

# PM shares anguish, 11 crushed in RCB victory frenzy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bengaluru

Celebrations for Royal Challengers Bengaluru's (RCB) first-ever IPL win turned tragic on Wednesday as at least 11 persons died and more than 30 were injured in a stampede outside the Chinnaswamy Stadium after thousands of fans gathered to catch a glimpse of the team.

"11 are dead and 33 injured due to stampede near Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru More than 2-3 lakh people came, and no one expected this much crowd," Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah said at a press conference.

He also said that the stadium could only accommodate 35 thousand spectators. The chief minister announced a magisterial inquiry into the incident and a ₹10 lakh compensation to the kin of the deceased. The stampede took place when thousands



A crowd of fans gather in large numbers during Royal Challengers Bengaluru's felicitation ceremony after their winning the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025, in front of Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Wednesday

PTI

## RECENT STAMPEDES

- 30 killed at Maha Kumbh 2025
- 8 died at the New Delhi Railway Station Feb 2025
- 6 killed and dozens injured for tickets at Tirumala Hills Jan 2025
- A woman died and a boy injured during 'Pushpa 2' screening Dec 2024
- More than 100 killed at Narayan Saakar Hari in UP's Hathras July 2024
- 36 died during a 'havan' on Ram Navami in Indore in March 2023
- 23 lost their lives on narrow bridge connecting the Elphinstone Road station in 2017
- 32 killed at Gandhi Maidan Patna after the Dussehra celebrations in 2014
- 115 killed and over 100 injured in Navratri festivities in MPs Datia district in 2013
- At least 104 Sabarimala devotees killed in Kerala's Idukki district in 2011

of fans attempted to enter the stadium from various gates. Police had a tough time controlling the crowd, triggering chaos and turning a joyful event into a tragedy. Police used mild force to control the crowd and bring the situation under control ahead of a special felicitation at the stadium for the Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) team organised by the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA).

Meanwhile, the felicitation of the players went ahead nonetheless as the stadium was packed to the rafters despite the chaos outside the stadium.

People were seen collapsing, visuals showed police shifting the injured persons and those who fell unconscious in ambulances to nearby hospitals. Visuals also showed some of those who were in an unconscious state being administered cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) by those nearby.

# Centre schedules Census and caste enumeration

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India's 16th Census with caste enumeration will be carried out in 2027 with the reference date of October 1, 2026 in snow-bound areas like Ladakh and of March 1, 2027 in the rest of the country.

It has been decided to conduct Population Census-2027 in two phases along with the enumeration of castes, the Union Home Ministry announced on Wednesday.

The Census is being carried out after a gap of 16 years as the last one was held in 2011. Over 30 lakh enumerators and their supervisors are likely to be engaged to carry out the mega exercise.

"The reference date for Population Census-2027 will be 00:00 hours of the first day of March 2027. For the Union Territory of Ladakh and the non-synchronous snow-bound areas of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir and States of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the reference date will be 00.00 hours of the



FILE PHOTO

first day of October 2026," the ministry said in a statement.

The last comprehensive caste-based count was done by the British between

1881 and 1931. The Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) conducted in 2011 under the UPA Government did collect caste data, but it was never fully published

or utilised. Bihar and Telangana have conducted caste surveys in the last three years.

Union Home Ministry said the notification for the intent of conducting the Population Census with the reference dates will be published in the official gazette "tentatively on 16.06.2025, as per provision of section 3 of Census Act 1948".

Officials said the second and final phase of the census will begin in February 2027 and conclude on March 1, 2027 (reference date). It is immediately not clear whether the exercise to update the National Population Register (NPR) will be carried out along with the Census or not.

The Government was planning to do it along with the Census in 2020 but the exercise was postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Even though the reference dates for the Census are October 1, 2026 (for snow-bound areas) and March 1, 2027 (for rest of India), the house listing phase is likely to start by April 2026.

# New details emerge on Operation Sindoor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Operation Sindoor destroyed at least nine aircraft including six Pakistan Air Force (PAF) fighter jets, two surveillance aircraft, ten armed drones and a C-130 Hercules transport aircraft, it was learnt. Moreover, the Indian military strikes inflicted heavy damage to Pakistan's aerial and ground military assets.

India launched Operation Sindoor early May in retaliation to the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22 in which 26 innocents were killed.

The military strikes were carried out in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK).

The destruction of Pakistani jets, according to sources, was confirmed via radar tracking and thermal signatures

captured by Indian ground-based missile systems and airborne early warning assets.

One of the crucial hits during the four-day engagement was the destruction of a high-value airborne surveillance platform. According to sources, the target was either an electronic countermeasure (ECM) platform or an Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW and C) aircraft, neutralised at an estimated range of 300 kilometres using India's long-range strike asset.

Another AEW and C aircraft of Swedish origin, reportedly stationed at Pakistan's Bholari airbase, was destroyed during a subsequent air-to-surface cruise missile strike.

In a separate operation, a PAF C-130 Hercules was destroyed during a targeted drone strike over Pakistani Punjab.

# Delhi to ban entry of polluting buses, goods vehicles

VAISHNAVI MISHRA ■ New Delhi

In order to combat the worsening air pollution crisis in the capital, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) has announced a blanket ban on the entry of all commercial goods vehicles and outstation buses into Delhi unless they run on clean fuel from November 1, 2025 and January 1, 2026 respectively and barred the further induction of petrol or diesel-run vehicles in the fleets of aggregators, delivery service providers, and e-commerce logistics operators, effective January 1, 2026.

The ban targets all diesel- and petrol-run goods vehicles, as well as tourist, inter-city and institutional buses, unless they operate on CNG, LNG, electricity or BS-VI diesel, and are not registered in Delhi and only CNG and electric three-wheelers and zero-emission two- and four-wheelers will be permitted in new registrations, although existing conventional vehicles in service may continue operating for now.

The restrictions, issued through a series of statutory directions by the CAQM, aim to drastically cut down vehicular emissions, which remain one of the largest contributors to Delhi's hazardous air quality, particularly during winter months. According to Direction No. 88, from November 1, 2025, only BS-VI compliant, CNG, LNG, or electric goods vehicles will be allowed to enter Delhi, with the exception of those registered within the city. The directive covers Light Goods Vehicles (LGVs), Medium Goods Vehicles (MGVs), and

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs), which together form a significant part of the daily commercial traffic entering the capital. Adding to the clean air initiative, the CAQM has also issued Direction No. 93, which extends similar restrictions to

**From November 1, 2026, all buses — including those under All India Tourist Permit, contract carriage, school and institutional services — must run on CNG, electricity or BS-VI diesel to enter Delhi**

buses entering Delhi. Effective from November 1, 2026, all buses — including those operating under All India Tourist Permit, contract carriage, school and institutional services — must run on CNG, electricity or BS-VI diesel to be permitted entry into Delhi.

These rules, however, do not apply to buses registered within Delhi, which are already expected to adhere to cleaner fuel norms under State transport regulations. Earlier directions — No. 78 and 81 — had already mandated that all inter-city buses from neighbouring States such as Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Jammu & Kashmir must comply with the cleaner fuel regime when entering Delhi-NCR.

The newly issued directives reaffirm and strengthen those requirements, pushing for comprehensive compliance across all categories of public transport entering the region.

# The Pioneer discusses growth with green

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Dehradun

The Uttarakhand Forest Minister Subodh Uniyal said that global warming and the phenomenon of climate change is a challenge not just for Dehradun or Uttarakhand, but for the entire world. He stressed on the vital role played by forests in this aspect. Speaking as the chief guest at the dialogue on 'Progress with purpose, growth with green—balancing development and environmental conservation' organised by *The Pioneer* here on Wednesday, the Forest Minister appreciated the initiative on this relevant issue, adding that he felt honoured to be part of this interaction.

The director general of Uttarakhand State Council for Science and Tehnology (UCOST) Durgesh Pant said that Uttarakhand is important from the environmental and other aspects, citing the example of Asia's first engineering college being founded in Roorkee along with institutions like the Survey of India being established the colonial era, Indian Institute of Remote Sensing in the 1960, and Forest Research Institute, Forest Survey of India and other nationally and internationally important institutions in the State. He pointed out that though environmental damage is likely to occur during developmental works, science and technology along with awareness holds the solution to achieving the balance between development and conservation.

The Mussoorie Dehradun Development Authority (MDDA) vice chairman Banshidhar Tiwari said that it is the collective duty of all stakeholders, the Government, civil society and every individual to ensure that the inherited natural resources are handed over to the future



Uttarakhand Forest minister Subodh Uniyal speaking at *The Pioneer* event

PIONEER PHOTO

generations. He said that behavioural changes are also responsible for the problems being faced in achieving the balance between development and conservation.

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), Dehradun director Saurabh Tiwari said that all citizens should focus on recognising the importance of standards in their lives, stressing on the value of benchmarks. Speaking about standards in construction, water conservation and other aspects, he said that BIS always involves stakeholders in the standard-making process.

Anthropologist and author Lokesh Ohri urged the authorities to stop the axing of healthy mature trees in Dehradun. Citing an example, he said that builders were called by the authorities for a meeting but even the architects of citizens were not involved. He urged the authorities to involve the citizens and other stakeholders in developmental plans, while stating that citizens are eager to collaborate with the authorities

to develop a Dehradun with cycling paths which is also pedestrian friendly.

Padma Shri recipient orthopaedic surgeon Dr BKS Sanjay said that the uncontrolled rise in population is a major factor responsible for depletion of natural resources and other problems being faced by the public. Stating that nature can thrive without humans though humans cannot survive without it, he stressed that sustainable development is the only solution to the problems being faced by society. Founder of Social Development for Communities (SDC) Foundation, Anoop Nautiyal said the population explosion in Uttarakhand in recent years is an alarming factor affecting both environmental and developmental aspects.

Stating that while Dehradun generates about five lakh kilograms of garbage daily, he pointed out that lakhs have migrated from rural and mountainous areas of the State and many continue to do so.

# IIT Delhi student found dead in hostel room

VAISHNAVI MISHRA ■ New Delhi

A second-year student at the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi was found dead under mysterious circumstances inside his hostel room on the campus on Wednesday.

According to police, the body had no visible injury marks, though vomit was found on the floor near the bed, suggesting possible medical complications. The student is said to be from Chandigarh and was pursuing a degree in Biomechanical Engineering while residing in one of the institute's hostels.

According to police officials, a Police Control Room (PCR) call was received at the Kishangarh Police Station on the morning of Wednesday, reporting that a student was not responding or opening the door of his room despite repeated knocks.

The matter was first reported by fellow hostel residents after the student remained unseen and unreachable since Monday.

He went to his room after having dinner on Monday. On Tuesday, he was not seen or contacted by any of his fellow students, which raised suspicion. Consequently, the matter was reported to the security staff who informed the police.

Upon receiving the call, police personnel rushed to the spot. Fire department officials were also called in to assist. "The door was locked from inside, and with the help of fire service personnel, the door had to be forcibly opened," a senior police official said.

## The ByStander



# Bangladesh disowns Bangabandu as father

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Bangladesh's interim Government has dropped the "Father of the Nation" title for Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as it amended a legislation, revising the definition of freedom fighter, according to media reports on Wednesday.

The move on Tuesday comes a few days after the Muhammad Yunus-led Government dropped the portrait of the country's founding father and deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's father Mujibur Rahman from new currency notes. The interim Government has amended the National Freedom Fighters Council Act, "altering" the definition of freedom fighter, The Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported.

The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs issued the related ordinance on Tuesday night, it said.

The amendment to the law also "modifies the term 'Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman'", the report said.

According to bdnews24.Com portal, "The words 'Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman' and portions of the law that mentioned the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman have been deleted."

# Bhutto fact-checked in UN on India claims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Former Foreign Minister of Pakistan and chairman of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was embarrassed for a while at a United Nations press briefing when he was fact checked by a journalist for making unsubstantiated claims about the treatment of Muslims in India.

Bilawal, who is part of Islamabad's diplomatic team at the UN, made the comment during a press conference while reiterating Pakistan's stance on Kashmir. He alleged that the recent terror attack in Pahalgam, which killed 26 civilians, was being politicised to vilify Indian Muslims.

However, a journalist attending the event called out the sweeping generalisation. Drawing from personal experience, the journalist pointed out that recent Indian defence briefings including on Operation Sindoor were conducted by Muslim officers themselves. "You said that the recent terrorist attack in Kashmir is being used as a political tool to demonise Muslims in India. But, sir, I have watched briefings on both sides, and as far as I recall, there were Muslim Indian military officers who were conducting the briefings," the journalist countered.

# Malaysia supports India snubs Pakistan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Citing Islamic solidarity, Pakistan tried to derail the visit of the Indian delegation on Operation Sindoor to Malaysia. Turning down Islamabad's request, Malaysia gave approval to the 9-member delegation to organise all the 10 proposed programmes. Sources said Islamabad tried to play the religion card and cited the "Kashmir matter in the UN" while seeking the cancellation of Operation Sindoor outreach programmes.

"We are an Islamic country, you are an Islamic country... don't listen to the Indian delegation, cancel all their programmes in Malaysia," Pakistan embassy reportedly told the Malaysian Government officials. Malaysia was the final stop of the delegation's multi-nation tour, which included Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Indonesia. Led by JDU MP Sanjay Jha-led, the Indian delegation to Malaysia and comprised BJP MPs Aparajita Sarangi, Brij Lal, Pradan Baruah and Hemang Joshi, Trinamool's Abhishek Banerjee, CPM's John Brittas, Congress's Salman Khurshid and former diplomat Mohan Kumar.

The Indian delegation met Malaysia's People's Justice Party (PKR), led by former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad minister YB Sim Tze Tzin, to emphasise India's "resolute approach" during Operation Sindoor.







# Rahul Gandhi holds meetings with Haryana Cong leaders ahead of state unit revamp

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday held a meeting with senior party leaders from Haryana, and the All India Congress Committee (AICC) and Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) observers here as part of an organisation rejuvenation campaign.

With the party's Haryana unit plagued by factionalism in the past, Gandhi's clear message was that when it comes to any work for the party, no "gutbazi" (factionalism) should come in the way and if any complaint comes, action will be taken. While addressing a meeting of the appointed observers, Gandhi stressed the need to nurture promising, ideologically committed leadership across all districts of the state.

The Congress, which has been out of power in Haryana for over a decade, has not had a formal organisational structure in the state for the past 11 years and Gandhi's visit was to set the process in motion as the party begins revamping the state unit.

Gandhi reached the Haryana Pradesh Congress Committee (HPCC) headquarters here at noon, half an hour after he reached the airport, as part of the party's 'Sangathan Srijan Abhiyan'. During his two-and-a-half-hour stay, Gandhi held a meeting with the party's senior leaders, with over 20 of them taking part. It was followed by another meeting with AICC and PCC observers. After this, he also held one more meeting with AICC observers separately.

Briefing reporters in the evening, Congress



leader in-charge of party's Haryana affairs, B K Hariprasad, said Gandhi gave a clear message which is to strengthen the Congress. It was also felt that factionalism in the state unit had delayed the appointment process of District Congress Committee (DCC) presidents, Hariprasad said. There is no objection to who is part of which group but no "gutbaazi" (factionalism) should come in the way when it comes to any work for the party and action will be taken if any complaint comes, Gandhi said during his meetings, Hariprasad told reporters.

Former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, party's state unit chief Udai Bhan, some former HPCC chiefs including Birender Singh, general secretary Kumari Selja and senior leaders Randeep Singh Surjewala, Ajay Singh Yadav, MP Deepender Singh Hooda and Ashok Tanwar were

among those present at the meeting with senior leaders. These senior Congress leaders gave suggestions pertaining to the reorganisation of the party unit and how DCC and the Congress in Haryana can be strengthened, party leaders said.

Gandhi later met with the AICC and PCC observers as the party's Haryana unit is set to start the process of putting the organisational cadre in place. Later, the Congress leader also separately met the AICC observers, one each of those appointed for the 22 districts in the state along with the 69 PCC observers. The party has appointed observers for the process of appointing the DCC presidents in Haryana.

