

## Government answerable to the people: Centre to SC

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ New Delhi

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

against denotification of Waqf properties, including 'waqf by user', besides a stay a provision allowing the inclusion of non-Muslims in the Waqf Council and Boards. "During the course of hearing, the Solicitor General states that the respondent (Union of India) would like to put in a short response within seven days. He further states and assures that till the next date of hearing, no appointments will be made to the Council and the Boards under Sections 9 and 14 (of the Act)," the Bench said.

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

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

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

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

Parliament, are answerable to the people."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## Dhankhar flays SC timeline for Presidential assent to Bills

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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



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

reserved for her consideration by a State Governor.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## India goes for jugular vein: Pakistan should vacate PoK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## PM Modi directs Delhi to clean Yamuna

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

rejuvenation, the Delhi government statement said.

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kota (Rajasthan)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



NOTICE

Informed That, In my Husband Ram Shanker Army No. 14843963X Rank NK/MT Records/Service Documents My Name Vebi Shahu is wrong, the Correct name is Vebi Sahu & Date of Birth 15/01/1989. On behalf of Aadhar (No. 56837994. In future, She would be known and recognised by this name only. Vebi Sahu W/o Ram Shanker R/o Village Dagraiya, Post Malwan Tehsil Binkdi, Distt. Fatehpur (U.P.) 212664.

NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that I, Smt. Rajinder Kaur wife of Rakesh Kumar Singh resident-631/49, Ajay Nagar, Kamta, Chinhath Lucknow, U.P. declare that my correct name is "Rajinder Kaur", which is mentioned in all my educational records. Whereas in my Aadhar card and election card, my domestic name is mentioned as "Ranu Singh", which is wrong. Both are my names. It is expected that my correct name Smt. Rajinder Kaur wife of Shri Rakesh Kumar Singh should be recorded in Aadhar card and election card.

NOTICE

Please be informed that I have completely disinherited my son Nafees son of Din Mohammad from all my movable and immovable properties due to his wrong conduct, behaviour and disobedience. I and my family will have no connection or concern with any of his actions. Shakila wife of Din Mohammad resident of New House, Begaria partial, Dubagga market, New Mosque, Kakori, Lucknow

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohammad Shafaiz Warsi to MOHD SHAH FAIZ WARSI S/o Riyasat Ali Warsi R/O Flat No-102, 15/47 Empire Estrade Civil Lines, Kanpur for all future purpose.

NOTICE

In my army service records my son's name mentioned as Shahide Ansari by mistake, while his correct name is Shahid Ansari. Which is also mentioned in his educational document and adhar card. In future he should be known as Shahid Ansari and will be used all documentary purpose. Sarafuddin Ansari Army No-15146398A Rank havaldar S/o Mukhtar Ansari R/o Jamin Ataulah Po & Ps Chiraiyakot Dist Mau. Uttar Pradesh.

NOTICE

Notice regarding name correction case no. X-438 roll number 23263163/2022 (x) candidate name Faiz Alam Nanhku Ram Public School, Ghorawal, Sonbhadra UP-231216 faiz alam is the student of class 10 during the session 2021-22. Due to clerical mistake his mother's name was filled incorrect during registration. Incorrect mother's name Musharrat Praveen correct mother's name Musharrat parveen

NOTICE

LJWS P S Nayal, son of Late H S Nayal, residing at 821 Balaji Mandir Colony, Rajendrar Nagar, Bareilly do hereby declare that Sunita Airara Nayal, mentioned as my spouse in PPO, and Sunita Nayal as appearing in Adhar Card and PAN Card, refer to one and the same person my legally wedded wife. This declaration is made to avoid any confusion and for official purposes

NOTICE

I, SHREYA SHUKLA holder of Indian Passport No: W4113747 issued at ABU DHABI on 10/04/2023 and Permanent Resident of R/4/1 RAJ NAGAR PS KAVINAGAR GHAZIABAD PIN 201002 UTTAR PRADESH INDIA and presently residing at FLAT 1503 HARDEES BLDG HAMDAN ST ABU DHABI UAE do hereby change my name from SHREYA SHUKLA to SHREYA (Given name) PATHAK (Surname) with immediate effect

## CM orders quick redressal of grievances

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath held a 'Janata Darshan' at his official residence here on Thursday, where over 125 individuals from various districts of Uttar Pradesh presented their grievances.

Personally meeting each of the attendees, the chief minister listened attentively to their concerns and issued immediate directives to officials for swift resolution.

Reiterating his government's commitment to justice, the chief minister said, "Our objective is to bring a smile to every victim's face by ensuring timely redressal of their problems."

Grievances related to police, revenue, medical assistance, pensions and infrastructure, including road construction, were raised during the session. The chief minister instructed the departments concerned to respond promptly.

In a compassionate gesture, Chief Minister Yogi also provided electronic charging walking sticks to two differently-abled youths, Rajesh and Chandrashekhar, who had come from Chandauli seeking assistance. Demonstrating his humane side, he interacted warmly with children, accompanying their parents, holding them in his lap, feeding them, and giving them chocolates.

The chief minister instructed all officials to be present in their offices by 10 am and ensure that public grievances are heard immediately. He emphasised that local-level issues



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath interacts with people during Janta Durbar at his official residence, in Lucknow on Thursday. PTI

must be resolved at the district level, and only those requiring state-level intervention should be forwarded to higher authorities.

Applications received at the Janata Darshan were handed over to senior officials on the spot. The chief minister specifically instructed the director general of police to act on complaints related to law enforcement, while revenue matters were referred to the chairman of the Revenue

Board. He assured the attendees that appropriate action would be taken and their issues would be resolved.

Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh, Additional Chief Secretary (CM) SP Goyal, Principal Secretary (Home/CM) Sanjay Prasad, Director General of Police Prashant Kumar, Revenue Board Chairman Anil Kumar, and several senior officials were present during the session.

## Loco pilot thrashed by contractor's goons

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

A loco pilot was allegedly thrashed by a contractor and his staff, allegedly for complaining about the quality of food served on Thursday at the running room's canteen at Charbagh railway station.

Irrked over this, the pilot called his colleagues and soon both the parties exchanged blows inside the newly-constructed running room at the Charbagh railway station. However, since the pilots were few in number, they bore the brunt in the fight.

Later, the aggrieved loco pilots of Moradabad division of Northern Railway, in support of the loco pilot, observed dharna demanding action against the persons involved in alleged assault on the loco pilot.

The loco pilot alleged that after working for 14 hours, when he came to the canteen to have food, the contractor refused to serve him freshly cooked food. When he asked for the reason, the contractor allegedly started quarrelling with him and slapped him.

He alleged that the contractor called some outsiders who were carrying sticks and got him beaten up.

The harried loco pilot then called his colleagues who flocked the scene and started raising slogans against the railway administration and officials. The victim loco pilot is said to be of Moradabad railways division. Later, while observing dharna, the railway employees demanded that a case be registered against the accused and the running room in-charge be removed.

Sources at the Charbagh railway station

said the chaos continued for five hours and the deadlock ended after senior officials gave an assurance to consider the demands of the employees.

### TWO RUN OVER BY TRAINS

Two youths were run over by trains in separate incidents under the Bakshi Ka Talab police station area on Thursday morning.

Police said that, prima facie, both incidents appear as cases of suicide, with the victims jumping before the trains.

"While one of the deceased has been identified, efforts to ascertain the identity of the other is on," the police said, adding that the bodies were found mutilated on the tracks.

The first incident took place at Tikari village railway crossing in Bakshi Ka Talab police station area. The deceased had been identified as Gaurav (25), a resident of Deori Rukhara village in BKT.

According to preliminary investigation, Gaurav was upset with his family and he committed suicide by jumping in front of a train. The police said they were yet to talk to family to get to know the reason behind the suicide.

The second incident took place near Lucknow-Sitapur road, also in BKT police station area. As per reports, a 25-year-old youth died after being hit by a train behind the Hanuman temple in the area.

A bike was found parked near the railway track. Also, plastic glasses and snacks were found kept on the bike. Efforts are being made to identify the youth, the police said.

## 60-year-old killed in celebratory firing; kin held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

A 25 year old youth was arrested on Thursday for celebratory firing which had claimed the life of his 60-year-old grandfather at a wedding function in Kakori on Wednesday night.

The deceased was identified as Shamsheer, alias Shera (60). The accused was identified as Imran of Para police station area. The police recovered the weapon used in celebratory firing.

According to police, the incident occurred during the *vidai* ceremony of Chand Babu's daughter. The marriage procession arrived from Kakori modh and the groom was Abrar, son of Nausad.

As per eyewitnesses, amid the wedding celebrations, someone in the crowd fired a shot in the air as part of celebratory firing. However, the bullet struck Shera, who was standing nearby, leading to serious injuries. He collapsed on the spot and was rushed to a nearby hospital where doctors declared him brought dead, said the police.

DCP, West Zone, Vishwajeet Srivastava, said that police started investigations in the case and a team nabbed the accused after his identity was ascertained based on videography of the incident.

The DCP had said that Shera's body was sent for post-mortem examination and additional police force was deployed in the area to maintain peace. Locals, while expressing shock over the incident, demanded stricter enforcement against celebratory firing.

## Jacob inspects works at Heritage Zone

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Dr Roshan Jacob made a thorough inspection of various components of the Heritage Zone being developed by Lucknow Development Authority at Hussainabad. She inspected the Fragrance Park, Museum Block, Food Court, Lazeez Gali, Rose Park and Lemon Park and issued guidelines to the officials concerned.

The inspection started from Fragrance Park, where the divisional commissioner reviewed the ongoing works. LDA Vice-Chairman Prathmesh Kumar said a state-of-the-art cafeteria and interpretation centre was being established there, in which information would be given about the process of perfume production and various fragrances of flowers.

The divisional commissioner gave instructions to open the park for the general public soon, giving priority to signage, lighting, sculpture and landscaping work.

The divisional commissioner also inspected the Tourist Facilitation Centre located in Hussainabad Museum Block. LDA officials informed that this centre will be equipped with a special cantilever view point, from which tourists will be able to see a panoramic view of the entire heritage area.

The divisional commissioner gave directions to complete the construction work within one month and all the works related to literature, artefacts, paintings and sculptures etc. for cultural display within four months.

During the inspection of the Food Court, the divisional commissioner

observed that many reputed franchises were operating from there. She gave directions that to promote the traditional cooking style of Lucknow, local vegetarian, sweets and famous dishes should also be included, so that the tourists coming there can experience the unique Lucknow taste.

During the inspection of Lazeez Gali, the divisional commissioner gave clear instructions that all the structures of this area should be in heritage style and it should be developed as per the format approved by the core design team of the LDA.

Emphasising on maintaining the uniformity of flowers in the Rose Park, the divisional commissioner gave directions for planting ornamental and multi-coloured roses in a planned manner. She also gave directions for immediate restart of the fountains found closed in the Nimbu Park, attractive facade lighting, adequate seating arrangements, heritage cafeteria and better landscaping.

While inspecting the common parking area near Ghantaghar, the divisional commissioner said that its tender process had been completed.

With the development of the parking space, the route from Bada Imambara to Chhota Imambara will be reserved for pedestrians and environment-friendly e-rickshaws and tongas, which will not only provide a better experience to the tourists but will also facilitate the traffic system. She directed the LDA officials to start the parking construction work as soon as possible. During the inspection, other senior officials including LDA Vice-Chairman Prathamesh Kumar, were also present.

## UPTDC to organise heritage walks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

On the occasion of World Heritage Day on Friday, Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. (UPSTDC) will organise special heritage walks across five iconic cities of the state — Varanasi, Lucknow, Prayagraj, Jhansi, and Agra.

Speaking at the launch of the heritage walk and tour packages, Uttar Pradesh Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiveer Singh said the goal was to connect people, especially youth, with the state's rich historical and cultural heritage. Through these heritage walks, participants will explore the architectural marvels, historical significance and vibrant culture of these cities.

The events will include expert-guided tours, cultural performances, and local cuisine tastings. The broader aim is not only to boost tourism but also to spread awareness about heritage conservation.

Trained guides will lead the heritage walk, taking the participants through key

historical sites, offering in-depth insights. In addition to historical narratives, tourists will get a first-hand experience of local folk art, crafts, and culinary traditions. The programme is designed to make the cultural richness of Uttar Pradesh accessible to a wider audience.

Special packages have been curated for each location, covering transport, guide services and entry tickets. The duration of each walk will be approximately 2.5 to 3 hours. Package pricing will start at Rs 899 for Agra, Rs 475 for Varanasi, Rs 850 for Jhansi, Rs 500 for Prayagraj, and Rs 800 for Lucknow per person. Bookings can be made through the official UPSTDC website. The tourism minister also highlighted that Uttar Pradesh is currently leading the country in domestic tourism and is working towards achieving a top position in international tourism as well. Continuous development of tourist destinations and infrastructure is underway to attract more visitors and elevate the state's presence on the global tourism map.

## Encroachments in front of Lok Bandhu Hosp removed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Lucknow Municipal Corporation, on Thursday, carried out an anti-encroachment drive and removed temporary shops located in front of Lok Bandhu Hospital. The drive was part of the beautification and redevelopment plan of the Lok Bandhu intersection under the Kanpur road scheme being implemented by the Lucknow Development Authority (LDA).

On the directives of Mayor Sushma Kharakwal and Municipal Commissioner Indrajit Singh, the drive began in the afternoon under Zone-8 Zonal Officer Ajit Rai. It was carried out peacefully with the deployment of police personnel, women police force and PAC. The shopkeepers had been informed in advance regarding their relocation. Zone-8 Tax Superintendent Surendra Singh, Revenue Inspector Devi Shankar

Dubey, Assistant Engineer Awadhesh Singh, along with officials from the LDA were present during the drive. There was no resistance or unrest during the drive.

According to the local administration, the action was necessary to improve traffic flow, complete the beautification project in a timely manner, and enhance public convenience in the area.

According to information provided by the LDA, Rs 60.50 crore was approved for the redevelopment and placemaking work at the crossing in the financial year 2024-25. The project includes redesigning the intersection, developing green spaces, widening footpaths, improving street lighting, and other civic upgrades. Local residents and commuters welcomed the LMC move and expressed hope that the area will now be more organised, aesthetically pleasing, and safer for all.

## Safety arrangements in hospitals reviewed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Arrangements related to fire safety, electrical safety and health services of private and government hospitals with more than 100 bed capacity in the district were reviewed by the divisional commissioner on Thursday. Senior officials of the departments concerned, representatives of hospitals and officials of Health, Fire and Electrical Safety departments were present in the meeting.

Its main objective was to evaluate the status of all types of emergency arrangements in hospitals while giving top priority to safety of patients and to give necessary corrective instructions. The divisional commissioner gave clear instructions that every hospital should have firefighting equipment, fire alarm system, smoke extractor, fire extinguisher, emergency evacuation route along with alternative evacuation route etc. as per the standard. She directed that mock drills should be made mandatory in hospitals from time to time.

## Businessman duped

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

An unsuspecting businessman in Indira Nagar was duped of Rs 36 lakh by unidentified miscreants who convinced him to invest in fake opportunities for high returns. The miscreants first won his trust by letting him earn profits on small investments. They then lured him to invest huge amounts and vanished with his money.

Left with no option to get back his money, the businessman filed a complaint with the cyber police on Thursday.

As per reports, the businessman, Akhilesh Verma of Sector 11 in Indiranagar, received a call from a woman caller on March 10. The woman introduced herself Advika Thomas and said her job was to guide people interested in investing money for gains. She assured Verma that he would earn huge profits if he invested money at her suggestion.

Following this an account was opened by Verma, who was contacted on WhatsApp and was sent a link to join the group. Later he was added to a group of 'investors'.

On April 5, Verma invested Rs 8,000 and earned a profit of Rs 1,836. The next day, he invested Rs 1 lakh and earned Rs 9,000. As he gained confidence, Verma was lured to deposit Rs 36 lakh in 18 installments between April 5 and April 7. He was told that all the investment work was done in companies in the United Kingdom. Seeing the profit in his investment account, when Verma tried to withdraw the money, he was asked to pay Rs 16.34 lakh as tax. At this point Verma realised that he had been duped.

