



## Mehul Choksi arrested in Belgium on India's request

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Abducting diamondaire Mehul Choksi has been arrested in Belgium following an extradition request by Indian probe agencies for his involvement in the ₹13,000 crore PNB bank loan "fraud" case, officials said on Monday. The action against the second "prime suspect" in this case, after Choksi's nephew diamondaire Nirav Modi, was taken on Saturday based on an extradition request moved by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Choksi, 65, was located in Belgium last year when he went there on the grounds of getting medical treatment. He had been staying in Antigua since 2018 after leaving India. Interpol Red Notice against him for arrest was "deleted" sometime back by the global police body and the Indian agencies were pursuing him via the extradition route since then, said officials.

At least two open-ended arrest warrants, issued by a special court in Mumbai in 2018 and 2021, have been shared by the Indian agencies with their Belgian counterparts as part of the extradition request, they said, adding that formal paperwork is being done following the arrest/detention. Choksi may seek bail on health grounds.

Choksi's lawyer Vijay Agarwal said his client was taken into custody by the Belgian Police on Saturday (April 12). "At the moment, he is in prison and there (Belgium), the procedure is not to apply for bail but file an appeal. During that appeal, request is made that he should not be kept in detention and he should be permitted to defend himself and oppose the extradition request while not being in custody," Agarwal told reporters. He said the "obvious" grounds for the appeal would be that Choksi is "not a flight risk, is extremely sick and undergoing treatment for cancer". He added that their legal defence would be that this is a "political case and the human condition (in Indian prisons) was not good".

Choksi, Nirav Modi, their family members and employees, bank officials and others were booked by the CBI and the ED in 2018 for perpetrating the alleged loan fraud at the Brady House branch of the Punjab National Bank (PNB) in Mumbai. It was alleged that Choksi, his firm Gitanjali Gems and others "committed the offence of cheating against PNB in connivance with certain bank officials by fraudulently getting the LOUs (letters of undertaking) issued and got the FLCs (for-

These LoUs and FLCs were allegedly issued to Choksi's firms without any sanctioned limit or cash margin and without making entries in PNB's central banking system to evade any scrutiny in case of a default. LoUs are a guarantee given by a bank on behalf of its client to a foreign bank. If the client does not repay the foreign bank, the liability falls on the guarantor bank.

Based on these LoUs by PNB, money was lent by SBI, Mauritius; Allahabad Bank,



FILE PHOTO

foreign letter of credit) enhanced without following prescribed procedure and caused a wrongful loss to the bank."

The CBI has filed two chargesheets against him in this case while the ED has filed three such prosecution complaints. Nirav Modi, declared a fugitive economic offender, has been lodged in a London jail since he was held by the authorities there in 2019 on the basis of a legal request made by the ED and the CBI in this case. He is contesting extradition to India. According to the investigating agencies, officials at PNB's Brady House branch in Mumbai issued 165 LoUs and 58 FLCs during March-April 2017, against which 311 bills were discounted.

Hong Kong; Axis Bank, Hong Kong; Bank of India, Antwerp; Canara Bank, Manama; and State Bank of India, Frankfurt.

"Since the accused companies did not repay the amount availed against the said fraudulent LoUs and FLCs, PNB made the payment of ₹6,344.97 crore (\$ 965.18 million), including the overdue interest, to the overseas banks, which had advanced buyer's credit and discounted the bills against the fraudulent LoUs and FLCs issued by the PNB," said the CBI's supplementary charge sheet in the PNB bank fraud case. The ED has attached or seized assets worth ₹2,565.90 crore in the case against Choksi and the court has allowed "monetisation" of all these properties.

## Turned Dalits, minorities to second class citizens: PM Modi on Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Hisar/ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday launched a scathing attack on the Congress on the birth anniversary of BR Ambedkar, accusing the party of turning Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and OBCs into "second-class citizens" while in power.

Amid the political heat over the Waqf (Amendment) Act, Modi sought to put the Congress and its allies opposed to the law in a corner, accusing them of destroying the Constitution by enacting a Waqf law, now amended, in 2013 above the constitutional values espoused by Ambedkar.

Modi alleged that the Muslim community suffered because of the Congress' appeasement policy. "The Congress made amendments in the Waqf law hurriedly at the end of 2013 so that it could get votes in elections. They made this law above the Constitution, which was the biggest insult to Babasaheb." "I want to ask them, who are greedy for vote bank? If you really have some sympathy for Muslims, then Congress should appoint a Muslim as its president," he asked.

Addressing a gathering after flagging off several infrastructure projects in Haryana, Modi alleged the Congress has become the destroyer of the Constitution framed by Ambedkar. The Congress "crushed" the Constitution whenever its government faced danger, Modi alleged and pointed to the 1975-77 Emergency to reinforce his claim.

"The spirit of the Constitution is to have a uniform civil code, which I call a secular civil code. But the Congress never implemented it," PM said.

He referred to the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code by the BJP government in Uttarakhand to say, "See the misfortune of this country. Those who carry a copy of the Constitution, these Congress people, are opposing that."

"If the Congress really has sympathy for Muslims, it should appoint a Muslim as its president and give 50 percent tickets to people from the community," Modi said.

He alleged the Congress followed a policy of appeasement which "pleased" only a few "fundamentalists" from among Muslims, while the rest of the community remained neglected, illiterate and poor. The biggest proof of this Congress' policy was the amendments it made in the Waqf law on the eve of the 2014 general elections, Modi said.

**Addressing a gathering after flagging off several infrastructure projects in Haryana, Modi alleged the Congress has become the destroyer of the Constitution**

"From Independence till 2013, there was a Waqf law. But to win elections, and in pursuing a politics of appeasement and vote bank, the Congress made amendments in the Waqf law hurriedly late in 2013 so that it can get votes in elections (few months later in 2014)," said Modi.

"If they (the Congress) really have some sympathy for Muslims, they should appoint their president from the Muslim community. Why do not they do it?" he asked.

He also asked the Congress to give 50 percent election tickets to people belonging to the Muslim community. "After they win, they will put forth their views," said Modi. "But they (the Congress) will not do it. They will give nothing from the Congress but will snatch away the rights of citizens," he said.

The Congress never had any intention of doing any good to anybody including Muslims, he said. "This is the real truth of the Congress."

He said the Waqf board owns lakhs of

hectares land in the country which could have been utilised for the benefit of the poor, the destitute women and children. "Had it been honestly utilised, Muslims youths would not have to spend their lives by fixing puncture tyres."

"It benefited only a handful of land mafia. There was no gain to Pasmanda Muslims. This land mafia was looting the land of Dalits, downtrodden, 'aadiwas' and widows. Hundreds of widows women wrote to the Centre and then a debate on this law took place," said Modi.

After the amendment to the Waqf law — enacted by his government and implemented from April 8 after the presidential approval to the Waqf Amendment Bill 2025 — such loot of the poor will stop, he said. "We have made another amendment in the Waqf law. Under this, the Waqf board now cannot even touch the land and property of any 'aadiwas' in the country," he said. Modi had recently said the new Waqf law was a significant step taken by his government towards social justice. He said the previous law, enacted in 2013, was an attempt for appeasement of land mafia and Muslim fundamentalists.

The Constitution has a provision of reservation for the SCs, STs and OBCs, but the Congress never cared for them, the PM claimed. "Babasaheb Ambedkar wanted to bring equality, but the Congress spread the virus of vote bank (politics) in the country. He wanted every poor person to live with dignity, with heads held high, to dream and fulfil them."

But the Congress made the SCs, STs and OBCs second-class citizens," he said. He slammed the Congress leadership, saying if they were so concerned about the welfare of the downtrodden, they should have ensured that water reached the homes of SCs, STs and OBCs when the party was in power.

Modi highlighted that his government has built 11 crore toilets and said the SCs, STs and OBCs had to face a lot of difficulties due to a lack of toilets earlier.

## Murshidabad Waqf violence reaches Kolkata's doorsteps

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Even as parts of riot-torn Murshidabad limped back to normalcy anti-Waqf Act protests traveled to Bhangar a notorious rural block in the eastern suburban areas of Kolkata where hundreds of Muslim protesters attacked the police and torched at least 6 vehicles including motorcycles and prison vans injuring five men in uniform.

The Monday's situation emerged when Murshidabad had barely started to limp back to normalcy after a weeklong violence that saw hundreds of families leaving the district and taking shelter to neighbouring Malda and even in Jharkhand.

The trouble started after the protesters' vehicles were stopped by the law-enforcers from moving towards Ramlila Maidan in Kolkata where Muslim cleric-turned legislator Naushad Siddiqui — the lone non-Trinamool Congress non-BJP MLA in Bengal Assembly — had called a rally against the new central laws. Siddiqui represents Indian Secular Front a new party mainly comprising Muslim populace.

A large contingent of Rapid Action Force was moved from Kolkata under senior IPS officer Rupesh Kumar to control the unruly



Security personnel stand guard after two Hindu devotees were allegedly assaulted during 'Charak Puja' celebrations on Sunday in Siliguri, West Bengal

mob, sources said adding the protesters pelted stones at the police and tore through the barricades near Bhojherhat on the Basanti Highway. The miscreants had come from Shonepur area of Bhangar as well as neighbouring areas of Minakhan and

Sandeshkhali sources said. Siddiqui however blamed the violence on "some mischief mongers who had pelted stones from the crowd," adding "ISF workers are always trained to take part in non-violence movement... This law is not just

an attack on Muslims, it is an assault on the Constitution. We won't accept this Act," he said adding if Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee was true to her statement that she was against this Act then "why her police are not allowing us to hold rallies in protest... why are they stopping our men from coming to Kolkata?"

However TMC MLA Shaukat Molla from the neighbouring Canning constituency said it were all Siddiqui's men who had committed the mischief. "We have repeatedly told that this law has been enacted by the Centre and the TMC has nothing to do with it... if he has courage he should go to Delhi to protest and not here in Bengal," Molla said. Curiously like in Murshidabad the police tended to stand silent spectators while the miscreants snatched their motorcycles, sprinkled petrol and set them on fire alongside a prison van. "Despite a commensurate High Court order to deal with the situation with the help of central forces the Mamata Banerjee Government is sitting silent because she cannot annoy her vote-bank... whereas in Uttar Pradesh or other places the police give such lessons to miscreants and in such places that they remember that for years," said Bengal BJP president Sukanta Majumdar.

## Mayawati plots Akash return amid rising Dalit vote battle

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a significant political turnaround, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati on Sunday reinstated her nephew Akash Anand into the party fold, just 41 days after removing him from all responsibilities-including his status as her declared political heir. The move, preceded by a public apology from Akash, signals a carefully calibrated strategy by the BSP supreme to reconnect with young Dalit voters amid growing competition from emerging leaders and rival parties.

Akash Anand, son of Mayawati's younger brother Anand Kumar, had been fast-tracked through the party ranks since entering politics in 2017. With an MBA from London and youthful appeal, he was seen as the party's next-generation face-appointed national coordinator in 2019 and twice declared Mayawati's political successor, most recently in June 2024.

But on March 3, 2025, he was abruptly expelled, with Mayawati citing his "immaturity" and "arrogance." She also accused his father-in-law, former Rajya Sabha MP Ashok Siddharth, of fomenting factionalism and attempting to derail Akash's

political career from within.

However, in a carefully timed gesture just two hours before his reinstatement was formally announced, Akash Anand posted a public apology to his aunt. In the letter, he took "full responsibility" for his actions, promised to sever political ties with his in-laws, and reaffirmed his loyalty to Mayawati and the party's core Ambedkarite ideology.

"I consider Behenji as my only political guru and ideal. I apologize for my past mistakes and promise never to act in a way that hurts the dignity of the party or its leadership again," he wrote.

Though no formal post has been assigned to Akash upon his return, the reintegration is widely seen as a tactical response to the BSP's eroding support among young Dalit voters. Over the past several weeks, Akash had maintained a conspicuous silence, while regularly amplifying Mayawati's messages on social media-signaling continued alignment with her. Party insiders confirm that Akash's apology was circulated on social media by BSP loyalists, suggesting that the reconciliation had been quietly orchestrated in advance.

## 300kg drugs recovered off Gujarat coast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ahmedabad

The Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad and the Coast Guard have seized 300 kg of drugs valued at ₹1,800 crore which were dumped into the Arabian Sea by smugglers before fleeing across the international boundary line. The seized contraband is suspected to be methamphetamine and has been handed over to the ATS for further probe, a release by the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) said on Monday.

The ATS and the Coast Guard carried out the joint operation near the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) in the Arabian Sea off Gujarat on the intervening night of April 12 and 13, said the release. Upon seeing the approaching Coast Guard ship, the smugglers, who were on a boat, dumped the contraband into the sea and fled across the IMBL, it said.

"In an overnight operation on April 12-13, the Indian Coast Guard undertook an intelligence based anti-narcotics operation at the sea jointly with the Gujarat ATS. More than 300 kg of narcotics approximately valued at ₹1,800 crore have been seized. The seized drug is suspected to be methamphetamine," the release said. Based on an input from the Gujarat ATS, an ICG

ship from the Coast Guard Region (West) was diverted to that area in the sea near IMBL where a suspected boat's presence was detected, it said.

"The ICG ship identified a suspect boat despite pitch dark night. On realising the approaching ship, the suspect boat dumped its narcotics consignment in the sea before it started fleeing towards the IMBL.

The alert ICG ship deployed its sea boat immediately for recovery of the jettisoned consignment whilst commencing a hot chase of the suspect boat," it said. The proximity of the international boundary line and the initial separation between the Coast Guard ship and the boat at the time of its detection helped the boat to evade interception before it crossed over the IMBL within a short time, said the release.

Later, the Coast Guard team, after a thorough search in the tough night conditions, recovered the narcotics which were dumped into the sea, it said. "The seized narcotics have been brought to Porbandar by the ICG ship for further investigations," the release said. The collaboration of the Coast Guard and the ATS, which has led to 13 such successful law enforcement operations in recent years, "reaffirms the synergy for national objective," it added.

## Delhi's T2 to be closed for four months for renovation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA)'s oldest terminal, Terminal 2 will be closed from Monday-Tuesday midnight for what is likely to be the last renovation of its 1986-era building for approximately four months to facilitate repair and upgrade work. During this period, all flights that were previously operated from T2, including those by airlines such as IndiGo and Akasa Air, will be relocated to Terminal 1 (T1). The Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), operated by DIAL, has three terminals and four runways. It is also the country's largest and busiest airport.

Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) has confirmed that T1 will operate at full capacity to accommodate the additional flights. "Starting from 15th April 2025 (0001 hrs), all flights operating from Terminal 2 will be relocated to Terminal 1 until further notice. Passengers are encouraged to verify their flight terminal information before travelling to the airport to avoid any inconvenience.

The Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), operated by DIAL, has three terminals and four runways. It is also the country's largest and busiest airport. T2 will be closed temporarily to carry out maintenance works from April 15, and one runway is already shut for maintenance works.

IGIA has a capacity to handle close to 11 crore passengers annually and saw 7.8 crore



last year. So there is no real hurry demolish T2 now as Noida Airport will open with a capacity of 1.2 crore passengers annually, which will increase to 7 crore in the next few years.

Effective April 15, IndiGo said its flights arriving to and departing from T2 will operate to/from T1. IndiGo on Monday said it has taken proactive measures to ensure that customers are well-informed about the change in terminals.

"The airline is reaching out to all passengers and their respective travel agents through SMS, calls, and emails to notify them. IndiGo recommends retrieving PNR on the airline's website or mobile app to

check departure/arrival terminal before heading to the airport," it said in a statement. On January 10, DIAL said the four-decade-old T2 will be closed for four to six months in the next financial year for refurbishment works, which are expected to be completed in the September quarter. Akasa Air has also notified that starting April 15, 2025, all its flights to and from Delhi will operate from Terminal 1 (1D). Passengers are urged to check their flight status before proceeding to the airport.

Civil Aviation Secretary Vumlungnam Vualnam on Monday said Terminal 3, along with the fully operational Terminal 1, at the Delhi airport will be able to handle passen-

ger traffic, emphasising that there is unlikely to be congestion due to the closure of Terminal 2 for maintenance works.

"T1 has now become fully operational... Proper assessment has been done. So, T1 will cover whatever capacity is required. "Between the T1 fully expanded and fully operational and T3, we should be able to meet the passenger requirements whatever is there," he said.

DIAL is conducting trials to facilitate the transfer of check-in baggage between Terminal 3 (T3), which handles international flights, and the all-domestic Terminal. This initiative aims to ease the process for passengers with connecting flights between domestic and international terminal.

Currently, there is no air train system in place, making transfers between T1 and T3 challenging. IGIA has achieved a remarkable milestone by securing the 9th position in Airports Council International (ACI) World's preliminary 2024 rankings of the world's busiest airports. Delhi Airport witnessed a record-breaking passenger traffic of 7.7 crore in CY 2024, reflecting its consistent year-over-year growth. This achievement follows its previous rankings of 10th in 2023, 13th in 2021, and 17th in 2019, showcasing its steady ascent as a global aviation hub. Earlier this year, Delhi Airport was honoured with the Airport Service Quality (ASQ) Award for Best Airport in Asia-Pacific for the 7th consecutive year, reaffirming its leadership in delivering superior passenger experiences.

# 62 locations prone to traffic congestion: Delhi Police survey

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

**D**elhi Traffic Police survey identified 62 locations that are prone to traffic congestion. These include Bhaybhuti Marg and Chelmsford Road near New Delhi railway station, in front of ISBT Kashmere Gate Ring Road, Boulevard Road, Majnu Ka Tila, Qutab Road, Baratooti Chowk, Kajiuri Chowk, Durgapuri Chowk, Libaspur underpass, Adchini village Faiz Road, Idgah, Shadipur Chowk and the Anand Vihar railway and bus terminal zone.

Several of these areas are near railway stations, ISBTs and metro stations and remain under consistent stress due to mixed vehicular and pedestrian load. "These areas see not just private and public vehicles but also auto-rickshaws, taxis and e-rickshaws jostling for space throughout the day," a senior traffic officer said. The survey is part of an internal study and includes inputs from field staff and CCTV analysis.

One of the primary goals of the survey is to minimise the financial burden of

maintaining unnecessary traffic signals. Signals require regular maintenance, power supply, and operational checks, all of which contribute to the city's expenses. By removing redundant signals, the authorities hope to reduce these costs while improving traffic management.

Currently, the traffic police is refining the list before writing to various civic and infrastructure agencies to initiate coordinated decongestion measures. Once the assessment is finalised, they may share it with agencies, such as the PWD, MCD, DDA and others, with location-specific suggestions, the officer told to media.

The identified locations have further been categorised based on the nature of traffic movement they handle, such as office-hour congestion, border bottlenecks and high-volume commercial traffic zones, a senior traffic police officer said.

Many arterial roads in central and south Delhi witness sharp surges in vehicular volume during office hours. Shadipur Chowk, Chirag Delhi, Khanpur, Lala Lajpat Rai Marg near Moolchand and Neela Gumbad are among the noted trouble spots. In east Delhi, the stretch



from Nizamuddin Bridge to Sarai Kale Khan and the nearby Ring Road sections remain chronically clogged in the mornings and evenings. Heavy congestion is also seen at entry and exit points connecting Delhi to adjoining states. These include Kalindi Kunj and DND approaches (towards Noida) and

Kapashera Border (towards Gurugram). "These border points often get choked due to a mix of long-distance goods vehicles, local traffic and inadequate road capacity or signal planning," the official said. Markets and wholesale areas continue to be major congestion hubs, especially during business hours. Sadar Bazar, Azadpur Mandi, Karol Bagh, Gandhi Nagar market and Lajpat Nagar feature prominently in the list.

Additionally, wholesale zones in Shahdara and Mori Gate are flagged for dense traffic during offloading hours.

Key roundabouts and flyovers such as Naraina Flyover, Punjabi Bagh Club Road, Mukarba Chowk and Apsara Border also figure in the list, as do long stretches like Burari 100-foot road, the Dwarka-Palam corridor, and the Noida Link Road near Mayur Vihar Phase I.

Officials said that while traffic personnel are already deployed at several of these locations, sustained improvement will require road redesign, removal of encroachments, signal synchronisation and better last-mile public transport planning, actions that fall within the purview

of multiple agencies. The traffic police is expected to review past studies and recommend practical solutions when it reaches out to other departments in the coming weeks. The police also emphasised that removing redundant signals would allow for smoother traffic flow. For example, if there is a traffic signal located between two flyovers with a distance of only 100 to 200 metres, it could be removed to avoid hindering traffic movement. This would enable vehicles to make U-turns under the flyovers without interruption.

A Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report highlighted that 40 per cent of these countdown timers were not functioning properly, with many traffic signals showing malfunctions and a lack of advisory messages.

According to Delhi government, 233 traffic congestion points have been identified and departments concerned have been directed to take swift action. Of these, 123 fall under the PWD. So far, 41 points have been cleared, with the CM setting a deadline to resolve all the remaining congestion issues by June, the statement said.

## Cabinet to discuss draft of EV 2.0 today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

**T**he Delhi Cabinet headed by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta is likely to meet on Tuesday to discuss the draft of the Electric Vehicle (EV) 2.0. The Cabinet is also expected to decide continuation of power subsidy and sugar subsidy to underprivileged families.

Under the power subsidy scheme implemented by the previous AAP regime, the Delhi government provides free electricity for a monthly consumption of up to 200 units. A 50 per cent subsidy is also given monthly for those consuming between 201-400 units. This is the third Cabinet meeting of the BJP ruled Delhi government after taking the oath on February 20.

Top sources said the Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and her Cabinet is likely to discuss the provisions of the draft of the EV policy 2.0, a step towards cleaner and more sustainable transportation in the capital. The EV Policy 2.0 is drafted not only to accelerate the shift towards electric mobility but also proposes subsidies to ensure a much smoother transition. Additionally, the draft policy includes dedicated subsidies for women buyers, encouraging their active participation and contribution towards this shift.

Suppose you're a woman buying an electric two-wheeler under the EV Policy 2.0 in Delhi. In that case, you can avail a subsidy of ₹12,000 per kWh of battery capacity, with the total subsidy capped at ₹36,000! The policy will offer this subsidy to the first 10,000 women buyers who hold a valid driving licence, benefiting thousands of women in the state.

**The policy is drafted not only to accelerate the shift towards electric mobility but also proposes subsidies to ensure a much smoother transition**

In addition to this women-specific subsidy, the draft policy also proposes a subsidy of ₹10,000 per kWh of battery capacity, with the total subsidy capped at ₹30,000 for all electric two-wheeler buyers, empowering them to join in the State's transition to electric mobility, according to the draft policy. All CNG auto-rickshaws above 10 years old will be mandatorily replaced or retrofitted to be run on batteries during the policy period.

In a strong recommendation, the draft policy also lays down that two wheelers running on petrol, diesel, CNG will not be

allowed from August 15, 2026. Similarly, it recommends that no diesel, petrol, CNG three-wheeler registration will be allowed in case of goods carriers from August 15, 2025.

The Rekha Gupta government is also expected to discuss the continuation of the power subsidy and sugar subsidy for under privileged people. Under the power subsidy scheme implemented by the previous AAP regime, the Delhi government provides free electricity for a monthly consumption of up to 200 units. A 50 per cent subsidy is also given monthly for those consuming between 201-400 units. Households consuming more than the permissible free electricity pay the applicable tariff rates.

During the Delhi Assembly elections, the BJP had made it clear that if came to power, it will not stop any subsidy being provided to the residents and the Cabinet may announce to continue the scheme.

In August 2023, the then Delhi Cabinet decided to provide free sugar to the residents of Delhi. Under this program, the Delhi Government provides free sugar to Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) beneficiaries under the sugar subsidy scheme. The distribution of sugar to AAY cardholders was made available free of cost.

