

YEH KASHMIR HAI...



Visitors at Tulip Garden after it was opened for the public in Srinagar on Wednesday. PIONEER PHOTO

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Srinagar

With over 1.7 million tulips of 74 exquisite varieties in its lap, Asia's largest Tulip garden overlooking the world-famous Dal Lake was thrown open on Wednesday by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, marking the beginning of the new tourism season in the Valley.

"Delighted to throw open Asia's largest Tulip Garden in Srinagar today," the Chief Minister's office posted on X.

The Chief Minister, sporting a skull cap and a traditional 'pheran' greeted and interacted with the tourists assembled at the garden to witness the blooming carpet of flowers.

He also extended an invitation to tourists from all over the world to make a plan to witness the sublime beauty of

nature and enjoy the warm hospitality of Kashmir. Visitors, who were seen posing for a group photograph, acknowledged the hard work of gardeners and all others who worked laboriously behind the scenes to decorate the Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden.

The Tourism department is already expecting a heavy tourist influx this year as compared to last year. Last year, as many as 4.45 lakh tourists thronged the garden, which was the highest ever.

A record number of tourists visited the Kashmir valley this year raising hopes of hoteliers and all other stakeholders of a buoyant tourism season ahead.

The floriculture department has expanded the channel to the top of the garden. In addition, some fountains have been set up in the garden to make it more attractive.

Briefing media persons, Floriculture director Shakeel-ul-Rehman Rather said, "Tourists intending to visit the famous Tulip Garden can now book tickets online as authorities have started an online and QR code-based booking system at several places, including the Srinagar Airport."

"We have planted 17.50 lakh tulip bulbs and other flowers," Rather said.

The director said this year, the department has started the facility of an online ticket booking system. "Tie-up has also been done with the tourism departments of many countries and their websites have the link for online tickets. Apart from this, tickets are also available through the physical mode.

The Union Territory administration has already made elaborate arrangements to accommodate the large rush of tourists visiting Jammu and Kashmir.

Supreme Court outraged by Allahabad High Court's insensitive rape order

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the Allahabad High Court's recent observations on grabbing of a woman's breasts and pulling the drawstrings of her "pyjama" not amounting to an attempt to rape and admonished that the order reflected total "insensitivity" and "inhuman approach".

Taking a strong exception to the High Court's observations made in its March 17 verdict, the apex court termed it a "very serious matter".

"In normal circumstances, we are slow in granting stay at this stage. But since the observations appearing in paragraphs 21, 24 and 26 are totally unknown to the canons of law and depict total insensitive and inhuman approach, we are inclined to stay the said observations," a Bench of Justices BR Gavai and Augustine George Masih said.

The top court took suo motu cognisance of the matter after "We the Women of India" collective wrote to Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna. "Until further orders, there shall be stay to the observations made by the judge in paragraphs 21, 24 and 26 of the order dated March 17, 2025," the Bench held.

to be naked..." Referring to the High Court's observations, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said, "This is one judgement I take a very serious exception." Attorney General R Venkataramani also appeared in the matter.

"It is a very serious matter," Justice Gavai said, "exhibiting total insensitivity on the part of the judge." The Bench added, "We are sorry to use such harsh words against the judge." The SG Mehta said the Chief Justice of the High Court was the master of the roster there and it was advisable that some steps were taken. "We are at pains to say that some of the observations made in the impugned order and particularly in paragraphs 21, 24 and 26 depict a total lack of insensitivity on the part of the author of the judgment," the Bench said.

and take such steps as deemed fit and proper," the bench said, posting the matter for hearing on April 15.

During the hearing, one of the advocates appearing in the matter said they moved a plea against the High Court Order. The Bench said the plea would be heard along with the suo motu proceedings. Another lawyer said they would file an application on behalf of the survivor's mother. The accused had challenged the summoning order of a special judge in Kasganj under Section 376 (rape) of the IPC, among other sections.

