

BANGLADESH TELLS PAKISTAN, SAY SORRY

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ New Delhi/Dhaka

Bangladesh has demanded a formal public apology for the "atrocities" committed by Pakistan during the 1971 Liberation War and raised pending financial claims during the first Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) meeting in 15 years. Bangladesh has also sought \$4.52 billion from Pakistan as part of its share of pre-1971 assets. After the 1971 War, East Pakistan split from West Pakistan to form an independent Bangladesh.

This came up at FOC meeting between Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin and visiting Pakistani counterpart Amna Baloch, ahead of Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Dhaka on April 27 and 28.

Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch led the Pakistani delegation while Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin represented Bangladesh. Bangladesh and Pakistan are trying to rebuild their strategic ties after one-and-a-half decades to remain engaged on pending issues.

"We have raised the historically unresolved issues with Pakistan. These issues need to be resolved to establish a solid foundation for our bilateral relations," Md Jashim Uddin told reporters after the meeting. He said the issues included "the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis, equitable distribution of undivided assets, transfer of foreign aid funds sent for the victims of the 1970 cyclone, and a formal public apology for the genocide committed by the then Pakistani military in 1971".

"We said this is the right time to settle the historical unsettled issues," the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary said, adding these issues needed to be resolved for having a "solid foundation of our relations" for mutual benefits and interests.

Asked what was the Pakistani side's response to the call, Uddin said they would

like to "remain engaged" with a positive outlook to discuss the unsettled issue in future.

After the talks at the State Guesthouse in Padma, Baloch called on Bangladesh Interim Government Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain separately.

According to the Foreign Secretary, Dhaka also asked Pakistan to pay up the unpaid \$200 million foreign donation for victims in the then East Pakistan after the 1970's cyclone.

Asked if the money devaluation over the decades was taken into consideration in quoting the amounts, the officer said the issue was tabled during the FOC and its details are expected to come up during the subsequent talks.

During the first Foreign Office Consultations meeting held in 15 years, Bangladesh has demanded \$4.52 billion from Pakistan as part of its share of pre-1971 assets

The Foreign Secretary said the FOC fixed April 27 and 28 for Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's planned Bangladesh visit. The talks come amid a thaw between the two countries after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in August last year.

The Yunus-led government appears to be playing down the role of Hasina's father Mujibur Rehman in Bangladesh liberation in 1971. The Indian Army took over 90,000 Pakistan soldiers as Prisoners of War.

The Pakistani Army's crackdown on the Bengali population of East Pakistan in March 1971 has been a sore point between the two nations since the formation of Bangladesh. During the Pakistani Army's 'Operation Searchlight', around 30 lakh Bengalis were believed to have been killed, and scores of women raped.

The two sides also discussed the launch of direct flights between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Bangladesh also raised the issue of the repatriation of more than 3 lakh Pakistanis stranded and living in relief camps in Bangladesh.

Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch also met Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain separately on Thursday.

India's rebuke to Dhaka: Focus on your own minorities

India on Friday rejected remarks by Bangladeshi officials on violence in West Bengal and asked Dhaka to focus on protecting the rights of its minorities instead of indulging in "virtue signalling".

"We reject the remarks made by the Bangladesh side with regard to the incidents in West Bengal," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "This is a barely disguised and disingenuous attempt to draw a parallel with India's concerns over the ongoing persecution of minorities in Bangladesh where the criminal perpetrators of such acts continue to roam free," he said.

Jaiswal was responding to media queries regarding comments made by Bangladeshi officials on the developments in West Bengal. "Instead of making unwarranted comments and indulging in virtue signalling, Bangladesh would do better to focus on protecting the rights of its own minorities," he said.

The sharp reaction came after Shafiqul Alam, the Press Secretary to Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, on Thursday called on New Delhi and the West Bengal government to take "all steps to fully protect the minority Muslim population." "We condemn attacks on Muslims that caused loss of lives and properties," he had said. "We urge the Governments of India and West Bengal to take all steps to fully protect the minority Muslim population," Alam had added.

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Vice President of India attacked by Opposition

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ New Delhi

A day after Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar's remarks on the higher judiciary, Opposition parties severely criticised his stand whereas the ruling BJP rallied behind the Rajya Sabha Presiding Officer while accusing the Opposition of "political hypocrisy".

Leaders of the Congress, TMC, DMK, Shiv Sena (UBT), RJD and several legal experts and advocates voiced concern and accused Dhankhar of "undermining Supreme Court's authority that potentially bordered on judicial contempt".

BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said there was no need to learn 'constitutional propriety' from a Party that says it won't implement a law passed by Parliament. "They mocked the Vice President's posture, protect rioters in the name of votebank politics, and find no time to visit Hindu victims in Bengal," the BJP said.

Addressing Rajya Sabha interns on April 17, Dhankhar had described Article 142 - which allows the Supreme Court to ensure "complete justice" - as "a nuclear missile against democratic forces" that is available to the judiciary round the clock. He also raised concerns about the Court mandating timelines for President of India's assent to State Bills and the judicial process surrounding absence of an FIR against the then Delhi High Court Judge from whose official residence here a stash of burnt currency notes was found.

Dhankhar's reaction vis-a-vis the higher judiciary came days after the Supreme Court fixed timeline for the President to grant assent to the State Bills reserved for her consideration by a Governor of a State.

Congress Rajya Sabha MP Randeep Singh Surjewala cited the Supreme Court's April 8 judgment that entails a three-month deadline for the President to act



on Bills sent by Governors. "Only the Constitution is supreme in our democracy. No authority, including the Vice President, can override constitutional checks and balances," Surjewala said.

TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee condemned the Vice President's "objectionable" tone that he termed a sign of "repeated disregard for constitutional institutions". He emphasised that as a high-ranking constitutional figure, Dhankhar should uphold and not question the authority of the higher judiciary.

DMK leader Tiruchi Siva labelled the comments "unethical," stressing that no one - regardless of office he or she holds - has the right to indefinitely stall legislative processes under the guise of constitutional power.

Siva said, "Under the (doctrine of) separation of powers as per the Constitution, the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary have distinct powers."

Senior Advocate and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal also joined the debate, questioning Dhankhar's objection to Article 142 of the Constitution. "The

Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to deliver complete justice. It is not about curtailing the powers of the President; it is about ensuring justice in its truest sense," he said.

Sibal asserted that the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Rajya Sabha Chairman should remain equidistant from the Opposition and the ruling party, and cannot be the "spokesperson of any party". "Everyone knows that the Lok Sabha Speaker's chair is in between. He or she is the Speaker of the House, not the speaker of one Party. They also don't vote - they only vote when there is a tie. The same is the case with the Upper House. You are equidistant from the Opposition and the ruling Party," Sibal said at a press conference.

Sibal also recalled the 1975 Supreme Court judgment that invalidated then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's election. "People would remember that when the Supreme Court's decision came on Indira Gandhi's election, only one judge - Justice Krishna Iyer - gave the decision," he said.

Odisha farmers to visit Malaysia



Will study advanced agricultural techniques

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A pioneering initiative by the Odisha Government will see a delegation of 14 farmers visiting Malaysia to study advanced agricultural techniques.

This programme, supported by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) and the World Bank, will also include 14 agricultural officers accompanying the farmers to gain insights into contemporary farming.

During the eight-day educational visit, the farmers will

explore modern agricultural practices, focusing on climate-resilient methods and agricultural industries in Malaysia. The tour will cover visits to agricultural research centres and specialised training in mushroom production. This experience aims to equip Odisha farmers with new skills and knowledge that can be implemented to improve practices back home.

On their return, these farmers will share their learning with their communities, disseminating knowledge about innovative Malaysian methods to potentially boost agricultural productivity and farmers' income in Odisha.

This was announced by Deputy Chief Minister and Agriculture Minister KV Singh Deo on Friday.

Staines murder convict sparks new questions

I was framed by Congress and BJD: Mahendra

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The brutal killing of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young sons in Keonjhar district in 1999 had shaken the conscience of the nation. Now, a fresh controversy surrounds the case following the release of Mahendra Hembram, one of the prime convicts, after 25 years in jail. His explosive statement post-release has revived suspicions and sparked a new political debate.

"I was framed by the Congress and the BJD. I had no role in the murders," Mahendra claimed in his first public remarks after being released. "I opposed illegal religious conversions and cow slaughter, but I never committed murder. I was wrongfully imprisoned."

Mahendra alleges that he was a political scapegoat. "I

was supposed to be released after 14 years, but due to a conspiracy, I spent 25 years in jail," he said. "The then Congress-led Central Government and BJD-led State Government deliberately suppressed court documents and delayed my release despite court orders."

Mahendra's release has now opened the door for potential clemency for Dara Singh, the main accused in the case, who remains behind bars in Keonjhar jail. Dara, aka Rabindra Kumar Pal, was originally sentenced to death by a CBI court in 2003, but his sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment by the Orissa High Court in 2005.

At the peak of the investigation, a total of 13 people were arrested in connection with the murder. Of them, 12 were sentenced to life imprisonment, but 11 were later acquitted by the High Court. Only Dara and Mahendra remained in prison until the latter's recent release.

2 ministers venture into forest, probe illegal coal mining

NALINI SAHU ■ Telendihi (Sundargarh)

In a bold move to curb rampant illegal coal mining in Sundargarh district, the State Government on Friday initiated a high-level probe into unregulated mining operations, particularly in the dense forested regions of Hemgiri block.

Steel and Mines Minister Bibhuti Bhusan Jena and Forest and Environment Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia led the initiative by venturing deep into the Telendihi forest to conduct ground-level inspections. They were accompanied by senior district officials.

Illegal coal extraction has reportedly been ongoing for years in forested pockets such as Gopalpur, Telendihi, Ratansara, Jamkani and Bhogra-Kachhar.

Responding to preliminary



findings, the Sundargarh district administration has already carried out raids on several local sponge iron units and coal washeries believed to be using illegally-sourced coal. The Mines Department has deployed a nine-member enforcement team to conduct

detailed investigations. Officials confirmed the seizure of approximately 10,000 tonnes of coal so far.

Minister Khuntia said, "We will not spare those who have been looting public resources and destroying the environment. Arrests are im-

minent." Khuntia also hinted at the possible complicity of officials under the previous government. "With the change in leadership, the truth is now emerging. Any official found to be complicit will face serious action," he warned.

Flash-charging electric buses likely between Cuttack, BBSR, Puri

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

In a move towards sustainable and high-tech public transportation, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari has proposed deployment of flash-charging electric buses in Odisha. The initiative aims to establish a direct electric bus service connecting Twin City of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack to the pilgrimage city of Puri.



arrival, ensuring minimal downtime.

The pilot project for these buses is set to commence in Nagpur, Maharashtra. Each bus measures 18 meters in length and comprises high-end features such as executive-class seating, individual TV screens, air conditioning,

laptop trays, mobile charging points and onboard refreshments, offering passengers an experience akin to air travel.

Moreover, these electric buses are expected to be 30% more cost-effective for passengers compared to conventional diesel buses while

also contributing significantly to environmental conservation. If the Nagpur model proves successful, similar services could soon be introduced in Odisha, providing eco-friendly, comfortable, and affordable travel for commuters on the Twin City-Puri corridor.

Ration cards to all those eligible by Apr 22

Directs govt to Collectors

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The State Government has announced plans to issue ration cards to new and left-out eligible beneficiaries shortly to streamline the provision of essential commodities to deserving families.

Officials have been instructed to ensure preparation of these ration cards by April 22. The directive has been communicated to all district Collectors.

As per a letter from the Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Department, the venue and date for the formal launch of the distribution of new ration cards to the eligible beneficiaries will be intimated shortly.

In a letter to all the Collec-

tors, Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Secretary Sanjay Kumar Singh stated, "I am to inform you that the government has approved for distribution of new ration cards to the eligible applicants and addition of new members in the existing ration cards after proper field verification with reference to the eligibility criteria notified in Odisha State Food Security (Targeted Public Distribution System) Rules, 2020 against the arising vacancies in the NFSA and SFSS ration card databases."

"Access has been given to the Block/ULB level BDO/EO users in RCMS to move the eligible cases retained in Draft Priority List (DPL) to the Final Priority List (FPL) after e-KYC verification of all members in the ration card and generate ration card PDFs," stated the Secretary.

Ratna Bhandar restoration to conclude next month

PNS ■ Puri

The renovation of the iconic Ratna Bhandar at the Jagannath Temple in Puri is expected to conclude within the next month, informed Justice Biswanath Rath, who chairs the Ratna Bhandar Inspection Committee, on Friday.

Justice Rath said the meticulous work is almost complete in the inner Ratna Bhandar while the repair work of the outer Ratna Bhandar is in progress.

"This renovation is being undertaken with the intention of securing the structural integrity of the Ratna Bhandar for at least the next 100 years. Five worn-out beams have been replaced with sturdy steel ones," said he.

"Once the repair work is

completed, the process of relocating the jewels and ornaments will commence following a pre-established standard operating procedure (SOP)," said Justice Rath.

"There is extensive work to be done. The walls of the inner Ratna Bhandar were badly damaged. With the Lord's grace, the repair work was undertaken in time. ASI authorities are conducting the repair work properly by using the right kind of materials," said Justice Rath.

"The repair work is being undertaken for three to four hours on a daily basis. Considering the pace of the work, it is expected that it will be finished within the next month. Following the completion of the work, the restoration and counting work will be undertaken," he added.

In Puri This high school has 5 teachers for 1 student!

PNS ■ Puri

In a baffling example of resource misallocation within education system in the State, a government high school in Puri district is reportedly functioning with just one student and five teachers.

The school in question is the Dandamkundapur Government High School in Pipili block, located merely 20 km from the State capital of Bhubaneswar. The stark situation has now triggered questions about educational governance, administrative efficiency, and alleged policy oversight.

Sources reported that most classrooms at this school remain locked, with currently, only Classes 9 and 10 functioning on its premises.

While the school was once bustling with students, with the completion of board exams, all Class 10 students graduated, leaving just one student promoted from Class 9 to Class 10 this academic year, added reports.



To make matters worse, the teachers maintained that he remains irregular in attendance and skips school when there are no classes. As such, the teachers, who still report to duty out of professional obligation, simply mark attendance and return home.

On days the student does attend, he is taught by a team of five teachers, all assigned full-time to the nearly empty school.

"I was the lone student in Class 9, and even after promotion, the situation remains the same. Being alone, I do not enjoy attending classes," said Satybrata Behera, the lone student of Dandamkundapur Government High School.

Due to the absence of a functional student base, the mid-day meal programme at the school has also come to a standstill. Notably, teachers stated that repeated attempts to boost student enrollment have failed as another larger school in the same panchayat is attracting most students, leaving this once-thriving institution on the verge of collapse.

Established in 1976, the Dandamkundapur Government High School is approaching its 50th anniversary. However, over the past decade, a steady decline in enrollment has turned it into a ghost school.

Local intellectuals allege that despite having just one

student, the government spends over Rs 4 lakh per month to run the institution, an amount meant to serve many more.

"We are extremely saddened by the state of affairs. Local panchayat, sarpanch, every one has appealed and tried to help revive the school but to no avail," said headmistress Banita Das.

When asked about the situation, Puri District Education Officer (DEO) Deepak Parihi confirmed that the BEO has been asked for an explanation.

"Immediate action will be taken. The lone student will be transferred to a nearby, better-functioning school, and the five teachers will be reassigned according to their subject specialisations," he added.

The Dandamkundapur case is not just an anomaly but is a reflection of a larger systemic issue. As Odisha continues to focus on improving literacy and learning outcomes, the government must address both under-resourced and overstaffed schools with equal urgency.

Govt explores Rs 4,500-cr green energy investment



Proposal made by Apollo group

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

A high-level meeting on expanding solar power infrastructure across Odisha was held on Wednesday at the Lok Seva Bhavan under the chairmanship of Agriculture, Farmers' Empowerment and Energy Minister and Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo.

The Apollo Green Energy Limited made a detailed presentation outlining its proposal to set up solar power projects in various parts of the State. Emphasising the State's commitment to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a 'Clean and Green India', Singh Deo assured full government support to promote renewable energy initiatives.

currently constructing a 54-MWp ground-mounted solar project in Ganjam district with an investment of Rs 151 crore. The company has proposed a further investment of Rs 4,500 crore to develop 1,000 MW of green energy capacity in Odisha. The proposed projects are expected to generate employment for over 3,000 people, both directly and indirectly.

The upcoming projects will also include Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) to store surplus power, ensuring stable and reliable energy supply.

The meeting was attended by Energy Department Principal Secretary Vishal Dev, OPTCL CMD Bhaskar Jyoti Sharma, GRIDCO MD Trilochan Panda and other senior officials of the Energy Department. From Apollo Green Energy, CEO Sanjay Gupta and president Rakesh Gupta participated in the discussions.

Samanta conferred Kalicharan Brahma Award



PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Eminent educationist, social reformer and founder of KIIT and KISS Dr Achyuta Samanta was on Friday conferred with the Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Award 2025. The award was presented in Kokrajhar, Assam, by the Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma Trust.

This recognition honours Dr Samanta's significant contributions to society through education and social empowerment. The award is named after Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, a revered spiritual leader and so-

cial reformer of the Bodo community, widely known as the "Mech Gandhi of Assam", who dedicated his life to the propagation, preservation and promotion of education.

As part of the honour, Dr Samanta received a citation, a memento and a cash award of Rs 1 lakh. In a noble gesture, Dr Samanta donated the entire award money back to the trust for its development.

Dr Samanta expressed his gratitude to the trust and reaffirmed his commitment to accelerate further his mission of empowering society through education.

In city Boy falls onto iron grill from rooftop

Condition critical, say doctors

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A 13-year-old boy named Sohan Diga sustained grievous injuries after falling onto an iron grill in the IRC village area in the capital city on Friday morning.

The incident occurred while Sohan was attempting to retrieve his school uniforms on the rooftop.

Fire Service personnel responded promptly to the dis-

tress call. A Fire Service team, which had been in the locality to clear trees broken due to thunderstorms in the morning, used a cutting machine to extricate the minor boy from the iron grill.

The boy was immediately rushed to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Bhubaneswar.

Sohan, a permanent resident of Kandhamal district, is still in critical condition following the incident, said doctors treating him in the hospital.

Nikunjia Dhal to go on Cntral deputation

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) on Friday approved Central deputation of Odisha-cadre IAS officer Nikunjia Bihari Dhal. The 1993-batch Odisha cadre IAS officer Nikunjia Bihari Dhal, presently serving as the Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister of Odisha Mohan Charan Majhi, has been appointed as the Secretary of Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs replacing IAS officer Umang Narula, who is set to retire on June 30, 2025.

The Centre also extended the deputation tenure of Odisha-cadre IAS officer

Santosh Kumar Sarangi with new assignment. The 1994-batch IAS officer, who is currently holding the position as the Director General at Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, has been appointed as the Secretary of Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.

The ACC has also approved in-situ upgradation of Ranjana Chopra to the level of Special Secretary in the rank and pay of Secretary to the Government of India. The 1994-batch Odisha-cadre IAS officer was elevated as the Additional Secretary and Financial Advisor of Ministry of Culture.

In Odisha Land, raw material woes hit industrial prospects

Experts say State must evolve from regulatory gatekeeper to enabling facilitator

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Despite approvals worth over Rs 1.65 lakh crore, major industrial projects in Odisha are stalling at the starting line. Land acquisition delays, unpredictable regulations, and insecure access to raw materials are choking the State's ability to convert intent into impact.

Industry experts now warn that unless these execution gaps are addressed urgently, Odisha risks falling behind in the race to attract and retain industrial investment.

At a high-level webinar titled "From Bhubaneswar to Bharat: Unlocking Odisha's Mineral Wealth for Its Social and Economic Prosperity," hosted by development platform Fijeeha, bureaucrats and industry leaders stressed the urgent need for Odisha to

evolve from a regulatory gatekeeper to an enabling facilitator. To truly align with its Viksit Odisha 2036 vision, the State must focus on ease of doing business and building long-term investor confidence.

Despite being endowed with some of India's richest reserves of iron ore, bauxite, and other minerals, Odisha continues to fall short in delivering end-to-end value creation, largely due to persistent regulatory uncertainty and fragmented supply chains.

Despite clearances, projects from leading firms like AMNS India, BPCL, GAIL, and JSW Steel have faced significant slowdowns because of land acquisition hurdles and procedural bottlenecks. Experts noted that industries need time-bound land allotment, a predictable policy environment, and secure raw material access to remain viable. Without this, rising costs and delays could push investors to friendlier states.

A common sentiment was that the government must enable land allocation as it is a

fundamental prerequisite for industrialisation. Delays in this process inflate project costs and risk making them unviable.

A key recommendation was the revamp of the single-window clearance system with measurable service-level agreements (SLAs). Industry leaders also called for the expansion and expedited opening of mines through self-certification, ensuring long-term material security with stable terms for local industries. They emphasized that 5% of profits from mining projects should be reinvested into local community development, aligning growth with grassroots impact.

"Odisha's bauxite reserves are a national asset-but their true value can only be realised through expedited mine clearances and opening of mines," said Senior Advisor, Centre for Environment and Development Dr Manoj K Dash.

Despite being one of the most resource rich states in India, like chromite, iron ore, bauxite, it has failed to create a dependable downstream in-

dustry ecosystem, leading to raw material shortage for the existing industries in the state. This has pushed some of the existing players to opt for other States for further investments, he added.

Moderating the session, Director, Sustainable Outcomes Pvt Ltd, Dr Nikhil Raj emphasised Odisha's potential to become the "Metal capital of the world", adding however that "Speed and time are of the essence. Odisha must act urgently to transform its promise into performance."

Former bureaucrat Dr Jayadev Sarangi recommended, "A dedicated Mineral Facilitation Cell could integrate approvals, logistics, and community engagement." Strategic Advisor, BGR Mining & Infra Ltd, Guruprasad Choudhary pushed for initiatives like faster approvals for mineral blocks, and self-certification models, adding that these will allow industries to plan long-term investments and create stable employment across mineral-rich States like Odisha.

Thunderstorms hit life in Twin City



Storms predicted in State till April 20

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A sudden spell of heavy rains and lightning lashed the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack on Friday, disrupting normal life and causing water-logging in several low-lying areas of the two cities.

In Bhubaneswar, the downpour, though providing relief from the prevailing heat wave conditions, slowed down vehicular movement and caused inconvenience to commuters. People were seen taking shelter under flyovers and overbridges as the rains caught many by surprise.

Similar conditions were also witnessed in Cuttack.

The Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department here has issued a Yellow alert across 15 districts in the next 24 hours, warning residents of the expected impact of Kalbaisakhi.

The districts of Mayurbhanj, Baleswar and Bhadrak are particularly at risk of experiencing intense storms with forecasts predicting significant rainfall, lightning and potential hailstorms. Particularly, Baleswar and Mayurbhanj could face heavy rainfall alongside lightning, with wind speeds reaching up to 50 to 60 km/h in certain areas.

