



DSPL-39



ଶ୍ରୀ ନରେନ୍ଦ୍ର ମୋଦୀ  
ପ୍ରଧାନମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ



ଶ୍ରୀ ମୋହନ ଚରଣ ମାଝୀ  
ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା

## ଜାତୀୟ ପଞ୍ଚାୟତିରାଜ ଦିବସ - ୨୦୨୫

ମୁଖ୍ୟମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ

### ଶ୍ରୀ ମୋହନ ଚରଣ ମାଝୀଙ୍କ

ସଦୟ ଉପସ୍ଥିତିରେ

### ରାଜ୍ୟସ୍ତରୀୟ ସମାରୋହ

୨୪ ଏପ୍ରିଲ ୨୦୨୫ | ତାଳବଣିଆ, ପୁରୀ

### ଜାତୀୟ ପଞ୍ଚାୟତିରାଜ ଦିବସ ପାଳନ ଅବସରରେ

ପଞ୍ଚାୟତ ସମିତିର ସାଧାରଣ ବୈଠକକୁ ଅନୁମୋଦିତ ମାଧ୍ୟମରେ ପରିଚାଳନା କରିବା ନିମନ୍ତେ

**ଇ-ପଞ୍ଚାୟତ ସଭା (ପଞ୍ଚାୟତ ସମିତି) ପୋର୍ଟାଲର ଉନ୍ନୋତନ**

ରାଜ୍ୟର ଅନୁମୋଦିତ ବିଭିନ୍ନ ପ୍ରକଳ୍ପ ପାଇଁ ରେକର୍ଡ ପ୍ରସ୍ତୁତି, ବୈଷୟିକ ମଞ୍ଜୁରୀ, ପ୍ରଶାସନିକ ଅନୁମୋଦନ ଭଳି ପ୍ରକ୍ରିୟା ଗୁଡ଼ିକୁ ସୁଗମ ରୂପେ ପରିଚାଳନା କରିବା ନିମନ୍ତେ

**ପି.ପି.ଏମ୍.ଏସ୍ ପୋର୍ଟାଲର ଉନ୍ନୋତନ**

ଗ୍ରାମ ପଞ୍ଚାୟତ ଭିତ୍ତିଭୂମିର ଦୃଶ୍ୟକରଣ ଏବଂ ନିର୍ବାଚିତ ପ୍ରତିନିଧିଙ୍କ ତଥ୍ୟକୁ ପ୍ରାପ୍ତ କରିବା ପାଇଁ

**ପଞ୍ଚାୟତ ମନିଟରିଂ ସିଷ୍ଟମର ଶୁଭାରମ୍ଭ (ପୋର୍ଟାଲ ଓ ମୋବାଇଲ୍ ଆପ୍)**

ପଞ୍ଚମ ରାଜ୍ୟ ଅର୍ଥ ଆୟୋଗ ଅନୁଦାନରେ ୨୧୩ ଗୋଟି ଗ୍ରାମ ପଞ୍ଚାୟତକୁ କାର୍ଯ୍ୟକ୍ଷମତାରେ ଶ୍ରେଷ୍ଠତା ପ୍ରତିପାଦନ, ନିଜସ୍ୱ ଆୟ ବୃଦ୍ଧି ତଥା ପଞ୍ଚାୟତର ସର୍ବାଙ୍ଗୀନ ବିକାଶରେ ନିରନ୍ତର ପ୍ରୟାସ ନିମନ୍ତେ

**୩୨ କୋଟି ଟଙ୍କାର ପ୍ରୋସ୍ତାହନ ରାଶି ବଣ୍ଟନ**

**୬ ଲକ୍ଷ ହିତାଧିକାରୀଙ୍କୁ ନୂତନ ରାସନ କାର୍ଡ ପ୍ରଦାନ**

ଖାଦ୍ୟ ଯୋଗାଣ ଓ ଖାଉଟି କଲ୍ୟାଣ ବିଭାଗ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର

ପ୍ରଧାନମନ୍ତ୍ରୀ ସୂର୍ଯ୍ୟଘର ଯୋଜନାରେ ୩ କିଲୋଘାଟ ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ସୋଲାରି ପ୍ୟାନେଲ ପାଇଁ ୧,୩୮,୦୦୦ ଟଙ୍କା ପର୍ଯ୍ୟନ୍ତ ସବସିଡି ପ୍ରଦାନ

ଶକ୍ତି ବିଭାଗ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର

**୪,୧୨୪ କୋଟି ଟଙ୍କା ମୂଲ୍ୟର ୩୧୪ ଟି ବ୍ଲକ୍ ସ୍ତରୀୟ ଷ୍ଟାଡ଼ିୟମ୍ ଭିତ୍ତିପ୍ରସ୍ତର ସ୍ଥାପନ**

କ୍ରୀଡ଼ା ଓ ଯୁବ ସେବା ବିଭାଗ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର

**୨ ଲକ୍ଷରୁ ଉର୍ଦ୍ଧ୍ୱ ନୂତନ ସୁଭଦ୍ରା ହିତାଧିକାରୀଙ୍କୁ ୨୦୦ କୋଟି ଟଙ୍କାରୁ ଉର୍ଦ୍ଧ୍ୱ ସହାୟତା ରାଶି ପ୍ରଦାନ**

ମହିଳା ଓ ଶିଶୁ ବିକାଶ ବିଭାଗ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର

ପଞ୍ଚାୟତିରାଜ ଓ ପାନୀୟ ଜଳ ବିଭାଗ, ଓଡ଼ିଶା ସରକାର

OIPR: 19001/13/0016/2526

# Pahalgam terrorist attack Pall of gloom descends on slain B'swar man's village

UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ Baleswar

A pall of gloom descended in Ishani village under Remuna block of the district ever since the villagers learnt a heart wrenching news that stated Prashant Satpathy, a resident of the village, who was on a holiday trip to J&K along with his family including wife and son from Sunday was killed by terrorists at Pahalgam.

People from various walks of life including political leaders made a beeline to his residence to express condolences to his family.

All were waiting for Satpathy's body to arrive in the village to pay their last respects. The family members of the deceased said they were making arrangements for conducting the final rites on Thursday and representatives of the State government were



The family members including mother of the deceased were in a deep state of shock after receiving unexpected bone chilling news. His elder brother Susanta Satpathy

broke down and said, "Prashanta had promised me that we were born in one place. We will not be separated till last. We all live in one place and die in one place till the end. But he didn't keep his word and he left me alone."

He also informed that their younger brother Jayanta Satpathy and brother-in-law have reached Srinagar.

Today the body will reach Bhubaneswar by direct flight from Srinagar via Delhi and ETD from Srinagar is at 2.35 PM.

According to reports, Prashanta was working in the Central Institute of Plastic Engineering and Technology (CIPET) as an accountant in Bampada while his spouse Priyadarshini works in the Sadar CDPO office under Mission Shakti as BPM.

# CS directs officials for regular field visits

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

In a bid to strengthen the effectiveness of public service delivery and ensure governance rooted in ground realities, Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja on Wednesday issued a directive to all senior government officials to regularly visit various districts and interact directly with field-level functionaries.

The move is aimed at promoting a deeper understanding of grassroots challenges and ensuring that state-level decisions are well-informed and aligned with the actual needs of the people.

According to Ahuja, field visits by top officials are not merely symbolic but a crucial step towards building a more responsive and efficient administrative system.

"Knowledge gained from the grassroots is essential for taking swift and practical decisions in governance," Ahuja remarked, stressing that real-time exposure to ongoing



projects and schemes would help bridge the gap between policy and practice.

As part of this initiative, officials have been instructed to start their visits from this month, with aspirational districts being given priority. During these visits, they are expected to closely monitor the day-to-day activities of local staffs, evaluate the status and effectiveness of developmental schemes, and understand the administrative bottlenecks that may hinder implementation.

Interaction with local beneficiaries and stakeholders would also be encouraged to gain a people-centric perspective. In a further step to ensure

genuine engagement, the Chief Secretary has advised officers to spend the night in the areas they visit. This will not only help them get a better sense of the local conditions but also build trust among the communities. Such immersive experiences are expected to provide valuable insights that desk-based reviews often miss.

Moreover, Ahuja has recommended that officials document their field observations and present them during regular high-level review meetings at the Lok Seva Bhawan. These insights would serve as critical feedback for policy refinement and better inter-departmental coordination.

# In Odisha CBI cracks down on GDS recruitment fraud

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Wednesday carried out extensive raids at 12 locations across five districts in Odisha as part of its ongoing probe into the 2023 Gramin Dak Sevaks (GDS) recruitment scam.

Acting on a reference from the Odisha Circle Chief Postmaster General in Bhubaneswar, the CBI had registered the case on May 9, 2023, following allegations that several candidates had secured jobs using forged matriculation certificates during the recruitment process.

The coordinated search operation was conducted in Bhubaneswar, Kalahandi, Balangir, Sambalpur, and Kendujhar districts. Raids targeted the residences and premises of suspected middlemen and individuals allegedly involved in manufacturing fake

certificates, particularly from the Uttar Pradesh Board and the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). Several incriminating documents and digital evidence were seized, pointing to a well-organised fraud network.

The CBI had earlier filed a chargesheet in the case on December 30, 2024, naming 58 accused, 55 candidates and three middlemen before the Court of the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate in Bhubaneswar.

Officials said the investigation is ongoing to trace additional candidates who may have used fraudulent means to secure employment and to unearth the masterminds behind the forgery racket. "The operation aims to dismantle the entire nexus responsible for tampering with academic credentials to manipulate government recruitment," a senior CBI official said.

# 5-day Women's Business Mela from Apr 30



PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Women's Business Mela 2.0 is starting again to promote the overall development of women at the Idco Exhibition Ground here on April 30.

The five-day mela, organised by the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), National Women's Entrepreneurship Council (INWEC), a partner organization of the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), will see participation of hundreds of women entrepreneurs.

Since its establishment in 2020, the INWEC has been organizing such melas and providing a huge platform for

women entrepreneurs from Odisha and outside Odisha to grow.

The innovative programme will be implemented under the leadership of the convener of INWEC, Preeti Pallavi Patnaik, and two co-conveners, Swati Kejriwal and Suma Devi Das. Completely run by women entrepreneurs, more than 200 stalls will be set up in the mela.

The biggest thing is that in the mela, selected enterprises, tribal entrepreneurs, SHG groups and child entrepreneurs from different districts of some States will be given completely free stalls. The event will promote small en-

trepreneurs in the districts of Odisha, take inclusive entrepreneurship forward and strengthen sustainable economic systems.

The main attraction is Bollywood celebrities, international faces who have made a name for themselves in the industry and famous speakers.

The mela will educate women on the strategies needed to grow their brand launches, marketing, customer relations, startups and MSMEs. It will cover various industries like fashion, health, food and agriculture to technology, education, economics, real estate and automobiles.

# 'Thinkers' Club webinar 'Hinduism is broader knowledge beyond religion'

PNS ■ Cuttack

The topic "Impact of Hindu Sanatani religion on the foreign lands" was discussed by the members of the Thinkers' Club in their 116th webinar. Er Ravi Kumar, who took charge of the RSS in 45 countries abroad, participating in the talk, narrated clearly about his experience in countries like Turkey, China and many advanced countries of Europe.

According to him, the Muslim and Christian countries also respect the Hindu way of living, its culture and some rituals. To site example, he said former President of USA, Barack Obama celebrated

Deewali in the White House. He also carried a coin that carries the image of Lord Hanuman. He said he saw, once the premier of Turkey touching the feet of the Indian Prime Minister going beyond the usual protocol. He has the experience of seeing people outside India respecting the Indian scriptures like the Gita, Vedas and Upanishads and other Shastas.

Hinduism is a broader knowledge beyond religion. It is high time, the Government of India adopted the age old principles of Hinduism with due modifications in the present context, emphasised Er Ravi Kumar.

President of the Club Barada Das moderated the meet. He said Hindus also live outside India in Nepal and Bangladesh. He suggested if the ancient proven system of Guru Kula Ashram is re-introduced in the country the prevailing education system will be upgraded to an effective level.

The meeting was attended by intellectuals from Rajasthan, Delhi, Baharin, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Mumbai. Monica Aurora, Pratap Rout, Dr Nanda Nandan Das, Sarbeswar Behera, Binode Mohanty and Umasankar Misra participated actively in the discussion.

# State expands judicial footprint

3 new Civil Judge Courts set up

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

In a bid to enhance legal access and streamline judicial services in remote regions, the Odisha Government on Wednesday established three new Civil Judge (Junior Division) Courts. The newly-created

courts will operate at Baliapal in Baleswar district, Lefripara in Sundargarh district and Rengali in Sambalpur district.

The move comes following a formal consultation with the Orissa High Court and subsequent approval by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi. An official notification

to this effect was issued by the government.

With the creation of these courts, jurisdiction over the respective tehsils will now be transferred to the newly-constituted benches, thereby relieving existing Civil Judge (Junior Division) Courts in neighbouring areas of their extended jurisdiction.

# HITTING THE BULL'S EYE Supreme Court's 3-month time limit ruling for President is superbly democratic

In most parliamentary democracies, the parliament operates under the framework of a constitution, which outlines the structure, powers, and functions of the parliament, as well as its relationship with other critical wings of the state namely the executive and the judiciary. It defines the legislative process, the scope of parliamentary authority and the rights and responsibilities of elected representatives. While parliament may have the power to amend laws or even the Constitution itself, it is still bound by the Constitutional provisions and principles. All Bills to become Acts by majority voting have to be as per the letter and spirit of the Constitution keeping in view the cardinal principles of 'rule of law' and 'fundamental rights' of the citizens. Since the judiciary is the protector of the Constitution and interpreter of the core laws, it is above all the wings of the state including the parliament. That is precisely why many of the laws made by the parliament have been struck down by the judiciary, particularly when the legislators make bizarrely whimsical laws, not in tune with the Constitutional spirit. Most importantly, quite a



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

few of the parliamentarians are not literate or wise enough to understand the Constitution because they have landed in the sacred House with the backing of guileful political masters, some of whom are essentially unscrupulous and unethical with criminal antecedents. For the Lok Sabha, any crook can grab a seat because of money and muscle power or close relationship with otherwise popular heavyweights who are no better than rogues down the streets. For the Rajya Sabha, the majority are politically nominated, who have no grey matter in the skull. Incidentally, the President and the State

Governors are chosen by the party in power and they are forced to conduct themselves as puppets.

The detractors also blame the judiciary for uncountable number of pending cases. But it is not believable that the executive, particularly the Indian one, would do a grand job of selecting the brightest and most ethical persons as judges, given their vile and sinister intentions of making personal benefits by abusing public office only to win the next election. A thorough scrutiny of events has clearly indicated that judges choosing judges is a way better system than the executive choosing them as the composition of the latter is by and large low-grade with a huge number of guys with questionable antecedents.

The recent Supreme Court decision to clamp a three-month time limit for the President to decide on bills reserved by Governors under Article 201, as established in the April 8, 2025, ruling in State of Tamil Nadu vs. Governor of Tamil Nadu, has sparked both support and criticism.

The Constitution does not explicitly prescribe a time limit for the President to act on bills under Article 201, which allows the Presi-

dent to either grant assent, withhold assent or return the bill for reconsideration except for money bills. This silence has historically enabled indefinite delays sometimes described as a 'pocket veto'. The Supreme Court argued that such delays disrupt the legislative process and undermine the democratic will expressed through the State legislatures. By fixing a three-month timeline, the court has ensured that bills do not languish indefinitely, preventing what it called 'constitutional paralysis'. This aligns with the principle that Constitutional functionaries must act within a 'reasonable time'. The court perhaps drew inspiration from the Sarkaria (1983) and Punchhi (2007) Commissions, which clearly emphasise the need for timely disposal of bills to maintain efficient Centre-State relations thereby upholding Federalism. The court has clearly protected the legislative autonomy of States by ensuring that the Union executive (via the President) cannot indefinitely stall any valid state legislation. The President's role under Article 201 is not to exercise an 'absolute or pocket veto' that enables the executive to override the legislative pro-

cess without citing any valid reasons.

The court has further asserted that the President's stalling actions under Article 201 are subject to judicial review as no Constitutional authority is beyond accountability. The three-month deadline provides a clear benchmark, allowing States to seek judicial recourse through a writ of mandamus ensuring perfect checks and balances are possible. The apex court ruling also mandates that reasons for delays beyond three months must be recorded and communicated to the State, proving transparency in the executive's decision-making process. All this was prompted by a dispute involving Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi, who reserved 10 bills for the President's consideration, some pending since January 2020, even after the State Assembly re-enacted them. Therefore, the court finding the Governor's actions 'illegal' and lacking 'bona fides', used its powers under Article 142 to deem the bills assented to, highlighting the need for a systemic fix to prevent such inordinate delays. The court's intervention is a response to the growing trend of Governors and the President, act-

ing on the Union Government's advice, of delaying bills in States ruled by opposition parties, which is a political tactic to undermine those State governments. It argued that indefinite delays frustrate the legislative process and the will of the people, as expressed through elected assemblies. The court avoided creating a new rule out of thin air. It only reinforced a framework already suggested by the executive and Constitutional bodies.

Critics, including Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, argue that the Supreme Court overstepped its authority by effectively amending the Constitution, which is the prerogative of Parliament. Since Article 201 does not prescribe any time limit, imposing one is seen as the judiciary encroaching on the executive's discretionary powers. The Centre is reportedly considering a review petition, arguing that the President was not given a chance to be heard.

The President's power to withhold assent under Article 201 is only a Constitutional check, particularly for bills that may conflict with Union laws, violate fundamental rights or undermine national

interests. So, critics argue that a rigid three-month deadline limits the President's ability to carefully consider complex legal and policy issues, especially for bills reserved on grounds of unconstitutionality. The court's suggestion that the President can easily refer questions of a bill's constitutionality to the Supreme Court under Article 143, which has infuriated those who question the 'judiciary supremacy'. They have forgotten that a 2016 Home Affairs memorandum had clearly suggested a three-month timeline as a strong guideline.

The court ruling aims to prevent delays by the Union executive and also embolden State governments to push contentious legislation as the President must now act within three months or face judicial scrutiny. The Article 142 is specifically intended to deliver 'complete justice'. Thus the Supreme Court was justified in addressing the issue of delays in Presidential assent as indefinite inaction undermines democracy and federalism.

The Centre's potential review petition may lead to further clarification, possibly by a larger bench, to balance judicial, executive and legislative roles.



## Pakistan invites diplomatic strike for Pahalgam carnage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday here reviewed security situation in the wake of the Pahalgam terrorist attack killing 26 people and took stock of preparedness to prevent recurrence of such incidents. He was also briefed during the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting about the ongoing operations to track down the perpetrators of the dastardly act and overall plans to enhance the security grid in Jammu and Kashmir.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and National

Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval took part in the high level meeting that went on for over two-and-a-half hours. The prime minister has vowed that these behind the attack will not be spared and brought to justice.

Among those also present at the crucial meeting were Cabinet Secretary T V Somanathan, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, besides the prime minister's two principal secretaries P K Mishra and Shaktikanta Das.

Earlier in the day, Home Minister Shah visited Baisaran in Pahalgam, the site where terrorists struck on Tuesday evening, as well as the hospital where some

of the injured were being treated. Incidentally, Prime Minister Modi, who cut short his visit to Saudi Arabia and returned to New Delhi on Wednesday morning, was briefed about all aspects of the incident at the airport by Jaishankar, Doval and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri.

