

# Government answerable to the people: Centre to SC

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ New Delhi

The Centre on Thursday assured the Supreme Court that it will neither denotify Waqf properties, including "Waqf by user," nor make any appointments to the Central Waqf Council and State Waqf Boards till May 5. The assurance on the matter by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta came when he informed a bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and KV Viswanathan that the Waqf law was passed by Parliament with "due deliberations" and it should not be stayed without hearing the Government.

The Centre strongly opposed the Apex Court's proposal to pass an interim order

against denotification of Waqf properties, including 'waqf by user', besides a stay a provision allowing the inclusion of non-Muslims in the Waqf Council and Boards.

"During the course of hearing, the Solicitor General states that the respondent (Union of India) would like to put in a short response within seven days. He further states and assures that till the next date of hearing, no appointments will be made to the Council and the Boards under Sections 9 and 14 (of the Act)," the Bench said.

The Bench noted that Mehta, appearing for the Centre, also said that Waqf properties, including 'Waqf by user' already registered or declared by way of notification, shall not be disturbed and denotified till the next

date of hearing. The Bench then granted a week's time to the Centre to file a preliminary response to the pleas that challenged the validity of the contentious Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025. It posted the mat-

**The Centre strongly opposed Apex Court's proposal to pass interim order on denotification of Waqf properties, including 'waqf by user'**

ter for further hearing on May 5. "If your lordships will say something about 'Waqf by user', what will be the fallout?" Mehta said. He added, "We, as a Government, and

Parliament, are answerable to the people."

The CJ said if the registration of any Waqf property had taken place under the erstwhile 1995 Act, then those properties can't be denotified till further hearing.

The Apex Court, while hearing the matter on Wednesday, proposed to stay certain key provisions of the Act, including the power to denotify properties declared as Waqf by courts and inclusion of non-Muslims in the Waqf Council and Boards.

On Thursday, Mehta asked whether the Court might consider staying, directly or indirectly, the Act based upon some prima facie or tentative reading of some of the Sections. "If your lordships are going to stay a statutory provision," Mehta said, "it by itself

is rare. We will have to take your lordships to the history of legislation, followed by amendment."

He said the Union Government received several representations, which ultimately resulted in the amended Act. Opposing the stay, the Central Law Officer referred to certain instances and said private properties were usurped as Waqf in several places. Terming it a "considered piece of legislation," Mehta said the pleas were filed before the Presidential assent and taken up immediately by the Bench.

"We are not deciding the matter finally," the Bench quipped.

Mehta argued that staying the Act's provisions may be a "harsh step" and said the

Government should be allowed to place its preliminary reply. "Allow me to place within a week my preliminary reply with some materials, documents and statutes to show," he said, adding "in one week, nothing will change."

Senior Advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, representing a State Government, said, "Heavens are not going to fall if the interim order is not passed for a week or so." Mehta further assured on not making appointments in the respective Waqf Boards even if some of the States were not before the Apex Court. The CJ said, "We don't want the position to change. Parliament makes laws, executive decides and judiciary interprets."

Continued on >> P2

# Dhankhar flays SC timeline for Presidential assent to Bills

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday severely criticised the higher judiciary by questioning the three-month timeline set by the Supreme Court for the President of India on assent to State Bills, saying this tantamount to judiciary acting as a 'super Parliament'. He also opined that Article 142 of the Indian Constitution was a 'nuclear missile available with the judiciary 24x7 against democratic forces.'

He also questioned absence of even an FIR in the alleged discovery of wads of burnt currency notes from the Delhi residence of a High Court Judge, wondering whether a "category beyond law" had secured immunity from prosecution.

"If the event had taken place at his (common man's) house, the speed would have been that of a rocket. Now it is not even a cattle cart," Dhankhar said. He said while a committee of three Judges is probing the matter, an investigation is the domain of the executive and not the judiciary.

Dhankhar's strong words about the judiciary came during his speech to Rajya Sabha interns, days after the Supreme Court sought to fix a timeline for the President to grant assent to the Bills



Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and others during the valedictory ceremony for the 6th Batch of Rajya Sabha Interns, at the Vice President Enclave, in New Delhi PTI

reserved for her consideration by a State Governor.

"So, we have judges who will legislate, who will perform executive functions, who will act as super Parliament and absolutely have no accountability because the law

of the land does not apply to them," Dhankhar remarked.

The Vice President also said Article 142, which grants plenary powers to the Supreme Court, had become a nuclear missile against democratic forces (and

available to (the) judiciary 24x7. Article 142 gives the Supreme Court the power to issue orders that ensure "complete justice" in any matter before it. This power is also known as the Supreme Court's plenary power. "There is a directive to the President by a recent judgment. Where are we heading to? What is happening in the country? We have to be extremely sensitive. It is not a question of someone filing a review or not. We never bargained for democracy for this day. The President being called upon to decide in a time-bound manner, and if not, (Bill) becomes law," Dhankhar said.

The Vice President said his worries were at the "very highest level" and he had never thought that he will have to see such a situation in his life.

He pointed out that the Indian President was in a very elevated position. "(The) President takes an oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution. Others, including Ministers, the Vice President, parliamentarians and Judges take an oath to abide by the Constitution," Dhankhar said. "We cannot have a situation where you direct the President. And on what basis? The only right you have under the Constitution is to interpret the Constitution under Article 145(3)."

Continued on >> P2

# India goes for jugular vein: Pakistan should vacate PoK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India on Thursday brushed aside Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir's remarks that Kashmir is Pakistan's "jugular vein," and asserted that the only link between Kashmir and Pakistan is Islamabad's illegal occupation of part of the region (PoK) that it must vacate.

Addressing a gathering of overseas Pakistanis in Islamabad on Wednesday, General Munir reiterated Pakistan's longstanding rhetoric on Kashmir and defended the controversial two-nation theory that led to the Partition in 1947. Pakistan Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif was present.

"Our stance is absolutely clear, it was our jugular vein. It will be our jugular vein, we will not forget it. We will not leave our Kashmiri brothers in their heroic struggle," General Munir said.

He also claimed that Pakistanis are bound by a "superior ideology and culture" and urged the diaspora to pass down the story of Pakistan's creation, rooted in the belief that "Muslims and Hindus were fundamentally different in

religion, customs, traditions, and ambitions." Rebutting his remarks, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said here: "How can anything foreign be in a jugular vein? This is a Union Territory of India. It's only relationship with Pakistan is the vacation of illegally occupied territories by that country."

**India's reaction came as Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir reiterated his country's rhetoric on Kashmir and defended controversial Two-Nation Theory**

On Pakistan's attempts to wash its hands off the 26/11 terror accused Tahawwur Rana, Jaiswal said, "Pakistan may try very hard but its reputation as the epicentre of global terrorism will not diminish." The extradition of Rana serves as a reminder to Pakistan that it needs to bring to justice other perpetrators of the 2008 Mumbai attacks whom it continues to shield," he said.

Continued on >> P2

# Will file CFLS report on authenticity of Biren tape shortly: Centre tells SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Centre informed the Supreme Court on Thursday that a forensic report on the authenticity of a leaked audio clip regarding the alleged role of former Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh in the ethnic violence in the northeastern State was ready and would be filed shortly in a sealed cover.

A bench headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna took note of the submissions of the counsel appearing for the Centre and the State Government to this effect and deferred the hearing on a plea filed by Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR) in the week commencing May 5.

The counsel said the report from the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFLS) will be filed by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta and sought an adjournment, saying the law officer was unavailable at the moment.

Singh resigned as the Chief Minister of Manipur on February 9, amid rumblings within the State BJP and growing demands for a change in leadership of the State. Earlier, the top court sought a sealed-cover report from the CFLS on the authenticity of the leaked audio clips that allegedly hinted at then CM Singh's role in the ethnic violence that began in May 2023. KOHUR, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan, had sought a court-

monitored SIT probe into Singh's alleged role. "The State is gradually limping back to normalcy and we will keep it (the matter) on hold at the moment," the CJ said, adding he would see later whether the top court or the High Court should hear the case. The Solicitor General agreed with the observations.

**A bench led by Chief Justice Khanna noted submissions of counsel for the Centre and the State and deferred hearing on a plea filed by Kuki body KOHUR in the week commencing May 5**

Bhushan termed the contents of leaked audio a "very serious matter" and said Singh was purportedly heard saying that Meitei groups were allowed to loot arms and ammunition of the State Government. "I have annexed transcripts of tape recordings," he added.

The Solicitor General said the petitioner had "ideological inclinations" and there was a report by a committee of three High Court Judges which stated that there were efforts to keep the "pot boiling".

"A truth lab confirmed that 93 per cent it is the voice of the (then) Chief Minister," said Bhushan, "and truth labs are far more reliable than the FSL reports". The law officer, however, ques-

tioned the veracity of the truth lab report. On November 8 last year, a bench headed by the then CJ DY Chandrachud directed KOHUR to produce material to indicate the authenticity of some of the leaked audio clips. Bhushan had said he would also file a copy of the tape in a CD format. Mehta, however, said the plea could be filed in the High Court under Article 226 of the Constitution.

Bhushan said that the recorded conversation prima facie showed the complicity and involvement of the State machinery in the violence against the Kuki Zo community. He said the clips had "disturbing conversations" and Singh could be heard instigating the violence and protecting the attackers.

KOHUR's plea alleged that Singh was instrumental in "inciting, organising and thereafter centrally orchestrating the large-scale murder, destruction and other forms of violence against the Kuki-dominated areas in Manipur".

"The petitioner is praying for a court-monitored investigation by a Special Investigation Team into the leaked audio tape clips as there is clear and strong prima facie evidence showing involvement of the highest functionary, ie, the (then) Chief Minister. The investigation will need to unearth the conspiracy which appears to involve the highest functionary of the State," the plea in the Apex Court said.

# PM Modi directs Delhi to clean Yamuna

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday chaired a comprehensive review meeting on the Yamuna to assess the current status of the river and discussed the ongoing and future plans for its cleaning and rejuvenation. The agency-wise action plan to clean the river was reviewed in the meeting.

It was also decided that Delhi will prepare an Urban River Management Plan for holistic water management, and integrate it with the City Master Plan. The meeting discussed steps like public participation and use of real-time data and space technology to revive the heavily polluted river. The Prime Minister emphasised that the experience of the Chhath Puja celebration by the people of Delhi should improve, it said.

The meeting held at the PM residence here was attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Jal Shakti Minister CR Patil, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and senior Government officers.

The meeting discussed short-term activities (of three months), mid-term activities (three months to one-and-a-half years) and long-term activities (one-and-a-half years to three years) related to the cleaning of the Yamuna along with management of drains, sewage, industrial waste and identification of gaps in wastewater treatment.

Monitoring measures, improving the Yamuna flow, flood plain protection, green riverfront development and public outreach were all discussed with specific timelines. The urgent need to rehabilitate Delhi's drinking water system to reduce leaks and non-revenue water was emphasised. The actions to be taken for Drain Management, Solid Waste Management,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta during a review meeting on Yamuna cleaning, in Delhi PTI

Sewage Management, Septage and Dairy Waste Management, Industrial Waste Management, gap identification of wastewater treatment infrastructure and monitoring steps, improving the river flow, flood plain protection, green river front development and public outreach were all discussed with specific timelines.

During the meeting, the river as a whole was discussed, including actions to be taken in the Haryana stretch of the river, the Delhi stretch as well as the stretch downstream of Delhi up to the Sangam at Prayagraj in UP. The current status of the wastewater treatment infrastructure, and the governance issues that impact the quality of the Yamuna waters were presented to the Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Modi advised that the best available technology should be harnessed to gather micro-level real-time data to measure the flows in the drains as well as monitor the functioning of the sewage treatment plants.

Agency-wise action plan to clean the river was reviewed in the meeting to assess the current status of the Yamuna and discuss ongoing and plans for its cleaning and

rejuvenation, the Delhi government statement said.

Prime Minister Modi said the experience of the people of Delhi while celebrating Chhath Puja should improve and emphasised the need to create a people-river connection to inculcate respect for the river and make it a part of the lives of people living in the cities settled along the Yamuna, it said. A 'Jan Bhagidari Movement' enlisting volunteers for Yamuna rejuvenation and holding public events around the river were also emphasised. In addition to the Delhi stretch, special attention may also be paid to the culturally rich area around Braj, making the 'Braj Yatra' a part of the river-people movement, the statement said.

The Prime Minister advised that the best available technology should be harnessed to gather micro-level real-time data to measure the flows in the drains as well as monitor the functioning of the sewage treatment plants. Further planning and implementation of pollution abatement infrastructure should be based on this data, it said.

