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BANGLADESH TELLS PAKISTAN, SAY SORRY

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ New Delhi/Dhaka

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

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

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

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

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

Asked what was the Pakistani side's response to the call, Uddin said they would like to "remain engaged" with a positive outlook to discuss the unsettled issue in future.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Detailed Story on >> P4

Vice President of India attacked by Opposition

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

Congress Rajya Sabha MP Randeep Singh Surjewala cited the Supreme Court's April 8 judgment that entails a three-month deadline for the President to act on Bills sent by Governors. "Only the Constitution is supreme in our democracy. No authority, including the Vice President, can override constitutional checks and balances," Surjewala said.

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

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

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

Senior Advocate and Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal also joined the debate, questioning Dhankhar's objection to Article 142 of the Constitution. "The Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to deliver complete justice. It is not about curtailing the powers of the President; it is about ensuring justice in its truest sense," he said.

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

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

The ByStander

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

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

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

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

During the inspection, the Minister observed that illegal and unlicensed raw meat shops, dhabas, polluting tandoors, illegal denim factories and dyeing units, and other polluting industrial units operating in residential areas are significant contributors to pollution.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York/Chandigarh

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

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

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

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

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

In January, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) had announced a cash reward of ₹5 lakh on Passia in connection with a hand-grenade attack on a house in Chandigarh in September last year. Passia and Pakistan-based designated BKI terrorist Harwinder Singh Sandhu alias Rinda were among the four named in a charge sheet in the case by the NIA.

Punjab Police investigation had allegedly found that Passia provided the accused with explosives, weapons and logistical support through his local associates. The September 2024 attack was intended to target a retired Punjab Police officer who the assailants believed was an occupant of the house in Sector 10, Chandigarh.

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

The fatal stabbing of the 17-year-old in northeast Delhi's Seelampur also triggered a war of words between the ruling BJP and opposition AAP on Friday. Both blamed each other for the "deteriorating law and order" in the city. The youngster was stabbed on Thursday at J Block in New Seelampur. Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said the youngster's family will get justice. "I have talked to the Commissioner of Police. The police is making all efforts and I hope the accused will be arrested soon. It will be ensured that the bereaved family gets justice," she said.

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

The deceased youth's family, meanwhile, claimed that Zikra, a local woman known as 'Lady Don' in the area was present when Kunal was killed, the officer said. Police have since detained Zikra for questioning, sources said, though she has not been formally arrested.

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

Zikra, who goes by the name 'Lady Don' on Instagram, once worked for a gangster's wife but now leads her own gang of around 10 to 15 young men. She often posts videos brandishing weapons on her social media platform. Last month, she posted a video on the social media, wherein she was allegedly flaunting a country-made pistol. She has more than 15,000 followers on Instagram. Zikra worked as a bouncer for jailed gangster Hashim Baba's wife Zoya, before the latter's arrest by Delhi Police in a drugs case. She was reportedly living with Zoya before the latter was jailed. It is believed that Zikra was trying to form her own gang after Zoya's arrest, sources said

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

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Manuscripts of Bhagvad Gita, Natyashastra added to UNESCO register

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bharat Muni makes a "groundbreaking statement in Natyashastra, asserting that 'no meaning can blossom forth without rasa', a profound contribution to world literature," it said.

> **The inclusion of the Gita and Natyashastra in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register is a global recognition of our timeless wisdom and rich culture**
>
> — NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER

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

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

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

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

"Due to its philosophical breadth and depth, the Bhagavad Gita has been read for centuries across the globe and translated into many languages," the UNESCO citation added. Union Home Minister Amit Shah hailed the development, and said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bharat has made incessant efforts to enshrine its cultural wisdom at the centre of global welfare. Shah also said that the world treasures Bharat's wisdom.

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

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

"Under the leadership of PM Shri @narendramodi Ji, Bharat has made incessant efforts to enshrine our cultural wisdom at the centre of global welfare. This is a great recognition of these efforts," he said. Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat also took to the social media, saying this was a "historic moment for Bharat's civilisational heritage". This global honour celebrates India's "eternal wisdom and artistic genius", the Minister said.

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

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

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Controversy erupts over Hindi language issue in Maharashtra

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

A major political controversy erupted in Maharashtra on Friday over the BJP-led MahaYuti government's decision to make Hindi as a compulsory language in primary schools in the state, with the Opposition Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and MNS strongly opposing the move and demanding its immediate withdrawal.

While the Congress dubbed the decision to "impose" Hindi as a compulsory language as a "ploy to destroy the Marathi language, identity, and culture", the Raj Thackeray-led Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) launched a campaign against the implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 with a plank "*Ami Hindu ahot, pan Hindi nahi*" (we are Hindu, but not Hindi). The Shiv Sena (UBT) accused Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis of indulging in politics over Hindi language. The NCP makes Hindi as a third language and will be mandatory for students in Classes 1 to 5 in Marathi and English schools of Maharashtra.

As a mark of protest, the MNS workers burnt down a copy of Government Resolution (GR) issued by the Maharashtra government on NEP.

The Opposition protests came a day after Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis defended the state government's decision of making Hindi as a third language in primary schools of the state on the ground that it is a single language of communication across the country.

"We have already implemented the NEP. Hence, no new decisions have been taken in this regard. It is our insistence that everyone in Maharashtra should know Marathi. Also, there should be a single language for communication across the country. Hindi is a language that can be a language for communication. Therefore, people should also learn Hindi, this is our effort."

Taking a serious exception to "impose" Hindi as a compulsory language, Maharashtra Congress president Harshavardhan Sapkal said, "The Marathi language is the identity and culture of Maharashtra, and the BJP government is trying to undermine this very culture. Unity in diversity is India's true identity, and the BJP is conspiring to erase that. The decision to impose Hindi as a compulsory language from the primary level is completely wrong and must be withdrawn immediately".

The MNS' Mumbai Chief Sandeep Deshpande said, "Our country adopted the formula of linguistic regionalisation after Independence, and while doing so, it prioritised the languages of each state. When this country has adopted a policy of not considering any one language as the national language of the country for so many decades, why is it now a matter of insisting on one country, one language?."

Commuters pass by a newly put-up poster of MNS president Raj Thackeray that reads — 'We are Hindus, but not Hindi', near Shiv Sena Bhavan at Dadar, in Mumbai on Friday PTI

The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena leader Sanjay Raut also hit out at the MahaYuti government for indulging in politics over Hindi language. "Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis wants to play language politics. Marathi is the state language here. First, make Marathi compulsory. Marathi language should be respected in employment, industry, and commerce," Raut said.

Talking to media persons at the Congress headquarters "Tilak Bhavan" here, Sapkal said: "On one hand, there's talk of granting Marathi the status of a classical language, and on the other, efforts are being made to sideline it-this is a hypocritical stance. Language is not just a medium of communication; it's a cultural expression. How are students expected to study other subjects when they're burdened with three compulsory languages?"

"Making Hindi a compulsory language will deprive children of foundational knowledge. Regional languages must be respected. While other languages deserve appreciation too, the BJP's intent is to eliminate regional cultures and languages. This decision could also threaten the jobs of teachers of other languages. The BJP's agenda of pushing Hindu, Hindi, and Hindu Rashtra is unacceptable, and Congress strongly opposes such enforcement," Sakpal said.

Sakpal wanted to know when Hindi was being opposed in Southern India, but being forced upon the students in Maharashtra. "Is this language imposition a means to divide the country? And are Marathi-speaking people not Hindus? The BJP is attempting to eliminate the very language in which Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj ran his Hindavi Swarajya-this is a direct attack," Sapkal said.

On his part, deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar of the NCP came down heavily on the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) saying that the Opposition parties were raking up unnecessary disputes because of lack of issues.

"Some people are creating disputes over the Hindi language only because they have nothing else to do. English is already widely used across the country, and similarly, Hindi is spoken in many Indian states. While there is an ongoing debate about whether Hindi is the rashtra bhasha… I do not wish to enter that argument," Ajit Pawar said in Pune.

Underlining the importance of promoting all three languages — Marathi, Hindi, and English, Ajit Pawar said, "Marathi will always hold primacy in Maharashtra. Marathi must remain intact and continue to grow".

Tearing into the MNS and other Opposition parties over the Hindi language issue, Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde) deputy leader Sanjay Nirupam said, "Marathi is respected in Maharashtra. Neither will we compromise over Marathi nor will we allow it to happen. However, if the government says that students from classes 1 to 5 will be taught English, Hindi and Marathi as per the New Education Policy, it is okay with us. Because, such a move will increase the skills of those students. If the students learn Hindi, then they would be able to work anywhere in the country with a lot of confidence".

One arrested in air hostess abuse case

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

A day after the formation of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the air hostess sexual assault case, the SIT on Friday nabbed the accused, after analysing at least 800 CCTV cameras installed inside and outside of the hospital, who sexually assaulted the woman when she was on a ventilator, police said.

The accused was identified as Deepak (25), a native of Muzaffarpur in Bihar. The accused had been working as a treatment machine technician in the ICU of the hospital for the past 5 months.

The accused was arrested in the Sadar police station area on Friday. An official privy to the matter said the accused has confessed his crime in the matter.

"While investigating the incident, eight police teams checked the footage of 800 CCTV cameras installed in the hospital, and around 50 hospital staff, including doctors, were questioned about the incident. Keeping in mind the seriousness of the incident, the police teams investigated from every angle and collected a lot of information related to the incident, as a result of which the police got great success in identifying the accused who committed the crime," Arpit Jain, DCP (headquarters), said in a statement.

On Thursday, Vikas Kumar Arora, Commissioner of Police, Gurugram, had constituted an SIT and ordered the identification and arrest of the accused.

As per the order of the police commissioner, an SIT was constituted under the leadership of Arpit Jain, Deputy Commissioner of Police Headquarters, Gurugram, in which a total of 8 different police teams were given special directions and deployed to collect information and evidence related to the incident.

The eight different teams, including Arpit Jain DCP (headquarters), Yashwant (ACP Sadar), Kavita (ACP CAW), Inspector Sunil Kumar (SHO, Sadar Police Station), Women Inspector Geeta (SHO Women Police Station West), Inspector Amit Kumar (in charge of CIA Sector-40), and Women Assistant-Sub-Inspector Sonika (investigation officer of the case), Gurugram, collected various information related to the matter.

The accused will be produced before the court on Saturday. The police will seek police custody for further investigation," police said.

Meanwhile, Dr Sanjay Durani, Medical Supritendent of Medanta Hospital said in a statement that, "We have been informed that the police has identified a suspect who has been taken into custody in connection with the ongoing investigation concerning allegations of sexual assault on a patient.

On the basis of information provided to us by the police, at present we have suspended the suspect employee. As we await the final outcome of the investigation, we will continue to provide full support to the police."

A 46-year-old air hostess had alleged in her complaint that she was sexually assaulted when she was on ventilator support in the intensive care unit (ICU) of a noted private hospital in Gurugram on April 6. The matter came to light on April 13 when she told her husband about the sexual assault, who alerted the police after dialing the 112 police control room.

Based on her complaint, a case was registered at the Sadar police station, Gurugram, on April 14.

According to her police complaint, she had come to Gurugram for training on behalf of the company and was staying in a hotel. During this time, her health deteriorated due to drowning in water, after which she was admitted to a private hospital for treatment.

After that, on April 5, her husband admitted her to another hospital in Gurugram for treatment. She was discharged from the hospital on April 13.

"During the treatment, on April 6, she was on a ventilator, during which some staff of the hospital sexually assaulted her. At that time she was on a ventilator and could not speak anything and was very scared. She was also unconscious at the time of the incident, and two nurses were also around her," the victim had alleged in her complaint.

After being discharged, she told her husband about the sexual assault, and he informed the 112 police and then complained to the police in front of the legal advisor.

Following a complaint filed by the victim, a case has been registered at the Sadar Police Station, Gurugram. A police team was rushed to the hospital to scan the duty chart and analyse the CCTV footage to identify the accused, police said.

The hospital earlier had rejected the air hostess's claim of being sexually harassed by a hospital staffer while she was on a ventilator in the ICU, allegedly in the presence of two nurses.

In a statement issued on April 15, the hospital had said that "no allegations have been substantiated" so far and that it has submitted CCTV footage and relevant medical records to the police.

BJP to launch Waqf awareness campaign in UP

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a strategic outreach effort, the BJP is set to launched a state-wide awareness campaign to inform Muslims about the benefits of the amended Waqf law. The initiative, titled Waqf Reform Jan Jagran Abhiyan, aims to dispel misconceptions and connect poor and underprivileged Muslims with the party's development agenda.

The campaign, which will be spearheaded by the BJP Minority Morcha, will cover Muslim-majority areas across Uttar Pradesh, including the state capital, Lucknow. Through public meetings, door-to-door outreach, and informational sessions, the party plans to educate the community on how the revised Waqf Act is designed for their socio-economic empowerment. Uttar Pradesh Minister of State for Minority Welfare, Danish Azad Ansari, emphasised that the reformed Waqf law is intended to ensure that Waqf properties serve their true purpose — the welfare of economically and educationally backward Muslims.

"This law has been brought for the economic upliftment of Muslims. Every poor Muslim stands to benefit from it," said Azad. "Unfortunately, certain vested interests who have misused Waqf properties for personal gains are spreading misinformation. The opposition is trying to create fear by claiming that properties are being taken away."

Mumbai's DPS Flamingo Lake declared conservation reserve

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

In a development welcomed by environmentalists, the Maharashtra Maharashtra State Wildlife Board (MSWB) has declared the Delhi Public School (DPS) wetland area in the satellite township of Navi Mumbai as a DPS Flamingo Conservation Reserve.

The decision to declare the DPS Lake or DPS Flamingo Lake — as it is popularly known — was taken at a MSWB meeting presided over by Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis in Mumbai.

Spread over 30 acres in the Seawoods area of Navi Mumbai, the Delhi Public School Flamingo Lake is part of the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary's satellite wetland ecosystem.

Many flamingos fly to the wetlands like Panje, DPS lake, and NRI and TS Chanakya wetlands in Navi Mumbai during the high tide in the creek for resting and in search of food. The neighbouring Thane Creek hosts many birds migrating on the Central Asian Flyway — and is a Ramsar site.

Flamingos descending in thousands on the wetland areas of Navi Mumbai are a common sight between November and May every year. More than a lakh of pink-winged birds are sighted every year. Flamingos migrate to Mumbai for feeding purposes from breeding sites in the Gujarat region as well as Iran.

Three years ago, the then Maharashtra chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had cleared the proposal for designating the biodiversity-rich Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary (TCFS) in Thane-Navi Mumbai belt as a Ramsar site as per the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, for submission to the Centre.

Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and various organisations in Navi Mumbai had given their representations to the MSWB, seeking its declaration of DPS Lake as a Flamingo Conservation Reserve.

Welcoming the MSWB's decision to declare DPS wetland as a conservation Reserve, BNHS' Director Kishor Rithe said that his organisation had for long been rooting for such a decision.

Forest Minister and vice-chairman of the MSWB Ganesh Naik, who pushed for the decision, said, "The DPS lake is a crucial destination for flamingos and deserves protection as a sensitive ecological zone".

It may be recalled that Naik, who had earlier visited the lake and noticed its terrible condition, had ordered the opening of two inlets and asked Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation (NMMC) to lower the pipes to ensure proper flow of tidal water.

"Plenty of algae accumulated in the lake due to the stagnant water, but now almost 60 per cent of the muck is cleared," a senior forest department official said.

With the partial restoration of the water flow, the pink beauties have once again begun to flock to their favourite destination, the DPS Flamingo Lake.

Environmental organisations — NatConnect, Navi Mumbai Environment Preservation Society (NMEPS), Save Flamingos and Wetlands Forum and Kharghar Wetlands and Hills forum — had also formed a human chain twice last year to focus attention on the plight of the flamingo abode.

Sandeep Sareen of NMEPS said endorsement of the proposal for the conservation reserve is a collective victory for all environment lovers. He too presented a memorandum to Naik during the Minister's janata darbar recently.

"With this decision, a wetland in the Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary's (TCFS) satellite ecosystem will receive such protection," NatConnect Foundation Director BN Kumar said.

BNHS had in the past recommended repeatedly that the satellite wetlands would have to be conserved as part of the TCFS management plan.

The Thane Creek falls under the Marine Ecoregions of the World (MEOW) but is fed by numerous freshwater sources, making the water brackish. Its mangrove forests provide nurseries for several fish species, sustaining the local fisheries, and also act as a natural buffer against floods, cyclones and seawater intrusions, enhancing the resilience of surrounding areas to such climate-related hazards.

Manuscripts...

Continued from >> P1

Collections are added to the register by a decision of UNESCO Executive Board, following the evaluation of nominations by an independent international advisory committee. Among the newly inscribed collections, 14 pertain to scientific documentary heritage.

Ithaf Al-Mahbub, submitted by Egypt, documents the Arab world's contributions to astronomy, planetary movement, celestial bodies, and astrological analysis during the first millennium of our era, UNESCO said.

The archives of Charles Darwin (United Kingdom), Friedrich Nietzsche (Germany), Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen (Germany) — which contain the very first recorded X-ray photographs — and Carlos Chagas (Brazil), a pioneer in disease research, have also been included.

Several collections document key moments in international cooperation, including the Geneva Conventions (1864-1949) and their protocols (1977-2005) (Switzerland), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations), and the 1991 Windhoek Declaration (Namibia), a global reference for press freedom, the UNESCO said in the statement.

"Documentary heritage is an essential yet fragile element of the memory of the world. This is why UNESCO invests in safeguarding — such as the libraries of Chinguetti in Mauritania or the archives of Amadou Hampate Ba in Cote d'Ivoire — shares best practices and maintains this Register that records the broadest threads of human history," UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay said.

Crackdown on illegal meat shops and dhabas...

Continued from >> P1

He also directed the officials to address waterlogging issues urgently and ensure cleaner roads to prevent the spread of disease. During the visit, Sirsa interacted with area residents and assured them of swift action to improve essential civic amenities such as electricity, water supply, sanitation and road infrastructure.

Those present during the Minister's inspection were officials from Delhi Development Authority (DDA), Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Public Works Department (PWD), Irrigation and Flood Control (I&FC), Delhi Jal Board (DJB), Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), and BSES, ensuring coordinated efforts to address the issues effectively.

On pollution, the Minister said the Delhi Government will roll out a comprehensive framework to tackle rising pollution levels, which will include deployment of 1,000 water tankers with sprinklers, anti-smog guns on high-rise buildings and CCTVs and LED screens on city borders to prevent entry of old vehicles. He said the roadmap will outline the city's strategy to fight pollution from 2025 to 2026. Sirsa said that one of the key goals is to bring PM2.5 levels down.

"We are installing water mist systems at various hotspots to clean the air and help particulate matter settle down. This initiative has already shown success over a 5-km stretch in Dwarka," he said. The city Government is now expanding the project to 13 identified hotspots across the city. To intensify dust suppression, over 1,000 GPS-enabled water tankers with sprinklers will be deployed. "These tankers will move to areas with high pollution levels. Their routes and performance will be monitored in real time. Wherever AQI (Air Quality Index) rises, tankers will be sent immediately," he said.

