



# National Herald case: ED chargesheets Sonia, Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate has filed a charge sheet against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and others vis-a-vis alleged money laundering in the National Herald case. Sonia is arrayed as first accused in the charge sheet, followed by Rahul and Young India company's Directors Sam Pitroda and Suman Dubey. Special Judge Vishal Gogne perused the charge sheet on Tuesday, which was filed on April 9, and posted the matter for further proceedings to April 25. "The present prosecution complaint shall next be taken up for consideration on the aspect of cognisance before this court on April 25 when the Special Counsel for the ED and IO shall also ensure the production of the case diaries for court perusal," the judge ordered. The charge sheet was filed under Sections 3 (money laundering) and 4 (punishment for money laundering) of

Prevention of Money Laundering Act by ED's Special Public Prosecutor NK Matta. "Let the complaint be checked and registered. The Ahlmad (court staff) shall ensure that the entire file/documents are properly paginated. The ED is directed to file a soft copy of the complaint and documents in readable/OCR format by the next date," the court said. The Special Judge dealing with the cases of lawmakers also took note of the ED submissions that it will move an application before the district judge for the transfer of a case related to predicate offence — under probe by the CBI for alleged cheating, criminal conspiracy and other offences, based on which the ED had started its investigation in the present matter — from another court to Judge Gogne's court. ED's case stems from a private complaint filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy, in which the trial is on. After the trial court issued summons to Sonia and Rahul in June 2014, Swamy had filed complaints with the Income Tax Department and the



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and his mother Sonia Gandhi

RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

ED to probe alleged tax evasion and money-laundering angle in the formation of a new company Young Indian and takeover of Associated Journal Limited, publisher of National Herald newspaper, which has buildings in many cities. On April 12, ED issued possession notice regarding National Herald's office buildings in Delhi, Mumbai and Lucknow. The predicate offence is required to be tried by the same court which takes cognisance of the offence under Section 3 of PMLA, the judge said. It is pertinent to mention here that Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are members of the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha respectively. "Essentially, the two offences viz the predicate offence and the PMLA offence are required to be tried by the same court," the judge noted. Since the allegations in the present complaint arise from the predicate offence, the file in the predicate offence is required to be called for perusal, the court added. "However, the power of assignment or transfer of a matter is not vested with

this court and is rather the prerogative of the Principal District and Sessions Judge, Rouse Avenue Courts Complex, New Delhi," the court remarked. The ED investigation began in 2021 after a Metropolitan Magistrate in Patiala House Courts in Delhi took cognisance of a private complaint filed by Swamy on June 26, 2014. The complaint, the ED said, highlighted a "criminal conspiracy" by prominent political figures, including Congress leaders Sonia and her son Rahul, late Congress leaders Motilal Vora and Oscar Fernandes besides Dubey, Pitroda and private company Young Indian regarding money laundering with respect to a "fraudulent" takeover of properties valued over ₹2,000 crore belonging to the Associated Journals Limited (AJL). "The legal proceedings against the accused have faced challenges but have been upheld by both the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India, allowing the investigation to proceed," the ED said.

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## Why make such observations: SC asks Allahabad HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday took exception to the Allahabad High Court's recent remark in a rape case wherein it said that the complainant 'herself invited trouble', and wondered why the court made such an observation while granting bail in the matter. The High Court had observed that the complainant 'herself invited trouble' by agreeing to go to the accused applicant's house after getting drunk. The Apex Court's observations came when it was hearing a suo motu case over the Allahabad High Court's separate order of March 17 in which the high court said grabbing breasts and pulling the drawstring of a woman's "pyjama" or lowers did not amount to the offence of attempt to rape.

"There is another order passed by another judge of the same high court," a bench of Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih said. Justice Gavai went on, "If one wants to grant bail that is okay but why make such observations that she invited trouble and

**The Apex Court's reation came while hearing a suo motu case over HC's March 17 order that said pulling a woman's pyjama's drawstring did not amount to the offence of attempt to rape**

all that. One has to be very careful on this side (bench) also." Solicitor General Tushar Mehta asked how a common man perceived such observations was required to be kept in mind.

The bench adjourned the hearing in the suo motu case for four weeks. On March 26, the apex court stayed the high court's March 17 order in the attempt to rape matter which meant the same couldn't be used in any judicial proceeding for seeking reliefs by the present set of accused or others. The top court had said some of the observations made in the order reflected total "insensitivity" and "inhuman approach". It had taken a suo motu cognisance of the matter after it was brought to the notice of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna. The high court's March 17 order held that the attempt to rape offence was not made out against the accused and they were liable to be summoned for the lesser offence of assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to disrobe her.

The High Court's order had come on a petition by the accused challenging the order of a special judge in Kasganj through which they were summoned for the alleged offence under section 376 (rape) of IPC among other sections. In another case, the high court passed an order granting bail to an accused and said, "Having heard counsel for the parties and examined the matter in its entirety, I find that it is not in dispute that victim and applicant both are major. Victim is student of MA, hence she was competent enough to understand the morality and significance of her act as disclosed by her in the FIR." The court added, "This court is of the view that even if the allegation of the victim is accepted as true, then it can also be concluded that she herself invited trouble and was also responsible for the same."

## ED questions Robert Vadra in Haryana land deal case, again

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday again questioned Robert Vadra in a 2008 Haryana land deal-linked alleged money laundering case linked to real estate company DLF. Terming the agency's move to summon him as "political vendetta", Vadra said he has spent hours earlier to take questions from the ED (in separate money laundering cases) as well as share thousands of pages of documents but still the central agency was 'raking' cases against him. "This is nothing but political vendetta. Whenever I speak for the minorities, they try to stop me, crush us... They tried to stop Rahul (Gandhi) in Parliament too. This is political vendetta and misuse of central agencies. I will cooperate

with them like in the past," the 56-year-old told the media as he walked two miles from his residence at Sujana Singh Park in central Delhi to the ED headquarters on the APJ Abdul Kalam Road here. Vadra entered the ED office at 11am along with his lawyer while his security team stayed out. Officials said the ED recorded his statement under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) for about two hours. The questioning session is expected to continue. Coming out of the ED office for lunch around 1.30pm, Vadra told reporters that while he was ready to cooperate with the investigation but there needed to be a closure. "How can you be talking about something that happened in 2007?" he said.

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## The Bystander



## Delhi power subsidy to continue, decides Cabinet

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Cabinet on Tuesday approved the continuation of the power subsidy scheme for the 2025-26 fiscal, wherein the State Government provides free electricity to households with consumption below 200 units, and a 50 per cent subsidy to households that use 201-400 units a month. The Cabinet also approved a proposal for the extension of its Electric Vehicle (EV) Policy by three months. The cabinet also discussed the draft of the proposed Electric Vehicles (EV) 2.0 Policy. The Cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, also approved the continuation of existing power subsidy for four categories: Domestic consumers, farmers, lawyers with chambers, and victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

Announcing at a press conference at Delhi Secretariat, Power Minister Ashish Sood said the Cabinet okayed the continuation of electricity subsidies for four specific categories. The Minister said the subsidy for the 1984 riot victims and lawyers represent particularly significant and sensitive decisions of the BJP government. Alleging misinformation by the Opposition, Sood asserted that false narratives were in circulation to claim that the Delhi Government planned to discontinue power subsidies. He asserted that today's Cabinet decision to continue with power subsidies for all four categories puts an end to such 'baseless propaganda'. The Cabinet decided to continue with the old EV Policy instead of approving draft of the new policy as the new EV Policy 2.0 is yet to be finalised.

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## Stalin announces committee to suggest ways to strengthen State autonomy

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Chennai

In a sudden move amid ongoing political struggle between Tamil Nadu and the Union Government, Chief Minister MK Stalin announced on Tuesday the constitution of a high-powered committee to suggest ways and means to "strengthen State autonomy" vis-à-vis the Centre. Former Supreme Court Judge Kurien Joseph, will head the three-member panel, Stalin announced in the Legislative Assembly. Former IAS officer Ashok Vardhan Shetty and State Planning Commission former vice-chairman and DMK leader Prof M Naganathan will be members of the committee. Interestingly, Kurian Joseph was a senior leader of the Kerala Congress (Mani) before his elevation to the Bench from the

Bar. At one time, he also led the Kerala Student Congress, a student wing of the Catholic Church-sponsored Kerala Congress (Mani). Shetty had worked as Stalin's secretary during his tenure as Deputy CM in a government headed by his father and DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi. The announcement on the panel was made under Rule 110 of the State Assembly after main Opposition party AIADMK staged a walkout in protest against the Speaker's refusal to allow them to raise an issue in the House. After Stalin's announcement, newly appointed BJP State chief Nainar Nagendran asserted that there was no need to discuss the issue of more autonomy for the States. Stalin said in the Assembly that the move to 'strengthen autonomy' of Tamil Nadu comes in the backdrop of the tug of war

between the State and the Union Government over National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET), which is out of the State purview. "Both NEET and National Education Policy (NEP) are beyond the jurisdiction of the State Government. We are totally against the NEET and NEP. The only option to save Tamil Nadu is to take it out of the jurisdiction of NEET and NEP," the Chief Minister remarked. The Tamil Nadu Government scored a big win this month when the Supreme Court gave a favourable ruling on its petition to challenge the alleged refusal of Governor RN Ravi to accord assent to 10 Bills passed by the Assembly, including the one on appointment of Stalin as Chancellor of the Universities in the southern State.

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## Sexually assaulted while on ventilator in ICU: Air hostess

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

A 46-year-old air hostess alleged that she was sexually assaulted while she was on ventilator support in the ICU of a noted private hospital in Gurugram on April 6, a police officer said on Tuesday. The police said the alleged crime came to light on April 13 when the woman told her husband about the sexual assault, who alerted the police by dialling 112 police control room. In her police complaint, she said she had arrived in Gurugram for training on her employer company's behalf and staying up in a hotel. Her health deteriorated due to reason, after which she was admitted to a private city hospital for treatment. On April 5, her husband got her admitted to another hospital in Gurugram, from where she was discharged on April 13. "During treatment, while I was on ventilator support, someone sexually assaulted me on April 6. Since I was unconscious, I could not react to the assault and was scared afterwards. Two nurses were however on duty around my bed at the time," the victim alleged in her complaint. After her discharge from hospital, she revealed the alleged crime to her husband, who complained to police. "A case has been registered at the Sadar Police Station on the basis of the woman's complaint. A police team was rushed to the hospital to scan the duty chart and analyse CCTV footage to identify the culprit," Sandeep Kumar, spokesperson of Gurugram Police, said.

"The woman's statement has since been got recorded by police before a city Magistrate. The police will soon identify the culprit and arrest him," he said. Hospital security staff denied any knowledge of the alleged crime, but the hospital later issued a statement on the alleged crime. "We have been made aware of a complaint from a patient and have been fully cooperating with investigations by authorities concerned. At this stage, no allegations have been substantiated and all relevant documents, including CCTV footage from the hospital for time period in question, have

**Police said the alleged crime came to light on April 13 when the woman told her husband about the sexual assault, who alerted the police by dialling 112 police control room**

been handed over to police. We remain committed to supporting the entire process of investigation," Dr Sanjay Durani, Medical Superintendent, Medanta Hospital, Gurugram, said in a statement. This incident is not the first in Gurugram's private hospitals. In July last year, a 51-year-old Kazakhistan woman was allegedly raped by an attendant of a private hospital. The accused was later arrested. Similarly, in October 2020, a 21-year-old tuberculosis patient was allegedly raped by a staff member of a hospital while she was on a ventilator in the ICU.

## Above-normal rainfall this monsoon season, predicts IMD

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

In good news for Indian farmers and the Union Government on the agricultural front and, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Tuesday predicted an above-normal rainfall for India during the coming June-September monsoon season, which quantitatively could be around 105 per cent of the long period average (LPA). This prediction is vital for India's agriculture, which supports a significant portion of the population and contributes substantially to the Gross Domestic Product of the country. Ruling out the possibility of El Nino conditions — typically linked to reduced rainfall — during the entire season, IMD chief Mrutyunjay Mohapatra told a press conference: "India is likely to see above-normal rainfall in the four-month monsoon season (June to September), with cumulative rainfall estimated at 105 per cent



of the long-period average of 87cm." El Nino conditions in the subcontinent are unlikely to develop this time," he added. This mirrors a consensus that most weathermen have on the Indian monsoon this year. Last week, private

weather forecasting agency Skymet also said that cumulative all-India southwest monsoon this year could be 'normal' at 103 per cent of the LPA. Rainfall between 96-104 per cent of the LPA is considered normal. The IMD prediction

## US visas a privilege, not right: US Secretary Rubio

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Sounding a note of caution to immigrants, including H-1B and Green Card holders, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said that US visas are a privilege and not a right, while pledging strict enforcement of visa laws under the Donald Trump administration. Rubio reaffirmed a tough stance on America's visa policy and asserted that entry into the United States is reserved for those who demonstrate respect for American laws and values, reinforcing Washington's commitment to stricter immigration standards. His statement in an interview to a US private television

channel came amid a nationwide crackdown on Palestine protests, particularly on college campuses, where foreign students have come under scrutiny for alleged "antisemitic behaviour" and participation in disruptive demonstrations following the October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel. "US visas are a privilege, rather than a right, reserved for those who make the United States better, not seek to destroy it from the inside," Rubio said in the interview. Furthermore, Rubio asserted that visa holders must continually meet eligibility standards, and that the State Department, working alongside DHS and other security agencies, actively reviews and revokes visas if violations are found. "The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) gives

us broad authority to revoke a visa. This authority is fundamental to safeguarding our national security," he said, adding that US laws are clear about who can and cannot come to the United States. Each visa application is vetted through those rules and people who "endorse or espouse terrorist activity or persuade others to endorse or espouse terrorist activity" are ineligible for US visas, The Secretary of State said. Rubio pointed to some incidents of unrest on American college campuses last year. The United States is home to over 1.1 million foreign students, many of whom attend prestigious universities.

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# Delhi eyes paperless House

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Assembly delegation led by Speaker Vijender Gupta arrived in Odisha on Tuesday as part of a tour focused on the e-Vidhan initiative.

The delegation met Odisha Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati, Assembly Speaker Surma Padhy and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi.

Deputy Speaker Mohan Singh Bisht, senior Delhi Assembly officials, and key officers involved in the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) project are also part of the delegation, according to a statement.

During the meeting with Majhi, the delegation was briefed on Odisha's digital attendance system for MLAs.

"The system enables members to mark attendance and access daily proceedings through digital dashboards, contributing to a paperless legislative environment," according to the statement.

Gupta held detailed discussions with his Odisha counterpart Padhy regarding adoption of the e-Vidhan system in Delhi.

Padhy shared Odisha's experience of going digital and assured full support for Delhi's efforts.

In a separate meeting with Kamb-



PIONEER PHOTO

hampati, Gupta spoke about the Delhi Assembly's plans to become fully solar-powered.

He said the Delhi Assembly would soon generate 550 kW of solar energy, saving approximately ₹15 lakh per month in electricity expenses.

Kambhampati expressed interest in adopting similar solar solutions at the Raj Bhavan in Odisha and praised Delhi's steps

towards sustainability and innovation, according to the statement.

The three-day visit is aimed at promoting knowledge exchange and fostering cooperation between the two legislative bodies.

The insights gained from Odisha's digital and green energy initiatives will help shape Delhi Assembly's own efforts in these areas, according to the statement.

# Protest to continue till wages raised: Kerala ASHA workers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Thiruvananthapuram

More than two months after starting their agitation, ASHA workers protesting outside the Secretariat here said on Tuesday that they will not relent until their wages are increased. They also accused the state government of unilaterally withdrawing from the talks with them.

S Mini, state vice president of the Kerala ASHA Health Workers Association (KAHWA) whose members are carrying out the agitation, also alleged that the proposal to set up a committee, to examine their demands and working conditions and give its report, "was only a tactic aimed at ending the protest". The proposal to set up a committee was not a sincere one. No panel has been set up till now. It was only a tactic aimed at ending the protest. "The protest will go on strongly. We will not end it without a hike in our wages," she told a TV channel. A section of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers have been protesting outside the

secretariat since February 10 demanding a hike in their honorarium from ₹7,000 to ₹ 21,000 and a post retirement benefit of five lakh rupees.

