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National Herald case: ED chargesheets Sonia, Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate has filed a charge sheet against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and others vis-a-vis alleged money laundering in the National Herald case. Sonia is arrayed as first accused in the charge sheet, followed by Rahul and Young India company's Directors Sam Pitroda and Suman Dubey.

Special Judge Vishal Gogne perused the charge sheet on Tuesday, which was filed on April 9, and posted the matter for further proceedings to April 25.

"The present prosecution complaint shall next be taken up for consideration on the aspect of cognisance before this court on April 25 when the Special Counsel for the ED and IO shall also ensure the production of the case diaries for court perusal," the judge ordered.

The charge sheet was filed under Sections 3 (money laundering) and 4 (punishment for money laundering) of Prevention of Money Laundering Act by ED's Special Public Prosecutor NK Matta.

"Let the complaint be checked and registered. The Ahlmad (court staff) shall ensure that the entire file/documents are properly paginated. The ED is directed to file a soft copy of the complaint and documents in readable/OCR format by the next date," the court said.

The Special Judge dealing with the cases of lawmakers also took note of the ED submissions that it will move an application before the district judge for the transfer of a case related to predicate offence — under probe by the CBI for alleged cheating, criminal conspiracy and other offences, based on which the ED had started its investigation in the present matter — from another court to Judge Gogne's court.

ED's case stems from a private complaint filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy, in which the trial is on. After the trial court issued summons to Sonia and Rahul in June 2014, Swamy had filed complaints with the Income Tax Department and the

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and his mother Sonia Gandhi RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

ED to probe alleged tax evasion and money-laundering angle in the formation of a new company Young Indian and takeover of Associated Journal Limited, publisher of National Herald newspaper, which has buildings in many cities.

On April 12, ED issued possession notice regarding National Herald's office buildings in Delhi, Mumbai and Lucknow. The predicate offence is required to be tried by the same court which takes cognisance of the offence under Section 3 of PMLA, the Jude said. It is pertinent to mention here that Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are members of the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha respectively.

"Essentially, the two offences viz the predicate offence and the PMLA offence are required to be tried by the same court," the judge noted. Since the allegations in the present complaint arise from the predicate offence, the file in the predicate offence is required to be called for perusal, the court added. "However, the power of assignment or transfer of a matter is not vested with this court and is rather the prerogative of the Principal District and Sessions Judge, Rouse Avenue Courts Complex, New Delhi," the court remarked.

The ED investigation began in 2021 after a Metropolitan Magistrate in Patiala House Courts in Delhi took cognisance of a private complaint filed by Swamy on June 26, 2014. The complaint, the ED said, highlighted a "criminal conspiracy" by prominent political figures, including Congress leaders Sonia and her son Rahul, late Congress leaders Motilal Vora and Oscar Fernandes besides Dubey, Pitroda and private company Young Indian regarding money laundering with respect to a "fraudulent" takeover of properties valued over ₹2,000 crore belonging to the Associated Journals Limited (AJL).

"The legal proceedings against the accused have faced challenges but have been upheld by both the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India, allowing the investigation to proceed," the ED said.

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Why make such observations: SC asks Allahabad HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday took exception to the Allahabad High Court's recent remark in a rape case wherein it said that the complainant 'herself invited trouble', and wondered why the court made such an observation while granting bail in the matter.

The High Court had observed that the complainant 'herself invited trouble' by agreeing to go to the accused applicant's house after getting drunk.

The Apex Court's observations came when it was hearing a suo motu case over the Allahabad High Court's separate order of March 17 in which the high court said grabbing breasts and pulling the drawstring of a woman's "pyjama" or lowers did not amount to the offence of attempt to rape.

"There is another order passed by another judge of the same high court," a bench of Justices B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih said.

Justice Gavai went on, "If one wants to grant bail that is okay but why make such observations that she invited trouble and all that. One has to be very careful on this side (bench) also." Solicitor General Tushar Mehta asked how a common man perceived such observations was required to be kept in mind.

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

The bench adjourned the hearing in the suo motu case for four weeks.

On March 26, the apex court stayed the high court's March 17 order in the attempt to rape matter which meant the same couldn't be used in any judicial proceeding for seeking reliefs by the present set of accused or others.

The top court had said some of the observations made in the order reflected total "insensitivity" and "inhuman approach".

It had taken a suo motu cognisance of the matter after it was brought to the notice of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna. The high court's March 17 order held that the attempt to rape offence was not made out against the accused and they were liable to be summoned for the lesser offence of assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to disrobe her.

The High Court's order had come on a petition by the accused challenging the order of a special judge in Kasganj through which they were summoned for the alleged offence under section 376 (rape) of IPC among other sections.

In another case, the high court passed an order granting bail to an accused and said, "Having heard counsel for the parties and examined the matter in its entirety, I find that it is not in dispute that victim and applicant both are major. Victim is student of MA, hence she was competent enough to understand the morality and significance of her act as disclosed by her in the FIR."

The court added, "This court is of the view that even if the allegation of the victim is accepted as true, then it can also be concluded that she herself invited trouble and was also responsible for the same."

ED questions Robert Vadra in Haryana land deal case, again

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday again questioned Robert Vadra in a 2008 Haryana land deal-linked alleged money laundering case linked to real estate company DLF. Terming the agency's move to summon him as "political vendetta", Vadra said he has spent hours earlier to take questions from the ED (in separate money laundering cases) as well as share thousands of pages of documents but still the central agency was 'raking' cases against him.

"This is nothing but political vendetta. Whenever I speak for the minorities, they try to stop me, crush us... They tried to stop Rahul (Gandhi) in Parliament too. This is political vendetta and misuse of central agencies. I will cooperate with them like in the past," the 56-year-old told the media as he walked two miles from his residence at Sujan Singh Park in central Delhi to the ED headquarters on the APJ Abdul Kalam Road here. Vadra entered the ED office at 11am along with his lawyer while his security team stayed out.

Officials said the ED recorded his statement under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) for about two hours.

The questioning session is expected to continue. Coming out of the ED office for lunch around 1.30pm, Vadra told reporters that while he was ready to cooperate with the investigation but there needed to be a closure. "How can you be talking about something that happened in 2007?" he said.

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The ByStander

Delhi power subsidy to continue, decides Cabinet

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Delhi Cabinet on Tuesday approved the continuation of the power subsidy scheme for the 2025-26 fiscal, wherein the State Government provides free electricity to households with consumption below 200 units, and a 50 per cent subsidy to households that use 201-400 units a month. The Cabinet also approved a proposal for the extension of its Electric Vehicle (EV) Policy by three months. The cabinet also discussed the draft of the proposed Electric Vehicles (EV) 2.0 Policy.

The Cabinet meeting, chaired by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, also approved the continuation of existing power subsidy for four categories: Domestic consumers, farmers, lawyers with chambers, and victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

Announcing at a press conference at Delhi Secretariat, Power Minister Ashish Sood said the Cabinet okayed the continuation of electricity subsidies for four specific categories. The Minister said the subsidy for the 1984 riot victims and lawyers represent particularly significant and sensitive decisions of the BJP government.

Alleging misinformation by the Opposition, Sood asserted that false narratives were in circulation to claim that the Delhi Government planned to discontinue power subsidies. He asserted that today's Cabinet decision to continue with power subsidies for all four categories puts an end to such 'baseless propaganda'. The Cabinet decided to continue with the old EV Policy instead of approving draft of the new policy as the new EV Policy 2.0 is yet to be finalised.

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Stalin announces committee to suggest ways to strengthen State autonomy

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Chennai

In a sudden move amid ongoing political struggle between Tamil Nadu and the Union Government, Chief Minister MK Stalin announced on Tuesday the constitution of a high-powered committee to suggest ways and means to "strengthen State autonomy" vis-à-vis the Centre.

Former Supreme Court Judge Kurien Joseph, will head the three-member panel, Stalin announced in the Legislative Assembly. Former IAS officer Ashok Vardhan Shetty and State Planning Commission former vice-chairman and DMK leader Prof M Naganathan will be members of the committee.

Interestingly, Kurian Joseph was a senior leader of the Kerala Congress (Mani) before his elevation to the Bench from the Bar. At one time, he also led the Kerala Student Congress, a student wing of the Catholic Church-sponsored Kerala Congress (Mani). Shetty had worked as Stalin's secretary during his tenure as Deputy CM in a government headed by his father and DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi.

The announcement on the panel was made under Rule 110 of the State Assembly after main Opposition party AIADMK staged a walkout in protest against the Speaker's refusal to allow them to raise an issue in the House. After Stalin's announcement, newly appointed BJP State chief Nainar Nagendran asserted that there was no need to discuss the issue of more autonomy for the States.

Stalin said in the Assembly that the move to 'strengthen autonomy' of Tamil Nadu comes in the backdrop of the tug of war between the State and the Union Government over National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET), which is out of the State purview.

"Both NEET and National Education Policy (NEP) are beyond the jurisdiction of the State Government. We are totally against the NEET and NEP. The only option to save Tamil Nadu is to take it out of the jurisdiction of NEET and NEP," the Chief Minister remarked.

The Tamil Nadu Government scored a big win this month when the Supreme Court gave a favourable ruling on its petition to challenge the alleged refusal of Governor RN Ravi to accord assent to 10 Bills passed by the Assembly, includging the one on appointment of Stalin as Chancellor of the Universities in the southern State.

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Sexually assaulted while on ventilator in ICU: Air hostess

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

A 46-year-old air hostess alleged that she was sexually assaulted while she was on ventilator support in the ICU of a noted private hospital in Gurugram on April 6, a police officer said on Tuesday.

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

In her police complaint, she said she had arrived in Gurugram for training on her employer company's behalf and staying put in a hotel.

Her health deteriorated due to reason, after which she was admitted to a private city hospital for treatment. On April 5, her husband got her admitted to another hospital in Gurugram, from where she was discharged on April 13.

"During treatment, while I was on ventilator support, someone sexually assaulted me on April 6. Since I was unconscious, I could not react to the assault and was scared afterwards. Two nurses were however on duty around my bed at the time," the victim alleged in her complaint.

After her discharge from hospital, she revealed the alleged crime to her husband, who complained to police. "A case has been registered at the Sadar Police Station on the basis of the woman's complaint. A police team was rushed to the hospital to scan the duty chart and analyse CCTV footage to identify the culprit," Sandeep Kumar, spokesperson of Gurugram Police, said.

"The woman's statement has since been got recorded by police before a city Magistrate. The police will soon identify the culprit and arrest him," he said.

Hospital security staff denied any knowledge of the alleged crime, but the hospital later issued a statement on the alleged crime. "We have been made aware of a complaint from a patient and have been fully cooperating with investigations by authorities concerned. At this stage, no allegations have been substantiated and all relevant documents, including CCTV footage from the hospital for time period in question, have been handed over to police. We remain committed to supporting the entire process of investigation," Dr Sanjay Durani, Medical Superintendent, Medanta Hospital, Gurugram, said in a statement.

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

This incident is not the first in Gurugram's private hospitals. In July last year, a 51-year-old Kazakhistan woman was allegedly raped by an attendant of a private hospital. The accused was later arrested. Similarly, in October 2020, a 21-year-old tuberculosis patient was allegedly raped by a staff member of a hospital while she was on a ventilator in the ICU.

Above-normal rainfall this monsoon season, predicts IMD

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

In good news for Indian farmers and the Union Government on the agricultural front and, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Tuesday predicted an above-normal rainfall for India during the coming June-September monsoon season, which quantitatively could be around 105 per cent of the long period average (LPA). This prediction is vital for India's agriculture, which supports a significant portion of the population and contributes substantially to the Gross Domestic Product of the country.

Ruling out the possibility of El Nino conditions — typically linked to reduced rainfall — during the entire season, IMD chief Mrutyunjay Mohapatra told a press conference: "India is likely to see above-normal rainfall in the four-month monsoon season (June to September), with cumulative rainfall estimated at 105 per cent of the long-period average of 87cm."

El Nino conditions in the subcontinent are unlikely to develop this time," he added. This mirrors a consensus that most weathermen have on the Indian monsoon this year. Last week, private weather forecasting agency Skymet also said that cumulative all-India southwest monsoon this year could be 'normal' at 103 per cent of the LPA. Rainfall between 96-104 per cent of the LPA is considered normal. The IMD prediction comes even as parts of the country are battling extreme heat. A significantly high number of heatwave days are expected in April-June period. This could strain power grids due to increased power demand and also result in water shortage. A forecast of normal rainfall during the monsoon comes as a huge relief to Indian farmers, with the agricultural sector supporting around 42.3 per cent of the Indian population and contributing 18.2 per cent to India's GDP.

Normal rains will also help bring down food prices, keep inflation at Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) comfort level, and allow the world's biggest rice exporter to ship out more of the staple food. A good, well-distributed rainfall will go a long way in boosting Kharif production and provide necessary residual soil moisture for the following Rabi harvest.

As per the Ministry of Agriculture, 52 per cent of the net cultivated area in India relies on primary rain-bearing system.

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US visas a privilege, not right: US Secretary Rubio

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Sounding a note of caution to immigrants, including H-IB and Green Card holders, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said that US visas are a privilege and not a right, while pledging strict enforcement of visa laws under the Donald Trump administration.

Rubio reaffirmed a tough stance on America's visa policy and asserted that entry into the United States is reserved for those who demonstrate respect for American laws and values, reinforcing Washington's commitment to stricter immigration standards.

His statement in an interview to a US private television channel came amid a nationwide crackdown on pro-Palestine protests, particularly on college campuses, where foreign students have come under scrutiny for alleged "antisemitic behaviour" and participation in disruptive demonstrations following the October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel. "US visas are a privilege, rather than a right, reserved for those who make the United States better, not seek to destroy it from the inside," Rubio said in the interview.

Furthermore, Rubio asserted that visa holders must continually meet eligibility standards, and that the State Department, working alongside DHS and other security agencies, actively reviews and revokes visas if violations are found. "The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) gives us broad authority to revoke a visa. This authority is fundamental to safeguarding our national security," he said, adding that US laws are clear about who can and cannot come to the United States.

Each visa application is vetted through those rules and people who "endorse or espouse terrorist activity or persuade others to endorse or espouse terrorist activity" are ineligible for US visas, The Secretary of State said.

Rubio pointed to some incidents of unrest on American college campuses last year. The United States is home to over 1.1 million foreign students, many of whom attend prestigious universities.

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Death of kingpin leads to arrest of dacoit gang members

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The death of the leader of a gang of dacoits, by a bullet fired by his own men during dacoity at a house in Mohanlalganj, led to arrest of other members of his gang.

The stunning facts surfaced after the arrest of members of the gang by a joint team of Mohanlalganj, Nigoha and Nagaram police on Sunday and Monday night.

The mutilated body of the accused kingpin Sushil Chauhan of Sitapur was found from the railway track in Gopal Khera on March 26.

After his wife identified the body on March 26, she alleged that Sushil was killed by his associates during some altercation. The cops worked on this line and were stunned when they found that Sushil had a criminal history and nearly 10 cases were registered against him in Sitapur, besides a case under Gangsters Act.

The police further quizzed Sushil's wife and name of his associates surfaced.

The police then started the hunt for Sushil's aides who were identified as Babu Ram, Jhabu alias Seth, Abhilakh Loniya, Shibbu alias Vikas, Kamlesh and Ram Chandra aka Chotu, all residents of Sitapur but were absconding.

