



INDIA SWINGS INTO ACTION AGAINST PAKISTAN

Demolition of terror factories in Kashmir commences

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

As tensions between India and Pakistan are gradually peaking in the aftermath of the horrific killing of tourists in Pahalgam, Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi Friday visited the Kashmir valley and took stock of the 'operational' readiness of the troops and ongoing anti-terror operations launched to hunt down the perpetrators behind the massacre.

The visit of the Army Chief assumed significance as it was taking place after the recent meeting of the cabinet committee on Security, where a series of extraordinary retaliatory measures against Pakistan were announced. Ahead of the visit of the Army Chief in the valley, the Pakistan army late Thursday night activated the Line of Control (LoC) at various locations by resorting to 'unprovoked' ceasefire violations. According to ground reports, these ceasefire violations

were reported from the North Kashmir area of Uri to the frontier districts of Rajouri and Poonch in the Jammu region. Rattled by India's tough posturing, the Pakistan army was probably assessing the ground situation and the preparedness of the neighbouring country. On his arrival in Srinagar, the Army Chief was briefed by the senior officers of the Northern Command headquarters in the presence of Goc-in-C Northern Command Lt-Gen MV Suchindra Kumar.

The Army Chief also reviewed the progress of the anti-terror operation launched to hunt down the perpetrators behind the Pahalgam terror attack.

The security forces are searching for a group of Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) terrorists, including four foreign and three locals, responsible for the Pahalgam attack.

At least half a dozen anti-terror operations were also being conducted at multiple locations across Jammu and Kashmir.

Continued on >> P2



Debris of the house of LeT terrorist Adil Hussain Thokar, which was destroyed after an explosion, in Bithahara, Kashmir PTI

Identification of Pakistanis across the country announced

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Government is working on a strategy to ensure that not a single drop of water flows from India into Pakistan, Jal Shakti Minister CR Paatil asserted on Friday following a high-level meeting chaired by Home Minister Amit Shah. Paatil said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has issued a slew of directives, and the meeting was held to follow up on them and Shah made several suggestions at the meeting for their effective implementation. Earlier on the day Shah called up all Chief Ministers and asked them to ensure that no Pakistani stays in India beyond the deadline set for leaving the country.

Talking to media, Jal Shakti Minister Paatil said "we will ensure that not a single drop of water flows into Pakistan from India". Government is working on a long-term plan to ensure the effective implementation of its decisions. Shah held the meeting to discuss the future course of action on the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 with Pakistan, which has been kept in abeyance following Tuesday's Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 people were killed. India has already informed Pakistan of its decision to keep the treaty in abeyance with immediate effect, as the neighbouring country has breached its conditions by targeting Jammu and Kashmir with sustained cross-border terrorism. Paatil said India has sent a strong message to Pakistan that it will not tolerate terrorism at all.

India on Thursday announced revoking all visas issued to Pakistani nationals residing in Pakistan to return home at the earliest, as tensions between the two countries escalated over the Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 people, mostly tourists, on Tuesday.

The Home Minister in the morning called up the Chief Ministers of all the States and asked them to ensure that no Pakistani stays in India beyond the deadline. The Chief Ministers were also told to identify the Pakistani nationals staying in their respective areas and ensure their deportation, the sources said.

The Indus Water Treaty brokered by the World Bank has governed the distribution and use of the Indus river and its tributaries between India and Pakistan since 1960

The revocation of visas does not apply to the long-term visas already issued to Hindu Pakistani nationals, which "remain valid". Government has also formally issued a notification to suspend the Indus Water Treaty. The treaty brokered by the World Bank has governed the distribution and use of the Indus river and its tributaries between India and Pakistan since 1960. The Indus river system comprises the main river, the Indus, and its tributaries. The Ravi, Beas, Sutlej, Jhelum and Chenab are its left-bank tributaries, while the Kabul river, a right-bank tributary, does not flow through Indian territory.

The Ravi, Beas and Sutlej are collectively referred to as the eastern rivers, while the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab are known as the western rivers. The water of this river system are crucial to both India and Pakistan.

At the time of Independence, the boundary demarcation between the two newly-formed nations — India and Pakistan — cut through the Indus Basin.

Continued on >> P2

UP Government serves eviction notices to Pakis

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a swift and sweeping response to the deadly terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam, which claimed 26 innocent lives, the Central Government has cancelled all visas issued to Pakistani nationals currently staying in India. This decision, aimed at tightening security, has cast a shadow of grief and helplessness over more than 1,500 Pakistani citizens residing in Uttar Pradesh.

Across cities such as Bareilly, Varanasi, and Rampur, Pakistani women can be seen with tearful eyes and packed bags, standing in queues at district administration offices or Foreigners Registration Offices (FROs), waiting for instructions on how and when to leave. Many had come to India for family functions, to meet ageing parents, or to celebrate weddings and births — never expecting their joyful visits would be cut short by violence they had no part in.

"I came to see my daughter who gave birth to a baby boy just last month," said 62-year-old Shabana Parveen from Karachi, holding her grandson in her arms outside an FRO in Bareilly. "I had planned to stay for two more months. Now I must leave in two days — how do I even say goodbye?"

The Ministry of Home Affairs has directed that all Pakistani nationals in India must return home by April 27, with a slight extension granted to those on medical visas until April 29. In Uttar Pradesh, DGP Prashant Kumar has issued orders to district officials to ensure the repatriation process is smooth and timely.

All concerned district authorities have been directed to complete documentation and facilitate the return of Pakistani citizens by April 27. Those who are in

India on medical visas will be allowed time until April 29," DGP Kumar said. Senior police officials are coordinating closely with local intelligence units to ensure that all foreign nationals are accounted for and that there are no over-stays or violations of visa norms. "This is a proactive measure. We are working in coordination with Central agencies to ensure safety and adherence to international protocols," said a senior official from the State Home Department.

This move is likely to have diplomatic implications, though the Centre has maintained that it is a security-driven decision in response to credible threats.

Security has been tightened across UP, especially in areas with a history of communal tension. CM Yogi has ordered increased surveillance ahead of Friday prayers

The Ministry of External Affairs is expected to issue a formal statement soon regarding the broader implications of the visa cancellations.

The abrupt decision follows the Pahalgam terror attack, which Indian intelligence agencies believe was planned by Pakistan-based terror groups. In response, security has been tightened across UP, especially in areas with a history of communal tension. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath chaired a late-night high-level meeting to review security arrangements and ordered increased drone surveillance and foot patrolling ahead of Friday prayers.

While security officials stress that the move is purely precautionary, the emotional fallout is undeniable.

Continued on >> P2

The Bystander



Delhi shuts down in solidarity with Pahalgam

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Delhi downed its shutters to protest against the Pahalgam killings and Shahi Imam of historic Jama Masjid Syed Ahmed Bukhar said terrorists claim to be Muslims but have acted in a manner that is utterly "un-Islamic." He made this assertion in his address during Friday prayers. People gathered for Friday prayers also staged a protest at the mosque's stairs, raising slogans against terrorism and expressing their anger over the killing of 26 people, most of them tourists, at Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam on Tuesday. Traders' bodies also took out an anti anti-terrorism march organised by Delhi Hindustani Mercantile Association, the apex body of cloth traders during the shutdown. The traders had also taken out a candle march in Connaught Place to express solidarity with the victims.

According to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), several of Delhi's busiest commercial hubs, including Connaught Place, Sadar Bazar and Chandni Chowk, were bereft of their usual hubbub on Friday as over 900 markets and 8 lakh shops downed its shutters, to an estimated trade loss of around ₹1,500 crore for the day. Shops across key sectors such as groceries, dry fruits, chemicals, grains, iron, bullion, stationery, electrical goods, textiles, spices, utensils, and bullion also joined the shutdown.

Sadar Bazar, one of Delhi's most promi-



A poster put up in Janpath, Delhi, paying tributes to victims of the Pahalgam terror attack during a bandh called by city traders against the attack PTI

nent markets, usually bustling with activity, wore a deserted look on Friday as even vegetable vendors did not turn up, a member of the traders' association said. Paramjeet Singh Pamma, Chairperson of the Federation of Sadar Bazar, said by shutting down our shops today, we are urging the Prime Minister to ensure that justice is delivered to the victims and their families.

Asia's largest wholesale readymade garment market in Gandhinagar remained completely shut, said a statement issued by the market association. "The shutdown was

held to demand justice for the tourist who was killed and to stand united against terrorism," it said. Kashmiri Gate, Asia's largest spare parts market wore a deserted look. Traders' say, most of the markets including Sadar Bazaar, Bhagirath Place, Gandhinagar, Naya Bazar, Khari Baoli, Chawri Bazar, Chandni Chowk, Dariba Kalan, Kashmiri Gate, Kamla Nagar, Jama Masjid, and Hauz Qazi, Karol Bagh, Malviya Nagar, INA Market wore a deserted look on Friday.

Continued on >> P2

Related stories on >> P3

Law made by Parliament, can't be stayed: Centre to SC on Waqf

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Centre on Friday sought the Supreme Court to dismiss the pleas challenging the validity of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 and said there cannot be a "blanket stay" on the law as there was a "presumption of its Constitutionality". In a 1,332-page preliminary counter affidavit, the Centre defended the contentious law saying that "shockingly" after 2013, there was an addition of over 20 lakh hectare (precisely 20,92,072.536) in Waqf land.

"Right before even Mughal era, pre-independence era and post-independence era, the total of Waqfs created was 18,29,163.896 acres of land in India," the affidavit said. It claimed "reported misuse" of earlier provisions to encroach upon private and Government properties. The affidavit was filed by Shersha C Shaik Mohiddin, joint secretary in the Ministry of Minority Affairs.

"The settled position in law that constitutional courts would not stay a statutory provision either directly or indirectly and will decide the matter finally. There is a presumption of constitutionality that applies to laws made by Parliament," it added.

The Centre went on, "While this court would examine these challenges when the cases are heard, a blanket stay (or a partial stay) without being aware of the adverse consequences of such an order in a gener-

ality of cases (even on members of the Muslim community itself) were the petitions to be unsuccessful would, it submitted, be uncalled for, especially in the context of the presumption of validity of such laws." The affidavit said the pleas challenging the Act proceeded on false premise that amendments take away fundamental rights of religious freedom. It said the court can review a law on the grounds of legislative competence and violation of fundamental rights under Article 32 of the Constitution.

The Government said the amendments were undertaken after a very comprehensive, in-depth and analytical study by a Parliamentary panel having members from major political parties. "Parliament has acted within its domain to ensure that religious endowments like waqf are managed in a manner that upholds the trust reposed in them by the faithful and the society at large, without trespassing on religious autonomy," it said. The law, the Centre said, was valid and result of a lawful exercise of legislative power.

The affidavit said replacing legislative regime, enacted by the legislature, was impermissible. On April 17, the Centre had assured the top court that it would neither denotify waqf properties, including "waqf by user", nor make any appointments to the central waqf council and boards till May 5. A bench headed by Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna is slated to hear the matter on May 5.

Former ISRO chief K Kasturirangan passes away

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday condoled the demise of former Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chief Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan and remembered him for playing a stellar role in the evolution of India's space programme. Kasturirangan (84) passed away in Bengaluru on Friday.

He was conferred with Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan. He headed ISRO between 1994 and August 27, 2003.

Kasturirangan was also a nominated member of Rajya Sabha. He was born on October 24, 1940 at Ernakulam in Kerala to C M Krishnaswamy Iyer and Visalakshi. Having origins in Tamil Nadu, his family had settled at Chalakudy in Thrissur district. His mother was hailing from Palakkad Iyer family.

He steered the Indian space programme gloriously for more than nine years as the chief of the ISRO, head of the Space Commission and secretary to the Government of India in the Department of Space, before laying down his office on August 27, 2003.

Continued on >> P2

India's martyrs to be immortalised in Delhi's metro stations

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC), in a unique gesture to honour Param Veer Chakra (PVC) awardees, has dedicated an entire platform wall at the Sir M Vishweshwaraiah Moti Bagh Metro station on the Pink Line. PVC is the highest gallantry medal.

"The artwork, meticulously crafted by a team of talented artists, features vivid and lifelike depictions of the Param Veer Chakra awardees, capturing their indomitable spirit and unwavering courage in the face of adversity. Each portrait is accompanied by a brief about them," said DMRC spokesperson Anuj Dayal.

Param Vir Chakra translates to "Wheel of the Ultimate Brave". It has been awarded a total of 21 times. Of those 21 awards, 14 were posthumous. This is India's highest military decoration, awarded for the most conspicuous bravery in the presence of the enemy, regardless of rank or branch of service.

"In a move that reflects the Delhi Metro's deep commitment to honouring the sacrifices made by our valiant soldiers, the platform walls of the station have been transformed into a breath-taking gallery

showcasing the portraits of these gallant warriors. The Delhi Metro has thereby created a unique space that fosters national pride and inspires a sense of gratitude among its commuters. This thoughtful integration within one of India's busiest metro networks highlights how infrastructure can be leveraged for cultural appreciation while enhancing community engagement through meaningful interactions with history," the Delhi Metro said.

"These heroes have received the highest military honour to protect our nation and serve as a poignant reminder of the immense sacrifices made by our armed forces in the defence of our motherland. DMRC invites the commuters to take a moment to pause and reflect on the lives of these remarkable individuals and to draw inspiration from their selfless dedication to the cause of our nation," Dayal said.

He said this art installation is not just a tribute to the heroes, but also a testament to the resilience and strength of the Indian spirit, and a celebration of the values of courage, sacrifice, and patriotism that define us as a people.

"Delhi Metro has always endeavoured to utilise its premises to pay respect to the



courage and valour of our armed forces. Delhi Metro has honoured the legacy of distinguished heroes by naming select stations after them, such as Major Mohit Sharma Rajendra Nagar Station, Arjan

Garh, and Brigadier Hoshiar Singh Station, among others," Dayal said.

In addition, a unique permanent exhibition dedicated to the Gallantry award recipients of the Indian Armed Forces has

been curated at the Rajouri Garden Metro station. This unique exhibition titled "Veerta Aur Vikas" is a tribute to the gallantry award recipients of the Indian Armed Forces who have shown exemplary courage to preserve the sovereignty and dignity of the nation.

Earlier, the Modi government has 21 largest unnamed islands of Andaman & Nicobar Islands after 21 Param Vir Chakra awardees in 2023. These islands have been named after the 21 Param Vir Chakra awardees, viz. Major Somnath Sharma; Subedar and Hony Captain (then Lance Naik) Karam Singh, MM; 2nd Lt. Rama Raghoba Rane; Nayak Jadunath Singh; Company Havildar Major Puru Singh; Capt GS Salaria; Lieutenant Colonel (then Major) Dhan Singh Thapa; Subedar Joginder Singh; Major Shaitan Singh; CQMH. Abdul Hamid; Lt Col Ardeshir Burzorji Tarapore; Lance Naik Albert Ekka; Major Hoshiar Singh; 2nd Lt. Arun Khetrapal; Flying Officer Nirmaljit Singh Sekhon; Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran; Naib Subedar Bana Singh; Captain Vikram Batra; Lt Manoj Kumar Pandey; Subedar Major (then Rifleman) Sanjay Kumar; and Subedar Major Retd (Hony Captain) Grenadier Yogendra Singh Yadav.

No discord in Mahayuti government: Bawankule

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

Amid reports of the ruling BJP and Shinde Shiv Sena vying for credit over the safe return of stranded tourists from Kashmir following the Pahalgam terror attack, Maharashtra BJP president Chandrashekar Bawankule on Friday denied that there was any “rift” or “discord” in the Mahayuti government over the issue. Bawankule’s denial came in the wake of Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnavis of the BJP rushing State Disaster Management Minister Girish Mahajan to Srinagar for coordinating the efforts to bring back tourists from the state, while deputy CM Eknath Shinde of the Shiv Sena air-dashing to Jammu and Kashmir in a private aircraft “to expedite the process of bringing back state tourists stranded in Jammu and Kashmir”.

Fadnavis had deployed two Cabinet ministers — Ashish Shelar and Mangalprabhat Lodha at the Mumbai airport to receive the stranded tourists arriving from the valley state, while Minister of State Madhuri Misal was stationed in the Pune airport. On the other hand, Shinde deployed two Cabinet ministers Dada Bhuse and Gulabrao Patil and Minister of State Yogesh Kadam at the Mumbai airport for receiving the tourists, Cabinet Minister Prakash Aitkar was present in the Pune airport. Meanwhile, a statement issued from the Chief Minister’s Office (CMO) on Thursday said the state government had



Maharashtra BJP president Chandrashekar Bawankule

FILE PHOTO

arranged a special flight each for IndiGo and Air India. A statement issued by the Deputy Chief Minister’s office said his visit to Kashmir highlighted that whenever a tragedy strikes, he was the first person to rush to help. Unofficial reports have meanwhile said that more than 500 stranded tourists from Maharashtra have so far been brought to Mumbai by special flights besides the dead bodies and survivors of the terror attack.

On his part, Bawankule rubbished reports that the ruling BJP and its ally in the government Shiv Sena (Shinde) were out grab credit for ensuring the safe return of the Maharashtra tourists stranded in Kashmir. Talking to media persons in Nagpur, Bawankule said, “There

is no rift or discord in the government. Neither is there any politics behind Deputy CM Eknath Shinde going to Srinagar to meet the tourists from Maharashtra. Nor is there any politics in Girish Mahajan’s visit to Jammu and Kashmir because he is the state disaster management minister.”

“We did not send other people to Kashmir to avoid much VIP movement over there. We are focused on bringing back over 3,000 tourists from Jammu and Kashmir. There is no politics or race to get credit for anything,” Bawankule said. When asked about Rahul Gandhi’s visit to Srinagar on Friday to meet those injured in the Pahalgam terror attack, Bawankule said it was a good move by the Congress leader.

Ladli Behna Yojana grapples with financial challenges

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh government’s much-publicised flagship initiative, the Ladli Behna Yojana, launched just months ahead of the 2023 Assembly elections, is now grappling with financial and administrative challenges. The scheme, which was initially launched in June 2023 to provide direct cash assistance to women from economically weaker sections, has seen a steady decline in beneficiary numbers and is reportedly under strain due to a shortage of funds.

Launched by then Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the scheme began with a monthly transfer of ₹1,000 to eligible women aged between 21 and 60 years. At its peak, over 1.34 crore women were registered beneficiaries. Chouhan had promised to eventually raise the amount to ₹3,000 per month, making the scheme a central element of his re-election strategy. However, since August 2023, the number of beneficiaries has reduced to 1.27 crore, a reduction of 7 lakh. Government officials attribute this drop to the automatic exclusion of women who crossed the upper age limit of 60 years. No new beneficiaries have been added to the list over the past 23 months, raising questions about the scheme’s sustainability.

After the elections, and the change in leadership with Dr Mohan Yadav assuming the Chief Minister’s office, there were sporadic protests from women who had supported the previous government. CM Yadav had assured

the public that no welfare scheme launched by his predecessor would be discontinued. Yet, internal sources suggest that the financial burden of the Ladli Behna Scheme — estimated at ₹47 crore per month — is weighing heavily on the state exchequer.

Launched by then CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan, the scheme began with a monthly transfer of ₹1,000 to eligible women aged between 21 and 60 years

In a notable development, the scheme’s official portal now includes an option for beneficiaries to voluntarily opt out, further fueling speculation about its future. Political observers believe the state government may wait until after the Bihar Assembly elections, scheduled for October this year, to make significant changes to the scheme. There is growing speculation that the number of beneficiaries may be drastically reduced or that a new welfare program may replace it.

While talking to *The Pioneer*, Madhya Pradesh Congress spokesperson Mithun Ahirwar, alleged that both the ruling BJP and bureaucrats are reluctant to continue the scheme in its current form. “Since the benefits are directly transferred to the bank accounts of women, there’s minimal scope for misappropriation. This doesn’t suit many,” Ahirwar said.

Delhi HC suspends Medha Patkar’s sentence in LG Saxena defamation case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a relief to activist Medha Patkar, the Delhi High Court on Friday suspended her sentence in a defamation case filed by Delhi LG VK Saxena in which she was arrested and produced in a sessions court earlier in the day. Saxena filed the case 23 years ago when he was heading an NGO in Gujarat.

On April 2, a sessions court upheld Patkar’s conviction in the defamation case but suspended her jail term and released her on “probation of good conduct”.

It directed her to furnish a ₹25,000 probation bond on April 8 and imposed a pre-condition of ₹1 lakh fine. Probation is a method of non-institutional treatment of offenders and a conditional suspension of sentence in which the offender, after conviction, is released on bond of good behaviour instead of being sent to prison.

However, a non-bailable warrant was issued against her after she failed to honour the conditions of probation on the prescribed date.

On Friday, Patkar was arrested and produced before a sessions court following which the judge orally ordered her release subject to furnishing the bond.

High court’s Justice Shalinder Kaur, however, suspended the sentence and granted her bail on a personal bond of ₹25,000. The court posted her plea against

Bombay High Court grants protection from arrest to Kunal Kamra

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

In further relief to Kunal Kamra, the Bombay High Court on Friday granted protection from arrest to the stand-up comedian in connection with the FIR registered against him by the Mumbai police over his “gaddar” jibe against Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

While refusing to grant a stay on the investigations against Kamra in the case, a HC bench of Justices Sarang Kotwal and SM Modak said that if the police wanted to question Kamra, they would have to do it in Chennai since Kamra resides in Tamil Nadu. After hearing arguments from both sides over a petition filed by Kamra seeking the quashing of the FIR registered against him, the HC bench granted interim protection to the stand-up comedian from arrest. HC in its order bench ruled: “The Petitioner (Kamra) shall not be arrested in connection with the case registered at Khar Police Station, Mumbai, during

pendency of this Petition. However, the investigation in this case can continue...

If the Investigating Agency wants to record the Petitioner’s statement, it can be recorded at Chennai with the help of the local police, after giving notice of reasonable period to the Petitioner so that he can remain present in Chennai”. “If during pendency of this Petition the charge-sheet is filed, the concerned Court shall not proceed against the Petitioner, during pendency of this Petition. In its 34-page order, the HC bench noted there were larger issues of freedom of speech that needed to be seen in the case. While senior Advocate Navroz Seervai represented Kamra, Public Prosecutor Hiten Venegaonkar appeared for the State.

