



CASTE CENSUS ROBS OPPOSITION OF AMMUNITION

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a major decision, the Government on Wednesday announced that caste enumeration will be included in the next census exercise in a "transparent" manner and slammed the opposition parties for using caste survey as a "political tool". Announcing the decision taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the census comes under the purview of the Centre, but some States have done caste enumeration in the name of surveys "non-transparently" which has created doubts in the society.

used the issue as a political tool. "Considering all these facts and to ensure that the social fabric is not disturbed by politics, caste enumeration should be transparently included in the Census instead of surveys," he said, adding that this will strengthen the social and economic structure of our society while the nation continues to progress.

The Minister alleged that the States ruled by opposition parties have done caste surveys for political reasons and emphasised that the Modi Government has resolved to transparently include caste enumeration in the forthcoming pan-India census exercise. Vaishnaw said the census comes under the purview of the Centre, but some States have done caste enumeration in the name of surveys "non-transparently" which has created doubts in the society.

The Congress and other opposition



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw briefs the media on cabinet decisions on Wednesday PTI

parties have been vociferously demanding a nationwide caste census, making it a major election issue, and some States like Bihar, Telangana and Karnataka have conducted such surveys. The Government decision comes ahead of assembly elections in Bihar, where several parties including some BJP allies have been coming out in support of the caste census.

Home Minister Amit Shah said the Congress and its allies opposed the caste census for decades while in power and played politics over it while in the opposition. "In the CCPA meeting held today under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji, a message of strong commitment towards social equality and rights of every section has been given by deciding to include caste census in the upcoming census," he wrote on X in Hindi. "This decision will

empower all economically and socially backward classes, promote inclusion, and pave new paths for the progress of the deprived," said Shah.

The opposition INDIA bloc had made caste census a major poll plank in the recent elections, with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi promising representation to people based on their population.

"Better late than never," Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X, reacting to the Government announcement. He said the party had raised the issue in its resolution on social justice, which was passed in Ahmedabad on April 9, 2025, and also shared an April 16, 2023 letter of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in which he had demanded that the decennial census be carried out and a comprehensive caste cen-

sus be made a part of it.

The last nationwide census was completed in 2011 and the next decadal one was to commence in April 2020 but got delayed due to the Covid pandemic. Though Home Minister Amit Shah had said late last year that the census would be conducted "very soon", there is no clarity as yet on when exactly the exercise would be carried out.

Vaishnaw said in 2010, the then prime minister Manmohan Singh had assured the Lok Sabha that the matter of caste census should be considered in the Cabinet. A group of ministers was formed to consider this after most of the political parties had recommended a caste census. "Despite this, the Congress Government decided to conduct only a survey instead of a caste census. That survey is known as SECC.

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After Pahalgam, India shall retain Ajit Doval as National Security Advisor

RAHUL DATTA ■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday here reviewed the entire spectrum of security situation in the wake of Pahalgam terror attacks in the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) meeting. It was the second CCS meeting since the dastardly act on April 22. Along with the high-level security meeting, two additional committee meetings - the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) and the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) were also convened at the Prime Minister's residence.

chairman. The NSAB is an advisory body that provides inputs to the National Security Council Secretariat.

Incidentally, the latest CCS meeting took

The latest CCS meeting took place a day after the PM accorded operational freedom to the armed forces on the "mode, targets and timing" of India's response to attack

place a day after the Prime Minister held a meeting here on Tuesday with the top military brass and accorded operational freedom to the armed forces on the "mode, targets and timing" of India's response to the April 22 attack that killed 26 people. In the first meeting on April 23, the CCS decided a raft of punitive measures against Pakistan, including suspen-

sion of the Indus Waters Treaty, shutting down of the only operation land border crossing at Attari and downgrading of diplomatic ties in view of cross-border links to the attack. In response, Pakistan shut its airspace to Indian airliners and suspended all trade with India, including through third countries. Pakistan rejected India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty and said any move to stop the flow of water would be seen as an "act of war".

In the high-level meeting with the defence brass on Tuesday, Modi asserted that the armed forces have "complete operational freedom" to decide on the mode, targets and timing of India's response, Government sources said. The meeting was attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan and the chiefs of three services.

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Pakistan bears its fangs at India

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

The military and political leadership in Pakistan is growing 'jittery' with every passing hour, after India sent out a 'strong and stern' message by giving a free hand to its armed forces to respond to the Pahalgam massacre.

This was evident on Tuesday. Barely hours after the Director General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of India and Pakistan spoke to each other to discuss the 'unprovoked' ceasefire violations by Pakistan since April 22, Pakistani troops once again resorted to cross-border firing along the International Border, for the first time in the last week, in the Pargwal sector of Jammu late Tuesday night.

Amid mounting tensions, India utilised the opportunity to warn Pakistan against the 'unprovoked' violations, but on the ground zero, the Pakistani troops breached the ceasefire agreement with impunity. The forward villages across the Jammu frontier have been kept in a state

of high alert as villagers have started making alternate arrangements to ensure their safety and security. At some places, the villagers have cleaned the community bunkers to utilise them during emergencies. The farmers have been rushing through the peak harvest season to prevent losses.

The Pak Army also traded fire at multiple locations along LoC on Tuesday, marking the sixth consecutive day of cross-border firing by Pakistani forces.

Following the firing in the Pargwal sector along the International Border, additional BSF personnel were deployed as Indian troops responded swiftly and in a calibrated manner to the Pakistani firing.

Along the LoC, the latest round of firing took place across the Nowshera and Sunderbani sectors in Rajouri district, as well as the Akhnoor sector in Jammu, and in Baramulla and Kupwara districts. Since April 22, the alert army troops have been maintaining a tight

vigil and have enhanced patrolling to ensure security along the border.

So far, the Pakistan army has been resorting to the use of small arms firing along the LoC. The artillery guns have not been utilised despite mounting tensions in the area.

Meanwhile, anti-terror operations are underway in the hinterlands of Anantnag, Pulwama, and Shopian, with security forces positioned on top of the mountains, clearing areas one by one and moving closer.

The Jammu and Kashmir Police and CRPF have been tasked with conducting house-to-house searches, including those of OGWs, and gathering more details about their connections.

Since the Pahalgam attack, cross-border firings by Pakistan have grown increasingly frequent, following a systematic pattern of provocation. On Monday night, multiple such incidents were reported from the Kupwara and Baramulla districts, as well as the Akhnoor sector.

The Bystander



Fourteen dead in Bengal hotel fire

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

At least 14 people including two women and two children died in a massive fire that broke inside an upmarket North Kolkata hotel late on Tuesday evening. About 12 people were injured and continue to recuperate in various hospitals, police said.

Most deaths occurred on account of choking from the smoke as the trapped guests and staff could not come out of the six-storey building at Mechua Bazar in North Kolkata's busy Bara Bazar area.

The fire broke out at about 8 pm and it took more than 10 hours for the fire-fighters to douse. "Initially what looked like a manageable fire the magnitude of it could be gauged only after the flames were put out and the dead people were rescued well past midnight," a senior fire official said. Most of those dead are from Bihar Fire Brigade sources said holding the hotel owners guilty of flouting the building norms. "The emergency exit door was closed because some building materials had piled up there as the authorities were building an illegal dance floor and bar without permission of the authorities," locals said. The Fire Brigade officials said the fire fighting system inside the hotel was not working and the water tank was empty adding the fire clearance certificate had lapsed three years ago.

A senior officer from the Kolkata Police said that, "There were 88 guests in 42 rooms at the time of the incident. A boy, a girl and a woman are among the dead." Locals said that a short circuit inside the kitchen could be the reason of the fire.



Relatives console a woman after she identified the body of her relative who was killed in the Rituraj hotel fire incident, at the RG Kar Hospital in Kolkata PTI

Kolkata Commissioner of Police Manoj Verma said Special Investigation Team had been constituted to investigate the matter. While the two owners Akash and Atul Chopra were still at large, the police arrested the manager of the hotel.

"It is very difficult to keep a tab on such unscrupulous elements in such a big city. The owners had been indulging in illegal constructions and had also not followed fire rules. An inquiry will be conducted and the guilty will be brought to book," Fire Minister Sujit Basu said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi sanctioned an ex-gratia amount of ₹2 lakh for those dead and ₹50,000 for those injured. The Prime Minister's wrote

on the X: "Anguished by the loss of lives due to a fire mishap in Kolkata. Condolences to those who lost their loved ones. May the injured recover soon. An ex-gratia of ₹2 lakh from PMNRF would be given to the next of kin of each deceased. The injured would be given ₹50,000."

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who was away in Digha inaugurating the replica of Puri Jagannath Temple too expressed her condolences and announced an ex-gratia payment of ₹2 lakh for the victims. She wrote on the X "14 died eventually in total because there were combustible materials stored inside. Investigation has been ordered. My condolences to the victim families and solidarity for all affected."

Andhra Temple Stampede

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Visakhapatnam

Seven people were killed when a rain-soaked wall collapsed at the Sri Varaha Lakshmi Narasimha Swamy Temple in Simhachalam here in the early hours of Wednesday.

The Government said seven people died after the wall collapsed on the ₹300 ticket queue line near the shopping complex on the ghat road from Simhagiri bus stand at around 3 am.

President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, AP Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, among others, expressed grief over the incident. Both the Centre and the State Government announced ex-gratia to the families of those killed in the incident.

State Home Minister V Anitha, who was present at the site, said preliminary reports indicated that the wall collapse at the temple was triggered by soil loosening due to heavy rains in the area. According to Government sources, one person sustained injuries.

CM Naidu expressed deep sorrow and said he had spoken to the Collector and SP and directed for treatment be provided to the injured.

"Deeply saddened by the death of seven devotees at Simhachalam...My condolences to the families. I'm closely monitoring the situation and have ordered continuous review and support for victims," said Naidu in a post on X.

The CM, who reviewed the situation via teleconference, announced an ex-gratia of ₹25 lakh each to the kin of the deceased and ₹3 lakh each to the injured, an official release said. An outsourcing

job in temples under the Endowments Department will be provided to a family member of each victim.

Naidu also ordered an inquiry into the incident by a three-member committee. The committee members are— Irrigation chief engineer Venkateswar Rao, Municipal Administration principal secretary S Suresh Kumar and senior IPS officer Ake Ravi Krishna. Naidu also reviewed the incident at his Undavalli residence with DGP Harish Kumar Gupta and other senior officials. They apprised the CM of the help being extended to the victims.

In her condolence message on X, President Murmu said: "Saddened by the loss of lives including those of women in a wall collapse incident in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. My thoughts and prayers are with the grieving families." "May the injured recover soon," she said. PM Modi mourned the victims.

"Deeply saddened by the loss of lives due to the collapse of a wall in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. Condolences to those who have lost their loved ones. May the injured recover soon." He also announced an ex-gratia of ₹2 lakh from PMNRF to the next of kin of each deceased and ₹50,000 to the injured. Telangana CM A Revanth Reddy also condoled the deaths. Earlier, the annual Chandanotsavam at the temple witnessed both grandeur and grief, as thousands gathered to witness the Nijaroopa darshanam of the Lord, even as tragedy struck in the form of the wall collapse.

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PIONEER IN SHORT

Amul increases milk prices by ₹2 per litre

Prices of Amul milk across all variants will increase by Rs 2 per litre starting May 1, the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF) announced on Wednesday. This hike represents a 3 per cent-4 per cent rise in the maximum retail price (MRP), which the federation noted is lower than the current average food inflation. GCMMF markets dairy products under the popular 'Amul' brand. With this revision, the 500ml pouch of Amul Gold will now cost ₹34, while the 500ml Amul Shakti variant will be priced at ₹31 in Gujarat. The federation attributed the price hike to a rise in overall input and operational costs incurred by dairy farmers.

SC overhauls KYC for differently abled

The Supreme Court on Wednesday mandated an inclusive overhaul of the digital Know Your Customer (KYC) process, ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities, including acid attack survivors and the visually impaired. A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan issued 20 directives to the Centre, its departments, and the RBI, stressing that digital access is a constitutional right under Article 21. The court emphasized that systemic digital exclusion violates equality and dignity, calling for accessible design, regional content, and alternative KYC verification methods. It also ordered regular accessibility audits, mandatory involvement of persons with disabilities in app testing, and appointment of nodal officers to ensure compliance across public and private digital platforms.

FULL REPORT ON P4

Nation mourns, but Prime Minister offers hope, in Mumbai

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ Mumbai

The Mumbai sky wears its usual grey, humid veil, but outside the Jio World Convention Centre (JWCC), something extraordinary is brewing till this weekend. The sprawling facade of the JWCC shimmers under spotlights and massive LED displays pulsing with the WAVES Summit logo. Security details move with intent, cranes hoist final fixtures, and camera crews scurry across pavements, their lenses trained on every movement. There is a low but constant hum of walkie talkies, clinking scaffolds, and rehearsals filtering through the air.

On the eve of the first ever WAVES Summit, the JWCC has transformed into a coliseum of creativity, a nucleus of anticipation brimming with power, passion, and promise. Across the city too, the signs are unmistakable. Banners flutter, hotels are booked to capacity, and the cultural pulse of Mumbai beats louder in readiness for what promises



Commuters pass by hoardings put up for the World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES) in Mumbai PTI

to be a landmark carnival of creativity and innovation

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi steps up to inaugurate the WAVES Summit on Thursday, it will signal more than just the opening of an event. It will

reflect India's bold move to lead the global conversation where storytelling, technology, and culture meet.

Organised by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the four-day summit, running from 1 to May 1-

4 in Mumbai, aims to position India as a creative and technological force across industries, from cinema and television to AI, immersive reality, gaming, and digital media. For creators, innovators, and investors alike, it offers a powerful platform to shape the future of entertainment.

At the heart of this extraordinary summit is the Bharat Pavilion, spread across 1,470 square metres, showcasing India's dynamic legacy under the theme "Kala to Code." To be inaugurated by PM Modi, the Pavilion will take visitors on an immersive journey through the evolution of Indian storytelling, from ancient oral traditions and visual arts to cutting edge technological advancements, across four experiential zones: Shruti, Kriti, Drishti, and Creator's Leap.

In addition to the Bharat Pavilion, WAVES 2025 will feature exclusive State Pavilions, where Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, and several other States will proudly showcase their cultural and cre-

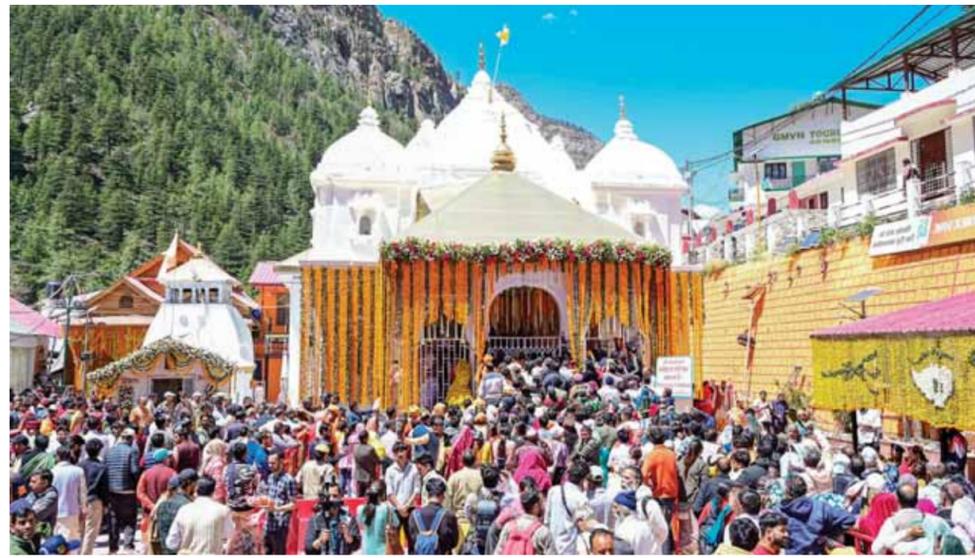
ative strengths. As the Pavilion opens its doors to this rich journey through time and technology, the inaugural day sets the tone with an experience just as immersive, blending music, culture, and innovation on stage. The performances begin with an orchestral crescendo under the baton of M. M. Keeravaani, followed by legendary voices such as Shreya Ghoshal, Shankar Mahadevan, Sonu Nigam, Mangli, and K. S Chithra.

Together, they will unveil the WAVES Anthem, a sonic emblem of unity and creative strength. Sharad Kelkar will guide the audience through a visual journey connecting ancient narratives to contemporary innovations, supported by mixed-media storytelling and dynamic dance forms.

The cultural diversity of India finds its way to centre stage through performances by the Tsetse Sisters from Nagaland, followed by AR Rahman introducing JHALAA, his experimental band that blends Indian classical music with new-age sound design.

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Char Dham Yatra begins



People during an event organised for the opening of the Gangotri portal on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya in Uttarkashi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dehradun

The Char Dham Yatra began on Wednesday with the opening of the portals of Gangotri and Yamunotri temples in Garhwal Himalayas for devotees on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami visited both temples on the opening day and performed a puja praying for the well-being and prosperity of all. "We wait for this day throughout the year and it has finally arrived. Char Dham Yatra is like a grand festival for us. Security of pilgrims is our priority," he told

reporters in Yamunotri soon after offering prayers. The gates of Gangotri were opened at 10.30 am and those of Yamunotri at 11.55 am amid traditional rituals, committees running the affairs of the temples said.

The doors of the other two Dhams — Kedarnath and Badrinath — will open on May 2 and May 4, respectively. The four temples remain closed for six months during winter. Nearly 6,000 police personnel, 17 companies of Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and 10 companies of paramilitary forces have been deployed on the Yatra routes for the security of pilgrims.

Besides, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel have also been deployed in more than 65 accident-prone areas.

More than 22 lakh devotees from across the country and abroad have already registered for the Yatra this year, officials said.

The number of pilgrims this year is likely to reach a record 60 lakh, Badrinath-Kedarnath temple committee's media in-charge Harish Gaur said.

Last year, 48 lakh pilgrims came for the Char Dham Yatra in spite of its disruption for more than a fortnight due to damage to the trek route to Kedarnath following heavy rain.

Minor stabs 25-year-old man in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

A minor and his associates allegedly stabbed a 25-year-old man in the stomach over his relationship with the accused's sister, police said.

According to police, the incident occurred at around 4 pm when three minors attacked Lavish in his shop in Samaypur Badli area. A purported CCTV footage of the incident surfaced online.

Lavish, a resident of Rana Park in Delhi was immediately rushed to BSA Hospital.

He works in the office of a builder in Badarpur, police said.

Initial investigation revealed that Lavish was in a relationship with a woman, police said.

The girl, an employee at a blood bank centre in Shalimar Bagh, has two brothers who were opposing her relationship.

"A few months ago, her elder brother had warned Lavish to stay away," a senior police officer said.

On Tuesday, tensions escalated when the woman's younger brother, a 10th-grade student in Pitampura, along with his juvenile associates arrived at Lavish's shop and attacked him with a knife multiple times.

All three accused have been identified, and multiple police teams have been formed to apprehend them.

"The victim is undergoing treatment. We are making all efforts to trace and apprehend the accused juveniles," senior police officer said.

Odisha CM disburses ₹1,025 crore to 51 lakh farmers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday disbursed ₹1,025 crore for 51 lakh farmers under the CM Kisan Assistance Scheme during Krushak Dibas held on the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya here.

Financial assistance of ₹2,000 each was credited to the bank accounts of farmers through the DBT facility as Majhi, accompanied by deputy CM KV Singh Deo, pushed the button at the function at the Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) farm here.

The CM also participated in 'Akhi Muthi Anukula' and Bhumi Pujan rituals. The beneficiaries included small, marginal, landless and tribal farmers. For the first time, 25,000 farmers from urban areas have been included under the CM-KISAN scheme, marking a significant expansion in the government's outreach to cultivators, Majhi said. The CM said needy farmers are being provided ₹2,000 each ahead of the Kharif crop to purchase seeds, fertilisers and other essential items. On September 8, 2024, the state government had rolled out the CM-KISAN Yojana, which then benefited around 46 lakh farmers.

Under the scheme, the farmers are given ₹4,000 financial assistance per annum on two occasions — Akshaya Tritiya and Nua Khai — to assist them for Kharif and Rabi crops. "I am a farmer by birth and used to work in fields along with my father during my college days," Majhi recalled. The Chief Minister said since the BJP came to power in the state in 2024, the administration has been continuously making efforts to increase the income of farmers. "The previous government

kept silent by bringing only a resolution in the assembly for MSP. We had promised, kept our word and gave ₹3,100 MSP. In the next five years, we have set a target of providing irrigation facilities in 15 lakh hectares with an investment of about ₹1 lakh crore," Majhi said.

He added the state is taking steps to set up cold storage facilities in every subdivision. "To increase the income of the farmers, we are providing necessary assistance with discounts for fish farming, animal husbandry, poultry and duck farming along with agriculture," Majhi said.

Opposition Congress also observed the 'Akshaya Tritiya' celebrations with OPCC president Bhakta Charan Das, Leader of Congress Legislature Party (CLP) Rama Chandra Kadam, former ministers Niranjan Patnaik, Sursh Routray and others performing 'Akhi Muthi Anukula' at Kalyanpur village near famous Dhauri peace pagoda here. Biju Janata Dal (BJD) leaders also performed the ritual of sowing the first seeds of the season at a village under Purana Pradhan gram panchayat under Baliaanta block. In a message, former chief minister and Leader of Opposition in Odisha Assembly, Naveen Patnaik in a post on X said, "My heartfelt greetings to the people of the state on the auspicious occasion of Akshaya Tritiya and Akhi Muthi Anukula. May the blessings of the Lord bring good harvest and happiness and prosperity to the lives of the farmer brothers and sisters. #AkshayaTritiya."

Akshaya Tritiya is considered the most auspicious day for the people of Odisha to begin any work. Farmers traditionally start cultivation on this day when both the Sun and the Moon are believed to be in their most favourable positions.

