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Dhiman Chakma suspended from service

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Dhiman Chakma, Sub-Collector of Dharmagarh in Kalahandi district, was suspended by Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on ground of corruption on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Chakma's health condition has reportedly deteriorated since he was sent to judicial custody on Tuesday following his arrest in a high-profile bribery case.

Chakma was apprehended on Sunday night for allegedly demanding and accepting a bribe of Rs 10 lakh from a local businessman. Sources indicate that the IAS officer is now suffering from deep depression and has been placed under close observation in the jail's medical ward due to both security and medical concerns.

The Vigilance team had executed a meticulous trap, catching Chakma red-handed while he accepted the illicit payment at his official residence. During subsequent searches, an additional Rs 47 lakh in unaccounted cash was recovered from his quarters.

Chakma, who reportedly asked the businessman to deliver the Rs 10 lakh as the first instalment of a larger Rs 20 lakh demand, had been produced before the Special Judge Vigilance court in Bhawanipatna on Monday. His bail plea was rejected, and he was remanded to judicial custody until June 22.

Prior to his arrest, Chakma had attended a two-day State-level workshop for revenue officers in Bhubaneswar, where Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Revenue Minister Suresh Pujari had reportedly cautioned officials against corrupt practices.

The Vigilance Department continues its investigation, verifying his movable and immovable assets.

State to roll out mobile app for revenue certificates

Aim is to ensures time-bound delivery

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Revenue Department is gearing up to launch a mobile application that will allow citizens to apply for and obtain crucial revenue certificates without visiting government offices. The move, announced on Monday by Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari, is aimed at curbing delays, ending harassment, and reducing corruption in tehsil-level services.

"The app is ready and will soon be rolled out. It will allow people to access around 18 key services, including caste, income, legal heir, resident and solvency certificates," Pujari said.

As per the proposed system, revenue officials, primarily tehsildars, will be required to issue certificates within a stipulated timeframe. Failure to do so will invite penalties, including deductions from the official's salary. Citizens will also have the option to lodge complaints directly through the app against erring officials.

The initiative marks a major departure from the past, where the single-window system often failed due to lax enforcement. Applicants were routinely forced to make multiple visits and faced unofficial demands to expedite service.

"The mobile app will shift the power back to the people. It will particularly benefit those in remote and rural areas, where access to tehsil offices is difficult and time-consuming," a senior department official said.

However, retired bureaucrats and governance experts have warned that while digital platforms improve access, real change depends on implementation. "The success of this move will lie in holding officials accountable online or offline," a former revenue officer remarked.

DHE-IGNOU pact for UG-PG, diploma courses in Odia

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Department of Higher Education (DHE) on Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) to offer undergraduate, postgraduate, diploma, and certificate courses in Odia through the distance learning mode.

The initiative aims to empower Odia-speaking students especially those in rural and remote regions to pursue higher education in their mother tongue. The programme aligns with the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasises education in regional languages for better learning outcomes and inclusivity.

The MoU was signed in the presence of Higher Education Minister Suryabanshi Suraj and IGNOU Vice-Chancellor Prof Uma Kanjilal.

Under this collaboration, the IGNOU will translate and deliver major academic programmes in Odia, including BA, BCom, MA in subjects like Education, Rural Development, Public Administration, Hindi and Social Work. Diploma and certificate programmes in areas such as Early Childhood Care, Nutrition, Tourism and Environmental Studies will also be available in Odia.

The IGNOU has already rolled out an MBA programme in Odia earlier this year, becoming the first national open university to do so. With this MoU, the IGNOU will now expand its Odia offerings to all 43 study centres across Odisha.

In the coming months, both DHE and IGNOU also plan to introduce NEP-aligned skill-based courses in Odia such as sand art and local heritage studies to strengthen employability and preserve Odisha's cultural identity.

Naveen flags collapse of health, women, farm sectors

Calls for Janajagaran Abhiyan to reach out to people

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Leader of Opposition and BJD president Naveen Patnaik on Tuesday launched a sharp attack on the BJP-led Odisha Government, accusing it of failing to deliver on key fronts like healthcare, women's welfare and farmers' rights. Addressing party leaders at Shankha Bhavan, Patnaik outlined the BJD's role as a responsible Opposition and called for intensified public outreach through the party's Janajagaran Abhiyan.

"In a democracy, people are the real masters. Today we are in Opposition by their mandate, but we continue to work for their welfare," Patnaik said.

He alleged that the health system in Odisha is on the verge of collapse. "Under our government, 90% of people benefited from Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana. But now, patients are left without medicines, and hospital services have deteriorated. Out of 30 districts, 19 CDMO posts are lying vacant," he stated.

Criticising the weakening of the Mission Shakti movement, he said, "Over 70 lakh women had been empowered, but today many are facing harassment at banks and offices. Their self-confidence is shaken, and the movement has been derailed."

He also slammed the government for failing farmers. "Despite tall promises, distress sale continues. Farmers are not getting MSP and face hurdles in accessing loans. Irrigation projects initiated during our tenure have stalled," he said.

On the financial front, Patnaik noted that the State's debt burden was Rs 18,000 crore in 2000, and the BJD left a surplus of Rs 45,000 crore in 2024. "But the BJP government is pushing Odisha into a cycle of record borrowings," he warned. Announcing the Janajagaran Abhiyan, he urged party workers to launch mass contact drives. "We must reach every household and expose the failures of this government. The BJD will always stand by the people," he concluded.

Ex-cop's son held for alleged Rs 1.08-cr fraud

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Cuttack-Bhubaneswar Commissionerate Police on Tuesday arrested a 32-year-old man for allegedly defrauding a businessman of over Rs 1.08 crore under the guise of facilitating a discounted luxury car purchase.

The accused, identified as Sambit Panda of Sailashree Vihar here, is the son of retired police officer Bidyut Chandra Panda. At the time of his arrest from a NEXA showroom in Cuttack, he was employed as a showroom manager.

According to police, complainant Rohit Roshan Mohanty was contacted by Panda on March 19, 2023. Panda, posing as a freelance car broker and former Audi Bhubaneswar manager, convinced Mohanty of his credentials, promising delivery of a high-end car within a month.

Trusting these assurances, Mohanty transferred Rs 1,08,50,000 in multiple bank transactions.

However, after receiving the funds, Panda failed to deliver the vehicle and ceased communication. When pressed, he allegedly resorted to verbal abuse and threats. A complaint filed through the JMFC, COG-II Court led to a case being registered at Infocity Police Station on September 7, 2024, under various sections of the BNS, including cheating, criminal intimidation and forgery.

Police revealed that Panda used forged documents in the transaction and is suspected of having defrauded others similarly. During interrogation, he confessed to the crime and implicated two accomplices, whose identities remain undisclosed as the investigation continues.

NABARD's three-day Mango Fest begins

Celebrating tribal livelihoods by providing wider market reach

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The much-awaited Annual Mango Festival commenced on Tuesday at the NABARD Regional Office Campus at Nayapalli here, bringing the best of Odisha's mangoes. The event will continue till June 12.

The Mango Festival is part of NABARD's flagship Tribal Development Fund (TDF) initiative, which began in 2003-04 to promote small orchard-based livelihoods—the Wadi—among tribal families. Mango cultivation, central to this effort, has transformed degraded lands into income-generating assets.

The Wadi initiative has transformed the lives of over 57,000 tribal families in 83 projects across 23 districts in the State. Moreover, NABARD is actively promoting mango exports from Odisha through a collaborative initiative known as "Export Pathshala". In May 2025 itself, two FPOs from Titilagarh in Balangir district successfully exported 50 quintals of mangoes to Europe.

The festival is not just a display of fruit—it is a strategic platform for ensuring better price realization for mango growers. By connecting farmers directly with urban consumers, it eliminates middlemen, offering fairer prices and instant feedback on produce quality.

"This festival is not just about showcasing fruit but celebrating the transformation mango cultivation has brought to thousands of tribal families," said NABARD CGM Sanjay Kumar Talukdar, adding, "It reflects our mission to enhance rural incomes and build sustainable livelihoods through stronger market linkages."

This year's event features over 50 participants from 20 FPOs and representatives from various TDF project areas. The mangoes—grown naturally and with care—are now reaching urban markets and international buyers. NABARD has roped in Palladium as the organising partner for the event.

The festival features a vibrant variety of mangoes including: Amrapalli, Dussehri, Langda, and other local favourites. Farmers/farmer collectives, participating with great zeal and encouragement, are sharing not only their produce but also their stories—of tradition, resilience, and pride.

Grim snapshot of unemployment

Engineers queue up for Home Guard posts

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

In a stark reflection of Odisha's deepening unemployment crisis, more than 10,000 candidates, many of them highly educated with B Tech, M Tech, MBA and MCA degrees, appeared for a written examination on Monday to secure a Home Guard position in Rourkela.

The startling mismatch lies in the fact that the position requires only a Class-V qualification and offers a modest daily wage of Rs 612. The recruitment was conducted for just 107 posts; yet, it drew an overwhelming number of overqualified youths.

The exam was conducted in two sittings and included Odia essay writing and general knowledge. "A total of 9,060 candidates appeared for the exam and others withdrew after seeing the huge number of aspirants. The process went smoothly with heavy deployment of security personnel," said Rourkela Additional SP Ramakanta Sahoo.

Social observers and academics have raised alarm over the incident, terming it a troubling sign of underemployment and economic stagnation. "When thousands of engineers and postgraduates apply for Class-V-level posts, it's not a statistic, it's a cry for help," said a senior economist.

Many candidates, who showed up for the exam, had prepared for competitive services but were left directionless due to limited government recruitment and insufficient private sector absorption. The lack of skill-based, industry-linked employment has become a recurring theme in Odisha's development narrative.

Experts have called for urgent, coordinated action from both the State and Union Governments to bridge the gap between educational output and market demand, especially in emerging sectors like IT, green energy, tourism and logistics.

Christians seek Prez's intervention amid rising persecution

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

In a growing chorus of concern over alleged religious persecution, Christian communities across Odisha staged coordinated protests on Monday, submitting memorandums to the President of India through district Collectors. The protests, held under the banner of the Rastriya Christian Morcha (RCM), sought urgent intervention to curb what the community describes as a disturbing rise in targeted violence and discrimination.

Speaking to the media, RCM State secretary general Dr Pallab Lima revealed that 54 incidents of persecution have been reported in Odisha alone over the last six months, marking a record high. "These are not isolated incidents but signs of a larger, more dangerous trend involving denial of basic human and constitutional rights," Dr Lima stated.

Among the most troubling allegations are false accusations of forced conversions, denial of burial rights, and even cases of exhumation of Christian bodies. Several recent reports have highlighted instances where families were either coerced into abandoning their faith or forced to bury their loved ones in distant areas due to opposition from local groups.

The protestors, supported by groups such as BAMCEF and Bharat Mukti Morcha, urged the Union Government to uphold the rights enshrined under Articles 25 to 28 of the Constitution, which guarantee freedom of religion and the right to practice and propagate faith.

The memorandums demand immediate action against perpetrators of violence, a judicial inquiry into reported incidents and strict enforcement of Constitutional protections for religious minorities. "We have faith in the Constitution. But when rights are violated repeatedly and go unchecked, it becomes a national concern," Dr Lima added.

HSRP fiasco: Dealers not uploading details on govt portal

Vehicle owners left in the lurch

SAROJ MISHRA ■ Bhubaneswar

The Central Government made it mandatory in 2019 for fixing of High Security Registration plates (HSRP) for vehicles and the automobile dealers were authorised by State authorities, upload HSRP details after receiving them from vehicle owners.

This includes the vehicle's registration number, chassis number, engine number, and other pertinent details. These details are then used to create the HSRP and associate it with the specific vehicle.

However, as the dealers are not uploading the HRPC data on the Vahan portal many of the vehicle owners are facing problems in getting their documents.

Road Safety expert Subrat Kumar Nanda said there are more than 600 automobile dealers in the State. More than 1.86 lakh vehicles are yet to be fitted with HSRPs. The highest number of 24,403 vehicles in in Bhubaneswar RTO I, Cuttack RTO 17,703, Sambalpur RTO 11, 971, Ganjam RTO 10,862, Korapur RTO 8, 532, Kalahandi RTO 7,295, Bhubenewar RTO II 6,946 and Balangir RTO 6,733 are some of the examples.

"As per rules, the HSRP details must be uploaded to the Vahan portal within seven days after it is fixed on the vehicle. However, in many cases, dealers delay this process for months. This causes significant inconvenience for vehicle owners. But surprisingly the Transport Department instead of blocking the dealership registration of the automobile dealers remained surprisingly silent over the matter, said Nanda.

The department's action would have effectively prohibited these dealers from selling new vehicles or registering them with the RTO, deeming any sales or registrations they process as unauthorised, Nanda said.

The people had to shell out money for HSRP number plates. Nowhere these number plates are being checked. On the basis of number plates not even one vehicle has been seized. The organisations which were given responsibility of manufacturing these HSRPs made profits worth crores of rupees at the common man's cost.

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FERTILITY RATE DROPS IN INDIA

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The elderly population currently stands at seven per cent, which is expected to rise in the coming decades as life expectancy improves

India's population is estimated to reach 1.46 billion in 2025, continuing to be the highest in the world. This comes from a new United Nations demographic report which also reveals that the country's total fertility rate has fallen to 1.9, below the replacement level of 2.1 signaling a significant demographic shift. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in India is currently 2.0 children per woman. This means that on average, a woman in India would be expected to have 2 children during her childbearing years (typically ages 15-49). This rate has remained constant since 2020, according to the Sample Registration System (SRS) report for 2021.

According to the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) 2025 State of World Population (SOWP) Report, one in three adult Indians (36 per cent) face unintended pregnancies, while 30 per cent experience unfulfilled desire for having either more or fewer children.

Notably, in 1960, when India's population was about 436 million, the average woman had nearly six children. In the 1970s, women on average had nearly five children. Now, they have close to two. This milestone reflects progress in health and education, but masks regional diversity in the Total Fertility Rate, which is the average number of children a woman will have in her lifetime.

The 2025 State of World Population (SOWP) report underscores that the real crisis lies not in population size, but in the widespread challenges to support individuals' right to decide freely and responsibly if, when, and how many children to have.

Despite the slowing birth rate, India's youth population remains significant, with 24 per cent in the age bracket of 0-14, 17 per cent in 10-19, and 26 per cent in 10-24. The country's 68 per cent of the population is of working age (15-64), providing a potential demographic dividend, if matched by adequate employment and policy support. The elderly population (65 and older) currently stands at seven per cent, a figure that is expected to rise in the coming decades as life expectancy improves. As of 2025, life expectancy at birth is projected to be 71 years for men and 74 years for women.

According to the report, India is now the world's most populous nation, with nearly 1.5 billion people - a number expected to grow to about 1.7 billion before it begins to fall, around 40 years from now. The elderly population currently stands at seven per cent, a figure that is expected to rise in the coming decades as life expectancy improves.

Behind these numbers are the stories of millions of couples who decided to start or expand their families, as well as the stories of women who had few choices about whether, when or how often they became pregnant, the report said. The elderly population currently stands at seven per cent, a figure that is expected to rise in the coming decades as life expectancy improves.

As of 2025, life expectancy at birth is projected to be 71 years for men and 74 years for women.

According to report, in 1960, when India's population was about 436 million, the average woman had nearly six children. Back then, women had less control over their bodies and lives than they do today. Fewer than 1 in 4 used some form of contraception, and fewer than 1 in 2 attended primary school, the report said. But in the coming decades, educational attainment increased, access to reproductive healthcare improved, and more women gained a voice in the decisions that affected their lives. The average woman in India now has about two children.

While women in India, and every other country, have more rights and choices today than their mothers or grandmothers did, they still have a long way to go before they are empowered to have the number of children they want, if any, when they want them.

The UN report placed India in a group of middle-income countries undergoing rapid demographic change, with population doubling time now estimated at 79 years.

Railway begins piloting 24hrs early charting

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ New Delhi

In a significant move, Indian Railways will now issue the final passenger chart 24 hours before the scheduled departure of trains - an improvement from the previous practice of releasing it just four hours prior.

Top level sources in the railways said the initiative is currently being implemented as a pilot project, which began on June 6 under the Bikaner Division of the Western Railway Zone. The Railways is expected to make an official announcement soon in this regards after studying the feasibility.

"The new system aims to help passengers plan their journeys more effectively. For instance, travelers coming from locations 100 km or more away will have better clarity and time to reach the boarding station without last-minute uncertainty. This change is expected to enhance convenience and reduce travel-related stress for passengers. The said practice has been initiated to avoid confusion and unnecessary stress during their travel," sources in the Indian railways told The Pioneer.

The move has been taken also to facilitate the passengers to board premium trains enroute, for instance if the New Delhi-Kolkatta Rajdhani which no stop between New Delhi and Kanpur and vice versa can be boarded by Aligarh or nearby passengers needing to travel in the train either from Delhi or Kanpur.

The initiative has also been kept in mind that passengers can re-plan their journey 24 hours in advance notice by the railways in case the tickets are waitlisted. "It is only two days of full working of the operations in Bikaner. In a weeks time a report shall be submitted to the Headquarters which shall be discussed at the Railway Ministry level. If feasible then the 24 hours chart notice will be rolled in some select Divisions to further asses the passengers as well the railways' social and economic benefit," explained a another rail official working on the model currently. However the system of current booking as per availability and rules and regulation shall remain unchanged. Similarly the railways aims to work on curbing the menace of ticketing touts as well as the Tatkal Rail Reservations System.

Railways has already made a change in the rules of Tatkal ticket booking. Now to book Tatkal tickets, confirmation of identity through e-Aadhaar i.e. electronic Aadhaar will be mandatory.

This will stop fraud and it will be easy for real passengers to get confirmed tickets and it will benefit needy and genuine passengers.

Those whose IRCTC booking account is linked with Aadhaar will get priority in the first 10 minutes of Tatkal ticket booking. Even authorized agents will not be able to book tickets in these 10 minutes. That is, if your identity is not verified from the government database, then you will not have access to the most valuable first 10 minutes for Tatkal tickets.

In the existing model of Railways' Charting - is the process of allocating the vacant seats of other quota to General/Tatkal Quota. The first chart is usually prepared four hours before departure of train from originating station or remote location station. For early morning trains chart is prepared the night before.

Proud of multi-party delegations: PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said he was proud of the manner in which the multi-party delegations presented India's views in various countries on the need to eradicate the menace of terrorism following the Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor.

Modi hosted the members of the multi-party delegations, comprising parliamentarians and former diplomats, who travelled to 33 world capitals over the past few weeks.

"Met members of the various delegations who represented India in different countries and elaborated on India's commitment to peace and the need to eradicate the menace of terrorism. We are all proud of the manner in which they put forward India's voice," Modi said in a post on X. Members shared their experience with the prime minister, with the central government having already praised the work of the seven delegations comprising over 50 persons, mostly current MPs.

Former parliamentarians and ex-diplomats were also part of these delegations that visited 33 foreign capitals and the European Union. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has already met the delegations and lauded their efforts in conveying India's strong stand against Pakistan-sponsored terrorism.

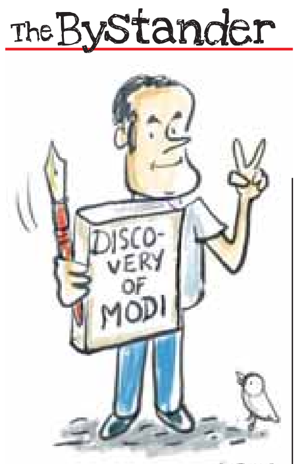
"We apprised the Prime Minister of the overwhelming support extended by these friendly nations for India's resolute fight against terrorism and our unwavering commitment to global peace," Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde said in a post on X.

Shinde had led the delegation to the United Arab Emirates, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. "The Prime Minister lauded our efforts and shared his inspiring vision for enhancing India's stature on the world stage. His words have further motivated us to work tirelessly for the nation," Shinde said.

The government had sent the multi-party delegations to portray a message of national unity in the fight against terrorism, with the likes of Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi joining the ruling alliance members in championing the Indian cause abroad.

Four delegations were led by MPs of the ruling alliance, including two from the BJP, one from JD(U) and one from Shiv Sena, while three were led by Opposition MPs, one each of the Congress, DMK and NCP(SP). BJP's Ravi Shankar Prasad and Baijyant Panda, Congress' Shashi Tharoor, JD(U)'s Sanjay Jha, Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde, DMK's Kanimozhi, and NCP (SP)'s Supriya Sule led their delegations to different parts of the world. Prominent former parliamentarians in the delegations included ex-Union ministers Ghulam Nabi Azad and Salman Khurshid.