In its significant observations made in its order, the HC bench noted: “Thus, there are larger issues of fundamental right of freedom of speech guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution canvassed by Mr Seervai against the restrictions put on that right

under Article 19(2) as canvassed by Mr Venegaonkar which included the aspect of decency, morality and public order. All these questions raised by both sides deserve serious consideration. Hence, arguable points are raised and, therefore, we are inclined to admit this petition.”

While refusing to stay the investigation and granting interim protection to Kamra from arrest, the HC bench noted: “In the background of the above discussion, we are not inclined to grant complete stay on the investigation of this case which is still in progress.

The Petitioner has also shown willingness to give his own statement. It is the case of the petitioner that he has been receiving death threats, therefore, his security is of concern. To that extent, some protection can be granted to him. Learned counsel for the petitioner has submitted that the statement can be recorded in Chennai if reasonable notice is given to the petitioner. Therefore, the investigation can continue, however, it is not necessary to arrest the petitioner”.

At the previous hearing held on April 16, 2025, the high court had said that stand-up comedian should not be arrested till it passed an order on his petition seeking quashing of an FIR registered against him by the Mumbai police over his “gaddar” jibe against Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. The HC order had come in the backdrop of the fact that the Madras High Court had extended Kamra’s interim protection till April 17, while hearing a petition seeking transit anticipatory bail in connection with the FIR lodged against him at Mumbai.

It may be recalled that based on a complaint lodged by Shinde Shiv Sena MLA Murji Patel with the MIDC Police Station on March 24, a Zero FIR was lodged against Kamra under Sections 353(1)(b), 353(2) [Public mischief] and 356(2) [Defamation] under BNS.

The FIR was later transferred to Khar police station in north-west Mumbai. Earlier on the night of March 23, the studio “the Habitat” — a venue located at

The UniContinental hotel in Khar suburbs of Mumbai where Kunal had shot his stand-up comedy — was vandalised by the Shinde Shiv Sena workers. In that show, Kamra had taken a jibe at Shinde without naming but using a modified version of a Hindi song from “Dil To Pagal Hai” — “meri nazar se tum dekho to gaddar nazar wo aaye, aaye.”

Three more FIRs were filed on March 28 under the same provisions. Additional cases were registered in Thane and Dombivli. More FIRs were registered against Kamra in Nashik, Jalgaon and Nandgaon, all of which are being probed by the Khar Police Station.

In his petition seeking the quashing of the FIR registered against him by the police, Kamra said that the continuation of the case would be a frontal attack on a “citizen’s constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression”. He asked the court whether a person’s right to comment on political developments and actions of leaders could be criminalised in this manner.

UP Government serves eviction notices to Pakis

Continued from >> P1 In Varanasi, 28-year-old Nida Khan sobbed outside the railway station. “I came for my cousin’s wedding. We were supposed to go shopping today. Now I’m heading back, heartbroken and humiliated, as if I did something wrong.”

Local authorities are working round the clock to coordinate logistics, issue travel permits, and ensure dignified departures. Still, the atmosphere remains heavy. Families on both sides of the border are caught between the pain of separation and the fears of escalating tensions.

As India grapples with the security threat, it is the human cost — the mothers, daughters, and grandparents forced to leave loved ones behind — that reminds us how deeply violence scars even those who never picked up a weapon.s

Delhi shuts down in solidarity with Pahalgam

Continued from >> P1

Some of the markets association held rallies in their areas to protest the Pahalgam terror attack.

Connaught Place, one of Delhi’s most coveted markets, known for its branded stores and restaurants, remained closed. So was Mukherjee Nagar, a major hub for coaching centres. The usually vibrant streets of Chandni Chowk, Janpath, and Sarojini Nagar had no teenagers thronging them. Thousands of traders took part in a march from Chandni Chowk to Red Fort, calling for urgent action.

In Chandni Chowk, trader associations displayed a poster featuring photos of the 26 victims captioned with brief descriptions. They offered floral tributes and lit candles in their memory. Many protesters wore black ribbons and carried posters that read “Delhi Bandh in protest against the massacre in Jammu and Kashmir”.

“The brutal killing of innocent people in Pahalgam has outraged the entire business community of Delhi. Over 8 lakh traders have closed their shops in protest. The attackers must face strict punishment,” BJP leader Praveen Khandelwal, who took part in the protest, said.

Daryaganj, Jama Masjid, Dariba, Chawri, Nai Sadak, Lal Kuan, Naya Bans, Khari Baoli, Naya Bazaar, Sadar Bazaar, Mori Gate, Kashmeri Gate, Malviya Nagar, INA Market, South Ex Market, Laxmi Nagar, and others observed a complete shutdown.

“This is not just a protest; it is a collective stand against terrorism. We are all united in this fight and are observing the bandh in memory of those who lost their lives in Pahalgam,” Brijesh Goyal, Chairperson of the CTI, said on Friday.

Meanwhile, Citing the Quran, Bukhari said, “To kill one human being is as if to kill all of humanity, and to save one human being is as if to save all of humanity.” Sanctity of human blood is such that taking the life of an innocent invites the “wrath” of Allah, he said addressing the people gathered at the mosque. Terrorism can never be justified or supported on any grounds, he said in a statement.

“The terrorists, claiming to be Muslims, have displayed behaviour that is utterly un-Islamic. What kind of Islam have they learned or been taught?”

The “horrifying” incident in Pahalgam has shaken the

“conscience” of India and stirred deep emotions within all the people, he said.

Killing innocent people on the basis of their religious identity is an “unforgivable crime”, Bukhari said. “People were stripped to identify their religious affiliation, and on confirming they were Hindus, these helpless and innocent individuals were shot and killed.”

The Shahi Imam said that the Pahalgam incident has nothing to do with the teachings, history or culture of Islam. “If such acts continue unchecked, it is hard to say where this will lead. India and its rich, traditional culture will never accept or allow such brutality under any circumstances,” he asserted.

Meanwhile, Palam’s 360 khap panchayat, led by its chief Chaudhary Surrender Solanki staged a strong protest and took out a candle march against the dastardly incident. The march began at Ambedkar Bhavan in Palam Extension and concluded at Ramphal Chowk where a large number of men, women, youth, and elderly took to the streets holding candles to pay respect to the martyrs and displayed unity against terrorism.

Identification of Pakistanis across the country announced

Continued from >> P1

The partition left India as the upper riparian and Pakistan as the lower riparian state. Two key irrigation works — one at Madhopur on the Ravi and another at Ferozepur on the Sutlej — on which Punjab on Pakistan’s side was entirely dependent, ended up within the Indian territory.

This led to a dispute between the two countries over the utilisation of irrigation water from the existing infrastructure. Following negotiations facilitated by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (now part of the World Bank Group), the Indus Waters Treaty was signed in 1960.

Under the treaty, India was granted exclusive rights to the water of the eastern rivers — the Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi — amounting to an average annual flow of about 33 million acre-feet (MAF). The water of the western rivers — Indus, Jhelum and Chenab — amounting to an average annual flow of around 135 MAF was largely allocated to Pakistan. However, the treaty allowed India to utilise the water of the western rivers for domestic needs, non-consumptive uses, agriculture and hydroelectric power generation. Pakistan has rejected India’s suspension of the treaty and said any measures to stop the flow of water “belonging to Pakistan” under the pact will be seen as an “act of war”.

Former ISRO chief K Kasturirangan passes away

Continued from >> P1

Kasturirangan got his bachelor’s and master’s degree in physics from the Bombay University and PhD in experimental high-energy astronomy while working at the Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad, in 1971.

He is credited with the successful launch and operationalisation of India’s prestigious launch vehicle, the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV), and the first successful flight testing of the all-important Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV).

Defining India’s most ambitious space-based high-energy astronomy observatory and initiating a related activities was also an important milestone under his leadership. Kasturirangan has made extensive and significant contributions to the studies of cosmic X-ray and gamma-ray sources and the effect of cosmic X-rays in the lower atmosphere.

“With his passion for knowledge, he also contributed greatly in diverse fields. He helped draft the National Education Policy, which is already making a profound impact on the shaping of the next generation. My condolences to his family and admirers,” President Murmu said in a social media post.

“Saddened to learn that Dr. Krishnaswamy Kasturirangan is no more. As head of ISRO, he played a stellar role

in the evolution of India’s space programme,” President Murmu said.

Prime Minister Modi hailed Kasturirangan as a towering figure in India’s scientific and educational journey. “I am deeply saddened by the passing of Dr. K. Kasturirangan, a towering figure in India’s scientific and educational journey. His visionary leadership and selfless contribution to the nation will always be remembered,” Modi said in a social media post.

The prime minister said Kasturirangan served ISRO with great diligence and steered India’s space programme to new heights, for which the country received global recognition. “His leadership also witnessed ambitious satellite launches and focussed on innovation,” he said.

Modi said India will always be grateful to Dr. Kasturirangan for his efforts during the drafting of the National Education Policy (NEP) and in ensuring that learning in India became more holistic and forward-looking. Kasturirangan was chairman of the drafting committee of the NEP.

Modi noted that Kasturirangan was also an outstanding mentor to many young scientists and researchers. “My thoughts are with his family, students, scientists and countless admirers. Om Shanti,” the prime minister said.

Congress leaders condoled the death

of former ISRO chairman K Kasturirangan, with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge saying he played a pivotal role in strengthening the organisation and his demise is a great loss to the scientific community as well as the country.

In a social media post, Kharge said the demise of Kasturirangan, who played a pivotal role in strengthening the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and worked on key space missions, is a great loss to the scientific community and the country.

“A Padma Vibhushan recipient, he made significant contributions in India’s space exploration and contributed in various positions in key policy making. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, colleagues and disciples,” the Congress chief said.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh noted that Kasturirangan was the third ISRO chairman and the organisation took giant strides under his leadership.

“An advisor to various governments in different areas, he was also a nominated member of the Rajya Sabha as well as a member of the Planning Commission. I recall our long and close association, especially during my ministerial tenure during 2006-2014,” Ramesh said.

“Our numerous conversations over the

years on various aspects of Indian science and technology greatly enriched my understanding of it. He would often tell me how profoundly he had been impacted personally and professionally by those two titans Vikram Sarabhai and Satish Dhawan. The nation is in his debt,” Ramesh added.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also condoled Kasturirangan’s demise. “My heartfelt condolences to the family and colleagues of Dr K Kasturirangan, a visionary who significantly advanced India’s space programme. His contributions to science and policy were invaluable,” she said in a social media post.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said the death of renowned astrophysicist Kasturirangan, who raised India’s flag in the field of space technology, is shocking. Dr Kasturirangan, hailing from Karnataka, had immense love and concern for our state, he said.

“Dr Kasturirangan’s long-standing service as Chairman of India’s proud ISRO and Director of the Centre’s Space Council has made India internationally recognised in the field of space science,” he added.

Condolences to the family members and admirers of Dr Kasturirangan. I share their grief. I pray for peace for the departed soul,” he added.

Demolition of terror factories in Kashmir commences

Continued from >> P1

These operations were carried out in the South Kashmir area of Pahalgam and Bandipore, Dudu-Basantgarh area of Udhampur, Doda, Kishtwar and Kathua districts. An over-ground worker of terrorists was killed while two security force personnel were injured in an encounter in Bandipora district of Jammu and Kashmir on Friday.

Later, the Army Chief also attended a security review meeting with the Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha in Srinagar.

During the meeting, LG Manoj Sinha asked the Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, to take effective steps not only to bring those responsible for the Pahalgam terror attack to justice but also to intensify efforts to crush the infrastructure of terrorism and its ecosystem.

During the discussion, Lieutenant Governor said the nation has full faith in the bravery and valour of our army, police and CAPFs and they must work in close synergy to identify perpetrators, enablers and OGWs of Pahalgam terrorist killing and pursue the entire chain in a sustained manner and neutralise them.

“Every perpetrator and supporter of Pahalgam terror attack, whatever his location or affiliation, must be hunted and they must pay the heavy price for the cowardly and dastardly act against our citizens,” the Lieutenant Governor told the top army

officials.

The meeting also reviewed security mechanisms in place, various short-term, long-term measures and integration and coordination among the various security agencies. The meeting was attended by Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi, GOC-in-C Northern Command Lt Gen MV Suchindra Kumar, Deputy Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Pratik Sharma and GOC 15 Corps Lt Gen Prashant Srivastava.

Meanwhile, Sending out a stern warning to the local terrorists and their associates who are harbouring foreign terrorists to execute their sinister plots, the homes of two local terrorists, allegedly involved in the Pahalgam terror attack, were destroyed in powerful explosions.

According to ground reports, the homes of two local terrorists of Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba-Adil Hussain Thoker of Bijbehara and Aasif Sheikh of Tral were razed to the ground late Thursday night.

To avoid collateral damage in the built-up area, the neighbours were shifted to safer locations before the houses were destroyed. The family members of these two local terrorists were reportedly picked up by the police for questioning. The lone female members were also directed to step out before the demolition was carried out. The local police authorities have not issued any statement on the demolitions till late evening.

DELHI BANDH OVER PAHALGAM TERROR ATTACK



(Left to right) Janpath Market, Chandni Chowk and Sadar Bazaar shops closed amid a shutdown called by traders in protest against the Pahalgam terror attack

RANJAN DIMRI

ANPR cameras to restrict vehicles from entering Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In an effort to effectively tackle pollution in the national Capital, plans are afoot to restrict polluting vehicles from entering Delhi, starting with the deployment of Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras at all Delhi border entry points.

Delhi Government is finalising its comprehensive Environment Action Plan 2025-26, which will include a series of technology-based, high-impact interventions aimed at curbing air pollution and controlling dust emissions, a statement on Friday said.

At the centre of these efforts is a strong push to restrict polluting vehicles from entering the Capital, starting with the deployment of Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras at all Delhi border entry points, Delhi government statement on Friday said.

In a high-level meeting chaired by Minister for Environment and Forests Manjinder Singh Sirsa, senior officials from the Environment Department, Transport Department, and Delhi Traffic Police reviewed measures to prevent the entry of End-of-Life Vehicles (ELVs)—

which are a major source of vehicular pollution.

The Minister directed the immediate installation of ANPR cameras, which will automatically capture incoming vehicle numbers, cross-check them against the VAHAN database, and identify whether the vehicle is legally permitted to enter.

ANPR cameras, which will automatically capture incoming vehicle numbers, cross-check them against the VAHAN database, and identify whether the vehicle is legally permitted to enter the city

Vehicle registration details will be verified, and if found to be categorised as ELV, an alert message will be played through an LED display system. LED screens at border points will also flash vehicle numbers and simultaneously trigger “wrong entry” alert SMS and WhatsApp messages to the owner.

“We want to target pollution at its very originating point,” Sirsa stated. “Following the same principle, ANPR cameras are

being phase-wise installed at Delhi’s border points to detect and restrict end-of-life and unfit vehicles. This is more than enforcement — this is about protecting the health of our people. Through data, automation, and inter-state communication, we are creating a pollution shield around Delhi.”

The installation of these cameras will also serve to sensitise truck drivers and vehicle owners about the restrictions placed on ELVs from entering Delhi. This system is designed not only to prevent violations but also to ensure wide-scale awareness within the transport community so that the message is effectively disseminated and adopted across regions.

As part of the plan, SMS and WhatsApp alerts will be sent to vehicle owners in neighbouring states, warning them that ELVs are banned from entering Delhi and will be fined if found violating the norms. Proactive alerts will also be sent to vehicles approaching the end-of-life threshold, with reminder messages to improve compliance. The Transport Department has been directed to prepare a 12-month SMS notification calendar for sustained inter-state outreach.

This initiative is one of several being

finalised under the Environment Action Plan 2025-26, which is directly being monitored by Sirsa. The plan envisions a multi-pronged strategy combining technology, enforcement, and public engagement. During the review meeting at the Delhi Secretariat, the Minister also reviewed timelines and targets across key thematic areas including vehicular pollution control, air quality improvement, mass tree plantation, solid and C&D waste management, and the deployment of water sprinkler trucks and anti-smog guns starting June 1.

Departments such as DPCC, MCD, NDMC, Delhi Jal Board, and Delhi Traffic Police were directed to streamline their implementation timelines and report back with revised execution schedules. The meeting also discussed new strategies for electric mobility, forest conservation, Yamuna rejuvenation, and enhanced public awareness initiatives on environmental sustainability. Reiterating the government’s commitment, Sirsa said, “We are building an action plan that is rooted in technology, accountability, and sustainability. Delhi’s fight against pollution is no longer reactive—it is proactive, precise, and people-centric.”

71 per cent voter turnout in JNUSU elections

VAISHNAVI MISHRA ■ New Delhi

The Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU) elections recorded around 71 per cent voter turnout on Friday, which is 2 per cent less than last year’s 73 per cent.

However, the second highest in the last 12 years after 2024. As per the EC, Out of a total 7,906 eligible voters, a total of approximately 5,400 students had cast their votes. Polling has been held in two sessions, from 9 am to 1 pm and from 2:30 pm to 5:30 pm at 17 centres across the campus. However, voting time increased by an hour, according to sources. The counting of votes began later in the night and is underway with the results expected by April 28.

This year’s elections mark a significant shift in campus politics. For the first time in years, the United Left stands divided. The All India Students Association (AISA) and the Democratic Students’ Federation (DSF) have formed one bloc, while the Students’ Federation of India (SFI), Birsa Ambedkar Phule Students’

Association (BAPSA), All India Students’ Federation (AISF), and the Progressive Students’ Association (PSA) have come together to form another.

This fragmentation is being seen as an opportunity for the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) to make a strong comeback. At the presidential debate, ABVP’s presidential candidate Shikha Swaraj declared, “I am very glad to see a broken Left. This is the time that ABVP will rise.”

In this year’s JNUSU Polls, core issues remained the same as fee hikes, drinking water, gender equality, freedom of expression, and the infrastructural challenges of JNU. But the recent terror attack in Kashmir’s Pahalgam has added a deeply emotional and political layer to the campaign. Before the presidential debate began, a two-minute silence was observed for the victims. AISA and DSF held a candlelight march, while ABVP’s Shikha Swaraj used the moment to strike a rhetorical blow, asking, “Did the terrorists in Kashmir ask the victims’ religion before killing them?”

BJP wins MCD polls, Raja elected as Delhi’s new mayor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The BJP on Friday reclaimed power in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), with the party’s Raja Iqbal Singh, 54, elected as Delhi’s next mayor, after a gap of almost two and half years.

Singh secured 133 votes against the Congress candidate, Mandeep Singh, the Nanglo councillor, who got 8 votes, the Congress’s total strength in the elected body. A total 142 votes were cast during the Mayoral polls. The BJP lost two votes due to the absence of MP Manoj Tiwari, while one vote was declared invalid. Key political figures, including BJP MPs Harsh Malhotra, Praveen Khandelwal, Bansuri Swaraj, Kawaljeet Sehrawat, and Yogendra Chandolia, cast their votes in the mayoral election.

Singh’s election, and the BJP’s return to power after losing the civic body elections in November 2022, was a formality since the AAP had announced that it would boycott the mayoral election. The AAP lost its majority in the MCD following a series of defections to the BJP after its victory in the Delhi Assembly elections in February. BJP’s Jai Bhagwan Yadav was elected unopposed as the Deputy Mayor after the Congress candidate Ariba Asif Khan withdrew her nomination.

As Singh took his seat, BJP councillors filled the air with chants of Bharat Mata ki Jai. BJP’s Jai Bhagwan Yadav was elected unopposed as the Deputy Mayor after the Congress candidate Ariba Asif Khan withdrew her nomination.

“We will try to form the Standing Committee within a month and work in coordination with the Delhi government to ensure people face no problems. Our priorities include making parks greener, curbing corruption and pollution, and scrapping user charges immediately,” Singh said after winning the Mayor’s post polls. He said the party will “motivate” teachers, provide funds for students’ uniforms, and improve school infrastructure. “The people of Delhi have shown faith



Newly-elected Delhi mayor Raja Iqbal and deputy mayor Jai Bhagwan Yadav show victory sign with others after winning the mayoral election, at Civic Center, in New Delhi on Friday

RANJAN DIMRI

DEVELOPMENT WORK TO SPEED UP: CM

NEW DELHI: After grabbing the Mayoral posts, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Friday said the work for a developed, clean and prosperous Delhi will speed up with the election of BJP candidate Raja Iqbal Singh as mayor, setting in motion triple engine of party ruled Centre, Delhi government and the MCD.

CM Gupta lauded Singh who was elected as mayor in the elections held at Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) headquarters, defeating Congress candidate Mandeep Singh in a one sided affair. The BJP councillor Jai Bhagwan Yadav was elected unopposed as deputy mayor since the Congress candidate Ariba Khan withdrew from the race.

“Now, under the leadership of the Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodiji, with the power of the triple engine - Centre, Corporation and Delhi Government - the work of making the capital clean, prosperous and developed will move ahead at a faster pace,” she said in a post on X.

Reacting to the BJP’s winning the Mayoral polls,

in Prime Minister Modi and the BJP. We are committed to serving the city through the MCD and delivering on our promises. All eligible contractual workers under

the AAP boycotted the Mayor and Deputy Mayor elections of the MCD declaring the BJP’s “four-engine government” would now be forced to deliver real results instead of empty rhetoric.

“Despite all the tactics and manipulations, the BJP has only 117 councillors in the MCD of 250 councillors. Even in a House of 238 councillors, a majority of 120 is required. BJP should know that in a 4-engine government, no excuses, no rhetoric will be tolerated; now the work will have to be shown by doing it. The public will know in 1 month,” said AAP Delhi State Convener Saurabh Bhardwaj.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva asserted that after the election of party candidates as mayor and deputy mayor, the path for smooth administration and citizen services of the MCD has been set. “The newly elected mayor will soon ensure formation of the Standing Committee of the civic body so that Delhi residents can begin reaping the benefits of the triple-engine governance by the BJP at the earliest,” he said.

BMP will be regularised as per rules,” he said.

