

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 of fans attempted to enter the stadium



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

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

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.

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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.

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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 Pahalgalam 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.

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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 buses entering Delhi. Effective from

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

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.

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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 Technology (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.

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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."

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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 Pahalgalam, 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.

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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.

Auction will be conducted online through <https://idfcgold.auctiontiger.net> on 13/06/2025 from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm. / <http://gold.samil.in> on 13/06/2025 from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm. By way of this publication the concerned borrower are hereby given final notice and last opportunity to pay the facility recalled amount, with all interest and charges before the schedule auction date failing which the jewellery will be auctioned. Please note that, if the auction does not get completed on the same day due to time limit the bank will re auction the pledged gold ornaments within next 7 days on the same terms and conditions. If the customer is deceased all the conditions pertaining to auction will be applicable to his legal heirs.

Panagariya: Most states for increase in tax revenue distribution to 50%

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

ChairmanChairman of the 16th Finance Commission, Arvind Panagariya, said here on Wednesday that the majority of 28 states have asked for an increase in tax revenue distribution between the Centre and states to 50 per cent.

Of the total revenue of the Union government the amount earmarked for devolution to states is called divisible pools. This amount is presently 41 per cent and the state governments want it to be increased to 50 per cent with the rest going to the Centre.

The Finance Commission was in the capital as part of its consultation visit to all states in the country. With the visit to UP, the Finance Commission has completed the process of consultation with the states.

At a press conference, Panagariya told reporters, "The previous Finance Commission had set the (tax revenue) share at 41 per cent for states and 59 per cent for Centre. That's how it is now."

"Like most other state governments, UP has also asked for the share to be raised to 50 per cent from the present 41 per cent. Out of the 28 states, more than 22 have made this recommendation," Panagariya said.

However, he declined to reveal if the Finance Commission's recommendations to the President of India would include this.

Panagariya noted that the convention in the past has been that the recommendations of the Finance Commission have been accepted in the exact form.

Sharing details of his meeting with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Panagariya said the UP chief minister had submitted a memorandum urging the Centre to raise Uttar Pradesh's share in central taxes from 41 per cent to 50 per cent. He said a detailed presentation of the finances of UP was made by the Finance Department.

UP has also sought a special DDA fund for targeted development schemes. The UP government presented its reform initiatives, which were appreciated by the Finance Commission, along with proposals to revise the weightage of key devolution criteria.

Sharing details of UP's key demands, Panagariya disclosed that the state has proposed changes to the devolution formula - suggesting a reduction in the weightage for income distance (from 45 per cent to 30 per cent), geographical area (15 per cent to 10 per cent), demographic performance (12.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent) and forest cover (10 per cent to 5 per cent), while seeking increases in the weightage for population (15 per cent to 22.5 per cent) and tax collection effort (2.5 per cent to 10 per cent).



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with 16th Finance Commission Chairman Arvind Panagariya during a meeting at Lok Bhavan in Lucknow on Wednesday

He also explained that the main job of the Finance Commission was to prepare a proposal for dividing taxes between the Central government and the states, which was then presented to the President of India.

He mentioned the 15th Finance Commission's recommendations for horizontal devolution as population 15 per cent, area 15 per cent, forest 10 per cent, tax effort 2.5 per cent and demographic performance 12.5 per cent. He added that the previous Finance Commission gave the highest weightage of 45 per cent to the income distance criterion.

Panagariya praised Uttar Pradesh as a well-governed state. He said that UP's tax collection was in proportion to GSDP, which was the highest in the country. He also noted that UP's fiscal deficit was within normal limits and its debt-to-GDP ratio was also within manageable levels.

UP Finance Minister Suresh Khanna said that the state government had placed the demand for greater share in the divisive pool of states with special consideration for Uttar Pradesh for additional funds. "Uttar Pradesh is leading on the path of development as our focus has been on bringing about improvement in the law and order and boosting development. We are working to achieve objectives of zero poverty and make UP a trillion-dollar economy," Khanna said.

The commission also meet representatives of Panchayati Raj institutions, urban local bodies and trade and industry and political parties.

The Samajwadi Party also submitted a memorandum to the commission seeking higher devolution of funds to UP.

On Thursday, the commission will leave for Varanasi from where it will proceed to New Delhi.

Yogi to attend pran pratishtha ceremony in Ayodhya today ... seek divine blessings on his birthday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ayodhya

June 5, 2025 will be etched in golden letters in the history of Ayodhya as the city prepares to witness a grand spiritual celebration. On this auspicious day, the *pran pratishtha* (consecration) of Raja Ram and other deities enshrined in the ramparts of the Ram Janmabhoomi complex will be held in a majestic event attended by the chief minister.

Coincidentally, June 5 also marks the 53rd birthday of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. On this special occasion, he will seek the blessings of Lord Ram, further deepening his long-standing spiritual bond with Ayodhya. Adding to the divinity of the day, the sacred city will also celebrate the *Trayodashi* birth anniversary of the Saryu river. The chief minister is also expected to participate in these festivities.

According to the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra trust, the pran pratishtha rituals will begin at 11 am, featuring special worship, Vedic chanting and havan ceremonies for the installation of the idols. Saints and seers have hailed the occasion as a historic milestone in Ayodhya's spiritual journey. The saint community of Ayodhya believes that Chief Minister Yogi has restored the lost glory of Ramnagari through the construction of the grand Ram temple and holistic development of the city. Over the past eight years, development projects worth over ₹32,000 crore have transformed Ayodhya's global identity.

Major advancements in road, rail and air connectivity, as well as the beautification of the city and expansion of tourism infrastructure, have positioned Ayodhya as a leading cultural and spiritual destination. Signature projects, such as Ram Katha Park, the revitalised Saryu riverfront and modern facilities at temple complexes, are reflections of this transformation. There is an air of celebration across Ayodhya as residents, saints and devotees prepare to mark the Chief Minister's birthday with devotion and grandeur. Special aartis and cultural programmes will take place on the banks of the Saryu river to mark Saryu Trayodashi Jannotsav. The district administration has made comprehensive security and law and order arrangements in anticipation of the large crowds, with thousands of devotees from India and abroad expected to attend the event. Anjani Seva Sansthan president Shashikant Maharaj eloquently captured the day's spiritual significance: "Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath Maharaj has lifted Lord Ram from a symbolic cradle and

enshrined Him in a grand temple. On June 5, Raja Ram will be ceremonially reinstalled – just as Guru Vashishtha performed His coronation in Treta Yuga. Yogi Maharaj will now perform His tilak. He has tirelessly worked to restore Ayodhya's glory and place it on the global map."

Recalling the city's transformation, he added, "Eight years ago, people feared to walk from Naya Ghat to Guptar Ghat after dark. Today, due to the chief minister's leadership, places like Aarti Ghat have become centres of devotion and celebration. Through Deepotsav, he conveyed to the world that Raja Ram is returning to Ayodhya. Now, that dream has come true." Maharaj also confirmed his participation in the Saryu Jayanti Mahotsav at Ram Ki Paidi, where he will inaugurate the celebrations.

Mahant Mithilesh Nandini Sharan emphasised the significance of a saint serving as the chief minister: "It is heartening that a monk has not only understood the spiritual pulse of the state, but has also energised it. Today, the people of Ayodhya no longer need to leave in search of livelihoods. From prasad sellers to garland vendors, local entrepreneurship is flourishing. External investors are also contributing to the city's hospitality sector. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi, Ayodhya has experienced significant cultural, economic and spiritual growth. Just search for Ayodhya on Google today – the first image you'll see is of Deepotsav."

Chamber of Commerce president Pankaj Gupta praised the chief minister's efforts: "In the double-engine government, Ayodhya has become a city of 'Nitya Mahotsav, Nitya Samangal' (daily celebrations and continuous prosperity). Business is thriving like never before. Along with attending the pran pratishtha, Chief Minister Yogi will also take part in the Saryu Jannotsav and a special programme marking two years of the municipal corporation's current tenure. His 53rd birthday will be celebrated with grandeur and joy." The chief minister's connection with Ayodhya transcends his political role. As a saint, a devotee of Ram, and a key figure in the Ram Mandir movement, his commitment to the spiritual uplift of Ayodhya is both personal and historic. Three generations of Gorakhnath Math have been actively involved in the Ram Mandir movement, and the chief minister's efforts continue that legacy. His leadership bridges the spiritual, political and developmental aspirations of the people, establishing Ayodhya as a global epicentre of Sanatan faith and culture.

Direct election of panchayat, block heads likely in UP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

Like Parliament and assembly, the government is thinking of direct election of district panchayat chairperson and block pramukh by the public in Uttar Pradesh.

Sources said the Uttar Pradesh government would soon send a proposal to the Central government in this regard. It is believed that if the Centre approves the UP government's proposal, then this new election process will be implemented in the upcoming panchayat elections.

A senior officer claimed that direct election of the members of the Panchayati Raj bodies will help in checking corruption as huge sums are offered by the contestants of district panchayat chairperson and block pramukh posts to get the vote of the elected representatives and even muscle power is used many times to rig these polls.

UP's Panchayati Raj Minister Om Prakash Rajbhar confirmed this move of the state government.

Rajbhar said that he had met Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath last weekend and discussed this matter.

He has reportedly proposed to the chief minister to direct the officials to prepare a

proposal regarding direct elections of district panchayat chairpersons and block pramukhs by the public.

The proposal should be prepared and sent to the Central government as soon as possible so that its preparation can be done in time, he added.

Rajbhar said the chief minister agreed to his proposal and also assured to send the proposal to the Centre soon.

Rajbhar said that he wanted this in the last election itself and would ask the officials to prepare a proposal for this.

During the meeting, Rajbhar's son Arvind Rajbhar was also present.

