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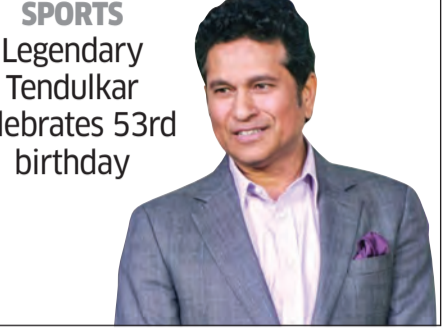
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## Chadha, six MPs quit AAP, merge with BJP

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal slams BJP, calling it betrayal of Punjab, as party faces one of its biggest parliamentary setbacks

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Friday suffered a big jolt with seven of its ten Rajya Sabha (RS) MPs led by Raghav Chadha joining the BJP. This development came days after Chadha was removed as deputy leader of the party in the Upper House of Parliament. His replacement in RS by AAP, Ashok Mittal, too switch sides on Friday. Mittal, founder and chancellor of Lovely Professional University, was raided by the ED on April 15. The five other MPs to join the BJP included cricketer Harbhajan Singh, Swati Maliwal, Rajinder Gupta, Vikram Singh Sawhney and Sandeep Pathak.

Chadha said before leaving for BJP headquarters to meet party chief Nitin Nabin. Chadha had been with the AAP since its inception in 2012, working as a trusted lieutenant to Kejriwal, who stormed into power in Delhi in 2015 riding the wave that followed the anti-corruption movement. Pathak, who addressed the presser alongside Chadha, said he had been thinking about resigning from the AAP for the past six-seven months. Explaining the reason behind distancing himself from party activities, Chadha said "I did not want to be a part of their crimes. I was not eligible for their friendship because I was not a part of their crime. We had just two options — either quit politics, give up our public work in the last 15-16 years or we do positive politics with our energy and experience. So,



BJP National President Nitin Nabin meets Rajya Sabha MPs Raghav Chadha, Sandeep Pathak and Ashok Mittal at the party's headquarters in New Delhi

"I am the right man in the wrong party. Therefore, today I announce that I am distancing myself from the AAP and going to the people,"

we have decided that we, the 2/3rd members belonging to the AAP in RS, exercise the provisions of the Constitution of India and merge ourselves with the BJP."

As per the Constitution, two-thirds of the total MPs of a party can merge with another party. We have submitted a letter to RS Chairman CP Radhakrishnan in this regard today along with all the documents required," he added. Reacting to this development, AAP national con-

social media platform X. Chadha's merger with the BJP wasn't unexpected. It follows nearly a month after the AAP acted against him in the Upper House of Parliament. The party had also requested the RS Chairman that Chadha should not be allotted time from the party's quota to speak in the House. The young leader confronted the move in video messages, calling it a "scripted campaign" and "coordinated action" against him. Chadha and the six others are unlikely to face action under the anti-defection law as it clearly stipulates that an RS member is not disqualified if their original political party merges with another party, and they either join the new party formed after the merger or choose to function as a separate group.

## Opposition makes fresh bid in RS to oust CEC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Opposition parties on Friday moved a fresh notice in the Rajya Sabha seeking the removal of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh and TMC leader Sagarika Ghose submitted the notice to the Rajya Sabha Secretary General. "His continued hold on the position is an assault on the Constitution. It is utterly shameful that this individual remains in office, so that he can continue to act on the directions of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister," Jairam Ramesh posted on social media. The notice calls for an address to the President for Kumar's removal, invoking provisions of the Constitution, the Chief



Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar

Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, and the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968. The Congress leader said there are now nine specific charges against the CEC, which have been recorded in "extreme detail", including the poll panel's failure to act on complaints against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "address to the nation on April 18, which cannot be "denied or suppressed".

## K Stadium to host Nat'l Artistic Gymnastics

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Odisha is gearing up to host the Junior and Senior Artistic Gymnastics National Championships 2026-27 with the event set to take place at Kalinga Stadium from April 25 to May 3. The announcement was made by the Odisha Gymnastics Association on Friday. Organised in collaboration with the Gymnastics Federation of India and supported by the State Sports and Youth Services Department, the championship is expected to draw over 600 gymnasts from 25 States, three Union Terri-

tories and service teams. Competitions will be held across Men's and Women's Artistic Gymnastics in both junior and senior categories. Officials underlined the importance of the Nationals in shaping India's international squads. GFI Chief Operating Officer Kallol Mukherjee said performances at the event would play a decisive role in selections for major tournaments such as the Asian Championships, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games. Pointing to Odisha's growing sports ecosystem, Additional Secretary Bijay Kumar

Swain said the State's sustained investment in infrastructure, coaching and grassroots development is helping disciplines like gymnastics gain prominence. OGA secretary Ashok Sahoo noted that the championship would also serve as a crucial trial for the 2026 Commonwealth Games and Asian Championships by offering a national platform for gymnasts to test their skills and gain exposure. Leading names such as Pranati Nayak, Asish Kumar and Yogeshwar Singh are expected to compete alongside a strong field of emerging talent.

## Man returns Rs 7.5L mistakenly credited to A/C



PNS ■ Jaipur

In a time when news of financial frauds often dominates headlines, a remarkable act of integrity from Jaipur district has restored faith in everyday honesty. Santosh Kumar Nayak of Radhadeipur village under Barachana block in the district has returned Rs 7.5 lakh that was mistakenly credited to his bank account, untouched for over three

months. The amount had inadvertently been transferred to Nayak's account on December 20, 2025. Startled by the unexpected deposit, he immediately visited his bank to verify the transaction. Upon confirmation, Nayak promptly informed the Barachana police in writing. Nearly two weeks later, Sunil Kumar, a jawan from Bihar, contacted Nayak stating that the money had been

mistakenly transferred from his savings account. Nayak reassured him that the funds were safe. On Thursday, Sunil Kumar arrived at the Barachana police station to reclaim the amount. Nayak handed over a cheque of Rs 7.5 lakh to the rightful owner. Locals and officials alike have lauded Nayak's rare honesty with many saying such acts reaffirm that integrity still exists in society.

## WhatsApp investment racket busted

Delhi accused held in Rs 2.06-cr fraud

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

A carefully orchestrated online investment scam, run through a fake trading platform and social media manipulation, has been busted with the arrest of a 56-year-old man from New Delhi by the Odisha Crime Branch's Cyber Police. The accused, Vinay Kumar Sharma of West Delhi's Janak Puri, was tracked down and nabbed from Dwarka after investigators pieced together a complex web of digital evidence and financial transactions. The case traces back to December 23, 2024 when the complainant was unknowingly added to a WhatsApp group that appeared to be dedicated to stock market discussions. What initially seemed like a forum for financial learning soon turned into a trap as fraudsters posing as seasoned market experts and a fund manager from a reputed firm began sharing convincing investment strategies and "guaranteed" profit opportunities.

Over the next three months, the victim attracted by the seemingly credible advice and consistent engagement ended up transferring Rs 2,06,07,500 in 54 separate transactions. The money was routed through five different bank accounts, indicating a layered effort to mask the trail. Trouble surfaced when the victim attempted to withdraw the promised returns. At that point, a so-called "risk control team" intervened citing technical and regulatory issues to delay the process. As excuses mounted and access to funds remained blocked, the victim realised the deception and approached the Cyber Crime police station to lodge a complaint. Acting on the FIR, a team led by Inspector Tapan Kumar Pradhan launched a detailed probe, analysing bank records, mobile data, and other digital footprints. This ultimately led them to Sharma, from whose possession several key items including mobile phones, SIM cards, Aadhaar, and PAN documents were recovered. Sharma has been produced before a Dwarka court and is being brought to Bhubaneswar on transit remand for further questioning.

## Schools to be closed from Apr 27

Govt announces early summer vacation

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Government on Friday announced early summer vacation for all schools in the State in view of the prevailing intense heatwave conditions. Chief

Minister Mohan Majhi declared that all educational institutions would remain closed from April 27. The decision was taken considering the ongoing severe heatwave sweeping across the State. The early declaration of summer vacation comes as a preventive measure to protect children from

exposure to extreme weather conditions. The move follows continued warnings of intense heat across Odisha with authorities closely monitoring the situation. Further decisions regarding reopening are expected to be taken based on weather conditions in the coming days.

## Across Odisha Revenue Board pushes faster disposal of 76,000 land cases

Priority for temple land disputes

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Government has stepped up efforts to expedite disposal of land-related cases with the Board of Revenue directing all revisional courts to fast-track hearings of nearly 76,000 pending matters across the State. The directions were issued during a high-level review meeting chaired by Additional Chief Secretary Satyabrata Sahu, who assessed the func-

tioning of 41 revisional courts and stressed timely delivery of justice in land disputes. Presiding officers from courts in Cuttack and Bhubaneswar attended the meeting while district Collectors and senior revenue officials joined virtually. Sahu instructed that all revisional courts must function at least three days a week and ensure quicker disposal of long-pending cases on judicial merit. He also emphasised that reports and records requisitioned from tehsil, sub-divisional and settlement offices should be submitted

promptly to avoid delays in proceedings. Special priority has been given to sensitive land matters, including those related to properties of Lord Jagannath and Lord Lingaraj along with other endowment lands. The Board directed strict vigilance to safeguard government land, forest land, leasehold land and properties belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. To improve transparency and accessibility, courts have been asked to make effective use of digital systems such as CCMS 2.0 for regularly updat-

ing cause lists, interim orders and final judgments. It was also decided that cases may be dismissed if applicants remain absent for more than three consecutive hearings. The Board further directed that old land deed-related cases pending in revisional courts be sent to the concerned tehsil offices for early disposal in line with recent government guidelines and standard operating procedures. Sahu called for immediate compliance with directions issued by the Orissa High Court from time to time.

## State tightens POSH compliance in colleges

Warns of loss of recognition

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Moving to tighten safeguards against workplace harassment in campuses, the Odisha Government has made it compulsory for all higher educational institutions to set up Internal Committees under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 (POSH Act) with strict penalties for non-compliance. The Higher Education Department, in a directive, warned that institutions failing to constitute functional

committees could face serious action, including loss of recognition, denial of admission permissions and restrictions on conducting examinations. In a major enforcement step, the government linked compliance to the admission process. Colleges operating through the Student Academic Management System (SAMS) will not be allowed to admit students without a duly formed Internal Committee. Similarly, universities that fail to meet the requirement may be barred from holding examinations. The directive also mandates institutions to submit annual reports of their Internal Com-

mittees to the respective Local Complaints Committees (LCCs) with copies to Regional Directors of Education (RDEs), ensuring a monitoring mechanism beyond campus-level oversight. Beyond institutional compliance, the government has outlined a set of campus safety measures. These include proper lighting across premises, installation of CCTV cameras in common areas while maintaining privacy norms, removal of isolated or vulnerable zones, deployment of adequate security personnel and maintenance of visitor records. Special emphasis has been placed on facilities for

women with instructions to ensure safe hostel arrangements, hygienic amenities, accessible complaint systems and functional emergency response mechanisms. Institutions have also been asked to prominently display details of Internal Committees, complaint procedures and helpline numbers on notice boards and official websites. Regional Directors of Education have been tasked with strict monitoring while all institutions have been directed to submit compliance reports to the department at the earliest, signalling a firm push towards accountability and safer educational environments.

## Transgender Welfare Board reconstituted

Minister restored as Chairperson within 48 hours

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

A sudden back-to-back reconstitution of Odisha's State Transgender Welfare Board within a span of just 48 hours has brought the focus squarely on governance priorities in one of the State's most sensitive social sectors into sharp focus. The swift shift in leadership from a bureaucrat-led structure back to a politically headed body has raised questions over administrative consistency and the government's evolving ap-

proach to transgender welfare.