Raja Iqbal Singh chairs meeting with Deputy Mayor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Newly elected Delhi Mayor Raja Iqbal Singh chaired a meeting with Deputy Mayor Jai Bhagwan Yadav and senior councillors on Wednesday to discuss pressing issues affecting parks across the city to ensure better maintenance and safety of public parks.

The meeting, held at the Mayor's office, focused on a range of problems that have been impacting the quality and accessibility of MCD parks.

Among the key issues discussed were broken boundary walls, deteriorated pathways, inadequate lighting, accumulation of dry leaves, shortage of gardeners, delays in receiving pruning permissions from the Forest Department, and the poor condition of water pumps essential for maintaining park greenery.

"The maintenance of our parks is a

matter of public concern, and we are committed to resolving these issues on a priority basis," said the Mayor Raja Iqbal Singh. "Parks are essential spaces for recreation, health, and community engagement. It is our duty to ensure that they remain clean, green, and safe for all citizens."

The Mayor directed the officials to initiate prompt action plans to repair infrastructure and enhance regular upkeep.

Emphasis was also placed on coordinating with the Forest Department to expedite permissions related to tree pruning, which is essential for plant health and public safety.

The Mayor concluded the meeting with a strong message that parks are vital public assets and must be maintained without delay to prevent inconvenience to residents and to promote environmental and physical well-being in the community.

Courts can modify arbitral awards, Supreme Court holds

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Wednesday held courts could modify arbitral awards under the 1996 law on arbitration and conciliation.

In a 4:1 majority ruling, Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna aside from Justices BR Gavai, Sanjay Kumar and Augustine George Masih held under certain circumstances, the arbitral awards could be modified by using provisions of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.

The verdict will impact domestic and international arbitral awards in commercial disputes. Pronouncing the judgement, the CJ, however, ordered courts to exercise "caution" in modifying arbitral awards. "The special powers of the Supreme Court under Article 142 of the Constitution can be applied to modify awards. But this power must be exercised with great caution within the limits of the Constitution," he said.

The CJ added, "The question of law is answered to say that the court has limited power to modify arbitral awards under

Sections 34 and 37 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996."

Justice KV Viswanathan, the lone dissenting judge, held courts couldn't alter arbitral awards. The majority verdict referred to circumstances in which the "limited power" to modify arbitral awards could be exercised by the courts.

"When the award is severable by separating the invalid portion from the valid portion of the award," the CJ said, "the power can be exercised to correct any clerical, computation or typographical errors which appear erroneous on the face of the record". The majority verdict said the power could be exercised to "modify post-award interest in some circumstances".

Article 142 of the Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to pass any decree or order necessary for "doing complete justice" in any case or matter pending before it.

This discretionary power allows the court to go beyond the strict legal requirements and ensure justice in situations where existing laws may be inadequate or

incomplete. A detailed judgement is awaited. The court on February 19 reserved its judgement on the contentions legal issue after hearing parties for three days. The final hearing in the matter began on February 13 after the issue was referred to it by a three-judge bench on January 23. Solicitor general Tushar Mehta aside from senior advocates Arvind Datar, Darius Khambata, Shekhar Naphade, Ritin Rai, Saurabh Kirpal and Gourab Banerji had argued in the case.

Lawyers led by Datar argued that the courts, which were empowered under Section 34 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996 to set aside the arbitral awards on certain grounds, could also modify it as their powers included the smaller discretion.

Another set of lawyers argued that the term "modify" which was not there in the statute couldn't be read into it to assume the non-existent powers.

Arbitration is an alternate mode of dispute resolution under the 1996 law and it minimises the role of courts to interfere with the awards by the tribunals.

While Section 34 of the Act provides for setting aside of an arbitral award on limited grounds such as procedural irregularities, violation of public policy, or lack of jurisdiction, Section 37 governs appeals against orders related to arbitration, including those refusing to set aside an award. Like Section 34, it also aims to minimise judicial interference while addressing exceptional cases requiring oversight.

"While examining the aforesaid question, the court will also examine the contours and scope of the power of the court ... and if the power of modification exists, to what extent the same can be exercised," the bench had said earlier.

The matter arose from Gayatri Balasamy v. ISG Novasoft Technologies Ltd. The courts have traditionally interpreted this section narrowly, avoiding a review of the merits of the award to uphold arbitration's principles of finality and efficiency.

In February 2024, a three-judge bench comprising Justices Dipankar Datta, KV Viswanathan, and Sandeep Mehta framed a few questions and referred the case to the CJ for consideration.

Andhra Temple Stampede

Continued from >> P1 The shrine is dedicated to Lord Narasimha Swamy, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The deity's idol is covered with sandalwood paste all through the year and revealed only once a year which is celebrated as Chandanotsavam.

Home Minister Anitha said heavy overnight rains and strong winds are suspected to have loosened the soil, causing the wall to give away.

Anitha, present at the temple during the incident, visited the site immediately. There was no negligence in the rescue response, she asserted. An official from the temple said that the cause appears to be structural failure triggered by rains, but a detailed probe is underway.

Endowments Minister Ramanarayana Reddy called the tragedy unfortunate and announced stronger safety protocols.

Rescue operations are underway, with teams from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and state

authorities pressed into service. According to State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel, eight devotees were trapped under the debris, and seven bodies—three women and four men were extricated during the rescue operation.

Former CM YS Jagan Mohan Reddy expressed shock over the incident and urged for best medical support to the injured and compensation to the victims' families. According to a YSRCP statement, Reddy will visit Visakhapatnam later on Wednesday to meet with the families of the deceased.

Deputy CM Pawan Kalyan expressed sorrow over the death of the devotees, adding that the disaster striking during Chandanotsavam is unfortunate.

Earlier this year, six devotees waiting to collect tokens for Vaikunta Dwara Darshanam at Lord Venkateswara Swamy temple on Tirumala Hills in Tirupati were killed in a stampede.

Nagaland student organisation intensifies protest over regularisation of ad-hoc professors, librarians

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Kohima

The Naga Students' Federation (NSF), the apex tribal students' organisation in Nagaland, intensified its protest for the second consecutive day on Wednesday here, against the regularisation of services of 147 ad-hoc professors and librarians and locked the main gate of the Directorate of Higher Education (DHE).

The NSF's agitation is against the April 21 government notification that regularised the services of 147 ad-hoc assistant professors and librarians under the DHE.

It wants the appointments to be rolled back and the posts filled up through the Nagaland Public Service Commission (NPSC). Speaking to the media, NSF president Medovi Rhi said the decision to lock the DHE gate was taken during an emergency presidential council meeting held on

Tuesday night with its federating units, following the first day of the agitation.

"Until and unless the government revokes its decision to regularise the services of the ad-hoc staff and initiates recruitment through NPSC, the NSF will continue its protest and prevent the functioning of the DHE," Rhi said.

When asked whether the government approached them for a resolution, Rhi said they were informed of a Cabinet meeting scheduled for the day and based on its outcome, the NSF would decide on the next course of action.

Officials of the district and administration and police deployed to thwart any escalating situation tried to convince the NSF activists to allow the DHE staff to enter the office for regular work.

The NSF representatives said, "Not possible till the government gives a pos-

itive response". Meanwhile, a parallel peaceful protest led by the Combined Technical Aspirants of Nagaland (CTAN) and the Nagaland NET Qualified Forum (NNQF) resumed their agitation on Tuesday.

The agitation, which began on April 21, was suspended on April 25 after receiving a verbal assurance from the Higher Education Minister Temjen Imna Along to revoke the regularisation order and dissolution of the High Powered Committee (HPC). In addition to the demands shared with NSF, the CTAN and NNQF are also calling for the dissolution of the HPC, which was constituted by the government to investigate the matter.

Dissatisfied with the lack of concrete action, they resumed their protest. CTAN convener Meshenlo Kath emphasised their commitment to a peaceful agitation

and affirmed that the protest would continue until all three demands were met.

On Monday, the state Cabinet reduced the HPC's reporting period from eight weeks to four, reiterated its commitment to uncovering the facts, and urged the NSF, CTAN, and NNQF to withdraw their protests. Despite this, the agitating groups have remained firm in their stance.

District administration officials and security personnel have been deployed to prevent any escalation. When asked why NSF, CTAN and NNQF are protesting separately, Rhi explained, "We are united in our demands but differ in our methods. NSF may escalate its protest beyond peaceful means, if needed, to put pressure on the government."

Despite differences in approach, both groups remain hopeful for a favourable outcome from the Cabinet meeting.

CASTE CENSUS ROBS OPPOSITION OF AMMUNITION

Continued from >> P1 "It is well understood that the Congress and its INDI alliance partners have used Caste Census only as a political tool," the minister alleged. The first caste enumeration in independent India was conducted in 2011 and was known as the Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011.

The census during the British rule

between 1881 and 1931 included caste enumeration, but post-independence the government decided in 1951 not to include caste in the census, except for SCs and STs. Vaishnav said that under Article 246 of the Constitution, the subject 'census' is listed in the Union list under entry 69 and according to the Constitution, the Census is a Union subject. He said some states have conduct-

ed surveys to enumerate castes.

Some states have done this well, while some others have conducted such surveys purely from a political angle in a non-transparent way. Such surveys have created doubts in the society, he said.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs has decided today (30th April 2025) that caste enu-

meration should be included in the forthcoming Census," the minister said. "This demonstrates that our government is committed to the values and interests of our society and country, like in the past when our government had introduced 10 per cent reservation for the economically weaker sections of the society without causing stress in any section of the society," Vaishnav said at the briefing.

Nation mourns, but Prime Minister offers hope, in Mumbai

Continued from >> P1 The summit will also debut the Waves of India album, a unique collaboration between musical icons Keeravaani, Rahman, and Mahadevan, each bringing a distinct musical tradition to the collective.

The evening continues with cross-cultural collaborations, as the Dharavi Dream Project teams up with South Korea's Beatpella House, followed by Indian pop sensation King and EDM star Alan Walker. The finale features cinematic legend Anupam Kher and choreographer Kruti Mahesh, capturing the essence of

Indian cinema. These performances aim to unite creators, cultures, and countries through music and movement.

What sets the WAVES Summit apart is its refusal to remain within the boundaries of traditional entertainment. As much as it highlights creative excellence, it also addresses the powerful changes shaping the industry.

Plenary sessions featuring icons like Hema Malini, Mithun Chakraborty, Rajnikanth, Akshay Kumar, SS Rajamouli, AR Rahman, Anil Kapoor, and Karan Johar promise more than glamour. These

sessions will offer rich insight into the evolution of Indian storytelling and the new expectations of global audiences. Rajamouli, riding the wave of international acclaim following RRR, is particularly anticipated for his reflections on filmmaking beyond borders.

Meanwhile, breakout sessions will take a deep dive into the industry's next frontier. Topics include regulatory frameworks for digital broadcasting, the role of artificial intelligence in creative production, and investment opportunities in the gaming sector. An open house hosted by

professionals from NVIDIA will explore how AI is reshaping animation, visual effects, and immersive storytelling.

Another key event, titled The New Arcade, will bring together venture capitalists and emerging gaming entrepreneurs to discuss the future of gaming in India. With mobile and console gaming gaining momentum among Indian audiences, these conversations could steer the direction of the country's gaming landscape in the years to come. The summit aims to place India at the heart of the global media conversation.

After Pahalgam, India shall retain Ajit Doval..

Continued from >> P1

The Prime Minister affirmed that it is "our national resolve" to deal a crushing blow to terrorism. Government sources said, adding that he expressed complete faith and confidence in the professional abilities of the Indian armed forces. As regards revamping National Security Advisory Board, the new seven-member board includes several distinguished former officers from the armed forces and civil services.

These include former Western Air Commander Air Marshal P M Sinha, former Southern Army Commander Lt General AK Singh, and Rear Admiral (retired) Monty Khanna from the military services.

Representing the Indian Police Service are Rajiv Ranjan Verma and Manmohan Singh, both retired IPS officers. Former Indian Foreign Service officer B Venkatesh Varma has been included in

the board. The National Security Advisory Board comprises a group of eminent national security experts outside the Government.

Members are usually senior retired officials, civilian as well as military, academicians and distinguished members of civil society drawn from and having expertise in internal and external security, foreign affairs, defence, science and technology and economic affairs.

Constituted in 1998, the National Security Advisory Board undertakes long-term analysis to provide perspectives on the national security issues to the National Security Council (NSC) and to recommend measures or solutions and policy options on the issues referred to it by the National Security Council.

The last board was constituted in 2018 with PS Raghavan, former Indian Ambassador to Russia (2014-16), as its head.

ACB files FIR against Sisodia, Jain in ₹2,000 crore school scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Government's Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) registered a First Information Report (FIR) against former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and former PWD minister Satyendra Jain on Wednesday over alleged corruption in the construction of classrooms. According to the ACB, the alleged scam, pegged at around ₹2,000 crore, pertains to the construction of 12,748 classrooms and associated buildings and involved awarding contracts at highly-inflated rates with classrooms in government-run schools reportedly built at ₹24.86 lakh each, nearly five times the usual cost during the AAP government's tenure.

Both AAP leaders are currently on bail in separate cases. Sisodia has been booked in a case related to alleged irregularities in the 2021-22 Delhi excise policy and Jain in a money laundering case. The case was registered after the ACB received the necessary sanction under Section 17-A of the Prevention of Corruption Act from the competent authority.

The project was allegedly awarded to contractors linked with the Aam Aadmi

Party when Sisodia served as the education minister and Jain as the PWD minister.

Reacting to this, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva demanded that the ACB investigate the role of the then chief minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, in the alleged scam. "This is a decisive moment in the fight against corruption of AAP and its previous government in Delhi," he said. Meanwhile, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said the case against its leaders Sisodia and Jain was registered to "pressure and scare" them as they were recently appointed as in-charge and co-charge of the Punjab party unit.

"The BJP has no intention of doing any meaningful governance for the coming 5 years — they're only interested in theatrics. One day it's a case, the next a raid. It is no coincidence that as soon as Durgesh Pathak is appointed as Sah-Prabhari of Gujarat, an FIR is registered against him and his house is raided. The moment Manish Sisodia and Satyendra Jain are given roles in Punjab, fresh FIRs appear against them," it said.

According to ACB officials, the project involving the construction of approximately 12,748 classrooms and school buildings across the national capital,



Manish Sisodia (left) and Satyendra Jain (right)

PIONEER PHOTO

which saw "significant financial irregularities, deviations and cost escalations".

The project was initially approved at a sanctioned cost with the condition that it would be completed by June 2016 and

without scope for future escalation. However, not a single work was completed within the prescribed timeline, the anti-graft body alleged in the statement.

Complaints regarding the alleged scam

were received from BJP leaders Harish Khurana, Kapil Mishra and Neelkanth Bakshi.

It was alleged that the total expenditure incurred on the project amounted to ₹2,892 crore, pushing the per-classroom cost to ₹24.86 lakh, compared to the estimated ₹5 lakh per room under standard norms. "Investigations revealed that the project was awarded to 34 contractors, most of whom are allegedly linked to AAP."

The construction involved Semi-Permanent Structures (SPS) with an expected lifespan of 30 years, yet costs matched those of Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) structures which typically last up to 75 years. "Officials noted that the adoption of SPS construction did not result in any financial benefit," read the statement.

The ACB further claimed that the consultant and architect for the project were appointed without following due process. "The Chief Technical Examiner (CTE) of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) had raised serious violations of various clauses in its report which highlighted gross violations of CPWD Works Manual 2014, GFR 2017, and CVC guidelines. However, the report

was allegedly suppressed for nearly three years," it added.

According to the ACB, the CTE report observed that the actual cost of SPS classrooms was nearly equivalent to that of permanent structures due to the adoption of richer specifications.

The cost per square foot for SPS classrooms was pegged at ₹2,292, compared to ₹2,044-2,416 per square foot for pucca model schools. This negated any financial advantage expected from using SPS. The initial tendered amount was ₹860.63 crore, which later saw an escalation of 17 per cent to 90 per cent amounting to ₹326.25 crore.

The anti-graft body said that of this, ₹205.45 crore was directly attributed to richer specifications, comprising nearly 24 per cent of the original tender value. No fresh tenders were invited to reflect these changes, contrary to CVC guidelines.

In five schools, work worth ₹42.5 crore was executed without proper tenders, using existing contracts, read the statement. A comprehensive investigation has been launched to unearth the whole conspiracy and fix the role and culpability of the AAP leaders, unknown government officials and contractors, it said.

CM Gupta leads DJB review, focusses on Yamuna cleanup



CM Rekha Gupta visiting to Delhi Jal Board headquarter

PIONEER PHOTO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta conducted a review meeting at the Delhi Jal Board headquarters on Wednesday to assess the departmental functioning and the action plan for Yamuna cleaning.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister provided several key directives regarding departmental functioning, water supply, and the sewerage system. A comprehen-

sive review was also undertaken of tanker management, grievance redressal systems, and digital monitoring mechanisms. Delhi Cabinet Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh was also present on this occasion.

At the meeting, the chief minister highlighted that during the summer season, Delhi faces significant challenges concerning water supply. Along with this, fixing the sewer system and cleaning the Yamuna are interconnected issues. To address these

challenges, a comprehensive review of water supply systems, tanker operations, and the sewer network was conducted at the DJB headquarters today. The GPS-based system implemented for tanker water supply was examined in detail, along with the real-time monitoring of tanker movements across the city at the Command and Control Center to ensure timely and transparent water distribution. The SCADA system's role in monitoring water supply status throughout Delhi was also reviewed, focusing on areas requiring improvements.

Following the review, the Chief Minister instructed that third-party audits be conducted to ensure transparency in the functioning of Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs). She stated that there would be no compromise on the quality and efficiency of STPs. Transparency and accountability will be ensured within the Delhi Jal Board's operations.

The Chief Minister noted that many areas in Delhi still rely on decades-old water pipelines and sewer lines. Officials were directed to replace all old lines under phase-wise planning with modern technology.

Additionally, instructions were given to utilise the latest technologies in making new STPs to enhance the effectiveness and environmental friendliness of the water purification process.

The Chief Minister informed that sewer lines have been successfully laid in

1,226 unauthorized colonies in Delhi so far, while work is in progress in 154 unauthorised colonies. The government aims to connect all unauthorized colonies with the sewer network by 2028.

CM Gupta reiterated the Delhi Government's complete commitment to Yamuna river cleaning and preservation. At the meeting, a detailed discussion was held on the implementation of a multi-faceted and phased action plan for Yamuna cleaning.

This includes drain treatment, sewerage network expansion, and establishing modern sewage treatment plants. The government has already approved the construction of 27 decentralized STPs. This Rs 3,140 crore project will include decentralized STPs, terminal SPS, and a 10 MGD STP at Delhi Gate, along with their maintenance. The government is ensuring that no untreated sewage enters the Yamuna. Once tendered, all these DSTPs will be completed within 18 months.

"We took stock of the reasons behind challenges faced by the city every summer: water supply, Yamuna River cleaning, and sewage management. All these are interconnected. Delhi still has 30-year-old sewer and water pipelines which are causing major problems. During the meeting, the functioning of GPS-fitted water tankers, water availability issues and providing sewerage infrastructure in all unauthorized colonies will be done," CM Gupta said.



Police at the spot after the victim's family blocks the road

PIONEER PHOTO

Youth dies in police custody, family alleges foul play

VAISHNAVI MISHRA ■ New Delhi

A 19-year-old youth in custody died and another was injured, on Tuesday, after they allegedly jumped out of a moving police vehicle during transit in the Vasant Kunj North area of Delhi's southwest. Family members of the victims blocked the Samalkha-Kapashera road and pelted stones at the police, alleging custodial death. Police have initiated legal proceedings and a judicial inquiry is underway into the youth's death.

According to police, the incident took place near Vasant Kunj North police station while police were taking the accused to lock-up, following their arrest in an arms and vehicle theft case on Tuesday. On Tuesday, Head constable Balbir Singh and constable Nitesh were on routine motorcycle patrol around 3 pm when they noticed two men on a motorcycle acting suspiciously.

"When police ordered them to stop, they tried to flee but were apprehended after a brief chase," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Southwest) Surendra Choudhary said.

Later, they both were identified as Vikas alias Majnu (28) and Ravi Sahni alias Ravi Kaliya (19), both residents of Samalkha in Delhi. "A country-made pistol and a live cartridge were recovered from Vikas. The motorcycle they were riding was found to be stolen in a case registered at Palam village police station and was being driven by Ravi," the DCP said.

Police registered a case at Kapashera police station. Both accused were medically examined and were being transported in a government vehicle to Vasant Kunj North lock-up.

However, while the vehicle was taking a turn near the police station, both men allegedly jumped out of the slow-moving van in an apparent attempt to escape.

Both accused sustained injuries due to the jump and were taken to IGI Hospital, where Ravi Sahni was declared dead on arrival. Vikas is undergoing treatment for minor abrasions, the police statement said.

On the other hand, the victim's family is accusing police of custodial killing of Ravi saying that police picked both of them from home and were taken for inquiry to some forested area.

JNU rusticates DSF leader Swati Singh again, amid row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has rusticated PhD student Swati Singh, president of the Democratic Students' Federation (DSF) and former councillor of the JNU Students' Union (JNUSU), in fresh disciplinary action that comes despite a Delhi High Court order earlier this year setting aside a similar punishment.

No immediate response was available from the university over the matter. The latest rustication order, dated April 28, states: "In view of the findings of the Proctorial Inquiry, Swati Singh is rusticated from the university and declared out of bounds with immediate effect."

The order further said that in compliance with the high court's February 7 directive, a fresh inquiry was initiated against Singh, a PhD scholar at the Centre for Russian Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies. The disci-

plinary proceedings found her guilty of "being involved in an argument and physical violence with a lady security guard of the JNU on 29 August 2023".

