

CM inspects Ganga Expressway, airstrip in Shahjahanpur



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Hardoi/Shahjahanpur/Hapur

In a major boost to India's defence and infrastructure capabilities, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday inspected the newly-built 3.5-kilometre-long modern airstrip on the Ganga Expressway in Shahjahanpur. This is the country's first airstrip where Indian Air Force fighter jets will be able to land and take off both during the day

and night. The facility will also serve as a practice ground for fighter planes, significantly strengthening operational readiness. For enhanced security, around 250 CCTV cameras will be installed on both sides of the airstrip to ensure safe movement and enable immediate police action in case of any suspicious activities. During his visit, Chief Minister Yogi made a major announcement regarding the expansion of the Ganga Expressway.

He stated that the expressway would be extended from Prayagraj to Ghazipur, and another link would connect Meerut to Haridwar. Additionally, plans are underway to develop an industrial hub along the expressway in Shahjahanpur. This hub is expected to create thousands of job opportunities and infuse new energy into the local economy. The chief minister said that the Ganga Expressway would be connected to

Bundelkhand through a link expressway from Farrukhabad. This will accelerate the establishment of industrial units in Bundelkhand.

He expressed confidence that the Ganga Expressway will be a milestone in the development of Uttar Pradesh. He also mentioned that the construction of the expressway will be completed by November 2025.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Sunday, inspected the under-construction Ganga Expressway and directed UP Expressway Industrial Development Authority and the construction agencies to complete the project within the timeline, while maintaining the highest quality standards. Expressing satisfaction with the progress of construction work in Groups 1 and 2, the chief minister instructed officials to accelerate further the pace of work in Groups 3 and 4.

During his visit, the chief minister travelled by car on the expressway, reviewing the construction quality firsthand. He reviewed the construction progress across three districts. He first inspected the 347+000 chainage in Bilgram tehsil of Hardoi under Group-3, followed by a visit to the 242+650 chainage in Jalalabad, Shahjahanpur under Group-2 (Budaun-Hardoi section). Finally, he reached the 62+200 chainage in Garh Mukteshwar tehsil of Hapur, part of the Meerut-Budaun Group-1 section.

Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister arrived at the Mallawan and Madhoganj development blocks of Hardoi district to inspect the expressway. He reiterated to UPEIDA officials the importance of completing the project on schedule without compromising quality.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday paying courtesy visit to Vice-President Jagdeep Thakur at his official residence in New Delhi on Sunday.

CM: India emerging as global leader in environ conservation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In his 'Mann Ki Baat' address on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged citizens to participate in the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign, encouraging everyone to plant a tree in honour of their mothers on the occasion of World Environment Day on June 5, marking the beginning of the campaign's first year.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath praised the initiative in a post on social media platform X, highlighting the campaign's significance. He emphasised that 'New India' is emerging as a global leader in environmental conservation.

In his message, the chief minister wrote: "The 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign offers every Indian an opportunity to deep-

en their bond with nature. I urge everyone to plant a tree and dedicate it to their mothers on June 5. It's a noble and meaningful act."

Expressing his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Yogi remarked that trees provide oxygen just as a mother gives life. He lauded this unique campaign as a testament to the prime minister's visionary and compassionate leadership.

Under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's leadership, Uttar Pradesh has planted 204.92 crore saplings over the past eight years, including 36.81 crore saplings this year alone. Continuing this momentum, the Forest Department has also commenced preparations to participate actively in the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign.

Drive against encroachments along Nepal border

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government has launched a strong campaign against illegal encroachments and unrecognised religious institutions in districts bordering Nepal.

Between April 25 and 27, numerous encroachments on valuable border land were cleared as part of this initiative to reclaim state-owned territory.

A total of 227 encroachments on government land were identified within 10 km of the India-Nepal border in Bahraich's Nanpara tehsil. Following the removal of 63 encroachments earlier, 26 more were cleared between April 25 and 27, bringing the total to 89. No religious or educational structures were found at any of the encroached sites. Furthermore, action has been taken

against 17 unrecognised madrasas in Shravasti district. Seven madrasas in Jamunha tehsil and 10 in Bhinga tehsil were shut down due to missing documents.

Additionally, action is going on under Section 67 of the Revenue Code in 119 cases of illegal encroachments, both temporary and permanent, in the 0-15 km area adjacent to the India-Nepal border.