Singh was the Leader of the Opposition in the MCD and earlier served as the

Mayor of North MCD. He hails from a family with strong Akali Dal connections. His father-in-law was a councillor from the GTB Nagar constituency, and his brother-in-law was also active in Akali politics. Singh too served as an Akali Dal councillor from GTB Nagar and headed the Civil Lines Zone of the corporation until September 2020.

Singh said that the BJP government in MCD will scrap user charges for garbage collection immediately to provide relief to the residents of Delhi.

Singh said that the priority of triple engine government will be to ensure proper sanitation, desilting of drains ahead of monsoon rains, flattening curve of garbage mountains, improving health and education system, abolishing inspector raj from the corporation on a priority basis. He said that ruling BJP will try to form the Standing Committee within a month and work in coordination with the Delhi government to ensure people face no problems.

Talking about roadmap for the newly formed government in the MCD, he said that their priorities include making parks greener, curbing corruption and pollution, and scrapping user charges immediately. He said the party will “motivate” teachers, provide funds for students’ uniforms, and improve school infrastructure.

Notably, the AAP had won elections in December 2022 by ending BJP’s 15 years of rule in the MCD. The AAP had got 134 seats out of 250 while the BJP had finished second with 104 seats. The congress party had won 9 seats while 3 independents had also won the elections.

In February 2023, AAP’s Shelly Oberoi became the first mayor and again she was elected mayor in April 2023. Though the gap between the AAP and the BJP was 30 in the beginning but it sharply reduced to three in November 2024 mayoral polls when AAP’s Mahesh Khichi elected as mayor from the party. Moment after losing by a narrow margin, the saffron party had declared to snatch power in the next mayoral elections.

CM, Sood inspect Delhi Fire Service headquarters

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta along with Home Minister Ashish Sood on Friday inspected the Delhi Fire Service Headquarters located at Connaught Place and announced the fire service will be fully equipped with modern equipment and new fire units including cutting-edge equipment such as AWT vehicles, 32-meter turntable ladders, and mini fire-fighting robots, which not only enhance efficiency in emergency situations but also ensure the safety of firefighters.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister said the government has allocated a total budget of Rs 504 crores for the fire service, out of which Rs 110 crores will be allocated for the purchase of new machinery and state-of-the-art equipment. Specially, 100 small and technically equipped fire vehicles/engines will be deployed for areas with narrow lanes. The fire control room will be equipped with a Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system, allowing real-time tracking of all fire vehicles.

“Surveillance cameras will be installed in all fire vehicles/engines, and the control room will be technically upgraded. The fire control room staff will receive modern training. The dilapidated building of the fire service headquarters will be rebuilt, and the government has already approved the budget for it,” she said.

The Chief Minister also mentioned that a comprehensive roadmap for both short-term and long-term works has been prepared for modernizing the fire service. Short-term works will include staff recruitment, equipment repair, and public awareness campaigns.

Long-term works will include the development of a GIS-based centralised portal, modernisation of fire trucks, and enhancing the fire service’s capabilities

to international standards through global partnerships.

“Our goal is to ensure that the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) is equipped with world-class tools and is always prepared for any emergency,” the chief Minister said after visiting the DFS headquarters accompanied by Delhi Home Minister Ashish Sood.

“Today, the Delhi Fire Service has 86 fire stations and over 3,000 dedicated fire fighters who face more than 36,000 emergency situations annually. This number is the highest compared to any other metropolitan city in the country, demonstrating the efficiency and commitment of this force,” the chief minister said.

The chief minister also highlighted the government’s commitment to rebuilding the dilapidated headquarters of Delhi Fire Services, a project being closely monitored by Home Minister Sood for its timely completion. Also, new fire stations will come up in the under-served areas, while the existing firefighting equipment will be thoroughly inspected, repaired and upgraded to ensure readiness at all times.

“Each fire station will undergo significant upgrades to strengthen operational capabilities and improve infrastructure. A long-overdue revamp of the fire control room is also underway to transform it into a fully computerised, state-of-the-art hub,” Gupta said.

The home minister also said that thorough inspections of elevators in the tall buildings, including those that reach up to 70 metres, are being conducted and there are plans to procure equipment that can reach up to 90 metres to ensure comprehensive coverage.

At his occasion, the DFS demonstrated several advanced equipment to Chief Minister Rekha Gupta with the objective of making it more technologically advanced and safer.

Government to revive Mandi Road upgradation project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a move to address traffic jams, the Delhi government is set to revive its more than a decade-old Mandi Road widening and upgradation project, which is crucial for smoothening traffic flow on Mehrauli-Gurgaon road in South Delhi.

According to Public Works Department (PWD) minister Parvesh Verma, the 8.8-km-long road will be handed over to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), which will now expand and manage it. The road is currently under the PWD. South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri also met Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari at his residence and thanked him for handing over Mathura Road from Ashram to Badarpur Border and Mehrauli-Gurgaon

Road from Qutub Minar to Gurgaon Border to NHAI.

“These roads were earlier under PWD but work on these roads was not being done for a long time. Now the widening of these roads, their drainage and other necessary changes will be completed soon, which will facilitate the movement of people,” he said.

Sharing details, Verma said that to decongest the Mandi Road, we plan to hand it over to NHAI. They will execute the project and are better at land acquisition, which is very much required in this project. As part of the decongestion plans for the area, a feasibility study will also be conducted for the construction of a flyover near the intersection of Main Chattarpur Road and SSN Marg, the Minister added.

MERI Group of Institutions signs MoU with UWED

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

MERI Group of Institutions has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Diplomatic Academy at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan in Tashkent in Uzbekistan on April 23, 2025.

Prof Lalit Aggarwal, Vice-President, MERI Group of Institutions and Prof Sadiq S Safoev, Rector, University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan signed the MoU on behalf of MERI Group of Institutions and UWED respectively.

Prof (Dr) Ramakant Dwivedi, Head, MERI Centre for International Studies (CIS) and Director, India Central Asia Foundation, Luv Aggarwal, CEO, MERI



Start up, Prof Abdusamat Khaydarov, Director, Diplomatic Academy, UWED, representative from the embassy of India in Uzbekistan, Dr Akram Umarov, and other dignitaries were present.

The Diplomatic Academy at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy was established in September, 2022 and included in the system of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The said MoU envisages cooperation in imparting education in management studies, information technology, artificial intelligence, diplomatic studies, and other professional areas.

The Institutions will undertake mutually agreed collaborative cooperation and research in International business management, Economics, Trade and Commerce, International Law, Culture studies, and other areas.

SC slams Rahul over remarks on Savarkar, stays HC order

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday censured Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for "irresponsible" remarks on Vinayak Damodar Savarkar at a rally in Maharashtra but stayed the criminal proceedings against him. A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Manmohan said, "Let's not mock our freedom fighters."

The bench further asked senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for Gandhi, whether he knew that even Mahatma Gandhi used the words such as "your faithful servant" in his communications to the Britishers.

When Singhvi argued charges of promoting enmity and public mischief were not made out against Gandhi, the bench remarked, "You are most obedient, does your client know that Mahatma Gandhi also used 'your faithful servant' while addressing the viceroy? Can Mahatma Gandhi be called a 'servant of Britishers' merely because he addressed himself to the viceroy as 'your servant'. In those days, even I have seen, our judges of the Calcutta High Court used to address Chief Justice as writing 'your servant'."

Justice Datta added, "Does your client know that his grandmother (Indira Gandhi), when she was the Prime Minister, also sent a letter praising this



Supreme Court of India

FILE PHOTO

very gentleman (Savarkar)?" The judge went on, "So, let's not make irresponsible statements about freedom fighters. You have made a good point on law, you are entitled to stay. We are not saying anything on that."

"Any further statement by him (Gandhi) will be taken suo motu. No more words on our freedom fighters, they have given us freedom and we treat them like this? This is not the way," the bench warned.

The top court then issued notice to Uttar

Pradesh government and complainant advocate Nripendra Pandey and stayed a Allahabad High Court order which refused to quash trial court's summons against Gandhi.

Singhvi urged the court to not make any comments and said Gandhi did not intend to create enmity between the groups. The bench retorted, "This is not how you treat freedom fighters, when you don't know anything about the history of India, you should not make any such com-

ments." Justice Datta further said, "He is a leader of a political party and why would you make a comment like this, you go to Maharashtra, he (Savarkar) is worshipped there. Don't do this."

Singhvi said the message was loud and clear. The top court, however, stayed the criminal proceedings against Gandhi in the case lodged in Uttar Pradesh.

Gandhi moved the apex court against an order of the high court. A case under various provisions for alleged offences such as promoting enmity between classes and public mischief was lodged against him by Pandey.

The case stems from the Congress leader's comments on Savarkar made on November 17, 2022, during his Bharat Jodo Yatra at a rally in Maharashtra's Akola district.

The Lucknow bench of the high court on April 4 said that Gandhi can file a revision petition before the sessions court, making the high court's intervention unnecessary at this stage.

Before the high court, Gandhi had challenged a trial court's decision to summon him in the case, while contesting the ongoing proceedings against him.

The complainant has accused Gandhi of intentionally insulting Savarkar during the rally and said his remarks were part of a "well-planned conspiracy" to defame Savarkar.



President Droupadi Murmu departs for Vatican City to attend the State Funeral of Pope Francis

President Murmu departs for Pope Francis' funeral

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday departed for Vatican City to attend the funeral of Pope Francis later this week. She is accompanied by Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs, Kiren Rijiju, Minister of State for Minority Affairs and Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, George Kurian and Deputy Speaker of Goa Legislative Assembly, Joshua De Souza, her office said in a social media post.

Murmu will be on a two-day visit to Vatican City and offer condolences on behalf of the government and people of India. "President Droupadi Murmu departs for Vatican City to attend the State Funeral of HH Pope Francis," read the post from the President's secretariat. Francis, who was the first non-European Pope in nearly 1,300 years, died on Easter

Monday. He was 88. Murmu will pay homage to Pope Francis by laying a wreath at Basilica of Saint Peter in Vatican City on Friday. "On April 26, the president will attend the funeral Mass of His Holiness Pope Francis at Saint Peter's Square in Vatican City, which will be attended by dignitaries from around the world," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement. India declared a three-day state mourning on the passing of Pope Francis.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi visited the Apostolic Nunciature here on Friday and offered condolences on the passing away of Pope Francis. The former Congress chief also paid a courtesy call on Archbishop Dr Leopoldo Girelli, the Apostolic Nuncio to India and Nepal. Apostolic nunciature is a top-level diplomatic mission of the Holy See, the central governing body of the Catholic Church and the Vatican City.

CM Naidu invites PM Modi to Amaravati launch on May 2

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu met Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Friday and invited him for the groundbreaking ceremony of the renewed ₹65,000-crore Amaravati capital city project scheduled for May 2.

During the brief meeting, Naidu also discussed the recent terrorist attack in Kashmir's Pahalgal, which killed 26 people, mostly tourists, and injured several others on Tuesday, sources said.

He informed the prime minister that two people from Andhra Pradesh — S Madhusudhan Rao, a software engineer and JS Chandramouli, a retired bank employee — were among those killed in the attack.

Naidu revived the Amaravati city project — the new capital of Andhra Pradesh on the banks of the Krishna River — after returning to power in the state in 2024.

The project remained stalled between 2019 and 2024.

The chief minister aims to build a world-class, inclusive and modern urban hub inspired by global cities such as Amsterdam, Singapore and Tokyo.

Amaravati was designated as the new capital following Andhra Pradesh's bifurcation in 2014.

The Amaravati Master Plan, crafted by UK-based firm Foster and Partners, envisions development over a 217.23 square kilometer area between Vijayawada and Guntur towns.

The city is expected to create 1.5 million jobs, house 3.5 million people, and have a GDP of \$35 billion by 2050.

Officials said the estimated budget for Amaravati's development works as determined in 2024 is about ₹64,910 crore, with Phase-1 to be completed over the next three years.

The Government of India has committed ₹15,000 crore in financial assistance and facilitated World Bank and Asian Development Bank support totalling USD 1.6 billion.

The Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (APCRDA) is designing branding programmes to attract anchor investors and private sector participation.

Public-private partnership projects are being promoted, with a special purpose vehicle envisioned to meet viability gap funding.

Sibal seeks special session on J and K attack

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Friday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to call a special session of Parliament and pass a resolution condemning the Pahalgal terror attack and conveying the message to the world that the country is united. Sibal also suggested to the government to send out delegations of the ruling and Opposition MPs to various important countries so that diplomatic pressure can be created on Pakistan. Addressing a press conference here, the former Union minister suggested that like the US does with its sanctions, India should tell all major nations who have trade with Pakistan that they cannot come to our market if they have trade with Islamabad.

"In 1972, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had said, 'we will bleed India with a thousand cuts'. Following that, terror attacks have taken place in Parliament in 2001, Kaluchak massacre in 2002, Indian Institute of Science was attacked in 2005, Mumbai train bombings in July 2006, Mumbai attack in 2008, Pathankot airstrike in 2016, Uri terror strike in 2016 and Pulwama suicide bombings in 2019, this continues," he said. "In context, I want to suggest to the PM to convene a special session of Parliament and hold discussion over this, because the coun-



Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal

FILE PHOTO

try is standing with you. The opposition is with you because it is an attack on India's sovereignty," the Independent Rajya Sabha MP said. Sibal said a resolution must be passed by Parliament unanimously to express the sentiment of the nation in front of the world that everyone is standing with the government and the country is together and will not tolerate such acts.

"A terrorist is a terrorist, is a terrorist, he has no religion. Pakistan wants to put forth its issues before the world through terrorism and thinks that its military system will stay in place," he said. Sibal also called for delegations of the ruling and Opposition MPs to be sent to countries

such as Africa, the US, Europe, China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and South America, so that "diplomatic pressure" is created. "We should tell all major nations who have trade with Pakistan that they cannot come to our market if they have trade with Pakistan. What the US does to other nations, do it, and the country will stand with you," the former Congress leader said. "We should present this point in every diplomatic initiative. The United Nations should create pressure. A resolution must be passed in the Security Council, and we should see whether China supports it or goes against it. We have to take these diplomatic initiatives," Sibal asserted. In the Parliament resolution, he said a message should be given against those who plays politics on terrorism.

"The statements being made in mainstream media are moving towards the direction Pakistan wants us to move. Does the mainstream media want to support Pakistan? Some BJP leaders are making statements and doing the same," he said. "Taking the life of an innocent be it of any religion you should not take political advantage of that. I agree with RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's statement that if you get together you will be heard," he said. Sibal also criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for not attending the all-party meeting on Thursday.

Social media posts reflect on service: New civil services guidelines

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

All recently selected civil service candidates have to be mindful that their social media posts reflect on the service and they should reject all forms of inducement such as gifts, hospitality, and free publicity, official guidelines issued on Friday stipulated.

Civil servants are the public face of the state and their conduct is under constant public scrutiny, it said.

"You must ensure that your personal conduct and official and social interface with the general public, people's representatives, corporate entities, civil society organisations, government personnel, all other dignitaries and vulnerable sections of the society is courteous, respectful, dignified and appropriate," read the guidelines issued by Mussoorie-based Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), a premier training institute for the civil servants.

The guidelines are meant for the candidates selected through the civil services examination 2024, the results of which were announced on Tuesday. As many as 1,009 candidates cleared that exam.

"As a future civil servant you are expected to be a role model throughout. Your past actions also will be a reflection of your character and personality throughout your career.

"You should start displaying exemplary conduct that befits an officer right from this day and not wait for your training to start. You will go on to occupy important positions in institutions of governance and public service delivery," it said.

Comments and any posts made or facilitated "by you on social media will also reflect on the service," the guidelines said. "Therefore, you should remain mindful, even at this stage, of avoiding posts that would or could defame the service or its members.

"Be diligent and judicious about posting content that could be considered unprofessional or inappropriate for an officer or member of service," it said.

One should, in particular, refrain from impulsively posting statements on social media, the guidelines said.

"Pause and reflect on the possible impact of what you are going to post. Rather, it is advisable to avoid posting any content lest it may lead to misinterpreta-

tion at an individual or institutional level," it added. The motto of the academy, 'Sheelam Param Bhushanam' — Character is the supreme embellishment — guides the officers and alumni to conduct themselves with integrity, dignity, humility and rectitude at all times, the guidelines said, adding that their "inner conscience is the best way to go forward" and that these dos and donts "can be a good start."

The guidelines, issued by the LBSNAA Director Sriram Taranikanti also said the candidates are expected to abstain from consuming any intoxicant substances in public

"The credibility of an officer is decided by his or her integrity, a timeless virtue. It is important to keep a diligent account of financial issues and reject all forms of inducement such as gifts and hospitality and free publicity. In this context care has to be taken that your success is not leveraged inappropriately at any stage hereon,"

it said. The academy said that respect to women is central in Indian ethos and the bureaucrats must be gender-sensitive.

"You are expected to display the highest attitude of compassion, respectful engagement and fraternal behavior while expressing your viewpoint without hurting the sentiments of others.

"Courteous and dignified behavior is expected not just within the academy but also outside the academy while dealing with the public at large," the guidelines said.

According to it, the soon-to-be bureaucrats are expected to follow civic manners like following traffic rules, not littering, spitting in public spaces, and follow personal hygiene like turning out well-groomed and dressed appropriately.

The guidelines, issued by the LBSNAA Director Sriram Taranikanti, said the candidates are expected to abstain from consuming any intoxicant substances in public. "It is essential to know clearly the conduct rules and instructions in this regard," it added. The candidates have also been advised to maintain punctuality.

"Respecting the time of others is very crucial. Do not cause any inconvenience

to others in whatsoever manner," the document said.

The academy said it is also good to familiarise the immediate family members with the cultural norms of the service.

"Care should be taken to maintain high levels of morality in your personal lives also. Sober, modest, culturally appropriate clothes befitting the occasion (formal, informal, traditional etc) should always be preferred," the guidelines said.

The academy said that in its curriculum, it promotes the use of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) for improving the speed and quality of services delivered to the people.

"In this context the academy also encourages the ethical and productive use of technology and gadgets by the probationers for accessing and processing the information for effective learning outcomes.

"While social media may pervade several aspects of life, and the academy too recognises the value of social media and digital platforms in effective administration at an institutional level, any kind of social media that promotes self is strongly discouraged," it added.

Journalist-turned-IAS, Ruchika Jha secures AIR 51

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

From breaking news to cracking the UPSC Civil Services exam, Ruchika Jha's journalism background helped her master current affairs and develop a habit of deep thinking and reading.

Jha, who cleared the prestigious exam in her fifth attempt, bagging the 51st rank, is also an electronics engineer. However, it was during her stint at the PTI newsroom that she discovered a passion for serving the country.

While balancing the demanding newsroom job with studies was an arduous task, Jha used her free time and weekends to strengthen her foundation.

Speaking exclusively to media, Jha said, "My UPSC journey started in 2020 while I was working as a copy editor with the Press Trust of India. I had completed my

journalism diploma from the Indian Institute of Mass Communication (IIMC) and then joined the media industry. While working at PTI, I began preparing for the civil services.

"The idea of serving the country and working at the grassroots level inspired me. It was not easy to balance my job and studies, but I used my free time and weekends to build my foundation," she said.

Jha asserted that her journalism background helped her in preparation, as her daily rendezvous with news solidified her knowledge of current affairs.

"Every day, I had to read, edit, and publish news stories, which improved my understanding of current affairs and many important topics. It also helped me develop a habit of deep reading and thinking. PTI supported me throughout the journey, especially when I asked for a sabbatical to

focus more on studies. "I am thankful to my then colleagues for extending all the necessary support when I was working at PTI from November 2018 to April 2022. This was my fifth attempt and second interview. The journey had its ups and downs, but with hard work, patience and the support of my family, friends and former colleagues, I finally achieved my goal in 2025," she said.

Born and raised in Delhi, Jha's family hails from Bihar. "My father is a Chemistry teacher and has always inspired me with his discipline and dedication, while my mother is a homemaker who has been my biggest emotional support throughout this journey.

"My family's simple and hardworking background has always kept me grounded and motivated to work towards my goals," she said. Jha is among the 32 can-

didates from Jamia Millia Islamia's (JMI) Residential Coaching Academy (RCA) who have cleared the UPSC Civil Services Examination 2024, one of the most competitive exams in the country.

The Civil Services Examination is conducted in three stages — preliminary, mains and interview — to select officers for the IAS, IFS, IPS and other central services.

The preliminary exam was held on June 16, 2024, with 9,92,599 candidates applying and 5,83,213 appearing. A total of 14,627 candidates qualified for the main exam held in September, and 2,845 reached the interview stage, which was conducted from January 7 to April 17, 2025.

This year, the UPSC has recommended 1,009 candidates — 725 men and 284 women — for appointment to various services.

NHRC condemns Pahalgal terror attack, calls for action

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Friday condemned the Pahalgal terror attack and said the time has come to act against those indulging in terrorism, "directly or indirectly."

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) said it was "deeply disturbed" by the news of the terror attack, and hoped "the state will take all necessary steps to fix accountability" and "bring the perpetrators to justice."

In a statement, the rights body also said that the time has come to act against those who are "aiding, abetting, supporting and advancing terrorism and to hold them accountable for this menace against

humanity". Terrorists struck at a prime tourist location in Pahalgal in Anantnag district on Tuesday, killing at least 26 people, mostly tourists, and injuring several others. The NHRC said it "condemns the dastardly attack on the unarmed and unsuspecting innocent civilians who were on a holiday to the Valley".

The attack, the worst in the Valley since the 2019 Pulwama strike, has drawn condemnation from several countries, with top world leaders extending their solidarity to India and condolences to the victims' families. "The incident has shaken the conscience of every right thinking human being as a serious issue of violation of human rights of the innocent victims and their families," the NHRC said in the statement.

Girls outshine boys in UP Board

HARI OM ■ Prayagraj

In a historic achievement for the Uttar Pradesh Madhyamik Shiksha Parishad (UPMSP), the results for the 2025 High School and Intermediate board examinations were declared on Friday — just 43 days after the final paper was conducted. This swift declaration marks one of the fastest result turn-arounds in the state's educational history.