Rajbhar said that last month he had met Union Home Minister Amit Shah besides Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi and discussed this issue on which they also agreed to get the district panchayat chairperson and block pramukh elected directly by the public. Rajbhar said that now a blueprint would be prepared and sent to the Centre as soon as possible for approval so that the next elections of tier three bodies, scheduled next year, were held on the new pattern and all office-bearers of the Panchayati Raj were elected directly by the public.

CM to plant sapling 'maa ke naam' in Ayodhya today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

On the occasion of World Environment Day, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will plant a sapling in Ayodhya on Thursday under the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign, promoting environmental awareness.

The plantation will take place at Pushp Vatika near Ramkatha Park on the banks of the Saryu river.

Similar drives will be conducted in all districts of Uttar Pradesh. Additionally, the Environment Department will host a special programme at the Regional Science Centre in Aliganj here. According to Ayodhya's Divisional Forest Officer Prakhari Gupta, the chief minister will plant a Harishankari sapling, and all preparations for the event have

been completed. Following Chief Minister Yogi's call to action, the Environment Department will involve schoolchildren and youth in taking a pledge to 'End Plastic Globally' and work towards protecting the environment.

The main event in Lucknow will include street plays, speeches, drawing competitions and training sessions to spread environmental awareness. Experts and volunteers from various organisations will also participate in the event. Environment Director Sushant Sharma stated that all district magistrates have been instructed to organise similar events in their respective areas. In line with the chief minister's directions, environment-focused programmes and plantation drives under the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign will be organised throughout the state.

Gomti Nagar, Charbagh, Chowk among most-polluted areas

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Lucknow

The IITR Pre-Monsoon Ambient Air Quality report released on the eve of World Environment Day shows that Gomti Nagar is the most polluted residential area while Chowk and Charbagh are the most polluted commercial areas.

The PM10 and PM2.5 measured at all the nine locations which included four residential, four commercial and one industrial area shows that in Aliganj, Vikas Nagar, Indira Nagar and Gomti Nagar residential areas, the 24 hours' concentrations of PM10 were in the range of 81.1 to 223.2 µg/m3 with an average of 123.7 µg/m3. The average PM10 concentration 131.3 µg/m3 was highest at Gomti Nagar among the residential areas.

In Charbagh, Alambagh, Aminabad and Chowk commercial areas, the concentrations of PM10 were in the range of 92.2 to 344.3 µg/m3 with an average of 169.1 µg/m3, respectively. The average PM10 concentration 187.6 µg/m3 was highest at Charbagh among the commercial areas.

In industrial areas (Amausi), the average concentration of PM10 was 186.1 µg/m3. However, in all locations, PM10 levels exceeded the prescribed National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) of 100 µg/m3.

Similarly, in Aliganj, Vikas Nagar, Indira Nagar and Gomti Nagar residential areas, the 24 hours concentrations of PM2.5 were in the range of 49.3 to 108.4 µg/m3 with an average of 74.2 µg/m3. The average PM2.5 concentration 82.5 µg/m3 was highest at Gomti Nagar among the residential areas. In Charbagh, Alambagh, Aminabad and Chowk commercial areas, the concentration of PM2.5 was in the

range of 57.3 to 156.3 µg/m3 with an average of 98.4 µg/m3 respectively. The average PM2.5 concentration 107.3 µg/m3 was highest in Chowk among the commercial areas.

In the Amausi industrial area, the average concentration of PM2.5 was 114.5 µg/m3. However, in all locations, PM2.5 levels exceeded the prescribed National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) of 60 µg/m3.

The report says that dominant sources for the poor air quality of the city are vehicular emissions, construction, demolition activities, waste burning, cooking fuel combustion, road dust entrainment, etc.

Further, the increasing urban population and associated economic activities have resulted in demands for open cooking and street food stalls, increasing the cooking combustion-related emission load to ambient air.

The report has recommended that government action plans are also required to include and promote device-based technology solutions to control the city's ambient air pollution directly.

It says road works, flyover construction and demolition activities in the city should be planned during non-peak hours to avoid traffic jams and the relative additional load of vehicular exhaust contribution to air pollution.

The other recommendations include that construction and demolition activities in the city should be done with dust obstacles and follow the construction and demolition waste management rules. Retrofitting of particulate matter filters should be encouraged in vehicles and the usage of BS VI vehicle models should be fastened to avoid old-age vehicles. Wrong-side parking or blocking roads should be prohibited to prevent traffic jams and unforeseen incidents.

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2.	AA00087	AA79	6.	AB00363	AB353
3.	AB00090	AB00090	7.	AB00424	AB409
4.	AB00166	AB200	8.	AB00426	AB411

If any individual has a claim over any of the above lockers, they are requested to contact Punjab National Bank, Sultanpur Awadh Branch within 7 working days from the date of publication of this notice. Address: Punjab National Bank, Sultanpur Awadh Branch Contact: 9919076005 Email: bo3126@pnb.co.in If no claims are received within the stipulated time, the bank shall be free to take further action regarding the said lockers as per its prescribed rules and procedures. Branch Manager Punjab National Bank Sultanpur Awadh Branch Mobile: 9919076005

सूचना	
यूनिवर्सल स्पेशलिटी केमिकल्स प्रा. लि. कंपनी द्वारा निचे उल्लेख किये गए 100% WATER SOLUBLE MIXTURE OF FERTILIZER उत्तर प्रदेश राज्य में वितरण करने हेतु	
100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture NPK 00:30:30	100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture NPK 00:24:35
100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture NPK 09:00:28	100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture NPK 22:47:00
100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture NPK 00:09:46	100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture NPK 10:34:00
100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture NPK 20:48:00	100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture NPK 00:60:20
100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture NPK 00:40:37	100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture NPK 14:48:00
100% water soluble Fertilizer mixture PK 42:47+2.8 FE	

The water-soluble fertilizers are manufactured or imported in strict compliance with the Fertilizer (Control) Order (FCO), 1985, as specified in Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare notification. S.O. 2900 (E) dated 24.10.2025: duly amended vide notification no. S.O. 4120 (E) dated 30.12.2017.

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited
(erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)
CIN : L65110TN2014PLC097792
Registered Office: KRM Towers, 8 Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai - 600031.
TEL: +91 44 4564 4000 | FAX: +91 44 4564 4022.



PUBLIC NOTICE
GOLD AUCTION CUM INVITATION NOTICE
The Below mentioned borrower has been issued notices to pay the outstanding amount towards the credit facility against Gold ornament savailed by him from IDFC FIRST Bank Limited. Since the borrower has failed to repay the dues under the facility. We are constrained to conduct an auction of the pledged Gold ornaments on **13/06/2025**. In the event any surplus amount is realized from this auction, the same will be returned to the concerned borrower and if there is any deficit post the auction, the balance amount shall be recovered from the borrower through appropriate legal proceedings. IDFC FIRST Bank has the authority to remove the following account from the auction without prior intimation. Further IDFC FIRST Bank reserves the right to change the Auction Date without any prior notice.

Loan Account Number	Customer Name	Branch Name
148316388	CHANDAN SRIVASTAVA	VARANASI LANKA BRANCH
148583780	TARUN KUMAR SRIVASTAVA	VARANASI LANKA BRANCH

Auction will be conducted online through <https://idfcgold.auctiontiger.net> on **13/06/2025 from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm**. / <http://gold.samil.in> on **13/06/2025 from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm**. By way of this publication the concerned borrower are hereby given final notice and last opportunity to pay the facility recalled amount, with all interest and charges before the schedule auction date failing which the jewellery will be auctioned. Please note that, if the auction does not get completed on the same day due to time limit the bank will re auction the pledged gold ornaments within next 7 days on the same terms and conditions. If the customer is deceased all the conditions pertaining to auction will be applicable to his legal heirs.
Date:05-06-2025 Place:VARANASI

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Loan Account Number	Customer Name	Branch Name
163712356	DIKSHA SRIVASTAVA	LUCKNOW VIBHUTI KHAND
165839659	ANURAG JAISWAL	ASHOK MARG LUCKNOW
167196941	AKASH TIRPATHI	ALIGANJ LUCKNOW BRANCH

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Date:05-06-2025 Place: LUCKNOW

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Loan Account Number	Customer Name	Branch Name
167011691	PRASHANT JOHARI	BAREILLY CIVIL LINES
164566563	PRADEEP SINGH	BAREILLY CIVIL LINES
145303076	RAJESH KUMAR	BAREILLY CIVIL LINES

Auction will be conducted online through <https://idfcgold.auctiontiger.net> on **13/06/2025 from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm**. / <http://gold.samil.in> on **13/06/2025 from 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm**. By way of this publication the concerned borrower are hereby given final notice and last opportunity to pay the facility recalled amount, with all interest and charges before the schedule auction date failing which the jewellery will be auctioned. Please note that, if the auction does not get completed on the same day due to time limit the bank will re auction the pledged gold ornaments within next 7 days on the same terms and conditions. If the customer is deceased all the conditions pertaining to auction will be applicable to his legal heirs.
Date:05-06-2025 Place: BAREILLY

Govt making efforts to strengthen Ayurvedic education: Minister



UP minister Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' laying foundation stone of pharmacy building at Government Ayurveda College in Varanasi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for AYUSH, Food Safety and Drug Administration Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' participated as the chief guest in the programme organised at Government Ayurveda College and Hospital here on Tuesday.

On the occasion, he inaugurated the state-of-the-art CBC machine in the col-

lege hospital and the badminton court built in the girl's hostel premises and performed 'bhoomi puja' of the Ayurveda Pharmacy building.

In his address, the minister said that the state government was making continuous efforts to strengthen Ayurvedic education and medical facilities in the state. He said that the installation of Complete Blood Count (CBC) machine in the college hospital would increase the quality of laboratory services which would provide more

2 more test positive for COVID-19

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said on Wednesday that two more persons had tested positive for COVID-19, taking the number of cases in the district so far to 10.