Elsewhere, districts including Jajpur, Kendrapada, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khordha, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati, Rayagada, Koraput and Malkangiri are also likely to witness Kalbaisakhi rains. These regions are expected to encounter turbulent weather conditions over the next three days due to the ongoing storm system.

The IMD said the storm would persist until April 20, after which a rise in temperature is anticipated as a shift in atmospheric conditions begins. Those in affected regions are advised to remain cautious and stay updated with the latest weather advisories.

Today is World Liver Day Processed foods harm the liver

DR PREETAM NATH

Regular exercise key to keeping it healthy

The World Liver Day is observed on April 19 every year to raise awareness about liver-related diseases and promote liver health. This year's theme, "Food is Medicine", emphasises the importance of nutrition in maintaining and improving liver health, highlighting how dietary choices can prevent and manage liver diseases. It encourages mindful eating and healthier food choices to support liver function.

The liver is one of the most vital organs in the human body, responsible for digestion, metabolism, detoxifica-

tion, nutrient storage and various other important functions in the body. Unfortunately, liver diseases such as hepatitis, fatty liver, cirrhosis and liver cancer are on the rise due to sedentary lifestyles, poor dietary choices, alcohol abuse and increasing metabolic disorders like obesity and diabetes mellitus.

How to maintain healthy liver

To safeguard this crucial organ, a few key lifestyle changes and practices are essential. Maintain a balanced diet by incorporating fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins while reducing intake of processed foods and saturated fats. Avoid all types of processed or ultra-processed foods. Regular exercise helps maintain a healthy weight and reduces fat accumulation in the liver.



Excessive alcohol is a leading cause of liver damage; moderation is key. Vaccination for Hepatitis B is essential for prevention against chronic viral Hepatitis B and Hepatitis B virus-related cirrhosis of liver and liver cancer. Avoid self-medication as some over-the-counter drugs can harm the liver if used without prescription of a doctor.

Regular checkups are recommended, especially if you have risk factors such as obesity, diabetes or a family history of liver disease.

About the Department of Gastroenterology & Hepatology

At the forefront of liver health in Odisha, the Department of Gastroenterology & Hepatology at KIMS is a state-

of-the-art facility led by Prof Manoj Kumar Sahu under the guidance of Prof Subrat Kumar Acharya, Prof YK Chawla and Prof. Anil C Anand and a team of expert gastroenterologists including Dr Sarat Chandra Panigrahi, Dr Preetam Nath, Dr Bipadabhanjan Mallick, Dr Dibyalochan Praharaj, Dr Saroj Kanta Sahu and Dr Suprabhat Giri. The department offers advanced diagnostic and therapeutic services for a wide spectrum of gastrointestinal and liver disorders.

Services include liver biopsy (both USG-guided and transjugular), Fibroscan (for non-invasive liver fibrosis assessment), all advanced endoscopic procedures such as ERCP, diagnostic and therapeutic endoscopic ultrasound, and third space endoscopy procedures (POEM, EMR,

ESD), along with cutting-edge treatments like TIPS, TACE (for liver cancer), and PTBD.

The department is a pioneer in Odisha for introducing several key procedures in Gastroenterology & Hepatology and offers 24/7 emergency care along with routine OPD services. It also actively contributes to academic research, with numerous publications in leading national and international journals. In addition, the department runs the prestigious DM (Gastroenterology) training program, shaping the next generation of specialists.

This World Liver Day, let's pledge to take proactive steps toward liver health because a healthy liver is key to a healthier life.

(The writer is Professor, Department of Gastroenterology & Hepatology, KIMS)

Infection fear looms in FM MCH TB patients treated with general patients in Medicine Ward

UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ Baleswar

Fears loom among the indoor patients of FM Medical College Hospital, especially those admitted in the medicine wards for various ailments as the patients detected with tuberculosis are also lodged in the same wards along with other patients in the want of a dedicated isolated ward for the highly infectious disease.

Reports said the arrangement of the hospital authorities has not only triggered the fear among the patients as well their attendants, the treating doctors are also afraid of their safety.

Sources further alleged that although the matter of serious concern was brought to the notice of the Superintendent of the medical college by the treating doctors, but he didn't pay any heed to it.

Sources confirmed that al-



though Baleswar has been declared a TB free district, yet a good number of patients are detected with positive sputum virgins. Due to lack of an earmarked isolation ward they are being lodged with other patients in the medicine wards.

A majority of the patients detected with TB are from the quarry mining areas mainly, Nilgiri, Khaira and Oupada. In the want of earmarked wards, while some serious patients

are admitted, others are discharged who receive medication from their homes.

After establishment of the medical college at Remuna, Medicine and its ancillary departments including Pulmonary, Skin & VD and Emergency Medicine were shifted from the district headquarters hospital in March last year and have been operational since then. The medicine ward houses 120 beds in four cu-

bicles and patients suffering from different diseases are treated with outdoor as well as indoor facilities.

A doctor on condition of anonymity said since the bacteria borne disease is highly contagious, lodging TB patients along with other patients is a highly risky affair. It is high time the medical college authorities established an isolation ward without further delay, he suggested.

In Bhadrak Cattle smugglers' van meets with mishap



30 cows rescued;
3 accused
detained

PNS ■ Bhadrak

A pickup van smuggling over 30 cattle crashed into an electric pole after it was chased by a police team in Bhadrak district on Thursday.

The vehicle collided with the power pole in the Gujjarada area during an attempt to evade capture by police. The incident unfolded during a police operation led by the City DSP aimed at curb-

ing unlawful cattle transportation. The authorities acted on reports of illicit activities, launching a raid to intercept the suspect vehicle.

One vehicle, in an effort to escape from the police dragnet, veered off course and collided with a pole situated within a nearby field. This collision not only incapacitated the vehicle but also led to the subsequent rescue of more than 30 cattle.

In the aftermath of the crash, three persons were detained by police on suspicion of cattle trafficking.

INBRIEF

Hit by tractor, Class-IX student dies in Sambalpur

Sambalpur: A Class-IX student lost his life in a road mishap while returning from school in Sambalpur town on Friday. The deceased was identified as Ayushman Behera, a student of Saraswati Sishu Vidya Mandir in Dhanupali in the town. A tractor struck him, leaving him critically injured. He was rushed to the District Headquarters Hospital, where doctors declared him dead upon arrival. Chief Minister Mohan Majhi expressed deep grief over the incident and announced an ex-gratia of Rs 4 lakh to the bereaved family.

Spanish Ambassador Meets SOA founder President

Bhubaneswar: Ambassador of Kingdom of Spain to India Juan Antonio March Pujol paid a courtesy visit to Professor (Dr) Manojranjan Nayak, founder President of Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (SOA) University, on Friday. Ambassador Pujol, who represents Spain in India as well as Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, met with Prof Nayak at the SOA University here. They discussed avenues for collaboration between Spain and India in areas such as education and healthcare. They also explored the prospects of promoting Spanish language education at the university.



Koraput DM chosen for PM Award

Koraput: District Collector Koraput V Keerthi Vasani would be presented with the 'PM Award for Excellence in Public Administration-2025' in the 'Holistic Development of Districts' category. Vasani is scheduled to receive the honour from PM Narendra Modi on April 21, which is observed as the 'Civil Services Day', in New Delhi. Speaking to The Pioneer, Vasani said, "This is an award for the people of Koraput district. We tried to execute principles of holistic development. The award motivates us to keep working towards solving problems for the people."



IIM Sambalpur Convocation today

Sambalpur: The Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Sambalpur is set to host its 9th Annual Convocation on Saturday (April 19). The event will celebrate the academic accomplishments of students from various programs, including MBA (2023-25), Executive MBA (2022-24), MBA for Working Professionals (2023-25), and PhD scholars. Dr Pramod Kumar Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, will grace the event as chief guest.

Tata Steel Medica City Centre opened at Jajpur Road

Jajpur Road: Tata Steel Medica Hospital has expanded its reach with the inauguration of the 'Tata Steel Medica City Centre' at Kaneipur, Jajpur Road on Friday. This new facility will bring a



wide range of advanced medical services closer to the community. The City Centre was inaugurated by Chanakya Chaudhury, Vice President, Corporate Services, Tata Steel and Chairman, Medica TS Hospital Pvt Limited, in the presence of Sudhir Kumar Mehta, MD & CEO, Neelachal Ispat Nigam.

AM/NS India to build apparel unit in Keonjhar

Keonjhar: The ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel India (AM/NS India) laid foundation-stone for construction of a Gandhamardan Apparel Unit in Jatra village, Banspal block, Keonjhar under its CSR initiative Project 'Nirman'. This unit



will provide enhanced livelihood opportunities to the Gandhamardan Apparel Farmer Production Company (FPC), which consists of more than 480 women from 80 local Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

SENNES opens showroom in Bhubaneswar

Bhubaneswar: SENNES is an initiative of Senco Gold Limited. The brand has a wide range of exquisite jewellery pieces. MD & CEO, Senco Gold & Diamonds Suvankar Sen announce the opening of a SENNES showroom at Galleria Mall in Bhubaneswar in the presence of actress Sheetal Patra.



Min lauds FLO's role in boosting women entrepreneurship



PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Minister of State for Industries, Skill Development and Technical Education, Sampad Swain addressed the FICCI FLO Bhubaneswar Chapter's change of guard ceremony marking the transition of leadership from outgoing chairperson Rashmi Sahoo to the newly appointed chairperson Dr Prangyan Paramita Mishra.

In his address, Swain commended FICCI FLO Bhubaneswar for its remarkable role in fostering women's leadership and entrepreneurship in the State. He urged founding chair Dharitri Patnaik and Chair Dr Prangyan Mishra along with other FICCI FLO members to establish and nurture strong platforms across districts for women-led development and for more women to become entrepreneurs.

The Minister reaffirmed the Government of Odisha's commitment to inclusive growth under the leadership of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, highlighting women's economic empowerment as a key pillar of the State's industrial policy.

Swain elaborated on key schemes benefiting women at both the national and State levels. He acknowledged the success of Subhadra Yojana in evolving into viable business enterprises and praised

Startup Odisha's targeted support for women-led startups.

On Odisha's growth agenda under Utkarsh Odisha, the Minister shared outcomes from recent Investors' Meets in New Delhi and Mumbai, where Odisha secured investments across sectors including green energy, EV manufacturing, food processing, and MSMEs.

"We are soon launching an Industrial Park for Women Entrepreneurs and the support desk in IPICOL for women in business," he said.

He called upon FICCI FLO to actively collaborate with the Industries Department and Skill Development Mission to build scalable models for mentorship, incubation, and women-centric industrial growth. "Together, let us build an Odisha where every woman has the opportunity to lead, innovate, and transform communities. FLO Bhubaneswar will remain a trusted partner in this journey," Swain concluded.

Chairperson Dr Mishra ensured that she is committed to continue FLO's mission of inclusive empowerment with innovation and strategic partnerships.

Founding Chair Patnaik urged the Minister to provide more enabling ecosystems and provisions for women entrepreneurs.

Ayushman launching meet melee

Raghunathpur block staffs stage pen-down protest Demand arrest of accused

KAHNU NANDA ■ Jagatsinghpur

Protesting police inaction in probing the melee at the Ayushman Bharat launching camp at Tarikunda Panchayat on April 12 and bringing the culprits to book, Raghunathpur block employees launched a pen-down agitation on Thursday.

The aggrieved government employees demanded safety and security at the office as some of them were thrashed by a band of hooligans. If police could not arrest the accused persons, including BJP OBC Morcha district president Subodha Barik, the stir would continue for an indefinite period, warned Pradipta Khuntia, a block junior engineer who had been injured during the incident.

Meanwhile, Tirtol BJD unit has decided to lay siege to the district SP office on Friday protesting the failure of police to arrest the people behind the incident, said Tirtol MLA Dr

Ramakanta Bhoi.

Raghunathpur BDO confirmed that the block staff have launched a pen-down strike protesting the Tarikunda Panchayat Ayushman Yojana launching ceremony disturbance and informed that he has spoken to the district Collector and senior police officials sharing with them the grievance of the staff on Thursday. They have assured to take action urgently, the BDO added.

Notably, BJP supporters and its OBC Mocha district president Barik had created ruckus at the Tarikunda Panchayat Ayushman Bharat launching function and allegedly assaulted the block junior engineer and other staff, accusing them of carelessly organising the function in the absence of public participation and due propaganda.

The victim, a lady junior engineer, and Tarikunda Sarpanch had lodged an FIR at Jagatsinghpur police station, but after passing of five days, police have taken no action and the investigation was going on very slow.

Pradhan unveils bilingual alphabet book at J'suguda

Titled 'Sambalpuri Bhasha Shiksha'

RAJKUMAR SHARMA ■ Jharsuguda

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Tuesday launched a bilingual alphabet book titled 'Sambalpuri Bhasha Shiksha' under the Comprehensive Education Scheme. The book, designed to help children learn the Odia alphabet using Sambalpuri-Koshli language, was unveiled alongside the district administration's Pathan Parvan literacy initiative.

Speaking at the event, Pradhan lauded the initiative as a step forward in connecting the mother tongue of western Odisha with the State language, Odia. "With Sambalpuri Bhasha Shiksha,



children will be able to learn the Odia alphabet through their native dialect, thus developing speaking, reading, and writing skills simultaneously," he said.

He also praised the Pathan Parvan programme, launched in November last year to promote reading habits among students from Class 1 onwards. As part of the initiative,

students read books in Odia, Hindi, and English and wrote summaries. Selected summaries were compiled and released in a book dedicated to the public. Over 56,000 students in Jharsuguda district have reportedly benefitted from the programmes.

Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari underscored the emo-

tional bond with one's mother tongue and its role in shaping society, drawing inspiration from literary legends like Gangadhar Meher. Bargarh MP Pradiip Purohit highlighted the importance of mother tongue in nurturing children's cognitive development, while Jharsuguda MLA Tankadhar Tripathy outlined the aims of the programme.

NITR, only NIT selected as Hub Institution for PAIR Prog

AUROBINDA DAS ■ Rourkela

The NIT, Rourkela has been selected as one of the hub institutions under the prestigious Partnerships for Accelerated Innovation and Research (PAIR) Programme, launched by the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF).

It is the only NIT across the country and the only hub institute from Eastern India selected under the programme.

Rooted in the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the PAIR initiative is a transformative step toward fostering a collaborative, inclusive, and high-impact research ecosystem across Indian higher education institutions. The PAIR Programme is designed to enhance the research capabilities of institutions where research is currently at a nascent stage but holds significant potential.

Out of 30 proposals evaluated nationally, only seven



were selected for funding in the first phase. These include three Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), one National Institute of Technology (NIT), the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), and two Central universities.

Following a rigorous review process and a final presentation before the Apex Review Committee in Bengaluru, NIT Rourkela emerged as the only NIT to be selected as a hub institution under the prestigious initiative, said sources.

In its first phase, the PAIR Programme focuses on insti-

tutions with demonstrable or promising research potential, while also ensuring regional diversity. Each PAIR comprises one 'hub' and a network of seven 'spoke' institutions, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration on nationally relevant research themes that aim to deliver tangible and measurable outcomes.

As a hub institution, NIT Rourkela will mentor a network of seven spoke institutions; Veer Surendra Sai University of Technology (VSSUT), Burla, Sambalpur University, Burla, Odisha University of Technology and Re-

search (OUTR), Bhubaneswar, Fakir Mohan University, Baleswar, International Institute of Information Technology (IIIT), Bhubaneswar, Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT), Bhubaneswar and Guru Angad Dev Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Ludhiana, Punjab

The ambitious project will focus on four key thematic areas; Energy Technologies, Environmental Sustainability, Health and Medical Technologies and Sustainable Agriculture.

Rampant illegal sand mining go unabated in Khariar

Thanks to mafia-official nexus

AJIT PANDA ■ Nuapada

Rampant illegal sand mining from various riverbeds in Khariar block of Nuapada district has come to light, even as the concerned authorities remain mute spectators.

Sand mafias are openly using heavy machineries such as JCB machines and Hyva trucks to extract and transport sand. While the illegal activity was earlier carried out under the cover of darkness, it is now brazenly taking place in broad daylight.

According to the OMMC rules, the use of heavy machin-

ery for extracting sand from riverbeds is prohibited, and the depth of quarrying must be limited to three meters or up to the water level, whichever is less. However, in practice, mechanized mining has already created large craters in the riverbeds. The movement of heavy vehicles such as Hyvas has led to the compaction of the filter zone. Additionally, sand extraction has extended well beyond the designated lease areas.

The villagers of Kushmal have reported that there must be above 20 Hyvas transporting sand daily from Kushmal ghat. Likewise, from Bichhnapali ghat the number of trips would be 30 every day.



Fakira Jagat, a farmer of Tukla village said, "The riverbeds of Arjuni (San Nadi) at Tukla and, Sanmula are over exploited. Hundreds of vehicles are seen waiting for the sand to be loaded by JCB machine. The sand is smuggled to different places of both Nuapada and Balangir districts as the river is the border between the two districts. The rivers are dying everywhere due to rampant exploitation,

you go anywhere between the downstream of Tikhali dam and Tukla you will find illegal mining."

Locals alleged that callous attitude of the authorities has led to the situation which in turn has resulted in gradual death of riverbed. "It is a mafia-official nexus. They are hands in glove due to which the illegal act runs with impunity," said former MLA of Khariar Hitesh Bagartti.

"When I drew attention of Durga Pani, the mining officer, Nuapada, about use of machineries in sand extraction, he said that machines are being allowed everywhere. After my repeated requests he assured that he would visit the sites but never did that," he added.

Bagartti has recently drawn the attention of the district administration and the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority, to the no-holds-barred sand mining with appeals for an investigation and heightened vigilance to protect the rivers.

Lakhs of people residing in villages are largely dependent on the river ecosystem. Advo-

cate Pratap of Duajhar village said, "The intake wells of drinking water supply projects dug on the banks of rivers are gradually drying creating uncertainty over future availability of drinking water. Livelihood of the people has been severely affected by the activities of sand mafia over the years."

Most of the sairat sources for sand in Khariar Tehsil have not been officially leased out. When this correspondent reached out to the Mining Official posted at Nuapada regarding rampant illegal sand mining and requested details of legally approved sand sources, the official was evasive.

India's rebuke to Dhaka: Focus on your own minorities

RAHUL DATTA ■ New Delhi

India on Friday rejected remarks by Bangladeshi officials on violence in West Bengal and asked Dhaka to focus on protecting the rights of its minorities instead of indulging in "virtue signalling".

"We reject the remarks made by the Bangladesh side with regard to the incidents in West Bengal," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"This is a barely disguised and disingenuous attempt to draw a parallel with India's concerns over the ongoing persecution of minorities in Bangladesh where the criminal perpetrators of such acts continue to roam free," he said.

Jaiswal was responding to media queries regarding comments made by Bangladeshi officials on the developments in West Bengal.

"Instead of making unwarranted comments and indulging in virtue signalling, Bangladesh would do better to focus on protecting the rights of its own minorities," he said.

The sharp reaction came after Shafiqul



Randhir Jaiswal MEA Spokesperson

PTI

Alam, the Press Secretary to Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, on Thursday called on New Delhi and the West Bengal government to take "all steps to fully protect the minority Muslim population". "We condemn attacks on Muslims that caused loss of lives and

properties," he had said. "We urge the Governments of India and West Bengal to take all steps to fully protect the minority Muslim population," Alam had added.

Some parts of West Bengal, including Murshidabad, witnessed sectarian violence in the past few days following

protests by the Muslim community against the Waqf (Amendment) Act.

There has been a sharp downturn in India-Bangladesh relations after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled Dhaka last August in the face of a massive anti-government protest.

The relations nosedived dramatically after the interim government headed by Yunus failed to contain attacks on minorities, especially Hindus, in that country.

The situation in Bangladesh has been volatile after Hasina's ouster last year. There have been multiple attacks on Hindus and minorities in Bangladesh by radical Islamists. Around 200 temples have been vandalised and priests have been arrested.

India has frequently raised concerns at various diplomatic levels about the condition of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has often denied allegations of targeted persecution of minorities. However, recent incidents, including the desecration of Hindu temples and attacks during religious festivals, have drawn sharp criticism from human rights groups and diaspora communities.

PM Modi, Musk talk India-US collaboration in tech, innovation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk on Friday reaffirmed mutual interest in strengthening collaboration between India and the United States in technology and innovation.

They also discussed other issues during a telephonic conversation. Modi said on the social media after speaking to Musk that they discussed various issues.

"Spoke to @elonmusk and talked about various issues, including the topics we covered during our meeting in Washington DC earlier this year. We discussed the immense potential for collaboration in the areas of technology and innovation," he said. The Prime Minister added "India remains committed to advancing our partnerships with the US in these domains".

The talks took place at a time when Tesla is reportedly exploring opportunities to enter the Indian electric vehicle market. The latest discussions between Modi and Musk build upon their earlier meeting in Washington DC this year.

The conversation highlighted the growing synergy between India's rapidly evolving tech ecosystem and Musk's ventures in cutting-edge innovation. The Prime Minister met Musk in February this year, during his two-day visit to the US. The

SpaceX CEO was accompanied by his three children - X, Strider and Azure. During the meeting, Musk gifted Modi a Starship hexagonal heatshield tile.

The Prime Minister's telephonic conversation with Musk comes amid reports that Tesla is preparing to enter the Indian market by shipping a few thousand cars to a port near Mumbai in the coming months.

Tesla's anticipated debut in India also

The Prime Minister's telephonic conversation with Musk comes amid reports that Tesla is preparing to enter the Indian market by shipping a few thousand cars to a port near Mumbai in the coming months

aligns with ongoing discussions between New Delhi and Washington over import tariffs, which are likely to shape the carmaker's long-term strategy in the country.

The move follows renewed momentum in Tesla's India plans, sparked by Modi's earlier in-person meeting with Musk in Washington. Since then, the company has reportedly begun hiring for roles related to showrooms and deliveries.

Shah calls for Naxals to surrender at earliest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday asked all underground Naxals to surrender as soon as possible and join the mainstream, saying the government is determined to free the country from the scourge of Naxalism before March 31, 2026.

Shah also said that the Cobra commandos and Chhattisgarh Police have arrested 22 notorious Naxalites with modern weapons and explosive materials in various operations in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district. He said that 11 Naxalites have also surrendered in Badesetti Panchayat of Sukma due to which this panchayat has become completely Naxal-free.

"I appeal to the hiding Naxalites to lay down their arms as soon as possible and join the mainstream by adopting the surrender policy of the Modi government. We are determined to free the country from the scourge of Naxalism before 31 March 2026," Shah said in a social media post.

Addressing the CRPF raising day function at Neemuch in Madhya Pradesh earlier on Thursday, the home minister

said that Naxalism is now confined to just four districts in India. "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 CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) and especially CRPF, CoBRA battalion, are playing a major role in eliminating Naxalism from the country

— AMIT SHAH, HOME MINISTER

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.

Shah said that the CRPF has set up over 400 forward operating bases in Naxal affected areas and violence in these regions has come down by more than 70 per cent because of this and "we are now close to ending it".