In Naugarh tehsil of Siddharthnagar district, encroachments have been confirmed at five locations within 10 km of the Nepal border, including the construction of a mosque and madrasa. Investigation and action are ongoing under the guidance of higher officials.

Additionally, illegal constructions have been identified at six sites in Shohratgarh tehsil. In Maharajganj district, illegal

encroachments have been found in Farendia, Nautanwa and Nichlul tehsils. While one case is pending in court, eviction and demolition actions are underway in the remaining cases under Section 67 (1) of the Revenue Code.

In Balrampur district, seven encroachments on government land have been identified — five in Balrampur tehsil and two in Tulsipur tehsil. Two illegal occupants voluntarily vacated the land, while eviction proceedings are underway against the others under Uttar Pradesh Revenue Code 67. The Yogi government has made it clear that illegal occupations and unrecognised religious or educational institutions within 10 km of the Nepal border will not be tolerated. The administration has been directed to remove identified encroachments promptly and ensure continuous monitoring.

Rahul to visit Rae Bareli, Amethi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Amethi

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi will begin his two-day trip to Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday during which he will visit his constituency Rae Bareli and party bastion Amethi, party leaders said here.

During his visit, Gandhi will inaugurate a heart unit at Sanjay Gandhi Hospital, Amethi and inspect the ordinance factory located in Munshiganj, they said. This will be Gandhi's first visit to Amethi after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Congress MP from Amethi, Kishori Lal Sharma, said that Gandhi will first visit Rae Bareli on April 29, where he will attend a meeting of the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA) and stay overnight at the Bhuemau Guest House.

AKY blames 'intelligence failure' for terror attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday blamed "intelligence failure" for the Pahalgam terror attack and accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government of prioritising "propaganda" over addressing critical issues.

He demanded ₹10 crore financial assistance and a government job for the families of each of the victims of the terrorist attack.

"The big question is how did the terrorists reach our home.. This is a failure of the government. It was the result of intelligence failure.

"There were no proper security arrangements and forces could not reach there. Now people are also talking about Pulwama with Pahalgam," he said at a press conference.

Raising the issue of unemployment, he alleged that the government was failing to provide adequate job opportunities which was depriving the marginalised sections the benefit of reservations.

"The Bharatiya Janata Party government is continuously working on propa-



ganda. We also have to remember that our issues are still unemployment," Yadav told reporters at the party headquarters after a meeting of the SP's youth wing.

"The way jobs are decreasing, people are unable to find work according to their qualifications. The government is unable to provide respectable employment. People who have degrees, who have degrees in good professional courses, have been made delivery

boys, so they are unable to provide respectable jobs," the former chief minister said.

Yadav alleged that the BJP government is undermining constitutional rights and tampering with reservation policies.

"While the people in the government, from time to time, do not give all the rights ensured in the Constitution, reservations are also being tampered with. "Not giving jobs means not giving reservations. There has been a lot of political interference in education," he alleged.

About the all-party meeting held on the issue, he said, "The party has conveyed its views at the meeting. I can't add to that. You can ask the chief minister (Yogi Adityanath) who is talking big on the matter."

Alleging that corruption under the BJP rule is on the rise in Uttar Pradesh, Yadav alleged that the government has caught the weakness of officers and was getting "wrong deeds" done through them.

"Officers from other states (posted here) are doing corruption and investing money in other states. Corrupt officers are hiding at the chief minister's residence," he

alleged.

Claiming "political interference" in constitutional institutions, Yadav said that his party workers are facing "discrimination and atrocities".

About Sunday's meeting, he said that the party has prepared a "PDA sankalp (pledge)" which will be distributed in villages.

It is about issues "related to PDA (backwards, Dalits and minorities) and is an attempt to make them aware to save the Constitution," he said.

On his party allegations that he was not allowed to land at the Kushinagar airport on Saturday, Yadav said they were told visibility is low.

"When there was clarity for five km, we were told there is low visibility," he said. Asked why he believed his flight was not allowed to land, Yadav jokingly remarked, "I went there after taking a bath. Maybe if I had used soap and shampoo, I would have been allowed to land." In a barbaric attack, terrorists on Tuesday shot dead 26 people, mostly tourists, in in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam, an incident that has spiked India-Pakistan tensions.

Bomb scare on flight, Canadian detained

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Varanasi

Panic broke out at Varanasi airport after a foreign national aboard a Bengaluru-bound IndiGo flight claimed he was carrying a bomb, police said on Sunday.