The Minister said that monitoring will be increased at all entry points to Delhi to curb entry of end-of-life vehicles. Cameras and LED screens will be installed in these borders, displaying vehicle details. "Data is being collected, and based on it, vehicle owners will be sent automated messages informing them not to enter Delhi if their vehicle is deemed illegal," he said. Sirsa also said high-rise buildings will soon be required to install air- water guns. AQI meters will be mandatory at all construction sites, he said.

"Everything will be automated and AI-driven. We are building a monitoring station at the Secretariat so that pollution data can be accessed and tracked live," he said.

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

Continued from >> P1

The deceased's family members claimed that sometime back, a few members from Kunal's community allegedly attacked Zikra's cousin brother Sahil, prompting police to register an attempt to murder case. Kunal's murder could be an act of revenge for that incident, the sources said.

"It is suspected that Kunal was also involved in the stabbing of Sahil. Although Sahil did not die, he along with Zikra hatched a plan to take revenge for the attack," a family source said.

Parveen, the mother of the deceased, said, "Zikra used to roam the area carrying a pistol. An incident happened with her cousin Sahil but my son was not involved. Yet they killed him. They brutally stabbed him multiple times."

Zikra was previously arrested under the Arms Act for posting a video with a pistol on the social media. Out on bail, she was living in a rented house near Kunal's residence. Names of some of her gang members are now surfacing in connection with Kunal's murder.

The youth's family also claimed that some area residents have been forced to flee out of fear of Zikra.

Meanwhile, security has been beefed up with deployment of police and Rapid Action Force (RAF) personnel in the area amid protests by area residents and activists of some Hindu outfits, including Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Posters with 'Hindus are migrating' and 'Please help, Yoji ji' written on them surfaced in the area, which police later removed. Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly and senior AAP leader Atishi accused the BJP-led Central government and Delhi Police of failing to ensure the safety of citizens.

"The murder of a 17-year-old youth in Seelampur is another example of the deteriorating law and order situation in Delhi," Atishi posted on X.

"What is Delhi Police doing? What is Home Minister Amit Shah doing? What is the double engine government doing?" she asked, referring to the BJP Government at the Centre which controls Delhi Police.

Countering the opposition charge, BJP MP from North East Delhi, Manoj Tiwari, condemned the killing and said the matter was being taken seriously by law enforcers and assured people that swift action will be taken.

"The murder of the Dalit youth named Kunal is extremely worrying. The anger among the area people is quite natural," Tiwari said in a post on 'X'.

"I have been in touch with senior police officers from the district since last night. Most of the criminals have been identified and a thorough investigation is underway," he added.

Assuring that the accused will be arrested and given strict punishment, Tiwari appealed for calm. "Efforts should be made to ensure that police action is not hindered," he said.

BJP MLA Ravinder Singh Negi said, "We have assured the family that there is no need to panic or leave the area. Strict action will be taken against the accused. Police are doing their job, the culprits will be punished. In Hindustan, Hindus will stay. No one needs to leave their homes. We have removed the posters and assured people that we are standing with them," he said.

"If there is a need for the Yogi model, it will be used. If an encounter is required, the police will act accordingly. If any accused tries to flee, we will respond with the Yogi model," he remarked.

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

Continued from >> P1

He went to London in October in 2020 and thereafter moved to the US.

Passia was initially aligned with Jaggu Bhagwanpuria gang members, including US- based associates Darmanjot Singh (Darman Kahlon) and Amritpal Singh (Amrit Bal). This affiliation with the Bhagwanpuria gang marks the inception of Passia's involvement in organised crime, laying the foundation for his subsequent collaboration with Rinda.

Rinda, lately, roped in Passia for execution of terror attacks in the State.

Between September and October 2023, Passia, in collusion with Rinda, orchestrated a series of extortion and terror activities in Punjab, India, according to the dossier.

They targeted liquor contractors and businessmen by making extortion calls and executing arson and shooting incidents at liquor vends in Batala and Amritsar to instil fear and force compliance.

Several terror and criminal modules backed by the Rinda-Passia network were busted by Punjab Police. The modules were raised to target leaders of Hindu groups, police establishments, serving and retired Punjab Police officers, processions carried out by Hindu groups as well as liquor contractors from Amritsar-Batala region for execution to raise funds for terrorism.

The alliance between Passia and Rinda led to the formation of a nefarious network aimed at executing acts of terror across Punjab.

Passia's collaboration with Rinda intensifies the gravity of his actions.

His participation in planning and orchestrating terror modules aimed at targeting key figures in Punjab underscores a significant threat.

Between late 2024 and early 2025, BKI orchestrated a series of 16 terror attacks across Punjab, including 14 hand-grenade assaults, one Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attack, and one Rocket-Propelled Grenade (RPG) strikes targeting police establishment and officials' residences.

A notable incident involved the planting of an IED near Ajnala Police Station on November 23, 2024 and a RPG attack on police establishment Qila Lal Singh in Gurdaspur district on the intervening night of 6 and 7 April.

These attacks were coordinated by Passia under the direction of Rinda, and in collaboration with his other US-based associates - Gurdev Singh Jaisal Pehalwan, Gurpreet Singh alias Gopi Nawanshehria and Germany-based Swaran Singh alias Jeevan Faujia, along with their local accomplices, the dossier said.

The Rinda-Passia network has been recruiting juveniles, often struggling with drug addiction, to carry out terrorist activities in exchange for money and narcotics.

In December 2024, Punjab Police arrested a 17-year-old involved in planting an IED at Ajnala Police Station, who confessed to being lured into the operation with promises of drugs and cash.

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Badesatti becomes Maoist-free gram panchayat

STAFF REPORTER
SUKMA

With the en masse surrender of 11 rebels, Badesatti in Sukma district has become the Maoist-free gram panchayat of Chhattisgarh, an official communique said on Friday.

Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said that the surrendered left-wing radicals were active in Badesatti village panchayat in the Phulbagdi area.

Among the surrendered Naxals, four carried a reward of Rs 2 lakh each, and one of them had a bounty of Rs 50,000.

Under the new Chhattisgarh Naxal Surrender/Victim Relief and Rehabilitation Policy-2025, the state government has introduced 'Elvad Panchayat Yojana', which has a provision of sanctioning development works worth Rs 1 crore to village panchayats that facilitate the surrender of Naxalites active in their area and pass a resolution declaring themselves Maoist free.

"For the last 15 days, the police had been targeting Badesatti village and were in contact with local panchayat representatives to encourage village-level members, like the militia and revolutionary party committee of the banned outfit, to surrender," the SP said.

Chavan said 11 Naxalites active in Badesatti were identified, and with their surrender, the panchayat has become Maoist-free. All the surrendered Naxalites were provided assistance of Rs 50,000 each, and they will be further rehabilitated as per the government's policy.

Home Minister Vijay Sharma, terming it as historical, said that Badesatti village has become the first Maoist-free panchayat, and soon Rs 1 crore will be sanctioned for development works there.

22 Maoists carrying Rs 40.5L reward surrender in Sukma

STAFF REPORTER
SUKMA

A Maoist couple among 22 rebels, 12 of them carrying a cumulative reward of Rs 40.50 lakh on their heads, surrendered to the security personnel in Sukma district in Chhattisgarh on Friday.

The rebels, including nine women cadres, turned themselves in citing disappointment with hollow Maoist ideology, Sukma Additional Superintendent of Police Akash Rao Girepune said.

They were active in the Maad (Chhattisgarh) and Nuapada (Odisha) divisions of the outlawed Maoist outfit.

Among them, Muchaki Joga was deputy commander in the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) company Number 1 under the Maad division of Maoists and his wife Muchaki Jogi was its member. The Maoist couple carried a reward of Rs 8 lakh each.

Kikid Deve and Manoj alias Dudhi Budhra, were Area Committee Members and carried a reward of Rs 5 lakh each.

Seven other surrendered radicals carried a bounty of Rs 2 lakh each, while another Naxalite carried a reward of Rs 50,000.

CCCI election concludes, top leaders elected unopposed

STAFF REPORTER
RAIPUR

The elections of the Chhattisgarh Chamber of Commerce and Industries have concluded and top leaders have elected unopposed, an official communique said on Friday.

Satish Thorani has been elected President, Ajay Bhasin as General Secretary and Nikesh Bardia as Treasurer.

Speaking to The Pioneer, General Secretary elect Ajay Bhasin said now they aim to ensure that the traders benefit from the welfare initiatives of the government.

They also aim to resolve the problems in business by creating various links and collaborating with the government, he said.

They will be sworn in on April 20 in the presence of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai.

CBI raids five places in connection to CGPSC scam

STAFF REPORTER
RAIPUR

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has conducted searches at five places in Chhattisgarh in connection with alleged irregularities in a recruitment examination conducted by the Chhattisgarh Public Service Commission (CGPSC) during the previous Congress rule, a CBI statement said on Friday.

The searches, conducted on Thursday, covered three locations in Raipur and two in Mahasamund districts belonging to five persons (middlemen/solvers), and the agency recovered incriminating documents from these premises, they said.

The alleged role of these persons emerged during the investigation into a case related to the Chhattisgarh Public Service Commission (CGPSC) recruitment scam.

The CBI in July 2024 took over the investigation of two cases regarding alleged malpractices in the recruitment for the posts of deputy collector, deputy superintendent of police and some other senior government posts through the CGPSC during 2020-2022.

The central agency has so far arrested seven persons named as then chairman of CGPSC Taman Singh Sonwani, his nephews Nitesh Sonwani and Sahil Sonwani, then Deputy Controller Examination (CGPSC) Lalit Ganvir, Director of Shri Bajrang Power and Ispat Ltd Shravan Kumar Goyal, his son Shashank Goyal and daughter-in-law Bhumika Katiyar.

Shashank Goyal, his wife Bhumika Katiyar and Nitesh Sonwani had been selected for the post of Deputy Collector, while Sahil had been selected for the post of Deputy Superintendent of Police.

The CBI on January 16 filed a charge sheet in the case before a special court in Raipur, naming all these persons as accused.

The investigation continued in respect of other candidates, officials of CGPSC and others.

As per the charge sheet, Taman Singh Sonwani leaked question papers to his nephews Nitesh and Sahil.

Further, Taman Singh and Lalit Ganvir entered into a criminal conspiracy with Shravan Kumar Goyal, whole-time director of Shri Bajrang Power and Ispat, and allegedly leaked question papers to Shravan. He shared them with his son and daughter-in-law.

Man kills his mother after she denies him money to buy a dog

STAFF REPORTER
RAIPUR

A man on Friday morning bludgeoned his 70-year-old mother to death after she refused to give him Rs 200 to purchase a dog in the outskirts of Chhattisgarh's Raipur city, police said.

The accused, Pradeep Dewangan (45), also injured his wife during the attack that occurred in Nageshwar Nagar in the Urla area around 8 am, Station House Officer BL Chandrakar said.

Pradeep was eager to purchase a German shepherd puppy for Rs 800 and was falling short of Rs 200, which he soughtfrom his mother, Ganeshi.

Pradeep bludgeoned the victim to death with a hammer after she refused to give him the money.

Pradeep managed to escape from the spot when his 15-year-old son intervened and alerted the neighbours about the attack.

The police reached the spot and rushed the two women to a hospital, where Ganeshi succumbed to injuries.

A case of murder and attempted murder was registered against him and efforts were on to nab the killer, the police said.

Teachers' protest on hold following assurances from CM

STAFF REPORTER
RAIPUR

The sacked B.Ed-trained assistant teachers put their protest on hold on Friday following assurances of reinstatement to equivalent posts from Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai.

They met Sai at his residence in Raipur.

About 2,621 dismissed teachers have peacefully protested for 126 days, seeking reinstatement to equivalent posts like lab assistant. A High Court ruling in April 2024 deemed them ineligible for the position of primary teachers, leading to their termination.

During their meeting, Sai said that the government understands their issue and was considering this matter with sympathy.

He added that all possible effort was being made to resolve this matter.

They urged Sai to promptly initiate the procedure of their reinstatement.

C'garh awarded for implementation of crop insurance scheme

STAFF REPORTER
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh was awarded as the second-best performing state for the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana in the large states category on Friday.

The award was presented at the two-day 12th National Review Meeting of the scheme organised by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare in Kerala.

Chhattisgarh's Mohla-Manpur-Ambagarh-Chowki and Sakti districts have also been selected as the best-performing districts under the scheme.

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai congratulated the Agriculture Department and said that this achievement reflects his government's commitment towards the welfare of the farmers.

A glimpse of the activities held to secure the boundaries of Keshkal Forest Division in Chhattisgarh on the first day of the Forest Border Security Week on Friday.

World Liver Day: Fix food habits to cut liver disease risk by 50 pc

AGENCIES

Medical experts on Friday emphasised the critical link between dietary habits and liver health, saying that healthy changes today can cut liver disease risk by 50 per cent.

Ahead of the World Liver Day which falls on April 19, healthcare experts said that food is medicine, as cases of liver diseases among both urban and rural populations rise in the country.

Doctors said that liver disease is no longer confined to alcohol abuse — there is a worrying rise in non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) due to unhealthy eating patterns, obesity, and lack of exercise.

A recent large-scale study published in Frontiers in Nutrition has reinforced the critical role of diet in liver health.

Analysing data from over 121,000 participants in the UK Biobank, researchers found that individuals consuming diets with higher pro-inflammatory potential— measured by the Dietary Inflammatory Index (DII) — had a 16 per cent increased risk of developing chronic liver disease (CLD).

Adherence to anti-inflammatory dietary patterns, such as the Mediterranean diet and those scoring high on the Healthy Eating Index 2020, was associated with a reduced risk of CLD.

"About 50 per cent of liver disease cases can be prevented simply by changing food habits and improving nutrition. Damage done to liver from poor dietary choices, alcohol, processed food, and sedentary lifestyles can be reversed if we take action today," said Dr Sanjiv Saigal, President, Liver Transplantation Society of India (LTSI).

The liver has a remarkable ability to heal itself, and even years of damage can be reversed with the right lifestyle changes. A diet rich in fresh fruits, green vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein not only prevents liver disease but also supports liver regeneration.

"As doctors, we witness miracles when patients switch to cleaner diets — liver enzyme levels improve, energy levels bounce back, and long-term health outcomes become significantly better. The first step is reading food labels and reduce your dependency on processed foods," Saigal added.

By choosing fresh produce, home-cooked meals, hydration, and mindful eating, we can keep liver diseases at bay. Sugar-loaded drinks, junk food, and fast meals are contributing to liver damage. Another recent study published in Nutrients highlights a concerning link between high fructose intake from processed foods and the development of metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) in obese children.

The research indicates that excessive consumption of fructose, commonly found in sugary beverages and processed snacks, is associated with increased fat accumulation in the liver and insulin resistance.

These findings underscore the urgent need to reduce added sugars in children's diets to combat the rising incidence of paediatric liver disease.

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

RAHUL DATTA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

Randhir Jaiswal MEA Spokesperson PTI

Some parts of West Bengal, including Murshidabad, witnessed sectarian violence in the past few days following protests by the Muslim community against the Waqf (Amendment) Act.

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

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

The conversation highlighted the growing synergy between India's rapidly evolving tech ecosystem and Musk's ventures in cutting-edge innovation. The Prime Minister met Musk in February this year, during his two-day visit to the US. The SpaceX CEO was accompanied by his three children - X, Strider and Azure. During the meeting, Musk gifted Modi a Starship hexagonal heatshield tile.

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

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

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

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

Shah calls for Naxals to surrender at earliest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

> **The CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) and especially CRPF, CoBRA battalion, are playing a major role in eliminating Naxalism from the country**
> — AMIT SHAH, HOME MINISTER

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

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

Shubhanshu Shukla to be first Indian on ISS in May

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Equipped with a C-band synthetic aperture radar, EOS-09 will be capable of capturing high-resolution images of Earth's surface under all weather conditions, day or night.

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

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

The LVM3-M5 mission, scheduled for July, will cater to a commercial contract with AST SpaceMobile Inc., USA, launching BlueBird Block-2 satellites under NewSpace India Limited's commercial program.

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

US to enforce strict rules on student visas

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

Indian students in the US are grappling with a growing threat of deportation as authorities cancel F-1 visas over a range of issues — from participation in pro-Palestinian protests to minor legal infractions. During his weekly press briefing on Thursday, Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, "We are aware that several Indian students have received communication from the US government regarding their F-1 visa status, which happens to be the student visa. We are looking into the matter. Our embassy and consulates, they are in touch with the students to provide support."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anurag Thakur slams Congress over National Herald funds

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

Thakur asked if a political party can give a loan. To a question about the allegation that the ED action was politically motivated, the BJP leader dared Congress leaders facing corruption charges to move courts to seek quick and time-bound trial in the cases against them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

India, UK hold defence talks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DGCA orders investigation in pilot's death

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

Apart from checking the medical history of the deceased crew member, the team will probe whether due precaution was taken during rostering of such crew who have flying restriction due to medical reasons, as per the DGCA order issued on April 17.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Pioneer
RAIPUR | SATURDAY | APRIL 19, 2025

Bengal Governor, NHRC, NCW visit Malda

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The riot-affected areas of Murshidabad on Friday witnessed a tripartite visit taking place with Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose, members of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and those from National Commission for Women (NCW) visiting the "refugee camps" in Malda district ignoring Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's advise not to go there till the situation normalised. Bose said that he as the Governor took his own decisions to visit affected areas. "I am going to the field," Bose said before reaching Malda.

The NHRC team visited the Parlalpur High School in Malda, where hundreds of displaced persons have taken shelter since communal clashes erupted in Murshidabad on April 11 and 12 during protests against the Central Government's amendments to the Waqf (Amendment) Act. He further said, "It is Mamata Banerjee's opinion that I should not go. But I want to. I have my own way of functioning. I want to assess things myself," before preparing a report. CM had earlier said that the situation in Murshidabad was normal and appealed all concerned to save the locals not to visit there.

"I would request non-locals not to visit Murshidabad right now. I would appeal to the Governor to wait for a few more days as confidence-building measures are underway… I could have gone there … but I desisted because I want the peace to return first," she said.

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose arriving at Malda Town railway station to visit a relief camp to meet those displaced by the violence that erupted during a protest against the Waqf (Amendment) act, 2025 in Malda on Friday PTI

At least 275 people had thus far been arrested including the three persons responsible for the brutal killing of a father and son duo. The prime accused in that case has been named as Inzamul and Dildar Sheikh — one from Suti town and the other from neighbouring Murarai in Birbhum district, sources said.

Apart from the Governor two teams from National Human Rights Commission and National Commission for Women too visited the area.

The NHRC team that visited the Par Lalpur High School at Baishnabnagar in Malda, where hundreds of displaced persons have taken shelter in the wake of communal attacks post enactment of the Waqf laws was greeted with protests with the evacuees demanding permanent BSF camp set up in areas like Shamsherganj, Suti in Murshidabad district. They narrated stories of how they had to flee their houses in a matter of minutes to escape attacks.

"Our houses have been burnt to ashes and our savings worth lakhs including gold and other items have been looted by the attackers," they complained adding they had to flee on boats across Bhagirathi River to neighbouring Malda. They also alleged that had the BSF not reacted on time they would not have lived to tell their woes. "We called the police continuously but they would either not receive calls or would arrive late when our houses had been looted," the complained.