Shubhanshu Shukla to be first Indian on ISS in May

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India is poised to script a defining chapter in its space journey as International Space mission carrying Indian astronaut has been scheduled for next month. Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla of the Indian Air Force is all prepared to fly to the International Space Station (ISS) next month as part of Axiom Space's Ax-4 mission.

Announcing this on Friday after a high-level meeting held to review major future plans of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in the coming months, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh said, the mission will mark the visit of first Indian ever to visit the International Space Station (ISS) and the first Indian astronaut to travel to Space in over four decades after Rakesh Sharma's iconic 1984 flight aboard a Soviet Soyuz spacecraft.

The announcement comes amid a flurry of activity in India's space sector, which is gearing up for an ambitious slate of missions in the coming months. Dr V Narayanan, Secretary, Department of Space and Chairman of ISRO, made a presentation elaborating the status of various upcoming Space missions.

Chairman ISRO informed that Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla is all prepared to fly to the International Space Station (ISS) next month as part of Axiom Space's Ax-4 mission. Group Captain Shukla's mission, scheduled for May 2025, marks a milestone in India's expanding international space collaborations.

A decorated test pilot with the Indian Air Force, he was shortlisted under ISRO's Human Spaceflight Program (HSP) and is among the top contenders for the Gaganyaan mission, India's first indigenous crewed orbital flight.

His journey aboard the Ax-4 mission is expected to provide critical hands-on experience in spaceflight operations, launch protocols, microgravity adaptation, and emergency preparedness — all essential for India's crewed space ambitions.

What sets Shukla's mission apart is its strategic importance. Unlike the symbolic undertones of India's first human spaceflight, this time the focus is on operational readiness and global integration.

His participation underscores India's growing engagement with public-private international partnerships in space and its resolve to emerge as a serious contender in human space exploration.

"India is ready for its next space milestone," said Jitendra Singh, underscoring

the significance of the upcoming human spaceflight and a series of critical ISRO missions. He noted that the collaboration with international partners and the strategic momentum of projects like Gaganyaan reflect India's commitment to becoming a global leader in space technology. The Minister emphasized that these efforts are not only scientific in nature but also aligned with the vision of a developed and self-reliant India.

During the meeting, ISRO updated the minister on several key developments since January 2025. These include the public release of data from the Aditya L1 solar mission, successful demonstration of docking and undocking technologies, testing of the highest thrust liquid engine developed in India, and the historic 100th launch (GSLV-F15) from Sriharikota.

ISRO also supported national events like the Kumbh Mela 2025 through satellite-based monitoring and announced a successful demonstration of restarting the Vikas Engine, crucial for future launch vehicle recovery missions.

Among the major missions lined up for May to July 2025, ISRO will launch the PSLV-C61 mission carrying the state-of-the-art EOS-09 satellite.

Equipped with a C-band synthetic aperture radar, EOS-09 will be capable of

capturing high-resolution images of Earth's surface under all weather conditions, day or night.

Another significant milestone will be the Test Vehicle-D2 (TV-D2) mission, designed to simulate an abort scenario and demonstrate the Gaganyaan Crew Escape System. The mission includes sea recovery operations for the Crew Module, mimicking procedures planned for India's first human spaceflight.

June will see the highly anticipated launch of the NISAR satellite aboard the GSLV-F16. This NASA-ISRO collaboration aims to study Earth's ecosystems and natural hazards through dual-frequency radar data, combining NASA's L-band payloads with ISRO's S-band contributions.

The LVM3-M5 mission, scheduled for July, will cater to a commercial contract with AST SpaceMobile Inc., USA, launching BlueBird Block-2 satellites under NewSpace India Limited's commercial program.

As India's space strategy matures, Group Captain Shukla's upcoming mission stands as a symbol of a confident, forward-looking nation ready to reclaim its place in the global space race. His journey is more than just a flight — it's a signal that India is stepping boldly into a new era of space exploration.

US to enforce strict rules on student visas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Students attempting to go against US laws will face the consequences, including deportation, the country's state department has warned.

In a virtual interview with media, US Department of State spokesperson Margaret MacLeod said the Trump administration was rigorously enforcing immigration laws, including the Immigration and Nationality Act and the Alien Registration Act.

"If you follow the law, America offers opportunities. But those who violate the law will face the consequences," MacLeod said. Videos on a question related to the issues faced by Indian students in various US universities.

Indian students in the US are grappling with a growing threat of deportation as authorities cancel F-1 visas over a range of issues — from participation in pro-Palestinian protests to minor legal infractions. During his weekly press briefing on Thursday, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "We are aware that several Indian students have received communication from the US government regarding their F-1 visa

status, which happens to be the student visa. We are looking into the matter. Our embassy and consulates, they are in touch with the students to provide support."

Jaiswal was responding to a question on several Indian students receiving communications from US authorities under the Trump administration on possible revocation of their visas.

While MacLeod did not mention specific cases, she emphasised that adherence to US legal and visa requirements was essential to avoid penalties.

On the broader issue of illegal immigration, MacLeod underscored the Trump administration's rigorous enforcement of immigration laws.

"The US government is committed to securing its borders and will not welcome those who enter by breaking our laws."

MacLeod urged individuals residing in the US illegally, including relatives of Indian families, to voluntarily return to their home countries.

"There is still an opportunity to return to your homeland," she said, directing them to contact the Department of Homeland Security or use the CBP app to facilitate their departures.

The US official expressed hope that those who entered the country unlawfully would leave voluntarily to avoid stricter enforcement measures.

More than 3.3 lakh Indian students were enrolled in US higher education institutions in the 2023-24 academic year, a 23 per cent increase from the previous year.

The figure made India the country with the highest number of students in the US. However, according to reports, the number of visas issued to Indian students fell 30 per cent in February — the first month of the second Trump administration.

Speaking about US Vice-President JD Vance's visit to India, the American official said he would meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi ahead of his private trip to Jaipur and Agra.

"They will discuss all the issues important for the two countries," MacLeod said. Asked about the deportation of Mumbai attack accused Tahawwur Hussain Rana to India, she said the US deported him to face justice under Indian law. "India and the US will continue to cooperate on counterterrorism measures."

Anurag Thakur slams Congress over National Herald funds



BJP leader Anurag Thakur addressing a press conference at the party's headquarter in New Delhi on Friday

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The BJP on Friday dared Congress leaders facing corruption charges to seek a quick and time-bound disposal of cases, as it slammed the party for citing politics as the reason for the ED's action against Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case.

The ruling BJP kept the heat on the opposition party following the ED's chargesheet against the Gandhis and accused chief ministers from the Congress-ruled states of ploughing public money as advertisement into the weekly newspaper which few read.

Former Union minister Anurag Thakur alleged that the Congress used the newspaper as its ATM, claiming that Gandhis sought to acquire properties worth ₹2,000 crores of the National Herald without investing a penny from their pocket.

Both Gandhis together owned 76 per cent of the Young Indian company which was, he said, given ₹50 lakh loan by the Congress. The company then took over the Associated Journals Limited, which owns the newspaper affiliated to the Congress, in lieu of ₹90 crore it owed to the opposition party, he said.

Thakur asked if a political party can give a loan. To a question about the allegation that the ED action was politically motivated, the BJP leader

dared Congress leaders facing corruption charges to move courts to seek quick and time-bound trial in the cases against them.

"If they have guts, they should do it," he said, adding that in the "Congress model of corruption" the thieves make a lot of noises. The National Herald case, he said, has stunned the Congress ecosystem into silence.

Thakur noted Gandhis have moved courts for quashing action against them for many times since a lower court took cognisance of the matter before the Modi government came to power.

The courts gave them no relief except that they are on bail, he said, adding that the judiciary did not intervene in the Enforcement Directorate's probe.

Turning to his home state Himachal Pradesh where the Congress is in power, Thakur accused the party of not fulfilling any of its 10 main promises but spending crores of rupees in advertisement in the National Herald.

"Does any Congress leader or member read it in Himachal," he asked, demanding that people should be given details of money spent by different Congress governments in advertisements in the newspaper, which is available digitally.

The Congress has been organising protests in different parts of the country against the ED action.

India, UK hold defence talks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India and UK reviewed the entire gamut of their bilateral defence ties and explored ways to further strengthen them during the annual bilateral defence dialogue between the two countries in London, defence ministry said here on Friday.

Giving details, officials said Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh concluded a two-day visit to London from April 16-17 leading a high-level Indian delegation for the annual bilateral defence dialogue with the United Kingdom.

During the visit, he co-chaired the 24th India-UK Defence Consultative Group meeting with David Williams, Permanent Under Secretary of State for Defence.

Both sides reviewed the evolving regional and global geopolitical landscape and reaffirmed their shared commitment to deepening defence ties.

The discussions were held in the context of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership announced in 2021 and the Roadmap to 2030, which continues to steer cooperation between the two nations.

The Defence Secretary also interacted with UK's National Security Adviser Jonathan Powell, with talks focused on expanding tri-service military engagements and strengthening collaboration between the two countries' defence industries.

Addressing participants at the India-UK Defence Industry Roundtable, organised by the UK India Business Council, Singh highlighted the growing capabilities of Indian start-ups across key defence domains such as naval systems, drones, surveillance, defence space and aviation.

He encouraged UK companies to explore partnerships with these agile innovators, noting their potential to deliver cost-effective and cutting-edge solutions.

The Defence Secretary also said India is working closely with the UK Ministry of Defence to develop an Industrial Cooperation Roadmap to guide future industry engagement.

He invited UK firms to invest in India's dedicated Defence Corridors in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, where they can take advantage of state-level incentives and a rapidly evolving defence manufacturing ecosystem.

DGCA orders investigation in pilot's death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has ordered a detailed investigation into the circumstances that led to the recent death of an Air India Express pilot, including checking the medical history of the deceased crew member and examining the existing guidelines to deal with such emergencies.

The Air India Express pilot, who was the first officer, died due to a sudden cardiac arrest while operating the flight IX1153 from Srinagar to Delhi on April 9.

Ordering the probe, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) investigation team will check whether the crew reported the sickness to the Air Traffic Controller (ATC) while in air and if so, whether the ATC initiated action appropriately.

Apart from checking the medical history of the deceased crew member, the team will probe whether due precaution was taken during rostering of such crew who

have flying restriction due to medical reasons, as per the DGCA order issued on April 17.

Among other aspects, the regulator will investigate whether any specific medical checks are required for such pilots to undergo before undertaking flights and whether the remaining onboard crew took action when the crew member reported feeling unwell.

According to DGCA, the probe will also look at the time taken in taking the crew member to the medical centre at the airport.

Further, the probe team will check the level of preparedness of the medical centre at the airport in handling such emergencies as well as examine and suggest changes with respect to existing guidelines in this regard.

Deputy Director of Air Safety Vishal Yadav will be the Investigator-in-Charge and Group Captain Murtaza as a subject matter expert will carry out the probe.

The team has been directed to submit its final investigation report as early as possible,

preferably within a period of six months, as per the order. In a statement on April 10, an Air India Express spokesperson said it deeply regrets the loss of a valued colleague due to a medical condition.

Without providing specific details, the spokesperson also said, "we request all concerned to respect privacy at this time and avoid unnecessary speculation, while we commit to assisting the relevant authorities in due process".

Last week, the Airline Pilots' Association of India (ALPA) said there is an urgent need to put in place transparent regulations that prioritise rest for pilots, safety and humane scheduling practices.

ALPA, which claims to represent around 800 pilots of various domestic airlines, is part of the International Federation of Airline Pilots' Association (IFALPA). The association had also said the untimely death of the Air India Express pilot raises troubling questions about pilot welfare, mental health, and working conditions in the Indian aviation industry.

Bengal Governor, NHRC, NCW visit Malda

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The riot-affected areas of Murshidabad on Friday witnessed a tripartite visit taking place with Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose, members of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and those from National Commission for Women (NCW) visiting the “refugee camps” in Malda district ignoring Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee’s advise not to go there till the situation normalised. Bose said that he as the Governor took his own decisions to visit affected areas. “I am going to the field,” Bose said before reaching Malda.

The NHRC team visited the Parulpur High School in Malda, where hundreds of displaced persons have taken shelter since communal clashes erupted in Murshidabad on April 11 and 12 during protests against the Central Government’s amendments to the Waqf (Amendment) Act. He further said, “It is Mamata Banerjee’s opinion that I should not go. But I want to. I have my own way of functioning. I want to assess things myself,” before preparing a report. CM had earlier said that the situation in Murshidabad was normal and appealed all concerned to save the locals not to visit there.

“I would request non-locals not to visit Murshidabad right now. I would appeal to the Governor to wait for a few more days as confidence-building measures are underway... I could have gone there... but I desisted because I want the peace to



West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose arriving at Malda Town railway station to visit a relief camp to meet those displaced by the violence that erupted during a protest against the Waqf (Amendment) act, 2025 in Malda on Friday

return first,” she said. At least 275 people had thus far been arrested including the three persons responsible for the brutal killing of a father and son duo. The prime accused in that case has been named as Inzamul and Dildar Sheikh — one from Suti town and the other from neighbouring Murarai in Birbhum district, sources said.

Apart from the Governor two teams from National Human Rights Commission and National Commission for Women too visited the area.

The NHRC team that visited the Par Lalpur High School at Baishnabnagar in Malda, where hundreds of displaced persons have taken shelter in the wake of communal attacks post enactment of the

Waqf laws was greeted with protests with the evacuees demanding permanent BSF camp set up in areas like Shamsheganj, Suti in Murshidabad district. They narrated stories of how they had to flee their houses in a matter of minutes to escape attacks.

“Our houses have been burnt to ashes and our savings worth lakhs including gold and other items have been looted by the attackers,” they complained adding they had to flee on boats across Bhagirathi River to neighbouring Malda. They also alleged that had the BSF not reacted on time they would not have lived to tell their woes. “We called the police continuously but they would either not receive calls or would arrive late when our houses had been looted,” the complained.

NCW chief Vijaya Rahatkar said that an inquiry team had been formed and it would conduct an extensive report and submit it. “We have received reports that women in the affected areas and relief camps are not being treated properly... such allegations will also be inquired into.” The life at the relief camp was as good as that in a prison the ‘refugees’ told the NCW representatives.

“We are not even allowed to meet our relatives who come here... the officials do not behave properly with us... as if we are beggars which we are not... They’re trying to force us to return home, but it’s still unsafe. We want BSF camps in our localities in Dhulian before we consider going back,” they told the visiting officials.

After spending the night in Malda the NCW team is likely to visit the riot affected areas of Murshidabad on Saturday. The team is also likely to meet senior district officials and Chief Secretary and State Director General of Police.

HC forms 3-member panel for victims’ rehabilitation

The Calcutta High Court on Thursday ordered the formation of a three-member committee for the identification and rehabilitation of people displaced by the violence during the protests over the Waqf (Amendment) Act in Murshidabad district.

A division bench comprising justices Soumen Sen and Raja Basu Chowdhury also said that its interim order of April 12, directing the deployment of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) in Murshidabad, will continue.

The court said the three-member committee will consist of an official each from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the West Bengal Human Rights Commission (WBHRC), besides the member secretary of the State Legal Services Authority (SLSA).

“We deem it appropriate to constitute a committee consisting of three officers who shall monitor and coordinate the situation,” it said. The committee was directed to identify the displaced persons, extent of damage caused to properties of the victims and also collect the data of the FIRs lodged.

348 seats decided uncontested in Assam panchayat polls: Himanta

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Guwahati

A total of 348 seats in the panchayat system in Assam were decided uncontested with the BJP-led NDA securing 325 of them, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed on Friday. Polling for the three-tier panchayat system is scheduled to be held in two phases — on May 2 and May 7.

Sarma said April 18 was the last date for the withdrawal of nominations for the panchayat elections.

“As per reports received so far, the NDA has already secured 37 Zila Parishad (35 BJP and 2 AGP) and 288 Anchalik Panchayat (259 BJP and 29 AGP) seats unopposed,” he claimed in a post on X, sharing a chart.

According to the chart he shared, Independents have secured 15 Anchalik Parishad seats uncontested, the Congress nine and the AIUDF one seat.



Teacher thrashed by Army jawans in Nowshera, probe ordered

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

A pre-marriage visit to a younger sister’s residence turned out to be a harrowing experience for Dr Liaqat Ali, serving as Assistant Professor at the School of Humanities, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, after he was ‘brutally’ beaten with a rifle butt by the Indian Army troops along with his cousins during routine vehicle checking in the Lam area of Nowshera, Rajouri district late on Thursday night.

A timely alarm raised by close relatives of Dr Liaqat Ali saved the situation from taking an ugly turn as a police officer from a nearby police post reached the spot and pacified both sides to exercise restraint.

Profusely bleeding Dr Ali was shifted to a local hospital in Nowshera, from where he was referred to the Government Medical College hospital, Jammu. Dr Ali received half a dozen stitches on the head. Early Friday morning, Dr Liaqat Ali posted a video along with a note on his social media page claiming he was ‘assaulted’ without any reason. “My entire family is in the Indian Army. I’ve always been proud

of that. Proud of the uniform, the service, the sacrifice. But today, what I experienced shook that pride to the core. Without any reason, without any question, I was assaulted - hit on the head with a weapon by the very people I once trusted blindly,” he said in a post that also had a picture showing him bleeding.

“It made me realise one terrifying truth: if the system chooses to, it can ‘encounter’ any human being — without evidence, without trial, without justice. There’s no apology that can undo this wound. Only one haunting question remains — has justice now become the privilege of the uniform alone?” the professor wrote.

As the video went viral, and people started questioning the conduct of the army troops, the Indian army also ordered an inquiry, claiming strict action would be taken under the existing law. The Indian Army also claimed that the individual tried to snatch weapons from the soldiers on duty and initiated a scuffle with them.” Interestingly, no charges were slapped against Dr Ali till late on Friday evening.

Local police have also registered a First Information Report 42/2025 u/s



Dr Liaqat Ali

126(2)/115 (2)BNS at Police Station Nowshera and launched investigations into the case. Without sharing the identity of the individuals involved in the brawl, the Indian army, in a written statement, claimed, “An incident has come to light wherein certain individuals were allegedly manhandled by Army personnel in Rajouri district. The Army had input on the likely movement of terrorists in a vehicle in this sensitive area. Accordingly, search operations were

being conducted. “Preliminary information suggests that on being stopped, the individual tried to snatch weapons from the soldiers on duty and initiated a scuffle with them. However, an inquiry has been initiated. Should any personnel be found guilty of misconduct, strict action will be taken in accordance with the existing law,” the Army said in a statement in Jammu. Soon after Dr Liaqat Ali was discharged from the hospital on Friday, he shared his nightmarish

experience with the media in Jammu.

Dr Ali said he travelled along with his cousins in a personal car and two tempos to transport some household items as part of the pre-wedding rituals. He said his sister was getting married on April 24. “As we reached the final stop near Lam, Nowshera, a group of army personnel, around twelve in number, directed us to go for a check of the vehicles. As the soldiers were doing their job, we cooperated with them.”

Dr Ali said. I was accompanied by my younger brother and cousins serving in the belt forces. “While I was sitting in the front seat of the car, I was also alerted to prove my identity. Dr Ali said soon after I showed my IGNOU card to one of the army personnel I was attacked by three four jawans with their rifle butts.”

“I received a serious head injury and started bleeding profusely. I had not expected such behaviour from army personnel, especially when my cousins informed them they too belonged to the belt forces and showed them their identity cards.” Dr Ali demanded justice from the authorities and strict action against those behind the attack.

33 Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh’s Sukma district

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Sukma

At least 33 Naxalites, 17 of them carrying a cumulative bounty of ₹49 lakh, surrendered before security forces in Chhattisgarh’s Sukma district on Friday, police said.

While 22 cadres, including nine women, turned themselves in before senior officials of the police and Central Reserve Police Forces (CRPF) earlier in the day, later 11 others, including two women, surrendered before police officials, they said.

The surrendered cadres cited disappointment with “hollow” and “inhuman” Maoist ideology and atrocities on local tribals, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said.

The official said they were also impressed by the state government’s ‘Niyad Nellanar’ (your good village) scheme, aimed at facilitating development works in remote villages, and the new surrender and rehabilitation policy.

As many as 22 surrendered Naxalites were active in the Maad (Chhattisgarh) and Nuapada (Odisha) divisions of Maoists, he said.

Chavan said the cadres included Muchaki Joga (33), deputy commander in PLGA (people’s liberation guerrilla army) company no. 1 under the Maad division of Maoists, and his wife Muchaki Jogi (28), a member of the same squad, who carried a reward of ₹8 lakh each.

Among the others were Kikid Deve (30) and Manoj alias Dudhi Budhra (28), both area committee members of Maoists carrying a reward of ₹5 lakh each, he said.

The official said seven surrendered cadres carried a bounty of ₹2 lakh each, while another Naxalite carried a reward of ₹50,000.

He said the other surrendered cadres were also involved in multiple attacks on security forces.

The district police, District Reserve Guard (DRG), CRPF, and its elite unit CoBRA played a crucial role in their surrender, he said.

The official said 11 other surrendered Naxalites were active in Badesatti village panchayat under the Phulbagdi police station limits. With this, Badesatti has become a Naxalite-free village panchayat, he said.

Chavan said four of them carried a reward of ₹2 lakh each, and one carried a bounty of ₹50,000.

The official said that under the new Chhattisgarh Naxal Surrender/Victim Relief and Rehabilitation Policy-2025, the state government has introduced ‘Elvad Panchayat Yojna’, which has a provision of sanctioning development works worth Rs 1 crore to village panchayats that facilitate the surrender of Naxalites active in their area and pass a resolution declaring themselves Maoist free.

“For the last 15 days, the police have been targeting Badesatti village and were

₹6 lakh, 11 laptops seized from encounter site

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Narayanpur

The security forces have recovered ₹6 lakh cash, 11 laptops and explosives belonging to Naxalites from the site of an encounter in Chhattisgarh’s Narayanpur district, police said on Friday. According to the police, the gunfight took place on April 15 on a forested hill between Kasod and Kumuradi villages under the Kohkameta police station area where a joint team of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and 41st battalion of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) was out on an anti-Naxal operation.

Security forces had launched an operation from Padamkot camp based on inputs about the presence of senior Maoists in forest falls in the Abhujmaad area, they said.

The police, in a release, said the exchange of fire lasted for about three hours, following which Naxalites fled the

spot, leaving their belongings behind.

Security forces seized ₹6 lakh cash, 11 laptops, 50 kg of gunpowder, 30 kg of other explosive material, 20 litres of petrol, 20 litres of diesel, two cooker bombs, 130 cartridges of self-loading rifles (SLR), 25 cartridges of 12-bore rifles, 18 cartridges of .303 rifles, two bundles of cordex wire and a Maoist uniform from the encounter site.

Electronic devices, medicines, tiffin boxes, Maoist literature, shoes and other items of daily use were also found, it said.

Police said blood stains found at the spot indicate that several Naxalites were either killed or injured in the gunfight, but their colleagues managed to drag them inside the forest.