Cyber Crime Police Station Inspector Brijesh Kumar Yadav said that a case had been registered and the police were making correspondence with banks in which Verma had deposited to get his accounts freed.

## Govt to train over 2 lakh fire safety personnel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Over the past eight years, the Yogi government has consistently created new employment avenues for Uttar Pradesh's youth. Continuing this momentum, the state government is now set to provide employment opportunities to more than two lakh young individuals as fire safety officers and personnel in private institutions. The Fire department will train these youths before deployment. Acting on the instructions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the department has formulated a comprehensive action plan for this initiative.

Following their training, these individuals will be eligible for employment in private establishments such as malls, hospitals, schools, and large commercial buildings. This initiative empowers the youth with meaningful jobs and enhances the state's disaster preparedness and safety infrastructure. With this move, Uttar Pradesh will become the first state in the coun-

try to systematically train and employ youth in firefighting roles across private institutions.

Additional Director General of the Fire department Padmaja Chauhan stated that an action plan has been developed to ensure the mandatory deployment of fire safety officers and personnel, akin to security guards, in private buildings.

She added, "Eligibility criteria have been defined, and training programmes ranging from one to four weeks will be conducted. Participants will receive certification upon completion, enabling them to secure jobs in private establishments like malls and multiplexes, hospitals with 100+ beds, non-residential buildings over 24 metres, residential buildings over 45 metres, and industrial units covering over 10,000 square metres."

She remarked further, "Uttar Pradesh is the first state to adopt the Centre's Model Fire Service Bill-2019 and implement the Uttar Pradesh Fire and Emergency Services Act-2022.

## Scam unearthed in health dept

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ SHAHJAHANPUR

A probe committee constituted on the orders of the Shahjahanpur district magistrate has unearthed an alleged scam worth Rs 100 crore in the district's health department. Following preliminary findings, the district magistrate has written to the state government seeking a formal investigation into the matter.

District Magistrate Dharmendra Pratap Singh told PTI that the inquiry was initiated after receiving complaints of irregularities in the health department.

He assigned the investigation to Chief Development Officer Aparajita Singh Sinsinwar. The CDO reportedly uncovered several layers of discrepancies, prompting the formation of a four-member inquiry panel headed by her and including the additional district magistrate (finance and revenue).

The district magistrate said the alleged scam spans a period of three years and involves two former chief medical officers, one acting CMO and five other officials.

A formal request has been made to the government to initiate a comprehensive state-level probe against the eight individuals, he said.

Sinsinwar revealed startling findings during the inquiry. She cited an instance where stethoscopes — bearing a printed price of Rs 350 and available in the market for around Rs 100 — were purchased at an inflated price of Rs 1,500 per unit.

Thousands of such units were found stockpiled in the department's warehouses. Moreover, 86 sub-centres listed in official records were found to exist only on paper.

According to departmental sources, the scam is estimated to exceed Rs 100 crore. Sinsinwar stated that only 12 files have been reviewed so far and irregularities involving several crores of rupees have already surfaced.

Authorities have sealed nine warehouses located in Dadraul and the old district hospital where large quantities of unused and unnecessary medical equipment were found, many of which had been procured in large quantities, far exceeding the actual requirements.

## Theft

Lucknow (PNS): Thieves stole jewellery worth Rs 6 lakh and Rs 3 lakh in cash from the house of a bank manager in Banthra area of Lucknow on Wednesday night. The theft was captured in the CCTV camera installed at the house and the police are searching for the thieves on the basis of the footage.

**PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY**  
WORKSHOP DIVISION  
No. EMWS/TECH-05/2024/554 Date: 15/04/2025  
Corrigendum-I to the Tender Call Notice No. EMWS-07/2025 for the work "Grant of license for Supply, Installation, Commissioning, Operation & Maintenance of 02 nos. 100 Ton Capacity HMC's for a period of 05 years." The last date of Bid Submission and opening of the bid for the above e-Tender Call Notice are hereby extended as follows: 1. Last date and time of Bid Submission : 06.05.2025 up to 18:00 Hrs., 2. Opening of Technical Bid : 07.05.2025 at 11.00 Hrs. All other Terms & conditions of the original Tender Call Notice shall remain unaltered.  
Sd/- Executive Engineer (M),  
Workshop Division-I, Paradip Port Authority  
PPA/PR/04/2025-2026 dtd. 17.04.2025

# Yogi hits out at oppn for silence on Murshidabad, Bangladesh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Thursday, launched a scathing attack on the opposition, criticising their silence over recent incidents in Murshidabad and Bangladesh. He said their lack of response had completely exposed their double standards in front of the public.



used to be scared during festivals. Today, festivals in UP are celebrated peacefully and with grandeur," he said.

The chief minister, while speaking at an event titled 'Uttar Pradesh: Towards a Glorious Century' organised by a major media group, strongly criticised the opposition parties, holding them responsible for deep-rooted issues like corruption, casteism and mafia rule during previous regimes. "The same people who were involved in scams and built hotels in London using public money are the ones who looted the state and divided people along caste lines," he said. He remarked: "Those who built their political empires on corruption, casteism, mafia power and dynastic politics are now silent on incidents like Murshidabad." The chief minister shared the progress made under his leadership in Uttar Pradesh, highlighting the development of infrastructure and the elimination of mafia rule. He said that his government had turned the state into a safer and more peaceful place. "In the past, mafia used to control entire districts. They took over government contracts, caused riots and harassed women and businessmen. People

district, one medical college, highlighting the state's improved health services. Furthermore, he mentioned the Purvanchal Expressway project as an example of efficient governance. He pointed out that the project was launched in 2016 without proper planning and was full of irregularities so his government canceled and redesigned it, completing the project at a cost of Rs 11,800 crore instead of the earlier Rs 15,200 crore. "We stopped the loot of public money — the same money that used to build hotels in England," he said. The chief minister further criticised the opposition for insulting national heroes like Shivaji, Maharana Pratap and Rana Sanga, while glorifying figures like Aurangzeb, Babur and Jinnah, who, he said, were against the idea of India. He accused opposition leaders of spreading propaganda and hatred in society for vote-bank politics. The chief minister said, "To build a prosperous Uttar Pradesh and a self-reliant, developed India, it is important to respect our national heroes. This is also one of the pledges of the prime minister's 'Panch Pran' vision." Highlighting Uttar Pradesh's rapid development, Chief Minister Yogi said the state now had some of the best infrastructure in the country, including highways, expressways, railways and metro systems. He shared that the state's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) has grown from Rs 12.75 lakh crore in 2017 to

nearly Rs 30 lakh crore today. The per capita income has more than doubled from Rs 46,000 to over Rs 1.10 lakh and is expected to cross Rs 1.25 lakh soon. He also mentioned that the state has successfully brought in investments worth Rs 15 lakh crore. Through the Nivesh Mitra portal, over 500 approvals are now being provided on a single platform, ensuring ease of doing business and timely incentives for investors. Speaking on Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, Chief Minister Yogi highlighted the participation of over 66 crore devotees, praising the cleanliness, arrangements and police conduct. He called Uttar Pradesh the spiritual heart of India, uniting the nation. On agriculture, he noted UP's leadership in food grain production, with 122 sugar mills operational and ₹2.80 lakh crore paid to sugarcane farmers in the last eight years. The CM further highlighted the importance of all four pillars of democracy — legislature, executive, judiciary and media — respecting their own limits. He said that along with rights, it was equally important to understand our responsibilities in a democracy. "India's democracy is strong because each pillar follows its own 'Lakshman rekha'," he said. The chief minister stressed that 'samvad' (dialogue) is the greatest strength of democracy. "Even the toughest problems can be solved through conversation. When dialogue ends, conflict begins. That is why it is important to always choose the path of discussion," he added.

# HC: Couples marrying against parents' wishes can't claim police protection as right

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Prayagraj

The Allahabad High Court has observed that couples who marry of their own will against the wishes of their parents cannot claim police protection as a matter of right unless there is a real threat perception to their life and liberty.

The court gave the ruling while deciding an application filed by a couple seeking protection.

It said the court can provide security to a couple in a deserving case but in the absence of any threat perception, such a couple must "learn to support each other and face the society".

Justice Saurabh Srivastava made this observation while hearing a writ petition filed by Shreya Kesarwani and her husband seeking police protection and a direction for the private respondents not to interfere in their peaceful marital life.

The court after going through the averments made in their petition, disposed of their writ petition, noting that there was no serious threat perception to the petitioners.

Disposing of the writ petition, the court observed, "There is no requirement of passing any order for providing police protection to them in the light of judgment rendered by the Supreme Court in the case of Lata Singh Vs State of UP and another,

wherein it has been held that the courts are not meant to provide protection to such youths who have simply fled to marry according to their own wishes."

The court also observed that there was no material or reason to conclude that the petitioners' life and liberty were in peril.

"There is not even an iota of evidence to evince that private respondents (relatives of either of the petitioners) are likely to cause physical or mental assault to the petitioners," the court noted.

In addition, the court noted that the petitioners had not submitted a specific application in the form of information to the concerned police authorities to file any FIR against the alleged illegal conduct of the private respondents. However, noting that the petitioners had already submitted a representation to the superintendent of police (SP), Chitrakoot district, the court said, "In case the concerned police find a real threat perception, they will do the needful in accordance with law." Against this backdrop, the court stressed that if any person misbehaves or manhandles them, the courts and the police authorities are there to come to their rescue.

In its decision dated April 4, the court disposed of the plea, holding that the petitioners cannot claim security as a matter of course or right.

# Maya targets SP over Dalit politics

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Upset with the Samajwadi Party's move to dent the Dalit vote bank of her party during the 2027 Uttar Pradesh assembly elections, Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati, on Thursday, accused it of creating an atmosphere of tension and violence.



gurus and great men of their society, due to which these people had become worthy of something. The BSP supremo advised the Dalit community not to be misled by the Dalit leaders of the SP. She also appealed to Muslims and OBCs to stay away from SP. Meanwhile, Mayawati expressed her concern over the attack on the marriage procession of a Dalit family in Agra.

Taking to social media platform 'X', the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh said that it was known that like other parties, the SP was also making its Dalit leaders give statements that create an atmosphere of tension and violence, on which there were allegations and counter-allegations.

"This is narrow and selfish politics. SP can also go to any extent for the sake of Dalit votes. Along with Dalits, Other Backward Classes and Muslim society should not fall prey to any of their aggressive instigations and should stay away from the political tactics of this party," BSP chief said.

Mayawati further said that instead of commenting on the history of others, it would be appropriate if the opportunistic Dalit leaders associated with such parties spoke about the goodness and struggle of the saints,

"Increasing attacks on the Dalit community in several parts of UP is a matter of concern for my party, which, during my regime, initiated stern action against the accused and stood behind the oppressed section of society," Mayawati posted on 'X' on Thursday evening while demanding action in the Agra incident.

## RAJARAM APPOINTED NATIONAL COORDINATOR

Mayawati appointed another national coordinator to give more momentum to the party's activities.

Former parliamentarian Rajaram has been made the national coordinator. He has been given the responsibility to promote the party's activities in other states and inform Mayawati about it.

Mayawati had appointed Ramji Gautam as the national coordinator after removing Akash Anand. Before this, BSP supremo Mayawati held a meeting with party officials in Lucknow here on Wednesday.

Mayawati also clarified the situation regarding Akash Anand. She said he came to apologise so she took him back into the party, but she was not giving any responsibility to him right now.

# Sitapur, Gzb to get healthcare upgrade

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Yogi Adityanath government is set to boost healthcare in Uttar Pradesh with a new 200-bed hospital in Sitapur and the renovation of the 200-bed MMG District Hospital in Ghaziabad.

The new district hospital in Sitapur will be constructed at a cost of ₹81 crore (excluding Goods and Services Tax), while the renovation of the MMG District Hospital in Ghaziabad will be carried out with an estimated expenditure of ₹80 crore (excluding GST).

The target is to complete both these works on engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) mode. These projects are designed to meet the growing healthcare needs of these regions.

In line with the vision of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Planning Department has prepared a detailed plan to complete both projects within 18 months. Once finished, these hospitals will significantly improve healthcare access and services for residents of Sitapur, Ghaziabad and their surrounding areas.

In Sitapur, the new district hospital will have a four-story main building, including the ground floor.

# Woman kills hubby with lover's help, blames it on snakebite

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Meerut was rocked with another sensational killing of a man by his wife and her paramour. The mysterious death of 25-year-old labourer Amit, alias Mickey, in Akbarpur Sadat village took a dramatic turn, with his wife having confessed to have orchestrated the killing with the help of her lover.



Police escort a woman, accused of killing her husband with the help of her lover, after producing them in a court in Meerut on Thursday

Later, to conceal the crime, they placed a snake near the victim to make it seem like death due to snakebite. The postmortem report, however, also ruled out snake bite as the primary cause of death.

Amit was found dead in his home on Tuesday, with a huge snake reportedly beneath his body. The victim's family claimed that Amit had been bitten ten times and the snake had bizarrely remained under the bed all night. They further added that after finding bite marks on his body, they rushed him to a local doctor in Bulandshahr district, where he was declared dead upon arrival. SP Rural Rakesh Kumar Mishra, however, disclosed that in the post-mortem report, apart from snake bite marks

on the body, some injury marks were also found on the body. Police officials revealed that during investigations, a major breakthrough came when Amit's wife, Ravita, admitted to orchestrating her husband's murder with the help of her lover, Amardeep, who was also a close friend of Amit. Ravita was involved in an extramarital affair with Amardeep, which Amit eventually discovered. This revelation caused frequent arguments between the couple. To eliminate her husband and avoid suspicion, Ravita plotted the murder carefully. She purchased a snake for ₹1,000, strangled Amit to death, and then placed the snake beneath his body to make the scene look like a snake bite incident, the cops claimed. Ravita has been arrested and legal action taken in the matter.

It may be mentioned that earlier in March also, the horrific killing of a 29-year-old Merchant Navy officer Saurabh Rajput shook Meerut. The deceased's body parts were dismembered and hidden in a blue drum by his wife and her lover to cover up the cold-blooded murder.

# Varanasi gang-rape: SIT to probe allegations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Varanasi

Families of a number of accused in the alleged gang-rape of a woman here claimed on Thursday that there were inconsistencies in the survivor's account, while the police formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to examine both allegations. According to the complaint, the 19-year-old woman was raped by 23 people at multiple places between March 29 and April 4. The survivor's family filed the complaint in this regard on April 6. Of the 23 named accused in the case, 14 have been arrested so far.

Police Commissioner Mohit Agarwal said the arrest of the remaining accused has been paused, pending the outcome of the SIT probe.

In a memorandum submitted to police, the families of a number of accused alleged that the woman had, at times, demanded "money to omit certain names from the

Questions have been raised about why the girl did not return home despite her being near her residence on multiple occasions, police sources said, adding the accused's kin have also claimed the survivor initially named 23 people but identified only nine in her court testimony which suggests possible manipulation or coercion.

Police said CCTV footage have purport-

edly shown the girl riding a bike during the time period of the alleged gang rape as mentioned in the complaint.

Questions have been raised about why the girl did not return home despite her being near her residence on multiple occasions, police sources said, adding the accused's kin have also claimed the survivor initially named 23 people but identified only nine in her court testimony which suggests possible manipulation or coercion. Police Commissioner Agarwal confirmed that when the survivor was first located by authorities, she neither mentioned rape nor expressed a desire to return home. "Only after a lengthy conversation with the officers did she agree to go back to her family," the police officer said.

The Varanasi city police chief said a Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been constituted to examine the woman's allegations and the counterclaims submitted by the families of the accused.

"The SIT is tasked with presenting a comprehensive report within 30 days," Agarwal said, and asserted, "No one — the survivor, or the accused — will face injustice." The case drew national attention after Prime Minister Narendra Modi was briefed on the situation during his visit to Varanasi last week. He had directed officials to take the "strictest possible action" against those found guilty. The survivor's mother had told PTI that she wished to meet PM Modi during his visit to Varanasi.

"I want to meet our PM and narrate my daughter's trauma. I want the people who committed such a heinous crime be given the harshest punishment so that in future, everyone thinks a thousand times before subjecting any girl to such barbarity," she had said. The woman's mother had also said the incident had left her daughter deeply traumatised. "She is not keeping well. The trauma has had a deep impact on her psyche," she had said.