## Notice issued for 55 lakh overage vehicles

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

**T**he transport department has issued a public notice regarding 55 lakh overage vehicles or End of Life Vehicles (ELV) emphasising that parking such vehicles is prohibited in all the public places, including areas outside residences which are considered public places.

According to the notice, "General public is informed that the government has deregistered 5.5 million over-aged vehicles (diesel vehicles more than 10 years old and Petrol/CNG vehicles more than 15 years old). The list of such vehicles can be accessed by visiting the Transport Department website at <https://transport.delhi.gov.in>. There is a complete prohibition on parking over-aged vehicles, including in areas just outside residences, which are considered public place."

This means owners of ELV will park their vehicle inside their premises. If such vehicles found plying or parked in public spaces in Delhi may result in seizure/impounding and attracting a penalty of ₹5,000 to ₹10,000 besides towing and parking charges for its one time release. The transport department is

also planning denying fuel to these vehicles in the coming days.

Delhi's Transport Minister, Pankaj Singh, had on March 6 announced a comprehensive plan to check unregistered vehicles, which the government claimed is one of the main contributory factors to traffic congestion in the national capital. After finalisation of the initiative, Singh

**If such vehicles are found plying or parked in public spaces may result in seizure or impounding and attracting a penalty of ₹5,000 to ₹10,000 besides towing and parking charges for their release**

had said that the government in Delhi is committed to improving road management. The transport department and traffic police will take action against vehicles operating without proper registration.

Additionally, orders were issued for petrol pump operators not to supply fuel to unregistered or unfit vehicles. "If they don't comply with the orders, they will also face penalties," the Minister said.

The transport department has asked

the owners of all such vehicles to either keep such vehicle inside the residential complex in a private parking space owned by the individual (not in a shared parking space even if it's part of a residential complex) or Obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to move the vehicle out of the NCT of Delhi within one year of the vehicle's expiry date.

It has also given another option for owners of over-aged vehicle is to scrap the vehicles through the 'voluntary vehicle scrapping application' at <https://vscrap.parivahan.gov.in/> at any nearby registered vehicle scrapping facility. Benefits in accordance with the notification issued earlier by the transport department for concession in the Motor Vehicles Tax on registration of new transport and non-transport vehicles can also be availed in the process.

The enforcement wing of the transport department, Delhi Traffic Police, New Delhi Municipal Council, Municipal Corporation of Delhi and Delhi Cantonment Board will impound such vehicles found parked or plying in public places in Delhi, even if an NOC has been issued but the vehicle has not been moved out of Delhi within one month of NOC issuance, it further added.

## Vijender Gupta embarks on study tour of Odisha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

**D**elhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta will visit Odisha on a three-day study tour from April 15 to April 17 to assess and learn from the implementation of the National e-Vidhan application in the Odisha Assembly, which has recently transitioned to a fully paperless system.

Speaker Gupta will be accompanied by the Deputy Speaker Mohan Singh Bisht, senior officials of the Delhi Assembly and other key personnel associated with the NeVA project. The objective of the tour is to study best practices, technological frameworks, and operational models adopted by Odisha in implementing NeVA effectively.

During the last Budget session, the Speaker had announced that the Delhi Assembly would become paperless with-

in 100 days. In alignment with this commitment, the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs is expected to release necessary funds to support the implementation of NeVA in Delhi.

The Speaker had expressed hope that this tour will be instrumental in accelerating Delhi Assembly's digital transformation, making it a modern and transparent legislative body.

On April 16, the delegation will participate in meetings with the Committee on NeVA and will also meet the Speaker of the Odisha Legislative Assembly. The final day of the tour will be dedicated to wrap-up meetings and further discussions with stakeholders involved in the NeVA implementation. The Delhi Legislative Assembly has announced to adopt a transparent, tech-enabled, and citizen-centric approach to legislative functioning through the swift implementation of NeVA.

## HC stays liquor ban at Hauz Khas Social

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

**T**he Delhi High Court has stayed an order of the excise department asking 'Hauz Khas Social', a popular eatery in the city, to stop serving liquor in the absence of a valid eating house licence.

The High Court, which was informed that the restaurant's eating house licence was valid till March 31, 2024, and it has been pursuing for the renewal ever since, said that as per law, the registration already granted to the eatery shall enure till the renewal certificate is issued or till an intimation of refusal is issued by the licensing unit of Delhi Police.

"Considering that under... of the Delhi Eating House Registration Regulations, 2023, the registration already granted to the petitioner shall enure, till the renewal certificate is issued or till an intimation of refusal is issued by the respondent No 2 (police), the direction contained in the show-cause notice-cum-order of April 8, 2024, requiring the petitioner to 'cease the

operation of service of liquor', is ex-facie misconceived," Justice Sachin Datta said in the order dated April 9.

The petitioner, Epiphany Hospitality Pvt Ltd, which operates the restaurant-cum-bar under the name 'M/s Social and Tinur', also known as 'Hauz Khas Social', at Hauz Khas village here, approached the court aggrieved by the sudden disruption of its operations on April 3, 2025, due to the pending renewal of its eating house licence. The eatery authorities were asked to put on hold the sale of liquor on account of no valid eating house licence with it.

The plea said the petitioner has a valid licence for serving Indian and foreign liquor, which has been extended till June this year. The counsel for Delhi government's excise department denied that any seizure of liquor has been done by it, and submitted that it has only issued directions that sale of liquor be discontinued till further directions from the department.

The licencing unit of Delhi Police sub-

mitted that it was seized of the petitioner's application for renewal of its eating house registration/licence and that the processing has been held up only for want of "area suitability report" from the unit concerned. The court in its order said as per the regulations, the petitioner's premises shall be deemed to be duly registered, until its registration certificate is duly renewed and delivered or till intimation is sent by the police that renewal has been refused.

"The respondent No 2 is directed to process the petitioner's application for renewal of registration/licence under the Delhi Eating House Registration Regulations, 2023, and take a decision thereon (either accepting the renewal application or intimating refusal thereof), as expeditiously as possible, and preferably within a period of two weeks," it said. The court said the direction in the excise department's show-cause notice, that the petitioner shall cease operation of service of liquor from its restaurant, is stayed till adjudication of the notice.

## Six new air monitoring stations for Delhi: Sirsa

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

**D**elhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa has said the government will set up six new air monitoring stations at key locations, including JNU, IGNOU and Delhi Cant.

With this, the number of such stations will rise to 46. The move is part of the newly formed BJP government's strategy to expand its air monitoring infrastructure to ensure better preparedness to battle yearly smog and overall poor air quality.

The stations will come up at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Delhi Cantonment, Netaji Subhash University (West Campus), and the Commonwealth Games Sports Complex, Sirsa said to media.

"These new stations will help us track pollution patterns more accurately and guide our response with real-time data. The installation process is underway and we are targeting completion by June 30," the minister said.

He said the government is addressing pollution at every level - from large-scale industrial emissions to localised sources.

Last month, Sirsa in an interview said that the city government will ensure that Delhi sees more clean air days in winter.

"We will not wait until winter to take action. Our work to purify Delhi has already started, and as part of this, we will also add new ambient air quality monitoring stations," Sirsa said.

The establishment of the six new stations was announced in March by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta.

At present, Delhi has 40 monitoring stations located at sites such as Alipur, Anand Vihar, Aya Nagar, Bawana, Burari, Chandni Chowk, DTU, Dwarka, IGI Airport, IHBAS, ITO, Jahangirpuri, Lodhi Road, Najafgarh, and Narela.

However, several densely populated areas remain unmonitored, and some stations are positioned in less inhabited zones like the Asola Bhatti Forest and Siri Fort.

Some of the stations are located in less inhabited areas such as IHBAS, Shri Aurobindo Marg, Karni Singh Shooting Range within the Asola Bhatti Forest Range, and Siri Fort near the Hauz Khas forest.

## Delhi CM, leaders pay tributes to Dr BR Ambedkar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

**D**elhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Monday paid her tributes to Dr BR Ambedkar at several events and said her government, following his principles, is committed to the welfare and empowerment of all communities.

The Chief Minister was one of the several dignitaries, including BJP president JP Nadda, who paid floral tributes at the statue of Ambedkar at Prerna Sthal on Parliament premises on the 135th birth anniversary of the chairman of drafting committee of the Constitution. Earlier in the day, she inaugurated four public parks in Ambedkar Colony and laid the foundation stone for a road in her Shalimar Bagh constituency.

"Delhi government is fully committed to building a robust and modern infrastructure across the capital. We aim to provide every citizen with better facilities and a safe, accessible environment," she said. The top priority of the Delhi government is to offer "world-class roads," healthcare, educational institutions, transport services, and a clean environment to the people of Delhi, she said.

"We envision a Delhi that not only meets the present needs but also lays a sustainable and strong foundation for future generations. Our resolve is to build Delhi as an empowered, self-reliant, and inclusive capital that serves as a model for the entire nation," she added.

CM also paid floral tributes at Dr Ambedkar's memorial on Alipur Road, with Nadda, Union Minister of Social



Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa and others during a ceremony to pay tribute to Dr BR Ambedkar on his birth anniversary at the Delhi Assembly premises in New Delhi

Justice and Empowerment Virendra Kumar, and Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva. She later accompanied Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijendra Gupta and other ministers to pay tribute at the stat-

ue of Ambedkar in the Vidhan Sabha premises. The Speaker remembered Ambedkar as a pioneer of equality, social justice, and human rights, highlighting his "unparalleled contribution" in framing the

Indian Constitution. The Delhi Chief Minister also participated in a cultural programme held at Shah Auditorium to mark the birth anniversary of Dr Ambedkar.

# Protest erupts over child's death in a pit dug by RMC

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The residents of PMAY colony in Chhattisgarh's Raipur city on Monday staged a sit-in protest over the death of a child who fell in a water-filled soak pit dug by Raipur Municipal Corporation (RMC) in the colony.

The boys Divyansh (7), Priyansh (6) and Ansh (5) fell in an uncovered water-filled soak pit while playing in the colony near Gulmohar Park in Ram Nagar locality on Sunday late evening.

The residents of the colony rushed the children to a nearby hospital where Divyansh was declared dead and two others were injured. One of the children is being treated and the other is said to be stable.

The residents on Monday staged a road blockade, and then they staged a sit-in protest outside the colony against the civic authorities.

One of the residents, Vijay Pande, alleged that the RMC authority had dug a soak pit near a septic tank a few months ago, but it was still uncovered and the RMC authorities neglected the



grievances whenever the residents asked to cover it.

They have demanded strict action on the civic body officials for negligence and proper compensation for the kin of the victim.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai has announced a financial aid of Rs 4 lakh for them.

The Congress leaders also participated in the protest.

In a damage control move, Raipur Mayor Meenal Choubey said that an order has been issued to the civic body officials to cover all the uncovered pot-holes of septic tanks and sump wells in BSUP and PMAY colonies along with other RMC premises of the city within 24 hours.

Raipur Municipal Commissioner Vishwadeep told The Pioneer that a notice was served on Sunday night to Zone-7 Commissioner, Executive Engineer, Assistant Engineer PMAY Yogesh Yadav, Deputy Engineer PMAY Ankita Agrawal and the PMAY civil contractor Madhusudan Agrawal.

Their replies were sought within 24 hours following the incident.

## Five IEDs defused in Bijapur



STAFF REPORTER ■ BIJAPUR

Security forces on Monday recovered five improvised explosive devices (IEDs) planted by Maoists in Bijapur district in Chhattisgarh.

The IEDs were detected on a dirt track near Mankeli village by a joint team of the security forces during an area domination and demining exercise, Bijapur Additional Superintendent of Police Chandrakant Governa said.

The Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) and local police were involved in the oper-

ation. Three beer bottle IEDs weighing two kg each, and two tiffin bombs weighing three to five kg each, were found.

A command switch mechanism was used in the IEDs, which were placed underground in a series position at a distance of three to five metres to target the security personnel.

The bombs were later neutralised by the Bomb Disposal Squad.

Maoists often plant explosives to target security forces during anti-Naxal operations in the Bastar division.

## Bastar is paying price of BJP's misgovernance: Baij



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Pradesh Congress Committee chief Deepak Baij said on Monday that Bastar was paying the price for the misgovernance of the double-engine BJP government.

He said this in reference to the insufficient water flowing through the Indravati River, which is affecting the locals. He also accused the government of exploiting the natural resources of Bastar.

Speaking on his X handle, Baij said that the Indravati River originates from Odisha and flows 164 km there and 233 km in Chhattisgarh.

Even though the BJP is in power in both states, Chhattisgarh is only getting a 16 percent share of the water, he said.

Indravati is the lifeline of Bastar—farmers, wildlife and forests depend on it, he said.

He announced to launch a mass movement called 'Save Indravati Campaign' soon.

## Firefighters campaign for fire safety awareness



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Fire Department personnel across Chhattisgarh took out rallies on Monday to honour martyred firefighters and raise awareness about fire safety.

The events marked the National Fire Safety Day, which is observed on April 14 to commemorate the

firefighters who died during a ship explosion at the Bombay Dockyard in 1944.

This also marks the commencement of Fire Safety Week, which is observed from April 14 to 20.

During this, the fire department will hold mock drills, rallies and competitions to educate people about fire safety.

## Digital service centres in 1,460 gram panchayats from Apr 24

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Atal Panchayat Digital Facility Centres will be launched in a total of 1,460 gram panchayats in Chhattisgarh on National Panchayat Day on April 24 to provide villagers cash payment and digital services.

For this, an MoU was signed between service providers of the Common Service Centre and Sarpanches on Monday.

The programme was organised in all district headquarters of the state. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and Home Minister Vijay Sharma virtually presided over.

These centres will provide villagers many services, like easily withdrawing money from their account, money transfers, bill payments as well as pension and insurance-related services.

The villagers will no longer have to visit block and district headquarters for small tasks. Addressing the event, Sai said that this was one of the guarantees Prime Minister Narendra Modi made during the 2023 Assembly elections.



He also announced the launch of a survey campaign for Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Rural on April 15.

He also expressed concerns over the

depleting groundwater levels in the state. He urged the adoption of water harvesting and the promotion of water conservation initiatives in every village.



The ST/SC/OBC Employees Association of the Central Bank of India held various activities in Raipur to honour Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar on his 134th birth anniversary on Monday.

## Double reward for en masse surrender of Maoists

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Amid the series of efforts to encourage Maoists to surrender, the Chhattisgarh government said on Monday that those rebels who are keen to surrender en masse will be given a generous reward.

If 80 per cent or more of the rebels of any Naxalite outfit surrender collectively, they will be given double the amount of reward money announced against them.

Besides this, Rs 1 crore will be provided to the Naxal-free village panchayats of the state.

If all the left-wing radicals and militia members active in any Gram Panchayat of the most Naxal-affected districts of Sukma, Bijapur, Dantewada, Narayanpur and Kanker give up their arms and the particular Gram Panchayat is declared Naxal-free, then Rs 1 crore will be sanctioned for developmental works there.



Under the new surrender policy, if a Maoist couple surrenders, then the couple will be considered as separate units and will be given the benefit of different rehabilitation schemes. However, this does not apply to all schemes.

The District Collector will have to ensure that the entire amount is paid to

the surrendered Maoist within 10 days of surrender.

The sub-committee of the Council of Ministers can close the previous criminal cases of a surrendered rebel considering his contribution to the Naxal eradication and his good conduct after six months of surrender.

## Eating more bananas, broccoli may help curb high blood pressure

AGENCIES ■

Eating bananas or broccoli, rich in potassium, may effectively help lower hypertension -- affecting over 30 per cent of adults globally, according to a study on Monday.

Hypertension or high blood pressure is the leading cause of coronary heart disease and stroke and may also lead to other afflictions like chronic kidney disease, heart failure, irregular heartbeats, and dementia.

Researchers from the University of Waterloo, Canada, found that increasing the ratio of dietary potassium to sodium intake may be more



effective for curbing blood pressure levels than simply reducing sodium intake.

"Usually, when we have high blood pressure, we are advised to eat less salt," said Anita Layton, Professor of Applied Mathematics, Computer Science, Pharmacy and Biology at the University of Waterloo.

"Our research suggests that adding more potassium-rich foods to your diet, such as bananas or broccoli, might have a greater positive impact on your blood pressure than just cutting sodium," Layton added.

Potassium and sodium are both

electrolytes -- substances that help the body send electrical signals to contract muscles -- affect the amount of water in your body and perform other essential functions.

The study was published in the American Journal of Physiology-Renal Physiology.

"Early humans ate lots of fruits and vegetables, and as a result, our body's regulatory systems may have evolved to work best with a high potassium, low sodium diet," said lead author Melissa Stadt, a doctoral candidate in Waterloo's Department of Applied Mathematics.

"Today, western diets tend to be

much higher in sodium and lower in potassium. That may explain why high blood pressure is found mainly in industrialised societies, not in isolated societies," Stadt said.

To understand how increasing potassium intake can help control blood pressure, the team developed a mathematical model.

The model successfully identifies how the ratio of potassium to sodium impacts the body. It showed that men develop high blood pressure more easily than pre-menopausal women. However, men were also more likely to respond positively to an increased ratio of potassium to sodium.

## President pays tribute to Dr Ambedkar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

President Droupadi Murmu, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla paid floral tributes at the statue of Bhimrao Ambedkar in the Parliament House Complex on Monday, marking his birth anniversary.

Senior Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, and Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge also paid homage at the statue of Ambedkar.

Union ministers, MPs and Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta were also present to offer their tributes. On the eve of the occasion, President Droupadi Murmu greeted people and said Ambedkar's contributions across various fields would continue to inspire future generations to work with dedication towards nation-building. In her message, she said Ambedkar created a distinct identity despite facing extreme hardships and earned global respect through his exceptional achievements. He considered edu-



President Droupadi Murmu with Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a ceremony to pay tribute to BR Ambedkar on his birth anniversary

cation an important tool for social change and empowerment of the downtrodden,

the President said. Paying tributes to Bhimrao Ambedkar on his birth anniversary,

Prime Minister Modi said that it was due to his inspiration that the country was dedicated to realising the dream of social justice.

His principles and ideas will strengthen and speed up the building of an 'aatmanirbhar' (self-reliant) and developed India, Modi said.

Ambedkar is recognised for his lifelong struggle for the empowerment of Scheduled Castes and his key role in drafting the Constitution. Born in a Dalit family in 1891, he was a brilliant student who went on to study abroad.

The discrimination he suffered in Indian society made him a committed social reformer. He was also India's first law minister.

Kharge stressed the need for a nationwide caste census as well as implementation of reservation for SCs, STs and OBCs in private educational institutions.

He said the Constitution is a gift from Ambedkar to citizens as it gives them the right of social, economic and political justice. Kharge said the Congress wants to forward five issues that it is striving for and asserted that a nationwide caste census is necessary.

## Importance of forensic science has increased: Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The importance of forensic science has increased manifold with crime becoming borderless and criminals often breaching the boundaries of states and countries, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said Monday, highlighting that the Modi government has made forensic science a part of the criminal justice system.

The government also is working to ensure people get justice in time and to their satisfaction, he said at the All India Forensic Science Summit 2025.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the government is striving to make the criminal justice system people-centric and scientific. Along with this, the government is working to ensure that the person seeking justice gets justice in time and also gets satisfaction of getting justice," he said.

The home minister said forensic science is very useful to strengthen the country's criminal justice system.

"Prime Minister Modi's vision has worked to change the landscape of the

criminal justice system of this country.

We have made forensic science a part of the criminal justice system so that justice is not only delivered and guilty is punished but at the same time ensuring that no innocent suffers," Union Home Minister Amit Shah said.

Shah said the Summit will prove to be very useful in bringing experts on one platform, discussing policies, formulating and shaping future strategies and finding a unanimously accepted solution.

"In today's times, if we have to provide timely justice and increase the conviction rate, then this is not possible without forensic science," he said.

Shah said there was a time when crime used to be limited to the boundaries of districts, states and countries, but it has become borderless now.

"In such a situation, the importance of forensic science increases manifold."

The home minister said there should be no injustice done either to the accused to the complainant.

"If we want to ensure this, then we will have to make forensic science a part of the criminal justice system."

## Delhi CM lays foundation stone in Shalimar Bagh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Monday laid the foundation stone for several development projects in the Shalimar Bagh constituency. She also inaugurated the beautification of four public parks located in Ambedkar Colony, Haiderpur and laid the foundation stone for the construction of the main road and drainage system from the Haiderpur bus stand to the nearby canal.

The chief minister stated that the Delhi government is fully committed to building a robust and modern infrastructure across the capital. "Our aim is to provide every citizen with better facilities and a safe, accessible environment," she said.

The CM said that the government's top priority is to offer world-class roads, healthcare, educational institutions, transport services, and a clean environment to the people of Delhi. "We envision a Delhi that not only meets the present needs but also lays a sustainable and strong foundation for future generations. Our resolve is to build Delhi as an empowered, self-reliant, and inclusive capital that serves as

a model for the entire nation," she added.

She further shared that the beautification work of the four public parks in Ambedkar Colony has now been completed and opened to the public. These parks are now equipped with swings for children, seating arrangements for senior citizens, and horticultural landscaping. "These spaces will now serve not only as recreational areas but also as centers of social harmony and inspiration," said the CM.

In addition, the CM laid the foundation stone for the construction of the main road and drains from the Haiderpur bus stand to the canal—a long-standing demand of the residents. This initiative is expected to significantly improve local connectivity and ease water logging issues.

On this occasion, CM Gupta said, "The life of Babasaheb BR Ambedkar inspires us with values of dedication, struggle, and equality. We are dedicating improved infrastructure to the people of Delhi. Our aim is not merely to commemorate him but to realize his ideals on the ground." She further emphasized that guided by Babasaheb's principles, the Delhi Government is consistently working.

## NCLAT dismisses Supertech promoter's plea

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has dismissed the plea filed by debt-ridden realty firm Supertech former promoter Ram Kishor Arora against personal insolvency proceedings initiated against him.

He had challenged an order by the Delhi bench of the National Company Law Tribunal, which, in February 2025, directed to initiate personal insolvency proceedings against Arora on the plea filed by IFCI and appointed an IRP.

A two-member bench of the appellate insolvency tribunal NCLAT said personal insolvency proceedings could not be defended based on another insolvency proceeding going against Supertech under section 7 of the IBC. It is on the lenders to proceed against both simultaneously or separately.

Section 95 (1) of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code allows the creditors to file insolvency proceedings against the personal guarantors.

Arora's counsel submitted the insolvency proceedings initiated against Supertech Ltd under Section 7 is currently sub-judice before the Supreme Court. In this matter,

the apex court had, on February 21, 2025, asked the promoters of Supertech and third parties to submit a settlement plan, and the process is already pending before the Supreme Court.

Supertech promoters and other parties are in the process of submitting a plan for construction and settlement.

Rejecting this argument, the NCLAT said: "Be that as it may, we are of the view that the personal insolvency proceedings are not defended on proceedings under Section 7, which are proceedings against the Corporate Debtor (Supertech), the liability of the personal guarantor and the Corporate Debtor to the lenders are co-extensive and it is open for the lenders to proceed against both simultaneously or separately."

Arora's counsel further submitted that the proposal has also been sent to IFCI Bank with an OTS (one-time settlement) Proposal, which is pending consideration.

"We after hearing the Counsel for the Appellant (Supertech), are of the view in so far as the admission of the application under Section 95, that cannot be faulted on the ground of pendency of proceedings under Section 7 against CD," said a NCLAT bench comprising Chairperson

Justice Ashok Bhushan and Barun Mitra.

However, the NCLAT said it will be open for Arora to bring before the Resolution Professional settlement with IFCI Bank if any, or any proceedings or any settlement, entered into the proceedings under Section 7, which are pending consideration before the Supreme Court. The appellate tribunal further said: "It goes without saying that all materials which are brought by the appellant be duly considered by the RP for proceeding further in the personal insolvency proceedings."