The ByStander



CM Majhi presents report card on first anniversary

- Showcases major reforms and vision
- We have not just governed; we have delivered, says he

NALINI SAHU ■ Bhubaneswar

As the BJP government in Odisha is set to complete its first year in office on June 12, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Tuesday unveiled a detailed report card, highlighting a series of transformative reforms and welfare measures aimed at inclusive growth and transparent governance.

Addressing the media in Bhubaneswar, Majhi emphasised the government's commitment to the promises made in the BJP's election manifesto, the Sankalpa Patra, asserting that his administration has governed with a clear sense of purpose under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"We have not just governed; we have delivered," Majhi declared. He expressed gratitude to PM Modi for his continued support, noting that the Prime Minister is scheduled to visit Odisha again on June 20, reflecting the Centre's strong engagement with the State.

Recalling the first cabinet meeting on June 12 last year, Majhi said four landmark decisions were taken, setting the tone for a people-first administration: opening all four gates of the Puri Jagannath Temple, launching the Subhadra Yojana for women's empowerment, establishing a ?500-crore Jagannath Temple development fund and fulfilling the promise of a ?800 bonus per quintal for paddy farmers.

In the agriculture sector, Majhi announced a record Rs 37,800 crore allocation under the Samruddha Krushi Yojana, the largest agri-budget in the State's history. Simultaneously, nearly 17 lakh women have been empowered under targeted livelihood schemes, earning them the title of "Lakhpati Didis".

Education, too, has received re-

newed attention. Majhi said his government has moved beyond cosmetic changes to introduce meaningful reforms, including the rollout of Shishu Vatika for early childhood education and plans to establish Godavarish Mishra Adarsh Vidyalayas in every panchayat. The implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) is also underway, aiming to revive trust in government schools.

The CM highlighted the government's firm stance on rooting out corruption and fostering transparency. "A new era of Susashan (good governance) has begun. People now have direct access to ministers, and grievances are being addressed on the ground," he said.

Focusing on the poor, farmers, women and youth, CM Majhi outlined future targets, including piped drinking water for 90 per cent of households by 2026 and the construction of five lakh Antyodaya homes for the underprivileged.

Majhi called opon citizens to actively participate in building a progressive, self-reliant and empowered Odisha.

In city

Tension at police station over protection to fraudster

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

Tensions prevailed at the Infocity police station in Bhubaneswar as irate residents protested alleging the cops of favouring a person who duped them of lakhs of rupees.

As per reports, the protest was triggered by accusations against one Ajay Barik, who is alleged to have defrauded more than 50 people through a scheme described as 'mini fund'.

Barik allegedly collected a substantial sum of money from his victims under false pretences. The residents of nearby Alasua village assembled at the police station demanding the repayment of their investments.

They questioned why accused Barik was only arrested without the assurance of fund recovery. Amidst the chaos, reports emerged of altercations involving protestors and police personnel. The protestors reportedly took law in their own hands and scuffled with police personnel.

"We want our money back. We had caught the accused. However, the police helped him escape," said a protestor.

"We have heard their grievances. They have been told that the accused has been forwarded as per the lawful procedure. They have been pacified. As per the lodged FIR, they have been defrauded of Rs 8 to 9 lakh. They have been demanding the return of their money. However, we will move as per the lawful procedure. We have forwarded the accused as he was found guilty prima facie," said Bhubaneswar ACP Sonali Singh Parmar.

Sonam, other accused to be taken to Meghalaya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bhopal

In the sensational Raja Raghuvanshi murder case, Meghalaya Police have successfully secured transit remands for all five accused, including the victim's wife, Sonam Raghuvanshi, paving the way for their transport to Shillong for further interrogation and investigation. Multiple police teams were involved in coordinated efforts across Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to bring the alleged conspirators into custody.

Sonam Raghuvanshi, accused of orchestrating her husband's murder, was located at a roadside eatery near the Varanasi-Ghazipur main road in Uttar Pradesh. After being initially held at a Sakhi One Stop Centre and undergoing a medical examination, Sonam was produced before a local magistrate in Ghazipur on Monday night. Meghalaya Police successfully secured a three-day transit remand from the court. Subsequently, she was taken to Phulwari Sharif police station in Patna, Bihar, on Tuesday and reached Shillong in the evening. Sonam has reportedly claimed to have no memory of how she reached Ghazipur, attributing it to being drugged by abductors.

'My simplicity shouldn't be mistaken for weakness'

Warns CM Mohan Majhi

NALINI SAHU ■ Bhubaneswar

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Tuesday sent out a stern message to detractors and vested interests, cautioning that his simplicity should not be mistaken for weakness. Reaffirming his government's 'zero-tolerance' policy towards corruption, he vowed to bring to justice those involved in graft, nepotism and misuse of power, irrespective of their statures.

Addressing a press conference on the eve of his government's first anniversary, Majhi minced no words in holding the previous dispensation accountable for alleged large-scale irregularities. "I started my career as a sarpanch and went on to be elected to the Odisha Legislative Assembly four times. I have witnessed people's struggles at the grassroots and closely observed the functioning of successive governments," Majhi remarked.

"The previous regime's tenure was marred by scandals - from the infamous chit fund scam to rampant mining irregularities and systemic corruption. We are actively gathering evidence and will ensure that those responsible, be they officials or politicians, are brought to book."

In what many political observers perceived as a veiled warning to a section of senior bureaucrats and certain leaders of the BJD which ruled the State from 2000 to 2004, Majhi reiterated his resolve to cleanse the administration. "I am a tribal who believes in righteousness and honesty. My simplicity must not be misread as weakness," he asserted.

Citing the recent arrest of an IAS officer caught redhanded while accepting a bribe from a businessman, Majhi declared, "No one - from peons to senior IAS officers - will be spared if found guilty of corruption."

"As we mark the first anniversary of our government, I want to assure the people of Odisha that a new era of 'Sushasan' (good governance) has begun. Our fight against corruption is uncompromising, and every government initiative will be implemented with integrity, ensuring it benefits the common man," he concluded.

COVID cases rise again in Odisha

Health Dept issues Rath Yatra advisory

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

COVID-19 cases in Odisha have begun to rise again, prompting health authorities to issue a fresh advisory ahead of the annual Rath Yatra in Puri. On Tuesday, five new infections were reported, taking the total number of COVID-19 cases in the State this year to 57. Of these, 18 have recovered while 39 are currently undergoing treatment, Public Health Director Dr Nilakant Mishra said.

COVID-19 infections have been reported across 12 districts. Khordha tops the list with 23 cases followed by Cuttack with 18. Puri, set to host the Rath Yatra later this month, has recorded three cases. Baleswar, Jagatsinghpur and Sundargarh reported two cases each while Keonjhar, Angul, Bargarh, Kandhamal, Ganjam and Subarnapur have reported one case each.

With cases spreading steadily and the Rath Yatra expected to draw lakhs of devotees, the Health Department has urged caution. It has advised individuals showing COVID-like symptoms, the elderly and those with comorbidities or serious illnesses to avoid participating in the event. Attendees have been urged to wear masks, wash hands regularly and consume only clean drinking water. The ICU facility in Puri, set up for the Rath Yatra, has been temporarily shut for review and possible upgrades.

At the national level, the COVID situation is also witnessing a gradual uptick. Active cases across India have reached 6,815. Kerala has the highest count with 2,053 active cases followed by Gujarat (1,109), West Bengal (747), Delhi (691), Maharashtra (613), Karnataka (559), Uttar Pradesh (225) and Tamil Nadu (207).

The Union Health Ministry has advised the States to ensure adequate medical facilities and oxygen availability while urging the public to maintain hygiene and observe respiratory precautions.

In Koraput and Bargarh

Two women govt engineers held for bribery

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Vigilance police on Tuesday arrested two government engineers in separate incidents of bribery, exposing rampant corruption in bill clearance under the MGNREGA scheme.

In Koraput district, Lamtaput block Assistant Engineer Suchismita Parija was caught red-handed while accepting a bribe of Rs 8,000 at her government quarters. The amount was part of a Rs 15,000-demand she had made from a village mate to facilitate release of payment for ghat-cutting work under MGNREGA. She had already collected Rs 5,000 earlier. Acting on a complaint, Vigilance officials laid a trap and recovered the marked bribe money from her possession. Searches were conducted at her government residence in Lamtaput and rented house in Similiguda.

Parija has been arrested and will be produced before court. A case under Section 7 of the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018 has been registered.

In Bargarh district, Gaisilet block Junior Engineer Susmita Oram was arrested while taking a bribe of Rs 8,000, the final instalment of a total Rs 32,000-demand made to a contractor for clearing pending bills for a road improvement project estimated at Rs 9.5 lakh. Oram had already received Rs 24,000 and insisted on the balance for processing the remaining payment. A trap was laid at her office where she was apprehended with the cash. She has been arrested and will be forwarded to court. A case has been registered at the Sambalpur Vigilance PS under Section 7 of the PC Act.

Daitapati Das Mahapatra reinstated amid Daru row

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Daitapati Nijoga secretary Ramakrushna Das Mahapatra, who was suspended last month over the controversial "Digha Jagannath Dham" episode, resumed his duties at the Jagannath Temple on Tuesday.

His re-entry into the temple comes a day before Deba Snana Purnima, one of the major rituals of the Rath Yatra calendar. With Senapata Lagi observed on Tuesday, Mahapatra actively participated in the rituals.

Mahapatra was suspended by Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) Chief Administrator Dr Arabinda Padhee on May 11 after allegations emerged that he facilitated the transfer of surplus Daru (sacred neem wood) from the 2015 Nabakalebar for idol making at a new Jagannath temple in Digha, West Bengal. A police complaint was filed by an RTI activist on May 3, prompting the SJTA to issue two show-cause notices.

Though Mahapatra had initially claimed to have provided the wood, he later denied making such statements. His involvement in the Digha temple's consecration drew criticism from religious scholars and devotees who raised concerns about preserving the sanctity of Srimandir traditions.

As per temple norms, Daru used during Nabakalebar must remain under strict temple custody and cannot be repurposed elsewhere. SJTA officials earlier described Mahapatra's actions as a breach of protocol.

While his suspension has ended, the issue remains contentious. Several religious organisations have called for a thorough inquiry into how sacred materials may have been accessed without proper authorisation.

Anupama honoured for medal at Asian event

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Director General of Police (DGP) Yogesh Bahadur Khurania on Monday felicitated Constable Anupama Swain for her exceptional performance at the 9th Ju-Jitsu Asian Championship held in Amman, Jordan, in May. Swain, currently posted in the Bhubaneswar Urban Police District, brought laurels to Odisha Police by winning two medals for India.

At a ceremony organised at the State Police Headquarters in Cuttack, Khurania presented Anupama a cash award and conveyed his best wishes for her bright future in sports and service.

Anupama secured a silver medal in the Contact category (below 52 kg) and a bronze in the Fighting System category (below 52 kg), marking a proud moment for Odisha at the international level.

The 9th Ju-Jitsu Asian Championship was held in Amman from May 23 to 25. Anupama was part of the Indian contingent. A decorated sportsperson, Anupama has earlier participated in several national and international championships, winning medals.

In Baleswar

Woman defrauded of Rs 26L by cyber cheats

UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ Baleswar

A woman of the Industrial area in Baleswar lost more than Rs 26 lakh after falling in the traps of online fraudsters.

The victim lodged a complaint with the Cyber police here following which the latter initiated an investigation.

According to reports, the victim while was doing saree business, both online as well as offline, she received a WhatsApp call from an unknown number about 6 months ago and the caller, identifying himself as Customs official, informed that she won a gift worth over Rs 1 crore and she had to deposit Rs 6.67 lakh to get the item released. Biting the bait, while she obliged and paid the amount, she received another call from a person identifying him as an Income Tax officer. The official, threatening her that malicious transactions took place in her account, asked her to deposit Rs 20 lakh to squash the matter.

After depositing Rs 20 lakh, another phone call came from yet another unknown number identifying him as an AAI officer demanding money. Later, the victim woman realized that she had been trapped by fraudsters and lodged a complaint in the online portal as well as with the Cyber police.

'Political audit to be held to expedite stalled projects'

Aparajita inaugurates host of projects in Jatni

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

A political audit will be conducted in villages through which stalled developmental works can be expedited. This was stated by Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi while inaugurating various developmental projects in Jatni block recently.

She also has granted MPLAD fund of Rs 50 lakh for a project at Chanaghara under Kusumati Panchayat of Jatni Block. The project will benefit around 20,000 people.

As part of a separate programme, she laid foundation stones for roads, drinking water, and other projects.

On the occasion, the MP stated that the "Developed Village, Developed Odisha" programme is being implemented to complete several key projects in each village.

She emphasized that the responsibility and duty of ensuring development in the Bhubaneswar parliamentary constituency lies with her. The main goal is to ensure roads, electricity, and drinking water reach every household, and this goal will be achieved within the next four years.

She expressed pride in having had the opportunity to serve the people of Bhubaneswar parliamentary constituency from 2019 to 2024 and pledged to repay the debt of the people of the region.

During the inauguration, MP Sarangi made an important point: "There is no political party in development." She invited everyone, regardless of political affiliation, to join hands in the development of villages.

It is noteworthy that many villages in Kusumati Panchayat did not have proper roads. Though demands had been raised for many years, they have now been fulfilled. With the laying of foundation stones for roads, drinking water, and other projects, there is a wave of happiness in the region. The villagers have praised the MP for her efforts.

Present at the event were Khordha BJP district president Bishwaranjan Barjena, Sarpanch Subhashini Biswal, Samiti Member Harmohan, and Jatni BDO.

In Jajpur

2 die, 3 injured as speeding car hits tree

PNS ■ Jajpur

Two persons died and another sustained critical injuries in a road accident late on Monday night near Mahulakhal under the Kaliapani police station in Jajpur district.

The mishap took place when five youths were returning home by a car.

As per reports, the vehicle lost control while taking a turn at high speed and rammed into a roadside tree. The impact of the collision was severe, causing the death of two of the occupants on the spot.

One of the youths was admitted to a nearby hospital in critical condition, while the other two sustained minor injuries. The deceased were identified as Bishwanath Mahanta of Kaduabandi and Sanjay Kumar Mahanta of Mahulakhal.

According to sources, no one witnessed the accident as it occurred, but a few passersby noticed the wreckage shortly after and immediately called for help.

The trapped victims were rescued from the mangled vehicle and rushed to the hospital.

The Kaliapani police arrived at the spot and sent the bodies for postmortem. An investigation has been launched to ascertain the exact cause of the mishap.

In Gajapati

Man kills wife suspecting extramarital affair

PNS ■ Paralakhemundi

A man killed his wife in Gaiba village under Gumma block in Gajapati district on the suspicion of her having an extramarital affair.

The deceased was identified as G Manika (26).

Getting information, Seranga police station incharge Pramod Khandual and other police officials rached the spot and began an investigation after sending the dead body for postmortem to thr District Headquarters Hospital. Manika had got married to Narendra Paika (31) of Keradanga following a love affair. Narendra was staying at his in-law place and was earning his livelihood from a small grocery shop. But due to some reasons, he began doubting his wife's character and decided to eliminate her.

On the fateful day, seeing that nobody was home, he bludgeoned Manika's head with a big stone and fled from the spot with some gold ornaments.

Later, when his mother-inlaw reached home, she saw the blood stained body of Manika, following which the police were informed.

In Baleswar

Mining officer injured in sand mafia's attack

PNS ■ Baleswar

A week after attack on a revenue official in Mayurbhanj district, a mining official was targeted by members of a sand mafia gang in Baleswar district on Tuesday.

The gang members attacked Tapas Kumar Behera, Junior Mining Officer of Kathasagada area in Remuna. Behera was hospitalised in a critical condition.

Behera accompanied by one office staff rushed to Kathasagada for inspection acting on a tipoff about illegal sand mining operation in the Budhabalanga riverbed.

After seeing the official at the site, the sand mafia intercepted his vehicle, dragged him out and physically assaulted him inhumanly. He suffered a serious head injury in the attack.

A complaint in this connection has been lodged with the police, who have launched an investigation after registering a case.

On June 2, Bhima Kanta Majhi, Additional Tehsildar, Kaptipada, Mayurbhanj district, was attacked by a group of people led by one Alok Rout and others allegedly linked with an illegal mining gang while he was on his way to raid illegal mining at some sand ghats. The accused torched his vehicle and humiliated publicly with derogatory remarks about his caste. The incident took place in front of Kaptipada police station, triggering public outrage and serious concerns on the safety and security of government officials on duty.

Nine persons have been arrested so far in connection with the incident.

Pollution, displacement

Scrap Essar unit in K'jhar: Samantara to CM

PNS ■ Keonjhar

Noted environmentalist Prafulla Samantara expressed his solidarity with villagers of Tikarpada and Mahadeijoda under Sadar block of Keonjhar who are opposing the proposed Essar's iron ore beneficiation plant.

Samantara, attending as the chief guest in a meeting held at Tikarpada organised by the Anti -Essar Forum, said that he had a video clip of CM Mohan Charan Majhi opposing the plant as MLA, Sadar when he was in the opposition party. He appealed to the CM to scrap the anti- public project.

He also appealed to the women to protest against the project in massive numbers otherwise there will not only be environmental problems but large-scale displacements of the local Adivasis. Forum convenor Ashok Thakar called for protection of rivers such as Sona, Karo and Baitarani. Madhusudan Sahoo presided over the meeting, while Thakur Marndi coordinated.

Environment Day held across Jagatsinghpur

Plantations undertaken

PNS ■ Jagatsinghpur

The World Environment Day was celebrated here on Thursday, with district Judge Jagatsinghpur, Srinibas Pratihari attending the event as chief guest.

He underscored the importance of the day, which is observed to raise awareness and promote action on global environmental challenges. Among others, Kendriya Vidyalaya Principal, ADJ Gargi Patnaik, District Bar Association president Subash Bhusan Mohapatra, the DLSA secretary, lawyers, NGO activists, forest department officials including Range officer Rajendra Kumar Samantray, and forester Pitabash Mohapatra were present.

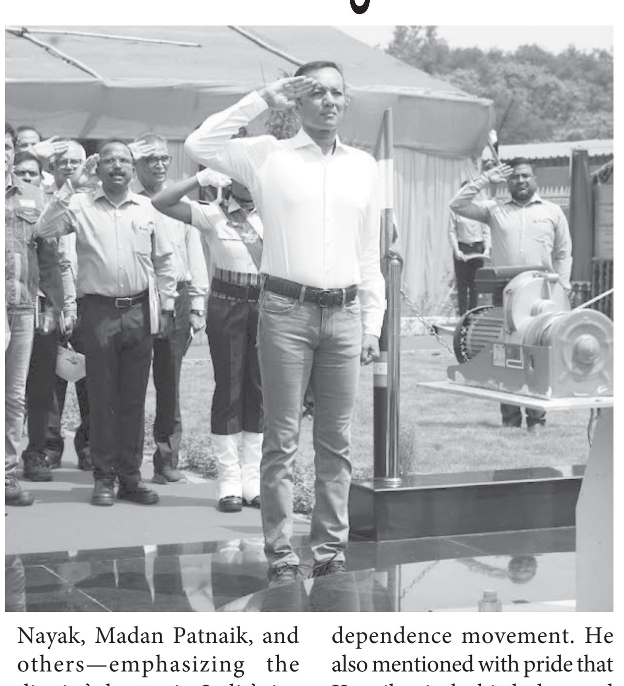
Similarly, a function was organised at Gramya Nayalaya premises, Raghunathpur to mark the occasion. Orissa High Court Judge Justice Biraja Prasanna Satpathy attended the event as chief guest, who planted saplings inside the Gramya Nayalaya sites, accompanied by the district Judge, SP Bhabani Shankar Udgata, DLSA staff, forest officials and residents. Later, Justice Satpathy proceeded to Tirtol, Kujanga, and Paradip, where he participated in the World Environment Day celebrations.

175th monumental Nat'l Flag installed at Kasia Mines

PNS ■ Keonjhar

President, Flag Foundation of India, Chairman, Jindal Steel and Power (JSP), and MP Naveen Jindal inaugurated a 72-ft monumental National Flagpole at the Kasia Iron and Dolomite Mines in Keonjhar. The towering mast now proudly holds a 16 x 24 ft Tricolour, flying high as a powerful symbol of national pride and regional identity.

