

RAKSHA MANTRI BRIEFS PRIME MINISTER

RAHUL DATTA ■ New Delhi

Amidst the preparedness to fight against terror, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh briefed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack. Rajnath arrived at PM's residence and he was joined by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, top brass of the defence and ministry bureaucrats.

The crucial meeting came a day after Singh met the Chief of General Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan to discuss the key decisions taken up by the military to counter Pakistan following the horrific terrorist attack in Pahalgam. Sources said General Chauhan briefed the Defence Minister on critical military decisions to counter Pakistan following the attack. Singh had also chaired an all-party meeting three days ago to discuss the security situation in the region.

There was however no official word on Singh's meeting with PM Modi however sources said the meeting was scheduled following the briefing by Chief of General Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan to the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence also met on Monday afternoon to further review preparedness and the Government's response to the situation while the Opposition demanded a Special Parliament Session to be convened to discuss the current situation prevailing in country following the terror activities.

Since the attack, teams from the National Investigation Agency (NIA) have been stationed in Pahalgam, intensifying evidence collection and investigations. The Indian Army remains on high alert, launching extensive search operations to neutralise the terrorists behind the assault. The teams, led by an IG, DIG, and SP from the anti-terror agency, are questioning eyewitnesses who observed the April 22 attack.

On April 23, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), chaired by Prime Minister Modi, held an emergency meeting, strongly condemning the attack and expressing condolences to the victims' families. The CCS noted the cross-border linkages to the attack and pointed out that it came amid successful elections and growing development in Jammu and Kashmir.

Citing "cross-border linkages" to the horrific attack, India has promised severe punishment to those involved in the strike that triggered wide-spread outrage

In the briefing to the CCS, cross-border linkages of attack were highlighted. It was noted that this attack came in the wake of the holding successful elections in the Union Territory

within India and abroad.

In the briefing to the CCS, the cross-border linkages of the terrorist attack were brought out. It was noted that this attack came in the wake of the successful holding of elections in the Union Territory and its steady progress towards economic growth and development.

As a security measure, India has decided to withdraw its own Defence, Navy, and Air Advisors from the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. These posts in the respective High Commissions are deemed annulled. Five support staff of the Service Advisors will also be withdrawn from both High Commissions. The overall strength of the high commissions will be brought down to 30 from the present 55 through further reductions, to be effective by 1 May 2025.

On Sunday, the prime minister said the "perpetrators and conspirators" of the Pahalgam attack will be "served with the harshest response". "The whole world

stands with 140 crore Indians in our fight against terrorism. I once again assure the affected families that they will get justice, and justice will be done. The perpetrators and conspirators of this attack will be served with the harshest response," Modi said in his 'Mann ki Baat' address.

Meanwhile Opposition MPs on Monday called for convening a special session of Parliament in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack. Rajya Sabha RJD MP Manoj Jha wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while Communist Party of India (CPI) MP P Sandosh Kumar sent a letter to Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, urging them to convene a special session of Parliament to express the will of the nation and send a message of unity.

Independent Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal too requested political parties to urge the Government to convene a special session of Parliament as early as possible in May.

The former Union minister has called for passing a resolution condemning the Pahalgam terror attack to convey the message to the world that the country is united.

Jha, in his letter addressed to the prime minister, said the Parliament of India stands as the cornerstone of the republic and the highest forum for democratic expression. "At this time of grief and testing, the Parliament must come together to pay heartfelt homage to the victims of the Pahalgam attack, honour their memory, and reaffirm our shared commitment to the ideals of unity, justice and peace," Jha said.

Kumar, a CPI MP from Rajya Sabha, in his letter addressed to Rijiju, said the special session would allow members across party lines to come together to mourn the loss and express the will of the nation. He said the attack did not only cause immense sorrow to the victims' kin but also shook the "collective conscience of our nation".

Nervous Pakistan continues to play dirty

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Sensing the mood of the Indian establishment in the aftermath of the horrific killing of 26 tourists in Pahalgam, the troops of the Pakistan army remain on their tenterhooks, anticipating 'punitive strikes' on the 'terror factories' located along the line of control to launch heavily armed infiltrators inside the Indian territory.

For the last four days, the Pakistan army has been resorting to 'unprovoked' ceasefire violations across different sectors in Jammu and Kashmir.

According to a Defence Spokesman, late Sunday night Pakistan army resorted to unprovoked firing in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch and Kupwara districts. A defence spokesperson in Jammu said, "During the night of April 27-28, Pakistan Army posts initiated unprovoked small arms fire across the LoC in areas opposite Kupwara and Poonch districts." Indian troops responded swiftly and effectively, he added. There were no reports of any casualties, he added.

According to field reports, the army has been keeping a close eye on the cross LoC activities especially along the possible routes of infiltration.

A fresh assessment was made by the security forces, suggesting that despite remaining on high alert, the Pakistan army is also providing cover fire to a small group of infiltrators to sneak into the Indian territory. It is for the same reason, local villagers in the border areas of Rajouri and Poonch districts have spotted the presence of suspicious men in the forward areas and alerted the security forces to launch searches to capture them before they could launch a fresh strike targeting Indian security personnel. The local villagers living in the direct line of fire in the frontier districts of Rajouri and Poonch are also spending sleepless nights amid heightened tensions in the region.

At several places, the farmers have started harvesting their maize crop to prevent heavy losses in the wake of escalating tensions in the region.

The local villagers have also started

cleaning the community bunkers to ensure the safety of their loved ones. The Indian army is maintaining a close liaison with the villagers and, wherever necessary, providing training to the members of the Village Defence Guards to maintain a tight vigil during the night. The army has advised these VDG groups to assist the local police during the night to maintain a tight vigil in the area.

agencies are carefully scanning the details to identify the perpetrators behind the attack. Several tourists present on the spot on April 22 have shared images and videos with the investigating agencies as responsible citizens to provide clues.

Meanwhile, a massive hunt is going on in the South Kashmir district of Anantnag to capture the group of terrorists behind the attack. The security



Security personnel keep vigil in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terrorist attack in Srinagar PTI

Meanwhile, the teams of Jammu and Kashmir police and the National Investigations Agency have widened the scope of investigation by detaining a large number of service providers, active over-ground workers, pony wallahs, and others to gather vital clues about the Pahalgam terror attack.

The exact number of people questioned so far could not be ascertained immediately, as the local police authorities are still collecting vital clues.

With a series of amateur videos surfacing on social media, the intelligence

forces have been combing the entire area for six days but have failed to hunt them down.

The security forces remain deployed at various locations in the adjoining areas bordering the Anantnag district. The local villagers in the region have been directed to share information about any suspicious movement in their areas in real time with the local police and army authorities. On the other hand, the Baisaran valley and other local getaways remain out of bounds for tourists arriving in Pahalgam.

The Bystander



At least 24 arrested for objectionable posts following J and K terror attack

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh Police have registered a case against noted folk singer and poetess Neha Singh Rathore, accusing her of making provocative social media posts that allegedly threatened national unity and incited communal disharmony in the aftermath of the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir.

The complaint was lodged by Abhay Pratap Singh at the Hazratganj police station in Lucknow. In his statement, Singh alleged that Rathore, through her Twitter (now X) handle @nehafolksinger, made several objectionable remarks targeting a particular religious community at a time when the nation was mourning the brutal killing of 26 individuals, most of them tourists. According to reports, the assailants had selectively targeted victims based on their religious affiliation.

Folk singer Neha Rathore has been charged for endangering the sovereignty and integrity of India, and promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion

The complainant asserted that while the entire country was grappling with grief and outrage over the Pahalgam incident, Rathore's posts sought to "incite one community against another," thereby undermining national integrity and public tranquility. The remarks, Singh contended, had the potential to disturb the peace and endanger the sovereignty and unity of India. In one of her posts, Neha Singh Rathore wrote:

"Why this selective outrage? Are the lives of people from a particular faith less valuable? Hatred has no religion, but unfortunately, some are using religion to spread

hatred openly. Justice for all innocent lives lost - not just slogans, but actions." In a subsequent post, she further criticised perceived selective condemnation of violence, stating:

"Silence in the face of such tragedies deepens divisions. Hypocrisy and hate crimes must be called out, regardless of the faith of the victims or the perpetrators." Following the complaint, the police registered a First Information Report (FIR) against Rathore under several sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the new criminal code that has replaced the colonial-era Indian Penal Code (IPC). She has been charged under Section 152 of the BNS, which pertains to acts endangering the sovereignty, unity, and integrity of India, as well as sections related to promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion and disturbing public order.

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ABVP gets a foot in the door in JNU red fortress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Left-backed candidates secured three of the four key posts in the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) elections, maintaining their stronghold over the premier university even as the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS)-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) broke a nine-year drought to win the post of joint secretary.

According to the results announced by JNUSU election commission early on Monday, Nitish Kumar of the All India Students' Association (AISA) secured 1,702 votes to win the post of president. His closest competitor, Shikha Swaraj of the ABVP secured 1,430 votes, while the Students' Federation of India (SFI)-supported Tayyaba Ahmed polled 918 votes. Manisha of the Democratic Students' Federation (DSF) won the post of vice-president by securing 1,150 votes, ahead of the ABVP's Nittu Goutham who polled

1,116 votes. The DSF also bagged the general secretary's post, with Munteha Fatima polling 1,520 votes, ahead of the ABVP's Kunal Rai, who secured 1,406 votes.

The ABVP clinched the post of joint secretary, with Vaibhav Meena polling 1,518 votes, ahead of AISA's Naresh Kumar (1,433 votes) and Progressive Students' Association (PSA) candidate Nigam Kumar (1,256 votes). Vaibhav Meena's win marked the first time the ABVP has bagged a central panel post since Saurav Sharma's victory on the same post in 2015-16. The last time the ABVP won the post of president was in 2000-01 when Sandeep Mahapatra had emerged victorious.

This year's election saw a split in the Left alliance, with the AISA and the DSF contesting as one bloc while the SFI and the All India Students' Federation (AISEF) formed a coalition with the Birsra Ambedkar Phule Students' Association (BAPSA) and the PSA.

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PIONEER IN SHORT

India, France sign ₹64,000 crore deal for 26 Rafale jets

India and France signed an intergovernmental agreement on Monday for the acquisition of 26 Rafale-Marine fighter jets, valued at approximately ₹64,000 crore, to bolster the Indian Navy's air power. The deal includes setting up production and maintenance facilities in India, technology transfer for integrating indigenous weapons, and delivery of the jets by 2030. The aircraft, to be deployed on INS Vikrant, will enhance joint capabilities with the Indian Air Force. Signed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his French counterpart Sebastien Lecornu, the pact also covers weapons, spares, and training, marking a major step in Indo-French defence cooperation.

FULL REPORT ON P5

PIB debunks false claims of Indian Army document leak

The Press Information Bureau (PIB) has flagged false claims by pro-Pakistan social media accounts alleging a leak of confidential Indian Army preparedness documents. PIB Fact Check confirmed on X that the documents are fake, urging the public to avoid spreading unverified information and rely on official sources. The disinformation follows a terror attack in Pahalgam on April 22, where 26 people were killed. In response, the Cabinet Committee on Security, led by PM Modi, ordered heightened vigilance. The Defence Ministry also warned against a fraudulent WhatsApp message claiming the Government is seeking donations for army modernisation, calling it misleading and fake.

Honour killing must get strong punishment: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday said upheld the conviction of 11 accused for the "dastardly murder" of a young couple in Tamil Nadu in July 2003 and said honour killing must get a strong measure of punishment. A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Prashant Kumar Mishra refused to interfere with the Madras High Court's June 2022 verdict that upheld the conviction and sentence of the accused persons, including two police officers.

The bench said the victims — Murugesan and Kannagi — who were in their early twenties were killed by administering poison in full view of a large number of villagers. The masterminds and the main perpetrators of this "macabre act" were none other than the father and brother of the woman, it added. The top court observed the reason behind the murder was that Kannagi belonged to the "Vanniyar" community whereas Murugesan was a Dalit from the same village in Cuddalore district. The couple secretly married in May 2003.

"So, at the root of this crime is the deeply entrenched hierarchical caste system in India, and ironically, this most dishonourable act goes by the name of honour-killing," the bench said in its 73-page verdict. Advocate Priyadarshini Rahul appeared for Murugesan's family.

"A crime is an act against the State. But a wicked and odious crime, as the one we have just dealt with, is the ugly reality of our deeply entrenched caste structure. Honour-

killing, as these are called, must get a strong measure of punishment," it said.

The bench awarded a compensation of ₹5 lakh to Murugesan's kin and said the amount was liable to be paid by Tamil Nadu Government. On the role of the police officers, the bench said both committed the offences under Section 217 of IPC and the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 as they

Witnesses turning hostile was underlined to be one of the key events in the case. The bench noted the many reasons for witnesses turning hostile was the delay caused in the trial

neglected their duties and disobeyed the law by not registering the FIR at the first instance with the intention to save the culprits.

Witnesses turning hostile was underlined to be one of the key events in the case. The bench noted one of the many reasons for witnesses turning hostile was the long delay usually caused in a trial. The court underscored the presence of "enough material" placed by the prosecution in the trial court turning sufficient to prove the guilt of the accused beyond a reasonable doubt.

The bench directed those on bail in the case to surrender within two weeks to undergo their remaining sentence. Of the total 15 accused who faced trial in the case, 13 were convicted.

Cases against CWG scam accused closed

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Bringing down curtains on a 13-year-old case, a special court on Monday accepted the Enforcement Directorate's closure report in a money laundering case against Suresh Kalmadi, the former head of the organising committee of 2010 Commonwealth Games and then secretary general Lalit Bhanot and others. The acceptance of the closure report brings to end the money laundering angle in the alleged scam, which took place 15 years ago.

The allegations of corruption in conducting the 2010-Commonwealth Games (CWG) triggered a huge political uproar in the country, leading to filing of several criminal and money laundering cases, including the present one. Kalmadi and others were accused of misconduct in award and execution of two important contracts for the games.

Special judge Sanjeev Aggarwal noted the CBI had already closed the corruption case, based on which the ED started its money laundering probe and accepted the report, which also named CWG OC's then COO, Vijay Kumar Gautam, its then treasurer, A K Matto, Event Knowledge Service (EKS), Switzerland, and CEO, Craig Gordon McLatchey.

The judge noted ED's submission that the offence of money laundering was not found during its investigation. "Since during the investigations, the prosecution has failed to make out an offence under section 3 (money laundering) of the PMLA...



As no offence under section 3 of the PMLA has been made out or has been committed, despite discreet investigations by the ED, therefore, there is no reason to continue with the present ECIR, as a consequence, the closure report filed by the ED stands accepted," the judge held.

The sole money laundering investigation was initiated by the ED based on the case lodged by the CBI. According to the CBI, the works contracts related to Commonwealth Games were Games Workforce Service (GWS) and Games Planning, Project & Risk Management Services (GPPRMS). An undue pecuniary gain was caused by the accused persons to the consortium of EKS and Ernst and Young, by way of awarding the two contracts in a deliberate and wrongful manner and caused corresponding loss of ₹30 crore to OC, CWG, the CBI alleged.

The CBI later filed a closure report in January 2014, saying "no incriminating evidence surfaced during the investigation in the matter" and the allegations in the FIR could not be substantiated against the accused persons. The Games took

place in Delhi from 3 to 14 October, 2010. Even before the event, the collapse of a new pedestrian bridge near the CWG main venue-Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium-made international news.

The event changed the face of Delhi but ultimately unseated the Congress Government, led by Sheila Dikshit. Every aspect of the city beautification and games management-from upgrading street lighting to renovation of stadiums-was marred by allegations of mismanagement and irregularities. A CAG audit report pointed out that Government procedures had not been adhered to meet the delay in the timelines. "Inexplicable delays in decision making-which put pressure on timelines, and thereby, led to the creation of an artificial or consciously created sense of urgency. Since the target date was immovable, such delays could only be overcome by seeking, and liberally granting, waivers to laid down Governmental procedures," the report noted.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) registered at least 19 FIRs. However, in the last 15 years, nobody has been able to fix the responsibility for the 'scam'. At least 11 FIRs have been closed, so far. These included FIRs related to the construction of badminton and squash courts at Siri Fort Stadium and another related to the upgrade and renovation of the Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee Swimming Pool Complex. The first conviction came five years after the 'scam' in August 2015 on an FIR that pertained to the upgradation of street lighting in Delhi.

UP govt to build 15 hostels for working women this FY

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In a major push for women's empowerment, the Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh government is fast-tracking the construction of Shramjeevi Mahila Hostels to provide safe and affordable housing for working women.

Supported by the Central and state governments, 15 hostels are targeted for completion within the 2024-25 financial year.

Launched in 2024-25, the Shramjeevi Mahila Hostel scheme is being implemented by the Women Welfare Department under the Government of India's Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) programme. A total of eight state-of-the-art hostels, each capable of accommodating 500 women, are being built in

Lucknow, Gautam Buddha Nagar and Ghaziabad, under the scheme.

The hostels are being built to the highest safety standards, featuring CCTV surveillance, security guards, fire extinguishers, crèche facilities, backup generators, gymnasiums, auditoriums, laundry services, parking areas, public transport vehicles, canteens and departmental stores.

Under the Mission Shakti guidelines, wardens, security staff and housekeeping teams will be appointed for the hostels. Land for these projects has been secured on an annual lease of just Re 1.

Seven additional hostels, each with a capacity for 500 women, are being constructed in Varanasi, Meerut, Prayagraj, Gorakhpur, Kanpur, Nagar, Jhansi and Agra, with a budget allocation of Rs 170 crore under the Mukhyamantri Shramjeevi

Mahila Hostel Yojana—a 100 per cent state-funded initiative.

The ambitious project is poised to significantly enhance the quality of life of working women by providing secure living spaces and better opportunities for their children's upbringing. It reflects the government's commitment to fostering self-reliance among women, enabling them to excel in their professional pursuits without concern for safety or housing.

Women Welfare and Child Development Director Sandeep Kaur emphasised, "Our aim is to provide a safe and dignified environment for working women, empowering them to move confidently towards self-reliance. All hostels will operate in strict compliance with Mission Shakti guidelines."

Govt's emphasis on effective solution of public problems

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Yogi Adityanath government has taken a historic step to ensure the immediate resolution of public issues. The government has decided to take strict action against officers and employees neglecting letters from MPs, MLAs and public representatives on public complaints.

Following Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's orders, the Parliamentary Affairs Department has issued a directive to all key officials, including principal secretaries, DGPs, divisional commissioners, and district magistrates.

The Yogi government has issued strict instructions to address public issues effectively. A correspondence register

must be maintained in every government office to record letters from public representatives. Replies should be sent immediately upon receipt and the status of the issue's resolution should be communicated to the representative concerned, eliminating the need for repeated correspondence.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has emphasised the importance of addressing letters of public representatives with seriousness, ensuring no negligence in resolving issues. He has issued strict instructions that any negligence in handling the concerns of the public will not be tolerated.

A correspondence register is now mandatory in all departments and offices to record letters from public representa-

tives. Complete information must be provided immediately upon receipt of a letter, and updates on the resolution must be shared. In line with the Chief Minister's instructions, any officer or employee who neglects letters of public representatives will face strict disciplinary action.

Under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's leadership, this decision will enhance transparency and accountability in governance. Departments are now required to act swiftly and effectively on letters from public representatives.

This move will strengthen the connection between the state government, public representatives and the public, ensuring timely resolution of issues and improving administrative efficiency.

'KRISHNA JANMABHOOMI' CASE

HC appears to be correct in impleading Centre, ASI in dispute, says apex court

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Monday said the Allahabad High Court was prima facie correct in allowing Hindu litigants to make the Centre and the Archaeological Survey of India as parties in the Mathura Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah dispute.

The Allahabad High Court on March 5, 2025 allowed amendments to two lawsuits and permitted petitioners to make Centre's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) as respondents.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar said prima facie there was nothing wrong in allowing the amendment of the lawsuit and replies to the amended plaint could be filed.

"One thing is clear. The amendment to the original plaint (two lawsuits) by the Hindu plaintiffs has to be allowed," the CJ observed.

The bench, however, deferred the hearing on the plea of the Committee of

Management, Trust Shahi Masjid Idgah, Mathura and tagged it with other pending cases relating to the dispute.

The mosque committee made "Devta Bhagwan Shri Krishna Lala Virjman next friend" and nine others including "Devasthan Shri Krishna Janam Bhoomi" and Hari Shankar Jain as parties.

The mosque committee said the amendment fundamentally altered the nature of the original suit filed by the Hindu litigants, who claimed rights over the site of Shahi Masjid Eidgah, alleging it to be the birthplace of Lord Shri Krishna.

Over 15 suits from different plaintiffs are pending regarding the same property, raising overlapping and competing claims, it said.

The high court order permitting the amendment undermined its defense already on record and effectively allowed the plaintiffs to set up a new case, the committee argued.

The plea said the high court, while allowing the amendment, also allowed impleading ASI and MHA, without any formal application under the Civil

Procedure Code, or establishing they were necessary parties to the suit.

On April 4, the top court issued notices on a separate plea of the mosque committee against the Allahabad High Court consolidating all suits of the Hindu side in relation to the Mathura Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah dispute.

The high court on October 23, last year, rejected an application of the Committee of Management, Trust Shahi Masjid Idgah seeking the recall of its January 11 order which consolidated all suits of the Hindu side in the case.

The mosque committee moved the high court after the top court on March 19, last year, asked it to first seek the recall of the order consolidating the lawsuits there.

The high court on August 1, 2024, ordered the framing of issues but no issues have been framed so far.

The controversy is related to Mughal emperor Aurangzeb-era Shahi Idgah mosque at Mathura which the Hindu side claims has been built after demolishing a temple at the birthplace of Lord Krishna.

Cash snatched from farmer by miscreants

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Two miscreants riding a motorcycle looted Rs 5,000 from an elderly farmer in Bakshi Ka Talab police station area on Monday afternoon.

The 65-year-old man, identified as Paale, a resident of Dhinohari village in Bakshi Ka Talab, had gone to deposit his electricity bill.

As per reports, Paale was returning home on his bicycle. When he was passing a deserted place near Sadhamau Primary School, the two miscreants overtook him, pushed him down and snatched his bag containing cash and fled around 12:30 pm.

Paale remained lying on the road for hours until some villagers passed the road. They called one Manoj Rawat, a member of Mahona nagar panchayat, who in turn informed the police about the incident.

With the help of locals, the injured old man was admitted to a hospital.

Senior police officers also reached the spot and asked the local police to expedite the investigation. Police have registered a case.

The police are scanning footage of CCTV cameras installed there.

Meanwhile, unidentified miscreants stole Rs 20,000 from a woman's purse in Mohanlalganj on Monday.

The victim, identified as Chandravati of Devikheda in Nagaram, had gone to the bank to withdraw Rs 44,000 around 10 am. After receiving the money from the cashier, she went to get the statement printed in her passbook. Around 11 am, she left the bank for her home by auto. On reaching home at around 12:30 pm, she found that a wad of Rs 200 notes amounting to Rs 20,000 were missing from her purse while the remaining Rs 24,000 was in it.

She later filed a complaint with the police.

Lalit Kala Academy to hold summer camps for youth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The youths will have an opportunity to nurture their hidden artistic talents this summer. The Uttar Pradesh State Lalit Kala Academy will hold summer camps across all 75 districts from May 1 to June 30. Divided into two age groups (10-17 and 18-25), the camps will offer expert-led training in various art forms, held daily from 8 am to 10 am.

Director of the State Lalit Kala Academy, Dr Shradha Shukla, stated that the workshop, being organised under the state government's guidance, aims to refine the artistic talent of Uttar Pradesh's youth. The initiative seeks to foster creativity and inspire interest in visual arts, with participants receiving certificates upon completion.

Dr. Shukla said that the workshop will impart detailed knowledge of visual arts.

Major topics will include art, sketching, watercolour painting, wash techniques, fabric work, clay work, and oil colour painting.

Subject experts will be appointed as regional coordinators in the districts. Participants will also learn about various forms of folk art such as Bundelkhand's Chiteri art, Sanjhi, Kohbar, and miniature paintings.

The director further mentioned that workshops will be conducted from 8 am to 10 am across all 75 districts. In addition to the State Lalit Kala Academy campus in Lucknow, sessions will be organised at the Lalit Kala Institute in Agra and the Department of Fine Arts at Allahabad University.

Training will also be conducted under university supervision in Gorakhpur. The initiative aims to provide local learning opportunities for talents from rural areas.

Folk singer booked for 'provocative' posts

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Police here have registered a case of sedition against folk singer Neha Singh Rathore over a complaint that her provocative social media posts targeting a particular community in the wake of the Pahalgam tragedy could harm the nation's unity.