This action of the security forces has not only caused heavy economic and strategic damage to the Naxalites but has also sent them a clear message that they are no longer safe in any area of Abhujmaad, the release said.

Maoist-free. All the surrendered Naxalites were provided assistance of ₹50,000 each, and they will be further rehabilitated as per the government’s policy, he said.

Last year, 792 Naxalites had surrendered in the Bastar region, comprising seven districts, including Sukma.

Wrong ‘Munni’ jailed in case of mistaken identity

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Bareilly

In a shocking case of mistaken identity, an innocent woman from Bandiya village in CB Ganj was arrested and sent to jail for a crime she never committed. The woman, identified as Munni Devi, wife of Janaki Prasad, was picked up by the Parsakheda police on April 13 in place of another woman — also named Munni — against whom a non-bailable warrant was issued in a case of electricity theft.

Munni Devi was wrongly arrested by Parsakheda outpost in-charge Saurabh Yadav, despite repeatedly telling the police she had no involvement in any crime and no FIR had ever been lodged against her. She was still sent to jail, where she remained until the mistake came to light and she was released on bail.

According to officials, the electricity department had registered an FIR against Munni, wife of late Chhote Shah, for electricity theft. When the accused failed to appear, the court issued a non-bailable warrant. However, in a shocking lapse, police arrested Munni Devi, who has no connection to the case.

Despite having a different husband’s name and address, Inspector Saurabh Yadav failed to verify her identity before taking her into custody. Munni Devi’s

son, Rakesh, who works at a sweet shop, ran from pillar to post to get his mother released. “My mother kept saying she was innocent. Still, the police did not listen,” said a visibly emotional Rakesh.

The error came to light after the matter reached senior officials. A report was sent to the court, following which Munni Devi was released on bail. As she returned home on Thursday, villagers gathered in large numbers, expressing outrage over the police’s negligence.

“This is nothing short of harassment. The police did not even bother to verify her identity before jailing her,” said a villager. When asked about the inspector’s response now, Munni Devi said, “He is not saying anything. He is just apologising.”

Taking cognisance of the incident, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Anurag Arya has ordered an inquiry into the matter. SP City Manush Pareek has been assigned to investigate the incident and submit a report to the SSP. Further action will be initiated against the outpost in-charge based on the findings of the inquiry. “This is a serious lapse and accountability will be fixed,” an official said and added, “The incident has raised critical questions about police and the need for strict verification before arresting individuals, especially in warrant-based actions.”

Sacred and soaring: Varanasi named world’s second most popular religious destination

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Varanasi

The ancient city of Varanasi, often called the spiritual heart of India, has earned a remarkable global distinction - it is now ranked the second most sought-after religious destination in the world, according to a new study by MyCross, a platform dedicated to faith-based travel trends.

The study assessed religious destinations across five crucial indicators — annual footfall, number of religious sites, online search trends, social media presence and accommodation availability. Each destination was then given a cumulative score out of 100.

Varanasi scored 78, just behind Kyoto, Japan, which topped the list with a perfect score of 100. While Kyoto attracted a staggering 75 million visitors annually and has the largest concentration of religious sites, Varanasi led in global online search inter-

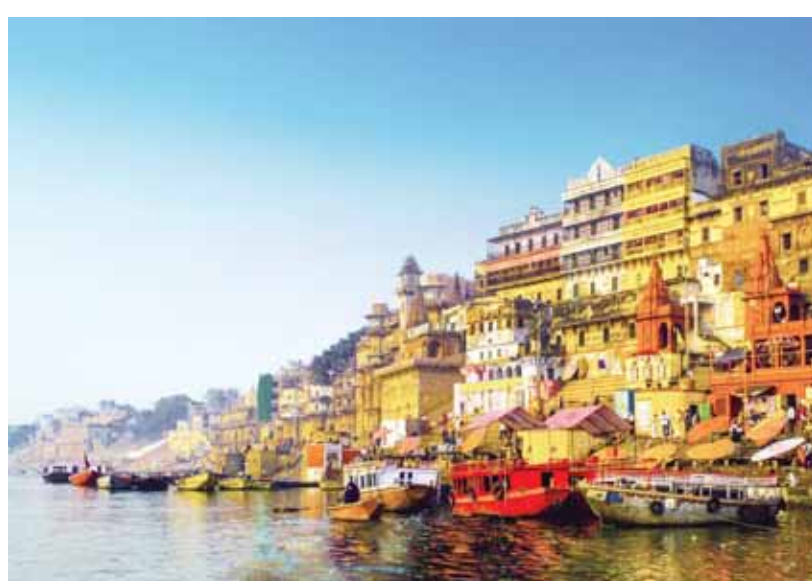
est with nearly 2.8 million monthly searches, reflecting its rising spiritual appeal on the digital map.

Welcoming around 11 million visitors each year, Varanasi offers 1,149 accommodation options — nearly double Kyoto’s count — highlighting its growing readiness to cater to a global audience seeking spiritual solace, rituals on the ghats, and the profound experience of Ganga Aarti.

In 2024, Varanasi attracted 3,09,932 foreign tourists. The total number of tourists to Varanasi in 2024 was 11,00,97,743, a significant increase compared to 10,18,67,618 in 2023.

Uttar Pradesh Tourism Minister Jaiver Singh welcomed the global recognition with pride. “This is a moment of honour not just for Varanasi, but for the entire country,” he said.

“The consistent focus of the state government, under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath’s leadership, to boost spiritu-



al tourism and enhance infrastructure is now delivering visible results. Varanasi is reclaiming its rightful place on the world stage as a spiritual capital.”

Tourism stakeholders in the city also feel the change. Ramesh Singh, a veteran tour operator in Varanasi, said the surge in global attention is being felt on the ground. “We’ve seen a sharp increase in international inquiries — from solo spiritual seekers to cultural tourists. They come not just for religious reasons but to witness the mystique of Varanasi — its music, temples, rituals, and timeless energy,” he said. “With better roads, riverfront development, and more curated spiritual experiences, Varanasi is evolving into a world-class religious tourism hub.”

Vatican City, with a score of 70, came in third. Though it houses just nine religious sites, it boasts the largest number of accommodations (3,859) and continues to be a magnet for Catholic pilgrims.

Other cities making it to the top 10 include Rio de Janeiro, Lhasa, Mecca, Madinah, Jerusalem, Siem Reap, and Canterbury.

A My Cross spokesperson noted the broader trend, “Religious tourism around the world shows how faith and travel are becoming more connected. Many traditional pilgrimage sites now mix spiritual meaning with modern tourism. In some popular places, there are far more visitors than places to stay, showing there’s room to grow. With careful planning, these spots could support local communities without losing their sacred feel. As religious tourism changes, the most successful destinations will be the ones that respect tradition while meeting the needs of today’s travelers.”

As global pilgrims rediscover the power of spiritual journeys, Varanasi is rising as a timeless destination — ancient in soul, but future-ready in spirit.

Editor's TAKE

Searing Summer, Soaking Monsoon

IMD forecasts an above-average monsoon — a silver lining with a dark cloud: floods

As India braces for a searing summer, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has offered a glimmer of hope: this year's south-west monsoon is expected to bring above-normal rainfall, with the country likely to receive 105 per cent of the long-period average. While this forecast may bring a sigh of relief to the agricultural sector and rural economy, it also comes with a note of caution — because with abundant rain often comes devastating floods.

For a country where nearly 60 per cent of agriculture is rain-fed, the monsoon is nothing short of a lifeline. A good monsoon translates to better crop yields, improved groundwater recharge, replenished reservoirs, and stable food prices. It plays a critical role in the livelihoods of millions, especially in rural India, and drives growth in allied sectors like food processing, transportation, and retail. This year's monsoon is predicted to benefit regions like Marathwada and parts of Telangana — areas that have historically suffered from water scarcity. States like Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh are also expected to receive normal to above-normal rainfall, offering much-needed respite for farmers and boosting kharif crop prospects.

Yet, the same monsoon that nourishes our farms can wreak havoc on our homes and cities. Floods are a recurring nightmare, leading to massive loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, and displacement of communities. Year after year, cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Patna, and Guwahati come to a standstill due to waterlogging and poor urban drainage systems. Rural regions are not spared either. Unregulated riverbanks, deforestation, and encroachments worsen the impact of heavy rainfall. Low-lying districts near rivers often face catastrophic flash floods and landslides.

As the IMD also warns of below-normal rainfall in parts of Tamil Nadu and the Northeast, the risk of regional imbalances — where some areas drown while others dry — becomes very real. It is time we stopped treating floods as a surprise and started seeing them as an annual certainty.

Projects like river interlinking can redistribute excess water from flood-prone regions to drought-hit areas. While controversial and logistically complex, such initiatives, if executed sustainably, could balance water distribution across states. Constructing more check dams, especially in vulnerable areas, and upgrading existing ones with modern sensors can help manage water flow during peak rainfall. However, dams should be operated scientifically, with real-time data guiding water release schedules.

IMD's forecasting has improved significantly, but local authorities must act promptly on early warnings. Investments in community awareness and disaster response training can save countless lives. Besides, natural buffers like forests and wetlands absorb excess rainwater and reduce runoff. Reviving these ecosystems will go a long way in reducing the impact of flash floods. Our cities need a radical revamp of their drainage systems.

Rainwater harvesting should be made mandatory in urban planning, and old stormwater drains must be widened, cleared, and maintained regularly. A lot of talk has gone down the drain to make smart cities. It is time that those cities are made functional at least. Providing efficient drainage systems is not rocket science. If Harappan people could do it, we can do it too.

The monsoon, India's annual gamble with nature, holds immense power, both to nurture and to destroy. As IMD's forecast signals a wet season ahead, it's time to plan not just for reaping its bounty but for mitigating its fury. We cannot stop the rain, but we can — and must — learn to live better with it. Let us not treat monsoon as a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon — it occurs every year and thus is no surprise. All we need is planning rather than acting shocked when the country submerges and nobody has any clue why that happened.

Fundamentalism in Bangladesh

Once hailed for secularism and cultural vibrancy, Bangladesh now finds itself at a critical crossroads. Islamist fundamentalist groups like Jamaat-e-Islami are regaining prominence, with alarming implications

Is Bangladesh moving once again towards becoming a cradle of Islamist fundamentalism and terrorism? Fundamentalism does not always mean terrorism, but it does create a discourse that facilitates the rise of extremism through the promotion of intolerance, leading to hatred towards those considered infidels and violence against them. Now, is Islamist fundamentalism waxing in Bangladesh? One needs to ask this because fundamentalist organisations like the Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) and Hefazat-e-Islam (Hefazat) are having a ball. The Jamaat had fully cooperated with the Pakistani Army during the liberation war of 1971 and was complicit in the latter's mass murders, rapes and other atrocities. Besides, its members and leaders — as well as those of affiliated bodies like Al-Badr, Al-Shams and Razakars — perpetrated unspeakable atrocities themselves. On 1 August 2013, Bangladesh's High Court had cancelled its registration as a political party, upholding a writ petition by an organisation called the Tariqat Federation, saying that the Jamaat was a religion-based political party which did not believe in Bangladesh's independence and sovereignty. It further claimed that the country's Representation of People Order did not allow the registration of a communal outfit as a political party.

The High Court had also observed that the Jamaat had no moral right to be in the country's political arena, given the atrocities it had perpetrated during the liberation war. Following the order, Bangladesh's Election Commission issued a gazette notification on 28 October 2018, cancelling the party's registration. On 19 November 2023, Bangladesh's Supreme Court dismissed the Jamaat's appeal against the High Court's verdict, as its counsels did not appear at the hearing. As a result of the High Court's order, the Jamaat could not participate in the parliamentary elections of 2014, 2018 and 2024. Besides, four of its top leaders — Abdul Quader Mollah, Kamaruzzaman, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid and Motiur Rahman Nizami — were executed, and several others given long prison terms, following convictions in cases related to genocide and war crimes by the International Crimes Tribunals established in 2010 and 2012 under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act of 1973, as amended in 2009. Finally, Sheikh Hasina's government banned the Jamaat and its students' organisation, Islami Chhatra Shibir (Shibir), on 1 August 2025 under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009. The grounds cited were



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Muhammad Yunus, reversed the order, saying that there was no proof that the Jamaat and the Shibir were involved in terrorist activities. On 23 October 2024, the Appellate Division of Bangladesh's Supreme Court restored the Jamaat's appeal, which the Supreme Court had rejected on 19 November 2023.

Meanwhile, the Jamaat is now politically fully active — holding meetings, demonstrations, meetings with other parties and foreign diplomats, and projecting itself as a major force to be reckoned with in the forthcoming elections, whenever they are held. Its ideology is quite clear. Its website says, "Jamaat performs as a spiritual party as spiritual life is important in Islam. Jamaat performs in political arena because Islamic law can't be implemented without political force." The Hefazat-e-Islam was formed in 2010 to oppose the Awami League government's women's development policy, promising women equal rights to property. It has considerable power to mobilise in the streets. Its intensely anti-India orientation was reflected in its violent protests against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence on 26

March 2021. Thirteen persons were killed and scores injured in clashes between its supporters and members of the security forces and Awami League's supporters. The Hefazat is a hard-core Islamist organisation. This is clear from its 13-point charter of demands in support of which it held a rally in Dhaka on 5-6 May 2013. The Hefazat's 13-point programme includes the enactment of an anti-blasphemy law with provision for the death penalty; exemplary punishment to all bloggers and others who "insult Islam"; cancellation of Bangladesh's policy for women's development; bans on the erection of sculptures in public places, the mixing of men and women in public, candlelight vigils, and "shameless behaviour and dresses"; besides declaring Ahmadiyas as "non-Muslims." Nadia Sarmin, covering its rally for ETV, was mercilessly beaten for daring to be a woman "in a men only" event. Griefously injured, she was rescued by other journalists.

The rally in May was extremely violent. A BBC report dated 6 May 2013 cites one witness as saying that the demonstrators "were very aggressive, some people were throwing stones and the situation quickly became violent". The interim government has close and warm relations with the Hefazat. It has lifted the ban on the organisation. The Adviser for Religious Affairs, AFM Khalid Hossain, is the latter's Nayebe-Amir. Chief Adviser Mohammad Yunus had a long and cordial meeting on 31 August 2024 with Mamunul Haque, the organisation's head. The Hefazat is holding rallies and processions all over the country. Doubtless, neither the Jamaat nor the Hefazat has been resorting to terrorist violence. Their elevated salience, however, gives a certain respectability to fun-

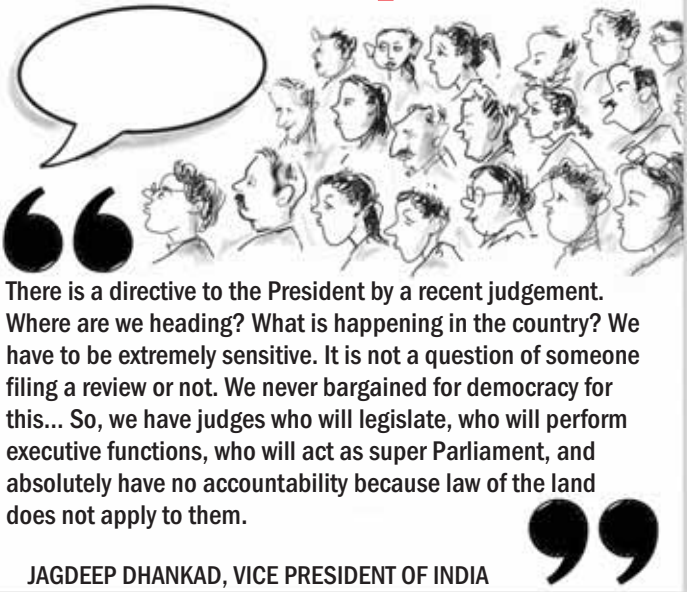
damentalist doctrines and encourages other fundamentalist organisations to flex their muscles. One of their principal targets is Bangladesh's moderate and liberal ethos — shaped by its rich literary and philosophical heritage, shaped by Rabindranath Tagore and the country's highly talented writers, poets and performing artists. A spiritual leader, philosopher, mystic poet and social reformer, Lalou articulated a weltanschauung, which encompassed the essence of the Bhakti cult and Sufism, rejected all distinctions of caste, class and creed, and opposed theological conflicts and racism. A gathering of sadhus and a Lalou fair was to be hosted in Madya Narsingpur, Kashipur Union Parishad in Narayanganj, on 22 November 2024.

The district administration, however, ordered its cancellation. According to a report in The Daily Star (23 November 2024), Hefazat-e-Islam leader Maulana Abdul Auwal had warned the administration to stop the event or face intervention by protesters. The celebration of Pehela Baishakh, the first day of the annual Bengali calendar, has been an important part of Bangladesh's cultural scenario. However, a stage constructed for the purpose was vandalised on 13 April 2025 in Chittagong city. Earlier, the district administration had permitted the organisers to hold the celebrations but reduced the timings and requested them not to include any song that would be deemed "controversial."

In Dhaka, a theatre group was all set to stage a play titled Shesher Kobita on 13 and 14 April. The authorities of the auditorium concerned, however, decided to cancel the programme on the 13th after receiving a threatening letter from a mob. The police offered protection following a public outcry. The show scheduled for 13 April was shifted to 15 April. Earlier, on 10 February 2025, a group calling itself "Towhidi Janata" attacked a publishing house's stall at Bangladesh's celebrated Amar Ekushe Boimela for displaying Taslima Nasrin's books. Instead of taking action against the attackers, police shut down the stall and detained the publisher, Shatabdi Bobo, at the fair's control room. Whither Bangladesh?

(The author is the Consulting Editor of The Pioneer. Views are personal)

Leaderspeak



There is a directive to the President by a recent judgement. Where are we heading? What is happening in the country? We have to be extremely sensitive. It is not a question of someone filing a review or not. We never bargained for democracy for this... So, we have judges who will legislate, who will perform executive functions, who will act as super Parliament, and absolutely have no accountability because law of the land does not apply to them.

JAGDEEP DHANKAD, VICE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

Inside the Mind of a Champion

SECOND Opinion

BY RAVI VALLURI

What is the difference between the brain and the mind? While the brain is a vital physical organ within our body, the mind is the seat of consciousness — it is where thoughts, feelings, and emotions arise. And it is the mind, not just the body, that defines the greatness of an athlete. "On your marks, set, go!" — with a gunshot, the world watches as Usain Bolt blazes down the track. In the span of a few electrifying seconds, he leaves behind the competition and makes history.

What sets these titans apart from the rest? Beyond talent and training, it is the strength of their minds — their inner power — that elevates them. Their minds are like that of Ajatashatru, a Sanskrit term for one who has no enemies, at peace with oneself and the world. This mental clarity and focus distinguish champions from others who falter under pressure or accept mediocrity as the norm. Why do many athletes freeze on the world stage?

Why do some settle for simply qualifying, for placing somewhere between fourth and tenth, rather than striving for the podium? It's not just physical preparation that separates winners from the rest — it's the mind. The mental resilience to endure, to persevere, and to focus with unflinching determination is what produces Olympic champions. We can draw

inspiration from Arjuna, the legendary archer of the Mahabharata, whose single-minded focus, humility, and faith in his mentor Dronacharya and friend Lord Krishna made him peerless.

Arjuna was not born a master; he became one by surrendering ego, trusting his training, and silencing doubt. His mind was his greatest ally — free from clutter, fear, and distraction. He truly embodied the spirit of Ajatashatru. Contrast that with India's disappointing performance at the 2024 Paris Olympics. Despite fielding the largest contingent in our history, we finished 71st in the medal tally. The hunger to win, to dominate, or even to express the agony of defeat, often seems missing. The spirit of Citius, Altius, Fortius — faster, higher, stronger — is diminished when we don't instil in athletes the burning desire to climb the podium draped in the tricolour, national anthem playing, igniting pride across the country. A victory at the Olympics is not just personal — it has national significance. It inspires, uplifts, and can have a ripple effect across society, including in areas like the economy, education, and youth development. But for that, we need to foster not just skill but vision.

So, what are we lacking? First, a cultural shift. India is not a sporting nation. Parents often discourage children from pursuing sports, fearful of the risks and uncertainty. We lack adequate infrastructure, visionaries who can scout talent, and political will to support sports beyond cricket. How many politicians have championed the building of world-class facilities like Gachibowli Stadium in Hyderabad for other sports? Cricket dominates every sphere of Indian sports — the media, spon-

sors, public imagination. Yet even in this bleak scenario, some institutions like the Indian Railways have provided much-needed support. In Paris 2024, India secured six medals — one silver and five bronze. Shooter Manu Bhaker stood out as the first Indian woman to win an Olympic shooting medal. Her mental fortitude, her ability to thrive under pressure, was nothing short of Ajatashatru-like. This mindset must become the norm, not the exception.

To nurture it, the Ministry of Sports must undergo a radical overhaul. We need public-private partnerships, active involvement of the armed forces and Indian Railways, and a robust CSR-driven funding model to create a sustainable ecosystem for sports. Administrators must also change their mindset. Instead of bureaucratic inertia, we need leaders who are flexible, visionary, and willing to take bold decisions. A daily regimen that includes yoga, pranayama, Sudarshan Kriya, and meditation can help in building mental strength, resilience, and focus. Countries like China and several East Asian nations already use such practices, alongside ancient philosophies and texts like Sun Tzu's Art of War, to cultivate winning mindsets in athletes. Buddha once said, "Endurance is one of the most difficult disciplines, but it is to the one who endures that the final victory comes." Victory is not accidental — it is earned by those who prepare relentlessly, physically and mentally. It is time we prepare for the Los Angeles Olympics 2028 — not tomorrow, but today.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

MGNREGA: A lifeline undermined

Madam — On April 17, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge strongly criticised the Modi government, labelling it "anti-poor" and accusing it of systematically oppressing MGNREGA workers. He demanded an increase in the minimum wage to ₹400 per day and an extension of guaranteed employment to 150 days annually under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS).

Despite recommendations from both the Joint Parliamentary Committee and the 2023 high-level committee led by Amarjeet Sinha, the government has failed to raise the daily wage meaningfully. Instead, it continues to impose restrictions — such as mandatory Aadhaar-based payments — and has allocated the lowest MGNREGA budget in the last decade relative to the overall Union Budget. MGNREGA was originally introduced by the Congress Party as a safety net for the poorest families in rural India.

Today, that legacy is under threat. If the government genuinely cares for rural India, it must adopt the two key demands: ₹400 per day as minimum wage and 150 days of guaranteed work per year.

In conclusion, the government must act decisively to uphold MGNREGA's founding purpose. Adopting the demands for ₹400 daily wages and 150 workdays annually is essential to protect rural livelihoods and restore dignity to India's poorest. Anything less would betray the scheme's intent — and the people it aims to serve.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Funding threatens academic freedom

Madam — As someone who closely follows the intersection of politics and education, I find former President Trump's decision to freeze over \$2.2 billion in funding to Harvard University deeply troubling. The freeze was triggered by Harvard's refusal to comply with the White House's demands — to monitor pro-Palestinian protests, revise diversity policies, and scrutinise foreign scholars.

