



India seeks Britain's response on Rahul's citizenship

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ New Delhi

The Centre has written to the UK Government seeking details about claims that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had British citizenship, the Allahabad High Court was told on Monday. After the submission, the Lucknow bench of the High Court granted time to the Central Government till May 5 to place before it the outcome of a representation moved against the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, seeking cancellation of his 2024 Lok Sabha election over claims that he had British citizenship.

A bench of Justices A R Masoodi and Rajiv Singh passed the order while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by S Vignesh Shishir, a BJP worker from Karnataka. While hearing the PIL on November 25, the court sought information from the central government regarding its decision on the representation of the petitioner. Deputy Solicitor General SB Pandey informed the court on Monday that acting on the petitioner's representation, the Ministry concerned had written to the UK Government seeking details about Gandhi's alleged British citizenship and hence the government needed more time to take a final

decision on the petitioner's representation. The central government had earlier also sought more time in this regard. In the PIL, BJP worker Vignesh Shishir, the petitioner has claimed that he has documents and some emails of the British government which prove that Rahul Gandhi is a British citizen, and due to this, he is ineligible to contest elections in India and cannot hold the post of a Lok Sabha member. The petitioner also said that he sent complaints twice to the competent authority regarding Rahul Gandhi's alleged dual citizenship, but no action was taken by them. On March 26, In BJP leader

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Subramanian Swamy's petition, Union Home Ministry informed Delhi High Court that probe on Rahul Gandhi's petition is under consideration. In April 2019, MHA had issued show cause notice to Rahul Gandhi on Subramanian Swamy's complaint

showing British company records, where Rahul declared himself as British citizen. Rahul had floated company named as Backops in London in 2002 and till 2009 in company registry he claimed as British Citizen and London resident. The petitioner also said that he sent complaints twice to the competent authority regarding Rahul Gandhi's alleged dual citizenship, but no action was taken by them.

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Modi, Vance discuss BTA, strategic ties

RAHUL DATTA ■ New Delhi

India and the US on Monday discussed the entire gamut of their bilateral ties and ways to further enhance strategic ties during talks here between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vice President J D Vance. They expressed satisfaction at the progress made in the trade pact. Parleys were held in the backdrop of ongoing negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement to address various issues including tariff and market access. Modi also hosted a dinner for the visiting dignitary.

In their talks, Prime Minister Modi and Vice President Vance also exchanged views on various regional and global issues of mutual interest.

A statement by Prime Minister's Office (PMO) after the talks said they welcomed progress in the India-US Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) and efforts towards enhancing cooperation in energy, defence, strategic technologies.

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Prime Minister Modi fondly recalled his visit to Washington D.C. in January and his fruitful discussions with President Trump, which laid down the roadmap for



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting with US Vice President JD Vance

PTI

close cooperation between India and the U.S., leveraging the strengths of Make America Great Again (MAGA) and Viksit Bharat 2047, the statement said. Both of them reviewed and positively

assessed the progress in various areas of bilateral cooperation. They welcomed the significant progress in the negotiations for a mutually beneficial India-US.

World mourns death of Pope Francis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lyon

Tributes to Pope Francis instantly poured in from around the world from presidents to people of all walks of life on Monday after the Vatican announced the pontiff's death at age 88. President Emmanuel Macron of France, a country that is largely Roman Catholic, focused on the pope's impact on the church, writing on X that "From Buenos Aires to Rome, Pope Francis wanted the Church to bring joy and hope to the poorest. For it to unite humans among themselves, and with nature. May this hope forever outlast him."

US Vice President JD Vance, who on Easter Sunday met with the pope before travelling on to India, wrote on X on Monday that his "heart goes out" to the millions of Christians who loved him, and said: "I was happy to see him yesterday, though he was obviously very ill."

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, who was one of the few official visitors to see Francis during his recent hospitalization, alluded to the pope's personal comfort and advice for her, saying "I had the privilege of enjoying his friendship, his counsel and his teachings, which never failed me, not even in times of trial and suffering."

Francis' death, she said, "deeply saddens us, as we are saying goodbye to a great man and a great shepherd." European

PM CONDONES POPE'S DEATH

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday condoled the passing of Pope Francis and said he would always be remembered as a beacon of compassion, humility and spiritual courage by millions across the world.

"Deeply pained by the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis. In this hour of grief and remembrance, my heartfelt condolences to the global Catholic community. Pope Francis will always be remembered as a beacon of compassion, humility and spiritual courage by millions across the world," Modi said in a social media post. "From a young age, he devoted himself towards realising the ideals of Lord Christ. He diligently served the poor and down-trodden. For those who were suffering, he ignited a spirit of hope," he said.

Modi fondly recalled his meetings with the pontiff and said he was greatly inspired by his commitment to inclusive and all-round development. "His affection for the people of India will always be cherished."

May his soul find eternal peace in God's embrace," the Prime Minister said. Modi met Pope Francis for the first time when he visited Italy for the G20 summit. The meeting took place at the Vatican when the world was still coping with Covid.

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen recalled the pontiff as an inspiration for the entire world, not just Christians. "He inspired millions, far beyond the

Catholic Church, with his humility and love so pure for the less fortunate," she tweeted. "My thoughts are with all who feel this profound loss. May they find solace in the idea that Pope Francis' legacy will continue to guide us all toward a more just, peaceful and compassionate world."

As crowds flocked to St. Peter's Square, well-wishers worldwide laid flowers at churches — many of whose bells tolled in honour of Francis, including at the recently reopened Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Israeli President Issac Herzog, whose role is mostly ceremonial, offered condolences and called Francis a man of "deep faith and boundless compassion."

"I truly hope that his prayers for peace in the Middle East and for the safe return of the hostages will soon be answered," Herzog posted on X, referring to the pope's repeated calls for an end to the war and the release of captives held by Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Francis had repeatedly criticized Israel's wartime conduct and said allegations of genocide, which Israel has adamantly denied, should be investigated.

On social media, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez hailed Francis for focusing on the world's most vulnerable; Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk posted a photo of himself on X with the pope, both smiling, and called Francis a "kind, warm and compassionate person."

CM Majhi holds grievance hearing in Sambalpur

RAJEEV RATHAN / NIMAI CHARAN SAHU ■ Bhubaneswar/Sambalpur

The entire Odisha administrative machinery descended on Sambalpur on Monday as Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, accompanied by ten Cabinet Ministers and senior bureaucrats, held a public grievance hearing at the Sambalpur Municipal Corporation office. The event marked a significant departure from routine governance bringing the government directly to the people, rather than the other way around.

This was the 10th edition of the State Government's grievance redressal programme, previously held only in Bhubaneswar. For the first time, the Chief Minister took the initiative out of the capi-



tal, underscoring his government's commitment to

decentralised and people-centric governance.

The CM and his team arrived in Sambalpur on Sunday

evening and offered prayers at the Maa Samaleswari temple before Monday's proceedings.

Addressing the gathering, Majhi described the occasion as a milestone in Odisha's democratic journey. "This initiative is not just about receiving complaints; it's about restoring trust between the people and the government," he said. "Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi has appreciated this model, and we draw inspiration from his guidance."

The CM added that these regional grievance hearings are being designed to empower local administration and ensure swift, on-the-spot resolution of public concerns.

"The previous regime ignored the voices of the poor and marginalised. Our approach is different and we are going to

every district, every corner of Odisha," he said.

Data from earlier hearings held in Bhubaneswar showed encouraging outcomes. Of the 9,377 grievances received, nearly 88% have already been resolved with the remaining cases under process.

On Monday, around 1,000 individuals had registered online to participate while about 400 grievances were submitted through offline channels.

In a significant move under the Chief Minister's Relief Fund (CMRF), Rs 19.5 lakh was sanctioned to 18 individuals for medical treatment.

Officials were directed to act promptly on all grievances raised during the hearing. The Chief Minister also hinted at holding similar camps in other regions soon.

J'suguda hottest in State at 44.8 degrees

Alert issued for 10 districts

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Heat wave conditions prevailed in some parts of Odisha as the maximum temperature crossed 41 degrees Celsius at four places in the State by Monday afternoon.

As per the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) the western Odisha town of Jharsuguda was the hottest place in the State with maximum temperature of 44.8 degrees.

Sambalpur recorded the maximum temperature of 42.6 degrees.

The maximum temperature was 41.8 degrees at Hirakud in Sambalpur and 41.2 degrees at Rourkela in Sundargarh district, said the Regional Office of the IMD here.

The mercury hovered around 36 to 37 degrees in places like Keonjhar, Chandbali and Baleswar.

Though the capital city Bhubaneswar recorded the maximum temperature at 35.2 degrees, due to high humidity it felt like 45 degree.

However, the IMD said the heat wave condition may intensify and the maximum temperature is likely to cross 42 degrees in ten districts of the State.