Invoking the divine blessings of Maa Tarini, the presiding deity of Keonjhar district, and Mahaprabhu Shri Baladev Jew for the prosperity of the local community, Jindal remembered the sacrifices of local freedom fighters—Dharanidhar Bhuyan, Dharanidhar Nayak, Ratna



Nayak, Madan Patnaik, and others—emphasizing the district's legacy in India's independence movement. He also mentioned with pride that Keonjhar is the birthplace and karma bhoomi of the present Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi.

Jindal is widely recognised for his relentless 10-year-long legal battle that led to the historic Supreme Court judgment in 2004, which granted every Indian citizen the right to hoist the National Flag with dignity on any day of the year. Under the visionary leadership of Jindal, the Flag Foundation of India launched a nationwide initiative in 2009 to install monumental National Flag masts at prominent locations across India. Since then, 175 monumental flags have been installed, including nine in Odisha—further strengthening the spirit of nationalism and public participation.

IFFCO cultural fest: Paradeep unit emerges winner

PNS ■ Paradip

The Paradeep unit of Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) emerged victorious at the 12th Inter Unit Cultural Festival (IUCF) 2025, which concluded with a grand finale on June 8.

Hosted for the first time at Paradip, the week-long celebration brought together IFFCO employees and their families from across the country in a vibrant display of talent, unity, and cultural heritage. The closing ceremony was graced by Managing Director of IFFCO Dr US Awasthi and Madam Rekha Awasthi, who served as chief guests for the evening.

Dr Awasthi expressed his gratitude to IFFCO Chairman Dileep Sanghani for his con-

tinuous support and reflected on the significance of hosting the event in Odisha. He also spoke about the strategic decision to acquire the Paradeep Unit, calling it a crucial step in IFFCO's growth. He shared the origins of the IUCF, which he started in 2005 to foster camaraderie and showcase the diverse talents of IFFCO employees.

Unit Head of IFFCO Paradeep PK Mahapatra praised the dedication of employees, volunteers, and support staff, and acknowledged the role of the Employees Union and Officers Association in ensuring a disciplined and smooth event.

Authorities issue oil spill advisory for Kerala coast

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Kochi/Mangaluru

As fire continued to rage on and explosions rocked the Singapore-flagged ship off the Kerala coast on Tuesday, authorities issued an oil spill advisory while a Chinese engineer rescued from the burning vessel suffered critical injuries.

While 18 crew members were recovered from MV Wan Hai 503 and brought to Mangaluru late on Monday, four remain unaccounted for.

Port workers described emotional scenes as the injured disembarked — some helped by fellow crewmates, others in stretchers, whispering prayers of gratitude or anxiously inquiring about their missing colleagues.

The vessel caught fire on Monday, and more than 24 hours later, flames were reported from the mid-ship area and container bay just ahead of the accommodation block, Indian Coast Guard officials said.

The forward bay fire has been brought under control, but thick smoke continues to rise from the vessel. The ship is listing approximately 10 to 15 degrees to port, and more containers have reportedly fallen overboard, they said.

ICG ships Samudra Prahari and Sachet are carrying out firefighting and boundary cooling operations at sea to prevent the flames from spreading further.

Meanwhile, Coast Guard vessel Samarth, carrying a team of salvors, is being deployed from Kochi to support ongoing efforts.

An ICG Dornier aircraft conducted an aerial survey of the incident site.

The major fire broke out on board the Singapore-flagged ship after a container explosion.

Following the incident, the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) issued advisories warning of drifting containers and a potential oil spill.

Indian Coast Guard ships carrying out the firefighting operation after a fire broke out on a Singapore-flagged ship following a container explosion off the Kerala coast PTI

The ship, which was en route to Nhava Sheva, Mumbai from Colombo, experienced an explosion in one of its containers, sparking a massive onboard fire while sailing roughly 70 nautical miles off Kozhikode. The vessel is currently adrift.

In response, INCOIS activated its Search and Rescue Aid Tool (SARAT) to track possible drift patterns of containers, debris, or people who may have gone overboard.

According to the latest simulations, there is a 70–80 per cent probability that drifting objects may move south-southeastward from the incident site over the next three days.

"Simulations show that the containers are likely to continue to drift in the ocean for the next three days and might take longer to reach the beach. However, caution is advised about a few containers beaching between Kozhikode and Kochi. The situation is closely monitored and updated drift directions will be provided," INCOIS said in a statement.

Local authorities have been urged to step up coastal surveillance and prepare communities for possible navigational or shoreline hazards, it said.

Earlier, 18 crew members were rescued from the blaze-hit container ship and safely brought to the New Mangalore Port Authority (NMPA) Coast Guard berth at Panambur by Indian Naval Ship INS Surat.

Among the rescued, two are said to be in critical condition, while four sustained minor injuries.

Twelve others suffered varying levels of trauma.

The injured were evacuated and transported to AJ Hospital in Kuntikana late on Monday night.Dinesh Kadam, Plastic Surgeon at AJ Hospital said, "Around 11.30 pm, six of them were bought by the Coast Guard. They were all on the ship. They had not jumped into water as it was reported. They were all in the vessel and were rescued from lifeboat by the Coast Guard."

"Out of the six, two are critically injured. One has 40 per cent burns and another 30 per cent. The one who sustained 40 per cent burns is a 47-year-old male, a Chinese national. He is an engineer. He sustained burns on the face, upper and lower limbs. They both have airway burns that is much more serious. Airway burns is one thing which is likely to worsen in next few hours or few days," he said.

According to the doctor, both of them also have deep burns so they may probably require some surgical procedures later.

"Right now, they are stable. They are conscious, they are able to speak and take some liquids also. Their vitals are okay but they are being closely monitored in the ICU."

Giving details of the condition of four others, he said one of them was in the observation room. He had deep facial burns but was conscious, oriented and taking food orally.

"The other three are ok. They are quite cheerful. They don't have much burn injuries but they have impacts as well. Some have cut injuries, tooth loss. There was a leak of chemical substance also because one of them (patient) said that he touched some liquid which was flowing out and sustained burns. But those are minor burns," he added.

With four persons still unaccounted for, search and rescue operations were on to locate them. The ship caught fire at approximately 9.20 am IST on Monday, around 44 nautical miles off Azhikkal in Kannur district of Kerala and 130 nautical miles northwest of Kochi.

Panel drafts report on quota in Jammu and Kashmir

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jammu

The Cabinet sub-committee tasked by the Jammu and Kashmir (J and K) Government with reviewing the Union Territory's reservation policy has finalised its draft report, according to a statement by Minister for Education Sakina Ittoo. The report, completed within the stipulated six-month timeframe, is set to be presented at the next cabinet meeting, marking a significant step in addressing the contentious issue of reservations in J and K.

The sub-committee was constituted in December 2024 following widespread protests led by students outside the residence of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah in Srinagar.

The demonstrations, spearheaded by National Conference (NC) leader and Lok Sabha member from Srinagar, Aga Ruhullah Mehdi, were in response to the existing reservation policy, which allocates only 30 per cent of seats for open merit candidates in educational institutions and government jobs. The remaining 70 per cent are reserved for various communities, a distribution that has sparked significant debate and dissatisfaction among open merit aspirants.

The protests were further fueled by the Central Government's decision to grant reservation status to the Pahari-speaking community in J and K, which further reduced the open merit quota. This move intensified concerns among students and other stakeholders, who argued that the limited open merit allocation restricts opportunities for those not covered under reserved categories.

Formed to examine these grievances and recommend revisions to the reservation policy, the sub-committee was given a six-month deadline to submit its findings. Minister Sakina Ittoo, in a post on her official X handle, confirmed the timely completion of the draft report, stating, "The Cabinet Sub-Committee constituted to examine the issue of reservations has drafted its report within the stipulated timeframe of six months. The report will be placed before the Cabinet when it meets." While the specifics of the report remain undisclosed, its submission is expected to initiate critical discussions within the cabinet on balancing the demands of open merit candidates with the affirmative action policies benefiting reserved communities.

Ayodhya circle rates hiked after eight years

BISWAJEET BANERJEE
Ayodhya

After an eight-year gap, Ayodhya's circle rates — the government-fixed minimum property valuation for registration — have been revised significantly upward, with hikes ranging from 30 per cent to as much as 200 per cent in certain locations, officials confirmed on Monday.

The steepest increase is seen in areas surrounding the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple, where land values have surged over 150 per cent, reflecting a sharp rise in demand following the rapid development and religious tourism boom.

The revised rates, which came into effect on Monday, apply to residential, commercial and agricultural land categories and vary according to land use and proximity to key urban and religious sites.

Officials said the areas within a 10-kilometre radius of the Ram temple are among the most impacted.

According to the new rate chart, land prices in prime areas around the Ram temple now range from ₹26,600 to ₹27,900 per square metre, up from the earlier rates of ₹6,650 to ₹6,975

"These revised rates were proposed in September 2024, and after resolving all objections, they were approved by District Magistrate Tikaram Funde. They are now in force," said Shanti Bhushan Chaubey, sub-registrar of Sadar (Faizabad) tehsil.

He said the revision reflects the shifting land dynamics in Ayodhya, particularly in areas witnessing heightened real estate activity. "The highest jump has been recorded in localities like Rakaabganj, Devkali, and the Awadh Vihar Yojana. These are now the most expensive residential zones in the district," he added.

According to the new rate chart, land prices in prime areas around the Ram temple now range from ₹26,600 to ₹27,900 per square metre, up from the earlier rates of ₹6,650 to ₹6,975. The sharp rise underscores the influence of major infrastructure projects and religious significance attached to the site.

"Circle rates have been updated based on location-specific demand. Residential, commercial, and agricultural plots have each been assessed differently. This rationalisation was long overdue," Chaubey explained.

Real estate players have offered mixed reactions, with many supporting the move for its potential to bring greater transparency to property deals.

"While a higher circle rate results in increased stamp duty for buyers, it also enhances the official valuation of land, which is beneficial for landowners in securing loans and selling property at realistic prices," said Saurabh Vikram Singh, director of a local real estate firm operating in Ayodhya.

Vivek Agrawal, another real estate developer active in the region, welcomed the step, noting that it could reduce unaccounted transactions.

"By aligning circle rates closer to market values, the old practice of dual pricing — white and black money — can be curtailed. It promotes a more transparent property market," he said.

Local resident Ram Prakash Yadav, who owns ancestral land near Devkali, expressed concern over the timing of the rate revision, suggesting that it may disproportionately benefit real estate developers.

"For years, big builders have been quietly buying land here at older, much cheaper rates. Now that the government has raised the circle rates, they have a perfect pretext to sell at much higher prices," Yadav said.

"Ordinary locals like us didn't get a chance to sell when the rates were low, and now land has slipped out of our reach. It feels like the system is favouring developers who had insider foresight."

Yadav added that while higher land valuation might look good on paper, the actual benefits for small landowners are limited.

Chhattisgarh bids adieu to ASP killed in IED blast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Raipur

Emotional scenes were witnessed here on Tuesday as a large number of people followed the cortege of Additional SP Akash Rao Girepunje, killed in an IED blast, to the crematorium where his brother and 7-year-old son lit the funeral pyre.

Earlier in the day, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai laid wreath at the mortal remains of the police officer and said the end of Naxalism is certain.

Additional Superintendent of Police (Konta division) Girepunje was killed and two others officers were injured after an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) planted by Naxalites exploded on Monday in Konta area of Sukma district.

The last rites of the 42-year-old officer was held here at Mahadev Ghat Muktidham where Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, senior police officials and other people from different walks of life bid an emotional farewell to him.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai pays his respects to the mortal remains of ASP Akash Rao Girepunje, who was killed in an IED blast triggered by Naxalites in Raipur PTI

Police personnel accorded a guard of honour to the deceased police officer at the crematorium.

Girepunje's younger brother Adarsh and 7-year-old son held the burning sticks and lit the funeral pyre, as they along with a large number of people bid him a tearful farewell.

Deputy CM Vijay Sharma, who also holds the home portfolio, said Naxalites have once again shown their face and intention.

Girepunje ji was a brave, dedicated and honest officer, he noted.

"He was awarded a gallantry medal earlier. Girepunje had said he will remain there (in Sukma) till the campaign to free Bastar from the clutches of red terror (Naxalism) is not completed and will not get transferred from there. He continued his work," Sharma said. "The entire society salutes to such a brave officer. The government has been standing with his family," he said.

Earlier in the morning, CM Sai paid homage to the martyred officer at the headquarters of the 4th battalion of Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) in Mana area here and said the end of Naxalism is certain. Amid emotional chants of 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' and 'Akash Rao Amar Rahe', wreaths were laid at the police officer's mortal remains at the 4th battalion of CAF premises.

Deputy CMs Vijay Sharma and Arun Sao, state assembly speaker Raman Singh, ministers, public representatives and senior administration and police officials were present at the wreath laying ceremony.

Girepunje's family members, including his parents, his wife and two minor children, were also present.

His 7-year-old son bowed at the mortal remains with folded hands, while a relative carried his 6-year-old daughter in his arms.

"We have lost a brave and committed officer. Naxalites have committed the cowardly act out of frustration. Naxalism is breathing its last and its end is certain," CM Sai told reporters after paying homage to Girepunje.

The chief minister, deputy CMs, Raman Singh and other officials lent their shoulders to Girepunje's mortal remains while they were being put in a flower-decked mini-truck at the CAF premises.

Political tussle over approval of new train in Madhya Pradesh

GIRISH SHARMA
Bhopal

A political tussle over credit has emerged in Madhya Pradesh following the approval of a new train connecting Guna to Bengaluru.

Union Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has taken centre stage, claiming credit for the launch of train number 11085/11086, which will now connect Gwalior to Sir M Visvesvaraya Terminal (Bengaluru) via Guna.

Scindia announced the development on social media, thanking Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw for fulfilling a long-standing demand of people in Guna, Ashok Nagar, and Shivpuri — districts that form the core of his political stronghold.

He emphasised that the train will benefit thousands of youths from the region who are employed in Bengaluru's IT and service sectors, removing the need to travel long distances to Bhopal, Bina, or Gwalior for southern-bound trains.

Congress leaders in the region have hinted that the move is part of Scindia's ongoing effort to consolidate his image ahead of the upcoming local elections

"This is not just a train; it's a lifeline for the youth of the region. I thank the Railway Ministry for accepting my proposal," Scindia posted on X (formerly Twitter).

However, the political tone of the announcement has stirred debate, with rivals pointing out that railway proposals often involve long-standing demands and collective efforts.

Congress leaders in the region have hinted that the move is part of Scindia's ongoing effort to consolidate his image ahead of the upcoming local elections.

Critics argue that Scindia, who defected from the Congress to the BJP in 2020, is using government infrastructure projects as a means to revive his influence in Guna, where his political clout has faced challenges in recent years.

Local observers note that while the train approval will indeed benefit residents, its timing and the publicity surrounding it are part of a broader narrative: positioning Scindia as a development-focused leader in a region where electoral dynamics have been shifting.

NICE 'E' round first runner-up: Vijval Ekbote

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The curtains fell on the final leg of the National Inter-College Crossword Expedition (NICE) 2025 with a crescendo of intellectual fireworks. Aptly dubbed Round 'E', the fourth and concluding online round electrified crossword enthusiasts across the country with its fierce competition and brain-teasing brilliance.

At the heart of this high-stakes mental marathon, VKS Gayatri of BITS Pilani, Hyderabad soared to the top, clinching the coveted first place at the national level with a masterclass in speed, accuracy, and lateral thinking.

Hot on his heels was Vijval Ekbote from Indraprastha Institute of Information Technology, New Delhi, who secured the second spot, showcasing sharp thinking and calm under pressure.

Rounding out the top three was Adya Singh from Patna, competing in the 'awaiting college admission' category. Her stellar performance earned her a national podium finish, marking her as a rising star in India's crossword circuit.

Based on speed and accuracy, the top scorers from each of the five zones have also emerged as the zonal winners. East Zone Winner as Ayush Warsh (GEC, Vaishali), West Zone Winner Ayush Sah (ABV-IIITM, Gwalior) North Zone Winner Isha (JNU, New Delhi), South Zone Winner Ashish CT (IIT Madras), North-East Zone Winner Om Kumar Jha (NIT, Manipur) figured in the list.

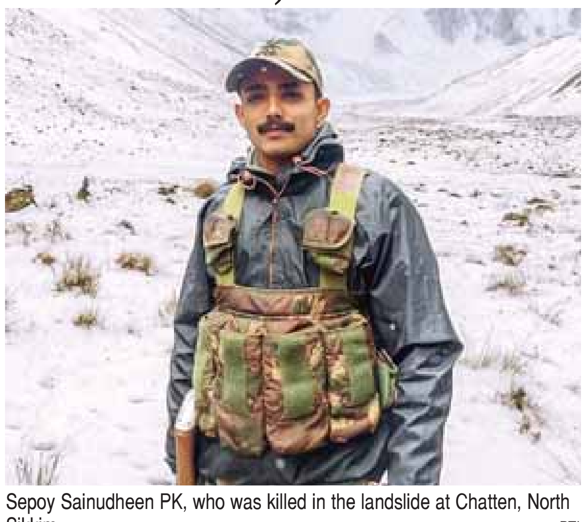
Sepoy Sainudheen PK makes supreme sacrifice in landslide at Chatten, North Sikkim

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Born in Lakshadweep, Sepoy Sainudheen PK, made the supreme sacrifice in the devastating landslide at Chatten, North Sikkim. Defence forces flew his body 2,500 km to his native place thereby reaffirming nation's gratitude and the enduring ethos of Service Before Self.

The mortal remains of Sepoy Sainudheen PK were recovered on Sunday after eight days of relentless search efforts by the Indian Army.

Born on December 20, 1991 in Androth, Lakshadweep, Sainudheen joined the Army on March 24, 2012. Over the past 13 years, he served with honour and distinction across some of the harshest operational terrains, including the forbidding heights of the Siachen Glacier. He was known among peers and seniors alike for his professionalism, discipline and unflinching dedication to duty.



Sepoy Sainudheen PK, who was killed in the landslide at Chatten, North Sikkim PTI

His final journey — traversing nearly 2,500 kilometres from Chatten in North Sikkim to his native island of Androth in Lakshadweep — was a solemn and dignified tribute to a life dedicated to the nation.

This long and logistically complex repatriation was made possible through a coordinated tri-services operation involving the Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Indian Navy, supported ably by the local administration.

Army Aviation helicopters and Indian Air Force aircraft, including the C-295, were employed for this effort, ensuring timely and seamless transportation across multiple legs of the journey.

A ceremonial wreath-laying tribute was conducted with full military honours at Bengdubi Military Station on Sunday, marking the Indian Army's respect. At Androth, the Indian Navy rendered a Guard of Honour, reaffirming the sanctity of soldierly sacrifice.

His Commanding Officer said "Sepoy Sainudheen P K embodied the finest traditions of the Indian Army—quiet professionalism, absolute integrity, and unmatched dedication. Whether in Siachen or Sikkim, he served with a quiet courage that inspired all ranks. His sacrifice is a reminder that true valour lies in selfless service even in the face of unseen dangers.

Mamata blames Centre for lax security at Pahalgam

SAUGAR SENGUPTA Kolkata

After having attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for over the past one week for "peddling Sindoor to garner votes in the name of patriotic fervour" Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday slammed the Centre for the lackluster security arrangement that led to the April 22 Pahalgam attack killing 26 innocent civilians.

Launching a scathing attack on the Centre for vital security and intelligence failure Banerjee said "the attack in Pehalgam happened because of the Centre's callous approach," asking "why the security personnel were absent from the spot which visited by so many tourists and now they are trying to use the valour of the Indian military to reap political dividends."

The Chief Minister was speaking inside the State Assembly where a unanimous resolution was passed praising the Indian defence forces for their exemplary technique and valour in the recent armed face off with Pakistan.

The armed forces did an excellent job teaching the terrorists a lesson of their lifetime but at the same time the BJP is using it to further their narrow electoral interests

The attack in Pehalgam was a result of Centre's callousness, she said adding "there was not a single police man deployed" at Baisaran valley where the attack took place. She also questioned why the Centre had failed to arrest the terrorists who perpetrated the attack.

Though the Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution lauding the valour of the armed forces for launching precision strikes on terror hubs in Pakistan and PoK the opposition BJP had expressed its displeasure at the terms "Operation Sindoor" being omitted from the draft resolution which was circulated earlier.

