



INDIA SHALL IDENTIFY, TRACK AND PUNISH EVERY TERRORIST

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi/Madhubani (Bihar)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday sent out a fierce message that perpetrators of Pahalgam terror attack will be pursued "to the ends of the earth" and promised to "identify, track and punish every terrorist and their backers".

In his first reaction after the dastardly attack, which left 26 dead on Tuesday, Modi also vowed that terrorists and conspirators behind the attack will get a punishment beyond their imagination.

Addressing a public rally in Madhubani, Bihar, Modi suddenly switched from Hindi to English to reiterate his message. It was an apparent move to address the global community about India's intentions and resolve to bring the killers of Pahalgam to justice.

In his first speech after the attack in Pahalgam, the Prime Minister vowed to punish terrorists behind the strike and said

India's spirit will never be broken by terrorism.

Modi then spoke in English and said, "Friends, today from the soil of Bihar, I say to the whole world India will identify, track, and punish every terrorist and their backers. We will pursue them to the ends of the earth. India's spirit will never be broken by terrorism. Terrorism will not go unpunished."

In the stern message, he said, "Every effort will be made to ensure that justice is done. The entire nation is firm in this resolve. Everyone who believes in humanity is with us. I thank the people of various countries and their leaders who have stood with us in these times."

In a message to Pakistan without naming the country, Modi said he will state it categorically that the terrorists who carried out the attack and those who hatched the conspiracy, they will be punished beyond their imagination. "Punishment will definitely be served." The prime minister said the willpower of 140 crore

PM'S PLEDGE TO THE NATION



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaking at the National Panchayati Raj Day programme in Madhubani district of Bihar

Indians will break the back of patrons of terrorism.

Paying condolences to the victims and their families, he said citizens across the country are in mourning over the brutal manner in which terrorists killed 26 innocent civilians in Kashmir on April 22. The nation stands with their families, he said. Modi, other leaders on the dais and the crowd observed silence to pay homage to the victims of the attack at the beginning of the prime minister's speech.

He said people lost their sons, brothers and husbands and noted that the victims belong to different parts of India, be it Bengal, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha and Bihar. "Our sorrow and anger are same from Kargil to Kanniyakumari," he said. Peace and security are the most necessary conditions for fast development, he added.

Earlier, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar condemned the terror attack at Pahalgam and told the prime minister that the entire nation was united against ter-

rorism. Panchayati Raj Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh said the entire nation had belief in Modi's strength and were confident he would give a befitting reply to the perpetrators of terror at an appropriate time. These strong assertions came a day after India on Wednesday downgraded diplomatic ties with Pakistan and announced a raft of measures, including expulsion of Pakistani military attaches, suspension of the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 and immediate shutting down of the Attari land-transit post in view of the cross-border links to the horrific Pahalgam terror attack.

These decisions were taken in Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting chaired by Prime Minister. He had cut short his visit to Saudi Arabia and returned to New Delhi on Wednesday. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri briefed him about the situation at the airport.

Army Commando killed in Jammu and Kashmir

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

An elite Para Commando of the Indian Army was 'killed in action' after an encounter broke out during an ongoing search operation in the forest area of Dudu Basantgarh in Udhampur district of Jammu region on Thursday.

A joint team of security forces were combing the area based on the receipt of information about the presence of terrorists in the area.

After the brutal massacre of tourists in Pahalgam, in which 26 tourists were killed and 17 others were wounded on Tuesday, this is the third encounter in the last 24 hours between terrorists and security forces in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Indian Army on Wednesday foiled an infiltration bid in the Uri Nala area of Baramulla, killing two terrorists amid an intense firefight.

The second encounter broke out after terrorists opened fire on security personnel

during a cordon and search operation in the Tangmarg area of Kulgam district of south Kashmir.

It is believed the forces were looking for the same group of terrorists who were earlier spotted in the Joffer area of Ramnagar tehsil on April 9.

After the brutal massacre of tourists in Pahalgam, in which 26 tourists were killed and 17 others were wounded on Tuesday, this is the third encounter in the last 24 hours

"Based on specific intelligence, a joint operation with Jammu and Kashmir Police was launched today in the Basantgarh area of Udhampur," the White Knight Corps said on X. Contact was established, and a fierce firefight ensued, it said.

"One of our bravehearts sustained griev-

ous injuries in the initial exchange and later succumbed despite best medical efforts," the Army said.

The deceased soldier has been identified as Havaladar Jhantu Ali Sheikh of 6 Para of the Special Forces.

"GOC White Knight Corps and all ranks salute braveheart Havaladar Jhantu Ali Shaikh of 6 PARA SF, who made the supreme sacrifice during a counter-terror operation," the Army said on X.

The Army said his indomitable courage and the valour of his team will never be forgotten. "We stand in solidarity with the bereaved family in this moment of grief," the Army added. The operation was still underway when the last reports came in from the spot, they added.

Four suspects were also picked up from the area for questioning.

In the last year, the area of Basantgarh has witnessed several incidents of terrorist violence.

Raksha Mantri holds All Party meet

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ New Delhi

The crucial All Party meeting convened by Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh saw all the political parties including the Opposition extending full support to the Narendra Modi Government in its fight against terrorism. Sources said the Government admitted to security lapses in the recent Pahalgam terror attack, which killed 26 people and injured many others.

The Government briefed leaders of various political parties on the Pahalgam terror attack and heard their views at the All Party meeting. At the beginning of the meeting, a moment of silence was observed for the victims of the attack.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh initiated the discussion at the meeting. Intelligence Bureau Director Tapan Deka gave all leaders a 20-minute briefing on the attack and how it happened. Later, he answered the questions of sev-

eral leaders and Home Minister Amit Shah joined him in answering the queries. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman were also present at the meeting from the government's side.

During the closed door meeting which lasted for about 46 minutes, several Opposition parties asked questions about the apparent failure of security protocols. "Where were the security forces? Where was the Central Reserve Police Force?" several leaders asked, according to sources.

In response, the Government reportedly said local authorities did not inform security agencies before opening the Baisaran area near Pahalgam in Anantnag district, which traditionally remains restricted until the Amarnath Yatra in June. Concerns were also raised about the delayed response to the incident. According to sources, Government officials explained that the site was a 45-

minute uphill walk and that no standard operating procedure (SOP) was in place to handle such situations.

Leaders across party lines assured their support to the Government in taking decisive action against terrorism and destroying terror camps, even as they flagged security lapses in Pahalgam.

Sources said Government claimed it was taking all measures to ensure security. It noted that the attack was aimed at vitiating the atmosphere at a time when the economy was on the upswing and tourism was booming in Jammu and Kashmir.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju said everyone agreed that India should fight terror united and all parties said that they are with the Government in this fight. All political parties have given this message and their leaders have said in one voice that whatever step the Government takes, they will support it.

National Panchayati Raj Day CM reaffirms commitment to grassroots governance

- Announces 6 lakh new ration cards
- Also 2 lakh Subhadra beneficiaries and 314 rural stadiums

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Reiterating his government's commitment to inclusive and grassroots-led development, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi addressed the State-level function at Talabania in Puri to mark the National Panchayati Raj Day on Thursday. He underscored the critical role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in building a stronger, self-reliant Odisha.

"India's development is rooted in its villages. With 83% of Odisha's population residing in rural areas, it is imperative that the engine of growth begins at the

grassroots," Majhi said, addressing elected representatives and stakeholders from across the State.

Marking the occasion, the Chief Minister laid the foundation for several key initiatives, distribution of 6 lakh new ration cards under the Public Distribution System, financial assistance to over 2 lakh women beneficiaries under the Subhadra Yojana and the construction of 314 block-level stadiums to boost rural sports infrastructure.

Tracing the genesis of the Panchayati Raj system, the CM said the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which came into force on April 24,



1993, was a watershed moment for decentralised governance in India. "The spirit of Gram Swaraj envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi can only be realised through empowered PRIs. Odisha has taken significant steps in this direction," he remarked.

Highlighting the strides made by Odisha, Majhi noted that several gram panchayats from the State have received national awards over the past

three years for their performance in implementing Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDPs).

The CM also took pride in Odisha's role as a pioneer in women's political empowerment, with 50% reservation for women in all three tiers of the panchayati raj structure. "This has not only transformed the political landscape but has empowered women to shape the future of their communi-

ties," he said. Sharing his personal journey, Majhi said his own political career began as a Panchayat Samiti Member in 1997. "Leaders emerging from the grassroots have a better grasp of people's issues. They are more attuned to the needs and aspirations of rural citizens," he emphasised.

In a veiled critique of past governments, Majhi said, "For 25 years, Gram Sabhas and Panchayats were allowed to become inactive. We are now reactivating these platforms to ensure villagers decide their own development priorities."

The event witnessed the participation of PRI representatives from all districts, government officials, and members of the public, reflecting Odisha's renewed push toward decentralised governance and rural empowerment.

CM pays tribute to terror victim Satpathy

Announces Rs 20-lakh aid, govt job for family

RAJEEV RATHAN/UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ Bhubaneswar/Baleswar

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday paid solemn tribute to Prashant Satpathy, the Odia tourist who was killed in the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir. Majhi visited the bereaved family at Ishani village under Remuna block in Baleswar district, where the mortal remains of Satpathy arrived earlier in the day amidst a sea of mourners.

Satpathy's body was brought in a procession from the Bhubaneswar airport to his native village, where thousands of people gathered to



pay their final respects. Condemning the attack in the strongest terms, CM Majhi described the incident as a "barbaric and inhumane act" and offered full state support to the grieving family.

The Chief Minister announced financial assistance of ₹20 lakh for the family along with a government job for Satpathy's wife Priyadarshini

Satpathy and assured that the education of their son would be fully borne by the State Government.

"I have met Prashant's wife and son. The pain is unimaginable, but the government will stand by them at every step. The State will provide all necessary support to ensure their security and dignity," Majhi added.

CM sanctions hike in police allowances

Announces 16,059 new posts

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi approved a significant proposal aimed at boosting the morale and efficiency of the State police force on Thursday. The decision includes a hike in uniform allowances and extra duty incentives for personnel ranging from constables to inspectors.

As per the new decision, uniform allowance for Inspectors has been doubled from Rs 4,300 to Rs 8,600 annually. Similarly, Sub-Inspectors and ASIs will now receive Rs 8,400 instead of Rs 4,200. Constables, Havildars and Sepoys will get Rs 10,000, up from Rs 5,000. Special Striking Force ex-army personnel will receive Rs 11,800 annually, up from Rs 5,900.



ply to all employees of equivalent rank.

In a parallel move, the annual cap on Extra Duty Incentives has also been raised. Constables, Sepoys and similar ranks will now receive up to Rs 25,000, while Havildars and equivalent posts will be eligible for up to Rs 30,000.

Following the announcement, leaders of police unions met the Chief Minister at Lok Seva Bhawan and expressed gratitude for the hike. The Chief Minister urged all per-

sonnel to enhance service delivery, improve law and order, and ensure timely FIR registration and investigation.

Reaffirming his government's commitment to building a disciplined and capable force, Majhi said the State has approved creation of 16,059 new posts, addressing the existing vacancy of over 16,000 positions.

He added that more officers would be sent to other States to study best policing practices.

Historic decision Similipal declared as National Park

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

In a historic move, the Odisha Government officially declared Similipal as a National Park on Thursday, a long-awaited decision that has finally come to fruition after several decades of deliberation. The proposal to grant Similipal the status of a National Park was first introduced in 1980, but its approval had been delayed for years. The much-anticipated decision comes after the Forests and Environment Minister Ganesh Ram Singh, expedited the process following his appointment.

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi approved the proposal, marking a significant milestone in Odisha's conservation efforts. With this declaration, Similipal be-



comes India's 107th National Park and the second in Odisha, after Chilika, spanning an area of 845.7 square kilometers. This vast expanse is now recognized as one of the largest national parks in the state. Similipal is home to a rich and multi-layered biodiversity, including wildlife sanctuaries, a tiger project, UNESCO biosphere reserves, and elephant sanctuaries. The park supports around 40 wild tigers and is one of the few places in the world where ti-

gers and elephants co-exist. Notably, about 25% of Odisha's elephant population resides here. Its unique ecosystem, which harbors some of India's rarest species of flora and fauna, draws national attention and makes it a critical area for conservation.

The national park's diverse ecosystem includes 104 orchid species and over 360 bird species, along with several endangered animals like tigers, sambar, and crocodiles. The state government has also launched the "Greater Similipal Landscape" program to protect the park and ensure its long-term conservation. In a remarkable conservation effort, two female tigers from Maharashtra's Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve have already adapted successfully to the park's environment.

Graham Staines murder case Dara Singh likely to walk free soon

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Jail Department has submitted a proposal to the State Sentence Review Board recommending premature release of 85 life-term convicts, among them Dara Singh, the principal accused in the 1999 murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two minor sons in Keonjhar district. This development comes shortly after the release of Mahendra Hembram, a co-convict in the same case, who walked free from Keonjhar jail earlier this April after serving 25 years. Hembram, who had been convicted for his role in the brutal triple murder, was granted remission on grounds of good behaviour.

Dara Singh, born Rabindra Pal Singh, was originally sentenced to death by a CBI court in 2003 for leading a mob that set fire to a vehicle in which Staines and his sons Philip (10) and Timothy (6) were sleeping. The Orissa High

Court in 2005 commuted Singh's sentence to life imprisonment, citing lack of evidence for a premeditated conspiracy. The Supreme Court upheld the life sentence in 2011, calling it a "crime that shook the conscience of the nation."

Having spent over 24 years behind bars, Singh recently filed a plea for remission, expressing remorse and stating his desire to reintegrate into society. In response, the Supreme Court has directed the Odisha government to review and decide on Singh's plea before May 1, 2025.

The State's consideration of Singh's remission has sparked a widespread debate. Human rights groups and Christian organisations have voiced concern over releasing individuals convicted of crimes that, they argue, amount to acts of religious hatred. Other groups have advocated for a humane approach to prisoners who have served long sentences and demonstrated good behaviour.

Odisha wins Nat'l Panchayat Award for 3rd yr



RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha has once again secured national acclaim by winning the prestigious National Panchayat Award 2023-24 for the third consecutive year, underscoring the state's commitment to strengthening grassroots democracy and fostering inclusive development. The awards were conferred during the National Panchayat Raj Day celebrations held in Madhubani, Bihar, where the Prime Minister of India honored outstanding Panchayats and institutions.

The State Institute for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (SIRD&PR) of Odisha, received the 2nd Prize under the "Panchayat Kshamata Nirman Sarbottam Sansthan Puraskar" category for its excellence in capacity building and providing vital support to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) across the state. Additionally, Hatbhadra Gram Panchayat (GP) of Kusumi Block in Mayurbhanj District, was awarded the 2nd Best Gram Panchayat under the "Atmanirbhar Gram Panchayat" category for its exceptional performance in

enhancing Own Source of Revenue (OSR), fostering self-sufficiency, and embracing financial sustainability at the grassroots level. These achievements reflect the tireless efforts of SIRD & PR, which has played a pivotal role in guiding the development of comprehensive Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs) through innovative training programs and continuous support. Notably, SIRD&PR's digital platform (pmsird.odisha.gov.in) has revolutionized PRI monitoring, offering real-time tracking of activities and ensuring

transparent governance. Drinking Water & Panchayati Raj Minister Rabi Narayan Naik expressed immense pride in Odisha's success, emphasizing the state's leadership in empowering Panchayats. Odisha SIRD & PR Director Surendra Kumar Meena attributed the recognition to the collective vision of the state's PRI members, officials, and village communities. With seven national awards in 2022-23 and eight in 2021-22, Odisha continues to set a benchmark for effective Panchayati Raj governance in India.

SWC meeting Rs 1,191-cr investment in green energy cleared

Target is to build 1,707.56 MW of renewable capacity

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Government has given a policy approval to renewable energy projects worth Rs 1,191.47 crore during the 10th Single Window Committee (SWC) meeting held on Thursday under the chairmanship of Department of Energy Principal Secretary Vishal Kumar Dev. The meeting was convened in alignment with the Odisha Renewable Energy Policy-2022. The projects approved by the committee include two wind energy projects with a combined capacity of 95.7 MW, four ground-mounted solar projects with a capacity of 53.97 MW, and the state's first battery energy storage project with a capacity of 0.6 MWh. "These initiatives reflect the State's strong commitment to building a greener future and ensuring sustainable economic growth," said Vishal Dev, highlighting the strategic role of renewable energy in Odisha's long-term development goals. Dev also emphasised the government's resolve to ease capital inflow into the sector and to ensure timely execution of all sanctioned projects. The meeting reviewed the implementation progress of projects approved in the 9th SWC and assessed inter-departmental coordination mechanisms to further streamline execution. With consistent policy reforms and a structured approval mechanism in place, Odisha has emerged as a promising destination for renewable energy investments. Through GRIDCO, the nodal agency, and the Single Window Committee, the State has so far approved 1,707.56 MW of renewable energy projects, drawing investments totaling Rs 12,387.36 crore.

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Woman dies in lift accident at Bhadrak hosp

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

A woman was crushed to death by a malfunctioning lift at the Bhadrak District Headquarters Hospital on Thursday. The deceased was identified as Minati Parida of Narasinghpur village under Randia panchayat in Bhadrak district. She had been admitted with fever and cold. After initial treatment in the female ward on the second floor, doctors referred her to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack. While attempting to board the lift with her daughter-in-law, the lift reportedly moved abruptly, crushing Minati. Her daughter-in-law narrowly escaped. The absence of

lift staff at the time of the incident has raised serious concerns about hospital safety protocols. The mishap sparked tension in the hospital premises. Police, led by Town IIC Prabhanshu Mishra, were deployed to maintain order. The district Collector confirmed that a technical fault caused the accident and assured strong action against those responsible. Meanwhile, the State Government has announced an ex-gratia of Rs 8 lakh to the bereaved family, drawing from various assistance funds. The victim's family has demanded compensation and strict action against the hospital staff involved in the negligence.

In Cuttack 2 youths drown in Mahanadi

PNS ■ Cuttack

Two youths who had gone missing after being swept away in Mahanadi river were rescued by Fire Services personnel in Cuttack, on Thursday. However, doctors at the SCB Medical College Hospital (SCBMCH) declared them 'brought dead' later in the day. The deceased were identified as Pinkun Jena (22) and Sai Behera (14) of Jobra area. According to sources, six youths were swimming in the river when two of them were swept away by the river current. Despite efforts by on-lookers to save them, the situation turned serious. Follow-

ing this a search operation was carried out by the Fire Services personnel. A frantic search was initiated, and the duo was rescued after for around an hour. The two youths were found in critical condition and rushed to hospital. "The fire services team located and brought the duo to safety, although their condition had remained serious. Unfortunately, the two youths could not be saved despite efforts. The fatal mishap occurred while the youths were swimming in the river near Jobra anicut, a popular bathing site for locals. We could not save them," a resident expressed.

Agniveer job racket 3 including two Navy personnel held

PNS ■ Khordha

The Khordha police have busted a racket involved in the Agniveer recruitment process and arrested three persons, including two Navy personnel. The police also freed multiple bank accounts in connection with the racket. Khordha SP Sagarika Nath said the accused had collected large sums of money from candidates who appeared for the Agniveer recruitment examination in November 2024. The accused allegedly promised to facilitate police verification, procure favourable medical certificates and ensure final selection in exchange for hefty bribes. One of the main accused was identified as Bhooshan, a former Navy personnel and resident of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. Another accused, Satyam Chahar, currently serving in the EAP 5 position at INS Kesari in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, has also been

arrested. Chahar is a resident of Uttar Pradesh. The third accused, Vinay Kumar Ray, holds the position of MC-at-ARMS-II and is presently posted at the INS Chilka, said Nath. The investigation was launched following information from Lieutenant Commander Adwitiya Singh, Training Correspondence Officer at INS Chilka. A formal police complaint was registered on April 19. Per the informant, during the induction process for positions including Agniveers (SSR/MR), CG Navik (GD), and Yantriks, several individuals were reportedly extorting money from candidates under the guise of providing unauthorised and illegal assistance. So far, 12 bank accounts have been frozen and four mobile phones have been seized as part of the ongoing investigation. The accused were collecting amounts ranging from Rs 30,000 to Rs 1.2 lakh from the aspirants, police said.