Continued on >> P2



White Bengal Tiger cub Bheem and female cub Skandi playing inside their enclosure at the Nahargarh Biological Park in Jaipur PTI

# Poor potter gets I-T notice for ₹14 crore deal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kota (Rajasthan)

A potter in Rajasthan with an annual income of ₹95,000 was left utterly dumbfounded after he received two back-to-back income tax notices last month for business transactions worth ₹13.55 crore in the 2020-2021 fiscal. It was later revealed that Vishnu Kumar Prajapat (32), a resident of Jhalijji Ka Barana in Bundi district, had possibly been a victim of identity theft. A case of cheating was registered by the police on Wednesday.

According to police, the potter's PAN and Aadhaar Card details were allegedly misused by a Mumbai-based firm to evade the tax scanner for two business transactions. Prajapat received the first notice on March 11 through email and speed post, saying no I-T return was filed for the transaction of over ₹10.61 crore in FY 2020-21. He was directed to file a reply by

March 19. He rushed to the local police station. From there, he was referred to the cyber police station in Bundi but there too nobody listened to his complaint, Prajapat claimed. The potter then took the help of a chartered accountant who, after some enquiries, discovered that his Aadhaar, PAN and other document details were "misused" for GST registration of a Mumbai-based firm owned by an individual.

It was also revealed that the firm allegedly executed two business deals, one of ₹10.61 crore and another of ₹2.83 crore, using the potter's details.

Armed with the information, Prajapat, on March 23, visited the office of Bundi Superintendent of Police, where ASP Uma Sharma heard his grievances, took his complaint and sent it to the cyber police station for probe.

Meanwhile, Prajapat received another I-T notice on March 30, this time for a

financial transaction of ₹2.83 crore in the same financial year.

"Two police personnel visited my home on Wednesday and assured me that I will not be wronged," said the potter, a graduate in Arts. He told PTI that he earns only around ₹95,000 each year by selling clay pots, a family business.

A cheating case was registered at the Gendoli police station on Wednesday night and further investigation was underway, said Assistant Sub-Inspector Mukhendrapal Singh.

The police official denied charges of delay in initiating a probe into the matter, saying the complaint was received just a few days ago and investigation into it disclosed fraud and tax theft.

Prajapat had earlier submitted his documents to a private firm in Bundi, seeking work as a daily-wager and it was likely that his personal details were leaked from there, Singh added.



# CBI raids Durgesh Pathak of AAP for FCRA violations

Rajesh Kumar in New Delhi  
The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Thursday morning conducted a raid at the residence of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Durgesh Pathak after registering an FIR against him for allegedly receiving foreign donations for his party in contravention of FCRA norms. Besides Pathak, the agency booked another office bearer of the party Kapil Bhardwaj (now deceased) in the case.  
The FIR was registered on a complaint from the Ministry of Home Affairs which had alleged that the party had received foreign donations in contravention of the provisions of Foreign Contribution (Regulations) Act (FCRA) 2010 (as amended in 2020).  
According to the FIR, the AAP had set a body "AAP Overseas India" with volunteers in USA, Canada, Australia etc. To mobilise foreign funds for the party in India.  
"During a fund raising event organised by MP in Canada in 2016, an e-mail conversation took place between Aniket Saxena (Coordinator of MP Overseas India) and Kumar Vishwas, then Convenor of MP Overseas India). This conversation revealed that Durgesh Pathak and Kapil Bhardwaj had asked Aniket to transfer the donation of USD 29,000, directly to Durgesh Pathak and Kapil Bhardwaj through Bhagwant Tor", the FIR alleged.  
The Home Ministry sent the matter to the CBI on the basis of findings of the ED, which had found that the party had

received Rs 1.08 crore of donation from 155 persons residing abroad on 404 occasions using 55 passport numbers.  
The ED alleged that there are multiple donors who have used the same passport for donations.  
"FCRA donations worth Rs. 51.15 lakh was received by the AAP from 19 Canadian nationals, however their nationality have been concealed by AAP in the records. One Canadian citizen Karnail Singh Sidhu has directly donated Rs 20,000 to AAP through AAP's online portal in 2016," the CBI FIR has alleged. The agency has alleged that 71 donors residing abroad have used 21 mobile numbers for making donations of Rs. 99.90 lakh on 256 occasions to the party while 75 donors have used 15 credit cards for making donations worth Rs. 19.92 lakh on 148 occasions.  
"The AAP has claimed that 201 persons residing abroad had donated Rs. 2.65 crore using 51 e-mail IDs on 639 occasions," the FIR alleged.  
The CBI FIR alleged that receipt of contributions from foreigners by a political party is prohibited under section 3 of the FCRA Act 2010 and section 29B of the Representation of the People Act 1951.  
Sources said during the course of investigation, the top brass of the party may be asked to join investigations and explain the alleged anomalies in the records.  
The agency has alleged that "irregularity have been done deliberately by AAP", with an intention to conceal identity and



AAP leader Durgesh Pathak with others after CBI carried out searches at his premises in connection with alleged violation of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act

nationality of the real donors.  
The CBI also alleged that Pathak attended a fund raising event on November 22, 15 in Canada. A handwritten raw data sheet containing real names of Canadian donors was sent by AAP volunteer to AAP overseas through e-mail.  
"However, the AAP deliberately concealed their names in its official records

and manipulated its records," the FIR alleged.  
At an event in Toronto in February 2016, a sum of USD 11786 was claimed to have been collected and, after deducting the expenditure of USD 3821, the amount of USD 7965 was allegedly sent to AAP in its IDBI account by using 11 Canadian passports whereas the amount was claimed to

have been collected from more than 200 persons, the FIR alleged.  
"The facts mentioned in letter no. 11/21022/58(445 )/2022-FCRA (MU) dated 20/05/24 disclose commission of offences punishable under section 120-B of IPC r/w section 3 r/w section 35 of Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act 2010 (as amended in 2020). Hence a regular case is registered against Durgesh Pathak, Office Bearer, Aam Aadmi Party, Kapil Bhardwaj, Office Bearer, Aam Aadmi Party and other unknown private persons," CBI officials said.  
In a communiqué to CBI, the MHA stated that as per provisions of FCRA, 2010, the case was examined and with the approval of the competent authority, vide letter dated 08-06-2023. The Central Security agencies have informed that use of same passport numbers for donations by different individuals raises suspicion which needs to be further investigated by concerned authorities. An email has been recovered from email dump of Aniket Saxena, an AAP volunteer, having an excel sheet as attachment. The excel sheet contains name of around 46 persons, their citizenship, mobile numbers, e-mail IDs and donation amounts (at some places). Out of these persons citizenship of several persons has been mentioned as 'Canadian'. The data of donations accepted by AAP during the period 2014-15 to 2019-20 was obtained by ED from Pankaj Gupta, National Secretary of AAP. ED obtained further details from payment

gateways, through which the donation has been received.  
"When the donations data was cross checked with the excel sheet recovered from email data, it was found that the donations data contains particulars of at least 19 persons who donated to AAP using the same mobile number or email id as found in excel sheet named "Volunteers of AAP" whose nationality is mentioned as Canadian in the excel sheet. However, names of these Canadian Nationals were changed in the data of donation provided by Pankaj Gupta and certain Indian passport numbers were mentioned against the changed names. It is likely that these 19 donors (many of whom have donated multiple times) were foreign nationals (Canadian) as per citizenship mentioned in the above mentioned excel list and have donated a cumulative amount of Rs. 51,15,044/-," the MHA in a note.  
It further stated that the D.O. letter dated 27-10-2022 also reports that 155 persons residing abroad have made donations totaling to Rs. 1,02,48,189/- on 404 occasions using 55 passport numbers. This makes it amply clear that at the passport information mentioned in the donations data is false as two persons can not have the same passport numbers.  
Pathak, who won the Rajinder Nagar Assembly seat in 2022, lost to BJP's Umang Bajaj in the 2025 elections. He was also AAP's in-charge for Goa during the 2022 Assembly elections.

## Vijay Jolly alleges cyber fraud

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■ New Delhi  
Senior BJP leader Dr Vijay Jolly has lodged a police complaint where he has claimed that his organisation Delhi Study Group has been duped by cyber fraudsters in the name of room booking in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh.  
Jolly alleged that cyber crime fraudsters are cheating people by creating fake websites of famous Dharamshalas and hotels and extorting money from devotees including the DSG. "It may be noted that the

fraudsters created a duplicate website of Ayodhya's famous Dharamshala Shri Janaki Mahal Trust and took thousands of rupees in advance through forgery in the name of Kundan Kumar in IDBI Bank Account No through a mobile number. This money was sought in the name of booking rooms at Ayodhya. But when doing fact check we figured that they have been cheated," Jolly, the former BJP MLA, said in his complaint lodged at Saket Police Station, Cyber Cell in South Delhi last week. Police sources said that the matter is being investigated.

## BJP, AAP trade charges after CBI raid on Pathak

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■ New Delhi  
The BJP and the AAP on Thursday engaged in a war of words over CBI's action against former opposition party MLA Durgesh Pathak. BJP National General Secretary Tarun Chugh came down heavily on the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) after the CBI raids on Durgesh Pathak, saying that the AAP is in the dock for its foreign funding. Chugh said the AAP has always been playing a dubious politics that bordered on anti-national interests.



Senior AAP leader Durgesh Pathak addressing a press conference

Hitting back, the AAP said the central government unleashed the CBI on the party's Gujarat co-incharge in fear of growing influence in the PM's home state. Reacting over the development, the Delhi BJP said that until now, they had heard of donation thieves, but now it has become a donation glut party as Pathak is the person who stole his own party's donations. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said that the AAP is truly a strange party. He said that the character of Arvind Kejriwal, the AAP and its leaders is rooted in loot, corruption, and lies. He said that continuing this pattern, Pathak has once again tried to hide a lie from the people of Delhi to cover up his loot and corruption. The money collect-

ed through the liquor scam in Delhi was funneled into the Goa elections, during which they former AAP MLA was in charge of the AAP's Goa campaign.  
"Pathak has essentially embezzled his own party's funds. If the investigating agencies are doing their job, what is his problem with it? Someone who steals from his own party's funds is even more corrupt than Lalu Yadav. The agencies are doing their job, and once the full report

is made public, more names involved in this case will be revealed. The money spent in the Goa elections came from the liquor policy, and it was used as party funds. However, Pathak has misappropriated this very donation money derived from the liquor policy," Sachdeva said.  
South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri slammed the AAP leader saying AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal has built a coterie of corrupt and tainted leaders, and

every time agencies initiate action, AAP resorts to crocodile tears and hollow allegations of political vendetta.  
Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders, including Pathak, slammed the government for the CBI action, saying it is a "conspiracy born out of fear" and an effort to "intimidate" him due to his growing political activity in Gujarat.  
"A team of five-six CBI officers came to my house and searched every corner of my two-room premises for around three-four hours. They did not tell me why they had come or for which case. They showed me a search warrant, and I welcomed them. They searched everything but couldn't find anything," Pathak said later at a press conference.  
"I think they came to scare me as I have started working in Gujarat for the AAP. They came so that nobody joins us in Gujarat... They arrested Sanjay Singh after the AAP got five MLAs in Gujarat and emerged as a good alternative in the state," he added.  
Echoing similar sentiments, senior AAP leader and former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia said on X, "CBI raid at Durgesh Pathak's house as soon as he got responsibility for Gujarat elections 2027! This is not a coincidence, this is a conspiracy born out of fear."

## Help found dead in Vasant Kunj

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■ New Delhi  
A girl working as a domestic help was found hanging in the bathroom of her employer's home in south Delhi's Vasant Kunj area, an official said on Thursday.  
The police said they are trying to verify the girl's age as her parents said that she was 17 but her employers claim she was aged around 19-20.  
However, during the preliminary medical examination, police found out that the girl was 14 years old, they said.  
Vasant Kunj South Police Station received

a call regarding the incident on Wednesday. A team was rushed to the spot where they discovered a young woman hanging from a shower pipe in the bathroom, they said.  
The girl, a native of Uttar Pradesh's Rae Bareilly, had been working at the house for the last one-and-a-half months.  
On Wednesday, she came to the house around 8 am for work. At around 4 pm, she also opened the door for the house owner, Deepak (39), when he returned home, the officer said.  
"After this, Deepak, his wife, and their children went to sleep. At about 6 pm, the cook came," he added.