Hariprasad said after June 10, the AICC and PCC observers will visit the respective districts as part of the process to appoint DCC chiefs and recommend a panel of six names from each district. "We have released a format for the applications which we have sought for DCC presidents... He or she should be an active member of the party for a minimum of five years and should be committed to Congress ideology," he said. He said adequate representation will be given to

people from SC/ST, OBC categories and women in the appointments of DCC chiefs.

Once the DCC chiefs are appointed, other appointments in the party state unit will follow, he said. Asked if the October 2024 assembly poll results in which the Congress failed to wrest power from the BJP for the third time in a row, Hariprasad said Gandhi's visit was to set in motion organisational structure-related process. However, one thing which came up was that the party's narrow loss in the assembly polls was also due to the lack of organisational structure, he said.

Speaking to reporters after Wednesday's meeting, senior leader and former Union minister Birender Singh said the Congress lacked an organisational structure in Haryana for the past 11 years. He said the party will get further strengthened when its full organisational structure is ready in Haryana. Replying to a question that the Congress in Haryana has in the past witnessed infighting, Singh said, "Everyone is united."

Amit Sihag, who took part in the meeting of the observers, told reporters later that the Congress leadership is trying to build an energetic organisation and added that the party's senior leaders will play a role in this. "Soon, you will see a strong organisation of our party in Haryana," Sihag said, adding this process will be completed in a time-bound manner.

Earlier, Gandhi was given a warm welcome by the party leaders upon his arrival at the airport. Gandhi had on Tuesday visited Bhopal as part of the 'Sangathan Srijan Abhiyan' (organisation rejuvenation campaign).

## Haryana emerges as top choice for national and international investors, says CM Saini



PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini has stated that the state government has created a favorable and robust industrial environment to promote industries in Haryana and as a result, the state has emerged as the preferred destination for industries and companies not only at the national level but also internationally.

Addressing the representatives of the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry at his residence, in which prominent industrialists from Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Delhi were present, the Chief Minister urged them to establish their industrial units in Haryana and actively contribute to the state's progress and development.

Saini emphasized that for industrial development in any state, it is essential to have robust road, rail, air connectivity, and other infrastructure facilities and expressed pride that Haryana offers all these facilities in accordance with the needs of the industries. "Today, major companies from various sectors are establishing their units in the state, thereby boosting Haryana's industrial growth," he said.

He stated that the government has implemented several reforms to strengthen direct communication between the government and industrialists and to create a more favorable environment for industries, adding that

moving beyond the single window system, a single roof system has been introduced, which sets a fixed time frame for every service. The process for obtaining NOCs from various departments has been simplified, with a minimum turnaround time of 15 days and a maximum of 45 days.

Saini stated that, as Finance Minister, he has made several announcements to promote industrial development and startups in the Haryana Budget for the year 2025-26 and mentioned that plans are underway to develop 10 new Industrial Model Townships (IMTs) in the state. Additionally, efforts are being made to strengthen the startup ecosystem to support budding entrepreneurs. To encourage research and development as well as private investment, the government is creating a Fund of Funds.

He stated that the Department of Future has been established to promote emerging technologies and innovations, adding that to realize the vision of an inclusive budget, he conducted pre-budget consultations with people from various sections of society and invited their suggestions. In this process, he also engaged with industrialists and startups to understand their experiences and gather their input. The Chief Minister affirmed that the valuable suggestions received from industrialists and startups have been incorporated into the budget.

Saini said the State Government's vision for a Developed Haryana by 2047, which includes adding new sectors to enhance Haryana's contribution to India's economy, aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goal of a Developed India. He emphasized that the target is to transform Haryana into a 1 trillion dollar economy by 2047. Achieving this goal requires the active participation of all sectors, including industry, he added.

On this occasion, Saini also unveiled the white paper on 'Haryana: Gateway to Northern India's Industrial Transformation' and "Traditional Craft of Haryana on Global Runway" and also invited suggestions from prominent industrialists present and assured them of all possible support from the State Government to promote industrial growth. **350th Shahidi Diwas of Guru Teg Bahadur to be celebrated with grandeur**

In another meeting, Saini said that to preserve the heritage of the Gurus and to disseminate their life philosophies and ideals among the masses, the work of the Sikh Museum and the Sant Shiromani Guru Ravidas Museum in Kurukshetra must be completed within the stipulated timeframe. This would enable future generations to draw inspiration from the Gurus and contribute meaningfully to nation-building.

Chairing a meeting on Wednesday to review the progress of the Sikh Museum and Guru Ravidas Museum in Kurukshetra, he instructed that the Sikh Museum be designed to provide a comprehensive overview of Sikh history, culture, and the contributions of the Gurus. He said that the museum must include detailed information about all places in Haryana visited by the Sikh Gurus, enabling the people of the state, especially the younger generation, to learn about the spiritual, social, and historical legacy of the Gurus. He said that the museum should realistically depict the historic battles fought by the Sikh Gurus against Mughal oppression, highlighting their efforts to protect religion, uphold justice, and establish human values. This portrayal would ensure that their sacrifice and struggle continue to inspire future generations. To ensure the authenticity and quality of the museum's content, the Chief Minister suggested the formation of an expert committee. This committee should also comprise experienced historians, professors from reputed universities and scholars associated with the Sahitya Akademi.

The Chief Minister said that the 350th Shahidi Diwas of Shri Guru Tegh Bahadur is being observed in the month of November, this year and preparations should begin immediately to celebrate this auspicious occasion on a grand scale with dignity and reverence. The event should not only be historically memorable but also effectively convey the timeless message of sacrifice and martyrdom of the Sikh Gurus to all sections of society. He urged that seminars, yatras and other commemorative activities be organized across the state to foster a deep connection between the community and the legacy of the Gurus' sacrifice.

### Political Riftstorm In Punjab over 'Op Sindoor'; BJP Hits Back Over CM's Remarks

**Chandigarh:** A fierce political slugfest erupted on Wednesday between the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann continued his scathing attack on the saffron party over 'Operation Sindoor' and its alleged "politicization" of national security issues, sparking outrage among BJP leaders who accused him of "disrespecting" the sentiments of widows of martyrs and aligning with Pakistan's narrative. Mann's controversial remarks came a day after he accused the BJP of seeking votes in the name of "sindoor" — traditionally a symbol of marriage — and mocked the party by questioning whether it had launched a "one nation, one husband" scheme. "If they come to your house with sindoor, will you apply it in the name of Modi?" Mann had asked on Tuesday, ridiculing the BJP's symbolic campaign around Operation Sindoor, which reportedly involved delivering sindoor to households as a tribute to the martyrs of the Pahalgam terror attack.

## Himachal will become the country's leader in green energy: CM

PNS ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu on Wednesday said that to save the environment and take essential measures for this, the present Congress government has set the target of making Himachal Pradesh a green energy state by 31 March 2026 and we are heading towards achieving this goal.

"We have introduced electric vehicles and around 350 e-buses are going to be launched soon in HRTC and its entire fleet will be replaced by e-vehicles. Himachal would soon be pioneering in the production of 'Green Hydrogen', paying the way for rest of the country," he said as he honoured the winners of Science Quiz, Mathematical Olympiad, Innovative Science Model, Science Skill, Essay Writing and Slogan Writing competitions during the closing ceremony of the two-day 32nd Himachal Pradesh State Level Children's Science Congress organized at Government College Dhaliara in Kangra district. About 600 child scientists and teachers from 12 districts participated in this programme.

For the promotion of science among the children, an amount of two crores was being received from the Central Government, but now that amount has been stopped. However the State Government assured that funds should not be a constraint for such programmes and made the funds available for Children's Science Congress. "I can see that the children seem to be confident enough and ready to accept future challenges and this thought is being instilled in them by their teachers who were equally contributing in shaping the future of children", he said.

The Chief Minister said that tough decisions were being taken in the interest of the State to strengthen its economy. He claimed that the Government has earned additional

revenue of Rs. 3000 crore in just two years by maintaining financial discipline. Sukhu said that the state government was making efforts to bring about major improvements education sector and by next year, CBSE pattern in 100 government schools will be implemented.

### Inaugurates integrated command control centre in Dharamshala

Chief Minister Sukhu on Wednesday also inaugurated an integrated command, control and crime response centre in Dharamshala. The state-of-the-art 'Chakshu Chakra' centre, developed under the Smart City Mission, is located at the Superintendent of Police Office, Dharamshala. Briefing the CM during the virtual inauguration, Kangra Superintendent of Police Shalini Agnihotri highlighted the key features of the project and said that a total of 229 CCTV cameras have been strategically installed at 89 vital locations across the city.

Of these, seven locations are equipped with specialised cameras under the Intelligent Traffic Management System (ITMS) to enhance traffic control and ensure public safety. Developed at a cost of Rs 2.72 crore, the centre will serve as a centralised hub for urban surveillance, coordination, and rapid response. It is expected to significantly bolster urban governance, facilitate real-time monitoring, and improve the efficiency of public service delivery.

In the future, all surveillance systems across Kangra district will be integrated with this central server, enabling seamless and comprehensive monitoring, officials said. The initiative reflects the state government's commitment to leveraging technology for smarter, safer, and more responsive urban management. Chakshu Chakra is poised to be a transformative step toward making Dharamshala a more secure, organised, and modern urban center, they added.

## Punjab Cabinet Approves Major Labour Reforms: Relief for 95% Small Businesses, End to Inspector Raj

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

In a major push towards promoting ease of doing business, the Punjab Cabinet on Wednesday approved sweeping amendments to the Punjab Shops and Commercial Establishments Act, 1958, aimed at drastically reducing compliance burdens on 95 percent of small businesses and shielding shopkeepers from the long-standing "Inspector Raj".

The Chief Minister, addressing the media after the Cabinet meeting for the third consecutive day, announced that the reform will significantly benefit lakhs of shopkeepers, who constitute nearly 85 percent of all traders in the state — by freeing them from routine inspections and archaic paperwork. "Our intention is to empower shopkeepers, not to harass them. These changes will dismantle the Inspector Raj and instill a culture of trust," said Mann.

The key highlights of the government's landmark labour reforms include a sweeping exemption for small establishments employing up to 20 workers from all provisions of the Act, aimed at reducing compliance burdens on 95 percent of businesses. For larger establishments, a streamlined registration process with deemed approval within 24 hours has been introduced to enhance ease of doing business.

Penalties have been rationalized significantly, increasing the minimum and maximum fines to Rs 1,000 and Rs 30,000 respectively, while the permissible overtime limit has been tripled from 50 to 144 hours per quarter, with mandatory double wages for work beyond nine hours a day or 48 hours a week — striking a balance between operational flexibility and fair worker compensation.

As per the reforms, all establishments

employing up to 20 workers will now be exempt from all provisions of the Act. These businesses will no longer require formal registration but must submit basic information to the Labour Department within six months of starting operations or from the Act's enforcement.

For establishments employing more than 20 workers, the registration process has been simplified. Applications will be deemed approved within 24 hours if no response is received. Any registration errors can later be rectified, and approvals will be auto-granted if delayed beyond the deadline.

In a significant shift from token penalties to meaningful deterrents, fines have been revised from a range of Rs 25-100 to Rs 1,000-30,000. Despite the increase, the government assured that this move is meant to encourage compliance, not penalize small businesses unjustly.

Acknowledging the demands of modern retail operations, the permissible overtime limit has been tripled from 50 hours to 144 hours per quarter. The daily spread-over period has also been extended to 12 hours, including rest intervals. However, any work exceeding nine hours a day or 48 hours a week will mandatorily attract double wages.

Mann asserted, "This ensures that while businesses have operational flexibility, worker rights and fair compensation are protected." The reforms bring a progressive shift by decriminalizing offences under the Act. A new Section 26A introduces a compounding mechanism — eliminating the need for court appearances. Penalties will now be payable at the Assistant Labour Commissioner level, with clear violation-wise fee structures to be published.

Moreover, a three-month grace period will be allowed between the first and second (or subsequent) violations, providing business-

### Key Labour Reforms Approved by Cabinet

- Exemption from all provisions for establishments with up to 20 workers
- Deemed registration approval within 24 hours for larger establishments
- Penalties revised from Rs 25 - Rs 100 to Rs 1,000 – Rs 30,000
- Overtime limit increased from 50 to 144 hours per quarter
- Double pay mandated for work beyond nine hours/day or 48 hours/week
- New Section 26A allows compounding of offences to avoid court visits
- Three-month grace period provided between violations
- Reforms apply to shops, banks, warehouses, restaurants, and work-shops
- Existing labour law protections for workers remain unchanged
- Digital compliance portal to be launched for easy registration and payments
- Amendments to be tabled in upcoming Assembly session
- Stakeholder consultations to be conducted before final rollout

es an opportunity to rectify issues without sffacing immediate prosecution.

The amended Act will apply to a wide spectrum of establishments, including shops, sales depots, storerooms, godowns, offices, banks, warehouses, restaurants, entertainment venues, mechanical workshops, and auto repair outlets. Inspections, if needed, will be limited to once every three months.

# Punjab YouTuber Arrested in Espionage Case Linked to Pak's ISI Network; 8th "spy" to be arrested in Punjab

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

A widely followed Punjabi YouTuber with over 1.1 million subscribers has landed at the heart of a major espionage scandal, exposing an alarming nexus between social media influencers and Pakistan's intelligence network. Jasbir Singh, the face behind the travel vlog channel "Jaan Mahal", has been arrested by the State Special Operations Cell (SSOC), Mohali, on Tuesday for allegedly acting as a conduit in a terror-backed spy ring. With links to expelled Pakistani diplomats, ISI handlers, and a previously arrested Haryana-based "spy" Jyoti Malhotra, Jasbir's arrest has peeled back the curtain on a dangerous fusion of digital stardom and anti-national activities.

In his 30s, Jasbir, from Mahlan village in Rupnagar district, is the eighth individual arrested in Punjab for spying activities allegedly linked to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

The arrest comes just a day after a Tarn Taran resident Gagandeep Singh, reportedly being in close contact with Pak-based Khalistani sympathizer Gopal Singh Chawla, was arrested for allegedly leaking classified critical information related to the Indian Army's movements during the high-stakes Operation Sindoor.

Jasbir's arrest also assumed significance as he is the second YouTuber after the apprehension of Haryana-based YouTuber Jyoti Malhotra on similar charges. Both content creators are now believed to be part of a larg-

er terror-backed espionage ring involving foreign operatives and expelled officials from the Pakistani High Commission.

Punjab Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said that Jasbir's arrest followed detailed surveillance and intelligence gathering, particularly after Malhotra's arrest triggered red flags about Jasbir's connections. The investigation revealed that Jasbir was in regular contact with Shakir alias Jutt Randhawa — a Pakistani-origin individual (PIO) believed to be a key operative in the ISI-supported espionage network.

Moreover, Jasbir is said to have maintained communication with Ehsan-ur-Rahim alias Danish — a Pakistani national who was earlier expelled from the Pakistani High Commission in India on charges of espionage. Danish, according to intelligence officials, extended an invitation to Jasbir to attend the Pakistan National Day celebrations held in Delhi in 2024. During this high-profile event, Jasbir reportedly met Pakistani Army officials and vloggers believed to have intelligence affiliations.

Incriminating digital evidence has also emerged during the probe. Jasbir's electronic devices, including his phone and laptop, were seized by the SSOC. Initial forensic analysis revealed multiple Pakistan-based contacts, deleted data trails, and encrypted communications. Police officials confirmed that Jasbir tried to wipe clean his digital footprint after Malhotra's arrest, presumably to avoid detection and dissociate himself from the network.