Meanwhile, Rajnath Singh cautioned people responsible for the "cowardly terrorist attack" on innocent citizens in Pahalgam will soon get a "strong response" to their nefarious acts on Indian soil, in the first clear indication of India's possible response to the massacre.

While vowing a befitting reply, he also said India will not only hunt down the people who perpetrated the attack but will also



Prime Minister Narendra Modi chairing a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) on Wednesday. At least 26 people were killed in a terror attack in Pahalgam of Jammu and Kashmir PTI

trace those "sitting behind the scenes" who had conspired to carry out the deadly act on the Indian soil. The defence minister made these assertions while delivering the annual Arjan Singh Memorial lecture here. Hours before the address, the Defence Minister reviewed the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir that was attended by NSA Doval and Chief of

Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi and Air Chief Marshal A P Singh.

Also present in the meeting was Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh. "Yesterday, in Pahalgam, our country lost many innocent citizens in a cowardly attack by terrorists targeting religion."

### IN A FIRST, INDUS TREATY SUSPENDED

New Delhi: Adopting a tough stance a day after the Pahalgam terrorist attack, India on Wednesday took a slew of measures including Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 in abeyance with immediate effect till Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism.

Announcing these steps, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said "Recognising the seriousness of this terrorist attack, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) decided upon the following measures — The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 will be held in abeyance with immediate effect until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism."

Secondly, the check post Attari will be closed. Those who have crossed over with valid endorsements may return through that route before 1st May 2025. Thirdly, Pakistani nationals will not be permitted to travel to India under the SAARC visa Exemption scheme.

## CM sends stern message to Andhra Kotia dispute

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi has taken a decisive stance on the contentious Kotia border dispute, signalling a break from past inaction. In this connection, a high-level virtual review meeting was held on Wednesday, reaffirming the BJP government's commitment to protecting Odisha's territorial integrity and countering Andhra Pradesh's recent incursions.

The meeting was attended by the two Deputy Chief Ministers, the Revenue Minister, senior bureaucrats and the Koraput District Collector.

Kotia is an integral part of Odisha. Any attempts by Andhra Pradesh to assert control will be met with strong legal and administrative resistance," CM Majhi said, making it clear that Odisha's borders are non-negotiable.

The urgency follows fresh reports of Andhra officials initiating construction work, specifically a water tank project in Dhulipadar village, one of the disputed territories. Three laborers engaged in the work were detained and later released after submitting written undertakings.

Meanwhile, sources confirmed a closed-door meeting

between Andhra's former Deputy Chief Minister Peedika Rajanna Dora and Kotia residents, including ex-sarpanch Bisu Gemel, reportedly to lobby for integration with Andhra.

Odisha School and Mass Education Minister Nityananda Gond stated that while Odisha is open to dialogue, any discussion must respect the State's legal rights and historical claims.

The Kotia cluster in Koraput district has been a flashpoint for decades. During the tenure of former Andhra CM Jagan Mohan Reddy, the neighbouring State made several symbolic

and administrative moves including the closure of a Jagannath temple raising concerns of aggressive expansionism.

CM Majhi's prompt intervention marks a clear policy shift from the previous BJD-led government's approach, with observers noting a more assertive posture in border governance.

For the residents of Kotia, long caught between political indifference and administrative overreach, the BJP-led government's active response could signal a new era of accountability and protection.

## Will not bend before terror: Amit Shah

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Srinagar

Shaken by the brutality of the Pahalgam massacre, which left 26 tourists dead and 17 others wounded on Tuesday, ordinary Indians have united in grief and rage, demanding swift retaliation against the perpetrators from the government.

Echoing similar sentiments, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday asserted that the country will not bend before terror and that those responsible for the killing of tourists at Pahalgam will not be spared.

Selective targeting of tourists, belonging to one faith, has not only devastated families but also shaken the public conscience.

To register their protest against the barbaric strike, people across Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday observed a complete shutdown.

Across the Valley, political, religious, social and professional organisations condemned the killing of tourists at the famous Baisaran meadow of Pahalgam. Protests were held in several parts of



Union Home Minister Amit Shah visiting the site of the Pahalgam terror attack in Anantnag district, Jammu and Kashmir. PTI

Jammu city, with many protesters raising anti-Pakistan slogans and demanding surgical strikes to destroy terror bases in the neighbouring country.

Before the mortal remains of tourists were dispatched to their native places, the Union Home Minister attended the

wreath-laying ceremony in Srinagar. Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also paid their tributes to the victims.

The Home Minister later interacted with families of the slain persons and other survivors of the attack.

## Move for Bharat Ratna for Madhubabu

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

President of India Droupadi Murmu has recommended to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to confer the Bharat Ratna on Utkal Gourab Madhusudan Das after a delegation of the Utkal Sammilani met her.

A copy of the letter sent by the President to the MHA has reached the office of the Utkal Sammilani in Bhubaneswar. The Sammilani has demanded that the MHA announce on the Madhubabu birth anniversary on April 28 about conferring of Bharat Ratna.

Utkal Sammilani general secretary Dillip Dashsharma said a letter has been written to the Home Department and the Urban Ministry for installing a statue of Madhubabu in the Parliament premises.



## Odisha unveils 'Vision 2036-2047' roadmap

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The 7th meeting of the Odisha Council of Ministers was convened on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi. Deputy Chief Ministers Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo and Pravati Parida, alongside all cabinet ministers, senior officials, and departmental secretaries, were present.

The Chief Minister announced the formulation

of an ambitious roadmap 'Odisha Vision 2036 and 2047' to mark the centenary of Odisha's formation and align with India's goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047. The vision, supported by NITI Aayog, is centred on three pillars 'Inclusion, Prosperity, and Wellness'.

To drive this transformation, the state will launch a strategic initiative titled '36 for 36', identifying 36 flagship programmes aimed at

catalysing growth across key sectors by 2036. The CM emphasized the need for enhanced infrastructure roads, rail, ports, and aviation and called for a collaborative approach involving public-private partnerships and technology-driven governance.

Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja underscored the importance of export-oriented manufacturing and reforms in deregulation, decriminalisation, and

digitisation to improve Ease of Doing Business. Development Commissioner Anu Garg and the six Sectoral Groups of Secretaries presented key components and sectoral priorities of the vision framework.

It was resolved that the draft Vision Document would be finalised within 15 days through public consultations at four regional workshops involving civil society, intellectuals and citizens.

## Come winter, welcome entry ban on all vehicles registered outside Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

In a move to tackle the high pollution load from commercial vehicles entering Delhi, the Commission of Air Quality Management (CAQM) on Wednesday issued an order banning on entry of all vehicles from November 1, 2025. Only BS-VI diesel, CNG, LNG and electric goods vehicles, including Light Goods Vehicles (LGVs), Medium Goods Vehicles (MGVs) and Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs), will be allowed entry into Delhi from that date, the commission said in an order. The CAQM said the order will apply to all such vehicles registered outside Delhi.

The Commission has also issued order not to give fuel to End of Life (EoL) vehicles, identified through the Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras or other such systems installed at the fuel pump stations from June 1, 2025 in Delhi and Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, Gautam Budh Nagar and sonapat will ban the fuel from November 1, 2025 and from April 1, 2026, it will be applicable in the rest of the national capital region.

According to experts, transport is the key contributors to air pollution in Delhi. There were 79.5 lakh vehicles registered as of March 31, 2023. Of these, 20.7 lakh were private cars. The total number of vehicles registered in Delhi was 1.2 crore, with 33.8 lakh being private cars, as per the Delhi Statistical Handbook 2023. The ever-growing vehicular traffic in Delhi - NCR has been a prime contributor to the enhanced vehicular emissions in the region and such large number of vehicles also cause traffic congestions and jams at major intersec-

tions and critical public places, thereby further enhancing the pollutant load from vehicular emissions.

"Such non-BS-VI compliant transport/commercial goods vehicles carrying essential commodities / providing essential services shall however be permitted to enter Delhi, but only for a limited period up to October 31, 2026 beyond which goods /services shall also have to be catered only through CNG / LNG / BV / BS-VI diesel vehicles." Transport Department/ Traffic Police in Delhi & the NCR States may accordingly widely disseminate this direction amongst all stakeholders and ensure strict compliance w.e.f. 01.11.2025 through effective implementation/enforcement measures at all border entry points to Delhi and regular monitoring/review of the same' Quarterly Reports on the action taken by the concerned agencies shall be furnished to commission," reads the order.

However, non-BS VI vehicles carrying essential commodities or providing essential services will be granted temporary exemption until October 31, 2026. After that, even essential services must switch to cleaner fuels.

The CAQM said commercial vehicles, especially older diesel ones, significantly contribute to Delhi-NCR's air pollution, particularly during winter. The decision is aligned with the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP), which already restricts entry of polluting vehicles during high-pollution days. The commission has directed the transport departments and traffic police in Delhi and neighbouring states to ensure strict enforcement of this order at all 126 border entry points and 52 toll plazas equipped with



Delhi Noida border

Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras. Quarterly compliance reports must be submitted by all implementing agencies, the CAQM said.

There is no restriction on entry of Diesel goods vehicles to BS-VI standards and all vehicles running on LNG, CNG or electric vehicles into Delhi at any point in time of the year.

"WHEREAS, the ever-growing vehicular traffic in Delhi - NCR has been a prime contributor to the enhanced vehicular emissions in the region and such large number of vehicles also cause traffic congestions and jams at major intersections and critical public places, thereby further enhancing the pollutant load from vehicular emissions;

"Whereas, within the vehicular sector, while transport/commercial goods vehicles are generally reported to be utilised extensively, these are often poorly maintained and thus are significantly high on emissions; WHEREAS, it has been established through various assessment studies that all classes of transport/commercial goods vehicles —

LGVs' MGVs and FIGVs particularly those with pre-BS-VI standards have significantly higher emission potential and these while passing through NCR areas and moving into Delhi contribute adversely to the overall vehicular pollution load in the entire NCR," it said.

On the barring fuel to overaged vehicles, the Commission ordered not to give fuel to such vehicles (End of Life-EoL) vehicles, identified through the Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras or other such systems installed at the fuel pump stations from June 1, 2025 in Delhi and Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, Gautam Budh Nagar and sonapat will ban the fuel from November 1, 2025 and from April 1, 2026, it will be applicable in the rest of the national capital region. 'Immediate legal action should be taken in respect of such BoL vehicles, including impounding and further disposal in accordance with RVSF Rules, 2021 and other extant policies of the respective State Governments and the GNCTD. There are 61, 14,728 overaged vehicles in Delhi; 27,50,152 in Haryana; 12,69,598 in UP and 6,20,962 in Rajasthan.

"Traffic surveillance cameras installed on major roads which facilitate the traffic police to challan vehicles for traffic violations and the Integrated Command Control Centers for traffic management in NCR cities/districts shall also be used for supplementing action against EoL vehicles found plying on roads, using camera feeds from strategic traffic points/intersections. Transport Department of GNCTD and the NCR States may accordingly widely disseminate this direction amongst all stakeholders including fuel stations and ensure its strict compliance through effective implementation / enforcement measures," it said.

# Cabinet meeting State approves key proposals in health, welfare, infra

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

A crucial State Cabinet meeting convened on Wednesday, led by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, set the stage for significant decisions shaping Odisha's future. Following the session, Chief Secretary Manoj Ahuja addressed the media, shedding light on the key decisions made, including the approval of six groundbreaking proposals across five vital departments.

The Cabinet approved an exemption for extra hour operation fees for Distilleries, Bottling Units and Brewery Units, as outlined in Rule 79 of the Odisha Excise Rules, 2017. This decision aims to

promote ease of doing business and attract investments, fostering employment opportunities and capacity building in the State.

The Cabinet also endorsed the conversion of the Excise Constable cadre from Divisional to District Cadre. This change will streamline the recruitment process and enhance service delivery at the district level.

Another important decision was the extension of the EMAS-108 scheme under Phase II for a period of five years, from 2023-24 to 2027-28. The scheme, currently running 866 ambulances, has been a vital service since its launch in 2013. With an estimated annual beneficiary count of 11-

12 lakh emergency cases, including pregnant women and children, the scheme will continue to improve pre-hospital emergency care across Odisha. A budget provision of Rs 2,398.45 crore has been made for the project.

In response to increasing welfare initiatives for Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, Minorities and Backward Classes, the Cabinet approved restructuring of the Odisha Subordinate Welfare Service (OSWS) and Odisha Welfare Service (OWS). This restructuring includes creation of 24 new posts at various levels, including 2 Additional District Welfare Officers, 11 Deputy Directors, 8 Joint Directors

and 3 Additional Directors. This move is expected to strengthen the implementation of welfare programmes for marginalised communities.

The Cabinet also approved an amendment to the Odisha Children's and Women's Welfare Service Rules, 1989, raising the qualification requirement for Anganwadi Workers to Graduation or its equivalent for appointments to the Junior Grade of Service. Current Anganwadi Workers will not be affected by the change and will continue under the previous qualification norms. This amendment aims to improve the quality of child and maternal care services by ensuring a

more qualified workforce.

Lastly, the Cabinet approved construction of an underground pipeline irrigation system under the Integrated Anandapur Barrage Project in Keonjhar district. This project, valued at Rs 108 crore, will enhance irrigation potential for 3450 hectares across two canals, the Baitarani Left Bank Canal (2221 Ha) and the Baitarani Right Bank Canal (1229 Ha). Farmers in Anandapur, Hatadihi and Ghasipura will benefit directly from this initiative, which is expected to boost agricultural productivity and socio-economic conditions in the region. The project is set for completion in 18 months.

# BJD team visits Puri minor's family, demands fast-track trial

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

A senior delegation of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) on Wednesday visited the family of Arshibad, the minor boy brutally murdered in Ratanpur village under Delang block in Puri district, and extended condolences on behalf of party president Naveen Patnaik.

The delegation, led by BJD spokesperson Sanjay Kumar Das Burma, condemned the "inhuman act" and demanded the accused be tried in a fast-track court to ensure swift and exemplary punishment. "Justice must not be delayed in such a heinous case," said Das Burma during the visit.

Accompanied by MLAs Sushant Rout, Tusharkanti Behera, and Nabakishore Mallick, along with former MLA Umakanta Samantaray



and leaders Rudra Pratap Maharathy and Pranab Balabantray, the delegation also visited the crime scene and interacted with locals.

Raising concerns over the prevailing law and order situation, the BJD leaders questioned the police's handling of the case and demanded stronger action. "Incidents like this expose growing gaps in rural policing," one of the leaders stated.

The delegation also expressed dismay over police action against 46 villagers who were booked for protesting the

murder. "These people were merely voicing their anguish and demanding justice. We urge the administration to withdraw the cases filed against them," said Das Burma.

The party delegation is also slated to meet the Puri Superintendent of Police to review the progress of the investigation and press for immediate legal redressal.

The visit comes amid growing outrage in the region and increasing pressure on the administration to deliver justice swiftly and transparently.

# CyberSafe India Conclave Odisha Govt suggested to form cyber security task force

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The CyberSafe India Conclave and Awards 2025, a landmark event dedicated to promoting cybersecurity awareness and fostering a safer digital ecosystem, was successfully organised by the Aasta Foundation here.



Dr Mishra appealed to the Government of Odisha to establish a dedicated cybersecurity task force comprising industry experts and law enforcement agencies to drive awareness and advocacy programmes across the State's rural areas.

Co-founder of Seat Papers Pte. Ltd., Singapore, Rajesh Singh reaffirmed his organisation's commitment to supporting the mission by offering advanced technological solutions and expertise.

Minister Harichandan stressed the importance of robust legal frameworks and surveillance mechanisms to counter cybercrime. He also outlined various initiatives and corrective measures undertaken by the Odisha Government to address cyber threats. Acknowledging Dr Mishra's proposal, the Ministers emphasised the growing threats in cyberspace and the urgent need to enhance digital literacy and awareness, especially in rural and underserved regions.

Chairman of Aasta Foundation and a globally recognised IT expert, Dr Stalin Mishra spearheaded the initiative with a compelling keynote address. He highlighted how innocent villagers are increasingly falling prey to cyber fraud due to a lack of digital education.

Other distinguished speakers at the conclave included Senior Director, NIC Sujata Das; Scientist-D, NIC Niladri Mohanty; Co-founder of Pinnacle Amit Srivastav; and Principal Scientist at WTCR Dr RK Panda.

# In Keonjhar 3 juveniles held for killing hostel mate

Had strangulated victim after argument

PNS ■ Keonjhar

A day after a 15-year-old student was found dead under mysterious circumstances in the hostel of a private institute in Keonjhar district; police have detained three of his hostelmates, all juveniles, on the alleged charge of murder.

The victim, Jaladhar Mahanta, son of Jagabandhu Mahanta of Tangarpada village under the Patna police station in Champua block, was found dead in his hostel room on Monday late night.

While initially it was suspected that Jaladhar could have had a heat stroke or heart

attack leading to sudden death. But subsequent probe by the Town police revealed that he died due to asphyxiation after being strangulated by three of his fellow roommates.

As per preliminary investigation, Jaladhar had come to the hostel 15 days back and was not getting along well with some of his classmates. The prime accused, a student from Naranpur village, being a class monitor used to be triggered when Jaladhar did not comply with his instructions. He was also enraged when some comments were reportedly passed by Jaladhar when they alighted from the college bus.

Harbouring a grudge against Jaladhar and attempting to seek revenge, the accused along with two other

students from Jashipur and Pandapada, suffocated Jaladhar with a blanket and strangled him to death following an argument which turned violent that day, police said.

"The accused have confessed to the crime. They have been produced in the Juvenile Court and taken to Rourkela Observation Home after their bail pleas were rejected," said Town police station IIC Srikant Sahu.

A student of Radhamadhav High School at Neundi village, Jaladhar had recently passed the HSC Examinations and was staying at the hostel of Gayatri Residential College, a private institution at Dangarpada in Keonjhar town to pursue a summer

course.

On Monday night, he had dinner with his friends as usual around 10 pm and went to sleep. Hostel mates found him sleeping in a bed in the corridor and went to wake him up at around 1 am. However, when Jaladhar reportedly did not respond, students called the college authorities and informed them about the situation following which he was rushed to the District Headquarters Hospital. But doctors declared him brought dead.

The deceased student's father later had filed a complaint with the Keonjhar Town police, alleging his son had been murdered in the hostel. Acting on it, cops had started probing the incident.

# In Sambalpur One suspected sunstroke death reported



CDMO orders probe

NIMAI CHARAN SAHU ■ Sambalpur

An order has been issued to the Rengali Community Health Centre (CHC) Superintendent to investigate the suspected sunstroke death of a 29-year-old man on Sunday, Sambalpur Chief District Medical Officer (CDMO) Sujata Rani Mishra said on Wednesday.

This is the first suspected sunstroke death in Sambalpur. The deceased has been identified as Anil Khandekar, son of Raju Khandekar of Maulinagar in Rengali Block, died at his home. The Rengali CHC superintendent has been asked to prepare a detailed report with the local Tehsildar to confirm the death.

Sambalpur, reeling at 43.8 degrees Celsius on Wednesday, has received an Orange warning with isolated warm nights for the upcoming three days. On Tuesday, three patients with heat-related illnesses visited government hospitals across the district, said sources in the District Headquarters Hospital (DHH).

Though no patient has

taken admission in hospitals yet, the heat-related illness cases are coming to OPD and being provided proper ORS and medicines, said Medical Supervisor Surya Narayan Sahu.