The complainant referred to the execution-like killing of 26 people, mostly tourists, in Pahalgam last week by terrorists after reportedly asking about their religious affiliation, which left the entire country grieving.

"In this situation, singer and poetess Neha Singh Rathore, using her Twitter (now X) handle @nehafolksinger made some objectionable posts that can adversely affect the national integrity and made repeated efforts to incite one community against another based on religion," the complainant, Abhay Pratap Singh, said.

Rathore, known for songs such as "Bihar mein ka ba", "UP mein ka ba?", and "MP mein ka ba?", said the government wants to divert attention from "real issues" by filing an FIR against her.

"What has the government done so far

in response to the Pahalgam attack? An FIR against me? If you have the guts then go, bring the heads of the terrorists. No need to blame me for your failures..."

"This is a democracy and questions will be asked in a democracy. If you don't want me to ask questions, go sit in the Opposition," she said in a video shared with her close to 435,000 followers on X on Monday.

The complaint was registered at the Hazratganj police station in Lucknow.

Based on the complaint, police registered a case against the folk singer on multiple charges under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), including attempting to promote sectarian animosity, disturbing public tranquillity and endangering the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India, police said, adding that she has also been booked under the Information Technology Act.

While BNS does not explicitly mention sedition as was specified in the colonial-era Indian Penal Code Section 124A, the new criminal code deals with similar charges of endangering the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the country under section 152.

One held for objectionable posts

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Lucknow police arrested a man who posted objectionable posts on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, from Mahigawan police station area in the state capital on Monday.

The accused had posted photos of the prime minister, the chief minister and many other Bharatiya Janata Party leaders along with Asaduddin Owaisi's photo on Facebook to ridicule them.

According to the police, 50-year-old Irfan Ali of Mazra Pur village in Paharpur was posting provocative posts on Facebook for the last few days. He had posted an edit-

ed photo of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen chief Asaduddin Owaisi, whom he showed holding a dog leash in his hand. Apart from this, he also posted derogatory photos of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The photos sparked anger among the supporters of BJP leaders and they demanded strict action against the accused and the police started searching him.

On Monday police located the accused and nabbed him. A police spokesman said a case had been registered against the accused under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

CLASSIFIEDS

सूचना
मैं आर्मी नं० 16026448 एल्का नायक जितेन्द्र सिंह पुत्र श्री राजेन्द्र कुमार सिंह निवासी ग्राम दोनपुर परगना सुहा पोस्ट सराय रावत लहरील हैदरगढ़ जिला बाराबंकी पिन नं० 225124 । मेरे सैन्य दस्तावेजों में मेरे पिता जी का नाम वृत्तिपूर्ण रूप से श्री राजेन्द्र दर्ज है। मेरे पिता जी का सही नाम राजेन्द्र कुमार सिंह है।

NOTICE
I have changed my name from RAMESH KALRA to RAMESH KUMAR KALRA to be known as RAMESH KUMAR KALRA in all future references. RAMESH KUMAR KALRA, Add.- Plot no. 108, HIG RATAN LAL NAGAR, Kanpur

NOTICE
Be it known to all that my registered sale deed number 4495 dated 14/09/2010 (seller Acche Miyan and buyer Smt. Suhila Devi) has actually been lost on 21/03/2025. An online FIR for the same has been lodged at Khulabad police station on 19/04/2025. Mohammad Ahmed son of late Zubair Ahmed resident of 296/1 Naya Abadi Chakia, GTB Nagar Tehsil Sadar, Prayagraj.

NOTICE
I, Mohammad Azaz, father of Mohammad Tauheed, resident of Mohalla Narobhaskar, Jalaun Khas, Jalaun, hereby state that in my son's Class 10th marksheet (Year 2023) issued by CBSE, my name has been incorrectly mentioned as "Mohammad Aejaz". The correct name is "Mohammad Azaz" and it will be used for all purposes.

NOTICE
I Prabha Devi Yadav, spouse of Kati Din Yadav resident of H No 224 Virat Nagar, Ahiwan, Harjinder Nagar, Kanpur Nagar have changed my name from Prabha Devi Yadav to Prabha Devi vide Affidavit dated 26/04/2025 at Kanpur.

NOTICE
It is informed to all that I disinherit my son Shubham Sagar Soni and daughter in law Sugandha Mall from all my movable and immovable properties. In future me and my family will have no connections with any of their misdoings. Ram Narayan Soni R/o-49, Lajwanti Nagar, Sector-11, Indiranagar, Lucknow.

Scientist duped by cyber thugs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Principal scientist in Indian Sugarcane Research Institute, Lucknow was duped of over Rs 3.66 lakh in a cyber thug in Mahanagar. The victim, Lal Singh Gangwar of Mahanagar, had received this money after surrendering an insurance policy of a private company at a bank's branch in Gomti Nagar on March 8, by NEFT.

Gangwar later received calls from Aparna Singh, Vishal Katiyar and DK Patel, all officials dealing with the private company's insurance scheme.

The callers told Gangwar that he suffered a loss by surrendering the policy and it could be compensated by purchasing a new policy bond, a proposal which the victim declined.

Even after this, a forged GBI bond paper of insurance was sent by Patel and a forged GBI bond paper of insurance was sent by Katiyar on the victim's WhatsApp number.

On March 28 this year, Gangwar opened his bank account at the same bank where he had surrendered his insurance policy. The account was linked to Gangwar's Google Pay.

Gangwar later found that Rs 3,66,890 had been withdrawn from his newly opened bank account in a number of transactions between March 20 and 24 this year.

He alleged that his policy details were leaked by the private company from which he had purchased the insurance policy and due to this cyber criminals gained unauthorised online access to his bank account and withdrew the money.

The police have registered a case and have started an investigation.

Meritorious students awarded

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The annual awards day and valedictory ceremony of Avadh Girls' Degree College (AGDC) were held on Monday. Manager/Secretary, Managing Committee of AGDC Dr Nishi Pandey emphasised the importance of celebrating and rewarding the success of students. Awards were presented to the meritorious students. Aamna Nizam secured the highest aggregate marks in MA English. Anshika Shukla of BA first year stood first in her class. Kaynaat Fatima of BA second year secured the highest marks in her class. Rishika Goswami of BA third year was at the top of her class. Simran Kaur secured the highest aggregate marks in BA.

Rishika Singh of BCom first year was at the top of her class. Muskan Mehta of B.Com third year secured the first position in her class. Kajal Murya of BCom secured the highest aggregate marks. A laptop was presented to Anvesha Mishra for excellence in research.

Former DM of Lucknow Aradhana Shukla, chief guest and an alumna of the college, while addressing the gathering encouraged the students to relentlessly pursue their dreams and stressed the importance of being vocal.

President, Managing Committee of Avadh Girls' Degree College Zarine Viccajee urged the students to adopt an optimistic attitude and strive for excellence. This was followed by the valedictory ceremony. The outgoing Students' Council surrendered their badges and received certificates of appreciation for carrying out their duties diligently.

Dean of students Prof Preeti Awasthi motivated the students to be true to themselves. She also wished the students all the best for all their future endeavours. Principal Prof Bina Rai congratulated the students for doing well and motivated them to keep up the good work.



Amethi police launch hi-tech e-Malkhana system

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Amethi

Taking the tech route, the Amethi police have launched a digitalised e-Malkhana at the Mohanganj police station to manage and maintain seized items more efficiently. Superintendent of Police (SP) Aparna Rajat Kaushik claimed this is the first system of its kind in the state, operating through QR codes. "With this new system, the status of any seized item stored in the malkhana can be checked simply by

scanning a QR code using the e-Malkhana mobile application," she said. SP Kaushik explained that the initiative was taken to improve the storage and management of items seized during police operations, which were previously kept in a disorganised manner across police stations in Amethi. The project has been launched first at the Mohanganj station. "Seized materials have now been systematically organised on separate racks according to the year of seizure," Kaushik said. "Each item is linked

and digitalised through a unique QR code." She said seized items received at the station are now stored in transparent plastic containers. The details of each case, along with photographs of the seized items, are fed into the e-Malkhana app, which automatically generates a QR code displaying comprehensive information such as the code number, police station name, case number, type and quantity of the item, relevant legal sections, item status, and the name of the officer who submitted it.

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E-Tender Enq. No.611/P-3/EMPW-12986 Dated 25-04-2025
Dy. Chief Engineer / Headquarter (Procurement Cell-3) GGSSTP, Roopnagar invites E-Tender ID No. 2025_POWER_139345_1 for Repair of Conveyor Belt Structure of Coal Handling Plant, GGSSTP, Rupnagar. For detailed NIT & Tender Specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from dated 25-04-2025 / 17:00 Noon onwards.
Note: - Corrigendum & Addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>
RTP-43/25
76155/12/4186/2023/43917 Dated CHD - 4/28/2025

All Pakistanis, barring one, deported from UP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In the wake of the cowardly Pahalgam terror attack, Pakistani citizens have been deported from Uttar Pradesh under the directives of the Central government.

An official spokesman of the government claimed here on Monday that UP has become the first state to achieve almost 100 per cent deportation of Pakistani nationals within 24 hours, with only one remaining to be deported. The last Pakistani citizen is set to be deported on Wednesday, under constant surveillance by police and intelligence agencies.

It is worth mentioning here that in response to the Pahalgam terror attack, the Central government issued immediate advisories for all states to deport Pakistani nationals. Acting swiftly, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath convened a high-level meeting with Home Department officials

and other agencies. He issued strict instructions to expel all Pakistani citizens from Uttar Pradesh, directing police teams to personally escort them to the border to ensure their safe return to Pakistan.

Following the chief minister's directives, all 75 districts in Uttar Pradesh were placed on high alert, and swift action was taken. Director General of Police Prashant Kumar confirmed that comprehensive steps were implemented statewide to deport Pakistani nationals.

He affirmed that 100 per cent of Pakistani citizens have been deported, with local police teams escorting them to the border. Only one Pakistani national remains and is set to be deported on April 30. The DGP claimed that Uttar Pradesh has emerged as the first state in India to execute such swift and comprehensive action against Pakistani citizens, ensuring their return with full verification at the border.

CM Yogi scripts UP's economic resurgence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh government has claimed that the state's economy has more than doubled, rising from ₹12.88 lakh crore in 2017 to ₹27.51 lakh crore today, all without the raising of taxes. The government is now ambitiously targeting an economy worth over ₹30 lakh crore in Financial Year 26.

The government claimed that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has repeatedly exposed how previous governments allowed rampant corruption and looting of public wealth, leaving the state coffers empty—so much so that even paying salaries to government employees was a struggle.

In sharp contrast, the Yogi government's commitment to good governance and transparent administration has stabilised the state's finances and propelled Uttar Pradesh to new heights of economic prosperity," an official said.

One of Yogi Adityanath's most significant achievements has been shedding Uttar Pradesh's image as a 'BIMARU' state. Through relentless efforts, he has positioned

One of Yogi Adityanath's most significant achievements has been shedding Uttar Pradesh's image as a 'BIMARU' state.

Through relentless efforts, he has positioned UP as the growth engine of India for the past five years.

UP as the growth engine of India for the past five years.

Although UP has always been India's largest state by population, its GSDP from 1950 to 2017 had only reached ₹12.75 lakh crore. Under Yogi's leadership, the GSDP has more than doubled to ₹27.51 lakh crore, with a target of ₹30.77 lakh crore set for the current financial year.

Once mocked, Uttar Pradesh today stands tall as India's second-largest economy, contributing 9.2 per cent to the national GDP. In 2023-24, while India's GDP grew at 9.6 per cent, Uttar Pradesh outpaced it with an impressive growth rate of 11.6 per

cent. It is worth recalling the situation before 2017, when UP struggled to pay salaries on time and development projects stalled due to chronic budgetary shortfalls. Today, thanks to prudent fiscal management and structural reforms under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh has become a revenue-surplus state for five consecutive years, all without burdening its citizens with additional taxes.

The government tackled tax evasion, plugged revenue leakages and embraced digital governance on a large scale to enhance transparency. Despite having the country's lowest diesel and petrol rates, Uttar Pradesh has continued its remarkable journey toward economic prosperity, proving that sustainable development is achievable with honest leadership and strategic planning. Uttar Pradesh today stands as a shining example of the digital revolution in India. By December 2024, during the financial year 2024-25, the state recorded over 1,000 crore digital transactions— with more than half conducted through UPI. Moreover, the government's direct transfer of funds into the

bank accounts of beneficiaries of welfare schemes has dismantled the web of middlemen, significantly curbing corruption. Presently, funds for 207 schemes across 11 departments, including 113 schemes of the Central government, are being disbursed via Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

In 2024-25 alone, over ₹1 lakh crore has been transferred to more than nine crore beneficiaries, saving the government approximately ₹10,000 crore through DBT efficiencies. Uttar Pradesh's economic resurgence under the Yogi government has also earned accolades from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). According to the RBI's 2024-25 state budget report, UP's share in the own tax receipts of all Indian states was 9.9 per cent, 10.5 per cent and 11.6 per cent for the years 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25 respectively—ranking it the second-best performing state. In these years, while the average own tax-to-GSDP ratio for other states stood at 6.5 per cent, 7.0 per cent and 7.2 per cent, UP posted higher ratios of 7.6 per cent, 9.8 per cent and 10 per cent, respectively.

BJP govt backed men attacked Suman: AKY

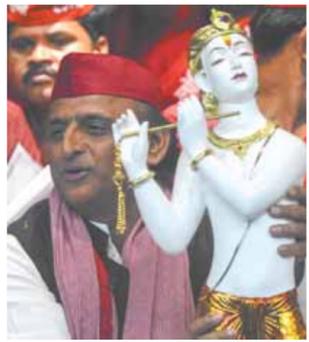
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, on Monday, alleged that the people who attacked Rajya Sabha member Ramji Lal Suman's convoy near Aligarh have "complete" support of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Uttar Pradesh government.

"Some people have been given a free hand to do anything they want, and this is because of their people who are sitting (in government) from top to bottom. The attack on Samajwadi Party leader Ramji Lal Suman indicates that they (the attackers) have complete support of the government," Yadav said.

"The attack took place because Ramji Lal Suman was going to Bulandshahr to raise his voice against those who oppress Dalits. The government is also making Thar and the bulldozer a symbol of fear," he said.

SP MP Suman alleged that his convoy was attacked near Aligarh and the



assailants attempted to break the windows of his car. He further claimed that the attackers had come with the intention to kill him and they were being protected by the state government.

"Sunehra is a place in Bulandshahr where people of a particular community

killed an elderly woman by driving (vehicle) at high speed, and four to five others were injured. We had a programme scheduled for the past three days, as per the orders of the Samajwadi Party, which meant that the police and administration were aware of it. The toll plaza at Ghabana was like a cantonment, and we were not allowed to pass. Some distance away from there, near Aligarh, our convoy was attacked, oil was poured on us, and the windows of the vehicles were broken. These people came with a conspiracy to attack and kill us, and they are backed by the state government," Ramji Lal Suman said. Suman has been under fire since his controversial statement on Rana Sangha last month. Suman called the 16th century Rajputana king a "traitor" for allegedly bringing Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty, to defeat Ibrahim Lodi.

On March 26, violence erupted outside the residence of Suman in Agra. Unidentified individuals resorted to pelting stones, breaking window panes and vandalised vehicles parked outside.

FIR against LU asstt professor for Pahalgam post

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

An assistant professor in Lucknow University (LU) was on Monday booked on charges of sedition and causing disharmony for her post on X (formerly twitter) on Pahalgam terror attack by the police on the complaint of a student leader affiliated to Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP).

The teacher, Madri Kakoti, assistant professor in the department of linguistics, had on April 23 posted that asking religion before killing people is terrorism, so is inquiring about religion before lynching, sacking from jobs, denying houses and bulldozing homes among others.

The FIR was lodged at Hasanganj police station based on a complaint filed by Jatun Shukla alias Manmohan Shukla, city co-minister of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) Lucknow unit.

In his complaint, Shukla alleged that on April 22, Pakistan-backed terrorist groups killed 26 tourists in Pahalgam after reportedly questioning their religion before carrying out the massacre.

He claimed that while the attack was a direct assault on India's sovereignty, some individuals with an "anti-national mindset" within the country were allegedly defending or supporting the incident indirectly through social media posts.

Shukla accused Kakoti of repeatedly attacking India's unity, integrity, and sovereignty through her posts made from the handle @ms_medussa on platform X (formerly Twitter). He further alleged that her posts posed a threat to public order and could potentially incite communal violence. The complainant also accused Kakoti of using derogatory terms like 'saffron terrorism' on social media, which he described as hateful and inflammatory. He urged the police to register a case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and initiate legal proceedings against her. Assistant Commissioner of Police, Mahanagar, Neha Tripathi, said that an FIR had been registered under charges of sedition, promoting enmity between different communities, and other provisions related to creating public disturbance and hurting religious sentiments.

Five buried under soil mound in Kaushambi



Policemen investigate after a mud mound collapsed while they were digging soil for house plastering, in Kaushambi on Monday. At least five people were killed in the incident according to officials. PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

In a tragic incident reported from Tikar Deeh village in Kokhraj area of Kaushambi district, eight people of the village who went to dig mud in a pond on Monday morning were buried under the mound of soil.

On hearing the screams, people rushed there and started removing people buried in the soil. Meanwhile, after getting information, the police also reached the spot. With the help of the villagers, everyone was taken out.

All the injured were rushed to the medical college hospital, where doctors pronounced 35-year-old Maamta, wife of Awadhesh; 35-year-old Lalita Devi, wife of Rajesh; 13-year-old Uma Devi; 15-year-old Khushi, daughter of Phoolchand; and 70-year-old Kachhari Devi, wife of late Chhotalal; dead.

Meanwhile, 40-year-old Maina Devi, wife of Raju; 16-year-old Sapna, daughter of Bharat; and 35-year-old Aakrosh Kumar, son of late Chhotalal; are undergoing treatment. The police have completed the legal formalities and sent the bodies for post-mortem.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed his condolences to the members of bereaved families and directed the local administration to ensure proper treatment of those who were injured in the mishap. He also announced a compensation of Rs 5 lakh each for the kin of those killed in the mishap.

Meanwhile, three children of a family drowned while bathing in a pond in Dharauli Madhupur ward of Kohndour area of Pratapgarh district on Sunday. Additional Superintendent of Police Durgesh Kumar Singh said on Sunday evening that Santosh Kumar Musahar's son Kesari (7), Kuki (6) and daughter Khushi (10) had gone to bathe in a pond in Dharauli Madhupur ward of Kohndour. He said that while bathing, the children went into deep water and started drowning. Singh said that people reached there after hearing the noise and took the three out of the pond and rushed them to the local hospital, where doctors pronounced them dead.

He said that the police had sent the bodies for post-mortem.

Surprise inspection at UP madrasa finds no class X student can write name in Eng

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bahraich

A surprise inspection at a madrasa in this district has unveiled the sorry state of education there, with officials saying that none of its class 10 students could write their names in English.

Alarmed, authorities issued a warning and a notice to the madrasa and asked the seminary to focus on other subjects besides Arabic and Persian.

Qari Irfan, a faculty member at the seminary, said 15 students have been enrolled in class 10 so far, and of them 10 were present during Monday's surprise inspection.

"The students asked to write in English are new to this seminary. They are weak in English and could not perform to the satisfaction of the inspecting officials. We will hold separate classes for struggling students," the acting principal (Naib Principal) of the madrasa, Maulana Shamsuddin, told PTI. District Minority Welfare Officer Sanjay Mishra told reporters on Monday that the

surprise inspection was conducted at Jamia Gaziya Sayyadul Uloom, a recognised madrasa in the Badi Takiya area.

One of the teachers was found absent though it was not recorded in the attendance register, Mishra said and also noted that students' attendance in Munshi, Maulvi, and Alim classes was significantly lower compared to the registered number.

"During the inspection, class 10 students were asked to write their names and that of the madrasa in English. But none could do it," he claimed and pointed out that the seminary's focus was largely limited to Arabic and Persian studies with little attention to other subjects. This has led to an "alarming" academic situation, the officer said, adding, "Neglecting the broader education of students is playing with their future."

The authorities have warned the madrasa of strict action if immediate steps are not taken towards improving the quality of education. Notices have been sent to the madrasa management and the absent

teacher. Shamsuddin pointed out that besides imparting religious education, the madrasa had provisions for teaching English, Hindi, Mathematics, and Science.

"Which is why a science teacher had been appointed. But more emphasis was given to Arabic, Persian, and Urdu rather than these subjects." "However, since the implementation of the NCERT curriculum... we have now started focusing on all subjects. It is better for the children's future that they are not limited to becoming just Alims (religious scholars) but also have opportunities in other fields as well," he said.

In view of the minority welfare officer's warning, "we have now prepared a timetable for teachers to teach all subjects", the acting principal added. About the officer complaining that very few students of Munshi, Maulvi, and Alim classes being in attendance at the seminary, Irfan said the madrasa has enrolled 350 pupils for this academic session so far and the admissions was still in progress.

Lko makes mark at Arabian Travel Mart

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Lucknow is making a strong impression at the Arabian Travel Mart being held in Dubai from April 28 to May 1. Iconic sites such as Rumi Darwaza, Bara Imambara and the Clock Tower, along with other major attractions, are being showcased to an international audience.

Uttar Pradesh Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiveer Singh said rich heritage, architecture and cultural diversity of Lucknow and other parts of Uttar Pradesh are being presented to attract foreign tourists. Alongside Lucknow's attractions, sites like Buland Darwaza, Fatehpur Sikri in Agra, National Chambal Sanctuary and Buddhist Circuit are also being promoted. "Our goal is to establish Lucknow as a leading destina-



tion on the global tourism map. Landmarks like Rumi Darwaza and Bara Imambara are not only the pride of

Lucknow but also invaluable symbols of Indian culture and history," he said.

The state government is also working to position other key religious, cultural and natural destinations such as Ayodhya, Varanasi, Mathura-Vrindavan and Vindhyachal on the global stage. The Tourism department is actively engaging with foreign tour operators, travel agents, and investors to open new avenues for tourism investment in Uttar Pradesh.

The tourism minister said that through the Travel Mart, Lucknow's craftsmanship, handicrafts, cuisine and cultural performances are being showcased to international audience. This initiative is expected to boost the number of foreign tourists and create new opportunities for local artisans and businesses associated with tourism.

Four from UP get Padma Shri award

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Monday, congratulated four distinguished personalities from Uttar Pradesh who were honoured with the Padma Shri award by President Droupadi Murmu in New Delhi. These four are: Dr. Shyam Bihari Agrawal, Hriday Narayan Dikshit, Ganeshwar Shastri Dravid, and Dr. Satyapal Singh. Extending his greetings through his social media handle, CM Yogi stated that their contributions to the nation and the state are invaluable. Their exceptional work in diverse fields such as art, literature, and sports will serve as a priceless legacy for future generations.

He also noted that receiving four out of the ten Padma Shri awards is a matter of pride for Uttar Pradesh.

Congratulating renowned painter, writer, and dedicated teacher Dr. Shyam Bihari Agrawal on receiving the Padma Shri, CM Yogi said that his dedication, teaching, and creativity have left an indelible mark on the Indian art world. He added that this recognition is a proud achievement for the entire art community, which will continue to draw inspiration from his contributions.

Wishing Hriday Narayan Dikshit on being conferred the Padma Shri, CM Yogi remarked that his writings express the essence of Indian culture, philosophy, and life values. He said that Dikshit's work reflects profound national, social, and cultural thought, unwavering faith in the nation's principles, and a commitment to social awakening. His writing will continue to ignite the spirit of nationalism.

Congratulating the renowned Vedic scholar Ganeshwar Shastri Dravid on his

Padma Shri award, the Chief Minister hailed him as a beacon of Indian literature and education. CM Yogi emphasized that Dravid's unparalleled scholarship and literary pursuits have given new dimensions to the Indian knowledge tradition. His remarkable contributions in determining the auspicious times for the foundation stone laying and consecration ceremonies at Shri Ram Janmabhoomi in Ayodhya and Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi are unforgettable.

Extending his best wishes to renowned para-athletics coach Dr. Satyapal Singh, CM Yogi said that his exceptional sportsmanship, dedication, and relentless hard work have brought glory to the nation on the global stage. He added that Dr. Singh's achievements would inspire athletes across the country and the state to dream bigger. He also wished him a bright future ahead.

Mathura prepares for grand Akshay Tritiya amid tight security

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mathura

Extensive arrangements have been made across Brajbhumi's temples for the smooth conduct of the Akshay Tritiya festival on April 30 amid tight security and a detailed traffic plan, officials here said on Monday.