"After Jyoti Malhotra's arrest, Jasbir attempted to erase all traces of his communications

### Espionage Crackdown in Punjab: 8 Arrests in a Month

Punjab Police and intelligence agencies have intensified their crackdown on espionage networks, arresting eight individuals in just over a month for alleged links with Pak's ISI and Khalistani elements. Here's a snapshot of the key arrests:

- April 29 – Bathinda:** Sunil Kumar, a cobbler near Bathinda Cantonment, arrested after chats with a Pakistani woman spy were found on his phone
- May 4 – Amritsar:** Palak Sher Masih and Suraj Masih held for leaking sensitive Indian Army intel to Pakistan. Arrests made with intelligence agency coordination
- May 11 – Malerkotla:** Ghazala Khatun and Yameen Mohammad came in contact with Pakistani agents while seeking visas. Khatun had visited the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi
- May 13 – Bathinda:** Raqeeb, a tailor working inside the Bathinda Army

with these foreign intelligence operatives. However, our cybercrime team has recovered vital leads. A case has been registered at SSOC, Mohali, and the devices are undergoing detailed forensic examination," said DGP Yadav.

Adding to the gravity of the case, the police have confirmed that Jasbir visited Pakistan not once, but thrice — in 2020, 2021, and most recently in 2024. Each visit, now under close scrutiny, allegedly involved interactions with influential Pakistani personalities. One such visit was documented in a

Cantonment and native of Roorkee (Uttarakhand), arrested for allegedly leaking classified military information.

- May 15 – Gurdaspur:** Sukhpreet Singh (Addiyan village) and Karanbir Singh (Chandu Wala village) arrested for allegedly leaking inputs related to "Operation Sindoor". Three mobile phones and eight live cartridges seized.
- June 3 – Tarn Taran:** Gagandeep Singh, resident of Mohalla Rodupur in Tarn Taran, arrested for sharing operational details related to "Operation Sindoor" with ISI and Khalistani handlers based in Pakistan
- June 4 – Rupnagar:** Jasbir Singh, YouTuber with 1M+ subscribers, arrested for spying and links with ISI operatives. Attended Pak National Day, visited Pakistan thrice, tried deleting data after Jyoti Malhotra's arrest. Devices sent for forensic analysis

YouTube vlog, where Jasbir is seen entering Pakistan via the Attari-Wagah border and exploring Lahore's streets while praising Pakistan's "beauty and hospitality". Another video showcased a young Indian woman's travel experience in Pakistan, produced by Jasbir.

In a separate vlog, Jasbir claimed that he received "VIP treatment" in Pakistan, where fans warmly welcomed him. His travel content, while appearing apolitical on the surface, is now being examined for subtle narratives or imagery potentially used for pro-



**Authorized Officer, ARM - Branch  
Canara Bank**







Editor's TAKE

Way forward in Ladakh but still long road ahead

The measures announced by the Govt aim to address some of the issues but they fall short of the Ladakh's aspirations

Since the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 and the bifurcation of the former state of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories — Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh — the people of Ladakh have been voicing growing concern over the erosion of their cultural identity, land rights, and political agency. Recent protests, sustained campaigns, and appeals from civil society groups across Leh have led the central Government to respond, culminating in the announcement of new measures on June 3, 2025. The policies notified by the Centre aim to address some of the grievances raised by the people of Ladakh, particularly regarding their language, culture, and access to land and jobs.

Among the key measures announced is a provision for up to 85 per cent reservation for indigenous people in government jobs. In a bid to regulate residency, the Government has defined domicile criteria requiring a person to have lived continuously in Ladakh for 15 years from 2019 onwards. This effectively means that migrants arriving after the withdrawal of Article 370 would only qualify as domiciles after 2034, providing a degree of protection to the local population from sudden demographic shifts. The policy also acknowledges the linguistic diversity of Ladakh by recognising English, Hindi, Urdu, Bhoti, and Purgi as official languages. Moreover, a third of the seats in the region's hill councils are to be reserved for women, a measure aimed at enhancing gender representation in governance.

While these steps signal an intent to preserve Ladakh's unique identity and ensure indigenous access to employment and representation, they stop well short of the demands that have been persistently raised by local civil society organisations and political groups.

The people of Ladakh have long sought full statehood, which would grant the region its own legislature and greater autonomy in policymaking. Equally important is their demand for inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which offers special protections for tribal regions. There is also a growing call for the allocation of a second seat in the Lok Sabha to ensure that both Leh and Kargil have distinct and equitable political representation. Another critical demand is the establishment of a dedicated Public Service Commission.

Despite the creation of over 1,200 gazetted posts since 2019, not a single one has been filled. While the Centre's recent announcements are a step in the right direction, they remain administrative in nature and fail to address the core structural and constitutional concerns of the region. Moreover, the continued lack of employment avenues and meaningful political representation only deepens the alienation felt by many, especially the youth.

Neglecting the aspirations of the people living in such a sensitive region is not just a matter of domestic politics; it is a national security concern. The emotional integration of Ladakh with the rest of the country requires more than administrative announcements. It demands constitutional empathy, political inclusion, and economic empowerment. The June 3 measures may be a beginning, but the journey toward justice and dignity for Ladakh must go much further.

India at the crossroads of global conflict

Amid this global unrest, where diplomatic declarations are often drowned out by the din of war, India emerges as a steadfast advocate for peace — not through passive neutrality, but through principled strength

In a world bristling with tension — from the razed streets of Gaza to the blood-soaked fields of Ukraine, from the persistent unrest in Kashmir to the volatile Taiwan Strait — peace is increasingly becoming an endangered ideal. Every diplomatic forum today rings with commitments to non-violence, yet the deafening sounds of war and terror often drown them out.

At this crossroads, India finds herself emerging not just as a stakeholder but as a conscience-keeper, calling for peace with accountability, dialogue with dignity and action with principle. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said during the G20 Summit, "This is not an era of war." These words, resonating beyond India's borders, have become emblematic of India's foreign policy posture, peace-oriented, yet unwilling to sacrifice justice and sovereignty at the altar of terrorism wherever it breeds.

In the contemporary international order, the line between terror and political resistance is often blurred, frequently shaped by geopolitical interests rather than universal principles. Professor Harsh V Pant, Vice President — Studies and Foreign Policy, at Observer Research Foundation (ORF), argues, "There can be no moral equivalence between a state that fights terror and those who use it as an instrument of policy." India's call to the world is both simple and urgent — 'peace cannot be built on platforms that provide impunity to terrorism.' The 2008 Mumbai attacks, the 2016 Uri assault, the 2019 Pulwama bombing, and the very recent mayhem at Pahalgam on April 22, 2025, are seared into India's national consciousness and raised by India across several national and international platforms, going beyond the realm of strategic silence.

Dr K Subrahmanyam, widely regarded as the father of India's strategic culture, once warned, "If you do not define terrorism objectively, you become complicit in its perpetuation." India's insistence on a 'Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism' at the United Nations has long been blocked by nations unwilling to alienate their proxies or strategic partners.

Many discussions on terrorism per se and the inability of the global community to arrive at a unified definition of terrorism have concluded, not because of the failure of language, but as scholars and analysts of foreign policy, such as Professor C Raja Mohan, have validated it as a 'failure of will'. Further, India's former envoy and permanent representative at the UN, Syed Akbaruddin, once remarked that "States have a duty to protect their citizens, and that cannot be



held hostage to the veto power of transnational terror." He was alluding to the UN's patchy record in addressing terrorism (here, Pakistan-supported) that directly affects India, especially when state sponsors of terror receive cover under larger strategic alliances.

A September 24, 2024, statement released by the United Nations regarding its 79th session, clearly declares the hardest truth, yet it looks like merely a paper document. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, on impunity warned, "We

are in a purgatory of polarity," and said that more and more countries feel they can trample international law, violate the UN Charter, invade another country, lay waste to whole societies, or utterly disregard the welfare of their people. "We see this age of impunity everywhere — in the Middle East, in the heart of Europe, in the Horn of Africa," he said. The statement further read that Gaza is a non-stop nightmare that threatens to take the entire region with it. The war in Ukraine is spreading with no signs of letting up, and civilians are paying the price. In Sudan, a brutal power struggle has unleashed horrific violence. The situation is growing increasingly dire even for those who do not live in war zones, he empha-

sised. Of the world's poorest 75 countries, one-third are worse off today than they were five years ago.

(<https://press.un.org/en/2024/ga12633.doc.htm>). It is also pertinent to note what Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva, President of Brazil, had to say in his statement. He said "The right to defence has become the right to vengeance." India's approach to international relations is increasingly being shaped by a nuanced doctrine — balancing hard power with Gandhian values of peace and dialogue. But this is not the pacifism of naivety; it is a peace rooted in strength.

The response of India to Pakistani terrorist outfits after the Pahalgam attack or the Balakot airstrike in 2019 was not just a military operation. It was a message to the world that India would not remain passive in the face of terror. This balance of assertiveness and moral grounding distinguishes India's diplomacy in an increasingly fractured world. India has supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine while maintaining communication with Russia. It has called for humanitarian aid to Gaza while opposing the humanitarianism emanating from its soil. International peace mechanisms, from the UN Security Council to the Human Rights Council, often suffer from inertia or politicisation.

As history shows, from Rwanda to Syria to Afghanistan, delayed justice breeds deeper conflict. Justice must accompany peace, or peace becomes fragile and fleeting. India's warning to the world is not apocalyptic — it is pragmatic. As External Affairs

Minister Dr S Jaishankar has reiterated, "Terrorism cannot be one state's strategic tool while another state's humanitarian concern. The world must develop a unified response." This is not just about India's security but about the precedent the global order sets. "Terror and talks cannot go together" is the new forceful strategy.

India does not claim to be perfect. But its stance on terrorism and peace is rooted in its lived experience and its democratic ethos. In a world where great powers often prioritise expediency over ethics, India offers an alternative — principled realism. Ronald Reagan, the 40th president of the United States, once said, "Peace is not absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means."

That ability must come from courage, not cowardice; from justice, not just dialogue; from unity, not uniformity. The global search for peace is urgent. Terrorism must be called out, not explained away. Dialogue must be sincere, not strategic. And nations must stop treating terror as an instrument of foreign policy.

Nelson Mandela rightly summarised, "If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner." But if your enemy refuses peace and chooses terror, principle must speak louder than platitude. Unmistakably, if peace is the goal, justice must be the path.

(The writer is a programme executive of Gandhi Smriti Sansthan. Views are personal)

Holding the Pen in the Age of Prompts

SECOND Opinion

There was a time, not very long ago, when people would ask me, "What do you do?" and I would say, a tad shyly, because in my opinion, what I did wasn't yet the biggest thing after sliced bread or before Google — "I write." But apparently, it was a big thing then. Not everyone could coherently string thoughts and communicate them with clarity and panache. Not everyone could weave narratives that touched hearts. So when I said I wrote, people's eyes would widen with amazement, some dropped their jaws, and others looked at me as if I could stand apart even in a carnival.

Writing, at that time, was as wondrous an occupation as chasing fireflies in the dark — elusive, luminous, and ignited from within. It breathed on its own and needed no ventilators or oxygen masks. It reflected the inner world in a cadenced manner. It described external wonders in a kaleidoscopic combination of phrases and words that only a wordsmith could summon in moments of deep contemplation.

Those days, alas, are gone. Now, hundreds of writers are born every moment. Stories appear like graffiti on a goods wagon and the reverence a genuine literary voice once evoked has dimmed. For every writer who labours for hours to craft a story, a new one now emerges

in a jiffy, built from a few prompts. Today, the writer of yore stands like a lone artisan at a digital assembly line, watching machine-made marvels flood the shelves, while they still shape sentences by hand, chiselling meaning out of silence and memory. This is not a declaration drawn from hubris or conceit. It comes from a place of doubt, and a fear of becoming inconspicuous. It arises from a vulnerable spot that throws up a question aloud: In a world where beautiful language is freely available, where anyone can sound 'writely' and poetic, how do I remain distinct? How do I continue to speak in a voice that carries the textures of a human soul? The angst is genuine, and it has already started to show on my nerves whenever I sit down to write.

What if my writing doesn't surprise or matter to my readers any longer? Should I follow the trend and adopt the technologies to stay relevant, or continue in a voice so innately mine that anything else would feel synthetic and devoid of life? I do not have clear-cut answers to the predicament I find myself in. But this much I know: In a world where machines can become anything but human, I need to be more human than ever. I must feel deeper, process my emotions in a legitimate way no prompt can replicate and write with an openness no automation can emulate. I need to push myself to a point where, like Hemingway, I sit at the computer and just bleed. Word by word. Line by line. Squeezing my veins to get the



ASHA IYER KUMAR

essence of my thoughts out because it is the only way I know to be true. Some argue that the soul of the story is still theirs, that the thoughts are their own, and that all they ask of AI is a little literary finesse. A polish. A ribbon tied around their raw words. And perhaps that is harmless. Perhaps it even helps those who never had the means to say things beautifully, finally find a way to be heard. But for someone like me, whose entire being has been devoted to how something is said — to cadence, rhythm, nuance, and texture — I worry.

Not because others now write well, but because what once set me apart is becoming commonplace. I worry about the slow dilution of literary effort. The waning of the meditative solitude that writing demanded. These may soon be seen as obsolete habits. That my labour will be deemed superfluous. And yet, I cannot do it any other way. I still believe in the contemplative pause between paragraphs; in the tear that wells up uninvited when a sentence lands right; and in the thrill I feel when I end a piece with a final flourish.

Maybe this aching need to feel every word before I write it is what will remain mine. Perhaps, the only way to stay authentic now is not to write differently, but to feel more deeply. To be imperfect, sometimes messy and rough-edged. Because if there's one thing I still trust, it's this: Readers may forget ornate phrases, but they will never forget how I made them feel — with a voice that has been echoing long enough to still be heard.

(The author is a Dubai-based columnist, independent journalist, and writing coach. Views are personal)

Letters to the Editor

PRECAUTION IS A MUST TO KEEP COVID AT BAY

This sounding caution against the surging numbers of Covid-19 cases (4-6-25) is timely. The World Health Organisation has already cautioned, saying the Covid wave is not over and it can reappear anytime, anywhere, in any form. The variant coming round this time is said to be mild, which simply means it doesn't claim lives.

But the incapacitating symptoms and the psychological fear it poses can do enough damage.

Moreover, though the variant is claimed to be non-fatal, its potential to cause long-term health issues cannot be commented upon now as it needs to be studied in detail.

By the time the details come out, it can only be a matter of mere academic interest as another variant may be playing havoc. Above all, the most important point is that the country has neither learnt lessons from the Covid-19 that shook the nation with heavy

loss of lives and heavy damage to the economy, nor made any worthy preparations to meet a health emergency situation. The condition that prevailed in 2019 remains the same except for a few oxygen plants erected. Infrastructure, manpower, and medicine continue to be insufficient to meet an emergency.

Even test results are to be flashed only after two days. The situation was worse even in countries where around 10 per cent of GDP was allocated to health. With around 1 per cent allocation, the condition in India can be easily understood.

Another important lesson India has failed to learn is that private healthcare institutions do not rise to the occasion in an emergency like a pandemic. A complete revamping of our healthcare system with the public sector playing a major role is required to be prioritised.

AS RAJMOHAN | ANANTPUR

PICTALK



Members of the newly created women's police team demonstrate their skills in tackling criminals in Hyderabad. PTI

Northeast reeling under monsoon fury

Landslides triggered by heavy rains damaged roads across Nagaland, with crop destruction reported from some districts. In Kohima district, a major land sinking occurred near Kisama Heritage Village, while a major landslide was reported along the Kigwema-Mima-Chakhabama road. The road sinking at Phesama village near Kisama Heritage Village, where a 50m stretch of NH-2 has collapsed, cut off the key route between Nagaland and Manipur.

This is the third major road collapse at this location since 2013. A permanent solution is long overdue. Continuous rainfall led to landslides and road blockages in several districts across the state.

Storms and heavy rain damaged paddy and maize fields in many villages. The people are being urged to remain alert as the monsoon intensifies, stressing the need to prioritise the protection of lives and property.

The Mizoram Government has issued a travel advisory urging all dignitaries and officials from both the Centre and state Governments to avoid visiting the state. The advisory came after incessant heavy rainfall triggered widespread landslides, mudslides and flash floods across Mizoram, leading to loss of lives and affecting normal life across several districts. The current wave of landslides, floods, incidents of house collapse and other calamities triggered by heavy downpours has so far claimed many lives.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Cycling comes of age

Cycling in India can be a challenge, with unruly traffic, pot-holed roads, and no lanes for bicyclists. Yet, the community is growing, with some using it as a fitness tool, a few to commute, and some as an adventure sport. Specialist biking stores have opened up, there are niche races, and better cycling gear.