## Sood claims victory after court orders inspection in DPS Dwarka fee hike issue



**PIONEER PHOTO**

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■ New Delhi  
After issuing show-cause notices to 11 private schools for unfair fee hikes and irregularities in accounts, Delhi Education Minister Ashish Sood on Thursday claimed a major victory against a top private school in Dwarka after a court ordered an inspection led by the District Magistrate. Sood said notices were issued to 11 schools after their accounts were inspected by Sub-Divisional Magistrates (SDMs) and prima facie there are signs of mismanagement.  
"The court passed an order yesterday with regard to DPS Dwarka. This is how such matters should be handled — with facts and legal steps. Based on the committee's reports, the DM had to inform the court to take over the management of DPS Dwarka," Sood said.  
Sood said a committee of district magistrates and sub-divisional magistrates was formed to inspect private schools in the capital, and based on their reports, the Delhi High Court pulled up a private school in Dwarka.  
On Wednesday, the high court pulled up the Delhi Public School (DPS) in Dwarka for treating students with "indignity" over a fee dispute by confining them

to a library and not allowing them to attend classes or interact with their peers. Justice Sachin Datta said the school, which was treating students like "chattel", deserved to be shut down.  
"We set up a committee of DMs and SDMs who conducted inspections in private schools and submitted their reports. The court made the observations based on those findings," Sood said at a press conference.  
While the issue of arbitrary fee hikes by private schools has been pending for the past five years, they are being addressed seriously only now after the BJP came to power in Delhi, Sood claimed.  
"Earlier, private schools were given the opportunity to explain the fee hikes but they did not respond. Even the former chief minister ignored the matter. But now under the leadership of Rekha Gupta, we are taking action," the minister said.  
Stating that the administration is committed to stopping any kind of injustice, he said, "Those who mock our government by comparing it to 'Phulera's Panchayat' should understand that governance requires strong political will, not just fancy words."  
"The previous (AAP) government couldn't take action for five years. But we

have acted on reports from 600 schools in a short time. Show-cause notices have been issued to several schools. We are doing what they (AAP) failed to do."  
The high court on Wednesday also stressed on placing some safeguards to ensure that students at DPS Dwarka were not "tortured" by the authority, which was running the institution merely as a "money making machine."  
The court examined an inspection report by an eight-member committee led by the district magistrate (South-West), flagging several discriminatory practices against students amid the fee hike row.  
The Delhi government on Wednesday inspected 600 private schools following complaints of unregulated fee hikes. Show-cause notices have already been issued to over 10 schools, officials said.  
According to the Directorate of Education (DoE), district-level committees have been formed to look into the complaints.  
The committees are headed by SDMs and include education department officials, accounts officers, and principals of government schools. They have been tasked with inspecting the private unaided schools, especially those named in the complaints.

## MCD's desilting targets ahead of monsoon

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■ New Delhi

Ahead of the monsoon season, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has prepared an action plan, targeting to clean 800 drains measuring 531 kilometres' length coming under its jurisdiction. The MCD has targeted to remove nearly 2.14 lakh metric tonnes of silt from all 12 zones.  
According to MCD's action plan, in South zone, the MCD has aimed to clean 71 drains with a total length of 45.95 kilometres, 65 drains with a total length of 50.70 kilometres in Central zone, 133 drains with a total length of 83.44 kilometres in West zone, 120 drains with a total length of 107.58 kilometres in Najafgarh zone, 115 drains with a total length of 65.22 kilometres in Shahdara North zone and 108 drains with a total length of 60.53 kilometres in Shahdara South zone.  
Similarly, it will remove silt from 10 drains with a total length of 5.21 kilometres in City SP zone, 32 drains with a total length of 23.39 kilometres in Karol Bagh zone, 16 drains with a total length of 6.94 kilometres in Civil Lines zone, 39 drains with a total length of 24.01 kilometres in Keshavpuram zone, 50 drains with a total length of 28.97 kilometres in Rohini zone and 41 drains with a total

**According to MCD's plan, in South zone, it has aimed to clean 71 drains, 65 drains in Central zone, 133 drains in West zone, 120 drains in Najafgarh zone, 115 drains in Shahdara North zone and 108 drains in Shahdara South zone**

length of 28.79 kilometres in Narela zone. The Corporation has aimed to spend a total of Rs 36 crore for desilting works.  
MCD Commissioner Ashwani Kumar chaired a comprehensive briefing and interactive session on Monsoon Preparedness on Thursday at the Kedar Nath Sahni Auditorium, Civic Centre. The session was attended by all Additional Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners of all zones, Engineers-in-Chief, Assistant Commissioners of zones, and engineers from the Maintenance, Building, Projects, and EMS departments, along with Sanitation Superintendents and other senior officials of the MCD. The meeting focused on the preparedness of the MCD for the upcoming monsoon season, with special emphasis on addressing issues related to water logging, sanitation, and

public safety.  
All Deputy Commissioners, Engineers-in-Chief, and Additional Commissioners shared detailed action plans to address water logging across the city. They also offered valuable suggestions aimed at strengthening infrastructure, enhancing resource availability, and augmenting manpower to ensure an effective and timely monsoon response. During the interactive segment, Sanitation Superintendents, Assistant Commissioners, Executive Engineers, Superintendent Engineers, Chief Engineers, and other senior officials shared their on-ground experiences, suggestions, key challenges, and operational bottlenecks related to the desilting of drains, persistent water logging issues, and inter-departmental coordination. The session witnessed active participation from SI, ASI, and employees from DEMS and the Engineering Department.  
Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta had, on March 17, said that the government is working with full seriousness to ensure residents do not face waterlogging during the monsoon. The CM had made the statement after carrying out an inspection of six major drains in the city along with LG V K Saxena and PWD Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh.

## Former Delhi MLA Jai Kishan no more

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE** ■ New Delhi

Senior Congress leader and former Delhi MLA Jai Kishan died of heart attack late Wednesday night. He was 66.  
A prominent Dalit face in the capital, Jai Kishan won four times from the Sultanpur Majra Assembly seat in 1993, 2003, 2008 and 2013. In the 1998 polls, he fielded his wife Sushila Devi and she, too, won from the seat.  
A sanitation worker before he began his political journey, Jai Kishan joined the Congress in 1980 and served in various organisational roles, including All India Congress Committee general secretary and vice-president of the party's Delhi unit. A renowned leader and social worker, Jai Kishan was again fielded from Sultanpur Majra by the Congress in the



recent Delhi Assembly elections, but his pursuit to regain the seat remained unsuccessful. He secured only 8,600 votes and came third, behind AAP's Mukesh Ahlawat (58,767 votes) and BJP's Karam

Singh Karma (41,641 votes).  
Jai Kishan was diabetic and his blood sugar levels were said to have been a cause for concern. The news of his demise was shared by Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav on social media platform X. Expressing his condolences, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge posted on X: "...As a dedicated Congress worker, he served the people and contributed to the empowerment of the underprivileged sections of society."  
Congress general secretary (organisation) K C Venugopal posted, "...On behalf of the entire Congress family, I convey our heartfelt condolences to his family and supporters. He rose from a marginalized background to go on and serve the public and the party with immense dedication for many years, and left an indelible mark on the lives he touched."





Editor's  
TAKE

## Preserving the past for the future's sake

World Heritage Day is all about protecting the identity, values and creativity of humanity

Every year on April 18, countries around the globe come together to celebrate World Heritage Day, also known as the International Day for Monuments and Sites. This important occasion, established by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in 1982 and later approved by UNESCO, serves as a reminder of the value of our cultural heritage — and the responsibility we all share to protect it.

Heritage — both tangible and intangible — is the collective memory of civilisations. It tells stories of who we are, where we came from, and how our societies evolved. While time, climate, and natural weathering have always been enemies of ancient structures and traditions, a more immediate and insidious threat today comes from political ideologies and regimes. Around the world, we have witnessed deliberate destruction of heritage as acts of dominance, revisionism, or retaliation. In trying to erase the past, these regimes destroy not just structures, but identity itself.

One of the most tragic and symbolic examples was the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in 2001. Carved in the 6th century, these towering statues were not just monuments of religious and artistic significance — they were irreplaceable pages of Afghan history. Their demolition was a stark message: the regime rejected not only the statues, but the entire cultural lineage they represented.

In Russia, we have seen another kind of heritage demolition. After the fall of the Soviet Union, statues of Lenin and other Communist-era icons were removed or destroyed by the new regime. While many saw this as necessary to move forward from a dark period, these relics were also historic markers — powerful reminders of an era that, like it or not, shaped the modern state. Similar stories play out in other regions. In post-colonial Africa and Latin America, monuments to colonisers have been toppled by newly empowered governments or protest movements. These acts are often cathartic for communities, but they also risk oversimplifying history by erasing it altogether.

India, a country with millennia of layered history, offers a complex example. On one hand, India has shown tremendous commitment to preserving its ancient temples, forts, and cities. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) manages thousands of monuments, and sites like the Taj Mahal, Hampi, and Khajuraho receive not just national, but global attention and protection. On the other hand, certain political narratives have led to the neglect, distortion, or even destruction of heritage. Mughal-era structures and other Islamic sites have sometimes been portrayed as symbols of foreign oppression rather than integral parts of India's pluralistic history. Controversies like the Gyanvapi Mosque case or the renaming of historic cities (e.g. Allahabad to Prayagraj) show how heritage is being rewritten to fit modern ideologies. India's heritage, like its culture, is layered and syncretic. To dismantle one layer in favour of another is to misunderstand the very nature of its identity.

When a regime destroys heritage, it isn't just erasing the past — it is destroying a mirror to itself. History cannot be undone. No matter how uncomfortable, the past lives in us. Monuments are not merely stones or statues; they are vessels of memory, cautionary tales, achievements, failures, and everything in between. Their destruction is a loss to humanity, not just a nation. As political tides shift, there is a growing need for governments to adopt a more mature approach to heritage. Recognise its value beyond ideology. Understand that history, in all its complexity, must be preserved, studied, and remembered — not sanitised or destroyed. Ultimately, heritage is not just about the past — it's about continuity. In destroying it, we are only severing ourselves from what could teach us, ground us, and guide us into the future.

## Leaderspeak



Harvard has set an example for other higher-ed institutions — rejecting an unlawful and ham-handed attempt to stifle academic freedom, while taking concrete steps to make sure all students at Harvard can benefit from an environment of intellectual inquiry, rigorous debate and mutual respect. Let's hope other institutions follow suit.

FORMER US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

# Learning to learn and live

Beneath the surface-level diversity lies a profound truth: the core principles that govern human relationships are remarkably consistent. These shared values — truth, respect and fairness — form the bedrock of civil society

The fundamentals of all personal dealings and individual relationships, all over the world, are remarkably similar. Anywhere in the world, truth is upheld as a cardinal principle, and everywhere in the world, a line is considered drawn between proper and improper. It has nothing to do with which religion one follows, what is the colour of one's skin, or what are one's social norms. Similarly, killing is considered wrong, and so is taking something that does not belong to you. The list can be multiplied, and in all cases, there is a universal value system that brooks no distinction on account of language, creed, or anything else.

Put simply, the unifying principles of humanity are many and have withstood the test of time through millennia, and no one has found it worth his time to negate or contradict these principles.

It, therefore, does not follow that there are no differences between one part of the globe or another, or for that matter, all humanity agrees on everything.

There are differences of belief in matters of religion, creed, and values of behaviour. In certain communities, polyandry is accepted. In others, monogamy is considered desirable.

The enforcement of these values is sometimes through written laws enforceable by courts and, in certain cases, by social practices and beliefs, none of which go to a court.

The varieties are many, and the practices often differ sharply. It is this that makes the processes of legislation important, and the norms must be known to hold credence.

This is the birth of a civil society that has taken the form of nation-states and various national and international legislations that make up the world order.

In reasonable reality towards this end, some important steps have been taken, and certain important steps are yet to be undertaken to complete the cycle of total cohesiveness of the civil variety. This may take time to emerge.

For the present, it is important to register that one must agree to accept differences as a natural and essential part of global existence. The nation-states present one type of governance, and within the nation-states, there can be differences in ethnicity, practices, and norms.

The seeming diversity within an otherwise unifying framework is the experience of many nation-states.

It is therefore essential to recognise that tolerance, communication, and respect for each other's practices are essential to cohesive collective living.



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

There are, even among nation-states, variations from monarchy and more, across relatively vast territories to small existences of island states.

There are many variations, and one must learn to agree to disagree and yet remain tolerant.

This takes one back to the fundamental beliefs of accepting mutual dignity as a human being and recognising that one must not inflict one's values on others.

