

Bhimapur High School to get heritage institution tag

Grievance Cell to visit Brahmapur to address public demands: CM

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Sunday said that the Bhimapur Government Upgraded High School in Ganjam district would be included among Odisha's heritage schools.

Addressing the school's centenary celebrations, Majhi said the State Government was committed to strengthening both primary and higher education to achieve the vision of a prosperous Odisha by 2036 when the State would celebrate its centenary.

Paying tribute to the school's founder, late Bhagaban Panda, the Chief Minister said that since its inception on March 15, 1924, the school had been a beacon of knowledge in the remote region for over a century. He emphasised that Indian



education had traditionally thrived through the 'Guru-Shishya' tradition, which was disrupted during British rule with the introduction of a system designed mainly to create clerical manpower, ignoring character building and knowl-

edge pursuit. "Unfortunately, this colonial education model continued even after independence. Schools must now aim to produce responsible citizens who can contribute to building a strong society," he said.

Majhi credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for ushering in reforms in the education sector by introducing the New Education Policy (NEP) in 2020. "Sadly, the previous State Government did not implement the NEP for five

years. Our Government has now enforced it, paving the way for transformational changes," he said.

Highlighting new initiatives, the Chief Minister said pre-primary classes under 'Shishu Vatika' have been started in line with NEP-2020. Under the 'Nipun Odisha Mission,' measures have been taken to strengthen foundational literacy and numeracy skills among children, he added.

Taking a dig at the previous regime, Majhi said, "The so-called ST School initiative was a farce. Only 16 per cent of schools were provided internet connectivity, yet they were falsely portrayed as 'Digital Schools'. No substantial effort was made to ensure quality education."

The Chief Minister also announced that the 'Chief Minister's Grievance Cell' would soon visit Brahmapur to directly hear the grievances and demands of the people.

Lecture highlights humanitarian activism



And legal aid partnerships

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Member Justice Dr Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi on Saturday underscored the urgent need to strengthen humanitarian activism and legal aid partnerships to address the rising incidents of human rights violations.

Speaking as the chief guest at a lecture organised by the Ganjam District Advocates' Association at its temporary office in Brahmapur, Justice Sadangi said that despite in-

creasing violations, particularly among poor, marginalized, and neglected communities, silence and apathy continue to pose a grave threat to the foundations of democracy. He called upon the legal fraternity to proactively intervene in cases of human rights violations and ensure justice for vulnerable sections of society.

"Lawyers must prioritise action in cases involving the rights of the helpless and neglected. Their proactive role is essential for safeguarding democracy," Justice Sarangi said.

State Bar Association member Sanjit Kumar Panigrahi also addressed the gathering,

emphasising that the protection of fundamental human rights forms the cornerstone of governance systems worldwide. He noted that although the Indian Constitution accords highest priority to human rights, a large section of citizens remains unaware of their entitlements due to lack of awareness and education.

District Circuit Judge Rupshree Chowdhury, association vice-president TK Reddy, secretary T Venket Rao, joint secretary Asit Sabat and several other prominent lawyers were present at the event.

The programme was presided over by association president Manoj Patnaik.

Cong to continue fight for women's security

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Crimes against women and girls have become routine in Odisha from February 21 till now. More than 2,000 cases of crimes have been lodged in different police station of the State in the tenure of Chief Mohan Charan Majhi, said the Congress on Sunday.

The rape of a minor girl in Patapur in Ganjam district on April 27, the rape and murder of a six-year-old girl in the Disha industrial area of Angul district on in March and the gang-rape of a seven-year-old in the Hindol area in Dhenkanal district is the failure of the Mohan Majhi gov-

ernment, said Nagendra Kumar Pradhan, chairman of the committee formed by the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) to investigate into the crimes against women and girls.

Pradhan said that in the rule of the BJP, women and girls across the State are not safe. So, they think about how to ensure their security. As the Odisha Police has failed to take stringent action against the culprits, the latter have dared to commit such crimes. But the Congress would fight under the leadership of PCC president Bhakta Charan Das to provide justice to the victims, said Pradhan.

In city

Couple stabbed by unidentified miscreants

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A couple was brutally attacked by unidentified miscreants on Saturday night in the Saheed Nagar area of Bhubaneswar, leaving the duo grievously injured.

According to reports, unidentified men launched a sudden attack on the couple, stabbing the woman and severely assaulting her husband with sharp weapons before fleeing the scene.

Panicked onlookers then rushed to the aid of the couple and found the woman with stab wounds in her abdomen

and the man lying in a pool of blood. The injured couple was immediately rushed to the Capital Hospital, where they are currently undergoing treatment, as per the last reports.

Getting information, a police team arrived at the spot and began an investigation. However, the identities of both the attackers and the victims have not been ascertained as yet. Further, the motive behind the attack remains unclear, but police are trying to ascertain the circumstances leading to the assault.

Justice sought for murdered Ganjam girl

Compensation demanded

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Outrage grows in Odisha, following the tragic death of a four-year-old girl in Ganjam district. The child, daughter of Ashok Swain from Mahanala village, went missing from Khalinga village on April 25, 2025 and was found murdered at an abandoned Anganwadi Kendra the next day.

While police have registered a case under Patapura Police station case 229/2025, the lack of arrests has fueled accusations of negligence. A key de-

mand is the immediate provision of compensation to the victim's family. The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) in Ganjam, has been criticised for its inaction in processing compensation under the Odisha Victim Compensation Scheme, 2018.

Human rights activist Jayanta Kumar Das has petitioned the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to intervene. The petition emphasises the urgency of financial relief for the family, alongside demands for the swift prosecution of the culprits and accountability for police failures.

In city

Man thrashed to death by-in-laws' family

After attacking wife over marital dispute

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A domestic dispute took a violent turn on Saturday night at Gramadiha village under the Infovalley police station, in which one person died and two others were critically injured.

According to sources, the incident took place at the residence of one Pramod Jena when his son-in-law,

Dibakar, arrived at late night and attacked his wife Lakshmi Priya, with a sharp weapon following a heated argument. Laxmi Priya sustained grievous injuries in the attack.

Upon witnessing his daughter being attacked, Pramod and his son retaliated by confronting Dibakar. In the ensuing scuffle, Dibakar sustained serious injuries. Despite efforts to save him, Dibakar succumbed to the injuries on the spot.

Following the violent incident, both Lakshmi Priya and her father, Pramod, were severely injured. They were rushed to AIIMS Bhubaneswar, where they are currently admitted in critical condition.

Eyewitnesses said Dibakar was in an inebriated condition. Further, they also added that matrimonial disputes between the husband and wife were ongoing for a while.

"Pramod daughter had returned to her maternal home after suffering repeated

abuses from Dibakar. Last night, he entered Pramod's residence and started attacking his wife and mother-in-law with a sharp weapon, following which a confrontation ensued," said Gramadiha Sarpanch Sudhanshu Shekhar Moharana.

Getting information, Infovalley police and Bhubaneswar Zone-3 ACP Tapas Pradhan rushed to the spot and began an investigation. Statements from key witnesses, including family members and neighbours, were recorded.

In Ganjam

2 brothers killed; bodies set on fire

Deceased had criminal records; old enmity suspected

PNS ■ Brahmapur

Two brothers of Sumandal village under the Beguniapada police station in Ganjam district were brutally killed and later their bodies were set on fire on Saturday night.

The incident was suspected by police to be fallout of old enmity.

According to reports, the

victims were identified as Sanjay Barik and his brother Ajay. Both brothers were allegedly involved in several criminal cases in the past and were known figures in the local area.

Police sources said that the attack was likely motivated by long-standing personal rivalry. The assailants attacked the two brothers at Shalaban village. After the gruesome murders, the assailants took the bodies to a deserted area near village, where they attempted to destroy evidence

by setting their bodies on fire.

Locals alerted the police after spotting the burnt remains, following which senior police officials rushed to the spot. The area has since been cordoned off and investigation was underway to identify and nab those responsible.

Police said that multiple angles, including past criminal disputes and personal enmity, are being thoroughly probed. "We are taking this case very seriously. Teams have been deployed to collect

evidence and track down the culprits. The victims' history of involvement in criminal activities may have played a role in the motive behind their murder," a senior officer said.

The incident has left residents of both Shalaban and Sumandal villages in fear and shock. Additional police forces have been deployed in the region to prevent any further unrest.

Meanwhile, the bodies have been sent for postmortem to ascertain the exact cause and timing of death.

In State

Technical glitches hit Ayushman Bharat rollout

Healthcare Providers Assn submitted memo to govt for sorting out issues

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Earlier this month, the Odisha government began the transition process of eligible health card beneficiaries of the State to the Ayushman Bharat scheme from the Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY).

Overseen by Union Health Minister JP Nadda, the rollout of the BJP government's flagship scheme ensures Rs 5 lakh annual health coverage per family, with an additional Rs 5 lakh for women beneficiaries, effectively expanding the benefits compared to BSKY.

However, the transition is reportedly not on a smooth

sail, with multiple software glitches reportedly hampering the process.

From the beneficiary migration data to fresh registrations, several software-related hurdles are threatening a delay in the implementation of the Ayushman Bharat scheme, according to State Secretary of the All India Healthcare Providers Association Nilanjana Mukherjee.

She said that the mandatory requirement of doctor-patient photographs has been met with resistance from medical professionals.

Additionally, the OTP generation time during patient registration, which has recently been reduced to 10 minutes, has created operational bottlenecks.

"Hospitals across the State are grappling with several technical problems that are



affecting the effective execution of the scheme. Despite 78% of Odisha's population being eligible beneficiaries, compared to the national average of 37%, the software is struggling to handle individual beneficiary cards under Ayushman Bharat."

She also added that the new scheme's individual card basis contrasts with the Biju

Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY), which operated on a per-family card system, lengthening processing and registrations.

Mukherjee also raised another major concern as the absence of a pre-approval or pre-authorisation mechanism under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, a feature that was available in BSKY. The mecha-

nism will reportedly reduce delays in treatment and processing, she added.

Odisha's hospitals also face restrictions on implant costs under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, stated sources.

Doctors need to carefully assess which pacemakers or spinal implants to use, as price caps vary and not all options are viable under the scheme's

current limitations. As such, these constraints are making it difficult for hospitals to deliver optimal patient care, even though treatments themselves are not being delayed.

"Although critical care is being provided without delay, the registration and re-registration process for patients is significantly delayed. Priority should be given to finding ways to expedite this process," said Mukherjee.

To address these challenges, the All India Healthcare Providers Association has submitted a memorandum to the State government. The aim is to initiate dialogue and find sustainable solutions for the smooth functioning of the Ayushman Bharat scheme in Odisha.

Meanwhile, a response from the State government regarding the memorandum is awaited.

Under Amrit scheme Railways to redevelop key KBK stations

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Indian Railways on Thursday announced the launch of a comprehensive station redevelopment drive under the Amrit Bharat Station scheme. The initiative targets key stations in the KBK (Kalahandi-Balangir-Koraput) region, aiming to enhance passenger experience and catalyse local development.

The scheme includes the re-development of stations at Balangir, Titlagarh, Kantabanji, Kesinga, Bhawanipatna, Rayagada, Muniguda, Koraput, Jeypore, Damanjodi, Harishankar Road, Khariar Road and Gunupur.

In Balangir Kid dies, parents hurt as two-wheeler hits truck

PNS ■ Balangir

A four-year-old boy lost his life while three others, including his parents, sustained critical injuries after their two-wheeler rammed into a truck on the Ghasian-Larambha road near Patnagarh in Balangir district on Sunday.

Sources said that the toddler, identified as Jeet Bariha of Bilaisathi village, was seated at the front of a two-wheeler being driven by his elder sister-in-law, whereas his parents were in the backseat.

The four of them were on their way to a marriage ceremony at Sakripani village when their two-wheeler crashed into a stationary

truck. The impact was so severe that the boy was flung out of the vehicle. He died on the spot.

Jeet's parents and his sister-in-law sustained critical injuries. Some locals rushed to the scene and immediately rescued the injured family members and sent them to a hospital at Ghassian. The injured were subsequently referred to the Bhima Bhoi Medical College Hospital in Balangir.

Getting information, the Larambha Police reached the accident site and launched an investigation into the circumstances leading to the mishap. Preliminary findings suggest that negligence and lack of visibility might have led to the crash.

Woman gang-raped, stabbed in Jaipur

Accused at large

PNS ■ Jaipur

In a shocking incident, a working woman was allegedly abducted, tied up, and brutally gang-raped by a group of youths in Jaipur town area.

Even though the incident took place on the night of April 22, it came to light on April 26.

According to the victim's complaint, she was waiting for a vehicle to go home at Gandhi Chhak when an auto driver offered to drop her near her house. However, the auto driver and two youths already inside the vehicle had other intentions. They took her to

a deserted place on the outskirts of the town, where three more drunken youths were waiting. The woman was allegedly raped, beaten, and stabbed with a knife. The victim, somehow, managed to escape and sought help from a nearby resident, who informed her family.

She was admitted to Jaipur District Headquarters Hospital in a critical condition with severe injuries on her back, hands, and other parts of her body. The police have registered a case and initiated an investigation. The accused still remain at large. The incident has sparked widespread outrage in Jaipur.

crore), Balangir (Rs 18.01 crore), and Jeypore (Rs 17.94 crore). Gunupur station has also been included, with detailed project estimates under finalisation. The project will improve station access, circulation areas, and integrate urban mobility through re-designed approach roads and designated parking zones. High-speed Wi-Fi, better signage, and security features are also planned.

Once implemented, the revamped stations are expected to boost tourism, local commerce, and employment in the underdeveloped KBK belt. Officials stated that construction would be carried out in phases with time-bound targets.

Lakhs gulped in MUKTA projects in Khariar

Probe on after allegations by Adivasi Mahasangha

AJIT PANDA ■ Nuapada

Following allegations of large-scale misappropriation of development funds under the MUKTA scheme in Khariar Notified Area Council (NAC), the Nuapada district administration has launched a formal inquiry.

The complaint was lodged by Odisha Adivasi Mahasangha president Balkrishna Sabar, who alleged that funds amounting to several lakhs had been siphoned off by Khariar NAC officials and their political masters for



works that were either not executed or only partially completed.

Sabar citing examples said, "Information obtained through the Right to Information (RTI) Act, reveals that Rs 5.30 lakh was shown as spent

on paving a road with paver blocks from Bhibe House to Thakurani Temple in Ward No.11, but no such work had been carried out. Similar irregularities in the construction of a boundary wall at the Girls' Primary School and sev-

eral other development projects are found."

Acting on the complaint, the district Collector constituted a three-member inquiry team comprising the Executive Officer and Executive Engineer of DRDA, along with

Gross negligence Khushi napkins lie scattered in Bhadrak school

Thanks to their non-distribution among students

PNS ■ Bhadrak

Presenting a scene of alleged gross negligence and loss of lakhs of funds to the State exchequer, hundreds of sanitary napkins, once meant to bring comfort and dignity to adolescent girls under the state's 'Khushi' scheme, now lie scattered and left to rot across various distribution centres in Odisha.

One such site at the Government Upper Primary School in Bankasahi of Bhadrak, where countless numbers of unused sanitary napkin packets lay across classrooms, corridors, and even the roof of the school, turning the premises into an unauthorised dump yard.