These two patients two males, including a 64 year-old man who had recently returned from Delhi. Both are in home isolation now.

accurate and quick diagnosis to the general public. Along with this, he described the bhoomi puja of the Pharmacy building as a meaningful and far-reaching initiative in the field of manufacturing and research of Ayurvedic medicines.

Describing the badminton court built in the girl's hostel premises as essential for the physical development and mental fitness of girl students, he said that through sports, coordinated development of both education and health was possible.

On the occasion, the minister praised the progress of the Arthritis Centre operating in the college hospital. He said that after the inauguration of the Arthritis Centre in September last year, more than 6,000 patients were successfully treated in

the last eight months, which shows the quality and service spirit of this centre.

He also released a booklet and leaflet related to general information prepared by Dr Manish Mishra, in charge of the Arthritis Centre, to create awareness among arthritis patients. Principal Prof Sanjay Kumar Pandey, in his welcome speech, gave detailed information about the educational and medical progress of the college and said that the college would be equipped with more modern technical and physical resources in the coming time. He said that this institute was continuously moving towards becoming a leading centre of the state in the field of Ayurveda medicine.

The programme was conducted by Dr Vijay Kumar Rai and presided over by the acting principal of the college, Prof Sanjay Kumar Pandey.

In this event, Regional Ayurveda Officer Dr Saroj Shankar Ram, teachers of the college, doctors, in charge of Arthritis Centre Dr Manish Mishra, Prof Awadhesh Kumar, Senior Medical Officer Dr Arvind Singh, Dr Uma Singh, Public Relations Officer of AYUSH Minister Gaurav Rath, Dr Hardatt Shukla, Sanjay Mishra, Jai Vishwakarma, Dr Tina Singhal, Dr Dinanath Singh, Dr Ajay Kumar, Dr Premkant Yadav, Gulab Singh, Sunil Verma, Pramod Mishra, Ajay Mishra, Sunil Mishra, Sarvesh Verma besides doctors, teachers, employees and students of the college were present.



Women of the Maheshwari community carry 'kalash' filled with Ganga river water to offer to Baba Kashi Vishwanath during a procession on the occasion of Mahesh Navami in Varanasi on Wednesday. PTI

IIT (BHU) implements initiatives to make campus safer, more student-friendly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

The Indian Institute of Technology (BHU), Varanasi, has recently implemented a series of important initiatives to make its campus safer and more student-friendly. These new measures are designed to enhance security, ensure swift responses during emergencies, and create a comfortable environment for everyone on campus. Chief Proctor Dr Sanjay Singh provided insights into these initiatives, highlighting that the number of CCTV cameras on campus has been increased from 200 to 520. Of these, 49 cameras are strategically installed at main gates, hostel entrances, and key roads. These critical areas are monitored around the clock to ensure constant vigilance. In addition, patrolling vehicles have been stationed at various locations to offer immediate assistance in emergencies. Dr Singh mentioned that as part of enhanced

night-time security, transportation support is being provided for female students and bike patrolling has been stepped up. Two ambulances have also been stationed on campus to address medical emergencies. Currently, 229 security guards—including 216 men and 13 women—are deployed across the institute, providing 24/7 security. Furthermore, a special 'Pink Booth' has been set up as a dedicated security helpdesk for female students, where they can report concerns or seek assistance. Security personnel and intelligence teams routinely visit departments and faculty areas. Additional vehicle support has been made available for faculty, staff and students, covering late-night travel, emergency trips or medical transport needs, which can be accessed through the security office. The institute also assists in coordinating with external agencies, such as the police, whenever needed.

Dr Singh said that the institute was strictly enforcing its 'Green Zone' policy, preventing unauthorised external individuals from entering the campus. To maintain Green Zone security, proper entry records are maintained for all external visitors and students venturing out at night. Rigorous checks are being conducted on vehicles without number plates, sudden ID checks, and monitoring for overspeeding to ensure comprehensive safety.

These comprehensive efforts aim to ensure that faculty, staff and students always feel safe, supported and protected. The security team also responds promptly to lost items, fire emergencies, and even the smallest incidents in hostels or staff quarters. Director Prof Amit Patra remarked, "Ensuring campus security is among our top priorities. These improvements are part of our ongoing commitment to creating a positive and safe environment for learning and growth."

Researchers develop portable drowning monitoring system

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

Researchers from the Department of Computer Science and Technology at the Indian Institute of Technology (BHU), Varanasi, led by Dr Prasenjit Chanak, have successfully developed a portable drowning monitoring system designed to offer life-saving protection for swimmers and fishermen. This state-of-the-art safety device integrates real-time sensors and data analytics to detect early signs of drowning and immediately sends alerts to ensure rapid intervention. Compact, battery-operated and user-friendly, the system is tailored for individuals engaging in swimming or fishing activities, continuously monitoring vital health metrics such as heart rate, location, and depth. "If signs of distress or submersion are detected, the system sends instant alerts to nearby responders or mobile devices, enabling timely rescue actions," said

Dr Prasenjit Chanak, Assistant Professor and lead inventor of the system. "Our goal is to deliver a reliable, accessible safety tool that can save lives in high-risk water environments—from backyard pools to open seas." The device stores daily and weekly health performance data of users, offering valuable insights for long-term safety. It is especially useful for vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly, who require additional care during water-based activities. With its potential to significantly improve the safety of fishermen—particularly during extreme weather conditions like cyclones—this innovation promises to strengthen resilience and support the sustainability of India's fishing industry. IIT (BHU) has already secured a patent for the technology and is currently conducting commercial trials while exploring partnerships for large-scale deployment. This development marks a significant step forward in alignment

with the Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat initiatives, underlining the Institute's commitment to addressing real-world challenges through scalable and impactful homegrown innovations.

REVIEW MEETING

A review meeting of the programmes and schemes of Rural Development Department and MNREGA was held in the Collectorate auditorium under the chairmanship of DM Satyendra Kumar on Tuesday. The DM directed all the BDOs to do cross verification after verification of beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Awas/ Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana. He said that special care should be taken in verification in those development blocks where more applications have been received. He directed the officers to complete all verification work by September at any cost.

NTPC Rihand organises awareness, cleanliness initiatives

CORRESPONDENT ■ Sonebhadra

As part of Swachhta Pakhwada 2025, conducted from May 16 to 31, NTPC Rihand organised a series of awareness and cleanliness initiatives throughout the township and surrounding areas.

The campaign commenced on May 16 with an awareness rally ('prabhat pheri') from Triveni Club to Son Shakti Stadium via KVS Rihandnagar, followed by employees, associates and CISF personnel taking the 'Swachhata pledge'.

The next day cleanliness drives were carried out in township schools, including DAV, KVS and SJS with active involvement from school staff and volunteers.

On May 18 a cleanliness drive was held at Bijpur Market in which employees and associates took part. The following day a similar drive took place at the township Subzi Mandi, where vendors were educated about segregating dry and wet waste and encouraged to use proper dustbins. On May 20 a training session titled 'Waste to Wealth' demonstrated creative ways of



reusing discarded packing wood and household waste such as old clothes. Alongside this, an online cleanliness quiz was conducted for employees and township women, drawing a large number of participants. The campaign continued on May 21 with a focused drive against sin-

gle-use plastic featuring banners and digital displays and distribution of eco-friendly jute and paper bags among horticulture and housekeeping staff. On May 22 dustbins were provided at key public locations like Subzi Mandi and township shops, along with sensitisation drives on

proper waste disposal. On May 23 GEM girls at EDC were engaged through a hygiene and cleanliness talk promoting personal hygiene and reduced plastic consumption. From May 24 onwards, a tree plantation drive was conducted near the township guest house to promote green cover and sustainability. On May 25 a cleanliness drive took place at the township's main gate, followed by a community-driven drain cleaning initiative in Dodhar Village on May 26 with participation from villagers, local leaders and NTPC staff.

On May 27 essay and slogan writing competitions were held at EDC for employees, their wards and township women. A craft exhibition showcasing decorative items made from reused materials was organised on May 28 followed by street plays at Swagat Gate and Mansarovar Shopping Complex on May 29 to spread cleanliness awareness. The campaign concluded on May 30 with a drawing competition for GEM girls on the theme 'Swachh School' where creative artworks were displayed and the top entries were awarded.

Mishap claims two lives

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

A couple was killed while two others were injured when their car collided with a tree due to the driver dozing off on the Kanpur-Sagar highway. The road accident took place on Wednesday morning near Kaimaha on Kanpur-Sagar highway in Mahoba district. The driver dozed off and the speeding car collided with a roadside tree. In the accident, the couple travelling in the car died on the spot, while two others were seriously injured. They have been referred from the district hospital to Medical College, Jhansi.

As per reports, four people from Chhatrapur district of Madhya Pradesh had gone to Chitrakoot to visit Kamatanath along with their families. The car occupants were returning home around 5 am on Wednesday. The driver dozed off near Kaimaha on the highway and the car went out of control and collided with a tree on road side. Satish Khare (50) and his wife Rashmi Khare (45) died on the spot in the accident. The injured were referred to Jhansi. Ramakant Shrivastav and his wife

Sangeeta were seriously injured. The police reached the spot, took the injured out of the car and took them to the district hospital by an ambulance. The doctor referred them to Jhansi Medical College after their condition became critical.

11 PROPOSALS PASSED

As many as 11 proposals were passed including 10 per cent discount in house tax in the Nagar Nigam House meeting. There was a consensus in the House on the transfer fee, but it will not be implemented now as the matter is pending in the court. Along with this, it was decided that the convention centre will be named after former foreign minister Sushma Swaraj. The proceedings of the Nagar Nigam House started at around 3 pm. Before this, two minutes of silence was observed in memory of those killed in the Pahalgam terrorist attack and the mother of senior corporators Mahendra Pandey and Adarsh Gupta. In the agenda of the House, it was announced to install 30 poles and street lights in each ward.