It came on record that an application was moved before the court of special judge, POCSO Act, alleging that on November 10, 2021, she (informant) was returning from her sister-in-law's home along with her 14-year-old daughter and Pawan, Akash and Ashok, who hailed from the same village, met her on the way and offered a lift to her daughter. They allegedly stopped their motorbike on the way to her village and grabbed her breasts.

Akash was accused of dragging her and trying to take her beneath the culvert while pulling the drawstrings of her lowers. The High Court said the alleged actions of the accused Pawan and Akash was "not sufficient to draw an inference that the accused persons had determined to commit rape" on the survivor as "apart from these facts no other act was attributed to them to further their alleged desire to commit rape on the victim."

Opposition parties also slammed the order as Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi wrote to CJI Sanjiv Khanna calling it "flawed" and seeking the judge's disqualification "for delivering such a misguided verdict." Calling the observations "outrageous" and "unacceptable", Chairperson of the Congress Social Media and Digital Platforms Supriya Shrinete said, "If courts give such observations, where do children and women go and report about incidents when they are harassed?"

Until further orders, there shall be stay to the observations made by the judge in paragraphs 21, 24 and 26 of the order dated March 17, 2025

— BENCH

The top court said it was not as if the order was dictated in the spur of the moment in the court. It noted the High Court had reserved its verdict on November 13, 2024, and after almost four months, the judgment was pronounced. "It is thus clear that the judge has authored the judgment after due application of mind," it said.

The top court issued notices to the Centre, Uttar Pradesh government and the parties before the high court in the matter seeking their responses in the suo motu proceeding. "The Registrar concerned of this court is directed to forthwith communicate this order to the Registrar General of the High Court of judicature at Allahabad, who shall place the same immediately before the Chief Justice of the High Court of judicature at Allahabad, who is requested to look into the matter

CBI raids ex-Chhattisgarh CM Baghel's houses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi/Raipur

The CBI on Wednesday conducted searches at 60 locations, including the residence of former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel, in connection with the alleged ₹6,000 Crore Mahadev betting app scam, officials said.

The agency teams cracked on at Baghel's residences in Raipur and Bhilai, as well as the houses of a senior police officer and a close associate of the former CM, they said. The searches also covered the premises of Congress MLA Devendra Yadav in Bhilai town of Durg district and of IPS officers Anand Chhabra, Abhishek Pallava and Arif Sheikh, among others, sources said. Congress said the CBI's searches at Baghel's residences were politically motivated, and asserted it will not be intimidated by such actions.

In a social media post from Baghel's office, the former chief minister's office said, "Now CBI has arrived. Former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel is scheduled to

go to Delhi today for the meeting of the 'Drafting Committee' constituted for the AICC meeting to be held in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) on 8 and 9 April. Before that, the CBI has reached Raipur and Bhilai Niwas."

The CBI has taken over the investigation from the Economic Offences Wing of the Chhattisgarh Police, which had earlier named Congress leader Baghel, promoters of the app, Ravi Uppal, Saurabh Chandrakar, Shubham Soni, and Anil Kumar Agrawal, and 14 others in its FIR. Baghel had termed the EOW FIR "politically motivated." The Enforcement Directorate (ED), which is also probing the case, has alleged that its probe revealed the involvement of several top politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh. The app was an umbrella syndicate arranging online platforms for illegal betting websites to enrol new users, create user IDs and launder money through a layered web of 'benami' bank accounts, it claimed. The projected proceeds of crime are about Rs 6,000 crore, the ED earlier said.

MHA finally responds to Rahul's citizenship issue

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Home Ministry on Wednesday informed the Delhi High Court that probe on the British Citizenship of Rahul Gandhi is "under consideration". Previous hearing, the High Court had sent notice to MHA to declare its stand, while the Ministry many times sought time to reply to the petition filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy.

"In this regard it is humbly submitted that the subject matter is presently under consideration in the Ministry. Therefore it is requested to appraise the Honorable Court regarding the same on the next date of hearing ie 26.3.2025, thereby defending the interest of the Union of India," said MHA's Foreigners Division (Citizenship Wing). The next hearing is posted for March 28, by dismissing an intervening petition by a BJP worker Vignesh Shishir.