Survey in Odisha Unpaid drudgery: Women heavily tilted against men

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A recent government survey has highlighted significant gender disparities in Odisha, revealing that women in the State spend nearly three times more time on unpaid domestic work than men. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's (MoSPI) Time Use Survey (TUS) 2024, conducted between January and December 2024, provides a comprehensive analysis of how individuals allocate their time across various activities. The TUS 2024, the second of its kind after the inaugural 2019 survey, collected data from over 50,000 individuals aged six and above across India. Participants were asked to record their activities over a 24-hour period, segmented into 30-minute intervals, capturing both primary and sec-

ondary activities. The methodology offers a detailed insight into daily routines, encompassing paid work, unpaid domestic tasks, caregiving, and leisure activities. The survey's findings for Odisha are particularly striking. In rural areas, women dedicate an average of 307 minutes per day to unpaid domestic services, while men contribute only 107 minutes. In urban settings, the disparity persists, with women spending 290 minutes compared to men's 100 minutes. This indicates that women are undertaking nearly three times the amount of household work as their male counterparts. Additionally, women are more involved in unpaid caregiving services. Rural women spend 141 minutes daily on caregiving, whereas rural men allocate 91 minutes.

In urban areas, women dedicate 142 minutes, while men spend 87 minutes on such activities. The survey also sheds light on employment-related activities. In Odisha, rural men spend an average of 424 minutes per day on employment and related tasks, compared to rural women's 323 minutes. Urban men allocate 502 minutes, while urban women spend 382 minutes daily. Nationally, the participation rate in employment activities for individuals aged 15-59 years stands at 75% for men and 25% for women, indicating a persistent gender gap in workforce engagement. The survey reveals that both rural and urban residents in Odisha spend approximately 407 to 412 minutes daily on learning activities, reflecting a consistent commitment to education across regions.

However, time allocated to self-care and maintenance, including activities like eating, sleeping, and personal hygiene, is slightly lower than the national average. Rural men spend 748 minutes, rural women 723 minutes, urban men 723 minutes, and urban women 714 minutes daily on self-care. The TUS 2024 highlights the disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic and caregiving work borne by women in Odisha. These responsibilities not only limit women's participation in the formal workforce but also impact their overall well-being and personal development. Addressing these disparities requires targeted policy interventions aimed at redistributing household responsibilities, promoting gender equality in domestic roles, and facilitating greater workforce participation among women.

In Dhenkanal Notorious criminal held in encounter with police

PNS ■ Dhenkanal

A notorious criminal Debasish Behera alias Hund was injured in an encounter with police at Mangalpu in Dhenkanal district on Wednesday. During the operation, Hund sustained bullet injuries in his leg. As per reports, a Sadar police team chased Hund and shot at him while he was going to commit a murder. Hund has been involved in more than 20 criminal cases. These include murder and dacoity. He was on the radar of police for long. He was operating the 'King of Forest Gang' which was involved in several crimes in the district. The activities of Hund and his gang had spread fear among the locals. Police aim

to dismantle networks linked to Hund. Last week, two notorious criminals were injured in a police encounter in the Indranipatna area of Choudwar in Cuttack. The joint operation was carried out by the Choudwar police and the Special Squad. The injured criminals were identified as Subhrajit Parida alias Jubula and Sangram Rout alias Katas, both of whom have long criminal histories. Residents from multiple affected villages are now demanding an impartial and comprehensive investigation, closure of illegal units, criminal action against violators, and compensation for crop loss, property damage, and environmental degradation.

SOCIAL CANVAS

Are funds under Action Plan for SCs properly utilised in Odisha?

Development Action Plan for Scheduled Castes (DAPSC) is a guideline to allocate and spend funds exclusively for the development of scheduled caste (SC) population of the State. The concept has been followed since 1980 with the recommendation of the then Planning Commission and subsequently adopted by the Union and State governments. The guideline says the State has to earmark funds out of their plan outlay in proportion to the percentage of its SC population and spend that amount as per the guideline in order to bridge the development gaps between the SCs and other social groups. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and its counterpart in State SC, ST Development Department are the nodal monitoring agencies for the purpose. But it has been observed that the government of Odisha has made only notional allocation in State's annual plans and demand grants but no dedicated schemes have been formulated to reach out to the targeted beneficiaries.



MANAS JENA

Even this time there has been no mention about the DAPSC in the Budget documents of 2025-26. There has been no information available in the public domain by the State government about such spending. For a long time, there has been no meetings of the State Scheduled Castes Advisory Board under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister to review such issues in the interest of the development of the most marginalized sections

constituting around one-fifth of the population. The Odisha Scheduled Caste Advisory Board Rules 1957 has such provisions which has been violated by previous BJD government and same is happening with the BJP government also. The SC, ST Finance and Development Corporation has no schemes and is almost dysfunctional which is supposed to take a lead role in the livelihood development of the poor SC families by providing skill development and income generating activities. A total of 39 Ministries /departments of the Union government have allocated funds under their different 233 schemes for the welfare of the SCs. It was Rs 1,65,492 crore which is about 15 per cent of the total allocation of Rs 10,99,391 crore under different schemes for the year 2024-2025. Along with this, the Union government has been providing additional support as special Central assistance to DAPSC as a Central sector scheme since 1980 which is a 100 percent grant to the States as an additive to the State plans. But the State has no such specific plans,

mechanism, or dedicated schemes exclusively for its implementation. Along with this provision of sub plan, the Constitution of India Article 164(1) has also made special provision for appointment of a Cabinet Minister from among STs to head the SC and ST Development Department. The department is the nodal coordinating agency to look into the implementation of the guideline in coordination with Scheduled Tribes Advisory Council and Scheduled Caste Advisory Board headed by the Chief Minister for the purpose of development and protection of SCs and STs of the State. It is alleged that the funds have been knowingly diverted to other purposes and spent on indivisible items such as roads, bridges and flyovers benefiting all without any direct impact over SCs though this is a serious violation of budgetary norms, and non-implementation of planned outlays. There is no legislation and institutional arrangement in this regard to make the authorities accountable and this continued political apathy towards the development of the

marginalised sections is largely reflected in the development administration. It is being demanded that in order to bring improvement in the implementation there must be legislation with clearly defined rules. For the last 45 years, the improper implementation of such an important guideline has had an adverse effect on the overall development of the poor people, who constitute a major section of the population, and continue to be in the lower strata of all development indicators in comparison to other social groups. The process has been widening social and economic gaps, assets and income inequality, manifested in poverty, unemployment, low income, distress migration, hunger death and malnutrition and weakening State's growth because of its non-inclusiveness in sharing public opportunities out of the State fund. There has been no awareness among the public about public spending on development programmes in the State and especially, among the marginalised sections, SC and ST, women and chil-

dren. There must be an attempt to address the issues of tracking of budgeted public spending and its most transparent implementation for the development of the marginalised sections and vulnerable groups, who are left behind the ongoing development process and getting further excluded in public expenditure. It has been said that it is not the paucity of funds but its effective implementation which has been a serious problem. The existing policy and practices in the context of DAPSC have been questioned on grounds of accountability of the government and the officials responsible for its implementation. The legislation in this regard can enhance responsibility among authorities violating norms that defeat the purpose of public spending. The States such as AP, Telangana and Karnataka have attempted to bring legislation to streamline the spending of DAPSC so that the purpose behind such provisions is not defeated. Odisha must design special schemes and exclusive projects to improve their social, economic and

environmental condition and priority must be on ensuring basic amenities such as homestead land, drinking water, sanitation, housing, electrification, linking road to their habitations, health and educational infrastructure and distribution of agriculture land with access to water, electricity and credit facilities and skill upgradation training. The funds should not be diverted for other purposes and must be non-lapsable and if unspent must have provision of utilisation in the next year. The government must make available dis-aggregated data on beneficiaries of each scheme and programme against the allocated amount out of the funds by different departments. The monitoring of such funds and tracking of expenditure must be done at a separate cell in department level through formation of monitoring bodies involving the beneficiaries. It must be reflected in statutory audit and impact assessment reports along with social audit reports. (manasbsr15@gmail.com)

Viksit Odisha 35 road corridors of 6,100 km to be developed by 2036

At an investment of Rs 3 L cr
PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha government has unveiled a comprehensive master plan to develop 35 road corridors spanning 6,100 km by 2036, aligning with its 'Viksit Odisha' vision.

According to reports, the network includes 2,800 km of National Highway (NH) arterial roads, 2,700 km of non-NH roads, 600 km of inter-corridor links, and 1,500 km of feeder roads for last-mile connectivity.

The corridors will prioritise access-controlled highways, linking industrial hubs, mineral-rich zones, ports, and socially significant regions.

The reports come after the recent visit of Union Road

Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari to the State, where he emphasised upgrading Odisha's highways to global standards, stating that projects worth Rs 2 lakh crore were already underway.

Raipur-Visakhapatnam Economic Corridor: A 464 km six-lane route (Rs 20,000 crore) connecting Chhattisgarh's coal reserves to Andhra's ports. Odisha's 241 km stretch (Rs 8,000 crore) is set for completion by December 2025.

Ranchi-Sambalpur Corridor: A 150 km four-lane highway (Rs 8,000 crore) to reduce travel distance by 65 km, easing coal and steel transport between Jharkhand and Odisha by 2028.

Chandikhole-Paradip Eight-Lane Corridor: This 77 km project (Rs 4,000 crore) will halve travel time to Paradip

Port, critical for mineral exports, by December 2026.

To reduce urban traffic, ring roads and bypasses will be built in all towns with populations exceeding one lakh.

The Bhubaneswar Ring Road, a six-lane bypass, will divert heavy traffic from the capital, and a 200 km greenfield highway from Chandikhol to Barbil (Rs 6,000 crore) will streamline steel and magnesium transport from mining zones.

Critical bridges will address regional disparities. Gadkari had stated plans for the Tel River Bridge to connect tribal regions of Bolangir and Kalahandi, while the Rs 500 crore Chilika Lake Bridge is expected to boost tourism to Puri and improve access to coastal industries.

Reports also added that the newly formed Odisha State Highway Authority (OSHA) will spearhead the master plan, with powers to expedite approvals and land acquisition, with institutions like IIT-Bhubaneswar and NIT-Rourkela slated to ensure quality control.

The Central government has allocated Rs 75,000 crore for road infrastructure over the next five years, supplementing ongoing central investments. With Rs 60,000 crore already spent, Gadkari pledged Rs 3 lakh crore in completed projects by 2026.

Tenders for key routes, including the 71 km Deogarh-Khairapalli Road (Rs 472 crore), are underway, ensuring a mega transformation for Odisha ahead of its centenary celebrations in 2036

DoP asked to compensate K'pada man with Rs 50K

For late delivery of letter that led him to lose job

RAJESH BEHERA ■ Kendrapada

The District Consumer Dispute and Redressal Commission of Kendrapada after adjudging a case, on Tuesday, directed to the Postal Department to compensate a person with a sum of Rs 50,000 as it delivered a speed post letter late, which led the victim to lose a job.

One Askhok Kumar Nayak, a resident of Chakroda village, filed an application for Khalashi post at district Collector office. The notification for the post was published on June 24, 2024 and its last date for filing application for the post was June 29, 2024. Nayak on June 25, 2024 had applied for the post by sending an ap-

plication by speed post.

Nayak sent his application from District Head Post office. But ironically, it took five days to reach at the district Collector office, which is only 2 km from the District Head Post office. The application of Nayak was rejected as it reached late.

Being deprived of the job due to negligence of the Postal department, Nayak moved the District Consumer Dispute and Redressal Commission of Kendrapada. The Commission later served notice to the Postal department, but the latter gave its reply late.

Adjudging the case, Commission President Susmita Mishra and senior member Bibekananda Das directed to the Postal department to compensate the complainant for the late delivery of the letter.

INBRIEF

Literary figure, activist Rahman of Khordha dies

Khordha: Literary figure and social activist Zillur Rahman of Kerang village passed away on Sunday. He had been ill for the past few days and was receiving treatment at home. He was 82. He was a columnist, literary figure and social worker. He made a great contribution to the mother tongue.



After receiving the news of his demise, hundreds of people including his relatives and friends visited his residence and expressed their condolences to the bereaved family. Later, his body was taken to the Baghatangi Graveyard in Kerang and the last rites were performed.

Undivided K'put Dental Assn holds first-ever meet

Koraput: The undivided Koraput Dental Association organised the first ever Dental Meet 2025 at Koraput. The event was inaugurated by Jeypore MLA Tara Prasad Bahinipati in the presence of Dean SLNMC Dr Susanta Dash



along with a host of other dignitaries. The first-ever IDA hill city branch was launched to unite the dentists of undivided Koraput district. Various issues faced by the dentist fraternity were discussed, besides innovation in the field of dentistry. The association declared its first elected committee where Dr Ashok Kumar Das was elected as president along with Dr Sidhant Nayak as treasurer and Dr Amit Kumar Dash as secretary.

15-ft King Cobra rescued from R'gada crusher unit

Rayagada: A 15-foot King Cobra was spotted by workers in a crusher unit in Guakona village in Kolnara block, 15 km from the district headquarters. Upon being informed, the Rayagada Forest Range officials along with snake catcher Pradeep Senapati arrived at the spot and safely rescued the snake which was fifteen feet long weighing 30 kg.



Bharatmala to put Koraput on Eastern India's tourism map

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Tucked away in the serene hills of the Eastern Ghats, Koraput is on the cusp of a tourism revolution. The district, long admired for its raw natural beauty and tribal heritage, is set to become a major attraction in Eastern India with the rollout of a six-lane Bharatmala economic corridor.

By drastically cutting down travel time from major urban centres, the corridor promises to open up Koraput to a broader wave of tourists and investors. The district is now coming into the spotlight with its scenic valleys, waterfalls, and reservoirs like Kolab, Machhakund, Indravati and Balimela drawing more footfalls than ever before.

New experiences are also taking shape in the region. Hot air balloon trials held at Denga Janiguda and the OSAP ground have sparked interest in adventure tourism, and officials say they are awaiting final approvals to launch full-fledged balloon rides.

Already this year, tourist visits to iconic sites like Deomali, Rani Duduma, Gupteshwar and Duduma Falls have crossed five lakh. District Collector V Keerthi Vasan said the administration is now aiming to integrate local culture and craft into the

tourism blueprint.

"We are developing dedicated craft villages such as handloom near Kotpad, terracotta in Laxmipur, and bamboo in Boipariguda to give visitors an authentic, immersive experience while creating livelihoods for over 3,000 artisans. Many of them are receiving support through the PM Vishwakarma Yojana," he said.

Adding further value to Koraput's appeal is a luxury cruise project at the Kolab reservoir's Pandighat. The State Government has approved Rs 10 crore for the jetty's development. In addition, infrastructure upgrades are planned with Rs 20 crore for Deomali, Rs 4 crore for Gupteshwar and Rs 1.4 crore for the Duduma waterfall.

Tourist Suman Rani Tripathy believes Koraput is uniquely positioned to become an eco-cultural tourism model. "With its reputation for organic products coffee, turmeric, black cumin, and millets the district has the potential to link agriculture, handicrafts and nature into a holistic travel experience," she said.

As the Bharatmala corridor nears completion, Koraput stands ready to take off not just as a destination, but as a story of sustainable tourism and inclusive growth.

Odisha advances ethanol mission to boost clean energy

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

In a major step towards environmental sustainability and cleaner fuel alternatives, the Odisha Government is prioritising the use of second-generation (2G) ethanol. A presentation was held on Wednesday at Lok Seva Bhawan by Midwest Energy Company, outlining plans to establish ethanol production plants across the state.

Company representative Prabhakar Reddy proposed utilizing crop residues particularly post harvest paddy straw for the production of ethanol. The initiative also envisions ethanol-blended fuel for boats operating in the ecologically

sensitive Chilika Lake.

Aligning with the Union Government's roadmap to achieve 5% ethanol blending in diesel by 2030, Odisha is taking proactive strides. "We are committed to turning this vision into action," Deputy Chief Minister Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo said.

Currently, agricultural stubble is often left to decay or burnt in fields, contributing to pollution. The new initiative proposes to convert this residue into biofuel, reducing emissions while creating an additional revenue stream for farmers. In addition to paddy, crop waste from sugarcane, maize, millet, and jowar will also be used. The company will pro-

duce these raw materials directly from farmers for ethanol production.

"This will not only promote clean fuel but also generate rural employment and reduce seasonal migration," Singh Deo added.

Also present were Law and Works Minister Prithviraj Harichandan, Industries Minister Sampad Charan Swain and senior bureaucrats including Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment Principal Secretary Dr Arabinda Kumar Padhee, Energy Principal Secretary Vishal Kumar Dev, Tourism Commissioner and Secretary Balwant Singh and IDCO MD Bhupendra Singh Poonia.

'Act swiftly on tribal protester's death in S'garh'

BJD urges OHRC

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) on Wednesday knocked at the doors of the Odisha Human Rights Commission (OHRC), demanding urgent intervention and accountability in the death of Ettua Ekka (35) tribal youth from Barkani village in Sundargarh district, who was crushed to death by an excavator during a peaceful protest on April 20.

The incident occurred amid demonstrations against the expansion of a railway line for the Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP), which local communities allege threatens their traditional land rights. The BJD termed

the episode a "grave human rights violation" and accused the administration of excessive force and negligence.

In its memorandum, the party called for a suo motu inquiry by the OHRC, an independent probe into the role of local officials and police, and the immediate registration of FIRs against those responsible for Ekka's death. The BJD also demanded the withdrawal of all cases filed against innocent tribal protesters and a review of previous land acquisitions in the region.

The delegation further urged the Commission to recommend the formation of a structured dialogue mecha-

nism between the administration and tribal communities to prevent future conflicts over land and livelihood.

"This is not just a legal issue; it is a question of constitutional dignity and justice for Odisha's tribal citizens," BJD leader Dr Priyabrata Majhi said, who led the delegation.

The team included spokesperson Dr Lenin Mohanty, Tumbanath Panda, Ranjita Sahoo, Ipsita Sahoo, Biswapratap Sahoo and Arup Srichandan.

The BJD said it would continue to oppose any form of displacement or injustice against indigenous people and uphold their rights at every forum.

Many Nuapada crusher units run illegally

Create massive dust pollution, pose health risk to residents

AJIT PANDA ■ Nuapada

Several stone crusher units in Nuapada district are found to be operating without mandatory clearance from the Odisha State Pollution Control Board (OSPCB), which is a legal requirement for operating such industries.

Locals and activists allege that these units are flouting environmental norms, damaging public infrastructure, and posing severe health risks to nearby communities.

The OSPCB website lists 31 crusher units established in the district, most of which have exceeded their granted period of Consent to Operate (CTO) but still are operating. In Khariar tehsil alone, 13 out of 14 operating crusher units lack the mandatory consent. Only one unit holds a valid

CTO, while the rest are functioning illegally-highlighting serious lapses in regulatory oversight and enforcement.

Two of the most contentious units are the stone crushers operating in Narasingpur and Rishigaon villages under the Rishigaon Gram Panchayat. The Narasingpur crusher, located near the Balangir district border, had been sourcing raw materials from across the border. However, following complaints from local residents, the Balangir district administration sealed the source, leading to the suspension of the plant's operations. Despite its closure, the environmental degradation it caused is considered irreversible.

Similarly, the Rishigaon crusher operates without a dedicated raw material source. Both units, with a significant production capacity of 110 TPH each, allegedly continued functioning even



after the expiry of their Consent to Operate (CTO).

"Every hour, around 5 to 6 tractor loads of surki (stone chips) are produced, releasing massive quantities of dust," said a local farmer. "This dust spreads across our fields, damaging crops and making it difficult to breathe," he added.

Villagers say they filed multiple complaints, but officials turned a blind eye until recently.

Environmental degradation is not the only concern.

Villagers of Barlabaheli had raised serious alarms over the frequent movement of heavy Hyva trucks on the embankments of the Lower Indra irrigation canal, which was never designed to withstand such loads.

"The canal is at risk of breaching. The quarry is just 20 metres from the culvert bridge, and the low-lying area has been filled up to nine metres to lay the canal. Blasting in the quarry was damaging the canal's compaction," said Falguni Pradhani of

Barlabaheli. He was falsely implicated in an atrocity case by a driver employed by the crusher owner for opposing the quarry. "We protested multiple times, but the administration failed to act. Instead, we were harassed by hired goons for speaking out," he added.