The scheme, launched in 2018 by the then-BJD government, was intended to provide free sanitary napkins to girl students from Class 6 to 12. Ironically, it was meant to



spread 'Khushi' ('happiness'), but instead ended up becoming a source of a looming health crisis for nearby residents.

"Stacks of sanitary napkins worth lakhs of rupees are rotting away, contaminating the school environment and creating health hazards. I have noticed that no authority is taking any measures to clean up the place, which is further aggravating the situation," said Jagabandhu Behera, a local resident.

Further, local residents also alleged that a major cause of these napkins going to waste was their poor quality

and lack of awareness. "The sanitary napkins that were received here were almost of no use; so neither the teachers nor the women of the region accepted them. However, the current government should account for and hold the people responsible for such a loss," said Chaitani Khillar, another local.

The issue has sparked a blame game between the Education and Health and Family Welfare departments. Bhadrak Block Education Officer Chakradhar Mallik pointed fingers at the Health department, claiming that more napkins than required were sup-

plied, leading to wastage.

"We found the place covered in sanitary napkins, with miscreants having stolen the cardboard boxes. We have informed the Health department, and they have assured us to dispose of them," he said.

In contrast, Sudhanshu Sekhar Bala, Bhadrak's Chief District Medical Officer, countered that the fault lay in non-distribution.

"The concerned officials will have to explain to us in writing why the napkins were never distributed," he stated, adding that the District Education Officer would be informed and questioned.

To address forest clearance bottlenecks 1st high-level weekly review meet takes up 26 projects

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

In a significant move to accelerate the progress of crucial developmental projects in Odisha, the State Government has initiated a high-level weekly review mechanism to address bottlenecks in forest land clearance.

Recognising the imperative for seamless coordination between various departments of Government and the Department of Forest, Environment and Climate Change, the first such review meeting was held

under Chairmanship of the Additional Chief Secretary, Forest, Environment and Climate Change, Satyabrata Sahu.

This was organised to make arrangements for the speedy and effective resolution of various issues related to clearance of forest land in planned projects with the concerned departments.

The meeting saw detailed discussions on a total of 26 projects spanning multiple sectors. These included six projects from the National Highways Authority of India

(NHAI), highlighting the focus on infrastructure development.

Furthermore, one project each from the Gas Authority of India (GAIL) and the Indian Oil Corporation (IOCL) were reviewed, indicating the importance of facilitating energy sector initiatives.

The State government's focus on education was evident with eight Ekalabya Model Residential School projects coming under scrutiny.

Additionally, three projects from the Water Resources Department and seven from the

Odisha Power Transmission Corporation Department were discussed, emphasizing the State's commitment to strengthening essential public services.

During the meeting, the progress of each of these 26 projects was thoroughly examined, and the specific challenges hindering the final approval of forest land were identified. Crucially, a clear timeframe was established for resolving these issues, signalling a proactive and target-oriented approach.

4 minors take watery grave in N'garh, Cuttack

PNS ■ Nayagarh / Cuttack

Three young boys met a watery grave at Godibida village under Daspalla Police Station limits in Nayagarh district, where they drowned in a pond while playing on Sunday morning, said reports.

The deceased were identified as 9-year-old Shubha Khilar from Bahadakhala Poda Sahi, Umakant Nayak, and Ritesh Pradhan, both 11 years old, from Khamlada village under Nuagaon Police Station limits.

According to local sources, the unprecedented drowning happened when the three friends had gone for a bath in a local pond seeking respite from the summer heat. The exact cause and circumstances of their drowning are not known immediately.

However, locals added that the three may have ventured into deeper waters, causing them to lose control and tragically drown thereafter. Hearing their wails, people nearby rushed into the pond and tried to rescue them.

the Assistant Engineer of CBDA. The team conducted physical verification of the alleged work sites on Friday.

"As the complainant, I was asked to be present during the verification. I found that many of the works were done in a haphazard manner, lacking both administrative approval and technical sanction from the competent authorities," Sabar stated. "Moreover, most of the files related to these works were processed in the engineering section instead of the development section, which is against the standard practice," he added. The inquiry team has assured Sabar that a detailed report will be submitted to the district Collector within 15 days for necessary action.

Maoist hideout busted in Boudh



Huge cache of explosives seized

PNS ■ Boudh

Security forces busted a Maoist hideout near Kanagan village in Boudh district on Saturday and seized explosives and other articles from the spot.

Acting on reliable intelligence inputs, a joint team comprising the Special Operations Group (SOG), District

Voluntary Force (DVF) launched a combing operation in the Matakupa protected forest under the Mannunda police station in the district.

Led by the Superintendent of Police (SP), the raid yielded a cache of explosives, including 36 detonators, 33 gelatin sticks, Maoist uniforms and propaganda materials. Authorities confirmed the seizure, terming it a major achievement in curbing Maoist activities in the region.

Late scribe Ratikant paid glowing tributes

Politicians, journalists, prominent figures of society join

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A special memorial service was held on Saturday to pay emotional tributes to veteran journalist Ratikant Mohanty, who passed away recently.

Many politicians, newspaper editors, journalists and prominent figures from various sections of society paid their last respects.

The memorial service, held at the Geet Govinda Sadan in Bhubaneswar, was inaugurated by Assembly Speaker Surma Padhy, former Finance Minister Prafulla Ghadai, Prasanna Acharya, Panchanan Kanungo and senior Congress leader Niranjan Patnaik by lighting the lamp.

In her tribute, Speaker Padhi said that Mohanty was a source of inspiration for many. He held her hand and guided her on how to rise in politics, saying that his re-



porting style was the most unique and different. He earned a great reputation as an honest, impartial and dedicated journalist. "If we can follow the path shown by him, that will be the best tribute to him," said Padhi. Along with this, she said that the Assembly will consider with sympathy the suggestions given by the Ratikant Memorial Committee to preserve the memory of Ratikant Bhai forever.

Former Finance Minister Ghadai said that Ratkant Babu had established himself as a very soft-spoken, unassuming and honest journalist. During Biju Patnaik's rule, Ratkant had a lot of influence in politics as well as in the ad-

ministrative sphere. Not only that, he had good relations with Chief Ministers like Janaki Ballav Patnaik, Hemanand Biswal and Giridhar Gamang, but he never asked anyone for anything for himself, said Ghadai, adding that this demonstrated his greatness.

Mohanty had been a journalist for four decades. His passing away is an irreparable loss to Odisha journalism, said senior Congress leader Niranjan Patnaik.

"I was very close to Ratikant. He could have asked for something for himself if he wanted. But he never asked for anything," said former Minister Srikant Jena.

The memorial service, con-

ducted by Ratikant Memorial Committee chairman Rabi Das and secretary Prabhukalyan Mohanty, was attended by Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan, Pradesh Congress Committee president Bhakta Charan Das, former Minister Debi Prasad Mishra, Atanu Sabayasachi Nayak, Arun Kumar Sahu, Sanjay Das Burma, Bijay Nayak, Anant Jena, Sudarshan Das, Minati Singh, Manmath Raut, BJP leader Golak Mohapatra, CPI(M) State general secretary Suresh Panigrahi, among others. On the occasion, a commemorative book was released and a documentary film on Mohanty's life was screened.

B'pur's Thakurani Yatra displays traditional arts

PNS ■ Brahmapur

The traditional arts and crafts have come alive in Brahmapur during the ongoing biennial Budhi Thakurani Yatra, with chariots of the deity and storytelling arts being exhibited in various locations across the Silk City.

The 25-day-long festival, which started on April 3, will end on April 28 with the return of Maa Budhi Thakurani, the presiding deity of the Silk City, to Her temple.

Thakurani Yatra is celebrated to mark the visit of the goddess to her father's house at Desibehera Street.

With dazzling lights and decorated pandals, the chariots of deities like Sri Ram, Laxman, Parsuram, Jwalamukhi, Mahalaxmi, etc, and the storytelling arts are the major attractions for visitors during the festival.

Some of the chariots, like 'Boita' (boat used by Odias in ancient times), 'Doli' (swing) and 'Binchhana' (fans), are



also displaced in various places.

A total of 28 chariots were set up in the city on the occasion.

"The chariot of 'Boita' (Boita Rath), which has been placed at Bachuwari street, represents the rich maritime activities of ancient Odisha and also Btahmapur as the major business hub of the Ztate," said retired history professor Bhagaban Sahu.

the organisers of the chariot at Kalu Patra Sahi here. He said the idol was made up of neem wood by one of the artists from Manjusha in Andhra Pradesh.

"Before the festival, we paint the idol to make it bright. Our budget to display with illumination is around Rs 10 lakh, which is collected as a donation," he added.

Similarly, the story of Sri Rama Leela was displayed in the art form at the Coconut market. This story of Ram is displayed in pictures in 113 frames.

"We have organised this storytelling painting for over 70 years," said Tutu Gouda of the Coconut Market Association.

The crafts and the storytelling arts of Sri Rama in 'Thakurani Yatra' have been depicting the marvellous art and culture of Odisha for a long time," said former principal of Government Art and Craft College, Khallikote, PK Das.

India emerges as global space leader: PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Noting that India has become a global space power, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the country is leading the most cost-effective but successful space programme in the entire world and is going to scale new heights in the future.

Many youth are attaining new milestones in the field of space startups, Modi said, adding 10 years ago, there was only one company, but today there are more than 325 space startups working in the country.

In his monthly radio broadcast ‘Mann Ki Baat’, he also paid tributes to former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief K Kasturirangan, who passed away last week.

“Two days ago we lost the country’s great scientist Dr K Kasturirangan ji. Whenever I met Kasturirangan ji, we discussed topics like the talent of Indian youth, modern education, Space-Science. His contribution in lending newer heights to science, education and India’s space programme shall always be remembered. ISRO attained a new identity under his leadership,” he said.

The space programmes that moved forward under his guidance gave global recognition to India’s efforts, Modi said. Many of the satellites that India uses today were launched under the supervision of Dr Kasturirangan, he said.

“There was one more special facet to his personality, which the younger generation can learn from. He always accorded

importance to innovation. The vision of learning, knowing and doing something new is very inspiring,” Modi said.

The prime minister said Kasturirangan also played a major role in formulating the new National Education Policy of the country.

Kasturirangan came up with the idea of “forward looking” education according to the modern needs of the 21st century, Modi said. “His selfless service to the country and contribution to nation building will always be remembered. Very humbly, I pay my tribute to Dr K Kasturirangan,” he said. Noting that April marks 50 years of the launch of the Aryabhata Satellite, Modi said, “Today, when we look back and remember this journey of 50 years, we realise how far we have come. This flight of India’s dreams in space once commenced with just conviction.

Some young scientists with the passion to do something for the nation - they neither had the modern resources like today, nor the access to world technology as such. If at all they had anything, it was talent, dedication, hard work and the passion to do something for the country.”

“You must have seen pictures of our scientists carrying critical equipment themselves on bullock carts and bicycles. It is the result of that very dedication and spirit of service to the nation that so much has changed today,” he said.

Modi pointed out that India has become a global space power, pointing “We have created a record by launching 104 satellites simultaneously. We have become the first country to reach the South Pole of the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi

FILE PHOTO

Moon. India has launched the Mars Orbiter Mission and we have reached pretty close to the Sun through the Aditya - L1 Mission,” he said.

Today, India is leading the most cost-effective but successful space programme in the entire world, he pointed out.

Many countries of the world take help from ISRO for their satellites and space missions, Modi said. “When we see a satellite launch by ISRO, we are filled with

pride. I had a similar feeling when I witnessed the launch of PSLV-C-23 in 2014. I was also present at the ISRO Centre in Bengaluru during the landing of Chandrayaan-2 in 2019. At that time Chandrayaan failed to achieve the expected success, it was a very difficult time for the scientists.

But I could see with my own eyes the patience of the scientists and their zeal to achieve something,” he said. And a few

years later, the whole world too noticed how the same scientists made Chandrayaan-3 a success, the Prime Minister added. Noting that India has opened her space sector for the private sector as well, Modi said today many youth are attaining new milestones in the field of space startups.

“The times to come are ushering in a lot of new possibilities in Space. India is going to scale new heights. The country is busy preparing for many important missions like Gaganyaan, SpaDeX and Chandrayaan-4. We are also working on the Venus Orbiter Mission and Mars Lander Mission,” he said. Indian space scientists are going to fill the people of the country with new pride through their innovations, Modi said.

Recalling the ‘Champran Satyagrah’, Modi said it was the first big experiment by Babu in India. “The entire British rule was shaken by Babu’s Satyagraha. The British had to suspend the law that forced farmers to cultivate indigo.

This was a victory that infused new confidence in the freedom struggle. All of you must be aware that another son of Bihar also contributed a lot to this Satyagraha, who became the first President of the country after Independence. The great personality was Dr Rajendra Prasad. He also wrote a book on the ‘Champran Satyagraha’, Modi said.

Many more indelible chapters of the freedom struggle are associated with April itself, he said. “Gandhiji’s ‘Dandi March’ culminated on the 6th of April itself. This march which commenced on the 12th of

March and continued for 24 days had shaken the British. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre took place in April itself. The marks of this blood stained history are still present on the soil of Punjab,” Modi said.

He said that in a few days, on May 10, the anniversary of the first freedom struggle would also be there. The spark that arose in that first battle for freedom, later became a torch for millions of freedom fighters, Modi said.

“On April 26, we observed the death anniversary of the great hero of the 1857 revolution, Babu Veer Kunwar Singh. The entire country derives inspiration from this great freedom fighter of Bihar. We have to keep alive the immortal inspirations of lakhs of such freedom fighters,” he said.

The energy received from them provides renewed strength to our resolve of ‘Amrit Kaal’, Modi added. He said the biggest strength of the country is our 140 crore citizens, their capability, their will power, and when crores of people join a campaign together, its impact is huge.

He cited the example of the ‘Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam’ campaign and pointed out that on the 5th of June, on ‘World Environment Day’, this campaign is completing one year.

“During this one year, under this campaign, more than 140 crore trees have been planted in the name of the mother across the country. Observing this initiative of India, people outside the country have also planted trees in the name of their mother,” he said. In his broadcast, Modi also lauded how in Wayanad, saffron is not being grown in any field or soil but with the help of aeroponics technique.



Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan paying tribute to former ISRO chief K Kasturirangan at Raman Research Institute in Bengaluru

PTI

Dharmendra Pradhan pays tribute to K Kasturirangan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday paid homage to former ISRO chief K Kasturirangan, who died on April 25, in Bengaluru, saying he was one of the brightest stars of the scientific and academic community.

“Paid homage to the mortal remains of Dr K Kasturirangan ji at Raman Research Institute, Bengaluru. One of the brightest stars of the scientific and academic community, Kasturirangan ji leaves behind an unparalleled legacy.

“May his soul attain sadgati. Pray to Almighty to grant solace to the bereaved family,” Pradhan wrote on social media and shared pictures.

Kasturirangan, who led the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for nearly a decade and was the man behind the reforms proposed in the new National

Education Policy (NEP), passed away at the age of 84 in Bengaluru. His mortal remains, wrapped in the national flag, were kept at the Raman Research Institute (RRI) for the public and well-wishers to pay their last respects.

His last rites will be conducted with full state honours. Pradhan shared a heartfelt post for Kasturirangan on social media on Friday, saying the space scientist was “more than a mentor” for him.