"Maximum temperature (day temperature) is very likely to rise by 3 to 5 degrees during the next three days. Maximum temperature is likely to be above 42 degrees over the districts of Angul, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Sundargarh, Balangir, Subarnapur, Boudh, Bargarh, Kalahandi and Nuapada," the IMD said.

Gold prices hit record highs in Bhubaneswar

- 24-carat crosses Rs 98,000-mark per 10gm
- Silver price also soars

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Gold prices in India continue their upward trajectory, reaching new record highs on Monday. In Bhubaneswar, the price of 22-carat gold has crossed the Rs 90,000 mark per 10 grams for the first time, trading at Rs 90,150, a steep rise of Rs 700 from the previous day.

Meanwhile, 24-carat pure gold has also witnessed a surge, touching Rs 98,350 per 10 grams.

This surge in gold prices has been mirrored by a similar rise in silver. The price of silver per kilogram has increased by Rs 1,000, bringing it close to Rs 1,11,000 per kg - another historic high in the

bullion market.

Experts attribute the consistent rise in precious metal prices to multiple global and domestic factors. International tensions, fluctuating stock markets, high inflation concerns, and a weakening rupee have driven investors toward safer investment options like gold and silver.

With the wedding season approaching and demand peaking, prices are expected to remain volatile and possibly rise further.

Jewellers in the city have reported a slowdown in walk-in customers due to the skyrocketing prices, although investment-driven purchases have remained steady.

"People are still buying, but



they are cautious. Many are waiting to see if prices stabilize," said a local jewellery shop owner in Bhubaneswar's Unit-1 market.

Financial advisors, meanwhile, suggest that those looking to invest in gold should consider gold bonds or digital gold options to avoid premiums and making charges associated with physical purchases. With no immediate signs of global economic easing, the upward trend in gold and silver prices is likely to continue, setting new benchmarks in the days to come.

Civil servants are India's 'steel frame'

Says CM on Civil Services Day

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

On the occasion of Civil Services Day 2025 on Monday, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi paid glowing tributes to civil servants, describing them as the "steel frame" of India's development journey. Recalling Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's famous remark, the CM said civil servants continue to uphold the administrative foundation of the nation and drive progress through their dedication.

In a video message during a State-level event organised by the Centre for Modernising Government Initiatives (CMGI) at the Lok Seva Bhavan, the CM said, "Civil Services are the backbone of India's governance and growth.



Your intellectual capital, dedication and sincerity form the bridge between the government and the people."

Majhi underscored his government's commitment to people-centric governance and urged civil servants to focus on

local-level solutions for local problems. "This is a government of the people. We are duty-bound to ensure that no one is deprived of housing, clean drinking water, electricity, or connectivity," he said.

Emphasising the need for an

efficient coordination between political and administrative leadership, the CM said the dream of a prosperous Odisha by 2036 can be realised through collaborative efforts.

Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja and senior officials of

the state government were present. A special video reflecting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat was also screened, highlighting the critical role of civil servants in translating the aspirations of citizens into reality.

Minor found murdered in Delanga, relative held

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

In a chilling case that has left locals in shock, the body of an 11-year-old boy who had gone missing from Ratanpur village under Delang block in Puri district was recovered from a septic tank on Monday. Police arrested a close relative in connection with the murder.



recovered the child's body from the toilet tank of a house belonging to Prabhakar Sahu, a cousin of the victim's father.

Initial forensic observations indicated that Ashirbad was killed the day he went missing. Disturbingly, it was found that his private parts had been mutilated, pointing to the brutal nature of the crime.

Police said the accused had allegedly murdered the boy and concealed the body in the septic tank before fleeing the village. He returned after four days, raising suspicions among neighbours and family members. Acting on specific leads, the police detained Prabhakar, who reportedly confessed to the crime during interrogation.

While the exact motive remains under investigation,

police have not ruled out sexual intent behind the killing. The body has been sent for postmortem, and further forensic tests are being conducted.

The incident has sparked widespread outrage with villagers demanding the harshest punishment for the accused. "It is hard to believe that someone from within the family could commit such a horrific act," said a local resident.

Police said a case has been registered under relevant sections 302, 201, 377 and POCSO Act. "We are committed to ensuring a watertight case and swift justice for the victim," said a senior police official.

Doctors issue one-month ultimatum to meet demands



restructuring, health insurance coverage, transparent transfer policies and extending benefits to dentists and ad-hoc doctors, contractual service periods of ad-hoc doctors in promotions, transparent transfers, prioritising doctors in KBK regions for relocation, health insurance for government doctors, authorising the Director of Health Services to handle appraisals, not district Collectors.

If the demands are unmet, the OMSA will begin boycotting outpatient services on Sundays and holidays starting May 20, limiting work to emergencies. Additionally, it also stated that escalation to mass resignations is slated for June 20.

OMSA president Dr Kishore Chandra Mishra also mentioned that the phased approach allows the government time to act while safeguarding public healthcare.

Over 5,000 doctors could resign, destabilising Odisha's healthcare infrastructure, even as the OMSA argues that reforms like DACP would reduce attrition, improve rural service quality and ensure fair career growth.

Threaten mass resignation

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Medical Services Association (OMSA) has issued a one-month ultimatum to the State Government threatening mass resignations and work boycotts if seven key demands are not addressed. The decision followed a Sunday general body meeting here attended by doctors from across Odisha.

The demands focus on career progression, welfare and systemic reforms. Doctors sought immediate implementation of the Dynamic Assured Career Progression (DACP) scheme, a system already adopted by 18 States, to ensure timely promotions and salary hikes.

Other issues include cadre

BJD meet discusses new executive body formation

Party dismisses speculation of internal rift

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

In a significant political development ahead of a possible reshuffle within the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), a high-level meeting of senior party leaders was convened on Monday at Naveen Niwas, the official residence of party president Naveen Patnaik.

The meeting was chaired by BJD president Patnaik himself and was attended by key senior leaders including Debi Prasad Mishra, Pranab Prakash Das, Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak, Pratap Deb, and Arun Sahoo.

Sources indicate that the



meeting was primarily focused on final deliberations regarding the formation of the new executive committee of the party. With the announcement of the 81-member list of office bearers expected soon, the BJD supremo is holding

detailed discussions with senior leaders to ensure a balanced and strategically composed leadership team.

After the meeting, senior leader Arun Sahoo addressed the media and shared insights, stating, "The decisions regarding the executive body will be taken in phases. Ultimately, Naveen Babu will decide who will hold which position in the party." He further added that "there is no internal conflict or rebellion within the party," dismissing any speculation of internal dissent or factionalism.

This strategic gathering comes at a crucial juncture when opposition parties are actively reorganizing and preparing for the upcoming rural elections. Political observers

view the BJD meeting as a

move to strengthen internal unity and sharpen the party's focus on organizational efficiency.

Notably, some senior BJD leaders also took veiled digs at the BJP, particularly pointing to the delay in their selection of a new State party president. The remarks are being interpreted as the BJD's attempt to project stability and decisiveness in contrast to the opposition's current leadership uncertainty.

As the State watches closely, the announcement of the new executive committee is likely to have far-reaching implications on BJD's future strategies and its positioning in the political landscape of Odisha.

Bhubaneswar case

3 held for duping aspirants on pretext of jobs in Israel

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Commissionerate police have arrested three persons on charges of duping several aspirants on the pretext of providing them employment opportunities in Israel.

The arrested were identified as Babulahari Gouda, a resident of Ganjam district. The other two are Mahesh Ramchandra Lokhande and Kiran Shashikant Ghumre, both residents of Mumbai.

According to reports, the trio had circulated fake advertisements on social media and used forged documents resembling official notifications from the Ministry of Labour and Employment to mislead the job-seekers.

Initially, they collected Rs 5,000 in advance from the aspirants and asked them to pay

Rs 70,000 upon issuing (fake) job offer letters.

Acting on a complaint by Protector of Emigrants, Bhubaneswar (Ministry of External Affairs) on April 20, a case was registered regarding a fake interview being conducted in a hotel under Kharvel Nagar police station in Bhubaneswar for alleged recruitment to various posts in Israel.

Based on the complaint, the police arrested three accused. The investigation revealed the accused were neither authorized by the Ministry of External Affairs nor by any registered recruitment agency.

The police also seized resumes of several candidates, forged documents and four mobile phones from possession of the accused. Further investigations are ongoing.

Commissionerate police hold blood donation camp



420 units collected

PNS ■ Cuttack

The Commissionerate police organised a mega blood donation camp on Sunday at the Cuttack Sadar police station under the Cuttack Urban Police District (UPD).

Due to the unprecedented response from the donors belonging to various social organisations, educational institutions and locals of the Sadar PS, Bayalish Mouza PS and Baranga PS area, 420 units of blood were collected.