NCW chief Vijaya Rahatkar said that an inquiry team had been formed and it would conduct an extensive report and submit it. "We have received reports that women in the affected areas and relief camps are not being treated properly… such allegations will also be inquired into." The life at the relief camp was as good as that in a prison the 'refugees' told the NCW representatives.

"We are not even allowed to meet our relatives who come here… the officials do not behave properly with us… as if we are beggars which we are not… They're trying to force us to return home, but it's still unsafe. We want BSF camps in our localities in Dhulian before we consider going back," they told the visiting officials.

After spending the night in Malda the NCW team is likely to visit the riot affected areas of Murshidabad on Saturday. The team is also likely to meet senior district officials and Chief Secretary and State Director General of Police.

HC forms 3-member panel for victims' rehabilitation

The Calcutta High Court on Thursday ordered the formation of a three-member committee for the identification and rehabilitation of people displaced by the violence during the protests over the Waqf (Amendment) Act in Murshidabad district.

A division bench comprising justices Soumen Sen and Raja Basu Chowdhury also said that its interim order of April 12, directing the deployment of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) in Murshidabad, will continue.

The court said the three-member committee will consist of an official each from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the West Bengal Human Rights Commission (WBHRC), besides the member secretary of the State Legal Services Authority (SLSA).

"We deem it appropriate to constitute a committee consisting of three officers who shall monitor and coordinate the situation," it said. The committee was directed to identify the displaced persons, extent of damage caused to properties of the victims and also collect the data of the FIRs lodged.

348 seats decided uncontested in Assam panchayat polls: Himanta

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Guwahati

A total of 348 seats in the panchayat system in Assam were decided uncontested with the BJP-led NDA securing 325 of them, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma claimed on Friday. Polling for the three-tier panchayat system is scheduled to be held in two phases — on May 2 and May 7.

Sarma said April 18 was the last date for the withdrawal of nominations for the panchayat elections.

"As per reports received so far, the NDA has already secured 37 Zila Parishad (35 BJP and 2 AGP) and 288 Anchalik Panchayat (259 BJP and 29 AGP) seats unopposed," he claimed in a post on X, sharing a chart.

According to the chart he shared, Independents have secured 15 Anchalik Parishad seats uncontested, the Congress nine and the AIUDF one seat.

"This is a massive and unprecedented mandate in Assam's political history. It reflects the immense trust and overwhelming love that the people of Assam have for the NDA and for our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji," Sarma said.

"We are confident that when the final election results are declared, this tally will grow even more impressive. The NDA is all set to sweep the Panchayat elections in Assam," he said. An official of the State Election Commission said the tally of uncontested seats will be issued on Saturday. Counting of votes for the panchayat elections will be held on May 11. There are a total of 21,920 seats in the Gram Panchayats, 2,192 seats in the Anchalik Parishads and 397 in the Zilla Parishads. Of the 34 districts in the state, panchayat polls are being held in 27 as the remaining seven are governed by autonomous councils.

A total of 1.80 crore people are eligible to vote in the panchayat polls.

Teacher thrashed by Army jawans in Nowshera, probe ordered

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

A pre-marriage visit to a younger sister's residence turned out to be a harrowing experience for Dr Liaqat Ali, serving as Assistant Professor at the School of Humanities, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, after he was 'brutally' beaten with a rifle butt by the Indian Army troops along with his cousins during routine vehicle checking in the Lam area of Nowshera, Rajouri district late on Thursday night.

A timely alarm raised by close relatives of Dr Liaqat Ali saved the situation from taking an ugly turn as a police officer from a nearby police post reached the spot and pacified both sides to exercise restraint.

Profusely bleeding Dr Ali was shifted to a local hospital in Nowshera, from where he was referred to the Government Medical College hospital, Jammu. Dr Ali received half a dozen stitches on the head. Early Friday morning, Dr Liaqat Ali posted a video along with a note on his social media page claiming he was "assaulted" without any reason. "My entire family is in the Indian Army. I've always been proud of that. Proud of the uniform, the service, the sacrifice. But today, what I experienced shook that pride to the core. Without any reason, without any question, I was assaulted - hit on the head with a weapon by the very people I once trusted blindly," he said in a post that also had a picture showing him bleeding.

"It made me realise one terrifying truth: if the system chooses to, it can 'encounter' any human being — without evidence, without trial, without justice. There's no apology that can undo this wound. Only one haunting question remains — has justice now become the privilege of the uniform alone?" the professor wrote.

As the video went viral, and people started questioning the conduct of the army troops, the Indian army also ordered an inquiry, claiming strict action would be taken under the existing law. The Indian Army also claimed that the individual tried to snatch weapons from the soldiers on duty and initiated a scuffle with them." Interestingly, no charges were slapped against Dr Ali till late on Friday evening.

Local police have also registered a First Information Report 42/2025 u/s

Dr Liaqat Ali PIONEER PHOTO

126(2)/115 (2)BNS at Police Station Nowshera and launched investigations into the case.

Without sharing the identity of the individuals involved in the brawl, the Indian army, in a written statement, claimed, "An incident has come to light wherein certain individuals were allegedly manhandled by Army personnel in Rajouri district. The Army had input on the likely movement of terrorists in a vehicle in this sensitive area. Accordingly, search operations were being conducted. "Preliminary information suggests that on being stopped, the individual tried to snatch weapons from the soldiers on duty and initiated a scuffle with them. However, an inquiry has been initiated. Should any personnel be found guilty of misconduct, strict action will be taken in accordance with the existing law," the Army said in a statement in Jammu. Soon after Dr Liaqat Ali was discharged from the hospital on Friday, he shared his nightmarish experience with the media in Jammu.

Dr Ali said he travelled along with his cousins in a personal car and two tempos to transport some household items as part of the pre-wedding rituals. He said his sister was getting married on April 24. "As we reached the final stop near Lam, Nowshera, a group of army personnel, around twelve in number, directed us to go for a check of the vehicles. As the soldiers were doing their job, we cooperated with them".

Dr Ali said. I was accompanied by my younger brother and cousins serving in the belt forces. "While I was sitting in the front seat of the car, I was also directed to prove my identity. Dr Ali said soon after i showed my IGNOU card to one of the army personnel i was attacked by three four jawans with their rifle butts".

"I received a serious head injury and started bleeding profusely. I had not expected such behaviour from army personnel, especially when my cousins informed them they too belonged to the belt forces and showed them their identity cards". Dr Ali demanded justice from the authorities and strict action against those behind the attack.

33 Naxalites surrender in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Sukma

At least 33 Naxalites, 17 of them carrying a cumulative bounty of ₹49 lakh, surrendered before security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Friday, police said.

While 22 cadres, including nine women, turned themselves in before senior officials of the police and Central Reserve Police Forces (CRPF) earlier in the day, later 11 others, including two women, surrendered before police officials, they said.

The surrendered cadres cited disappointment with "hollow" and "inhuman" Maoist ideology and atrocities on local tribals, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said.

The official said they were also impressed by the state government's 'Niyad Nellanar' (your good village) scheme, aimed at facilitating development works in remote villages, and the new surrender and rehabilitation policy.

As many as 22 surrendered Naxalites were active in the Maad (Chhattisgarh) and Nuapada (Odisha) divisions of Maoists, he said.

Chavan said the cadres included Muchaki Joga (33), deputy commander in PLGA (people's liberation guerrilla army) company no. 1 under the Maad division of Maoists, and his wife Muchaki Jogi (28), a member of the same squad, who carried a reward of ₹8 lakh each.

Among the others were Kikid Deve (30) and Manoj alias Dudhi Budhra (28), both area committee members of Maoists carrying a reward of ₹5 lakh each, he said.

The official said seven surrendered cadres carried a bounty of ₹2 lakh each, while another Naxalite carried a reward of ₹50,000.

He said the other surrendered cadres were also involved in multiple attacks on security forces.

The district police, District Reserve Guard (DRG), CRPF, and its elite unit CoBRA played a crucial role in their surrender, he said.

The official said 11 other surrendered Naxalites were active in Badesatti village panchayat under the Phulbagdi police station limits. With this, Badesatti has become a Naxalite-free village panchayat, he said.

Chavan said four of them carried a reward of ₹2 lakh each, and one carried a bounty of ₹50,000.

The official said that under the new Chhattisgarh Naxal Surrender/Victim Relief and Rehabilitation Policy-2025, the state government has introduced 'Elvad Panchayat Yojna', which has a provision of sanctioning development works worth Rs 1 crore to village panchayats that facilitate the surrender of Naxalites active in their area and pass a resolution declaring themselves Maoist free.

"For the last 15 days, the police have been targeting Badesatti village and were in contact with local panchayat representatives to encourage village-level members like militia and revolutionary party committee of the banned outfit to surrender," he said.

Chavan said 11 Naxalites active in Badesatti were identified, and with their surrender, the panchayat has become Maoist-free. All the surrendered Naxalites were provided assistance of ₹50,000 each, and they will be further rehabilitated as per the government's policy, he said.

Last year, 792 Naxalites had surrendered in the Bastar region, comprising seven districts, including Sukma.

₹6 lakh, 11 laptops seized from encounter site

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Narayanpur

The security forces have recovered ₹6 lakh cash, 11 laptops and explosives belonging to Naxalites from the site of an encounter in Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur district, police said on Friday. According to the police, the gunfight took place on April 15 on a forested hill between Kasod and Kumuradi villages under the Kohkameta police station area where a joint team of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and 41st battalion of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) was out on an anti-Naxal operation.

Security forces had launched an operation from Padamkot camp based on inputs about the presence of senior Maoists in forest falls in the Abhujmaad area, they said.

The police, in a release, said the exchange of fire lasted for about three hours, following which Naxalites fled the spot, leaving their belongings behind.

Security forces seized ₹6 lakh cash, 11 laptops, 50 kg of gunpowder, 30 kg of other explosive material, 20 litres of petrol, 20 litres of diesel, two cooker bombs, 130 cartridges of self-loading rifles (SLR), 25 cartridges of 12-bore rifles, 18 cartridges of .303 rifles, two bundles of cordex wire and a Maoist uniform from the encounter site.

Electronic devices, medicines, tiffin boxes, Maoist literature, shoes and other items of daily use were also found, it said.

Police said blood stains found at the spot indicate that several Naxalites were either killed or injured in the gunfight, but their colleagues managed to drag them inside the forest.

This action of the security forces has not only caused heavy economic and strategic damage to the Naxalites but has also sent them a clear message that they are no longer safe in any area of Abhujmaad, the release said.

Wrong 'Munni' jailed in case of mistaken identity

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Bareilly

In a shocking case of mistaken identity, an innocent woman from Bandiya village in CB Ganj was arrested and sent to jail for a crime she never committed. The woman, identified as Munni Devi, wife of Janaki Prasad, was picked up by the Parsakheda police on April 13 in place of another woman — also named Munni — against whom a non-bailable warrant was issued in a case of electricity theft.

Munni Devi was wrongly arrested by Parsakheda outpost in-charge Saurabh Yadav, despite repeatedly telling the police she had no involvement in any crime and no FIR had ever been lodged against her. She was still sent to jail, where she remained until the mistake came to light and she was released on bail.

According to officials, the electricity department had registered an FIR against Munni, wife of late Chhote Shah, for electricity theft. When the accused failed to appear, the court issued a non-bailable warrant. However, in a shocking lapse, police arrested Munni Devi, who has no connection to the case.

Despite having a different husband's name and address, Inspector Saurabh Yadav failed to verify her identity before taking her into custody. Munni Devi's son, Rakesh, who works at a sweet shop, ran from pillar to post to get his mother released. "My mother kept saying she was innocent. Still, the police did not listen," said a visibly emotional Rakesh.

The error came to light after the matter reached senior officials. A report was sent to the court, following which Munni Devi was released on bail. As she returned home on Thursday, villagers gathered in large numbers, expressing outrage over the police's negligence.

"This is nothing short of harassment. The police did not even bother to verify her identity before jailing her," said a villager. When asked about the inspector's response now, Munni Devi said, "He is not saying anything. He is just apologising." Taking cognisance of the incident, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Anurag Arya has ordered an inquiry into the matter. SP City Manush Pareek has been assigned to investigate the incident and submit a report to the SSP. Further action will be initiated against the outpost in-charge based on the findings of the inquiry. "This is a serious lapse and accountability will be fixed," an official said and added, "The incident has raised critical questions about police and the need for strict verification before arresting individuals, especially in warrant-based actions."

Sacred and soaring: Varanasi named world's second most popular religious destination

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Varanasi

The ancient city of Varanasi, often called the spiritual heart of India, has earned a remarkable global distinction - it is now ranked the second most sought-after religious destination in the world, according to a new study by MyCross, a platform dedicated to faith-based travel trends.

The study assessed religious destinations across five crucial indicators — annual footfall, number of religious sites, online search trends, social media presence and accommodation availability. Each destination was then given a cumulative score out of 100.

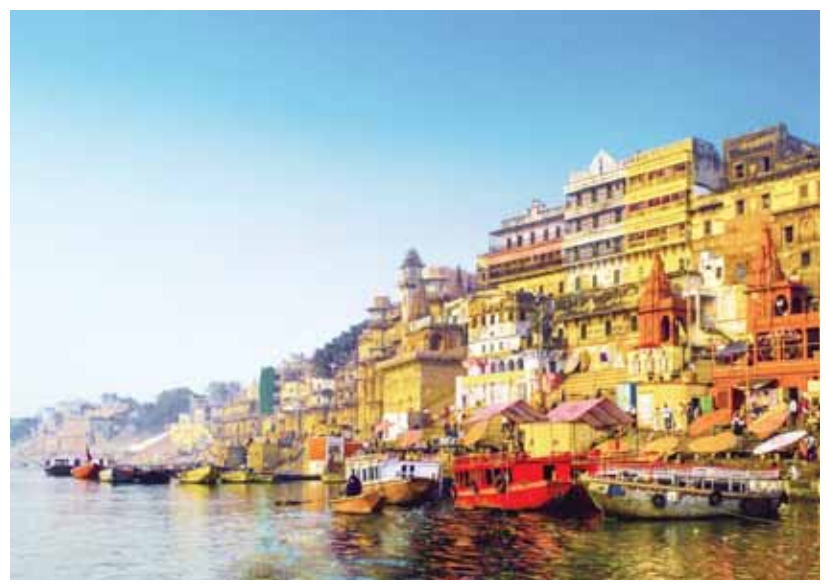
Varanasi scored 78, just behind Kyoto, Japan, which topped the list with a perfect score of 100. While Kyoto attracted a staggering 75 million visitors annually and has the largest concentration of religious sites, Varanasi led in global online search interest with nearly 2.8 million monthly searches, reflecting its rising spiritual appeal on the digital map.

Welcoming around 11 million visitors each year, Varanasi offers 1,149 accommodation options — nearly double Kyoto's count — highlighting its growing readiness to cater to a global audience seeking spiritual solace, rituals on the ghats, and the profound experience of Ganga Aarti.

In 2024, Varanasi attracted 3,09,932 foreign tourists. The total number of tourists to Varanasi in 2024 was 11,00,97,743, a significant increase compared to 10,18,67,618 in 2023.

Uttar Pradesh Tourism Minister Jaiveer Singh welcomed the global recognition with pride. "This is a moment of honour not just for Varanasi, but for the entire country," he said.

"The consistent focus of the state government, under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's leadership, to boost spiritual tourism and enhance infrastructure is now delivering visible results. Varanasi is reclaiming its rightful place on the world stage as a spiritual capital."



Tourism stakeholders in the city also feel the change. Ramesh Singh, a veteran tour operator in Varanasi, said the surge in global attention is being felt on the ground. "We've seen a sharp increase in international inquiries — from solo spiritual seekers to cultural tourists. They come not just for religious reasons but to witness the mystique of Varanasi — its music, temples, rituals, and timeless energy," he said. "With better roads, riverfront development, and more curated spiritual experiences, Varanasi is evolving into a world-class religious tourism hub."

Vatican City, with a score of 70, came in third. Though it houses just nine religious sites, it boasts the largest number of accommodations (3,859) and continues to be a magnet for Catholic pilgrims.

Other cities making it to the top 10 include Rio de Janeiro, Lhasa, Mecca, Madinah, Jerusalem, Siem Reap, and Canterbury.

A My Cross spokesperson noted the broader trend, "Religious tourism around the world shows how faith and travel are becoming more connected. Many traditional pilgrimage sites now mix spiritual meaning with modern tourism. In some popular places, there are far more visitors than places to stay, showing there's room to grow. With careful planning, these spots could support local communities without losing their sacred feel. As religious tourism changes, the most successful destinations will be the ones that respect tradition while meeting the needs of today's travelers."

As global pilgrims rediscover the power of spiritual journeys, Varanasi is rising as a timeless destination — ancient in soul, but future-ready in spirit.

Editor's TAKE

Searing Summer, Soaking Monsoon

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fundamentalism in Bangladesh

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

HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

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

The High Court had also observed that the Jamaat had no moral right to be in the country's political arena, given the atrocities it had perpetrated during the liberation war.Following the order, Bangladesh's Election Commission issued a gazette notification on 28 October 2018, cancelling the party's registration. On 19 November 2023, Bangladesh's Supreme Court dismissed the Jamaat's appeal against the High Court's verdict, as its counsels did not appear at the hearing. As a result of the High Court's order, the Jamaat could not participate in the parliamentary elections of 2014, 2018 and 2024. Besides, four of its top leaders — Abdul Quader Mollah, Kamaruzzaman, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid and Motiur Rahman Nizami — were executed, and several others given long prison terms, following convictions in cases related to genocide and war crimes by the International Crimes Tribunals established in 2010 and 2012 under the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act of 1973, as amended in 2009. Finally, Sheikh Hasina's government banned the Jamaat and its students' organisation, Islami Chhatra Shibir (Shibir), on 1 August 2025 under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009. The grounds cited were their responsibility for genocide and crimes against humanity during the Liberation War of 1971, and involvement in terrorist activities.On 28 August 2024, the Bangladesh interim government, headed by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, reversed the order, saying that there was no proof that the Jamaat and the Shibir were involved in terrorist activities. On 23 October 2024, the Appellate Division of Bangladesh's Supreme Court restored the Jamaat's appeal, which the Supreme Court had rejected on 19 November 2023.

Meanwhile, the Jamaat is now politically fully active — holding meetings, demonstrations, meetings with other parties and foreign diplomats, and projecting itself as a major force to be reckoned with in the forthcoming elections, whenever they are held. Its ideology is quite clear. Its website says, "Jamaat performs as a spiritual party as spiritual life is important in Islam. Jamaat performs in political arena because Islamic law can't be implemented without political force." The Hefazat-e-Islam was formed in 2010 to oppose the Awami League government's women's development policy, promising women equal rights to property. It has considerable power to mobilise in the streets. Its intensely anti-India orientation was reflected in its violent protests against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence on 26 March 2021. Thirteen persons were killed and scores injured in clashes between its supporters and members of the security forces and Awami League's supporters. The Hefazat is a hard-core Islamist organisation. This is clear from its 13-point charter of demands in support of which it held a rally in Dhaka on 5–6 May 2013. The Hefazat's 13-point programme includes the enactment of an anti-blasphemy law with provision for the death penalty; exemplary punishment to all bloggers and others who "insult Islam"; cancellation of Bangladesh's policy for women's development; bans on the erection of sculptures in public places, the mixing of men and women in public, candlelight vigils, and "shameless behaviour and dresses"; besides declaring Ahmadiyas as "non-Muslims." Nadia Sarmin, covering its rally for ETV, was mercilessly beaten for daring to be a woman "in a men only" event. Grievously injured, she was rescued by other journalists.