The overall pass percentage for High School students stood at 90.11 per cent, while Intermediate students registered a pass rate of 81.15 per cent. Once again, girls have outperformed boys in both categories, continuing a consistent trend over recent years. In High School, girls surpassed boys by a margin of 7.21 per cent, and in Intermediate, the gap widened to 9.77 per cent.

In terms of individual performance, Yash Pratap Singh of Late Raskendri Devi Inter College, Umri (Jalaun district), topped the High School exam with an impressive 97.83 per cent score. In Intermediate, the top position was secured by Mehak Jaiswal of Bacha Ram Yadav Inter College, Bhulai Ka Pura (Prayagraj district), who scored 97.20 per cent.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath congratulated all successful students and lauded



Students taking selfie in Prayagraj after the Uttar Pradesh Board declared class 12 result PTI

the efforts of the education department. “The prompt and transparent result declaration is a testament to the state's commitment to educational excellence,” the Chief Minister said in a statement, adding that the students' achievements would inspire many others across the state.

The results were announced by Director of Secondary Education Mahendra Dev

and UP Board Secretary Bhagwati Singh, who highlighted the extensive planning and technological integration behind this year's exams. The examinations were conducted between February 24 and March 12 across 8,140 centres. Answer sheets were evaluated from March 19 to April 2 at 261 designated centres, where 92,594 teachers assessed High School papers and 56,066

evaluated Intermediate scripts. Officials credited CM Yogi's directives for ensuring a smooth, fair, and cheating-free examination process. The practical exams for Intermediate students were held earlier in two phases from February 1 to 21.

A closer look at the numbers reveals that a total of 25,45,815 students appeared in the High School exams - 13,27,024 boys and 12,18,791 girls. Out of these, 22,94,122 students cleared the exam. In the Intermediate category, 25,98,560 students appeared, including 13,87,263 boys and 12,11,297 girls, with 21,08,774 passing the exam. In a noteworthy development, inmates from jails across the state also participated in the exams and recorded impressive results. Of the 94 inmates who appeared for the High School exam, 91 passed, registering a pass percentage of 96.81 per cent. Similarly, 105 inmates appeared for the Intermediate exam, with 91 successfully clearing it, resulting in a pass rate of 86.67 per cent.

The UP Board's achievement in conducting and evaluating such a massive examination process in record time, while ensuring transparency and fairness, reflects the impact of administrative reforms and use of technology in the state's education system.

Terrorism to be addressed by humanity in unison: Dhankar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Udhagamandalam (Tamil Nadu)

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankar said on Friday that the Pahalgam terror attack was a grim reminder that terrorism is a global menace that needs to be addressed by humanity in unison.

He also appealed to the people to rise above political, personal and other interests to prioritise national interest.

Bharat, he said was the world's most peace loving nation and her civilisation ethos reflected in ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ (the doctrine that sees the world as a family) was getting global resonance.

“We observed silence at the commencement of this conference. I join the nation in expressing profound grief and outrage at the heinous attack in Pahalgam that claimed innocent lives,” the Vice President said speaking at the inaugural session of the two-day Vice Chancellors conference of state, central, and private universities of Tamil Nadu at the Raj Bhavan, Udhagamandalam.

Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi, and

Vice Chancellors joined the Vice President in observing a minute's silence in memory of those killed in the Pahalgam terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir on April 22.

The visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was in his third term, was our greatest assurance that a nation's rise cannot be handicapped by any situation, internal or external. “But

I join the nation in expressing profound grief and outrage at the heinous attack in Pahalgam that claimed innocent lives

— JAGDEEP DHANKAR, VICE PRESIDENT

we all have to bear in mind that national interest is supreme,” he said quoting BR Ambedkar.

Dhankar stressed the need to always keep national interest which cannot be intertwined with partisan interest, uppermost. “It cannot be subservient to other interests, political, personal or for a group. It was with this spirit that we observed silence,” he said.

Widespread protests erupt across Lucknow

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

Widespread protests erupted across the city on Friday as members of the Muslim community, deeply aggrieved by the recent terrorist attack on tourists in Pahalgam, Kashmir, expressed their anger and grief. After the Friday congregational prayers, demonstrators burned the Pakistani flag and raised strong demands to declare Pakistan and Israel as terrorist nations. Prayers were offered in mosques for peace across the country, including Kashmir, and for an end to terrorism.

The protests, marked by black bands and slogans against terrorism, were led by prominent clerics and witnessed significant participation from the community. Protesters called for national unity and communal harmony to defeat what they termed Pakistan's “sinister conspiracy” to divide Hindus and Muslims.

celebrated the killing of civilians and emphasised that “the pain of death is the same for all, regardless of religion or geography.” His speech ended with a strong demand to label both Pakistan and Israel as terrorist states.

The demonstration at Telee Wali Masjid was equally powerful, with a large number of worshippers attending while wearing black armbands. After the prayers, Imam Maulana Fazle Mannan Rahmani led a solemn two-minute silence in memory of the slain tourists. He said, “No religion justifies the killing of innocent lives. We demand the harshest punishment for those responsible for the Pahalgam killings.”

The protests, marked by black bands and slogans against terrorism, were led by prominent clerics and witnessed significant participation from the community

At the forefront of the protest held at the historic Asifi Mosque in Bada Imambara, General Secretary of the Majlis-e-Ulma-e-Hind, Maulana Syed Kalbe Jawad Naqvi, launched a scathing attack on Pakistan, referring to it as “Papist.” He said, “The statements coming from Pakistan clearly indicate their intent to spark conflict between Hindus and Muslims. But we will foil their conspiracy by promoting mutual love and unity.”

Maulana Kalbe Jawad further added, “Anyone — Hindu or Muslim — who tries to spread hatred is acting as an agent of Pakistan. The terrorists who killed the tourists were not Muslims. The real Muslims were the Kashmiri youth who risked their lives to save the victims.”

He also questioned the security arrangements in Pahalgam, suggesting a failure in intelligence and protection. On the Gaza conflict, he condemned those who

Shia cleric Maulana Kalbe Sibtain Noori, son of the late Dr. Kalbe Sadiq, also took part in the protest and delivered a fiery address. He said, “It is high time we launch direct attacks on terror camps operating in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Innocent Muslims are being wrongly targeted after the Pahalgam incident. Those spreading hatred are enemies of India and of both Hindus and Muslims.”

Prominent clerics including Maulana Sartaj Haider, Maulana Raza Hussain, and Maulana Adil Faraz were present during the protest. The unified message from all religious leaders was clear: terrorism has no religion, and unity is the only way to counter divisive forces. The demonstrations concluded with a call for peace, national integrity, and resolute action against terrorism in all its forms.

Kerala bids final farewell to attack victim N Ramachandran

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kochi

Under a grey April sky, grief hung heavy over Changampuzha Park, Edappally, on Thursday morning. A sea of mourners — across politics, professions, and generations — gathered in silence to bid a final farewell to N Ramachandran (65), who was killed in the Pahalgam terror attack. His last rites were conducted with full state honours.

Emotional scenes unfolded as his body was kept for public homage at Changampuzha Park and later at his residence. The body, brought from a private hospital mortuary, arrived at the park around 7 am. Accompanied by grieving relatives and close friends, it was placed for public homage, marking a sombre morning in the heart of Kochi.

As mourners gathered, many softly chanted the universal prayer “Loka Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu” (may all beings everywhere be happy). A steady stream of people paid their respects for



Wife, Sheela (left) and daughter Aarti pay their last respects to N Ramachandran on Friday PTI

about four hours, some offering flowers, and others folding their hands in silence. Many consoled his wife, Sheela, daughter Arathi R Menon, and son Suresh Menon. Kerala Governor Rajendra Arlekar, Goa Governor PS Sreedharan Pillai, Union Minister Suresh Gopi, Kerala

Industries Minister P Rajeev, Leader of Opposition VD Satheesan, Kochi Mayor M Anilkumar, Ernakulam Collector NSK Umesh, actor Jayasurya, Kerala High Court Judge Devan Ramachandran and others paid their respects.

At 10 am, as the crowd grew, the body

was moved to his residence on Mangattu Road, Edappally, where friends, neighbours, and well-wishers awaited with tearful eyes and heavy hearts. As Ramachandran's final journey began around noon, the air echoed with chants of “Bharat Mata Ki Jai”, “Ramachandran Amar Rahe”, and “Namallem Onnanne” (We are one)—an acknowledgement of a life cut short by terror, but remembered with dignity and gratitude.

Hundreds joined the solemn procession that ended at the Santhikavadam crematorium, Edappally. The cremation, conducted with full state honours at around 1 pm, was marked by quiet dignity and public solidarity.

His son Suresh lit the pyre. A condolence meeting followed at Changampuzha Park. Later, a steady stream of visitors continued to Ramachandran's home. Higher Education Minister R Bindu, former minister PK Sreemathi, and filmmaker Major Ravi were among those who offered condolences.

Five dead, three injured in rice mill explosion in UP

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ BAHRAICH

In a tragic industrial accident early on Friday morning, five workers lost their lives and three others sustained critical injuries after a rice mill dryer exploded in Bahraich district of Uttar Pradesh. The blast, which occurred around 7 am, led to a fire that engulfed the premises in thick smoke, causing chaos and panic among the workers present.

According to the eyewitnesses, 15 to 17 labourers were working inside the mill when the dryer suddenly exploded while paddy was being dried. The explosion triggered a fire, followed by heavy smoke, which quickly filled the entire mill.

Several workers lost consciousness due to suffocation and began collapsing.

Hearing cries for help, local residents rushed to the site and started rescue operations. The injured were carried out from the smoke-filled building and transported to the district hospital. Chief Medical Superintendent MM Tripathi confirmed that eight unconscious workers were brought in, of whom five were declared dead on arrival. The remaining three, in critical condition, were referred to the medical college for advanced treatment.

District Magistrate Monica Rani, who reached the spot soon after the incident, said the accident took place during paddy-drying operations. She confirmed

that an inquiry had been launched to determine what led to the explosion.

Lavkush, a survivor and a resident of Shravasti, described the terrifying moments inside the mill. He said that they were drying paddy when the dryer suddenly exploded. The resulting fire and smoke caused many to collapse. He managed to escape and called nearby villagers for help, who then assisted in evacuating the injured.

The deceased workers were identified as Gaffar Ali, aged 40; Bablu, aged 28; Rajnesh, aged 35 and a resident of Kannauj; Hur, aged 50 from Shravasti; and Bittu Shah, aged 30 from Bihar. The three critically injured — Sukhdev, Devi Prasad, and Surendra Shukla — continue to

receive treatment at the medical college's emergency department.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has expressed deep sorrow over the incident and conveyed his condolences to the families of the victims. He directed district officials to ensure that the injured receive the best possible medical care and called for a detailed report on the cause of the explosion. The CM also emphasised the need to examine safety protocols in such industrial establishments to prevent future tragedies.

As investigations proceed, the incident has stirred public concern over the safety standards maintained in rice mills and small-scale industrial units, particularly those handling combustible materials like paddy husk and grain dust.

Pahalgam terror attack murder of humanity, says Kerala Governor

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kochi

Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar on Friday said here that the terror attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam was the “murder of humanity” and the terrorists were trying to “wipe out” all the work done by the Central government there in the last few years. Arlekar also said that in the current circumstances citizens of India need to stand together as a nation, in an apparent reference to criticisms of security lapses from some quarters, including the Congress and the CPI(M).

Goa Governor PS Sreedharan Pillai also expressed a similar view. He said that the entire nation needs to stand together to face such challenges and terror activities like this will be seen as a war against the nation and dealt with accordingly.

MLA among six arrested in Assam for posts on Pahalgam: Chief Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

At least six people, including an opposition MLA, have been arrested across Assam for their alleged pro-Pakistan stand following the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Friday.

Of the six, four were held on Friday while two including the legislator were arrested the previous day.

Sarma said the Assam Police is carrying out an operation against people commenting in favour of Pakistan and more arrests are likely in the coming period.

“Assam will not tolerate any individual who, directly or indirectly, supports or defends Pakistan in connection with the heinous attack in Pahalgam,” he said in a post on X.

Sharing the names, Sarma said the six individuals were arrested by police for directly or indirectly promoting the cause of Pakistan on social media.

Out of the apprehended people, two were from Silchar in Cachar district, and one each, from Hailakandi, Morigaon, Nagaon and Sivasagar, he added.

“Further arrests are underway as part of our ongoing crackdown,” the chief minister stated.

On Thursday, two people were arrested -- AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam and one student of Assam University in Silchar.

The opposition legislator Islam was also arrested on sedition charges for allegedly defending Pakistan and its complicity in the Pahalgam terror attack, Sarma had said during a press meet.

An Assam University student has been arrested by Cachar Police based on a complaint alleging the use of inflammatory and communally inciting content on social media regarding the Pahalgam



terror attack, a senior official said on Friday. “He is currently in police custody and will be produced before a court in due course. We are investigating the matter,” he added.

The student was arrested after the Assam University unit of Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) filed a complaint. ABVP sources said the accused, a student pursuing a computer science course in the varsity, had made a post on Facebook on Wednesday, allegedly using abusive and derogatory language against certain individuals, including ABVP members, for their stand against the Pahalgam terror attack.

The post by the accused is no longer available on the social media platform. In a later post, the student has tendered his

apology and claimed he did not intend to offend anyone.

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

In a separate post, he said, “A terrorist is a terrorist, no matter what he says. But when his faith becomes his gun and hate becomes his way. When he believes his religion tells him who to fight, He turns his cruelty into a cause — and calls it faith and right.”

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

Operation against Naxals in Chhattisgarh enters fifth day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Raipur

A massive operation against Naxalites involving about 10,000 security personnel in a hilly region along the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border continued for the fifth day on Friday, a senior official said.

It is believed that some 500 cadres of the banned CPI (Maoist) including top leaders are holed up in the area, and Telangana Police are assisting in the exercise, said the official who is monitoring the action on the ground.

The operation, one of biggest counter-insurgency actions launched in the Bastar region, involves personnel of different units including the District Reserve Guard, Bastar Fighters and Special Task Force of the Chhattisgarh police, the Central Reserve Police Force and its elite Commando Battalions for Resolute Action (CoBRA).

On Thursday, three women Naxalites were killed on Karregutta hills, and a huge cache of weapons, explosives and other materials was recovered. The operation was launched on Monday in the densely forested hills of Karregutta and Durgamgutta along the inter-state border.

Parts of the area fall in the Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh, over 450 km away from state capital Raipur. It is believed to be the base of the PLGA (People's Liberation Guerilla Army) battalion No 1, the strongest military formation of the Maoists, an official said. Intelligence inputs suggest more than 500 Naxalites belonging to PLGA battalion No 1, Telangana state committee and Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee of Maoists led by senior Maoists such as Hidma and Damodar are holed up in the area, he said. “It is a crucial operation because it would be a battle to finish off the military strength of outlawed CPI

(Maoists) by targeting PLGA battalion no 1 and the Maoists think tank in Dandakaranya special zonal committee (DKSZC) and Telangana state Committee,” the official said.

On Thursday, though the bodies of three Naxalites were recovered, many more might have been killed or seriously injured in the gunfight, he said, adding the entire area has been cordoned off. “This operation is like a Test cricket match. It would last long and we would not get very exciting news in every session. But at the end of the match, we are hopeful of very favourable result,” the official said.

It is believed that some 500 cadres of the banned CPI (Maoist) including top leaders are holed up in the area, and Telangana Police are assisting in the exercise

All stakeholders of Centre, Chhattisgarh government and neighbouring states are directly or indirectly involved in this operation, he said. “So far, all our troops are safe. No problems except for the hardship of tough terrain and hot summer. But the morale of the troops is high,” he said.

Helicopters and drones are being used in the operation, the official added. As per sources, some jawans involved in the operation were shifted to hospital after they suffered dehydration and heat-stroke. The security forces have killed more than 350 Naxalites in a string of encounters, mostly centred in the Bastar region, since January last year.

As many as 18 Naxalites, including 11 women, were killed in twin encounters in Bastar region on March 29.

Editor's TAKE

Lessons from Chernobyl disaster

Its remembrance day is a stark reminder of nuclear perils and human resilience

Every year on April 26, the world pauses to commemorate International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day, honouring the victims of one of the gravest nuclear catastrophes in human history. It is not just a day of remembrance, but also a solemn call for vigilance — against the potential hazards of nuclear power and the far-reaching consequences when things go wrong. On April 26, 1986, Reactor No 4 of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, located in what is now Ukraine, exploded during a late-night safety test gone wrong.

The blast released radioactive material across much of the western Soviet Union, affecting territories now known as Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. Nearly 8.4 million people were exposed to high levels of radiation, with long-term effects on their health, environment, and livelihoods.

What made Chernobyl particularly harrowing was not just the scale of the disaster but also the delayed and inadequate response. The Soviet Government did not request international help until 1990, four years after the explosion, acknowledging only then the need for global cooperation in managing the fallout.

History records only two instances where nuclear explosions directly led to large-scale human casualties: the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and the industrial disaster at Chernobyl in 1986. While the former were acts of war, Chernobyl was a stark reminder that nuclear technology, even in peaceful applications, can spiral into catastrophe without stringent oversight and safety protocols. Both events left indelible scars on humanity and taught us one crucial lesson: nuclear power is not merely a technological marvel — it is a profound responsibility.

In response to the disaster, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 45/190 in 1990, launching a global movement to mitigate the consequences of the explosion.

Over the years, more than 230 projects have been implemented in health, nuclear safety, environmental restoration, clean food production, and education. In 2002, the UN changed its approach, focusing not only on humanitarian aid but also on long-term sustainable development. Agencies such as the UNDP led regional recovery efforts in Belarus, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation.

The launch of the International Chernobyl Research and Information Network (ICRIN) in 2009 further reinforced this developmental vision. Perhaps the most symbolic milestone was the 2019 completion and handover of the New Safe Confinement, a \$2.2 billion engineering marvel built to encase the damaged reactor. Funded by over 45 nations, it stands as a global symbol of what international cooperation can achieve in the name of safety.

Technological advancements have significantly improved nuclear safety since 1986. Modern reactors are equipped with passive safety systems, improved materials, and fail — safes that automatically shut down operations during emergencies. International regulatory bodies have also tightened oversight, ensuring higher standards for reactor design, operation, and waste management. Yet, the core truth remains: no system is immune to human error, natural disasters, or unforeseen technical failures.

As the world grapples with climate change and searches for clean energy alternatives, nuclear power is once again in the spotlight. While it offers low-carbon energy, it also carries high risks — making it imperative that caution, transparency, and global cooperation remain the cornerstones of nuclear development.

International Chernobyl Disaster Remembrance Day is not only about looking back; it's about ensuring we never repeat the mistakes of the past. It's about remembering the lives affected, the lessons learned, and the enduring message: with great power comes great responsibility — especially when that power lies in the nucleus of the atom. Let us honour this day by committing to a future where nuclear technology is wielded wisely, ethically, and with the utmost respect for life and the planet.

A crime against humanity

As India reels from the horror, pahalgam massacre underscores the persistent threat of cross-border terror, the fragility of peace in Jammu and Kashmir, and the urgent need for a robust national and global response

In the deadliest terror attack on civilians in the country since the Mumbai mayhem of 26/11, a picturesque meadow near Jammu & Kashmir's Pahalgam, which is the most — loved tourist destination and mini-Switzerland of India, was marred by a heart-wrenching act of perpetrators who brutally cut short innocent lives, leaving the consciousness of the nation stirred and the entire community devastated.

The ghastly and barbaric attack was not merely aimed at tourists or individuals; rather, it is seen as an assault and atrocity on humanity that has shattered the subtle fabric of cohesive society, as the terrorists selectively killed innocent people point-blank only after identifying their religion (Hindu).

It appears that they have tried to create inflammatory narratives in India, which is currently fending off the kerfuffle caused by the Waqf Bill and communally charged Aurangzeb rhetoric.

The Resistance Front (TRF), a splinter group of the Pakistan — based Lashkar-e-Taiba, is suspected of orchestrating Tuesday's terrorist attack in Pahalgam's Baisaran, which claimed 26 lives. The timing of the Pahalgam meadow massacre exposes the nefarious modus operandi of Pakistan, which has been the biggest enemy of normalcy in the Valley.

The assaults were carried out when Prime Minister Modi was visiting Jeddah for diplomatic engagement and bilateral talks to boost the centuries — old economic and socio-cultural ties between India and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The attack unfolded while US Vice President JD Vance's ongoing four — day visit to India marked an important milestone for the diplomatic push to deepen bilateral dialogues during Trump's trade tariff global gung — ho.

The Pahalgam terror attack, which mirrors former US President Bill Clinton's 2000 trip to India when LeT carried out a Sikh massacre in Chittisinghpura in Anantnag district of J&K, could be seen in the backdrop of US President Donald Trump's reluctance to entertain Pakistan's Kashmir clamour.

The Pahalgam incident took place exactly a week after Pakistan's army chief Asim Munir made the most provocative comments filled with anti-India rants and called Kashmir Pakistan's "jugular vein." Pakistan, which currently represents hunger, poverty, extremism, terrorism, and economic decline — is at a crossroads as its military is reported to be facing the fire of inter-



RAMAKANT CHAUDHARY

caused great concern for China, which has significantly invested in several projects, including energy, transport, and infrastructure, in Pakistan. Pakistan's failure to engage with tribal communities has fuelled the growth of armed separatist groups, targeting security forces, Chinese interests, and migrant workers.

The growing alienation of the population, driven by the denial of democratic and economic rights, has fuelled anger, especially among the youth.

The brutal attack on tourists, which rarely happened even during the heydays of militancy in the Valley, vividly shows the frustration and desperation of Pakistan-based terror outfits.

The barbaric attack happened just ahead of the Amarnath Yatra, which attracts huge

numbers of Hindu tourists and pilgrims. The perpetrators aimed at blunting the sole growing tourist-based economy of J&K and tried to dismantle the perception that the Valley is steadily marching towards stabilisation after the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019.