Arora was the personal guarantor of the loans taken by Supertech from IFCI.

Earlier, on December 12, 2024, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal had appointed state-owned NBCC as a project management consultant to complete debt-ridden realty firm Supertech Ltd's 16 real estate projects at a cost of nearly ₹9,500 crore.

This was challenged before the Supreme Court, which on February 21, 2025, stayed it and directed all stakeholders, including corporate guarantors, Supertech promoter RK Arora and the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (Yeida), to submit alternative proposals.

Insolvency proceedings were initiated

against Supertech on March 25, 2022.

This was immediately challenged by Arora before the appellate tribunal National Company Law Appellate Tribunal, which on June 10, 2022, modified the order and directed the Committee of Creditors (CoC) to be constituted with regard to Project Eco Village-II only. For other projects, the appellate tribunal directed to be kept as ongoing projects. The construction of all other projects was to continue with the overall supervision of IRP.

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal order was challenged by the lenders and Indiabulls before the Supreme Court.

The apex court allowed the order passed by the NCLAT on June 10, 2022, to operate. Regarding Eco Village-II, the Supreme Court said the process beyond voting on the Resolution Plan will await a further order.

Earlier this year, on May 31, 2024, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal directed for a project-wise resolution of Supertech and steps were taken by the IRP. On July 15, 2024, NBCC made a statement showing their interest in the projects of Supertech.

## Chhattisgarh: Injuries to troops in anti-Naxal jump four times

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi/Raipur

The number of security personnel who got injured in IED attacks in Chhattisgarh has jumped to around 300 per cent in the first quarter of 2025, presenting a "formidable" challenge for them to meet the Centre's deadline of eliminating Naxalites from the country by March 2026.

As summer peaks in the jungles of the "last Naxal bastion" of the central Indian state, the security agencies are "treading with caution" on roads and dirt tracks to avoid getting trapped by these IED blasts that have killed hundreds and led to loss of limbs for many over more than two decades of the insurgency.

According to official data accessed by PTI, the first quarter (January-March) of 2025 saw 23 improvised explosive device (IED) attacks, leading to injuries to 23 personnel from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and other forces including Chhattisgarh Police and recovery of 201 such bombs weighing more than 500 kgs.

The comparative figures for the same period of last year show that there were nine IED attacks in Chhattisgarh, leading to injuries to six personnel and recovery of 85 such bombs weighing about 257 kgs. The attacks have risen by around 150 per cent while the injuries to troops have gone up by four times in the first three months of this year, according to the data.

The entire year of 2024 saw 43 cases of IED attacks which led to recovery of 292 IEDs and injuries to 33 personnel including nine from the Central Reserve Police Force, the lead anti-Maoist operations force across the Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected states.

"There is about 2.5 times spurt in IED attacks and four-fold increase in injuries to personnel this year in Chhattisgarh.

This is because the Naxals are not undertaking one-to-one combat as they are very low on arms, ammunition, manpower and morale," a senior security officer posted in the Bastar region of the state said.

The security forces, hence, have been asked to scrupulously follow the old drill of walking the stretch rather boarding vehicles during operations and avoid taking the beaten track, he said.

On March 23 this year, two vehicle-borne Special Task Force (STF) personnel of Chhattisgarh Police suffered injuries in such an attack in Bijapur district as a convoy of eighteen vehicles was returning to the base, aided by the troops of the road opening party who sanitise roads.

## Man arrested for allegedly killing his live-in partner

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

A crime branch team of the Gurugram police has arrested a man for allegedly killing his live-in partner on March 11, 2025, police said.

The accused was identified as Shiv Shankar Sharma, Alias Kali Charan, a resident of Uttar Pradesh. While the victim was identified as Rita, a native of Bihar.

According to the police, on March 11, information was received regarding the body of a woman found in village Naharpur.

On receiving the information, the police team reached the spot where the body of a woman was found wrapped in a blanket in a field in village Naharpur.

The police team got to the scene and had the body inspected by the scene-of-crime and fingerprint teams and kept the body in the mortuary for postmortem and identification. On March 31, the deceased's father identified the victim as his daughter, Rita, who was residing in village Naharpur, Manesar, in rented accommodation. He told the police in his complaint that his daughter Rita was married 11 years ago.

"About 5 years ago, Rita and her husband came to the village of Naharpur and started living on rent and started working here.

Due to a rift between his daughter and her husband, he left his daughter in Naharpur. After that, his daughter started living in a relationship with a person named Shiv Shankar, Alias Kalicharan," he told the police.

Thereafter, he came to Naharpur to meet his daughter, where he came to know that a few days ago, the body of a woman was found in the fields here. He saw the photo of the body and identified her as Rita.

He suspects that Shiv Shankar, alias Kalicharan, has murdered his daughter.

**The deceased's father identified the victim as his daughter, Rita, who was residing in village Naharpur, Manesar, in rented accommodation**

On the complaint received, a case was registered under the relevant sections in Police Station Manesar, Gurugram. During the investigation, the police nabbed the accused on Monday from village Naharpur in Gurugram.

In the initial police interrogation, it was found that the above accused was in a relationship with Rita. The accused used to work as a laborer, and Rita worked in a company in IMT Manesar itself.

"The accused suspected Rita of having a relationship with someone else, due to which the accused killed Rita on February 23 and dumped Rita's body in a wheat field," Sandeep Kumar, spokesperson of the Gurugram police, said.

For further interrogation, the accused will be produced in the court and was taken into police custody.

## BJP committed to Ambedkar's values: Nadda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

BJP president JP Nadda led the ruling BJP to pay homage to Babasaheb Ambedkar at several commemorative events across the country as well party offices. Several BJP leaders at its headquarters also read out the Constitution's preamble to stress their commitment to its values.

Party leaders and its different state units launched the drive, 'Ambedkar Samman Abhiyan', to highlight how its governments at the Centre and in states have kept the deprived sections of society central to its welfare programmes in line with the vision of Ambedkar.

Union Social Justice Minister Virendra Kumar accused the Opposition of exploiting Dr Ambedkar's name for political mileage while failing to respect his contributions or develop places associated with his life. Opposition has only used Babasaheb's name all their lives. They neither shared his pain nor worked to develop places linked to his legacy. Today they roam around carrying copies of the Constitution, but when they were in power, they violated it multiple times. They even imposed Emergency through constitutional amendments for their selfish interests," Kumar said it was PM Narendra Modi's government that gave constitutional status to the Backward Classes Commission, something the opposition failed to do. "Those who ruled from panchayat to Parliament for 56 years never gave the Commission constitutional status. Modi ji did that," he said.

"The BJP is the only party that has given the Constitution the highest regard. The Constitution is the soul of this



Union Minister JP Nadda pays tribute to Dr. BR Ambedkar on his birth anniversary in New Delhi

country," he said. On reservation, the minister said limits have been set by the judiciary, and any discussion must remain within those boundaries.

Adityanath lauded Ambedkar as a true Bharat Ratna and a living school of democracy. "His struggle to establish an egalitarian and justice-loving society will continue to inspire all of us for eternity," he said. At a programme, he said his government has worked to ensure law and order and to boost development and welfare, as he accused rivals of being involved

in rampant corruption and nepotism.

Shah lauded Ambedkar in his post on X saying he laid the foundation of social transformation based on education, equality and justice, and remained committed to the rights of the deprived sections of society throughout his life.

Following the setback it received in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls when it lost a majority on its own largely due to the loss of votes from the poorer sections of society, including Dalits, in some states, the BJP has ratcheted up its outreach to them.

## Anti-independence forces destroying Bangladesh's culture: Hasina

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Bangladesh's deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina has said that anti-independence forces have illegally seized power and were actively trying to destroy the country's secular culture as she urged people to drive the usurpers out.

"Today, anti-liberation forces have illegally seized power in Bangladesh. They are actively trying to destroy Bengali culture," the 77-year-old self-exiled ousted premier said in a statement on the occasion of Bengali New Year - Pohela Boishakh.

Hasina left Bangladesh in August last year after her nearly 16-year-long Awami League government was toppled in a student-led uprising. Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, who was in a protracted row with the Hasina regime for obscure reasons, assumed the charge of an interim government.

"Whenever anti-independence forces

gained control in the past, they attacked the nation's history, heritage, and culture. They not only tried to stop the Mangal Shobhajatra but even attempted to change its name," Hasina said.

Hasina, who now lives in India, said that those who now run Bangladesh are "enemies of the nation" and "enemies of our culture." "Let us drive out the anti-liberation and anti-culture forces, and raise Bangladesh's head high on the global stage," said the former premier as Bangladesh celebrated the Bengali New Year in a changed cultural scenario.

"On this auspicious moment of Bengali New Year, let us commit to rejecting all that is unhealthy, ugly, or part of a distorted culture - and instead, embrace a healthy, beautiful, and creative way of life," she added.

This year, Bangladesh authorities renamed the traditional "Mangal Shobhajatra" procession, a central attrac-

tion of Pohela Boishakh celebrations, as "Anondo Shobhajatra" after conservative Islamists groups like Hefazat-e-Islam called the "Mangal Shobhajatra" a "Hindu ritual" and urged the government to change its name. Dhaka University's fine arts faculty, which centrally stages the colourful street march in Dhaka, at a press conference last week announced the renaming of the event where towering masks, hand-crafted puppets, and vivid depictions of animals feature the procession.

Dhaka University's new Vice-Chancellor Professor Mohammad Niaz Ahmed Khan, however, said on Monday that "Anondo Shobhajatra" this year was the largest and most diverse to date with representation from the highest number of ethnic communities, including indigenous groups. UNESCO declared "Mangal Shobhajatra" an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2016 while Hasina said the Bengali New Year became

a symbol of the "secular consciousness" of the Bengali nation.

"Those who dared to change the name of Mangal Shobhajatra, those who engage in such heinous conspiracies against our heritage and culture, are enemies of the nation, enemies of our culture, enemies of Bangladesh," Hasina said.

**"They are actively trying to destroy Bengali culture," the 77-year-old self-exiled ousted premier said in a statement on the occasion of Bengali New Year - Pohela Boishakh**

"The people of this country will never let them succeed," she added.

Recalling the brutal assassination of her father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with his family in 1975,

Hasina said, "There was an attempt to erase Bengali cultural identity and revert to a Pakistani ideology. Political toxins were insidiously injected into the realm of culture."

"But the Bengali people did not remain silent - they carried forward an unyielding cultural resistance," she added.

Hasina said Pohela Boishakh is the most universal celebration of the Bengali people. "This occasion is celebrated with hopes for happiness, peace, and prosperity while leaving behind the grief of past mistakes and failures," she added.

"The first light of dawn on this day brings forth new dreams, aspirations, and possibilities. It unites the Bengali nation in its unique worldview and rich cultural identity. I call upon all to step into the new year, leaving behind the old and the worn, embracing harmony that transcends religion, race, and community," she added.

# Kalash installed atop main spire of Ram Jannabhoomi Temple

KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ Ayodhya

In a moment etched in history, a ceremonial Kalash (sacred pitcher) was installed atop the main spire of the sanctum sanctorum of the Shri Ram Jannabhoomi temple in Ayodhya on Monday, marking a major spiritual and architectural milestone in the ongoing construction of the grand temple.

The ceremonial installation was preceded by a Vedic havan and puja, where the Kalash was first worshipped before being placed atop the spire amidst chants and rituals. The sacred ritual began at exactly 9:15 AM on Vaishakh Krishna Pratipada, corresponding to April 14, 2025, with the chanting of Vedic hymns by a congregation of Vedic scholars and priests.

At 10:15 am, in strict accordance with traditional Vastu Shastra and Vedic customs, the Kalash was ceremoniously installed on the temple's primary shikhara (spire) directly above the idol of Ram Lalla.

The event was conducted in an atmosphere charged with spiritual fervor and devotion, as priests performed the Kalash Puja — a sacred offering and invocation ritual — amid the rhythmic resonance of conch shells and Vedic chants.

The temple complex radiated with



The 'Kalash Puja' being conducted atop the main Shikhara of the Garbha Griha of Ram Jannabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya

divine energy, as the installation symbolised the fulfillment of a crucial phase in the sacred construction journey.

"This Kalash, now crowning the temple's highest point, is not only an architectural element but also a profound representation of Sanatan faith and timeless tradition. Its placement directly above the deity signifies the divine culmination of the temple's structural sanctity and spiritual completeness," Convenor Shri Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust Chanpat Rai said.

For devotees across India and beyond,

this moment was one of deep reverence, devotion, and national pride. The Shri Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust also shared rare and awe-inspiring images of the event, capturing the sacred spire adorned with the Kalash, highlighting the intricacy and spiritual gravity of the ritual.

"This installation marks a golden milestone in the chronicle of the Ram Temple's construction — a project seen as the cultural and spiritual resurgence of the nation. It will be remembered as a historic step in fulfilling a centuries-old dream

rooted in collective faith and perseverance," Rai said. Rai also informed the media about several upcoming developments, including enhanced security measures. A four-kilometre-long protective wall will be constructed around the temple complex to ensure its security. "The wall will be completed within 18 months," Rai said.

Ram Mandir Nirman Samiti Chairman Nripendra Mishra added that Engineers India Limited will lead the construction of the security wall. "Soil testing is underway, and a final decision on the wall's height and thickness will be taken soon," Mishra said. He also mentioned plans to expand the capacity of the Yatri Suvidha Kendra.

Responding to discussions about distributing sacred soil from the Ram Jannabhoomi among devotees, Mishra clarified: "No such decision has been made. The soil excavated during construction will remain within the complex. It is puja bhoomi—sacred—and will be used for leveling the park and Sadhana Sthal areas," Mishra confirmed that the overall construction of the Ram temple will be completed by May 15, including the installation of a flagpole, lightning conductors, and aviation safety lights atop the main spire. "We are in the final stages of completing the temple's pinnacle," he said.

# UP cop mistakes judge for theft accused, faces action

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In an extraordinary case of bureaucratic blunder, a police officer in Uttar Pradesh's Ferozabad mistakenly targeted a sitting judge while attempting to execute a proclamation order meant for a theft accused—earning a scathing reprimand from the court.

The mix-up unfolded last month when Sub-Inspector Banwarilal, tasked with serving a proclamation notice under Section 82 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), erroneously reported to the court that the accused—named "Nagma Khan"—could not be located at her residence. What he failed to realise was that Nagma Khan is, in fact, the Chief Judicial Magistrate who had issued the order in the first place. In his written submission to the court, Banwarilal stated: "When the attached NBW (non-bailable warrant) was served by me, a thorough search was conducted at the address of Nagma Khan, and no accused of this name lives at the said location. Therefore, you are requested to please pass further orders."

Outraged by the officer's mistake, Magistrate Khan issued a sharply worded order on March 24, calling the error "quite bizarre" and indicative of a deep lack of understanding of judicial procedure.

"Without giving an inch of attention to the process, he carelessly referred to the proclamation as an NBW and blindly recorded the name of the presiding

officer—my name—in place of the actual accused," she wrote.

The judge emphasised that Banwarilal had neither read nor understood the court document, demonstrating what she described as "gross dereliction of duty" and "utter neglect." She noted that the officer's confusion between a proclamation notice and a non-bailable warrant reflected his unawareness of basic procedural responsibilities. "Such a patent and grave error reflects poorly on his professional conduct," she observed. "It suggests he is entirely unaware of the duties enjoined upon him as a police officer."

Magistrate Khan also warned that negligent handling of court notices poses serious risks to individual liberty and undermines public trust in the legal system.

"If negligent police officials are allowed to carry out these duties blindly and without accountability," she said, "they may trample upon the precious fundamental rights to liberty of individuals, acting on mere whims."

Highlighting the alarming nature of the oversight, she directed top officials—including the Director General of Uttar Pradesh Police Prashant Kumar—to take strict disciplinary action against Banwarilal to ensure such incidents are not repeated.

The episode has sparked embarrassment for the local police department and raised questions about the training and oversight of officers tasked with carrying out judicial orders.

# PM Modi to inaugurate engineering marvels of modern India

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

Marking India's growing engineering prowess at a global stage, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to make history by inaugurating the two latest engineering marvels of modern India—world's highest railway arch bridge, standing at a height of 359 metres from the Chenab river bed, and India's first cable-stayed bridge over Anji khad ahead of inaugurating the Vande Bharat Express to Kashmir from Katra on April 19.

Before flagging off the train from the holy township of Katra, base camp of Mata Vaishno Devi Cave Shrine, the Prime Minister is scheduled to inspect the world's highest railway arch bridge, which is 35 metres taller than the Eiffel Tower.

Traveling in a special train, the Prime Minister will also visit India's first cable-stayed bridge located over the Anji Khad, one of the most vital links of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway project.

Elaborate security arrangements have been made in advance amid ongoing anti-terrorism operations going on across different district headquarters of the Jammu region to flush out the Pakistani terrorists hiding inside the thickly forested areas. Three hardcore terrorists were eliminated in the Chatroo area of Kishtwar by the joint teams of security forces on April 12.

The Director General of Police, Nalin Prabhakar, separately chaired a meeting of senior police officers on Monday in Jammu to review the foolproof security arrangements. Meanwhile, the railway authorities have also installed CCTV cameras for round-the-clock vigil along the track and at the important railway stations.

In addition, drone cameras have also been deployed to keep a hawk's eye over the suspected movement of anti-national elements near the railway track. To ensure the safety of the vital bridges and tunnels along the route, additional deployment of security personnel has been made.

The Railway Protection Force, Indian army, and Government Railway Police personnel have been deployed along the 111 km route between Katra and Bahihal.

To acknowledge the hard work of the large number of engineers, workers, technicians, who have worked on the prestigious national project since its inception, the railway authorities have extended invitations to them to witness the inauguration ceremony and become part of the history by embarking on the first train journey connecting Kashmir valley with the rest of the country.

# Leaders unite to honour Dr BR Ambedkar on his 134th birth anniversary

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

The 134th birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, was observed with reverence and enthusiasm across Lucknow on Sunday. From early morning, political leaders, party workers, students and citizens gathered at the iconic Ambedkar statue in Hazratganj to pay floral tributes to the social reformer and Dalit icon.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was among the first dignitaries to arrive at the site. Accompanied by Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak, Lucknow Mayor Sushma Kharkwal, Rajya Sabha MP Brijlaj and senior BJP leader Neeraj Singh, the Chief Minister offered flowers and bowed in respect to Dr Ambedkar's legacy.

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav reached soon after, wearing his trademark red cap along with a symbolic blue gamchha—a gesture that resonated deeply with Ambedkarite ideology. Laying flowers at the statue, Yadav addressed the media, saying, "Dr Ambedkar gave us a Constitution that guarantees our rights, our reservation, and a path of progress for the PDA (Pichhda,

Dalit, Alpsankhyak) communities. He overcame unimaginable discrimination and still gave India the most visionary and inclusive Constitution the world has seen." A sea of SP workers greeted him with chants of "Jai Bhim" and "Jai Akhilesh," waving posters of Dr Ambedkar and cheering as their leader made a symbolic appeal through his attire and words.

In his media interaction, Akhilesh Yadav underscored the Constitution's continuing relevance in protecting the marginalised. "It is the only document that guarantees dignity, equality, and justice to the underprivileged. Without it, many communities would still be voiceless," he asserted.

Reflecting on Dr Ambedkar's personal struggles, Yadav said, "Baba Saheb faced untouchability and rejection at every stage of his early life, yet he rose to become a global symbol of intellect and justice. His commitment to liberty, equality, and fraternity gave shape to our democratic republic." He also expressed concern over ongoing vandalism of Ambedkar statues across Uttar Pradesh.

"These are not random incidents. They reveal an ideological discomfort with Dr Ambedkar's vision—a political intent to



UP CM Yogi Adityanath with Deputy CM Brajesh Pathak during a ceremony to pay tribute to BR Ambedkar on his birth anniversary in Lucknow on Monday

erase what he stood for," Yadav alleged. Earlier, CM Yogi took to social media to extend his greetings, stating that Dr Ambedkar "dedicated his life to ending social injustice and empowering the deprived."

BSP supremo Mayawati also released a statement, calling Ambedkar Jayanti an occasion to renew the pledge toward social equality and justice. BJP MP Brijlaj emphasised the government's efforts for Dalit welfare, adding, "The BJP has launched numerous initiatives aimed at uplifting the Dalit community."

Beyond political tributes, the day was marked by cultural and educational events across the city. Ambedkar Udyan in Gomti Nagar hosted a bustling "Bheem Fair," featuring exhibitions, public talks, and literature inspired by Ambedkar's life and thoughts.

At Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (BBAU), students participated in a spirited "Bhim Walk" that traced the journey of Dr Ambedkar's life and ideals. In Hazratganj, the heart of the city turned into a visual tribute with a vibrant bike rally. Participants, wrapped in blue scarves and carrying flags bearing Ambedkar's image, rode through the streets, symbolising unity, resistance and pride.

# NDA to retain power under Nitish's leadership: Samrat

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary on Monday asserted that the NDA will retain power in the state and form the next government "under the leadership" of JD(U) president Nitish Kumar.

The BJP leader was talking to reporters on the sidelines of a function where Kumar launched 'Ambedkar Samagra Seva Abhiyan'.

A campaign aimed at ensuring that schemes meant for tribals and Dalits reached all the intended beneficiaries.

"Kudos to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for launching a drive on the birth anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar that shows his deep concern for SCs and STs," said Choudhary.

He added, "As part of the campaign, officials will take stock of the implementation of 22 schemes, including Ujjwala Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. All panchayats will be covered."

"Remedial action will be taken wherever the benefits may not have reached all the people."

Choudhary was also asked about the controversy sparked by a statement of Haryana Chief Minister Naib Singh Saini that "under the leadership of

Samrat Choudhary".

The party hoped to win the upcoming Assembly polls in Bihar.

The former Bihar BJP president replied, "The BJP-led NDA is running a government in the state under the leadership of Nitish Kumar.

"We look forward to forming the next government under his leadership." Choudhary lambasted RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav for suggesting that Saini's statement "makes it clear that the BJP will not allow Nitish to enjoy another term in office".

Choudhary said, "Tejashwi should tell us what his father and mother, who ruled Bihar for 15 years, did for the state.

"They could not even set up a medical college".

Incidentally, Choudhary was a minister in the cabinet of Yadav's mother Rabri Devi, who succeeded her husband Lalu Prasad, the RJD president, as the Chief Minister.

Choudhary also made light of Union minister Jitan Ram Manjhi alleging that the BJP did not give a fair deal to his Hindustani Awam Morcha in last year's Lok Sabha polls.

"It is only natural for all leaders to raise the demands of their party. It will be taken care of", the BJP leader said.

# Possibility of jihadi attacks against Christians made Centre to tighten rules

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Kochi

Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka. A series of synchronised serial blasts rocked three churches and three deluxe star hotels resulting in the death of 280 persons including 45 foreign nationals.

The victims include three police officers and eight suicide bombers while more than 500 persons were injured seriously. This was the first major casualty that struck the island nation after the dreaded LTTE and its leader Velupillai Prabhakaran were decimated by the Sri Lankan Army in 2009.

According to Sri Lankan media which quoted intelligence officers, the eight suicide bombers were members of National Thowheeth Jama'ath, an Islamic outfit in the island nation and had possible links with most of the terrorist organisations in West Asia. The churches that came under attack were at Colombo, Batticaloa and Negombo.

Though the terrorists had planned a second wave of suicide bombings, it was prevented by the timely intervention of the Sri Lankan security forces. If it could happen in Colombo and other places in Sri Lanka, what would have happened in New Delhi and other Indian cities is beyond imagination. With Tahawwur

Hussein Rana under its custody and the widespread riots in Bengal against the Waqf (amendment) Bill becoming a legislation, the "angels of peace" could strike anywhere, everywhere and anytime in India.