"Any intimidation or insulting behaviour towards a student, staff, or faculty... May be considered... A violation of discipline and conduct. In view of this, Swati Singh is rusticated for two semesters and declared out of bounds from the university with a strict warning not to repeat such indisciplined activities in the future," the order added. It also warned that "anyone giving shelter to Swati Singh in any hostel/residence in the campus shall invite disciplinary action". Singh had earlier been rusticated in November 2023 for her alleged involvement in a campus protest. She challenged the action in the high court, which quashed the orders and directed the JNU to reinstate her academic status and provide hostel accommodation to her.

"After the court order, my academics were reinstated but despite my requests, I

was not provided my hostel back. I am still living outside the campus, paying a high rent," Singh said. "Now, I have been rusticated again and my scholarship will be stopped. How am I supposed to pay the rent and carry on my academics?" she asked. She said the latest rustication would further delay her research. "I have already suffered due to my last rustication as I lost six months. Now, when I had to submit my RAC for the research, I am again rusticated. This will lead to a minimum one-year delay," she said, adding, "This is not just about me -- the administration wants to shut every voice that questions it."

The JNUSU termed the renewed action a "show trial" and "a violation of legal and democratic principles".

"This rustication order is not only arbitrary and disproportionate, but also represents a disturbing case of double jeopardy," the JNUSU said in a press release. "It reflects a disconcerting pattern of victimisation against student activists." The

students' union also linked the move to Singh's ongoing court case against the cancellation of her nomination for the general secretary's post in the 2024-25 JNUSU polls.

"They are doing it to put pressure on me as the case of my cancellation in the JNUSU election is still in court," Singh said. "My nomination was cancelled arbitrarily just a few hours before the closing of nominations. I will again approach the court for justice." The JNUSU has submitted a memorandum to the vice-chancellor, demanding immediate revocation of Singh's rustication, restoration of basic facilities to affected students and withdrawal of recent amendments to the chief proctor's manual. The changes, it said, are being used to "criminalise dissent" and create a chilling effect on campus activism.

Government to rehabilitate beggars, homeless children under SMILE plan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi government will rehabilitate beggars, including homeless children, with the help of NGOs and provide skill development training, health care facilities and education.

The Department of Social Welfare has issued a call for Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from NGOs and other interested organisations for the implementation of the SMILE scheme (Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise), which focuses on the comprehensive rehabilitation of beggars. The department has instructed the organisations to submit their proposals by May 13, according to a statement issued by the Social Welfare Department.

The SMILE scheme, introduced by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, will be implemented in nine selected areas of Delhi -- Karol Bagh, Dwarka, Munirka-Vasant Vihar, R.K. Puram, Nizamuddin, Rohini, Shahdara, Old Delhi and Bangla Sahib Gurudwara.

As part of the process, selected agencies will carry out surveys in a uniform format to identify individuals engaged in begging. This information will be uploaded to a central portal for easy access and coordination among stakeholders

multi-step approach involving identification, outreach, shelter and long-term resettlement. It prioritises support for children, women, senior citizens and persons with disabilities, it stated.

As part of the process, selected agencies will carry out surveys in a uniform format to identify individuals engaged in begging. This information will be uploaded to a central portal for easy access and coordination among stakeholders, it said. Once identified, individuals will be reached through outreach activities to encourage them to move into shelter homes voluntarily. These homes will provide basic ameni-

ties and support services aimed at helping residents rebuild their lives with dignity, it added.

The shelter homes, accommodating at least 50 individuals each will offer food, clothing, hygiene facilities, and recreational options, the order read.

It also mentioned that there will be separate shelters for men and women, with provisions for children accompanying female residents. Special efforts will be made to link children to Anganwadi centres and Child Care Institutions to ensure their safety and early development.

Beneficiaries will also receive assistance in identification documents and will be connected with existing welfare schemes. Health care services, including medical check-ups and referrals for de-addiction support (if needed), will be provided through government hospitals, it stated.

Education and vocational training form a core part of the rehabilitation process. Children will be enrolled in nearby schools under existing government education schemes, while adults will receive skill development training based on their abilities and interests, it

stated. Agencies will collaborate with recognised training centres, including those supported by the Ministry of Skill Development and the PM-DAKSH programme, to help beneficiaries secure employment or start small businesses. NGOs can also engage private partners through CSR initiatives to expand training opportunities, it stated.

Residents are expected to stay in the shelter homes for a period of three to six months, depending on their needs. This time will be used for recovery, skills training, and preparation for reintegration into the community, it said.

To be eligible, organisations must be legally registered and have at least three years of experience working with marginalised or homeless populations. They should also have sound operational and financial capabilities and must not have been blacklisted by any government or funding agency, the order said.

Proposals must include registration documents, audited financial reports of the last three years, a record of relevant experience, and a technical approach for implementation, it added.

INDIAN RAILWAYS

National Contest

for Digital Clock Designing

Commencement Date: **01.05.2025**

Closing Date: **31.05.2025**

Submission Method: High-resolution images (minimum 300 DPI, more than 2 MB) without watermark or logo, to be sent via email to contest.pr@rb.railnet.gov.in.

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Ownership: Copyright of the selected designs will rest with Indian Railways.

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| Category | 1st Prize | Consolation prize |
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ADDITIONAL BENEFITS: • Certificate of Recognition for all winners • Free 3A-Class Railway Pass for each winner and one companion, for travel to and from their home location to the award ceremony venue

IMPORTANT GUIDELINES: • Designs must be innovative, practical for implementation, and reflect the spirit of Indian Railways • Participants are encouraged to provide a brief concept note (up to 300 words) explaining the idea behind their design • Submissions with any form of plagiarism or copyright infringement will be disqualified

For further details and terms & conditions visit the official website of Indian Railways at www.indianrailways.gov.in

SC directs changes in KYC process for differently abled

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Upholding inclusivity rights, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed changes in the digital KYC process enabling acid attack survivors and persons with visual disabilities to access banking services and welfare schemes, among others.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan passed 20 crucial directions to the Centre and its departments aside from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for making the digital KYC process inclusive and accessible for the disabled.

The bench said bridging the digital divide was no longer merely a matter of policy discretion but a constitutional imperative to secure a life of dignity, autonomy and equal participation in public life.

“The right to digital access, therefore, emerges as an intrinsic component of the right to life and liberty, necessitating that the State proactively design and implement inclusive digital ecosystems that serve not only the privileged but also the marginalised, those who have been historically excluded,” the bench said.

In the contemporary era, the bench said, where access to essential services, governance, education, healthcare and economic opportunities was increasingly mediated through digital platforms, the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution must be reinterpreted in light of these technological realities.

“The digital divide — characterised by unequal access to digital infrastructure, skills, and content — continues to perpetuate systemic exclusion, not only of persons with disabilities, but also of large sections of rural populations, senior citizens, economically weaker communities, and linguistic minorities. The principle of substantive equality demands that digital transformation be both inclusive and equitable,” the bench said.

Persons with disabilities encounter unique barriers in accessing online services due to the lack of accessible websites, applications and assistive technologies, it added.



The top court verdict came on two pleas including the one filed by acid attack survivors suffering from facial disfigurement and severe eye burns aside from a person with 100 per cent blindness.

Justice Mahadevan, who penned the verdict on behalf of the bench, said persons in remote or rural areas often faced poor connectivity, limited digital literacy, and a scarcity of content in regional languages, effectively denying them meaningful access to e-governance and welfare delivery systems. “In such circumstances, the State’s obligations under Article 21 — read in conjunction with Articles 14, 15 and 38 of the Constitution — must encompass the responsibility to ensure that digital infrastructure, government portals, online learning platforms, and financial technologies are universally accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all vulnerable and marginalised populations,” the 62-page verdict said.

The bench said while digital KYC had benefitted general public by making verification processes faster and more efficient, persons with blindness and low vision continued to face hurdles in access-

ing and completing such procedures.

The top court passed the directions to stakeholders and said the ministries should direct all regulating entities — government or private — to follow accessibility standards as prescribed from time to time.

“The respondents shall appoint a nodal officer in every department responsible for digital accessibility compliance,” it said. All regulated entities must mandatorily undergo periodical accessibility audit by certified accessibility professionals and involve persons with blindness in user acceptance testing phase while designing any app or website or in case of any new feature being launched, the bench added.

The top court further directed the RBI to issue guidelines to all regulated entities to adopt and incorporate alternative modes for verifying the “liveness” or capturing a “live photograph” of the customers for digital KYC or e-KYC beyond the traditional “blinking of eyes” to ensure inclusivity and user convenience.

The top court flagged the incompatibility of many digital platforms with screen readers and crucial information being often presented in visual formats without alternative text. Such barriers, the bench pointed out, significantly hindered the ability of persons with disabilities to work, learn, and engage with society and violated their right to equal opportunity and full participation as guaranteed under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and national disability laws.

“These barriers collectively amount to a denial of equal access and violate the accessibility mandates under the RPwD (Rights of Persons with Disabilities) Act, 2016 and result in economic and social marginalisation,” it added.

The petitioners in the apex court outlined their inability to complete KYC processes, which required them to perform visual tasks such as blinking, moving the head, or positioning their face within specified frames — tasks, which they are unable to accomplish due to their visual impairments and facial disfigurements.

Cabinet approves Shillong-Silchar highway project of ₹22,864 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the development of a 166.80 km greenfield high-speed corridor from Mawlyngkhung in Meghalaya to Panchgram in Assam on hybrid annuity mode at a total cost of ₹22,864 crore. According to an official statement, the project length of 166.80 km (NH-6) lies in Meghalaya (144.80 km) and Assam (22 km).

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the proposal for the development, maintenance and management of four-lane greenfield access-controlled 166.80 km of National Highway No 6 from Mawlyngkhung (near Shillong) in Meghalaya to Panchgram (near Silchar) in Assam on hybrid annuity mode. At a total capital cost of ₹22,864 crore, it added. The proposed greenfield high-speed corridor will improve the service level for the traffic moving between Guwahati to Silchar, the statement noted.

“The development of this corridor will improve the connectivity to Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and the Barak Valley region of Assam from mainland and Guwahati with substantially reduced travel distance and travel time,” it said, adding that this will, in turn, contribute to the enhancement of logistics efficiency of the nation.

Briefing the media, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the development of this corridor will improve the connectivity to Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and the Barak Valley region of Assam from mainland and Guwahati with substantially reduced distance and travel time.

The corridor will improve connectivity between Assam and Meghalaya and spur economic development, including the development of industries in Meghalaya, as it passes through the cement and coal production areas of Meghalaya.



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw briefs the media on Cabinet decisions in New Delhi on Wednesday

As per the statement, this corridor will cater to the national and international tourists coming from well-connected Guwahati Airport, Shillong Airport, and Silchar Airport (via existing NH-06), connecting Guwahati to Silchar.

This would connect scenic places of tourist attraction in the Northeast and promote tourism. This critical infrastructure project will improve inter-city connectivity between Guwahati, Shillong and Silchar, traversing through Ri Bhoi, East Khasi Hills, West Jaintia Hills, East Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya and Cachar district in Assam and reduce congestion on existing NH-06 and enhance transport infrastructure

development in line with the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.

The statement said that upon completion, the Shillong — Silchar Corridor will play a pivotal role in regional economic growth, improving connectivity between Guwahati, Shillong, Silchar, Imphal, Aizawl and Agartala. The project aligns with the Government’s vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, enhancing infrastructure while generating employment and fostering socio-economic development in Meghalaya, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura, it added. The statement also said the project will generate 74 lakh man-days (direct) and 93 lakh man-days (indirect) employment.

Endangered red-crowned roofed turtle back to Ganga river

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The critically endangered Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle has been reintroduced in the Ganga river as part of the government’s flagship programme of cleaning the river and enhancing its biodiversity.

In a social media post on Wednesday, Union Jal Shakti Minister CR Paatil said, 20 such turtles were released in Uttar Pradesh’s Haiderpur Wetland On April 26.

It is a UNESCO Ramsar site near the Bijnor Ganga Barrage within the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary. This human-made wetland was formed in 1984 with the Madhya Ganga Barrage construction on the river’s floodplain.

Believed to be on the brink of extinction in north India, the Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle has been reintroduced into the river through a carefully planned scientific rehabilitation effort, the minister said. He described it as an important milestone in restoring the ecology of the Ganga river. According to his ministry, there has been no confirmed report of adult Red-Crowned Roofed turtle sighting in the main channel of the Ganga in the past 30 years.

To make the reintroduction project a success, each turtle has been fitted with tracking devices so that their movement patterns and progress in adapting to the environment can be monitored.

According to officials, the turtles were divided into two groups for the reintroduction process.

One group was released in the upstream of the Haiderpur Wetland barrage and the other on the downstream in the main channel of the Ganga to determine which method is more effective for turtle reintroduction, they said.

The turtles would be tracked and monitored over the next two years.

The Union ministry said this was the first attempt at reintroducing this species in the Ganga by following a ‘soft’ versus ‘hard’ release strategy. The aim is to house the species in the Ganga in a stable manner with the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department’s help, the ministry added.

Paatil credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his vision that took the shape of the Namami Gange Mission for the turtle reintroduction initiative.

Preparing for the reintroduction of the freshwater reptiles, the Turtle Survival Alliance India project team, with support from the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), conducted a detailed assessment of turtle diversity and abundance in the Haiderpur Wetland Complex (HWC) in 2020.

This was followed by a 2022 Habitat Evaluation study on the newly formed turtle sanctuary along the Ganga near Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh.

The study along HWC suggested the presence of nine turtle species whereas indirect evidence of five turtle species was found in Prayagraj.

Explainer: Caste Census — history, politics, its significance today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

All castes were enumerated during census exercises carried out in British India between 1881 and 1931, but at the time of the first census of independent India in 1951, the then government decided not to count castes any more except for scheduled castes and tribes. A decade later in 1961, the Central Government asked states to conduct their own surveys and prepare state-specific lists of OBCs if they wished so.

Over six decades later now and after demands from several quarters and various parties, the government has now decided to include caste enumeration in the next nationwide census. The last nationwide caste enumeration took place in 2011 under Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) in a bid to gather detailed information about the socio-economic status of households and

individuals, including their caste. Here is a look at history, politics, and recent developments

What is a Caste Census?

A caste census involves the systematic collection of data on the caste identities of individuals during a national census exercise. In India, where caste has historically shaped social, economic, and political dynamics, such data can provide insights into the demographic distribution, socio-economic conditions, and representation of various caste groups. This information can be used to inform policies on affirmative action, reservations, and social justice.

What is its historical context?

Caste enumeration in India has a long history: British India (1881–1931): The British colonial administration included caste enumeration in census exercises con-

A decade later in 1961, the Central Government asked states to conduct their own surveys and prepare state-specific lists of OBCs if they wished so

ducted every decade between 1881 and 1931. These surveys categorised the population by caste, religion, and occupation, providing detailed demographic data. The exercise was partly driven by the colonial need to understand and govern India’s complex social structure.

Post-Independence Shift (1951): After India gained independence in 1947, the first census of independent India in 1951 marked a significant departure. The government, under then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, decided to discontinue caste enumeration except for Scheduled

Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). This decision was rooted in the belief that focusing on caste could perpetuate divisions and hinder national unity in a newly independent nation.

1961 Directive: A decade later, in 1961, the central government allowed states to conduct their own surveys to prepare state-specific lists of Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This was in response to demands for affirmative action for socially and educationally backward groups beyond SCs and STs. However, no nationwide caste census was undertaken.

How caste census evolved into a political issue?

Mandal Commission (1980): The Mandal Commission’s recommendation to provide 27 per cent reservation for OBCs in central government jobs brought caste back into the political spotlight. The lack of comprehensive caste data made it

challenging to accurately identify and quantify OBC populations, fueling demands for a caste census.

Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011: In 2011, the UPA Government conducted the Socio-Economic and Caste Census, the first attempt since 1931 to collect caste data nationwide. However, the caste data from SECC 2011 was never fully released or utilised, leading to criticism from opposition parties and caste-based organisations.

State-level initiatives: In the absence of a national caste census, states like Bihar, Telangana, and Karnataka have conducted their own caste surveys in recent years. These surveys aimed to gather data to support state-specific reservation policies and welfare programs. Bihar’s caste survey in 2023 revealed that OBCs and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) constituted over 63 per cent of the state’s population.

Rahul Gandhi welcomes Government’s ‘sudden’ Caste Census decision



Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi during press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said he welcomes the Government’s ‘sudden’ decision to include caste enumeration in the forthcoming census after “11 years of opposing it” but it should give a timeline for its implementation. His comments came within hours of the government announcing that caste enumeration would be included in the forthcoming census exercise in a “transparent” manner.

Addressing a press conference here, the Congress leader said, “We support this (Government’s decision) completely but we want a timeline. We want to know by when it will be done.” Welcoming the Narendra Modi dispensation’s “sudden” decision to include caste enumeration in the census exercise after “11 years of opposing it”, he said,

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said the Government has Opposition’s 100 per cent support and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has to take action on Pahalgam terror attack

“This is the first step and Telangana is a model for caste census.”

While reiterating the demand for removing the 50 per cent cap on reservations, Gandhi said funds should be allocated for the caste census. “We want people’s census, not bureaucrats’ census,” he added. Opposition parties, including the Congress, have been demanding a nationwide caste census, making it a major election issue. Some states like Bihar, Telangana and Karnataka have

conducted such surveys.

Addressing questions on Pakistan sponsored terrorism, Rahul said that those responsible for the Pahalgam terror attack must pay the price for what they have done and Prime Minister Modi must act strongly and not dilly dally on the action. Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha said those behind Pahalgam attack must pay the price and be made to realise they cannot do this to India. He said the Government has opposition’s 100 per cent support and Modi has to take action.

“The Prime Minister has to take action. Action has to be clear and strong. The prime minister must not dilly dally and needs to act. He can act in whatever time frame he thinks necessary,” said Rahul. The Congress MP also said he met the family of a victim of the Pahalgam attack in Kanpur and they want they should be given a martyr status.

Rajnath Singh to attend Russian Victory Day Parade on May 9

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will represent India at Russia’s Victory Day parade on May 9 that will mark the 80th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Germany in the Second World War, official sources said on Wednesday. Russia invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the grand parade to be held in Moscow but India conveyed to Russia that Rajnath Singh will attend it.

“An invitation was extended to the prime minister to attend the Victory Day Parade at Moscow. The Russian side was informed earlier that India would be represented by Defence Minister Singh,” said a source. Russia has invited leaders of several friendly nations to attend this year’s Victory Day parade. A number of other

Russia invited PM Narendra Modi for the grand parade to be held in Moscow but India conveyed to Russia that Rajnath Singh will attend it

international leaders, including Chinese President Xi Jinping, are expected to come to Russia for events to mark the 80th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany in World War Two. Preparations are underway to host about 20 foreign leaders in Moscow.

Modi had travelled to Russia twice last year for an annual summit with President Vladimir Putin and to attend the BRICS Summit in Kazan. The Russian president is expected to visit India for the annual summit this year.

Champak magazine takes BCCI to court

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought response from the BCCI on a plea filed by the publishers of renowned children’s comic book Champak alleging trademark infringement over the IPL naming its AI-powered robotic dog “Champak”. Justice Saurabh Banerjee observed the Champak brand name was existing since eternity and asked the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and Indian Premier League (IPL) to file written statements in response to the plea within four weeks.

The court posted the hearing on July 9. The plaintiff’s counsel also prayed that an interim protection be granted to him by directing the defendants not to use the mark. The court, however, did not pass any interim order at this stage. Delhi Press Patra Prakashan Pvt Ltd moved the high court, saying it has been publishing Champak magazine since 1968. The

18th session of the IPL is currently underway and will end on May 25, 2025. During one of the matches, BCCI and IPL introduced an AI-generated robotic dog and on April 20, calling it “Champak”.

Advocate Amit Gupta, representing the publisher, said naming the robotic dog “Champak” amounted to infringement of its registered trademark and also commercial exploitation as Champak was a well known mark. He said “Champak” (robotic dog) as an entertainment feature during IPL matches, which are broadcast nationwide to over 20 crore viewers, resulted in irreparable harm to the plaintiff by diluting its well-established brand, tarnishing its goodwill, and unjustly enriching themselves.

“This constitutes dilution by way of tarnishment, causing injury to the distinctiveness and positive public perception painstakingly built by the plaintiff over decades,” the plea said.

Senior advocate J Sai Deepak, who

appeared for BCCI, opposed the plea saying Champak was the name of a flower and people associated the robotic dog with a character of a TV series and not the magazine.

“Today my issue is the usage of the word Champak which is my registered trademark,” Gupta said. The plea said naming of the robotic dog was done following a purported poll process on social media which heavily favoured the name Champak owing to the existing goodwill and recognition of the plaintiff’s brand.

The plea claimed the defendants’ continued promotion of “Champak” across various media platforms, including news outlets and social media, was aggravating the damage being caused to the plaintiff’s rights. The publisher, therefore, urged the court to restrain BCCI and IPL from infringing its trademark and sought ₹2 crore in damages for loss of “distinctiveness, goodwill, reputation, dilution, and harm” caused to its trademark.

Mamata inaugurates Jagannath temple

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee too has a mandir to take pride on now. The chief minister on Wednesday sneaked into the proverbial "Mandir politics" by inaugurating a gigantic replica of Puri's Jagannath Temple an Rs 250 crore state-funded project at the popular beach town of Digha on Bay of Bengal. The temple a grand replica of the Puri's ancient Jagannath Temple has been constructed by the West Bengal Housing and Urban Development Corporation Ltd.

This, even as a frantic BJP continued to question why in a "secular" country the state would fund religious enterprise. Banerjee on her part added salt to BJP's injury by receiving senior saffron leader and former state president Dilip Ghosh at the guest house of the Digha temple where he came with his newly married wife and praised its "exquisite architectural style."

Banerjee who chose the auspicious occasion of Akshay Tritiya to inaugurate the grand facsimile of the Puri's iconic ancient structure prayed for "universal peace." Built after an unadulterated Kalinga school of architecture the Digha Jagannath temple exactly mirrors the ancient Puri temple. Additionally it dominates the sea barely a few hundred away and the verdant acres around making the site an absolute dekho for the world tourists.

