

BANGLADESH TELLS PAKISTAN, SAY SORRY

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ New Delhi/Dhaka

Bangladesh has demanded a formal public apology for the "atrocities" committed by Pakistan during the 1971 Liberation War and raised pending financial claims during the first Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) meeting in 15 years. Bangladesh has also sought \$4.52 billion from Pakistan as part of its share of pre-1971 assets. After the 1971 War, East Pakistan split from West Pakistan to form an independent Bangladesh.

This came up at FOC meeting between Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin and visiting Pakistani counterpart Amna Baloch, ahead of Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Dhaka on April 27 and 28.

Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch led the Pakistani delegation while Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin represented Bangladesh. Bangladesh and Pakistan are trying to rebuild their strategic ties after one-and-a-half decades to remain engaged on pending issues.

"We have raised the historically unresolved issues with Pakistan. These issues need to be resolved to establish a solid foundation for our bilateral relations," Md Jashim Uddin told reporters after the meeting. He said the issues included "the repatriation of stranded Pakistanis, equitable distribution of undivided assets, transfer of foreign aid funds sent for the victims of the 1970 cyclone, and a formal public apology for the genocide committed by the then Pakistani military in 1971."

"We said this is the right time to settle the historical unsettled issues," the Bangladesh Foreign Secretary said, adding these issues needed to be resolved for having a "solid foundation of our relations" for mutual benefits and interests.

Asked what was the Pakistani side's response to the call, Uddin said they would

like to "remain engaged" with a positive outlook to discuss the unsettled issue in future.

After the talks at the State Guesthouse in Padma, Baloch called on Bangladesh Interim Government Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Affairs Adviser Touhid Hossain separately.

According to the Foreign Secretary, Dhaka also asked Pakistan to pay up the unpaid \$200 million foreign donation for victims in the then East Pakistan after the 1970's cyclone.

Asked if the money devaluation over the decades was taken into consideration in quoting the amounts, the officer said the issue was tabled during the FOC and its details are expected to come up during the subsequent talks.

During the first Foreign Office Consultations meeting held in 15 years, Bangladesh has demanded \$4.52 billion from Pakistan as part of its share of pre-1971 assets

The Foreign Secretary said the FOC fixed April 27 and 28 for Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's planned Bangladesh visit. The talks come amid a thaw between the two countries after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in August last year.

The Yunus-led government appears to be playing down the role of Hasina's father Mujibur Rehman in Bangladesh liberation in 1971. The Indian Army took over 90,000 Pakistan soldiers as Prisoners of War.

The Pakistani Army's crackdown on the Bengali population of East Pakistan in March 1971 has been a sore point between the two nations since the formation of Bangladesh. During the Pakistani Army's 'Operation Searchlight', around 30 lakh Bengalis were believed to have been killed, and scores of women raped.

The two sides also discussed the launch of direct flights between Bangladesh and Pakistan. Bangladesh also raised the issue of the repatriation of more than 3 lakh Pakistanis stranded and living in relief camps in Bangladesh.

Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch also met Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain separately on Thursday.

India's rebuke to Dhaka: Focus on your minorities

India on Friday rejected remarks by Bangladeshi officials on violence in West Bengal and asked Dhaka to focus on protecting the rights of its minorities instead of indulging in "virtue signalling".

"We reject the remarks made by the Bangladesh side with regard to the incidents in West Bengal," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "This is a barely disguised and disingenuous attempt to draw a parallel with India's concerns over the ongoing persecution of minorities in Bangladesh where the criminal perpetrators of such acts continue to roam free," he said.

Jaiswal was responding to media queries regarding comments made by Bangladeshi officials on the developments in West Bengal. "Instead of making unwarranted comments and indulging in virtue signalling, Bangladesh would do better to focus on protecting the rights of its own minorities," he said.

The sharp reaction came after Shafiqul Alam, the Press Secretary to Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, on Thursday called on New Delhi and the West Bengal government to take "all steps to fully protect the minority Muslim population." "We condemn attacks on Muslims that caused loss of lives and properties," he had said. "We urge the Governments of India and West Bengal to take all steps to fully protect the minority Muslim population," Alam had added.

Detailed Story on >> P5

Vice President of India attacked by Opposition

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ New Delhi

A day after Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar's remarks on the higher judiciary, Opposition parties severely criticised his stand whereas the ruling BJP rallied behind the Rajya Sabha Presiding Officer while accusing the Opposition of "political hypocrisy".

Leaders of the Congress, TMC, DMK, Shiv Sena (UBT), RJD and several legal experts and advocates voiced concern and accused Dhankhar of "undermining Supreme Court's authority that potentially bordered on judicial contempt".

BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said there was no need to learn 'constitutional propriety' from a Party that says it won't implement a law passed by Parliament. "They mocked the Vice President's posture, protect rioters in the name of votebank politics, and find no time to visit Hindu victims in Bengal," the BJP said.

Addressing Rajya Sabha interns on April 17, Dhankhar had described Article 142 - which allows the Supreme Court to ensure "complete justice" - as "a nuclear missile against democratic forces" that is available to the judiciary round the clock. He also raised concerns about the Court mandating timelines for President of India's assent to State Bills and the judicial process surrounding absence of an FIR against the then Delhi High Court Judge from whose official residence here a stash of burnt currency notes was found.

Dhankhar's reaction vis-a-vis the higher judiciary came days after the Supreme Court fixed timeline for the President to grant assent to the State Bills reserved for her consideration by a Governor of a State.

Congress Rajya Sabha MP Randeep Singh Surjewala cited the Supreme Court's April 8 judgment that entails a three-month deadline for the President to act



on Bills sent by Governors. "Only the Constitution is supreme in our democracy. No authority, including the Vice President, can override constitutional checks and balances," Surjewala said.

TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee condemned the Vice President's "objectionable" tone that he termed a sign of "repeated disregard for constitutional institutions". He emphasised that as a high-ranking constitutional figure, Dhankhar should uphold and not question the authority of the higher judiciary.

DMK leader Tiruchi Siva labelled the comments "unethical," stressing that no one - regardless of office he or she holds - has the right to indefinitely stall legislative processes under the guise of constitutional power.

Siva said, "Under the (doctrine of) separation of powers as per the Constitution, the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary have distinct powers."

Senior Advocate and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal also joined the debate, questioning Dhankhar's objection to Article 142 of the Constitution. "The

Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to deliver complete justice. It is not about curtailing the powers of the President; it is about ensuring justice in its truest sense," he said.

Sibal asserted that the Lok Sabha Speaker and the Rajya Sabha Chairman should remain equidistant from the Opposition and the ruling party, and cannot be the "spokesperson of any party". "Everyone knows that the Lok Sabha Speaker's chair is in between. He or she is the Speaker of the House, not the speaker of one Party. They also don't vote - they only vote when there is a tie. The same is the case with the Upper House. You are equidistant from the Opposition and the ruling Party," Sibal said at a press conference.

Sibal also recalled the 1975 Supreme Court judgment that invalidated then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's election. "People would remember that when the Supreme Court's decision came on Indira Gandhi's election, only one judge - Justice Krishna Iyer - gave the decision," he said.

The Bystander



Crackdown on illegal meat shops and dhabas in residential areas of Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Friday ordered a crackdown on illegal meat shops and dhabas operating in residential areas of the national capital, directing officials to demolish such establishments and disconnect their water and power supplies.

During an inspection in West Delhi's Rajouri Garden Assembly constituency, Sirsa highlighted widespread civic violations and pollution concerns, stressing that unauthorised commercial activities in residential localities will not be tolerated.

During the inspection, the Minister observed that illegal and unlicensed raw meat shops, dhabas, polluting tandoors, illegal denim factories and dyeing units,

and other polluting industrial units operating in residential areas are significant contributors to pollution.

He said thousands of illegal meat shops and dhabas are operational in residential areas, making life difficult for the city residents. These pose difficulties in the movement of residents.

"In a single lane, there are over 40-50 illegal dhabas and meat shops running without permission. These pose a serious threat to public health and cause inconvenience to residents," said Sirsa, asserting that no illegal establishment will be spared.

Sirsa asked officials to take stern action, stating, "Illegal activities will not be tolerated." Officials were advised to close down the illegal raw meat shops, dhabas and illegal polluting establishments.

"Today, I have instructed the District Commissioner and the Additional Commissioner to take action and demolish all these illegal dhabas. They will be sealed, and their water and electricity connections cut," he said.

Sirsa said strict steps be taken to ensure that such unlawful activities are completely stopped across the national capital. The Minister observed that "meat shops must operate with valid licences in designated areas and maintain hygienic standards".

Sirsa emphasised that meat shops must be licensed, hygienic and confined to designated commercial zones. "Polluting and illegal establishments cannot function within residential colonies. This endangers public health and the wellbeing of area people," he added.

Continued on >> P8

Wanted Punjab terrorist held in US, had links with ISI, BKI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York/Chandigarh

Gangster-turned-terrorist Harpreet Singh alias Happy Passia, wanted in connection with multiple terror attacks across Punjab and an alleged collaborator of Pakistan's ISI and Khalistani group BKI, has been arrested in the US, officials said Friday.

Passia alias Jora, who had illegally entered the US, was arrested by the FBI and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Enforcement and Removal Operations in Sacramento, the US federal law enforcement agency said. "Today, Harpreet Singh, an alleged terrorist responsible for terror attacks in Punjab, India, was arrested by the #FBI & #ERO in Sacramento. Linked to two international terrorist groups, he entered the US illegally and used burner phones to evade capture," FBI Sacramento said in a statement on X.

Agents from the FBI's Legal Attache office in New Delhi informed Sacramento that Passi was wanted in connection with multiple terror attacks across Punjab, FBI Sacramento said. "He had been evading capture by using untraceable burner phones and encrypted applications. This case reinforces the importance of international cooperation in apprehending those who threaten global security," it said.

Official sources in Punjab said Passia is wanted for orchestrating 16 terror attacks, including 14 grenade strikes in the State and is also suspected to have collaborated with Khalistani terrorist group Babbar Khalsa International (BKI).

In January, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) had announced a cash



Harpreet Singh, an alleged gangster turned terrorist, after his arrest by the FBI and ERO, in Sacramento, California, USA PTI

reward of ₹5 lakh on Passia in connection with a hand-grenade attack on a house in Chandigarh in September last year. Passia and Pakistan-based designated BKI terrorist Harwinder Singh Sandhu alias Rinda were among the four named in a charge sheet in the case by the NIA. Punjab Police investigation had allegedly found that Passia provided the accused with explosives, weapons and logistical support through his local associates. The September 2024 attack was intended to target a retired Punjab Police officer who the assailants believed was an occupant of the house in Sector 10, Chandigarh.

A total of 33 FIRs have been registered at different police stations and 10 Lookout Circulars have been issued against Passia, according to a dossier prepared by Punjab Police. Hailing from village Pashia in Amritsar district, Passia had left for Dubai in April 2018 and returned to India in February 2019.

Continued on >> P8

Seelampur murder probe: 'Lady don' in Delhi Police crosshairs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Police is probing the role of a woman alias 'Lady Don', who worked as a bouncer for jailed gangster Hashim Baba's wife, after the fatal stabbing of a 17-year-old youngster in northeast Delhi's Seelampur area. There is a heavy police presence in the narrow lanes of Seelampur as the murder sparked protests in the area. Even as the police is investigating the crime, the name of a 'Lady Don' has now cropped up in the case.

The fatal stabbing of the 17-year-old in northeast Delhi's Seelampur also triggered a war of words between the ruling BJP and opposition AAP on Friday. Both

blamed each other for the "deteriorating law and order" in the city. The youngster was stabbed on Thursday at J Block in New Seelampur. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the youngster's family will get justice. "I have talked to the Commissioner of Police. The police is making all efforts and I hope the accused will be arrested soon. It will be ensured that the bereaved family gets justice," she said.

Police have identified two suspects - Sahil and Rehan - after scanning CCTV footage, Joint Commissioner of Police (Eastern Range), Pushpendra Kumar, said.

The deceased youth's family, meanwhile, claimed that Zikra, a local woman known as 'Lady Don' in the area was pre-

sent when Kunal was killed, the officer said. Police have since detained Zikra for questioning, sources said, though she has not been formally arrested.

"We have identified the accused who will be nabbed soon. Ten teams have been formed to crack the case, and they are looking at all possible angles. We have detained a few people for questioning. The case will be solved soon," Kumar said.

Zikra, who goes by the name 'Lady Don' on Instagram, once worked for a gangster's wife but now leads her own gang of around 10 to 15 young men. She often posts videos brandishing weapons on her social media platform. Last month, she posted a video on the social media, wherein she was

allegedly flaunting a country-made pistol. She has more than 15,000 followers on Instagram. Zikra worked as a bouncer for jailed gangster Hashim Baba's wife Zoya, before the latter's arrest by Delhi Police in a drugs case. She was reportedly living with Zoya before the latter was jailed. It is believed that Zikra was trying to form her own gang after Zoya's arrest, sources said.

According to locals, she is frequently seen roaming the area brandishing a pistol and filming reels for the social media. She was also seen with a gun during Holi celebrations. The videos, however, led to a First Information Report (FIR) under the Arms Act against her

Continued on >> P8

Manuscripts of Bhagavad Gita, Natyashastra added to UNESCO register

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Manuscripts of Bhagavad Gita and Bharat Muni's Natyashastra are among 74 new documentary heritage collections that have been added to the UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a social media post on Friday, described the inscriptions as "a proud moment for every Indian across the world".

"The inclusion of the Gita and Natyashastra in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register is a global recognition of our timeless wisdom and rich culture. The Gita and Natyashastra have nurtured the (human) civilisation and consciousness for centuries. Their insights continue to inspire the world," he said.

Entries on scientific revolution, women's

contribution to history and major milestones of multilateralism from 72 countries and four international organisations are included in the Register, according to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

The Register consists of books, manuscripts, maps, photographs, sound or video recordings as a documentary heritage of humanity. The development comes on World Heritage Day on April 18.

Preserved at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute and codified around the 2nd century BC, the Natyashastra is "an epitome of Natyaveda, an oral body of knowledge of performing art containing 36,000 verses known as the Gandharvaveda," the UNESCO said in its citation list about the new inscriptions.

Bharat Muni makes a "groundbreaking statement in Natyashastra, asserting that

'no meaning can blossom forth without rasa', a profound contribution to world literature," it said.

The inclusion of the Gita and Natyashastra in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register is a global recognition of our timeless wisdom and rich culture

— NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER

The Natyashastra embodies a comprehensive set of rules that define natya (drama), abhinaya (performance), rasa (aesthetic experience), bhava (emotion), sangita (music), among others, thus articulating the character of Indian theatre, poetics, aesthetics, dance and music.

The Manuscript collection of Bhagavad

Gita: Ancient samgraha grantha of Indian thought with worldwide readership and influence also now finds a place in the coveted UNESCO register.

"The Bhagavadgita, containing 700 verses in 18 Chapters, is embedded within the Bhismaparva of the epic Mahabharata. It takes the form of a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna with armies lined up for the great war intended to free Arjuna of dejection (visada)," the citation read.

Bhagavad Gita is a central text in the continuous, cumulative ancient intellectual Indian tradition, synthesising various thought movements such as Vedic, Buddhist, Jain and Carvaka, it said.

"Due to its philosophical breadth and depth, the Bhagavad Gita has been read for centuries across the globe and translated into many languages," the UNESCO cita-

tion added. Union Home Minister Amit Shah hailed the development, and said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bharat has made incessant efforts to enshrine its cultural wisdom at the centre of global welfare. Shah also said that the world treasures Bharat's wisdom.

"Congratulations to every Indian on the grand occasion of the Gita and Natyashastra getting included in the UNESCO Register," he said in a social media post.

The Home Minister said the scriptures depict the ancient wisdom of Bharat that has shined light to humanity to make the world better and lives more beautiful since time immemorial.

"Under the leadership of PM Shri @narendramodi ji, Bharat has made incessant efforts to enshrine our cultural wisdom at the centre of global welfare. This is a great

recognition of these efforts," he said. Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat also took to the social media, saying this was a "historic moment for Bharat's civilisation heritage". This global honour celebrates India's "eternal wisdom and artistic genius," the Minister said.

"These timeless works are more than literary treasures - they are philosophical and aesthetic foundations that have shaped Bharat's worldview and the way we think, feel, live, and express. With this, we now have 14 inscriptions from our country on this international register," he posted and shared some images of the two texts.