The sequence began on April 21, 2026 when the Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (SSEPD) Department issued a Notification announcing a reconstituted board. In a departure from past practice, the Chief Secretary was designated as Chairperson replacing the departmental minister. The move signalled a tilt towards bureaucratic oversight in steering welfare policies.

However, within two days, the arrangement was reversed. On April 23, 2026, the department withdrew the earlier notification and issued a

fresh Notification the same day reinstating the SSEPD Minister as Chairperson. The abrupt rollback, without any official explanation, has drawn attention in administrative circles.

Despite the change at the top, the board's composition remains largely unchanged. The SSEPD Principal Secretary continues as Vice-Chairperson and the Director serves as Member Secretary. Members of the transgender community, including Dipti Ranjan Mahapatra and Soumya Das, have also been retained.

The development is significant in light of earlier prece-

dents. When the board was constituted on May 15, 2025, the departmental minister had served as Chairperson. The April 21 notification marked a shift by placing the Chief Secretary at the helm, only for the government to revert to the earlier model within an unusually short span.

The State Transgender Welfare Board is tasked with safeguarding the rights of transgender persons and facilitating access to social security, healthcare, education and livelihood support. In this context, stability in leadership is essential for continuity in policy execution.

## 119 DAV CSPur students qualify for JEE(A)



24 score over 99 percentile

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

As many as 119 students of DAV Public School, Chandrasekharpur, Bhubaneswar, have qualified for the JEE Advanced exam to be conducted in mid May. Sakyasingha Patra with 99.989 topped in the list from the school followed by Shitapragnya Kar and Sai P Mishra with 99.932 and 99.928 respectively. The National Testing Agency (NTA) conducted the all India JEE Main Session 2 and the final results were published recently.

Out of the successful qualifiers, 24 candidates have scored more than 99 percentile, 45 more than 98, 57 above 97, 68 more than 96 and 83 students have scored more than 95 percentile. Among others, Asutosh Acharya with 99.860, Arjun Mohanty with 99.838, Ayush Gupta with 99.710, Abhilasha Panda with 99.687, Baibhab K Dash with 99.685, Devidutta Panda with 99.590 and Arpit Behera with 99.563 percentile have placed themselves at the top notch category.

The school authorities congratulated the meritorious students for the results and wished good luck for the JEE Advanced.

## KIIT 6th best varsity in India

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The KIIT-DU has secured the 6th position among all universities in India across both government and private institutions in the Times Higher Education (THE) Asia University Rankings 2026. The university has also emerged as the top-ranked institution not only in Odisha but across the entire eastern region of India.

Globally, the KIIT has climbed to the 169th position in Asia.

Founder of KIIT and KISS Dr Achyuta Samanta has hailed the ranking, stating that it demonstrates the sustained efforts and commitment of the faculty, staffs and students towards achieving academic excellence. He said that KIIT's emphasis on internationalisation and innovation has helped it build a world-class academic ecosystem.

## Meeting at Utkal Chamber

### US envoy addresses Odisha biz community

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Utkal Chamber of Commerce and Industry Limited (UCCIL), under the guidance of its president Dr Prabodh Mohanty, organised a meeting here on April 22 to celebrate the 250th birth anniversary of the United States of America, providing a venue for local industry leaders to reflect on the historical journey of American independence and the growth of international diplomacy.

The gathering was graced by Laura Williams, the US Consul General based in Hyderabad. In her address to the Odisha business community, she spoke extensively about the robust and evolving partnership between India and the United States.

Her insights focused on the shared democratic principles



that underpin the economic and social ties between the two nations.

Dialogue during the event focused on several strategic areas of cooperation, including advancement of renewable energy and sustainable technologies in Odisha.

There was also a strong emphasis on the expansion of semiconductor manufacturing and the strengthening of digital infrastructure to sup-

port a modern economy.

UCCIL president Dr Mohanty highlighted the value of these high-level diplomatic interactions in bridging the gap between local industry and global markets.

The meeting ended with a mutual pledge to continue deepening economic relations and promoting cultural and tourism exchanges, reinforcing the collaborative spirit between Odisha and the United States.

## IIT BBS strengthens innovation dialogue

Session on technology commercialisation held

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

As part of its 100 CUBE entrepreneurship development initiative, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bhubaneswar hosted a session on Technology Commercialisation on Thursday.

The session brought together faculty members, researchers, innovators and members of the institute's innovation and incubation ecosystem for an interaction with 2025 Rashtriya Vigyan Puraskar awardee Prof Mohanasankar Sivaprakasam from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras. Ways of

translating academic research into impactful technologies and commercially viable products were discussed.

Prof Shreepad Karmalkar stated that the 100 CUBE initiative of the institute aims at mentoring 100 start-ups, each of worth at least Rs 100 crore by 100th year of Odisha, i.e., 2036. He outlined two key steps taken by the institute towards this aim. These include a mandatory course on 'Research & Entrepreneurship' for research students and the mandate for each faculty member to identify two industries for collaboration to strengthen industry-academia ties. The institute is presently mentoring 140 start-ups, of which 8 are led by IIT faculty, 16 by IIT students and rest more than 100 by others.

Prof Mohanasankar appreciated the variety in the areas covered by the start-ups as well as the fact that the institute has attracted a large number of non-IIT entrepreneurs. Reinforcing the importance of industry collaboration, he noted that "you have to create very strong industry linkages... a connect and collaboration where one influences the other," adding that such partnerships are key to building sustainable technology commercialisation ecosystems.

He remarked, "Technology commercialisation has multiple routes... incubation is one route, but not necessarily the only route. Co-developing products with industry and technology transfer through licensing are equally important pathways."

## 'Eviction on Bhoodan land despite High Court stay'

OJC alleges illegality

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Janata Congress (OJC) on Friday alleged that the Bhubaneswar Development Authority (BDA) is carrying out unlawful evictions on Bhoodan land in Sampur mouza despite a subsisting stay order from the Orissa High Court.

Addressing a press conference, party leaders claimed that poor families are being displaced after their houses were demolished by authorities, who have termed the land as encroached government property. An OJC delegation visited the area and discussed the issue with BDA officials.

The party said the land dates back to 1953 when about 80 acres were donated to the Bhoodan Yagna Committee for distribution among landless families. In 1961, the land was reportedly allotted to 74

families, who have been in possession for decades.

The dispute arose in 2023 after the BDA initiated eviction proceedings. Following this, 16 affected families moved the Orissa High Court, which on May 11, 2023 directed that eviction be halted until the case is resolved. OJC leaders alleged that despite the order remaining in force, eviction drives are continuing in violation of court directions.

They further alleged that families' belongings were destroyed and access to basic services such as water and electricity was cut off, terming the actions inhuman.

Led by founder president Mohammed Moqim, the OJC said it would continue its fight for justice and demanded immediate suspension of eviction until the court verdict.

OJC also called for granting pattas to eligible beneficiaries, compensation for affected families and a Whitepaper detailing the status of the land.

## Rail line for Sijimali, Kutrumali mines

Notified by Centre amid rising tensions

PNS ■ Bhubaneswar

The Centre has formally notified development of a dedicated railway line connecting the Sijimali and Kutrumali bauxite mines aimed at strengthening mineral transportation infrastructure in Odisha's resource-rich regions.

A notification issued by the Ministry of Railways on April 21 accorded 'Special Railway Project' status to the new broad gauge line linking Tikiri station with the Kutrumali and Sijimali bauxite blocks under the Waltair Division of East Coast Railway.

The project is expected to streamline evacuation of baux-

ite from the two major mining blocks, enhancing logistics efficiency in southern Odisha.

However, the move comes against the backdrop of escalating tensions in the region. Earlier this month, a violent clash broke out in Kantamal of Rayagada district between villagers and police over construction of a 3-km road to facilitate access to the Sijimali mining site.

Two MPs from Odisha have raised serious concerns over the developments in the Sijimali hills spanning Rayagada and Kalahandi districts. They have called for a comprehensive review of statutory clearances granted to the projects, stressing the need to safeguard tribal rights and ensure ecological protection.

## 14 more ATs in State to boost road safety

Vehicle fitness tests to be transparent, error-free

SAROJ MISHRA ■ Bhubaneswar

The Odisha Government has authorised setting up of 14 more automated testing stations (ATs) to use camera-enabled, fully automated systems in the State to assess vehicle fitness, which would reduce human error and corruption.

This was decided in a meeting presided over by Commerce and Transport Secretary NBS Rajput in the presence of Transport Commissioner Amitabh Thakur.

The Secretary emphasised the strategic importance of ATs in enhancing vehicle fit-



ness assessment, improving road safety and ensuring compliance with regulatory standards.

Road safety expert Subrat Kumar Nanda said the setting up of 14 new ATs is a welcome decision, as it would improve transparency and curb corruption in vehicle fitness checks. Through ATs, vehicle fitness testing is completely

automated, camera-enabled, algorithm-based and data-logged, which reduces human error, increases transparency and reliability, and accelerates the achievement of road safety and pollution control goals.

High-accuracy testing of brakes, steering, suspension and headlights reduces accidents caused by mechanical failure, while precise emission

tests ensure vehicles meet environmental norms, reducing harmful fumes. Additionally, automated systems eliminate human intervention, offering tamper-proof reports and reducing bribery. Digital, automated lanes also reduce waiting times and enable quicker inspections, Nanda said.

Manual vehicle fitness checks, traditionally conducted at Regional Transport Offices (RTOs), suffer from significant inefficiencies, lack of standardisation and a high potential for human error. Such inspections are alleged to be a major source of corruption, allowing unsafe vehicles on the roads due to inadequate in-person examination. The shift towards ATs is driven by the need to address these gaps, he added.

## ECoR among top railway zones

Earnings cross Rs 32,800 cr in FY 26

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Delivering a solid performance in 2025-26, East Coast Railway (ECoR) has reinforced its standing as one of the most efficient zones under Indian Railways backed by robust earnings, improved cost management and strong infrastructure spending.

The zone reported an Operating Ratio of 54.81%, the second-best among all railway zones, indicating tighter expenditure control and better productivity. Its gross apportioned revenue touched Rs 26,058.10 crore by March-end while originating earnings

climbed to Rs 32,837.67 crore, marking an annual growth of more than 11%.

Financial streamlining remained a key highlight with Traffic Suspende brought down to Rs 22.86 crore (0.087%) from Rs 25.04 crore in the previous year, reflecting faster settlement of accounts and improved transparency.

On the investment front, the ECoR recorded substantial capital expenditure, with net CAPEX reaching Rs 12,221.81 crore surpassing the revised grant utilisation. Gross spending stood at Rs 6,488.24 crore, channelled into critical areas such as new line projects, track doubling, renewals, bridges, and modern signalling systems.

## 'Print media can stand up threats in digital era'

PRASANT DAS ■ Brahmapur

In a thought-provoking gathering that brought together media professionals, academicians, and community leaders, a seminar titled "Challenges and Future of Print Media in the Digital Era" was organised here.

The seminar was presided over by V Rajendra Raju. Delivering the welcome address, Editor, Odisha Today, Abinash Mishra underscored the rapidly evolving media landscape. He emphasised the urgent need for print journalism to embrace digital transformation without compromising its core values of credibility, depth, and public trust.

Distinguished guests including senior advocate Bhagaban Sahu, Head of the Department of Journalism at Berhampur University,



Bandita Pansa, senior journalist Jyoti Ranjan Das, Saktidhar Rajaguru, environmentalist Sudhir Rout, Bighneswar Sahu, among others, spoke on the occasion.

The speakers delved into the pressing challenges confronting print media today - declining readership, fierce competition from digital platforms, shrinking revenue streams, and the constant pressure to innovate. They also explored strategies for a sustainable future, stressing the importance of main-

taining ethical standards, investigative depth, and community connect that print media has traditionally offered.