While the Mohanlalganj police was looking for these absconding miscreants, a team nabbed two of the above name absconders in an encounter on April 13 night. The arrested accused were identified as Ramchandra aka Chhotu and Kamlesh, both of Sitapur. Both the above accused suffered injuries in their legs during the encounter. During interrogation, the accused disclosed location of their absconding 'accomplices' and a joint team of Nigoha and Nagram was enaged to nab them. On Monday night, the police was tipped off about the absconding miscreants and a team surrounded them on Meerakh Nagar road. They were asked to surrender but the miscreants opened fire and in retaliatory fire, two miscreants, Jhabbu and Babu Ram, suffered injuries in their legs while the other two, Abhilakh and Vikas, surrendered.

When all the six accused were interrogated jointly they disclosed that they killed their mentor Sushil Chauhan during an altercation during an attempt to commit dacoity at the house of Gangaram in Bhaidua, Mohanlalganj, on the night of March 24.

According to their confession, they all reached the house of Gangaram of Bhaidua Mohanlalganj through the field and climbed on its roof.

Meanwhile, during a quarrel, their mentor and kingpin Sushil Chauhan got shot as one of the accused opened fire. On hearing the sound of gunshot the house owner and his family woke up and raised an alarm. The accused fled carrying their injured companion, Sushil Chauhan, on their shoulders. The injured accused, however, died due to excessive bleeding. The other accused scratched the spot of bullet injury on the leg of the deceased with some sharp object so that it could not be identified as a firearm injury.

After this, the accused covered the body of the kingpin under the help of straw in Gopal Kheda. The next day, the body was thrown on the railway track in Gopal Khera to make Sushil's death look like a case of suicide. As a train passed on the track, the body of the gang leader was cut into pieces.

The arrested accused disclosed further that they wanted to destroy the body completely so they again threw the body parts on the railway track and the body was mutilated. The accused disclosed that they kept the motorcycle and mobile phone of the deceased in a wheat crop field.

But to their bad luck, the body of the slain kingpin was identified on March 26 on the basis of clothes and an investigation of the case started.

Theft at 3 shops in Sarojininagar; goods, cash goes missing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Thieves stole liquor bottles, electrical items and cigarettes packets worth lakhs besides Rs 1.35 lakh in cash from four shops in Sarojini Nagar on Monday night.

The owner of an electric items' shop reported the theft first. Vinay Rajput told police that he had closed the shop at 9:30 pm on Monday night and gone home. On Tuesday morning around 5 am, when his mother went out for a morning walk towards the shop, she found the shutter of the shop broken. She immediately informed Vinay. When Vinay reached the shop, he saw that the cash box was broken and Rs 40,000 kept in the box missing. He immediately informed Sarojini Nagar police which inspected the spot and started investigations.

The police scanned footage of CCTV cameras installed nearby to reach the miscreants. While the police were carrying out the investigations, a complaint of theft at a liquor/beer shop reached to the police. The police reached the shop and enquired about the stolen goods.

It surfaced that the salesman had not come to the shop due to a holiday on Monday. Shop owner, Sardar Karamjeet Singh, said salesman Gagandeep closed the shop at 10 pm on Sunday night and went home. On Tuesday morning someone called the number written on the board outside the shop and informed him about the shutter being broken.

It surfaced that the miscreants used a jack to lift up the shutter of the liquor-beer shop. When Karamjit Singh reached the spot with his brother-in-law and salesman Gagandeep, the shutter was found broken and about Rs 70,000 kept in the cash box and bottles of foreign liquor worth about Rs 2.5 lakh missing. The thieves also stole the CCTV camera installed outside the shop.

Similarly, the thieves stole items from the shop of one Anuj Yadav of Anaura village who runs a grocery shop and a cafe near TSM Hospital on Amausi Railway Station -Mauda Road.

Anuj closed the shop late on Monday evening and left for home. When he reached the shop on Tuesday morning, the locks of both the shops were found broken and their doors were found open. All the goods were scattered inside. Anuj said that the thieves had taken away cash worth about Rs 25,000 including coins kept in the cash box and goods worth about Rs 70,000 including a LED TV. When the police arrived after receiving information, three teenagers were clearly seen committing theft in the CCTV.

It is said that the same teenagers are seen in the CCTV cameras at the electrical shop, liquor-beer shop, grocery and cafe shops. From this, it is being assumed that these teenagers have committed the crime at all the three places on Monday night. At present, the police have started searching for the young men with the help of CCTV cameras.

Maurya: Cong paid for Muslim appeasement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya on Tuesday said the Congress has got itself punctured by doing the politics of Muslim appeasement.

In a post in Hindi on microblogging site X, Maurya said, "The history of politics is witness to the Congress getting itself punctured by doing the politics of Muslim appeasement for decades. Despite this bitter truth, it is still far away from realising the ground reality. The truth is also that it has no other way except to crawl on the crutches of regional parties."

"Despite all this, its arrogance is such that it thinks the burden of the country is on it. Despite being the opposition, it behaves like the ruling party. Congress, which believes in 'monarchy' under the Gandhi family's shadow instead of democracy, has never cared about the Constitution," Maurya wrote. In an apparent attack on Congress leader and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, the deputy chief minister wrote, "The only change in Congress' history is that now it has given up Gandhiji's 'khadi' and started using T-shirts."

Congress has limited impact on the public because even after becoming a Member of Parliament five times "Rahul Gandhi means impossible", he wrote.

"On the other hand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi means 'possible'. Under his leadership BJP is changing the picture of the country, whereas Congress only wants to see the Muslim community punctured," Maurya wrote.

In a separate post attacking Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav, the deputy chief minister wrote, "Seeing that the Samajwadi Party is sure to be wiped out in 2027, Akhilesh Yadav is completely upset. Now he is giving and getting others to give irresponsible statements that divide the society and break the social fabric. But this policy will harm the Samajwadi Party more than it benefits it."

"The historic public support received on Babasaheb Ambedkar's birth anniversary has upset Samajwadi Party's digestion. The balloon of their fake PDA (Pichre, Dalit, Alpashankak) has also burst. The party's formula 'SP with some, development of family and goons' is enough to make Samajwadi Party a 'Samaaptwaadi Party'. Samajwadi Party and the Saifai family will never accept the development of the poor, backward and Dalits," Maurya wrote.

He added that BJP is the present and the future, and it "will repeat 2017 in 2027".

Ruckus marks Nagar Nigam budget session

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The budget session of Lucknow Municipal Corporation House began on Tuesday with a lot of uproar . For the past several months, the House was not able to function due to differences between Mayor Sushma Kharakwal and the councillors. Today, when the budget was presented, some members of the executive committee registered a strong protest against the rules of expenditure imposed in the councillor funds despite the increase in it.

The councillors are unhappy because they were not allowed to spend the councillor fund of Rs 2.10 crores on various items. Calling these rules wrong, the councillors created a ruckus in the House and the Mayor had to adjourn the House twice.

The controversy escalated when Maulviganj ward councillor Mukesh Singh Monty tore the copy of the budget in the House calling it 'fake'. After this, there was a lot of noise and allegations and counter-allegations in the House for a long time.

When the House resumed, Mayor Sushma Kharakwal demanded an apology from Mukesh Singh Monty for tearing the copy of the budget. On this, the councillors raised the question that when the proposal for spending items from the councillor fund was not passed in the executive, then how was it included in the agenda of the House?

When the House resumed after lunch there was a heated debate in the House regarding house tax when councillor Mukesh Singh Chauhan raised questions about the discount available on online and offline payments.

He said that 10% discount is available on online payment, while only 8% discount is being given on offline payment.

On this, the Chief Tax Assessment Officer Ashok Singh clarified that this exemption is being given under the policy of the Government of India, so that digital payments can be promoted.

There was a heated debate between BJP councillors and opposition councillors in the House on this issue.

Mukesh Singh Chauhan called it discrimination against the public and demanded equality in exemption. The Councillors also demanded that date for discount be further extended from April 31 to July in public interest.

The budget 2025-26 was finally passed by the House.

Five killed in road accident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Five people, including two children, died after their tempo collided with a bus in on the Gonda-Bahraich highway on Tuesday. Thirteen injured were shifted to the medical college from where seven were referred to Trauma Centre as their condition was critical.

All the victims were going to attend a marriage function when the accident occurred. As soon as the information was received, the DM and SP reached the medical college and enquired about the condition of the injured.

Reports said that the family members of Kalimunnisha of Hiraipur village of Huzurpur area, had booked a tempo and were going to attend a Daawat-e-Valima in Kolhua village of Payagpur area on Tuesday. Eighteen people were travelling in the tempo.

Near Khutehna Chowki, the tempo collided head-on with a private bus coming from the opposite side and was completely damaged. The police sent 15 injured to the medical college by ambulance, while three people were admitted to a private hospital in Khutehna.

The doctors at the medical college declared tempo driver Amjad (45), Maryam (65), Farhad (5), Azim (12) and Munni (45) dead. The deceased belonged to the same family.

Ultrasound facility at Chinhat CHC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Rajya Sabha MP Brijlal inaugurated an ultrasound machine from MP fund in Community Health Centre (CHC) Chinhat on Tuesday.

Brijlal said it is important to ensure that no patient returns from the hospital due to lack of treatment. "The government is committed to providing treatment to all and adequate resources are available at health units", he said. He said good behaviour of doctors and health workers with the patient cures half of their illness.

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr NB Singh said things requested by the MP have been made available in the CHC.

The MP also dedicated the meeting hall, dental chair and trolley to the public.

40-year-old woman ends life

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

A woman committed suicide by hanging herself at her house in BBD police station area on Monday night.

As per reports, at around 11.00 am on Tuesday, the BBD police received a death memo from Dr Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital that one Sushma Bhatia, aged about 40 years, of Sanjeevani House colony in BBD, had been brought to the hospital dead at 9.00 am on Monday.

On this information, a team of BBD police reached the hospital and conducted a panchayatnama in presence of the family members of the deceased woman. The body was later sent for autopsy.

The police then talked to the family of the deceased and it surfaced that Sushma Bhatia hanged herself in a room at her house last night by making a noose out of a dupatta. "On getting information in the morning, the family members took her to the hospital for treatment, where the doctor declared her dead," a police spokesman said. The deceased had a son (21) and daughter (15).

Meanwhile, the body of an unidentified 75-year-old woman was found at roadside near a park in Gomtinagar on Tuesday.

As per reports, at about 1 pm the police was informed that an elderly woman, aged about 75 years, was lying unconscious outside the UP Darshan Park in Gomtinagar.

On information, the local police reached the spot and sent the woman to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital for treatment, where she was declared dead by the doctor. "Efforts are being made to identify the deceased. Other further legal proceedings are being done," a police spokesman said.

LU holds induction meet for students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Lucknow University organised an online induction programme for new students admitted to M.Com, MBA, MSW. MA English, Economics, B.Com and BBA online education programs at LUCODE.

The students participated with great enthusiasm and got their doubts cleared.

The programme was inaugurated by Professor Piyush Bhargava, Director of Online Education. After that, the new students were welcomed by the Registrar of Lucknow University, Vidyanand Tripathi.

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

Tender Notice Reference No.GNDU/Gen/06/2025

The Department of G.N.D.U. Amritsar invites online bids for the following:
Sr. No.1
Item:- Computer Quantity:- 10
Item:- Server Quantity:- 01
Closing date & Time: **06/05/2025 at 5:00 PM**
For details log onto: **www.eproc.punjab.gov.in**
Note: Any corrigendum(s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only

Assistant Registrar (General)
Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar-143005 (Punjab) India

NA/12/29338/2023/43558
Dated CHD :- 4/15/2025

Bomb threat emails received by several district collectorates; turn out to be hoax

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Emails claiming that bombs were planted in four district collectorate offices in Uttar Pradesh triggered a security alert on Tuesday, but nothing suspicious was found after the buildings were evacuated and extensively searched.

Soon after the emails were received by authorities in Firozabad, Aligarh, Barabanki and Chandauli, bomb disposal units, anti-sabotage checking teams, dog squads and local police were swiftly mobilised to the respective collectorate premises. All buildings were evacuated and thoroughly searched, officials said.

Authorities in all four districts said that no explosives or suspicious items were found. Investigations are on to identify those responsible for sending the hoax emails, they added.

In Aligarh, a senior police officer told reporters, "Soon after the email was received, security forces reached the District Magistrate's office and evacuated the premises. A thorough inspection of the entire complex was conducted. While no suspicious items were found, the inspection is still ongoing as a precaution."

The official added that the threatening email was received on the official email ID of the Aligarh District Magistrate.

...bomb disposal units, anti-sabotage checking teams, dog squads and local police were swiftly mobilised to the respective collectorate premises.

In Barabanki, District Magistrate Shashank Tripathi said, "Today, we received a threatening email on the official ID, claiming that explosives like RDX were planted in the collectorate campus.

"Though the information did not initially seem credible, we immediately alerted the Superintendent of Police and called in the bomb disposal squad, which carried out a thorough search. No suspicious object has been found so far. Efforts are underway to trace the source of the email." Barabanki City Circle Officer Sumit Tripathi said the origin and authenticity of the email remain unclear.

"Investigations are ongoing to determine whether this was a mischief attempt or part of a larger conspiracy," he said.

In Chandauli, District Magistrate Nikhil Tikaram Funde said a person identifying himself as Gopal Swami had sent an email warning of a possible bomb blast at the collectorate, allegedly linked to political issues in Tamil Nadu.

"The sender even listed a Tamil Nadu address. We immediately alerted the Superintendent of Police and launched a complete search of the collectorate premises. Nothing suspicious was found. The email content appeared frivolous and lacked credibility, but we still acted with full caution," the DM said.

In Firozabad, a similar threat was received via email around Tuesday afternoon, stating that explosive material had been placed in the District Magistrate's office.

Superintendent of Police (City) Ravi Shankar Prasad said, "Upon receiving the email, a bomb disposal team, dog squad, local police from Matsena police station, and the SOG team carried out an intensive search of the premises. No explosives were found."

A case has been registered at the cyber police station based on a complaint by the Matsena SHO, and authorities are working to trace the sender of the email.