"I pray for universal peace this day of inauguration on the Akshay Tritiya and hope that this temple will continue to inspire spirituality and send religious waves for thousands of years... and will continue to stir creativity, touristic and architectural imaginations," the Chief Minister said adding, "I pray for universal peace by the grace of Lord Jagannath."

The Chief Minister also wrote, "Today, as the sacred Dhawja rose above the Jagannath Temple in Digha, I witnessed a vision conceived in 2018 come to life. With the Maha Yajna complete, we wait with bated breath for the Lord of the Universe



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee offers prayer to Lord Jagannath enshrined in the 'Garbhagriha' of the newly inaugurated Jagannath Temple in Digha PTI

to grace His humble abode by the sea. May His presence usher in harmony, strength and enduring peace for all."

The temple was opened for the general public on Wednesday evening and all the daily religious affairs would be looked after by the International Society of Krishna Consciousness.

The Trinamool Congress wrote in its official handle, "Today, the grand Shri Jagannath Temple opens its gates to the world, a divine blend of spirituality, heritage, & Bengal's cultural soul. A sacred legacy begins today, one that will inspire generations to come!"

While the critics called the construction and imagination of the grand temple — as dominating as the ancient original structure of Puri "a smart beginning for the 2026 Assembly elections," BJP continued to fume wondering why instead of visiting the riot torn areas Murshidabad the Chief Minister was playing politics using State funds.

"The Chief Minister has used the tax payers money to construct the Jagannath

Temple unlike the Ram Temple at Ayodhya which has been constructed with the funds donated by the devotees... if it is not playing politics with religion then what is," asked BJP State president Sukanto Majumdar. The BJP also asked "why the Chief Minister has yet not visited the desecrated temples of Murshidabad... this is because she would not dare anger her vote bank... what she is doing in Digha is because she is afraid that the Hindu voters have now started getting alienated."

Curiously Banerjee also asked the State Information and Culture Department to dispatch prasadam and a picture card of the temple to every household in the state. "I will request the I&C Department to send the picture and prasadam of the temple to every household in the state as also to the renowned people throughout India who praise such kind of works."

Apart from her bid to hijack some part of the "temple card" from the saffrons Banerjee also hit a second bird by receiving on Wednesday senior BJP leader and former State party president and MP

Dilip Ghosh at the guest house of the Jagannath Temple almost creating a flutter in the State BJP ranks. More so when the saffron leader — who is often credited with taking BJP from a two-seat status to an 18-parliamentary seat grade between 2016 and 2019 — praised Banerjee for her imagination. "This is a genuinely good work and deserves praise... the temple has been exquisitely built," he said before meeting the Chief Minister for more than 25 minutes along with his wife.

Other Opposition leaders including Suvendu Adhikari, Majumdar, Congress Pradip Bhattacharya and others including the Left leadership who too were invited in the ceremony skipped the function.

When asked to comment on Dilip Ghosh's visit to the temple, a visibly disturbed Adhikari said, "I am here to speak about my job as an Opposition Leader or to support my party line or react to the statements, corruption, misuse etc of the Chief Minister and none else... for someone's personal acts it is for him or the party to respond."

BJP MP Alok Sharma makes provocative remarks in Bhopal

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

A fresh political controversy has erupted in Madhya Pradesh after BJP Member of Parliament Alok Sharma made provocative, religion-charged remarks during a public address in Bhopal, triggering outrage from opposition parties and civil society. The comments — delivered in the context of an alleged 'Love Jihad' case — have intensified communal tensions and drawn comparisons to a broader pattern of polarizing rhetoric ahead of political mobilisation in the state.

Addressing a local gathering on Wednesday, Sharma said, "If any Miyan (Muslim) has the courage, let him try Love Jihad now. I was born to confront those with beards and skull caps." He further claimed that Brahmin girls were being systematically targeted and warned that the Brahmin community would respond with the "strictest punishment." Sharma also called for separate Garba events for Hindu women, and alleged that the Hindu population in Old Bhopal was shrinking, urging the community to "unite before it's too late."

The remarks were met with immediate backlash. Congress leaders slammed the BJP MP for attempting to inflame communal sentiments ahead of upcoming political activity in the state.

While talking to *The Pioneer* Mukesh Nayak, Chairman of the Madhya Pradesh Congress Media Department, said, "This is the real face of the BJP — stoking religious divisions to distract from core issues like inflation, unemployment, and poor governance."

Congress Vice-President Abbas Hafeez added, "Yes, we oppose anyone who commits a crime or forces religious conversion. But to publicly target an entire community is dangerous, shameful, and unacceptable from someone holding public office." Hafeez demanded immediate

action against Sharma and urged the state BJP president to clarify the party's stance on such rhetoric.

A senior BJP functionary, speaking on the condition of anonymity, described the case as "shocking," adding that Alok Sharma resides in the old city area and is therefore closely familiar with the local dynamics. "He understands the intensity of the situation better than most. It has become a topic of conversation in nearly every household in Bhopal. Many believe that what has surfaced in the investigation so far may only be the tip of the iceberg," the leader said.



Sharma's statement adds to a troubling pattern in the state's political narrative. In recent years, several BJP leaders have made controversial, hate-laced remarks. In 2021, BJP MLA Rameshwar Sharma referred to Muslims as 'descendants of Aurangzeb' and called for a boycott of Muslim businesses. In 2022, BJP leader Usha Thakur claimed that madrassas were 'centres of terrorism'. These recurring episodes reflect a broader strategy of communal polarization critics say is being used for political mobilisation.

As communal rhetoric becomes more frequent in political discourse, concerns are growing about its long-term effects on social harmony and democratic values in Madhya Pradesh.

Rahul Gandhi reconnects with Amethi

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Amethi

On his return to Amethi after a gap of nearly ten months since the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi sought to reconnect with the people of his former constituency through a mix of developmental outreach and party-building efforts. His one-day visit was marked by emotional public interactions, strategic meetings with Congress workers, and the inauguration of a key healthcare facility.

Gandhi began the day by visiting the Ordnance Factory in Korwa, where he inspected indigenous weapons and technical equipment. Factory officials gave him a detailed briefing on the manufacturing processes and the push towards self-reliance in the D**EDS: THIRD

PARTY IMAGE** In this image released by @MamataOfficial via X on Wednesday, April 30, 2025, West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee offers prayer to Lord Jagannath enshrined in the 'Garbhagriha' of the newly inaugurated Jagannath Temple in Digha. (@MamataOfficial via PTI Photo) (PTI04_30_2025_000295B) *** Local Caption *** efence sector.

Later, he inaugurated a newly built open-heart surgery operation theatre at the Sanjay Gandhi Hospital in Munshiganj.

Addressing a small gathering, Gandhi said the new facility would allow cardiac patients to receive advanced treatment in Amethi itself, eliminating the need to travel to larger cities like Lucknow.

As part of his political outreach, Rahul Gandhi met senior Congress leaders and

grassroots workers. He urged them to strengthen the party from the ground up — starting from gram panchayats to the district level. He emphasised the need for active participation by those willing to devote time to the party's revival.

Throughout the visit, Gandhi received a warm welcome. In Fursatganj, at Ursaha Baba Chauraha, hundreds of party workers led by District Congress President Pradeep Singla greeted him enthusiastically. Gandhi paused his convoy to personally interact with the workers, even stopping a band performance to better hear their concerns. In Jais town, he made an impromptu stop to greet children who had gathered to see him. Gandhi stepped out of his vehicle and handed out toffees, drawing smiles and excitement from the young crowd.

CM Himanta resigns from Bar Association over differences on shifting of Gauhati HC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who was a practicing lawyer before being elected to the State Assembly in 2001, on Wednesday resigned from the Gauhati High Court Bar Association (GHCBA) over differences on shifting of the existing court premise to a new location.

Sarma said he has sent his resignation letter to the president of the bar association due to 'conflict of interest'.

The GHCBA has been opposing relocation of the High Court complex to Rangmahal in the northern bank of Brahmaputra from its existing address in



Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma FILE PHOTO

the heart of the city.

It has claimed that the decision to shift the court premise was a unilateral one and 'the relocation to a remote area lacking adequate infrastructure will significantly impede the efficiency of legal proceedings, and adversely affect litigants and legal professionals'.

As the Chief Minister, I am committed to constructing the new court premise at Rangmahal. The Bar association is opposed to this decision of the government.

"With conflict of interest arising in the matter, I have tendered my resignation," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a panchayat election rally in Goalpara.

Chief Town Planner, Government of Goa, Rajesh J Naik suspended over alleged corruption charges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Panaji

In response to serious allegations of corruption and undervaluation of fees for land zone changes by the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Department, the Government of Goa has placed Rajesh J Naik, the Chief Town Planner (Planning), under suspension with immediate effect.

This decision follows the ongoing investigation into the matter, which has raised concerns about significant financial losses to the state's exchequer.

Earlier, the High Court (HC) had directed the Chief Secretary to investigate the allegations presented in a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), which claims that the TCP department deliberately undervalued the fees for zone corrections.

The miscalculation allegedly resulted in a loss of ₹7.1 crore to the state's exchequer in just one case involving the rectification of 89,500 square metres to a settlement zone.

The Government of Goa, through its robust vigilance policies, has already initiated a preliminary investigation into the matter.

The Directorate of Vigilance is actively working to uncover the full extent of the irregularities, with a report set to be submitted to the court in a sealed cover.

This proactive investigation is part of the government's commitment to ensuring transparency and accountability at all levels of governance.

Naik's suspension reflects the government's firm stance on eradicating corruption and upholding the highest standards of governance.

The Government of Goa has consistently demonstrated its zero-tolerance policy towards corruption and it will take swift and decisive action against those found guilty of misconduct.

The vigilance systems in place are designed to identify and address such issues promptly, ensuring the protection of public resources.

Pakistan wives in India face scrutiny after Pahalgam attack

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

Stories of cross-border love that once symbolised hope and harmony are now under a cloud of suspicion. Pakistani women who married Indian men and settled in India on long-term visas are facing increased surveillance from intelligence agencies in the wake of the recent terror attack in Pahalgam.

Following security alerts issued after the Pahalgam terrorist incident, the Union Government has intensified its scrutiny of Pakistani nationals living in India. While initial actions targeted those on short-term visas, the focus has now shifted to long-term visa (LTV) holders — particularly Pakistani women who entered India after marrying Indian citizens.

These women, mostly from cities like

Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi, came to India between the early 2000s and 2010s and settled in districts such as Bulandshahr, Varanasi, Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Bhadohi, and Meerut. Having lived for years in Indian society — raising families, participating in community life, and in many cases applying for Indian citizenship — they are now being asked to verify their identity and visa status.

"I came to India in 2010 after marrying my husband in Lahore. For 14 years, I have lived in Meerut, raised two children, and never thought of returning," says Nazma Khatoun (name changed). "Now we are being treated as suspects, and I don't know how to explain this to my children."

Officials from the Home Department confirm that around 50 Pakistani nation-

als on short-term visas have already been deported from Uttar Pradesh. Several others have reportedly left voluntarily. The current phase of the review is focused on long-term visa holders, with the majority being women who entered through matrimonial routes.

While authorities stress that this is a preventive step, not a crackdown, families feel a sense of insecurity.

"This is my home. My parents are gone, and my life is here with my husband and children. Why should I be forced to live in fear after all these years?" asks Farzana Bano (name changed), who lives in Bulandshahr.

A senior intelligence officer said the exercise is aimed at ensuring there are no overstays, fake documents, or misuses of the LTV category. "We are verifying

records to identify individuals whose documents have expired or who may not have followed the proper procedures for extending visas or applying for citizenship. This is a national security exercise, not a personal one."

The real challenge, according to officials, is the lack of a consolidated database. Many of these women were issued visas years ago, and their files are scattered between local offices, district authorities, and the Ministry of Home Affairs. In some cases, delays in processing citizenship applications have left applicants in legal limbo.

For Indian husbands, the situation is deeply unsettling. Abdul Rahim, a carpenter from Azamgarh, says he feels betrayed by a system that once welcomed his wife. "We went through the proper legal

process, submitted documents, and followed every rule. Now we are being asked to re-submit everything as if we're hiding something."

The verification process also includes discreet inquiries into the background of each woman and their families, although no terror-related links have emerged so far. Officials insist that those with clean records have nothing to worry about.

However, the psychological toll is growing. Many of these women, unfamiliar with political developments and legal intricacies, now feel alienated in the land they adopted as their own.

"We are not illegal. We are not a threat," says one woman quietly as she walks her daughter home from school in Varanasi. "But right now, we feel like outsiders in our own homes."

Massive fire destroys slums in Gurugram

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

A massive fire broke out in the slums and scrap located in Sector 102 of the city at around 3.30 am on Wednesday, fire officials said.

The fire spread so fast that many slums were burnt to ashes in no time. The belongings of the people kept in the slums also caught fire and were completely destroyed.

As soon as the incident was reported, several fire tenders from Bhim Nagar Fire Station, Sector 37 Udyog Vihar, and Sector 29 Fire Station reached the spot, and the fire personnel controlled the flame.

Due to the promptness of the fire brigade personnel, the fire was prevented from spreading to other nearby settlements.

However, the fire officer said there is no report of any casualty in this accident at present, but due to high flames and smoke, panic spread in the area.

The cause of the fire has not been ascertained yet, but according to the preliminary investigation, it is suspected that the fire broke out in a slum while making tea, etc, he said. "We received a call about the fire at 3.50 am. The fire brigade team reached the spot within 10 minutes. There were 150 huts there. Out of



Firefighters try to douse fire that broke out in a slum area in Gurugram PTI

which 40 to 50 were burnt. About 10 vehicles were called from Sector 37, Bhim Nagar, and Pataudi fire stations," Fire Officer Narendar said. It is being said that during the fire, many small cylinders kept in the huts exploded. Due to this, the fire kept spreading. "400 to 450 people were living in these huts, who were rescued. The fire brigade teams car-

ried out rescue operations and cooling operations to douse the flame completely," he said.

The fire was brought under control by 7 am. Smoke is still coming out from the scrap and debris, so a fire brigade vehicle is stationed at the spot. A search operation will be carried out after the fire is completely extinguished, he added.

Tilakraj Malhotra removed as advisor to Gurugram Mayor

PARVESH SHARMA ■ Gurugram

Following a criticism of the opposition, Tilakraj Malhotra, husband of newly elected Gurugram Mayor Rajrani Malhotra, has been removed from the post of advisor.

A week ago, Municipal Corporation Gurugram (MCG) Commissioner Ashok Kumar Garg had issued a letter regarding the appointment of Mayor's husband and former BJP District President Tilakraj Malhotra, but after questions were raised by the opposition, the MCG removed him from the position.

"In compliance of the directions of the Government issued vide memo Number DULB/Admin./2A/CMS/2025/001 dated 29 April 2025, the order regarding appointment of Shri Tilak Raj Malhotra, S/o Shri Prabhudayal, resident of Flat Number 170, HEWO Apartments, Sector-15 Part-II, Gurugram as Advisor to Mayor, Municipal Corporation, Gurugram issued vide Endst Number MCG/2025/CMC/9763-64 dated 21st April, 2025 are hereby withdrawn with immediate effect," read the order.

He has been sent to the vacant post of Additional Chief Executive Officer in Haryana Kisan Kalyan Pradhikaran.

Kumar had issued caste certificate to Rajrani Malhotra on Sunday. A few days ago, Gurugram Court had issued notice to deputy commissioner Gurugram, ADC, Mayor and Congress Mayor candidate Seema Pahuja on the petition filed in the case of caste certificate. His transfer is being linked to this case.

Tilakraj Malhotra had to assist in the work assigned by the Mayor. His post was completely unpaid and he could not take any benefit from the MCG. But political uproar has started over this appointment.

Congress leader Pearl Chaudhary had reacted sharply to BJP's elected mayor Rajrani Malhotra appointing her husband as a personal advisor.

She described this move as a tampering with the spirit of the Constitution and against the basic purpose of women's reservation and demanded that this appointment be canceled with immediate effect.

"This appointment exposes the statements made by the BJP against nepotism. According to the act, there is no provision for such a post of blood relation. 'If husbands have to run the house, then the meaning of women's reservation ends. Then the husband of a female councilor can also become an advisor," she said.

Editor's TAKE

Deepening rifts and rising trade tensions

BRICS foreign ministers meet ends without joint statement as internal rifts surface

As the BRICS grouping of emerging powers convenes its foreign ministers in Rio de Janeiro ahead of its highly anticipated July summit, cracks within the expanded coalition are becoming increasingly visible. Despite shared concerns over global trade and geopolitical shifts, the meeting ended without a joint communiqué — an uncommon outcome that underscores growing internal disagreements. BRICS first summit was held in 2009. It originally brought together Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa to reshape global governance in a way that reflects the growing economic and political weight of the Global South.

In 2024, the group expanded significantly to include Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and Iran — an enlargement aimed at amplifying its geopolitical influence. Together, BRICS nations represent over 40 per cent of the global population and a significant share of global GDP, positioning the bloc as a potential counterweight to Western-dominated institutions like the G7, the IMF, and the World Bank. Its growing economic heft and strategic alignment have made it central to discussions about a new multipolar world order. However, this recent meeting revealed that size does not always translate to cohesion.

The group was unable to issue a joint statement — a traditional diplomatic outcome — due to disagreements among members, particularly over language relating to United Nations reforms. Egypt and Ethiopia reportedly objected to proposals endorsing a stronger role for South Africa in a reformed Security Council, a priority for legacy BRICS members like India, Brazil, and South Africa. Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira acknowledged the divisions but emphasised that “there is room to resolve differences before July.” He highlighted that while consensus was reached on major issues, the diversity of the group, especially post-expansion, requires more negotiation to align positions.

Despite these diplomatic fissures, the foreign ministers rallied around a common concern: the rise of protectionist economic policies, particularly those implemented by the United States under President Donald Trump.

The Chair statement issued by Brazil expressed “serious concern at the prospect of a fragmented global economy and the weakening of multilateralism.” Without naming the US directly, the statement criticised “unjustified unilateral protectionist measures” and specifically condemned the “indiscriminate raising of reciprocal tariffs and non-tariff measures.”

These comments clearly referenced the Trump administration’s aggressive trade policies, including high tariffs on Chinese goods and escalating trade spats that risk destabilising the global economy. China, which has borne the brunt of these tariffs — facing levies as high as 145 per cent — reportedly pushed for stronger language in the statement. While Brazil and others supported a unified position, some newer members were less enthusiastic about directly antagonising the US, reflecting varied foreign policy alignments within the bloc.

The 2024 expansion of BRICS brought new energy and increased global clout to the bloc, but it also introduced conflicting interests and historical rivalries. Diplomats acknowledged that with greater power comes a need for more diplomacy. Indeed, the expansion has its costs, but it also gives BRICS more resources and a bigger platform for cooperation. Besides, so far the journey of BRICS has been rather rhetorical than real. It is yet to take on the Western world and establish itself as a formidable force in world trade and the geopolitical landscape.

Despite its growing economic clout and strategic aspirations, BRICS continues to suffer from several structural handicaps that limit its effectiveness as a unified global force. Chief among them is the vast political, economic, and ideological diversity among its members, which often results in conflicting priorities and diluted consensus. While legacy members like India, Brazil, and South Africa push for democratic reforms in global institutions such as the United Nations, newer entrants like Egypt and Ethiopia may resist initiatives that undermine regional balances or national interests.

Additionally, the bloc lacks a permanent secretariat or institutional framework to enforce decisions or coordinate policies, relying instead on rotating presidencies and ad hoc mechanisms. Geopolitical rivalries — such as the uneasy relationship between China and India — further complicate joint action. These internal frictions frequently undercut the group’s ability to present a cohesive front on major global issues, from trade and security to climate policy and governance reform.

Looking ahead to the July summit, the challenge for BRICS will be to forge a coherent strategy that accommodates its internal diversity while pushing forward its shared interests — particularly in trade, development finance, and institutional reform. As the global system edges away from US unipolarity towards a more fragmented and competitive landscape, BRICS ability to function as a unified bloc may well determine how the emerging multipolar world takes shape.

Taiwan: Advancing health equity

Taiwan, with its world-leading National Health Insurance system and pioneering digital health innovations, stands as a model for equitable, accessible healthcare. Yet, it remains excluded from the WHO due to political barrier

Health is a fundamental human right and a universal value. Improved health results in greater well-being for the people and has ramifications for the survival and development of a country and even the world.

At the 77th World Health Assembly, members adopted the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) Fourteenth General Programme of Work for 2025–2028. The programme includes such strategic objectives as improving health service coverage and bolstering financial protections to ensure universal health coverage.

WHO has called on all countries to take action on these issues. As concerns universal health coverage, Taiwan launched the National Health Insurance (NHI) system in 1995. The scheme, which brought together already existing occupational insurance schemes, has reached its 30th year and now covers 99.9 per cent of the population.

The NHI system provides equitable, accessible, and efficient healthcare to all people in Taiwan. It is also an important pillar and guarantor of Taiwan’s social stability as well as people’s health and safety. It has, moreover, become a global benchmark for achieving universal health coverage.

In an annual survey carried out by Numbeo, Taiwan has been ranked first in the Health Care Index category for seven consecutive years. The NHI operates on a pay-as-you-go, self-sustaining model capable of addressing the financial challenges posed by an ageing population and rising healthcare costs. By reforming premium rates and adding additional funding sources, such as the tobacco health and welfare surcharge, the system is on a sound, sustainable footing.

To promote the health of our people, President Lai Ching-te articulated a vision of a healthy Taiwan in 2024. This aims to ensure that people are healthy, the nation is strong, and the world is ready to embrace Taiwan. Remaining focused on people, families, and communities, we are expanding health promotion operations and preventive healthcare.