There are many leaders in the Opposition parties who do not want Rana to spill the beans. The outburst by an Islamist member of parliament in the run up to the enactment of the Waqf

**The decision not to allow permission for "way of the Cross" rally scheduled for Sunday by the Delhi administration**

Amendment Bill should be read along with this. The Madhya Pradesh Government's decision to ban Hanuman Jayanti rallies in Guna and even in New Delhi speak volumes about the concern of the Centre viz-a-viz the scheme of plans devised by the Islamists.

The decision not to allow permission for "Road to the Cross" rally scheduled for Sunday by the Delhi administration has drawn widespread condemnation from all secular political leaders ranging

from M A Baby of the CPI(M) to K C Venugopal, the Congress strongman.

They described the same as an attack on religious freedom assured in the Indian Constitution. But there was no reaction from these leaders regarding the ban on Hanuman Jayanti Rally and this is sheer hypocrisy, according to Stanly Sebastian, an educationist who is a devotee Christian.

He said there is a threat perception against the Christian community members from various Islamist outfits. "The chances are that the Jihadis are sure to strike during the Holy week that culminates with Easter and it could be the reason behind the Centre tightening the rules," said Sebastian.

The demand by former Maharashtra Chief Minister and veteran Congress leader Prithviraj Chauhan that Tahawwur Hussein Rana be provided with all legal help to ensure his human rights sounded dubious to many and they cannot be blamed for doubting about the Congress leader's alleged link with Rana.

It is this unprecedented concern over the safety of terrorists and scorn for the majority religion that is pushing the followers of Sanatan Dharma to the fold of Hindu zealots.

# TMC leaders planned attack on Hindus: Locals

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Hindu victims of Murshidabad violence blame the henchmen of local Trinamool Congress politicians including MLAs and MPs for orchestrating attacks on them that left hundreds of houses gutted and many hundred families leaving the district out of fear.

"We seen a TMC leader Kaushar Ali who is also the elder brother of local MLA from Farakka Munirul assembling men and directing them to attack the Hindu neighbourhoods, he was carrying a gun and even resorted to firing, they hurled bombs through the night and in the

morning a crowd came, pulled out an old sculptor and his son who make idols and hocked them to death, we have nowhere to go, our houses have been burnt, shops looted, so much so that we had to flee our houses for hour honour in a single saree and in some cases with newborn babies," locals said.

Jangipur, Shamsheganj and Sutti towns of Murshidabad, once the capital of Nawabs like Murshid Quli Khan, Aliwardi Khan and Siraj ud Daulah, has been burning for the past one week with a section of Muslim population coming out on the streets to protest against the newly amended Waqf Act. At least three persons have been killed and 20 others

including 15 policemen wounded in the violence prompting the Calcutta High Court to deploy central forces in the area.

In some areas the terrified women blocked the vehicle of ADG, BSF asking him not to leave the place "or else they will kill us when as soon as you leave." The women demanded BSF posting in the Hindu localities. "We have no faith in the police as they act as per the wishes of the TMC leaders who have been orchestrating the attacks from the past several days, are we living in India or Bangladesh," they wondered. When contacted Kaushar Ali however, said he was being framed by his political opponents. Whereas his MLA brother Munirul said his house too was

not spared by the attackers. "They are attacking my house also," he said.

Elsewhere TMC MLA from the neighbouring Bharatpur Humayun Kabir blamed the TMC legislators for the attacks. "Two MLAs and an MP, all of them come from Shamsheganj and Suti area where the violence took place, they are telling that they have no idea because the miscreants came from outside, it is not possible that things can take place without their knowledge, even if it is so, what their men were doing when the attacks took place, they cannot evade responsibility, it is a shame on Murshidabad if the Hindu brothers and sisters have to flee out of fear.

# AICTE, IIM Mumbai, IIT Delhi and Extra-C announce Crossword Contest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Patna

The fourth edition of the National Inter College Crossword Contest (NICE) 2025, India's most awaited crossword championship for college students, has been officially announced. Organised collaboratively by the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), IIM Mumbai, IIT Delhi and Extra-C, NICE 2025 promises an intellectually charged journey into the world of words, wit and lateral thinking.

NICE 2025 is open to all bona fide students from recognized colleges and universities across India. The contest, which has grown in stature and reach over the years,

offers a national platform to showcase linguistic dexterity, quick reasoning and a love for puzzles.

Freshers who have appeared for their Class 12 board examinations this year and are awaiting college admissions are also eligible to apply. The competition is structured in multiple phases which includes Online Phase where the Contest will begin with an online Practice Round to familiarise participants with clue formats.

The stage II which is also Zonal Rounds (Offline) will see top 50 participants from each of the five zones—North, South, East, West and Northeast—will qualify for the Zonal

Editor's TAKE

## A matter of faith, fear and politics

Issues of faith must be approached with inclusivity and mutual trust to avoid flare ups

In a nation as diverse as India, policies that touch religious life must be crafted with sensitivity, consultation, and fairness. Otherwise, what begins as lawmaking in Parliament risks becoming lawbreaking on the streets. Murshidabad, West Bengal, the latest flashpoint in sectarian violence, bears testimony to this. It has become the epicentre of communal tension following violent protests over the recently passed Waqf Amendment Bill, 2025. In Murshidabad, a district with a Muslim majority, protests turned violent on April 11-12, leading to the deaths of three people and over 150 arrests. Protesters, many affiliated with groups like the Social Democratic Party, clashed with police and allegedly targeted properties of other communities.

What began as demonstrations against the Central Government's move to reform the management of Islamic charitable properties has now escalated into deadly riot and clashes between the communities. Reportedly some 400 Hindu families have moved out of the district fearing for their life. Passed earlier this month by Parliament, the Waqf Amendment Bill, 2025, introduces structural changes to how Waqf properties are governed across India.

Waqf, an Islamic endowment of property for religious or charitable purposes, includes an estimated lakhs of crores of assets such as mosques, shrines, graveyards, and commercial land. What is frowned upon by the Muslims is the inclusion of non-Muslims in Waqf board management and centralised oversight mechanisms to address alleged corruption and mismanagement. Besides, greater government authority over registration and use of Waqf land.

While the Government argues that the amendments aim to enhance transparency and accountability, many Muslims view it as a targeted encroachment on their religious autonomy. Unlike other religious institutions in India, Muslim endowments would now potentially be overseen by those outside the faith — a move critics say undermines constitutional guarantees of minority rights. The Muslims see it as an attempt to infringe their religious rights as the bill singles out Muslim institutions for reform while leaving others untouched, reinforcing a narrative of discrimination. Inclusion of non-Muslims in managing Waqf boards is seen as a violation of religious self-governance.

Moreover, there are anxieties that Waqf lands could be taken over or repurposed under the guise of regulatory control. Ironically, the WAqf Bill may not be implemented in West Bengal as Mamata has assured people but then the protests turned into a game of political one-upmanship. The opposition leader Suvendu Adhikari of the BJP has accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress (TMC) Government of enabling "radical elements" and allowing a breakdown of law and order. Such demographic shifts can leave lasting scars, deepening mistrust and setting a precedent for further segregation along religious lines. Banerjee's administration is now walking a tightrope — balancing the concerns of a large Muslim population while also addressing the security concerns of minority Hindus in districts like Murshidabad.

This latest communal riot is unfortunate. People can have genuine grievances against the government policies but it does not give them right to target other community. It is the responsibility of the State Government to maintain law and order in the state and protect people's life and property.

The violence in Murshidabad is a wake-up call. It is not merely about a Bill, but about trust, representation, and the fragile fabric of Indian secularism. The State and Central Governments must work in tandem — not at odds — to prevent further communal alienation.

# Resetting the world order

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Ursula von der Leyen President of the European Commission share a common world view. Their leadership and synergy forges new pathways in global diplomacy, trade, and security

In a rapidly changing global landscape, countries across the world are striving to innovate and evolve — seeking deeper economic, strategic, and cultural integration. A united front has become essential to counter the disruptive ambitions of rising global actors and to address complex transnational challenges. In this context, India and the European Union emerge as natural partners, committed to shaping a more secure, prosperous, and cooperative world order.

This spirit of collaboration was evident during the recent visit of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, accompanied by the College of Commissioners, to India. The visit marked a significant moment in India-EU relations, taking place against the backdrop of major global shifts — including the reorientation of American economic policy under former United States President Donald Trump and the continuing, destabilising conflicts between Israel and Palestine as well as Russia and Ukraine.

The high-level meeting between India and the 27-member European Union has opened up new avenues for economic cooperation, trade negotiations, and investment protection. This dialogue has brought greater alignment among the EU nations and India, aiming for enhanced collaboration in Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. These efforts reflect the depth of understanding and mutual respect between the two sides.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ursula von der Leyen have demonstrated remarkable vision and strategic foresight in recent years. Their leadership has forged new pathways in global diplomacy, trade, and security. They have worked tirelessly to establish multiple channels for negotiation, with the goal of inclusive democratisation in world politics. Their approach emphasises innovation, strategic adaptability, and a commitment to addressing the needs of all stakeholders.

One of the most pressing concerns remains the need for global consensus on relaxing intellectual property rights under the TRIPS Agreement, especially related to vaccines. Facilitating access to life-saving medicines during health emergencies is vital. The growing consensus on climate change, renewable energy, and technological development is another area where India and the EU are finding common ground.

Their focus on sustainable energy, power generation, and a coordinated response to challenges posed by initiatives like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) bodes well for global peace and prosperity.

The 2019 Japan-EU agreement was a step in this direction. India and the EU have



enjoyed historically strong relations, with bilateral trade witnessing a significant surge over the past five years. Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands have emerged as major importers from India, while Germany, France, and Belgium remain key exporters to India. These relationships are being further strengthened through recent diplomatic engagements, promoting a stable environment for economic growth, free trade, and strategic cooperation.

The EU's Civil Protection System provided timely support to India during the devastating second wave of COVID-19. This humanitarian gesture created opportunities for deeper integration and expanded cooperation across a range of sectors. Diplomacy, especially during crises, thrives on timely gestures and coordinated responses. Leaders such as Emmanuel Macron of France and the Prime Ministers of Spain and Belgium have lauded India's efforts in tackling the pandemic, reaffirming the strength of India-EU relations.

While past negotiations on a Broad-Based Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) did not reach a final conclusion on issues like market access and foreign direct investment, the partnership continues to progress. There has been meaningful cooperation in areas like nuclear energy and environmental sustainabil-

ity. Future discussions may result in a robust strategic framework to address terrorism, international crime, drug trafficking, smuggling, and cyber threats posed by non-state actors.

Strengthening maritime cooperation is also on the agenda, particularly in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific regions. These areas are increasingly significant in global geopolitics. A collaborative partnership built on equity, timely assistance, and mutual respect can empower people and governments to respond effectively during crises.

Such initiatives will also promote long-term development across both regions. By adopting a new structural approach and rethinking traditional frameworks, stakeholders can maintain synergy even when facing divergent perspectives. A fresh, inclusive vision will be essential to manage global challenges.

One emerging area of concern is the misuse of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), or drones. While primarily used for commercial purposes, their affordability and accessibility make them vulnerable to exploitation by extremist groups. The repeated misuse of drones globally has raised major security concerns. India and the EU have recently begun a dialogue on this issue, recognising the urgent need to establish regulations and monitoring mechanisms.

This cooperation stems from a broader strategic roadmap that began with the "EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025," launched in July 2020. Another significant step was the 2021 conference focus-

ing on enhancing the strategic partnership. With ongoing conflicts in West Asia, the Russia-Ukraine war, and unrest in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the potential for misuse of technology by non-state actors remains high. Therefore, developing a common understanding through the European Union's Project on Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia is crucial.

The next major challenge will be establishing an effective regulatory framework for intelligence gathering and risk assessment. India-EU cooperation against terrorism must be supported by robust systems capable of addressing potential threats from biological, chemical, and nuclear attacks. These may be carried out by rogue individuals or extremist groups, making it essential to stay ahead through innovation and shared intelligence.

The current global landscape is undergoing rapid transformation. International relations must evolve to include a shared strategic vision and multilateral approaches to ensure mutual prosperity and global peace. In this spirit, there is an urgent need to develop international funding mechanisms to support education, healthcare, science, and technology. Even smaller nations are now increasingly affected by global economic and political changes, underscoring the need for a collective approach.

(The author, a recipient of the Bharat Gaurav and the Asian Achievers Award, is a professor and an expert on strategic affairs. Views are personal)



SUDHIR HINDWAN

## Leaderspeak



This latest escalation is a grim reminder: Russia was and remains the aggressor, in blatant violation of international law. Strong measures are urgently needed to enforce a ceasefire. Europe will continue to reach out to partners and maintain strong pressure on Russia until the bloodshed ends and a just and lasting peace is achieved, on Ukraine's terms and conditions. Europe stands with Ukraine and President Zelenskyy.

URSULA VON DER LEYEN, PRESIDENT EU COMMISSION

## The power of positive thinking

### SECOND Opinion

BY RAVI VALLURI

It is only natural to feel emotionally and energetically drained when surrounded by negativity. People who constantly complain or criticise can deplete our inner energy and lower our "prana" — the life force that sustains us. In contrast, individuals with a positive disposition uplift us. They radiate warmth and optimism, qualities that make them naturally likeable and often deeply inspiring.

True success in life is not merely measured by financial wealth. One may be a millionaire or an industry leader, but what truly matters is the legacy one leaves behind — a legacy that inspires future generations to innovate, create, and live with purpose. Take, for instance, Steve Jobs — co-founder of Apple and one of the most iconic innovators of our time. His life story is not just about creating revolutionary technology, but about a mindset — one rooted in curiosity, creativity, and resilience.

Despite his eccentric habits, including experimenting with LSD and following a strict fruitarian diet, Jobs maintained a sharp, forward-thinking mind that propelled Apple to unimaginable heights. His vision continues to influence the tech world long after his passing. Jobs wasn't perfect, but he embodied the power of positive action. Apple has continued to evolve, recently releasing the iPhone 16 — a tes-

tament to the enduring spark Jobs ignited. He proved that positively inclined individuals are capable of achieving the extraordinary. To them, the word "impossible" doesn't exist. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama once said, "In order to carry a positive action, we must develop here a positive vision." A person with such a vision is generous, productive, and constructive. They are not ego-driven or self-absorbed, but instead see their challenges as small compared to the larger suffering in the world.

Even when Steve Jobs faced a terminal illness like pancreatic cancer, his passion didn't waver. He continued to innovate, inspire, and strive for excellence. His life, though marked by physical deterioration, was also filled with immense creativity and unwavering drive. Khalil Gibran aptly described the selfish and self-absorbed, saying, "Wisdom ceases to be wisdom when it becomes too proud to weep, too grave to laugh, and too selfish to seek other than itself." Negativity, selfishness, and jealousy are detrimental to personal growth. We encounter such individuals in our lives — be it in families, workplaces, or social circles. They are quick to ask for help, but rarely offer it. In the long run, they lose the trust and respect of others. Positively inclined people, on the other hand, view money as a means, not an end. They live for a larger cause — one that includes serving society and uplifting others. This gives them inner peace and a sense of fulfilment that money alone cannot buy. Negativity, in contrast, leads only to dissatisfaction, strained relationships, and a hollow sense of existence. Creative and enthusiastic individuals are often

deeply immersed in their passions — whether it's technology, music, science, or art. This devotion becomes a form of meditation, bringing joy and meaning to their lives. Jobs led a remarkably simple life despite his wealth. Similarly, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, India's beloved "Missile Man," owned little material wealth, yet his vision and humility inspired an entire generation. Both men were spiritual in their own ways — Jobs drew from Zen philosophy and Indian meditation, while Kalam found solace in music and literature. Their lives remind us that success is as much about the spirit as it is about science. Truly productive individuals don't wear masks. They are authentic — what you see is what you get. Sports legends like Kapil Dev and Virender Sehwag, for instance, were aggressive on the field but warm and genuine off it. They didn't waste energy on gossip or criticism but channelled their focus into their craft. Another hallmark of such individuals is their refusal to wallow in self-pity. They don't let others' opinions define them.

Instead, they stay focused, take responsibility, and act with purpose. They step outside their comfort zones to help others, finding deep satisfaction in doing so. As Steve Jobs once said, "Being the richest man in the cemetery doesn't matter to me. Going to bed at night and saying we've done something wonderful — that's what matters to me." That sentiment captures the essence of a life well-lived — one that goes beyond wealth to create meaning, impact, and inspiration.

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

## Letters to the Editor

### Plight of airline passengers

Madam — This refers to the news, Air traffic congestion delays 450 flights at Delhi airport (April 13). Frequent disruptions of flights at Delhi's Indra Gandhi International Airport on account of air traffic congestion have heavily disturbed the visiting schedules of airline commuters. People going on important assignments or to attend medical emergencies suffer the most. This has become rather routine. Despite modern equipment adverse weather conditions have also led to disruption of arrivals and departures of flights.

Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) is accustomed to announcing "inconvenience regretted" through posts on its X handle. There is a heavy load on three runways that are operational at IGIA — and another runway is still not operational and under scheduled maintenance activities. IGIA — being the country's largest airport — has caused frequent disruption in flight operations.

Another aspect in this context is the pricing tariff war going on — like gambling — over one-to-one seat sale and purchase. Several times, airline commuters feel cheated and defeated. Adverse weather conditions are unavoidable, but the redressal of the grievances of airline commuters is the need of the hour — and it should be dealt with on priority in the interests of the commuters.

YUGAL KISHORE SHARMA | FARIDABAD

### From fear to freedom

Madam — Tribals, once living in fear under the shadow of Maoist violence, are now joining the mainstream of development. Data from the Union Home Ministry confirms a decline in Maoist violence, with significant progress in affected areas since 2010.

Robust intelligence, modern technology, and strategic operations by security forces have weakened Maoists. Their offer for peace talks signals that their base has collapsed. This victory belongs not only to the bravery of security forces but also to the government's policies and the public's unwavering trust in democracy.

In states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha, roads, schools, hospitals, and job opportunities have brought new light to tribal lives.

Between 2014 and 2024, road networks in Maoist areas grew by over 50 per cent — easing connectivity and opening paths to economic prosperity. Yet, the journey remains incomplete.

Education and healthcare services need further strengthening to erase the last traces of Maoism. It is time to make these regions symbols of a fear-free and prosperous India. This story of liberation from Maoism is a true triumph of democracy, development, and social harmony — laying a strong foundation for a secure India for future generations.

RK JAIN | BARWANI

### West Bengal Govt fails Murshidabad

Madam — Apropos of the headlines (14 April) on Murshidabad violence and the fleeing of hundreds of ill-fated Hindus from Murshidabad fearing catastrophic persecution at the hands of violent and bloodthirsty mobs opposing the Waqf Amendment Law passed in Parliament and enacted after the President's assent.

The role of the TMC government and CM Mamata Banerjee in inciting and supporting the opposition of the Waqf Amendment Law — and failing to control the irate mobs attacking Hindus — is certainly deplorable. The High Court had to order deployment of paramilitary forces to contain violence. Implementation of Waqf law is the prerogative of the state government, so Mamata Banerjee was fully and constitutionally empowered to do so.

The Supreme Court has taken cognisance of the disputes raised by Muslim clergy and politicians — though their opposition does not emanate from the Waqf clauses. They don't even refer to Waqf law clauses while opposing the law. There are no Waqf boards in Islamic countries, so the Muslim leaders and clergy fail to convince how Waqf law is against their religion. The apparent reason for the Waqf law opposition is the apprehension of evacuation of illegally possessed properties by Waqf boards — and misuse of the Waqf assets by the vested interests in the Waqf boards

VINOD JOSHI | DELHI

### DELIMITATION AND THE CONCERNS OF SOUTHERN STATES

Speaking at the launch of the book *Demography, Representation, Delimitation*, written by Ravi K Mishra, a scholar who has researched modern Indian political history, and the history of China and Canada, scholar-economist Meghnad Desai described India as a "multi-ethnic nation." With growing conflict between the southern and northern states regarding delimitation, Desai rightly suggested that some criteria should be fixed, such as no state receiving fewer seats than those it currently holds.

He further stated, "India is a conglomeration of many nations. Every linguistic state considers itself a nation. And we are building a civilisation. So, you have to respect the dignity of every nation and its right to be part of the Indian Union."

Desai also advised the central government to avoid prematurely rejecting solutions, warning, "Don't ban the solution before starting the talks. Don't begin by saying, 'We have 545 seats now, but we cannot have more than 700 seats.'"

The announcement by Home Minister Amit Shah to implement the delimitation provision, long on hold, has greatly agitated the southern states. Leaders like Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu have urged citizens to have more children. Though the Central Government may try to downplay this as an imagined fear, it is not that simple. The South is an integral part of India. Thus, the Central Government should address their concerns, such as:

Will the political power of the southern states be reduced in Parliament?

Will their share of revenue be diminished?

Will their influence on key national issues and decisions be weakened?

Will this delimitation threaten federalism?

Will it result in injustice to the southern states in terms of democracy?

JANG BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

# Ghibli-fied: The rise of digital escapism

Generative AI has sparked a new cultural wave — one that's as enchanting as it is unsettling. The latest phenomenon? Ghibli AI — a trend that transforms ordinary selfies into dreamy, Studio Ghibli-style portraits, flooding our timelines with wide-eyed nostalgia

FIRST Column



In attempting to become art, we may be rendering art flat, predictable, and mechanised. Moreover, this frenzy sets a dangerous precedent, where the most consumed visuals are not the ones made by human hands but the ones conjured by code.

In this light, the Ghibli trend is not just a creative outlet, it's a cultural warning. A glimpse into a future where originality might become indistinguishable from imitation.

The Ghibli AI art generator is not merely a toy. It is a cultural artefact of our times, revealing everything from our psychological needs to our digital dependencies.

Gone are the days when art was defined by its process, from its conception stage to the technique and the presentation.

Traditionally, the journey of creating art was as valued as the final product. Artists spent years mastering their craft, developing unique techniques, and pouring their lived experiences into their work.

The art appreciation was not just for the final product; it was also for the sheer amount of hard work, thought process, and passion for the craft.

A painter might spend months perfecting a portrait, a musician might iterate through countless melodies before finding the right composition, and a writer might revise a manuscript dozens of times before publication.

These processes were integral to the art itself, often visible in brushstrokes, musical motifs, or literary styles. Unfortunately, in the age of Generative AI, this elaborate creative process is now often reduced to a prompt — a few words typed into a text box. "Create a surrealist landscape in the style of Salvador Dali with melting clocks by a seashore at sunset."

Within seconds, an AI system can generate an image that bears a striking resemblance to Dali's work, without any understanding of surrealism's philosophical underpinnings or Dali's personal experiences that informed his distinctive style.

As we navigate this brave new world of AI-generated art, we must reconcile our fascination with technological possibility with our reverence for human creativity.

The Ghibli AI phenomenon isn't merely a passing trend but a pivotal moment that challenges our understanding of art itself.

Perhaps the solution isn't to resist these tools but to redefine our relationship with them — using AI not as a replacement for human creativity but as an extension of it.

In this delicate balance lies the future of art: one where technology amplifies human expression rather than diminishing its value, preserving the soul behind the creation.

(The writer is Former Civil Servant, writes on Cinema and Strategic Communication. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan. Views are personal)



CHAITANYA K. PRASAD

emotional connections. But there's a flipside: virality-driven branding risks becoming shallow and performative.

As trends like "Dalgona coffee" and "Barbiecore" show, the thirst for belonging can foster a culture of reinvention rooted in fear of irrelevance; alienating those who can't or won't keep up. Beneath the charm of Ghibli-fied faces lies a stark reality: vast amounts of facial and emotional data are being fed into opaque AI systems.