# Naimisharanya witnessing new dawn of development

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Naimisharanya, the sacred land of penance for 88,000 sages and saints, rests serenely on the banks of the Gomti river. This ancient pilgrimage site, steeped in spiritual legacy, is now witnessing a new dawn of development under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. It is worth mentioning here that on the eve of Gandhi Jayanti 2023, CM Yogi visited Naimisharanya and met with local saints. He assured ample funding for its holistic develop-

ment and expressed his vision to transform it into a major spiritual and tourism hub, declaring, "I aim to develop Naimisharanya in a manner that surpasses Ayodhya."

To ensure systematic development, the Yogi government established the Naimisharanya Tirtha Parishad. Under this initiative, a new ghat is being constructed between Rajghat and Dashashwamedh Ghat, whereas several existing ghats are being renovated and beautified — some of which are already complete, with others progressing rapidly.

**IDFC FIRST Bank Limited**  
(erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)  
CIN : L65110TN2014PLC097792  
Registered Office : - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai- 600031.  
Tel : +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

**Notice under Section 13 (2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002**

The following borrowers and co-borrowers availed the below mentioned secured loans from IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) The loans of the below-mentioned borrowers and co-borrowers have been secured by the mortgage of their respective properties. As they have failed to adhere to the terms and conditions of the respective loan agreements and had become irregular, their loan were classified as NPA as per the RBI guidelines. Amounts due by them to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) are mentioned as per respective notices issued more particularly described in the following table and further interest on the said amounts shall also be applicable and the same will be charged as per contractual rate with effect from their respective dates.

Sr No.	Loan Account No.	Type of Loan	Section 13 (2) Notice Date	Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice
1	102529055 & 145610499	LOAN AGAINST PROPERTY	02.04.2025	12,80,854.79/-

**NAME OF BORROWERS AND CO-BORROWERS :** 1. SANTOSH KUMAR VISHAWKARMA 3. SUMAN SANTOSH

**PROPERTY ADDRESS :** ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF PROPERTY AREA 190 SQ. MTRS. PART OF GATA NO. 474, SITUATED AT VILLAGE: BAHLOLPUR, CATEGORY-K, PARGANA: SADAR, TESHIL: LALGANJ, DISTRICT: PRATAPGARH, UTTAR PRADESH-230137, AND BOUNDED AS:- EAST: KHET OF WAHIDA W/O MOHD. BAKSH, WEST: ROAD SAHABGANJ TO PURANI BAZAR & LEELAPUR, NORTH: LAND OF PREMA DEVI, SOUTH: LAND OF JAY SINGH

You are hereby called upon to pay the amounts to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) as per the details shown in the above table with contracted rate of interest thereupon from their respective dates and other costs, charges etc. within 60 days from the date of this publication, failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to initiate proceedings, under Section 13 (4) and section 14 of the SARFAESI Act, against the mortgaged properties mentioned hereinabove to realize the amount due to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited). Further you are prohibited under Section 13 (13) of the said Act from transferring the said secured assets either by way of sale/lease or otherwise.

Sd/- Authorized Officer  
Date : 18.04.2025 IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with Place : PRATAPGARH IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)

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Sr No.	Loan Account No.	Type of Loan	Section 13 (2) Notice Date	Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice
1	122641972	LOAN AGAINST PROPERTY	29.03.2025	6,89,803.45/-

**NAME OF BORROWERS AND CO-BORROWERS :** 1. KAMAR KHAN 2. SAKINA ANEES 3. ANIS AHMAD

**PROPERTY ADDRESS :** ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF LAND/PLOT AREA 29X40 = 1160 SQ. FT. I.E. 107.80 SQ. MTRS., PART OF GATA NO. 136, SITUATED AT VILLAGE: HAFEEJIPUR MAJRA LALHAPUR, PARGANA: HYDERABAD, TESHIL: GOLA, DISTRICT: KHERI (LAKHIMPUR), UTTAR PRADESH-262802, AND BOUNDED AS:- EAST: PLOT OF MUSHTAQ & LINE - 40 FEET, WEST: HOUSE OF NAMALOO (OTHER) & LINE - 40 FEET, NORTH: RASTA & LINE-28 FEET, SOUTH: HOUSE OF NAVAB ALI & LINE-30 FEET

You are hereby called upon to pay the amounts to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) as per the details shown in the above table with contracted rate of interest thereupon from their respective dates and other costs, charges etc. within 60 days from the date of this publication, failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to initiate proceedings, under Section 13 (4) and section 14 of the SARFAESI Act, against the mortgaged properties mentioned hereinabove to realize the amount due to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited). Further you are prohibited under Section 13 (13) of the said Act from transferring the said secured assets either by way of sale/lease or otherwise.

Sd/- Authorized Officer  
Date : 18.04.2025 IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with Place : KHERI (LAKHIMPUR) IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)

# KDA directed to develop ponds for rainwater harvesting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

A review meeting focusing on overall development works of Kanpur district was held under the chairmanship of Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana in the new auditorium at Sarsaiya Ghat on Thursday.

During the review of the Kanpur Ring Road project, NHAI officials informed that the project is divided into four packages. Work has already commenced on three of them, while the tendering process for the fourth is underway and land acquisition is in progress.

Regarding the Kanpur-Lucknow Expressway, NHAI reported that the work is to be completed in two packages. The construction has been initiated by M/s PNC Infratech Ltd. and is progressing rapidly. The six-lane expressway will begin at Shaheed Path Junction and end at Bani. Package 2 will include an elevated section descending near the Outer Ring Road where a junction will also be constructed. The project is advancing on a war footing and is expected to be completed soon. Mahana also addressed the concerns of residents from Kanpur Nagar South, instructing departments to coordinate and resolve issues effectively. During the review of the Saebis Lake development, he directed that it should be made structurally safe and aesthetically enhanced.



Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana chairing the review meeting on Thursday.

For the Jajmau to Chakeri Airport route, he emphasised removing obstacles and ensuring swift construction.

It was informed that a proposal has been prepared by Setu Nigam for the construction of a four-lane Panki Padoo Bridge, and the plan has been included in the action agenda. Regarding the Mega Leather Cluster, he instructed that all necessary work must be completed by May 31. If not, alternative solutions

must be considered.

The Kanpur Development Authority (KDA) was directed to protect its land and develop ponds for rainwater harvesting. The MD of KESCO was instructed to expedite the underground power cabling work in Lal Bangla Market, ensuring that all necessary processes are completed promptly.

The police commissioner was asked to ensure that wedding processions move on only one side of the road to facilitate

smooth traffic flow. In the review of the Defense Corridor, he emphasised completing land acquisition and removing existing hurdles quickly.

The municipal commissioner was directed to relocate the vegetable market at GK First from beneath the overbridge to a more organised location. Regarding the Baniyapurwa sewage plant project, he directed that operations must begin by July under all circumstances.

Instructions were also given to ensure complete removal of silt during drain cleaning activities and regular cleaning of streets, lanes and neighbourhoods. Cleanliness should be maintained not only in urban but also in rural areas, with sanitation workers regularly present. The KESCO was instructed to maintain effective communication and resolve any electrical faults on a war footing. The meeting was attended by Mayor Pramila Pandey, MLAs Neelima Katiyar, Saroj Kuril, Surendra Maithani and Mahesh Trivedi, Divisional Commissioner Vijayendra Pandian, Police Commissioner Akhil Kumar, District Magistrate Jitendra Pratap Singh, Joint Police Commissioner (Law & Order) Harishchandra, MD KESCO Samuel Paul, Municipal Commissioner Sudhir Kumar, Chief Development Officer (CDO) Diksha Jain, and other concerned officials.

# Complex surgery performed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

A complex surgery on a one-year-and-six-month-old girl child was performed at Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU). The kid was referred from Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya Cancer Centre (MPMCC), Varanasi, to the Department of Paediatric Surgery at IMS-BHU with a diagnosis of Wilms' tumour, accompanied by tumour thrombus extending from the renal vein into the right atrium of the heart via the inferior vena cava. Chemotherapy had been initiated at MPMCC to control the progression of the tumour. Prof Siddharth Lakhota from Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgery (CTVS) and Prof Vaibhav Pandey from Paediatric Surgery planned the definitive surgical management.

The surgery posed an exceptional challenge due to the young age of the child and the extensive spread of the tumour from the kidney to the heart.

A multidisciplinary expert team was constituted comprising Prof Siddharth Lakhota, Dr Arvind Pandey and Dr Narendra Nath Das from Cardiothoracic Surgery, Prof Vaibhav Pandey and Dr Ruchira from Paediatric Surgery, Dr Pratibha Rai from Paediatric Cardiology, Dr RB.Singh from Paediatric Anaesthesia, and Dr Sanjeev from Cardiac Anaesthesia.

After a few days of meticulous preparation, including detailed clinico-radiological evaluation of the tumor status by Prof Vaibhav Pandey with assistance from

Dr Ishan (Radiology) and cardiac assessment by Dr Pratibha Rai and her team, a comprehensive anesthetic and surgical plan was developed by Dr RB Singh and Dr Sanjeev.

Considering the child's age, disease severity and the complexity of the surgery, which involved open-heart procedures with miniature instruments and bypass catheters, the expected cost in a private hospital was around Rs 25 lakh. However, with the efforts of Medical Superintendent of Sir Sunderlal Hospital (SSH-BHU) Prof KK Gupta and all team members, the necessary equipment was arranged, and the surgery was performed at BHU at a nominal cost of Rs 60,000.

A team of 20 doctors, led by Prof Vaibhav Pandey, performed the complex surgery over 10 hours in two stages. In the first stage, Prof Vaibhav Pandey, along with Dr Ruchira, Dr Seth, Dr Bhanumurthy, Dr Manish, and Dr Raghav, removed the kidney tumour and carefully excised the thrombus from the inferior vena cava and liver with magnification and precise vascular control, repairing the IVC meticulously. In the second stage, Prof Siddharth Lakhota and his team performed the cardiac procedure, using cardiopulmonary bypass and transesophageal echocardiography (provided by Dr Sanjeev's team) to extract the tumour thrombus from the right atrium of the heart. The thrombus was successfully removed on a beating heart with CPB support. The surgery was successfully completed, making this child the youngest in north India to undergo such an advanced procedure.

# Importance of working on happiness stressed



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

The 'Muskuraye Kanpur' officially launched the Happiness School Project on Thursday. The inauguration was attended by chief guest MLA Neelima Katiyar along with founder Dr Sudhanshu Rai, Project Manager Amit Agrawal and coordinators Prof. Mridula Shukla and Dr Neelam Trivedi.

Speaking on the occasion, Neelima Katiyar emphasised the importance of working on happiness in today's times. She praised the concept of 'Happiness School' for educational institutions, stating that it will have long-term positive effects and will help develop a progressive mindset in society.

Founder Dr Sudhanshu Rai described the project as a transformative initiative where social experts will guide students beyond the standard curriculum, focusing on practical skills, human values, personality development, counselling, communication skills and Indian cultural values. He also proposed the establishment of

Happiness Clubs in schools.

Senior social worker and Manager Amit Agrawal stressed the inclusion of teachers along with students in this concept, noting that the initiative will undoubtedly bring positive social change.

Prof. Mridula Shukla and Dr Neelam Trivedi have been made the coordinators of the project. Prof. Shukla shared that the initiative is completely free of cost and based on social cooperation, aiming for holistic societal development.

Muskuraye Kanpur President Dr Anurag Mehrotra encouraged all stakeholders to work with a broad and inspired vision. Secretary Deepika Srivastava stated that happiness has been adopted as the core mission of Muskuraye Kanpur. While hosting the programme, Coordinator Dr Neelam Trivedi highlighted that the 'Happiness School' is a unique experiment designed for schools under the Muskuraye Kanpur initiative. The event was attended by Seema Nigam, Patron Meena Mehrotra, Richa Awasthi, Dr Hemant Mohan and others.

# Training programme on plant tissue culture techniques ends

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

A two-day training programme on 'Plant tissue culture techniques' successfully concluded at the Centre for Tissue Culture Technology, Jacob Institute of Biotechnology and Bioengineering, Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences (SHUATS) here on Thursday. It was organized in collaboration with the Department of Botany, Ewing Christian College, Prayagraj.

The programme began with an opening prayer led by Prof Eapen P Koshy, followed by a welcome address by Dr Gurudayal R Guru. Prof Pragati Shukla provided an



overview of the training programme and the centre's activities. In her inaugural address, she emphasised the importance of this training for the career growth of participants. Dr Gurudayal R. Guru proposed the vote of thanks.

# MD inspects new underground metro stations

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

In preparation for the upcoming expansion of metro passenger services from Moti Jheel to Kanpur Central, the Managing Director of Uttar Pradesh Metro Rail Corporation Limited (UPMRC) Sushil Kumar conducted a detailed inspection of all new underground metro stations — Chunniganj, Naveen Market, Bada Chauraha, Nayaganj and Kanpur Central — accompanied by senior officials. During the visit, he also reviewed the pedestrian route connecting Kanpur Central Railway Station to the metro station.

The Kanpur Central Metro Station is situated near Ghantaghar Chauraha, where expansion work under the Amrit Bharat scheme is currently underway. After consultations with railway officials, the metro station has been seamlessly integrated with a designated access point at the railway station. This linkage will provide convenient connectivity for passengers transitioning between train and metro services.

Highlighting the importance of integrated transport, the MD said, "Kanpur Metro will serve as a boon for both intra-city commuters and inter-city travellers. To ensure seamless connectivity, metro stations have been strategically developed near key railway and bus terminals under



UPMRC MD Sushil Kumar inspecting new underground metro stations

the multi-modal connectivity concept."

With the expansion of passenger services, major traffic nodes, including Kanpur Central railway station, Chunniganj bus station, Rawatpur railway and bus stations and Kalyanpur railway station will offer enhanced commuter convenience. In the near future, Jhakkarkatti bus station will also be linked to the metro network, significantly easing travel both within the city and to destinations beyond.

The new metro line from Moti Jheel to Kanpur Central significantly improves access to several key commercial, educa-

tional, healthcare and administrative hubs of the city. Starting from Chunniganj metro station, passengers stepping out of Gate No. 1 will find BNSD Inter College right in front, with GIC Inter College, the DIOS office and the busy cycle market located nearby. On the other side lie the Chunniganj bus station and the Colonelganj fire station, while the Government District Library is just a short walk away, making the station particularly convenient for students and book enthusiasts. Moving forward, the Naveen Market Station serves as a gateway to loca-

tions like Crystal Parking, Parade Chauraha, Somdatt Plaza and Naveen Market. This station is also ideal for reaching the revered Anandeshwar Temple and the bustling Moolganj locality. Cricket fans can access Green Park Stadium from here and the station also provides convenient connectivity to Ursala Hospital.

At Bada Chauraha Station, commuters can easily reach prominent landmarks such as the District Court, Kanpur Head Post Office, Christ Church College, JS Tower, and the State Bank of India.

The station also offers quick access to major shopping centres like Z Square Mall and Shivala Market as well as the historic Nana Rao Park. Nayaganj Station caters to a densely packed area filled with commercial and institutional landmarks, including Birhana Road, Mega Mall, the LIC building, Phoolbagh Chauraha, Sagar Market, SN Sen Girls School and the Kanpur Cantt area, enhancing convenience for both daily commuters and occasional travellers. Finally, Kanpur Central Station, located adjacent to the Kanpur Central Railway Station, serves as a crucial interchange point. It is well connected to Ghanta Ghar Chauraha, Latouche Road, Collector Ganj Market and the nearby Nayaganj Market, ensuring seamless transition for passengers moving between rail and metro networks.

# Workshop on sports injury prevention from April 22

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

The University Sports Board (USB), Banaras Hindu University (BHU) will organise a workshop on 'Sports injury prevention and rehabilitation' from April 22 to 24 at the Seminar Hall of USB. It workshop is designed to educate athletes, coaches, and sports enthusiasts on managing and preventing sports injuries.