District Magistrate Chandra Prakash Singh said, "Without compromising security, every effort will be made to facilitate easy darshan for devotees."

He also added that Nagar Nigam officials have been instructed to ensure a constant water supply and fans are installed to provide relief from the heat.

The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) has also been directed to ensure round-the-clock medical facilities, including ambulance availability, the official said.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP)

Shlok Kumar stated that the area has been divided into three zones and nine sectors, with adequate police arrangements in place.

He also noted that a detailed traffic plan has been devised to ensure smooth vehicle movement during the festival.

Gyanendra Kishor Goswami, the priest of Bankey Bihari Temple, explained, "Devotees pay obeisance to the lotus feet of Bihari Ji Maharaj in the morning and have Sarwang Darshans in the evening, a rare occasion available once a year."

He highlighted the special rituals for the day, including the application of sandalwood paste and offering 'Sattu' prashad to the deity to protect him from the heat.

"Bankey Bihari Maharaj wears a Peetambari (yellow-coloured dhoti) and Payal (anklets) on this day, a tradition started by Swami Haridas," he added.



The priest also mentioned that darshan of the lotus feet of the deity on Akshay Tritiya is considered equivalent to visiting the Badrinath Dham in Uttarakhand, which reopens today after the winter closure.

In Vrindavan's Radha Raman Temple, the day marks the start of a tradition where the deity is given a new floral abode daily. Dinesh Chandra Goswami, the temple priest, noted that this practice cools the deity as the sanctum is kept cool. The deity's attire, including Dhoti, Bagalbandi, crown, and flute, will be made of sandalwood, and the "Bhog" will include cooling fruits like muskmelon and cucumber. The preparation of sandalwood paste for this event began 15 days ago.

The temple also observes Jhaki darshan, where the curtain is drawn and opened frequently to protect the deity from evil eyes.

Bhagwatacharya Keshav Acharya explained the significance of Akshay Tritiya, stating, "According to Hindu mythology, Treta Yuga began on this day. It is a day of giving up, and blessings received on this day continuously increase."

In Goverdhan, performing circumambulation of the hillock is believed to open the gates of salvation.

Pawan Kaushik, the priest of Daanghati Temple, emphasized the importance of this ritual, while also mentioning the auspicious nature of paying obeisance during the "Mangala Aarti," when sandalwood paste, mixed with Ganges and Yamuna river water, perfume, camphor, and saffron, is applied to the deity. Similar rituals will be observed in all seven ancient Krishna temples of Vrindavan, making Akshay Tritiya a day of spiritual significance across Brajbhumi.

DM listens to public grievances



District Magistrate Jitendra Pratap Singh during the public hearing on Monday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

District Magistrate Jitendra Pratap Singh on Monday held a public hearing at the Collectorate office where he heard grievances of the public and resolved several issues immediately. During the hearing, Brijesh Kumar of

Hardev Nagar, Barra, made a request regarding the treatment of his daughter-in-law, Ramita Kumari. He said that Ramita, originally from Bihar, has been unable to hear in either ear. Despite running from one government hospital to another for the past eight months, no solution had

been found. Taking immediate cognizance of the matter, the district magistrate personally contacted the director of a private hospital and requested assistance for Ramita's treatment. The hospital director agreed and promptly called the family to the hospital, where

Ramita's treatment was initiated free of cost.

Meanwhile, during the public hearing, Sneha, a resident of Kuli Bazaar, lodged a complaint regarding the non-issuance of death certificate since her mother Anita Devi's died in July last year. The district magistrate immediately directed the officials concerned to issue the certificate, which was prepared and handed over to her within an hour. District Magistrate Jitendra Pratap Singh instructed all present officials to ensure the swift and quality redressal of public grievances.

UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE FOR 288 CHILDREN

It became an unforgettable experience for 288 children from the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) receiving training at The Sports Hub (TSH). With the support of JCI, these children were taken on a trip to the grand Blue World Theme Water Park located in Bithoor.

This commendable initiative by The Sports Hub management and JCI not only provided entertainment for the children but also taught them the importance of teamwork, cooperation, and staying joyful in life.

Throughout the event, the TSH coaching staff took full responsibility for the children's safety and management, allowing them to enjoy every moment with complete enthusiasm and ease.

Man, grandson die in road accident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

A man and his grandson died in a road accident near Rajpur village in Koraon area here on Monday.

Reports said that Harilal Sharma (65) of Tharparsia village of Mirzapur and his grandson Vinay Sharma (30) were returning after distributing wedding cards. Their bike collided with a tractor-trolley on the Koraon-Drummondganj road and the injured Harilal and Vinay were taken to Buchh Community Health Centre where doctors declared both of them dead. After the accident, the driver left the trolley and fled with the tractor.

The marriage of Harilal's daughter was to scheduled to take place on May 8 in Garha village of Koraon area. Harilal was the father of three children. The deceased Vinay was the eldest of four brothers. His mother, Rekha Devi, is inconsolable.

Ramgarh outpost in charge Rajendra Singh said a case has been registered against the tractor driver in this connection. Investigation was being done and further action would be taken soon, he added.

SECURITY TIGHTENED

After the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, the security of Kashmiri students studying in Allahabad University has been tightened. Special arrangements have been

made for the security of five Kashmiri students living in its Muslim Hostel. The police administration has increased the deployment of security forces around the hostel. A helpline number has been issued and the university administration and the police are in constant touch with students.

Security has been increased at public places in Prayagraj. Special surveillance is being done at bus stands, railway stations and crowded areas. Security forces have been put on alert mode.

DCP Prayagraj Abhishek Bharti said action will be taken as soon as any suspicious activity is reported. He appealed to citizens not to pay attention to rumours and inform the police about suspicious activities.

BSF JAWAN'S DEATH MOURNED

A solemn atmosphere prevailed in Baraut town of Handia as the village mourned the loss of BSF jawan Gulam Mohammad (45). The jawan, posted on the West Bengal border, died due to illness while on duty.

His family received the devastating news on Monday morning following which the village was plunged into mourning.

Gulam Mohammad's father, Mukhtar Ahmed, said his son's health deteriorated during duty and he was given the sad news by the BSF over the phone.

Students honoured



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

Founder of Tenderfoot Priti Kesarwani, and co-teacher Vani Budhwani honoured the students for the annual session 2024-2025.

The chief guest was Dr Indra Mohan Rohatgi, President, Uttar Pradesh Veterans Cricket Association and Chairman, United Public School, who lit the lamp.

The students included Riddhi Valiramani, Kavish Kesarwani, Aavyan Agarwal, Sanya Kanodia, Ishani Jaiswal, Navyata Dhawan, Harshil Dhawan,

Vamika Agarwal, Aadya Bhagat, Nainika Kesarwani, Parth Sarogi, Aavya Sahu, Vardan Chauhan, Atharv Mishra, Jaidev Gupta, Kartik Tandon, Mayra Sarin, Parth Srivastava, Mridansh Bhagat, Aarav Agarwal, Naisha Devjani, Ayansh Chaurasia, Gurmehar Gupta, Yuwan Gandhi, Nitiksha Mishra, AyanaDevjani, Meerab Rahil and Sayraa Chawla.

The vote of thanks was proposed by Priti Kesarwani. Teachers Vaani Budhwani, Aiman Javed, Shikha Rathor, Unnati Gupta, Ifra Meraj and Vaishnavi Mehrotra welcomed the parents and guests.

Mishap in Kanpur Dehat claims two lives

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

Two people died and 22 were injured in a road accident in Kanpur Dehat late on Sunday night. After the incident there was chaos and commotion at the spot.

According to a report, a Janrath Roadways bus going from Agra to Varanasi collided with a truck from behind near Rania (Kanpur Dehat). As a result one passenger and the driver of the bus died in the accident, while 22 people were injured. The injured have been admitted to the Medical College, from where six were referred to the LLR (Hallet) Hospital, Kanpur, as their condition was critical.

The incident took place around 1.30 am when a bus of Taj Depot, Agra, ramed into a truck ahead of it on the Mantora bridge in Rania police station area of Kanpur Dehat.

One side of the front portion of the bus got badly crushed. Co-driver Bhupendra Singh (52) of Bindu Katra, Tukpura, Agra,



The badly damaged bus after the mishap in Rania, Kanpur Dehat.

conductor Anil Kumar (30) of Deeh (Rajasthan) sitting in the cabin were among 22 people who sustained injury in the incident. Immediately, Circle Officer Priya Singh along with force from Rania and Akbarpur police stations rushed to the spot and rescued the injured. They were sent to the medical college where Dr Sriprakash on emergency duty declared Rajendra Prasad (60) of Ranjithpura, Agra, dead. Meanwhile, bus driver Jagvir Singh (50) of Hathras also succumbed to his injury while Narsingh, Shama Begum, Salim, Mohd Ehtesham, Alsifa and Shivraj Singh were referred to Hallet Hospital, Kanpur. Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Avaneesh Kumar, tehsildar and naib tehsildar also rushed to spot.

SP Arvind Mishra reached the hospital and enquired about the injured passengers. He directed the Chief Medical Superintendent (CMS) Dr Vandana Singh to provide better treatment to the injured. Bus conductor said that 28 people were present in the bus.

Emphasis on understanding NABL accreditation process



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

The Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding (Society of Plant Breeders and Seed Technologists) of SHUATS in collaboration with the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories (NABL), Gurugram, organised a one-day awareness programme on NABL accreditation as per ISO/IEC 17025 standards. The event took place at the JIBB Auditorium, SHUATS campus, Naini.

Joint Director, NABL, Piyush Goyal, and Deputy Director, NABL, Pujja Singh, emphasised on understanding the NABL accreditation process, its significance, and implementation under ISO/IEC 17025 standards.

The programme was attended by senior faculty members, including Professor B Mehera, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Administration/Dean Faculty of Agriculture, and Professor Vaidurya Pratap Sahi, Head, Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding.

The NABL officials visited various laboratories, including the Notified State Seed Testing Laboratory, Tissue Culture Laboratory and Molecular Biology Laboratory, to gain insights into their operations and facilities. The awareness programme aimed to enhance understanding of NABL accreditation and its importance in ensuring quality and standards in testing and calibration laboratories.

24-yr-old woman found dead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kaushambi

A 24-year-old woman was found dead with her throat slit Monday on the rooftop of her home in the Paschim Sharira area of Kaushambi district, police said.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Brijesh Kumar Srivastava said that Jyoti, the daughter of Shambhu, a native of Kolhuwa village, was sleeping in a rooftop room, while her parents lay asleep in another part of the house.

When she did not wake up in the morning by the usual time, her family members went to check on her. They found her body soaked in blood with her throat slit, and veins of both her hands cut, Srivastava said.

Her body was sent for post-mortem examination and a case of murder was filed against unknown persons in this connection.

EPS-95 NAC meeting held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

The monthly meeting of the EPS-95 National Agitation Committee (Kanpur Division), was held with at Rawatpur Bus Stand. It was presided over by Divisional President Ashok Kumar Yadav and chaired by State President Om Shankar Tiwari.

Addressing the gathering, State President Om Shankar Tiwari elaborated on the ongoing four-point demands — minimum pension of Rs.7500 + DA, healthcare facilities for both husband and wife under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme, among others. National Advisor Rajesh Kumar Shukla, in his address, emphasised that success is very near and stressed the need to stay united with strong numbers.

The meeting was conducted by divisional secretary and state coordinator Jai Roop Singh Parihar. At the end, homage was paid to the tourists killed by terrorists in Pahalgam, and a strong demand was made to the government for stringent action against terrorism. The meeting was also addressed by Anoop Kushwaha, Sudha Nigam, Sudhir Mishra, GP Pathak and others.

'Constitution of India a living document'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

The Indian Constitution is not just a legal document, but a living entity that embodies the ideals of justice, equality and liberty and it shapes the identity of every Indian. It serves as a reminder that the Constitution is a cornerstone of India's democracy and the source of its national pride.

This view was expressed by Director, IITA, Prof Mukul Sharad Sutaone, while speaking at a programme "Hamara Samvidhan, Hamara Swabhimani" ("Our Constitution, Our Self-Respect" organised in the Administrative block auditorium on Monday. He said this phrase emphasises the deep connection between India's Constitution and the nation's pride and identity.

The Constitution of India, adopted on January 26, 1950, is the supreme law of the land and represents the principles and values upon which India stands — democracy, equality, justice, secularism, and the rule of law.

Director said that when we say "Hamara Samvidhan," we refer to the foundational document that not only guides the

The Constitution of India, adopted on January 26, 1950, is the supreme law of the land and represents the principles and values upon which India stands — democracy, equality, justice, secularism and the rule of law.

governance of the country but also ensures the protection of the rights and freedoms of every citizen. "Hamare Swabhimani" (Our Pride) reflects the Indian Constitution and dignity that every citizen of India feels towards the Constitution, recognising it as a symbol of unity, diversity and strength.

Dean, Student Affairs (SA), Prof Pavan Chakraborty, said the Indian Constitution is derived from a combination of multiple sources, both domestic and international, that helped shape its structure, provisions and functioning. Its derivation is rooted in the historical, legal and philosophical influences that contributed to its creation. Dean

(Infrastructure) Prof OP Vyas said that the Indian Constitution is a product of historical circumstances, philosophical thought and global influences. It was designed to be a flexible, progressive document that would reflect India's diverse social, cultural and political landscape while ensuring the protection of fundamental rights and promoting social justice and equality.

The way it draws upon multiple sources—particularly the British legal system, American federalism and Gandhian ideals—reflects the complexity and uniqueness of India's constitutional democracy.

Dean (Development) Prof Shekhar Verma said the Constitution of India was a living document, evolving over time through amendments and judicial interpretations. It aims to create a just, democratic and inclusive society by ensuring the protection of rights and promoting the welfare of all citizens. Registrar Prof Mandar Karyakte proposed the vote of thanks while Dr Sanjay Kumar Singh conducted the programme.

2 robbers arrested after exchange of fire

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Muzaffarnagar

Police arrested two robbers after an exchange of fire in Muzaffarnagar's Kotwali area and recovered Rs 2 lakh looted cash from them, officials said Monday.

Both the accused identified as Vishal and Vishesh were injured in the encounter and are currently hospitalised, they said.

Superintendent of Police (City) Satya Narain said, "During checking, the two suspects were intercepted. They opened fire at the police, and in retaliation, were injured and arrested. We recovered the full looted amount, two pistols, and a bike without a number plate from them."

The robbery had taken place on April 22 when a villager was returning from a bank at Behdi village, Narain said.

Stress on increasing crop yield



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

The IFFCO Pulphur unit on Monday organised a 'kisan chaupal' in Mahulia village, focusing on the benefits and usage of Nano Urea Plus and Nano DAP for paddy crops. The event aimed to educate farmers on the effective application of these products to enhance crop yield.

The team demonstrated the method of spraying Nano Urea Plus and Nano DAP, highlighting their benefits and optimal usage. Senior Executive Director Sanjay Kudesia encouraged farmers to experiment with Nano Urea Plus and Nano DAP on a portion of their land to witness the difference. IFFCO announced plans to provide free drones and training to farmers on drone-based spraying methods in col-

laboration with CORDET. Farmers attending the chaupal showed enthusiasm towards Nano Urea Plus and Nano DAP and many expressed interest in adopting these products for their paddy crop. Principal of CORDET Dr Harishchandra, Senior Manager Umesh Kumar, Manager Anurag Tiwari, PRO Swayam Prakash and local farmers were present on the occasion.

Pankaj Udhas, Shekhar Kapur among Padma awardees

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Former chief of Suzuki Motor late Osamu Suzuki, late singer Pankaj Udhas, former Bihar deputy chief minister late Sushil Kumar Modi, and publisher of Tamil daily Dinamalar, Lakshminarayana Ramasubbaiyer, were among the 71 prominent personalities conferred with Padma awards by President Droupadi Murmu on Monday.

Altogether 139 distinguished persons were named for the country's civilian awards — Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri — on the eve of the 76th Republic Day on January 25.

While 71 of them were given the awards at the Rashtrapati Bhavan's majestic Durbar Hall on Monday in the presence of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home

Minister Amit Shah, among others, the remaining will be conferred with the decorations at a separate function to be held soon.

Veteran actor Shekhar Kapur, cricketer Ravichandran Ashwin, hockey player P R Sreejesh, chairman of Asian Institute of Gastroenterology and AIG Hospitals, D Nageshwar Reddy, violinist Lakshminarayana Subramaniam and Telugu superstar Nandamuri Balakrishna, also known as Balayya, were the other prominent persons conferred with the Padma awards by Murmu.

Among the awardees, four received Padma Vibhushan — Suzuki (Posthumous), Subramaniam, Reddy and Malayalam author and film director MT Vasudevan Nair (Posthumous).

A total of 10 distinguished personalities were conferred with Padma Bhushan.



President Droupadi Murmu conferring the Padma Bhushan on filmmaker Shekhar Kapur during the Civil Investiture Ceremony-I at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi

They include Udhas (Posthumous), Sushil Kumar Modi (Posthumous), Balakrishna, Kapur, Sreejesh, Tamil actor S Ajith Kumar, chairperson of Zydrus Lifesciences, Pankaj Patel, and Vinod Dham, an Indian-American engineer, who is widely known as the 'Father of the Pentium'.

As many as 57 prominent personalities were conferred with Padma Shri.

These include former chairperson of the State Bank of India, Arundhati Bhattacharya, industrialist Pawan Kumar Goenka, wildlife researcher and Marathi author Maruti Bhujangrao Chitampalli, who gave unique dictionaries on birds, animals and trees, and master puppeteer Bhimavva Daddabalappa Shillekyathara, who was one of the first women to practise Togalu Gombeyaata (leather puppetry) art form.

Former AIIMS and SGPGI director A

K Mahapatra and Punjabi singer Jaspinder Narula Kaul were also given Padma Shri.

This year, the Padma awards were given to 30 unsung heroes, including 100-year-old Libia Lobo Sardesai, who played an important role in Goa's freedom movement. She co-founded an underground radio station — 'Voz da Liberdade (Voice of Freedom)' — in a forested area in 1955 to rally people against Portuguese rule.

The awards are given in various disciplines and fields such as art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports and civil service, among others.

Padma Vibhushan is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; Padma Bhushan for distinguished service of high order; and Padma Shri for distinguished service in any field.

Rafale jets: India-France ink pact of ₹64,000 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India and France on Monday inked an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to procure 26 naval variants of Rafale fighter jets at a cost of around Rs 64,000 crore for the Indian Navy.

The pact provides for setting up of a production facility for Rafale fuselage as well as maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities for aircraft engines, sensors and weapons in India, according to the Defence Ministry.

In line with the Government's thrust on Aatmanirbhar Bharat, the agreement includes Transfer of Technology for integration of indigenous weapons in India. It also includes setting up of production facility for Rafale Fuselage as well as Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul facilities for aircraft engine, sensors and weapons in India.

The deal is expected to generate thousands of jobs and revenue for a large number of MSMEs in setting up, production and running of these facilities.

The IGA has been signed by Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh and Minister of Armed Forces of France Sebastien Lecornu. The signed copies of the agreement, aircraft package supply protocol and weapons package supply protocol were exchanged by Indian and French officials in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh at Nausena Bhawan. The ministry said the delivery of the aircraft would be completed by 2030, with the crew undergoing training in France and India.

India is procuring the jets for deployment on board aircraft carrier INS Vikrant. Manufactured by French defence major

Dassault Aviation, the Rafale-Marine is a carrier-borne combat-ready aircraft with proven operational capabilities in the maritime environment.

The sealing of the mega deal came three weeks after the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi cleared the procurement.

Under the terms of reference, the delivery of the jets will have to start around five years after the signing of the contract. In July 2023, the defence ministry accorded the initial approval for the mega acquisition following a series of deliberations and evaluation tests of the platform.

Under the deal, the Indian Navy will also get associated ancillary equipment including weapon systems and spares from Dassault Aviation.

The Defence Ministry said that the Rafale-Marine has commonality with the Rafale being operated by the Indian Air Force (IAF).

"Its procurement will substantially enhance joint operational capability, besides optimising training and logistics for the aircraft for both Indian Navy and IAF," it said in a statement.

"The induction would lead to the addition of a potent force multiplier to the Indian Navy's aircraft carriers, substantially boosting the nation's air power at sea," it said.

Manufactured by France's Dassault Aviation, the Rafale-Marine is a carrier-borne combat-ready aircraft with proven operational capabilities in maritime environment. The delivery of these aircraft would be completed by 2030, with the crew undergoing training in France and India.

Rafale-Marine has commonality with the Rafale being operated by IAF.

Naresh Tikait speaking 'language of Pakistan': BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The BJP on Monday accused Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) president Naresh Tikait of speaking the "language of Pakistan" after he took exception to the government's decision of putting in abeyance the Indus Waters Treaty in consequence to the Pahalgam terror attack. Tikait in a video clip that made rounds on social media condemned the Pahalgam terror strike and called for the strictest action against those involved.

But he also remarked that the Narendra Modi government should not have suspended the Indus Waters treaty with Pakistan as it would affect the common people, especially farmers, in the neigh-

bouring country. BJP Kisan Morcha president and MP Rajkumar Chahar lashed out at Tikait and demanded that he apologise for his remarks.

"Naresh Tikait is speaking the language of Pakistan. He says the government's decision to stop water was wrong. He says that all Pakistanis are not culprits, only some people did that (terror strike)," he charged. "I strongly condemn his remarks. He should be ashamed of making such comments. He has spoken against India. He should apologise to the people of the country," Chahar added.

The BJP leader said that the Modi government had taken tough decisions against Pakistan which included suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty after the

Pahalgam terror attack. "In the coming days, more effective decisions will be taken," he added.

Delhi Cabinet Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma also slammed the Tikait for voicing views against the Indian government's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty, saying the farmers of India have always sweated in the fields for the pride of the tricolour and sacrificed their sons to protect the country. Verma said Tikait's statement has exposed the real face of those who do politics of power by pretending to be patriots.

"If leaders like Tikait brothers, who pursue politics in the name of farmers, have so much sympathy for Pakistan, then it would be better that they leave India and

go to Pakistan," he said.

Verma's Cabinet colleague Manjinder Singh Sirsa also slammed Tikait, saying the BKU leader was indulging in anti-national activities under the garb of trans-border farmer unity. "Those who are worried about the farmers of Pakistan today are neither true citizens of India nor true well-wishers of the farmers," he said. Sirsa also trained his guns on Tikait and asked, "Should we continue giving water to those who want to shed our blood?"

Meanwhile, BKU national spokesperson Rakesh Tikait also reportedly raised questions on the government's line of action post-Pahalgam, saying the probe agencies should catch those who stand to benefit from the incident.

Delhi court extends Tahawwur's custody for 12 days

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi court on Monday extended by 12 more days the NIA custody of 26/11 Mumbai attack accused Tahawwur Hussain Rana. Special NIA judge Chandarjit Singh extended Rana's custody on NIA's request after his previous 18-day remand got over. Rana was produced in court with his face covered amid tight security.

Senior advocate Dayan Krishnan and special public prosecutor Narendar Mann are representing the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in the matter which is taking place in chamber. Advocate Piyush Sachdeva from Delhi Legal Services Authority is representing Rana. In its previous remand order, the court directed the NIA to conduct Rana's medical examination every 24 hours, and allow him to meet his lawyer every alternate day.

The court allowed Rana to use only a

"soft-tip pen" and meet his lawyer in the presence of the NIA officials, who would be out of an audible distance.

During the arguments on the last occasion, the NIA said Rana's custody was required to piece together the full scope of the conspiracy, and submitted he was required to be taken to various locations for retracing the events that took place 17 years ago.

Rana, a close associate of 26/11 main conspirator David Coleman Headley alias Daoud Gilani, a US citizen, was brought to India after the US Supreme Court on April 4 dismissed his review plea against his extradition to India.

On November 26, 2008, a group of 10 Pakistani terrorists went on a rampage, carrying out a coordinated attack on a railway station, two luxury hotels and a Jewish centre, after they sneaked into India's financial capital using the sea route in the Arabian Sea.



Police escort Tahawwur Hussain Rana after he was produced at the Patiala House Court in New Delhi on Monday

Congress distances itself from leaders making controversial comments on Pahalgam attack

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Congress on Monday distanced itself from the controversial comments of some of its leaders on the Pahalgam terror attack, saying that only the recent CWC resolution and the views expressed by AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and authorised AICC office-bearers represent its position.