Doctors and supporting staff of Red Cross and SCB Medical College Hospital,

Cuttack conducted the blood donation camp and cooperated in making it possible.

The senior police officials said blood is essential for helping people of all ages who suffer from diseases, disasters and accidents. Blood donation saves lives and makes the community safe.

ADCP Debadutta Kar,

ADCP Manas Garnaik, ACP Zone IV Amitabh Mohapatra, Sadar PS IIC Omm Prakash Pattanaik IIC, Baranga PS IIC Debendra Biswal II and Bayalish Mouza PS IIC Girish Moharana Bayalish Mouza motivated the donors and coordinated for making the blood donation camp possible.

World Art Day Vedanta promotes tribal art heritage in K'handi



PNS ■ Bhawanipatna

Observing the World Art Day, Vedanta celebrated the rich artistic heritage of Odisha by organising a cultural event at Eklavya Model Residential School at Thummul Rampur in Kalahandi district.

Aimed at fostering creativity and encouraging traditional art among the school students, such an initiative was undertaken by Vedanta's Sijimali Bauxite team.

The highlight of the event was a hands-on workshop on Saura art, one of the oldest tribal art forms of Odisha, conducted by the faculty members of Kalahandi College of Art and Research.

More than 120 participating students displayed their latent talents on the origin, symbolism and techniques of Saura art by deepening their understanding of the region's indigenous culture and its relevance in today's world.

Speaking about the initiative, Vedanta Bauxite Mines Chief Operating Officer (CEO) Nitin Tiwari said, "Our community development efforts are deeply rooted in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of the regions we operate in. Through events like these, we aim to inspire the younger generation to embrace their roots while exploring their creative potential."

In Jagatsinghpur Tension at DHH after pregnant woman's death

Kin allege medical negligence, police highhandedness

PNS ■ Jagatsinghpur

Tension prevailed at the District Headquarters Hospital (DHH) on Monday morning following the death of a pregnant woman. The deceased was identified as Rashmita Nath.

Sources said that the husband of the deceased Deepak Dalei, has raised severe allegations of medical negligence against the doctors and medical staff of the hospital. He also accused the local police of high-handedness in the matter.

Relatives of the deceased eventually staged a demonstration by placing the body in front of the hospital and refused every attempt to vacate the premises.

According to medical reports, Nath was four months pregnant when she suddenly fell

ill on Sunday night. Initially, she was taken to Atharabanki Health Centre, but was later transferred to the DHH. However, her condition worsened and she passed away. In contrast, her husband alleged that his wife had suffered a miscarriage and was brought to Jagatsinghpur for cautionary care.

He alleged that his wife was in stable condition and responded normally, but passed away unexpectedly while under treatment. Dalei has since maintained that medical negligence led to his wife's death and demanded justice.

He also alleged that the medical staffs hid the fact that his wife was dead and instead asked him to arrange an ambulance and shift her to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack. Further, he claimed that the DHH staffs called the police, who, instead of listening to his pleas, beat him black and blue. However, the DHH authorities or police have not commented on the allegations.

SP to fight for caste census, backward class quota

Party to contest 2027 rural polls also

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

For a caste-based census and social justice for the backward communities in Odisha, the Samajwadi Party (SP) will strengthen its organisational position from the grassroots level and in the upcoming 2027 panchayat elections, the party will field its candidates from all over Odisha under the leadership of State president Shiv Hathi Yadav.

Hathi alleged that the double engine government of Odisha by BJP has looted Odisha by transferring the mines, water and various public sector enterprises to various private companies in the past 11 months. The Samajwadi Party strongly op-



poses this and at the same time, it will fight for the rights of the backward classes in Odisha by ensuring that they get due reservation in job and education as per their population strength in the State, Hathi said.

The rule of the upper classes has been going on in Odisha

for many years. Those who have never taken any steps for the interests of the backward classes, they are now shedding crocodile's tear for the deprived sections. The Samajwadi Party Odisha State Committee, under the leadership Hathi will continue its struggle for the constitutional

rights and social justice of 54% OBC or backward classes, he stated further.

He added that after party national president Akhilesh Yadav's recent visit to Odisha, the State unit has got energised; and in coming days, the SP will play a decisive role in Odisha politics.

In Nabarangpur Man kills wife, hides body before absconding

PNS ■ Nabarangpur
In a gruesome incident, a man allegedly killed his wife at Haladi village under the Chandahandi police station in Nabarangpur district, concealed her body in a box cot and absconded from the village.



Chandahandi police station. Acting on the complaint, a police team reached the spot and broke open the locked

house. Upon entering, they discovered Anita's body hidden in a box cot. A forensic team was also roped in for fur-

ther investigation and evidence collection.

As per initial reports, the motive behind the murder remains unclear. The police have launched a manhunt to trace Dushmant, who is currently on the run.

The incident has left the local community in shock, with villagers expressing their disbelief over such a heinous act occurring in their midst. The victim's family is demanding justice and strict action against the accused.

However, the motive behind the crime was yet to be ascertained.

In Bhubaneswar Kalinga Super Cup football begins

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar
The much-anticipated Kalinga Super Cup football tournament got underway on Sunday night at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar, drawing an enthusiastic crowd and marking the beginning of a high-octane sporting spectacle that will continue till May 3.



In the tournament opener, Kerala Blasters FC secured a convincing victory over East Bengal FC, kicking off the championship on a thrilling note. The match showcased the energy and competitiveness expected from the country's premier football clubs.

Deputy Chief Minister Pravat Parida, Sports and Youth Services Minister Suryabanshi Suraj and Ekamra MLA Babu Singh were present at the stadium to inaugurate the event. The leaders extended their greetings to the players and applauded their dedication, adding to the festive atmosphere of the day.

Thousands of football fans thronged the stadium, lending their voices in support of their favorite teams. The packed stands and vibrant cheers reflected the growing popularity of football in Odisha and set the tone for what promises to be an exciting tournament.

Police torture in Bhadrak NHRC asks State Govt to compensate Dalit woman

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar
The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has directed the Chief Secretary, Odisha, to release compensation of Rs 10,000 to a Dalit woman, Mita Sethi of Bhadrak district, a victim of police beating and torture.

The NHRC also asked the CS to submit compliance report of payment along with proof of payment within six weeks.

The NHRC passed the order acting on a petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer and rights activist Radhakanta Tripathy. In the petition, he cited the incident which occurred on June 25, 2024, wherein Mita was ruthlessly assaulted by the police officials in the premises of Chandabali police station.

The incident occurred when the kid of the woman was playing with the shoe cover during which the shoe cover fell in front of the police station. On-duty Constable namely Ravi Shethy asked the woman to pick up the shoe cover. However, when the woman did not obey telling him that she was not his servant, she was slapped by the accused Constable Ravi who was later joined by two others including one ASI. The incident was captured in the mobile by the nearby residents and went viral in social media.

It can be seen in the video that the woman is being pulled by her legs and thrown to the ground by the policemen. They also assaulted the woman with plastic pipe. Tripathy requested an independent and impartial investigation of the incident with legal action against the accused police officials, psycho-social counselling and adequate compensation to the victim women etc.

Considering the petition, the NHRC first sought for Action Taken Report (ATR) from the SP, Bhadrak. The ATR submitted by the SP stated that both the victim woman and the police Constable are accused in two different FIRs for their conducts.

The NHRC perused the reports and vide proceeding dated 12.11.2024 issued show cause notice to the CS.

Bhadrak: 4 held over political violence

PNS ■ Bhadrak
Police on Monday arrested four persons in connection with a clash between two groups at Talakanpada village under Tihidi block in Bhadrak district on April 16, over political rivalry.

Police had registered cases from both sides and initiated an investigation. A forensic team, along with local police, reached the spot to collect evidence.

Following the investigation, four persons from both groups were arrested and subsequently produced in court. Police officials said that a further probe is underway to identify and apprehend others involved in the violent episode.

Meanwhile, security has been stepped up in the area to prevent any further escalation.

Youth shot dead in Dhenkanal; 2 held

PNS ■ Dhenkanal / Brahmapur
Another injured in attack in Ganjam

A youth was shot dead by miscreants on Sunday night at Karigar Sahi under the Town police station in Dhenkanal. The deceased was identified as Maheswar Behera alias Titu.

The attack took place around 11 pm while Titu was returning home. A group of miscreants suddenly opened fire on him near his house, with two bullets hitting him in the leg. As he collapsed on the spot, the attackers allegedly dragged him to another location and brutally killed him by smashing his head with a stone.

Hearing gunshots, Titu's wife rushed out of the house, but by then, the attackers had fled the scene. Locals immediately rescued him and rushed him to the District Headquarters Hospital, where doctors declared him brought dead.