Despite persistent protests and repeated petitions to the Balangir district administrations, the issue remained unaddressed for a prolonged period, reflecting a glaring inaction by authorities. It was only after sustained pressure and when the Kantabanji MLA raised the matter in the Odisha Assembly, concrete step was taken-leading to the eventual seizure of quarry operations. However, by then, the damage had been done.

"Although the crusher owner has now removed his machinery from the site, he cannot be trusted; he can get anything done with money," the villagers remarked bit-

terly. The administration's delayed response not only emboldened the violator but also exposed the community to continued exploitation, highlighting how administrative apathy can amount to a grave violation of human rights.

Locals estimate that the Narasingpur crusher unit alone may have produced over 1.5 lakh metric tons of material in the past five years - far exceeding its permitted limit of 2,500 metric tons annually.

Adding to the controversy, Barlabaheli villagers claim that continuous blasting has caused structural damage to houses, including cracks in an Anganwadi Centre, which are hardly 200 metres from the mining site. While the official lease area for mining is about 5 acres, locals allege that actual mining has expanded over 15 acres, encroaching on additional land without approval.

Mounjaro's debut in India: Can it transform obesity treatment?

According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (2022), 23% of Indian women and 22.1% of men are overweight based on BMI, with abdominal obesity affecting up to 40% women and 12% men. This silent epidemic significantly raises the risk of diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, obstructive sleep apnea, and joint issues. Until recently, treatment options in India were largely limited to lifestyle interventions and older medications like Orlistat, which generally delivered modest results.

Mounjaro (Tirzepatide), known to aid in weight loss of up to 22% (a figure comparable to results from bariatric surgery) has finally made its debut in India this March, as an once a week subcutaneous injection. Touted as one of the most talked-about drugs since the COVID-19 vaccine, Mounjaro has captured global attention. Initially, it was ap-



SUNIL KUMAR KOTA

proved by the US FDA in May 2022 for type 2 diabetes and in November 2023 for chronic weight management. The current launch in India is backed by about one and a half years of international experience of its usage.

The delayed Indian launch is attributed to the soaring global de-

mand, prompting manufacturers to focus on more established markets first. Another crucial factor was to make it more affordable and accessible for Indians.

More Potent Than Ozempic, Wegovy

Tirzepatide has dual-action mechanism - it targets both GLP-1 and GIP receptors. This gives it an edge over other globally approved weight-loss medications like liraglutide (marketed as Saxenda) and semaglutide (marketed as Ozempic and Wegovy), which act solely on the GLP-1 receptor. Tirzepatide promotes weight loss by suppressing appetite and promoting satiety by means of its effect on hypothalamus in brain; slowing the emptying of food from stomach thereby increasing the sense of fullness; improving insulin action and metabolism by reduction of fat storage, stimulation of fat breakdown and by reducing cravings for high calorie and high fat foods.

Older weight-loss medications usually result in just a 5-8% reduction in weight, while injectable semaglutide (Wegovy) performs



better with an average weight loss of around 15%. Tirzepatide can lead to weight loss of up to 22%, approaching the 25-30% typically achieved through bariatric surgery.

Many individuals struggle to lose weight despite genuinely committing to diet and exercise. Introduction of Tirzepatide and the upcoming availability of injectable semaglutide (Wegovy)-has the potential to redefine obesity treatment across the country by offering a much-needed alternative

More Than Just a Trend

These next-generation treatments do more than aid weight loss, manage diabetes (1.5-2.4% HbA1C reduction over 40-52 weeks of treatment as per SURPASS Trials), with potential heart and liver health protection. In the United States, it is marketed in pen form, whereas in India, it is sold in Vial form making 80% cheaper in India than in the US.

The SURMOUNT clinical trials demonstrated that after 72 weeks, participants lost an average of 15% of their body weight on the 5 mg dose, 19.5% on the 10 mg dose, and 20.9% on the 15 mg dose. By comparison, the people in the placebo group, lost just 3.1%. The SURMOUNT-OSA Clinical trial has demonstrated benefits in treating Obstructive sleep Apnea (a condition associated with night time snoring, excessive day time sleepiness and lethargy), making it the only drug approved for treatment

of Sleep Apnea by USFDA in December 2024.

Managing Side Effects

Gastrointestinal side effects are relatively common. Nausea, constipation and diarrhoea were noticed in 31%, 17% and 23% participants of the clinical trials, respectively. Most symptoms are mild and tend to resolve over time, between 4-7% of patients discontinue the medication due to intolerance. To reduce these effects, the treatments typically begin followed by gradual up-scale - allowing the body time to adjust and minimizing digestive discomfort.

Tirzepatide is contraindicated in patients with medullary thyroid cancer and pancreatitis. Rapid weight loss can also increase the likelihood of gallbladder complications, such as gallstones or cholecystitis-reported in about 0.6% of trial participants.

A 2024 study showed that participants who discontinued the

drug regained about 14% of the weight they had lost within a year. Contrarily, those who stayed on the medication lost an additional 5.5% weight over the same period. This raises an important, yet unresolved question: how long should patients remain on the medication?

So far, current data supports the use of newer anti-obesity medications like Tirzepatide as an effective supplement when diet and exercise alone are not enough, with the benefits far outweighing the risks. However, as with any new therapy, ongoing research and careful monitoring are key to ensuring safety while maximizing benefit.

(Dr Kota is MD (Med), DrNB (Endocrinology), FACE Consultant Endocrinologist & Diabetes, Thyroid, Obesity Superspecialist Swasthya Sadan, Berhampur Ph: 77498 04401 Email: diab.endocare@gmail.com)

PM Modi launches ₹13,500 crore projects in Bihar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India cannot develop without developing its villages, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday as he launched and inaugurated projects worth ₹13,500 crore in Bihar's Madhubani, and addressed Panchayati Raj Institutions across the country.

Speaking at an event to mark National Panchayati Raj Day here, Modi also lauded the work done by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in the poll-bound state.

He said a developed Bihar is essential for a developed India, and said efforts are being made to ensure the benefits of progress reach all corners of the state.

Modi said Mahatma Gandhi's idea that India cannot be developed without empowering its villages is the concept behind the Panchayati Raj system.

"Bihar is the land where Mahatma Gandhi expanded the mantra of Satyagraha," Modi said, highlighting Mahatma Gandhi's firm belief that "India's rapid development is only possible when its villages are strong".

He said the projects launched on Thursday will boost development and generate employment opportunities in the state.

"Farmers are the backbone of the rural economy, the stronger this backbone, the

stronger the villages, and consequently, the nation," Modi said.

He also underscored that panchayats have strengthened social participation, remarking that Bihar was the first state in the country to provide 50 per cent reservation for women in panchayats.

"Today, a significant number of women from economically weaker sections, Dalits, Mahadalits, backwards, and extremely backward communities are serving as public representatives in Bihar. This is real social justice and democracy," he said.

"Many steps have been taken to strengthen panchayats, and technology has also been used... More than 2 lakh gram panchayats have been linked with the internet, and more than 5.5 lakh common service centres have been established in villages," he said.

Modi said more than 30,000 new panchayat buildings have also been constructed.

He lauded the Bihar government's 'Jeevika Didi' programme and said, today, self-help groups of women in Bihar have been provided financial assistance of approximately ₹1,000 crore.

He said this will further strengthen the economic empowerment of women and contribute to the goal of creating three crore 'Lakhpati Didis' across the country.

Modi said villages have seen the con-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi flags-off a Namo Bharat train launching India's first 16-coach Namo Bharat Rapid Rail service between Jayanagar and Patna, during a National Panchayati Raj Day event in Madhubani, Thursday

struction of houses for the poor, roads, gas connections, water connections, and toilets, bringing lakhs of crores of rupees to rural areas.

"The last decade has been a decade of infrastructure development for India," said the prime minister, asserting that this modern infrastructure is strengthening the

foundation of a developed India.

Talking about the steps taken by the Union government, he said more than 10,000 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and more than 800 Jan Aushadhi Kendras have come up in Bihar, due to which around ₹2,000 crore of out-of-pocket medical expenses were saved.

He also mentioned the AIIMS being established in Darbhanga.

At the event, where four new trains were also flagged off, Modi noted that metro projects are underway in Patna, and over two dozen cities across the country are now connected with metro facilities.

He announced the launch of the 'Namo Bharat Rapid Rail' service between Patna and Jaynagar, which will significantly reduce travel time between the two locations, and emphasised that this development will benefit lakhs of people from Samastipur, Darbhanga, Madhubani, and Begusarai.

Modi called floods a "persistent challenge" in the Mithila and Kosi regions, and said the government is set to invest Rs 11,000 crore to mitigate its impact on Bihar.

He said the investment will facilitate the construction of dams on rivers such as Bagmati, Dhar, Budhi Gandak, and Kosi, and canals will be developed, ensuring irrigation arrangements through river water.

He highlighted the Budget announcement of the Makhana Board, which is expected to transform the fortunes of makhana farmers.

The prime minister flagged off four new trains — Amrit Bharat Express between Saharsa and Mumbai, Namo Bharat Rapid Rail between Jaynagar and Patna and trains

between Pipra and Saharsa and Saharsa and Samastipur.

He also inaugurated the Supaul Pipra Rail Line, Hasanpur Bithan Rail Line and two-lane rail over bridges at Chapra and Bagaha and dedicated to the nation the Khagaria-Alauli Rail Line.

Other projects of which Modi laid the foundation stone included an LPG bottling plant with a rail unloading facility at Hathua in Gopalganj worth around ₹340 crore. He also laid the foundation stone of projects worth over ₹1,170 crore and inaugurated multiple projects worth over ₹5,030 crore in the power sector in Bihar under the revamped distribution sector scheme.

Modi distributed benefits of around Rs 930 crore under the community investment fund to over 2 lakh SHGs from Bihar under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), handed over sanction letters to 15 lakh new beneficiaries of PMAY-Gramin and released instalments to 10 lakh PMAY-G beneficiaries from across the country.

Apart from these, the prime minister presented the Special Category National Panchayat Awards 2025, which include the Climate Action Special Panchayat Award, Atma Nirbhar Panchayat Special Award, and Panchayat Kshamta Nirman Sarvottam Sansthan Puraskar.

Pahalgam terror attack is direct assault on values of our republic: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Congress on Thursday said the "cowardly" Pahalgam attack has been masterminded by Pakistan and is a direct assault on the "values of our republic", even as it accused the BJP of exploiting the tragedy to promote discord and polarisation at a time when unity is most needed.

The Congress Working Committee (CWC), the highest decision-making body of the party, adopted a resolution expressing its deepest shock and condemnation of the heinous terrorist attack, which claimed the lives of 26 innocent tourists and left more than 20 others grievously injured. "The Congress Working Committee extends its deepest condolences to the bereaved families. It stands with them wholeheartedly in this moment of profound anguish."

"This cowardly and calculated act of terror, masterminded by Pakistan, is a direct assault on the values of our republic. The deliberate targeting of Hindus was done to inflame passions across the country," the party's resolution said.

"We appeal for calm in the face of this grave provocation and reaffirm our collective strength in the face of adversity. The CWC appeals for calm and reaffirms the Indian National Congress' longstanding resolve to combat cross-border terrorism with determination and unity,"

the resolution said.

Reading out the resolution at a press conference, party general secretary K C Venugopal, along with Jairam Ramesh and Pawan Khera, said the CWC also paid tributes to the local ponywalas and tourist guides, one of whom was killed while trying to protect tourists to uphold the idea of India.

Our primary question is only on security lapses and intelligence failure, which are evident. We are expecting an answer from the Government

— KC VENUGOPAL, GENERAL SECRETARY

The CWC said in its resolution that the massacre has rightly drawn condemnation from all political parties in Jammu and Kashmir and from a wide cross-section of its citizens.

"However, it is shocking that the BJP is exploiting this grave tragedy through official and proxy social media platforms to sow further discord, mistrust, polarisation and division at a time when unity and solidarity are most needed," it said. Venugopal said the Congress, being a responsible opposition, asks questions on the security and intelligence failure that led to the terror attack.

"Our primary question is only on security lapses and intelligence failure, which are evident. We are expecting an answer

from the government, let the answer come, and then we will respond," he said. Venugopal also announced that the Congress will hold candle marches across the country on April 25 to pay homage to the victims of the attack and protest against terrorist activities.

The CWC noted that Pahalgam is known to be a heavily guarded area, secured by a three-tier security arrangement and, "It is imperative that a comprehensive analysis is conducted into the intelligence failures and security lapses that enabled such an attack in a Union Territory — an area directly under the purview of the Union Home Ministry."

"These questions must be raised in the larger public interest. This is the only way justice can truly be seen to be served for the families whose lives have been so brutally devastated," the CWC resolution said.

Noting that the Amarnath Yatra is set to commence shortly and lakhs of pilgrims from across India will participate in the annual journey, the CWC said their safety must be treated as a national priority. "Robust, transparent, and proactive security arrangements must be put in place without delay. The safety of pilgrims, as well as the livelihoods of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, many of whom depend on tourism, must be protected with full sincerity and seriousness," the resolution adopted by the CWC said.

Pahalgam attack similar to Hamas strike: Israel envoy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Israel's Ambassador to India, Reuven Azar, on Thursday compared the terrorist attack in Pahalgam to the October 7, 2023, Hamas strike on Israel, citing similarities in their targeting of civilians and warning of growing coordination among terrorist groups.

Drawing parallels to the Hamas-led assault that killed over 1,100 people in Israel, Azar pointed to the deliberate targeting of unarmed civilians in both cases.

His remarks came after terrorists struck at a prime tourist location in Pahalgam in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing at least 26 civilians, mostly tourists, and injuring several others.

"Unfortunately, we must confess, these terrorist groups are inspiring each other. There are similarities between the Pahalgam attack and what happened on October 7 (2023) in Israel. Innocent tourists were enjoying their vacation in Pahalgam, while in Israel, people were celebrating a music festival," Azar said.

He also linked the Pahalgam attack's timing to the recent visits by Hamas leaders to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), where they reportedly met with Jaish-e-Muhammed operatives and a few others, suggesting possible coordination.

The Israeli ambassador also praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's

response to the Pahalgam attack, particularly his speech at a gathering in Madhubani, Bihar, on Thursday where he vowed to "hunt down" those responsible for the killings.

"I'm very encouraged by not only the strong condemnation but also the strict measures taken by the Indian government," Azar told PTI Videos, referring to India's diplomatic moves, including the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 with Pakistan and immediate shutting down of the Attari land-transit post in view of the cross-border links to the attack in Pahalgam.

Azar also urged the global community to expose the state sponsors of terrorism, emphasising that the problem extends much beyond individual terrorists. "Terrorism has to be exposed because terrorists enjoy a series of deeds by countries that supply money, intelligence inputs and weapons (to them), which is unacceptable," he said.

Calling for stronger international coordination to curb terrorism, the Israeli diplomat said, "I feel all countries should put restrictions on the capabilities of companies to supply services to the extremist elements."

"Countering terrorism requires not just military action but also efforts to combat incitement. The terrorists are not just using violence. They are inciting violence," he added.

AIIMS Raipur performs its first swap kidney transplant

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The AIIMS Raipur has successfully performed its first swap kidney transplant, making it the first among the newer AIIMS institutions and the first government hospital in Chhattisgarh to carry out this complex and life-saving procedure. The Union Health ministry said swap kidney transplant, which is also known as Kidney Paired Transplant (KPT), can lead to a 15 per cent increase in the number of transplants.

In a swap transplant, a patient with renal failure who has a willing living donor but is unable to receive the kidney due to an incompatible blood group or the presence of HLA antibodies can still undergo a transplant by exchanging donors with another incompatible pair. Through this arrangement, both recipients receive compatible kidneys, resulting in successful transplants for both pairs.

In the case at AIIMS Raipur, two male End Stage Renal Disease patients, aged 39 and 41 from Bilaspur, had been on dialysis for three years, the ministry said in a statement. Both were advised to undergo kidney transplantation. Their respective wives came forward as living donors. However, due to blood group incompatibility direct donation was not possible.

Delhi HC orders attachment of TMC MP Saket Gokhale salary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Thursday ordered the attachment of TMC MP Saket Gokhale's salary in a defamation case filed by former diplomat Lakshmi Puri. Justice Manmeet Pritam Singh Arora observed Gokhale was previously directed to apologise to the former assistant secretary general of the United Nations and pay her ₹50 lakh in damages.

However, the court said, neither did he deposit the fine amount nor offer a reasonable explanation.

"Accordingly, issue warrant of attachment as section 60(i) with respect to salary of the respondent which is stated to be ₹1.90 lakh. The salary shall remain attached until ₹50 lakh is deposited with the court," the court said.

Section 60 of the Code of Civil Procedure stipulates in matters of execution of a decree, the salary of a judgement-debtor can be attached to the extent of the first one thousand rupees and two-third of the remainder.

The court passed the order while dealing with Puri's plea seeking execution of the decree in her favour.

Though Gokhale's plea in relation to a "recall" of the judgement against him was pending before another bench, the court said there was no stay on the present proceedings.

Puri moved the high court in 2021, alleging Gokhale tarnished her good-will and reputation by making reckless and false allegations about her financial affairs in the context of an apartment that she owned in Geneva.

In the July 1, 2024 verdict, aside from directing publication of an apology and payment of ₹50 lakh as damages, the high court restrained Gokhale from publishing any more content on any social media or electronic platform concerning his imputation against Puri.

NHAI starts construction work of six foot over bridges

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has started the construction work of six foot over bridges (FOBs) on the Delhi-Jaipur National Highway (NH-48). These FOBs will be ready by August in Gurugram and Rewari districts, officials said.

In Gurugram, these FOBs will be built in Rampura, the NSG Campus in Manesar, and the village of Binola.

In Rewari, these FOBs will be built in villages Rathivas, Malpura, and Jaisingh Kheda. Jaisingh Kheda is situated on the border of Haryana and Rajasthan.

NHAI allotted the work of construction of new FOBs on the Delhi-Jaipur Highway to a company in February this year.

This company has been assigned the work of repairing two old FOBs. It will cost around ₹12 crore. Apart from this, the FOBs built in village Sidhrwali and village Kharkhada will be repaired.

NHAI has an FOB near Signature Tower on the Delhi-Jaipur Highway. It is in bad condition due to lack of maintenance. The machine has been stolen from

its escalator. The escalator is in bad condition. Because of this, people have to cross this highway on foot, due to which there is a fear of road accidents.

On the other hand, the Gurugram Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) will construct FOBs near Raheja Mall and CD Chowk on the Gurugram-Sohna Highway, besides Old Delhi Road and Sheela Mata Road.

The construction of these FOBs will cost around ₹16 crore. Lifts and escalators will be constructed in these FOBs. Due to this, people will not face any problem in crossing these roads.

GMDA has decided the location of these FOBs. Construction will start in the next one or two months. On the other hand, GMDA has claimed that the construction work of the FOB under construction in village Narsinghpur will be completed soon.

"The tender for construction of six FOBs on the Delhi-Jaipur Highway has been allotted. Work has started under this. All these FOBs will be constructed within the month of August. Apart from this, two FOBs will also be repaired," Prakash Tiwari, Manager, NHAI, said.

CRPF launches biggest anti-Naxal operations in Chattisgarh, three killed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi/Raipur

In one of the biggest operations, more than 10,000 security personnel apart from back up units are engaged in fire-fight with naxals in jungles of Chattisgarh bordering Telangana and three female naxals have, so far, died. Security teams from both the states besides Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) are engaged in the ongoing action.

It is the biggest offensive launched this year to neutralise most-wanted Maoist Hidma, officials said Thursday. The operation launched from the Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh to Karregutta hills in Mulugu district across the border in Telangana has clocked over 60 hours after it was launched on Monday with close to 5,000 troops apart from backup units. The forces and Maoists were exchanging fire till the fore noon of Thursday and it is expected to continue, they said.

The assault is led by the 210th battalion of CRPF's CoBRA units and has teams from the Chhattisgarh police, its special task force (STF), DRG, some regular

CRPF units and Telangana Police, they said. Around 9:30 am on Thursday, three bodies of female Maoists along with an equal number of weapons has been seized. The operation is continuing, a senior CRPF officer said. Director General (DG) of CRPF G P Singh is monitoring the operation from Raipur and Jagdalpur since April 21, he said.