Journalists Sameer Achariya and Rupesh participated in the discussion, sharing practical insights on how traditional media houses can adapt to the changing dynamics of news consumption while preserving journalistic integrity.

A highlight of the event was the felicitation of ten distinguished personalities for their

outstanding contributions in various fields.

The awardees included senior journalists, A Raja and Jyotiranjana Das, environmentalists Sudhir Rout and Sibaram Panigrahi, educationist Satyanarayan Sahu, entrepreneur Partho Padhi, businessman Kanhu Senapati and Principal, Government ITI, Brahmapur Ranjan Kumar Parida.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by district correspondent of Orissa Today Sandhya Gauda.

## Workshop focuses on online safety for children

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ Bhubaneswar

Strengthening awareness around digital risks faced by children, a training programme on "Online Safety for Children" was conducted for District Education Officers (DEOs) and ADEOs (Academic) here on Friday bringing together key stakeholders from multiple departments and organisations.

The workshop, organised in collaboration with the Odisha State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (OSPCPR) and ChildFund India, saw participation of around 80 officials from OSEPA and the School & Mass Education Department, among others.

OSPCPR Chairperson Babita Patra highlighted the growing need to ensure children's safety in the digital



space and stressed the crucial role of the Education Department in addressing online threats.

School & Mass Education Department Commissioner-Naik termed the initiative timely and urged participants to actively spread awareness among children and parents to prevent online exploitation.

OSEPA State Project Director Ananya Das called for integrating online safety into school curricula using engaging, activity-based methods while Additional Director Sangita Behera spoke on strengthening institutional mechanisms to curb online abuse.

Presenting findings from a pilot project in Kendrapada,

Shrabanti Sen emphasised the need for coordinated efforts among departments such as Home, School & Mass Education and Women & Child Development.

The programme was coordinated by OSCPCPR Secretary Smruti Prajna Priyadarshini while ChildFund India Deputy Director Naveen proposed a vote of thanks.

## JSW and Japan's JFE to set up JV

S'pur, J'suguda to be leading manufacturing hub: Pradhan

PNS ■ Sambalpur

A ceremony to establish a Joint Venture (JV) between India's leading steelmaker JSW and Japan's renowned JFE Steel Corporation was held here on Friday in the presence of Union Education Minister and Sambalpur MP Dharmendra Pradhan and Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi.

Pradhan asserted that the development project of 'JSW JFE Steel Limited' will trans-



form Sambalpur and Jharsuguda, including Odisha, into a leading manufacturing and logistics hub.

Welcoming the historic partnership, Pradhan said that under the mega project, an investment of about Rs 1

lakh crore will be made in Odisha, which will mainly focus on high-quality steel production. The strong diplomatic relations between India and Japan since 1952 will complete 75 years in 2027, and the investment will further

strengthen the relationship between the two countries, he said.

Highlighting the deep spiritual ties between Odisha and Japan, he said that for the first time, JFE is coming out of Japan and working in Odisha

with JSW of India, where both the companies together have a steel production capacity of more than 59 million metric tons per annum. The merger of JSW and JFE is not just a business agreement, but it is a combination of Japan's technological excellence and India's industrial capabilities for responsible development, Pradhan said and hoped that the project will also set an example in the field of environmental protection by emphasizing on 'green steel' production.

The event was attended by Ambassador of Japan to India, Ono Keiichi, State Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari, Panchayati Raj, Rural Development and Drinking Water Minister Ravi Naik, Sambalpur MLA Jaya Narayan Mishra, Jharsuguda MLA Tankadhar Tripathi, CMD of JSW Group in India Anil Jindal and CEO of JFE Steel Corporation Yoshihisa Kitano.

Pradhan emphasised on giving priority to local employment, skill development and social inclusion along with industrialisation.

JSW and Japan's JFE Steel Corporation have agreed to expand the annual production capacity of JSW plant in Sambalpur from 4.5 million

### IN BRIEF

#### Baba, disciples pledge to donate organs

Paralakhemundi: A profound message of service beyond life echoed from the sacred hills of Mahendragiri as revered seer Laxmi Baba (Dandiswami Bhaskar Tirtha) of Mahendragiri Ashram pledged to donate his body to the MKCG Medical College, Brahmapur. The saint's decision, formally declared earlier on March 26, found powerful expression during the Samarpan Mahotsav, where it stirred not just devotion but a deep sense of social consciousness among the followers. Moved by his example, hundreds of devotees assembled at the foothills and took a solemn pledge before Lord Parashurama to donate their bodies after death.



#### San and Neel distributes buttermilk

Brahmapur: The San and Neel Foundation has been distributing cold buttermilk and chilled drinking water to passersby who are struggling with high humidity, scorching sun rays, and extreme heat. Every day, more than 800 people are benefiting from the service. The programme is being actively coordinated by forum president Dharma Rao, secretary Chitti Babu, treasurer Kiran Patro along with Dinesh Kumar, Donda Shetty, Shameer and Laxman Reddy.



#### CII IWN holds 'Nua Odisha' programme

Bhubaneswar: The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Indian Women Network (IWN), Odisha Chapter organised a programme titled "CII IWN NUA Odisha" here on April 21



bringing together women leaders, entrepreneurs and grassroots changemakers from across the State. The programme was graced by Chief Secretary Anu Garg, who highlighted the critical role of women in shaping the State's growth trajectory. She encouraged greater participation of women entrepreneurs and professionals in economic development and emphasised strengthening ecosystems that support women-led enterprises, underscoring that women empowerment is key to inclusive and sustainable growth. CII Odisha State Council vice-chairman Manikanta Naik, chairperson Zubina Ali and co-chairperson Snehaprava Das also spoke.

#### HBT holds Vig Day on Child Marriage

Bhubaneswar: On the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya, a high-risk period for child marriages, Humara Bachpan Trust (HBT), in collaboration with the district administrations, observed Vigilance Day against Child Marriage across Keonjhar and Kandhamal districts with the objective of building a child marriage-free society. In Keonjhar district, awareness activities were conducted across various panchayats to prevent child marriages and ensure timely reporting of such incidents to authorities. In Kandhamal district, the programme was organised at Phulbani under the leadership of CDPO Baijanti Mallick in the presence of Phulbani BDO Sai Somyajit Patra. Around 120 ASHA and Anganwadi frontline workers were trained on identifying potential child marriage cases, tracking vulnerable children and taking timely preventive action.

#### Navi AMC holds financial meet for young docs

Bhubaneswar: Navi AMC Limited conducted a financial awareness session for young doctors at the YOUTHCON 2026, organised by the Indian Medical Association Junior Doctors Network in Cuttack. The session brought together medical students, junior doctors and early-career practitioners. The session, led by Aditya Mulki, CEO, Navi AMC, focused on the unique financial realities faced by young doctors including delayed earning years due to prolonged education, student debt, career uncertainty during specialisation and the need for disciplined long-term savings.

## In Kendrapada 33 weddings held under Kanya Vivaha Yojana



RAJESH BEHERA ■ Kendrapada

As many as 33 marriages were performed including two nikahs, here on Tuesday, under the Mukhyamantri Kanya Vivaha Yojana. Brides from the economically disadvantaged backgrounds tied the nuptial knot, marking a big step for boosting social welfare and promoting unity.

The Department of Women and Child Development organised the mass wedding programme where district Collector Raghuram R Iyer and ADM Nabakrushna Jena donned the role of father for two brides and personally did the Kanyadan. Notably, under the yojana, each eligible bride receives Rs 60,000 in support

out of which Rs 45,000 goes straight into the bride's bank account through Direct Benefit Transfer, providing some financial stability and the remaining Rs 15,000 covers the costs of organising and holding the wedding ceremony itself. The scheme is aimed at easing the burden of marriage-related expenses on families, encouraging education among girls and preventing child marriage, with priority extended to widows and other vulnerable groups. Each couple also got a marriage certificate at the venue.

To qualify for getting the scheme's benefit, the bride must be between 18 and 35 years old, while the groom must be between 21 and 35 years, informed Collector Iyer.

## JSpur woman murder case: Lover of deceased held; Supari killer absconding

KAHNU NANDA ■ Jagatsinghpur

The police have resolved the brutal murder of a 24-year-old woman, Sashmita Das, after arresting her former lover, Suryakanta Swain alias Papu, and forwarding him to court on Thursday.

Another accused, likely hired by Suryakanta for the crime, is still absconding and will be picked up soon, informed Jagatsinghpur SP Ankit Kumar Burma here.

Suryakanta hails from Kula Mundilo village under Jagatsinghpur block and resides in Jamshedpur, where he runs an auto parts shop. Besides, he operates trawlers and fishing boats in Paradip and Astaranga.

The accused came into contact with deceased Sashmita in the year 2016 and developed a relationship over phone. Later, he met her several times while visiting Odisha.

The relation of the duo deepened with Suryakanta assuring to marry her. He purchased a homestead land at Rs 12 lakh in her name and a LIC policy for her amounting Rs 10 lakh in 2017.

But their affair turned sour when Sashmita knew that Suryakanta is married and has a child. Later, she maintained distance from Suryakanta. One day, both were engaged in a quarrel that led to the filing of a police case against Suryakanta based on Sashmita's complaint on December 12, 2024. The case was compromised, and the accused lost contact with the deceased.

However, when Suryakanta came to know that Sashmita was going to marry a man from Bhadrak, he hatched a plan to eliminate her. The marriage negotiation was likely to be held on April 19, 2026.

Suryakanta hired a Supari killer from Jamshedpur and reached Jagatsinghpur with him. They stayed in a lodge on April 18. Interestingly, Suryakanta attended Sashmita's negotiation ceremony held at Dhunapari village and persuaded her to break the marriage but she refused.

As a plan, Suryakanta invited Sashmita to meet him near Pakanapur Warehouse for the last time. Obeying her estranged lover's proposal, Sashmita reached at the spot as per the scheduled time around 7 pm and held a normal conversation but all of a sudden, the Supari killer attacked Sashmita with an iron chopper. As a consequence, she fell on the floor in a pool of blood and likely died on the spot. After committing the crime, the accused persons fled from the spot by riding a two-wheeler.

Based on the complaint of the deceased's father, the police started a manhunt and conducted a scientific and technical investigation. Later, they picked up the prime accused, Suryakanta, from Jamshedpur and brought him to Jagatsinghpur on April 22. During a police investigation, he confessed to the crime and revealed the identity of the Supari killer who had committed the crime, the SP said.

## 'Women Bill's intent is politically-motivated'

Cong leader Jena flays PM Modi

PNS ■ Keonjhar

Former Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) president Jaydev Jena sharply criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a Press conference held in Keonjhar.

Responding to allegations by the BJP that Congress obstructed the passage of the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, Jena accused the Prime Minister of misleading the public. He alleged that the bill, which failed to pass in the Lok Sabha on April 17 due to not securing the required two-thirds majority,



had intentions beyond women's reservation.

According to Jena, the proposed amendment sought to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha from 543 to 850 seats and enable immediate delimitation based on the 2011 Census, with provisions linked to implementing 33%

reservation for women.

He further claimed that the bill's underlying intent was politically motivated, alleging it was aimed at consolidating long-term power rather than genuinely advancing women's representation.

Jena clarified the Congress party's position, stating that

the party would support the implementation of 33% reservation for women within the existing 543 Lok Sabha seats based on the 2011 Census.

Among others present at the Press conference were District Congress president Manoj Jena and former district president Mohan Parida.

## Nuapada missing migrant traced but denied rehab

UP employer, local Sardar go scot-free

AJIT PANDA ■ Nuapada

Uttam Yadav (36), son of Nandu Yadav of Bhaleswar village in Nuapada district, was missing for nearly five years. Following the intervention of the Chief Minister of Odisha during the Nuapada-by-election campaign in October 2025, he returned. However, the family is aggrieved that no case was registered under the relevant Acts against the kiln owner who allegedly kept him forcibly for years or against the (Sardar) middleman who conspired to send him to the kiln.