Police have started an investigation into the incident and suspect previous enmity as the possible motive behind the murder. So far, two men have been arrested in connection with the incident.

Titu's wife alleged that a month ago, the same miscreants had attacked him and fractured his hand.

In another incident, a youth was critically injured after he was allegedly attacked over previous enmity at Sana Ustapada village under the

Kabisuryanagar police station in Ganjam district on Sunday.

The incident occurred during a wedding procession, when a heated argument led to the victim being attacked with a sharp weapon.

The victim, identified as Banti, suffered severe injuries, with around 90 percent of his palm being severed.

Later, Banti was shifted from Kodala to Brahmapur and subsequently to Cuttack after his condition deteriorated.

While the exact motive behind the attack was yet to be ascertained, initial investigations by the Kabisuryanagar police indicated that a past feud may have led to the incident.

Pradhan unveils OVO egg processing unit in B'ngir



SUDHIR MISHRA ■ Balangir
Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday formally inaugurated the OVO Egg processing plant at Balangir after laying foundation stone of Kendriya Vidyalaya at Patnagarh and Titilagarh.

Known for its best quality, premium and nutritious eggs, OVO Farm Private Limited is one of the most advanced farms with fully automated state-of-the-art technology. The farm was one of the official suppliers at FIFA World Cup held in Qatar in 2022.

Earlier, MD of OVO Farm Soumendhra Mishra spoke in detail about their journey from setting up the plant to export its products abroad.

"This is an export oriented unit and employment opportunities are available mostly for highly skilled professionals. However, when such an industry comes up, it helps to develop an ecosystem where in ancillary industry grows, which further ensures growth of economic conditions of that area," said Samarendra.

"If you want to a big project, you have to dream high. Today I have come to see such a big project, the OVO Farm project, where in every thing is automated. Eggs produced from this farm are exported worldwide," said Pradhan.

Notwithstanding the backwardness of Balangir, Soumendhra and Samarendra Mishra started the automated plant here and their efforts is praiseworthy, added Pradhan.

In Boudh IRB Commander axed over ganja smuggling

PNS ■ Boudh
The Platoon Commander of an Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB), identified as Deputy Subedar Narayan Bhoi of the Boudh Battalion, was suspended from his duties on Monday in connection with a ganja smuggling case.



According to reports, the 5th Battalion Commander, Manoranjan Biswal, suspended Bhoi for negligence in duty and for failing to supervise his team properly.

The case pertains to another order in the first week of April when three jawans from his platoon were found in possession of ganja, leading to their dismissal from service.

during a raid on the Manamunda Police Barracks in Boudh, where authorities confiscated 15 kilograms of ganja from their possession.

As of the latest reports, the Battalion Commander stated that even though the three IRB personnel were actively involved in illegal activities, Platoon Commander Narayan Bhoi failed to detect their actions and hence, has been discharged from his duties.

The stringent action comes amid a State-wide crackdown on illegal ganja trading under the State government's 'Green Clean Mission'. The initiative plans to eliminate the cultivation and trade of such contraband by 2026.

In Jajpur DM directs Mines Dept to stop quarrying at Dankari

AKSHAY ROUT ■ Jajpur
The Jajpur district administration has directed the Deputy Director, Mines (Minor Minerals) to stop quarrying of black granite at the Dankari hillock in Dharmasala block in the district, clearing the way for establishment of a commercial-cum-strategic petroleum reserve facility.



"Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi had in January said the Union Government has approved establishment of a commercial-cum-strategic petroleum reserve facility at Dankari. Following this, the district administration swung into action and the Collector directed us on April 16 to halt all quarry works at Dankari," said Deputy Director Mines (Minor Minerals) Jayaprakash Nayak.

On December 16, 2024, Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Suresh Gopi, had told the Rajya

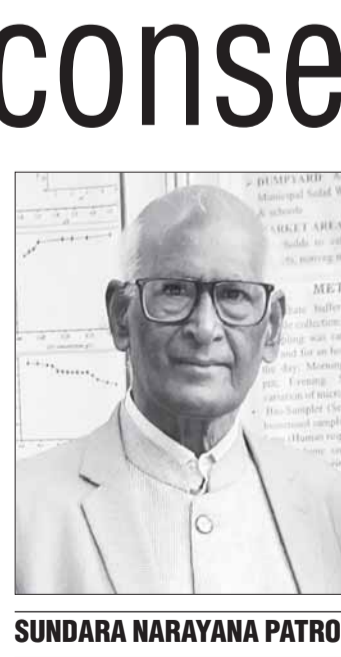
Sabha that in July 2021, the government approved establishment of two additional commercial-cum-strategic petroleum reserve facilities with total storage capacity of 6.5 MMT, including one at Dankari in Jajpur district with 4 MMT, on public-private partnership (PPP) mode.

Responding to a question from Sasmit Patra, the minister said the project cost is about Rs 9,000 crore for the

potentially largest reserve of the country that will boost Odisha's GDP and increase auxiliary economic activities in the area. "Currently, 17 leaseholders are legally doing quarry works at Dankari after getting valid permission from the authorities, for which it would be difficult on our part to prevent them from doing quarry works. We are discussing this issue with our senior officials," added Nayak.

April 22 is World Earth Day Let's conserve energy, save environment

Every year on April 22, since 1970, the world unites to celebrate the World Earth Day, a moment to reflect on our environmental responsibilities and take meaningful action toward a sustainable future. This was a landmark initiative before the first ever global level United Nations Conference on the 'Human Environment' held in Stockholm, Sweden during June 5-16, 1972. The next major global event was the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during June 3-14, 1992.



SUNDARA NARAYANA PATRO

The first Earth Day celebration laid the foundation for the creation of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the passage of landmark environmental laws, including the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Endangered Species Act. In India, Water (Prevention and Control) Act, Air (Prevention and Control) Act, Environment (Protection) Act and Biodiversity Act were enacted in 1974, 1981, 1986 and 2002 respectively.

Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted at the UN Summit for Sustainable Development on September 25, 2015. The agenda includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030. The SDG 7 advocates for universal access to energy, with focus on a higher share of renewable energy and massive improvements in energy efficiency, while the SDG 12 stresses on sustainable consumption. The impactful Climate Agreement was adopted the same year in Paris on December 12, 2015. The theme for World Earth Day 2025 is "Our Power, Our Planet", an urgent call for accelerating the global shift to renewable energy. The focus is on mobilising people worldwide to phase out fossil fuel energy and triple clean electricity generation by 2030. The campaign encourages individuals, governments, and industries to act now towards implementing renewable solutions like solar, wind, hydro, tidal, geothermal, and bio-energy power.

Here are just a few of the impactful initiatives happening globally, during the event: (1) The Great Global Cleanup: Volunteers around the world will remove over 7.5 million pounds of trash from neighbourhoods, parks, rivers, and beaches; (2) The Canopy Project: Aims to plant 5,50,000 trees, restoring critical ecosystems and improving air quality; (3) Earth Action Day: Over 550 cities and 100 colleges will participate in events ranging from climate marches to energy-efficiency workshops; (4) Climate Education: 1 million schools will implement climate-focused curricula, shaping environmentally conscious future leaders. The Industrial Revolution that began around 1760 in Great Britain was fuelled by coal mining from places such as Wales and County Durham and there was the concentration of industries in large establishments. There were huge

changes in agricultural methods. In 1712, Thomas Newcomen produced the first successful steam engine, and in 1769, James Watt patented the modern steam engine. It followed many more technological advancements. Factories pumped pollutants into the air, lakes and rivers with few legal consequences. By the early 1960s, Americans, being aware of the effects of pollution on the environment, constituted a forum to express their concern about what was happening to the land, rivers, lakes and air. Rachel Louise Carson, an American marine biologist, writer, and conservationist, late in the 1950s, turned her attention to some problems she believed were caused by synthetic pesticides. Her best-selling book 'Silent Spring' (1962) brought environmental concerns to an unprecedented share of the American people. The impact was very powerful. It spurred a rever-

sal in national pesticide policy, which led to a nationwide ban on DDT and other pesticides. The Earth Day, founded in 1970, was the brainchild of Senator Gaylord Nelson. On the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, rallies were held in Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles and most other American cities. Today, the Earth Day Network collaborates with more than 17,000 partners and organizations in 174 countries. On Earth Day 2016, the landmark Paris Agreement was signed by the United States, the United Kingdom, China, and 120 other countries. This signing satisfied a key requirement for the entry into force of the historic draft climate protection treaty adopted by consensus of the 195 nations present at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris. Importantly though, the greatest crisis on Earth today is not the tariff wars after US President