The assault is led by the 210th battalion of CRPF's CoBRA units and has teams from the Chhattisgarh police, its Special Task Force (STF), DRG, some regular CRPF units and Telangana Police

Four helicopters, two drone squadrons comprising 20 big and small unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in each along with satellite imagery and maps provided by the NTRO have been deployed to track Hidma, the top commander of the PLGA battalion no 1, the officer said. Inputs suggested that Hidma was seen

around a bunker built in the Karregutta Hills along with an armed squad and the operation was launched on this information, a second officer said.

This is the biggest operation launched by any of the security agencies in or around Chhattisgarh this year, he said.

The hill area is dotted with many improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and the forces are still on the job, the officer said. The offensive is part of the Union government's declaration to end Left Wing Extremism (LWE) from the country by March, 2026. Chhattisgarh and its border areas remain the "last bastion" of this task, according to officials.

The operation, one of biggest counter-insurgency actions launched in Bastar region, involved around 10,000 security personnel belonging to different units, including the District Reserve Guard (DRG), Bastar Fighters, Special Task Force (STF), all units of the state police, as well as the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and its elite Commando Battalions for Resolute Action (CoBRA), he said. The Telangana police were also assisting in the operation, the official said.

Second edition of Milipol India showcases cutting-edge defence solutions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The second edition of Milipol India 2025 was formally inaugurated on Thursday by Francois-Noël Buffet, representing the French Minister of the Interior, alongside esteemed dignitaries.

The event witnessed the presence of Dr Thierry Mathou, the French Ambassador to India, and Colonel Yannick Vidal, Chief of Staff for Operations from the French National Gendarmerie Intervention Group (GIGN), along with senior officials from Indian and French security and governmental agencies.

Enhancing the significance of the occasion, India's Minister of State for Home Affairs, Nityanand Rai, delivered a keynote address, emphasising the strengthening Indo-French collaboration in homeland



security. He highlighted the joint efforts in advanced technology development, intelligence sharing, and reinforcing security infrastructure, reaffirming the commitment of both nations toward global security advancements and counter-terrorism strategies.

Rover Mark-1, developed by "Security Defence System," "totally Makein India, is a cutting-edge innovation known for producing the highest number of indigenous products. Designed for handling suspicious objects, with its load capacity of 10 kg. Equipped with four cameras, it offers precise control — up to 200 meters out of sight and 01 km within the line of sight and weighs 84 kg. This advanced device is utilised by CISF, J and K Police, Maharashtra Police and Punjab Police, along with security operations at four air-

ports. CARACAL from UAE has showcased some of the finest weapons, with their flagship model, the CSR 50 anti-material sniper rifle, taking center stage — an asset that could significantly enhance Indian Army, CAPF and State police operations. With an effective range of 2 km and beyond, it offers long-range precision essential for border security, counter-terrorism missions, and high-threat engagements. Maintaining its distinction as the lightest in its category, weighing just 10 kg without accessories, the rifle ensures greater mobility and operational efficiency for soldiers in rugged terrains.

This year, the rifle has seen impressive advancements, including advanced ergonomics and reduced recoil, enhancing stability for Indian sharpshooters during prolonged operations.

Akhilesh slams airfare surge post-Pahalgam terror attack

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday condemned the recent terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, while also launching a scathing attack on the sharp spike in airfares to and from Srinagar in its aftermath. Calling the incident a national tragedy, Akhilesh expressed full support for strong government action against terrorism but criticised what he described as opportunistic profiteering and intelligence failure.

Addressing a press conference at the SP headquarters in Lucknow, the former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister said, "We are with the government on this issue. The central government must take strict and effective action against the perpetrators of this act of terror. But the BJP cannot absolve itself of responsibility. If earlier lessons had been learned, this tragedy might have been prevented."

Akhilesh Yadav condemned the hike in airfares from Srinagar following the attack, calling it "inhuman, shameful and a form of extortion."

He accused airline operators of exploiting a national crisis for profit and questioned the government's silence on the issue. "How can the government remain mute when airlines are charging exorbitant prices during a time of crisis? This reflects not just apathy but collusion. Taxes from these ticket prices go to the government—so why is there no regulation?" he asked.

Reports indicate that ticket prices from Srinagar surged dramatically within 24 hours of the attack, leaving many stranded tourists and pilgrims unable to return home. Some fares were reportedly double or triple the usual rates.

Akhilesh urged the Civil Aviation Ministry to step in immediately and implement a mechanism to regulate airfare during emergencies. "There must be



Samajwadi Party (SP) President Akhilesh Yadav addressing a press conference at the party office in Lucknow on Thursday

clear rules to prevent profiteering in times of national distress. The silence of the authorities only emboldens such behaviour," he added. On national security, the SP chief maintained a bipartisan stance, urging unity across political lines. "Terrorists have no religion. Their only aim is to spread fear. The country is angry, and this is a time to stand together, not play politics," he said.

However, he did not shy away from criticising the BJP for prioritising propaganda over preparedness. "While the BJP spends crores on publicity, our security systems remain underfunded. It is time to stop the slogans and start focusing on real action," he said. Reaffirming his opposition to the Agniveer recruitment scheme, Akhilesh said, "The youth of this country reject Agniveer. They want permanent jobs, not temporary assignments. The government should reconsider this scheme for the sake of national security." He supported the five recent decisions taken by the

Centre against Pakistan in response to terror activity, stating, "We back those moves, but the government must go further. Tougher decisions are necessary."

Expressing dismay over attempts to politicise the tragedy, Akhilesh alleged that "even in this moment of grief, BJP leaders are circulating animated posters for political gain. Airline profiteering, social media propaganda—these are signs of a party looking for opportunity in disaster."

Calling the Pahalgam attack a failure of the intelligence system, he said, "This was not just a single lapse. It reflects a deeper, structural failure. Why did not previous attacks prompt stronger preventive action?"

He concluded with a call for lasting, impactful reforms. "We all want terrorism to be wiped out from its roots. We had hopes when demonetisation happened, when Article 370 was removed—but those hopes must be matched with decisive action, not just announcements."

Assam CM slams Rahul, warns against caste-based politics

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hojai

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday alleged Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was trying to divide Hindus on the basis of castes, but the terrorists who perpetrated the Pahalgam attack just wanted to know the religion of the victims.

Addressing a panchayat poll rally in Hojai, Sarma said there was no room for caste-based politics in the country at the moment.

"Terrorists earlier never asked about the religious identities of their targets, but in Pahalgam, victims were asked about their faith. When they replied that they were Hindus, the men were shot dead right in front of their wives," he said.

"Is it a crime to be a Hindu? Hindus have been in India for 5,000 years and will remain here. Such acts are not acceptable," he asserted.

Maintaining that people of all religions were safe under the BJP government, Sarma urged everyone to unite in the fight against terrorism.

"Hindus and Muslims have to fight terrorism together, have to work together," he said. Hitting out at Gandhi, the CM claimed that he was trying to divide the Hindus into OBCs, SCs and STs.

"But the terrorists did not ask the caste, they asked only whether the target was a Hindu or not. There is no room for caste politics. 'Ek rahenge toh safe rahenge' (we will be safe if we stay united)," he said, calling upon Hindus to remain united.

"We have to be united and punish countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh," he added.

Sarma claimed that some people living in Assam were indirectly supporting Pakistan through posts on social media and warned that they would not be spared, however important they may be.

He also spoke of a Congress MP from

the state who "stayed in Pakistan" for 15 days without informing the government.

"The Congress has three MPs in Assam. One of them had crossed into Pakistan through the Atari border and stayed there for 15 days without informing the government. We have all the evidence," he claimed.

"We won't forgive such people and will take stringent action against them," he said.

Appealing to the people to support the BJP and its allies in the panchayat polls, Sarma claimed that the state has been witnessing a prolonged phase of peace since 2021.

He alleged that it was only killings, blasts, agitations, corruption, communal riots, and insurgency under the Congress governments, which believed

Appealing to the people to support the BJP and its allies in the panchayat polls, Sarma claimed that the state has been witnessing a prolonged phase of peace since 2021

in the 'panchamrit' of "lungi, dhoti, suta (yarn), blanket and mosquito net" as means of appeasement.

"But with the BJP coming to power here in 2016, peace has been restored and the state is witnessing rapid strides in growth," Sarma, who heads the second BJP-led government in the state, said.

The CM said the ration card, which was once a document for "Bangladeshis to fend off police", is now linked to welfare schemes.

He affirmed the government's commitment to ensure that the schemes benefit the most deprived section, stating that more assistance in the form of bringing down of LPG cylinder prices and power tariff will be announced later this year.

US based Hindu outfit asks PM to declare India as Hindu Rashtra

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Kochi

Close on the heels of Tuesday's massacre of 28 Hindus at Pahalgam in Kashmir by the assassins of Lashkar-e-Toiba, the United States based Global Heritage Hindu Foundation (GHHF), an umbrella organisation of all Hindu outfits, has asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi to declare India as Hindu Rashtra.

In a release issued on Thursday, the GHHF said the entire Hindu community has been shocked, surprised, stunned, and astonished to read about the ghastly massacre of tourists in Kashmir's Pahalgam.

"Muslim terrorists shot and killed at least 26 tourists and injured nearly 40 tourists on April 22nd in Pahalgam, Kashmir."

Intelligence sources and eyewitnesses revealed that the terrorists inquired about the religion of the tourists before shooting them dead.

"They even looked at their ID cards and killed them if they happened to be Hindus," said the GHHF release.

It further states that since Independence, Hindus have become sacrificial goats in the hands of terrorists.

"Government after government have been allowing Hindu haters to rampage through the scenic Himalayan region."

"Terrorists took advantage of liberal media and Leftist parties, and have been hitting, attacking, raping, killing Hindus regularly."

These inhuman, insane, merciless attacks have claimed tens of thousands of lives over more than seven decades," said the GHHF which has been abstaining from making any kind of controversial demands all these years.

3,400 missing women, girls in MP with no end in sight

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

Eighteen days have passed since a six-year-old girl disappeared from under a bridge in Bhopal's Koh-e-Fiza area, and the Madhya Pradesh Police still have no answers.

This is not just a case of one missing child—it's a glaring indictment of a crumbling law and order system in a state that prides itself on going "high-tech."

If a child can vanish from the capital city, just miles from the Chief Minister's residence and top police offices, what hope is there for families in the remaining 54 districts? The harsh reality is: there is none.

According to data from the Police Headquarters, over 3,400 women and girls have gone missing in Madhya Pradesh in the last three years alone.

That's nearly 100 a month. And these are just the reported cases. Behind every statistic lies a devastated family, a broken future, and a police force that seems either unwilling or incapable of acting.

The much-hyped 'Operation Muskan', re-announced with fanfare last year by DGP Kailash Makwana, was supposed to rescue and rehabilitate missing girls.

In truth, the initiative has existed since 2021—with little to no results to show. It has become another bureaucratic buzzword, useful only in press releases, not on the ground where it matters.

Congress Media Department Chairman Mukesh Nayak minced no words in his criticism of the government and police.

"The Madhya Pradesh police lack both the resources and the will to act. It's one of the most corrupt forces in the country.

Officers only move when there's money involved. If there's no bribe, there's no investigation," Nayak told The Pioneer.

The current case exposes how hollow the system truly is. The missing girl's mother, a homeless woman with eight children, suspects a relative's involvement.

Yet the police have done little beyond scanning a few CCTV clips and making vague statements. No arrests. No progress. No urgency.

Worse still, basic policing infrastructure remains broken. CCTV networks are patchy, rapid-response teams are missing in action, and coordination between units is almost non-existent. This is not just negligence—it's state-sanctioned apathy.

The disconnect between government claims and ground realities has never been wider. While ministers sit in air-conditioned offices, families of missing girls wander from one police station to another, begging for action.

This isn't a law and order issue anymore. It's a humanitarian crisis.

If the administration cannot protect the most vulnerable—children sleeping under bridges, women walking home from work—then what legitimacy does it have left? How long will the government continue to hide behind numbers and announcements?

It's time for the people of Madhya Pradesh to demand more than promises. They deserve safety, justice, and accountability. Because until every missing girl is found, and every guilty officer held accountable, no campaign, no slogan, and no speech will matter.

Nitish condemns terror, reaffirms NDA alliance loyalty

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madhubani (Bihar)

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday condemned the Pahalgam attack, emphasising that the entire country stands united in the fight against terrorism.

Speaking at a government programme to mark the National Panchayati Raj Day in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Kumar also reaffirmed his political alignment, saying, "I made a mistake in the past, but I will stay with the NDA forever."

"The attack at Pahalgam left the entire nation devastated. It was a heinous act. We all condemn it. I express my condolences to the bereaved families. We are with you," and the entire country is united in the fight against terrorism."

Terrorists struck at a prime tourist location in Pahalgam in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing at least 26 people, mostly tourists, and injuring several others.

Stating that he had "made mistakes" in the past by joining hands with the Opposition, the Bihar CM said, "I will stay with NDA forever. I went 'idhar udhar aur Gadbadi Hua' in the past. But now, I am with the NDA and will remain with the alliance forever."

"We formed the government in 2005. The previous state government had done nothing for panchayats. It was in a poor state. "When we came to power, we amended the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act in 2006, which established the gram panchayat at the village level, panchayat samiti at the block level, and zila parishad at the district level," the CM said.

"We also introduced 50 per cent reservation for women in panchayats and



PM Narendra Modi with Bihar Governor Arif Mohammad Khan, CM Nitish Kumar and Union Ministers Jitan Ram Manjhi, Lallan Singh, Chirag Paswan and others, flags-off a Nammo Bharat train launch, during National Panchayati Raj Day event in Madhubani on Thursday

municipalities. The previous government took no steps to improve the condition of women in the state.

"So far, our government has constructed 1,639 panchayat bhavans across Bihar for local bodies, and construction of the remaining bhavans will be completed before the upcoming elections later this year," he added.

The JD(U) supremo further said, "We have been working for the overall development of the state for the last 20 years — in sectors like education, transport, roads, electricity and water. When we

assumed office in 2005, the state budget was just ₹38,000 crore. For the financial year 2025-26, the budget has increased to ₹3.18 lakh crore."

He said this year alone, the state government approved 430 new schemes worth ₹50,000 crore for various districts.

Kumar added that the establishment of the Makhana Board in Bihar, opening of Greenfield Airports, and expansion of IIT Patna are also progressing with the help of the Centre.

The CM said he requested the PM to inaugurate the Khelo India Youth Games

2025, scheduled to be held in Patna from May 4. "It is a matter of great happiness that this major event is being hosted in Bihar," he said.

Bihar is set to host the seventh edition of Khelo India Youth Games 2025 from May 4 to 15.

The games will be organised in various cities including Patna, Gaya, Rajgir, Begusarai and Bhagalpur.

The CM and Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya recently unveiled the mascot and logo of Khelo India Youth Games 2025.

UP CM pays tribute to martyr Shubham Dwivedi

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Kanpur

The mortal remains of Shubham Dwivedi, the young soldier from Kanpur who was killed in the recent terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, were consigned to flames with full state honours on Thursday. The atmosphere was heavy with grief and anger as thousands gathered to pay their final respects. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath visited Shubham's residence earlier in the day and met his grieving family members, including his wife Aishwarya, who broke down while recounting the harrowing details of the incident. CM Yogi offered condolences and assured the family that strictest action would be taken against those responsible.

"Have faith in the government. Terrorism will be wiped out," he said. Yogi got emotional and when he came back from Dwivedi's residence he was seen wiping eyes.

The Chief Minister condemned the Pahalgam attack, calling it "a cruel, cowardly and inhuman act." He added, "Shubham had been married just two months ago. The entire nation mourns his loss. This barbaric act has shaken not only India but the world." CM Yogi reaffirmed that the government's zero-tolerance policy towards terrorism would be enforced strictly. He said that both Prime



UP CM Yogi Adityanath pays tribute to Shubham Dwivedi at his residence in Kanpur on Thursday

Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah had taken tough decisions during the recent CCS (Cabinet Committee on Security) meeting. As Shubham's body was taken for the last rites, the streets of Kanpur overflowed with people—students, traders, government officials, and ordinary citizens—all standing shoulder to shoulder in a powerful show of unity and respect. Chants of "Shaheed Shubham Amar Rahein" filled the air as the funeral procession passed through the city. The pyre was lit in the presence of his family, local officials, and a sea of mourners. Emotions ran high as Shubham's father, with folded hands, pleaded with the

Chief Minister to ensure that the perpetrators receive the harshest punishment. "Make sure no other family has to go through this pain," he said. Shubham's untimely death has struck a deep chord across Kanpur and beyond. The district administration, honouring public sentiments, ensured that the final rites were conducted with full state honours.

Leaders from all walks of life have condemned the attack and expressed solidarity with the family. CM Yogi concluded by saying, "We are with the family. The double-engine government will not compromise on national security. The sacrifice of our brave son will not go in vain."

Assam MLA held for defending Pakistan after J and K attack

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

Assam's opposition AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam was arrested on Thursday on sedition charges for allegedly defending Pakistan and its complicity in the Pahalgam terror attack, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The AIUDF has distanced itself from the legislator's comments, stating that the views were his own and not of the party. "We have seen a video where the MLA is defending Pakistan and its complicity in the attack. I had instructed the police to take action and accordingly, the DGP has informed me that he has been arrested," Sarma said at a press conference here. Islam was arrested from his residence in Nagaon district.

"The MLA will be produced before a court and we will take the case to its logical conclusion," he added. Twenty-six people, mostly tourists, were killed in a terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam on Tuesday.

Sarma said no attempt to directly or indirectly support Pakistan through any means, including on social media, will be tolerated and the police have strict directions to act against such persons immediately. The chief minister, in a post on

X, affirmed the state government's strong action against anyone defending Pakistan.

"Assam will take the strongest possible action against anyone who dares to defend—directly or indirectly—the horrific, Pakistan-sponsored terror attack in Pahalgam. "Let it be known clearly: those who attempt to justify, normalise, or dilute the brutal murder of innocent civilians are not exercising freedom of expression—they are standing against the soul of India," he said.

"Assam Police, also in a post on social media, said the AIUDF legislator has been arrested for a "misleading and instigating statement, which went viral and had the potential to create an adverse situation". A case has been registered at Nagaon Sadar police station under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. Meanwhile, AIUDF president Badruddin Ajmal said the views expressed by Islam are his personal opinion.

"The comments made by Aminul Islam are unfortunate. This is the time to stand with our government. Terrorists have no religion. These terrorists are giving Islam a bad name," Ajmal said. He maintained that the views expressed by Islam in the video did not reflect the party's stand, and the AIUDF already condemned the attack.

Assam to pay ex gratia of ₹5 lakh to families of all 26 killed in attack

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

The Assam government on Thursday announced an ex-gratia of ₹5 lakh for families of all 26 people killed in the Pahalgam terror attack. Assam had reeled under insurgency for long and "we can understand the pain of the families," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

"Addressing a press conference here, he said, "Our government has decided to offer this small amount as a token of respect for the sacrifice made by the deceased and their families."

Sarma said strict watch is being kept along the state's border with Bangladesh also. "We are concerned about Bangladesh. "There has been hobnobbing between Bangladesh and Pakistan. We have alerted our security agencies to keep watch and remain vigilant," he said.

Chief Ministers of other NorthEastern States to be part of Bhupen Hazarika Centenary Birthday celebration, said Assam CM ₹7500 crore Guwahati Ring Road Project will include another Bridge over Brahmaputra river.

Terror in Pahalgam shatters India's diplomatic high

As world leaders lauded India's geopolitical ascent, the attack marked a chilling reminder that terror in Kashmir remains a calculated lever in the regional and international balance of power

FIRST Column

JD Vance, the Vice President of the United States, arrived in India on 19 April, following a solemn stop at the Vatican, where he became the final high-ranking official to meet the late Pope Francis — an emblematic rebel of the modern Church whose death this week marked the end of a transformative papacy.

Vance's arrival was framed as an endorsement of India's ascendant geopolitical status, punctuated by public tributes to Prime Minister Modi and the deepening of the Indo-American strategic alliance. This diplomatic spectacle was further amplified by the April 9 extradition of Tahawwur Hussain Rana, a Pakistani — origin Canadian linked to the 2008 Mumbai attacks, representing a rare convergence of legal triumphs between the two nations in their fight against terrorism.