As the protest entered its 65th day, Mini said that they were willing to end the agitation if the government were to increase, as an interim measure, their honorarium by ₹3,000 and announce that retirement benefits of ₹5 lakh would be provided.

"We had informed the government about this in the last talks when they came with the proposal to set up a committee. They (government) said that talks will continue on the next day. But, on the next day, they informed us that there will be no talks. So, it is the government which unilaterally withdrew from the talks," she claimed.

She was referring to the fifth round of talks held with the government on April 3. Last week, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan had contended that the government had held six rounds of talks with the agitating ASHA workers and had also taken several measures to make their working conditions easier.

# PM Modi's J and K Visit postponed amid security concerns

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Jammu and Kashmir on April 19 to inaugurate the world's highest railway arch bridge over the river Chenab and the flagging off ceremony of Vande Bharat Express between Katra and Srinagar has been postponed, official sources said.

The next date of the launch of train services will be communicated later, official sources confirmed to The Pioneer.

According to official sources, PM Modi was scheduled to inspect the world's highest railway arch bridge and India's first cable-stayed bridge over Anji Khad ahead of the flagging-off ceremony of Vande Bharat Express on April 19.

Amid ongoing anti-terror operations in the adjoining districts of Udhampur, Kathua and Poonch the entire security grid was kept in a state of high alert to prevent any targeted strike ahead of the visit of the Prime Minister.

In Poonch, a joint team of security forces conducted massive cordon and search operations during the day after establishing contact with terrorists at the village Lassana in Surankote tehsil of Poonch district late Monday evening.

In Srinagar, Inspector General of Police Kashmir Zone, VK Birdi, on Tuesday, chaired a high-level joint security review meeting at Police Control Room, Kashmir, to assess preparedness for upcoming events and to ensure seamless coordination among various security agencies.

# Healthcare sector taken monumental leap under BJP government: Nadda

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rishikesh

Union Minister JP Nadda on Tuesday said the country's healthcare sector has taken a monumental leap under the Narendra Modi government with the number of AIIMS rising to 23 and medical colleges being set up in rural areas.

Addressing the 5th convocation ceremony of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Rishikesh, the health minister said AIIMS that have come up in different parts of the country are all equipped with state-of-the-art facilities.

"For half a century, the AIIMS in Delhi was the only institute of its kind in the country.

"After Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the Prime Minister, six more were set up of which AIIMS-Rishikesh is one.

"But in the last 10 years of Narendra Modi's prime ministership, 16 more AIIMS have been added, taking the total number to 23," Nadda, the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, said.

He praised the premier institute in Rishikesh for the "great work" it was doing in the field of telemedicine promotion

alongside AIIMS, Delhi and PGI, Chandigarh by providing quality healthcare services to remote and under-served areas.

The air ambulance service launched by Prime Minister Modi at AIIMS-Rishikesh in October last year has in a short span of time saved the lives of 309 critical patients by airlifting them from their homes in difficult terrain to the premier health facility, Nadda said.

The number of medical colleges in the country has risen from 387 to 780 over the last 10 years which indicates that medical

colleges are being opened in rural areas as well. "Medical colleges have been opened in non-descript remote places where one could not imagine them at one time," he said.

He attributed the reformative changes to the approach of today's policymakers.

"Today, you have world-class facilities right here. You do not need to go anywhere else," he said.

He spoke at length about how the shift in focus from curative health to preventive and promotive health in the new health policy was proving beneficial to the

country. Nadda said education is a birthright but not professional education which he described as a privilege given by society.

"On each student in a professional course, the government is spending ₹35 lakh per annum. So, your responsibility towards the society is immense," he told the gathering.

He said students who were conferred with their degrees on Tuesday should look upon the day as just the beginning of a long journey and use the skills learnt at the institute to the service of the society.

# Woman shot dead days before mother's *Chaliswa*

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Days before a woman's 'chaliswa' - a 40-day mourning ritual — was to be observed, her 20-year-old daughter was shot dead in Delhi's Shahdara, leaving their family to deal with another cruel blow within a span of weeks. Saira was shot twice by her boyfriend, Rizwan (20) around 9.30 pm on Monday at Shahdara's GTB Enclave area, a senior police officer said.

She is survived by her two brothers and two sisters who are now having to come to terms with the twin tragedy. "We were still mourning one loss, now we are preparing for another funeral," a family member said. Saira had only recently moved to live with one of her sisters, Sayyeda (41), and her husband in Kudi Colony after their mother's death. Her father died many years ago.

The family was preparing for the 'chaliswa' of Saira's mother on Thursday. The next day, she was supposed to go to Jaipur to another sister's house.

On Monday night, Saira had dinner and went to her room, a relative told PTI. "When Sayyeda went to her room around 10 pm, she was not there." Since it was not unusual for Saira to go out at night to meet Rizwan, the family didn't suspect anything. However, late at night around

2 am, they received a call from the police saying she had been shot dead. The spot near the Delhi Jal Board office at Sunder Nagri where she was killed had blood spatters — for many in the area, this was the first such sight. Raj Kumar Bhandari (51), a property dealer, who lives close to the spot, said at first he thought he heard something like a firecracker burst. "I had just finished eating when I heard a noise. I thought children were bursting crackers to chase away monkeys from the area which they usually do," he said.

When he stepped out he saw a huge crowd gathered around, only to discover a girl lying on the road in a pool of blood. "We were terrified seeing the blood. This is the first such case in our vicinity," he said. Another resident of the area said he didn't hear any noise but later saw police personnel at the spot.

"I saw a huge crowd gathered around.

When I came out, a girl was lying down and she was covered with a white cloth. There was a lot of blood around her," he added. Police said they received a PCR call late on Monday night that a woman had been shot and was lying unconscious. A police team from GTB Enclave station rushed to the spot and found the body. Upon examination, two bullet wounds were found on her body — one on the head and the other on the back.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court would likely hear on Wednesday a batch of petitions, including the one of AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi, against the constitutional validity of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025.

A three-judge bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K V Viswanathan, so far, listed 10 petitions on the issue.

In addition to Owaisi's plea, the court listed for hearing the petitions filed by AAP leader Amanatullah Khan, Association for the Protection of Civil Rights, Arshad Madani, Samastha Kerala Jamiathul Ulema, Anjum Kadari, Taiyyab Khan Salmani, Mohammad Shafi, Mohammed Fazlurrahim and RJD leader Manoj Kumar Jha.

Several fresh pleas, which are yet to be listed, were filed in the top court subsequently including the ones filed by TMC MP Mahua Moitra, Samajwadi Party MP from Sambhal, Zia-ur-Rahman Barq.

The YSRCP-led by former Andhra Pradesh chief minister Jagan Mohan Reddy, the Communist Party of India (CPI), Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam chief and actor-turned-politician Vijay have also moved the top court on the issue.

Advocate Hari Shankar Jain and one Mani Munjal have also filed a separate petition challenging the constitutional validity of several provisions of the law



Supreme Court of India

PIONEER PHOTO

on the ground that they violate fundamental rights of non-Muslims following which the CJI agreed to list it.

The Centre, on April 8, filed a caveat in the apex court and sought a hearing before any order was passed in the matter. A caveat is filed by a party in the high courts and the apex court to ensure that no orders are passed without hearing it.

The Centre recently notified the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, which got the assent of President Droupadi Murmu on April 5 after its passage from Parliament following heated debates in both houses.

The bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha with 128 members voting in favour and 95 opposing it.

It was cleared by the Lok Sabha with 288 members supporting it and 232 against it. The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Congress MPs Imran Pratapgarhi and Mohammad Jawed are other key petitioners.

On April 7, a bench headed by the CJI assured senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, to

consider listing the petitions. The DMK moved the top court through its deputy general secretary A Raja and said in a press release, "Despite widespread opposition, the Waqf Amendment Bill, 2025 was passed by the union government without proper consideration of the objections raised by the members of the JPC and the other stakeholders."

The AIMPLB filed the plea in the top court late April 6. In a Press statement, S Q R Ilyas, the AIMPLB spokesperson, said the petition strongly objected to the amendments passed by Parliament for being "arbitrary, discriminatory and based on exclusion".

Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind also filed a petition in the apex court, claiming it was a "dangerous conspiracy" to strip Muslims of their religious freedom.

In its separate plea filed in the top court, Samastha Kerala Jamiathul Ulema, a religious organisation of Sunni Muslim scholars and clerics in Kerala, has claimed the Act was a "blatant intrusion" into the rights of a religious denomination to manage its own affairs in the matter of religion.

NGO Association for the Protection of Civil Rights also filed a petition in the apex court challenging the constitutional validity of the Act.

AAP MLA Khan sought the law declared as unconstitutional, being violative of "Articles 14, 15, 21, 25, 26, 29, 30 and 300-A of the Constitution".

# Delhi power subsidy to continue, decides Cabinet

**Continued from >> P1** Delhi Transport Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh clarified that discussions on the new EV 2.0 Policy is currently underway and that the existing EV Policy will continue to remain in force until the new policy is finalised. "Once the new policy is approved, it will be brought in the public domain," he said.

The Transport Minister also pointed out the delays in disbursing existing EV subsidies by the previous Aam Aadmi Party Government, which he said had impacted public trust in EV-related incentives. The BJP Government is committed to addressing these gaps and ensuring a smoother, more transparent implementation going forward, he added.

"There are many things our Government wants to do for city residents, and we will incorporate those in the revised EV Policy. However, I want to make it clear that there will neither be a ban on autos, nor there is any proposal to ban any category of vehicles. The current EV Policy is expected to continue for the next three to four months," he added. Slamming the AAP leaders, Sood said that people must understand how certain 'self-proclaimed unemployed leaders' are deliberately spreading misinformation and making misleading statements. "While they continue to spread lies, the Delhi Government continue to work with focus and transparency. With today's decision, the facts have become crystal clear," he said.

# Stalin announces panel to suggest...

**Continued from >> P1**

Legal experts were not pleased with Stalin's move on the three-member panel. "There is no need to strengthen the autonomy of Tamil Nadu since all States in India enjoy autonomy granted by the Constitution. This is a dubious move with ulterior motive," senior lawyer and constitutional expert KC Muraleedharan said.

G Rajagopalan, Additional Solicitor General, said, "As of date, there is no need for any discussion on autonomy of the State. The Indian Constitution has explicitly divided the powers between the Centre and the State, as enumerated in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. There is no confusion with regard to the powers enjoyed by the Centre and the State. It seems only DMK and Stalin are rooting for more autonomy. It is a futile exercise," Rajagopalan claimed.

# National Herald case: ED chargesheets Sonia, Rahul

**Continued from >> P1**

Congress leaders Sonia and Rahul are majority shareholders of Young Indian, with 38 per cent shares each. They were questioned for hours by the ED in this case a few years ago. The ED asserted that its investiga-

tion has "conclusively" found that Young Indian, a private company 'beneficially owned' by Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, 'acquired' AJL properties worth ₹2,000 crore for a mere ₹50 lakh, significantly undervaluing its worth. "Young Indian

and AJL properties were used for generation of further proceeds of crime in the form of bogus donations to the tune of ₹18 crore, bogus advance rent to the tune of ₹38 crore and bogus advertisements of ₹29 crore," said the ED.

# US visas a privilege, not right...

**Continued from >> P1**

"These foreigners shut down college campuses for American citizens, harassed Jewish students, blocked highways, and stormed buildings," Rubio remarked, pledging that the Trump administration will take decisive steps to prevent such incidents in the future.

The US official also clarified that constitutional protections

do not extend to foreign nationals when it comes to visa violations. "The Supreme Court has made it clear for decades that visa holders or other aliens cannot use the First Amendment to shield otherwise impermissible actions taken to support designated foreign terrorist organisations," he explained.

# ED questions Robert Vadra in Haryana land deal case, again

**Continued from >> P1**

Vadra, the son-in-law of Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, was first summoned in this case on April 8 but he sought another date. The probe against

Vadra is linked to a land deal with DLF in Haryana's Manesar-Shikohpur (now Sector 83) in Gurugram. The land deal of February 2008 was done by a company named Skylight Hospitality Pvt Ltd, where Vadra was a director earlier on, as it purchased a 3.5 acre land in Shikohpur from a firm named Onkareshwar Properties at a price of Rs 7.5 crore. A Congress government led by Bhupinder Singh Hooda was in power in Haryana at that time. Vadra's wife Priyanka Gandhi was also a director in his company. Four

years later, in September 2012, the company sold this 3.53 acre land to realty major DLF for Rs 58 crore.

The land deal courted controversy in October 2012 after Haryana cadre IAS officer Ashok Khemka, then posted as Director General of Land Consolidation and Land Records-cum- Inspector General of Registration, cancelled the land mutation, categorising the transaction as violative of State Consolidation Act and related procedures. The Haryana Police filed an FIR regarding this deal in 2018.

Vadra has been questioned multiple times by the federal probe agency in two money laundering cases so far. The ED had filed a charge sheet in December 2023

against UAE-based NRI businessman CC Thampi, who is allegedly linked to Vadra, and Sumit Chadha, a relative of UK-based arms consultant Sanjay Bhandari, saying it was investigating purchase of three plots of land in Haryana during 2005-06 by Vadra from a real estate agent along with a land deal made by his wife Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Neither Vadra nor Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were named as accused in the charge sheet.

Thampi, the ED had said, had purchased about 486 acres between 2005 and 2008 in Amirpur village in Faridabad in Haryana through HL Pahwa, a real estate agent based in Delhi-NCR. "It is imper-

ative to mention that Vadra also purchased three pieces of land measuring 334 kanals (40.08 acres) in Amirpur from HL Pahwa in 2005-2006 and sold it to Pahwa again in December 2010," the charge sheet said. "Further, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also purchased agricultural land measuring 40 kanal (05 acres) in village Amirpur, district Faridabad, Haryana, from Pahwa in April 2006 and sold it again to Pahwa in February 2010.

"Pahwa was receiving cash out of the books for the purpose of acquisition of land. It was also noticed that Vadra did not pay the entire consideration to Pahwa. The investigation in this regard is still going on," the ED had said.

# Above-normal rainfall...

**Continued from >> P1**

It is also crucial for replenishing reservoirs critical for drinking water supply, apart from power generation across the country. However, normal cumulative rainfall does not guarantee uniform temporal and spatial distribution of rain across the country, with climate change further increasing the variability of rain-bearing system.

The monsoon usually arrives in the Indian subcontinent from the southern tip in Kerala around June 1 and retreats in mid-September. The IMD defines average or normal rainfall as ranging between 96 per cent and 104 per cent of a 50-year average of 87 cm (35 inches) for the four-month season. An El

Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) that has turned neutral is expected to remain so by the time the monsoon season kicks in in June. A neutral Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) and below-normal snow cover in the northern hemisphere from January to March will altogether combine to give India a good monsoon, the IMD said.

The southwest monsoon had closed the 2024 season with 8 per cent surplus rains, the best in the past three years (since 2020). Cumulatively, the national all-India rainfall during June-September months last year was estimated at 935 mm, which was 8 per cent more than a normal of 870 millimetres.







# Try to uplift underprivileged: Murmu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday asked a group of newly inducted IAS officers to make special efforts for the upliftment of the underprivileged.

Asserting that being in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) gives them an opportunity to bring about transformative changes in the lives of countless people, she said officers should keep in mind the rights and duties of civil servants.

“The duties of a public servant are their responsibilities and their rights are the means to fulfil those duties,” President Murmu said addressing the IAS officers from the 2023 batch, who are currently serving as assistant secretaries in various Union ministries and departments.

Addressing the IAS officers, she said that they had become IAS officers through extraordinary determination and hard work.

“This has brought about a transformative change in their personal lives. Now with even more determination and dedication, they have the opportunity to bring about transformative changes in the lives of countless people,” she said.

Their area of service and authority are so vast that they can make the lives of many fellow citizens better in their first



President Droupadi Murmu during an interaction with a group of IAS officers from the 2023 batch at the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre in New Delhi

posting itself, the President said.

She advised them to make special efforts for the upliftment of the underprivileged. President Murmu also advised them to visit the places of posting during their career journey after some time and see the far-reaching results of their work.

