harassed women and businessmen. People used to be scared during festivals. Today, festivals in UP are celebrated peacefully and with grandeur.”

He also drew a comparison between the current situation in Murshidabad and what cities like Muzaffarnagar, Bareilly, Aligarh, and Lucknow used to face in the past.

Highlighting Uttar Pradesh’s rapid development, CM Yogi said the state now has some of the best infrastructure in the country, including highways, expressways, railways, and metro systems.

He shared that the state’s GSDP has grown from Rs 12.75 lakh crore in 2017 to nearly Rs 30 lakh crore today.

The per capita income has more than doubled from Rs 46,000 to over Rs 1.10 lakh and is expected to cross Rs 1.25 lakh soon.

Editor's TAKE

Preserving the past for the future's sake

World Heritage Day is all about protecting the identity, values and creativity of humanity

Every year on April 18, countries around the globe come together to celebrate World Heritage Day, also known as the International Day for Monuments and Sites. This important occasion, established by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1982 and later approved by UNESCO, serves as a reminder of the value of our cultural heritage — and the responsibility we all share to protect it.

Heritage — both tangible and intangible — is the collective memory of civilisations. It tells stories of who we are, where we came from, and how our societies evolved. While time, climate, and natural weathering have always been enemies of ancient structures and traditions, a more immediate and insidious threat today comes from political ideologies and regimes. Around the world, we have witnessed deliberate destruction of heritage as acts of dominance, revisionism, or retaliation. In trying to erase the past, these regimes destroy not just structures, but identity itself.

One of the most tragic and symbolic examples was the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in 2001. Carved in the 6th century, these towering statues were not just monuments of religious and artistic significance — they were irreplaceable pages of Afghan history. Their demolition was a stark message: the regime rejected not only the statues, but the entire cultural lineage they represented.

In Russia, we have seen another kind of heritage demolition. After the fall of the Soviet Union, statues of Lenin and other Communist-era icons were removed or destroyed by the new regime. While many saw this as necessary to move forward from a dark period, these relics were also historic markers — powerful reminders of an era that, like it or not, shaped the modern state. Similar stories play out in other regions. In post-colonial Africa and Latin America, monuments to colonisers have been toppled by newly empowered governments or protest movements. These acts are often cathartic for communities, but they also risk oversimplifying history by erasing it altogether.

India, a country with millennia of layered history, offers a complex example. On one hand, India has shown tremendous commitment to preserving its ancient temples, forts, and cities. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) manages thousands of monuments, and sites like the Taj Mahal, Hampi, and Khajuraho receive not just national, but global attention and protection. On the other hand, certain political narratives have led to the neglect, distortion, or even destruction of heritage. Mughal-era structures and other Islamic sites have sometimes been portrayed as symbols of foreign oppression rather than integral parts of India's pluralistic history. Controversies like the Gyanvapi Mosque case or the renaming of historic cities (e.g. Allahabad to Prayagraj) show how heritage is being rewritten to fit modern ideologies. India's heritage, like its culture, is layered and syncretic. To dismantle one layer in favour of another is to misunderstand the very nature of its identity.

When a regime destroys heritage, it isn't just erasing the past — it is destroying a mirror to itself. History cannot be undone. No matter how uncomfortable, the past lives in us. Monuments are not merely stones or statues; they are vessels of memory, cautionary tales, achievements, failures, and everything in between. Their destruction is a loss to humanity, not just a nation. As political tides shift, there is a growing need for governments to adopt a more mature approach to heritage. Recognise its value beyond ideology. Understand that history, in all its complexity, must be preserved, studied, and remembered — not sanitised or destroyed. Ultimately, heritage is not just about the past — it's about continuity. In destroying it, we are only severing ourselves from what could teach us, ground us, and guide us into the future.

Learning to learn and live

Beneath the surface-level diversity lies a profound truth: the core principles that govern human relationships are remarkably consistent. These shared values — truth, respect and fairness — form the bedrock of civil society

The fundamentals of all personal dealings and individual relationships, all over the world, are remarkably similar. Anywhere in the world, truth is upheld as a cardinal principle, and everywhere in the world, a line is considered drawn between proper and improper. It has nothing to do with which religion one follows, what is the colour of one's skin, or what are one's social norms. Similarly, killing is considered wrong, and so is taking something that does not belong to you. The list can be multiplied, and in all cases, there is a universal value system that brooks no distinction on account of language, creed, or anything else.

Put simply, the unifying principles of humanity are many and have withstood the test of time through millennia, and no one has found it worth his time to negate or contradict these principles.

It, therefore, does not follow that there are no differences between one part of the globe or another, or for that matter, all humanity agrees on everything.

There are differences of belief in matters of religion, creed, and values of behaviour. In certain communities, polyandry is accepted. In others, monogamy is considered desirable.

The enforcement of these values is sometimes through written laws enforceable by courts and, in certain cases, by social practices and beliefs, none of which go to a court.

The varieties are many, and the practices often differ sharply. It is this that makes the processes of legislation important, and the norms must be known to hold credence.

This is the birth of a civil society that has taken the form of nation-states and various national and international legislations that make up the world order.

In reasonable reality towards this end, some important steps have been taken, and certain important steps are yet to be undertaken to complete the cycle of total cohesiveness of the civil variety. This may take time to emerge.

For the present, it is important to register that one must agree to accept differences as a natural and essential part of global existence. The nation-states present one type of governance, and within the nation-states, there can be differences in ethnicity, practices, and norms.

The seeming diversity within an otherwise unifying framework is the experience of many nation-states.

It is therefore essential to recognise that tolerance, communication, and respect for each other's practices are essential to cohesive collective living.



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

There are, even among nation-states, variations from monarchy and more, across relatively vast territories to small existences of island states. There are many variations, and one must learn to agree to disagree and yet remain tolerant. This takes one back to the fundamental beliefs of accepting mutual dignity as a human being and recognising that one must not inflict one's values on others. What can be stated so simply can become comparatively complicated to practise, and these are the roots of much conflict which takes place even in civil states. Understanding the anatomy of conflict, therefore, requires a need for a concurrent understanding of the practice of the principles of 'live and let live'. Perhaps this should be made a part of each

child's learning before the child grows into adulthood. The present stage of learning through different stages of school and colleges emphasises knowledge acquisition. There is nothing wrong with that. What is needed, however, is the recognition that one has to let others live to be able to live oneself peacefully and happily.

These are lifestyle learnings and not knowledge learnings. It is, therefore, necessary to keep re-examining the fundamentals of educational systems and values which make coexistence not only desirable but feasible.

Put simply, a recognition of individual identities is useful, but a recognition of the other person's right to that living is also a must. For the physically powerful, adopting a stance of dominance, assertion, and compulsion is easy.

There has to be self-restraint in recognising how this is a must if the other person also needs to have the same spaces for life as one wants for oneself.

The long and short of it is not just the development of the mind, not just the devel-

opment of one's might, but also the development of one's patience, one's understanding, and how necessary it is to respect each other's identity.

A marriage, and a family, are the basic unit of the constitution of a civil society, and it is important to inculcate these values at the core of these institutions.

This can be best done by example and by reflection that the other person has the same right as one wants for oneself.

It is a happy truth that civilisational values have progressively advanced in that direction. That there are notable exceptions is understandable.

Perhaps dealing with it with patience and purpose is the way forward. It takes time but can be done with positive practices in the family and positive values in collective places like schools and elsewhere. The direction is non-negotiable, and the attempt is worth its effort.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views are personal)

Why we must learn to laugh at ourselves again

SECOND Opinion

BY ASHA IYER KUMAR

Once upon a time, we laughed without offence or guilt. We laughed at power, at politics, at bureaucracy, and most of all, at ourselves. It was a laughter steeped in mockery but in a shared understanding of the absurdities of life. Remember R. K. Laxman's Common Man?

The bespectacled, bewildered figure who stood silently witnessing the nation's daily dramas was our collective conscience drawn in ink. His was the lens through which middle-class India smiled at its foibles. No one was spared, and yet no one was wounded. His cartoons, which ran for decades under the banner You Said It, didn't merely capture the socio-political temperature — they made us laugh through the chaos, without cynicism, without rage, and it inspired us to gauge ourselves on the scale of changing times. How far we've come — and not for the better! Just the other day, The Times of India reported that Western Railway in Mumbai asked for the removal of a hoarding that humorously depicted Mumbai's famously crowded local trains.

Everyone who knows the city even remotely will vouch that the depiction wasn't far from reality. But even reality now seems too irreverent to tolerate. Our thresholds have shrunk. Satire is suspect. Irony is an offence. And humour — a great salve to wounded hearts — has become a minefield. It is as though

we have forgotten how to laugh without hurting, or how to be the subject of a joke without taking it personally. The public frame has grown brittle. Everything is either an insult or an agenda. Our collective skin has thinned, and with it, our ability to process humour as a mirror rather than a missile. We have become sensitive to our peril, for laughter now is no more a medicine but an action to be indulged in stealth. We now laugh at our own risk, for not all out there are amused. But let us pause here. What does it mean to laugh at oneself? And why is it so crucial to the health of a society, and to the sanity of the individual? To laugh at oneself is acknowledging one's imperfections without shame or embarrassment. It is to accept the human comedy in which we are all actors, fumbling, contradicting, faltering and having great falls like Humpty-Dumpty.

It is an act of humility. And humility, unlike humiliation, does not diminish. It enlarges us. It softens the ego, smoothes the sharp edges of pride, and allows us to be more forgiving — towards others, yes, but especially towards ourselves. We are not meant to take ourselves too seriously. The capacity to see one's absurdity, to smile at it, and even to share it with others, is a mark of inner strength.

In that laughter is a quiet wisdom — the wisdom to know that life is far too unpredictable to be lived in perpetual indignation. And as creatures, we are too tiny and insignificant in the canvas of the cosmos. Philosophers from every tradition have hinted at this. In Zen, the enlightened monk is often depicted laughing. In ancient Greece, Socrates was known for his irony, and his capacity to deflate pomposity through

humour. Closer home, the Bhakti poets gently mocked dogma and orthodoxy. Their irreverence was rooted in love, not spite. They knew that humour could illuminate truth in ways solemnity never could, and it was taken in its true spirit. But today, we confuse being offended with being right. And so, we silence the comedian, the cartoonist, the satirist, and slowly, we silence ourselves. We build fortresses around our fragility and call it righteousness. We seek apology where we should seek perspective.

This is not a defence for vulgarity or cruelty masquerading as humour, which too has become abundant in these indelible times. We know the difference between crassness and coolness. And we must always be vigilant against humour that punches down, that mocks the marginalised, that cloaks prejudice in punchlines or masks depravity in insensitivity. But the answer to bad humour is not humourlessness. It is better humour. Finer irony. Truer satire. And most of all, a thicker skin. As a society, we need to grow up. We need to rediscover the art of laughing together and at ourselves.

The Common Man did not need to speak because the society around him understood the language of the silent chuckle. That silent chuckle is now endangered. Let us then re-learn the ability to look at ourselves with a smile, not a scowl. Let us not fear humour; let us fear the day when we lose our humour. When people can no longer laugh at themselves, they are no longer free.

(The author is a Dubai-based columnist and a writing coach. She has published six books. Views are personal)

Leaderspeak



Harvard has set an example for other higher-ed institutions — rejecting an unlawful and ham-handed attempt to stifle academic freedom, while taking concrete steps to make sure all students at Harvard can benefit from an environment of intellectual inquiry, rigorous debate and mutual respect. Let's hope other institutions follow suit.

FORMER US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Letters to the Editor

A bold step towards social justice

Madam — The Telangana Government's decision to divide Scheduled Castes (SCs) into three categories is a commendable move towards social justice. It's important to note that the Supreme Court, in its August 2024 verdict, permitted such classification. There are undeniable disparities within the SC community. While some groups have benefited from government schemes, others remain marginalised. By dividing SCs into three groups — each comprising various sub-castes — the Government aims to ensure that the most disadvantaged are not left behind. Other states should take inspiration from Telangana's initiative.

However, while categorisation is a step forward, much remains to be done for the overall development of the SC community. Education must be made accessible to all members of the community, as it is the most effective tool for empowerment. Additionally, self-employment opportunities and skill development programmes must be introduced to boost economic independence.

After all, inclusive human resource development is essential for national progress. To truly uplift the SC community, this categorisation must be followed by sustained policy action. Holistic measures in education, employment, and skill training are vital. Only through inclusive development can we bridge internal disparities and ensure that every section of society participates equally in the nation's progress.