The rally in May was extremely violent. A BBC report datelined 6 May 2013 cites one witness as saying that the demonstrators "were very aggressive, some people were throwing stones and the situation quickly become violent". The interim government has close and warm relations with the Hefazat. It has lifted the ban on the organisation. The Adviser for Religious Affairs, AFM Khalid Hossain, is the latter's Nayeb-e-Amir. Chief Adviser Mohammad Yunus had a long and cordial meeting on 31 August 2024 with Mamunul Haque, the organisation's head. The Hefazat is holding rallies and processions all over the country. Doubtless, neither the Jamaat nor the Hefazat has been resorting to terrorist violence. Their elevated salience, however, gives a certain respectability to fundamentalist doctrines and encourages other fundamentalist organisations to flex their muscles. One of their principal targets is Bangladesh's moderate and liberal ethos — shaped by its rich literary and philosophical heritage, shaped by Rabindranath Tagore and the country's highly talented writers, poets and performing artists. A spiritual leader, philosopher, mystic poet and social reformer, Lalon articulated a weltanschauung, which encompassed the essence of the Bhakti cult and Sufism, rejected all distinctions of caste, class and creed, and opposed theological conflicts and racism. A gathering of sadhus and a Lalon fair was to be hosted in Madya Narsingpur, Kashipur Union Parishad in Narayanganj, on 22 November 2024.

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

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

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

Leaderspeak

There is a directive to the President by a recent judgement. Where are we heading? What is happening in the country? We have to be extremely sensitive. It is not a question of someone filing a review or not. We never bargained for democracy for this... So, we have judges who will legislate, who will perform executive functions, who will act as super Parliament, and absolutely have no accountability because law of the land does not apply to them.

JAGDEEP DHANKAD, VICE PRESIDENT OF INDIA

Inside the Mind of a Champion

SECOND Opinion

BY RAVI VALLURI

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

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

Why do some settle for simply qualifying, for placing somewhere between fourth and tenth, rather than striving for the podium? It's not just physical preparation that separates winners from the rest — it's the mind. The mental resilience to endure, to persevere, and to focus with unflinching determination is what produces Olympic champions. We can draw inspiration from Arjuna, the legendary archer of the Mahabharata, whose single-minded focus, humility, and faith in his mentor Dronacharya and friend Lord Krishna made him peerless.

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

So, what are we lacking? First, a cultural shift. India is not a sporting nation. Parents often discourage children from pursuing sports, fearful of the risks and uncertainty. We lack adequate infrastructure, visionaries who can scout talent, and political will to support sports beyond cricket. How many politicians have championed the building of world-class facilities like Gachibowli Stadium in Hyderabad for other sports? Cricket dominates every sphere of Indian sports — the media, sponsors, public imagination. Yet even in this bleak scenario, some institutions like the Indian Railways have provided much-needed support. In Paris 2024, India secured six medals — one silver and five bronze. Shooter Manu Bhaker stood out as the first Indian woman to win an Olympic shooting medal. Her mental fortitude, her ability to thrive under pressure, was nothing short of Ajatashatru-like. This mindset must become the norm, not the exception.

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

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

Letters to the Editor

MGNREGA: A lifeline undermined

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

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

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

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

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Funding threatens academic freedom

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

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

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

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

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

BHAGWANTHADANI | MUMBAI

The shame of trafficking

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

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

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

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

SRINIVAS MADHAV I HYDERABAD

WAQF AMENDMENT ACT: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR DIALOGUE

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

However, the discourse lacked depth. There was little to no engagement from legal scholars or constitutional experts. Instead, television debates fuelled fear and division, with repeated claims that Waqf properties endangered national interests. Though passed by Parliament through procedural means and majority strength, the Amendment Act seems more symbolic than substantive.It has triggered a surge of petitions in the Supreme Court — and rightly so. Legislation of this nature should be grounded in law, not in populist fervour.The real tragedy is the deepening communal divide this has caused. A matter of such sensitivity could have been resolved through inclusive dialogue and mutual understanding. Instead, we are left with increased polarisation and unrest. As Mark Twain once said, "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it's time to pause and reflect."In conclusion, the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025, stands as a cautionary tale of what happens when legislative action prioritises political optics over constitutional rigour. The Supreme Court's involvement offers a glimmer of hope that legal reason will prevail over populist narratives.

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

AVINASH GODBOLEY DEWAS

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

The Saudis: Peacekeepers or power brokers?

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

FIRST Column

NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

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

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

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

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

The paradox deepens when juxtaposing Saudi Arabia's financing of foreign conflicts with its self-portrayal as a stabiliser. The Kingdom, directly or through proxies, has been implicated in the fomentation of conflict zones including Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Libya. In Yemen, particularly, its military intervention since 2015 has left an indelible humanitarian scar. UN estimates suggest over 375,000 deaths, mostly from indirect causes. Despite this, Riyadh now courts global opinion as a peace broker, hosting summits that purport to end the very conflicts it helped perpetuate. This performative peacemaking is a diplomatic palimpsest, rewriting its culpability in real time.

Yet perhaps nowhere is the ideological volte-face more pronounced than under the stewardship of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS). A man who rose to prominence not through military conquest or scholarly erudition but via internal court calculus and the invocation of modernist necessity, MBS has become the emblem of Saudi Arabia's neo-nationalist rebranding. His statement in 2017, "We will not waste 30 years of our lives dealing with extremist ideologies. We will destroy them now and immediately" serves as both mea culpa and strategic distancing. It is a rhetorical exfoliation of the kingdom's historical role in incubating the very ideologies it now condemns.

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

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

The chilling assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018 inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul became a gruesome watermark of the state's coercive architecture. This contradiction was prophetically foreshadowed by King Faisal decades earlier, who once mused, "Injustice cannot be concealed, and one day it will speak."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RAJIV HORA

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

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

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

Fighter Flying Is Dangerous

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

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

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

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

Camaraderie and Competition

Flying in formation, especially during combat training, demands absolute trust among pilots. Each member must perform at their best — not just for personal safety but for the team. There's an unspoken but powerful mix of pride, ego, and responsibility. No one wants to be the weak link, and this drives pilots to push the limits of their aircraft and themselves.

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

Fitness: The Hidden Demands

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

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

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

Practice and Precision

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

Mistakes in modern warfare can be fatal — not just personally, but collectively. In the era of Beyond Visual Range (BVR) combat, where pilots often engage targets they cannot see, the risk of fratricide, or "blue on blue" incidents, increases. Identifying targets correctly in a high-pressure, information-dense environment demands exceptional clarity and focus.

The Systems in Play

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

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

Team Effort Behind the Scenes

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

Flight Safety: A Mission

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

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

The Reality of Service

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

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

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

India main player on world stage today: AlBanai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nations

If a decision is made on expanding the UN Security Council, "then surely" India will be a contender, Chair of Intergovernmental Negotiations on UNSC reforms on Thursday said.

"The goal of this reformed Council must be representative. Obviously, India is a main player on the world stage today. But it (UN) is a membership of 193 countries. The consideration is representative for everybody and the whole membership of the United Nations," Ambassador Tareq AlBanai said at a press briefing here.

"So surely, if the decision is made that expansion of the Council goes to from anywhere from 21 to 27 members, then surely India will be a contender in that and will be subject to the decision of the wider membership," AlBanai said in response to a question by PTI.

AlBanai, who is Kuwait's Permanent Representative to the UN, recalled that last year he and co-Chair Ambassador Alexander Marschik of Austria had visited India and had a conversation there "at the highest level" on the issue of UNSC reform.

Updating on the progress made in the IGN process during the current 79th UNGA session, the ambassador said while the road to reform is "undeniably complex, we are taking steady and meaningful steps toward the path forward."

He noted that aside from an increase in the number of elected members in 1965, the first iteration of the Security Council has lasted over 80 years. "Whatever formulation the reformed Council takes, it must be designed to endure for the next century, anchored in the principles of inclusivity, transparency, efficiency, effectiveness, democracy and accountability."

Responding to a question on how many members an expanded UNSC must have, he said there is no decision yet but the numbers being floated range between 21 and 27 member states.

To a question on text-based negotiations, AlBanai noted that India's position has always been to move towards text-based negotiations as soon as possible. "Obviously, this process will lead us to text-based negotiations" as that is the "least complicated" part of this process.

"The most complicated part is to have consent on what that text contains, and then putting it on paper is not really going to be that difficult. Do we have consensus? Yes, we have consensus on many issues regarding the five clusters, many issues of convergence that we have been able to put together over all those many years. There are still some issues of contention, but we are working steadily and surely to make sure that we overcome those," AlBanai said.

Permanent representative of the State of Kuwait, Tareq AlBanai PTI

The five issues are categories of membership, question of the veto, regional representation, size of an enlarged Security Council, and working methods of the Council, and relationship between the Council and the General Assembly.

AlBanai said he is "encouraged" by the momentum shown by the Member States in this session.

"The spirit of reform requires both courage and creativity, and the active engagement of all delegations remains essential as we work to find consensus on core elements of Security Council reform."

Earlier this week, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador, P Harish, in a statement on behalf of the G4 nations of Brazil, Germany, Japan, and India, told an IGN meeting that the existing UN architecture is from a different era, one that no longer exists and the current geopolitical realities warrant a review of this architecture.

Harish said Security Council membership needs to be increased from the current 15 to 25 or 26, with a reformed Council consisting of 11 permanent members and 14 or 15 non-permanent members. At present, the powerful UN organ consists of five veto-wielding permanent members — China, France, Russia, UK and the US. The remaining 10 members are elected to sit at the horse-shoe table for two-year terms as non-permanent members. India last sat in the Council as a non-permanent member in 2021-22.

The G4 nations have also encouraged Member States to submit further model of reforms in order to facilitate text-based negotiations.

"We invite the Chair to start text-based negotiations now, ideally by the end of the current IGN," the group has said.

AlBanai and Marschik last February met External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, who in a post on X said he "appreciated their assessment of the ongoing discussions on UNSC reform.

The international community hopes that under their stewardship the IGN process moves forward this year."

After the meeting, Kuwait's Permanent Mission had on X said that both sides discussed ongoing developments with regards to the reform process, and ways in which it could be further developed.

"The Co-Chairs thanked India's Minister of External Affairs for the generous invitation, and commended India's commitment to this vital process," the Mission said.

AlBanai, however, said he could not tell whether the reform would take place by 2030 or any other year.

"I'm very positive about breaking down whatever barriers there are because people are understanding that we need something different and Member States are understanding that this is the recourse of the world community to tackle all issues, including peace and security, development and human rights.

1,000 plus international students' US visas revoked

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

More than 1,000 international students have had their visas or legal status revoked in recent weeks, and several have filed lawsuits against the Trump administration, arguing the government denied them due process when it suddenly took away their permission to be in the US.

The actions by the federal government to terminate students' legal status have left hundreds of scholars at risk of detention and deportation.

Their schools range from private universities like Harvard and Stanford to large public institutions like the University of Maryland and Ohio State University to some small liberal arts colleges.

At least 1,024 students at 160 colleges, universities and university systems have had their visas revoked or their legal status terminated since late March, according to an Associated Press review of university statements, correspondence with school officials and court records.

In lawsuits against the Department of Homeland Security, students have argued the government lacked justification to cancel their visa or terminate their legal status.

Visas can be cancelled for a number of reasons, but colleges say some students are being singled out over infractions as minor as traffic violations, including some long in the past.

In some cases, students say it's unclear why they were targeted.

"The timing and uniformity of these terminations leave little question that DHS has adopted a nationwide policy, whether written or not, of mass termination of student (legal) status," ACLU of Michigan attorneys wrote in a lawsuit on behalf of students at Wayne State University and the University of Michigan.

In New Hampshire, a federal judge last week issued a restraining order in the case of a Dartmouth College computer science student from China, Xiaotian Liu, who had his status terminated by the government. Attorneys have filed similar challenges in federal court in Georgia and California.

Homeland Security officials did not respond to a message seeking comment.

In some high-profile cases, including the detention of Columbia University activist Mahmoud Khalil, President Donald Trump's administration has argued it should be allowed to deport noncitizens over involvement in pro-Palestinian activism.

But in the vast majority of visa revocations, colleges say there is no indication affected students had a role in protests.

"What you're seeing happening with international students is really a piece of the much greater scrutiny that the Trump administration is bringing to bear on immigrants of all different categories," said Michelle Mittelstadt, director of public affairs at the Migration Policy Institute.

Students in other countries must meet a series of requirements to obtain a student visa, usually an F-1. After gaining admission to a school in the US, students go through an application and interview process at a US embassy or consulate abroad. Students on an F-1 visa must show they have enough financial support for their course of study in the US. They have to remain in good standing with their academic programme and are generally limited in their ability to work off-campus during their academic programme.

Entry visas are managed by the State Department. Once they're in the US, international students' legal status is overseen by the Student and Exchange Visitor Programme under the Department of Homeland Security.

The actions by the United States government to terminate students' legal status have left hundreds of scholars at risk of detention and deportation

In recent weeks, leaders at many colleges learned the legal residency status of some of their international students had been terminated when college staff checked a database managed by Homeland Security. In the past, college officials say, legal statuses typically were updated after colleges told the government the students were no longer studying at the school. Historically, students who had their visas revoked were allowed to keep their legal residency status and complete their studies.

The lack of a valid entry visa only limited their ability to leave the US and return, something they could reapply for with the State Department. But if a student has lost legal residency status, they risk detention by immigration authorities. Some students already have left the country, abandoning their studies to avoid being arrested.

Higher education leaders worry the arrests and visa revocations could discourage students overseas from pursuing higher education in the United States.

The lack of clarity of what is leading to revocations can create a sense of fear among students, said Sarah Spreitzer, vice president of government relations at the American Council on Education.

"The very public actions that are being taken by ICE and the Department of Homeland Security around some of these students, where they are removing these students from their homes or from their streets, that's not usually done unless there is a security issue when a student visa is revoked," she said. "The threat of this very quick removal is something that's new."

In messages to their campuses, colleges have said they are asking the federal government for answers on what led to the terminations. Others have re-emphasised travel precautions to students, recommending they carry their passports and other immigration documents with them.

College leaders spoke of a growing sense of uncertainty and anxiety.

Judge in Baltimore limits DOGE access to Social Security data

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Baltimore

A federal judge on Thursday imposed new restrictions on billionaire Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, limiting its access to Social Security systems that hold personal data on millions of Americans. US District Judge Ellen Hollander issued a preliminary injunction in the case, which was brought by a group of labour unions and retirees who allege DOGE's recent actions violate privacy laws and present massive information security risks. Hollander had previously issued a temporary restraining order.

The injunction does allow DOGE staffers to access data that's been redacted or stripped of anything personally identifiable, if they undergo training and background checks. Hollander said DOGE and any DOGE-affiliated staffers must purge any of the non-anonymised Social Security data that they have received since Jan. 20.

They are also barred from making any changes to the computer code or software used by the Social Security Administration, must remove any software or code they might have already installed, and are forbidden from disclosing any of that code to others.

"The objective to address fraud, waste, mismanagement, and bloat is laudable, and one that the American public presumably applauds and supports," Hollander wrote in the ruling issued late Thursday night. "Indeed, the taxpayers have every right to expect their government to make sure that their hard earned money is not squandered." But that's not the issue, Hollander said — the issue is with how DOGE wants to do the work.

"For some 90 years, SSA has been guided by the foundational principle of an expectation of privacy with respect to its records. This case exposes a wide fissure in the foundation," the judge wrote.

During a federal court hearing Tuesday in Baltimore, Hollander repeatedly asked the government's attorneys why DOGE needs "seemingly unfettered access" to the agency's troves of sensitive personal information to uncover Social Security fraud. Union members and retirees gathered outside the courthouse to protest DOGE's actions, which they consider a threat to the future of Social Security benefits.

"What is it we're doing that needs all of that information?" Hollander said, questioning whether most of the data could be anonymised, at least in the early stages of analysis.

Attorneys for the Trump administration said changing the process would slow down their efforts.

Appeals Court slams Trump administration over mistaken deportation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

The Trump administration's claim that it can't do anything to free Kilmar Abrego Garcia from an El Salvador prison and return him to the US "should be shocking," a federal appeals court said Thursday in a scathing ruling in favour of the Maryland man.

A three-judge panel from the 4th US Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously refused to suspend a judge's decision to order sworn testimony by Trump administration officials to determine if they complied with her instruction to facilitate Abrego Garcia's return.

The panel said Republican President Donald Trump's government is "asserting a right to stash away residents of this country in foreign prisons without the semblance of due process that is the foundation of our constitutional order."

"Further, it claims in essence that because it has rid itself of custody that there is nothing that can be done. This should be shocking not only to judges, but to the intuitive sense of liberty that Americans far removed from courthouses still hold dear," they wrote.

The Justice Department appealed after US District Judge Paula Xinis on Tuesday ordered sworn testimony by at least four officials who work for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department.

The fourth Circuit panel unanimously denied the government's request for a stay of Xinis' order while they appeal. Its opinion says the executive and judicial branches of the federal government "come too close to grinding irrevocably against one another in a conflict that promises to diminish both."

"This is a losing proposition all around," they wrote.

The Judiciary will lose much from the constant intimations of its illegitimacy, to which by dent of custom and detachment we can only sparingly reply. The Executive will lose much from a public perce

Two killed, five wounded in Florida State shooting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Tallahassee

A gunman opened fire on Thursday at Florida State University, killing two people and wounded at least five others, police said. The 20-year-old gunman was the son of a sheriff's deputy whose former service weapon was used in the shooting, authorities said.

The two people who died were not students at the university, but the shooter is believed to be a student, Florida State University Police Chief Jason Trumbower.

Five people were being treated at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital, Trumbower said, and the shooter was also receiving medical attention.

Students and frightened parents hid in a bowling alley and crammed into a freight elevator inside the student union after hearing gunshots outside the building. Ambulances, fire trucks and patrol vehicles from multiple law enforcement agencies raced toward the campus just west of Florida's capital after the university issued an active shooter alert midday Thursday, saying police were responding near the student union.

Ryan Cedergren, a 21-year-old communications student, said he and about 30 others hid in the bowling alley in the union's lower level after seeing students running from a nearby bar. "In that moment, it was survival," he said.

After about 15 minutes, university police escorted the students out of the building and he saw a person getting emergency treatment on the lawn, he said. Chris Pento told WCTV in Tallahassee that he and his twins were getting lunch at the student union during a campus tour when they heard gunshots. "It was surreal. And people just started running," he told the TV station.

They packed into a service elevator after encountering locked doors at the end of a hallway. "That was probably the scariest point because we didn't know. It could get worse, right?" he said.

"The doors opened and two officers were there, guns drawn." Florida State's alert system announced about three hours after the shooting that law enforcement had "neutralised the threat." Officials asked students and faculty to avoid the student union and other areas still considered an active crime scene. Dozens of patrol vehicles, including a forensics van, were parked outside the student union. Officers blocked off the area with crime scene tape.