“I am deeply heartbroken by the passing of Padma Vibhushan Dr K Kasturirangan ji. His loss is not only a profound one for the global scientific and academic community, but an intensely personal one for me.

“To me, he was far more than a mentor — he was a guiding light, a wellspring of wisdom, compassion, and quiet strength. I consider myself truly fortunate to have received his affection, blessings and guidance over the years,” the minister wrote.

509 Pakistanis leave India after notice

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

As many as 509 Pakistani nationals, including nine diplomats and officials, left India in three days beginning Friday through the Attari-Wagah border point as the exit deadline for the 12 categories of short-term visa holders of the neighbouring nation ended Sunday, officials said.

A total of 745 Indians, including 14 diplomats and officials, have returned from Pakistan through the international border crossing located in Punjab.

The ‘Leave India’ notice to the Pakistani nationals was issued by the government after 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed by Pakistan-linked terrorists at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir on April 22. Officials said that altogether 237 Pakistani nationals, including nine diplomats and officials, left India through the Attari-Wagah border post on Sunday, 81 Pakistani nationals left on April 26 and 191 on April 25.

Similarly, 116 Indians, including one diplomat, returned from Pakistan on Sunday through the international land border crossing, 342 Indians, including 13 diplomats and officials, came back from Pakistan on April 26 and 287 Indians crossed over on April 25, officials said.

Some of the Pakistanis might have left India through airports too, they said, pointing out that since India does not have direct air connectivity with Pakistan, they might have left for other countries. The deadline for exiting India for those holding SAARC visas was April 26. For those carrying medical visas, the deadline is April 29.

The 12 categories of visas whose holders have to leave India by Sunday are — visa on arrival, business, film, journalist, transit, conference, mountaineering, student, visitor, group tourist, pilgrim and group pilgrim.

Three Defence or Military, Naval and Air Advisors in the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi have been declared Persona Non Grata and they

were given one week to leave India. Five support staff of these defence attaches were also asked to leave India. India has also withdrawn its defence attache from the Indian High Commission in Islamabad.

However, those having long-term and diplomatic or official visas were exempted from the ‘Leave-India’ order.

At the Attari border in Amritsar district, vehicles queued up as Pakistani nationals hurried to cross over to their country. Many Indians came to bid farewell to their relatives, the pain of separation evident on their faces.

Sarita and her family had come to India for a kin’s wedding set for April 29. “We came to India after nine years.”

Besides, 438 Pakistani nationals are in the foreign countries on long-term visas and they include Hindus who have applied for Indian citizenship

She, her brother and her father are Pakistanis while her mother is an Indian national. “They (the authorities at Attari) are telling us they will not allow my mother to go along. My parents got married in 1991. They are saying Indian passport holders will not be allowed,” she said, crying bitterly.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said all Pakistanis have been accounted for and arrangements are being made to deport the people whose visas have been revoked as per the Centre’s directives.

State minister Yogesh Kadam on Saturday said the 1,000 Pakistani nationals with short-term visas have been asked to leave India.

Around 5,050 Pakistani citizens have been living in Maharashtra and most of them are on long-term visas, officials said. The Bihar government said that all Pakistani nationals, who had been to the state in the recent past, have left well

ahead of the April 27 deadline.

In the southern state of Telangana, police chief Jitender cited official records to say that as many as 208 Pakistani nationals were staying in the state, mostly in Hyderabad. Among them, 156 hold long-term visas, 13 short-term visas and 39 were with the travel document for medical and business purposes.

There were 104 Pakistani nationals in the southern coastal state of Kerala, of whom 99 were on long-term visas. The remaining five, who were on either tourist or medical visas, have left the country. Central India’s Madhya Pradesh had around 228 visiting Pakistani nationals, many of whom have left the country already, officials said.

On the other hand, around 12 Pakistanis have been identified in Odisha and all of them have been asked to follow the deadline set for them to leave the country. Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has said three Pakistani nationals, who were in the state on short-term visas, have been asked to leave.

Seven Pakistanis were in Gujarat on short-term visas — five in Ahmedabad and one each in Bharuch and Vadodara. They have either left India or are leaving by Sunday, officials said.

Besides, 438 Pakistani nationals are in the western state on long-term visas and they include Hindus who have applied for Indian citizenship.

In the north, Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police Prashant Kumar said on Saturday that the process of sending back all categories of Pakistani citizens visiting the state who have been ordered to leave India has been completed.

One Pakistani national is still in the state and he will depart for Pakistan on April 30, the DGP said.

As many as 19 Pakistani nationals staying in Bihar with short-term visas have left the country.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday called up the chief ministers of all states and asked them to ensure that no Pakistani stays in India beyond the deadline set for leaving the country.

PM Modi to inaugurate first WAVES summit in Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the first World Audio Visual and Entertainment Summit (WAVES) in Mumbai on Thursday, a four-day event that will bring together the entire spectrum of the media and entertainment industry.

The prime minister is also expected to interact with top leaders of the media and entertainment industry during the summit, which is also aimed at giving a boost to the creator’s economy taking shape across the world.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw will also address the inaugural session of the summit, which is expected to witness participation from top actors such as Amitabh Bachchan, Rajinikanth, Mohanlal, Hema Malini, and Chiranjeevi, among others.

The summit will feature theme-based plenaries and discussions aimed at shaping the future of the audio-visual industry in India and beyond.

The first two days will focus on cinema, filmmaking, and marketing, while the next two days will witness business meetings and participation from the general public.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is expected to chair the Global Media Dialogue which will see participation from ministers, leaders of the media industry and policymakers from across the world.

Mumbai is expected to be the permanent venue of the WAVES summit, billed as the biggest gathering of the media and entertainment industry, similar to what World Economic Forum meeting at Davos is for the business and economy sectors, officials said.

IIT-Madras non-destructive evaluation centre grows

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

From sensors detecting leaks in pipelines, tanks, bridges and dams without tearing those down to robots for ending manual scavenging — IIT-Madras has established itself as a global centre of excellence for developing disruptive material testing technology.

“Non Destructive Evaluation” (NDE) is the broad name given to the field of testing and analysis used by industry to characterise components or structures for indicators of performance degradation, without causing damage to the original part.

The “NDE 5.0 — Industrial Assets and Process Management CoE (CNDE)” at IIT-Madras is developing advanced inspection solutions using X-rays, infrared thermography, lasers, ultrasonics, microwave, terahertz and eddy currents, leveraging industry tools in robotics, drones, AI, Machine Learning, virtual reality, distributed ledgers, hyperspectral imaging and quantum computing.

Krishnan Balasubramanian, Chair Professor, IIT-Madras, said that the centre of excellence has a team of internationally acclaimed professors and researchers who have executed projects with a cumulative value over ₹200 crore, attracted industry funding in excess of ₹ 50 crore and CSR funding of ₹10 crore for

socially-relevant projects. “The research undertaken by this team has already led to 15 IIT Madras-incubated startups with a combined valuation in excess of ₹2,000 crore.

“The vision is to carry out cutting-edge research on asset integrity platforms for society and industry validated and accepted as benchmarks that can be commercialised worldwide,” he said.

Balasubramanian also underlined that technologies from this CoE impact the efficiency of industry operations and increase the availability and safety of industrial and infrastructural assets.

“The key objectives of this CoE include impacting industries by helping them reduce operating costs by 40 per cent, decrease failure risk, improve availability and uptime by 20 per cent and extend as well as maximise asset life safety,” he added.

“The country has the second-longest road network in the world (6 million km) and the Indian Railways is one of the largest rail networks in the world under one management. The ports handle 95 per cent of its international trade in and out of India.

“The country is currently the fourth largest consumer of energy globally after the US, China and Russia and, hence, has over 40,000 km of cross-country pipelines and underground oil reserve storage facilities,” he said.



Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna being greeted by Supreme Court Bar Association President Kapil Sibal before the start of a friendly cricket match between CJI XI and SCBA-XI at Modern School Cricket Ground in New Delhi on Sunday

PTI

CM Yogi Adityanath directs timely completion of Ganga Expressway

SAJID KHAN ■ Shahjahanpur

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has issued firm instructions to officials to complete the construction of the ambitious Ganga Expressway project by November this year, emphasising that there should be no compromise on quality or deadlines.

The directive came during his visit to the expressway site on Sunday, where he personally reviewed preparations for a significant upcoming event - the first-ever night landing of fighter aircraft on an expressway airstrip in India. Chief Minister Yogi's helicopter landed at 11:56 AM on a helipad constructed over the expressway near Jalalabad. Upon arrival, he boarded a vehicle and inspected approximately 500 meters of the newly developed 3.5-kilometer-long airstrip. The inspection was carried out meticulously, with a focus on assessing the surface readiness, lighting systems, and overall infrastructure essential for safe aircraft operations.

After the inspection, the Chief Minister moved to a secure facility (safe room) where he held a detailed meeting with administrative officers, representatives from the Uttar Pradesh Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEI-



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath address during inspection of the Ganga Expressway construction in Jalalabad

DA), and officials from the construction companies involved in the project. During the review, he was briefed on the pace of work and the current status of different segments of the expressway.

Highlighting the importance of the Ganga Expressway for Uttar Pradesh's eco-

nomie growth and strategic connectivity, Yogi Adityanath stressed that the project must be completed within the stipulated time frame. He further reviewed the elaborate preparations underway for the landing exercises by the Indian Air Force, particularly focusing on night operations

- a first for India's expressways.

He directed that all tasks related to the airstrip and supporting infrastructure should be completed on priority and that utmost attention should be given to safety and security measures. The Chief Minister also sought details about emergency response mechanisms, lighting installations, and animal control measures to prevent any untoward incidents during the landings.

Officials informed the Chief Minister that the preparations had been completed. The night landing exercise is scheduled for May 2, while daytime landings will take place on May 3. Senior Indian Air Force officers have been supervising the arrangements to ensure flawless execution of the event.

To create a safe operational environment, a five-kilometer radius around the airstrip has been declared a 'No-Flying Zone' for civilian aircraft and drones. Additionally, iron fencing has been erected around the airstrip to prevent animals from straying onto the runway, further strengthening safety protocols.

The 594-kilometer-long Ganga Expressway is one of the flagship infrastructure projects of the Uttar Pradesh government, aimed at enhancing connectivity between the western and eastern parts of the state.

China unlikely to affect India-Pakistan tensions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Guwahati

China is unlikely to get directly involved in the "instability" between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack, due to the current geopolitical scenario and tariff-related "complexities", a former Indian Army commander has said.

He, however, also underscored that China's friendship with Pakistan is a known fact.

"Post the Galwan 2020 incident, after a lot of consultations and deliberations between the two countries, the stand-off at the last of the friction points has been resolved," former Eastern Command chief Lt Gen (retd) Rana Pratap Kalita said.

A "process of normalisation" has taken place after resolution of the last areas of conflict and bilateral mechanism has picked up, including talks to start direct flights and resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, he said.

Kalita also pointed out that both countries face hiked trade tariffs imposed by the US, which also impacts the global economy. With India and China being manufacturing countries as well as major consumption markets, the impact of change in tariffs is bound to be felt more, he said.

"Seeing these complexities and geopolitical developments as well, whether there will be any direct manifestation of the Chinese towards the instability caused by the Pahalgam incident is difficult to pre-

dict at the moment. But as of now, I don't see them getting directly involved," the former army commander said.

"The vulnerability of the sea link with Pakistan is known. The importance of access to the Arabian Sea through Pakistan for China is also a known fact," Kalita added.

On vulnerability along the Bangladesh border, he said it remains and "more so after the change of government in Bangladesh". "After the Sheikh Hasina government was deposed, we have seen that there is a rising anti-India feeling in Bangladesh, which is being fueled by religious fundamentalists," he said.

The release of leaders of terror groups like Ansarul Bangla from jail after the caretaker government came into power in Bangladesh has also "collectively added to the rise of the anti-India feeling," he said.

The visit by senior Pakistan military officers, "including the DG of the ISI who met various people there adds to the vulnerability", the former army commander said.

Migration from Bangladesh and infiltration to "spread Islamic fundamentalism within the northeast" because of the existing vulnerability borne by the demographic pattern, particularly in Assam and Tripura where it is sensitive and balanced, are areas of concern, he said.

Kalita said the narrow Siliguri corridor is also an area of vulnerability for India, as it provides strategic connectivity to the northeast.

Himanta asks 'Congress MP, Gogoi' over stay in Pakistan, wife's job

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi on Sunday traded barbs on social media over the opposition leader's alleged links with Pakistan, and both politicians brought each other's families into the spat. Sarma was the first to launch the tirade by posting three questions to Gogoi on X, which was retorted with a similar number of queries by the MP on the same platform.

Without naming anyone in his first post, Sarma asked a Congress MP whether he had stayed in Pakistan for a continuous period of 15 days and if his wife gets salary from an NGO of the neighbouring country. "Questions for the Hon'ble Member of Parliament from the Congress Party: 1. Did you visit Pakistan for a continuous period of 15 days? If so, could you kindly clarify the purpose of your visit?" he asked.

The CM also questioned whether it is true that the MP's wife "continues to receive a salary from a Pakistan-based

NGO while residing and working in India". "If so, may we ask why a Pakistan-based organisation is paying a salary for activities conducted in India?" Sarma questioned. He also asked about the citizenship status of the parliamentarian's wife and two children.

"Are they Indian citizens, or do they hold the citizenship of any other country? Many more questions will follow," he added. Sharing Sarma's post, Gogoi countered the allegations with three questions from his end. "Questions for the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Assam: 1) Will you resign if you fail to prove your allegations against me and my wife being agents of an enemy country? 2) Will you take questions on your own children and wife?" the Congress MP asked. He also questioned whether the state police would arrest those "linked to coal mafia who are ravaging the hills of Assam and making crores of undeclared money". It was an apparent reference to Enforcement Directorate's findings that illegal rat hole quarrying was being 'rampantly' done in Meghalaya and a 'syndicate' with people

from both states ensured that trucks containing illegal coal cleared the borders of Meghalaya and entered into Assam. Gogoi had posted on X about this matter on Saturday. "Waiting for the SIT report to be submitted," Gogoi added to his post with the three questions, though he didn't clarify which investigation he was referring to. The state government had in February formed a Special Investigation Team to probe into the alleged interference of Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, who is claimed to have links with Gogoi's British wife Elizabeth Colburn, in India's internal affairs. Responding to Gogoi's post, Sarma said that he or his family had no connection with Pakistan and that 'sufficient materials' will be put in public domain in coming days to 'expose' the Congress MP's links with the neighbouring nation.

"I would like to clarify that neither I nor my son and daughter have ever visited Pakistan. Furthermore, my wife and our entire family would never even think of accepting any salary or financial support from Pakistan," he said.

Gurugram issues advisory amid rising heat in the city

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

As temperature continues to rise, the district administration has issued advisory to residents to take necessary precautions to avoid heat waves and other heat-related illnesses.

Chairman of District Disaster and Management Authority and Deputy Commissioner Gurugram Ajay Kumar on Sunday stressed the danger of heat waves, while emphasising that they could cause severe physical stress and, in extreme cases, could even be life-threatening.

In the advisory he said, "Residents are advised to stay updated on the local weather-related news by checking newspapers, radio, or TV.

This will help them prepare for the intensity of the heat in their area.