The statement came after the BJP asked Kharge and Rahul if their call for national unity was merely a formality and cited comments of Congress leaders questioning the need for war with Pakistan and the Pahalgam terror attack victims' account that terrorists marked out non-Muslims. Congress leaders like Vijay Wadettiwar, Mani Shankar Aiyar, Shashi Tharoor, Tariq Hameed Karra and Saifuddin Soz have triggered a row on the Pahalgam terror attack. The BJP alleged that some from the opposition party were speaking "Pakistan's language".

The Congress Working Committee had termed the Pahalgam attack masterminded by Pakistan as a direct assault on the values of our republic. It also called for a comprehensive examination of intelligence failures and security lapses.

Both Kharge and Rahul had expressed support to the government on whatever action it takes on the matter. Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The Congress Working Committee had met on April 24, 2025, and passed a resolution on the brutal terror attack on tourists in Pahalgam two days earlier. "Thereafter, on the evening of April 24, 2025, the Congress President and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha attended the all-party meeting and put forward the party's views." "Some Congress leaders have been speaking to the media. They speak for themselves and do not reflect the Congress' views."

"There should be absolutely no doubt whatsoever at this most sensitive of times that the CWC resolution, the views expressed by Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi and the views of authorised AICC office-bearers ALONE represent the position of the Congress (sic)," Ramesh said in a post on X.

Aiyar, during a book release event here on Saturday, had wondered whether the April 22 terror attack in the tourist spot of Baisaran that left 26 dead, was a result of



Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with his Deputy DK Shivakumar and Congress leaders during a party conference in Belagavi on Monday

"unresolved questions of the Partition".

Former Jammu and Kashmir Congress president Saifuddin Soz, Prasad said, criticised India's decision to put the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance as the river is Pakistan's lifeline. The BJP leader asserted that Soz has asked the Indian government to take into Pakistan's official claim that it was not involved in the attack.

Tharoor's comments on the Pahalgam terror attack, in which he reportedly said there was some failure but no country can ever have a "foolproof, 100-per cent intelligence", have come under attack from within the Congress with party leader Udit Raj hitting out at him. Raj has said that being a Congressman, he should ask when will Prime Minister Narendra Modi teach Pakistan a lesson. "According to you Congress should guarantee foolproof intelligence to BJP and nothing should be asked of the BJP," Raj said in a post on X.

"Shashi Tharoor said no country has 100 per cent foolproof intelligence? At the time of 26/11 Mumbai attack, Modi ji had said after reaching Mumbai from Gujarat that it is the failure of the central government."

"He also said that the problem is the Centre and not the border. How did the

terrorists come when the intelligence, BSF and CRPF are with the Centre. Tharoor ji, ask from Modi ji," said Raj, who is the chairman of the "Unorganised Workers and Employees Congress Other Than Professionals". The Congress Working Committee, in a resolution, on Thursday said the cowardly Pahalgam attack masterminded by Pakistan is a direct assault on the values of our republic. It also accused the BJP of exploiting the tragedy to promote discord and polarisation at a time when unity is most needed.

The CWC, chaired by Kharge, asserted that it is imperative that a comprehensive analysis is conducted into the intelligence failures and security lapses that enabled such an attack in a Union Territory, which is directly under the purview of the Union home ministry.

"This cowardly and calculated act of terror, masterminded by Pakistan, is a direct assault on the values of our Republic. The deliberate targeting of Hindus was done to inflame passions across the country. We appeal for calm in the face of this grave provocation and reaffirm our collective strength in the face of adversity," the resolution had said.

BJP questions Kharge, Rahul Gandhi over issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The BJP on Monday questioned Congress Chief Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi on Monday over the comments of several of their colleagues, some of whom have questioned the need for a war with Pakistan and the Pahalgam terror attack victims' account that the terrorists had marked out non-Muslims, asking if their call for national unity was merely a formality.

Addressing a press conference here, former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad also lashed out at Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav for saying that he will not visit the grieving family of Shubham Dwivedi, one of the 26 people, mostly tourists, shot dead by terrorists at Pahalgam, as he had no relations with them. Yadav had, however, added that he would ask his party members to visit the Kanpur-based family and alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), at times, incites people in mourning to misbehave on such occasions.

This is the height of insensitivity, Prasad said and noted that some Congress leaders even went on to question the accounts of Pahalgam attack victims, including Dwivedi's wife, that the terrorists had identified their victims by religion. Prasad named a number of Congress leaders, including Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, senior Maharashtra leader Vijay Wadettiwar, Karnataka minister RB Timmapur and Gandhi's brother-in-law Robert Vadra, for their controversial comments to target the opposition party's leadership.

"Do Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge have no control over their party? Or both of them made pro-forma comments while letting others the freedom to speak as they wished?" he asked, adding that the remarks of the opposition leaders are being used in Pakistan, including by its media, to defame India. Has any warning been given to these Congress leaders or have they been asked to apologise, Prasad asked of the opposition party's leadership. He said Kharge, the Congress president, and Gandhi, the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha, had extended their support to the BJP-led Centre at an all-party meeting over

the countermeasures being considered by it following the Pahalgam attack, and said this reflected the strength of India's mature democracy.

However, several Congress leaders have made comments that appeared to be part of a pattern, Ravi Shankar Prasad said, wondering if the top leadership of the opposition party merely responded in a perfunctory manner in the wake of the attack. Former Jammu and Kashmir Congress president Saifuddin Soz, he said, has criticised India's decision to put the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance as the river is Pakistan's lifeline. The BJP leader added that Soz has asked the Indian government to take into Pakistan's official claim that it was not involved in the attack.

Siddaramaiah has expressed his opposition to a war with Pakistan and subsequently, clarified that it should be pursued only as a last resort. When the world is with India after the terror strike, be it the United States, France or Saudi Arabia, these leaders are making such shameless and irresponsible remarks, Prasad said, reiterating PM Narendra Modi's assertion that the perpetrators of the Pahalgam attack and those who conspired with them will be pursued to the end of the world and subjected to the harshest punishment.

This is the height of insensitivity, he said, adding that the likes of Wadettiwar and Timmapur too have also questioned the account of some of the victims that the terrorists had identified non-Muslims before shooting them dead.

Wadettiwar had asked if the terrorists had time to ask the victims about their religion, a view also shared by Timmapur. A few days ago, Vadra alleged that Muslims are being targeted by the government, promoting its Hindutva ideology, as he hinted at links between terror activities and anger in a society. Prasad said when the country should speak in one voice, many Congress leaders are making such irresponsible statements.

Noting that he was the BJP's chief spokesperson during the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack in 2008, when the Congress-led UPA was in power, Prasad said he was instructed by his leadership to affirm the party's support to the government headed by then PM Manmohan Singh.

Government ensure no lapses in upcoming NEET-UG exam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Education is holding a series of meetings with district magistrates and superintendents of police from all states and Union territories to ensure there are no lapses in the upcoming medical entrance exam NEET-UG, sources said on Monday.

The May 4 exam will be conducted in more than 550 cities at over 5,000 centres across the country. The Ministry has been working on a "fool-proof" plan after the last year's exam was blighted by irregularities, including paper leaks.

"To ensure smooth, fair and secure conduct of NEET-UG, a series of meetings have been held with DMs and SPs of all states and UTs. The district-level coordination committees are being fully activated to manage logistics, security and crisis response," a source said to media.

"There will be multi-layered frisking by district police in addition to NTA-designated security at the centres. The transport of confidential materials like question papers and OMR sheets will be under full police escort. Coaching centres and digital platforms will be monitored to prevent organised cheating networks," the source added. Duty Magistrates are being deployed for mandatory inspection of all examination centres, while there will be personal visits by DMs and SPs to exam centres to assess preparedness.

Under scrutiny over last year's irregularities in NEET-UG and PhD entrance NET, the Centre had last year set up a panel to ensure "transparent, smooth and fair" conduct of exams by the National Testing Agency, or NTA.

Last year, the UGC-NET (University Grants Commission - National Eligibility Test) was cancelled as the ministry received input that its integrity had been compromised. Both matters are being investigated by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Two other exams — CSIR-UGC NET, NEET-PG — were cancelled at the last moment as a preemptive step.

This year, more than 23 lakh candidates are expected to appear for the exam which determines whether they will sit for a medical college in the country.

The NTA had on Saturday opened a platform to report suspicious claims regarding NEET-UG.

Editor's TAKE

Sweltering heat grips northern India

IMD issues advisories as vast swathes of the country brace for even hotter days ahead

As April nears its end, large parts of northern and central India are already in the grip of a blistering heatwave, with temperatures soaring well beyond seasonal norms. Delhi, the national capital, has touched 42°C — an ominous marker considering that the hottest months of May and June still lie ahead.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has sounded a yellow alert for the city, warning that maximum temperatures could touch 43°C in the coming days, a full 3-4 degrees above the usual average for this time of year. This unrelenting heat has not spared other parts of the country either. States across north, central, and eastern India — including Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal — are witnessing an early and intense summer. In parts of Jharkhand, temperatures have already breached the 43°C mark, prompting fresh warnings and health advisories from the IMD. The early arrival of such extreme heat is no longer an anomaly, but rather an indication of broader climatic shift.

Meteorologists have attributed this current spell to a combination of local and global factors. Dry and hot westerly winds continue to sweep across the northern plains, preventing any cloud development and keeping the heat trapped at the surface. A Western Disturbance — an upper air system that usually brings brief relief in the form of rain and cooler winds — is active, but its influence has largely remained confined to the Himalayan region, failing to bring much respite to the plains.

Additionally, global climate patterns such as the El Niño phenomenon in the Pacific Ocean are likely playing a role in distorting India's seasonal cycles. These disruptions are contributing to the growing unpredictability of weather, often resulting in prolonged dry spells, delayed monsoons, or early heatwaves. While temperatures have been climbing steadily, the IMD has made it clear that the coming days will be particularly challenging. The capital region is under a yellow alert, with authorities advising people to avoid stepping out during peak afternoon hours between 11 AM and 3 PM. Precautions such as staying hydrated, using umbrellas or hats, and wearing light, breathable clothing have been strongly recommended. The consequences of such extreme weather go far beyond mere discomfort. Public health experts warn of increased risks of heatstroke, dehydration, and respiratory illnesses.

For vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, outdoor laborers, and those with pre-existing conditions, the risk is especially high. There are also growing concerns about the strain on infrastructure, particularly in terms of water and electricity. With power demand peaking due to widespread use of fans and air conditioning, there is a very real danger of grid overloads and outages.

Water reservoirs, already under stress in several regions, are likely to see further depletion as evaporation rates surge. Simultaneously, the contrast in regional weather patterns continues to widen. While the north and central parts of the country reel under extreme heat, the northeastern states are bracing for heavy rainfall. The IMD has forecast widespread showers accompanied by thunderstorms, lightning, and strong winds — particularly over Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Tripura.

This rainfall, expected between April 25 and 29, offers a stark reminder of India's increasingly uneven climate patterns — with floods and droughts occurring side by side in different corners of the nation. Further south, states such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and coastal Andhra Pradesh are dealing with a different but equally taxing weather pattern — hot and humid conditions that pose their own set of challenges, particularly for urban populations. This spell of early heat serves as yet another warning about the growing impact of climate change.

Once considered rare, heatwaves are now more frequent, more intense, and longer-lasting. Their consequences — on health, livelihoods, agriculture, and infrastructure — are already being felt and will likely worsen in the absence of strong mitigation and adaptation measures.

As India heads into what could be one of its hottest summers on record, it is clear that the time for reactive measures is over. Urban planning must prioritise heat-resilient infrastructure, public awareness campaigns must be ramped up, and long-term policies addressing climate adaptation need urgent attention.

The sweltering temperatures of April may just be the beginning. What lies ahead could be far more testing.

UCC on the horizon

As the BJP frames the Uniform Civil Code as a step toward national integration and gender justice, critics warn of growing unrest and constitutional challenges ahead

After the controversial passage of the Waqf Bill, the Modi Government plans to implement the equally or even more contentious Uniform Civil Code (UCC) passed last year.

This raises the question of whether it is the right time to push for the UCC amid ongoing protests against the Waqf Bill, which began after the UCC was approved in Parliament last year.

The BJP has released a video recently on the achievements of Modi's first year in his third term and is preparing for the UCC implementation. The video, titled 'Big Moves Under Modi 3.0 — The Journey Has Just Begun...' suggests prioritising the UCC. The video presents it as an important step towards national integration and gender equality.

Despite being proposed and withdrawn twice in 2019 and 2020, the UCC bill was eventually approved by Parliament last year. For the BJP, the UCC is a crucial part of its political agenda, alongside the completion of the Ayodhya temple and the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. The UCC is a complex issue.

It has several angles, such as political, legal, legislative, religious, gender, and Constitutional perspectives. The country witnessed angry agitations even during the passage of the law. Just as the Waqf Act creates unrest, the UCC is bound to trigger nationwide agitations.

It is worth noting that while many countries like France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia have a UCC, others like Kenya, Pakistan, Italy, South Africa, Nigeria, and Greece do not.

Prime Minister Modi defended the implementation of the UCC in Lok Sabha in December last year, stating that the Constituent Assembly, which drafted the Indian Constitution, wanted the Uniform Civil Code to be enacted by an elected Government.

He also highlighted that BR Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, strongly advocated for a uniform civil code preventing one-sided claims.

The Apex Court also emphasised the need for a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in 1985 to maintain national unity and recommended a single law for all citizens in 1995. In 2019, the Modi Government reaffirmed its commitment to the UCC.

The Court had also declared Triple Talaq unconstitutional, promoting gender justice. Minority groups feel that personal laws are vital to cultural and religious identities, and implementing a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) could infringe on religious freedom



under Article 25 of the Constitution. India currently has separate personal laws for various religious communities, including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Parsis, which govern issues like marriage, divorce, and inheritance. The UCC supporters argue for one law for all citizens.



KALYANI SHANKAR

Moreover, experts warn that the UCC could overstep state legislative authority, challenging the principles of cooperative federalism. The Portuguese Civil Code, introduced in the 19th century, is still in effect in Goa and has not been replaced since the state's liberation. Early this year, Uttarakhand implemented the UCC for the state. Other BJP-ruled states like Assam and Maharashtra want to push it through.

The BJP may want to replicate this in different states. The challenges of implementing the UCC are many.

While supporters argue for a UCC implementation, others caution against it, citing the need to respect religious and cultural diversity. The lack of consensus among political parties presents a formidable challenge. Many opposition parties and even some NDA allies, and some communities like the Muslims, have strongly opposed it. Ensuring effective implementation across the vast and diverse India is formidable, as it requires preparations for administration, infrastructure, resources, and significant public awareness and education about the UCC. Implementing the UCC brings up concerns about religious freedom and cultural identity.

While the Supreme Court upholds the constitutional validity of the Uniform Civil Code, implementing it remains a contentious issue in Indian society and politics. It is a highly sensitive issue in India, with diverse cultures.

Many minority communities are concerned about the potential risks to their religious liberties, highlighting the complexity of the issue.

The Modi Government claims that the

Uniform Civil Code (UCC) will secure equal property rights for women, ensuring fair distribution of a deceased person's assets among the spouse, children, and parents. Previously, only mothers inherited the property.

Both parties need to give grounds for divorce. Some communities, like Muslims, are apprehensive that a UCC could undermine this and the protections that the Constitution has provided. Implementing a UCC due to concerns about losing their cultural identity or traditional practices is a key fear. It will be prudent to address the complexities of the implementation before pushing it through, mainly to avoid law and order agitations at the ground level.

There are already demonstrations against the Waqf Bill, and the intention to implement the UCC will only add to the unrest. Therefore, a balanced approach, ensuring the rights of all communities, is the only way forward apart from mobilising a political consensus.

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

Rekindling spirituality in public service

SECOND Opinion

BY KANISHK

Spirituality in public service is a quiet force — a subtle, transformative presence that elevates action beyond duty and policy. It is not dramatic or ceremonial; rather, it is the silent essence that gives meaning to governance. Without it, public service risks becoming mechanical, devoid of soul. With it, even routine work becomes an act of purpose, a service imbued with deeper intent.

At its heart, public service is a commitment to something larger than the self. It seeks to uplift the vulnerable, amplify the voices of the unheard, and bring dignity to the weary. This service calls for more than expertise or efficiency — it requires a vision born from character, moral clarity, and spiritual depth. True public service is not confined to a role or title.

It manifests in the policymaker, the volunteer, the social worker, the diplomat — all united by a common purpose: the greater good. Leadership, in this realm, cannot rely on knowledge alone. Knowledge is inert until shaped by reflection, compassion, and inner values. Spiritual wisdom breathes life into decisions, offering clarity and courage when doubt or fatigue sets in. Without this grounding, even the most brilliant minds may falter — confusion creeps in, cynicism sets root, and leadership loses its compass. Leadership today is often misunderstood as a position of authority, but real leadership stems from

authenticity. It is not found in designations but discovered in one's depth of conviction and steadiness of spirit. Authority may be granted by position, but legitimacy is earned through inner alignment. Spiritually grounded leaders do not chase applause — they pursue truth and inspire through vision and integrity. They don't act from ambition, but from an attunement to the pulse of humanity. Such leadership stirs hope, cuts through cynicism, and dissolves indifference.

These leaders don't rebel against tradition for the sake of it; instead, they bring discernment and evolution. Their compass is conscience, not ideology. In moments of crisis, they offer stability. Their ethics are not performance, but an extension of their being. They see not division, but interconnectedness — as if all lives are branches of a single sacred tree. This worldview fosters institutions where dignity becomes a right, not a privilege.

Compassion becomes inclusive, not selective. Governance finds rhythm not in control, but in care. Here, spirituality is not religious dogma but a deep connection to something timeless and meaningful. Today, the world seeks not just knowledge or efficiency, but meaning.

A quiet spiritual awakening is unfolding. This awakening isn't about IQ or even EQ, but a higher dimension — Spiritual Quotient (SQ): the ability to see beyond the immediate, to act with purpose and compassion. Without SQ, institutions crumble under their own weight; fatigue replaces idealism, and burnout overtakes brilliance. When a leader is spiritually aligned, their institutions reflect that purpose. This generates "spiritual capital" — the shared conscience of a community

that guides its ethos. When such spiritual clarity guides governance, it becomes more than administration — it becomes dharma in action. The ancient Indian ideal of Ram Rajya embodied this: a just society led by humility, where governance was sacred, and transformation flowed from values, not mandates. Great nations and institutions outlive their founders when their leaders' spiritual fire seeps into collective consciousness.

It becomes legacy, not just memory. This is no idealistic dream — it is rooted in India's own civilisational wisdom. Indian governance was never purely utilitarian. It emerged from Vedantic insight, where action and spirit were inseparable. Chanakya's Yogakshema envisioned a state that nourished holistic well-being, and his Rajarshi — the philosopher-king — was a leader who blended contemplation with action. Colonial rule, however, severed governance from spirituality. Administration became technical, education lost its soul, and systems bred compliance over conscience.

That legacy still lingers in our institutions today. But the spiritual embers remain — and they hold the promise of renewal. From the mystical Nasadiya Sukta to the Bhagavad Gita's call to duty, India's heritage calls us to see leadership as sacred service. Let service be a quiet prayer. Let leadership be a steady flame. Let us rekindle, through stillness, a public life that is once again filled with soul.

(The writer is a Central Government Officer, presently serving in the Ministry of Home Affairs. Views are personal)

Leaderspeak



In this war against terrorism, the unity of the country, the solidarity of 140 crore Indians is our biggest strength. We have to strengthen our resolve to face this challenge that has appeared before the country. We have to demonstrate strong willpower as a nation. Today, the world is watching, after this terrorist attack, the whole country is speaking in one voice.

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI

Letters to the Editor

Indo-Pak staff is ominous

Madam — While the United Nations and world leaders, including the United States, have condemned the Pahalgam massacre, no nation has actively engaged in mediation talks, treating the matter as a bilateral affair. Meanwhile, in response to India's diplomatic measures and warnings to Pakistan over its alleged role in the incident, Pakistan is scrambling to bolster its operational readiness.

It has launched a three-day air warfare exercise, Zarb-e-Haideri, along its borders, deploying PL-15 Chinese missiles with a range of 200 km for the first time in its southern sector.

Additionally, Pakistan has positioned fifth-generation fighter aircraft such as the J-10, JF-17, and F-15C, capable of striking targets up to 290 km away, along with long-range anti — ship precision missiles to protect the Karachi harbour area.

The situation risks escalating into a standoff reminiscent of 'Operation Parakram' more than two decades ago. Pakistan should know that India is fully prepared to respond firmly to any Pakistani misadventure with anger held in abeyance as added strength hence should resort to diplomatic talks showing evidence of its non involvement in the massacre and help India in destroying terrorism jointly to diffuse the situation.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

International Dance Day

Madam — April 29 is the "International Dance Day" celebrated annually all over the world. The International Theatre Institute, ITI has established the day in 1982 and recognised by UNESCO to highlight the amazing diversity and talent of dancers all over the globe. April 29 marks the birth anniversary of renowned dancer Jean Georges Noverre.

Evidence of dance has been found dating back 9000 years and it has been growing fast into a worldwide phenomenon. This day provides an annual opportunity to unite dancers and enthusiasts in the joy of movement. Dance transcends cultural boundaries and connects people across the globe. It's a day to honour the beauty, passion, and expression that dance brings to our lives. Dance is healthy for the body, mind, heart, and soul and has been established as a form of happiness in many people's lives. Dance is an outlet of expression and communication of emotion, it helps in releasing powerful feelings into the environment to feel less overwhelmed.

One of the key aims of this day is to persuade governments and political bodies to recognise the importance of dance and remove obstacles to participation. Let's organise a professional dance performance, recognise the popular dancers, promote dance form in educational institutions, seek government support, financial help to dancers and dance trainers, erase the stigma about any form of dance, and exhibit the cultural importance of dance.

DR B MADHUSUDHAN REDDY | KARIMNAGAR

Houses of alleged terrorists demolished

Madam — Authorities here have demolished the houses of three alleged active terrorists in Bandipora, Pulwama and Shopian districts of Jammu and Kashmir as security forces continued their crackdown on the terror ecosystem following the Pahalgam terror attack. With this, nine houses of suspected terrorists and overground workers of terror outfits have been razed so far since the April 22 attack in the lush meadows of Baisaran that killed 26 people and left the nation grief-stricken and fuming.

As part of the anti-terror crackdown, that picked up more steam after the Pahalgam tragedy, security forces have raided more than 500 locations in the Valley in just five days and grilled hundreds of suspects. Political parties have urged the Centre to ensure that innocent people are not targeted while it goes after terrorists. Following the Pahalgam terror attack, Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged to hunt down the killers "to the ends of the earth" as his government linked the dastardly attack to Pakistan. Since then New Delhi has announced a raft of retaliatory steps, including the cancellation of visas and suspension of the 1960s Indus Water Treaty, and Islamabad hitting back with a string of tit-for-tat measures, that included putting the 1972 Shimla Agreement in abeyance. Pakistan has warned that if India actually goes through with diverting or blocking the Indus water flow, Islamabad would see it as an "act of war".

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

TEACH PAKISTAN A LESSON BUT WITH CAUTION

The content of the article, "No Indus water to Pak..." (284-25), though carries some emotional touch, will be endorsed by many. It is true, Pandit Nehru was gentle enough and stood firm on international norms, a humane approach and tried to live up to the theory of Love thy Neighbour. The recipient not reciprocating the best of sentiments and gestures demonstrated by the Indus Water Treaty is a fallout of the misplaced priority of focusing more on communal agenda than on developing the country. India has waited enough and suspension of the treaty should sensitise the ruling dispensation to shun its communal agenda and focus on peoples' welfare besides establishing peace with all. Pakistan is falling in debt trap besides living with the menace of terrorism. All these make clear that the leadership in Pakistan is not prepared to change its course. India's decision to deprive Indus water, which is a lifeline for Pakistan, suits the situation of this day. However, it is to be kept in mind that there

is possibility of our action becoming a precedent that turns against us as we have China on the other side with a major river flowing through its soil into India. Basic fact Pakistan needs to understand is that it has wasted decades in pursuing communal agenda in the process of which it has lagged far behind India in every aspect, besides living with the pains inflicted by terrorism. In spite of attacks and constant irritants from Pakistan India is growing in many spheres whereas Pakistan is sinking under debt and lack of development, which should open its eyes. Using hate towards India to make its failures and misdeeds may work for sometime but not for all the time. It should remember the poetic justice which says "those who take sword will perish by sword". It is also time for the Union government to spare some time and energy to settle all the disputes over sharing of water among the States, keeping all political considerations aside.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTPUR

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

India's grand rewrite of communication order

The WAVES summit will drive the country's creative economy through intellectual property creation and develop its M&E infrastructure. It will also help build the industry's capacity to create a skilled workforce for global needs

FIRST Column

As the final countdown to the WAVES Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit draws near, the moot question remains: how will the global communication ecosystem respond to the vision, challenges, and opportunities unleashed by the four-day summit in Mumbai from 1 May?

