

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.

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.

'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.

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 Bangladeshi officials on the developments in West Bengal. 'Instead of making unwarranted comments and indulging in virtue signalling, Bangladesh would do better to focus on protecting the rights of its own minorities,' he said.

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

Detailed Story on 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.

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York/Chandigarh

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

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

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

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

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



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

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 Passia in Amritsar district, Passia had left for Dubai in April 2018 and returned to India in February 2019.

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 north-east 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 north-east Delhi's Seelampur also triggered a war of words between the ruling BJP and opposition AAP on Friday. Both

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Manuscripts of Bhagavad Gita, Natyashastra added to UNESCO register

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- NARENDRA MODI, PRIME MINISTER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Home Minister said the scriptures depict the ancient wisdom of Bharat that has 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.

BJP slams Minister Hafizul's remark, announces protest march on April 21

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

A political storm has erupted in the State after the state's Minority Welfare Minister and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader, Hafizul Hasan Ansari, reportedly stated that 'Shariat is above the Constitution'. The remark has drawn strong condemnation from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which termed the minister's comment as an "open attack on India's democratic fabric and constitutional values."

massive protest march to be held on April 21. The party said it will take to the streets in large numbers to voice its outrage and demand accountability. An important strategy meeting was held at the BJP district office in Sakchi under the chairmanship of District President Sudhanshu Ojha. The meeting was attended by senior party functionaries, including office bearers from various BJP fronts. Detailed discussions were held to ensure the success of the planned protest.



East Singhbhum Deputy Commissioner's office on April 21 at 10 am. BJP lead-

The party will organize a grand protest march from the district office in Sakchi to the

ers stated that thousands of party workers and citizens are expected to join the

protest. A memorandum condemning the minister's remarks will be submitted to

the Deputy Commissioner during the march. Addressing the press, BJP District President Sudhanshu Ojha strongly criticized Minister Ansari's remarks, stating, "The statement is not just an insult to the Indian Constitution but also an endorsement of extremist ideology. A minister who has sworn an oath to uphold the Constitution is now undermining it." Ojha added, "India is governed by the Constitution, not by Shariat. Such statements are dangerous and divisive." He also launched a scathing attack on the ruling JMM-Congress alliance, accusing it of

remaining silent on the issue. Taking a dig at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Ojha said, "Will Rahul Gandhi, who often speaks about saving the Constitution, remain a mute spectator? Or will he have the courage to withdraw support from the JMM-led government over such an anti-constitutional remark?" The BJP has urged all party workers and citizens to assemble in large numbers on April 21 at 10 am in Sakchi to join the protest march in defense of the Constitution. Several prominent BJP leaders participated in the planning meeting, including: District Vice

Presidents Sanjeev Sinha, Babua Singh, Renu Sharma, District General Secretaries, Anil Modi and Sanjeev Singh, District secretary Vijay Tiwari, Treasurer Krishna Neelu Machhua, Minority Morcha President Manjeet Singh, SC Morcha President Paresh Mukhi and ST Morcha President Ramesh Baske. The BJP emphasized that the protest is not just political but is meant to defend the secular and constitutional ethos of the nation.

Renovation of 9 roads in Potka to begins at a cost of Rs 12.95 Crore



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

A major step has been taken to strengthen the infrastructure in Potka block. After receiving approval for the strengthening of nine dilapidated roads at a cost of Rs 12.95 crore, local MLA Sanjiv Sardar performed the Bhoomi Pujan and formally commenced the construction work. On the occasion, MLA Sardar stated that ensuring smooth and quality road con-

nectivity for the people of Potka Assembly is his top priority. He mentioned that he had personally recommended the reconstruction of these roads to Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who not only approved the proposal but also conducted the online foundation laying ceremony. MLA Sardar shared that a total of 250 roads will be renovated in 12 phases over the next two years. He assured the public that development work will be executed at a

(from Shivnath Yadav's house) to Bargikocha, Dewli Chowk to Digarasai (via Amda), Jamda to Kantashola Main Road (via Mahalisai), Kantashola Main Road to Narayanpur (via Phooljhari) ,Mejogoda to Phooljhari, Harina to Bhagabeda village, Bhalki to Harina Main Road (Talasai), Upardiha Chandni Chowk to Janmdih Chowk.

The event was attended by former councillor Hiramani Murmu, Rajni Shadangi, Bablu Choudhary, Mukhya Saraswati Murmu, Ardhendu Sardar, Kalipad Sardar, Aseem Sardar, Jima Sardar, Panchayat Samiti member Raghunath Sardar, former Mukhiya Pratima Sardar, village head Muchiram Murmu, Narendra Sardar, Soda Sardar, Sudhir Soren, Bhuvaneshwar Sardar, Hitesh Bhakt, Manoranjan Sardar, Sunil Sardar, Bimal Das, Bapi Bhattmishra, Shalkhu Soren, Nishapati Sardar, Manik Sardar, Lakhinder Sardar, along with hundreds of villagers.

rapid pace. Most of these roads have been in a dilapidated condition for nearly a decade, and their renovation was taken up in response to persistent demands from villagers. He further emphasized that he is committed to living up to the trust of the people and is determined to lead Potka on the path of progress.