On Thursday, UNESCO added 74 new documentary heritage collections to its Memory of the World Register, bringing the total number of inscribed collections to 570, the world body said.

Continued on >> P8

Doctor's biggest identity is his compassion: CM Adityanath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday said that a doctor's "biggest identity" is his compassion as he can cure half the illness of a patient suffering from the most serious disease with it.

The chief minister said if a doctor does not have compassion then it should be thought whether he deserves to be called a doctor or not.

Speaking at a function here after laying the foundation stone and performing bhoomi puja of the 500-bed "Power Grid Vishram Sadan" to be built at a cost of about Rs 45 crore at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Gorakhpur, he shared the pain of patients and their attendants coming to the hospital.

"A doctor can cure half the illness of a patient suffering from the most serious disease with his compassion. The biggest identity of a doctor is his compassion and if a doctor does not have compassion then it should be thought whether he deserves to be called a doctor or not," said Adityanath.

"His behaviour should be in the same manner and if there are three to four attendants with a patient then there should be such a centre of compassion for them too," he added.



CM Yogi Adityanath laying the foundation stone of the 500-bed "Power Grid Vishram Sadan" to be built at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Gorakhpur.

The chief minister said that two to four attendants also come to the hospitals with every patient and added how inhuman it is when someone is forced to go out in

extreme cold, torrential rain, lightning and blazing sun.

Imagine if this is the situation with someone today then "tomorrow you too may have to go through it," he added.

Giving the example of Gorakhpur's AIIMS, Adityanath said that there would be at least 1,200 people (attendants) in this campus who are forced to go out and live on the road side or at some other place.

"Therefore, it is important that we first think about such people in a humane way who are connected here with the pain of their patients, but they have to bear an additional pain," he added.

The chief minister thanked the Power Grid for 500-bed residential facility for attendants and relatives of the patients at the AIIMS, Gorakhpur, and said this is a new achievement.

Referring to the poor condition of medical system in eastern Uttar Pradesh under the previous governments, Adityanath said that he had been raising his voice in this regard since 2003.

He said that Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was the prime minister at that time, had announced six AIIMS outside Delhi.

It is a pleasure today that everyone is getting to see its materialization without any discrimination across the country under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, added Adityanath.

Help farmers: Yogi to officials

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday said the state government is actively monitoring the situation in several districts affected by storms, rain, and hailstorms, and assured citizens that their safety remains the administration's top priority. He said officials in affected districts have been instructed to conduct field surveys and carry out relief work with full urgency.

"Dear residents of the state, there have been reports of storms, rainfall, and hailstorms from various districts. However, there is no need to panic. The safety of every citizen is the government's foremost concern," he said on X. In cases of human or livestock casualties, officials have been directed to immediately disburse compen-

sation and ensure proper medical treatment for the injured," the chief minister said. Referring to the ongoing government wheat procurement, Adityanath directed officials to ensure the safe storage of wheat at all procurement centres and mandis. He also asked them to assess crop damage and submit detailed reports to the government for further action. Additionally, the chief minister instructed those arrangements for water drainage be made on a priority basis in affected areas. Isolated rain and thundershowers were reported in parts of both western and eastern UP on Thursday, according to the weather department.

Similar weather is expected to continue on Friday, with warnings of gusty winds reaching 40 to 50 km/hr in some areas. The forecast indicates that these conditions may persist through Saturday and Sunday.

UNESCO honour a proud moment: CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Agra

UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday hailed the inclusion of manuscripts of the Bhagavad Gita and Bharat Muni's Natyashastra in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register as a "proud moment" for every Indian.

The register consists of books, manuscripts, maps, photographs, sound or video recordings as a documentary heritage of humanity. In a post in Hindi on X, Adityanath said, "It is a proud moment for every Indian that the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, which has been nourish-

ing human civilisation and consciousness for millennia, and Bharat Muni's Natyashastra have been inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register."

The chief minister described the recognition as "an unprecedented honour for India's unparalleled spiritual consciousness, unique intellect, eternal knowledge traditions, timeless artistic brilliance, and rich cultural heritage". He attributed the global recognition of India's civilisational treasures to the "epoch-making efforts" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi towards cultural revival.

Akhilesh condemns demolition of Jain temple in Mumbai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday voiced concern over the recent demolition of a Jain temple in Mumbai, accusing the BJP governments of systematically targeting the peaceful Jain community across India.

He was responding to reports in a section of the media that a Jain temple has been demolished in Mumbai.

In a post on X, Yadav addressed the Jain community directly, stating, "In today's times, being a minority in the country is becoming a curse. The fear, insecurity, and uncertainty currently prevailing among the Jain community is deeply concerning and has drawn worldwide attention and condemnation."

Highlighting a series of incidents, Yadav claimed these were part of an increasing pattern of aggression towards the community.

He referred to the violent attack on Jain monks in Singoli, Madhya Pradesh, a leaked audio clip from Jabalpur allegedly containing objectionable remarks against Jains by BJP members, and the demolition of a Jain temple in Mumbai, where sacred idols, scriptures, and religious books were alleged-



ly disrespected. Yadav questioned, "Why is it that wherever there is a BJP government, such incidents targeting Jain temples, pilgrimage sites, and institutions occur?"

He alleged that BJP-backed elements have been eyeing not just Jain religious and public properties but also their private assets.

Listing past incidents, he recalled the controversy around Shri Gurnar Ji in Gujarat, central government's interference at Shri Sammed Shikhar Ji, and the opposition to the installation of a Jain idol in Baghat, Uttar Pradesh. He also referred to the 2022 killing of 65-year-

old Bhowarlal Jain in Neemuch, Madhya Pradesh, allegedly at the hands of a powerful BJP supporter.

Yadav further alleged that the BJP views the Jain community only through the lens of donations and votes. "Does the BJP believe our importance lies only in giving donations? Who will protect our religion and community?" he asked.

"Rebuilding a temple cannot undo the insult caused to our idols, scriptures, and sentiments."

Praising the Jain philosophy of non-violence, co-existence, and compassion, Yadav said, "Jainism has long stood as a model of tolerance and morality, contributing immensely to India's culture, economy, and education."

He assured the community of support, saying the Jain community may be numerically small but is a part of the broader PDA (Pichhda-Dalit-Alpanshyak) alliance representing 90 per cent of the population.

"These discouraging actions by those in power will not weaken the Jain community. We stand united with them in this difficult time." The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister ended his message with a sharp remark: "The Jain community must remember - 'BJP is loyal to no one.'"

Yogi govt to set up 'Invest UP' offices in metro cities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In a strategic push towards transforming Uttar Pradesh into a \$1 trillion economy, the Yogi Adityanath-led government is set to establish Invest UP offices in three of India's major metro cities — New Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. This initiative is part of the state's larger vision to enhance investor outreach, streamline investment processes, and showcase the state's progressive industrial policies and achievements.

The planned offices will serve as dedicated hubs to facilitate direct communication with potential investors, resolve their queries in real time, and promote UP's investor-friendly environment. By creating a strong on-ground presence in these key economic centres, the government aims to build an accessible and responsive support network for businesses considering investment in Uttar Pradesh. This will also create lakhs of employment opportunities.

In a recent high-level meeting, the chief minister said that the goal of opening Invest UP offices in different cities is to promote investment in the state. These offices will help solve investors' problems and introduce them to the state's business-friendly environment.

"Our government will make every effort to ensure that investors see UP as a top investment destination," he said.

The Invest UP office in New Delhi will act as a strong link with the central government, foreign embassies, industry bodies, and investors. The Mumbai office will connect the state with financial institutions, multinational companies, and private investors.

Meanwhile, the Bengaluru office will focus on attracting technology companies, startups, and innovation-based investors. These offices will not only encourage investment but also help grow knowledge-based industries in the state, making UP more industrially self-reliant. Due to these consistent efforts by the Yogi government, Uttar Pradesh is now counted among the top investment destinations in India.

Theme parks to come up in Mathura, Ayodhya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In a major cultural and tourism push, the Yogi Adityanath government is set to develop theme parks and experience centres based on the life stories of Lord Krishna and Lord Ram.

As part of this plan, the Urban Development Department has presented a comprehensive proposal to the chief minister for the construction of Krishna Lok Park in Mathura and Lav-Kush Park along with a Shri Purushottam Darshan Anubhav Kendra in Ayodhya.

Drawing inspiration from Prayagraj's Shivalaya Park and Lucknow's UP Darshan Park, these upcoming projects aim to turn urban waste into artistic, spiritual spaces. Using scrap metal and other city waste materials, these parks will be developed under the state's 'Waste to Wealth' initiative, aligning with Chief Minister Yogi's vision of sustainable urban development.

The Krishna Lok Park in Mathura will showcase the divine life episodes of Lord Krishna, while Ayodhya's Lav-Kush Park and Shri Purushottam Anubhav Kendra will narrate the tales of Lord Ram's sons and other key events from the Ramayana.

In Mathura-Vrindavan, the Krishna Lok Park will showcase important events from Lord Krishna's life using 3D imaging, interactive models, and light and sound shows. Visitors will get to experi-

In Ayodhya, the Lav-Kush Park will focus on the lives of Lord Ram's sons, Lav and Kush, along with other episodes from Lord Ram's life.

ence scenes like his birth, the defeat of Putana, Bakasura and Kansa, his youth, Draupadi's rescue, and his Vishwaroop during the Bhagavad Gita in the Mahabharata.

The park will also have fun zones for children, including swings shaped like flutes and peacocks, and visuals recreating ancient Mathura-Vrindavan.

In Ayodhya, the Lav-Kush Park will focus on the lives of Lord Ram's sons, Lav and Kush, along with other episodes from Lord Ram's life. The park will include a hi-tech Shri Purushottam Darshan Anubhav Kendra, using LED displays, interactive LED walls, murals, projections and touch kiosks to present inspiring stories. For children, Lav-Kush Park will also feature an entertainment zone with selfie points, a bow-and-arrow field, horse rides, obstacle paths, a learning area, and storytelling zones using interactive technology.

These theme parks aim to entertain and educate visitors, serve as revenue-generating models for local municipal bodies, and boost spiritual tourism in both cities.

Honey-trapped doc loses lakhs to woman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

A woman honey-trapped a doctor in Mahanagar and extorted huge sums of money from him.

As per the victim's statement to police, the accused woman first talked to the doctor through social media and seduced the doctor to talk to her. After that, she sent him some of his obscene videos which she had filmed while speaking to him and threatened him to meet her. She said, "If you meet me, you will be saved, your future will be saved. Otherwise, I will send these

to your relatives." After this, she sent the victim a morphed video from a different number. She started threatening him with making that obscene video viral and told him that she would send it to his wife and acquaintances which would defame the doctor.

The doctor requested the woman to delete the video. On this the woman started demanding money. She collected lakhs of rupees from the doctor through UPI and Google Pay. On April 7, on the pretext of settlement, the woman called the doctor to meet her at a hotel in PGI police sta-

tion area. There she made another obscene video of the doctor and started threatening him again, instead of settling the issue. Due to this incident, the doctor remained in depression for the last many days.

His wife came to know of his mental stress when the troubled doctor told the whole story to his wife. The doctor's wife has lodged a complaint against the woman in the PGI police station. The doctor's wife disclosed the name of the woman to the police said the accused contacted her husband through social media. The police is investigating into the matter.

Chitrakoot transitions from a haven of bandits to one of devotion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Once notorious for its dreaded bandit gangs, Chitrakoot is illuminated by the light of development today. The same land where outlaws like Dadua, Thokia, Radhe, Babli Kol, Gauri Yadav, Sadhna Patel, and Goppa once ran parallel regimes — instilling fear and even swaying political outcomes — has now shed its dark past under the decisive leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

Chitrakoot, deeply revered as Lord Shri Ram's favoured land during his exile, holds immense spiritual and historical significance. Here, Ram, along with Sita and Lakshman, spent the longest part of their exile — finding peace among the forests, rivers, and sages.

In his Ramcharitmanas, Tulsidas beautifully captures this divine connection, describing Chitrakoot as a place of natural beauty, serenity, and spiritual energy. In these forests, Ram met Bharat, setting an eternal example of brotherly love, and engaged with the Kol and Kirat communities, spreading the message of social harmony.

Today, that same Chitrakoot is witnessing a renaissance. With the personal initiative and commitment of CM Yogi, Chitrakoot is reclaiming its past glory — not through legends alone, but through concrete development. The Chitrakoot

Dham Teerth Vikas Parishad's establishment laid the foundation for systematic growth. Enhanced connectivity via the Bundelkhand Expressway and the region's first airport — nestled in the hills — has brought this sacred land closer to the rest of the country.

Tourism is thriving, with a noticeable rise in footfall, especially during events like the Prayagraj Mahakumbh, where reverse tourism brought countless pilgrims to Chitrakoot. Anticipating further growth, the Yogi government is continually upgrading infrastructure and amenities to provide pilgrims and visitors a comfortable, enriching experience.

Chitrakoot is once again becoming what it was in the Treta Yuga — a serene, sacred haven radiating peace, devotion, and progress.

In a major decision taken during the cabinet meeting held on April 8, the Uttar Pradesh government approved a budget of Rs 50 crore to enhance tourism infrastructure in Chitrakoot. A significant portion of this will be used to upgrade facilities at key stopovers along the Ram Van Gaman Path, with Rs 12 crore allocated specifically for improving existing tourist facilities. Additionally, a state-of-the-art Tourist Facility Centre will be constructed at Devangana, near the airport, at an estimated cost of Rs 17.56 crore.

Furthering Chitrakoot's spiritual and



aesthetic appeal. Rs 20.45 crore has been earmarked for the comprehensive development of the Kamadgiri Parikrama Marg. First instalments — ranging from Rs 50 to Rs 75 lakh — have already been released for several of these projects.

These include beautification works at locations deeply connected with Lord Ram's exile such as the Mandakini River, Tuls Das's birthplace in Rajapur, and Maharishi Valmiki's ashram in Lalpur.

Chitrakoot is emerging as a prominent spiritual and cultural destination after Ayodhya and Kashi. Before the Mahakumbh, the town saw an average of 2,500 vehicles arriving daily, surging to 7,000 during the Kumbh.

On weekends and holidays, the number touched 14,000 — highlighting the growing popularity of Chitrakoot among pilgrims and tourists. Adding to the attraction is a newly developed ropeway under the PPP model, which is further drawing interest.

However, the Yogi government's vision for Chitrakoot extends beyond tourism. It aims to make the region a hub for investment. The Prayagraj-Chitrakoot Development Area has been formed, comprising six districts: Prayagraj, Chitrakoot, Fatehpur, Banda, Kaushambi, and Hamirpur.

CM Yogi Adityanath announced this initiative during the Mahakumbh. It is designed to attract tourists and investors. Notably, Chitrakoot is also one of the six key nodes of the UP Defence Corridor.

The transformation of Chitrakoot began in earnest in 2017, with the ascension of CM Yogi Adityanath. Recognising the deep cultural and global resonance of Shri Ram, the government launched several initiatives including the Ramayana Conclave, Ramayana Mela, Digital Ramayana Gallery, and a Water Screen Laser Show, with an investment of Rs 52 crore.

Tour operators were also roped in to brand Chitrakoot as a major spiritual tourism destination. In its second term, the government prioritized world-class infrastructure and branding for selected religious sites, with Chitrakoot as a key focus.

Connectivity too is being rapidly enhanced. The Chitrakoot Link Expressway is being integrated with the Bundelkhand Expressway via the Prayagraj-Rewa route. Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has announced a four-lane greenfield expressway connecting Satna to Chitrakoot, which is underway as part of the Bharatmala Project. This will strengthen Chitrakoot's connectivity with Madhya Pradesh and Mumbai.

Additionally, the Centre is investing Rs 11,000 crore in developing the Ram Van Gaman Marg from Ayodhya to Chitrakoot, slated for completion by 2026. This will improve access to significant points from Shri Ram's exile, such as Shringverpur — where Ram met Nishad Raj, marking a powerful symbol of social harmony. A grand statue commemorating this moment has also been installed.

With spiritual legacy and infrastructure converging, Chitrakoot is experiencing a resurgence. It is reclaiming its place as both a divine destination and a beacon of progress.