What can be stated so simply can become comparatively complicated to practise, and these are the roots of much conflict which takes place even in civil states.

Understanding the anatomy of conflict, therefore, requires a need for a concurrent understanding of the practice of the principles of 'live and let live'.

Perhaps this should be made a part of each

child's learning before the child grows into adulthood. The present stage of learning through different stages of school and colleges emphasises knowledge acquisition. There is nothing wrong with that. What is needed, however, is the recognition that one has to let others live to be able to live oneself peacefully and happily.

These are lifestyle learnings and not knowledge learnings. It is, therefore, necessary to keep re-examining the fundamentals of educational systems and values which make coexistence not only desirable but feasible.

Put simply, a recognition of individual identities is useful, but a recognition of the other person's right to that living is also a must. For the physically powerful, adopting a stance of dominance, assertion, and compulsion is easy.

There has to be self-restraint in recognising how this is a must if the other person also needs to have the same spaces for life as one wants for oneself.

The long and short of it is not just the development of the mind, not just the devel-

opment of one's might, but also the development of one's patience, one's understanding, and how necessary it is to respect each other's identity.

A marriage, and a family, are the basic unit of the constitution of a civil society, and it is important to inculcate these values at the core of these institutions.

This can be best done by example and by reflection that the other person has the same right as one wants for oneself.

It is a happy truth that civilisational values have progressively advanced in that direction. That there are notable exceptions is understandable.

Perhaps dealing with it with patience and purpose is the way forward. It takes time but can be done with positive practices in the family and positive values in collective places like schools and elsewhere. The direction is non-negotiable, and the attempt is worth its effort.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views are personal)

## Why we must learn to laugh at ourselves again

### SECOND Opinion

BY ASHA IYER KUMAR

Once upon a time, we laughed without offence or guilt. We laughed at power, at politics, at bureaucracy, and most of all, at ourselves. It was a laughter steeped in mockery but in a shared understanding of the absurdities of life. Remember R. K. Laxman's Common Man?

The bespectacled, bewildered figure who stood silently witnessing the nation's daily dramas was our collective conscience drawn in ink. His was the lens through which middle-class India smiled at its foibles. No one was spared, and yet no one was wounded. His cartoons, which ran for decades under the banner You Said It, didn't merely capture the socio-political temperature — they made us laugh through the chaos, without cynicism, without rage, and it inspired us to gauge ourselves on the scale of changing times. How far we've come — and not for the better! Just the other day, The Times of India reported that Western Railway in Mumbai asked for the removal of a hoarding that humorously depicted Mumbai's famously crowded local trains.

Everyone who knows the city even remotely will vouch that the depiction wasn't far from reality. But even reality now seems too irreverent to tolerate. Our thresholds have shrunk. Satire is suspect. Irony is an offence. And humour — a great salve to wounded hearts — has become a minefield. It is as though

we have forgotten how to laugh without hurting, or how to be the subject of a joke without taking it personally. The public frame has grown brittle. Everything is either an insult or an agenda. Our collective skin has thinned, and with it, our ability to process humour as a mirror rather than a missile. We have become sensitive to our peril, for laughter now is no more a medicine but an action to be indulged in stealth. We now laugh at our own risk, for not all out there are amused. But let us pause here. What does it mean to laugh at oneself? And why is it so crucial to the health of a society, and to the sanity of the individual? To laugh at oneself is acknowledging one's imperfections without shame or embarrassment. It is to accept the human comedy in which we are all actors, fumbling, contradicting, faltering and having great falls like Humpty-Dumpty.

It is an act of humility. And humility, unlike humiliation, does not diminish. It enlarges us. It softens the ego, smoothes the sharp edges of pride, and allows us to be more forgiving — towards others, yes, but especially towards ourselves. We are not meant to take ourselves too seriously. The capacity to see one's absurdity, to smile at it, and even to share it with others, is a mark of inner strength.

In that laughter is a quiet wisdom — the wisdom to know that life is far too unpredictable to be lived in perpetual indignation. And as creatures, we are too tiny and insignificant in the canvas of the cosmos. Philosophers from every tradition have hinted at this. In Zen, the enlightened monk is often depicted laughing. In ancient Greece, Socrates was known for his irony, and his capacity to deflate pomposity through

humour. Closer home, the Bhakti poets gently mocked dogma and orthodoxy. Their irreverence was rooted in love, not spite. They knew that humour could illuminate truth in ways solemnity never could, and it was taken in its true spirit. But today, we confuse being offended with being right. And so, we silence the comedian, the cartoonist, the satirist, and slowly, we silence ourselves. We build fortresses around our fragility and call it righteousness. We seek apology where we should seek perspective.

This is not a defence for vulgarity or cruelty masquerading as humour, which too has become abundant in these indignant times. We know the difference between crassness and coolness. And we must always be vigilant against humour that punches down, that mocks the marginalised, that cloaks prejudice in punchlines or masks depravity in insensitivity. But the answer to bad humour is not humourlessness. It is better humour. Finer irony. Truer satire. And most of all, a thicker skin. As a society, we need to grow up. We need to rediscover the art of laughing together and at ourselves.

The Common Man did not need to speak because the society around him understood the language of the silent chuckle. That silent chuckle is now endangered. Let us then re-learn the ability to look at ourselves with a smile, not a scowl. Let us not fear humour; let us fear the day when we lose our humour. When people can no longer laugh at themselves, they are no longer free.

(The author is a Dubai-based columnist and a writing coach. She has published six books. Views are personal)

## Letters to the Editor

### A bold step towards social justice

Madam — The Telangana Government's decision to divide Scheduled Castes (SCs) into three categories is a commendable move towards social justice. It's important to note that the Supreme Court, in its August 2024 verdict, permitted such classification. There are undeniable disparities within the SC community. While some groups have benefited from government schemes, others remain marginalised. By dividing SCs into three groups — each comprising various sub-castes — the Government aims to ensure that the most disadvantaged are not left behind. Other states should take inspiration from Telangana's initiative.

However, while categorisation is a step forward, much remains to be done for the overall development of the SC community. Education must be made accessible to all members of the community, as it is the most effective tool for empowerment. Additionally, self-employment opportunities and skill development programmes must be introduced to boost economic independence.

After all, inclusive human resource development is essential for national progress. To truly uplift the SC community, this categorisation must be followed by sustained policy action. Holistic measures in education, employment, and skill training are vital. Only through inclusive development can we bridge internal disparities and ensure that every section of society participates equally in the nation's progress.

VENUG S | KOLLAM

### India's market resilience shines

Madam — Indian equities soared as markets reopened after an extended weekend, with the NSE Nifty 50 Index rallying by up to 2.4 per cent on Tuesday in Mumbai, surpassing its 2 April closing level. According to Bloomberg, this rebound positions India as the first major global market to recover from losses triggered by reciprocal tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump earlier this month. Investors continue to place confidence in India's large, domestic-driven economy, which appears better equipped to weather a potential global slowdown than markets more exposed to US tariffs.

Amid the escalating US — China trade war, India has emerged as a viable alternative manufacturing hub. Unlike Beijing's combative stance, India has maintained a conciliatory approach and is actively working towards a provisional trade agreement with Washington.

This recovery is indeed a positive sign for India's economic resilience. India's steady performance amidst global volatility reflects the strength of its domestic consumption, robust financial systems, and prudent policy measures.

As geopolitical tensions and protectionist policies unsettle other economies, India's focus on self-reliance, infrastructure development, and investor-friendly reforms offers a competitive edge. This rebound is not just a short-term surge — it signals long-term confidence in India's growth trajectory.

JAYANTHY SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

### A defining moment for Congress

Madam — Referring to the headline 'National Herald Case: ED Chargesheet Sonia, Rahul' (16 April), the Enforcement Directorate's chargesheet marks a serious escalation in the money laundering case involving the Gandhi family and the Congress party.

The allegations of financial irregularities in the Young Indian case are grave. Rather than presenting legal rebuttals, the Congress appears to be adopting a political counter-narrative, blaming the Government.

Moreover, Rahul Gandhi has yet to clarify his citizenship status amid ongoing allegations by Subramanian Swamy. The ED's chargesheet details ₹988 crore in alleged misappropriation, with market valuations of assets pegged at approximately ₹5,000 crore.

This is one of the most significant financial scandals to implicate a political family at the national level. The Congress must focus on proving its innocence in court rather than politicising the issue. It is essential that the judiciary ensures speedy justice, especially when such a high-profile case is involved. The seriousness of the charges demands transparency, accountability, and a fair legal process.

As public trust in institutions is at stake, both the Congress party and the Gandhi family must prioritise legal clarity over political rhetoric. Swift and impartial judicial proceedings will not only uphold the rule of law but also strengthen democratic credibility.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

### ILAYARAJA'S LEGAL FIGHT FOR CREATIVE RIGHTS IN FILM MUSIC

Veteran music composer Ilayaraja has taken legal action against the makers of Ajith's recent film Good Bad Ugly for using three of his iconic songs without prior consent. The songs in question — Illamaj Idho from Sakalakala Vallavan, En Jodi Manja Kuruvi from Vikram (1986), and Oththa Roova from Nattupura Pattu — were used without permission.

Ilayaraja has demanded a formal apology and ₹5 crore in compensation from the production house. This case highlights Ilayaraja's unwavering commitment to protecting his creative legacy and reinforces the importance of respecting intellectual property rights. In the past, he has repeatedly defended his works against unauthorised usage. Gone are the days when filmmakers collaborated extensively with composers to create original music. Today's trend of remixing and reusing old songs might offer short-term appeal but erodes originality and often

leads to copyright violations. It is high time that filmmakers prioritised creativity over gimmicks and ensured legal compliance in music usage.

This incident underscores the growing menace of piracy and blatant copyright violations in the Indian film industry. Using a creator's work without consent not only disrespects their artistry but also sets a dangerous precedent — one that undermines intellectual property rights. Ilayaraja's legal stand is a reminder that creativity must be protected, not exploited.

In an era where originality is often overshadowed by remixes and recreations, strict enforcement of copyright laws is crucial. The industry must foster a culture that values artistic integrity, ensures rightful compensation, and deters infringement — to safeguard the future of creative expression in India. The government must take strict action against any violations.

M PRADYU | KANNUR

# River ecosystems in the shadow of sand mining

As illegal mining alters the riverbeds and drains life from these once-thriving arteries, the need for sustainable management becomes urgent. To preserve rivers as living, life-giving entities, we must shift from exploitation to stewardship, write BKP SINHA and AJAY JHA

FIRST Column

Rivers are more than just flowing water — they are living archives of the Earth's memory, coded in sediment, speed, erosion, and the contours of their valleys.

Each river carries within it a unique story of origin, shaped by the terrain it traverses and the climates it endures.

Their courses mark the pulse of the land, shifting over centuries, yet always finding a path forward. In their constant motion, rivers mirror the rhythms of nature — cyclical, adaptive, and ever-evolving.

The flow of a river is driven by the force of gravity, which is counteracted by the resistance of the terrain it flows through.

The characteristics of the surrounding environment, such as the landscape's shape, soil type, vegetation, and factors like climate, land use, and geological play a significant role in determining the river's flow rate, the course it follows, and the sediments it carries. As rivers flow through diverse landscapes, they expose the layers beneath the surface, providing a glimpse into the Earth's geological history.

The sediments they carry — from fine silt to large boulders — reveal rock types, erosion patterns, and the entities that give shape to the terrain they have crossed. As rivers leave steep slopes for gentler terrain, their speed drops, reducing erosion.

They begin depositing transported sediments, with coarser materials giving way to finer silt, clay, and sand. The river may meander, forming curves and oxbow lakes, while sediment builds up along banks and floodplains, creating a more stable course and aquatic ecosystems.

Continuous erosion and deposition, however, cause these river channels to change course, often leading to braided river patterns with multiple interconnected streams.

Naturally developed embankments do help contain the river during high flows, prevent erosion of floodplains, and check disruption of ecosystems including any significant alterations to the river's path. The floods, however, deposit fertile silt on floodplains, enriching soil for agriculture like in the Indo-Gangetic plain. Again, as they approach larger water bodies, intricate deltas are formed, creating biodiverse ecosystems as exemplified in the vast Ganges-Brahmaputra Delta.

As the rivers flow, they provide a variety of resources and life-supporting services. Securing their ecological health is essential for the survival of humanity. River sand, apparently a relatively innocuous item made available by rivers, is in great demand, especially for construction activity. The extraction of river sand is regulated by the Government.