The Roads to be Renovated Include: Digarasai (Old Amda) to RWD Road, Hensel Amda Tola Chowk

Raj Bhavan's finger at EE of JSBCL for wrong report of NPU

PNS : DALTONGANJ

The executive engineer Jharkhand state building construction corporation limited gave 'wrong report' to the headquarter and to the Nilamber Pitamber university claiming the availability of the boring for the water supply as a result of this wrong report the university took over the academic building on January 24, 2025. The executive engineer of Jharkhand state building construction corporation limited here in Daltonganj is in the firing line of the Raj Bhavan for giving a wrong report in regard to the availability of water boring in the academic building.

Sources said the Nilamber Pitamber university was under tremendous pressure from the Jharkhand state building construction corporation limited and also from its going to retire VC in-charge Bal Kishun Munda to concede to take over the academic building of the Nilamber Pitamber university.

The university took over the building on January 24 just 7 days ahead of the retirement of the then VC in-charge Bal Kishun Munda.

All hell was brought on the registrar in-charge for taking over the building but now the two page letter of the additional chief secretary to the Governor Nitin Madan Kulkarni dated April 16 to the Secretary finance department government of Jharkhand, dispels the cloud raising accusing finger at the executive engineer of Jharkhand state building construction corporation limited for the major wrong reporting.

Again the additional chief secretary to the Governor's letter points towards lack of inspection of the academic building by the university officials from time to time. Here it is worth mentioning that the Nilamber Pitamber university has no engineer even of the junior level with it.

Lots of infrastructure works go on here in the colleges under the university here but there is no engineer with the university to oversee or inspect the ongoing construction works. College teachers are sadly a misfit to oversee or inspect any construction work.

The additional chief secretary to the Governor has asked for a special audit of the academic building by a team of officials of the finance department itself.

There has been an increase in the estimate of the academic building worth 43 crores which is the most eyebrow raising.

Union Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya gets grand welcome in Bokaro

PNS : BOKARO

Union Minister for Labour & Employment and Youth Affairs & Sports, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, received a grand welcome by BJP workers at Birsa Chowk, Naya Mod, during his journey from Ranchi to Dhanbad. The event was led by Bokaro's Ex MLA Biranchi Narayan, who, along with a large gathering of party workers, greeted the minister with great enthusiasm.

Dr. Mandaviya paid floral tributes at the statue of tribal hero Bhagwan Birsa Munda and lauded the contribution of labourers in building the nation through sectors like manufacturing, mining, and construction. Highlighting welfare initiatives, he said over 60 crore people are benefiting from



the Ayushman Bharat scheme, receiving free treatment worth up to Rs 5 lakh every year. "This is Modi ji's guarantee. No one needs to borrow money for medical care anymore," he stated, adding that the government is considering extending this scheme's benefits to more hospitals,

especially for workers. Prominent Bokaro BJP leaders present included district president Jaydev Rai, Shashi Bhushan Ojha Mukul, Sanjay Tyagi, Kamlesh Rai, and many others, showcasing strong local support for the minister's visit and the government's labour welfare initiatives.

Free entry in Air Show, more people should come to see it: DC



Ranchi DC Manjunath Bhajantri, SSP Ranchi Chandan Kumar Sinha alongwith IAF's Surya Kiran team during a press conference in Ranchi on Friday. Pix by Ratan Lal

PNS : RANCHI

Addressing a press conference, Deputy Commissioner-District Magistrate Ranchi, Manjunath Bhajantri today said that entry to the air show is free, more and more Ranchi residents should come to see the air show. Bhajantri said that the air show is being organized by the Indian Air Force (IAF) in collaboration with the district administration, the main objective of which is to give information about the Indian Air Force to the youth as well as inspire them to serve in the air service in future. He said that the district administration has ensured full

preparation for the program. The DC said that the Air Service Chief will also watch the program. He also said that along with the girl students of CM School of Excellence, all the schools of the district have also been invited for the air show so that the children can enjoy the show and get inspiration. PVTG Family has also been invited by the district administration. Bhajantri has requested the people coming to watch the show from the security point of view not to bring any kind of food to the venue. He said that everyone must take their place by 8:30 am. There will be three-tier

security at the venue Army Ground, Khoja Toli, Namkum for the IAF air show. During the press meet SSP Chandan Kumar Sinha said that necessary deputation has been done for crowd management as well as security arrangements. During the air show, Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team will show beautiful and amazing stunts in the sky. On the occasion, the commentator and administrator of the team Kanwal Sandhu said that people will be able to see the tricolour fluttering by the plane in the sky of Ranchi. Giving detailed information about the program, he said that the air show is divided

into two parts, in the first part 9 planes will fly together. These aircraft of the Indian Air Force will be seen flying together while maintaining a distance of 5 meters and in the second part all the 9 aircraft will make different shapes in the sky from different directions giving proof of their speed and discipline, apart from this the aircraft will also be seen flying upside down.

Sandhu said that the pilots of the team are the best fighter pilots of the Indian Air Force. The team has completed its preparation by working hard for 6 months. She expressed hope that the people of Ranchi will give full support and the show will be successful.

The commentator and administrator of the team said that the purpose of the show is to encourage the youth and children to join the Indian Armed Air Force in the future and contribute to the service of the country.

The Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team told that after the establishment of the team, the team has done many air shows so far. The team has also done shows abroad. The team has shown stunts in the sky in Dubai, Singapore, Thailand and China. The team said that their aim is to give proof of the efficiency and discipline of the Indian Air Force all over the world.