Cleanliness drive conducted



BoB officials carrying out a cleanliness drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Kanpur

The Bank of Baroda, Kanpur Rural Region, under the leadership of Regional Head Santosh Kumar organised a 'Wakethon' and cleanliness drive on the theme of beat plastic pollution on the occasion of World Environment Day. All the staff members of Kanpur Rural region participated in the campaign. A cleanliness drive was conducted in the area around the Moti Jheel Park. Through the event the harms of sin-

gle-use plastic and measures to prevent it were highlighted and the message of 'Throwing plastic is easy, but it harms the earth' was given to the city residents.

MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED

A delegation of the Merchants Chamber of Uttar Pradesh met the Labour Commissioner Markandey Shahi and submitted a memorandum regarding the issues arising from the Community Innovation Survey (CIS). The delegation comprised Prem Manohar Gupta, Sushil Sharma and Yadvendra Singh Sachan.

Labour Commissioner Shahi assured the delegation that if any kind of harassment takes place during the CIS survey, strict action would be taken against those responsible. He also stated that efforts will be made to simplify and streamline the survey process. Additionally, he said that entrepreneurs would be made aware of the CIS survey process and that the compliance guidelines would be provided in a simplified and understandable manner. Furthermore, it would be clearly communicated to the entrepreneurs which types of industries were subject to specific compliance rules and which were exempted, he added.

Awareness rally taken out at Varanasi City stn

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Varanasi

An awareness rally was taken out at Varanasi City railway station on the eve of World Environment Day on Wednesday in which passengers were made aware about water conservation, saving, keeping water in thermos steel and metal pots.

Similarly, on the penultimate day under the ongoing Environment Protection Week at Banaras station, passengers were made aware to use thermos bottles instead of plastic bottles and to bring food in home tiffins instead of plastic bags. Besides, the passengers were informed about the harm caused to us and the environment by plastic. A rally was also taken out for saving the environment and the message of 'Save Environment, Save Life' was given.

Besides, passengers were also made aware to use thermos bottles from home instead of plastic bottles at Prayagraj Rambagh station, as well as to bring food in home tiffin instead of plastic bags. They were informed about the harm caused by plastic, as well as a message was given by taking out a rally to save the environment.

Stress on spending time in sports, outdoor activities



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Prayagraj

The Women Welfare Committee of Prayagraj Division successfully concluded a 16-day summer camp for children of 'Bal Vatika', a school run by the committee for children of railway employees. As many as 42 children participated in the camp held from May 19 to June 4.

During it the children were taught yoga, dance, art, craft and utilisation of waste materials. Besides, training was provided in badminton, hurdle race and physical training (PT) to promote physical well-being. Children learned to prepare dishes like lahiya, bhelupuri etc without using fire, electric stove or gas stove. Emphasis was laid on spending time in sports and outdoor activities instead of spending too

much time on screen.

The closing ceremony was attended by Divisional Railway Manager Rajneesh Agarwal, as the chief guest. Additional Divisional Railway Manager (Infra), Naveen Prakash, Vice-President of Women Welfare Committee Taruna Prakash, Secretary, Preeti Kesarwani, Treasurer, Niharika Singh and School in charge, Suman Gupta were present on the occasion. As part of the event, the office-bearers of Women Welfare Committee conducted tree plantation in the Government Railway Police Colony to promote environmental awareness and sustainability.

The summer camp was organised under the leadership of Vandana Agarwal, President of the Women Welfare Committee and supported by teachers of

Bal Vatika. The event showcased the committee's commitment to providing holistic development opportunities for children.

PAPERLESS TICKETING

The Prayagraj Division of North Central Railway has seen a significant increase in the adoption of paperless ticketing through the Unreserved Ticketing System (UTS) Mobile App. This initiative has not only enhanced passenger convenience but also contributed to environmental protection by reducing paper usage.

PRO Amit Singh said that in the current financial year 2025-26, approximately 6.20 lakh passengers have travelled with 1.73 lakh tickets booked through the UTS App.

VALEDICTORY FUNCTION ON JUNE 6

The Basic Flying Training School (BFTS) of the Indian Air Force situated at Air Force Station Bamrauli, Prayagraj, is set to host the valedictory function on June 6. The momentous occasion will mark the culmination of rigorous training for 215 APC (Helicopters) and ICG Stage-I courses, celebrating the achievements of the next generation of aviators.

BJP slams Rahul’s surrender-barb at Prime Minister Narendra Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICEN ■ New Delhi

The BJP on Wednesday slammed Rahul Gandhi for his surrender-barb at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying it is not only a grave insult to the armed forces and country but also no less than treason.

If any Pakistani had made such a claim, “We would have laughed at him”, BJP president JP Nadda said, stressing that after the havoc inflicted on Pakistan by Operation Sindoor, even its army and prime minister could not dare to speak what Rahul Gandhi was saying. “This is no less than treason,” he said.

“Rahul Gandhi, you, your party and your leaders might have surrendered because this has been your history, but Bharat never surrenders.

“Surrender is in your party Congress’ dictionary, it is in your DNA. You surrendered to terrorism, surrendered in Sharmal-Shekh, surrendered at the table in Shimla after winning the 1971 war, surrendered in the Indus Water Treaty. And even surrendered to the Muslim League at the time of independence of the country”, Nadda said in a series of social media posts.

At a press conference, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said Rahul Gandhi’s remarks reflect a “sick and dangerous” mindset and added the Congress leader had surpassed even Pakistan’s army chief, prime minister and the terrorist masterminds based there in speaking in support of their country.



BJP president JP Nadda

PTI

Targeting Rahul Gandhi, he called the Congress leader “Rahul Munir” and “Rahul Sharif”, using the surnames of the Pakistani army chief and prime minister.

Citing a string of historical developments on the Congress watch, from India’s division to China and Pakistan occupying parts of Indian territory to Gandhi lamenting the Western indifference to the alleged democratic slide in India under Modi, he said history is full of such “surrenders” from the Nehru-Gandhi family and lauded Prime Minister Modi as the “lion of mother India”.

“Rahul Gandhi and the Congress may have a history of surrender but Bharat will never surrender before anyone,” Trivedi said.

He also took a clear swipe at US President Donald Trump, whose repeated claims of mediating the stoppage of military actions from India and Pakistan have given the opposition a handle to attack the Modi Government.

The BJP spokesperson referred to Trump’s recent post about a conspiracy theory that his predecessor Joe Biden was killed in 2020 and replaced by a robotic clone.

“How much can one trust. I want to ask even the US Government as he made the comment on his official Truth Social handle. It will be better if Rahul Gandhi tells us if he believes in this,” he said, noting that the Indian armed forces and the Ministry of External Affairs have clarified

numerous times that there was no third party mediation.

He also mentioned how during the presidential campaign, Trump had said that he once told Modi he can “stop the country (Pakistan) which has been annoying India but the Indian prime minister insisted, ‘No, no, we have taught them lessons several times. I will do it’”.

Nadda said on social media, “Rahul Gandhi dubbing unmatched valour of Indian forces as surrender is not only unfortunate but also a grave insult to the Indian military, the nation and 140 crore Indians.”

Trivedi also noted the controversial comments of various leaders of the opposition INDIA bloc, which met on Tuesday and demanded a special session of Parliament following Operation Sindoor, and claimed the alliance has been unmasked. “INDIA is in their name but Pakistan is in their heart,” he alleged.

He said Rahul Gandhi’s comments have shown that he lacked the maturity and seriousness expected of the Leader of Opposition.

If the Congress leader made these remarks on his own, then it raises a serious question over his loyalty, he said, adding that Rahul Gandhi should consider changing advisers if they were behind it.

Rahul Gandhi had on Tuesday alleged at a Congress event in Bhopal that Modi surrendered after a call from US President Trump during the India-Pakistan military conflict.

Congress hits back at BJP for criticism of Rahul Gandhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICEN ■ New Delhi

The Congress on Wednesday said it is wrong to think that “Narendra Modi is India and India is Narendra Modi”, as it slammed the ruling BJP for its criticism of Rahul Gandhi over his dig at the prime minister and doubled down on the “Narendra-surrender” jibe.

Amid the BJP’s criticism of his remarks, Rahul Gandhi reposted a post he had made on social media on June 21, 2020, in which he had said, “Narendra Modi is actually Surrender Modi”.

Congress’s media and publicity department head Pawan Khara claimed that Rahul Gandhi’s “Narender surrender” remarks encapsulate how the prime minister has time and again “surrendered India’s national interests in situations where the requisite deft and the ‘vishwaguru’ status should have been shown.

“The BJP people were making a film for their hero for the last 11 years — ‘Muqaddar Ka Sikandar’. But when the film was ready, it turned out to be ‘Narender Ka Surrender’. Actually, there is no injection of bravery, but it is in-built in the character of a person. The history of BJP-RSS people has been of cowardice”, Khara told a press conference at the Congress’s Indira Bhawan headquarters here.

When such a person takes over the reins of the country, its future comes in danger, which is being witnessed at present, he claimed.

The Congress leader’s remarks came a day after Rahul Gandhi said in Bhopal that “as soon as Trump signalled from there,

picked up the phone and said, ‘what are you doing Modiji? Narender, surrender’. And Modiji obeyed Trump’s orders with ‘ji Huzoor’”.

Urging people to remember 1971, Rahul Gandhi said back then, a phone call had not come but the United States had sent its 7th fleet, weapons and an aircraft carrier, but prime minister Indira Gandhi did not surrender and said she would go by national interest.