The President told officers that their real career story would be created by their work, not by increasing the number of followers on social media.

“Their real social net worth would be determined by their good work,” Murmu was quoted as having said in a statement

issued by the President’s office. The President said that every public servant should work with honesty of purpose.

“We all face the challenges of environmental pollution and climate change. Pollution of immorality and erosion in values are also very serious challenges. There should be no need to say anything else about being devoted and honest.

“The people who move ahead following life values of honesty, truth, and simplicity are happier. Honesty is the most desirable policy in public service. It is expected from the public servant that they would present examples of integrity and sensitivity in every sphere of life,” she said.

President Murmu said that in the digital era, people’s aspirations are rising. “They are becoming aware of the accountability of administrators,” she told the officers, who had called on the President, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre here.

The President advised officers to develop closeness with their fellow citizens and increase their participation in local efforts. She also advised them to resolve public interest issues raised by people’s representatives.

The President said that the development and public welfare work done by them at the local and state level would help in achieving national goals.

# Congress slams Centre over fuel, LPG price hikes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Congress on Tuesday targeted the Centre over the hike in excise duty on petrol and diesel and the rise in LPG cylinder prices, demanding the government call a special session of Parliament to discuss inflation and issue a ‘white paper’ on the matter.

Its women’s wing chief Alka Lamba urged the government to immediately reduce the prices of LPG, petrol and diesel, bring a strict policy to tame the prices of essential commodities and announce a special relief package for women and the poor.

“The government has turned its back on inflation. Their only goal is to fill the coffers of the government and private companies. The common person of the country is bearing the brunt of this inflation,” she said at a press conference here.

Lamba also compared the prices of petrol, diesel and LPG under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) dispensation and the Narendra Modi government.

“In 2014, the price of petrol was ₹72 per litre. But today, it is ₹98 to ₹100 per litre. In the Congress government, diesel was ₹55 per litre, while under the BJP

government, it has become ₹88 per litre,” she said. “In the Congress government, the excise duty on petrol was ₹9.20 per litre, today it has increased to ₹19.90. In 2014, the excise duty on diesel was ₹3.46, today it has increased to ₹15.80. Under the Congress government, the price of crude oil was USD 108 per barrel, but today it is USD 65.31 per barrel,” she said.

Lamba said that the Congress was agitating against inflation across the country with women joining the “movement”. She alleged that some companies were making profits by looting the public. “Our demand is that a CAG audit should be done in this matter. If this does not happen, it will be clear that BJP is involved in this whole matter,” she said.

“The prices of LPG, petrol and diesel should be reduced immediately. A strict policy should be brought to control the prices of essential commodities, a special relief package should be announced for women and poor families and a special session should be called in Parliament to discuss inflation in which a white paper should be issued,” Lamba said. The government recently hiked excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹2 per litre each.

# Gurugram police arrests 23, busts ₹32.8 Crore cyber fraud network

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

In a big, breakthrough, the Gurugram Police arrested 23 persons in cyber fraud cases and unearthed fraud of about ₹32.8 crore across India, police said. The arrested were identified as Abhishek, Hritik, Vipul, Anurool, Siraj, Govind Jha, Digvijay Kumar, Suraj Kumar, Arjun Prasad, Suraj Srivastava alias Sanjay, Sonu Kumar, Gurdeep Singh, Harpal, Sachin Kumar, Vishnu Panwar, Ladduram, Neelam Kumari, Manoj Kumar, Kushaal Meena, Dhara Singh Meena, Naveen Kumar, Antony and Shankar Kumar.

According to the police, After reviewing the data of the 15 mobile phones and 4 SIM cards recovered from the accused by the police from the Indian Cyber Crime Coordinate Center (I4C), it was found that the accused were involved in fraud of about ₹32.8 crore and around 8,565 complaints were registered against them across India.

According to the police, 274 cyber fraud cases were registered against unknown 23 suspects across India of which around 16 cases were registered in Haryana out of which nine cases were registered against them with the Gurugram different cyber crime police stations.

ACP (DLF/Cyber Crime) Vikas Kaushik of the Gurugram police said that information related to mobile phones or SIM cards or laptops or other electronic devices recovered from the accused in any cybercrime case is shared by the Gurugram Cyber Police with the Indian Cyber Crime Co-ordinate Centre.

“While obtaining information related to mobile phone or SIM card or laptop or other electronic devices or equipment and to know how many fraud incidents have been committed by these accused we found that they had duped multiple people worth ₹32.8 crore while using four SIM cards,” the ACP said.

The accused duped the people in the name of investment fraud, electricity bill payment fraud, extortion, loan app, fake ID on Instagram, he said.

Further action is being taken regularly on the information obtained by examining the devices recovered from the arrested cyber fraudsters by the Gurugram Police, he added.

# Long incarceration no ground for bail in terror cases: Delhi HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court has said an undertrial’s long incarceration cannot be a ground to grant bail in terror cases, which have country-wide implications and the intent to destabilise the country’s unity among other things.

A bench of Justices Navin Chawla and Shalinder Kaur made the observation and denied bail to separatist leader Nayeem Ahmad Khan in a terror-funding case involving Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and 26/11 Mumbai attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed.

The accused, who challenged a trial court order against his bail plea, argued the trial was not likely to conclude in near future and to balance the period of custody undergone by him with his fundamental right to liberty, he ought to

be granted bail. “While we are aware that the right of an undertrial to a speedy trial is of paramount consideration, in cases involving terrorist activities which have nation-wide implications and where there is an intention to destabilise the unity of the union of India and to disrupt its law and order, more so, to create terror in the minds of general public, which are also factors that weigh in, the long period of incarceration would not, in itself, be ground enough to enlarge an accused on bail,” said the bench’s order on April 9.

Hurriyat Conference leader Khan was arrested on July 24, 2017 and is currently in judicial custody.

In the case registered in 2017 under the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the NIA claimed secessionists entered into a criminal

conspiracy to instigate the general public to resort to violence and create a surcharged atmosphere for the propagation of their agenda in the valley.

**The bench noted there was no delay in proceeding with the trial at the prosecution’s end and the same had now been fast-tracked**

The court, in its decision, observed prima facie, the accused persons, including Khan, conspired for secession of Jammu and Kashmir from the union of India through terrorist activities, which threatened the unity, integrity and security of the nation, and granting him bail would be detrimental to the security and safety of the public as well as the trial.

The court took note of the documen-

tary evidence, statements of the witnesses and other material found by the prosecution to opine there were reasonable grounds to believe the accusations against Khan to be true, therefore, attracting the limitation on grant of bail under UAPA.

“The evidence prima facie show that the appellant (Khan) was a member of the Hurriyat and the chairman of Jammu and Kashmir National Front and a part of the conspiracy.

“It can prima facie be gathered that the appellant was leading the pro-ISIS rally and had attended the Hurriyat meetings wherein directions were given to organise rallies and anti-India demonstrations, to make anti-national speeches and slogans,” the court said.

The order observed protected witnesses had also brought out the nexus between the Hurriyat and the appellant

and the Pakistan establishment aside from the funding received from Pakistan for organising secessionist activities.

“The main purpose of the appellant was to engage himself to create unrest in Jammu and Kashmir,” it added.

The bench noted there was no delay in proceeding with the trial on the prosecution’s end and the same had now been fast tracked.

“The prosecution is also conscious of the fundamental right of the appellant to liberty and they have also made efforts to expedite the trial by dropping 92 witnesses. A trial hurried is also detrimental to the accused persons.

“Nonetheless, the present is not a case where the appellant is in custody where either the charges have not been framed or that the witnesses are not being examined at regular intervals,” the court said.

# India, Tanzania boost ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth met Tanzania’s Minister of Defence and National Service Stergomena Lawrence Tax in Dar es Salaam and discussed new ways to bolster bilateral ties and cooperation in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations.

The meeting was held on April 14. Seth also called on Vice President of Tanzania Philip Isidor Mpango, the Indian Ministry of Defence said on Tuesday.

During the meeting between Seth and Tax, the ongoing defence cooperation was reviewed and “new ways were explored” to further bolster the ties.

“Training of Tanzanian officers in military training institutes of India, defence industry collaboration, cooperation in counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations and cyber security were some of the key areas of cooperation deliberated upon during the meeting,” the defence ministry said in a statement.

On April 13, Seth and Tax inaugurated the harbour phase of the Indian Navy’s maiden initiative of Africa India Key Maritime Engagement (AIKEYME), a multilateral naval exercise in Dar es Salaam, onboard INS Chennai. A Defence Expo was also inaugurated.

In his address on the occasion, Seth emphasised oneness and unity of purpose to overcome the “vast maritime challenges” and to ensure a peaceful and prosperous future.

Co-hosted by India and Tanzania, the

naval exercise also involves participation of Comoros, Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles and South Africa.

During his meeting with the Tanzanian Vice President Mpango, Seth updated him on the Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement cooperation, from Indian defence industries to exercise AIKEYME, and the Defence Expo.

He offered to fulfil the defence requirements of Tanzania People’s Defence Force.

India-Tanzania development partnership, cultural connections and cooperation in health and education were also discussed, the statement said.

The exercise represents the commitment of the participating countries to a free, open and secure Indian Ocean.

A “new chapter has been added today” to the growing relations between India and Africa, the Indian defence ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

On April 14, Seth also visited Sanatan Dharma and Swaminarayan Mandir prior to an interaction with the Indian diaspora.

He also participated in Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations organised in the High Commission of India in Tanzania.

During his interaction with the Indian community, Seth highlighted the progress India has made in various spheres in recent years.

He underlined the contribution of the Indian diaspora to the growth and prosperity of not only India but Tanzania too.

# IAF salutes late Air Marshal Arjan Singh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Indian Air Force extolled the legacy of war hero Marshal Arjan Singh on his 106th birth anniversary on Tuesday, remembering him as a leader who “led from the cockpit” and not just the command room.

An icon in the country’s military history, he was the only officer of the IAF to be awarded the rank of Marshal.

Born on April 15, 1919, in Lyallpur in Punjab in undivided India, his father, grandfather and great-grandfather had served in the cavalry.

Singh had led a fledgling IAF in the 1965 India-Pakistan war when he was in his 40s. He died in September 2017 at the age of 98.

On Tuesday, the IAF, the Indian Army, the Chief of Defence Staff and the Ministry of Defence paid homage to the legendary figure and recalled his legacy and contribution to the nation.

“On the 106th Birth Anniversary of the legendary Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh, #IAF honours the remarkable legacy of a visionary leader.

“Promoted to the rank of #MarshalOfTheAirForce in 2002, he remains the only officer in the history of the IAF to hold the prestigious five-star rank. “#SalutingTheLegend, #RememberingArjanSingh, #YearsOfDefenceReforms, #IAF @DefenceMinIndia @SpokespersonMoD @HQ\_IDS\_India @adgpi, @IndiannavyMedia,” the IAF said in a post

on X. The Air Force also shared a short video clip containing a montage of some of the rare photographs of the hero, tracing his journey in the IAF.

“From a young flight cadet to Marshal of the Air Force, Singh’s journey began with a fearless heart and a skyward gaze. His early years shaped the legend he became,” read a line used in the montage. “A warrior. A leader. A legend,” read another line. The IAF, in the tribute video, said he played a “pivotal role” in shaping the IAF into a “modern formidable force”.

**The IAF, the Indian Army, the Chief of Defence Staff and the Ministry of Defence paid homage to the Air force legend on his 106th birth anniversary and recalled his legacy**

“His leadership during the 1965 war exemplified courage under fire” and he was “a leader who led from the cockpit, not just the command room,” the IAF said.

Singh was a highly decorated officer and received the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) in 1944 for his outstanding leadership during a campaign in World War II.

Known for his gallantry and strategic brilliance, he was awarded a Padma Vibushan in 1965.

The IAF also said as the Chief of the

Air Staff, he stayed “deeply connected with flying”. The Ministry of Defence, the Indian Army and the CDS paid tributes to him in separate posts on X.

“General Anil Chauhan #CDS and All Ranks of #IndianArmedForces pay tribute to Marshal of the Indian Air Force Arjan Singh, DFC, on his 106th #BirthAnniversary.

“His strategic brilliance and unparalleled contributions to India’s military history continue to inspire generations. @DefenceMinIndia @SethSanjayMP @SpokespersonMoD,” Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff wrote in a post on X.

The Army in its post on X, wrote: “Remembering the Legend... The #IndianArmy salutes the legacy of Marshal of the Indian Air Force Arjan Singh, DFC, on his 106th Birth Anniversary.

The first Five-Star Rank officer of the #IAF, his exemplary leadership, valour and unwavering dedication to the Nation remains a timeless source of inspiration for generations to come. @HQ\_IDS\_India @IAF\_MCC”

The Ministry of Defence shared a brief profile of him on X and remembered him as a “fearless air warrior”.

“Honouring Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh on his 106th birth anniversary. A legendary icon, fearless air warrior, and hero of the 1965 war. His legacy of valour and dedication continues to inspire generations. #ArjanSingh @IAF\_MCC,” it said.

# CBI cracks down on digital arrest scam syndicates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a major crackdown on syndicates running digital arrest scams, the Central Bureau of Investigation has arrested four people following searches at 12 locations, officials said on Tuesday.

Terming it “Operation Chakra-V”, they said the CBI carried out searches in connection with a digital arrests case registered by it on the request of the Rajasthan government in which two persons each were arrested from Moradabad in Uttar Pradesh and Mumbai.

It was alleged that the arrested accused extorted a total of ₹7.67 crore in 42 instalments. The victim was digitally detained for over three months by cybercriminals posing as personnel of various law enforcement agencies, the officials said.

“The CBI has been adopting a multi-pronged approach in investigating digital arrest cases, with a special emphasis on dismantling the infrastructure behind such offences,” a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

He said the CBI has registered multiple

cases of digital arrests in recent months. The agency conducted an in-depth investigation involving extensive data analysis and profiling after taking over the Rajasthan case.

**The agency conducted an in-depth investigation involving extensive data analysis and profiling, arresting four persons after searches at 12 locations**

“The CBI employed advanced investigative techniques to identify the perpetrators. Based on the leads generated during the investigation, the CBI conducted extensive searches recently across 12 locations in Moradabad and Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh, Krishnanagar in West Bengal, Mumbai and Jaipur, leading to the arrest of four individuals involved in this highly organised crime syndicate,” the spokesperson said.

The agency seized bank account details, debit cards, cheques, deposit slips, and digital devices or evidence during the searches, he said.

# 90 per cent policewomen in constabulary: Report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India’s police force has less than 1,000 women in senior positions like Director-Generals and Superintendents of Police, with 90 per cent of all women in policing serving in the constabulary, according to a new report.

The India Justice Report (IJR) 2025, initiated by Tata Trusts and supported by several civil society organisations and data partners, tracked the performance of states across four areas — Police, Judiciary, Prisons and Legal Aid.

According to the report, despite growing awareness about the need for gender diversity in law enforcement, not a single state or Union Territory has met its target for women’s representation in the police force.

The IJR 2025, released on Tuesday, ranked Karnataka as the top-performing state among the 18 large and mid-sized states in terms of justice delivery, maintaining its position from 2022.

Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu followed Karnataka, with the five southern states outperforming others due to better diversity, infrastructure and staffing across sectors.

The report also underscored gender

disparities within the police hierarchy.

Out of 2.4 lakh women in police, only 960 are in the Indian Police Service (IPS) ranks, while 24,322 hold non-IPS officer positions such as Deputy Superintendent, Inspector or Sub-Inspector.

The authorised strength of the Indian Police Service (IPS) is 5,047 officers.

A staggering 2.17 lakh women serve in the constabulary. Madhya Pradesh tops the chart for the highest number of women Deputy Superintendents of Police (DySPs), with 133.

Around 78 per cent of police stations now have Women Help Desks, 86 per cent of prisons are equipped with video conferencing facilities and the per capita expenditure on legal aid has nearly doubled between 2019 and 2023, reaching ₹6.46.

The share of women in the district judiciary has also increased to 38 per cent in the same period.

However, the share of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the district judiciary remains low at 5 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively.

In the police force, SCs account for 17 per cent and STs 12 per cent, falling short of proportional representation.

