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DEADLINE FOR PAKISTANIS EXPIRES TODAY

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Any Pakistani, who fails to leave India as per the deadlines set by the Government, will be arrested, prosecuted and may face a jail term of up to three years or a fine of a maximum ₹3 lakh or both, according to the Immigration and Foreigners Act 2025.

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. 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.

Meanwhile, Delhi Police is carrying out verification of nearly 6,000-7,000 Pakistani nationals staying here following a Centre directive issued after a recent terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam district. According to sources, the Foreign Regional Registration Office (FRRO) passed the list to the police's special branch, which has forwarded it to district units for verification. Most listed individuals have had their visas revoked, except those holding Long-Term Visas (LTVs), especially Hindu Pakistani nationals, who are exempt.

Most Pakistani nationals told the media that they had come to India to meet their relatives. Some had arrived to attend weddings but were now forced to return without attending

Sources said authorities are verifying overlaps in two separate lists of 3,000 and 2,000 names. The Ministry of Home Affairs has confirmed visa revocations effective April 27, excluding medical, diplomatic, and LTV categories.

Most Pakistani nationals told the media that they had come to India to meet their relatives. Some had arrived to attend weddings but were now forced to return without attending. The visas of Pakistan nationals have been revoked in the wake of the recent directive of the centre, prompted by a recent terrorist attack on tourists in the Pahalgam district of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Immigration and Foreigners Act 2025, which came into effect on April 4, overstaying, violating visa conditions, or trespassing in restricted areas could lead to three years in jail and a fine of up to ₹3 lakh. "Whoever,-(a) being a foreigner, remains in any area in India for a period exceeding the period for which the visa was issued to him or stays in India without a valid passport or other valid travel document in contravention of provisions of Section 3 or does any act in violation of the conditions of the valid visa issued to him for his entry and stay in India or any part thereunder;

"(b) contravenes any other provisions of this Act, other than sections 17 and 19, or of any rule or order made thereunder or any direction or instruction given in pursuance of this Act or such order or direction or instruction for which, no specific punishment is provided under this Act, shall be punishable with an imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years or with a fine which may extend to ₹3 lakh or with both," the Act says.

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. After Shah's telephonic conversations with the chief ministers, Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan held a video conference with the chief secretaries and asked them to ensure that all Pakistani nationals whose visas were revoked must leave India by the fixed deadline.

Navy tests battle readiness for strikes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In the backdrop of tension between India and Pakistan after the Pahalgam terror attack, the Indian Navy carried out multiple anti-ship firings revalidating their readiness for long range precision "offensive" strikes. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, meanwhile, was briefed about the current security situation by military top brass.

"Indian Navy ships undertook successful multiple anti-ship firings to revalidate and demonstrate readiness of platforms, systems and crew for long range precision offensive strike," the Indian Navy said in a statement here on Sunday.

"Indian Navy stands combat ready, credible and future ready in safeguarding the nation's maritime interests anytime, anywhere, anyhow," it said. The Navy also released videos of the live firings at sea.

The visuals showed BrahMos anti-ship and anti-surface cruise missiles being launched from a fleet of warships, including Kolkata-class destroyers and Nilgiri and Krivak-class frigates,

Indian Navy Ships undertook successful multiple anti-ship firings to revalidate and demonstrate readiness of platforms, systems and crew for long range precision offensive strike. PTI

The demonstration of the Navy's combat prowess came amid heightened tensions between India and Pakistan over the dastardly Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 civilians.

Amid escalating tensions, INS Surat, last week also completed a successful precision test of the Medium Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MR-SAM) system against a sea-skimming target in the Arabian Sea.

NIA takes over Pahalgam terror probe

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) formally launched investigations in the Pahalgam terror attack case following orders from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Sunday.

Meanwhile, a 45-year-old social activist succumbed to his fatal injuries after he was targeted by suspected terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district on Sunday.

The Pakistan Army violated the ceasefire agreement for the third consecutive day along the Line of Control in the Kashmir valley on Sunday. According to Defence PRO, on the night of April 26-27, Pakistan army posts initiated unprovoked small arms firing across the line of control in the areas opposite Tutmari Gali and Rampur sector. Own troops responded effectively with appropriate small arms fire.

In Kashmir valley, the security forces demolished houses of three more terrorists, taking the total number of razed houses to 10 so far in the last six days.

According to a NIA spokesman, the NIA teams, already camping in Pahalgam since Wednesday, in the aftermath of the merciless killing of 26 tourists in the Baisaran meadow of Pahalgam, have intensified efforts to gather credible evidence in the case. The NIA teams will be gathering vital inputs based on the questioning of eyewitnesses present at the spot on April 22, when a group of terrorists emerged from inside the forested area to target tourists on a holiday. According to a statement issued by the NIA, "a team of NIA officials led by its Inspector General (IG) was rushed to the site to assist the local police. The NIA teams have been camping at the terror attack site since Wednesday, looking for clues".

Separate teams of NIA officials have been visiting across the country to seek details from survivors of the terrorist attack, said to be orchestrated by Pakistan-based LeT

"The teams, aided by forensic and other experts, are checking the entire area thoroughly for evidence to expose the terror conspiracy that led to the horrendous attack that has shocked the nation," an NIA statement said.

The eyewitnesses are also being questioned in minute detail to piece together the sequence of events that led to one of the worst terror attacks in Kashmir, it said.

Separate teams of NIA officials have been visiting across the country to seek details from survivors of the terrorist attack, said to be orchestrated by Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the officials said.

NIA teams have recorded accounts from victims' family members in Maharashtra, Odisha and West Bengal among other states, they said.

Initial investigations into the dastardly terror attack indicate that the number of terrorists involved could range from five to seven, they said.

The attackers were also aided by at least two local terrorists who received training in Pakistan, the officials said.

Security agencies have released sketches of three terrorists suspected of being involved in the attack. The trio, from Pakistan, are said to be Asif Fauji, Suleman Shah and Abu Talha, they said.

The ByStander

PIONEER IN SHORT

MP: 11 killed after van falls into well following collison

In Madhya Pradesh's Mandsaur district, a van carrying 13 people collided with a bike and fell into a water-filled well, killing 11, including the biker and a rescuer. The incident occurred in the Narayangarh area. Four passengers survived. Rescue operations by NDRF are ongoing. Deputy CM Jagdish Devda visited the site and stated the van driver likely lost control.

Two dead in Delhi slum fire, over 800 shanties gutted

A massive fire broke out in a jhuggi cluster in Sector 17, Rohini, on Sunday morning, killing two children and injuring five people. Over 800 shanties were destroyed. Firefighters battled the blaze for over three hours, deploying 26 fire tenders despite access challenges. Union Health Minister JP Nadda urged immediate relief. Cooling operations continue as the cause is investigated—suspected to involve LPG cylinders.

Dalit MP attacked by caste group on national highway

Samajwadi Party Dalit MP Ramjilal Suman's convoy was attacked with tires by Karni Sena activists at Gabhana Toll Booth on the Aligarh-Delhi GT Road on Sunday, causing a minor pile-up. Though no one was injured, police deployed forces and later suspended the toll booth in-charge for negligence. Suman was en route to Sohana village, where Dalits were attacked on April 21, but was stopped and sent back. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav condemned the incident.

Students forced to recite namaz in Chhattisgarh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BILASPUR

Eight persons, including seven faculty members, were booked for allegedly forcing some students of Guru Ghasidas Central University to offer namaz during a National Service Scheme (NSS) camp in Chhattigarh's Bilaspur district. Nobody has been arrested so far.

Police said the booked persons had forced 159 students to offer namaz during the NSS camp held between March 26 and April 1 in Shivtarai village under Kota police station limits, though only four among them were Muslims.

A probe was instituted after students came back and protested, following which Right Wing outfits too agitated seeking action against those responsible, the official said. "The incident took place on March 31. Bilaspur Senior Superintendent of Police Rajnesh Singh had constituted a four member committee under City Superintendent of Police (Kotwali) Akshay Sabadra to investigate the matter. The case was lodged on Saturday after the investigation report was submitted to the SSP," said the official. Seven faculty members of Guru Ghasidas Central University and a team core leader-cum-student have been booked under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Chhattisgarh Religious Freedom Act for promoting enmity among groups on the basis of religion etc, outraging religious feelings and other offences, the official said.

Local police station said that the case diary has been received and a probe begun. "The persons named in the FIR will be served notices to be present for recording of statements. Action will be taken on the basis of further probe," he said. Bilaspur SSP Rajnesh Singh ordered an inquiry and formed a four-member committee led by Kotwali (City) SP Akshay Sabadra. Based on the committee's investigation report, a case was registered on Saturday against teachers Dilip Jha, Madhulika Singh, Jyoti Verma, Neeraj Kumari, Prashant Vaishnav, Suryabhan Singh, Basant Kumar, and student leader Ayushman Chaudhary.

"They have been charged under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Chhattisgarh Religious Freedom Act. We will arrest them soon," IG of Police, Bilaspur range, Sanjeev Shukla said.

The case was initially filed at the Koni police station, with the case being subsequently transferred to the Kota police station for further investigation, the officer added.

Blood of every Indian is boiling: PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Sunday said blood of every Indian is boiling looking at pictures of the Pahalgam attack killing 26 people and cautioned that Kashmir saw progress but terrorists want to destroy it. He assured the nation that perpetrators of this act will definitely be brought to justice.

Making this assertion in his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' radio broadcast, he also said terrorists and conspirators behind the killings of 26 civilians will be served the harshest punishment.

Blood of every Indian is boiling by looking at the pictures of the attack, he said.

It is the second time in the last few days Prime Minister Modi spoke about the dastardly act. On Thursday last, he sent out a fierce message that perpetrators will be pursued "to the end of the earth" and promised to "identify, track and punish every terrorist and their backers".

Addressing a public rally in Madhubani, Bihar, Modi also vowed the terrorists and conspirators behind the attack will get a punishment beyond their imagination.

In his addressing in the public rally, Modi suddenly switched from Hindi to English to reiterate his message. It was an apparent move to address the global community about India's intentions and resolve to bring the killers of Pahalgam to justice. Modi said in English, "Friends, today from the soil of Bihar, I say to the

whole world India will identify, track, and punish every terrorist and their backers. We will pursue them to the ends of the earth. India's spirit will never be broken by terrorism. Terrorism will not go unpunished."

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

On Sunday, Modi also said the country's unity and solidarity of its 140 crore citizens is its biggest strength in this war against terrorism. "This unity is the basis of our decisive fight against terrorism," he said. The prime minister said the attack in the famous tourist town in Kashmir reflected the desperation and cowardice of the patrons of terrorism, a reference to Pakistan, at a time when peace was returning to the Valley and there was vibrancy in its schools and colleges.

He said construction work had gained unprecedented pace, democracy was getting stronger, the number of tourists was increasing at a record rate, people's income was increasing, and new opportunities were being created for the youth.

Modi said, "Enemies of the country, the enemies of Jammu and Kashmir did not like that. Terrorists and the masterminds of terror want Kashmir to be destroyed again and hence they executed such a big conspiracy."

The prime minister said his heart is in deep anguish over the biggest terror attack on civilians in Kashmir in a long spell of time, and said the incident has hurt every citizen of the country.