On the other hand, to beat the heat people have adopted different ways. The surge to the city centre mall has increased with people visiting the place for air-conditioned ambience.

A city resident Krishna Gupta said, "Sambalpur is becoming hotter year by year. The condition wasn't like this five years ago. In the name of road expansion and developmental projects, the government has been incessantly felling trees in the past two years. You won't find giant trees in the town to take shelter for a long stretch; there is no tree. It's really becoming difficult to stay in summer. All important works are being postponed. We are stepping outside during night time only."

Reportedly, Sambalpur had seven confirmed deaths in June 2024.

The DHH and the VIMSAR have made proper arrangements with air-conditioned rooms and sufficient beds available for the admission of heatstroke patients in the coming days.

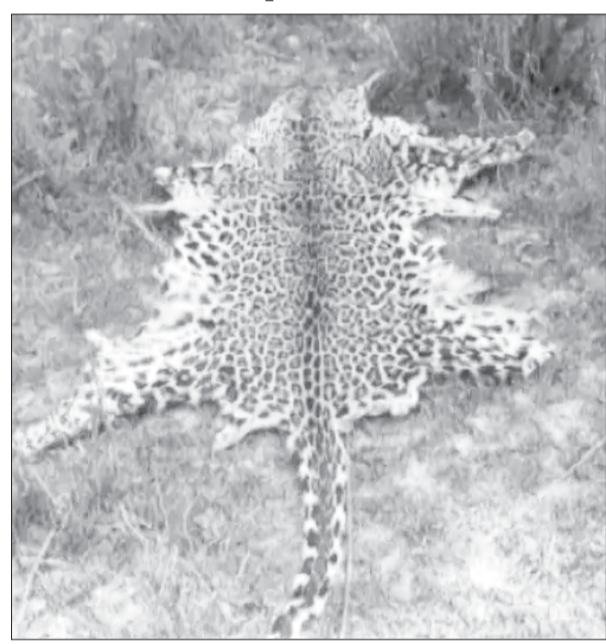
# In Kandhamal STF seizes leopard skin; 2 held

PNS ■ Phulbani

The Special Task Force (STF) of the Crime Branch has arrested two persons in Kandhamal district for illegal possession of a leopard skin on Monday.

Acting on inputs, a STF team conducted a raid along State Highway No 1, near Dahapadar Chhak on the Phulbani-Baliguda road, under the jurisdiction of Phulbani Sadar police station.

During the operation, two suspects, identified as Pradip Mallick (35) and Gutusha Pradhan (56), both residents of Budruma village in Kandhamal, were arrested. Authorities recovered a leopard



skin and other incriminating materials from their possession. The accused failed to provide valid documentation for the leopard skin. Consequently, they were presented before the Sub-Divisional Judicial Magistrate (SDJM) Court in Phulbani.

The STF has registered a case under Sections 303(2), 317(2), and 61(2) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, along with Section 51 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The seized leopard skin was sent for biological examination at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in Dehradun to determine its authenticity and gather further evidence.

# Two die of suffocation in Rayagada village

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Two brothers, Tete Tangaranga (25) and Chittaranjan Tangaranga (30), tragically lost their lives due to oxygen deprivation while cleaning a well at Bandhiri village in Rayagada district on Wednesday.

The brothers had descended into the well early in the morning to begin their cleaning work in Kalima Sahi locality, within the jurisdiction of Chandrapur police station. They fell unconscious and were unable to recover, succumbing to the lack of oxygen. Fire Service personnel retrieved their bodies and transported them to a nearby health centre, where they were pronounced dead.

This incident adds to a growing concern over occupational safety, particularly involving sanitation workers.

Earlier this year, three workers in Cuttack died from lack of oxygen while attempting to rescue others from an underground septic tank, highlighting systemic safety issues in such hazardous jobs.

Suffocation in confined spaces like wells or septic tanks often occurs due to oxygen depletion or toxic gas accumulation. This has resulted in several fatalities across Odisha, including a similar case in Rayagada in 2023, where two workers died while installing a motor pump.

Public outcry often follows these incidents with demands for faster investigations and stricter enforcement of laws like the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers Act. Additionally, safety measures, such as protective gear and better rescue protocols, need to be urgently implemented to prevent further tragedies.

# Distress migration from Dangaria Kandha villages

Many death cases reported at workplaces in recent months

BADAL TAH ■ Rayagada

A tribal girl named Adai Wadaka, daughter of Ganesh Wadaka belonging to Dangaria Kandha tribe, a Primarily Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of Niyamagiri Hills, migrated to a tile making company, named Kaltila Tiles, in Thrissur district, Kerala and after working there for a few days, her dead body returned to her native village at Khajuri in Kurli Gram Panchayat of Bissam Cuttack Block.

Along with her, 17 youths, both boys and girls, had migrated through a broker/labour contractor. Five were from Khajuri village itself. Ganesh said that his daughter migrated as there was no

source of livelihood in the village.

The district administration got into action when it was informed to Collector Parul Patawari in writing by Jitu Jakesika belonging to the same PVTG community and district president, Bahujan Samaj Party.

Bissam Cuttack MLA Nilamadhav Hikaka also quickly intervened by contacting the labour department. DIPRO Basanta Pradhan, Rayagada said that the owner of the factory paid Rs 40,000 for the part cost of ambulance and other sundry expenses while the balance cost will be met by the district administration.

Unfortunately, the poor father of the deceased girl along with a few villagers came all the way from Khajuri, which is around 50 km from the district headquarters and ap-



proached ADM Nihar Ranjan Kahanr for some financial help, but in vain. Jitu is anguished over the lackadaisical attitude of the district administration and their assurance.

He further said that the tile company gave only Rs 25,000 instead of Rs 40,000 for which they had to collect Rs 25,000 from the community itself and sent to the tile company. Till

writing of the report no responsible government official had visited the deceased girl's house.

"Though the exact reasons of death are yet to be ascertained, it is really a matter of concern that especially poor tribals and Dalits are dying at the migrated working spots. During recent months, half a dozen death cases have come to the fore. Tribals live in an organic and natural forest based habitat. Sudden change to a totally different atmosphere coupled with heavy pollution could be the reason of mortality. Change in food habits and congested staying arrangements leads to ill health. Government must probe the root cause of migration at source and working conditions at the work spots. Ensuring employment in the villages through MGNREGA and other government schemes and checking pilferage may help these impover-

ished tribal community," opined State vice president, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangha Jageswar Das.

As there is a sheer development deficit in these Dangaria villages, apart from general government development schemes, there is a special scheme called Odisha PVTG Empowerment Livelihood Improvement Programme (OPELIP) executed by Dangaria Kandha Development Agency (DKDA) under Gunupur ITDA. Interestingly, major chunk of OPELIP funds are dumped in Khajuri village. The Government staff showcased their achievements in this village. Now, there is PM-JANMAN programme and Sakata as model village declared by GOI. Collector Parul projected a rosy picture to her bureaucratic and political bosses at Delhi. But the situation is denigrating at ground zero, alleged sources.

# Pahalgam terror attack sparks national outcry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Several Chief Minister and political figures on Wednesday condemned the Pahalgam terror attack and expressed condolences to the families of the deceased.

Assam government is making all arrangements to bring back a survivor family of the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said.

"The CMO Office Assam has spoken to a survivor from Assam of the dastardly #PahalgamTerrorAttack and has taken a full brief of the incident which they have faced yesterday," the CMO said in a social media post.

"The entire family's return to the State is being arranged on priority and the Government of Assam is in touch with the Govt of India to bring the family back to Assam at the earliest," it added.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the images of coffins are heartbreaking and have shaken the nation's conscience.

"The people of Assam join Adarniya @AmitShah ji in offering our prayers for the departed. This nefarious attack will be avenged and the perpetrators will not be spared... India will never forget and never forgive!" he said in a series of posts. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said those responsible for the "cowardly" attack on tourists in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam will not be spared.

"We strongly condemn the cowardly and planned attack on tourists... Those who have committed this act will not be spared, and strict action will be taken

against them," Saini told reporters in Gurugram, asserting that the Centre's resolve to fight against terror is firm.

Among those killed in the attack was 26-year-old Indian Navy officer Lieutenant Vinay Narwal, a resident of Haryana's Karnal, who was holidaying with his wife in Pahalgam. Narwal got married recently.

On Wednesday, Saini made a video call to Narwal's grandfather, who sought from Prime Minister Narendra Modi exemplary punishment for the perpetrators and firm action to weed out terrorism. "Today, I have lost my grandson, tomorrow it can be someone else," he said while speaking to chief minister Saini.

Haryana Assembly Speaker Harvinder Kalyan, who is a BJP MLA from Gharaunda in Karnal district, also reached Karnal city to be with the bereaved family. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee confirmed that three persons from the state were killed in the terror attack.

Describing it to be a "grim hour" for the state, Banerjee said her government was making all the arrangements to get family members of the victims back home from New Delhi and she was personally overseeing it. "As per the latest updated information made available to us, three persons from our state have died in the most unfortunate Kashmir violence," Banerjee said in a social media post.

The three deceased are Bitan Adhikari of Baishnabghata in Kolkata, Samir Guha of Sakher Bazar in Kolkata and Manish Ranjan of Jhalda in Purulia district.

"All arrangements are being put up by our administration at Delhi Airport to help



Security personnel near the site of the Pahalgam terror attack in Anantnag district, Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday. At least 26 people were killed in the terrorist attack on Tuesday. PTI

the family members of the victims and their onward journey to Kolkata. Flight is likely to arrive in Kolkata at 8.30 pm today," she said. The resident commissioner's office in Delhi is in touch with the family members, the chief minister said.

Extending her condolences to the families of those killed in the attack, Banerjee said that her government is standing by them in the crisis. "A grim hour for all of us," she said. A two-minute silence was observed on Wednesday at a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami in Dehradun to pay tribute to the victims of the terror attack at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir.

The meeting chaired by Dhami and

attended by senior officials, including Garhwal Commissioner Vinay Shankar Pandey, Secretary to CM Shailesh Baghlauli and Secretary (housing and energy) R Meenakshi Sundaram was held at the chief minister's official residence.

Conveying his deep condolences to the families that lost their loved ones in the attack, Dhami said, "My deep condolences to the bereaved families on behalf of the people of Uttarakhand. This cowardly attack is not only an attack on innocent people but also on the culture, peace and values of humanity of our country."

"The attempts by terrorists to disturb Jammu and Kashmir will never succeed. A befitting reply will be given to this mis-

deed and the culprits will not be spared," he said. Union Minister G Kishan Reddy and several other BJP leaders and activists on Wednesday held a protest in Hyderabad against the Pahalgam terror attack, raising slogans calling for an attack against Pakistan.

Kishan Reddy, who wore a black dress as an expression of protest, said those responsible for the attack will not be spared. The government would take a decision to act against the terrorists, he said.

Terming the attack as a "cowardly act" in a statement issued in Shimla, Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said such incidents were not acceptable in a civilised society and anti-social elements must be curbed at all costs.

Former Himachal Pradesh chief minister Jai Ram Thakur also condemned the terror attack and said "such cruelty" cannot be tolerated in a civilised society.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said the TDP-led NDA government extends its solidarity with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the union government in the backdrop of the terror attack.

The chief minister underscored that the state government extends its support to Modi and the Centre in their commitment to safeguard India's sovereignty and responding to terrorism with "firm and decisive action".

Further, he mourned the death of JC Chandra Mouli and Madhusudhan in the attack, who were of Telugu origin.

"Our thoughts and prayers are with their families during this time of profound grief, and I pray they find the strength to endure this immense loss," added Naidu, who is

scheduled to receive Mouli's body in Vizag later on Wednesday.

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav described the terror attack as "very painful" and termed the killing of tourists as "unthinkable".

He said, "One of the deceased happens to be from Bihar, but posted in Hyderabad. We offer condolences to all bereaved family members."

The reference was to Manish Ranjan, an Intelligence Bureau official, whose father had migrated to West Bengal long ago.

Ranjan's wife and children, who were accompanying him at the tourist spot in Jammu and Kashmir, survived the attack.

Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt General K T Parnaik (retired) termed the killing of innocent people as a "barbaric act of cowardice," and said such attacks are a direct assault on the composite and inclusive fabric of India, which binds the nation in unity and diversity.

On Corporal Tage Hailyang of the Indian Air Force, an Arunachal Pradesh resident who lost his life in the attack, Parnaik said the entire state stands united in mourning this irreparable loss, a Raj Bhavan statement said here.

Parnaik, who served in Jammu and Kashmir including as the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Northern Command, also wished a speedy and full recovery to those injured in the attack.

AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi alleged the Pahalgam terror attack was the result of an intelligence failure. He demanded the Narendra Modi government to fix accountability over the incident saying the attack is more dangerous, condemnable and painful than the similar incidents in Uri and Pulwama.



Indian Navy Lt. Vinay Narwal's wife breaks down while paying tribute to her husband after his mortal remains were brought at the cargo terminal of IGI Airport in New Delhi on Wednesday. PTI

## Navy officer killed in J and K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Chandigarh

Married just a few days ago, 26-year-old Indian Navy officer Lieutenant Vinay Narwal was holidaying with his wife in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam when terrorists shot him dead.

Hailing from Bhushi village in Karnal district, Narwal's family was presently living in Karnal city.

The Indian Navy also confirmed Narwal's death in the terror attack.

"Adm Dinesh K Tripathi, #CNS and all Personnel of the Indian Navy are shocked and deeply saddened by the tragic loss of Lt Vinay Narwal who fell to the dastardly terror attack in Pahalgam. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family during this moment of unimaginable grief.

"The #IndianNavy also stands in solemn solidarity with all others that lost their lives in this heinous act of violence. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims' families and we pray for the swift recovery of those injured," the Navy said in a social media post.

Narwal's neighbour Naresh Bansal said the officer had recently got married.

"After the marriage, everyone was celebrating and in a happy mood. And now suddenly this sad news comes," he said about the terror attack incident.

Another neighbour Seema recalled that there were grand celebrations at his home and not just the Narwal family, but the entire neighbourhood was celebrating after the wedding.

She told reporters in Karnal that Narwal did his engineering and later cleared the exams to become an officer in the Indian Navy.

"They were planning a honeymoon in Switzerland, but decided to go to Kashmir instead taking into account the leave he had, we can't imagine what his family is going through," she said.

"We saw videos where a girl was crying and pleading with the terrorists to kill her too but they told her they were sparing her so that she can tell (PM Narendra) Modi what happened," she said without elaborating.

At least 26 persons — mostly tourists — were killed by terrorists on Tuesday at the Baisaran meadows in Pahalgam in one of the worst terror attacks on civilians in Kashmir in the past many years.

## Ujjain Collector breaks norm with chair for citizens

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

In a gesture that quietly speaks volumes, Ujjain district Collector Roshan Kumar Singh is drawing praise for a simple but significant move— placing a chair in front of his desk during public hearing so that complainants can sit and speak comfortably.

Singh, a 2015 batch IAS officer, assumed charge as Ujjain's Collector on April 15. At his very first Jan Sunwai (public hearing) in the district, held on a Tuesday as mandated across Madhya Pradesh, Singh instructed his staff to place

a chair for complainants. Traditionally, complainants stand while presenting their grievances, while the Collector and revenue officials remain seated—a practice often criticised for its symbolic imbalance.

While talking to The Pioneer, Singh downplayed the gesture. "People come with problems—some of them serious and deeply personal. The least we can do is offer them a seat and a sense of dignity," says Ujjain Collector Roshan Kumar Singh, explaining the thought behind his simple yet impactful change during public hearings.

While public hearings are a regular feature in all district Collectorate of Madhya Pradesh, Singh's approach has reignited the debate about why such a small act of empathy has remained so rare.

This is not the first time Singh has introduced people-centric innovations. During his tenure as Vidisha Collector, he took a proactive approach to resolving complaints under the CM Helpline. Going beyond the standard protocol, he personally reached out to complainants through random calls to verify if their issues were genuinely resolved and to assess their satisfaction levels.

Prior to his posting in Ujjain, Roshan Kumar Singh served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Morena District Panchayat and was later appointed Commissioner of the Ujjain Municipal Corporation in 2022. He subsequently served in the Public Relations Department in Bhopal before taking charge as Collector of Vidisha.

Now in Ujjain, Singh continues to uphold a governance style that prioritizes accessibility, humility, and a genuine connection with the public—a refreshing approach in a system often seen as hierarchical and distant.

## 'I'm alive for a reason', says terror attack survivor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Neha alias Kishori Waghulade, who works as a casual announcer with the All India Radio (AIR) in Maharashtra's Jalgaon city, feels she must have done something good in life to have survived the deadly terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam town.

Visiting Pahalgam with a group of holiday-makers, Neha Waghulade was admiring the natural beauty of Baisaran meadows, a prime tourist location, when gunshots rang in the air on Tuesday afternoon. The meadows in the upper reaches of Pahalgam soon turned into a site of carnage where 26 people, mostly tourists, were gunned down by terrorists.

"I must have done something good in life, that's why I am still alive," she told her husband after surviving the terror attack. Her husband, Tushar Waghulade, speaking from Jalgaon, said his wife went to Kashmir with a group of friends on April 15. "The group was in Pahalgam. I had not been in touch with her for two days because of work. When I called her

around 2 pm on Tuesday, she said there was firing and a terror attack was taking place. She told me she was safe and would contact me later," he said. Tushar Waghulade said he sensed the gravity of the situation from her voice. "She sounded shaken. Then she cut the call. I understood how serious it was," he said. They spoke again in the evening.

"Between 7.30 pm and 8 pm, she told me she was fine. She mentioned ambulances and that more security personnel were arriving. She said some tourists had died, but her group was safe," Tushar Waghulade maintained. Yetesh Sudhir Parmar, a resident of Gujarat's Bhavnagar, who was killed in the terrorist attack at Pahalgam in Anantnag district of Jammu & Kashmir. "She told me that during the afternoon call there was a loud noise and people were panicking. After she hung up, I assumed her group had been moved to a safer place," he said.

They first hid tourists in vehicles and ambulances and later shifted everyone to a safe place about 1.5 km from the attack site. Many tourists spent the night there," he said.

## Three Gujarat tourists killed in terror attack



(Left and right) Yeshesh Sudhir Parmar and Smit Yeshesh Parmar residents of Gujarat's Bhavnagar, who were killed in the terrorist attack at Pahalgam in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir. PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ahmedabad

Three tourists hailing from Gujarat were among the 26 persons killed in a terror attack in Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag district, officials said on Wednesday.

The Gujarat administration was in touch with the Centre and the Jammu and Kashmir government to bring back the bodies, state Health Minister Rushikesh Patel told reporters.

Shailesh Kalathiya from Surat, Yatish Parmar and his son Smit Parmar from Bhavnagar were among the 26 persons killed in the horrific terror attack in Pahalgam on Tuesday, as per officials.

"Three persons from Gujarat — two from Bhavnagar and one from Surat — were killed in the attack, while two were injured. The victim hailing from Surat lived in Mumbai.

"We are in touch with the Centre and Jammu and Kashmir government to bring back the bodies. We have also started efforts to bring back other tourists who survived the attack," Patel said.

Kalathiya (44), belonging to Chikwadi area in Surat city, shifted to Mumbai a few years back after he was transferred there, according to officials.

"Kalathiya's cousin told us that he shifted to Mumbai four years ago due to job transfer. He had gone to Pahalgam with his wife and two children. His wife and children are safe," Surat disaster management department's revenue officer Sajid Merujay said.