Yet, this orchestration of diplomatic victories quickly unravelled, as within days of these high-profile engagements, Kashmir — a region central to India's evolving image — was once again thrust into global headlines, not by progress, but by tragedy. On April 22, a massacre in the idyllic meadows of Baisaran near Pahalgam once heralded as the face of Kashmir's resurgence, accentuated a brutal paradox: the strategic narrative of peace and prosperity was violently interrupted by terror, forcing the world to confront the enduring volatility of the region at a moment when India appeared poised for diplomatic consolidation.

On April 22, 2025, a massacre unfolded in the meadows of Baisaran near Pahalgam, often romanticised as "India's Switzerland." What had become a symbol of India's Kashmir renaissance — a picturesque site of family vacations, film shoots, and summer retreats — was reduced to a field of carnage as unidentified gunmen opened fire on a group of tourists. At least twenty-eight civilians, mostly men, were methodically executed, while women and children were reportedly spared.

The attack was not merely an act of terror, but a deeply choreographed intervention in India's domestic and international narrative regarding Kashmir. It sought not just to kill, but to provoke, destabilise, and symbolically mutilate the emerging image of a peaceful, integrated, and economically flourishing region. The timing of the attack is far too conspicuous to be dismissed as arbitrary. Beyond coinciding with the visit of the American Vice President and coming a few days after the extradition of a high-profile terrorist suspect, the attack occurred against the backdrop of growing international recognition of India's Kashmir policy post the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019. Since that constitutional transformation, Jammu and Kashmir have experienced what some argue is the beginning of a socio-economic metamorphosis. The region recorded a significant uptick in tourist arrivals, over 3.5 million in 2024 alone — and notable improvements in infrastructure, per capita income, and public order, especially relative to other northern Indian states. Critics of New Delhi's policy feared a resurgence of insur-



gency post-2019, but such forecasts had not materialised at the scale predicted. Instead, the Indian Government appeared to have successfully restrained militant mobilisation through strategic military presence, economic incentives, and political integration. In this context, the Pahalgam attack functions as a violent punctuation — an abrupt and bloody interruption in a gradually stabilising narrative. Its deliberate orchestration, selective targeting of non-Muslim male tourists, and execution-style killings point to a calculated act of psychological and political warfare. Intelligence sources have attributed the operation to The Resistance Front (TRF), a group often described as a proxy of

Lashkar-e-Taiba, the Pakistan-based organisation responsible for the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. Although the Pakistani state has officially denied any involvement, the attack bears the hallmarks



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

FROM THE CHATTISINGHPORA MASSACRE IN MARCH 2000, WHERE 36 SIKH VILLAGERS WERE EXECUTED DURING PRESIDENT CLINTON'S VISIT, TO THE 2001 JAMMU AND KASHMIR ASSEMBLY BOMBING, THE 2003 NANDIMARG MASSACRE OF KASHMIRI PANDITS, THE 2017 AMARNATH YATRA AMBUSH, AND NOW THE 2025 PAHALGAM KILLINGS, THE PATTERN IS UNMISTAKABLE

of asymmetric warfare, characteristic of entities that, though ostensibly autonomous, often operate under the shadow and sanction of foreign state apparatuses. This week, newly declassified US intelligence documents, released by the National Security Archive, highlight a chilling historical continuity with the current crisis.

A 1981 memorandum warned of catastrophic consequences from an Indian strike on Pakistan's Karachi Nuclear Power Plant, with up to 20,000 latent cancer cases in Karachi due to Iodine-131 exposure. The document reflected Washington's concerns about how quickly a conventional South Asian conflict could escalate to nuclear war. This was echoed in a 1989 report by the US State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, which deemed a full-scale war between India and Pakistan "improbable," yet stressed the high risk of escalation through miscalculation, especially in the event of strikes on Pakistan's nuclear sites. By 1993, a National Intelligence Estimate suggested a one in five chance of war, noting that nuclear rivalry, cross-border militancy, and rising extremism could turn even minor skirmishes into a regional disaster. What emerges from these archival assessments is a grim continuity: terror

in Kashmir has consistently been a strategic tool wielded not merely to express ideological dissent but to force geopolitical recalibration. This is not a theatre of mindless extremism; it is a crucible of meticulously calibrated violence. From the Chattisinghpura massacre in March 2000, where 36 Sikh villagers were executed during President Clinton's visit, to the 2001 Jammu and Kashmir Assembly bombing, the 2003 Nandimarg massacre of Kashmiri Pandits, the 2017 Amarnath Yatra ambush, and now the 2025 Pahalgam killings, the pattern is unmistakable. Civilian targeting escalates in moments of diplomatic progress, suggesting an ideological commitment by militant actors to challenge not only the Indian state but also its evolving position within the global order.

The present attack comes at a moment when India is enjoying heightened diplomatic engagement with the Arab Countries and the West. Saudi Arabia, traditionally a close ally of Pakistan, has in recent years pivoted towards India as a key economic and strategic partner. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and even Iran have signalled similar recalibrations.

This realignment was most visible during the 2019 India-Pakistan standoff when the Gulf states played a critical role in de-escalation, and again when they muted their responses to India's abrogation of Kashmir's autonomy. The Kashmir issue, once a central rallying cry in Islamic internationalism, has lost its salience in the Gulf's strategic calculus. For militant organisations and their state backers, this diminishing global sympathy poses an existential challenge. Reinvigorating the Kashmir discourse through acts of horror appears to be the chosen mode of revival.

It would be naïve to view the Pahalgam massacre in isolation. The possibility of future attacks targeting soft civilian clusters — tourists, religious pilgrims, migrant workers — across other regions in South Asia cannot be discounted. Nepal's porous borders, Sri Lanka's post-conflict fragilities, and India's Northeast remain potential theatres for replication.

In the wake of this attack, Prime Minister Modi faces a dilemma reminiscent of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's conundrum following the Hamas assault in October 2023. A tempered response could be construed as weakness, emboldening adversaries and fuelling domestic political critiques of failed security assurances. Conversely, a muscular retaliation — especially if aimed at Pakistan or its proxies — risks internationalising the Kashmir dispute once again, undoing years of diplomatic effort to position it as an internal Indian matter. Moreover, in the context of escalating global multipolarity and emergent regional axes, a misstep could precipitate a broader crisis, pulling in actors far beyond South Asia.

(The writer is a columnist based in Colombo. Views are personal)

Mental Health: A silent crisis demanding urgent action

Mental well-being can no longer be treated as secondary to physical health. As Government initiatives take shape and public awareness grows, the time has come for a collective, compassionate response to protect our nation's mental health and with it, our future

There is an old saying that a healthy mind leads to a healthy body — I could not agree with it more! Ever since the pandemic, we are witnessing a steep rise in mental health related conditions. It's a matter of grave concern that a large number of people are today suffering from what is termed as unmanageable stress, depression and anxiety. It is equally concerning to note that these ailments are impacting across the age spectrum, be it students, young adults or the elderly.

When we look at the data pertaining to mental health, it is like being hit by a ton of bricks. Such is the extent of this issue that one student is committing suicide every hour in India.

Taking note of the growing suicide deaths in higher educational institutions across the country, the Supreme Court recently formed a National Task Force for a mechanism to prevent student suicide deaths on campuses and address their mental health issues.

The bench said that the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data for 2021 highlights the grim reality that over 13,000 students lost their lives by committing suicide in the country.

According to the World Health Organisation, depression affects over 300 million people globally, and it is predicted to be the leading cause of disability by 2030.

In 2024, studies in India continue to reveal a significant burden of depression, with estimates indicating that over 56 million people are affected and research points to a rising trend, particularly in rural areas and among certain demographics.

Factors like rapid urbanisation, economic pressures, social isolation, and the pandemic have contributed to the increase. The Bipolar disorder landscape in India is also quite serious, about 1 in 150 persons in the country suffer from it, and quite disturbingly, 70 per cent remain untreated.



as depression or bipolar disorder. This finding is significant as it points to a series of progressions before this most tragic final step.

When we look deeper into the mental health scenario in India, multiple issues that have a profound impact on mental health — come to the fore.

In the case of the students and the young, many are too busy searching for material things as the entire space for them has become extremely competitive, there is reduced focus on relaxation and unwinding, and as a result burn outs and depression encircle their lives.

In all this, the impact of the internet and social media in aggravating pressures

and setting unattainable and overambitious goals — courtesy of peer pressure, is also creating a havoc in the lives of the youth.

In the case of the elderly, we are witnessing the rise in loneliness as their children are either not living with them, due to studies or jobs, or spending much less time because of preoccupations and inability to detach from their busy schedules. There is therefore, a fear of growing old, along with increasing insecurities — about who will take care of them, when they reach their physical limits due to advancing age.

Since the pandemic, we are witnessing a renewed focus and much greater emphasis on mental health issues. They are now being increasingly considered as much of a priority as many physical issues.

The Indian Government has launched several initiatives to address mental health, including the National Tele Mental Health Programme (Tele

MANAS) and the Ayushman Bharat, HWC Scheme.

Tele MANAS provides free, 24/7 mental health support through a toll-free helpline, while the Ayushman Bharat scheme integrates mental health services into primary healthcare. Additionally, the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) and the District Mental Health Programme (DMHP) are key components of India's mental healthcare services. For the elderly, the Government has launched the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE) and the Atal Vayo Abhyuday Yojana (AVYAY).

The NPHCE provides comprehensive healthcare, including mental health services, to senior citizens. AVYAY supports various welfare initiatives for senior citizens, including grant-in-aid for mental health services and awareness programs. Additionally, the National Helpline for Senior Citizens (Elderline) offers support and guidance, including emotional sup-

port for those struggling with mental health issues.

It is extremely reassuring that the highest levels of our nation — are aware and alive, to the seriousness of the situation. In fact, our hon'ble Prime Minister has led from the front with his views and possible solutions that can go a long way in addressing this critical subject. In his popular monthly program 'Mann Ki Baat', he highlighted the importance of mental health, especially among the youth in the current era, and spoke with crystal clarity about the role of physical activity, diet, yoga, along with the use of technology like artificial intelligence to elevate mental health.

This should be seen as a nudge, and it requires a collective approach that involves the families, academia and the community to create an enabling ecosystem that safeguards our students and the generations to follow. These guardrails should both protect and strengthen — protect against the perils of social media,

the pressure that it can unleash on the young and innocent, strengthen the two-way communication (candid and unreserved) between the students and their parents/families, strengthen the role of the friends, peers and the community in creating a positive environment that accepts average performance as not the end of the world, and instils the spirit of optimism.

All of these, will ensure, that the dejection from failure or pressure of excelling, are dealt with most effectively. The educational institutions and their leadership also have to provide an environment where students feel motivated, encouraged and appreciated. Grades and excellence alone are not what life is all about — it's about an honest to self and best possible effort.

It's for all this, that suitable conditions have to be created. This can include counselling, dedicated presence and round the clock availability of experts who can spot the red flags and identify those who need psychological support and guidance in a timely manner, thereby, ensuring that a decline in mental health, especially among the students in their institutions is drastically reduced.

This will play an impactful role in the creation of a quintessential complete establishment — one that focuses not just on the studies but also creates avenues of growth for the all-round development of its students.

In the end, we have to be mindful of the ground realities. Our journey has just started on this very long and arduous path, and it will take multiple approaches to address this key health aspect, that has a huge bearing on our country.

Mental health is a significant component of a 'Swastha Bharat' dream, and has a direct and crucial impact on national creativity and productivity. While factors that contribute to mental ailments will only increase in the coming times, it's our proactive and head-on engagement, that will ensure effective remedies.

I do believe, that well begun is half done, and that we are indeed headed in the right direction — one of hope and promise of a bright future!

(The writer is President — Corporate Affairs, ITC. Views are personal)

Pakistan top brass meet, discuss India's response

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday held a meeting with key ministers and the three services chiefs to formulate the country's response on India's move to suspend the Indus Water Treaty and downgrade diplomatic ties after the Pahalgam terror attack.

The decisions taken at the National Security Committee meeting were not immediately known.

India on Wednesday suspended the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 and announced downgrading diplomatic ties with Pakistan, including expulsion of its military attaches, in view of the cross-border links to the Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26

people on Tuesday.

Earlier, Dawn reported that deputy prime minister Ishaq Dar, while speaking to a private television channel late on Wednesday, lashed out at India's approach, calling it "immature" and "hasty".

"India has not given any evidence. They have not shown any maturity in their response," Dar said. "This is a non-serious approach. They started creating hype immediately after the incident."

Pakistan's Foreign Office, in a separate statement earlier on Wednesday, expressed regret over the loss of life. Diplomatic observers warn that the Indian response and Pakistan's counter-messaging could push bilateral relations to new lows, further widening a rift that has persisted since the 2019 Pulwama-Balakot crisis.

The treaty suspension, in particular, risks sparking long-term water disputes, while the downgrading of diplomatic ties could hinder any future de-escalation efforts, Dawn reported.

A day after the Pahalgam attack, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) met in New Delhi on Wednesday evening under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and firmed up the responses to the terror attack.

The CCS also decided to close the Integrated Check Post at Attari with immediate effect. Pakistani nationals will not be permitted to travel to India under the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES) and any such visas issued in the past to Pakistani nationals are deemed cancelled, it was announced.

China successfully launches three new astronauts to its space station

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beijing

China has successfully launched three astronauts to its space station on Thursday to replace their colleagues manning the station for the past six months.

The Shenzhou-20 crewed spaceship carrying the astronauts blasted off at 5:17 pm (Beijing Time) from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China.

Minutes after the launch an official in the mission control centre announced that the launch was a "complete success." The launch was telecast live by the state-run CGTN.

The spaceship is carrying three astronauts — Chen Dong, Chen Zhongrui and Wang Jie.

It will dock with the space station later tonight.

Shenzhou-20 is the 35th flight mission of China's manned space programme, and the fifth crewed mission during the application and development stage of China's space station.

The crew is scheduled to return to the Dongfeng landing site in north China in late October this year.

China rotates a three-member crew manning the space station named Tiangong every six months.

After the new set of crew members enter the station, the other three are expected to return to earth on April 29.

The crew will conduct new life science experiments involving zebrafish, planarians and streptomycetes, the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) spokesman Lin Xiqiang told the media on Wednesday.

These experiments will mark China's first space-based investigation into the regeneration of planarians, a new organism introduced to China's space station and known for their extraordinary ability to regrow organs, Lin said.

This project will enhance our understanding of fundamental mechanisms of regeneration at the individual level and could provide insights into human health issues related to space-induced injuries, Lin said.



Chinese astronauts for the Shenzhou-20 mission Chen Dong, right, and Chen Zhongrui wave during a send-off ceremony for their manned space mission at the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in northwestern China

The CMSA also said on Wednesday that two Pakistani astronauts will be selected to receive spaceflight training in China to take part in a joint mission to the country's space station.

One of the two Pakistanis will participate as a payload specialist, state-run Xinhua quoted a CMSA spokesperson as saying.

China built its space station after it was reportedly excluded from the International Space Station (ISS) over concerns that China's space programme is manned by its military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

It is currently the only country to have a space station while the ISS is a collaborative project of several countries.

Observers say China's space station may become the only one of its kind in orbit once the ISS retires in the coming years.

The two robotic arms of the station, especially the long one which has the ability to grab objects including satellites from space, drew international concerns.

The launch day coincided with China's 10th Space Day. China had designated April 24 as its Space Day in 2016 to mark the successful launch of its first satellite,

Dongfanghong-1 on April 24, 1970.

Separately, the China National Space Administration (CNSA) announced on Thursday that scientists from institutions in France, Germany, Japan, Pakistan, the UK and the US have been granted the opportunity to borrow lunar samples collected by the Change-5 mission for scientific research.

At a ceremony for China's Space Day in Shanghai, the agency announced that seven institutions from six countries have been authorised to borrow the lunar samples, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

In 2020, China's Change-5 mission retrieved samples from the moon weighing about 1,731 grams.

Shan Zhongde, head of the CNSA, said China's lunar exploration programme has always adhered to the principles of equality, mutual benefits, peaceful utilisation and win-win cooperation, sharing achievements with the international community.

By the end of December 2023, CNSA had received 24 applications from 11 countries and international organisations, the report said.

Korean leader indicted for alleged bribery

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

South Korean prosecutors indicted former liberal President Moon Jae-in on bribery charges Thursday, saying that a budget airline gave his son-in-law a lucrative no-show job during Moon's term in office.

Moon's indictment adds him to a long list of South Korean leaders who have faced trials or scandals at the close of their terms or after leaving office.

Prosecutors allege that Moon, who served as president from 2017-2022, received bribes totalling 217 million Won (USD 151,705) from Lee Sang-jik, founder of the budget carrier Thai Eastar Jet, in the form of wages, housing expenses and other financial assistance provided to Moon's then-son-in-law from 2018-2020.

South Korean media reported that Moon's daughter and her husband were divorced in 2021.

The Jeonju District Prosecutors' Office said in a statement that Lee was also indicted on charges of paying bribes to Moon and committing breaches of trust.

The prosecutors' office said Moon's former son-in-law was hired as a director-

level employee at Lee's company in Thailand even though he had no work experience in the airline industry.

The office said he spent only brief periods at the company's office in Thailand and carried out only minor duties while claiming to be working remotely from South Korea.

Moon's indictment adds him to a long list of South Korean leaders who have faced trials or scandals at the close of their terms or after leaving office

The prosecutors' office said it had not found evidence that Moon performed political favours for Lee, who worked on Moon's campaign, but that Lee likely expected his assistance to be repaid.

Lee was later named the head of the state-funded Korea SME and Startups Agency and was nominated by Moon's party to run for parliament while Moon was in office, but the prosecutors' office said that it hasn't found any evidence that Moon helped Lee win those positions.

There was no immediate response from Moon.

Moon's indictment comes before South Korea elects a new president on June 3 to succeed conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol, who was ousted over an ill-fated imposition of martial law. It's unclear if Moon's indictment will influence prospects for liberals to win back the presidency.

Observers say liberal presidential aspirant Lee Jae-myung is heavily favoured to win the vote as conservatives remain in disarray over Yoon's ouster, although Lee also faces criminal trials on allegations of corruption and other charges.

Most past South Korean presidents have been embroiled in scandal in the final months of their terms or after leaving office. In 2017, Park Geun-hye, South Korea's first female president, was removed from office and arrested over an explosive corruption scandal.

Park's conservative predecessor Lee Myung-bak was also arrested on a range of crimes, years after leaving office. Moon's friend and former liberal President Roh Moo-hyun jumped to his death in 2009 amid corruption investigations into his family.

South Korean truth commission halts probe into adoption fraud, cases in limbo

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

The South Korean government's fact-finding commission suspended its groundbreaking investigation into the extensive fraud and abuse that tainted the nation's historic foreign adoption program, a decision stemming from internal disputes among commissioners regarding which cases warranted recognition as problematic.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission confirmed human rights violations in just 56 of the 367 complaints filed by adoptees before suspending its investigation Wednesday night, just one month before its May 26 deadline.

The fate of the remaining 311 cases, either deferred or incompletely reviewed, now hinges on whether lawmakers will establish a new truth commission through legislation during Seoul's next government, which takes office after the presidential by-election on June 3.

After a nearly three-year investigation into adoption cases across Europe, the United States, and Australia, the commission concluded in a March interim report that the government bears responsibility for facilitating a foreign adoption program riddled with fraud and abuse, driven by efforts to cut welfare costs and carried out by private agencies that often manipulated children's backgrounds and origins.

However, some adoptees, and even

members of the commission, criticised the cautiously-worded report, arguing that it should have more forcefully established the government's complicity.

Disputes also arose after the commission's nine-member decision-making panel, dominated by conservative-leaning members appointed by recently ousted President Yoon Suk Yeol and his party, voted on March 25 to defer the assessments of 42 adoptee cases, citing insufficient documentation to conclusively prove the adoptions were problematic.

Commission officials haven't disclosed which documents were central to the discussions. However, they suggested that some commissioners were hesitant to recognize cases where adoptees couldn't definitively prove falsification of biological details in their adoption papers, either through meeting their birth parents or verifying information about them.