The incident took place on Saturday night, police said, adding that the passenger, a Canadian, has been detained.

Security sleuths are questioning the man, officials said.

Following the bomb scare, the aircraft was moved to the isolation bay for a thorough inspection, but no explosive material was found, said Puneet Gupta, Director of the airport.

Gupta said the IndiGo crew promptly informed the Air Traffic Control (ATC) about the threat after the passenger's claim.

The flight was grounded and inspected as per standard security protocols. After receiving clearance from security agencies,

Following the bomb scare, the aircraft was moved to the isolation bay for a thorough inspection, but no explosive material was found, said Puneet Gupta, Director of the airport.

the aircraft departed for Bengaluru on Sunday morning, officials said.

"Flight 6E 499 operating from Varanasi to Bengaluru on April 26 was delayed due to a bomb threat received before takeoff. As per protocol, the aircraft was taken to an isolation bay, passengers were safely disembarked and all standard operating procedures were followed," IndiGo said in a statement.

"We deeply appreciate the patience, understanding, and cooperation of our customers," it said.

A detailed probe is on in the matter.

Lucknow attracts international tourists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Lucknow charmed international tourists who arrived in the city on Sunday.

The Uttar Pradesh Eco-Tourism Development Board has organised a special familiarisation trip (FAM trip) from April 22 to 30. As part of this initiative, a delegation of leading tour travel operators and travel writers from the UK, US, Germany, and Australia are travelling across Uttar Pradesh. They are presently witnessing the vast tourism potential of the state.

The delegation has been divided into two groups, presently touring different destinations across the state. One group is visiting Dudhwa having toured Varanasi, Prayagraj and Lucknow. The other group has travelled through Agra, Kannauj, Dudhwa National Park and were in Lucknow on Sunday.

The delegates were extremely charmed by Lucknow while exploring historical landmarks such as the Residency, Imambara and La Martiniere. They particularly enjoyed the city's



renowned local cuisine. Following their stay in Lucknow, the second group will proceed towards Prayagraj, exploring the sacred Sangam, historical sites, and the renowned farm stay 'Planters Bungalow'. Thereafter they will head towards Kashi

(Varanasi) to visit Kashi Vishwanath Temple, experience the Ganga Aarti, the famed mornings of Varanasi, local arts and crafts and traditional cuisine. The other group will continue its journey to Dudhwa National Park and other desti-

nations for the next leg of the FAM trip. This FAM trip is a significant step toward familiarising foreign delegates with the major tourist destinations of Uttar Pradesh and further strengthening the state's presence on the international tourism map. From Chambal Safari to Kashi, and from the forests of Dudhwa to the historical ghats of Prayagraj, the delegation is witnessing the cultural diversity, historical heritage and natural beauty of the state.

Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiver Singh said Uttar Pradesh has immense potential for eco-tourism, which is now being actively realised. The Eco-Tourism Development Board is working to showcase the state's natural beauty on a global platform. In this effort, familiarisation trips for delegates from various countries are being organised. This delegation also includes travel writers, who are helping promote Uttar Pradesh's natural attractions internationally through their reports, articles and social media posts. This initiative is expected to give a new dimension to the state's tourism industry.

Regaining Pahalgam's lost paradise

A brutal terrorist attack in Pahalgam's Baisaran Valley has shattered dreams, reignited fear, and exposed the fragile calm, threatening Kashmir's hard-earned progress and hopes for lasting peace

FIRST
Column

Holidaying in happiness turned into a nightmare at the idyllic landscape of Pahalgam, often described as a 'heaven on earth', as a scene of unimaginable horror broke open on April 22, 2025.

A brazen terrorist attack on a group of tourists in the Baisaran Valley — mainly men being killed based on their religious identity — resulted in the tragic and unfortunate loss of at least 28 lives and left over 20 others critically injured.

This barbaric act, claimed by 'The Resistance Front' (TRF), a shadow outfit of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), has not only devastated families and shattered dreams but has also ripped apart the fragile veneer of normalcy that authorities had been attempting to bring back in the Kashmir Valley.

The gruesome incident unfolded in the afternoon of 22 April when a group of four to six heavily armed militants, disguised in military — style uniforms, emerged from the dense forests surrounding Baisaran Valley (a meadow accessible only by foot or pony and an open area with no hideouts for safety). According to eyewitness accounts, the assailants systematically targeted non-Muslim tourists after checking their identities and religious affiliations.