With peace limping back to the Valley in the face of a slump in terror attacks in the Valley, lakhs of tourists have made a beeline to the Valley. It prompted huge investment in the region to win the hearts of tourists.

As tulips bloom and tourism booms — this year Srinagar has witnessed huge footfalls of domestic and international tourists. The growing tourism endorses the success saga of the Government and the engagement of locals and Kashmiri youths for harvesting income, heralding normalcy in the Valley. So, the attack on tourism was the obvious choice of militants and "Mullahs."

The Government response must be befitting and multi-dimensional to give a tight lesson to evil minds.

The Pahalgam attack is the biggest since the Pulwama attack of 2019 in terms of casualties. India's past retaliatory actions are still echoing. The Uri surgical strikes (2016) and Balakot airstrikes (2019) have formed the foundation of India's punitive responses. In its full-scale diplomatic retaliation, the PM

Modi Government took a strong stand: Keeping the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 in Abeyance, Shutting off Attari Integrated Check Post, Stopping of SAARC Visa Scheme for Pakistanis, Cutting of High Commission Strength to 30, and Declaration of Military Advisors in the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi Persona Non-Grata. India's military response to the Pahalgam attack appears to be another defining moment in the turbulent history of Kashmir and could add a new chapter in dealing with terrorism.

A swift and strategic response will not only deter future attacks but also reinforce India's commitment to safeguarding its citizens and restoring peace in the Valley.

By addressing the root causes of unrest and strengthening security measures, India can ensure that such heinous acts do not derail the progress towards stability and prosperity in Jammu & Kashmir.

It is pertinent to mention a famous quote of Kofi Annan to end terrorism: "The only way to deal with the scourge of terrorism is to address its root causes and unite against it with unwavering resolve."

(The author works with PRP Group as Content Head. Views are personal)

Towards economy with a conscience

SECOND Opinion

BY RAJYOGI BRAHMKUMAR NIKUNJJI

During the last two decades or so there has been a growing trend towards globalisation of trade and commerce and a free-market economy. The academic economists believe that these steps would give a spurt to forces of competitiveness, efficiency, better job opportunities and generation of more wealth and prosperity.

But one has to take into account not just these benefits but also the overall consequences of globalisation and the free play of market forces. As everyone knows, globalisation is only a small bit of economic philosophy or policy and one must know the all-inclusive worldview or philosophy of which it forms a part. Without viewing it in the full context, one may have an erroneous view of it.

Like, the globalisation of business and trade without a global view of society as a global family would lead to social tensions and economic strife and this is what we are experiencing today.

Also, globalisation in economics is an outward-looking view and if it has no corresponding inward — looking view, it would unleash bitter competition and in the absence of the inward-looking balancing forces, it would lead to stark materialism and commercialism, diminishing or setting at nought the values of sympathy, kindness, compassion, world-brotherhood,

co-operation and so on. Thus, it would not only destabilise the financial markets but create disharmony in human relations as well. Moreover, it's a known fact that capital tends to flow from countries that have free — market economies to other countries where it has a better chance of profit by employing cheap labour, available resources, etc., whereas labour does not find it as easy to go to places where it has better prospects because labour has emotional ties with family and is affected by family circumstances.

Thus, due to better mobility and flexibility of capital in contrast to that of labour, international portfolio investors, and not the labour, would benefit the most.

Thus, globalisation would result in disproportionate profit to those who can invest capital and it would lead to uneven distribution of benefits and social and economic deprivation. Further, in a free-market economy, every player in the manufacturing sector would tend to drive others out of the market and thus competition would grow and stiffen and the financial markets, which are inherently unstable, would accentuate instability.

Thus, the whole economy would never return to some kind of equilibrium. In this state of instability, the business and industrial class would tend to adopt all sorts of unfair means to prevent any dwindling of its profit and, thus, the whole atmosphere would be vitiated, for the portfolio investors would try to take the politicians and the bureaucrats also with them to survive or thrive.

This would further give rise to corruption, black money and other evils. Thus, it is strange that our leaders talk of moral

values on the one hand and of globalisation on the other hand without making any efforts to make popular a global spiritual view of society as a global family. One can see that the major economic powers today dominate the multilateral trading system. They define and redefine globalisation to suit their national interests. This leads to clashes of interests and instability. Again, to assess the merits or demerits of a system, one should also go into the ideological base of a policy and take notice of its consequences.

We should ask ourselves the question as to why we want a free-market economy or a state — controlled one. We should be clear in our mind about our desirable goal and see whether a particular form of economy takes us towards that goal. If our goal is to remove poverty and great economic disparity and to have a society based on economic justice and fair play, then we should sort out whether globalisation or a state-controlled economy can do it better.

This should be judged by those who are neutral and have no vested interests in either form of economy. So, if in the present world situation, we must have globalisation, then we should have a global open society that has some sort of state control in certain sectors and constantly strives to correct and improve. In any case, a happy blend of economics and spirituality — both based on values — is necessary and, in the process of decision-making, involvement of such institutions as are neutral would be beneficial.

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

Leaderspeak



The whole country is with the bereaved families. The Government is trying its best to ensure the well-being of those injured. Someone has lost a son, someone has lost a brother, someone has lost life partner... From Kargil to Kanyakumari, there is grief and rage. This attack was not just on innocent tourists; the country's enemies have shown the audacity to attack India's soul.

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

Letters to the Editor

A selfless act of a pony operator

Madam — I wish to pay my heartfelt tribute to Syed Adil Hussain Shah, the 30-year-old pony operator who displayed unimaginable bravery during the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam.

Adil selflessly attempted to shield tourists he had escorted to Baisaran Meadow, ultimately losing his life in the process. Reports state he even tried to snatch a weapon from one of the terrorists before being shot thrice in the chest. His sacrifice is both heroic and heartbreaking. In a time marred by religious polarisation, Adil's actions remind us of the innate goodness and humanity that transcends faith. He stands as a beacon of courage and compassion — proof that heroism knows no religion. While extremists attempt to divide us along communal lines, Adil's martyrdom reaffirms the simple truth: humanity is our greatest religion. It is often said that a terrorist has no religion. But those who die protecting others, regardless of the victims' faiths, show us what it means to truly embody divine values.

In contrast, religious zealots who push a narrative of "our god versus their god" only undermine the very essence of spirituality. Adil's story deserves national recognition. Let us remember him not just as a brave man from Pahalgam, but as a true son of India. We must amplify such stories of unity and courage, and let them shape the discourse of our nation.

SUJIT DEJ | KOLKATA

Bullish sentiment reflects optimism

Madam — The Indian stock market witnessed a remarkable upswing on April 24, 2025, with the BSE Sensex closing at 74,339.44 — an increase of 486.50 points (0.66 per cent). The NSE Nifty too mirrored this surge, climbing 167.95 points (0.75 per cent) to settle at 22,570.35.

The momentum was largely driven by robust performances in the banking, financial, and metal sectors. Investor sentiment appears buoyant, with consistent buying indicating renewed faith in India's macroeconomic outlook.

Analysts attribute this positive trend to multiple factors: stable inflation rates, proactive fiscal policies, and strong corporate earnings. Foreign investment has also shown encouraging signs, reflecting global confidence in India's economic resilience. These gains are not just numbers — they signify broader economic stability and the potential for sustained growth.

A bullish market often translates into increased consumer and business confidence, spurring spending, job creation, and infrastructural development.

However, while optimism is warranted, it's essential to remain cautious and well-informed. Markets can be volatile, and policy decisions — both domestic and international — can influence future trends. Nevertheless, this surge offers a promising indicator for investors and the economy at large.

AAMIR ZAMAN | MUMBAI

An urgent appeal against rising hate

Madam — It is deeply distressing to witness the growing atmosphere of hostility and organised propaganda against minorities, particularly Muslims, in our country. As the world's largest democracy, India should be a model of co-existence and inclusivity.

Unfortunately, a segment of political and ideological forces seems determined to distort this legacy. Every day, Muslims are subjected to suspicion, hate, and vilification — under the guise of nationalism, patriotism, or allegations of extremism. These narratives are often propagated through media, political rhetoric, and social platforms, creating an environment of fear and alienation. The consequences are grave: rising intolerance, social division, and the erosion of communal harmony.

Such developments are a betrayal of India's constitutional ideals and its centuries-old tradition of unity in diversity. When citizens are targeted based on their faith, we do not just harm the targeted community — we weaken the fabric of the nation itself.

I urge your esteemed platform to bring attention to this pressing issue. The public must be made aware of these undercurrents of hate, so they can reject the politics of division and stand up for truth and justice. Only by confronting these challenges together can we ensure that India remains a truly secular and democratic republic.

OMAR FARUQUE MONDAL | GOALPARA

PAHALGAM ATTACK: A NATION'S ANGUISH DEMANDS STRONG ACTION

This is in reference to the headlines and editorial on the Pahalgam tragedy (April 24). The entire nation is engulfed in grief and anger over this horrific attack.

While diplomatic steps such as suspending the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, shutting down the Attari check post, withdrawing from the SAARC visa exemption scheme, recalling our diplomats, and asking Pakistani officials to leave are substantial in the long term, they fall short of addressing the immediate public outrage and sorrow. The statements of sympathy from Islamic nations to the victims' families seem, as always, perfunctory and lack meaningful substance.

These symbolic gestures do little to shake or impact Pakistan. The Jammu and Kashmir Government must accept accountability for this grave security lapse. Inviting tourists without ensuring their safety is a betrayal of trust. The popular Baisaran Valley, often referred to as "Mini Switzerland," attracts scores of tourists.

Yet, had there been adequate police or paramilitary deployment along the route, this tragedy could likely have been prevented.

Tourists were left vulnerable, ferried on ponies through remote and risky paths by pony operators, many of whom are reportedly insensitive to the needs of travellers. It is time the Government reconsidered promoting Jammu and Kashmir as a safe tourist destination.

The Northeast, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Odisha offer equally, if not more, breathtaking views without the shadow of constant threat.

More symbolic gestures — candle marches, market closures, and all-party condemnations — are not enough. It calls for another surgical strike across the nation, but the question remains — have previous strikes served as a deterrent? The public deserves justice, not platitudes.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

Building a new world economic order

A new, multipolar economic order is taking shape, led by nations like India, whose demographic strength, resource wealth, and deeply rooted ethos of fairness position it as a key architect of a more just and sustainable global economy

FIRST Column



ic growth of these countries through the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century could not be matched by the economically saturated and stagnating first-world block, WTO and a set of trade rules thereunder, like GATT and TRIPS, were established.

But these also could not give the intended growth impetus to the first-world block, because of the working of immanent natural laws of economics.

It is time again today to look at the above natural laws. The capitalistic, debt-based model of growth is unnatural and unsustainable. The plunder or exploitation-based model is inhuman and naturally unsustainable too.

The world is staring at a new economic order because of the changing power equations across

the globe. Today, military and industrial technology is not the sole preserve of the designated first-world nations of the twentieth century.

China, India, Brazil, and Iran are some of the ex — third-world countries that, besides being resource-rich, also have industrial and military technologies.

China and India possess nuclear arsenals, and even Iran is on its way to acquiring nuclear capability. So, neither military might nor economic might of the erstwhile powers can sustain the old world economic order.

The mammoth debt of China, pegged at 300 per cent of GDP, and of the USA, estimated at 36 trillion US dollars (more than 100 per cent of its GDP), is already showing its detrimental effects in both these countries, evidenced by the economic recession, inflation, and unemployment.

The Belt and Road initiative of China has landed in a quandary, and WTO rules are being thrown to the winds by the Trump administration in the USA.

The new world economic order will, inex-

orably, see the decline and demise of the US dollar as the dominant currency and the emergence of a multiple — currency basket for trade.

The natural laws of economics are manifesting their work in the resurgence of India, and there seems to be no stopping the slow-stepped elephant after the dragon in its neighbour seems to have fagged out.

The unique positive naturally endowed features of India are its plentiful, productive Human Resources and its economically strategic agro-climatic location along with its rich mineral resources.

Today, this country is mostly free from exploitative interference and arm-twisting by global powers and is poised for rapid take-off to become a developed nation.

The new economic order will, therefore, inevitably, see a strong economic resurgence of the Indian subcontinent, regression of the euro-zone countries, and a relatively slow growth of Latin American and African countries. The latter will pick up growth led by a resurgent India in the years and decades to come.

The Indian subcontinent, in its growth and development journey, will not indulge in the exploitation of the smaller and weaker states, unlike its colonial masters and their new avatars. It is not in the DNA of India to invade, conquer, and plunder other nations.

The Indian ethos underlines the philosophy of 'live and let live' instead of 'survival of the fittest'. That is another area where India is different and unique.

In conclusion, the global economic landscape is undergoing a profound transformation driven by the unsustainability of a debt-fuelled, capitalist model and the waning dominance of the US dollar.

The era of Western economic hegemony — rooted in military might, exploitative trade practices, and the artificial supremacy of fiat currency — is rapidly eroding. Emerging economies like India, China, Brazil, and Iran, rich in resources and technological capabilities, are reshaping the balance of power.

Among these, India stands uniquely poised for sustained and inclusive growth, bolstered by its demographic advantage, strategic location, and ethical economic philosophy.

As the global order pivots toward a multi — currency trading system and more equitable partnerships, India's non-imperial ethos positions it as a natural leader in the evolving economic era.

The new world economy will not just be about wealth accumulation but about fairness, sustainability, and mutual progress — principles deeply embedded in India's civilisational values. A future rooted in cooperation, not domination, is now within reach.

(The writer is a management consultant based in New Delhi. Views are personal)

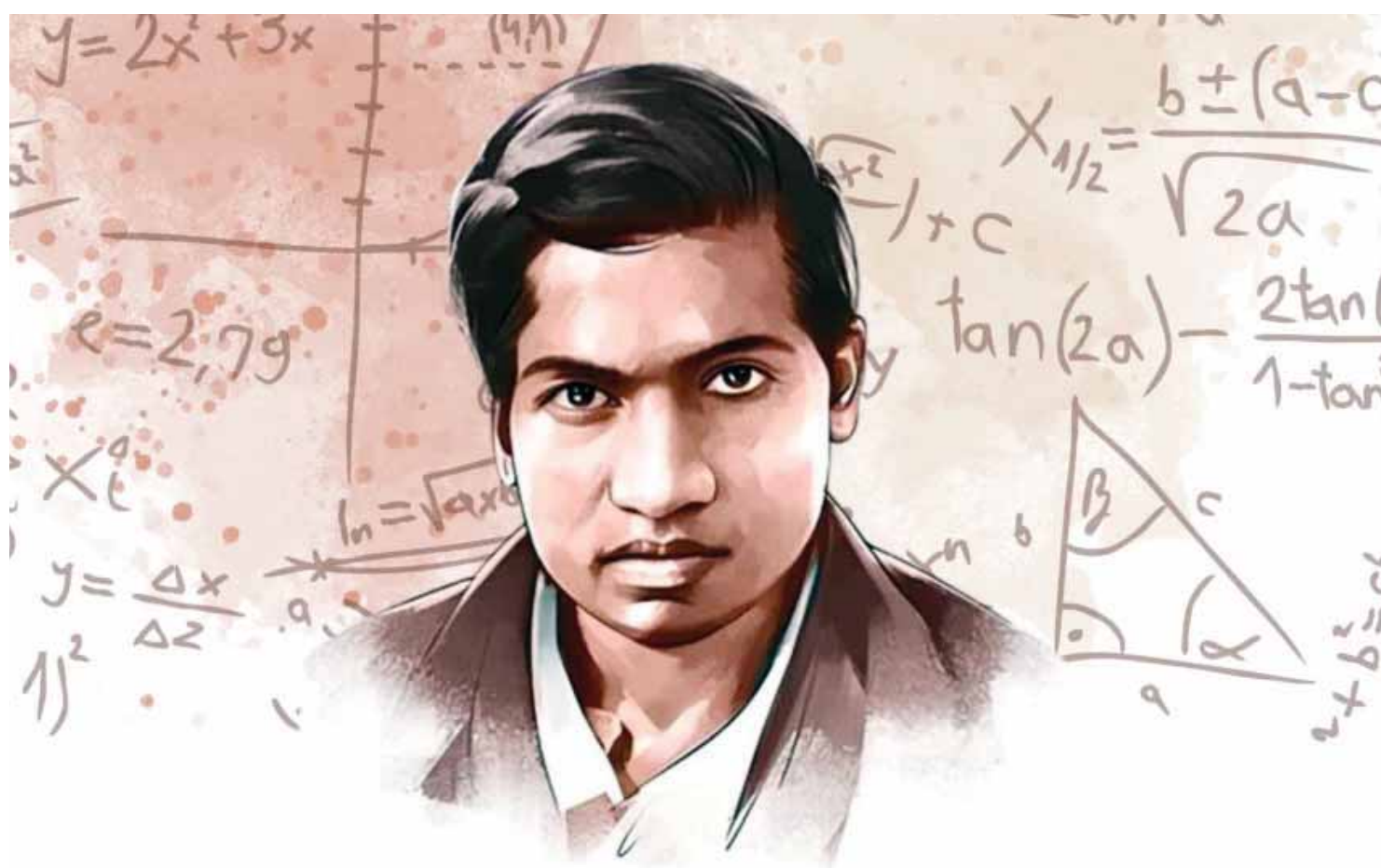


ATUL SEHGAL

MILITARY MIGHT CREATED POLITICAL HEGEMONY AND THIS GRADUALLY TRANSFORMED INTO ECONOMIC HEGEMONY THROUGH ONE-SIDED TRADE RULES THAT PERPETUATED THE POVERTY OF THIRD-WORLD COUNTRIES AND FURTHER ENRICHED THE FIRST-WORLD COUNTRIES

Ramanujan: Eternal lamp in the temple of mathematics

On April 26, 1920, the nation lost Srinivasa Ramanujan a rare mathematical genius. His mathematical consciousness illuminated the world for eternity. This is not merely his death anniversary; it is a celebration of a saint — like devotee of numbers who elevated mathematics to the realms of philosophy and the divine



RK JAIN ARJEET

mathematics is beyond the human mind; it is divine inspiration." Ramanujan was invited to Cambridge, and his collaboration with Hardy sparked a revolution in mathematics. The Hardy — Ramanujan formula on the distribution of prime numbers, along with their other contributions, are considered monumental achievements.

Ramanujan's greatest legacy lies in his notebooks — thousands of formulas, many without proofs, that took mathematicians decades to fully understand.

His mock theta functions, penned during his final days, baffled mathematicians for nearly a

century but are now essential in quantum physics and string theory.

His contributions to the Riemann zeta function continue to influence research on one of mathematics' most profound mysteries — the Riemann Hypothesis.

Yet, Ramanujan's journey was not without immense struggle. At Cambridge, he battled cultural isolation, dietary challenges, and the harsh English climate. Diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1917, his health deteriorated, and he returned to India in 1919.

Just a year later, on April 26, 1920, at the age of 32, he passed away in Kumbakonam. But though his mortal life ended, his spirit lives on through his work.

The discovery of his "Lost Notebook" in 1976 reignited excitement and opened new doors in mathematical research. Ramanujan's influence goes far beyond mathematics. His story is a bea-

con for dreamers and doers who dare to rise above adversity. In 1987, India marked his birth centenary by declaring it National Mathematics Year. His legacy continues in the world's top institutions, and his life inspired Robert Kanigell's biography The Man Who Knew Infinity, later adapted into a global film.

In his honour, December 22 is now celebrated as National Mathematics Day in India. Ramanujan's life is proof that genius needs no degree, wealth, or privilege. His journey is a testament to passion, faith, and the boundless potential of the human mind. His discoveries not only advanced science but also revealed a deep philosophical truth — that within each of us lies the power to touch the infinite.

Today, as we remember him on April 26, we do more than pay tribute — we renew our commitment to nurturing the spark within us. Like Ramanujan, may we turn our dreams into devotion. Equations may evolve and theorems may change, but there will never be another Ramanujan.

He is the eternal lamp in the temple of mathematics — forever radiant. His legacy is not India's alone — it belongs to all of humanity. As long as numbers are written and equations are solved, Ramanujan will remain immortal — a soul who touched infinity and offered its light to the world.

Srinivasa Ramanujan was not just a mathematician — he was a visionary who transformed numbers into a divine language. On April 26, we don't just mourn his passing; we celebrate a life that elevated mathematics into art, spirituality, and cosmic truth.

Despite humble beginnings and relentless hardships, his passion and genius blazed trails that continue to shape modern science.

His discoveries — ranging from infinite series to mock theta functions — remain cornerstones of mathematics, physics, and beyond. Ramanujan's journey proves that brilliance needs neither privilege nor pedigree.

His life is a testament to what the human spirit can achieve with faith, curiosity, and devotion. Today, his legacy lights the path for dreamers, thinkers, and seekers of truth across the world. As we remember him, we also honour the infinite potential within us all.

Ramanujan lives on, not just in equations, but in the eternal quest for knowledge he so passionately embodied. He is, and always will be, mathematics' guiding flame.

(The writer is a columnist and a blogger. Views are personal)

FROM A YOUNG AGE, NUMBERS WERE HIS COMPANIONS AND HIS PLAYGROUND. WHILE OTHER CHILDREN PLAYED WITH TOYS, HE DELVED DEEP INTO THE MYSTERIES OF MATHEMATICS

Dignitaries gather for Pope's funeral

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Vatican City

Heads of state and royalty will start converging on Rome on Friday for the funeral of Pope Francis in the Vatican's St Peter's Square, but the group of poor people who will meet his casket in a small crosstown basilica are more in keeping with Francis' humble persona and disdain for pomp.

US President Donald Trump and Argentine President Javier Milei are among the leaders arriving Friday, the last day Argentine pope will lie in state in St Peter's Basilica before his coffin is sealed in the evening in preparation for his funeral Saturday. The Vatican said 130 delegations are confirmed, including 50 heads of state and 10 reigning sovereigns.



Faithful gather for a prayer for Pope Francis at the St John Lateran Basilica in Rome

PTI

Paying respects

Tens of thousands of mourners have waited hours in line to bid farewell to Francis, who died Monday after suffering a stroke at the age of 88.