Paralegal volunteers (PLVs), considered

a crucial link for access to legal aid, have declined by 38 per cent over five years, with only 3 PLVs per lakh population now available.

There are only 25 psychologists or psychiatrists available across prisons nationwide, the report said.

The IJR also flags serious infrastructural and staffing deficiencies across the justice system. India has just 15 judges per million people, far below the Law Commission’s 1987 recommendation of 50.

High Courts are operating with 33 per cent vacancies and district courts with 21 per cent, leading to massive workloads — up to 15,000 cases per judge in High Courts like Allahabad and Madhya Pradesh. District court judges, on average, are handling 2,200 cases each.

Prison overcrowding is another area of concern, with a national average occupancy rate of 131 per cent.

Uttar Pradesh has some of the worst instances — one in every three jails there holds over 250 per cent of its capacity, the report said.

Furthermore, the availability of medical personnel in jails remains inadequate, with the prisoner-doctor ratio standing at 775:1 against the recommended 300:1.

In many large states, including Haryana, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, this ratio exceeds 1,000:1.

Among the small states, Sikkim retained the top rank, followed by Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh.

Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha showed the most improvement among large and mid-sized states between 2022 and 2025.

Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand also improved, surpassing Gujarat and Haryana on the improvement index.

The report also evaluated the functioning of 25 State Human Rights Commissions and featured essays on access to justice for persons with disabilities and mediation as an alternative dispute resolution method.

With India’s prison population projected to hit 6.8 lakh by 2030, the IJR warned that unless systemic reforms are prioritised, the justice system will continue to disproportionately burden the vulnerable and marginalised.

The report has sourced information from official portals such as the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Ministry of Law and Justice, National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) and Prison Statistics India, among others.



# Bihar polls: Tejashwi meets senior Congress leaders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna/New Delhi

With Assembly elections due in politically versatile state of Bihar, the stakeholder leaders and partners have started putting their weight as the ruling alliance member JD(U) asserted on Tuesday that Nitish Kumar will be the NDA's chief ministerial face in the Bihar Assembly polls, former Deputy Chief Minister and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav met senior Congress leaders.

Yadav called on party president Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, to discuss the Mahagathbandhan's preparedness for the upcoming Bihar Assembly polls and exuded confidence that INDIA bloc government will be formed in the state. Yadav, along with RJD MPs Manoj Jha and Sanjay Yadav, met the Congress leadership at Kharge's residence. He urged the media not to speculate over Mahagathbandhan's (grand alliance) chief ministerial face and said the constituents would talk among themselves and decide.

The meeting comes amid indications that hard bargaining is on the cards among Mahagathbandhan allies, with all parties looking to strengthen their hold on

the ground. The meeting also comes weeks after Congress firmed up its strategy for the upcoming Bihar assembly polls at a meeting. Last month, the Congress said it would contest the elections as part of the INDIA bloc and asserted that the alliance partners would take a "collective decision" on the chief ministerial face. The RJD-led Mahagathbandhan is looking to wrest power from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the Assembly polls, which are due later this year.

"I don't know why you all are worried about the CM face; we will talk among ourselves and decide. Things will become clear; you all should not worry about it," the former Deputy Chief Minister said.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting with Congress leaders, Yadav alleged that Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) president Nitish Kumar has been "hijacked" by the BJP. "Nitish ji has been hijacked. Amit Shah has been saying that they will fight elections under his leadership but does not say he will become the CM," Yadav said.

He said the Congress and the RJD will sit in Patna to finalise a strategy and asserted that the INDIA bloc is committed to taking Bihar on the path of progress.

"The government that has been there for



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with LoP in the Lok Sabha and party leader Rahul Gandhi and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav during a meeting in New Delhi PTI

20 years in Bihar and PM Modi is at the helm for 11 years... Amid all this, Bihar has been given step-motherly treatment. Bihar is the most economically backward (state), with the lowest per capita income, lowest

farmers' income and highest migration. We all want to fight the elections on real issues," Yadav said. "We are in the opposition. It is our responsibility to highlight the limitations of the government to the public,"

he said. The RJD leader asserted that it is certain that there won't be an NDA government in Bihar and an INDIA bloc government will be formed.

"Today we met the former Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar, Tejashwi Yadav, and discussed the strength of the Mahagathbandhan. In the coming elections, we will give the people of Bihar a strong, positive, just and welfare option. Bihar will be freed from BJP and its opportunistic thug alliance," Kharge said in a statement on social media.

Rahul Gandhi also shared pictures from the deliberations on his WhatsApp channel and called it an "important meeting." Congress general secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal, Bihar Congress chief Rajesh Kumar and AICC Bihar in-charge Krishna Allavaru were also present in the meeting. Asked if Tejashwi would be CM's face, Kumar did not give a direct reply and said, "We will sit on different dates and discuss all the points".

With the opposition seizing on Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini's remarks to mount an attack on the BJP and its treatment of allies, JD(U) national spokesperson Rajeev Ranjan Prasad shrugged off the Haryana leader's comment and asserted that the rul-

ing alliance faces no crisis over its chief ministerial face in Bihar. Saini had said at an event on Monday that the BJP's victory march will continue in polls, and it will be achieved under Choudhary's leadership in Bihar. "The Bihar elections will be held under the leadership of Nitish Kumar, and he will be the face of the National Democratic Alliance. CM Nitish Kumar will head the NDA government which is certain to be formed after the elections for a full term till 2030," Prasad said.

He said senior BJP leader and Union Home Minister Amit Shah has spoken on similar lines in the past and took a swipe at the opposition INDIA bloc, claiming that it is going to unravel in Bihar as it has in many other states.

He noted that while RJD has declared Tejashwi Yadav as its chief ministerial face, Congress leader Sachin Pilot had said recently that a decision on their alliance's leader in Bihar will be taken after the elections, expected to be held later this year. He claimed that Yadav had returned empty-handed from his meeting with Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and senior party leader Rahul Gandhi. The NDA will notch up its biggest-ever win in the coming polls in Bihar, he said.

# No protest against Waqf Act in Assam, says Himanta

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said no protest against the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 will be allowed in the state and suggested that the agitators present their side before the Supreme Court.

After its enactment earlier this month, several individuals and groups have challenged the controversial legislation, which seeks to improve the functioning of Waqf properties, address complexities, ensure transparency and introduce technology-driven management.

"The case is with the Supreme Court. If anyone has anything to say, please present it before the apex court as it can be properly discussed there. If someone hits the streets in Assam against the Waqf Act, then people will also hit the streets in support of the legislation. It will lead to a clash, which we don't want," Sarma told reporters.

He reminded the All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU) that if the organisation opposes the law, then there are people who support it.

"We don't need any conflict. The brotherhood should be maintained for the progress of Assam. That's why we should



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma attends Sri Sri Vishnu Hajanta at Barnadi in Nalbari district on Tuesday PTI

be able to differentiate between good and bad. If anyone opposes the Waqf Act, I have nothing to say and I suggest him to go to the Supreme Court.

"Those who are supporting the Act should also go to the apex court. We went to the SC yesterday in support of the Act.

## ASSAMESE NEW YEAR CELEBRATED WITH FERVOUR

Guwahati: The Assamese New Year was welcomed with festive fervour by people across the state on Tuesday, with all praying for a prosperous and fulfilling year ahead.

Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma wished the people on the occasion, hoping that the Rongali, or Bohag, Bihu celebrations will reaffirm the age-old harmony in the state.

"I extend my heartiest greetings on the occasion of Rongali Bihu and Assamese New Year," Acharya said in a post on X. "May this Rongali Bihu strengthen further our age-old harmony and bring prosperity and happiness to all," he added. The Rongali Bihu celebrations had started on Monday with 'Garu Bihu',

centering around cattle, with the first day of the month of Bohag on Tuesday marked as 'Manuh Bihu', when people greet each other. The festivities typically continue for nearly the entire month, with the first week of Bohag dedicated to celebrating different aspects and elements of nature and people. The CM, taking to the micro-blogging site, affirmed his government's commitment to the welfare of the people. "Today, from Kamakhya to Kachakanti, people across Assam are welcoming the New Year and celebrating Assam's success in the year gone by," he said. "On this day, our Government renews its commitment to make Assam as one of Bharat's top 5 states and ensure the welfare of every citizen," the Chief Minister Sarma added.

But we will not allow anything to take place on the roads," Sarma said.

Agitators and the police clashed during a rally against the Waqf (Amendment) Act in Cachar district of Assam on Sunday. The protesters pelted the police with stones while the law enforcers dispersed them with batons.

After the clash, the Cachar district administration imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNS) across the dis-

trict. The Act proposes that an officer above the rank of collector will investigate government properties claimed as Waqf. In case of disputes, the senior government official will have the final say on whether a property belongs to Waqf or the government.

This replaces the earlier system where such decisions were made by Waqf tribunals. The Act also allowed the inclusion of non-Muslim members in the central and state Waqf boards for inclusivity.

# Modi to inaugurate 250 key projects in Kanpur

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Kanpur

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Kanpur on April 24, where he is likely to address a massive public rally at the Chandrashekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology (CSA) grounds. Preparations for the high-profile visit have already begun, with senior administrative and party officials on the ground to oversee arrangements.

Sources indicate that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath may visit Kanpur on April 16 or 17 to review the preparations and hold meetings with district officials regarding ongoing development projects and event logistics.

During his visit, the Prime Minister may also take a short ride on the Kanpur Metro from Nayaganj to Geetnagar. On Tuesday, District Magistrate Jitendra Pratap Singh inspected the Nayaganj Metro Station and discussed security and route arrangements. The metro journey is expected to be a symbolic showcase of the city's growing urban infrastructure.

The Prime Minister will lay the foundation stone and inaugurate a total of 250 development projects across Uttar Pradesh, with the department-wise list currently being finalised.

Key among these are the newly con-

structed Panki Power Plant and the Neyveli Power Plant in Ghatampur, which are already operational and supplying electricity to both the state and the central grid. These projects will be inaugurated virtually from the rally venue.

Preparations at Chandrashekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology grounds are in full swing. Initially, the rally was to be held at the Railway Ground in Nirala Nagar, but the venue was later shifted to the CSA campus. Equipment for setting up the stage and pandal has already been delivered, and late-night inspections by senior officials, including ADM City Rajesh Kumar, are being conducted to ensure readiness.

According to preliminary plans, PM Modi's chopper will land at the Chakeri Airport, from where he will fly directly to Chandrashekhar Azad University of Agriculture and Technology via another chopper. After addressing the gathering, he is expected to travel by car to Nayaganj Metro Station, board a metro to Geetnagar, and then return to the rally site.

Officials from the district administration, police, and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are coordinating closely to ensure seamless execution of the Prime Minister's visit, which is seen as a significant moment ahead of upcoming political developments in the state.

# Coast Guard seizes sea cucumber in Tamil Nadu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on Tuesday said it has seized 145 kilograms of sea cucumbers worth ₹58 lakh during an anti-poaching operation at Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu.

Sea cucumber harvesting and trade are banned in India under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

"On April 13, 2025, Indian Coast Guard Station in Mandapam seized 145 kilograms of illegal sea cucumbers worth Rs 58 lakh during an anti-poaching operation. A major step towards safeguarding our marine environment and curbing illegal transshipment," the coast guard posted on microblogging site X.

The coast guard and Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) had on Monday seized 300 kilograms of drugs valued at ₹1,800 crore, which smugglers dumped into the Arabian Sea before fleeing across the International Maritime Boundary Line.

According to a statement issued by the ICG on Monday, the seized contraband, suspected to be methamphetamine, has been handed over to the ATS for further probe.

The coast guard and ATS had carried out a joint operation near the International Maritime Boundary Line in the Arabian Sea off Gujarat on the intervening night of April 12 and 13, the statement said.



145 kg of illegal sea cucumbers seized by Indian Coast Guard during an anti-poaching operation PTI

# Bomb threat to Ram Temple triggers panic

KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ Ayodhya

A threatening email claiming a plan to blow up the under-construction Ram Temple in Ayodhya triggered a wave of panic late Monday night. The email, received on the official account of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, warned authorities to "increase the security of the temple."

Following the threat, a comprehensive search and security operation was launched across Ayodhya. Police and intelligence agencies, along with bomb disposal squads, swept the temple premises and nearby sensitive areas. Security measures were also ramped up in adjoining districts including Barabanki.

An FIR was registered at the Ayodhya Cyber police station based on a complaint filed by Mahesh Kumar, Accounts Officer of the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust. The Cyber Cell has launched a probe to trace the origin of the email and identify the sender.

Authorities have not taken the threat lightly, especially given the high-profile nature of the Ram Temple project and the upcoming religious events expected to draw massive crowds.

Senior police officials confirmed that additional forces have been deployed and surveillance has been intensified in and around the Ram Janmabhoomi complex. "We are treating the matter with utmost seriousness," a police spokesperson said.

In view of the sensitivity of the matter, security alerts were also issued in adjoining districts such as Barabanki, Gonda, and Basti. Checkpoints were set up at district borders, and inter-district vehicle movement was put under strict scrutiny.

The Ram Janmabhoomi Trust expressed concern over the threat but also assured the public that faith and security would not be shaken by such attempts. "The temple construction is a symbol of national pride and faith. We are cooperating fully with the administration to ensure the security of the site and the devotees," a senior Trust member said.

With several religious events and festivals scheduled in the coming weeks, the latest security scare has prompted the administration to review its preparedness.

Meanwhile, the district administration has appealed to the public to remain calm and cooperate with law enforcement agencies.

# Jaishankar inaugurates gymnastic hall

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rajpipla (Gujarat)

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, a Rajya Sabha MP from Gujarat, on Tuesday inaugurated a new gymnastic hall upgraded with modern equipment, as well as a smart classroom and an anganwadi built with MPLAD funds in Narmada district.

On the second day of his Gujarat tour, he also visited a Post Office Passport Seva Kendra at Rajpipla town in the tribal-dominated district. In a post on X, the BJP Member of Parliament commended the Centre's effort in providing "smooth and efficient passport services at grassroots level."

The Union Minister visited Lachras, one of the villages adopted by him in the district, and inaugurated a smart anganwadi (child care centre) and a digital classroom. "In the age of mobile, smart classrooms make school interesting for students," he told media persons after inaugurating the facility.

"When I became a minister six years ago and visited Narmada district for the first time, people demanded a passport centre.



External Affairs Minister inaugurating a gymnastic hall at Rajpipla in Narmada district of Gujarat PTI

I visited there after a long time, and it is working fine with 30-40 appointments a day. Facilitates for passports have increased, and people think I have done something good for them as the External Affairs Minister," he said.

"Visited Post Office Passport Seva Kendra, Rajpipla. Commend their efforts in providing smooth and efficient passport services at grassroots level," the diplomat-turned-politician said in a post.

# UP gears up for assistant teacher exam at 52 centres

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

As part of its Mission Rozgar initiative, the Uttar Pradesh government has made comprehensive preparations to ensure that the upcoming written examination for the post of Assistant Teacher (Sahayak Acharya) is conducted in a fair, transparent and free manner. The examination will be held on April 16 and 17 across two shifts at 52 centres in six districts — Agra, Meerut, Prayagraj, Lucknow, Gorakhpur and Varanasi.

Reaffirming his zero-tolerance policy on malpractice, CM Yogi has issued clear instructions to ensure that no examination is tainted by unfair practices. To safeguard the integrity of the recruitment process, sector and static magistrates will be deployed at every centre, supported by comprehensive security measures.

District Magistrates have been directed to deploy fully armed police personnel at each examination venue. They have

also been granted authority to enforce prohibitory orders if required.

A total of 82,876 candidates are expected to appear for the exam. Among them, the highest number — 18,240 — will take the exam in Prayagraj, followed by 16,010 in Meerut, 15,602 in Gorakhpur, 13,528 in Lucknow, 10,958 in Varanasi, and 8,538 in Agra. The maximum number of centres - 10 each - have been established in Meerut, Prayagraj and Gorakhpur, followed by 9 in Lucknow, 7 in Varanasi and 6 in Agra.

In line with CM commitment to restoring youth confidence in the recruitment process, the examination will be held under the joint supervision of the commission and district administration. The Chairman of the Commission, nominated members, district and centre supervisors will monitor the entire process to ensure transparency and merit-based evaluation — giving every deserving candidate a fair chance.