Moreover, we are implementing a family physician plan, offering comprehensive care to patients with chronic diseases, and utilising telemedicine to improve healthcare accessibility in rural areas. By promoting integrated long-term care, palliative care, and ageing in place, we ensure holistic, lifelong, and dignified care for all people, realising health equity. In 2021, WHO released the Global Strategy on Digital Health for 2020–2025.

Under this plan, the global health body is seeking the development and adoption of



person-centric digital health solutions to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious diseases. It also oversees the development of infrastructure and applications to use health data to promote health and well-being. Taiwan continues to utilise its prowess in information and communications technology to build effective, high-ROI health systems and services.

The NHI cloud facilitates the more efficient exchange of medical records, while the adoption of international standards such as Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources enhances international medical data sharing. Additionally, the incorporation of AI-assisted technologies is advancing the development of smart healthcare.

The introduction of a virtual health insurance card and the My Health Bank app, which enables real-time management of personal health data, empowers people to make health-enabling choices. In 2008, Taiwan introduced the Health Technology Assessment to facilitate evidence — based policymaking. It also accelerated the inclusion of new treatments under the NHI system.



CHIU TAI-YUAN

For example, in 2023, gene and cell therapies were covered for the first time, marking a new era for precision medicine and offering patients enhanced treatment options. Taiwan also continues to leverage innovative technologies to improve the working environment for the medical workforce and to bolster the overall quality of medical service.

What’s more, despite facing political challenges, Taiwan has continuously participated in international health affairs and has been dedicated to supporting the global health system. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan played a crucial role in sharing supplies, strategies, and experiences, and proved to be a reliable partner of countries worldwide. Separately, Taiwan’s success story in implementing universal health coverage offers valuable lessons for countries worldwide. As we continue to share our experiences in universal coverage, financial management, and digital health, we hope to facilitate other nations in reaching WHO’s goal of universal health coverage.

In this rapidly changing era, health challenges transcend borders, and global cooperation has become essential to addressing various health crises. However, Taiwan has been prevented from participating in WHO — the foremost global health cooperation body — due to China’s continued distortion

of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2758 and World Health Assembly Resolution 25.1. Neither of these resolutions mentions Taiwan or declares that Taiwan is part of the People’s Republic of China.

Therefore, these resolutions have no power to confer upon the PRC any right to represent Taiwan in WHO. In light of this, and to uphold the core UN values of inclusiveness and universality, we urge WHO and all relevant parties to recognise Taiwan’s considerable contributions to global public health and the human right to health.

WHO must adopt a more open-minded approach and demonstrate flexibility, adhering to the principles of professionalism and inclusivity. Taiwan should be included, as a matter of pragmatism, in the World Health Assembly and all WHO meetings, activities, and mechanisms, particularly those concerned with the WHO pandemic agreement.

Taiwan earnestly hopes to work with the international community to create a future of borderless healthcare that realises the fundamental human right to health stipulated in the WHO Constitution and the vision of leaving no one behind espoused in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

(The writer is Minister of Health and Welfare ROC Taiwan. Views are personal)

Leaderspeak



I would guess that India would be one of the first trade deals we would sign. Vice President Vance was in India last week, talked about substantial progress. I have mentioned that the negotiations with the Republic of Korea have gone very well, and I think we’ve had some very substantial negotiations with our Japanese allies.

US TREASURY SECRETARY SCOTT BESSENT

SECOND Opinion

BY RAVI VALLURI

The Bengal Renaissance marked a pivotal awakening in India’s social, cultural, and intellectual life. Bengal became the crucible of this transformation, led by men of exceptional intellect and character — figures like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshub Chandra Sen, and Dwarkanath Tagore.

Their relentless efforts reshaped the moral and philosophical foundation of a stagnating Indian society, breathing new life into a nation shackled by tradition, superstition, and social injustice. Foremost among these reformers was Raja Ram Mohan Roy, born on May 22, 1772 in Radhanagar at Ramakanto Roy and Tarini Devi. A visionary far ahead of his time, Roy found no solace in the rigid orthodoxy and ritualism of contemporary Hinduism. Deeply disturbed by idolatry, he even journeyed to Tibet in search of spiritual truth, hoping to find refuge in Buddhism. However, his experience there was disappointing — he found Tibetan Buddhism equally steeped in rituals and idolatrous practices. Yet this journey left a profound mark on his life. After a group of Tibetan women saved him from violent monks, he developed a deep reverence for women, recognising their strength and resilience. This experience became the foundation of his lifelong advocacy for women’s emancipation,

especially his crusade against sati, the inhumane practice that forced widows to self-immolate on their husband’s funeral pyre. Roy’s dedication to social reform extended beyond this. He promoted women’s education, property rights, and gender equity — causes later championed by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, culminating in the landmark Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. Roy’s vision laid the groundwork for a more progressive and humane society. Spiritually, Roy sought to uncover the core, universal truths of religion. He founded the Brahma Sabha, which later evolved into the Brahma Samaj — a reformist movement that drew from both Hindu and Christian traditions. A polyglot fluent in at least ten languages, Roy studied religious texts across traditions — Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam. He even learnt Hebrew and Greek to explore the foundational texts of Christianity.

Through this comparative lens, he published *The Precepts of Jesus*, appreciating Christianity’s ethical teachings while also advocating for pure theism within Hinduism, stripped of its superstitions. An ardent proponent of modern education, Roy believed that Sanskrit-based instruction alienated the masses. Although he respected ancient scriptures, he opposed Sanskrit education for practical reasons, arguing that its esoteric nature hindered widespread learning. His progressive stance led him to advocate for English education, emphasising the need for rational and scientific knowledge. His vision helped establish prestigious institutions such as Hindu College, Presidency College, Vedanta College, and the English School in Calcutta. He even peti-

tioned the East India Company to expand English-language instruction, showcasing his commitment to national enlightenment. Roy also pioneered journalism in India, launching publications in Bengali, Persian, Hindi, and English. These journals served as powerful tools to disseminate knowledge in science, literature, and politics.

Despite oppressive press restrictions of the time, Roy fiercely defended freedom of expression, challenging censorship in courts and through official appeals. Although he did not live to witness the removal of these press controls, abolished by Charles Metcalfe in 1835 — his role as a crusader for free speech remains undeniable.

Politically astute, Roy campaigned against the Jury Act of 1827, which barred Indians from participating in trials involving fellow natives. He also opposed the renewal of the East India Company’s charter and called for key reforms, including civil and criminal law codification, greater Indian representation in the military, and the separation of judiciary and executive powers. Though an internationalist — he travelled to England in 1831 — Roy remained deeply empathetic to the plight of Indian peasants, decrying exploitative zamindars and punitive export duties. In every respect, Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a man far ahead of his time. His unwavering commitment to truth, reason, justice, and unity laid the foundation for the Indian freedom movement and inspired generations.

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

Letters to the Editor

Liberals call the shots in Canada

Madam — The recent Canadian midterm election results brought unexpected reactions from global leaders, reminiscent of the classic 1960s Bollywood song *Na Na Karte Pyar Tumhi Se Kar Baithe*. Many appeared to hope for a loss for Canada’s Liberal Party, but despite falling three seats short of the majority mark of 172, the party is poised to form the Government.

Notably, Donald Trump, who once quipped about making Canada the 51st US state, congratulated Liberal leader Mark Carney — not via social media, but with a personal phone call. Ironically, Trump’s antagonism may have helped Carney. As a vocal critic of Trump, Carney’s opposition struck a chord with voters, boosting the Liberals’ vote share by 11 per cent and securing 15 more seats than in the last election.

Meanwhile, the Indian Government was seen favouring Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre, possibly due to past tensions with Justin Trudeau. Indian media widely predicted a Liberal defeat — but reality defied those expectations. Reluctantly, Prime Minister Modi congratulated Carney. Encouragingly, Carney has called for renewed India–Canada relations, emphasising their importance and expressing his intent to restore full diplomatic engagement. It is time both nations move past their differences and rebuild a strong, respectful partnership.

JANG BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

China faces the brunt of US tariffs

Madam — As tensions between India and Pakistan reach a peak, the tariff war between the United States and China has also intensified. Many factories in China have shut down after losing orders from the United States. There is growing concern that around 10 to 20 million workers in China, linked to export industries, may face unemployment.

Many factories manufacturing toys, sports goods, and cheap products have sent their workers home and have nearly stopped production. In response, several Chinese companies are now seeking new customers in Europe and Latin America instead of depending on the United States. They are also considering setting up production units in India and Southeast Asia. In the coming months, this shift could completely transform China’s export model. The situation is most eroding in Yiwu and Dongguan, China’s major export hubs.

The athletic wear factory Wuiswole in Ningbo has started online sales in the domestic market. According to several Chinese company heads, the impact of Trump’s tariffs is more severe than that of COVID-19. Chinese tech companies have come forward to support domestic businesses. Hundreds of companies have been provided with free AI tools and virtual hosting services to help them resume online sales quickly amid difficulties caused by the Trump tariffs. The Chinese dragon is now deeply entangled in the web of American tariff strategies.

DATAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

A tipping point in the global trade

Madam — The article on Mr Trump’s tariff moves (dated 30-4-25) sheds light on a deep-rooted global economic struggle. After the two World Wars, colonial powers lost access to cheap raw materials and captive markets. In response, they established mechanisms like the World Bank, IMF, and Asian Development Bank — to maintain economic dominance. However, these institutions often left newly liberated nations trapped in debt rather than fostering growth.

The global economic system, driven by profit, has increasingly benefited a tiny elite while depriving the majority. Without sufficient purchasing power among the masses, markets dried up — a crisis that surfaced in the 1930s. Economist Keynes proposed state-led welfare spending to revive demand, a strategy that helped restore economic activity. Yet, the relentless pursuit of profit led to a repeat collapse in 2008, exposing the fragility of the system.

Globalisation, once hailed as a panacea, soon turned the United States into a dumping ground, diminishing its dominance. Trump’s reaction — tariffs and trade barriers — reflects a shift towards protectionism.

While most nations resist his unilateralism, bilateral trade pacts are rising. China stands firm, signalling the end of American economic hegemony. Trump’s recent pause on tariffs and softer stance suggest a reluctant recognition of this new multipolar trade reality.

AG RAJMOHAN | ANANTAPUR

PAHALGAM MASSACRE: TARGETED KILLINGS, NATIONAL OUTRAGE

The terrorists who massacred 26 people in Pahalgam also fired an extremely destructive weapon. Inadvertently or by design, they asked the tourists their religion, and asked to identify themselves by reading the Kalma or other means. After confirming them to be Hindus, killed them mercilessly in front of their wives and children! The mass murder of 26 unsuspecting tourists is a gory inhuman act, but after sometime, like Pulwama or 26/11 Mumbai attack will become an statistic. But the pointed killing of Hindus by openly identifying them will surely result in violent retribution continuously.

They and their masters knew very well that enmity between the Indians can be very easily created. Since they have absolutely no love lost for Muslims in India, they are hardly bothered of their fate as long as they are able to inflict a million cuts; and that too without any nefarious efforts by them!

Already, there are calls of boycotting Muslims and their business, attacks on

them accusing them of cow-slaughter. Kashmiri students studying in other states are threatened and are made to feel insecure, prompting the Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister to request respective governments to ensure their safety.

Amidst call of unity the BJP is blaming the opposition and the opposition calling out the criminal lapses of the ruling party! Not one person has asked for finding how could the terrorists just walk in and create bloody mayhem. Nobody is talking of the lapses, intelligence failure or what precautions are to be taken to prevent such tragedies in future! The PM down to the ministers and ordinary member are roaring and warning of strong action; all this after the killings! We still are unaware how the Pulwama carnage took place!

The terrorists both here and in Pakistan will be celebrating this schism in the country! These attacks give our upstart politicians opportunity to blame each other and shameless upmanship!

ANIL BAGARKA | MUMBAI

Reimagining migration: It's time for an overhaul

As global labour shortages intensify, a policy reset could transform this demographic strength into a global competitive edge, if India can shift from fragmented migration to a structured, ethical, and strategic talent export framework

FIRST
Column

The Reserve Bank of India's recent bulletin reaffirms India's position as the world's top recipient of remittances, receiving a record \$129.1 billion in 2024, amounting to 3.4 per cent of the national GDP and 14.3 per cent of global inflows. These remittances now rival nearly 30 per cent of India's merchandise exports, positioning India's migrant workforce as a critical economic asset to families back home and the nation's macroeconomic stability. This record inflow is not merely a number, it represents the enduring ambition and resilience of over 35 million Indian diaspora, encompassing Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) living and working abroad, making up the world's largest diaspora. Their contribution is even more significant when seen as a source of foreign exchange, a buffer to the current account deficit, and a stabilising force during global economic shocks, as observed during the pandemic and subsequent economic downturns.

The epicentre of illegal migration, Punjab alone received ₹32,535 crore in remittances in 2024, representing over 56 per cent of its merchandise exports and 4.6 per cent of its GDP — underscoring how significant migrant remittances are to state economies. Similar patterns are seen in Kerala, where remittances have historically funded household consumption, real estate, education, and local infrastructure. According to the World Bank, remittances exceed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in many developing nations, and India is no exception.

Despite these achievements, India's migration landscape is marked by a stark duality. At the same time, approximately 2.5 million Indians migrate overseas yearly, and remittances continue to grow — so do irregular and unsafe migration, driven by a lack of legal pathways, poor governance, and limited awareness. States such as Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala — traditional migration hubs — are also grappling with the social and human costs of undocumented migration: from human trafficking and exploitation to unsafe "donkey routes" and permanent statelessness.

An Untapped Opportunity

As high-income countries — particularly OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) nations like the US, UK, Germany, France, Japan, and Australia — face a projected workforce shortage of 40–50 million by 2030, rising to 160 million by 2040, India stands uniquely positioned to meet this global demand.

With over 65 per cent of its population under 35, India has the world's largest youth cohort. Sectors like healthcare, logistics, construction, education, and technology are already witnessing acute shortages abroad. If paired with policy foresight, this demographic dividend could transform India into the world's leading exporter of skilled



human capital. But to realise this, a shift from sporadic migration to structured, state-supported, legal migration is crucial. The Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024, currently under consideration, promises a long-overdue update to the Emigration Act of 1983.

It seeks to build a modern, transparent, and welfare-oriented migration system. But legislative reform alone won't suffice. We need a federalised, mission-mode approach involving Central Ministries, State Governments, skilling agencies, and private sector partners. To catalyse this shift, India must embrace a "Talent Export Policy" — similar in ambition to the "Invest India" initiative. Here's a seven-pronged roadmap to do so:

Establish a National Overseas Employment Authority

Set up a dedicated body under the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) that works with State Governments to identify destination country

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ACCORDING TO THE WORLD BANK, REMITTANCES EXCEED FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI) IN MANY DEVELOPING NATIONS, AND INDIA IS NO EXCEPTION. DESPITE THESE ACHIEVEMENTS, INDIA'S MIGRATION LANDSCAPE IS MARKED BY A STARK DUALITY

demands, facilitate skill-matching, and negotiate bilateral migration corridors. District-level Migration Resource Centres and Indian embassy helpdesks should be institutionalised worldwide.

Integrate Global Skill Standards

India must reimagine its skilling architecture to align with global job market standards, including foreign languages, cross-cultural communication, and sector-specific certifications. NSDC (National Skill Development Corporation) can partner with countries for mutual qualification recognition.

Make Migration Affordable

Migration costs to Europe can reach up to ₹10 lakh, deterring legal movement and incentivising illegal channels. Low-interest loans, Government subsidies, and employer-funded training models, inspired by the Philippines' ESA-Pay system, must be adopted to reduce the financial burden.

Strengthen Migrant Welfare Systems Abroad

Enforce ILO (International Labour Organisation)-compliant employment standards and fund legal aid cells, health insurance, and cultural orientation programmes in collaboration with Indian missions abroad. The Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) can be scaled up to provide real-time support.

Negotiate Migration Agreements

India must expand its Bilateral Labour Mobility Agreements (BLMAs) portfolio like those already signed with Japan, the UAE, and Germany, ensuring wages, insurance, housing, and grievance redressal mechanisms are part of the contract.

National Mobility Industry Council

Bringing together ethical recruitment agencies, training institutes, employers, and regulators under a national industry body will professionalise migration practices, reduce fraud, and ensure quality assurance.

Harness the Power of Returning Migrants

Returning migrants bring global exposure, savings, and skills. A repatriate reintegration programme can turn them into local entrepreneurs and job creators, including re-skilling, credit access, and start-up incubators.

The Way Forward

For India, migration is not just an economic tool, it's a geopolitical asset. A well-supported diaspora can influence foreign policy, trade ties, cultural diplomacy, and technology transfer. Countries like the Philippines, Mexico, and Vietnam have already built national strategies around their overseas workforce. It is time for India to do the same, not out of compulsion but with a vision to lead. With the proper safeguards, strategic investments, and bold policy thinking, India can become the world's largest remittance-receiving nation and the most respected exporter of skilled talent. The global workforce crisis is India's demographic opportunity but only if we act with urgency, coordination, and compassion.

From gaon (village) to global capitals, Indian migrants are already shaping the world. Now it's time for India to shape the future of migration — legally, ethically, strategically and geopolitically. India's migration story is at a critical crossroads — rich in promise yet fraught with challenges. With remittances at record highs and global demand for skilled workers surging, the moment calls for bold, coordinated action.

By embracing a structured, rights-based migration policy, India can not only safeguard its migrants but also elevate them as strategic assets in global diplomacy, trade, and development. Legal, affordable, and skill-aligned migration must become the new norm. If done right, India can transition from being the world's top remittance recipient to a global leader in talent export — transforming migration into a national strength and a tool for inclusive progress.

(The writer is Vice-Chairman (Cabinet Minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board and Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views are personal)

The Unseen hands that build our world

On May 1, Workers' Day, we do more than mark a date — we remember a revolution born from blisters, built on dignity, and carried forward by the unbreakable spirit of those whose work shapes our lives, yet whose names we rarely know

She wakes not to an alarm but to the first strike of a hammer. There is no day, no night — just an endless chain of work that begins before sunrise and continues after dark. The hands that bear blisters are the ones that strengthen the nation's foundation. The sweat that falls to the ground raises towering buildings. Yet, these hands have been given more space on floors than in the pages of history.

They haven't been counted — they've been brought down, bent low. But May 1 is the day when the worker straightened their back and told the world: No more.

This day is not just a date on the calendar but a symbol of the consciousness that unites voices crushed for centuries. It is the echo of the strength hidden in the sweat of labourers — a strength that can redirect rivers, split mountains, and, most importantly, transform society's mindset.

A worker is not just a person but an idea. An idea that says labour is the foundation of creation. No uniform, no title, no rank — yet these are the most real people in the world. They may not have degrees to show, but every perfectly aligned brick is proof of their skill.

They are the ones who build cities but often get lost on their edges. They are denied entry to malls, yet they are the ones who build them. Labour is not just working; it is an unwritten poem, composed in lines of blisters, sweat, and unseen exhaustion.

It is a battle — a battle for existence, dignity, and identity that is repeatedly crushed by being called 'unskilled'. But the truth is, the most vital skills belong to those without whom the world would become a stalled machine.

Imagine for a moment: if workers stopped working for a day, what would happen? Cities would halt, streets would empty, and the framework of our so-called modernity would crumble. Yet, how often do we salute their labour?

Today's era is one of technology and innovation. We talk of Digital India, start-ups, and artificial intelligence, but do we forget that the engine of all this still runs on human effort? The delivery boy pedalling through scorching afternoons to bring your package — do we see the exhaustion hidden in his smile?

The welder whose eyes, sparked by more than just metal, forge the future — do we honour their art? Labour is no longer confined to factories; it is the story of every person who lives not for a 'job' but for a passion, even if that passion is to feed their family. It is the story of the rickshaw puller who carries the weight of his family with the strength of his legs. It is the story of the domestic worker who



weaves dreams for her children, even if she never attended school. These people are the backbone of our society, yet how often do we dismiss them as mere 'workers'?

The workers' fight is not just for wages or working hours but for the respect their labour deserves. They often fight alone — sometimes with their voices, sometimes with tears, and sometimes in silence. But when they stand together, they change history. That day in 1886, when workers in Chicago demanded an eight-hour workday, was not just an event — it was a spark that ignited labour movements worldwide.

Even today, when workers take to the streets, their voice represents not just themselves but every person who stands against injustice. No law, no

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WE MUST ASK: IS OUR DEVELOPMENT TRULY INCLUSIVE IF WORKERS' CONTRIBUTION IS LIMITED TO THEIR LABOUR? IS OUR PROGRESS GENUINE IF ITS FRUITS DON'T REACH THOSE WHO WATER ITS ROOTS? NO REVOLUTION, NO DEVELOPMENT, NO CONSTRUCTION IS COMPLETE WITHOUT THE WORKER'S SMILE AT ITS CORE.

Government, and no policy is greater than their collective consciousness. Workers' Day is not just a red mark on the calendar — it is a warning to systems that believe labourers only follow orders. They also ask questions, and when they do, the world must answer.

We need a society where labour is seen not as a class but as a value. Where honest work is not looked down upon. Where a child who says, "I want to be a worker like my father," is met with respect, not pity. This will only be possible when we view labour not just as a means of survival but as an art — a matter of pride.

We must understand that workers don't just work — they shape dreams. They don't just build structures — they lay the foundation of society. May 1 will truly be a festival when, instead of spending the holiday in malls, we take a step for workers' rights. When we listen to their stories and give their voices a platform.

This day also reminds us that workers are not just a tale of the past but the architects of the future. As we speak of the environment, sustain-

able development, and social justice, workers are at the heart of that change. Those who grow crops in fields, operate machines in factories, or clean our streets — they are the axis keeping our planet and society alive. Yet, our policies, priorities, and thinking often push them to the margins.

We must ask: Is our development truly inclusive if workers' contribution is limited to their labour? Is our progress genuine if its fruits don't reach those who water its roots?