VENUGS | KOLLAM

India's market resilience shines

Madam — Indian equities soared as markets reopened after an extended weekend, with the NSE Nifty 50 Index rallying by up to 2.4 per cent on Tuesday in Mumbai, surpassing its 2 April closing level. According to Bloomberg, this rebound positions India as the first major global market to recover from losses triggered by reciprocal tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump earlier this month. Investors continue to place confidence in India's large, domestic-driven economy, which appears better equipped to weather a potential global slowdown than markets more exposed to US tariffs.

Amid the escalating US — China trade war, India has emerged as a viable alternative manufacturing hub. Unlike Beijing's combative stance, India has maintained a conciliatory approach and is actively working towards a provisional trade agreement with Washington.

This recovery is indeed a positive sign for India's economic resilience. India's steady performance amidst global volatility reflects the strength of its domestic consumption, robust financial systems, and prudent policy measures.

As geopolitical tensions and protectionist policies unsettle other economies, India's focus on self-reliance, infrastructure development, and investor-friendly reforms offers a competitive edge. This rebound is not just a short-term surge — it signals long-term confidence in India's growth trajectory.

JAYANTHY SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

A defining moment for Congress

Madam — Referring to the headline 'National Herald Case: ED Chargesheet Sonia, Rahul' (16 April), the Enforcement Directorate's chargesheet marks a serious escalation in the money laundering case involving the Gandhi family and the Congress party.

The allegations of financial irregularities in the Young Indian case are grave. Rather than presenting legal rebuttals, the Congress appears to be adopting a political counter-narrative, blaming the Government.

Moreover, Rahul Gandhi has yet to clarify his citizenship status amid ongoing allegations by Subramanian Swamy. The ED's chargesheet details ₹988 crore in alleged misappropriation, with market valuations of assets pegged at approximately ₹5,000 crore.

This is one of the most significant financial scandals to implicate a political family at the national level. The Congress must focus on proving its innocence in court rather than politicising the issue. It is essential that the judiciary ensures speedy justice, especially when such a high-profile case is involved. The seriousness of the charges demands transparency, accountability, and a fair legal process.

As public trust in institutions is at stake, both the Congress party and the Gandhi family must prioritise legal clarity over political rhetoric. Swift and impartial judicial proceedings will not only uphold the rule of law but also strengthen democratic credibility.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

ILAYARAJA'S LEGAL FIGHT FOR CREATIVE RIGHTS IN FILM MUSIC

Veteran music composer Ilayaraja has taken legal action against the makers of Ajith's recent film Good Bad Ugly for using three of his iconic songs without prior consent. The songs in question — Illamai Idho Idho from Sakalakala Vallavan, En Jodi Manja Kuruvi from Vikram (1986), and Oththa Roova from Nattupura Pattu — were used without permission.

Ilayaraja has demanded a formal apology and ₹5 crore in compensation from the production house. This case highlights Ilayaraja's unwavering commitment to protecting his creative legacy and reinforces the importance of respecting intellectual property rights. In the past, he has repeatedly defended his works against unauthorised usage. Gone are the days when filmmakers collaborated extensively with composers to create original music. Today's trend of remixing and reusing old songs might offer short-term appeal but erodes originality and often

leads to copyright violations. It is high time that filmmakers prioritised creativity over gimmicks and ensured legal compliance in music usage.

This incident underscores the growing menace of piracy and blatant copyright violations in the Indian film industry. Using a creator's work without consent not only disrespects their artistry but also sets a dangerous precedent — one that undermines intellectual property rights. Ilayaraja's legal stand is a reminder that creativity must be protected, not exploited.

In an era where originality is often overshadowed by remixes and recreations, strict enforcement of copyright laws is crucial. The industry must foster a culture that values artistic integrity, ensures rightful compensation, and deters infringement — to safeguard the future of creative expression in India. The government must take strict action against any violations.

M PRADYU | KANNUR

River ecosystems in the shadow of sand mining

As illegal mining alters the riverbeds and drains life from these once-thriving arteries, the need for sustainable management becomes urgent. To preserve rivers as living, life-giving entities, we must shift from exploitation to stewardship, write BKP SINHA and AJAY JHA

FIRST Column

Rivers are more than just flowing water — they are living archives of the Earth's memory, coded in sediment, speed, erosion, and the contours of their valleys.

Each river carries within it a unique story of origin, shaped by the terrain it traverses and the climates it endures.

Their courses mark the pulse of the land, shifting over centuries, yet always finding a path forward. In their constant motion, rivers mirror the rhythms of nature — cyclical, adaptive, and ever-evolving.

The flow of a river is driven by the force of gravity, which is counteracted by the resistance of the terrain it flows through.

The characteristics of the surrounding environment, such as the landscape's shape, soil type, vegetation, and factors like climate, land use, and geological play a significant role in determining the river's flow rate, the course it follows, and the sediments it carries. As rivers flow through diverse landscapes, they expose the layers beneath the surface, providing a glimpse into the Earth's geological history.

The sediments they carry — from fine silt to large boulders — reveal rock types, erosion patterns, and the entities that give shape to the terrain they have crossed. As rivers leave steep slopes for gentler terrain, their speed drops, reducing erosion.

They begin depositing transported sediments, with coarser materials giving way to finer silt, clay, and sand. The river may meander, forming curves and oxbow lakes, while sediment builds up along banks and floodplains, creating a more stable course and aquatic ecosystems.

Continuous erosion and deposition, however, cause these river channels to change course, often leading to braided river patterns with multiple interconnected streams.

Naturally developed embankments do help contain the river during high flows, prevent erosion of floodplains, and check disruption of ecosystems including any significant alterations to the river's path. The floods, however, deposit fertile silt on floodplains, enriching soil for agriculture like in the Indo-Gangetic plain. Again, as they approach larger water bodies, intricate deltas are formed, creating biodiverse ecosystems as exemplified in the vast Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta.

As the rivers flow, they provide a variety of resources and life-supporting services. Securing their ecological health is essential for the survival of humanity. River sand, apparently a relatively innocuous item made available by rivers, is in great demand, especially for construction activity. The extraction of river sand is regulated by the Government.

With increasing focus on construction in recent times, however, almost all the states in the country are facing an acute problem of illegal mining of river sand. Major lengths of the rivers being in non-forest areas, the newspapers abounded with journalistic accounts regarding assaults by illegal sand miners on the revenue department's enforcement agency. Indicating, however, that the sand mafia is entering forest areas too in the current construction season, there are reports of several assaults on foresters too.



Sand is abundantly available in deserts, but the sand particles created by wind erosion are rounded and hence are less suitable for construction. Construction-grade sand should be angular and with a certain mineral composition.

The proportion of fine particles (e.g. sand) and coarse particles (e.g. gravel), along with the cost of mining and transport, lead the extraction agencies to select the favourable spots. Indiscriminate sand mining, whether in the active channel or floodplain terraces, however, impacts the physical, chemical, and biological aspects of the riverscape apart from the human populations.

There are strong reasons for regulating river sand extraction. Depending on the type of mining, the riverbed's morphology changes, the groundwater table of the surrounding area is lowered, the stability of the riverbank is affected, and the flow regime of the river and the dynamic equilibrium of erosion and sedimentation gets permanently affected. They make way for disasters to happen.

As regards the chemical impact, the sand excavation and transport machinery severely degrade water and air quality through fuel/oil spills and exhaust

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WATER QUALITY DETERIORATES, STAGNANT WATER IN OLD SAND MINES IMPACTS THE HEALTH AND LIVELIHOODS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES, AND THE COLLAPSE OF INFRASTRUCTURES BECOMES IMMINENT. WATER QUALITY DETERIORATES, STAGNANT WATER IN OLD SAND MINES IMPACTS THE HEALTH OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

fumes. Extraction of river sand removes sediment-bound nutrients from the mining site which are then deposited on downstream sandbars. While these nutrient-rich deposits support green floodplains as seen along India's Periyar River, the process signifies a loss of nutrients from the river system but a reduced nutrient flow from land to marine environments.

Continuous removal of a sand layer of the riverbed can lead to the destruction of the habitat of microorganisms maintaining the river's biological health and endanger ecosystem services. Increased turbidity due to sand mining in active channels can block sunlight, hinder photosynthesis, and exterminate aquatic life like diatoms, macroinvertebrates, benthic algae, and fish eggs.

The shallow and braided flow impedes fish migration between flows and pools, disrupting the entire food web. Studies show that rampant sand mining has threatened species like the Ganges River dolphin and Chambal River's gharial. Further, unregulated sand mining results in the loss of aquatic flora and also riverside vegetation due to lowered water table, damaging the 'Shaded Riverine Aquatic Habitat' (SRA), which provides shade, bank stabilisation, and

nutrients to numerous organisms.

Again, the disturbed ecosystem creates conditions favourable for the proliferation of invasive species, such as the water hyacinth, in many Indian riverscapes. The repercussions of ecological instability are cumulative and far-reaching.

Water quality deteriorates, stagnant water in old sand mines impacts the health and livelihoods of local communities, and the collapse of infrastructures like buildings, roads, and bridges becomes imminent. Water quality deteriorates, stagnant water in old sand mines impacts the health and livelihoods of local communities, and the collapse of infrastructures like buildings, roads, and bridges becomes imminent.

The lowering of groundwater tables due to sand extraction is reported in the Achankovil and Manimala river basins in Kerala, where wells have dried up and agricultural productivity dropped as irrigation structures became ineffective. The decline in fisheries productivity has been reported in the Ganges River and other basins, impacting local livelihoods directly.

Meeting the ever-increasing demand for sand while adhering to sustainable sand mining practices in the interest of the river's survival is a formidable challenge today. With the Government's will to ensure the conservation and sustenance of our river systems as the non-negotiable premise, a range of responsible approaches must be adopted.

They should include creation of inventory of the available sustainable resources based on scientific study, carefully selected locations for extraction, pre- and post-mining baseline surveys, controlled extraction volumes, phased mining with concurrent or subsequent reclamation of mined areas through measures like refilling and revegetation, no extraction during seasons of aqua fauna's high biological activity, and third-party monitoring and evaluation as well as social audit of mining activities involving villagers and using GPS and drone surveillance as in Kerala.

Simultaneously, a concerted effort be made to diminish reliance on natural river sand by promoting the recycling of construction and demolition waste and the adoption of alternative materials like manufactured sand (M-sand), which is being promoted in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

While the ideal scenario involves widespread adherence to the above-suggested action points, developing a well-grounded strategy for effective enforcement has no alternative so far as a balanced and environmentally sound approach to sand management and riverscape conservation is concerned. Rivers have long been revered as symbols of life and spirituality.

To truly understand our rivers, we must see them as a part of the ecosystem that sustains humanity, and not just as resources to be exploited.

They deserve to be approached with cultural humility, legal innovation, and ecological wisdom. In the face of climate change and environmental degradation also, rivers stand as an eternal reminder that revival is always possible — if we learn to listen, respect, and align ourselves in harmony with nature.

(The writers are former Principal Chief Conservators of Forests, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. Views are their own)

India's startup surge: A new innovation powerhouse

In less than ten years, India has transformed from a budding startup landscape into the world's third-largest startup ecosystem, behind only the United States and the United Kingdom, write VINAY PATHAK and SANDEEP JOSHI

In just a decade, India's startup ecosystem has emerged as a powerful driver of innovation, employment, and national competitiveness. From a nascent startup scene, India has exploded into one of the world's most dynamic and rapidly expanding startup ecosystems.

The numbers tell a dramatic story, where from approximately 500 Government-recognised startups in 2016, the count surged to over 1.59 lakh by 15 January 2025.

This is not just development, but represents a fundamental change in India's economic structure, making the country the world's third-largest startup hub, after the United States and the United Kingdom. The presence of over 100 unicorns depicts the scale and value being created within this vibrant ecosystem.

India's startup boom, from 2014 to early 2025, is not just a result of entrepreneurial spirit but the outcome of a powerful convergence — the drive of Indian entrepreneurs coupled with proactive government policies designed to nurture a thriving ecosystem.

This remarkable growth highlights the synergy between intentional policy and organic innovation, unleashing hidden potential across the nation. It demonstrates how focused efforts have transformed ideas into successful businesses, paving the way for India's emergence as a global startup hub.

The exponential growth trajectory of India's startup ecosystem coincides directly with the rollout of key government programmes and visionary leadership that removed roadblocks and actively fostered innovation. Launched in 2016, these initiatives provided a structured framework that catalysed the entrepreneurial surge. Pivotal to this transformation was the launch of the Startup India initiative in January 2016.