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Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Mohali Dairy a) Lifting (Purchase) of paneer whey ex-factory Verka Mohali Dairy on daily Basis. b) Hiring of agency for packaging of dahi pouch/cups/matkas, lassi pouches, kheer cups, ghee, paneer and yoghurt. Packaging and recombination of white butter and reconstitution of SMP/WMP & sugar. c) Auction of cutting & lifting of different varities of trees at Verka Mohali Dairy. d) Purchase of Nitric Acid (53%-54%).	Annual As per day to day requirement of market 69 No's Annual
2.	For Verka Bathinda Dairy Hiring of insulated vehicles for supply of packed milk and fresh milk products in bathinda milkshed area.	One year with extension upto one year
3.	For Verka Hoshiarpur Dairy Outsourcing of all activites of city supply dispatch dock.	Annual
4.	For Verka Sangrur Dairy a) Design, fabrication, supply, erection & commissioning of boiler chimney with flue gas duct for 06 TPH boiler at Verka Sangrur Dairy including dismantling of old chimney. b) Flex banners, flex board, flex board both sides, glow sign board, glow sign board both side, aluminium roll up stadees, flanges, danglers, A3 stickers without lamination, A3 stickers with lamination, pamphlets, Eco solvent vinyl print, canopy, sun board, umbrella, one way vision with eco print etc. c) Fresh cut firewood. d) Wall/shutter painting and vehicle painting.	01 No's Annual 500 MT Annual
5.	For Verka Ludhiana Dairy Invited for sale of the unserviceable material for one time sale basis.	One time basis

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1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. **eproc.punjab.gov.in.**
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The pioneer CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I Roshni Runoy spouse of JC-781898F N Sub Runoy Rajappan resident of Village-Pettah, Post-Vallakkadavu, Tehsil-Trivandrum, District- Trivandrum (Kerala) 695008 have changed my name from Roshni Runoy to Roshni Robert vide affidavit dated 15/04/2025. Certificate No-IN-UP91568883395300X before SDM sadar Lucknow.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from ABDUL RAEES To SHEKH ABDUL RAIS for future purposes Shekh Abdul Rais R/o 97/10 Kayastha Road, Talaq Mahal Kanpur

NOTICE

I, MARIYA KHATOON, swear that my name in my high school mark sheet is MARIYA KHATUN. In all other documents it is MARIYA KHATOON. Both the names are of me and in future I should be known and identified as MARIYA KHATOON. Resident of 105/696, Bhannana Purwa, Sareen Apartment, Fahimabad Kanpur.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from DALJEET SINGH To DALJEET SINGH BHATIA, Daljeet Singh Bhatia S/o Mohinder Singh Bhatia R/o Flat No.401 Plot No 117/H-2/133, Pandu Nagar Kanpur

NOTICE

I have changed my name from RAMINDER PAL SINGH To RAMINDER PAL SINGH BAGGA, Raminder Pal Singh Bagga S/o Amrit Pal Singh Bagga R/o H.No.120/908, Ranjeet Nagar Kanpur

NOTICE

I have changed my name from RAHUL TIWARI To SUSHEEL TIWARI and henceforth I shall be named and known as Susheel Tiwari for all purposes. Susheel Tiwari S/o Shiv Narayan Tiwari R/o Abdulpur, Post Chaubepur, Malau, Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

My correct name is Moh Hamd jiyad S/o Moh jamal siddique R/o-90/254 B(5) globe rabber factory iftikharabad Kanpur nagar which is mentioned Bank passbook pan card aadhar card all educational Records by mistake LIC no.232062722 my name is mentioned as Baby siddique which is my household name In future I will be known Moh Hamd jiyad I have completed all legal formalities regarding the above by me

NOTICE

I, Varsha daughter of Sandeep Nigam resident of 47 Duparapur Unnao 209801, hereby inform about changing my name from Varsha to Darshika Nigam on all legal documents. Affidavit No. 243 dated 15 April 2025.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, PRATISHTHA MISHRA D/O PRADEEP CHANDRA MISHRA R/o 90, Jagaipurwa, Lalbangla, Harjinder Nagar, Kanpur Nagar, U.P.-208007, name of mine and my father has been wrongly written as PRATISHTHA MISRA and PRADEEP MISRA in my 10th Class Certificate. Actual name of mine and father are PRATISHTHA MISHRA and PRADEEP CHANDRA MISHRA.

PD(1873)A

I, NAVNEET SINGH S/O RAJAN SINGH R/o I-2/137, Sector-G, Kanpur Road, LDA Colony, Lucknow, U.P.-226012, changed my minor son's name daughter PIHU SINGH to NIVASHNI SINGH. aged 14 years.

PD(1874)A

The Pioneer
LUCKNOW | WEDNESDAY | APRIL 16, 2025

Stick only treatment for rioters: CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hardoi

Launching a scathing attack on Mamata Banerjee over the violence during protests in West Bengal against the Waqf law, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said "Bengal is burning" but its chief minister is "silent" and even calling the rioters "messengers of peace".

Adityanath also said that stick is the only treatment for rioters, as *"Laton ke bhoot baaton se kahan manne wale hain* (Those who respond only to thrashing don't understand words)".

Speaking in Hardoi after inaugurating and laying the foundation for 729 developmental schemes worth ₹650 crore, Adityanath said, "You all can see how Bengal is burning but the chief minister of the state is silent. She even calls the rioters messengers of peace. They have given a complete free hand to the rioters in the name of secularism.

"This type of anarchy must be controlled. The entire Murshidabad has been burning for the past week. I would like to thank the court there for ordering the deployment of central forces and taking steps for the safety of the minority Hindus in the district," he said.

Hailing the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, Adityanath said, "We are thankful to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, who got the Waqf (Amendment) Bill passed (in Parliament), thereby reining in the loot of poor people's land.

"Now, hospitals, schools and universities will come up on those lands, and no one will be allowed to grab them. That's why these people are worried, because the loot will stop now and their goons will be rendered jobless."

Adityanath's remarks came after violent protests erupted on Friday and Saturday in pockets of Murshidabad district, including Suti, Dhulian and Jangipur, triggered by anger over the Waqf law. The demonstrations soon escalated into clashes, leaving at least three people dead and several injured. "The Congress, Samajwadi Party and Trinamool Congress are silent on the Murshidabad riots. The rioters are making threats and supporting what happened in Bangladesh. If they like Bangladesh so much, they should go there. Why are they becoming a burden on our land," Adityanath asked.

Security forces are keeping a strict vigil to prevent any fresh episode of violence in Murshidabad district, officials said on Tuesday. Personnel of the BSF, CRPF, state police and RAF have been deployed in large numbers in Jangipur, Dhuliyan, Suti and Shamsherganj, where no new incident of violence was reported in the past 48 hours, the officials said.

"When the security situation improves, investments come in, employment generation takes place, and exodus of youths comes down. Before 2017, riots used to take place every second-third day (in Uttar Pradesh). The only treatment for these rioters is stick, without which they can't be reined in," Adityanath said.

Talking about the development schemes, the chief minister said, "The PM Mitra Textile Park is going to come up on the borders of Hardoi district, which will benefit lakhs of youth. I was looking at the textile work of Mallawan town. Its craftsmanship and weaving work are beautiful. Once the textile park comes up, the talented weavers will find more work.

"Also, the youth will no longer have to go to Punjab and Surat in search of work. Rather, people from other states will come to Hardoi for work."

In March 2023, the government of India announced sites for setting up seven PM Mega Integrated Textile Regions and Apparel (PM MITRA) Parks for the textile industry.

The parks will come up in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

"India has become the fifth-largest economy in the world and will reach the third position in the next few years behind the US and China," Adityanath said.

Stating that people must remain careful of those who are trying to fool the public and throw dust in their eyes, the chief minister said, "We have to believe in the Constitution framed by Babasaheb Ambedkar and join the process of development."

"Prime Minister Modi has presented the vision of a developed India to build a self-reliant nation. No one can stop India from becoming the world's biggest power in 2047, thus fulfilling the dreams of our freedom fighters," Adityanath said.

The chief minister also paid floral tributes to Raja Narpati Singh, who bravely resisted the British during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the Uttar Pradesh government said in a statement. "The first war of Independence in 1857 gave the country a new impetus to unite and fight against the British. Mangal Pandey, Rani Lakshmibai, Nana Rao Peshwa, and Bandhu Singh – they all fought the British on their respective fronts. The British could not defeat Bandhu Singh in Gorakhpur," Adityanath said. Marking the occasion, the chief minister presented assistive devices to persons with disabilities besides distributing toys to children.

Five-member committee to probe Lokbandhu Hospital fire incident

A patient being evacuated after a fire broke out at Lok Bandhu hospital in Lucknow on Monday PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

A five-member committee will probe into the fire incident at the Lokbandhu hospital on Monday night.

On instructions of Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak, a letter has been issued by the Chief Secretary for investigations. The Deputy CM said here on Tuesday that if anyone is found guilty in this case, strict action will be taken against him. The investigation committee will also submit its suggestions to prevent such incidents in future.

In line with the instructions given to Principal Secretary, Medical and Health, Parthasarathi Sen Sharma, this investigation committee will provide its report in 15 days regarding the primary cause of the fire, identification of any kind of negligence or fault (if any) and effective steps to be taken to prevent such incidents in future.

Pathak said that the chairman of this committee will be the Director General of Medical Health Services. The members include Director of Electrical Safety Directorate, Additional Director of Medical Education Department, officer nominated by the Fire Department and Additional Director of Medical Health Services (Electricity). Further action will be taken after the investigation report comes.

Akhilesh distances from party MLA's comments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, on Tuesday, distanced himself from the provocative comments against Sanatan Dharma made by party MLA Indrajeet Saroj. He said he has not come across the statements by Indrajeet Saroj or Ramji Lal Suman on the issue. Indrajt Saroj had questioned the strength of Sanatan Dharma — God and temples in preventing the invasion by foreign forces in medieval period.

"Our deities and gods were not that powerful. In 712 AD Mohammed Bin Qasim, an Arab, invaded and looted Sindh in India. Mohammed Ghori also invaded and looted India, so what did the gods and goddesses of this country do. They should have cursed the Muslims. They would turn into ashes, die and become blind. It means that there is something lacking and our gods are not that powerful", Samajwadi Party MLA Indrajit Saroj had said.

SP chief instead emphasises the importance of focusing on progressive issues rather than contentious issues of history. He said if the debate on historical issues cannot provide a positive direction, then it's better to ignore such matters.

"I have not heard the statement on dharma made by Indrajeet Saroj, I have not even heard statement made by Ramji Lal Suman, but I will say there is no question related to history should be raised. I want that if the things of history cannot show us a good path, if it cannot show us to a positive path, if it cannot give us a positive direction, then history should be allowed to remain history. History should not be discussed …Samajwadi's have done so many progressive things, have said so many progressive things," said Akhilesh Yadav.

Akhilesh Yadav accused BJP governments in Uttar Pradesh and at the Centre of not delivering on their promises and alleged that the party was repackaging old schemes with new names to mislead the public.

"Before they become zero themselves, everything around them is turning into zero," Yadav said in a swipe at the BJP.

"Just like their 'zero tolerance' has become zero, the slogan of 'zero poverty' will also turn out to be a BJP-style jumla," the former chief minister said. India gave the world the concept of zero in mathematics, "not for distributing lies among people", he added.

"Poverty is eradicated through actions, not words. And when it comes to action, the BJP government stands at zero," Yadav said, claiming that the government will leave everything in a state of "shunya" (zero) before its exit. He also criticised the BJP for renaming rural development schemes.

"They may continue their old tradition of deceit by renaming schemes like Ambedkar Village and Lohia Village, and presenting them in new formats but they have nothing original to offer," he added.

Yadav called on the BJP to fulfil its promises.

"Before making new promises, they should transfer Rs 15 lakh into people's bank accounts, visit the adopted villages to witness their plight and wipe the dust that has settled on the unfulfilled promises of homes for all and water in every home," he said.

"At least stop lying to the poor," he said terming the BJP's approach as "deplorable".

Hospital lacked Fire dept NOC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Lokbandhu hospital, which witnessed a major fire on Monday night, has no fire NOC.

Sources at the hospital revealed that the fire NOC of the hospital was valid from 2022 to January 25, 2024 and its extension was pending.

"An inspection was carried out by the Fire department in 2024 which identified a few gaps that included the absence of a public address system, smoke extractors and sprinklers. Though we have purchased the smoke extractors and the public address system, the budget for the sprinklers has been sent to the state government and its purchase is still pending. We are still awaiting the fire NOC", said the sources at the hospital.

A senior official from the Fire department when contacted said that there are 900 hospitals in Lucknow and those who have no Fire NOC should not be given license by the health department. He said that the fires mostly occurred due to short circuits and it was important to get a electricity audit done to prevent fires.

Director Sangeeta Gupta said that she had joined recently and was not aware whether the hospital had a fire NOC or not.

Meanwhile the Lokbandhu OPD and Emergency started functioning from Tuesday. Director Sangeeta Gupta said that the OPD was functioning normally and that they were likely to start their indoor services at the earliest.

"We are taking no new admissions. All the admitted patients have already been shifted to other hospitals", she said. Regarding the death of one person during the course of shifting , she said that the patient had already been declared dead at Lokbandhu. "He had suffered from a multiorgan failure, " she said.

Talking about the fire safety measures, she said that steps were being taken to strengthen the fire safety measures at the hospital. Regarding the damages which had occurred because of the fire, she said that that the loss was being assessed.

Mayawati to chair key meeting in Lko today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati will preside over a crucial meeting of senior party leaders from Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand here on Wednesday.

The meeting, to be held at the BSP's state office in Mall Avenue, will be attended by senior office-bearers and all district presidents of the party from the two states, according to a media invite.

"The focus of the session will be to review grassroots-level preparations, assess the progress of key organisational tasks assigned so far, and chalk out future strategies to strengthen the party's presence among the masses," it said.

The meeting will begin at 11 am, the invitation said.

Meanwhile, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati on Tuesday questioned the government's governance over vacant top posts in premier educational institutions of the country and the declining campus placements. She also flagged lack of government jobs and employment opportunities for educated and skilled people.

Taking to social media platform X, Mayawati said, "The news of 17 premier central educational institutions in the country, including IITs, IIMs and NITs, being led by interim heads instead of permanent ones amid a decline in campus placements — as noted with concern by a parliamentary committee — raises many questions about the government's governance." In a follow-up post, she highlighted the grim employment scenario faced by educated and skilled individuals.

"Moreover, the shortage of suitable employment opportunities for educated unemployed youth and skilled individuals, and the proliferation of insecure jobs such as courier services, salesmen, security guards and other unorganised sectors have made people quite troubled and unhappy. Serious measures for employment and good governance are essential," she added. The former UP chief minister cited a media report which claimed absence of permanent heads in at least 17 top educational institutions in the country including the IIMs, the IITs.

Museum to come up at Rashtra Prerna Sthal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In line with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's vision of blending development with national pride, the Uttar Pradesh government is taking a major step to inspire future generations. The Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) has prepared an ambitious blueprint for a grand museum at the under-construction Rashtra Prerna Sthal in Sector-J of the Basant Kunj Scheme.

The state-of-the-art museum will feature inspiration galleries dedicated to Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee—offering visitors a deep, immersive look into their ideologies, contributions, and legacies. In addition to the galleries, the museum will house a modern holographic theatre, an audiovisual hall, 3D projection mapping, and an engaging light-and-sound show. Various thematic art installations will also be showcased, enhancing the museum's visual and cultural appeal.

According to the LDA's detailed plan, the museum will be developed with a perfect blend of cutting-edge technology and India's timeless heritage. The Rashtra Prerna Sthal itself is envisioned as a thematic memorial park dedicated to the three great stalwarts of Indian politics. It will narrate their life stories and host large public events such as rallies, cultural festivals like Lucknow Mahotsav, and group activities, including yoga, meditation, and spiritual sessions.

The museum will be a key attraction of the park, designed to educate and inspire through interactive exhibits, captivating displays, and enriching educational programs. It aims to become a beacon of values such as leadership, public service, and civic duty—especially for the youth.

The museum will be developed across five thematic zones with Zone 1: Arrival Gallery, Zone 2: Corridor Display Area, Zone 3: Digital Display Gallery, Zone 4: Outdoor Display Gallery, and Zone 5: Three individual galleries dedicated to Mukherjee, Upadhyay, and Vajpayee.

Subject experts and historians will guide the installation work to ensure historical accuracy and artistic integrity.

The project also includes the development of advanced facilities like a holographic theatre and an audiovisual hall, where dynamic presentations will bring to life India's freedom movement and other landmark moments.

The Yogi government has sanctioned a budget of ₹65 crore for the construction and development of the museum. Out of this, ₹35.30 crore has been earmarked specifically for the museum infrastructure, and the first instalment of ₹22.55 crore has already been released to kick-start the work. This transformative initiative is poised to become a landmark destination— bridging history, technology and cultural pride, while keeping the memory of India's visionary leaders alive for generations to come.

Gyanvapi row: HC adjourns hearing on plea seeking survey of Wazukhana area

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Prayagraj

The Allahabad High Court on Tuesday adjourned its hearing till May 5 on a petition challenging a Varanasi court's order refusing to direct the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) to undertake a survey of the Wazukhana area in Gyanvapi mosque complex.

Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal postponed the hearing on the revision plea by Rakhi Singh, considering the interim order by the Supreme Court which directed that no court will pass any effective interim or final orders, including orders for a survey of a religious place, till April 21, 2025. The high court also granted time to the managing committee of the Gyanvapi mosque, which abuts the Kashi Vishwanath temple, to file its counter affidavit in the meantime.

In her revision plea, Rakhi Singh has pleaded that the survey of the Wazukhana (ablution) area is necessary in the interest of justice. In the petition, it has been said that the survey of the Wazukhana area will help determine the religious character of the entire property.

Rahul defamation case: Court defers matter to April 28

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Sultanpur

A special court on Tuesday deferred the hearing over a defamation case against Congress MP Rahul Gandhi after a witness from the complainant's side did not depose in court.

The special MP-MLA court fixed April 28 as the next date of hearing, according to a lawyer in the case.

Gandhi's lawyer, Kashi Prasad Shukla, said, "The hearing was scheduled to take place today, but no action could be taken as the witness from the complainant's side was not produced. The court has fixed April 28 as the next date of hearing."

The previous hearing in the case took place on April 3. Complainant's lawyer Santosh Kumar Pandey said a witness was supposed to testify on Tuesday.

"The witness had come to court but could not record the statement due to ill health. Upon my request, the judge set April 28 as the next hearing date," he added.

The case dates back to 2018, when local BJP politician Vijay Mishra filed a defamation suit over Gandhi's alleged objectionable remarks against BJP leader Amit Shah during the Karnataka assembly elections.

After five years of legal proceedings, the court issued a warrant against Gandhi in December 2023.

The Rae Bareli MP surrendered before the court in February 2024, and was granted bail on two sureties of Rs 25,000 each by the special magistrate. On July 26, he recorded his statement before the court, claiming innocence and calling the case a political conspiracy.

Earlier this year, multiple hearings were postponed due to a strike by lawyers and the ill health of Gandhi's counsel.

On February 11, Gandhi's lawyer Shukla completed the cross-examination of the complainant.

Asstt teachers' exam today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

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

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

District Magistrates have been directed to deploy fully armed police personnel at each examination venue. They have also been granted authority to enforce prohibitory orders if required. Additional precautions have been taken for the secure transportation of confidential examination materials between the treasury and the commission office. A total of 82,876 candidates are expected to appear for the exam. Among them, the highest number — 18,240 —will take the exam in Prayagraj, followed by 16,010 in Meerut, 15,602 in Gorakhpur, 13,528 in Lucknow, 10,958 in Varanasi, and 8,538 in Agra. The maximum number of centres — 10 each — have been established in Meerut, Prayagraj, and Gorakhpur, followed by 9 in Lucknow, 7 in Varanasi, and 6 in Agra. In line with CM Yogi's commitment to restoring youth confidence in the recruitment process, the examination will be held under the joint supervision of the commission and district administration. The Chairman of the Commission, nominated members, district supervisors, and centre supervisors will monitor the entire process to ensure strict adherence to transparency and merit-based evaluation — giving every deserving candidate a fair chance at success.

3 killed as bus collides with car

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

Three persons, including two women, died while two others were seriously injured when a bus collided head on with a car on the GT Road in Naramau under Bithoor police station area around 7:30 am on Tuesday. The deceased included two government school teachers and a car driver.

A car-borne woman teacher and a motorcyclist were seriously injured and undergoing treatment at the Rama Hospital, Mandhana (Bithoor). On getting information the Bithoor police and NHAI team rushed to the spot and got both the damaged vehicles to the roadside.

Car driver Vishal Dwivedi (25) of Kalyanpur had left for Unnao to drop the school teachers, Akanksha Mishra (30) of Kalyanpur, Anjula Mishra of Barra and Richa Agnihotri of Goa Garden to their school. In Naramau when Vishal wanted to turn the car from the cut on the highway near Dalhan road to collect fuel from CNG pump, it suddenly collided with an adjacent bike, seriously injuring its rider, a government school teacher, Ashok Kumar of Panki. Thereafter, when then the car proceeded towards Naramau from the wrong side, it collided head on with the private traveller bus. Around a dozen private factory employees present in the bus got down from the vehicle and moved to their destination.

The badly damaged car after the accident in Naramau, Bithoor, on Tuesday

Car driver Vishal and school teachers Akanksha Mishra, Anjula Mishra and Richa got entangled in the vehicle and were rescued by the police with the help of passers-by.

The Bithoor police sent Akanksha Mishra, Anjula Mishra and Vishal to LLR (Hallet) Hospital where both the women were declared dead while Vishal succumbed to his injury during treatment. Seriously injured Richa Agnihotri was under going treatment in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Rama Hospital, Mandhana, while Ashok was admitted in a private ward there.

No party in favour of cow protection: Shankaracharya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

Jyotishpeeth Shankaracharya Swami Avimukteshwarananda Saraswati said no established political party is in favour of cow protection. Addressing a press conference at Srividya Math (Kedar Ghat) here on Tuesday, he said, "Every party has been talking about cow protection since before independence, but even after 78 years of it, no central law could be made on this issue because in reality no established party wanted it in our country with majority Hindus." He said it is the lack of political will that despite the fact that Article 48 of the Indian Constitution calls for an attempt to ban cow slaughter and majority of the Indian population constantly demanding cow protection, a law for cow protection has not been made in the country.

He said that after running the 'Gau Pratishtha Abhiyan' for a long time, he had asked every established political party on behalf of the entire theistic Hindu society to clarify their views on cows within 33 days after the end of Maha Kumbh but even after going to the doors of the offices of political parties, no party

responded. "This was the first occasion in history when any Shankaracharya went to the doors of political parties and asked whether they are standing with cows or against it? But no political party answered", he said. "Despite being given repeated opportunities, the silence of the parties on the issue of cow protection shows that they do not have any interest, priority or faith in cow protection and it would be foolish to expect anything from them now", he said, and added that the only solution left now is for the voters should be determined for cow protection.

CU to provide scholarships worth ₹40 cr to students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

The Chandigarh University will provide scholarships worth Rs 40 crore to meritorious students through Chandigarh University Common Entrance Test 2025 (CUCET 2025) to help meritorious and financially weak students to get world-class AI-augmented multidisciplinary education, tailored to the evolving needs of 21st-century learners at India's next-gen futuristic university which is offering 49 AI (Artificial Intelligence) augmented courses from the upcoming academic session 2025-26 at its state-of-the-art campus, built at a cost of over Rs 2,500 crore on Kanpur-Lucknow Highway.

This information was provided by Advisor to the Chancellor, Chandigarh University Lucknow, Dr Manoj Joshi, while addressing mediapersons in Kanpur on Tuesday. on the occasion of launch of the Chandigarh University Common Entrance Test (CUCET 2025) portal (https://cucet.cuchd.in). He was accompanied by Dr Ajay Kumar Yadav, Registrar, Chandigarh University Lucknow.

Dr Joshi said, "CUCET 2025 portal is

Advisor to the Chancellor, Chandigarh University Lucknow, Dr Manoj Joshi, addressing mediapersons on Tuesday.

now open for registrations for those seeking admission to the Lucknow campus of the university in 2025-26 academic year. He said Chandigarh University Lucknow, has already received recognition from the UGC on January 24, 2025, and the University has also been included in the list of state public universities by Uttar Pradesh government." Additionally, the University will offer Rs 3 crore 'CV Raman Scholarship' to support students pursuing careers in scientific research.

Registrar Dr Ajay Kumar Yadav, said, "The AI-Augmented Chandigarh University Lucknow, located in the vicinity of India's first AI City in Lucknow State Capital Region (SCR), will revolutionise country's educational landscape with 49 AI-augmented futuristic undergraduate and postgraduate programs. By embracing a multidisciplinary education model enriched by AI integration, these programmes will be offered across six streams including Engineering, Business Administration, Health and Life Sciences, Humanities, Liberal Arts and Legal Studies from the 2025-26 academic year."

FILMMAKING WORKSHOP

The Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU) and Jagran Institute of Management and Mass Communication (JIMMC), in collaboration with Rangshila Productions, inaugurated the state's first-ever three-day filmmaking workshop at Senate Hall on Tuesday.

The workshop to be held till April 17 is a pioneering initiative aimed at nurturing aspiring filmmakers and creative minds from across the region.

BJP has always been vocal for rights of Dalits: Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Ayush Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' said that today Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is fulfilling all the objectives of Babasaheb. The party has always been vocal for rights of Dalits and has always respected democracy under the Indian Constitution, he said. Addressing party workers present on the occasion of birth anniversary of Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar at his camp office in Sigra here on Monday, Dayalu said that the BJP's central and state governments have worked to bring the poor and deprived class to the mainstream of society.

"BJP has always believed that poverty is a social evil. Therefore, political power should be in the hands of such people who move forward with social ideals as a concern.

Babasaheb was in favour of such a society in which there is maximum production and equal distribution of wealth", the minister said adding that for more than a decade, our governments have been working tirelessly to fulfil the dreams of Baba Saheb whether it is about bringing 25 crore people out of poverty, strengthening the SC/ST Act, flagship programmes of the government like Swachh Bharat, PM Awas Yojana, Jal Jeevan Mission, Ujjwala Yojana, each of these schemes has benefited the poor and marginalised people as per Babasaheb's dreams.

Babasaheb's birth anniversary celebrated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

The 134th birth anniversary of Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar was celebrated in the Bharatendu Auditorium Room of the Divisional Office of North Eastern Railway (NER) on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vineet Kumar Srivastava. In his address, the DRM said that Dr Ambedkar is known as the architect of the Indian Constitution as well as Bodhisattva and Vishwa Ratna.

While conducting the programme, Divisional Personnel Officer (in charge) Abhinav Kumar Singh said Baba Saheb was

DRM VK Srivastava awarding a winner of essay contest in Varanasi on Tuesday.

such a great man, whose thoughts and deeds not only challenged the social structure of India, but also laid the foundation of a new India. The ADRM (Infrastructure) Roshan Lal Yadav, ADRM (Operations) Rajesh Kumar Singh, Senior Divisional Engineer (Coordination) Rakesh Ranjan, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Sheikh Rehman, Divisional Finance Manager Rajesh Kumar, Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (General) Pankaj Kesharwani, Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (Traction) RN Singh, Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer (C&W) Abhinav Pathak, Senior Divisional Signal and Telecommunication Engineer Rajat Priya, Senior Divisional Security Commissioner S Ramakrishnan, Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer (EnHM) Abhishek Rai, Senior Divisional Safety Officer Balendra Pal and others paid homage by offering flowers on the picture of Babasaheb.

Social implications of GST addressed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

A week-long workshop on 'Smart Taxation System' based on Goods and Services Tax (GST) began at the Faculty of Commerce, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), with a ceremonial tribute to Bharat Ratna Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya's statue, followed by lamp lighting here on Tuesday. In the welcome address, Faculty Dean Prof HK Singh emphasised the balance between theory and practice and highlighted the economic welfare perspective, particularly focusing on principles that support the interests of the poor and social equality.

Workshop coordinator Dr Lal Babu Jaiswal informed that the workshop will feature sessions conducted by renowned chartered accountants and officials, covering various dimensions of GST. Former head of the Economics department Prof Achal Kumar Gaur explained GST as a 'consumption-based tax' and shed light on its implications for investment and savings.

Devesh Tiwari, Deputy Commissioner (GST), Varanasi Division, elaborated on the commercial data collection aspects of GST, along with its schedules, technical structure, and legal framework. He also discussed the foundational structure established by various earlier committees. Prof Akhil Mishra spoke about how GST impacts the general public and addressed its multiple dimensions.

Senior assistant registrar Dr Shardul Chaubey addressed the social implications of GST, comparing tax systems across countries.

Chartered Accountant Vishal Singh pointed out that GST is not applicable to everyone and small traders are largely exempted. He also discussed its practical aspects. The event was conducted by Dr Ishi Mohan and the vote of thanks was presented by programme coordinator Dr Avadhesh Singh. Prof Yash P Agrawal, Prof OP Singh, Prof Fateh Bahadur Singh, Prof Sundaram, Dr Anchal Singh, Dr Rakhi Gupta, along with over 150 students participated in the programme.

A 'prabhat pheri' was organised from the Guest House at NTPC Auraiya to mark Ambedkar Jayanti on Monday. The employees and their families gathered to pay tribute to Dr BR Ambedkar. Led by AGM (O&M) SK Balyan and HOHR Tanmoy Dutta, all employees and members of SC-ST Association took part in it. Everyone participated with great enthusiasm, raised slogans and showed respect for Babasaheb's life and message. A cultural programme showcasing the life of Dr Ambedkar was organised In the evening .

Tribute paid to Dr Ambedkar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

The North Central Railway (NCR) Headquarters celebrated Bharat Ratna Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar's 134th birth anniversary on Tuesday. The event was held in Aravali auditorium, where General Manager Upendra Chandra Joshi paid tribute to Dr Ambedkar by lighting a lamp and garlanding his picture.

GM NCR said Dr Ambedkar was a renowned jurist, economist, social reformer and political leader who played a pivotal role in shaping India's history.

Principal Chief Personnel Officer S Balachandra Iyer and other officials offered flowers the picture of Dr Ambedkar. The GM highlighted the biography of Dr Ambedkar emphasising his role in promoting social justice and equality.

On this occasion, Meetu Kori recited a poem, praising Dr Ambedkar's contribution.

An essay writing competition was also

organised to raise awareness about Dr Ambedkar's values. The winners received cash prizes and certificates. Vandana Singh who bagged the first position was given a reward of ₹2,000, Richa Pandey who got the second position was given ₹1,500 and Arjun Singh who secured the third position was awarded ₹1,000.

Eco-friendly drinking straws developed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

In a significant step towards sustainable innovation, researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (BHU), Varanasi, have successfully developed eco-friendly drinking straws from bamboo and waste biomass, offering a durable and biodegradable alternative to plastic and paper straws.

As the world becomes increasingly conscious of environmental sustainability, the food and beverage industry is actively seeking alternatives to harmful plastic straws. These conventional straws are non-degradable, generate microplastics and pose serious health risks to both humans and ecosystems. Paper straws, often touted as eco-friendly, fall short due to their sogginess, mechanical fragility and presence of plastic coatings that can release microplastics.

In response to these challenges, the research team from the School of Biochemical Engineering at IIT (BHU) led by assistant professor Dr Prodyut Dhar and research scholar Rohit Rai, has pioneered the development of bamboo-based drinking straws. These straws offer high mechanical strength, reusability, biodegradability, thermal stability and anti-fizzing properties—all achieved using a cost-effective, microwave-assisted fabrication method.

"Bamboo is a highly renewable resource with low ecological impact and wide availability across India," said Dr Prodyut Dhar. "Our technology enables the production of straws that are not only sustainable but also meet performance expectations, making them a viable replacement for existing plastic and paper options."

The breakthrough work has been recognised with the granting of Indian Patent number 557472, titled 'Biodegradable bamboo-based drinking straws and a method of preparation thereof'. The patented technology has already undergone technology transfer for potential industrial production, with discussions ongoing to scale up for mass manufacturing and commercial deployment.