On Wednesday, the panel resolved the standoff by unanimously agreeing to suspend, rather than completely drop, the investigation into the 42 cases. The approach leaves open the door for the cases to be reconsidered if a future truth commission is established. The panel also agreed to suspend investigations into the remaining 269 cases, citing insufficient time to complete the reviews before the deadline, according to three commission sources who described the discussions to the Associated Press.

The ruling triggered a snap presidential election set for June 3. Park Geon Tae, a senior investigator who led the probe into adoptions, said the truth commission would be unable to produce any further



It was unclear if and when another commission will be established. Political attention is now focused on the early presidential election. South Korea's constitutional Court formally removed Yoon from office on April 4, months after the opposition-controlled legislature impeached him over his brief imposition of martial law in December.

The ruling triggered a snap presidential election set for June 3. Park Geon Tae, a senior investigator who led the probe into adoptions, said the truth commission would be unable to produce any further

investigation reports on adoptions before the end of its mandate, after the terms of five of the nine commissioners ended following Wednesday's meeting.

This potentially paralyses the decision-making process, which requires the support of at least five members. Most Korean adoptees were registered by agencies as abandoned orphans, even though many had relatives who could have been easily identified or located. This practice has often made it difficult - or even impossible - for them to trace their roots.

The reluctance of some commissioners

to accept cases in which adoptees have been unable to find information about their birth parents reflects a lack of understanding of the systemic problems in adoption and contradicts the commission's broader findings, which acknowledged the manipulation of children's origins, said Philsik Shin, a scholar at South Korea's Anyang University.

Shin's analysis of government, law enforcement, and adoption records concludes that more than 90 per cent of Korean children sent to the West between 1980 and 1987, when adoptions peaked, almost certainly had known relatives.

The commission's findings released in March broadly aligned with previous reporting by The Associated Press. The AP investigations, which were also documented by Frontline (PBS), detailed how South Korea's government, Western countries and adoption agencies worked in tandem to supply some 200,000 Korean children to parents overseas, despite years of evidence that many were being procured through questionable or outright unscrupulous means.

Military governments implemented special laws aimed at promoting foreign adoptions, removing judicial oversight and granting vast powers to private agencies, which bypassed proper child relinquishment practices while shipping thousands of children to the West every year.

Western nations ignored these problems and sometimes pressured South Korea to keep the kids coming as they focused on satisfying their huge domestic demands for babies.

South Korea's government has never acknowledged direct responsibility for issues related to past adoptions and has so far not responded to the commission's recommendation to issue an official apology.

Modeled after the South African commission established in the 1990s to expose apartheid-era injustices, South Korea originally launched the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2006 to investigate past human rights violations. That ended its work in 2010.

Following the passing of a law that allowed for more investigations, the commission was relaunched in December 2020 under South Korea's former liberal government, with a focus on cases that occurred during the country's military dictatorship from the 1960s to 1980s.

Foreign adoptions were a major subject of the second commission, along with the atrocities at Brothers Home, a government-funded facility in Busan that kidnapped, abused and enslaved thousands of children and adults deemed as vagrants for decades until the 1980s. In January, the commission confirmed at least 31 cases in which children from Brothers Home were adopted abroad, which came years after The AP exposed adoptions from the facility as part of a vast, profit-driven operation.

SA scraps proposed tax increase after pushback

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Johannesburg

The South African government on Thursday cancelled a proposed tax increase that had threatened to collapse the unity government after a pushback from various political parties.

Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana announced that the government would no longer implement a 0.5 per cent increase on value-added tax (VAT), payable on goods and services including food and electricity, that would have increased it to 15.5 per cent.

The decision to forgo the increase follows extensive consultations with political parties, and careful consideration of the recommendations of the parliamentary committees

FINANCE MINISTER ENOCH GODONGWANA

The proposed VAT increase is the latest contentious issue faced by the unity government that was formed after the African National Congress party lost its parliamentary majority for the first time since coming to power in 1994.

"The decision to forgo the increase follows extensive consultations with political parties, and careful consideration of the recommendations of the parliamentary

committees," said Godongwana in a statement early Thursday.

The government was looking to increase tax revenues through the VAT increase, and Godongwana said the estimated revenue would fall short by around USD 4 billion.

The Democratic Alliance, the second-biggest political party in the country and the coalition government, opposed the VAT increase and voted against the annual budget which initially proposed it.

The DA subsequently challenged the matter in court this week and claimed victory on Thursday, saying the cancellation of the tax increase was a win for all South Africans.

"We will continue to fight for all South Africans, especially the poor and the marginalised, in seeking responsible public spending so that the government does not keep on raising taxes to fund unlawful expenditure, corruption and sheer waste," said DA federal chairperson Helen Zille. Opposition parties and civil society have also criticised the proposed increase as anti-poor.

More than 20 million people in South Africa rely on welfare grants, with the unemployment rate at over 32 per cent, according to official statistics.

This is the latest disagreement between the two main parties after the formation of the unity government last year.

Ancient Taiwan jawbone is of human ancestors: Scientists

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Taipei

An ancient jawbone discovered in Taiwan belonged to an enigmatic group of early human ancestors called Denisovans, scientists reported Thursday. Relatively little is known about Denisovans, an extinct group of human cousins that interacted with Neanderthals and our own species, Homo sapiens.

"Denisovan fossils are very scarce," with only a few confirmed finds in East Asia,

said study co-author Takumi Tsutaya at the Graduate University for Advanced Studies in Japan.

So far, the only known Denisovan fossils include partial jawbones, a few teeth and part of a finger bone found in caves in Siberia and Tibet. Some scientists believe fossils found in a cave in Laos may also belong to Denisovans.

The probable identification of the jawbone from Taiwan as Denisovan expands the region where scientists know these

ancient people once lived, said Tsutaya.

The partial jawbone was first recovered when a fishing operation dredged the seafloor in the Penghu Channel near the Taiwan Strait. After it was sold to an antique shop, a collector spotted it and purchased it in 2008, then later donated it to Taiwan's National Museum of Natural Science. Based on the composition of marine invertebrates found attached to it, the fossil was dated to the Pleistocene era. But exactly which species of early human

ancestor it belonged to remained a mystery.

The condition of the fossil made it impossible to study ancient DNA. But recently, scientists in Taiwan, Japan and Denmark were able to extract some protein sequences from the incomplete jawbone. An analysis showed some protein sequences resembled those contained in the genome of a Denisovan fossil recovered in Siberia. The findings were published in the journal Science.

Istanbul residents spend night outdoors after earthquake

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Istanbul

Many Istanbul residents spent the night outdoors, too fearful to return to their homes, following a strong earthquake and over 180 aftershocks.

The magnitude 6.2 quake tremor that struck on Wednesday deeply impacted the city of 16 million residents, leaving many inhabitants shaken and wary of a possible more destructive tremor. There were no reports of serious damage but the tremor, the strongest felt in Istanbul in recent years, prompted widespread panic and scores of injuries.

The earthquake had a shallow depth of 10 kilometers (about 6 miles), according to the United States Geological Survey, with its epicentre about 40 kilometers (25 miles) southwest of Istanbul, in the Sea of Marmara. It was felt in several neighbouring provinces. At least 236 people were treated for injuries they suffered while trying to jump from buildings or for panic attacks. Most of the



injuries were in Istanbul, where residents remain on edge because the city is considered at high risk for a major quake. In fear of a stronger earthquake that could demolish homes, residents sought refuge by sleeping in their

cars or setting up tents in parks and other open spaces. Many lit camp fires to keep warm after the temperature dipped. Turkey is crossed by two major fault lines, and earthquakes are frequent. For many, the memory of a devastating earthquake that struck 11 southern and southeastern provinces two years ago, remains vivid.

The 7.8-magnitude earthquake on February 6, 2023, claimed more than 53,000 lives and destroyed or damaged hundreds of thousands of buildings. Another 6,000 people were killed in the northern parts of neighbouring Syria. The Turkish disaster and emergency management agency, AFAD, said Wednesday's earthquake was followed by 184 aftershocks - seven of them of a magnitude 4 or stronger.

Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change Minister Murat Kurum stated that authorities had received 378 reports of structural damage in various buildings. At least 12 buildings had been evacuated as a precautionary measure, he said.

US officials, lawmakers condemn Pahalgam attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Top Trump administration officials and US lawmakers continued to condemn the Pahalgam terror attack, expressing solidarity with India and stressing that there is no place for terrorism in the world.

Representative Brian Fitzpatrick strongly condemned the horrific terrorist attack and offered prayers for the victims, their families, and all those affected by this senseless act of evil.

able violence." Congressman Tom Suozzi also condemned the attack and said, "There is no place for terrorism in our world. It must be stopped."

immediate shutting down of the Attari land-transit post in view of the cross-border links to the terror attack.

in the strongest terms. My heart goes out to the victims & families who have suffered this tragedy & I hope the authorities will bring the perpetrators to justice."

of the deadliest civilian attacks in the region in years." He added that New Jersey's Indian American community, many with ties to Kashmir, is mourning.

Vatican keeps St Peter's open all night for public viewing of Pope Francis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Vatican City

So many mourners lined up to see Pope Francis lying in state in a simple wooden coffin inside St Peter's Basilica that the Vatican kept the doors open all night due to higher-than-expected turnout, closing the basilica for just an hour Thursday morning for cleaning.

respect that I have for him and the great person he was, it's worth the wait." The last numbers released by the Vatican said more than 20,000 people had paid their respects during the first 8 1/2 hours of the public viewing on Wednesday.

sage of inclusion, the grieving faithful joined the procession of mourners that wended from St Peter's Square through the basilica's Holy Door, with the repen-

t among them winning an indulgence, a form of atonement granted during the Jubilee Holy Year. From there, the line extended down the basilica's central

aisle to the pope's simple wooden casket. By late Wednesday, the wait appeared to be three or four hours and growing. A person doing crowd management esti-

mated that the wait was closer to five hours. The mourners stretched down the centre of Via della Conciliazione, in a lane set aside for Jubilee pilgrims.

The basilica is bathed in a hushed silence as mourners from across the globe make a slow, shuffling procession up the main aisle to pay their last respects to Francis, who died Monday after a stroke.

Like many others, the Scorpatti family from Calabria is in Rome on an Easter vacation, only to be met with the news of Francis' death on Easter Monday. Out of devotion to the pope and his mes-

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THANKS GIVING Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.

Table with 5 columns: Train No., ARR., DEP., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. for 04610/04609 Jammu Tawi-Varanasi-Jammu Tawi.

Table with 5 columns: Train No., ARR., DEP., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. for 04022/04021 New Delhi-Gorakhpur-New Delhi.

Table with 5 columns: Train No., ARR., DEP., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. for 04022/04021 New Delhi-Gorakhpur-New Delhi.

Table with 5 columns: Train No., ARR., DEP., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. for 04022/04021 New Delhi-Gorakhpur-New Delhi.

Table with 5 columns: Train No., ARR., DEP., STATIONS, ARR., DEP. for 04022/04021 New Delhi-Gorakhpur-New Delhi.

THANKS GIVING Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.

For any kind of information, passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or visit Indian Railways website

THANKS GIVING Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.

THANKS GIVING Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.

THANKS GIVING Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.

THANKS GIVING Thank you holly spirit for all the blessings Celine.

'India Inc revenue growth to remain flat'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

India Inc's revenue growth will remain flat at about 5 per cent to 6 per cent in the March quarter, but profitability will widen, a domestic rating agency said on Thursday.

An arm of Crisil Ratings said the operating profit margins are seen at 8 per cent, a widening of up to 0.60 per cent, when compared with the year-ago performance. The agency analysed over 400 companies accounting for over 50 per cent of NSE's market capitalisation to arrive at its estimates. Some companies, especially in the information technology sector have already announced their earnings.

Improved showing by the consumer-driven sectors excluding staples will be a key contributor for the topline growth, while the bottom line will benefit from a

mixed set of aspects which are unique to a sector, it said.

Crisil Intelligence's director Pushan Sharma said consumer discretionary products, services and staple services segment is expected to see 8 per cent to 9 per cent on-year increase in revenue.

The agency analysed over 400 companies accounting for over 50 per cent of NSE's market capitalisation to arrive at its estimates

"This would be led by an expected 15 per cent surge in telecom services revenue resulting from significant tariff hikes implemented in the second quarter and the introduction of premium 5G plans by

telecom operators.

"The retail segment likely saw a robust 17 per cent growth, led by demand in the value fashion, and food and grocery segments, as well as an expansion of store networks," Sharma said.

The automobile sector's revenue likely grew 6 per cent as retail momentum for passenger vehicles picked up and realisations rose owing to a change in the product mix and increasing share of exports, Sharma said. The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) segment is expected to see 4-6 per cent revenue growth led by price hikes amid subdued volume growth, it said, adding that rural demand has been resilient and urban demand has stayed subdued.

Overall exports revenue is likely to grow 4 per cent, including 2-3 per cent growth in IT services revenue following a mar-

ginal improvement in demand and project pick-ups and 8 per cent in the pharmaceutical sector. In the agriculture sector, including fertilisers, revenues are likely to grow 17-19 per cent with consumption improving, following a stable summer crop acreage and higher disposable incomes stemming from better yields and remuneration for kharif paddy.

In construction-linked sectors, revenue growth is seen limited to 1-2 per cent as cheaper steel imports throughout the year resulted in lower prices.

However, steel prices have improved sequentially after the announcement of safeguard duty, it noted.

On the profitability front, its associate director Elizabeth Master said, "the top 10 sectors, which collectively account for over 70 per cent of revenue, showed a mixed trend in EBITDA margins."

Five sectors including export-driven ones such as pharmaceuticals, investment-linked ones such as power, and consumer discretionary services such as telecom services, likely saw margin expansion, Master said. Five other sectors — automobile, IT services, FMCG, cement, and steel — saw margins decline in the March quarter.

The automobile sector's EBITDA margin fell by 1 percentage point following a 25 per cent increase in aluminium prices driven by inventory decline and supply concerns in various global regions.

The margin in IT services is estimated to have fallen by up to 0.40 per cent on-year owing to higher marketing and travel spends.

The FMCG sector margin likely slipped 0.50-1 per cent on increased cost of essential inputs such as palm oil, tea and dried coconut kernels, the agency said.

'Regulations alone can't save you if you don't protect yourself': BSE CEO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

Stressing the need for investor awareness and responsibility, BSE Managing Director and CEO Sundararaman Ramamurthy on Thursday said that regulations alone cannot protect investors if they do not take adequate precautions while investing.

"You trade what you understand, and you understand what you trade - if you don't do that, you have a problem," Ramamurthy said, urging investors to be vigilant and informed.

He criticised the tendency of investors to rely on hearsay rather than due diligence. "You scan a vegetable before you buy it, but when you invest your life's earnings, you go by hearsay - that's not how it should be," he said.

On regulatory expectations, the BSE chief remarked that there is a general perception that regulators are blamed when investors lose money, but when markets do well the same person praise their own knowledge. "If you don't want to safeguard yourself, no amount of regulation can save you. Be alert," he stressed.

Addressing the issue of retail participation while speaking at the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce, Ramamurthy advised that small investors who are not market experts should opt for the mutual fund route - and even then, they should avoid thematic funds and instead choose broad-based mutual funds or large-cap funds to diversify risk.

He also encouraged women and the youth to begin investing early in their careers. Highlighting the potential of India's SME sector, the BSE CEO pointed out that only about 40 companies from this region are currently listed on the stock exchange, while the actual potential could be well over 1,000. He urged more small and medium enterprises to consider listing as a viable route to raise funds and grow their business and unlock their potential.

Responding to a question on possible manipulation in SME listings, Ramamurthy acknowledged that frauds such as pump-and-dump schemes could not be ruled out entirely even if regulators and stock exchanges are vigilant.

Shyam VNL unveils Cyber Solutions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Shyam VNL, a trailblazer in innovation-led security and communication technologies, reaffirmed its leadership in the Homeland Security (HLS) with the launch of next-generation solutions focused on empowering the HLS, CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) & Security Agencies at the MILIPOL India 2025 exhibition being held at the Yashobhoomi India International Convention & Expo Centre. The event featured a keynote presentation by Rajiv Mehrotra, Chairman of Shyam VNL, highlighting the company's unwavering commitment to national security.

At the Center of attention is Shyam VNL's cutting-edge solution designed to counter the increasing threat of mobile devices covertly embedded in everyday electronic appliances. As spying from homes and offices using concealed devices becomes a rising concern, Shyam VNL introduced its proprietary "Secure Meeting Guard" and "Secure Ops Room Guard" - advanced systems that neutralize all RF transmissions within a specified area. These solutions ensure that no mobile device can operate in sensitive spaces, creating 100% secure, Mobile free zones. Also drawing significant interest



was the company's comprehensive Counter-Drone portfolio, tailored to meet varied operational needs across borders, critical infrastructure, VVIP security, and more. On display were Drone Detection Systems, Networked Directional Drone, Detectors and Jammers, Backpack and Hand Held Drone Detectors & Jammers, Handheld Drone Guns in multiple configurations and Wearable Drone Detection and Jamming Systems - for individual Soldiers. These solutions address the

increasing threat of short-range drone attacks, moving away from traditional long-range surveillance models. By integrating AI and machine learning, Shyam VNL enhances real-time situational awareness and operational responsiveness for ground forces.

Further reinforcing its commitment to the 'Made in India' innovation ecosystem, the company also showcased a range of tactical solutions designed for use by various security agencies, including the Defence sector.

SEBI facilitates ease of doing business for SM REITs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

To facilitate ease of doing business for Small and Medium REITs (SM REITs), markets regulator Sebi has standardised disclosures in draft scheme offer document and simplified public issue processes for such schemes.

In its notification, the regulator has standardised disclosures in scheme offer document by splitting the document into two parts — Key Information of the Trust (KIT) that contains information about the SM REIT, its investment manager, Trustee, and overall structure and Key Information of the Scheme (KIS) that includes details specific to the individual scheme and its assets.

On processing of KIT and KIS, Sebi said that for the first scheme, KIT and KIS will be filed together for its review. For subsequent schemes, only the new KIS needs to be submitted, while KIT is updated for records, and the regulator will review only the KIS. Sebi said any material changes in the KIT will be disclosed through an addendum on the SM REIT's website and reported to the regulator and stock exchanges within seven days.

Further, the investment manager will

have to ensure that KIT is updated every 6 months and the updated KIT is disclosed on the website of SM REIT within 30 days from the end of half-year.

The investment manager is required to file the updated KIT with Sebi and stock exchanges for records within 30 days from the end of half-year.

With regards to proposals for the public issue process for SM REITs, the regulator has extended REIT Guidelines to SM REITs with certain exceptions.

Also, the regulator said a scheme of SM REIT can make an initial offer of its units by way of public issue only. Such an initial offer is required to be made within one year of Sebi's observations.

If not, a fresh draft scheme offer document needs to be filed.

"The minimum subscription amount shall be 90 per cent of the fresh issue size as specified in the KIS in case of a scheme of SM REIT which opts to utilise leverage in accordance with these regulations. The minimum subscription amount shall be 100 per cent of the fresh issue size as specified in the KIS in case of a scheme of SM REIT which does not opt to utilise leverage in accordance with these regulations," Sebi said in its notification

SEBI tweaks framework for ESG rating providers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Markets regulator Sebi has tweaked the framework for ESG Rating Providers (ERPs), especially for those using a subscriber-pays model, requiring them to share ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) rating reports with both subscribers and the rated issuer simultaneously.

This policy needs to be publicly disclosed. To give this effect, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has amended rules governing credit rating agencies in a bid to enhance clarity and transparency.

"An ESG rating provider following a subscriber-pays business model shall share the ESG rating report with its subscribers and the rated entity or the issuer whose securities have been rated at the same time and provide two working days to such rated entity or the issuer to provide its comments," Sebi said in its notification issued on Tuesday.

Further, all comments or clarifications received from the rated entity within the specified timeline will be included in the addendum to the ESG rating report by the ERP.

If the rated entity or the issuer has a different viewpoint on the data stated in the report, ERPs, after taking into account such viewpoint, can either revise the report or issue an addendum to the report with its remarks, for circulation to all its subscribers.

Moreover, ERPs are required to disclose the policy regarding the sharing of ESG rating reports with the rated entity or the issuer whose securities have been rated and the subscribers on its website.

Also ERP will provide a facility to the rated entity or the issuer whose securities have been rated to seek any clarification, including the ESG rating methodology or assumptions.