These generators harvest biometric inputs, aesthetic preferences, and mood cues; treasured assets



BEYOND THE REALM OF BRANDING AND PRIVACY, THERE LIES A MORE EXISTENTIAL CONCERN: WHAT BECOMES OF ART ITSELF? WHAT ARE WE LOSING IN THIS TIDAL WAVE OF ALGORITHMIC BEAUTY?

for advertisers and algorithmic profiling. Users may be unknowingly trading privacy for pixels. This gamified engagement masks a growing risk: manipulation, deepfakes, and surveillance capitalism.

As play blurs with peril, we must ask: are we surrendering control for digital prettiness? The Ghibli AI trend is both a mirror and a warning: a reflection of our yearning and a reminder of the agency we must not give away. Beyond the realm of branding and privacy, there lies a more existential concern: what becomes of art itself?

What are we losing in this tidal wave of algorithmic beauty? As everyone begins to look like a Ghibli protagonist, the uniqueness of the aesthetic begins to dilute. Mass replication may be the enemy of meaning.

## A blow to public education's integrity

With thousands of appointments declared void in West Bengal and the State Government under fire, the scandal underscores the urgent need for transparency and accountability in public sector recruitment, especially in education



BK SINGH

didates. The court on humanitarian grounds allowed differently abled candidates to continue in the job and draw salaries, even though the entire process of selection was cancelled.

The bribe for job controversy had led to the 2022 arrest of former state's education Minister Partha Chatterjee, who was charged by ED for money laundering.

Authorities had seized more than 49 crore rupees in cash from the flats of his aide and Chatterjee has been in jail for years. West Bengal Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee, refused to accept the court's verdict and vowed to take it up for review. She accused BJP and CPM of trying to destabilise Bengal's education system and questioned why other recruitment scandals,

such as Madhya Pradesh's Vyapam scam, had not faced similar legal consequences. She met the teachers terminated by the Supreme Court a few days ago at Netaji Indoor Stadium, Kolkata, and promised them to provide jobs in other departments, in case the state fails to find a favourable decision in review.

Her Education Minister Bratya Basu constituted a liaison committee with representatives of affected school staff, who would deal with the state's legal team comprising Abhishek Manu Singhvi, Kapil Sibal, Rakesh Dwivedi, Kalyan Banerjee, and Prashant Bhushan to safeguard the rights of the eligible teachers.

First and foremost, the state should have a check and balance system so that the irregularities found in recruitment are not carried forward. The recruitment by the School Service Commission, where fraud has occurred, has been in progress from 2016 to 2021.

Even after the scam came to light in 2021, it was incumbent on the state to

make alternative arrangements and take up a transparent and impartial process to recruit a new set of teaching staff. There is no dearth of talent in the state. There are sincere and meritorious candidates, who do not have any Godfather to promote their candidature. They are generally from a humble background and will not have sufficient money to pay the bribe. Only a fair and impartial examination system for recruitment can provide them with an opportunity.

Nearly half a century ago, government schools in West Bengal and many other states provided a platform for students from humble backgrounds to rise in life. The teachers those days used to be extraordinary. Once they explained the topic in the class, one only needed to revise at home and there was never any need for tuition in extra hours. Teachers were also available to students to clear any doubt during breaks and when they had free periods. Further, before taking up a fresh topic in the class, they were in the habit of review-

ing how students had understood the previous chapter and took pleasure in explaining the concepts again, where the understanding was lagging. Besides, some brighter students took it upon themselves to help those who lagged. There was no culture of tuition even in subjects like Science and Mathematics. My several friends cracked Indian Institute of Technology's entrance examination for admission in Engineering trades for graduation. They were attentive in classes, and did not undergo any IIT coaching.

These days, no one gets admission even in ordinary Engineering and Medical colleges without two years of rigorous coaching. Government schools and colleges often imparted superior training to students, as compared to private institutions. In my case, I did not get admission to a Government intermediate college, as my 10th standard marks were below the cut-off. Nevertheless, I got wonderful teachers of Physics and Mathematics in a private institution named DB Inter College

Gorakhpur, who nicely trained me to utilise my full potential in learning the subjects. I am especially thankful to my Mathematics Teacher Sri Sambhoo Saran Dubey, whose meticulous training to approach any problem in the subject led to immense confidence building in me, which helped to crack UPSC's Indian Forest Service Examination in 1975. Dubey sir spent time on weak students too. He conducted extra classes on holidays without any additional emoluments.

The trends in the education system differ these days; Science, Engineering and Mathematics students do not opt for the subjects they graduated from in UPSC's competitive examinations. Engineering graduates from even IIT opt for Geology and Forestry in Indian Forest Service exams and Anthropology/Geography in Civil Services.

The course materials in altogether new subjects as well as the coaching are available in all major cities of the country helping them to crack the exams. Why these days students lack confidence in their core Science subjects? It adversely reflects on the system. They do not have a solid foundation in the subject. Imagine the degeneration in the system visible to present-day senior citizens over five decades.

What worse can we expect when there is corruption in the recruitment of the teaching staff? Such teachers' heads hang in shame and cannot face students and parents when questioned regarding the payment of bribes for their appointments.

The most striking part is the degradation of standards in government schools over this period. The corruption and inefficiency in the governments is to fully account for such downfall.

Society has also changed and there has been a mushrooming of private institutions, which is unaffordable for students from humble backgrounds.

Let the governments focus on corruption-free administration in the education system. When the wrongdoing was pointed out in selection of West Bengal teachers in 2021-22, the state should have immediately gone for fresh recruitments and saved four years for students.

(The writer is Retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Karnataka. Views are personal)

# Israel hit Gaza hospital on Palm Sunday, kills 21

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Deir al-Balah**  
 A wave of Israeli strikes across Gaza on Sunday hit a hospital and other sites, killing at least 21 people, including children, as Israel vowed to expand its security presence in the small coastal strip.  
 The predawn strike on Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City was the latest of several attacks on northern Gaza's last major hospital providing critical health care.  
 Hospital director Dr. Fadel Naim said the emergency room, pharmacy and surrounding buildings were severely damaged, affecting over 100 patients and dozens of staff.  
 One patient, a girl, died during the evacuation following an Israeli warning because staff were unable to provide urgent care, Gaza's Health Ministry said. Israel said it struck a Hamas command and control center at the hospital, without providing evidence. Hamas denied the allegations.  
 Al-Ahli Hospital is run by the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, which condemned the attack, saying in a statement it happened on "Palm Sunday, the start of the Holy Week, the most sacred week of the Christian year."  
 Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and worshippers in Gaza City marked it in a church whose gilded trim and intact walls were a contrast to the widespread debris elsewhere.  
 Associated Press video showed the hospital's caved-in roof surrounded by rubble.

The health ministry's director general, Dr. Munir al-Boursh, said patients had been carried outside in beds and slept in the streets.  
 "Nothing was left safe inside the hospital, or all over Gaza," said Mohammad Abu Nasser, an injured man who sat on his bed outdoors and looked at the destruction.  
 The health ministry said the hospital was temporarily out of service and patients were transferred to other hospitals in Gaza City. The aid group Medical Aid for Palestinians called it the fifth attack on Al-Ahli since the war began.  
 Hospitals have special protection under international law. Israel has besieged and raided them, some several times, and struck multiple ones while accusing Hamas of using them as cover for its fighters.  
 Last month Israel struck Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, the largest in southern Gaza, killing two people and causing a large fire, the health ministry said. The facility had been overwhelmed when Israel ended a two-month ceasefire last month with a surprise wave of airstrikes.  
 Hours later Sunday, a strike on a car in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza killed at least seven people including six brothers, according to staff at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies. The youngest brother was 10.  
 Their father, Ibrahim Abu Mahadi, said his sons worked for a charity that distributes food to Palestinians. "For what sin were they killed?" he said.



Volunteers and emergency workers search for bodies and survivors from the rubble of the Manoun family's house after it was targeted by an Israeli army strike in Jabalia al-Balad, Gaza City on Sunday

AP reporters saw the mangled, bloodied car as relatives wept over the bodies. Israel's military asserted that it killed the deputy head of a Hamas sniper cell.  
 An airstrike Sunday afternoon hit a house in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza, killing at least seven people including two women, according to the Indonesian hospital.

A pregnant woman was rescued from the rubble. Alaa Manoun later wept after learning her youngest daughter had died, along with her husband and her mother. Two other daughters, ages 4 and 7, were injured.  
 Manoun had a broken ankle but otherwise seemed OK, according to a doctor. No scan was available, since the only machine

in northern Gaza was at Al-Ahli Hospital, now damaged.  
 "We don't know whose body is this and whose body is that," said a neighbor, Abdallah Dardouna. "There is no resistance, there is no Qassam, no Hamas, there is no one here. It's only civilians here."  
 Another strike in Deir al-Balah hit a municipal building and killed at least three

people, according to Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital. In Khan Younis, a strike killed at least three people, according to staff at Nasser Hospital.  
 Israel's military said in a statement it had struck over 90 militant targets over the past 48 hours including command and control centers, tunnels and weapons. The military also said it had intercepted a projectile fired from Gaza.  
 The war started when Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, during an Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel and took 250 people captive. Many were eventually freed in ceasefire deals.  
 Israeli authorities have vowed to pressure Hamas to release the remaining 59 hostages, 24 believed to be alive, and accept new ceasefire terms. It cut off all supplies to Gaza over a month ago.  
 More than 50,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's retaliatory offensive, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its count but says more than half of the dead have been women and children.  
 Israel's military said a missile was launched from Yemen on Sunday afternoon and the details were under review. Sirens sounded in several parts of Israel and the occupied West Bank. There were no reports of casualties or damage.  
 The Iranian-backed Houthis rebels in Yemen continue to target Israel in what they have called solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza.

## Trump targets TV channel for going after him

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington**  
 President Donald Trump bitterly attacked "60 Minutes" shortly after the CBS newsmagazine broadcast stories on Ukraine and Greenland on Sunday, saying the network was out of control and should "pay a big price" for going after him.  
 "Almost every week, 60 Minutes ... Mentions the name TRUMP in a derogatory and defamatory way, but this Weekend's BROADCAST tops them all," the president said on his Truth Social platform.  
 He called on Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr to impose maximum fines and punishment "for their unlawful and illegal behaviour."  
 The network had no immediate com-

ment.  
 Trump has an ongoing \$20 billion lawsuit against "60 Minutes" for how it edited an interview with Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris last fall. The president claims it was edited in a way to make Harris look good, something the newscast denies.  
 But there are ongoing reports that Trump's lawyers and CBS' parent company are involved in settlement talks. Carr and the FCC have launched a parallel investigation of CBS News about the same case, one of several that it has undergone that also involve ABC News, NBC, PBS, NPR and the Walt Disney Co.  
 Despite the legal battle, "60 Minutes" has been unflinching in its coverage of Trump's administration since he took office for a second term, particularly correspondent Scott Pelley. He travelled to

Ukraine to conduct an interview with that country's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, on the site of a Russian attack where nine children were killed earlier this month.  
 In the interview broadcast on Sunday, Zelenskyy said he has "100 per cent" hatred for Russian President Vladimir Putin for the invasion of Ukraine, and invited Trump to his visit his country to see what has been done.  
 Also Sunday, correspondent Jon Wertheim reported from Greenland on what some people in that nation are saying about Trump's desire to take control.  
 In his social media message, Trump said "60 Minutes" was no longer a news show but "a dishonest Political Operative simply disguised as News," and must be responsible for what they have done, and are doing.

## Tariff exemptions are temporary, chip tariffs coming: US Commerce Secretary

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Nashville**  
 Tariff exemptions announced Friday on electronics like smartphones and laptops are only a temporary reprieve until the Trump administration develops a new tariff approach specific to the semiconductor industry, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said Sunday.  
 "They're exempt from the reciprocal tariffs but they're included in the semiconductor tariffs, which are coming in probably a month or two," Lutnick told ABC's "This Week" on Sunday.  
 President Donald Trump added to the confusion hours later, declaring on social media that there was no "exception" at all because the goods are "just moving to a different" bucket and will still face a 20 per cent tariff as part of his administration's move to punish China for its role in fentanyl trafficking.  
 The Trump administration late Friday had said it would exclude electronics from broader so-called reciprocal tariffs, a move that could help keep the prices down for popular consumer devices that aren't usually made in the US.



US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick

The move was expected to benefit big tech companies like Apple and Samsung and chip makers like Nvidia, though the uncertainty of future tariffs may rein in an expected tech stock rally on Monday.  
 US Customs and Border Protection said items like smartphones, laptops, hard drives, flat-panel monitors and some chips would qualify for the exemption. Machines used to make semiconductors are excluded too. That means they won't be subject to most of the tariffs levied on China or the 10 per cent baseline tariffs elsewhere.  
 It's the latest tariff change by the Trump administration, which has made several U-turns in its massive plan to put tariffs in place on goods from most countries. Lutnick's comments Sunday made clear that more changes were on the way, including a policy specific to the computer chip industry.  
 On Air Force One Saturday night, President Donald Trump told reporters he would get into more specifics on exemptions on Monday. In his post Sunday on TruthSocial, he promised the White House was "taking a look at Semiconductors and the WHOLE ELECTRONICS SUPPLY CHAIN in the upcoming National Security Tariff Investigations."  
 Some had assumed the exemption filed Friday night reflected the president's real-

ization that his China tariffs are unlikely to shift more manufacturing of smartphones, computers and other gadgets to the US any time soon, if ever.  
 The administration has predicted that the trade war prod Apple to make iPhones in the US for the first time, but that was an unlikely scenario after Apple spent decades building up a finely calibrated supply chain in China.  
 What's more, it would take several years and cost billions of dollars to build new plants in the US, and then confront Apple with economic forces that could triple the price of an iPhone, threatening to torpedo sales of its marquee product.  
 The turmoil has battered the stocks of tech's "Magnificent Seven" — Apple, Microsoft, Nvidia, Amazon, Tesla, Google parent Alphabet and Facebook parent Meta Platforms.  
 At one point, the Magnificent Seven's combined market value had plunged by \$2.1 trillion, or 14 per cent, from April 2 when Trump unveiled sweeping tariffs on a wide range of countries. When Trump paused the tariffs outside of China on Wednesday, the lost value in those companies was pared to \$644 billion, or a 4 per cent decline.  
 An electronics exemption would fulfill

the kind of friendly treatment that industry was envisioning when Apple CEO Tim Cook, Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Google CEO Sundar Pichai, Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos assembled behind the president during his January 20 inauguration.  
 That united display of fealty reflected Big Tech's hopes that Trump would be more accommodating than President Joe Biden's administration.  
 Apple won praise from Trump in late February when the Cupertino, California, company committed to invest \$500 billion and add 20,000 jobs in the US during the next four years. The pledge was an echo of a \$350 billion investment commitment in the U.S. That Apple made during Trump's first term when the iPhone was exempted from China tariffs.  
 The move removes "a huge black cloud overhang for now over the tech sector and the pressure facing US Big Tech," said Wedbush analyst Dan Ives in a research note. Ives amended that note after Lutnick's comments Sunday, saying the confusing news out of the White House "is dizzying for the industry and investors and creating massive uncertainty and chaos for companies trying to plan their supply chain, inventory, and demand."

## Trump team tries to project confidence and calm after tariffs rattle markets

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Atlanta**  
 Trump administration officials were out in force across the television networks Sunday defending President Donald Trump's economic policies after another week of reeling markets that saw the Republican administration reverse course on some of its steepest tariffs.  
 Trump, meanwhile, said on his social media platform that there ultimately will be no exemptions for his sweeping tariff agenda, disputing characterizations that he has granted tariff exceptions for certain electronics, including smart phones, whose production is concentrated in China. Rather, Trump said, "those products are subject to the existing 20per cent Fentanyl Tariffs, and they are just moving to a different Tariff bucket."  
 White House advisers and Cabinet members tried to project confidence and calm amid Trump's on-again, off-again approach to tariffs on imported goods from around the world. But their explanations about the overall agenda, coupled with Trump's latest statements, also reflected shifting narratives from a president who, as a candidate in 2024, promised an immediate economic boost and lower prices but now asks American businesses and consumers for patience.  
 A week ago, Trump's team stood by his promise to leave the impending tariffs in place without exceptions. They used their latest news show appearances to defend his

**A week ago, Trump's team stood by his promise to leave the impending tariffs in place without exceptions. They used their latest news show appearances to defend his move**  
 move to ratchet back to a 10 per cent universal tariff for most nations except China (145 per cent), while seeming to grant exemptions for certain electronics like smartphones, laptops, hard drives, flat-panel monitors and semiconductor chips.  
 There are varying answers on the purpose of the tariffs. Long before launching his first presidential campaign in 2015, Trump bemoaned the offshoring of US manufacturing. His promise is to reindustrialise the United States and eliminate trade deficits with other countries.  
 Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, interviewed on CBS' "Face the Nation," played up national security. "You've got to realize this is a national security issue," he said, raising the worst-case scenarios of what could happen if the US were involved in a war.  
 "We don't make medicine in this country anymore. We don't make ships. We don't have enough steel and aluminum to fight a battle, right?" he said.  
 Lutnick stuck to that national security framing, but White House trade adviser

Peter Navarro focused more on the import taxes being leverage in the bigger economic puzzle.  
 "The world cheats us. They have been cheating us for decades," Navarro said on NBC's "Meet the Press." He cited practices such as dumping products at unfairly low prices, currency manipulation and barriers to U.S. Auto and agricultural products entering foreign markets.  
 Navarro insisted the tariffs would yield broader bilateral trade deals to address all those issues. But he also relied on a separate justification when discussing China: the illicit drug trade.  
 "China has killed over a million people with their fentanyl," he said.  
 Speaking before Trump's Truth Social post disputing the notion of exemptions, Lutnick alluded to that coming policy. "They're going to have a special focus-type of tariff to make sure that those products get reshored," he told ABC's "This Week."  
 The status of negotiations with other nations, including China, remains fuzzy.  
 With the higher rates set to be collected beginning April 9, administration officials argued that other countries would rush to the negotiating table.  
 "I've heard that there are negotiations ongoing and that there are a number of offers," Kevin Hassett, director of the White House Economic Council, told ABC. He claimed that "more than 50 countries (were) reaching out," though he did not name any.

## As Hungary bans LGBTQ+ Pride, what does it mean for other basic rights?

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Budapest**  
 Hungarian lawmakers are preparing to vote on a constitutional amendment viewed by many critics as both a crackdown on the freedoms of assembly and expression and the most recent move by the populist government to restrict the rights of LGBTQ+ communities.  
 The amendment, which will almost certainly be passed Monday by the two-thirds majority of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's nationalist Fidesz party, would permanently codify a ban on public events held by LGBTQ+ communities — including the popular Pride event that draws thousands annually in the capital, Budapest.  
 It will also provide a constitutional basis for denying the gender identities or sexual characteristics of minority groups, and allow for some Hungarians to have their citizenship suspended if they are deemed to pose a threat to Hungary's security or sovereignty.  
 Here's what the amendment will do,

what it entails for LGBTQ+ Hungarians, and for some of the basic rights of all citizens in the Central European nation.  
 The amendment, the 15th to Hungary's constitution since it was unilaterally authored and approved by the ruling Fidesz-KDNP coalition in 2011, gives legal support to a law fast-tracked in March that made it an offense to hold or attend events that violate the country's contentious "child protection" legislation, which prohibits the "depiction or promotion" of homosexuality to minors aged under 18.  
 That law also allows authorities to use facial recognition tools to identify individuals that attend prohibited events — such as Budapest Pride — and can come with fines for violators of up to 200,000 Hungarian forints (\$546).  
 Some legal experts have argued that such a restriction on assembly rights violates Hungary's constitution. In order to bring the Pride ban in line with constitutional protections, the amendment declares that children's rights to moral, physical and spiritual development super-

**This declaration will provide a constitutional basis for denying the gender identities of transgender people, as well as ignoring the existence of intersex individuals, who are born with atypical sexual characteristics**  
 sede any other fundamental right other than the right to life — including that to peacefully assemble.  
 The amendment also declares that "a person's sex at birth is a biological characteristic and can be either male or female" — an expansion of an earlier amendment that prohibits same-sex adoption by stating that a mother is a woman and a father is a man.  
 This declaration will provide a constitutional basis for denying the gender identities of transgender people, as well as ignoring the existence of intersex individ-

uals, who are born with atypical sexual characteristics that do not align with binary conceptions of male and female.  
 The human rights agency of the United Nations has written that up to 1.7 per cent of the global population is born with intersex traits.  
 The amendment, as well as previous legislation targeting LGBTQ+ communities, is reminiscent of similar restrictions against sexual minorities in Russia. Orbán, seen as Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest ally in the European Union, has in recent years prohibited same-sex adoption and banned any LGBTQ+ content including in television, films, advertisements and literature that is available to minors.  
 His government argues that its policies are designed to protect children from "sexual propaganda," but critics view them as part of a broader effort to scapegoat sexual minorities and mobilize his conservative base.  
 Hungary has taken vigorous steps in recent months to protect its national sovereignty from what it claims are foreign

efforts to influence its politics or even topple Orbán's government.  
 The self-described "illiberal" leader has accelerated his longstanding efforts to crack down on critics such as media outlets and groups devoted to civil rights and anti-corruption, which he says have undermined Hungary's sovereignty by receiving financial assistance from international donors.  
 In a speech laden with conspiracy theories in March, Orbán compared people who work for such groups to insects, and pledged to "eliminate the entire shadow army" of foreign-funded "politicians, judges, journalists, pseudo-NGOs and political activists."  
 As part of the government's sovereignty protection efforts, the newest constitutional amendment will make it possible to suspend the Hungarians' citizenship if they are deemed to pose a threat to public order, public security or national security.  
 Such suspensions would apply to Hungarian citizens who also hold citizen-

ship of another country that is not a member of the EU or European Economic Area. Such suspensions may last for a maximum of 10 years.  
 The passage of the law banning Pride set off a wave of protests in Hungary with thousands taking to the streets to demand the restoration of assembly rights. Demonstrators employed the tactic of blocking bridges and major thoroughfares in Budapest, something Orbán later said would be prohibited by new legislation.  
 Reacting to the ban on Pride, local organizers wrote: "This is not child protection, this is fascism."  
 On Monday, when lawmakers vote to approve the constitutional amendment, the opposition Momentum party will attempt to blockade the parliament and prevent the vote from taking place. The party accused Orbán's government of being an "intimidating and cowardly power," writing on social media: "Let's collectively prevent them from leading us down the Putin road and depriving us of our freedom."



# 'No winners' in tariff war: China's Xi

# MP Tulip Siddiq denies corruption allegations

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Hanoi**

China's leader Xi Jinping started a week of diplomacy in Southeast Asia with a visit to Vietnam on Monday, signaling China's commitment to global trade, just after US President Donald Trump upended the global economy with his latest tariffs moves. Although Trump has paused some tariffs, China was the outlier, as he has kept in place 145 per cent tariffs on the world's second-largest economy.



Chinese President Xi Jinping and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh posing for photos at the office of the Party Central Committee in Hanoi in Vietnam on Monday

Xi's visit this week lets China show Southeast Asia it is a "responsible superpower in the way that contrasts with the way the US under President Donald Trump presents to the whole world," said Nguyen Khac Giang, a visiting fellow at Singapore's ISEAS — Yusof Ishak Institute. China also can work to shore up its alliances and find solutions for the high trade barrier that the US has on Chinese exports. "There are no winners in a trade war, or a tariff war," Xi wrote in an editorial jointly published in Vietnamese and Chinese official media. "Our two countries should resolutely safeguard the multilateral trading system, stable global industrial and supply chains, and open and cooperative international environment."

Xi's visit this week lets China show Southeast Asia it is a "responsible superpower in the way that contrasts with the way the US under President Donald Trump presents to the whole world," said Nguyen Khac Giang, a visiting fellow at Singapore's ISEAS — Yusof Ishak Institute. China also can work to shore up its alliances and find solutions for the high trade barrier that the US has on Chinese exports. "There are no winners in a trade war, or a tariff war," Xi wrote in an editorial jointly published in Vietnamese and Chinese official media. "Our two countries should resolutely safeguard the multilateral trading system, stable global industrial and supply chains, and open and cooperative international environment."