Envisioned as a flagship programme, its core objective was to cultivate a startup culture, build a robust and inclusive ecosystem, and fundamentally transform India into a country of "job creators instead of job seekers."

India's visionary leadership has transformed the nation from job-seekers to job providers, reflecting its entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to building a self-



reliant, job-generating economy. It wasn't just a slogan; it was backed by a comprehensive Action Plan focusing on Simplification, Funding, and Incubation. This framework offered tax exemptions, simplified compliance, and financial support to help early-stage ventures overcome funding and regulatory challenges.

Simultaneously, the Government launched the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) in 2016, which fostered a culture of innovation through initiatives like the Atal Tinkering Labs and Atal Incubation Centres. These programmes not only nurtured young talent but also created a robust infrastructure that supported startups across diverse sectors, including technology, healthcare, and manufacturing. AIM's focus on nurturing creativity and research has played a crucial role in strengthening the ecosystem and preparing it for the future.

In 2024, the Indian Government made a transformative decision by abolishing the angel tax in the Union Budget. Introduced in 2012, this tax had acted as

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THE EXPONENTIAL GROWTH TRAJECTORY OF INDIA'S STARTUP ECOSYSTEM COINCIDES DIRECTLY WITH THE ROLLOUT OF KEY GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES AND VISIONARY LEADERSHIP THAT REMOVED ROADBLOCKS AND ACTIVELY FOSTERED INNOVATION

a significant obstacle for investors, discouraging investment by imposing levies on capital raised above fair market value, often hindering critical funding at vital stages. This step has cleared the way for a more investor-friendly environment, fostering growth and opportunity for startups across the nation.

The removal of this tax has been celebrated as a major step towards creating a more investor-friendly environment, helping startups access the funding they need to scale and succeed.

The decision to abolish the angel tax, alongside other reforms, showcases the Government's commitment to providing a conducive atmosphere for entrepreneurship to thrive. The growth of India's startup ecosystem has been far from centralised. While traditional tech hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Gurugram remain significant, a noticeable shift has occurred as entrepreneurs from smaller cities and towns have begun to make their mark.

This democratisation of innovation has been facilitated by the Government's push

for a more inclusive startup ecosystem that is accessible to a broader pool of talent.

Sectors like fintech, healthcare, and agritech have emerged as hotspots for innovation, with over 1,300 active tech startups added in 2022 alone. The Government has played a vital role in fostering growth within these sectors, encouraging investment and providing specialised support to startups that address critical societal needs.

For instance, fintech startups have revolutionised access to financial services, healthcare ventures have improved healthcare delivery, and agritech innovations have brought efficiency to the agriculture sector. Despite facing challenges like funding slowdowns and hiring freezes, the ecosystem demonstrated resilience. In 2023, India added over 1,000 startups, including 400 in emerging areas, underscoring the sector's adaptability.

The journey of our nation from ancient to modern India is a saga of remarkable achievements and milestones. It begins with the wisdom of great saints, progresses through the profound teachings of Swami

Vivekananda and the Upanishads, and extends to the strides of modern innovation like the upagrah (satellite) and the evolution from the traditional Kumbh Mela to the Startup Kumbh Mela. Each chapter of this journey stands as a powerful testament to our nation's relentless hard work, groundbreaking innovation, and unwavering self-reliance.

India is now rapidly emerging as a global leader in fostering sustainable, innovative, and thriving startups. As reported by the Press Information Bureau (PIB) on 16 January 2025, the country commemorates nine years of Startup India, a game-changing initiative launched in 2016. National Startup Day marks a key milestone in India's entrepreneurial journey.

Startup India, launched under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has become a cornerstone of national innovation and growth. It has championed the entrepreneurial spirit across the country, empowering thousands to explore creativity and innovation. As a result, India has become the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world.

India's startup story is a testament to the indomitable entrepreneurial spirit of New India. Since 2016, our vision has been to drive innovation, provide financial support, and nurture budding businesses. In just under a decade, ideas have evolved into industry giants, and dreams have become tangible realities.

Today, India stands tall, not only as a hub for technology but as a beacon of progress across diverse sectors. Our achievements in areas like vaccination further reflect our scientific prowess and societal resilience.

Inspired by the principles of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) and Na Phalshu Kadachana (focus on action, not results), India continues to grow with values at its core. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's push for "Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi" (growth and heritage, hand in hand) defines today's India — which is modern and aspirational, yet deeply rooted in its rich traditions and culture. India's story is not just one of economic expansion, but a journey of purpose, passion, and progress.

(Vinay Pathak is Assistant Professor at IIT Sonapat and Sandeep Joshi is a senior technology journalist. Views are their own)

Trump joins tariff talks with Japan as US seeks deals amid trade wars

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

President Donald Trump on Wednesday inserted himself directly into trade talks with Japanese officials, a sign of the high stakes for the United States after its tariffs rattled the economy and caused the administration to assure the public that it would quickly reach deals.

The Republican president attended the meeting alongside Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, top economic advisers with a central role in his trade and tariff policies.

"Hopefully something can be worked out which is good (GREAT!) for Japan and the USA!" Trump wrote in a social media post ahead of the meeting.

Afterward, he posted: "A Great Honour to have just met with the Japanese Delegation on Trade. Big Progress!"

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told reporters Thursday in Tokyo that his chief trade negotiator, Ryosei Akazawa, told him from Washington that the talks were "very candid and constructive."

"Of course the talks are not easy, but President Trump stated his intention to make this negotiation a top priority," Ishiba said. "I believe we had talks that lead to a next step."



Ishiba said he will closely watch how ministerial talks go and plans to visit Washington to meet with Trump at an appropriate time.

Trump's choice to get directly involved in negotiations points to his desire to quickly finalise a slew of trade deals as China is pursuing its own set of agreements. It's an open test of Trump's reputation as a dealmaker as countries around the world seek to limit the potential damage unleashed by his import taxes.

The sweeping tariffs that Trump announced on April 2 triggered panic in the financial markets and generated recession fears, causing the US president to quickly put a partial 90-day hold on the import taxes and increase his already steep tariffs against China to as much as 145 per cent.

The pause temporarily spared Japan from 24 per cent across-the-board tariffs, but there continues to be a 10 per cent baseline tariff and a 25 per cent tax on import-

cars, auto parts, steel and aluminum exports.

With Japan charging an average tax rate of 1.9 per cent on other countries' goods and having a longstanding alliance with the US, the talks on Wednesday are a crucial indicator of whether the Trump administration can achieve a meaningful deal that reassures the markets, American voters and foreign allies.

US economic rival China, meanwhile, is trying to capitalise on the turmoil around Trump's announcements, with its leader, President Xi Jinping, touring nations of Southeast Asia and promoting his country as a more reliable trade partner.

Japan is among the first countries to start open negotiations with the US Trump and other administration officials have said the phones have been "ringing off the hook" with dozens of countries calling, eager to strike deals with a president who views himself as a master negotiator to avoid tariffs when the 90-day pause ends.

Israel and Vietnam have offered to zero out their tariff rates, but Trump has been noncommittal as to whether that would be sufficient. On Thursday, Trump is scheduled to meet with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who will likely be carrying messages on behalf of the European Union about how to resolve the tariffs Trump placed on the 27-state group.

India-UK Defence group agrees to enhance collaboration

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

A review of Defence ties, with a particular focus on enhancing defence industry collaboration and boosting the 'Make in India' initiative, were on the agenda of the 24th India-UK Defence Consultative Group discussions here this week.

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and his British counterpart Permanent Secretary David Williams co-chaired the dialogue, which was aimed at deepening bilateral defence cooperation. The successful completion of the regular dialogue was confirmed by the Defence ministries on both sides in social media updates.

"The 24th India-UK Defence Consultative Group meeting in London saw Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and UK counterpart David Williams co-chair discussions, aimed at deepening bilateral defence cooperation," the Indian Ministry of Defence said.

"Key focus areas included expanding defence industry collaboration and promoting the 'Make in India' initiative, especially in niche and emerging technologies," the statement added.

It comes as the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence announced the final preparations for aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales to sail from Portsmouth on April 22 for its Indo-Pacific deployment, including planned port visits in India.

The upcoming deployment of the Carrier Strike Group, named Operation Highmast, is described as an opportunity for the United Kingdom's armed forces to conduct a major global deployment and a chance to exercise complex operations alongside partners and allies such as India.

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and his British counterpart David Williams co-chaired the dialogue, aimed at deepening bilateral defence cooperation

"The group will transit through the Indian Ocean, conducting exercises and port visits with partners including the US, India, Singapore and Malaysia, before joining 19 partner nations for Exercise Talisman Sabre near Australia, and then training alongside the Japanese Self-Defence Forces and conducting a port visit to India," stated the UK Ministry of Defence.

The Indo-Pacific is seen as a "critical region" for United Kingdom trade, with imports and exports in the region worth billions of pounds for the United Kingdom economy.

The deployment will also provide a chance for United Kingdom companies to take part in trade events during port visits.

US threatens Harvard's foreign enrollment criteria

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

The Donald Trump administration has threatened to revoke Harvard University's eligibility to enrol international students if it doesn't submit detailed records of its foreign students' "illegal and violent activities."

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem on Wednesday wrote a "scathing letter" demanding detailed records on Harvard's foreign student visa holders' illegal and violent activities by April 30, or face immediate loss of Student and Exchange Visitor Programme (SEVP) certification, a DHS news release said. "Harvard bending the knee to antisemitism — driven by its spineless leadership — fuels a cesspool of extremist riots and threatens our national security."

"With anti-American, pro-Hamas ideology poisoning its campus and classrooms, Harvard's position as a top institution of higher learning is a distant memory. America demands more from universities entrusted with taxpayer dollars," Noem said.

DHS said since Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, Harvard's foreign visa-holding rioters and faculty have spewed antisemitic hate, targeting Jewish students.

"With a \$53.2 billion endowment, Harvard can fund its own chaos — DHS

won't. And if Harvard cannot verify it is in full compliance with its reporting requirements, the university will lose the privilege of enrolling foreign students," it said. Earlier this week, Harvard had said the Trump administration issued an



updated and expanded list of demands, "warning that Harvard must comply if we intend to maintain [our] financial relationship with the federal government."

Harvard President Alan Garber said the "unprecedented demands" being made by the federal government to control the Harvard community include requirements to "audit" the "viewpoints of our student body, faculty, staff, and to 'reduc[e] the power' of certain students, faculty, and administrators targeted because of their ideological views."

"We have informed the administration through our legal counsel that we will not accept their proposed agreement."

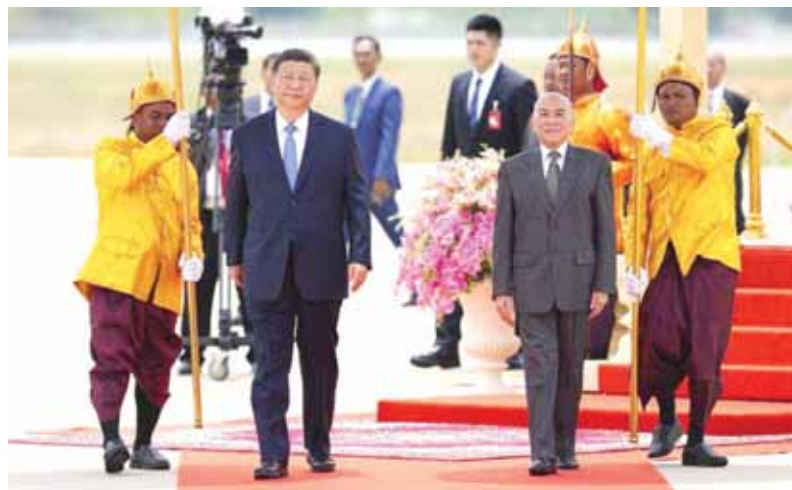
China President Xi Jinping arrives in Cambodia to wrap up 3-nation Asia tour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Phnom Penh (Cambodia)

Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Cambodia on Thursday for a two-day state visit that serves as an opportunity to further strengthen already robust relations. The visit, Xi's first since 2016, will conclude a three-nation Southeast Asian tour that included stops in Vietnam and Malaysia. China has been increasing its influence in the region over the past decade, largely by exercising its substantial economic leverage.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet recently described Beijing as "an important and indispensable friend of Cambodia that has helped support the country's economic and social development." Xi was formally greeted at the airport in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh by head of state King Norodom Sihamoni. During his visit, Xi is also scheduled to meet Prime Minister Hun Manet and Senate President Hun Sen, who is Hun Manet's father and predecessor as prime minister. In a statement at Phnom Penh International Airport after his arrival on his presidential aircraft, an American-made Air China Boeing 747, Xi said he was "delighted" to visit again.