A higher-than-expected turnout prompted the Vatican to extend the basilica's opening hours overnight.

By Friday morning, more than 128,000 people had filed past Francis' open coffin placed in front of the basilica's main altar to pay their respects.

Mourners filed past at times praying, at times holding smart phones aloft — despite instructions not to — for a photo of the late pontiff laid out in red robes, a bishop's pointed miter and a rosary entwined in his hands.

St. Peter's Basilica remained open most of the second night, closing for just a few hours. Mourners began arriving before dawn, and sprinted into the piazza when security reopened the flows.

Giovanni Guarino drove from Naples with his girlfriend to make their final

farewells to the Francis, moved by his work to help the young and disadvantaged.

"I hope that his successor follows the footsteps of Francis," Guarino said.

The three days of public viewing are scheduled to end at 7pm.

On Friday, after which Francis simple wooden coffin will be sealed. Cardinal Kevin Farrell will preside over the closing and sealing of the coffin in his role of camerlengo, or interim Vatican administrator. A white cloth will be placed over the pope's face, and a bag containing coins minted during his papacy will be put in the coffin along with a one-page written account of his papacy.

We will see each other again

Roman neighbours and retired flight attendants, Aurelia Ballarini, 72, and Francesca Codato, 78, arrived to pay respects to Pope Francis on Friday for different reasons. Ballarini, grappling with grief, mourns the pope's death, which has left a void in her life. Though only 16 years younger than Francis, she saw him as a grandfather figure, starting each morning

by logging onto Facebook to receive his daily greeting and respond with a few words. Codato, however, sought forgiveness.

"He gave everything, all of himself, until the end," said Ballarini, expressing her sorrow. "I spent the last two days crying. I couldn't even say the word after his passing. For me, he flew away. One day, we'll meet again." Codato, feeling immense guilt for forsaking Francis in favour of St. John Paul II, admitted,

"He was an outsider to me when he became pope." She now feels guilty after watching videos revealing Francis' deep humanity and closeness to ordinary people. "I came to ask for forgiveness, because I feel like a worm toward him," she said.

Cardinals are in discussions

The work of the conclave to choose a new pope won't start until at least May 5, after nine days of public mourning.

Cardinals have been also arriving in Rome, with 113 meeting Thursday morning to discuss church business. They will meet again Friday before taking a

break for the weekend. Cardinal François-Xavier Bustillo, who hosted Pope Francis during his last papal trip, to Corsica, last year, remembered Francis as "a free man" who "humanised the church without desecrating it".

He describe the atmosphere inside the meetings as "good", but said they were not yet "at the point of decisions; we are in discussions".

Papal burial

In keeping with Francis' embrace of the marginalised, the Vatican said a group of poor and needy people will meet the pope's coffin to pay homage to him when it arrives at St Mary Major basilica for burial on Saturday. It has already become a point of pilgrimage.

The tomb is being prepared behind a wooden barrier within the basilica that he chose to be near an icon of the Madonna that he revered and often prayed before, especially during moments of solitude.

Photos released by the Vatican on Friday show the marble tombstone flat against the pavement, with the simple engraving in Latin that he requested in his last testament: "Franciscus"

Royals and leaders

Trump, accompanied by First Lady Melania Trump, is set to arrive on Friday, after Pope Francis' coffin has been sealed.

Other confirmed foreign dignitaries attending the papal funeral include Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and First Lady Olena Zelenska, French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Prince William, Spain's King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, alongside several high-ranking Vatican officials.

Wildlife gradually returns to Eaton fire burn area

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Los Angeles

Behind the remains of a town scorched by fire, the foothills are lush with new green and filled with birdsong.

Wildlife is returning to the Eaton Fire burn area and scientists are closely tracking it four months after the Los Angeles area wildfires tore through the Angeles National Forest and destroyed hundreds of homes and businesses in Altadena. Trail cameras installed by a group of volunteers documented the first mountain lion back in the area March 26. It was seen again as recently as two nights ago. "My first inclination was to share that to people who have lost so much during this fire and our community in Altadena, because it's a sign of hope that nature's returning, that nature's resilient," said Kristen Ochoa, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, medical school leading the effort.

Ochoa, a long-time resident of Southern California, first began documenting the plants and animals that live in the area known as the Chaney Trail Corridor in July 2024.

She founded the Chaney Trail Corridor Project and began uploading observations on iNaturalist, a volunteer-driven network of naturalists and citizen scientists that maps and shares documentation of biodiversity across the globe. Located right behind Altadena, with a trailhead only 1.6 kilometers up the road from neighborhoods that were decimated during the fires, the privately owned area adjacent to Angeles National Forest land was slated for sale and development into a sports complex. Ochoa and other volunteers set up a

network of trail cameras to showcase the biodiversity of the area and take "inventory of everything that was valuable."

Much of the land was charred and barren after the fires, and the group also lost all of its cameras, watching as photos of the flames were transmitted before they went dark. But less than two months after the start of the fires, Ochoa was able to go back out and install new ones to start documenting the landscape's recovery.

"The thing I really remember is coming here right after the fire — there was so much birdsong," Ochoa said.

Many volunteers with the group are local residents who lost their homes and have told Ochoa that witnessing nature's recovery in the area has brought hope to them as well. While the fires were intense, they burned unevenly, leaving patches of trees and a small oasis of greenery around a stream untouched, providing refuge for animals.

Although no deceased animals have been found, reports mentioned an injured bear and deer. Heavy rain following the fires aided recovery. On a recent morning, Ochoa pointed out charred San Gabriel oak trees, sprouting green growth around their bases due to their deep root systems. An invasive bloom of yellow mustard flowers has spread, potentially crowding out native plants like California sagebrush and wild cucumber, a food source for ground squirrels. The group is collaborating with UCLA scientists to study how bats and birds have fared post-fire. While setting up a trail camera, Ochoa noted bobcat scat and fresh deer tracks, with two red-tailed hawks performing a mating ritual overhead.

Pakistan Senate firmly rejects India's allegation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

Amid growing tensions between India and Pakistan, the Senate of Pakistan on Friday adopted a resolution firmly rejecting what it described as India's "frivolous and baseless attempts" to associate Pakistan with the recent terror attack in Pahalgam.

The attack, which occurred on Tuesday in the Pahalgam area of Indian-administered Kashmir, claimed the lives of 26 individuals, most of whom were tourists.

The Resistance Front (TRF), widely considered a proxy of the banned Pakistan-based terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba, claimed responsibility for the assault. The resolution was presented by Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar and received unanimous backing from all political parties represented in the upper house of Parliament. The text of the resolution underlined that Pakistan remains "fully capable and prepared" to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the face of any aggression, including acts of "water terrorism" or military provocation.

While rejecting any link to the Pahalgam attack, the resolution stated that the targeting of innocent civilians was entirely against the values and principles upheld by Pakistan. It went on to denounce what it termed "an orchestrated and mala fide campaign" launched by the Indian government to defame Pakistan, accusing New Delhi of consistently exploiting terrorism-related incidents for narrow, domestic political gains. The resolution further criticised India's recent decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty, calling the move a provocation that amounts to "an act of war".

The treaty, signed decades ago to manage water-sharing between the two nations, has long served as a rare example of

cooperation amid otherwise strained bilateral relations. In his address to the Senate, Deputy Prime Minister Dar informed lawmakers that the Foreign Office had briefed diplomats from 26 countries regarding the developing regional situation. He reiterated that Pakistan's armed forces are fully prepared to counter any form of Indian aggression, and warned that any military misadventure would be met with a robust and proportionate response, similar to past instances, firmly underscoring the nation's unwavering commitment to defending its sovereignty and national interest.

While rejecting any link to the Pahalgam attack, the resolution stated that the targeting of innocent civilians was entirely against the values and principles upheld by Pakistan

The resolution followed a high-level National Security Committee (NSC) meeting on Thursday, during which Pakistan's top civilian and military leadership decided to put the Simla Agreement and other bilateral arrangements with India on hold. The NSC also resolved to suspend all trade with India and to close Pakistani airspace to Indian carriers, reflecting a significant escalation in bilateral tensions.

Additionally, the Pakistani government urged India to stop engaging in a "reflexive blame game" and to refrain from the "cynical, staged, managed exploitation" of events such as the Pahalgam attack in pursuit of its narrow political objectives. Meanwhile, the Indian government announced a series of retaliatory steps against Pakistan on Wednesday.

'Crimea will stay with Russia', Trump on Ukraine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kyiv

US President Donald Trump said in an interview published on Friday that "Crimea will stay with Russia," the latest example of the US leader pressuring Ukraine to make concessions to end the war while it remains under siege. "Zelenskyy understands that," Trump said, referring to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "and everybody understands that it's been with them for a long time."

The US president made the comments in a Time magazine interview conducted on Tuesday. Trump has been accusing Zelenskyy of prolonging the war by resisting negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Crimea is a strategic peninsula along the Black Sea in southern Ukraine. It was seized by Russia in 2014, while US



President Barack Obama was in office, years before the full-scale invasion that began in 2022.

"They've had their submarines there for long before any period that we're talking about, for many years. The people speak largely Russian in Crimea," Trump said.

"But this was given by Obama. This wasn't given by Trump."

Meanwhile, Russia has continued its bombardment. A drone struck an apartment building in a southeastern Ukraine city, killing three people and injuring 10 others, officials said Friday, a day after

Trump rebuked Russia's leader for a deadly missile and drone attack on Kyiv. A child and a 76-year-old woman were among the civilians killed in the nighttime drone strike in Pavlohrad, in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region, the head of the regional administration, Serhii Lysak, wrote on Telegram.

Russian forces fired 103 Shahed and decoy drones at five Ukrainian regions overnight, Ukraine's air force reported. Authorities in the northeastern Sumy and Kharkiv regions reported damage to civilian infrastructure but no casualties.

The war could be approaching a pivotal moment as the Trump administration weighs its options. Senior US officials have warned that the administration could soon give up attempts to stop the war if the two sides do not come to an agreement. That could potentially mean a halt of crucial US military aid for Ukraine.

Houthi rebels shoots down seven US Reaper drones in six weeks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

In under six weeks, Houthi rebels in Yemen have successfully shot down seven US MQ-9 Reaper drones, resulting in aircraft losses exceeding \$200 million — one of the most significant costs incurred by the Pentagon in its ongoing campaign against the Iran-backed group. According to US Defence officials, three of the drones were downed just in the past week, indicating an apparent improvement in the Houthis' ability to target American drones operating over Yemen. The drones were carrying out surveillance missions or attack operations when they were brought down, crashing both on land and in the sea.

The escalation follows President Donald Trump's March 15 directive to intensify US military strikes against the Houthis. Trump pledged to apply "over-

whelming lethal force" until the group halts attacks on vessels traversing a vital maritime corridor. Since then, the US has conducted over 750 strikes. A defense official noted that while hostile fire is the likely cause of the drone losses, investigations are ongoing. The official added that heightened US strike activity increases the risk to American aircraft, but emphasized that the US would take all necessary measures to protect its forces and assets in the region.

Each Reaper drone, built by General Atomics, costs approximately \$30 million and is capable of flying at altitudes exceeding 12,100 meters. Houthi leaders have publicly celebrated their success in striking the drones. One defense official listed drone losses on March 31 and April 3, 9, 13, 18, 19, and 22.

Meanwhile, concerns are mounting in the US Senate over potential civilian casu-

alties caused by the strikes. Democratic Senators Chris Van Hollen, Elizabeth Warren, and Tim Kaine recently wrote to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, questioning whether the administration is neglecting obligations to mitigate civilian harm. They specifically cited reports suggesting over 70 civilians may have died in a recent US strike on the Ras Isa fuel terminal.

Alongside drone attacks, the Houthis have launched persistent missile and one-way drone strikes at US naval vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, though none have hit their targets. In response, the US has deployed warships, jets, bombers, and drones, with aircraft now launching from two Navy carriers, the USS Harry S Truman in the Red Sea and the USS Carl Vinson in the Gulf of Aden.

Defense Secretary Hegseth, who earlier extended the Truman's deployment, is considering another extension following

a request from US Central Command. The Navy remains cautious, as prolonged carrier deployments disrupt maintenance schedules and affect sailors' time at home. Last year, the USS Dwight D Eisenhower had to remain in the region for an extended deployment during intense naval clashes — the most sustained since World War II. The Houthis, citing solidarity with Hamas amid the Gaza conflict, have escalated attacks on commercial shipping.

Between November 2023 and January 2024, they targeted over 100 merchant ships with missiles and drones, sinking two and killing four sailors, significantly impacting vital international trade through the Red Sea — a strategic corridor that typically sees \$1 trillion in annual commerce and supports livelihoods across multiple continents, including supply chains for food, energy, and medicine.

India advocates technology democratisation, offers DPI global collaboration

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nations

India said it is expanding its Digital Public Infrastructure ecosystem into areas such as agriculture and smart cities and stands ready to share successes with the international community, as UN leaders commended the country for its leadership in investing in this domain.

Minister of State for the Ministry of Commerce & Industry and the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, Jitin Prasada, said that the Indian DPI success story is a showcase to the world.

"DPI is all about empowering citizens, good governance, inclusive and sustainable growth at the societal level.

The future will not be built by machines alone but by the choices we make about how technology serves humanity," Prasada said in his keynote address at the event organised by India's Permanent Mission to the UN at the world body's headquarters on Thursday.

Prasada added that looking forward, India is expanding its DPI ecosystem into agriculture, logistics, smart cities and more. "The next wave will prioritise privacy and data protection, digital skilling and literacy, cross-border DPI partnerships, sustainability and resilience.

Artificial Intelligence is going to be a force multiplier for DPI. India is deploying AI, keeping in mind our philosophy

of serving the last person at the bottom of the pyramid," he said.

Prasada said that India believes that technology must be democratised, made inclusive, affordable and advance human dignity. "That is what India's digital public infrastructure represents," he said.

President of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly, Philemon Yang, commended India on the success of its digital transformation and leadership in investing in digital public infrastructure.

"I commend India on the success of its digital transformation and leadership in investing in digital public infrastructure. Indeed, digital public infrastructure holds the key to inclusion in the global digital society. And these technologies are evolving at breakneck speed," he said at the special event titled "Empowering the Digital Citizen of the Future: Towards an Integrated Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)." Yang added that digital technologies are impacting every aspect of human life and are transforming economies, reducing costs, opening new doors to education and healthcare, and empowering citizens like never before.

"In India, for example, it means 'anywhere access' to 'anytime vaccination' for any registered pregnant woman or child across the country," he said.

Yang noted that he was "privileged" to see the U-WIN digital initiative himself



earlier this year and voiced appreciation for what happens when digital public infrastructure and women and girls are at the heart of the digital revolution.

"These technologies hold vast potential to unleash progress across the Sustainable Development Goals," he said.

India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched the U-WIN (Universal Immunisation Win) that streamlines the entire process of vaccination services.

Prasada added that the DPI scales, serves and saves. It is not infrastructure for

a few, but it is an architecture for many.

"A global public good. The world is taking note," he said, adding that over 18 countries are exploring or adopting India's DPI — from Singapore integrating UPI to Sierra Leone piloting digital ID, and DPI elevated to a global agenda at the G20.

He said India is pushing for greater representation of the global south in AI discourse.

"The digital citizen of the future must not be a consumer of technology, but a co-creator of equity... India stands ready to col-

laborate by sharing its DPIs," Prasada said, adding that India's DPI proves that development can be fast, fair and frictionless. "When inclusion is coded into design, exclusion becomes obsolete. Let us work to build a world where digital dignity is a right, not a privilege."

India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador P Harish, said that with the launch of Digital India in 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has implemented several unique digital transformational projects.

He highlighted Aadhaar, Unified Payments Interface, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana as well as the Jan Dhan Yojana-Aadhaar-Mobile the so-called JAM Trinity initiative that linked 540 million Jan Dhan bank accounts, with Aadhaar cards, and mobile phone numbers to facilitate Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs) of government subsidies to needy citizens, ushering in the world's largest financial inclusion programme and reducing leakages and corruption.

Harish stressed that AI is redefining Indian agriculture by enhancing productivity, optimising resource use, and improving decision-making for 200 million farmers. "Our digital citizens of the future deserve an integrated Digital Public Infrastructure aided by AI systems, so that no one is digitally left behind.

Our duty is to work for that, and in such

an endeavour, India is a friend and partner of choice for all, especially the Global South," he said. Under-Secretary-General and UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Digital and Emerging Technologies Amandeep Singh Gill said that India's experiment with DPIs is a "model" and also lauded examples from other regions like Brazil, Southeast Asia, and Africa. "We now have enough evidence that DPIs work. They work at scale and they work in a deeply transformative manner," Gill said. Gill added that "we are looking at how interoperability across DPIs can improve intra-regional, inter-regional trade and scale for digital entrepreneurs."

"There is great potential in these challenging times when global trade is under pressure to build resilience and intra-regional scale for entrepreneurs by linking together DPIs and by reimagining them, by building them in more of an interoperable way," Gill added.

The event featured a presentation by Founding CTO of Aadhaar and CEO of Khosla Labs Srikanth Nadhamuni on how India is leveraging artificial intelligence to enhance the impact of its DPI and highlighted that India's inclusive approach to AI and DPI — built as global digital public goods — can serve as a transformative model for countries, offering innovative solutions for sectors like healthcare, education, and agriculture.

'Will support India,' says Tulsi Gabbard

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York/Washington

US Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard on Friday said America stands with India as it hunts down those responsible for the heinous Pahalgam attack that killed 26 Hindus. The State Department too said the US stands with India and called for Pahalgam attack perpetrators to be brought to justice.

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

"We stand in solidarity with India in the wake of the horrific Islamist terrorist attack, targeting and killing 26 Hindus in Pahalgam," Gabbard said in a post on X.

"My prayers and deepest sympathies are with those who lost a loved one, PM @narendramodi, and with all the people of India. We are with you and support you as you hunt down those responsible for this heinous attack," she said. Earlier on Wednesday, US President Donald Trump strongly condemned the terror attack in Pahalgam in a phone call with Prime Minister Modi and expressed full support to India to bring to justice the perpetrators of the "heinous attack".

On Thursday, State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce said, "As President (Donald) Trump and Secretary (Marco) Rubio have made clear, the United States stands with India, strongly condemns all acts of terrorism."

"We pray for the lives of those lost and for the recovery of the injured and call for the perpetrators of this heinous act to be brought to justice," Bruce added. Responding to a question on whether the US sees Pakistan as potentially being behind the attack and if Washington is playing any role in trying to de-escalate tensions between the two South Asian nations, Bruce said the issue was highlighted due to the severity of the situation but added that no further comment would be made at this time.

"What I can tell you is, of course, as we all know, it's a rapidly changing situation and we are monitoring it closely, as you might imagine. And we, of course, are not now taking a position on the status of Kashmir or of Jammu either, so that's really going to be the extent of what I can say today."

When asked if President Donald Trump had offered to mediate between India and Pakistan in his first term, she said, "I'm not going to be remarking... As I mentioned." Meanwhile, Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, who had been nominated by US President Donald Trump to be the US ambassador to the United Nations, said America is deeply saddened by the horrific mass terror attack in Kashmir, India.

Public notice regarding the sale of property belonging to Mr. Akram Ahmed Siddiqui and Mrs. Afshan Siddiqui.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS logo and CHANGE OF NAME header.

Notice regarding the change of name of the daughter of Mr. SACHIN DHALL (Advocate) to Akansha Dev.

LOST & FOUND header.

Notice regarding the lost original Sale Deed of Mrs. DARSHNA DEVI, wife of LATE MUKESH KUMAR.

CLIX HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED notice regarding the securitization and reconstruction of financial assets.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding the sale of property belonging to Sh. Vikas Kalra.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding the Director Town & Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh's approval for land transfer.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding the signature of the Director Town & Country Planning, Haryana, Chandigarh.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding the sale of property belonging to Mrs. Manoj Kumar Tripathi and Mrs. Sunita Tripathi.

Verka notice regarding the Punjab State Cooperative Milk Producers Federation Ltd. e-tenders.

Chief Engineer, Uttarakhand Rural Roads Development Agency, notice regarding the PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA (PMGSY).

ARMY PUBLIC SCHOOL, SRINAGAR notice regarding the recruitment of staff and website information.

PUBLIC NOTICE regarding the recruitment of a Relation Manager at IIM Ranchi.

DELHI TRANSCO LIMITED NOTICE INVITING e-TENDERS for the supply of 220kV D/C U/G 1200 Sq.mm XLPE Cable.

SUPREME HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED notice regarding the securitization and reconstruction of financial assets.

Chief Engineer, Uttarakhand Rural Roads Development Agency, notice regarding the PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA (PMGSY).

Chief Engineer, Uttarakhand Rural Roads Development Agency, notice regarding the PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA (PMGSY).

Chief Engineer, Uttarakhand Rural Roads Development Agency, notice regarding the PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA (PMGSY).

NORTHERN RAILWAY Open E-Tender Notice for the supply of 220kV D/C U/G 1200 Sq.mm XLPE Cable.

Manabhavn Home Finance India Private Limited (Company) notice regarding the public notice.

राष्ट्रीय प्रतिस्पर्धात्मक निविदा (e-tendering) notice for the supply of 220kV D/C U/G 1200 Sq.mm XLPE Cable.

NERES XVI POWER TRANSMISSION LIMITED notice regarding the CORE - 4, SCOPE COMPLEX 7, LODHI ROAD, DELHI, SOUTH DELHI, INDIA 110003.

ARMY PUBLIC SCHOOL, SRINAGAR notice regarding the recruitment of staff and website information.

Aim for higher production: Goyal to steel industry

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said the target of achieving 500 million tonnes (MT) of steel production is a 'sub-optimal' one and the industry should aim for a higher target amid increasing per capita consumption of the metal in the country. The minister was delivering his keynote address at the 6th edition of Steel India 2025 event, hosted jointly by the Ministry of Steel and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci), which started on Thursday.

'Clearly 500 million tonnes (of steel production) is a sub-optimal target. We should, I think, aspire to go up to the level of our nearest competitor. And why can we not aspire to be the world's largest manufacturer of steel by 2047,' Goyal exhorted the industry.