Editor's TAKE

Babasaheb and the battle for justice

The truest tribute to Dr Ambedkar is to see the work he began through to completion

As the nation marked the 135th birth anniversary of Dr BR Ambedkar — the principal architect of the Indian Constitution and a tireless champion of equality — a deeply unsettling incident unfolded in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh, the place where Dr Ambedkar was born. In Indore district's Sanghvi village, a Dalit bridegroom seeking blessings at a local Ram temple was denied entry when members of the Rajput community forcibly locked the temple doors. The situation escalated into a major controversy, and despite the presence of police, the authorities remained unable to defuse the tension or uphold the groom's right to worship. This is exactly what Dr Ambedkar fought for throughout his life — dignity to the people and equal rights for all, clearly still a far cry in many parts of the country including his hometown.

Every year Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar Jayanti is celebrated to pay tribute to a towering intellect, a tireless reformer, and the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. But the work he started is still unfinished. A lot needs to be done when it comes to social equality, justice, and liberty. This is where Babasaheb's legacy guides us. It continues to inspire millions, especially those fighting for equality, justice, and dignity in modern India.

Dr Ambedkar served as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly. Entrusted with the monumental task of crafting the legal backbone of independent India in a caste divided society, he approached it with clarity, wisdom, and an unshakeable commitment to liberty, equality, and fraternity. He ensured that the Constitution enshrined fundamental rights for all citizens, irrespective of caste, creed, or gender — a radical and visionary step at the time. One of his most enduring legacies is his insistence on constitutional morality — the idea that institutions must function according to ethical and legal principles, not merely the will of the majority. His emphasis on social democracy as the foundation for political democracy remains deeply relevant today.

Born on April 14, 1891, in Mhow (now officially Dr Ambedkar Nagar), a town in the Indore district in Madhya Pradesh state of India, into a Dalit family, Dr Ambedkar's early life was marred by discrimination and exclusion. Yet, he rose through sheer brilliance and perseverance. He earned multiple doctorates from prestigious institutions, including Columbia University and the London School of Economics, becoming one of the most educated Indian leaders of his time. Despite his global education, Ambedkar never distanced himself from the struggles of the oppressed. He turned his intellect into a weapon against caste oppression, tirelessly working to uplift marginalised communities through education, legal rights, and political representation. Dr Ambedkar's thoughts were rooted in human dignity, rationalism, and social justice. He believed that political independence was meaningless without social equality. He was also a sharp critic of the caste system and Hindu orthodoxy. His decision to embrace Buddhism in 1956, along with millions of his followers, was both a spiritual and political act — a rejection of caste-based discrimination and an embrace of a religion founded on compassion, reason, and equality. He has been posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award. However, till India becomes as he wanted it to be — free from injustices and treating all individuals equals his work remains unfinished. Dr Ambedkar was a visionary and saw that the work he started was not easy and would take decades, if not centuries, to complete. As India reflects on his legacy, Dr Ambedkar's words serve as a reminder and a warning: "However good a Constitution may be, if those who are implementing it are not good, it will prove to be bad." His vision was not just about drafting laws — it was about awakening the moral soul of a nation.

Leaderspeak



On behalf of all the countrymen, I bow down to Bharat Ratna Pujya Babasaheb on his birth anniversary. It is due to his inspiration that the country is dedicatedly engaged in realising the dream of social justice today. His principles and ideals will give strength and momentum to the creation of a self-reliant and developed India.

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI



Saluting the Gorkha spirit

From World War trenches to high-altitude patrols, and now well into their centenarian years, these warriors — my comrades, my teachers, my brothers — carry their legacy with the same quiet pride as they once did a *khukuri*

In my nearly 66 years of trekking and travelling in Nepal, from a Second Lieutenant to a General, in every rank, I have savoured Nepal at its best — from dawn to dusk and at night glow with fireflies. Especially meeting Nepal's greatest gift to mankind, the Gorkha soldier. His name is emblematic of everything tough, brave and never to be messed with — and not for the faint-hearted.

The khukuri, madal, share, Khukuri rum, Gorkha beer and the list goes on; are all synonymous with the soldier. Whether during the two World Wars, Falklands, Borneo, Kashmir, Sylhet, or Jaffna, the Gorkha has left his indomitable imprint. As there is no expiry date for his use, after retiring he has been called out as fighter — contractor in Afghanistan, several places in the Middle East and North Africa, and other places under the radar for even rogue operations. The pedestal the Gorkha occupies in India will soon vanish if the government persists with the demented Agniveer policy, willy-nilly wiping out a strategic asset from the 'colonial' era.

There is a flicker of hope that the absurdity inflicted on the Indian Army — which has damaged deterrence and combat capability — will be removed sooner than later. In my travels and trekking in Nepal since 1959 — worth 60,000 km — I have met Victoria Cross winners, Mahavir Chakra awardees and other gallantry award notables.

But with very difficult conditions in Nepal in the past, their survival rate was low. Now, with development in inaccessible places, health and education improving, and the vintage habits of old soldiers fading, the new Gorkha is living longer. There is no one better than me to make this judgment, as I have seen Nepal transform in slow motion over the years. My Holi travels last month touched Pokhara, Sallyan, Rolpa, Piuthan, Ghorai and Tikapur, where at most places I met old soldiers, some of whom even accompanied me on my climb to Swargadwar, the famous shrine in West Nepal.

I had not met many burros — as pensioners are endearingly called — who were older than me. But last year, while distributing awards to burhos above 80 years, I met 92-year-old Khetiram Pun from our 3-inch mortar platoon.

He was my Guruji when I joined my VC battalion 2/5 Gorkha Rifles FF in 1957 in Kashmir. But this Holi, occurred the mother of all surprises — attending the 106th birthday party in full Gurung style



of our own Havildar Ramprasad Gurung on 18th March; and one week later, the 99-year-old Havildar, Tejbahadur Thapa. The young Gurung joined the battalion as a 16-year-old in 1939. The Master of Ceremonies at his birthday party introduced Ramprasad with his Army number 5430423, adding that he was from Gandaki Pradesh, Syangjah district, Putlibazar Nagapalika, Oda no 6, Kolma- Pokhrichap, Majhakot ghar. Gurung was from B Company, 2/5 GR VC Paltan, who retired with 21 years of service in May 1961, fought in World War II mainly in Burma from 1939 to 1945, then was in Japan with the British Occupation Force. Later, in 1961, he served in Kashmir, and before that from 1946 in NEFA, Nagaland and Calcutta.



His only daughter, 59-year-old Jhaman Kumari, was the envy of attention and query. All of Kolma-Pokhrichap appeared to have descended on Pokhara to join the festivities. We represented his beloved battalion and were squeezed into the elaborate Tamu Samaj protocol and allotted a short window to congratulate Gurung. I recalled visiting Kolma

Pokhrichap in 1959, 66 years earlier. The cake-cutting ceremony was unique: the icing on the two cakes was used as a tika to be planted on the forehead. Every well-wisher is trying to put a pinch of cake into Gurung's overloaded mouth. Daughter Jhaman Kumari's yells of 'bhayo bhayo' (stop) — his mouth cannot take any more cake — go unheard. Gurung is unable to speak and not unhappy about it.

He is covered with confetti, icing, khatas (scarves) and gifts. Loud Nepali music signals the start of the feast. They're serving Old Durbar whiskey, Khukuri rum, Gorkha Strong beer and the hill favourite, Kodo ko Rakshi. After the mammoth menu of snacks of every edible two-legged and four-legged, there is dal, bhat and masu, without which no celebration is considered complete. The 106-year-old Gurung would have liked to recall his patrol encounters with the Japanese near Basha Hill in which he was wounded. But he has lost his voice. Fully repaired, Gurung returned to the battalion to survive the fateful Sittang River crossing in 1942.

Gurung's celebrations are covered in local newspapers as well as Annapurna Express and Naya Patrika. My second encounter a week later is with a 13-month-shy of a century-old soldier in Ghorai. His career graph is more colourful and enchanting than the 106-year-old

Gurung's. Havildar Tej Bahadur Thapa was born on 5 May 1926 and joined 2/8 GR, was transferred to 6/8 GR and again moved to 3/8 GR, where he was Signal (communications) Havildar. He too fought in the Burma jungles and at the end of the war, was chosen among 1350 Indian soldiers led by Brig JN Chaudhury, who later became Indian Army Chief, at Victory Parade 1945 in London. After retiring from the Indian Army, Thapa joined Nepal Police by fudging his age by five years. He told me triumphantly: 'I have three dates of birth and get two pensions: one from India, one from Nepal. Next year my Indian pension will double.' His memory is crystal clear and his art of mixing nostalgia with encounters of war, spellbinding.

He walks with a medical stick and has a hazy vision but imbibes with gay abandon. He loves Blue Riband gin, Tuborg beer — which we split — and of course, Old Monk Rum. But he also has local rakshi. He's a perfect specimen from Jumlepani village made famous by late Hony Capt Indrabir Thapa, Sardar Bahadur, OBI, MBE, MC from my VC Paltan. I must be blessed to have met two great old soldiers.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

Human trait: Excusing the inexcusable

SECOND Opinion

BY RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

It is one of the reasons why mankind has been unable to solve many national and international problems. Man, who is considered rational, has been using his reasoning in a wrong and perverted way. He has either been rationally explaining the defects of his personality and flaws of his character as his sterling virtues, or he has been using reason wrongly to justify his uncivilised behaviour as necessary for the well-being of his community or the security of his country.

He has been rationalising even his vulgar, barbarous, or animalistic behaviour as biologically 'natural', psychologically justified, and politically beneficial. Like, in the past, until recently, any woman who gave birth to many children was considered 'very fertile' and the father of those children was considered as 'potent', 'manly' or 'masculine' in character. In other words, people adored his libidinousness and her sexual vigour, rather than took notice of the lack of self-restraint or self-control on the part of the man and the woman.

Likewise, one who could slaughter large numbers of people, even for a tyrant ruler or for an aggressive and ambitious nation, was considered a 'brave warrior', a 'courageous soldier' or a 'national hero'. In other words, people praised the quality of one's being a greater butcher, i.e. a killer, and less attention was paid to the quality of forgiveness or compassion.

Moreover, they rationalised aggression as an 'instinct', as an in-built psychological response, or as genetically correct behaviour. It is this kind of rationalisation that has resulted in the present state of the world. Man's faults of character have now acquired global dimensions and are now threatening the very existence of society. Yet his attempt to rationalise his irrational behaviour continues to be. Man's arguments justifying his habits of smoking, drinking alcohol or taking a non-vegetarian diet also are due to his tendency to rationalise the irrational. A matter of more pity is that he does not recognise that he is arguing in favour of irrational and harmful behaviour.

Unless he realises this wrong tendency, no global problem can be solved. As stated earlier, this tendency to rationalise the irrational has led to small and individual defects taking the form of global problems. For example, man's libidinous tendencies, which were earlier justified on biological or psychological grounds, have now resulted in the grave danger caused by over-population, promiscuity, illegitimate children, rapes, abductions and the threat of the spread of AIDS.

The threat caused by overpopulation is not less than the one caused by nuclear weapons. Yet man does not try to have self-restraint, self-control or continence. Instead, he tries to rationalise his irrational and errant behaviour since that suits his perverted instincts, and emotions, and gives him short-lived pleasure even though it is a great strain upon his stamina and moral health.

The same can be said of his tendencies of aggression and greed. His justification of his self-interest and the wrong notion of security has led the world into the morass of grave econom-

ic imbalance and the race for war weapons. Hence there is an urgent need to put man's rational faculty on the right track and, thereby, enable him to put an end to his irrational, irresponsible and injurious behaviour to save mankind from several global upheavals.

There was a time when defects in man's personality or faults in his character were considered as of individual concern. It was thought that society had no cause to bother about an individual's habits, as it was believed that these can, at the most, be of concern to one's family members or a few individuals who directly interact with that man. But now, with our better understanding, we know that defects in man's personality are of concern not only to that individual but to the whole society as well because individual defects add up to global problems. Smoking, for example, is not only injurious to the health of the man who smokes but it is injurious to others also who do not smoke but are exposed to tobacco smoke.

The libidinousness and the aggressiveness of individuals, as already explained, have now led to the problems of high population growth and a huge stockpile of war weapons respectively. The whole society has thus to suffer because of these habits of the individuals. The way to solve these problems now lies in the inner transformation of the individual but this is not possible unless man first gives up the habit of rationalising his irrational behaviour and justifying his bad habits of perverted instincts by employing faulty reasoning.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

Larger than life cut-outs are menacing

Madam — The giant cut-outs of the candidates during the time of election in our country make them appear as larger-than-life characters. This is to create supermen out of democratic leaders and to generate bhakti and awe among us for them. However, such an effort is surely against the concept of democracy. Bhakti for a superman is a roadblock to safeguarding the essence of democracy. B. R. Ambedkar categorically said, "In politics, Bhakti or hero worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship."

Hero worship emanates from a slavish mindset, which interestingly wants to enslave others. On the other hand, a person who does not have a slavish mentality will never try to enslave others. Abraham Lincoln once said, "As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy." "You — master — me — slave" or "Me — master — you — slave" mentality is nothing but two sides of the same coin — and both are equally dangerous for a democracy. Bhakti in politics injects a TINA (There Is No Alternative) factor into our mindset. Ironically, this TINA has a "No" within it which says no to other leaders and no to any democratic change — which is indispensable for the survival of democracy. Thus, bhakti in politics makes democracy slip into a dictatorship, as bhakti and awe are the basic ingredients of manufacturing a dictator. Indeed, bhakti in politics weakens democratic shakti.

SUJIT DE | KOLKATA

Congress party revamps itself

Madam — Apropos the news report "Rahul Gandhi launches pilot to strengthen district units" published on 15 April, here is my response. Congress held its first AICC session in the state of Gujarat since 1961, as it has been out of power in Gujarat for almost three decades now — and it laid down a revival plan, from reviving the organisation to pledging a caste census. Congress's biggest rival — the ruling BJP — is a cadre-based party, and this is where the grand old party lacks the most. We hope that it has realised its biggest weakness. It has to build an effective organisation at the grass-roots level across the country. District committees and district-level leadership is a step in this direction — but how Congress would be able to manage this in the strongly established high-command culture, where Gandhi's way or the highway prevails, will be interesting to watch.

Almost all Congress state units are in disarray, and whether district-level leadership will unite them — or widen the gulf further — will decide Congress's fate in future state elections, including the Gujarat elections to be held in two years' time. The CWC session from the land of Mahatma Gandhi will decide which path Congress will usher into. At the moment, all that Congress needs is a sense of direction and purpose — which it must find to remain relevant in the game.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

Now enjoy sleep tourism

Madam — Although tourism and vacation is the most preferred time for any individual who wants to have fun with family and friends — to the surprise of the world, after ecotourism, cultural tourism, and medical tourism, a new variant is paving its way into the current world order: sleep tourism.

The level of tiredness and exhaustion is so high these days that the world needs more sleep for bodily rejuvenation than anything else. To the tiring world, deep sleep is — no doubt — the ultimate panacea which everyone is searching for. Sleep tourism is the need of the hour for the fast-forward, rushing world that is constantly chasing things with an unstoppable approach.

There was a time when tourism was all about exploring, adventure, and recreation. As we all had health soundness, we could better enjoy vacations. But with time, the level of physical, mental, and emotional fatigue has increased — and as a result, man is in search of health soundness, happiness, and mental peace.

Then many new forms of tourism were added — village tourism, medical tourism, and even slum tourism. The latest one to join is, of course, sleep tourism. The idea of sleep tourism is actually welcome in this world like Piccadilly Circus — because, at the end of the day, the art of rest is what

KIRTI | WADHAWAN

THE SC CURBS GOVERNORS' POWERS TO WITHHOLD BILLS INDEFINITELY

The Supreme Court curbed the power of the President to indefinitely delay the enactment of state legislation in a judgement that is bound to have serious repercussions on the Indian polity — especially in helping restore the balance between the Centre and the states in India's federal structure.

And it will be taken as a welcome strike in favour of states' rights that had been casually infringed upon by an authoritarian Centre that has little respect for democratic norms and federal principles.