"Cambodia is a priority in China's neighbourhood diplomacy. China will unwaveringly support Cambodia in upholding strategic autonomy and in pur-



suing a development path suited to its national conditions," he said according to a transcript of his remarks distributed by the Chinese embassy. Trade will likely be a major topic of Xi's discussions in Cambodia, which faces among the highest tariff rates proposed by Washington. In addition to Trump's universal 10 per cent tariff, the country faces the threat of a 49 per cent tax on exports to the US once his 90-day pause expires.

In addition to discussions on strengthening bilateral ties and regional and international issues, several agreements are expected to be signed on cooperation in

various sectors. In both countries, Xi emphasised strengthening ties, particularly in trade and investment, amid global economic uncertainties and the backdrop of trade tensions with the United States. He underscored the need to oppose unilateralism and protectionism and uphold the multilateral trading system. China is presenting itself as a source of stability and certainty as Southeast Asia scrambles to respond to tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump, which threaten the region export-oriented economies whose largest markets are generally the United States.

Bangladesh, Pakistan hold talks after 15 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh and Pakistan on Thursday held a foreign secretary-level Foreign Office Consultation here after a gap of nearly 15 years and discussed the entire range of bilateral issues focusing on trade ties.

The meeting took place days ahead of Pakistan's Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Dhaka. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin and Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch led their respective sides during the Foreign Office Consultation held at the state guest house Padma, state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha said. During the meeting, the two sides discussed the entire range of bilateral issues between the two nations, the BSS said.

Baloch, who arrived here on Wednesday, is scheduled to pay courtesy calls on Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain later in the day.

The last FOC between Bangladesh and Pakistan was held in 2010. Dar's scheduled visit to Dhaka later this month, will be the maiden visit to Bangladesh since 2012.

Israeli strike kills family of 10 in Gaza

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Deir Al-Balah (Gaza Strip)

Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip overnight into Thursday killed at least 23 people, including a family of 10, local health officials said.

The United Nations meanwhile raised alarm over the mounting impact of Israel's six-week-old blockade preventing all food and other supplies from entering the territory. Israel ended its ceasefire with Hamas last month and renewed its bombardment, killing hundreds of people and seizing large parts of the territory to pressure the militants to accept changes to the agreement.

A strike in the southern city of Khan Younis killed five children, four women and a man from the same family, all of whom suffered severe burns, according to Nasser Hospital, which received the bodies. Strikes in northern Gaza killed 13 people, including nine children, according to the Indonesian Hospital. The Israeli military says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames their deaths on Hamas because it operates in residential areas. There was no immediate comment on the latest strikes.

The UN humanitarian office, known as OCHA, said that almost all of Gaza's more than 2 million people now rely for food on the only 1 million prepared meals produced daily by charity kitchens supported by aid groups.

Other food distribution programmes have shut down for lack of supplies, and the UN and other aid groups have been sending their remaining stocks to the charity kitchens. The only other way to get food in Gaza is from markets. But most cannot afford to buy there because of spiralling prices and widespread shortages, meaning humanitarian aid is the primary food source for 80 per cent of the population, the World Food Programme said in its monthly report for April on Gaza's markets. "The Gaza Strip is now likely facing the worst humanitarian crisis in the 18 months since the escalation of hostilities in October 2023," OCHA said. Most people in Gaza are now down to one meal a day, said Shaina Low, a



spokesperson for the Norwegian Refugee Council. "It's far lower than what is needed," she said. Water is also growing scarce, with Palestinians standing in long lines to fill jerry cans from trucks. Omar Shatat, an official with a local water utility, said people are down to six or seven litres per day, well below the amount the UN estimates is needed to meet basic needs.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said Wednesday that preventing humanitarian aid is one of the "central pressure tactics" used against Hamas, which Israel accuses of siphoning off aid to maintain its rule. Israel is demanding that Hamas release more hostages at the start of any new ceasefire and ultimately agree to disarm and leave the territory. Katz said that even after Israel will continue to occupy large "security zones" inside Gaza.

Hamas is currently holding 59 hostages, 24 of whom are believed to be alive. It says it will only return them in exchange for the release of more Palestinian prisoners, a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a lasting truce, as called for in the now-defunct ceasefire agreement reached earlier this year. Hani Almadhoun, co-founder of Gaza

Soup Kitchen, said his kitchen has food for about three more weeks. "But food is loosely defined. We have pasta and rice but nothing much beyond that. No fresh produce. There is no chicken or beef. The only thing we have is canned meat," he said. He said 15-20 per cent of the people who come to his kitchen for food leave empty-handed.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251. Most of the hostages have since been released in ceasefire agreements or other deals. Israel has rescued eight and recovered dozens of bodies. Israel's offensive has killed over 51,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were civilians or combatants. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has destroyed vast parts of Gaza and most of its food production capabilities. The war has displaced around 90 per cent of the population, with hundreds of thousands of people living in tent camps and bombed-out buildings.

Iran confirms second round of nuclear talks with United States set in Rome

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

Iran confirmed on Wednesday that the next round of nuclear talks with the United States this weekend will be held in Rome after earlier confusion over where the negotiations would be held.

The announcement by Iranian state television came as Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian formally approved the resignation of one of his vice presidents who served as Tehran's key negotiator in its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

The head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, Rafael Mariano Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency, also arrived in the Islamic Republic on Wednesday. His talks may include negotiations over just what access the IAEA inspectors can get under any proposed deal. The state TV announcement said Oman will again mediate the talks on Saturday in Rome. Oman's foreign minister served as an interlocutor between the two sides at talks last weekend in Muscat, the sultanate's capital. Officials initially on Monday identified Rome as hosting the negotiations, only for Iran to insist early Tuesday they would return to Oman. American officials so far haven't said publicly where the talks will be held, though Trump did call Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Tuesday, while the ruler was on a trip to the Netherlands.

The stakes of the negotiations couldn't be higher for the two nations closing in on half a century of enmity. US President Donald Trump repeatedly has threatened to unleash airstrikes targeting Iran's nuclear program if a deal isn't reached. Iranian officials increasingly warn that they could pursue a nuclear weapon with their stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels.

Pezeshkian praises former vice president while acknowledging his resignation. The former vice president, Mohammad Javad Zarif, served as a key supporter of Pezeshkian in his election last year but

drew criticism from hard-liners within Iran's Shiite theocracy, who long have alleged Zarif gave away too much in negotiations. In March, Zarif tendered his resignation to Pezeshkian. However, the president did not immediately respond to the letter. Zarif has used resignation announcements in the past in his political career as leverage, including in a dispute last year over the composition of Pezeshkian's Cabinet. The president had rejected that resignation.

But on late Tuesday, a statement from the presidency said Pezeshkian wrote Zarif a letter praising him but accepting his resignation.

Officials initially on Monday identified Rome as hosting the negotiations, only for Iran to insist early Tuesday they would return to Oman

"Pezeshkian emphasised that due to certain issues, his administration can no longer benefit from Zarif's valuable knowledge and expertise," a statement from the presidency said.

The president in a decree appointed Mohsen Ismaili, 59, to be his new vice president for strategic affairs. In Iran's political system, the president has multiple vice presidents. Ismaili is known as a political moderate and a legal expert.

Grossi visit comes as Iran has restricted IAEA access

Grossi arrived in Tehran for meetings with Pezeshkian and others. He met Wednesday night with Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, writing on the social platform X after the meeting: "Cooperation with (the IAEA) is indispensable to provide credible assurances about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme at a time when diplomacy is urgently needed."

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency described Araghchi as briefing Grossi on

the first round of talks with the US, while also urging the IAEA to "adopt a clear and unambiguous stance regarding threats against Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities."

Both Israel and the US have threatened to attack Iran's nuclear sites if a deal can't be reached to limit Tehran's programme. "As variety of spoilers are gathered to derail current negotiations, we need a Director General of Peace," Araghchi wrote on X. "Our predisposition is to trust Grossi in mission to keep the Agency away from politics and politicisation, and to retain focus on its technical mandate."

Since the nuclear deal's collapse in 2018 with Trump's unilateral withdrawal of the US from the accord, Iran has abandoned all limits on its programme, and enriches uranium to up to 60 per cent purity — near weapons-grade levels of 90 per cent.

Surveillance cameras installed by the IAEA have been disrupted, while Iran has barred some of the Vienna-based agency's most experienced inspectors. Iranian officials also have increasingly threatened that they could pursue atomic weapons, something the West and the IAEA have been worried about for years since Tehran abandoned an organised weapons programme in 2003.

Any possible deal between Iran and the US likely would need to rely on the IAEA's expertise to ensure Tehran's compliance. And despite tensions between Iran and the agency, its access has not been entirely revoked.

Iran's foreign minister questions contradictory responses from US envoy. Meanwhile, Araghchi on Wednesday warned the US about taking contradictory stances in the talks.

That likely refers to comments from US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff, who this week initially suggested a deal could see Iran go back to 3.67 per cent uranium enrichment — like in the 2015 deal reached by the Obama administration. Witkoff then followed up with saying "a deal with Iran will only be completed if it is a Trump deal."

Gandhi's bust unveiled in South Africa

larger-than-life bust of Mahatma Gandhi has been unveiled at the Anglo-Boer War Museum in the Free State province of South Africa...

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The Dy. Chief Engineer/TMC/Line, Northern Railway, State Entry Road, New Delhi for and on behalf of the President of India invites Open E-tender under One Packet System for the under noted work:

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Reg. Vacant Plot of land area measuring 50 sq.yds., falling in Kharsa No. 244, mm situated at Village Sadulabad in the abadi of New Anand Vihar Colony...

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME I. Vikram Kumar @ Vipin Sharma S/o Manbahadur, R/o N-21/B-90, Mouji Wala Bagh, Lal Bagh Azadpur, North West Delhi- 110033 has changed my name from Vikram Kumar @ Vipin Sharma to Vikram Kumar, vide affidavit dated 17/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE

FORM NO. 5 DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL 600/1, University Road, Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that Mr. Anuj Aggarwal is purchasing the Built-Up Entire Second Floor, (Without Terrace Right), Built-on freshhold Property Bearing No. K-17, area measuring 200 Sq. Yds., Situated at Jangpura Extension, New Delhi-110014 from Mrs. Indira Sawhney & Mr. B.B. Sawhney who became owners vide Sale Deed dated 21.05.2007 (Doc No. 10457) and same to be financed & mortgaged by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. Thd. (C) Original Partition Deed dated 26.07.2004 (Doc No. 9279) executed among Mr. Savinder Pal Singh, Mr. Charan Pal Singh & Ms. Bindu, (2) Original Sale Deed dated 02.08.2004 (Doc No. 9698) executed by Ms. Bindu in favour of Mr. Jasvir Singh & Mr. Amarjit Singh, (3) Original Regd. GPA dated 28.10.2004 executed by Mr. Pawanjit Singh Chawdhary in favour of Mr. Kavinder Singh are not available. So, to comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim/right/interest/mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, within his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucern Legal LLP B-33B, Second Floor, Opp. SBI Bank Sector 2, Noida, UP-201301 Contact# 0120-4269379

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PUBLIC NOTICE

FORM NO. 5 DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL 600/1, University Road, Hanuman Setu Mandir, Lucknow

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Mr. Anuj Aggarwal is purchasing the Built-Up Entire Second Floor, (Without Terrace Right), Built-on freshhold Property Bearing No. K-17, area measuring 200 Sq. Yds., Situated at Jangpura Extension, New Delhi-110014 from Mrs. Indira Sawhney & Mr. B.B. Sawhney who became owners vide Sale Deed dated 21.05.2007 (Doc No. 10457) and same to be financed & mortgaged by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. Thd. (C) Original Partition Deed dated 26.07.2004 (Doc No. 9279) executed among Mr. Savinder Pal Singh, Mr. Charan Pal Singh & Ms. Bindu, (2) Original Sale Deed dated 02.08.2004 (Doc No. 9698) executed by Ms. Bindu in favour of Mr. Jasvir Singh & Mr. Amarjit Singh, (3) Original Regd. GPA dated 28.10.2004 executed by Mr. Pawanjit Singh Chawdhary in favour of Mr. Kavinder Singh are not available. So, to comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim/right/interest/mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, within his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucern Legal LLP B-33B, Second Floor, Opp. SBI Bank Sector 2, Noida, UP-201301 Contact# 0120-4269379