Referring to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Rahul Gandhi said they are habituated to writing “surrender letters” since Independence.

The BJP has accused Gandhi of insulting the armed forces with his “surrender” barb at Modi, saying it amounted to undermining the success of Operation Sindoor.

BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said the Congress leader has surpassed even Pakistan’s army chief, prime minister and the terror masterminds based there in speaking in support of the neighbouring country, and alleged that his jibes reflect a sick and dangerous mindset. Hitting back at the BJP, Khara said, “When the brave Indian Army had Pakistan on its knees, (US President Donald) Trump called and Narendra Modi surrendered. Trump said many times that we got the ceasefire done by threatening about trade, but Modi has not given a reply to Trump till date.”

“He will not even answer, because the name is Narender, the work is surrender — this is the reality and the truth,” he added.

States asked to ensure preparedness on COVID-19

PIONEER NEWS SERVICEN ■ New Delhi

All states have been instructed to ensure availability of oxygen, isolation beds, ventilators and essential COVID-19 medicines in view of rising cases of Covid, official sources said on Wednesday.

A series of technical review meetings were held on June 2 and 3 under the chairpersonship of Director General of Health Services (DGHS) Dr Sunita Sharma.

The meeting was held with representatives of Disaster Management Cell, Emergency Management Response (EMR) Cell, National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) and central Government hospitals in Delhi and with representatives from all states and Union territories to evaluate the current COVID-19 situation and preparedness measures.

According to the sources, state and district surveillance units under IDSP are closely monitoring Influenza Like Illness (ILI) and Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI). “Testing is recommended for all admitted SARI cases and 5 per cent of ILI

cases as per guidelines and positive SARI samples are sent for Whole Genome Sequencing through the ICMR VRDL network,” an official source said.

As of June 4, India reported 4,302 active cases, with an increase of 864 cases in the past 24 hours. The official sources said most cases are mild and managed under home care. Since January 1, 44 deaths have been reported, primarily among individuals with pre-existing illnesses, they said. “States have been instructed to ensure availability of oxygen, isolation beds, ventilators and essential medicines,” the source said. A mock drill assessing oxygen supply systems (PSA plants, LMO tanks, MGPS lines) was conducted on June 2. Facility-level preparedness mock drills are planned for Wednesday and Thursday.

The official sources advised people to practise hand hygiene, cough etiquette, and avoid crowded places when unwell and that individuals with acute respiratory illness should self-monitor and seek medical care if symptoms worsen.

Trusted sources such as health ministry’s website and PIB releases should be followed to avoid misinformation and rumours, they said.

PM Modi to launch initiative to reforest Aravalli range on World Environment Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICEN ■ New Delhi

On the occasion of World Environment Day (June 5), Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch a special initiative aimed at reforesting the 700-km Aravalli mountain range extending from Delhi to Gujarat.

According to a statement issued by the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), Modi will plant a banyan sapling under the ‘*EK Ped Maa Ke Naam*’ initiative at the Bhagwan Mahavir Vanasthali Park in the national capital on Thursday morning.

This will be part of the ‘Aravalli Green Wall Project’, which aims to reforest the 700-km Aravalli range, the statement said.

The project is a major initiative to spread green cover in the five km buffer area around India’s oldest mountain range in 29 districts of four states, including Delhi, Rajasthan, Haryana and Gujarat.

It aims to boost biodiversity of the Aravallis through afforestation, reforestation and restoration of water bodies. It will also help improve soil fertility, water availability and climate resilience of the region, the PMO said.

It said the project will benefit the local communities by providing them with

employment and income generation opportunities.

The Prime Minister will also flag off 200 electric buses under Delhi government’s sustainable transport initiative, promoting clean urban mobility and symbolising the nation’s collective responsibility towards ecological balance.

The Prime Minister will also flag off 200 electric buses under Delhi Government’s sustainable transport initiative, promoting clean urban mobility

The Chief Ministers of Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat will participate in the launch of the project, environment ministry officials said.

They said around 1,000 nurseries will be developed in 29 districts falling in the Aravalli range as part of the project.

According to the government, this initiative will be crucial in combating air pollution in the region, meeting India’s climate goal of creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent and restoring 26

million hectares of degraded land by 2030.

The Government unveiled the Aravalli Green Wall initiative in March 2023. The 5-km-wide green belt buffer will cover 6.45 million hectares across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi. Within this buffer zone, about 42 per cent (2.7 million hectares) of land is degraded.

The Aravalli range acts as a natural barrier against desertification, preventing the expansion of the Thar desert and protecting cities such as Delhi, Jaipur and Gurugram. The Aravallis are also the source of important rivers such as the Chambal, Sabarmati and Luni. Its forests, grasslands and wetlands support endangered plant and animal species.

However, deforestation, mining, livestock grazing and human encroachment are worsening desertification, damaging aquifers, drying up lakes and reducing the range’s ability to sustain wildlife.

Of the total degraded area, 81 per cent is in Rajasthan, 15.8 per cent in Gujarat, 1.7 per cent in Haryana and 1.6 per cent in Delhi. Rajasthan’s Udaipur district has the highest degraded area within the buffer zone (0.675 million hectares), which is more than the combined degraded area of Haryana, Delhi and Gujarat (0.568 million hectares).

Clerics urge Muslim community to follow Government guidelines for Eid sacrifice

PIONEER NEWS SERVICEN ■ New Delhi

Ahead of Eid-ul-Azha, Muslim clerics on Wednesday urged members of the community to strictly follow the government guidelines while performing sacrifice and avoid sharing pictures of slaughtered animals on social media.

In his message to Muslims, Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind President Maulana Arshad Madani said that there is no substitute for sacrifice in Islam as it is a religious duty.

A person on whom sacrifice is obligatory must perform this obligation, he said.

However, Madani said that in view of the current situation, it is important that Muslims take precautionary measures on their own and avoid advertising and sharing of pictures of slaughtered animals on social media.

The Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid, Delhi urged the Muslim community to refrain from performing animal sacrifices in open areas or on the streets.

The festival is to be celebrated on June 7.

Rajnath Singh hails Australia support to India’s response to Pahalgam terror attack

PIONEER NEWS SERVICEN ■ New Delhi

India and Australia on Wednesday resolved to further boost their strategic ties with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh hailing Canberra’s unequivocal support to New Delhi’s resolute response to the barbaric Pahalgam terror attack.

Rajnath Singh held wide-ranging talks with his visiting Australian counterpart Richard Marles focusing on various aspects of bilateral defence cooperation as well as New Delhi’s “extreme challenges” along its border with Pakistan.

Marles is the first senior Australian minister to visit India after Prime Minister Anthony Albanese retained power for a second term following victory of his Labor party in the parliamentary elections last month.

His visit to New Delhi coincides with the fifth anniversary of the firming up of India Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership that facilitated deeper defence ties between the two sides, especially in the

maritime domain.

Following the meeting, Rajnath Singh thanked Australia for its unequivocal support to India’s “resolute response against the barbaric act of terror in Pahalgam.” The defence minister said he and Marles reviewed the “full range of the India- Australia defence partnership during the extremely fruitful”.

His personal commitment and leadership in strengthening bilateral defence cooperation has emerged as an important pillar of our strategic partnership

— RAJNATH SINGH, DEFENCE MINISTER

“His personal commitment and leadership in strengthening bilateral defence cooperation has emerged as an important pillar of our comprehensive strategic partnership,” Rajnath Singh said in a social media post. Marles, also Australia’s deputy prime minister, is in India as part of his four-nation trip to South and Southeast

Asia. It is learnt that one of the priority areas of the talks was to bolster bilateral defence ties in the Indo-Pacific — a region that has witnessed increasing Chinese military muscle-flexing.

In his opening remarks, Rajnath Singh made a mention of achieving “significant milestones” in the bilateral defence ties and hoped to work with “renewed momentum” to ensure further growth.

He also talked about India facing “extreme challenges” at its western border, apparently referring to Pakistan-backed cross-border terrorism.

In his remarks, Marles said, Australia’s relationship with India is that of the “highest priority.” He also conveyed Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s message of solidarity with India over the Pahalgam attack. We want to make clear that Australia stands with India and all countries in combating terrorism, he said.

The Australian deputy prime minister also welcomed cessation of hostilities between India and Pakistan.

MHA asks States, UTs to utilise Central fund to help poor prisoners obtain bail

PIONEER NEWS SERVICEN ■ New Delhi

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has asked all the states and union territories to provide financial assistance from a Central fund to poor prisoners who are unable to secure bail or release from prison due to non-payment of fine owing to financial constraints.

In a communication, the MHA has conveyed to all the States and Union Territories to avail the funds made available by it from where they can draw an appropriate amount to provide benefits to the eligible prisoners.

Funds to the States and UTs are provided through the Central Nodal Agency (CNA). The National Crime Records Bureau has been designated as the CNA for this scheme.

“As you are aware, the Ministry of Home Affairs had introduced the ‘Support to Poor Prisoners Scheme’ in May, 2023, with the objective of providing financial assistance to States and UTs for extend-

ing relief to poor prisoners who are unable to secure bail or release from prison due to non-payment of fine on account of financial constraints,” the communication said. However, the MHA said, despite repeated follow-up, funds have remained unutilised as many States and UTs have not identified the eligible prisoners and have not provided the benefit of the scheme to them.

While a few States and UTs have utilised the funds, the overall implementation of the scheme by them has not been very encouraging, it said.

The MHA has already issued guidelines and a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the implementation of the scheme.

As part of the guidelines, States and UTs were advised to constitute an ‘empowered committee’ in each district and an ‘oversight committee’ at the State headquarters level. According to the guidelines, these committees are responsible for sanctioning financial aid to the eligible prisoners.

appropriate measures to address the misconduct,” the CJI said.