Editor's TAKE

Impactful eleven years of Modi Government

From bold reforms to welfare breakthroughs, the Modi era has redefined the narrative of governance

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi completes 11 years in office, the occasion marks a significant chapter in India's political and developmental journey. Over the past decade, the Modi Government has overseen a broad transformation — economically, socially, and ideologically — ushering in what can be termed as a new era of governance focused on performance, accountability, and national pride. BJP President JP Nadda has also emphasised key achievements of the Government ranging from social-economic to political achievements of the Modi Government.

Under Modi's leadership, India has risen from the 10th to the 4th largest economy globally. Welfare schemes targeting the poor, such as Jan Dhan, Ayushman Bharat, Ujjwala Yojana and housing initiatives, have lifted an estimated 25 crore people out of poverty, reflecting what the Government calls its "gareeb kalyan" model of development.

A strong push for women-led development has seen the expansion of maternity leave, the rise of self-help groups like 'Lakhpati Didis,' and women making major strides in sectors ranging from grassroots entrepreneurship to space exploration. The Government also claims credit for shifting Indian politics from identity-based appeasement to a results-oriented model, where report cards, not rhetoric, define public leadership. One of the most testing periods of Modi's tenure was the COVID-19 pandemic, during which India conducted the world's largest free vaccination drive, delivering over 220 crore doses. This was accompanied by swift emergency operations like Vaccine Maitri and Operation Ganga, enhancing India's stature as a responsible global actor. In Jammu and Kashmir, the Government's decision to abrogate Article 370 marked a turning point in India's internal integration efforts. The move, followed by record voter turnout in local elections, is presented as proof of deeper democratic normalisation in the region.

Infrastructure too has been a defining pillar, with the long-pending Chenab Bridge project finally completed and inaugurated this year. Other headline reforms over the years include the abolition of Triple Talaq, the Citizenship Amendment Act, and changes to Waqf laws, all aimed, according to the Government, at correcting long-standing social imbalances.

The Modi Government continues to project the vision of a "Viksit Bharat" by 2047, guided by the principle of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas." While critics point to concerns over democratic freedoms and centralisation of power, even detractors acknowledge the sweeping nature of the changes witnessed under Modi's leadership.

At the end of 11 years, Narendra Modi's tenure has not only redefined governance in India but has also reshaped the expectations citizens have from their leaders. Whether viewed as transformational or polarising, the Modi era has left an unmistakable imprint on the nation's political and developmental psyche.

Debate on India's defence doctrine

The larger question looms: Can India afford costly engagements with transient outcomes, without a comprehensive reimagining of its military doctrine, defence spending and national security policy?

CDS Gen Anil Chauhan has made the startling comment that costs don't matter, outcomes do. He was answering questions from Bloomberg in Singapore about the number of Indian jets downed in Op Sindoor. Some previous combat losses: World War II — Allies 91,105 aircraft; Axis Powers 70,900 aircraft. In 1965, IAF 59 aircraft, and Pakistan Air Force (PAF) 43 aircraft in 22 days.

At Balakot both sides incurred the loss of one aircraft each while India also lost a helicopter due to friendly fire, all within 48 hours. There are other examples of air assets lost. But all these engagements were contact wars, some spread over years. Op Sindoor was an 88-hour non-contact, Beyond Visual Range (BVR) conflict.

For India, a developing economy and aspiring to be a developed nation by 2047, the cost of conflict and resultant homeland-instability impinge negatively on development, especially when the outcome is non-decisive and deterrence only transitory. Pakistan will not cease to wage war, skirmishes and proxy wars as it has for the last 80 years.

Delhi failed to terminate wars decisively because of not appreciating the strength of military power and the use of force. Hard power is built over time with costs and investments. The muscular counter-terrorism policy the BJP Government has adopted for over a decade was built on rhetoric, spending less than 2 per cent of GDP on defence. The absence of credible deterrence, erratic use of force and the unresolved issue of Kashmir led to the Pahalgam carnage and other terrorist incidents in Kashmir. Had a more serious view been taken of comprehensive national power, Pakistan would not have dared to bait India periodically. Op Sindoor, its tactical successes and strategic flaws necessitate an immediate defence review encompassing the entire span of the current BJP rule.

Since the appointment of CDS and Department of Military Affairs and the centrality of National Security Adviser and the Defence Planning Committee he leads, strategic thinking ought to have led to the enunciation of defence and security doctrines which in turn could have facilitated the formation of Integrated Theatre Commands, still waiting to happen. The domination of air power will rejuvenate the debate on the indivisibility of air assets and put a spoke in the wheel of the early fruition of Theatre Commands.

First salvos in this regard have already been fired by IAF veterans. No longer is the IAF a support arm as late CDS Gen Bipin Rawat had forcefully averred. After Op Sindoor, it emerged as the sword arm, persuading Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi to skip the CII Military Partnership Summit, Delhi for blessings from the Rajguru of Chitrakoot temple who sought from Army Chief PoK as Guru Dakshina. While Air Chief Marshal AP Singh modestly stole the limelight at the summit following the stand-off campaign of attrition of Pakistan Air Force air and land assets, Gen Dwivedi kept alive the relevance of land forces in the territorial conquest of PoK and in capturing and holding ground.

ASHOK K MEHTA

Returning to reforms, the Government must immediately commit to higher defence spending, which is the manifest trend the world over following the Ukraine war entering its fourth year, the Gaza outrage in its third year, compound instabilities in West Asia and turbulence in the Indo-Pacific, especially the South China Sea. President Trump is telling NATO and Indo-Pacific allies to spend more on defence — 5 per cent for NATO and substantial but unspecified increases for Japan and South Korea. Earlier this month, Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced his Government's first Strategic Defence Review and an increase from 2 to 2.5 per cent of GDP by 2027 and ultimately, targeting 3 per cent by 2034. He said these are not aspirational but achievable targets. He announced an immediate increase in defence spending of GBP 15 bn, saying additional capabilities will deter conflict, naming Russia (and China) as the main threat.

As India is afraid to name China as a threat, it does not have a written national security policy. Imagine Prime Minister Modi making similar announcements in his Mann ki Baat or an interview with ANI like Starmer did on BBC. He outlined the key ingredients of defence preparedness — the type of equipment the UK would build for its strategic and conventional deterrence and its focus on NATO First. NATO and Europe have three nuclear-armed nations to deter Russia and China.

The other two original nuclear-armed powers all together constitute the P5 in the UN Security Council. India's defence forces, on the other hand, have been hollowed out over time due to inadequate funding and lethargic procurement procedures. While Aatm-nirbharta is an undeniable great virtue, Delhi's dependence on Russia, France, the US, Israel, the UK and Germany for niche technologies makes self-reliance somewhat suspect.

Immediate injection of resources, especially in R&D, is imperative if the new normal of enhanced thresholds of non-contact and hot war under the nuclear overhang is to be sustained. Business Standard's AK Bhattacharya, a long-term advocate of higher defence spending, recently suggested that there were two ways to do this: first, to break the limit on fiscal deficit; and the other to reduce capex to transfer funds to defence.

As this will affect growth, he said, accepting a higher fiscal deficit was the better option. There is a third way too. Past Finance Commissions have tossed ideas but the Government has not shown political courage to make the right choices as those will hurt its welfare schemes and impose a fresh burden on the taxpayer.

Periodic clashes with Pakistan have created uncertainties and instabilities that will deter FDI and discourage shifting supply chains to India. Delhi's import reliance on China is increasing phenomenally; in 2023–24 to USD 110 bn, which is almost twice India's defence budget. China remains the primary challenge, rival and competitor. Enhanced defence allocation will have meaning if defence acquisition processes are streamlined to ensure full utilisation of funds by the end of the fiscal. For too long, modernisation funds have had to be surrendered. Costs matter as much as outcomes.

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

PIC TALK

A young boy plays Rabaabon a Shikara in Dal Lake as weather remains pleasant in Kashmir Valley. PTI

India needs a smarter approach to crowd management

SECOND Opinion

In India, large gatherings are not rare disruptions. They are the norm. Cricket victories, political rallies, religious festivals, celebrity appearances, airport inaugurations — each can summon thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, into open public spaces, often with little formal planning. These crowds reflect India's energy and scale.

But they also present a persistent challenge: how to manage such gatherings safely, predictably, and without incident. Recent tragedies have highlighted the cost of poor crowd management. But the solution lies not in stricter enforcement or post-incident inquiry. It lies in something India's governance structures too often overlook: systemic planning. Crowds in India are changing. They no longer assemble only for annual religious rituals or pre-scheduled political events. Instead, many now form spontaneously — mobilised in minutes via social media, often in semi-urban spaces not designed to handle them.

They are less hierarchical, more mobile, and more complex to anticipate. Policing such crowds with traditional methods — barricades, loudhailers, baton units — is both inefficient and increasingly inadequate. Frontline officers are experienced but often under-resourced. What is needed is not better policing, but better governance. India would benefit from codifying its approach to mass gatherings into a National Framework for Crowd Management. This would not be a one-size-fits-all mandate but a flexible, tiered system of planning protocols — classified by crowd size, event type, and infrastructure profile.

Such a framework could formalise practices that are currently ad hoc. Risk assessments, exit planning, inter-agency co-ordination, and deployment checklists should be standard procedures, not left to individual discretion. Crowd safety should be integrated into disaster management plans and urban planning policies, rather than remaining solely the responsibility of district police officers. At the district level, the introduction of Joint Operations Centres (JOCs) — multi-agency units that co-ordinate planning and response during significant events — could vastly improve efficiency. Police, health services, fire departments, transportation authorities, and municipal bodies should work from a shared playbook with clear lines of authority and command. Technology can also do more of the heavy lifting. Many Indian cities are now equipped with CCTV networks and drone units.

OP SINGH

These assets, combined with crowd-modelling software and AI-based density tracking, can provide real-time alerts and enable pre-emptive responses. In high-risk events, AI heatmaps can help guide crowd dispersal, monitor entry flows, and identify potential pressure points before they escalate into dangerous situations. However, few police units have access to this technology in a usable, integrated form.

The Ministry of Home Affairs could bridge this gap by funding state-level pilot projects through the Modernisation of Police Forces scheme. Partnerships with Indian research institutions and private tech firms could yield homegrown solutions suited to India's unique conditions. Physical infrastructure often determines whether a crowd flows or clogs. India's urban spaces frequently lack adequate signage, multiple exits, or directional guidance for mass movement. Cities should be encouraged, through innovative city programmes or urban development grants, to incorporate crowd-conscious design into their routine infrastructure upgrades. For recurring high-density events, such as pilgrimages or local festivals, temporary modular infrastructure (barricades, elevated walkways, digital signage, and mobile medical units) can be deployed.

No system of control is complete without public co-operation. In moments of panic, communication — fast, accurate, and trusted — is critical. Police forces should develop public messaging strategies tailored to event type and local language, using both digital platforms and community networks. In areas with recurring gatherings, citizen engagement, through resident welfare associations, local leaders, and panchayats, can enhance both awareness and compliance. India's police forces learn constantly, but often in isolation. A national repository of After-Action Reports — brief, structured analyses of crowd events — could be maintained by the Bureau of Police Research and Development. Accountability, too, must evolve.

(The author is DGP and Head, Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

PM Modi to attend G7 summit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's invitation to the upcoming G7 outreach meeting in Canada next week is seen as a precondition for Modi's participation in the day-long meeting, which follows the G7 Summit, amid ongoing tensions over the Hardeep Singh Nijjar killing. Carney had placed "conditions" on the invitation to the Indian Prime Minister, and Modi asked for time to decide on whether to accept the conditions or not.

Carney, facing domestic criticism for inviting Modi so soon after the RCMP accused Indian agents of involvement in Nijjar's murder. The G7 summit, scheduled for June 15–17 in Kananaskis, Alberta, will focus on "strengthening peace and security, countering foreign interference as well as transnational crime and improving joint responses to wildfires," according to Carney.

It is the first of the three priorities that Carney has outlined for the summit, and directly addresses the concerns Canada has expressed about the Modi Government in the wake of the Nijjar assassination. Relations between the two countries had sharply deteriorated after Canada's public allegations of the Modi Government's involvement in Nijjar's murder. The resumption of law enforcement dialogue can be seen as a step toward rebuilding bad ties, but Canadian officials stress that justice and ongoing investigations remain central to their agenda.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

A Call for Balanced Governance

On the occasion of completing the first year of his third term the Prime Minister has appreciated himself for achieving the country's economy to grow to be the fourth largest in the world. His colleagues are also falling in line. No doubt, it deserves appreciation. India is also producing more billionaires than any other countries. But it is one part of the story. But equally important other part also needs to be considered. India is holding 105th place in Global Hunger Index in the list of 127 countries.

India is put on 'serious' category in the hunger list. In the Corruption Perception Index India is placed in 96th place with 38 points in the list of 180 countries. The country's place in World Happiness Report is 118 in the list of 147. Education policy and standard of education stand exposed for producing unemployable youth. Unemployment, especially among the educated youth, is growing to a staggering level. Above all 81 crore people are still depending on free ration. Manipur and Kashmir are yet to see peace and normal life. States are crying foul against the fading federal spirit and discriminatory treatments. The judiciary is forced to intervene to maintain the supremacy of the constitution. Attending these woes is also the duty of this Government, which the leaders are reminded of to attend to them with equal concern to ensure comprehensive development that benefits all.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

Vande Bhart reaches Kashmir valley

The Vande Bharat Express, being put into service on the Jammu-Srinagar route, is specifically engineered to withstand severe winter conditions in the Himalayan region. It can improve connectivity and trade and commerce. Firstly, it reduces the travel time between the Jammu region, the Kashmir Valley, and the rest of the country.

The Vande Bharat train comes into play especially when inclement weather plays spoilsport, making roads and air travel congested or delayed. This special train, being put into service on the Jammu-Srinagar route, is specifically engineered to withstand severe winter conditions in the Himalayan region. It can improve connectivity and trade and commerce. It should boost the tourism sector, a key contributor to Jammu and Kashmir's economy, especially when we consider that horticulture is the breadwinner for a significant portion of the populace. It can greatly reduce travel time for products such as apples, plums, or cherries, thereby generating extra income for the natives. It can be said to a certain extent that railways have had a transformative effect on the cultural landscape of India. So, the recently launched Vande Bharat train can be seen as a harbinger of goodwill that should bridge cultural divides, especially in sensitive zones. this initiative holds immense potential to not only enhance economic prosperity but also foster greater national integration in the region.

VIAJY SINGH ADHIKARI | NAINITAL

INDUS WATER TREATY SUSPENSION IS IRREVERSIBLE

Apropos of the front-page news (June 9) on India's snub on the Indus Water Treaty 1960, post-Pahalgam massacre and Operation Sindoor, the reversal of the suspension of the treaty looks politically improbable fearing an outrage in India. The infrastructure plans for diverting Indus river tributaries to water-deficient regions of Jammu-Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan are under implementation. The intervention by any country or the World Bank is ruled out as they have no stakes, and the pressure tactics of the 1960s will not work. But Pakistan is itself responsible for this suspension. Until now, its leaders and Ministers had been threatening India on the Indus and its tributaries in a violent tone, but in vain. Pakistan has discriminated on water against certain states and on budgeting against Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa besides oppressive rules. Its allies in the past and present had only empowered it with arms and ammunition, and army bases for their strategic gains, eyeing India. But Pakistan chose to play their tunes instead of strengthening itself with its most friendly neighbour, India, whose support for its sustenance economically and geographically was not just immensely invaluable but indispensable.

Most significantly, the partition itself was unviable, as it proves now beyond doubt, and the calls from PoJK across the border resonate it. Such disruptive and secessionist political scenarios also look irreversible till their army supersedes the elected Governments. Pakistan still fails to see its future and seeks compensation in the name of grants and aids from the IMF, World Bank, and other countries, which comes at a heavy cost. The IWT is a more potential factor for Pakistan than any supplies of arms and ammunition. The friends and allies of Pakistan are in fact its worst enemies.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

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

Free food scheme is inherently prone to misuse

As the Government continues to provide free foodgrain to over 800 million people, a closer look reveals troubling patterns of misuse, policy distortion, and an urgent need for reform. The question now is not whether food should reach the poor — but how best to do it without enriching the corrupt

FIRST Column

Last year, the Indian Council For Research On International Economic Relations (ICRIER) released a Study titled 'Rationalising Public Distribution System in India' saying there was grain leakage under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) of 20 million tons entailing an estimated annual fiscal cost of around ₹70,000 crore to the central exchequer.

Under the PMGKAY, the Union Government asks the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and other state agencies to procure food from the farmers at MSP (minimum support price) and organise its distribution to around 820 million people for free. This is done through a network of fair-price shops under the Public Distribution System (PDS). The entire cost i.e. MSP paid to farmers plus handling and distribution cost (HDC) is reimbursed to the FCI/other state agencies as a subsidy.

While, the PMGKAY has been in force since January 1, 2023, before that, the Centre was giving food to 820 million persons at a heavily subsidised price of ₹2/3/1 per kg for wheat/rice/coarse cereals under the National Food Security Act or NFSA. In addition, since April 2020, it has given 5 kg of food per person per month for "free" to all 820 million beneficiaries under PMGKAY to mitigate the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

From January 1, 2023, they have been getting free food under the PMGKAY. Umpteen ground reports corroborate the substantial leakage of cereals from the PDS. The most recent revelation is from Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly, Agra and Meerut divisions where between 2015 and 2018, the heavily subsidised food at ₹2/3/1 per kg for wheat/rice/coarse cereals under the NFSA was given to 'ineligible persons' thereby depriving the real beneficiaries of their due.

UTTAM GUPTA

Last year, there were reports of a massive scam in West Bengal where rice meant for distribution through the PDS made its way to privately owned rice mills who after re-milling (polishing) sold in the open market raking in a moolah.

The scale of diversion can be gauged from the fact that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) — currently investigating — estimates the proceeds of crime to be ₹9,000-10,000 crore. The leakage has continued for more than a decade.

In 2016, there were reports of the disappearance of a significant amount of food grain stocks from godowns in Punjab raising concerns about potential losses and the financial implications for banks involved in the state's food borrowing program. Under directions from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), banks were forced to make provisions for such losses estimated to be around ₹12,000 crore. This was even as the Central Government didn't allow this loss to be absorbed under the 'food subsidy' budget.

There could be other numerous instances of leaks hidden from public glare. All put together, these could be denting the state exchequer by colossal amounts. So, when we talk of the ever-increasing food subsidy bill of the Centre (over ₹200,000 crore during FY 2024-25), it includes a sizeable portion towards the leak.

Its root cause has to do with how food subsidy is administered. Under the extant system, the subsidy is built into the price which under this Scheme is Zero; even under regular NFSA from 2013 till December 2022, the price was close to zero at ₹2/3/1 per kg.

Compare this with the cost of supply (MSP plus HDC) which is currently around ₹27 per kg for wheat and ₹39 per kg for rice. The availability of a mammoth of around 55 million tons (the quantity distributed through the PDS) in the supply chain with zero price tag is an open invitation to dubious stakeholders to derive unintended gains.

> LAST YEAR, THERE WERE REPORTS OF A MASSIVE SCAM IN WEST BENGAL WHERE RICE MEANT FOR DISTRIBUTION THROUGH THE PDS MADE ITS WAY TO PRIVATELY OWNED RICE MILLS WHO AFTER RE-MILLING (POLISHING) SOLD IN THE OPEN MARKET RAKING IN A MOOLAH

Fundamentally, subsidised food is meant for the poor. The number of poor isn't more than 15-20 per cent of India's population. Yet, the current number of beneficiaries is 59 per cent of the population. Even as per the Shanta Kumar Committee (2015), the beneficiary number under the then NFSA shouldn't be more than 40 per cent. Furthermore, according to Niti Aayog, since 2015, 250 million persons have come out of poverty. This should have led to a corresponding reduction in the number of beneficiaries. But, this was not to be.

Even as millions of 'undeserving' people refuse to exit, the Supreme Court (SC) has directed the Central Government to update the list of beneficiaries to take into account the population during 2021 (the existing list is based on 2011 Census estimates). On this basis, the latter will need to give free food to an additional 100 million. With no deletion, the Scheme will have to cater to 920 million.

The NFSA legislation enacted in 2013 required beneficiaries to pay ₹2/3/1 per kg for wheat/rice/coarse cereals. It froze these rates for three years. Since 2016, there has been no legal bar on increasing the price. Yet, far from increasing, the Modi-Government has reduced the price to zero.