This three-day workshop aims to provide athletes, coaches, physical education professionals, and sports enthusiasts with critical insights into the prevention, management, and rehabilitation of sports-related injuries. Participants will engage with leading experts through lectures, demonstrations, and hands-on sessions focused on maintaining peak athletic performance while minimising injury risks. The sessions will be conducted in the evening from 3 pm to 6 pm, making it convenient for students to participate without affecting their academic schedules.

# DM reviews pending loan applications

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

District Magistrate S Rajalingam on Thursday inspected the Bank of Baroda (BoB), Ledhupur branch, to review the pending loan applications under the Mukhya Mantri Yuva Udyami Vikas Abhiyan. When information was sought regarding the pending applications at the bank branch, the branch manager informed that nine applications have been approved and two were pending for which the loan distribution will be done on April 21. The DM was also informed that loan distribution in the pending applications will be completed within a week. The DM also inspected some other loan files. The lead district manager present at the bank branch was directed by the DM to issue a common check list for loan approval/distribution under the scheme so that all bank branches can get records from the applicants smoothly.

The DM directed the deputy commissioner (Industries) to share a Google Sheet of all applications pending for approval under this scheme with all bank branches/applicants with the facility of their comments. By creating a column of DPR, quotation, enterprise registration,

rate agreement if applicable and other points in this Google Sheet, application-wise comments should be obtained from the branch so that monitoring can be done in real time and timely progress under the scheme can be achieved by removing the deficiencies pointed out by the bank branch, providing the desired records.

Earlier, a meeting of the District Level Committee (DLC) for the year 2024-25 under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana was held under the chairmanship of the DM in which its members were present. In a detailed discussion was held on the action plan for the year 2024-25.

An explanation was sought for not organising the meeting for the last one year and it was directed that in future this meeting should be held on a quarterly basis and more time should be kept for discussion. It was directed that in the said meeting in addition to the ex-officio members of the committee, all block development officers, officials of agriculture and other related departments in the committee such as chief veterinary officer, district horticulture officer, assistant registrar (Cooperative) and deputy commissioner (National Rural Livelihood Mission), DDM NABARD and Municipal Corporation officials should

also be called. The committee also directed that women of self-help groups should also be benefited from the schemes of the Fisheries Department. Applicants should also be benefited by including them in the cooperative society for livelihood nutrition. CDO Himanshu Nagpal emphasised on the proposal of fish feed mill and fish seed hatchery in the district.

## KISAN DIWAS ORGANISED

Kisan Diwas was organised under the chairmanship of Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal in Vikas Bhawan on Wednesday. In the meeting, the CDO ordered to withhold the salaries of two officers for the current month. Along with the Agriculture Department, officials of Irrigation, Minor Irrigation, Cooperatives, Fisheries, Horticulture, Tubewell, Animal Husbandry, District Lead Bank Manager, Silk, UP NEDA, Forest Department, Police Department and farmers of the district participated in the meeting. An effort was made by the officials of the departments concerned to connect as many farmers as possible to the schemes by giving information about their respective departmental schemes.

# Hariprasad Chaurasia captivates music lovers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

Despite his age, the eminent flute player Padam Vibhushan Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, kept the classical music lovers spellbound, marking the beginning of six-day internationally famous Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh on Wednesday evening. The first day's programme ended in the wee hours on Thursday and a good number of audience were present to enjoy the duet of sarod-sitar by Pt Vikas Maharaj and Abhishek Maharaj of Varanasi.

This is one of such events for which music lovers wait for the whole year. This 102nd music festival organised on Chaitra Purnima, starting from the fourth day of Hanuman Jayanti, is being held on the Mukta Kashiy stage of Sankat Mochan Temple. The inaugural presentation of this historic event was given by Pt Hariprasad Chaurasia and Sankat Mochan Temple



Padam Vibhushan Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia presenting a programme at Sankat Mochan Temple in Varanasi on Wednesday night.

Mahant Prof Vishwambhar Nath Mishra.

Pt Hariprasad presented alapchari in Raag Bihag, Jod, Jhala, after bandish in Jhaptal and he concluded the his programme with gatkari in Teentaal. In the

end, the recital was concluded with the tune of Om Jai Jagdish Hare. He was also supported by Ashish Radhwani on tabla and Vivek Sonar and Vaishnavi Joshi on flutes. In the second performance, Janani

Murali, who came from Bengaluru, performed Bharatanatyam. She started the dance with Ganga Stuti, then Hanuman Stuti and others. Bhaav Anga was predominant in her dance and due to which the dance was eye-catching. She performed the entire performance on recorded music.

In the third performance, the famous santoor player Pt Rahul Sharma after Alaap, Jod, Jhala in Raga Jhinjhoti presented Gatkari in Rupak and Teental and ended the performance with a Pahadi tune. The influence of his father Guru Pt Shivkumar Sharma was clearly visible in his playing. Pt Ram Kumar Mishra made the performance impressive by giving a wonderful participation with him on the tabla. In the fourth performance, the famous vocalist from Pune, Pt Ajay Pohankar mesmerised the audience with his melodious singing. After singing a bandish in Jhaptal in Raga Abhogi, he ended the performance by singing a Dadra in Raga Pahadi.

# Tenderfoot founder felicitated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

The Meadows Foundation Trust felicitated the founder of Tenderfoot Priti Kesarwani in New Delhi for her outstanding contribution and two decades of unwavering commitment to early childhood education and development in the presence of Padamshree Dr HR Nagendra Gurui. The guests of honour were MP Dr Mahesh Sharma, and former MP Dr Ramkishore Singh.

Established 20 years ago, Tenderfoot has grown into a respected institution under her visionary leadership, offering a nurturing and dynamic environment for young learners. Her efforts have not only shaped the lives of countless children but have also set a benchmark for quality education and care in the early years.

The award ceremony, held in New Delhi, recognised her relentless dedication, resilience and the positive impact she has



Meadows Foundation Trust felicitating Priti Kesarwani in New Delhi.

made in the community. The Foundation lauded her as a symbol of strength and inspiration, whose work continues to uplift and empower both students and educators alike.

# India will emerge as number one military power: Rajnath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday here said India is not only securing its borders but also positioning itself as a key player in the international Defence ecosystem. "The day is not far when India will not only emerge as a developed country, but our Military Power will also emerge as the number one in the world," he said.

Making these assertions at a defence conclave, he reiterated that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the revival and strengthening of the defence sector is one of the biggest priorities for the government.

He further stated that the government's first and foremost challenge was to change the mindset that India would simply import to meet its defence needs. "India will reduce its dependency on imports and create a defence industrial complex that will not only meet India's needs but will also strengthen the potential of defence exports," the Defence Minister emphasised.

"Today, while India's Defence sector is moving ahead on the path of self-reliance, it is also ready to play a very important role in making global supply chains resilient," he said. Rajnath Singh underlined that India's growing Defence capability is not meant to provoke conflict. "Our Defence capabilities are like a credible deterrence, to maintain peace and tranquillity. Peace is possible only when we remain strong," he added.

On the evolving nature of warfare, he underscored that in the coming days, conflicts and wars will be more violent and unpredictable. The Cyber and Space Domains are rapidly emerging as new battlefields and along with this, a war of narrative and perception is also being fought all over the world. To address these challenges, he mentioned that the focus is on



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh addressing at The Week Defence Conclave in New Delhi

holistic capacity building and continuous reforms. The defence minister also announced that Ministry of Defence had declared 2025 as the 'Year of Reforms'.

He also outlined the government's indigenisation drive, noting the release of five positive indigenisation lists by the Armed Forces and five by Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs).

"The total number of defence equipment, weapon systems and platforms included in the list of the Services is 509. These will now be produced in India. Similarly, the total number of items included in the DPSU lists is 5,012 including strategically important Line Replacement Units, sub-systems, spares and components," he said.

Rajnath Singh also underlined the fact that the government has reserved 75 per cent of the Defence Budget for procure-

ment from domestic companies. He pointed out that defence production in India has risen from ₹40,000 crore in 2014 to over ₹1.27 lakh crore today. "This year, Defence production should cross ₹1.60 lakh crore, while our target is to produce Defence equipment worth ₹3 lakh crore by the year 2029," he added.

On Defence exports, Rajnath Singh underscored that the figures had surged from ₹686 crore in 2013-14 to ₹23,622 crore in 2024-25.

Highlighting India's growing strategic capabilities, the Defence Minister mentioned that the country now stands shoulder to shoulder with developed nations in critical areas such as missile technology (Agni, BrahMos), submarines (INS Arihant), aircraft carriers (INS Vikrant), artificial intelligence, drones, cyber defence and hypersonic systems. A

# BJP cites digital campaign for anger against Mamata's rule

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The BJP on Thursday cited a digital campaign against the Mamata Banerjee-led government in West Bengal as a spontaneous expression of people's anger.

"The people of West Bengal are finally raising their voices against the unimaginable atrocities, lawlessness, and rampant crimes under Mamata Banerjee's rule," BJP's co-in-charge for the state Amit Malviya said.

He was referring to what BJP leaders described as a citizen-driven campaign through a website [www.Soibenaarbangla.Com](http://www.Soibenaarbangla.Com) (Bengal will no longer tolerate it) against the alleged corruption and lawlessness in the state. The campaign urges people not to vote for the ruling Trinamool Congress to save Bengal, asking them to rise above fear and patronage and seeking their support with musical campaign material. It alleges that Hindus have been at the receiving end of the state government's "biased" conduct.

Malviya claimed, "Incidents like the Murshidabad riots, the SSC (school recruitment) scam, the rape and murder of a woman doctor at RG Kar Medical College, and the sexual violence against women in Sandeshkhali have devastated the state and shaken its conscience."

Though critical of the TMC, the campaign does not endorse any party.

The TMC has accused the BJP of driving a smear campaign against its government, with the political battle between the two parties rising in intensity and acrimony as the assembly elections scheduled for the next year approach.

# WB recruitment: SC extends tenure of untainted teachers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a major relief, the Supreme Court on Thursday extended till December 31 the services of terminated teachers found untainted by the CBI. A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar considered West Bengal's submissions that the terminations adversely impacted teaching in various state-run and aided schools. The order came on the pleas of the State Government, which moved court after the April 3 verdict.

The top court judgment invalidated the appointment of 25,753 teachers and staffers in various schools, calling the entire selection process "vitiated and tainted". On Thursday, it also took note of the State Government saying fresh recruitment would take time. Several districts in the state witnessed widespread protests as a section of teachers and non-teaching staffers, rendered unemployed post the Supreme Court verdict, clashed with the police. Taking note of the submissions, the top court said it will grant extension of service to untainted teachers only but it won't apply to Grade C and D employees of the state government run and aided schools.

"We are inclined to accept the prayer in the present application in so far as it relates to the assistant teachers for classes 9-10th and 11-12th subject to certain conditions," the CJI said.

Listing out the conditions, the CJI said the advertisement for fresh recruitment will be published on or before May 31 and the entire process including the examination will be completed by December 31 this year. "This order will not accord any special rights or advantage to the aforesaid teachers in so far as fresh recruitment is concerned," the CJI added.

The court asked the state government and its West Bengal School Service Commission to file a compliance affidavit

on the initiation of the recruitment process on or before May 31. On April 3, the top court while annulling the appointments, upheld a Calcutta High Court verdict of April 22, 2024, and said the tainted candidates should refund their "salaries/payments received".



"This is a case wherein the entire selection process has been vitiated and tainted beyond resolution. Manipulations and frauds on a large scale, coupled with the attempted cover-up, have dented the selection process beyond repair and partial redemption. The credibility and legitimacy of the selection are denuded," the bench had said.

The case stemmed from the alleged irregularities in the 2016 recruitment process conducted by the West Bengal SSC in which 23 lakh candidates appeared for 24,640 posts and a total of 25,753 appointment letters were issued. The apex court had called it a "systemic fraud".

Former West Bengal Education Minister Partha Chatterjee and Trinamool Congress MLAs Manik Bhattacharya and Jiban Krishna Saha are among the accused being probed in the recruitment scam.

# CCPA advises coaching centres to strictly adhere to Consumer Protection Act 2019

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has advised coaching centres to strictly adhere to the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and Guidelines for the Prevention of Misleading Advertisements in the Coaching Sector, 2024, according to Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution statement on Thursday. It also said notices were sent to some coaching centres for not adhering to the guidelines.

The notices pertained to issues like guaranteed placement/selection, assurance of rank in JEE/NEET, violation of consumer rights and misleading advertisement. Also, unfair trade practices including promised services not provided, admission cancelled but fee not refunded, deficiency in service, non/partial refund of fees.

These claims and practices appear to be violating various provisions of the Act including Section-2(28) and 2 (47) of Consumer Protection Act, 2019 and Guidelines for Prevention of Misleading Advertisement in Coaching Sector, 2024.

The authority clearly outlines that it is essential their representations are accurate, clear, and free from misleading claims or the concealment of important information

from consumers. Additionally, coaching centres should avoid making assurances of guaranteed success. Coaching centres must clearly disclose key details in their advertisements, including the student's name, rank, course type and whether the course was paid. Disclaimers must be prominently displayed in the same font size as other important information to ensure consumers are not misled.

Following the recent declaration of results for examinations such as IIT-JEE and NEET, the Central Consumer Protection Authority observed that coaching centres are not adhering to the guidelines for the prevention of misleading advertisements in the coaching sector, 2024. The Guidelines for the Prevention of Misleading Advertisements in the Coaching Sector, 2024, were issued on November 13, 2024.

These guidelines prohibit coaching centres from making false or misleading claims/advertisements to promote their services and from engaging in deceptive or unfair practices.

These guidelines represent a vital step toward preventing the exploitation of students and ensuring that they are not misled by false promises or compelled into unfair contracts.

The guidelines are framed to enhance

transparency and fairness in the sector, helping students and their families make informed decisions based on accurate and truthful information.

These guidelines supplement existing regulations and further strengthen the regulatory framework governing advertisements in the coaching sector. In a significant move to protect consumer rights and ensure transparency in the coaching sector, the Central Consumer Protection Authority has, over the past three years, taken action against misleading advertisements, unfair trade practices, and violations of consumer rights by coaching centres.

In this regard, the Central Consumer Protection Authority has issued 49 notices and imposed a total penalty of ₹77.60 lakh on 24 coaching centres and directed them to discontinue misleading advertisements and unfair trade practices.

The Central Consumer Protection Authority had earlier taken action against coaching centres offering services for competitive exams including UPSC CSE, IIT-JEE, NEET, RBI, NABARD, among others, reaffirming its commitment to ensuring that no false or misleading advertisements are made in contravention of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

# Possibility of resumption of Kailash Mansarovar Yatra soon, says India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India on Thursday said there is a possibility of resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra soon and preparations for it are underway.

India and China have been looking at resuming the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra as part of efforts to improve ties after the two countries completed disengagement of troops at the two remaining friction points of Demchok and Depsang under the framework of a pact sealed in October last year.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said both India and China have agreed in-principle to resume flight services between the two sides as well and that relevant modalities are being worked out.

The move to resume the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and flight services is part of efforts by India and China to repair the ties hit by the over four-year military standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

"We will soon issue a public notice on the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and there is a possibility of resumption of the Yatra soon," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"The Yatra will happen this year and we

are making preparations. More information will be put out for the public soon," he added.

The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra has not taken place since 2020.

On resumption of flight services, Jaiswal said: "In principle, both countries have agreed that flight operations will resume."

"The technical teams on both sides are looking into the technical arrangements for the flight services to resume. The two civil aviation authorities have met and are discussing the relevant modalities, including the updated framework," he said.

Last month, India and China explored ways to rebuild ties and agreed to initiate efforts to promote people-to-people exchanges, including arrangements for resumption of direct flights as well as Kailash Mansarovar Yatra this year.

In a meeting in Beijing, the two sides also discussed resumption of dialogue mechanisms in a "step-by-step" manner to utilize them to address each other's priority areas of interest and concern and move the relations on to a "more stable and predictable path".

The relations between the two countries came under severe strain following the Galwan Valley clashes in 2020.

The meeting in Beijing was held

between Gourangal Das, the joint secretary in the MEA's East Asia division, and Liu Jinsong, the director general at the Chinese foreign ministry's department of Asian affairs.