Every Indian is feeling deep sympathies for the affected families, no matter which state one belongs to or which language one speaks, he said.

Modi said, "I can feel that the blood of every Indian is on the boil after seeing the pictures of the terrorist attack. I once again assure the affected families that they will get justice, and justice will be definitely done. The perpetrators and conspirators of this attack will be served the harshest punishment." He added,

"We have to strengthen our resolve to face this challenge before the country. We have to demonstrate a strong willpower as a nation.

Today the world is watching that after this terrorist attack the whole country is speaking in one voice."

Out with Mughals, in with Maha Kumbh: NCERT overhauls school textbooks

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ New Delhi

Massive overhauling of the NCERT text books for the current session of class seven has incorporated chapters on Government's socio-economic initiatives like `Make in India', Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Atal Tunnel.

While it has done away with the references to Mughals and Delhi Sultanate, new chapters on Indian dynasties, geographical aspects and Maha Kumbh are among the new additions to the new textbooks released as per the guidelines of new National Education Policy (NEP) and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE),

The Social Science textbook "Exploring Society: India and Beyond" has new chapters on ancient Indian dynasties like the Magadha, Mauryas, Shungas, and Satavahanas with a focus on "Indian ethos." Another new edition in the book is a chapter called "How the Land Becomes Sacred" that focuses on places considered sacred and pilgrimages across India and outside for religions like Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

The chapter introduces concepts like "sacred geography" detailing networks of such places as 12 jyotirlingas, the char dham yatra, and the "Shakti pithas." The chapter also details such places as river confluences, mountains, and forests, which are revered.

NCERT officials said the latest book released is only the first part of the text book which has newer items as designed by NEP while the second part of the book shall be in coming months

The text includes a quote from Jawaharlal Nehru, who described India as a land of pilgrimages - from the icy peaks of Badrinath and Amarnath to the southern tip at Kanyakumari. The book also talks about the varna-jati system which resulted to inequalities during the colonial era. The just concluded Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj mentions that about 65 crore people from the across the world took a holy dip.

NCERT officials said the latest book released is only the first part of the text book which has newer items as designed by NEP while the second part of the book for class seven shall be released during the next couple of months.

Officials however could not specify whether the chapters on medieval India would be retained in the second part of yet to be released book.

Its not the first time but NCERT had previously trimmed sections on the Mughals and Delhi Sultanate — including detailed account of dynasties like Tughlaqs, Khaljis, Mamluks, and Lodis and a two-page table on Mughal emperors' achievements as part of its syllabus rationalisation during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022-23. But this time new textbook has removed all references to them.

Further a chapter on the movement of allowing individuals to fly the national flag at their homes has also been introduced.

First woman dog handler of the Assam Rifles, Rifle-woman Sreelakshmi PV, during her training. PTI

GUEST COLUMN

Importance of correct timing for construction work in higher altitudes

VP Dimri

The world witnessed the Mana avalanche which trapped 54 road widening workers killing eight workers without any warning on February 8 earlier this year. The Mana village is in Chamoli district and is the last village bordering Tibet now renamed as the 'First Village' once you enter from Tibet. It is situated at an altitude of 3,200 metres from mean sea level (10, 500 feet) and about three kilometres from the Badrinath temple. It is known for the clear skies and clear air. Due to heavy snow cover in the vicinity of the area, it is closed for about six months which coincides with the opening and closing of Badrinath temple. The residents of the area generally stay there in summer and with the advent of winter, return to the lower altitude villages like Chhinaka near Chamoli town and Naiguard near Gopeshwar which is also the district headquarter of Chamoli. The residents of this region used to do business with Tibet. They used to take jaggery, sugar and other items brought from Rishikesh, Kotdwar and in return from Tibet bring like rock salt and herbal medicines, among other products. The transport of goods is taken care of by the goats, horses and other domesticated animals. This was true with all higher altitude villages like Niti village situated at an altitude of 3,600 metres about 80 kilometres from Jyotirmath in Chamoli District. It is also the last village boarding Tibet and here also the residents used to do business with Tibet in summer and return to the lower altitude villages like residents of Mana village in the winter. These two villages were very far away from the main stream of Garhwal region of Himalaya and there is one saying; 'Kaha Niti, Kaha Mana, ek Shyam Singh Patwari ne Kaha Kaha Jana' ie how one government official like patwari can visit these unnoticeable and unapproachable villages?

There can be many reasons why residents of Mana and Niti villages did not stay in their villages during winter. One obvious reason is heavy snowfall which prevents any physical movement. The other reason is the closing of agriculture activities. The region is good for millet production. In fact, the prasad of lord Shiva in Badrinath is produced by Ramdana, a variety of millet grown in Mana village. The Ramdana is locally known as chuwa grown around Mana region and is very costly since it is also used as an Ayurvedic medicine. This was one main source of income of the people of Mana village. The other type of millet that is grown is finger millet with high nutritive value.

Fortunately, the region is protected by any natural disaster as also in the case of the Badrinath temple. In the past, the big avalanches did damage the whole town of Badrinath except for the main temple and its surroundings. The ancestors had chosen the location of the temple at a site comparatively safe from any natural disaster. Similarly, Mana village is known for being safe from big natural disasters. This time on February 28, there was a big avalanche about 550 metres away from the village. There was widening of a road commonly known as Rishikesh-Mana road for the defense purpose being constructed by Border Roads Organisation. Generally, avalanches in this area normally happen in February and March. Intelligent village people are aware of the history of avalanches and used to vacate the village. This is the wisdom of the villagers of Mana which government officials were ignoring since a long time.

So, it is advisable that such construction work in the higher altitude regions for the defense purposes should be avoided in winter particularly in the months of February and March.

(A Padma Shri recipient, the author is an eminent scientist who has worked in various institutions. Views expressed are personal)

> **"Fortunately, the region is protected by any natural disaster as also in the case of the Badrinath temple. In the past, the big avalanches did damage the whole town of Badrinath except for the main temple and its surroundings. The ancestors had chosen the location of the temple at a site comparatively safe from any natural disaster. Similarly, Mana village is known for being safe from big natural disasters. This time on February 28, there was a big avalanche about 550 metres away from the village."**

FILE PIC

Kailash Mansarovar Yatra to start on June 30 after four-year gap

AFZAL FAUJI ■ Nainital

The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra is scheduled to resume on June 30 after being stalled for about four years since the Covid-19 pandemic. Those who pass the health checkup in Delhi will be included in the groups permitted to undertake this pilgrimage. The Central and State governments have made elaborate arrangements to make this Yatra secure and convenient.The agency organising the Yatra in Uttarakhand, the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN) has also undertaken various steps. Its managing director Vineet Tomar said that the Yatra will begin from Delhi on June 30. The first group will travel from Tanakpur to Dharchula and Gunji and then proceed towards Kailash Mansarovar. On the return journey, the group will also visit prominent temples in Kumaon including the Kainchi Dham before reaching Delhi. Tomar further informed that so far five groups have been made for the pilgrimage with each group to have 50 members each. The road facility is being improved in order to minimise inconvenience to the pilgrims. Compared to past years, the condition of the roads in the remote areas has been improved, he said.

The KMVN will welcome pilgrims who arrive here for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra in the traditional Uttarakhandi style after applying a Tilak on them. During the pilgrimage, they will also get a chance to witness the culture and heritage of the State. According to officials, the pilgrims will be served Uttarakhandi food at places where accommodation has been arranged for them. They will also be introduced to the folk culture of the State.

Officials further informed that during the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, along with the deployment of security forces, the local administration and personnel of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) will also be deployed to assist the pilgrims undertaking this Yatra. Medical teams and helicopter facility will also be made available on the Yatra routes. In addition to this, the government is also focusing on environmental conservation. Considering this, the pilgrims have been appealed to shun plastic during the pilgrimage.

It is pertinent to mention here that while Hindus belive Kailash to be the abode of Lord Shiva, the mountain and Mansarovar lake are also held sacred by Buddhists and Jains.

Investing in Bhiwadi promises high real estate returns

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Bhiwadi, a town at the eastern boundary of Rajasthan and part of National Capital Region-identified as a priority town in the Regional Plan-2021 of NCR-is fast emerging as a real estate 'hotspot', experiencing rapid growth and ballooning demand for properties. Popular among investors and buyers alike, it is all set to see substantial surge in property values in time to come. Its transformation from a tiny rural settlement with a population of just 1,624 persons in 1971 into a vibrant industrial centre thanks to the energetic efforts of Rajasthan State Industrial Development and Investment Corporation since 1975 is amazing. Bhiwadi's population grew to 15,000 in 1991 when it was declared a census town and then, in the next 10 years, its population grew to 33,877. A wealth advisor based in Delhi, Amrit Verma, who has visited the town and assessed its property promoting potential, is all praise for the place. "Bhiwadi is increasingly being viewed as an affordable and high-potential alternative to Gurugram and Delhi," he said.

Asked why he is pinning so much hope on Bhiwadi as an emerging paragon for real estate investment, Verma said that there are numerous factors on which his optimism is based. "First, we must consider its location convenient for commuters and business alike. Just 50 kilometres from Gurugram and 70 kilometres from Delhi, it is well-connected via the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC). Besides, the upcoming Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) will further boost its connectivity," he added.

He further pointed out the affordable property prices in Bhiwadi compared to the skyrocketing prices in Delhi and Gurugram. "This is why the first-time buyers and investors are increasingly choosing Bhiwadi for investing their money," he stressed. Next, he mentioned the presence of industrial and economic hubs in Bhiwadi. "It is home to over 2,700 industries, including major players like Honda, Hero MotoCorp and Shree Cement. This industrial boom opens employment avenues in abundance and this is what is pushing up the housing demand," he said.

Asked to spell out other major factors that scale up the real estate value of the town, another Delhi-based wealth advisor, Himanshu Choudhary, who is also supposed to have a good understanding of the possibilities and opportunities inherent in the fast-developing place, spoke of its planned urban infrastructure. "The Greater Bhiwadi Master Plan 2031 promises significant upgrades in infrastructure encompassing roads, transportation, water supply and sewage system among others. This planned development ensures organised growth across industrial, commercial and residential zones," he observed. He then came to the upcoming transport projects which, according to him, will prove to be the growth engine in terms of the upward curve of the real estate potential of the town. "Mega connectivity projects like the Delhi-Alwar Metro, RRTS and the Dedicated Freight Corridor are set to reduce travel time and enhance accessibility. This will definitely make Bhiwadi even more attractive for professionals and businesses," he said.

More than 11K hectare forest land under encroachment in U'khand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

About 11,383 hectareas of land under the Uttarakhand Forest department is reported as encroached forest land in the State. Out of this, encroachments were removed from about 1,400 hectares under the anti-encroachment drive from April 2023 to March 2025. The Forest department is also working on an action plan for the removal of encroachments from forest land. This was revealed in the response submitted by the State Forest department during the recent hearing on an application in the National Green Tribunal (NGT).The NGT had taken up the matter following a media report regarding encroachments on forest land in Uttarakhand.