The Supreme Court judgement settling the dispute between Tamil Nadu Governor R. N. Ravi and the ruling DMK government over the clearing of Bills speaks volumes about the courage demonstrated by the apex Court.

This is yet another bold milestone that is rarely seen these days — when the borderline between the executive and the judiciary often gets blurred, to

the peril of the institution of democracy that rests on the three pillars of the legislature, executive, and judiciary functioning independent of one another. It is in the interest of a healthy Indian democracy that its three pillars — the legislature, executive, and judiciary — run at cross purposes, rather than their interests converge.

After the 8 April judgement, the Tamil Nadu government notified 10 pending Bills as Acts in the government gazette, citing: "There is no 'pocket veto' or 'absolute veto' available to the President in discharge of his functions under Article 201.

The use of the expression 'shall declare' makes it mandatory for the President to make a choice between the two options available under the substantive part of Article 201 — that is, to either grant assent or to withhold assent to a Bill," the bench said.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR



# Bridging education and employability

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 promises a sweeping transformation of India's education system. Its success hinges not just on vision, but on action, investment, and a unified national commitment to reimagining education for the 21st century

FIRST  
Column

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a landmark initiative to reshape India's educational landscape, particularly by integrating vocational training into mainstream education. This integration is vital for enhancing skill development and employability, and it complements initiatives such as 'Samagra Shiksha' and the Skill India Mission.

The establishment of PM SHRI Schools embodies the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP), promoting a holistic educational experience nationwide. However, significant challenges stand in the way of realising this ambitious vision.

## The Challenges in Implementation

The primary objective of NEP 2020 – to ensure that by 2025, at least 50 per cent of learners receive vocational exposure — faces multiple hurdles. As of 2023, states such as Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Uttar Pradesh have lagged significantly in implementation due to financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified teachers. A staggering 75 per cent of technical institutions currently report a lack of alignment between the skills being taught and those sought by industry, highlighting a disconnect that must be addressed.

At the core of these challenges is the lack of a well-designed curriculum that is robust enough to meet the demands of the job market.

Despite a government push, only about 5 per cent of students in vocational education receive practical training in fields relevant to today's job market. Many traditional academic institutions remain resistant to integrating vocational education into their curricula, fearing it may dilute academic rigour.

This results in inadequate exposure for students, many of whom graduate without the skills needed to thrive in a competitive labour market.

Furthermore, there is a notable deficiency in educators trained in emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and automation. Reports indicate that over 80 per cent of institutions lack faculty proficiency in these essential areas, compromising the quality of vocational training offered.

## The Path Forward

The path forward requires actionable strategies to ensure that vocational education becomes a core component of the school curriculum. Making vocational education mandatory from Class 9 to Class 12, with students continuing in their chosen fields, is essential.

For instance, a student selecting 'Electrician' as a vocational subject should continue to engage with this subject through Class 10 and beyond, ensuring a deep, practical understanding.

To encourage participation, the government could implement a financial incentive model. Providing a monthly stipend of ₹500 for students from economically weaker sections, along



DINESH SOOD

with a vocational training kit, could promote enrollment. An increased stipend of ₹1,000 per month for students who continue in vocational training through their higher classes would further incentivise sustained commitment. Graduating students should receive certification after four years, bolstering their employability both domestically and internationally.

## Bridging the Skill Gap

India, with over 260 million students in 1.5 million schools and more than 40 million in higher education, holds one of the largest student populations globally.

Yet, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) stands



INDIA, WITH OVER 260 MILLION STUDENTS IN 1.5 MILLION SCHOOLS AND MORE THAN 40 MILLION IN HIGHER EDUCATION, HOLDS ONE OF THE LARGEST STUDENT POPULATIONS GLOBALLY

at approximately 32 per cent, compelling many to seek employment in the unorganised sector — a domain fraught with exploitation and underpayment.

Vocational education has the potential to effectively address this gap. By focusing on industry-relevant skills, these programs not only enhance employment opportunities but also foster the development of future entrepreneurs.

Countries like Germany and Switzerland exemplify successful dual vocational education systems, blending classroom learning with hands-on industry experience.

India could adopt similar frameworks, ensuring students gain practical exposure, which is increasingly necessary in an evolving job landscape.

## Adapting to Emerging Technologies

As technological innovation accelerates, vocational programs must incorporate modern skills relating to AI, IoT, and cloud computing. The Central

Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) initiative to introduce AI and IoT into the curriculum for Classes VI to X is a step in the right direction. With over 20,000 teachers trained in these areas, reaching approximately 350,000 students, substantial progress is evident.

However, a 2022 survey indicated that 31 per cent of teachers are still not proficient with digital tools, while a 2023 report found that 49 per cent feel unprepared to address the impact of AI on education. To tackle these challenges effectively, the public and private sectors must invest in comprehensive teacher training that equips educators for a changing marketplace.

Collaborations with ed-tech companies to bring AI-powered learning tools into classrooms can further support this transition, ensuring that students receive training that is both modern and relevant.

Addressing Regional DisparitiesAlthough the Union Education Minister has asserted that states are beginning to implement NEP 2020, the pace of implementation varies greatly.

Reports indicate that Haryana has set an ambitious target to fully implement the National Education Policy (NEP) by 2025, aiming to increase the gross enrollment ratio of girls in higher education from 32 per cent to over 50 per cent by 2030.

However, discrepancies across states — due to funding shortages, trained faculty shortages, and bureaucratic inertia — not only create inconsistencies but also significantly undermine the policy's potential.

To ensure a level playing field, a centralised monitoring mechanism is essential to track progress and enforce uniform implementation across states.

Conclusion NEP 2020 presents a transformative opportunity for integrating vocational education into mainstream schooling, but its success hinges on strategic implementation, sufficient funding, infrastructure development, and robust teacher training.

As India aspires to become a \$10 trillion economy, investing in a comprehensive vocational education system is not just an educational imperative — it's a vital economic strategy.

By addressing the barriers to implementation, India can empower its youth with essential skills, fostering innovation and adaptability that contribute to national growth.

A well-implemented vocational skills education framework represents a win-win for both students and the government, laying the groundwork for a skilled and self-reliant workforce that is pivotal to India's economic future.

(The writer is a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres, an initiative of the Government of India. Views are personal)

# How PM Modi's vision revitalised BIMSTEC

Over the years, through initiatives like the 'Neighbourhood First and Act East policies,' the MAHASAGAR vision, and a consistent push for institutional reform and regional connectivity, PM Modi has transformed BIMSTEC into a vibrant platform for cooperation

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was established in 1997 with the promise of fostering deeper regional collaboration among countries bordering the Bay of Bengal.

Yet, for nearly two decades, the organisation remained relatively dormant — its potential untapped, its purpose loosely defined. That changed in 2016 when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi injected fresh momentum into the grouping, anchoring it firmly within India's broader regional and global strategic vision.

## A Strategic Turn in Goa

The turning point came when PM Modi extended a special invitation to BIMSTEC leaders to attend a Leaders' Retreat in Goa, held on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in 2016. This wasn't just a diplomatic courtesy — it was a strategic pivot. By placing BIMSTEC on the same platform as BRICS, Modi elevated its visibility and importance. His message was clear: India viewed the Bay of Bengal region as central to its regional diplomacy, economic connectivity, and maritime strategy. Since then, Modi's personal involvement and consistent emphasis on BIMSTEC have transformed it from a symbolic forum to an active and evolving regional body. In a move that underscored his commitment, he again invited BIMSTEC leaders to attend his swearing-in ceremony in 2019 — signalling continuity, priority, and seriousness of intent.

## Vision-Driven Diplomacy:

What sets PM Modi's leadership apart is his ability to integrate BIMSTEC within a broader web of policies that collectively enhance India's regional and global role. His Neighbourhood First policy, Act East strategy, and the MAHASAGAR initiative are all geared toward strengthening India's ties in its immediate and extended neighbourhood.

At the same time, his Indo-Pacific vision promotes a free, open, and inclusive region, aligning with global efforts to ensure stability and cooperation across maritime domains.

This policy convergence has lent BIMSTEC a new strategic dynamism. The group now finds itself not just an extension of South Asian cooperation, but a crucial bridge connecting South Asia and Southeast Asia, linking economies, people, and futures.

## Strengthening the Institutions

While BIMSTEC's Secretariat had existed for some time, a significant leap in its institutional development came in May 2024 with the formal adop-



SHEFALI GUPTA

tion of the BIMSTEC Charter. This milestone endowed the organisation with an international legal identity, clearly defined principles, and an institutional architecture that allows it to function with more coherence and purpose.

Further boosting its multilateral capacity, India appointed Indra Mani Pandey — an experienced diplomat known for his multilateral acumen — as the Secretary-General. India also committed USD 1 million to enhance the Secretariat's institutional and capacity-building efforts.

India's active diplomatic engagement has also seen it hosting the BIMSTEC Foreign Ministers' Meeting in July 2024, followed by an informal meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in September 2024. These events marked a new phase of energised diplomacy and

engagement, laying the foundation for greater regional integration.

## A Holistic Agenda

One of the standout features of BIMSTEC under India's leadership has been the expansion and organisation of its agenda.

The grouping now operates through seven key pillars, each led by a different member nation, allowing for greater ownership and specialised focus.

India leads the all-important Security pillar, while Bangladesh helms Trade, Investment, and Development.

Bhutan focuses on Environment and Climate Change, Myanmar leads on Agriculture and Food Security, Nepal on People-to-People Contacts, Sri Lanka on Science and Technology & Innovation, and Thailand on Connectivity.

This structured approach has allowed BIMSTEC to evolve into a results-oriented body, addressing challenges and harnessing opportunities across the spectrum — from trade and security to climate action and innovation. And the

change is visible in its approach.

## India's Pillars of Focus

India's leadership in the Security domain has seen the development of a robust legal framework to tackle terrorism, violent extremism, and transnational crimes — issues of shared concern across the region. Efforts are underway to harmonise counter-terror frameworks, intelligence-sharing, and maritime cooperation. On Connectivity, India has placed particular emphasis on developing physical, digital, and energy links. The BIMSTEC Energy Centre, hosted in Bengaluru, coordinates initiatives toward regional grid interconnectivity.

This aligns with PM Modi's bold vision of "One World, One Sun, One Grid", which aims to create a globally interconnected solar energy grid. In the area of Sustainability and Disaster Management, India has positioned itself as a responsible regional partner. It hosts regular disaster management exercises involving member countries and leads the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate in Noida, playing a critical

role in forecasting, climate data sharing, and early warning systems. Given the region's high vulnerability to natural disasters, this collaboration holds immense practical value.

## Fostering Regional Identity

Beyond policy and security, PM Modi has consistently championed the softer dimensions of regional cooperation — particularly culture, youth engagement, and environmental consciousness. These elements have been brought to the forefront through a series of vibrant events that promote shared identity and regional pride. Recent highlights include the BIMSTEC Aquatic Championship in Delhi (Feb 2024), the BIMSTEC Business Summit (Aug 2024), and cultural showcases like the BIMSTEC Pavilion at the Surajkund Mela (Feb 2025) and the BIMSTEC cultural troupe's performance at Bali Jatra in Cuttack (Nov 2024). Youth engagement, too, has been given a fresh thrust through the BIMSTEC Youth Summit in Ahmedabad and the BIMSTEC Youth-Led Climate Change Conference in Delhi, both held in February 2025. Another notable milestone was the launch of the BIMSTEC-India Marine Research Network in February 2024, which aims to foster scientific collaboration and ocean sustainability.

## From Goa to Bangkok

The vision articulated by PM Modi during the 2016 Goa Retreat continues to shape BIMSTEC's trajectory. The decisions taken during that seminal retreat are coming to fruition, most recently in Bangkok, where two key developments have been unveiled: the adoption of the BIMSTEC Vision 2030 and the Eminent Persons Group Report. These initiatives provide a long-term roadmap and intellectual foundation.

## Conclusion

Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BIMSTEC has transitioned from a dormant regional forum to a vibrant, forward-looking grouping. India's proactive engagement — rooted in strategic vision and people-centric diplomacy, has redefined the role of BIMSTEC in the 21st century. What began as a diplomatic gesture in Goa has evolved into a robust regional movement. As BIMSTEC continues to chart its course, India's leadership remains central to its strength, stability, and success, ensuring the Bay of Bengal becomes a beacon of cooperation, connectivity, and shared prosperity.

(The writer is Founder President, Om Aarohanam Samsthan (Janani Suraksha Yojana) and a BJP functionary. Views are personal)







## 09



# More US tariffs on key imports, including drugs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bangkok

The Trump administration has taken its next steps toward imposing more tariffs on key imports, launching investigations into imports of computer chips, chip making equipment and pharmaceuticals.

The Department of Commerce posted notices about the probes late Monday on the Federal Register, seeking public comment within three weeks. It had not formally announced them earlier.

Although President Donald Trump paused most of his biggest tariff hikes last week for 90 days, apart from those for imports from China, he has said he still plans tariffs on pharmaceutical drugs, lumber, copper and computer chips.

The Commerce Department said it is investigating how imports of computer chips, equipment to make them and products that contain them — which include many daily necessities such as cars, refrigerators, smart phones and other

items — affect national security.

Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 permits the president to order tariffs for the sake of national security.

The probe includes assessing the potential for US domestic production of computer chips to meet US demand and the role of foreign manufacturing and assembly, testing and packaging in meeting those needs.

Among other aspects of the entire computer chip supply chain, the government intends to also study the risks of having computer chip production concentrated in other places and the impact on US competitiveness from foreign government subsidies, “foreign unfair trade practices and state-sponsored overcapacity”.

After Trump said electronics would not be included in what his administration calls “reciprocal” tariffs of up to 50 per cent on some nations, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick explained in an interview on ABC News that pharmaceuticals, semiconductors and autos will be handled with



“sector specific” tariffs.

“And those are not available for negotiation,” Lutnick said. “They are just going to be part of making sure we reshore the

core national security items that need to be made in this country. We need to make medicine in this country,” he said. “We need to make semiconductors.”

## India’s gems, jewellery exports decline in FY25, says GJEPC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

India's overall gems and jewellery exports declined by 11.72 per cent to \$28.5 billion (around ₹2.41 lakh crore) in 2024-25 compared to the previous financial year on continued geopolitical tensions, according to the Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC).

The overall gems and jewellery exports stood at \$32.2 billion (₹2.67 lakh crore) in 2023-24, according to GJEPC data. However, in March, the exports improved slightly, witnessing a growth of 1.02 per cent at \$2,582.97 million (₹22,340.89 crore), compared to \$2,556.97 million (₹21,228.71 crore) in the same month of the previous year, it added.

“The decline in gems and jewellery exports is mainly due to the continuous dip in demand in China as well as the US, India's key export markets, due to the ongoing geopolitical tensions.”

“Also, the correction in rough diamond prices by 10-15 per cent impacted the value, causing the overall decline in exports,” GJEPC Chairman Kirit Bhansali told PTI.

The overall exports of Cut and Polished diamonds (CPD) dipped by

16.75 per cent at \$13,292.0 million (₹1.12 lakh crore) compared to \$15,967.02 million (₹1.32 lakh crore) for the same period of the previous year.

The export of polished lab-grown diamonds for the period of April 2024-March 2025 declined by 9.64 per cent at \$1,267.26 million (₹10,716.13 crore), against \$1,402.44 million (₹11,612.36 crore) in the previous year.

Total gold jewellery exports during FY25 showed a decline of 0.11 per cent at \$11,215.46 million (₹94,937.78 crore) against \$11,227.72 million (₹93,066.82 crore) in FY24.

Silver jewellery exports in FY25 dipped by 40.58 per cent at \$961.79 million (₹8,115.32 crore), compared with \$1,618.63 million (₹13,424.4 crore) in the previous year.

However, exports of platinum jewellery in FY25 witnessed a growth of 11.79 per cent at \$182.75 million (₹1,547.3 crore) against \$163.48 million (₹1,354.41 crore) for the previous year.

Meanwhile, the coloured gemstone exports showed a decline of 8.01 per cent during FY25 at \$440.38 million (₹3,729.93 crore), compared to \$478.71 million (₹3,961.98 crore) in the previous year.