With increasing focus on construction in recent times, however, almost all the states in the country are facing an acute problem of illegal mining of river sand. Major lengths of the rivers being in non-forest areas, the newspapers abounded with journalistic accounts regarding assaults by illegal sand miners on the revenue department's enforcement agency. Indicating, however, that the sand mafia is entering forest areas too in the current construction season, there are reports of several assaults on foresters too.



Sand is abundantly available in deserts, but the sand particles created by wind erosion are rounded and hence are less suitable for construction. Construction-grade sand should be angular and with a certain mineral composition.

The proportion of fine particles (e.g. sand) and coarse particles (e.g. gravel), along with the cost of mining and transport, lead the extraction agencies to select the favourable spots. Indiscriminate sand mining, whether in the active channel or floodplain terraces, however, impacts the physical, chemical, and biological aspects of the riverscape apart from the human populations.

There are strong reasons for regulating river sand extraction. Depending on the type of mining, the riverbed's morphology changes, the groundwater table of the surrounding area is lowered, the stability of the riverbank is affected, and the flow regime of the river and the dynamic equilibrium of erosion and sedimentation gets permanently affected. They make way for disasters to happen.

As regards the chemical impact, the sand excavation and transport machinery severely degrade water and air quality through fuel/oil spills and exhaust

6  
WATER QUALITY DETERIORATES, STAGNANT WATER IN OLD SAND MINES IMPACTS THE HEALTH AND LIVELIHOODS OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES, AND THE COLLAPSE OF INFRASTRUCTURES BECOMES IMMINENT. WATER QUALITY DETERIORATES, STAGNANT WATER IN OLD SAND MINES IMPACTS THE HEALTH OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

fumes. Extraction of river sand removes sediment-bound nutrients from the mining site which are then deposited on downstream sandbars. While these nutrient-rich deposits support green floodplains as seen along India's Periyar River, the process signifies a loss of nutrients from the river system but a reduced nutrient flow from land to marine environments.

Continuous removal of a sand layer of the riverbed can lead to the destruction of the habitat of microorganisms maintaining the river's biological health and endanger ecosystem services. Increased turbidity due to sand mining in active channels can block sunlight, hinder photosynthesis, and exterminate aquatic life like diatoms, macroinvertebrates, benthic algae, and fish eggs.

The shallow and braided flow impedes fish migration between flows and pools, disrupting the entire food web. Studies show that rampant sand mining has threatened species like the Ganges River dolphin and Chambal River's gharial. Further, unregulated sand mining results in the loss of aquatic flora and also riverside vegetation due to lowered water table, damaging the 'Shaded Riverine Aquatic Habitat' (SRA), which provides shade, bank stabilisation, and

nutrients to numerous organisms.

Again, the disturbed ecosystem creates conditions favourable for the proliferation of invasive species, such as the water hyacinth, in many Indian riverscapes. The repercussions of ecological instability are cumulative and far-reaching.

Water quality deteriorates, stagnant water in old sand mines impacts the health and livelihoods of local communities, and the collapse of infrastructures like buildings, roads, and bridges becomes imminent. Water quality deteriorates, stagnant water in old sand mines impacts the health and livelihoods of local communities, and the collapse of infrastructures like buildings, roads, and bridges becomes imminent.

The lowering of groundwater tables due to sand extraction is reported in the Achankovil and Manimala river basins in Kerala, where wells have dried up and agricultural productivity dropped as irrigation structures became ineffective. The decline in fisheries productivity has been reported in the Ganges River and other basins, impacting local livelihoods directly.

Meeting the ever-increasing demand for sand while adhering to sustainable sand mining practices in the interest of the river's survival is a formidable challenge today. With the Government's will to ensure the conservation and sustenance of our river systems as the non-negotiable premise, a range of responsible approaches must be adopted.

They should include creation of inventory of the available sustainable resources based on scientific study, carefully selected locations for extraction, pre- and post-mining baseline surveys, controlled extraction volumes, phased mining with concurrent or subsequent reclamation of mined areas through measures like refilling and revegetation, no extraction during seasons of aqua fauna's high biological activity, and third-party monitoring and evaluation as well as social audit of mining activities involving villagers and using GPS and drone surveillance as in Kerala.

Simultaneously, a concerted effort be made to diminish reliance on natural river sand by promoting the recycling of construction and demolition waste and the adoption of alternative materials like manufactured sand (M-sand), which is being promoted in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

While the ideal scenario involves widespread adherence to the above-suggested action points, developing a well-grounded strategy for effective enforcement has no alternative so far as a balanced and environmentally sound approach to sand management and riverscape conservation is concerned. Rivers have long been revered as symbols of life and spirituality.

To truly understand our rivers, we must see them as a part of the ecosystem that sustains humanity, and not just as resources to be exploited.

They deserve to be approached with cultural humility, legal innovation, and ecological wisdom. In the face of climate change and environmental degradation also, rivers stand as an eternal reminder that revival is always possible — if we learn to listen, respect, and align ourselves in harmony with nature.

(The writers are former Principal Chief Conservators of Forests, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. Views are their own)

# India's startup surge: A new innovation powerhouse

In less than ten years, India has transformed from a budding startup landscape into the world's third-largest startup ecosystem, behind only the United States and the United Kingdom, write VINAY PATHAK and SANDEEP JOSHI

In just a decade, India's startup ecosystem has emerged as a powerful driver of innovation, employment, and national competitiveness. From a nascent startup scene, India has exploded into one of the world's most dynamic and rapidly expanding startup ecosystems.

The numbers tell a dramatic story, where from approximately 500 Government-recognised startups in 2016, the count surged to over 1.59 lakh by 15 January 2025.

This is not just development, but represents a fundamental change in India's economic structure, making the country the world's third-largest startup hub, after the United States and the United Kingdom. The presence of over 100 unicorns depicts the scale and value being created within this vibrant ecosystem.

India's startup boom, from 2014 to early 2025, is not just a result of entrepreneurial spirit but the outcome of a powerful convergence — the drive of Indian entrepreneurs coupled with proactive government policies designed to nurture a thriving ecosystem.

This remarkable growth highlights the synergy between intentional policy and organic innovation, unleashing hidden potential across the nation. It demonstrates how focused efforts have transformed ideas into successful businesses, paving the way for India's emergence as a global startup hub.

The exponential growth trajectory of India's startup ecosystem coincides directly with the rollout of key government programmes and visionary leadership that removed roadblocks and actively fostered innovation. Launched in 2016, these initiatives provided a structured framework that catalysed the entrepreneurial surge. Pivotal to this transformation was the launch of the Startup India initiative in January 2016.

Envisioned as a flagship programme, its core objective was to cultivate a startup culture, build a robust and inclusive ecosystem, and fundamentally transform India into a country of "job creators instead of job seekers."

India's visionary leadership has transformed the nation from job-seekers to job providers, reflecting its entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to building a self-



reliant, job-generating economy. It wasn't just a slogan; it was backed by a comprehensive Action Plan focusing on Simplification, Funding, and Incubation. This framework offered tax exemptions, simplified compliance, and financial support to help early-stage ventures overcome funding and regulatory challenges.

Simultaneously, the Government launched the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) in 2016, which fostered a culture of innovation through initiatives like the Atal Tinkering Labs and Atal Incubation Centres. These programmes not only nurtured young talent but also created a robust infrastructure that supported startups across diverse sectors, including technology, healthcare, and manufacturing. AIM's focus on nurturing creativity and research has played a crucial role in strengthening the ecosystem and preparing it for the future.

In 2024, the Indian Government made a transformative decision by abolishing the angel tax in the Union Budget. Introduced in 2012, this tax had acted as

6  
THE EXPONENTIAL GROWTH TRAJECTORY OF INDIA'S STARTUP ECOSYSTEM COINCIDES DIRECTLY WITH THE ROLLOUT OF KEY GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES AND VISIONARY LEADERSHIP THAT REMOVED ROADBLOCKS AND ACTIVELY FOSTERED INNOVATION

a significant obstacle for investors, discouraging investment by imposing levies on capital raised above fair market value, often hindering critical funding at vital stages. This step has cleared the way for a more investor-friendly environment, fostering growth and opportunity for startups across the nation.

The removal of this tax has been celebrated as a major step towards creating a more investor-friendly environment, helping startups access the funding they need to scale and succeed.

The decision to abolish the angel tax, alongside other reforms, showcases the Government's commitment to providing a conducive atmosphere for entrepreneurship to thrive. The growth of India's startup ecosystem has been far from centralised. While traditional tech hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Gurugram remain significant, a noticeable shift has occurred as entrepreneurs from smaller cities and towns have begun to make their mark.

This democratisation of innovation has been facilitated by the Government's push

for a more inclusive startup ecosystem that is accessible to a broader pool of talent.

Sectors like fintech, healthcare, and agritech have emerged as hotspots for innovation, with over 1,300 active tech startups added in 2022 alone. The Government has played a vital role in fostering growth within these sectors, encouraging investment and providing specialised support to startups that address critical societal needs.

For instance, fintech startups have revolutionised access to financial services, healthcare ventures have improved healthcare delivery, and agritech innovations have brought efficiency to the agriculture sector. Despite facing challenges like funding slowdowns and hiring freezes, the ecosystem demonstrated resilience. In 2023, India added over 1,000 startups, including 400 in emerging areas, underscoring the sector's adaptability.

The journey of our nation from ancient to modern India is a saga of remarkable achievements and milestones. It begins with the wisdom of great saints, progresses through the profound teachings of Swami

Vivekananda and the Upanishads, and extends to the strides of modern innovation like the upagrah (satellite) and the evolution from the traditional Kumbh Mela to the Startup Kumbh Mela. Each chapter of this journey stands as a powerful testament to our nation's relentless hard work, groundbreaking innovation, and unwavering self-reliance.

India is now rapidly emerging as a global leader in fostering sustainable, innovative, and thriving startups. As reported by the Press Information Bureau (PIB) on 16 January 2025, the country commemorates nine years of Startup India, a game-changing initiative launched in 2016. National Startup Day marks a key milestone in India's entrepreneurial journey.

Startup India, launched under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has become a cornerstone of national innovation and growth. It has championed the entrepreneurial spirit across the country, empowering thousands to explore creativity and innovation. As a result, India has become the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world.

India's startup story is a testament to the indomitable entrepreneurial spirit of New India. Since 2016, our vision has been to drive innovation, provide financial support, and nurture budding businesses. In just under a decade, ideas have evolved into industry giants, and dreams have become tangible realities.

Today, India stands tall, not only as a hub for technology but as a beacon of progress across diverse sectors. Our achievements in areas like vaccination further reflect our scientific prowess and societal resilience.

Inspired by the principles of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family) and Na Phaleshu Kadachana (focus on action, not results), India continues to grow with values at its core. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's push for "Vikas bhi, Virasat bhi" (growth and heritage, hand in hand) defines today's India — which is modern and aspirational, yet deeply rooted in its rich traditions and culture. India's story is not just one of economic expansion, but a journey of purpose, passion, and progress.

(Vinay Pathak is Assistant Professor at IIT Sonapat and Sandeep Joshi is a senior technology journalist. Views are their own)

# Trump joins tariff talks with Japan as US seeks deals amid trade wars

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

President Donald Trump on Wednesday inserted himself directly into trade talks with Japanese officials, a sign of the high stakes for the United States after its tariffs rattled the economy and caused the administration to assure the public that it would quickly reach deals.

The Republican president attended the meeting alongside Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, top economic advisers with a central role in his trade and tariff policies.

"Hopefully something can be worked out which is good (GREAT!) for Japan and the USA!" Trump wrote in a social media post ahead of the meeting.

Afterward, he posted: "A Great Honour to have just met with the Japanese Delegation on Trade. Big Progress!"

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba told reporters Thursday in Tokyo that his chief trade negotiator, Ryosei Akazawa, told him from Washington that the talks were "very candid and constructive."

"Of course the talks are not easy, but President Trump stated his intention to make this negotiation a top priority," Ishiba said. "I believe we had talks that lead to a next step."



Ishiba said he will closely watch how ministerial talks go and plans to visit Washington to meet with Trump at an appropriate time.

Trump's choice to get directly involved in negotiations points to his desire to quickly finalise a slew of trade deals as China is pursuing its own set of agreements. It's an open test of Trump's reputation as a dealmaker as countries around the world seek to limit the potential damage unleashed by his import taxes.

The sweeping tariffs that Trump announced on April 2 triggered panic in the financial markets and generated recession fears, causing the US president to quickly put a partial 90-day hold on the import taxes and increase his already steep tariffs against China to as much as 145 per cent.