One of the most important precautions is staying hydrated. Drinking plenty of water is essential," the Deputy Commissioner Gurugram Ajay Kumar said. "Wearing light-colored loose cotton clothes in summer, keep your head covered, use a hat or umbrella, and drink a suf-

ficient amount of water—even if you are not thirsty, stay refreshed by consuming ORS (oral rehydration solution) and homemade drinks like lassi, lemon water and buttermilk, etc.

Do not leave children in vehicles, as they may be at risk of heat stroke; do not go out barefoot; keep a hand fan with you for relief from heat; take short breaks in between work; and if you are working in the field, then take shelter under a tree or in the shade from time to time.

Avoid junk food in the summer season. Eat fresh fruits, salads, and homemade food. Especially do not go out in the sun between 12 noon and 3 pm.

If the child feels dizzy, vomits, panics, or has a severe headache, chest pain, or difficulty in breathing, consult a doctor, Deputy Commissioner Gurugram Ajay Kumar said.

"Heat stroke symptoms like dizziness, headaches, and fainting should not be ignored. If anyone feels unwell, one should seek medical attention immediately. Using fans and taking cold water baths can also help lower body temperature," the DC said.

Yadav directs officials to ensure safety of J and K students studying in MP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bhopal

Amid tensions following the Pahalgam terror attack, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has directed officials to ensure the safety of students from Jammu and Kashmir studying in the state. Yadav also directed the administration to ensure the return of Pakistani nationals as per the directives of the Union Home Ministry.

The chief minister issued the directives on Saturday during a high-level meeting on the law-and-order situation in the state. After the meeting, Yadav said necessary guidelines have been issued in connection with the strict implementation of the Home Ministry's directives on Pakistani nationals.

"I have directed officials to identify Pakistani visa holders in the state within the stipulated time limit. All Pakistani citizens, except those holding long-term, diplomatic and official visas, should be expelled from the state. Identify students from Jammu and Kashmir studying in Madhya Pradesh and ensure their safety," he said in a social media post.

The chief minister said he gave clear instructions to senior police officers to keep an eye on sensitive places in the state and ensure peace, law and order under any circumstances.

Tensions between India and Pakistan have escalated after the terror attack in Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir, in which 26 persons, most of them tourists, lost their lives earlier this week. The Ministry of External Affairs has said all Pakistani nationals currently in India must leave the country before their visas expire. An official on Saturday said that 228 Pakistani nationals living in Madhya Pradesh will have to leave India before the April 27 deadline set by the Centre. The MEA has said that all existing valid visas issued by India to Pakistani nationals stand revoked with effect from April 27 while medical visas issued to Pakistani nationals will be valid only till April 29.

Essential to make state drug-free: Haryana CM Saini

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chandigarh

Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Sunday emphasised that the cooperation of every section of society is essential in the fight against drugs, saying only through a united effort can a drug-free Haryana be achieved.

He called for collective efforts from the saints, khap panchayats, sarpanches, and the people of Haryana to actively participate in the campaign for a drug-free state.

Saini was addressing a gathering in Sirsa as part of Cyclothon 2.0, during which he urged all sections of society to unite and contribute toward making the state drug-free. Addressing the gathering at the event, he said that to realize the dream of a developed India and a developed Haryana, it is essential to make the state drug-free.

Therefore, in the campaign for a 'drug-free Haryana,' everyone must also rise above party politics and unite to empower and strengthen the youth of Haryana, he said.

The Cyclothon began at Shaheed Bhagat Singh Stadium in Sirsa and will pass through various parts of the city, before concluding at Odhan in Sirsa district. On the occasion, Saini rode a bicycle to the event venue and reinforced the strong message of promoting a drug-free Haryana.

He said that today in Sirsa, through the Cyclothon, an extraordinary confluence of energy, celebration, and unity has been witnessed, which symbolises the collective fight against drugs.

He added that it is a matter of pride that the Khap Panchayats have extended their support to this Cyclothon.

According to an official statement, the cyclothon, which started from Hisar on April 5, has travelled across the entire state and has now reached its final destination in Sirsa after a 23-day journey.

A similar cyclothon rally was conducted in 2023, lasting 25 days.

Congratulating all the youth who participated in this cyclothon, he said that these young individuals have tirelessly spread the message of drug de-addiction to every corner of society.

This was not just a rally but the beginning of a new thought process that included important issues like health,

environment, road safety, and youth empowerment, he said.

He said that the organizers, participants, and citizens have proven that when the goal is noble, the intention is honest, and there is public participation in the efforts, any ill in society can be eradicated from its roots.

Saini said that Haryana is the land of 'Jawans, Pehlwanas and Kisans' (soldiers, wrestlers, and farmers), and there is no place for drugs here.

He said that all of us must come together to advance the spirit of a strong and resilient Haryana.

Saini said that while today marks the final stop of the Cyclothon 2.0, it should not be considered the end but rather the beginning of the fight against drugs.

He urged everyone to take a pledge to make each home and every village in Haryana drug-free. Surely, this campaign will yield meaningful results, he added.

Saini said that de-addiction centres are being run to help the youth trapped in drug addiction.

Separate de-addiction facilities have also been opened in government hospitals and medical colleges.

Saini said that sarpanches have been urged to make their villages drug-free, pollution-free, and perform exceptionally well on parameters like cleanliness and health.

Villages securing the first, second, and third positions across the state will be honored with awards of Rs 51 lakh, Rs 31 lakh, and Rs 21 lakh respectively, the CM reiterated.

The Chief Minister said that Station House Officers (SHOs) have been directed to take prompt action on any drug-related complaints received from villages within their jurisdiction.

SHOs whose entire jurisdiction becomes drug-free will also be honored and rewarded, he said.

Appealing to the citizens, the Chief Minister said that if any person has fallen into the trap of drug addiction, they should not be isolated; instead, efforts should be made to help and reintegrate them into the mainstream.

He said that the government has created the 'Manas' portal, where any citizen can report information about drug trafficking, and immediate action will be taken on such reports.

UP RO, ARO exam to be held on July 27

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh government is gearing up to conduct the Review Officer (RO) and Assistant Review Officer (ARO) examination on July 27, with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath directing officials to ensure the process is conducted with utmost fairness, transparency, and security.

Following the Chief Minister's clear instructions, preparations have been intensified across the state to guarantee a smooth and flawless examination. The exam will be held simultaneously across all 75 districts of Uttar Pradesh, with approximately 10,76,004 candidates expected to participate. To accommodate the large number of candidates, more than 2,000 examination centers are being established. In line with CM Yogi's vision for a transparent recruitment process, detailed guidelines have been issued for the selection and finalisation of exam centers. A

high-level committee, chaired by the District Magistrate and including senior officials such as the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Additional District Magistrate (ADM), District Inspector of Schools, and Technical Education Officer, has been constituted in each district to oversee the arrangements.

The exam centers have been categorised into two groups: The Category A includes government or government-aided higher secondary schools, government colleges, universities, polytechnic institutes, and government medical colleges. The category B includes reputed private institutions that have demonstrated excellence in conducting previous examinations. So far, according to reports from 63 districts, arrangements have been made for 7,63,532 candidates across 1,750 centers. In total, 2,242 centers with a seating capacity of 480 candidates each, and 2,803 centers with a seating capacity of 384 candidates each, have been identified.

Finalisation of centers for the remaining 3,12,472 candidates is underway.

As per the prescribed standards, exam centers must be located within 10 kilometers of a bus stand, railway station, or treasury and must be situated in urban areas to ensure easy access to transportation and basic amenities. To streamline management, the number of candidates per shift will be capped at five lakh. In districts where the number of candidates is particularly high, the exam will be conducted in two shifts.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will personally monitor the preparations to uphold the principles of merit and transparency. Enhanced security measures have been mandated, including the deployment of police personnel, installation of CCTV cameras, activation of flying squads, and confidential inspection teams to maintain vigilance. Prohibitory orders will be enforced around all exam centers to prevent any disruptions.

Time to move from food security to farmer prosperity: Dhankhar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu)

The time has come for national agriculture agenda to move from food security to farmer prosperity and the latter has to rise above just being a producer, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar said here on Sunday.

Dhankhar was addressing the students and others at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) on the topic "Fostering Agri-Education, Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Viksit Bharat."

While 46 per cent of population supports agriculture, the sector contributes only 16 per cent to GDP. Institutions like TNAU should carry ahead legacy of veteran agri scientist, the late Dr M S Swaminathan in ensuring "there is quantum jump in the contribution of this sector to our GDP," he said.

Swaminathan was an alumnus of TNAU. Dhankhar said India is now a net exporter of agriculture produce with agri food products forming over 11 per cent of our total exports.

"You have to script a new chapter. It is time that our national agriculture agenda must move from food security, which was of prime importance, a national priority



Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar with wife Sudesh Dhankhar visit an exhibition on the premises of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University in Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu

at one point of time. Because we had food scarcity, our concern was food security."

"But now the time has changed. We must move from food security to farmer

prosperity. Farmer has to be prosperous and this has to evolve from institutions like yours," he said.

The gap between land and lab should be

bridged and there should be a seamless connect. "Lab and land should be together and for this our 730 Krishi vigyan kendra must be vibrant centres of action with farmers to educate them," he said.

There should be change in curriculum which must align to make farmer an entrepreneur. "You must persuade the farmer to rise above being just a producer," the V-P said. Further, he said innovation and research initiatives must be evaluated on what impact they have on the farmer. Research has to be applied, must be based on need. It must serve a cause.

"Research must be supported, apart from the government at the Centre and the state, also by industry, trade, business and commerce," he said.

He also stressed that agri entrepreneurship needs to be given a great fillip. There are 6,000 such startups but for a country of 1.4 bn this is not enough.

"The government has started innovative schemes. The PM Kissan Nidhi Samman scheme—it is not a freebie, it is distinct from freebie. It is doing justice to a sector that is our lifeline. This is a direct transfer to the farmer," he said.

The US helps its farmers massively but it has only one motto — it will directly help the farmer.

Editor's TAKE

Honouring the bravehearts

Metro murals for Param Vir Chakra winners must be replicated for the next generation

The Delhi Metro has put up murals to honour Param Vir Chakra winners, transforming urban spaces into canvases of culture and history. Among the most poignant of these are murals dedicated to the Param Vir Chakra (PVC) winners, the highest military decoration awarded to Indian soldiers for their acts of exceptional valour during wartime. These murals not only serve as artistic tributes but also as a powerful reminder of the bravery and sacrifice of these unsung heroes.

The Param Vir Chakra is awarded to those soldiers who display extraordinary courage in the face of adversity, often paying the ultimate price for the safety and sovereignty of the nation. From the Indo-Pakistani Wars to the Kargil conflict, the valour of these soldiers has always been at the forefront of India's military history.

But while their bravery is celebrated in military circles, it is essential that these heroes are also remembered in the heart of the public's consciousness. The decision to honour Param Vir Chakra winners through murals is a step in the right direction — ensuring that their legacies are etched not just in the history books, but in the very spaces we live in.

These murals are not just decorative but hold deep significance. They act as visual landmarks in metro stations — places that see thousands of commuters pass by daily. In their fleeting moments of travel, these individuals are exposed to the murals, reminded of the heroes who defended the nation with unparalleled courage. By embedding these murals in the daily lives of citizens, the brave hearts who earned the Param Vir Chakra are given the attention and respect they deserve.

It is always crucial to honour bravehearts, as their sacrifices are the foundation of national pride and security. They fought not for fame or recognition, but out of a deep sense of duty. By commemorating them, we also emphasise the values of patriotism, sacrifice, and honour — values that are essential for the growth of a nation.

Moreover, such tributes provide an educational aspect to public art. Younger generations, who may not be familiar with the history of these gallant warriors, are exposed to their stories in a non-traditional format. A mural, rich with symbolism and imagery, can tell the story of a Param Vir Chakra recipient far more vividly than words can, offering a visual narrative that resonates deeply with those who may have never encountered these histories in textbooks. Honouring such brave soldiers in public spaces also sets an example. It helps instill a sense of respect for service members and the dedication required to protect one's country. It teaches the value of courage and sacrifice, ensuring that these principles continue to inspire future generations. The concept of using metro stations as platforms for public art has gained significant traction in India over the last decade. As urbanisation grew and metro systems expanded in major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore, authorities recognised the power of art to transform sterile, utilitarian spaces into cultural hubs.

Metro murals are not a new phenomenon, but their focus on historical figures and national heroes is a relatively recent development. Prior to this, murals mostly depicted abstract art or symbolic representations. As the push for greater recognition of national heroes grew, so did the idea to place these figures at the forefront of public consciousness through art.

Today, metro murals dedicated to Param Vir Chakra winners are part of a larger movement to preserve the history and valour of India's armed forces in a visually accessible way. For instance, the Delhi Metro, one of the busiest metro systems in the world, has a long history of commemorating India's heroes through art. Murals celebrating figures from the Indian independence struggle, as well as the brave soldiers of post-independence wars, have become a common sight. These murals are a testament to India's commitment to never forget its warriors, regardless of how much time has passed. Murals have the power to communicate in a way that transcends words. Unlike statues or plaques, which can sometimes feel distant or formal, murals exist in the everyday life of a city. They engage people on their way to work, school, or while simply waiting for a train. These works of art are a bridge between history and the present, making it easy for anyone to reflect on the bravery of soldiers and the sacrifices they made.

Moreover, metro murals are also an important form of urban storytelling. They speak to the identity of the city and, in many ways, reflect the values of its people. By painting the faces of Param Vir Chakra winners on the walls of bustling metro stations, the cities are not only recognising their importance but also making sure their legacies live on.

Leaderspeak



In 2013 Waqf Bill was passed unanimously by both houses of Parliament. As per the theory of separation of powers, the judiciary, the legislature, and the executive are all independent. If the Government misuses its powers or any article of the Constitution, the judiciary will intervene. Where else will we go?

ASADUDDIN OWAIISI, MEMBER OF THE LOK SABHA



No Indus water for Pakistan

In a decisive shift, the Government of India has suspended the Indus Waters Treaty, marking a bold recalibration of its strategic doctrine

The recent terrorist ambush in Pahalgam of innocent tourists once again has exposed the rot of cross-border terror and has brought into sharp focus the question of proportionality and response. Each time blood is spilt on Indian soil by forces emanating from across the border, the nation mourns, reacts with diplomatic outrage, tightens security, and moves on. But this cycle must be broken. At some point, restraint becomes complicity.

In the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack, the Government of India has taken a bold and long-overdue step — it has moved to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), one of the most generous and lopsided water-sharing agreements in the world. This is not just a policy shift; it is a recalibration of India's strategic doctrine. Signed in 1960, in an era far removed from today's realities, the Indus Waters Treaty was an act of remarkable generosity by an upper riparian India. It granted Pakistan near-exclusive rights over the waters of the Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab — rivers that originate in Indian territory.

For decades, India honoured the treaty even during full-scale wars and covert proxy conflicts. But the age of automatic magnanimity is over. The suspension of the IWT marks a decisive turn — where cooperation is no longer unconditional, and dialogue is no longer disconnected from deeds. The Jhelum River, whose headwaters lie in India, flows directly through the region where Pakistan — backed militants gunned down Indian soldiers in Pahalgam. That water, nourished by Indian glaciers and mountains, eventually sustains Pakistan's economy and agriculture.

In return, what India receives is infiltration, radicalisation, and relentless bloodshed. The symbolism is stark — and so is the imperative. The Government's decision to suspend the IWT is not an act of retaliation; it is an assertion of sovereign logic.