Harvard, led by President Alan Garber, rightly resisted, citing violations of academic freedom and the First Amendment. This isn't just about one university; it's about the growing use of state power to intimidate academic institutions.

When funding is used as a weapon to enforce political conformity, we edge dangerously close to authoritarianism. While concerns about hate speech or foreign influence are valid, they must be addressed through balanced, lawful means — not by bulldozing university autonomy. Campuses should foster debate, not silence.

True leadership is measured by its tolerance for dissent — not its impulse to crush it. In threatening Harvard's funding, the government undermines academic freedom and sets a chilling precedent for all universities. Disagreement must not be silenced by coercion.

In a democracy, campuses must remain spaces for open inquiry, not instruments of political control. Freedom of thought is not negotiable — it's foundational.

BHAGWANTHADANI | MUMBAI

The shame of trafficking

Madam — The Supreme Court's recent expression of dismay over a newborn trafficking case is a sobering reminder that 'son preference' continues to plague Indian society. In this case, a newborn was purchased for ₹4 lakh simply because the buyer "wanted a son." The Court rightly stated that hospitals must face immediate licence cancellation in such cases.

This mindset fuels child trafficking, sex-selective abortions, and violence against women. With India's sex ratio at birth (933 girls per 1,000 boys) still alarmingly skewed, we are witnessing the long-term damage of systemic gender bias.

Add to that the daily average of 1,200 crimes against women in 2022, and the picture turns bleak. There is a lesson to be learned from South Korea, which successfully normalised its skewed sex ratio through emotionally resonant campaigns like Daughters Are More Compassionate.

Public messaging, school curricula, and media initiatives helped shift mindsets — not just laws. India must embrace a similar strategy — one that reshapes hearts and minds. Women like Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, and Delhi CM Rekha Gupta prove that daughters are not burdens — they are the nation's future.

SRINIVAS MADHAV | HYDERABAD

WAQF AMENDMENT ACT: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR DIALOGUE

The Supreme Court's observations regarding the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025, have brought much-needed legal scrutiny to what has largely been a media-driven, politically charged issue. For months, we were bombarded with claims that the original Waqf Act of 1995 led to unchecked land acquisition by the Muslim community, necessitating urgent amendments.

However, the discourse lacked depth. There was little to no engagement from legal scholars or constitutional experts. Instead, television debates fuelled fear and division, with repeated claims that Waqf properties endangered national interests. Though passed by Parliament through procedural means and majority strength, the Amendment Act seems more symbolic than substantive. It has triggered a surge of petitions in the Supreme Court — and rightly so. Legislation of this nature should be grounded in law, not in populist fervour. The real tragedy is the deepening communal divide this has caused. A mat-

ter of such sensitivity could have been resolved through inclusive dialogue and mutual understanding. Instead, we are left with increased polarisation and unrest. As Mark Twain once said, "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect." In conclusion, the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025, stands as a cautionary tale of what happens when legislative action prioritises political optics over constitutional rigour. The Supreme Court's involvement offers a glimmer of hope that legal reason will prevail over populist narratives.

True progress lies not in reactionary amendments, but in fostering inclusive conversations that respect both religious rights and national interests. As citizens, we must demand more thoughtful governance — one that seeks unity, not division. Let this moment serve as a reminder that justice, not majoritarian sentiment, must remain the cornerstone of a healthy democracy.

AVINASH GODBOLEY DEWAS

The Saudis: Peacekeepers or power brokers?

In a transformation as ambitious as it is paradoxical, Saudi Arabia is rebranding itself from an austere theocracy to a cosmopolitan architect of global diplomacy. This evolution raises a fundamental question: can a state rewrite its past without reckoning with it?

FIRST Column

The transformation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from a puritanical theocracy to an aspiring architect of global peace is one of the most paradoxical and politically engineered evolutions of the modern era. Far from the deserts where Wahhabism first struck its austere roots, the Kingdom now positions itself as a mediator between global powers, a patron of modernity, and a crucible of cross-cultural aspiration. Yet beneath the glistening architecture of NEOM and the diplomatic smiles of peace summits lies a stratified narrative — one obscured by revisionist theatre and gilded silence.

Saudi Arabia's foundation in 1932 under King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud was not merely a unification of tribal territories; it was a theological consolidation. The strategic pact with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, brokered generations earlier, transformed Islam into an instrument of statecraft. As the CIA Handbook observed in 1972, "The Saudi Government is a monarchy based on a fusion of secular and religious authority, with the King at its apex." The same report stated, "The royal family dominates both the political and economic life of the country," a candid admission of dynastic monopolisation. Governance was less institutional than charismatic, mediated through familial bonds, tribal allegiances, and theocratic endorsement.

The Kingdom's export of Wahhabism, particularly from the 1960s onward, became one of the most under-scrutinised forms of ideological colonisation. Flush with petrodollars after the 1973 oil embargo — an embargo that King Faisal declared in defence of Arab dignity, stating, "Our oil is our weapon, and we will use it to protect our Arab rights" — Saudi Arabia embarked on a global proselytisation project. Mosques, madrasas, and clerical scholarships were funded from Islamabad to Jakarta, Sarajevo to Khartoum, shaping generations in an image that often opposed indigenous Islamic traditions. A lesser-known revelation from a declassified 1981 US State Department cable noted: "Saudi financial support to Islamic institutions in Southeast Asia has significantly altered the religious landscape, prioritising doctrinal rigidity over cultural synthesis."

The domestic reality, too, remained draconian under the veneer of religiosity. The 1979 Grand Mosque seizure by a fundamentalist group paradoxically catalysed a more regressive clampdown, as the royal family tightened its alliance with the religious establishment to legitimise its authority. It is telling that King Fahd, who in the 1980s declared, "We will build the future without abandoning our past," presided over an era where ministries functioned as courtiers rather than administrators. As noted in a 1972 CIA internal report, "Much of the bureaucracy remains inefficient, with key decisions often bypassing formal channels and handled by royal intermediaries."

The paradox deepens when juxtaposing Saudi Arabia's financing of foreign conflicts with its self-portrayal as a stabiliser. The Kingdom, directly or through proxies, has been implicated in the fomen-



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

tation of conflict zones including Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Libya. In Yemen, particularly, its military intervention since 2015 has left an indelible humanitarian scar. UN estimates suggest over 375,000 deaths, mostly from indirect causes. Despite this, Riyadh now courts global opinion as a peace broker, hosting summits that purport to end the very conflicts it helped perpetuate. This performative peacemaking is a diplomatic palimpsest, rewriting its culpability in real time.

Yet perhaps nowhere is the ideological volte-face more pronounced than under the stewardship of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). A man who rose to prominence not through military conquest or scholarly erudition but via internal court

“SAUDI FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA HAS SIGNIFICANTLY ALTERED THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE, PRIORITISING DOCTRINAL RIGIDITY OVER CULTURAL SYNTHESIS.”

calculus and the invocation of modernist necessity, MBS has become the emblem of Saudi Arabia's neo-nationalist rebranding. His statement in 2017, "We will not waste 30 years of our lives dealing with extremist ideologies. We will destroy them now and immediately" serves as both mea culpa and strategic distancing. It is a rhetorical exfoliation of the kingdom's historical role in incubating the very ideologies it now condemns.

What makes this transformation most paradoxical is the simultaneous consolidation of autocracy. The same MBS who champions futuristic cities and cultural liberalisation also orchestrated the arrest of dissenting clerics, feminists, and businessmen — a campaign sanitised by the euphemism of anti-corruption.

The chilling assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul became a gruesome watermark of the state's coercive architecture. This contradiction was prophetically foreshadowed by King Faisal decades

earlier, who once mused, "Injustice cannot be concealed, and one day it will speak."

In global diplomacy, Saudi Arabia is no longer content with petrodollar influence; it now seeks epistemic legitimacy. The launch of NEOM, a city touted as the world's first cognitive metropolis, symbolises this ambition — yet, emblematic of the new Saudi state, it is erected upon contested land and enforced silence. Beyond NEOM, the Kingdom's financial outreach has extended to international media, sports, universities, and even Hollywood, buying not just partnerships but narratives. This is cultural laundering masquerading as soft power.

Saudi Arabia's overtures toward mediating the Russia-Ukraine conflict, brokering a rapprochement between Iran and Arab states, and its increasing engagement with China and Israel signify not merely a regional aspiration, but a superpower mimicry. In February 2023, Riyadh hosted talks to ease tensions in Sudan, while simultaneously continuing arms imports that fuel its military-industrial complex. As a 2022 report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute noted, "Saudi Arabia remains one of the top five global arms importers, despite its increasing involvement in peace dialogues."

This dualism is not new but is now consciously choreographed. The kingdom no longer hides its contradictions; it flaunts them as strengths. It wishes to be judged not by the tenets of liberal democracy, but by a self-fashioned rubric of efficacy, vision, and global brokerage.

And in this, it has found unlikely endorsements. Elon Musk, after touring Saudi ventures, declared them "an exciting vision for civilisation". Goldman Sachs and SoftBank speak of "unprecedented opportunities". Even sceptics are drawn to the economic gravity Riyadh exerts.

But can a state undergo ontological transformation without historical accountability? Can it broker peace while archives of complicity remain sealed? The Kingdom's diplomatic epistles, such as the declassified 1973 letter from the US President to King Faisal praising him as "a voice of wisdom and reason," read today as documents of strategic appeasement, not genuine admiration. The phrase, "Your personal efforts to bring moderation and stability to the region are of great significance," thinly veils the realpolitik that underpinned Western support for autocracy.

Indeed, what Saudi Arabia seeks now is not reinvention but redemption. It seeks to transmute petrodollar moral hazard into soft power prestige. In doing so, it exploits the cognitive dissonance of the global order: that authoritarianism, when efficient and well-funded, can be tolerated, even admired. Perhaps this is the Kingdom's most radical export yet — a model where ideological elasticity replaces democratic legitimacy.

(The writer is a Colombo-based journalist. Views are personal)

The cost of the skies: The risk and reality of fighter flying

The recent crash of an Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter jet, which tragically claimed the life of a young pilot, has once again stirred public concern and debate over flight safety and the risks faced by those in uniform

A few days ago, the Indian Air Force (IAF) suffered a devastating loss when a fighter jet crashed during an operational sortie. The tragic accident claimed the life of a young fighter pilot, a promising individual in the prime of his life and career. The exact cause of the incident is still under investigation by a Court of Inquiry, and conclusions will only be drawn after a thorough examination.

While we collectively grieve the loss of a brave soul and extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and comrades, the incident has once again ignited public debate — particularly on social media — about the IAF's safety record. Many have questioned why, after decades of technological advancements and operational experience, such accidents continue to occur. With each modern fighter aircraft costing upward of ₹500 crore, the financial burden is immense. Yet, even more valuable are the human lives put at risk and, at times, tragically lost.

This article attempts to offer readers an insight into the world of fighter pilots — a world often viewed as glamorous from afar but fraught with danger, discipline, and unyielding demands. It also seeks to dispel the widespread misconception that the Air Force forces its personnel to fly outdated or poorly maintained aircraft.

Fighter Flying Is Dangerous

To begin with, fighter flying is among the most high-risk professions in the world. Pilots operate incredibly powerful machines weighing up to 40,000 kg and powered by engines capable of producing over 25,000 kgf of thrust.

Achieving maximum performance from such a complex aircraft requires seamless coordination between the pilot, the aircraft, and multiple supporting agencies on the ground. Even a minor error in judgment or execution can have catastrophic consequences, especially during air combat.

Fighter pilots are selected after a rigorous evaluation of their flying skills, temperament, and psychological makeup. Qualities such as mental agility, fast decision-making, situational awareness, and emotional resilience are non-negotiable. Only after years of intensive training are they considered fit for combat missions.

Even during peacetime, these pilots undergo combat training that mirrors the conditions of actual warfare as closely as possible — minus the use of live weaponry. Every day in the cockpit is a test of their physical endurance and mental sharpness.

Camaraderie and Competition

Flying in formation, especially during combat training, demands absolute trust among pilots. Each member must perform at their best — not just for personal safety but for the team. There's an unspoken



RAJIV HORA

but powerful mix of pride, ego, and responsibility. No one wants to be the weak link, and this drives pilots to push the limits of their aircraft and themselves.

Air combat is binary, there are no partial victories. You either prevail, or you are outmanoeuvred. This stark reality instils a relentless drive for excellence and perfection.

Fitness: The Hidden Demands

Maintaining peak physical condition is critical. Fighter pilots regularly train to increase their G-tolerance, which is crucial during the high-speed, tight turns of air combat.

Even with G-suits, seasoned pilots can experience forces up to 8-9 times their body weight. The stress on the human body is enormous, and those unac-

customed to it can lose consciousness.

Even minor illnesses such as a cold can impair judgment or sensory performance and are grounds for grounding a pilot. Strict rules govern alcohol consumption and sleep routines — standards summed up by the phrase "12 hours between bottle and throttle." Flight fitness is constantly monitored under the supervision of aero-medical experts.

Practice and Precision

Each training mission is carefully reviewed post-flight. Advanced tools allow for detailed debriefing, helping pilots analyse their performance, correct errors, and refine tactics. This ensures that when a real combat scenario arises, the pilot is ready for the critical moment when an enemy target appears in the radar scope.

Mistakes in modern warfare can be fatal — not just personally, but collectively. In the era of Beyond Visual Range (BVR) combat, where pilots often engage targets they cannot see, the risk of fratricide, or "blue on blue" incidents, increases. Identifying targets cor-

rectly in a high-pressure, information-dense environment demands exceptional clarity and focus.

The Systems in Play

Weather is another unpredictable factor. While missions are authorised based on available weather data, conditions can rapidly change mid-flight, presenting fresh challenges during takeoff, flight, or landing. Thunderstorms, turbulence, or poor visibility are all part of a fighter pilot's reality. To mitigate risks, the IAF, like other global air forces, uses an Operational Risk Management (ORM) system. This considers multiple variables, from pilot experience and aircraft condition to mission type and weather — to determine if a sortie should be authorised.

Even once airborne, the pilot must juggle a host of responsibilities. From interpreting radar and electronic warfare systems to tracking formation positions and navigating terrain at 900 kmph just a few hundred feet off the ground, everything hinges on razor-sharp timing. A single lapse can be fatal. At such speeds, there are no second chances.

Team Effort Behind the Scenes

A fighter pilot never flies alone in the truest sense. An extensive support ecosystem underpins every mission. Engineers, technicians, air traffic controllers, radar operators, and safety crews work in synchrony to ensure aircraft are airworthy and operations are smooth. Even older aircraft are rigorously maintained to official standards. The notion that pilots are forced to fly "junk" aircraft is baseless and unfair to the dedicated personnel who keep these machines operational. Still, aircraft can develop snags mid-air. Pilots are trained to respond to emergencies calmly and quickly, often practising drills in simulators. In worst-case scenarios, they may have to eject to save their own lives. While it's heartbreaking to abandon a multi-crore aircraft, saving a trained pilot — whose training takes 6-7 years and enormous investment — takes precedence.

Flight Safety: A Mission

Despite the best efforts, accidents do occur. They are rarely due to a single error; rather, they're often the result of multiple, layered failures — a concept known as the Swiss Cheese Model of accidents. A hole in the system, hidden until it aligns with others, can lead to tragedy.

The IAF maintains a robust flight safety mechanism. Every incident is examined thoroughly, and lessons are incorporated into procedures and even future aircraft designs. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), often forged in the aftermath of loss, are sacred and followed rigorously. Phasing out a fleet of aircraft is a strategic decision, balancing operational needs, cost implications, and national security. Not every accident warrants the retirement of an entire platform. Over time, accident rates do fall — thanks to continuous risk management, technological upgrades, and relentless learning from both successes and failures.

The Reality of Service

Behind the image of swaggering pilots in sunglasses lies a life of discipline, danger, and determination. Fighter pilots sacrifice comfort, health, and sometimes their lives — not for glory, but for duty. It's important for the public to understand that accidents often happen not due to negligence, but despite stringent precautions.

It is never as simple as flipping a switch or grounding a fleet. As the saying goes, "The safest place for a ship is in the harbour, but that's not where it's meant to be." Similarly, fighter aircraft and the warriors who fly them are meant to be in the sky, safeguarding our nation. Treading safely, always — but boldly.

(The writer is an Air Vice Marshal (Retired). Views are personal)

India main player on world stage today: AlBanai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nations

If a decision is made on expanding the UN Security Council, "then surely" India will be a contender, Chair of Intergovernmental Negotiations on UNSC reforms on Thursday said. "The goal of this reformed Council must be representative. Obviously, India is a main player on the world stage today. But it (UN) is a membership of 193 countries. The consideration is representative for everybody and the whole membership of the United Nations," Ambassador Tareq AlBanai said at a press briefing here.

"So surely, if the decision is made that expansion of the Council goes to from anywhere from 21 to 27 members, then surely India will be a contender in that and will be subject to the decision of the wider membership," AlBanai said in response to a question by PTI.

AlBanai, who is Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN, recalled that last year he and co-Chair Ambassador Alexander Marschik of Austria had visited India and had a conversation there "at the highest level" on the issue of UNSC reform.

Updating on the progress made in the IGN process during the current 79th

UNGA session, the ambassador said while the road to reform is "undeniably complex, we are taking steady and meaningful steps toward the path forward."

He noted that aside from an increase in the number of elected members in 1965, the first iteration of the Security Council has lasted over 80 years. "Whatever formulation the reformed Council takes, it must be designed to endure for the next century, anchored in the principles of inclusivity, transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, democracy and accountability."

Responding to a question on how many members an expanded UNSC must have, he said there is no decision yet but the numbers being floated range between 21 and 27 member states.

To a question on text-based negotiations, AlBanai noted that India's position has always been to move towards text-based negotiations as soon as possible. "Obviously, this process will lead us to text-based negotiations" as that is the "least complicated" part of this process.

"The most complicated part is to have consent on what that text contains, and then putting it on paper is not really going to be that difficult. Do we have consensus? Yes, we have consensus on many issues regarding the five clusters, many issues of



Permanent representative of the State of Kuwait, Tareq AlBanai

PTI

convergence that we have been able to put together over all those many years. There are still some issues of contention, but we are working steadily and surely to make sure that we overcome those," AlBanai said.

The five issues are categories of membership, question of the veto, regional rep-

resentation, size of an enlarged Security Council, and working methods of the Council, and relationship between the Council and the General Assembly.

AlBanai said he is "encouraged" by the momentum shown by the Member States in this session.

"The spirit of reform requires both courage and creativity, and the active engagement of all delegations remains essential as we work to find consensus on core elements of Security Council reform."

Earlier this week, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador, P Harish, in a statement on behalf of the G4 nations of Brazil, Germany, Japan, and India, told an IGN meeting that the existing UN architecture is from a different era, one that no longer exists and the current geopolitical realities warrant a review of this architecture.

Harish said Security Council membership needs to be increased from the current 15 to 25 or 26, with a reformed Council consisting of 11 permanent members and 14 or 15 non-permanent members. At present, the powerful UN organ consists of five veto-wielding permanent members — China, France, Russia, UK and the US. The remaining 10 members are elected to sit at the horse-shoe table for two-year terms as non-permanent members. India last sat in the Council as a non-permanent member in 2021-22.

The G4 nations have also encouraged Member States to submit further models of reforms in order to facilitate text-based negotiations.

"We invite the Chair to start text-based negotiations now, ideally by the end of the current IGN," the group has said.

AlBanai and Marschik last February met External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who in a post on X said he "appreciated their assessment of the ongoing discussions on UNSC reform."

The international community hopes that under their stewardship the IGN process moves forward this year."

After the meeting, Kuwait's Permanent Mission had on X said that both sides discussed ongoing developments with regards to the reform process, and ways in which it could be further developed.

"The Co-Chairs thanked India's Minister of External Affairs for the generous invitation, and commended India's commitment to this vital process," the Mission said.

AlBanai, however, said he could not tell whether the reform would take place by 2030 or any other year.

"I'm very positive about breaking down whatever barriers there are because people are understanding that we need something different and Member States are understanding that this is the recourse of the world community to tackle all issues, including peace and security, development and human rights."

1,000 plus international students' US visas revoked

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

More than 1,000 international students have had their visas or legal status revoked in recent weeks, and several have filed lawsuits against the Trump administration, arguing the government denied them due process when it suddenly took away their permission to be in the US.

The actions by the federal government to terminate students' legal status have left hundreds of scholars at risk of detention and deportation.

Their schools range from private universities like Harvard and Stanford to large public institutions like the University of Maryland and Ohio State University to some small liberal arts colleges.

At least 1,024 students at 160 colleges, universities and university systems have had their visas revoked or their legal status terminated since late March, according to an Associated Press review of university statements, correspondence with school officials and court records.

In lawsuits against the Department of Homeland Security, students have argued the government lacked justification to cancel their visa or terminate their legal status.

Visas can be cancelled for a number of reasons, but colleges say some students are being singled out over infractions as minor as traffic violations, including some long in the past.

In some cases, students say it's unclear

why they were targeted.

"The timing and uniformity of these terminations leave little question that DHS has adopted a nationwide policy, whether written or not, of mass termination of student (legal) status," ACLU of Michigan attorneys wrote in a lawsuit on behalf of students at Wayne State University and the University of Michigan.

In New Hampshire, a federal judge last week issued a restraining order in the case of a Dartmouth College computer science student from China, Xiaotian Liu, who had his status terminated by the government. Attorneys have filed similar challenges in federal court in Georgia and California.

Homeland Security officials did not respond to a message seeking comment. In some high-profile cases, including the detention of Columbia University activist Mahmoud Khalil, President Donald Trump's administration has argued it should be allowed to deport noncitizens over involvement in pro-Palestinian activism.

But in the vast majority of visa revocations, colleges say there is no indication affected students had a role in protests.

"What you're seeing happening with international students is really a piece of the much greater scrutiny that the Trump administration is bringing to bear on immigrants of all different categories," said Michelle Mittelstadt, director of public affairs at the Migration Policy Institute.

Students in other countries must meet

a series of requirements to obtain a student visa, usually an F-1. After gaining admission to a school in the US, students go through an application and interview process at a US embassy or consulate abroad. Students on an F-1 visa must show they have enough financial support for their course of study in the US. They have to remain in good standing with their academic programme and are generally limited in their ability to work off-campus during their academic programme.

Entry visas are managed by the State Department. Once they're in the US, international students' legal status is overseen by the Student and Exchange Visitor

The actions by the United States government to terminate students' legal status have left hundreds of scholars at risk of detention and deportation

Programme under the Department of Homeland Security.

In recent weeks, leaders at many colleges learned the legal residency status of some of their international students had been terminated when college staff checked a database managed by Homeland Security. In the past, college officials say, legal statuses typically were updated after colleges told the government the students were no longer studying at the school. Historically, students who had their visas revoked were

allowed to keep their legal residency status and complete their studies.