BLW symbol of India's technological self-reliance & global progress: GM



GM NP Singh at an exhibition organised on World Heritage Day at BLW in Varanasi on Friday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

An exhibition was organised on World Heritage Day in Banaras Locomotives Works (BLW) here on Friday in which BLW's historical journey, technological innovations and international achievements were presented in a live form. General Manager Naresh Pal Singh, along with Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer (PCME) Vivek Sheel and Assistant Design Engineer (Bogie) Rajesh Kumar Shukla, inaugurated the exhibition by cutting the ribbon in the presence of

other senior officers.

The GM said, "BLW is not just a workshop, but a symbol of India's technological self-reliance and global progress. This event provides us both the inspiration of the past and the direction of the future." The journey from BLW manufactured first diesel locomotive 'WDM-2' named 'Kundan' to electric loco 'WAP 7' in the exhibition were displayed. From the first indigenous engine 'Kundan' manufactured in 1964 to the development journey of the most modern engines, the visitors got an exciting glimpse of technological

progress.

Technical details and models of engines like WDM2, WDG4D, WDP4D etc made the exhibition extremely educative and worth seeing. A section focused on international exports to countries like Vietnam, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Malaysia etc highlighted India's global technological presence. The 1935 British era 'Miss Muffet' locomotive became the centre of attraction for the visitors by becoming a living symbol of cultural heritage and technological history. The digital display, photo gallery, rail engine models and painted rail-engines transformed the premises into a 'living museum'. All visitors, from children to the elderly, thoroughly enjoyed the exhibition.

This event was not only a celebration of BLW's achievements but also an effort to connect the new generation to their roots, technical values and the importance of self-reliance. The GM said, "Technological development is meaningful only when it is linked to our cultural and historical heritage. The BLW will always strive to maintain this balance."

This inaugural event was also attended by Principal Chief Materials Manager (PCCM) Alok Agarwal, Chief Mechanical Engineer (Service) Neeraj Jain, CME (Production & Marketing) Suneel Kumar, Chief Design Engineer (Diesel) Praveen Kumar, Chief Quality Assurance Manager Ram Jann Choubey, Chief Materials Manager (Loco) Amit Verma, Chief Safety Officer SB Patel, Public Relations Officer Rajesh Kumar, Staff Council Member Santosh Kumar Yadav and others from various departments.

Minister inaugurates electrification work



UP Minister Ravindra Jaiswal during the programme for laying the foundation stone of lighting work on Saranath-Ring Road on Thursday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Registration Fees Ravindra Jaiswal, on Thursday inaugurated the electrification work to be done on both sides of the road from Saranath Tiraha to Ring Road at a cost of Rs 50.15 lakh.

Addressing the people on the occasion, he said now any citizen entering Varanasi via Saranath from the Ring Road will not face any problem.

Laying the foundation stone of the lighting work on the road on Thursday, he said many types of auspicious programmes are organised on the Ring Road and due to proper lighting, peo-

ple coming to the city late at night will no longer have to face any kind of problem. While instructing the departmental officers present on the spot, he said this electrification work should be completed very soon by running a campaign on a war footing and no laxity should be shown in it at any level.

Earlier, the minister distributed vending carts to hundreds of people through the Street Vendor Seva Samiti in Saranath ward of City North Legislative Assembly. He said this will give people the opportunity to do their own business.

On the occasion secretary of Varanasi Development Authority (VDA) Gunakesh Sharma, executive engineer LB Dubey, former mandal president of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Ajit Singh,

mandal president Atul Singh, corporator Abhay Pandey, Sanjay Jaiswal, Rajendra Maurya, Manoj Jaiswal, Arvind Jaiswal, Sonu Rajbhar, Virendra Rajbhar, Mamta Patel and other BJP workers were present.

TRIBUTE PAID

Rich tribute was paid to Satish Kumar Singh, founder and inspiration of School of Management Sciences (SMS) Varanasi, who passed away at the age of 73. The news of his demise sent a wave of grief across the SMS group, including Varanasi. The foundation of SMS Group of Institutions was laid in 1995 in Varanasi and later in 2008, while expanding SMS, Singh also laid the foundation of SMS Lucknow.

Singh, originally a resident of Basti, retired from the post of Joint Commissioner (Food and Supply). It was the result of his foresight and leadership that SMS became a leading institute of management education in the private sector of Uttar Pradesh, which set new standards of academic excellence and value-based teaching. In the year 2002, due to his efforts, C-SHE (Centre for Spiritualism and Human Enrichment) was established in the institute, which proved to be a milestone in the inclusion of spirituality, ethics and human values in the Indian education system.

On behalf of the SMS Varanasi family, Director Prof PN Jha, Registrar Sanjay Gupta and all the members paid emotional tribute to SK Singh and expressed condolences to the members of the bereaved family, including Singh's younger brother Ashok Kumar Singh, Secretary, SMS Society, and Dr MP Singh, Executive Secretary, SMS Society.

Awareness programmes to mark Heritage Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

The Prayagraj Division of North Central Railway (NCR) marked World Heritage Day on Friday with a series of creative and awareness programmes. The aim of the celebrations was to promote pride and awareness about the glorious tradition of Indian Railways among citizens and passengers.

Selfie cut-out boards were installed at Prayagraj and Kanpur railway stations on the occasion, where passengers and rail enthusiasts could take memorable pictures with historical background. Heritage banners were installed at Prayagraj and Kanpur stations, which depicted the historical journey and heritage of Indian Railways through pictures.

Heritage videos were screened at Prayagraj station premises and Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) office, which included the historical development and rare scenes of Indian Railways. The heritage items of Indian Railways like steam engines at Prayagraj station and heritage material kept at North Central Railway



headquarters were cleaned and painted, giving them a new look. Special efforts are being made to preserve the rich heritage of Prayagraj division, which includes regular maintenance of old items, digitisation of historical documents and public awareness programmes. Public Relations Officer Amit

Singh said the DRM of Prayagraj division reiterated the division's commitment towards preservation and promotion of the historical heritage of Indian Railways. These efforts promote pride and awareness among citizens and passengers about the glorious tradition of Indian Railways.

Sankat Mochan Samaroh: Ajay Chakraborty regales audience

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

The second night programme of six-day internationally famous Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh at jam-packed premises on Sankat Mochan Temple on Thursday evening started with dance of Lavanya Shankar who came from Chennai, overwhelming the audience with Bharatnatyam. Her footwork, handwork and expressions were perfect. She started the dance with Mallari and then presented Ram Ramayan, Visheshwar Darshan, Ganga's arrival in Kashi.

In the second performance, Padam Bhushan Pandit Ajay Chakraborty, the flag-bearer of Patiala Gharana, sang in *vilambit ektal*, *jhaptal* and *tarana teentaal* in Raag Yaman and ended his presentation with Thumri's 'Karun Saji Aaye Na Balam'. He was accompanied by Kalyan Chakraborty on tabla and Pt Dharmarath Mishra on samvadhini. In the third performance, Dr Rajesh Shah of Banaras played sitar. After *alap*, he ended his performance by playing *gatkari* in *teentaal*. His performance was *swara* oriented. Dr Rajneesh Tiwari played the tabla skillfully with him. Then Vivek Pandya, who had come from America, created a storm by playing tabla solo. During his performance in *teentaal*, he played many things of Banaras gharana with full preparation. Every word came out clean. Along with him, Mohit Sahni played beautifully on the samvadhini.

In the fifth performance, the eminent



Eminent vocalist Pt Ajay Chakraborty presenting his programme at Sankat Mochan Temple

sitar player Pt Purvaayan Chatterjee presented sitar performance. He is world famous and in accordance with that, he enthralled the audience with his performance. After *alapchhari* in Raga Jog, he first ended his performance by playing *gatkari* in *jhaptal* and then *tritala*. After this, he accompanied Aney Gadgil on the synth scale and made the audience sing Garaj Aayi Megh. Pt Sanju Sahay gave a wonderful duet with him on the tabla.

Sohini Rai Choudhary, who came from Kolkata, first sang two compositions in *ektaal* and *teentaal* in Raga Jog and then ended the singing with thumri and bhajan. Her singing was melodious. Deviyoti Bose on the tabla, Mohit Sahni on the sam-

vadhini and Gauri Banerjee on the sarangi played with skillful participation.

Manjunath Madhavappa-Nagraj Madhavappa, who came from Mysore, presented violin playing in the Karnataka style. They overwhelmed the audience by playing in Raga Abhogi. Pandit Yella Venkateswara Rao played Mridangam and Vivek Pandya played tabla with great participation. In the next presentation, Rohit Pawar, who had come from Delhi, performed Kathak dance along with his artistes in which the dance was ended by showing Shiv Stuti. The presentation was worth watching. The last presentation of the second day was singing. The artist was Pt Jasraj's senior disciple Pt Neeraj Parikh. After singing a composition in Raag Bairagi Bhairava in *ektaal* and *teentaal*, he ended the presentation by singing a composition of Lord Hanuman. He was accompanied by Bilal Khan Sonawi on tabla, Mohit Sahni on *samvadin* and Vidushi Gauri Banerjee on sarangi with skillful participation.

PUBLIC RELATIONS DAY

The Public Relations Society of India (PRSI), Varanasi Chapter like in the past years, will celebrate the National Public Relations Day on April 21 this year too. A seminar will be organised on 'Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI): Role of Public Relations' at 1 pm in collaboration with the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication of Dharendra Mahila PG College, Sundarapur.

Training session on Trade Connect Portal



Special training session on Trade Connect Portal being inaugurated at Merchants' Chamber auditorium.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

The Merchants' Chamber of Uttar Pradesh (MCUP) organised a special training session on the 'Trade Connect Portal'. The programme aimed to disseminate the digital initiatives of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) among the business community and to connect them with modern tech-

nological tools. The programme was conducted by Secretary of the Chamber Mahendra Modi. The event commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp by Assistant Director General, DGFT, Rajan Joshi. Chairman, Export and Import Committee, MCUP, Tarun Garg, highlighted the purpose of the programme, emphasising that technological integration in trade is the need of the hour and DGFT's

initiative is a commendable step in that direction.

Following this, Rajan Joshi delivered a detailed presentation on the functioning, utility and features of the Trade Connect Portal. He explained that the Certificate of Origin is one of the most crucial documents required for exporting goods from India. Previously issued offline by the Chamber, this certificate can now be obtained online. Exporters can now issue it conveniently from their own offices without any hassle. He said this portal will help make trade communication more transparent, faster, and simpler. At the end a Q&A segment was conducted by Alok Srivastava, where participants had their practical queries related to the portal addressed. This segment proved to be instrumental in deepening the understanding of the subject. Advisor, Export and Import Committee, Yogesh Dubey, proposed the vote of thanks and congratulated all participants on the successful organisation of this informative session. Ruffi Waqf, Sushil Sharma and others were present.

Karchana murder: Financial aid provided to victim's family

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

Samajwadi Party national president Akhilesh Yadav provided financial assistance of ₹2 lakh to the family of the Dalit youth who was murdered in Karchana recently.

A delegation, led by SP national general secretary Indrajit Saroj, visited Karchana on Friday, and met the victim's family. The team included senior leaders, former minister Daddu Prasad, MLA Sandeep Patel, SP city unit president and other

office bearers. The delegation took information about the incident and assured the family of providing all possible justice. They will submit a full report to national president Akhilesh Yadav soon. The Samajwadi Party has strongly condemned the incident and demanded strict action against the culprits. Prior to the delegation's visit, SP MP from Kaushambi Pushpendra Saroj also met the victim's family and spoke to administrative officials, demanding security and necessary facilities for the family.

CONTRACTOR ASSAULTED

A contractor identified as Ashok Pal, was allegedly assaulted by Nanha Pal, a former shooter of Atiq Ahmed, in Kathula village under the Airport police station area. Nanha reportedly beat Ashok and injured him with a pistol butt. It is alleged that he demanded Rs 10 lakh from Ashok Pal, which was refused.

ACP (Dhoomanganj) Varun Kumar confirmed that the case is under investigation and strict legal action will be taken against the accused.

Filmmaking workshop concludes



Actor Shashi Bhushan Chaturvedi addressing students at the filmmaking workshop.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

The three-day filmmaking workshop jointly organised by the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University (CSJMU), JIMMC

and Rangshila Productions, concluded on Thursday.

The final day of the workshop saw students move from classroom concepts to real-world application, with sessions focused on scriptwriting, storyboarding, and on-location shooting. The immersive

training allowed participants to gain firsthand experience in the fundamentals of visual storytelling.

Renowned Orai-based actor Shashi Bhushan Chaturvedi joined as a special guest on the last day and offered encouraging insights to students.

The workshop was also supported by filmmaker and mentor Sachin Malviya from Rangshila Productions, who guided students through the basics of cinematic narration and production.

Reflecting on the educational value of the workshop, Head of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, CSJMU, Dr Vishal Sharma, said, "What we witnessed today is the transformation of students into storytellers. They are beginning to understand the visual grammar of cinema, which is an essential skill for communicators of the modern world."

Dr Priyanka Chatterjee, Om Shankar Gupta, Dr Rashmi Gautam, Prem Kishore Shukla, Dr Jitendra Dabral, Dr Yogendra Kumar Pandey along with the technical crew and the Rangshila Productions team, who worked collaboratively to ensure the success of the training were present on the final day.

Shreyansh Kapoor felicitated



Managing Partner, Kashi Jewellers, Shreyansh Kapoor, being felicitated in Mumbai.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

Managing partner of Kashi Jewellers Shreyansh Kapoor was felicitated in a grand ceremony organised by the Third Edition of National Gold Outlook at Jio Convention Centre,

Mumbai. He was felicitated for providing momentum and direction to the industry through his experience and suggestions. Speaking on the occasion, Kapoor said there has been a tremendous increase in the demand for gold globally in view of the US President Donald

Trump's tariff policy, geopolitical tension, purchases by central banks and reduction in dollar monopoly.

Talking to media he said India imports more than 80 per cent of its gold requirements, due to which investors are showing interest in buying gold. He said that in view of the wedding season, invest in diamond jewellery as well as gold and choose the jewellery of your choice within your budget. He added that 18 carat and 14 carat are available at Kashi Jewellers at low prices as per the standards set by the Government of India and with 100 per cent exchange policy.

3-YR-OLD GIRL DIES AFTER BRICK FALLS ON HER

A three-year-old girl died when a brick from an under construction five-storey building fell on her in Beconganj police station area on Friday morning. The incident took place when she was playing with her siblings. The family informed the police after which an FIR was lodged against the building owner and the contractor in this connection and the body of the deceased was sent for an autopsy.

India's rebuke to Dhaka: Focus on your own minorities

RAHUL DATTA ■ New Delhi

India on Friday rejected remarks by Bangladeshi officials on violence in West Bengal and asked Dhaka to focus on protecting the rights of its minorities instead of indulging in "virtue signalling".

"We reject the remarks made by the Bangladesh side with regard to the incidents in West Bengal," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"This is a barely disguised and disingenuous attempt to draw a parallel with India's concerns over the ongoing persecution of minorities in Bangladesh where the criminal perpetrators of such acts continue to roam free," he said.

Jaiswal was responding to media queries regarding comments made by Bangladesh officials on the developments in West Bengal.

"Instead of making unwarranted comments and indulging in virtue signalling, Bangladesh would do better to focus on protecting the rights of its own minorities," he said.

The sharp reaction came after Shafiqul



Randhir Jaiswal MEA Spokesperson

protests by the Muslim community against the Waqf (Amendment) Act.

There has been a sharp downturn in India-Bangladesh relations after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled Dhaka last August in the face of a massive anti-government protest.

The relations nosedived dramatically after the interim government headed by Yunus failed to contain attacks on minorities, especially Hindus, in that country.

The situation in Bangladesh has been volatile after Hasina's ouster last year. There have been multiple attacks on Hindus and minorities in Bangladesh by radical Islamists. Around 200 temples have been vandalised and priests have been arrested.

India has frequently raised concerns at various diplomatic levels about the condition of Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has often denied allegations of targeted persecution of minorities. However, recent incidents, including the desecration of Hindu temples and attacks during religious festivals, have drawn sharp criticism from human rights groups and diaspora communities.

Alam, the Press Secretary to Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, on Thursday called on New Delhi and the West Bengal government to take "all steps to fully protect the minority Muslim population". "We condemn attacks on Muslims that caused loss of lives and

properties," he had said. "We urge the Governments of India and West Bengal to take all steps to fully protect the minority Muslim population," Alam had added.

Some parts of West Bengal, including Murshidabad, witnessed sectarian violence in the past few days following

PM Modi, Musk talk India-US collaboration in tech, innovation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk on Friday reaffirmed mutual interest in strengthening collaboration between India and the United States in technology and innovation.