The department also faces various challenges in the execution of the action plan for the removal of encroachments from forest land. When it comes to enforcement, while forest protection laws exist, their effective implementation and enforcement can be inadequate due to factors like inadequate staffing, insufficient funding and improper infrastructure for monitoring and surveillance. The department acknowledges that in some cases, powerful individuals or groups with political connections may be involved in or provide patronage to encroachers, making it difficult for authorities to take impartial action. Further, instances of corruption and collusion between forest officials and encroachers can facilitate illegal occupation and hinder eviction efforts. This undermines the integrity of forest protection agencies. The department states that the operational plan for the removal of encroachments on forest land is a multi-stage process that prioritises accuracy, legal compliance with the latest Indian Forest Ac 1927 (Uttarakhand Amendment of 2002), and effective execution. The initial and foundational stage involves meticulous mapping and demarcation of the encroached areas. This is no longer a solely manual process but critically leverages modern geospatial technologies to ensure precision and legal defensibility.

Meanwhile, activists opine that even though forests are considered to be the major resource of the State, it appears as if the authorities have continued to adopt an apathetic stance when it comes to protecting this irreplaceable resource. They claim that instances of encroachments on reserved forest land and activities that damage forest resources are not uncommon even in the suburbs of the provisional State capital Dehradun.

Rawat announces measures for enhancing education, checks health facilities for Yatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Uttarkashi

Education and Health minister Dhan Singh Rawat laid the foundation for the Kasturba Gandhi girls boarding school hostel building costing Rs 330 lakh during an event at Chinyalisaud here on Sunday. The minister also checked Health department preparations for the Char Dham Yatra.

Congratulating the Rajkeeya Shikshak Sangh for successfully organising the event, he directed officials to identify land for a building of the association. Rawat said that Uttarakhand is the first State to have declared the results of the board examination. About 40 per cent of the students have secured first division in the board examination results this year. This shows the good condition of the education system in the State, he said.

The minister announced that girl students who score more than 70 per cent marks in class VI will get a monthly scholarship of Rs 600 which will be increased by Rs 100 every year in order to reach the amount of Rs 1,200 by the time the student reaches class XII. The government will provide books free of cost to students from class I to XII. This will benefit about 12 lakh students in the State, he said. In addition to this, the 10 toppers in each block will be taken on the national educational tour. The minister further said that the government is working to develop virtual classes and smart classes along with computer facilities in all government schools in the State. Sports equipment will be distributed to 1,200 schools, he said, while adding that the government has made a Rs 50 crore provision for repairing damaged school buildings.

Earlier, the minister also reviewed preparations for the Char Dham Yatra at Chinyalisaud. He directed the chief medical officer to ensure that pilgrims receive high quality medical facilities during the Yatra slated to begin on April 30. The minister also directed the officials concerned to ensure the availability of doctors, adequate quantity of essential medicines and oxygen at the community health centre in Badkot and other medical units in the district. The government has also ensured the deployment of specialist doctors during the pilgrimage season, the minister added.

Police seize wrongly parked vehicles during a checking drive aimed at improving the traffic in Nainital city on Sunday **Pioneer photo**

Dutta checks forest fire management efforts in Uttarakhand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Senior Supreme Court advocate Rajiv Dutta inspected the integrated command and control centre (ICCC) at the Forest department headquarters here on Sunday. The principal chief conservator of forests Dhananjai Mohan and other officials were also present on the occasion. The additional PCCF (Forest Fires & Disaster Management) Nishant Verma provided information about the use of the forest fire mobile application and action being taken to control forest fires. Information was also provided about innovations for forest fire management in the State. According to officials, Dutta appreciated the efforts undertaken by the State government and Forest department for controlling forest fires in the State. After the visit to the ICCC, Dutta and departmental officials also visited the Thano crew station and saw the fireline cleaning work in this part of Dehradun forest division.

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Govt cancels registration of Pakistani pilgrims for Char Dham and Hemkund Yatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The State government has cancelled the registration of 77 Pakistani pilgrims for Char Dham and Hemkund Yatra following the brutal killing of 26 people in Pahalgam by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists, the Tourism minister Satpal Maharaj said. He condemned the attack, calling it a cowardly act and stated that

tourism and terrorism cannot coexist. The Char Dham Yatra has generated significant enthusiasm, with over 22 lakh devotees already registering, including more than 25,000 foreign pilgrims from 185 countries. Maharaj said that in response to the attack, the government acted swiftly to revoke the registrations of all Pakistani visitors to ensure the safety of pilgrims. He also informed that to manage traffic on the Yatra routes, the Uttarkashi police will patrol sensitive paths using 10 new motorcycles. The Tourism department has also directed officials to take strict action against the black marketing of helicopter tickets and unauthorised parking fees along the Yatra routes, he said. He informed that this year, the government has made registration easier by offering online, offline and Aadhaar-based registration options for pilgrims. He stated that 75 per cent of pilgrims can now register online as the registration limit has been recently increased by 15 per cent. The offline registration will begin on April 28, at four locations- Haridwar, Rishikesh, Vikasnagar and Herbertpur, he said. Maharaj also added that he has directed all departments concerned to work in coordination to ensure all works are done efficiently without causing any inconvenience to pilgrims.

All works on Char Dham routes expected to be completed by April 29

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Garhwal commissioner Vinay Shankar Pandey said that all major and minor works on Char Dham routes will be completed in two days, with the final preparations expected by April 29. The departments concerned have also ensured proper arrangements for accommodations, drinking water and toilet facilities along the pilgrimage route. Pandey said that all arrangements for the Char Dham Yatra, set to begin on April 30, are on track. He stated that after the previous Char Dham Yatra season, chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami conducted a meeting to address any shortcomings and improve the travel experience for this year's journey. "Our main focus has been on improving road connectivity and basic infrastructure. Authorities have identified locations along the routes to provide food, shelter and toilet facilities in case of landslides or emergencies. To strengthen security, 10 companies of central paramilitary forces have been deployed too along with the local force," the commissioner said. He also informed that the government has expanded online and offline booking facilities. The number of offline counters in Haridwar and Rishikesh has been increased to ensure a smooth travel experience. New counters will also be established at Gauchar for Badrinath, Bhatwadi and Uttarkashi for Gangotri, Dobata and Damta for Yamunotri and the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam (GMVN) guest house in Guptkashi for Kedarnath. Almost all preparations are done and authorities are working to make the Char Dham Yatra a safe and comfortable experience for all pilgrims, he added.

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Unity of Indians biggest strength in decisive war on terror: Dhami

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The unity of all Indians is the biggest strength of the nation in the decisive war on terror. Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said this after listening to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Mann Ki Baat here on Sunday. Dhami along with MLA Khajan Das, position holders Anil Dabbu, Puneet

Mittal and others listened to the 121st edition of PM Modi's Mann Ki Baat at the CM's camp office.

Dhami said that the PM had expressed deep empathy and grief at the recent terror attack at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir. This attack shows the desperation and cowardice of those who sponsor terrorism. Dhami said that the unity of all the Indians is the nation's biggest strength in the decisive war on terror. Calling the Mann Ki Baat programme very inspirational, he said that by mentioning various positive works in society, the PM encourages those people who are contributing to taking the nation forward. The CM further said that PM Modi provides a platform for the suggestions, opinion and successful efforts of the citizens which inspire lakhs of people. The Mann Ki Baat programme is now emotionally and intellectually linked deeply with thte people of India, Dhami added.

CM flags off Six Sigma high altitude medical services team

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhami flagged off the Six Sigma high altitude medical services' team from his camp office here on Sunday. Also launching the Sanjeevani kit on the occasion, the CM said that the service being provided by Six Sigma will also contribute to the successful conduct of

the Char Dham Yatra.

Wishing the Six Sigma high altitude medical services team, the chief minister also pointed at the importance of this service for the devotees undertaking the Char Dham Yatra. According to officials, the Six Sigma High Altitude Medical Services will provide medical services through camps to be held during the Yatra to Adi Kailash, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Madhyamaheshwar, Tungnath and Rudranath. The Sanjeevani kit launched by Dhami on the occasion includes oxygen, essential medicines and portable ICU equipment. Rajpur Road MLA Khajan Das, BJP leader Puneet Mittal, Six Sigma CEO Pradeep Bharadwaj and others were also present on the occasion.

Police impose Rs 16.20 lakh penalty on landlords in Dehradun

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The police imposed a penalty of Rs 16.20 lakh on 162 individuals for keeping unverified tenants and workers in Dehradun. The Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said that in preparation for the ensuing Char Dham Yatra and the peak tourist season, police launched a large-scale verification campaign across both urban and rural areas of the district on Sunday. The drive was aimed at verifying the details of individuals, tenants and

workers from outside the State in the area. Over 800 individuals, including outsiders and tenants, were verified during the operation. It should be mentioned here that this move also comes in the wake of heightened security concerns following the recent terror attack in Pahalgam, which has led to increased vigilance across Uttarakhand, especially in the border areas and places with floating populations. With a surge in the number of tourists, the police have intensified their efforts to ensure the safety of pilgrims and visitors. The SSP said that property owners and shopkeepers were reminded of their responsibility to verify the identity of tenants and employees to prevent any security threats. He said that 162 building and shop owners who had failed to verify their tenants or workers were charged under Section 83 of the Police Act, resulting in fines totaling Rs16.2 lakh on Sunday. Besides this, over 130 suspects were brought in for questioning at local police stations and 44 of these individuals were charged under Section 81 of the Police Act, with Rs 14,000 in fines. Singh said that the police campaign, conducted across various police stations in the city and rural areas, is part of the broader security strategy to ensure the safety of residents and tourists alike. He urged property owners and shopkeepers to comply with verification procedures, contributing to the safety of the region. Similar campaigns will continue to run regularly, especially during the busy tourist season, to ensure public peace and security, the SSP added.

Officials and contractors booked for construction work violations in Doon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

Authorities filed cases against officials and contractors of the Jal Sansthan for negligence and breach of standards during construction on Canal Road. They also booked officials, employees, and contractors of GAIL and UPCL for violations during

work on Mata Mandir Road on the Dehradun district magistrate Savin Bansal's order. The administration blacklisted the agencies and contractors for three months, barring them from undertaking new projects during this period. Bansal informed that the administration had allowed construction under strict safety conditions but agencies continued work during the day, violating rules and creating accident-prone zones. Local residents raised concerns over public inconvenience and safety risks. Authorities registered cases for damaging public property, endangering public life and failing to follow safety norms. He said that following the violations, the administration suspended the agencies' work permissions for three months and lodged FIRs under serious sections. Though permission was granted for safe road cutting, the agencies ignored public safety measures during construction, as per the DM. The district administration cited violations such as leaving debris on roads, failing to level excavated areas, and abandoning construction equipment. Bansal stated that any compromise with public safety will not be tolerated. He directed all agencies to ensure complete safety arrangements during construction, promptly remove debris and restore roads to prescribed standards after completing the work.

Officials review shuttle services in Rudraprayag ahead of Char Dham Yatra

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

In view of the Char Dham Yatra starting on April 30,

senior Transport officials inspected the Sonprayag to Gaurikund shuttle service checkpost on Sunday. They instructed officials to ensure smooth operation of the shuttle services. The senior officials collected the vehicle numbers of approximately 200 shuttle vehicles and planned their rotation for efficient service, the regional transport officer (Administration) of Dehradun division and nodal officer of Char Dham Yatra, Sandeep Saini said.