Devotees join KCA's Good Friday Mass



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

As part of the Holy Week observances, the Kerala Catholic Association (KCA) conducted solemn Good Friday services at the Divya Jyoti Retreat Centre, Sundernagar. Upholding the Syro-Malabar liturgical tradition, the Malayalam Mass witnessed the participation of over 100 faithful from the community.

The Mass was celebrated by Father Sebastian VC, Father Saji VC, and Father George VC, who led the congregation through the deeply spiritual and reflective rituals of Good Friday. In the homily, the significance of

Good Friday was powerfully conveyed. Marking the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the day serves as a solemn reminder of Christ's ultimate sacrifice for humanity's sins. The sermon reflected on the betrayal by Judas Iscariot, Jesus' trial under Pontius Pilate, and His crucifixion — a profound act of love and redemption central to Christian belief. The faithful observed the day with prayer, fasting, and quiet reflection, contemplating the themes of sacrifice, forgiveness, and the hope of resurrection.

The retreat centre echoed with reverence as members engaged in the liturgy, scripture readings, and veneration of the cross. The service was a moving experience for all present, serving as a spiritual anchor in the lead-up to Easter Sunday.

Jolly Mathew, Secretary of KCA, delivered the Voice of Thanks, expressing gratitude to the priests, volunteers, and all attendees for making the event spiritually enriching and well-organized.

The Good Friday Mass is part of the ongoing Holy Week celebrations, which continue at the same venue. The highlight of the concluding events will be the Easter Vigil on Saturday, April 19, 2025, beginning at 7:00 PM, also in Malayalam.

Jiju Thomas, President of the Kerala Catholic Association, extended heartfelt thanks to all participants and urged the community to join the remaining services with the same devotion and enthusiasm, making the Holy Week a memorable and blessed experience for all.

Elderly couple devoid of pension given assistance in Garhwa

NITYANAND DUBEY : GARHWA

Following reports received from various sources, Sanjay Kumar, the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) of Garhwa, paid a visit to an elderly couple in Patharia village on Thursday. Acting on information received that morning regarding the challenges faced by Bhulai Biar and Murti Devi, an elderly couple, in relation to their ration and pension, the SDO arrived at their home in Tetaria Basti, Patharia village, which falls under Padhua Panchayat and is located approximately 20 kilometres from the sub-divisional headquarters. He was accompanied by relevant officials and brought rations with him.

Upon his arrival, Kumar initially provided the couple with the rations. He then proceeded to enquire about their overall well-being, financial circumstances, health, care arrangements, pension, housing situation, and ration card information.

Investigations revealed that the couple's pension payments were current, with funds having been deposited into their account up to March. However, biometric issues were preventing them from accessing the money. The SDO immediately contacted the State Bank of India (SBI) branch manager and instructed them to resolve the issue in accordance with the rules. The bank manager addressed the technical problem without delay. Instructions were also given to the Circle Officer cum Block Supply Officer to include the couple's names on the ration card.

The Block Development Officer (BDO) and Circle Officer (CO) were instructed to ensure that the couple received their monthly ration promptly until their names were officially added to the card. Before leaving, Sanjay



Kumar gave the elderly woman a small amount of money to cover the cost of her medication. Kumar also appealed to the couple's sons to look after their parents properly and to contact the sub-divisional or block office directly if they encountered any problems.

Free medical camp organised in Lohardaga

VINOD PRASAD : LOHARDAGA

A free medical camp was organized on Friday on the occasion of the third year of Madhur Medicare Hospital in Patratala, a suburban area of Lohardaga. In this, patients from far flung areas and inaccessible areas took advantage of free treatment. In the camp, bone joint and vein specialist Dr. Vivek Madhur, General Surgeon and Gynecologist Dr. Neha Jyoti, Cardiologist Dr. Vineet Kumar Mishra, Neurosurgeon Dr. Deepak Kumar, Pediatricians Dr. Abha Madhur and Dr. Chandan Kumar treated 213



patients who reached the camp for free. In the camp, blood sugar, uric acid, lss and bone calcium were examined by BMD machine. All patients were given free medicines as required. Dr. Vivek Madhur treated patients related to bone, joint and vein diseases. Dr. Vivek



said that lifestyle is changing a lot in the present situation. People need to be conscious and aware of their health. He told the patients the necessary measures to take care of bone and vein. Dr. Neha Jyoti

Madhur treated hemorrhoids, fisher, hernia, hydrosil, ancestors and kidney stones, breast lumps and wounds, abdominal disease and pregnant women. Dr. Chandan Kumar also

treated common diseases. Hospital director Ajay Madhur said that a free check-up camp for health will continue further at Madhur Medicare Hospital. He said that the purpose of Madhur Medicare is to awaken health. The OPD fee will be free on the first Sunday of the month. Ajay Madhur, Savitri Madhur, Surendra Thakur, Sushila Kujur, Ushwati Yadav, Devanti Beck, Acharaj Kujur, Suraj Yadav, Neha Singh Gulab Nayak, Angad Singh, Sadhana, Aman Kumar, Nargis Khatoon, Siddharth Singh, Mo Khalid, Priyanshu, Khushi Khakha, Shahid Ansari etc. were important in making the camp successful.