Yatish Parmar and his son Smit Parmar, residents of Kaliyabid area of Bhavnagar city, were among those killed in the Pahalgam terror attack, district collector Manish Kumar Bansal said.

The two were among 19 persons from Bhavnagar who went to Kashmir on April 16 to attend religious preacher Morari Babu's discourse there, according to sources.

Terrorists struck at a prime tourist location in Pahalgam in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing at least 26 persons, mostly tourists and injuring several others. Security has been beefed up across the valley, especially at vital tourist spots.

## UP announces DA hike for 5th and 6th Pay Commission employees

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a significant decision aimed at easing the financial burden on government employees, the Uttar Pradesh government has approved a hike in dearness allowance (DA) for staff receiving salaries under the 5th and 6th Pay Commissions. The announcement, made through an official order issued by the Additional Chief Secretary (Finance), is expected to benefit thousands of employees across the state, including teachers, technical staff, and urban local body workers.

According to the revised structure, the DA for employees under the 5th Pay Commission has been increased by 11 per-

cent, raising the rate from 455 percent to 466 percent of basic pay. Employees falling under the 6th Pay Commission will see a 6 percent hike, bringing their total DA to 252 percent from the earlier 246 percent.

These rates reflect the government's effort to account for the rising cost of living and inflationary trends that have impacted employees still serving under older pay structures. The enhanced DA will be paid in cash starting from April 1, 2025.

For the period between January 1 and March 31, 2025, the amount will be credited to the employees' General Provident Fund (GPF) accounts or other designated future savings instruments. This method ensures that the fiscal burden is

managed prudently while still securing the benefit for the employees. The increase will cover a wide category of employees, including state government personnel, staff of government-aided educational institutions, technical institute employees, and regular and full-time staff employed by urban local bodies.

These are employees who, for various administrative or structural reasons, have not been transitioned to the 7th Pay Commission and continue to work under previous regimes. While, Vivek Kishore, leader of the State Government Employees Association, welcomed the move but said more needed to be done to bring parity. "This increase in dearness allowance is a

welcome step. Our long-standing demand has finally been addressed and it will provide financial relief to a large section of employees. We urge the government to consider bringing all employees under the 7th Pay Commission to ensure uniformity in compensation and benefits."

Employee unions, associations have been pressing for the revision for several months, arguing that stagnant allowances were eroding real income, particularly as inflation and cost of essential commodities have risen sharply. This announcement comes at a crucial time, towards new fiscal year and reflects its intent to maintain administrative harmony and employee satisfaction.

## Kanpur plunged into grief over Shubham Dwivedi's death in Pahalgam terror attack

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Kanpur

A deep pall of sorrow hangs over Kanpur as news of the death of Shubham Dwivedi, a young man from the city killed in the recent terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam, spreads through his locality.

The 28-year-old, who had gone to the Valley for a short vacation with his wife, was shot in the head by terrorists in a brutal assault that claimed over two dozen civilian lives. Shubham had only recently stepped into a new chapter of his

life—he was married on February 12 this year. The attack has left not just his family, but an entire neighborhood in mourning.

"He was full of life, always ready to help everyone," said Rajesh Sinha, a neighbour who had known Shubham since childhood.

"We just attended his wedding celebrations in February. Who knew that we would be attending his funeral so soon?"

Locals gathered outside Shubham's home in Govind Nagar on Wednesday morning, many in tears, as they awaited

updates from the family.

Some lit candles in the evening and held a silent prayer for the departed soul.

"Shubham was like a son to all of us. His death feels like a personal loss," said Sunita Verma, an elderly woman who lives two houses away from the Dwivedis.

"His wife is in shock. We just want her to know that the entire mohalla stands with her." Shubham's cousin Saurabh Dwivedi said the terrorists had allegedly asked names before opening fire.

"My sister-in-law called my uncle and said Shubham was shot in the head. We

have been told the body will be handed over in a couple of days after official procedures," he said.

The incident has triggered outrage and sorrow in equal measure. Local social groups have demanded that the government take strict action against terror outfits responsible for the attack.

"This is not just about Shubham. He represents every Indian civilian who dares to dream, travels for peace, and falls victim to mindless violence," said Shailesh Mishra, a local youth activist who plans to hold a peace march in

Shubham's memory.

The attack, which took place in Pahalgam, has been attributed to a group with suspected links to Lashkar-e-Taiba. Home Minister Amit Shah visited the attack site and assured that the perpetrators would be brought to justice.

As the Dwivedi family prepares to receive Shubham's mortal remains, Kanpur stands united in grief—remembering a young life snatched away too soon, and demanding that such bloodshed never be repeated again.

Meanwhile, Prime Narendra Modi

has cancelled the programme scheduled in Kanpur on April 24 in the wake of Pahalgam terror attack where 26 people were gunned down.

The Prime Minister was scheduled to visit Kanpur on April 24 to inaugurate and lay the foundation stone for development projects worth over ₹20,000 crore.

However, in light of the recent terror attack that claimed a number of lives, including that of Shubham, who hails from Kanpur, the event has been cancelled.

**Editor's TAKE**

## Humanity dies in Pahalgam

**Terrorists slaughter 28 tourists — a tragic reminder that terror still haunts the Valley**

In one of the deadliest terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, 28 tourists were massacred on Tuesday in the tranquil Baisaran meadow near the popular hill resort of Pahalgam. The Resistance Front (RF), a proxy terror outfit of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), claimed responsibility. This attack has not only shocked the nation but also reopened deep-seated concerns about the fragile security scenario in Kashmir.

The tourists, who included honeymooners, families, and two foreign nationals—from Nepal and the UAE—were gunned down in a sudden gunfire. Despite existing security measures, including checkpoints and patrols, the attackers managed to infiltrate and execute their mission with clinical precision, raising serious questions about intelligence and on-ground preparedness.

This incident is not an isolated act of violence but appears deeply orchestrated. It coincided with two significant geopolitical events: The visit of US Vice President JD Vance to India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomatic mission in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, it followed a combative speech by Pakistani Army chief General Asim Munir, intensifying suspicions that the attack was calibrated to internationalise the Kashmir issue and portray the region as a nuclear flashpoint. The synchronicity is disturbingly reminiscent of the Chittisinghpura massacre in 2000, where 36 Sikhs were murdered days before US President Bill Clinton's visit.

By targeting tourists — symbols of normalcy and economic recovery—the terrorists aimed to derail the narrative of a stable Kashmir and provoke communal unrest across India. Since Article 370 was revoked, the Indian government has maintained a tight security apparatus in Kashmir, focusing on counter-insurgency and infrastructure development to boost tourism. While there has been a marked decline in local recruitment into terrorist groups, proxies like TRF have stepped up infiltration, especially using foreign fighters and sleeper cells.

The attack also underscores significant lapses. Despite heavy surveillance, there was no forewarning of this operation. The use of Army uniforms by terrorists highlights a dangerous tactic to bypass trust and checkpoints. Tourists, previously considered off-limits, are now being directly targeted, expanding the threat matrix. But the question is why now? Indeed it has to do with the arrival of US Vice President JD Vance. Pakistan may be attempting to paint Kashmir as unstable and urge foreign intervention.

Tourism in Kashmir has seen a resurgence post-370, contributing significantly to the local economy. Attacking tourists directly threatens this recovery. The brutal nature of the attack — execution-style killings — aims to spread fear and signal the reach and intent of the perpetrators.

India now faces the dual challenge of responding decisively to terror while safeguarding the fragile gains in Kashmir. It is time to enhanced human intelligence and local collaboration to detect sleeper cells. Deployment of smart surveillance technologies in vulnerable areas is a must and should be taken on priority. In the wake of this unspeakable tragedy, India faces a critical inflection point — one that demands not just a military or tactical response, but a comprehensive strategic recalibration.

First and foremost, a robust diplomatic offensive is essential. India must intensify international pressure on nations that provide safe haven or support to terror outfits, directly or indirectly. This includes leveraging global forums such as the United Nations, and bilateral partnerships to isolate state and non-state actors that are responsible for terrorism. Silence and inaction on terror can no longer be diplomatically acceptable — strategic complacency must be met with unwavering clarity and consequence.

Second, the long-term antidote to terrorism lies not only in security but in stability. Continued economic development and civic engagement in Jammu and Kashmir are key to undermining extremist narratives.

Investment in education, job creation, tourism infrastructure, and inclusive governance empowers local communities, weakens recruitment for terror networks, and fosters a sense of belonging among youth. A region that thrives economically is harder to radicalise. Most critically, it is time to revisit and reinforce the security architecture surrounding tourism. Tourists — once regarded as ambassadors of peace and economic revival — have now become targets. This demands a thorough overhaul of safety protocols, especially in remote and high-traffic areas like Pahalgam. The aim is not to deter tourism, but to restore confidence. Kashmir must not once again become a hostage to fear.

## Leaderspeak



The dastardly killing of innocent, unsuspecting tourists by terrorists in Pahalgam yesterday around 2:30 PM has deeply hurt, shocked, and saddened us all. The Congress Party unequivocally condemns this cowardly act of terror and those responsible for it in the strongest possible terms. This attack is a direct assault on the unity and integrity of our nation.

MALLIKARJUN KHARGE, PRESIDENT, CONGRESS PARTY

# Political fault lines shift in Bihar

With caste dynamics, coalition equations, and leadership challenges all in play, the stage is set for a high-stakes political showdown between the NDA and the Mahagathbandhan

The Bihar polls at the end of the year are pretty unpredictable. Currently, there will be no cakewalk for the BJP, RJD, Congress or the JD(U). The churning is quietly taking place in Bihar politics. There could be a potential shift in power dynamics. The BJP, playing second fiddle to the Janata Dal (United) for the past two decades, is eyeing a lead role. The RJD wants to form the government.

Two crucial power groups are in the fight. On one side, the NDA and, on the other, the Mahagathbandhan, which comprises the RJD, Congress, and the Left parties. Intra-party and inner-party dynamics are in full swing.

The NDA and Mahagathbandhan are making calculated moves for a high-stakes political showdown. Encouraged by consecutive victories in states where the odds were against it, a revitalised BJP has now set its sights on Bihar after winning Delhi.

Bihar's caste politics is interesting. Backward classes comprise 63.13 per cent of the population, and the upper caste is only 15.52 per cent. Other Backward Classes comprise 27.12 per cent of the backward class category, while the Extremely Backward Class population numbered 36 per cent. Dalits comprise almost 19.65 per cent and

Yadavs account for 14.26 per cent. Kurmi, Nitish Kumar's Kurmi caste, also categorised as OBC, is 2.87 per cent of the population. In the last Assembly polls, upper castes, around 15 per cent of the population, dominated ticket distribution in many parties. BJP gave 47.3 per cent of its tickets to upper caste candidates, whereas Congress gave 40 per cent of its seats to upper castes.

In the 2020 Bihar assembly elections, the Mahagathbandhan did not win a simple majority in the 243-member legislative assembly, missing it by just 12 seats. The RJD was the largest party in the House but could not form the government.

For the 2025 polls, JD(U) has confirmed Nitish Kumar as the chief ministerial face. The well-known poll expert Prashant Kishor predicted that Nitish Kumar would end his political career. The RJD has opted for its leader, Tejaswi Yadav. Congress has not opened its cards yet. A series of meetings between Congress and the RJD, which began this month, continues.

The Janata Dal (United) party and the BJP coalition currently rule Bihar. Nitish Kumar's deteriorating health, caste balance, and the functioning of the alliance make Bihar politically unpredictable. Even if the



BJP chooses Nitish, his health issues could significantly impact the election outcome.

The JD(U) wants to bargain for more seats with the BJP. In 2020, the JD(U) ran for 115 seats but only won 43. In contrast, the BJP ran for 110 seats and won 74. The Mahagathbandhan, which consists of RJD,

Congress, and some smaller parties, pose stiff opposition. The RJD and top Congress leaders met in Delhi last week to advance the alliance.

Political realignments since 2020 — the VIP joining the MGB, the LJP aligning with the NDA and the Rashtriya Lok Samata Party merging into the JD(U) — complicate the poll picture.

A key development since 2020 has been the change in the power equation within the NDA, with the BJP emerging stronger. The BJP has strategically cultivated non-dominant other backward classes (OBCs) and non-dominant Dalit communities.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah visit-

ed Bihar for two days. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Bihar.

RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav made a surprising announcement, stating that he is open to reconciling with his socialist ally, Nitish Kumar. In response to this mischievous statement, Nitish remarked that he had inadvertently aligned with the RJD. Tejaswi Yadav, however, asserted that there is no place for Nitish in the Mahagathbandhan. Many believe that Nitish, known for his U-turns, could switch sides.

The INDIA opposition bloc has appointed Tejaswi Yadav, the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister, as head of its coordination committee for the upcoming Bihar Assembly elections. This decision was made during a meeting of the six alliance partners in Patna on April 17.

The Congress and Left parties in the Mahagathbandhan are worried that the RJD will wait until the last minute to finalise seat-sharing agreements. The Congress party is unhappy with the weak constituencies it was given in 2020. It only won 19 out of the 70 seats it contested in the last election. The CPI(ML), which did

well in 2020, wants a larger share of seats. Since 2005, the RJD has had difficulty regaining power, except for short periods in 2015 and 2022.

Currently, Tejaswi Yadav has two main tasks. First, he needs to expand the support beyond its core groups of Muslims and Yadavs to include other castes. This involves a stronger grassroots campaign, as the traditional voting trends are changing. The Congress has not developed younger leadership in Bihar. Its old core groups of Muslims and Dalits have shifted to other parties. The party has launched the 'Samvidhan Leadership Programme' to eye marginalised communities.

The main parties face challenges both within their groups and from outside, and a significant political change is expected. A point to note is that Nitish Kumar's EBC is intact and challenges the RJD-Congress alliance.

There could be many more changes before November; they would be interesting to watch. In politics, one week is said to be long. Six months is really long.

(The author is a popular columnist. Views are personal)

## Why EQ matters more than IQ

### SECOND Opinion

BY SHARMILA VAIDYA

In my most rewarding 26 years of experience working as an educator, I have had the privilege of working with students from diverse backgrounds and in different educational settings. It is during this period I started administering the state mandated IQ tests. These tests were administered to measure an individual's cognitive abilities, mostly logical reasoning, memory and verbal mathematical aptitude. They tell us how well someone can solve abstract problems under specific conditions.

I was surprised to see how these standardised tests categorised and measured individuals by numbers and scores often disregarding their potential, experiences and abilities, making it inherently biased.

This realisation prompted me to explore what IQ, intelligence and success fully mean in the real world. Hence, I decided to conduct a small survey. To get a fair sampling, I included people of different backgrounds — educators, parents, students, homemakers and professionals.

My questions were:  
1. What qualities make you see someone as intelligent?  
2. Do you think people with low IQ can be successful?  
I was pleasantly surprised to see the responses from the survey. According to the survey - some of these qualities were,

- someone who is empathetic, creative, problem-solving, curious, open to ideas, a good communicator, accepting without being judgmental ... and many more. Most people also believe that individuals with lower IQ scores can achieve success - especially when they possess strong emotional intelligence (EQ).

Based on this survey I concluded that there was a shift in people's perception from IQ to EQ. In general, the meaning of intelligence exceeded beyond the confinement of standardised test. In order to get a broader understanding of intelligence I started researching the different types of intelligences as per psychological theory.

In the 1980s, Harvard psychologist, Howard Gardner proposed a theory that broke away from the "one-size-fits-all" model of intelligence. He introduced eight distinct types of intelligence that reflected the diverse ways humans learn, express themselves, and solve problems. These were:

Linguistic Intelligence: Word savvy like, writers, storytellers  
Logical: Mathematical Intelligence: Analytical thinkers, like scientists and engineers

Musical Intelligence: Musically inclined, like musicians, Kinesthetic Intelligence: Physical grace and skill like, dancers

Spatial Intelligence: Visual and spatial thinkers like architects and artists

Interpersonal Intelligence: People skills and empathy like, therapists, teachers, and leaders.

Intrapersonal Intelligence: Deep self-understanding like philosophers and spiritual leaders

Naturalistic Intelligence: Attunement to nature, like, gardeners and environmentalists.

Among other psychologists that followed, Daniel Goldman played an important role in introducing the concept of Emotional Intelligence, which includes empathy, self-awareness and emotional regulation which demonstrated that EQ plays an important role in personal success.

Together, these theories encourage us to look beyond IQ scores and appreciate the depth and diversity of human potential. Hence, even if one wasn't considered academically intelligent and didn't fit in the traditional high IQ "cookie cutter" mould, many have been very successful and have contributed to society at large. Examples include:

Thomas Edison was considered "difficult" in school and reportedly had very little formal education. His teachers thought he was slow or unable to learn. Despite this, he became one of the most prolific inventors in history.

Walt Disney was reportedly fired from a newspaper job for "lacking imagination," and he struggled academically. His success came through storytelling, creativity, and persistence.

Therefore, we must reconsider the tendency to label someone as lazy or unintelligent based solely on conventional standards. I believe my experience along with research and survey findings strongly support this perspective, which is aptly captured in the quote: "A high IQ may open a door, but emotional intelligence determines how far you'll go once you walk through it."

(The writer is an educator based in the US. Views are personal)

## Letters to the Editor

### National Panchayat Day

Madam — The evolution of Panchayat Raj System in India can be traced back to ancient Vedic period. On 24 April 1993 Panchayat Raj system in India came into effect with the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act on 22/23 December 1992, was ratified by state legislatures and came into effect on 24 April 1993.

To mark the establishment of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India through constitution, "National Panchayat Raj Day" is observed every year on 24 April to promote grassroots democracy, rural development, inclusive governance, women empowerment, ensure accountability and transparency, strengthening local governance, and empower rural communities.

The decentralisation of power, e-governance, capacity building, and financial oversight are some of the core responsibilities of PRIs in India. This day mainly focus on enhancing participatory governance, rural upliftment, rural women empowerment, and digital transformation in village-level administration.

The Constitution of India recognises PRIs as "Institutions of Self-governance". Currently, there are nearly 2.63 lakh Panchayats, 31.47 lakh elected representatives of PRIs of which 14.54 lakh are women. It is important for achieving inclusive growth and addressing issues like climate change and rural-to-urban migration.

B. MADHUSUDHAN REDDY | KARIMNAGAR

### Contempt plea against Dubey

Madam — The Supreme Court on Tuesday 22 April said it will hear next week a contempt plea filed against BJP MP Nishikant Dubey for his controversial remarks blaming Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna for "civil wars" in the country.

The matter was brought before a Bench comprising Justice B.R. Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih by a lawyer who highlighted that the Attorney General had not responded to the request for sanction to initiate contempt proceedings.

"The remark is viral. Dubey says CJI responsible for civil wars. No reply from Attorney (General)," the lawyer said, prompting Justice Gavai to respond, "List it next week."

Dubey had sharply criticized the judiciary, claiming that if the Supreme Court continues to frame laws, then Parliament and state assemblies might as well be shut down.

His comments came after the Centre assured the court that it would hold off on implementing controversial provisions of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, following judicial scrutiny. The BJP was quick to distance itself from Dubey's explosive comments.

Party president J.P. Nadda called the statements personal opinions and reiterated the BJP's "utmost respect for the judiciary," instructing party leaders to refrain from such remarks in the future.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

### Mangoes can be a health risk!

Madam —Mango is a fruit rich in flavor, nutrition, and energy. It contains essential vitamins such as A and C, along with iron—nutrients that are highly beneficial for the eyes, skin, and immune system.