PUBLIC NOTICE

Indoor Medical Records of the patients admitted during period of 01/04/2021 to 31/03/2022 financial year (2021-2022) are scheduled to be disposed of as per hospital policy.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Mr. Raj Kishore Mahro to inform to the public at large that Mrs. Sangita Devi W/o Mr. Raj Kishore Mahro is purchasing the Entire Ground Floor Without Roof Rights, Built-up Property Bearing No. A-100, area measuring 50 Sq. Yards, out of Kharsa No. 168, situated in the area of village Bindapur, Delhi State Delhi, colony known as Nand Ram Park, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110059 from Mrs. Prem Lata who became owner vide Regd. GPA with consideration dated 20.11.2006 (Doc. No.26588) (Along with Notarized ATS dated 20.11.2006 & WILL dated 20.11.2006) executed by Mrs. Raj Rani and same to be finance & mortgage by Mottal Overseas Home Finance Limited. So, to comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim/right/interest/mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, within his objections, within 14 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucern Legal LLP B-33B, Second Floor, Opp. SBI Bank Sector 2, Noida, UP-201301 Contact# 0120-4269379

PUBLIC NOTICE

PROPOSAL INVITED FROM Chartered Accountants/CA firm for conducting Statutory Audit of Shri Sri Sri Apartment Owners Association, 15, Ahinsa Khand-1, Indraprastha, Ghazabud, U.P-201014 for the Financial Year 2024-25 interested Chartered Accountants or CA firms may submit their proposals with quotations on or before 30/04/25 Wednesday at the email aca.srisht@gmail.com Ph 953310671 CA/firms must have post qualification experience of more than 5 years. Audit experience of Apartment Association under UP Apartment Act will be preferred. Individual CAs or any CA firm, SHOULD NOT have any association/interfere with the accountant, internal auditor, AOA board members or any of the Apartment Owner of Shri Sri Sri Apartment. SCOPE OF WORK: The Apartment Association is making the affairs of the common area and facilities of the Multi Storey Apartment having 744 Flats & the primary source of revenue is the collection of common area monthly maintenance charges from the Apartment Owners. Auditor shall be required to undertake the statutory audit of the books of accounts maintained by the board of association The Auditor fee will be minimum Rs 5000/- excluding govt. taxes. Sd/-Secretary

NORTHERN RAILWAY OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE

The Sr. Divisional Engineer-II, Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites E-Tender for the following work:

NORTHERN RAILWAY INVITATION OF TENDERS THROUGH E-PROCUREMENT SYSTEM

Table with columns: S. No., Tender, Brief Description, Qty., Closing Date. Includes items like CROSS BAR, DIESEL GENERATING SET, SUPPLY & INSTALLATION OF AEROSOL FIRE, etc.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby informed to the general public that Shri Tarun Chopra & Kiran Chopra had booked a residential flat in the project being developed by M/s. Prateek Realtors India Private Limited (hereinafter referred to as the "Company") with the name of Mr. Tarun Chopra & Mrs. Kiran Chopra at Prateek Wisteria, Sector-77 Noida, U.P. That Mrs. Kiran Chopra has unfortunately expired on 28.02.2021 and Mr. Tarun Chopra son of Shri Sunder Nath Chopra Resident of A-24 Sector-30 Noida have approached and applied to the Company being the legal heirs of Late Mrs. Kiran Chopra. In case there is/are any other legal heirs of Late Mrs. Kiran Chopra, the said person is required to approach the company along with relevant documents within 15 days from the publication of this notice in case no names is/are received by the Company, Mr. Tarun Chopra son of Shri Sunder Nath Chopra Resident of A-24 Sector-30 Noida will be registered as legal heirs of Mrs. Kiran Chopra and no objection would be accepted thereafter.

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given that Mr. Gurucharan Singh Chauhan, son of Late Kailash Singh, residing at J-13/23J, 2nd Floor, Rajouri Garden, Tagore Garden, West Delhi - 110027, has agreed to sell to my client the property described in the Schedule hereunder. Hereinafter referred to as the "said flat". He has assumed my client that the said flat is free from all encumbrances and defects in title. Any persons having any claims by way of sale, mortgage, lease, gift, easement, exchange, possession, inheritance, succession or otherwise howsoever in respect of the same are required to intimate the same in writing to the undersigned together with the proof thereof within 7 days of publication of this notice, failing which all such claims, if any shall be deemed to have been waived and/or abandoned.

NORTHERN RAILWAY Open E-Tender Notice

For and on behalf of President of India: Sr. Divisional Mechanical Engineer (Chg.), Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites sealed e-tender on 'SINGLE PACKET SYSTEM' for following work from experienced and capable tenderers.

Clix Capital Services Pvt. Ltd.

NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13(2) OF THE SECURITIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002

MORE SUMMER SPECIAL TRAINS

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. Includes 04098/04097 Anand Vihar Terminal - Sitamarhi - 48 Trips.

ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES EXAMINATION SECTION

ADMISSION NOTICE No. 133 /2025 03.04.2025 F. No. AIIMS/7-10/Exam.Sec/(B.Sc-M.Sc-2025)/2025

ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES ANSARI NAGAR, NEW DELHI - 110029

No.FAIIIMS/Exam.Sec./4-12/(INI-SS-JULY-25)/2025 Dated: 09th April 2025 INI-SS Entrance Test for Admission in DM/M.Ch Courses for AIIMS, PGIMER, NIMHANS, SCTIMST & JIPMER for July-2025 session

04098/04097 Anand Vihar Terminal - Sitamarhi - 48 Trips

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. Includes 04098/04097 Anand Vihar Terminal - Sitamarhi - 48 Trips.

04504/04503 Chandigarh - Patna Jn. - Chandigarh Reserved Special Express Train 12 Trips

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. Includes 04504/04503 Chandigarh - Patna Jn. - Chandigarh Reserved Special Express Train 12 Trips.

04030/04029 Anand Vihar Terminal - Muzaffarpur Jn. - 16 Trips

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. Includes 04030/04029 Anand Vihar Terminal - Muzaffarpur Jn. - 16 Trips.

04012/04011 Delhi Jn. - Darbhanga Jn. - Delhi Jn. Reserved Special Express Train 48 Trips

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. Includes 04012/04011 Delhi Jn. - Darbhanga Jn. - Delhi Jn. Reserved Special Express Train 48 Trips.

04094/04093 Anand Vihar Terminal - Jogbani - 24 Trips

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. Includes 04094/04093 Anand Vihar Terminal - Jogbani - 24 Trips.

04213/04214 Ayodhya Cantt. - Anand Vihar Terminal - Ayodhya Cantt. Reserved Special Express Train 72 Trips

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. Includes 04213/04214 Ayodhya Cantt. - Anand Vihar Terminal - Ayodhya Cantt. Reserved Special Express Train 72 Trips.

04302/04301 Yog Nagri Rishikesh - Muzaffarpur Jn. - 26 Trips

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. Includes 04302/04301 Yog Nagri Rishikesh - Muzaffarpur Jn. - 26 Trips.

01021/01022 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus - Gorakhpur Jn. - Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus Unreserved Special Train 02 Trips

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. Includes 01021/01022 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus - Gorakhpur Jn. - Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus Unreserved Special Train 02 Trips.

04212/04211 Sultampur - Lokmanya Tilak Terminus - 22 Trips

Table with columns: Train No., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. Includes 04212/04211 Sultampur - Lokmanya Tilak Terminus - 22 Trips.

For any kind of information & detailed time-table etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTES App

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BluSmart cab services suspended in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi-NCR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Electric cab-hailing platform BluSmart remained non-operational on Thursday across Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, and Mumbai, as the market regulator cracked down on its co-founder over alleged misuse of funds at an affiliated company.

BluSmart app, that offered more than 8,000 taxis in the three metros, stopped taking bookings on Wednesday evening and remained non-operational on Thursday as well. The sudden suspension puts the livelihood of thousands of drivers at risk and has led to customers venting out their frustration on social media.

The company, backed by BP Ventures - an arm of the global energy giant BP - did not immediately offer any comments on the issue.

"We've decided to temporarily close bookings on the BluSmart app," the firm said in an email to customers without giving any reasons.

Earlier this week, Sebi (securities and exchange board of India) banned brothers Anmol and Puneet Jaggi from the stock market and ordered a forensic investigation into their listed renewable energy company Gensol. The investigation focuses on allegations that they used funds intended for procuring electric vehicles to purchase luxury apartments.

"I have almost 20K balance in BluSmart and today morning got this mail that BluSmart services are suspended. What is this?? When can get the refund of BluSmart is getting closed," said a customer in a post on X on Wednesday and attached the screenshot of the company's e-mail.

BluSmart in the e-mail assured to initiate a refund to customers within 90 days.

"We truly appreciate your support. While we strive to be back soon, we will initiate a refund within 90 days if services do not resume before that," the e-mail said.

Another customer wrote on X: "I loved BluSmart. More than the money in the



FILE PHOTO

wallet, I am more concerned about driver partners who will be out of job until the saga plays out."

Meanwhile, Delhi Airport on Tuesday evening issued a passenger advisory, stating that "BluSmart has temporarily suspended its operations at Delhi Airport".

Apart from providing services in the three Indian cities, BluSmart also offers premium all-electric limousine services in the UAE, which it launched last June.

The company, as on January 9, had a fleet of over 8,500 electric vehicles and a charging network of 5,800 stations across 50 hubs in Delhi-NCR and Bengaluru, and was supported by 10,000-plus active driver partners.

Sebi on Tuesday barred Gensol engineering and promoters — Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi — from the

securities markets till further orders in a fund diversion and governance lapses case.

The regulator has also debarred Anmol and Puneet Singh Jaggi from holding the position of a director or key managerial personnel in Gensol until further orders.

Further, the markets watchdog directed Gensol Engineering Ltd (GEL) to put on hold the stock split announced by it.

The order came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) received a complaint in June 2024 relating to the manipulation of share price and diversion of funds from GEL and thereafter started examining the matter.

According to Sebi's order, Gensol Engineering secured a total of ₹977.75 crore in loans from IREDA and PFC, of which ₹663.89 crore was meant specifi-

cally for the purchase of 6,400 electric vehicles (EVs). EVs were procured by the company and subsequently leased to BluSmart, a related party.

However, in a response submitted to Sebi in February, Gensol admitted that it had procured only 4,704 EVs till date — far less than 6,400 for which it had received funding. This was corroborated by Go-Auto Private Limited, the EV supplier, which confirmed delivering 4,704 units to the company for a total consideration of ₹567.73 crore.

Given that Gensol was also required to provide an additional 20 per cent equity contribution, the total expected outlay for the EVs was around ₹829.86 crore. By that calculation, ₹262.13 crore remains unaccounted for.

Gensol hits circuit limit as investors dump stock

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Shares of Gensol Engineering dropped 5 per cent on Thursday to hit the lower circuit limit after Sebi barred the firm and its promoters — Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi — from securities markets till further orders in a fund diversion and governance lapses case.

The stock tanked 4.97 per cent to Rs 117.50 — its lower circuit limit as well as record low — on the BSE.

At the NSE, it slumped 5 per cent to Rs 116.54 — the lowest trading permissible limit for the day as well as an all-time low.

Shares of Gensol Engineering had tumbled 5 per cent to hit the lower circuit limit on Wednesday as well.

From its 52-week high of ₹1,125.75, the stock is now down 89.56 per cent.

The regulator has also debarred Anmol and Puneet Singh Jaggi from holding the position of a director or key managerial personnel in Gensol until further orders.

Further, the markets watchdog directed Gensol Engineering Ltd (GEL) to put on hold the stock split announced by it.

The order came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) received a complaint in June 2024 relating to the manipulation of share price and diversion of funds from GEL and thereafter started examining the matter.

In a 29-page interim order, Sebi said on Tuesday, "The prima facie findings have shown mis-utilisation and diversion of funds of the company (GEL) in a fraudulent manner by its promoter directors, Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi, who are also the direct beneficiaries of the diverted funds."

"The company has attempted to mislead Sebi, the CRAs (credit rating agencies), the lenders and the investors by submitting forged conduct letters purportedly issued by its lenders," the regulator said.

Gensol Engineering is engaged in providing solar consulting services, Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) services, leasing of electric vehicles, etc.

Shares of the firm have been falling for the seventh straight session on Thursday.

Gensol Engineering on Wednesday said the company will fully cooperate with

GENSOL ENGINEERING DIRECTOR RESIGNS

New Delhi: Gensol Engineering, the beleaguered firm that came under market regulator Sebi's lens for fund diversions and governance lapses, said that its independent director Arun Menon has resigned with immediate effect.