This selective targeting underscores the malicious intent to sow communal discord and further destabilise the region. The victims included 24 tourists from various parts of India, two local residents, and two foreign nationals from Nepal and the UAE. The serene meadow erupted into chaos and grief in the attack's immediate wake.

Social media feeds flooded with harrowing videos — terrified cries for help mingled with the grim sight of lifeless bodies scattered across the once-picturesque landscape.

The emotional wounds inflicted on the bereaved families are immeasurable. While the Government's offer of ₹20 lakhs for information on the terrorists' location is one step to involve citizens' participation in nabbing the culprit, it cannot erase the haunting memories of this devastation.

The image of the young woman beside her fallen Navy officer husband, a honeymooner tragically cut short; the local pony owner's family, now without their sole provider after his courageous son tried to shield tourists; the woman forced to witness the brutal murder of her husband and son; the recently married IAF officer from Arunachal Pradesh on vacation — these stories of unimaginable loss and despair paint a stark and enduring picture of terrorism's human cost, shattering the illusion (read deception) of calm in this vulnerable region.

Following the Pahalgam attack, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) recommended a set of five decisive actions against Pakistan — that included holding the 'Indus Waters Treaty of 1960' in abeyance until verifiable cessation of cross-border terrorism; immediate closure of the 'Integrated Check Post Attari' with a grace period until 1 May for those with valid endorsements to return; the cancellation of all 'SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme' (SVES) visas for Pakistani nationals with a 48-hour deadline for those currently in India to depart; the declaration of Pakistan's Defence/Military, Naval, and Air Advisors in New Delhi as 'Persona Non Grata' with a week to leave (and a reciprocal withdrawal of Indian counterparts from Islamabad along with five support staff from each mission); and a significant reduction in the overall strength of High Commissions from 55 to 30 personnel by May 1, 2025.



RAJDEEP PATHAK

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The Pahalgam attack has triggered widespread condemnation across India, with many viewing it as a direct assault on the nation's unity and secular fabric. Many countries, including the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, and several European

and Middle Eastern nations, especially the UAE, issued strong statements condemning the attack.

They emphasised the need for international cooperation to eradicate terrorism and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. This incident has added a new dimension to Kashmir's intricate geopolitical situation.

For decades, this region has been a fiercely contested territory between India and Pakistan, leading to repeated conflicts and border tensions and solidifying its status as a highly sensitive area. The situation has become even more complex with China's bordering presence. Adding to this volatile mix, Bangladesh has recently emerged as a neighbour in dispute with India, further intensifying regional dynamics.

The timing of this unrest could be a calculated move to draw international attention to the Kashmir issue and undermine India's attempts to showcase normalcy, particularly as it coincided with US Vice President JD Vance's visit and the ongoing WAQF debate. Moreover, striking at the height of the tourist season — a critical period for the local economy —

THIS REVERSES THE REMARKABLE GROWTH FROM 1.62 CRORE TOURISTS IN 2019 TO 2.36 CRORE IN 2024, WHICH HAD SIGNIFICANTLY BOOSTED LOCAL ECONOMIES AND LIVELIHOODS DEPENDENT ON THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY, INCLUDING HOTELS, HOUSEBOATS, GUIDES, AND ARTISANS, THEREBY REIGNITING FEAR AND UNCERTAINTY.

is a calculated attempt to inflict maximum economic harm and cultivate an atmosphere of fear, thereby disrupting peace and stability.

Since the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, the Indian Government has been actively pursuing peace-building and confidence — regaining measures in Jammu and Kashmir, while also promoting local entrepreneurship and development, recognising the practicalities of the situation on ground, which had begun to yield positive results, thereby projecting a return to normalcy in the region.

The recent attack has severely impacted its sector, specifically, the recovering tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir. Travel agencies in Delhi experienced nearly 90 per cent booking cancellations, as per media reports.

This reverses the remarkable growth from 1.62 crore tourists in 2019 to 2.36 crore in 2024, which had significantly boosted local economies and livelihoods dependent on the hospitality industry, including hotels, houseboats, guides, and artisans, thereby reigniting fear and uncertainty.

Amidst the tears of this tragedy, the response of the Kashmiri people showcased a powerful display of humanity. Immediately following the attack, residents rushed to the scene to assist the injured tourists.