All they ask is that you join the club, helmet firmly in place and if you wear arm and leg gears its well and good as an additional protection from an impending danger. Cycling is mainly an aerobic activity, which means that your heart, blood vessels and lungs all get a workout. You will breathe deeper, perspire and experience increased body temperature, which will improve your overall fitness level. Cycling as a family is a fun way to spend your free time, and a great bonding experience.

You will enjoy the excitement of discovering new routes together and the shared sense of achievement as your fitness improves and you become more confident, experienced cyclists. And there lies the cycling success. Cardiovascular diseases include stroke, high blood pressure and heart attack. Regular cycling stimulates and improves your heart, lungs and circulation, reducing your risk of cardiovascular diseases. Whether it's to boost your fitness, health or bank balance, or as an environmental choice, taking up bicycle riding could be one of the best decisions you ever make.

NIKHIL CK MANIAM | MUMBAI

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI



# India’s dilemma: Farm yield rises, industrial growth sluggish

As the Government boosts minimum support prices and extends credit schemes to sustain rural momentum, policymakers face a complex balancing act — how to nurture farm-driven optimism amid factory-floor fatigue and an uncertain global trade climate

FIRST  
Column

India’s agricultural sector is charting new territory as record-breaking food production sets the stage for a stronger presence in global export markets. While farms flourish, a contrasting picture emerges in the industrial landscape, where stagnating production signals underlying economic strain. This divergence underscores a shifting balance in India’s growth narrative — buoyant fields amid faltering factories.

To pace it up further, the Centre also increased the kharif crop minimum support price (MSP) focusing on pulses, oilseeds and coarse grains. The MSP for paddy was raised by ₹69, three per cent, to ₹2369 per quintal. The MSP of 14 other items including groundnut, sunflower seed, cotton, tur/arhar, and niger seed benefitted.

The Centre claims that its procurement of wheat has surpassed previous three-year records yet is below the target. The 5 per cent interest subvention scheme on Kisan Credit Card up to ₹3 lakh will continue. Amid such a farm yield bonanza, the stymied industrial production remains a concern. The country’s industrial output growth slowed to an 8-month low in April, dragged down by contraction in mining, sluggish electricity and manufacturing sectors. It is dipping since reaching a peak of 6.2 per cent in April 2024 which had fallen to minus 0.1 per cent during mid-year.

India has achieved a record food grain production of 353.95 million tonnes (MT) in the 2024-25 crop season. This is largely due to record harvests of paddy (rice) — 149.07 MT, wheat — 117.50 MT, and maize — 42 MT.

India surpassed China to become the world’s largest rice producer. Maize production jumped by 12.3 per cent. Oilseeds yield also rose by 7.4 per cent.

Data show a record production of rice, wheat, maize, soybean, rapeseed, mustard, and sugarcane.

“The third estimated production of major crops such as paddy, wheat, soybean, groundnuts, oilseeds, and pulses are going to be a record,” says Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan. This is against agricultural ministry figures of about a 1.2 per cent fall in production a year back.

## 8-year-record

The food-grain estimate claims a 6.6 per cent record increase in major crops in eight years. Chouhan announced that the country’s food grain production reached 3539.59 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) in 2024-25, which is 216.61 LMT higher than last year’s (2023-24) 3322.98 LMT.

Another heartening news is India’s agriculture exports rising 6.4 per cent to \$51.9 billion in 2024-25, from \$48.8 billion during the preceding fiscal year that ended March 2024. This was as against the almost flat 0.1 per cent growth in the value of



its overall goods exports in 2024-25.

In 2024-25, India’s total merchandise exports reached \$374.1 billion, a 6 per cent increase from the \$352.9 billion in 2023-24, excluding petroleum products. This marked a record high for non-petroleum merchandise exports. Overall, India’s total exports (merchandise and services) reached \$824.9 billion, the highest ever. Services exports reached a high of \$387.5 billion. However, the country’s exports in February 2025 experienced a decline, marking the fourth consecutive month of contraction. The export value fell to \$ 36.91 billion, a 10.85 per cent decrease compared to the same period last year. Both exports and imports saw a sharp contraction. This decline was primarily attributed to factors like volatility in petroleum prices, global uncertainties, and the impact of sanctions on the gems and jewellery sector.

The country is hit also by lower capital expenditure hitting the ₹86000 crore construction equipment industry. It grew 21 per cent in 2022-21 per

cent and 24 per cent in 2023-24. Companies like Caterpillar, JCB, Tata Hitachi, Cummins and Volvo CE are piqued at the overall growth of 3 per cent in 2024-25.

**Private sector laggard**

Overall construction infrastructure activities are stated to be slowing down. The infra and construction goods sector slowed by 4 per cent in April against 8.5 per cent in April 2024, according to the National Statistics Office (NSO).

The construction industry has been thriving on liberal Government expenditure. Its thaw speaks a lot that the private sector’s contribution to the country’s growth is below the expectations. The manufacturing sector remained subdued, growing by 3.4 per cent in April, lower than the 4.2 per cent a year earlier. The IIP dip is stated to be lower than estimated at a 2.7 per cent fall. The slowdown is broad — based across sectors, according to rating agency ICRA. The infra and construction goods sector slowed to 4 per cent in April against 8.5 per cent in April 2024.



SHIVAJI SARKAR

## A national cooperative framework for ethical biodiversity economy

As India enters its Amrit Kaal, a deeper transformation is unfolding — one not just of infrastructure or economy, but of thought and soul. The Five Prans laid out by Hon’ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi are not abstract ideals; they are a declaration that Bharat will no longer walk the path laid out by colonial rule. Among them, the resolve to end the colonial mindset and break the culture of servitude stands out like a blazing torch. For centuries, India’s vast biodiversity was viewed through an extractive lens — its forests seen as timber depots, its tribal knowledge dismissed as folklore, and its people treated as passive suppliers to global industries. That mindset must end. A new India is rising — one that respects its people, reclaims its knowledge, and builds prosperity from the grassroots.

In a landmark move, the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) has reinforced this shift by issuing a decisive order on the enforcement of the Access and Benefit-Sharing (ABS) mechanism under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002. This mechanism ensures that communities who have traditionally conserved biological resources and associated knowledge are no longer invisible in the value chain. Whether it is a medicinal herb in the Himalayas or microbial wealth in the Eastern Ghats, any commercial exploitation of biodiversity must now be accompanied by fair and equitable benefit-sharing with the very people who nurtured it for generations.

But the question remains: How do we operationalise this mechanism in a way that is people-centric, employment-generating, and equitable? The answer lies in India’s oldest and most democratic economic system — the cooperative economic framework. With over 95,000 PACS (Primary Agricultural Credit Societies), hundreds of tribal and forest cooperatives, women SHGs, and digitally connected FPOs, India already possesses a grassroots engine capable of delivering ABS at scale. These cooperatives are not mere financial units; they are people’s institutions, rooted in local soil, culture, and trust.

Through the cooperative system, Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) at the village level can negotiate access contracts, monitor resource use, and direct benefit-sharing into community-led green enterprises. PACS can serve as aggregation points — documenting biodiversity use, collecting royalties, and channelling funds into bio-enterprise clusters. A tribal cooperative in Bastar could sell seed products with Geographical Indication (GI) tags. A forest-based SHG in Odisha could process and export mahua oil.

An FPO in the Western Ghats could develop ayurvedic supplements from endemic herbs. These are not pipe dreams — they are now viable, legal,



and scalable under the new ABS framework.

What is now required is a national institutional backbone to scale this up. There is a compelling need to establish a dedicated Multistate Cooperative for Biodiversity-Based Enterprises, with the National Biodiversity Authority as the Chief Promoter.

This cooperative would function as the nodal body to support, coordinate, and fund biodiversity — linked enterprises through cooperatives across the country. It would assist BMCs and PACS in contract formulation, ensure compliance with ABS protocols, facilitate branding and export of local biodiversity products, and link with existing cooperative structures like the National Cooperative Export Society, National Commodity Exchange Cooperative, and tribal cooperatives.

The proposed cooperative would also ensure a transparent Access to Benefit Transfer mechanism through digital platforms, enabling real-time monitoring of resource use, revenue inflow, and distribution of benefits.

This is especially important as India digitises its entire cooperative ecosystem, linking PACS to state federations and national apex bodies. A tech-enabled ABS cooperative could leverage data to inform policy, ensure compliance, and prevent biopiracy — while ensuring that “jan-bhagidari” (people’s participation) remains at the heart of biodiversity conservation.

Importantly, this move aligns with the broader “PACS to Apex” vision of the Ministry of Cooperation, led by Hon’ble Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah, which seeks to empower cooperatives as value — chain creators, not just input suppliers. By embedding the ABS mechanism within the cooperative economic

framework, India will not only ensure biodiversity conservation but also create millions of green, decentralised jobs across rural and tribal belts.

At its core, this is about restoring dignity. For too long, the tribal woman who held the secrets of the forest was ignored while pharmaceutical giants profited from her knowledge. The ABS mechanism, implemented through cooperatives, reverses that injustice — transforming her into a rights holder, an entrepreneur, and a contributor to the bioeconomy. It brings us closer to the vision of Sahkarita se Samriddhi — cooperation-led prosperity — and Sahkarita se Sanrakshan — cooperation-led conservation.

In the era of climate action, sustainable growth, and global green transitions, India’s bioeconomy stands at the cusp of global relevance. But that future must not be built on exploitation. It must be built on cooperation, local leadership, and justice. With NBA at the helm of a Multistate Cooperative, India can become the world’s most ethical and equitable bioeconomy — one where the biodiversity wealth of the land is matched by the economic dignity of its people.

As we prepare for a Viksit Bharat by 2047, let this be our message: India will not just be a powerhouse of innovation but also a custodian of nature and tradition. Let us rise — not just as a bioeconomy, but as a bio-civilisation.

“Prosperity comes from cooperation, protection comes from dedication. Where there is the village, there lies the world — India shows the path through cooperation.” Let this be our Sankalp: From Sahkarita to Samriddhi, from Sahkarita to Sanrakshan. Let the world learn — from the heart of rural India — how cooperation can be the greatest form of conservation.

(The writer is Secretary General, Confederation of NGOs of Rural India; Views are personal)

## Fire, Frequency, and Faith: Inside Modern Mysticism

Recently, Dhyani Foundation hosted a distinctive 6-night residential retreat in Jaipur centered around the Science of Yagyas and Divya Chikitsa Mantras. Under the leadership of Ashwini Guruji, the retreat promised not just theoretical knowledge but an immersive, transformative experience based on ancient Vedic practices — particularly the purifying power of fire rituals and the vibrational science of mantras.

Ashwini Guruji, a self-styled spiritual teacher and founder of Sanatan Kriya, has long positioned himself as a bridge between classical Indian wisdom and the modern world.

At the heart of this retreat were yagyas — fire-based rituals which, according to Guruji, are not merely religious rites but “a science to interact with the Divine.”

As per his explanation, when yagyas are performed in the correct manner, the environment changes perceptibly — no smoke in the fire, fragrant air, and often, so-called divine manifestations appearing in the flames.

Such phenomena, reportedly captured in unedited photographs, were used to lend credence to his claims. Notably, Minister of State for New & Renewable Energy, Shri Shripad Naik, who attended a yagya at Dhyani Ashram, was quoted saying he had “never heard such a mantra uchharan before.”

Another focal point of the retreat was the introduction to Divya Chikitsa Mantras, a set of seven mantras taught by Ashwini Guruji himself.

These are said to target the body’s nadis (energy channels) and chakras, creating a healing and transformational impact on the practitioner’s mind and body. According to the Foundation, the mantras operate on the principle that “everything in creation vibrates at a specific frequency,” and Vedic rishtis had mapped these frequencies to various deities through sound.

Dhyani Foundation had even conducted an experiment using a “Mantra Scanner,” which reportedly captured divine forms emerging from Guruji’s chanting — a bold and controversial claim that remains unverified by independent scientific bodies.

Dhyani Foundation promotes such retreats through its official platforms and affiliated events, branding them as both experiential and spiritually potent.

They promote these opportunities as direct interactions with Ashwini Guruji, offering participants not only teachings but also energy transmissions through guided practices like mantra chanting, chakra balancing, and advanced pranayama.

The Foundation has carved a niche by present-

In 2024-25, India’s private sector capex also saw a decline, falling by nearly 9 per cent to ₹26.8 lakh crore. This represents a three-year low and the second consecutive year-on-year decline.

Both the developments, in agriculture and industry, are significant in the light of the US policy manipulations by President Donald Trump. India is in protracted negotiations with the US to moderate and modify the tariff regime, particularly in the thawed world market, where multilateral UN institutions, including the World Trade Organisation, are being bypassed. Surfeit of bilateral transactions like the Indo-UK trade deals are changing the global trade scenario. The developing countries are particularly at the receiving end as they have to spend more effort, time and resources on talks. The settled multilateral norms are being gradually bypassed. It reflects on their exports and global growth. There are issues of farm exports particularly in the light of Russia-Ukraine war, conflict situations near the Mediterranean zone and Israel-Gaza — the Middle East. India must resolve these to boost global trade.

Despite a ceasefire in the wake of Operation Sindoor, Pakistan has not lifted the ban on its airspace for Indian airlines. It is bleeding the airline industry by a cost overrun of 30 per cent a flight. Air India estimated it lost over ₹100 million in a month for detouring Pakistan.

The stock markets too are tizzy having lost severely since January as it crashed with the US President Donald Trump’s tariff hikes and retaliation from China fueled investors’ jitters amid fears that a full-blown trade war could impact economic growth across the world.

The pace of policy pronouncements, along with postponements and modifications, has created heightened uncertainty for companies and US trading partners. A fluid trade policy environment is likely to continue as the administration continues to negotiate, takes steps to impose additional sectoral tariffs and reviews requests for product-specific exemptions from tariffs amid the latest US Federal Court striking down Trump tariffs. The coming year months may see many global changes and the fortunes of India.

Despite an impressive agricultural surge—marked by record food grain output and rising agri-exports—India’s broader economic landscape remains uneven. Sluggish industrial growth, faltering manufacturing, and declining private capex cast a shadow over rural gains. Global uncertainties, fluid trade policies, and weak infrastructure demand further complicate recovery. While Indian farms bloom, factories struggle to regain momentum. The Government’s challenge now is to bridge this rural-urban growth divide and sustain momentum in both agriculture and industry amid global flux.

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



BINOD ANAND



PRABHA GUPTA

ing ancient practices through a modern lens, often conducting sessions in luxurious settings and combining esoteric Vedic wisdom with a touch of spectacle.

Their humanitarian efforts — especially in animal welfare — and advocacy of non-commercial yogic teachings have won them a dedicated base of volunteers and followers.

However, this modern packaging of spirituality hasn’t come without criticism. Despite their spiritual claims and humanitarian image, questions about transparency, authenticity, and legality surround these operations:

Assertions such as diagnosing diseases via photographs at an Indian Medical Association event and scanning mantra frequencies for divine manifestations lack independent validation, inviting skepticism.

While Dhyani Foundation promotes a sattvic (pure) lifestyle, inconsistencies are observed — such as serving eggs and onions during high-end retreats, which contradict traditional yogic dietary norms.

The Foundation’s animal welfare activities, particularly cow rescues, have led to over 2,000 legal cases. While they frame these as resistance from vested interests in the meat industry, critics argue that their tactics often resemble vigilante activism, sometimes clashing with law enforcement and raising questions about legal and ethical boundaries.

Dhyani Foundation undeniably contributes to the revival and reinterpretation of ancient Indian knowledge systems. Their Science of Yagyas and Divya Chikitsa Mantras retreat offers a glimpse into powerful, lesser-known aspects of the Vedic tradition. Yet, the blend of spectacle, and unverifiable claims creates a complex picture — both alluring and troubling.