Students and staff who left behind phones, keys and other items in the rush to evacuate waited in the shade and prayed for the victims.

President Donald Trump said from the Oval Office that he had been fully briefed on the shooting. "It's a horrible thing. It's horrible that things like this take place," he said.

Diplomat leads Trump's 'America First' at UN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nations

The highest-ranking US representative now at the United Nations told Congress two years ago that Russia's invasion of Ukraine was "unprovoked" and "unjustified," urging UN members to condemn Moscow's aggression and demand an end to the war.

In February, it was the same career diplomat, Dorothy Shea, who voiced the Trump administration's extraordinary decision to split with European allies and refuse to back a UN resolution blaming Russia for its invasion on the third anniversary of the war.

While it is typical for diplomats to stay on as US presidents - and their political parties - change, Shea's interim role has unexpectedly made her a face of the stunning US transition on the world stage, with President Donald Trump's "America First" approach increasingly upending the post-World War II international order.

Shea will be in place longer than expected after Trump's unusual decision last month to withdraw his nominee for UN ambassador, Rep. Elise Stefanik, from consideration because of a slim Republican House majority.

"I would say (Shea's) position is unique. It is probably particularly unique in that because of the extraordinary change, not just from one administration to another, but really an era of US foreign policy, even when there were nuanced differences," said Phillip Reeker, the former acting assistant secretary of state for Europe.

United States UN Ambassador Dorothy Shea addressing the UNSC PTI

"The change in the vote that took place at the UN on the Russia-Ukraine war was really an inflection point in US policy."

On Feb. 24, the US joined Russia in voting against a European-backed Ukrainian resolution demanding an immediate withdrawal of Moscow's forces. A dueling US resolution noted "the tragic loss of life" and called for "a swift end to the conflict," but it didn't mention Moscow's aggression as the Trump administration opened negotiations with Russia on a ceasefire. "Continuing to engage in rhetorical rivalries in New York may make diplomats feel vindicated, but it will not save souls on the battlefield," Shea, 59, said at the time. "Let us prove to ourselves and to our citizens that we can come together and agree on the most basic principles. Let us show one another that the bold vision of peace that once pulled us out of hell can prevail."

The message was a shocking retreat for the US in the 193-member UN General Assembly, whose resolutions are not legally binding but are seen as a barometer of world opinion.

US airstrikes on Yemeni oil port kills 74 people, wounds 171

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dubai

US airstrikes targeting an oil port held by Yemen's Houthi rebels killed 74 people and wounded 171 others, the group said Friday, marking the single-deadliest known attack under President Donald Trump's new campaign targeting the rebels.

Assessing the toll of Trump's campaign, which began March 15, has been incredibly difficult as the US military's Central Command so far has not released any information on the campaign, its specific targets and how many people have been killed.

Meanwhile, Yemen's Houthi rebels strictly control access to areas attacked and don't publish information on the strikes, many of which likely have targeted military and security sites.

But the strike on the Ras Isa oil port, which sent massive fireballs shooting into the night sky, represented a major escalation for the American campaign. The Houthis also immediately released graphic footage of those killed in the attack.

In a statement, Central Command said that "US forces took action to eliminate this source of fuel for the Iran-backed Houthi terrorists and deprive them of illegal revenue that has funded Houthi efforts to terrorise the entire region for over 10 years."

"This strike was not intended to harm the people of Yemen, who rightly want to throw off the yoke of Houthi subjugation and live peacefully," it added. It did not acknowledge any casualties and declined to comment when asked by The Associated Press regarding civilians reportedly being killed.

The Iranian-backed Houthis later Friday launched a missile toward Israel that was intercepted, the Israeli military said. Sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and other areas. The war in Yemen, meanwhile, further internationalised as the US alleged a Chinese satellite company was "directly supporting" Houthi attacks, something Beijing did not immediately acknowledge.

US to drop Ukraine-Russia peace efforts, if no progress seen: Rubio

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Friday that the US may be ready to "move on" from efforts for a Russia-Ukraine peace deal if there is not progress in the coming days.

Speaking in Paris after a marathon day of landmark talks among US, Ukrainian and European officials, Rubio said the discussions had been constructive and produced an outline for steps toward peace.

French officials said a new meeting in the same format is expected in London in the coming days. Rubio said he could join that meeting, and it's expected early in the week. "We are now reaching a point where we need to decide whether this is even possible or not," Rubio told reporters upon departure.

After weeks of efforts by the Trump administration to broker a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine have failed to bring an end to the fighting, Rubio said the US administration wants to decide "in a matter of days whether or not this is doable in the next few weeks."

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio along with Germany's Gunter Sautter PTI

France hosted high-level talks Thursday to discuss Ukraine and its security, the first time since President Donald Trump's inauguration that top American, Ukrainian and European officials are known to have met together to discuss an end to the war. The meetings came as European concerns grow about Trump's readiness to draw closer to Russia.

Rubio and presidential envoy Steve Witkoff have helped lead US efforts to seek peace. Several rounds of negotiations have been held in Saudi Arabia. Witkoff has met three times with Putin, Rubio said.

Moscow has effectively refused to accept a comprehensive ceasefire that Trump has pushed and Ukraine has endorsed. Russia has made it conditional on a halt in Ukraine's mobilization efforts and Western arms supplies, which are demands rejected by Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Russia kept up a series of deadly strikes on Ukrainian cities, according to officials there, wounding scores of civilians days after missiles killed at least 34 during Palm Sunday celebrations in the northern city of Sumy.

One person died and over 60 others were hurt as Russia hit Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, early in the day, Ukraine's Emergency Service reported.

Lower internal trade barriers will help Canada, says Carney

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Toronto

Prime Minister Mark Carney said Thursday eliminating trade barriers within Canada would benefit Canadians far more than US President Donald Trump can ever take away with his trade war as he made his case to retain power at the last debate ahead of the April 28 vote.

Carney has set a goal of free trade within the country's 10 provinces and three territories by July 1. Canada has long had interprovincial trade barriers.

"We can give ourselves far more than Donald Trump can ever take away," Carney said "We can have one economy. This is within our grasp."

Carney said the relationship Canada has had with the US for the past 40 years has fundamentally changed because of Trump's tariffs. If reelected Carney plans to immediately enter into trade walks with the Trump administration.

"We are facing the biggest crisis of our lifetimes. Donald Trump is trying to fundamentally change the world economy, the trading system, but really is he's trying to break us so the US can own us. They want our land, they want our resources, they our water, they want our country" Carney said in his closing statement. "I am ready and I have managed crisis over the years ... We will fight back with counter tariffs and we will protect our workers."

Trump's trade war and threats to make Canada the 51st state have infuriated Canadians and led to a surge in Canadian nationalism that has bolstered Liberal Party poll numbers.

Opposition Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre is imploring Canadians not to give the Liberals a fourth term. He hoped to make the election a referendum on Justin Trudeau, whose popularity declined toward the end of his decade in power as food and housing prices rose and immigration surged.

But Trump attacked, Trudeau resigned and Carney, a two-time central banker, became Liberal party leader and prime minister last month after a party leadership race.

"It maybe difficult, Mr. Poilievre, you spent years running against Justin Trudeau and the carbon tax and they are both gone," Carney said. "I am a very different person than Justin Trudeau."

US intelligence contradicts Trump claims linking gang to Venezuela

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

A new US intelligence assessment found no coordination between Tren de Aragua and the Venezuelan government, contradicting statements that Trump administration officials have made to justify their invocation of the Alien Enemies Act and deporting Venezuelan migrants, according to US officials.

The classified assessment from the National Intelligence Council, released this month, is more comprehensive and authoritative than an earlier intelligence product released Feb. 26 and reported last month by The New York Times, according to two US officials familiar with the assessment. They were not authorized to address the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The new assessment draws input from the 18 agencies that comprise the intelligence community. It repeatedly stated that Tren de Aragua, a gang that originated in a prison in Venezuela, is not coordinated with or supported by the country's president, Nicolás Maduro, or senior officials in the Venezuelan government. While the assessment found minimal contact between some members of the gang and low-level members of the Venezuelan government, there was a consensus that there was no coordination or directive role between gang and government.

The assessment provided support and extensive sourcing for those assertions, according to the officials. Of the 18 organizations that make up the US government's intelligence community, only one — the FBI — did not agree with the findings. It is not uncommon for intelligence agencies to differ in their assessments on matters of great public interest. But the latest assessment was significant for its near unanimity.

Several years ago, under former Director Christopher Wray, the FBI assessed that the COVID-19 pandemic most likely originated from a lab leak, though that was hardly the uniform consensus. The position got recent support from a CIA assessment declassified in January.

The White House and the office of Tulsi Gabbard, the director of national intelligence, did not respond to messages seeking comment Thursday night.

The intelligence assessment's findings come as the Supreme Court last week ruled that the Trump administration can use the Alien Enemies Act, a 1798 wartime law, to deport Venezuelan migrants — but that the migrants must get court hearings before they're taken from the United States.

Tren de Aragua has been linked to a series of kidnappings, extortion and other crimes throughout the Western Hemisphere. Those activities are tied to a mass exodus of millions of Venezuelans as their country's economy unraveled over the past decade.

The Alien Enemies Act was created to give the president wide powers to imprison and deport noncitizens in time of war. Until now, it has been used just three times, most recently eight decades ago during World War II to justify the detention of Japanese-American civilians.

The American Civil Liberties Union, which has filed legal challenges to the Trump administration's use of the law, contends that Trump does not have the authority to use the Alien Enemies Act against a criminal gang rather than a recognized state.

President Donald Trump invoked the act in March, declaring in a proclamation that Tren de Aragua "is closely aligned with, and indeed has infiltrated, the Maduro regime, including its military and law enforcement apparatus."

Attorney General Pam Bondi repeated that assertion Monday night in an interview on Fox News Channel. Bondi defended the invocation of the wartime law and called Tren de Aragua "a foreign arm of the Venezuelan government."

"They are organized. They have a command structure. And they have invaded our country," she said.

Last month, the Trump administration used the Alien Enemies Act to fly more than 130 men accused of being members of the gang to El Salvador, where the US has paid for the men to be held in a notorious prison. The Venezuelans deported under the act received no opportunity to challenge the orders, and attorneys for many of the men have said there is no evidence they are gang members.

The Trump administration has argued that the gang has become an invading force and designated it, along with seven other crime groups, as "foreign terrorist organisations."

The latest intelligence assessment was first reported Thursday by The Washington Post.

Israeli strikes kill at least 17 people in Gaza

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

Israeli airstrikes across Gaza killed at least 17 people early Friday including children, hospital workers said, as the new US ambassador to Israel made his first public appearance in Jerusalem. Among the dead were 10 people in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp, including eight from the same house, according to the Indonesian Hospital, which received the bodies. In the southern city of Khan Younis, seven people were killed, one of them a pregnant woman, according to Nasser Hospital, where the bodies were brought.

The strikes came a day after more than two dozen people died in Gaza as Israel ramps up attacks, pressuring Hamas to return the hostages and disarm. US Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee on Friday appeared at the Western Wall, the holiest Jewish prayer site in Jerusalem's Old City. Huckabee inserted a prayer into the wall, which he said was handwritten by US President Donald Trump.

In his first act as ambassador, Huckabee said Trump told him to take his prayer and pray for the peace of Jerusalem, he said. Huckabee also said every effort was being made to bring the remaining hostages held by Hamas home. A one-time presidential hopeful, Huckabee has acknowledged his past support for Israel's right to annex the West Bank and incorporate its Palestinian population into Israel but said it would not be his "prerogative" to carry out that policy.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to notify the general public that Cdr RN Gulati was the original allottee of Flat P-359, Sector-21, Jal Vayu Vihar, Noida. During his lifetime, he executed a registered will vide Bahi No. 3, Jild No. 186, Page No. 399-404, Document No. 63, dated 03/02/1999 at the Sub-Registrar Office, Noida, in favor of Maj. Vivek Misra, son of Late B.K. Misra, residing at P-359, Sector-21, Noida.
The transfer of this property is being carried out in favour of Maj. Vivek Misra on the basis of the registered will, and an application has already been submitted to Noida Authority and the Air Force Naval Housing Board, New Delhi for the transfer of ownership. Any person having claims or objections regarding the transfer of this property may submit their concerns, along with supporting documents, to the Group Housing Department, Noida Authority, or the Air Force Naval Housing Board, New Delhi, within 30 days from the date of publication of this notice. Objections received after the stipulated time will not be considered, and the transfer process will proceed as per legal provisions. Maj. Vivek Misra

PUBLIC NOTICE

This notice is for information to General Public that the company M/s. KAPOOR SUNNY CHIT FUND PVT. LTD. located at B-467, Majlis Park Main Road, Delhi-110033 has permanently closed its operations since October, 2021 due to unforeseen circumstances and prevailing market risks.
For any inquiries regarding the said closure please contact the Directors of the Company Mr. Sunil Kapoor (M-9811105986), Mr. Vinod Kumar Khanna (M-9891081919), email address kscf2001@gmail.com.
SONIA KAPOOR (ADVOCATE)
281, Lawyers Chamber Block-II Delhi High Court. New Delhi-100003.
En No D/944/2017.Mob 9213521140.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This Public at large is hereby notify that my client Mr. Arun Bansal S/o Shri Jagdish Kumar Bansal is the absolute and lawful owner of Flat No. F-304, Shree Ganesh Apartment, Plot No.93, I.P. Extension, Patparganj, Delhi-110092. That the Original Conveyance Deed dated: 10.12.2008 of the above said flat is laminated and it is not possible to remove it.
If anyone has any objection/Claim for any type such as any Loan, .Mortgage, Surety, Security etc. over the said property regarding the above said original documents, then contact to the undersigned within 15 days of this Notice. Thereafter no body have any right on the said property.
SAHIL ARORA (ADVOCATE)
Office No.107, First Floor, M.S. Chambers, Aruna Park, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110092
Mob.: +91-9811912277

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public on behalf of my client, Smt. Savita Goyal, W/o Late Sh. Anil Kumar Goyal @ Anil Kumar, R/o C-1/124A, Keshav Puram, North-West, Delhi- 110035 that she has disowned and disinherited her son, Mr. Ankit Goyal S/o Late Sh. Anil Kumar Goyal R/o C-1/122A, Lawrence Road, Keshav Puram, North-West, Delhi- 110035, due to his continuous misconduct and unacceptable behaviour. Mr. Ankit Goyal shall not inherit any of the properties of my client and shall not have any right, claim, share or interest whatsoever in any movable or immovable property, assets, or belongings of my client, whether existing now or acquired in the future. Mr. Ankit Goyal shall not be entitled to any share in the estate, and he shall further not be entitled to the probate or benefits of any will or testament of my client. Now, my client would have no relation or concern with her Son Mr. Ankit Goyal. The general public is hereby cautioned not to deal or transact with Mr. Ankit Goyal in reference to any assets or properties of my client. Any such dealings shall be at one's own risk and responsibility.
Dipanshu Chugh (Advocate) Office at: E-46, Basement, Greater Kailash Enclave-II, New Delhi-110048, M: 9953569992

PUBLIC NOTICE

Hereby given that the undersigned are the directors and shareholders of R. S. Ajit Singh & Co. Private Limited ("Company"), a company incorporated under the Companies Act and having its registered office at C-91/10 Wazirpur, Industrial Area, Delhi, India, 110052. The Company vide its application request no. LD38754IND/CON/07032024 dated 29.11.2024, had applied before Delhi Development Authority for conversion of the Property bearing no. 91/10, Block C, admeasuring 2300.60 Square Yards situated at Wazirpur Industrial Area (the "Demised Premises") from industrial use to freehold. It was further proposed by the Company to sell the Demised Premises and accordingly a board resolution dated 09.04.2024 was passed by the Company authorising Mrs. Gurpal Khurana to sell the Demised Premises and execute required documents on behalf of Company.
An objection was raised by Mr. Parvinder Singh Gurbhachan Singh Arora and Mr. Gurinder Singh regarding the conversion and letters dated 06.02.2025 and 10.02.2025 were issued to DDA. Furthermore, a public notice was released by them on 30.01.2025 objecting to the same. However, the said letters have now been withdrawn by Mr. Parvinder Singh Gurbhachan Singh Arora and Mr. Gurinder Singh vide their letters dated 18.02.2025 to DDA, and a no objection has been provided for conversion of the Demised Premises from industrial use to freehold premises. Mr. Parvinder Singh Gurbhachan Singh Arora and Mr. Gurinder Singh are not the directors of the Company and do not have any objection regarding the sale of the Demised Premises.
Accordingly, it is brought to the attention of the public at large that the Company has proceeded with the conversion of the Demised Premises from industrial use to freehold, and the sale of Demised Premises to the party as agreed in 2024. Further, Mrs. Gurpal Khurana is authorised vide Board Resolution dated 09.04.2024 passed by the Company to sell the Demised Premises and execute required documents on behalf of Company.
Sd/-
GURPAL KHURANA
Director
R.S. AJIT SINGH & CO. PVT LTD
Date: 19.04.2025
Place: New Delhi

JM FINANCIAL

JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited
Corporate identify Number : U67190MH2007PLC74287
Registered Office Address : 7th Floor, Cnergy, Appasaheb Marathe Marg, Prabhadevi, Mumbai 400025
T: +91 22 6630 3030 F: +911 22 6630 3223 www. Jmfinancialarc.com

DEMAND NOTICE

Under Section 13(2) of the Securitisation And Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with Rule 3 (1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. The Piramal Capital and Housing Finacne Ltd have assigned a pool of Loan (including below mentioned Loans) together with underlying security interest created therefor along with all the rights, title and interest thereon under Section 5 (1) (b) of the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 ("SARFAESI ACT") vide an assignment agreement dated March 29, 2023 ("the Assignment Agreement") in favour of JMFARC (JM) (herein reffered as Assingee). The undersigned is the Authorised Officer of (JM) assignee. Under Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (the said Act). In exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) of the said Act read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the Authorised Officer has issued Demand Notices under Section 13(2) of the said Act, calling upon the following Borrower(s) (the "said Borrower(s)"), to repay the amounts mentioned in the respective Demand Notice(s) issued to them that are also given below. In connection with above, Nnotice is hereby given, once again, to the said Borrower(s) to pay to JM, within 60 days from the publication of this Notice, the amounts indicated herein below, together with further interest as detailed in the said Demand Notice(s), from the date(s) mentioned below till the date of payment and/or realization, payable under the loan agreement read with other documents/writings, if any, executed by the said Borrower(s). As security for due repayment of the loan, the following assets have been mortgaged to JM by the said Borrower(s) respectively.