The BJP worker from Karnataka had approached Allahabad High Court, and Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has been asked to take a decision by April 21. A Division Bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice



Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi during the Budget session of Parliament. PTI

Shishir. "It has been posted for hearing before High Court on April 21," the ASG pointed out.

The petitioner Subramanian Swamy alleged that Government was resorting to delay tactics. "This is delaying tactic. My petition has been there since 2019. The minister had given a show cause notice to which Gandhi has not replied. At least, a direction can be passed to file his affidavit. When I had filed this matter, there was no other matter (in any other High Court). It is unfair that after doing all this work, they have recycled the same matter," Swamy said.

The Court nevertheless said that the issue is under the consideration of the MHA and the hearing can wait till a decision is taken by the Government. "ASG has been informed by Ministry about the Allahabad High Court order. It is for the Ministry to make this decision. We cannot pass any direction. We are only taking notice of the Allahabad High Court decision which has been passed by a division bench," the Delhi High Court remarked while adjourning the case.

Tushar Rao Gedela noted the same and also said the Ministry should have apprised the Court of the action taken, since the pendency of similar matter before Allahabad High Court could lead to divergent orders.

Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Chetan Sharma, appearing for the MHA, said that the Allahabad High Court had on March 24 ordered MHA to decide the representation filed by the petitioner before the High Court, one Vignesh

Mirror, mirror on the wall...who's the fairest of us all?

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Kochi

Sarada Muraleedharan, chief secretary of Kerala, who had made empowerment of women, social justice and equal opportunities as her mission in life found late on Tuesday night that the renaissance of the State as claimed by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has remained a non-starter and there is large scale discrimination based on colour of one's skin.

People in the State was in for a shock on Wednesday morning as Muraleedharan took to the social media to give vent to her shock and sorrow over comments made by a section of the society that the last seven months of her tenure as the top bureaucrat of Kerala was a period

of black while her predecessor's stewardship stood out as white. Muraleedharan had taken over as chief secretary from V Venu on August 31, 2024. Interestingly, Venu is her husband and it was a rare event in the State to see the wife succeeding her husband as chief secretary.

Venu happened to be of fair complexion while Muraleedharan was a bit on the dark side. The comments about the colour of Muraleedharan's skin are yet another proof that the self-styled progressive State is yet to come out of the regressive mindset. The heart-wrenching account by Muraleedharan speaks about dilemma and taunts suffered by her because of the tone of her skin.

"As a four-year-old, I apparently asked my mother whether she could put me back in her womb and bring

me out again, all white and pretty. I have lived for over 50 years buried under that narrative of not being a colour that was good enough. And buying into that narrative. Of not seeing beauty or value in black. Of being fascinated by fair skin. And fair minds, and all that was fair and good and wholesome. And of feeling that I was a lesser person for not being that — which had to be compensated somehow," writes Muraleedharan.

She further stated that it was her children who glorified the beauty of black and she felt happy afterwards about her tone. "Black is the all pervasive truth of the universe. Black is that which can absorb anything, the most powerful pulse of energy known to humankind.

widely respected and adored artist in the State irrespective of caste and religion.

The Jamat-e-Islami leader and another leader who owns educational institutions across Kerala have called for the establishment of a Caliphate in South India.

"This is ridiculous. Offering pooja at a temple is to request the God Almighty to cure the person for whom the ritual is held. The community and political leaders should see this as a plea to the deity for the well being of the person," said Sreejit Panicker, political observer.

Lal's pooja for Mammooty is happening in a film, which is a dog eating dog world.

Juvenile crime turns fatal, 16-year-old killed for ransom

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A 16-year-old boy was abducted and killed for an ₹10 Lakh ransom in the Wazirabad area of north Delhi and three juveniles were apprehended in connection with the crime. They reportedly also tried to cut the boy's body into parts. All the three lived near the victim's home.

The class nine students were taken to a deserted area near Bhalaswa Lake, where he was stabbed multiple times, police officials said on Wednesday.