The nexus of corrupt politicians/officials and local ration dealers/millers stares at the 'huge differential' between the zero-priced PDS stuff and the high market price with hawkish eyes.

They can circumvent even the best of technology interventions made by the Modi-Government; those include installing PoS (point of sale machines) at ration shops; digitisation of the supply chain from procurement to distribution; authentication of beneficiaries with their Aadhaar numbers and so on.

On the procurement front, cases have come to light where small/poor farmers are unable to sell their produce to the State agencies — despite registering at the latter's portal. This deprives them of the MSP benefit and guaranteed purchase even as dubious traders acting in collusion with the officials manipulate the system to their advantage.

Leakage can be curbed in fact, eliminated if only the Government gives subsidy directly to the beneficiaries using DBT mode. For instance, taking the cost of supplying wheat ₹27 per kg, it can transfer ₹135 a month (₹1620 per annum) to a beneficiary's account being the eligible subsidy amount for 5 kg of monthly food entitlement under the Scheme.

With this money, she can purchase her needs from the market. The ration shops — currently catering to PDS — will have to recalibrate and work like any normal retailer.

The state agencies need not procure food for distribution to the beneficiaries which under the proposed DBT mechanism, won't be required. The farmers will sell their produce in the same manner as happens for any other commodity in a market-driven framework. The three central farm laws should be revived as that will give them more options to them sell their farm output and fetching a good price.

With no zero-priced food available in the system, there won't be any temptation to divert. Also, there won't be any clamour to corner food (albeit free) in the name of fake beneficiaries.

The Government will be able to better target subsidies by excluding the underserving persons. It will also be spared the 'guaranteed' purchase from farmers and associated high cost and subsidy outgo which it can't avoid under the existing dispensation.

In short, by restructuring the Scheme, the Government has much to gain by way of eliminating misuse and leakages, bringing about huge savings in subsidy, putting in place competitive/efficiently driven markets and ensuring remunerative prices to farmers.

(The writer is a policy analyst. Views expressed are personal)

Indian Rail Reaches Kashmir Heights: A Marvel of Indian Engineering

On a clear June day, draped in marigold flowers and national pride, the Vande Bharat Express began its maiden journey from Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra to Srinagar. Flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the moment marked more than the launch of a high-speed train. It was the culmination of a century-old dream — one forged in steel, vision, and unyielding resolve. The rail unification of Kashmir with the rest of India is that resolve. It is evident on the happy faces of the people travelling on the train. Train to Kashmir with an ultra-modern travel experience runs on the solid foundation of our engineers. Cutting short the travel time, high-speed Vande Bharat trains are running twice a day, six times a week from both sides. They are not only bringing much-needed push for the local economic development in the valley but are also proving to be a boon for the tourists from across the country. The picturesque journey with ultra-modern comforts in such a short time of three hours vis-à-vis road journey of six to seven hours has truly unified hilly Kashmir with the rest of India in all weathers for us. For decades, Kashmir's story has been told through the lens of conflict and remoteness. It's heartening to see it being rewritten in the language of infrastructure — bridges, tunnels, and rail lines threading their way through the mountains. Coming on the eve of 11 years of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's governance at the centre, the special trains and the connecting link are all set to change the destiny of locals in Kashmir.

In its 172-year history of service to the nation, Indian Railways has proudly crossed many important milestones. Generations of dedicated railway men and women have toiled to make connectivity and carriage a daily reality. But to paraphrase a line from an iconic Indian advertisement: Indian Railways doesn't just build tracks-it also knits the fabric of national unity!

From Isolation to Integration

Historically, Kashmir's isolation was more than metaphorical — it was geographic and punishingly real. Tucked high in the Himalayas and routinely cut off by snow for days, the region remained distant not just in reach but even in experience. Roads were often treacherous, air travel limited, and full rail connectivity a mirage long promised.

A British-era proposal for a Kashmir rail link remained on the drawing board for decades, hindered by complex geopolitical challenges. After countless rounds of deliberations, feasibility studies, technical evaluations, and consultations with both domestic and international experts, the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) was officially sanctioned in 1994. While the northern and southern sections progressed steadily and were effectively completed within a decade, the central stretch — from Katra to Banihal — posed an engineering and security challenge of Himalayan proportions. For years, the rail line lingered as two disconnected segments — like outstretched hands reaching across a chasm of mountains. But that chasm symbolised more than just physical terrain. The final push to complete the USBRL project came when the Government declared it a national priority. With firm resolve and cutting-edge technology working in tandem, the project finally saw light at the end of the tunnel — quite literally. As Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw aptly remarked, this was far more than a transportation initiative; it was a nation-building effort.

JAYA VARMA SINHA

Where Steel Defies the Sky

The USBRL project may well be the most ambitious rail initiative since Independence. The 272-km stretch between Udhampur and Baramulla snakes through 40 tunnels and over 900 bridges. And at the centre of it all is the record-breaking Chenab Bridge — the tallest railway bridge in the world, standing 359 metres above the riverbed. This marvel of engineering is capable of withstanding wind speeds up to 260 kmph and tremors of seismic zone V. Beside it stands the Anji Khad Bridge, India's first cable-stayed railway bridge, stretching asymmetrically across a valley, anchored by a single pylon and supported by 96 cables.

Tunnels, including the 11-kilometre-long T-80 (Banihal-Qazigund) tunnel through the Pir Panjal range, have been carved through fragile rock with a mix of dynamite and human grit.

Physical surveys were done on horseback, while drones and satellite imaging provided aerial support. Workers laboured through harsh winters, sudden landslides, and the looming threat of Pak-sponsored terrorist attacks.

Today, more than 190 km of tunnels and thousands of tonnes of steel later, the line stands complete — a feat that combines precision engineering with a certain audacity of vision, linking the Valley to the rest of the nation in a way that is profoundly symbolic.

A Train Called Hope

In many ways, the Vande Bharat Express is not just a train — it is a metaphor. It glides quietly through meadows and valleys, bridging distances both physical and psychological, proclaiming that Kashmir is no longer distant!

It has reduced travel time between Srinagar and Katra to just over three hours, down from nearly six. What was once a treacherous road journey through landslide-prone hairpin bends and unpredictable weather, is now a smooth ride through tunnels and bridges that defy belief. It connects not just cities, but lives. Children in far-off villages are now talking about universities in Jammu and Delhi. Local artisans, apple growers, and carpet weavers now see their goods reaching markets beyond the valley — fresher, faster, further. "Where there were once checkpoints and delays," said a young shopkeeper in Srinagar, "there is now the sound of a train. It feels like we're no longer waiting for the rest of the country to arrive — we are moving with it."

A New Journey, Still Unfolding

This is not to suggest that one train will solve Kashmir's complex problems. Infrastructure cannot erase history or immediately heal wounds —security concerns will need addressing yet. But it can open doors — both literal and symbolic. And it can lay the groundwork for integration that is economic, social, and, ultimately, emotional.

What began as a dream on drawing boards in colonial offices has become a reality on steel rails blending with Himalayan rock. The rail line to Kashmir is the story of a country that refused to be daunted by terrain, terror, or time. From mountain shadows to sunlit stations, a new journey has begun!

(The writer is Ex CEO & Chairman of the Railway Board. Views expressed are personal)

COVID-19 cases rise again: What's driving the surge and how to stay safe

After months of relative calm, COVID-19 cases are once again climbing in India and many parts of the world. As of early June 2025, several states have reported a noticeable uptick in daily infections, with urban clusters seeing a higher positivity rate. While the numbers are not yet alarming compared to previous waves, the increase has reignited public concern and drawn the attention of health authorities. So what is driving this latest rise, how is it different from earlier waves, and what should people do now?

What's Causing the Spike?

Experts attribute the current surge to a mix of factors. One of the key drivers is the emergence of new variants, particularly FLiRT variants such as KP.2 and KP.3, sub-lineages of Omicron that have evolved with mutations helping them partially evade immunity from previous infections or vaccinations. These variants are not necessarily more severe, but they are more transmissible.

Another contributor is seasonal behaviour. Just like flu tends to peak during certain times of the year, COVID-19 now appears to show a seasonal trend, especially with the monsoon approaching in India. People are spending more time indoors, increasing the likelihood of airborne transmission in poorly ventilated spaces.

Increased travel, public gatherings, and a general sense of pandemic fatigue — where people have relaxed masking and distancing norms — also play a role. Many no longer adhere to precautions like wearing masks in crowded spaces or staying home when symptomatic, which adds fuel to the spread.

TUSHAR TAYAL

Are the Symptoms Any Different This Time?

According to doctors, the symptoms seen in the current wave are broadly similar to those in previous Omicron-driven surges. Patients typically report mild to moderate symptoms such as fever, sore throat, nasal congestion, fatigue, and cough. Some also experience body aches, headaches, and gastrointestinal symptoms like nausea or diarrhoea.

What's different, however, is that most cases are milder, especially among vaccinated individuals. Hospitalisations and ICU admissions remain low, with a majority of patients recovering at home. Those most at risk continue to be the elderly, people with weakened immunity, and those with underlying conditions such as diabetes or lung disease.

Despite the lower severity, public health experts caution that a mild virus can still pose a threat at the population level if it spreads unchecked. Even a small percentage of severe cases from a large infected population can strain healthcare resources.

Mortality Rate and Serious Illness

As of now, the mortality rate remains low, though isolated deaths have been reported, often in individuals with comorbidities or advanced age. It's important to note that COVID-19, while less deadly now than in the early pandemic years, still carries a risk of serious complications, including long-term COVID-19 — an umbrella term for persistent symptoms that can affect the lungs, brain, heart, and more.

India reported a few recent deaths in individuals who tested positive for COVID-19, but health officials are cautious about linking the deaths directly to the virus without deeper investigation. COVID likely acted as an aggravating factor in people already unwell from other causes.

Vaccination: Is There a Need for a Booster Now?

India had seen impressive uptake for the first two vaccine doses, but booster coverage remains low, particularly among younger adults. Many took their last dose more than a year ago. While vaccine — induced immunity does wane over time, it still offers substantial protection against severe disease.

Globally, updated vaccines targeting newer variants are being developed, but in India, the availability of such formulations is still limited. Current vaccines — primarily Covishield and Covaxin — do still offer partial protection. At this point, experts are not recommending universal re-vaccination, but those who are elderly, immunocompromised, or have underlying illnesses may benefit from a booster in consultation with their doctors and in accordance with Government guidelines. The concept of herd immunity also needs to be revisited. With the virus evolving and immunity waning, the population's collective defence is not as robust as once assumed. Hence, periodic vaccination or updated boosters may become a seasonal norm much like the flu shot in the future.

Should We Be Worried?

This is not a situation that calls for panic, but complacency is also dangerous. The rise in cases is a reminder that COVID-19 has not disappeared. Instead, it's transitioning into an endemic pattern — present in the population at lower, fluctuating levels. So far, no alarming red flags have been raised. However, given India's large and dense population, authorities remain cautious and are urging people to report symptoms and get tested if necessary.

What Precautions Should People Take?

The tools to stay safe remain the same, and they are simple but effective: Wear a mask in crowded indoor spaces or when visiting healthcare settings.

Wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your face unnecessarily. Do not ignore symptoms like persistent fever, chest discomfort, or shortness of breath — seek medical help early. Community awareness campaigns must be revived to prevent the false sense of safety that can lead to sudden spikes.

(The writer is consultant at CK Birla Hospital and is a seasoned internal medicine specialist. Views expressed are personal)

Jaishankar meets EU chief in Belgium

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Brussels

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday met European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen here and praised her "strong condemnation" of the Pahalgam attack and solidarity in combating terrorism. Jaishankar called on the top EU leader during his visit to Belgium and Luxembourg. "Pleased to call on @EU_Commission President @vonderleyen this morning. Welcomed her strong condemnation of terrorist attack in Pahalgam and solidarity in combatting terrorism," he said in an X post.

The April 22 Pahalgam terror attack claimed 26 lives, following which tensions between India and Pakistan escalated. India carried out precision strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on May 7. During the meeting, Jaishankar and von der Leyen also discussed efforts that are underway to deepen the India-EU partnership. "Agreed on the potential benefits of stronger cooperation in trade, technology, connectivity and security for both our regions," Jaishankar added.

Von der Leyen also took to X after the meeting and said, "The EU-India strategic partnership is getting stronger."

"We're working on a Strategic Agenda based on growth with an ambitious FTA, tech & innovation and security & defence. I look forward to adopting it with @narendramodi at our next Summit," she said.

In June 2022, India and the 27-nation bloc resumed negotiations for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, an investment protection agreement and a pact on Geographical Indications after a gap of over eight years.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar interacting with members of the Indian community in Belgium and Luxembourg PTI

The negotiations stalled in 2013 due to differences over the level of opening up of the markets. On February 28, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission chief agreed to seal the much-awaited free trade deal by the end of this year. Jaishankar met members of the European Parliament on Monday along with the Indian Ambassador to the EU, Belgium and Luxembourg, Saurabh Kumar.

In a post on X, he said it was "good to meet" David McAllister, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, Sandro Gozi, Chair of the Delegation to EU-UK Parliamentary Assembly, and Greek parliamentarian Nikos Papandreou.

The meetings followed an interaction with members of the Indian community on Monday evening.

Earlier in the day, Jaishankar held wide-ranging discussions with his Belgium counterpart Maxime Prevot on deepening bilateral cooperation, including in trade, investment, technology, defence and security, clean energy and mobility.

During his week-long tour of Europe, Jaishankar will also hold talks with leaders of the European Union and France to boost bilateral ties and reaffirm India's policy of zero-tolerance against terrorism.

US-China trade talks in London enter second day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
London

The US and China are holding a second day of talks on Tuesday in London aimed at easing their trade dispute, after President Donald Trump said China is "not easy" but the US was "doing well" at the negotiations.

A Chinese delegation led by Vice Premier He Lifeng met US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Trade Representative Jamieson Greer for several hours on Monday at Lancaster House, an ornate 200-year-old mansion near Buckingham Palace.

Wang Wentao, China's commerce minister, and trade negotiator Li Chenggang are also in Beijing's delegation.

Asked late on Monday how the negotiations were going, Trump told reporters: "We are doing well with China. China's not easy."

The two sides are trying to build on negotiations in Geneva last month that agreed to a 90-day suspension of most of the 100 per cent-plus tariffs they had imposed on each other in an escalating trade war that had sparked fears of recession.

Since the Geneva talks, the US and China have exchanged angry words over advanced semiconductors that power artificial intelligence, visas for Chinese students at American universities and " rare earth " minerals that are vital to carmakers and other industries.

Trump spoke at length with Chinese leader Xi Jinping by phone last Thursday in an attempt to put relations back on track. Trump announced on social media the following day that the trade talks would resume in London.

China, the world's biggest producer of rare earths, has signaled it may ease export restrictions it placed on the elements in April, alarming automakers around the world who rely on them.

Japanese warship arrives in Australia as Tokyo bids for defence deal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Newcastle (Australia)

A state-of-the-art Japanese warship has arrived in Australia as part of a high-stakes campaign to secure a $6.5 billion contract to build the country's next fleet of general-purpose frigates.

The JS Yahagi, a Mogami-class stealth frigate from Japan's Maritime Self-Defence Force, is docked in Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory in what appears a symbolic and strategic move aimed at strengthening defense ties with Australia and showcasing Japanese naval technology.

Japan's bid, led by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, was short-listed in November for the Royal Australian Navy's SEA 3000 frigate project and is competing against Germany's MEKO A-200 offered by Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems.

The Australian Government is expected to select a preferred design later this year, with construction for 11 new vessels slated to begin the following year.

Japan would jointly develop and produce the frigates for the Australian navy.

Bolstering defence industry

As part of its military buildup, Japan is pushing to strengthen its largely domestic defence industry by participating in joint development, including a next-generation fighter jet with Britain and Italy, and promoting foreign sales like the Mogami-class ships.

In a sign of its commitment and heavy investment Japan has pledged to prioritise the RAN's order over its own naval procurement.

The project not only serves to further deepen cooperation between Japan and Australia but also to enhance Japan's warship capabilities, Defense Minister General Nakatani has said. The Japanese Mogami-class design boasts advanced combat systems, anti-submarine and anti-air warfare capabilities, and mine countermeasure operations — all operated by a lean crew of around 90, helping to address ongoing recruitment challenges in the Australian Navy.

The vessel's commanding officer, Tamura Masayoshi, said the ship's smaller crew was an aim of the Mogami-class ship.

"The Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force thought we need stealth, and less people, and a little bit smaller ship," Masayoshi told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Closer military ties

The JS Yahagi's visit to Darwin comes amid intensifying strategic cooperation between Canberra and Tokyo, both of which have emphasised the importance of maritime safety and security of sea lanes. The frigate's arrival is also seen as a gesture of Japan's growing role in regional security and its desire to align more closely with key partners like Australia.

Trump sends Marines, more National Guard to LA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Los Angeles

Another 2,000 National Guard troops along with 700 Marines are headed to Los Angeles on orders from President Donald Trump, escalating a military presence local officials and Governor Gavin Newsom don't want and the police chief says creates logistical challenges for safely handling protests.

An initial 2,000 Guard troops ordered by Trump started arriving on Sunday, which saw the most violence during three days of protests driven by anger over Trump's stepped-up enforcement of immigration laws that critics say are breaking apart migrant families.

Monday's demonstrations were far less raucous, with thousands peacefully attending a rally at City Hall and hundreds protesting outside a federal complex that includes a detention centre where some immigrants are being held following workplace raids across the city. Trump has described Los Angeles in dire terms that Mayor Karen Bass and Newsom say are nowhere close to the truth.

Protesters confront Los Angeles police department personnel in riot gear in downtown Los Angeles on Monday PTI

They say he is putting public safety at risk by adding military personnel even though police say they don't need the help.

Los Angeles Police Chief Jim McDonnell said in a statement he was confident in the police department's ability to handle large-scale demonstrations and that the Marines' arrival without coordinating with the police department would present a "significant logistical and operational challenge" for them. Newsom called the deployments reckless and "disrespectful to our troops" in a post on the social platform X.

"This isn't about public safety," Newsom said. "It's about stroking a dangerous President's ego." The protests began Friday after federal immigration authorities arrested more than 40 people across the city. The smell of smoke hung in the air downtown Monday, one day after crowds blocked a major freeway and set self-driving cars on fire as police responded with tear gas, rubber bullets and flash-bang grenades.

Additional protests against immigration raids continued into the evening on Monday in several other cities including San Francisco and Santa Ana, California, and Dallas and Austin, Texas.

California pushes back against troops

California Attorney General Rob Bonta filed a lawsuit over the use of National Guard troops following the first deployment, telling reporters that Trump had "trampled" the State's sovereignty.

"We don't take lightly to the president abusing his authority and unlawfully mobilising California National Guard troops," Bonta said.

He sought a court order declaring Trump's use of the Guard unlawful and asking for a restraining order to halt the deployment.

Trump said the city would have been "completely obliterated" if he had not deployed the Guard.

US officials said the Marines were being deployed to protect federal property and personnel, including immigration agents. A convoy of 10 to 15 buses with blacked-out windows and escorted by sheriff's vehicles, left the base at Twentynine Palms in the desert east of Los Angeles late on Monday and travelled along Interstate 10 toward the city.

Ten dead in Austria school shooting

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Vienna

At least 10 people were killed in a shooting at a school in the Austrian city of Graz on Tuesday, and the suspected perpetrator also died, the city's mayor said.

Mayor Elke Kahr described the events as a "terrible tragedy," the Austria Press Agency reported. It added that the fatalities were seven students and one adult. Kahr said that many people were taken to hospitals with injuries.

Police said they believe the assailant acted alone.

Special forces were among those sent to the BORG Dreierschützengasse high school, about a kilometre from Graz's historic centre, after a call at 10 am. At 11.30 am, police wrote on social network X that the school had been evacuated and everyone had been taken to a safe meeting point. They wrote that the situation was "secured" and there is no longer believed to be any danger.

Ambulances, paramedics outside the school where the shooting took place

Police deployed in large numbers, with police and other emergency vehicles guarding the area around the school and with at least one police helicopter flying above the area, according to photos published by the regional newspaper Kleine Zeitung. Graz, Austria's second-biggest city, is located in the southeast of the country and has about 300,000 inhabitants. Austrian Chancellor Christian Stocker, who is going to Graz, said the shooting "is a national tragedy that deeply shocks our whole country."