Name of the Borrower(s) / Guarantor(s)	Demand Notice Date and Amount with NPA date	Description of secured asset (immovable property)
(LC No. 200FB100281 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Raju Chakraborty (Borrower) Subarna Chakraborty (Co Borrower 1)	Dt :19-03-2025 ₹ 2971923.86 /-(₹ Twenty Nine lakh Seventy One Thousand Nine Hundred Twenty Three Only and Eighty Six Paise) NPA (16-09-2016)	H No 113 Second Floor Front Side I P Col Ony Faridabad Haryana :- 121001
(LC No. 20000041971 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) Manish Kumar (Borrower) Rajani (Co Borrower 1)	Dt :19-03-2025 ₹ 2948071.86 /-(₹ Twenty Nine lakh Forty Eight Thousand Seventy One Only and Eighty Six Paise) NPA (09-02-2017)	Plot No. D-203, Phase-2, shardhapuri Colony Pocket- D, Meerut, U. P Meerut Meerut Uttar Pradesh :- 250002
(LC No. 19700044521 of Gurgaon - Sohna Road Branch) Sandeep Bhardwaj (Borrower) Kamini Bhardwaj (Co Borrower 1)	Dt :19-03-2025 ₹ 38843260 /-(₹ Three Crore Eighty Eight lakh Forty Three Thousand Two Hundred Sixty Only) NPA (01-11-2015)	Plot No 6 Pocket 13 Sector A 6 Narela New Delhi New Delhi Delhi :- 110001
(LC No. 01400005008 of New Delhi Branch) M/s.Arun Gupta And Sons (Borrower) Alok Gupta (Co Borrower 1) Pramod Gupta (Co Borrower 2) Suman Gupta (Co Borrower 3)	Dt :19-03-2025 ₹ 4191548.86 /-(₹ Forty One lakh Ninety One Thousand Five Hundred Forty Eight Only and Eighty Six Paise) NPA (08-11-2022)	Property No. B-12, Second Floor Front Side Without Roof, Dr. Lohia Road Adarsh Ngr Kh No-262/258/217/4 Village Bharola, Delhi New Delhi - 110033
(LC No. 11900001564 of Noida - Sector 2 Branch) J.N.C Constructions Pvt Ltd (Borrower) (Through It's director Mr. Jitendra Taneja) Chander Prakash (Co-Borrower) Jitender Taneja (Co-Borrower) Nanak Chand (Co-Borrower)	Dt :27-03-2025 ₹ 150352962 /-(₹ Fifteen Crore Three lakh Fifty Two Thousand Nine Hundred Sixty Two Only) NPA (04-10-2018)	Property Bearing No. G-128 (plot No. 128, Block G), Measuring Area Of 181 Sq. Mtrs Approx. I.e. 216 Sq. Yds. Consisting According To Site And With Roof / Terrace Rights, Along With Rights To Construct Up To Last Permissible Storey, Situated In The Layout Plan Of 'preet Nagar Co-operative House Building Society Ltd, Colony Known As Preet Vihar, Delhi – 92.Boundaries As : - East: 30' Wide Road, West: Plot No. 129, North: 30' Wide Road, South: 15' Service Lane

If the said Borrowers shall fail to make payment to JM as aforesaid, JM shall proceed against the above secured assets under Section 13(4) of the Act and the applicable Rules, entirely at the risks of the said Borrowers as to the costs and consequences. The said Borrowers are prohibited under the Act from transferring the aforesaid assets, whether by way of sale, lease or otherwise without the prior written consent of JM. Any person who contravenes or abets contravention of the provisions of the said Act or Rules made there under, shall be liable for imprisonment and/or penalty as provided under the Act.
Sd/-
(Authorised Officer)
JM Financial Asset Reconstruction Company Limited
Date : 19.04.2025
Place : Delhi

NAME CHANGE

I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that I have re-nounced, relinquished and abandoned the use of my old name Moirangthem Surbala as I have assumed my new name Moirangthem Surbala Devi. In future I shall be known as Moirangthem Surbala Devi in all my documents and others.
Sd/- Moirangthem Surbala Devi
Phaknung Mayai Leikai,
Imphal East District, Manipur-795010

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice to General Public That, Mr. Mohan Kumar Karki has applied for a loan from M/s Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd. for the MIG Flat No. 016, on Ground Floor, in Block-B-14, situated at Sector-34, District Gautam Budh Nagar, Noida, U.P. 201307: hereinafter referred to as "said flat". That, Mr. Mohan Kumar Karki has made us understand he has lost or misplaced the Original Allotment Letter dated 30/06/1992, Possession Certificate dated 20/10/1993 and Lease Cum Sale Deed vide Document No. 1946-45 dated 19/08/1998 in respect of said property vide LR 2760983/2025 dated 17.04.2025 somewhere, which are not traceable or cannot be found.
Now, I would like to announce to general public that If anybody or any person got or having any claim against on the said above documents by way of legal heirs, Mortgage, Gift, Lease, Inheritance, Lien or otherwise or any objection with said above documents may come to our Delhi office within seven days and render their claim with documentary valid evidence. If any, else the same would be treated as unclaimed and unrebutted and moved forth accordingly.
M/S PASS & ASSOCIATES LLP
B-132, L.G.F, Malviya Nagar
New Delhi-110017, Mob: 9991116006

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is brought to the notice of the General Public that my client SUNITA SINGH W/o LATE ASHOK KUMAR SINGH R/o RZ-243, KHASRA No.52/2, PEEPAL WALI GALI, GALI No.2, RAJ NAGAR-II, PALAM COLONY, NEW DELHI-110077, has entered into an agreement to purchase the SECOND FOOR WITHOUT ROOF RIGHTS of property No.RZ-243, area 44 sq. yds. (15.3 Ft. X 25.8 Ft.) Khasra No.52/2, VILLAGE PALAM, COLONY RAJ NAGAR, PART-II, NEW DELHI from POOJA SHARMA W/o MR. MAHESHWAR R/o 1882-A, SHRI RAM MANDIR, UDAY CHAND MARG, KOTLA MUBARAKPUR, NEW DELHI-110003, who has lost /misplaced all the Original Documents of above said property which are not traceable. In this regard, FIR/NCR has been lodged on Delhi Police online portal vide LR No.2764223/2025 dated 18-04-2025. The finder may please contact me and return the documents within 15 days of this notice to the addressee given below. He shall be suitably rewarded. Any misuse of any of the above documents shall be treated as an offence and the person concerned shall be proceeded against as per the Law. If the above-mentioned document is not found / received, this document shall be treated as invalid in all respects. Also any objection towards sale purchase of that property by any such person please contacts me within 15 days thereafter all objections shall be treated as null and void in all respect.
PREM PRAKASH (Advocate) 207, Central Market, Plot No.1, Sector-10, Dwarka, N.D.-110075 Ph: 9871268399

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given on behalf of PRIYANKA ANIL SUNDER who is purchasing the First Floor, without roof rights built on Property bearing no.380/A, area measuring 76.93 sq. Mtrs. i.e. 92 Sq. Yds. of Khasra No. 642, situated at Village Chandrawali alias Shahdara colon known as Pathan Pura Shahdara, Delhi-110032, from MRS. MEENA SHARMA who has owned the subject property vide Sale Deed dated 09.12.2011 bearing Document no.21377, Book no.I, Volume no.5931, on pages 142-150, dated 09.12.2011 (SRO-VIII DELHI), now MRS. PRIYANKA ANIL SUNDER intend to purchase the same and intend to mortgage against the financial assistance from ADITYA BIRLA HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED. To comply the requirements of BANK/NBFC, we give this public notice that if any Person having any type of claim /right/title/interest/creating mortgage over the said property, may inform in writing at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within 7 days from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc. Lucem Legal LLP
Plot No.136, (Basement) Uday Park, New Delhi-110049,Contact # 011-40046316

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Manjit Kaur Agnihotri, W/o. Col Lalit Agnihotri , R/o, D-28 , Sector 36 , Noida also known as Manjeet Agnihotri certify that Manjeet Agnihotri and Manjit Kaur Agnihotri are the same person . Henceforth, I will be called Manjit Kaur Agnihotri .
PD(1856)A

I, Tellen Benjamen Kom, a resident of village Tonsen Khullen, PO & PS Sugnu, Chandel district, Manipur, do hereby declare that my wife's correct name is Telien Sharmila Kom, not L.V. Shalmila Lamkang as recoded in other documents. The name Telien Sharmila Kom will be used in all future purposes.
PD(1857)C

I, No.15443438K Nk Shrawan Kumar, Serving at- Base Hospital, Delhi Cantt-110010, declare that in my service records, my mother's name is wrongly recorded as Simiritra Devi, whereas her correct name is Sumirata, vide affidavit dated 18/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(1858)C

I, Arun Kumar Singh, Mother of- No.16028519P Rfn Anoop Kumar Singh, R/o- Vill – Nara, Po – Pura Bazar, Dist - Faizabad, Ayodhya, U.P.-224171, have changed my name from Arun Kumar Singh to Arun Kumari, vide affidavit dated 18/04/2025 before Notary Public Delhi
PD(1859)C

I, Geeta Kuvarwan, W/o No.14662493H Nk Darbar Pravin Sinh Dipuji, R/o- Vill-2/145 Timbavalo Vas Khorajdabhi, Nardipur, Gandinagar, Gujarat- 382735, have changed my name from Geeta Kuvarwan to Dabhi Gitaba, vide affidavit No. GJ96856030996955X dtd. 16/04/2025 before Notary Public Mansa, Gujarat
PD(1860)C

I, No.14662493H Nk Darbar Pravinsinh Dipuji, R/o- Vill-2/145 Timbavalo Vas Khorajdabhi, Nardipur, Gandinagar, Gujarat- 382735, have changed my son's name from Prajval Sinh to Dabhi Prajval Sinh Pravinsinh, vide affidavit No. GJ96857652088039X dtd. 16/04/2025 before Notary Public Mansa, Gujarat.
PD(1861)C

Yaari Digital Integrated Services Limited
(CIN: L51101HR2007PLC077999)
Extract of Consolidated Audited Financial Results for the quarter and year ended 31 March 2025
(Rs. in Crores)

Particulars	Quarter ended 31-Mar-25 (Refer note - 3)	Quarter ended 31-Dec-24 Unaudited	Quarter ended 31-Mar-24 (Refer note - 3)	Year to date 31-Mar-25 Audited	Year ended 31-Mar-24 Audited
Total Income from Operations	0.01	-	0.28	0.51	3.15
Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax, Minority Interest and Share of Profit / (Loss) of Associate, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	(51.78)	(5.54)	(6.70)	(68.19)	(21.61)
Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax, Minority Interest and Share of Profit / (Loss) of Associate (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items))	(51.78)	(5.54)	(6.70)	(68.19)	(21.61)
Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after Tax, Minority Interest and Share of Profit / (Loss) of Associate (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	(51.78)	(5.54)	(6.70)	(68.20)	(21.61)
Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	(71.19)	27.95	(7.34)	(42.65)	(12.31)
Equity Share Capital	19.74	19.74	19.74	19.74	19.74
Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve) as shown in the audited Balance Sheet				(296.16)	(253.50)
Earnings per Share (EPS) before extraordinary items					
- Basic (Amount in Rs.)	(5.16)	(0.55)	(0.67)	(6.79)	(2.15)
- Diluted (Amount in Rs.)	(5.16)	(0.55)	(0.67)	(6.79)	(2.15)
Earnings per Share (EPS) after extraordinary items					
- Basic (Amount in Rs.)	(5.16)	(0.55)	(0.67)	(6.79)	(2.15)
- Diluted (Amount in Rs.)	(5.16)	(0.55)	(0.67)	(6.79)	(2.15)

Notes:
1) The above results have been reviewed by the Audit Committee and subsequently approved at the meeting of the Board of Directors held on 18 April 2025.
2) Key Standalone Financial Information :
(Rs. in Crores)

Particulars	Quarter ended 31-Mar-25 (Refer note - 3)	Quarter ended 31-Dec-24 Unaudited	Quarter ended 31-Mar-24 (Refer note - 3)	Year to date 31-Mar-25 Audited	Year ended 31-Mar-24 Audited
Total Income	0.09	0.09	0.37	0.86	3.57
Profit/(Loss) before Tax	(57.03)	(10.69)	(14.36)	(89.63)	(43.37)
Net Profit/(Loss) after Tax	(57.03)	(10.69)	(14.36)	(89.63)	(43.37)

3) Figures for the quarters ended 31 March 2025 and 31 March 2024 represent the balancing figures between the audited figures for the full financial year and published reviewed year to date figures upto third quarter of the respective financial year.
4) The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly/Annual Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly/ Annual Financial Results are available on the Company's website (https://www.yaari.com) and on the website of BSE (https://www.bseindia.com) and NSE (https://www.nseindia.com).

Registered Office: 5th Floor, Plot No. 108, IT Park, Udyog Vihar, Phase-1 Gurugram, Haryana 122016
For and on behalf of the Board of Directors
Place : Gurugram
Date : 18 April 2025
Kubeir Khera
Executive Director & CEO
The same can be accessed by scanning the QR code provided below

DGTR issues final findings in 13 anti-dumping cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The commerce ministry's investigation arm DGTR has issued final findings in as many as 13 anti-dumping cases, mostly against China, in March, according to the Commerce Ministry.

The ministry also said that in addition to this, the Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR) has started 11 investigations in March.

The final findings have been issued against dumping of products such as vitamin-A palmitate, insoluble sulphur, aluminium foil, plastic processing machines, digital offset printing plates and decor paper.

Out of the 13 cases, 12 are against China. The other countries included in these probes include European Union, Japan, Taiwan, Russia and Thailand.

DGTR, under the commerce ministry, is the apex authority for administering all trade remedial measures, including antidumping, countervailing duties and safeguard measures.

These measures help deal with the rising incidences of unfair trade practices and to provide a level playing field to the domestic industry.

The role of the directorate has become crucial in the backdrop of sweeping tariffs imposed by the US and China on each other, as high import duties are making goods more expensive in both countries. And this would lead to diversion of goods into countries like India.

While the US has imposed 245 per cent against China. In retaliation, Beijing has slapped 125 per cent tariff on goods coming from Washington.

The government has set up an inter-ministerial import surge monitoring group to strictly monitor imports.

In the last fiscal, India's exports to China contracted 14.5 per cent to $14.25 billion as against $16.66 billion in 2023-24.

The imports, however, rose by 11.52 per cent in 2024-25 to $113.45 billion against $101.73 billion in 2023-24.

The trade deficit with China has widened by about 17 per cent to $99.2 billion in the last fiscal from $85.07 billion in 2023-24.

China continued to be the second largest trading partner of India with $127.7 billion two-way commerce in 2024-25 as compared to $118.4 billion in 2023-24.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The US has informed the global trade body WTO that the decision to impose tariffs on steel and aluminium, was based on national security grounds and should not be considered as safeguard measures, according to a communication.

The US shared this response with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) after India requested consultations under the WTO's Safeguards Agreement on April 11 with America. India has said that notwithstanding the USA's characterisation of these measures as security measures, they are in essence safeguard measures.

It has also stated that America has failed to notify the WTO Committee on Safeguards under a provision of the Agreement on Safeguards (AoS) on taking a decision to apply safeguard measures. "The US notes that the premise for India's request for consultations under Article 12.3 of the Agreement on Safeguards is that the tariffs are safeguard measures, the (US) President imposed the tariffs on steel and aluminum pursuant to Section 232, under which the President determined that tariffs are necessary to adjust imports of steel and aluminum articles that threaten to impair the national security of the US," America has said in a communication, dated April 17, to the trade body.

The US also said that Section 232 is a national security statute, and the tariffs are being kept in place under the security exception allowed under a provision of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994. It added that the tariffs were not imposed under a provision of the Trade Act of 1974, which is the law under which the US imposes safeguard measures.

"The United States is not maintaining these actions pursuant to the safeguards or emergency action provision, these actions are not safeguard measures and, therefore, there is no basis to conduct consultations under the Agreement on Safeguards with respect to these measures," the US added.

"Accordingly, India's request for consultations, has no basis in the Agreement on Safeguards," it said adding "nonetheless, we are open to discuss this or any other issue with India".

However, it said that they are open to discuss this issue with India. "Any discussions regarding the tariffs would not be under the Agreement on Safeguards and would be without prejudice to our view that the tariffs are not safeguard measures," it added.

EPFO set to launch version 3.0 with ATM fund withdrawals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ranchi

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is set to undergo a major digital overhaul to enhance services for over nine crore beneficiaries, with Version 3.0 set to launch by May or June, Union Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Friday.

In coming days, EPFO beneficiaries will be able to withdraw funds from ATMs due to faster processing of claims on the newer Version 3.0, Mandaviya said in an interview with media.

"EPFO will soon implement Version 3.0 with the help of a robust IT platform to provide seamless and simplified services, including auto-claim settlements, digital corrections, and ATM-based fund withdrawals. The overhaul is aimed at making EPFO accessible and efficient," he said.

According to Mandaviya, the new version will eliminate the need for complex and lengthy form-filling processes or physical visits for claims and corrections. Beneficiaries will be able to update their EPFO accounts and mandates using OTP verification and conveniently monitor their pension entitlements or withdraw funds. Due to fast settlement of claims, the funds would be quickly available in the subscriber's bank account, he added. He said EPFO currently holds a corpus of Rs 27 lakh crore with a sovereign guarantee and offers 8.25 per cent interest. The Centralised Pension Payment System, already in place, benefits over 78 lakh pensioners by allowing them to receive pensions in any bank account across the country, removing the earlier requirement of maintaining accounts in designated zonal banks.

The minister said the government is also considering the integration of various social security schemes, including the Atal Pension Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Bima Yojana, and Shramik Jan Dhan Yojana, to streamline and strengthen pension coverage.

In a move to enhance healthcare access for workers, Mandaviya said that beneficiaries under the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) will soon be able to receive free medical treatment at hospitals empanelled under the Ayushman Bharat scheme.

In addition, designated charity-run private hospitals will also be brought under its ambit to expand social security coverage.

Currently, ESIC provides free treatment to about 18 crore people through 165 hospitals, over 1,500 dispensaries and around 2,000 empanelled hospitals.

Mandaviya said the EPFO has significantly improved its grievance redressal mechanism following the rollout of Version 2.01, with complaints being reduced to less than half.

With the introduction of EPFO 3.0, the organisation aims to further improve accessibility and efficiency.

Gold imports rise 192 per cent to $4.47 billion

PRES TRUTS OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

After registering negative growth, the country's gold imports, which impact Current Account Deficit (CAD), jumped by 192.13 per cent to $4.47 billion in March, on account of significant increase in the prices of the yellow metal according to commerce ministry data.

Gold imports stood at $1.53 billion in January 2024.

Cumulatively, during April-March 2024-25, the inbound shipments rose 27.27 per cent to $58 billion against $ 45.54 billion in 2023-24.

The increase in imports also indicates strong investor confidence in the precious metal as a safe asset.

The other reasons include asset diversification towards gold due to global uncertainties, increasing demand from banks, and jump in prices.

On April 17, the gold prices rose by ₹70 to hit yet another record high of ₹98,170 per 10 grams in the national capital.

The prices soared to record highs due a weaker dollar, escalating trade war tensions, and growing concerns over global economic growth following US President Donald Trump's tariff announcements.

However, silver prices plunged by ₹1,400 to ₹98,000 per kg.

The white metal had settled at ₹99,400 per kg in the previous market close.

Silver imports in March contracted by 85.4 per cent to $119.3 million.

It was down 11.24 per cent year-on-year in 2024-25 to $4.82 billion.

Switzerland is the largest source of gold imports, with about 40 per cent share, followed by the UAE (over 16 per cent) and South Africa (about 10 per cent).

The precious metal accounts for eight per cent of the country's total imports.