In his resignation letter addressed to Anmol Singh Jaggi, one of the promoters of the company, Menon said, "There was growing concern on the leveraging of GEL balance sheet to fund the capex of other business's; and the sustainability of servicing such high debt costs by GEL." Menon's resignation came a day after Sebi on Tuesday barred Gensol Engineering and its promoters — Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi — from the securities markets till further orders in the fund diversion and governance lapses case.

The markets watchdog also directed Gensol Engineering Ltd (GEL) to put on hold the stock split announced by it and restrained the promoters from holding the position of a director or a Key Managerial Personnel in any listed firm.

The order came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) received a complaint in June 2024 relating to the manipulation of share price and diversion of funds from GEL and thereafter started examining the matter. Arun Menon has tendered his resignation as the independent director of the company, with immediate effect, GEL said in a regulatory filing on Wednesday. "Consequently, he shall also cease to be a member of various committees of the company," it stated.

Menon has cited restrictions from his present employer as well as "adding limited value to the company" as reasons for his resignation. —PTI

the forensic audit to be conducted at the behest of Sebi.

As directed in the interim order, Sebi will appoint a forensic auditor to thoroughly examine the books of accounts of the company and its related entities, Gensol Engineering said in an exchange filing.

Meanwhile, the company has informed the stock exchange that its independent director Arun Menon has resigned with immediate effect.

'Telangana Rising' delegation visits Sony headquarters in Japan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Hyderabad

The official 'Telangana Rising' delegation led by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy visited the headquarters of Sony Corporation in Japan on Thursday, according to a Press release by the Telangana Congress.

Officers of the Sony Corporation showcased several new initiatives at Sony, and detailed their workings, including new products, to the delegation. The delegation also held detailed discussions on the animation subsidiary of the company, Crunchyroll.

The delegation explained the strengths of Hyderabad in the animation, VFX and Gaming sectors. Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy outlined his vision on the setting up of a modern film city, which would have the capability of end-to-end production, said the release.

On the first day of the visit, Reddy met senior leadership of Marubeni Corporation, a leading Japanese industrial conglomerate with interests in energy, transport, real estate, industrial infra, metals, medical services, trading etc., in Tokyo.

Following discussions, Marubeni Corp conveyed their interest to establish a state-of-the-art next generation industrial park in the Future City and both sides



signed and exchanged a Letter of Intent (LoI).

With a proposed initial investment of Rs 1,000 crore, a world-class, next-generation

industrial park will be developed in 600 acres in a phase-wise manner in the Future City.

The industrial park will be dedicated for Japanese companies and other multinational companies to set up their manufacturing plants in Hyderabad and will attract major investments of over Rs 5,000 crore.

Telangana has emerged as a preferred investment destination due to its progressive policies, robust infrastructure, and focus on fostering innovation. The state attracts global leaders, reinforcing its reputation as a leading hub for manufacturing.

Speaking on the occasion and welcoming Marubeni to the Future City being developed in Hyderabad, Reddy said, "The Marubeni industrial park will be among the first of its kind to be developed in the proposed 'Future City'. It is expected to create 30,000 direct and indirect jobs, enriching livelihoods and enhancing the skill ecosystem in Telangana."

Welcoming the Chief Minister and the delegation to Japan, Dai Sakakura, Executive Officer and COO, Next Generation Business, Marubeni, said, "We are delighted after listening to CM Revanth Reddy's vision for Telangana and Hyderabad, and wish to be amongst the earliest to explore possibilities there."

Shrimp exporters seek Government intervention as Tariffs stir uncertainty

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Indian shrimp exporters are keeping their fingers crossed as the US is set to begin its review of anti-dumping and countervailing duties on shrimp next month, and are seeking Government intervention to help secure relief amid stiff global competition, industry experts say.

The exporters said that the formula of the US to calculate these duties is incorrect, and the Indian Government should take up the issues with them bilaterally, as domestic traders are facing tough competition from Ecuador and Vietnam in the American market.

"The US authorities consider India's RoDTEP and duty drawback schemes as incentive schemes, which is not the case. Both are WTO-compliant duty refund schemes only," Kolkata-based seafood exporter and MD of Megaa Moda Yogesh Gupta said.

He added that the US uses a 'zeroing' method to impose anti-dumping duty on shrimp, which is not correct and needs to be re-looked as it distorts the calculation of the margin of dumping.

He said that exporters are concerned and the Government should come forward to support them by re-introducing the Transport and Marketing Assistance

The US is not making a fair comparison between the export price and the normal value, leading to distorted dumping margins. Besides these duties, Indian shrimp exporters face a 10 per cent baseline tariff

(TMA) scheme.

Through this, the United States is not making a fair comparison between the export price and the normal value, leading to distorted dumping margins.

Besides these duties, Indian shrimp exporters face a 10 per cent baseline tariff imposed by the US on April 2. Giving a big relief, America has suspended the additional 26 per cent duty on India.

Currently, Indian shrimp exports to the US face an effective customs duty of 17.7 per cent, including 5.77 per cent in countervailing duties and 1.8 per cent in anti-dumping duties.

Seafood Exporters Association of India Secretary General K N Raghavan has recently urged the Government to focus on securing a "level-playing field" for the country's seafood exports during upcoming trade talks before the tariff pause expires.

Another exporter said Ecuador is India's

biggest competitor in the sector, as it faces lower duties and enjoys a major advantage in shipping due to its proximity to the US market.

Odisha-based exporter Rajen Padhi said the anti-dumping duty has been in place for two decades, and it's time the US sets a uniform rate for India.

"As per an international agreement, no taxes should be exported. So now we can convince the US that the RoDTEP (Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products) scheme is not an incentive scheme as we have a mechanism in place to do the verification," said Padhi, Commercial Director, B One Business House Pvt Ltd.

The US is the largest market for the domestic shrimp industry. Out of India's total shrimp exports, the country ships 40 per cent to America.

Ecuador and Indonesia are major competitors of the domestic exporters in the US market. There are around 1 lakh shrimp farms in India, most of which are in Andhra Pradesh.

The export of frozen shrimps during 2023-24 was 7,16,004 tonnes. The US imported 2,97,571 tonnes last fiscal year, followed by China (1,48,483 tonnes), the European Union (89,697 tonnes), and Japan (35,906 tonnes).

Markets surge for 4th day, Sensex reclaims 78k-level

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged nearly 2 per cent on Thursday, registering their fourth day of rally, as investors turned buoyant after foreign investors returned to domestic equities amid expectations of a breakthrough in US-Japan trade negotiations over reciprocal tariffs.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 1,508.91 points or 1.96 per cent to reclaim the 78,000 level. It finally settled at 78,553.20. During the day, it soared 1,572.48 points or 2.04 per cent to 78,616.77. The NSE Nifty surged 414.45 points or 1.77 per cent to 23,851.65.

From the Sensex firms, Eternal, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Reliance Industries were among the biggest gainers. Tech Mahindra and Maruti were the laggards.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,936.42 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. On Tuesday, FIIs bought equities for Rs 6,065.78 crore.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index, Tokyo's Nikkei 225, Shanghai SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled higher.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,936.42 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. On Tuesday, FIIs bought equities for Rs 6,065.78 crore

negative territory. US markets ended significantly lower on Wednesday.

The US and Japan are currently holding trade talks over reciprocal tariffs, with an aim to strike a deal soon.

"A strong rally in large-cap stocks was observed today, primarily driven by financials, amid expectations of improved margins stemming from changes in savings deposit interest rates. Positive sentiment was further supported by a reversal in FII flows, although the sustainability of this trend remains uncertain."

"Nonetheless, optimism surrounding the domestic market persists, bolstered by the expectation of a favourable outcome from US-India trade negotiations and a relatively minimal disruption from the US-China trade tensions. Additionally, a moderating inflation trajectory towards more comfortable levels is further enhancing market sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Rupee ends 27 paise up at 85.37 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The rupee strengthened for the fourth consecutive session and closed 27 paise higher at 85.37 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, hitting the April 3 closing level, on the back of foreign fund inflows in domestic equities and broad weakness in the greenback.

The unit has pared all its losses since April 2, when US President Donald Trump announced sweeping reciprocal tariffs on multiple countries. On April 2, the rupee was quoted at 85.52 against the US dollar.

According to forex traders, a positive trend in domestic equities following a reprieve from the US tariffs boosted overall investor sentiment even though some recovery in crude prices weighed down on the Indian currency.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.48 and moved between the high of 85.31 and the low of 85.62 against the greenback during intraday. The unit ended the session at 85.37 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a gain of 27 paise from its previous closing level.

The rupee closed Wednesday's session with a gain of 16 paise at 85.64 against the

dollar.

In the preceding four sessions, the Indian currency has added 131 paise, or over 1.5 per cent, since its April 9 closing mark of 86.68 against the greenback.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee gained on surge in the domestic equities and FII inflows.

However, importer buying of dollars and recovery in crude oil prices may cap sharp gains, he said, adding "Traders may take cues from weekly unemployment claims and housing data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.20 to 85.70."

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading marginally higher by 0.10 per cent at 99.24.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.88 per cent to \$ 66.43 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex surged 1,508.91 points or 1.96 per cent to settle at 78,553.20, while the Nifty climbed 414.45 points or 1.77 per cent to 23,851.65.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,936.42 crore on a net basis on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Campa Cola to open new bottling plant in Bihar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Campa Cola, the soft drinks brand owned by Reliance Consumer Products Ltd, the FMCG arm of Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries, will open a new bottling plant in Bihar.

According to reports, Reliance Consumer Products Ltd (RCPL)-owned brand will have a new plant on 35 acres of land in the Begusarai district of Bihar, where it will invest around Rs 1,000 crore. Confirming the development, the state Government's agency, Bihar Industrial Area Development Authority (BIADA) through a post on social media platform 'X' informed that the plot has been allotted to EPIC Agro Product Ltd, a company that produces and distributes Campa Cola.

The upcoming facility will integrate both bottling and manufacturing operations. This marks a significant milestone in Campa Cola's aggressive growth strategy, with a sharp focus on expanding its footprint in eastern and northeastern India.

The move comes just two months after the launch of a similar plant in Assam.

This year in February, RCPL inaugurated a new plant in Guwahati, Assam, strengthening the presence of Campa Cola in Northeast India.

Reliance, which has entered into the fast-growing beverage market in August 2022 after acquiring Campa Cola, is expanding its presence across the country by setting up required infrastructure as supply chain, logistics network and bottling plants.

Campa, which is directly competing with Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, leading players in the cola segment, has disrupted the segment with its aggressive pricing and higher margin to retailers. It has forced players to reduce prices in the select markets where it is available.

On January 16, in its Q3 results, Reliance, which has ambitions to become a relevant player into the FMCG segment, said its Campa brand is projected to cross Rs 1,000 crore turnover in FY25.

Commenting on the development, Nuvama Institutional Equities Executive Director (Research) Abneesh Roy said this indicates Campa is now getting more aggressive in the eastern and northeastern parts of the country.

"We expect these investments to continue and expect that eventually Campa will have a pan-India manufacturing and distribution presence," he said.

Under the Campa brand, RCPL has launched a range of beverage variants including cola, orange, lemon, and energy drinks.

APRIL
READS



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Books that Celebrate Heritage

Books provide an immersive journey into monuments, linking the past with the present, says SAKSHI PRIYA

Books open pathways to the past. They illuminate what lies behind walls, under domes, and within the foundations of a civilisation. In a country as layered as India, where history reveals itself not only in palaces and temples, but in the everyday architecture of towns and villages, literature becomes one of the most powerful ways to connect with heritage.

In an ever-changing world, where globalisation often threatens to overshadow local traditions and histories, **World Heritage Day** calls for a moment of reflection. It encourages us to ask: how can we preserve the soul of a civilisation when it is often reduced to fleeting images on a screen or lost amidst urban development? Books, however, have always been powerful guardians of our heritage. They are the silent keepers of our collective memory. Through the pages of books, the world's diverse heritage — from the awe-inspiring

architecture of ancient cities to the forgotten melodies of indigenous tribes — continues to live on. Let's explore a few remarkable books that have dedicated themselves to preserving the essence of our world's heritage:

Lost Kingdoms of Africa by Gus Casely — Hayford's is a stunning exploration of Africa's forgotten kingdoms, those that flourished long before colonial powers arrived on the continent. This book is a reclamation of it. Casely-Hayford delves into the hidden histories of powerful kingdoms that were once central to global trade, culture, and politics.