No revolution, no development, no construction is complete without the worker's smile at its core. As long as their share is only sweat and not the rewards, our achievements remain incomplete. This day is not an empty slogan — it is the sound that rose from the strike of a hammer and can still shake our souls — if we are willing to listen.

It gives us a chance not only to remember workers' struggles but to ask what we can do for them. Perhaps it's time we see their labour not just as work but as a force that can change the world. Perhaps it's time we make Workers' Day not just a holiday but a day of resolve — a resolve to build a society where every worker stands tall, and their voice is heard. Because until the worker's smile becomes part of our progress, no achievement of ours will ever be complete.

On May 1, we do not just honour workers, we awaken to the truth they represent. Their hands, though blistered and unseen, shape the world we live in. They are the silent force behind our cities, our comforts, and our dreams.

Yet, they remain invisible — underpaid, undervalued, and often unheard. Workers' Day is a call not just to remember their struggles but to reimagine a society where labour is not just a necessity but a value of pride.

True progress lies in dignity for all not just in technology or wealth, but in the recognition of every hand that builds, cleans, grows, and delivers. Until we ensure their voices are heard and their efforts rewarded, our achievements remain hollow.

Let this day be a pledge — not just of gratitude but of action — to build an inclusive, just, and respectful world, where every worker stands tall and every drop of sweat is met with the respect it deserves.

On May 1, we honour not just the worker's toil but their truth. Their sweat shapes our world, yet their worth goes unseen. Let this day remind us: without dignity for labour, progress is hollow. Real development begins when every worker's voice is heard and their efforts valued equally.

(The author is a professor and a columnist. Views are personal)

Bangladesh High Court orders Hindu leader's release on bail

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Dhaka

A bench of Bangladesh High Court on Wednesday ordered release of Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das on bail, five months after he was arrested on a charge of defaming the country's national flag, court officials said.

"The two-judge bench declared absolute its earlier rule asking authorities why he should not be granted bail," an official of the High Court said.

The bench comprising Justice Atoar Rahman and Justice Ali Reza granted the bail after the final hearing on their previous rule.

On October 31, a case with Kotwali police station in Chattogram was filed accusing Das and 18 others of disrespecting the Bangladesh national flag.

A former ISKCON leader, Das was arrested at Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on November 25 last year.

A spokesperson for the Sammilito Sanatani Jagaran Jote, a Hindu organisation, Das was taken to the court at the southeastern port city of Chattogram, which sent him to jail rejecting his bail petition the next day.

Das' arrest sparked widespread protests with his followers demonstrating in Dhaka and other places. In the port city, the protest turned violent when assistant gov-



Hindu leader Chinmoy Krishna Das

FILE PHOTO

ernment prosecutor Saiful Islam Alif was hacked to death, hours after Das was sent to jail. The development - less than three months after a mass student-led protest ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5 - also emerged as an issue between Bangladesh and India with New Delhi expressing its concern over his detention. After Hasina fled to India, Muhammad Yunus took over as Chief Adviser of the Interim government on August 8.

"This incident follows the multiple attacks on Hindus and other minorities by extremist elements in Bangladesh. There are several documented cases of arson and looting of minorities' homes and business establishments, as well as theft and vandalism and desecration of deities and temples," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in New Delhi on November 26. "It is unfortunate that while the perpetrators of these incidents remain at large, charges should be pressed against a reli-

gious leader presenting legitimate demands through peaceful gatherings," MEA said and urged Bangladesh authorities to ensure the safety and security of Hindus and all minorities. Earlier, the lawyers of the Hindu community leader had failed to secure bail for him as the lower court in Chattogram denied their petitions.

"The allegation of disrespecting the national flag is baseless, as it was not a national flag. We informed the court that this case cannot proceed," top defence counsel Apurba Kumar Bhattacharya told journalists emerging from the court room last time in January.

Bhattacharya, a former deputy attorney general, was leading a team of 11 Supreme Court lawyers to represent Das.

Earlier on December 11, the court rejected a plea seeking advanced hearing of his bail petition by lawyer Rabindra Ghose ruling that it would be heard on the previously fixed date on January 2, 2025.

An associate of Das in his Sammilita Sanatani Jagaran Jote, Sawtantra Gauranga Das, earlier said no lawyer stood for the Hindu leader fearing threats and pressure from a "politically motivated lawyers' group". The government prosecutor's death sparked a counter campaign demanding a ban of ISKCON, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, which distanced itself from Das saying he was expelled from the organisation more than six months ago.

Parents await Pakistan man's body from Chennai

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi

The parents of a 23-year-old Pakistani man who died during treatment at a Chennai hospital were still waiting Wednesday for the body as the airline which was scheduled to carry it landed without it.

It was reported on Tuesday that the body of Syed Aryan Shah has been brought to Karachi after his mother appealed to the government for help after the Pahalgam attack.

The airline was supposed to bring the body on Tuesday.

"They (airlines) were supposed to bring his body on Tuesday evening to Karachi. The flight arrived without the body because of some operational and logistical issues," Saima Shah, Aryan's mother, said. Aryan was suffering from heart and severe lung ailments and was on life support for respiratory failure at the MGM Healthcare hospital in Chennai. He died on April 25.

Aryan's mother said that after she had appealed to the Pakistan government to help her clear the hospital bills and also arrange for transportation of the body to Karachi, the Balochistan government had come to her rescue by coordinating with the foreign ministry and arranging to transport the body from Chennai to Colombo. His mother had flown with Aryan to Chennai and got him admitted there on February 12 for his urgent treatment. The situation became difficult for the Pakistani family after India directed all Pakistani nationals holding visitor

medical visas to leave the country by April 29 in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22 in which 26 people were killed.

"Since the family belongs to Quetta, the Balochistan government contacted the foreign office, and we cleared all the medical bills to get the body release. We have also made all travel arrangements to fly the body back to Karachi," Shahid Rind, a spokesperson for the government, said.

Rind said the plan was to bring the body by road from Karachi to Quetta by Wednesday for burial.

The airlines have assured the body will be brought to Karachi as soon as possible, but have given no schedule.

According to media reports, Aryan Shah had been suffering from interstitial lung disease and was put on ECMO support for the last 70 days.

After all existing Indian visas issued to Pakistani nationals were revoked, some families from Pakistan who were in Chennai or New Delhi for the treatment of their children had to cancel their plans and return home.

This week, two families from Karachi returned home from New Delhi without the treatment of their sons being completed. In one case, two boys aged 9 and 7 had to return home without undergoing a procedure for their heart defect since birth.

Chennai and New Delhi have been destinations for Pakistanis who are looking for advanced tertiary medical care at affordable costs.

Ten terrorists killed by Pakistan security forces

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Karachi

Pakistan's security forces have killed 10 terrorists in two separate incidents in the country's restive Balochistan province, authorities said.

The terrorists were killed in the Kech and Ziarat districts during a fresh crackdown against militant elements in the province.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the terrorists were killed during separate intelligence-based operations (IBOs) in the districts. The operation was launched based on intelligence about the presence of militants in the area.

As per details, three terrorists were killed during an operation near Turbat in Kech district. The operation was launched based on intelligence about the presence of militants in the area.

The ISPR said in a statement that a heavy exchange of fire took place between security forces and armed terrorists.

Weapons and ammunition were recovered from the slain terrorists, who the ISPR said were involved in numerous

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the terrorists were killed during separate intelligence-based operations. The operation was launched based on intelligence about the presence of militants in the area

attacks against security forces and the killing of civilians.

In a separate incident, security forces killed seven terrorists during an operation conducted on intelligence reports in the Choteera area of Ziarat district.

Officials said the targeted operation took place between the Choteer and Sanjavi areas. Armed militants hiding in the area opened fire on the security forces, who retaliated after taking positions.

Ziarat Deputy Commissioner Zakaullah Durrani confirmed the deaths and said that seven bodies were shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital, Ziarat, by security personnel.

North Korea's Kim Jong watches missile test firings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Seoul

North Korea said Wednesday leader Kim Jong Un observed the first test firings of missiles from a recently launched destroyer - the first such warship for the North - and called for accelerating efforts to boost his navy's nuclear attack capabilities.

North Korea last week unveiled the 5,000-tonne destroyer equipped with what it called the most powerful weapons built in its warship industry. During Friday's launching ceremony at the western port of Nampo, Kim called the ship's construction "a breakthrough" in modernising North Korea's naval forces.

Outsider experts say it's North Korea's first destroyer and that it was likely built with Russian assistance. They say North Korea's naval forces lag behind South Korea's but still view the destroyer as a serious security threat as it could bolster North Korea's attack and defence capabilities.

The official Korean Central News Agency said Wednesday that Kim watched the tests of the destroyer's supersonic and strategic cruise missiles, anti-aircraft missile, automatic guns and electronic jamming guns earlier this week.

He appreciated the ship's combination of powerful strike weapons and conventional defenses and set tasks to speed the nuclear-arming of his navy, the report said. During the ship's launching ceremony,



Test firings conducted in North Korea

PTI

Kim said the destroyer will be deployed early next year. He said the acquisition of a nuclear-powered submarine would be his next big step in strengthening his navy. He underscored the need to beef up North Korea's deterrence capability to cope with what he called escalating US-led hostilities targeting the North.

An analysis of photos of the warship shows that its anti-air radar system is likely from Russia, said Lee Illwoo, an expert with the Korea Defense Network in South Korea. He said the warship's engine system and some of its anti-air weapons systems also likely came from Russia.

North Korea and Russia have been

sharply expanding military and other cooperation in recent years, with the North supplying troops and conventional weapons to support Russia's war efforts against Ukraine.

The US, South Korea and their partners worry Russia will likely in return provide North Korea with high-tech weapons technologies that can enhance its nuclear programme as well as shipping other military and economic assistance.

Lee said the deployment of a warship with an advanced radar system off North Korea's west coast could sharply bolster its air defence capabilities for Pyongyang, the capital.

Lee said South Korea, which has 12 destroyers, still vastly outpaces North Korea's naval forces.

But he said the North Korean destroyer, which can carry about 80 missiles, can still pose a serious threat, as South Korea's navy hasn't likely braced for such an enemy warship.

Animosities on the Korean Peninsula are running high as North Korea continues its weapons testing activities meant to enlarge its nuclear and missile arsenals.

On Monday, North Korea confirmed for the first time that it has sent combat troops to Russia to support its war efforts against Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin thanked North Korea and promised not to forget the sacrifices of North Korean soldiers for Russia.

Vietnam celebrates 50 years since war's end with focus on peace, unity

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■

Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam)

Vietnam on Wednesday celebrated the 50th anniversary of the end of the war with the United States and the formation of its modern nation with a military parade and a focus on a peaceful future.

The fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975 marked the end of a Vietnam divided into the communist North and US-allied South, and the country's top official told crowds the past decades had led to ever increasing unity.

"All the Vietnamese are the descendants of Vietnam. They have the rights to live and work, to have freedom to pursue happiness and love in this country," said To Lam, the Vietnam Communist Party's general secretary.

"In a spirit of closing the past, respecting differences, aiming for the future, the whole party, the people and the army vow to make Vietnam become a country of peace, unity, prosperity and development," he added.

Thousands camped overnight on the streets of the former South Vietnamese capital, which was renamed Ho Chi Minh City after it fell to North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops, to get the best vantage point for the parade.

Many lingered on the streets later in the afternoon and ate picnics while waiting for drone and fireworks shows scheduled for the evening.

"Now it's time for peace," said spectator Nguyen Thi Hue, a city resident. "Peace is the dream that everyone in the world wants."

One float carried the Lac bird, Vietnam's emblem, another a portrait of Ho Chi Minh.

Chinese, Laotian and Cambodian troops marched behind Vietnamese army formations, including some wearing uniforms similar to what was worn by northern Vietnamese troops during the war.



Helicopters carrying the national flag and jets flew over the parade near Independence Palace, where a North Vietnamese tank smashed through the gates on the final day of the war.

Sitting next to Vietnam's leader were Cambodia's former leader Hun Sen and Laotian Communist Party General Secretary Thongloun Sisolith.

To Lam said beyond a victory over the US and South Vietnam, the fall of Saigon was a "glorious landmark" that ended a 30-year fight for independence that began with the fight to oust French colonial troops.

He said Vietnam owes its position in the world today to support from the Soviet Union, China and solidarity from Laos and Cambodia, as well as "progressive" people all over the world including the US.

The emphasis on reconciliation and not, like previous years, on military victory reflected how Vietnam was approaching the changing tides of the global economy and geopolitics today, said Nguyen Khac Giang, an analyst at Singapore's ISEAS-Yusuf Ishak Institute.

He added that the Vietnam War remains central to how the Communist Party framed its legitimacy, not just as a military triumph but also as a symbol of national unity. But To Lam's comments underlined that the reconciliation remains unfinished.

"The war still defines Vietnam's unity, and its unresolved divides," Giang said. For Pham Ngoc Son, a veteran who fought for the communists, today there is "only space for peace and friendship" between the US and Vietnam.

"The war is over a long time ago," said the 69-year-old who, during the war, served as an army truck driver bringing troops and supplies from the north to the south along the Ho Chi Minh trail - the secret supply route used by North Vietnam.

This year also marks the 30-year anniversary of diplomatic ties between Vietnam and the US.

In 2023, Vietnam upgraded its relations with the US to that of a comprehensive strategic partner, the highest diplomatic status it gives to any country and the same level of relations as China and Russia.

Sudanese return to their homeland, hoping for stability

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Cairo

Ahmed Abdalla sat on a sidewalk in downtown Cairo, waiting for a bus that will start him on his journey back to Sudan. He doesn't know what he will find in his homeland, wrecked and still embroiled in a 2-year-old war.

His wife and son, who weren't going with him, sat next to him to bid him goodbye. Abdalla plans to go back for a year, then decide whether it's safe to bring his family.

"There is no clear vision. Until when do we have to wait?" Abdalla said, holding two bags of clothes. "These moments I'm separating from my family are really hard," he said, as his wife broke down in tears.

Abdallah is among tens of thousands of Sudanese who were driven from their homes and are now going back. They are hoping for some stability after the military in recent months recaptured the capital, Khartoum, and other areas from its rival, the Rapid Support Forces.

But the war still rages in some parts of the country. In areas recaptured by the military, people are returning to find their neighbourhoods shattered, often with no electricity and scarce food, water and services. The battle for power between the military and the RSF has caused one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. Famine is spreading. At least 20,000 people have been killed, according to the UN, though the figure is likely higher.

Nearly 13 million people fled their homes, some 4 million of whom streamed into neighbouring countries while the rest sought shelter elsewhere in Sudan.

A relatively small portion of the displaced are returning so far, but the numbers are accelerating. Some 400,000 internally displaced Sudanese have gone back to homes in the Khartoum area, neighbouring Gezira province and south-east Sennar province, the International Organisation for Migration estimates.

Since Jan. 1, about 123,000 Sudanese returned from Egypt, including nearly 50,000 so far in April, double the month before, the IOM said. Some 1.5 million Sudanese fled to Egypt during the war, according to UNHCR.

Nfa Dre, who had fled to northern Sudan, moved back with his family to Khartoum North, a sister city of the capital, right after the military retook it in March.

They found decomposing bodies and unexploded ordnance in the streets. Their home had been looted.

"Thank God, we had no loss of lives, just material losses, which matter nothing compared to lives," Dre said. Three days of work made their home inhabitable. But conditions are hard. Not all markets have reopened and few medical services are available. Dre said residents rely on charity kitchens operated by a community activist group called the Emergency Response Rooms, or ERR. They haul water from the Nile River for cooking and drinking. His home has no electricity, so he charges his phone at a mosque with solar panels.

"We asked the authorities for generators, but they replied that they don't have the budget to provide them," Dre said. "There was nothing we could say."

Salah Semsaya, an ERR volunteer, said he knew of displaced people who tried returning to Wad Madani, the capital of Gezira province, but found the basics of life so lacking that they went back to their displacement shelters.

Others are too wary to try. "They're worried about services for their children. They're worrying about their livelihoods," said Sheldon Yett, UNICEF Representative to Sudan.

Throughout the war, there has been no functional government. A military-backed transitional administration was based in Port Sudan, on the Red Sea coast, but had little reach or resources. After retaking Khartoum, the military said it will establish a new interim government.

"Erosion of multilateralism threatens global stability"

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Johannesburg

South African Deputy President Paul Mashatile has called on G20 nations to strongly discourage the erosion of multilateralism, warning that it is a potential threat to global growth and stability.

Addressing a gathering of African thought leaders at the Think 20 (T20) Africa High-Level Dialogue in Pretoria on Tuesday, Mashatile said multilateralism was facing serious challenges that were reshaping global dynamics and relationships. "Therefore, we should take a dim view and strongly discourage the erosion of multilateralism, as it poses a potential threat to global growth and stability," he said.

The dialogue, themed 'Strengthening African Agency in the G20 Within the Global Order', served as a preparatory meeting for the G20 Summit later this year. South Africa holds the G20 Presidency for 2025. Mashatile said a fair, transparent, equitable, and inclusive international order was essential for economic stability and sustained growth.

He warned of the hardships caused by global megatrends such as geopolitical instability, climate change, rising nationalism, and trade wars. "Global economic growth is subdued, with many economies, particularly in Africa, burdened by unsustainable debt levels, while billions are affected by underdevelopment, inequality, poverty, and unemployment," he noted.

Mashatile listed the challenges which he said were "testing our global humanity and solidarity among nations."

The Deputy President stressed that South Africa would use its G20 Presidency to prioritise employment generation, gender-responsive policies, equitable access to opportunity, and reforms to the global financial system - including fair credit rating systems, accessible climate financing, and debt relief for low-income countries.

Delhi: Wedding businesses to surpass ₹5,000 crore on Akshaya Tritiya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Wedding-related businesses in Delhi are expected to surpass Rs 5,000 crore in one day as the national capital is witnessing around 21,000 marriages to coincide with Akshaya Tritiya — an auspicious day in the Hindu calendar. It's not just the couples who are feeling the joy — the wedding business is also seeing a boom, across a wide range of sectors including apparel, jewellery, food and catering, decoration, photography, transport, hotel bookings, event management, beauty salons, DJ services and floral services. Today, nearly all banquet halls, hotels and wedding venues in Delhi are fully booked. Meanwhile, hotel and banquet hall prices have surged by 10-15 per cent and most venues across the city are already fully booked, reflecting the massive wedding wave sweeping Delhi on Wednesday.

Notably, despite record prices, gold and silver trade across India touched a new high on Wednesday, on Akshaya Tritiya, a day considered auspicious in the country. According to the estimates of jewellery traders, gold sales alone were worth ₹12,000 crore on Wednesday. Akshaya Tritiya, celebrated annually on the third day of the bright half of Hindu calendar month Vaisakha, falls on Wednesday this year.

The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), has estimated Wedding-related businesses in Delhi are expected to surpass ₹5,000 crore in one day.



The Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI) estimated that the overall wedding-related business in the Delhi on Wednesday could exceed ₹1,000 crore. "Rates of banquet halls and hotels have seen a 10-15 per cent increase due to high demand," CTI Chairman Brijesh Goyal said. CTI General Secretary and gold trader Gurmeet Arora said that the gold and silver trade alone is expected to see a turnover of around ₹200 crore. However, with gold prices at record highs, buyers are showing more interest in light-weight jewellery.

"The price of gold has risen significantly. Ten grams of gold is currently priced at around ₹97,000, compared to ₹73,500 on Akshaya Tritiya last year. As a result, traders are focusing on smaller, lighter gold and diamond jewellery pieces to meet customer demand," Arora said.

Families are estimated to spend around 10 per cent of their wedding budget on clothing, 15 per cent on jewellery, and five per cent each on electronics, sweets and dry fruits. Gift items account for around four per cent of spending, according to Deepak Garg,

Senior Vice-President of CTI. In the services category, five per cent of the budget typically goes to banquet halls and hotels, three per cent to management, 10 per cent to tent and decoration services, and another 10 per cent on other services such as catering, he said.

Flower decoration makes up four per cent of total expenses, while transportation, photography, and music-related services together account for about 15 per cent, he added.

According to the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), the prices of gold and silver have surged significantly this year. Currently, the price of 10 grams of gold has reached around ₹1,00,000, compared to ₹73,500 on Akshaya Tritiya last year. Similarly, silver prices have touched ₹1,00,000 per kilogram, up from ₹86,000 per kilogram in 2023. In 2023, Akshaya Tritiya witnessed jewellery sales worth approximately ₹14,500 crore across the country, but the 2024 Lok Sabha elections have led to a noticeable dip in trade activity this year.

According to the latest data released by the World Gold Council, India's gold demand in the first three months of the year (January-March 2025) stood at 118.1 tonnes, a 15 per cent drop from 139 tonnes in the same period last year.

According to mythological beliefs, on this day, Lord Shiva blessed Kubera with immense wealth and Goddess Lakshmi with the title of the goddess of fortune — making it one of the most auspicious days for buying precious metals.

Centre hiked sugarcane price by 4.41 per cent for 2025-26

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday decided to increase the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane by 4.41 per cent to ₹355 per quintal for the upcoming 2025-26 season beginning October, keeping in mind the interest of sugarcane farmers.

For the current 2024-25 season, the sugarcane FRP has been fixed at ₹340 per quintal. FRP is the minimum price mandated by the Government of India that sugar mills are legally obligated to pay sugarcane farmers for their produce.

Briefing media after the meeting, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the FRP of ₹355 per quintal has been approved for a basic recovery rate of 10.25 per cent.

"The Fair and Remunerative Price for sugar season 2025-26 is 4.41 per cent higher than current sugar season 2024-25," the statement said.

A premium of ₹3.46 per quintal for each 0.1 per cent increase in sugar recovery over and above 10.25 per cent will be provided to farmers. A reduction in Fair and Remunerative Price by ₹3.46 per quintal will be for every 0.1 per cent decrease in recovery rate.

The government has also decided that there will not be any deduction in case of sugar mills where recovery is below 9.5 per cent. Such farmers will get ₹329.05 per cent for sugarcane in

the ensuing 2025-26 season.