As alternative spirituality continues to gain traction, the importance of discernment becomes ever more crucial.

Navigating the rapidly evolving landscape of modern mysticism requires both critical thinking and a clear awareness of its potential benefits as well as its hidden pitfalls.

In conclusion, Dhyani Foundation’s Yajna retreat and Divya Chikitsa Mantras offer a compelling blend of ancient Vedic practices and modern presentation.

As the line between mysticism and marketing blurs, seekers must approach such experiences with open eyes and a discerning mind, honoring tradition while remaining vigilant about authenticity and ethical integrity in the spiritual space.

(The writer is a columnist writing on development, social issues and spiritual practices. Views expressed are personal)



# Senior officials gather to drum up weapons, ammunition for Ukraine

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Brussels

Senior officials from almost 50 nations gathered Wednesday to drum up more weapons and ammunition for Ukraine, with the Pentagon's chief absent for the first time since the group organising the military aid was set up three years ago. The Ukraine Defence Contact Group meeting at NATO headquarters is going to be chaired by the United Kingdom and Germany.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth would only arrive in Brussels after it's over. He will participate in a meeting of NATO defence ministers on Thursday.

His absence is the latest in a series of steps that Washington has taken to distance itself from Ukraine's efforts to repel Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on February 24, 2022. More than 12,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed, according to UN estimates, as well as tens of thousands of soldiers on both sides.

Before Wednesday's meeting, the UK said that it plans a tenfold increase in drone



production to help Ukraine. Drones have become a decisive factor in the war, now in its fourth year.

UK Defence Secretary John Healey said that British companies are using lessons learned from the battlefield "to develop advanced new drones to help protect Ukraine's civilians and also strengthen our own national security."

Hegseth's predecessor, Lloyd Austin, created the group after Russia launched all-out war on Ukraine in 2022. Since then, Ukraine's backers have collectively provided around \$126 billion in weapons and military assistance, including more than \$66.5 billion from the US.

The United States hasn't chaired a meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group since the Trump administration took office in January. European NATO allies are concerned that the US might withdraw troops from Europe to focus on the Indo-Pacific.

French President Emmanuel Macron has warned that abandoning Ukraine would erode US credibility in deterring any conflict with China over Taiwan.

# UN Security Council to vote on Gaza ceasefire resolution

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ United Nations

UN Security Council scheduled a vote Wednesday on a resolution which demands "an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza respected by all parties." UN diplomats said the United States is likely to veto it.

The resolution, drafted by the council's 10 elected members who serve two-year terms, reiterates its demand for the release of all hostages held by Hamas and other groups following their October 7, 2023 surprise attack in southern Israel.

Calling the humanitarian situation in Gaza "catastrophic," the proposed resolution also demands "the immediate and unconditional lifting of all restrictions on the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza and its safe and unhindered distribution at scale, including by the UN and humanitarian partners."

The vote, scheduled for late Wednesday afternoon, comes amid near-daily shootings following the establishment by an Israeli and US-backed foundation of aid distribution points inside

Israeli military zones, a system it says is designed to circumvent Hamas.

The United Nations has rejected the new system, saying it doesn't address Gaza's mounting hunger crisis, allows Israel to use aid as a weapon, and doesn't comply with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence.

The draft resolution demands the restoration of all essential humanitarian services in line with those principles, international humanitarian law and UN Security Council resolutions.

Several UN diplomats from different countries, speaking on condition of anonymity Tuesday because discussions have been private, said they expect the United States to veto the resolution.

The US Mission to the United Nations said it had no comment on the draft resolution at this time. Israel's UN Mission did not respond to a request for comment on the draft.

Gaza's roughly two million people are almost completely reliant on international aid because Israel's offensive has destroyed nearly all of Gaza's food production capabilities.

# Israeli forces killed 27 heading to aid site, says Gaza officials

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Rafah (Gaza Strip)

Israeli forces fired on people as they headed toward an aid distribution site in Gaza on Tuesday, killing at least 27, Palestinian health officials and witnesses said, in the third such shooting in three days. The army said it fired "near a few individual suspects" who left the designated route, approached its forces and ignored warning shots.

The near-daily shootings have occurred after an Israeli and US-backed foundation established aid distribution points inside Israeli military zones, a system it says is designed to circumvent Hamas. The United Nations has rejected the new system, saying it doesn't address Gaza's mounting hunger crisis and allows Israel to use aid as a weapon.

The Israeli military said it "fired to drive away suspects." In a statement, army spokesperson Effie Defrin said "the numbers of casualties published by Hamas were exaggerated" but that the incident was being investigated. He said the army is not preventing Palestinians in Gaza from reaching aid in the distribution areas but rather allowing it.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which operates the sites, says there has been no violence in or around them. On Tuesday, it acknowledged that the Israeli military was investigating whether civilians were wounded "after moving beyond the designated safe corridor and into a closed military zone," in an area that was "well beyond our secure distribution site."

A spokesperson for the group said it was "saddened to learn that a number of civilians were injured and killed after moving beyond the designated safe corridor." Gaza's roughly two million people are almost completely reliant on international aid because Israel's offensive has destroyed nearly all of Gaza's food production capabilities.

Israel imposed a blockade on supplies into Gaza in March and limited aid began to enter again late last month after pressure from allies and warnings of famine.

## Either way we will die

Witnesses have said the shootings all occurred at the Flag Roundabout, around a kilometre (half-mile) from one of the GHF's distribution sites in the now mostly uninhabited southern city of Rafah. The entire area is an Israeli military zone where journalists have no access outside of army-approved embeds. Yasser Abu Lubda, a 50-year-old dis-

placed person from Rafah, said the shooting started around 4 am Tuesday, and he saw several people killed or wounded.

Neima al-Aaraj, a woman from Khan Younis, said the Israeli fire was "indiscriminate." She added that when she managed to reach the distribution site, there was no aid left.

"After the martyrs and wounded, I won't return," she said. "Either way we will die." Rasha al-Nahal, another witness, said that "there was gunfire from all directions." She said she counted more than a dozen dead and several wounded along the road.

When she reached the distribution site, she found there was no aid left, she said. She gathered pasta from the ground and salvaged rice from a bag that had been dropped and trampled upon.

"We'd rather die than deal with this," she said. "Death is more dignified than what's happening to us."

UN human rights official condemns shootings. At least 27 people were killed early Tuesday, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Hisham Mhanna, a spokesperson for the International Committee of the Red Cross, confirmed the toll, saying its field hospital in Rafah received 184 wounded people, 19 of them declared dead on arrival, with eight others later dying of their wounds.

The dead were transferred to Nasser Hospital in the city of Khan Younis. Three children and two women were among the dead, according to Mohammed Saqr, head of nursing at the hospital.

Hospital director Atef al-Hout said most of the patients had gunshot wounds.

An Associated Press reporter who arrived at the Red Cross field hospital at around 6 am saw wounded people being transferred to other hospitals by ambulance. Outside, people were returning from the aid hub, mostly empty-handed, while empty flour bags stained with blood lay on the ground.

Jeremy Laurence, a spokesman for the UN human rights office, told reporters it also had information indicating that 27 people were killed.

"Palestinians have been presented the grimmest of choices: die from starvation or risk being killed while trying to access the meagre food that is being made available through Israel's militarised humanitarian assistance mechanism," Volker Türk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in a statement.

# Germany launches programme to encourage investment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Berlin

Germany's new Government on Wednesday launched a package of tax breaks and eventual tax cuts for companies, moving to encourage investment as it tries to give new momentum to an economy that has shrunk for the past two years and is expected to stagnate this year.

Chancellor Friedrich Merz's Cabinet approved the so-called growth booster program, which must still be passed by lawmakers.

Its central component is a hefty tax write-off on investments in machinery and other equipment over the next three years, followed by a gradual reduction of the corporate tax rate from 15 per cent to 10 per cent between 2028 and 2032.

There will also be tax breaks over the next 2½ years for companies that buy electric cars and measures to encourage investment in research.

Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil, who is also the vice chancellor, said that "we are making Germany as a location more competitive internationally." Germany has Europe's biggest economy.

# Two more attacks on Jews in USA

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

For the leaders of US Jewish institutions, the recent attacks in Boulder, Colorado, and Washington, DC, are stark reminders of their responsibility to remain vigilant despite years of hardening their security measures and trying to keep their people safe.

Now, they're sounding the alarm for more help after a dozen people were injured in Boulder while demonstrating for the release of Israeli hostages in Gaza on Sunday. And just over a week earlier, two Israeli Embassy staffers were fatally shot outside a Jewish museum in Washington.

After that shooting, 43 Jewish organisations issued a joint statement requesting more support from the US Government for enhanced security measures. Specifically, they asked Congress to increase funding to the Nonprofit Security Grant Programme to \$1 billion.

"Every Jewish organisation has been serious about security for years. We have to be," said Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism. "The grants are to harden the buildings, for things like cameras and glass, and some kind of blockage so they can't drive a truck into the building."

"These are the everyday realities of Jewish life in the 21st century in America. It's a sad reality, but it is an essential responsibility of leadership to make sure that people are first and foremost safe."

Shira Hutt, executive vice president at The Jewish Federations of North America, said existing federal funds were inadequate,



with only 43 per cent of last year's applicants to the grant programme receiving funding. Citing the attack in Boulder, she said increased funding for local law enforcement is also crucial. "Thankfully, the attack was stopped before even further damage could have been done," she said.

"This is really now a full-blown crisis, and we need to make sure that we have all the support necessary."

One of the Jewish Federation's state-based affiliates, JEWISHcolorado, on Tuesday launched an emergency fund to raise \$160,000 in support of the Boulder community. Its goals include enhancing safety and security measures for Jewish institutions and events. Leaders of Jewish Federation Los Angeles urged government,

business and philanthropic groups to "supercharge an alliance so we can build mutual understanding, dispel conspiracy theories, and provide rapid response when any group is under threat."

"Jews here in Los Angeles are terrified but determined," said the federation's president, Rabbi Noah Farkas. "We do not need more community meetings, we need results and we are counting on our local government and our law enforcement partners to do more." The security costs at 63 Jewish day schools have risen on average 84 per cent since the Israel-Hamas war began on October 7, 2023, according to the Teach Coalition, the education advocacy arm of the Orthodox Union, an umbrella group for Orthodox Judaism.

# India calls for WTO action on non-tariff barriers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

India has called for action to curb non-tariff barriers, address trade distortions caused by non-market economies, and restore a strong dispute settlement mechanism at the WTO, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Wednesday.

The minister also pitched for strengthening the current consensus-based approach at the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the special and differential treatment given to less developed countries and developing countries and bringing back focus on issues that have already been finalised and mandated at previous ministerial meetings.

"India made a strong pitch for addressing non-tariff barriers that certain coun-

tries use to deprive others of market access, take necessary action against non-market economies, ensure that we have a strong dispute settlement mechanism at the WTO so that finality can be brought and discipline can be maintained," Goyal told reporters here.

The minister made these remarks in a meeting of about 25 ministers of WTO member countries, including Australia, Singapore, France and Nigeria. WTO Director General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala also participated in the meeting.

This mini-ministerial informal gathering was called by Australia ahead of the 14th ministerial conference, scheduled in Cameroon in March next year.

It was held on the margins of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Ministerial

Council Meeting here. The WTO deals with the global rules of trade between nations.

Its main function is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible. It is a Geneva-based 166-member body.

Since 2009, the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism has not been functioning properly as the US has stalled appointments of members in the appellate body. On earlier occasions, India has pressed for a two-tier dispute resolution system at the WTO.

"All in all, the shared concerns of all the ministers were placed before the gathering today, and we have all resolved to collectively work to strengthen the working of the WTO, to ensure the core principles are respected and work towards global good

and global growth in trade," he said.

He added that it was agreed upon by the member nations to make an effort to bring back the mojo into the organisation as all countries recognise the importance of multilateralism.

The other tracks which came up for discussion include resolving agri issues, including finding a permanent solution to the issues of public stockholding for food grains. "There is the track on finding solutions to address the concerns of overfishing and indiscriminate fishing that is leading to depletion of fish stocks, there are concerns about several ISIs (joint statement initiatives) (or) pluri-laterals, which some countries believe should be brought within the multi-lateral framework," he said.

On the China-led proposal for an investment facilitation pact, he said.

# Indian delegation in US to push anti-terror message

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

All-party parliamentary delegation led by Congress leader Shashi Tharoor will meet members of the US Congress, American officials, think tanks and policy experts to brief them on Operation Sindoor, terrorism faced by India and regional security.

The delegation arrived in the US capital Tuesday and will have packed days of engagements till Thursday.

The multi-party group will be engaging with members of the US Congress, American think tanks and media professionals. Chairperson of the Standing Committee on External Affairs Tharoor is leading the delegation, which comprises Sarfaraz Ahmad (JMM), Ganti Harish Madhur Balayogi (TDP), Shashank Mani Tripathi (BJP), Bhubaneswar Kalita (BJP), Milind Deora (Shiv Sena), Tejasvi Surya (BJP) and India's former Ambassador to the US Taranjit Sandhu.

"An all party delegation led by Dr @ShashiTharoor arrives in Washington DC. Over the next two days the delegation will be meeting members of the US Congress and administration, think tanks, media and policymakers to brief them on Operation Sindoor and India's strong stand against terrorism," the Indian Embassy said in a post on X.



Members of the all-party delegation led by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor upon their arrival in Washington DC

PTI

The delegation, which had reached New York from India on May 24, travelled to Guyana, Panama, Colombia and Brazil before arriving in Washington for the last leg of its tour.

In its interactions in the US, the delegation will convey India's resolve against terrorism and emphasise Pakistan's links to terrorism.

Speaking to media, delegation member Deora said that the group in the US, as well as those visiting other regions and

countries, is telling the world that "India has had enough."

He said that every country they visited so far "issued very unequivocal, I would almost say, unconditional, statements in favour of India."

He asserted that just as countries like the US have every right to protect themselves and eliminate terrorists-whether state-sponsored or non-state actors-"India has that same right. And for India to grow, for India's economy to thrive, for

American investments to continue to perform in India, India needs peace. India needs strong borders. India needs security." "We want to live in peace. We would prefer it if we have a stable neighbour. Nobody wants an unstable lunatic living next to you," he said.

Another delegation member Surya told PTI that there is absolutely no sympathy towards Pakistani-originated terrorism.

The countries the delegation visited have "very clearly understood why India was constrained to respond militarily in the way it did, and have supported India's counterterrorism measure."

On Wednesday, when the Indian delegation begins its meetings here, a parliamentary delegation from Pakistan led by Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is also set to arrive in Washington, DC.

Speaking to reporters at the United Nations headquarters in New York, Zardari-who met UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres along with his delegation-said they would meet US government representatives and lawmakers in the American capital.

"The President of the United States has a unique opportunity to deliver on his commitment to peace within the context of India and Pakistan."

# Three former Salvadoran officer convicted for killing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ San Salvador (El Salvador)

Three former Salvadoran officers were convicted by a five-person jury late Tuesday for the 1982 killings of four Dutch journalists during the Central American nation's civil war.

A jury made up of five women convicted the three men of murder in a lightning trial that began Tuesday morning in the northern city of Chalatenango, said Oscar Perez, lawyer for the Foundation Comunicandonos that represented the victims. Perez said prosecutors requested 15-year prison sentences for all three.

Convicted were former Defence Minister Gen. Jose Guillermo Garcia, 91, former treasury police director Col Francisco Moran, 93 and Col Mario Adalberto Reyes Mena, 85, who was the former army commander of the Fourth Infantry Brigade in Chalatenango.

Garcia and Moran are under police guard at a private hospital in San Salvador, while Reyes Mena lives in the United States. In March, El Salvador's Supreme Court ordered that the extradition process be started to bring him back.

The Dutch TV journalists - Jan Kuiper,

Koos Koster, Hans ter Laag and Joop Willemson - had linked up with leftist rebels and planned to spend several days behind rebel lines reporting. But Salvadoran soldiers armed with assault rifles and machine guns ambushed them and the guerrillas.