The CJI’s remarks come in the backdrop of Allahabad High Court’s Justice Yashwant Varma facing allegations of corruption after the discovery of a large amount of cash from his official residence in Delhi.

CJI Gavai said in every democracy, the judiciary must not only dispense justice, but also be seen as an institution that deserves to hold truth to power and the terms “judicial legitimacy” and “public confidence” are interconnected.

“Legitimacy and public confidence are not secured through coercion of command but through the credibility earned by courts. Any erosion of this confidence risks weakening the judiciary’s constitutional role as the ultimate arbiter of

rights. Transparency and accountability are democratic virtues,” CJI Gavai said.

Dealing with the often debated issue of post-retirement jobs taken by judges, he said the timing and nature of such post-retirement engagements could undermine the public’s trust in the judiciary’s integrity, as it could create a perception that judicial decisions were influenced by the prospect of future government appointments or political involvement.

“Another point of discussion is post-retirement jobs taken by judges. In India, judges are subject to a fixed retirement age. If a judge takes up another appointment with the Government immediately after retirement, or resigns from the bench to contest elections, it raises significant ethical concerns and invites public scrutiny,” he said.

Instances of corruption, misconduct within judiciary impact public confidence: CJI Gavai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICEN ■ New Delhi

Chief Justice of India BR Gavai has said instances of corruption and misconduct in the judiciary have a negative impact on public confidence, potentially eroding faith in the integrity of the system as a whole.

Speaking at a roundtable conference in the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom on “Maintaining Judicial Legitimacy and Public Confidence”, he also spoke about post-retirement jobs taken by judges and said if a judge takes up another appointment with the Government immediately after retirement, or resigns from the bench to contest elections, it raises “significant ethical concerns and invites public scrutiny”.

On the issue of corruption, the CJI said

whenever these instances of corruption and misconduct have come to light, the Supreme Court has consistently taken immediate and appropriate measures to address the misconduct.

“Furthermore, every system, no matter how robust, is susceptible to issues of professional misconduct. Sadly, there have been instances of corruption and misconduct that have surfaced even within the judiciary. Such occurrences inevitably have a negative impact on public confidence, potentially eroding faith in the integrity of the system as a whole.

“However, the path to rebuilding this trust lies in the swift, decisive, and transparent action taken to address and resolve these issues. In India, when such instances have come to light, the Supreme Court has consistently taken immediate and appro-



Chief Justice of India BR Gavai

FILE PHOTO

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 emphasised.



RAJDEEP PATHAK

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 terrorism 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



ASHA IYER KUMAR

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 'writerly' 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

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

Elon Musk's stint at the US Govt ends

After winning the presidential election, Donald Trump, who is himself an industrialist, appointed Elon Musk, the richest person in the world, as his chief adviser. Despite not being used to the Government environment, Musk took various decisions to achieve his goals.

However, these decisions were not very successful, nor did the expected results come. To reduce the expenses of the Trump Government, Musk decided to reduce Government staff and sent employees from many departments home. Elon Musk cut the funds given to domestic and international organisations. Many unpleasant steps were taken to save the Government's expenses. The reduction of staff created widespread resentment. There were protests against the Tesla company. Due to this, Elon Musk and his company suffered a huge loss on a personal level. Musk had a dispute with Trump's close Government officials. Musk had spent \$250 million on Trump's campaign.

Musk had entered the Trump administration to bring about changes in American politics and the Government system. But due to the lack of expected success and the impact on the sales of American citizens and, most importantly, Tesla cars, Musk's "Space X" came to the ground. As a result, Elon Musk has stepped down from the position of special adviser in the Trump administration, because the sales figures of his Tesla company have fallen.

DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR | MUMBAI

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

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 | JANANTPUR

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 percent in April 2024 which had fallen to minus 0.1 percent 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

THE CENTRE ALSO INCREASED THE KHARIF CROP MINIMUM SUPPORT PRICE (MSP) FOCUSING ON PULSES, OLSEEDS 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

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.

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

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 sal 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 Samridhhi — 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 Samridhhi, 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, Dhyan 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 Dhyan 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 rishis had mapped these frequencies to various deities through sound.

Dhyan 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.

Dhyan 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)



SHIVAJI SARKAR



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 Dhyan 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.

Dhyan 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, Dhyan 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)

Tight security ahead of PM’s Jammu and Kashmir visit

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ Jammu

A multi-layered security apparatus has been put in place across Jammu and Kashmir ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s historic visit to Katra on June 6, to inaugurate the world’s highest railway bridge, the Chenab Bridge and flag off the much-anticipated Vande Bharat Express train service between Katra and Srinagar. This is the Prime Minister’s first visit to the Union Territory since Operation Sindoor, in response to the deadly April 22 Pahalgam terror attack that claimed 26 lives, mostly tourists.

The visit, which also includes the formal launch of the 272-km Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project, is seen as a significant step toward integrating the Kashmir Valley with the rest of India through a robust rail network.

However, the event’s timing, following recent security challenges, has prompted authorities to implement stringent measures to ensure an incident-free inauguration.

Security forces have been placed on high alert across Jammu and Kashmir, with a multi-layered security grid deployed in and around Katra, the base camp for the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, and along the Katra-Srinagar railway corridor.

According to official sources, sharpshooters from the Jammu and Kashmir Police’s Special Operations Group (SOG) and Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) have been strategically positioned at key vantage points, including railway stations, bridges, and tunnels along the



route. Drones equipped with high-resolution cameras are conducting round-the-clock aerial surveillance to monitor for suspicious activities, particularly along the newly completed railway track.

The Chenab Bridge, a marvel of engineering standing 359 meters above the riverbed in Reasi district, and the Anji Khad Bridge, India’s first cable-stayed railway bridge, are under intense security scrutiny due to their strategic importance.

A fresh security audit of the entire Katra-Srinagar railway track was conducted following the Pahalgam attack, with additional police personnel deployed and infrastructure fortified to address vulnerabilities. High-tech cameras have been installed inside tunnels and along bridges to ensure real-time monitoring and prevent any untoward incidents.

In Jammu city, security has been signif-

icantly beefed up, with increased vigilance at markets, entry and exit points, and key installations. Checkpoints, or “nakas,” have been set up along major road links, including the Jammu-Srinagar route, with vehicles being thoroughly frisked.

A senior security official told The Pioneer, “We have left no stone unturned to ensure the Prime Minister’s visit and the launch of the train services proceed without any disruptions.

The deployment of sharpshooters, drones, and additional forces reflects our commitment to maintaining peace and stability during this high-profile event.”

The Prime Minister is scheduled to address a public rally at Katra Stadium, where he is likely to elaborate on the significance of Operation Sindoor and the government’s commitment to the region’s stability and progress.

Final stretch of Nagpur-Mumbai expressway open for traffic

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ Mumbai

The third and final stretch of the 701 km Nagpur-Mumbai Super Communication Expressway — from Igatpuri in Nashik district to Amane in Thane district — will be thrown open to traffic on Thursday, marking the completion of one of the country’s longest Greenfield road projects.

Known formally as Hindu Hrudaysamrat Balasaheb Thackeray Maharashtra Samruddhi Mahamarg, the Nagpur-Mumbai Super Expressway passes through Maharashtra’s 10 districts and 390 villages and it touches prominent urban regions of Amravati, Aurangabad and Nashik.

After Phase-III commissioning, the entire 701-km Expressway will be fully functional which will reduce the travel time between Mumbai and Nagpur from 16 hours to just eight — almost half the time needed earlier. The project is designed for a speed limit of 150 km per hour.

Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis along with Deputy chief ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar will formally inaugurate the final 76 km stretch from Igatpuri in Nashik to Amane in Thane, the Phase-III of the project, on Thursday.

Constructed at a cost of ₹55,000 crore, the Nagpur-Mumbai Super Communication Expressway promises to bring about development in as many as 24 districts Vidarbha, Marathwada and North Maharashtra regions of the state.

The Samruddhi Mahamarg — as the Nagpur-Mumbai Expressway is also

known as — will provide connectivity to the Delhi Mumbai Expressway, Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT), Bengaluru-Chennai Economic Corridor, Western Dedicated Freight Corridor, Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor, Chennai-Vizag Economic Corridor and Golden Quadrilateral.

It will also provide access to tourist locations like Ajanta Ellora Caves, Shirdi, Verul and Lonar.

In all, there are 33 major bridges, 274 minor bridges, 65 flyovers and six tunnels along the Nagpur-Mumbai Expressway

It may be recalled that the Phase-I of the project from Nagpur to Shirdi was thrown open to traffic by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 11, 2022, in presence of then chief minister Eknath Shinde, and his then deputy Devendra Fadnavis.

The first phase between Nagpur and Shirdi involved a distance of 520 km.

Later on May 26, 2023, Shinde — along with Fadnavis, CM, inaugurated the Phase-II of the expressway from Shirdi to Igatpuri in Nashik district, involving a distance of around 80 km.

The Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation Ltd (MSRDC) has been the nodal agency for the implementation of the project.

The just-completed Phase-III has been jointly funded by the MSRDC and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI).

It features three key interchanges at Igatpuri, Kutghar in Shahapur and Amane near Thane, as well as India’s longest road tunnel, stretching 7.8 km through the Kasara Ghat region.

SC issues notice to MP on scribes’ plea alleging assault by cops

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought Madhya Pradesh Government’s response on a plea of two journalists who were thrashed by police for reporting on illegal sand mining activities.

A bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Satish Chandra Sharma, however, refused to grant interim protection from arrest to them.

The bench agreed to hear the pleas of Shashikant Goyal and Amarkant Singh Chouhan, and issued notices to Madhya Pradesh and the NCT of Delhi for their responses and posted the matter on June 9.