According to the statement, the cost of production of sugarcane for the sugar season 2025-26 is ₹173 per quintal. The FRP of Rs 355 per quintal fixed for 2025-26 at a recovery rate of 10.25 per cent is higher by 105.2 per cent over production cost.

The sugar sector is an important agro-based sector that impacts the livelihood of about 5 crore sugarcane farmers and their dependents and around 5 lakh workers directly employed in sugar mills, apart from those employed in various ancillary activities including farm labour and transportation.

Briefing media after the meeting, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the FRP of ₹355 per quintal has been approved for a basic recovery rate of 10.25 per cent

The FRP has been determined on the basis of recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) and after consultation with state governments and other stakeholders.

As of April 28, about 87 per cent of total cane dues of ₹97,270 crore have been paid to farmers in the 2024-25 season, while 99.92 per cent of total cane dues of ₹1,11,782 crores were paid to farmers for 2024-25.

Rupee jumps 38 paise to close at 84.58 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ MUMBAI

The rupee surged 38 paise to 84.58 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday as trade-deal hopes and foreign fund inflows boosted investor sentiments. US President Donald Trump's statement that tariff talks with India are in a positive direction enthused investors, forex dealers said. However, geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan and a muted sentiment in domestic equities weighed on investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.15 and moved between the intra-day high of 84.47 and the low of 85.15 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 84.58 (provisional), registering a gain of 38 paise over its previous closing level.

On Tuesday, the rupee gained 27 paise to settle at 84.96 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, Trump said negotiations with India over a bilateral trade deal are "coming along great", and he thinks Washington will "have a deal" with New Delhi.

Trump made the remarks on Tuesday while speaking to reporters before departing the White House for a rally in Michigan, marking the first 100 days of his second administration.

Trump said negotiations with India over a bilateral trade deal are "coming along great", and he thinks Washington will "have a deal" with New Delhi

Airspace restrictions increase costs for Indian airlines

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai/ New Delhi

Indian airlines are likely to face additional weekly expenses of ₹77 crore for international flights operated from north Indian cities as the airspace curbs result in increased fuel consumption and longer flight durations.

An analysis of the number of overseas flights and back-of-the-envelope calculations based on increased flight time as well as approximate expenses by media showed that the additional monthly operational costs could be over ₹306 crore. Amid escalating tensions between India and Pakistan due to the Pahalgam terror attack, Pakistan on Thursday said it will bar Indian airlines from using its airspace. Alternative flight path is resulting in additional flying time of up to 1.5 hours for international flights from Delhi and north Indian cities.

A senior airline industry official, who has extensive experience in the commercial side, told to media that the additional time for a 16-hour flight to North America will be around 1.5 hours.

For 1.5 additional hours, the cost will be around ₹29 lakh, including landing and parking charges on account of a technical halt in an airport enroute, the official said. Similarly, the additional flight time for a 9-hour flight to Europe will be about 1.5 hours, and the extra cost will be around ₹22.5 lakh.

In the case of Middle East flights, the additional time will be around 45 minutes, and the resultant cost will be about ₹5 lakh, the official said.

Indian carriers are scheduled to operate more than 6,000 flights one way to various international destinations in April, data from aviation analytics firm

Cirium showed. Over 800 weekly flights are operated by Indian airlines to and from north Indian cities to overseas destinations, including North America, the UK, Europe and the Middle East, as per an analysis of the Cirium data.

There are little over 3,100 flights both ways in a month, and on a weekly basis, the count comes to nearly 800 flights.

Out of the total monthly flights, nearly 1,900 are operated with narrow-body planes and some wide-body aircraft to the Middle East. Considering the additional cost of ₹5 lakh per flight for the extra 45 minutes, the overall expenses will be about ₹90 crore.

With respect to Europe and North America, the total two-way flights are nearly 1,200. On the basis of additional flying time of 1.5 hours costing around ₹29 lakh for North America services and ₹22 lakh for Europe flights, the total amount will be about ₹306 crore per month. As per the analysis, the total additional monthly expenses will be about Rs 307 crore and ₹77 crore on a weekly basis. These figures are based on rough estimates. Apart from higher fuel consumption, longer flying hours also pose payload and aircraft availability issues, as well as crew flying duty time limitation challenges for airlines. On April 25, IndiGo said that around 50 international routes operated by it will require longer sectors and hence may be subject to some slight schedule adjustments.

"With the same restrictions and limited rerouting options, unfortunately, Almaty and Tashkent are outside the operational range of IndiGo's current fleet," it had said in a statement.

Flights to Almaty stand cancelled from April 27 until at least May 7 and to Tashkent from April 28 until May 7.

Gold prices decline by ₹900 to ₹98,550/10 gm

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices declined by ₹900 to ₹98,550 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday amid a weak trend in international markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹99,450 per 10 grams on Tuesday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity declined ₹900 to ₹98,100 per 10 grams from the previous close of ₹99,000 per 10 grams. However, increased buying by consumers on Akshaya Tritiya, which is considered an auspicious day for buying gold, jewellery and other valuables, capped the decline in gold prices.

Jewellers expect around 35 per cent increase in sales in value terms this year, mainly due to high prices, on the Akshaya Tritiya festival compared to last year. Gold prices ruled at ₹72,300 per 10 grams on Akshaya Tritiya in 2024 which fell on May



10. In volume terms gold sales are expected to remain flat at 20 tonnes, say jewellers. Silver prices slumped ₹4,000 to ₹98,000 per kg against the previous close of ₹1,02,000 per kg on Tuesday.

In the overseas market, spot gold dipped \$43.35 or 1.31 per cent to \$3,273.90 per ounce. Spot silver was quot-

ed 1.83 per cent lower at \$32.33 per ounce. "Gold extended its decline after US President Donald Trump signed an executive order aimed at softening the impact of his auto tariffs and cited progress in trade negotiations with several countries," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP-Commodity Research, Kotak Securities, said.

Trump offers automakers some relief

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

President Donald Trump signed executive orders Tuesday to relax some of his 25 per cent tariffs on automobiles and auto parts, a significant reversal as the import taxes threatened to hurt domestic manufacturers.

Automakers and independent analysts have indicated that the tariffs could raise prices, reduce sales and make US production less competitive worldwide. Trump portrayed the changes as a bridge toward automakers moving more production into the United States.

"We just wanted to help them during this little transition, short term," Trump

told reporters. "We didn't want to penalise them." Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, who spoke earlier at a White House briefing on Tuesday, said the goal was to enable automakers to create more domestic manufacturing jobs.

"President Trump has had meetings with both domestic and foreign auto producers, and he's committed to bringing back auto production to the US," Bessent said. "So we want to give the automakers a path to do that, quickly, efficiently and create as many jobs as possible."

Trump signed one order on Tuesday that amended his previous 25 per cent auto tariffs, making it easier for vehicles that are assembled in the US with foreign

parts to not face prohibitively high import taxes.

The amended order provides a rebate for one year of 3.75 per cent relative to the sales prices of a domestically assembled vehicles. That figure was reached by putting the 25 per cent import tax on parts that make up 15 per cent of a vehicle's sales price.

For the second year, the rebate would equal 2.5 per cent of a vehicle's sales price, as it would apply to a smaller share of the vehicle's parts.

The official said automakers would over the next month announce additional shifts for workers, new hires and plans for new facilities.

IKEA to set up compact stores in smaller cities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ NEW DELHI

Swedish home furnishings retailer IKEA is taking a "huge shift" in its India growth strategy by deciding to set up compact stores in smaller cities with a view to become more accessible to customers, said a company official.

IKEA, currently in the second phase of its growth in India, plans to expand through a network of small-format stores tailored to specific locations and catchment areas.

These stores could be as compact as 10,000 square feet, making them suitable for neighbourhood shopping malls, IKEA India Country Expansion Manager Pooja Grover told to media.

Further, she said these small-format stores will help IKEA to expand more quickly, remain agile, and establish a presence in malls and on high streets. She added that IKEA is also exploring partnerships with real estate developers to support this new concept.

Although these stores will have a limited physical display of IKEA's products, they will be equipped with a digital catalogue that allows customers to explore the brand's range of around 7,000 products and place orders. Multiple delivery options will be available, including home delivery, pickup at a collection point, or pickup by a third party, she added.

"We are trying to integrate various aspects and offer different kinds of experiences across different formats... From a size point of view, this is a huge benefit for us in India as well, where we will be more accessible to many people," said Grover, adding that "this size option opens up a lot of accessibility" for IKEA.

When asked whether IKEA plans to enter smaller tier II and III cities with its smaller-format stores, she said the company is currently focused on six priority cities: Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi NCR, Chennai, and Pune.

"So, we are focusing on these cities, we are also looking at smaller cities, tier II cities, and we will be finalising our plan shortly, but yes, we will be looking at physical CMPs (Customer Meeting Point) at some point in these cities as well," she added.



Regarding the number of upcoming stores, Grover said, "We are working on the overall numbers and plans for the next four to five years. We have recently received direction from the board, along with the necessary approvals."

In February, IKEA started online sales in Delhi-NCR and nine other markets ahead of its coming physical stores in Gurugram and Noida. It plans to open physical stores in Chennai and Pune in

the next phase after having operational stores in Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Bengaluru and two more coming stores in Delhi-NCR in Gurgaon and Noida.

"We have three standard stores currently in the country, all of which are large size, they are 40,000 square metre plus stores and we have one city store in Mumbai, which is around 7,500 square metres, and now we have a range of options..." she said.

IKEA has launched its first Plan & Order Point (PaOP) in Bengaluru, covering 740 square metres. This new format acts as a dedicated customer interaction hub, offering personalised consultations, expert home design guidance, flexible planning assistance, and installation services — bringing IKEA's expertise closer to customers.

Here, customers can choose their preferred level of service, whether it's a DIY approach, expert-guided planning, or complete end-to-end design and installation, with access to IKEA's full home furnishing range of over 7,000 products.

IKEA CEO Susanne Pulverer told to media in February that the company is now aiming for profitable growth in the coming year. It is also in discussions with the government to secure approval for the next round of foreign direct investment (FDI). In 2013, the government had approved IKEA's FDI proposal worth Rs 10,500 crore to establish 10 stores along with allied infrastructure over a period of 10 years.

However, Ingka Centres, a part of Ingka Group that operates IKEA retail, is investing one billion euros to set up two centres in Gurgaon and Noida under the Lykli brand.

INBRIEF

AUTISM AWARENESS DAY CELEBRATED BY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, GURU NAK DEV UNIVERSITY



The Department of Education organised a meaningful and impactful Autism Awareness Month celebration in the month of April 2025, in alignment with the vision of Professor (Dr) Karamjeet Singh, Vice Chancellor of Guru Nanak Dev University, to promote inclusion and support individuals with different abilities. By organising such initiatives, the university demonstrates its commitment to fostering an inclusive environment, empowering students with autism, and raising awareness about neurodiversity. The program was graced by the presence of Professor (Dr) Harwinder Singh Saini, Dean Student Welfare, who attended as the chief guest.

NATIONAL SOCIOLOGICAL CONFERENCE CONCLUDES AT GNDU

The 24th National Conference of the North-West Indian Sociological Association (NWISA) concluded at the Guru Nanak Dev University, after two days of rigorous academic engagement and rich intellectual exchange. Organised under the patronage of Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Karamjeet Singh, the conference was a collaborative effort of the School of Social Sciences and the Department of Sociology, and was supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi.



ACADEMIC LECTURE ON 'AI IN HEALTH CARE' AT GNDU

Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Guru Nanak Dev University, under the patronage of Vice Chancellor Professor Karamjeet Singh, organised a lecture on "AI in Health Care". Professor Harish Dureja, Dean Research & Development; Dean Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, an eminent scientist with more than 300 research publications and editor of more than 10 books delivered the expert talk. The online talk was attended by more than 100 students and faculty members. Professor Dureja stated that AI is based on machine learning and comprises highly involved advanced neural networking. He emphasised that artificial intelligence is defining the future of pharmaceutical industry as well as medicine. Especially, post Covid, there has been a boom in AI based interventions.

Swiatek, Sabalenka power into Madrid quarterfinals

Press Trust of India ■ Madrid

Power was restored at the Caja Magica tennis complex and the Madrid Open resumed with a packed schedule that included second-ranked Iga Swiatek advancing to the quarterfinals after a "more relaxed" day because of the blackout.

Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka made into the last eight by defeating Peyton Stearns in straight sets, while on the men's side, top-seeded Alexander Zverev was upset by 21st-ranked Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina. Following the major blackout that prompted 22 matches to be postponed on Monday, Swiatek returned to the center court and defeated Diana Shnaider 6-0, 6-7 (3), 6-4 to stay on track to defend her title in the Spanish capital.

"I liked yesterday. I think the whole world was just more relaxed, kind of, obviously the people who didn't lose because of this," she said. "I enjoyed the time off, and I tried to just recover, because we need to survive these free days, for sure."

Swiatek said she took away food from the tournament site and relaxed at the hotel until the power came back on.

"I just chilled and used that time to not think about what I should do," she said.

"There was no signal, so basically no one used their phones. It was nice, I liked it."

Most parts of Madrid regained power overnight, but the Caja Magica was still without electricity early Tuesday, causing a delay in the opening of the gates for fans.

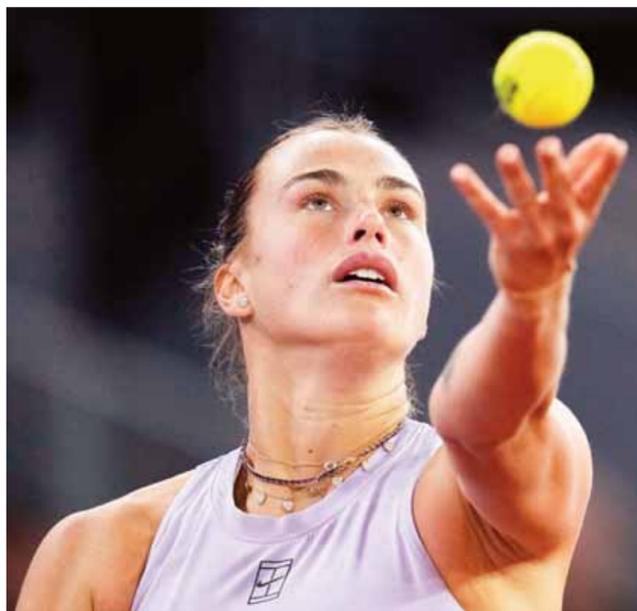
The power came back quickly, though, and organizers did not have to alter the day's schedule of matches, although there was the possibility of the night session being delayed because of the high number of matches during the day.

Swiatek cruised in the first set but had to save 11 of 13 break points to seal a hard-fought victory against the 13th-seeded Shnaider. Swiatek has not lost before the quarterfinals in seven tournaments this season but hasn't gone past the semifinals since Roland Garros last year. She will next face Madison Keys, who defeated Donna Vekic 6-2, 6-3.

It will be Swiatek's first meeting with Keys since she lost despite having match point in the semifinals of the Australian Open that was won by Keys.

"We played last year here, but I think it was a night session or something," Swiatek said. "I don't know, I think it was like colder or a little bit different, so for sure we'll watch that match."

Sabalenka defeated 44th-ranked Stearns



6-2, 6-4 to advance to the Madrid quarterfinals for the fourth time in five years. It was the WTA Tour-leading 28th win this season for the two-time Madrid champion. She was tied with Jessica Pegula with 27. Sabalenka lost last year's final to Swiatek.

Cerundolo defeated the second-ranked Zverev 7-5, 6-3 to continue his quick rise in the rankings.

Cerundolo, who also defeated Zverev last year in Madrid, broke serve once in each set and saved the only break opportunity he conceded at center court.

Who also defeated Zverev last year in Madrid. Zverev was coming off the title in Munich and will move on to defend his title in Rome.

"He played better than me today," Zverev said. "He definitely played better than me last year when we played here. But to be honest, I didn't play terrible, he just played better than me."

In the men's side, 31st-ranked Matteo Berrettini withdrew an abdominal injury after losing the first set 7-6 (2) to sixth-ranked Jack Draper.

Sixth-seeded Alex de Minaur tied Carlos Alcaraz with a tour-leading 24th win this season by getting past Denis Shapovalov 6-3, 7-6 (3).

The seventh-ranked De Minaur will next face Lorenzo Musetti, who beat 2019 runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas 7-5, 7-6 (3).

Americans Tommy Paul and Frances Tiafoe both won their matches. The 11th-seeded Paul defeated Karen Khachanov 6-3, 3-6, 6-2, while the 16th-seeded Tiafoe beat Alexandre Muller 6-3, 6-3.

Paul was among the players having to play doubles on the same day as their singles matches. Another was 19-year-old Jakub Mensik, the Miami winner who defeated Alexander Bublik 6-3, 6-2 before having to play his doubles match on the same court a bit later.

The 27-year-old Bublik joked in a conversation with the match's referee during a changeover.

"Remember when tennis was easy? Like five years ago it was super easy to play tennis," the four-time winner on tour said. "A bunch of random people in the top 50, barely moving. Now this guy is not even top 5, not even top 10. What is that?"

Ninth-seed Daniil Medvedev matched his career-best result in Madrid by reaching the last eight with a 3-6, 6-1, 6-4 victory over American Brandon Nakashima. Fourth-ranked Taylor Fritz was another American eliminated, losing 7-5, 6-4 to Casper Ruud.

Women's hockey: India look to get right combination

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Perth

The Indian women's hockey team will field its "best combinations" and look to fix some defensive frailties in the three-match Test series against Australia starting here on Thursday with head coach Harendra Singh hoping to identify his core group for the FIH Pro League matches in June.

After opening the tour with back-to-back losses to the Australia A side, India will be eager to bounce back with a stronger performance.

"In the first two games, most of the players have had a chance to play and now we will try out the best combinations among players," chief coach Harendra Singh said in a press release issued by Hockey India.

"I am looking forward to this because this is how we identify the players who can compete in the forthcoming Pro League matches in Europe."

"Before going to the World Cup next year, the new girls should play a minimum of 35 matches. That is the goal we keep in mind while preparing for such tournaments," he added.

India went down 3-5 in the opening match before narrowly losing 2-3 in the second against Australia A. Despite the results, the coach was upbeat about the team's effort.

"In both the matches, we have conceded some soft goals which were disheartening, but apart from that, we have been very competitive. This is a test series so it is not about winning or losing, it is about the experience," the coach said.

He stressed on the importance of giving youngsters early exposure at the international level.

"There are some players who have come out of the country to play for the very first time. I am giving the youngsters a chance to play so they are prepared to be the next generation," he added.

India's 26-member squad, led by Salima Tete with Navneet Kaur as vice captain, will now face a bigger challenge against the senior team of Australia over the next three matches on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

The last time both sides met, India enjoyed a 1-0 victory during the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023-24 and will look to obtain a similar result.

Praggnanandhaa bounces back to jump to second

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Warsaw

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa bounced back from a poor start to climb to second in the overall standings at the end of the first half of the blitz section in the Superbet Rapid & Blitz tournament, part of the Grand Chess Tour.

Praggnanandhaa's efforts held him in good stead for a second day running. The Indian had not done well on the first two days of rapid chess but has come back strongly especially showing his expertise in the blitz section.

With just five minutes given for each game and a three seconds increment after every move is made, Praggnanandhaa played his usual brand of complicated games and ended with three straight wins.

He had started with losses to Deac Bogdan-Daniel of Romania and Levon Aronian of United States but then recovered to beat Firouzja Alireza of France and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave.

In the last three rounds, Praggnanandhaa put it across former world champion Veselin Topalov of Bulgaria, Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind), Levon Aronian (Usa); David Gavrillescu of Romania to collect score 5.5 points out of allotted nine games.

On a day when Indian GM Aravindh Chithambaram ran a bit out of steam and could only garner 3.5 points from his nine games, Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia cruised to a brilliant 8/9 on the penultimate day and took his tally to a massive 19 points out of a possible 27.

Fedoseev's dominance started right from the beginning now enjoys a huge 3.5 points lead over second place Praggnanandhaa.

Unless there is a massive change in the fortunes of other players, the overall first place seems almost decided for which 4.5 points should be enough for Fedoseev in the remaining nine games slated on the final day.

Aravindh started off with 2.5 points from first four games and then could only get one point from the last five.

He will have to fight hard in the second half of blitz in order to finish what he started so well - tying for first place in the rapid section.

Standings after nine rounds rapid and blitz: 1. Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo) 19; 2. R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 15.5); 3-5: Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind), Levon Aronian (Usa); Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) 14.5 each; 6. Firouzja Alireza (Fra) 14.

Will be exciting: Boult on bowling opposite Suryavanshi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

Mumbai Indians pacer Trent Boult described the prospect of facing Rajasthan Royals' 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi as "exciting", but said it is not something that would "worry" him on a flat Sawai Mansingh Stadium deck.

The 14-year-old Suryavanshi wrote his name in history books, hitting a 38-ball 101 against Gujarat Titans to become the youngest ever to score a ton in the IPL and overall men's T20 cricket. His 35-ball innings was also the second fastest ton in the tournament.

"(I have) bowled to some brilliant batsmen around the world, the Chris Gayles, the AB de Villiers, all the quality that come in these tournaments. I think I'll be careful not to say I'm worried about a 14-year-old," Boult told the media on the eve of MI's clash against RR here.

"But it's going to be an exciting challenge to come up against a guy who's obviously fearless and running in hot form at the moment, so that's what it's about."

"The whole world saw that performance the other night. (It was a) quality (knock) from such a young kid. It's the beauty of

this tournament, of all the players coming out and taking any opportunity with both hands and I thought he did that very nicely."

Boult said his experience and knowledge of the pitch and conditions here would hold them in "good stead".

"No, I don't as a bowler," he said when asked if he was anticipating another high-scoring game at this venue.

"It's a high-scoring ground; history says that. It's a solid wicket matched by a very, very quick outfield. I've been lucky enough to experience the ground over the last three seasons so hopefully I can put that experience into good stead over the next game," Boult added.