CM to lead delegation to Spain to strengthen industrial and energy investment ties

PNS : RANCHI
Chief Minister Hemant Soren will lead a senior Government and Industry delegation to Spain from April 19 to April 27, 2025 in a strategic effort to strengthen industrial and energy ties between Jharkhand and Spanish enterprises. The delegation will include MLA Kalpana Murmu Soren, Chief Secretary Alka Tiwari, Additional Chief Secretary to Chief Minister Avinash Kumar, Secretary Industries Department Jharkhand Arwa Rajkamal, Director Industries Sushant Gaurav, Personal Advisor to Chief Minister Ajay Kumar Singh

along with other dignitaries. This official visit will be part of the State's comprehensive strategy to attract high quality Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in its most dynamic sectors including steel and metals, energy (conventional and renewable), advanced manufacturing and infrastructure development. Jharkhand, one of India's most resource-rich states, contributes significantly to the country's industrial output. It houses some of the big names like Tata Steel, Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) and NTPC. The state has also seen major investments from global companies like



Vedanta Resources, Tata Power, Linde Group and Adani Power, including projects related to steel production, power generation and gas infrastructure. Spain and India have

steadily grown their economic ties over the past decade. Today, more than 280 Spanish companies operate in India and bilateral trade is set to reach US\$8.78 billion in 2024, representing a growth of 6.3% year-on-year. Sectors such as renewable energy, metallurgical industries, smart infrastructure and electric mobility represent key synergies between the two economies. The Jharkhand delegation will interact with major Spanish industrial and energy groups, investors and public institutions during its visit to Spain and Sweden. The scheduled business forums and B2B meetings will inform Spanish companies on Jharkhand's ambitious industrial roadmap, investor facilitation policies and public-private cooperation opportunities. The delegation will also hold meetings in Sweden.



Christians during a mass prayer at a Church on the occasion of Good Friday in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

Marandi takes a dig on RIMS director's removal



PNS : RANCHI

BJP State President and Leader of Opposition Babulal Marandi took a dig at the dismissal of RIMS Director.

He said that it is very unfortunate that Dr. Rajkumar was removed from the post of RIMS Director due to opposing the corruption of the Health Minister and departmental officials in the RIMS Governing Council meeting held recently and not following the order of improper payment.

Marandi said that it has been learned that in the recent meeting of the Governing Council, the Health Minister and the Departmental Secretary themselves were putting pressure on the RIMS Director to pay crores of rupees to private diagnostic centers without any contract. During this, the Departmental Secretary also tried to hurt the dignity of the Governing Council. Along with not accepting the pressure of improper payment,

the Director had even said that he would resign in that meeting.

He further said that now the government has made its intention clear by removing the RIMS Director from the post that the game of corruption will continue in RIMS like this. Earlier, in the last tenure of Chief Minister Hemant Soren, due to not accepting improper pressure, many directors of RIMS had to resign prematurely and leave from here. If the government does not want to accept the advice of the governing body, then it would be better to dissolve it rather than holding a formal meeting.

Marandi also reacted on Chief Minister's foreign tour. Marandi said that today the law and order in the state has collapsed, murders are taking place in broad daylight, power crisis has deepened, and amidst all this, the Chief Minister is leaving for Sweden and Spain with a large government delegation, taking his MLA wife along.

He said if the purpose of this trip is to bring foreign investment, then the biggest question is why is the Industry Minister not being taken along? The Secretary and Director of the Industry Department are included in this delegation, but the name of the Industry Minister is missing from the list. Does the minister have no role in the investment talks?

In a first in country, NHM joins WDW IMA Jharkhand for a social cause

Women Doctors Wing, IMA Jharkhand becomes official partner of National Health Mission in cervical cancer eradication campaign

PNS : RANCHI

In a landmark move to eliminate cervical cancer in Jharkhand, the National Health Mission (NHM), Jharkhand, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Women Doctors' Wing of the Indian Medical Association (IMA), Jharkhand. This partnership is aimed at strengthening the ongoing efforts of the IMA's Cervical Cancer Eradication campaign in the state.

With this collaboration, Jharkhand has become the first state in India where an IMA branch has been officially recognized as a partner of the National Health Mission.

Since 2014, the Women Doctors' Wing of IMA, Jharkhand, has been dedicated to eliminating cervical cancer in some of the state's most underserved and remote areas. They have conducted large-scale health camps for women in Naxal-affected and distant regions including Gua, Goelkera, and Tonto in West Singhbhum, and Deoghar, Jamtara, Pakur, and Sahibganj in Santal Pargana.

The 'Jharkhand Model' for cervical cancer screening was launched in 2021 through a joint initiative between the Jharkhand



Health Minister Dr Irfan Ansari and Dr Bharti Kashyap after signing an MoU for the first time between IMA, Jharkhand and Health Department for the elimination of cervical cancer, in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

Health Department and Nari Shakti Award recipient Dr. Bharti Kashyap, Chairperson of IMA Jharkhand's Women Doctors' Wing. This model has surpassed expectations in terms of its effectiveness and outreach.

In India, cervical cancer claims the lives of around 67,000 women annually. It is the second most common cancer among Indian women, yet it is also one of the most preventable and treatable forms of cancer. The introduction of the Jharkhand Model significantly boosted

the campaign's impact, helping it meet and exceed its screening goals.