In addition to bamboo, the lab is also exploring agro-waste biomass sources such as rice straws, wheat straws, mustard stems, and papaya waste. These variants have demonstrated unique properties including spoilage sensing and adulteration detection in beverages— highlighted in high-impact journals like iScience (Cell Press) and Food Chemistry (Elsevier). Another complementary study, recently published in the Chemical Engineering Journal (Elsevier), showcases a gelatin-based composite derived from bamboo waste that further enhances straw durability, biodegradability, and thermal resistance. Director of IIT (BHU) Prof Amit Patra congratulated Dr Dhar and the team, stating, "This innovation is a significant step towards 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Make in India', and it directly benefits society." This indigenous technology aligns with national initiatives such as 'Make in India', 'Swachh Bharat', and 'Swasth Bharat' and makes an important contribution toward making India plastic-free.

ORIENTATION PROGRAMME

Mudra – The Finance and Corporate Cell of the Faculty of Commerce, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) conducted its orientation programme on Tuesday at Faculty of Commerce. The event witnessed the participation of around 70 students.

The session commenced with the address of convener Dr Meenakshi A Singh in which she highlighted Mudra as a transformative platform that bridges classroom learning with real-world finance and corporate exposure. She praised its student-driven approach and emphasised the importance of analytical thinking, financial literacy and industry engagement, encouraging members to actively participate and grow into future-ready professionals.

Chief guest and Dean, Faculty of Commerce, Prof HK Singh emphasised the holistic development of functional skills in the domain of finance and economics. He highlighted society's role in fostering an environment for critical thinking, analytical ability, and real-world applicability. "Mudra has always aimed at creating a bridge between academic learning and industry expectations," he remarked.

Advantages of nano fertilisers highlighted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

The Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) Phulpur unit on Tuesday organised a 'kisan chaupal' in Pure Ka Bhulai, Babuganj, with the aim of educating farmers about the benefits of using Nano Urea Plus and Nano DAP on crops like millet, moong and paddy. The event was held at the Panchayat Bhawan and was enthusiastically attended by farmers.

Senior Executive Director (Unit Head) Sanjay Kudeshiya addressed the gathering, highlighting the advantages of nano fertilisers in improving crop yields while preventing soil degradation. He encouraged farmers to adopt these innovative products and assured them of immediate support from the IFFCO team in case of any issues. Kudeshiya emphasised the importance of awareness about nano fertilisers among farmers.

Kudeshiya said that IFFCO's nano fertilisers are designed to provide essential nutrients to crops, promoting healthy growth and development. These

products help increase crop yields, reduce soil pollution and improve soil fertility.

Farmers can reach out to the IFFCO team for guidance on using nano fertilisers and addressing any concerns.

The 'kisan chaupal' saw participation from various stakeholders, including Cordet Pracharya Dr Harischandra, Public Relations Officer (PRO) Swayam Prakash, Manager Training Anurag Tiwari and General Secretary of IFFCO Employees' Union Vijay Kumar Yadav.

Village head Pushpa Devi and other IIFCO employees, including Kamlesh Kumar, Jagdev Prasad Chaudhary, Gulab Singh, Lal Chandra Vishwakarma, Abrar, Alok Yadav and Bhanu Pratap Patel among others were present. PRO Swayam Prakash said by educating farmers about the benefits of nano fertilisers, IFFCO aims to promote sustainable agricultural practices and improve crop yield in the region.

Social worker felicitated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

A dedicated social worker from Prayagraj, Manpreet Kaur, was felicitated for her outstanding contribution to social service at a grand ceremony held in Goa. She was presented this prestigious honour by dignitaries, including Goa Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant and MP Hema Malini.

Kaur's organisation, Maa Sita Rasoi, has been tirelessly serving the community through various initiatives: Providing spiritual guidance to countless individuals, helping them overcome personal struggles and find self-realisation.

Maa Sita Rasoi has been running successfully in Ayodhya for five years, serving lakhs of people daily. During the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, the organisation provided *prasad* to lakhs of devotees and bathers through its day-and-night *bhandaras* at camps of prominent saints and major locations. Kaur, a renowned spiritual leader and an entrepreneur, expressed gratitude for the recognition, and reiterated her mission to serve humanity.

Try to uplift underprivileged: Murmu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

Their area of service and authority are so vast that they can make the lives of many fellow citizens better in their first posting itself, the President said.

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

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

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

"Their real social net worth would be determined by their good work," Murmu was quoted as having said in a statement issued by the President's office. The President said that every public servant should work with honesty of purpose.

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

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

President Murmu said that in the digital era, people's aspirations are rising.

"They are becoming aware of the accountability of administrators," she told the officers, who had called on the President, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre here.

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

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

Congress slams Centre over fuel, LPG price hikes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

"In 2014, the price of petrol was ₹72 per litre. But today, it is ₹98 to ₹100 per litre. In the Congress government, diesel was ₹55 per litre, while under the BJP government, it has become ₹88 per litre," she said. "In the Congress government, the excise duty on petrol was ₹9.20 per litre, today it has increased to ₹19.90. In 2014, the excise duty on diesel was ₹3.46, today it has increased to ₹15.80. Under the Congress government, the price of crude oil was USD 108 per barrel, but today it is USD 65.31 per barrel," she said.

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

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

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

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

The accused, who challenged a trial court order against his bail plea, argued the trial was not likely to conclude in near future and to balance the period of custody undergone by him with his fundamental right to liberty, he ought to be granted bail. "While we are aware that the right of an undertrial to a speedy trial is of paramount consideration, in cases involving terrorist activities which have nation-wide implications and where there is an intention to destabilise the unity of the union of India and to disrupt its law and order, more so, to create terror in the minds of general public, which are also factors that weigh in, the long period of incarceration would not, in itself, be ground enough to enlarge an accused on bail," said the bench's order on April 9.

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

In the case registered in 2017 under the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the NIA claimed secessionists entered into a criminal conspiracy to instigate the general public to resort to violence and create a surcharged atmosphere for the propagation of their agenda in the valley.

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

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

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

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

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

The order observed protected witnesses had also brought out the nexus between the Hurriyat and the appellant and the Pakistan establishment aside from the funding received from Pakistan for organising secessionist activities.

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

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

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

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

India, Tanzania boost ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

Co-hosted by India and Tanzania, the naval exercise also involves participation of Comoros, Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles and South Africa.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IAF salutes late Air Marshal Arjan Singh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

"On the 106th Birth Anniversary of the legendary Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh, #IAF honours the remarkable legacy of a visionary leader. Promoted to the rank of #MarshalOfTheAirForce in 2002, he remains the only officer in the history of the IAF to hold the prestigious five-star rank.

"#SalutingTheLegend #RemeberingArjanSingh #YearsOfDefenceReforms #IAF @DefenceMinIndia @SpokespersonMoD @HQ_IDS_India @adgpi @IndiannavyMedia," the IAF said in a post on X. The Air Force also shared a short video clip containing a montage of some of the rare photographs of the hero, tracing his journey in the IAF.

"From a young flight cadet to Marshal of the Air Force, Singh's journey began with a fearless heart and a skyward gaze. His early years shaped the legend he became," read a line used in the montage.

"A warrior. A leader. A legend," read another line. The IAF, in the tribute video, said he played a "pivotal role" in shaping the IAF into a "modern formidable force".

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

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

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

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

The IAF also said as the Chief of the Air Staff, he stayed "deeply connected with flying". The Ministry of Defence, the Indian Army and the CDS paid tributes to him in separate posts on X.

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

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

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

The first Five-Star Rank officer of the #IAF, his exemplary leadership, valour and unwavering dedication to the Nation remains a timeless source of inspiration for generations to come. @HQ_IDS_India @IAF_MCC".

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

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

CBI cracks down on digital arrest scam syndicates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

90 per cent policewomen in constabulary: Report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

The report also underscored gender disparities within the police hierarchy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Editor's TAKE

Babasaheb and the battle for justice

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

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

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

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

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

Saluting the Gorkha spirit

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

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

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

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

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

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

He was my Guruji when I joined my VC battalion 2/5 Gorkha Rifles FF in 1957 in Kashmir. But this Holi, occurred the mother of all surprises — attending the 106th birthday party in full Gurung style of our own Havildar Ramprasad Gurung on 18th March; and one week later, the 99-year-old Havildar, Tejbahadur Thapa. The young Gurung joined the battalion as a 16-year-old in 1939. The Master of Ceremonies at his birthday party introduced Ramprasad with his Army number 5430423, adding that he was from Gandaki Pradesh, Syangjah district, Putlibazar Nagapalika, Oda no 6, Kolma- Pokhrichap, Majhakot ghar. Gurung was from B Company, 2/5 GR VC Paltan, who retired with 21 years of service in May 1961, fought in World War II mainly in Burma from 1939 to 1945, then was in Japan with the British Occupation Force. Later, in 1961, he served in Kashmir, and before that from 1946 in NEFA, Nagaland and Calcutta.

ASHOK K MEHTA

His only daughter, 59-year-old Jhaman Kumari, was the envy of attention and query. All of Kolma-Pokhrichap appeared to have descended on Pokhara to join the festivities. We represented his beloved battalion and were squeezed into the elaborate Tamu Samaj protocol and allotted a short window to congratulate Gurung.I recalled visiting Kolma Pokhrichap in 1959, 66 years earlier. The cake-cutting ceremony was unique: the icing on the two cakes was used as a tika to be planted on the forehead. Every well-wisher is trying to put a pinch of cake into Gurung's overloaded mouth. Daughter Jhaman Kumari's yells of 'bhayo bhayo' (stop) — his mouth cannot take any more cake— go unheard. Gurung is unable to speak and not unhappy about it.

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

Gurung's celebrations are covered in local newspapers as well as Annapurna Express and Naya Patrika. My second encounter a week later is with a 13-month-shy of a century-old soldier in Ghorai. His career graph is more colourful and enchanting than the 106-year-old Gurung's.Havildar Tej Bahadur Thapa was born on 5 May 1926 and joined 2/8 GR, was transferred to 6/8 GR and again moved to 3/8 GR, where he was Signal (communications) Havildar. He too fought in the Burma jungles and at the end of the war, was chosen among 1350 Indian soldiers led by Brig JN Chaudhury, who later became Indian Army Chief, at Victory Parade 1945 in London. After retiring from the Indian Army, Thapa joined Nepal Police by fudging his age by five years. He told me triumphantly: 'I have three dates of birth and get two pensions: one from India, one from Nepal. Next year my Indian pension will double.' His memory is crystal clear and his art of mixing nostalgia with encounters of war, spellbinding.

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

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

Leaderspeak

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

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

Human trait: Excusing the inexcusable

SECOND Opinion

BY RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

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

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

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

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

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

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

The same can be said of his tendencies of aggression and greed. His justification of his self-interest and the wrong notion of security has led the world into the morass of grave economic imbalance and the race for war weapons. Hence there is an urgent need to put man's rational faculty on the right track and, thereby, enable him to put an end to his irrational, irresponsible and injurious behaviour to save mankind from several global upheavals.

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

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

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

Letters to the Editor

Larger than life cut-outs are menacing

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

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

SUJIT DE | KOLKATA

Congress party revamps itself

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

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

BAL GOVIND I NOIDA

Now enjoy sleep tourism

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

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

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

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

KIRTI I WADHAWAN

THE SC CURBS GOVERNORS' POWERS TO WITHHOLD BILLS INDEFINITELY

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

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

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

This is yet another bold milestone that is rarely seen these days — when the borderline between the executive and the judiciary often gets blurred, to the peril of the institution of democracy that rests on the three pillars of the legislature, executive, and judiciary functioning independent of one another. It is in the interest of a healthy Indian democracy that its three pillars — the legislature, executive, and judiciary — run at cross purposes, rather than their interests converge.

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

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

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

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

Bridging education and employability

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

FIRST Column

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

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

The Challenges in Implementation

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

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

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

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

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

The Path Forward

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

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

To encourage participation, the government could implement a financial incentive model. Providing a monthly stipend of ₹500 for students from economically weaker sections, along with a vocational training kit, could promote enrollment. An increased stipend of ₹1,000 per month for students who continue in vocational training through their higher classes would further incentivise sustained commitment. Graduating students should receive certification after four years, bolstering their employability both domestically and internationally.

DINESH SOOD

Bridging the Skill Gap

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

Yet, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) stands at approximately 32 per cent, compelling many to seek employment in the unorganised sector — a domain fraught with exploitation and underpayment.

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

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

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

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

Adapting to Emerging Technologies

As technological innovation accelerates, vocational programs must incorporate modern skills relating to AI, IoT, and cloud computing. The Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) initiative to introduce AI and IoT into the curriculum for Classes VI to X is a step in the right direction. With over 20,000 teachers trained in these areas, reaching approximately 350,000 students, substantial progress is evident.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How PM Modi's vision revitalised BIMSTEC

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

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

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

A Strategic Turn in Goa

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

Vision-Driven Diplomacy:

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

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

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

Strengthening the Institutions

While BIMSTEC's Secretariat had existed for some time, a significant leap in its institutional development came in May 2024 with the formal adoption of the BIMSTEC Charter. This milestone endowed the organisation with an international legal identity, clearly defined principles, and an institutional architecture that allows it to function with more coherence and purpose.

SHEFALI GUPTA

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

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

A Holistic Agenda

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

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

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

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

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

India's Pillars of Focus

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

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

Given the region's high vulnerability to natural disasters, this collaboration holds immense practical value.

Fostering Regional Identity

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

From Goa to Bangkok

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

Conclusion

Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BIMSTEC has transitioned from a dormant regional forum to a vibrant, forward-looking grouping. India's proactive engagement — rooted in strategic vision and people-centric diplomacy, has redefined the role of BIMSTEC in the 21st century. What began as a diplomatic gesture in Goa has evolved into a robust regional movement.

As BIMSTEC continues to chart its course, India's leadership remains central to its strength, stability, and success, ensuring the Bay of Bengal

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

Delhi eyes paperless House

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In a separate meeting with Kambhampati, Gupta spoke about the Delhi Assembly's plans to become fully solar-powered.

PIONEER PHOTO

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

Kambhampati expressed interest in adopting similar solar solutions at the Raj Bhavan in Odisha and praised Delhi's steps towards sustainability and innovation, according to the statement.

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

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

Protest to continue till wages raised: Kerala ASHA workers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Thiruvananthapuram

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

S Mini, state vice president of the Kerala ASHA Health Workers Association (KAHWA) whose members are carrying out the agitation, also alleged that the proposal to set up a committee, to examine their demands and working conditions and give its report, "was only a tactic aimed at ending the protest". "The proposal to set up a committee was not a sincere one. No panel has been set up till now. It was only a tactic aimed at ending the protest. "The protest will go on strongly. We will not end it without a hike in our wages," she told a TV channel. A section of Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers have been protesting outside the secretariat since February 10 demanding a hike in their honorarium from ₹7,000 to ₹ 21,000 and a post retirement benefit of five lakh rupees.

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

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

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

PM Modi's J and K visit postponed amid security concerns

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

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

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

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

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

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

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

Healthcare sector taken monumental leap under BJP government: Nadda

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rishikesh

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

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

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

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

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

He praised the premier institute in Rishikesh for the "great work" it was doing in the field of telemedicine promotion alongside AIIMS, Delhi and PGI, Chandigarh by providing quality healthcare services to remote and under-served areas.

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

The number of medical colleges in the country has risen from 387 to 780 over the last 10 years which indicates that medical colleges are being opened in rural areas as well. "Medical colleges have been opened in non-descript remote places where one could not imagine them at one time," he said.

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

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

He spoke at length about how the shift in focus from curative health to preventive and promotive health in the new health policy was proving beneficial to the country. Nadda said education is a birthright but not professional education which he described as a privilege given by society.