They helped with evacuations, offered first aid, and provided emotional support to those traumatised by the event. A day later, on April 23, religious organisations condemned the attack and large numbers of Kashmiri citizens took to the streets in protest of this massacre, holding peaceful demonstrations with the Tricolour, besides candlelight vigils, further underscoring the rejection of violence by the local population and their desire for peace and stability.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the insidious nature of terrorism often finds fertile ground in the tilled soil of human emotions — fear, anger, and envy — emotions that are tragically amplified by the harsh realities of systemic inequalities and sometimes, forced acts of blind belief.

It is a matter of grave national concern to observe the seeds of violence taking root even in our villages, and growing children's aggressive behaviour. This early violence is often a bitter harvest of neglect, stemming from a lack of fundamental education that instils mutual respect, and the gnawing anxiety of unemployment, that darkens the horizons of their future. These interconnected issues demand serious and sustained attention to prevent the escalation of individual frustrations into larger societal threats.

While the Government is taking strong counter-terrorism measures in light of this barbaric attack, the participation of citizens in rebuilding the shaken confidence is crucial. Despite this barbaric act that threatens to undermine the hard-won progress in the Valley, rebuilding trust is now paramount. The time is now to act — in all directions, for peace is the only way.

(The writer is a programme executive Gandhi Smriti Sansthan. Views are personal)

Congress in crisis: Reform or perish

Despite the energy generated by Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo campaigns, the session offered little more than ritualistic rhetoric, exposing deep structural inertia and a status quo mindset at odds with the urgency of the political moment

Why is the Congress reluctant to change its formation in terms of organisational network, and reform the decades — old processes related to the functioning of its highest bodies — Congress Working Committee, AICC and its customary session?

Are the Congress leaders fearful of the change or intense pressure from some invisible forces that have forced them to play safe and be status quo?

These questions confronting the current Congress dispensation (read Sonia Gandhi-Mallikarjun Kharge-Rahul Gandhi powerful trio) are not new. But a refresh button pressed by the recently held non-happening Ahmedabad AICC session has once again made these questions relevant and begging for answers.

The session left all those participating or not (the party leaders rank and file, and the public) unenthused to the level of the lowest ebb, as it failed to throw an alternative vision to fight the might of Mr Narendra Modi — led well-oiled ruling network — and also to ignite the minds of the Congresspersons to make them ready for future political battles — elections or otherwise.

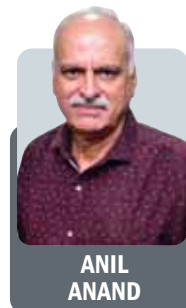
The abysmal affair that the AICC session turned out to be, with no clear-cut direction emerging out of it as to how the Grand Old Party (GOP) proposes to fight the politico-ideological battle on its way to strengthening its place as the premier opposition party and the unchallenged leader of the fledgling opposition combine — I.N.D.I.A. The session has ended up adding to the confusion and demoralisation rather than emanating any ray of hope.

The Ahmedabad AICC session was not different from the preceding ones held in the last few decades. At a time when the Congress is facing the toughest battle of its survival, with an all-round onslaught launched by the ruling dispensation — both at the political and Government levels — the session was expected to be a path-breaking one, if not revolutionising the party's thinking or strategy. But nothing of the sort happened.

Where does the Congress — particularly Mr Rahul Gandhi, whose remarkable Bharat Jodo Yatra and Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra had rekindled a fresh hope — go from here?

The Ahmedabad AICC session was a valuable opportunity to unveil the blueprint of what the party intends to do in the coming times. Most of the contentious but significant issues — such as strengthening and overhauling the organisational set-up, changing the style of working, purging the party of non-performers and the deadwood, and those conniving with the arch-political rivals — went missing from the discourse.

Those who had their eyes and ears fixed on the session and waited with bated breath for a new look



ANIL ANAND

agenda to unfold were despairing to be content with passing references (on these issues) made by Mr Kharge and Mr Gandhi in their speeches.

The scores of leaders and the delegates who travelled long distances to be in attendance, left without carrying a message to enthuse the workers back home, as there was none. Under the circumstances, getting back to the grassroots and convincing the people to be back in the Congress — fold remains a tall order.

Although Mr Kharge, as the Congress president, has done commendable work despite age-related and physical constraints and has left no opportunity to go inside and outside the Parliament — without

fighting back on crucial issues — the challenge is more daunting for Mr Gandhi.