Trump's 2nd term, but it is the climate change. Through gigantic commerce, mining, militarism and industrialization, our planet-heating emissions have caused the Anthropocene—an era of indelible impacts upon Earth. Its metrics include temperature rise to rapid global ice loss, sea level rise, extreme weather events, heatwaves, fires, droughts and floods. Displacement of people, environmental refugees, loss of life and property are colossal. Today, the Earth Day remains the largest secular observance in the world on environmental campaigns and actions. This year's theme, 'Our Power, Our Planet', urges everyone to recognize our collective power to shape a better future through cleaner energy, environmental responsibility, and steady unity. (Dr Patro is president, Orissa Environmental Society, (M) 943719040)

Editor's TAKE

Visa shock for Indian students

US revokes hundreds of student visas: 50 per cent affected are Indian students

In a move that has sparked concern across academic and diplomatic circles, the Trump administration has revoked student visas for hundreds of international students, with a staggering 50 per cent of the affected individuals hailing from India. The American Immigration Lawyers' Association (AILA) has revealed this information. AILA collected 327 reports of visa revocations and Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) terminations from students, attorneys, and university personnel. What is of concern to India is that this move disproportionately affects Indian nationals, followed by students from China (14 per cent), South Korea, Nepal, and Bangladesh. There are serious concerns about the transparency and consistency of the process, as the actions lack proper oversight and are leaving students with little to no recourse. The revocations are not only a personal and academic setback for the students involved but also reflect a growing unease in the international student community. Many have described the process as abrupt and arbitrary, with limited opportunities to appeal SEVIS terminations or clarify misunderstandings. For Indian students, who comprise one of the largest populations of international students in the United States, this development is deeply unsettling. These students invest heavily — both financially and emotionally — in pursuing higher education in the US. The visa revocations interrupt academic progress, affect employment opportunities tied to their studies, and, in many cases, may force them to leave the country abruptly. The psychological toll is equally significant. Students face uncertainty, fear of deportation, and the potential stigma of visa termination, which could affect future travel and academic prospects.

The ramifications of this policy move extend beyond individual students to American educational institutions. International students are a vital source of revenue for US universities, contributing billions of dollars annually through tuition and living expenses. Many graduate programmes in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) — areas critical to US innovation — rely heavily on international talent, particularly from India and China. With increasing visa uncertainties, universities may find it harder to attract top global students. This could result in lower enrolment numbers, loss of funding, and a diminished reputation for academic inclusiveness and excellence. Moreover, such measures may deter future applicants, who may opt for more welcoming countries such as Canada, Australia, or Germany. While the Trump administration has not offered detailed justifications for these specific revocations, the actions are consistent with its broader immigration stance.

Throughout his presidency, Donald Trump emphasised tightening immigration controls and "putting Americans first," often casting a sceptical eye on visa programmes — even those meant for students and skilled workers. One reason for these revocations may be tied to concerns about misuse of visa programmes, fraudulent enrolment, or security vetting. However, critics argue that such justifications are being applied too broadly, punishing legitimate students and tarnishing the US's image as a global education hub.

The Trump administration's decision to revoke a significant number of student visas, disproportionately affecting Indian nationals, marks a troubling development in US immigration policy. If left unchecked, such policies could shift global student mobility away from the US, undermining the nation's historical status as the premier destination for higher education.

India's expanding maritime vision

As India reimagines its role in the Indo-Pacific, this quiet yet profound pivot signals not only a strategic response to China's growing presence, but also a deeper civilisational reawakening rooted in partnership, not patronage

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi first outlined India's SAGAR vision — Security and Growth for All in the Region — in 2015 during a visit to Mauritius, few could have predicted how it would evolve into a sweeping geopolitical doctrine encompassing not only the Indian Ocean but the western coasts of Africa and beyond. Nearly a decade later, India's maritime strategy is undergoing a quiet yet profound transformation. From SAGAR, the nation is now navigating toward Mahasagar — literally, the "Great Ocean" — signalling a decisive pivot in India's foreign and security policy with Africa in clear sight. The SAGAR initiative, initially conceived to promote maritime security and economic cooperation among Indian Ocean nations, has served as a foundation for India's role as a "net security provider" in the region. But today's reality demands more than regional stewardship. The increasing footprint of China in the Indian Ocean, from Gwadar to Djibouti, and the growing strategic relevance of the western Indian Ocean island states, have prompted India to recalibrate. The shift to Mahasagar (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security And Growth Across Regions) represents not just a change in terminology but a fundamental reimagining of India's role in the Indo-Pacific.

At the heart of this transformation lies Mauritius, a small island nation with outsized significance. More than a maritime partner, Mauritius shares a cultural and civilisational bond with India that predates diplomatic relations. Home to a large Indian-origin population, Mauritius has become a trusted partner in India's security calculus. Over the years, India has extended grants, built infrastructure, supplied patrol vessels and aircraft, and helped set up coastal surveillance radar systems across the Mauritian archipelago. But it is the development of the Agalega Islands — with an airstrip and jetty capable of supporting military-grade assets — that best symbolises the quiet assertiveness of the Mahasagar vision.

Critics argue that India's investment in Agalega mimics the Chinese playbook of dual-use port development seen in Hambantota and Gwadar. However, the crucial difference lies in the nature of India's partnerships. Unlike China's debt-driven port diplomacy, India's maritime engagement rests on mutual respect, development cooperation, and the principle of shared security. The Indo-Mauritian relationship is one of kinship diplomacy — one that grows not just from strategic needs but from shared history and people-to-people ties.



But the Mahasagar doctrine does not stop at Mauritius. It casts a wider net — one that spans from Seychelles and Madagascar to Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania. India is increasing its naval engagements, signing logistics and defence agreements, and offering capacity-building assistance across the African coast. The logic is strategic: the western Indian Ocean is not just a transit zone but a critical maritime highway for global trade, energy routes, and naval mobility. With China making aggressive inroads through the Belt and Road Initiative and military bases like the one in Djibouti, India is asserting its own footprint — not by coercion, but through collaboration. The pivot to Mahasagar also highlights India's ambition to become a blue-water navy with global reach. Indian naval ships are now a common sight in African ports. Naval exercises, hydrographic surveys, humanitarian missions, and training programmes have become regular features of India-Africa maritime relations. The Indian Navy is no longer a regional patrol force; it is fast becoming a symbol of India's strategic confidence, capable of shaping the security architecture of the

SANTHOSH MATHEW

entire Indo-Pacific. Importantly, this transformation is not purely militaristic. The Mahasagar vision also embraces the idea of the blue economy — a sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and ecosystem health. India's support for maritime infrastructure, fisheries development, and coastal tourism in partner countries underscores its commitment to holistic maritime growth. It is a model that seeks not just security but shared prosperity.

The messaging is also clear. As China intensifies its presence through military bases and commercial ports, India is building friendships. Where Beijing offers loans, India offers trust. Where China sets up surveillance posts, India establishes radar stations with shared access. Where China builds harbours that could dock submarines, India helps build coast guard stations to fight piracy, smuggling, and maritime crime. This contrast is not lost on African nations seeking partners who respect sovereignty and sustainability. Domestically, the Mahasagar strategy aligns with India's broader geopolitical identity. As a civilisational power with ancient maritime traditions — from Chola expeditions to trade with East Africa and the Gulf — India is reclaiming its historical place in the oceanic realm. The Indian Ocean is not a frontier — it is India's historical highway, linking cultures, religions, and com-

merce. By integrating Africa into this vision, India is not expanding its reach; it is reawakening a dormant maritime consciousness. In geopolitical terms, this shift could not come at a more crucial time. As the global order becomes increasingly multipolar and the Indo-Pacific emerges as the new theatre of strategic competition, India's Mahasagar doctrine provides a distinct alternative.

It blends hard power with soft diplomacy, regional ambition with global responsibility, and tradition with modern strategy. It positions India not just as a counterweight to China, but as a civilisational ally to Africa — one whose rise is guided by partnership, not patronage. What began in 2015 as a regional security initiative has now matured into a grand ocean dream. The journey from SAGAR to Mahasagar is more than a maritime shift — it is a statement of intent.

It tells the world that India is ready to lead not by dominance, but by example. And in doing so, it has found a natural partner in Africa and a reliable anchor in Mauritius. "An ocean for all, free and open, where every nation may sail in peace and security," aptly said Woodrow Wilson.

(The author is Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies and Social Sciences, Pondicherry Central University, India. Views are personal)

India's demographic dividend at risk

SECOND Opinion

BY KAJLEEN KAUR

India boasts a demographic dividend, with a working-age population (15-64 years) of around 67 per cent, which can propel economic growth. This momentous opportunity, however, necessitates optimising the potential of the available labour force by ensuring a reduction in unemployment and underemployment and building human capital.

The macroeconomic growth models explain long-term sustainable progress as a function of labour force growth and technology built over time with human capital.

India faces no dearth in population and therefore labour force, but it lacks education, which is necessary to develop individuals' productivity and foster technological advancements. Besides, the economy languishes with high unemployment, which fails to realise the so-called "demographic dividend".