They also discussed other issues during a telephonic conversation. Modi said on the social media after speaking to Musk that they discussed various issues.

"Spoke to @elonmusk and talked about various issues, including the topics we covered during our meeting in Washington DC earlier this year. We discussed the immense potential for collaboration in the areas of technology and innovation," he said. The Prime Minister added "India remains committed to advancing our partnerships with the US in these domains".

The talks took place at a time when Tesla is reportedly exploring opportunities to enter the Indian electric vehicle market. The latest discussions between Modi and Musk build upon their earlier meeting in Washington DC this year.

The conversation highlighted the growing synergy between India's rapidly evolving tech ecosystem and Musk's ventures in cutting-edge innovation. The Prime Minister met Musk in February this year, during his two-day visit to the US. The

SpaceX CEO was accompanied by his three children - X, Strider and Azure. During the meeting, Musk gifted Modi a Starship hexagonal heatshield tile.

The Prime Minister's telephonic conversation with Musk comes amid reports that Tesla is preparing to enter the Indian market by shipping a few thousand cars to a port near Mumbai in the coming months.

Tesla's anticipated debut in India also aligns with ongoing discussions between New Delhi and Washington over import tariffs, which are likely to shape the carmaker's long-term strategy in the country.

The move follows renewed momentum in Tesla's India plans, sparked by Modi's earlier in-person meeting with Musk in Washington. Since then, the company has reportedly begun hiring for roles related to showrooms and deliveries.

The Prime Minister's telephonic conversation with Musk comes amid reports that Tesla is preparing to enter the Indian market by shipping a few thousand cars to a port near Mumbai in the coming months

Shah calls for Naxals to surrender at earliest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday asked all underground Naxals to surrender as soon as possible and join the mainstream, saying the government is determined to free the country from the scourge of Naxalism before March 31, 2026.

Shah also said that the Cobra commandos and Chhattisgarh Police have arrested 22 notorious Naxalites with modern weapons and explosive materials in various operations in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district. He said that 11 Naxalites have also surrendered in Badesetti Panchayat of Sukma due to which this panchayat has become completely Naxal-free.

"I appeal to the hiding Naxalites to lay down their arms as soon as possible and join the mainstream by adopting the surrender policy of the Modi government. We are determined to free the country from the scourge of Naxalism before 31 March 2026," Shah said in a social media post.

Addressing the CRPF raising day function at Neemuch in Madhya Pradesh earlier on Thursday, the home minister

said that Naxalism is now confined to just four districts in India. "Naxalism has been confined to just four districts in India. The menace will end in the country by March 31, 2026, as stated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) and the CRPF, especially its CoBRA battalion, are playing a major role in eliminating Naxalism from the country," he said.

The CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) and especially CRPF, CoBRA battalion, are playing a major role in eliminating Naxalism from the country

— AMIT SHAH, HOME MINISTER

The Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) is a specialised unit of the CRPF, known for its proficiency in guerrilla and jungle warfare, particularly in combating the Naxal menace.

Shah said the CRPF has set up over 400 forward operating bases in Naxal affected areas and violence in these regions has come down by more than 70 per cent because of this and "we are now close to ending it".

Shubhanshu Shukla to be first Indian on ISS in May

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India is poised to script a defining chapter in its space journey as International Space Station (ISS) next month as part of Axiom Space's Ax-4 mission. Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla of the Indian Air Force is all prepared to fly to the International Space Station (ISS) next month as part of Axiom Space's Ax-4 mission.

Announcing this on Friday after a high-level meeting held to review major future plans of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in the coming months, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh said, the mission will mark the visit of first Indian ever to visit the International Space Station (ISS) and the first Indian astronaut to travel to Space in over four decades after Rakesh Sharma's iconic 1984 flight aboard a Soviet Soyuz spacecraft.

The announcement comes amid a flurry of activity in India's space sector, which is gearing up for an ambitious slate of missions in the coming months. Dr V Narayanan, Secretary, Department of Space and Chairman of ISRO, made a presentation elaborating the status of various upcoming Space missions.

Chairman ISRO informed that Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla is all prepared to fly to the International Space Station (ISS) next month as part of Axiom Space's Ax-4 mission. Group Captain Shukla's mission, scheduled for May 2025, marks a milestone in India's expanding international space collaborations.

A decorated test pilot with the Indian Air Force, he was shortlisted under ISRO's Human Spaceflight Program (HSP) and is among the top contenders for the Gaganyaan mission, India's first indigenous crewed orbital flight.

His journey aboard the Ax-4 mission is expected to provide critical hands-on experience in spaceflight operations, launch protocols, microgravity adaptation, and emergency preparedness — all essential for India's crewed space ambitions.

What sets Shukla's mission apart is its strategic importance. Unlike the symbolic undertones of India's first human spaceflight, this time the focus is on operational readiness and global integration.

His participation underscores India's growing engagement with public-private international partnerships in space and its resolve to emerge as a serious contender in human space exploration.

"India is ready for its next space milestone," said Jitendra Singh, underscoring

the significance of the upcoming human spaceflight and a series of critical ISRO missions. He noted that the collaboration with international partners and the strategic momentum of projects like Gaganyaan reflect India's commitment to becoming a global leader in space technology. The Minister emphasized that these efforts are not only scientific in nature but also aligned with the vision of a developed and self-reliant India.

During the meeting, ISRO updated the minister on several key developments since January 2025. These include the public release of data from the Aditya L1 solar mission, successful demonstration of docking and undocking technologies, testing of the highest thrust liquid engine developed in India, and the historic 100th launch (GSLV-F15) from Sriharikota.

ISRO also supported national events like the Kumbh Mela 2025 through satellite-based monitoring and announced a successful demonstration of restarting the Vikas Engine, crucial for future launch vehicle recovery missions.

Among the major missions lined up for May to July 2025, ISRO will launch the PSLV-C61 mission carrying the state-of-the-art EOS-09 satellite.

Equipped with a C-band synthetic aperture radar, EOS-09 will be capable of

capturing high-resolution images of Earth's surface under all weather conditions, day or night.

Another significant milestone will be the Test Vehicle-D2 (TV-D2) mission, designed to simulate an abort scenario and demonstrate the Gaganyaan Crew Escape System. The mission includes sea recovery operations for the Crew Module, mimicking procedures planned for India's first human spaceflight.

June will see the highly anticipated launch of the NISAR satellite aboard the GSLV-F16. This NASA-ISRO collaboration aims to study Earth's ecosystems and natural hazards through dual-frequency radar data, combining NASA's L-band payloads with ISRO's S-band contributions.

The LVMS-3-M5 mission, scheduled for July, will cater to a commercial contract with AST SpaceMobile Inc., USA, launching BlueBird Block-2 satellites under NewSpace India Limited's commercial program.

As India's space strategy matures, Group Captain Shukla's upcoming mission stands as a symbol of a confident, forward-looking nation ready to reclaim its place in the global space race. His journey is more than just a flight — it's a signal that India is stepping boldly into a new era of space exploration.

US to enforce strict rules on student visas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Students attempting to go against US laws will face the consequences, including deportation, the country's state department has warned.

In a virtual interview with media, US Department of State spokesperson Margaret MacLeod said the Trump administration was rigorously enforcing immigration laws, including the Immigration and Nationality Act and the Alien Registration Act.

"If you follow the law, America offers opportunities. But those who violate the law will face the consequences," MacLeod said in a video on a question related to the issues faced by Indian students in various US universities.

Indian students in the US are grappling with a growing threat of deportation as authorities cancel F-1 visas over a range of issues — from participation in pro-Palestinian protests to minor legal infractions. During his weekly press briefing on Thursday, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "We are aware that several Indian students have received communication from the US government regarding their F-1 visa

status, which happens to be the student visa. We are looking into the matter. Our embassy and consulates, they are in touch with the students to provide support."

Jaiswal was responding to a question on several Indian students receiving communications from US authorities under the Trump administration on possible revocation of their visas.

While MacLeod did not mention specific cases, she emphasised that adherence to US legal and visa requirements was essential to avoid penalties.

On the broader issue of illegal immigration, MacLeod underscored the Trump administration's rigorous enforcement of immigration laws.

"The US government is committed to securing its borders and will not welcome those who enter by breaking our laws."

MacLeod urged individuals residing in the US illegally, including relatives of Indian families, to voluntarily return to their home countries.

"There is still an opportunity to return to your homeland," she said, directing them to contact the Department of Homeland Security or use the CBP app to facilitate their departures.

The US official expressed hope that those who entered the country unlawfully would leave voluntarily to avoid stricter enforcement measures.

More than 3.3 lakh Indian students were enrolled in US higher education institutions in the 2023-24 academic year, a 23 per cent increase from the previous year.

The figure made India the country with the highest number of students in the US. However, according to reports, the number of visas issued to Indian students fell 30 per cent in February — the first month of the second Trump administration.

Speaking about US Vice-President JD Vance's visit to India, the American official said he would meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi ahead of his private trip to Jaipur and Agra.

"They will discuss all the issues important for the two countries," MacLeod said. Asked about the deportation of Mumbai attack accused Tahawwur Hussain Rana to India, she said the US deported him to face justice under Indian law. "India and the US will continue to cooperate on counterterrorism measures."

Anurag Thakur slams Congress over National Herald funds



BJP leader Anurag Thakur addressing a press conference at the party's headquarter in New Delhi on Friday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The BJP on Friday dared Congress leaders facing corruption charges to seek a quick and time-bound disposal of cases, as it slammed the party for citing politics as the reason for the ED's action against Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case.

The ruling BJP kept the heat on the opposition party following the ED's chargesheet against the Gandhis and accused chief ministers from the Congress-ruled states of ploughing public money as advertisement into the weekly newspaper which few read.

Former Union minister Anurag Thakur alleged that the Congress used the newspaper as its ATM, claiming that Gandhis sought to acquire properties worth ₹2,000 crores of the National Herald without investing a penny for their pocket.

Both Gandhis together owned 76 per cent of the Young Indian company which was, he said, given ₹50 lakh loan by the Congress. The company then took over the Associated Journals Limited, which owns the newspaper affiliated to the Congress, in lieu of ₹90 crore it owed to the opposition party, he said.

Thakur asked if a political party can give a loan. To a question about the allegation that the ED action was politically motivated, the BJP leader

dared Congress leaders facing corruption charges to move courts to seek quick and time-bound trial in the cases against them.

"If they have guts, they should do it," he said, adding that in the "Congress model of corruption" the thieves make a lot of noises. The National Herald case, he said, has stunned the Congress ecosystem into silence.

Thakur noted Gandhis have moved courts for quashing action against them for many times since a lower court took cognisance of the matter before the Modi government came to power.

The courts gave them no relief except that they are on bail, he said, adding that the judiciary did not intervene in the Enforcement Directorate's probe.

Turning to his home state Himachal Pradesh where the Congress is in power, Thakur accused the party of not fulfilling any of its 10 main promises but spending crores of rupees in advertisement in the National Herald.

"Does any Congress leader or member read it in Himachal," he asked, demanding that people should be given details of money spent by different Congress governments in advertisements in the newspaper, which is available digitally.

The Congress has been organising protests in different parts of the country against the ED action.

India, UK hold defence talks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India and UK reviewed the entire gamut of their bilateral defence ties and explored ways to further strengthen them during the annual bilateral defence dialogue between the two countries in London, defence ministry said here on Friday.

Giving details, officials said Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh concluded a two-day visit to London from April 16-17 leading a high-level Indian delegation for the annual bilateral defence dialogue with the United Kingdom.

During the visit, he co-chaired the 24th India-UK Defence Consultative Group meeting with David Williams, Permanent Under Secretary of State for Defence.

Both sides reviewed the evolving regional and global geopolitical landscape and reaffirmed their shared commitment to deepening defence ties.

The discussions were held in the context of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership announced in 2021 and the Roadmap to 2030, which continues to steer cooperation between the two nations.

The Defence Secretary also interacted with UK's National Security Adviser Jonathan Powell, with talks focused on expanding tri-service military engagements and strengthening collaboration between the two countries' defence industries.

Addressing participants at the India-UK Defence Industry Roundtable, organised by the UK India Business Council, Singh highlighted the growing capabilities of Indian start-ups across key defence domains such as naval systems, drones, surveillance, defence space and aviation.

He encouraged UK companies to explore partnerships with these agile innovators, noting their potential to deliver cost-effective and cutting-edge solutions.

The Defence Secretary also said India is working closely with the UK Ministry of Defence to develop an Industrial Cooperation Roadmap to guide future industry engagement.

He invited UK firms to invest in India's dedicated Defence Corridors in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, where they can take advantage of state-level incentives and a rapidly evolving defence manufacturing ecosystem.

DGCA orders investigation in pilot's death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has ordered a detailed investigation into the circumstances that led to the recent death of an Air India Express pilot, including checking the medical history of the deceased crew member and examining the existing guidelines to deal with such emergencies.

The Air India Express pilot, who was the first officer, died due to a sudden cardiac arrest while operating the flight IX1153 from Srinagar to Delhi on April 9.

Ordering the probe, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) investigation team will check whether the crew reported the sickness to the Air Traffic Controller (ATC) while in air and if so, whether the ATC initiated action appropriately.

Apart from checking the medical history of the deceased crew member, the team will probe whether due precaution was taken during rostering of such crew who

have flying restriction due to medical reasons, as per the DGCA order issued on April 17.

Among other aspects, the regulator will investigate whether any specific medical checks are required for such pilots to undergo before undertaking flights and whether the remaining onboard crew took action when the crew member reported feeling unwell.

According to DGCA, the probe will also look at the time taken in taking the crew member to the medical centre at the airport.

Further, the probe team will check the level of preparedness of the medical centre at the airport in handling such emergencies as well as examine and suggest changes with respect to existing guidelines in this regard.

Deputy Director of Air Safety Vishal Yadav will be the Investigator-in-Charge and Group Captain Murtaza as a subject matter expert will carry out the probe.

The team has been directed to submit its final investigation report as early as possible, preferably within a period of six months, as per the order. In a statement on April 10, an Air India Express spokesperson said it deeply regrets the loss of a valued colleague due to a medical condition.

Without providing specific details, the spokesperson also said, "we request all concerned to respect privacy at this time and avoid unnecessary speculation, while we commit to assisting the relevant authorities in due process".

Last week, the Airline Pilots' Association of India (ALPA) said there is an urgent need to put in place transparent regulations that prioritise rest for pilots, safety and humane scheduling practices.

ALPA, which claims to represent around 800 pilots of various domestic airlines, is part of the International Federation of Airline Pilots' Association (IFALPA). The association had also said the untimely death of the Air India Express pilot raises troubling questions about pilot welfare, mental health, and working conditions in the Indian aviation industry.

Editor's TAKE

Searing Summer, Soaking Monsoon

IMD forecasts an above-average monsoon — a silver lining with a dark cloud: floods

As India braces for a searing summer, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has offered a glimmer of hope: this year's southwest monsoon is expected to bring above-normal rainfall, with the country likely to receive 105 per cent of the long-period average. While this forecast may bring a sigh of relief to the agricultural sector and rural economy, it also comes with a note of caution — because with abundant rain often comes devastating floods.

For a country where nearly 60 per cent of agriculture is rain-fed, the monsoon is nothing short of a lifeline. A good monsoon translates to better crop yields, improved groundwater recharge, replenished reservoirs, and stable food prices. It plays a critical role in the livelihoods of millions, especially in rural India, and drives growth in allied sectors like food processing, transportation, and retail. This year's monsoon is predicted to benefit regions like Marathwada and parts of Telangana — areas that have historically suffered from water scarcity. States like Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh are also expected to receive normal to above-normal rainfall, offering much-needed respite for farmers and boosting kharif crop prospects.

Yet, the same monsoon that nourishes our farms can wreak havoc on our homes and cities. Floods are a recurring nightmare, leading to massive loss of life, destruction of infrastructure, and displacement of communities. Year after year, cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Patna, and Guwahati come to a standstill due to waterlogging and poor urban drainage systems. Rural regions are not spared either. Unregulated riverbanks, deforestation, and encroachments worsen the impact of heavy rainfall. Low-lying districts near rivers often face catastrophic flash floods and landslides.

As the IMD also warns of below-normal rainfall in parts of Tamil Nadu and the Northeast, the risk of regional imbalances — where some areas drown while others dry — becomes very real. It is time we stopped treating floods as a surprise and started seeing them as an annual certainty.