He said that respective transport officials were instructed to issue green cards only to those vehicles that meet fitness standards, especially focusing on brakes, hand brakes, tires and wipers. The department has made it clear that any vehicle failing to meet these standards must not receive a green card, he said.

He informed that they also inspected the driver dormitory in Sitapur, Sonprayag and directed the ARTO concerned to contact the Rudraprayag district magistrate to arrange for electricity and water supply. Saini said that a prayer ceremony also took place at the Triyuginarayan Temple in Ukhimath Tehsil of Rudraprayag which was also joined by deputy transport commissioner Rajeev Mehra, Pauri RTO Dwarika Prasad and other officials among others. He said that all performed prayers for the safe and successful execution of the Char Dham Yatra this year.

Visitors halt to view a glacier which was cut to clear a stretch of the national highway to Gangotri near Harshil in Uttarkashi district **Mangesh Kumar/Pioneer photo**

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

Prime Minister Narendra Modi FILE PHOTO

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 'Champaran Satyagraha', Modi said it was the first big experiment by Bapu in India. "The entire British rule was shaken by Bapu'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 'Champaran 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.

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

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.

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 (UPEIDA), 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.

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

Highlighting the importance of the Ganga Expressway for Uttar Pradesh's economic 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 predict 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 sufficient 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, Pehlwans 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. Abd tge 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 at one point of time. Because we had food scarcity, our concern was food security."

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 PTI

"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 instil 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.

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.

BHUPESH CHAUDHARY

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: principled, 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 awaken 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)

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 OWAISI, MEMBER OF THE LOK SABHA

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 digital 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.

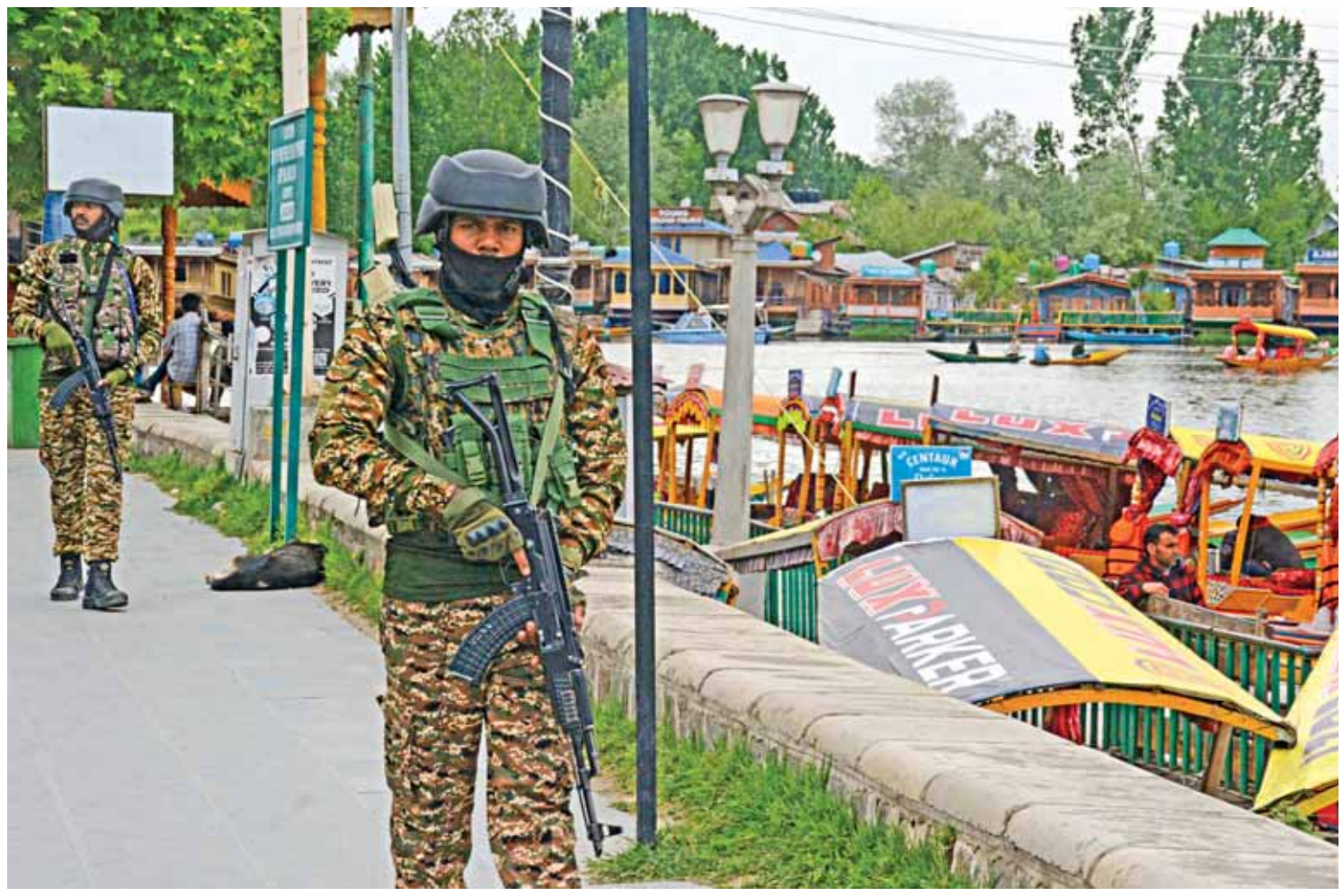
BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE | FARIDABAD

Please send your letter to the letterstopioneer@gmail.com. In not more than 400 words. We appreciate your feedback.

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



RAJDEEP PATHAK

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 once-picturesque 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' (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 and Middle Eastern nations, especially the UAE, issued strong statements condemning the attack.

> 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.

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 — is a calculated attempt to inflict maximum economic harm and cultivate an atmosphere of fear, thereby disrupting peace and stability.

Since the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, the Indian Government has been actively pursuing peace-building and confidence — regaining measures in Jammu and Kashmir, while also promoting local entrepreneurship and development, recognising the practicalities of the situation on ground, which had begun to yield positive results, thereby projecting a return to normalcy in the region.

The recent attack has severely impacted its sector, specifically, the recovering tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir. Travel agencies in Delhi experienced nearly 90 per cent booking cancellations, as per media reports.

This 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.

Amidst the tears of this tragedy, the response of the Kashmiri people showcased a powerful display of humanity. Immediately following the attack, residents rushed to the scene to assist the injured tourists.

They helped with evacuations, offered first aid, and provided emotional support to those traumatised by the event. A day later, on April 23, religious organisations condemned the attack and large numbers of Kashmiri citizens took to the streets in protest of this massacre, holding peaceful demonstrations with the Tricolour, besides candlelight vigils, further underscoring the rejection of violence by the local population and their desire for peace and stability.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the insidious nature of terrorism often finds fertile ground in the tilled soil of human emotions — fear, anger, and envy — emotions that are tragically amplified by the harsh realities of systemic inequalities and sometimes, forced acts of blind belief.

It is a matter of grave national concern to observe the seeds of violence taking root even in our villages, and growing children's aggressive behaviour. This early violence is often a bitter harvest of neglect, stemming from a lack of fundamental education that instils mutual respect, and the gnawing anxiety of unemployment, that darkens the horizons of their future. These interconnected issues demand serious and sustained attention to prevent the escalation of individual frustrations into larger societal threats.

While the Government is taking strong counter-terrorism measures in light of this barbaric attack, the participation of citizens in rebuilding the shaken confidence is crucial. Despite this barbaric act that threatens to undermine the hard-won progress in the Valley, rebuilding trust is now paramount. The time is now to act — in all directions, for peace is the only way.

(The writer is a programme executive Gandhi Smriti Sansthan. Views are personal)

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

ANIL ANAND

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

> 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.

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 ploy 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)

Boston celebrates Freedom Rally

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Boston

As a Black teenager growing up in Boston, Wayne Lucas vividly remembers joining about 20,000 people to hear the Rev Martin Luther King Jr speak out against the city's segregated school system and the entrenched poverty in poor communities.

Sixty years on, Lucas was back on the Boston Common on Saturday to celebrate the anniversary of what became known as the 1965 Freedom Rally. He joined others in calling for continued activism against many of the same injustices and inequities that King fought against, and in criticising President Donald Trump and his administration for current divisions and fears about race and immigration across the country.

"The message was ... That we still have work to do," said Lucas (75). "It was a lot of inspiration by every speaker out there."

The gathering drew several hundred people on a rainy and windy day, conditions similar to those during the 1965 event. King's son, Martin Luther King III, gave a keynote speech, saying he never thought racism would still be around and on the rise like it is today.

"We must quadruple our efforts to create a more just and humane society," he told the crowd. "We used to exhibit humanity and civility, but we have chosen temporarily to allow civility to be moved aside. And that is not sustainable, my friends."

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

showed us how to stay on the battlefield, and mom, throughout their lives. They showed us how to build community."

US Representative Ayanna Pressley, a Massachusetts Democrat, said the work of 1960s civil rights leaders remains unfinished, with too many people still experiencing racism, poverty and injustice.

The original protest rally in 1965 brought the civil rights movement to the Northeast, a place Martin Luther King Jr knew well from his time earning a doctorate in theology from Boston University and serving as assistant minister at the city's Twelfth Baptist Church. It was also the place where he met his wife, who earned a degree in music education from the New England Conservatory.

In his speech, King told the crowd that he returned to Boston not to condemn the city but to encourage its leaders to do better at a time when Black leaders were fighting to desegregate the schools and housing and working to improve economic opportunities for Black residents. King also implored Boston to become a leader that other cities like New York and Chicago could follow in conducting "the creative experiments in the abolition of ghettos".

"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 blind to the threat to liberty, the denial of opportunity, and the crippling poverty that we face in some sections of this community." The Boston rally happened after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and months ahead of the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 signed in August.

King and other civil rights movement leaders had just come off the Selma to Montgomery march in Alabama, also referred to as Bloody Sunday, weeks before the Boston rally. The civil rights icon also was successful in the 1963 Birmingham campaign prompting the end of legalised racial segregation in the Alabama city, and eventually throughout the nation. Saturday's rally came as the Trump administration is waging war on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in government, schools and businesses around the country, including in Massachusetts.

The Defense Department at one point temporarily removed training videos recognising the Tuskegee Airmen and an online biography of Jackie Robinson. In February, Trump fired Air Force Gen CQ Brown Jr, a champion of racial diversity in the military, as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The administration has fired diversity officers across government, curtailed some agencies' celebrations of Black History Month and terminated grants and contracts for projects ranging from planting trees in disadvantaged communities to studying achievement gaps in American schools.King's son: Attacks on diversity make little sense

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

Lawsuit says migrants endure isolation at detention centre

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

Immigration and civil rights advocates have renewed concerns that immigrants detained at Guantanamo Bay are being held in extreme isolation, cut off from meaningful access to legal counsel or candid communication with relatives, according to a new court filing on Saturday.

In a lawsuit brought on behalf or two Nicaraguan immigrants held at the US Navy base on Cuba, attorneys say there is a climate of "extreme fear and intimidation" that interferes with constitutional rights to due process and legal counsel. The revised lawsuit asks a federal judge in Washington to intervene on behalf of all future immigrants at Guantanamo, which authorities have used as a way station for immigrants whom President Donald Trump calls "the worst", with final removal orders, as his administration seeks to ramp up mass deportations.