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

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

Woman shot dead days before mother's *Chaliswa*

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

On Monday night, Saira had dinner and went to her room, a relative told PTI. "When Sayyeda went to her room around 10 pm, she was not there." Since it was not unusual for Saira to go out at night to meet Rizwan, the family didn't suspect anything. However, late at night around 2 am, they received a call from the police saying she had been shot dead. The spot near the Delhi Jal Board office at Sunder Nagri where she was killed had blood spatters — for many in the area, this was the first such sight. Raj Kumar Bhandari (51), a property dealer, who lives close to the spot, said at first he thought he heard something like a firecracker burst. "I had just finished eating when I heard a noise. I thought children were bursting crackers to chase away monkeys from the area which they usually do," he said.

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

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

SC to hear petitions against Waqf Act Amendments

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

Advocate Hari Shankar Jain and one Mani Munjal have also filed a separate petition challenging the constitutional validity of several provisions of the law on the ground that they violate fundamental rights of non-Muslims following which the CJI agreed to list it.

Supreme Court of India PIONEER PHOTO

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

The Centre recently notified the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, which got the assent of President Droupadi Murmu on April 5 after its passage from Parliament following heated debates in both houses. The bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha with 128 members voting in favour and 95 opposing it.

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

On April 7, a bench headed by the CJI assured senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, to consider listing the petitions. The DMK moved the top court through its deputy general secretary A Raja and said in a press release, "Despite widespread opposition, the Waqf Amendment Bill, 2025 was passed by the union government without proper consideration of the objections raised by the members of the JPC and the other stakeholders."

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

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

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

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

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

Delhi power subsidy to continue, decides Cabinet

Continued from >> P1

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

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

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

Stalin announces panel to suggest...

Continued from >> P1

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

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

National Herald case: ED chargesheets Sonia, Rahul

Continued from >> P1

Congress leaders Sonia and Rahul are majority shareholders of Young Indian, with 38 per cent shares each. They were questioned for hours by the ED in this case a few years ago. The ED asserted that its investigation has "conclusively" found that Young Indian, a private company 'beneficially owned' by Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, 'acquired' AJL properties worth ₹2,000 crore for a mere ₹50 lakh, significantly undervaluing its worth. "Young Indian and AJL properties were used for generation of further proceeds of crime in the form of bogus donations to the tune of ₹18 crore, bogus advance rent to the tune of ₹38 crore and bogus advertisements of ₹29 crore," said the ED.

US visas a privilege, not right...

Continued from >> P1

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

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

ED questions Robert Vadra in Haryana land deal case, again

Continued from >> P1

Vadra, the son-in-law of Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, was first summoned in this case on April 8 but he sought another date. The probe against Vadra is linked to a land deal with DLF in Haryana's Manesar-Shikohpur (now Sector 83) in Gurugram. The land deal of February 2008 was done by a company named Skylight Hospitality Pvt Ltd, where Vadra was a director earlier on, as it purchased a 3.5 acre land in Shikohpur from a firm named Onkareshwar Properties at a price of Rs 7.5 crore. A Congress government led by Bhupinder Singh Hooda was in power in Haryana at that time. Vadra's wife Priyanka Gandhi was also a director in his company. Four years later, in September 2012, the company sold this 3.53 acre land to realty major DLF for Rs 58 crore.

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

Vadra has been questioned multiple times by the federal probe agency in two money laundering cases so far. The ED had filed a charge sheet in December 2023 against UAE-based NRI businessman CC Thampi, who is allegedly linked to Vadra, and Sumit Chadha, a relative of UK-based arms consultant Sanjay Bhandari, saying it was investigating purchase of three plots of land in Haryana during 2005-06 by Vadra from a real estate agent along with a land deal made by his wife Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Neither Vadra nor Priyanka Gandhi Vadra were named as accused in the charge sheet.

Thampi, the ED had said, had purchased about 486 acres between 2005 and 2008 in Amirpur village in Faridabad in Haryana through HL Pahwa, a real estate agent based in Delhi-NCR. "It is imperative to mention that Vadra also purchased three pieces of land measuring 334 kanals (40.08 acres) in Amirpur from HL Pahwa in 2005-2006 and sold it to Pahwa again in December 2010," the charge sheet said. "Further, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also purchased agricultural land measuring 40 kanal (05 acres) in village Amirpur, district Faridabad, Haryana, from Pahwa in April 2006 and sold it again to Pahwa in February 2010.

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

Above-normal rainfall...

Continued from >> P1

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

The monsoon usually arrives in the Indian subcontinent from the southern tip in Kerala around June 1 and retreats in mid-September. The IMD defines average or normal rainfall as ranging between 96 per cent and 104 per cent of a 50-year average of 87 cm (35 inches) for the four-month season. An El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) that has turned neutral is expected to remain so by the time the monsoon season kicks in in June. A neutral Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) and below-normal snow cover in the northern hemisphere from January to March will altogether combine to give India a good monsoon, the IMD said.

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

Global markets rally even as Trump thinks more tariffs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Tokyo

Global benchmarks mostly rose Tuesday, echoing a rally on Wall Street after President Donald Trump appeared to let up on some of his tariffs and as stress from within the US bond market seemed to be easing.

Still, the Trump administration took further steps toward imposing more tariffs, saying it was investigating the national security implications of imports of pharmaceuticals, computer chips and related products.

France's CAC 40 added 0.6per cent to 7,316.09, while Germany's DAX jumped 1.5per cent to 21,277.44. Britain's FTSE 100 rose 1.0per cent to 8,215.51.

The future for the S&P 500 was up 0.3per cent while that for the Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 0.2per cent.

In Asian trading, Japan's benchmark Nikkei 225 surged 0.8per cent to finish at 34,267.54.

Automakers were among the biggest gainers, although their early surge was moderated by closing time. Toyota Motor Corp. Jumped 3.7per cent, while Honda Motor Co. Gained 3.6per cent. Electronics and entertainment giant Sony Corp.'s stock price added 2.2per cent.

Australia's S&P/ASX 200 added 0.2per cent to 7,761.70 and South Korea's Kospi gained 0.9per cent to 2,477.41.

Chinese shares wobbled, with Hong Kong's Hang Seng rising 0.2per cent to 21,466.27 after fluctuating much of the day. The Shanghai Composite added 0.2per cent to 3,267.66.

"You know the drill: one step forward, two steps back, then a whiplash pivot into carrot-and-stick diplomacy. It's becoming the signature of this White House — deliver a policy gut punch, then soften the blow with selective reprieves or 90-day pauses. It's market management by whack-a-mole," said Stephen Innes, managing partner at SPI Asset Management.

US to control land on Mexico border as base, migrants could be detained

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

A long sliver of federal land along the US-Mexico border that President Donald Trump is turning over to the Department of Defense would be controlled by the Army as part of a base, which could allow troops to detain any trespassers, including migrants, US officials told The Associated Press.

The transfer of that border zone to military control — and making it part of an Army installation — is an attempt by the Trump administration to get around a federal law that prohibits US troops from being used in domestic law enforcement on American soil.

But if the troops are providing security for land that is part of an Army base, they can perform that function. However, at least one presidential powers expert said the move is likely to be challenged in the courts.

The officials said the issue is still under review in the Pentagon, but even as any legal review goes on, the administration's intent is to have troops detain migrants at the border.

The corridor, known as the Roosevelt Reservation, is a 60-foot-wide federal buffer zone that ribbons along the border from New Mexico to California, except where it encounters tribal or privately owned land. It had been run by the Interior Department until Trump directed control be transferred to the Defense Department in a presidential memo released Friday night.

For the next 45 days, the Defense Department will test taking control of a section of the Roosevelt Reservation in New Mexico, east of Fort Huachuca, which is an Army installation in Arizona, one of the US officials said. During that period, the Army will put up additional fencing and signs warning people not to trespass.

People not authorised to be in that area could be arrested by the Army's security forces, the officials said, who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details not yet made public.

Any migrants in the country illegally who are detained by military personnel on those lands would be turned over to local civilian law enforcement agencies, the officials said.

Troops are prohibited from conducting civilian law enforcement on US soil under the Posse Comitatus Act. An exception known as the military purpose doctrine allows it in some cases — but would not apply here and would likely be challenged in the courts, said Elizabeth Gotein, an expert on presidential emergency powers at the Brennan Center for Justice.

That's because even though troops would be on land designated as an Army installation, they would have to prove that their primary mission there was not to conduct border security and law enforcement — and the whole point of Trump's order transferring the Roosevelt Reservation to the military's control is to secure the border, she said.

The military purpose doctrine "only applies if the law enforcement aspect is incidental," Gotein said. "Does this (area) have a military purpose that has nothing to do with enforcing customs and security at the border?"

Activist expecting US citizenship arrested

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

A Palestinian man who led protests against the war in Gaza as a student at Columbia University was arrested Monday at a Vermont immigration office where he expected to be interviewed about finalising his US citizenship, his attorneys said.

Mohsen Mahdawi, a legal permanent resident who has held a green card since 2015, was detained at the US Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Colchester by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, his lawyers said.

The attorneys said they do not know where he is. They filed a petition in federal court seeking an order barring the government from removing him from the state or country.

"The Trump administration detained Mohsen Mahdawi in direct retaliation for his advocacy on behalf of Palestinians and because of his identity as a Palestinian. His detention is an attempt to silence those who speak out against the atrocities in Gaza. It is also unconstitutional," attorney Luna Droubi said in an email.

According to the court filing, Mahdawi was born in a refugee camp in the West Bank and moved to the United States in 2014. He recently completed coursework at Columbia and was expected to graduate in May before beginning a master's degree program there in the fall.

The petition describes him as a committed Buddhist who believes in "non-violence and empathy as a central tenet of his religion." As a student, Mahdawi was an outspoken critic of Israel's military campaign in Gaza and organised campus protests until March 2024. He co-founded the Palestinian Student Union at Columbia with Mahmoud Khalil, another Palestinian permanent resident of the US and graduate student who recently was detained by ICE.

Khalil was the first person arrested under President Donald Trump's promised crackdown on students who joined campus protests against the war in Gaza. On Friday, an immigration judge in Louisiana ruled that Khalil can be deported as a national security risk.

Christopher Helali, a friend of Mahdawi who lives near him in Vermont, was present outside the immigration office when Mahdawi was detained and recorded a video of Mahdawi being led away by authorities. In the video, which Helali released on social media Monday, Mahdawi is shown giving a peace sign with his hands and being led away to a car.

Helali described Mahdawi as a peaceful demonstrator who has worked to foster dialogue about the struggle of Palestinians in his homeland. Helali said he and Mahdawi were aware that Mahdawi could be detained today and that his friend went forward with the appointment anyway."And rightfully so, he was nervous for what was going on around him. But he was very much resolute in coming to this interview and coming today because he didn't do anything wrong and was a law-abiding citizen, or soon-to-be citizen," Helali said.

Iran's Khamenei endorses US talks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

Iran's supreme leader said on Tuesday that the first round of talks with the United States went "well", in his first public comment on the negotiations, state television reported. The comments by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, while couched, represented his endorsement of the talks so far. "We are neither radically optimistic about the talks nor radically pessimistic about the talks," the 85-year-old Khamenei said. However, he said the talks had been "implemented well in the first steps" and that Iran remained "pessimistic" about America. He also urged officials "not to tie the country's affairs" to the talks, which are scheduled to have a second round on Saturday.

US flies bombers for drill with South Korea

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

The United States flew long-range B-1B bombers in a show of force against North Korea on Tuesday, days after the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to resist a US-led push to eliminate the North's nuclear programme. North Korea often reacts to the US deployment of B-1B bombers and other powerful military assets with missile tests and fiery rhetoric.

Tuesday's flyover of the US bombers could draw an angrier response because it happened when North Korea was marking a key anniversary — the 113th birthday of state founder Kim Il Sung, the late grandfather of the current leader.

South Korea's Defence Ministry said the US bombers participated in a South Korea-US aerial drill over the Korean Peninsula to strengthen the allies' combined operational capability and demonstrate their deterrence capability against North Korea's advancing nuclear programme.

A ministry statement said South Korean F-35 and F-16 fighter jets and American F-16 fighter jets also took part in the training. It said South Korea and the US will continue to expand their joint military exercises to respond to North Korean nuclear threats.

It was the second time a US B-1B's had participated in a drill with South Korea since President Donald Trump began his second term in January.

In February, North Korea's Defence Ministry slammed the B-1B's earlier flyover as proof of intensifying US-led provocations since Trump's inauguration. It pledged to counter the strategic threat of the US with strategic means.

Days later, North Korea test-fired cruise missiles in what it called an attempt to show its nuclear counterattack capability. Trump has repeatedly said he will reach out to Kim Jong Un to revive diplomacy. North Korea hasn't directly responded to Trump's outreach.

Last Wednesday, Kim Yo Jong — Kim's sister and a senior official — derided the US and its Asian allies over what she called their "daydream" of denuclearising the North, insisting that the country will never give up its nuclear weapons programme. Her statement came as a response to a recent meeting among the top diplomats of the United States, South Korea and Japan where they reaffirmed their commitment to push for the North's denuclearisation.

Israel strikes Gaza hospital, injures nine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Deir Al-Balah

An Israeli airstrike hit the northern gate of a field hospital in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, killing a medic and wounding nine other people, a spokesman for the hospital said.

The strike hit the Kuwaiti Field Hospital in the Muwasi area, where hundreds of thousands have sought shelter in sprawling tent camps. The wounded were all patients and medics, and two of the patients were in critical condition after the strike, said Saber Mohammed, a hospital spokesman. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

The military has struck hospitals on several occasions during the 18-month war, accusing Hamas militants of hiding out in them or using them for military purposes. Hospital staff have denied the allegations and accused Israel of recklessly endangering civilians and gutting the territory's health system.

On Sunday, Israel struck the last major hospital providing critical care in northern Gaza after ordering an evacuation. A patient died during the evacuation, and the strike severely damaged the emergency room, pharmacy and surrounding buildings, according to Al-Ahli Hospital.

The military has struck hospitals on several occasions during the 18-month conflict, accusing Hamas militants of hiding in them or using them for military purposes

The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, which runs the hospital, condemned the strike. Israel said it targeted a Hamas command and control center within the facility, without providing evidence. Hamas denied the allegations.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251. Fifty-nine hostages are still inside Gaza, 24 of whom are believed to be alive, after most of the rest were released in ceasefire agreements or other deals.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 51,000 people, according to an updated toll released by Gaza's Health Ministry on Tuesday. That includes more than 1,600 people killed since Israel ended a ceasefire and resumed its offensive last month to pressure Hamas to accept changes to the agreement.

The ministry is led by medical professionals but reports to the Hamas-run government. Its toll is seen as generally reliable by UN agencies and independent experts, though Israel has challenged its numbers. Israel says it has killed some 20,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The ministry does not say how many were civilians or combatants but says women and children make up more than half of the dead. The offensive has destroyed much of the territory and displaced around 90 per cent of its population of roughly 2 million Palestinians.

Inflation, currency woes worsen Venezuela's complex economic crisis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Maracaibo

Erick Ojeda has no money. He returned to land almost empty-handed from an overnight trip fishing for shrimp. His sister and her newborn are waiting for him to pick them up from a hospital. He has had no luck finding a ride there, so he is still helping fishermen get boats out of the water and weigh what little they caught.

The fishermen are all struggling, like most everyone in Venezuela, whose protracted crisis continues to evolve, entering a critical phase in recent weeks by further gutting people's purchasing power and laying the groundwork for a recession. This latest chapter in the 12-year crisis even prompted President Nicolás Maduro to declare an "economic emergency" last week.

Tired, hungry and worried, the fishermen don't complain and keep to their tasks, or nap, under a hut with a view of an oil tanker on Lake Maracaibo. They know they are lucky to have a source of income, unreliable as it is, in 2025.