This move comes after years of diplomatic exhaustion. India has been patient. It has absorbed attacks in Uri, Pulwama, and now Pahalgam, while choosing to respond through global forums, dossiers, and restraint. But when a treaty becomes a strategic liability — when it empowers a belligerent neighbour with economic lifelines while they export terror — it ceases to be a diplomatic instrument and becomes a moral failure. It is important to understand that this suspension is not an arbitrary breach of international norms.

Under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, a fundamental change in circumstances — such as the continued use of terror as state policy — provides legal ground



for renegotiation or withdrawal. India has exhausted the dispute resolution mechanisms under the IWT. Pakistan's habitual misuse of arbitration panels and neutral experts to stall Indian projects has made the treaty unworkable. The Government's move is legally defensible, diplomatically deliberate, and strategically astute.

What does this suspension mean in operational terms? It means that India will now assert its full entitlement over the eastern rivers, accelerating long-delayed projects like the Shahpur Kandi Dam and Ujh multipurpose project.

It means that hydropower infrastructure on western rivers will be scaled up rapidly. It means that water flowing unutilised into Pakistan will now be directed to support irrigation, industry, and drinking water needs in Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh. This is not water as a weapon.

This is water as a national right. Critics may raise concerns about international backlash or ecological consequences. But the reality is that global sentiment has shifted. The global community, increasingly aware of Pakistan's double game, is unlikely to be swayed by cries of victimhood. Moreover, India's position can be bolstered by highlighting how the IWT, signed in a pre-climate-

change, pre-terrorism era, is now outdated. The treaty does not account for glacial melt, increased water variability, transboundary hydro-politics or asymmetric warfare. A revised framework — rooted in sustainability, reciprocity, accountability and hard realism — is both logical and necessary. If anything, revising the treaty offers an opportunity to integrate climate resilience, data transparency, and regional sustainability into a 21st-century water framework. Domestically, the benefits are immense. Jammu and Kashmir, long denied full utilisation of its riverine potential due to international sensitivities, can now develop large-scale hydropower that generates jobs, stabilises grids, and improves infrastructure. Ladakh, with its unique water needs and altitude challenges, can benefit from controlled storage and adaptive distribution. Even Punjab and Haryana, battling agrarian distress, can gain from better irrigation planning. This is a national interest in action not at the cost of others, but in fulfilment of what was always rightfully ours.

By suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, India is also rewriting the rules of engagement. The message to Islamabad is clear: treaties require trust. When that trust is systematically eroded by proxy war and cross-border terrorism, the framework of cooperation cannot hold.

If Pakistan wants the privileges of diplomacy, it must first uphold the principles of peace. The days of one-sided patience are over. This is a new water doctrine: princi-

pled, powerful, and unapologetically Indian. This decision also sets a precedent for the broader region. It signals that India will no longer allow historical inertia to dictate present vulnerability. Whether it is trade, visas, culture, or water, reciprocity is the new baseline. It also reminds the world that sovereignty is not merely about borders — it is about resources, resilience, and refusal to be taken for granted.

The terrorists who struck in Pahalgam sought to destabilise the Valley. What they have done instead is awoken a deeper resolve. India has responded not just with weapons and diplomacy, but with the reassertion of control over its natural capital. Rivers, like nations, must flow with dignity. Dignity cannot coexist with duplicity.

As the Indus flows through the mountains of Kashmir and into the plains of Pakistan, let it now carry a message — not of hostility, but of hard realism. India will share what is fair, but it will no longer suffer what is unjust. The Indus Waters Treaty was forged in hope. Today, it flows through hypocrisy.

If Pakistan wishes to continue enjoying the privileges of a water-sharing agreement, it must renounce the politics of bloodshed. Until then, India has every moral, legal, and strategic right to turn the tide. The suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty is not the end of diplomacy; it is the beginning of a new equilibrium, forged in the waters of resolve.

(The author is an IAS officer. Views are personal)

Future belongs to XR, AR and 3D innovation

SECOND Opinion

BY SANJEEV DE

The Indian industrial landscape is undergoing a seismic shift. As products grow more complex, markets demand faster turnarounds, and sustainability becomes non-negotiable, businesses face a pressing challenge: how to communicate value effectively while keeping costs low and engagement high. Traditional tools like static brochures, PowerPoint decks, and physical demonstrations are increasingly falling short. Immersive technologies such as 3D product animation, Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and Extended Reality (XR) are stepping in to redefine how Indian industries market, sell, and train.

The rapid evolution of India's industrial sectors has exposed the limitations of conventional approaches. Companies now need ways to simplify product demonstrations, accelerate sales cycles, cut operational costs, and boost digital engagement. Immersive technologies address these needs by offering dynamic, interactive ways to showcase offerings — whether it is a heavy-duty machine, a cutting-edge vehicle, or a consumer lifestyle product. A standout example of this transformation is XploR, a new immersive tech vertical launched by BizConnect, designed to bring these cutting-edge solutions to Indian businesses. The disruptive solution was born from this very demand, aiming to make industrial marketing

smarter, faster, and more sustainable by leveraging 3D and XR tools to deliver powerful product stories. Across various industries, immersive tech adapts to unique demands and transforms operations. In manufacturing and heavy engineering, complex machinery often requires detailed explanations of internal mechanisms and workflows. 3D animations illustrate these intricacies with precision, while XR tools allow companies to replace bulky physical demos with portable, interactive kits. The goal is to empower manufacturers to showcase entire product portfolios at trade fairs using compact XR-based solutions, eliminating the need for costly shipping and setup. In the automotive and new mobility sector, from passenger cars to electric vehicles (EVs), immersive tech brings products to life. 3D modelling reveals engine functionality or vehicle interiors without dismantling anything, and virtual showrooms enable global presentations and dealer training. These immersive technologies customise presentations for diverse vehicle categories, slashing logistical challenges. For energy, power, and infrastructure companies, visualising equipment like transformers or wind turbines changes the game. XR simulations demonstrate installation, maintenance, and performance remotely.

XploR supports this by enabling energy firms to simulate smart grids or solar plant systems dynamically, streamlining sales, training, and even Government tender processes. In the lifestyle and retail space, AR-powered virtual try-ons for clothing, accessories, or furniture help shoppers see products in their own homes or on themselves, boosting confidence, cutting return rates, and bridging the gap between physical and dig-

ital shopping. Beyond innovation, immersive tech delivers measurable gains. Reducing the need for physical demos and event logistics can slash expenses by up to 70 per cent, eliminating freight, installation, and handling costs. Less reliance on printed materials and product shipping lowers carbon footprints and promotes greener practices.

Globally, immersive tech is already standard practice. In Germany, Japan, and the US, B2B Expos feature 3D displays, OEMs use VR for training, and retailers leverage AR to enhance online shopping. India, with its burgeoning industrial and retail sectors, is ripe for this shift. Indian businesses are now well-positioned to compete on this global stage, offering customised immersive solutions that modernise marketing and training responsibly. The proof lies in real-world results.

Companies worldwide have slashed costs by replacing machinery shipments with XR demos, engaging buyers faster with interactive displays, and streamlining training with virtual simulations. One industry leader points out, "We used to haul entire units to expos; now, a headset does the job better." Immersive technology is not just a glimpse into the future, it is a tool for the present.

For Indian industries, it is a chance to sell with confidence, train with clarity, and communicate with creativity. With the adoption of immersive technologies, India has the tools to lead, not follow. By harnessing 3D and XR, the industry can now meet its unique challenges and ambitions.

(The writer researcher and expert on immersive technologies and founder of BizConnect. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

Adieu Dr Kasturirangan

Madam — Any discussion on the odyssey of India's space and research history is incomplete without making the mention of Dr Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan. He bade adieu to all of us at the age of 84, due to illness.

From holding the peculiar chairmanship of ISRO from 1994 to 2003, he held the basket of accolades and honours to his name. From the satellite missions like Bhaskara I and II, his excellent leadership has given India its first remote sensing satellite, powerhouse launch vehicle technologies like PSLV and GSLV, INSAT-2, and also chaired Earth Observation Satellite committees.

India will never forget his contribution in making Indian space and research capable of attaining self-reliance. He extended his versatile contribution to his nation's service during his entire life. From the space apex of ISRO to Rajya Sabha to Planning Commission to chairing many other committees on environment, higher education and technology, his list of national contribution is really long. India can never forget her son, who has used his academic power to revolutionise the nation in the path of progress and development. He will remain the beacon of inspiration for the upcoming generations to initiate stellar contribution in national service. As India reaches for the stars, his spirit will always shine amongst them.

KIRTI WADHAWAN | KANPUR

The war against Naxals

Madam — The anti-Naxal operations in Chhattisgarh are at their peak. Naxal hotbeds Bijapur and Sukma have never witnessed such an unprecedented "war" against the Maoists. Combing operations by more than 10,000 security personnel, drawn from various forces — including the dedicated Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) — have gone hammer and tongs at Naxal dwellings and explosives by working day in and day out at unfamiliar terrains.

Amidst the ongoing operations against the Naxals, Chhattisgarh Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma has proposed a dialogue with the Maoists. Quickly acting on the proposal, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) has, instead, asked for a month-long ceasefire in anti-Naxal operations to come to the negotiating table. It has to be noted that plenty of Naxals have laid down arms and surrendered before the Government. Therefore, the ceasefire request of the Naxals has to be taken with a pinch of salt by the Chhattisgarh Government.

In a serious war against any kind of terror, aimed at the State, the Government cannot let its guard down by agreeing to a truce. The dangerous Naxals may seize the ceasefire period to recoup. The Government must tread very carefully in responding to the Maoist offer. While the prospect of dialogue is welcome, it must be backed by clear surrender and accountability.

CK SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

Trade tariffs are counter-productive

Madam — Trade tariffs are intended to protect domestic industries and promote local production. Taxes on imported goods make local products cheaper and more attractive, which boosts the economy and employment.

However, high import prices of raw materials increase the cost of production, burden consumers and increase inflation. Exports can become expensive and lose competitiveness in the global market.

Trade disputes around the world have affected economies, as seen in the Trump era, where some countries have benefited and others have been affected. India should maintain its export potential despite rising costs, explore new markets, support local industries and train its youth so that the economy becomes self-sufficient and can withstand trade pressures.

While trade tariffs aim to protect domestic industries, they can also increase production costs, burden consumers, and impact global competitiveness. India must focus on maintaining export potential, exploring new markets, and strengthening local industries.

By investing in workforce training and fostering self-sufficiency, the country can better withstand global trade pressures and position itself for sustainable economic growth in an evolving global landscape.

MOHAMMAD ASAD | MUMBAI

RAHUL GANDHI GETS WARNING FROM SC FOR SAVARKAR REMAKRS

Belonging from a freedom fighter family, I agree with the Supreme Court (SC) that it is not good for anyone to make disparaging remarks about freedom fighters. SC's stern warning to the Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi stated that Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is revered in Maharashtra. Not only this, the SC, pointing out that Gandhi's grandmother, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, had written a letter praising Savarkar. Pardon me, for SC to have credibility in their views, but they must first identify freedom fighters, and their actions. It is not about whether Rahul Gandhi has any obligation to accept the actions of his grandmother (or great-grandfather, or great-great-grandfather), but whether any defamation of someone who espoused the ideology of Hindu Mahasabha led to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. Moreover, was it not part of history that Savarkar did write at least six petitions of mercy between 1911 and 1920 for his release from the notorious Cellular Jail? Or did he not

receive a pension of ₹60 per month (which was higher than the salary of a District Collector) from the British Government, after his release from imprisonment in 1924, when Savarkar was placed under surveillance and had restrictions on his movements? Not only these, was Savarkar not supposed to have supported Mahatma Gandhi's call for the Quit India Movement?

But instead of support, he was recruiting Indians for the British Army. Parivar (many among them worship the first terrorist in India, Nathuram Godse, who killed the Father of the Nation) and the people of Maharashtra, majority other Indians have not recognised Savarkar as a freedom fighter, because he was the original propounder of the two-nation theory — the theory ("there are two antagonistic nations living side by side in India") which led to the partition of India. My humble request to the Honourable Justice of the SC, the above points also need to be examined.

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE | FARIDABAD

Regaining Pahalgam’s lost paradise

A brutal terrorist attack in Pahalgam’s Baisaran Valley has shattered dreams, reignited fear, and exposed the fragile calm, threatening Kashmir’s hard-earned progress and hopes for lasting peace

FIRST
Column

Holidaying in happiness turned into a nightmare at the idyllic landscape of Pahalgam, often described as a ‘heaven on earth’, as a scene of unimaginable horror broke open on April 22, 2025.

A brazen terrorist attack on a group of tourists in the Baisaran Valley — mainly men being killed based on their religious identity — resulted in the tragic and unfortunate loss of at least 28 lives and left over 20 others critically injured.

This barbaric act, claimed by ‘The Resistance Front’ (TRF), a shadow outfit of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), has not only devastated families and shattered dreams but has also ripped apart the fragile veneer of normalcy that authorities had been attempting to bring back in the Kashmir Valley.

The gruesome incident unfolded in the afternoon of 22 April when a group of four to six heavily armed militants, disguised in military — style uniforms, emerged from the dense forests surrounding Baisaran Valley (a meadow accessible only by foot or pony and an open area with no hideouts for safety). According to eyewitness accounts, the assailants systematically targeted non-Muslim tourists after checking their identities and religious affiliations.

This selective targeting underscores the malicious intent to sow communal discord and further destabilise the region. The victims included 24 tourists from various parts of India, two local residents, and two foreign nationals from Nepal and the UAE. The serene meadow erupted into chaos and grief in the attack’s immediate wake.

Social media feeds flooded with harrowing videos — terrified cries for help mingled with the grim sight of lifeless bodies scattered across the onepicturesque landscape.

The emotional wounds inflicted on the bereaved families are immeasurable. While the Government’s offer of ₹20 lakhs for information on the terrorists’ location is one step to involve citizens’ participation in nabbing the culprit, it cannot erase the haunting memories of this devastation.

The image of the young woman beside her fallen Navy officer husband, a honeymoon tragically cut short; the local pony owner’s family, now without their sole provider after his courageous son tried to shield tourists; the woman forced to witness the brutal murder of her husband and son; the recently married IAF officer from Arunachal Pradesh on vacation — these stories of unimaginable loss and despair paint a stark and enduring picture of terrorism’s human cost, shattering the illusion (read deception) of calm in this vulnerable region.

Following the Pahalgam attack, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) recommended a set of five decisive actions against Pakistan — that included holding the ‘Indus Waters Treaty of 1960’ in abeyance until verifiable cessation of cross-border terrorism; immediate closure of the ‘Integrated Check Post Attari’ with a grace period until 1 May for those with valid endorsements to return; the cancellation of all ‘SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme’



RAJDEEP PATHAK

(SVES) visas for Pakistani nationals with a 48-hour deadline for those currently in India to depart; the declaration of Pakistan’s Defence/Military, Naval, and Air Advisors in New Delhi as ‘Persona Non Grata’ with a week to leave (and a reciprocal withdrawal of Indian counterparts from Islamabad along with five support staff from each mission); and a significant reduction in the overall strength of High

Commissions from 55 to 30 personnel by May 1, 2025.