It remains a fact that Mr Kharge is acting only as a guardian figure, but every policy decision in the party has Mr Gandhi's stamp affixed to it. The party president has no one in doubt about his position and candidly admitted from time to time that Mr Gandhi was the real force. A very tricky situation seems to have arisen in Congress, particularly after the lacklustre AICC session and with the next set of assembly elections approaching fast.

Normally, the onset of any election has been used as a standard excuse by the Congress strategist to ward off or postpone decisions on vital issues — to the great disadvantage of the party — which is there for everyone to see at the AICC and the state/UT levels where confusion prevails supreme. The play would not work anymore.

The clock is ticking fast and the indecisiveness is getting entrenched deeper, a situation that demands

ACCORDINGLY, THE ENTIRE GAMUT OF ORGANISING AICC SESSIONS MUST ALSO DRASTICALLY CHANGE. IT SHOULD NOT BE MERELY A CUSTOMARY FULFILMENT OF ELECTION COMMISSION REQUIREMENTS BUT AN EXERCISE THAT SHOULD BE DEEPLY INTERACTIVE AND ALL-ENCOMPASSING.

a fast remedy.

Since Mr Gandhi has led the battle from the front, notwithstanding the personalised campaign against him to tarnish his image, with two pan-India sojourns having a dramatic effect both for the party and at the personal levels, unfortunately, the spirit has not been carried forward. A weak organisation, dotted by leaders with vested interests and at times working at cross-purposes to BJP's advantage, has been the Congress's bane and a spoke in Mr Gandhi's wheels.

With this backdrop, it has become imperative that Mr Gandhi must press the alarm bell. The image of indecisiveness has to be shed and the mask of the status quo has to be blown to smithereens as fast as possible.

The charity must begin at the AICC with a thorough change in its work culture. In most of the cases, it has become a parking place for those elevated as its office-bearers in charge of key tasks. A big casualty is that they tend to lose touch with the middle-lower rung leaders and workers.

Accordingly, the entire gamut of organising AICC sessions must also drastically change. It should not be merely a customary fulfilment of Election Commission requirements but an exercise that should be deeply interactive and all — encompassing. The Ahmedabad AICC session starkly revealed the Congress party's deep-rooted reluctance to confront its structural inertia and outdated processes.

Despite the hopes ignited by Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo initiatives, the session failed to offer any meaningful vision or reforms, leaving leaders and workers disillusioned.

The Congress's continued avoidance of internal overhaul — especially in revamping the AICC, energising the grassroots, and purging non-performers — has eroded morale at a time when clarity and decisiveness are critical.

With Mr Kharge serving more as a caretaker and Rahul Gandhi being the de facto decision-maker, the party can no longer afford to hide behind election timelines to defer reforms. The Congress must shed its image of indecisiveness and break free from status quoist tendencies.

Only a bold reimagining of its organisational network and work culture — starting at the top — can revitalise the Grand Old Party and position it as a credible challenger in the evolving political landscape. The clock is ticking.

Every missed opportunity deepens the disconnect with the electorate and empowers the opposition narrative. Time for half-measures is over — action must replace introspection.

(The writer is a political and national affairs analyst. Views are personal)



Self-Care

Now a Lifestyle, Not a Luxury

In an age of overstimulation, walking into a wellness clinic is a kind thing you can do for yourself, says **ABHI SINGHAL**

In a typical working week, how much time do you really take out for yourself, to slow down, to recharge, or to nourish your skin and scalp? For many, the answer still leans towards "too little." But the narrative around self-care is shifting. Wellness is no longer considered a luxury; it has steadily become a lifestyle choice. As individuals strive to balance demanding careers with personal well-being, they're beginning to invest not just in rest, but in routines that nourish both body and mind.

At the heart of this evolution lies a deeper appreciation for skincare and hair care - once seen as cosmetic indulgences, they are now recognised for their therapeutic and preventive benefits.

Facials, in particular, have transformed from occa-

sional treats to essential self-care rituals. More than just a glow-up, they are a reflection of inner health and mindfulness.

Daily skincare routines, while foundational, often fall short when it comes to tackling environmental stressors, premature ageing, and hormonal fluctuations. This is where professional facial treatments come in - offering targeted solutions that cleanse, nourish and repair the skin at a cellular level. Treatments like Hydrafacials, Fire & Ice facials, nano-needling, and chemical peels are now powered by dermatologist-led protocols and medical-grade devices. These don't just make the skin look good, they help it function

SKIN ANALYSIS IS IMPORTANT

Every facial is preceded by an in-depth skin analysis, ensuring that the treatment is suited to your skin and current condition - particularly important in seasons like summer, where a simple de-tan facial without proper diagnosis can do more harm than good.

better.