"The family members of the boy had received a call regarding a ransom of ₹10 Lakh. Later, they discovered his body," said the officer.

On Monday, a complaint was filed at the local police station about a boy missing since Sunday. The boy studied in Mukherjee Nagar.

"During investigation, it was found that the missing/kidnapped boy was last seen with three boys, two of them aged 16 and 17, on a motorcycle on Jharoda Pushta road," the officer said.

The sighting was confirmed through CCTV footage from the area.

Police apprehended all three boys, who, during interrogation, revealed they had kidnapped the boy for a ransom of ₹10 Lakh.

They said that on Sunday, they took him

with them on a motorcycle to hang out. They took him to a forested area near Bhalaswa Lake, where they stabbed him and fled, leaving him dead.

The next day, they called the boy's father, a driver by profession, using the boy's SIM and demanded a ransom of ₹10 Lakh.

"The body of the victim was discovered by a police team at the instance of the apprehended juveniles," the officer said. Police sources said that the accused also tried to cut the boy's body into parts. Victim's mother told reporters that the boys, who allegedly killed her, son lived nearby.

"My son left on Sunday around 7.30 pm after receiving a call, saying he will come back in 10 minutes. Later, we got a call with a demand for ₹10 Lakh," she said.

The father of the boy added, "Two boys came to our house to pick my son. After that, his mother kept calling him but it went unanswered. Around 9 pm on Sunday, his phone went off. I started a search for him and then went to the police station to register a complaint."

He said around midnight he got a call with the demand for a ransom, to be paid within three days, or else his son would be killed.

"He was killed so brutally. His throat was slit and he was stabbed multiple times. I want them to go through the same pain that my son did," he said.

Muslim prayer inadmissible in Sabarimala: Islamic zealot

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ Kochi

Malayalam film industry's megastar Mammooty has been dragged into a controversy by a religious zealot O Abdullah, a Jama-at-e-Islami fundamentalist, who questioned the former for allowing another megastar Mohan Lal to offer prayers at the holy shrine of Sabarimala for the former's health.

Abdullah and another Islamic extremist Nazir Faizi who heads a powerful wing by name Samasta called for an atonement by Mammooty and they also demanded the megastar to apologise to the Muslim community in the State.

Mohan Lal's special pooja for the

health of his friend Mammooty, whom he addresses as Mammookka (a mark of respect for his senior) was the fall out of an unsubstantiated news that the latter was suffering from colon cancer.

Though there has been no communication from Mammooty or his close family members about the report, persons who claim to be close to the megastar said he was diagnosed with the ailment and was undergoing medication for the same.

What added to the controversial news was that Mammooty and family shifted to Chennai from Kochi and he has cancelled his shooting schedule for the next two months.

But this could be due to the fasting he

routinely undertakes during the Ramadan month. Mohan Lal who undertook a pilgrimage to Sabarimala on the first of Malayalam month Meenam had held special poojas as the shrine for his mother, wife and Mammooty.

The receipt from the temple authorities carrying the birth-star and name of Mammooty went viral in the social media and this made Abdullah, who masquerades as a journalist, furious. The Jamaat-e-Islami leader lambasted Mammooty and called him to perform atonement lest he may have to face religious punishment.

Abdullah's comment has created a furor in Kerala as Mammooty remains a

widely respected and adored artist in the State irrespective of caste and religion.

The Jamaat-e-Islami leader and another leader who owns educational institutions across Kerala have called for the establishment of a Caliphate in South India.

"This is ridiculous. Offering pooja at a temple is to request the God Almighty to cure the person for whom the ritual is held. The community and political leaders should see this as a plea to the deity for the well being of the person," said Sreejit Panicker, political observer.

Lal's pooja for Mammooty is happening in a film, which is a dog eating dog world.