While Xi's trip likely was planned earlier, it has become significant because of the tariff fight between China and the US, the world's two largest economies. In Vietnam, Xi will meet with Vietnam's

the coercive and self-interested US. There will be a lot of expectations about what type of leadership and initiatives China is going to come up with at this time of crisis," she said.

Vietnam is experienced at balancing its relations with the US and China. It is run under a Communist, one-party system like China but has had a strong relationship with the US.

In 2023, it was the only country that received both US President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping. That year it also upgraded the US to its highest diplomatic level, the same as China and Russia. Vietnam was one of the biggest beneficiaries of countries trying to decouple their supply chains from China, as businesses moved here. China is its biggest trading partner, and China-Vietnam trade surged 14.6 per cent year-on-year in 2024, according to Chinese state media.

But the intensification of the trade war has put Vietnam in a "very precarious situation" given the impression in the US that Vietnam is serving as a backdoor for Chinese goods, said Giang, the analyst at Singapore's ISEAS — Yusof Ishak Institute. Vietnam had been hit with 46 per cent tariffs under Trump's order before the 90-day pause. China and Vietnam have real long-term differences. They have disputes over territory in the South China Sea, and Vietnam has faced off with China's coast guard but does not often publicise the confrontations.

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London**

Labour Party MP Tulip Siddiq, the niece of Bangladesh's deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has denied any wrongdoing after reports emerged of an arrest warrant issued by Dhaka's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). Siddiq resigned as UK treasury minister in January this year, saying her family connections were becoming a "distraction" for the work of Prime Minister Keir Starmer-led government.

Her spokesperson in a statement over the weekend said the allegations of corruption against Siddiq were "completely false" and her lawyers had dealt with that. "The ACC has made various allegations against Siddiq through the media in the last few months. The allegations are completely false and have been dealt with in writing by Siddiq's lawyers," the spokesperson said. "The ACC has not responded to Ms Siddiq or put any allegations to her directly or through her lawyers. Siddiq knows nothing about a hearing in Dhaka relating to her and has no knowledge of any arrest warrant that is said to have been issued," the statement said.

Addressing the specific claims, the spokesperson stressed there was "no basis at all" for any charges to be made against London-based Siddiq, and there was

"absolutely no truth" in any allegation that she received a plot of land in Dhaka through illegal means. "She has never had a plot of land in Bangladesh and has never influenced any allocation of plots of land to her family members or anyone else. No evidence has been provided by the ACC to support this or any other allegation made against Siddiq," the spokesperson said.

The 42-year-old Labour MP for Hampstead and Highgate in north London attempted to distance herself from the flurry of allegations emanating from Bangladesh and reiterated in her resignation letter that her "family connections are a matter of public record".

In the letter released by 10 Downing Street back in January, Siddiq pointed out that Starmer's independent adviser on ministers' interests had not found her in breach of the ministerial code and asserted that she had not "acted improperly".

In response, Starmer praised her role in spearheading the rollout of Banking Hubs and leading the government's thinking on financial inclusion in her junior ministerial role as Economic Secretary to the Treasury. As there is no formal extradition treaty between the UK and Bangladesh, further steps following reports of the Bangladeshi arrest warrant remain unclear.

# US airstrikes kill six people in Yemen

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai**

Suspected US airstrikes around Yemen's rebel-held capital killed at least six people and wounded 30 overnight, the Houthis said on Monday.

Since its start nearly a month ago, the intense campaign of US airstrikes under President Donald Trump targeting the rebels over their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea waters related to the Israel-Hamas war has killed over 120 people, according to casualty figures released by the Houthis' Health Ministry.

Footage aired by the Houthis' al-Masirah satellite news channel showed firefighters spraying water on a raging fire they described as being sparked by the airstrikes. Rubble littered a street as rescuers carried one person away from the site, which the rebels claimed was a ceramics factory in the Bani Matar neighbourhood of Sanaa, the capital.

The US military's Central Command, which oversees American military operations, did not acknowledge the strikes. That follows a pattern for the command, which now has authorisation from the White House to conduct strikes at will in the campaign that began March 15.

The American military also hasn't been providing any information on targets hit. The White House has said over 200 strikes have been conducted so far.

An AP review has found the new US operation against the Houthis under President Donald Trump appears more extensive than that under former President Joe Biden, as Washington moves from solely targeting launch sites to firing at ranking personnel and dropping bombs on cities.

# PAP to field Indian origin candidates in upcoming general poll: Singapore PM

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Singapore**

The ruling People's Action Party (PAP) will certainly include members of the Indian community in the upcoming general election, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said on Sunday, acknowledging the ethnic group's outsized contributions to the country in many areas, including in businesses, industries and public services.

In the 2020 General Election, the PAP did not field any Indian candidates among its slate of 27 new faces, which had then sparked questions about the ethnic group's representation in Parliament.

Speaking at a dialogue with youths from the Indian community, Wong said, "You may be a small community, but, certainly, your contributions to Singapore and the impact that you have on Singapore are not small at all." "In fact, I would say you already reflect that Singapore spirit. Your story is a story of Singapore — small and yet punching above your weight," media quoted Wong as saying. Indians in Singapore have made outsized contributions to the country in many areas, including in business, industry and the Government, Wong underscored.

Indians represented 7.6 per cent of Singapore's citizens, while Malays and Chinese made up 15.1 per cent and 75.6 per cent of the population, respectively, in 2024, according to the Singapore daily report. The 90-minute Vaanga Ippo Pesalaam Chat (Come, Let's Chat in Tamil), or VIP Chat, was organised by newspaper Tamil Murasu. Senior Minister of State for Digital Development and Information Janil Puthuchery, of Indian descent, also engaged with about 130 youths at the dialogue.

In his opening remarks, PM Wong said Singapore has benefited from many Indian civil servants, such as Dr Janil, who is also Senior Minister of State for Health.

The Prime Minister said there will be new Indian candidates from the PAP for the upcoming election but did not give further details or names.

New faces who have been spotted with political leaders recently include former Agency for Integrated Care chief executive Dinesh Vasu Dash, managing partner at law firm Tito Isaac & Co, Kawal Pal Singh, Jagathishwaran Raju, a trade unionist for 13 years, and Indian orthopaedic surgeon Hamid Razak, according to media reports.

A 59-year-old noted lawyer Harpreet Singh Nehal of Indian ethnic has also been seen among potential Indian candidates from the opposition Workers' Party which won 10 seats in the 2020 election.

In 2020, PAP won 83 seats in parliament. The 2025 election is to be held this year, with speculation of it likely to be called in a month or so, given political parties naming potential candidates and undertaking grassroots level mingling with Singaporeans. These potential candidates have been doing "walk about" with sitting members of parliament in various community centres, the hubs of constituencies. A day earlier, Wong said the party, which has ruled ever since independence, will field more than 30 new candidates — the largest in recent history — in its 2025 line-up. In his remarks, Wong also encouraged participants to continue building a distinctive Singaporean Indian identity.

**You may be a small community, but, certainly, your contributions to Singapore and the impact that you have on Singapore are not small at all**

— LAWRENCE WONG, PRIME MINISTER

He said the Indian community here is very diverse and has retained its traditions while evolving into a different culture. "For the Singaporean Indian, your values, your norms, your way of thinking, are different from Indians in India. And it is something precious that we have created here. It is a Singaporean attitude, mindset, way of life," he said, continuing, "You can be proud of your ethnic roots and at the same time proud to be a Singaporean, and that is what we mean by being Singaporean." He encouraged participants to embrace their roots and also engage with fellow Singaporeans outside their community to "enlarge the common space we share".

Wong continued, "This is how we can try, even as a little red dot (as Singapore is popularly often referred to), how we can ensure we remain strong and united. We can continue to have harmony with one another, even in a very turbulent world which we already see today."

He also said that though most youths in Singapore share the same concerns, the Indian community represents issues of race, religion and language differently.

# Sudan's biggest museum looted, wrecked by 2-year war

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Cairo**

Inside Sudan's biggest museum, the exhibition halls once filled with statues and relics from centuries of ancient civilisations are trashed, littered with debris. The display cases stand empty and shattered. A mummy lies exposed in an open storage box. All the gold artifacts have been looted. The Sudan National Museum has been wrecked by two years of war in Sudan, with most of its artifacts stolen. Authorities blame the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, which held this district of Khartoum along the banks of the Nile River for most of the conflict.

Since the Sudanese military regained control of the capital last month, officials have been working to assess the damage and loss in hopes of one day restoring the museum. "The losses are extremely big and saddening. A significant number of antiquities were stolen," Gamal ElDeen Zain al-Abdeen, a senior official at the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums, told to media. "The RSF destroyed everything... Concerning the civilisation of the Sudanese people."

The National Museum has thousands of pieces, dating back to the Paleolithic era well before the development of agriculture, and through the kingdoms of ancient Sudan. Many came from the Napatan era in the eighth and seventh centuries BC, when pharaohs from Sudan ruled over much of ancient Egypt, or from the later Meroitic kingdom that built pyramids in Sudan. Other halls had later Christian and Islamic material.

**Museums paid a heavy price**

He blamed the RSF for the destruction, saying they had fighters in the museum at some point during the war. The war in Sudan broke out in April 2023, after tensions between the Sudanese army and the rival RSF turned into battles in the streets of Khartoum and rapidly spread around the country.

The RSF held much of Khartoum during the war, including the district of the museum. Now that they have been driven out, the extent of the destruction from fighting and looting is coming clear.

The ransacking is a blow to a country with a rich heritage, one that has deep resonance among Sudanese but is often overlooked abroad because of Sudan's decades of instability.

"No building was spared from the bloodshed and theft, and this is what I saw with my own eyes."

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

This is to inform the public at large that the Property Being House No. 7, are measuring 128 sq. Yards, part of Khadra No. 29 situated at Kewal Park, as Agrasan Marg, Kewal Park, Azadpur, Delhi-110033, was rightfully owned by Smt. Pushpa Bansal, who is deceased. The said property was purchased by Smt. Varsha Bishr from Smt. Shyama Singh vide Notarized GPA, ATS and dated 15.05.2014. Now Smt. Varsha Bishr wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

If any other person having any objection kindly contact: Rajesh Aggarwal (Advocate) the undersigned within 7 days.

**AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION**  
Ch. No. 769 - Dwarika Court Sector-10, Dwarika, New Delhi-75  
**Mobile :- 9899013918**

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Known to all that my client Smt. Varsha Bishr owner of the THIRD FLOOR, PLOT NO. 58, AREA 95.550 SQ. YDS., KHASRA NO. 239 AND 240, NAWADA, BHAGWATI GARDEN EXTN., BLOCK-F, UTTAM NAGAR, NEW DELHI-110059 and Smt. Varsha Bishr purchase property from Smt. Shyama Singh vide Notarized GPA, ATS and dated 15.05.2014. Now Smt. Varsha Bishr wants to sell aforesaid property. And it is informed that any deal with said documents by any person except my said client and said institution regarding said property, shall be deemed as null and void. If any person having any claim, right in said property then he may contact and handover the same and apprise his claim to undersigned within 15 days of this publication.

**AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION**  
Ch. No. 769 - Dwarika Court Sector-10, Dwarika, New Delhi-75  
**Mobile :- 9899013918**

**THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS**

**CHANGE OF NAME**

**I, Bajrang Singh, Father of- JC-472916Y Sub Deep Singh Rathore, R/o- Gram & Post-Kolwa, Teh- Baswa, Dist-Dausa, Rajasthan, have changed my name from Bajrang Singh to Bajrang Singh Rathore, vide affidavit dated 14/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.**

**PD(1862)C I, N.16013422M Hav Mukesh Kumar, R/o- VPO- Ureeka, Teh- Chirawa, Dist- Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan-333033, have changed my son's name from Jai Kishan Singh to Jai Kishan, vide affidavit dated 14/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.**

**PD(1863)C I, Bebi Raja, Mother of- N.16022570Y L/Nk Rahul Raja Parmar, R/o- Vill- Janori, PO- Noner, Teh & Dist- Datia, M.P. - 475661, have changed my name from Bebi Raja to Beby Raja, vide affidavit dated 14/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.**

**PD(1864)C I, Bhanu Devi, Mother of- JC-471487W Sub Maj & Honey Capt Mahendar Singh, R/o- VPO- Ureeka, Teh- Chirawa, Dist- Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan-333033, have changed my name from Bhanu Devi to Bhanu, vide affidavit dated 14/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.**

**PD(1865)C I, Narbada Devi, Mother of- JC-472975L Sub Satyaveer Singh, R/o- Vill- Amar Singh Pura, Post- Pilod, Dist- Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan-333029, have changed my name from Narbada Devi to Narbada, vide affidavit dated 14/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.**

**PD(1866)C I, Raj Bay, Mother of- JC-472916Y Sub Deep Singh Rathore, R/o- Gram & Post-Kolwa, Teh- Baswa, Dist-Dausa, Rajasthan, have changed my name from Raj Bay to Raj Kanwar, vide affidavit dated 14/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.**

**PD(1867)C I, Vidhya Devi, Mother of- JC-471601H Sub Honey Lt Mahesh Singh Rajput, R/o- Gram-Nangla Jadu, Notoj, Dist-Alwar, Rajasthan- 321606, have changed my name from Vidhya Devi to Kabooli Devi, vide affidavit dated 14/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.**

**PD(1868)C I, Jeet Kanwar W/o- No. 16018744W Hav Himmat Singh, R/o- 389- A, Amar Nagar-C, Panchayawa, Jaipur, Rajasthan- 302034, have changed my name from Jeet Kanwar to Jeetu Kanwar, vide affidavit dated 14/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.**

**PD(1869)C I, Kumari Shweta Rathore W/o- No.16017552M Hav Narendra Singh Bhadoria, R/o- New Suraksha Vihar Phase- 2, Gwalior Road, Agra, U.P.- 282001, have changed my name from Kumari Shweta Rathore to Shweta Rathore, vide affidavit dated 14/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.**

**PD(1870)C I, krishan S/o Sh. Deepak kumar R/o 27/34 Gali No -09 Vishwas Nagar Delhi- 110032, my correct name is krishan Rawat also known as krishan. Krishan and krishan Rawat both are same and one person.**

**PD(1871)C**

# Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa dies at 89

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lima (Peru)**

Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa, Nobel literature laureate and a giant of Latin American letters for many decades, has died, his son said Sunday. He was 89. "It is with deep sorrow that we announce that our father, Mario Vargas Llosa, passed away peacefully in Lima on Monday, surrounded by his family," read a letter signed by his children Alvaro, Gonzalo and Morgana, and posted by Alvaro on X. The letter says that his remains will be cremated and that there won't be any public ceremony.

"His departure will sadden his relatives, his friends and his readers around the world, but we hope that they will find comfort, as we do, in the fact that he enjoyed a long, adventurous and fruitful life, and leaves behind him a body of work that will outlive him," they added. He was author of such celebrated novels as "The Time of the Hero" (La Ciudad y los Perros) and "Feast of the Goat."

A prolific novelist and essayist and winner of myriad prizes, Vargas Llosa was awarded the Nobel in 2010 after being considered a contender for many years. Vargas Llosa published his first collection of stories "The Cubs and Other Stories" (Los Jefes) in 1959. But he burst onto the literary stage in 1963 with his groundbreaking debut novel "The Time of the Hero," a book that drew on his experiences at a Peruvian military academy and angered the country's military. A thousand copies of the novel were burned by military authorities, with some generals calling the book false and Vargas Llosa a communist.

That, and subsequent novels such as "Conversation in the Cathedral," (Conversación en la Catedral) in 1969, quickly established Vargas Llosa as one of the leaders of the so-called "Boom," or new wave of Latin American writers of the 1960s and 1970s, alongside Gabriel García Márquez and Carlos Fuentes.

Vargas Llosa started writing early, and at 15 was a part-time crime reporter for La Crónica newspaper. According to his official website, other jobs he had included revising names on cemetery tombs in Peru, working as a teacher in the Berlitz school in Paris and briefly on the Spanish desk at Agence France-Presse in Paris. He continued publishing articles in the press for most of his life, most notably in a twice-monthly political opinion column titled "Piedra de Toque" (Touchstones) that was printed in



several newspapers. Vargas Llosa came to be a fierce defender of personal and economic liberties, gradually edging away from his communism-linked past, and regularly attacked Latin American leftist leaders he viewed as dictators.

Although an early supporter of the Cuban revolution led by Fidel Castro, he later grew disillusioned and denounced Castro's Cuba. By 1980, he said he no longer believed in socialism as a solution for developing nations. In a famous incident in Mexico City in 1976, Vargas Llosa punched fellow Nobel Prize winner and ex-friend García Márquez, whom he later ridiculed as "Castro's courtesan."

It was never clear whether the fight was over politics or a personal dispute, as neither writer ever wanted to discuss it publicly, as he slowly turned his political trajectory toward free-market conservatism. Vargas Llosa lost the support of many of his Latin American literary contemporaries and attracted much criticism even from admirers of his work. Jorge Mario Pedro Vargas Llosa was born March 28, 1936,

in Peru's southern city of Arequipa, high in the Andes at the foot of the Misti volcano.

His father, Ernesto Vargas Maldonado, left the family before he was born. To avoid public scandal, his mother, Dora Llosa Ureta, took her child to Bolivia, where her father was the Peruvian consul in Cochabamba.

Vargas Llosa said his early life was "somewhat traumatic," pampered by his mother and grandmother in a large house with servants, his every whim granted. It was not until he was 10, after the family had moved to Peru's coastal city of Piura, that he learned his father was alive. His parents reconciled and the family moved to Peru's capital, Lima.

Vargas Llosa described his father as a disciplinarian who viewed his son's love of Jules Verne and writing poetry as surefire routes to starvation, and feared for his "manhood," believing that "poets are always homosexuals." After failing to get the boy enrolled in a naval academy because he was underage, Vargas Llosa's father sent him to Leoncio Prado Military Academy - an experience that was to stay with Vargas Llosa and led to "The Time of the Hero." The book won the Spanish Critics Award.

The military academy "was like discovering hell," Vargas Llosa said later. He entered Peru's San Marcos University to study literature and law, "the former as a calling and the latter to please my family, which believed, and without certain cause, that writers usually die of hunger."

After earning his literature degree in 1958 - he didn't bother submitting his final law thesis - Vargas Llosa won a scholarship to pursue a doctorate in Madrid.

Vargas Llosa drew much of his inspiration from his Peruvian homeland, but preferred to live abroad, residing for spells each year in Madrid, New York and Paris. His early novels revealed a Peruvian world of military arrogance and brutality, of aristocratic decadence, and of Stone Age Amazon Indians existing simultaneously with 20th-century urban blight.

"Peru is a kind of incurable illness and my relationship to it is intense, harsh and full of the violence of passion," Vargas Llosa wrote in 1983.

After 16 years in Europe, he returned in 1974 to a Peru then ruled by a left-wing military dictatorship. "I realised I was losing touch with the reality of my country, and above all its language, which for a writer can be deadly," he said.

# Xi says China will focus on joint modernisation of Asia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beijing

Visiting Vietnam to enhance political and trade ties amid a major tariff row with the US, Chinese President Xi Jinping Monday said that China will ensure continuity and stability in its neighbourhood diplomacy and jointly advance the modernisation of Asia. Xi arrived in Hanoi on his first visit abroad after US President Donald Trump slapped steep tariffs against China while pausing levies on a host of other countries, including Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia — the three countries on the Chinese president's current itinerary.

In an article published in Vietnam's Nhan Dan newspaper ahead of his visit, Xi said China would deepen friendly cooperation with neighbouring countries by ensuring continuity and stability of its neighbourhood diplomacy. "We will stay committed to the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness," he wrote. "We will continue to pursue the policy of forging friendship and partnership with our

neighbours," he added.

Xi, who is under pressure after Trump's unprecedented 145 per cent tariffs against Chinese exports to the US which amounted to over USD 438 billion last year, spoke of focussing on joint modernisation of Asia along with China's neighbours as part of its new policy to reduce trade dependence on the US and the EU.

While Beijing hit back with 125 per cent tariffs against US goods in tit-for-tat retaliation, foreign trade-dependent China looks to fast-paced diversion of its commerce to make up the losses.

"Asia represents a new elevation in global cooperation and development. At a new starting point toward revitalisation of the whole region, Asia faces both unprecedented opportunities and challenges", Xi said.

Amid the tariff war with the US, Xi is visiting the three Southeast Asian countries which are part of the ASEAN bloc with which Beijing has its largest foreign trade, totalling over USD 962 billion.

The ASEAN countries, Vietnam in particular also faced a major crisis as the US



Chinese President Xi Jinping waves as he arrives for a two-day state visit, at Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport

tariffs targeted the country which prospered by reshoring Chinese industries and products and exporting them to the US, benefiting from Trump's tariffs against China in his previous term.

Vietnam became the biggest beneficiary of the China Plus One strategy of several multinational firms like Apple besides Chinese companies moving their investments there to escape the US tariffs, becoming one of the key trade routes for exports to America.

Last year alone, Vietnam's exports to the US amounted to over USD 142 billion.

Trump last week hit Vietnam with 46 per cent tariffs, one of the highest besides China, in an apparent bid to target Hanoi's reshoring policy.

After fervent appeals from Vietnam, Trump agreed to negotiate a new tariff deal during the 90-day pause in the levies on many countries except China.

Before the key visit to three Southeast nations, Xi pledged to strengthen strategic bonds with neighbouring nations by "appropriately" managing differences and

enhanced supply chain ties as the tariff war with the US escalated.

In his first public speech after Trump's tariffs, Xi called for breaking new ground for China's neighbourhood diplomacy at a meeting of the ruling Communist Party of China in Beijing on April 9. China sought to improve ties with several countries in its fraught neighbourhood.

Beijing in recent months wended down border tensions with India and sought to improve its relations with other major neighbours like Japan and South Korea, bracing for tough times under the Trump presidency on trade and strategic fronts.

The India-China relations, which remained frozen for over four years over the Eastern Ladakh military standoff, showed signs of improvement after the meeting between Xi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Kazan in Russia last October.

Recently, China held trade talks with South Korea and Japan, the first economic dialogue between the three countries in five years, to discuss regional trade facilitation.

## China's exports jump 12.4 per cent and imports fall

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bangkok

China's exports jumped 12.4 per cent in March from a year earlier as companies rushed to beat increases in US tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump, the government said Monday. Imports fell 4.3 per cent, the customs administration reported.

It said exports from the world's second largest economy rose 5.8 per cent in the first three months of the year from a year earlier while imports sank 7 per cent.

China's trade surplus with the United States was \$27.6 billion in March as its exports rose 4.5 per cent. It logged a surplus of \$76.6 billion with the US in the first quarter of the year.

China is facing 145 per cent tariffs on most exports to the United States as of the most recent revisions in Trump's trade policies.

However, the biggest increases in exports were to China's Southeast Asian neighbors, which saw exports from China jump nearly 17 per cent in March from a year earlier. Exports to Africa rose more than 11 per cent.

Chinese President Xi Jinping was trav-

elling to Vietnam on Monday as part of a regional tour that also will take him to Malaysia and Cambodia, giving him an opportunity to firm up trade ties with other Asian countries that also are facing potentially steep tariffs, though last week Trump delayed enforcing them by 90 days.

China's exports to Vietnam jumped nearly 17 per cent last month from a year earlier, while its imports fell 2.7 per cent.

While Xi's trip likely was planned earlier, it gained significance amid the trade war between Washington and Beijing.

A customs administration spokesperson, Lyu Daliang, said China was facing a "complex and severe external situation" but that the sky would not fall. He pointed to China's diversified export options and huge domestic market.