"Had a case been registered, my son would have received financial assistance and rehabilitation support. But since no case was filed, he received nothing," said Pan Bai, 70



years old mother of Uttam.

"The Sardar took Uttam along with three other labourers - Mukesh, Jharna, and Gana Rout. While the others returned home after six months, Uttam didn't," added she.

"We repeatedly asked the Sardar to provide whereabouts of my son, but he did not cooperate. We ap-

proached the SP and the Collector, but nothing happened. Finally, we approached the Chief Minister during the by-election campaign. It was only after his intervention that our son was traced - but he returned with a broken leg," Pan Bai informed.

Chaturbhuj Sharma, a social worker and BJP leader from Nuapada, said that Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krishna Chandra Patra took the matter seriously after hearing the grievances of Panbai and directed the police administration to trace Uttam.

"Uttar Pradesh police, acting on information shared by Odisha authorities conducted regular searches for Uttam. They knew that Uttam was in a brick kiln in Haridwar. The owner knew that police were searching Uttam, therefore he

asked Uttam to leave the premises," Sharma said.

That very night, Uttam was hit by a four-wheeler while wandering aimlessly on the road resulting in a fractured leg. He was later rescued by the police and sent back home.

Uttam is unable to do hard work and is entirely dependent on his elderly mother. He has not been provided with any disability pension or financial assistance from the government.

Activist Sanjay Tiwari says, "Incidents of distress migration and labour exploitation are not new in Nuapada, but it raises serious concerns about the half-hearted implementation of the Inter-State Migrant Workmen Act. Moreover, the authorities do not acknowledge the existence of the 'Dadan' system and instead label it as 'Prabasa,' thereby avoiding action under the Bonded Labour laws."

## Odisha needs more manufacturing units to grow fast

All the time we think of the growth of Odisha, we talk of industries. The neighbouring States like Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh have a strong industrial base. States like Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, etc are far ahead of Odisha in terms of development.

The key reason is Odisha doesn't have a strong industrial base which actually manufactures products. Mostly the industries in Odisha are mineral-based. Since Odisha is full of minerals of various kinds, the entrepreneurs find it easy to build an industry based on minerals which are available in good quantity in the State. The people go for the easy thing. Because the industries get the mineral raw materials in good quantity.

After independence the major factory that was created in Odisha are the Rourkela Steel Plant based on iron ore. Similarly in the coastal districts like Kalinga Nagar, Bhadrak and



MA KHARABELA SWAIN

Baleswar, most of the industries are not manufacture-based but mostly they are material-based. Even in places from Dhenkanal to Sambalpur in both the sides of the National Highway one will find mineral-based industries.

In Bhubaneswar there is a MAS Industries Pvt.Ltd. which manufactures elevator. There is another Kalinga Chemical Industries in Mancheswar which claims to

be a manufacturing unit. But the name itself shows what kind of manufacturing does it create. Another industries is Sunshine Packaging industries which rightly defines the product. There are many steel industries in Odisha. One of them is Tata's industry in Jaipur Road. Almost all the industries in Kalinga Nagar are dealers of iron ore or manganese. There is another JBC industries in Bhubaneswar which claims to be a manufacturing unit. Green Lam industries Ltd. in Bhubaneswar claims to be a manufacturer unit. JP plastic, Pradhan industries, Utkal electrical industries claim themselves to be manufacturers. S.stars industries in Bhubaneswar manufactures match box. Kityply industries Ltd in Bhubaneswar shows what type of industry it is. Utkal Valves has industrial equipment in Bhubaneswar. Krishna industries is based on

wood products being a unit of Basudev woods. Odisha Transformers Pvt.Ltd. claims to be a manufacture which creates products of aluminum, copper etc. These are required for making transformer. Girbanic industries Pvt.Ltd. claims to be a manufacturing unit. K industries in Bhubaneswar claims to be a manufacturer. S Industries Pvt.Ltd is a manufacturer garden pipe etc.

Most of these industries close by 7 O'clock or 6 O'clock in evening but a typical manufacturing unit should not close at that time. Once upon a time Baleswar was one of the major industrial bases in Odisha. Biralta tyres which was a major manufacturing unit in Odisha has closed down. Besides Jindal power and steel, hardly anybody is setting of a manufacturing unit. This shows the mood of the State.

On the contrary, Odisha being basically an agriculture based State, it can be a perfect place for industries which can go for packaging of food and

milk products. Like Andhra Pradesh many other manufacturing units can be set up in Odisha. Such type of manufacturing units don't require huge money for being set up. Instead they require firm attitude to set up industries where many persons could be employed.

This requires the rise of startups who can start with a limited money to grow further in life and future. Odisha must think big in order to create an atmosphere of productive and manufacturing unit in Odisha. There was a day when West Bengal, particularly, Kolkata led the industrial growth in India. But because of political instability in West Bengal and regular atmosphere of violence in the State, most of the manufacturing units have fled from the State. When the Tata's Nano car factory was not allowed to function in West Bengal it fled to Gujarat. At that time Odisha could have tried to retain the car factory in Odisha. In the districts like Baleswar and Mayurbhanj

they could have been established.

From West Bengal, the company went of to Sanand, Gujarat, where there is a car manufacturing centre. Now cars like Maruti, Fiat and others are getting manufactured from the same factory of the Tata's. If a company could go to 3,000 kilometers away to Gujarat why it couldn't be set up in an adjacent State like Odisha which is only 200 kilometer away. The lukewarm interest of the Odisha Government at that time allowed the company to run away to a State like Gujarat.

Odisha has a lot of things to learn from this episode, where as Odisha shouldn't be neglected by others. Industrialization specifically the manufacturing of goods should change the mindset of the people of the State and it should also see that Odias also are placed in leading position in the country.

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## NDA boost, Kejriwal's AAP bleeds as seven MPs quit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Barely a year after losing power to the BJP in Delhi, AAP suffered its greatest jolt on Friday with seven of its Rajya Sabha MPs including Raghav Chadha quitting the party. The seven Rajya Sabha MPs to quit the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and who once formed the party's public and organisational face included Sandeep Pathak, former cricketer Harbhajan Singh, Swati Maliwal, Ashok Mittal, Rajinder Gupta and Vikram Sahney besides Chadha.

With this, the NDA on Friday got a boost after seven AAP MPs switched sides, but the ruling alliance is still 18 members short of a two-thirds majority in the Rajya Sabha, and the BJP is 10 MPs short of a simple majority of

its own in the Upper House. The NDA now has the support of 145 MPs in the upper house. The two-thirds majority mark in the house, which has a total strength of 244, now stands at 163.

Once the NDA gets a two-thirds majority in the Upper House, it won't be difficult for it to clear crucial legislation requiring constitutional amendments.

The NDA does not have a two-thirds majority in Lok Sabha too, even though it enjoys a simple majority. It needs the support of 363 MPs for a two-thirds majority in Lok Sabha.

After Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan approves the merger of the AAP Parliamentary Party into the BJP, the ruling party will have a total of 113 MPs. At present, the BJP has 106 MPs.



The ruling party is also likely to get the support of seven nominated members and two independent MPs, which puts the number of those who are in the BJP's support

at 122, exactly the halfway mark. Chadha, who joined AAP at its inception in 2012, was among the party's founding members and helped draft

the Delhi Lokpal Bill the same year. A chartered accountant by profession, he later emerged as the party's television face and became its youngest national

spokesperson. Maliwal was elected to the Rajya Sabha from AAP in 2024. Before that, she served as the chairperson of the Delhi Commission for Women. The BJP bagged a Rajya Sabha seat after a long wait of 26 years, she switched sides. The BJP had sent three Rajya Sabha MPs in 1994, and no leader was elected in the Upper House after that. The BJP's Om Prakash Kohli, K R Malkani and Vijay Kumar Malhotra represented Delhi as Rajya Sabha MPs from January 1994.

She became critical of the party in May 2024 after alleging that she was assaulted at the residence of the then Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal. She reported being slapped and kicked at the CM's residence, calling it a traumatic experience.

Sandeep Pathak, one of the MPs who quit AAP, said his academic journey began at Cambridge University before he moved to the University of Oxford and later the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He returned to India and became a professor at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). Pathak joined AAP in 2022 and was elected to the Rajya Sabha the same year. He was also appointed the party's in-charge for Gujarat and co-in-charge for Punjab.

Former cricketer Harbhajan Singh joined AAP in 2022 before entering the Rajya Sabha. He is also known for his work as a sports commentator and actor. Ashok Mittal, founder and chancellor of Lovely Professional University, also

joined AAP in 2022 and was elected to the Rajya Sabha. In 2024, he was chosen as a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance. Rajinder Gupta, a businessman and industrialist, became a Rajya Sabha MP from AAP in 2025. He was awarded the Padma Shri for his contributions to trade and industry. Vikram Sahney, also a Padma Shri awardee, joined the party in 2022. He had earlier received the International Peace Award from the President of Mauritius. AAP lost the Delhi assembly elections held on February 5, 2025. While the BJP won 48 out of 70 seats, AAP was victorious on 22 seats. The BJP returned to power in the national capital after 26 years.

## Punjab will not forgive: AAP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Friday termed the resignation of seven of its Rajya Sabha MPs a "betrayal of Punjab", accusing the BJP of engineering the split and using fear of central agencies to poach its leaders.

The party said the people of Punjab would not forgive those who "stabbed the state in the back" after being elevated to Parliament. In a post on X, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal said, "The BJP has once again betrayed Punjabis."



AAP leader Manish Sisodia said the MPs who "bowed before the BJP" and betrayed the people of Punjab due to "fear, greed and personal compulsions" would not be forgiven by the state. "Punjab never forgives traitors," Sisodia said. He said that while party workers in Gujarat were risking their lives to strengthen AAP's ideology, some leaders chose to become turncoats.

Reacting to this decision, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann dubbed AAP's Rajya Sabha members, who quit the party and announced joining the BJP, as "gaddars" (traitors). "BJP was trying to break the AAP and had betrayed the people

of Punjab. When they did not find anything against Bhagwant Mann, they tried to break AAP, said Mann. According to him, they are perturbed why Mann is becoming the leader of people. "People of Punjab are with AAP; they firmly stand with the party," he said, while adding that the party is bigger than an individual, and 6-7 people who have left do not comprise Punjab.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh accused the top BJP leadership, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, of trying to weaken the party by poaching its leaders. "They have betrayed the people of Punjab. The people of Punjab must remember these seven names. They

## Den of corruption: BJP lashes out at AAP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The BJP Friday said the AAP is in "complete disarray" and has become a "den of corruption" after seven of its Rajya Sabha members, including Raghav Chadha and Sandeep Pathak, quit and announced they are joining the BJP.

The BJP accused party chief Arvind Kejriwal of running the organisation in an authoritarian manner and straying from its founding ideals.



In a post on X, BJP national spokesperson Pradeep Bhandari said, "No one believes in the corrupt AAP. The party, which started by claiming to be a party with a difference, has become a den of corruption." BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said on X, "The Aam Aadmi Party is in complete disarray. The collapse is no longer speculation; it is unfolding in real time."

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva launched a direct attack on Kejriwal, alleging that the party, formed in the name of political change, had drifted into corruption under his leadership. He said Kejriwal had transformed from a party convener into what he described as a "dictator," leading to growing dissatis-

faction among founding members. Sachdeva claimed that several early leaders of the party had already distanced themselves over time. He also linked the reported resignations to what he called growing disillusionment within the party ranks. "The developments reflect the voice of their conscience," he said, referring to the MPs who are said to have exited.