Garcia was deported from the US in 2016, after a US judge declared him responsible for serious human rights violations during the early years of the war between the military and the leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front guerrillas. The prosecution of the men was reopened in 2018 after the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional a general amnesty passed following the 1980-1992 war. It moved slowly, but in March 2022, relatives of the victims and representatives of the Dutch government and European Union demanded that those responsible for killing Jan Kuiper, Koos Koster, Hans ter Laag and Joop Willemson be tried.

The United Nations Truth Commission for El Salvador, which was set up as part of a UN-brokered peace agreement in 1992, concluded there was clear evidence that the killings were the result of an ambush set up by Reyes Mena with the knowledge of other officials, based on an intelligence report that alerted of the journalists' presence.







# RBI MPC meets amidst rate cut expectations

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) rate-setting panel started its three-day brainstorming on monetary policy as expectations are high of a 25 bps or even a jumbo 50 bps rate cut to fuel economic growth amid uncertainties created by Trump's tariff moves.

The decision of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), headed by Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra, will be announced on Friday. The RBI reduced the key interest rate (repo) by 25 bps each in February and April, bringing it to 6 per cent. This could be the third back-to-back reduction in the short-term benchmark lending rate. In response to the 50-bps cut in the policy repo rate since February 2025, most of the banks have reduced their repo-linked external benchmark-based lending rates (EBLRs) and marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR).

Experts are of the view that the RBI may reduce the repo rate by 25 bps on Friday and another similar cut in the next policy. However, an SBI research expects the central bank to go in for a "jumbo" rate cut of 50 bps in June itself.

CareEdge Ratings said falling inflation will give the RBI the flexibility to prioritise growth amidst external headwinds. While growth momentum has improved, challenges like uneven consumption recovery, muted private capex growth, and subdued manufacturing growth remain. CPI inflation is expected to stay comfortable



in 2025-26, it said.

"This opens room for further monetary policy easing. We expect the RBI MPC to cut the policy rate by another 50 bps in FY26 (including 25 bps in June), with chances of a deeper rate cut cycle if growth falters," it said.

Deepak Aggarwal, Co-founder and Co-CEO of Moneyboxx Finance said that with inflation expected to remain below the

RBI's 4 per cent target and growth holding steady, the upcoming MPC meeting presents an encouraging window for a calibrated rate cut.

"A lower interest rate regime, supported by targeted liquidity measures, can meaningfully strengthen credit flow to MSMEs and NBFCs, especially those serving rural and semi-urban regions," Aggarwal said. Raoul Kapoor, Co-CEO of

Andromeda Sales and Distribution, said there are strong indications and widespread expectations that the RBI will implement a third round of rate cut later this week.

Should another 25 bps rate cut occur, it would bring the cumulative rate reduction in the calendar year 2025 to a notable 75 basis points.

"The easing of rates not only provides

immediate financial relief but also stimulates consumer spending and investment, potentially bolstering overall economic growth. As a result, both existing and potential borrowers can look forward to a more favourable borrowing landscape in the coming months," Kapoor said. Mandar Pitale, Head, Financial Markets, SBM Bank (India) opined that the upcoming RBI MPC meeting is coming at the backdrop of a strong GDP growth print of 7.4 per cent, which was significantly higher than the market expectation of 6.8 per cent.

"We expect a 25 bp cut in policy rate at the June MPC meeting. This, coupled with the ongoing accommodative stance, will position MPC to react to any data surprises on either side," Pitale said, and added there may be another 25 bps reduction in August by the RBI.

On his expectations from the 55th meeting of MPC, Rohit Arora, CEO and Co-Founder of Biz2X & Biz2Credit said a rate cut in the range of 25- 50 basis points appears likely, supported by inflation staying below the 4 per cent target and continued moderation in core inflation. "This would provide a timely boost to credit flow, especially for MSMEs and housing, while reinforcing growth momentum. While the RBI remains focused on domestic conditions, global cues like the US Fed's projection of two rate cuts in 2025 also provide comfort on the external front," Arora said.

The MPC consists of three members from the RBI and three external members appointed by the Government.

## Countries eager to partner with India, says Tejasvi Surya

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Washington

Investing in India is increasingly viewed as an investment in "democracy," "responsible civilian leadership," and global progress, BJP MP Tejasvi Surya, who is part of an all-party delegation visiting the US, has said.

Surya highlighted the enthusiastic response from the four countries visited by the multiple-party parliamentary delegation led by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor. The group arrived in the US on Tuesday after a visit to Brazil.

"Every single country was enthusiastic about what they can offer to India and what India can offer to them," he said, underlining that after addressing the agenda of Operation Sindoor, the delegation engaged in conversations focusing on potential partnerships in sectors like manufacturing and technology.

"People know that investment in India is investing in democracy and investment in India is investment in responsible civilian leadership," he said, adding that it means global progress as well. On the other hand, he said these countries can only talk about terrorism with Pakistan. The delegation travelled to Guyana, Panama, Colombia and Brazil before arriving in Washington for the last leg of its tour."Many countries which are interested in manufacturing, which are interested in technology, they want to partner with India," said Surya.

He noted that every terrorist attack in the last 20-30 years that has rocked the world has had investigations directly or indirectly leading to Pakistan.

Another delegation member and Shiv Sena MP Milind Deora said that "for American investments to continue to perform in India, India needs peace. India needs strong borders. India needs security." "We want to live in peace. We would prefer it if we have a stable neighbour. Nobody wants an unstable lunatic living next to you," he said

The multi-party group will be engaging with members of the US Congress, American think tanks and media professionals during its visit.

The delegation also comprises Sarfaraz Ahmad (JMM), Ganti Harish Madhur Balayogi (TDP), Shashank Mani Tripathi (BJP), Bhubaneswar Kalita (BJP), and India's former Ambassador to the US Taranjit Sandhu.

## Indian services sector growth broadly steadied in May

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Indian services growth broadly steadied in May and was underpinned by healthy demand conditions, new client wins and greater staffing capacity, a monthly report said on Wednesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index was at 58.8 in May, marginally up from April's 58.7 and signalled another sharp rate of expansion. In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"India registered a 58.8 services PMI in May 2025, broadly in line with the steady readings from recent months. Strong international demand continued to fuel services activity, as evidenced by the new export business index's uptick from April," said Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

As per the survey, new orders rose at a sharp pace largely driven by advertising, demand strength and repeat orders from existing clients.

Companies also observed a near-record improvement in international demand for their services during May with faster increases in new export orders recorded in Asia, Europe and North America in particular.

"To keep up with swelling demand, India's service providers heavily increased staff recruitment. Indeed, the employment index rose to the highest reading ever recorded by this survey," Bhandari said. Almost 16 per cent of panel members reported higher payroll numbers, while 1 per cent indicated a fall. "The resulting overall rate of job cre-

ation was the strongest in the history of the survey," the survey said.

The increase in workforce numbers, coupled with overtime payments, added to firms' cost burdens. Some companies also cited greater outlays on cooking oil, material and meat.

Meanwhile, price gauges showed an intensification of input cost and output charge inflation, with rates of increase edging above their historical averages in each case.

**Ongoing improvements in demand for Indian goods and services led to survey-record increases in jobs across the two sectors. Hence, aggregate employment expanded**

There was a recovery in business sentiment during May and the upgraded forecasts stemmed from expectations that greater staffing capacity, expanded clientele and marketing initiatives will support activity growth in the year ahead.

Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite PMI Output Index came in at 59.3 in May, down only marginally from 59.7 in April, signalling a further sharp upturn in aggregate activity.

The downward movement in the headline index reflected softer growth of factory production, as services activity rose at a quicker pace.

Ongoing improvements in demand for Indian goods and services led to survey-record increases in jobs across the two sectors. Hence, aggregate employment expanded at an unprecedented pace.

## NCLAT stays insolvency proceedings against Reliance Infrastructure

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

In a big relief to Reliance Infrastructure, appellate tribunal NCLAT on Wednesday stayed the insolvency proceedings against the company. Reliance Infrastructure in a regulatory filing said that the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) suspended the order passed by the NCLT over an appeal filed by it.

"In the appeal filed, the NCLAT, today has suspended the Order dated May 30, 2025 passed by National Company Law Tribunal, Mumbai in case no. C.P. (IB)/624(MB)2022, admitting the company into Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process," it said. On May 30, the Mumbai bench of the National Company Law

**In April 2022, IDBI Trusteeship had filed a petition for insolvency resolution process against Reliance Infrastructure, alleging a default of ₹88.68 crore as of August 2018**

Tribunal (NCLT) had admitted an insolvency plea against the company filed by IDBI Trusteeship Services Ltd.

This was opposed by Reliance Infra, saying that it has made the full payment of ₹92.68 crore to Dhursar Solar Power Pvt Ltd towards claims of tariff, making the initiation of insolvency proceedings infructuous. "The company has made full payment

## Adani Airports raises \$750 million to boost infrastructure

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ahmedabad

Adani Airports Holdings Ltd (AAHL), India's largest private airport operator and a subsidiary of Adani Enterprises Ltd, has secured \$750 million through External Commercial Borrowings (ECB) from a consortium of global banks to fund infrastructure expansion and refinancing debt.

The financing deal, finalised with First Abu Dhabi Bank, Barclays PLC and Standard Chartered Bank as lead arrangers, is set to accelerate AAHL's development plans across its airport portfolio, which includes six key facilities in Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Mangaluru, Jaipur, Guwahati and Thiruvananthapuram.

**AAHL's expansion signals larger trends in India's aviation sector, which continues to see strong growth driven by rising demand and Government focus on modernising infrastructure**

AAHL said the capital will support infrastructure upgrades, boost airport capacity and scale up its non-aeronautical businesses, such as retail, food and beverage, duty-free, and other passenger services.

The operator handled 94 million passengers in fiscal year 2024-25 across its current network, which has an installed

capacity of 110 million passengers annually. AAHL aims to triple this to 300 million passengers per year by 2040 through phased development.

A key part of this growth strategy includes the Navi Mumbai International Airport, which is slated to become operational shortly. The airport will initially handle 20 million passengers annually, with plans to scale up to 90 million over time, strengthening aviation infrastructure in the Mumbai metropolitan region.

"The trust placed in us by leading global financial institutions underscores the long-term value and potential of India's aviation infrastructure," said Arun Bansal, CEO of AAHL. "We are committed to delivering world-class airport experiences,

leveraging technology for efficiency and sustainability while engaging with communities meaningfully."

Legal advisors for the transaction included Latham and Watkins LLP and Linklaters LLP under English law, and Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas and TTA under Indian law.

AAHL's expansion underscores broader trends in India's aviation sector, which continues to experience strong growth driven by rising passenger demand and Government focus on modernising infrastructure. The company emphasised its long-term goal of setting new global benchmarks in service quality and environmental stewardship across its expanding airport network.

## UP Govt unveils bio jet fuel policy to boost farmer incomes

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a significant step toward boosting farmers' income and promoting green energy, the Uttar Pradesh Government is set to launch a first-of-its-kind policy to establish industrial units for producing bio jet fuel from agricultural residues such as sugarcane bagasse, paddy husk, and wheat straw.

This initiative is expected to directly benefit nearly 2.5 crore farmers in the State by creating a new market for agricultural waste and surplus grains.

To explore investment opportunities in this emerging sector, Invest UP recently organised a high-level roundtable conference at Hotel Taj, where it presented the Uttar Pradesh Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) Manufacturing Promotion Policy — 2025. The proposed policy aims to promote the manufacturing of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), also known as bio jet fuel, from agricultural biomass. The conference, chaired by Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh, brought together key investors, industry leaders, and policy experts to discuss Uttar Pradesh's vision for becoming a hub for green aviation fuel. Singh highlighted the incentives and infrastructure support included in the policy, stating that this would be India's first dedicated SAF manufacturing policy.

"Our fertile land, robust infrastructure, and proactive industrial policies make UP an ideal destination for green fuel production," Singh said. "This policy not only accelerates our green energy transition but ensures that farmers receive tangible benefits, with more money in their hands and a greener future."

## ‘Verdict on Mittal Group’s claim against Bosnia likely in a month’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The verdict on the \$400 million (around ₹3,438 crore) international arbitration claim filed by industrialist Pramod Mittal, brother of steel tycoon Lakshmi Mittal, is likely to be announced within a month, an official of the Mittal Group said on Wednesday.

Mittal, the chairman of the Mittal Group — a global conglomerate engaged in steel, energy, mining and infrastructure — filed a \$400 million international arbitration claim against the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina, citing serious breaches of the India-Bosnia Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) signed in 2006, the company official said.

"This is one of the strongest investor-state claims emerging from India in recent years. It goes beyond commercial loss —

it tests the credibility of BIT protection in fragile jurisdictions," the person said, requesting anonymity.

An e-mailed query to Mittal Group spokesperson remained unanswered.

The claim, filed under the UNCITRAL arbitration framework in early 2023 in Vienna, stems from the breakdown of a joint venture between Mittal's Global Steel Holdings Ltd and Bosnia's State-owned Koksno Hemijski Kombinat (KHK). The partnership, launched in 2003, gave rise to Global Ispat Koksna Industrija Lukavac (GIKIL) — a major coke producer employing over 900 people in northeastern Bosnia.

The official said over time, Mittal's majority stake and management rights were systematically eroded. In 2019, Mittal and other executives — Paramesh Bhattacharyya, then General Director of GIKIL, and Rajib Das, Finance Director of



## Markets rebound after 3-day decline tracking rally in global equities

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty ended higher on Wednesday after three days of decline, tracking a rally in global markets.

Buying in blue-chips Reliance Industries and HDFC Bank also added optimism to markets recovery. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 260.74 points, or 0.32 per cent, to settle at 80,998.25. During the day, jumped 349.78 points, or 0.43 per cent, to 81,087.29.

The NSE Nifty went up 77.70 points, or 0.32 per cent, to 24,620.20. From the Sensex firms, Eternal climbed 3.32 per cent. Bharti Airtel, IndusInd Bank, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Tata



Motors, HDFC Bank, Tata Steel and Hindustan Unilever were the other major gainers.

However, Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Titan and Larsen & Toubro were among the laggards.

"The domestic market traded in a narrow range with a mildly positive bias, supported by favourable global cues such as strong US job data and signs of easing US-China trade tensions," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

"Mid and small-cap stocks outperformed, driven by better-than-estimated earnings growth and moderation in valuation. Investors are now focused on the RBI policy meeting starting today, with expectations of a rate cut and clarity on the future growth & inflation forecast," Nair said. In the Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi jumped sharply. Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng also settled higher.

## Maruti-Suzuki increases solar power generation to 79MW

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The country's largest carmaker Maruti-Suzuki added another 30 Megawatts-peak (MWp) of solar power, installing 20 MWp at their latest plant at Kharkonda and 10MWp at Manesar both in Haryana. This takes the total installed solar-power by the carmaker to a total of 79MWp across their multiple manufacturing facilities across India. The company has a target of achieving 85 percent of their power sourcing from renewable sources by financial year 2030-31.

Speaking on the Company's green energy initiatives, Hisashi Takeuchi, Managing Director, Maruti Suzuki India Limited, said, "Aligned with our parent

**By FY2030-31, Maruti Suzuki plans to reach 319MWp of solar capacity, backed by an investment of over ₹925 crore**

company, Suzuki MotorCorporation's Environment Vision 2050i and the Government of India's focus on renewable energy, we are systematically enhancing the use of renewable energy in our operations. By FY2030-31, Maruti Suzuki plans to reach 319MWp of solar capacity, backed by an investment of over ₹925 crore. As we scale up production to four million units, we are committed to matching that growth with equally ambitious sustainable energy practices."





Karnataka Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar with Royal Challengers Bengaluru team members during a felicitation ceremony after winning the IPL 2025 at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Wednesday

# IPL champions RCB arrive in Bengaluru to rousing welcome

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

Newly-crowned IPL champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru touched base at the Garden City on Wednesday afternoon amid a roaring and chaotic welcome from fans, who lined up the streets and thronged the Chinnaswamy stadium to catch a glimpse of the team's stars, including the talismanic Virat Kohli.