"Officers at Guantanamo have created a climate of extreme fear and intimidation where immigrant detainees are afraid to communicate freely with their counsel," the lawsuit says, adding that conditions are more restrictive than at mainland detention facilities, prisons and in some instances law-of-war military custody at Guantanamo Bay.

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 against advocates' attempts to help migrants at Guantanamo and prevent further transfers there, days after the administration moved all migrants out of the facility.

Two Nicaraguans who arrived since then have submitted court declarations charting their journey through detention centres in Louisiana to Cuba and describing their anguished concerns that phone conversations are being monitored and might lead to punishment or reprisals.

Attorneys have no in-person contact with clients at the base and say they are chained and placed in restraints during legal calls that are broadcast on speakerphone with officers seated outside an open doorway. That undermines the right to confidential communication and attorney-client privilege, the lawsuit says.

The complaint also says some detainees have been interrogated by the FBI about possible gang affiliation while surrounded by military officers. One person was stripped in search of a missing toothbrush, and another was locked in a concrete cell with no windows or lights for four days, it adds.

"I have been allowed to speak to my family about 20 times. Each call is about five minutes," Johon Suazo-Muller said in a written declaration to the court that was translated into English.

He said he immigrated to the US from Nicaragua in October 2023 in search of asylum from political conflict and a better life.

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

Catholic faithful pay respects to Pope Francis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Vatican City

Roman Catholic faithful began visiting the tomb of Pope Francis on Sunday, filing past the simple white tomb in St. Mary Major Basilica a day after he was bade farewell by the powerful of the world and a crowd of hundreds of thousands.

A single white rose was placed on the tomb that said "Franciscus" - the pope's name in Latin.

A light cast its warm glow over the tomb and a reproduction of the late pontiff's pectoral cross on the wall above it. People filed past, many crossing themselves or snapping photos with their phones.

Ushers urged them to keep moving to accommodate the thousands who flocked to the Rome basilica to see the tomb, forming a long line outside.

"Pope Francis for me was an inspiration, a guide," said Elias Caravalhal.

Caravalhal lives in Rome but was unable to pay his respects to Francis when the body was lying in state in St. Peter's Basilica after his death on Easter Monday at the age of 88. He said he visited the tomb "to thank him for what he has done."

The tomb was opened on the second of nine days of official mourning for Francis, after which a conclave will be held to elect the next pope.

A special Mass was also celebrated in St. Peter's Square on Sunday by Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state. Parolin is considered a possible contender to be the next pope due to his prominence in the Catholic hierarchy.

"The shepherd whom the Lord gave to his people, Pope Francis, has ended his earthly life and has left us," Parolin said in his homily, delivered on the first Sunday after Easter.

"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."

Houston pays tribute to victims of J and K attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Houston

Hundreds of Indian-Americans gathered here to pay tribute to the victims of the Pahalgam terrorist attack and called for stronger measures to prevent targeted attacks against Hindus.

Peaceful vigils were also held across major cities of North America. The Houston vigil commenced with the national anthems of India and the US, followed by solemn hymns, recited by a Hindu priest for the departed souls as the crowd, comprising young children and seniors alike, stood in silence.

The majority of the participants wore white, the traditional colour of mourning in India, and held placards reading "Stop Killing Innocents", "Indian Americans Against Terror", "Justice for Kashmir Victims", and "Hindu Lives Matter". "Terror has only one religion."

The chants of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" resounded in the sprawling Sugarland Memorial Park.

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 the crowd.

Another speaker urged the community to "stand together against these inhuman killings of innocent Hindus".

Terrorists opened fire in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam on Tuesday, killing 26 people, mostly tourists, in the deadliest attack in the Valley since the Pulwama strike in 2019. The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy of the banned Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Houston vigil commenced with the national anthems of India, US, followed by solemn hymns, recited by a Hindu priest for the departed souls

Photographs of the victims and placards bearing messages such as "All Eyes on Pahalgam", "Never Forget 26", and "Hindu 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, and faith."

Similar vigils were organised across North America, including at Shri Bhagavad Gita Park in Ontario, Canada; Denny Park in Seattle; Pioneer Boulevard in Artesia, California; the University of Texas in Dallas; and in Atlanta, Georgia.

At Denny Park in Seattle, around 50 people gathered under the theme "Standing United Against Terrorism", led by the Washington Hindu Education and Seva Foundation, with support from other local organisations. In Atlanta, Raj Razdan, Chair of the National Federation of Indian Associations (NFIA) in Georgia, condemned the killings as "cowardly and senseless", and said, "The Indian diaspora stands united. These attacks will not break us."

Earlier this week, students at the University of Houston organised a campus vigil. More events are scheduled over the weekend, including gatherings at Frisco Square near Dallas, Bellevue Downtown Park in Washington, Times Square in New York City, and Edison, New Jersey.

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

Romanians confront online disinformation ahead of election re-run

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bucharest

Romanians are confronting a deluge of online disinformation ahead of a fraught presidential election redo next week, including ominous claims that the NATO member country is surging toward "imminent war" with Russia.

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.

Soon, allegations emerged of electoral violations and a Russian campaign promoting Georgescu, following declassified intelligence showing a highly-sophisticated, coordinated campaign via TikTok. Moscow denied it meddled.

Romania's Constitutional Court then annulled the vote and ordered a redo.

Georgescu, who has praised Russian President Vladimir Putin and criticised NATO and the EU, is now under criminal investigation.

In March, he was barred from running in the May 4 election redo, prompting chaos on the streets of Romania's capital, Bucharest, as his incensed supporters staged protests that descended into violence.

What happened in Romania unnerved Brussels and raised questions about foreign interference.

The EU Commission responded by launching an ongoing probe into TikTok to determine whether it had violated the EU's Digital Services Act in failing to deal with risks to Romania's election. Some 8.5 million Romanians aged 18 and above use the platform in the country of about 19 million.

Nine killed in Vancouver street festival crowd: Police

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Vancouver

At least nine people were killed when a man drove into a crowd at a Filipino heritage festival in the Canadian city of Vancouver, and an unknown number were injured, police said Sunday.

The vehicle entered the street at 8:14 pm on Saturday and struck people attending the Lapu Lapu Day festival, the Vancouver Police Department said in a social media post. Several other people were injured but the exact number of casualties was not immediately available.

A 30-year-old Vancouver man was arrested at the scene and the department's Major Crime Section is overseeing the investigation, police said.

"At this time, we are confident that this incident was not an act of terrorism," the police department posted early Sunday.

The festival was being held in a South Vancouver neighbourhood. Video posted on social media showed victims and debris strewn across a long stretch of road, with at least seven people lying immobile on the ground. A black SUV with a crumpled front section could be seen in still photos from the scene.

The vehicle entered the street at 8:14 pm on Saturday and struck people attending the Lapu Lapu Day festival killing atleast nine people

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.

"It was terrible to see that kind of incident, that situation. It was heartbreaking," Cruzat said. "I couldn't even imagine that it's actually happening in real life, because normally we see that on TVs or movies.

But when you are in that kind of situation, it was really shocking... You couldn't do anything but to pray for them."

Vancouver Mayor Kenneth Sim said in a social media post that the city would provide more information when possible.

"I am shocked and deeply saddened by the horrific incident at today's Lapu Lapu Day event," Sim said. "Our thoughts are with all those affected and with Vancouver's Filipino community during this incredibly difficult time."

Vancouver had more than 38,600 residents of Filipino heritage in 2021, representing 5.9 per cent of the city's total population, according to Statistics Canada, the agency that conducts the national census. Lapu Lapu Day celebrates Datu Lapu-Lapu, an Indigenous chieftain who stood up to Spanish explorers who came to the Philippines in the 16th century. The organisers of the Vancouver event said he "represents the soul of native resistance, a powerful force that helped shape the Filipino identity in the face of colonisation".

Prime Minister Mark Carney and other Canadian political figures posted messages expressing shock at the violence, condolences for victims and support for the community celebrating its heritage at the festival. "I offer my deepest condolences to the loved ones of those killed and injured, to the Filipino Canadian community, and to everyone in Vancouver. We are all mourning with you," Carney wrote. "As we wait to learn more, our thoughts are with the victims and their families - and Vancouver's Filipino community, who were coming together today to celebrate resilience," wrote Jagmeet Singh, leader of the New Democratic Party, who was at the festival earlier in the day.

"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.

Ukranians shocked by US peace proposal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kyiv (Ukraine)

A peace proposal by the Trump administration that includes recognising Russian authority over Crimea shocked Ukrainian officials, who say they will not accept any formal surrender of the peninsula, even though they expect to concede the territory to the Kremlin, at least temporarily.

Giving up the land that was illegally annexed by Russia in 2014 is also politically and legally impossible, according to experts. It would require a change to the Ukrainian constitution and a nationwide vote, and it could be considered treason. Lawmakers and the public are firmly opposed to the idea.

"It doesn't mean anything," said Oleksandr Merezkho, a lawmaker with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's party. "We will never recognise Crimea as part of Russia."

Unlike a territorial concession, a formal surrender would permanently relinquish Crimea and abandon the hope that Ukraine could regain it in the future.

The Ukrainian public largely understands that land must be ceded as part of any armistice because there is no way to retake it militarily. Polls indicate a rising percentage of the population accepts such a trade-off.

But much of the public messaging about land concessions has suggested that they are not necessarily permanent, as when Kyiv Mayor Vitalii Klitschko told the BBC recently that Ukraine may need to temporarily give up land as part of a peace deal.

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 killed or wounded.

US President Donald Trump underscored the Crimea proposal in an interview published Friday in Time magazine: "Crimea will stay with Russia. Zelenskyy understands that, and everybody understands that it's been with them for a long time."

His comments offered the latest example of the US leader pressuring Ukraine to make concessions to end the war while it remains under siege. Trump has also accused Zelenskyy of prolonging the war by resisting negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

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 Yanukovych, who had refused to sign an association agreement with the European Union.

US forces deploy anti-ship missiles in Philippines

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Batan Island (Philippines)

The US military has deployed an anti-ship missile launcher for the first time on Batan Island in the Philippines, as Marines unloaded the high-precision weapon on the northern tip of the archipelago, just a sea border away from Taiwan.

US and Philippine forces separately unleashed a barrage of missile and artillery fire that shot down several drones acting as hostile aircraft in live-fire drills on Sunday in Zambales province facing the disputed South China Sea.

The mock battle scenarios over the weekend in the annual Balikatan exercises between the US and its oldest treaty ally in Asia, the Philippines, not only simulated real-life war.

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.

About 9,000 American and 5,000 Filipino military personnel took part in the combat maneuvers. At least 260 Australian personnel also joined, with smaller observer delegations from Japan and other countries.

China has fiercely opposed the combat drills as provocative. Its aircraft carrier group sailed by a few days earlier near Batanes, where the US military had deployed the Navy Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System on Saturday on Batan near the Bashi Channel just south of Taiwan, a critical trade and military route that the US and Chinese militaries have tried to gain strategic control of.