"I have to keep toiling away even if work is bad," Ojeda, 24, said. " We keep going trusting God. Let's see if God works miracles to fix all of Venezuela."

The country's economy is unraveling yet again as key oil revenue dries up due to renewed economic sanctions punishing Maduro for electoral fraud and as his government finds itself with little wiggle room to respond despite some post-pandemic stability.

Venezuelans emerged from the pandemic to fully stocked grocery stores and the U.S. Dollar as the dominant currency for everyday transactions. They left behind years of bartering, lining up for hours outside supermarkets or even fighting on the streets for flour, rice, bread or other food items. They also stopped carrying bricks of worthless bolivar bills to pay for necessities.

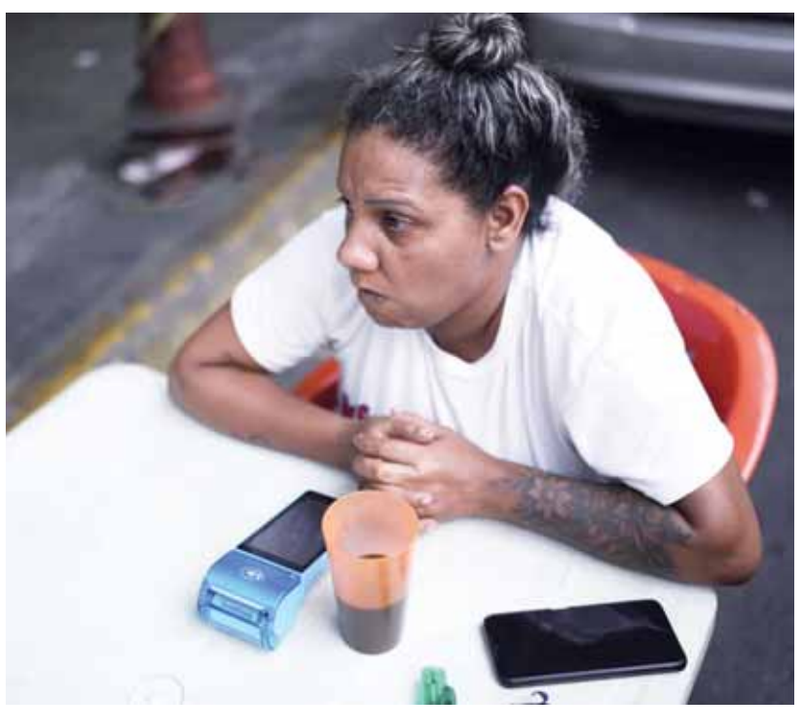
Those changes were the result of government decisions that eased price controls on basic goods and allowed consumers and businesses to use greenbacks without restrictions. They also occurred because the government used the Venezuelan Central Bank to inject millions of dollars into the foreign currency exchange market every week and prop up the bolivar.

Those government measures helped end a yearslong cycle of hyperinflation, which had reached 130,000per cent in 2018. Gross domestic product grew 8per cent in 2022, according to the International Monetary Fund, after the economy shrank about 80per cent between 2014 and 2020.

Maduro and his government began touting an economic renaissance of sorts. In the capital, Caracas, imported goods stores, restaurants, department stores and other businesses began to pop-up seemingly overnight. The use of ride-hailing and food-delivery apps proliferated. Some families in poor neighborhoods ventured into business ownership operating hot dog carts and other food stands.

But the growth mostly concentrated in Caracas, and communities across the country, including Maracaibo, which prides itself in being the heart of the oil industry, did not see major gains.

"If you pay more attention to those main avenues… you'll see that most of the businesses are closed," Luis Medina, 21, said pointing to an avenue in downtown Maracaibo. "There's a Subway that's closed, for example, and next to it is a Movistar (cellphone store), which is also closed. Next to it is an international restaurant, El Gaucho, originally from Argentina, which is closed, too."



A street food vendor waiting for patrons in Caracas, Venezuela

Like people in other Latin American countries – and long before their nation came undone in 2013 – Venezuelans have used the U.S. Dollar as a safe haven asset and see the exchange rate as a measure of the economy's health.

Maduro's government began using cash reserves in 2021 to artificially lower the exchange rate, making people at one point pay 3.50 bolivars for $1. That led to roughly 67per cent of retail transactions being made in foreign currency.

The rate grew slowly, and by 2023, Maduro's efforts to inject dollars into the economy were aided by energy giant Chevron, which started regularly selling millions to banks to get bolivars to pay bills after the U.S. Government let it to restart operations in Venezuela. The infusion of dollars allowed the government to maintain the rate around 35 bolivars to $1 through mid-2024, when the warnings of economists materialized.

"So many of us said that … sooner or later, it was going to be unsustainable," economics professor Leonardo Vera said. "It was already evident in July that there were shortages of foreign currency in the official market in the face of growing demand, and those who couldn't get foreign currency began to move to the black market, a very small market where when a surge in demand arrives… the price goes up."

This month, the official rate reached 70 bolivars to $1, but the black market hit 100 bolivars to $1 last month.

Vera explained that factors influencing the price include Maduro's reelection claim, the results of the U.S. Election and the decision of the Trump administration to revoke Chevron's permit to pump and export Venezuelan oil.

The Biden administration granted Chevron's permit in late 2022 after Maduro agreed to work with Venezuela's political opposition toward a democratic election. But the election, which took place in July 2024, was neither fair nor free, and Maduro was sworn in in January for a third six-year term despite credible evidence that his opponent got more votes.

Before the official and black market rates grew apart considerably, formal and informal businesses applied the government's rate for transactions. These days, however, informal businesses, such as the food markets where the majority of Venezuelans buy groceries, favour the black market's rate, making some goods unaffordable.

Prices have also increased at formal businesses, including grocery and hardware stores, because companies are setting them based on the expected higher cost to replenish their inventories.

Economist Pedro Palma said Venezuela's inflation rate could be between 180per cent and 200per cent. He warned that people will cut spending because salaries will not keep up with inflation and some could even lose their jobs. "We have a truly dramatic outlook: on the one hand, skyrocketing inflation; on the other, the prospect of a very significant recession," Palma said.

Maduro last week sent a decree to the ruling-party controlled National Assembly seeking powers to enact emergency measures to "defend the national economy," including suspending tax collections and establishing "mechanisms and percentages for mandatory purchases of national production to promote import substitution."

He attributed the decision mostly to the impact of the U.S. Tariffs on the global economy, but Venezuela's latest economic troubles predated Trump's announcement. Weeks earlier, he also announced the shortening of state employees' workweek, effectively giving them ample time to pick up second jobs to complement their approximately $1.65 monthly minimum wage and $100 monthly stipends.

But companies generally are not hiring, and some businesses are now paying employees in bolivars instead of dollars, which has increased the demand for greenbacks in the black market as exchange houses limit the sums available to the public.

The latest economic developments were the greatest fears of many Venezuelans ahead of last year's presidential election. So much so that a nationwide poll conducted before the election showed that roughly a fourth of people were thinking about migrating, primarily for economic reasons.

More US tariffs on key imports, including drugs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bangkok

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And those are not available for negotiation," Lutnick said. "They are just going to be part of making sure we reshore the core national security items that need to be made in this country. We need to make medicine in this country," he said. "We need to make semiconductors."

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

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

The US produces about a fifth of all pharmaceuticals made worldwide, but consumes about 45 per cent, far more than any other country. The US also is a major producer of semiconductors, but only in some areas. It relies heavily on imports from Taiwan and South Korea for certain kinds of advanced chips. In particular, Taiwan dominates advanced logic chip production at 92 per cent of all fabrication capacity according to the International Trade Administration, with South Korea making 8 per cent. Products like laptops, smartphones and the components needed to make them accounted for nearly $174 billion in US imports from China last year.

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

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

India's gems, jewellery exports decline in FY25, says GJEPC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

The overall exports of Cut and Polished diamonds (CPD) dipped by 16.75 per cent at $13,292.0 million (₹1.12 lakh crore) compared to $15,967.02 million (₹1.32 lakh crore) for the same period of the previous year.

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

The passenger vehicle segment also recorded its highest-ever exports in FY25, reaching 0.77 million units, a 15 per cent increase compared to FY24, SIAM said.Growth in exports has been driven by the demand of global models being manufactured in the country, it added. Two-wheeler dispatches to dealers rose 9 per cent to 1,96,07,332 units in the last fiscal year, up from 1,79,74,365 units in FY24. Improved rural demand and resurgence in consumer confidence are helping the segment to recover, SIAM stated.

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

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

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

Besides, two-wheeler exports registered a good growth of 21 per cent last fiscal as compared to FY24.

Total commercial vehicle wholesales declined one per cent last fiscal year to 9,56,671 units as against 9,68,770 units in 2023-24 fiscal. Three-wheeler dispatches rose 7 per cent to 7,41,420 units as compared to 6,94,801 units in FY24.

"The Indian automobile industry continued its steady performance in FY25, driven by healthy demand, infrastructure investments, supportive government policies, and continued emphasis on sustainable mobility," SIAM President Shailesh Chandra said.

Passenger vehicles and three-wheeler witnessed a moderate growth on account of the high base effect but saw the highest-ever sales in these categories, while the two-wheeler segment registered strong growth, he added.

However, commercial vehicles witnessed a slight degrowth in the FY2024-25, though performance in recent months has been comparatively better, Chandra said.

"On the exports front, good recovery is seen across all segments, particularly passenger vehicles and two-wheeler, reflecting improved global demand and India's growing competitiveness," he noted.

Not activating countercyclical capital buffer: Reserve Bank

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

Sensex, Nifty surge over two per cent

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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

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

ITC and Hindustan Unilever were the only laggards.

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

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

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

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 3.21 per cent and midcap index rallied 3.02 per cent. All BSE sectoral indices ended higher. Realty zoomed 5.81 per cent, Industrials soared 3.76 per cent, capital goods (3.67 per cent), auto (3.39 per cent), consumer discretionary (3.12 per cent), financial services (2.94 per cent) and metal (2.75 per cent).

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

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

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

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

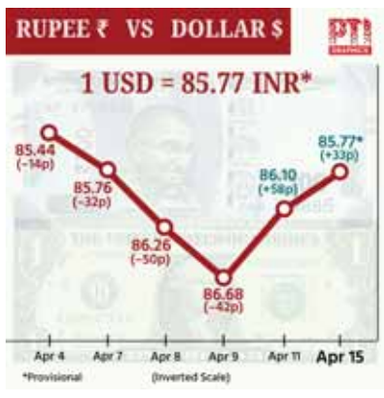
Rupee gains 33 paise against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Bharti-Airtel partners with Blinkit to deliver SIM cards

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Anand/Ahemdabad

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

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

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

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

He suggested that with this agreement, we should aim to establish primary dairy cooperative societies in 50 per cent villages within the first five years. If dairy cooperative societies are established in 50 per cent villages, then the milk processing capacity in the cooperative sector will increase manifold and make the farmers prosperous.

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

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

CM Mohan Yadav stated that under "Prosperity through Cooperation," Madhya Pradesh is taking a significant step to transform the lives of dairy farmers through this agreement. The state has a favourable environment for milk production. Yadav conveyed that farmers will be encouraged to increase milk production and the state government is committed to ensure that milk is purchased directly from dairy farmers at fair prices.

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

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

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

Karamjit Singh Chahal takes charge as Registrar of GNDU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Amritsar

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

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

Colloquium on food safety

The Department of Hotel Management and Tourism, Guru Nanak Dev University inaugurated a colloquium series under the aegis of CHAT 2025, themed "Feeding Tomorrow: Revolutionising Safety and Hygiene in India's Small-Scale Food Industry." The event was held under the patronage of Prof Karamjit Singh, Vice Chancellor, whose visionary leadership guided the initiative.

Jashan-2025 postponed

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

Lecture on 'Empowered Women Power Society' today

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

Injury keeps Gayatri-Treesa duo out of Sudirman Cup Finals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

India, who qualified for the prestigious mixed team championships based on their overall world ranking, have been clubbed in a challenging Group D alongside former champions Indonesia, two-time runners-up Denmark, and a strong English outfit. The tournament will see the return of the formidable men's doubles duo of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty after an injury break.

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

The young pairing of Hariharan Amsakarunan and Ruban Kumar Rethinasabapathi has been named as backup for Satwik and Chirag in men's doubles.

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

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

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

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

Losing ISL final to Mohun Bagan stinks, says Chhetri

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Asia Road Racing tourney to be held in Thailand in April

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

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

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

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

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

Sarthak Chavan from India made history in 2024 season by becoming the first Indian to secure a top-three finish internationally.

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

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

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

Turf war in India's boxing administration intensifies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Himachal Pradesh Boxing Association President and former BFI Vice President Rajesh Bhandari alleged that Singh refused to take the inputs of the executive committee while deciding on the coaching staff, which led to the poor performance in the Paris Games.

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

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

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

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

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

Anything is possible: Real Madrid on three-goal deficit

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

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

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

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

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

Only four times has a home team erased a first-leg deficit of three goals or more, according to UEFA.

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

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

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

Madrid won its 14th Champions League title in 2022 after rallying its way through the knockout rounds. It looked beaten at the Bernabeu in the last 16 against PSG, in the quarterfinals against Chelsea and in the semifinals against Manchester City, but every time it found a way to advance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

Twenty-eight-year-old Gill, who was also the first-round leader at last week's PGTI event in Ahmedabad, didn't have the best of starts after making an early bogey on the 12th. However, Gill came back strongly with birdies on the 15th and 16th to make the turn at one-under.

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

"Balancing the world of high-performance sport with the responsibilities of leading a major corporation is challenging, but deeply fulfilling," said Amar Sarin. "Moments like these—standing in the arena with my daughter—make it worth it." Amar Sarin is no stranger to the spotlight. A qualified individual for the 2025 Asian Continental Championship, Amar has steadily risen to become one of India's most respected figures in show jumping.

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bahrain

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> Improvements need to come in the near future so that he (Max Verstappen) once again has a car that he can win with
>
> — HELMUT MARKO, ADVISER

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

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

What's gone wrong at Red Bull?After two record-breaking years of dominance for Verstappen and Red Bull in 2022 and 2023, Red Bull fell behind McLaren on pace partway through the season in 2024. Verstappen won only two of the last 14 races but still retained the title. McLaren won the constructors' championship.

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

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

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

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

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

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

IPL: DC eye comeback against RR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Jolted by a dramatic loss at home after a dream start to the season, Delhi Capitals (DC) will look to put the setback behind them when they take on a faltering Rajasthan Royals (RR) in the IPL here on Wednesday.

Riding high on a four-match winning streak, the Axar Patel-led Capitals looked like a well-oiled machine before a stunning batting meltdown against Mumbai Indians (MI) halted their momentum here on Sunday.

What was meant to be a triumphant return to base ended in despair as the loss saw them slip to second on the points table. In contrast, Rajasthan Royals find themselves in a precarious position with just two wins from six matches, languishing at eighth. Their season has been marred by inconsistency.

Impact substitute Karun Nair, fresh off a prolific domestic season, led Delhi's chase against MI with a dazzling 89 in pursuit of 206 in their first game at the Feroz Shah Kotla this season.

At 119/1 in 10 overs, the match looked all but sealed. But what followed was a jaw-dropping collapse, which included three run-outs in the penultimate over. DC were eventually bowled out for 193 in a chase of 205.

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

hold the key for Delhi. Despite the challenge of the evening dew, wrist spinners Kuldeep Yadav and 20-year-old Vipraj Nigam will look to weave their magic.