The Rajat Patidar-led squad was received by state's Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar at the airport before proceeding towards the Vidhana Soudha for a meeting with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. "Virat Kohli, from past 18

years, has given his youth, his experience, his love, and his heart (to RCB) and made our state proud. I stand here with the heartfelt support of all the youngsters of our state," Shivakumar said.

"On behalf of the Karnataka Government, we extend our heartfelt congratulations to all of them and wish them continued success. 18 years of struggle is not a small thing," he added.

En route to Siddaramaiah's office, fans assembled on both sides of the road cheered the triumphant squad with gusto. RCB defeated Punjab Kings by six runs in the IPL final at Ahmedabad on Tuesday to clinch their maiden title in 18 years. It was another major achievement

for the team's talisman Virat Kohli, who has only played for this franchise since the league's inception. After the appointment with the CM, the RCB players will head to the M Chinnaswamy Stadium for a fan engagement programme.

The much-anticipated open-top bus parade from Vidhana Soudha to the stadium will also start at 5pm after the CM gave special permission for it. The crowd has already

It was earlier stated by the Bengaluru Traffic Police that it might not take place because of congestion on the route.

"We request all fans to follow guidelines set by police and other authorities, so that everyone can enjoy the roadshow

peacefully," the franchise posted on its official 'X' page. However, the scenes outside the Chinnaswamy stadium painted a different picture as fans jostled to sneak inside amid heavy police presence. Thousands of fans were also seen waiting outside the Vidhana Soudha to cheer the players.

The rainy weather in the city hasn't helped and the police has already endured a torrid time managing the crowd that flooded the streets to celebrate the triumph last night. In visuals shared online, Kohli could be seen holding the trophy and watching in awe, thousands who lined up the team's bus route, cheerfully waving at the convoy.

## Never thought this day would come, says Kohli

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

His moist eyes melted hearts just after Josh Hazlewood had bowled his second delivery of the 20th over and when an emotionally choked Virat Kohli kissed the Motera turf, there could have been million teary eyed fans who had waited for this day just like their hero. IPL turned an adult this season and Kohli's stature just got bigger.

"This win is as much for the fans as it is for the team. It's been 18 long years. I've given this team my youth, prime and experience. I've tried to win it every season, gave it everything I have," Kohli, perhaps the most eloquent speaker by a distance among his contemporaries put words to his emotions.

Just after the final, the exhausted Kohli hugged his wife Anushka and one could gauge that the couple were coming to terms that it has finally happened.

"To finally have it is an unbelievable feeling. Never thought this day would come, I was overcome with emotion after the last ball was bowled. Gave each and every ounce of my energy and it's an amazing feeling."

His best buddy AB de Villiers standing at the edge of the boundary during the final moments and Kohli paid a fitting tribute to one of RCB's greatest.

"What ABD has done for the franchise is tremendous, told him 'this win is as much yours as it is ours. I want you to celebrate with us'. He's been the 'Player Of The Match' most times in the franchise despite being retired for four years.

"Tells you the impact he's had on the

league, team and me. He deserves to be on the podium, lifting the Cup"

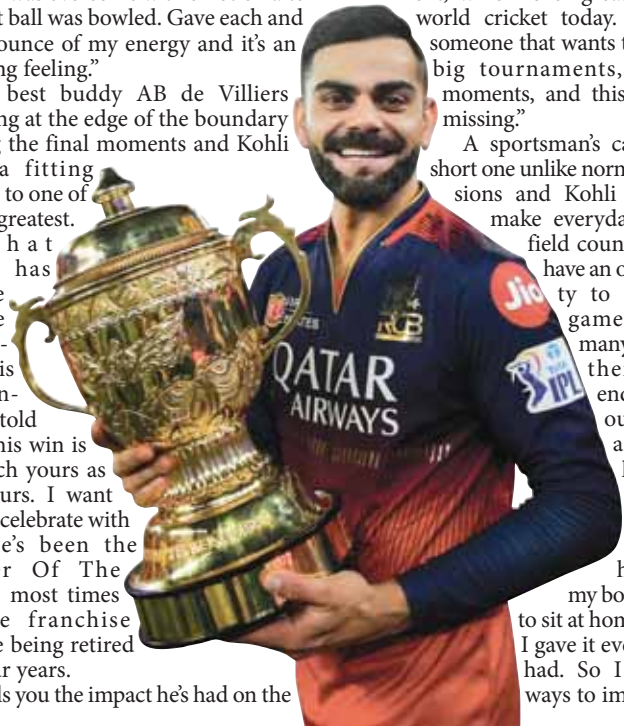
Commentator Matthew Hayden asked him where he rates his first IPL Trophy having won the ODI World Cup, T20 World Cup and Champions Trophy.

"Well, it's right up there, if I have to be honest. As I said, I've given everything that I had for the last 18 years. I've stayed loyal to this team, no matter what. I've had moments where I thought otherwise, but I stuck to this team. I stood behind them, they stood behind me.

"And I always dreamt of winning it with them. And this is far more special than winning it with anyone else because my heart is with Bangalore, my soul is with Bangalore. And as I said, this is the team I'm going to play for till the last day that I play the IPL. So this one is absolutely right up there."

What makes IPL special is the quality of the tournament where one needs to give more than 100 percent. "As a sportsman, you grind for something, and this is a very high intensity, high quality tournament, which is of great value in world cricket today. And I'm someone that wants to win the big tournaments, the big moments, and this one was missing."

A sportsman's career is a short one unlike normal professions and Kohli wants to make everyday on the field count. "Well, I have an opportunity to play this game for not many years. So there is an end date to our career, as you know. And by the time that I hang up my boots, I want to sit at home and say I gave it everything I had. So I look for ways to improve."



## Kohli still five notches below Test cricket

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

It is right up there with the "best moments" of his storied career but Virat Kohli would still rank the IPL trophy, won after 18 years of toil, five notches below his Test achievements as he believes the longest format is the one that earns a player respect. The 36-year-old, who retired from Tests last month, won the IPL for the first time when his franchise Royal Challengers Bengaluru edged past Punjab Kings by six runs in the season finale on Tuesday night.

"You know, this moment is right up there with the best moments I've had in my career. But it still marks five levels under Test cricket," an emotionally overwhelmed Kohli told the tournament broadcaster.

"That's how much I value Test cricket. And that's how much I love Test cricket," he added. Considered the biggest promoter of the red-ball cricket in the past decade, Kohli urged youngsters to respect Test cricket and chase greatness in that format for a lasting legacy. "So I would just

urge the youngsters coming through, to treat that format with respect. Because if you perform in Test cricket, you walk around anywhere in the world, people look you in the eye and shake your hand and say, 'well done, you played the game really well'.

"So if you want to earn respect in world cricket all over, take up Test cricket, give your heart and soul to it," added Kohli, whose Test career yielded 9,230 runs in 123 appearances. Kohli was seen hugging and celebrating with former teammates A B de Villiers and Chris Gayle, both of whom left the franchise without winning the coveted trophy. He walked into the dressing room with de Villiers and joyously declared that the heartbreak corner no longer existed in it. "Finally, that's the heartbreak corner no more. It is very difficult to explain man. I am just relieved," he said with his franchise captain Rajat Patidar looking on.

"(It's a) full bunch of match winners, people stepping up at different stages and putting their hand up to get the job done for the team. I am just happy I could do

it with RCB. "These guys are a different mindset," he added.

**Tears of joy, relief**

Kohli was not as composed when the moment of triumph hit him in the team dugout. After Josh Hazlewood had bowled his second delivery of the 20th over, an emotionally choked Kohli kissed the Motera turf and later stated that he had given his "youth, prime and experience" to the team. "I've tried to win it every season, gave it everything I have," the modern great said, articulating his thoughts quite clearly despite the heavy emotions.

Commentator Matthew Hayden asked him where he would place his first IPL Trophy in the list of achievements that includes the ODI World Cup, the T20 World Cup and Champions Trophy recently. "Well, it's right up there, if I have to be honest. As I said, I've given everything that I had for the last 18 years. I've stayed loyal to this team, no matter what. I've had moments where I thought otherwise, but I stuck to this team. I stood behind them, they stood behind me.

## It's all for you – the fans: Kohli, Patidar dedicate RCB's triumph to faithfuls

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Bengaluru

Perhaps mindful of the tragedy outside the stadium, Virat Kohli was not his usual exuberant self but still managed to draw emotional roars from spectators who thronged the Chinnaswamy Stadium to be a part of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's maiden IPL trophy triumph celebrations here Wednesday.

At least four people died and several left injured in the stampede-like situation outside the stadium, where RCB did the fan engagement programme after their title win on Tuesday.

"I'm going to start off by repeating what our captain (Rajat Patidar) said (during the trophy presentation ceremony on Tuesday night). It's no more ee sala cup namde, it's ee sala cup namdu," said Kohli to a rousing applause and roar from the gathered crowd. Kohli then dedicated the victory to RCB fans who stood with the team for 17 long years without a trophy to show.

**Kohli then dedicated the victory to RCB fans who stood with the team for 17 long years without a trophy to show**

Challengers Bengaluru side landed in the city in the afternoon from Ahmedabad on a chartered flight, and their first official assignment of the day here was to meet Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

The entire squad met the CM at his office in the Vidhana Soudha, along with Deputy CM DK Shiva Kumar.

After a short meeting inside the room, the players and the political leaders took their appointed place in the open dais in front of the state government headquarters. The players were felicitated with the traditional Mysore Petta (turban) and garlands before they left for the stadium.

However, there was no open top bus parade as it was cancelled due to incessant rain and concerns surrounding crowd management owing to the chaos.

The players entered the stadium in the team bus with a large number of flag-waving fans running after the bus cheering them with slogans and chants.

## Virat Kohli deserves it more than anyone else: Patidar



Royal Challengers Bengaluru captain Rajat Patidar holds the championship trophy

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

After 18 years of hurt and disappointment, and a final that ebbed and flowed, when newly-crowned IPL champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Rajat Patidar got a chance to say "Ee Sala Cup Namdu" (this year the cup is ours), the fans roared.

But when he said that "Virat Kohli deserved it more than anyone else", the cheers were deafening as the legend grinned from ear to ear.

"It is really special for me, for Virat Kohli, and all the fans. Those who have supported for years, they all deserve it. It's a great opportunity for me and a great learning for me to captain Kohli, he deserves it more than anyone else," Patidar said after the final here on Tuesday.

Talisman Kohli praised Patidar's captaincy through the tournament and

tossed his bat at him during the dressing room celebrations, and the skipper was seen kissing the willow in a show of respect. "Rajat led from the front, led with composure, his bowling changes, his calmness was absolutely phenomenal through the tournament," Kohli said.

"Heartbreak corner. No more. "What a turnaround. From injury replacement to IPL-winning captain. Bloody hell," Kohli said of Patidar as he entered the dressing room.

It was at this very venue that India lost the final of the 2023 World Cup to Australia after an unbeaten run to the title clash, with Kohli in imperious form. "Very difficult to explain, man," Kohli said to the RCB cameraman.

I think I am going to feel the real side of it when we get to Bengaluru tomorrow and celebrate it with the city and the fans who have stood with us through thick and thin. So I am just relieved.

## New captain cool: Shreyas could be leader India needs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

He was a Knight in the shining armour for Kolkata in 2024 and in 2025, became the King who almost led Punjab to the crown. Shreyas Iyer's IPL season didn't end with the trophy but he well and truly established himself as the leader that India might need in the not-so-distant future.

Iyer became the third skipper after Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Rohit Sharma to captain an IPL franchise to three finals and he did it with three different teams in the last five years. That's some range for a player, who astoundingly did not make the Indian Test team for the tour of England this month. KKR let him go last year as they didn't consider his demand for a higher retention fee to be just. Their loss was, needless to say, a massive gain for Punjab Kings.

They got an astute captain and a passionate leader of the men in the 30-year-old, who knows a thing or two about handling the highs and lows of a career with grace. The jury is still out on Shubman Gill, who will face a trial by fire as captain in England. But after June 3, 2025, Shreyas Santosh Iyer should be rated as one of the best captains in Indian cricket. There is a Dhoni-like cool quotient, a Virat Kohli-like aggressive streak when the situation demands and also a 'Bindas Mumbaikar' in him just like his illustrious India teammate Rohit Sharma.

"Job is still half done, we have to win it next year," Iyer's confidence shone through the disappointment of missing it this time by a mere six runs in Ahmedabad on Tuesday night. That he is not in the squad for England has surprised none more than his Punjab Kings coach Ricky Ponting. "I actually was gutted...But he's accepted that really well and he's moved on," Ponting said on The ICC Review of Iyer, prior to the IPL Playoffs.

"He's just got that real hunger in his eyes to do well every time that he plays for us here and wants to win games of cricket and wants to evolve and develop into the best leader and captain that he can be."

**Been through the grind**

A statement like that coming from a two-time World Cup winning captain carries weight and Ponting didn't say that just to back his franchise captain.

The two do go back a long way. In the 2017 season when the now India head coach Gautam Gambhir decided to



quit captaincy mid-season, it was on Ponting's insistence that Iyer became the captain of the Delhi IPL franchise.

The only time Capitals played the finals, in 2020, was under Iyer. After an injury-forced break that Iyer endured, the Capitals decided that they could not hold on to him and risk losing Rishabh Pant, a rising star of that time with burning captaincy ambitions. Iyer went to KKR as captain in 2024, but got very little credit for their trophy-winning run as he batted in the lower order to suit the needs of the team. His then KKR coach Gambhir walked away with major credits for tactical nous, while the skipper's instinctive decisions and meticulous homework went relatively unnoticed.

However, if a player leads two different franchises, with different managements, philosophies and changed roster of players to the finals in back-to-back seasons, his strategic brilliance can't go unrecognised for too long.

And Iyer finally got his due this season. It became clear that his grasp on match situations and strategies was second to none. He knew that on pitches where there is lack of bounce, Kyle Jamieson's back of the length deliveries will work and it turned out to be a masterstroke. Against Gujarat Titans, he asked Vijaykumar Vyshak to nail the wide yorkers repeatedly and it worked. Against Mumbai Indians in Qualifier 2, he told him to take pace off his deliveries with knuckle balls and that worked too.

He has shown that possibly, after Rohit Sharma calls it quits in ODIs, he can be thought of as a candidate for leadership considering he is a phenomenal 50-over batter. And when it comes to T20s and Tests, it's a matter of time before he plays both formats again.

**What drives Iyer the captain?**

"First and foremost clarity of thought. He is a very process-driven man. He doesn't miss his routines and drills pertaining to physical fitness. There are no cheat days. But most importantly, he has limited his friend circle over the years. "He does that to ensure no negativity creeps into his system," someone who has worked very closely with Iyer in the past couple of years said.

For his batting, the mental aspect and visualisation has been handled by Abhishek Nayar while childhood coach Praveen Amre rebuilt his game when he was away from the Indian team. "Constantly visualising with a bat in his hand. Working on his head position, body stance and visualising every delivery," a close friend said.



# Gukesh loses Hikaru in Norway Chess

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Stavanger (Norway)

American Grandmaster Hikaru Nakamura broke world champion D Gukesh's run of classical wins by comprehensively beating the Indian to earn three full points even as Arjun Erigaisi roared back to contention with victory over Fabiano Caruana in Norway Chess here.

India's Erigaisi trapped his opponent Caruana in a time scramble in the eighth round of the prestigious tournament on Tuesday. World Number 2 and former Norway Chess champion Nakamura pressed home the early advantage he got with the white pieces to dominate his 19-year-old opponent and score a "very smooth" victory and take revenge for his Round 3 loss to the Indian. Gukesh, who had regained his mojo after a disappointing start to the tournament when he beat world Number 1 Magnus Carlsen and Erigaisi in Round 6 and 7 respectively, was cornered by Nakamura, who didn't give his opponent an inch during the course of the nearly four-hour-long contest. With two more rounds to go, Gukesh was tied for third place with Nakamura on 11.5 points, while American GM Caruana, despite the loss to Erigaisi, was in the lead with 12.5 points.