However, consuming mangoes before their natural season poses serious health risks, especially when they are artificially ripened using harmful chemicals like calcium carbide.

This chemical accelerates the ripening process unnaturally, but its toxic compounds can damage the stomach, liver, and nervous system. Prolonged exposure or consumption may lead to ulcers, nausea, and in severe cases, even increase the risk of cancer.

It is therefore wise to prefer naturally ripened mangoes and prioritize health over momentary pleasure. Naturally ripened mangoes are available only during the proper mango season. The ones found in markets before that time are often treated with hazardous substances to enhance their appearance and ripen them prematurely. In fact it is the duty of the Government that no food item is sold which is a health risk.

Those who indulge in this practice must be behind the bars. So, for now, stay away from your "beloved" mango—and choose health over desire. A little patience today can ensure a safer and sweeter tomorrow!

ABDUL MBODD | MUMBAI

### PAHALGAM ATTACK: TERRORISTS ARE ENEMIES OF ENTIRE MANKIND

Once again Kashmir is lying in blood. It is very sad to note that at least 26 people mostly tourist were killed and several were injured by the Terrorist. The gruesome attack should be condemned by each and every one. The Government boasted a lot after abrogation of Article 370 that the terrorism will come to an end in Jammu and Kashmir. After the rhetoric of Amit Shah and PM Narendra Modi that there is normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir the attack has proved that the Central Government has failed miserably to crumble down the terrorism. While many tourist were enjoying a peaceful afternoon amidst snow-capped peaks and pine forests the militants had split blood in Pahalgam. This is a direct attack on the Indian state. The entire nation is in great shock. Previously in the gruesome terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir over 43 brave soldiers were killed. Every now and then many innocents people's

are being killed by terrorism. Now killing of 26 tourist is act of barbarians and act of cowardice and assault on the values of humanity. Conceded that there can be genuine grievances of the people and individuals but violence is certainly not an option for redressal. It is a crime against humanity and has to be condemned by one and all. The terrorists are the enemies of entire mankind and they do not belong to a particular religion or particular country. All religions are great and love should be the universal religion. I request the Government to take stringent action against those are behind the terror attack. My sympathies to the families and prayers to the injured. At this moment the nation must stand by the families of the brutally killed innocent people and make all efforts to bring the culprits and give them exemplary punishment.

ZAKIR HUSSAIN | KAZIPET

## WAVES 2025: Redefining global media diplomacy

WAVES weaves together storytelling, technology and international cooperation to reshape the global media and entertainment. This summit marks a decisive leap into a future where India leads with innovation, cultural capital and strategic foresight

FIRST Column

Come May 1st, India has truly arrived with the WAVES Entertainment Summit being held in Mumbai from 1st to 4th of May 2025. The summit echoes the vision envisaged in 2019 by PM Modi in his speech at the inauguration of the National Museum of Indian Cinema; highlighting Indian cinema as a powerful medium of global outreach and soft power, calling it a “silent force” that shapes global perceptions and connects cultures. He emphasised cinema’s potential to promote film tourism, inviting international filmmakers to explore India’s diverse landscapes. The design of WAVES is an unusual convergence of like-mindedness of M&E stakeholders; individuals or institutions that think alike in carving out a landscape that will be suited for the global fraternity responsible for creating content and its consumption.

WAVES 2025 brings a bold new phase of soft power diplomacy, focusing on transformative and technology-driven partnerships. Innovation in this segment is bound to create a new buzz for foreign policy tie-ups, carried forward on the wings of emerging tools such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and immersive content ecosystems. The diverse participation at WAVES will open unprecedented avenues for multilateral cooperation and dialogue across critical areas of knowledge sharing, media engagement, storytelling ecosystems, and digital co-productions. It provides India with an unparalleled opportunity to assert global leadership in the creative domain; by fusing its creativity quotient, strategic foresight, and cultural capital into a soft power matrix that fosters goodwill and purposeful international collaboration.

At the heart of WAVES 2025 lies its evocative tagline: “Connecting Creators, Connecting Countries”, a bold declaration of India’s intent to reposition itself as a global M&E powerhouse. As a summit that seeks to reimagine communication diplomacy, one of its most awaited outcomes is the WAVES Declaration, a visionary charter that could reshape the media discourse globally.

Rarely has a platform attempted to knit together creativity, business, leadership, and soft power into a cohesive global identity. But WAVES seeks to do just that, with a Global Media Dialogue, a declaration of shared values, and a structured roadmap for the M&E industry that reflects the ethos of a borderless, tech-enabled, creatively interconnected world. The declaration will place communication-clear, coherent, and collaborative-at the centre of a new global information order, founded on equity, access, equality, and participation.

WAVES has quietly but effectively given a new meaning to soft power diplomacy wherein all constituents that create charisma associated with knowledge sharing and storytelling play a critical role in bilateral or multilateral cooperation. It would be appropriate to mention that diplomacy will adorn new wings of change based on creativ-



ity, innovation and the spirit of collaboration. WAVES will truly be the “Mahakumbh” of ideas, opportunities, experiences and knowledge sharing.

The philosophical underpinning of WAVES 2025 can be distilled into the 7 Cs of Communication: Clarity, Conciseness, Concreteness, Correctness, Coherence, Completeness, and Courtesy. These seven pillars not only ensure effective storytelling but serve as diplomatic principles guiding cross-border media collaboration. They offer a timeless framework as we enter an era where communication is the new currency of power, diplomacy, and development.

With narratives shaping geopolitics, trade, and international perception, there is a pressing need for a Global Media Charter, a binding commitment from nations to protect freedom of creative expression, foster diverse storytelling, and ensure ethical media practices. WAVES 2025 can be the birthplace of this transformative shift. In a world increasingly governed by digital influence and algorithmic reach, a unified declaration will help navigate the



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

THE SUMMIT ALSO AIMS TO INCREASE INDIA'S GLOBAL MARKET SHARE IN MEDIA, ATTRACT MAJOR INVESTMENTS, AND ENCOURAGE CO-PRODUCTION BETWEEN INDIAN AND INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS. BY BRINGING TOGETHER CREATORS, INVESTORS, AND POLICYMAKERS, WAVES OFFERS A SHARED SPACE TO BUILD PARTNERSHIPS AND GROW IDEAS

ethical dilemmas of deepfakes, information disorder, and cultural homogenisation. It's not just about content anymore; it's about cultural continuity, technological responsibility, and global unity through creative collaboration.

WAVES isn't just about short-term buzz, it's about building something lasting. It understands that media and entertainment (M&E) isn't a quick fix but a long-term strategic play. At its heart is a clear goal: to make India the global content hub and a net exporter of stories. With its rich cultural diversity and languages, India has all the ingredients to build a strong intellectual property base that resonates worldwide.

The summit also aims to increase India's global market share in media, attract major investments, and encourage co-production between Indian and international players. By bringing together creators, investors, and policymakers, WAVES offers a shared space to build partnerships and grow ideas. Platforms like WaveXcelerator and WAVES Bazaar will help startups and innovators scale up and plug into global markets.

WAVES 2025 is designed to be a complete experience. The Global Media Dialogue brings together ministers and top policymakers from around the world to exchange ideas. The Thought Leaders Track will host key sessions exploring future trends and challenges in media.

In the Exhibition Zone, companies will showcase the latest in gaming, animation, VR, and AI. The WAVES Bazaar will act as a meeting ground for buyers and sellers to find the right collaborators. WaveXcelerator will give startups a chance to pitch live and attract investors.

The Bharat Pavilion will spotlight India's storytelling journey; from folk tales to futuristic formats. The CreateSphere will feature masterclasses, creators' meet-ups, and the grand finale of the Create in India Challenge. And finally, a series of cultural performances will bring together talent from across the globe, blending tradition with innovation.

WAVES is expected to drive real outcomes, from new content partnerships and global investments to job creation and policy support. It will help position India as a creative and tech-savvy media partner for the world. With cutting-edge tech on display, including AI tools and immersive experiences, the summit will also show how India is shaping the future of media.

By promoting co-productions, content exchanges, and new distribution deals, WAVES could help Indian stories travel further. It also gives international stakeholders a chance to build real connections with Indian creators-paving the way for shared growth and innovation. Most importantly, it sets the stage for India to lead the way in global media diplomacy.

The timing couldn't be better. According to the EY-FICCI 2025 M&E Report, India's media sector grew to INR 2.5 trillion in 2024 and is expected to touch INR 2.7 trillion in 2025.

Digital media now makes up 32% of total revenue, with digital ads growing fast. OTT platforms grew by 18%, driven by regional stories finding global fans. The report projects that the sector will hit INR 3.1 trillion by 2027, powered by gaming, animation, and immersive tech. WAVES gives these numbers real meaning, by turning data into action, partnerships into policy, and content into soft power. It's where the industry meets diplomacy and the future is co-created.

India is no longer on the sidelines of the global media conversation, it is setting the agenda. With WAVES 2025, India is articulating a bold creative vision for the world: one that transcends platforms, breaks silos, and builds coalitions of creators. WAVES 2025 isn't just another summit, it is a cultural declaration, a geopolitical realignment of media narratives, and a commitment to connect not just creators, but countries, cultures, and communities.

By placing communication at the heart of global partnerships, WAVES brings together not only markets but also minds and meanings. The world is watching, and India is ready to lead.

(The writer is former Civil Servant, writes on Cinema and Strategic Communication. Views are personal. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan)

## Reclaiming our humanity: A call to connection in a fragmented world

Amid global turmoil, Danish explorer Thor Pedersen's journey to every country without flying stands as quiet proof that kindness and shared humanity endure – even in the unlikely places. It's a story of contrast, conviction, and hope

Septuagenarian Dr Iain McGilchrist, a world-renowned philosopher, psychiatrist and neuroscientist, recently addressed a symposium titled The Future of Humanity, where he delved into some of the most pressing questions at the heart of our existence—the existence of what is good, beautiful, and true. Reflecting on his lifetime, he observed that these fundamental transcendental values have been increasingly sidelined, decried, debased, and even destroyed. “It is not just that we are distracted from the truth,” he noted, “but we demand protection from it, lest it hurt us—in case life itself hurts us.”

This observation resonates deeply in a world increasingly perceived as unkind, unfeeling, and unconcerned, where the very essence of humanity—compassion, love, and concern—seems to be vanishing at an alarming rate.

In our hyper-competitive socio-political environment, every sphere of life—familial, social, professional, and spiritual—is under strain. Systems meant to support them are collapsing. Yet amid this bleakness, glimmers of hope remain. One such beacon is a traveller's journey—marked by twists, encounters, and insights, offering a powerful affirmation of the human spirit.

Take the journey of Thor Pedersen, a Danish explorer. Thor is the only person in history to travel to every country in the world without flying. Between 2013 and 2023, he visited over 200 nations—India being his 168th—using only ships, trains, buses, and other ground or sea-based transport. His journey was more than a feat of endurance; it became a profound exploration of humanity, transcending borders, cultures, and beliefs.

At the heart of his experience lay a simple truth: “People are just people.” Wherever he went, he met ordinary people living ordinary lives—finding joy in food, music, and sports, and valuing safety and stability over political and religious



divides. Across every border he crossed, he was met with kindness and generosity. Strangers offered him meals, shelter, contacts, translations, or simply a smile when he needed it most—true to the spirit of our shared humanity.

His realisation deepened when he observed: “If we reduce people to numbers and statistics, we create distance and lose empathy. Divide and conquer is an age-old strategy, and it works well—but at what cost? We can keep dividing the world until, eventually, we all sit alone.”

However, the Danish globetrotter's voyage was not without challenges. He encountered a few unpleasant incidents and individuals along the way, threatened by drunk, armed, and hostile men, battling cerebral malaria, and being held at gunpoint. While all this, however, did not dishearten him, we are reminded of Gandhiji's profound words: “You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is like an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean

are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.”

Thor's journey, devoid of privilege and elitism—underscores vital truths:

- Even if gentleness and kindness seem to be in decline, they continue to thrive quietly at the grassroots.
- Though humanity struggles to find its rightful place in a world consumed by the relentless pursuit of power, pleasure, and profit, it is not lost - only marginalised.
- As we glamorise wealth, we risk losing the very qualities that define us as human—compassion, care, and cooperation.

History bears witness to countless individuals who, in moments of crisis, be it accidents, tragedies, or desperate need—step forward uninvited, saving lives and rekindling faith in humanity. Though often overlooked, their actions quietly pull humanity back from the brink. That said, the world remains enmeshed

in grave, interconnected crises—war, inequality, poverty, climate change—all demanding collective will. Sadly, world leaders, despite their promises, continue to ignore the catastrophic plight of millions. As they routinely gather to design an ostensibly better future, they remain either unable or unwilling to respond—revealing not just a failure of meaningful action, but a failure of intent.

### Grim Realities

For long, we have viewed the world as manipulable and controllable—ripe to be bent to our will. Therefore, few doubt that many crises plaguing our world are not mere accidents of fate or unavoidable circumstances; they are often the deliberate outcomes of power-driven agendas. Fueled by greed, ruthless self-interest, and an insatiable thirst for domination, these forces ignite brutal conflict, widespread deprivation, environmental devastation, racism, and religious extremism—creating

a reality steeped in suffering and division.

Poverty, an affront to human dignity, heightens vulnerability to abuse. Tied to climate change, it's set to intensify—new research led by Dr Timothy Neal (University of New South Wales) warns the average person could be 40% poorer if global temperatures rise by 4°C.

Shockingly, those who hold power—whether in struggling countries, developing economies, or even the most developed nations—have often abandoned humanity as the foundation of governance. Opportunistic toxic politics and hybrid forms of authoritarianism continue to destroy the sacred ground of human dignity, pushing aside the cardinal principle that must guide all leadership: People Over Everything.

Even the COVID-19 crisis—exposing vulnerabilities and inequities—failed to instil lasting solidarity. Human dignity remains dispensable.

What of more grim realities?

According to the Geneva Academy, more than 45 armed conflicts are currently raging across the Middle East and North Africa. Africa follows closely, with over 35 non-international armed conflicts (NIACs). Asia remains a battleground for 19 such conflicts, while Europe contends with seven.

Bleak as it may seem, this is a call to action—one urging us to deepen our commitment to humanistic values, where every life is worthwhile, wanted, and welcomed.

While it may be simplistic to expect everything to align perfectly with the humanistic way, it is crucial to recognise the deeper causes of suffering, distress, and anguish within the fabric of human society—locally, nationally, and globally. In an age of deep disillusionment, we must remember: the world is not merely a map of borders, but a shared home.

As Professor Harvey Whitehouse of Oxford reminds us: “Remembering that we are all related and experience many of the same challenges could be the key to solving global problems—from intergroup conflicts to poverty and the climate crisis.”

What kind of world do we want to live in? If we fail to address this, we risk sliding into a soulless existence—a world full of people, yet empty of humanity. We may exist, but we will not truly live. The degradation of humanity is not inevitable. Though messiness and imperfection are part of what makes us human, it is in our ability to reclaim substantive conversation and enrich our relationships, based on humanistic virtues. Our hearts and minds—feeling, willing, knowing, sensing—must not grow numb to the suffering that surrounds us. We must not be swayed by eloquent words, empty rhetoric, or the shallow display of symbolism. Only through real, tangible action can we reclaim what is slipping away—the very essence of our shared humanity.

The imperative of our times: Reawakening our humanity — Embracing what matters most—People, planet, and our shared future.

(The writer is columnist and author. He is former Deputy General Manager, India International Centre, Delhi. Views expressed are personal)



DEBASHISH BHATTACHARYYA

## US lawmakers condemn J-K attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

US lawmakers, prominent India-US bodies and members of the Indian-American community on Wednesday strongly condemned the horrific terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, asserting that perpetrators should be brought to justice.

"I send my condolences to the people of India in the aftermath of the horrific attack in Kashmir and hope those responsible will be brought to justice soon. Terrorism is never tolerated," US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Senator Jim Risch said in a post on X.

Terrorists killed 26 people, mostly tourists, in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam on Tuesday, in what is the deadliest attack in the Valley since the Pulwama strike in 2019.

In a call with Modi, who was on a two-day State visit to Saudi Arabia, US President Donald Trump strongly condemned the terror attack and expressed full support to India to bring to justice the perpetrators of the "heinous attack."

Deputy Secretary at the Department of State Christopher Landau said the US "strongly condemns" the terrorist attack in Kashmir and "stands resolutely alongside India. Sending very heartfelt condolences to all Indians, and especially those who have lost their loved ones in this heinous attack on tourists and civilians."

Senator Bill Hagerty said the US stands with India. "I condemn the shocking attack today by Islamic terrorists who murdered dozens of people in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir."

The "terrorist attack in Kashmir is a deeply disturbing reminder that the threat posed to civilized nations by terrorism remains acute," Senator Ted Cruz said.

He added that the US will stand with India and Prime Minister Modi "as they bring these terrorists to justice."

Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi said he is heartbroken by the horrific attack on innocent tourists in Kashmir. "We must stand united against terrorism in all its forms and bring the perpetrators to justice," he said.

Representative Ro Khanna, Congressman Shri Thanedar, Congressman Rich McCormick, Congressman Greg Murphy, Congressman Jimmy Patronis, Representative Bill Huizenga and Representative Marc Veasey also condemned the terrorist attack and offered condolences and prayers to the families of the victims.

Senator Rick Scott said he and his wife Ann are devastated to hear of the "evil terrorist attack" in Pahalgam, India. "The US stands with India as we pray for those who lost loved ones or were injured in this unimaginable attack."

Vivek Ramaswamy, who was a 2024 presidential primary candidate and had briefly co-headed the Department of Government Efficiency along with billionaire Elon Musk, termed the attack "horrific" and extended condolences to the families of those who died.

Khanderao Kand, Chief of Policy and Strategy at the Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies, strongly con-

**While India will continue to remain resilient in the face of such adversity, this unfortunate incident is a sobering reminder, of just why the US-India defence and security partnership remains vital to stand up to such adversaries**

— US-INDIA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP FORUM

demned the terrorist attack, saying both the US and India have been burned by state-sponsored terror.

"The world must stand united to eradicate terrorism in all its forms, everywhere and states directly or indirectly sponsoring or promoting such acts of terrorism must not only be condemned but also sanctioned with stoppage of any aid to them, especially military. India has been subjected to an ongoing war of terror sponsored by Pakistan agencies, operators, terror groups and agencies," he said.

The US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) strongly condemned the dastardly attack, saying it was a reminder of the constant threat of terrorism that continues to lurk from both state and non-state nefarious actors.

"While India will continue to remain resilient in the face of such adversity, this unfortunate incident is a sobering reminder, of just why the US-India defence and security partnership remains vital to stand up to such abominable adversaries and anticipate and prevent further attacks both on Indian soil or to its strategic partners and assets overseas," USISPF said, adding that it is a shame that the picturesque town of Pahalgam has

now been marred with the bloody horrors of this heinous attack.

Former advisor to President Joe Biden and Co-Chair for the Economic Subcommittee for Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AANH-PI) Commission Ajay Bhutoria too condemned the terrorist attack in Kashmir. "My prayers go out to the victims and their families. Let's unite against terror!"

Hindus Advancing Human Rights Initiative (HAHRI), an arm of HinduPACT, unequivocally condemned the attack, with its executive director Rahul Sur saying that the "world has been warned repeatedly about this Islamic fundamentalism. It must be crushed. It is time to sanction Pakistan."