Referring to the steel industry as the 'backbone' of the country's economy, the minister emphasised the crucial role of steel in the nation's journey toward becoming a developed and prosperous country. Steel is an essential component in nearly every sector of life, be it shipping, shipbuilding, railways, defence, automobiles, infrastructure across the country, it is there in every walk of life,' he said.



Union Minister Piyush Goyal

FILE PHOTO

The minister also urged for continued growth and innovation, questioning if the country should be satisfied with its current status.

He emphasised the need for collective action within the steel sector to further elevate India's position on the global stage. Stressing the potential for expanding steel's use in new sectors, particularly in the construction of prefabricated buildings,

he pointed out that many developed nations have adopted precast prefabricated building structures and suggested that India should consider introducing such practices, especially in urban areas.

While acknowledging that prefabricated buildings may initially be more expensive, Goyal proposed that the steel industry invest in research and development (R and D) to minimise the cost differences.

Government notifies rules for GST Appellate Tribunals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The government has notified the Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (Procedure) Rules, which provide for mandatory e-filing of applications and conducting hearings in a hybrid mode.

The rules also provide that any urgent matter filed by an applicant before 12:00 noon shall be listed before the Appellate Tribunal on the following working day, if the application is complete in all respects.

In exceptional cases, the application may be received after 12:00 noon but before 3:00 pm for listing on the following day, with the specific permission of the Appellate Tribunal or President.

The benches of GSTAT, a crucial body for resolving GST-related disputes, would sit from 10:30 am to 01:30 pm and from 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm, subject to any order made by the President.

The administrative offices of the Appellate Tribunal will remain open on all working days from 9:30 am to 6:00 pm, according to the Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (Procedure) Rules, 2025.

In May last year, the government had appointed Justice (Retd) Sanjaya Kumar Mishra as the first President of the GST Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT).

Mishra was a former Chief Justice of the Jharkhand High Court and selected by a Search-cum-Selection Committee headed by the Chief Justice of India.

The GSTAT is the Appellate Authority established under the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017, to hear various appeals under the said Act and the respective State/Union Territories GST Acts against the orders of the first appellate authority. It consists of a principal bench and various state benches. As per the approval of the GST Council, the government has notified the Principal Bench, to be located in New Delhi, and 31 state benches at various locations across the country. The process for the appointment of judicial members and technical members is already in progress.

The tribunal will ensure swift, fair, judicious and effective resolution to GST disputes, besides significantly reducing the burden on higher courts.

The establishment of the GSTAT would further enhance the effectiveness of the GST system in India and foster a more transparent and efficient tax environment in the country.

Senior Partner at AMRG & Associates, Rajat Mohan, said, with a total of 11 Chapters, 70 Rules, and 4 Statutory Forms, this legal framework covers the full procedural and administrative life-cycle of GSTAT appeals.

UK's carbon storage project HyNet gets green light

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The UK government has given green light to a major carbon storage project, where Essar Energy Transition (EET) will play an anchor role, EET said on Friday.

The North Sea Transition Authority (NSTA) has granted Eni three carbon storage permits for the Liverpool Bay CCS, a CO2 transportation and storage system designed to support the HyNet industrial cluster. It will capture CO2 from major industrial emitters in north-west England and north Wales. Phase one of HyNet aims to store 109 million tonnes of CO2 in the East Irish Sea, 20 miles off the coast of Liverpool, over the course of 25 years - equivalent to removing 60.1 million cars from the road for a year.

'EET congratulates Eni and the UK Government on achieving financial close on the core carbon transport and storage project of the HyNet Industrial Cluster (the Liverpool Bay CCS). We are delighted that Eni's construction phase will now begin on the infrastructure enabling HyNet; vital to massive reductions in carbon emissions and enabling much needed investment, protecting and growing jobs and industries across North West England and North Wales,' it said in a statement.

EET's Hydrogen Production Plant (HPP1) project is one of the four initial projects that will provide carbon to this infrastructure for permanent storage. HPP1 is expected to be the UK's first large scale low-carbon hydrogen production plant with a capacity of 350 MW and capturing some 600,000 tonnes of CO2 per annum - equivalent to taking 125,000 cars off the road.

EET's Stanlow Manufacturing Complex is located at the heart of HyNet, anchored by the EET Fuel's refinery which is a major offtake and enabler of HPP1.

EET's projects are transforming Stanlow into a world-leading energy transition hub that can capture around 2 million tonnes of carbon from the refinery through its wider decarbonisation programme, which includes electrification and carbon capture, as well as further Hydrogen Production Plant (HPP2) and development of Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF).

India could grow at 6.5 per cent in FY26: EY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Indian economy could grow at 6.5 per cent in the current fiscal as lower prices of crude oil are expected to ease inflationary pressure and support domestic growth, despite intensifying global trade tensions, EY said on Friday.

The 'EY Economy Watch' report for April identifies four key interlinked effects which would have a bearing on India's growth - reduced exports, global slowdown, falling crude oil prices, and the impact of global excess production capacities. 'With suitable fiscal and monetary policies, India may be able to sustain a real GDP growth at about 6.5 per cent in FY26 as also in the medium term, while maintaining a CPI inflation below 4 per cent.'

'We also expect global crude prices to remain in the range of \$ 60-65/bbl in FY26, which may be to India's advantage,' EY India Chief Policy Advisor D K Srivastava said.

It said exports may slow due to higher tariffs and weakening global demand, but the overall GDP impact may be limited, given the subdued role of net exports in India's recent growth experience. Global slowdown may constrain growth worldwide, but India's relatively strong fiscal space and monetary flexibility provide scope for calibrated stimulus.

Excess production capacities in major exporting nations could lead to dumping risks, requiring India to consider targeted anti-dumping measures.

Falling crude oil prices dropping from \$ 75/bbl in early April to \$ 65/bbl by mid-month, and remaining within an expected range of \$ 60-65 during FY26, is expected to support domestic growth while easing inflationary pressures. 'India's response to these global disruptions must be strategic and multi-pronged. We see the potential for India to emerge relatively stronger, provided it continues to manage its macroeconomic fundamentals well through a growth-oriented fiscal policy and accommodative monetary stance,' Srivastava said.

EY Economy Watch suggests that India's short-term strategy could include switching part of its crude oil imports to the US thereby improving trade balance and lowering its reciprocal tariff rate.

A comprehensive bilateral trade agreement, expected by September-October 2025, could further enhance trade stability with the US.

From a medium to long-term perspective, the EY Economy Watch underscores the importance of accelerating reforms in land and labour, investing in education, skilling and emerging technologies like AI and GenAI, and expanding PLI coverage. The EY report also recommends that India should deepen trade ties with the UK, EU, and select regional partners.

'With proactive macroeconomic management and external sector realignment, India appears well-positioned to maintain growth momentum despite global headwinds,' the report said.

EY's India growth projections for 2025-26 are within the range of 6.2-6.7 per cent projected by global agencies. The economy is estimated to have grown at 6.5 per cent in the last fiscal (2024-25). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank project growth to be 6.2 per cent and 6.3 per cent, respectively in FY26.

While the RBI and S&P Global Ratings project FY26 growth at 6.5 per cent, the OECD and Fitch Ratings forecast GDP expansion at 6.4 per cent amid the ongoing tariff war and uncertainty over the US trade policy.

On April 2, US President Donald Trump had announced reciprocal tariffs or taxes on imports from other countries to match the duties levied by those countries on imports from the US.

On April 9, the US administration authorised a 90-day pause on the implementation of most reciprocal tariffs, reverting to a universal rate of 10 per cent on almost all targeted countries, while raising tariffs on most goods from China to 145 per cent. On April 16, the US further hiked tariffs on exports from China to 245 per cent.

Maruti Suzuki Q4 net profit dips 1 per cent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Auto major Maruti Suzuki India on Friday said its consolidated net profit declined by 1 per cent year-on-year to ₹3,911 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2025, on account of higher expenses.

The company's largest carmaker reported a net profit of ₹3,952 crore in the January-March quarter of FY24.

Total revenue increased to ₹40,920 crore in the March quarter last fiscal as compared with ₹38,471 crore in the year-ago period, Maruti Suzuki India (MSI) said in a regulatory filing.

The company said its total expenses during the fourth quarter rose to ₹37,585 crore against ₹34,624 crore in Q4 FY24, an increase of 8.5 per cent.

On a standalone basis, the company said its net profit declined to ₹3,711 crore as compared with ₹3,878 crore in the same

quarter a year ago. Net sales rose to ₹38,849 crore against ₹36,697 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The company said its sales stood at 6,04,635 units in the January-March period, the highest ever in any quarter.

The domestic sales grew by 3 per cent while exports grew by 8 per cent, resulting in an overall growth of 3.5 per cent, it added. Domestic sales stood at 5,19,546 units and exports at 85,089 units in the fourth quarter, the auto major stated.

For the full year ended March 31, 2025, the maker of models like Swift and Grand Vitara reported a consolidated net profit of ₹14,500 crore, up 7.5 per cent, as compared with ₹13,488 crore in 2023-24 fiscal. Revenue rose to ₹1,52,913 crore in FY25 on a consolidated basis against ₹1,41,858 crore in FY24.

On a standalone basis, the company said it achieved its all-time high net profit of

₹13,955 crore in FY25, up 6 per cent from ₹13,209 crore in FY24. Net sales rose to ₹1,45,115 crore last fiscal, a growth of 7.5 per cent over ₹1,34,938 crore in FY24.

Last fiscal, the carmaker said it sold a total of 22,34,266 vehicles during the last fiscal, comprising 19,01,681 units in the domestic market and 3,32,585 units in the export market.

MSI said it recorded its highest ever annual total sales and exports in FY25. The company continued to be the top exporter for the fourth consecutive year, now contributing nearly 43 per cent of total passenger vehicle exports from India.

It, however, noted that domestic market growth was quite muted in the last financial year.

'For the company, a modest domestic sales growth of 2.7 per cent was compensated by a healthy 17.5 per cent export growth, leading to an aggregate growth of 4.6 per cent for the year,' MSI said.

Assam CM, Norway discuss areas for future alliance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

Avenues for collaboration between Assam and Norway in sectors ranging from green energy to sustainable aviation fuel were explored in a meeting between Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the European nation's ambassador to India May-Elin Stener.

Elin Stener had met the Assam chief minister here on Thursday evening during a visit to the state. 'Pleased to have met @NorwayAmbIndia, H.E May-Elin Stener this evening.

We discussed a wide array of issues of common interest - Bio refinery, green ammonia, etc and explored possible collaboration between Norway and Assam in areas of green energy and other emerging sectors,' Sarma said in a social media post.

Another post by the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said the discussions focused on areas of mutual interest such as bio-refinery, green ammonia and sustainable aviation fuel.

Sarma highlighted Assam's green energy initiatives and explored avenues for future collaboration with Norway.

'HCM also apprised the Envoy of Assam's natural and cultural richness, including its 3 World Heritage Sites, and welcomed her keen interest in visiting Kaziranga National Park,' the CMO added. Ambassador Elin Stener, also in a post on the micro-blogging site expressed interest in future collaborations.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma highlighted Assam's green energy initiatives and explored avenues for future collaboration with Norway

'Thank you Hon'ble Chief Minister @himantabiswa for the good meeting. We look forward to future discussions in areas of common interest,' Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

AP government to adopt AI for better governance

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Amaravati

The Andhra Pradesh government is identifying Artificial Intelligence Champions from 20 state departments during an AI workshop organised in partnership with Wadhvani Centre for Government Digital Transformation (WGDT), official sources said.

The selected departments will cover 80 per cent of government operations with Artificial Intelligence and the officials will convert 100-150 Artificial Intelligence projects into Proofs of Concept (PoCs) and scalable solutions.

'Departments will nominate senior officers as Artificial Intelligence Champions, supported by Artificial Intelligence Catalysts,' Real Time Governance Society (RTGS) Secretary Bhaskar Katamaneni said during the workshop's second-day, according to a press release.

These officers will undergo a struc-

tured four-day training programme with support from Wadhvani Centre for Government Digital Transformation and the information technology (IT) sector) Department to solve department-specific challenges through Artificial Intelligence.

Inspired by National e-Governance Plan (NeGP), this initiative aims to build a new cadre of Artificial Intelligence-driven leaders within the public administration framework for digital transformation.

Workshops, mentorship sessions, and real-time project development will empower each team, including directors and enthusiastic mid-level officers trained to implement Artificial Intelligence innovations.

This strategic move underlines the state's vision of 'Minimum Government - Maximum Governance' through ethical, efficient, and impactful use of emerging technologies in governance.

Rupee falls 7 paise, closes at 85.40 per US Dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The rupee pared its initial gains and settled for the day lower by 7 paise at 85.40 against the US dollar on Friday, amid heightened geopolitical tensions and a negative trend in the domestic markets.

Forex traders said escalated geopolitical tensions, following a terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir weighed on market sentiment.

Moreover, a muted trend in domestic equities and positive US dollar index dented investors' sentiment further.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.17 and moved between the intra-day high of 85.08 and the low of 85.65 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.40 (provisional), registering a fall of 7 paise over its previous closing level.

On Thursday, the rupee gained 12 paise to close at 85.33 against the USD.

'We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias amid heightened geopolitical tensions and weak tone in the domestic markets. However, persistent FII inflows, overall weakness in the US dollar may prevent a sharp fall in the rupee. \$-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85 to 85.90,' said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan.

On Tuesday, at least 26 persons - mostly tourists - were killed by terrorists at the Baisaran meadows in Pahalgam in one of the worst terror attacks on civilians in Kashmir in the past many years.

In a stern message, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said India will identify, track and punish every terrorist and their backers who were responsible for the attack in Pahalgam 'beyond their imagination'.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.24 per cent at 99.61.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.66 per cent to \$ 66.11 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex slumped 588.90 points or 0.74 per cent to 79,212.53, while the Nifty fell 207.35 points or 0.86 per cent to 24,039.35.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹8,250.53 crore on a net basis on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Forex traders said a prospective trade agreement with the US boosts India's strategic edge.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has said he expects India to strike the first bilateral trade deal to avoid President Donald Trump's reciprocal tariffs.

Gold prices drop to ₹95,073 per 10 grams

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Gold prices retreated by ₹839 to ₹95,073 per 10 grams in futures trade on Friday as the US dollar strengthened amid a potential de-escalation of the US-China trade war.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, gold contracts for June delivery dropped by ₹839 or 0.87 per cent to ₹95,073 per 10 grams in a business turnover of 18,007 lots.

In addition, the August contract of the precious metal dipped ₹760 or 0.79 per cent to trade at ₹95,858 per 10 grams on the bourse.

Analysts attributed the fall in gold prices to weak global cues.

On the global front, gold futures slipped by \$ 40.26 or 1.20 per cent to \$ 3,308.34 per ounce in New York.

'Gold prices are under pressure as the US dollar strengthens on hopes of progress in US-China trade talks,' Abans Financial Services' Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta said.

In a notable shift, China is considering exempting some US imports from its steep 125 per cent tariffs and has asked businesses to identify products that could qualify - the strongest indication yet that Beijing is growing increasingly anxious about the economic fallout of the trade war.

This development is easing safe-haven demand for gold as investors anticipate a potential thaw in tensions. If this trend persists, gold may remain on the back foot in



the near term, he said.

On the geopolitical front, escalating tensions between India and Pakistan, creating a volatile environment where investors are looking to hedge against volatility and geopolitical instability.

Mehta further said that attention will turn to the upcoming IMF's meeting this weekend, where any indications of further policy easing or extended global uncertainty could enhance gold's appeal and reinforce safe-haven demand.

According to HDFC Securities' Senior Analyst of Commodities Saamil Gandhi, traders are looking forward to US macro-

economic data, including the Michigan Consumer Sentiment Index and 1-year inflation expectations to be released later in the day. The data release will gauge the strength of the economy and potential future monetary policy decisions by the US Federal Reserve.

Additionally, trade-related comments may have an impact on the overall market direction, Gandhi said.

Meanwhile, gold prices in spot markets in Mumbai dropped by ₹655 to ₹95,631 per 10 grams (99.9 purity). The standard gold (99.5 purity) declined by ₹652 to ₹95,248 per 10 grams.

Sensex, Nifty fall after India, Pakistan border tensions

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty declined sharply on Friday due to selling in Axis Bank and growing tensions along the Indo-Pak border following the terror attack at Pahalgam in Jammu & Kashmir.

Wiping out all early gains, the 30-share BSE barometer tanked 588.90 points or 0.74 per cent to settle at 79,212.53. During the day, it dropped 1,195.62 points or 1.49 per cent to 78,605.81. Falling for the second day, the NSE Nifty tumbled 207.35 points or 0.86 per cent to 24,039.35.

Experts said worries over growing geopolitical tensions after Tuesday's Pahalgam terror attack weighed on market sentiment.

'Investor sentiment turned cautious amid escalating tensions along the Indo-Pak border. Mid and smallcap stocks bore the brunt of the sell-off, driven by their elevated valuations and growing concerns over potential earnings downgrades following a muted start to the earnings season,' Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

A Sacred Step

A powerful dance drama that brings the Ramayan to life with grace, strength, and deep emotion, says SAKSHI PRIYA

CULTURAL CELEBRATION

Ms. Rekha Gupta, the Chief Minister of Delhi, whose presence added prestige to the event and highlighted the cultural significance of the evening. Her support for the arts is well-known and her attendance at this dance drama reflected her dedication to promoting India's rich cultural heritage.



Ram's birth in Ayodhya to his return as king, through classical dance, dramatic expression and layered symbolism. Guru Ajay Bhatt and Aamrapali Bhandari's choreography respected the epic's soul.

Every movement was chosen with care. Ram's journey began with the celebration of his birth in Ayodhya. The air was alive with movement and colour. But celebration gave way to duty. Ram's departure into vanvaas was a haunting moment, his farewell to Kaushalya staged with restraint, as dancers encircled him like time closing in. The lighting shifted to capture the weight of sacrifice.

The forest scenes were among the most visually captivating. With nothing more than cloth, shadow and body formations, the dancers created rivers, trees, and wild animals. Sita stood tall with presence and dignity, while Lakshman reflected Ram's sense of duty with measured steps.

Then came the heart of the epic — Ravan's entrance. Played with authority and presence, his character carried pride and ego that ultimately led to his fall. The abduction of Sita was staged in stillness: a tight spotlight, the sudden clash of cymbals, and her hands rising in despair.

No cries — only silence, and it was deafening. Hanuman's scenes brought a shift in energy. His entry was spirited and charged, with leaps and spins that filled the stage. The youngest performing alongside the seasoned artists, especially in the search for Sita, held their own with focus and honesty, proving that emotion carries more weight than age or training.

AND THEN THE WEDDING SEQUENCE

Of all the moments, this stood out as the most poetic. Ram and Sita's swayamvar was staged with dignity. The breaking of Shiva's bow was done through a symbolic gesture — the clap and sudden illumination. But it was what followed that left the audience completely still: the phoolon ki baarish. There were no real flowers, yet one could see them. Each dancer opened their palms to the sky, then turned their hands downward, releasing imaginary petals in slow motion. It was the suggestion that created magic. The hall watched in stillness, as if the gods themselves were blessing the union. The battle between Ram and Ravan was marked by strong choreography, precise and deliberate, reflecting the conflict both within and around. And when Ram returned to Ayodhya, it was the sight of the people lighting lamps, forming the deepmala with their bodies that brought home the meaning of Diwali.

The dialogues were few, spoken with clarity at the right moments — Ram's declaration of duty, Sita's quiet resolve, Hanuman's pledge. The lighting throughout was purposeful — never overpowering, always in line with the mood of each scene. This was the Ramayan performed with clarity, discipline and respect. Dr Mehra and her team brought together talent, tradition and a deep sense of purpose.



DEVOTION CAPTURED IN EVERY STEP AND MOTION

Every scene, every expression, every beat of the foot was in service of the story, what stayed was the feeling that something timeless had passed before our eyes, an offering of art, devotion and truth that will remain with those who witnessed it.

There are moments when art stops being performance and becomes prayer. When the movement of feet, the strength of hands, and the silence between gestures speak louder than words. **Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram**, presented by the Urvasi Dance Music Art & Cultural Society, was one such offering. The dance carried with it the weight of legacy, the fire of devotion, and the strength of truth.

It began in silence — no fanfare. Just the stage slowly lighting up to the sound of a conch, a chant rising through the Kamani Auditorium and the sight of dancers entering barefoot, as if walking into a sacred space. From that very first moment, the performance became an experience. Among the distinguished guests in attendance was Ms Rekha Gupta, the Chief Minister of Delhi, whose presence highlighted the cultural significance of the evening. Directed with remarkable sensitivity by Dr Rekha Mehra, the production traced the arc of the Ramayan from



Art as a form of Reflection

A moving journey through colour and memory, where quiet forms speak to something deeply human

BY TEAM VIVA

Art, in its purest form, communicates feelings that words cannot capture. Through the play of form, colour, and texture, it creates a space for personal reflection. The exhibition, **Beyond Myth & Metaphor** by Shabir Hussain Santosh and curated with an essay by Archana Khare Ghose, is being held at Shridharani Gallery, New Delhi and is presented by Sanchit Art.

It invites the viewer into a world where myth is not retold but felt. Santosh's paintings do not aim to deliver a heavy narrative; instead, they evoke a deeper feeling, a subtle undercurrent of emotion that emerges through his use of abstract forms. He doesn't seek to tell stories in the traditional sense. Instead, he captures the essence of myth in a way that goes beyond its literal meaning. The figures in his paintings are often soft, undefined, allowing for a sense of fluidity and openness. The colours employ a particularly striking. Warm, earthy reds and glowing yellows are infused with a quiet energy, evoking both the warmth of the earth and the depth of memory.

Standing in front of these paintings, viewers often find themselves captured by the quiet stillness of the artwork. They stare, perhaps searching for a clearer understanding of what the painting is about, but it is precisely this uncertainty that makes the work so compelling. The figures are often incomplete or fragmented, and yet they evoke such a powerful emotional response.