Delhi cabinet minister Kapil Mishra also reacted strongly, welcoming the reported decision of the MPs to leave AAP. In a social media post, he said that only corrupt individuals remain within the party and claimed that those with a conscience would not stay for long. Mishra described the move by leaders such as Raghav Chadha, Sandeep Pathak, and others as a bold decision. He said it could prove decisive in what he termed as protecting Punjab from alleged exploitation.

He also shared a statement attributed to Raghav Chadha, which claimed that more than two-thirds of AAP's Rajya Sabha MPs had merged with the BJP in accordance with constitutional provisions. According to the statement, seven MPs signed the required documents and submitted them to the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

Echoing similar criticism, BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said the reported exit of MPs had exposed what he described as the "true nature" of the AAP leadership. He alleged that the party was being run in a highly centralised manner and accused Kejriwal of sidelining leaders within his own organisation. Bidhuri further claimed that internal dissatisfaction had been building for some time, leading to leaders leaving one after another. He said the situation has now reached a point where the party's future appears uncertain.

## AAP is BJP's B team, veil finally lifted: Delhi Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Delhi Congress president Devender Yadav on Friday accused the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of being the "B team" of the BJP, claiming its formation dashed public hopes of service to common people. "This was bound to happen and we have been saying this from the beginning that this Aam Aadmi Party is completely the B team of the BJP. Today that veil has been removed and what we have been saying from the beginning has come in front of everyone, when these people have gone and joined the BJP," the Congress leader said. His remarks followed AAP MP Raghav Chadha and six other MPs joining the BJP. He noted that even at inception, doubts lingered about AAP's intentions, especially after its Delhi government took office and key leaders either quit or were ousted. "Over the past 12 years, we have seen only nautanki instead of good governance," Yadav said. "If anyone has borne the brunt of this gimmick, it is Delhi—its people trusted AAP to form the government, only to be betrayed."

## Delhi on heat alert: CM orders cool rooms, water access across city

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Friday directed all departments to step up heatwave preparedness, ordering immediate measures such as special cooling rooms in hospitals, widespread access to drinking water, and public awareness drives as temperatures rise across the capital. Chairing a high-level review meeting at the Secretariat, the Chief Minister said the government is on full alert and aims to bring heat-related deaths down to zero by 2030. She instructed officials to ensure readiness at every level under the Heat Wave Action Plan 2026. "The focus is on prevention and preparedness. Every department must act with urgency to protect people from extreme heat," the Chief Minister said. Senior officials, including Chief Secretary Rajiv Verma, attended the meeting. The Chief Minister directed hospitals to maintain adequate bed capacity for heatstroke and related illnesses. She also said all ambulances must

be equipped to handle heat emergencies. A key part of the plan is expanding access to clean drinking water. The Chief Minister ordered that water facilities be ensured at hospitals, schools, construction sites, bus stands, police stations, post offices, and public canteens. She stressed that water tankers, coolers, and water ATM units must function without disruption across the city. Schools have been asked to introduce a "water bell" system to remind students to drink water at regular intervals. The Chief Minister also said oral rehydration solution packets should be made available at schools and public places wherever needed. The Government will also launch a citywide awareness campaign to educate residents on heatwave safety and preventive steps. Officials said the campaign will focus on early recognition of heat-related symptoms and basic precautions. The Heat Action Plan is being implemented through the Delhi Disaster Management Authority in



coordination with multiple departments and more than 17 partner organisations, including non-government groups. Authorities said this approach ensures a coordinated and science-based response. The Chief Minister highlighted the rising severity of heat conditions in recent years. She noted that temperatures touched 43.7 degrees Celsius in 2025 and remained above 40 degrees for nearly 40 days over the past few years. In response, the government has adopted a structured monitoring system using alerts issued by the India Meteorological Department. The colour-coded alert

system includes green, yellow, orange, and red warnings. These alerts are shared in real time with departments and the public to enable timely action. On the health front, officials said more than 339 health centres have been stocked with ORS packets, ice packs, and related supplies. Over 30 hospitals have created dedicated cooling rooms for treating heatstroke patients. In addition, 174 medical officers and ASHA workers have received training to manage heat-related illnesses. Emergency services have also been strengthened. Around 330 ambulances have been kept ready for rapid response across the city.

Infrastructure measures are being expanded to reduce heat exposure in public spaces. Authorities said drinking water points, shaded shelters, and cooling stations are being set up in various locations. Delhi Police has already installed over 11,000 air coolers and more than 1,900 water coolers across the city. Special attention is being given to vulnerable groups, especially outdoor workers. The Chief Minister directed that working hours at construction sites be adjusted to avoid peak afternoon heat. Employers have been told to provide shade, rest breaks, drinking water, and ORS to workers. The Chief Minister also stressed the need for coordination among departments to ensure effective implementation on the ground. She said all agencies must work together to minimise the impact of the heatwave. Officials said the Government's focus remains on reducing health risks and ensuring that residents are protected during extreme weather conditions.

## DDA plans to establish five multi-level car parking facilities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) plans to establish five multi-level car parking (MLCP) facilities across the city. According to DDA, these are proposed at strategic locations across the city — Karkardooma, Okhla Industrial Area Phase-1, Dilshad Garden, Dwarka and Saini Enclave areas in Delhi. All these projects are expected to be completed within the next three years. With a combined capacity of 1,261 Equivalent Car Spaces (ECS), the projects are designed to ease on-street parking pressure and enhance traffic flow in densely populated zones. The distribution includes 248 ECS at Karkardooma, 362 at Okhla Industrial Area Phase-1, 232 at Dilshad Garden, 134 at Dwarka, and 285 at Saini Enclave. In a statement, the authority said that the total project area spans 11,048.87 sq. m. across Delhi. To ensure



financial viability and create vibrant urban spaces, a portion of each development has been earmarked for commercial use. The commercial component will allow general commercial activities in accordance with the provisions of MPD-21. A differentiated pricing structure has been adopted for parking and commercial components to enhance the attractiveness and feasibility of the projects for prospective bidders. The Karkardooma MLCP will complement DDA's ongoing high-rise development in the area, supporting its transformation into a modern, high-density

urban hub with integrated infrastructure. Similarly, the Dwarka MLCP aligns with DDA's continued efforts to strengthen Dwarka as a well-planned sub-city with robust civic and transport infrastructure. This initiative forms part of DDA's broader vision to create a more organised, efficient, and sustainable urban environment. The Authority remains committed to enhancing ease of living for residents and visitors by continuously strengthening urban infrastructure and promoting planned, sustainable growth in the national Capital.

## DPCC used only 43% of Environmental Compensation fund collected over past decade: RTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has utilised only around 43 per cent of the Environmental Compensation fund collected over the past decade, according to information obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. The fund, collected from fines on pollution-causing entities, is primarily used for ecological restoration and mitigation of pollution in the

national Capital. The RTI filed by environmental activist Amit Gupta has revealed that ₹158.88 crore was collected between 2015-16 and 2025-26, and only ₹68.07 crore was spent during the same period. Year-wise data shared in the RTI reply showed that collections were highest in 2025-26 (up to February) at ₹36.53 crore, while expenditure peaked in 2024-25 at ₹35.93 crore, marking a sharp spike compared to previous years.

The data showed that in 2015-16, ₹3.58 crore was collected, and only ₹71 lakh was spent. Whereas in 2016-17, ₹16.74 crore was collected, and ₹1.29 crore was utilised. In 2017-18, ₹3.42 crore was collected, and ₹2.55 crore was spent, and in the following year, 2018-19, ₹5.60 crore was collected, and only ₹1.34 crore was utilised. In 2019-20, collections rose to ₹19.84 crore and ₹1.39 crore spent, while ₹9.17 crore was collected in 2020-21 and ₹2.90 crore utilised. The figures for

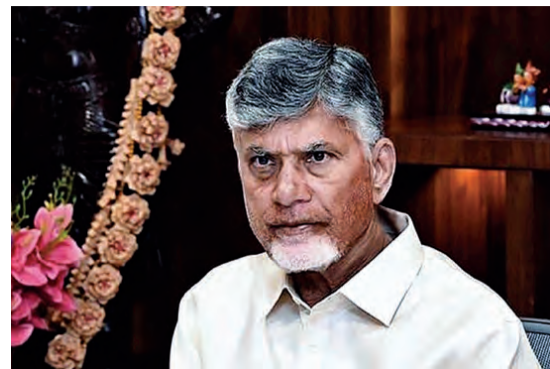


2021-22 showed ₹16.84 crore collected and ₹1.23 crore spent, and for 2022-23, ₹19.14 crore collected and ₹1.45 crore utilised. The RTI data further showed that ₹11.32 crore was collected in 2023-24, of which ₹7.84 crore was spent. In 2024-25, ₹16.63 crore was collected and ₹35.93 crore utilised. In 2025-26 up to February, ₹36.53 crore was collected while ₹11.38 crore was spent. The DPCC, however, did not provide details of the

specific works or projects on which the funds were spent, the RTI reply said. "Why is such a large amount not being utilised? Where is the money parked? What environmental work has actually been carried out on the ground?" Gupta said, questioning the underutilisation of funds meant for pollution control in Delhi. "The city is consistently among the most polluted in the country, yet nearly 57 per cent of the allocated or collected funds remain unspent.

This is not a question of shortage of money, but of lack of long-term vision and planning," the activist added. The pollution control boards impose Environmental Compensation (EC) as fines on industrial units and other entities causing pollution, based on the "Polluter Pays Principle." The penalty is imposed to deter environmental damage and is often based on the CPCB guidelines, with funds deposited into a designated DPCC account.

## Nation Focus



### Amaravati to be built as key economic hub: CM Naidu

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has directed officials to develop Amaravati as a major economic hub and growth engine for the State. Chairing the 60th meeting of the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority (APCRDA), he emphasised that all constructions in the Capital city must reflect Telugu culture and traditions. "Officials should develop Amaravati as a major economic hub and growth engine for Andhra Pradesh. The capital should become a hub for investments and economic activity, with plans for high-rise and iconic buildings," Naidu said in an official release late on Thursday.



### RSS desperately seeks acceptance abroad: Congress

The Congress on Friday claimed that the RSS was fundamentally at odds with the idea of India, and despite the outfit's "pretentious nationalism", it desperately seeks acceptance abroad. The Congress's reaction came on a day Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale said at an event in the US that the organisation was not an Indian version of the Ku Klux Klan, the American white supremacist group. In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said while the RSS tried to show that it was no 'Ku Klux Klan', there is "abundant evidence" to show how it derived inspiration from European fascist movements.

# Hero of Hill Kaka Fazal Hussain Tahir laid to rest in J&K

MOHIT KANDHARI  
■ Jammu

62-year-old Fazal Hussain Tahir, labelled as the 'Hero of Hill Kaka', was laid to rest in his native village of Murrah in the Hill Kaka area of Poonch with the highest respect and military traditions late Thursday evening.

Tahir passed away on Wednesday in Uttarakhand after suffering a cardiac arrest.

In 2003, Tahir played a key role in Operation Sarp Vinash, launched by the Indian army to clear terrorist strongholds in the Hill Kaka area of Poonch-Rajouri.

Over a period of two long months, between April and May 2003, the Indian Army launched a major offensive in which they flushed out over 70 battle-hardened Pakistani

terrorists and destroyed their bunkers and natural caves in the Hill Kaka bowl of Poonch-Surankote.

According to Shafiq Mir, a senior journalist who later contested the Panchayat elections, Fazal Tahir joined hands with the Indian Army along with several youngsters in the summer of June 2002 to avenge the killing of his elder brother at the hands of Pakistani terrorists.