Sebi has defined subscriber-pays business model as a business model where the ESG rating provider derives its revenues from ESG ratings from subscribers including banks, insurance companies, pension funds, or the rated entity itself.

An ESG rating provider following a subscriber-pays business model will have to ensure that assigned rating is based only on publicly available information and that the fee paid by the subscriber is the lowest fee paid amongst all the subscribers if the rated entity or issuer is a subscriber itself.

Rupee gains 16 paise to settle at 85.29 against US Dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

After a two-day pause, the rupee gained 16 paise to 85.29 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, on weak greenback and overnight decline in crude oil prices.

Forex traders said the rupee strengthened on the weak US dollar and overnight decline in crude oil prices amid slowing US business activity. The US Treasury yields also declined with the 10-year yield falling 3 basis points to 4.35 per cent.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.60 and moved between the intra-day high of 85.25 and the low of 85.67 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.29 (provisional), registering a gain of 16 paise over its previous closing level.

On Wednesday, the rupee depreciated 26 paise and settled for the day at 85.45 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias as weakness in the US dollar is likely to remain intact amid trade tariff uncertainties. However, risk-on sentiments in the global markets and FII inflows may support the rupee at lower levels. "Traders may take cues from weekly unemployment claims, durable goods orders and existing home sales data from the US. USD INR spot price is

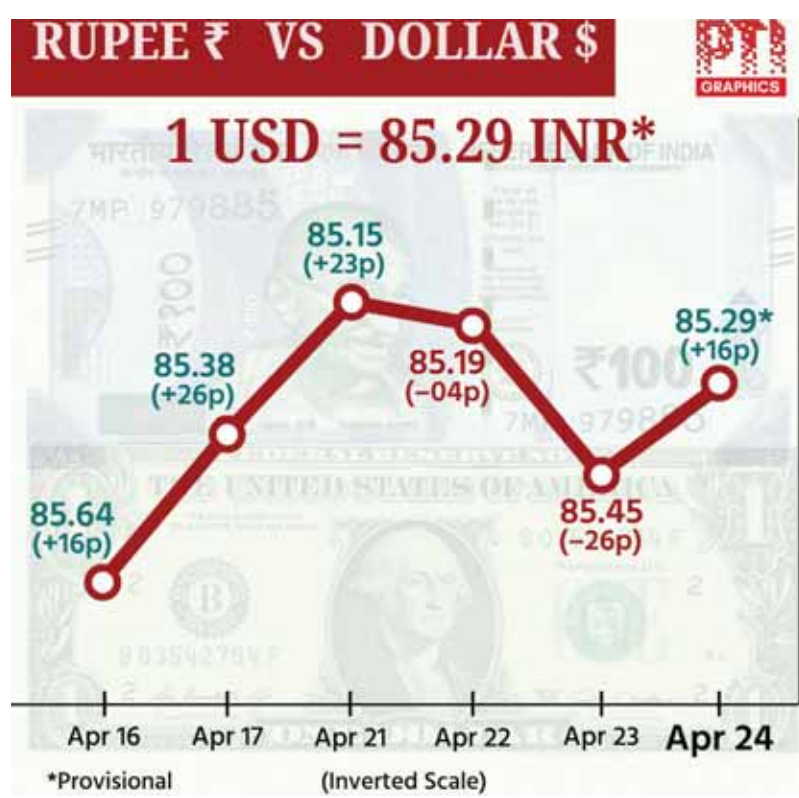
expected to trade in a range of 85 to 85.70," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.51 per cent at 99.33. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.65 per cent at C 66.55 per barrel in futures trade.

"Near-term technicals for spot USD INR indicate support at 85.03 and resistance at 85.70. High-frequency data suggests a stronger rupee, though geopolitical factors may cap the gains," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities, said.

Traders said heightened geopolitical tensions, following the terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir, weighed on market sentiment.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday declared that the killers of Pahalgam will be pursued "to the ends of the earth" and promised to "identify, track and punish every terrorist and their backers". India on Wednesday downgraded diplomatic ties with Pakistan and announced a raft of measures, including expulsion of Pakistani military attaches, suspension of the Indus Water Treaty of 1960, and immediate shutting down of the Attari land-transit post in view of the cross-border links to the horrific



Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 civilians were killed.

Gold climbs ₹200 to ₹99,400/10 gm amid US, China standoff

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Gold prices climbed ₹ 200 to ₹99,400 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday following fresh buying by stockists and jewellers and a weak dollar, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity took a U-turn from the historic ₹ 1 lakh-mark and declined ₹ 2,400 to ₹ 99,200 per 10 gram on Wednesday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also increased ₹ 200 to ₹ 98,900 per 10 grams against the previous close of ₹ 98,700 per 10 grams.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Wednesday said the current trade standoff between the US and China could continue for a while.

Adding to this, there were reports that President Donald Trump signalled that China may receive a new tariff rate in the next "two to three weeks" while countries that are currently in the negotiation phase might see reciprocal tariffs come in if negotiations are not going the way he wants.

According to commodities market experts, remarks by Trump and Bessent help revive demand for the safe-haven bullion following a corrective slide from the all-time peak.

Meanwhile, silver prices appreciated ₹ 700 to ₹ 99,900 per kg on Thursday. The white metal had settled at ₹ 99,200 per kg in the previous close.



In futures trade, gold contracts for June delivery bounced ₹ 1,046, or 1.1 per cent to ₹ 95,768 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange.

"Gold opened with a strong gap-up of over ₹ 1,000, hitting ₹ 95,700 on MCX, as Comex gold held firm above \$ 3,300.

The renewed upside came after a sharp shift in the Trump administration's tone — indicating that tariffs may still remain a central part of the conversation before any concrete trade talks with China begin.

"This delay in diplomatic progress, cou-

pled with uncertainty around China's official response, continues to keep risk sentiment elevated," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst, Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

Notably, China has yet to issue a strong or clear stance on the trade discus-

Stock market decline after 7-day rally, HUL drops

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Thursday amid profit-taking after a seven-day rally and disappointing earnings from Hindustan Unilever.

Selling in blue-chips ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel and a largely muted trend in Asian and European equities also dragged the markets lower. The 30-share BSE benchmark declined 315.06 points or 0.39 per cent to settle at 79,801.43.

During the day, it dropped 391.94 points or 0.48 per cent to 79,724.55. The

NSE Nifty went down by 82.25 points or 0.34 per cent to 24,246.70.

In the past seven trading days, the BSE benchmark gauge zoomed 6,269.34 points or 8.48 per cent and the Nifty jumped 1,929.8 points or 8.61 per cent.

From the Sensex firms, FMCG major Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) dropped 4 per cent after the firm reported a decline of 3.35 per cent in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,475 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2025 on lower margins. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled lower.

INBRIEF

IGNOU CELEBRATES EARTH DAY

Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, and Geological Society of India, Bangalore celebrated Earth Day on April 22, 2025, with "Our Power, Our Planet" programs to raise awareness and promote sustainability. The event was sponsored by India's Ministry of Earth Sciences. Earth Day promotes resource conservation for future generations. Earth Day addresses global environmental concerns. It promotes sustainable living to protect the planet.





INDIA'S SEGMENT IN THE BOOK EMPHASISES ON THE STAMPS OF YELLOW-CRESTED COCKATOO ISSUED IN 2016, ENDANGERED SUN CONURE ISSUED IN 2016 AND MANY MORE

PARROTS: Species SHOWN IN PRINT

A blend of nature, art and numismatics, the book is a visual and knowledgeable journey into the lives of parrots at risk, says **ABHI SINGHAL**

The **Endangered Parrots of the World on Stamps, Coins and Banknotes**, by Sushilkumar Agrawal, published by Mintage World is an eye-catching coffee table book that brings together to you the world of stamps, coins and currency notes with the important subject of parrot conservation. The coffee table book has been published by Mintage World, the world's first online museum for vintage and modern coins, stamps and notes. The book is both a collector's treasure and an informative guide for nature lovers and bird enthusiasts.

The colourful book offers a journey through the lives of some of the world's most at-risk parrot species. Based on the latest data from the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (July 2024), it shares useful information about the challenges these birds face around the world. Through its pages, readers can learn about the wide variety of parrot species and why it is so important to protect their natural homes.

The find special in this book for the reader's is its rare collection of over 459 stamps, 37 coins and 12 banknotes released by different countries like India, Ajman, Cuba, Dominica, Mauritius and so many more. Each item features a parrot species that is either threatened or endangered.

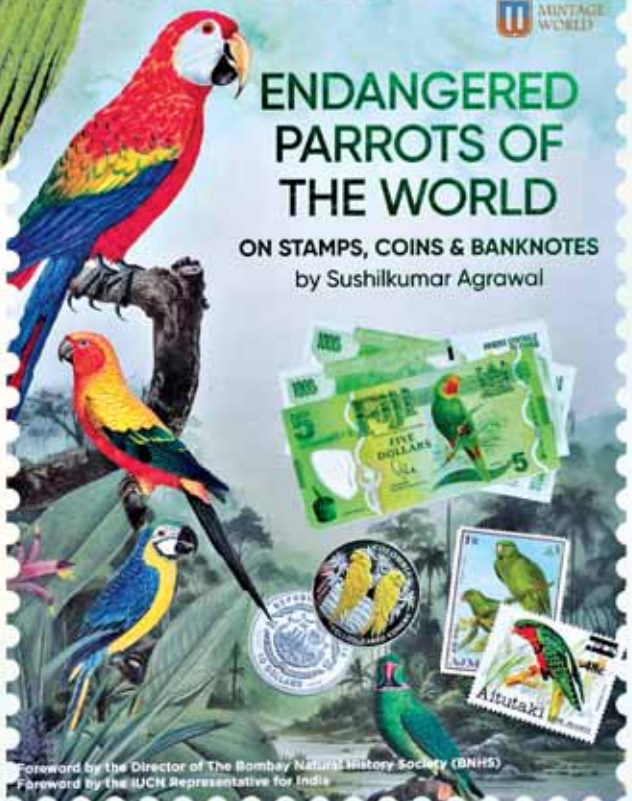
From the colourful Imperial Amazon and the clever African Grey Parrot, to the Cockatoo from the Philippines and Brazil's Lear's Macaw, every entry includes background on where the bird is from and why it is at risk. These items are not just shown as collectibles, but as a way to help raise awareness about protecting birds and nature.

Visually, the book is full of bright images and attractive designs. The stamps, filled with detail and colour, show the beauty of each bird. The coins, made from metals like silver, gold, copper and bronze, display detailed artwork of parrots in their natural surroundings. The banknotes offer another level of interest,

SPECIALITY OF THE BOOK LIES IN THE RARE COLLECTION OF OVER 459 STAMPS, 37 COINS AND 12 BANKNOTES RELEASED BY DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

ENDANGERED PARROTS OF THE WORLD

ON STAMPS, COINS & BANKNOTES
by Sushilkumar Agrawal



GLOBAL CATALOGUE

Parrots have accompanied humans since ancient times. They are found on every continent except Antarctica. Some parrot species have exceptional intelligence and mimicking ability, making them great human companions and pets. This book is meant to bring together and catalogue legal stamps, coins, and banknotes issued on parrots. The information is sourced from the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as of July 2024.

showing how countries use these birds to highlight nature and conservation on their currency.

The book also sorts the parrots into five main groups for their readers based on their risk of extinction — Extinct (EX), Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), Vulnerable (VU) and Nearly Threatened (NT).

This gives readers a clearer picture of the danger each bird is in and the issues they face, such as the illegal pet trade, cutting

down of forests, loss of habitat and climate change.

Talking about the part of India which lies at Page 66 of the book, emphasises on the stamps of Yellow-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua sulphurea*) issued in 2016, endangered Sun Conure (*Aratinga solstitialis*) issued in 2016 and many more. A buy to fact is that the book also has many interesting facts which will make a good read.

The Parrots on Coins part of the book is equally amazing and visually appealing. This section showcases the parrots on coins issued by different countries like Australia (10 Dollar with Palm Cockatoo — Page 144), Bahamas, Cameroon, Cayman Islands-Cuba, Indonesia, Jamaica (the 10 Jamaican Dollars with Black-billed Parrot- Page 157), Liberia and more.

Whether you're a bird lover, a coin or stamp collector, a conservation supporter or simply someone who enjoys informative books, **Endangered Parrots of the World on Stamps, Coins and Banknotes** is a wonderful addition to your library. It is not just a book - it is a tribute to these amazing birds and a call to action to help protect them for future generations.



SAINT LUCIA



NORTH BORNEO



S. TOMÉ E PRÍNCIPE



MAURITIUS



COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA



DOMINICA



COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA



INDIA

A BUY TO FACT IS THAT THE BOOK IS FILLED WITH HIDDEN & INTERESTING FACTS WHICH WILL MAKE A GOOD READ



NAVIDAD 1967/68



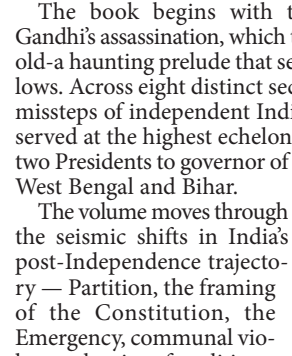
CORREOS DE CUBA



SURINAME



BAHAMAS



50c

APRIL READS

LIES OUR MOTHERS TOLD US
Author: Nilanjana Bhowmick
Publisher: Alpha Book Company
Price: ₹699

ENTERING THE MAZE
Author: Krishnagopal Mallick, Niladri Chatterjee
Publisher: Thornbird Books
Price: ₹350

ON DEMOCRACIES AND DEATH CULTS
Author: Douglas Murray
Publisher: HarperCollins
Price: ₹599

THE SECRET OF MORE
Author: Tejaswini Apte Rahm
Publisher: Alpha book company
Price: ₹899

The Erasure of Truth from Our Classrooms

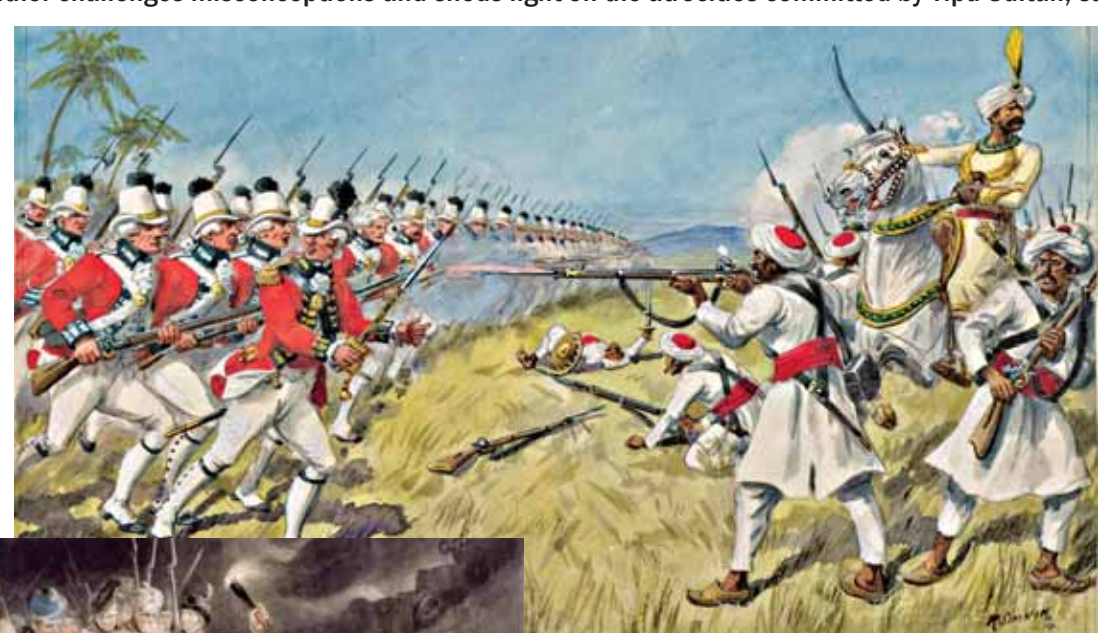
A powerful book revisits distorted narratives and uncovers the legacy of Tipu Sultan's reign, presenting a thought-provoking account of a lesser-known chapter in Indian history, the author challenges misconceptions and sheds light on the atrocities committed by Tipu Sultan, says **KUMAR CHELLAPPAN**

Most of us have heard about the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), formed in 1972 by the Government of India to foster objective and scientific writing of history and to inculcate an informed appreciation of the country's national and cultural heritage.

The ICHR, since the day it was formed, has been jam-packed with Leftist intellectuals who decide what the true history is and what should be told to the world about the history and tradition of the subcontinent. It was the Marxists who constituted the think tank and determined the quality of Indian history. The organisation publishes a journal *Indian Historical Review* (IHR) twice a year and it is said that the publication has a list of historical research undertaken by the eminent historians in the country whose are the last words in history.

The IHR is published by a foreign agency with a dubious track record. The old issues are sold across the counters in ICHR's stalls during book fairs and exhibitions. It is priced at ₹800/- per issue to make sure that ordinary mortals do not buy or read these reviews. Neither Raghuvendra Tanwar, Chairman, nor other members of the ICHR could give an answer to the query why this review is being published by an outside agency while the Council itself is flush with funds. A top official, when asked and pointed out this discrepancy, told this writer, "Dekhenge" (Let's see). The reasons behind the mystery associated with the ICHR are not much to seek. The organisation has a lot to hide from the public eye.

If you have any doubts, please read what has been written by S L Bhyrappa, that wonderful scholar from Mysore, as foreword to **Tipu Sultan — The Saga of Mysore's Interregnum (1760-1799)** authored by Vikram Sampath, the young historian who created a storm with his earlier book on Savarkar. Since 1969, what we read and learn as history in schools and universities in the country is manufactured history and tampered chronicles. The series *Yes, Prime Minister*, authored by Jonathan Lynn and



ABOUT THE BOOK
Book: Tipu Sultan
Author: Vikram Sampath
Publisher: Penguin
Price: ₹1499/-

Antony Jay and telecast as a series by Doordarshan way back in the 1980s, is a good example. There was this cabinet minister in Britain, Right Hon. James Hacker, who was elevated as Prime Minister of the country by accident. Hacker wanted to leave an indelible track record about his tenure and asked Lynn and Jay to edit his memoirs. "We were astonished to discover that, at times, Hacker seems to have de-

erated and rearranged past events in order to present himself in a favourable light... We cannot believe that any politician would rearrange past events deliberately in order to distort the historical record and so we have had to assume that Hacker had some strange defect of mind that frequently led him to ask not "What did I do?" but "What is the most impressive explanation of my actions that cannot be disproved by published facts?"

Bhyrappa says that a meeting of educationists was convened by G Parthasarathy, an acolyte of Indira Gandhi, and asked them to rewrite Indian history to integrate the nation through education. For that to happen, Parthasarathy wanted the educationists to remove the unpalatable truths from Indian history and fill it with half-lies and full lies so that students would

remain ignorant of the cruelties meted out by the likes of Aurangzeb, Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, all Islamic zealots. What the then government wanted was to black out the cruel deeds and genocides of Hindus by Aurangzeb and others. When Bhyrappa objected to this diktat, he was quickly eased out of the committee and replaced with a Marxist ideologist.

Since then, we have been hearing about Akbar the Great, Aurangzeb the Mighty, and Tipu Sultan the Lion, etc. What Sampath has done in this 904 — page volume is a chronicle of events launched by Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan as rulers of Mysore and the treachery committed by the duo to cleanse the region free of infidels. During Tipu's campaign in the Malabar province, he took into custody thousands of Hindus and asked them: "Sword or Islam?"

Those who refused to get converted to Islam were slaughtered instantly.

The Malabar campaign of Tipu stands out for the murder and mayhem unleashed by him in the region. Not only Malabar, the entire stretch of area from Kasaragod to Kochi bore the brunt of his savage deeds.

Tipu Sultan, portrayed as the embodiment of secularism, had destroyed, demolished, desecrated and plundered thousands of temples spread across Karnataka, Malabar and Kochi. But there are certain forces out to whitewash him as an angel. His father, Hyder Ali, too was a barbarian and had murdered the Wodeyar King who had appointed him as a commander in the Mysore Army.

In yet another book *It Happened Along the Kaveri*, authors Padma Seshadri and Padma Malini had recounted with proof that Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan were the founding fathers of scams and corruption.