Initially, the target was to screen approximately 2.7 lakh women, but under the Jharkhand Model, about 5 lakh women—particularly those showing symptoms of genital inflammation or considered at high risk—have been screened. Additionally, 2,792 women have received cryotherapy treatment for cervical erosion, a condition that could develop into cervical cancer if left untreated.

At the MoU signing,

Jharkhand Health Minister Irfan Ansari stated, "This MoU, which had been pending for years, marks a major step by our government in the battle against cervical cancer. It is the first such initiative of its kind in India and will serve as a benchmark for other states."

Dr. Bharti Kashyap emphasized the importance of maintaining momentum in the campaign. Despite exceeding the overall screening target, certain districts have yet to meet their goals, and new cases continue to emerge annually.

She also noted that, through the Jharkhand Model, not only women of reproductive age are being screened and treated, but also government gynecologists in remote locations are receiving ongoing training. These healthcare professionals are being equipped to identify pre-cancerous conditions using VIA and VILI tests and to perform colposcopy-guided cryotherapy with the help of oncogynecologists from Delhi and Kolkata. As a result, a strong network of trained gynecologists has been established, and cervical pre-cancer detection and treatment facilities have been set up in 14 major government hospitals across the state.

Govt sacks RIMS Director, new director takes charge



PNS : RANCHI

Director Rajendra Institute of Medical Science (RIMS), Dr. Rajkumar was removed with immediate effect on Thursday. The decision was taken by Health Minister Dr. Irfan Ansari, who is also the chairman of the RIMS Governing Council.

Dr. Ansari said that Dr. Rajkumar has been removed due to administrative negligence and ignoring government orders. He said that the RIMS director did not follow many important instructions given by the department and the governing council.

The letter issued by the government states that Dr. Rajkumar could not fulfill the targets set under the RIMS Act 2002. Therefore, he has been removed under Rule-9 (vi). However, the government has also ordered to give him 3 months' salary and allowance. This decision has been taken after the approval of Chief Minister Hemant Soren. Dr. Rajkumar was

appointed as RIMS Director on January 31, 2024 for 3 years. On the other hand, Dr. Rajkumar told the media on phone that he has received a letter in which it has been said that he will be removed from the post and at present he is in Delhi and the real reason for his removal has not been told.

The Health Minister said that the functioning of the department was reviewed in the recent GB meeting, in which serious questions were raised on the working style of the RIMS director. He told that the director ignored the orders, deliberately delayed the departmental work and kept running away from responsibilities. Due to all these reasons, the decision was taken to remove him from the post.

Meanwhile, Dr. Shashibala Singh has been appointed as the new interim in-charge director of RIMS. The Health Department has issued an official notification in this regard.

In the name of Oppn, BJP is becoming a negative and disappointing group: JMM

PNS : RANCHI

Senior Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leader Vinod Kumar Pandey has hit back at the BJP's allegations. He has said that jealousy and insecurity is omnipresent among BJP leaders towards any positive initiative of the Hemant government. There is nothing surprising in the BJP's response. How can BJP leaders digest the foreign tour of a tribal youth Chief Minister, it is not in their DNA.

He said that under the leadership of Chief Minister Hemant Soren, Jharkhand will soon make its presence felt in many other countries. Hemant Soren's leadership ability is



unmatched. People's faith in his great personality is getting stronger. On the other hand, in

the name of opposition, BJP is becoming a negative and disappointing group. The only work of the BJP is to conspire to spoil communal harmony. After being rejected by the people in the elections, BJP leaders have no work in the state. Therefore, even before the positive work or initiatives of the government show results, BJP leaders are trying to stay alive in politics by creating imaginary results according to their own wishes.

Pandey said that as far as the economy of Spain and Sweden is concerned, Spain and India have continuously increased their economic relations in the last decade. More than 280 Spanish companies work in India and bilateral trade is set to reach US\$ 8.78 billion in 2024, showing a

growth of 6.3 per cent year-on-year. Sectors such as renewable energy, metallurgical industry, smart infrastructure and electric mobility represent major synergies between the two economies. The Jharkhand delegation will interact with major Spanish industrial and energy groups, investors and public institutions during its visit to Spain and Sweden. The scheduled business forums and B2B meetings will inform Spanish companies about Jharkhand's ambitious industrial roadmap, investor facilitation policies and public-private cooperation opportunities. The delegation will also hold meetings in Sweden.

Criminals shoot at jeweller in broad daylight

PNS : RANCHI

Chatakpur market under Ratu police station area of the State Capital witnessed chaos on Friday afternoon when two bike-borne criminals shot Basant Kumar, owner of Akash Jewellers.

This sensational incident was carried out in broad daylight in the middle of the market, due to which there is an atmosphere of panic in the area.

According to eyewitnesses, two youths arrived near the shop on a bike and without any hassle opened fire on Basant. The bullet hit him directly in his left shoulder. After the incident, the injured Basant was rushed to the city hospital with the help of local people, where his condition is said to be stable.

Immediately after this, there was chaos in the market. People showed courage and tried to chase the attackers, but they fled from the spot by riding the bike at high speed.

As soon as the information was received, the police team of Ratu police station reached the spot and started investigation. Some empty shells have been recovered from the spot. Police are scanning the nearby CCTV footage and trying to identify the attackers.

At present, the reason behind this attack is not clear. Police are investigating the criminal angle as well as any business rivalry. This incident, which took place in a busy market like Chatakpur, has raised questions on the security system of the city.