The India Employment Report 2024 shows the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) at 52 per cent, compared to 76 per cent in China. This indicates that nearly half of the possible dividend is forfeited.

To further add to the woes, the female LFPR stands at 37 per cent in India, compared to an average of 70 per cent in China. This places India as the 13th lowest female LFPR.

The report also highlights that India's youth grapples with soaring unemployment rates. Shockingly, they account for 83 per cent of the unemployed workforce. Even more disappointing is the share of youngsters with higher education in the total unemployed, which has almost doubled from 35.2 per cent in 2000 to 65 per cent in 2022.

This brings to the surface the grave reality that a large portion of the potential labour force capable of contributing to growth is dissipated.

More particularly, India adds 3 million graduates annually, but 33 per cent of them are unemployed or underemployed (CMIE, 2024). There exists a wide gap between industry requirements and the education system.

Only 15 per cent of our workforce has formal vocational training, compared to 70 per cent in South Korea (UNESCO). However, the Government's initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme, and Skill India Digital Hub are trying to bridge this divide. The Economic Survey 2023-24 notes that the Indian economy needs to generate an average of nearly 78.5 lakh jobs annually until 2030, in the non-farm sector, to cater to the rising workforce. This is further distressed as around 90 per cent of the workforce is engaged in informal work, facing irregular work and income, absence of social security benefits, and sub-standard working conditions.

The manufacturing sector, which has huge untapped potential to absorb unskilled and semi-skilled labour that

moves away from agriculture, contributes only 14 per cent to the GDP in India as compared to 27 per cent in China.

While the agrarian sector employs 43 per cent of the workforce, it contributes only 16 per cent to GDP. India's economic growth has been primarily driven by the services sector, which lacks employment absorption because of skill intensity.

Additionally, the advent of artificial intelligence is undeniably a threat to the already dismal employment situation, further aggravating the population-to-opportunities mismatch. There is an ardent need to prioritise labour-intensive manufacturing to engage unskilled labour, along with concentrated efforts to support MSMEs.

Moreover, the transforming nature of employment, such as the gig workforce, is expected to form 6.7 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce or 4.1 per cent of the total livelihood in India by 2029-30; the labour policy must ensure a robust minimum level of employment quality.

Most importantly, for India to harness its demographic dividend and not make it a missed opportunity, investment in skilled education is needed to nurture a workforce equipped with employable skills.

India's demographic dividend offers immense potential, but without addressing unemployment, skill gaps, and informal employment, it risks becoming a lost opportunity.

The writer is Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, SGGSC, University of Delhi. Views are personal)

Leaderspeak



Very sad news on the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis. On behalf of the people of Latvia I express my deep condolences to all the Catholics and the Church. Pope Francis was compassionate and kind human being and he will be greatly missed.

EDGARS RINKEVICS, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

Letters to the Editor

SC reins in overreaching Governor

Madam — The Supreme Court has issued a timely and firm reminder to Governors across various states that they are not political gatekeepers or watchdogs, but constitutional functionaries. They are duty-bound to act within the framework of the Constitution, and failure to do so will invite judicial intervention — as seen recently in Tamil Nadu. The case involving Governor R N Ravi is a stark example. His tenure has been marred by political friction, constitutional brinkmanship, and disregard for democratic norms. The Supreme Court made it unequivocally clear: Governors cannot stall the legislative process or undermine the will of elected Governments. Under the Constitution, a Governor may return a bill once for reconsideration or reserve it for the President. Prolonged delays — stretching into years — are unacceptable. Such actions are not only unconstitutional but also a dereliction of duty.

This ruling brings much-needed clarity and alignment between state and central governance. Just as the President must assent to a re-passed bill by Parliament, Governors must do the same at the state level. They have no veto powers based on political preference. By reaffirming that legislatures, not unelected officials, are the cornerstone of democracy, the Supreme Court has upheld the spirit of federalism. Its directive is both appropriate and timely.

RK JAIN | BARWANI

UNESCO recognises Bhagavad Gita

Madam — This refers to the recent news, "Manuscripts of Bhagavad Gita, Natyashastra added to UNESCO register" (April 19). It is a matter of immense pride for the spiritual and cultural communities in India and abroad that manuscripts of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and Bharat Muni's Natyashastra have been included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

The Bhagavad Gita holds a timeless place in the spiritual consciousness of India. The guidance imparted by Lord Krishna to Arjuna, through 700 verses across 18 chapters, offers eternal wisdom and remains relevant to this day.

Its teachings continue to illuminate the path for followers of Sanatan Dharma and inspire philosophical discourse worldwide. Similarly, the Natyashastra — an ancient treatise on performing arts — underscores India's deep-rooted cultural traditions.

This international recognition reinforces the richness of India's intellectual and spiritual legacy. The inclusion of the Bhagavad Gita and Natyashastra manuscripts in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register is a proud moment for India.

This global recognition highlights the enduring spiritual, philosophical, and cultural significance of these ancient texts, reaffirming India's profound contributions to the world's intellectual and artistic heritage.

YUGAL KISHORE SHARMA | FARIDABAD

Made in India gets global traction

Madam — India's "Made in India" initiative is gaining strong traction, positioning the country as a rising global manufacturing hub. Several developments signal this shift: India now produces 20 per cent of the world's iPhones, there's a notable rise in exports of Indian-manufactured weapons, and countries such as Canada are exploring collaboration on Vande Bharat Express trains.

The ongoing trade conflict between the United States and China is likely to accelerate this trend. With China threatening to withhold rare earth materials crucial for the manufacturing of weapons and electronics, the U.S. defence and tech sectors could face significant disruption.

This presents a unique opportunity for India to step up and fill the gap. Now is the opportune moment for India to aggressively promote its manufacturing sector.

With the right policies and strategic investments, this shift could lead to a substantial economic boost and elevate India's position in the global supply chain.

India's growing manufacturing capabilities, from iPhones to defence exports, signal its emergence as a global industrial hub.

Amid US-China trade tensions, India has a unique chance to fill critical supply chain gaps. Strategic investments now can propel economic growth and cement India's role in global manufacturing leadership.

AMARJEET KUMAR | HAZARIBAGH

BANGLADESH MUST END TARGETED VIOLENCE AGAINST HINDUS

Proposes "Protect minorities without excuses: India tells Bangladesh" (The Pioneer, April 20), the recent brutal killing of Bhabesh Chandra Roy — vice-president of the Biral unit of the Bangladesh Puja Ujjapan Parishad and a respected Hindu community leader — has shocked and saddened many. In just the past two months, there have been 76 attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh, leading to 23 deaths.

These attacks have intensified following the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina amid student-led protests. Since then, the Hindu minority has faced relentless violence, property destruction, and severe harassment. Under the interim Government led by Muhammad Yunus, the situation has deteriorated further, with perpetrators enjoying impunity.

This pattern points to a systemic targeting of Hindus and an alarming disregard for basic human rights. The atroci-

ties against minorities not only weaken the secular fabric of Bangladesh but also strain its ties with India. Despite repeated diplomatic appeals and condemnations from India, the persecution continues unabated. It is imperative that Bangladesh acts swiftly to protect its minorities and uphold justice.

In light of ongoing violence against Hindus in Bangladesh, including the recent killing of Bhabesh Chandra Roy, India has rightly urged Dhaka to act without excuses.

Since Sheikh Hasina's ouster, attacks on minorities have surged under the interim Muhammad Yunus-led Government. With over 70 incidents in just two months, the impunity of perpetrators is deeply troubling.

Bangladesh must urgently uphold minority rights, restore law and order, and prevent further erosion of its secular and diplomatic standing — else it runs the risk of total breakdown.

N. SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

The Supreme Court roars for the forests

The Supreme Court has once again stepped in with unprecedented urgency and resolve. In a suo motu intervention, the Court expressed outrage at the illegal felling of over 100 acres of forest land in Telangana

FIRST Column

The Supreme Court of India, on December 12, 1996, in its epoch-making order on TN Godavarman Thirumullapad vs Union of India and Others, had set into motion a marvellous judicial intervention on forest conservation in the country — and the rest is the history of an innumerable number of orders in correcting the several wrong decisions affecting forest and wildlife conservation in the country.

After 29 years of experience of judicial intervention, in yet another suo motu intervention on April 3, 2025 — thanks to the students of Hyderabad University and the media — the Supreme Court Bench headed by Justice B R Gvai and Augustine George Masih, helped by Senior Advocate K Parmeshwar (the amicus curiae in the Godavarman forest cases, who alerted the Court to media reports about the deforestation), acted.

The Bench acted swiftly, expressing shock at the scale of the tree felling and the use of heavy machinery to clear approximately 100 acres in just a few days — directing the Registrar General of Andhra High Court to visit the site of the felling and submit the report the same day in the afternoon of April 3 itself.