The counsel appearing for the petitioners pressed for interim protection but the court said, “Let the other side respond. Let the facts be brought by the state also. We are listing it on Monday (June 9).”

The top court asked why the petitioners did not make the superintendent of police of Bhind a party to the petition.

“It is very easy to say all kinds of things against an IPS officer without making him a party. Whatever comes to your mind, just put it in black and white against the IPS officer,” it added.

The bench also asked why the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and the NCT of Delhi were made parties.

New details emerge on Operation Sindoor

Continued from >> P1 The C-130 was being used for logistical support and was parked at a forward operating base near Multan when the drone strike occurred, sources said.

The IAF also undertook precision strikes against unmanned systems. A hangar housing multiple Chinese-origin Wing Loong series medium-altitude, long-endurance drones was destroyed. According to sources, over ten UAVs were destroyed in this single strike.

Also, Indian air defence units intercepted and downed several Pakistani UAVs over Indian airspace during the conflict, particularly over sectors in Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan.

Reports referring to Pakistani military dossier on Operation Bunyan un Marsoos, Islamabad’s codename for its military operation revealed that India struck at least seven more targets than acknowledged in official Indian state-

ments.

According to maps and data in the dossier, Indian airstrikes targeted facilities in Peshawar, Jhang, Hyderabad (Sindh), Gujrat (Punjab), Bahawalnagar, Attock, and Chor.

The additional strike locations, all of which host key Pakistani military or dual-use infrastructure, confirm that Indian air operations reached far deeper into Pakistani territory than previously known.

Operation Sindoor commenced on the night of May 6-7 with coordinated strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistani Punjab and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Nine key targets were identified, including the Jaish-e-Mohammed headquarters in Bahawalpur, Lashkar-e-Taiba camp in Muridke, and facilities in Muzaffarabad, Kotli, Rawalakot, Bhimber, and Chakwal.

IIT Delhi student found dead in hostel room

Continued from >> P1 Once inside, the police found the student lying unconscious on his bed. Medical personnel from the IIT health center arrived shortly afterward and declared him dead on the spot. There were no visible signs of

external injury on the body, although traces of vomit were found on the floor near the bed, raising suspicions of a possible medical emergency or toxic ingestion. The police have not confirmed the cause of death as a full forensic and post-

mortem report is yet to come. “The Crime and Forensic teams were called to the scene for a thorough examination. Samples have been collected, and the room has been sealed for investigation,” an officer added. The deceased’s body has

Bhutto fact-checked in UN on India claims

Continued from >> P1 The remark visibly unsettled Bhutto, who offered no rebuttal and merely acknowledged, “As far as the operations are concerned, you’re absolutely right.”

The journalist’s reference was to the media briefings on Operation Sindoor held by Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, who gained nationwide prominence along with another woman officer, Wing Commander Vyomika Singh.

Bilawal Bhutto is currently leading a

parliamentary delegation to the United States, tasked with presenting Islamabad’s version of recent regional tensions. The visit comes in the wake of Operation Sindoor, India’s military response to the April 22 terror attack. The Pakistani team is in the US around the same time an Indian parliamentary delegation led by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor is visiting the US to highlight India’s policy of zero-tolerance to terrorism and expose Pakistan’s support to terrorist groups.

Bangladesh disowns Bangabandu as father

Continued from >> P1 The Daily Star newspaper reported that the ordinance also makes slight changes to the definition of the Liberation War.

“The new definition of Liberation War drops the name of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The previous one mentioned that the war was waged responding to Bangabandhu’s call for independence,” it said.

According to the revised ordinance, all MNAs (members of the national assembly) and MPAs (members of the provincial assembly) associated with the wartime government-in-exile of Bangladesh (Mujibnagar Government), who were later considered members of the erstwhile constituent assembly, will now be cate-

gorised as “associates of the Liberation War,” the Dhaka Tribune reported.

Until now, they were recognised as freedom fighters.

As per the amendment, all civilian individuals who, between March 26 and December 16, 1971, received combat training or made preparations for war within the country, enrolled in training camps in India with the aim of participating in the war, took up arms against the occupying Pakistani military forces and their local collaborators, in the pursuit of Bangladesh’s independence, and who were within the government-determined minimum age at that time, will be recognised as freedom fighters.

The local collaborators include

Razakars, Al-Badr, Al-Shams, the then-Muslim League, Jamaat-e-Islami, Nezame-Islam and members of the peace committees. Members of the armed forces, East Pakistan Rifles (EPR), police, Mukti Bahini, the Mujibnagar government and its recognised forces, naval commandos, Kilo Force, and Ansar will also be included under the definition of freedom fighters. Women who were subjected to torture by the invading Pakistani forces and their collaborators during the war (Birangona) will also be recognised as freedom fighters under the new definition.

Doctors, nurses and medical assistants who served injured fighters in field hospitals during the war will also be acknowledged as freedom fighters. The ordinance

redefines Liberation War as the armed struggle carried out between March 26 and December 16, 1971, by the people of Bangladesh aiming to establish a sovereign democratic state founded on equality, human dignity and social justice, against the occupying Pakistani armed forces and their collaborators, the Dhaka Tribune report said. In January, the interim government introduced new textbooks for primary and secondary students for the 2025 academic year that state that Ziaur Rahman, who was an Army major and later a sector commander of the Liberation War, declared the country’s independence in 1971, replacing the previous ones crediting founding father Mujibur Rahman with the declaration.

Centre schedules census and caste enumeration

Continued from >> P1 Prior to that, the enumerators and supervisors will be given training for the smooth conduct of the exercise. The Census of India is conducted under the provisions of the Census Act, 1948 and the Census Rules, 1990.

The last Census was conducted in 2011 in two phases: Phase I of House Listing (HLO) from April 1 to September 30, 2010) and Phase II of Population Enumeration (PE) (February 9 to 28, 2011). Census 2021 was also proposed to be conducted in two phases with phase I during April-September 2020 and the second phase in February 2021.

All preparations for the first phase of the Census to be conducted in 2021 were completed and the fieldwork was scheduled to begin in some States/UTs from April 1, 2020. However, due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic across the country, the census work was postponed.

The government recently decided that it will carry out caste enumeration along with the census. It will also be the first digital census giving the citizens an opportunity to self-enumerate.

The entire Census exercise is likely to cost the government over Rs 13,000 crore.

A meeting of the Union cabinet on December 24, 2019, approved the proposal for conducting the Census of India 2021 at a cost of Rs 8,754.23 crore and updating the NPR at a cost of Rs 3,941.35 crore. However, the Budget 2025-26 allocat-

ed just Rs 574.80 crore for census surveys and statistics/the Registrar General of India (RGI). A government functionary said the budget was a minor issue and could be sorted out without any impediment.

On April 30, the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to include caste enumeration in the upcoming census.

The decision demonstrated that the Modi government is committed to the holistic interests and values of the nation and society, an official statement issued by the government on April 30 said.

According to Article 246 of the Constitution, the Census is a subject listed at 69 in the Union List in the Seventh Schedule. While some states have conducted surveys to enumerate castes, these surveys have varied in transparency and intent, with some conducted purely from a “political angle, creating doubts in society,” the government had said.

“Considering all these circumstances, and to ensure that our social fabric does not come under political pressure, it has been decided that caste enumeration should be included in the main census instead of being conducted as a separate survey,” the statement said.

This will ensure that society becomes stronger economically and socially, and the country’s progress continues without hindrance. It is noteworthy that when a provision of 10 per cent reservation was made

for the economically weaker sections of society, it did not create tension in any section of society, it said.

Caste was excluded from all census operations conducted since independence.

In 2010, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had assured the Lok Sabha that the matter of caste census would be considered in the Cabinet.

A Group of Ministers was formed to deliberate on this subject, and most political parties recommended conducting a caste census. However, the previous Congress-led government opted for a survey instead of a caste census, known as the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC).The Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner had prepared around three dozen questions to be asked to the citizens.

The questions include whether a family has a telephone, internet connection, mobile or smartphone, bicycle, scooter or motorcycle or moped and whether they own a car, jeep or a van.

The citizens were asked questions such as the cereal they consume in the household, the main source of drinking water, the main source of lighting, access to latrines, type of latrine, wastewater outlet, availability of bathing facility, availability of kitchen and LPG/PNG connection, main fuel used for cooking and availability of radio, transistor and television.

They were asked about the predominant

material of floor, wall and roof of the census house, the condition of the census house, the total number of persons normally residing in the household and whether the head of the household is a woman. They were asked whether the head of the household belongs to a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe, the number of dwelling rooms exclusively in possession of the household and the number of married couples living in the household among others.

The Census is the primary source of data collection from every section of the society and a decennial activity. Training is a very important aspect of conducting the Census successfully by ensuring seamless execution of Census 2027 in the field.

At the apex level, there will be at least 100 national trainers. The national trainers will be trained on both census and trainer development skills to further impart training to the next level, that is, master trainers.

About 1800 master trainers will impart training to the field trainers.

About 45,000 field trainers would be trained to provide training to the field functionaries, i.e., the enumerators and the supervisors. The field trainers will further train about 30 lakh enumerators and their supervisors at the sub-district level. These enumerators and supervisors will do house-to-house enumeration at designated places.

Delhi to ban entry of polluting buses, goods vehicles

Continued from >> P1

To ensure implementation, the Transport and Traffic Police Departments of the Delhi Government (GNCTD) have been instructed to enforce the directions using technology such as Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems and RFID tracking at border checkpoints. Additionally, all State and UT governments in the NCR have been asked to spread awareness about the new mandates and ensure coordination with transporters and bus operators for seamless enforcement.NCR states like Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan have been directed to set up web portals - on the lines of Delhi’s model - for monitoring and ensuring compliance among mobility service providers.