The lack of a valid entry visa only limited their ability to leave the US and return, something they could reapply for with the State Department. But if a student has lost legal residency status, they risk detention by immigration authorities. Some students already have left the country, abandoning their studies to avoid being arrested.

Higher education leaders worry the arrests and visa revocations could discourage students overseas from pursuing higher education in the United States.

The lack of clarity of what is leading to revocations can create a sense of fear among students, said Sarah Spreitzer, vice president of government relations at the American Council on Education.

"The very public actions that are being taken by ICE and the Department of Homeland Security around some of these students, where they are removing these students from their homes or from their streets, that's not usually done unless there is a security issue when a student visa is revoked," she said. "The threat of this very quick removal is something that's new."

In messages to their campuses, colleges have said they are asking the federal government for answers on what led to the terminations. Others have re-emphasised travel precautions to students, recommending they carry their passports and other immigration documents with them.

College leaders spoke of a growing sense of uncertainty and anxiety.

Judge in Baltimore limits DOGE access to Social Security data

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Baltimore

A federal judge on Thursday imposed new restrictions on billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, limiting its access to Social Security systems that hold personal data on millions of Americans. US District Judge Ellen Hollander issued a preliminary injunction in the case, which was brought by a group of labour unions and retirees who allege DOGE's recent actions violate privacy laws and present massive information security risks. Hollander had previously issued a temporary restraining order.

The injunction does allow DOGE staffers to access data that's been redacted or stripped of anything personally identifiable, if they undergo training and background checks. Hollander said DOGE and any DOGE-affiliated staffers must purge any of the non-anonymised Social Security data that they have received since Jan. 20.

They are also barred from making any changes to the computer code or software used by the Social Security Administration, must remove any software or code they might have already installed, and are forbidden from disclosing any of that code to others.

"The objective to address fraud, waste, mismanagement, and bloat is

laudable, and one that the American public presumably applauds and supports," Hollander wrote in the ruling issued late Thursday night. "Indeed, the taxpayers have every right to expect their government to make sure that their hard earned money is not squandered." But that's not the issue, Hollander said — the issue is with how DOGE wants to do the work.

"For some 90 years, SSA has been guided by the foundational principle of an expectation of privacy with respect to its records. This case exposes a wide fissure in the foundation," the judge wrote.

During a federal court hearing Tuesday in Baltimore, Hollander repeatedly asked the government's attorneys why DOGE needs "seemingly unfettered access" to the agency's troves of sensitive personal information to uncover Social Security fraud. Union members and retirees gathered outside the courthouse to protest DOGE's actions, which they consider a threat to the future of Social Security benefits.

"What is it we're doing that needs all of that information?" Hollander said, questioning whether most of the data could be anonymised, at least in the early stages of analysis.

Attorneys for the Trump administration said changing the process would slow down their efforts.

Appeals Court slams Trump administration over mistaken deportation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

The Trump administration's claim that it can't do anything to free Kilmar Abrego Garcia from an El Salvador prison and return him to the US "should be shocking," a federal appeals court said Thursday in a scathing ruling in favour of the Maryland man.

A three-judge panel from the 4th US Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously refused to suspend a judge's decision to order sworn testimony by Trump administration officials to determine if they complied with her instruction to facilitate Abrego Garcia's return.

The panel said Republican President Donald Trump's government is "asserting a right to stash away residents of this country in foreign prisons without the semblance of due process that is the foundation of our constitutional order."

"Further, it claims in essence that because it has rid itself of custody that there is nothing that can be done. This should be shocking not only to judges, but to the intuitive sense of liberty that Americans far removed from courthouses still hold dear," they wrote.

The Justice Department appealed after US District Judge Paula Xinis on Tuesday ordered sworn testimony by at least four officials who work for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department.

The fourth Circuit panel unanimously denied the government's request for a stay of Xinis' order while they appeal. Its opinion says the executive and judicial branches of the federal government "come too close to grinding irrevocably against one another in a conflict that promises to diminish both."

"This is a losing proposition all around," they wrote.

The Judiciary will lose much from the constant intimations of its illegitimacy, to which by dint of custom and detachment we can only sparingly reply. The Executive will lose much from a public perce

Two killed, five wounded in Florida State shooting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Tallahassee

A gunman opened fire on Thursday at Florida State University, killing two people and wounded at least five others, police said. The 20-year-old gunman was the son of a sheriff's deputy whose former service weapon was used in the shooting, authorities said.

The two people who died were not students at the university, but the shooter is believed to be a student, Florida State University Police Chief Jason Trumbower.

Five people were being treated at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital, Trumbower said, and the shooter was also receiving medical attention.

Students and frightened parents hid in a bowling alley and crammed into a freight elevator inside the student union after hearing gunshots outside the building. Ambulances, fire trucks and patrol vehicles from multiple law enforcement agencies raced toward the campus just west of Florida's capital after the university issued an active shooter alert midday Thursday, saying police were responding near the student union.

Ryan Cedergren, a 21-year-old communications student, said he and about 30 others hid in the bowling alley in the union's lower level after seeing students running from a nearby bar. "In that moment, it was survival," he said.

After about 15 minutes, university

police escorted the students out of the building and he saw a person getting emergency treatment on the lawn, he said. Chris Pento told WCTV in Tallahassee that he and his twins were getting lunch at the student union during a campus tour when they heard gunshots. "It was surreal. And people just started running," he told the TV station.

They packed into a service elevator after encountering locked doors at the end of a hallway. "That was probably the scariest point because we didn't know. It could get worse, right?" he said.

"The doors opened and two officers were there, guns drawn." Florida State's alert system announced about three hours after the shooting that law enforcement had "neutralised the threat." Officials asked students and faculty to avoid the student union and other areas still considered an active crime scene. Dozens of patrol vehicles, including a forensics van, were parked outside the student union. Officers blocked off the area with crime scene tape.

Students and staff who left behind phones, keys and other items in the rush to evacuate waited in the shade and prayed for the victims.

President Donald Trump said from the Oval Office that he had been fully briefed on the shooting. "It's a horrible thing. It's horrible that things like this take place," he said.

Diplomat leads Trump's 'America First' at UN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nations

The highest-ranking US representative now at the United Nations told Congress two years ago that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was "unprovoked" and "unjustified," urging UN members to condemn Moscow's aggression and demand an end to the war.

In February, it was the same career diplomat, Dorothy Shea, who voiced the Trump administration's extraordinary decision to split with European allies and refuse to back a UN resolution blaming Russia for its invasion on the third anniversary of the war.

While it is typical for diplomats to stay on as US presidents - and their political parties - change, Shea's interim role has unexpectedly made her a face of the stunning US transition on the world stage, with President Donald Trump's "America First" approach increasingly upending the post-World War II international order.

Shea will be in place longer than expected after Trump's unusual decision last month to withdraw his nominee for UN ambassador, Rep. Elise Stefanik, from consideration because of a slim Republican House majority.

"I would say (Shea's) position is unique. It is probably particularly unique in that because of the extraordinary change, not just from one administration to another, but really an era of US foreign policy, even when there were nuanced differences," said Phillip Reeker, the former acting assistant secretary of state for Europe.



United States UN Ambassador Dorothy Shea addressing the UNSC

PTI

"The change in the vote that took place at the UN on the Russia-Ukraine war was really an inflection point in US policy."

On Feb. 24, the US joined Russia in voting against a European-backed Ukrainian resolution demanding an immediate withdrawal of Moscow's forces. A dueling US resolution noted "the tragic loss of life" and called for "a swift end to the conflict," but it didn't mention Moscow's aggression as the Trump administration opened negotiations with Russia on a ceasefire.

"Continuing to engage in rhetorical

rivalries in New York may make diplomats feel vindicated, but it will not save souls on the battlefield," Shea, 59, said at the time. "Let us prove to ourselves and to our citizens that we can come together and agree on the most basic principles. Let us show one another that the bold vision of peace that once pulled us out of hell can prevail."

The message was a shocking retreat for the US in the 193-member UN General Assembly, whose resolutions are not legally binding but are seen as a barometer of world opinion.

US airstrikes on Yemeni oil port kills 74 people, wounds 171

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

US airstrikes targeting an oil port held by Yemen's Houthi rebels killed 74 people and wounded 171 others, the group said Friday, marking the single-deadliest known attack under President Donald Trump's new campaign targeting the rebels.

Assessing the toll of Trump's campaign, which began March 15, has been incredibly difficult as the US military's Central Command so far has not released any information on the campaign, its specific targets and how many people have been killed.

Meanwhile, Yemen's Houthi rebels

strictly control access to areas attacked and don't publish information on the strikes, many of which likely have targeted military and security sites.

But the strike on the Ras Isa oil port, which sent massive fireballs shooting into the night sky, represented a major escalation for the American campaign. The Houthis also immediately released graphic footage of those killed in the attack.

In a statement, Central Command said that "US forces took action to eliminate this source of fuel for the Iran-backed Houthi terrorists and deprive them of illegal revenue that has funded Houthi efforts to terrorise the entire region for over 10 years."



"This strike was not intended to harm the people of Yemen, who rightly want to throw off the yoke of Houthi subjugation and live peacefully," it added. It did not acknowledge any casualties and declined to comment when asked by The Associated Press regarding civilians reportedly being killed.

The Iranian-backed Houthis later Friday launched a missile toward Israel that was intercepted, the Israeli military said. Sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and other areas. The war in Yemen, meanwhile, further internationalised as the US alleged a Chinese satellite company was "directly supporting" Houthi attacks, something Beijing did not immediately acknowledge.

US to drop Ukraine-Russia peace efforts, if no progress seen: Rubio

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Friday that the US may be ready to "move on" from efforts for a Russia-Ukraine peace deal if there is not progress in the coming days.

Speaking in Paris after a marathon day of landmark talks among US, Ukrainian and European officials, Rubio said the discussions had been constructive and produced an outline for steps toward peace.

French officials said a new meeting in the same format is expected in London in the coming days. Rubio said he could join that meeting, and it's expected early in the week. "We are now reaching a point where we need to decide whether this is even possible or not," Rubio told reporters upon departure.

After weeks of efforts by the Trump administration to broker a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine have failed to bring an end to the fighting, Rubio said the US administration wants to decide "in a matter of days whether or not this is



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio along with Germany's Gunter Sautter

doable in the next few weeks." time since President Donald Trump's inauguration that top American, Ukrainian and European officials are

known to have met together to discuss an end to the war. The meetings came as European concerns grow about Trump's readiness to draw closer to Russia.

Rubio and presidential envoy Steve Witkoff have helped lead US efforts to seek peace. Several rounds of negotiations have been held in Saudi Arabia. Witkoff has met three times with Putin, Rubio said.

Moscow has effectively refused to accept a comprehensive ceasefire that Trump has pushed and Ukraine has endorsed. Russia has made it conditional on a halt in Ukraine's mobilization efforts and Western arms supplies, which are demands rejected by Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Russia kept up a series of deadly strikes on Ukrainian cities, according to officials there, wounding scores of civilians days after missiles killed at least 34 during Palm Sunday celebrations in the northern city of Sumy.

One person died and over 60 others were hurt as Russia hit Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, early in the day, Ukraine's Emergency Service reported.

Lower internal trade barriers will help Canada, says Carney

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Toronto

Prime Minister Mark Carney said Thursday eliminating trade barriers within Canada would benefit Canadians far more than US President Donald Trump can ever take away with his trade war as he made his case to retain power at the last debate ahead of the April 28 vote.

Carney has set a goal of free trade within the country's 10 provinces and three territories by July 1. Canada has long had interprovincial trade barriers.

"We can give ourselves far more than Donald Trump can ever take away," Carney said. "We can have one economy. This is within our grasp."

Carney said the relationship Canada has had with the US for the past 40 years has fundamentally changed because of Trump's tariffs. If reelected Carney plans to immediately enter into trade walks with the Trump administration.

"We are facing the biggest crisis of our lifetimes. Donald Trump is trying to fundamentally change the world economy, the trading system, but really is he's trying to break us so the US can own us. They want

our land, they want our resources, they want our water, they want our country" Carney said in his closing statement. "I am ready and I have managed crisis over the years ... We will fight back with counter tariffs and we will protect our workers."

Trump's trade war and threats to make Canada the 51st state have infuriated Canadians and led to a surge in Canadian nationalism that has bolstered Liberal Party poll numbers.

Opposition Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre is imploring Canadians not to give the Liberals a fourth term. He hoped to make the election a referendum on Justin Trudeau, whose popularity declined toward the end of his decade in power as food and housing prices rose and immigration surged.

But Trump attacked, Trudeau resigned and Carney, a two-time central banker, became Liberal party leader and prime minister last month after a party leadership race.

"It may be difficult, Mr. Poilievre, you spent years running against Justin Trudeau and the carbon tax and they are both gone," Carney said. "I am a very different person than Justin Trudeau."

US intelligence contradicts Trump claims linking gang to Venezuela

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

A new US intelligence assessment found no coordination between Tren de Aragua and the Venezuelan government, contradicting statements that Trump administration officials have made to justify their invocation of the Alien Enemies Act and deporting Venezuelan migrants, according to US officials.

The classified assessment from the National Intelligence Council, released this month, is more comprehensive and authoritative than an earlier intelligence product released Feb. 26 and reported last month by The New York Times, according to two US officials familiar with the assessment. They were not authorized to address the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The new assessment draws input from the 18 agencies that comprise the intelligence community. It repeatedly stated that Tren de Aragua, a gang that originated in a prison in Venezuela, is not coordinated with or supported by the country's president, Nicolás Maduro, or senior officials in the Venezuelan government. While the assessment found minimal contact between some members of the gang and low-level members of the Venezuelan government, there was a consensus that there was no coordination or directive role between gang and government.

The assessment provided support and extensive sourcing for those assertions, according to the officials. Of the 18 organizations that make up the US government's intelligence community, only one — the FBI — did not agree with the findings. It is not uncommon for intelligence agencies to differ in their assessments on matters of great public interest. But the latest assessment was significant for its near unanimity.

Several years ago, under former Director Christopher Wray, the FBI assessed that the COVID-19 pandemic most likely originated from a lab leak, though that was hardly the uniform consensus. The position got recent support from a CIA assessment declassified in January.

The White House and the office of Tulsi Gabbard, the director of national intelligence, did not respond to messages seeking comment Thursday night.

The intelligence assessment's findings come as the Supreme Court last week ruled that the Trump administration can use the Alien Enemies Act, a 1798 wartime law, to deport Venezuelan migrants — but that the migrants must get court hearings before they're taken from the United States.

Tren de Aragua has been linked to a series of kidnappings, extortion and other crimes throughout the Western Hemisphere. Those activities are tied to a mass exodus of millions of Venezuelans as their country's economy unraveled over the past decade.

The Alien Enemies Act was created to give the president wide powers to imprison and deport noncitizens in time of war. Until now, it has been used just three times, most recently eight decades ago during World War II to justify the detention of Japanese-American civilians.

The American Civil Liberties Union, which has filed legal challenges to the Trump administration's use of the law, contends that Trump does not have the authority to use the Alien Enemies Act against a criminal gang rather than a recognized state.

President Donald Trump invoked the act in March, declaring in a proclamation that Tren de Aragua "is closely aligned with, and indeed has infiltrated, the Maduro

regime, including its military and law enforcement apparatus."

Attorney General Pam Bondi repeated that assertion Monday night in an interview on Fox News Channel. Bondi defended the invocation of the wartime law and called Tren de Aragua "a foreign arm of the Venezuelan government."

"They are organized. They have a command structure. And they have invaded our country," she said.

Last month, the Trump administration used the Alien Enemies Act to fly more than 130 men accused of being members of the gang to El Salvador, where the US has paid for the men to be held in a notorious prison. The Venezuelans deported under the act received no opportunity to challenge the orders, and attorneys for many of the men have said there is no evidence they are gang members.

The Trump administration has argued that the gang has become an invading force and designated it, along with seven other crime groups, as "foreign terrorist organisations."

The latest intelligence assessment was first reported Thursday by The Washington Post.

PUBLIC NOTICE. This is to notify the general public that Cdr RN Gulati was the original allottee of Flat P-359, Sector-21, Jai Vayu Vihar, Noida. During his lifetime, he executed a registered will...

PUBLIC NOTICE. This notice is for information to General Public that the company M/S. KAPOOR SUNNY CHIT FUND PVT. LTD. located at B-467, Majlis Park Main Road, Delhi-110033 has permanently closed its operations...

PUBLIC NOTICE. This Public at large is hereby notified that my client Mr. Arun Bansal S/O Shri Jagdish Kumar Bansal is the absolute and lawful owner of Flat No. F-304, Shree Ganesh Apartment, Plot No.93, I.P. Extension, Patparganj, Delhi-110092. That the Original Conveyance Deed dated: 10.12.2008 of the above said flat is laminated and it is not possible to remove it.

PUBLIC NOTICE. This is to inform the general public on behalf of my client, Smt. Savita Goyal, W/O Late Sh. Anil Kumar Goyal @ Anil Kumar, R/O C-1124A, Keshav Puram, North-West, Delhi-110035 that she has discovered and disinherited her son, Mr. Ankit Goyal S/O Late Sh. Anil Kumar Goyal R/O C-1122A, Lawrence Road, Keshav Puram, North-West, Delhi-110035, due to his continuous misconduct and unacceptable behaviour.

PUBLIC NOTICE. Hereby given that the undersigned are the directors and shareholders of R. S. Ajit Singh & Co. Private Limited ("Company"), a company incorporated under the Companies Act and having its registered office at C-91/10 Wazirpur, Industrial Area, Delhi, India, 110052. The Company vide its application request no. LD38754IND/CO/07032024 dated 29.11.2024, had applied before Delhi Development Authority for conversion of the Property bearing no. 91/10, Block C, admeasuring 2300.60 Square Yards situated at Wazirpur Industrial Area (the "Demised Premises") from industrial use to freehold. It was further proposed by the Company to sell the Demised Premises and accordingly a board resolution dated 09.04.2024 was passed by the Company authorising Mrs. Gurpal Khurana to sell the Demised Premises and execute required documents on behalf of Company.

PUBLIC NOTICE. An objection was raised by Mr. Parvinder Singh Gurucharan Singh Arora and Mr. Gurinder Singh regarding the conversion and letters dated 08.02.2025 and 10.02.2025 were issued to DDA. Furthermore, a public notice was released by them on 30.01.2025 objecting to the same. However, the said letters have now been withdrawn by Mr. Parvinder Singh Gurucharan Singh Arora and Mr. Gurinder Singh vide their letters dated 18.02.2025 to DDA, and a no objection has been provided for conversion of the Demised Premises from industrial use to freehold premises. Mr. Parvinder Singh Gurucharan Singh Arora and Mr. Gurinder Singh are not the directors of the Company and do not have any objection regarding the sale of the Demised Premises.

JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited. Corporate identity Number : U67190MH2007PLC74287. Registered Office Address : 7th Floor, Cyber, Appasaheb Marathe Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai 400025. T: +91 22 6630 3030 F: +91 22 6630 3223 www.jmfinancialarc.com. DEMAND NOTICE. Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The Piramal Capital and Housing Finance Ltd have assigned a pool of Loan (including below mentioned Loans) together with underlying security interest created under the Security Interest (Enforcement) Act, 2002 ("SARFAESI ACT") vide an assignment agreement dated March 29, 2023 (the "Assignment Agreement") in favour of JMFCAR (JM) (herein referred to as Assignee). The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of JMFCAR (JM) assigned. Under Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act), in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, Notice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to JM, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to JM by the said Borrower(s) respectively.

PUBLIC NOTICE. Notice is hereby given on behalf of PRIVYANKA ANIL SUNDAR who is purchasing the First Floor, without roof rights built on Property bearing no.30/04, area measuring 76.93 sq. Mtrs. i.e. 92 Sq. Yds. of Kharsa No. 642, situated at Village Chandrawali alias Shahdara colony known as Pathan Pura Shahdara, Delhi-110032, from MRS. MEENA SHARMA who has owned the subject property vide Sale Deed dated 09.12.2011 bearing Document No.21377, Book No.1, Volume No.5931, on pages 142-150, dated 09.12.2011 (SRO-VIII DELHI), now MRS. PRIVYANKA ANIL SUNDAR intend to purchase the same and intend to mortgage against the financial assistance from ADITYA BIRLA HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim right/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing at the address mentioned below, about 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. Contact Legal LLP Plot No.136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049, Linc No. 011-40046316

PUBLIC NOTICE. I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that I have renounced, relinquished and abandoned the use of my old name Moirangthem Surbala as I have assumed my new name Moirangthem Surbala Devi. In future I shall be known as Moirangthem Surbala Devi in all my documents and others. Sd/- Moirangthem Surbala Devi Phangkum Mayal Leikai, Imphal East District, Manipur-795010

Table with columns: Name of the Borrower(s) / Guarantor(s), Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date, Description of secured asset (immovable property). Includes details for various loans and properties.

NAME CHANGE. I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that I have renounced, relinquished and abandoned the use of my old name Moirangthem Surbala as I have assumed my new name Moirangthem Surbala Devi. In future I shall be known as Moirangthem Surbala Devi in all my documents and others. Sd/- Moirangthem Surbala Devi Phangkum Mayal Leikai, Imphal East District, Manipur-795010

PUBLIC NOTICE. It is brought to the notice of the General Public that my client SUNITA SINGH W/O LATE ASHOK KUMAR SINGH R/O RZ-243, KHARSIA NO.522, PEPPAL WALL GALLI GALLI No.2, RAJ NAGAR-II, PALAM COLONY, NEW DELHI-110077, has entered into an agreement to purchase the SECOND FLOOR WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS of property No.RZ-243, area 44 sq. yds. (15.3 FL X 25.8 FT) Kharsa No.522, VILLAGE PALAM, COLONY RAJ NAGAR, PART-II, NEW DELHI from POUJA SHARMA W/O MR. MAHESHWAR R/O 1882-A, SHRI RAM MANDIR, UDAY CHAND MARG, KOTLA MUBARAKPUR, NEW DELHI-110003, who has lost/misplaced all the Original Documents of above said property which are not traceable. In this regard, FIR/NCR has been lodged on Delhi Police online portal vide LR No.274424/2024 dated 18-04-2024. The finder may please contact me and return the documents within 15 days of this notice to the address given below. He shall be suitably rewarded. Any misuse of any of the above documents shall be treated as an offence and the person concerned shall be proceeded against as per the Law. If the above-mentioned document is not found/misplaced all the Original Documents of above said property which are not traceable, in this regard, FIR/NCR has been lodged on Delhi Police online portal vide LR No.274424/2024 dated 18-04-2024. The finder may please contact me and return the documents within 15 days of this notice to the address given below. He shall be suitably rewarded. Any misuse of any of the above documents shall be treated as an offence and the person concerned shall be proceeded against as per the Law. If the above-mentioned document is not found/misplaced all the Original Documents of above said property which are not traceable, in this regard, FIR/NCR has been lodged on Delhi Police online portal vide LR No.274424/2024 dated 18-04-2024. 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DGTR issues final findings in 13 anti-dumping cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The commerce ministry's investigation arm DGTR has issued final findings in as many as 13 anti-dumping cases, mostly against China, in March, according to the Commerce Ministry. The ministry also said that in addition to this, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) has started 11 investigations in March. The final findings have been issued against dumping of products such as vitamin-A palmitate, insoluble sulphur, aluminium foil, plastic processing machines, digital offset printing plates and decor paper. Out of the 13 cases, 12 are against China. The other countries included in these

probes include European Union, Japan, Taiwan, Russia and Thailand. DGTR, under the commerce ministry, is the apex authority for administering all trade remedial measures, including antidumping, countervailing duties and safeguard measures. These measures help deal with the rising incidences of unfair trade practices and to provide a level playing field to the domestic industry. The role of the directorate has become crucial in the backdrop of sweeping tariffs imposed by the US and China on each other, as high import duties are making goods more expensive in both countries. And this would lead to diversion of goods into countries like India. While the US has imposed 245 per cent against China. In retaliation, Beijing has

slapped 125 per cent tariff on goods coming from Washington. The government has set up an inter-ministerial import surge monitoring group to strictly monitor imports. In the last fiscal, India's exports to China contracted 14.5 per cent to \$14.25 billion as against \$16.66 billion in 2023-24. The imports, however, rose by 11.52 per cent in 2024-25 to \$113.45 billion against \$101.73 billion in 2023-24. The trade deficit with China has widened by about 17 per cent to \$99.2 billion in the last fiscal from \$85.07 billion in 2023-24. China continued to be the second largest trading partner of India with \$127.7 billion two-way commerce in 2024-25 as compared to \$118.4 billion in 2023-24.