"There are no words for the pain and grief that all of us — the whole of Austria — feel now," he wrote in a statement posted on X.

President Alexander Van der Bellen said that "this horror cannot be captured in words."

"These were young people who had their whole lives ahead of them. A teacher who accompanied them on their way," he said. Interior Minister Gerhard Karner was also on his way to Graz.

"Schools are symbols for youth, hope and the future," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen wrote on X.

Indian students at Harvard navigate uncertainties

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New York

Indian students at Harvard say they are navigating a "rollercoaster" of uncertainty and anxiety amid the Trump administration's relentless battle against the university while also dealing with a dearth of job opportunities.

"It's just been a time of not quite knowing what to do, whether we should make our moves back home, or whether we should try and figure something out here," an Indian student, who graduated last month from the Harvard Kennedy School, said, not wishing to be identified.

Indian students at Harvard, speaking to media on condition of anonymity, shared their concerns and experiences of the last few months during which the prestigious university has seen relentless attacks by the Trump administration.

The administration's actions include a freeze of $2.2 billion in grants, revocation of the university's eligibility to enrol international students and suspension of entry of foreign nationals seeking to study or participate in exchange programmes at Harvard.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has said that Harvard's leadership has created an "unsafe campus environment by permitting anti-American, pro-terrorist agitators to harass and physically assault individuals, including many Jewish students, and otherwise obstruct its once-venerable learning environment."

US President Donald Trump, in a proclamation last week, said Harvard had refused recent requests of the DHS for information about foreign students' "known illegal activity," "known dangerous and violent activity," "known threats to other students or university personnel," and other related data.

Another Indian student, who graduated from the Harvard Graduate School of Design after completing a two-year course, said students come to American institutions with plans of finishing their studies and then finding jobs to work for a few years in the US. But she described the situation of the past few months as being a "rollercoaster."

"With all the uncertainty, I can say that a lot of people who are hiring were generally hesitant of international students, and maybe the Harvard tag helped earlier, but that's not the same right now at this particular moment," she said.

The student from Harvard Kennedy School pointed out that she is in a "desperate job search" at the moment, noting how difficult it is to get a job in the current environment.

"Employers have just stopped entertaining any international students, forget international students from Harvard, because our visa statuses are so volatile that who would want to employ us right now." She said she doesn't know whether she will be going back to India, staying back or heading to a different country altogether.

"That uncertainty is a lot in a country like America where you're paying" huge amounts of money in rent. She added that she thinks this is a short-term turbulence and things will settle down in the future.

"But while we're caught in the crossfire, I think it's been difficult to plan, and so it's stressful for sure." The students also pointed out that funding cuts initiated by the Trump administration are impacting jobs in the policy space, climate change, healthcare and public health sectors.

Russia launches another large-scale drone, missile attack on Ukraine, kills 3, wounds 13

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA KYIV

Russia sent waves of drones and missiles in an attack on two Ukrainian cities early on Tuesday that killed three people and wounded at least 13 others, Ukrainian officials said.

The attack struck the capital, Kyiv, and the southern port city of Odesa. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in an online statement called the attack on Kyiv "one of the biggest" in the war that has raged for over three years, and said that Moscow's forces had fired over 315 drones, mostly Shaheds, and seven missiles at Ukraine overnight.

"Russian missile and Shahed strikes are louder than the efforts of the United States and others around the world to force Russia into peace," Zelenskyy wrote, urging "concrete action" from the US and Europe in response to the attack. A maternity hospital and residential buildings in the centre of the southern port city of Odesa were damaged in the attack, regional head Oleh Kiper said. Two people were killed and nine injured in the city, according to a statement from the regional prosecutor's office.

An additional victim was found in Kyiv's Obolon district, regional head Tymur Tkachenko wrote on Telegram.

"Russian strikes are once again hitting not military targets but the lives of ordinary people. This once again shows the true nature of what we are dealing with," Tkachenko said.

Attacks continue despite talks

The fresh attacks came a day after Moscow launched almost 500 drones at Ukraine in the biggest overnight drone bombardment in the three-year war. Ukrainian and Western officials have been anticipating a Russian response to Ukraine's audacious June 1 drone attack on distant Russian air bases.

Russia has been launching a record-breaking number of drones and missiles targeting Ukraine in recent days, despite both sides trading memoranda during direct peace talks in Istanbul on June 2 that set out conditions for a potential ceasefire.

However, the inclusion of clauses that both sides see as nonstarters make any quick deal unlikely, and a ceasefire, long sought by Kyiv, remains elusive. The only tangible outcome of the talks has been in the exchange of prisoners of war, with a swap starting on Monday to release soldiers aged between 18 and 25.

A similar exchange was also announced for the bodies of fallen soldiers held by both sides, although no schedule for that has been released.

Smoke covers the sky following Russia's massive missile and drone attack in Kyiv, Ukraine on Tuesday PTI

Asked to comment on the exchange of bodies with Ukraine, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that it has remained unclear when it could take place and how many bodies of Russian soldiers Ukraine was going to hand over. He again accused Kyiv of dragging its feet on the exchange.

"There is one unarguable fact, we have had trucks with bodies standing ready for it on the border for several days," he said in a call with reporters.

Kyiv residents seek shelter

Plumes of smoke were visible in Kyiv as air defence forces worked to shoot down drones and missiles on Tuesday morning. Meanwhile, Ukrainian residents took shelter and slept in metro stations during the hours-long attack. Nina Nosivets, 32, and her 8-month-old son, Levko, were among them.

"I just try not to think about all this, silently curled up like a mouse, wait until it all passes, the attacks. Distract the child somehow because its probably the hardest thing for him to bear," she said. Krystyna Semak, a 37-year-old Kyiv resident, said the explosions frightened her and she ran to the metro at 2 am With her rug.

Russia has been launching a record-breaking number of drones and missiles targeting Ukraine while the two countries continue to swap prisoners of war, the only tangible outcome of recent direct peace talks held in Istanbul. A ceasefire, long sought by Kyiv, remains elusive.

In Kyiv, fires broke out in at least four districts after debris from shot down drones fell on the roofs of residential buildings and warehouses, according to the Kyiv City Military Administration. Vasyl Pesenko, 25, stood in his kitchen, damaged in the attack.

"I was lying in bed, as always hoping that these Shaheds (drones) would fly past me, and I heard that Shahed (that hit the house)," he said. "I thought that it would fly away, but it flew closer and closer and everything blew away."

Indian student in handcuffs: 'Crying, treated like criminal' in US

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New York

Indian-American social entrepreneur, who filmed a video of a young Indian man being "handcuffed, crying and treated like a criminal" at a US airport, has said that he felt "helpless and heartbroken" over what he described as a "human tragedy."

The video, posted on social media by Kunal Jain, showed the Indian man handcuffed and pinned to the ground by 2-3 Port Port Authority Police officers at Newark Liberty International Airport.

In a series of posts on X, Jain said that the Indian Embassy in the US needs to help the man.

"I witnessed a young Indian student being deported from Newark Airport last night — handcuffed, crying, treated like a criminal. He came chasing dreams, not causing harm. As an NRI, I felt helpless and heartbroken. This is a human tragedy," Jain posted on X on Sunday.

He also tagged the Embassy of India in the post.

"This poor guy was speaking in Haryanvi language. I could recognise his accent where he was saying "Main pagal nahi hun, ye log mujhe pagal sabit karne me lage huye hain" (I'm not insane. These people are trying to prove that I'm insane)," Jain said.

Jain added "This poor kid's parent won't know what's happening to him. @IndianEmbassyUS @DrSJaishankar he was to be boarded last night in the same flight with me but he never got boarded. Someone needs to find out what's going on with him at New Jersey authorities. I found him disoriented."

His posts went viral, with hundreds of people re-posting and commenting on them.

The Consulate General of India here said it is in touch with local authorities after the video surfaced online.

"We have come across social media posts claiming that an Indian national is facing difficulties at Newark Liberty International Airport. We are in touch with local authorities in this regard," the Indian Consulate said in a post on X.

"The Consulate remains ever committed to the welfare of Indian Nationals," it said.

Jain said in a post that these young people arrive in the US and for some reason, they are unable to explain the purpose of their visit to the immigration authorities and are sent back on the same day tied up like criminals. Jain claimed that every day there are 3-4 such cases that are coming to light.

Five Qatar-based Indian nationals die in Kenya accident

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Doha

At least five Indian nationals residing in Qatar, who were visiting Kenya, have died after their bus met with an accident.

The Indian Embassy in Qatar said a group of 28 Indians was visiting Kenya where their bus met with an accident on Monday.

"As per available information, 5 Indian nationals have lost their lives in the accident. Officials from HCI Nairobi are on the ground and extending all help," the embassy posted on X.

The Gulf Times newspaper reported that the bus they were travelling in got out of control and fell into a gorge in the north eastern county of Nyandarua.

The identity of the deceased is yet to be verified, the newspaper said.

The Indian mission in another post said it is also in touch with the Indian Cultural Centre (ICC), Indian Community Benevolent Forum (ICBF) and other community groups in Doha.

"We extend sincere condolences to the families and friends of those who have unfortunately passed away," it added. The mission also provided a helpline number for any queries or assistance.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Nandita Pal Rudra Paul W/o No.14869034W Sep Rakesh Rudra Paul, R/o- Vill- Devinagar, PO & PS- Ranir Bazar, Dist- West Tripura, Tripura- 799035, have changed my name from Nandita Pal Rudra Paul to Nandita Pal, vide affidavit dated 10/05/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(2201)C

I, A Dalaiya, Father of IC-74895Y Lt Col A Nagesh Rao, R/o- Kirtipur, Lohidabgm, Ladigam, Golanthara, Ganjam, Odisha- 760003, have changed my name from A Dalaiya to A Daleya, vide affidavit dated 10/06/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(2202)C

I, No.14840931K Hav Vitkar Satish Shivaji, R/o- B Wing F-104, Sr. No. 495, Rahee Kasturi, PO- Charoli BK, Pune, Maharashtra- 412105, have changed my son's name from Aarya to Arya Satish Vitkar, vide affidavit dated 10/06/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(2203)C

I, Mandabaz Sobale M/o- No.15581223K Hav Sobale Ajit Ganpat, R/o- GREF Centre Dighi Camp, Pune- 411015, have changed my name from Mandabaz Sobale to Mandabai Ganpat Sobale with my correct DOB as 01/06/1959, vide affidavit dated 10/06/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(2204)C

I, Sona Mati Davi, Mother of No.15704686H Nk Ram Jee Prasad, R/o- Gram/PO- Moap Kala, Dist- Bhojpur, Bihar- 802222, have changed my name from Sona Mati Davi to Sonamati Devi vide affidavit dated 10/06/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(2205)C

I, Sunita Satish Vitkar W/o- No.14840931K Hav Vitkar Satish Shivaji, R/o- B Wing F-104, Sr. No. 495, Rahee Kasturi, PO- Charoli BK, Pune, Maharashtra- 412105, have changed my name from Sunita Satesh Vitkar to Sunita Satish Vitkar, vide affidavit dated 10/06/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(2206)C

I, Saipatri Kumari, W/o- No.15704686H Nk Ram Jee Prasad, R/o- Gram/PO- Moap Kala, Dist- Bhojpur, Bihar- 802222, have changed my name from Saipatri Kumari to Saipatri Devi vide affidavit dated 10/06/2025 before Notary Public Delhi.
PD(2207)C

I, Bhoomi D/o Ajay Kumar R/o BK-56, West Shalimar Bagh, Delhi-110088 have changed my name from Bhoomi to Bhoomi Khandelwal for all purposes.
PD(2208)C

I, Aruna W/o Ajay Kumar R/o BK-59, West Shalimar Bagh, Delhi-110088 have changed my name from Aruna to Aruna Khandelwal for all purposes.
PD(2209)C

I, Rinku Singh wife of Deepak Kumar R/O, B-5/213 First Floor Rohini Sector-11, Delhi-110085, Aadhar No. 7543 3086 4651, have change my Name to RINKU KUMARI SINGH.
PD(2210)C

Inflow into equity MFs hits 13-month low at ₹19,000 crore

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Inflow in equity mutual funds slumped to its lowest level in 13 months to ₹19,013 crore in May, with large-cap, mid-cap and small-cap funds experiencing lowered inflows, primarily triggered by profit booking by investors.

This also marks the fifth consecutive month of decline in inflow in equity funds and nearly 22 per cent drop in net inflow on a month-on-month basis from ₹24,269 crore registered in April, according to data released by the Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi) on Tuesday.

Despite the deceleration, May marked the 51st consecutive month of positive flows into equity-oriented schemes, reflecting sustained investor confidence.

Also, systematic investment plan (SIP) contributions remained robust, registering a record ₹26,688 crore in inflows in May, higher than Rs 26,632 crore in the preceding month.

Overall, the mutual fund industry experienced an infusion of over ₹29,000 crore in May compared to ₹2.77 lakh crore in the preceding month.

The inflow has lifted the industry's assets under management to a record ₹72.2 lakh crore as of May from Rs 70 lakh crore in April-end.

According to the data, equity-oriented mutual funds saw an inflow of ₹19,013 crore in May, making it the lowest level since April 2024, when such funds experienced an inflow of ₹18,917 crore.

Such funds witnessed an inflow of ₹24,269 crore in April, ₹25,082 crore in March, ₹29,303 crore in February, ₹39,688 crore in January, and ₹41,156 crore in December.

"The slowdown in net equity inflows can be attributed to several factors, including a rise in equity market performance in May 2025, and a potential phase of consolidation or profit booking by investors.

"Additionally, rising global volatility — triggered by geopolitical tensions following India's launch of Operation Sindoor against Pakistan and ongoing concerns over global inflation — fuelled a risk-off sentiment among certain investors," ITI Mutual Fund CEO Jatinder Pal Singh said.

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director, Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, also attributed the slowdown in equity inflows to a mix of factors — a less buoyant equity market in May compared to April, concerns around global economic headwinds, and a possible consolidation phase or profit booking in the domestic equities following sharp rallies in the previous months and stretched valuations.

While the equity markets continued their upward momentum in May, gains were relatively subdued.

Within the equity fund categories, Flexi Cap Funds recorded the highest inflows in May, attracting ₹3,841 crore.

However, equity-linked saving schemes saw an outflow of ₹678 crore. Besides, value funds and dividend yield funds experienced an outflow of ₹92 crore and ₹21 crore, respectively.

Large-cap funds witnessed inflows of ₹1,250 crore in May, a decline from ₹2,671 crore in April.

Mid-cap funds saw inflows reducing to ₹2,808 crore in May, compared to ₹3,313 crore in the previous month. Similarly, small-cap funds attracted ₹3,214 crore in May, down from ₹3,999 crore in April.

Apart from equities, gold exchange traded funds (ETFs) recorded a net inflow of ₹292 crore in May, an improvement from the marginal outflow of nearly ₹6 crore in April.

'Hiring outlook steady for upcoming quarter'

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Corporate India has a steady hiring outlook for the next three months, driven by strong growth in the private services sector and hopes of economic benefits stemming from shifts in global trade dynamics, a report said on Tuesday.

According to the latest ManpowerGroup Employment Outlook Survey, employers reported a Net Employment Outlook (NEO) of 42 per cent — the second highest outlook globally and emerging as a key player in the global employment landscape.

The NEO is calculated by subtracting the percentage of employers who anticipate reductions in staffing levels from those who plan to hire.

"As we enter the third quarter of 2025, India's employment Outlook remains robust, with a NEO of 42 per cent — among the highest globally. Despite a slight dip from the previous quarter, the 12-point year-on-year gain highlights sustained employer confidence and growth momentum in the labour market," said Sandeep Gulati, Managing Director, ManpowerGroup India and Middle East.

As per the survey findings, the majority of employers - 54 per cent anticipate an increase in hiring, 32 per cent expect to maintain current staffing levels, 12 per cent anticipate a decrease, and 2 per cent are unsure.

Globally, the UAE reported the strongest NEO of 48 per cent, followed by India (42 per cent) and Costa Rica (41 per cent) in the second and third position, respectively.

The other countries in the top five most bullish hiring outlook include — Brazil with 33 per cent at the fourth position and the Netherlands with 30 per cent at the 5th rank.

"This optimism is driven by strong hiring intent in sectors such as Information Technology, Energy & Utilities, and Financial Services, where companies are actively expanding and accelerating digital transformation.

"Even amid global geopolitical uncertainty and trade disruptions, Indian employers are staying proactive — 82 per cent report increased investment in automation, while 67 per cent are evolving their workforce strategies to meet changing skill demands," Gulati said.

No declining trend in FDI into India: Goyal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bern

There is no declining trend in Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) into India, though periodic fluctuations may occur sometimes due to global interest rate changes, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said.

He added India is seeing renewed overseas inflows and the Government is open to suggestions and will adopt new measures to promote FDI in the country.

Over the last eleven financial years (2014-25), India attracted FDI worth $ 748.78 billion, an increase of 143 per cent over the previous eleven years (2003-14), which saw $ 308.38 billion in inflows.

Additionally, the number of source countries for FDI increased from 89 in 2013-14 to 112 in 2024-25, underscoring India's growing global appeal as an investment destination.

In 2024-25, India received a total FDI of $81 billion, which is the highest in the last three years, he said.

Government considering scheme to help MSME exporters: Goyal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bern

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal during an interaction with with Indian business delegates in Switzerland PTI

The Government is considering formulating a scheme to fund exporters, especially MSMEs, in registering new products in new markets with an aim to boost the country's outbound shipments, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has said.

He added that the entire cost of such registration will be funded by the Government.

"I am thinking of coming out with a scheme that any MSME that needs to spend any amount of money to register their products any where in the world, particularly for new products, new markets, new exporters, the Government will fund the whole cost," Goyal said here on June 9 while addressing Indian business delegation.

The minister is here on an official visit to hold meetings with Swiss leaders and companies to boost trade and investments between the two countries. This scheme is expected to be part of the Export Promotion Mission (EPM), which was announced in the Budget.

It may include 12 components, including easy credit schemes for MSMEs, e-commerce exporters, facilitation of overseas warehousing, and global branding initiatives, to tap emerging export opportunities and strengthen trade tools for small businesses.

The EPM is divided into two broad categories — Providing Trade Finance Support (NIRYAT PROTSAHAN) and Driving International Holistic Market Access (NIRYAT DISHA) Initiative. The country's total exports of goods and services have increased to $ 825 billion in 2024-25 from $ 778 billion in the previous fiscal. MSMEs account for over 40 per cent of the country's exports.

Further, he urged the Indian industry to focus on exporting value-added goods and run campaigns for brand building and marketing.

"I would urge you to come with an idea for the Government to support (exporters) in brand building, in getting registrations around the world.

"We do a lot of rice exports, can we look at how to value add those exports. We need to brand the products, can we run campaigns, can we run joint campaigns to market Indian rice or grown in India rice," he suggested.

To increase the area of exhibition in the country, the minister informed that the second phase of construction at Bharat Madapam has been authorised.

SEBI notice to OPG Securities in NSE co-location case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

SEBI has sent notices to stock broker OPG Securities and its directors asking them to pay ₹5.35 crore, in a case of unfair access to secondary market servers in connection with the NSE co-location issue, and warned of attachment of assets as well as bank accounts if they fail to make the payment within 15 days.

The demand notices came after the entities failed to pay the fine imposed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) in April 2025.

In three separate recovery notices issued on Monday, the regulator directed OPG Securities and its directors — Sanjay Gupta, Sangeeta Gupta, and Om Prakash Gupta — to pay dues totalling ₹5.35 crore within 15 days. This included a penalty amount and an interest.

In the event of non-payment of dues, the market regulator said it will recover the amount by attaching and selling their moveable and immovable properties. Besides, they face attachment of bank accounts and arrest.

In its order passed in April, SEBI levied a fine of ₹5 crore on OPG Securities and its directors jointly for engaging in unfair trade practices.

Additionally, SEBI imposed a fine of ₹10 lakh each on OPG Securities and Sanjay Gupta for non-compliance with the regulator's code of conduct and hampering the investigation, respectively.

"Noticee 1 (OPG Securities) gained an unfair advantage by repeatedly accessing the Secondary POP Server, thereby making unlawful gain. Regardless of the quantum of such unlawful gain, it is evident that the manner in which Noticee 1 connected to the secondary server constituted an unfair practice, which was recurrent in nature. This amounts to a serious violation," SEBI had stated.