The Kashmiri Overseas Association (KOA) condemned the terror attack in Pahalgam and said the 26 tourists were executed by Islamist terrorists by targeting solely for their Hindu faith.

The Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO) unequivocally condemned the terrorist action, with GOPIO International President Prakash Shah saying the "world cannot idly stand by each time terrorists take actions and nations must unite and take joint actions against terrorists and those that harbor them." "That is the only way to end Terrorism," Shah added.

GOPIO Chairman Thomas Abraham reaffirmed solidarity and resolve in the fight against terrorism in all its forms and wherever it occurs. "The Indian Diaspora will remain united with the Government of India's efforts to combat terrorism," he said.

## US forest fire forces thousands to evacuate

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barnegat Township

A fast-moving wildfire still burning in New Jersey on Wednesday forced thousands of people to evacuate and temporarily closed a stretch of a major highway. The Garden State Parkway, one of New Jersey's busiest highways, was closed between Barnegat and Lacey townships on Tuesday night. It has since reopened, the Ocean County Sheriff's Office posted online Wednesday morning.

More than 1,300 structures were threatened and about 3,000 residents were evacuated, the New Jersey Forest Fire Service said. Shelters were open at two high schools, according to the Barnegat Police Department.

The fire service planned to give an update at a news conference late Wednesday morning.

The Jersey Central Power and Light

**The site of the fire is near an alpaca farm. The farm said in a Facebook post that the property wasn't threatened and all of the animals were safe. The blaze is the second major forest fire in the region in less than a week**

Company cut power to about 25,000 customers at the request of the Forest Fire Service and the wildfire's command post Tuesday evening, including thousands in Barnegat Township. The company said on X that it doesn't expect to restore the power before Wednesday.

"This is for the safety of crews battling the fire," the company said.

The fire in the Greenwood Forest Wildlife Management Area burned more than 34 sq km of land, fire officials said.

The blaze, burning in Ocean and Lacey

Townships in Ocean County, was only about 10% contained Tuesday night, the fire service said. The cause of the fire was under investigation.

There were no immediate reports of injuries.

Debi Schaffer was caught in gridlocked traffic after evacuating with her two dogs while her husband agreed to stay with their 22 chickens, The Press of Atlantic City reported.

"I wanted to take them in the car with me; can you imagine 22 chickens in a car?" she told the newspaper.

Around her Waretown house it was "like a war zone," she said, describing smoke, sirens and the buzz of helicopters.

The site of the fire is near an alpaca farm. The farm said in a Facebook post that the property wasn't threatened and all of the animals were safe.

The blaze is the second major forest fire in the region in less than a week.

## Harvey Weinstein's rape retrial set for opening statements

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Five years after Harvey Weinstein's original #MeToo trial delivered a searing reckoning for one of Hollywood's most powerful figures, the ex-studio boss is on trial again after an appeals court threw out the landmark rape conviction. Opening statements are set for Wednesday in a trial that could take six weeks. It's happening at the same Manhattan courthouse as his first trial, and two accusers who testified then are expected to return.

But Weinstein's retrial is playing out at a different cultural moment than the first, which happened during the height of the #MeToo movement. And along with the charges being retried, he faces an additional allegation from a woman who wasn't involved in the first case.

The jury counts seven women and five men — unlike the seven-man, five-woman panel that convicted him in 2020 — and there's a different judge.

The #MeToo movement, which exploded in 2017 with allegations against Weinstein, has also evolved and ebbed.

At the start of Weinstein's first trial, chants of "rapist" could be heard from protesters outside. TV trucks lined the street, and reporters queued for hours to get a seat in the packed courtroom. His lawyers decried the "carnival-like atmosphere" and fought unsuccessfully to get the trial moved from Manhattan.

This time though, over five days of jury selection, there was none of that.

Those realities, coupled with the New York Court of Appeals' ruling last year vacating his 2020 conviction and 23-year prison sentence — because the judge allowed testimony about allegations Weinstein was not charged with — are shaping everything from retrial legal

## British PM condemns Kashmir terror attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has condemned the terrorist attack in Kashmir, joined by Foreign Secretary David Lammy who described it as a "cowardly" act.

They took to social media to express their shock as the death toll rose to 26 in the Pahalgam attack on Tuesday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi cutting short his Saudi Arabia visit to return to New Delhi on Wednesday.

"The horrific terrorist attack in Kashmir today is utterly devastating. My thoughts are with those affected, their loved ones, and the people of India," said Starmer in a post on his X handle.

Lammy also took to the platform a little earlier with his reaction: "I am appalled by the horrific and cowardly terrorist attack on Kashmir earlier today. My thoughts are with all of those affected, especially those who have lost loved ones."

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, issued a statement to say the organisation "stands in solidarity with the people of India at this time".

"We are united in our determination today. The Commonwealth speaks with one voice that the terrorists will not succeed in their divisive mission to undermine our Commonwealth Charter values of peace, inclusiveness, tolerance, respect and understanding."

"We reiterate our absolute condemnation of all acts of terrorism in whatever

form or wherever they occur or by whomsoever perpetrated, with the consequent tragic loss of life and human suffering," she said.

The official UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) travel advisory for the region, which advises against all travel to the region, remains unchanged.

"FCDO advises against all travel to the region of Jammu and Kashmir (including Pahalgam, Gulmarg, Sonamarg, the city of Srinagar, and the Jammu-Srinagar national highway)," it reads.

Meanwhile, diaspora groups in Britain have also been taking to social media to express their shock and horror at the gunning down of innocent tourists in the popular scenic resort.

"FISI UK strongly condemns the horrific terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, and demands immediate action to ensure those responsible are brought to justice. Such a sinister agenda will never succeed — they must be held to account," said a statement from the Friends of India Society International (FISI) UK.

Terrorists struck at the prime tourist location in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing at least 26 people, mostly tourists, and injuring several others. The deceased include two foreigners, from the UAE and Nepal, and two locals.

The bodies of the 26 victims were brought to the Government Medical College (GMC) in Srinagar early on Wednesday and then taken to the Police Control Room where Home Minister Amit Shah laid wreaths on them.

## Gunmen kill two personnel guarding polio vaccination team in Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi

Two security personnel guarding a polio vaccination team were shot dead by unidentified gunmen on Wednesday in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, police said.

The incident took place in the Teeri area of Mastung district, where Levies personnel protecting the polio vaccination team were attacked by masked gunmen, Assistant Commissioner Akram Harifal told the media.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. However, militants frequently target polio vaccinators in

Pakistan, terming them un-Islamic and against Sharia.

"One of them died on the spot while the other expired as he was moved to a hospital," Harifal said.

He said that security for the polio vaccination teams has been increased after the attack. This is not the first time that security personnel providing security to polio vaccination teams have been killed in Pakistan. In the past, even female health workers have been attacked and killed.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the attack on the polio vaccination team, the state-run Radio Pakistan reported.

"Terrorists who harm the lives and properties of innocent people are enemies of humanity and will be brought to justice," he said.

Such incidents cannot deter the government's commitment to eradicating polio from the country, he said, adding that the anti-polio campaign will continue with determination.

Balochistan government spokesperson Shahid Rind condemned the attack, saying "a thorough investigation into the incident was underway".

"The provincial government will not allow the polio campaign to be sabotaged under any circumstances," he added.

## International students are piling up wins in US courts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Atlanta

Anjan Roy, from Bangladesh, was studying with friends at Missouri State University when he got an email that turned his world upside down. His legal status as an international student had been terminated, and he was suddenly at risk for deportation. "I was in literal shock, like, what the hell is this?" said Roy, a graduate student in computer science.

At first, he avoided going out in public, skipping classes and mostly keeping his phone turned off. A court ruling in his favour led to his status being restored this week, and he has returned to his apartment, but is still asking his roommates to screen visitors. More than a thousand international students have faced similar disruptions in recent weeks, with their academic careers — and their lives in the US — thrown into doubt in a widespread crackdown by the Trump administration.

Some have found a measure of success in court, with federal judges around the country issuing orders to restore students' legal status at least temporarily.

In addition to the case filed in Atlanta, where Roy is among 133 plaintiffs, judges have issued temporary restraining orders in states including New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Montana, Oregon and Washington. Judges have denied similar requests in some other cases, saying it was not clear the loss of status would cause irreparable harm.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said last month the State Department was revoking visas held by visitors who were acting counter to national interests, including some who protested Israel's war in Gaza and those who face criminal charges.

But many affected students said they have been involved only in minor infractions, or it's unclear altogether why they were targeted. The attorney for Roy and his fellow plaintiffs, Charles Kuck, argued the government did not have legal grounds to terminate the students' status.

He speculated in court last week the government is trying to encourage these students to self-deport, saying "the pressure on these students is overwhelming." He said some asked him if it was safe to leave their homes to get food, and others worried they wouldn't receive a degree after years of work or feared their chances of a career in the US were shot. "I think the hope is they'll just leave," Kuck said. "The reality is these kids are invested."

An attorney for the government, R David Powell, argued the students did not suffer significant harm because they could transfer their academic credits or find jobs in another country.

At least 1,100 students at 174 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.

## London talks on ending Ukraine war pared down

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kyiv

A planned meeting Wednesday between top US, British, French and Ukrainian diplomats to push for a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine was scrapped at the last minute amid little sign of progress in international efforts to end the more than three-year war.

UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy announced the talks in London would involve only lower-ranking officials after the US State Department said Tuesday that Secretary of State Marco Rubio was unable to attend because of a scheduling issue.

Rubio's abrupt cancellation raised doubts about the direction of the negotiations. It came as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy ruled out ceding territory to Russia as part of any potential peace agreement, calling it a nonstarter. The Ukrainian leader spoke Tuesday in response to reports the Trump administration was proposing a deal that would allow Russia to keep occupied Ukrainian territory as part of a potential peace agreement. Even achieving a limited, 30-day ceasefire has been beyond the reach of negotiators, as both sides have continued to attack each other in a grinding war of attrition along the 1,000-km front line and launch long-range strikes.

A Russian drone struck a bus carrying workers in Marganets, in eastern Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region on Wednesday morning, killing seven women and two men, regional head Serhii Lysak wrote on

**During similar talks last week in Paris, US officials presented a proposal that included allowing Russia to keep control of occupied Ukrainian territory as part of a deal, according to a European official privy to talks**

his Telegram channel. More than 40 people were injured, he said.

Lysak published photos of a bus with its windows blown out and shards of glass mixed with blood spattered on the bus floor.

President Donald Trump has pushed for an end to the war and said last week that negotiations were "coming to a head". That comment came after Rubio suggested that the US might soon back away from negotiations if they don't progress.

Rubio had indicated that Wednesday's meeting could be decisive in determining whether the Trump administration remains engaged.

Those still attending the meeting included retired Lt Gen Keith Kellogg, Trump's envoy for Ukraine and Russia.

Andrii Yermak, the head of Ukraine's presidential office, said on X that a delegation including him, Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha and Defence Minister Rustem Umerov had arrived in London for the talks despite the alterations.

"The path to peace is not easy, but Ukraine has been and remains committed to peaceful efforts," Yermak said.

Officials would "discuss ways to achieve a full and unconditional ceasefire as the first step toward a comprehensive settlement and the achievement of a just and lasting peace".

US special envoy Steve Witkoff was expected to visit Moscow again later this week, according to Russian officials.

The abrupt change of plans in London came amid growing speculation that the US will press Ukraine to cede territory to Russia as part of a potential peace agreement — a possibility that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday again ruled out.

During similar talks last week in Paris, US officials presented a proposal that included allowing Russia to keep control of occupied Ukrainian territory as part of a deal, according to a European official familiar with the matter.

Zelenskyy pushed back against that during an appearance in Kyiv, saying: "There is nothing to talk about — it is our land, the land of the Ukrainian people."

Russia, meanwhile, has effectively rejected a US proposal for an immediate and full 30-day halt in the fighting by imposing far-reaching conditions.

Trump said repeatedly during his election campaign last year that he would be able to end the war "in 24 hours" upon taking office. But he has expressed frustration with Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Some European allies are wary of the American proposal for Ukraine to exchange land for peace. But an official said there's also acknowledgment by

some allies that Russia is firmly entrenched wholly or partially in five regions of Ukraine — Crimea, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

If the goal is to obtain a ceasefire immediately, "it should be based on the line of contact as it is," said a senior French official. The official was not authorised to be publicly named and spoke on the condition of anonymity according to French presidential policy.

Still, Ukraine's territorial integrity and aspirations to strengthen ties with the rest of the continent are a top priority for the Europeans, the European official said.

Britain had downplayed expectations of a breakthrough in London, but says this is an important week for diplomatic efforts to stop the fighting.

Western analysts say Moscow is in no rush to conclude peace talks, because it has battlefield momentum and wants to capture more Ukrainian land.

Zelenskyy said Tuesday that Ukraine's delegation heading to the UK had a mandate to discuss only an unconditional or partial ceasefire with Russia. He said that "after a ceasefire, we're prepared to sit down for talks in any format".

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov cautioned that reaching a settlement could be a drawn-out process.

Putin declared a 30-hour unilateral ceasefire on Saturday, but Ukraine and British officials said Russian attacks continued during the alleged pause. The Associated Press was unable to verify whether a ceasefire was in place along the roughly 1,000-km front line.







# Will not to raise stake in Vodafone Idea: Scindia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The government has no plans to increase its shareholding in Vodafone Idea (VIL) as it does not want the telecom operator to turn into a public sector undertaking (PSU), Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has said.

Sending out a strong message to Vodafone Idea, Scindia said in an interview that it is now the telco's job to ensure it performs. After the recent conversion of Rs 36,950 crore of outstanding spectrum auction dues into equity, the government now holds 48.99 per cent shares in Vodafone Idea Ltd. Prior to this, the government's stake was about 22.6 per cent.

It is pertinent to mention that any additional stake could potentially turn the company into a PSU - bringing it under the administrative control of the government which would then get to appoint the board. Also the company would come under the

purview of CAG and other oversight bodies, under such circumstances.

"It is now their (VILs) job to ensure that they perform. Government today has 49 per cent of the company. There is no intention for the government to make that into a PSU. So we will stick to 49 per cent," Scindia said. On his assessment of impact of dues conversion on VILs health and future competitiveness, specially given wide skepticism that the telco may still struggle to meet future payment obligations, the minister said: "That question should be directed at VIL... It is now their job to ensure that they perform."

Analysts have been saying that government relief to Vodafone Idea into through dues-to-equity conversion may ease near-term liquidity constraints for the telco, but that structural challenges remain for the operator with factors like stabilisation of subscriber base, tariff hikes, long-pending debt raise, and further relief on dues being vital for the telco's long-term

**Analysts claim that government relief to Vodafone Idea into through dues-to-equity conversion may ease near-term liquidity constraints, but that structural challenges remain for the operator**

survival. On the issue of MTNL's default on bank loans, the minister noted that it has substantial land bank and informed that same will be monetised for clearing dues of banks and debt.

"MTNL now has a large amount of asset base in terms of its land bank. We are today progressing on that. And through NLMC - National Land Monetisation Committee - that land will be divested and through the proceeds of that land, all dues to banks and debt will be taken care of," Scindia assured. He did not specify timelines that may

be involved for such monetisation, and said he is pursuing the matter.

"NLMC is under DIPAM and the Finance Ministry. I am pursuing with them. As soon as that's done that will be taken care of," the minister said.

It is pertinent to mention here that state-run telecom firm MTNL has defaulted on bank loans worth ₹8,346.24 crore from seven public sector banks, according to a statutory filing by the company over the weekend. The loss-making public sector telecom firm's total debt obligations reached ₹33,568 crore as on March 31, 2025, according to the filing dated April 19.

The total loan default includes ₹3,633.42 crore of debt raised from Union Bank of India, ₹2,374.49 crore of Indian Overseas Bank, ₹1,077.34 crore of Bank of India, ₹464.26 crore Punjab National Bank, ₹350.05 crore from State Bank of India, ₹266.30 crore from UCO Bank and ₹180.3 crore along with principal and interest payment.

The defaults in loan payment occurred

between August 2024 to February 2025. The total debt on the company comprises ₹8,346 crore bank loan, Rs 24,071 crore sovereign guarantee (SG) bond, and loan of ₹1,151 crore from Department of Telecom (DoT) for paying SG bond interest. The minister said Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) has scripted an "amazing turnaround" and lauded it for delivering a "stellar performance". "It's been an arduous task and it has been an amazing turnaround. I must, on this occasion, also thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his belief in BSNL and providing those relief packages for BSNL without which we would have not seen this day," Scindia said.

BSNL during in the October to December quarter of FY25 has delivered net profit (₹262 crore) for the first time in 18 years. "After 72 quarters, we posted net profit...It is my firm belief that as we roll out 4G on an 'Atmanirbhar' solution...Only the fifth in the world to do so (there are only four other countries that have pro-

duced 4G technology)...India has produced 4G technology. We are rolling out 100,000 towers. As of date, 90,000 towers have been installed," he said. About 74,000 towers have been commissioned. "It is my fervent hope that by July or so, we will roll out the balance towers. We then have to stabilise the network...Then as a next step, ensure quality of service...The number of call drops, the amount of latency, the number of interruptions...And once that is stabilised, then I intend to move the 4G network, convert that into a 5G network," he said.

Doing so would require an additional equipment, include BTS, to graduate BSNL from 4G on to 5G.

"The next step would be then to also strengthen this network. So that's the path forward. But I think it is important to keep BSNL customer-centric. We are also putting in place a number of software so that we can connect with the consumer, as customer service is paramount to us," the Minister stated.

## Jitendra Srivastava appointed CMD of REC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Gurgaon

Jitendra Srivastava, IAS, has assumed charge as Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) of REC Limited on April 22, 2025.

On 18th April 2025, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) appointed Srivastava, who is an IAS from Bihar Cadre (2000 Batch), as the CMD of REC. This appointment has been made in the rank and pay of Additional Secretary to the Government of India, under the Ministry of Power.

Srivastava is a seasoned civil servant with over two decades of distinguished service. Over the years, he has held several key administrative and leadership roles across the Government of India and the Government of Bihar.

Srivastava has served as Joint Secretary in the Department of Drinking Water and



Sanitation, Ministry of Jal Shakti from January 2023 onwards. Earlier, he served as Secretary to Govt. of Bihar in Home Department and Public Health Engineering Department (PHED).

He holds a B.A. (Hons) in Economics from Delhi University's Hansraj College and MBA (Finance) from Cochin University of Science and Technology.

## Pahalgam terror attack: Hospitality industry braces for Kashmir travel booking cancellations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Anticipating largescale travel booking cancellations for Jammu and Kashmir in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, aggregators on Wednesday said they are working with airlines and hotels to offer free date change and cancellation waivers to travellers.

Hospitality industry players expect the terror attack to sow fear in the minds of tourists who were keen to visit Jammu and Kashmir, adversely affecting the livelihoods of people in the state who are dependent on tourism. At least 26 people - mostly tourists - were killed by terrorists on Tuesday at the Baisaran meadows in Pahalgam.

"As per the early observations, flight cancellations jumped 7x, and a drop in future bookings by nearly 40 per cent," said Manjari Singhal, Chief Growth and

**Hospitality industry players expect the terror attack to sow fear in the minds of tourists who were keen to visit Jammu and Kashmir, adversely affecting the livelihoods of people in the state**

Business Officer, Cleartrip. "As travellers navigate this difficult situation, our teams are working round the clock with airline and hotel partners to provide flexibility and assistance on bookings/ cancellations. Our on-ground team is doing everything in their capacity to offer support to travellers. We remain committed to providing continued assistance to both our customers and partners during this difficult time," a MakeMyTrip spokesperson said.