But the modern wellness journey doesn't stop at skincare. A healthy scalp is just as vital as a glowing face - and this realisation has brought hair care treatments into the wellness spotlight.

Much like skin, the scalp suffers from pollution, stress, and lifestyle choices, and requires targeted care to stay healthy. Advanced therapies such as Scalp Analysis, the K Revive Scalp Spa, and Low-Level Laser Therapy (LLLT) now provide holistic solutions for common issues like hair thinning, dryness, and dandruff, while also encouraging new growth and scalp balance.

However, just like with skincare, a one-size-fits-all approach does more harm than good. It's crucial to consult a qualified dermatologist or cosmetologist before beginning any facial or scalp treatment. These professionals can assess your skin and scalp type, identify underlying concerns, and

APPROACH TO BETTER HAIR

Equally impressive is Merakki Wellness and Co., approach to hair wellness. Recognising that good hair starts with a healthy scalp, the clinic offers FDA-approved treatments like LLLT and the K Revive Scalp Spa, a luxurious therapy that

detoxifies the scalp, boosts circulation, and nourishes hair follicles from the root. With rising cases of stress-related hair fall and scalp sensitivity, such treatments are no longer a niche - they're a necessity.

curate a plan that works best for your individual needs. Choosing the wrong products or treatments without expert advice can lead to allergies, acne breakouts, or further damage.

One wellness centre leading this science-meets-self-care revolution is Merakki Wellness Co., a premium skin, hair, and beauty clinic based in Faridabad.

Founded in 2023 by wellness entrepreneur Rima Narula, the centre is redefining what it means to take care of oneself - offering personalised services that blend advanced technology with natural healing principles.

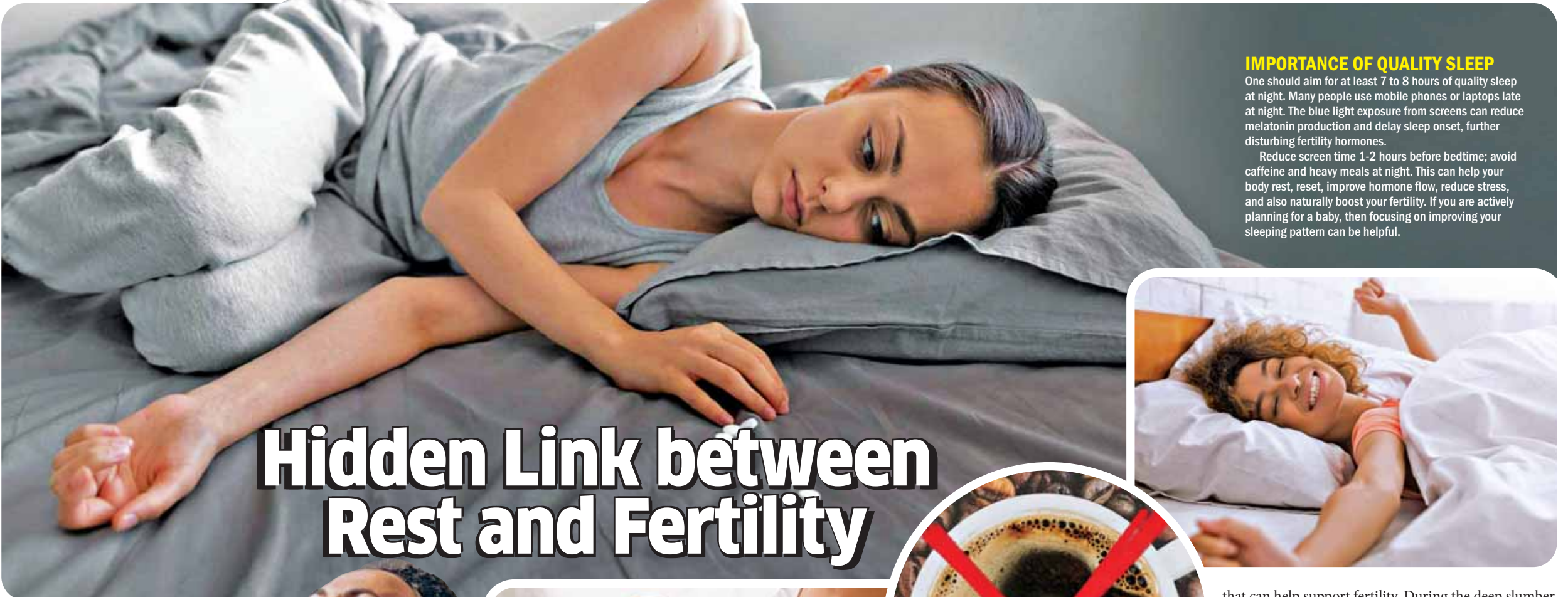
At this wellness centre, the facial menu reads like a tailored skincare blueprint: from the calming Signature Facial to the luxurious Platinum Hydra Facial, each treatment is designed to address specific concerns, whether it's pigmentation, dullness, or fine lines.