More than just another gathering, WAVES is a seismic shift. It promises to reorient the way we understand, design, and deliver the future of media and entertainment (M&E). With an architecture built around inclusivity, imagination, and integrated diplomacy, the summit is poised to be a landmark "Communication Moment" for the world.

Through its immersive curation of threads, themes, ideas, and tools, WAVES will redraw the boundaries of what M&E can mean in an era marked by disruption and reinvention.

At the heart of this transformation lies a compelling proposition: that the summit is not merely about showcasing creativity — it is about systematising it. The real takeaway from WAVES 2025 is not just the exchange of ideas, but the articulation of a futuristic communication order — one that interweaves Commerce, Creativity, Content, and Culture into a coherent, collaborative, and globally relevant vision.

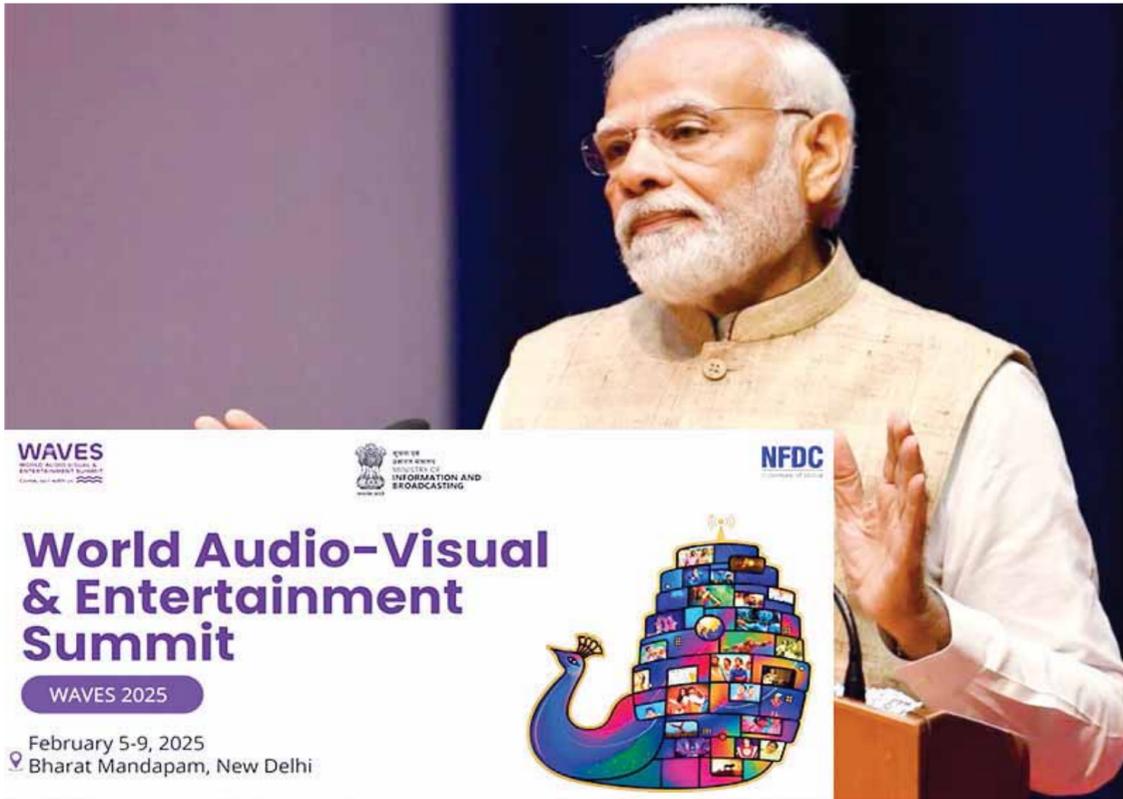
From the outset, WAVES has been propelled by an unflinching commitment to innovation and ideation. As the inaugural edition, it places "Communication First" not just as a slogan but as an organising principle. For perhaps the first time, a summit in the M&E space has been imagined as a "Communication Mahakumbh", where continuity meets disruption, and heritage is re-engineered through innovation.

The four identified pillars of WAVES — Broadcast & Infotainment, AVGC-XR, Digital Media, and Films — each distinct in their scope, nevertheless converge powerfully in intent and deliverables. Together, they represent a conscious synthesis of old and new, traditional mediums and emerging technologies, global ambitions and local identities.

What sets WAVES apart is its ability to harmonise these forces into a dynamic, composite framework. In doing so, it sketches the contours of a new communication order — one led by India, but built for the world. The catalytic force behind this vision has been the launch of Create in India: Season I, an initiative that has electrified the industry with its participatory energy and collaborative ethos.

It has thrown open the doors to storytellers, technologists, investors, and policymakers, crafting a rich ecosystem of engagement that mirrors the complexity of the M&E sector itself.

The themes and templates curated under this banner are refreshingly forward — looking. They tackle not just today's industry pain points but anticipate tomorrow's cultural, economic, and technological shifts. From decentralisation of nar-



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

atives and platform-neutral storytelling to immersive formats and multilingual access, WAVES has laid down a clear thesis: the future belongs to those who dare to reimagine.

In doing so, it positions India as the Content Hub of the World, a nation not just exporting stories, but shaping the very grammar of global storytelling. The commercial vision that undergirds this ambition is bold and aspirational, showcasing India's intent to lead not only through scale, but through thought leadership.

WAVES 2025 emerges at a moment when the

“Creator Economy” is reshaping global production — consumption cycles. Here, India is not a passive participant but a proactive architect; fusing its demographic dividend, cultural wealth, and technological prowess into an unbeatable formula for soft power.

WAVES is the conduit through which this soft power is being systematised, internationalised, and strategically leveraged.

It is not just a summit. It is a signal — a signal that India is ready to anchor the future of M&E diplomacy through stories, ideas, and innovations that resonate across borders.

The kinetic current of visibility, opportunity, collaboration, and growth generated by WAVES is designed to have a lasting ripple effect, influencing how future summits around the world are conceived, especially in terms of fostering international tie — ups, cinematic synergies, and media-tech alliances.

THE FOUR IDENTIFIED PILLARS OF WAVES — BROADCAST & INFOTAINMENT, AVGC-XR, DIGITAL MEDIA, AND FILMS EACH DISTINCT IN THEIR SCOPE, NEVERTHELESS CONVERGE POWERFULLY IN INTENT AND DELIVERABLES.

At its core, WAVES is a think tank in motion — where storytelling meets strategy, policy meets participation, and art meets action. By blurring the lines between entertainment and engagement, it reminds the world that M&E is no longer a side-show to diplomacy. It is diplomacy. In an increasingly multipolar world, cultural influence is power. And the medium through which that power is asserted is communication — fluid, visual, participatory.

Through M&E, nations now shape perceptions, steer conversations, and signal intent. WAVES situates India's M&E industry squarely within this strategic frame, projecting it as a potent tool of statecraft and global engagement. The brilliance of WAVES lies in its refusal to chase uniformity. It understands that the future of M&E is not about amplifying one dominant voice but about curating a chorus of perspectives.

As the world negotiates climate shifts, social transformations, digital disruptions, and identity politics, storytelling must evolve — from monologue to mosaic.

India, with its plurality of languages, genres, and formats, offers a compelling framework for this evolution. WAVES is a celebration of that plurality. It is a staging ground for narratives that are rooted in tradition but responsive to the future — narratives that can travel far, yet stay authentic. In a time where content is everywhere, WAVES is a reminder that context is king.

And in this context, India leads not just as a creator, but as a curator of meaning in a fragmented world. To conclude, one of the key objectives of the summit is to have global M&E leaders invest in India.

A lot of hard work and thought has gone into WAVES and officials are upbeat about its success. Sanjay Jaju, Secretary, I&B Ministry, said WAVES would be the first-ever global summit covering the entire gamut of the M&E industry.

The most promising aspect of WAVES is the interest it has generated across the globe. The international outreach of the summit is evident by a line-up that boasts Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen, YouTube CEO Neal Mohan, Instagram Head Adam Mosseri, Netflix CEO Ted Sarandos, marketing agency WPP's CEO Mark Read, Spotify's Chief Public Affairs Officer Dstee Jenkins, and NVIDIA's Vice President Richard Karris — all of them will be part of the programming roster.

The Ministry hopes that the summit will promote India as a "one-stop destination" for content creation, drive the country's creative economy through intellectual property creation and develop its M&E infrastructure, as also build the industry's capacity to create a skilled workforce for global needs.

(The writer is a former civil servant and writes on cinema and strategic communication. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan. Views are personal)

Why a new linguistic survey is crucial for cooperative India

A comprehensive linguistic survey is not just about collecting data; it is a transformative step toward building inclusive cooperative frameworks that truly reflect the voices of every Indian

In the land where the echoes of countless languages have woven a timeless cultural tapestry, India stands as a testament to resilience and diversity. Our linguistic heritage has not only shaped our folklore and traditions but also nurtured the roots of cooperative living.

From the ancient guilds of traders and craftsmen to the community — driven farming practices of our villages, collaboration has always been the essence of our economic framework. However, as we move towards the ambitious goal of Viksit Bharat @2047, it is alarming that we are yet to fully understand the linguistic landscape that underpins the cooperative spirit of this nation.

A comprehensive linguistic survey is not a luxury — it is a necessity. It is the compass that will guide policymakers to ensure that cooperative reforms are inclusive and effective.

Without accurate data on the languages spoken across regions, our policy interventions remain shallow, and our efforts to strengthen the cooperative economic framework risk becoming fragmented.

The Government's vision of the PACS-to-APEX approach — empowering primary agricultural credit societies to function cohesively with apex institutions — cannot materialise without understanding the linguistic and cultural nuances of local communities. Physiological density data and linguistic insights will ensure that financial services, credit schemes, and agricultural innovations reach the last mile.

Ironically, the most extensive linguistic survey of India was conducted not for the welfare of its people but for colonial administrative control.

The Linguistic Survey of India, initiated by Sir George Grierson during the British era between 1898 and 1928, documented Indian languages primarily to serve the colonial intent of consolidating power. The British viewed linguistic diversity as a tool to deepen divisions and enforce policies of divide and rule.

This colonial baggage still weighs heavily on our administrative systems. Despite over seven decades of independence, we have done little to refine or update this foundational linguistic knowledge.

Adding to this disparity is the fact that, while the private sector has astutely recognised the importance of linguistic insights, development practitioners and policymakers often lag. Rural marketing practitioners in corporate houses possess extensive data on regional languages, dialects, and consumer behaviour.

Using this intelligence, they successfully penetrate rural markets, build brand loyalty, and tailor communication strategies that resonate with



BINOD ANAND

local communities.

In stark contrast, Government initiatives aimed at development and economic upliftment continue to operate with outdated linguistic data or delegate language considerations entirely to state Governments.

The result is a fragmented approach that fails to execute cooperative economic frameworks effectively. Consider this: a rural marketing executive knows precisely how to communicate with farmers in their dialect to sell fertilisers or machinery, but a Government financial literacy campaign in the same village may miss its mark simply because it

is not available in the local language. This gap in understanding not only undermines the potential of Government schemes like PM-KISAN and FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations) but also impedes the inclusive growth of cooperatives.

By conducting a fresh linguistic survey, policymakers can bridge this knowledge gap, making public-sector interventions as impactful and relatable as their private-sector counterparts.

A renewed linguistic survey will empower cooperatives to function as truly participatory institutions. It will facilitate the creation of multilingual financial literacy programmes, region — specific agricultural advisories, and cooperative training modules.

Further, the promotion of Indigenous languages will encourage knowledge sharing of traditional farming techniques, watershed

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AIMED AT DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT CONTINUE TO OPERATE WITH OUTDATED LINGUISTIC DATA OR DELEGATE LANGUAGE CONSIDERATIONS ENTIRELY TO STATE GOVERNMENTS

management practices, and sustainable agriculture. With more accurate linguistic and physiological density data, policymakers can design hyper-localised interventions that cater to each region's unique challenges.

Moreover, respecting linguistic diversity fosters social cohesion and national unity.

By acknowledging and celebrating our people's rich linguistic heritage, we send a powerful message that every voice matters. The cooperative economic framework, founded on the principles of collective growth and mutual benefit, can only thrive when communication barriers are dismantled.

To achieve Viksit Bharat @2047, we must acknowledge that economic empowerment is incomplete without linguistic inclusion. Every cooperative, from the grassroots PACS to the apex-level institutions, must reflect the diverse voices of its members.

It is time for policymakers to embrace the richness of India's linguistic heritage and weave it into the fabric of cooperative governance. Only then can we build an equitable economic framework that uplifts every community, leaving no one behind. The call for a linguistic survey is not just a call for data — it is a call to honour the soul of our nation.

To realise the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, India must prioritise linguistic inclusion as a cornerstone of cooperative growth. Our diverse languages are more than cultural artefacts — they are vital tools for empowerment, communication, and social cohesion.

Without updated and comprehensive linguistic data, policy interventions risk alienating the very communities they aim to support.

A new linguistic survey will bridge the gap between Government initiatives and grassroots realities, enabling cooperatives to function with greater participation, relevance, and impact.

It will foster multilingual literacy programmes, amplify Indigenous knowledge systems, and ensure that no voice is left unheard. As private enterprises leverage language to drive market success, so too must policymakers harness it for national development.

Recognising the role of language is not merely about effective governance — it is about honouring India's pluralism and building an inclusive, equitable economy. The time to act is now; the call for a linguistic survey is a call to unify and uplift.

(The writer is member of the PM MSP Committee and Agricultural Reforms. Views are personal)

India bans Pakistani YouTube channels

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a major crackdown following the Pahalgam terror attack that left 26 people dead, India has banned 16 Pakistani YouTube channels including Dawn News, Samaa TV, Ary News and Geo News, for disseminating provocative and communally sensitive content and false and misleading narratives and misinformation against India, its Army and security agencies after the Pahalgam terror attack.

The Government also rapped BBC for its reporting on the terror attack in the Kashmir valley last week. India has written a letter to BBC India head, Jackie Martin, for terming terrorists as "militants". BBC referred to the terror attack as a "militant attack" in an article titled "Pakistan suspends visas for Indians after deadly Kashmir attack".

The Government's move follows recommendations from the Ministry of Home Affairs in the wake of the April 22 terror attack in the upper reaches of the Kashmir resort town in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed. Besides, the Ministry of External Affairs will be monitoring reporting of the BBC, which termed terrorists as militants.

The banned platforms, which collectively have around 63 million subscribers,

include major Pakistani news channels such as Dawn News, Samaa TV, ARY News, Bol News, Raftar, Geo News, and Suno News. YouTube channels run by journalists like Irshad Bhatti, Asma Shirazi, Umar Cheema, and Muneeb Farooq have also been blocked for Indian users.

Other banned channels include The Pakistan Reference, Samaa Sports, Uzair Cricket, and Razi Naama. In addition, cricketer Shoaib Akhtar's separate YouTube channel, with over 3.5 million subscribers, has also been banned.

While clicking on these channels, YouTube showed this message: "This content is currently unavailable in this country because of an order from the government related to national security or public order. For more details about government removal requests, please visit the Google Transparency Report".

The government has also blocked a message doing the rounds on WhatsApp terming it as "misleading". The message talked about the contribution of one rupee every day for "modernisation of the country".

Sources said the action was taken on the recommendations of the Ministry of Home Affairs after it was found that these channels were spreading misinformation, false narratives, and content designed to

incite communal tensions, particularly in the aftermath of the Pahalgam tragedy, where 25 tourists and a local Kashmiri were killed in cold blood on April 22.

The Government also rapped BBC for its reportage on the Pahalgam terror attack. In a strongly worded letter to the

The banned platforms, which collectively have around 63 million subscribers, include major Pakistani news channels such as Dawn News, Samaa TV, ARY News, Bol News, Raftar, Geo News and Suno News

news agency, the Government objected to the usage of the word militants for terrorists who opened fire in the Baisaran valley, killing 26 people and injuring several others.

The Government will continue to monitor BBC's reportage on the incident. In a formal letter written to the BBC, the Indian Army and for soldiers who are injured or martyred in the war zone". Sources said the action was taken on the recommendations of the Ministry of Home Affairs after it was found that these channels were spreading misinformation, false narratives, and content designed to

Head, BBC) regarding their reporting on the terror attack."

In an article titled "Pakistan suspends visas for Indians after deadly Kashmir attack," the BBC referred to the terror attack as a "militant attack", prompting the Narendra Modi Government to write to the BBC's India head, Jackie Martin.

In an article titled "Pakistan suspends visas for Indians after deadly Kashmir attack," the BBC referred to the terror attack as a "militant attack", prompting the Narendra Modi Government to write to the BBC's India head, Jackie Martin.

This development comes days after the US Senate panel blasted The New York Times for calling the Pahalgam terrorists "militants" in their reportage.

The US House Foreign Affairs Committee criticised the government for diluting the seriousness of the terror attack by calling the attackers "militants" and "gunmen".

In a post on X, the US foreign affairs committee struck out the word "militants", replacing it in bold red with "terrorists". "Hey, @nytimes we fixed it for you. This was a TERRORIST ATTACK plain and simple. Whether it's India or Israel, when it comes to TERRORISM the NYT is removed from reality," the committee wrote on X, calling out the newspaper in public domain.

Bengal Opposition slams CM for 'subverting' SC order

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Bengal Opposition parties have condemned Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for "subverting" the very "essence" of the Supreme Court order on school level recruitment scam by announcing a hefty honorarium for the Group C and Group D staff who lost vides a Supreme Court order declaring the entire 2016 panel of teaching and non-teaching staff as void on account of a tainted recruitment process.

"If the Chief Minister really wants to stand by the victims of the job scam then she should announce allowance for the entire 22 lakh candidates that appeared in the 2016 recruitment exams including those who got selected, empanelled but later were not given appointment letters as her own party men sold jobs for lakhs to non-deserving candidates," Bengal Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari said.

"Has the decision been passed in the Cabinet. If so on what basis this decision has been taken subverting the very essence of the Supreme Court order setting aside a tainted recruitment process where several thousand crores of rupees changed hands illegally. And here the Government is trying to compensate the tainted so that its leaders are not attacked by the illegal appointees who had paid anywhere between ₹5 lakh and ₹25 lakh for school jobs," said a senior CPI(M) leader and a former MP adding soon the Government order could be challenged in the High Court and wondering whether the decision would amount to contempt of court.

In an apparent bid to control damage post the Supreme Court order in an election year Banerjee had earlier announced an honorarium of ₹25,000 for Group C employees and ₹20,000 for Group D staff till the State Government came out a list of genuinely tainted candidates. The Chief Minister reportedly announced the decision after holding discussions with Chief Secretary Manoj Pant.

"The families of the staff who have lost their jobs are in great trouble. They have to take care of their old parents and have other responsibilities, sudden loss of job will be a big problem for them. So the Government is standing by their side and is trying to find a way out... for the time being we can pay an honorarium after consulting all the stakeholders," Banerjee said adding this would be a temporary arrangement till the Government could prepare list of tainted and untainted candidates and also a review petition was filed before the Supreme Court.

The Court in an order early this month had cancelled the entire panel of teaching and non teaching staff calling it a tainted recruitment process as a result of which 25,762 teachers and non teaching staff lost their jobs in one go triggering an unprecedented crisis in the school education sector apart from affording the opposition a vicious election issue against

the Trinamool Congress.

Incidentally the Court had modified its judgment to the extent of allowing the teachers — save those who had been identified as tainted — to go to their respective schools in lieu of salaries till December 31 to enable the academic session run without impediment. The Court also directed the Government to hold fresh recruitment examinations within a given date.

The teachers had since April 5, been holding regular protests demanding explanation from the Government asking the authorities to publish the OMR sheets and prepare a list of tainted and non-tainted staff "to save our jobs and our prestige."

Many of them asked, "after ten years of service and reaching middle age are we expected to still be alert, agile and prepared enough to sit in competitive exams and compete with young minds in their twenties who have been continuously through examination processes as we had been 10-15 years ago." They also wondered whether they had the dexterity to attend school and then prepare for exams simultaneously.

The new controversy comes up at a time when another decision on yet another alleged tainted recruitment process for primary school level was pending before a Division Bench of the Calcutta High Court.

"The career of about 32,000 teachers and non-teaching staff hangs in balance in the High Court because there too thousands of crores were taken as bribe for providing job to the underserving candidates and all that money went to the top-most family and families of the State," said Firdaus Shamim one of the advocates. A number of senior politicians including former Education Minister and TMC general secretary Partha Chatterjee, a bevy MLAs and senior functionaries including sitting Vice Chancellor and Chairman State Board of Secondary Education went to jail in connection with the recruitment scam in the education department.

The name of Leaps and Bounds a company owned by "one" Abhishek Banerjee too came into the picture as the investigation agencies found that a large amount of money had been channeled through the said company.

Meanwhile, traffic came to a standstill for nearly an hour along the busy Asutosh Mukherjee Road-Hazra Road crossing as hundreds of teachers and non-teaching staff on Monday marched towards the Kalighat residence of the Chief Minister and were prevented by the Police at Hazra Crossing a few hundred metres away from Banerjee's house.

The agitating school staff asked whether the temporary allowance, of ₹25,000 allowance for Group C and ₹20,000 for Group D employees until December 31 was enough. "We want our jobs back till we reach the age of 60," they demanded.

Police nab three men for forging documents

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Three men were nabbed in as many raids in the city, leading to the unearthing of a massive cache of forged documents, laptops, hard disks loaded with editing software used in generating fake identities, an officer on Monday said.

The accused, part of a gang, used fake thumb impressions and iris scans to illegally operate Aadhaar software for demographic updates, he said.

"On April 19, a team from Turkman Gate Police Post in central Delhi, received a tip-off during routine patrolling. They raided a shop located in the Chitli Kabar area. The police apprehended one man, identified as Ashish (26), a resident of Firozabad in Uttar Pradesh, who was caught red-handed in possession of numerous forged documents," the police officer said.

During their search, police discovered 121 Aadhaar cards, 73 fake PAN cards — some carrying fake holograms — 181 voter ID cards, several birth certificates, and many mark sheets. Blank and incomplete voter ID cards were also seized, said the officer. Ashish accessed Aadhaar update systems by using fabricated rubber thumb impressions and pre-recorded iris scans of authorised operators to make updates to Aadhaar demographic details such as name, date of birth and address, he said.

"Upon interrogation, Ashish revealed that he, along with two associates, was running a systematic operation of preparing fake identity documents. His associates, Toshif and Md Firoz, were operating from nearby shops and were actively involved in preparing counterfeit documents for clients seeking Aadhaar updates," the officer said.

At his instance, police arrested Satish, 36, a resident of Uttam Nagar, with a laptop filled with fake templates and document editing software in his possession. From Daryaganj, they nabbed Md Firoz, who confessed to preparing and supplying forged documents for illegal Aadhaar updates. Toshif, however, remains at large and hunt for him is on, he said.

In all, police seized three laptops and six hard disks. It was also found that the gang used duplicate biometric impressions to bypass security layers in the Aadhaar system, a serious breach with grave implications for identity security and national KYC processes.

The officer said the accused would first create fake supporting documents such as birth certificates, PAN cards, and voter ID cards.

These were then used to fraudulently update demographic data in Aadhaar records through cloned thumb impressions and iris scans of genuine operators.

Need to be united to give befitting reply to Pakistan, says CM Himanta

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said the country has to remain united to give a befitting reply to Pakistan for the Pahalgam terror attack.

He also said advocated strong action against anyone supporting the neighbouring country.

Addressing a panchayat election rally in Sonitpur district, Sarma said, "We, Indians, have to remain united and reply together for the Pahalgam attack... We have to support our Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji at this moment so that he can not only eliminate the terrorists, but also ensure that Pakistan never dares to cast its evil eye on us again."

Assam and its people are always with the prime minister, he said.

Sarma also slammed a Congress MP, without naming him, for his alleged connection with Pakistan.

"There is an MP in the Congress party who had stayed in Pakistan for 15 days without informing the authorities. His wife works in India, but her salary comes from Pakistan. He has not even made his children Indian citizens," Sarma claimed.

The CM also dwelt on the welfare schemes being implemented by his government, while criticising the Congress for its alleged failure to work for the development of the state and its people during



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma

the long years it was in power.

He maintained that youths are getting jobs in a corruption-free manner, heralding a sense of positivity and optimism among people. Sarma said beneficiaries are receiving free foodgrains, education,

cashless health insurance, and that more such measures targeted at the poorer sections of society are in the offing.