EaseMyTrip Chairman and Founder Nishant Pitti said, "In light of the ongoing situation in Srinagar, we at EaseMyTrip are fully committed to supporting our customers who are travelling to or from Srinagar. We understand the uncertainty this situation may cause and are here to minimise any inconvenience to your travel plans. To ensure flexibility, we have extended free change and cancellation waivers for all bookings made on or before April 22, applicable for travel up to April 30".

FAITH (Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality) General Secretary Rajiv Mehra said for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, tourism is not just a livelihood, it is their pride, their legacy and their hope.

"This attack has not only harmed innocent lives but has also dealt a cruel blow to the thousands of families who depend

on tourism to survive. From houseboat owners and hoteliers to local guides and artisans, every individual in this chain of warmth and welcome is affected," he observed.

Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) also expressed its deep anguish and pain on selected targeting of tourists in Kashmir by a group of terrorists, saying it strongly condemns the cowardly terror attack "which is clearly designed to deeply impact tourism in Kashmir and create an atmosphere of fear".

We are shocked and appalled at these attacks in our country. Since 2020, the J&K region has seen a steady upswing in tourism numbers going from 3 million in 2020 to close to 24 million in 2024. This 8x huge surge in tourists impacts and improves the lives of the long-tail of the tourism industry and leads to the prosperity of the locals.

## Rupee falls 25 paise to settle at 85.44 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The rupee depreciated 25 paise and settled for the day at 85.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, on surge in crude oil prices and importer demand for the American currency.

Forex traders said the American currency recovered, supported by Donald Trump's softened stance - particularly towards the Federal Reserve and China.

However, positive domestic markets and weak US dollar index and foreign fund inflows supported the domestic unit at lower levels.

Forex traders said the market found support after Trump on Tuesday backed off from threats to fire FED Chair Jerome Powell after days of intensifying criticism against him for not cutting rates. Trump also signalled the possibility of lower tariffs against China.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.24, and touched an intra-day low of 85.52 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.44 (provisional), registering a loss of 25 paise over its previous closing level.

On Tuesday, the rupee settled lower by 4 paise at 85.19 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias amid risk on sentiments in the global markets and FI inflows. Overall weakness in the US dollar may also support the rupee.

## Alcohol industry seeks uniform taxation for sector



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Alcoholic beverage maker's body CIABC on Wednesday urged the government to introduce uniform taxation for the sector and allow promotion of heritage spirits like 'Mahua' and 'Feni' globally, saying such reforms are vital to boost exports and help Indian brands compete internationally.

Deepak Roy, Chairman at Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Industry (CIABC), also said that the government should allow the industry to communicate freely with its consumers.

With the government's help, Indian heritage spirits can be promoted in international markets, as they have great potential in India and globally, he said.

Roy was speaking at the Alcobev India 2025, the industry conclave organised by CIABC here.

"One segment that can really make it happen is the Indian heritage spirits. When 'Tequila' can be synonymous with Mexico, 'Sake' with Japan and 'Soju' with Korea, the same we can achieve internationally with 'Feni' or 'Mahua', which have a rich cultural legacy. We need to get out of the old mindset and promote Indian heritage spirits," he said.

He added that different taxation levels in states are a big challenge for the industry.

"There is no cohesive strategy for the Indian alcoholic beverage industry. The industry needs a uniform taxation mechanism which will propel the growth," he added.

## EU fines Apple 500 million Euros and Meta 200 million in separate cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

European Union watchdogs fined Apple and Meta hundreds of millions of euros Wednesday as they stepped up enforcement of the 27-nation bloc's digital competition rules.

The European Commission imposed a 500 million euro (USD 571 million) fine on Apple for preventing app makers from pointing users to cheaper options outside its App Store.

The commission, which is the EU's executive arm, also fined Meta Platforms 200 million euros because it forced Facebook and Instagram users to choose between seeing personalised ads or paying to avoid them.

The punishments were smaller than the blockbuster multibillion-euro fines that the commission has previously slapped on Big Tech companies in antitrust cases.

Apple and Meta have to comply with the decisions within 60 days or risk unspecified "periodic penalty payments," the commission said.

The decisions were expected to come in March, but the self-imposed deadline slipped amid an escalating transatlantic trade war with US President Donald Trump, who has repeatedly complained about regulations from Brussels affecting American companies.

The penalties were issued under the EU's Digital Markets Act, also known as the DMA. It's a sweeping rulebook that amounts to a set of do's and don'ts

designed to give consumers and businesses more choice and prevent Big Tech "gatekeepers" from cornering digital markets.

The DMA seeks to ensure "that citizens have full control over when and how their data is used online, and businesses can freely communicate with their own customers," Henna Virkkunen, the commission's executive vice-president for tech sovereignty, said in a statement.

**The commission said it ordered Apple to remove technical and commercial restrictions that prevent developers from steering users to other channels, and to end 'non-compliant' conduct**

"The decisions adopted today find that both Apple and Meta have taken away this free choice from their users and are required to change their behaviour," Virkkunen said. Both companies indicated they would appeal. Apple accused the commission of "unfairly targeting" the iPhone maker, and said it "continues to move the goal posts" despite the company's efforts to comply with the rules.

Meta Chief Global Affairs Officer Joel Kaplan said in a statement that the "Commission is attempting to handicap successful American businesses while allowing Chinese and European companies to operate under different standards."

In a press briefing in Brussels, commission spokespeople sought to tamp down concerns that the penalties would inflame trade tensions.

"We don't care who owns a company. We don't care where the company is located," commission spokesperson Thomas Regnier told reporters. "We are totally agnostic on that front from a European

Union." "And be it a Chinese company, be it an American company, or be it a European company, you will have to play by the rules in the European Union."

In the App Store case, the Commission had accused the iPhone maker of imposing unfair rules preventing app developers from freely steering consumers to other channels. Among the DMA's provisions are requirements to let developers inform customers of cheaper purchasing options and direct them to those offers.

The commission said it ordered Apple to remove technical and commercial restrictions that prevent developers from steering users to other channels, and to end "non-compliant" conduct.

Apple said it has "spent hundreds of thousands of engineering hours and made dozens of changes to comply with this law, none of which our users have asked for." "Despite countless meetings, the Commission continues to move the goal posts every step of the way," the company said. The EU's Meta investigation centred on the company's strategy to comply with strict European data privacy rules by giving users the option of paying for ad-free versions of Facebook and Instagram.

Users could pay at least 10 euros a month to avoid being targeted by ads based on their personal data. The US tech giant rolled out the option after the European Union's top court ruled Meta must first get consent before showing ads to users.

Regulators took issue with Meta's model, saying it doesn't allow users to exercise their right to "freely consent" to allowing their personal data from its various services, which also include Facebook Marketplace, WhatsApp, and Messenger, to be combined for personalised ads.

Meta rolled out a third option in November giving Facebook and Instagram users in Europe the option to see fewer personalised ads if they don't want to pay for an ad-free subscription.

## '90 per cent IT and security experts report cyberattacks'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

New research from Rubrik Zero Labs has traced that Indian organisations are facing a wave of cyberattacks. In the past one year, 80 per cent of Indian organisations that experienced a ransomware attack paid a ransom to recover their data or to stop the ransomware attack. Significantly, 52 per cent of Indian organisations paid a ransom due to data extortion threats while 44 per cent of Indian organisations reported that cyber attackers successfully affected their backup and recovery options.

Accepting that cyberattacks are a constant threat, the RZL research, "The State of Data Security in 2025: A Distributed Crisis," also notes that 65 per cent of organisations in India store their sensitive data across 2-3 multiple environments (on-premises, Cloud, or SaaS) while 38 per cent respondents say that one of the biggest challenges they face in securing their data is securing sensitive data across multiple environments. As many as 44 per cent of Indian organisations reported that cyber attackers successfully affected their backup and recov-

ery options. The consequences of these attacks were that 29 per cent of respondents reported financial losses, 31 per cent noted reputational damage and loss of customer confidence, and 36 per cent experienced a forced leadership change following a cyber incident.

"The State of Data Security in 2025: A Distributed Crisis" is based on insights from over 1,600 IT and security leaders across 10 countries (half of whom were CIOs or CISOs) from the US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Japan, Australia, Singapore and India. From India 125 IT respondents participated in the survey conducted by Wakefield Research.

RZL research - "The State of Data Security in 2025: A Distributed Crisis," - states that globally, 90 per cent of the IT and security leaders reported cyberattacks in the past year. It also reveals the hazards that hybrid environments are creating, leading to a cloud security crisis that organisations are unprepared to address.

Many organisations that move to the cloud assume their providers will handle security," said Joe Hladik, Head of Rubrik Zero Labs.

## Markets rise for 7th day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Stock markets extended the winning run to seventh day on Wednesday with benchmark BSE Sensex jumping 520 points to close above 80,000 level for the first time in four months driven by strong gains in IT and auto shares.

The 30-share Sensex rose by 520.90 points or 0.65 per cent to settle at 80,116.49, the highest closing level since December 18. During the day, it surged 658.96 points or 0.82 per cent to 80,254.55.

The NSE Nifty rallied 161.70 points or 0.67 per cent to 24,328.95.

Foreign fund inflows and positive global trends also boosted the market sentiment, analysts said.

Among the Sensex firms, HCL Tech surged the most by 7.72 per cent after the firm posted an 8.1 per cent increase in consolidated net profit at ₹4,307 crore for March quarter 2024-25, mainly on account of large deals with a total contract value of about ₹25,500 crore.

Tech Mahindra, Tata Motors, Infosys, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Steel, Bharti Airtel and Maruti were also among major gainers.

Banking shares witnessed a sell-off after recent sharp gains with leading pri-

vate lender HDFC Bank dropping by 1.98 per cent to emerge as the biggest loser among Sensex shares.

Kotak Mahindra Bank, State Bank of India, Axis Bank, ITC and UltraTech Cement were also among the laggards.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index, Tokyo's Nikkei 225 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled in the positive territory. Shanghai SSE Composite ended marginally lower. Markets in Europe were trading significantly higher.

US markets bounced back sharply on Tuesday. Nasdaq Composite surged 2.71 per cent, Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 2.66 per cent and S&P 500 rallied 2.51 per cent.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹1,290.43 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

"The Indian equity market sustained its positive momentum, driven by better outcome from the latest set of IT results and optimistic forward-looking comments. However, profit-booking was visible in financials after the recent sharp rally.

"While US-China trade tensions appear to be easing, a rally in US tech stocks has further bolstered overall global market sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

### IN BRIEF

**GNDU, NSE ACADEMY LAUNCH MBA IN FINANCIAL ANALYTICS**

Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University has signed a three-year MoU with NSE Academy to launch an MBA in Financial Analytics, blending academic rigor with industry insights. The program will offer live projects, certifications, and practical training starting this academic session.

**GNDU NATIONAL SEMINAR ON INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM**

Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University's Hindi Department, in collaboration with the Central Hindi Directorate, held a two-day national seminar titled "Indian Knowledge System: A Multidimensional Legacy", highlighting India's rich literary and philosophical traditions. Eminent scholars and cultural figures from across the country participated.

# Man City scores late winner to beat Aston Villa 2-1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Manchester

Pep Guardiola celebrated wildly as Manchester City took a big step toward Champions League qualification with a 2-1 victory over Aston Villa in the Premier League. With clenched fists, the City manager roared with delight after Matheus Nunes struck deep into stoppage time at the Etihad Stadium.

"I was so happy. I have to admit it," Guardiola said after a win that could help salvage a troubled season for his once dominant team.

The late winner moved four-time defending league champion City up to third in the standings, with the top five securing a place in European club soccer's top competition. Nunes fired home from a tight angle in the fourth minute of added time after Jeremy Doku's low cross through the box. The game had looked destined to end in a draw after Bernardo Silva's first-half goal had been canceled out by a Marcus Rashford penalty.

There is still likely to be a tense battle for the Champions League with a clutch of teams in contention going into the final weeks of the season and just four points separating third to seventh in the standings. But City's fate is in its own hands after a troubled campaign that saw its title defense unravel before Christmas and its hopes of winning the Champions League end in the playoffs.

A top-five finish would go some way to ending the season on a high — and Guardiola's celebration was evidence of just



how important the win could prove to be.

"We have a lot of pressure for the club to go to the Champions League," said Guardiola, whose City team won the competition for the first time in 2023.

"If we win the next four games, it will

have been so important," he added.

Victory moved City up to 61 points and above Nottingham Forest in fourth and Newcastle in fifth. Chelsea is sixth and Villa, with 57 points, is seventh.

England's top flight will be given a bonus

fifth Champions League place because of the performances of English teams in Europe this season. Both City and Villa have played a game more than their top-five rivals. But City knows a perfect record from its remaining four league

games would guarantee a place in next season's Champions League.

It would be the 15th season in a row that City has qualified for the competition and would provide an uplifting finale to a campaign that brought an end to Guardiola's recent dominance of English soccer.

There is likely to be a rebuild in the off-season, with Kevin De Bruyne leaving and Silva and Ilkay Gundogan also in the latter stages of their careers. But it was Silva who provided the opener for City in the seventh minute from close range after Omar Marmoush's cutback. Rashford had already hit the post for Villa by that point after bursting into the box seconds after kickoff. And the on-loan Manchester United forward was on the score sheet in the 18th — equalising from the penalty spot following a VAR review of Ruben Dias' foul on Jacob Ramsey in the box.

Defeat was a blow to Villa's hopes of making it back-to-back seasons in the Champions League after returning to the competition for the first time in 41 years this term and advancing to the quarterfinals. "Of course, today we lost, but there are still matches to play, still points to play (for). We will have chances to get the Champions League," Villa manager Unai Emery said.

"I am happy how we are reacting, how every player is facing the moment we are (in)." Both City and Villa are also in the semifinals of the FA Cup.

Villa plays Crystal Palace on Saturday, and City plays Nottingham Forest on Sunday.

# Andre Agassi to play at US Open Pickleball Championships

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Naples (US)

Andre Agassi collected two of his eight Grand Slam tennis titles at the US Open and now he'll be competing at a different racket event with that name.

Agassi, who retired from professional tennis in 2006 after playing his last match at Flushing Meadows, will line up alongside teenager Anna Leigh Waters in the mixed pro division at the US Open Pickleball Championships next week in Naples, Florida.

Agassi, who turns 55 next week, has participated in made-for-TV pickleball exhibitions with other former tennis players and can be seen pitching pickleball equipment via social media. This will be his first professional pickleball appearance.

He won the tennis US Open in 1994 and 1999, completed a career Grand Slam by winning at least one championship at each of that sport's majors and was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 2011.

It was announced earlier this month that Agassi will be a studio analyst for TNT Sports during the semifinals and finals at the French Open this year.

Pickleball is a mix of tennis and ping pong that uses paddles and a wiffleball.

# Can't afford any slip-up, need to start winning games: Dravid

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

Head coach Rahul Dravid on Wednesday acknowledged that Rajasthan Royals cannot afford another slip-up after sliding to eighth on the IPL points table and his team has "no option" other than start "winning games quickly." The Royals will come up against an in-form Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Thursday, and another reversal will make it really tough for them to nourish play-off aspirations.

"It's a very important game for us, in fact, every game from here on in, as the position we find ourselves in, we can't afford to make many mistakes. This stage is a tournament... just over half way, we find ourselves at the bottom half of the table," Dravid said in the pre-match press conference.

"We've got to start climbing that table quickly and we've got to start winning games quickly. There are no options, no chances of slipping up anymore," he added. Dravid accepted that the Royals have not fared well in crunch situations in this tournament despite playing excellent cricket in patches.

"We know we have to play well to be still alive in this tournament. Now, we've lost a couple of close games coming into this, but we've played some good cricket as well. "It's one of those tournaments where a few balls going here or there and we might have been in a slightly different position. But you need to play well in those critical moments and it hasn't happened for us," he noted.

The Chinnaswamy stadium pitch has unusually favoured bowlers more in this IPL than the batters, but Dravid hoped for a change of character on Thursday.

"You just have to go for it irrespective (of the nature of the pitch). But I think every surface will be different. The wicket I'm seeing here, from at least what I can make of it, looks like a really good wicket. "So, I can't really say how those wickets looked in earlier games, but the track that's been produced for this one looks actually to be a very good cricket wicket and I think it should be a pretty high scoring game," he added.

## Sanju is getting assessed

Dravid said regular RR skipper Sanju Samson's fitness is getting assessed on a daily basis. Samson will miss the match against RCB with an abdominal niggle.

"Sanju, I think, sort of picked up a bit of a side issue with the game against Delhi (Capitals) and he couldn't play the last game and in this game as well. He wasn't fit and our medical team sort of didn't rule him fit to play this game.

"So, we took the decision and the medical advice to not risk him to travel — make two more flights and be here. We kept the physio back so that we can treat him and try and get him back as quickly as we possibly can. We're looking at it on a day-to-day basis." The former India coach did not give any specific time-line for Samson's return.

**We've got to start climbing that table quickly and we've got to start winning games quickly. There are no options, no chances of slipping up anymore**

— RAHUL DRAVID, RR HEAD COACH

"I have no time-line to give as to when exactly he will be fit, but we're trying our best, you know, obviously we've got to play here, after this we've got a game on (April) 27th and we've got a few games quickly and then we've got a gap.

"So, we'll just have to see how it goes. Honestly, he was not fit for this game and he didn't travel here," he added.

Dravid said Riyan Parag has stepped in effectively as the captain of the side in the absence of Samson despite a few matches not going the team's way.

"Sanju is still the captain of the team and Riyan is the vice-captain and he stepped in really well. I think Riyan had captained four of the games, even in the first three games, in fact, Sanju wasn't able to field because of the finger injury.

"Some of those games haven't been easy, especially the high-scoring ones, like the game against Sunrisers Hyderabad. But I think he's done a good job."

The 52-year-old said Parag has remained collected in the face of a tough job like the IPL captaincy.

"I think he's been really good, calm and, you know, we were just having a chat with him about some of his bowling changes and field placements.

"I think they've been really good and he's getting the pulse of the game really well. So for someone who's so young and just starting out in his captaincy, I think he's kind of, you know, adapting well to it. Of course, the team needs to play well for him," he said.

# World Cup Olympics of cricket, says Steve Waugh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

At a time when the relevance of ODIs has become a topic of debate, former Australian captain Steve Waugh has battled for the format, saying that it would never lose significance as the quadrennial World Cup is akin to the "Olympics of cricket."

In an interaction with select media on the sidelines of the Laureus World Sports awards here, Waugh said despite the pressure of shorter formats, ODIs are holding ground as was evident from the record viewership garnered by the 2023 World Cup. "Everyone seems to think one-day cricket's not going to survive, but then you have the World Cup and it's huge and the ratings are massive and people love it and fall back in love with the game. Then it dies down for a couple years and we go through the same scenario," Waugh said.

"So right now, somehow we're managing to fit three formats of the game in and there's pressure of T10 maybe coming in, so could be four, four formats of cricket. I don't know how that's all going to get

managed, but right now it seems to be going okay. "World Cup is significant for one-day cricket. It's pretty much the Olympics, to play (the World Cup) every four years," he added. Cricket will have its share of spotlight in the actual Olympics as well when it makes a comeback to the Games after more than 100 years in the 2028 Los Angeles edition.