Duty imposed on steel, aluminium due to national security: US to India in WTO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The US has informed the global trade body WTO that the decision to impose tariffs on steel and aluminium, was based on national security grounds and should not be considered as safeguard measures, according to a communication. The US shared this response with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) after India requested consultations under the WTO's Safeguards Agreement on April 11 with America. India has said that notwithstanding the USA's characterisation of these measures as security measures, they are in essence safeguard measures. It has also stated that America has failed to notify the WTO Committee on Safeguards under a provision of the Agreement on Safeguards (AoS) on tak-

ing a decision to apply safeguard measures. "The US notes that the premise for India's request for consultations under Article 12.3 of the Agreement on Safeguards is that the tariffs are safeguard measures, the (US) President imposed the tariffs on steel and aluminum pursuant to Section 232, under which the President determined that tariffs are necessary to adjust imports of steel and aluminum articles that threaten to impair the national security of the US," America has said in a communication, dated April 17, to the trade body. The US also said that Section 232 is a national security statute, and the tariffs are being kept in place under the security exception allowed under a provision of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994. It added that the tariffs were not imposed under a provision of the Trade Act of 1974, which is the law

under which the US imposes safeguard measures. "The United States is not maintaining these actions pursuant to the safeguards or emergency action provision, these actions are not safeguard measures and, therefore, there is no basis to conduct consultations under the Agreement on Safeguards with respect to these measures," the US added. "Accordingly, India's request for consultations, has no basis in the Agreement on Safeguards," it said adding "nonetheless, we are open to discuss this or any other issue with India." However, it said that they are open to discuss this issue with India. "Any discussions regarding the tariffs would not be under the Agreement on Safeguards and would be without prejudice to our view that the tariffs are not safeguard measures," it added.

EPFO set to launch version 3.0 with ATM fund withdrawals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ranchi

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is set to undergo a major digital overhaul to enhance services for over nine crore beneficiaries, with Version 3.0 set to launch by May or June, Union Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Friday. In coming days, EPFO beneficiaries will be able to withdraw funds from ATMs due to faster processing of claims on the newer Version 3.0, Mandaviya said in an interview with media. "EPFO will soon implement Version 3.0 with the help of a robust IT platform to provide seamless and simplified services, including auto-claim settlements, digital corrections, and ATM-based fund withdrawals. The overhaul is aimed at making EPFO accessible and efficient," he said. According to Mandaviya, the new version will eliminate the need for complex and lengthy form-filling processes or physical visits for claims and corrections. Beneficiaries will be able to update their EPFO accounts and mandates using OTP verification and conveniently monitor their pension entitlements or withdraw funds. Due to fast settlement of claims, the funds would be quickly available in the subscriber's bank account, he added. He said EPFO currently holds a corpus of Rs 27 lakh crore with a sovereign guarantee and offers 8.25 per cent

interest. The Centralised Pension Payment System, already in place, benefits over 78 lakh pensioners by allowing them to receive pensions in any bank account across the country, removing the earlier requirement of maintaining accounts in designated zonal banks. The minister said the government is also considering the integration of various social security schemes, including the Atal Pension Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Bima Yojana, and Shramik Jan Dhan Yojana, to streamline and strengthen pension coverage. In a move to enhance healthcare access for workers, Mandaviya said that beneficiaries under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) will soon be able to receive free medical treatment at hospitals empanelled under the Ayushman Bharat scheme. In addition, designated charity-run private hospitals will also be brought under its ambit to expand social security coverage. Currently, ESIC provides free treatment to about 18 crore people through 165 hospitals, over 1,500 dispensaries and around 2,000 empanelled hospitals. Mandaviya said the EPFO has significantly improved its grievance redressal mechanism following the rollout of Version 2.0.1, with complaints being reduced to less than half. With the introduction of EPFO 3.0, the organisation aims to further improve accessibility and efficiency.

Gold imports rise 192 per cent to \$4.47 billion

PRESS TRUSTS OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

After registering negative growth, the country's gold imports, which impact Current Account Deficit (CAD), jumped by 192.13 per cent to \$4.47 billion in March, on account of significant increase in the prices of the yellow metal according to commerce ministry data. Gold imports stood at \$1.53 billion in January 2024. Cumulatively, during April-March 2024-25, the inbound shipments rose 27.27 per cent to \$58 billion against \$ 45.54 billion in 2023-24. The increase in imports also indicates strong investor confidence in the precious metal as a safe asset. The other reasons include asset diversification towards gold due to global uncertainties, increasing demand from banks, and jump in prices. On April 17, the gold prices rose by ₹70 to hit yet another record high of ₹98,170 per 10 grams in the national capital. The prices soared to record highs due to a weaker dollar, escalating trade war tensions, and growing concerns over global economic growth following US President Donald Trump's tariff announcements. However, silver prices plunged by ₹1,400 to ₹98,000 per kg. The white metal had settled at ₹99,400 per kg in the previous market close. Silver imports in March contracted by 85.4 per cent to \$119.3 million. It was down 11.24 per cent year-on-year in 2024-25 to \$4.82 billion. Switzerland is the largest source of gold



imports, with about 40 per cent share, followed by the UAE (over 16 per cent) and South Africa (about 10 per cent). The precious metal accounts for eight per cent of the country's total imports. In volume terms, the imports dipped to 757.15 tonnes in 2024-25 against 795.32 tonnes in 2023-24. The gold imports in February were down by about 62 per cent, while it rose by 40.8 per cent in January and 55.39 per cent in December 2024. The jump in gold imports pushed the country's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) to \$21.54 in March. It touched an all-time high of \$282.82 billion in the last fiscal. India is the world's second-biggest gold

consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry. Gems and jewellery exports during the month rose by 10.62 per cent year-on-year to about \$3 billion. It was however dipped by 8.84 per cent to USD 29.82 billion in 2024-25 from USD 32.7 billion in 2023-24. India's CAD inched up to \$11.5 billion, or 1.1 per cent of GDP, in the December quarter from \$10.4 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) in the year-ago period, mainly due to higher trade deficit. It widened to \$37.0 billion (1.3 per cent of GDP) during April-December 2024 from \$30.6 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) during the corresponding period of last year.

No decision on nationwide rollout of satellite-based tolling: MoRTH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) on Friday clarified that no decision has been taken on the nationwide implementation of satellite-based tolling from May 1. The ministry's response came after some sections of the media reported that a satellite-based tolling system would be launched from May 1, 2025 and will replace the existing FASTag-based toll collection system. In a statement, the ministry said that to enable seamless, barrier-free movement of vehicles through toll plazas and reduce travel time, an 'Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)-FASTag-based barrier-less tolling system' will be implemented at selected toll plazas. According to the statement, the advanced tolling system will combine ANPR technology, that will identify vehicles by reading their number plates, and the existing 'FASTag system' that uses Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) for toll deduction. Under this, vehicles will be charged based on their identification through high performance ANPR cameras and FASTag readers, without needing to stop at the toll plazas. In case of non-compliance, e-notices will be served to the violators, non-payment of which may result in suspension of FASTag and other VAHAN related penalties.

New traffic radar rules to ensure accurate speed enforcement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The government on Friday said new regulations requiring mandatory verification and stamping of traffic radar equipment will be implemented from July 1 to improve road safety and enforcement accuracy across the country. The Consumer Affairs Ministry has notified the rules following extensive consultations with stakeholders, including the Indian Institute of Legal Metrology, Regional Reference Laboratories, manufacturers, and vehicle certification organisations. "These rules will come into force from July 1, 2025, providing sufficient time for industries and enforcement agencies to comply with the provisions," the ministry said in a statement. The new rules, which fall under the Legal Metrology (General) Rules, 2011, will apply to "microwave Doppler radar equipment" widely utilised for measuring vehicle speeds on roads. These rules specify detailed technical and safety requirements, ensuring proper calibration, stable operation under various environmental conditions and protection against tampering. Such measures will foster a culture of technological reliability and legal accountability.

Strange sell-off in dollar raises spectre of investors losing trust in US under Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Among the threats tariffs pose to the US economy, none may be as strange as the sell-off in the dollar. Currencies rise and fall all the time because of inflation fears, central bank moves and other factors. But economists worry that the recent drop in the dollar is so dramatic that it reflects something more ominous as President Donald Trump tries to reshape global trade: a loss of confidence in the US. The dollar's dominance in cross-border trade and as a safe haven has been nurtured by administrations of both parties for decades because it helps keep US borrowing costs down and allows Washington to project power abroad — enormous advantages that could possibly disappear if faith in the US was damaged. "Global trust and reliance on the dollar was built up over a half century or more," says University of California, Berkeley, economist Barry Eichengreen. "But it can be lost in the blink of an eye." Since mid-January, the dollar has fallen 9 per cent against a basket of currencies, a rare and steep decline, to its lowest level in three years. Many investors spooked by Trump don't think the dollar will be pushed quickly from its position as the world's reserve currency, instead expecting more of a slow decline. But even that is scary enough, given the benefits that

would be lost. With much of world's goods exchanged in dollars, demand for the currency has stayed strong even as the US has doubled federal debt in a dozen years and does other things that would normally send investors fleeing. That has allowed the US government, consumers and businesses to borrow at unnaturally low rates, which has helped speed economic growth and lift standards of living. **The dollar lost more than five per cent against the euro and pound and six per cent against the yen since early April** Dollar dominance also allows the US to push around other countries like Venezuela, Iran and Russia by locking them out of a currency they need to buy and sell with others. Now that "exorbitant privilege," as economists call it, is suddenly at risk. "The safe haven properties of the dollar are being eroded," said Deutsch Bank in a note to clients earlier this month warning of a "confidence crisis." Added a more circumspect report by Capital Economics, "It is no longer hyperbole to say that the dollar's reserve status and broader dominant role is at least somewhat in question." Traditionally, the dollar would

strengthen as tariffs sink demand for foreign products. But the dollar not only failed to strengthen this time, it fell, puzzling economists and hurting consumers. The dollar lost more than 5 per cent against the euro and pound, and 6 per cent against the yen since early April. As any American traveler abroad knows, you can buy more with a stronger dollar and less with a weaker one. Now the price of French wine and South Korean electronics and a host of other imports could cost more not only due to tariffs but a weaker currency, too. And any loss of safe-haven status could hit US consumers in another way: Higher rates for mortgages and car financing deals as lenders demand more interest for the added risk. More worrisome is possible higher interest rates on the ballooning US federal debt, which is already at a risky 120 per cent of US annual economic output. "Most countries with that debt to GDP would cause a major crisis and the only reason we get away with it is that the world needs dollars to trade with," says Benn Steil, an economist at the Council on Foreign Relations. "At some point people are going to look seriously at alternatives to the dollar." They already have, with a little help from a US economic rival. China has been striking yuan-only trading deals with Brazil for agricultural products, Russia for oil and South Korea for other goods for years.

Our technology products now globally respected: Vaishnaw



Ashwini Vaishnaw speaking during inauguration of the Mechanical Innovation Park at VVDN Campus in Gurugram

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Manesar

India's electronics manufacturing and export have grown multi-fold in the last decade driven by policies and incentives, and the Made-in-India products now command global recognition given their reliability and respect for IP rights, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Friday. Inaugurating VVDN Technologies' SMT (Surface Mount Technology) Line at Manesar, the Minister noted that electronics manufacturing in India has risen 5-fold in the last decade topping ₹11 lakh crore. Exports have grown 6 times during this period, crossing ₹3.25 lakh crore. The entire ecosystem has spurred 25 lakh jobs,

Vaishnaw, Minister for Electronics and IT said. "In global market, Indian products, given their reliability and respect for IP (intellectual property) rights, have an advantage, and it is being recognised globally," he said. India's design capabilities have paved the way for complex products — from AI cameras to automobile electronics and telecom network equipment to power electronics — being designed here, adding to India's sheen as an electronics hub, he said. "Now addition of electronics components incentives, approved by Cabinet recently, will improve depth of electronics manufacturing ecosystem, leading to more opportunities," the Minister asserted.

Sensex, Nifty surge six per cent amid Tariff pause, foreign inflows

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged more than 6 per cent in the last four trading sessions, as a temporary pause on tariffs by the US, return of foreign investors to the domestic market and prediction of an above-normal rainfall in the upcoming southwest monsoon season lifted investors' sentiments. Moreover, retail inflation dipping to a nearly six-year low also raised hopes for a third rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), according to market experts. In the last four trading days, the BSE benchmark index jumped 4,706.05 points or 6.37 per cent, and the NSE Nifty surged 1,452.5 points or 6.48 per

cent. Accordingly, investors' wealth rallied by ₹25.77 lakh crore to ₹4,19,60,046.14 crore (USD 4.90 trillion) in the past four days. Stock markets are closed on Friday for 'Good Friday'. According to Vishnu Kant Upadhyay, AVP, Research and Advisory, Master Capital Services, several factors like foreign fund inflows, temporary pause on tariffs by the US and further monetary easing by the RBI have converged to drive the recent sharp rally in the Indian markets despite global trade uncertainty. "In the last three trading sessions, foreign portfolio investors purchased over USD one billion worth of Indian equities after a prolonged selling streak. Further, the announcement of a temporary pause on tariffs by the US and

potential negotiations with countries also led to the relief rally," Upadhyay said. Moreover, the RBI's 25 bps rate cut on April 9, and its shift of stance from "neutral" to "accommodative" added fresh momentum to the equity market, as investors priced in further monetary easing, he noted. On April 9, the RBI cut interest rates for a second consecutive time. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), consisting of three central bank members and an equal number of external members, voted unanimously to cut the repurchase or repo rate by 25 basis points to six per cent. RBI changed its policy stance to "accommodative" from "neutral", indicating the possibility of more rate cuts in future, Governor Sanjay Malhotra said,

while announcing the MPC decisions. Marketmen are also betting big on upcoming southwest monsoon as according to the India Meteorological Department, India is expected to get above-normal rainfall in the upcoming southwest monsoon season, which raised hopes for a bountiful harvest for the largely agri-based economy. Echoing similar sentiments, Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking said the rally in the domestic equities was primarily fueled by optimism surrounding the deferral of tariffs and recent exemptions on select products, raising hopes for potential negotiations that could mitigate the impact on global trade. "As the week progressed, market participants responded positively to a slew of favorable develop-

ments, including updates on a normal monsoon, easing retail inflation — which raised hopes for potential policy rate cuts — and the absence of any major negative surprises from global markets," Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. In the upcoming week, all eyes will be on the earnings reports, Mishra said. Globally, any updates related to tariffs and their potential impact on world markets will remain in focus, he added. On the domestic macroeconomic front, retail inflation dipped marginally to a nearly six-year low of 3.34 per cent in March due to decline in prices of vegetables, eggs and protein-rich items, raising hope for a third rate cut by the RBI as it remains below the median target of four per cent.

Broken, Not Guilty?

What if the truth is buried beneath layers of trauma, power, and silence? Can justice survive?

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

There are plays, and then there are experiences that etch themselves into the psyche, SHADOWed etches. From the moment the first line is spoken, the atmosphere tightens. Something powerful has begun, and once it takes hold, it grips attention and refuses to loosen its hold.

The play compels a closer look at truths often pushed aside. Produced by Samar Sarila, an actor, writer and producer known for his work in both theatre and film, including the acclaimed Viceroy's House and Turning 30 and Vidushi Mehra, an acclaimed actress and theatre director who has also made

her mark in films like Raees and No One Killed Jessica, SHADOWed is a work of depth and relevance, confronting uncomfortable truths with skill and passion. In a world saturated with headlines and fleeting digital outrage, SHADOWed cuts through with startling clarity.

The courtroom becomes a battleground, not just for justice, but for sanity, vulnerability and memory. Inspired by the 1996 Hollywood classic *Primal Fear*, the production has been adapted for the Indian stage with precision and urgency, rooting itself in the emotionally charged backdrop of contemporary New Delhi. At its core is Aaryan, an 18-year-old, unnervingly calm, accused of murdering his influential uncle, Minister Siddhant Shah. The city reels at the crime, but the real uneasy lies within the trial. This is no standard legal drama. It is a question: why would someone so young commit such an act? And deeper still—did he?

Victor Roy (Samar Sarila), the defence attorney, arrives not only with arguments but with inner turmoil that simmers just beneath the surface. Battling his past while fighting for his clients

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

SHADOWed stands as a necessary conversation, a story that grips from the first moment and stays in the mind long after the final scene.

The cast delivers a space for collective reckoning. Theatre like this should not just be watched—it should be talked about, dissected, and remembered.

future, he commands the stage with quiet intensity. Opposing him is Jaya Anand (Vidushi Mehra), composed and firm, a prosecutor determined to uncover the truth. Between them stands Dr Vineeta Varma (Preeti Agarwal Mehta), a clinical psychiatrist whose analysis has the power to sway both the court and the conscience.

The writing is lean, powerful and emotionally resonant. The story pierces deep, asking: Can trauma rewrite memory? Is guilt ever truly clear? What lies beneath the silence of a teenager accused of murder?

Samar Sarila brings gravitas to Victor Roy, inhabiting the role with layered restraint. Vidushi Mehra, in a riveting performance, commands attention with her stillness and strength. Preeti Agarwal quiet power, never backing down, always calculating, yet never cold. Shivam Sahni is chillingly effective. His stillness is disarming. One moment evokes empathy, the next, doubt.

Every aspect of SHADOWed is crafted to focus on the raw emotional core of its characters. There is no softening of themes—sexual abuse, power dynamics, and mental health are addressed with honesty and courage. The audience is not handed easy conclusions. Instead, they are offered a mirror held up to society, asking: where do compassion and accountability meet?

This production is not comfortable. It is not predictable. And that is its strength. In a city known for its cultural offerings, this one rises high on the list. It is one of the most stirring productions seen on stage in recent times. This is the kind of theatre that shakes the ground it stands on.

SHADOWed | Performance Details
VENUE: Alliance Française, Lodhi Road, New Delhi
PUBLIC SHOWS: April 19, 20, 26 & 27, 2025
4:00 PM & 7:00 PM

A Visual that Sings stories



BY TEAM VIVA

There's something instinctive about the way music and art speak to us—wordless, yet deeply understood. Both stir emotion, trigger memory, and offer connection. When the two come together, the impact is immediate. *Bambai Se Aaya Mera Dost* captures this fusion with striking clarity, creating an exhibition that's as evocative as it is unforgettable.

Titled after the iconic Bollywood song, the show brings Mumbai's creative energy to New Delhi in full force. Curated as a collective voice, it brings together various galleries and artists, not competing, but collaborating to showcase works that explore identity, nostalgia, rebellion, and belonging.

The participating artists are varied, yet each brings a unique contribution that speaks to the pulse of Mumbai's dynamic art scene. Sameer Kulavoor's iconic cityscapes capture the essence of urban India, filled with vibrant and chaotic life.

Mithu Sen's uncompromising narratives explore identity and the human condition, while Saviya Lopes brings intimate textures and layered emotions that resonate deeply with the viewer. Each artwork converses with the next, creating a cohesive narrative that spans across

mediums, ideas, and emotions. This exhibition invites you to feel the stories behind it. Whether it's Gurjeet Singh's powerful, introspective works or Dhruvi Acharya's striking compositions, each piece adds a layer to the broader conversation on memory, history, and belonging. From the urban streets to intimate expressions of memory, the exhibition spans various artistic narratives. Artists like Tyler, Akshy Mahajan Sameer and SAGE bring forward works that reimagine their surroundings.

As gallery founder Sahil Arora puts it, this exhibition is "An opportunity for Mumbai's thriving art scene to make its presence felt in Delhi, strengthening the ties between our communities."

This art that resonates long after you've walked away. It's an opportunity to experience a dynamic cross-section of contemporary Indian art. The show reflects a new chapter for Method Delhi, an evolving platform for contemporary art, where collaboration is celebrated.



Erosion of History in Art forms

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Art exhibitions often provide an opportunity to experience the complex interplay of history, identity, and memory. *Kindred Dichotomies*, currently on view at Black Cube Gallery in Hauz Khas, New Delhi, is one such exhibition that invites visitors into a thought-provoking dialogue between two distinct artistic voices—Sudhanshu Sutar and Andrea Zucchi.

The show brings together works that explore the tension between past and present, offering a fresh perspective on historical imagery and cultural symbols.

Curated by Sanya Malik, *Kindred Dichotomies* stands out for its ability to highlight the contrasts and connections between the two artists despite their different backgrounds. Sudhanshu Sutar, hailing from Odisha, India, presents works deeply rooted in his personal and cultural history. His paintings focus on themes of lost royalty and shifting identities, drawing inspiration from the Kanika Palace, a structure once grand, now fading from memory. Sutar's compositions are highly staged, evoking the theatricality of Indian Natak, where figures are stripped of individuality to become symbols of broader concepts of power, kingship, and historical displacement.

As visitors move through the exhibition, Sutar's paintings stand out for their meditative quality. His use of archival photographs and surrealist undertones creates a sense of historical continuity, but it's the way he approaches these images that leaves an impression. The viewer is drawn into a narrative that speaks not only to India's royal past but also to the larger themes of memory, power, and identity that resonate across cultures.

In contrast, Andrea Zucchi's work brings a playful yet critical energy to the exhibition. Zucchi's engagement with 19th-century photographs is marked by an irreverent and almost surreal twist. The works



IT PROVIDES A SPACE WHERE HISTORY IS OBSERVED AND EXPERIENCED. BOTH THE ARTISTS INVITE THE VIEWER TO CONSIDER NOT JUST WHAT HISTORY IS, BUT HOW IT CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

question the authenticity of historical imagery and challenge the viewer to rethink the boundaries between the past and the present.