He said the government will work on increasing subsidy on LPG cylinders, and slash power tariffs further later this year.

Gurugram Police busts cyber fraud case of ₹80.37 crore

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

Cybercrime Police team of the Gurugram Police arrested 19 suspects in cyber fraud cases and disclosed fraud of about ₹80.37 crore across India, police said.

The arrested were identified as Sarvesh Yadav, Aman, Renu Diman, Harsitan Sharma, Dinesh, Hrithik, Shubham, Lavkush, Deepak Kumar, Aditya aka Kaku, Abhay, Devesh, Nitin, Azharuddin, Sahun, Ravi, Santosh Kumar, Sangam and Pradeep Kumar.

According to the police, after reviewing the data of the 15 mobile phones and 10 SIM cards recovered from the accused by the police from the Indian Cyber Crime Coordinate Center (I4C), it was found that the accused were involved in fraud of about ₹80.37 crore, and around 16,919 complaints were registered against them across India.

According to the police, 589 cyber fraud cases were registered against 19 unknown suspects across India, of which around 41 cases were registered in

Haryana, and 12 of those cases were registered against them with the Gurugram different cybercrime police stations.

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

"While obtaining information related to mobile phones/SIM cards/laptops or other electronic devices/equipment and to know how many fraud incidents have been committed by these accused, we found that they had duped multiple people worth ₹80.37 crore while using 10 SIM cards," the ACP said.

The accused duped the people with fake websites, digital arrests, fake documents, fake profiles, sextortion, and investment fraud, he said. Further action is being taken regularly on the information obtained by examining the devices recovered from the arrested cyber fraudsters by the Gurugram Police, he added.

Congress seeks probe into irregularities in MHT-CET

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

Flagging the issue of "20 to 25 incorrect answer options" in the state-level Common Entrance Test (MHT-CET) for engineering admissions held on Sunday, the Maharashtra Congress on Monday demanded investigations into the irregularities in the MHT-CET and awarding of marks to students for erroneous questions.

In a letter written to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, State Congress president Harshvardhan Sakpal said that scores of students who appeared for the MHR-CET at a centre in Ahilya Nagar (known earlier as Ahmednagar) district of western Maharashtra, had complained that "20 to 25 questions" in the 50-mark Mathematics paper had "incorrect" answer options.

"This is a serious matter. Apart from ordering investigation into the matter, we have demanded ordering of marks for these erroneous answer options," Sakpal said. "So erroneous was the setting of question papers at the MHT-CET exams that in some cases all four given options were wrong."

However, since students were required to attempt all questions, they were compelled to choose incorrect options. When students complained about this at the exam center, their

grievances were ignored". "Similar complaints have been reported from other examination centers across the state. Some centers also faced server outages, but satisfactory responses were not provided by the examination authorities," Sakpal said.

"This examination is crucial for engineering admissions. If as many as 20 to 25 questions had incorrect options, it could cause significant harm to students. Who is responsible for this? Why should students suffer due to the negligence of the institutions or companies responsible for preparing the papers and conducting the examination?" the State Congress chief asked.

"This is not merely a matter of a few questions; it concerns the future of thousands of students. The State Government must take this issue seriously and take strict action against those responsible. Institutions that cannot properly prepare papers or organise examinations should never be entrusted with such tasks again and should be blacklisted," Sakpal said.

Sakpal said that in view of the fact that the Maharashtra Government was fully responsible for protecting the interests of the students, the State Government should take all steps to ensure that the lapse on the part of the examination authorities would not adversely affect the students' future.

ABVP gets a foot in the door in JNU red fortress

Continued from >> P1

The ABVP contested the election independently.

Newly-elected JNUSU President Nitish Kumar said, "This is a mandate against a Government that has been trying to destroy the campus. It's a mandate against the current Government's policies." "We are witnessing how funds are being slashed and infrastructure is being ruined at JNU. This is a strong message against such destructive policies. The Government should stop these actions and start giving JNU what it rightfully deserves," he said.

Hailing the victory of its alliance on three central panel posts, AISA also raised concern over the ABVP's narrow win for the post of joint secretary and called it a challenge to the Left's dominance on campus.

"It is indeed a matter of concern that the ABVP has won the post of joint secretary with a margin of 85 votes. Despite this structural assault and corruption of the admission process to ensure BJP loyalists

in faculty positions act as a ticket for the ruling regime on campus, the Left has returned to its leadership position in the JNUSU," AISA said in a statement.

It called the alliance's victory a mandate against the Government's New Education Policy which, it said, undermined public-funded education and discriminated against marginalised groups.

In contrast, the ABVP called its victory "a historic shift in JNU's political landscape" and said it broke the Left's "so-called red fortress".

"This victory in JNU is not only proof of the ABVP's proactive hard work and students' faith and commitment to nationalist thinking but it is also a victory for all students who consider education as the foundation for nation-rebuilding. This is a democratic revolution against the so-called ideological tyranny established by the Left for years in JNU," the ABVP said in a statement.

Meena, the newly-elected joint secretary,

said, "I am not at all considering this victory as my personal achievement or gain but it is a massive and fascinating victory of tribal consciousness and the nationalist ideology, which has been suppressed by the Left for years. This success is an embodiment of students who want to advance in education by wholeheartedly upholding cultural identity and the spirit of nation re-building," he said.

The polls, held on April 25, witnessed about 5,500 of the 7,906 eligible students casting their votes.

While the turnout was slightly lower than the 73 per cent recorded in 2023, it was among the highest since 2012. Twenty-nine candidates were in the fray for the four central panel posts and 200 for the 44 councillor seats. In the March 2024 polls, held after a four-year gap following the outbreak of Covid, the United Left won three of the four central panel posts while BAPSA—which had contested independently—secured one.

At least 24 arrested...

Continued from >> P1

Additionally, charges have been framed under the Information Technology Act for the use of electronic communication to spread content deemed inflammatory.

Although the BNS does not explicitly contain a provision titled "sedition" as was present under Section 124A of the IPC, the new legal framework criminalises similar acts that threaten the sovereignty and unity of the nation.

Senior police officials confirmed the registration of the case and stated that further investigation is underway to ascertain the extent and impact of Rathore's posts. Any

further legal action will be taken based on the findings of the inquiry, they added.

Neha Singh Rathore, known for her socially and politically charged folk songs, has not yet issued a formal statement responding to the charges. Her posts, however, have sparked intense debate online, with supporters defending her remarks as calls for universal justice, while critics have accused her of inflaming communal sensitivities. The incident highlights the increasing scrutiny of social media discourse in sensitive situations and the growing tensions surrounding expressions of dissent or critique in the public sphere.

Ranjit Savarkar roots for expulsion of Bangladeshi infiltrators in Maharashtra

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

Ranjit Savarkar, the grandson of freedom fighter Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, on Monday warned that if the Bangladeshi infiltrators are expelled from Maharashtra within the next 5 to 10 years, it would mark the end of the Hindutva-based Government in the state.

"The attack in Pahalgam is not the first of its kind on Hindus. Earlier too, Kashmiri Pandits were exiled from Kashmir solely because they were Hindus. Similarly, brutal killings of Hindus occurred in Murshidabad in West Bengal," Ranjit Savarkar, the Chairman of the Swatantryaveer Savarkar National Memorial, said.

Speaking at the release of book - "Dabholkar Hatya Aur Main" (Dabholkar Murder and Me) written by Vikram Bhawe at the Kashinath Dhuru Hall in Dadar in north-central Mumbai, Ranjit Savarkar said: "When terrorists can fire bullets at Hindus after asking them to identify their religion, why cannot Hindus engage in economic boycott to protect their faith?"

"Currently, Bangladeshi infiltrators are conducting businesses around us. If they are not expelled from Maharashtra, within the next 5 to 10 years, that would mark the end of the Hindutva-based government in the state," he said.

Vikram Bhawe, who was acquitted from the case involving the murder of rationalist and anti-superstition activist Dr Narendra Dabholkar, has in his book written about the atrocities committed against Hindus.

"Allegations of terrorism were leveled against Hindus. If Hindus were truly terrorists, Vikram Bhawe would not have gone to prison," Ranjit Savarkar said. "In the Dabholkar murder case, the CBI wrongfully implicated me and Sanjeev Punalekar, causing immense mental harassment. This book vividly depicts how agencies operate to frame Hindutva activists with false accusations," Bhawe said.

Death toll in Iran port explosion reaches 46

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

The death toll from a huge explosion that rocked one of Iran's main ports rose Monday to 46 people killed, authorities said.

Iranian State television offered the toll from the blast at Shahid Rajaei port near Bandar Abbas, citing local officials.

A fire still burned at the site, some two days after the initial explosion Saturday, just as Iran began a third round of negotiations with the United States over its rapidly advancing nuclear program. Over 1,000 people suffered injuries in the blast.

Authorities still haven't offered an explanation for the explosion.

Private security firm Ambrey says the port received missile fuel chemical in March. It was part of a shipment of ammonium perchlorate from China by two vessels to Iran, first reported in January by the Financial Times. The chemical used to make solid propellant for rockets was going to be used to replenish Iran's missile stocks, which had been depleted by its direct



attacks on Israel during the war with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The Iranian military denied receiving the chemical shipment. Social media footage of the explosion saw reddish-hued

smoke rising from the fire just before the detonation.

That suggests a chemical compound being involved in the blast, like in the 2020 Beirut port explosion.

New York protests against the Pahalgam attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Members of the Indian diaspora gathered outside the Pakistan Consulate and at Times Square here to protest against the Pahalgam terrorist attacks.

The protestors waved the Indian tricolour and held banners that read 'Declare Islamic Republic of Pakistan a Terrorist State — Pahalgam Hindu massacre'.

They also held a long banner that had the photos of the 26 victims of the terror attack, with the caption 'CNN, NBC, NYT, WAPO, UN - Please share their names, show their faces' along with the hashtag 'Hindu Lives Matter', 'End Terrorism Now', 'Islamic Terror - End Today', 'Enough is Enough'.

The protests were held on April 27 and an interfaith-vigil against Jihadist terror was also held outside the Pakistani Consulate in New York, where members from diaspora communities waved the Indian and Israeli flags, jointly condemning terrorism and calling on the world to send a strong message to collectively combat terrorism.

A Hindu priest chanted prayers of peace for the victims of the attack and community members at the vigil held a one minute silence to pay their respects

to those killed and injured in the Pahalgam attack.

In a post on X The Consulate General of India shared the photos from the protest and said "Condolences and Protest at Times Square, NY"

The protestors waved the Indian tricolour and held banners that read 'Declare Islamic Republic of Pakistan a Terrorist State - Pahalgam Hindu massacre'

"A large number of Indian community members and friends of India gathered at Times Square to express their deep sorrow and condemnation over the terrorist attack in Pahalgam. The gathering paid tribute to the victims, and extended condolences to their families," the post said.

In another post, the Indian Consulate said "The Dawoodi Bohra community in Queens, New York, held a heartfelt prayer meeting in solidarity with the victims of the tragic Pahalgam Terror Attack in Jammu and Kashmir."

The April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam killed 25 Indians and one Nepali citizen. The victims were mostly tourists from

all across India.

Following the terror attack, India highlighted "the cross-border linkages of the terrorist attack" and announced a slew of measures including putting the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 in "abeyance with immediate effect", until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that India will identify, track and punish every terrorist, their handlers and their backers.

"We will pursue them to the ends of the earth. India's spirit will never be broken by terrorism. Terrorism will not go unpunished," he said.

Messages of solidarity and support for India continued to flow from global leaders.

FBI Director Kash Patel said in a post on X that the agency sends its condolences to all the victims of the recent terrorist attack in Kashmir — and will continue offering our full support to the Indian Government.

"This is a reminder of the constant threats our world faces from the evils of terrorism. Pray for those affected."

Thank you to the men and women of law enforcement who answer the call in moments like these," FBI Director Kash Patel said.

US airstrike kills 68 African migrants: Houthi rebels

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

Yemen's Houthi rebels on Monday alleged a US airstrike hit a prison holding African migrants, killing at least 68 people and wounding 47 others. The US military had no immediate comment. The strike in Yemen's Saada governorate, a stronghold for the Houthis, is the latest incident in the country's decade-long war to kill African migrants from Ethiopia and other nations who risk crossing the nation for a chance to work in neighbouring Saudi Arabia.

It also likely will renew questions from activists about the American campaign, known as "Operation Rough Rider," which has been targeting the rebels as the Trump administration negotiates with their main benefactor, Iran, over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program.

The US military's Central Command, in a statement early Monday before news of the alleged strike broke, sought to defend its policy of offering no specific details of its extensive airstrike campaign. The strikes have drawn controversy in America over Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's use of the unclassified Signal messaging app to post sensitive details about the attacks.

"To preserve operational security, we have intentionally limited disclosing details of our ongoing or future operations," Central Command said. "We are very deliberate in our operational approach, but will not reveal specifics about what we've done or what we will do."

It did not immediately respond to questions from The Associated Press about the alleged strike in Saada.

Graphic footage aired by the Houthis' al-Masirah satellite news channel showed what appeared to be dead bodies and others wounded at the site. The Houthi-run Interior Ministry said some 115 migrants had been detained at the site. The rebels' Civil Defense organisation said at least 68 people had been killed and 47 others wounded in the attack.

Footage from the site analysed by the AP suggested some kind of explosion took place there, with its cement walls seemingly peppered by debris fragments and the wounds suffered by those there.

A woman's voice, soft in the footage, can be heard repeating the start of a prayer in Arabic: "In the name of God." An occasional gunshot rang out as medics sought to help those wounded.

Ethiopians and other African migrants for years have landed in Yemen, braving the war-torn nation to try and reach Saudi Arabia for work. The Houthi rebels allegedly make tens of thousands of dollars a week smuggling migrants over the border. Migrants from Ethiopia have found themselves detained, abused and even killed in Saudi Arabia and Yemen during the war. An Oct. 3, 2022, letter to the kingdom from the UN said its investigators "received concerning allegations of cross-border artillery shelling and small arms fire allegedly by Saudi security forces, causing the deaths of up to 430

and injuring 650 migrants." Monday's alleged strike recalled a similar strike by a Saudi-led coalition battling the Houthis back in 2022 on the same compound, which caused a collapse killing 66 detainees and wounding 113 others, a United Nations report later said.

The Houthi shot dead 16 detainees who fled after the strike and wounded another 50, the UN said. The Saudi-led coalition sought to justify the strike by saying the Houthis built and launched drones there, but the UN said it was known to be a detention facility.

"The coalition should have avoided any attack on that facility," the UN report added. That 2022 attack was one of the deadliest single attacks in the years-long war between the coalition and the Houthi rebels and came after the Houthi struck inside the UAE twice with missiles and drones, killing three in a strike near Abu Dhabi's international airport.

Meanwhile, US airstrikes overnight targeting Yemen's capital killed at least eight people, the Houthis said. The American military acknowledged carrying out over 800 individual strikes in their month-long campaign. The overnight statement from Central Command also said "Operation Rough Rider" had "killed hundreds of Houthi fighters and numerous Houthi leaders," including those associated with its missile and drone program. It did not identify any of those officials. "Iran undoubtedly continues to provide support to the Houthis," the statement said.

"The Houthis can only continue to attack our forces with the backing of the Iranian regime." "We will continue to ratchet up the pressure until the objective is met, which remains the restoration of freedom of navigation and American deterrence in the region," it added.

The US is targeting the Houthis because of the group's attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, a crucial global trade route, and on Israel. The Houthis are also the last militant group in Iran's self-described "Axis of Resistance" that is capable of regularly attacking Israel.

The US is conducting strikes on Yemen from its two aircraft carriers in the region - the USS Harry S. Truman in the Red Sea and the USS Carl Vinson in the Arabian Sea. On April 18, an American strike on the Ras Isa fuel port killed at least 74 people and wounded 171 others in the deadliest-known attack of the American campaign. Central Command on Monday offered an explanation for why it hit the port. "US strikes destroyed the ability of Ras Isa Port to accept fuel, which will begin to impact Houthi ability to not only conduct operations, but also to generate millions of dollars in revenue for their terror activities," it said.

Meanwhile, the Houthis have increasingly sought to control the flow of information from the territory they hold to the outside world. It issued a notice Sunday that all those holding Starlink satellite internet receivers should "quickly hand over" the devices to authorities.

Singapore: condolences offered to victims of Pahalgam attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Singapore

Condolences were offered on Monday at the inaugural India-Singapore Futures Forum to the families of the 26 people killed by terrorists in Kashmir's Pahalgam.

India's High Commissioner to Singapore Dr Shilpak Ambule informed forum delegates of the "unfortunate and tragic" manner of the killings by terrorists last Tuesday.

"The manner of killing by identifying the religion (of the victims) was something unprecedented," said the envoy.

Joining Ambule in condemning the attack, keynote speaker and Singapore Ambassador at Large Professor Tommy Koh said, "Singapore stands with India in fighting the scourge of terrorism."

Last week, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) said, "Singapore strongly condemns the terror attacks in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, on Apr 22, 2025, which have claimed many lives."

In his keynote, Professor Koh highlighted the strength of Singapore-India bilateral relations. He also noted a messy transition globally, moving away from free trade and open economics and shifting towards protectionism and economic nationalism.

"Global cooperation is giving way to growing competition and distrust," he said.

"In the face of such upheavals and chal-

lenges, we need like-minded and trusted friends such as India and Singapore. Together, we will seek shelter from the storms ahead and seek opportunities in the midst of adversity," Prof Koh told the forum, pointing to the high level of comfort and mutual trust between the leaders of the two countries.

High Commissioner Ambule also spoke about the growing bilateral relations and the process of expanding cooperation into new areas including advanced technologies and manufacturing.

Meanwhile, forum speakers discussed and addressed opportunities and challenges in four critical areas between the two countries. They discussed artificial intelligence, semiconductors, fintech and space. In 2024, India and Singapore signed a memorandum of understanding on Digital Technologies which provides a comprehensive blueprint for joint AI development, emphasising ethical governance, talent exchange and scalable solutions for global challenges.

"India's vast data resources, technical talent pool and thriving startup ecosystem align seamlessly with Singapore's strengths in governance frameworks, research infrastructure and global market connectivity," said Prof Iqbal Singh Seva, director of the Institute of South Asian Studies, a think-tank at the National University of Singapore which organised the inaugural forum.

Minister Piyush Goyal arrives in London to begin UK, tour



Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal

FILE PHOTO

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal arrived in London on Monday morning at the start of a five-day three-city tour, also covering Oslo and Brussels, to drive forward trade and investment dialogues with the UK and Europe.

The minister, who is accompanied by a business delegation of leading Indian companies, is expected to hold a series of high-level talks with UK Government ministers and officials. During a meeting with his UK counterpart, Jonathan Reynolds, the duo are scheduled to take stock of the ongoing Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, believed to be approaching their final stages.

"This Government is committed to doing the right deal with India which will improve access for UK businesses, cut tariffs, and make trade cheaper and easier," a UK Department for Business and Trade (DBT) spokesperson said ahead of the ministerial meeting.

"Talks have been ongoing since they were relaunched in February, and we will only sign a deal that is in the best interests of the British people and drives growth across the UK," the spokesperson

said. The relaunch of the negotiations, following a hiatus for general elections in both countries last year, is aimed at clinching an agreement that is expected to significantly enhance the estimated GBP 41 billion a year India-UK trade partnership.

Goyal's visit comes soon after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's London visit earlier this month, when she had highlighted a "great sense of positivity and also eagerness and a dedication" to have the FTA conclude "sooner rather than later". According to officials close to the discussions, the talks have been progressing at speed with some of the remaining issues expected to be ironed out at the ministerial level.

From the UK, Goyal is expected to review progress of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) signed with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members which include Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland besides Norway.

For the final leg of his Europe tour, the minister is scheduled for meetings in Brussels, expected to revolve around ongoing trade negotiations with the 27-member EU.

China calls for 'swift and fair investigation' into Pahalgam attack

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beijing

China has called for a "swift and fair investigation" into the Pahalgam terrorist attack and expressed support for its all-weather ally Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and security interests amid Islamabad's rising tensions with India. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Sunday held a telephonic conversation with Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, State-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Dar briefed Wang — also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee — on the latest tensions between Pakistan and India "following a terrorist attack in the Kashmir region", it said in the report.

For his part, Wang said China was closely following the developments, stressing

that combating terrorism was a shared responsibility of the entire world while reaffirming Beijing's consistent support for Pakistan's firm counterterrorism efforts, it added.

"As an ironclad friend and an all-weather strategic cooperative partner, China fully understands Pakistan's legitimate security concerns and supports Pakistan in safeguarding its sovereignty and security interests," the report quoted Wang as saying.

"China advocates for a swift and fair investigation and believes that conflict does not serve the fundamental interests of either India or Pakistan, nor does it benefit regional peace and stability," Wang noted.

China hopes both sides will remain restrained, move toward each other, and work together to de-escalate the situation,

he added. Dar emphasised that Pakistan had consistently and firmly fought terrorism and was against any actions that could lead to an escalation of the situation, according to the report.

Pakistan is committed to managing the situation in a mature manner and will maintain communication with China and the international community, Dar said, the news agency reported.

On April 23, China "strongly condemned" the brutal terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed.

"We strongly condemn the attack. China firmly opposes all forms of terrorism," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun had told a media briefing.

"We mourn for the lives lost and express sincere sympathies to the bereaved families and the injured," he had said.

Seven killed, Nine injured in bomb blast in northwest Pakistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Peshawar

At least seven people were killed and nine injured on Monday after a powerful bomb blast ripped through the office of a peace committee in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, police said.

The bomb blast occurred at the office of a local peace committee in Wana, headquarters of South Waziristan district, police said. According to hospital administration, 16 injured people were brought to the hospital after the explosion, of which seven succumbed to their injuries.

So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the blast.

The police stated that the explosion was so severe that it destroyed the building of the peace committee's office, trapping several people under the debris.

Rescue teams and locals reached the site upon receiving the information and started an operation to retrieve the injured from the rubble.

The injured were transferred to a nearby hospital, where they are receiving treatment.

The bomb blast occurred at the office of a local peace committee in Wana, headquarters of South Waziristan district

According to the hospital administration, some of those injured are reportedly critical.

So far, no official statement has been released about the nature or motives behind the explosion.

However, police and security agencies have cordoned off the area and launched an investigation.

Officials have said that evidence is being collected from the scene and different aspects are being examined to trace those responsible for the blast.

Rare exposition of sacred Buddha tooth relic ends

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

The rare exposition of the sacred tooth relic of Lord Buddha has been concluded in Sri Lanka's central town of Kandy, according to an official statement. The exposition began on April 18 and concluded on Sunday.

The chief monks, in a joint statement, said the exposition was the largest gathering in a single place in the entire history of the island.

The tooth relic holds special spiritual, historical and cultural significance for the 74 per cent Sinhala Buddhist majority in the island nation of 21 million people.

Hundreds of thousands of Buddhist devotees attended the 10-day exposition, the first since 2009.

The organisers had planned the event for nearly 2 million devotees, however, the officials believed only a less than half of that number attended as the authorities stopped the entry when it seemed they were going out of control in providing basic sanitary facilities for such a large turnout.

"We are so pleased that it has come to an end. But we are left with the bigger task of removing various temporary structures



put up in the town," Indika Kumari, the Municipal Commissioner of Kandy, told reporters.

She said the cleaning operations commenced last night itself.

"We are currently in the process of segmenting the garbage.

Non-perishable garbage is estimated to be about 10 tonnes. We believe that 300 tonnes of rubbish have been piled up," Kumari said.

The exposition came at the request of President Anura Kumara Dissanayake. The Opposition charged that it was a political move by Dissanayake to gain support from the Buddhist majority in the local council election scheduled for May 6.

According to historical records, the tooth relic, which came to Kandy in 1590, came to symbolise Buddhist holiness, becoming Sri Lanka's most treasured possession and the seal of sovereignty.

India to be competitive on many products: Scindia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The current global tariff environment notwithstanding, India is expected to stay competitive due to its vast domestic market, scale advantages, and focus on innovation, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has said, asserting that seen even from the lens of a comparative matrix of tariffs vis-a-vis other nations, India holds a more favourable position.

In a recent interview to media, Scindia — who is the Minister for Communications as well as Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) — noted that given that other nations too face varying levels of tariffs, India will likely emerge “fiercely and much more competitive” across numerous products than before. The lucrative domestic market has drawn global multinational companies to set up a significant presence here, he said and cited the strong pace of India’s economic growth and New Delhi’s policy push on manufacturing and innovation.

“So I do believe that irrespective of the prevailing environment of tariffs, India will continue to be competitive because she has economies of scale behind her because innovation comes along with that economies of scale to be able to cater to such a large market. And therefore, even in comparison with other nations, India will remain to be competitive,” the minister said.