"The introduction of NMESIS into the first island chain for sea denial, sea control is another step in our force design journey," US Marine Lt. Gen. Michael Cederholm told a small group of journalists, including from The Associated Press, who were invited to witness the transport of the missile system aboard a C-130 Air Force aircraft to Batanes.

"We're not here practising a war plan," said Cederholm. "We're practising for the defense of the Philippines."

The US and the Philippines have denied the annual combat maneuvers - which both said would focus on a "full-scale battle scenario" this year - were aimed at China or any adversary. The lines between what's mock and real, however, have been at times murky.

Massive explosion at Iranian port kills 25, injures atleast 800

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Muscat

A massive explosion and fire rocked a port on Saturday in southern Iran purportedly linked to a shipment of a chemical ingredient used to make missile propellant, killing 25 people and injuring around 800 others.

Helicopters and aircraft dumped water from the air on the raging fire through the night into Sunday morning at the Shahid Rajaei port.

The explosion occurred just as Iran and the United States met Saturday in Oman for the third round of negotiations over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program.

No one in Iran outright suggested that the explosion came from an attack.

However, even Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who led the talks, on Wednesday acknowledged that "our security services are on high alert given past instances of attempted sabotage and assassination operations designed to provoke a legitimate response."

Firefighters work to extinguish the fire on Sunday, after a massive explosion and fire rocked a port near the southern port city of Bandar Abbas, Iran on Saturday PTI

State media offered the casualty figures, saying authorities identified only 10 of the dead, including two women.

Meanwhile, state TV reported the fire was under control and will be fully extinguished later Sunday. It also said activities have resumed at the port, showing footage of containers of a commercial ship being unloaded.

There were few details on what sparked the blaze just outside of Bandar Abbas, causing other containers to reportedly explode. Private security firm Ambrey says the port received missile fuel chemical in March. It is part of a shipment of ammonium perchlorate from China by two vessels to Iran, first reported in January by the Financial Times.

The chemical used to make solid propellant for rockets was going to be used to replenish Iran's missile stocks, which had been depleted by its direct attacks on Israel during the war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

"The fire was reportedly the result of improper handling of a shipment of solid fuel intended for use in Iranian ballistic missiles," Ambrey said.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas appoints new deputy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Ramallah (West Bank)

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Saturday named a veteran aide and confidant as his new vice president. It's a major step by the aging leader to designate a successor. The appointment of Hussein al-Sheikh as vice president of the Palestine Liberation Organisation does not guarantee he will be the next Palestinian president. But it makes him the front-runner among longtime politicians in the dominant Fatah party who hope to succeed the 89-year-old Abbas.

The move is unlikely to boost the image among many Palestinians of Fatah as a closed and corrupt movement out of touch with the general public. Abbas hopes to play a major role in postwar Gaza. He has been under pressure from Western and Arab allies to rehabilitate the Palestinian Authority, which has limited autonomy in parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. He has announced a series of reforms in recent months, and last week his Fatah movement approved the new position of PLO vice president.

The PLO is the internationally recognized representative of the Palestinian people and oversees the Western-backed Palestinian Authority. Abbas has led both entities for two decades. Under last week's decision, the new vice president, coming from the PLO's 16-member executive committee, would succeed Abbas in a caretaker capacity if the president dies or becomes incapacitated. That would make him the front-runner to replace Abbas on a permanent basis, though not guarantee it. The PLO's executive committee would need to approve that appointment, and the body is filled with veteran politicians who see themselves as worthy contenders.

The Palestinian Authority, meanwhile, would have a separate caretaker leader, Rawhi Fattouh, the speaker of the Palestinians' non-functioning parliament. But within 90 days, it would have to hold elections. If that is not possible, the new PLO president would likely take over the position.

Al-Sheikh, 64, is a veteran politician who has held a series of top positions over decades, most recently as the secretary-general of the PLO's executive committee for the past three years. He spent 11 years in Israeli prisons in his youth and is a veteran of the Palestinian security forces — experiences that could give him credibility with Palestinian security figures and the broader public.

Now he finds himself in a strong position to shore up his power.

He is Abbas' closest aide and, most critically, maintains good working relations with Israel and the Palestinians' Arab allies, including wealthy Gulf countries. As Abbas' point man with Israel, al-Sheikh is responsible for arranging coveted travel permits for Palestinians, including VIP leaders, giving him an important lever of power over his rivals.

However, polls show al-Sheikh, like most of Fatah's leadership, to be deeply unpopular with the general public. This week's decision behind closed doors by the PLO's aging leadership is likely to reinforce its image as being stodgy and out of touch.

The move is unlikely to boost the image among many Palestinians of Fatah as a closed and corrupt movement out of touch with the general public

In a 2022 interview with The Associated Press, al-Sheikh defended his unpopular coordination with Israel, saying there was no choice under the difficult circumstances of the occupation. "I am not a representative for Israel in the Palestinian territories," he said at the time. "We undertake the coordination because this is the prelude to a political solution for ending the occupation."

The most popular Palestinian, Marwan Barghouti, is serving multiple life sentences in an Israeli prison, and Israel has ruled out releasing him as part of any swap for Israeli hostages held in Gaza by the Hamas militant group.

As Israel's war with Hamas drags on, with talk by US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of uprooting Palestinians in Gaza to relocate them elsewhere, al-Sheikh will be under mounting pressure to unite the Palestinian leadership.

The PLO is a rival for Hamas, which won the last national elections in 2006 and is not in the PLO. Hamas seized control of Gaza from Abbas' forces in 2007, and reconciliation attempts have repeatedly failed.

Abbas is still seen internationally as the leader of the Palestinians and a partner in any effort to revive the peace process, which ground to a halt when Netanyahu returned to office in 2009. The chain-smoking political veteran has clung to power since his mandate expired in 2009.

UAE president strongly condemns J and K attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Abu Dhabi/New Delhi

President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, spoke with Prime Minister Narendra Modi over phone and "strongly condemned" the Pahalgam terror attack, expressing full solidarity and support with India, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Saturday. MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal in a post on X said the two leaders agreed that terrorism must be rejected in all its forms and manifestations.

President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, further stated that Narendra Modi appreciated our sentiments and words of sympathy

The terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22, which claimed 26 lives, has drawn widespread condemnation from countries and world leaders around the globe. "President HH @MohamedBinZayed of UAE called PM @narendramodi and conveyed condolences on the loss of lives in the barbaric terror attack on the Indian soil of Jammu & Kashmir. He strongly condemned the attack and expressed full solidarity and support with India," Jaiswal posted. He further stated that Prime Minister Modi appreciated the President's sentiments and words of sympathy.

"Both leaders agreed that terrorism should be rejected in all its forms and manifestations. PM conveyed India's strong resolve to bring the perpetrators of the heinous crime and their supporters to justice," Jaiswal said.

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

The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy of the banned Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), claimed responsibility for the attack.

Iranian President condemns Pahalgam terror attack, calls for regional unity against terrorism

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■
Tehran/New Delhi

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Saturday condemned the Pahalgam terrorist attack during a phone call with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and emphasised the need for regional cooperation to combat terrorism.

President Pezeshkian said that Iran unequivocally denounces such "inhumane acts", Iran's embassy in New Delhi said in a post on X.

These tragic events amplify the shared responsibility of all countries in the region and compel the regional states to eradicate the roots of terrorism through empathy, solidarity, and close cooperation, ensuring lasting peace and tranquility for the nations in the region, Pezeshkian stressed.

Referencing the valuable legacy of renowned Indian leaders, the president noted that Iran holds the Indian nation and its prominent figures, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru — "who were messengers of peace, friendship, and co-existence" — in high regard. He also expressed hope that this spirit will remain in India's relations with all countries.

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Regarding mutual economic ties between Iran and India, he expressed hope for the expansion of cooperation in trade and infrastructure more than ever before.

The development of Chabahar Port can serve as a hub for strategic interactions in the region and as a vital connection point between Iran, India, and Russia, the president said.

Pezeshkian also invited Prime Minister Modi to visit Tehran, noting that Iran is keen to discuss ways to strengthen comprehensive collaboration with India in a friendly and constructive atmosphere.

In turn, Modi appreciated Iran's sympathy regarding the tragic terrorist attack in Pahalgam, noting that New Delhi fully agrees with Tehran's perspective that the fight against terrorism requires the unity and comprehensive cooperation of all countries in the region, the embassy said.

Modi also praised Iran's constructive role in fostering peace and security, adding that India supports the Islamic Republic's efforts to enhance regional and international stability.

The prime minister further emphasised the need for a diplomatic solution to differences, including those between Iran and the United States.

He expressed deep sorrow over the massive explosion at Shahid Rajaee Port and conveyed India's readiness to assist Iran in addressing the aftermath of this incident.

Modi also extended his heartfelt wishes to the Iranian president, expressed his hopes for the health of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, and conveyed his aspirations for the ongoing progress of the great nation of Iran, the embassy said.

South Africans show solidarity with India after terrorist attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Johannesburg

Scores of South Africans, along with members of the Indian expatriate community, have gathered to express their solidarity with India and pay tribute to the victims of the Pahalgam terrorist attack at a memorial service organised by the Consulate General of India here.

Speakers representing the Jewish and Hindu communities on Friday shared their outrage over the attack and extended condolences to the families of those killed and injured. Rabbi Aharon Zulberg condemned terrorism in all its forms.

"We know all too well the effects of terrorism... Today, we stand together with you. Let us work as one to mend this broken world, replacing hatred with understanding, love, and hope," Zulberg said in his opening prayer.

Consul General Mahesh Kumar said the attack was "a cowardly act of terror" that should be unequivocally condemned.

"This attack marks the largest number of civilian casualties in India since the 26/11 Mumbai attack (in 2008), which was also targeted against Indian civilians and some foreigners from friendly countries and others who were visiting us then," Kumar said. "The attack forms part of a recurring pattern of targeting civilians, minority communities and visitors to Jammu and Kashmir, especially following the successful and peaceful democratic elections held in the Union Territory last year," the envoy added.

Kumar also pointed to a disturbing historical parallel, noting that the Pahalgam attack coincided with the visit of US Vice President JD Vance to India — similar to an attack in March 2000 in Chittisinghpura in Jammu and Kashmir, during then-US president Bill Clinton's state visit, when 35 Sikh civilians were massacred.

"The motive behind the attack appears very clear: to disrupt the narrative of returning peace and normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir. The region has recently witnessed record tourism and a democratic government assuming office.

An Indian Army personnel at the site of the Pahalgam terror attack, in Anantnag district FILE PHOTO

"The Indian nation stands united in the face of this tragedy. We will not be cowed. The memory of the victims will strengthen our resolve to eradicate terrorism and bring those responsible to justice," Kumar said. Yashika Singh, representing the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) of South Africa, also denounced the attack.

"Wherever it may be and in whichever country, we do not wish for these organisations to hijack these communities, to hijack religion, and to speak on behalf of people that they don't know themselves," Singh said.

Rajesh Gupta, CEO of Mahindra South Africa, said the attack had shamed humanity. "This barbaric act has been extremely shameful. From any part of the world, belonging to any caste or religion, what matters to us is being human, but not getting butchered like the way it happened there. I think the time has come when we all, from all aspects of the world, should stand up against this kind of sentiments which are prevailing in such a way that they get subdued over a period of time," Gupta said.