There have been series of meetings between India and China following the disengagement of troops in Depsang and Demchok.

In December, NSA Doval travelled to Beijing and held talks with Foreign Minister Wang Yi under the framework of Special Representatives (SR) dialogue on the boundary question.

The decision to revive the SR mechanism and other such dialogue formats was taken at a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Kazan on October 23 last year.

The Modi-Xi meeting came two days after India and China signed a disengagement pact for Depsang and Demchok, the last two friction points in eastern Ladakh.

In January, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Beijing and held talks with his Chinese counterpart Sun Weidong.

In the meeting, the two sides decided to resume the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and agreed to take certain people-centric steps to "stabilise and rebuild" ties.

# BJP Government 'oppressing' MGNREGA workers: Kharage



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday alleged that the "anti-poor" Modi Government is bent on "oppressing" MGNREGA workers and reiterated the party's demands that their minimum wage per day be fixed at ₹400 and that they be provided at least 150 days of work in a year.

Kharge shared on social media, a media report which claimed that the government is unlikely to raise the daily floor wage under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) substantially, on top of the usual annual hike, despite recommendations by two panels.

"It seems that the anti-people Modi government has refused to increase MGNREGA wages. This is like attacking the rights of MGNREGA workers," Kharge said in a post in Hindi on X.

He pointed out that recently, the Joint Parliamentary Committee had recom-

mended increasing the daily wage of MGNREGA workers to ₹400 per day.

"Amarjeet Sinha's High Level Committee formed in 2023 had also suggested increasing wages and increasing the budget of MGNREGA. But the anti-poor Modi government is bent on oppressing MGNREGA workers," the Congress chief said. Be it excluding nearly seven crore registered workers from MGNREGA by imposing the condition of Aadhaar-based payment, or allocating the lowest MGNREGA budget in the last 10 years as compared to the total budget, the Modi government has been negatively impacting MGNREGA, he said.

"MGNREGA — Employment guarantee scheme was brought by the Congress Party for the poorest families of our country. We are firm on our two demands — Minimum wage of ₹400 per day should be fixed for MGNREGA workers and at least 150 days of work in a year be provided to them," Kharge said.

# No entry fee at monuments on World Heritage Day, says ASI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on Thursday announced that on the occasion of 'International Day for Monuments and Sites', celebrated globally on April 18, no fee shall be charged on visiting Archaeological Survey of India monuments across India, Ministry of Culture said here in a statement.

This initiative aims to encourage visitors to explore India's rich cultural heritage. With 3,698 monuments and sites under its protection, ASI is offering this opportunity to reconnect with the country's historical legacy and architectural marvels.

This year's theme for 'International Day for Monuments and Sites' is 'Heritage under threat from disaster and conflicts' where awareness is being spread on safeguarding the heritage sites from natural or man-made disasters, threats or conflicts.

By waiving off entry fee, Archaeological Survey of India hope to promote greater public engagement around the importance of conservation and management of our built heritage and how can citizens play active role in keeping our heritage preserved.

After all, as per the Fundamental Duties laid down in our Constitution, it is our collective responsibility to protect these invaluable heritage sites and do our bit to protect them.

# US Vice President visit to boost ties: MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India on Thursday said it is "very positive" that the upcoming visit of US Vice President JD Vance will give "further boost" to the India-US bilateral ties and "all relevant issues" will be on the table. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal made the comments while indicating that issues relating to trade and tariff will figure during Vance's talks with Indian leaders.

Vance is scheduled to pay a four-day visit to India beginning April 21 during which he will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi that are expected to focus on an early finalisation of the proposed bilateral trade pact.

Vance will be accompanied by his wife, Usha, their three young children — Ewan, Vivek and Mirabel — and senior members of the US administration.

"This is an official visit. He will be meeting the prime minister. With the US, we have a comprehensive strategic global partnership. When you have that level of partnership with any country, obviously, you will discuss all relevant issues," Jaiswal said. "And with the US, our relationship is such that we are doing anything that is part of human endeavour," he added.

"All the bilateral issues will be discussed and we are very positive that the visit will give further boost to our bilateral ties," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing in response to a question.

Vance is travelling to India amid rising global concerns over US President Donald Trump's tariff tussle and both sides are likely to deliberate on firming up the proposed trade deal that is aimed at addressing issues relating to levies, market access and supply chains. Soon after their arrival



MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal addressing a press conference in Delhi on Thursday

on Monday in New Delhi, Vance and his family are expected to visit the Red Fort, people familiar with the matter said.

In the afternoon, Vance will meet National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president JP Nadda, they said.

Modi will interact with Vance and his family and host them for a formal dinner in the evening, the people said.

The Vances will travel to Jaipur on April 22 and visit key tourist sites and have some engagements, they added.

They will travel to Agra the next day to visit the Taj Mahal, the people said.

The US vice president is travelling to India against the backdrop of Trump's policy on tariffs that has triggered massive

trade disruptions and fears of a global economic recession.

Days after his reciprocal tariff kicked in this month, Trump announced a 90-day pause on it on all countries, except China, as countries around the world wilted under the impact of the seismic action. Vance's visit will take place weeks after US Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Tulsi Gabbard's trip to India. The DNI held separate meetings with Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Jaishankar and Doval.

The US president's tariff tussle has stoked fears of a global trade war.

Following talks between Modi and Trump in Washington DC in February, the two sides announced to negotiate the first tranche of the BTA by the fall of 2025.

Editor's TAKE

## Preserving the past for the future's sake

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Leaderspeak



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

FORMER US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

# Learning to learn and live

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

remain tolerant.

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

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

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

Perhaps this should be made a part of each

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Why we must learn to laugh at ourselves again

### SECOND Opinion

BY ASHA IYER KUMAR

Once upon a time, we laughed without offence or guilt. We laughed at power, at politics, at bureaucracy, and most of all, at ourselves. It was a laughter steeped not in mockery but in a shared understanding of the absurdities of life. Remember R. K. Laxman's Common Man?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Letters to the Editor

### A bold step towards social justice

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

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

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

VENUG S | KOLLAM

### India's market resilience shines

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

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

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

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

JAYANTHY SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

### A defining moment for Congress

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

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

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

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

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

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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

M PRADYU | KANNUR

# River ecosystems in the shadow of sand mining

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

FIRST  
Column

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

nutrients to numerous organisms.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# India's startup surge: A new innovation powerhouse

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Multi-tier security grid in J and K ahead of PM visit

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

The multi-tier security grid across Jammu and Kashmir continues to remain on its tenterhooks even after the proposed visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been cancelled. The PM was scheduled to inaugurate the Vande Bharat Express from Katra on April 19 after dedicating the world's highest railway arch bridge to the Nation. In the hinterland, the joint teams of security forces have been conducting regular combing and search operations to neutralise the group of foreign terrorists who have recently infiltrated into the Indian territory via traditional routes of infiltration in the Kathua district. So far, two terrorists have been neutralised in the Juthana forest area of

Kathua. At least three others, who were part of the same group, spotted for the first time in the Sanyal village of Hiranagar on March 23, are still at large. The last contact with these terrorists was made in the Joffer area of Ramnagar tehsil in the Udhampur district on April 9. The same group of terrorists, possibly accompanied by the local guide, has so far managed to breach the security cordon even after knocking on the doors of local villagers and collecting food and clothes from them. In the absence of real-time human intelligence and a lack of information about the active underground workers, extending logistic support to these Pakistani terrorists, the security forces are yet to track down their footprints inside the thickly forested areas. In a separate encounter, the security

forces eliminated three terrorists in the Chatroo area of Kishtwar on April 12. The security forces recovered AK rifles and M4 rifles from both these encounter sites in Kathua and Kishtwar. A quick assessment of the hideout carved out by the terrorists in the Chatroo area suggested the involvement of local underground workers in the area. The local police authorities in Kathua claimed 30 people have been identified and booked under the Public Safety Act (PSA). In Kishtwar, local police authorities have also detained some locals to ascertain the identity of the active underground workers who have been extending logistics to these foreign terrorists in the area. Meanwhile, anti-terror operations are also going on in the Poonch and Rajouri districts of the Jammu region to flush out the terrorists.

# Bihar Mukhyamantri Khel Gyanotsav 2025 ends



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna

The much-anticipated grand finale of the Mukhyamantri Khel Gyanotsav 2025 — India's first-ever state-level sports quiz contest for school students — was successfully held on Thursday at the Patliputra Sports Complex, Patna. In a gripping culmination of wit, strategy, and sporting knowledge, the event witnessed a dazzling display of intellect as students from across Bihar locked horns in the state's first-ever sports quiz championship. The spotlight shone brightest on Zaifi Javed and Deepankar from JNV Samastipur, who emerged victorious, lifting the trophy amid thunderous applause and cheers. With lightning-fast answers, razor-sharp presence of mind, and unshakable composure, the duo from Samastipur outpaced 25 other top teams from across the nine divisions of the state. The contest concluded with the top three positions awarded to the teams with first prize to Zaifi Javed and Deepankar (JNV Samastipur); second prize: Ambar Sinha and Isha Bhusha (St Karen's School, Patna) and Third prize to Nyasha Shrivastava and Rishav Kumar (Cinderella English School, Darbhanga). Renowned sports commentator and host Aniket Mishra conducted the quiz with trademark flair, ensuring an engaging and high-octane contest for participants and audience alike. The Grand Finale was graced by sev-

eral distinguished guests like Vivek Singh, IAS, Chairman, RERA Bihar as the Chief Guest & Chief Mentor of Extra-C, Raveendra Sankaran, IPS, Director General, BSSA, Sanjay Sinha, IAS (Retd.), Consultant, BSSA and Rajnarayan Singh, Coordinator, MKG 2025. Singh lauded the spirit and scale of the event. "I heartily congratulate the BSSA team for their path-breaking initiative. Under their dynamic leadership, Bihar has successfully hosted major sports events such as the Asian Hockey Championship, Sepak Takraw World Cup 2025, and now the Khelo India Games. What touched me the most was the brilliance displayed by students from remote areas of Bihar. Their performance filled my heart with pride. Bihar will soon showcase its immense talent to the entire world," Singh said. In his keynote address, Sankaran, IPS, Director General of the Bihar State Sports Authority (BSSA), highlighted the uniqueness of the event. The Mukhyamantri Khel Gyanotsav not only tested the sporting IQ of school students but also served as a vibrant platform to promote sports culture and awareness in Bihar's academic landscape. 1.16 lakh students from across Bihar participated in the contest. The event was jointly coordinated by BSSA and knowledge partner Extra-C, with dedicated support from volunteers and educationists across the state," said Ranjan.

# Trying to hire another agency for processing of waste, says Sirsa

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Thursday said the government was exploring the possibility of hiring an additional agency to expedite the waste processing and asserted the city's garbage mounds would "disappear just like dinosaurs" in the next five years. Inspecting the Ghaziipur landfill site in east Delhi, he said the government was working on a war footing to clear the legacy waste and free the city from its piles of garbage that have accumulated over the years, resembling hills. "I want to offer my commitment that the garbage mountains in Delhi will disappear just like dinosaurs," he told reporters. The minister said that of the 80 lakh metric tonnes of waste at the site, 14-15 lakh tonnes have already been processed. The pace of biominning has picked up, and about 7,000-8,000 metric tonnes of waste will be processed daily over the next six months. However, it will still take at least five to six years to remove the waste already lying at the site, Sirsa said. The Delhi government is also exploring the possibility of hiring an additional agency to expedite the waste processing work, the environment minister said. "If we engage another agency and carry out parallel work...the task can be completed faster," he said. He also stressed monitoring the progress of the work and said, "The CM's office and our department will monitor all dumps and landfills continuously." In the future, every vehicle entering Delhi will be monitored, and every construction site over 500 square meters will be under surveillance, he highlighted. All data will be uploaded daily to a government dashboard, including pollution levels and waste removal statistics, and those who fail to meet deadlines will face penalties, he asserted.

# SIT to investigate air hostess abuse case

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

The Gurugram Police have established a six-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) to investigate the 46-year-old air hostess sexual abuse case on Thursday. The SIT will be led by Deputy Commissioner of Police (Headquarters) Dr. Arpit Jain, supported by two assistant commissioners of police (ACPs), three inspectors, including one from the Crime Branch, and the investigation officer (IO) of the case. This move comes after the seriousness of the matter, which raises concerns about the protection of the patients privacy and security during the treatment. While confirming the development, DCP (headquarters) Dr Arpit Jain told The Pioneer that "An SIT has been formed under his leadership to probe the case further. However, he said that the investigation is in an initial stage and further developments into the matter will be shared accordingly." Apart from this, the sources claimed that the National Commission for Women

(NCW) will launch an independent inquiry. The team will soon meet the complainant victim for speedy justice. Meanwhile, a 46-year-old air hostess had alleged that she was sexually assaulted when she was on ventilator support in the intensive care unit (ICU) of a noted private hospital in Gurugram on April 6. The matter came to light on April 13 when she told her husband about the sexual assault, who alerted the police after dialing the 112 police control room. Based on her complaint, a case was registered at the Sadar Police Station, Gurugram, on April 14. According to her police complaint, she had come to Gurugram for training on behalf of the company and was staying in a hotel. During this time, her health deteriorated due to drowning in water, after which she was admitted to a private hospital for treatment. After that, on April 5, her husband admitted her to another hospital in Gurugram for treatment. She was discharged from the hospital on April 13. "During the treatment, on April 6, she

was on a ventilator, during which some staff of the hospital sexually assaulted her. At that time she was on a ventilator and could not speak anything and was very scared. She was also unconscious at the time of the incident, and two nurses were also around her," the victim had alleged in her complaint. After being discharged, she told her husband about the sexual assault, and he informed the 112 police and then complained to the police in front of the legal advisor. Following a complaint filed by the victim, a case has been registered at the Sadar Police Station, Gurugram. A police team was rushed to the hospital to scan the duty chart and analyse the CCTV footage to identify the accused, police said. Meanwhile, Medanta Hospital had rejected the air hostess's claim of being sexually harassed by a hospital staffer while she was on a ventilator in the ICU, allegedly in the presence of two nurses. The hospital added that it is "fully cooperating with investigations conducted by the relevant authorities."

# JNU dismisses don over harassment charge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A senior faculty member of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has been dismissed over charges of sexual harassment involving a Japanese embassy official. The alleged incident took place a few months ago during a university event, according to JNU sources. University officials confirmed that this was not an isolated case and several complaints against the professor had been received in the past. "This administration is committed to a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual predators, rent seekers and corrupt staff," JNU Vice-Chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit said. She said the dismissal reflects the university's firm stance on campus safety and accountability. The decision was taken by the university's Executive Council — its highest statutory body — after a detailed internal inquiry. The victim, who was working at the Japanese embassy here, was allegedly molested by the faculty member during a university event. She returned to Japan and filed a formal complaint. The matter was brought to the attention of the Indian Embassy through diplomatic channels and subsequently referred to the Ministry of External Affairs and the university.

# Act against firm for fielding UAVs with Chinese parts: RTI activist

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

RTI activist Tej Pratap Singh on Thursday sought action against IdeaForge after two of its partner companies that had participated in the Indian Army's bids for procurement of overall 80 mini-surveillance drones were disqualified for fielding IdeaForge UAVs consisting of Chinese parts — which, he said, are a threat to national security. At a press conference Singh said that he has filed complaints with the PMO and Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Commerce Ministry seeking action against IdeaForge, as using Chinese parts in drones poses threat to national security. Singh said he is awaiting a response. Accompanied by his legal advisors, Singh also alleged that these drones were supplied to armed forces in the past, too. In the latest development both Rohal Technologies Pvt Ltd and Deftech & GreenIndia Pvt Ltd had pitched IdeaForge's Q6 V2 D&N UAVs for two separate tenders — floated by the Government e Marketplace (GeM) in July and August of 2024, respectively, for 40 mini surveillance drones, each. These UAVs could operate during the day as well as at night. IdeaForge, however, did not participate in the bidding process for drones meant for Indian Army's Northern Command, which guards the borders with China and Pakistan. The disqualification follows a detailed technical evaluation that uncovered the presence of foreign-manufactured parts in contravention of the Make in India policy and Ministry of Defence procure-



ment norms. "It is a clear threat to National Security, as these drones are being used by the Indian Army and other Defence Forces. The presence of Chinese parts would have serious consequences for the lives of the Indian Army. The drones of IdeaForge Technology do not comply with the Make in India Policy and Rule 144 (xi) of the General Financial Rules, 2017 and were hence disqualified. Therefore, a proper evaluation of these drones is a necessity before operating them any further," said advocate Piyo Harold Jaimon. Responding to the allegations the IdeaForge in a statement said, "It has come to our attention that misleading information has been circulated regarding the disqualification of our partners in a tender. We would like to clarify that the issue was related to non-critical components manufactured by a Swiss OEM, with a coun-

try of origin in China. As these were trials of an opportunity they may have asked our partners to fix this for the next iteration. We fail to see how this can be construed as a national security concern. The company has a long-standing track record of participating in such tenders and has successfully won multiple tenders in the past, adhering strictly to all compliance norms." Regarding the allegations of hacking, the Indian Army has already clarified that the issue was a technical glitch and not a cyber breach. Known phenomena such as cross-border jamming should not be misrepresented as hacking incidents. We hope this clarification helps dispel any misinformation and brings focus back to the merits and integrity of the ongoing procurement process, read the company's statement.