To a question on how he sees the US tariff situation playing out, the Minister said



that the whole question of tariffs has to be seen from a comparative matrix point of view. “So if you’re a country that I used to compete with and the tariffs that have been put on you are possibly today double of what mine are. Where I used to be uncompetitive vis-a-vis you, I now become competitive. So, I think it is important to look at it not only from purely India-centric point of view but from a comparative matrix point of view,” Scindia said.

The Minister expressed confidence that for many products in many areas, India will emerge fiercely and much more competitive than prior to the tariffs being in place. India has transformed itself from an

infrastructure standpoint, and from an exporting nation standpoint as well, he said terming it “a monumental change”.

“...You have to understand where we stand as an economy....Today, India stands very tall...We’re today going to become the third-largest economy by 2028. We’re today at almost a \$4 trillion economy, \$5 trillion by 2028, close to \$6 trillion by 2030,” the minister said. From a country that used to import an overwhelming majority of its mobile phone requirement and produced merely 5 crore units, India is producing over 35 to 40 crore mobile phones, today. “Our exports are over ₹1,75,000 crore purely on mobiles,” he said.

Bullet train to be operational by 2028: Devendra Fadnavis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The \$15 billion Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project being built in collaboration with Japan will be operational by 2028, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Monday.

Fadnavis also said the state is looking to raise \$50 billion from international financiers for infrastructure development in the state, and announcements for the same will be done in four months.

Without naming Shiv Sena’s Uddhav Thackeray, Fadnavis said the bullet train project suffered during a two-year rule until 2022, but now the work is on in full swing.

“By 2028, we will be able to travel in the bullet train,” Fadnavis said, conceding that neighbouring state Gujarat is ahead of Maharashtra on the project development.

Fadnavis said creating infrastructure is very important to achieve the goal of \$1 trillion GDP, and that \$30 billion was invested in infrastructure creation during his first stint as the chief minister between 2014-19, and more money is being put into important projects now.

Speaking at an event on the India-Middle East Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) project organized by VRF here, he said the Vadnavan port will be operational in the next 3-4 years.

He said the port, being built on reclaimed land, will help reduce the cost of logistics, pointing out that the turnaround time at JNPA, India’s largest container port located nearby, is higher.

The Vadnavan port will also have an adjoining airport which will be built through land reclamation on the sea, Fadnavis said, adding that many major cities in the world have such airports.

It will also have a halt for the bullet train, Fadnavis said.

The Chief Minister said Maharashtra is building a highway from Nashik to Vadnavan port which will ensure that 17 districts of the state get connected with the modern port.

Without naming Shiv Sena’s Uddhav Thackeray, Fadnavis said the bullet train project suffered during a two-year rule until 2022, but now the work is on in full swing

The state is building the Shaktipeeth highway to connect Nagpur with Goa, Fadnavis said, adding that this road project passing through the backward regions will also help boost the economic growth.

He said Mumbai and Maharashtra will play an important role in the IMEEC, and assured that the state will create the facilitating ecosystem for the project to be a success.

Speaking at the same event, Sanjeev Krishan, the country chairperson of consulting firm PwC said the corridor, when combined with existing trade routes, will have a multiplier effect on the global economy.

‘Adding 50-GW renewable energy yearly can end coal imports by 2029’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

If India adds 50 gigawatts of renewable energy every year, it could completely stop importing thermal coal by 2029 and save about \$66 billion in foreign exchange between 2025 and 2029, according to a new report published on Monday. The total savings could be at least \$173 billion from 2025 to 2034, the report prepared by think tank Climate Risks Horizon said.

The climate and energy think tank said the country’s electricity sector remains heavily dependent on coal imports, with around 20 per cent or 206 million tonnes of thermal coal imported in 2023-24 at a cost of \$21 billion.

Thermal coal imports have risen by 58 per cent between 2013 and 2023, but the value of these imports has increased by 124 per cent due to volatile global prices and a weakening rupee, it added.

The report said imports surge during the summer months, when cooling demand pushes up electricity consumption. Over the said period (2013 to 2023), India imported around 2,128 million tonnes of coal, mostly thermal coal used for power generation. The import of thermal coal has been increasing steadily at 3.7 per cent annually and has gone up to 40 per cent since 2013. The think tank said India’s dependency on imported coal poses both physical and financial risks. Physical risks arise with any disruption in the supply of imported coal, either due to unforeseen political changes or natural disasters.

Attari-Wagah closure likely to hit dry fruit imports from Afghanistan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India’s imports of dry fruits, including almonds, raisins, dried apricots, and pistachios, from Afghanistan are expected to be impacted due to the closure of the land borders amid heightened tensions between India and Pakistan following the Pahalagam terror attack, which is expected to push domestic prices of these commodities, according to exporters.

Following the terror attack in Pahalagam, which killed 26 people, mostly tourists, India took a series of measures, including immediate shutting down of the Attari land-transit post, used for movement of certain kinds of goods.

In retaliation, Pakistan also announced that all trade with India, including to and from any third country through Pakistan, is suspended forthwith. This move may affect India’s exports to Afghanistan.

The exporters said that Afghanistan is a key exporter of these dry fruits into India. New Delhi also imports these goods from Islamabad. At present, India is trading with Afghanistan via the Attari-Wagah border and Pakistan’s suspension of trade will impact domestic exports and imports to Kabul. In 2024-25 (April-January), India’s exports to Afghanistan were \$264.15 million, while imports stood at \$591.49 million. Out of this, India’s inbound shipments of dry fruits stood at \$358 million.

During this period, India’s fruits and nuts import from Pakistan was \$0.08 million. The main goods imported from Afghanistan through the land route included dried figs, asafoetida, saffron, dried apricots, pistachios, and raisins.

Attari is near Amritsar in Punjab. A Delhi-based importer said that the closure of the land route will definitely impact imports of dry fruits from both Pakistan and Afghanistan.

“Though immediate there is no impact as goods are in transit, but after ten days the imports will be stopped completely. After that the prices would go up to 20 per cent in the national capital,” Rajiv Batra, president, Khari Baoli Traders’ Association, said. He added, “We will get the nuts but it would come from countries like UAE, Iran, and Iraq as these would act as an alternate route for Afghan dry fruits”.

Sensex jumps 1,006 points, foreign fund inflows

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Benchmark BSE Sensex soared by 1,006 points to close above 80,000 level on Monday as a sharp rally in Reliance Industries and private banks, and foreign fund inflows helped stock markets cut short two days of fall amid India-Pakistan border tensions.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,005.84 points or 1.27 per cent to settle at 80,218.37 with 23 of its constituents ending with gains and seven in the red. During the day, it surged 1,109.35 points or 1.40 per cent to 80,321.88. The NSE Nifty rallied 289.15 points or 1.20 per cent to close at 24,328.50. All key sectors, barring IT, participated in the rally, with pharma, energy, and auto emerging as the top gainers. Reliance Industries surged by 5.27 per cent to emerge as the biggest gainer among Sensex stocks.

The oil-to-retail behemoth reported a 2.4 per cent rise in March quarter net profit beating street estimates. Mahindra & Mahindra spurted 2.29 per cent after the auto major announced a ₹555-crore acquisition of SML Isuzu and said that the buy-out was a strong strategic fit for the company that would put it in a strong position. SML Isuzu Ltd shares, on the other hand, tanked 10 per cent. Sun Pharma, Tata Steel, State Bank of India, Axis Bank, Tata Motors, Larsen & Toubro and ICICI Bank were also among the Sensex gainers. HCL Tech, UltraTech Cement, Nestle

and Hindustan Unilever were among the laggards. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,952.33 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Foreign investors have infused Rs 17,425 crore in the country’s equity markets last week, supported by a combination of favourable global cues and strong domestic macroeconomic fundamentals. This came following a net investment of ₹8,500 crore in the preceding holiday-truncated week ended April 18.

“The domestic market recouped from the losses incurred during the last two days of the previous week, which stemmed from the border tensions. “While sustained buying from FIIs and better results from RIL also boosted the investor sentiment. A weakening dollar and inflationary pressure in the US may attract FIIs into the domestic market,” Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said. The BSE midcap gauge jumped 1.34 per cent and smallcap index climbed 0.39 per cent. Among BSE sectoral indices, energy jumped 3.02 per cent, oil & gas (2.90 per cent), capital goods (1.93 per cent), healthcare (1.60 per cent), metal (1.59 per cent), bankex (1.53 per cent) and realty (1.41 per cent).

In Asian markets, South Korea’s Kospi index and Tokyo’s Nikkei 225 settled in the positive territory while Shanghai SSE Composite and Hong Kong’s Hang Seng ended lower.

Climate change may impact defaults: RBI DG

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Climate change would lead to additional operational costs for borrowers with an increased possibility of a loss of their assets, leading to an increased probability of default by borrowers, RBI deputy governor M Rajeshwar Rao has said.

Speaking on the topic ‘Building a robust ecosystem for Green and Sustainable Finance in India’, he said climate change risks impact the financial institutions, financial system and real economy through the traditional risk categories and one risk factor that prominently stands out is credit risk.

“Climate change would lead to addi-

tional operational costs for the borrowers with an increased possibility of loss of their assets, leading to increased probability of default by the borrowers,” he said at Credit Summit 2025 organised by the Bharat Climate Forum here on April 17.

The real economy is also impacted through various means such as direct property losses, crop losses, loss of employment and livelihood losses, according to his speech posted by the RBI on Monday. “Another facet of credit risk in climate change emanates from the need to promote green and sustainable financing. The fact that the net-zero technologies driving the transition to decarbonisation, are at various developmental and evolving stages, itself signifies a signifi-

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Apple on Monday released a new study saying that the App Store ecosystem in India facilitated ₹44,447 crore (\$5.31 billion) in developer billings and sales in 2024. The study — conducted by Professor Viswanath Pingali from the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad — showed that more than 94 per cent of that revenue accrued solely to developers and businesses, without any commission paid to Apple.

The study showed that over the last five years, the global earnings of India-based developers have tripled, highlighting the tremendous business opportunity and global reach the App Store provides.

“The App Store has been an economic miracle for developers in India and all around the world, and we’re thrilled to support their work,” Tim Cook, Apple’s CEO said in a release. This study underlines the power of India’s incredibly vibrant app economy, he added.

“And we’re committed to keep investing in the success of developers of all sizes as they build apps that make an important impact and enrich people’s lives,” according to him. The study from Professor Pingali took a close look at the key drivers shaping the App Store ecosystem in India, including increased app usage in sectors like food delivery, travel, gaming, and entertainment. In 2024



alone, it found that App Store developers generated ₹38,906 crore (\$4.65 billion) in total billings and sales from the sale of physical goods and services, ₹3,014 crore (\$352.9 million) from in-app advertising, and ₹2,527 crore (\$302 million) from digital goods and services.

Since its launch more than fifteen years ago, developers have more ways than ever to monetise their apps and build successful businesses on the App Store, resulting in a healthy and dynamic ecosystem. In 2024, developers active in India have been successful across a diverse range of app categories such as games, health, and fit-

ness, lifestyle and utilities, as per the study. The App Store’s ecosystem of innovation provides Apple developers around the world with a global distribution platform across 175 storefronts.

In 2024, close to 80 per cent of India-based developers’ App Store earnings came from users outside of the country, and 87 per cent of developers were active on multiple storefronts.

Moreover, throughout the same year, users from all over the world downloaded apps from developers in India more than 755 million times through the App Store, twice as many as five years ago.

INBRIEF

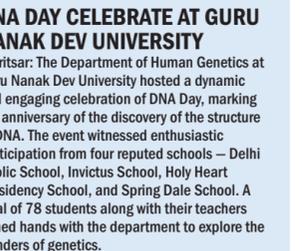
GNU CELEBRATES EARTH DAY

Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar celebrated Earth Day under the guidance of Vice-Chancellor Professor Karamjeet Singh with great zeal and environmental consciousness. The event was jointly organised by the College Development Council and the NSS unit of GNDU. The Earth Day rally was flagged off by Registrar, KS Chahal, Dean Student Welfare, HS Saini and Saroj Arora, Dean College Development Council.



DNA DAY CELEBRATE AT GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY

Amritsar: The Department of Human Genetics at Guru Nanak Dev University hosted a dynamic and engaging celebration of DNA Day, marking the anniversary of the discovery of the structure of DNA. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from four reputed schools — Delhi Public School, Invictus School, Holy Heart Presidency School, and Spring Dale School. A total of 78 students along with their teachers joined hands with the department to explore the wonders of genetics.



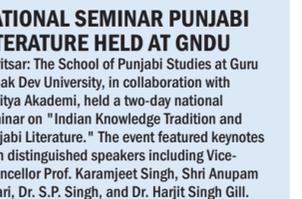
VEDANTA LEVERAGES AI TO TRANSFORM SAFETY

New Delhi: On World Day for Safety and Health at Work, Vedanta reaffirmed its safety commitment, leveraging AI, drones, and smart systems. Innovations like VR training simulators and AI-based monitoring enhance safety. The company also focuses on employee health, with initiatives including wellness programs, mental health support, and community safety training.



NATIONAL SEMINAR PUNJABI LITERATURE HELD AT GNDU

Amritsar: The School of Punjabi Studies at Guru Nanak Dev University, in collaboration with Sahitya Akademi, held a two-day national seminar on “Indian Knowledge Tradition and Punjabi Literature.” The event featured keynotes from distinguished speakers including Vice-Chancellor Prof. Karamjeet Singh, Shri Anupam Tiwari, Dr. S.P. Singh, and Dr. Harjit Singh Gill.



Gold declines ₹1,000 to ₹98,400/10 gm amid weak global trend

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Gold prices declined ₹1,000 to ₹98,400 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid weak global trend, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹99,400 per 10 grams on Thursday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity depreciated ₹1,000 to ₹97,900 per 10 grams against the previous close of ₹98,900 per 10 grams.

“Gold prices continued to decline as easing US-China trade tensions boosted investors’ risk appetite, reducing demand for safe-haven assets like bullion while a stronger dollar added downward pressure on gold,” Abans Financial Services’ Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta said.

On Friday, China announced it would exempt some US imports from its steep 125 per cent tariffs, though it denied that

any formal trade talks were underway. Meanwhile, the US Federal Reserve officials signalled that they see no immediate need to adjust monetary policy, choosing instead to monitor the economic impact of the Trump administration’s tariffs.

This hawkish stance suggests that interest rate cuts may not materialise in the near term, further weighing on gold, which typically loses appeal as a non-yielding asset when interest rates stay elevated. Mehta further said, “Rising geopolitical tensions could limit gold’s downside. As war risks escalate and new conflicts emerge, investors are likely to seek refuge in gold.”

“With tensions brewing among major powers, and regional strains like the growing friction between India and Pakistan, demand for gold as a safe-haven asset is expected to rise, making it a preferred hedge against market

Gold prices continued to decline as easing US-China trade tensions boosted investors’ risk appetite, reducing demand for safe-haven assets like bullion while a stronger dollar added downward pressure on gold

volatility and uncertainty,” he added. The local bullion markets were closed on Friday due to traders’ protest against the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir’s Pahalagam.

Additionally, silver prices also plunged ₹1,400 to ₹98,500 per kg on Monday. The white metal had settled at ₹99,900 per kg in the previous session.

On the global front, spot gold fell nearly one per cent to trade at \$3,291.04 per ounce. “Gold traded weak amid the US

opening tariff talks with multiple nations and growing expectations of a possible China-US trade agreement according to US President Donald Trump. Additionally, optimism around a potential Russia-Ukraine peace deal further weighed on safe-haven demand for gold,” Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. Spot silver in the Asian market hours traded 0.2 per cent lower at \$33.05 per ounce.

According to HDFC Securities’ Senior Analyst of Commodities Saumil Gandhi said this week traders expect the spotlight will be mostly on tariff-related developments.

On the macroeconomic front, US data release such as manufacturing PMI data for April, GDP data, and, most importantly, US non-farm payrolls and unemployment rates will impact the bullion market, Gandhi said.

Liverpool wins Premier League

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Liverpool

A selfie with Mohamed Salah. An impromptu sing-along with Arne Slot. Fireworks and flares. It was party time at Anfield on Sunday as Liverpool sealed the Premier League title in style.

The 5-1 rout of Tottenham was almost a side issue as a record-equaling 20th English league championship was confirmed — matching the achievement of Liverpool's great rival Manchester United. "Everyone was sitting on the bus saying there is no way we are going to lose the game," said Slot, standing in the middle of the field after being doused in champagne by his players.

Fans had turned up long before kick-off, lining the streets around the stadium in anticipation of a title celebration. And despite going behind to an early goal from Dominic Solanke, Liverpool did not let them down — racing to a 3-1 lead by half-time to effectively ensure there would be no further delay to a title victory that has looked likely for much of the season.

CLUB GREATS

The smell of sulfur filled the air early in the day as red smoke canisters were let off outside the famous stadium that has been home to so many championship-winning Liverpool teams. Flags were hung from nearby houses.

Inside the ground, giant banners floated across the stands, celebrating icons past and present. Slot has joined that list of club greats in only his first season after replacing Jurgen Klopp. He also joins a select group of managers by winning the title in his first year in the Premier League — following Jose Mourinho, Carlo Ancelotti, Manuel Pellegrini and Antonio Conte.

He has managed it with plenty to spare, with Liverpool 15 points ahead of second-placed Arsenal with four rounds of the season to go.



TRIBUTE TO KLOPP

Slot is also the first Dutch coach to win the Premier League, which is some feat considering serial trophy winners like Louis van Gaal, Guus Hiddink and Erik ten Hag have all managed in English soccer's top flight.

"It's always special to win something. It's even more special if you're the first one, and even more special at a club where it's not common that you win the league every year," said Slot, who paid tribute to his predecessor by singing Klopp's name to fans after the final whistle.

Klopp had led Liverpool to a full set of trophies in more than eight years in charge, including the Champions League and that long-awaited Premier League. Few could have expected Slot to have such an instant impact in his first year in a new country — halting Manchester City's dominance of English soccer at the first attempt. Slot thanked Liverpool's owners

for their faith in hiring him from Dutch team Feyenoord last year.

City manager Pep Guardiola was quick to congratulate Slot on a "well deserved" victory.

SPECIAL DAY

This was Liverpool's second title in five years, having ended a 30-year wait to be champion in 2020. But this time there was a crucial difference as the triumph was shared with supporters.

Five years ago Liverpool had to finish off the season behind closed doors as the UK faced lockdown restrictions because of the COVID pandemic. Now there was a packed stadium to erupt at the final whistle and watch as the players danced and embraced on field.

Throughout the match a packed Anfield crowd had been in rapturous voice, singing the club's anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone" in the final moments.

It was reprised later as Slot and his players stood facing the famed Kop stand to be serenaded by fans.

Having spent 206 days at the top of the standings, Liverpool only needed one more point to be confirmed champion.

For a brief moment Solanke's 12th-minute header had threatened to spoil the party, but the home team powered back with strikes from Luis Diaz, Alexis Mac Allister and Cody Gakpo before halftime. Salah added another after the break and Destiny Udogie's own-goal rounded off the rout.

In the end, the victory was so comfortable that Salah even had time to pose for a selfie in front of the crowd after scoring his 33rd goal of the season in all competitions.

Rasmus Hojlund scored in added time to salvage a 1-1 draw for Manchester United at Bournemouth in the other Premier League game on Sunday.

Manchester City beats Forest 2-0 to reach FA Cup final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

Even Manchester City's worst season under Pep Guardiola could still end with a trophy.

On the day it was officially deposed as Premier League champion, City reached the FA Cup final for the third year in a row by beating Nottingham Forest 2-0 at Wembley Stadium to maintain a chance of salvaging something from a dismal campaign. City scored early Sunday in each half as Rico Lewis put his team ahead in just the second minute and defender Josko Gvardiol doubled the lead in the 51st with a header from a corner.

Forest hit the woodwork three times after that but could not get a consolation goal in its first FA Cup semifinal since 1991. The win gives Pep Guardiola's team a chance to salvage something from a disappointing campaign where its hopes of a fifth straight Premier League title disappeared early and it failed to even reach the round of 16 in the Champions League.

City will play Crystal Palace in the final on May 17. "Unfortunately, the season has not been as we wanted, but we are still in another FA Cup final," said City midfielder Mateo Kovacic, who set up the opening goal. "So it's good that we want to finish it in a strong way." Liverpool clinched the Premier League title at the same time as City was playing, and even an FA Cup title would be a mere consolation for a club that has dominated English soccer under Guardiola. Even Guardiola made it clear that winning the cup would not make this a successful season.

"Noooo," the Spaniard said emphatically. "The season has not been good. We are a thousand million points behind Liverpool. But of course the damage will be (smaller)." That's currently 21 points behind Liverpool for the record, but City still has work to do just to secure a Champions League spot for next season.

Forest is one of the teams trying to finish above City, meaning there's little time to dwell on this loss.

"Tomorrow we will wake up and see that we have a lot to fight for," Forest manager Nuno Espirito Santo said.

EMPTY SEATS

The jaded feeling among City fans was made evident by the 5,000 or so empty seats at Wembley in the sky blue half but the supporters who did make the trip had reason to celebrate early.

Lewis scored with his team's first chance when he was teed up by Kovacic just outside the area, turned to face the goal and hit a low shot inside the left post.

Forest hardly had a whiff at goal in the first half but had a chance to get right back in the game just after the restart. Halftime substitute Anthony Elanga almost scored with his first touch when Callum Hudson-Odoi picked him out with a low cross into the area, but the Swede put his effort wide.

Instead, City made it 2-0 minutes later.

A chaotic sequence where Forest goalkeeper Matz Sels made three saves in quick succession ended in a corner after City had a strong appeal for handball waved away. Any debate about whether it should have been a penalty ended when Gvardiol rose unchallenged to head home the corner from close range.

Morgan Gibbs-White then hit the woodwork twice, first blasting a volley against the crossbar and later hitting the post from a tight angle after he pounced on a poor back pass and rounded goalkeeper Stefan Ortega.

Taiwo Awoniyi also hit the post in the 79th and Ortega kept out Gibbs-White's effort from the rebound as Forest just couldn't find a breakthrough.

"It's devastating. ... I hold my hand up and apologise. I should have scored at least one of them," Gibbs-White said about his chances.



India face Indonesia in BWF Sudirman Cup Final

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Xiamen (China)

Faced with a herculean task to trump a formidable Indonesia and stay afloat in the competition, an under-strength India will need its struggling singles stars to deliver the goods in a must-win Group D contest at the BWF Sudirman Cup Finals here on Tuesday.

India's campaign began on a disastrous start on Sunday with a 1-4 defeat to Denmark, a result that put their qualification for the knockout stage in serious jeopardy. With only two teams progressing from Group D, India must secure a win against Indonesia to keep their hopes alive otherwise, their third and final group match against England will be reduced to just a formality.

The poor form of their star singles players — Lakshya Sen, HS Prannoy, and PV Sindhu has not helped the team.

However, there is some hope for India. Lakshya has defeated Indonesia's top men's singles player Jonatan Christie in their last two encounters — at the Paris Olympics and the All England Championships.

In the women's singles, with Indonesia's top player Gregoria Mariska Tunjung pulling out, Sindhu will face world No. 11 Putri Kusuma Wardani, a player she has beaten twice before.

Despite this, Indonesia boast a strong contingent of doubles players, including Fajar Alfian, Muhammad Rian Ardianto, Leo Rolly Carnando, Muhammad Shohibul Fikri, and Daniel Marthin — all

ranked among the world's top 10.

With India's top men's doubles duo of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty absent, the inexperienced pairing of Hariharan Amsakarunan and Ruban Kumar Rethinasabapathi will face an uphill battle in what is likely to be a tough contest.

In the women's doubles, Febriana Dwipuji Kusuma and Amallia Cahaya Pratiwi are ranked world No. 8, and without Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand, Tanisha Crasto and Shruti Mishra will be hoping to build on their encouraging performance against Denmark, which was the lone bright spot for India in their opening match.

In the mixed doubles, India's Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha will face the challenge of overcoming world No. 21 Rinov Rivaldy and Pitha Haningtyas Mentari of Indonesia.

Back in February, India had suffered a setback at the Badminton Asia Mixed Team Championship, where they were eliminated in the quarterfinals in Qingdao, despite fielding a strong squad and they would like to avoid a league stage exit here.

India's best-ever performance at the Sudirman Cup has been two quarterfinal finishes: in 2011 and 2017.

While India has made significant progress in recent years - highlighted by their historic Thomas Cup win in 2022 and the Badminton Asia Women's Team Championships title in 2024 - the absence of key doubles pairs has dampened their prospects in the ongoing Sudirman Cup.