Mumbai Indians were languishing at the penultimate spot at one point earlier in the season but they have turned around their fortunes with five wins in a row.

"No team looks to get off to a bad start, looks to lose matches in the first half of the tournament. T20 cricket is just that type of game," he said.

"(We) came close in a couple of games, you're looking at a couple of boundaries here or there, saved or gained can be the difference in this format so take the learnings, try to get that a little bit better."

Seven archers inducted in TOPS core group

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Seven compound archers, including Asian Games gold-winning duo of veteran Abhishek Verma and fast-rising Parneet Kaur, were on Wednesday inducted into the Sports Ministry's Target Olympic Podium Scheme's core group after the sport was made a part of the 2028 Los Angeles Games roster.

The decision was taken at the Mission Olympic Cells (MOC) 155th meeting here that was attended by Pullela Gopichand, Viren Rasquinha, Prashanti Singh, Kamlesh Mehta, MM Somaya, and Siddharth Shanker of Reliance Foundation, among others. took cognizance of the International Olympic Committee's recent decision to make compound archery part of the Los Angeles 2028 Olympics," stated a release from the Sports Authority of India (SAI).

The other compound archers included in the elite group were Ojas Pravin

Deotale, Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Aditi Gopichand Swami, Priyansh, and Prathamesh Samadhan Jawkar.

The MOC also cleared 56 proposals across TOPS, TEAMS and TAGG (Target Asian Games Group) disciplines amounting Rs 4.37 crore.

It is the first time since archery's re-introduction to the Olympic Games in 1972 that a new bow-style has been added to the competition.

At the Archery World Cup in Florida, USA recently, India's most decorated compound archer Jyothi Surekha Vennam clinched three gold medals.

The Asian Games gold-medallist bagged the women's team top honours with Aditi Swami and the 20-year-old Parneet. She then teamed up with Abhishek, 35, to win the mixed team gold. Jyothi also won the individual gold medal.

In the men's event, Abhishek, Priyansh and Prathamesh's team grabbed the gold, while Priyansh settled for silver.

Jannik Sinner considered quitting tennis before accepting three-month ban in doping case

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rome

Jannik Sinner considered leaving tennis entirely earlier this year before he accepted a three-month ban in a settlement with the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Asked during an interview with Italian state TV RAI if he ever thought about quitting, the top-ranked Sinner replied, "Yes. I remember before the Australian Open this year, it wasn't a very happy time," Sinner added. "I didn't really feel comfortable in the locker room, where we were eating. Players were looking at me differently. I said to myself, Maybe I need to take some time off after Australia. I didn't want (the ban) though."

Sinner won his second straight Australian Open title in January.

It wasn't until February that the settlement was made in the doping case, after WADA appealed a decision last year by the International Tennis Integrity Agency

to fully exonerate Sinner for what it deemed to be an accidental contamination by a banned anabolic steroid in March, 2024.

"I had a tough time accepting these three months. Because I knew that I didn't do anything wrong. So why do I have to pay this price?" Sinner said. "But then we discussed it with my lawyer and about what could have happened in the worst-case scenario and so we decided to accept it."

The handling of Sinner's case had raised questions about double standards. The positive tests weren't publicly revealed until August because Sinner successfully appealed against being provisionally banned from playing. He then won the U.S. Open in September. The settlement also raised questions, since it conveniently allows Sinner to return next week at the Italian Open — his home tournament — and not miss any Grand Slams.

"The last year was definitely very



stressful," Sinner said in the interview, which was broadcast late Tuesday. "But we were still able to obtain incredible results. We started this year really well, too. Then what happened happened. At the start it was a bit strange to find myself in that situation. Also, a lot of things happened off

the court that I didn't expect."

Several top players suggested that Sinner was treated too lightly.

"I don't even want to respond. Everyone is free to say what they want. For me, the important thing is that I know what happened," Sinner said.

She's in charge: At F1 Miami Grand Prix, top executive roles are held by women

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens

For the Miami Grand Prix, someone is in charge of all the strategic planning and the budget. Someone else oversees the construction of 163 temporary buildings needed for a Formula 1 race weekend. Someone else designs the seating areas and keeps track of food and beverage needs. Someone else makes sure that the rich and famous have everything they need and want, from the right drink to the right kind of throw pillow.

These jobs make the race happen. And in Miami, they're all being done by women.

It's something that the Miami Grand Prix believes sets its race apart. In a sport and a circuit still dominated by males — there hasn't been a woman behind the wheel for a Formula 1 race since 1992 — it will be difficult this weekend to find an element of the event that isn't overseen by a woman. "I'm so proud," said Katharina Nowak, the Miami race's vice president of business operations. "The amount of talent, whether male or female, that we have in that room, it just makes you want to be better. Every day, we push ourselves to just continue to maintain the standard at which we all expect to be working at, which just pushes everybody to be better for each

other because no one wants to let anyone down."

There are men on the masthead for the race's local overseers: Miami Dolphins owner Stephen Ross owns the race, Tom Garfinkel is the managing partner and Tyler Epp is president of the race that takes place at the Dolphins' Hard Rock Stadium campus. From there, many other top Miami roles are held by women, including:

— Nowak — only 28 years old — reports to Epp as the race's second-in-command and oversees all strategic plans, the budget and 17 internal departments. She also speaks four languages.

— Natalie Clark is the senior director of event operations, overseeing the process of building, loading in and loading out, which means she tracks what every truck is bringing onto the campus and where it goes.

— Sydney McClain is the senior director of events and food and beverage, meaning she creates virtually the entire fan experience on the 250-acre campus.

— Melanie Cabassol is vice president of hospitality and curated experiences, meaning she creates the atmosphere for premium clients — a list that in past years has included the likes of LeBron James, Patrick Mahomes, Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos.



"I've worked at other places before, and it hasn't been that I'm sitting around a conference table and a majority of women are driving different initiatives within this business," McClain said. "So, it is very unique. It's very exciting. And I think that we owe a lot of that to the female leaders that have been here, been in our shoes before, and

that have helped pave the way for us."

The race, now in its fourth year, is part of a diverse series of events at the Hard Rock campus. It's primarily the home of the Dolphins, who have their training facility adjacent to the stadium. It also plays host to Miami Hurricanes football, concerts, soccer — the Club World Cup later

this year and the FIFA World Cup next year will hold some matches there — and the Miami Open tennis tournament. The F1 race alone has generated more than \$1 billion in economic impact in its first three years. The women leading the Miami race aren't alone in their fields. At F1, the chief commercial officer is Emily Prazzer and, until late last year, Sacha Woodward Hill had been there for nearly 30 years as the chief legal officer.

But Miami stands out, said Susie Wolff, the managing director of F1 Academy — an all-female developmental racing series.

"I think it's something which we can all take quite an amount of pride in, that the sport has shifted in such a way that it's now the case that it is not regarded as something unusual," Wolff said. "I don't see it as unusual. I think it is a testament to the progress we've made."

This week in Miami takes the other 51 weeks on the calendar to prepare for. Eight months of planning, three months of executing the plan and then one month of it all actually happening.

Part of Clark's job, along with overseeing 245 tent structures and 110 generators and 35 miles of plumbing infrastructure — all of it temporary and hidden — also is to work with architects and construction companies who execute what she draws up

for a plan.

"I think when I was younger in my career, I got a little bit of, Who is she? Why is she in the meeting? Why does she have these construction plans?" Clark said. "And what happens over time is they hear you speak, your confidence, and once people understand that you are a master at your craft, there's less questions being asked."

Cabassol leaves nothing to chance in her job. She's in charge of the most luxurious spaces on the campus, the Palm Club, the Casa Tua Trackside Club and the 72 Club. The original blueprints for those spaces were her vision. Every glass, every bottle of Champagne, every element of those spaces gets her approval.

They call her group a "white glove team," VIP service for VIP guests. She even manages a secret road of sorts on the campus — Palm Alley, they call it, a palm tree-lined path that drops off some of the world's richest people 10 feet from the entrance. Inside the club, there are the strictest of rules: no entourage, no private security, the VIP and one guest only. No cameras, no media.

Cabassol and her group know the likes and dislikes, what kind of food, what kind of drink, every guest will want ahead of time by dealing with the VIPs' own teams.

Attention on him avoidable: Dravid on Suryavanshi

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Rahul Dravid doesn't want microscopic attention on 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi following his path-breaking hundred in the IPL but having said that, the Rajasthan Royals head coach knows it is something that he can't control.

Having received a barrage of questions on Suryavanshi in the Star Sports Press Room on Wednesday, Dravid realised that the cricketing world will not be leaving the talented teenager alone from now onwards. The Bihar teen will have to find a way to handle this overnight stardom, he said.

In the interaction, the former India head coach also touched upon Suryavanshi's special skills that make him a formidable T20 batter at such a young age before adding that he remains very much a work in progress.

"I think it won't be possible to completely sort of avoid him from the experience that

is around him. I can't control what people are talking about him. I have come to this interaction and all I have heard is questions about Vaibhav," said Dravid when asked about protecting the youngster from the hysteria around him.

"It is going to be challenging for him but it is exciting at the same time. I would love to say that we should not shower him with that much attention. Maybe I am being naive as that it is not going to happen.

"Recognising that it happens and putting a certain level of support around that and navigate that attention and allow him space to be a youngster. It is part of being a cricketer in this country, it is impossible to distance yourself from and (you tend to get) sucked into it."

As the India U-19 coach, Dravid nurtured the likes of Rishabh Pant, Shubman Gill, Prithvi Shaw, Yashasvi Jaiswal and many more exciting talents.

Asked about Suryavanshi, Dravid



explained what makes him special.

"For me it is really the ability to have that level of fearlessness and not get fazed by the occasion. You don't get to see that with people that young. The range of shots he showed.

"He is only going to get better. Nobody is saying that he is a finished article. No one should rush to call him somebody he is not. Teams will be smarter against him. T20 format is such where he will have games where it will not work out," he cautioned.

Suryavanshi's six-hitting ability also stands out. He cleared the ropes 11 times in his 35-ball hundred against a potent Gujarat Titans attack.

"What gives him power is a good bat speed, high backlift, hand-eye coordination. His judgment of length is something that has amazed me, whether it is fractionally short or full, he can capitalise on that. His natural strength is helpful in this situation," said the Indian great.

A video clip of Suryavanshi was shown during the interaction where he was seen praising Dravid for making him a better cricketer over the past three months.

"The moment the footage ended, Dravid played down the role played by him in his rise.

"The biggest credit goes to him. It would be wrong of me to take credit for him. He has come through a system (having played first class and India U19).

"His father has been supportive. Here in Rajasthan Royals, so many people have been involved...He will be asked Dravid questions and he has to give a diplomatic answer," the former India captain said with a smile.

"We try to keep it simple with him. For us, it is important that he plays the kind of cricket he enjoys playing...It is pretty obvious he likes to play attacking brand of cricket. We picked him not keeping his age in mind, we were convinced of his talent," he added.

Gujarat Titans looking at Gill as long-term captain

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

Gujarat Titans have systems and processes in place to help Shubman Gill "grow as a captain" as the franchise has appointed the India batter with a long-term view, says COO Colonel Arvinder Singh.

A vital cog in their title-winning campaign in Gujarat Titans' maiden season in IPL 2022, Gill was appointed captain of the franchise when Hardik Pandya moved back to Mumbai Indians ahead of the 2024 edition.

While the first year as a full-time skipper didn't bring Gill much success as GT finished eighth, his side has been one to beat in this IPL, currently ranked third with an impressive six wins and three losses in nine matches so far.

"At Gujarat Titans, whatever we do, we don't do it for a season or two; we think long-term. When Hardik moved on, many were of the opinion that we had players who can just walk in and take on the role of a captain; but we chose to invest in Shubman," Singh said in a statement. "This decision clearly indicated that we were investing in Shubman for a long-term, not just for a single season. The results of that investment are now evident," he added.

Singh said GT have put in a system in place for Gill, who was appointed India's vice-captain during their victorious Champions Trophy campaign, to devel-

Singh said GT have put in a system in place for Gill, who was appointed India's vice-captain during their victorious Champions Trophy campaign, to develop as a leader. Gill was appointed captain of the franchise when Hardik Pandya moved back to MI

op as a leader.

"What is more important for us as an ecosystem is to understand that you cannot just make someone a captain and expect him to do everything," Singh said.

"There is a full-fledged system and process in place that has helped him grow as a captain. This is in addition to what he has gained at the international level over the years, representing India as a vice-captain on many occasions."

"Of course, we've had several senior players in the team, including Jos Buttler, Rashid Khan, and Kane Williamson. Shubman is someone who is very open to learning from others," he added.

Singh said Gill, who is nearing the 400-run mark for GT once again in the IPL, is stepping up as a leader on the field.

"The transformation in his leadership from last year to this year is remarkable; he is truly stepping up as the leader on the field. It's inspiring to witness," he said.

Cricket retained for 2026 Asian Games in Japan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) has confirmed that cricket will be a part of the 2026 Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games to be held in Japan from September 19 to October 4.

The call to retain cricket was taken during the meeting between the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the organising committee (AINAGOC) earlier this week.

"The latest development in the compilation of the sports program came at the 41st meeting of the AINAGOC Board of Directors at Nagoya City Hall on Monday, April 28, when cricket and Mixed Martial Arts were both formally approved," the OCA said.

Cricket matches will be played in the T20 format and hosted in Aichi prefecture, although the exact venues are yet to be finalised.

"The venue for cricket will be in Aichi prefecture but the exact location has not been decided. Interest will be high, not only because of cricket's popularity in South Asia in particular but also because the T20 (20 overs per side) format will be included in the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 2028," the OCA said.

"This will be cricket's first appearance in the Olympics since 1900 in Paris, where Great Britain beat France by 158 runs in the final of the two-team tour-

nament.

Cricket will be among 41 sports featured at the Games, which are expected to see participation from 15,000 athletes and officials representing the OCA's 45 National Olympic Committees.

This will be the fourth time cricket features in the Asian Games, following its inclusion in Guangzhou (2010), Incheon (2014), and Hangzhou (2023). The Indian men's and women's teams are the defending champions.

Cricket will also feature in 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. It will be cricket's first appearance in the Olympics since 1900 in Paris, where Great Britain beat France by 158 runs in the final of the two-team tournament.

The OCA also confirmed that a "floating Athletes' Village" — a cruise ship docked in Nagoya Port — will accommodate 4,600 athletes and officials. It will house athletes from several disciplines including archery, basketball 3x3, canoe/kayak (sprint), cycling mountain bike, cycling BMX racing, football (men), gymnastics, handball, judo, kabaddi, kurash, mixed martial arts, rowing, rugby, sepahtakraw, sport climbing, squash, tennis, weightlifting, wrestling and wushu.

However, that cricketers will be accommodated in hotels, alongside athletes from badminton and football.

Dhawan lauds Suryavanshi, terms his ton "phenomenal"

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Former India opener Shikhar Dhawan on Wednesday lauded teenage sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi for his fearless IPL hundred, saying the 14-year-old's confidence belies his age and his performance will inspire aspiring cricketers across the country. Rajasthan Royal's Suryavanshi set the IPL ablaze by becoming the youngest player to score a century in the tournament. His 35-ball hundred against table-toppers Gujarat Titans was also the second-fastest in league history.

"It's a great performance indeed, the way he batted was just phenomenal. The big thing is not that he is just 14, the greater thing in that is his self-confidence at such a tender age," said Dhawan on the sidelines of the Intercontinental Legends Championship (ILC) launch.

The baby-faced big-hitter from Bihar's Samastipur hammered 11 towering sixes and seven fours, accumulating 94 of his 101 runs in boundaries. His innings was the fastest by any RR batter, breaking Yusuf Pathan's 15-year-old record of a 37-ball hundred against Mumbai Indians.

"The way he dominated the bowlers that night who have a name in international cricket is a great achievement indeed...the country should be proud and it will inspire other youngsters in the country," Dhawan said.

Dhawan, the first player to hit back-to-back centuries in the IPL, was also impressed with other youngsters, includ-

ing Ayush Mhatre, who have made a mark this season.

"It is great to see these players—some-one is 14, another is 17—playing in the Indian Premier League. To see these boys achieve success at such a young age is great to see," said Dhawan.

The 39-year-old also condemned the recent terrorist attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam region, expressing heartfelt condolences to the victims' families and backing the government's response.

"I have no words for what happened in Pahalgam... I have full faith in our government that they'll be planning something to counter this. I have my full condolences with the families of the victims. It was heart-wrenching indeed," said Dhawan.

Dhawan was the guest of honour at the launch of the Intercontinental Legends Championship (ILC), which has been co-founded by U-19 Cricket World Cup winner and former Delhi Ranji player Pardeep Sangwan. I had envisioned this league since the day I retired... Shikhar (Dhawan) bhai, Praveen (Kumar) bhai, Parvinder Awana and Pawan Negi—thank you for extending your warm support, along with the sponsors who believed in us," said Sangwan.

Congratulating Sangwan on the initiative, Dhawan said: "I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Pardeep (Sangwan) and his team for organising ILC. In such leagues, the pressure is relatively high because we play for respect. The competition will be tough."

Took the retirement call in Gabba, did not want to repeat the circle: Ashwin



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Former India off-spinner R Ashwin thought about retiring after his 100th Test but finally took the call midway into the tour of Australia to ensure the "whole circle" related to his spot in the playing eleven doesn't repeat itself.

Speaking on a newly-launched podcast by Chennai Super Kings, Ashwin told fellow CSK member Mike Hussey that he made up his mind on retirement after not starting the Australia series in Perth where Washington Sundar played ahead of the veteran off-spinner.

Ashwin did play the second Test at Adelaide before being left out of the eleven for the third Test at Gabba where he eventually brought the curtains down to a glorious career.

"To be very honest, I wanted to do it after my 100th Test (in Dharamsala, March 2024). And then I thought, Ok, let me give it a go in the home season. Because, I mean, you're playing well, and you're getting wickets, you're making runs," Ashwin said.

"I thought I'd probably close off with the Chennai Test here (against Bangladesh). I ended up getting a six-wicket haul and a hundred. So it's very tough to quit when you're doing very well.

"So, I went on with the series, and we lost against New Zealand. So, one after the other, it was just building up. And then I thought, okay, let me go to Australia. Let me see how this goes. Because the last time I was in Australia, I had a great, great tour," said India's second highest wicket-taker in Tests with 537 scalps to his name.

Having said that, time away from

home was beginning to affect him.

"I thought it does make sense to play a bit. I was having a lot of fun, but the whole hard yards that I had to put through to put myself in the park again, physically and mentally, one of the most important things that was pulling me down was the family time," he said.

The 38-year-old, who is back at CSK this season, eventually made the announcement at the Gabba.

"And when I didn't start in Perth, it was like, okay, this whole circle keeps going again. People add very little value to what you're going through emotionally," he said.

"They don't really consider that because your emotions are yours, and it doesn't matter to anybody else. So I had been contemplating that, and then I thought, okay, maybe it is time," added Ashwin.

Azhar Mahmood shows interest in becoming Pakistan head coach

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lahore

Former Pakistan all-rounder Azhar Mahmood on Wednesday expressed his interest in becoming the next head coach of the national team, saying he will soon apply for the high-pressure post.

The PCB was forced to begin a fresh search to find a new head coach and Director of the National Cricket Academy after foreign coaches Gary Kirsten and Jason Gillespie resigned last year, less than eight months into their two-year contracts.

The PCB had named one of their selectors, Aaqib Javed as their interim head coach until the T20 series in New Zealand.

Azhar reckons that he has "gained a lot of experience while working as assistant and bowling coach of the Pakistan team in recent years". He has worked with Mickey Arthur, Kirsten and Gillespie.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has set May 5 as the deadline for interested candidates to apply for the head coach position.

The PCB has not confirmed as yet whether it will appoint separate coaches for the red and white ball teams or one coach for both formats.

Pakistan's former test spinner Saqlain Mushtaq, who has also worked as interim head coach and bowling coach in the past with the national team, is said to be another strong candidate in the running for future assignments.

According to PCB sources, New Zealand's Mike Hesson is the front runner to take over as head coach if he agrees to take up the assignment.

Two years back, PCB had approached Hesson but he had turned down the offer due to his prior commitments in leagues.

Hesson is coaching the undefeated

Islamabad United in the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

Pakistan's first commitment of its new international season will be a five-match T20 series at home against Bangladesh in late May and early June.

Pakistan has had several foreigners as team director, head coach, high performance coach and even bowling, fielding and batting coaches since 2023 but most of them left on not-so-very-amicable terms with the PCB.

The list includes Mickey Arthur, Grant Bradburn, Andrew Puttick, Morne Morkel, Tim Nielsen, Simon Helmot, Yasir Arafat, Kirsten and Gillespie.

The PCB has also experimented with local coaches including Saqlain Mushtaq, Muhammad Hafeez, Aaqib Javed not to forget the long list of local batting, bowling and fielding coaches.

Assam lifts the first North East Little Masters Trophy (U-14)



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Guwahati

Assam defeated Tripura by 47 runs in the final of the inaugural NE Little Masters Trophy 2025 at the ACA Cricket Academy Ground, Fulung, Guwahati.

Player of the Match (Final): Ayush Pandey (Assam) Best Batter of the

Tournament: Shresthangshu Deb (Tripura) Best Bowler of the Tournament: Abhinav Khanal (Meghalaya) Player of the Tournament: Pastha Pratim Kashyap (Assam) The closing ceremony was attended by BCCI Secretary Devajit Saikia, BCCI Apex Council Member Mamon Majumdar, ACA Secretary Tridib Konwar, Tournament Director Romen Dutta, Treasurer Chiranjit

Langthasa and representatives of all the cricket associations of the Northeast states. BCCI Secretary Shri Devajit Saikia appreciated the efforts of ACA in hosting this grassroots-level tournament and expressed confidence that such initiatives will help young cricketers from the Northeast dream big and reach higher levels.