Initially, the locals were trained by the Indian army to share real-time human intelligence about the movement of terrorists inside the forested areas. Later, they were trained to operate weapons and recruited as Special Police Officers (SPOs). Fazl Hussain was credited with establishing one of the first Village Defence Committees

in the region. One of the groups led by Fazl Hussain Tahir played a crucial role in the success of Operation Sarp Vinash. Deeply familiar with the local topography, the group was strategically deployed by army officers in key positions, significantly contributing to the effectiveness of the



anti-terrorist operations. The mortal remains of the braveheart were shifted to his native village late Thursday evening. Before the final rites took place, a wreath-laying ceremony was held, and a two-minute silence was observed to honour his memory. The people of Murrah and Kulali expressed gratitude

for the Army's support, as the region mourned the loss of a true hero. Paying tributes to Fazl Husaain, the army officers who attended his last rites in his native village said, "He was a symbol of courage and unity, playing a pivotal role in the successful operation that eradicated terrorism in the Hill Kaka and Murrah areas of Jammu & Kashmir in 2003". The Army officers also acknowledged the role of the local Gujjar-Bakarwal community in supporting the counter-terror operations and maintaining peace in the region. The local community members also paid rich tribute to Tahir's sacrifice, acknowledging his extraordinary courage in the fight against terrorism. Cabinet Minister Javed

Ahmed Rana, in his condolence message, said, "Deeply saddened by the passing of Tahir Fazal Choudhary, the 'Hero of Hill Kaka' and a legendary figure of our Pir Panjal Region.

Tahir Fazal was an unsung warrior whose unparalleled courage during Operation Sarp Vinash (2003) helped the Army reclaim the highlands from militancy. His leadership of the Indian Pir Panjal Scouts and his unwavering patriotism were pivotal in restoring peace to the Hill Kaka Bowl. He was not just a warrior but a steadfast advocate for the development and security of Tribals with dignity. His legacy of bravery and selflessness will continue to inspire generations in Jammu & Kashmir and beyond".

His leadership of the Indian Pir Panjal Scouts and his unwavering patriotism were pivotal in restoring peace to the Hill Kaka Bowl. He was not just a warrior but a steadfast advocate for the development and security of Tribals with dignity. His legacy of bravery and selflessness will continue to inspire generations in Jammu & Kashmir and beyond".

Officials should develop Amaravati as a major economic hub and growth engine for Andhra Pradesh. The capital should become a hub for investments and economic activity, with plans for high-rise and iconic buildings," Naidu said in an official release late on Thursday.

The Congress on Friday claimed that the RSS was fundamentally at odds with the idea of India, and despite the outfit's "pretentious nationalism", it desperately seeks acceptance abroad. The Congress's reaction came on a day Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale said at an event in the US that the organisation was not an Indian version of the Ku Klux Klan, the American white supremacist group. In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said while the RSS tried to show that it was no 'Ku Klux Klan', there is "abundant evidence" to show how it derived inspiration from European fascist movements.

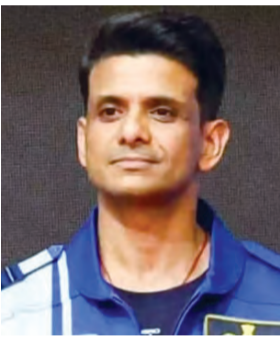
## Expectations from India's space programme rising: Astronaut Shukla

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

People are no longer surprised by the achievements of ISRO and want to become a part of the space agency's missions, astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla said on Friday.

He said that earlier, when the country's space programme was at a nascent stage, people did not expect it to successfully execute missions such as Chandrayaan and Mangalyaan.

"The surprise element is gone. People are now expecting from us. They are saying that we would like to fly with you and like to go with you in Gaganyaan," said Shukla, who became the first Indian to visit the International Space Station



as part of the Axiom Mission 4 in July 2025.

The astronaut made the comments during his address at the final day of the Indian Defence Space Symposium (IDS) 2026, organised by the Indian Space Association (ISPA).

Shukla also highlighted that there is a need to adopt space technology breakthroughs in the

defence sector.

"For example, space technology solutions such as light-weight composites and alloys can be used for protection against high-speed projectiles. Environmental control systems used in extreme conditions can be deployed on ground as well," said Shukla.

The astronaut also suggested that India could establish a central agency solely focused on utilising space for different purposes, including defence, agriculture, and disaster management.

"If we align our resources and vision effectively, there is a real opportunity for India not just to participate, but to lead with unique, future-ready frameworks that others look to adopt," said Shukla.

## INS Sudarshini halts at Canary Islands before embarking on trans-Atlantic voyage

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Indian Navy's Sail Training Ship INS Sudarshini has made a port call at Las Palmas as part of its ongoing transoceanic deployment under 'Lokayan 26', officials said on Friday, adding that the visit underscored the growing maritime cooperation and engagement between the navies of India and Spain.

The port call to the Canary Islands archipelago is significant as it marks the maiden visit of an Indian naval ship to the archipelago, they said.

INS Sudarshini arrived at Las Palmas on April 23, as part of its ongoing transoceanic deployment under 'Lokayan 26', a spokesperson of the Indian Navy said.

"The stopover serves as a



Indian Navy sail training ship INS Sudarshini during its port call at Las Palmas, Canary Islands, Spain on Thursday

strategic pause before the ship embarks on her ambitious trans-Atlantic passage," the official said.

During the visit, the Commanding Officer of INS Sudarshini is scheduled to hold professional interactions with Spanish naval authorities. Strengthening

people-to-people ties, the ship will also be open to visitors from the local Spanish community and the Indian diaspora, the officials said.

The visit underscores growing maritime cooperation and engagement between the Indian Navy and the Spanish Navy, they said.

## No doubt on India's future, will become Vishwaguru: Bhagwat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Nagpur

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Friday said India will certainly become a 'Vishwaguru' and guide the world, and nobody should harbour any doubts about the country's future.

He also said that earlier, people doubted if Ram temple would ever be built, but it came into being. In the same way, India becoming a 'vishwaguru' (teacher to the world) is certain to happen.

Bhagwat was speaking after laying the foundation stone of 'Bharat Durga Shakti Sthal' temple coming up on the premises of the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in the Jamtha area on the outskirts of Nagpur city in the evening.

The vision of India becoming a vishwaguru would be realised through consistent efforts and collective discipline, he said, expressing confidence that such a transformation could be witnessed in the present generation.

Doubts about India's future should be abandoned, the RSS chief said. "Don't doubt India's future. Live with courage and self-reliance and practise these values in daily life. India will be strong and will guide the world. People doubted if Ram temple will be built, but it happened. Similarly, India becoming a Vishwaguru is certain," he said.

"There should be no confusion whether it will happen or not. What is destined will happen," he said, citing the Ram temple movement as an example of perseverance leading to eventual success.

"If we act according to our resolve step by step, India will become strong, virtuous and a global guide," he added.

Bhagwat said that to truly understand India, people must first understand Bharat deeply and then begin to practise it in their everyday lives.

"To worship Bharat Mata, we must become Bharat ourselves," he said, adding that the country must be understood from its own civilisational values rather than through a colonial or Western lens developed over 150 years.

## Government to launch NMBA 2.0 app to combat substance abuse

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is set to launch the upgraded Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA) App 2.0 to strengthen monitoring and coordination under the National Action Plan for Drug Demand Reduction (NAPDDR).

The enhanced application has been designed as a centralised digital platform to facilitate real-time reporting, monitoring and coordination among stakeholders at the national, State, district and institutional levels, the

ministry said in a statement on Friday.

The Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBA), launched on August 15, 2020, in 272 vulnerable districts, has since been expanded to cover all districts across the country, with the aim of spreading awareness on substance abuse.

According to the statement, more than 26 crore people have been sensitised under the campaign so far through over 8.3 lakh activities conducted nationwide. This includes over 9.5 crore youths, 6.47 crore women and more than 28,000 master volunteers.



The existing NMBA App, accessible to authorised users, enables States, districts, spiritual organisations and other stakeholders to upload and track campaign activities through a consoli-

dated dashboard with near real-time visibility.

It also provides information, education and communication (IEC) material and support for onboarding and management of volunteers,

besides facilitating awareness activities and access to de-addiction and mental health helplines.

The upgraded NMBA App 2.0 will introduce several new features, including access for citizens to take e-pledges, view IEC content, access helpline support and locate de-addiction centres.

Grant-in-aid (GIAs) institutions will be onboarded with role-based access to enable real-time reporting and monitoring of activities at de-addiction facilities, the statement said.

The app will also provide real-time status of 'Anudan'

(grants) for such institutions, ensuring transparency and improved tracking of fund utilisation.

A 'nearest de-addiction centre' feature will allow users to locate treatment facilities easily, while a feedback mechanism will enable the public to share inputs for further improvement.

The launch of the NMBA 2.0 App underscores the Government's commitment to strengthening institutional mechanisms and leveraging digital platforms for effective implementation of drug demand reduction, the statement added.

## CRPF honours 25 fallen jawans with memorial in Sukma

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Sukma

The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) on Friday dedicated a memorial built in honour of its 25 personnel killed in a 2017 Maoist ambush in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh and asserted that their ultimate sacrifice helped free the State from the Naxal menace.

CRPF Deputy Inspector General (Sukma) Anand Rajpurohit dedicated the memorial at the headquarters of the central force's 74th battalion at Dornapal in the district.

In one of the deadliest attacks on security forces in the history of insurgency, 25 personnel, belonging to the CRPF's 74th battalion, were killed on April 24, 2017, when Maoists ambushed them in Burkapal under Chintagufa police station limits while



they were providing security for road construction work.

DIG Rajpurohit said sacrifices of the fallen jawans symbolise their unwavering commitment to the unity, integrity and security of the nation.

"On April 24, we remember our brave colleagues who laid down their lives while ensuring security for development works. Their courage and dedication continue to inspire future generations," he declared.

"It is due to their sacrifice that Chhattisgarh has

become Maoist-free. We once again pay tribute to them," the IPS officer stated.

The memorial was formally inaugurated with rituals and ceremonies, followed by a guard of honour by officers and personnel of the CRPF. A two-minute silence was observed in memory of the fallen jawans.

The Bastar region, where Sukma is located, had once witnessed intense Maoist activity, particularly during the construction of the Dornapal-Jagargunda road, which required heavy secu-

rity deployment. Several security personnel had laid down their lives during the road construction, which was targeted by Naxals, said officials.

The sacrifices of these personnel have significantly contributed to improving security in the region. The memorial has been established to preserve the legacy, courage and supreme sacrifice of the fallen jawans, they said.

Commandant of the CRPF's 74th battalion, Himanshu Pandey, officials and personnel of the 159th, 223rd and 226th battalions of the force were present at the dedication ceremony.

Notably, a similar memorial dedicated to 76 security personnel killed in a 2010 Maoist ambush in the Tadmetla area of Sukma district was inaugurated on April 6 this year.

## 6.68 lakh register for CBSE class 10 second board exam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

Over 6.68 lakh applications have been received for the second edition of the CBSE class 10 board exams, a majority of which are for improvement of scores received in the main exam whose results were declared earlier this month, the CBSE said on Friday.

A total of 6,68,854 regular candidates have applied for the second edition of CBSE boards, including 5,25,655 for improvement, 85,285 under compartment, and 57,914 under both compartment and improvement categories.

CBSE has introduced a two-edition system for class 10 board examinations from 2026, under which students are required to mandatorily appear in the first (main) examination, while the second examination serves as an additional opportunity for those in the compartment category or those seeking improvement.

The best marks among both examinations will be reflected in the mark sheet-

cum-certificate issued by the board.

Students who pass the first examination can improve their performance in up to three subjects (Science, Mathematics, Social Science, and Languages).

According to official data, 1,92,508 candidates have opted to take the test for one subject, 2,79,227 for two subjects, and 1,97,119 for three subjects.

In addition, 9,765 private candidates have applied, including 8,323 under the third chance category and 1,442 under the first chance category.