Marseille beat Brest 4-1 to reclaim second place in Ligue 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

Amine Gouiri scored with a stunning overhead kick on his way to a hat trick as Marseille beat Brest 4-1 to reclaim second place in Ligue 1, strengthening its chances of qualifying automatically for next season's Champions League.

Marseille is two points ahead of third-placed Lille and three ahead of fourth-placed Monaco with three games left.

Lyon, Nice and Strasbourg are one point behind Monaco and separated on goal difference in what promises to be a hectic race to the line for a place in Europe's elite club competition. Paris Saint-Germain had already clinched a record-extending 13th Ligue 1 crown. The top three sides in France qualify automatically for the Champions League, with the side finishing fourth entering qualifying.

Gouiri has earned a reputation as one of the most skillful yet inconsistent forwards in French soccer but he is changing that this season with a highlight-reel collection of goals.

After he put Marseille ahead in the eighth minute with a fine angled drive from the right of the penalty area, sloppy defending allowed Brest striker Abdallah Sima to equalise in the 26th.

Marseille regained the lead in the 37th when club top scorer Mason Greenwood's deflected strike wrong-footed the goalkeeper. Then came Gouiri's wonder goal just before halftime.

Marseille regained the lead in the 37 minute, when club top scorer Mason Greenwood's deflected strike wrong-footed the goalkeeper

He positioned himself near the penalty spot to control Greenwood's cross from the right on his chest, and then shifted his body to score with an overhead shot with his right foot.

Two months ago Marseille coach Roberto De Zerbi said the 25-year-old Gouiri has the potential to become one

of the best strikers in Europe, after he scored two outstanding goals when Marseille routed Saint-Etienne 5-1.

Gouiri completed his hat trick against Brest in the 63rd, beating the offside trap to latch onto France midfielder Adrien Rabiot's pass and calmly slotting the ball into the bottom corner.

Gouiri, who joined from Rennes for 22 million euros (\$23 million) in the January transfer window, received an ovation at Stade Velodrome when he was taken off after his third goal.

LILLE GAINS MOMENTUM

Earlier Sunday, Lille kept up its push for an automatic spot with a 2-0 win at Angers for its third straight victory.

Brazilian defender Alessandro put Lille ahead in first-half stoppage time when he headed in Hakon Haraldsson's free kick from the right.

Haraldsson doubled Lille's lead shortly after halftime when he was set up by striker Chuba Akpom.

Monaco dropped points on Saturday following a 1-1 draw at lowly Le Havre,

while Lyon, Nice and Strasbourg all won their games.

NANTES CLOSER TO SAFETY

Nantes picked up a useful point in its fight to avoid relegation following a 0-0 draw with Toulouse.

Toulouse held on despite having French striker Noah Edjouma sent off late in the first half and avoided a sixth straight loss.

But Nantes striker Mostafa Mohamed fluffed a golden chance from three meters out midway through the second half.

Nantes is in 14th place and four points clear of Le Havre in 16th and the relegation-promotion playoff spot.

OTHER MATCHES

Rock-bottom Montpellier was already relegated on Saturday because of Le Havre's draw but at least stopped a 12th consecutive defeat with a 0-0 home draw with Reims. Also, midtable Auxerre romped to a 4-0 win at Lens with two goals from forward Gaëtan Perrin and Dutch defender Ki-Jana Hoever.

Cristiano Ronaldo's Al-Nassr dominating in Asian Champions League Elite

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jeddah

Big-spending Saudi clubs including Cristiano Ronaldo's Al-Nassr are dominating the Asian Champions League Elite, accounting for all but one of the semifinalists in action this week.

In three quarterfinals played on the weekend, the three Saudi Pro League teams won with a combined scoreline of 14-1. At least one is guaranteed a place in the final on May 3 as four-time champion Al-Hilal meets two-time finalist Al-Ahli in the first of the two semis at Jeddah.

On Wednesday, Al-Nassr takes on Japan's Kawasaki Frontale, the only non-Saudi club still in contention for the continental title. Kawasaki edged 2011 champion Al Sadd of Qatar 3-2 after extra time on Sunday to advance to the semifinals for the first time.

With all playoff games taking place in Jeddah, there is home advantage and big crowds supporting the three domestic clubs that are laden with high-profile

international stars. In the summer transfer window of 2023, Saudi clubs spent almost \$1 billion and it's making a difference in Asian competition.

Al-Nassr thumped last season's runner-up Yokohama F.Marininos of Japan 4-1 on Saturday, with goals coming from Ronaldo, former Liverpool star Sadio Mane and two from Jhon Duran, who signed from Premier League club Aston Villa in January in a deal reportedly worth more than \$80 million.

"When you come here, the teams are playing Premier League-level football," Yokohama's interim coach Patrick Kisnorbo said. "I don't think it's a technical issue but sometimes these things happen. We have to move forward."

The journey to Jeddah was also a punishing one for teams in the middle of domestic seasons in East Asia.

"Our local league is our priority," Buriram United coach Osmar Loss said after his Thai club lost 3-0 to Al-Ahli on Saturday. "It's a long trip to Jeddah and

back and I needed to protect our main players." In the most lopsided of the quarterfinals, South Korean club Gwangju FC, making its first appearance in the tournament, was thrashed 7-0 by Al-Hilal on Friday.

Al-Hilal now faces Jeddah club Al-Ahli on Tuesday in a bid to reach its 10th title match in the Asian competition. Al-Ahli, fourth in the domestic league, had a 3-2 win over Al-Hilal in February with all three goals scored by England striker Ivan Toney. With other former Premier League stars such as Riyad Mahrez and Roberto Firmino on the scoresheet against Buriram United, coach Matthias Jaissle believes Al-Ahli is well placed to advance to a third final and then to capture a first title.

"I congratulated the players for making it to the semifinals but from now on, they have to focus on what's best — rehabilitation, rest, and get back to the best physical level to perform against Al Hilal," Jaissle said.

Theegala, Rai finish 18th in Zurich Classic

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Avondale

Indian-origin golfers Sahith Theegala and Aaron Rai finished a creditable tied 18th after turning in one under 71 in the final round of the Zurich Classic here.

The pair signed off with a total of 21-under 267 as old friends Andrew Novak and Ben Griffin combined to win the title, which was the first PGA Tour win for both. They totalled 28-under 260. Danish identical twins, Nicolai and Rasmus Hojgaard, narrowly missed out their first PGA Tour win and finished second just a stroke adrift after carding 68 in the final round.

The tournament featured 80 teams of two which faced off over four rounds played in four-ball and foursome format alternately. Defending champion team of Masters winner Rory McIlroy and fellow Irishman Shane Lowry was in contention through 12 holes but ultimately scored even-par 72 in the final round to aggregate 22-under and finish tied 12th.

Theegala, who has been having a modest season, and Rai had two birdies against a bogey in the final round. Theegala, who is now being sponsored by the Hero group, has played 13 events and made the cut in 12. However, he has finished in the top-25 only twice.

In the world rankings, another Indian-American Akshay Bhatia was placed 26th, followed by Rai (27th) and Theegala (28th) at the beginning of the week ahead of Zurich Classic.

In terms of FedEx Cup rankings, Bhatia is 30th and Rai is 42nd and Theegala is lying 95th with a good part of the season, including three Majors, still ahead of them.

Griffin drained a clutch birdie putt from nearly 35 feet on the 17th hole, and the tandem combined for a one-under 71 in alternate-shot play Sunday to become first-time PGA TOUR winners.

Scott McTominay two goals hepls Napoli defeat Torino 2-0 in Serie A

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rome

There are still streamers and banners hanging over the city's streets and piazzas celebrating Napoli's Serie A title two seasons ago.

Now there might be another championship to celebrate.

Scott McTominay scored two first-half goals and Napoli beat Torino 2-0 on Sunday to move three points clear of Inter Milan with four rounds remaining in the Italian league.

Inter lost 1-0 at home to Roma earlier for its third consecutive defeat.

Despite losing Victor Osimhen in September and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia in January, Napoli is in position to claim its second title in three seasons. That's a shorter span than the two championships in

four seasons with Diego Maradona in 1987 and 1990. McTominay has scored five goals in three matches.

"Obviously we're now leading the race. But for us it's keep calm, keep everything relaxed and go game by game, because this game's not important unless we win the next one and the next one after that," McTominay said. "So for us it's calm and see where that gets us."

The Scotland international put Napoli ahead seven minutes in at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona after redirecting a pass from Andre-Frank Anguissa. Then he doubled the advantage shortly before halftime with a similar goal, redirecting a cross amid four defenders.

With 11 league goals, McTominay set the record for a Scottish player in Serie A, overtaking Denis Law, who had 10 with



Torino in 1961-62.

Philip Billing nearly made it 3-0 for Napoli when his header hit the crossbar in the second half.

Napoli hadn't had sole possession of the lead since February.

INTER MISSING THURAM

Marcus Thuram has missed three matches and Inter has lost all three without scoring a single goal.

Roma's attacking midfielder Mattias Soule scored midway through the first half in Milan by redirecting a deflection as the Giallorossi produced one chance after another.

For Inter, the defeat followed a 1-0 loss at Bologna in the league a week ago and a 3-0 midweek loss to AC Milan in an Italian Cup semifinal derby.

SURYAVANSHI HAMMERS TITANS INTO SUBMISSION

Notches second-fastest IPL 100 in 35 balls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

Fourteen-year-old boy wonder Vaibhav Suryavanshi walked into the collective consciousness of cricket fans by becoming the youngest ever to score a hundred in an IPL match where result became inconsequential in the wake of a batting carnage for the ages.

For the record, Royals kept their play-off qualification hopes alive with a walk-in-the-park eight-wicket victory over Gujarat Titans in a chase of 210 made easy by a chubby-cheeked prodigy from Bihar's Samastipur, who was born three years after the cash-rich league started. His 35-ball century is now the second fastest in IPL and fastest ever for any Indian after Chris Gayle's 30-ball knock for RCB. When other 14-year-olds cross the country are busy completing middle-school assignments and being admonished by quietly sneaking in for a PlayStation session, the left-handed Suryavanshi, simply stood and delivered against Indian bowlers Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Siraj with a collective experience of 141 Tests between them.

Ishant had made his Test debut back in 2006 when Suryavanshi wasn't even an idea but the "Gen Alpha" kid (all those born between 2010-2024) made a mockery of everything thrown at him.

There were 11 sixes and seven fours in his 38-ball-101 that even made a regal Yashvir Jaiswal (70 not out, 40 balls, 9x4s, 2x6s) look like a mere bystander.

Even with baby fat refusing to leave the contours of his cheeks, the stable core and holding his shape are things that stand out.

The basics built through those hours of toil in Patna, playing 600 balls a day from the age of 10 did show its results. The days of facing 16-17 year old net bowlers for whom his father Sanjiv Suryavanshi, would pack 10 extra tiffin boxes haven't gone waste.

The decision of the Suryavanshi family to put all their eggs in one basket and have no Plan B by selling farm land to fuel their son's cricketing ambitions will certainly become a part of cricketing folklores that will be spoken in years to come.

The bat speed was astonishing and the manner in which he picked up Siraj over long-on and belted Ishant into the square leg stand was there to be seen.

Even Test spinner Washington Sundar scurried for cover and Karim Janat, the Afghan international was hit for 30 runs in an over including a disdainful flick. By the time he was yorked by Prasadh Krishna, none of the GT players had any energy left to

celebrate.

Ravi Shastri said on air that RR assistant coach Sairaj Bahutule had told him about the little one's fondness for jalebis and possibly head coach Rahul Dravid won't mind a bit of indulgence.

When Shubman Gill scored 50-ball-84 and Jos Buttler smashed 26-ball-50 not out earlier, it seemed like a mayhem but once Suryavanshi started to send the balls into the orbit, no one knew that how he could be stopped.

"His hitting was tremendous," GT skipper Gill said.

"Incredible, one of the best innings that I have seen. I just told him to keep going," was all Jaiswal, the megastar in-waiting could say.

Indian cricket is replete with stories about how some incredible talents were lost as they couldn't handle limelight. Laxman Sivaramakrishnan, Maninder Singh, Sadanand Viswanath, Vinod Kambli and Prithvi Shaw in recent times have all failed to realise their potential.

Indian cricket has got an uncut diamond and it is now establishment's duty to preserve and help him shine.

Suryavanshi's journey has just begun.

Earlier, skipper Shubman Gill was epitome of class in his 50-ball-84 that took Gujarat Titans to a healthy 209 for 4.

The Gujarat Titans skipper scored his fourth half-century with help of five fours and four sixes, adding 93 for the opening stand with an in-form Sai Sudharsan (39 off 30 balls).

The Titans were ready to capitalise on a solid platform laid by the duo and Jos Buttler (50 not out off 26 balls) made a mincemeat of Royals' ordinary bowling attack from thereon, smashing four sixes apart from three boundaries.

Buttler executed reverse pulls and ramps at will while using the pace of deliveries to punish his former team Rajasthan Royals, which is one side that completely messed up their auctions with no match-winning bowler in its ranks. Gill displayed the cricketing smarts by picking the shorter boundary in one of the leg-side and the RR bowlers were guilty of drifting towards his pads.

There were pick-up pulls — one over square leg and one over wide of mid-on — but the flicked maximum off Yuvraj Singh stood out.

There was also a perfect off-drive and his opening partner Sudharsan was more than happy to give his skipper bulk of the strike.

Once Sudharsan was dismissed, the dangerous Buttler piled up further misery with a 24-run over off Wanindu Hasaranga, which included three sixes and a boundary.

Till date, the devoted Rajasthan Royals fans are unable to fathom how Royals failed to retain Buttler.

After that 15th over, Riyan Parag, who has been a complete disaster as a stand-in captain, was clueless as to whom he should look up to for getting breakthroughs. Jofra Archer (1/49) has been good in patches but the main issue has been the two Sri Lankan spinners Hasaranga and Maheesh Theekshana, who have not delivered on expected lines.

Hasaranga though has been better, Theekshana bowled too many loose balls for his comfort. On the night, the duo gave away 74 runs collectively in eight overs and never looked like troubling GT opening pair. Gill looked set for his fifth IPL hundred but was holed out in the deep off Theekshana, but Buttler, in company of Washington Sundar and Rahul Tewatia, took GT past the 200-run mark.

Delhi Capitals eye comeback against KKR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Delhi Capitals (DC) would aim for an improved batting effort in the middle overs when they face a struggling Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in their Indian Premier League match here on Tuesday.

DC have suffered two defeats in their last four matches, including a loss to Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Sunday, and will look to avoid any hiccups at the business end of the tournament.

Abhishek Porel has batted with plenty of aggressive intent at the top of the order but veteran Faf du Plessis will quickly need to get used to the slow nature of surface at Kotla after struggling in his comeback game. KL Rahul has been DC's leading run-getter this season but could not accelerate against the spinners on Sunday night. He would back himself to take on the likes of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakaravathy.

With quality spinners in their ranks, KKR could pose a stiff challenge for the home. The Ajinkya Rahane led-side is slightly low on confidence after a tough outing against Punjab Kings in a rain-hit match.

A solid innings is expected from Karun Nair to ensure Rahul isn't left to shoulder the burden alone in the middle-order.

In the bowling department, DC skipper Axar Patel led from the front with two wickets but found little support from others. Star pacer Mitchell Starc, who went wicketless against RCB, will look to exploit the weaknesses in his former team, while Kuldeep Yadav, with his deceptive googlies, remains a threat in the middle overs.

DC's fielding has also felt much to be desired against RCB, with Porel dropping a crucial catch of Krunal Pandya on Sunday night.

KKR, meanwhile, have managed just seven points so far and are placed seventh in the standings, having failed to collect any points from their last three matches, including two losses and a no-result.

Rahane will be desperate to arrest the slide and keep their playoff hopes alive, with another defeat making the task tougher. Issues have cropped up across departments for KKR.

Their batting lacks a settled look, with Quinton de Kock and Rahmanullah



Gurbaz being rotated in the opening slot alongside Narine, while the side has relied heavily on Rahane and youngster Angkrish Raghuvanshi to score runs. The middle-order trio of Venkatesh Iyer, Andre Russell, Rinku Singh and Ramandeep Singh has struggled to make a significant impact.

Bowling has been another area of concern, with KKR failing to break opening stands, allowing teams to post big totals — as seen in the last game where PBKS added 120 for the opening wicket. While KKR managed to pull things back at the death, it will require a collective effort from Chakaravathy, Vaibhav Arora, and Harshit Rana to stem the flow of runs against DC.

Teams

Delhi Capitals: Axar Patel (c), Jake Fraser-McGurk, Abhishek Porel, Karun Nair, KL Rahul (wk), Tristan Stubbs, Ashutosh Sharma, Vipraj Nigam, Mitchell Starc, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohit Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Sameer Rizvi, Darshan Nalkande, Donovan Ferreira, Tripurana Vijay, Dushmantha Chameera, Faf du Plessis, T Natarajan, Ajay Yadav Mandal, Manvath Kumar L, Madhav Tiwari.

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

Sunil Joshi biggest name in contention for spin coach's role at BCCI's COE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Former India left-arm spinner Sunil Joshi has thrown his hat in the ring for the post of spin bowling coach at BCCI's Centre of Excellence (COE) that was vacated by Sairaj Bahutule earlier this year. The COE was earlier known as the National Cricket Academy when it was based out of the Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru. It remains in the city but is now operational from a new location after BCCI purchased land to build a more expansive facility.

Bahutule resigned to become an assistant coach in IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals. The 54-year-old Joshi, who played 15 Tests and 69 ODIs for India between 1996 and 2002, is currently working with Ricky Ponting in the Punjab Kings IPL team and has also coached Uttar Pradesh during the domestic season.

He has also worked with Bangladesh's national men's team as its spin bowling consultant.

According to sources in the BCCI, Joshi appeared for his interview online in front of a three-member panel comprising COE's Head of Cricket VVS Laxman, chairman of men's selection committee Ajit Agarkar and General Manager (Cricket Operations) Abbey Kuruvilla.

There were four others, who appeared for the interview in person, including India U-19 women's team coach Nooshin Al Khadeer, who was an off-spinner during her playing days.

She represented the country in five Tests and 78 WODIs and has been working in the erstwhile NCA setup for some years now. Another strong candidate is believed to be Rakesh Dhruv, a former Gujarat and Saurashtra left-arm spinner. Veteran off-spinner Pritam Gandhe, a domestic doyen from Vidarbha, has also been interviewed for the post.

When a senior BCCI official was asked about the interviews for the position, he said: "Obviously, Sunil Joshi has the best CV out of all the other candidates. In case

of Nooshin, the BCCI is also going to have an elaborate women's wing with dedicated staff for international, national and domestic age-group women's cricketers."

"While playing elite level does embellish the CV and Sunil is the only (men's) Test cricketer among those who appeared for interview, his biggest plus is considerable experience in elite level coaching."

"He has coached multiple first-class teams, has been a part of IPL coaching set-up and also coached senior men's international team. And do not forget, he is from Bengaluru, which makes a lot of sense logistically," he said.

But even Dhruv cannot be ruled out as he has played a lot of cricket for Saurashtra and Gujarat. Most of the candidates were asked about their vision for the role.

The chosen candidate will be expected to not just provide technical insight to international stars like Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav or Washington Sundar but also work with a host of India A, India U-19 and top domestic performers.

Twelve teams to compete in Arjan Singh Memorial hockey tournament

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chandigarh

Twelve teams will compete in the sixth edition of the Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh Memorial hockey tournament to be held here from April 29 to May 6. Air Force Hockey team from Bangladesh will be one of the 12 sides taking part in the tournament, Air Marshal S Sivakumar said on Monday.

The other participating teams include Indian Air Force, Chandigarh XI, Punjab & Sind Bank, Central Industrial Security Force, Army XI, Indian Navy, Indian Railways and Rail Coach Factory.

The tournament winning team will get a prize money of ₹three lakh while the runners-up side will pocket ₹two lakh. Man of the match for each match will get Rs 10,000 while the player of the tournament will pocket ₹25,000.

The matches will be played at Raghbir Singh Bhola Hockey Ground, 3 Base Repair Depot, Air Force Station here on

league-cum-knockout basis.

Air Force Sports Control Board has been organising the prestigious hockey tournament in the memory of legendary late Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh at 3 BRD, Air Force Station, Chandigarh since 2018.

Q To promote hockey, the game in which our country has excelled for so many years in the international arena and to bring back its glory

— YS PANGHAL, ORGANISING SECRETARY

"Considering the eminence of the tournament in the Indian hockey scenario and the initiatives being taken by the Air Force Sports Control Board to encourage hockey at all levels, an all out effort is being made to promote the event," Sivakumar said.

Sivakumar said the organisers are hoping participation of more overseas

teams, including from the UK, in next year's edition.

The organisers also plan to hold the event alternately in Chandigarh and Bengaluru beginning next year, he said.

Group Captain Y S Panghal, Organising Secretary of the event, briefed about the tournament.

"Our air warriors have toiled hard and proved their mettle at all competitive levels and have brought laurels to the country as well as the Indian Air Force," Panghal said. "To promote hockey, the game in which our country has excelled for so many years in the international arena and to bring back its glory, it is strongly felt that there should be quality tournaments in the country where emerging talent competes and gets exposure to the fast pace game."

"This has resulted in the evolution of the Marshal of the Air Force Arjan Singh Memorial Hockey tournament since 2018," Panghal said.

KL Rahul should bat at four for India in next year's T20 World Cup: Kevin Pietersen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

KL Rahul is best placed to bat at number four and keep wickets for India in next year's T20 World Cup, believes Delhi Capitals (DC) mentor Kevin Pietersen.

With his intent in the shortest format being questioned in the past, Rahul has tweaked his approach to be the leading run-getter for Delhi Capitals this season.

The competition for the wicket-keeper-batter's slot in the national team is stiff with Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Dhruv Jurel and Ishan Kishan being the other options for the selectors.

Rahul has not been a part of India's T20 setup since the 2022 World Cup but Pietersen reckons not only has he done enough to warrant a comeback, he is best suited for the wicket-keeper-batter's role.

"I'd bat KL at four for India in T20 cricket. I think you guys have got plenty of opening batters."

et now, he would be my first choice to bat at four, and keep wickets for India," said Pietersen in response to a query after DC's loss to Royal Challengers Bengaluru on Sunday night.

At the start of the season, Rahul himself had talked about his renewed approach towards the T20 format.

Besides the stellar show in IPL, it was Rahul's recent performances for India in ODI cricket that left a huge impression on Pietersen, one of the best batters to have played for England.

"KL has been playing in a very positive manner since. Mid to late last year. We saw how he finished off a couple of the games for India and almost sealed the deal in the Champions Trophy in Dubai."

"I've had a lot of incredibly brilliant conversations with him about batting, a lot of deep and meaningful conversations because when you grow up as a youngster like he did, you get taught defence, elbow up, play in the V," he explained.

The big-hitter said it is not easy to



change that approach after hitting the thirties. "You've got to change it and you've got to become a different kind of player for a different format which is evolving all the time. "It's very, very difficult. So the way that he has accepted that he's needed to

change, the way that he has changed is of great, great credit to the person that he is," said Pietersen.

The next T20 World Cup will be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka. Fine with tough batting surfaces in T20s

Scores in the range of 250 were a common occurrence last IPL but the slower nature of pitches has made batting tougher this season. Pietersen has no issues with that. "On wickets like these (the one at Feroz Shah Kotla), you've got to be methodical, you've got to find rhythm. Virat (Kohli) found rhythm this evening. KL got rhythm," he said. "And I think that's where you see the true batter. The real batter that can come out there, and sort of monitor the situation, and it looks effortless... Is it good for T20 cricket to have the occasional wicket like this? I do not think it's a bad thing," he added.

Pietersen was not in favour of bowlers "just being served up into the stands every single ball". "...I don't think every night people want to see that. I don't really want to see it every night," Pietersen said.

Foundations can be laid in IPL

He has played in the IPL and more recently been a part of the commentary

panel. This season, he is back in the dugout as a member of DC support staff. The 44-year-old spoke about his role in the team.

"I always knew that when I was playing franchise cricket, that no particular coach could change you over that four to six week period, or eight week period," he conceded. However, he cited his interactions with Abhishek Porel to stress that changes introduced during the tournament can become permanent if persisted with over a period of time.

"Last night I was working on something. We are five weeks into the tournament, we have only got three or four weeks left of the tournament. And I said to him, I said, 'Abhi, this is not going to work for you tomorrow.'"

"It might not work for you the next week. But if you keep working on it, in the next month, two months, three months, four months, I promise you this is going to help your game. And it's going to take you to a level where you're going to become a more destructive batter."