Both these bowlers have been DC's standout performers this season, their spin variations bamboozling opposition batters. However, skipper Axar Patel is yet to leave his mark. As captain, he has led the side admirably but the left-arm spinner has gone wicket-less in 14 overs across six matches, conceding runs at an economy that is a touch lower than 10.

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

Young Jake Fraser-McGurk, who set the stage ablaze last season with his power-hitting, has been a shadow of his former self this time around. His high-risk game has completely backfired, yielding a meagre 46 runs, including two ducks.

With Faf du Plessis still side-lined due to injury, Nair looks to have firmly secured his spot in the team.

Delhi's middle-order looks strong this season thanks to the experience of KL Rahul, the firepower of Tristan Stubbs, Ashutosh Sharma, and the promising Nigam. Royals, meanwhile, have been plagued by inconsistency. Their batting unit, which is heavily reliant on Indian stars, has mis-fired repeatedly.

While Yashasvi Jaiswal notched a fluent fifty in the previous outing in the loss to RCB, his overall form remains patchy.

Skipper Sanju Samson is yet to produce a defining knock, while the young guns Riyan Parag and Dhruv Jurel have shown potential without lasting impact.

On the bowling front, Jofra Archer seems to have shaken off the rust after copping the most expensive spell in IPL history.

But the Royals' attack as a whole has been toothless. Apart from Sandeep Sharma, their other bowlers have struggled to control the scoring rate.

Squads

Delhi Capitals: Axar Patel (C), Faf du Plessis, Karun Nair, Sameer Rizvi, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Ashutosh Sharma, KL Rahul, Abishek Porel, Donovan Ferreira, Tristan Stubbs, Madhav Tiwari, Tripurana Vijay, Manvanth Kumar, Vipraj Nigam, Ajay Mandal, Darshan Nalkande, Mukesh Kumar, Mohit Sharma, T Natarajan, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Kuldeep Yadav.

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

Punjab Kings defend 111

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mullanpur

Punjab Kings defended the lowest-ever total in Indian Premier League (IPL) history as they beat Kolkata Knight Riders by 16 runs in a thrilling match here on Tuesday. Chasing 112 for a win, KKR were comfortably placed at 71 for 3 in 9.1 overs, but they suffered a sensational collapse to be bowled out for 95 in 15.1 overs.

KKR lost seven wickets and scored just 24 runs in six overs after that.

Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal was the main architect of Punjab's improbable-looking win with his excellent figures of 4/28. He took the crucial wickets of Ajinkya Rahane (17), Angkrish Raghuvanshi (37), Rinku Singh (2) and Ramandeep Singh (0) to orchestrate KKR's stunning downfall — the last two in consecutive balls in the 12th over.

Pacer Marco Jansen chipped in with three wickets for 17 runs while Xavier Bartlett, Glenn Maxwell and Arshdeep Singh got one each as KKR allowed PBKS to snatch a win from the jaws of defeat.

The earlier lowest total defended was 116 by Chennai Super Kings against then Kings XI Punjab in 2009.

Sunil Narine (5) was looking for his characteristic explosive start but Jansen had other ideas as he was cleaned up by the South African. That was the start Punjab were looking for and it got even better as Xavier Bartlett got the other opener Quinton de Kock (2) in the next over. KKR captain Rahane held the innings together for a while along with Raghuvanshi, digging into his vast domestic and international experience.

Rahane was at his best when he lofted a Bartlett half-volley for a straight six into the sightscreen, taking his side to 55 for 2 at the end of powerplay. The introduction of Chahal in the eighth over did the trick for PBKS as the leg-spinner got Rahane out LBW.

Chahal struck again in his next over to give PBSK some hope. He had Raghuvanshi caught at backward point by Bartlett who leaned forward to take a low catch. KKR were 72 for 4 at the halfway stage.The match seemed to have opened up when Venkatesh Iyer was ruled out LBW off Maxwell in the 11th over, with the third umpire upholding the on-field umpire's decision after a long look. Chahal then turned the match on its head as he removed the dangerous Rinku Singh (2) who was foxed by a delivery that sneaked between his bat and pad for Inglis to do the rest behind the stumps.

There was no stopping Chahal as he dismissed Ramandeep Singh (0) in the next ball to leave KKR at a precarious 76 for 7 in 11.4 overs. Jansen joined the party as he got Harshit Rana (0) out with a short delivery that the batter played on. Andre Russell has not scored in double-digit figures before Tuesday's match and he was on fire in the 14th over, hitting two sixes and a four to take 16 runs in total. Vaibhav Arora survived five balls bowled by Arshdeep Singh but he offered a simple catch to Inglis in the final ball of the 15th over.

Earlier, KKR dished out a clinical bowling show to bundle out hosts Punjab Kings out for a mere 111 — the third lowest total in this season of the Indian Premier League here on Tuesday.

Use of saliva, second-ball rule in IPL 2025 help bowlers, says Mohit Sharma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Delhi Capitals (DC) pacer Mohit Sharma feels the return of saliva to shine the ball and the option of a ball change in the second innings have provided much-needed relief for bowlers in this year's IPL.

Ahead of IPL 2025, the BCCI lifted the long-standing ban on the use of saliva, first imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and also introduced the "second ball rule," allowing teams to opt for a used ball after the 10th over in the second innings of evening games to combat the dew factor.

"Yes, it (ball change) is 100 per cent helpful. We saw that in the last game. The ball started getting wet after 12 overs in the first innings and then there was heavy dew in the second innings when 13th or 14th over that Karn bowled and the ball spun," Sharma said on the eve of DC's match against Rajasthan Royals.

He added that while the changed harder ball makes a difference initially, its impact fades after a few overs.

"So, that hard ball definitely creates a slight difference. But with time, when it reaches 15th or 16th over, the condition of the ball becomes the same."

> 100 per cent saliva has made a difference. You will see that in 70 per cent games, the ball is tailing in, that is only because saliva is heavy, sweat is not
>
> — MOHIT SHARMA, PACER

The 36-year-old veteran also emphasised on the tactical advantage if teams can accurately predict dew.

"If you are 100 per cent sure that the dew is coming, you can plan accordingly but you need to sure. We have seen in practice matches there was a lot of dew in Vizag but then there was none during the match."

On the use of saliva he said, "100 per cent saliva has made a difference. You will see that in 70 per cent games, the ball is tailing in, that is only because saliva is heavy, sweat is not. So if the ball is heavy it will tail in."

Kuldeep Yadav has been Delhi's stand out bowler and Sharma lauded skipper Axar Patel for using the spinner effectively. "If someone is bowling the best not only for DC but the tournament it is Kuldeep. The way he is bowling is very good for the team. And the way Axar is using him in between wherever we need the wickets, are under pressure or when a patnership is being built is amazing."

Do not care about individual scores, win for team important

Rajasthan Royals batter Nitish Rana said he does not care about the milestones as long as the team is winning.

"On a given day, what you perform is important. 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 is just a milestone for me as a player and a batsman. What is more important is as a team, where do you stand?

"How do you perform on that individual day? How do you take those two points home? That is the most important thing."

Rajasthan are currently eighth in the points table having managed just two wins in six games.

KL Rahul has been standout wicketkeeper batter in IPL so far, says Mark Boucher

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

KL Rahul has been the standout wicketkeeper-batter in the Indian Premier League (IPL) thus far and is a contender for a spot in the national T20 team, reckons former South Africa and Mumbai Indians' head coach Mark Boucher.

Rahul, who is not part of India's T20 setup, has made 200 runs in four games at a stellar average of 66.66 and strike rate of 163.93 while batting in the middle-order for his new franchise Delhi Capitals.

"If you look at IPL — I am not talking about MS Dhoni here as we are talking about the future — one player who has been sound with his 'keeping and (has) batted ready well is KL Rahul," Boucher, a JioStar expert, said in a selection media interaction on Tuesday.

"He has played some fantastic innings. He made a comment the other night I could relate to. He said when he keeps, he picks up a lot of information that he can use in his batting. He would be the standout keep batter in the IPL."

"Dhruv Jurel also has good hands, Rishabh Pant is improving all the time, he kept well last night. You are guys are in India blessed with a lot of options," said the 48 year old who played 147 Tests, 295 ODIs and 25 T20s for the Proteas.

For someone who was with Mumbai Indians as recent as last year, Boucher is not concerned about Rohit's lack of runs in the IPL but said fatigue could be a factor behind his lean run.

"I am not too sure where he is at the moment (mindset), from a fatigue perspective. He has played a lot of cricket. So, sometimes as a coach, the only thing you can do is you can sort of look at the player, have a conversation with him and say to him, how can you challenge yourself?

"Sometimes it's not about you giving advice to a player, it's just asking one or two questions of him. Players always, sort of, they do not like to be challenged, but sometimes they like to challenge themselves as well. So, a guy like Rohit, he's going to come good as well. He's going to come good because he's such a good player," said Boucher.

The IPL is into its fourth week and Boucher has been left impressed with rookies like Punjab Kings opener Priyansh Arya and LSG spinner Digvesh Rathi.

"Arya, the innings (103 off 42 balls against CSK) that he played the other night, that was something special. I'm not only talking about the shot selection that he had, the way that he took the game on despite wickets falling at the other end," Boucher said.

"For a youngster who hasn't played much first class cricket, technically he's very good and he's very responsive and instinctive on where he's hitting the ball. That's going to stand him in good stead in the future," he added.

On Rathi, the former player said, "I have really enjoyed Rathi as well from LSG. He's come onto the scene, people would have thought that Ravi Bishnoi would be the first spinner for LSG and he's sort of taken on that role and he quite enjoys it as well. He has been quite aggressive and kept the match referees busy (with his notebook celebrations)."

India to play four matches in Mirpur, two in Chattogram: BCB

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

India will play four games at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur and the remaining two in Chattogram during their white-ball away series against Bangladesh in August, the BCB announced on Tuesday.

India will play three ODIs and as many T20s in Bangladesh. This will also be India's first T20 bilateral series in Bangladesh and first exclusive white-ball tour since 2014.

The first two ODIs and the last two T20s will be played in Mirpur while the third ODI and first T20 will be held in Chattogram.

India are set to arrive in Dhaka on August 13. They will play the first two ODIs on August 17 and 20, before heading to Chattogram to play the third ODI and first T20 on August 23 and 26. They will return to Dhaka to play the last two T20s on August 29 and 31.

The tour will also help in preparation for the Asia Cup T20. While India are the hosts of the tournament, it is still not clear if the event will be entirely held in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh or UAE as Pakistan will not travel to India as per the understanding between the two countries.

"This series promises to be one of the most exciting and most anticipated events in our home calendar," BCB's chief executive Nizam Uddin Chowdhury was quoted as saying by ESPNcricinfo.

Pant had some plans in mind: Bishnoi backs LSG captain

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Lucknow Super Giants leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi is not quite sure why he did not get to bowl at the death against CSK despite a fine spell but backed his captain Rishabh Pant's decision, saying as a skipper "he had some plans in mind." Pant had opted for pace over spin at the death when MS Dhoni joined Shivam Dube (43) in the middle with CSK needing 56 off the last 30 balls.

The decision backfired as Dhoni blasted 26 off 11 balls as CSK achieved the victory target of 167 with three balls to spare.

"I didn't really talk (to Pant) about it. I came to the wicket twice, but maybe he had some plans in mind. He probably wanted to execute something else...," Bishnoi said during the post-match press conference.

"A captain can see better and from behind the stumps, he can understand the situation better. So according to me, he took the decision that he felt was better.

"No, nothing like that (talk about the fourth over). It was clear in his mind (what he had to do). In a tense situation, it is better for a captain to think from his point of view so he took what was the better decision," he added.

Bishnoi send down nine dot balls in his three overs, dismissing Rahul Tripathi and Ravindra Jadeja in the ninth and 13th overs respectively. Dhoni teaches you how to play the game: CSK bowling coach

A five-time IPL winner, Dhoni took over the captaincy role again after regular skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad was ruled out due to an injury. Highlighting his influence in the team, CSK bowling coach Eric Simmons said, "His influence has been there all the time, even when he was not captain. His relationship with Rutu is very important. His relationship with Fleming and all the players is very important.

"It is not that he teaches typical technical issues about the game, but it is the calmness that you see out there—that is how he teaches you to play the game.

"He teaches an understanding of cricket, which is a very important aspect of the game. So that influence, that calmness that he brings, has always been there, but tonight we saw it once again."

Dhoni was named the Player of the Match for his contribution on the field and also scored 26 off 11 balls to take CSK home against LSG. "The fact that he is captain or not captain — he is the same person. It did not change when he was not, in terms of his actual influence on the team. He's obviously a very important part of our setup," Simmons said.

"It is a pity that Ruturaj is not there to play and be our captain and our leader, but MS has always been like that. It does not feel like a massive change because he's always been there to give advice, give thoughts, give inputs. "And as I said, he is always a calming influence and gives a great level of understanding about how cricket should be played. His wisdom is tremendous."

Prepare better pitches: Dhoni urges Chepauk's curators

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Mahendra Singh Dhoni has urged the curators at the Chepauk to prepare better surfaces which can give his batters the confidence to play their shots like they did here as he does not want Chennai Super Kings to play timid cricket. Dhoni's 11-ball 26 was instrumental in CSK's win over Lucknow Super Giants after the five-time champions snapped their four-match losing streak, which also included three defeats at home. Chasing a target of 167, CSK won with three balls to spare with a markedly better batting performance.

CSK have been invincible at 'Fortress Chepauk' over the years but the 'Yellow Brigade' is yet to open its account at home this season.

"One of the reasons could be that the Chennai wicket is slightly on the slower side. When we have played away from home, the batting unit has done slightly better," Dhoni, who won his first player of the match award in six years, said in the post-match presentation on Tuesday.

"Maybe we need to play on wickets that are slightly better so that it'll give the batters con-

fidence to play their shots. You don't want to play timid cricket," the 'Captain Cool' said.

Dhoni admitted that his batters need to fulfil their roles and responsibilities better. "As a batting unit, we can do better. Roles and responsibilities - that's what we talk about. If you get off to a good start, and you're someone who can play through the innings, then why not. I think he batted really well today."

He also agreed that CSK's Powerplay performance has been an issue in the past five games.

"If you see the powerplay, whether it was the combination or the conditions, we were struggling with the ball. And then we weren't able to get the start we wanted as a batting unit. Also the fall of wickets. We keep losing wickets at the wrong time to some extent."

In fact, R Ashwin often bowled in Powerplays with not much success during this edition.

"We were putting too much pressure on Ash. He was bowling two overs in the first six (overs). We made changes and this looks like a better attack. As a bowling unit we've done well."

Former India U-19 World Cup winner Shaik Rasheed made his debut for Chennai Super Kings scoring 27 off 19 balls with six boundaries. Rasheed has been around for past two seasons but got his debut only this year and the legendary former India captain seemed happy with what he saw.

"He has been with us for quite a few years (Shaik Rasheed). This year he has been batting really well in the nets against both pacers and spinners. It's just the start. He has the capability to dominate with authentic shots," the skipper said.

When it doesn't come your way, God makes it tough

Dhoni felt that in a tournament like IPL, losing a few games on the bounce can make comebacks a bit tough.

"It's good to win a game. When you play a tournament like this, you want to win games. Unfortunately the (earlier) matches didn't go our way for whatever reasons. There can be lots of reasons.

"It gives confidence to the whole team and helps us improve in areas we want to improve. We all knew that when it doesn't come your way in cricket, God makes it very tough, and it was a tough game."

He also said in lighter vein that he didn't know why the adjudicators zeroed in on him to win the Player of The Match award.

"Even today I was like - 'why are they giving me the award?'" Noor (Ahmed) bowled really well."

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