Furthermore, the regulator had highlighted that OPG Securities failed to uphold standards of integrity, due skill, care, and diligence in its business operations, while also neglecting to ensure compliance with statutory requirements.

Since the Guptas were directors of OPG Securities during the period of violation, they were deemed vicariously liable for the company's actions, it had added.

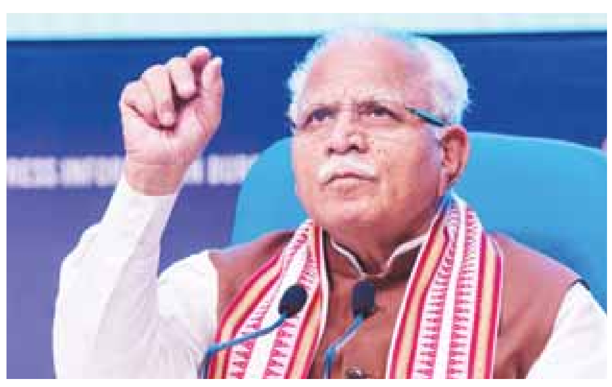
India emerging as energy surplus nation: Manohar Lal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Union Power Minister Manohar Lal on Tuesday said there has been no shortage of electricity in the county in the past two months and India is emerging as an energy surplus nation.

Addressing a press conference, the minister said in the fiscal year 2024-25, power deficit was 0.1 per cent.

Noting that power demand depends on weather conditions, he said India's peak power demand touched 241 GW (on June 9) during this summer season, while last year peak power demand was at record high of 250 GW on May 30, 2025.



Union Minister of Power Manohar Lal Khattar addresses a press conference regarding the achievements of the Ministry of Power over the past 11 years of the NDA Government, in New Delhi PTI

He also noted that peak power demand can touch 270 GW during this summer season. The peak power demand has been lower than the projected 270 GW so far, as unseasonal rains in May reduced the use of cooling appliances like desert coolers and air conditioners.

According to the Indian Meteorological Department, Monsoon hit Kerala coast on May 24, eight days ahead of schedule.

Power consumption in India dipped over 4 per cent to 148.71 billion units in May 2025, compared to the same month a year ago, due to the early arrival of the monsoon and unseasonal rains.

Official data show that power consumption in May 2024 was 155.15 billion units.

The peak day for power demand — the highest demand for a day — in May 2025 was recorded at 231 gigawatt, significantly lower than the 250 gigawatt recorded in May 2024, which touched an all-time high.

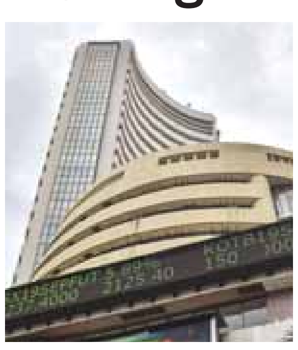
According to IMD, India is expected to experience hotter-than-usual temperatures from April to June, with more heatwave days in Central and Eastern India and the Northwestern plains.

Minimum temperatures will be higher than usual across most of the country, except for a few places in the Northwest and the Northeast, where temperatures may be normal or slightly below normal, the IMD said.

Heatwaves in the country also arrived as early as February 27-28 this year, compared to the first heatwave experienced in 2024 on April 5.

Sensex snaps 4-day rally, Nifty unchanged

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai



Benchmark BSE Sensex closed lower by 53 points in a volatile trade on Tuesday, snapping its four-day winning run due to profit-taking in banking and energy shares.

The 30-share Sensex declined by 53.49 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 82,391.72 with 14 of its constituents closing lower, 15 with gains and one remaining unchanged.

The index opened higher and climbed further 235.58 points or 0.28 per cent to 82,680.79 in morning trade. However, the barometer pared gains later due to profit-taking in index major Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank. It dropped by 204.81 points or 0.24 per cent to hit a low of 82,240.40 during the day. The 50-share NSE Nifty eked out gains of 1.05 points to end at 25,104.25, marking its fifth straight day of gains on the back of gains in IT and pharma shares.

In the past four days, the Nifty has jumped over 560 points or 2.27 per cent while the Sensex rallied 1,707.7 points or 2.11 per cent.

"Markets traded in a lacklustre manner and ended almost unchanged, taking a breather after the recent surge. Participants remain slightly cautious amid mixed global cues, and the divergent trend among index heavyweights continues to weigh on overall sentiment," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Among Sensex firms, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finance, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank, Maruti, Reliance Industries, HDFC Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra declined.

Tech Mahindra, Tata Motors, Infosys, HCL Tech, IndusInd Bank and UltraTech Cement were among the gainers.

Investors await the outcome of the US-China trade talks being held in London.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.33 per cent and midcap index went up 0.04 per cent. Among sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT surged the most by 1.63 per cent, followed by IT (1.58 per cent), utilities (1.11 per cent), power (0.95 per cent), teck (0.87 per cent), healthcare (0.45 per cent) and commodities (0.40 per cent).

Realty dropped 1.18 per cent, telecommunication (0.55 per cent), financial services (0.46 per cent), services (0.21 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.16 per cent).

Rare earth magnet supply disruption can impact vehicle production: Report

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

A disruption in rare earth magnet supplies lasting beyond a month can impact production of passenger vehicles, including electric models, weighing on the domestic automobile industry's growth momentum, a report on Tuesday said. Rare earth magnets, low in cost but critical in function, could emerge as a key supply-side risk for India's automotive sector if China's export restrictions and delays in shipment clearances persist, Crisil Ratings said in a statement.

"The supply squeeze comes just as the auto sector is preparing for aggressive EV rollouts. Over a dozen new electric models are planned for launch, most built on PMSM platforms," Crisil Ratings Senior Director Anuj Sethi said.

While most automakers currently have 4-6 weeks of inventory, prolonged delays could start affecting vehicle production, with EV models facing deferrals or rescheduling from July 2025, he added.

A broader impact on two-wheelers and ICE PVs may follow if the supply bottlenecks persist for an extended period, Sethi said.

"The shortage of rare earth magnets is forcing automakers to reassess supply-chain strategies. Despite contributing less than 5 per cent of a vehicle's cost, these magnets are indispensable for EV motors and electric steering systems," said Crisil Ratings Director Poonam Upadhyay. Automakers are actively engaging with alternative suppliers in countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan, Australia, and the US, while also optimising existing inventories, she noted.

"With applications across EVs and ICE vehicles, a prolonged supply squeeze could disrupt production of PVs and 2Ws, making this low-cost component a potential high-impact bottleneck for the sector," she said.

Traditional fishermen's trade in Goa gets a boost during rainy season

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Panaji

Traditional fishermen in Goa are seeing a surge in demand for their catch, as the coastal State's Government has enforced a seasonal ban on mechanised fishing during the monsoon.

Goa Fisheries Minister Nilkant Halarnkar also said the State Government has been implementing several schemes to help the traditional fishermen, who continue to venture out for fishing using non-mechanised methods like canoes.

The annual ban on fishing with mechanised trawlers came into force on June 1 and will continue till July 31, with the State Government sealing all its seven fishing jetties.

Nauxi and Cacra villages in North Goa near Panaji are among the last hamlets preserving the traditional style of fishing.

Fisherman from Nauxi village, having 40-odd houses, start their day early by 4.30 am to 5 am to venture in the Arabian Sea with their canoes for a catch. They return by 7 am.

Villager Sanjay Pereira told PTI that though fishing with big boats is banned, the fishermen either manually pull the canoe or use eight— horse-power engines.

"During this time, a large number of fish come closer from the deep sea for breeding, due to which the ban is necessary," he said.

Fishermen do not venture in the deep sea owing to the weather warnings, including for cyclonic winds, he noted.

Pereira said the State Government has been helping traditional fishermen the entire year.

TRSL enters wheelset manufacturing business

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kolkata

Titagarh Rail Systems Ltd (TRSL) has entered the forged wheel manufacturing business through a joint venture with Ramkrishna Forgings, aiming to ease the country's ongoing shortage of wheelsets which is crucial for train and coach production, an official said on Tuesday.

The company's Freight Rolling Stock vertical reported a 5.6 per cent jump in consolidated revenue to ₹3,610 crore for FY25, the official said adding that the new vertical aligns with the Centre's push for import substitution and self-reliance under the Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative.

The company stated that its plan to stabilise production at around 950 to 1,000 wagons per month was hampered over the past two quarters due to a shortage of wheelsets. It attributed the issue to supply constraints at the Rail Wheel Factory in Bangalore, the mandated supplier under railway board contracts.

However, the situation is expected to improve from June onwards as production at the factory is likely to normalise, the TRSL official said.

"One of the most significant developments of the year has been our foray into wheel manufacturing. We see this as a national service and a big opportunity. The import dependence must end," Vice Chairman and Managing Director Umesh Chowdhary told PTI.

India has been heavily dependent on imports of forged wheels from countries like China, Ukraine, and Russia. Geopolitical situations like the war in Ukraine, combined with logistical bottlenecks and limited the global supply chain.

There had also been disruptions at the mandated supplier under railway board contracts, Rail Wheel Factory in Bangalore. "This led to production delays in key rail and Metro projects, including the Vande Bharat trains," Chowdhary said.

TRSL said it aims to not only meet domestic demand but also emerge as a global supplier. "We are not just creating a facility to meet domestic requirements-we are also looking at becoming a global supplier of forged wheels," Chowdhary said.

The company's current order book stands at ₹24,526 crore, offering over three years of revenue visibility, according to management. "This backward integration will give us better control over costs, quality and timelines. It's a strategic move," the official said.

The forged wheels unit is expected to come online in the next financial year, initially catering to Indian Railways, Metro corporations and captive consumption.

The Pioneer
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Carlos Alcaraz, Jannik Sinner take rivalry to Wimbledon

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

The takeaways from Carlos Alcaraz's fifth-set tiebreaker victory over Jannik Sinner in the riveting and record-breaking French Open men's final were multiple and significant.

Let's start with this: Anyone worried about how men's tennis would survive in the post-Big Three era can rest easy. Alcaraz and Sinner produced 5 1/2 hours of evidence Sunday that the game is in good hands - and that their rivalry will be, and perhaps already is, a transcendent one.

Take it from no less an authority than Roger Federer. The retired owner of 20 Grand Slam titles, and rival of Rafael Nadal (22 majors) and Novak Djokovic (24), began a post on social media by declaring, "3 winners in Paris today," then listed Alcaraz, Sinner and "the beautiful game of tennis. What a match!"

No. 1 Sinner and No. 2 Alcaraz could renew their rivalry at WimbledonThis was the 12th Alcaraz-Sinner meeting, the first in a major final.

"Hopefully not the last time," Alcaraz said. "Every time that we face ... Each other, we raise our level to the top."

It would be shocking if there weren't many more of these to come - perhaps as soon as at

Wimbledon, where play begins on June 30 and No. 2-ranked Alcaraz is the two-time defending champion.

His comeback against No. 1 Sinner from two sets down, then three championship points down, to win 4-6, 6-7 (4), 6-4, 7-6 (3), 7-6 (10-2) was unprecedented at Roland-Garros. It was unforgettable. Alcaraz's coach, Juan Carlos Ferrero, described his guy's best trait this way: "His strength is (to) keep believing all the time, until the last ball is gone."

Alcaraz has five Grand Slam titles at age 22

Alcaraz's five Grand Slam titles at 22 - that's the age at which Nadal, Bjorn Borg and Pete Sampras also got to five; no one's done it younger - show how special he is. So does the Spaniard's 5-0 record in major finals, a career start surpassed among men only by Federer's 7-0. Sinner is pretty good, too. Tuesday marks a full year that he has been ranked number one. He has reached the finals of his last eight tournaments, a run last accomplished by Djokovic a decade ago. He has won three majors. He has won 47 of his last 50 matches.

Notably, all three of those losses came against — yes, you guessed it — Alcaraz. That hearkens back to the days when Federer would beat everyone other than Nadal.

Sinner had claimed 31 Slam sets in a row right up until the moment he was up 2-0 against Alcaraz. What was unmistakable to anyone watching in-person at Court Philippe-Chatrier or following along from afar on TV is that Alcaraz vs. Sinner is a must-see. "The level," Alcaraz said, "was insane."

Alcaraz and Sinner have won the last 6 Grand Slam titles Sinner's take?

"I'm happy to be part of this," the 23-year-old Italian said. "Would be even more happy if I would have, the big trophy."

As with any great rivalry — think Evert vs Navratilova or Borg vs McEnroe or Federer vs Nadal, no first names needed — Alcaraz vs Sinner provides a clash of excellence and a study in contrasts.

Alcaraz displays emotion, pumping his fists, pointing to an ear to ask for more noise, yelling "Vamos!" Sinner is rather contained. Sinner's long limbs get him to nearly every ball. Alcaraz's motor reaches speeds no one can equal. Sinner's ball-striking is pure. Alcaraz's drop shots are legendary. Both hammer groundstrokes that leave opponents exasperated and spectators gasping.

Both can improve. Sinner has never won a match that lasted four hours.

Sumit Nagal's ranking nosedives to 233

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

A string of early exits on the ATP circuit has taken a toll on Sumit Nagal's singles ranking as he is now placed 233rd, his lowest in almost two years after a massive loss of 63 places while 45-year-old Rohan Bopanna, who is still playing solid tennis, lost his place in the top-50 for the first time in 15 years.

The last time the 27-year-old Nagal was ranked outside the top-200 was in July 2023 when he was placed 231. Since then he made a steady progress on the Tour and climbed to a career-best 68 in July 2024.

However, he has struggled to win since the start of the season. He was placed inside the top-100 in January this year but in the last five months has lost 142 places on the ranking ladder.

On the back of his top-100 rank, he competed in five straight Grand Slam main draws from 2024 Australian Open but could not qualify for the recently-concluded French Open in Paris.

The gulf between number one and two players is also huge as the next best is Sasikumar Mukund at number 430 followed by Karan Singh (445), Aryan Shah (483) and Dev Javia (621).

The last time the 27-year-old Nagal was ranked outside the top-200 was in July 2023 when he was placed 231

In doubles, Yuki Bhambri is now the country's No.1 player at number 35 with a jump of six places, while veteran Bopanna has dropped out of the top-50 in 15 years. The 45-year-old is now placed 53 after losing 20 places following his French Open campaign.

On June 21, 2015, Bopanna was ranked 52nd. Last year in January, he became the oldest world number one in the doubles format.

He is still playing solid tennis, with his booming serve still considered one of the best on the Tour.

Brazil could secure World Cup spot with victory in Sao Paulo

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Sao Paulo

More South American teams could qualify for the 2026 World Cup on Tuesday.

Second-place Ecuador can do it by winning in Peru. Fourth-place Brazil or third-place Paraguay could secure a spot at next year's global tournament with a win in Sao Paulo as long as Venezuela loses at Uruguay.

If Venezuela draws, either team could also qualify with a win if defending champion Argentina, which has already qualified, beats Colombia.

The most anticipated match of the round is in Sao Paulo, where Carlo Ancelotti will make his home debut as Brazil coach. Brazil, which had a 0-0 draw with Ecuador last week, is two points behind Paraguay in the standings.

Lionel Messi's Argentina takes on Colombia in Buenos Aires in a match where coach Lionel Scaloni will continue adding depth to his squad.

South America's last two qualifying game days are in September. The top six teams earn direct spots for the World

Cup next year in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The seventh-place team goes into an international playoff.

Ancelotti's home debut

Ancelotti's changes to shore up the defense at Ecuador worked. Defender Alexsandro had an impressive game on debut and veteran midfielder Casemiro helped block the hosts.

More changes are expected on Tuesday, the day Ancelotti turns 66.

Striker Richarlison lost his place in the starting lineup to Matheus Cunha during training, and teenager Estêvão is expected to make way on the left wing for Raphinha, who was suspended last week. Ancelotti is also expected to replace midfielder Gerson with winger Gabriel Martinelli.

"We had the necessary time on those days to prepare both matches, a little less against Ecuador. The team is fresh, we will have every tool to do well tomorrow," Ancelotti said Monday.

"Raphinha gives us very important mobility. That could be key to unblock tomorrow's match."

Casemiro enjoyed success with Ancelotti at Real Madrid, but has said his return to the national team after more than a year's absence is due to his performances at Manchester United. "I'm glad to be back and back playing well, I want to stress that," Casemiro said.

"I am not here because I know the coach, but because I deserve it. This was undoubtedly one of the most important years of my career."

Paraguay will be a tough challenge for Brazil. Since coach Gustavo Alfaro took over, the Paraguayans have been unbeaten for nine matches.

Alfaro has already equaled Paraguay's record for qualifying points set by coach Paulo César Carpegiani in the campaign for the 1998 World Cup in France.

Eyes on Venezuela

As the only South American team that has never made it to the World Cup, Venezuela will be under extra pressure at Centenario Stadium against fifth-place Uruguay.

A win for Venezuela and coach Fernando Batista will almost lock up seventh place and boost its chances of fighting for a direct spot. A Venezuela defeat could give Bolivia a chance to bid for the international playoff position.

"We have three finals in which we can't overlook, we can't fail. We are ready for that," Batista said. "We are focused on getting the most possible points."

Uruguay has endured a shaky patch with no wins in its last four qualifiers. A home victory against Venezuela is key for the team to regain confidence.Head coach Marcelo Bielsa, who has been clashing with Uruguay players since the Copa America last year, took some blame for the poor performance in the 2-0 loss at Paraguay.

"I truly feel responsible for the situation of the team because the problem is the lack of creation of scoring opportunities, and my position before this problem is to propose solutions," Bielsa said.

"I have players who are special in their clubs, but can't do it in the squad I have ... I have no option (but) to recognize my lack of efficiency."

Uruguay remains without key midfielder Federico Valverde, who is injured, and striker Darwin Núñez, who is suspended.

Hundal to lead Indian junior men's hockey team

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Experienced drag-flicker Araijeet Singh Hundal will lead a 24-member Indian junior men's hockey team in the 4-Nation Tournament in Berlin beginning June 21, which will also serve as a preparation for the Junior World Cup scheduled in Chennai and Madurai later this year. Besides India, the 4-Nation tournament, scheduled from June 21 to 25, will feature Spain, Australia and hosts Germany.

"The tournament is a significant part of our preparation roadmap for the FIH Junior World Cup later this year (November-December). It will give us the chance to play against top-quality

international opponents in a competitive setting, which is crucial for the development of these young players," said former India goalkeeper and junior men's coach PR Sreejesh.

The two-time Olympic bronze-medallist added that more than the results, the focus would be on giving the youngsters experience against top-notch sides.

"This tour is less about results and more about preparing these young athletes for the bigger picture. Competing against quality international sides like Germany, Australia, and Spain will challenge our boys in different ways - tactically, physically, and mentally. These are the kind of experiences that shape world-class players," added the former goalkeeping stalwart.

Hundal, who was a part of the team that won the 2023 Junior Asia Cup gold and also played in the 2023-24 Pro League, will have defender Amir Ali as his deputy.

Each team will play against each other side in a single round-robin pool stage with the top two squaring off in the final. The third and fourth-placed teams will play a classification match.

Sreejesh added that the tournament will give him the opportunity to try out different combinations. "We have picked a squad that brings a healthy balance of energy and potential. This tour will allow us to sharpen our strategies, experiment with combinations, and give players the opportunity to take ownership in critical match situations. These learnings will be invaluable for players as we build towards the Junior World Cup at home," he said.

Madrid's new street circuit to debut in 2026, replacing Imola on F1 schedule

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

A new street circuit in Madrid will make its debut on the Formula 1 schedule in September of next year, replacing the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix at Imola.

F1 announced its 2026 calendar on Tuesday, setting the first grand prix at the new Madring track in the Spanish capital for Sept. 13.

Spain gets two races in 2026 as Barcelona stays on the calendar for the final year of its contract. It faces an uncertain future after that.

F1 has previously said Madrid's race will be known as the Spanish Grand Prix. The new schedule doesn't specify a new name for Barcelona's race, which has been known as the Spanish Grand Prix since 1991.

Spain's second race means Italy drops back to having one grand prix as Imola leaves the schedule. The historic track, a favorite with drivers, returned to the schedule in 2020 as a late addition amid the COVID-19 pandemic and has hosted five races since. Its contract was up this year. The Australian Grand Prix on March 8 starts the season for the second year running because the races in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia again move to April to avoid clashing with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. The season stays at 24 races and concludes with the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix from December 4-6. As part of a push to limit intercontinental travel, the Canadian Grand Prix moves forward from June to May 24 so that it follows the Miami Grand Prix.