Russia launches 150 drones against Ukraine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kyiv

Russia launched a sweeping drone assault and airstrikes across Ukraine overnight into Sunday, killing at least four people, officials said, after US President Donald Trump cast doubt over Russian President Vladimir Putin's willingness to end the war.

Three people died and four were wounded Sunday morning in airstrikes on Kostyantynivka in the Donetsk region, the regional prosecutor's office said. Another person died and a 14-year-old girl was wounded in a drone attack on the city of Pavlohrad in the Dnipropetrovsk region, which was hit for the third consecutive night, local Governor Serhii Lysak said.

The attacks came hours after Russia claimed to have regained control over the remaining parts of the Kursk region, which Ukrainian forces seized in a surprise incursion last August. Ukrainian officials said the fighting in Kursk was still ongoing. Trump said Saturday that he doubts Putin wants to end the more than three-year war in Ukraine, expressing new skepticism that a peace deal can be reached soon. Only a day earlier, Trump had said Ukraine and Russia were "very close to a deal."

"There was no reason for Putin to be shooting missiles into civilian areas, cities and towns, over the last few days," Trump wrote in a social media post as he flew back to the United States after attending Pope Francis' funeral at the Vatican, where he met briefly with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Trump also hinted at further sanctions against Russia. The Trump-Zelenskyy conversation on the sidelines of the pope's funeral was the first face-to-face encounter between the two leaders since they argued during a heated Oval Office meeting at the White House in late February. Russia fired 149 exploding drones and decoys in the latest wave of attacks, the Ukrainian air force said, adding that 57 were intercepted and another 67 jammed.

One person was wounded in drone attacks on the Odesa region and one other in the city of Zhytomyr. Four people were also wounded in a Russian airstrike on the city of Kherson on Sunday morning, according to local officials. Russia's Defense Ministry said Sunday that air defences shot down five Ukrainian drones in the border region of Bryansk, as well as three drones over the Crimean peninsula, which was illegally annexed by Russia in 2014.

Five people were wounded when Ukrainian forces shelled the city of Horlivka in the partially occupied Donetsk region, the city's Russian-installed Mayor Ivan Prikhodko said.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Arti Devi, legally wedded spouse of- No.15415710P NK/Artisan WW Sachidanand Upadhyay, Unit- Army Hospital R & R, Delhi Cantt- 110010, have changed my name from Arti Devi to Arti Upadhyay, vide affidavit dated 26/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1936)C

I, No.14668083H Rank Nk Brajesh Kumar Kurmi, R/o- Vill/PO- Chhulla, Teh- Garhakota, Dist- Sagar, M.P.- 470232, Now at Unit - 6121 (I) FWC (608 EME BN) C/O 56 APO, declare that I have changed my daughter's name from Diya to Diya Kurmi, vide affidavit No.IN-DL74880762436612X, Dated 26/04/2025 by Notary Public Delhi.

PD(1937)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

DECLARATION

1. I, Smt Bulbul Tilanga, wife of No. 2850246 Ex Naik (Late) Nanda Lal Tilanga and an Indian citizen by birth residing at Flat No - 304, Forest View Apartment, New Delhi for many years do hereby declare the following:-

2. That my real and actual name is Bulbul Tilanga and date of birth is October 13,1962 whereas my name has been erroneously endorsed as Bulbul and date of birth as June 25, 1954 by my husband in his service document as well as by PAO (AR) in the Pension Payment Order. I declare and undertake that Bulbul Tilanga and Bulbul is the same and one person having single identity, i.e myself in all respect and liable for dual name.

3. That I was married to Nanda Lal Tilanga on June 25, 1977 and Master Jai Prakash (eldest son) was born out of our wedlock on May 15, 1978. However, my date of marriage and date of birth of Master Jai Prakash has been erroneously endorsed as June 25, 1964 and May 15, 1973 respectively by my husband in his service documents.

4. That the statements and declarations made herein above by me are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Sd/- xx xx xx
Dated: April 28, 2025 BULBUL TILANGA

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice to General Public That, **Mr. Sumit Choudhary** has seeking a loan from **M/s Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd.** for the **House No. H-1-A, area measuring 50 sq. yds., Block -H, Gali No. 1, Out of Khasra No. 670, situated at Village Ghonda Gurjan Khadar, Jai Prakash Nagar, Shahdara, Delhi.; hereinafter referred to as "said flat/floor".** That, the said property transferred several times on the basis of POA and finally Mr. Dharam Singh purchased the through GPA/ATS/Will dated 23.05.1983. Thereafter, Mr. Dharam Singh died and Mrs. Babita released the share in favour of Mrs. Dharmbati who is the legal heir of deceased late Mr. Dharam Singh and became owner through Relinquishment Deed dated 23.04.2023 for the said property. Now, Mrs. Dharambati wish to further sale the said property.

Now, I would like to announce to general public that If anybody or any person got or having any claim against on the said regarding this transaction for above documents by way of legal heirs, Mortgage, Gift, Lease, Inheritance, Lien or otherwise or any objection with said above documents may come to our Delhi office within seven days and render their claim with documentary valid evidence. If any claims/ objections/disputes shall be consideration as waved and failing which, it will proceed to complete the sale transaction with the above owners and else the same would be treated as unclaimed and unrebutted and moved forth accordingly.

M/S PASS & ASSOCIATES LLP
B-132, L.G.F, Malviya Nagar
New Delhi-110017, Mob: 9991116006

PUBLIC NOTICE

General Public is hereby informed that Flat Unit No.-1051, Floor- 5th, Tower-01, Pious Orchards, Sector-150, Noida, was booked in the name of Mr. Raj Kumar Garg S/o Mishri Lal Garg. Mr Raj Kumar Garg expired on 29-10-2024. Regarding mentioned property, the name of Sushma Garg is being noted as Primary allottee in M/s Homekraft Infra Pvt. Ltd. records in respect of captioned unit. If anybody has any objection to this, he or she may approach M/s Homekraft Infra Pvt. Ltd. within 21 days of publication of this notice at address; ATS Tower, Plot No;16, 2nd Floor, Sector-135, Noida-201305. Ph; 91-120-7111500.

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NOTICE INVITING TENDER Date: 28.04.2025

E-tenders under two Bid System (Unpriced & Priced) are invited as per the following details:-

NIT No.	Brief Description	Estimated Cost (₹)	Cost of EMD (₹)	Due Date & Time of Submission	Date & Time of Opening
CMC/BY/25-26/ RS/SkS/MD/1 (RFx no: 2200000111)	SURVEY, DESIGN, ENGINEERING, SUPPLY, ERECTION, TESTING, & COMMISSIONING OF NEW 11kV SWITCHGEAR PANELS AND DISMANTLING OF EXISTING EQUIPMENTS ON TURNKEY BASIS AT DWARKAPURI GRID	3.20 Crore	6.40 Lakh	20.05.2025 15:00 Hrs	20.05.2025 16:00 Hrs

Cost of each Tender Document: ₹1,180/-

For details in respect of Equipment/BOM/Services, Qualifying requirements, Terms & conditions, purchase/submission of tender documents, corrigendum etc. please visit our **websitewww.bsesdelhi.com --> Tenders--> BSES YAMUNA POWER LTD --> Open Tenders.**

Head (Contracts & Materials)

Regd.Off: BSES Yamuna Power Ltd, Shakti Kiran Building, Karkardooma, Delhi-110032 | CIN: U40109DL2001PLC111525
Website: www.bsesdelhi.com

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 excercise, 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 operational 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.

'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.

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. "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 investments. 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 from competitors is outright banned in the office".

FILE PHOTO

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 stated.

"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 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 admissions), 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.

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

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 specifies 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 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

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 mainstay 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.

Self-Care
Now a Lifestyle, Not a Luxury

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

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 occasional 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 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 tailoured 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.

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 detoxifies the scalp, boosts circulation, and nourishes hair follicles from the root. With rising cases of stress-related hair fall and scalp sensitivity, such treatments are no longer a niche - they're a necessity.

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

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.

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 natural 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 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

Barcelona wins Copa del Rey title

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seville

Barcelona has launched its bid for a treble after edging Real Madrid 3-2 in a thrilling Copa del Rey final with Jules Koundé scoring an extra-time winner. Right back Koundé pounced on a pass by Luka Modric and fired into the low corner of Thibaut Courtois' net for the 116th-minute decider.

Barcelona will carry momentum from its record-extending 32nd Copa del Rey title into Wednesday's start of its Champions League semifinal series against Inter Milan. It also leads La Liga by four points over Madrid.

Pedri González dictated the game for Barcelona from midfield and scored from long range to take a 28th minute-lead at La Cartuja Stadium.

Madrid rallied with two second-half goals, with Kylian Mbappé coming off the bench at halftime and scoring from a free kick in the 70th and midfielder Aurélien Tchouaméni's header in the 77th making it 2-1. Ferran Torres leveled in the 84th to force extra time. Barcelona has beaten Madrid in all three of the clasicos this season, including a 5-2 rout in the Spanish Super Cup final in January after winning 4-0 at Madrid in the league in October.

"This was such a physically demanding game, but we showed that we are a great team that never gives up," said Torres, who filled in perfectly for the injured Robert Lewandowski.

The loss to its fierce rival was another blow to Madrid after it was knocked out of the Champions League quarterfinals by Arsenal. This could have been its last title decider with Carlo Ancelotti in charge. The Italian coach said he will decide his future this summer amid speculation he is bound to take over Brazil.

Ancelotti, when asked about his future, said: "As I have said, I can continue, I can stop, it will be a topic for the coming weeks." While Ancelotti's second stint in Madrid appears to be coming to an end, Hansi Flick has only added to his superb first season with Barcelona. The German coach has invigorated a group of players who seemed spent under Xavi Hernández and helped young players such as Lamine Yamal and Pau Cubarsí continue to grow into stars.

"I have to say thanks to the team because they had an unbelievable performance," Flick said. "A huge win in the Copa final is great for everyone and it gives us confidence for more."

King Felipe VI awarded the trophy to Barcelona captains Ronald Araujo and Marc-Andre ter Stegen, after the monarch returned to Spain following his attendance at the funeral of Pope Francis.

The trophy is the first piece needed to repeat a treble that Barcelona won under Pep Guardiola in 2009 and Luis Enrique in 2015.Madrid's Antonio Rudiger was shown a red card by the referee in the final moments when he apparently threw wice at the referee and shouted aggressively.

Jude Bellingham and Lucas Vázquez were also shown red cards for protesting.

BARCELONA DOMINATES FIRST HALF

One of the biggest rivalries in global soccer was again a tale of two halves — until Torres scored the late equaliser against the flow of play to renew Barcelona's prospects.

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

The only semblance of a Madrid attack came when Bellingham was able to spin away from his marker. But a Bellingham pass intercepted by Cubarsí cued Barcelona's opener. Pedri lobbed forward for Yamal, breaking down the flank. The 17-year-old phenom — sporting a new dyed-blond hairdo — threaded a pass back to the top of the box, where Pedri arrived to blast it home.

MBAPPÉ SPARKS MADRID FIGHTBACK

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.