Artist ability to convey such powerful emotions with the simplest of forms speaks volumes about his understanding of the human condition. His work is not about spectacle but about evoking a quiet space for thought and reflection.



EXHIBITION THAT ENCOURAGES SLOWING DOWN AND ALLOWING THE EMOTIONS IN THE PAINTINGS TO TAKE ROOT. IT IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC UNTIL APRIL 30, 2025. GO SEE IT - NOT TO UNDERSTAND EVERY DETAIL, BUT TO FEEL THE MESSAGE.



The Rediscovery of a 17th-Century Masterwork

BY TEAM VIVA

Art, in its essence, is an exploration of human emotions, experiences, and ideas. **Caravaggio's Magdalene in Ecstasy** offers a vivid representation of these elements, capturing a raw and sincere moment in a remarkable way. This painting, rediscovered after centuries, provides an intimate view into the depths of Mary Magdalene's emotional state, offering more than just a visual experience, but a deep reflection on penitence and spiritual devotion.

Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy (1606), 40.75 in x 36 in, showcases the artist's masterful use of chiaroscuro — the dramatic contrast between light and shadow — which imbues the painting with both realism and emotional intensity. Roberto Longhi, a key researcher of Caravaggio, noted that the subject was interpreted in a unique and innovative manner, with Caravaggio placing the figure in a diagonal position that draws the viewer into the 17th century.

The rediscovery of this painting is a remarkable event in the art world. Mina Gregori, an expert in Caravaggio's work, recalled the emotional experience she had when first encountering the painting, describing how it felt like an act of devotion. This painting is not only significant for its artistic merit but also for its historical value in understanding the role of images and faith during the Counter-Reformation period.

One of the most notable aspects of Magdalene in Ecstasy is the rendering of the hands. Caravaggio's attention to detail in these hands, with their vivid colours and naturalistic depiction, is considered one of the defining elements of the original painting. These hands, full of tension, convey a deep sense of emotion that goes beyond technique, showing the artist's ability to bring life into his work. The face of Magdalene is another focal point of the painting. The careful blending of light



and shadow on her face gives it an inner mobility, which, in turn, heightens the emotive impact of the piece. Caravaggio's treatment of the eyes, especially the tears, merging the emotional depth of the subject with the natural world around her. The striking red hair of Magdalene, cascading over her shoulder, is depicted with equal intensity.

Caravaggio's use of light to highlight this feature contributes to the painting's dramatic effect, and the folds of her red cloak, executed with bold, vigorous brushstrokes, further emphasise the dynamic tension within the composition. The cross and skull, symbols of death and devotion, are placed strategically in

HISTORIC BAROQUE MASTERPIECE

In an exciting cultural milestone, **Magdalene in Ecstasy** will be unveiled in New Delhi as part of a historic exhibition. The Cultural Centre of the Italian Embassy, in partnership with The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, proudly announces the arrival of Caravaggio's masterpiece in Delhi on the occasion of the visit of Italian Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani and Minister for University and Research Anna Maria Bernini. The exhibition will be opened to the public at KNMA Saket till May 18, 2025. The rediscovery of this work is a powerful reminder of the timeless nature of Caravaggio's art. His ability to capture the essence of human emotion, through light, shadow, and form, continues to resonate with modern viewers, offering them a glimpse into the complexities of the human soul.

the painting to prompt reflection. The positioning of these elements invites the viewer to contemplate not only the life of Magdalene but also the broader themes of redemption and eternal life.

The crown of thorns, situated above Magdalene, speaks to her sacrifice and connection to the suffering of Christ, urging viewers to meditate on the spiritual significance of her actions.

Through his masterful technique and vivid portrayal of the human experience, he conveys not only the visual appearance of his subjects but also their internal emotional state. In **Magdalene in Ecstasy**, every brushstroke carries the weight of human struggle, spirituality, and devotion.

PBKS vs KKR: High-stakes clash in IPL 2025

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

The man who led them to glory just a season ago could now stand in the way of Kolkata Knight Riders' (KKR) playoff qualification when the side hosts the Shreyas Iyer-led revamped Punjab Kings (PBKS) in a high-stakes IPL clash here at the Eden Gardens on Saturday.

Twelve months ago, Iyer had led KKR to their first IPL title in a decade. On Saturday, he returns in opposition colours, at the helm of a rejuvenated Punjab side chasing a playoff spot.

Let go by KKR in one of the most surprising off-season moves, Iyer has found both comfort and purpose in Punjab Kings.

Reuniting with his old Delhi Capitals mentor Ricky Ponting, the duo has steadied PBKS into the top five of the table with five wins from eight games.

The partnership has given Iyer the space to lead confidently and he has tallied 263 runs with three half-centuries so far. However, he comes into the weekend game, carrying three single digit scores.

Saturday offers him the perfect chance to make a statement — much like KL Rahul did the other against his former franchise Lucknow Super Giants with a composed 57 not out.

Iyer too could have a Rahul-like moment under the Eden lights. KKR, on the other hand, are in desperate need of momentum.



With five defeats in eight matches, another stumble could tighten their already narrow path to the playoffs.

Their top-order remains unsettled, the

middle-order erratic, and the spin attack ineffective on a surface they once called their fortress.

KKR's middle-order trio of Russell,

Rinku and Ramandeep has failed to deliver the finishing punch this season, prompting calls for a shake-up.

The team may be forced to bring in

Caribbean all-rounder Rovman Powell, whose power-hitting and handy pace can add much-needed spark and balance.

Angkrish Raghuvanshi, one of the few bright spots in KKR's batting, might once again look to negotiate the tricky phase when the likes of Arshdeep Singh (Punjab's leading wicket-taker with 11 scalps) and Yuzvendra Chahal operate.

Skipper Ajinkya Rahane too will be under the scanner, having anchored the innings well at times but struggled to shift gears and finish games.

He will be wary of Yuzvendra Chahal, who dismantled KKR in their demoralising 95 all-out collapse only last week by claiming the wickets of Rahane, Raghuvanshi, Rinku Singh, and Ramandeep Singh in a devastating spell.

With Marco Jansen providing the early menace and new find Nehal Wadhwa managing tidy finishes, PBKS certainly look a more confident and well-rounded outfit.

For KKR's bowling unit, Harshit Rana's duel with PBKS opener Priyansh Arya could set the tone. Arya smashed a century against Chennai Super Kings earlier this season.

Despite their troubles, KKR are, however, still alive in the playoffs race.

Winning five of their remaining six games could be sufficient, but anything less would leave them dependent on other results.

For this to happen, KKR must fix their

home record, which is just one win from four matches here.

The much-publicised friction with Eden curator Sujan Mukherjee over pitch preparations has drawn unwanted attention and debates over spin-friendly surfaces, fairness, and even calls from commentators to consider shifting base.

Despite it being slow and grippy, which is exactly what KKR wanted, Sunil Narine has taken just two wickets at the Eden. Varun Chakravarthy (4) has been marginally better, while Moeen Ali has failed to strike in two matches.

Teams

KKR: Ajinkya Rahane (c), Rinku Singh, Quinton de Kock (wk), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Rovman Powell, Manish Pandey, Luvnith Sisodia, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Moeen Ali, Ramandeep Singh, Andre Russell, Anrich Nortje, Vaibhav Arora, Mayank Markande, Spencer Johnson, Harshit Rana, Sunil Narine, Varun Chakravarthy and Chetan Sakariya.

PBKS: Shreyas Iyer (c), Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Marcus Stoinis, Nehal Wadhwa, Prabhsimran Singh, Glenn Maxwell, Vyshak Vijaykumar, Yash Thakur, Harpreet Brar, Vishnu Vinod, Marco Jansen, Lockie Ferguson, Josh Inglis, Xavier Bartlett, Kuldeep Sen, Pyla Avinash, Suryansh Shedge, Musheer Khan, Harnoor Pannu, Aaron Hardie, Priyansh Arya, Azmatullah Omarzai.

Josh Hazlewood great player, under pressure: Andy Flower

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's (RCB) Josh Hazlewood is a world-class bowler who can soak in the pressure in any format of the game and knows what delivery has to bowl at a particular moment, said head coach Andy Flower after the IPL side defeated Rajasthan Royals by 11 runs here.

RCB notched their first win in four games at home to rise to the number 3 spot on the points table, with Hazlewood's death-overs bowling making a huge impact.

The Australian took four wickets and gave away only seven runs in his last two overs to return figures of 4-0-33-4 as RCB recorded their sixth win in nine matches. "I would probably refer to both of his last overs because his two overs went for seven runs and he took three wickets in them. Both those overs showed the class of the guy," Flower told the media after the match.

He (Josh) is a class operator, he is a world-class bowler, he is great under pressure in any format of the game. I know he is known for his heavy length bowling

— ANDY FLOWER, RCB COACH

"He is a class operator, he is a world-class bowler, he is great under pressure in any format of the game. I know he is known for his heavy length bowling but he is got some great all-round skills."

"He mixes in those yorkers, wide yorkers, slower balls and he seems to know what type of ball to bowl at the right time," he added. Flower said the quality three-pronged pace attack was one of RCB's biggest assets. RCB.

"I thought Bhuvi's (Bhuvneshwar Kumar) been superb this season and Yash (Dayal) was outstanding again today (Thursday), that last over. He showed outstanding skill and composure under pressure to repeatedly bowl yorkers like

that," Flower said.

"I think those three quicks have been great for us so far this season. I have got some more work to do, obviously, to help us in this last third of the league matches and Hazlewood certainly leads from the front in that regard," he said.

Flower said RCB must build on this win at home as they will now play three of their five remaining matches here at the Chinnaswamy Stadium. "It was really important. We have had four home games here, we have lost the toss each time," he said.

"We know that trying to defend a target here is tough and in the first three games I thought our bowlers and fielding unit did outstanding work to keep us in the game as long as they did, because all three totals were a bit below par."

Devdutt Padikkal scored a blazing 50 off 27 balls, which opener Virat Kohli played another masterclass, scoring 70 runs, and Flower said the duos 95-run partnership was pivotal to RCB scoring 205 runs batting first.

"Dev Padikkal was sensational to score 50 of 27 balls like that, without ever sloggling. We say a lot about Virat (Kohli) but his 70 off 42 balls and that partnership with Dev really gave us a platform on a pitch that wasn't that easy."

"Obviously our amazing supporters wanted to see some of that success. They were concerned about us here at home. We have got three more games here at home that's so vitally important for us to play well in these conditions," he said.

Rajasthan Royals' Sandeep Sharma acknowledged his side has not been able to respond well in "crunch moments", leading to seven losses in nine games.

"I won't say it is going wrong but we are not able to catch the crunch moments in a match, be it while chasing or while defending," he said.

"Every team gets such moments and it is important to catch them. This year, we are dropping crucial catches or batters are being dismissed when they are looking to accelerate."

India announces team for Asian Athletics Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India on Friday named a 59-member team for the upcoming Asian Athletics Championship in South Korea with star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra expectedly skipping the event while almost all those who had excelled in the just-concluded Federation Cup in Kochi making the cut. Double Olympic medallist Chopra missing the event was on expected lines as his focus this season will be the Diamond League Meetings and the World Championships in September, besides the NC Classic which he is hosting in Bengaluru on May 24.

He has not competed in the continental showpiece since the 2017 edition in Bhubaneswar where he won a gold. Since then, his focus has remained on the DL Meetings, World Championships and Olympic. National record holder shot putter Tajinderpal Singh Toor, who had won gold in the last edition of the continental championships, was omitted from the squad after he finished a disappointing second in the Federation Cup.

Pole vaulter Dev Kumar Meena also missed the bus despite re-writing his own national record as his effort was below the Asian Championships qualification mark set by the Athletics Federation of India. But others such as Avinash Sable (men's 3000m steeplechase), Parul Chaudhary (women's 3000m steeplechase) and Gulveer Singh (5000m and 10000m) have been included in the squad even though they did not take part in the Federation Cup, as they were training and competing abroad after taking AFI's permission.

Also featuring in the squad for the May 27-31 Asian Championships in Gumi are sprinter Animesh Kujur, who set a new 200m national record, and triple jumper Praveen Chitravel, who equalled his own NR during the Federation Cup. National record holder in women's javelin throw, Annu Rani would consider herself to be lucky to make it to the squad as she has been struggling for some time to reach the 60m mark.

The 32-year-old did a 60.68m in May 2024 and since then she has been struggling. This year, she produced a 58.82m effort at the Indian Open Throws Competition in Mumbai in March before winning gold with a 56.66m throw — far below the Asian Championships qualifying distance of 58m — on Thursday in the Federation Cup. The Federation Cup (April 21-24) was the last selection event for the Asian Championships and the AFI had made it mandatory for all the athletes — except who got exemptions — to compete in it if they want to be picked for the continental championships. In the last edition in Bangkok, India had finished third behind Japan and China with 27 medals — 6 gold, 12 silver and 9 bronze.

India's squad:

MEN: Animesh Kujur (200m), Anu Kumar and Krishan Kumar (800m), Yoonus Shah (1500m), Avinash Sable (3000m steeplechase), Gulveer Singh and Abhishek Pal (5000m), Gulveer Singh and Sawan Barwal (10,000m), Praveen Chitravel and Abudilla Aboobacker (triple jump), Sarvesh Kishore (high jump), Sachin Yadav and Yasvir Singh (javelin throw), Samardeep Singh (shot put), Tejaswin Shankar (decathlon), Servin Sebastian and Amit

(20km race walk).
4X100M RELAY: Pranav Pramod Gurav, Animesh Kujur, Manikanta Hoblidar, Amlan Borgohain, Tamilarasu S, Ragul Kumar G, Gurdvinder Singh.
4X400M RELAY: Vishal TK, Jay Kumar, Manu TS, Rince Joseph, Tushar Manna, Santhosh Kumar, Dharamveer Choudhary, Mohit Kumar.
WOMEN: Nithya Gandhe (200m), Rupal Chaudhary and Vithya Ramraj (400m), Twinkle Chaudhary and Pooja (800m), Lili Das and Pooja (1500m), Parul Chaudhary and Ankita (3000m steeplechase), Sanjivani Jadav and Parul Chaudhary (5000m), Sanjivani Jadhav and Seema (10,000m), Jyothi Yarraji (100m hurdles), R Vithya Ramraj and Anu R (400m), Shaali Singh and Ancy Sojan (long jump), Pooja (high jump), Seema (discus throw), Annu Rani (javelin throw), Aagsara Nandini (heptathlon).

4X100M RELAY: Nithya Gandhe, Abinaya Rarajaran, Sneha SS, Srabani Nanda, Daneshwari AT, V. Sudheeksha.
4X400M RELAY: Rupal Chaudhary, Sneha K, Subha Venkatesan, Jisna Mathew, Kunja Rajitha, Sarndramol Sabu.

Getting hate for inviting Nadeem to NC Classic: Neeraj

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Indian javelin throw star Neeraj Chopra on Friday said he has been bombarded with "hate and abuse" for inviting Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem to next month's NC Classic in Bengaluru, clarifying that the Olympic champion's presence was "completely out of question" in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack.

The Tokyo Olympics gold-medallist and Paris Games silver-winning star from Haryana said he was deeply hurt to see his and his family's integrity being questioned in abusive social media posts.

Chopra invited Nadeem, who defeated the Indian in Paris last year to win gold, for the inaugural Neeraj Chopra Classic to be held in Bengaluru on May 24.

"After all that has taken place over the last 48 hours, Arshad's presence at the NC Classic was completely out of the question. My country and its interests will always come first," Chopra, who is a Subedar Major in the Indian Army, said in a lengthy post on X.

"To those that are going through the loss of their people, my thoughts and prayers are with you. Along with

the entire nation, I am both hurt and angry at what has taken place," said Chopra. "I am confident that our country's response will show our strength as a nation and justice will be served," he added. Nadeem had declined to come citing other commitments. The 27-year-old Chopra said he is well aware of the chatter surrounding his invitation to Nadeem after

the Pahalgam attack in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were gunned down by terrorists. "...Most of it has been hate and abuse. They haven't even left my family out of it," said Chopra. "I usually am a man of few words, but that doesn't mean I will not speak up against what I think is wrong. More so when it comes to questioning my love for our country, and the respect and honour of my family," he wrote. Chopra said invites for NC Classic were sent out on Monday, a day before the Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed.

"The invitation I extended to Arshad was from one athlete to another — nothing more, nothing less. The aim of NC Classic was to bring the best athletes to India and for our country to be the home of world-class sporting events.

"Invites had gone out to all athletes on Monday, two days (sic) before the terrorist attacks at Pahalgam," he added. Chopra also highlighted the targeting of his mother, Saroj, for her statement after the Paris Games last year in which she described Nadeem as akin to her son.



the Pahalgam attack in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were gunned down by terrorists.

"Invites had gone out to all athletes on Monday, two days (sic) before the terrorist attacks at Pahalgam," he added. Chopra also highlighted the targeting of his mother, Saroj, for her statement after the Paris Games last year in which she described Nadeem as akin to her son.

Barcelona, Real Madrid meet in Copa del Rey final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barcelona

Barcelona and Real Madrid meet in the Copa del Rey final on Saturday with more than just the trophy on the line for the fierce Spanish rivals.

Barcelona wants to grab the first piece of a potential treble of major titles in coach Hansi Flick's debut season. The team is on pace to conquer La Liga, and three days after the cup final it will start its two-legged Champions League semifinal against Inter Milan.

It could also be the last trophy for Carlo Ancelotti, who many Madrid watchers speculate could leave the powerhouse this summer, possibly to take over the Brazil national team. Madrid arguably has more at stake. Out of the Champions League, the cup is its best chance to salvage the campaign with some silverware. It is also alive in La Liga, but it needs to overhaul a four-point deficit to Barcelona with five games left — a home stretch that includes yet another clásico.

For Barcelona, a title won at the expense of Madrid would give it a huge momentum boost for Inter's visit on Wednesday as the Catalan club pursues its first European Cup in a decade. Barcelona dominated their other two



meetings this season, beating Madrid 5-2 in the Spanish Super Cup final in January after winning 4-0 at Madrid in the league in October.

The third clásico of the season will be played before 70,000 fans in Seville's La Cartuja Stadium, where King Felipe VI will award the trophy to the winners.

This is the first Copa del Rey final between Spain's biggest clubs since 2014. Barcelona holds a record 31 Spanish cups. Madrid has 20, third place all time.

Filling in for Lewandowski

Flick's biggest task will be filling in for the



injured Robert Lewandowski, who picked up a left-thigh injury last weekend. The Poland striker is producing another stellar season with a team-high 40 goals across all competitions.

Ferran Torres is likely to start in his place. The versatile forward has emerged as Barcelona's super sub in this campaign. He has netted 17 goals overall in limited minutes, including five in the cup. Another option, however, could be playing attacking midfielder Dani Olmo as a "false nine" flanked by Lamine Yamal and Raphinha.

Barcelona will also be without starting

left back Alejandro Balde. Youth player Gerard Martin is likely to take his place unless Flick wants to slot a more experienced player into that position.

Mbappé's moment?

Finishing the season without a trophy would be a major disappointment after Madrid brought in superstar Kylian Mbappé last summer.

The France striker has scored goals galore but has failed to produce big in the biggest games of the season. He was jeered when substituted late in the second of two losses to Arsenal in the Champions League quarterfinals.

Vinicius Júnior has seen his productivity in attack fade ever since he felt overlooked in the Ballon d'Or award selection earlier this season. But the Brazil forward has previously risen to the occasion in finals.

Midfielder Eduardo Camavinga injured a tendon this week and will miss the rest of the season, joining Madrid's long-term casualty list that includes defenders Dani Carvajal and Eder Militao.

Madrid's main task in defense will be keeping Yamal and Raphinha in check after both ran rampant in the previous clásicos this campaign.

Harry Kane on verge of winning German league

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Munich

World soccer's great runner-up is finally about to lift a trophy. Harry Kane is on the verge of winning the German league title with Bayern Munich and he could seal the deal on Saturday.

After a career filled with individual top scorer awards and a host of runner-up medals — the Champions League, two European Championships, two English League Cups — it will be the first major trophy of Kane's career.

A player who's often talked of putting the team above himself will finally get his reward. "If it is me scoring a couple of goals, I will take that for sure, but if it is someone else, I am not going to worry too much," Kane said this month. "All those kinds of individual achievements are what you think about after it's done."

Bayern has an eight-point lead over second-place Leverkusen with four games to play. The title could be confirmed Saturday if Bayern beats Mainz and Bayer Leverkusen doesn't beat Hoffenheim. "No one deserves it more than him," Bayern's honorary president Uli Hoeness

told broadcaster Sky on Wednesday. Why has not Kane won a trophy before? There's been bad luck along the way and Kane's trophy drought has sometimes brought mockery from opposition fans.

At Tottenham, it often seemed like Kane and Son Heung-min were working wonders with a team which couldn't match rivals' budgets. Tottenham has been in sharp decline since its all-time top scorer left. There have been tough days, especially when Kane was limited by an ankle

If it is me scoring a couple of goals, I will take that for sure, but if it is someone else, I am not going to worry too much

— HARRY KANE, FOOTBALLER

injury in Tottenham's 2-0 loss to Liverpool in the 2019 Champions League final, or England's penalty shootout loss to Italy at his home European Championship two years later.

Kane could have won a trophy hours after signing for Bayern for a fee of potentially over 100 million pounds (\$110 million at the time), but the team lost the German Super Cup on his debut.

Although every possible care and caution has been taken to avoid errors or omissions, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that information given in this publication is merely for reference and must not be taken as having authority of or binding in any way on the writers, editors, publishers, and printers and sellers who do not owe any responsibility for any damage or loss to any person, a purchaser of this publication or not for the result of any action taken on the basis of this work. All disputes are subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of competent court and forums in Delhi/New Delhi only. Readers are advised and requested to verify and seek appropriate advice to satisfy themselves about the veracity of any kind of advertisement before responding to any contents published in this newspaper. The printer, publisher, editor and any employee of the Pioneer Group will not be held responsible for any kind of claim made by the advertisers of the products & services and shall not be made responsible for any kind of loss, consequences and further product-related damages on such advertisements.