Editor's TAKE

Mending ties with China

The ongoing talks with China are a step in the right direction to resolve pending issues

As the saying goes, you can choose your friends, but changing your neighbors is no easy feat. That's why maintaining good relations with them is crucial. However, this is often easier said than done—especially when the neighbor in question is China, making the task even more challenging. But the effort must always be there to achieve this end. India and China recently engaged in discussions aimed at resolving outstanding bilateral issues and enhancing cooperation in areas such as border management, trans-border river sharing, and the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage. Though the talks may not resolve the issues but talking about it does help in reaching a solution.

The Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) meeting in Beijing was a step toward normalising relations between the two nations following their agreement to disengage military forces in the Ladakh sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The discussions at the WMCC meeting revolved around implementing agreements reached during the Special Representatives' meeting on the boundary question in December. The talks were described as "positive and constructive," with both sides exchanging views on early resumption of cross-border cooperation, including religious pilgrimages and data-sharing on trans-border rivers. Additionally, the two nations explored measures to strengthen diplomatic and military mechanisms to ensure peace and stability along the border. Both sides also agreed to make substantial preparations for the upcoming meeting of the special representatives, which will take place in India later this year.

Resolving border tensions would create a stable environment for trade and investment. Both countries are major economies, and fostering better relations could lead to increased economic exchanges, benefiting businesses and consumers alike. Given their influence in regional geopolitics, improved India-China relations would contribute to broader stability in Asia. A peaceful resolution of disputes would also help mitigate security concerns and reduce military expenditures.

Resuming the Kailash-Mansarovar yatra would promote cultural ties and strengthen people-to-people exchanges. Such initiatives foster goodwill and mutual understanding between the people of both countries. India's push for resuming data-sharing on trans-border rivers is crucial, particularly given China's plans to develop hydropower projects on the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra. Cooperative management of water resources would help in flood control, irrigation, and sustainable use of river systems.

An agreement on effective border management mechanisms would ensure peace and prevent potential flare-ups along the LAC. Confidence-building measures would allow both countries to focus on development rather than military posturing. Despite the progress in discussions, several challenges remain, including the final resolution of the border dispute, withdrawal of forces from key friction points, and rebuilding trust after the Galwan Valley clash in 2020. However, continued dialogue, coupled with diplomatic and military coordination, is essential for lasting peace. The latest round of talks between India and China signals a willingness to mend strained ties and find common ground. If both nations successfully resolve their differences, they stand to gain economically, strategically, and diplomatically. A cooperative approach will not only benefit the two countries but also contribute to regional and global stability. Moving forward, sustained engagement and trust-building measures will be crucial in shaping the future of India-China relations.

India's rise to AI global leadership

India's rise as a leader in AI is all about driving innovation, however, its true success lies in making AI accessible, inclusive, and transformative, write VINAY PATHAK and SANDEEP JOSHI

The journey of Artificial Intelligence (AI) from an unattainable goal to becoming a real-world changer has happened within a short period. For an emerging nation like India, AI is more than just a technological breakthrough, it is a powerful catalyst poised to reshape the country's future.

In recent decades, India has been employing AI step by step, simultaneously starting with school studies and competing with countries that are front-runners in the global AI arena. The path, which is marked by commitment, far-reaching planning, and the promotion of equal economic growth, demonstrates the country's readiness to employ the latest technology for the common good. At present, India is not only one of the key participants in the global AI revolution but is also one of the primary developers.

This became evident with India playing a crucial role at the recent AI Summit in Paris, where India showcased its noteworthy progress in the field of AI.

India's journey to the top of AI is profoundly linked with the wider narrative of development and progress. The first corners of AI research in India were practised at the campuses of top colleges and research laboratories. Undergraduate and graduate students at institutes such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) are the ones who started an AI era in India by exploring the possibilities of machine learning, neural networks, and data analytics. They were just small-scale attempts. Nevertheless, they had laid the basis for a national movement.

India's emergence as a powerful force in the IT revolution not only placed the nation on the global stage but also laid the foundation with robust, flexible infrastructure, transforming emerging technologies into tangible realities. Indian IT professionals, known for their problem-solving skills, started using AI in real-life applications, from healthcare diagnosis to stock market predictions, as early as in the first decade.