## Passenger vehicle demand surges to over 43 lakh units in FY25, says SIAM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Passenger vehicle (PV) dispatches in India from factories to dealers rose to record levels at over 43 lakh units in FY25, with utility vehicles accounting for 65 per cent of the total sales in the segment, industry body SIAM said on Tuesday. Passenger vehicle (PV) dispatches rose to 43,01,848 units in the last fiscal year, marking a 2 per cent increase compared to 42,18,750 units in FY 2023-24.

The high base effect of FY24 resulted in moderate growth last fiscal year, the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) said in a statement. Utility vehicles continued to drive growth, now contributing 65 per cent of total passenger vehicle sales in FY25, up from around 60 per cent in FY24, it added. Utility vehicle sales grew 11 per cent to 27,97,229 units in FY25 as compared to 25,20,691 units in FY24. In comparison, passenger cars saw a dip of 13 per cent to 13,53,287 units as against 15,48,947 units in FY24.

The passenger vehicle segment also recorded its highest-ever exports in FY25, reaching 0.77 million units, a 15 per cent increase compared to FY24,

SIAM said. Growth in exports has been driven by the demand of global models being manufactured in the country, it added. Two-wheeler dispatches to dealers rose 9 per cent to 1,96,07,332 units in the last fiscal year, up from 1,79,74,365 units in FY24. Improved rural demand and resurgence in consumer confidence are helping the segment to recover, SIAM stated.

**The passenger vehicle segment also recorded its highest-ever exports in FY25, reaching 0.77 million units, a 15 per cent increase compared to FY24**

Growth in the two-wheeler segment is led by scooters due to improved rural and semi-urban connectivity and the availability of newer models with enhanced features, it added.

It is noteworthy that the share of EVs in overall two-wheelers has crossed the 6 per cent mark in 2024-25 fiscal, the industry body stated.

Besides, two-wheeler exports registered a good growth of 21 per cent last

The investigation into pharmaceutical imports includes ingredients used to make such drugs and touches on many of the same aspects of relying on imports to make them. Asked about his plans for more tariffs on pharmaceuticals, Trump said Monday, “Yeah, we’re going to be doing that.” He said it would be in the “not too distant future”. “We’re doing it because we want to make our own drugs,” he said.

More than 70 per cent of the materials, or active pharmaceutical ingredients, used to make medicines made in the United States are produced in other countries, with India, the European Union and China leading suppliers.

The US produces about a fifth of all pharmaceuticals made worldwide, but consumes about 45 per cent, far more than any other country. The US also is a major producer of semiconductors, but only in some areas. It relies heavily on imports from Taiwan and South Korea for certain kinds of advanced chips. In particular, Taiwan dominates advanced logic chip

production at 92 per cent of all fabrication capacity according to the International Trade Administration, with South Korea making 8 per cent. Products like laptops, smartphones and the components needed to make them accounted for nearly \$174 billion in US imports from China last year.

The administration's plans suggest that such electronics will still be taxed by previous (non-reciprocal) tariffs — and potentially under additional, sector-specific levies. Although major computer chip makers like Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Corp. Are investing heavily in US manufacturing facilities, partly due to incentives put in place during former President Joe Biden's time in office, the costly process of changing entire supply chains would take years.

Separately, the Commerce Department said Monday that it was withdrawing from a 2019 agreement that had suspended an antidumping investigation into imports of fresh tomatoes from Mexico, effective in 90 days.

## Not activating countercyclical capital buffer: Reserve Bank

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The Reserve Bank on Tuesday said it has decided against activating countercyclical capital buffer (CCyB) as it is not needed in the present circumstances. The framework on CCyB was put in place by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in terms of guidelines in February 2015, wherein, it was advised that the CCyB would be activated as and when the circumstances warranted and that the decision would normally be pre-announced.

The framework envisages the credit-to-GDP gap as the main indicator, which may be used in conjunction with other supplementary indicators. “Based on review and empirical analysis of CCyB indicators, it has been decided that it is not necessary to activate CCyB at this point in time,” the RBI said in a statement. The provision has not been used by the RBI since it was introduced in 2015. As per the RBI, the aim of the CCyB regime is two-fold. Firstly, it requires banks to build up a buffer of capital in good times, which may be used to maintain the flow of credit to the real sector in difficult times.

## Sensex, Nifty surge over two per cent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty surged over two per cent on Tuesday, tracking a rally in global markets after US President Donald Trump relaxed some of the tariffs on electronics products and hinted at duty revision for automobiles. Rallying for the second straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,577.63 points or 2.10 per cent to settle at 76,734.89. During the day, it zoomed 1,750.37 points or 2.32 per cent to 76,907.63, driven by the across-the-board rally.

The NSE Nifty surged 500 points or 2.19 per cent to 23,328.55. Intra-day, it rallied 539.8 points or 2.36 per cent to 23,368.35. The key indices have recovered almost all the losses induced by Trump's reciprocal tariffs announced on April 2.

All the BSE sectoral indices closed in the green. BSE Realty, Auto, Capital Goods and Industrials were lead gainers, jumping up to 5 per cent.

IndusInd Bank was the lead gainer among Sensex shares, surging by 6.84 per cent. Tata Motors rallied 4.50 per cent. Larsen & Toubro, Axis Bank, Adani Ports, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and HCL Tech were also among the gainers.

ITC and Hindustan Unilever were the only laggards.

Trump has suggested that he might temporarily exempt the auto industry from tariffs that were imposed earlier.

“The rally is fuelled by the surprise pause in reciprocal tariffs which continued today led by the exemption on electronics goods also. Auto stocks gained on potential tariff relief and banking stocks benefited from deposit rate cuts.

“Domestically, the focus has shifted to the earnings season which has a weak forecast while global recovery and RBI's accommodative stance are supporting sentiment,” Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 3.21 per cent and midcap index rallied 3.02 per

cent. All BSE sectoral indices ended higher. Realty zoomed 5.81 per cent, Industrials soared 3.76 per cent, capital goods (3.67 per cent), auto (3.39 per cent), consumer discretionary (3.12 per cent), financial services (2.94 per cent) and metal (2.75 per cent).

As many as 3,302 stocks advanced while 785 declined and 169 remained unchanged on the BSE.

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

Trump said he was temporarily exempting smartphones, computers and other electronics items from his tariffs.

“Benchmark indices extended the sharp gains on Tuesday, after Donald Trump carved out more exemptions from tariffs even as uncertainty continued. Broader mid and smallcaps also posted strong gains and so are all major sectors.”

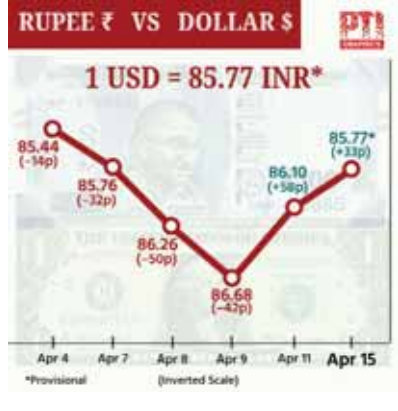
## Rupee gains 33 paise against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Rising for the second straight session, the rupee jumped 33 paise to end at 85.77 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday due to a sharp rise in equity markets and continuing weakness in the American currency amid global uncertainties. Besides, lower global crude prices, favourable domestic inflation numbers and the US administration's latest move to suspend the additional 26 per cent tariffs on India till July 9 also supported the local currency, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.85, the day's lowest level, and touched the intra-day peak of 85.59 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.77 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 33 paise over the previous closing level.

The rupee had closed Friday's session with a sharp gain of 58 paise at 86.10 against the greenback. Forex markets were closed on Monday on account of Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar Jayanti. Anuj



Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee gained on weak US dollar index and a surge in domestic markets.

Choudhary further said that the overnight decline in crude oil prices and upbeat macroeconomic data supported the rupee. However, FII outflows capped sharp gains.

“Overall weakness in crude oil prices may also support the rupee at lower levels. However, importer buying of dollars and FII outflows may cap sharp gains. Traders may take cues from Empire State manufacturing index data from the US,” he said and projected the USD-INR spot price to be in the range of ₹85.40 to ₹86.

The latest government data released on Tuesday showed wholesale price inflation in the country declined to a 6-month low of 2.05 per cent in March as prices of vegetables, potato and other food items eased. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.02 per cent at 99.38, a level seen on March 1, 2022. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.11 per cent to its four-year low of \$64.81 per barrel in futures trade. The crude had earlier hit this level in April 2021. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,577.63 points or 2.10 per cent to settle at 76,734.89, while the Nifty surged 500.00 points or 2.19 per cent to 23,328.55.

## Bharti-Airtel partners with Blinkit to deliver SIM cards

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

Bharti Airtel has partnered with quick commerce platform Blinkit for delivery of its new SIM cards to customers in Chennai within 10 minutes at a fee of ₹49, the telecom major said on Tuesday.

A first of its kind service by Bharti Airtel being introduced in 16 cities with plans to add more towns over a period of time.

“This collaboration marks a significant milestone enabling customers to receive SIM cards at their doorstep in 10 minutes at a convenience fee of ₹49. Post the delivery of the SIM card, customers can activate the number using a simple activation process through AADHAAR based KYC authentication,” Airtel said in a company statement on Tuesday.

“Today, we are thrilled to partner with Blinkit for 10-minute SIM card delivery to customers’ homes across 16 cities and in due course of time we plan to expand this partnership to additional cities,” Bharti Airtel CEO Connected Homes and Director of Marketing, Siddharth Sharma said. Customers, post delivery of the SIM Card would need to activate the SIM within a 15 day window, the company said.

## MP Dairy Federation, NDDDB sign agreement to build robust dairy cooperative ecosystem

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■

Anand/Ahemdabad

Madhya Pradesh State Cooperative Dairy Federation (MPCDF) and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDDB) has signed a collaboration agreement to build a robust dairy cooperative ecosystem in Madhya Pradesh in the august presence of Home Minister Amit Shah and Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav.

Paving the way for collaboration between NDDDB and Bhopal Dugdh Sangh, NDDDB Chairperson Dr Meenesh Shah and Kaushlendra Vikram Singh, Divisional Commissioner of Bhopal exchanged another agreement.

On the occasion Amit Shah said that since formation of the Ministry of Cooperation, there has been a significant change in the cooperative sector under the leadership of the Prime Minister.

Now, this sector is progressing rapidly, he said. Shah also mentioned that Madhya Pradesh has greater potential for the expansion of cooperative societies compared to other states.

He suggested that with this agreement, we should aim to establish primary dairy cooperative societies in 50 per cent villages within the first five years. If dairy coop-

erative societies are established in 50 per cent villages, then the milk processing capacity in the cooperative sector will increase manifold and make the farmers prosperous.

Amit Shah stated that in this endeavour, the Modi government and the National Dairy Development Board are firmly supporting the farmers of Madhya Pradesh. NDDDB and MPCDF are committed to taking every possible step for the welfare of the farmers. It is a matter of great happiness that a collaboration agreement is being signed, transferring the management and operations of the federation and its allied milk unions to NDDDB.

The revival, expansion and strengthening of the dairy cooperative sector will not only benefit lakhs of milk producers in the state but also accelerate the growth of the state's dairy industry. He advised the Government of Madhya Pradesh and NDDDB to work together to ensure that dairy cooperatives reach the maximum number of villages.

CM Mohan Yadav stated that under “Prosperity through Cooperation,” Madhya Pradesh is taking a significant step to transform the lives of dairy farmers through this agreement. The state has a favourable environment for milk production. Yadav conveyed that farmers will be

encouraged to increase milk production and the state government is committed to ensure that milk is purchased directly from dairy farmers at fair prices.

The processing capacity of all milk unions will be increased, providing farmers with livelihood opportunities and market access. Yadav expressed hope that NDDDB will play a vital role in the development of dairy cooperatives by providing continuous support and guidance to milk federations and producer institutions.

He also announced that his Government has decided to launch Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar Kamdhenu Scheme to increase milk production in Madhya Pradesh. Dr Meenesh Shah, Chairman, NDDDB said that under the inspiring leadership of Shri Amit Shah and guidance of Dr Mohan Yadav, NDDDB will provide direction and support services in the areas of cooperation.

Major focus will be on expanding cooperative coverage; quality improvement measures at various stages of milk collection, transportation and processing; optimal utilisation of existing infrastructure, plant technology upgradation and end-to-end digitisation; market penetration activities of milk and milk products and deployment and capacity building of human resources.

## Karamjit Singh Chahal takes charge as Registrar of GNDU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Amritsar

Distinguished academician and Architect, Prof Karamjit Singh Chahal has officially taken charge as the new Registrar of the Guru Nanak Dev University in the presence of VC Prof Karamjeet Singh, Prof Palwinder Singh, Dean Academic Affairs and university officials including S Hariqbal Singh, OSD and S Parminder Singh, OSD.

In a brief address during the ceremony, Karamjeet Singh commended Prof Chahal's extensive experience in academic administration and expressed confidence in his ability to steer the Registrar's office towards greater efficiency and innovation. Taking the podium, Registrar Prof Karamjit Singh Chahal expressed gratitude for the opportunity and outlined his vision for the Registrar's office. “I am deeply honoured to assume this responsibility. My focus will be on fostering an environment of transparency, improving administrative processes and ensuring that we remain responsive to the needs of our students and university fraternity.”

**Colloquium on food safety**

The Department of Hotel Management and Tourism, Guru Nanak Dev University inaugurated a colloquium

series under the aegis of CHAT 2025, themed “Feeding Tomorrow: Revolutionising Safety and Hygiene in India's Small-Scale Food Industry.” The event was held under the patronage of Prof Karamjit Singh, Vice Chancellor, whose visionary leadership guided the initiative.

**Jashan-2025 postponed**

Guru Nanak Dev University has announced the postponement of the Inter Department Cultural Competitions 'Jashan-2025', which was originally scheduled to take place from April 16 to April 19, 2025, in the Dasmesh Auditorium and various venues of the University. The event will now be held from April 17 to April 19.

**Lecture on ‘Empowered Women Power Society’ today**

Under the Prof (Dr) Karamjeet Singh, Vice Chancellor, the Guru Nanak Dev University in collaboration with the Shaheed Nanak Singh Foundation is organising the 1st Late Sardarni Harbans Kaur Annual Memorial Lecture on the theme “Empowered Women Power Society.” The lecture is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, April 16, 2025, at 2:30 pm at Shri Guru Granth Sahib Bhawan of the University.



# Injury keeps Gayatri-Treesa duo out of Sudirman Cup Finals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The women's doubles pair of Gayatri Gopichand and Treesa Jolly will miss out due to injury, but P V Sindhu and Lakshya Sen will spearhead a strong Indian singles challenge at the Sudirman Cup Finals to be held in Xiamen, China from April 27 to May 4.

It has been learnt that both Treesa and Gayatri, currently ranked 10th in the world, are recuperating from shoulder issues attributed to a packed schedule last year. The duo have already featured in five tournaments this season, adding to the 22 events they contested in 2024.

The pair had enjoyed a successful run last year, clinching the Syed Modi International title and reaching the semi-finals of the BWF World Tour Finals in December.

In their absence, the young combination of Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra will shoulder the responsibility in the women's doubles event after being named in the 14-member Indian squad by the Badminton Association of India (BAI).



India, who qualified for the prestigious mixed team championships based on their overall world ranking, have been clubbed in a challenging Group D alongside former champions Indonesia, two-time runners-up Denmark, and a strong English outfit. The tournament will see the return

of the formidable men's doubles duo of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty after an injury break.

Chirag had suffered a back injury during the second round of All England Championships in March. The young pairing of Hariharan

Amsakarunan and Ruban Kumar Rethinasabapathi has been named as backup for Satwik and Chirag in men's doubles.

"The selectors have picked the best possible combination in all the five categories despite some injury worries," Badminton Association of India (BAI) General Secretary Sanjay Mishra said in a release.

"We are no longer dependent on one or two disciplines to win the tie and that makes us a formidable force in any team event. We are confident that the team will not only make its mark in the group stages but can go on to create history by winning a medal," he added.

Besides Sen, the men's singles line-up also features H S Prannoy, while Sindhu will be joined by former national champion and world number 45 Anupama Upadhyaya in women's singles.