The Commission has underscored the urgency of transitioning to cleaner transportation in high vehicle density cities like Gurugram, Faridabad, Sonapat,

Noida, Greater Noida, and Ghaziabad, all of which depend heavily on inter- and intra-city vehicular movement. With commercial vehicles known for poor maintenance and high mileage, their disproportionate emission levels pose a consistent environmental hazard, making these reforms not just regulatory, but essential for public health. Together, these steps mark one of the most aggressive efforts yet to reduce air pollution in Delhi-NCR, signaling a firm policy shift toward electric mobility and sustainable transport infrastructure across northern India.

In addition, the Commission has urged all State Governments and Union Territory Administrations to widely disseminate the new rules to ensure that stakeholders are well informed and that only compliant buses and commercial vehicles enter Delhi after the specified cut-off dates.

PM shares anguish, 11 crushed in RCB victory...

Continued from >> P1 The injured were hospitalised at Bowring and Lady Curzon Hospital in Shivajinagar and other hospitals. According to hospital sources, deaths could have been caused due to suffocation. There were also heart-wrenching scenes at the hospitals, where people were crying over the death of their loved ones.

“The stampede incident shouldn’t have happened, and the government expresses grief over it,” Siddaramaiah said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the stampede as “absolutely heartrending.”

“In this tragic hour, my thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones. I pray that those who are injured have a speedy recovery,” Modi said on X.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also expressed deep anguish over the loss of lives. “The crowd was uncontrollable, police were finding it difficult, so we had to stop the procession,” Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said while speaking about the tragedy because of which a planned victory parade could not take place. The BCCI said the turn of events was shocking and the organisers should have been better-prepared.

“It’s most unfortunate, organisers should have planned RCB’s IPL-winning celebrations better,” BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia told PTI.

“When one organises a victory celebration of this magnitude, proper precautions and security measures need to be taken,” he added.

Similar sentiments were expressed by IPL chairman Arun Dhimal, who said, “Whatever inquiry that needs to be done, the concerned authorities will do that. It was not a BCCI event. It is sad and tragic.” The political slugfest also start-

ed soon enough, with the opposition BJP targeting the Congress-led government for not handling the situation properly.

The tickets for the hastily-arranged engagement programme were sold in a jiffy, but the fans crowded all the gates 12, 13 (main gates) and 10 (clubhouse entrance) with not enough security to control them.

The number swelled to unexpected levels around 3.30 pm, and it forced the police and stadium security officials to close all the gates to prevent the ticketless from squeezing in along with the ones who had valid tickets.

“We came to watch our stars. I bought tickets for the function, but was not even able to enter the stadium. Police suddenly blocked all the roads and closed all the entrances to the venue, and suddenly they started lathi-charging near the main gate,” said Prashant Shetty, a post-graduate student who came along with a few of his friends.

“I don’t know what we did wrong. We were invited to the function, bought tickets, but in the end got beaten up and abused. Terrible day for fans like us,” he added. According to a traffic advisory from the Bengaluru police, entry to Chinnaswamy Stadium was limited to only those with valid tickets and passes.“As there is limited parking facility available near the Chinnaswamy Stadium, those who are attending the event are advised to use public transport and Metro. The public is requested to cooperate,” it said in its advisory ahead of the felicitation ceremony.

Some reports also suggested that the sudden collapse of a temporary slab placed over a drain near the stadium due to the weight of people standing on it was the reason for the stampede.

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 JSIs (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

An 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

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 Pranjud 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

of ₹92.68 crore to Dhursar Solar Power Private Limited, towards claim of tariff as per the Energy Purchase Agreement with the company," Reliance Infra had said in a stock exchange filing on June 2.

In April 2022, IDBI Trusteeship had filed a petition for initiating a corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) against Reliance Infrastructure, alleging a default of ₹88.68 crore as of August 28, 2018, plus interest. The default was on payment of 10 invoices raised between 2017 and 2018 by Dhursar Solar Power Private Ltd (DSPPL) for supplying solar energy to Reliance Infrastructure.

IDBI Trusteeship, being the security trustee of DSPPL, sought payments against the invoices from Reliance Infrastructure.

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 TT&A 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



GIKIL, were detained on allegations of financial mismanagement.

Mittal and both the executives were later released on bail, and no conviction has been registered to date, and no charges against them have been proven.

"This arbitration is not just about recovering losses. It reflects the risks investors face when legal safeguards are ignored in politically unstable economies," said a former director of GIKIL, who worked closely with both GSHL and Bosnian authorities.

Mittal's arbitration may also signal a broader shift in the strategy of Indian investors abroad — more assertive, treaty-backed, and legally prepared, he said.

"This case could become a reference point for future BIT claims filed by Indian companies operating in post-conflict economies," he added.

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 Motor Corporation'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."

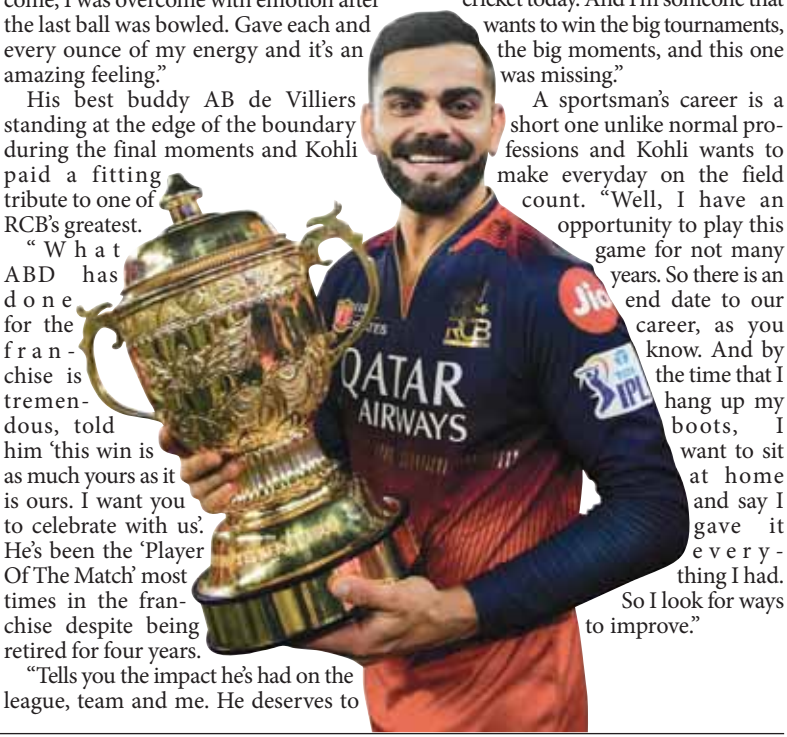
Commentator Matthew Hayden asked him where he rates his first IPL Trophy having won the ODI World Cup, T20 World Cup and Champions Trophy.

"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 'Bindaas' 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 to 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 g6 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."

ADITYA BIRLA HINDALCO INDUSTRIES LIMITED (RISHI NAGAR POWER PLANT) HINDALCO

On this World Environment Day, M/s Hindalco Renuagar reaffirms its commitment towards Environmental Protection, Sustainable business & enrich lives as our group purpose :-

- ❖ Hindalco ranks as the world's most sustainable aluminum company in Dow Jones Sustainability Indices for 5th consecutive year 2020 to 2024.
- ❖ Fly ash utilization >100%. Fly ash Utilization award -2025 from Mission Energy Foundation
- ❖ Eco-friendly Coal Transportation thru belt pipe conveyor & aerial ropeway system.
- ❖ Hindalco focus on ESG. Water neutrality and rainwater harvesting initiatives.
- ❖ Adequate green belt developed & maintained with enriched flora and fauna.
- ❖ AQI is being maintained by water sprinkling & running Sweeping Machine on roads.
- ❖ Community health, drinking water & check dam constructions works in adopted villages.
- ❖ Zero Waste to Landfill Certificate received from M/s Bureau Veritas.
- ❖ Brick Plant manufactures ash bricks of good quality & bricks available for Sale.

England rout Wndies 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 pre-game 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 Buttler's unbeaten 41.

The teams play three Twenty20s from Friday, starting at Chester-le-Street.

NZC seeks new head coach for all formats

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."

India Women to open Asia Cup campaign against Thailand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The Indian women's hockey team will open its Asia Cup campaign against Thailand on September 5 before taking on defending champions Japan and Singapore, Hockey India announced on Wednesday. The Indian team, which claimed the bronze medal in the previous edition, is placed in Pool B along Japan, Thailand and Singapore while Pool A consists of hosts China, Korea, Malaysia, and Chinese Taipei. The tournament is set to take place in Hangzhou, China, from September 5 to 14 and the winner will get a direct qualification to the 2026 World Cup.

India's second match will be against Japan on September 6, followed by final Pool B contest against Singapore on September 8. "Being placed in Pool B alongside defending champions Japan will test our skills and character from the very start. However, facing them in the pool stage will be a great opportunity to measure ourselves early in the tournament," India captain Salima Tete said. "Our focus will be on playing smart, disciplined hockey and taking it one match at a time. The ultimate goal is to lift the trophy and earn a direct spot in the 2026 women's FIH Hockey World Cup." Echoing Salima's sentiments, vice-captain Navneet Kaur said, "It will be a challenging tournament with Asia's top teams competing with each other, but we see it as a chance to bring out our best right from the first whistle." "We've been training with intensity and purpose, and we will aim to execute our plans on the field during the tournament. Playing against Japan in the group stage gives us an early look at high-pressure hockey, which can only help us grow stronger as a unit. We're determined to make this Asia Cup campaign count and make the country proud." India had won the Asia Cup back in 2017, when they defeated China in the final. According to the format, the top two teams from each pool will advance to the Super 4s Pool, where each team will play one match against each of the other three teams.

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