As the capabilities of AI become more evident day by day, cities in the different part of nation start adopting technology to address challenges and improve governance. potential of AI became increasingly evident, cities and states across nation start adopting technology for improvement of governance and to address challenges. Today, AI-driven initiatives are transforming urban landscapes, making cities smarter, more efficient, and more liveable. Lucknow, designated as India's first AI city, is fostering technological advancements and economic growth through AI-centric infrastructure. Maharashtra is leveraging AI



in agriculture, healthcare, and education, with predictive analytics for crop management, telemedicine services, and personalised learning platforms. Tamil Nadu Artificial Intelligence Mission (TNAIM) aims to position the state as a leading AI hub, focusing on governance, social welfare, and economic development. Karnataka is at the forefront of AI adoption in education and governance, while Kerala is advancing AI research with its Digital University developing an indigenous AI processor. Gujarat emphasises sustainable AI practices, focusing on energy-efficient technologies, and Andhra Pradesh is building AI-enabled cities like Visakhapatnam. West Bengal is innovating for safer roads with AI-driven traffic management systems in Kolkata, and Telangana has established an Applied AI Research Centre in Hyderabad. Even smaller states like Goa and Sikkim are leveraging AI for traffic management, addressing unique urban mobility challenges. There are numerous stories where India is leveraging AI for its holistic development and social progress.

These city and state-level initiatives are part of a larger national movement driven by visionary policies and initiatives. The "AI for India 2030" initiative provides a structured approach to integrating AI across the socio-economic fabric of the country. By focusing on sectors like agriculture, healthcare, and urban planning, this initiative aims to contribute significantly to the economy and improve the quality of life for millions.

The digital Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj high-

lights India's innovative use of AI capabilities to handle massive gathering of public by AI-powered tools.

On one hand it helped in the security and seamless operation and on the other hand set a global benchmark for event management.

India's role in AI is not surprisingly only a technological one; today it is a socially responsible one too. As a leader in the world, India acknowledges AI's ethical dimensions and, thus, is aiming to build a framework that will ensure transparency, fairness, and responsibility in the development of this innovative technology. The country's increasing focus on making AI a useful tool for social welfare, sustainable development, and inclusive growth has made it a role model for the rest of the world. This dedication was vividly demonstrated at the recent AI Summit in Paris where India was a spearhead in shaping international policies on AI regulation and democratisation. In Paris India co-chaired debates on the proper use of AI, thus contributing to the signing of a joint declaration with other 57 countries. The Summit emphasised the need for the establishment of a governing body that could warrant the ethical and sustainable development of AI innovation. The invitation for India to co-chair the AI Summit is a strong demonstration of the world's realisation of India as a leader in AI and of its commitment to ethical innovation. The world leaders are convinced and have strong faith in leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that he is capable to democratise AI regulatory body or

framework to neutralise the biasness of data.

On the domestic front, while the Union Budget allocated ₹500 Crore for AI education, another major accomplishment was made when Meta announced the gigantic underwater cabling project for boosting digital infrastructure. Furthermore, the CEO of OpenAI, Sam Altman, had a meeting with India's IT Minister, where they discussed expanding the ecosystem of AI, a move that showed India's commitment to becoming a global leader in the AI revolution.

Rapid developments in the field of AI in India puts the country at a special vantage point of responsibility. The nation's achievements stand as a model for other developing countries as to how technology can be used for inclusive and sustainable development. Grounded in grassroots innovation and an international vision, India has the potential to be a driving force in the design of the next generation of AI. India's commitment to ethical practices in research and international sharing of knowledge places it in a strong position to handle this complex landscape. As India gains prominence on the global stage, it also shares the responsibility of steering the AI revolution with both vision and strategic foresight. This is a testament to India's indomitable will and commitment to build a better tomorrow for all.