Projects like river interlinking can redistribute excess water from flood-prone regions to drought-hit areas. While controversial and logistically complex, such initiatives, if executed sustainably, could balance water distribution across states. Constructing more check dams, especially in vulnerable areas, and upgrading existing ones with modern sensors can help manage water flow during peak rainfall. However, dams should be operated scientifically, with real-time data guiding water release schedules.

IMD's forecasting has improved significantly, but local authorities must act promptly on early warnings. Investments in community awareness and disaster response training can save countless lives. Besides, natural buffers like forests and wetlands absorb excess rainwater and reduce runoff. Reviving these ecosystems will go a long way in reducing the impact of flash floods. Our cities need a radical revamp of their drainage systems. Rainwater harvesting should be made mandatory in urban planning, and old stormwater drains must be widened, cleared, and maintained regularly. A lot of talk has gone down the drain to make smart cities. It is time that those cities are made functional at least. Providing efficient drainage systems is not rocket science. If Harappan people could do it, we can do it too.

The monsoon, India's annual gamble with nature, holds immense power, both to nurture and to destroy. As IMD's forecast signals a wet season ahead, it's time to plan not just for reaping its bounty but for mitigating its fury. We cannot stop the rain, but we can — and must — learn to live better with it. Let us not treat monsoon as a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon — it occurs every year and thus is no surprise. All we need is planning rather than acting shocked when the country submerges and nobody has any clue why that happened.

Fundamentalism in Bangladesh

Once hailed for secularism and cultural vibrancy, Bangladesh now finds itself at a critical crossroads. Islamist fundamentalist groups like Jamaat-e-Islami are regaining prominence, with alarming implications

Is Bangladesh moving once again towards becoming a cradle of Islamist fundamentalism and terrorism? Fundamentalism does not always mean terrorism, but it does create a discourse that facilitates the rise of extremism through the promotion of intolerance, leading to hatred towards those considered infidels and violence against them. Now, is Islamist fundamentalism waxing in Bangladesh? One needs to ask this because fundamentalist organisations like the Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) and Hefazat-e-Islam (Hefazat) are having a ball. The Jamaat had fully cooperated with the Pakistani Army during the liberation war of 1971 and was complicit in the latter's mass murders, rapes and other atrocities. Besides, its members and leaders — as well as those of affiliated bodies like Al-Badr, Al-Shams and Razakars — perpetrated unspeakable atrocities themselves. On 1 August 2013, Bangladesh's High Court had cancelled its registration as a political party, upholding a writ petition by an organisation called the Tariqat Federation, saying that the Jamaat was a religion-based political party which did not believe in Bangladesh's independence and sovereignty. It further claimed that the country's Representation of People Order did not allow the registration of a communal outfit as a political party.

The High Court had also observed that the Jamaat had no moral right to be in the country's political arena, given the atrocities it had perpetrated during the liberation war. Following the order, Bangladesh's Election Commission issued a gazette notification on 28 October 2018, cancelling the party's registration. On 19 November 2023, Bangladesh's Supreme Court dismissed the Jamaat's appeal against the High Court's verdict, as its counsels did not appear at the hearing. As a result of the High Court's order, the Jamaat could not participate in the parliamentary elections of 2014, 2018 and 2024. Besides, four of its top leaders — Abdul Quader Mollah, Kamaruzzaman, Ali Hsan Mohammad Mujahid and Motiur Rahman Nizami — were executed, and several others given long prison terms, following convictions in cases related to genocide and war crimes by the International Crimes Tribunals established in 2010 and 2012 under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act of 1973, as amended in 2009. Finally, Sheikh Hasina's government banned the Jamaat and its students' organisation, Islami Chhatra Shibir (Shibir), on 1 August 2025 under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009. The grounds cited were



damentalist doctrines and encourages other fundamentalist organisations to flex their muscles. One of their principal targets is Bangladesh's moderate and liberal ethos — shaped by its rich literary and philosophical heritage, shaped by Rabindranath Tagore and the country's highly talented writers, poets and performing artists. A spiritual leader, philosopher, mystic poet and social reformer, Lalou articulated a weltanschauung, which encompassed the essence of the Bhakti cult and Sufism, rejected all distinctions of caste, class and creed, and opposed theological conflicts and racism. A gathering of sadhus and a Lalou



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

their responsibility for genocide and crimes against humanity during the Liberation War of 1971, and involvement in terrorist activities. On 28 August 2024, the Bangladesh interim government, headed by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, reversed the order, saying that there was no proof that the Jamaat and the Shibir were involved in terrorist activities. On 23 October 2024, the Appellate Division of Bangladesh's Supreme Court restored the Jamaat's appeal, which the Supreme Court had rejected on 19 November 2023.

Meanwhile, the Jamaat is now politically fully active — holding meetings, demonstrations, meetings with other parties and foreign diplomats, and projecting itself as a major force to be reckoned with in the forthcoming elections, whenever they are held. Its ideology is quite clear. Its website says, "Jamaat performs as a spiritual party as spiritual life is important in Islam. Jamaat performs in political arena because Islamic law can't be implemented without political force." The Hefazat-e-Islam was formed in 2010 to oppose the Awami League government's women's development policy, promising women equal rights to property. It has considerable power to mobilise in the streets. Its intensely anti-India orientation was reflected in its violent protests against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence on 26

March 2021. Thirteen persons were killed and scores injured in clashes between its supporters and members of the security forces and Awami League's supporters. The Hefazat is a hard-core Islamist organisation. This is clear from its 13-point charter of demands in support of which it held a rally in Dhaka on 5-6 May 2013. The Hefazat's 13-point programme includes the enactment of an anti-blasphemy law with provision for the death penalty; exemplary punishment to all bloggers and others who "insult Islam"; cancellation of Bangladesh's policy for women's development; bans on the erection of sculptures in public places, the mixing of men and women in public, candlelight vigils, and "shameless behaviour and dresses"; besides declaring Ahmadiyas as "non-Muslims." Nadia Sarmin, covering its rally for ETV, was mercilessly beaten for daring to be a woman "in a men only" event. Grievously injured, she was rescued by other journalists.

The rally in May was extremely violent. A BBC report dated 6 May 2013 cites one witness as saying that the demonstrators "were very aggressive, some people were throwing stones and the situation quickly become violent". The interim government has close and warm relations with the Hefazat. It has lifted the ban on the organisation. The Adviser for Religious Affairs, AFM Khalid Hossain, is the latter's Nayeb-e-Amir. Chief Adviser Mohammad Yunus had a long and cordial meeting on 31 August 2024 with Mamunul Haque, the organisation's head. The Hefazat is holding rallies and processions all over the country. Doubtless, neither the Jamaat nor the Hefazat has been resorting to terrorist violence. Their elevated salience, however, gives a certain respectability to fun-

fair was to be hosted in Madya Narsingpur, Kashipur Union Parishad in Narayanganj, on 22 November 2024.

The district administration, however, ordered its cancellation. According to a report in The Daily Star (23 November 2024), Hefazat-e-Islam leader Maulana Abdul Auwal had warned the administration to stop the event or face intervention by protesters. The celebration of Pahela Baishakh, the first day of the annual Bengali calendar, has been an important part of Bangladesh's cultural scenario. However, a stage constructed for the purpose was vandalised on 13 April 2025 in Chittagong city. Earlier, the district administration had permitted the organisers to hold the celebrations but reduced the timings and requested them not to include any song that would be deemed "controversial."

In Dhaka, a theatre group was all set to stage a play titled Shesher Kobita on 13 and 14 April. The authorities of the auditorium concerned, however, decided to cancel the programme on the 13th after receiving a threatening letter from a mob. The police offered protection following a public outcry. The show scheduled for 13 April was shifted to 15 April. Earlier, on 10 February 2025, a group calling itself "Towhidi Janata" attacked a publishing house's stall at Bangladesh's celebrated Amar Ekushe Boimela for displaying Taslima Nasrin's books. Instead of taking action against the attackers, police shut down the stall and detained the publisher, Shatabdi Bobo, at the fair's control room. Whether Bangladesh?

(The author is the Consulting Editor of The Pioneer. Views are personal)

Inside the Mind of a Champion

SECOND Opinion

BY RAVI VALLURI

What is the difference between the brain and the mind? While the brain is a vital physical organ within our body, the mind is the seat of consciousness — it is where thoughts, feelings, and emotions arise. And it is the mind, not just the body, that defines the greatness of an athlete. "On your marks, set, go!" — with a gunshot, the world watches as Usain Bolt blazes down the track. In the span of a few electrifying seconds, he leaves behind the competition and makes history.

What sets these titans apart from the rest? Beyond talent and training, it is the strength of their minds — their inner power — that elevates them. Their minds are like that of Ajaratashtru, a Sanskrit term for one who has no enemies, at peace with oneself and the world. This mental clarity and focus distinguish champions from others who falter under pressure or accept mediocrity as the norm. Why do many athletes freeze on the world stage?

Why do some settle for simply qualifying, for placing somewhere between fourth and tenth, rather than striving for the podium? It's not just physical preparation that separates winners from the rest — it's the mind. The mental resilience to endure, to persevere, and to focus with unflinching determination is what produces Olympic champions. We can draw

inspiration from Arjuna, the legendary archer of the Mahabharata, whose single-minded focus, humility, and faith in his mentor Dronacharya and friend Lord Krishna made him peerless.

Arjuna was not born a master; he became one by surrendering ego, trusting his training, and silencing doubt. His mind was his greatest ally — free from clutter, fear, and distraction. He truly embodied the spirit of Ajaratashtru. Contrast that with India's disappointing performance at the 2024 Paris Olympics. Despite fielding the largest contingent in our history, we finished 71st in the medal tally. The hunger to win, to dominate, or even to express the agony of defeat, often seems missing. The spirit of Citius, Altius, Fortius — faster, higher, stronger — is diminished when we don't instill in athletes the burning desire to climb the podium draped in the tricolour, national anthem playing, igniting pride across the country. A victory at the Olympics is not just personal — it has national significance. It inspires, uplifts, and can have a ripple effect across society, including in areas like the economy, education, and youth development. But for that, we need to foster not just skill but vision.

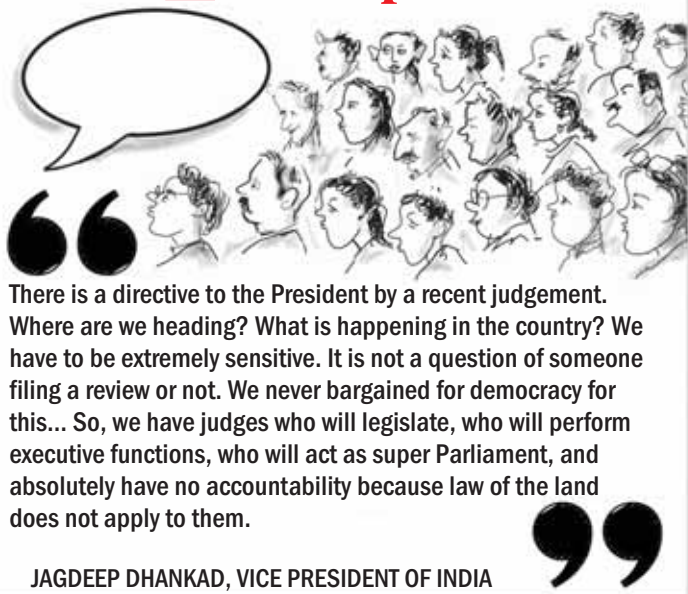
So, what are we lacking? First, a cultural shift. India is not a sporting nation. Parents often discourage children from pursuing sports, fearful of the risks and uncertainty. We lack adequate infrastructure, visionaries who can scout talent, and political will to support sports beyond cricket. How many politicians have championed the building of world-class facilities like Gachibowli Stadium in Hyderabad for other sports? Cricket dominates every sphere of Indian sports — the media, spon-

sors, public imagination. Yet even in this bleak scenario, some institutions like the Indian Railways have provided much-needed support. In Paris 2024, India secured six medals — one silver and five bronze. Shooter Manu Bhaker stood out as the first Indian woman to win an Olympic shooting medal. Her mental fortitude, her ability to thrive under pressure, was nothing short of Ajaratashtru-like. This mindset must become the norm, not the exception.

To nurture it, the Ministry of Sports must undergo a radical overhaul. We need public-private partnerships, active involvement of the armed forces and Indian Railways, and a robust CSR-driven funding model to create a sustainable ecosystem for sports. Administrators must also change their mindset. Instead of bureaucratic inertia, we need leaders who are flexible, visionary, and willing to take bold decisions. A daily regimen that includes yoga, pranayama, Sudarshan Kriya, and meditation can help in building mental strength, resilience, and focus. Countries like China and several East Asian nations already use such practices, alongside ancient philosophies and texts like Sun Tzu's Art of War, to cultivate winning mindsets in athletes. Buddha once said, "Endurance is one of the most difficult disciplines, but it is to the one who endures that the final victory comes." Victory is not accidental — it is earned by those who prepare relentlessly, physically and mentally. It is time we prepare for the Los Angeles Olympics 2028 — not tomorrow, but today.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living. Views are personal)

Leaderspeak



There is a directive to the President by a recent judgement. Where are we heading? 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... So, we have judges who will legislate, who will perform executive functions, who will act as super Parliament, and absolutely have no accountability because law of the land does not apply to them.

JAGDEEP DHANKAD, VICE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

Letters to the Editor

MGNREGA: A lifeline undermined

Madam — On April 17, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge strongly criticised the Modi government, labelling it "anti-poor" and accusing it of systematically oppressing MGNREGA workers. He demanded an increase in the minimum wage to ₹400 per day and an extension of guaranteed employment to 150 days annually under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS).

Despite recommendations from both the Joint Parliamentary Committee and the 2023 high-level committee led by Amarjeet Sinha, the government has failed to raise the daily wage meaningfully. Instead, it continues to impose restrictions — such as mandatory Aadhaar-based payments — and has allocated the lowest MGNREGA budget in the last decade relative to the overall Union Budget. MGNREGA was originally introduced by the Congress Party as a safety net for the poorest families in rural India.

Today, that legacy is under threat. If the government genuinely cares for rural India, it must adopt the two key demands: ₹400 per day as minimum wage and 150 days of guaranteed work per year.

In conclusion, the government must act decisively to uphold MGNREGA's founding purpose. Adopting the demands for ₹400 daily wages and 150 workdays annually is essential to protect rural livelihoods and restore dignity to India's poorest. Anything less would betray the scheme's intent — and the people it aims to serve.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Funding threatens academic freedom

Madam — As someone who closely follows the intersection of politics and education, I find former President Trump's decision to freeze over \$2.2 billion in funding to Harvard University deeply troubling. The freeze was triggered by Harvard's refusal to comply with the White House's demands — to monitor pro-Palestinian protests, revise diversity policies, and scrutinise foreign scholars.

Harvard, led by President Alan Garber, rightly resisted, citing violations of academic freedom and the First Amendment. This isn't just about one university; it's about the growing use of state power to intimidate academic institutions.

When funding is used as a weapon to enforce political conformity, we edge dangerously close to authoritarianism. While concerns about hate speech or foreign influence are valid, they must be addressed through balanced, lawful means — not by bulldozing university autonomy. Campuses should foster debate, not silence.

True leadership is measured by its tolerance for dissent — not its impulse to crush it. In threatening Harvard's funding, the government undermines academic freedom and sets a chilling precedent for all universities. Disagreement must not be silenced by coercion.

In a democracy, campuses must remain spaces for open inquiry, not instruments of political control. Freedom of thought is not negotiable — it's foundational.

BHAGWANTHADANI | MUMBAI

The shame of trafficking

Madam — The Supreme Court's recent expression of dismay over a newborn trafficking case is a sobering reminder that 'son preference' continues to plague Indian society. In this case, a newborn was purchased for ₹4 lakh simply because the buyer "wanted a son." The Court rightly stated that hospitals must face immediate licence cancellation in such cases.

This mindset fuels child trafficking, sex-selective abortions, and violence against women. With India's sex ratio at birth (933 girls per 1,000 boys) still alarmingly skewed, we are witnessing the long-term damage of systemic gender bias.

Add to that the daily average of 1,200 crimes against women in 2022, and the picture turns bleak. There is a lesson to be learned from South Korea, which successfully normalised its skewed sex ratio through emotionally resonant campaigns like Daughters Are More Compassionate.