Care and Administration of Heritage Monuments in India by Dharendra Kumar Pant is a revelation. This book volume is an academic chronicle and a story of awakening. Drawing deeply from the archives of British India, Pant traces a fascinating evolution: from the neglect of monuments to the shaping of a definitive policy under the East India Company and later the British Crown. Why did the

British feel compelled to preserve India's monuments? Was it genuine admiration, administrative necessity, or a political move to legitimise their rule?

The Heritage Sites of Gujarat: A Gazetteer by Sanjay Deshpande, Shweta Sinha Deshpande and Vasant Shinde is a treasure map in every sense. From the earliest Stone Age settlements to the grand urban centres of the Harappan civilisation, Gujarat's layered history is presented through a carefully curated lens. It goes beyond listing monuments; it tells the story of a land that was never on the periphery but at the heart of India's cultural and political landscape.

A History of the World in 100 Objects by Neil MacGregor is a work that redefines how we understand history. Through 100 carefully selected objects, author traces the journey of human civilisation across continents and epochs. Each object, whether a coin, a sculpture, or a tool, tells a story of human endeavour, creativity, and survival.

LIVING HISTORY

Other works take a broader view of heritage, tracing its influence through both time and space. **A New History of India** by Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Shobita Punja, and Toby Sinclair provides a sweeping narrative that stretches from prehistoric settlements to modern-day India. Through vivid photographs and detailed maps, the book brings India's complex civilisation to life, highlighting its diverse society, culture, and monumental moments.

This remarkable work serves as an invaluable guide to the history of one of the world's oldest and most diverse nations, ensuring that we understand the importance of safeguarding such a legacy for future generations.



Ancient India
Author: Upinder Singh
Publisher: Rupa
Price: ₹789/-

HISTORIAN CRAFT

Few historians write about ancient India with the clarity, depth, and courage that Upinder Singh brings to this remarkable volume. **Ancient India: Culture of Contradictions** is not content to simply recount dynasties and dates — it dares to question, to examine the paradoxes that shaped an entire civilisation.

Author explores contradictions that defined ancient Indian life, between desire and detachment, devotion and discrimination, peace and power. Drawing from religious texts, inscriptions, plays, and archaeology, Singh paints a picture of ancient India that is intellectually rich and morally complex. The monuments and material are sites of debate and dialogue, alive with meaning even today.



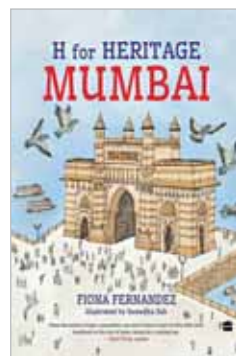
A Saint, A Folk Tale and Other Stories
Author: Rana Safvi
Publisher: Rupa
Price: ₹295

HIDDEN STORIES

A Saint, A Folk Tale and Other Stories by Rana Safvi is a captivating exploration of India's lesser-known monuments. In this book, author guides readers beyond the typical tourist spots to uncover hidden sites rich in history, poetry, and architecture. From the secret whispers of Khurau Bagh to the forgotten resting places of queens, the book brings to light the stories embedded in these often-overlooked corners of India. Safvi's engaging narrative invites us to rediscover these architectural treasures, urging us to protect and preserve the silent monuments that hold the key to our cultural heritage. Through her writing, author connects the past with the present, offering a deep appreciation for the richness of India.

HERITAGE MOSAIC

Taking a more localised yet lively approach is **H for Heritage: Mumbai** by Fiona Fernandez. Through an engaging A-to-Z format, this book criss-crosses Mumbai and its suburbs, uncovering a treasure trove of forgotten facts, curious anecdotes, and urban legends. Fernandez blends humour and research to celebrate Mumbai's layered past — from colonial architecture and Art Deco façades to unsung neighbourhoods and civic champions. Illustrated by Smedha Sah, the book brings heritage to young and old readers alike, making the city's landmarks and lesser-known sites vivid and memorable. Its part travelogue, part trivia, and wholly a love letter to a city bursting with character.



H for HERITAGE MUMBAI
Author: Fiona Fernandez
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹499/-

Quietly, She Changed Everything

NEW LAUNCH

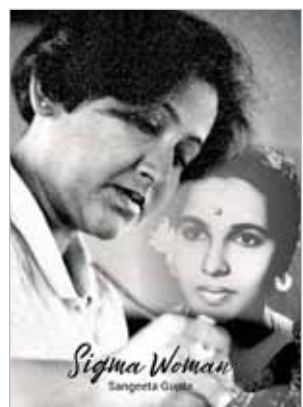
Sigma Woman is a candid and quietly compelling memoir that chronicles the journey of Sangeeta Gupta — a woman who has lived many lives, each shaped by courage, creativity, and conviction. A bureaucrat, poet, artist, and filmmaker, Gupta offers her story not as a retrospective of accolades, but as an exploration of selfhood, strength, and solitude.

The book spans 350 pages and reads like an unfolding of a life where each chapter reflects a choice to stay true to oneself despite odds, to pursue passions beyond professional boundaries, and to rebuild after every fall. It presents her experiences across the corridors of power and the world of art, all woven together by an underlying spirit of quiet rebellion and inner clarity.

At its centre is the idea of the 'Sigma woman' — a personality that thrives outside traditional hierarchies. She is not defined by how the world sees her, but by how she sees herself. "Failures and adversity have not broken me," Gupta writes. "I've faced them with courage and grit and always bounced back." This sense of resilience is not worn like a badge but flows through the narrative with understated strength.

Gupta reflects on how her life has been shaped by interactions with people, travels to distant places, and long periods of solitude. These weren't grand epiphanies, but moments that mirrored her evolving sense of identity. She doesn't claim to have all the answers, but her journey offers insights into how one can stay grounded and grow simultaneously.

Sigma Woman speaks particularly to readers standing at life's crossroads, those asking questions about who they are and where they're headed. The memoir doesn't preach or promise transformation. Instead, it provides companionship, a voice



ABOUT THE BOOK
Book: Sigma Women
Author: Sangeeta Gupta
Publisher: Prithvi Fine Art and Cultural Centre Delhi
Price: ₹600/-

that understands the doubts, honours the struggles, and encourages the reader to keep moving forward with quiet determination.

What makes the book stand apart is its honesty. Gupta doesn't position herself as a hero. She presents herself as someone who kept going, learned along the way, and continues to evolve. There's a generosity in the way she shares her story, not to impress, but to connect. In a world crowded with noise, **Sigma Woman** is a rare offering, thoughtful, authentic, and deeply human. It reminds us that the journey inward can be the most powerful one of all, and that sometimes, the quietest voices carry the strongest messages.

The book is a celebration of the power that lies in embracing one's own story, without trying to fit into the moulds imposed by society.

It's a call for readers to carve out their own spaces, trust in their instincts, and have the courage to lead a life that is unapologetically theirs.

A Century of India's voice and Cultural Impact

This book explores Akashvani's rich legacy, highlighting its cultural and informational impact, says KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

There are certain institutions across the world the names of which arouse in the mind a sense of respect and dignity. Pan Am, BOAC, Qantas, international airlines headquartered in the US, Britain and Australia are known for safety, security, punctuality and courteousness to the customers. Automobile giants like General Motors, Chrysler, Ford, Mercedes-Benz, and Rolls-Royce too evoke adulation. These feelings are rooted in decades of immaculate track record. Such institutions with top global ratings are very few in India. The licence-permit raj in vogue from 1947 to 1998 had blown out the spirit of entrepreneurship from the minds of Indians. "Chalta hai" was the hallmark of the country's average citizen.

Despite these shortcomings, there are few institutions based in India which have done the country proud. All India Radio is one such organisation respected all over the world for its credibility, clarity and reliability. All India Radio, the Hindi name of which is Akashvani, is the voice of India and is the largest radio network in the world. What started as a broadcast of a small music programme from Bombay in November 1922 underwent many transformations over the decades and has become the nation's pride.

The history of Akashvani is not without blemishes. The days of internal emergency (June 1975-March 1977) saw the reputation of Akashvani suffering a setback thanks to the craving by the then Prime Minister to somehow hang on to office. The AIR network earned the not-so-good reputation as IndiraVani, as the news, features and even cultural programmes aired by it were paeans in honour of Indira Gandhi. I do remember a radio commentator by name Ravi Chaturvedi weeping during the live commentary of the 1975-76 cricket Test match between India and West Indies which was won by India. The whole cricket fraternity who were tuned



in to the radio listened to Chaturvedi attributing India's victory to the Twenty Point Programme and Five Point Programme initiated by Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi respectively.

For the first time in the history of Akashvani, a book **Akashvani: A Century of Stories from AIR** has hit book shelves across India. The book is authored by Vikrant Pande and Neelesh Kulkarni. Vikrant Pande shot into fame through Shivaji: The Great Maratha, a translation of Ranjit Desai's Marathi novel

Shriman Yogi. It was a great literary work and Pande's translation was of top quality. He has not let the readers down and has opened a window to the world of India's radio broadcasting. Dr Ranjit Nair, a physicist working at Cambridge University, came across scientific papers authored by Prof J C Bose which stated that the latter had held public demonstrations of radio in November 1895, much before Marconi entered the field. Prof Bose never liked the idea of selling his innovation for personal gains and wanted the radio to benefit humanity. During the sesquicentennial event held at Cambridge University, invited scientists from all five continents described Prof Bose as a scientist who thought much ahead of his times, said Prof Nair who was one of the lead organisers of the event. In a subcontinent like India, the

while private operators are yet to tap this significant segment. The Green Revolution that elevated India to be a country that exports foodgrains has been supplemented to a great extent by the Farm and Home programmes. As the saying goes, a rut has set in the way Akashvani is functioning. It is time for rebooting the radio in tune with the changed times. Mann Ki Baat, the monthly programme aired by AIR in which the PM shares with listeners various topics, proves that radio is here to stay.

What Akashvani lacks is an exclusive national channel broadcasting round-the-clock news, music, newsreels, discussions and debates. Though there is a medium wave relay station at Nagpur, the programmes broadcast through this transmitter are hardly audible outside Maharashtra. The launching of a channel exclusively for news and current affairs should be given top priority. An institution with the motto "Bahujan Hitaya: Bahujan Sukhaya" can easily set up a two-channel system. Kudos to Pande and Kulkarni for this work which is a must-read for all those who are associated with mass media. I still remember the care with which AIR engineers set their clock in sync with the master clock maintained in New Delhi AIR at 4 PM every day for accuracy and sharpness.



ABOUT THE BOOK
Book: Akashvani
Author: Thomas Mathew
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹399/-



BCCI removes assistant coach Nayar; support staff all set for overhaul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Indian cricket team's assistant coach Abhishek Nayar has been sacked just eight months into the assignment amid speculation of a rift with a high-profile member of the support staff even though Test debacles against New Zealand and Australia are being cited as the reason for his ouster.

If board sources are to be believed, Nayar has already been intimidated of the BCCI's decision to part ways with him.

"While India's recent Test debacles (against New Zealand and Australia) has led to the churning but there is also a feeling in the BCCI that Nayar became a scapegoat in the turf war between an important member of the support staff and a senior star player," a BCCI source told media. Fielding coach T Dilip, and Strength and Conditioning coach Soham Desai are also on their way out after completing more than three years in their respective positions.

The new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of the BCCI has capped the support staff's tenure at three years.

It is learnt that India's first ever Strength and Conditioning coach Adrian Le Roux is likely to return for a second stint. The South African is widely credited for ushering in a new fitness culture in the then Sourav Ganguly-led Indian team during



the 2003 World Cup. BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, when contacted by media, chose to sidestep the query.

"Certain things are being finalised. You will receive a press note from BCCI in some days," Saikia said when asked about the development.

The 41-year-old Nayar, a former all-

additional batting coach. "...Just after the tour of Australia, there was a review meeting conducted by the BCCI. The top officials of the board, including secretary Devajit Saikia and vice-president Rajeev Shukla, were present along with important members associated with the Indian team, and the national selectors," the BCCI source said.

"On the sidelines of the meeting, a powerful member of the support staff expressed his apprehensions about Nayar's presence and said how him being in the dressing room is proving to be counter-productive.

"While the BCCI didn't act immediately but they brought in Kotak, the former Saurashtra run-accumulator. It was a way of side-lining Nayar during the Champions Trophy," the source added.

It is understood that Nayar was not the first-choice assistant for head coach Gautam Gambhir when the appointments were finalised.

He was appointed to act as a bridge between Gambhir and skipper Rohit Sharma, with whom he has shared a close friendship owing to their time together as Mumbai teammates.

Nayar and Dilip have been the Indian skipper's "most trusted lieutenants" and it is not known whether Rohit was kept in the loop by the BCCI mandarins about these decisions.