The Pahalgam attack has triggered widespread condemnation across India, with many viewing it as a direct assault on the nation’s unity and secular fabric. Many countries, including the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, and several European

HIS REVERSES THE REMARKABLE GROWTH FROM 1.62 CRORE TOURISTS IN 2019 TO 2.36 CRORE IN 2024, WHICH HAD SIGNIFICANTLY BOOSTED LOCAL ECONOMIES AND LIVELIHOODS DEPENDENT ON THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY, INCLUDING HOTELS, HOUSEBOATS, GUIDES, AND ARTISANS, THEREBY REIGNITING FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY.

and Middle Eastern nations, especially the UAE, issued strong statements condemning the attack.

They emphasised the need for international cooperation to eradicate terrorism and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. This incident has added a new dimension to Kashmir’s intricate geopolitical scenario.

For decades, this region has been a fiercely contested territory between India and Pakistan, leading to repeated conflicts and border tensions and solidifying its status as a highly sensitive area. The situation has become even more complex with China’s bordering presence. Adding to this volatile mix, Bangladesh has recently emerged as a neighbour in dispute with India, further intensifying regional dynamics.

The timing of this unrest could be a calculated move to draw international attention to the Kashmir issue and undermine India’s attempts to showcase normalcy, particularly as it coincided with US Vice President JD Vance’s visit and the ongoing WAQF debate. Moreover, striking at the height of the tourist season — a critical period for the local economy —

Congress in crisis: Reform or perish

Despite the energy generated by Rahul Gandhi’s Bharat Jodo campaigns, the session offered little more than ritualistic rhetoric, exposing deep structural inertia and a status quo mindset at odds with the urgency of the political moment

Why is the Congress reluctant to change its formation in terms of organisational network, and reform the decades — old processes related to the functioning of its highest bodies — Congress Working Committee, AICC and its customary session?

Are the Congress leaders fearful of the change or intense pressure from some invisible forces that have forced them to play safe and be status quo?

These questions confronting the current Congress dispensation (read Sonia Gandhi–Mallikarjun Kharge–Rahul Gandhi powerful troika) are not new. But a refresh button pressed by the recently held non-happening Ahmedabad AICC session has once again made these questions relevant and begging for answers.

The session left all those participating or not (the party leaders rank and file, and the public) unenthused to the level of the lowest ebb, as it failed to throw an alternative vision to fight the might of Mr Narendra Modi — led well-oiled ruling network — and also to ignite the minds of the Congresspersons to make them ready for future political battles — elections or otherwise.

The abysmal affair that the AICC session turned out to be, with no clear-cut direction emerging out of it as to how the Grand Old Party (GOP) proposes to fight the politico-ideological battle on its way to strengthening its place as the premier opposition party and the unchallenged leader of the fledgling opposition combine — I.N.D.I.A. The session has ended up adding to the confusion and demoralisation rather than emanating any ray of hope.

The Ahmedabad AICC session was not different from the preceding ones held in the last few decades. At a time when the Congress is facing the toughest battle of its survival, with an all-round onslaught launched by the ruling dispensation — both at the political and Government levels — the session was expected to be a path-breaking one, if not revolutionising the party’s thinking or strategy. But nothing of the sort happened.

Where does the Congress — particularly Mr Rahul Gandhi, whose remarkable Bharat Jodo Yatra and Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra had rekindled a fresh hope — go from here?

The Ahmedabad AICC session was a valuable opportunity to unveil the blueprint of what the party intends to do in the coming times. Most of the contentious but significant issues — such as strengthening and overhauling the organisational set-up, changing the style of working, purging the party of non-performers and the deadwood, and those coniving with the arch-political rivals — went missing from the discourse.

Those who had their eyes and ears fixed on the session and waited with bated breath for a new look



ANIL ANAND

agenda to unfold were despaired to be content with passing references (on these issues) made by Mr Kharge and Mr Gandhi in their speeches.

The scores of leaders and the delegates who travelled long distances to be in attendance, left without carrying a message to enthuse the workers back home, as there was none. Under the circumstances, getting back to the grassroots and convincing the people to be back in the Congress — fold remains a tall order.

Although Mr Kharge, as the Congress president, has done commendable work despite age-related and physical constraints and has left no opportunity to go inside and outside the Parliament — without

ACCORDINGLY, THE ENTIRE GAMUT OF ORGANISING AICC SESSIONS MUST ALSO DRASTICALLY CHANGE. IT SHOULD NOT BE MERELY A CUSTOMARY FULFILMENT OF ELECTION COMMISSION REQUIREMENTS BUT AN EXERCISE THAT SHOULD BE DEEPLY INTERACTIVE AND ALL, ENCOMPASSING.

fighting back on crucial issues — the challenge is more daunting for Mr Gandhi.

It remains a fact that Mr Kharge is acting only as a guardian figure, but every policy decision in the party has Mr Gandhi’s stamp affixed to it. The party president has no one in doubt about his position and candidly admitted from time to time that Mr Gandhi was the real force. A very tricky situation seems to have arisen in Congress, particularly after the lacklustre AICC session and with the next set of assembly elections approaching fast.

Normally, the onset of any election has been used as a standard excuse by the Congress strategist to ward off or postpone decisions on vital issues — to the great disadvantage of the party — which is there for everyone to see at the AICC and the state/UT levels where confusion prevails supreme. The play would not work anymore.

The clock is ticking fast and the indecisiveness is getting entrenched deeper, a situation that demands

a fast remedy.

Since Mr Gandhi has led the battle from the front, notwithstanding the personalised campaign against him to tarnish his image, with two pan-India sojourns having a dramatic effect both for the party and at the personal levels, unfortunately, the spirit has not been carried forward. A weak organisation, dotted by leaders with vested interests and at times working at cross-purposes to BJP’s advantage, has been the Congress’s bane and a spoke in Mr Gandhi’s wheels.

With this backdrop, it has become imperative that Mr Gandhi must press the alarm bell. The image of indecisiveness has to be shed and the mask of the status quo has to be blown to smithereens as fast as possible.

The charity must begin at the AICC with a thorough change in its work culture. In most of the cases, it has become a parking place for those elevated as its office-bearers in charge of key tasks. A big casualty is that they tend to lose touch with the middle-lower rung leaders and workers.

Accordingly, the entire gamut of organising AICC sessions must also drastically change. It should not be merely a customary fulfilment of Election Commission requirements but an exercise that should be deeply interactive and all — encompassing. The Ahmedabad AICC session starkly revealed the Congress party’s deep-rooted reluctance to confront its structural inertia and outdated processes.

Despite the hopes ignited by Rahul Gandhi’s Bharat Jodo initiatives, the session failed to offer any meaningful vision or reforms, leaving leaders and workers disillusioned.

The Congress’s continued avoidance of internal overhaul — especially in revamping the AICC, energising the grassroots, and purging non-performers — has eroded morale at a time when clarity and decisiveness are critical.

With Mr Kharge serving more as a caretaker and Rahul Gandhi being the de facto decision-maker, the party can no longer afford to hide behind election timelines to defer reforms. The Congress must shed its image of indecisiveness and break free from status quoist tendencies.

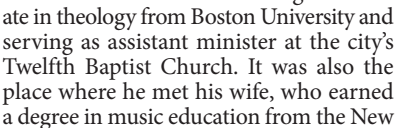
Only a bold reimagining of its organisational network and work culture — starting at the top — can revitalise the Grand Old Party and position it as a credible challenger in the evolving political landscape. The clock is ticking.

Every missed opportunity deepens the disconnect with the electorate and empowers the opposition narrative. Time for half-measures is over — action must replace introspection.

(The writer is a political and national affairs analyst. Views are personal)

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA **Boston**

He added, "Today, we've got to find a way to move forward, when everything appears to be being dismantled, it seems to be attempting to break things up. Now, you do have to retreat sometimes. But dad



"It would be demagogic and dishonest for me to say that Boston is a Birmingham, or to equate Massachusetts with Mississippi," he said. "But it would be morally irresponsible were I to remain

Martin Luther King III said that the attacks on diversity make little sense.

US Southern Command, which oversees the base, declined to comment on the lawsuit and referred requests to the Department of Homeland Security, which did not immediately respond to an email. In March, a federal judge ruled

"I am not allowed to give any information about my time at Guantanamo," Suazo-Muller said.

Caravalhal lives in Rome but was unable to pay his respects to Francis when

“The grief at his departure, the sense of sadness that assails us, the turmoil we feel in our hearts, the sense of bewilderment: We are experiencing all of this, like the apostles grieving over the death of Jesus.”

Speakers at the event called for stronger measures to prevent targeted attacks against Hindus. "India must take stern action to stop the targeted killings of Hindus, from Kashmir to Murshidabad," said one speaker, drawing applause from

Photographs of the victims and placards bearing messages such as “All Eyes on Pahalgam”, “Never Forget 26”, and “Hind Lives Matter” were displayed at the venue. Sunanda Vashisht, political commentator and emcee for the Houston event, said, “We mourn the tragic loss of innocent Hindu lives in a terror attack in Pahalgam. It was an attack not just on individuals but on the very principles of humanity, peace,

As the Houston vigil concluded, participants lit candles and stood silently, pledging to keep the memory of the victims alive and to continue demanding justice.

The campaign, attributed to unidentified anti-government and pro-Russian actors, underscores how large social media platforms can be exploited to fuel distrust and spin anti-Western narratives. Romania's political landscape was shaken last November when Calin Georgescu, a little-known, far-right populist, won the most votes in the first round of the presidential election, advancing to the runoff against reformist Elena Lasconi of the progressive Save Romania Union party.

James Cruzat, a Vancouver business owner, was at the event and heard a car rev its engine and then "a loud noise, like a loud bang" that he initially thought might be a gunshot. "We saw people on the road crying, others were like running, shouting, or even screaming, asking for help. So we tried to go there just to check what was really actually happening until we found some bodies on the ground. Others were lifeless, others like, you know, injured," Cruzat said.

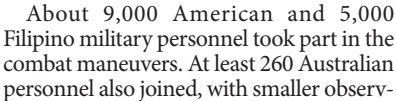
"My thoughts are with the Filipino community and all the victims targeted by this senseless attack. Thank you to the first responders who are at the scene as we wait to hear more," Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre wrote.

Unlike a territorial concession, a formal

Saying otherwise would effectively admit defeat - a deeply unpopular move, especially for Ukrainians living under Russian occupation who hope to be liberated and reunited with their families one day. It also would call into question the sacrifices made by tens of thousands of Ukrainian service members who have been

Crimea, a strategic peninsula along the Black Sea in southern Ukraine, was seized by Russia years before the full-scale invasion that began in 2022. The Russian takeover followed large protests that ousted former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who had refused to sign an association agreement with the European Union.

They were also staged near major geopolitical hotspots, which have become delicate frontlines in the regional rivalry between China and the US under former President Joe Biden and now Donald Trump.



China has fiercely opposed the combat drills as provocative. Its aircraft carrier

Finance Ministry to bring Insurance Bill in Parliament during monsoon session

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Insurance Amendment Bill, which proposes 100 per cent FDI in the insurance sector, may be introduced in Parliament in the upcoming monsoon session, sources said.

The draft bill is ready and will be placed before Cabinet for its approval soon, sources said, adding, after Cabinet nod the Department of Financial Services under the finance ministry would begin the process for introduction of the Bill in the Parliament. The ministry hopes to table the Bill in Parliament during the upcoming monsoon session, sources said.

Monsoon session of Parliament usually commences in July.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in this year's Budget speech proposed to raise the foreign investment limit to 100 per cent from existing 74 per cent in the insurance sector as part of new-generation financial sector reforms.

"This enhanced limit will be available for those companies which invest the entire premium in India. The current guardrails and conditionalities associated with foreign investment will be reviewed and simplified," she had said.



FILE PHOTO

The finance ministry has proposed to amend various provisions of the Insurance Act, 1938, including raising foreign direct investment (FDI) in the insurance sector to 100 per cent, reduction in paid-up capital, and provision for composite licence.

The bill also proposes agents to be allowed to sell products from multiple insurers breaking away from the existing

exclusivity model.

As part of comprehensive legislative exercise, the Life Insurance Corporation Act 1956, and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Act, 1999 will be amended alongside the Insurance Act, 1938.

The amendments to LIC Act proposes to empower its board to take opera-

tional decisions like branch expansion and recruitment.

The proposed amendment primarily focuses on promoting policyholders' interests, enhancing their financial security, and facilitating the entry of more players into the insurance market leading to economic growth and employment generation.

Such changes will help enhance efficiencies of the insurance industry, enabling ease of doing business and enhancing insurance penetration to achieve the goal of 'Insurance for All by 2047'.

The Insurance Act, of 1938, serves as the principal Act to provide the legislative framework for insurance in India. It provides the framework for the functioning of insurance businesses and regulates the relationship between an insurer, its policyholders, shareholders and the regulator IRDAI. The entry of more players in the sector would not only push penetration but result in greater job creation across the country.

Currently, there are 25 life insurance companies and 34 non-life or general insurance firms in India. These include companies like Agriculture Insurance Company of India Ltd and ECGC Ltd.

Need to end tax terrorism: Congress on World Bank report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Attacking the Modi government citing a World Bank report, the Congress on Sunday claimed that sharpening inequality is now firmly embedded in the nature of the country's economic growth, and called for a compelling need for tax reforms in GST, ending "brazen corporate favouritism" and providing income support for families.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the World Bank has released its Poverty and Equity Brief for India this month, and the report raises several concerns even as the Modi government spins it to its benefit.

In its report, the World Bank has said, "Over the past decade, India has significantly reduced poverty. Extreme poverty (living on less than \$ 2.15 per day) fell from 16.2 per cent in 2011-12 to 2.3 per cent in 2022-23, lifting 171 million people above this line." In his statement on the report, Ramesh noted that as per calculations based on the international poverty line (\$ 2.15/ day), poverty has continued its downward trend in recent years to reach extremely low levels.

"This reflects the success of India's growth story - which began with liberalisation in June 1991 and which has since taken a momentum of its own - and that of several social welfare interventions

developed by Dr Manmohan Singh's government during 2004-14," he said.

Ramesh claimed the most important intervention is the MGNREGA, 2005 which has effectively set a floor on the annual income for crores of families, acting as a safety net to keep families out of poverty and the National Food Security Act, 2013 that provides the foundation for the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKY).

He, however, pointed out that the World Bank has also warned that more updated data adoption of purchasing power parity conversion factor from 2021 as compared to that of 2017 would result in a higher rate of extreme poverty.

ty. "Changes in the questionnaire design, survey implementation, and sampling in the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022-23 present challenges from making comparisons over time," the Congress leader said, citing the report.

"It is worth recalling that these changes were made after the Government rejected the previous iteration of the survey (conducted in 2017-18) after it showed falling consumption in rural areas," he said. As a lower middle-income country, the appropriate rate to measure poverty in India is that of \$ 3.65/day, Ramesh said, adding that by this measure, the poverty rate for India in 2022 is significantly higher at 28.1 per cent.

RBI Governor asks US industry to invest in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra has exhorted the US industry to invest in India, stressing that the country continues to be the fastest growing major economy supported by policy consistency and certainty.

Addressing the US-India Economic Forum organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and US India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) here on Friday, Malhotra said that India is expected to record a growth rate of 6.5 per cent in the current financial year despite tremendous increase in uncertainty and volatility in global financial markets.