(Vinay Pathak is assistant professor, IIT and Sandeep Joshi is senior tech journalist. Views expressed are personal)

Leaderspeak

In Uttar Pradesh, Muslims are the safest. If Hindus are safe, then they are also safe. If there were riots in UP before 2017, if Hindu shops were burning, then Muslim shops were also burning. If Hindu houses were burning, then Muslim houses were also burning. And after 2017, the riots stopped. They will have the freedom to practise all religious customs. But can 50 Hindus be safe among 100 Muslim families? If there is smoke or someone is being hit, we should be careful before we get hit.

YOGI ADITYANATH, CHIEF MINISTER OF UTTAR PRADESH



A small inconvenience for a safer, better world

SECOND Opinion

The late-night flight from Dubai to Chennai landed smoothly. My mind was full of expectations about a large family gathering at a wedding the next day. As I walked out after immigration clearance, I saw a customs officer flagging someone frantically. I presumed it was for someone behind me, but he accosted me and asked, "Are you carrying any gold?"

"No, no, nothing except what I am wearing," I blurted. "The bangles you are wearing seem to be new."

"No, these are my everyday bangles," I said wrenching a bangle from my wrist and showing him the white film of soap settled in the grooves.

"If you are hiding any gold with you other than this, you must declare it now," the officer said, a tad menacingly.

I yanked my mangalsutra out. "Don't show, just answer me." The instruction wasn't rude, but it was firm. He called a lady subordinate and asked her to take me for a full-body frisk. Did he think I was smuggling gold? Did I look like a carrier?

The lady did a full pat down. It was a first for me in 27 years of living abroad and multiple times entering the country through various airports. I should have been outraged for being obliquely seen in a shadow of doubt, but I was not.

Startled but not overly perturbed, I let the officials do the search and be convinced that I was not a partner in any crime



ASHA IYER KUMAR

like the one Kannada actress Ranya Rao had been caught for in Bengaluru. I had an obligation as a law-abiding citizen to let the officers perform their duty. I could not blame them. Smugglers came in all sizes, shapes and genders these days and they carried out daring acts that belied stereotypes. A lone woman traveller from Dubai could be anything but innocent, and the keepers of law had every right to make sure no guilty got away even if a few innocents got inconvenienced.

On my return flight to Dubai, I was stopped again at the security checkpoint. I was asked to open my cabin baggage, much to my disappointment. I had been very diligent in my packing, making sure I did not carry any prohibited articles in the hand baggage, and yet, I was called up to open my bag and spill its contents. What had shown up in the scanner was the jewellery I had carried for the family wedding. They asked me to hold up each piece to see if there was anything dangerous. None, whatsoever. "Are they real?" a junior officer asked.

I laughed good-naturedly. "Who wears original jewellery these days, sir? Especially when we have pretty ones in imitation?" The senior officer did not find my quip amusing and pointed at a plastic bag in which I was carrying my lunch, and asked, "What's in the box?"

"Curd rice," I said. He asked me to open it. I opened it without batting an eyelid. When I was cleared, I was left with two trays full of assorted items waiting to be repacked. I was annoyed, but only slightly.

I felt pity for all those who went through the ordeal, along with my understanding of how the security personnel themselves bore the brunt of public irritation for following the protocol and making sure that nothing went wrong because of their oversight. As I stood there watching the officers work, I realised that the people in uniform were doing exactly what they were trained to do—ensuring that no one got away with jeopardising the safety of others. They were upholding a system designed to protect everyone, even when it meant inconveniencing some innocent travellers in the process.

Why do we feel affronted and targeted when we are asked to follow rules? As much as we may hate the hassle, isn't it a small price to pay for the peace of mind that comes with knowing these checks are in place? It is about understanding that the system is not designed to harass us, but to protect us, or to maintain law and order in society. The obligation to follow rules is incumbent upon us. As I read a small poster on the cockpit door from my second-row seat, I was reminded that everyone had rules to follow. I felt a quiet gratitude for those who dedicated themselves to keeping us safe on the ground and in the sky.

"Flying is a serious profession. Do not carry your worries beyond this point," the signage read. By the same token, let us not carry resentment against those who uphold the rules, for, more often than not, their vigilance is the reason the world still has some order.