BJP terms CM's Europe tour as directionless

PNS : RANCHI

BJP state spokesperson Pratul Shahdeo has targeted Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren's Europe tour. He said, this is being done only for camera exposure and sightseeing. This entire tour is an unnecessary investment of taxpayers' money. In reality, he is visiting Spain and Sweden for the purpose of tourism. 13 crore tourists came to visit Sweden and Spain in the year 2024. The Chief Minister is going to increase this number this year with his team.

Pratul said that Jharkhand is a state with a mining and agriculture-based economy. About 15% of India's GDP comes from agriculture. A large popula-

tion of Jharkhand along with the country is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture for employment. Pratul said that while only 2.5% of Spain's GDP comes from agriculture and only 1.7% of Sweden's GDP is based on agriculture. In the agricultural sector, Jharkhand and India are far ahead of these countries. Pratul said that Jharkhand has a large number of coal mines, iron ore mines, bauxite mines. Investment in mining and agriculture sector is very important for the state. India's mining technology is much more advanced than that of Spain and Sweden.

There is no great history of mining in these two countries. Pratul said that no big investment or tech-

nology transfer can be expected from these countries in the mining sector. Pratul said that Spain and Sweden are focusing on overcoming the problem of severe recession after the imposition of 20% tariff by America. The main basis of Spain's economy is tourism and service sector. Till the time the law and order of Jharkhand does not improve, the number of tourists cannot increase. The Chief Minister should have first paid attention to the law and order of his state. Pratul said that the unemployment of youth below 25 years of age in Spain is 28.4%. 12000 units of industrial units in Spain have either closed down or are moving towards closure. In such a situation,



BJP State Spokesperson Pratul Shahdeo during a press conference in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

will the Spanish industries first save their home or invest in Jharkhand? "Pratul said that Spain's 'La Tomatina' (Tomato Festival), 'Fiesta de San Fermin' (Bull Chase) and 'La Liga' (Spanish Football League) are very famous among tourists. Perhaps the Chief Minister also likes all three."

Pratul said that the situation in Sweden has become even worse. In 2023, Sweden's GDP decreased from 7% to 1.2%. There has been a huge decline in housing construction there.

According to the report of the prestigious organization Eurofound, the number of unemployed youth under the age of 25 in Sweden in 2024 is 23.8%. Thousands

of industrial units in Sweden became sick in the recession of 2023. The focus of the Swedish government is on saving them. At present, external investment is not a priority.

Pratul said that a surprising aspect of this tour is that the Industry Minister is missing from this delegation that went for industrial investment. Pratul said that this is the same situation where the entire baraat left but the groom was left at home. Not taking the industry minister along makes it clear that this is just a tourist trip. It has nothing to do with bringing investment.

Pratul said that the CM should definitely go to Stockholm in Sweden where Bofors has its head-

quarters. He will also learn a lot from the working methods of that office about how the path of corruption can be smooth. After all, his ally Congress had committed the biggest Bofors scam in the history of the country in association with this company.

Pratul said that there is still a possibility that the CM will come back after getting photographed with the representatives of local companies in Spain and Sweden.

There will also be a drama of signing the MoU for a big investment and after that the delegation will return to the country. Everything will be forgotten in a few days.

But the purpose of tourism will be achieved.

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 Bangladeshi officials on the developments in West Bengal.

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

The sharp reaction came after Shafiqul



Randhir Jaiswal MEA Spokesperson

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alam, the Press Secretary to Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, on Thursday called on New Delhi and the West Bengal government to take "all steps to fully protect the minority Muslim population".

"We condemn attacks on Muslims that caused loss of lives and

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

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

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 that 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

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

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

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

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

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."

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.

Anurag Thakur slams Congress over National Herald funds



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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

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...

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.

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.

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 are drenched while others dry — becomes very real.

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.

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.

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.

Let us not treat monsoon as a once-in-a-lifetime phenomenon — it occurs every year and thus is no surprise. All we need is planning rather than acting shocked when the country submerges and nobody has any clue why that happened.

Fundamentalism in Bangladesh

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

Is Bangladesh moving once again towards becoming a cradle of Islamist fundamentalism and terrorism? Fundamentalism does not always mean terrorism, but it does create a discourse that facilitates the rise of extremism through the promotion of intolerance, leading to hatred towards those considered infidels and violence against them.



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

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."

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 rally in May was extremely violent. A BBC report dated 6 May 2013 cites one witness as saying that the demonstrators "were very aggressive, some people were throwing stones and the situation quickly became 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 Nayebe-Amir. Chief Adviser Mohammad Yunus had a long and cordial meeting on 31 August 2024 with Mamunul Haque, the organisation's head.

The Hefazat is holding rallies and processions all over the country. Doubtless, neither the Jamaat nor the Hefazat has been resorting to terrorist violence. Their elevated salience, however, gives a certain respectability to fun-

amentalist doctrines and encourages other fundamentalist organisations to flex their muscles. One of their principal targets is Bangladesh's moderate and liberal ethos — shaped by its rich literary and philosophical heritage, shaped by Rabindranath Tagore and the country's highly talented writers, poets and performing artists. A spiritual leader, philosopher, mystic poet and social reformer, Lalou articulated a weltanschauung, which encompassed the essence of the Bhakti cult and Sufism, rejected all distinctions of caste, class and creed, and opposed theological conflicts and racism. A gathering of sadhus and a Lalou fair was to be hosted in Madya Narsingpur, Kashipur Union Parishad in Narayanganj, on 22 November 2024.