The Registrar General, after visiting the site in the afternoon, sent the report; and then the Bench, in a very forthright, acerbic tone, warned the state Chief Secretary and senior bureaucrats of putting them in jail in the same location by constructing a temporary jail.

The Court comments are scathing for the Telangana Governemnt but in favour of trees, wildlife and the natural environment, which are part of our ecosystem but cannot speak and protest, yet they are the resource base for human survival.

The Court heard the case again on 16 April and again warned the Chief Secretary and other officers of sending them to imprisonment for felling trees over 100 acres if the damage was not addressed through a restoration plan and directed the Telangana governemnt to submit the same in the next four weeks.

While hearing the case, the Bench reiterated that the 1996 Supreme Court order is sacrosanct in defining what constitutes forests — irrespective of the status of the land.

The Bench, while reiterating its warning to the officers of state, directed the state Chief Wildlife Warden to ensure protection to wildlife and asked for a restoration plan for the 100-acre felled forests, while also stating that high-rise buildings cannot be made in the company of wildlife. It made it clear that the State Governemnt had to take permission for felling of all kinds of trees — be it recorded forests or otherwise — if it comes under the purview of deemed forests as outlined in the 1996 order of the Supreme Court.

So, the die has been cast so far as the definition of forest is concerned, coming as it did after



the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act was passed by Parliament in 2023. The amendment primarily clarifies the scope of forest land and simplifies procedures for certain activities.

The amendment clarifies that forest land includes areas notified under the Indian Forest Act, 1927, or recorded in Governemnt records as forest land as on the 1980 Act's enforcement date.

The Act exempts certain types of land from its purview, such as land within 100 km of India's border needed for national security projects, small roadside amenities, and public roads leading to a habitation.

Now, the observations of the Supreme Court Bench have restored the 1996 order of the Supreme Court, and hence all states are duty-bound to obtain permission for non-forest use of



VK BAHUGUNA

THE BENCH, WHILE REITERATING ITS WARNING TO THE OFFICERS OF STATE, DIRECTED THE STATE CHIEF WILDLIFE WARDEN TO ENSURE PROTECTION TO WILDLIFE AND ASKED FOR A RESTORATION PLAN FOR THE 100-ACRE FELLED FORESTS, WHILE ALSO STATING THAT HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS CANNOT BE MADE IN THE COMPANY OF WILDLIFE

deemed forest land.

Now let us examine the context of such virulent observations of sending state officers to jail by the Apex Court on April 3, as well as reiterating it on April 16, 2025. After this, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has also sought a report from the Telangana Governemnt.

It is a stark fact that the forests of the country are not in good shape — and the most important reason is the public apathy for conservation of forests at all levels, be it the public at large, administrative or political leaders of all hues, though they keep tom-tomming on solemn occasions and provide lip service to the forests, biodiversity and river systems.

This is quite revealed from the way our Governemnts function at both the Centre and state level. We need to look at the State of Forest Report 2023, which clearly brought out that more than 37 per cent of tree cover out of the 82 million ha of forest and tree cover is created by the farmers of the country — and it is worth pondering the fate of forest-related biodiversity on these

farmers' land.

Another grim reminder is the lack of adequate regeneration in recorded forests, as only 48 per cent of the forest areas have adequate regeneration. The degradation is also increasing, as 46,000 ha of recorded forests have nearly completely lost their tree cover.

There is a need that the IAS and IFS officers sitting in the Ministry decide to change this matrix of degradation and work sincerely to ensure a policy framework for better forest and biodiversity management.

This writer is very forthright in asking the forest service mandarins to get over the clique syndrome and speak in a single voice for the trees, wild animals and our rivers and rivulets. The professionalism these days is seen more in acquiescence and lobbying than in standing for the real cause.

It is because of this that the Supreme Court Bench made these sarcastic comments — and it is time now that the officers work honestly and balance the need for development with conservation. Once they stand firm and truthful, then the political masters shall follow.

There is a need for increasing the budget of the forestry sector and empowerment of communities under the Joint Forest Management Programme.

But one of the biggest causes of deforestation is the lopsided and open-ended implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006, by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, who — along with foreign-funded NGOs and 'Jhola chhap' social activists and phoney foresters — portray the romantic vision of promoting encroachments on forest land.

They must desist or must be sidelined by the Governemnt and asked to work to make the land so far allotted to tribals productive so that their socio-economic status improves.

It is hoped that this intervention of the Apex Court will force all concerned to change track. In conclusion, the Supreme Court's timely intervention once again underscores the vital role of the judiciary in safeguarding India's forests and wildlife.

The strong stance taken by the Court, including warnings of imprisonment for errant officials — reaffirms the sanctity of the 1996 Godavarman order and its relevance despite recent legislative changes. It also highlights the growing civic engagement, especially from students and media, in environmental issues.

Moving forward, it is imperative for administrative leadership and policymakers to prioritise ecological integrity, implement restoration measures, and foster genuine, professional commitment to forest conservation — balancing development with sustainability for future generations.

(The writer is former Director-General & Chancellor of ICFRE, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Views are personal)

Bridging the agritech divide with advanced farming technology

As the agriculture sector stands at a crossroads, scalable innovations like satellite-based sensing, region-specific tools, and inclusive pricing models offer a path toward a more sustainable and tech-enabled agricultural future

The farming industry is one of the significant pillars of the Indian economy, contributing a significant 16 per cent of India's GDP and engaging more than half of the country's population. However, to date, there has been a slow uptake of advanced technologies in agriculture. While several agritech start-ups have been launched and well-funded by investors, the connection between these ventures and farmers remains a challenge. One of the main problems that these start-ups have to contend with is that of high costs, which tend to be associated with technology.

There are many tools — including those used in precision farming, machinery such as weather stations, and sensors that can be applied to the soil — that hold the future of increased yields and sustainable farming. However, the cost associated with such technologies might be unaffordable for small farmers, who form the largest percentage of India's farming community. Devices such as IoT sensors can cost hundreds of dollars per year, meaning that while a slight increase in yield for such farmers is hard to come by, the devices do not offer value for money.

More than 80 per cent of farmers in India are marginal farmers, cultivating landholdings of less than five acres. These marginal lands are often fragmented into multiple smaller plots, allowing farmers to grow different crops on the same holding.

This fragmentation poses a challenge for agritech solutions designed for large-scale farming. However, satellite-based data solutions can bridge this gap by providing precise, farm-specific insights even for farms having an area of only a quarter of an acre (about 10,000 square feet), enabling even smallholder farmers to optimise their crop management and improve productivity.

The policies of the Indian agricultural sector fluctuate, and some crucial aspects like water — which is a basic necessity for agriculture — are controlled by the state governemnt.

While such interventions as subsidies and grants are useful, they have led to a situation where agritech remains a state-subsidised model rather than a market-driven one.



Many new agritechs have come to depend on these Governemnt partnerships for revenue instead of selling directly to farmers, which has impacted the growth and sustainability of most of them in the private market.

Among the challenges that have limited the embrace of agritech is ignorance among farmers. It is essential to understand that large-scale farmers might invest time and resources to evaluate and consider adopting new technologies, while smallholder farmers are more likely to

make decisions by word of mouth or based on regular practices. This is mainly due to the poor devel-

opment of facilities and capacity-building to form the basis for adopting innovations in farming technologies.

Cost-Effective Solutions

The first area of intervention for farmer uptake can be increased through improved adoption of technologies that are cheaper to develop. Although IoT-based sensors are costly, satellite remote sensing is feasible.

While IoT sensors can cost several hundred dollars and give localised information, satellite technology offers information for the whole farm area at a considerably lower cost — usually less than 5 per cent of the price of sensors. Satellite remote sensing, combined with artificial intelligence and machine learning, can be used to monitor soil nutrient levels, manage pest and disease risks, and support irrigation water management across large areas of farmland.

These solutions are especially practical and accessible for smallholder farm-

ers. In this way, satellite-based solutions represent a constrained set of technological tools whereby agritech companies can propose complete and high-quality products and services at more competitive prices.

Localised Solutions

Given the highly heterogeneous climate of the country and the different farming practices followed across regions, it can be said that a market solution carved in one casting will not fit this agritech market. Start-ups must provide region-specific products.

They can, therefore, apply different ways of ensuring their solution reaches farms in varying regions so that farmers can adopt it.

Pricing Models

Long-term, technology must be accessible to small and marginal farmers and useful even for field crops like wheat — especially in terms of the ultimate cost

of the technology delivered to the farm. A scholar cited that the cost of any new technology farmers must consider has to be less than or equal to 10 per cent of the total farming cost. This is crucial for adoption.