Public messaging, school curricula, and media initiatives helped shift mindsets — not just laws. India must embrace a similar strategy — one that reshapes hearts and minds. Women like Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee, and Delhi CM Rekha Gupta prove that daughters are not burdens — they are the nation's future.

SRINIVAS MADHAV | HYDERABAD

WAQF AMENDMENT ACT: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR DIALOGUE

The Supreme Court's observations regarding the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025, have brought much-needed legal scrutiny to what has largely been a media-driven, politically charged issue. For months, we were bombarded with claims that the original Waqf Act of 1995 led to unchecked land acquisition by the Muslim community, necessitating urgent amendments.

However, the discourse lacked depth. There was little to no engagement from legal scholars or constitutional experts. Instead, television debates fuelled fear and division, with repeated claims that Waqf properties endangered national interests. Though passed by Parliament through procedural means and majority strength, the Amendment Act seems more symbolic than substantive. It has triggered a surge of petitions in the Supreme Court — and rightly so. Legislation of this nature should be grounded in law, not in populist fervour. The real tragedy is the deepening communal divide this has caused. A mat-

ter of such sensitivity could have been resolved through inclusive dialogue and mutual understanding. Instead, we are left with increased polarisation and unrest. As Mark Twain once said, "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect." In conclusion, the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025, stands as a cautionary tale of what happens when legislative action prioritises political optics over constitutional rigour. The Supreme Court's involvement offers a glimmer of hope that legal reason will prevail over populist narratives.

True progress lies not in reactionary amendments, but in fostering inclusive conversations that respect both religious rights and national interests. As citizens, we must demand more thoughtful governance — one that seeks unity, not division. Let this moment serve as a reminder that justice, not majoritarian sentiment, must remain the cornerstone of a healthy democracy.

AVINASH GODBOLEY DEWAS

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

The Saudis: Peacekeepers or power brokers?

In a transformation as ambitious as it is paradoxical, Saudi Arabia is rebranding itself from an austere theocracy to a cosmopolitan architect of global diplomacy. This evolution raises a fundamental question: can a state rewrite its past without reckoning with it?

FIRST
Column

The transformation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from a puritanical theocracy to an aspiring architect of global peace is one of the most paradoxical and politically engineered evolutions of the modern era. Far from the deserts where Wahhabism first struck its austere roots, the Kingdom now positions itself as a mediator between global powers, a patron of modernity, and a crucible of cross-cultural aspiration. Yet beneath the glistening architecture of NEOM and the diplomatic smiles of peace summits lies a stratified narrative — one obscured by revisionist theatre and gilded silence.

Saudi Arabia's foundation in 1932 under King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud was not merely a unification of tribal territories; it was a theological consolidation. The strategic pact with Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, brokered generations earlier, transformed Islam into an instrument of statecraft. As the CIA Handbook observed in 1972, "The Saudi Government is a monarchy based on a fusion of secular and religious authority, with the King at its apex." The same report stated, "The royal family dominates both the political and economic life of the country," a candid admission of dynastic monopolisation. Governance was less institutional than charismatic, mediated through familial bonds, tribal allegiances, and theocratic endorsement.

The Kingdom's export of Wahhabism, particularly from the 1960s onward, became one of the most under-scrutinised forms of ideological colonisation. Flush with petrodollars after the 1973 oil embargo — an embargo that King Faisal declared in defence of Arab dignity, stating, "Our oil is our weapon, and we will use it to protect our Arab rights" — Saudi Arabia embarked on a global proselytisation project. Mosques, madrassas, and clerical scholarships were funded from Islamabad to Jakarta, Sarajevo to Khartoum, shaping generations in an image that often opposed indigenous Islamic traditions. A lesser-known revelation from a declassified 1981 US State Department cable noted: "Saudi financial support to Islamic institutions in Southeast Asia has significantly altered the religious landscape, prioritising doctrinal rigidity over cultural synthesis."

The domestic reality, too, remained draconian under the veneer of religiosity. The 1979 Grand Mosque seizure by a fundamentalist group paradoxically catalysed a more regressive clampdown, as the royal family tightened its alliance with the religious establishment to legitimise its authority. It is telling that King Fahd, who in the 1980s declared, "We will build the future without abandoning our past," presided over an era where ministries functioned as courtiers rather than administrators. As noted in a 1972 CIA internal report, "Much of the bureaucracy remains inefficient, with key decisions often bypassing formal channels and handled by royal intermediaries."

The paradox deepens when juxtaposing Saudi Arabia's financing of foreign conflicts with its self-portrayal as a stabiliser. The Kingdom, directly or through proxies, has been implicated in the fomen-



NILANTHA
ILANGAMUWA

helped perpetuate. This performative peacemaking is a diplomatic palimpsest, rewriting its culpability in real time.

Yet perhaps nowhere is the ideological volte-face more pronounced than under the stewardship of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). A man who rose to prominence not through military conquest or scholarly erudition but via internal court

tation of conflict zones including Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Libya. In Yemen, particularly, its military intervention since 2015 has left an indelible humanitarian scar. UN estimates suggest over 375,000 deaths, mostly from indirect causes. Despite this, Riyadh now courts global opinion as a peace broker, hosting summits that purport to end the very conflicts it

“SAUDI FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA HAS SIGNIFICANTLY ALTERED THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE, PRIORITISING DOCTRINAL RIGIDITY OVER CULTURAL SYNTHESIS.”

calculus and the invocation of modernist necessity, MBS has become the emblem of Saudi Arabia's neo-nationalist rebranding. His statement in 2017, "We will not waste 30 years of our lives dealing with extremist ideologies. We will destroy them now and immediately" serves as both mea culpa and strategic distancing. It is a rhetorical exfoliation of the kingdom's historical role in incubating the very ideologies it now condemns.

What makes this transformation most paradoxical is the simultaneous consolidation of autocracy. The same MBS who champions futuristic cities and cultural liberalisation also orchestrated the arrest of dissenting clerics, feminists, and businessmen — a campaign sanitised by the euphemism of anticorruption.

The chilling assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul became a gruesome watermark of the state's coercive architecture. This contradiction was prophetically foreshadowed by King Faisal decades

earlier, who once mused, "Injustice cannot be concealed, and one day it will speak."

In global diplomacy, Saudi Arabia is no longer content with petrodollar influence; it now seeks epistemic legitimacy. The launch of NEOM, a city touted as the world's first cognitive metropolis, symbolises this ambition — yet, emblematic of the new Saudi state, it is erected upon contested land and enforced silence. Beyond NEOM, the Kingdom's financial outreach has extended to international media, sports, universities, and even Hollywood, buying not just partnerships but narratives. This is cultural laundering masquerading as soft power.

Saudi Arabia's overtures toward mediating the Russia-Ukraine conflict, brokering a rapprochement between Iran and Arab states, and its increasing engagement with China and Israel signify not merely a regional aspiration, but a superpower mimicry. In February 2023, Riyadh hosted talks to ease tensions in Sudan, while simultaneously continuing arms imports that fuel its military-industrial complex. As a 2022 report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute noted, "Saudi Arabia remains one of the top five global arms importers, despite its increasing involvement in peace dialogues."

This dualism is not new but is now consciously choreographed. The kingdom no longer hides its contradictions; it flaunts them as strengths. It wishes to be judged not by the tenets of liberal democracy, but by a self-fashioned rubric of efficacy, vision, and global brokerage.

And in this, it has found unlikely endorsements. Elon Musk, after touring Saudi ventures, declared them "an exciting vision for civilisation". Goldman Sachs and SoftBank speak of "unprecedented opportunities". Even sceptics are drawn to the economic gravity Riyadh exerts.

But can a state undergo ontological transformation without historical accountability? Can it broker peace while archives of complicity remain sealed? The Kingdom's diplomatic epistles, such as the declassified 1973 letter from the US President to King Faisal praising him as "a voice of wisdom and reason," read today as documents of strategic appeasement, not genuine admiration. The phrase, "Your personal efforts to bring moderation and stability to the region are of great significance," thinly veils the realpolitik that underpinned Western support for autocracy.

Indeed, what Saudi Arabia seeks now is not reinvention but redemption. It seeks to transmute petrodollar moral hazard into soft power prestige. In doing so, it exploits the cognitive dissonance of the global order: that authoritarianism, when efficient and well-funded, can be tolerated, even admired. Perhaps this is the Kingdom's most radical export yet — a model where ideological elasticity replaces democratic legitimacy.

(The writer is a Colombo-based journalist. Views are personal)

The cost of the skies: The risk and reality of fighter flying

The recent crash of an Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter jet, which tragically claimed the life of a young pilot, has once again stirred public concern and debate over flight safety and the risks faced by those in uniform

A few days ago, the Indian Air Force (IAF) suffered a devastating loss when a fighter jet crashed during an operational sortie. The tragic accident claimed the life of a young fighter pilot, a promising individual in the prime of his life and career. The exact cause of the incident is still under investigation by a Court of Inquiry, and conclusions will only be drawn after a thorough examination.

While we collectively grieve the loss of a brave soul and extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and comrades, the incident has once again ignited public debate — particularly on social media — about the IAF's safety record. Many have questioned why, after decades of technological advancements and operational experience, such accidents continue to occur. With each modern fighter aircraft costing upward of ₹500 crore, the financial burden is immense. Yet, even more valuable are the human lives put at risk and, at times, tragically lost.

This article attempts to offer readers an insight into the world of fighter pilots — a world often viewed as glamorous from afar but fraught with danger, discipline, and unyielding demands. It also seeks to dispel the widespread misconception that the Air Force forces its personnel to fly outdated or poorly maintained aircraft.

Fighter Flying Is Dangerous

To begin with, fighter flying is among the most high-risk professions in the world. Pilots operate incredibly powerful machines weighing up to 40,000 kg and powered by engines capable of producing over 25,000 kgf of thrust.

Achieving maximum performance from such a complex aircraft requires seamless coordination between the pilot, the aircraft, and multiple supporting agencies on the ground. Even a minor error in judgment or execution can have catastrophic consequences, especially during air combat.

Fighter pilots are selected after a rigorous evaluation of their flying skills, temperament, and psychological makeup. Qualities such as mental agility, fast decision-making, situational awareness, and emotional resilience are non-negotiable. Only after years of intensive training are they considered fit for combat missions.

Even during peacetime, these pilots undergo combat training that mirrors the conditions of actual warfare as closely as possible — minus the use of live weaponry. Every day in the cockpit is a test of their physical endurance and mental sharpness.

Camaraderie and Competition

Flying in formation, especially during combat training, demands absolute trust among pilots. Each member must perform at their best — not just for personal safety but for the team. There's an unspoken



RAJIV
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but powerful mix of pride, ego, and responsibility. No one wants to be the weak link, and this drives pilots to push the limits of their aircraft and themselves.

Air combat is binary, there are no partial victories. You either prevail, or you are outmanoeuvred. This stark reality instils a relentless drive for excellence and perfection.

Fitness: The Hidden Demands

Maintaining peak physical condition is critical. Fighter pilots regularly train to increase their G-tolerance, which is crucial during the high-speed, tight turns of air combat.

Even with G-suits, seasoned pilots can experience forces up to 8-9 times their body weight. The stress on the human body is enormous, and those unac-

customed to it can lose consciousness.

Even minor illnesses such as a cold can impair judgment or sensory performance and are grounds for grounding a pilot. Strict rules govern alcohol consumption and sleep routines — standards summed up by the phrase "12 hours between bottle and throttle." Flight fitness is constantly monitored under the supervision of aero-medical experts.

Practice and Precision

Each training mission is carefully reviewed post-flight. Advanced tools allow for detailed debriefing, helping pilots analyse their performance, correct errors, and refine tactics. This ensures that when a real combat scenario arises, the pilot is ready for the critical moment when an enemy target appears in the radar scope.

Mistakes in modern warfare can be fatal — not just personally, but collectively. In the era of Beyond Visual Range (BVR) combat, where pilots often engage targets they cannot see, the risk of fratricide, or "blue on blue" incidents, increases. Identifying targets cor-

rectly in a high-pressure, information-dense environment demands exceptional clarity and focus.

The Systems in Play

Weather is another unpredictable factor. While missions are authorised based on available weather data, conditions can rapidly change mid-flight, presenting fresh challenges during takeoff, flight, or landing. Thunderstorms, turbulence, or poor visibility are all part of a fighter pilot's reality. To mitigate risks, the IAF, like other global air forces, uses an Operational Risk Management (ORM) system. This considers multiple variables, from pilot experience and aircraft condition to mission type and weather — to determine if a sortie should be authorised.

Even once airborne, the pilot must juggle a host of responsibilities. From interpreting radar and electronic warfare systems to tracking formation positions and navigating terrain at 900 kmph just a few hundred feet off the ground, everything hinges on razor-sharp timing. A single lapse can be fatal. At such speeds, there are no second chances.

Team Effort Behind the Scenes

A fighter pilot never flies alone in the truest sense. An extensive support ecosystem underpins every mission. Engineers, technicians, air traffic controllers, radar operators, and safety crews work in synchrony to ensure aircraft are airworthy and operations are smooth. Even older aircraft are rigorously maintained to official standards. The notion that pilots are forced to fly "junk" aircraft is baseless and unfair to the dedicated personnel who keep these machines operational. Still, aircraft can develop snags mid-air. Pilots are trained to respond to emergencies calmly and quickly, often practising drills in simulators. In worst-case scenarios, they may have to eject to save their own lives. While it's heartbreaking to abandon a multi-crore aircraft, saving a trained pilot — whose training takes 6-7 years and enormous investment — takes precedence.

Flight Safety: A Mission

Despite the best efforts, accidents do occur. They are rarely due to a single error; rather, they're often the result of multiple, layered failures — a concept known as the Swiss Cheese Model of accidents. A hole in the system, hidden until it aligns with others, can lead to tragedy.

The IAF maintains a robust flight safety mechanism. Every incident is examined thoroughly, and lessons are incorporated into procedures and even future aircraft designs. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), often forged in the aftermath of loss, are sacred and followed rigorously. Phasing out a fleet of aircraft is a strategic decision, balancing operational needs, cost implications, and national security. Not every accident warrants the retirement of an entire platform. Over time, accident rates do fall — thanks to continuous risk management, technological upgrades, and relentless learning from both successes and failures.

The Reality of Service

Behind the image of swaggering pilots in sunglasses lies a life of discipline, danger, and determination. Fighter pilots sacrifice comfort, health, and sometimes their lives — not for glory, but for duty. It's important for the public to understand that accidents often happen not due to negligence, but despite stringent precautions.

It is never as simple as flipping a switch or grounding a fleet. As the saying goes, "The safest place for a ship is in the harbour, but that's not where it's meant to be." Similarly, fighter aircraft and the warriors who fly them are meant to be in the sky, safeguarding our nation. Treading safely, always — but boldly.

(The writer is an Air Vice Marshal (Retired). Views are personal)

DGTR issues final findings in 13 anti-dumping cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The commerce ministry's investigation arm DGTR has issued final findings in as many as 13 anti-dumping cases, mostly against China, in March, according to the Commerce Ministry. The ministry also said that in addition to this, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) has started 11 investigations in March. The final findings have been issued against dumping of products such as vitamin-A palmitate, insoluble sulphur, aluminium foil, plastic processing machines, digital offset printing plates and decor paper. Out of the 13 cases, 12 are against China. The other countries included in these

probes include European Union, Japan, Taiwan, Russia and Thailand. DGTR, under the commerce ministry, is the apex authority for administering all trade remedial measures, including antidumping, countervailing duties and safeguard measures. These measures help deal with the rising incidences of unfair trade practices and to provide a level playing field to the domestic industry. The role of the directorate has become crucial in the backdrop of sweeping tariffs imposed by the US and China on each other, as high import duties are making goods more expensive in both countries. And this would lead to diversion of goods into countries like India. While the US has imposed 245 per cent against China. In retaliation, Beijing has

slapped 125 per cent tariff on goods coming from Washington. The government has set up an inter-ministerial import surge monitoring group to strictly monitor imports. In the last fiscal, India's exports to China contracted 14.5 per cent to \$14.25 billion as against \$16.66 billion in 2023-24. The imports, however, rose by 11.52 per cent in 2024-25 to \$113.45 billion against \$101.73 billion in 2023-24. The trade deficit with China has widened by about 17 per cent to \$99.2 billion in the last fiscal from \$85.07 billion in 2023-24. China continued to be the second largest trading partner of India with \$127.7 billion two-way commerce in 2024-25 as compared to \$118.4 billion in 2023-24.