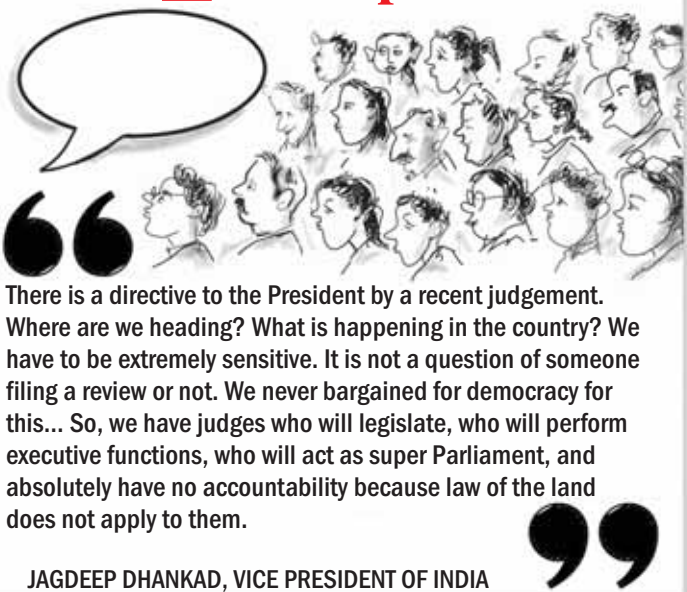
The district administration, however, ordered its cancellation. According to a report in The Daily Star (23 November 2024), Hefazat-e-Islam leader Maulana Abdul Auwal had warned the administration to stop the event or face intervention by protesters. The celebration of Pehela Baishakh, the first day 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)

(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

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, spon-

sors, public imagination. Yet even in this bleak scenario, some institutions like the Indian Railways have provided much-needed support. In Paris 2024, India secured six medals — one silver and five bronze. Shooter Manu Bhaker stood out as the first Indian woman to win an Olympic shooting medal. Her mental fortitude, her ability to thrive under pressure, was nothing short of 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)

Inside the Mind of a Champion

Letters to the Editor

WAQF AMENDMENT ACT: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR DIALOGUE

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

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

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

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

AVINASH GODBOLEY DEWAS

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

MGNREGA: A lifeline undermined

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

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

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

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

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Funding threatens academic freedom

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

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

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

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

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

BHAGWANTHADANI | MUMBAI

The shame of trafficking

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

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

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

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

SRINIVAS MADHAV | HYDERABAD

The Saudis: Peacekeepers or power brokers?

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

FIRST
Column

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

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

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

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

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



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fighter Flying Is Dangerous

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

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

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

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

Camaraderie and Competition

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



RAJIV HORA

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

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

Fitness: The Hidden Demands

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

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

customed to it can lose consciousness.

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

Practice and Precision

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

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

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

The Systems in Play

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

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

Team Effort Behind the Scenes

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

Flight Safety: A Mission

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

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

The Reality of Service

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

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

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

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



Permanent representative of the State of Kuwait, Tareq AlBanai PTI

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. 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. 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.

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

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 dint 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 wounding 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 mid-day 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.

DGTR issues final findings in 13 anti-dumping cases

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

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

Out of the 13 cases, 12 are against China. The other countries included in these

probes include European Union, Japan, Taiwan, Russia and Thailand.

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

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

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

While the US has imposed 245 per cent against China. In retaliation, Beijing has

slapped 125 per cent tariff on goods coming from Washington.

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

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

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

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

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

It has also stated that America has failed to notify the WTO Committee on Safeguards under a provision of the Agreement on Safeguards (AoS) on tak-

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

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

under which the US imposes safeguard measures.

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

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

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

EPFO set to launch version 3.0 with ATM fund withdrawals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ranchi

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

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

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

According to Mandaviya, the new version will eliminate the need for complex and lengthy form-filling processes or physical visits for claims and corrections. Beneficiaries will be able to update their EPFO accounts and mandates using OTP verification and conveniently monitor their pension entitlements or withdraw funds. Due to fast settlement of claims, the funds would be quickly available in the subscriber's bank account, he added. He said EPFO currently holds a corpus of Rs 27 lakh crore with a sovereign guarantee and offers 8.25 per cent

interest. The Centralised Pension Payment System, already in place, benefits over 78 lakh pensioners by allowing them to receive pensions in any bank account across the country, removing the earlier requirement of maintaining accounts in designated zonal banks.

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

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

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

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

Mandaviya said the EPFO has significantly improved its grievance redressal mechanism following the rollout of Version 2.01, 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

PRESS TRUSTS OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

Gold imports stood at \$1.53 billion in January 2024.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Switzerland is the largest source of gold



imports, with about 40 per cent share, followed by the UAE (over 16 per cent) and South Africa (about 10 per cent).

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

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

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

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

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

India is the world's second-biggest gold

consumer after China.

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

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

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

India's CAD inched up to \$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

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 telecom network equipment to power electronics — being designed here, adding to India's sheen as an electronics hub, he said.

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

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

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

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

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

In the last four trading days, the BSE benchmark index jumped 4,706.05 points or 6.37 per cent, and the NSE Nifty surged 1,452.5 points or 6.48 per

cent. Accordingly, investors' wealth rallied by ₹25.77 lakh crore to ₹4,19,60,046.14 crore (USD 4.90 trillion) in the past four days. Stock markets are closed on Friday for 'Good Friday'.