# Government answerable to people...

Continued from >> P1 The Bench decided to hear only five of the pleas before it and titled the case. As many as 72 petitions, including those by AIMM leader Asaduddin Owaisi, All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, the DMK, Anwar Basha former chairman Karnataka State Board

of AUQAF represented by advocate Tariq Ahmed, Congress MPs Imran Pratapgarhi and Mohammad Jawed, were filed against the new law. Senior counsel, including Kapil Sibal, Abhishek Manu Singhvi and Huzefa Ahmadi appear for different petitioners in the case.

# India goes for jugular: Pakistan should vacate PoK

Continued from >> P1 Rana, 64, was brought to India on April 10 after all hurdles for his extradition were removed by the US. A Canadian national of Pakistani origin, Rana is now in the custody of Indian investigating agencies.

In his speech, General Munir asked Pakistanis to tell their children of the "stark differences between Hindus and Muslims" as the basis for the Islamic Republic's creation. "Our forefathers believed that we were different from Hindus in every possible aspect of life. Our religion is different. Our customs are different. Our traditions are different. Our thoughts are different... that was the foundation of the Two-Nation Theory. It was laid on the belief that we are two nations, not one," General Munir remarked. "You must tell this to your children so that they never forget the story of Pakistan," he said, adding "our forefathers made immense sacrifices, and we too, have sacrificed a lot for the creation of this country... my dear brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters, please do not forget this story." The Two-Nation Theory - championed by Pakistan founder Muhammad

Ali Jinnah in the 1940s - argued that Muslims and Hindus constituted distinct nations. On this basis, Jinnah advocated the necessity of a separate homeland for Muslims. This ideology led to the Partition of British India in 1947, and the creation of Pakistan as a Muslim-majority Islamic State. General Munir, stressing the difference between the two communities, pointed out how Pakistan's Army continues to rely on this narrative to define its national identity, particularly in relation to India. His rhetoric on the Hindu-Muslim divide came days after India slammed Pakistan for once again bringing up the Kashmir issue during a United Nations debate on peacekeeping reforms. India had asked Islamabad to vacate parts of its territory that Pakistan "occupied illegally". General Munir also issued warnings to Baloch rebels, and vowed a crackdown. He said that "even ten generations of terrorists cannot harm Balochistan and Pakistan." "Do you think these terrorists can alter our nation's future? If 1.3 million soldiers of the Indian Army haven't been able to shake us, how can these militants break our resolve?" General Munir said.

# Dhankhar flays SC timeline for Presidential assent to Bills

Continued from >> P1 There also, it has to be five Judges or more..." he said. Stressing the principle of separation of powers, he underlined that when the Government is elected by the people, the Government is accountable to the Parliament and to the people through elections. "There is a principle of accountability in operation. In Parliament, you can ask questions... but if this executive governance is by the judiciary, how do you ask questions? Whom do you hold accountable in elections? "Time has come when our three institutions (pillars of democracy) -- legislature, judiciary and executive -- must blossom... any incursion by one in the other's domain poses challenge that is not good..." Dhankhar said. On the absence of an FIR after a stash of burnt currency, the Vice President said judicial independence is not some kind of an "impregnable cover" against inquiry or investigation, and asserted that the surest way to degenerate an institution or an individual is to give total immunity against probes. The Supreme Court ordered an in-house probe into the alleged discovery of half-burnt wads of cash at Justice Yashwant

Varma's residence in Delhi after a fire on March 14 night. Justice Varma has since been repatriated from the Delhi High Court to his parent High Court of Allahabad. Dhankhar also questioned the legal standing of the three-Judge panel carrying out the in-house probe. He said every Indian is deeply concerned over the matter. He said the probe committee has not been set up under any provision of the Constitution or law. "And what can the committee do? The committee can at the most make a recommendation. Recommendation to whom? And for what? "The kind of mechanism we have for Judges, the only action finally that can be taken is by Parliament (by way of removal of the judge)," he said. The committee report, Dhankhar said, inherently lacks legal standing. "It is over a month now. Even if it is a can of worms, even if there are skeletons in the cupboard, (it's) time to blow up the can, (it's) time for its lid to go out, and (it's) time for the cupboard to collapse. Let the worms and skeletons be in the public domain so that cleansing takes place," he added. He said for seven days no one knew about the incident. "We have to put

questions to ourselves. Is the delay explainable? Condonable? Does it not raise certain fundamental questions? In any ordinary situation, things would have been different," Dhankhar said. After the incident was confirmed by the top court, it became clear that something required to be investigated, he said. "Now, the nation waits with bated breath. The nation is restive because one of our institutions to which people looked up to always with the highest respect and deference was put in the dock," the Vice President said. Emphasising the significance of the rule of law, he said in a democracy purity of its criminal justice system defines its direction. He said no investigation under the law is in progress at the moment due to the lack of an FIR. "It is law of the land that every cognisable offence is required to be reported to the police and failure to do so, and failure to report a cognisable offence, is a crime. Therefore, you all will be wondering why there has been no FIR," he said. An FIR, Dhankhar pointed out, can be registered against anyone and any constitutional functionary, including the Vice President.

"One has only to activate the rule of law. No permission is required. But if it is judges, their category, an FIR cannot be straightaway registered. It has to be approved by the judiciary concerned," he said. He underlined that the Constitution has accorded immunity from prosecution only to President and Governors. "So how come a category beyond law has secured this immunity?" he wondered aloud. Underscoring the importance of transparency, the Vice President referred to a decision of a Lokpal bench that it possessed the jurisdiction to investigate corruption complaints against High Court Judges. Taking suo motu cognisance, the Apex Court stayed the order on the grounds of independence of the judiciary, he recalled and added, "This independence is not a protection. This independence is not some kind of impregnable cover against inquiry, investigation or probe. "Institutions thrive under transparency, with there being a probe. The surest way to degenerate an institution or an individual is to give total guarantee there will be no inquiry, no scrutiny, no probe," Dhankhar said.

# PM Modi directs Delhi to clean Yamuna

Continued from >> P1 The data must also be used for improving governance to ensure that the existing infrastructure is functioning effectively. He also advised that space technology may be used for this purpose, the statement added. Actions to be taken for rejuvenating the river stretches in Haryana, Delhi as well as the stretch downstream up to Sangam at Prayagraj were deliberated in the meeting. It was also decided that Delhi will prepare an Urban River Management Plan for holistic water management and integrate it with the city Master Plan. According to a monitoring report of Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) dated January 30, 2025, Yamuna is still in decent health when it enters Delhi at Palla, with 6mg/l of dissolved oxygen (DO), 3mg/l bio-

chemical oxygen demand (BOD) and faecal coliform at 950 MPN/100ml, whereas ammoniacal nitrogen was 1.2mg/l, which is well within set standard. At Wazirabad barrage 30km away, Yamuna's flow reduces by another 90 per cent. What goes downstream is spillage, and from there begins the assault on the river. Near Signature Bridge, which Delhi boasts as a modern landmark, Yamuna's water quality deteriorates sharply at the outflow of Najafgarh drain. According to a parliamentary standing committee report which tabled in Parliament, the river stretches 40km in Delhi - from Palla on the Haryana border to Aagrapur in Uttar Pradesh. The report found that the Yamuna water in Delhi is unfit for bathing.



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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

ed cars, auto parts, steel and aluminum exports.

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

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

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

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

# India-UK Defence group agrees to enhance collaboration

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

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

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

"The 24th India-UK Defence Consultative Group meeting in London saw Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and UK counterpart David Williams co-chair discussions, aimed at deepening bilateral defence cooperation," the Indian Ministry of Defence said.

"Key focus areas included expanding defence industry collaboration and promoting the 'Make in India' initiative, especially in niche and emerging technologies," the statement added.

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

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

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

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

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

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

# US threatens Harvard's foreign enrollment criteria

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

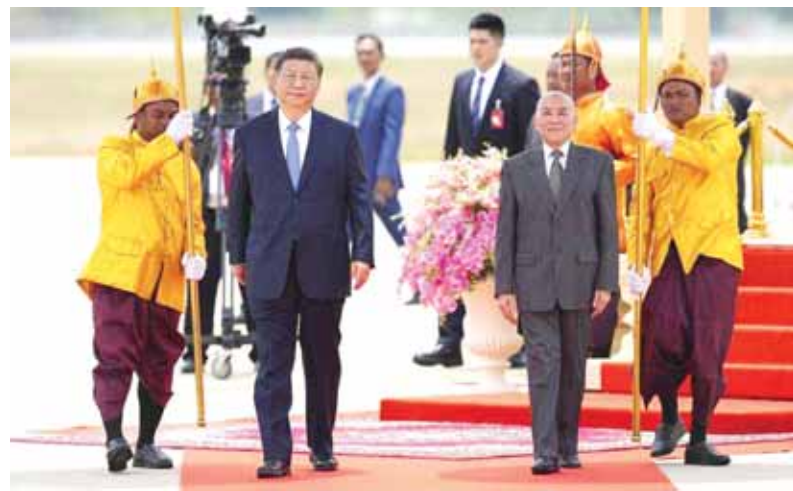
# China President Xi Jinping arrives in Cambodia to wrap up 3-nation Asia tour

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Phnom Penh (Cambodia)

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

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

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



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

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

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

# Bangladesh, Pakistan hold talks after 15 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

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

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

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

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

# Israeli strike kills family of 10 in Gaza

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

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

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

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

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

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

Most people in Gaza are now down to one meal a day, said Shaina Low, a



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

Israeli Defence Minister Isaac Katz said Wednesday that preventing humanitarian aid is one of the "central pressure tactics" used against Hamas, which Israel accuses of siphoning off aid to maintain its rule. Israel is demanding that Hamas release more hostages at the start of any new ceasefire and ultimately agree to disarm and leave the territory. Katz said that even after Israel will continue to occupy large "security zones" inside Gaza.

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The president in a decree appointed Mohsen Ismaili, 59, to be his new vice president for strategic affairs. In Iran's political system, the president has multiple vice presidents. Ismaili is known as a political moderate and a legal expert. Grossi visit comes as Iran has restricted IAEA access. Grossi arrived in Tehran for meetings with Pezeshkian and others. He met Wednesday night with Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, writing on the social platform X after the meeting: "Cooperation with (the IAEA) is indispensable to provide credible assurances about the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear programme at a time when diplomacy is urgently needed."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# BluSmart cab services suspended in Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi-NCR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Electric cab-hailing platform BluSmart remained non-operational on Thursday across Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, and Mumbai, as the market regulator cracked down on its co-founder over alleged misuse of funds at an affiliated company.

BluSmart app, that offered more than 8,000 taxis in the three metros, stopped taking bookings on Wednesday evening and remained unoperational on Thursday as well. The sudden suspension puts the livelihood of thousands of drivers at risk and has led to customers venting out their frustration on social media.

The company, backed by BP Ventures — an arm of the global energy giant BP — did not immediately offer any comments on the issue.

"We've decided to temporarily close bookings on the BluSmart app," the firm said in an email to customers without giving any reasons.

Earlier this week, Sebi (securities and exchange board of India) banned brothers Anmol and Puneet Jaggi from the stock market and ordered a forensic investigation into their listed renewable energy company Gensol. The investigation focuses on allegations that they used funds intended for procuring electric vehicles to purchase luxury apartments.

"I have almost 20K balance in BluSmart and today morning got this mail that BluSmart services are suspended. What is this???" When can get the refund of BluSmart is getting closed," said a customer in a post on X on Wednesday and attached the screenshot of the company's e-mail.

BluSmart in the e-mail assured to initiate a refund to customers within 90 days.

"We truly appreciate your support. While we strive to be back soon, we will initiate a refund within 90 days if services do not resume before that," the e-mail said.

Another customer wrote on X: "I loved BluSmart. More than the money in the



FILE PHOTO

wallet, I am more concerned about driver partners who will be out of job until the saga plays out..."

Meanwhile, Delhi Airport on Tuesday evening issued a passenger advisory, stating that "BluSmart has temporarily suspended its operations at Delhi Airport".

Apart from providing services in the three Indian cities, BluSmart also offers premium all-electric limousine services in the UAE, which it launched last June.

The company, as on January 9, had a fleet of over 8,500 electric vehicles and a charging network of 5,800 stations across 50 hubs in Delhi-NCR and Bengaluru, and was supported by 10,000-plus active driver partners.

Sebi on Tuesday barred Gensol engineering and promoters — Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi — from the

securities markets till further orders in a fund diversion and governance lapses case.

The regulator has also debarred Anmol and Puneet Singh Jaggi from holding the position of a director or key managerial personnel in Gensol until further orders.

Further, the markets watchdog directed Gensol Engineering Ltd (GEL) to put on hold the stock split announced by it. The order came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) received a complaint in June 2024 relating to the manipulation of share price and diversion of funds from GEL and thereafter started examining the matter.

According to Sebi's order, Gensol Engineering secured a total of ₹977.75 crore in loans from IREDA and PFC, of which ₹663.89 crore was meant specifically

for the purchase of 6,400 electric vehicles (EVs). EVs were procured by the company and subsequently leased to BluSmart, a related party.

However, in a response submitted to Sebi in February, Gensol admitted that it had procured only 4,704 EVs till date — far less than 6,400 for which it had received funding.

This was corroborated by Go-Auto Private Limited, the EV supplier, which confirmed delivering 4,704 units to the company for a total consideration of ₹567.73 crore.

Given that Gensol was also required to provide an additional 20 per cent equity contribution, the total expected outlay for the EVs was around ₹829.86 crore. By that calculation, ₹262.13 crore remains unaccounted for.

# Gensol hits circuit limit as investors dump stock

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Shares of Gensol Engineering dropped 5 per cent on Thursday to hit the lower circuit limit after Sebi barred the firm and its promoters — Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi — from securities markets till further orders in a fund diversion and governance lapses case.

The stock tanked 4.97 per cent to Rs 117.50 — its lower circuit limit as well as record low — on the BSE.

At the NSE, it slumped 5 per cent to Rs 116.54 — the lowest trading permissible limit for the day as well as an all-time low.

Shares of Gensol Engineering had tumbled 5 per cent to hit the lower circuit limit on Wednesday as well.

From its 52-week high of ₹1,125.75, the stock is now down 89.56 per cent.

The regulator has also debarred Anmol and Puneet Singh Jaggi from holding the position of a director or key managerial personnel in Gensol until further orders.

Further, the markets watchdog directed Gensol Engineering Ltd (GEL) to put on hold the stock split announced by it.

The order came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) received a complaint in June 2024 relating to the manipulation of share price and diversion of funds from GEL and thereafter started examining the matter.

In a 29-page interim order, Sebi said on Tuesday, "The prima facie findings have shown mis-utilisation and diversion of funds of the company (GEL) in a fraudulent manner by its promoter directors, Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi, who are also the direct beneficiaries of the diverted funds".

"The company has attempted to mislead Sebi, the CRAs (credit rating agencies), the lenders and the investors by submitting forged conduct letters purportedly issued by its lenders," the regulator said.