Newcastle, Chelsea move into Champions League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

Newcastle and Chelsea picked up victories in the Premier League to move into the Champions League qualification positions as Ipswich became the third and final team to be relegated.

On the day Newcastle manager Eddie Howe returned to the dugout after recovering from pneumonia, his team's 3-0 win over Ipswich at St. James' Park was significant at both ends of the standings.

Newcastle jumped into third place in the congested race to finish in the top five and secure a spot in next season's Champions League. Meanwhile, Ipswich's return to the Championship was confirmed, with the team partly owned by pop star Ed Sheeran joining Southampton and Leicester back in the second tier.

It is the second straight season that the three promoted clubs have gone straight back down.

"It is been a massive challenge," said Ipswich manager Kieran McKenna, who led the team into the Premier League and back-to-back promotions from the third tier. "Many things we have done positively that will set us up well for the years ahead (and) there's been some things we could have done better and things we will learn from."

Howe has already guided Newcastle to the English League Cup title this season for the club's first major trophy in 70 years. He said his team's remaining four league matches feel like cup finals, too.

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

Chelsea climbed into fifth place, two points behind Newcastle and one behind Manchester City, by beating Everton 1-0 thanks to Nicolas Jackson's first-half goal. That sealed back-to-back wins for Chelsea.

Just five points separate Newcastle and seventh-placed Aston Villa, which wasn't in action in the Premier League on Saturday.

Instead, Villa was losing to Crystal Palace 3-0 at Wembley Stadium in the first FA Cup semifinal.

Eberechi Eze and Ismaila Sarr (two) were the scorers for Palace, which reached the final for a third time in its bid for the first major trophy in the south London club's history. It lost to Manchester United on both previous occasions, in 1990 and 2016.

VARDY'S PENALTY WOE

Jamie Vardy began his long goodbye to Leicester, after confirming on Thursday he'd be leaving at the end of the season, by having a penalty saved in a 3-0 loss at Wolverhampton.

"That was so unfortunate," Leicester manager Ruud van Nistelrooy said. "I really wanted him to score to get us back in the game but also for himself."

Brazil striker Matheus Cunha, linked heavily with a summer move to Manchester United, scored one and set up two in Wolves' sixth straight win that has seen the team power clear of relegation danger.

"It shows he is committed with us, with his teammates, with everyone," Wolves manager Vitor Pereira said of Cunha.

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

IPL: Gujarat Titans take on Rajasthan Royals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

In red-hot form, Gujarat Titans (GT) will aim to tighten their grip on the top spot and move closer to securing a playoff berth when they take on a faltering Rajasthan Royals (RR) in the Indian Premier League (IPL) here on Monday.

Perched comfortably atop the 10-team table with six wins from eight outings, the Shubman Gill-led side now needs just two more victories to book their place in the playoffs.

Functioning like a well-oiled machine, the Titans have tasted defeat only twice this season, with Sai Sudharsan and Prasidh Krishna leading the charge and the Orange and Purple Cap races, respectively. At the heart of Gujarat's batting dominance lies the formidable trio of Gill, Sudharsan, and Jos Buttler. Together, they have not just amassed over 300 runs each, but have also maintained an impressive strike rate of over 150, combining consistency with aggressive intent.

Despite losing Kagiso Rabada, who left for home due to personal reasons early in the season, the Titans' bowling emerged as their major strength.

Prasidh, who returned to competitive T20 cricket after multiple injury layoffs, has been sensational, snaring 16 wickets at a staggering average of 14.12 in eight games. His ability to out-think batters and vary his length have been the key to his success.

Mohammed Siraj too has been effective with the ball, claiming 12 wickets thus far and is joint fifth in the standing of the leading wicket-takers.

R Sai Kishore also finds himself among the top five wicket-takers this season, the left-arm spinner taking 12 wickets at an economy of 8.22.

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

In contrast, Rajasthan Royals became the first team to be knocked out of the tournament after losing to Royal Challengers Bengaluru by 11 runs earlier this week.

It was their fifth straight defeat and seventh loss in nine matches.

They now sit ninth on the points table. The inaugural edition's champions have struggled to find momentum all season.

They came close to winning in their last three games but failed to close out matches, suffering narrow defeats, including a heartbreaking Super Over loss to Delhi Capitals. While their top-order batters Yashasvi Jaiswal, Riyan Parag, and Nitish Rana have shown some form, their bowling has been a major letdown. The inability to control the flow of runs and pick up wickets at crucial moments has cost them dearly, leaving them to play only for pride in their remaining matches.

Teams

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

Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (Captain), Jos Buttler (wk), B Sai Sudharsan, Shahrukh Khan, Sherfane Rutherford, Rahul Tewatia, Rashid Khan, Kagiso Rabada, Ravisrinivasan 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.

Prabhsimran showing greater maturity this IPL: Joshi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

Punjab Kings (PBKS) opener Prabhsimran Singh is showing "greater maturity" this IPL season and repaying the faith shown in him by the team management, believes their spin bowling coach Sunil Joshi.

Starting off cautiously, the seasoned Punjab batter exploded in the latter half of his innings to top-score with a 49-ball 83, guiding them to 201 for four against Kolkata Knight Riders here on Saturday.

Prabhsimran, who was on 34 off 32 balls at one stage, accelerated brilliantly to score 49 runs in his next 17 deliveries.

"I think it's all about confidence. In the pre-season, how much volume he adds to his batting is very important. Of course, positive environment with (head coach) Ricky (Ponting) and the batting coaching staff has really done well," Joshi said after rain washed out their match with KKR stranded at 7/0 after one over.

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

"He has been consistently performing in white-ball format as well. Last year also, he has shown consistency and the numbers show that. But this year, he has been more matured. He was part of an emerging team as well. So, that confidence also added to him," Joshi said.

> Prabhsimran is a seasoned campaigner. He is more experienced. He has come up with successfully good plans for today
> — SUNIL JOSHI, COACH

While Prabhsimran rediscovered his touch, youngster Priyansh Arya continued to impress, hammering a 35-ball 69 as the duo stitched a commanding 120-run stand for the opening wicket.

Arya, who made headlines with a century against Chennai Super Kings, has been one of PBKS' biggest finds this season, playing the early aggressor in the entertaining partnership.

"They are exciting players. Prabhsimran is a seasoned campaigner. He is more experienced. He has come up with successfully good plans for today. So, it's a long way ahead for both of them," Joshi said. The openers' strategy to start cautiously and then shift gears aggressively, coupled with clear communication, was crucial, Joshi pointed out.

"I think the credit should be given to both of them, they batted according to the pitch conditions, took calculated runs and had very positive approaches.

"Of course, at this level, it's very simple key words — situation, conditions, pitch conditions, how it behaves and according to that you can plan your shots. So, that was a good communication from the coaching staff," he said.

"The communication is very clear from captain and coach, head coach and coaching staff also. That's why we invest in the players." The way the PBKS openers tackled KKR's spin duo of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy 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 learning curve for batsmen to assess both the bowlers in front of them. And it's always difficult when you are defending or when you are bowling first.

"So, obviously, your game plan and your dynamics changes when you are bowling first and when you are bowling second and our batsmen adapted to conditions very well," Joshi said.

On the washout Joshi said, "I think we can't go against the nature. We have to accept it. If the game would have been there, it would have been a good contest.

"There was an opportunity for two points, but yes, we have to accept that we got one. We missed one."

Meanwhile, KKR's young pacer Vaibhav Arora, who has impressed with the new ball this season, said the team was content with sharing points.

"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.

Bowlers will have their day at some point, says Boult

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Batters take power-hitting to another level in the IPL but the "bowlers will have their day" if they focus on staying aggressive without compromising accuracy, says Mumbai Indians' star seamer Trent Boult.

Teams are consistently crossing 200-plus totals in the ongoing edition of the league and breaching the 300-run barrier is also being talked about by experts and players. Boult said T20 cricket has evolved with batters finding ways to hit big shots but that also presents the bowlers an opportunity to bag wickets.

"No doubt, a 300-plus score will be reached this tournament. The ball seems to be travelling further, though I'd like to believe it's still swinging in some parts of the country," Boult said on JioHotstar's special series 'Gen Gold'.

"From a bowling perspective, the only positive is that batsmen are coming hard, which creates opportunities. If we focus on being accurate, stay aggressive, and give it a real crack, bowlers will have their day at some point. That's what fans want to see, and I am sure there'll be plenty watching."

The New Zealander said bowling at death has become a huge challenge and his endeavour has been to keep getting better and never let with his skills or performance dip. "I'm constantly pushing myself to come up with new options and plans. These days, there are so many batters — some we've never even heard of or played against — so you've got to be on your game."

Djokovic faces 'new reality' after losing opening match

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

After losing a second straight opening match and three in a row overall, Novak Djokovic said he was facing a "new reality" in his two decades of pro tennis. Djokovic's public coming to terms with his rare losing streak came after he fell in straight sets to Matteo Arnaldi in his first match of the Madrid Open on Saturday.

The 37-year-old Djokovic came to Spain after also losing his opener to Alejandro Tabilo at the Monte Carlo Masters two weeks ago and, before that, the Miami Open final. "I was hoping I can play one more match than I played in Monte Carlo. (It's) kind of a new reality for me, I have to say, trying to win a match or two, not really thinking about getting far in the tournament," Djokovic said.

The struggles by the winner of 24 Grand Slam titles coincide with the start of the clay-court swing culminating in the French Open next month.

"It's a completely different feeling from what I had in 20-plus years of professional tennis," he said.

"It's a challenge for me mentally to really face these kinds of sensations on the court, going out early now regularly in tournaments." Arnaldi won 6-3, 6-4, delaying Djokovic's search for a career 100th title. The Serb was undermined by 32 unforced errors to his opponent's 18 and had his serve broken three times.

It was the first meeting between Djokovic and 44th-ranked Arnaldi of Italy. "He's my idol, he's always been," Arnaldi said of Djokovic. "To play him at a stage like this was already a victory for me. He's not at his best right now, so I came on court to try to play my best tennis and win and it happened."Arnaldi raised his arms and turned to the crowd after striking a winner that gave him a second-set break. Djokovic tried to hit right back and had three break points, but Arnaldi rallied to save his serve and finished off the three-time champion.

He wrote "OMG" (Oh my god) on the camera when given the marker for the now customary message by the winner to the television audience.

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 Jimmy Connors (109) and Roger Federer (103). Arnaldi will next face Damir Dzumhur 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), 6-2.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 Jack 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 against Le Havre 1-1 in Ligue 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 PURRING

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 Alexandre Lacazette blasted a shot into the top right following a rapid counter-attack for his 13th league goal.

Rennes replied early in the second half through 17-year-old striker Mohamed Kader Meïté before Lyon's fourth goal from Georges Mikautadze, which was the best of the night.

Midfielder Rayan Cherki swapped passes inside the penalty area with Mikautadze and then, despite having almost no space, flicked the ball up to the Georgia winger, who controlled it on his chest before adroitly volleying in.

LE HAVRE KEEPS FIGHTING

The draw boosted Le Havre's chances of staying up after fellow relegation battler Saint-Etienne earlier lost at Strasbourg 3-1.

Le Havre was in 16th place and the relegation-promotion playoff spot, one point above Saint-Etienne.

The draw relegated rock-bottom Montpellier.

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