The pause temporarily spared Japan from 24 per cent across-the-board tariffs, but there continues to be a 10 per cent base-line tariff and a 25 per cent tax on import-

ed cars, auto parts, steel and aluminum exports.

With Japan charging an average tax rate of 1.9 per cent on other countries' goods and having a longstanding alliance with the US, the talks on Wednesday are a crucial indicator of whether the Trump administration can achieve a meaningful deal that reassures the markets, American voters and foreign allies.

US economic rival China, meanwhile, is trying to capitalise on the turmoil around Trump's announcements, with its leader, President Xi Jinping, touring nations of Southeast Asia and promoting his country as a more reliable trade partner.

Japan is among the first countries to start open negotiations with the US Trump and other administration officials have said the phones have been "ringing off the hook" with dozens of countries calling, eager to strike deals with a president who views himself as a master negotiator to avoid tariffs when the 90-day pause ends.

Israel and Vietnam have offered to zero out their tariff rates, but Trump has been noncommittal as to whether that would be sufficient. On Thursday, Trump is scheduled to meet with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who will likely be carrying messages on behalf of the European Union about how to resolve the tariffs Trump placed on the 27-state group.

# India-UK Defence group agrees to enhance collaboration

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

A review of Defence ties, with a particular focus on enhancing defence industry collaboration and boosting the 'Make in India' initiative, were on the agenda of the 24th India-UK Defence Consultative Group discussions here this week.

Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and his British counterpart Permanent Secretary David Williams co-chaired the dialogue, which was aimed at deepening bilateral defence cooperation. The successful completion of the regular dialogue was confirmed by the Defence ministries on both sides in social media updates.

"The 24th India-UK Defence Consultative Group meeting in London saw Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and UK counterpart David Williams co-chair discussions, aimed at deepening bilateral defence cooperation," the Indian Ministry of Defence said. "Key focus areas included expanding defence industry collaboration and promoting the 'Make in India' initiative, especially in niche and emerging technologies," the statement added.

It comes as the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence announced the final preparations for aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales to sail from Portsmouth on April 22 for its Indo-Pacific deployment, including planned port visits in India.

The upcoming deployment of the Carrier Strike Group, named Operation Highmast, is described as an opportunity for the United Kingdom's armed forces to conduct a major global deployment and a chance to exercise complex operations alongside partners and allies such as India.

**Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and his British counterpart David Williams co-chaired the dialogue, aimed at deepening bilateral defence cooperation**

"The group will transit through the Indian Ocean, conducting exercises and port visits with partners including the US, India, Singapore and Malaysia, before joining 19 partner nations for Exercise Talisman Sabre near Australia, and then training alongside the Japanese Self-Defence Forces and conducting a port visit to India," stated the UK Ministry of Defence.

The Indo-Pacific is seen as a "critical region" for United Kingdom trade, with imports and exports in the region worth billions of pounds for the United Kingdom economy.

The deployment will also provide a chance for United Kingdom companies to take part in trade events during port visits.

# US threatens Harvard's foreign enrollment criteria

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

The Donald Trump administration has threatened to revoke Harvard University's eligibility to enrol international students if it doesn't submit detailed records of its foreign students' "illegal and violent activities."

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem on Wednesday wrote a "scathing letter" demanding detailed records on Harvard's foreign student visa holders' illegal and violent activities by April 30, or face immediate loss of Student and Exchange Visitor Programme (SEVP) certification, a DHS news release said. "Harvard bending the knee to antisemitism — driven by its spineless leadership — fuels a cesspool of extremist riots and threatens our national security."

"With anti-American, pro-Hamas ideology poisoning its campus and classrooms, Harvard's position as a top institution of higher learning is a distant memory. America demands more from universities entrusted with taxpayer dollars," Noem said.

DHS said since Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, Harvard's foreign visa-holding rioters and faculty have spewed antisemitic hate, targeting Jewish students.

"With a \$53.2 billion endowment, Harvard can fund its own chaos — DHS

won't. And if Harvard cannot verify it is in full compliance with its reporting requirements, the university will lose the privilege of enrolling foreign students," it said. Earlier this week, Harvard had said the Trump administration issued an



updated and expanded list of demands, "warning that Harvard must comply if we intend to maintain [our] financial relationship with the federal government."

Harvard President Alan Garber said the "unprecedented demands" being made by the federal government to control the Harvard community include requirements to "audit" the "viewpoints of our student body, faculty, staff, and to 'reduce the power' of certain students, faculty, and administrators targeted because of their ideological views."

"We have informed the administration through our legal counsel that we will not accept their proposed agreement.

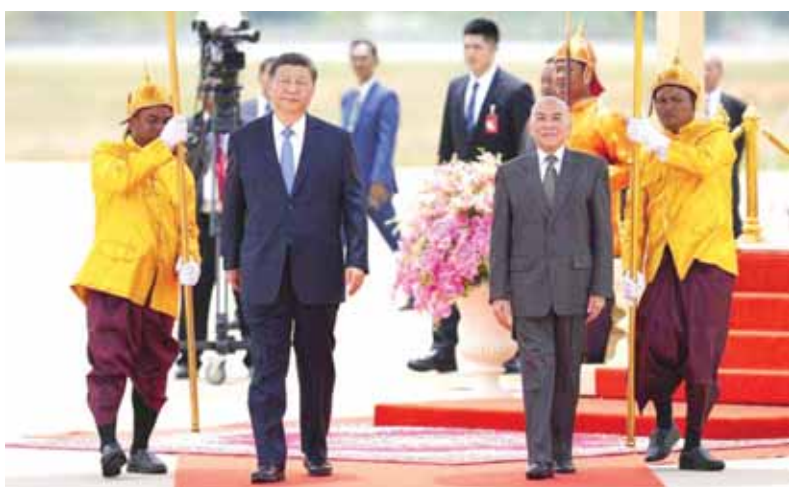
# China President Xi Jinping arrives in Cambodia to wrap up 3-nation Asia tour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Phnom Penh (Cambodia)

Chinese President Xi Jinping arrived in Cambodia on Thursday for a two-day state visit that serves as an opportunity to further strengthen already robust relations. The visit, Xi's first since 2016, will conclude a three-nation Southeast Asian tour that included stops in Vietnam and Malaysia. China has been increasing its influence in the region over the past decade, largely by exercising its substantial economic leverage.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet recently described Beijing as "an important and indispensable friend of Cambodia that has helped support the country's economic and social development." Xi was formally greeted at the airport in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh by head of state King Norodom Sihamoni. During his visit, Xi is also scheduled to meet Prime Minister Hun Manet and Senate President Hun Sen, who is Hun Manet's father and predecessor as prime minister. In a statement at Phnom Penh International Airport after his arrival on his presidential aircraft, an American-made Air China Boeing 747, Xi said he was "delighted" to visit again.

"Cambodia is a priority in China's neighbourhood diplomacy. China will unwaveringly support Cambodia in upholding strategic autonomy and in pur-



suing a development path suited to its national conditions," he said according to a transcript of his remarks distributed by the Chinese embassy. Trade will likely be a major topic of Xi's discussions in Cambodia, which faces among the highest tariff rates proposed by Washington. In addition to Trump's universal 10 per cent tariff, the country faces the threat of a 49 per cent tax on exports to the US once his 90-day pause expires.

In addition to discussions on strengthening bilateral ties and regional and international issues, several agreements are expected to be signed on cooperation in

various sectors. In both countries, Xi emphasised strengthening ties, particularly in trade and investment, amid global economic uncertainties and the backdrop of trade tensions with the United States. He underscored the need to oppose unilateralism and protectionism and uphold the multilateral trading system. China is presenting itself as a source of stability and certainty as Southeast Asia scrambles to respond to tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump, which threaten the region export-oriented economies whose largest markets are generally the United States.

# Bangladesh, Pakistan hold talks after 15 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

Bangladesh and Pakistan on Thursday held a foreign secretary-level Foreign Office Consultation here after a gap of nearly 15 years and discussed the entire range of bilateral issues focusing on trade ties.

The meeting took place days ahead of Pakistan's Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Dhaka. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin and Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Anam Baloch led their respective sides during the Foreign Office Consultation held at the state guest house Padma, state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha said. During the meeting, the two sides discussed the entire range of bilateral issues between the two nations, the BSS said.

Baloch, who arrived here on Wednesday, is scheduled to pay courtesy calls on Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain later in the day.

The last FOC between Bangladesh and Pakistan was held in 2010. Dar's scheduled visit to Dhaka later this month, will be the maiden visit to Bangladesh since 2012.

# Israeli strike kills family of 10 in Gaza

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Deir Al-Balah (Gaza Strip)

Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip overnight into Thursday killed at least 23 people, including a family of 10, local health officials said.

The United Nations meanwhile raised alarm over the mounting impact of Israel's six-week-old blockade preventing all food and other supplies from entering the territory. Israel ended its ceasefire with Hamas last month and renewed its bombardment, killing hundreds of people and seizing large parts of the territory to pressure the militants to accept changes to the agreement.

A strike in the southern city of Khan Younis killed five children, four women and a man from the same family, all of whom suffered severe burns, according to Nasser Hospital, which received the bodies. Strikes in northern Gaza killed 13 people, including nine children, according to the Indonesian Hospital. The Israeli military says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames their deaths on Hamas because it operates in residential areas. There was no immediate comment on the latest strikes.

The UN humanitarian office, known as OCHA, said that almost all of Gaza's more than 2 million people now rely for food on the only 1 million prepared meals produced daily by charity kitchens supported by aid groups.

Other food distribution programmes have shut down for lack of supplies, and the UN and other aid groups have been sending their remaining stocks to the charity kitchens. The only other way to get food in Gaza is from markets. But most cannot afford to buy there because of spiralling prices and widespread shortages, meaning humanitarian aid is the primary food source for 80 per cent of the population, the World Food Programme said in its monthly report for April on Gaza's markets. "The Gaza Strip is now likely facing the worst humanitarian crisis in the 18 months since the escalation of hostilities in October 2023," OCHA said. Most people in Gaza are now down to one meal a day, said Shaina Low, a



spokesperson for the Norwegian Refugee Council. "It's far lower than what is needed," she said. Water is also growing scarce, with Palestinians standing in long lines to fill jerry cans from trucks. Omar Shatat, an official with a local water utility, said people are down to six or seven litres per day, well below the amount the UN estimates is needed to meet basic needs.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said Wednesday that preventing humanitarian aid is one of the "central pressure tactics" used against Hamas, which Israel accuses of siphoning off aid to maintain its rule.

Israel is demanding that Hamas release more hostages at the start of any new ceasefire and ultimately agree to disarm and leave the territory. Katz said that even after Israel will continue to occupy large "security zones" inside Gaza.

Hamas is currently holding 59 hostages, 24 of whom are believed to be alive. It says it will only return them in exchange for the release of more Palestinian prisoners, a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a lasting truce, as called for in the now-defunct ceasefire agreement reached earlier this year. Hani Almadhoun, co-founder of Gaza

Soup Kitchen, said his kitchen has food for about three more weeks. "But food is loosely defined. We have pasta and rice but nothing much beyond that. No fresh produce. There is no chicken or beef. The only thing we have is canned meat," he said. He said 15-20 per cent of the people who come to his kitchen for food leave empty-handed.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251. Most of the hostages have since been released in ceasefire agreements or other deals. Israel has rescued eight and recovered dozens of bodies. Israel's offensive has killed over 51,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not say how many of the dead were civilians or combatants. Israel says it has killed around 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war has destroyed vast parts of Gaza and most of its food production capabilities. The war has displaced around 90 per cent of the population, with hundreds of thousands of people living in tent camps and bombed-out buildings.

# Iran confirms second round of nuclear talks with United States set in Rome

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

Iran confirmed on Wednesday that the next round of nuclear talks with the United States this weekend will be held in Rome after earlier confusion over where the negotiations would be held.

The announcement by Iranian state television came as Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian formally approved the resignation of one of his vice presidents who served as Tehran's key negotiator in its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

The head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, Rafael Mariano Grossi of the International Atomic Energy Agency, also arrived in the Islamic Republic on Wednesday. His talks may include negotiations over just what access the IAEA inspectors can get under any proposed deal. The state TV announcement said Oman will again mediate the talks on Saturday in Rome. Oman's foreign minister served as an interlocutor between the two sides at talks last weekend in Muscat, the sultanate's capital.