Sindhu, who was recovering from a hamstring injury sustained in February, had valuable match practice at the Badminton Asia Championships last week. In mixed doubles, Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto, who reached the quarter-finals at the Asia Championships, will lead the challenge.

# Losing ISL final to Mohun Bagan stinks, says Chhetri

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

He had a dream run in an eventful year both for club and country but the prized domestic trophy eluded him this time and Bengaluru FC captain Sunil Chhetri admitted that the loss to Mohun Bagan Super Giant in the Indian Super League (ISL) final will hurt him immensely.

Bengaluru FC lost 1-2 to Mohun Bagan Super Giant in the ISL summit clash on April 12 in Kolkata with the latter lifting the Cup after winning the League Winners' Shield earlier in the season.

"I know how all of you are feeling. Losing stinks. And this one will linger for a while," the 40-year-old Chhetri wrote on his social media accounts.

"I did what everyone does after losing a final. I sat with all the what-ifs and should-haves. The freekick. The header. Every half chance."

It's not that Chhetri and BFC have not won the ISL Cup. They had claimed it in the 2018-19 season with the talismanic striker as the captain. But lifting the Cup as a 40-year-old after retiring and making a comeback for the national team would have been a fairy-tale story.

He scored 14 goals in 28 matches this ISL season to be the highest scorer among

the Indians and second only overall to Moroccan and NorthEast United striker Alaeddine Ajarai — 23 goals from 28 matches. Chhetri had also scored 14 goals from 21 matches in the 2017-18 season. He has scored 75 goals from 183 matches since 2015 in the ISL. He has turned up for BFC since then till now.

"And so, in what is uncharacteristic advice, go and sink into that tub of ice cream. Call for that cheat meal on a Monday. Skip the gym. Whatever it takes for you to feel better. Then after a few days, acknowledge that this hurt will end only when we win," he wrote.

"You love this team because you know how we're built. Don't let anything change that. We have lost many finals and have only come back stronger. That's the only way we at BFC know how to operate."

"We'll hurt for now, and then we'll brave it till we get over the line. That's how we'll do it. That's how we've always done it at this football club."

Chhetri announced international retirement in June 2024 but made a shocked return to play for India's two matches in March — against Maldives in an international friendly and against Bangladesh in an AFC Asian Cup qualifying round matches — when the ISL was in recess due to FIFA international window.

# Asia Road Racing tourney to be held in Thailand in April

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

The 2025 Idemitsu FIM (Federation Internationale de Motocyclisme) Asia Road Racing Championship scheduled to be held later this month in Thailand would see the participation of top racers from newer geographies including Spain, England and Argentina.

Sarthak Chavan, Chiranth Viswanath and KY Ahamed all from India would also be part of the TVS Asia One Make Championship (OMC) Season 4 in the event to be held between April 25 and 27 at Chang International Circuit, Thailand.

A race-optimised 310cc motorcycle TVS Apache RR 310, from TVS Motor Company, would also feature this season, a company statement here said on Tuesday.

As many as 15 riders from 12 countries would battle for the championship title which includes seven returning racers from the 2024 squad. Last year, Japan's Hiroki Ono bagged his second championship title.

Sarthak Chavan from India made his

tory in 2024 season by becoming the first Indian to secure a top-three finish internationally.

"As we enter our fourth season at the Idemitsu FIM Asia Road Racing Championship with the TVS Asia One Make Championship, we are raising the bar once again with a race-optimised TVS Apache RR 310 and participation from diverse set of racers from new countries.

With top racers from 12 nations and key performance enhancements to the TVS Apache RR 310, including an upgrade aero package, increased power and refined riding dynamics this season is set to push the boundaries of racing technology and competition," TVS Motor Company Head-Premium Business Vimal Sumbly said.

"Our commitment to motorsport excellence continues to drive innovation, nurture global talent and reinforce TVS Racing's leadership in two-wheeler motorsport. The 2025 season promises to be the most competitive yet, and we look forward to seeing our racers showcase their skills and set new benchmarks on the track," he added.

# Turf war in India's boxing administration intensifies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The turf war in India's boxing administration intensified on Tuesday with members of various state units calling for immediate elections while the newly-formed Interim Committee announced its own set of key decisions, including the conduct of national championships and appointment of coaches.

The tenure of the BFI office-bearers ended on February 2. However, the elections have been delayed by legal disputes.

In its latest order, the Himachal Pradesh High Court directed the Sports Ministry observer and the Returning Officer to issue a fresh election schedule before April 28, when the case is set to be heard again.

"Ajay Singh (the former BFI President and current head of the interim committee) has tried all tactics to delay the election and undermine the constitution of the Boxing Federation of India," Assam Boxing President and former secretary general of the BFI Hemanta Kalita told reporters on Tuesday.

"We are grateful and happy that the law of the land has prevailed and the honourable High Court has passed the order



to conduct the election in a free and fair manner," he added.

The elections, which were scheduled for March 28, had been "paused" by Returning Officer RK Gauba following directives from the Delhi and Himachal Pradesh High Courts to reinstate names omitted from the Electoral College, including that of former union sports minister Anurag Thakur.

"Ajay Singh is working in a dictatorial

manner. We did not have any national championship last year, our performance at the Paris Olympics was zero," Madhya Pradesh Boxing President and former BFI Treasurer Digvijay Singh said.

"We are worried and want the elections to happen as soon as possible. So that our athletes don't lose out and their future is secure," he added.

Himachal Pradesh Boxing Association President and former BFI Vice President

Rajesh Bhandari alleged that Singh refused to take the inputs of the executive committee while deciding on the coaching staff, which led to the poor performance in the Paris Games.

"It's because of Ajay Singh's wrong policies, Indian boxing is going down," Bhandari said.

The Interim Committee, formed by World Boxing to oversee the affairs of the BFI and ensure administrative continuity and management of domestic and international competitions, in its first meeting on Monday took decisions to rejuvenate the domestic circuit as well as restart the elite boxing system.

The six-member committee includes BFI Vice President Narender Kumar Nirwan, Executive Director Arun Malik, Olympian L Sarita Devi and Singapore Boxing Association's president Fairuz Mohamed.

The final member of the committee is yet to be nominated by the Indian Olympic Association President.

The committee also decided that the selections of coaches and support staff for the elite men's and women's national coaching camps will be appointed soon.

# Anything is possible: Real Madrid on three-goal deficit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

Real Madrid's website defiantly told fans that "anything is possible," one day before the defending champion attempts to overcome a three-goal deficit to Arsenal in the Champions League.

A video showed Madrid's memorable comebacks in recent years, mentioning the "team of dreams" and the club's achievements "in this stadium, in this competition."

"Bernabeu, again," was the headline on the website ahead of the second leg of the quarterfinals at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium on Wednesday.

Record 15-time European champion Madrid lost the first leg 3-0 in England last week.

Only four times has a home team

erased a first-leg deficit of three goals or more, according to UEFA.

Madrid rival Barcelona recovered after a 4-0 loss at Paris Saint-Germain with a historic 6-1 home victory in the round of 16 in the 2016-17 season. In the 2018-19 semifinals, Liverpool lost 3-0 at Barcelona but advanced with a 4-0 home victory. A season earlier in the quarterfinals, Barcelona was involved again. After beating Roma 4-1 at home, Barcelona lost the second leg 3-0 in the Italian capital.

The only other three-goal comeback by the home team came in 2004 in the quarterfinals, when Spanish club Deportivo La Coruna lost 4-1 at AC Milan and then won 4-0 at home to advance.

Madrid has a recent history of comebacks in the Champions League that has given fans hope of another magical night at the Bernabeu.

Madrid won its 14th Champions League title in 2022 after rallying its way through the knockout rounds. It looked beaten at the Bernabeu in the last 16 against PSG, in the quarterfinals against Chelsea and in the semifinals against

**We (Real Madrid) are aware of how much our fans and the stadium can help us. We're going to try until the last minute and until the last ball**

— CARLO ANCELOTTI, COACH

Manchester City, but every time it found a way to advance.

Against City, Madrid needed two late goals by forward Rodrygo — in the 90th minute and in stoppage time — to force extra time, when Karim Benzema converted a decisive penalty kick to put Madrid

in the final, where it beat Liverpool.

"Real Madrid is the only team that has done it many times, but we'll try to do it once again," coach Carlo Ancelotti said last week. "We're aware of how much our fans and the stadium can help us. We're going to try until the last minute and until the last ball, starting tomorrow."

Tough testArsenal hasn't conceded three or more goals in nearly 80 matches across all competitions, since a 4-3 win at Luton in the Premier League in December 2023.

The English side last overcame Madrid in the Champions League knockout stage in 2005-06, when it reached the final and eventually lost the title to Barcelona.

Arsenal is looking to reach the European semifinals for the first time since 2009, when it was eliminated by Manchester United.

# Gill, Ghai, Baisoya share first round lead at Calance Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Pukhraj Singh Gill, Gurugram's Tapendra Ghai and Delhi's Honey Baisoya returned identical cards of six-under 64 to share the first-round lead at the Calance Open here on Tuesday.

Five players were tied in fourth place at five-under 65 at the Par-70 Qutab Golf Course which is playing host to a PGTI event after 15 years. The chasing pack at 65 included Chandigarh's Yuvraj Sandhu, who made birdies on his last four holes, as well as Karandeep Kochhar, another Chandigarh golfer, along with Bangladesh's Badal Hossain, Delhi's Kapil Kumar and Kolkata's Shankar Das.

Twenty-eight-year-old Gill, who was also the first-round leader at last week's

PGTI event in Ahmedabad, didn't have the best of starts after making an early bogey on the 12th. However, Gill came back strongly with birdies on the 15th and 16th to make the turn at one-under.

Gill, searching for his maiden title, then added five more birdies on the front-nine thanks to some superb driving, accurate pitching and extremely consistent short to mid distance putting.

Baisoya and Ghai, both of whom hail from the DLF Golf & Country Club, were co-leaders with Gill on day one. While Baisoya had a bogey-free round, Ghai signed off with eight birdies and two bogeys. Baisoya made two birdie conversions from a range of 12 to 15 feet but also missed out on two eagle opportunities from a distance of 10 feet.

# Amar Sarin creates National Record of 1.90m jump at Delhi Horse Show

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a historic moment for Indian equestrian sport, Amar Sarin, astride his magnificent Belgian stallion Bajrang, soared to a record-breaking height of 1.90 meters in the Open Jumping Six Bar at the prestigious Delhi Horse Show 2025, held at JPC. This remarkable feat has now been officially recognised as a National Record.

Representing TARC Equestrian Centre, Amar's achievement stands as a testament to his unmatched athleticism, precision, and years of dedicated training under the expert guidance of renowned international coach Nick Verlies. Bajrang, born in 2014 and imported from Belgium, has consistently delivered top-tier performances and once again proved his class in a packed arena filled with equestrian enthusiasts.

Adding to the celebratory weekend, Amar's eight-year-old daughter, Shivaaya Sarin, secured gold in the Future Star Show Jumping category, riding her pony Mistral and Silver in Fault and Out on her pony Fairy Tale. It was a heartwarming and symbolic moment—father and daughter both standing atop their podiums, united by their shared love for the sport. This dual triumph is even more inspiring given Amar Sarin's multifaceted life. As Managing Director and CEO of TARC Limited, a leading name in the



Indian luxurious real estate known for its innovative developments and customer-centric vision, Amar juggles the demanding roles of corporate leadership and competitive sport with extraordinary grace. His journey is a rare blend of boardroom precision and athletic grit.

"Balancing the world of high-performance sport with the responsibilities of leading a major corporation is challenging, but deeply fulfilling," said Amar Sarin. "Moments like these—standing in the arena with my daughter—make it worth it." Amar Sarin is no stranger to the spotlight. A qualified individual for the 2025

Asian Continental Championship, Amar has steadily risen to become one of India's most respected figures in show jumping.

His deep involvement with TARC Equestrian Centre, New Delhi a state-of-the-art riding and training facility—has also been instrumental in mentoring young Indian talent and fostering a new generation of riders.

As Amar continues to elevate Indian equestrianism on the global stage, this national record is not just a personal milestone—it is a symbol of what's possible when passion meets perseverance, and for the future of the sport in our country.

# Helmut Marko's advice for Red Bull: Need to create base level of performance

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bahrain

Max Verstappen and Red Bull are one of Formula 1's all-time most successful partnerships. But a disastrous race has raised concerns Verstappen could consider a move elsewhere.

Following the Bahrain Grand Prix, Verstappen talked of a "catastrophe" as he listed the problems. The defending world champion had to cope with tires overheating, brake problems and two different pit stop delays. At one stage, he was briefly last before finishing sixth.

Why might Verstappen's future be in question? Red Bull's influential motorsport adviser Helmut Marko has previously indicated there's a performance-related clause in Verstappen's contract, which is officially dated to 2028.

The specifics aren't public but Marko indicated to the BBC last month a clause could come into play "if we don't deliver for Max."

Red Bull seemed to have the fourth-fastest car in Bahrain, behind McLaren, Ferrari and Mercedes.

Asked by Sky Sport Germany after the Bahrain race Sunday if he had concerns that Verstappen might consider his future, Marko said: "The (concern) is great ... Improvements need to come in the near future so that he once again has a car that

he can win with."

Verstappen signaled his unhappiness with a key team decision last month. He "liked" an Instagram post by ex-F1 driver Giedo van der Garde which suggested it was a "panic move" to replace Liam Lawson as his teammate after two races of the season.

**Improvements need to come in the near future so that he (Max Verstappen) once again has a car that he can win with**

— HELMUT MARKO, ADVISER

Where could Verstappen go? Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff expressed interest in a potential move last year. Both of his drivers are only confirmed to be under contract for this year. Verstappen has hinted at leaving F1 someday, saying last year he'd "passed halfway for sure" in his career and dislikes the busy schedule.

Marko suggested Sunday that Verstappen's most recent wins in the rain in Brazil and after a stunning qualifying lap in Japan had come despite the car, not because of it. He added that Red Bull needed to create "a base level" of performance "so that he can fight for the world championship."

What's gone wrong at Red Bull?After two record-breaking years of dominance for Verstappen and Red Bull in 2022 and

2023, Red Bull fell behind McLaren on pace partway through the season in 2024. Verstappen won only two of the last 14 races but still retained the title. McLaren won the constructors' championship.

The regulations are largely unchanged since 2022 and there are competing theories for Red Bull's decline.

Verstappen said last year that Red Bull had turned a winning car "into a monster" in its attempts to squeeze more pace out of the design. His then-teammate Sergio Perez made similar claims when his results fell off dramatically.

There are also questions over the effect of car design guru Adrian Newey leaving or whether Red Bull has simply reached the limits of the car's basic concept.

Marko said the team mismanaged Friday practice sessions, meaning unpleasant surprises like Verstappen lacking grip on hard tires in Bahrain. Those "Black Fridays" need to end, Marko said.

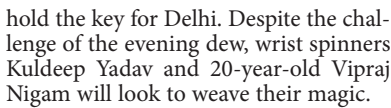
How soon could Red Bull turn it around?Probably not this week.

The Saudi Arabian GP in Jeddah on Sunday could bring more issues with heat, though Verstappen expects less tire wear than in Bahrain. Upgrades are expected for the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix at the Imola circuit in Italy on May 18.



**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA** ■ New Delhi

Though the Capitals will undoubtedly rue the missed opportunity of collecting two points, they have little time to dwell on the defeat with another crucial clash looming. Once again, the spinners will



Known for his batting heroics as well, the all-rounder is yet to get going in the tournament.

Nigam. Royals, meanwhile, have been plagued by inconsistency. Their batting unit, which is heavily reliant on Indian

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

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA** ■ Mullanpur

In-form PBKS captain Iyer was dis-

Punjab were in deep trouble at the halfway mark with just 80 on board for six wickets. Veteran KKR spinner Narine played his part to virtually seal Punjab's fate by dismissing both Suryansh Shedge (4) and Marco Jansen (1) in the 11th over. By that time, Punjab were 86 for 8.

"Some people recover from that and step into the next tournament quicker than most or others. It's not that others can't get into it. He hasn't got that kind of a start but then we know what kind of a player he is or what kind of a match winner is," said Anjum.