"At a time when many advanced economies are facing economic headwinds and a deteriorating economic outlook, India continues to offer strong growth and stability making it a natural choice for investors seeking long term value and opportunity," the governor said. India, he added, "continues to be an economy supported by stability monetary, financial and political; policy consistency and certainty; congenial business environment; and strong macroeconomic fundamentals."

Malhotra said that India offers a policy ecosystem that is transparent, rule-based, and forward-looking an ideal setting for long-term and productive invest-

ments. As the world's fastest-growing major economy, India is not just a destination for investment, it is a partner in prosperity, he said, adding, "together, we have the chance to shape the future not only for India but for a better world. I invite you to be a part of this journey, to collaborate, innovate, and invest in India."

Observing that the Indian economy has demonstrated remarkable resilience and dynamism, Malhotra said that over the past four years (2021-22 to 2024-25), the country recorded an average annual growth rate of 8.2 per cent.

"It was and continues to be the fastest-growing major economy in the world. This is a significant step up from the average growth rate of 6.6 per cent in the preceding decade (2010 to 2019)," he added.

Even in the current financial year, he said that growth was expected to remain robust at 6.5 per cent. This, he added, "is despite the tremendous increase in uncertainty and volatility in global financial markets." Although 6.5 per cent growth rate falls short of India's aspirations, it remains broadly in line with past trends and the highest among major economies, he said.

Malhotra told the gathering over the last ten years, India has leapfrogged from the tenth largest economy to the fifth. In terms of purchasing power parity, India is already third.

Zomato CEO refutes allegations of toxic workplace

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Zomato Founder and CEO Deepinder Goyal has rejected an anonymous Reddit post alleging that things were "going off the rails" with the company, rebranded as Eternal, losing market share to Zepto Cafe and Swiggy and forcing employees to order from its food delivery platform.

The post also claimed that the work culture has become "laughably inconsistent" with "toxicity" baked in, and the only thing keeping the company profitable now is platform fees, and the "crisis" compounded by "underpaid and overworked" delivery partners.

In a post on X on Saturday, Goyal said, "All of this - reddit.Com/r/StartUpIndia! - is utter nonsense. Neither are we losing market share, nor will we ever force our employees to order on Zomato. Freedom of choice is something we stand for vehemently." He further said "it is embarrassing to even clarify this but doing it since many people reached out to me with concern. And thanks everybody for your concern.. Appreciate it".

The Reddit post had alleged that "in a recent internal huddle, leadership admitted we're losing a good chunk of the market share to Zepto Cafe and Swiggy. The reaction? Panic and ridiculous new rules. One of them: employees must order from Zomato at least seven times a month and yes, they'll track it. Ordering



FILE PHOTO

from competitors is outright banned in the office".

It claimed that on Monday, Rakesh Ranjan, the CEO of Zomato's food delivery business is on Slack doing a townhall, telling everyone to "stay focused" and "get back on track." By Wednesday, he's removed from the role.

"You seriously can't make this stuff up.

No clear direction, just a game of musical chairs in leadership and everyone's shitting their pants not knowing what will happen next," the post said.

"The only thing keeping the company profitable now is platform fees unbelievably. Internally, no one seems to care about long-term sustainability, just numbers. One of the biggest crises right now is the

delivery partners. They are being underpaid and overworked. Compared to competition who Zomato pays significantly less and sometimes nearly half. As a result, many riders are quitting or switching platforms," the post said.

It further claimed that Zomato might still look shiny from the outside but inside, "it's falling apart".

Eternal, formerly Zomato, on Thursday clarified that its food delivery CEO Rakesh Ranjan has not resigned and that any reshuffling of the leadership team at the company is a standard practice as part of its efforts to optimise organisational effectiveness.

The clarification through a regulatory filing came in response to a media report on the stepping down of Ranjan.

"We would like to clarify as on date, there has been no resignation tendered by Rakesh Ranjan and he still continues to be part of the leadership team. At Eternal Group, internal reshuffling of the leadership team is considered a standard practice as part of the company's ongoing efforts to optimise organisational effectiveness," Eternal said.

Earlier this month, the food and grocery delivery platform officially changed its name to 'Eternal Ltd' on the stock exchanges following approval from Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

The brand name of the company's food delivery business, Zomato remains the same, along with the app.

Rank states based on case-clearance rate to encourage faster dispute resolution: CII

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

CII on Sunday called for "urgent reforms" to address the burgeoning pendency of cases across India, suggesting that the National Judicial Data Grid could report real-time automated rankings of states on the basis of case-clearance rate to encourage faster dispute resolution.

With over 5 crore cases pending across various courts and case disposal rates lagging behind the new admissions in many jurisdictions, urgent reforms are required to address the burgeoning pendency of cases, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) stated.

It termed the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) an important initiative towards reducing pendency by enabling data-driven policy interventions.

With a view to fostering competitive spirit among states, NJDG could report real-time automated rankings of states based on the data collected on grid, the industry body said.

Ranking could subsequently be considered at more disaggregated levels, like for commercial and non-commercial cases, separately.

"To begin with, the rankings could be considered on the basis of case-clearance rate (ratio of case disposals to case admis-

By enabling real-time, data-driven policy intervention, NJDG could accelerate dispute resolution, strengthen judicial efficiency, and foster a more investment-friendly business environment, CII said

sions), averaged over completed months for a calendar year, which could be provided retrospectively for past 5-10 years. This would encourage states to streamline their dispute resolution processes, adopt best practices and drive judicial reforms," CII recommended.

The NJDG was launched in 2015 under the e-Courts Mission Mode Project to track, manage, and reduce case pendency across India's judicial system.

In the World Bank Group's Doing Business Report 2020, India was ranked 163rd out of 190 economies on this crucial parameter.

By enabling real-time, data-driven policy intervention, NJDG could accelerate dispute resolution, strengthen judicial efficiency, and foster a more investment-friendly business environment, CII said.

NJDG is a publicly accessible portal, providing judicial data on key performance

indicators, such as case institution, pendency and disposal, etc, across the formal court system in the country.

It aims to promote transparency, accessibility, and accountability while supporting evidence-based judicial reforms.

India's rapid growth and urbanisation have led to a surge in disputes, overwhelming the capacity of the judicial system.

While the grid is already immensely useful, it must continue to evolve in its scope, coverage and quality to facilitate an even more effective informed policymaking in the space of judicial system spread intricately across length and breadth of the country, according to CII.

Positioning the grid as a transformative tool for facilitating expeditious dispute resolution, CII has outlined various recommendations to enhance its effectiveness.

It believes there is a need for introducing greater degree of specifics in categorisation of disputes in a manner that they are linked to their respective statutes and legal provisions.

At present, certain courts do not report case statistics, resulting in an underestimation of pendency in a state. A case in point is Tamil Nadu, which reports only 15 pending commercial cases at district level on NJDG as against the actual number estimated to be around 5,000.

Geopolitical developments, earnings to drive markets in this week: Analysts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Geopolitical developments between India and Pakistan, quarterly earnings and macro data will be the key drivers of stock markets in the holiday-shortened week, say analysts.

Trading activity of foreign investors, who were sustained buyers in the Indian market last week, and global trends would also guide movement in the market, they said. Equity markets will remain closed on Thursday for 'Maharashtra Day'.

Further updates related to tariffs will also be watched by investors, experts noted. Stock markets witnessed profit-taking in the last two sessions due to increased geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan following the death of 26 people in a terror attack on tourists at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir.

"The upcoming holiday-shortened week also marks the beginning of a new month, making monthly auto sales data a key area of focus for market participants. On the macroeconomic front, investors will closely track the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) data and the HSBC manufacturing PMI data.

"Meanwhile, geopolitical developments between India and Pakistan will remain on the radar. On the corporate earnings

Last week, the BSE benchmark gauge climbed 659.33 points or 0.83 per cent, and the NSE Nifty went up by 187.7 points or 0.78 per cent despite profit-taking in the last two sessions

front, several prominent companies—including BPCL, IOC, Bajaj Finance, TVS Motor, and UltraTech Cement—are set to release their quarterly results. Globally, updates related to tariffs and trade will also be watched closely," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Last week, the BSE benchmark gauge climbed 659.33 points or 0.83 per cent, and the NSE Nifty went up by 187.7 points or 0.78 per cent despite profit-taking in the last two sessions.

On Friday, the 30-share BSE barometer Sensex tanked 588.90 points or 0.74 per cent to settle at 79,212.53. The NSE Nifty dropped 207.35 points or 0.86 per cent to 24,039.35.

Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said, "Geopolitical developments between India and Pakistan could add volatility to the Indian market

over the next few days. Meanwhile, stock/sector specific action would continue on the back of ongoing Q4 earnings announcements. Key results this week include those from largecaps like Ultratech Cement, Bajaj Finance, Trent, Ambuja Cements amongst others."

Meanwhile, Reliance Industries Ltd on Friday reported a 2.4 per cent rise in its March quarter net profit as store rationalisation in retail business and improved margins in telecom helped offset weakness in mainstream oil and petrochemicals business and higher finance cost.

Consolidated net profit of Rs 19,407 crore, or Rs 14.34 per share, in January-March - the fourth quarter of April 2024 to March 2025 fiscal (FY25) - was higher than Rs 18,951 crore, or Rs 14 a share, in the same period a year back, the company said in a statement.

"The week from April 28 to May 2, 2025, is set to bring another series of crucial economic releases that could impact global market dynamics and investor sentiment. In India, attention will be on the Industrial Production (YoY) data for March, scheduled for release on April 28, which will offer insights into the strength of the country's manufacturing and industrial sectors," according to Bajaj Broking Research.

‘India may seek parity with US on tech access in BTA’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India is likely to ask the US to ease export controls and grant it access to critical technologies on par with key American allies like Australia, the UK, and Japan under the proposed Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA), sources said.

They added that India may seek these easing for sectors like telecom equipment, biotechnology, AI (artificial intelligence), pharmaceuticals, quantum computing and semiconductors.

The country is also seeking duty concessions for labour-intensive sectors like textiles, gems and jewellery, leather goods, garments, plastics, chemicals, shrimp, oil seeds, chemicals, grapes and bananas in the proposed pact with America.

On the other hand, the US wants duty concessions in sectors like certain industrial goods, automobiles (electric vehicles particularly), wines, petrochemical products, dairy, agriculture items such as apples, and tree nuts, they said.

As part of the proposed BTA, one of the sources said, India may request the US to place it on par with other key US allies including Australia, UK and Japan regarding access to technology through easing of export controls particularly in key areas like telecom equipment, biotechnology, and AI. Easy access to cutting-edge technologies in these sectors would help boost India's innovation capabilities, enhance its technological infrastructure, and further push the country's economic growth. The commerce ministry, which is leading the negotiations for the agreement, declined to comment when asked about these issues.

According to think tank GTRI, the US has eased export controls to strengthen technology partnerships with close allies like Australia, the United Kingdom, and Japan. The changes are designed to make collaboration easier in critical sectors.

It said that as part of the AUKUS security pact, the US has simplified rules for sharing defence and dual-use technologies with Australia and the UK. Beginning September 1, 2024, about 80 per cent of defence-related exports to these countries no longer require individual licences under revised US arms regulations.

India is also seeking duty concessions for labour-intensive sectors like textiles, gems and jewellery, leather goods, garments, plastics, chemicals, shrimp, oil seeds, chemicals, grapes and bananas

In September 2024, Washington also introduced new global controls on exports related to quantum computing and semiconductor manufacturing.

However, trusted partners such as Australia, the UK, Japan, and other G7 nations are largely exempt from these new requirements, helping keep research and trade channels open, GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

On India's request, he said, while Washington is eager to strengthen tech ties with India, especially under the Quad framework, it may stop short of offering full parity.

"American officials could point to ongoing concerns about India's export controls, intellectual property protections, cybersecurity standards, and military relationships with Russia. Rather than blanket exemptions, Washington may suggest mechanisms such as trusted partner programmes, project-specific licences, or expanded licensing exceptions for select Indian entities," Srivastava added.

The terms of references (ToRs) have been finalised by India and the US for the proposed agreement, which include around 19 chapters covering issues such as tariffs, goods, services, rules of origin, non-tariff barriers, and customs facilitation. To give further impetus to the talks in the 90-day tariff pause window, an Indian official team was there in Washington to iron out differences on certain issues before formally launching negotiations for the pact.

The US remained India's largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year in 2024-25 with bilateral trade valued at \$ 131.84 billion. The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total goods exports, 6.22 per cent in imports, and 10.73 per cent in the country's total merchandise trade.



In an age of overstimulation, walking into a wellness clinic is a kind thing you can do for yourself, says ABHI SINGHAL

Self-Care Now a Lifestyle, Not a Luxury



In a typical working week, how much time do you really take out for yourself, to slow down, to recharge, or to nourish your skin and scalp? For many, the answer still leans towards "too little." But the narrative around self-care is shifting. Wellness is no longer considered a luxury; it has steadily become a lifestyle choice. As individuals strive to balance demanding careers with personal well-being, they're beginning to invest not just in rest, but in routines that nourish both body and mind.

At the heart of this evolution lies a deeper appreciation for skincare and hair care - once seen as cosmetic indulgences, they are now recognised for their therapeutic and preventive benefits.

Facials, in particular, have transformed from occa-

sional treats to essential self-care rituals. More than just a glow-up, they are a reflection of inner health and mindfulness.

Daily skincare routines, while foundational, often fall short when it comes to tackling environmental stressors, premature ageing, and hormonal fluctuations. This is where professional facial treatments come in - offering targeted solutions that cleanse, nourish and repair the skin at a cellular level. Treatments like Hydrafacials, Fire & Ice facials, nano-needling, and chemical peels are now powered by dermatologist-led protocols and medical-grade devices. These don't just make the skin look good, they help it function

SKIN ANALYSIS IS IMPORTANT

Every facial is preceded by an in-depth skin analysis, ensuring that the treatment is suited to your skin and current condition - particularly important in seasons like summer, where a simple de-tan facial without proper diagnosis can do more harm than good.



APPROACH TO BETTER HAIR

Equally impressive is Merakki Wellness and Co., approach to hair wellness. Recognising that good hair starts with a healthy scalp, the clinic offers FDA-approved treatments like LLLT and the K Revive Scalp Spa, a luxurious therapy that

better.

But the modern wellness journey doesn't stop at skincare. A healthy scalp is just as vital as a glowing face - and this realisation has brought hair care treatments into the wellness spotlight.

Much like skin, the scalp suffers from pollution, stress, and lifestyle choices, and requires targeted care to stay healthy. Advanced therapies such as Scalp Analysis, the K Revive Scalp Spa, and Low-Level Laser Therapy (LLLT) now provide holistic solutions for common issues like hair thinning, dryness, and dandruff, while also encouraging new growth and scalp balance.

However, just like with skincare, a one-size-fits-all approach does more harm than good. It's crucial to consult a qualified dermatologist or cosmetologist before beginning any facial or scalp treatment. These professionals can assess your skin and scalp type, identify underlying concerns, and

curate a plan that works best for your individual needs. Choosing the wrong products or treatments without expert advice can lead to allergies, acne breakouts, or further damage.