In volume terms, the imports dipped to 757.15 tonnes in 2024-25 against 795.32 tonnes in 2023-24.

The gold imports in February were down by about 62 per cent, while it rose by 40.8 per cent in January and 55.39 per cent in December 2024.

The jump in gold imports pushed the country's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) to $21.54 in March.

It touched an all-time high of $282.82 billion in the last fiscal.

India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China.

The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry.

Gems and jewellery exports during the month rose by 10.62 per cent year-on-year to about $3 billion.

It was however dipped by 8.84 per cent to USD 29.82 billion in 2024-25 from USD 32.7 billion in 2023-24.

India's CAD inched up to $11.5 billion, or 1.1 per cent of GDP, in the December quarter from $10.4 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) in the year-ago period, mainly due to higher trade deficit.

It widened to $37.0 billion (1.3 per cent of GDP) during April-December 2024 from $30.6 billion (1.1 per cent of GDP) during the corresponding period of last year.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) on Friday clarified that no decision has been taken on the nationwide implementation of satellite-based tolling from May 1.

The ministry's response came after some sections of the media reported that a satellite-based tolling system would be launched from May 1, 2025 and will replace the existing FASTag-based toll collection system. In a statement, the ministry said that to enable seamless, barrier-free movement of vehicles through toll plazas and reduce travel time, an 'Automatic Number Plate Recognition(ANPR)-FASTag-based barrier-less tolling system' will be implemented at selected toll plazas.

According to the statement, the advanced tolling system will combine ANPR technology, that will identify vehicles by reading their number plates, and the existing 'FASTag system' that uses Radio-Frequency Identification (RFID) for toll deduction. Under this, vehicles will be charged based on their identification through high performance ANPR cameras and FASTag readers, without needing to stop at the toll plazas.

In case of non-compliance, e-notices will be served to the violators, non-payment of which may result in suspension of FASTag and other VAHAN related penalties.

New traffic radar rules to ensure accurate speed enforcement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The government on Friday said new regulations requiring mandatory verification and stamping of traffic radar equipment will be implemented from July 1 to improve road safety and enforcement accuracy across the country.

The Consumer Affairs Ministry has notified the rules following extensive consultations with stakeholders, including the Indian Institute of Legal Metrology, Regional Reference Laboratories, manufacturers, and vehicle certification organisations.

"These rules will come into force from July 1, 2025, providing sufficient time for industries and enforcement agencies to comply with the provisions," the ministry said in a statement. The new rules, which fall under the Legal Metrology (General) Rules, 2011, will apply to "microwave Doppler radar equipment" widely utilised for measuring vehicle speeds on roads.

These rules specify detailed technical and safety requirements, ensuring proper calibration, stable operation under various environmental conditions and protection against tampering.

Such measures will foster a culture of technological reliability and legal accountability.

The new framework requires all speed measurement devices to undergo verification and receive official stamps before deployment.

This process aims to guarantee precise readings for speed and distance measurements, crucial for traffic law enforcement. The implementation of these rules provides significant benefits to all stakeholders across the board.

For the common citizen, the mandatory verification and stamping of radar-based speed measurement equipment will ensure the accurate enforcement of speed limits, thereby preventing unfair penalties and significantly enhancing road safety.

For industries, particularly those involved in manufacturing radar-based speed-measuring devices, the new rules establish a clear technical and regulatory framework aligned with international standards.

For law enforcement agencies, the introduction of verified and stamped devices ensures a higher degree of operational effectiveness and credibility.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Among the threats tariffs pose to the US economy, none may be as strange as the sell-off in the dollar. Currencies rise and fall all the time because of inflation fears, central bank moves and other factors.

But economists worry that the recent drop in the dollar is so dramatic that it reflects something more ominous as President Donald Trump tries to reshape global trade: a loss of confidence in the US. The dollar's dominance in cross-border trade and as a safe haven has been nurtured by administrations of both parties for decades because it helps keep US borrowing costs down and allows Washington to project power abroad — enormous advantages that could possibly disappear if faith in the US was damaged.

"Global trust and reliance on the dollar was built up over a half century or more," says University of California, Berkeley, economist Barry Eichengreen. "But it can be lost in the blink of an eye."

Since mid-January, the dollar has fallen 9 per cent against a basket of currencies, a rare and steep decline, to its lowest level in three years.

Many investors spooked by Trump don't think the dollar will be pushed quickly from its position as the world's reserve currency, instead expecting more of a slow decline. But even that is scary enough, given the benefits that would be lost. With much of world's goods exchanged in dollars, demand for the currency has stayed strong even as the US has doubled federal debt in a dozen years and does other things that would normally send investors fleeing.

That has allowed the US government, consumers and businesses to borrow at unnaturally low rates, which has helped speed economic growth and lift standards of living.

The dollar lost more than five per cent against the euro and pound and six per cent against the yen since early April

Dollar dominance also allows the US to push around other countries like Venezuela, Iran and Russia by locking them out of a currency they need to buy and sell with others.

Now that "exorbitant privilege," as economists call it, is suddenly at risk.

"The safe haven properties of the dollar are being eroded," said Deutsch Bank in a note to clients earlier this month warning of a "confidence crisis." Added a more circumspect report by Capital Economics, "It is no longer hyperbole to say that the dollar's reserve status and broader dominant role is at least somewhat in question."

Traditionally, the dollar would strengthen as tariffs sink demand for foreign products. But the dollar not only failed to strengthen this time, it fell, puzzling economists and hurting consumers. The dollar lost more than 5 per cent against the euro and pound, and 6 per cent against the yen since early April. As any American traveler abroad knows, you can buy more with a stronger dollar and less with a weaker one. Now the price of French wine and South Korean electronics and a host of other imports could cost more not only due to tariffs but a weaker currency, too.

And any loss of safe-haven status could hit US consumers in another way: Higher rates for mortgages and car financing deals as lenders demand more interest for the added risk.

More worrisome is possible higher interest rates on the ballooning US federal debt, which is already at a risky 120 per cent of US annual economic output.

"Most countries with that debt to GDP would cause a major crisis and the only reason we get away with it is that the world needs dollars to trade with," says Benn Steil, an economist at the Council on Foreign Relations. "At some point people are going to look seriously at alternatives to the dollar. "

They already have, with a little help from a US economic rival. China has been striking yuan-only trading deals with Brazil for agricultural products, Russia for oil and South Korea for other goods for years.

Our technology products now globally respected: Vaishnaw

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Manesar

India's electronics manufacturing and export have grown multi-fold in the last decade driven by policies and incentives, and the Made-in-India products now command global recognition given their reliability and respect for IP rights, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Friday.

Inaugurating VVDN Technologies' SMT (Surface Mount Technology) Line at Manesar, the Minister noted that electronics manufacturing in India has risen 5-fold in the last decade topping ₹11 lakh crore. Exports have grown 6 times during this period, crossing ₹3.25 lakh crore. The entire ecosystem has spurred 25 lakh jobs, Vaishnaw, Minister for Electronics and IT said. "In global market, Indian products, given their reliability and respect for IP (intellectual property) rights, have an advantage, and it is being recognised globally," he said.

India's design capabilities have paved the way for complex products — from AI cameras to automobile electronics and telcom network equipment to power electronics — being designed here, adding to India's sheen as an electronics hub, he said.

"Now addition of electronics components incentives, approved by Cabinet recently, will improve depth of electronics manufacturing ecosystem, leading to more opportunities," the Minister asserted.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged more than 6 per cent in the last four trading sessions, as a temporary pause on tariffs by the US, return of foreign investors to the domestic market and prediction of an above-normal rainfall in the upcoming southwest monsoon season lifted investors' sentiments.

Moreover, retail inflation dipping to a nearly six-year low also raised hopes for a third rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), according to market experts.

In the last four trading days, the BSE benchmark index jumped 4,706.05 points or 6.37 per cent, and the NSE Nifty surged 1,452.5 points or 6.48 per cent. Accordingly, investors' wealth rallied by ₹25.77 lakh crore to ₹4,19,60,046.14 crore (USD 4.90 trillion) in the past four days. Stock markets are closed on Friday for 'Good Friday'.

According to Vishnu Kant Upadhyay, AVP, Research and Advisory, Master Capital Services, several factors like foreign fund inflows, temporary pause on tariffs by the US and further monetary easing by the RBI have converged to drive the recent sharp rally in the Indian markets despite global trade uncertainty.

"In the last three trading sessions, foreign portfolio investors purchased over USD one billion worth of Indian equities after a prolonged selling streak. Further, the announcement of a temporary pause on tariffs by the US and potential negotiations with countries also led to the relief rally," Upadhyay said.

Moreover, the RBI's 25 bps rate cut on April 9, and its shift of stance from "neutral" to "accommodative" added fresh momentum to the equity market, as investors priced in further monetary easing, he noted. On April 9, the RBI cut interest rates for a second consecutive time.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), consisting of three central bank members and an equal number of external members, voted unanimously to cut the repurchase or repo rate by 25 basis points to six per cent.

RBI changed its policy stance to "accommodative" from "neutral", indicating the possibility of more rate cuts in future, Governor Sanjay Malhotra said, while announcing the MPC decisions.

Marketmen are also betting big on upcoming southwest monsoon as according to the India Meteorological Department, India is expected to get above-normal rainfall in the upcoming southwest monsoon season, which raised hopes for a bountiful harvest for the largely agri-based economy.

Echoing similar sentiments, Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking said the rally in the domestic equities was primarily fueled by optimism surrounding the deferral of tariffs and recent exemptions on select products, raising hopes for potential negotiations that could mitigate the impact on global trade. "As the week progressed, market participants responded positively to a slew of favorable developments, including updates on a normal monsoon, easing retail inflation — which raised hopes for potential policy rate cuts — and the absence of any major negative surprises from global markets," Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

In the upcoming week, all eyes will be on the earnings reports, Mishra said.

Globally, any updates related to tariffs and their potential impact on world markets will remain in focus, he added.

On the domestic macroeconomic front, retail inflation dipped marginally to a nearly six-year low of 3.34 per cent in March due to decline in prices of vegetables, eggs and protein-rich items, raising hope for a third rate cut by the RBI as it remains below the median target of four per cent.

Broken, Not Guilty?

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

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

There are plays, and then there are experiences that etch themselves into the psyche, **SHADOWed** etches. From the moment the first line is spoken, the atmosphere tightens. Something powerful has begun, and once it takes hold, it grips attention and refuses to loosen its hold.

The play compels a closer look at truths often pushed aside. Produced by Samar Sarila, an actor, writer and producer known for his work in both theatre and film, including the acclaimed Viceroy's House and Turning 30 and Vidushi Mehra, an acclaimed actress and theatre director who has also made her mark in films like Raees and No One Killed Jessica, SHADOWed is a work of depth and relevance, confronting uncomfortable truths with skill and passion. In a world saturated with headlines and fleeting digital outrage, SHADOWed cuts through with startling clarity.

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

Victor Roy (Samar Sarila), the defence attorney, arrives not only with arguments but with inner turmoil that simmers just beneath the surface. Battling his past while fighting for his client's future, he commands the stage with quiet intensity. Opposing him is Jaya Anand (Vidushi Mehra), composed and firm, a prosecutor determined to uncover the truth. Between them stands Dr Vineeta Varma (Preeti Agarwal Mehta), a clinical psychiatrist whose analysis has the power to sway both the court and the conscience.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

SHADOWed stands as a necessary conversation, a story that grips from the first moment and stays in the mind long after the final scene.
The cast delivers a space for collective reckoning. Theatre like this should not just be watched — it should be talked about, dissected, and remembered.

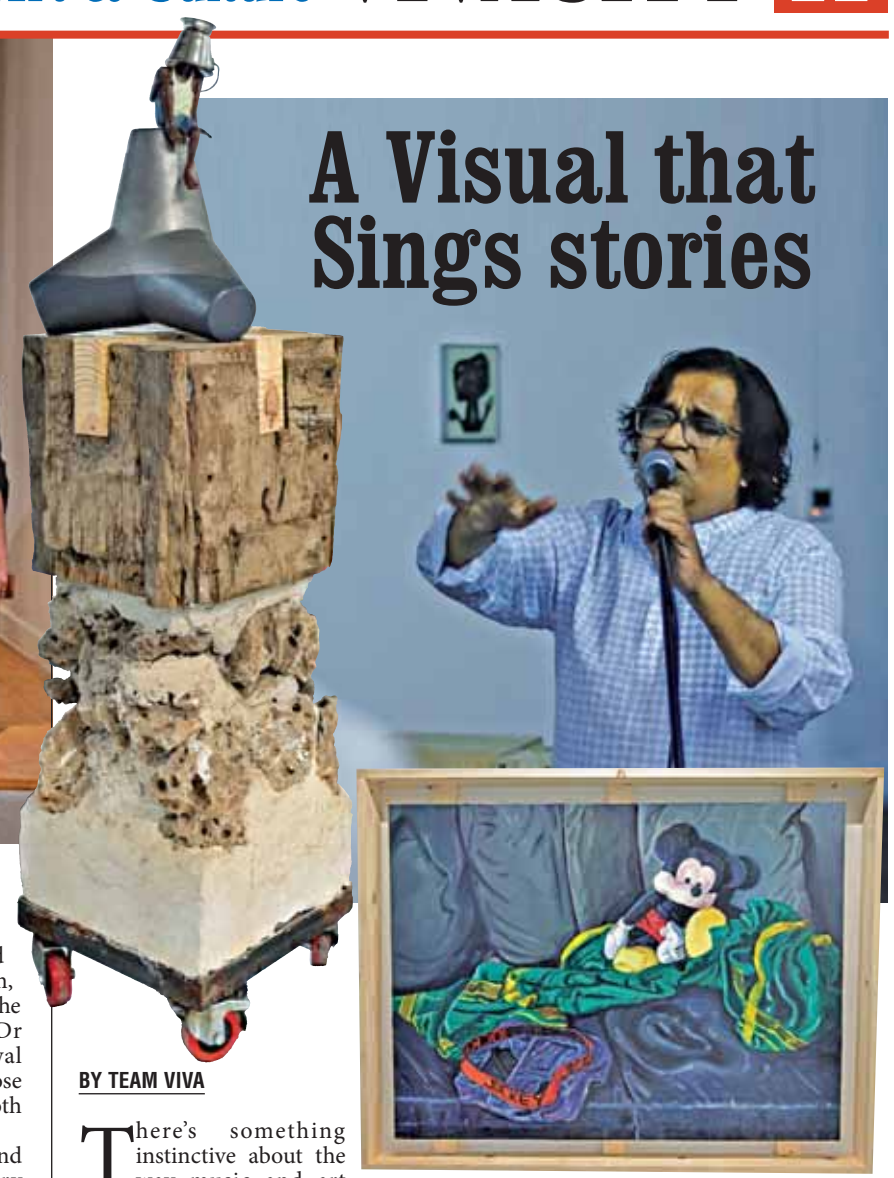
The writing is lean, powerful and emotionally resonant. The story pierces deep, asking: Can trauma rewrite memory? Is guilt ever truly clear? What lies beneath the silence of a teenager accused of murder?

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

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

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

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



A Visual that Sings stories

BY TEAM VIVA

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

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

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

Mithu Sen's uncompromising narratives explore identity and the human condition, while Saviya Lopes brings intimate textures and layered emotions that resonate deeply with the viewer. Each artwork converses with the next, creating a cohesive narrative that spans across mediums, ideas, and emotions. This exhibition invites you to feel the stories behind it. Whether it's Gurjeet Singh's powerful, introspective works or Dhruvi Acharya's striking compositions, each piece adds a layer to the broader conversation on memory, history, and belonging. From the urban streets to intimate expressions of memory, the exhibition spans various artistic narratives. Artists like Tyler, Akshy Mahajan Sameer and SAGE bring forward works that reimagine their surroundings

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

Erosion of History in Art forms

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

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

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

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

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

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

In contrast, Andrea Zucchi's work brings a playful yet critical energy to the exhibition. Zucchi's engagement with 19th-century photographs is marked by an irreverent and almost surreal twist. The works question the authenticity of historical imagery and challenge the viewer to rethink the boundaries between the past and the present.

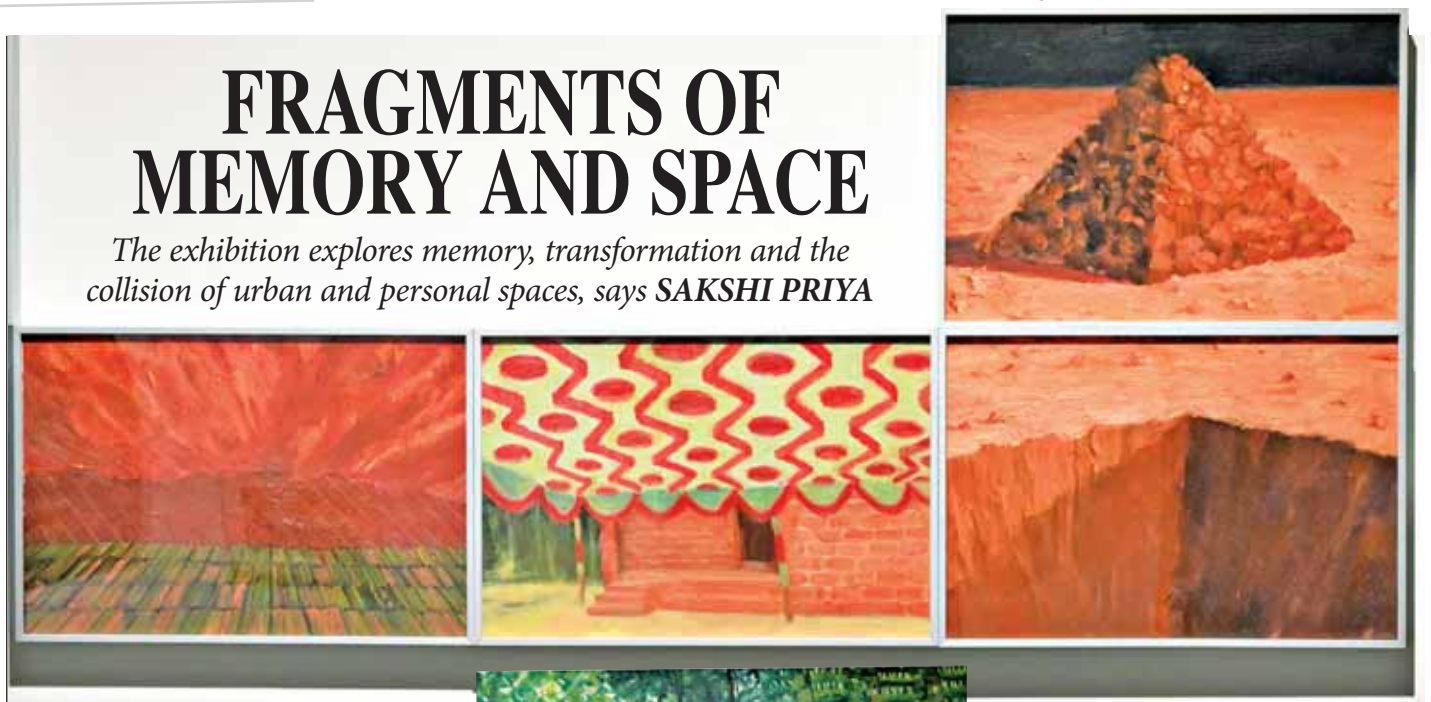
Zucchi's work doesn't simply appropriate the past; it transforms it, creating a disorienting but engaging reworking of historical narratives. The use of bright, almost garish colours and the layering of contemporary elements onto historical images offer a critique of how history is reproduced and recontextualised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

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

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

FRAGMENTS OF MEMORY AND SPACE

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



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

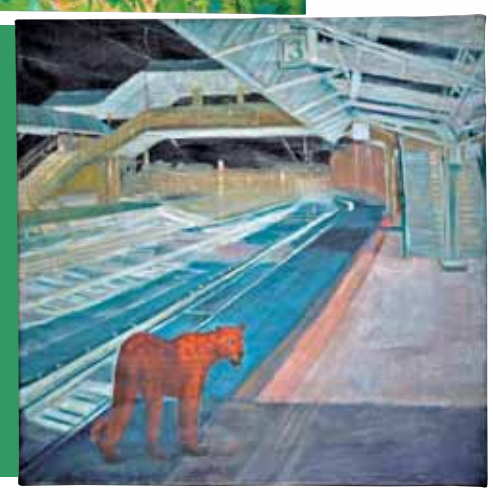
Gavankar, a visual artist and poet trained at Sir J. J. School of Art, presents his works as complex arrangements of memory, paintings that deliberately blur the boundaries of past and present, real and imagined. In works like *Memories of Water and Glass* and *Blasting and Other Images 2*, oil, charcoal,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

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

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

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

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



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

RR desperately need win against LSG

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

An inconsistent Rajasthan Royals (RR) will be desperate to plug the holes across departments and halt a three-match losing streak when they host Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) in the Indian Premier League (IPL) here on Saturday.