A total of 2,66,209 female candidates and 4,02,643 male candidates have registered for the exams, while two candidates fall under the 'other' category.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) said the Second Examination is scheduled from May 15, 2026, onwards, with examinations to be conducted till May 21, 2026. The date sheet was released on April 23, 2026 and is available on the official CBSE website.



## Karnataka Dy CM urges Rajnath to ease height curbs near Bengaluru defence airports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Friday met Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, urging a review of height restrictions imposed within a 20-km radius of defence airports in Bengaluru, which he said were hampering the city's vertical growth.

Bengaluru has four operational airports, two of which are defence airbases

— HAL Airport and Yelahanka Airbase.

Authorities seeking construction permits on their premises are required to obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from these airport authorities.

In a formal representation to the Union Minister, Shivakumar pointed out that while GSR 751 (E) restricts building heights to 150 metres only up to a 15-km radius around defence airports, the concerned author-



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, during a meeting with Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar in New Delhi

ities have been enforcing the same limit up to 20 km, effectively substituting the rules prescribed under the notification.

He said this amounts to bringing an additional 78 per cent of areas, falling within the 15-20 km radius, under height restrictions that go beyond what the rules mandate.

The Deputy Chief Minister warned that curbing vertical development in the city's core would push growth

outward in an unplanned manner, undermining the State Government's efforts to ensure systematic urban expansion.

"I request you to kindly review the restrictions being imposed in the 20-km radius of the defence airports in Bengaluru, keeping in mind both flight safety and the city's development needs," Shivakumar said. The Deputy Chief Minister is likely to meet other Union ministers over the next two days.

## States Focus

## Hooghly river carries timeless spirit of civilisation: PM Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Kolkata

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday morning took a boat ride on the Hooghly river here and said its divine waters carry the timeless spirit of an entire civilisation. Modi also asserted that he was committed towards the development of West Bengal and the prosperity of the "great Bengali people".

The PM posted a few photographs of his river trip on social media, in which he is seen seated on a wooden boat with a camera in hand, and the iconic Howrah Bridge and the Vidyasagar Setu are visible in the background. "Tried my hand at photographing this great river. Also caught a close glimpse of the Vidyasagar Setu and Howrah Bridge," the Prime Minister said on X.

For every Bengali, the Ganga occupies a very special place, he said. "One can say that the Ganga flows through the soul of



PM Narendra Modi during a boat ride on the Hooghly river ahead of the second phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections in Kolkata PTI

Bengal. Her divine waters carry the timeless spirit of an entire civilisation. This morning in Kolkata, I spent some time on the banks of the Hooghly river, an opportunity to express gratitude to Maa Ganga," Modi said on social media.

The Hooghly is the distributary of the Ganga river. The Prime Minister said he had the opportunity to "meet boatmen, whose hardworking nature is admirable, and morning walkers" during the trip.

State BJP sources said Modi spent the night at Lok Bhavan here after he had led a road-

show from Howrah to Kolkata on Thursday evening. He headed straight to the Princep Ghat this morning to have a boat ride, they said.

"Yesterday evening, during the long roadshow from Howrah to Kolkata, I was on Howrah Bridge. And this morning, I saw this bridge from the Hooghly River!," he said.

Modi also said, "On the Hooghly, reiterated our commitment to work towards the development of West Bengal and the prosperity of the great Bengali people."

## PM could enjoy Hooghly ride as its water is clean unlike Yamuna: Mamata

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Kolkata

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi could enjoy a boat ride on the Hooghly in the State because its waters were clean, unlike the Yamuna in Delhi, which she alleged was polluted.

Addressing an election meeting in Howrah, Banerjee said Modi would not be able to undertake a similar boat ride on the Yamuna in the national capital due to pollution, blaming the BJP-led administration there for the river's condition.

She said it was good that the prime minister chose to take a boat ride on the Hooghly River, where riverfront areas had been beautified by the State Government and civic bodies, including the Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

Responding to Modi's claims about women's safety in Bengal, Banerjee said he should assess the situation himself and compare



Howrah: Senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee on Friday took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he had inadvertently become the "biggest brand ambassador" for West Bengal tourism by showcasing the State's Ganga ghats, roads and street food during campaign visits.

it with BJP-ruled States. "See how safe women are here - in the city, in the State, on the streets - unlike BJP-ruled places like Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere, where incidents of attacks on women are reported every day," she said.

"Why do you forget about Hathras and Delhi? Please go to Manipur, which is burning. Why are you silent on Manipur?" she asked.

Referring to alleged remarks by Union Home Minister Amit Shah that "TMC tormentors will be hung upside down publicly" after May 4, Banerjee questioned whether a Union minister could issue such threats.

"With all decorum and respect, may I ask if a Union minister can issue any such threat?" she said.

MODI BIGGEST BRAND AMBASSADOR FOR BENGAL'S TOURISM: ABHISHEK

Howrah: Senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee on Friday took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he had inadvertently become the "biggest brand ambassador" for West Bengal tourism by showcasing the State's Ganga ghats, roads and street food during campaign visits.

Addressing election rallies in Jagatballavpur and Domjur Assembly constituencies in Howrah district, Banerjee said Modi's public appearances, including eating murti on a pavement in Jhargram and walking along the Ganga, had done more to promote the State than official tourism campaigns.

"If Bengal had not been promoted this way - how beautiful the Ganga is, how developed the roads of Jhargram are - people of the country would not have known or understood," he said.

## ECI SUSPENDS HINGALGANJ OC FOR PARTISAN CONDUCT

The Election Commission of India (ECI) ordered the suspension of the officer-in-charge (OC) of the HingalGANJ police station in North 24 Parganas district following allegations that he was acting in a partisan manner. In a communication to West Bengal Chief Secretary Dushyant Nariala, the ECI said it had examined a report sent by State Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Manoj Agarwal on April 21 regarding complaints of bias and an alleged nexus between the OC and "local elements".

"After considering the facts and circumstances of the matter, the Commission directs that Sandip Sarkar, Officer-in-Charge, HingalGANJ Police Station, be suspended and disciplinary proceedings be initiated against him immediately," said the order dated April 23.



## ECI ACTING LIKE DEPARTMENT OF BJP, ALLEGES CONGRESS LEADER

Congress general secretary KC Venugopal on Friday accused the ECI of acting like a "BJP department," alleging that it swiftly issued a notice to party chief Mallikarjun Kharge over his remarks against the prime minister, while taking no action on Narendra Modi's recent public address.

Venugopal claimed that the prime minister's recent public address, following the defeat of bills related to women's reservation and delimitation in Parliament, was "a clear violation of election rules and the Model Code of Conduct."

## BJP will stop Babri-model mosque in West Bengal: Amit Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Kolkata

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday accused the Trinamool Congress of allowing a suspended party leader to build a mosque modelled on the Babri Masjid of Ayodhya in West Bengal, and asserted that the BJP would not allow its construction as long as one party worker is alive in the State.

Addressing back-to-back poll rallies, Shah also asserted that after the BJP comes to power in the State, those involved in cattle smuggling

will be dealt so severely that their next three generations would not dare to engage in this.

He also mounted a sharp attack on the Mamata Banerjee Government, alleging failure on governance, law and order and employment fronts, and said the upcoming assembly election is crucial for making Bengal free from terror, riots and infiltrators.

"Mamata didi, remember that till one BJP worker is alive in Bengal, we will not allow construction of Babri Masjid here," Shah



Union Home Minister Amit Shah addressing a press conference ahead of the second phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections in Kolkata PTI

said in Uttarpara in Hooghly district. The BJP leader hit out at

Banerjee, also the TMC supreme, Mamata Banerjee, alleging that a former party

MLA Humayun Kabir was allowed to initiate construction of a mosque modelled on the Babri Masjid in Murshidabad district.

Kabir, after being suspended from the Trinamool Congress, has formed a new outfit, Aam Janata Unnayan Party, which is contesting several seats in the assembly elections.

Shah alleged that infiltrators are taking away jobs and rations of the poor, and they will be identified and jailed after May 5, he said, expressing confidence in the BJP's victory in the State.

## CPI(M)'s AK Balan calls Ex-MLA Anvar chameleon over TMC switch claim



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Palakkad (Kerala)

Senior CPI(M) leader AK Balan on Friday called former LDF MLA PV Anvar a "political creature who changes colour like a chameleon" in connection with the latter's recent reported claims that more Left leaders will join the TMC.

Balan said that after leaving the LDF, Anvar first went to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and then to the Trinamool Congress (TMC).

"Now, who knows where he will go," the CPI(M) leader said while speaking to a TV channel here. He also said all this was the consequence of "cheating the Left front".

"This is proof of how the identity and credibility of a person is lost," he said. Anvar has not reacted to Balan's comments yet.

## CM Stalin meets DMK candidates after record high TN turnout



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Chennai

Chief Minister MK Stalin on Friday met the DMK candidates a day after Tamil Nadu voted enthusiastically recording 85.15 per cent voting.

He interacted with the candidates from Chennai, Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur districts at the party headquarters Anna Arivalayam here regarding the unprecedented voter turnout on April 23, a source in the party said.

According to sources, Stalin, who is the president of the DMK, is likely to go on a short trip with his family to Kodaikanal on April 25. He had hectorically campaigned for the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance candidates during the month-long campaign.

His son and Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi had left for Dubai along with his family for a short vacation.

A source in the AIADMK said the party general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami is in his hometown of Siluvampalayam in Salem district, while BJP State chief Nainar Nagenthran is in his home district of Tirunelveli.

Sustaining the pitch raised during the Assembly election, BJP candidate from Mylapore and former Governor Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan accused Stalin of not holding local body elections.

"But as leader of the Opposition he had demanded the conduct of local body elections on time," she said in a post on the 'X'.

## TN poll parties to keep vigil on strong rooms storing EVMs

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Chennai

As the ECI shifted EVMs to the strong rooms following polling on April 23, political parties including ruling DMK and the AIADMK and have decided to maintain 24/7 shift-based vigil at the designated centres.

Ahead of the May 4 counting of polled votes, the Election Commission has shifted the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPATs) to the strong rooms.

Though multiple security systems including central



armed police force, Tamil Nadu special police teams were in place, political parties have deployed their

cadres to ensure the safety of EVMs. R M Babu Murugavel, Joint Secretary, AIADMK Legal

Wing told PTI that "our cadres will be in the campus round-the-clock on shift basis where the EVMs and VVPAT were stored".

Stating that all the entry and exit points will be monitored thoroughly, he said strong rooms will be guarded till counting starts on May 4.

"We have also ensured pure drinking water facilities and food supply to our cadres, who will be ensuring the safety of EVMs and VVPATs," G Venkatesan, a senior DMK functionary of Pallavaram constituency in Chennai said.

He said that the party

workers, who will be "on duty" near the strong rooms, were given ID cards. "We have also instructed our cadres to be friendly with other political parties' functionaries so that there will be smooth monitoring activities", he added.

Election Commission (EC) sources here said that the strong rooms have been sealed in the presence of political party representatives and election observers with required documentation and video recording. Besides deploying armed forces, CCTV cameras have been installed in all the strong rooms across the

State and they would be monitored round the clock.

A senior official said that the State election authorities have given permission with certain terms and conditions for the representatives of the political parties to keep vigil on the strong rooms where the EVMs are stored.

Elections to 234 Assembly segments in Tamil Nadu were held on Thursday.

The DMK, which heads the Secular Progressive Alliance, is seeking to retain power, and is leading a multi-party coalition that includes Congress, Left parties and the VCK.

## AAP strong alternative in Gujarat, will win Rajkot civic polls: Sisodia

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Rajkot

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Manish Sisodia on Friday said that his party has emerged as a strong alternative in Gujarat and will sweep the upcoming Rajkot Municipal Corporation election.