Gensol Engineering is engaged in providing solar consulting services, Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) services, leasing of electric vehicles, etc.

Shares of the firm have been falling for the seventh straight session on Thursday.

Gensol Engineering on Wednesday said the company will fully cooperate with

## GENSOL ENGINEERING DIRECTOR RESIGNS

New Delhi: Gensol Engineering, the beleaguered firm that came under market regulator Sebi's lens for fund diversions and governance lapses, said that its independent director Arun Menon has resigned with immediate effect.

In his resignation letter addressed to Anmol Singh Jaggi, one of the promoters of the company, Menon said, "There was growing concern on the leveraging of GEL balance sheet to fund the capex of other business"; and the sustainability of servicing such high debt costs by GEL." Menon's resignation came a day after Sebi on Tuesday barred Gensol Engineering and its promoters — Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi — from the securities markets till further orders in the fund diversion and governance lapses case.

The markets watchdog also directed Gensol Engineering Ltd (GEL) to put on hold the stock split announced by it and restrained the promoters from holding the position of a director or a Key Managerial Personnel in any listed firm.

The order came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) received a complaint in June 2024 relating to the manipulation of share price and diversion of funds from GEL and thereafter started examining the matter. Arun Menon has tendered his resignation as the independent director of the company, with immediate effect, GEL said in a regulatory filing on Wednesday. "Consequently, he shall also cease to be a member of various committees of the company," it stated.

Menon has cited restrictions from his present employer as well as "adding limited value to the company" as reasons for his resignation. —PTI

the forensic audit to be conducted at the behest of Sebi.

As directed in the interim order, Sebi will appoint a forensic auditor to thoroughly examine the books of accounts of the company and its related entities, Gensol Engineering said in an exchange filing.

Meanwhile, the company has informed the stock exchange that its independent director Arun Menon has resigned with immediate effect.

# 'Telangana Rising' delegation visits Sony headquarters in Japan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Hyderabad

The official 'Telangana Rising' delegation led by Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy visited the headquarters of Sony Corporation in Japan on Thursday, according to a Press release by the Telangana Congress.

Officers of the Sony Corporation showcased several new initiatives at Sony, and detailed their workings, including new products, to the delegation. The delegation also held detailed discussions on the animation subsidiary of the company, Crunchyroll.

The delegation explained the strengths of Hyderabad in the animation, VFX and Gaming sectors. Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy outlined his vision on the setting up of a modern film city, which would have the capability of end-to-end production, said the release.

On the first day of the visit, Reddy met senior leadership of Marubeni Corporation, a leading Japanese industrial conglomerate with interests in energy, transport, real estate, industrial infra, metals, medical services, trading etc., in Tokyo.

Following discussions, Marubeni Corp conveyed their interest to establish a state-of-the-art next generation industrial park in the Future City and both sides



signed and exchanged a Letter of Intent (LoI).

With a proposed initial investment of Rs 1,000 crore, a world-class, next-generation

industrial park will be developed in 600 acres in a phase-wise manner in the Future City.

The industrial park will be dedicated for Japanese companies and other multinational companies to set up their manufacturing plants in Hyderabad and will attract major investments of over Rs 5,000 crore.

Telangana has emerged as a preferred investment destination due to its progressive policies, robust infrastructure, and focus on fostering innovation. The state attracts global leaders, reinforcing its reputation as a leading hub for manufacturing.

Speaking on the occasion and welcoming Marubeni to the Future City being developed in Hyderabad, Reddy said, "The Marubeni industrial park will be among the first of its kind to be developed in the proposed 'Future City'. It is expected to create 30,000 direct and indirect jobs, enriching livelihoods and enhancing the skill ecosystem in Telangana."

Welcoming the Chief Minister and the delegation to Japan, Dai Sakakura, Executive Officer and COO, Next Generation Business, Marubeni, said, "We are delighted after listening to CM Revanth Reddy's vision for Telangana and Hyderabad, and wish to be amongst the earliest to explore possibilities there."

# Shrimp exporters seek Government intervention as Tariffs stir uncertainty

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Indian shrimp exporters are keeping their fingers crossed as the US is set to begin its review of anti-dumping and countervailing duties on shrimp next month, and are seeking Government intervention to help secure relief amid stiff global competition, industry experts say.

The exporters said that the formula of the US to calculate these duties is incorrect, and the Indian Government should take up the issues with them bilaterally, as domestic traders are facing tough competition from Ecuador and Vietnam in the American market.

"The US authorities consider India's RoDTEP and duty drawback schemes as incentive schemes, which is not the case. Both are WTO-compliant duty refund schemes only," Kolkata-based seafood exporter and MD of Megaa Moda Yogesh Gupta said.

He added that the US uses a 'zeroing' method to impose anti-dumping duty on shrimp, which is not correct and needs to be re-looked as it distorts the calculation of the margin of dumping.

He said that exporters are concerned and the Government should come forward to support them by re-introducing the Transport and Marketing Assistance

**The US is not making a fair comparison between the export price and the normal value, leading to distorted dumping margins. Besides these duties, Indian shrimp exporters face a 10 per cent baseline tariff**

(TMA) scheme.

Through this, the United States is not making a fair comparison between the export price and the normal value, leading to distorted dumping margins.

Besides these duties, Indian shrimp exporters face a 10 per cent baseline tariff imposed by the US on April 2. Giving a big relief, America has suspended the additional 26 per cent duty on India.

Currently, Indian shrimp exports to the US face an effective customs duty of 17.7 per cent, including 5.77 per cent in countervailing duties and 1.8 per cent in anti-dumping duties. Seafood Exporters Association of India Secretary General K N Raghavan has recently urged the Government to focus on securing a "level-playing field" for the country's seafood exports during upcoming trade talks before the tariff pause expires.

Another exporter said Ecuador is India's

biggest competitor in the sector, as it faces lower duties and enjoys a major advantage in shipping due to its proximity to the US market.

Odisha-based exporter Rajen Padhi said the anti-dumping duty has been in place for two decades, and it's time the US sets a uniform rate for India.

"As per an international agreement, no taxes should be exported. So now we can convince the US that the RoDTEP (Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products) scheme is not an incentive scheme as we have a mechanism in place to do the verification," said Padhi, Commercial Director, B One Business House Pvt Ltd.

The US is the largest market for the domestic shrimp industry. Out of India's total shrimp exports, the country ships 40 per cent to America.

Ecuador and Indonesia are major competitors of the domestic exporters in the US market. There are around 1 lakh shrimp farms in India, most of which are in Andhra Pradesh.

The export of frozen shrimps during 2023-24 was 7,16,004 tonnes. The US imported 2,97,571 tonnes last fiscal year, followed by China (1,48,483 tonnes), the European Union (89,697 tonnes), and Japan (35,906 tonnes).

# Markets surge for 4th day, Sensex reclaims 78k-level

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged nearly 2 per cent on Thursday, registering their fourth day of rally, as investors turned buoyant after foreign investors returned to domestic equities amid expectations of a breakthrough in US-Japan trade negotiations over reciprocal tariffs.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 1,508.91 points or 1.96 per cent to reclaim the 78,000 level. It finally settled at 78,553.20. During the day, it soared 1,572.48 points or 2.04 per cent to 78,616.77. The NSE Nifty surged 414.45 points or 1.77 per cent to 23,851.65.

From the Sensex firms, Eternal, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Reliance Industries were among the biggest gainers. Tech Mahindra and Maruti were the laggards.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,936.42 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. On Tuesday, FIIs bought equities for Rs 6,065.78 crore.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index, Tokyo's Nikkei 225, Shanghai SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled higher.

European markets were trading in the

**Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,936.42 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. On Tuesday, FIIs bought equities for Rs 6,065.78 crore**

negative territory. US markets ended significantly lower on Wednesday.

The US and Japan are currently holding trade talks over reciprocal tariffs, with an aim to strike a deal soon.

"A strong rally in large-cap stocks was observed today, primarily driven by financials, amid expectations of improved margins stemming from changes in savings deposit interest rates. Positive sentiment was further supported by a reversal in FII flows, although the sustainability of this trend remains uncertain.

"Nonetheless, optimism surrounding the domestic market persists, bolstered by the expectation of a favourable outcome from US-India trade negotiations and a relatively minimal disruption from the US-China trade tensions. Additionally, a moderating inflation trajectory towards more comfortable levels is further enhancing market sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

# Rupee ends 27 paise up at 85.37 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The rupee strengthened for the fourth consecutive session and closed 27 paise higher at 85.37 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, hitting the April 3 closing level, on the back of foreign fund inflows in domestic equities and broad weakness in the greenback.

The unit has pared all its losses since April 2, when US President Donald Trump announced sweeping reciprocal tariffs on multiple countries. On April 2, the rupee was quoted at 85.52 against the US dollar.

According to forex traders, a positive trend in domestic equities following a reprieve from the US tariffs boosted overall investor sentiment even though some recovery in crude prices weighed down on the Indian currency.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.48 and moved between the high of 85.31 and the low of 85.62 against the greenback during intraday. The unit ended the session at 85.37 (provisional) against the dollar, logging a gain of 27 paise from its previous closing level.

The rupee closed Wednesday's session with a gain of 16 paise at 85.64 against the

dollar.

In the preceding four sessions, the Indian currency has added 131 paise, or over 1.5 per cent, since its April 9 closing mark of 86.68 against the greenback.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee gained on surge in the domestic equities and FII inflows.

However, importer buying of dollars and recovery in crude oil prices may cap sharp gains, he said, adding "Traders may take cues from weekly unemployment claims and housing data from the US. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.20 to 85.70."

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading marginally higher by 0.10 per cent at 99.24.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.88 per cent to \$66.43 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex surged 1,508.91 points or 1.96 per cent to settle at 78,553.20, while the Nifty climbed 414.45 points or 1.77 per cent to 23,851.65.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,936.42 crore on a net basis on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

# Campa Cola to open new bottling plant in Bihar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Campa Cola, the soft drinks brand owned by Reliance Consumer Products Ltd, the FMCG arm of Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries, will open a new bottling plant in Bihar.

According to reports, Reliance Consumer Products Ltd (RCPL)-owned brand will have a new plant on 35 acres of land in the Begusarai district of Bihar, where it will invest around Rs 1,000 crore. Confirming the development, the state Government's agency, Bihar Industrial Area Development Authority (BIADA) through a post on social media platform 'X' informed that the plot has been allotted to EPIC Agro Product Ltd, a company that produces and distributes Campa Cola.

The upcoming facility will integrate both bottling and manufacturing operations. This marks a significant milestone in Campa Cola's aggressive growth strategy, with a sharp focus on expanding its footprint in eastern and northeastern India.

The move comes just two months after the launch of a similar plant in Assam.

This year in February, RCPL inaugurated a new plant in Guwahati, Assam, strengthening the presence of Campa Cola in Northeast India.

Reliance, which has entered into the fast-growing beverage market in August 2022 after acquiring Campa Cola, is expanding its presence across the country by setting up required infrastructure as supply chain, logistics network and bottling plants.

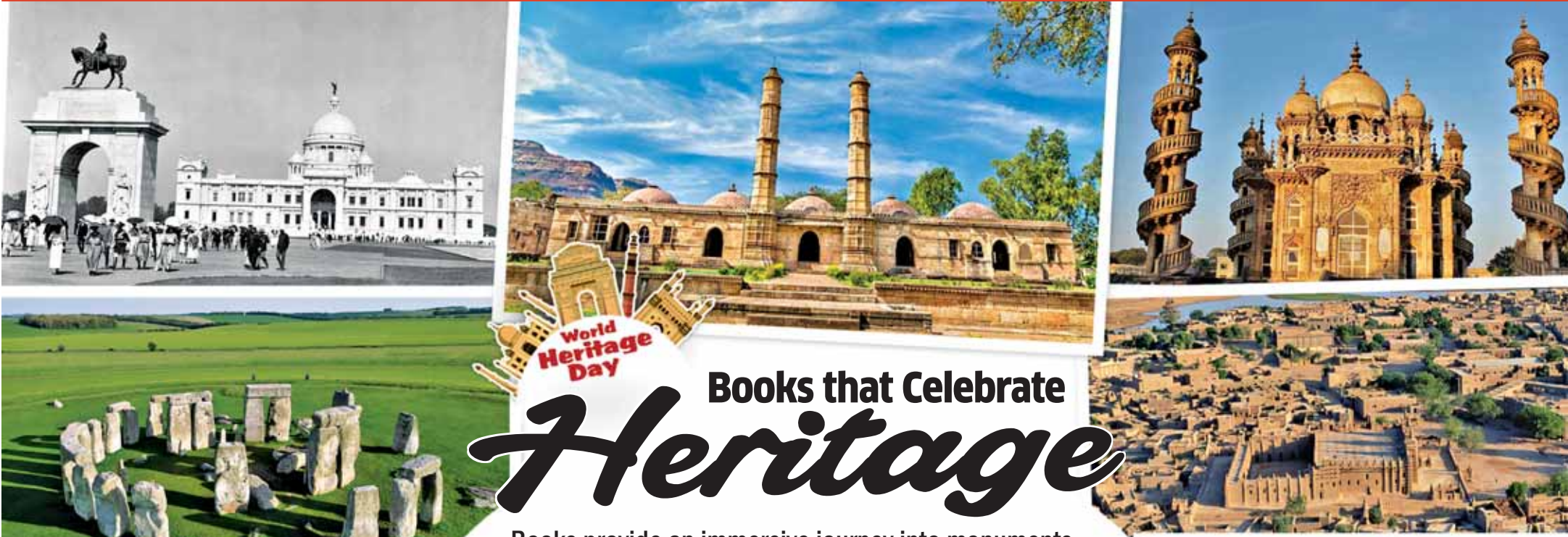
Campa, which is directly competing with Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, leading players in the cola segment, has disrupted the segment with its aggressive pricing and higher margin to retailers. It has forced players to reduce prices in the select markets where it is available.

On January 16, in its Q3 results, Reliance, which has ambitions to become a relevant player into the FMCG segment, said its Campa brand is projected to cross Rs 1,000 crore turnover in FY25.

Commenting on the development, Nuvama Institutional Equities Executive Director (Research) Abneesh Roy said this indicates Campa is now getting more aggressive in the eastern and northeastern parts of the country.

"We expect these investments to continue and expect that eventually Campa will have a pan-India manufacturing and distribution presence," he said.

Under the Campa brand, RCPL has launched a range of beverage variants including cola, orange, lemon, and energy drinks.



## Books that Celebrate Heritage

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### HIDDEN STORIES

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



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

### HISTORIAN CRAFT

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

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

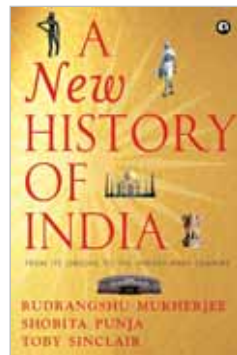


**Ancient India**  
Author: Upinder Singh  
Publisher: Rupa  
Price: ₹789/-

### LIVING HISTORY

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

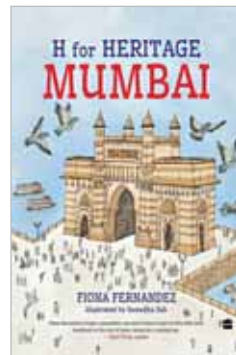
This remarkable work serves as an invaluable guide to the history of one of the world's oldest and most diverse nations, ensuring that we understand the importance of safeguarding such a legacy for future generations.



**A New History of India**  
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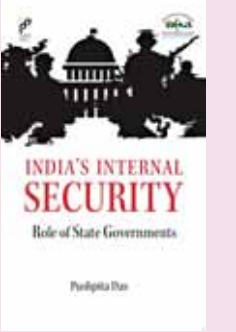
### HERITAGE MOSAIC

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



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

### APRIL READS



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Author: Harini Srinivasan  
Publisher: Om Books International  
Price: ₹250

### NEW LAUNCH

## Quietly, She Changed Everything

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



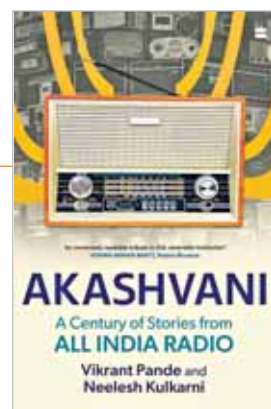
in to the radio listened to Chaturvedi attributing India's victory to the Twenty Point Programme and Five Point Programme initiated by Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi respectively.