Axar backs McGurk, says Australian is game-changer

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Delhi Capitals skipper Axar Patel conceded that his team has struggled with shaky starts with Jake Fraser-McGurk yet to fire this season but backed the Australian to be a game-changer once he finds his rhythm.

The 23-year-old opener, who lit up the tournament in his maiden season last year with his power-hitting, has looked a shadow of himself in this edition.

His ongoing struggles at the top continued in DC's dramatic Super Over win against Rajasthan Royals, as he perished inside the Powerplay for the fifth time this season.

"I have a different opinion. If you don't get a start, we are still doing well. So you have that cushion that you can go from the same team," Axar told reporters on Wednesday. "So I was thinking, the box isn't getting ticked but at the same time we are winning and he is such a player, that the day he gets going he will hand you the match."

I back myself: Axar on captaincy
As the IPL reaches its halfway stage, the overall all-rounder has emerged as the tournament's most successful captain, steering his side to five wins in six games.

"I was captaining for state cricket, I know what to do and what not to do. And when you get a chance to run the team as you want and play the way you want to play then why not," said Axar.

Axar, who has led his state side Gujarat in 23 matches across formats, said he isn't one to lean heavily on analytics or prescribed captaincy templates.

"I am doing what I think is right and not following a template. I am backing myself. I am not captaining for the first time. There is planning, which is for my awareness that what's going on, how the other team is playing. Obviously, sometimes it works.

"But as a captain, I see who is in form, how their day is going, what they can do and what they can't. I choose according to the situation. I am not completely data driven," he added.

Against RR, Axar's impact wasn't just with strategy. After a string of low-key

outings, he finally delivered a telling performance with both bat and ball. His 14-ball 34 provided Delhi with the much-needed boost.

"I thought I was batting well for the last one-and-a-half years. But when I came to this tournament, I wasn't able to create an impact. I don't know if it was a soft dismissal or something. I was getting out in an over-aggressive manner. But when I went today, I was clear. I knew who I wanted to target."



With the ball, he plucked his first wicket of the season by bamboozling Riyan Parag. Asked about his underwhelming returns, Axar reiterated that a finger injury sustained during the Champions Trophy has held him back. "I sustained a cut on my finger during the Champions Trophy. The skin is yet to come. Every time I bowl, the skin comes off. So I was saving myself. I couldn't bowl at my speed. So I felt I was bowling well but was not able to get the impact I want."

Du Plessis play the next match

DC vice-captain Faf Du Plessis has missed the team's last two games, against Mumbai Indians and Rajasthan Royals, due to an unspecified injury. "I had been told that he wouldn't be able to play three matches — that's the time he needs to recover — and two matches are done. Maybe he will play the Gujarat game. But the physio has to confirm how his rehab has been going," Axar said.

Rohit to be face of T20 Mumbai League; India players to feature

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

India's Test and ODI captain Rohit Sharma is set to be the ambassador of T20 Mumbai League with the MCA expressing hope that the city's other stars such as Shreyas Iyer and Suryakumar Yadav will make themselves available for the event that was halted owing to the COVID-19 pandemic after two editions.

The league was held in 2018 and 2019 before the pandemic led to its suspension. Rohit has retired from T20 Internationals but continues to play in the IPL.

Suryakumar Yadav, Shreyas Iyer, Ajinkya Rahane, Shivam Dube, Tushar Deshpande and Prithvi Shaw are some of the popular Mumbai players. Test opener Yashasvi Jaiswal moved to Goa a few days ago.

Most of them are busy with their IPL commitments right now. The MCA (Mumbai Cricket Association) event will not start before the IPL's conclusion on May 25.

"We have not made it mandatory for them to play but we strongly expect them to play in the T20 Mumbai League. Their participation will only help Mumbai cricket grow, and benefit the players and the league," an MCA

official told media. Rohit will be present at an event to announce the league here on Friday. It is also learnt that the MCA is contemplating a pay of ₹15 lakh each for the "icon players" in the competition.

The MCA has received more than 2,800 entries for the event. The tournament will comprise eight teams with two new sides to be announced soon.

The other six teams are North Mumbai Panthers, ARCS Andheri, Triumph Knights Mumbai North East, Namo Bandra Blasters, Eagle Thane Strikers and Aakash Tigers Mumbai Western Suburbs.

Feeling sense of seniority after coming to PBKS: Arshdeep

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mullanpur

India seamer Arshdeep Singh says he has been feeling a sense of "seniority" since the beginning of his tenure at Punjab Kings thanks to the responsibility entrusted upon him by the IPL franchise that has also helped him in his professional growth.

The 26-year-old left-arm pacer was in his teens when he joined Punjab Kings (formerly Kings XI Punjab) and has been an integral part of the side since then, leading the pace attack on most occasions.

He has been remarkably consistent with the ball having taken 84 wickets for PBKS in seven seasons with a highest of 19 scalps last year. PBKS are currently placed fourth on the points table with the gangly pacer having taken eight wickets so far in this edition of IPL.

"Ever since I came to Punjab Kings, barring the first year, I started feeling seniority in my role. I have been associated with this team for the last seven years and after spending my first year with the team, I started feeling that I have been given a huge responsibility," said the pacer during the 'Kandid with Kings' episode.

Arshdeep said the responsibility thrust upon him has "helped me grow as a player and person" both in the Indian side and at his franchise.

He said that he understood quite early that mistakes, however small, could hamper the prospects of the team and he had to be on his toes at all times on the field.

"The elevation in my role and growth came pretty early and hence, I knew that I could not mess up at crucial stages because at those times, not working as per the plan can put the team in serious trouble. Hence, I became serious and started feeling like a senior way too early." Like any other player, Arshdeep too gets trolled for a bad day in office and the India seamer said rather than getting flustered, he has started to enjoy the memes and messages.

"I have had ups and downs in my career. I have seen the highest point as well as the lowest point in a very short span. But I feel very entertained by these trolls. I laugh at their creativity and memes.

"Earlier, I used to save these memes and messages so I could use those later but now I feel they don't make any sense. However, I still enjoy looking at people's creativity," the pacer says.

PBKS will next face Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Friday.

Golfer Scottie Scheffler rested, ready to defend title at Hilton Head

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hilton Head Island

Scottie Scheffler was the star attraction of a parade just two days after the Masters. This one was all about a red plaid jacket from Harbour Town, not a green jacket from Augusta National.

The tradition of the RBC Heritage is for the defending champion to lead a half-mile parade that ends near the 18th green at Harbour Town, where he hits a ceremonial tee shot into the Calibogue Sound as a cannon is simultaneously fired.

"I had some ear plugs. It's always nice when a cannon is going off," Scheffler said. "It was definitely a unique experience. I was glad just to be able to make contact with the ball and not embarrass myself out there." And at least he was well-rested for Tuesday's opening ceremony.

Scheffler is in a different spot in so many ways compared with a year ago, when he was coming off a victory in the Masters. He flew home to Dallas for a brief celebration, then got back on a plane to coastal South Carolina for a \$20 million signature event. He won that, too.

Scheffler couldn't always hit it where he was aiming this year in the Masters. He still tied for fourth and was proud of putting up a fight. It was tiring, yes, but without the adrenaline rush of winning and all that

comes with it. Instead of a big party, a flight home to Dallas and then back to Hilton Head Island, Scheffler enjoyed a peaceful three-hour drive and some relaxation that this tournament offers.

Even with a \$20 million purse, this can feel like one big exhale.

Masters champion Rory McIlroy is not playing, and that's by design. He had mentioned earlier this year Harbour Town was not among his favorites — the course is more about position off the tee and small greens than blasting away — and he didn't enter the tournament at last Friday's deadline. It's the kind of course on which Scheffler thrives. Even while running on fumes after his Masters victory a year ago, he still had enough left in the tank to put on a tee-to-green clinic, building a lead with a 63 on Saturday and finishing off the win Monday morning because of rain.

"This golf course is much more about control and putting your ball in the right spots and staying out of the trouble," Scheffler said. "The fairways here are much smaller than Augusta and a flatter golf course overall. A bit of a different test, but definitely still a good test." That depends on how well he's playing, and Scheffler feels he's close.

Everything is forward in his world, though there was a concession that he has been trying to catch up form having missed



a month away from golf — the work in the gym, and practice on the course — from his decision to make ravioli on Christmas Day. He punctured his right hand with a wine glass and required minor surgery.

Scheffler is still trying to put together a complete game — driving well one week when irons are suspect, good irons and pedestrian driving the next.

"I was playing a bit of catch-up," he said. "I feel like I'm improving each week. Body's starting to feel better. Swing's starting to feel better. I feel like I'm working towards having another good season. I haven't had my best start this year, but I've had some good finishes." He flirted with contention at Torrey Pines. He was in contention until the very end in the Houston Open. And

even in the Masters, he was a birdie or two away — with some help from McIlroy — from having a chance.

Scheffler recalls being in the 18th fairway, two shots behind Justin Rose and McIlroy, thinking of nothing but holing out for eagle. Rose was in the group ahead of him and made a 20-foot birdie putt, leaving Scheffler three behind. He recalls telling caddy Ted Scott, "I guess I'm going to aim at the middle of the green now." Scott concurred, Scheffler made par and he was on his way to Harbour Town.

His final act was twice helping McIlroy into the Masters green jacket — first in Butler Cabin, then during the trophy presentation on the 18th green.

"It was cool to be able to see Rory get the job done," Scheffler said. "Definitely from the outside it looked a lot more like relief than anything. Rory has accomplished everything in the game of golf, and that was really the last thing for him to accomplish. The guy has won FedEx Cup, The Players, all four majors. Maybe the only other thing would be the Olympics is what he would want to win.

"It was really cool for me to be there in that moment," he said. "He's a good friend of mine. To be able to congratulate him and just see the joy on him and his family was really cool.

Courtois questions Real Madrid's attack after loss to Arsenal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barcelona

Thibaut Courtois watched from the other end of the pitch as Real Madrid's forwards took turns crashing against the Arsenal defense.

Courtois had done his part by stopping a penalty. But Kylian Mbappé's best shot sailed high and wide. Rodrygo's dribbles got him nowhere, and Vinicius needed a defensive blunder to take Madrid's sole goal of a 5-1 aggregate defeat in the Champions League quarterfinals.

"Sometimes you have to be self-critical and have a good look at everything," the Belgian goalkeeper said after the 2-1 home loss to Arsenal midweek.

"Maybe we need to make more team moves and not so many individual ones, because if they double-mark Vini or Mbappé they can break it once, but not three, four or five times," Courtois said. "We can't always rely on one of our four attacking players dribbling past three defenders and scoring a great goal, we have to attack and defend better as a team."

Exiting from the competition it has won five times in the last decade was not what Madrid expected when it added Mbappé to a squad that was coming off a record 15th European Cup and Spanish league title last season.

The France captain has scored a glut of goals in his first season with Madrid but failed to come up big in the biggest games, including two lopsided losses to Barcelona. Jeers were heard for Mbappé when he limped off the field on Wednesday with a hurt right ankle.



The hard truth is that the team has played worse with him on board. Madrid has had injuries in defense and it lost mid-

fielder Toni Kroos to retirement but its attack has failed to click, with Mbappé having to adapt to a central striker role as

Vinicius' production dropped. Courtois even called into question the range of attacking options for a squad that

also counted on Endrick and Brahim Diaz as sparks off the bench. The goalie said Madrid was missing the tall, big striker who could win balls in the box like Joselu Mato, who scored critical goals in last season's Champions League.

"It was difficult to find openings and we had little success. We were also unlucky with balls into the box. This year we don't have a Joselu who can win those duels," Courtois said. "Now we have to analyze what we can do better because we still have the (Spanish) league, the final of the Copa del Rey and the Club World Cup, and we want to get everything right."

Athletic Bilbao up next in La Liga There will be little let up for Madrid with a strong Athletic Bilbao arriving on Sunday aiming to dig into the wound left by Arsenal.

Madrid must try to overhaul a four-point deficit to Barcelona in La Liga as it tries to salvage the season by defending its domestic title.

Madrid could be facing a seven-point gap with Barcelona by kickoff, if the front-runner beats Celta Vigo at home on Saturday. Madrid will also face Barcelona in the Copa del Rey final next week, but coach Carlo Ancelotti will likely also need his team to retain the league crown to keep his job.

The Italian manager admitted his future was in doubt after his team was outplayed by Arsenal, while also attempting to dampen speculation.

"I'm only thinking about preparing for the next game to stay in the fight for the league title and try to win the Copa del Rey," he said.