Carlsen, who lost to China's Wei Yi in the Armageddon tie-break, was second with 12 points, while Erigaisi was fifth with 10.5 points. "It was a very smooth game, I'm very happy with it. It looks very good," said Nakamura after the win.

The 37-year-old Nakamura, winner of the 2023 edition of Norway Chess in which Gukesh finished third, said that the reigning world champion was uncomfortable



with the pawn structure, which probably resulted in him coming under time pressure and giving an easy win to the American. "I'm not sure what happened, whether Gukesh just didn't know this bishop move, or what exactly it was, but it was very clear to me that, based on the long think, he didn't like the pawn structure at all," said Nakamura, who at 15 years of age had become the youngest American GM. Nakamura added that his loss to Gukesh in Round 3 was more on account of him "slackening" a bit. "Just when I had equalised, I completely relaxed. I just fell asleep for like one to two moves, and immediately, I was in a lot of trouble, and I couldn't recover," he added.

## Gukesh played horribly: Nakamura

Nakamura expressed surprise over Gukesh's play in the tournament so far, saying he was lucky to have survived Carlsen and Erigaisi in Round 6 and 7 respectively.

"It's a very strange term, because his result is very good, but if we're being objective about chess, I think he's played horribly. He should have lost to Magnus, he was completely lost against Arjun (Erigaisi). "Other than the first game against me, and maybe the game against Wei Yi, at some point, he was losing; even Fabiano (Caruana), he (Gukesh) was also losing in that game," said Nakamura.

"So, it's very, very hard to judge what his play is, but when I look at his game, one of the big things that he has, that I would say Arjun and R. Praggnanandhaa don't have, is he's mentally very strong.

"He's a lot less emotional than the other two players, and that has served him very well, especially in this tournament, so it's a mixed bag."

Nakamura added, "I think his defensive skills are very good, like in this game, I thought there were probably three or four moments when I was winning, and then I had to still find more moves to convert,

so he's definitely showing very strong defensive skills."

"India is the next Soviet Union of chess" Nakamura gave a strong indication that this could be his last appearance in Norway Chess, and that he had probably played his final classical game against Carlsen. He also averred that "the future of chess is in India."

"India is basically the new Soviet Union as far as chess goes. You have Gukesh, you have Arjun, you have Praggnanandhaa, I think Aravindh (Chithambaram) just broke into the top-10, if I'm not mistaken. "If I look forward to the next 5-10 years, Indians are going to dominate chess, there's no doubt about it," he said.

## Humpy regains sole lead

Two-time world rapid champion, India's Koneru Humpy wrested back the lead with two rounds to go, beating Spanish International Master Sara Khadem in the day's only classical win.

Humpy, on 13.5 points, was one point ahead of reigning world champion China's Ju Wenjun. Ju's six-match winning streak was broken by R Vaishali — who is fifth on 9.5 points — in the Armageddon tie-break.

### Results (Round 8):

(Open) Arjun Erigaisi (Ind — 10.5 points) bt Fabiano Caruana (USA — 12.5); Hikaru Nakamura (USA — 11.5) bt D Gukesh (Ind — 11.5); Wei Yi (Chn - 8) bt Magnus Carlsen (Nor — 12) in Armageddon tie-break.

(Women) Sara Khadem (Esp — 6) lost to Koneru Humpy (Ind — 13.5); R Vaishali (Ind — 9.5) bt Ju Wenjun (Chn — 12.5) in Armageddon tie-break; Anna Muzychuk (Ukr - 12.5) bt Lei Tingjie (Chn — 10) in Armageddon tie-break.

# New Zealand Cricket seeks new head coach for all formats



Gary Stead

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Wellington

New Zealand Cricket has begun a search for a new head coach to lead the Black Caps in all three formats after ruling out the incumbent Gary Stead, who has been national coach since 2018.

Stead stepped down in April from the white ball formats and said he was considering his future as test coach. NZC hurried his decision when it said Wednesday it is now looking for one coach to cover all formats.

South African Rob Walter, former New Zealand fast bowler Shane Bond and current assistants Luke Ronchi and Shane Jurgensen are expected to be interviewed. Stead coached the Black Caps in 52 test matches, winning 27 including the inaugural World Test Championship. Under his coaching, New Zealand won

56 of 97 one-day internationals and 64 of 119 Twenty20 internationals.

New Zealand was runner-up on a countback of boundaries in the 2019 World Cup and runner-up at the Champions Trophy earlier this year.

Stead took over as head coach from Mike Hesson, who had enjoyed success in company with captain Brendon McCullum.

"Brendon McCullum and Mike Hesson had left the team with strong values and a style of play and I've just tried to build and shape that further to grow our ability to be consistent in everything we do," Stead said.

"It's been nice to be competitive across all three formats and I'd like to think that regardless of results, the opposition know the Black Caps are a team that won't fold and will always show the grit and determination to compete.

# DIKSHA TO LEAD CONTINGENT OF 5 INDIANS AT TENERIFE OPEN

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Canary Islands

Diksha Dagar will lead a five-Indian contingent at the Tenerife Women's Open golf tournament in the Canary Islands this week on the Ladies European Tour (LET), which begins after a mini break. The tournament in Tenerife returns to the schedule for the first time since 2011.

Besides, Diksha, Avani Prashanth,

Tvesa Malik, Hitaashee Bakshi and Sneha Singh are the other Indians in the field of 132 players from 35 nations at the Abama Golf Resort.

Pranavi Urs was also in the field but has withdrawn as she is yet to fully recover from her wrist injury.

After nine events this year, Diksha is the top Indian in eighth place on the LET Order of Merit, which decides the year-long race to crown the Tour's number one

player. Diksha has played nine events, made seven cuts and finished in Top-10 four times, including a runner-up finish in Morocco. Avani, at 39th, is the second best Indian on LET Merit list.

The Indian challenge includes the last two Hero Order of Merit winners in India.

LET rookie Hitaashee in two starts has done well to finish T-12 at the Dutch Ladies Open and T-34 at Jabra Ladies,

while Sneha will make her first start.

Tvesa in six starts has made only two cuts with T-34 at Jabra Ladies as the best.

The top four of the current 2025 Order of Merit are in the field. They are England's Mimi Rhodes, compatriot Cara Gainer and Czech Republic's Sara Kouskova, who secured her maiden LET victory at Evian Resort. One spot back in the Order of Merit is Chiara Tamburlini, who will no doubt be as confident as any-

one in Tenerife after she secured her best ever Major result last week. The Swiss star, winner of the 2024 Order of Merit, recorded a T-14 finish at the testing US Women's Open in Wisconsin, a score helped by rounds of 69-71 to start the week.

The field has 17 home stars, including Nuria Icurro, a four-time winner on the LET. The week will also see the return of Carly Booth after a three year injury

absence. Booth last played at the Belgian Ladies Open in May 2022 but has since been sidelined due to an ACL injury and had a reconstructive knee surgery. The three-time LET winner returns this week ahead of several European events in June. The tournament previously took place between 2002-2011 and the Abama Golf course provides a tricky test for the players this week with undulation and sloppy greens.

# SPAIN BEATS ENGLAND 2-1 IN NATIONS LEAGUE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Barcelona

World champion Spain beat European champion England 2-1 in the UEFA Women's Nations League in their last competitive game before the Lionesses defend their title next month. Spain substitute Cláudia Pina turned the game around by scoring twice within minutes of coming on in the second half on Tuesday after England led thanks to Alessia Russo's goal in the 22nd.

Barcelona forward Pina struck in the 60th and 70th minutes at Espanyol's stadium to ensure Spain topped their Nations League group despite losing 1-0 to England at Wembley Stadium in February.

"The second half, they started really quick," England coach Sarina Wiegman said. "They pressed even higher. We had some trouble to get out of the press and keep the ball." Spain, which also beat England in the 2023 Women's World Cup final, advances to the semifinals in October. The draw is made Friday and will involve defending champion Spain, France, Germany and Sweden. The European Championship is the priority this year, and the 16-team tournament kicks off July 2 in Switzerland.

England is in a tough group with France, the Netherlands and Wales. Spain is drawn with Portugal, Belgium and Italy.

Playing in her 50th game for England, Russo's goal was her 22nd for her country. The Arsenal forward was in the Women's Champions League winning team last month, dethroning Pina's Barcelona.

# England routs West Indies to sweep ODI series

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

Late start, early finish. England needed just 30 of 40 available overs to beat the West Indies by seven wickets and achieve a 3-0 clean sweep of their one-day international series at the Oval on Tuesday. Jamie Smith's maiden ODI fifty, 64 of the 93-run opening stand in seven overs, launched England's successful assault on the rain-revised target of 246.

The game was delayed twice, first because a traffic lights outage trapped the West Indies bus long enough so the team wasn't even at the ground at the scheduled toss, and secondly for a 90-minute rain break. Without a warmup in the nets, and forced to bat in gloomy bowler-friendly conditions, the West Indies slumped to 28-3 before the rain and 154-7 soon afterward. That it eventually racked up 251-9 was impressive.

Sherfane Rutherford kept the innings alive with 70 off 71 balls, then teammates Gudakesh Motie and Alzarri Joseph, the Nos. 8 and 9 batters, gave their side a fighting chance with a partnership of 91 in 11.2 overs. In the highest ever eighth-wicket ODI stand by the West Indies against England, Motie and Joseph clobbered the host with five sixes and 10 boundaries. Joseph was out to a skier on



41 off 29, and Motie was bowled on the last ball on 63 off 54. Spinner Adil Rashid was the pick of the bowlers with 3-40. England players adapted to the pregame traffic problems near the Oval by exiting their bus and hiring bicycles to get to the ground.

Smith used more of that dynamic thinking on the fly to deflate West Indies hopes again on his home ground.

Smith blasted 10 boundaries and three

sixes before his off stump was bowled by Motie in the seventh over after scoring 64 from 28 deliveries. Smith scored at such a rate that England's 100 in the eight-over powerplay was the fourth fastest in ODIs, and its 121-1 after 10 overs was England's best-ever 10-over total. Ben Duckett propelled England further with 58 from 46, falling at 155-2 with the chase more than half over. The mopping up was left to Joe Root with a casual 44, and Jos

# FRENCH OPEN: LORENZO MUSETTI BEATS FRANCES TIAFOE

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Paris

Lorenzo Musetti used his sleek one-handed backhand and sprint-then-slide court coverage to reach his first semifinal at the French Open, and second at a Grand Slam tournament, by beating Frances Tiafoe 6-2 4-6 7-5 6-2 in the same stadium where he won a bronze medal at last year's Olympics.

When the match ended on Tuesday, Musetti, a 23-year-old Italian, rolled up his green shirt's right sleeve and flexed his biceps. No one would be surprised if things get tougher on Friday: That's when Musetti will meet defending champion Carlos Alcaraz for a berth in the championship match. Alcaraz wasn't really tested Tuesday night during a 6-0 6-1 6-4 quarterfinal victory over Number 12 Tommy Paul, who had his right thigh heavily taped and wasn't able to produce his best tennis.

Number 8 seed Musetti and Number 1 Jannik Sinner — who faces unseeded Alexander Bublik in the quarterfinals Wednesday — gave Italy two male quarterfinalists at Roland-Garros for the first time since 1973. Tiafoe also was part of a rare accomplishment for his country: He and Paul were the first American men to get to the round of eight in Paris since Andre Agassi in 2003 — and the first duo to do it in the same year since Jim Courier and Pete Sampras in 1996. But with Tuesday's results, US men are 1-60 since 1999 at the French Open against opponents ranked in the top 10.

In women's action, three-time defending

champion Iga Swiatek and No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka both won in straight sets to set up a semifinal showdown on Thursday.

Number 15 Tiafoe, a 27-year-old from Maryland, hadn't dropped a set on the way to the quarterfinals. But he wasn't up to the task against Musetti, a semifinalist at Wimbledon in 2024. Wearing a chain around his neck with a pendant reading "Big Foe" in capital letters, Tiafoe missed all eight first serves in his initial service game and sent a backhand wide to give Musetti a 2-0 lead. Tiafoe looked at his coach, David Witt, and complained about the wind. "He didn't start as he wanted, but today it was really complicated to play well," Musetti said. "It was so windy and it was difficult to manage to hit properly." At match's end, Musetti had more winners, 44-33, and far fewer unforced errors, 51-32. Still, when two-time US Open semifinalist Tiafoe smacked a forehand to even the match at a set apiece, he let out a roar and shouted: "Let's go! Let's go!"

During that set, Musetti was warned for unsportsmanlike conduct for kicking a tennis ball that inadvertently hit a linesperson. Unlike most top-level tennis tournaments, which rely on electronic line-calling, there are still humans on court at Roland-Garros to decide whether shots land in or out. Told by the postmatch interviewer that he has an elegant game, Musetti joked: "I mean, we are Italian. We are elegant."

The point of the match came in the third set's sixth game. Musetti stretched wide of the doubles alley near the net to reach a shot at a seemingly impossible angle. Tiafoe then did

the same in response, sending his near the baseline. Musetti ran and, with his back to the net, twisted his body to somehow flick a low ball back with a half-swing. It worked, though, and Tiafoe - perhaps startled to see the point wasn't over - netted an awkward, shoulder-high volley.

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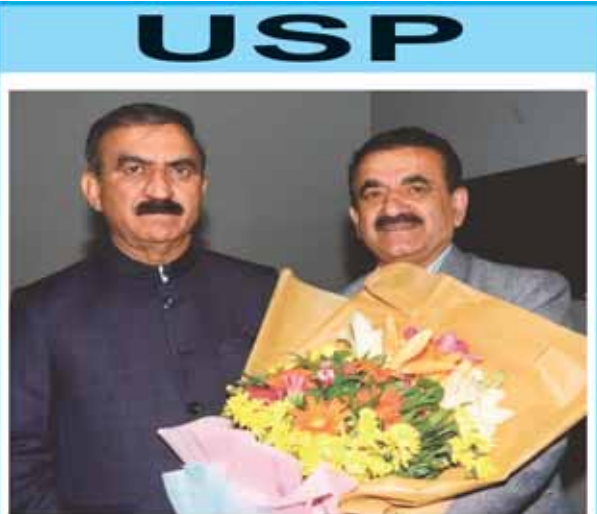


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## Vice Chancellor Professor Mahavir Singh met with courtesy with Chief Minister

Newly appointed Vice Chancellor of Himachal Pradesh University, Professor Mahavir Singh, today met Chief Minister Sukhinder Singh Sukhu. This was the first formal meeting of the newly appointed Vice Chancellor with the CM after the appointment.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister said that Himachal Pradesh University should not only move towards educational excellence, but should also set new records in research and expansion activities. He expressed confidence that Himachal Pradesh University under the leadership of the newly appointed Vice Chancellor will make significant progress in this direction. During this meeting of CM and VC, there was a detailed discussion on the development and future plans of the university. The Chief Minister also directed to complete the incomplete construction works going on at the university campus as soon as possible. He stressed that these works should be completed on priority basis so that students and teachers do not have any kind of inconvenience in the campus.



## Paraguayan President Meets Trident Chairman Emeritus Rajinder Gupta to Attract Investment

Chandigarh / Punjab: Underscoring its growing global influence and industrial leadership, Trident Group, one of India's foremost global textile conglomerates, played host to a high-level diplomatic engagement as the Hon'ble President of Paraguay, Mr. Santiago Peña, met with Mr. Rajinder Gupta, Chairman Emeritus of the Trident Group, during his visit to Mumbai. The meeting described by both sides as "very fruitful" forms a key part of Paraguay's strategic initiative to invite Indian investment into its rapidly expanding industrial landscape. President Peña personally sought an audience with Mr. Gupta, acknowledging Trident Group's exemplary contributions to sustainable manufacturing and its position as a global pioneer in value-driven industry. At the heart of the discussions was Paraguay's invitation to Trident and similar Indian enterprises to explore opportunities in key sectors, including home textiles, chemicals, and pulp & paper— areas where Trident has already established international excellence.