Duty imposed on steel, aluminium due to national security: US to India in WTO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The US has informed the global trade body WTO that the decision to impose tariffs on steel and aluminium, was based on national security grounds and should not be considered as safeguard measures, according to a communication. The US shared this response with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) after India requested consultations under the WTO's Safeguards Agreement on April 11 with America. India has said that notwithstanding the USA's characterisation of these measures as security measures, they are in essence safeguard measures. It has also stated that America has failed to notify the WTO Committee on Safeguards under a provision of the Agreement on Safeguards (AoS) on tak-

ing a decision to apply safeguard measures. "The US notes that the premise for India's request for consultations under Article 12.3 of the Agreement on Safeguards is that the tariffs are safeguard measures, the (US) President imposed the tariffs on steel and aluminum pursuant to Section 232, under which the President determined that tariffs are necessary to adjust imports of steel and aluminum articles that threaten to impair the national security of the US," America has said in a communication, dated April 17, to the trade body. The US also said that Section 232 is a national security statute, and the tariffs are being kept in place under the security exception allowed under a provision of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994. It added that the tariffs were not imposed under a provision of the Trade Act of 1974, which is the law

under which the US imposes safeguard measures. "The United States is not maintaining these actions pursuant to the safeguards or emergency action provision, these actions are not safeguard measures and, therefore, there is no basis to conduct consultations under the Agreement on Safeguards with respect to these measures," the US added. "Accordingly, India's request for consultations, has no basis in the Agreement on Safeguards," it said adding "nonetheless, we are open to discuss this or any other issue with India". However, it said that they are open to discuss this issue with India. "Any discussions regarding the tariffs would not be under the Agreement on Safeguards and would be without prejudice to our view that the tariffs are not safeguard measures," it added.

EPFO set to launch version 3.0 with ATM fund withdrawals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ranchi

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is set to undergo a major digital overhaul to enhance services for over nine crore beneficiaries, with Version 3.0 set to launch by May or June, Union Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Friday. In coming days, EPFO beneficiaries will be able to withdraw funds from ATMs due to faster processing of claims on the newer Version 3.0, Mandaviya said in an interview with media. "EPFO will soon implement Version 3.0 with the help of a robust IT platform to provide seamless and simplified services, including auto-claim settlements, digital corrections, and ATM-based fund withdrawals. The overhaul is aimed at making EPFO accessible and efficient," he said. According to Mandaviya, the new version will eliminate the need for complex and lengthy form-filling processes or physical visits for claims and corrections. Beneficiaries will be able to update their EPFO accounts and mandates using OTP verification and conveniently monitor their pension entitlements or withdraw funds. Due to fast settlement of claims, the funds would be quickly available in the subscriber's bank account, he added. He said EPFO currently holds a corpus of Rs 27 lakh crore with a sovereign guarantee and offers 8.25 per cent

interest. The Centralised Pension Payment System, already in place, benefits over 78 lakh pensioners by allowing them to receive pensions in any bank account across the country, removing the earlier requirement of maintaining accounts in designated zonal banks. The minister said the government is also considering the integration of various social security schemes, including the Atal Pension Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Bima Yojana, and Shramik Jan Dhan Yojana, to streamline and strengthen pension coverage. In a move to enhance healthcare access for workers, Mandaviya said that beneficiaries under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) will soon be able to receive free medical treatment at hospitals empanelled under the Ayushman Bharat scheme. In addition, designated charity-run private hospitals will also be brought under its ambit to expand social security coverage. Currently, ESIC provides free treatment to about 18 crore people through 165 hospitals, over 1,500 dispensaries and around 2,000 empanelled hospitals. Mandaviya said the EPFO has significantly improved its grievance redressal mechanism following the rollout of Version 2.0.1, with complaints being reduced to less than half. With the introduction of EPFO 3.0, the organisation aims to further improve accessibility and efficiency.

Gold imports rise 192 per cent to \$4.47 billion

PRESS TRUSTS OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

After registering negative growth, the country's gold imports, which impact Current Account Deficit (CAD), jumped by 192.13 per cent to \$4.47 billion in March, on account of significant increase in the prices of the yellow metal according to commerce ministry data. Gold imports stood at \$1.53 billion in January 2024. Cumulatively, during April-March 2024-25, the inbound shipments rose 27.27 per cent to \$58 billion against \$45.54 billion in 2023-24. The increase in imports also indicates strong investor confidence in the precious metal as a safe asset. The other reasons include asset diversification towards gold due to global uncertainties, increasing demand from banks, and jump in prices. On April 17, the gold prices rose by ₹70 to hit yet another record high of ₹98,170 per 10 grams in the national capital. The prices soared to record highs due to a weaker dollar, escalating trade war tensions, and growing concerns over global economic growth following US President Donald Trump's tariff announcements. However, silver prices plunged by ₹1,400 to ₹98,000 per kg. The white metal had settled at ₹99,400 per kg in the previous market close. Silver imports in March contracted by 85.4 per cent to \$119.3 million. It was down 11.24 per cent year-on-year in 2024-25 to \$4.82 billion. Switzerland is the largest source of gold



imports, with about 40 per cent share, followed by the UAE (over 16 per cent) and South Africa (about 10 per cent). The precious metal accounts for eight per cent of the country's total imports. In volume terms, the imports dipped to 757.15 tonnes in 2024-25 against 795.32 tonnes in 2023-24. The gold imports in February were down by about 62 per cent, while it rose by 40.8 per cent in January and 55.39 per cent in December 2024. The jump in gold imports pushed the country's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) to \$21.54 billion in March. It touched an all-time high of \$282.82 billion in the last fiscal. India is the world's second-biggest gold

consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry. Gems and jewellery exports during the month rose by 10.62 per cent year-on-year to about \$3 billion. It was however dipped by 8.84 per cent to USD 29.82 billion in 2024-25 from USD 32.7 billion in 2023-24. India's CAD inched up to \$115 billion, or 1.1 per cent of GDP, in the December quarter from \$104 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) in the year-ago period, mainly due to higher trade deficit. It widened to \$37.0 billion (1.3 per cent of GDP) during April-December 2024 from \$30.6 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) during the corresponding period of last year.

No decision on nationwide rollout of satellite-based tolling: MoRTH

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) on Friday clarified that no decision has been taken on the nationwide implementation of satellite-based tolling from May 1. The ministry's response came after some sections of the media reported that a satellite-based tolling system would be launched from May 1, 2025 and will replace the existing FASTag-based toll collection system. In a statement, the ministry said that to enable seamless, barrier-free movement of vehicles through toll plazas and reduce travel time, an 'Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)-FASTag-based barrier-less tolling system' will be implemented at selected toll plazas. According to the statement, the advanced tolling system will combine ANPR technology, that will identify vehicles by reading their number plates, and the existing 'FASTag system' that uses Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) for toll deduction. Under this, vehicles will be charged based on their identification through high performance ANPR cameras and FASTag readers, without needing to stop at the toll plazas. In case of non-compliance, e-notices will be served to the violators, non-payment of which may result in suspension of FASTag and other VAHAN related penalties.

New traffic radar rules to ensure accurate speed enforcement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The government on Friday said new regulations requiring mandatory verification and stamping of traffic radar equipment will be implemented from July 1 to improve road safety and enforcement accuracy across the country. The Consumer Affairs Ministry has notified the rules following extensive consultations with stakeholders, including the Indian Institute of Legal Metrology, Regional Reference Laboratories, manufacturers, and vehicle certification organisations. "These rules will come into force from July 1, 2025, providing sufficient time for industries and enforcement agencies to comply with the provisions," the ministry said in a statement. The new rules, which fall under the Legal Metrology (General) Rules, 2011, will apply to "microwave Doppler radar equipment" widely utilised for measuring vehicle speeds on roads. These rules specify detailed technical and safety requirements, ensuring proper calibration, stable operation under various environmental conditions and protection against tampering. Such measures will foster a culture of technological reliability and legal accountability. The new framework requires all speed measurement devices to undergo verification and receive official stamps before deployment. This process aims to guarantee precise readings for speed and distance measurements, crucial for traffic law enforcement. The implementation of these rules provides significant benefits to all stakeholders across the board. For the common citizen, the mandatory verification and stamping of radar-based speed measurement equipment will ensure the accurate enforcement of speed limits, thereby preventing unfair penalties and significantly enhancing road safety. For industries, particularly those involved in manufacturing radar-based speed-measuring devices, the new rules establish a clear technical and regulatory framework aligned with international standards. For law enforcement agencies, the introduction of verified and stamped devices ensures a higher degree of operational effectiveness and credibility.

Strange sell-off in dollar raises spectre of investors losing trust in US under Trump

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Among the threats tariffs pose to the US economy, none may be as strange as the sell-off in the dollar. Currencies rise and fall all the time because of inflation fears, central bank moves and other factors. But economists worry that the recent drop in the dollar is so dramatic that it reflects something more ominous as President Donald Trump tries to reshape global trade: a loss of confidence in the US. The dollar's dominance in cross-border trade and as a safe haven has been nurtured by administrations of both parties for decades because it helps keep US borrowing costs down and allows Washington to project power abroad — enormous advantages that could possibly disappear if faith in the US was damaged. "Global trust and reliance on the dollar was built up over a half century or more," says University of California, Berkeley, economist Barry Eichengreen. "But it can be lost in the blink of an eye." Since mid-January, the dollar has fallen 9 per cent against a basket of currencies, a rare and steep decline, to its lowest level in three years. Many investors spooked by Trump don't think the dollar will be pushed quickly from its position as the world's reserve currency, instead expecting more of a slow decline. But even that is scary enough, given the benefits that

would be lost. With much of world's goods exchanged in dollars, demand for the currency has stayed strong even as the US has doubled federal debt in a dozen years and does other things that would normally send investors fleeing. That has allowed the US government, consumers and businesses to borrow at unnaturally low rates, which has helped speed economic growth and lift standards of living. The dollar lost more than five per cent against the euro and pound and six per cent against the yen since early April. Dollar dominance also allows the US to push around other countries like Venezuela, Iran and Russia by locking them out of a currency they need to buy and sell with others. Now that "exorbitant privilege," as economists call it, is suddenly at risk. "The safe haven properties of the dollar are being eroded," said Deutsch Bank in a note to clients earlier this month warning of a "confidence crisis." Added a more circumspect report by Capital Economics, "It is no longer hyperbole to say that the dollar's reserve status and broader dominant role is at least somewhat in question." Traditionally, the dollar would

strengthen as tariffs sink demand for foreign products. But the dollar not only failed to strengthen this time, it fell, puzzling economists and hurting consumers. The dollar lost more than 5 per cent against the euro and pound, and 6 per cent against the yen since early April. As any American traveler abroad knows, you can buy more with a stronger dollar and less with a weaker one. Now the price of French wine and South Korean electronics and a host of other imports could cost more not only due to tariffs but a weaker currency, too. And any loss of safe-haven status could hit US consumers in another way: Higher rates for mortgages and car financing deals as lenders demand more interest for the added risk. More worrisome is possible higher interest rates on the ballooning US federal debt, which is already at a risky 120 per cent of US annual economic output. "Most countries with that debt to GDP would cause a major crisis and the only reason we get away with it is that the world needs dollars to trade with," says Benn Steil, an economist at the Council on Foreign Relations. "At some point people are going to look seriously at alternatives to the dollar." They already have, with a little help from a US economic rival. China has been striking yuan-only trading deals with Brazil for agricultural products, Russia for oil and South Korea for other goods for years.

Our technology products now globally respected: Vaishnav



Ashwini Vaishnav speaking during inauguration of the Mechanical Innovation Park at VVDN Campus in Gurugram

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Manesar

India's electronics manufacturing and export have grown multi-fold in the last decade driven by policies and incentives, and the Made-in-India products now command global recognition given their reliability and respect for IP rights, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Friday. Inaugurating VVDN Technologies' SMT (Surface Mount Technology) Line at Manesar, the Minister noted that electronics manufacturing in India has risen 5-fold in the last decade topping ₹11 lakh crore. Exports have grown 6 times during this period, crossing ₹3.25 lakh crore. The entire ecosystem has spurred 25 lakh jobs,

Vaishnav, Minister for Electronics and IT said. "In global market, Indian products, given their reliability and respect for IP (intellectual property) rights, have an advantage, and it is being recognised globally," he said. India's design capabilities have paved the way for complex products — from AI cameras to automobile electronics and telecom network equipment to power electronics — being designed here, adding to India's sheen as an electronics hub, he said. "Now addition of electronics components incentives, approved by Cabinet recently, will improve depth of electronics manufacturing ecosystem, leading to more opportunities," the Minister asserted.

Sensex, Nifty surge six per cent amid Tariff pause, foreign inflows

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

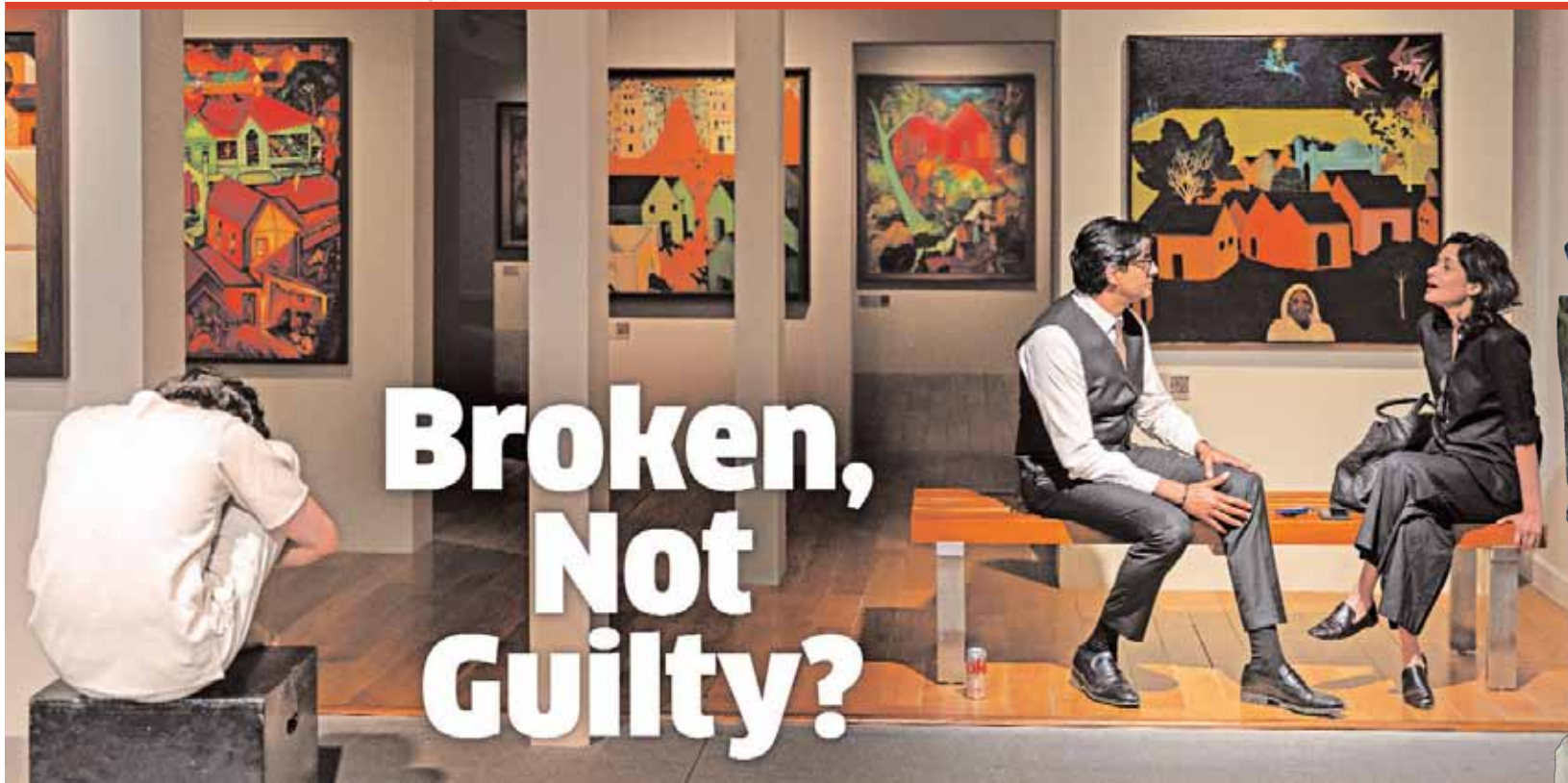
Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged more than 6 per cent in the last four trading sessions, as a temporary pause on tariffs by the US, return of foreign investors to the domestic market and prediction of an above-normal rainfall in the upcoming southwest monsoon season lifted investors' sentiments. Moreover, retail inflation dipping to a nearly six-year low also raised hopes for a third rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), according to market experts. In the last four trading days, the BSE benchmark index jumped 4,706.05 points or 6.37 per cent, and the NSE Nifty surged 1,452.5 points or 6.48 per