(The author is a Dubai-based columnist and writing coach. She has published six books. Views expressed are personal)

Letters to the Editor

JUDICIARY UNDER SCRUTINY: THE NEED FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

As proposed by the headline "Dhankhar holds meet over cash controversy" (March 26), the controversy surrounding the unaccounted cash found at the residence of Delhi High Court Judge Yashwant Varna is bound to have far-reaching implications. This issue raises serious concerns about the erosion of public faith in the judiciary. The first political fallout of this controversy is the renewed debate over the implementation of the NJAC Act, 2014, which seeks to replace the Collegium system. The Supreme Court, as the guardian of the law, has the responsibility to uphold the integrity of the legal system. The Collegium system has once again come under scrutiny following the discovery of substantial unaccounted cash at Justice Varna's official residence—an issue that remains uninvestigated even after two weeks. Speculation suggests that any in-depth

inquiry into this matter could expose deeper systemic issues within the judiciary. The absence of accountability in the institution is fostering public disillusionment. Citizens' trust in the Indian judiciary may wane due to the lack of an alternative mechanism.

There should be no political interference or debate regarding the implementation of the NJAC Act, 2014, especially when the Collegium system is plagued by opacity. Instead, the recruitment of judges could be entrusted to the UPSC through the Civil Services Examination to address the existing vacancies across the country. Why should the elected government not have a say in the appointment of judges and be credibly entitled to participate in the process? Moreover, it is perplexing why the NJAC Act, passed by Parliament a decade ago, remains unimplemented.

VINOD JOHRI | DELHI

Jay Bhattacharya confirmed as NIH head

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

Indian-American scientist Jay Bhattacharya has been confirmed by the US Senate as the Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH)...

of modern biomedical science fails this basic test," the news portal quoted him as saying. "If confirmed, I will carry out President Trump and (Health and Human Service) Secretary Kennedy's agenda of Making America Healthy Again...

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences Sadiq Road, Faridkot -151203 Ph. 01639-256232, 256236

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CHANGE OF NAME

I, Anita Mishra W/O Late. Ram Roop Mishra, R/O A-5, GALI NO-7, CHANCHAL PARK...

I, Minkee Pandey, W/o No.17021300N Sep Sandeep Pandey, R/o- VIII- Gogahi, PO- Gogaura, PS- Dhansoi...

I, Amit Kumar, R/o- H.No.- 213, Lane No.-12, Sainik Nagar, RBL Road, Lucknow, U.P. have changed my son's name from Kaartikeya Yadav...

कार्यालय नगर पालिक निगम, (यांत्रिकी शाखा), भोपाल

IMF approves loan for Pakistan to address climate change

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

The International Monetary Fund approved a loan of \$1.3 Billion for Pakistan to address climate change while also reaching a staff-level agreement on the first review of the already agreed \$7 Billion loan.

Additionally, freeing \$1 Billion for the country under the \$7 Billion bailout programme would bring the total disbursements to \$2 Billion.

"The IMF team has reached a staff-level agreement (SLA) with the Pakistani authorities on the first review of the 37-month extended arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF)...

"Upon approval (by the IMF board), Pakistan will have access to about \$1 Billion under the EFF, bringing total disbursements under the programme to about \$2 Billion," he added.

According to Radio Pakistan, the two agreements giving access to about 2 billion dollars is a "testament to Pakistan's significant strides in economic reforms, focusing on tax equity, monetary stability, energy sector transformation, and climate resilience."

The IMF in its statement also appreciated Pakistan for its efforts to bring stability.

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New Okhla Industrial Development Authority Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, (U.P.) Website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in

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HARYANA SHEHRI VIKAS PRADHIKARAN PUBLIC NOTICE As per the decision of the Full Bench of Hon'ble High court of Punjab and Haryana in CWP No. 22252 of 2016 titled as Rajiv Manchanda Vs. State of Haryana...

THE KANGRA CO-OPERATIVE BANK LTD. APPENDIX IV [See rule 8(1)] POSSESSION NOTICE (For immovable property)