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

"In the last three trading sessions, foreign portfolio investors purchased over USD one billion worth of Indian equities after a prolonged selling streak. Further, the announcement of a temporary pause on tariffs by the US and

potential negotiations with countries also led to the relief rally," Upadhyay said.

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

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

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

while announcing the MPC decisions.

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

Echoing similar sentiments, Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking said the rally in the domestic equities was primarily fueled by optimism surrounding the deferral of tariffs and recent exemptions on select products, raising hopes for potential negotiations that could mitigate the impact on global trade. "As the week progressed, market participants responded positively to a slew of favorable develop-

ments, including updates on a normal monsoon, easing retail inflation — which raised hopes for potential policy rate cuts — and the absence of any major negative surprises from global markets," Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

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

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

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

Broken, Not Guilty?

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

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

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

The play compels a closer look at truths often pushed aside. Produced by Samar Sarila, an actor, writer and producer known for his work in both theatre and film, including the acclaimed Viceroy's House and Turning 30 and Vidushi Mehra, an acclaimed actress and theatre director who has also made

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

The courtroom becomes a battleground, not just for justice, but for sanity, vulnerability and memory. Inspired by the 1996 Hollywood classic *Primal Fear*, the production has been adapted for the Indian stage with precision and urgency, rooting itself in the emotionally charged backdrop of contemporary New Delhi. At its core is Aaryan, an 18-year-old, unnervingly calm, accused of murdering his influential uncle, Minister Siddhant Shah. The city reels at the crime, but the real 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 clients

MEMORY AND IDENTITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Visual that Sings stories



BY TEAM VIVA

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

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

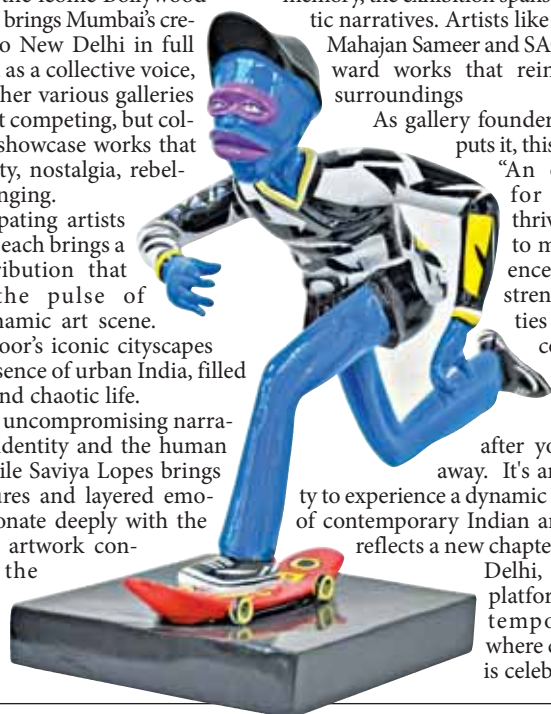
The participating artists are varied, yet each brings a unique contribution that speaks to the pulse of Mumbai's dynamic art scene. Sameer Kulavoor's iconic cityscapes capture the essence of urban India, filled with vibrant and chaotic life.

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

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

As gallery founder Sahil Arora puts it, this exhibition is "An opportunity for Mumbai's thriving art scene to make its presence felt in Delhi, strengthening the ties between our communities."

This art that resonates long after you've walked away. It's an opportunity to experience a dynamic cross-section of contemporary Indian art. The show reflects a new chapter for Method Delhi, an evolving platform for contemporary art, where collaboration is celebrated.



Erosion of History in Art forms

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

What unites the two artists in *Kindred Dichotomies* is their shared engagement with history—not as a fixed entity, but as a space for reinterpretation. While Sutar's works are grounded in a personal history that focuses on the fading grandeur of royalty, Zucchi's approach to historical imagery is more playful, almost irreverent. Together, they offer viewers a multifaceted look at how history is both remembered and 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 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



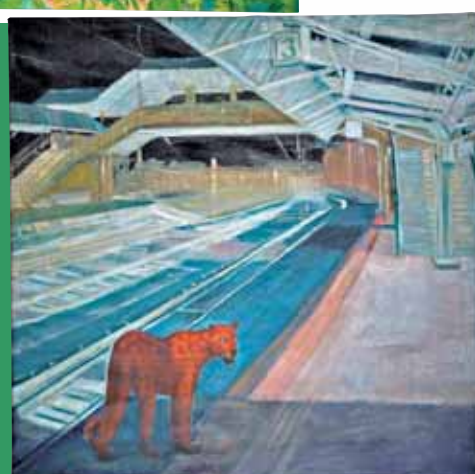
A walk through *MAGIC ERASE*, the solo exhibition by Hemant Gavankar at Art Centrix Space, is like entering a layered palimpsest of time, space, and fleeting memory. Curated by Sibdas Gupta and presented under the Art Centrix Painting Grant, the exhibition is an exploration of changing cityscapes and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

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

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



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



Gavankar brings abstraction into deeply personal. His layering of mediums mirrors the disordered 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.

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 layer of deliberate layer. This is not an exhibition one walks away from; it unsettles and stays with you.