cent. Accordingly, investors' wealth rallied by ₹25.77 lakh crore to ₹4,19,60,046.14 crore (USD 4.90 trillion) in the past four days. Stock markets are closed on Friday for 'Good Friday'. According to Vishnu Kant Upadhyay, AVP, Research and Advisory, Master Capital Services, several factors like foreign fund inflows, temporary pause on tariffs by the US and further monetary easing by the RBI have converged to drive the recent sharp rally in the Indian markets despite global trade uncertainty. "In the last three trading sessions, foreign portfolio investors purchased over USD one billion worth of Indian equities after a prolonged selling streak. Further, the announcement of a temporary pause on tariffs by the US and

potential negotiations with countries also led to the relief rally," Upadhyay said. Moreover, the RBI's 25 bps rate cut on April 9, and its shift of stance from "neutral" to "accommodative" added fresh momentum to the equity market, as investors priced in further monetary easing, he noted. On April 9, the RBI cut interest rates for a second consecutive time. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), consisting of three central bank members and an equal number of external members, voted unanimously to cut the repurchase or repo rate by 25 basis points to six per cent. RBI changed its policy stance to "accommodative" from "neutral", indicating the possibility of more rate cuts in future, Governor Sanjay Malhotra said,

while announcing the MPC decisions. Marketmen are also betting big on upcoming southwest monsoon as according to the India Meteorological Department, India is expected to get above-normal rainfall in the upcoming southwest monsoon season, which raised hopes for a bountiful harvest for the largely agri-based economy. Echoing similar sentiments, Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking said the rally in the domestic equities was primarily fueled by optimism surrounding the deferral of tariffs and recent exemptions on select products, raising hopes for potential negotiations that could mitigate the impact on global trade. "As the week progressed, market participants responded positively to a slew of favorable develop-

ments, including updates on a normal monsoon, easing retail inflation — which raised hopes for potential policy rate cuts — and the absence of any major negative surprises from global markets," Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. In the upcoming week, all eyes will be on the earnings reports, Mishra said. Globally, any updates related to tariffs and their potential impact on world markets will remain in focus, he added. On the domestic macroeconomic front, retail inflation dipped marginally to a nearly six-year low of 3.34 per cent in March due to decline in prices of vegetables, eggs and protein-rich items, raising hope for a third rate cut by the RBI as it remains below the median target of four per cent.



Broken, Not Guilty?

What if the truth is buried beneath layers of trauma, power, and silence? Can justice survive?

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

There are plays, and then there are experiences that etch themselves into the psyche, **SHADOWed** etches. From the moment the first line is spoken, the atmosphere tightens. Something powerful has begun, and once it takes hold, it grips attention and refuses to loosen its hold. The play compels a closer look at truths often pushed aside. Produced by Samar Sarila, an actor, writer and producer known for his work in both theatre and film, including the acclaimed Viceroy's House and Turning 30 and Vidushi Mehra, an acclaimed actress and theatre director who has also made

her mark in films like Raees and No One Killed Jessica, **SHADOWed** is a work of depth and relevance, confronting uncomfortable truths with skill and passion. In a world saturated with headlines and fleeting digital outrage, **SHADOWed** cuts through with startling clarity.

The courtroom becomes a battleground, not just for justice, but for sanity, vulnerability and memory. Inspired by the 1996 Hollywood classic *Primal Fear*, the production has been adapted for the Indian stage with precision and urgency, rooting itself in the emotionally charged backdrop of contemporary New Delhi. At its core is Aaryan, an 18-year-old, unnervingly calm, accused of murdering his influential uncle, Minister Siddhant Shah. The city reels at the crime, but the real unease lies within the trial. This is no standard legal drama. It is a question: why would someone so young commit such an act? And deeper still—did he?

Victor Roy (Samar Sarila), the defence attorney, arrives not only with arguments but with inner turmoil that simmers just beneath the surface. Battling his past while fighting for his client's

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

SHADOWed stands as a necessary conversation, a story that grips from the first moment and stays in the mind long after the final scene.

The cast delivers a space for collective reckoning. Theatre like this should not just be watched — it should be talked about, dissected, and remembered.

future, he commands the stage with quiet intensity. Opposing him is Jaya Anand (Vidushi Mehra), composed and firm, a prosecutor determined to uncover the truth. Between them stands Dr Vineeta Varma (Preeti Agarwal Mehta), a clinical psychiatrist whose analysis has the power to sway both the court and the conscience.

The writing is lean, powerful and emotionally resonant. The story pierces deep, asking: Can trauma rewrite memory? Is guilt ever truly clear? What lies beneath the silence of a teenager accused of murder?

Samar Sarila brings gravitas to Victor Roy, inhabiting the role with layered restraint. Vidushi Mehra, in a riveting performance, commands attention with her stillness and strength. Preeti Agarwal quiet power, never backing down, always calculating, yet never cold. Shivam Sahni is chillingly effective. His stillness is disarming. One moment evokes empathy, the next, doubt.

Every aspect of **SHADOWed** is crafted to focus on the raw emotional core of its characters. There is no softening of themes—sexual abuse, power dynamics, and mental health are addressed with honesty and courage. The audience is not handed easy conclusions. Instead, they are offered a mirror held up to society, asking: where do compassion and accountability meet?

This production is not comfortable. It is not predictable. And that is its strength. In a city known for its cultural offerings, this one rises high on the list. It is one of the most stirring productions seen on stage in recent times. This is the kind of theatre that shakes the ground it stands on.

SHADOWed | Performance Details
VENUE: Alliance Française, Lodhi Road, New Delhi
PUBLIC SHOWS: April 19, 20, 26 & 27, 2025
 4:00 PM & 7:00 PM



A Visual that Sings stories

BY TEAM VIVA

There's something instinctive about the way music and art speak to us — wordless, yet deeply understood. Both stir emotion, trigger memory, and offer connection. When the two come together, the impact is immediate. **Bambai Se Aaya Mera Dost** captures this fusion with striking clarity, creating an exhibition that's as evocative as it is unforgettable.

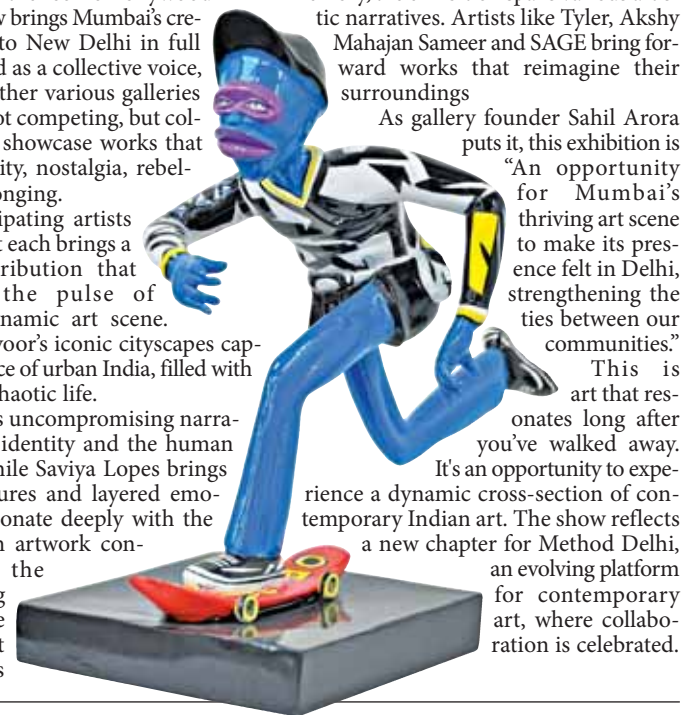
Titled after the iconic Bollywood song, the show brings Mumbai's creative energy to New Delhi in full force. Curated as a collective voice, it brings together various galleries and artists, not competing, but collaborating to showcase works that explore identity, nostalgia, rebellion, and belonging.

The participating artists are varied, yet each brings a unique contribution that speaks to the pulse of Mumbai's dynamic art scene. Sameer Kulavoor's iconic cityscapes capture the essence of urban India, filled with vibrant and chaotic life.

Mithu Sen's uncompromising narratives explore identity and the human condition, while Saviya Lopes brings intimate textures and layered emotions that resonate deeply with the viewer. Each artwork converses with the next, creating a cohesive narrative that spans across

mediums, ideas, and emotions. This exhibition invites you to feel the stories behind it. Whether it's Gurjeet Singh's powerful, introspective works or Dhruvi Acharya's striking compositions, each piece adds a layer to the broader conversation on memory, history, and belonging. From the urban streets to intimate expressions of memory, the exhibition spans various artistic narratives. Artists like Tyler, Akshy Mahajan Sameer and SAGE bring forward works that reimagine their surroundings.

As gallery founder Sahil Arora puts it, this exhibition is "An opportunity for Mumbai's thriving art scene to make its presence felt in Delhi, strengthening the ties between our communities." This is art that resonates long after you've walked away. It's an opportunity to experience a dynamic cross-section of contemporary Indian art. The show reflects a new chapter for Method Delhi, an evolving platform for contemporary art, where collaboration is celebrated.



Erosion of History in Art forms

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Art exhibitions often provide an opportunity to experience the complex interplay of history, identity, and memory. **Kindred Dichotomies**, currently on view at Black Cube Gallery in Hauz Khas, New Delhi, is one such exhibition that invites visitors into a thought-provoking dialogue between two distinct artistic voices — Sudhanshu Sutar and Andrea Zucchi.

The show brings together works that explore the tension between past and present, offering a fresh perspective on historical imagery and cultural symbols.

Curated by Sanya Malik, **Kindred Dichotomies** stands out for its ability to highlight the contrasts and connections between the two artists despite their different backgrounds. Sudhanshu Sutar, hailing from Odisha, India, presents works deeply rooted in his personal and cultural history. His paintings focus on themes of lost royalty and shifting identities, drawing inspiration from the Kanika Palace, a structure once grand, now fading from memory. Sutar's compositions are highly staged, evoking the theatricality of Indian Natak, where figures are stripped of individuality to become symbols of broader concepts of power, kingship, and historical displacement.

As visitors move through the exhibition, Sutar's paintings stand out for their meditative quality. His use of archival photographs and surrealist undertones creates a sense of historical continuity, but it's the way he approaches these images that leaves an impression. The viewer is drawn into a narrative that speaks not only to India's royal past but also to the larger themes of memory, power, and identity that resonate across cultures.

In contrast, Andrea Zucchi's work brings a playful yet critical energy to the exhibition. Zucchi's engagement with 19th-century photographs is marked by an irreverent and almost surreal twist. The works



IT PROVIDES A SPACE WHERE HISTORY IS OBSERVED AND EXPERIENCED. BOTH THE ARTISTS INVITE THE VIEWER TO CONSIDER NOT JUST WHAT HISTORY IS, BUT HOW IT CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

question the authenticity of historical imagery and challenge the viewer to rethink the boundaries between the past and the present.

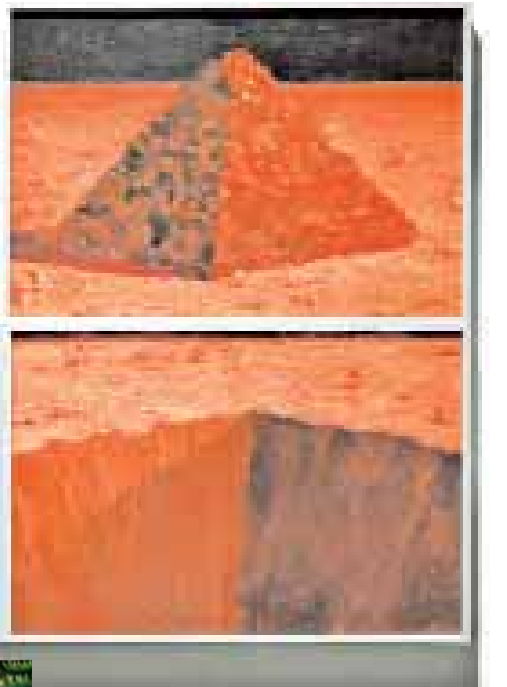
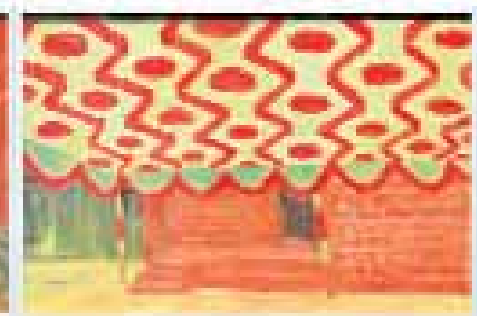
Zucchi's work doesn't simply appropriate the past; it transforms it, creating a disorienting but engaging reworking of historical narratives. The use of bright, almost garish colours and the layering of contemporary elements onto historical images offer a critique of how history is reproduced and recontextualised in the modern world. His art becomes a reflection on memory and the way images are altered and reinterpreted, often without consideration for their original context.

What unites the two artists in **Kindred Dichotomies** is their shared engagement with history—not as a fixed entity, but as a space for reinterpretation. While Sutar's works are grounded in a personal history that focuses on the fading grandeur of royalty, Zucchi's approach to historical imagery is more playful, almost irreverent. Together, they offer viewers a multifaceted look at how history is both remembered and reimaged. The exhibition is a reminder that the past is not static, but rather something that is constantly reshaped by the lens through which we view it.

For anyone interested in contemporary art that explores complex themes with depth and originality, this exhibition that should not be missed.

FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY AND SPACE

The exhibition explores memory, transformation and the collision of urban and personal spaces, says SAKSHI PRIYA



A walk through **MAGIC ERASE**, the solo exhibition by Hemant Gavankar at Art Centrix Space, is like entering a layered palimpsest of time, space, and fleeting memory. Curated by Sibdas Sengupta and presented under the Art Centrix Painting Grant, the exhibition is an exploration of changing cityscapes and interior geographies, each frame marked by the rhythm of personal and urban transformation.

Gavankar, a visual artist and poet trained at Sir J. J. School of Art, presents his works as complex arrangements of memory, paintings that deliberately blur the boundaries of past and present, real and imagined. In works like *Memories of Water and Glass* and *Blasting and Other Images 2*, oil, charcoal, gouache, and pastels are used to great effect, juxtaposing fragments from different spatial and temporal planes.

One particularly striking piece, Inauguration of *Modern Temple and Other Images*, observes the collision of the sacred and the contemporary. A quadriptych on paper, it balances order and disarray, hinting at the strange dualities of belief and modern architecture. Similarly, *Qasam's Ginni Grandmom's Thumb and Land* and its studies unfold like intimate visual journals, quiet and unsettling in equal measure. The sense of distance and emotional fragility is visible.



LAST NIGHT, RENDERED IN ACRYLIC AND OIL ON PRIMED FABRIC, IS A COMPACT YET EVOCATIVE WORK THAT CAPTURES AN ATMOSPHERE OF QUIET MUSING. ITS INTIMATE SCALE DRAWS THE VIEWER IN, ALMOST AS IF OVERHEARING A WHISPERED MEMORY



Gavankar brings abstraction into deeply personal. His layering of mediums mirrors the disorderly nature of memory — partial, unpredictable, and fragmented. Works like *Memory of a Memory 3* and *The Lost Room* intensify this experience, presenting places that feel familiar yet unreachable — scenes glimpsed between waking and sleep.

There is an unmistakable contemporary urgency in his interrogation of public, private, and digital spaces. The exhibition's title, **MAGIC ERASE**, points to both disappearance and transformation, a quiet erasure of lines, boundaries, and certainty. Artist resists finality, inviting viewers to observe, interpret, and reimagine.

The art is bold, unafraid of ambiguity, and intellectually engaging. It challenges conventional visual comfort, yet it is precisely this discomfort that provokes reflection. It is the kind of art that grows on the viewer, revealing it slowly, and layer by deliberate layer. This is not an exhibition one walks away from; it unsettles and stays with you.