When asked about falling Chinese imports, he told reporters that China has been the world's second largest importer for 16 straight years, increasing its share of global imports from about 8 per cent to 10.5 per cent. "At present and in the future, China's import growth space is huge, and the large Chinese market is always a great opportunity for the world," he said.

## SBI passes RBI rate cuts, slashes interest rate by 25 bps

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI) has reduced its lending rate by 25 basis points following the Reserve Bank's policy rate cut, making loans cheaper for both existing and new borrowers.

With the latest round of reduction, the Repo Linked Lending Rate (RLLR) of SBI would come down by 25 basis points to 8.25 per cent.

It has also reduced the External Benchmark Based Lending Rate (EBLR) by similar basis points to 8.65 per cent. The revised rates come into effect from April 15, 2025, according to updated rate information on SBI's website.

The rate reduction is in response to last week's RBI slashing key interest rate by 25 basis points for the second time in a row to support growth facing the threat of reciprocal tariffs by the US.

Besides, the bank also cut deposit rates by 10-25 basis points, which will again be effective from April 15.

With the revision, for fixed deposits up to ₹3 crore, the interest rate on 1-2 year term deposits will be lower by 10 basis points to 6.70 per cent, and deposits



FILE PHOTO

having two years to less than 3 years maturity will attract 6.90 per cent as against 7 per cent.

In case of fixed deposits over ₹3 crore, term deposits of maturity 180 days to 210 days have been reduced by 20 basis points to 6.40 per cent while for 211 days to less than 1 year by 25 basis points to 6.50 per cent. Similarly, for 1-2 years, the new interest rate would be 6.80 per cent

from 7 per cent, and for 2-3 years would be 6.75 per cent from 7 per cent, a reduction of 25 basis points.

SBI green rupee term deposit is available for three specific tenors of 1111, 1777 and 2222 days, at 10 bps below card rate. The specific tenor scheme of '444 days' (Amrit Vrishi) at rate of interest 7.05 per cent is effective from April 15, 2025, and senior citizens are offered a

rate of interest 7.55 per cent and super senior citizens are offered an interest rate of 7.65 per cent.

Meanwhile, private sector major HDFC Bank has lowered interest rate on savings accounts by 25 basis points to 2.75 per cent which is the lowest among peers in the private sector.

For balances above ₹50 lakh, the rate now stands at 3.25 per cent as against 3.5 per cent. The reduction in rate is effective from April 12, as per the HDFC Bank's website. Another public sector Bank of India has withdrawn its 400-day special deposit scheme which offered 7.3 per cent. Mumbai-based Bank of India has announced a reduction of 25 basis points in its home loan interest rates, benefitting both new and existing customers.

With this revision, the home loan rate stands reduced to 7.9 per cent per annum based on CIBIL score. The revised rates come into effect from April 15, 2025.

In addition to home loans, Bank of India has also reduced interest rates by 25 basis points across select existing retail loan products, including vehicle loan, personal loan, loan against property, education loan and Star reverse mortgage loan, it said.

## Tariffs may open new opportunities for India: Skoda Auto Volkswagen MD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

European auto major Skoda Auto Volkswagen India on Monday said while it does not support the new reciprocal tariff imposed by the Trump Administration, which have now been paused for 90 days on non-retaliating countries, the move may open up opportunities for the industries in the long term.

Earlier, the group, which is battling a ₹11,000-crore tax show cause notice for alleged customs duty fraud related to the import of cars as completely knocked down units, rolled out the all-new Volkswagen Tiguan R-Line at an introductory price of ₹49 lakh.

"Of course, we do not support the (reciprocal) tariffs but at the same time there are a lot of discussions about opening up the economy even in India through bilateral trade or free trade agreements," Piyush Arora, Managing Director at Skoda Auto Volkswagen India said at the launch event.

Emphasising that the group always believes in "free trade" and transfer of technology between countries for customers and their benefits, Arora said there is a lot of uncertainty right now hovering around the recent announcements on the tariff front which the US administration has imposed.

He, however, added that these developments (tariff discussion) might expedite the free trade agreements being dis-



Ashish Gupta, Brand Director, Volkswagen India and Skoda Auto Volkswagen India CEO Piyush Arora during the launch of Volkswagen's Tiguan R-Line SUV

cussed between India and the EU for a long time. "I do believe that there are opportunities for India. We have always been a proponent of having lower tariffs between Europe whether it is EU trade or bilateral FTA which has been discussed for a very long time but at the same time might give an opportunity.

"There might be short-term hiccups because of increased tariff for our component industry from India which is exporting a good amount of parts to the US and the initial tariffs can hinder that but in the long run maybe it will open up

opportunities," Arora said.

At the same time, it can't be said at this stage how would this entire tariff issue settle down and in which direction it is heading for as the goal posts are moving, he said, adding, "India getting affected in a different way vis-a-vis some other competing economies so we will have to see how it pans out."

Built on the MQB EVO platform, the all-new third-generation flagship SUV Tiguan R-Line boasts of a new chassis generation and comes with a 2.0-litre TSI EVO engine

which can be a big force in deciding the trend and trajectory in the near term.

According to him, Indian equity markets are navigating a complex landscape which is shaped by global uncertainties and potential shifts in US trade policy. While domestic resilience and strengthening corporate earnings could offer a base for recovery.

"Despite the steep correction that took off during the end of the previous year, participants are optimistic that the market could rebound in the second half of FY26. This projected rebound is likely to be aided by a recovery in corporate profits and renewed foreign capital inflow since valuation has turned reasonable.

"But the present phase of uncertainty may last for another three to six months specifically because of fear of a US slowdown and recession that is stifling investor sentiment. Conversely, if global conditions stabilise, Indian equities may once again emerge as a desirable destination for foreign investors seeking long-term growth potential," Upadhyay said.

## CEPC Carpet Expo begins in Bharat Mandapam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

On April 14, 2025, the four-day Carpet Expo organized by the Carpet Export Promotion Council (CEPC) commenced at Hall No. 1 of Bharat Mandapam. The event is scheduled from April 14 to 17, 2025. It was inaugurated by the Honourable Union Minister of Textiles, Mr. Giriraj Singh, in the presence of Mrs. Amrit Raj, IAS, Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), by lighting the ceremonial lamp.

Other dignitaries present at the inaugural ceremony included Mr. Kuldeep Raj Watal, Chairman, CEPC, and members of the Executive Committee - Mr. Anil Kumar Singh, Mr. Mehraj Yaseen Jain, Mr. Piyush Kumar Barnwal, Mr. Rohit Gupta, Mr. Sanjay Gupta, Mr. Shaikat Khan, and Mr. Sheikh Ashiq Ahmad, along with other members and exporters. Dr. Smrita Nagarkoti, Officiating Executive Director-cum-Secretary, was also present during the auspicious event.

The Honourable Minister of Textiles, Mr. Giriraj Singh, visited various carpet stalls at the expo and was impressed by the wide range of colorful carpets. He expressed his admiration and reiterated his full support for the development of the industry, assuring complete cooperation from the government to promote

its growth. He affirmed that the government stands firmly with the exporters.

India Carpet Expo is one of Asia's largest exhibitions of handmade carpets, providing an exceptional platform for buyers to purchase premium handmade carpets, rugs, and other floor coverings under one roof. With participation from 160 exhibitors, it has become a globally recognized destination for handmade carpets.

On the first day, the expo witnessed a record attendance of 125 overseas carpet buyers from around 34 countries including Argentina, Australia, Brazil, France, Canada, Israel, Turkey, Japan, Russia, the USA, the UK, Italy, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, and 75 buying representatives. These buyers visited the expo to explore business opportunities with this rural-based cottage sector.

CEPC Chairman Mr. Kuldeep Raj Watal stated, "India Carpet Expo is an ideal platform for international carpet buyers, buying agents, architects, and Indian carpet manufacturers and exporters to interact and build long-term business relationships. This exhibition is a significant step toward taking Indian handmade carpet exports to greater heights." He further mentioned that there are tremendous business opportunities for participating manufacturers and exporters as many prominent global buyers of handmade carpets will be attending the show, and orders worth thousands of crores are expected to be executed in the near future.

## Draft rules issued for gas metres to protect consumers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The government has drafted new rules requiring testing, verification and stamping of all domestic, commercial, and industrial gas metres before they can be used in trade, the consumer affairs ministry said on Monday.

The proposed regulations under the Legal Metrology (General) Rules, 2011 aim to ensure accuracy and reliability in gas measurement, preventing billing disputes and protecting consumers from faulty devices. "Verified and stamped gas meters will prevent overcharging or under-measurement, reduce disputes and provide guaranteed protection to consumers against faulty or manipulated devices," the ministry said in a statement. Consumers will benefit through fair billing, improved energy efficiency and reduced maintenance costs from standardised equipment, it added.

The draft rules include provisions for re-verification of meters in use and establish a compliance framework for manufacturers and distribution companies aligned with International Organisation of Legal Metrology standards. The ministry framed the regulations after consulting with the Indian Institute of Legal Metrology, industry experts, consumer organisations,

## Investor wealth erode by ₹11.30 lakh crore since tariffs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Investors' wealth eroded by ₹11.30 lakh crore since early this month, where the BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled nearly 2 per cent, as stock markets experienced turbulence in recent times initially due to US President Donald Trump unveiling a massive tariff plan, followed by growing concerns of a tit-for-tat trade war between China and the US.

Since April 2, the BSE benchmark gauge has slumped 1,460.18 points or 1.90 per cent. Tracking uncertainty in equities, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms tumbled by ₹11,30,627.09 crore to ₹4,01,67,468.51 crore (USD 4.66 trillion) during this period. Benchmark indices jumped nearly 2 per cent on Friday as investors rejoiced at the 90-day suspension of additional import duties by the US.

Markets remained closed on two occasions, on April 10 for Mahavir Jayanti and April 14 due to Ambedkar Jayanti.

Market participants fear that tensions between the world's two largest economies could cause widespread global damage. China is the only country to have retaliated with tit-for-tat levies

House later announced a 90-day pause on "reciprocal tariffs" for most countries except China, which in turn decided to impose 125 per cent tariffs on US imports.

China on Friday upped its additional tariff on US goods to 125 per cent, retaliating the America's 145 per cent levy.

"Markets had a rocky start to the new fiscal year after Trump announced sweeping reciprocal tariffs on the world. Global markets witnessed sharp losses, and India also was not immune to the sell-off but fared relatively better so far," Satish Chandra Aluri, Analyst at Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

The US, on April 2, announced an additional 26 per cent tariff on Indian goods entering the US. But on April 9, the Trump administration announced the suspension of these on India for 90 days until July 9 this year. However, the 10 per cent baseline tariff imposed on the countries will continue to remain in place.

"Immediate challenge emanates from the global trade war with escalating tit-for-tat tariffs between the US and China. How the trade war evolves will be the key factor in determining the growth trajectory and market outlook for FY26," Aluri added.

Market participants fear that tensions between the world's two largest economies could cause widespread global damage.

China is the only country to have retaliated with tit-for-tat levies.

Vishnu Kant Upadhyay, AVP - Research & Advisory at Master Capital Services, said that the Indian markets have indeed experienced turbulence in recent times, driven by a combination of domestic and global factors. But, now global uncertainty is the major fear of market participants

## Lodha brothers resolve dispute over use of brand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Abhishek Lodha-led Macrotech Developers has resolved trademark and brand dispute with House of Abhinandan Lodha (HoABL), formed by his younger brother.

Macrotech Developers will continue to use 'Lodha' brand while the younger brother will continue to operate under 'House of Abhinandan Lodha' brand, as per the agreements between the two brothers under the guidance of their parents.

Abhishek and Abhinandan will not have any claims against each other.

In January, Macrotech Developers filed a suit in the Bombay High Court against HoABL for infringement of its trademarks and sought appropriate injunctions, reliefs, and damages.

Macrotech Developers and HoABL announced that they have resolved the dispute over the use of Lodha brand, through

separate statements but with similar words. "In a significant development, the Lodha brothers — elder brother, Abhishek Lodha and younger brother, Abhinandan Lodha — and the companies led by them, have amicably resolved all outstanding disputes under the guidance of their parents," the statement said.

As per the agreement, listed entity Macrotech Developers Ltd is the owner of and has the exclusive right to use, the brand names 'Lodha' and 'Lodha Group'.

Abhinandan Lodha is the owner of, and has the exclusive right to use the brand name 'House of Abhinandan Lodha'.

"Lodha Group" and 'House of Abhinandan Lodha' have no connection with each other. Both entities will communicate this widely," as per the statement.

# Rory McIlroy wins Masters at Augusta National

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Augusta

Rory McIlroy began "the best day of my golfing life" by finding a note in his locker at Augusta National before he got ready for what turned out to be one of the wildest final rounds ever at the Masters.

It was from Angel Cabrera, a thoughtful gesture to wish him good luck. McIlroy could have taken either way. Cabrera played in the final group with him in 2011 at the Masters when McIlroy had the world at his feet and a four-shot lead and one arm in a Masters green jacket. But then he threw it away with an 80 in the final round. "It was a nice touch and little bit ironic at the same time," McIlroy said of the note. "It is been 14 long years. But thankfully, I got the job done."

He did, barely, beating Justin Rose in a sudden-death playoff with a gap wedge that spun back to 3 feet for birdie on the 18th hole. Along with a lifelong dream of being a Masters champion, McIlroy is now part of golfing immortality as only the sixth player with the career Grand Slam.

But what a ride. "I have been saying it until I am blue in the face: I truly believe I am a better player now than I was 10 years ago," McIlroy said. "It is so hard to

stay patient. It is so hard to keep coming back every year and trying your best and not being able to get it done.

"It is been an emotionally draining week for a lot of reasons," he said. "Absolutely thrilled to be sitting here at the end of the week as the last man standing."

A final round that lasted four hours, 45 minutes felt like 14 years, certainly the past 11 years that have been consumed with him getting the final leg of the Grand Slam.

McIlroy began with a double bogey and lost his two-shot lead in two holes. It was a start comparable to when he played in the final group at the 2018 Masters with Patrick Reed, all of Augusta on his side and laid an egg.

He ran off two birdies with a sublime chip and pure 5-iron, then twice made pars with amazing escapes through gaps in the Georgia pines. Yes, this is the guy who has won the FedEx Cup a record three times and reached number one in the world on nine occasions.

Staked to a four-shot lead on the back nine, he hit his worst shot of the week. McIlroy had a big target from 82 yards with a luge wedge and put it into the tributary of Rae's Creek in front of the par-5 13th green for a double bogey.

This looked like the player who two-



putted every green in the final round at St Andrews, who missed two short putts in the closing stretch at Pinehurst number two last summer to watch Bryson DeChambeau hoist that US Open trophy.

So much brilliance. Too many blunders. And ultimately, so much determination to keep coming back for more, to not give up

on the one prize he was chasing no matter how much it hurt.

Consider his final round Sunday. He set a record for making six straight 3s to start the third round. He set another record for most double bogeys — four! — by a Masters champion.

McIlroy famously said two years ago

after a runner-up finish in the US Open left him gutted, "I would go through 100 Sundays like this to get my hands on another major championship."

He won this Masters with that willingness to keep going no matter the setbacks. McIlroy wasted a superb opening round with two careless double bogeys leaving him seven shots behind. He answered with a 66 the next day.

He went from a four-shot lead to trailing by one shot on Sunday when he answered with his best swings — the 7-iron over the pond to 6 feet on the par-5 15th, the 9-iron to a back pin on the 16th to 9 feet, the 8-iron blind shot to 2 feet on the 17th. When he failed to convert a 5-foot birdie putt on the 18th in regulation, he was headed to a playoff with Rose, more major disappointment perhaps waiting. But then he pounded his drive, hit gap wedge to 3 feet and won the Masters.

"There was points on the back nine today I thought, Have I let this slip again? But again, I responded with some clutch shots when I needed to," McIlroy said. "And really proud of myself for that."

Rose was gracious as ever after his second straight time finishing second in a major, having lost out at Royal Troon last summer. "We saw a part of history today,"

Rose said. "Someone won a career Grand Slam. It is a momentous day in the game of golf." It had been 25 years since the last addition to the club, Tiger Woods. Before that it had been 34 years since Jack Nicklaus won all four.

President Donald Trump, who played golf with McIlroy in February, offered him congratulations aboard Air Force One on his way back to Washington from Florida.

"People have no idea how tough that is and he came back. He should be proud," Trump said. "It is better for him that it happened that way because that showed real courage."

McIlroy might beg to differ on the latter point. "I certainly did not make it easy," he said. But when it comes to McIlroy, is there any other way? He had lunch with Nicklaus the previous week and went over how to play the course.

This was not the Nicklaus way, or even the Tiger way. When they built leads, they played without mistake and forced players to catch them.

That's not how Rory rolls. It might have taken longer than he wanted — his 17th time playing the Masters, the 11th time with the Grand Slam at stake — but he got what he so desperately wanted. That green jacket is a size 38.



## Roma draw against Lazio

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rome

The always-tense Rome derby ended 1-1, allowing Roma to extend its unbeaten run to 16 matches and enabling Lazio to stay one spot in front of its city rival in the standings.

Lifelong Lazio fan Alessio Romagnoli achieved a childhood dream when he put Lazio ahead shortly after the break. Matias Soule equalised for Roma with a long-distance shot midway through the second half. Sixth-placed Lazio remained two points ahead of seventh-placed Roma, which hasn't lost since December.

The result also ended the perfect run of five straight derbies won for Roma coach Claudio Ranieri, who is expected to retire at the end of the season.

Hours before kickoff, police in riot gear intervened to prevent clashes between rival fans outside the stadium.

In the first half, Roma goalkeeper Mile Svilar was the star, making several spectacular saves to deny Lazio winger Gustav Isaksen. Romagnoli scored for Lazio two minutes after the break by redirecting in a free kick with a header.

There was also a spectacular save from Lazio goalkeeper Christos Mandas, who tipped away a dangerous header from Gianluca Mancini.

But there was no stopping a powerful shot from Soule that deflected in off the underside of the crossbar and then out of the goal. After a brief moment of suspense, the referee awarded the goal when his wrist watch vibrated to confirm the decision by goal-line technology.

Atalanta revives Champions League hopesItaly center forward Mateo Retegui scored one goal and set up another as Atalanta ended a run of three straight losses with a 2-0 win over Bologna to revive its chances of finishing in the Champions League places.

Atalanta moved back up to third in Serie A while Bologna remained fifth.

Atalanta is two points ahead of Juventus, which beat Lecce 2-1 on Saturday, and four points ahead of Bologna — with the top four finishers qualifying for the Champions League. Retegui scored his league-leading 23rd goal early on and then set up another for Mario Pasalic less than 20 minutes later.

Atalanta goalkeeper Marco Carnesecchi preserved the advantage when he palmed a shot from Bologna's Dan Ndoye off the post. Both goals came on counterattacks.

Retegui outmuscled a defender to redirect in a cross from Raoul Bellanov and then he worked his way past another defender on the right flank before whipping in a cross that Pasalic turned in with one touch.

Bologna had not lost since February. Also, Fiorentina-Parma and Hellas Verona-Genoa ended 0-0; and Como beat Torino 1-0 with a first-half header from Anastasios Douvikas. Sassuolo promoted after 1 season in Serie B.

Serie B leader Sassuolo was assured of promotion to the top flight after Spezia drew 2-2 at Mantova in Serie B. The result left Sassuolo, which won 3-1 at Modena on Saturday, 16 points ahead of third-placed Spezia with five rounds remaining.

## Hockey India announces 26-member women's squad for tour of Australia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Five new players got their first senior national call-ups as Hockey India on Monday announced a 26-member women's squad for the upcoming five-match tour of Australia, scheduled to take place from April 26 to May 4. India will take on Australia A in the first two games, followed by three matches against the senior Australia team. All the five matches will be played at the Perth Hockey Stadium.

The tour will be a crucial preparatory assignment ahead of the team's European leg of the FIH Pro League 2024-25, set to be held in June.

Five players — Jyoti Singh, Sujata Kujur, Ajmina Kujur, Pooja Yadav and Mahima Tete — have earned a call-up to the senior team. They will be eager to make their senior team debut.

The squad, which is a mix of experienced and fresh players, will be led by dynamic midfielder Salima Tete, with experienced forward Navneet Kaur serving as her deputy.

Seasoned goalkeeper Savita and young

talent Bichu Devi Kharibam will share responsibilities between the posts, providing a strong last line of defence.

The defensive line-up features a mix of experience and promising young talent, comprising Jyoti Singh, Ishika Chaudhary, Sushila Chanu Pukhrabam, Sujata Kujur, Suman Devi Thoudam, Jyoti, Ajmina Kujur and Sakshi Rana.

In the midfield, captain Tete will marshal the centre with support from Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Neha, Sharmila Devi, Manisha Chauhan, Sunelita Toppo, Mahima Tete, Pooja Yadav and Lalremsiami, bringing depth and creativity to the side.

The forward line looks sharp and attacking with Navneet Kaur, Deepika, Rutaja Dadaso Pisal, Mumtaz Khan, Baljeet Kaur, Deepika Soreng, and Beauty Dungdung.

Additionally, Bansari Solanki (goalkeeper), Anjana Dundering and Lalchandluangi (defenders), Sakshi Shukla and Khaidem Shileima Chanu (midfielders), along with Dipi Monika Toppo and Sonam (forwards), have

been named as standby players.

Reflecting of the team selection, chief coach Harendra Singh said, "This tour is an important opportunity for us to test our skills and strategies against top-level competition. We have selected a balanced squad that combines experience with fresh energy.

"It is great to see young players earning their spots through consistent performances in national level tournaments and senior camps. It will be exciting to see how they adapt and rise to the challenge at the international level."

Singh said the team is in good shape, both mentally and physically, after a solid block of training at the national camp in Bengaluru. "Playing against Australia A and the Hockeyroos will help us fine-tune our game before the European leg of the FIH Pro League."

"We are in the process of strengthening key areas such as fitness, decision-making, and building a resilient mentality that allows us to stay composed and competitive in high-pressure situations. We aim to maintain the fighting spirit we showed in the Pro League recently."

## United States, Japan qualify for Billie Jean King Cup Finals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bratislava

Haley Baptiste and Bernarda Pera had straight-set wins to give the United States a spot in the Billie Jean King Cup Finals with a 2-1 victory over host Slovakia. Baptiste beat Renata Jamrichova 6-3, 6-4 and Pera overcame Slovakian number one Rebecca Sramkova 7-6 (2), 7-5 in the Group C match.

"Honestly, I am so overwhelmed by the emotions, so happy," Pera said. "I had so much fun with the team, the girls are amazing. I got so much support from all of them and I am super happy."

The US, which beat Denmark 3-0 on Saturday, topped Group C.

Japan advancesEna Shibahara and Shuko Aoyama defeated Canadians Kayla Cross and Rebecca Marino 6-3, 5-7 6-2 in the decisive doubles match in Group A to secure Japan a spot in the finals.

Canada had taken a 1-0 lead when Victoria Mboko defeated Shibahara 6-4, 6-7 (8), 7-5.

## Lyon beats Auxerre to move up to fourth in Ligue 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

Forward Georges Mikautadze scored one goal and set up another as resurgent Lyon won 3-1 at Auxerre to climb into fourth place in Ligue 1.

It was Lyon's fifth win in the last six league games and moved it one point behind Marseille in third place, and one point above Lille in fifth. The top three get an automatic spot in next season's Champions League while the team in fourth enters qualifying.

Mikautadze tucked away a penalty in the 54th minute after being fouled by goalkeeper Donovan Léon as he went clean through.

Right back Saël Kumbédi and midfielder Corentin Tolisso then combined to set up Rayan Cherki for a neat curled finish in the 62nd.

After Auxerre striker Lassine Sinayoko pulled one back, the fleet-footed Mikautadze pinged over a low cross from the left to give veteran striker Alexandre Lacazette an easy finish in the 84th.