Sandeep Balakrishna, in his compendium *Tipu Sultan: The Tyrant of Mysore*, buried Tipu, while Vikram Sampath has erected his gravestone with this work. A moviemaker like Vivek Agnihotri has enough material in this book for a widescreen film. If you miss this book, you are the loser.

In Step with a Republic's Journey

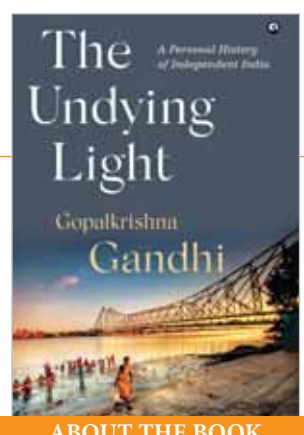
BY TEAM VIVA

The **Undying Light** by Gopalkrishna Gandhi is a deeply personal and panoramic account of India's journey from Independence to the present. With the quiet dignity and precision that characterise his public life, Gandhi weaves together memoir, political commentary, and historical reflection into a work that is both intimate and illuminating.

The book begins with the tragic memory of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, which the author witnessed as a three-year-old—a haunting prelude that sets the emotional tenor for what follows. Across eight distinct sections, he traces the milestones and missteps of independent India through the lens of one who has served at the highest echelons of government, from secretary to two Presidents to governor of West Bengal and Bihar.

The volume moves through the seismic shifts in India's post-Independence trajectory — Partition, the framing of the Constitution, the Emergency, communal violence, the rise of coalitions, and the emergence of majoritarian politics. Gandhi filters these moments through a moral and reflective lens. His writing is meditative and grounded, offering a perspective shaped by first-hand observation and an enduring faith in democratic values. The Emergency is dissected with the same rigour as the demolition of the Babri Masjid; the idealism of the Nehruvian era is weighed alongside the complexities of the present. His reflections on federalism, secularism, and democratic ethics serve as poignant reminders of the principles upon which modern India was built—and the forces now testing their resilience. The book was recently launched by Sharmila Tagore, who described it as a profound reflection on India's rich history and values. The launch also featured a panel discussion with Aruna Roy, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, and Rudrangshu Mukherjee, who shared insights that added depth to Gandhi's perspective.

The **Undying Light** does not aim to dazzle with dramatic flourish, but to illuminate the path of a nation that continues to evolve. It is a considered work—layered, compassionate, and quietly urgent. For readers seeking a deeper engagement with modern Indian history through the lens of a scholar — statesman, this book offers a compelling narrative rooted in lived experience and thoughtful observation.



ABOUT THE BOOK
Book: The Undying Light
Author: Gopalkrishna Gandhi
Publisher: Aleph Book Company
Price: ₹999/-

CSK vs SRH: Battle of survival

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

Chennai Super Kings (CSK) will eye a crucial turnaround at home when they face an equally desperate Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) in a battle of survival in the Indian Premier League here on Friday. Both sides have endured a turbulent season, notching just four points from eight games, and must now win all remaining fixtures to keep their slim qualification hopes alive.

Known to make the most of home conditions, five-time champions CSK find themselves in unchartered territory as they have not been able to read the wickets well at the Chepauk.

They started strong at their fortress, dominating Mumbai Indians as Nour Ahmad spun a web around the visitors. But the early promise fizzled out quickly, with three successive losses at home.

The also endured the ignominy of posting their lowest-ever IPL total at home — 103/9 against Kolkata Knight Riders.

Head coach Stephen Fleming has also voiced frustration over the Chepauk surface, which has offered more to seamers than CSK's usual spin-heavy attack.

There away form has not been any better either, with just one win in four attempts.

CSK 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.

MS Dhoni has returned as full-time captain. While his knee continues to limit mobility, the former Indian captain's



leadership remains invaluable.

His death-overs batting, field placements, and ability to recalibrate the bowling attack could be key in CSK's revival.

In encouraging signs, 17-year-old Ayush Mhatre made a promising debut against MI with the bat. The franchise has also roped in South Africa's Dewald

Brevis in a bid to strengthen their power-hitting department.

SRH, meanwhile, have endured an equally erratic campaign. A bright start gave way to inconsistency, with their ultra-aggressive, attack-at-all-costs strategy falling flat.

The explosive opening pair of Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma, so vital last

season, have failed to hit the same heights this year.

While Sharma's brilliance secured a win against Punjab Kings, Head is yet to truly make his mark.

The heavy dependence on their top two has exposed the frailty of the middle order, which has struggled to absorb pressure, something head coach Daniel Vettori also conceded after the seven-wicket loss to Mumbai Indians.

"When Head and Abhishek don't succeed, then it's the responsibility of the other batsmen. Potentially that's what we haven't had this season around. The ability for partnerships, for one or two guys to step up," Vettori said.

TEAMS
SUNRISERS HYDERABAD: Pat Cummins (c), Ishan Kishan (wk), Atharva Taide, Abhinav Manohar, Aniket Verma, Sachin Baby, Smaran Ravichandran, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Travis Head, Harshal Patel, Kamindu Mendis, Wiaan Mulder, Abhishek Sharma, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Mohammed Shami, Rahul Chahar, Simarjeet Singh, Zeeshan Ansari, Jaydev Unadkat, Eshan Malinga.
CHENNAI SUPER KINGS: MS Dhoni (c&wk), Dewald Brevis, Devon Conway, Rahul Tripathi, Shaik Rasheed, Vansh Bedi, Andre Siddharth, Ayush Mhatre, Rachin Ravindra, Ravichandran Ashwin, Vijay Shankar, Sam Curran, Anshul Kamboj, Deepak Hooda, Jamie Overton, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Ravindra Jadeja, Shivam Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Nour Ahmad, Mukesh Choudhary, Nathan Ellis, Shreyas Gopal, Matheesha Pathirana.



Boult backs Rohit Sharma, calls him world-class player

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hyderabad

Mumbai Indians' pacer Trent Boult has backed "world-class" Rohit Sharma to play a pivotal role in the team's pursuit for a record-extending sixth IPL title, following back-to-back half-centuries that signalled his timely return to form.

The Kiwi left-arm pacer was instrumental in dismantling Sunrisers Hyderabad's famed top order, returning with a match-winning spell of 4/26 to cap MI's fourth straight win in emphatic style.

After SRH collapsed to 143/8, MI, powered by Rohit's commanding 46-ball 70, chased down the target in just 15.4 overs. The emphatic win not only boosted their net run rate but also propelled them to third place on the points table.

"I think the whole side, the whole Mumbai Indians squad possesses some world-class players and obviously Rohit needs no introduction in that regard," Boult said at the post-match media interaction.

"I am sure everyone wants to be contributing at some points, but Rohit's doing a fantastic job of late and playing nicely just at the right time. So he's going to play a huge role for us in the remaining part of the season. I think you just need to be prepared for any role," he added.

Boult also praised captain Hardik Pandya for his leadership style, calling it a refreshing experience.

"Hardik's a passionate cricketer, obviously

ly very skilful. He's a great leader, I think. He leads from the front.

"He's a great communicator. He's one of my favourite Indian cricketers, so to get the chance to play underneath him is a great experience."

Boult, who has adjusted seamlessly into a new role after shifting from Rajasthan Royals to MI, emphasised the importance of adaptability in a long tournament like the IPL.

"At Rajasthan I was prepared to bowl at any stage of the match. I've been lucky enough to play 10 IPL seasons where it hasn't always been the same recipe every time. So I think the first thing is you've got to always want the ball.

"There's some great players in there. Obviously, (Jasprit) Bumrah needs no introduction either, so it's great to be having ball back in hand with him."

Mumbai Indians had just one win in their first five matches, and now they have four on the trot, keeping them firmly placed for a playoff berth. But Boult is not looking too far ahead.

"Momentum wasn't on our side to start with, but to turn it around to have four wins in a row was the focus, just to get a bit of momentum, a bit of rhythm. Guys playing nice cricket at certain points. We're not going to look too far ahead.

"It can quickly change. Looking forward to getting back home, playing in some conditions that we know pretty well, but there's a long way to go in this tournament," he added.

SRH need support from middle order: Coach Vettori

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hyderabad

Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) head coach Daniel Vettori admitted that a dramatic top-order collapse coupled with a wrong "assessment" of the pitch proved decisive in their a crushing defeat to Mumbai Indians.

The big-hitting SRH top order slumped to 24/4 in the powerplay, and despite a fighting partnership between Heinrich Klaasen (71) and impact substitute Abhinav Manohar (43), the hosts could only manage 143/8, a total that proved woefully inadequate on a pitch that has

already seen two 240-plus totals this season. "The toss was important — we wanted to bowl first. The wicket was different from what we'd seen before, and while we had discussed the possibility of a 250-280 surface, the conditions changed dramatically. It was tough to assess the par score early on," he said at the post-match press conference.

"Once we got through two overs, the assessment was that it was not the 250-260 wicket that this has been the last couple of games. And we obviously went out of depth." He said their strategy was to go all out in the powerplay but the plan

unravelling quickly.

"We wanted to maximise the powerplay, but unfortunately we kept losing wickets and once we realised that the surface wasn't what we anticipated, then we needed to build towards that sort of 180 score, and that unfortunately became difficult to do when you're 24/4 after the power play.

Vettori said Ishan Kishan's bizarre dismissal only added pressure to the team.

Batting at number 3, Ishan Kishan stunned everyone by walking off, indicating a faint edge, even as none of the MI players appealed and the on-field umpire was on the verge of signalling a wide.

"Ishan's dismissal was obviously disappointing, and that put pressure on everyone coming in. When you are in a power play situation, you still want to try and maximise those two fielders out."

Vettori said there's a need for better game awareness and support from the middle order when the aggressive top-order duo of Head and Abhishek fail to fire.

"Travis and AB, when they go, they are very aggressive and they take the game on and it's led to a lot of success for us. And when they don't succeed, then it's the responsibility of the other batsmen.

Real Madrid beats Getafe 1-0 in Spanish league

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

Real Madrid kept pace with Spanish league leader Barcelona with a 1-0 win at Getafe ahead of the rivals' meeting in the Copa del Rey final.

Arda Güler scored a first-half goal for Madrid, which moved back within four points of Barcelona. The Catalan club edged Mallorca 1-0 on Tuesday.

Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti used many reserves ahead of Saturday's Copa final in Seville. Brazil forward Endrick made his first Spanish league start with the club, and Vinicius Júnior was substituted in the second half. Jude Bellingham came off the bench in the second half.

Midfielder Eduardo Camavinga had to be replaced because of an apparent muscle injury in the final minutes and is doubtful to be available for Saturday's

was important to give us confidence for the final (on Saturday)."

Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois made a couple of difficult saves late to secure Madrid's victory.

It was the third league win in a row for Madrid, which endured a Champions League elimination against Arsenal in the competition's quarterfinals.

Getafe has lost three in a row, and four of its last five league games. The club from southern Madrid sits in 12th place.

The match was briefly stopped in the second half as fans from Getafe chanted "Die (Dani) Ceballos, die Ceballos."

CELTA WINS AGAIN

Celta Vigo moved to seventh place by routing fifth-place Villarreal 3-0 at home with goals by Fer López, Borja Iglesias and Iago Aspas.

The victory ended a two-match losing

Liverpool must wait to clinch Premier League title after Arsenal draws with Crystal Palace

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

One more point. That's all Liverpool needs to secure a record-tying 20th English top-flight title after second-place Arsenal drew 2-2 with Crystal Palace in the Premier League.

Arne Slot's runaway leaders can take care of business on Sunday by avoiding defeat to Tottenham in what is set to be a big party at Anfield. A draw or a win would ensure Liverpool cannot be caught by Arsenal with four more rounds remaining and therefore clinches a second title in five years, tying with fierce rival Manchester United on number 20 overall.

Becoming the champion in 2020 ended the storied club's 30-year title drought but Liverpool's players couldn't celebrate in front of their fans because of restrictions during the pandemic.

They'll try to make up for it this weekend. Arsenal twice squandered the lead at Emirates Stadium, with Jean-Philippe Mateta taking advantage of a defensive

error by William Saliba to score Palace's second equaliser in the 83rd and leave Arsenal 12 points behind Liverpool.

Arsenal, which started with star forward Bukayo Saka on the bench, looked vulnerable throughout against Palace, with its players perhaps having an eye on the Champions League semifinals against Paris Saint-Germain starting next week.

"We have the most important game of the season in six days," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said. "We need to get our energy back."

ARSENAL BATTLING TO HOLD OFF RESURGENT CITY

Arsenal has been runner-up to Manchester City in the Premier League the previous two seasons and is facing a third straight second-place finish.

However, an improving City — a 2-1 winner over Aston Villa on Tuesday — is only six points back in third place after Arsenal's 13th draw of an inconsistent campaign.

The hosts went ahead through Jakub Kiwior's header at a free kick in the third

minute, only for Palace to reply when playmaker Eberechi Eze met a corner with a brilliantly taken downward volley that skimmed off the turf and flew in off the post in the 27th.

Leandro Trossard wriggled free in the area and scored with a deflected shot in the 42nd minute to restore Arsenal's lead. Mateta, a second-half substitute, had the final say, though, by capitalising on Saliba's poor pass and floating a shot over stranded goalkeeper David Raya from around 40 meters.

PALACE SWITCHES FOCUS TO THE FA CUP

Palace remained in 12th place and has little to play for in the Premier League. It is, however, heading into an FA Cup semifinal game against Aston Villa on Saturday in better heart.

"It's important to keep this energy and confidence for the semifinal on Saturday," Palace manager Oliver Glasner said.

"It was not our goal to decide the title, it was our goal to win the game. I think a draw is a very good result.



final. He had entered the match at halftime to replace defender David Alaba, who is also doubtful because of a muscle ailment.

"We'll see, but it's unlikely that they will be available on Saturday," Ancelotti said.

Madrid had demoralizing losses in both "clásicos" against Barcelona this season — 5-2 in the Spanish Super Cup final and 4-0 in their first league encounter at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

Güler scored the winner with a well-placed right-footed shot in the 21st minute at the Coliseum in Getafe.

"Fortunately, I scored the goal that gave us the three points," Güler said. "We knew it was going to be a tough match. It

streak for the Vigo team. Villarreal, winless in two matches, played a man down from the 37th after Eric Bailly was sent off with a straight red card.

WILLIAMS SCORES EARLY

Iñaki Williams scored five minutes into the match to give fourth-place Athletic Bilbao a 1-0 win over Las Palmas, helping the Basque Country club to open an eight-point gap above Villarreal, which remains with a game in hand.

Las Palmas, sitting in 18th place, was coming off two wins in a row after a 12-match winless streak in the league.

Alaves moved out of the relegation zone by beating ninth-place Real Sociedad 1-0 at home with a goal by Nahuel Tenaglia in the 65th.

AC Milan ruins Inter's treble bid with derby win to reach Italian Cup final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Milan

AC Milan has not achieved much this season — except when playing city rival Inter Milan.

Milan ruined Inter's bid for a treble and advanced to the Italian Cup final with a 3-0 derby win Wednesday courtesy of two goals from Luka Jovic.

It was Milan's third win over Inter this season, having also beaten the Nerazzurri in the Italian Super Cup final in January.

"It was a very important game for us. As you know we are not that good in Serie A. We had to show the quality today. We had to show the character," Jovic said. "And we showed it and we are going to Rome." And if Milan can win another trophy, coach Sergio Conceicao might have a chance at keeping his job — despite the seven-time European champion sitting ninth in Serie A.

Winning the Italian Cup — which carries a Europa League berth — could be Milan's only route to a spot in continental play for next season.

Milan advanced on 4-1 aggregate following a 1-1 first leg. Bologna brings a 3-0 lead over Empoli into the second leg of the other semifinal on Thursday.

The final is scheduled for May 14 in Rome. Inter pressed forward early on and Federico Dimarco struck the crossbar in the 23rd. But Jovic put Milan ahead 13

minutes later with a powerful header and then doubled the advantage from close range shortly after the break.

Tijjani Reijnders added another for Milan in the 85th by finishing off a full team move.

"We have a lot of belief," Reijnders said.

"We have difficulties in the league but we

If Milan can win another trophy, coach Sergio Conceicao might have a chance at keeping his job — despite the seven-time European champion sitting ninth in Serie A

know this is the fastest way to reach (Europe). And if we play like we did today we can win this trophy."

It was Inter's second straight loss after the Serie A leader fell 1-0 at Bologna on Sunday. Inter will play Barcelona in the Champions League semifinals.

JUVENTUS POSTS FIRST LOSS UNDER TUDOR

Juventus wasted a chance to move back into the Champions League places following a 1-0 loss at Parma in a rescheduled Serie A match.

Parma forward Mateo Pellegrino scored

with a header in first-half stoppage time. Juventus remained fifth, one point behind Bologna, with five rounds remaining. Making matters worse for Juventus was that center forward Dusan Vlahovic came off at halftime with an apparent thigh issue. Juventus was also in fifth place when it fired Thiago Motta last month and hired Igor Tudor as its new coach for the remainder of the season. It was Juventus' first loss under Tudor, following two wins and a draw.

Cristian Chivu took over as Parma coach in February and the team is on a six-game unbeaten run that also includes a 2-2 draw with Serie A leader Inter Milan this month.

Parma-Juventus was one of four matches postponed from Monday due to the death of Pope Francis. Each game was preceded by a moment of silence to mourn the pope, who died Monday at 88.

LAZIO BACK IN 6TH

Lazio leapfrogged city rival Roma and moved back into sixth place — level on points with Juventus — with a 2-0 win at 10-man Genoa.

Valentin Castellanos and Boulaye Dia scored for Lazio after Genoa defender Sebastian Otoa was shown a direct red card in his Serie A debut for pushing down Mattia Zaccagni.

Italian teenager Federico Cina wins ATP Masters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

Italian teenager Federico Cina picked up his second ATP Masters 1000 victory by defeating Coleman Wong in straight sets at the Madrid Open, while Gael Monfils became the oldest winner in the tournament's history. The 38-year-old Monfils rallied from a poor start to defeat qualifier Borna Gojo 1-6, 6-2, 6-4 for his first win in Madrid since 2022. The 42nd-ranked Monfils is a two-time quarterfinalist at the Masters 1000 clay-court event.

"At the beginning, he served one second serve," Monfils said of Gojo. "I think he had a 94 first-serve percentage, he played great. I (let the) storm pass, then different tactics. I served more with kick and tried to play a little bit different, maybe let him go and not do so much. At the end, just run, run to the ball. It's not a pretty win, but it's a win."

The 18-year-old Cina won 7-6 (5), 6-1 to back up his victory over current No. 70 Francisco Comesaña in Miami last month, which marked his ATP 1000 debut. He saved both break points he faced against Wong and finished with 19 winners. "Before the match I was a little bit tight but after a few games I started to feel good," said the 373rd-ranked Cina, a wild-card entry who will next face American Sebastian Korda.

"It is really special to win a match at this event." Monfils next meet seventh seed defending champion Andrey Rublev, who defeated Monfils two weeks ago in the round of 32 in Monte Carlo. Alexander Bublik beat Alex Michelsen 7-6 (2), 7-6 (4), while Comesaña got past Spaniard Pedro Martinez 6-4, 6-4 at the clay-court tournament.

Nuno Borges of Portugal rallied to defeat home-crowd favorite Pablo Carreno Busta 6-7 (7), 7-6 (3), 6-3, while Arthur Rinderknech defeated Roman Safiullin 7-6 (4), 6-1. Christopher O'Connell got past Camilo Ugo Carabelli 6-3, 6-4.

RETURNING MOTHERS

Belinda Bencic, who returned from maternity leave last October, defeated Zeynep Sonmez 6-0, 6-2 on the first birthday of her daughter, Bella. Three-time Madrid Open champion Petra Kvitova, who was back from her maternity leave in February, lost 6-4, 6-0 to Katie Volynets.

Anastasija Sevastova, who has played infrequently since giving birth in late 2022, defeated Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-4, 7-5. Emma Raducanu had her first win on outdoor clay since 2022, coming from a break down in both sets to beat Suzan Lamens 7-6 (4), 6-4.

The 2021 U.S. Open champion had missed most of the 2023 clay season because of wrist and ankle surgeries. She then cut short her 2024 season on the surface after losing in her Madrid opener.