Officials initially on Monday identified Rome as hosting the negotiations, only for Iran to insist early Tuesday they would return to Oman. American officials so far haven't said publicly where the talks will be held, though Trump did call Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Tuesday, while the ruler was on a trip to the Netherlands.

The stakes of the negotiations couldn't be higher for the two nations closing in on half a century of enmity. US President Donald Trump repeatedly has threatened to unleash airstrikes targeting Iran's nuclear program if a deal isn't reached. Iranian officials increasingly warn that they could pursue a nuclear weapon with their stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels.

Pezeshkian praises former vice president while acknowledging his resignation. The former vice president, Mohammad Javad Zarif, served as a key supporter of Pezeshkian in his election last year but

drew criticism from hard-liners within Iran's Shiite theocracy, who long have alleged Zarif gave away too much in negotiations. In March, Zarif tendered his resignation to Pezeshkian. However, the president did not immediately respond to the letter. Zarif has used resignation announcements in the past in his political career as leverage, including in a dispute last year over the composition of Pezeshkian's Cabinet. The president had rejected that resignation.

But on late Tuesday, a statement from the presidency said Pezeshkian wrote Zarif a letter praising him but accepting his resignation.

**Officials initially on Monday identified Rome as hosting the negotiations, only for Iran to insist early Tuesday they would return to Oman**

"Pezeshkian emphasised that due to certain issues, his administration can no longer benefit from Zarif's valuable knowledge and expertise," a statement from the presidency said.

The president in a decree appointed Mohsen Ismaili, 59, to be his new vice president for strategic affairs. In Iran's political system, the president has multiple vice presidents. Ismaili is known as a political moderate and a legal expert.

Grossi's visit comes as Iran has restricted IAEA access.

Grossi arrived in Tehran for meetings with Pezeshkian and others. He met Wednesday night with Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, writing on the social platform X after the meeting: "Cooperation with (the IAEA) is indispensable to provide credible assurances about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme at a time when diplomacy is urgently needed."

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency described Araghchi as briefing Grossi on

the first round of talks with the US, while also urging the IAEA to "adopt a clear and unambiguous stance regarding threats against Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities."

Both Israel and the US have threatened to attack Iran's nuclear sites if a deal can't be reached to limit Tehran's programme. "A variety of spoilers are gathered to derail current negotiations," we need a Director General of Peace," Araghchi wrote on X. "Our predisposition is to trust Grossi in mission to keep the Agency away from politics and politicisation, and to retain focus on its technical mandate."

Since the nuclear deal's collapse in 2018 with Trump's unilateral withdrawal of the US from the accord, Iran has abandoned all limits on its programme, and enriches uranium to up to 60 per cent purity — near weapons-grade levels of 90 per cent.

Surveillance cameras installed by the IAEA have been disrupted, while Iran has barred some of the Vienna-based agency's most experienced inspectors. Iranian officials also have increasingly threatened that they could pursue atomic weapons, something the West and the IAEA have been worried about for years since Tehran abandoned an organised weapons programme in 2003.

Any possible deal between Iran and the US likely would need to rely on the IAEA's expertise to ensure Tehran's compliance. And despite tensions between Iran and the agency, its access has not been entirely revoked.

Iran's foreign minister questions contradictory responses from US envoy Meanwhile, Araghchi on Wednesday warned the US about taking contradictory stances in the talks.

That likely refers to comments from US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff, who this week initially suggested a deal could see Iran go back to 3.67 per cent uranium enrichment — like in the 2015 deal reached by the Obama administration. Witkoff then followed up with saying "a deal with Iran will only be completed if it is a Trump deal."







APRIL READS



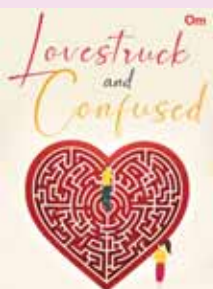
Book: India's Internal Security  
Author: Pushpita Das  
Publisher: Pentagon press  
Price: ₹1295



Book: Stop People Pleasing  
Author: Chase Hill  
Publisher: Rupa  
Price: ₹195



Book: The Rise of the Hitman  
Author: R Kaushik  
Publisher: Rupa  
Price: ₹595



Book: Lovestruck and Confused  
Author: Harini Srinivasan  
Publisher: Om Books International  
Price: ₹250

## Books that Celebrate Heritage

Books provide an immersive journey into monuments, linking the past with the present, says SAKSHI PRIYA

Books open pathways to the past. They illuminate what lies behind walls, under domes, and within the foundations of a civilisation. In a country as layered as India, where history reveals itself not only in palaces and temples, but in the everyday architecture of towns and villages, literature becomes one of the most powerful ways to connect with heritage.

In an ever-changing world, where globalisation often threatens to overshadow local traditions and histories, **World Heritage Day** calls for a moment of reflection. It encourages us to ask: how can we preserve the soul of a civilisation when it is often reduced to fleeting images on a screen or lost amidst urban development? Books, however, have always been powerful guardians of our heritage. They are the silent keepers of our collective memory. Through the pages of books, the world's diverse heritage — from the awe-inspiring

architecture of ancient cities to the forgotten melodies of indigenous tribes — continues to live on. Let's explore a few remarkable books that have dedicated themselves to preserving the essence of our world's heritage:

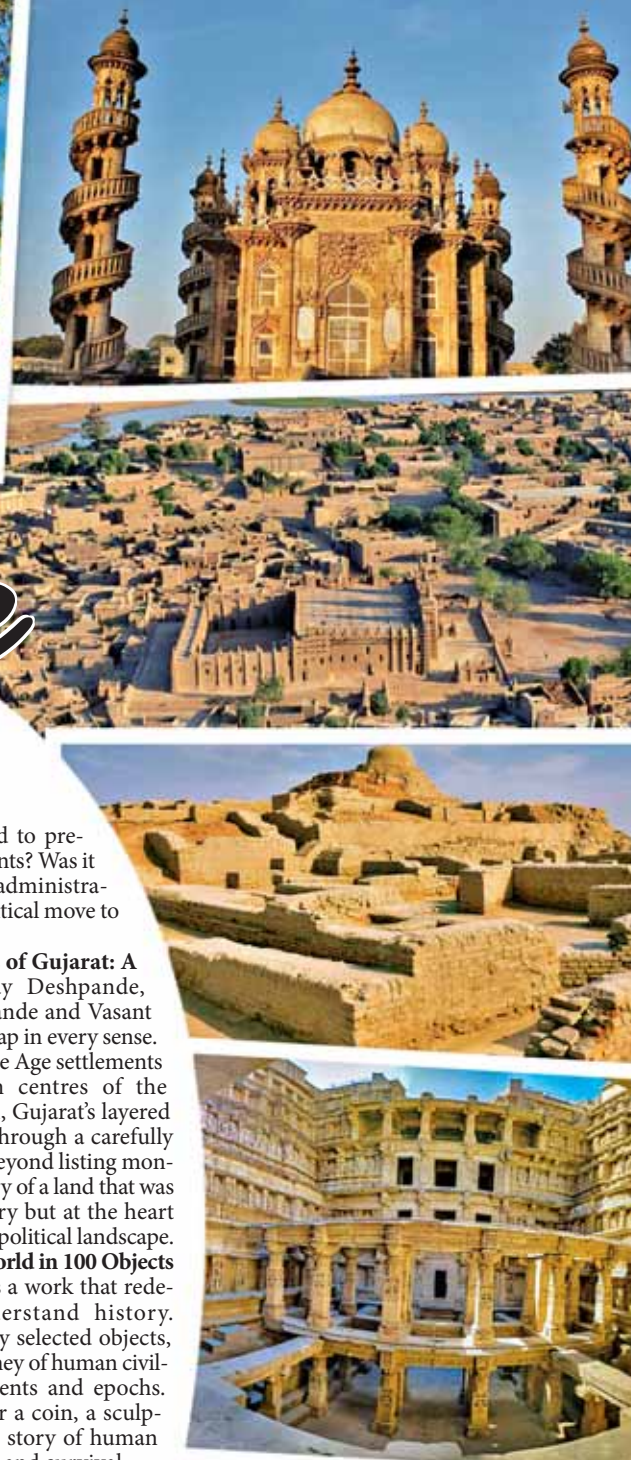
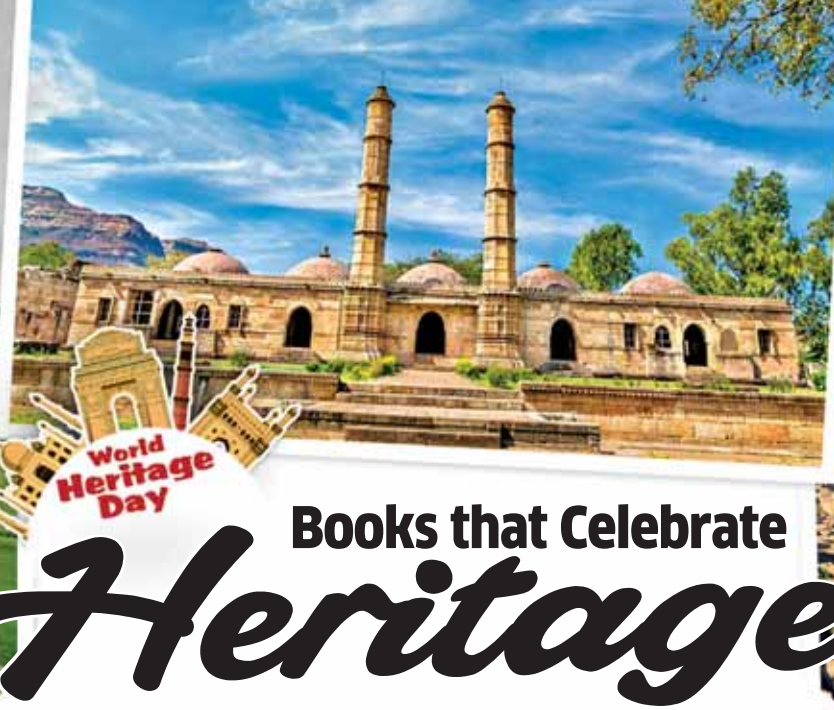
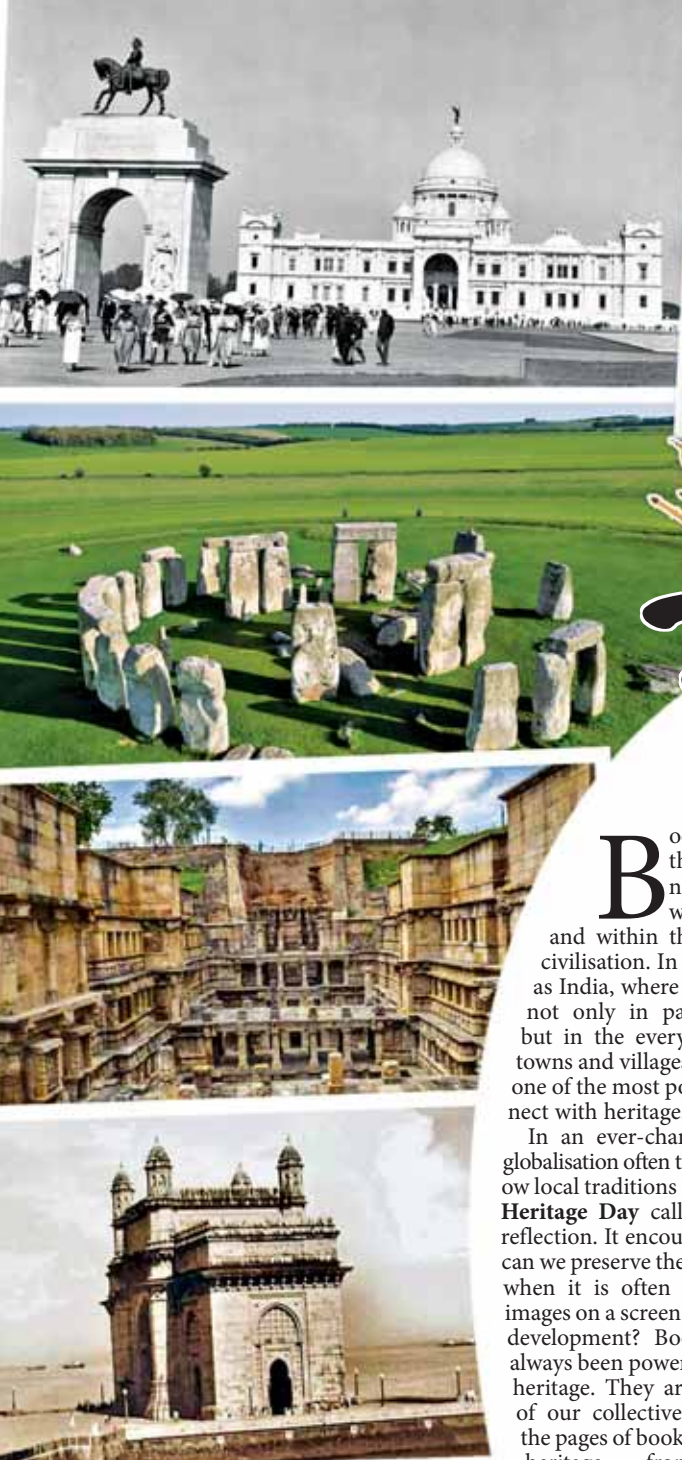
**Lost Kingdoms of Africa** by Gus Casely — Hayford's is a stunning exploration of Africa's forgotten kingdoms, those that flourished long before colonial powers arrived on the continent. This book is a reclamation of it. Casely-Hayford delves into the hidden histories of powerful kingdoms that were once central to global trade, culture, and politics.