Affordability is another value that agritech start-ups should embrace, enabling them to offer their products at a cheaper cost and within reach of many farmers. Other revenue models that can be used include fee-for-service or usage plans in which the farmer pays only for what is used.

Fostering Education

Guaranteeing extensive use of such technology — even if it is cheap — requires more education and support. Agritech companies must incorporate education campaigns as a key means of informing farmers about the benefits of using these products.

This might be achievable through human capital development programmes,

farmer organisations or local associations. This paper contends that hands-on training and demonstrations enable farmers to overcome hesitance stemming from a lack of familiarity. Current strategies point to the need to make technology simple and easy to use to minimise the chances of farmers being unable to adopt it on the farm.

Government and Private Sector Collaboration

Although major funding is currently being attracted to agritech start-ups via governemnt grants, the long-term model will require the involvement of both public and private entities.

This implies a need for policies that encourage agritech growth while avoiding excessive dependence on state subsidies. This includes strengthening policy content, creating private-sector incentives, and guaranteeing support for farmers transitioning to better technologies. Scaling efforts via public-private partnerships may help deliver appropriate support to farmers.

Final Thoughts

The Indian agritech industry is at a turning point. Although there is hope in the power of technology to transform agriculture, challenges such as cost, accessibility and uptake remain significant. High-end technologies like IoT sensors and UAVs are often too expensive for small and marginal farmers.

However, affordable and scalable solutions — such as satellite remote sensing, regionalised products, optional pricing structures and farmers' sensitisation — are available. When combined with agricultural expertise and AI/ML, satellite remote sensing emerges as a practical and inclusive solution, making advanced technology accessible even to small and marginal farmers.

India, being one of the top agricultural producers globally, has a wealth of insights from its diverse farming landscape. These learnings not only improve Indian agriculture but are also leveraged globally to assist small and marginal farmers elsewhere.

(The writer is Founder, Co-founder & CEO, Satyukt Analytics. Views are personal)

Israeli President urges India to further deepen ties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jerusalem

Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Monday urged India to further deepen bilateral ties by working together on geostrategic issues, especially emphasising on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) project, which he described as the "future of the world".

moving towards peace and inclusion, connectivity and of course enhancing the incredible relations between our people". Touching upon areas of cooperation between the two countries, Herzog described the IMEC as the "future of the world", which has the potential to change the entire geostrategic situation of the globe.



Minister Narendra Modi to Washington in February, US President Donald Trump said he agreed with the Indian leader to enhance the scope of the project, linking it right up to America. Singh emphasised the strategic partnership between India and Israel, noting that they had stood by each other in the hour of crisis.

ship. We are engaged with each other in a number of areas — in agriculture, water management, IT sector as well as defence cooperation. IMEC is a very important initiative," Singh said. "As you know, the agreement (IMEC) was signed when India was heading the G20 Presidency and this will connect the big Indian civilisation with Europe and the Atlantic shores and it will pass through this region. Similarly, I2U2 is another initiative which is very important for both the countries," the Indian envoy noted. The I2U2 group, comprising India, Israel, the US and the UAE, emerged during the visit of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to Israel in October 2021 when the foreign ministers of the four countries held a virtual meet, announcing that they intend to advance physical connectivity between countries in the Middle East region, among others.

safe return of all the hostages. "We all are passing through a very difficult phase and for us dialogue and diplomacy is the way we can achieve peace in the region. I know that Israel, in particular, is passing through a very difficult phase. We hope and pray for an early and safe return of all the hostages," he said. Herzog responded, saying, "This is our highest priority. We want to see all our hostages back home. Till the last one of them. They are going through hell and we are very worried and disturbed by it". "I would add that it requires enormous international effort and I also want to thank your government and your Prime Minister for standing near Israel and with Israel from day one, October 7th. I met your Prime Minister in the previous Climate Conference in UAE and I know he has extremely good relations with our Prime Minister. Our governments enjoy strong relations," he added. Herzog also talked about Iran's efforts to achieve nuclear capability and Israel's resolve to foil it at any cost.

United States says allied forces can repel Asian aggression

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Manila

Thousands of allied American and Filipino forces opened annual combat drills on Monday that are set to include repelling an island attack to simulate the defense of the Philippine archipelago and seas in a "full-scale battle scenario" that has antagonised China.

meaning shoulder to shoulder in Tagalog, are not aimed at any particular country. "It's joint training with the US forces to increase our capability in securing our territory and, of course, it will increase our capabilities and our preparedness and responsiveness to any eventuality," Lorenzo said.

The annual Balikatan military exercises between the longtime treaty allies are scheduled from April 21 to May 9 with about 9,000 American and 5,000 Filipino military personnel. Fighter jets, warships and an array of weaponry including a US Marine anti-ship missile system will be involved, US and Philippine military officials said.

The exercises are set to include a mock allied counter-assault against an enemy attack on an island, the use of a barrage of artillery and missile fire to sink a mock enemy ship, joint navy sails in or near the disputed South China Sea and aerial combat surveillance, according to the Philippine military. A Philippine military statement described this year's largescale combat exercises as "a full-scale battle scenario meticulously designed to rigorously test and enhance the combined capabilities of both nations' armed forces under the most realistic and challenging conditions".

China has steadfastly opposed such war drills in or near the disputed South China Sea and in northern Philippine provinces close to Taiwan, especially if they involve US and allied forces that Beijing says aim to contain it and, consequently, threaten regional stability and peace. "We are ready," US Marine Corps Lt. Gen. James Glynn told a news conference when asked if US and Philippine forces have built up the capability to address any major act of aggression in the Taiwan Straits or the South China Sea after years of joint combat exercises. "Our combined strength... possesses a degree of lethality for a force that possesses an indomitable warrior ethos and spirit," Glynn said in a speech in the opening ceremony of the annual combat-readiness exercises.

A Philippine military statement described this year's largescale combat exercises as "a full-scale battle scenario meticulously designed to rigorously test and enhance the combined capabilities of both nations' armed forces under the most realistic and challenging conditions". Aside from US and Philippine military personnel, Australia plans to deploy about 260 participants, an Australian military officer said. Several countries including Japan intend to send military observers. A mid-range missile system, which was deployed to the northern Philippines by the US Army last year, will be used again in the combat exercises, US and Philippine military officials said without offering additional details.

"It's all dedicated to one purpose, to ensure the defense of the Philippines and to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific." "All of us want to resolve any regional conflict peacefully but should deterrence fail, we need to be prepared," said Glynn, who previously helped lead special operations forces against the Islamic State and served in Fallujah, Iraq.

Philippine army Maj. Gen. Francisco Lorenzo said the exercises during Balikatan, "are not aimed at any particular country. It's joint training with the US forces to increase our capability in securing our territory and, of course, it will increase our capabilities and our preparedness and responsiveness to any eventuality," Lorenzo said.

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CHANGE OF NAME. I, Surendra Kumar Aggarwal S/o Kanti Prasad R/o 102, Menka-2, Amrapali Royal, Indrapuram, Ghaziabad (U.P.) 201014 have changed my name to Surendra Kumar Aggarwal for all purposes.

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CHANGE OF NAME. I, Ram Sakhi Devi, Mother of- No. 16017341K Hav Dheerendra Singh, R/o- VPO- Bharoli Khurd, Dist- Bhind, M.P.- 477557, have changed my name from Ram Sakhi Devi to Ram Shree, vide affidavit dated 21/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

CHANGE OF NAME. I, Shaktuntala Devi, Mother of- No.10136742X NK Surendra Singh, R/o- VPO- Arya Nagar, Teh- Badhra, Dist- Bhiwani, Haryana-127308, have changed my name from Shaktuntala Devi to Shakuntla, vide affidavit dated 21/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

CHANGE OF NAME. I, Pushpa Devi, Mother of- No.10136941L RFN Dilip Kumar Mishra, R/o- PZ- B-9, Gali No. 1, Sita Puri- II, Ram, Delhi- 110045, have changed my name from Pushpa Devi to Pushpa Devi Mishra, vide affidavit dated 21/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

CHANGE OF NAME. I, Daljeet Singh Lamba, S/o, Shri Kishan Singh Lamba, R/o C-77/3, third floor, Fateh Nagar, Tilak Nagar West Delhi, delhi - 110018, that I have changed my name from Daljeet Singh Lamba to Daljit Singh Lamba permanently. (both are one and the same person).

CHANGE OF NAME. I, Daljeet Singh Lamba, S/o, Shri Kishan Singh Lamba, R/o C-77/3, third floor, Fateh Nagar, Tilak Nagar West Delhi, delhi - 110018, that I have changed my name from Daljeet Singh Lamba to Daljit Singh Lamba permanently. (both are one and the same person).

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Table with 3 columns: Name of the Borrower(s)/ Guarantor(s), Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date, and Description of secured asset (immovable property). Contains multiple entries for various borrowers and their secured assets.