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

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

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

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



**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
Book: Akashvani  
Author: Thomas Mathew  
Publisher: HarperCollins  
Price: ₹399/-

# BCCI removes assistant coach Nayar; support staff all set for overhaul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Indian cricket team's assistant coach Abhishek Nayar has been sacked just eight months into the assignment amid speculation of a rift with a high-profile member of the support staff even though Test debacles against New Zealand and Australia are being cited as the reason for his ouster.

If board sources are to be believed, Nayar has already been intimidated of the BCCI's decision to part ways with him.

"While India's recent Test debacles (against New Zealand and Australia) has led to the churning but there is also a feeling in the BCCI that Nayar became a scapegoat in the turf war between an important member of the support staff and a senior star player," a BCCI source told media. Fielding coach T Dilip, and Strength and Conditioning coach Soham Desai are also on their way out after completing more than three years in their respective positions.

The new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of the BCCI has capped the support staff's tenure at three years.

It is learnt that India's first ever Strength and Conditioning coach Adrian Le Roux is likely to return for a second stint. The South African is widely credited for ushering in a new fitness culture in the then Sourav Ganguly-led Indian team during



the 2003 World Cup. BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia, when contacted by media, chose to sidestep the query.

"Certain things are being finalised. You will receive a press note from BCCI in some days," Saikia said when asked about the development.

The 41-year-old Nayar, a former all-

rounder who played three ODIs but was largely a domestic stalwart with 103 first-class games, didn't respond to a text message sent by media. His presence deemed "counter-productive"

It is learnt that Nayar's removal was on the cards after Sitanushu Kotak was added to the Indian team's support staff as an

additional batting coach. "...Just after the tour of Australia, there was a review meeting conducted by the BCCI. The top officials of the board, including secretary Devajit Saikia and vice-president Rajeev Shukla, were present along with important members associated with the Indian team, and the national selectors," the BCCI source said.

"On the sidelines of the meeting, a powerful member of the support staff expressed his apprehensions about Nayar's presence and said how him being in the dressing room is proving to be counter-productive.

"While the BCCI didn't act immediately but they brought in Kotak, the former Saurashtra run-accumulator. It was a way of side-lining Nayar during the Champions Trophy," the source added.

It is understood that Nayar was not the first-choice assistant for head coach Gautam Gambhir when the appointments were finalised.

He was appointed to act as a bridge between Gambhir and skipper Rohit Sharma, with whom he has shared a close friendship owing to their time together as Mumbai teammates.

Nayar and Dilip have been the Indian skipper's "most trusted lieutenants" and it is not known whether Rohit was kept in the loop by the BCCI mandarins about these decisions.

# Mumbai Indians outplay Sunrisers by 4 wickets

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

A sprightly Mumbai Indians continued their ascent in the Indian Premier League with a four-wicket victory over Sunrisers Hyderabad in a one-sided contest on a tricky wicket here on Thursday.

Led by Will Jacks who played a decisive role with a fine 36 (26 balls, 3x4s, 3x6s) after a crucial spell of 3-0-14-2, Mumbai Indians executed an all-round show to record their second consecutive win.

The home side came on top for having assessed the Wankhede Stadium pitch accurately and adapting quickly to the conditions it presented, with each of the pieces falling in place for the five-time winners.

MI's fast bowlers used the short and slower balls well throughout the first innings and nailed their yorkers perfectly. In the run chase, the MI batters showed a clear plan to keep finding the boundaries which kept them on top.

Chasing 163 on a pitch which had grip and turn, MI were also benefited by SRH's reluctance to bring on spin in the powerplay, as the home side made 166/6 in 18.1 overs to record their third win of the season. Even though Rohit Sharma endured another failure after a promising start in which he made 26 off 16 balls with three sixes, he gave MI the momentum with the bat and the others capitalised on it. Opener Ryan Rickelton made a fluent 31 while Suryakumar Yadav hammered two sixes and as many fours to make 26 (off 15 balls) to provide a strong support to Jacks.

Captain Hardik Pandya played a crucial cameo of 21 off just nine balls to take MI to the threshold of victory. Tilak Varma (21 not out) then took MI over the line after a late minor hiccup as the home side reached 166 for 6 in 18.1 overs. In the first half, Sunrisers Hyderabad found late momentum with the bat to fight their way through and post 162 for 5.

With the surface at the Wankhede Stadium providing grip and turn for the spinners and slower deliveries giving div-

idents to the pace bowlers, Sunrisers Hyderabad batters struggled to adapt to the wicket for most part of the innings.

But a big finish — 57 runs coming off the last five overs — gave SRH some much-needed impetus towards the end.

MI bowlers were spot-on in formulating their plans and near-perfect in their execution with Jasprit Bumrah delivering a measly 4-0-21-1, Trent Boult nailing his yorkers again to return 4-0-29-1 and Will Jacks producing an impressive 3-0-14-2.

The SRH struggle was evident from the start even as Abhishek Sharma stroked his way to 40 off 28 balls with seven boundaries.

It all started with an eventful first over when the two SRH openers got a reprieve each off Deepak Chahar.

Abhishek went down the wicket, swinging his bat on the first delivery. The ball shaped away slightly to take the edge but Jacks failed to get hold of it.

On the fourth delivery, Travis Head played one straight to Karn Sharma at midwicket where he failed to pluck a low catch as the ball fell just short of him.

Abhishek looked to be hitting his strides when he smacked three fours off Chahar in the fifth over but there was just no momentum gained.

Raj Angad Bawa timed his dive to grab the ball to dismiss Abhishek off Pandya for the first breakthrough and by then it was evident that SRH would have to scrape their way through to a competitive total. Jacks then had former MI player Ishan Kishan stumped for a mere two.

Head was unable to open up even as he tried his best to cut loose. Despite having caught off a no-ball with Pandya overstepping, Head failed to capitalise as he fell for an ordinary 29-ball 28.

Such was the impact of MI's control that the first six of the game came as late as in the 18th over — the best one of SRH's innings — when Heinrich Klaasen (37 off 28 balls, 3x4s, 2x6s) took 21 runs to spoil Chahar's figures (4-0-47-0).

In the final over, Aniket Verma hit a couple of sixes and Pat Cummins smacked one to take vital 22 runs off Pandya.

# Rohit to be face of T20 Mumbai League; India players to feature

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

India's Test and ODI captain Rohit Sharma is set to be the ambassador of T20 Mumbai League with the MCA expressing hope that the city's other stars such as Shreyas Iyer and Suryakumar Yadav will make themselves available for the event that was halted owing to the COVID-19 pandemic after two editions.

The league was held in 2018 and 2019 before the pandemic led to its suspension. Rohit has retired from T20 Internationals but continues to play in the IPL.

Suryakumar Yadav, Shreyas Iyer, Ajinkya Rahane, Shivam Dube, Tushar Deshpande and Prithvi Shaw are some of the popular Mumbai players. Test opener Yashasvi Jaiswal moved to Goa a few days ago.

Most of them are busy with their IPL commitments right now. The MCA (Mumbai Cricket Association) event will not start before the IPL's conclusion on May 25.

"We have not made it mandatory for them to play but we strongly expect them to play in the T20 Mumbai League. Their participation will only help Mumbai cricket grow, and benefit the players and the league," an MCA

official told media. Rohit will be present at an event to announce the league here on Friday. It is also learnt that the MCA is contemplating a pay of ₹15 lakh each for the "icon players" in the competition.

The MCA has received more than 2,800 entries for the event. The tournament will comprise eight teams with two new sides to be announced soon.

The other six teams are North Mumbai Panthers, ARCS Andheri, Triumph Knights Mumbai North East, Namu Bandra Blasters, Eagle Thane Strikers and Aakash Tigers Mumbai Western Suburbs.

# Feeling sense of seniority after coming to PBKS: Arshdeep

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mullanpur

India seamer Arshdeep Singh says he has been feeling a sense of "seniority" since the beginning of his tenure at Punjab Kings thanks to the responsibility entrusted upon him by the IPL franchise that has also helped him in his professional growth.

The 26-year-old left-arm pacer was in his teens when he joined Punjab Kings (formerly Kings XI Punjab) and has been an integral part of the side since then, leading the pace attack on most occasions.

He has been remarkably consistent with the ball having taken 84 wickets for PBKS in seven seasons with a highest of 19 scalps last year. PBKS are currently placed fourth on the points table with the gangly pacer having taken eight wickets so far in this edition of IPL.

"Ever since I came to Punjab Kings, barring the first year, I started feeling seniority in my role. I have been associated with this team for the last seven years and after spending my first year with the team, I started feeling that I have been given a huge responsibility," said the pacer during the 'Kandid with Kings' episode.

Arshdeep said the responsibility thrust upon him has "helped me grow as a player and person" both in the Indian side and at his franchise. He said that he understood quite early that mistakes, however small, could hamper the prospects of the team and he had to be on his toes at all times on the field.

"The elevation in my role and growth came pretty early and hence, I knew that I could not mess up at crucial stages because at those times, not working as per the plan can put the team in serious trouble. Hence, I became serious and started feeling like a senior way too early. Like any other player, Arshdeep too gets trolled for a bad day in office and the India seamer said rather than getting flustered, he has started to enjoy the memes and messages.

"I have had ups and downs in my career. I have seen the highest point as well as the lowest point in a very short span. But I feel very entertained by these trolls. I laugh at their creativity and memes.

"Earlier, I used to save these memes and messages so I could use those later but now I feel they don't make any sense. However, I still enjoy looking at people's creativity," the pacer says.

PBKS will next face Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Friday.

# Golfer Scottie Scheffler rested, ready to defend title at Hilton Head

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hilton Head Island

Scottie Scheffler was the star attraction of a parade just two days after the Masters. This one was all about a red plaid jacket from Harbour Town, not a green jacket from Augusta National.

The tradition of the RBC Heritage is for the defending champion to lead a half-mile parade that ends near the 18th green at Harbour Town, where he hits a ceremonial tee shot into the Calibogue Sound as a cannon is simultaneously fired.

"I had some ear plugs. It's always nice when a cannon is going off," Scheffler said. "It was definitely a unique experience. I was glad just to be able to make contact with the ball and not embarrass myself out there." And at least he was well-rested for Tuesday's opening ceremony.

Scheffler is in a different spot in so many ways compared with a year ago, when he was coming off a victory in the Masters. He flew home to Dallas for a brief celebration, then got back on a plane to coastal South Carolina for a \$20 million signature event. He won that, too.

Scheffler couldn't always hit it where he was aiming this year in the Masters. He still tied for fourth and was proud of putting up a fight. It was tiring, yes, but without the adrenaline rush of winning and all that

comes with it. Instead of a big party, a flight home to Dallas and then back to Hilton Head Island, Scheffler enjoyed a peaceful three-hour drive and some relaxation that this tournament offers.

Even with a \$20 million purse, this can feel like one big exhale.

Masters champion Rory McIlroy is not playing, and that's by design. He had mentioned earlier this year Harbour Town was not among his favorites — the course is more about position off the tee and small greens than blasting away — and he didn't enter the tournament at last Friday's deadline. It's the kind of course on which Scheffler thrives. Even while running on fumes after his Masters victory a year ago, he still had enough left in the tank to put on a tee-to-green clinic, building a lead with a 63 on Saturday and finishing off the win Monday morning because of rain.

"This golf course is much more about control and putting your ball in the right spots and staying out of the trouble," Scheffler said. "The fairways here are much smaller than Augusta and a flatter golf course overall. A bit of a different test, but definitely still a good test." That depends on how well he's playing, and Scheffler feels he's close.

Everything is forward in his world, though there was a concession that he has been trying to catch up form having missed



a month away from golf — the work in the gym, and practice on the course — from his decision to make ravioli on Christmas Day. He punctured his right hand with a wine glass and required minor surgery.

Scheffler is still trying to put together a complete game — driving well one week when irons are suspect, good irons and pedestrian driving the next.

"I was playing a bit of catch-up," he said. "I feel like I'm improving each week. Body's starting to feel better. Swing's starting to feel better. I feel like I'm working towards having another good season. I haven't had my best start this year, but I've had some good finishes." He flirted with contention at Torrey Pines. He was in contention until the very end in the Houston Open. And

even in the Masters, he was a birdie or two away — with some help from McIlroy — from having a chance.

Scheffler recalls being in the 18th fairway, two shots behind Justin Rose and McIlroy, thinking of nothing but holing out for eagle. Rose was in the group ahead of him and made a 20-foot birdie putt, leaving Scheffler three behind. He recalls telling caddie Ted Scott, "I guess I'm going to aim at the middle of the green now." Scott concurred, Scheffler made par and he was on his way to Harbour Town.

His final act was twice helping McIlroy into the Masters green jacket — first in Butler Cabin, then during the trophy presentation on the 18th green.

"It was cool to be able to see Rory get the job done," Scheffler said. "Definitely from the outside it looked a lot more like relief than anything. Rory has accomplished everything in the game of golf, and that was really the last thing for him to accomplish. The guy has won FedEx Cup, The Players, all four majors. Maybe the only other thing would be the Olympics is what he would want to win.

"It was really cool for me to be there in that moment," he said. "He's a good friend of mine. To be able to congratulate him and just see the joy on him and his family was really cool.

# Courtois questions Real Madrid's attack after loss to Arsenal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barcelona

Thibaut Courtois watched from the other end of the pitch as Real Madrid's forwards took turns crashing against the Arsenal defense.

Courtois had done his part by stopping a penalty. But Kylian Mbappé's best shot sailed high and wide. Rodrygo's dribbles got him nowhere, and Vinicius needed a defensive blunder to take Madrid's sole goal of a 5-1 aggregate defeat in the Champions League quarterfinals.

"Sometimes you have to be self-critical and have a good look at everything," the Belgian goalkeeper said after the 2-1 home loss to Arsenal midweek.

"Maybe we need to make more team moves and not so many individual ones, because if they double-mark Vini or Mbappé they can break it once, but not three, four or five times," Courtois said. "We can't always rely on one of our four attacking players dribbling past three defenders and scoring a great goal, we have to attack and defend better as a team."

Exiting from the competition it has won five times in the last decade was not what Madrid expected when it added Mbappé to a squad that was coming off a record 15th European Cup and Spanish league



title last season.

The France captain has scored a glut of goals in his first season with Madrid but failed to come up big in the biggest games, including two lopsided losses to Barcelona. Jeers were heard for Mbappé when he limped off the field on Wednesday with a hurt right ankle.

The hard truth is that the team has played worse with him on board. Madrid has had injuries in defense and it lost midfielder Toni Kroos to retirement but its attack has failed to click, with Mbappé having to adapt to a central striker role as Vinicius' production dropped.

Courtois even called into question the

range of attacking options for a squad that also counted on Endrick and Brahim Diaz as sparks off the bench. The goalie said Madrid was missing the tall, big striker who could win balls in the box like Joselu Mato, who scored critical goals in last season's Champions League.

"It was difficult to find openings and we

had little success. We were also unlucky with balls into the box. This year we don't have a Joselu who can win those duels," Courtois said. "Now we have to analyze what we can do better because we still have the (Spanish) league, the final of the Copa del Rey and the Club World Cup, and we want to get everything right."

Athletic Bilbao up next in La Liga There will be little let up for Madrid with a strong Athletic Bilbao arriving on Sunday aiming to dig into the wound left by Arsenal.

Madrid must try to overhaul a four-point deficit to Barcelona in La Liga as it tries to salvage the season by defending its domestic title. Madrid could be facing a seven-point gap with Barcelona by kick-off, if the front-runner beats Celta Vigo at home on Saturday. Madrid will also face Barcelona in the Copa del Rey final next week, but coach Carlo Ancelotti will likely also need his team to retain the league crown to keep his job. The Italian manager admitted his future was in doubt after his team was outplayed by Arsenal, while also attempting to dampen speculation.

"I'm only thinking about preparing for the next game to stay in the fight for the league title and try to win the Copa del Rey," he said.

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