With just two wins from seven games, the Royals are languishing at eighth on the table and come into the contest on the back of a gut-wrenching Super Over defeat to Delhi Capitals.

As the league hits the halfway mark, they'll need to shake off the heartbreak quickly if they hope to upstage Rishabh Pant's men and climb out of the bottom half. Plagued by inconsistency in both batting and bowling, RR's campaign has struggled to find momentum. To make matters worse, skipper Sanju Samson suffered a side strain in the previous match and had to retire hurt, though he later said he was feeling "alright."

The Royals' batting, built around Indian mainstays, has mis-fired far too often, leaving the middle order exposed and under pressure.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, however, seems to have shaken off his rustiness with back-to-back half centuries against Royal Challengers Bengaluru and DC. But it will have to be seen if he carries the momentum in Saturday's match.

Samson is yet to produce a defining knock, with the 66 he made in RR's first match against Sunrisers Hyderabad being his best so far. A lot will depend on his and Jaiswal's form regarding how RR fare against the likes of Shardul Thakur, Avesh Khan, Digvesh Rathi and Ravi Bishnoi.

Riyan Parag and Dhruv Jurel have not made much contribution so far in the batting front and duo need to fire if RR have to post or chase down a big total.

Nitish Rana came back to form with a 51 against DC after the 81 he made against Chennai Super Kings last month, and he needs to carry on the momentum.

On the bowling front, Jofra Archer has slowly gotten into his groove.

But the Royals' attack as a whole has been toothless. Apart from Sandeep Sharma, their other bowlers have struggled to control the scoring rate.

LSG also head into Saturday's match after losing to CSK but they are in a much better position currently, with their four wins from seven matches keeping them at fifth spot.

Their batting form has been impressive overall with Nicholas Pooran (357 runs from seven matches) and Mitchell Marsh (295 from six matches) in top form. Pooran and Marsh are in top and third sports in the batting chart.

South African Aiden Markram has also been among runs though compatriot David Miller's form has been a worry with 27 as his highest score in seven matches.

LSG have scored more than 200 runs in three matches and above 160 in all the other games.

Fortunately for LSG also, captain Pant has shown some form with 63 off 49 balls against CSK, his first fifty in this IPL from seven matches, though in a losing cause.

LSG's bowling was their weakest link at the start of the competition with injuries to main pacers but made amends later thanks to some on and off performances from Avesh Khan, and Shardul Thakur.

India's fastest bowler Mayank Yadav has joined the squad after the last game but the team management is still awaiting his fitness certificate from the Centre of Excellence.

Mayank has been recuperating from multiple fitness issues including a lower back stress fracture.

Teams

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubham Dubey, Nitish Rana, Riyan Parag, Dhruv Jurel (w), Shimron Hetmyer, Jofra Archer, Maheesh Theekshana, Tushar Deshpande, Sandeep Sharma, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Kunal Singh Rathore, Akash Madhwal, Kumar Kartikeya, Kwena Maphaka, Wanindu Hasaranga, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Ashok Sharma, Vaibhav Suryavanshi.

Lucknow Super Giants: Rishabh Pant (C&wk), David Miller, Aiden Markram, Aryan Juyal (wk), Himmat Singh, Matthew Breetzke, Nicholas Pooran (wk), Mitchell Marsh, Abdul Samad, Shahbaz Ahmed, Yuvraj Chaudhary, Rajvardhan Hangargekar, Arshin Kulkarni, Ayush Badoni, Shardul Thakur, Avesh Khan, Akash Deep, Manimaran Siddharth, Digvesh Rathi, Akash Singh, Shamar Joseph, Prince Yadav, Mayank Yadav, Ravi Bishnoi.

IPL: Delhi Capitals to take on Gujarat Titans today

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

Mitchell Starc's mastery of death overs will be up against Mohammed Siraj's artistry when the high-flying Delhi Capitals (DC) take on an equally well-placed Gujarat Titans (GT) in a high-voltage top-of-the-table IPL clash here on Saturday. The Capitals sit pretty at the top with 10 points from six games, while the Titans trail close behind with eight from as many outings.

Confidence in the Delhi camp would be soaring after their dramatic Super Over win over Rajasthan Royals, another heist scripted under pressure with Starc at the heart of it. The Australian left-arm quick bowled three overs of pinpoint yorkers, including a nerve wracking Super Over, to turn the game on its head.

Having skipped the Champions Trophy to freshen up after the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Starc has returned to the IPL recharged and razor sharp.

With 10 wickets at an economy just over 10, he's led the DC pace unit featuring Mukesh Kumar and Mohit Sharma. If Starc can conjure another match-defining spell, it could be the edge that Delhi needs.

His battle with Gujarat Titans' top order, led by skipper Shubman Gill, the consistent Sai Sudharsan, and Ashes rival Jos Buttler, could prove pivotal.

So far, the trio has carried the bulk of the batting load, with at least one of them notching a half-century in every match.

The GT middle order, largely untested, faltered when finally called upon against Lucknow Super Giants, resulting in a defeat. If Delhi can crack that top-order code early, the ripple effect could tilt the contest in their favour.

On the other hand, after an underwhelming Border-Gavaskar Trophy and missing India's Champions Trophy-winning campaign, Siraj used his time away from the game to iron out flaws and the results are showing.

Refreshed and raring, Siraj has emerged as the cornerstone of Gujarat Titans' bowling attack this season.

With his Test-match lengths and ability to generate movement off the deck, he has picked up 10 wickets at an economy of 8.50, particularly excelling in the Powerplay. Up against him will be Delhi's relatively inexperienced opening duo of Jake Fraser-McGurk, who has struggled for rhythm, and the promising Abishek Porel.

The pair will have their work cut out not just against Siraj but also Prasidh Krishna, who is enjoying a standout season.

Should Delhi's top order crumble early, the Capitals will look towards the experience of KL Rahul and Karun Nair to steady the ship. Axar Patel, who plays for Gujarat in the domestic circuit, too will be eager to make an impact at his home-ground, having rediscovered his rhythm with both bat and ball. Both teams also boast of high-quality spin arsenals.

While Gujarat have banked on the reliable duo of Sai Kishore and Rashid Khan, Delhi's standout performer has been Kuldeep Yadav, ably supported by the impressive Vipraj Nigam.

SRH need to adapt to tough surfaces: Vettori after loss to Mumbai Indians

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Urging his batters to suitably tweak their approach on "difficult" surfaces, Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) coach Daniel Vettori said they cannot expect belters at every venue and need to up their game after being outgunned by a wily Mumbai Indians (MI) in their Indian Premier League (IPL) clash here.

Mumbai Indians produced a perfect show on a tricky pitch here at the Wankhede Stadium which had assistance for spin and pace for the seamers, especially with the slow and short balls to win the contest by four wickets on Thursday.

Sunrisers Hyderabad could only post 162 for five after struggling to find their flow with the bat. MI pacers and right-arm off-spinner Will Jacks (2/14) set up the win.

"I feel like no one really has control over their surface, so there's a little bit of luck involved in terms of coming up against wickets that don't suit us," Vettori told the media after SRH failed to win another away game in this IPL.

SRH features big-hitters like Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head Heinrich Klaasen, Ishan Kishan and Nitish Reddy. Barring Abhishek (40 off 28 balls), and Klaasen (37 off 28 balls), the other batters could not make a noteworthy contribution.

"There has to be more to it from our side that we have to adapt. We know that conditions like this exist in Chennai, sometimes (in) Ahmedabad. We're not expecting to go over around the country and come up on belters, so the ball's in our court to realise that," the former New Zealand spinner said.

Vettori said it was MI bowlers who made the job extremely tough for SRH batters in the first half of the game, especially in the middle overs.

> It was a difficult surface. Mumbai Indians read the conditions exceptionally well. They really relied on that slow ball
> — DANIEL VETTORI, SRH COACH

"It was just incredibly tough through those middle stages," he said.

"It was a difficult surface. Mumbai read the conditions exceptionally well. They really relied on that slow ball, but it was mainly effective because of their execution and there's some supreme exponents of it in (Jasprit) Bumrah and Trent Boult and even Hardik Pandya."

"The way they bowled, particularly through those middle stages, really stifled us. We were 66 for three through those 10 overs, and in these sort of conditions you probably need more than that," he added.

Jacks, who also scored 36 after an impactful bowling show, acknowledged the pitch was tricky but his team's plans were clear.

"It was not what we have seen in the past here, but it was definitely still a good wicket. We felt when there was pace on the ball, we thought we could play our shots freely as long as we weren't trying to over-hit the ball," he said.

"I knew there was going to be a bit of spin assistance so as long as I was not floating the ball up there and bowling aggressively and bowling hard, using the wicket, that's what I was trying to do."

Jacks also revealed that MI spinner Karn Sharma suffered an injury to his finger webbing in the second half of the game. "He has got a slight finger-webbing issue. I'll be honest, I have not seen him but hopefully it's not too bad and he can bounce back quickly," Jacks said.

Jacks said the pitch did not change much from first to the second innings with SRH struggling to put bat on the ball but MI were not facing any such challenges given the nature of the surface.

"There was hold when people bowled slower balls into the wicket. There wasn't much dew either so I don't think there was massive change in conditions as such," he said.

"We executed well with the ball and I think we understood what we had to do with the bat," he added.

Shooter Shriyanka finishes eighth in women's 50m rifle 3P at ISSF World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lima

Paris Olympics shooter Shriyanka Sadangi finished eighth in the women's 50m rifle 3 positions (3P) final on the third day of the ISSF World Cup Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun stage here.

She became the latest Indian shooter on this double-legged South American sojourn to make the cut for a maiden individual World Cup final, but made the exit after the 10th shot of the standing position round, the 40th of the 45-shot final.

Sagen Maddalena of the USA, the silver medallist in the Paris Games, won the gold. Sagen's effort took the USA to the top of the medal tally with three golds and six medals.India was second at the end of the competition on day three on Thursday, with two gold medals and a silver and a bronze each. Indian shooters had a challenging day overall with none of them making the men's 3P final and also finding themselves with lots to do after the first round of qualifying in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol (RFP) event.

In the women's 3P as well, the Indians struggled after the first two kneeling and prone positions. But all three -- Shriyanka, Ashi Chouksey and previous World Cup gold winner Sift Kaur Samra -- picked up the pace admirably in the final standing position to make a dash for the qualifying mark. Shriyanka succeeded in taking seventh with a solid 588, while Ashi finished stronger on accuracy than Sift, taking the ninth spot to the latter's 11th with both stopping at 587 and thereby missing out narrowly.

In the final, the Indian began well with a 10.5 as her first effort, but as the grind to the finish began in right earnest, Shriyanka petered out. Her best chance was when she had moved up to sixth with two more shots of the second Prone position remaining but returns of 9.8 and 9.3 effectively doused her challenge.

She closed with a 9.9 as her final shot to wrap with 400.7, bowing out alongside seventh placed Brazilian Geovana Meyer.

In the men's 3P, Aishwary Tomar, Niraj Kumar and Chain Singh finished at 17th, 18th and 19th respectively. The first two shooters shot identical scores of 587 to miss the last qualifying mark by a couple of points, while Chain shot 586.

There was also 25m action on the day with Anish, Vijayveer Sidhu and Gurpreet Singh all finishing the first day of qualifying in the men's rapid-fire pistol outside the top six qualifying mark.

They will need to be at their best in the second rapid-fire round on Saturday to get a shot at a medal.

Minister of Public Health Engineering of Assam Jayanta Mallabaruah inaugurating 5th All India Brahmaputra Squash Championship in Guwahati on Friday PIONEER PHOTO

India sends squad for Asian U-15, U-17 boxing tourney

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India has fielded a 56-member squad for the Asian U-15 & U-17 Boxing Championships being held in Amman, Jordan. This the first event organised by Asian Boxing, endorsed by both the Olympic Council of Asia and the newly-formed World Boxing.

The standout names in the U-17 boys' squad include Sahil Duhan and Devansh, who clinched silver and bronze respectively at the 2024 Asian Junior Championship, as well as Tikam Singh, who is the SGFI 2024 gold medallist. On the girls' side, Samiksha Singh, Anshika, and Khushi Chand were among the medal winners at the 2024 Asian School Boys amd Girls Boxing Championships in Al Ain.

The U-15 lineup features Ravi Sihag, a bronze medallist from the Asian School Boys Championship in Al Ain in 2024, as well as the 2024 sub-junior national girls boxing champion (64-67 kg) Trushna Mohite. The team was selected by the World Boxing-formed Interim Committee, chaired by former Boxing Federation of India president Ajay Singh.

Veer, Anahat enter semis of world squash championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kuala Lumpur

Indian squash players Veer Chotrani and Anahat Singh advanced to the semifinals of the World Championship Qualifying Event (Asia) after registering contrasting wins here on Friday.

Chotrani logged a come-from-behind win over home favourite Mohammad Syafiq Kamal in the men's event. The second seeded Indian prevailed 9-11 11-6 11-6 11-7 over his sixth-seeded opponent to make the last-four stage.

The 17-year-old Anahat, seeded fifth, produced a dominant display, defeating Japan's Akari Midorikawa 11-1 11-7 11-5 in the women's quarterfinals.

She will take on eighth-seeded Helen Tang of Hong Kong in the semifinals on Saturday. Tang had beaten India's Tanvi Khanna 11-5 11-6 10-12 11-9 in the quarterfinals. Khanna had upstaged top seed N Ching Cheng of Hong Kong in her previous match.

The winners of the tournament will qualify for the world championships scheduled in Chicago from May 9 to 17.

I have not lost hope: Max

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jeddah

Ahead of Sunday's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix this Formula 1 season is looking like McLaren vs McLaren. Still, defending champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull says he has not lost hope. McLaren drivers Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri are the only one to consistently have the pace through the first four rounds of the championship.

Norris has a three-point lead but admits he is not at his best, while Piastri is the driver with momentum after winning in Bahrain last week. Ferrari, Red Bull and Mercedes have all their had their moments, but none has been a consistent challenger, as McLaren's 58-point constructors' championship lead shows.

Max Verstappen is the only non-McLaren driver to win a Grand Prix this season but in Bahrain he was struggling so much that Red Bull motorsport adviser Helmut Marko said he was concerned Verstappen might consider his future. Verstappen said this week he was not considering the championship picture this early in the season.

"I am not thinking about that. I just go race by race," Verstappen said. "I think at the moment, of course, we are not the quickest. So then naturally, it is very tough to to fight for a championship, but it's still a very long road... I am hopeful that we can still improve things and we will see what we get." Two-time champion Fernando Alonso dampened speculation Verstappen could seek to join his team, Aston Martin, after Red Bull car designer Adrian Newey made that move last year.

Asked if he'd welcome being Verstappen's teammate, Alonso said Thursday: "Yes, but it's unlikely to happen. Very unlikely." Alonso's current teammate is Lance Stroll, son of team owner Lawrence Stroll. Busy scheduleJeddah hosts the fifth race in six weeks in a hectic start to the season, which stays at a record 24 races. There's a little respite after Saudi Arabia, with two weeks till the next race in Miami."I think it's on the upper end of the limit. It feels like race 10 already," said Williams driver Alex Albon, adding it's especially tough on mechanics and other crew members.

"As drivers, we travel better than everyone else in the paddock. We stay in better hotels than everyone else in the paddock — it's just a function of being in a privileged position."

No plans to race till 50 but post 2026: Fernando Alonso

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jeddah

At 43, Fernando Alonso continues to defy age and push the boundaries of endurance in a Formula 1 car and while the two-time world champion doesn't see himself racing at 50, he plans to take it one season at a time once his Aston Martin contract runs out in 2026.

Aston Martin don't have a race-winning car at the moment but their long-term ambition is to win the championship.

With the new regulations kicking in next year, Alonso is confident that genius car designer Adrian Newey will produce a formidable piece of machinery and even if it doesn't happen, he would be happy to walk into the sunset and start a new role at Aston Martin.

Speaking ahead of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, Alonso explained the rationale of signing the contract that will see him driving till the end of 2026.

"Not at 50 (racing), but I don't know. That's why we kept open the possibility as well. I wanted to race this year for sure and next year for sure because of the change of regulations — and I wanted to experience the 2026 rules and Honda coming to the team. Then the surprise that Adrian was joining the team a few months after that," said Alonso.

"There were things that were appealing last year when we sat together and negotiated the contract. But after 2026, I don't know. I will go season by season. I will see how I feel, how motivated I am. Now I am very motivated, but I cannot guarantee that for three or four years and compromise the team.

"If it's in another position, or I don't feel fast enough, I will be the first one to raise my hand. But my contract is much longer than my racing career, so I will stay with this team for many, many years in a different role. If that means we can win a World Championship even when I'm not behind the wheel, I will still feel very proud of the project."

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton is another driver on the grid who is racing in his 40s.

Alonso's two titles with Renault came way back in 2005-06 and since then, his race starts have swelled to a staggering 405. He retired from the sport he loves in 2018 for "bigger challenges" only to make a comeback in 2021.

Alonso doesn't see a third title on the horizon but he knew what he was getting into at Aston Martin.

"It's not about right or wrong decisions. You make your choices. When I left Alpine, I thought that I would not fight for a World Championship there. They may do in the future, but not in the short term – and I don't have a long-term future, I will not race forever.

"So in the period when my racing career is active, I thought Aston Martin was a better place. I did enjoy 2023, being competitive. And I do enjoy now the process that we are in and the building of this team of the future. I sometimes say we are not the team of the present – and that's what I would like to have, because in the future I don't know if I will be behind the wheel," he said.