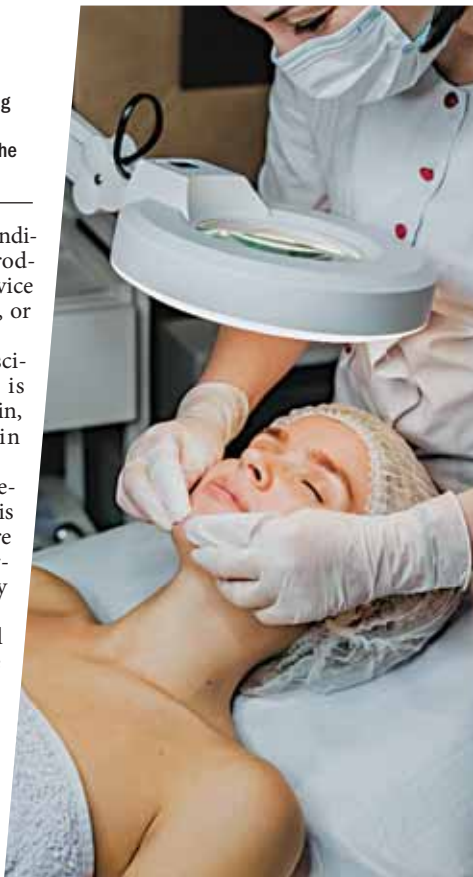
One wellness centre leading this science-meets-self-care revolution is Merakki Wellness Co., a premium skin, hair, and beauty clinic based in Faridabad.

Founded in 2023 by wellness entrepreneur Rima Narula, the centre is redefining what it means to take care of oneself - offering personalised services that blend advanced technology with natural healing principles.

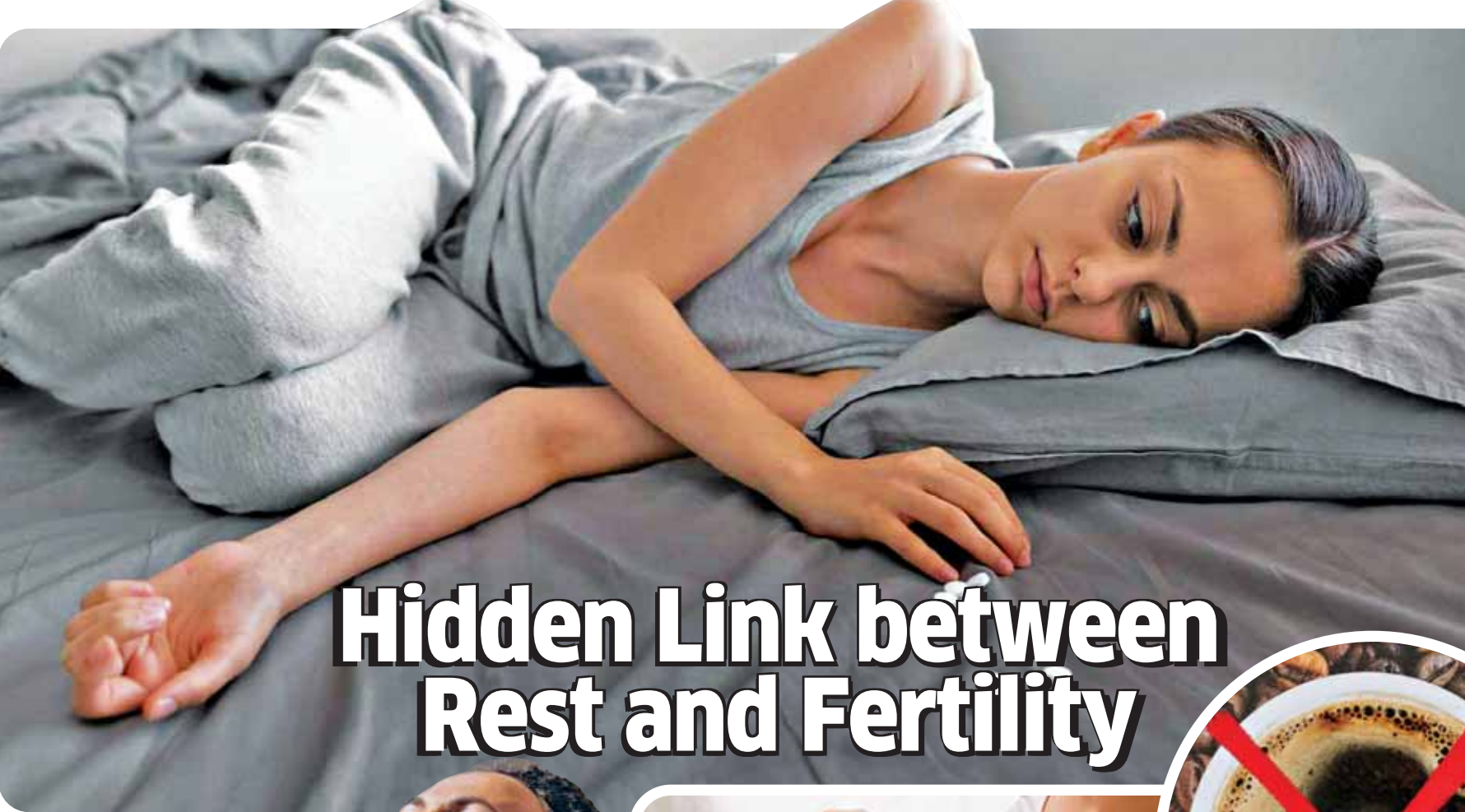
At this wellness centre, the facial menu reads like a tailored skincare blueprint: from the calming Signature Facial to the luxurious Platinum Hydra Facial, each treatment is designed to address specific concerns, whether it's pigmentation, dullness, or fine lines.

The use of LED therapy, oxygen infusion, and deep exfoliation ensures both immediate results and long-term skin health. But what truly sets Merakki apart is its commitment to expert-led care.

Every facial is preceded by an in-depth skin analysis, ensuring that the treatment is suited to your skin type and current condition - particularly important in seasons like summer, where a simple de-tan facial without proper diagnosis can do more harm than good.



What makes centres like Merakki Wellness Co. in Faridabad a growing part of people's routine is not just the range of services, but the shift in how people perceive self-care. Today, facials and scalp therapies are seen much like a balanced meal or a weekly workout - they are maintenance tools, designed to keep your body functioning at its best. It's not about vanity; it's about vitality. Because when you take time for your skin and scalp, you're not just pampering yourself - you're protecting your peace and embracing a lifestyle that puts you first.



Hidden Link between Rest and Fertility

BY DR JYOTI GUPTA

Trying to balance your hormones or start a family? Your sleep schedule might be more important than you may think. Discover how a good night's sleep can support your hormones and boost your fertility naturally.

Sleep is more than just resting your body. It is also about giving yourself enough time to do crucial internal work, especially when it comes to hormones. In today's busy lifestyle, many people often struggle to get quality sleep for even a few hours. This can lead to sleep deprivation. This can be mainly due to taking too much stress, long and busy working schedules, or excessive screen time. But what one may not realise is how a lack of sleep can silently disrupt your body's natu-



al balance, particularly the hormonal system. Your hormones are responsible for controlling various key functions such as mood, energy levels, metabolism, and most importantly, reproduction. If you are someone who is dealing with problems like irregular periods, low sperm

count, difficulty in conceiving despite continuous efforts, or frequently feeling tired, then your sleeping pattern may be the culprit. Both women as well as men need enough sleep to ensure that their reproductive hormones are working smoothly. One must understand that good quality sleep not only helps boost fertility but also supports your overall health.

The Role of Sleep in Hormonal Balance and Fertility

Your sleep plays a vital role in efficiently balancing the hormones

IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY SLEEP

One should aim for at least 7 to 8 hours of quality sleep at night. Many people use mobile phones or laptops late at night. The blue light exposure from screens can reduce melatonin production and delay sleep onset, further disturbing fertility hormones.

Reduce screen time 1-2 hours before bedtime; avoid caffeine and heavy meals at night. This can help your body rest, reset, improve hormone flow, reduce stress, and also naturally boost your fertility. If you are actively planning for a baby, then focusing on improving your sleeping pattern can be helpful.

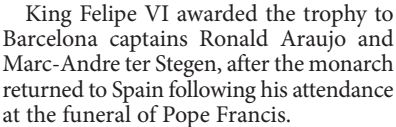


that can help support fertility. During the deep slumber, your body works effortlessly to regulate important hormones like oestrogen, progesterone, testosterone, and luteinising hormones that are essential for the production of sperm and regular ovulation. Not getting enough sleep for an extended period can easily confuse your internal clock, causing imbalances. It can increase the production of a stress hormone called cortisol. This can further lower fertility by negatively interfering with these reproductive hormones. Lack of sleep is more likely to reduce melatonin, a hormone that protects the eggs and sperm from getting damaged. Disturbed sleep patterns in women can lead to irregular menstrual cycles or problems with egg release. Poor sleep is also linked with insulin resistance, which can affect fertility; in this way, metabolic hormones and sleep are also interconnected. Chronic sleep deprivation can impact thyroid hormones which can be linked with poor sleep, and can lead to irregular periods or ovulatory issues. In men, it can lower their testosterone levels, reduce sperm quality, and also affect libido. This is why it becomes crucial to prioritise your sleep. Many people use mobile phones or laptops late at night. The blue light exposure from screens can reduce melatonin production and delay sleep onset, further disturbing fertility hormones.

- The author is the Senior IVF Consultant at Motherhood Hospitals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seville

Ancelotti, when asked about his future, said: "As I have said, I can continue, I can



Barcelona dominated the first half with its ball control and a pressure defence that was quick to recover the ball.

Mbappé started the game on the bench after injuring his ankle last week. But Ancelotti sent his striker on at halftime to replace Rodrygo. Modric and playmaker Arda Guler soon followed. The changes helped Madrid click, and the game became a back-and-forth contest with both teams creating scoring chances.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

Additionally, the Titans have a fairly settled line-up. They have rotated their impact players — Ishant Sharma, Washington Sundar or Kulwant Khejroliya

Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (Captain), Jos Buttler (wk), B Sai Sudharsan, Shashrukk Khan, Sherfane Rutherford, Rahul Tewatia, Rashid Khan, Kagiso Rabada, Ravirajnivasan Sai Kishore, Mohammad Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Ishant Sharma, Washington Sundar, Glenn Phillips, Anuj Rawat, Mahipal Lomror, Arshad Khan, Jayant Yadav, Nishant Sindhu, Kulwant Khejroliya, Gerald Coetzee, Manav Suthar, Kumar Kushagra, Gurnoor Brar and Karim Janat.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

Prabhsimran, who has been part of the side since his IPL debut in 2019, was among the players retained by PBKS

"They are exciting players. Prabhsimran is a seasoned campaigner. He is more

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

"No doubt, a 300-plus score will be reached this tournament. The ball seems to be travelling further, though I'd like to

enning match

immy Connors (109) and Roger Federer (103). Arnaldi will next face Damir Zumurud after he rallied past Sebastian Baez 1-6, 6-1, 6-2.

OTHER MEN'S RESULTS

The sixth-seeded Alex de Minaur beat Lorenzo Sonego 6-2, 6-3 and moves on to play Denis Shapovalov after the Canadian defeated Kei Nishikori 6-1, 6-4.

Stefanos Tsitsipas fought back against Jan-Lennard Struff 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 and will face 10th-seeded Loranzo Musetti, who beat Tomas Martin Etcheverry 7-6 (3), 6-4. Cameron Norrie also came back to down Jiri Lehecka 2-6, 6-4, 6-0. He will play Gabriel Diallo.

Other winners included fifth-seeded Nick Draper and 15th-seeded Grigor Dimitrov.

SWIATEK, ANDREEVA AGAIN INTO LAST 16

Second-seeded Iga Swiatek saw off Linda Noskova 6-4, 6-2 as the defending champion advanced to the round of 16.

Swiatek will play Diana Shnaider in the quarterfinals. Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva advanced to the last 16 for the third straight year by defeating Magdalena Frech 7-5, 6-3.

Monaco draw Le Havre 1-1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

Monaco dropped points in the race to qualify directly for next season's Champions League after drawing at Ligue 1 struggler Le Havre 1-1. Monaco moved above Marseille and into second place on goal difference, but direct rivals Lyon in fourth, Nice in fifth and sixth-placed Strasbourg all won to move one point behind Monaco with three matches left.

The top three qualify automatically and the team finishing fourth enters qualifying. Marseille needs to beat mid-table Brest on Sunday to reclaim second spot.

LYON'S ATTACK PURRRING

Lyon blew Rennes apart in the first half on the way to a 4-1 win.

Belgium forward Malick Fofana scored a brilliant goal, cutting in from the left and curling the ball into the top right corner from 20 meters out.

Veteran captain Corentin Tolisso curled one into the bottom right corner from outside the penalty area and

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

"You are ticking down," he said. "We have put ourselves back into a strong position but we know it can change quickly."

VARDY'S PENALTY WOE

Van Nistelrooy said he was unaware about his own future after failing to keep Leicester up.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

"They are exciting players. Prabhsimran is a seasoned campaigner. He is more

in the players.” The way the PBKS openers tackled KKR’s spin duo of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravathy was a standout feature. Taking calculated risks, they managed to dominate without losing wickets, as PBKS amassed 72 runs between overs 10 and 15. “I think it’s a

“Unfortunately match did not happen, can’t say if we are happy or sad. But it is better to settle for one point than get nothing. It is a bonus point for us so we have to take it positively and you never know we qualify from this one point,” Arora said.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

"No doubt, a 300-plus score will be reached this tournament. The ball seems to be travelling further, though I'd like to

enning match

immy Connors (109) and Roger Federer (103). Arnaldi will next face Damir Zumurud after he rallied past Sebastian Baez 1-6, 6-1, 6-2.

OTHER MEN'S RESULTS

The sixth-seeded Alex de Minaur beat Lorenzo Sonego 6-2, 6-3 and moves on to play Denis Shapovalov after the Canadian defeated Kei Nishikori 6-1, 6-4.

Stefanos Tsitsipas fought back against Jan-Lennard Struff 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 and will face 10th-seeded Loranzo Musetti, who beat Tomas Martin Etcheverry 7-6 (3), 6-4. Cameron Norrie also came back to down Jiri Lehecka 2-6, 6-4, 6-0. He will play Gabriel Diallo.

Other winners included fifth-seeded Nick Draper and 15th-seeded Grigor Dimitrov.

SWIATEK, ANDREEVA AGAIN INTO LAST 16

Second-seeded Iga Swiatek saw off Linda Noskova 6-4, 6-2 as the defending champion advanced to the round of 16.

Swiatek will play Diana Shnaider in the quarterfinals. Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva advanced to the last 16 for the third straight year by defeating Magdalena Frech 7-5, 6-3.

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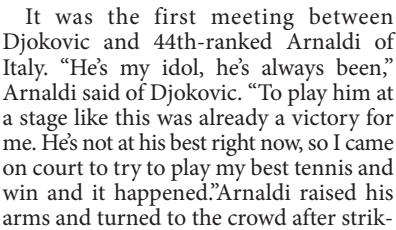
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PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

"It's a challenge for me mentally to really face these kinds of sensations on the court, going out early now regularly in



Djokovic is still seeking his first title of the season after winning his 99th title last August at the Paris Olympics. He has lost four finals since then. The only two players to reach the 100-title milestone are

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The draw relegated rock-bottom Montpellier.

Lorient was promoted from the second tier after beating last-placed Caen 4-0.