Lyon visits bitter local rival Saint-Etienne next Sunday, with Mikautadze facing countryman Zuriko Davitashvili and much at stake for both sides at opposite ends of the table.

Never give upSaint-Etienne earlier came from behind three times to draw 3-3 with Brest in Ligue 1 and earn a valuable point in its relegation fight.

The draw moved 17th-placed Saint-Etienne three points behind Le Havre in the relegation-playoff spot with five rounds left.

The manner of the performance may give Saint-Etienne fans hope, although the

club has a difficult run-in. Saint-Etienne also faces high-flying Monaco and Strasbourg — with those sides chasing a Champions League spot next season.

**It was Lyon's fifth win in the last six league games and moved it one point behind Marseille in third place and one point above Lille in fifth**

Eighth-placed Brest led 3-2 after a thrilling first half where striker Ludovic Ajorque scored twice for the visitors and Abdallah Sima got the other goal, while lively forwards Lucas Stassin and Irvin Cardona netted for Saint-Etienne.

Cardona made it 3-3 with 10 minutes to go and Saint-Etienne went close to win-

ning when Davitashvili's header hit the crossbar five minutes into stoppage time.

Rennes routs Le HavreRennes raced into a 3-0 lead inside 15 minutes on the way to a 5-1 win at Le Havre.

Dutch midfielder Azor Matusiwa scored after 37 seconds following a huge blunder by goalkeeper Mathieu Gorgelin, who passed the ball straight to a Rennes player. Striker Arnaud Kalimuendo then set up Matusiwa for an empty-net goal.

Defender Lorenz Assignon and Kalimuendo netted soon after. Le Havre pulled one back before the break but Jordan forward Mousa Tamari and substitute Andrés Gomez grabbed completed a rout as Rennes moved up to 11th.

Montpellier's misery continuesStriker Esteban Lepaul scored twice as Angers beat rock-bottom Montpellier 2-0 and pushed it closer to relegation.

## Indian-origin golfers Rai, Theegala finish in Top-30

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Augusta

Indian-origin golfers Aaron Rai, Sahith Theegala and Akshay Bhatia had a modest finish, with two of the three signing off in the Top-30 at the Masters here. Rai (70) finished at one-under for four days for a T-27 finish on his Masters debut, while Theegala (71) was even par for four days and finished T-29.

Bhatia shot 71 and was four-over 292 for the week, finishing T-42.

Theegala was playing his third Masters and Bhatia his second.

At the top, Rory McIlroy ended an 11-year wait for a fifth Major with a dramatic win. Despite a double bogey start that wiped out his two-shot advantage right at the beginning, McIlroy picked up the pieces as his opponents failed to seize their chances.

After going into a tie at 11-under with Justin Rose, the Northern Irishman birdied the first hole in the play-off to end the mother of all waits.

Rose ended runner-up at the Masters for a third time — the previous ones being in 2015 and 2017 — while 2018 Masters winner Patrick Reed was third, and Scottie Scheffler, the defending champion and twice winner in the previous three years, was fourth at 8-under for the week.

## India wins four medals in Archery World Cup Stage 1

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Auburndale

India wrapped up their campaign at the Archery World Cup Stage 1 with a creditable four medals, including a silver in the men's recurve team event and a bronze by rising star Dhiraj Bommadevara in the individual recurve category, here on Sunday.

The 23-year-old Army archer Dhiraj showed exceptional grit and composure to clinch the bronze medal match, bouncing back from a 2-4 deficit to beat Andres Temino Mediel of Spain 6-4 in a tense five-setter.

**India's medal tally from the tournament stood at four — gold in the compound mixed team, bronze in compound men's team, silver in recurve men's team and bronze in recurve men's individual (Dhiraj)**

Earlier in the day, he was also part of the Indian trio alongside veterans Tarundeep Rai and Atanu Das that settled for silver after a 1-5 loss to China in the team final.

India's medal tally from the tournament stood at four — gold in the compound mixed team, bronze in com-

-pound men's team, silver in recurve men's team and bronze in recurve men's individual (Dhiraj). India's campaign also saw Abhishek Verma narrowly miss out on a medal, finishing fourth in the compound men's individual section.

In the bronze medal match, Dhiraj and Mediel tied the first set 28-28.

The Spaniard then edged ahead 29-28 in the second set with two 10s, while Dhiraj could manage only one, to take a 3-1 lead. The third set was again deadlocked at 29-29, putting Dhiraj under pressure. But the young Indian responded with a brilliant fourth set, hitting two 10s (including an X, the arrow closer to the centre) to win it 29-28 and level the score at 4-4.

In the deciding set, Dhiraj was ice-cold under pressure, nailing three perfect 10s to seal a well-deserved bronze. Earlier in the semifinals, he had lost 1-7 to world number four and Paris Olympics silver medalist Florian Unruh of Germany, who proved too strong with consistently high scoring.

Earlier, the Indian men's recurve team of Dhiraj, Tarundeep Rai and Atanu Das started well in the gold medal match against China, tying the first set 54-54.

However, inconsistency in the second set — marked by two 8s allowed the Chinese trio of Li Zhongyuan, Kao Wenchao and Wang Yan to pull ahead with a 58-55 scoreline.

## Spanish league: Real Madrid beats Alaves

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Madrid

Real Madrid overcame Kylian Mbappé's red card for a reckless tackle in the first half to win 1-0 at Alaves and get back to within four points of Spanish league leader Barcelona.

Mbappé was sent off shortly before the break after coming in hard for a studs-up challenge on Alaves midfielder Antonio Blanco. The France star was initially shown a yellow card but the referee changed it to a red after video review.

Mbappé had not seen a red card since 2019 while still playing for Paris Saint-Germain. He will miss at least the Spanish league game at Athletic Bilbao next Sunday. "Kylian is not violent, he has apologized," said Madrid assistant coach Davide Ancelotti, who was in charge on the bench because of a yellow-card suspension for his father, Carlo Ancelotti, who watched from the stands.

"He knows what he has done," Davide Ancelotti said. "It is a clear red-card foul and he paid for it." Alaves also played with 10 men from the 70th minute after Manu Sánchez was sent off for a foul on Madrid forward Vinícius Júnior. Eduardo Camavinga scored Madrid's winner with a shot from outside the area in the 34th. He had not scored a goal since a Copa del Rey match in January.

Barcelona had increased its lead over Madrid with a 1-0 win at Leganes on Saturday. The victory snapped Madrid's three-game winless streak in all competitions, a run that included Tuesday's 3-0 loss



at Arsenal in the first leg of the Champions League quarterfinals.

Carlo Ancelotti rested some of his regular starters ahead of the second leg on Wednesday in the Spanish capital.

"The victory gives us confidence," Davide Ancelotti said. "It was what we were looking for and we knew it was not going to be easy." Alaves, which has only two wins in its last 11 league games, stayed in 17th place, just outside the relegation zone.

The match was briefly interrupted in the 70th because of some fans' "Die" chants against Madrid defender Raúl Asencio.

Fight for fourthBoth fourth-placed Athletic Bilbao and fifth-placed Villarreal won their matches.

Athletic beat Rayo Vallecano 3-1 at home and Villarreal defeated sixth-placed

Real Betis 2-1 on the road. Athletic has a six-point lead over Villarreal, which has a game in hand. Betis is a further three points back.

Villarreal rallied with goals from Thierno Barry and Ayoze Pérez after Aitor Ruibal had put the hosts ahead three minutes into the match. It was Betis' first loss after nine games without defeat.

Athletic got a pair of goals by Oihan Sancet and one by Nico Williams against 10th-placed Rayo. The victory ended Athletic's streak of three straight draws across all competitions.

Osasuna wins Osasuna beat Girona 2-1 to move to 12th place and end a three-game losing streak against the Catalan club in the league. It had not won in nine matches in all competitions.

# IPL: Punjab Kings take on KKR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mullanpur

beleaguered Punjab Kings need to pick up pieces after being blown away by 'tornado' Abhishek Sharma as they face yet another challenging opposition in Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), here on Tuesday. It is a rarity that a team loses after putting on board a mammoth score like 245 but Punjab Kings had to endure a hard-to-digest defeat due to Abhishek Sharma's whirlwind knock of 141 off just 55 balls in their previous match against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

A helpless Shreyas Iyer, who himself smashed a 36-ball 82, could only laugh at the end of the match after watching his bowlers torn to shreds by Abhishek's blazing blade.

The carnage unfolded in Hyderabad, where the flat Uppal track resembles a 'national highway' where no total is safe.

On Tuesday, though, Punjab will play at their home in Mullanpur where the pitch is also conducive for batters and the team management needs to decide what kind of conditions it would prefer going forward. In the two matches at Mullanpur, 200-plus scores were managed by team batting first. The bowling unit's confidence must have been shaken, especially of the two spinners Yuzvendra Chahal and



Glenn Maxwell, who gave away 96 runs in seven overs between them.

And herein lies the dilemma. If Punjab goes for a flat deck, there is no guarantee that the bowling unit can defend anything in the 220 range, especially when KKR have the likes of Sunil Narine, Rinku Singh, and Venkatesh Iyer in their rank.

One piece of statistics that head coach Ricky Ponting would not like to look at is Punjab bowling unit's economy rate.

try's most improved T20 spinner Varun Chakravarthy, who loves to bowl on these kind of surfaces and Sunil Narine, who despite being past his prime, can be more than a handful in slower conditions. KKR is a unit which can be equally dangerous on both flatter decks and the slow spin-friendly tracks since they have all their bases covered.

Also the severe thrashing they handed the Chennai Super King at Chepauk would have done a world of good to their confidence.

The Punjab Kings batting is heavily dependent on skipper Iyer (250 runs), who has scored three fifties in five games so far. Priyansh Arya (194 runs) has been the find of the season.

Nehal Wadhwa (141 runs), Prabhsimran Singh (133 runs) and finisher Shashank Singh (108 runs) also give the team a lot of solidity. But Punjab's weak link is not their Indian players but the two Australians — Glenn Maxwell (34 runs) and Marcus Stoinis (59 runs), who have not contributed with the bat much so far.

The team expects a lot more from them but facing Varun Chakravarthy and Narine would be a big challenge for the duo. Even Marco Jansen (ER of 11.33) has bowled way too many loose deliveries for his comfort.

# Rishabh Pant powers LSG to post 166/7 against CSK

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lucknow

Skipper Rishabh Pant returned to form with a vital half-century and guided Lucknow Super Giants to 166 for seven against Chennai Super Kings in an IPL match here on Monday.

Pant (63 off 49 balls) struggled initially but grew in confidence as the innings progressed and together with Abdul Samad (20) shared 53 runs for the fifth wicket off 33 balls.

Coming off five successive losses, CSK made a dream start after electing to bowl. Left-arm pacer Khaleel Ahmed (1/38) struck the first blow in the opening over when he dismissed Aiden Markram with Rahul Tripathi taking a brilliant diving catch after sprinting backwards.

Two overs later, Anshul Kamboj removed the dangerous Nicholas Pooran LBW. Mitchell Marsh, returning to the side after sitting out of the last match due to personal reasons, took the attack to the opposition and smashed Khaleel for a four and six in consecutive balls.

Pant, who has struggled in the tournament so far, came out with intent and looked to get back to form with some unorthodox but confident hitting, which

included a reverse scoop six off a length delivery from Jamie Overton.

Veteran Ravindra Jadeja (2/34) went for 10 runs in his first over but came back strongly in his next over to disturb the timbers of Marsh.

Young Ayush Badoni (22 off 17) meant business and played his shots from the onset. He hit Overton for two huge consecutive sixes — one over cover and the next over fine leg to take LSG to 95 for three after 12 overs.

Pant welcomed Matheesha Pathirana (2/45) with an exquisite cover drive to the boundary.

After surviving two chances — first when he was caught off a no ball and then a close LBW call off Jadeja in the 14th over — Badoni got out when the left-arm spinner foxed him completely and Dhoni did the rest behind the stumps.

Pant struggled against CSK spinners, especially Noor Ahmad, who returned brilliant figures of 4-0-13-0.

But with pace back into the attack in the form of Pathirana in the 18th over, Pant took his chances as he smashed the Sri Lankan for two sixes — the second one a one-handed pull over square-leg to bring up his fifty.

# Pandya praises Karn Sharma

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

relieved Hardik Pandya credited 'impact sub' Karn Sharma for showing a lot of heart to fashion Mumbai Indians' 12-run win against Delhi Capitals here on Sunday, a result that helped the visitors get their IPL campaign back on track.

DC were cruising at 119 for one just after the halfway stage but were eventually bowled out for 193 in 19 overs, with spinner Karn playing a pivotal role by taking three wickets for 36 runs.

It was skipper Rohit Sharma who suggested to coach Mahela Jayawardene to bring Karn into the attack and also requested a ball change after the 11th over.

"Absolutely. Winning is always special. Especially in games like this. You have to keep fighting and it means a lot," said Pandya at the post-match presentation when asked if he felt relieved after MI secured only their second win of the season. "(Karn was) Fantastic. Coming in and changing the way he bowled, showed a lot of heart, especially at a small ground like that." Karun Nair's whirlwind 89 went in vain, and Pandya admitted the knock took them by surprise.

"We were running out of options regarding what to bowl at him. The way he took on our bowlers, took his chances, and the way he executed — it shows the hard work he has put in. I think he took us by surprise." DC batters suffered a dramatic collapse that included three successive run outs, ending their chase at 193.

"I always believe fielding is something

that can change the game upside down. We were switched on, didn't give up, and they got the chances and converted."

Sent in to bat, Tilak Varma smashed a 33-ball 59 to power Mumbai Indians to 205 for 5. Ryan Rickelton (41 off 25), Suryakumar Yadav (40 off 28), and Naman Dhir (38 off 17) also made vital contributions. Speaking about MI's batting approach, Pandya said it depends on the situation. "Amazing. It's always going to depend on the situation. The more the in-form players try to face the balls and take responsibility.

"Obviously, dew played a factor later. Just making sure the game is not over till it's over. Keep fighting — that was the chatter in the group and my message to the boys. Wins like this change the momentum and bring everything back."

Delhi Capitals skipper Axar Patel blamed "soft dismissals" in the middle order for the loss but didn't want to dwell too much on the result.

"We had the game. I think we had soft dismissals from the middle order, some bad shots. We lost by 12 runs with an over to go, so we could have still won it. It can't happen that your lower-order batters will always come and save you in chases.

"There are some odd days where you play wrong shots, so I don't think there's any point thinking too much about it. I thought 205 was a great target because it was a good pitch and dew was also coming." Axar also pointed to sloppy fielding as a factor that allowed MI to cross the 200-mark, but praised his spin unit.

# I was ready, waited for my chance, says Karun Nair

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Karun Nair marked his return to IPL with a superb knock for Delhi Capitals (DC) but despite being away from the league for two seasons, he always knew what to expect from opposition in terms of quality having been there and done that earlier too.

Grabbing his first opportunity of the season with both hands, Karun hit a superb 40-ball 89 while chasing a target of 206, but it went in vain as DC ended on 193 in 19 overs to go down by 12 runs to Mumbai Indians.

Not many batters have hit Jasprit Bumrah for two sixes in an over and Karun underlined his preparation as a key to success, having gained enough confidence during the domestic season in which he aggregated 1870 runs for Vidarbha across formats.

"Honestly, I had the confidence that I have played (IPL) before and I know how it is going to be, and it is nothing different that I am going to be facing anything new," said Nair, a Test-match triple-century, told reporters.

"So, but in my mind, it was just about going out there and giving myself a few balls and just getting used to the speed of the game again and the atmosphere," said Nair, who last played in the 2022 season for Rajasthan Royals.

He also spoke about hitting conventional shots during Powerplay and then going for improvisation during the latter part of



the innings. "So I just told myself, 'give yourself the time, play normal shots and then, you know, improvise when needed.' Fortunately, everything came off, and I am happy that I batted well. But again, I would have loved that if the team had gone on to win."

He did not play in first four games but knew that sooner or later his chance would come and he would have to be ready. "Look, obviously, we lost an important player in Faf, and we always knew - the few of us batters who are sitting outside who should be and have to be ready at any given time. So, mentally, I was ready, and obviously looking forward to

the chance, whenever it came."

"I felt confident. I felt like, I am well prepared to play in the IPL if given the opportunity. So it was all about me preparing the way that I have been all through the season and waiting for my chance. So I was doing my bit to prepare and be ready for the game."

"It is always a tough call for the team to pick 11 or 12 players, and I have always respected that. For me, it was about preparing and keeping the same process that I followed, which has worked for me, and just being ready to go out there and perform for the team."

Veteran leg-spinner Karn Sharma, who

dismissed Abhishek Porel, KL Rahul and Tristan Stubbs admitted that ball change after 13th over did help Mumbai Indians as it gripped and turned making life difficult for batters.

"I did not expect that there would be a dew. Because in the first innings, I think there was no dew. So when the ball was changed, the seam was newer and it was a little upright. So it gave me purchase from the wicket and we benefited from that," Karn, who took 3 for 36, said at the post match press conference.

Karn, who had won the IPL with Mumbai Indians in 2017, is considered as a 'Lucky Mascot' in IPL circles. He has been part of three IPL winning sides — SRH in 2016, MI in 2017 and CSK in 2018.

"It is a good thing that I came back after 6-7 years to Mumbai Indians where I finished in 2017. I just wanted to continue from there whenever I get a chance," Karn said.

"At that time, the situation was that they were going 10-11 runs per over. My role was just to take wickets in between. So, Mitchell Santner and I had to take wickets in between."

"In such matches, every wicket is important. The way they were playing, the way they were performing, the way the batting was going on ... Obviously, KL Rahul is a big name for them. And they finished the game very well in the last match. So, for us, all the wickets were important at that time."

# George Foreman to be honoured at Houston memorial service

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Houston

Family, friends and the public are preparing to remember boxing legend, pastor and entrepreneur George Foreman during a memorial service in his hometown of Houston.

George Foreman IV, one of five sons of the boxing legend, along with Houston Mayor John Whitmire and former boxer Michael Moorer, who Foreman defeated in 1994 to become the oldest man at age 45 to win the heavyweight championship, are expected to speak at the service Monday.

The service will be hosted by Foreman's family and the city of Houston at the Wortham Theater Center, a performing arts center that is home to the city's bal-

let and opera companies.

"We are going to celebrate the life of George Foreman, two-time heavyweight champion of the world and certainly the face of how great Houston is," Whitmire said. Foreman died on March 21 at age 76. Foreman's family has not disclosed his cause of death, only saying on social media that he "peacefully departed ... surrounded by loved ones."

**We are going to celebrate the life of George Foreman, two-time heavyweight champion of the world and certainly the face of how great Houston is**

— SOURCE, DESIGNATION

Born in Marshall, Texas, Foreman was

raised in Houston's Fifth Ward, one of the city's historically Black neighborhoods.

He began his boxing career as an Olympic gold medalist in 1968, turning pro the next year.

Foreman became the heavyweight champion of the world when he beat Joe Frazier in 1973. But he lost the title the following year when Muhammad Ali beat Foreman in the famous "Rumble in the Jungle" fight in Zaire.

Foreman then gave up boxing and after a religious awakening, became an ordained minister in 1978. He began preaching in Houston, later founding The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in 1980. The middle-aged fighter returned to the ring after a 10-year absence and in 1994 pulled off one of the most spectacular

knockouts in boxing history, flooring Moorer — 19 years his junior — with a surgical right hand to claim Moorer's two heavyweight belts.

Foreman retired in 1997 with a 76-5 career record.

He then moved to the next chapter in his life as a businessman, pitchman and occasional actor.

He became known to a new generation as the face of the George Foreman Grill. The simple cooking machine sold more than 100 million units and brought him more wealth than boxing. A biographical movie based on his life was released in 2023.

Foreman had 12 children, including five sons who are all famously named George Edward Foreman.

# ISSF World Cup: Indian shooters look to maintain good form

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lima (Peru)

Indian shooters will look to maintain their impressive form when they take to the range in the ISSF World Cup beginning here from Tuesday.

The Indian team finished a creditable second in the year's first World Cup for rifle, pistol and shotgun shooters in Buenos Aires last week.

On the first competition day in the capital city of Peru, the likes of Manu Bhaker, Suruchi and Sainyam will be in action in the women's air pistol competition, while Saurabh Chaudhary, Varun Tomar and Ravinder will take another shot at gold in the men's air pistol event

at the Las Palmas range.

Both the men's and women's 10m air pistol finals are scheduled for Tuesday. Close to 400 shooters from 43 countries, including a 35-member Indian contingent, will compete across 15 events in the three disciplines of rifle, pistol and shotgun over the next week, to establish early supremacy with the blue-riband ISSF World Championships coming up at the end of the year.

India finished second to China in the first leg which concluded last week in Argentina. The squad had won four gold and a total of eight medals.

All winners from the Argentina World Cup will be competing in Lima.

# Barcelona, PSG, Arsenal hold leads in Champions League quarterfinal matches

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Manchester

Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain and Arsenal hold such commanding leads in their Champions League quarterfinal matches that a place in the last four looks all but certain.

Do not be so sure. European club soccer's most prestigious competition has a habit of upsetting the odds.

Barcelona and PSG have very recent memories of how quickly things can change. Barcelona was 4-2 up on aggregate against PSG early in the second leg of last year's quarterfinals - only to lose 6-4.

In 2017 PSG led 4-0 after the first leg of a round of 16 game between the two in Paris, but famously lost 6-1 at Camp Nou.

Part of what makes the Champions League such compelling viewing is the fragility of even the most commanding leads.

Liverpool trailed AC Milan 3-0 at half-time of the final of 2005 before staging a dramatic fightback and going on to win in a penalty shootout. The Merseyside club stunned Barcelona on its way to the title in 2019 when overturning a 3-0 loss in the first leg of the semifinals by winning the return leg 4-0.

There are many more examples of how the tables can be turned when Europe's elite go head-to-head, which is why nothing can be taken for granted ahead of this week's

second leg matches.

## REAL TROUBLE

Record 15-time winner and defending champion Real Madrid will have to produce another of its famous comebacks to overturn a 3-0 first leg loss to Arsenal.

If anyone can, Madrid can — but it goes into Wednesday's game at the Bernabeu after a run of unconvincing results. Carlo Ancelotti's team has only won one of its last four games in all competitions — Sunday's 1-0 victory against Alaves.

The defeat to Arsenal could have been even heavier after being dominated at the Emirates Stadium and came after Madrid needed a penalty shootout to overcome Atletico Madrid in the round of 16.

But Madrid's history is built on producing special performances in Europe. Its run to the title in 2022 was filled with dramatic comebacks — none more so than the semifinals win against Manchester City when trailing 5-3 on aggregate going into the 90th minute of the second leg. Madrid simply never knows when it is beaten.

## EUROPE'S FINEST?

This could be the first great Barcelona team of the post-Lionel Messi era. Top of the Spanish league and on the verge of the Champions League semifinals, Barcelona looks like the team to beat in this year's competition. Leading 4-0 against Borussia



Dortmund, it would take the unlikely of collapses in Germany on Tuesday to prevent Hansi Flick's team from booking its place in the semifinals.

With the devastating goal-scoring power of Robert Lewandowski and the individ-

ual brilliance of Raphinha and Lamine Yamal, this looks like Barcelona's best team since the days of Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez and its best chance in a long time of winning its first Champions League title since 2015.

## A NEW ERA

The post-Kylian Mbappe era is going just fine for PSG. A record-extending 13th French league title has already been sealed and there have been standout performances in the Champions League.

## DARK HORSE

Inter Milan leads Bayern Munich 2-1 in the closest match of the quarterfinals.

Davide Frattesi's 88th-minute winner in Munich gave the 2023 finalist the advantage heading into the second leg at the San Siro. Bayern, under Vincent Kompany, cruised to the quarterfinals and looks like regaining the German league title this season. Inter could be the dark horse of this year's competition, having come so close to stopping City's treble of trophies two years ago.