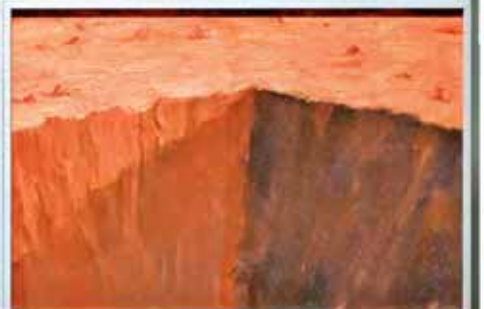
Zucchi's work doesn't simply appropriate the past; it transforms it, creating a disorienting but engaging reworking of historical narratives. The use of bright, almost garish colours and the layering of contemporary elements onto historical images offer a critique of how history is reproduced and recontextualised in the modern world. His art becomes a reflection on memory and the way images are altered and reinterpreted, often without consideration for their original context.

What unites the two artists in *Kindred Dichotomies* is their shared engagement with history—not as a fixed entity, but as a space for reinterpretation. While Sutar's works are grounded in a personal history that focuses on the fading grandeur of royalty, Zucchi's approach to historical imagery is more playful, almost irreverent. Together, they offer viewers a multifaceted look at how history is both remembered and reimagined. The exhibition is a reminder that the past is not static, but rather something that is constantly reshaped by the lens through which we view it.

For anyone interested in contemporary art that explores complex themes with depth and originality, this exhibition that should not be missed.

FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY AND SPACE

The exhibition explores memory, transformation and the collision of urban and personal spaces, says SAKSHI PRIYA



A walk through *MAGIC ERASE*, the solo exhibition by Hemant Gavankar at Art Centrix Space, is like entering a layered palimpsest of time, space, and fleeting memory. Curated by Sibdas Gupta and presented under the Art Centrix Painting Grant, the exhibition is an exploration of changing cityscapes and interior geographies, each frame marked by the rhythm of personal and urban transformation.

Gavankar, a visual artist and poet trained at Sir J. J. School of Art, presents his works as complex arrangements of memory, paintings that deliberately blur the boundaries of past and present, real and imagined. In works like *Memories of Water and Glass* and *Blasting and Other Images 2*, oil, charcoal, gouache, and pastels are used to great effect, juxtaposing fragments from different spatial and temporal planes.

One particularly striking piece, *Inauguration of Modern Temple and Other Images*, observes the collision of the sacred and the contemporary. A quadriptych on paper, it balances order and disarray, hinting at the strange dualities of belief and modern architecture. Similarly, *Qasam's Ginni Grandmom's Thumb and Land* and its studies unfold like intimate visual journals, quiet and unsettling in equal measure. The sense of distance and emotional fragility is visible.



LAST NIGHT, RENDERED IN ACRYLIC AND OIL ON PRIMED FABRIC, IS A COMPACT YET EVOCATIVE WORK THAT CAPTURES AN ATMOSPHERE OF QUIET MUSING. ITS INTIMATE SCALE DRAWS THE VIEWER IN, ALMOST AS IF OVERHEARING A WHISPERED MEMORY



Gavankar brings abstraction into deeply personal. His layering of mediums mirrors the disorderly nature of memory—partial, unpredictable, and fragmented. Works like *Memory of a Memory 3* and *The Lost Room* intensify this experience, presenting places that feel familiar yet unreachable—scenes glimpsed between waking and sleep.

There is an unmistakable contemporary urgency in his interrogation of public, private, and digital spaces. The exhibition's title, *MAGIC ERASE*, points to both disappearance and transformation, a quiet erasure of lines, boundaries, and certainty. Artist art resists finality, inviting viewers to observe, interpret, and reimagine.

The art is bold, unafraid of ambiguity, and intellectually engaging. It challenges conventional visual comfort, yet it is precisely this discomfort that provokes reflection. It is the kind of art that grows on the viewer, revealing it slowly, and layer by layer of deliberate art. This is not an exhibition one walks away from; it unsettles and stays with you.

RR desperately need win against LSG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

An inconsistent Rajasthan Royals (RR) will be desperate to plug the holes across departments and halt a three-match losing streak when they host Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) in the Indian Premier League (IPL) here on Saturday.

With just two wins from seven games, the Royals are languishing at eighth on the table and are into the contest on the back of a gut-wrenching Super Over defeat to Delhi Capitals.

As the league hits the halfway mark, they'll need to shake off the heartbreak quickly if they hope to upstage Rishabh Pant's men and climb out of the bottom half. Plagued by inconsistency in both batting and bowling, RR's campaign has struggled to find momentum. To make matters worse, skipper Sanju Samson suffered a side strain in the previous match and had to retire hurt, though he later said he was feeling "alright."

The Royals' batting, built around Indian mainstays, has mis-fired far too often, leaving the middle order exposed and under pressure.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, however, seems to have shaken off his rustiness with back-to-back half-centuries against Royal Challengers Bengaluru and DC. But it will have to be seen if he carries the momentum in Saturday's match.

Samson is yet to produce a defining knock, with the 66 he made in RR's first match against Sunrisers Hyderabad being his best so far. A lot will depend on his and Jaiswal's form regarding how RR fare



after losing the likes of Shardul Thakur, Avesh Khan, Digvish Rath and Ravi Bishnoi.

Riyan Parag and Dhruv Jurel have not made much contribution so far in the batting front and duo need to fire if RR have to post or chase down a big total.

Nitish Rana came back to form with a 51 against DC after the 81 he made against Chennai Super Kings last month, and he needs to carry on the momentum.

On the bowling front, Jofra Archer has slowly gotten into his groove.

But the Royals' attack as a whole has been toothless. Apart from Sandeep Sharma, their other bowlers have struggled to control the scoring rate.

LSG also head into Saturday's match

has shown some form with 63 off 49 balls against CSK, his first fifty in this IPL from seven matches, though in a losing cause.

LSG's bowling was their weakest link at the start of the competition with injuries to main pacers but made amends later thanks to some on and off performances from Avesh Khan, and Shardul Thakur.

India's fastest bowler Mayank Yadav has joined the squad after the last game but the team management is still awaiting his fitness certificate from the Centre of Excellence.

Mayank has been recuperating from multiple fitness issues including a lower back stress fracture.

Teams

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubham Dubey, Nitish Rana, Riyan Parag, Dhruv Jurel (w), Shimron Hetmyer, Jofra Archer, Maheesh Theekshana, Tushar Deshpande, Sandeep Sharma, Fazalqa Farooqi, Kunal Singh Rathore, Akash Madhwal, Kumar Kartikeya, Kwen Maphaka, Wanindu Hasaranga, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Ashok Sharma, Vaibhav Suryavanshi.

Lucknow Super Giants: Rishabh Pant (C&wk), David Miller, Aiden Markram, Aryan Juyal (wk), Himmat Singh, Matthew Breetzke, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Mitchell Marsh, Abdul Samad, Shahbaz Ahmed, Yuvraj Chaudhary, Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Arshin Kulkarni, Ayush Badoni, Shardul Thakur, Avesh Khan, Akash Deep, Manimaran Siddharth, Digvish Rath, Akash Singh, Shamar Joseph, Prince Yadav, Mayank Yadav, Ravi Bishnoi.

IPL: Delhi Capitals to take on Gujarat Titans today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

Mitchell Starc's mastery of death bowlers will be up against Mohammed Siraj's artistry when the high-flying Delhi Capitals (DC) take on an equally well-placed Gujarat Titans (GT) in a high-voltage top-of-the-table IPL clash here on Saturday. The Capitals sit pretty at the top with 10 points from six games, while the Titans trail close behind with eight from as many outings.

Confidence in the Delhi camp would be soaring after their dramatic Super Over win over Rajasthan Royals, another heist scripted under pressure with Starc at the heart of it. The Australian left-arm quick bowled three overs of pinpoint yorkers, including a nerve wracking Super Over, to turn the game on its head.

Having skipped the Champions Trophy to freshen up after the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Starc has returned to the IPL recharged and razor sharp.

With 10 wickets at an economy just over 10, he's led the DC pace unit featuring Mukesh Kumar and Mohit Sharma. If Starc can conjure another match-defining spell, it could be the edge that Delhi needs.

His battle with Gujarat Titans' top order, led by skipper Shubman Gill, the consistent Sai Sudharsan, and Ashes rival Jos Buttler, could prove pivotal.

So far, the trio has carried the bulk of the batting load, with at least one of them notching a half-century in every match.

The GT middle order, largely untested, faltered when finally called upon against

Lucknow Super Giants, resulting in a defeat. If Delhi can crack that top-order code early, the ripple effect could tilt the contest in their favour.

On the other hand, after an underwhelming Border-Gavaskar Trophy and missing India's Champions Trophy-winning campaign, Siraj used his time away from the game to iron out flaws and the results are showing.

Refreshed and raring, Siraj has emerged as the cornerstone of Gujarat Titans' bowling attack this season.

With his Test-match lengths and ability to generate movement off the deck, he has picked up 10 wickets at an economy of 8.50, particularly excelling in the Powerplay. Up against him will be Delhi's relatively inexperienced opening duo of Jake Fraser-McGurk, who has struggled for rhythm, and the promising Abhishek Porel.

The pair will have their work cut out not just against Siraj but also Prasad Krishna, who is enjoying a standout season.

Should Delhi's top order crumble early, the Capitals will look towards the experience of KL Rahul and Karun Nair to steady the ship. Axar Patel, who plays for Gujarat in the domestic circuit, too will be eager to make an impact at his home-ground, having rediscovered his rhythm with both bat and ball. Both teams also boast of high-quality spin arsenals.

While Gujarat have banked on the reliable duo of Sai Kishore and Rashid Khan, Delhi's standout performer has been Kuldeep Yadav, ably supported by the impressive Vipraj Nigam.

SRH need to adapt to tough surfaces: Vettori after loss to Mumbai Indians

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Urging his batters to suitably tweak their approach on "difficult" surfaces, Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) coach Daniel Vettori said they cannot expect belters at every venue and need to up their game after being outgunned by a wily Mumbai Indians (MI) in their Indian Premier League (IPL) clash here.

Mumbai Indians produced a perfect show on a tricky pitch here at the Wankhede Stadium which had assistance for spin and pace for the seamers, especially with the slow and short balls to win the contest by four wickets on Thursday.

Sunrisers Hyderabad could only post 162 for five after struggling to find their flow with the bat. MI pacers and right-arm off-spinner Will Jacks (2/14) set up the win.

"I feel like no one really has control over their surface, so there's a little bit of luck involved in terms of coming up against wickets that don't suit us," Vettori told the media after SRH failed to win another away game in this IPL.

SRH features big-hitters like Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen, Ishan Kishan and Nitish Reddy. Barring Abhishek (40 off 28 balls), and Klaasen (37 off 28 balls), the other batters could not make a noteworthy contribution.

"There has to be more to it from our

side that we have to adapt. We know that conditions like this exist in Chennai, sometimes (in) Ahmedabad. We're not expecting to go over around the country and come up on belters, so the ball's in our court to realise that," the former New Zealand spinner said.

Vettori said it was MI bowlers who made the job extremely tough for SRH batters in the first half of the game, especially in the middle overs.

It was a difficult surface. Mumbai Indians read the conditions exceptionally well. They really relied on that slow ball
— DANIEL VETTORI, SRH COACH

"It was just incredibly tough through those middle stages," he said.

"It was a difficult surface. Mumbai read the conditions exceptionally well. They really relied on that slow ball, but it was mainly effective because of their execution and there's some supreme exponents of it in (Jasprit) Bumrah and Trent Boult and even Hardik Pandya."

"The way they bowled, particularly through those middle stages, really stifled us. We were 66 for three through those 10 overs, and in these sort of conditions you probably need more than that," he added.

Jacks, who also scored 36 after an

impactful bowling show, acknowledged the pitch was tricky but his team's plans were clear.

"It was not what we have seen in the past here, but it was definitely still a good wicket. We felt when there was pace on the ball, we thought we could play our shots freely as long as we weren't trying to over-hit the ball," he said.

"I knew there was going to be a bit of spin assistance so as long as I was not floating the ball up there and bowling aggressively and bowling hard, using the wicket, that's what I was trying to do."

Jacks also revealed that MI spinner Karn Sharma suffered an injury to his finger webbing in the second half of the game. "He has got a slight finger-webbing issue. I'll be honest, I have not seen him but hopefully it's not too bad and he can bounce back quickly," Jacks said.

Jacks said the pitch did not change much from first to the second innings with SRH struggling to put bat on the ball but MI were not facing any such challenges given the nature of the surface.

"There was hold when people bowled slower balls into the wicket. There wasn't much dew either so I don't think there was massive change in conditions as such," he said.

"We executed well with the ball and I think we understood what we had to do with the bat," he added.

Shooter Shriyanka finishes eighth in women's 50m rifle 3P at ISSF World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lima

Paris Olympics shooter Shriyanka Sadangi finished eighth in the women's 50m rifle 3 positions (3P) final on the third day of the ISSF World Cup Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun stage here.

She became the latest Indian shooter on this double-legged South American sojourn to make the cut for a maiden individual World Cup final, but made the exit after the 10th shot of the standing position round, the 40th of the 45-shot final.

Sagen Maddalena of the USA, the silver medalist in the Paris Games, won the gold. Sagen's effort took the USA to the top of the medal tally with three golds and six medals. India was second at the end of the competition on day three on Thursday, with two gold medals and a silver and a bronze each. Indian shooters had a challenging day overall with none of them making the men's 3P final and also finding themselves with lots to do after the first round of qualifying in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol (RFP) event.

In the women's 3P as well, the Indians struggled after the first two kneeling and prone positions. But all three -- Shriyanka, Ashi Chouksey and previous World Cup gold winner Sift Kaur Samra -- picked up the pace admirably in the final standing position to make a dash for the qualifying mark. Shriyanka succeeded in taking sev-



enth with a solid 588, while Ashi finished stronger on accuracy than Sift, taking the ninth spot to the latter's 11th with both stopping at 587 and thereby missing out narrowly.

In the final, the Indian began well with a 10.5 as her first effort, but as the grind to the finish began in right earnest, Shriyanka ptered out. Her best chance was

when she had moved up to sixth with two more shots of the second Prone position remaining but returns of 9.8 and 9.3 effectively doused her challenge.

She closed with a 9.9 as her final shot to wrap with 400.7, bowing out alongside seventh placed Brazilian Geovana Meyer.

In the men's 3P, Aishwary Tomar, Niraj Kumar and Chain Singh finished at 17th, 18th and 19th respectively. The first two shooters shot identical scores of 587 to miss the last qualifying mark by a couple of points, while Chain shot 586.

There was also 25m action on the day with Anish, Vijayveer Sidhu and Gurpreet Singh all finishing the first day of qualifying in the men's rapid-fire pistol outside the top six qualifying mark.

They will need to be at their best in the second rapid-fire round on Saturday to get a shot at a medal.



Minister of Public Health Engineering of Assam Jayanta Mallabaruah inaugurating 5th All India Brahmaputra Squash Championship in Guwahati on Friday

Veer, Anahat enter semis of world squash championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kuala Lumpur

Indian squash players Veer Chotrani and Anahat Singh advanced to the semifinals of the World Championship Qualifying Event (Asia) after registering contrasting wins here on Friday.

Chotrani logged a come-from-behind win over home favourite Mohammad Syafiq Kamal in the men's event. The second seeded Indian prevailed 9-11 11-6 11-6 11-7 over his sixth-seeded opponent to make the last-four stage.

The 17-year-old Anahat, seeded fifth,

produced a dominant display, defeating Japan's Akari Midorikawa 11-1 11-7 11-5 in the women's quarterfinals.

She will take on eighth-seeded Helen Tang of Hong Kong in the semifinals on Saturday. Tang had beaten India's Tanvi Khanna 11-5 11-6 10-12 11-9 in the quarterfinals.

Khanna had upstaged top seed N Ching Cheng of Hong Kong in her previous match.

The winners of the tournament will qualify for the world championships scheduled in Chicago from May 9 to 17.

I have not lost hope: Max

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jeddah

Ahead of Sunday's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix this Formula 1 season is looking like McLaren vs McLaren. Still, defending champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull says he has not lost hope. McLaren drivers Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri are the only one to consistently have the pace through the first four rounds of the championship.

Norris has a three-point lead but admits he is not at his best, while Piastri is the driver with momentum after winning in Bahrain last week. Ferrari, Red Bull and Mercedes have all their had their moments, but none has been a consistent challenger, as McLaren's 58-point constructors' championship lead shows.

Max Verstappen is the only non-McLaren driver to win a Grand Prix this season but in Bahrain he was struggling so much that Red Bull motorsport adviser Helmut Marko said he was concerned Verstappen might consider his future. Verstappen said this week he was not considering the championship picture this early in the season.

"I am not thinking about that. I just go race by race," Verstappen said. "I think at the moment, of

course, we are not the quickest. So then naturally, it is very tough to try to fight for a championship, but it's still a very long road... I am hopeful that we can still improve things and we will see what we get." Two-time champion Fernando Alonso dampened speculation Verstappen could seek to join his team, Aston Martin, after Red Bull car designer Adrian Newey made that move last year.

Asked if he'd welcome being Verstappen's teammate, Alonso said Thursday: "Yes, but it's unlikely to happen. Very unlikely." Alonso's current teammate is Lance Stroll, son of team owner Lawrence Stroll. Busy schedule Jeddah hosts the fifth race in six weeks in a hectic start to the season, which stays at a record 24 races. There's a little respite after Saudi Arabia, with two weeks till the next race in Miami. "I think it's on the upper end of the limit. It feels like race 10 already," said Williams driver Alex Albon, adding it's especially tough on mechanics and other crew members. "As drivers, we travel better than everyone else in the paddock. We stay in better hotels than everyone else in the paddock — it's just a function of being in a privileged position."

With mechanics... These are people with families. These are the people that really struggle."

INDIA SENDS SQUAD FOR ASIAN U-15, U-17 BOXING TOURNEY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India has fielded a 56-member squad for the Asian U-15 & U-17 Boxing Championships being held in Amman, Jordan. This is the first event organised by Asian Boxing, endorsed by both the Olympic Council of Asia and the newly-formed World Boxing.

The standout names in the U-17 boys' squad include Sahil Duhan and Devansh, who clinched silver and bronze respectively at the 2024 Asian Junior Championship, as well as Tikam Singh, who is the SGFI 2024 gold medalist. On the girls' side, Samiksha Singh, Anshika, and Khushi Chand were among the medal winners at the 2024 Asian School Boys and Girls Boxing Championships in Al Ain.

The U-15 lineup features Ravi Sihag, a bronze medalist from the Asian School Boys Championship in Al Ain in 2024, as well as the 2024 sub-junior national girls boxing champion (64-67 kg) Trushna Mohite. The team was selected by the World Boxing-formed Interim Committee, chaired by former Boxing Federation of India president Ajay Singh.

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Office of the Engineer-in-Chief, Water Resources, Secha Sadan, Bhubaneswar
Email Address: cemch.ecicwr.od@gmail.com
e-Procurement Notice - Bid Identification No. - CEM/MDC- 04/2025-26

- Name of the Work : Mechanical Gate Works
- No. of Works : 01 (One)
- Category of executors : SSI Units registered under DIC/ NSIC/ MSME for Irrigation Shutters / Hydro mechanical gates.
- Bid Identification No. : CEM / MDC - 04/ 2025-26
- Estimated Cost : Rs. 26,68,432.00
- Period of Completion : 02 (Two) calendar months.
- Date & time of availability of bid documents in the Portal : From dt.21.04.2025 (10.00 AM) to dt.02.05.2025(5.30 PM)
- Last date/ time for receipt of bid In the Portal : dt. 02.05.2025 (up to 5.30 PM)
- Date and Place of opening of Bid : dt.03.05.2025 (12.00 Noon onwards in the O/O the undersigned)
- Name of the Officer inviting bid : Chief Engineer, Mechanical, O/O the E.I.C, Water Resources, Odisha, Bhubaneswar

Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. Any further issue of Addenda/ Corrigenda/ Cancellation Notice shall be uploaded in the aforesaid website only.
Chief Engineer, Mechanical
O/o - Engineer-in-Chief,
Secha Sadan, Bhubaneswar

OIPR-32520/110039/2526

AFFIDAVIT
By virtue of an affidavit before the Executive Magistrate (K), Phulbani I, Sanjukta Dash aged about 47 years, W/O Bijayananda Dash of Gopal sahi, PO/PS Phlbani, Dist- Kandhamal do hereby declare that I have changed my surname from Sanjukta Ratha to Sanjukta Dash as per my husband's surname. That Sanjukta Dash and Sanjukta Ratha is one and same person for all future purposes.
Sd/-
Sanjukta Dash

AFFIDAVIT
I, Biranchi Pattanaik, S/o Late Dhruva Charan Pattanaik, resident of At/P.O. Santhapada, P.S. Talcher, Dist. Angul, Odisha, PIN- 759104 do hereby declare by virtue of this affidavit No-53 dtd. 17.4.2025 & affidavit No-51 dtd. 17.4.2025 respectively that my deceased father shall be known as DHRUBA CHARAN BEHERA @ PATTANAİK & my deceased mother shall be known as DUKHI BEHERA @ PATTANAİK for all future purposes.

ODISHA HYDRO POWER CORPORATION LTD.
OFFICE OF THE SENIOR GENERAL MANAGER (ELECTRICAL),
BALIEMA HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT,
BALIEMA HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT,
AT/POST: BALIEMA, DIST. MALKANGIRI, PIN-764051 (ODISHA)
E-mail: segmh.baliema@odisha.gov.in / segmh.baliema@gmail.com

e-Procurement Notice
NOTICE INVITING TENDER NO. BHEP/03/2025-26 DATED 14.04.2025
The Unit Head, Baliema Hydro Electric Project, Balmila, Dist- Malkangiri invites percentage rate bids in double cover system i.e. Cover I (Technical Bid) & Cover II (Price bid) for the work through e-procurement from eligible contractors as detailed in the table below:

Sl. No.	Name of the Work	Approx. Estimated cost in Rs.	EMD in Rs.	Class of Contractor	Cost of bid documents in Rs.	Period of Completion
01	Repair of cable trench with replacement of damaged RCC slabs with new RCC slabs from Power House to Valve House, BHEP, Baliema	35,98,575.00	36,000.00	'B' & 'C' class Civil Contractors registered with the state Govt./Central Govt./MES/ Railways	6,000/- + GST @ 18% = 7,080/-	120 days

Availability of bid document in the portal: From 10:00 Hrs of 21.04.2025 to 05.05.2025 (Up to 12:00 Hrs)
Last date & time of submission of bid: Up to 12:00 Hrs of 05.05.2025
The date & Time of opening of the bid: 12:00 Hrs onwards of 06.05.2025
(Only Technical bid)

Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>
Unit Head,
BHEP, Baliema

OIPR-64019/110079/2526