**Care and Administration of Heritage Monuments in India** by Dharendra Kumar Pant is a revelation. This book volume is an academic chronicle and a story of awakening. Drawing deeply from the archives of British India, Pant traces a fascinating evolution: from the neglect of monuments to the shaping of a definitive policy under the East India Company and later the British Crown. Why did the

British feel compelled to preserve India's monuments? Was it genuine admiration, administrative necessity, or a political move to legitimise their rule?

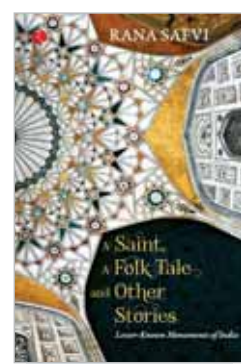
**The Heritage Sites of Gujarat: A Gazetteer** by Sanjay Deshpande, Shweta Sinha Deshpande and Vasant Shinde is a treasure map in every sense. From the earliest Stone Age settlements to the grand urban centres of the Harappan civilisation, Gujarat's layered history is presented through a carefully curated lens. It goes beyond listing monuments; it tells the story of a land that was never on the periphery but at the heart of India's cultural and political landscape.

**A History of the World in 100 Objects** by Neil MacGregor is a work that redefines how we understand history. Through 100 carefully selected objects, author traces the journey of human civilisation across continents and epochs. Each object, whether a coin, a sculpture, or a tool, tells a story of human endeavour, creativity, and survival.



### HIDDEN STORIES

A Saint, A Folk Tale and Other Stories by Rana Safvi is a captivating exploration of India's lesser-known monuments. In this book, author guides readers beyond the typical tourist spots to uncover hidden sites rich in history, poetry, and architecture. From the secret whispers of Khurau Bagh to the forgotten resting places of queens, the book brings to light the stories embedded in these often-overlooked corners of India. Safvi's engaging narrative invites us to rediscover these architectural treasures, urging us to protect and preserve the silent monuments that hold the key to our cultural heritage. Through her writing, author connects the past with the present, offering a deep appreciation for the richness of India.



Book: A Saint, A Folk Tale and Other Stories  
Author: Rana Safvi  
Publisher: Rupa  
Price: ₹295

### HISTORIAN CRAFT

Few historians write about ancient India with the clarity, depth, and courage that Upinder Singh brings to this remarkable volume. **Ancient India: Culture of Contradictions** is not content to simply recount dynasties and dates — it dares to question, to examine the paradoxes that shaped an entire civilisation.

Author explores contradictions that defined ancient Indian life, between desire and detachment, devotion and discrimination, peace and power. Drawing from religious texts, inscriptions, plays, and archaeology, Singh paints a picture of ancient India that is intellectually rich and morally complex. The monuments and material are sites of debate and dialogue, alive with meaning even today.

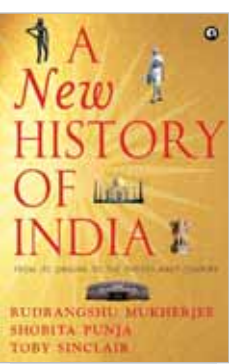


Book: Ancient India: Culture of Contradictions  
Author: Upinder Singh  
Publisher: Rupa  
Price: ₹789/-

### LIVING HISTORY

Other works take a broader view of heritage, tracing its influence through both time and space. **A New History of India** by Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Shobita Punja, and Toby Sinclair provides a sweeping narrative that stretches from prehistoric settlements to modern-day India. Through vivid photographs and detailed maps, the book brings India's complex civilisation to life, highlighting its diverse society, culture, and monumental moments.

This remarkable work serves as an invaluable guide to the history of one of the world's oldest and most diverse nations, ensuring that we understand the importance of safeguarding such a legacy for future generations.



Book: A New History of India  
Author: Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Shobita Punja, and Toby Sinclair  
Publisher: Rupa  
Price: ₹999/-

### HERITAGE MOSAIC

Taking a more localised yet lively approach is **H for Heritage: Mumbai** by Fiona Fernandez. Through an engaging A-to-Z format, this book criss-crosses Mumbai and its suburbs, uncovering a treasure trove of forgotten facts, curious anecdotes, and urban legends. Fernandez blends humour and research to celebrate Mumbai's layered past — from colonial architecture and Art Deco façades to unsung neighbourhoods and civic champions. Illustrated by Suredha Sah, the book brings heritage to young and old readers alike, making the city's landmarks and lesser-known sites vivid and memorable. Its part travelogue, part trivia, and wholly a love letter to a city bursting with character.



Book: H for Heritage: Mumbai  
Author: Fiona Fernandez  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Price: ₹499/-

## Quietly, She Changed Everything

**Sigma Woman** is a candid and quietly compelling memoir that chronicles the journey of Sangeeta Gupta — a woman who has lived many lives, each shaped by courage, creativity, and conviction. A bureaucrat, poet, artist, and filmmaker, Gupta offers her story not as a retrospective of accolades, but as an exploration of selfhood, strength, and solitude.

The book spans 350 pages and reads like an unfolding of a life where each chapter reflects a choice to stay true to oneself despite odds, to pursue passions beyond professional boundaries, and to rebuild after every fall. It presents her experiences across the corridors of power and the world of art, all woven together by an underlying spirit of quiet rebellion and inner clarity.

At its centre is the idea of the 'Sigma woman' — a personality that thrives outside traditional hierarchies. She is not defined by how the world sees her, but by how she sees herself. "Failures and adversity have not broken me," Gupta writes. "I've faced them with courage and grit and always bounced back." This sense of resilience is not worn like a badge but flows through the narrative with understated strength.

Gupta reflects on how her life has been shaped by interactions with people, travels to distant places, and long periods of solitude. These weren't grand epiphanies, but moments that mirrored her evolving sense of identity. She doesn't claim to have all the answers, but her journey offers insights into how one can stay grounded and grow simultaneously.

**Sigma Woman** speaks particularly to readers standing at life's crossroads, those asking questions about who they are and where they're headed. The memoir doesn't preach or promise transformation. Instead, it provides companionship, a voice



Book: Sigma Woman  
Author: Sangeeta Gupta  
Publisher: Prithvi Fine Art and Cultural Centre Delhi  
Price: ₹600/-

that understands the doubts, honours the struggles, and encourages the reader to keep moving forward with quiet determination.

What makes the book stand apart is its honesty. Gupta doesn't position herself as a hero. She presents herself as someone who kept going, learned along the way, and continues to evolve. There's a generosity in the way she shares her story, not to impress, but to connect.

In a world crowded with noise, **Sigma Woman** is a rare offering, thoughtful, authentic, and deeply human. It reminds us that the journey inward can be the most powerful one of all, and that sometimes, the quietest voices carry the strongest messages.

The book is a celebration of the power that lies in embracing one's own story, without trying to fit into the moulds imposed by society.

It's a call for readers to carve out their own spaces, trust in their instincts, and have the courage to lead a life that is unapologetically theirs.

## A Century of India's voice and Cultural Impact

This book explores Akashvani's rich legacy, highlighting its cultural and informational impact, says KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

There are certain institutions across the world the names of which arouse in the mind a sense of respect and dignity. Pan Am, BOAC, Qantas, international airlines headquartered in the US, Britain and Australia are known for safety, security, punctuality and courteousness to the customers. Automobile giants like General Motors, Chrysler, Ford, Mercedes-Benz, and Rolls-Royce too evoke adulation. These feelings are rooted in decades of immaculate track record. Such institutions with top global ratings are very few in India. The licence-permit raj in vogue from 1947 to 1998 had blown out the spirit of entrepreneurship from the minds of Indians. "Chalta hai" was the hallmark of the country's average citizen.

Despite these shortcomings, there are few institutions based in India which have done the country proud. All India Radio is one such organisation respected all over the world for its credibility, clarity and reliability. All India Radio, the Hindi name of which is Akashvani, is the voice of India and is the largest radio network in the world. What started as a broadcast of a small music programme from Bombay in November 1922 underwent many transformations over the decades and has become the nation's pride.

The history of Akashvani is not without blemishes. The days of internal emergency (June 1975-March 1977) saw the reputation of Akashvani suffering a setback thanks to the craving by the then Prime Minister to somehow hang on to office. The AIR network earned the not-so-good reputation as IndiraVani, as the news, features and even cultural programmes aired by it were paeans in honour of Indira Gandhi. I do remember a radio commentator by name Ravi Chaturvedi weeping during the live commentary of the 1975-76 cricket Test match between India and West Indies which was won by India. The whole cricket fraternity who were tuned



State-owned AIR is beaming myriad programmes catering to the tastes and requirements of the population. Akashvani has played a major role in popularising the folklores and tribal music which are aired as Lok Sangeet. The National Programme of Music featuring Hindustani, Carnatic and Rabindra Sangeet has become an essential ingredient in daily life. The archives of AIR are a repertoire of presentations by the Great Masters.

in to the radio listened to Chaturvedi attributing India's victory to the Twenty Point Programme and Five Point Programme initiated by Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi respectively.

For the first time in the history of Akashvani, a book **Akashvani: A Century of Stories from AIR** has hit book shelves across India. The book is authored by Vikrant Pande and Neelesh Kulkarni. Vikrant Pande shot into fame through Shivaji: The Great Maratha, a translation of Ranjit Desai's Marathi novel



Book: Akashvani  
Author: Thomas Mathew  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Price: ₹399/-

Shriman Yogi. It was a great literary work and Pande's translation was of top quality. He has not let the readers down and has opened a window to the world of India's radio broadcasting. Dr Ranjit Nair, a physicist working at Cambridge University, came across scientific papers authored by Prof J C Bose which stated that the latter had held public demonstrations of radio in November 1895, much before Marconi entered the field. Prof Bose never liked the idea of selling his innovation for personal gains and wanted the radio to benefit humanity. During the sesquicentennial event held at Cambridge University, invited scientists from all five continents described Prof Bose as a scientist who thought much ahead of his times, said Prof Nair who was one of the lead organisers of the event. In a subcontinent like India, the

state-owned AIR is beaming myriad programmes catering to the tastes and requirements of the population. Akashvani has played a major role in popularising the folklores and tribal music which are aired as Lok Sangeet. The National Programme of Music featuring Hindustani, Carnatic and Rabindra Sangeet has become an essential ingredient in daily life. The archives of AIR are a repertoire of presentations by the Great Masters.

This is said to be the world's biggest collection of music recordings. The Farm and Home programmes (Krishi Darshan) of AIR have survived the test of time, while private operators are yet to tap this significant segment. The Green Revolution that elevated India to be a country that exports foodgrains has been supplemented to a great extent by the Farm and Home programmes. As the saying goes, a rut has set in the way Akashvani is functioning. It is time for rebooting the radio in tune with the changed times. Mann Ki Baat, the monthly programme aired by AIR in which the PM shares with listeners various topics, proves that radio is here to stay.

What Akashvani lacks is an exclusive national channel broadcasting round-the-clock news, music, newsreels, discussions and debates. Though there is a medium wave relay station at Nagpur, the programmes broadcast through this transmitter are hardly audible outside Maharashtra. The launching of a channel exclusively for news and current affairs should be given top priority. An institution with the motto "Bahujan Hitaya: Bahujan Sukhaya" can easily set up a two-channel system. Kudos to Pande and Kulkarni for this work which is a must-read for all those who are associated with mass media. I still remember the care with which AIR engineers set their clock in sync with the master clock maintained in New Delhi AIR at 4 PM every day for accuracy and sharpness.