Waugh also offered his views on other issues concerning international cricket right now, including the obvious Indian dominance in the administration of the sport and the revenue sharing arrangement that favours big Test-playing nations.

A recent study by the World Cricketers Association (WCA) claimed that the BCCI currently receives 38.5 per cent of the global cricket revenue, and recommended the figure be brought down to 10 per cent to ensure fairer distribution.

Calling for equal pay for all Test players regardless of nationality, Waugh said: "If you play a Test match, every player who plays a Test match should have equal pay. "No one listened to me, but I said that in 1999 in an article, that every Test match

player should get paid the same. You play a Test match, the fee should be exactly the same," added the 59-year-old.

The report also highlighted the congested international schedule, with overlapping bilateral and domestic leagues making it difficult to manage player workload and team commitments. When pointed out that only the IPL has a designated window, Waugh was candid: "BCCI runs world cricket, that's why they have their own window. Simple."

## Bumrah among best but unfair to compare others with him

Among players, Waugh hailed Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah as one of the finest pacers of modern era, but said it would be unfair to assess other Indian fast bowlers using the same yardstick.

"Bumrah obviously is one of the best bowlers of this modern era, if not of all time. It's very hard when you're judging the other players on him because he's at the elite level. But India have got plenty of backup and plenty of quick bowlers," he felt. Bumrah has led India's pace attack almost single-handedly for quite a while

and remains one of the most feared bowlers across formats. However, frequent injury concerns have plagued his career in recent times. The 31-year-old was India's standout performer during the four-match Test series in Australia, which the visitors lost 1-3. "There's plenty of Indian bowlers out there. Obviously, Bumrah had a great series (in Australia). (Mohammed) Siraj did pretty well and some of the young guys coming through," he said.

With Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli in the twilight of their international careers, both are eyeing the 2027 ODI World Cup as their swansong. The duo has already announced their retirement from T20Is.

Waugh said their participation will depend on "form, fitness and motivation."

"I'm not sure. I mean I don't follow their careers that closely but they've both been incredible cricketers for India," the former skipper said when asked if he sees them playing a role in the 2027 edition.

Every career has got to end at some stage. They've both been outstanding and they're still world-class players now but lots of things coming up.

# Barcelona beat Mallorca 1-0 to increase Spanish League Lead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

Dani Olmo scored early in the second half as Barcelona defeated Mallorca 1-0 to increase its Spanish league lead.

The home win on Tuesday gave the Catalan club a seven-point lead over Real Madrid, which visits Getafe on Wednesday. Barcelona, seeking its first league title since 2023, has five league games left.

Olmo's winner came a minute into the second half at Montjuic stadium, with the playmaker finding the net from inside the area. It was the third consecutive victory for Barcelona in the league. The Catalan side had 40 attempts on goal, while Mallorca had only four — none on target.

"We created many scoring opportunities and we should have taken advantage of them, but that's soccer," Barcelona midfielder Gavi said.

"We can't always score easily. We insisted until we finally scored and that's what's important."

Mallorca, which has only two wins from its last nine matches, stayed in seventh place. Barcelona and Madrid will meet in the Copa del Rey final on Saturday in Seville. Barcelona coach Hansi Flick made several changes to his starting lineup, with forward Ansu Fati making his first league



start in nearly six months. Striker Robert Lewandowski was absent because of a muscle injury. "We played a great match," Gavi said. "I'm happy for the players who rotated and got to play."

## Espanyol draws at Valencia

Earlier on Tuesday, Espanyol's three-game

winning streak ended with a 1-1 draw at Valencia, which has drawn two in a row after three straight victories.

The result left both teams tied on 39 points, though Espanyol has a game in hand. Valencia was in 14th place, just behind Espanyol. Also Wednesday, Celta Vigo hosts fifth-place Villarreal, and Las

Palmas visits fourth—place Athletic Bilbao. Relegation-threatened Alaves welcomes ninth-place Real Sociedad.

On Thursday, third-place Atletico Madrid hosts midtable Rayo Vallecano, while sixth-place Real Betis visits last-place Valladolid, which has lost 12 of its last 13 matches.

# 15 selected for NCOEs from ASMITA sub-junior hockey league

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Five under-16 girls from Mizoram are among the 15 hockey players selected by the Sports Authority of India to be inducted into the various National Centres of Excellence (NCOEs).

Seen as the building block for women's hockey in India, the girls have been chosen after the conclusion of the 2024-25 season of the ASMITA leagues matches.

The 15 selected for training at the NCOEs include three players from Haryana and two each from Jharkhand and Odisha, besides girls from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh.

Piyush Dubey, hockey's High Performance Director for SAI and Khelo India, said these girls have been chosen keeping future Olympics in mind.

"We have to think of a pathway and these girls have the potential to make it to the senior national team. In the last three-four years, ASMITA has provided the opportunity to see so many players in action and this is a welcome change in our hockey ecosystem. This did not exist before," said Dubey.

He added that many players like Sunelita Toppo, Sujata Kujur and Sakshi Rana have emerged from this hockey league and are now representing India.

Six teams featuring 120 under-16 players took part in the ASMITA sub-junior hockey league's final phase.

A total of 17 matches were played in the Rs 15.5 lakh

prize money event. SAI Shakti won the team championship for the third consecutive time beating Madhya Pradesh Hockey Academy 2-1 in the final match at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium here.

Mizoram's ascendancy in women's hockey has been quite startling. For the first time in its history, the tiny North-eastern state, known for its footballers and boxer-

**The 15 selected for training at the NCOEs include three players from Haryana and two each from Jharkhand and Odisha, besides girls from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh**

ers, won a bronze medal in the senior national women's hockey championship in Panchkula.

Dubey said the Mizoram girls have shown immense improvement in the last five-six years and credit goes to the coaches who are working at the SAI centre in Thenzawl. Lalrothuami, a 2009 junior India player, said young girls are taking interest in hockey and some 40 are training at the SAI centre.

Mizoram have found a unique way to attract youngsters to play hockey. The image and profile of current Indian women's team player and Tokyo Olympian Lalremsiami have been used in advertisements and social media to attract girls to participate in trials.

"The response has been fairly good from the villages. Two of our girls — Lalhantluangi and Lalrinpui — are ASMITA products and are junior Indian team members. They are a great advertisement for us and we are very happy that five Mizoram girls have been selected for training at NCOEs," said Lalrothuami.

"Our players need more competitive exposure and better training ecosystem. In terms of skills, all players are more or less equal but Mizo girls are stronger and have the stamina. We hope they will utilise the facilities at NCOEs well." However, selection at NCOEs does not guarantee long-term membership. There are two assessments every year and players are judged on the three basic parameters — physical strength, sports science tests and skills.

The following players have been selected:

**For NCOE Lucknow:** Shweta Upadhyay (Haryana), Rashi (Haryana).

**For NCOE Mumbai:** Laldinpui (Mizoram), Binita Karketta (Jharkhand), Suneli Burh (Odisha), Salmi Jadia (Odisha).

**For NCOE Delhi:** Tulashi (Andhra Pradesh), Pearlina (Karnataka), Vanlarinlui (Mizoram), Lalnulfelli (Mizoram).

**For NCOE Sonapat:** Diya (Haryana).

**For NCOE Bhopal:** Aradhana Rajbhar (Uttar Pradesh), Shivani Khalko (Jharkhand).

**For NCOE Kolkata:** Loicy Lalhanpui (Mizoram), Lalfakwami (Mizoram).

# Give BCCI Hundred stake to unlock Indian players: Lancashire CEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

The England and Wales Cricket Board should bring on board the BCCI as a "minority ownership partner" of The Hundred in order to attract Indian players to the tournament, Lancashire CEO Daniel Gidney has said, according to a report.

Even though Indian men's players are not issued "No Objection Certificates" to play outside the IPL, the T20 league owners have expanded their footprint across the globe, and have stakes in SA20 (South Africa), ILT20 (UAE) and Major League Cricket (USA).

According to ESPNcricinfo, Gidney believes "aligning interests" would be the way to bring Indian players to compete in The Hundred.

"I think it's possible. If I was the ECB, I'd be talking about perhaps bringing the BCCI in as a minority ownership partner in the tournament as a whole. If you do that, then you are aligning interests," he said. While Indian men's players fea-

ture only in the IPL, the country's women cricketers, including captain Harmanpreet Kaur and Smriti Mandhana, have featured in England's The Hundred and Australia's Women's Big Bash League.

"That is probably your best chance of getting (Indian) players in The Hundred. It comes down to the will, and the individuals on both sides," Gidney said.

"The BCCI has been really successful with protecting their brand and by making sure they don't plan any T20 tournaments anywhere in the world..."

"If I was the BCCI, then I would have to say I would need a significant incentive to relax the current policy because that has been extraordinarily successful and has grown the IPL into the massive commercial entity that it is," he said.

The report added that the Lancashire CEO was in India recently to finalise a deal with RPSG Group, which will see them acquire a 70 per cent stake in the Manchester Originals and run the franchise as a joint venture.

Indian athletes condemn Pahalgam terror attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's sporting fraternity oscillated between grief and rage as it joined the nation in condemning the deadly terrorist attack in Pahalgam...

On Tuesday, terrorists opened fire at a prime tourist location in south Kashmir's Pahalgam, killing at least 26 civilians and injuring several others.

Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli expressed shock as they mourned the loss of lives.

"The affected families must be going through an unimaginable ordeal — India and the world stand united with them at this dark hour, as we mourn the loss of lives and pray for justice," Tendulkar wrote.

"Heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. Praying for peace and strength to families all those who lost their lives and justice to be served for their cruel act," Kohli posted on his Instagram.

Similar sentiments were expressed by other top players such as Jasprit Bumrah and Suryakumar Yadav.

"To target and kill innocent civilians in the name of religion is pure evil... No cause, no belief, no ideology can ever justify such a monstrous act. Yeh kaisi ladai hai... Jahaan insaan ki jaan ki koi keemat hi nahi (what



The affected families must be going through an unimaginable ordeal — India and the world stand united with them at this dark hour — SACHIN TENDULKAR, CRICKETER

sort of a fight is this in which there is no value for human life," he asked.

"I hope this madness ends soon and these terrorists are found and punished, without mercy," he added.

"And this is exactly why I say — you don't play cricket with Pakistan. Not now. Not ever. When BCCI or the government refused to send India to the Champions Trophy in Pakistan, some had the audacity to say, 'Oh, but sport should rise above

politics," Goswami wrote.

"...Murdering innocent Indians seems to be Pakistan's national sport and India should respond with zero tolerance and not with bats and balls," he added.

While India has not played bilateral cricket with Pakistan since 2012-13, and the BCCI declined to send its team for the Champions Trophy earlier this year, other Indian teams have continued to travel to Pakistan for international events.

Goswami, who had recently visited Pahalgam, said he had sensed hope and peace returning to the valley.



Praying for the families of the deceased. Those responsible for this will pay. India will strike — GAUTAM GAMBHIR, INDIAN CRICKET TEAM HEAD COACH

"And now... This bloodshed again. It breaks something inside you. It makes you question how many more times we're expected to stay silent, stay 'sporting,' while our people die. No more. Not this time," he added.

"Our brave soldiers will definitely give a befitting reply to this cowardly attack in the coming times. In the presence of the brave sons of Mother India, the plans of those who want to disturb the peace in

Jammu and Kashmir will never succeed," he asserted. Indian cricket team head coach and BJP MP Gautam Gambhir wrote, "Praying for the families of the deceased. Those responsible for this will pay. India will strike."

"My heart aches for the victims of the Pahalgam terror attack. So much pain. So much loss. No reason, no cause can ever justify such brutality.

"To the families left behind — your grief is beyond words, but you are not alone. We

are with you. In these dark moments, may we find strength in each other, and never let go of the hope that peace will return!" Sindhu wrote.

"Heartbroken by the tragic attack in Jammu & Kashmir. Prayers for the victims and their families," Chopra wrote.

"I am shocked and saddened by the horrific terrorist attack in Pahalgam. My thoughts are with the victims and their families. Terror has no place in our world, we must stand united against hatred and violence," Bindra added.

"Strongly condemn this cowardly act by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists. India stands united with our brave Army, J&K Police, and Paramilitary forces in the fight against terrorism. Justice will prevail," said former India all-rounder Suresh Raina.

"My heart goes out to family members of all those who lost their lives in dastardly attack. This can't be forgiven," former India spinner Harbhajan Singh wrote.

Olympic medal-winning former hockey goalkeeper PR Sreejesh, shuttler Saina Nehwal and two-time world champion boxer Nikhat Zareen also called for justice.

"Kondemnation is not enough, justice must follow. Our hearts bleed for Pahalgam. Terror must never win. Prayers for all affected in the Pahalgam attack," Sreejesh wrote.

Zareen added, "Those who attack innocents attack humanity itself. Strongly condemn the cowardly terror attack in Pahalgam. Justice must be swift."

RCB eye home improvement against struggling Rajasthan Royals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

Struggling to find form in their own den, Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look to regain control of their IPL campaign at home when they meet a floundering Rajasthan Royals here on Thursday.

The RCB batters have appeared strangely subdued and their bowlers seem to have forgotten the lengths to adopt here.

Central to that woeful run is the changed character of the 22-yard strip here which has offered some grip to the bowlers. The Bengaluru batters are yet to find the right tempo to tide over the slowness in the pitch, as they seem to have been caught in the dilemma of whether to step on the

gas or not. It's evident in the team's totals here so far — 169/8, 163/7 and 95/9 (14 overs). They have scored over 9-10 runs an over in other venues, but here the rate has dropped down to 7-8 runs an over.

Their mainstay Virat Kohli has been in decent form this season, averaging 64, but more would be expected of Phil Salt, Devdutt Padikkal and skipper Rajat Patidar. The inconsistent bounce is holding back the RCB batters, particularly after the Power Play segment and, hopefully, they will find the rhythm against RR.

Avoid mid-table tussle

RCB currently have 10 points to be placed at third on the table but Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants also have 10 points. Mumbai Indians are quietly sneaking up the ladder with eight points. If they win against Sunrisers Hyderabad then MI too will have 10 points and can displace RCB (4.7

from the third slot on account of better net run rate (4.8).

Therefore, a favourable result will help RCB to stay above the possible mid-table logjam of four teams with 10 points.

RR's turmoils

Rajasthan have a messy house to deal with. Sanju Samson will miss this match with an abdominal injury that earlier forced him to skip the game against Delhi Capitals as well.

Riyan Parag will continue to lead the Royals, who are currently tottering at eighth on the table with four points, in the absence of their regular captain.

Their front-line batsmen — Yashasvi Jaiswal, Parag, Shimron Hetmyer and Nitish Rana — are in reasonable form despite six defeats in eight matches and the start made by young Vaibhav Suryavanshi is also encouraging. However, the bowlers' lack of penetration has hurt them badly.

Wanindu Hasaranga (6 matches: 9 wickets) is their leading wicket-taker but the Sri Lankan spinner has taken four wickets in one match and struggled in the rest. Jofra Archer (8 matches, 8 wickets), Maheesh Theekshana (8 matches, 7 wickets) and Sandeep Sharma (8 matches, 6 wins) too offer a similar tale.

They have not either been able to take wickets or stem the run flow, and Archer (9.33) has the best economy rate among the bowlers tells a story.

The Royals management will hope that they will regain some mojo on the Chinnaswamy track which, by the occurrences of the recent past, will have something in it for them to explore.

Teams

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Rajat Patidar (capt), Phil Salt, Virat Kohli, Liam Livingstone, Jitesh Sharma (w), Tim David, Krunal Pandya, Bhuvneshwar

Kumar, Josh Hazlewood, Suyash Sharma, Yash Dayal, Devdutt Padikkal, Rasikh Dar Salam, Manoj Bhandage, Jacob Bethell, Swapnil Singh, Lungi Ngidi, Romario Shepherd, Nuwan Thushara, Mohit Rathee, Swastik Chikara, Abhinandan Singh.

Rajasthan Royals: Yashasvi Jaiswal, Riyan Parag (capt), Nitish Rana, Dhruv Jurel, Shimron Hetmyer, Wanindu Hasaranga, Jofra Archer, Maheesh Theekshana, Sandeep Sharma, Tushar Deshpande, Shubham Dube, Kumar Kartikeya, Yuvraj Singh Chakar, Kunal Singh Rathore, Akash Madhwal, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Kwena Maphaka, Ashok Sharma, Vaibhav Suryavanshi, Sanju Samson (injured).

We never press panic button: CSK CEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Chennai Super Kings as a franchise never presses the panic button and there is not much to worry about despite the five-time champions' ordinary run in the current season IPL, its CEO Kasi Viswanathan told to media on Wednesday.

They have lacked firepower in the batting department and captain Ruturaj Gaikwad's absence due to an injury has only made it worse for the storied outfit. CSK CEO has also spoken about his team's run in IPL 2025.

"We have not been performing up to the mark. We are trying to improve and we will try to do well in the next few games. We have never pressed the panic button in our franchise is not like that, it is just a game," Viswanathan told to media.

Following the defeat to Mumbai Indians, CSK find themselves in a must-win situation in their remaining six games with Dhoni already speaking about the planning for 2026.

Can Dhoni script a turnaround after taking over from Gaikwad midway into the tournament? "See, it's not the question of anybody. It's a question that the team should do well and not just one individual. We



don't talk to the team management. Dhoni will do what is right for the team. "What we are expecting as administrators is good performance by the team and we don't criticise our team at all," he added.

Sri Lanka women bring in several changes for Tri-Series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo



Sri Lanka on Wednesday announced a 17-member squad for the upcoming Tri-Series against India and South Africa, making sweeping changes to their ODI lineup.

The likes of Vishmi Gunaratne, Nilakshi Silva, Hasini Perera, Piumi Wathsala, Dewmi Vihanga, Inoka Ranaweera, Inoshi Fernando, Hansima Karunaratne, Rashmika Sewwandi, Malki Madara, Sugandika Kumari, Achini Kulsuriya.

Ranaweera and Hansima Karunaratne have also made their way back into the squad. The tournament begins on Sunday with all matches set to be played at the R Premadasa Stadium here.

Sri Lanka will open their campaign against India on Sunday. The final is scheduled for May 11.

Sri Lanka squad: Chamari Athapaththu (c), Vishmi Gunaratne, Harshitha Samarawickrama, Nilakshi Silva, Kavisha Dilhari, Anushka Sanjeevani, Hasini Perera, Piumi Wathsala, Manudi Nanayakkara, Dewmi Vihanga, Inoka Ranaweera, Inoshi Fernando, Hansima Karunaratne, Rashmika Sewwandi, Malki Madara, Sugandika Kumari, Achini Kulsuriya.

Current focus to win IPL with DC: Abishek Porel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Like any other cricketer from the country, young Delhi Capitals opener Abishek Porel aspires to represent India in the future but said his current focus is to help his side win its maiden Indian Premier League trophy this year.

"I know my game and the support staff also knows that. The support staff always tells me to play freely and not to take any tension." Asked to bat, LSG made a quick start with Aiden Markram (52) and Mitchell Marsh (45) sharing 87 runs for the opening stand in 10 overs.

"They (LSG) got runs initially but we knew we can restrict them in middle overs. We had good spinners so we backed ourselves and made a comeback with some good bowling in the second half." LSG assistant coach Vijay Dahiya said the hosts lost the momentum in the second half of their innings after a bright start.

"I think leaving pitch, you can see that we scored over 80 runs in nine overs. From there we lost the momentum a bit. We had the momentum and we should have taken advantage of that," he said.

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