The use of LED therapy, oxygen infusion, and deep exfoliation ensures both immediate results and long-term skin health. But what truly sets Merakki apart is its commitment to expert-led care.

Every facial is preceded by an in-depth skin analysis, ensuring that the treatment is suited to your skin type and current condition - particularly important in seasons like summer, where a simple de-tan facial without proper diagnosis can do more harm than good.



What makes centres like Merakki Wellness Co. in Faridabad a growing part of people's routine is not just the range of services, but the shift in how people perceive self-care. Today, facials and scalp therapies are seen much like a balanced meal or a weekly workout - they are maintenance tools, designed to keep your body functioning at its best. It's not about vanity; it's about vitality. Because when you take time for your skin and scalp, you're not just pampering yourself - you're protecting your peace and embracing a lifestyle that puts you first.



Hidden Link between Rest and Fertility

IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY SLEEP

One should aim for at least 7 to 8 hours of quality sleep at night. Many people use mobile phones or laptops late at night. The blue light exposure from screens can reduce melatonin production and delay sleep onset, further disturbing fertility hormones.

Reduce screen time 1-2 hours before bedtime; avoid caffeine and heavy meals at night. This can help your body rest, reset, improve hormone flow, reduce stress, and also naturally boost your fertility. If you are actively planning for a baby, then focusing on improving your sleeping pattern can be helpful.



BY DR JYOTI GUPTA

Trying to balance your hormones or start a family? Your sleep schedule might be more important than you may think. Discover how a good night's sleep can support your hormones and boost your fertility naturally.

Sleep is more than just resting your body. It is also about giving yourself enough time to do crucial internal work, especially when it comes to hormones. In today's busy lifestyle, many people often struggle to get quality sleep for even a few hours. This can lead to sleep deprivation. This can be mainly due to taking too much stress, long and busy working schedules, or excessive screen time. But what one may not realise is how a lack of sleep can silently disrupt your body's natur-



al balance, particularly the hormonal system. Your hormones are responsible for controlling various key functions such as mood, energy levels, metabolism, and most importantly, reproduction. If you are someone who is dealing with problems like irregular periods, low sperm

count, difficulty in conceiving despite continuous efforts, or frequently feeling tired, then your sleeping pattern may be the culprit. Both women as well as men need enough sleep to ensure that their reproductive hormones are working smoothly. One must understand that good quality sleep not only helps boost fertility but also supports your overall health.

The Role of Sleep in Hormonal Balance and Fertility

Your sleep plays a vital role in efficiently balancing the hormones

that can help support fertility. During the deep slumber, your body works effortlessly to regulate important hormones like oestrogen, progesterone, testosterone, and luteinising hormones that are essential for the production of sperm and regular ovulation. Not getting enough sleep for an extended period can easily confuse your internal clock, causing imbalances. It can increase the production of a stress hormone called cortisol. This can further lower fertility by negatively interfering with these reproductive hormones. Lack of sleep is more likely to reduce melatonin, a hormone that protects the eggs and sperm from getting damaged. Disturbed sleep patterns in women can lead to irregular menstrual cycles or problems with egg release. Poor sleep is also linked with insulin resistance, which can affect fertility; in this way, metabolic hormones and sleep are also interconnected. Chronic sleep deprivation can impact thyroid hormones which can be linked with poor sleep, and can lead to irregular periods or ovulatory issues. In men, it can lower their testosterone levels, reduce sperm quality, and also affect libido. This is why it becomes crucial to prioritise your sleep. Many people use mobile phones or laptops late at night. The blue light exposure from screens can reduce melatonin production and delay sleep onset, further disturbing fertility hormones.

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