Matt Vogt once chose dentistry over golf, back home at US Open

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Pittsburgh (US)

Matt Vogt was always going to be at the US Open this week. The man who likes to plan had it all planned out.

He and his wife, Hilary and their 15-month-old daughter, Charlotte, and their dogs would make the nearly six-hour drive from the Indianapolis suburbs and then crash at his mom's house in Cranberry, about 20 minutes from Oakmont.

At some point, the 34-year-old knew he'd make it out to the course where he spent five-ish years caddying, a job whose perks included the opportunity to put a tee in the ground on Monday nights, something he admits now he didn't do nearly often enough.

And the day after this year's Open ended, Vogt would find himself back in the main office of the dental practice he opened in 2018.

That last part is still part of the plan, by the way. It's everything else about this trip that's changed.

Three rounds of exquisitely steady golf - the kind Vogt found so elusive as a "hot-headed" 20-year-old that he left his college team to focus on his other passion instead — will do that.

So yes, Vogt will be at Oakmont this week after qualifying for the 125th edition of the national championship. In essentially his hometown, on a course that certainly feels like home on Father's Day weekend, just two months after losing his father and biggest supporter, Jim, to colon cancer. "This is pretty wild," Vogt said on Monday while walking in for a news

conference that carried on for more than 20 minutes, unheard of at a major tournament for an amateur with a respectable but hardly historic resume. When "pipe dreams" become reality, it usually is.

Trading one passion for another Vogt is a dreamer sure. Just a pragmatic one.

Even though he's 6-foot-6. Even though he's always been able to hit the ball a long, long way. Even though he's long felt drawn to a game that requires discipline, focus and a touch of math, he never considered trying to make a living doing it.

By the time he graduated from Seneca Valley High School, an hour north of Pittsburgh in 2009, he was pretty sure he didn't have "it."

A couple of years playing at Butler University reinforced what he held to be true: that he wasn't prepared - physically or mentally — for the toll the game can take if you dedicate your life to chasing it.

So he took a break, a long one. He graduated with a degree in biology, then enrolled in dental school at the University of Indiana.

Maybe I am just sick, enjoy challenge, says Schauffele

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Oakmont (US)

Xander Schauffele wrapped up nine holes of the most punishing U.S. Open course and was smiling. This was on a Monday, only a practice round at Oakmont. But the image illustrates why Schauffele rarely seems to suffer at the major reputed to be the toughest test in golf.

He has finished out of the top 10 only once in his eight previous US Open appearances. His highest score is a 75 in the third round at Brookline in 2022. He tied for 14th that week.

"Maybe I'm just sick and enjoy the challenge," Schauffele said with another smile.

"Something about it playing really hard. I think a good attitude goes a long way. It's obviously easier said than done, hard to keep a good attitude through the entire stretch of 72 holes, practice rounds as well. I don't know. I think they're a lot of fun."

The attitude will be tested at Oakmont, the course with rough that looks like a cabbage and greens so fast it can feel like putting in a bathtub. The Stimpmeter was developed after the inventor read about Gene Sarazen hitting a putt into a bunker at Oakmont.

Schauffele still hasn't figured out the winning part of it, at least not at the US Open. Despite his top 10s, he has yet to seriously challenge in the final hour.

This year presents a different test for the 31-year-old Californian, who broke through last year in the biggest events by winning the PGA Championship and the British Open.

He is still trying to find his groove after missing two months with a rib injury that significantly slowed the start of his season. That was a serious challenge - sitting at home, resting, doing next to nothing.

"I felt like I was playing at a pretty high level. Then I got hurt," he said. "My expectations of what I knew I could do to where I was were different. And accepting that was tough. I think that was sort of the biggest wake-up call for me coming back."

So a US Open at Oakmont — fun, he calls it — might be a good measure of where he is.

Most of the 156 players and even a few alternates, made their way out to the course on a relatively dry day that should stay that way at least until the weekend.

Justin Thomas was among those who came to Oakmont a few weeks ago to get in some serious study, knowing practice rounds can be the biggest grind because they take so long. Everyone is trying to figure out what to do from the rough, where to miss, how to avoid mistakes.

Dustin Johnson played nine holes, his first time back at Oakmont since he won his first major nine years ago.

Immigration crackdown may impact next year's World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Philadelphia's host city executive for the 2026 World Cup says organizers accept that an immigration crackdown by President Donald Trump's administration may be among the outside events that impact next year's tournament.

"There are certainly things that are happening at the national level, the international level, there are going to be geopolitical issues that we don't even know right now that are going be affecting the tournament next year, so we recognize that we're planning with- in uncertainty," Meg Kane said Monday at a gathering of the 11 U.S. Host city leaders, one year and two days ahead of the tournament opener.

The World Cup will be played at 16 stadiums in the U.S., Mexico and Canada from June 11 to July 19 next year, a tournament expanded to 48 nations and 104 games. All matches from the quarterfinals on will be in the U.S., with the final at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

"Whether it's the Olympics, whether it's a World Cup, whether it's a Super Bowl, you name it, anytime you've got a major international sporting event, geopolitics is going to

have a role," said Alex Vasry, CEO of the New York/New Jersey host committee.

Kane said the host committees must adapt to decisions made by others. "One of the things that I think we all recognize is that we have to be really good at operating within that uncertainty," Kane said.

"I think for each of our cities, we want to be prepared to make any person that is coming and makes the decision to come to the United States or come to this World Cup feel that they are welcome.

We do not play a role necessarily in what is happening in terms of the decisions that are made." Trump's travel ban on citizens from 12 countries exempted athletes, coaches, staff and relatives while not mentioning fans.

"We allow for FIFA to continue having constructive conversations with the administrations around visas, around workforce, around tourism," Kane said.

FIFA is running the World Cup for the first time without a local organizing committee in the host nation.

Asked in late April whether FIFA president Gianni Infantino was available to discuss the tournament, FIFA director of media relations Bryan Swanson forwarded the request to a member of the media relations staff, who did not make Infantino available.

Legislation approved by the House of Representatives and awaiting action in the Senate would appropriate $625 million to the Federal Emergency Management Agency "for security, planning, and other costs related to the 2026 FIFA World Cup."

Ruturaj Gaikwad to join Yorkshire for County Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Leeds (England)

Indian batter Ruturaj Gaikwad will join Yorkshire for five matches of the County Championship's Division One as well as the One-Day Cup.

Gaikwad will link up with the Yorkshire squad ahead of their County match against Surrey at Scarborough in July and will remain with the team until the end of the season, the club said on its website.

The 28-year-old is currently a part of the India A squad on the tour of England where they have played two four-day unofficial Tests against England Lions and their last assignment will be an intra-squad four-day match in Beckenham against the senior side from June 13-16.

"Captain of Chennai Super Kings in the Indian Premier League and Maharashtra in the Ranji Trophy, the Pune-native is a highly accomplished batter with six international ODI caps alongside his 23 appearances in IT20's," Yorkshire said on their website.

"The right-hander can bat anywhere in the top four and has shown versatility when required to step up and open the batting for India."

"It has always been a goal of mine to experience cricket in this country and there is no bigger Club in England than Yorkshire," Gaikwad stated.

"I know how important it is that I hit the ground running at what will be a crucial part of the season. We have some vital games in the County Championship and the One-Day Cup is a great opportunity to win some silverware."

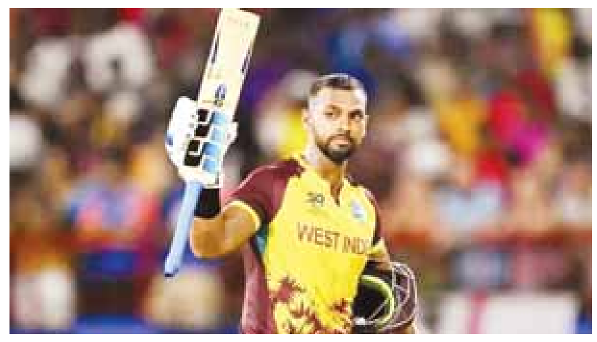
Yorkshire head coach Anthony McGrath hoped Gaikwad's addition would bring "extra solidity" to the team.

"He is a very accomplished cricketer with a natural all-round game that is well suited to the cricket we want to play. Ruturaj will give us some extra solidity in our batting lineup whilst having that ability to score quick runs when required. He's an exciting talent and one I know is highly rated across the game," he said.

Yorkshire are currently placed second last in the 10-team Division One points table with one win, four defeats and two drawn games so far.

West Indies batter Nicholas Pooran announces retirement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Port of Spain



Star West Indies batter Nicholas Pooran on Tuesday stunningly announced his retirement from international cricket at the age of 29 without specifying any reasons but insisted that "much thought and reflection" had gone into taking the call.

His decision came days after he opted out of selection for the T20I series against England. The swashbuckling left-handed batter finished as West Indies' most capped T20I player with 106 matches and also its highest run-getter, with a tally of 2275 at an average of 26.14 and strike rate of 136.39. In 61 ODI appearances, he scored 1983 runs at an average of 39.66 and strike rate of 99.15.

"After much thought and reflection, I've decided to announce my retirement from international cricket," Pooran, a former West Indies white-ball captain, wrote on his social media pages.

"This game we love has given and will continue to give so much - joy, purpose, unforgettable memories, and a chance to represent the people of the West Indies," said the Trinidadian who made his international debut in 2016 in a T20 International match.

He never played Test cricket for his country.

"Wearing that maroon, standing for the anthem, and giving everything I had each time I stepped on the field. It's hard to put into words what that truly means to me. To have led the team as captain is a privilege I will always hold close to my heart," he said.

Pooran had recently opted out of selection for West Indies' T20I series against England after playing the full Indian Premier League (IPL) season for Lucknow Super Giants (LSG).

He hasn't featured in ODIs since West Indies' exit in the 2023 World Cup Qualifiers. His last match for West Indies was against Bangladesh at Kingstown in December 2024.

"To the fans - thank you for your unwavering love. You lifted me in the tough moments and celebrated the good ones with unmatched passion. To my family, friends and teammates — thank you for walking the journey with me. Your belief and support carried me through it all," he wrote.

We are on journey to become a great Australian team: Lyon

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
London

Winning the ICC World Test Championship title for the second consecutive time here will be an important step in establishing the current side as one of the greatest Australian teams of all times, feels star off-spinner Nathan Lyon. The 37-year-old Nathan Lyon is part of Andrew McDonald's squad that will take on South Africa at Lord's in the final of the ICC World Test Championship 2023-25 cycle.

Australia will be looking to defend the title they clinched in 2023 with a 209-run victory over India at the Oval and Lyon is keen to build on the progress made since that triumph.

"It is important that we look at this week as a celebration piece. We've done incredibly well over the last couple of years, at home and away, and that is something that as a team, we should be really proud of," he was quoted as saying by the ICC.

"In my eyes, we're on a journey to becoming a great Australian team. We're not there yet, I'm well aware of that, but that's our goal too.

"This game is another step up that ladder," said the spin ace who took the match-winning wicket of Mohammed Siraj in Australia's win against India in 2023.

Australia finished second in the league table during the 2023-25 WTC cycle, behind South Africa, having claimed 67.54 per cent of the points on offer to them.

Australia were also the only side that did not lose a series in the 2023-25 cycle, winning four of the six series they played. Their percentage was only bettered by the table-topping Proteas' 69.44 per cent.

Lyon has taken 56 wickets against South Africa in 18 matches and expects a fierce contest with the side captained by Temba Bavuma. "Yes, we've been here before, but South Africa qualified first during this World Test Championship," said Lyon who has taken 553 wickets from 136 matches since making his Test debut in 2011.

"Throughout these two years, they've done something really well to finish top, and so they deserve that home changing room leading into this game.

"It's international cricket. We're expecting an extremely hard challenge and there's going to be a lot of problems out there, but we're going to have to be good enough to solve those problems ASAP."

The presence of multiple experienced and skilled bowlers in the Australian camp like captain Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Mitchell Starc and Scott Boland only adds to the Australian fire-power, said Lyon.

"As a bowling squad, we are very proud of where we are currently at," he said. "But we're not leaving any stone unturned and we're still trying to get better as a bowling group. I feel that spurs each and every one of us on to get better."

Australia last featured in a Test series in England during the 2023 Ashes — the opening assignment of the 2023-25 World Test Championship cycle — but several members of the squad have since returned to ply their trade in county cricket. Lyon turned out for Lancashire in 2024, while Marnus Labuschagne, Cameron Green and Beau Webster represented Glamorgan, Gloucestershire and Warwickshire, respectively, during the ongoing season.

"I feel like you get a lot of understanding of how the game is played over here in these conditions, how the Dukes ball moves around and how the overhead conditions play a role," he said.

"It's been amazing to have Greeny over here. I think he's played four or five games for Gloucestershire and done really well. So, hopefully, that gives him the confidence to pick things up from where he left off.

"It's important, especially for the younger players, like Greeny, to come over here and play county cricket."

It is unfortunate: Dravid on Bengaluru stampede

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

The legendary Rahul Dravid on Tuesday expressed deep anguish over the death of 11 people in a stampede during Royal Challengers Bengaluru's IPL victory celebrations, terming the incident as "unfortunate" and "sad".

Tragedy struck last Wednesday when nearly 2.5 lakh fans gathered in and around the Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru to catch a glimpse of their favourite stars, resulting in a stampede that claimed lives and left 56 injured. "Yeah, very disappointing. Obviously, very sad. Thoughts go out to people," Dravid, a former India coach and captain, told media.

Dravid, who is currently associated with IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals as a coach, said the incident was particularly painful given the city's deep sporting culture.

"This is a really sports passionate city. I come from here. People love their sport, not only cricket. People love sport in the city and they've really followed all the sporting teams here, whether it's been our football team or it's been our kabaddi team.

> So really sad, very unfortunate what happened. And our thoughts go out to everyone who unfortunately was injured and some of them who lost their lives
>
> — RAHUL DRAVID, EX-CRICKETER

"And of course, the RCB is a really very well-followed team. So really sad, very unfortunate what happened. And our thoughts go out to everyone who unfortunately was injured and some of them who lost their lives." In the aftermath of the tragedy, A Shankar and ES Jairam resigned from their respective position of secretary and treasurer of the KSCA.

Australia faces South Africa in World Test Championship

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
London

When it comes to major cricket finals, Australia is in a league of its own.

Only Australia has won all four men's global trophies. It is hard to beat in finals, having won 10 of 13 across the 50-over World Cup, 20-over World Cup, Champions Trophy and World Test Championship. And let's not get started on the women's team, which is even more dominant.

The men go for world title No. 11 from Wednesday in the WTC final against South Africa at neutral Lord's.

That ruthless focus Australia brings on the biggest stages is in marked contrast to South Africa, a perennial underachiever. The Proteas have won just one major title, the Champions Trophy in 1998, when most of the current Proteas were toddlers.

An experienced squad — average age 29 1/2 — compensates with a bond that can't be underestimated, a determination to have each other's backs.

That showed often in the 2023-25 WTC cycle as the Proteas, who used 30 players, more than any other team, found a run-scorer or wicket-taker at just the right time. They won their last seven tests and were first to qualify for the final.

"We haven't been super dominant in our performances," South Africa captain Temba Bavuma said when the team qualified in December. "We definitely haven't been clinical or ruthless when the opportunity or the situation is called upon. But I think what we've done is that we've found ways to make sure that the result is on our side."

Who opens with Khawaja?

Australia already was a veteran team when it won the 2023 final by crushing India by 209 runs at the Oval. Ten of that 11 are back. Only David Warner is missing, retired from tests.

Medium-pace bowler Josh Hazlewood was injured and didn't play, but he's expected to replace one of the 2023 stars, Scott Boland. Hazlewood overcame a shoulder injury to spearhead Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a first Indian Premier League title last week with 22 wickets in 12 innings.

Warner's permanent replacement at opener still hasn't been settled. Sam Konstas made an audacious debut at age 19 in December against India, but Travis Head was preferred in Sri Lanka in February. They seem to be the main candidates.

Marnus Labuschagne has opened only once since 2016, and his form has dropped to the point of concern.

He averaged just 28.33 in the WTC cycle and attempts last month to spark form at Glamorgan in the second tier of the English County Championship fell flat.

In the same division, all-rounder Cameron Green scored three hundreds for Gloucestershire in a comeback from lower spine surgery which sidelined him for six months. But he's not ready to bowl.

It may not matter. Australia has four of its top 10 all-time leading wicket-takers in Nathan Lyon (553, third), Mitchell Starc (382, fourth), captain Pat Cummins (294, eighth), and Hazlewood (279, 10th).

Star batter Steve Smith turned 36 last week and hasn't played in the top flight since March, just like Konstas, opener Usman Khawaja, Lyon, Boland, and wicketkeeper Alex Carey. But they're entrusted with the knowhow to switch on when it counts.

Smith has four hundreds in his last five tests, and passed 10,000 career runs, almost as many as the South Africans. At Lord's he averages 58.

"At Lord's, there's always sort of something going on," he said on Monday.

"There's always something going off for the bowlers, particularly if the clouds roll in. And then when the clouds are out, it can be really nice to bat."

Arshdeep back in Kent, focussing on rhythm ahead of England Test series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
London

India left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh is delighted to be back in Kent where he had earlier played county cricket as he looks to rediscover his red-ball rhythm ahead of the five-match Test series against England beginning June 20.

The 26-year-old is eyeing his maiden Test appearance after being named in the Indian squad. The team is playing a four-day tour match against India A at the Kent County Cricket Ground at Beckenham from June 13.

Primarily known for his white-ball exploits, Arshdeep, who represented Kent in the County Championship two years ago, had a notable season in the IPL 2025 with Punjab Kings, who finished runners-up. "As for today's training session, my only motivation was to get a feel for the rhythm -- how the body feels, how the red ball is coming out of the hand -- because all the players have been playing with the white ball for quite a while. So I really enjoyed it," he told BCCI.TV.

"Going forward, as we keep progressing step by step, the intensity will keep increasing, and we'll keep making it more and more difficult for the batters to face the ball."

India, without the services of retired Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, will be led by new skipper Shubman Gill. The team includes a crop of young batters such as Sai Sudharsan and Yashasvi Jaiswal.

Arshdeep said he is enjoying bowling to his team-mates as he sharpens his red-ball skills.

"It was fun bowling to the batters. They looked quite compact, and there was a competitive spirit-even though we were just working on rhythm, they were fully competing. So that made it even more fun," he said.

INDIA LOOK TO SNAP BACK-TO-BACK LOSSES IN CLASH AGAINST ARGENTINA IN PRO LEAGUE HOCKEY

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Amstelveen (The Netherlands)

Smarting from back-to-back defeats, the Indian men's hockey team will look to improve its penalty corner conversions and address the recurring issue of conceding late goals as it aims to bounce back against Argentina in the FIH Pro League here on Wednesday.

It has been a disappointing start to the European leg for India, as they suffered 1-2 and 2-3 defeats against the Netherlands in the two matches played in Amstelveen. On both occasions, India conceded late goals, allowing the matches to slip away from their hands.

Another area of concern has been the penalty corner conversion. India were guilty of squandering several opportunities, managing to convert just one out of the nine penalty corners earned during Monday's match. With six matches still to be played in the competition, India currently occupies fourth in the standings with 15 points.

With a spot in next year's World Cup at stake, the Indian team will be determined to put up strong performances in the remaining fixtures.

The team is now preparing for its next challenge against Argentina here. "We are aware of the task at hand in the matches against Argentina. The team is working hard every day in training, and we are confident of doing well. Argentina is a strong team, and at this level, no match is easy," captain Harmanpreet Singh said.

The two teams have faced each other frequently in recent years, and India hold a favourable head-to-head record against Argentina.

At the Paris Olympics, the two sides played out an entertaining draw. However, in the Pro League 2023/24, India defeated Argentina twice — the second win coming via a shootout.

"We are prepared for whatever comes our way. We've prepared well for this tournament and tried various combinations and strategies in the lead-up. We are confident of putting on a strong performance against Argentina," Harmanpreet said.

India have never lost a regulation-time match to Argentina in the Pro League. The only defeat came in a shootout in 2022 in Bhubaneswar.

"The team has a good track record against Argentina, but we're not taking anything for granted. Those results are in the past - we need to perform in the present to stay on course for World Cup qualification," the Indian captain said.

"The team has been training well, and the coaching staff has been giving us a lot of encouragement. I'm confident we'll deliver strong performances."