Speaking to reporters here on the last day of campaigning for the April 26 polls, Sisodia accused the BJP-led state Government of systematically weakening public hospitals and governance over the last 30 years.

Elections to local bodies in Gujarat, including 15 municipal corporations, will be held on April 26, and votes will be counted on April 28.



"AAP has now emerged as a strong alternative. This time it will win in the Rajkot Municipal Corporation," the former deputy chief minister of Delhi said.

He targeted the ruling party, alleging that the condition of Government schools in Rajkot is "extremely poor".

While some school buildings had undergone improvements after AAP raised the issue, the quality of education remains poor, he said.

## Mamata winning polls in Bengal, Congress in Kerala, DMK in TN: Farooq Abdullah

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Srinagar

National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah claimed on Friday that opposition parties are winning Assembly polls in the three key states of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

"I tell you, and the rest, god knows, Mamata Banerjee is winning in Bengal, Congress is winning in Kerala and (MK) Stalin's party (DMK) is winning in Tamil Nadu. This is God's blessing," Abdullah told reporters at Hazratbal when asked about the ongoing elections.

Responding to a question on the conflict in the Middle East, the NC chief said peace is essential and expressed



hope that the war would end as soon as possible.

"If peace does not return to the Middle East, tragedies for this world are major and everyone - every country, every leader - must try and see that this war comes to an end immediately. I hope that the US president has realised that Israel was not right in pushing him towards

war. I hope to god that he will move quickly and China and Russia will also see to it that this war comes to an end as quickly as possible," he said.

On the Centre's Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan, the former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said people's support is imperative to win the war against drugs.

## TN voters redefined election politics, shatter myth: TVK chief Vijay

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Chennai

Actor-politician and TVK chief Vijay on Friday said that the 85 per cent voter turnout recorded in the April 23 Tamil Nadu Assembly election redefined election politics and shattered myths.

The State saw an enthusiastic turnout of voters never seen before, he said, and remarked that the "election is a festival of democracy" was truly felt



yesterday. Tamil Nadu recorded a voting percentage of 85.15,

its highest ever, on Thursday when elections were held to 234 Assembly segments,

according to EC figures. "As the people of Tamil Nadu have redefined Tamil Nadu election politics, I offer my gratitude to them," Vijay said in a statement posted on 'X'.

He noted that families, including first-time voters, flocked to polling stations with enthusiasm usually witnessed during temple festivals.

Also, he thanked the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam polling agents and party members and lauded their

work carried out despite their political adversaries mocking them for lack of political experience.

He said the myths created by those who confined politics within the realm of the powerful or experienced have now been shattered by ordinary people.

Vijay exuded confidence that the TVK would emerge victorious in the polls. "Let's remain optimistic. Good things will follow. Victory is certain," Vijay said.

## TMC threatened BJP worker in Kolkata: Suvendu Adhikari



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Kolkata

BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari on Friday alleged that a BJP worker was intimidated and threatened at her residence in South Kolkata by ruling TMC supporters, and demanded immediate action from the Election Commission of India.

In a post on X, Adhikari claimed that BJP worker Bina Das was targeted by a group of "goons" who surrounded her house on late Wednesday evening and harassed her for conducting door-to-door campaigning for the party.

"This is a blatant attempt to stifle the Opposition and terrorise women party workers who are standing up against this corrupt regime," Adhikari, the leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, said.

He linked the incident to the high voter turnout of nearly 93 per cent recorded in the first phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections on Thursday, claiming the

ruling party was "scared" following what he described as an "imminent rout."

Adhikari, who is contesting from the high-profile Bhabanipur constituency, the seat held by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, said a complaint had been filed at Kalighat police station and urged the ECI to take "immediate cognisance" and ensure strict action against the perpetrators.

Adhikari had won from the Nandigram seat in the 2021 Assembly elections, defeating Banerjee. She later went to the Assembly after winning a bypoll from Bhabanipur. The BJP leader is contesting from Nandigram this time too.

"If the local police remain silent spectators to this hooliganism, we will not sit back," he warned, adding that TMC's threats will not stop change. The TMC was not immediately available for comment. Bhabanipur will go to the polls in the second and final phase of voting on April 29. Results will be out on May 4.

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### Order Order

## SIR: CJI hails record voter turnout in first phase of West Bengal polls



The Supreme Court on Friday asked the appellate tribunals to give out-of-turn hearing to those who make out a case of urgent hearing for addition in voter lists after the Special Intensive Revision of rolls in West Bengal. At the start of the hearing, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant expressed happiness over the high voter turnout in the first phase of West Bengal Assembly polls held on Thursday. West Bengal registered a record voter turnout of 92.72 per cent in the first phase of assembly polls for 152 constituencies. "As a citizen of India, I was very happy to see the voting percentage. When people exercise the right to vote, this strengthens democratic set up," the CJI said. The bench, also comprising justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, was hearing a batch of petitions, including the one filed by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee related to the SIR of electoral rolls in the state. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta also hailed the high voter turnout besides commending the role of central forces in ensuring peaceful elections in the state which has a history of violence-hit elections in the past. The top court also asked the persons excluded from the voter lists to approach the court-appointed 19 appellate tribunals for redressal of pending issues, including the deletion of names from the voters list.

## SC stays proceedings against cop for rioting



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Noting that no prosecution witness had been examined for 35 years, the Supreme Court has stayed proceedings against a police officer in a case of rioting and voluntarily causing hurt dating back to 1989. The top court said it was inclined to quash the proceedings on the ground of delay alone, but would like to hear the State before proceeding further.

A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and Vijay Bishnoi issued a notice to the Uttarakhand Government on the police officer's plea challenging an Allahabad High Court order refusing to quash the criminal proceedings. "We are informed that in all, five accused came to be chargesheeted, including the present petitioner. Out of five, two co-accused passed away, and the other two co-accused have already been acquitted as the prosecution failed to produce any of the prosecution witnesses for the purpose of recording oral evidence.



## SC refers Christian Michel's plea for release to another bench

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday referred to another bench a plea of alleged middleman Christian Michel James in the ₹3,600-crore AgustaWestland VVIP chopper scam case seeking his release from jail. The Delhi High Court had on April 8 dismissed the petition of the British national in the case, saying there was no merit in the plea of James who was extradited from Dubai in December 2018.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi took note of the fact that the earlier pleas of the accused were heard by another bench headed by Justice Vikram Nath. "Let this matter be referred to a bench headed by Justice Vikram Nath," the CJI said. In his petition, James

assailed a provision of the India-UAE extradition treaty. He also challenged a trial court order of August 7, 2025 by which his application under Section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) for his release from jail was rejected.

James challenged Article 17 of the treaty, signed in 1999, which allows the requesting state (in this case India) to prosecute extradited persons not only for the specific offence for which extradition was done, but also for connected offences.

It was argued before the high court that an extradited person can be prosecuted only for the offences for which extradition took place, and not for connected offences.

James, in its petition, also submitted that he completed seven years in jail on December 4, 2025 and has, therefore, already undergone



Christian Michel in custody coming to court

FILE PHOTO

the maximum sentence possible for the offences for which he was extradited, rendering his continued detention in India illegal.

The high court, in his order, stated that it was not permissible for James to re-agitate issues pertaining to the treaty

which, at least on a prima facie basis, have already been considered by the Supreme Court.

It nonetheless considered provisions of the treaty and ruled that James was extradited for facing trial for offences which directly arises from

the factual background in the present case, and therefore, his prosecution fell within the scope of the treaty.

After his extradition, James was arrested by the CBI and the Enforcement Directorate (ED). James is among the three alleged middlemen being probed in the case, and the other two are Guido Haschke and Carlo Gerosa.

He was granted bail by the Supreme Court in the CBI case in February 2025. The high court granted him bail in the ED case in March that year.

James, however, continues to be in jail as he was unable to fulfil the bail conditions.

A trial court directed James to furnish a personal bond of ₹5 lakh and a cash surety of the same amount to secure his release in the CBI case. In the ED case, the high court asked him to furnish a personal bond of ₹5 lakh and a cash surety of ₹10 lakh.

The high court also clarified that James could be released without depositing the passport, which has expired immediately.

The authorities concerned were asked to deposit the fresh passport, whenever ready, with the trial court directly, it added.

The high court also asked the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) to ensure that James does not leave the country.

The CBI, in its charge sheet, has alleged an estimated loss of 398.21 million euros (about ₹2,666 crore) to the exchequer due to the deal that was signed on February 8, 2010, for the supply of VVIP choppers worth 556.26 million euros.

The ED, in its charge sheet filed against James in June 2016, alleged that he had received 30 million euros (about ₹225 crore) from AgustaWestland.

## SC directs Uttar Pradesh DGP to form SIT to probe minor's rape and murder in Ghaziabad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the Uttar Pradesh DGP to constitute a special investigation team to probe the case of a four-year-old girl, who was allegedly raped and killed in Ghaziabad last month.

Observing that the victim's parents were dissatisfied with the probe conducted by Ghaziabad police, a bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant said the special investigation team (SIT) should be notified preferably on Friday or by 11 am on Saturday. The bench, also comprising justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, directed that the SIT should consist of women police officers and be headed by an officer of the rank of commissioner or inspector general.

The SIT will look into all the grievances raised by the victim's parents and also probe the role of two private hospitals,



which allegedly denied treatment to the victim, the bench said.

The SIT will file its supplementary report before the concerned trial court within two weeks, the bench said, as it asked the trial court to keep the ongoing proceedings in the case in abeyance till then. The bench passed the order while hearing a plea filed by the victim's father seeking a court-monitored probe into the

case, either by an SIT or the CBI.

Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the police, told the bench that a chargesheet has already been filed in the case and the trial has also commenced.

While hearing the matter on April 13, the top court had flagged the "reluctance" of Ghaziabad police in lodging an FIR and conducting an investigation into the case. On March 16, a neighbour allegedly lured the victim on the pretext of buying her chocolates. When the child did not return, her father launched a search and found her lying unconscious, soaked in blood.

On April 10, the apex court had lambasted Ghaziabad police's "insensitive approach" in the investigation of the case. The court had expressed dismay that two private hospitals in Ghaziabad had refused to admit the bleeding child, who was eventually declared dead at a Government hospital.

## Gherao of judicial officers: SC permits NIA to file chargesheet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday permitted the NIA to file its charge sheet on completion of investigation in the sensational incident of April 1 in West Bengal in which seven judicial officers were illegally confined by a mob in Malda district.

As many as 700 judicial officers from West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand are deployed in the ongoing SIR process to deal with over 60 lakh objections of those excluded from the voter list.

The top court had taken



suo motu cognisance of a letter from the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court detailing a harrowing incident of April 1 night, where seven judicial officers,

including three women, and a five-year-old child were held captive by a mob for over nine hours without food or water.

Later, the National

Investigation Agency (NIA) took over the probe into the case on a complaint of the Election Commission at the instruction of the top court.

On Friday, a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi was informed by Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, appearing for the NIA, that a fresh status report was filed by the probe agency giving details of the investigation carried so far.

The bench took note of the submissions of the law officer and said, "The NIA will be at liberty to file

chargesheet in a court of competent jurisdiction."

It also permitted the NIA not to file any further status report in the case for the time being after Raju said that the investigators will be "neckdeep into the investigation". On April 13, the bench made it clear that the security cover provided to judicial officers engaged in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal will remain in place until the conclusion of the upcoming assembly election and cannot be withdrawn without its prior permission.

## MIB blocked release of Lawrence of Punjab docuseries, Delhi HC told

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Zee5 on Friday told the Delhi High Court that the central Government has asked it not to go ahead with the release of a docuseries on gangster Lawrence Bishnoi, which is scheduled to air on its OTT platform on April 27. Justice Purushendra Kumar Kaurav was hearing a petition by Bishnoi against the release of 'Lawrence of Punjab' on Zee5.

"MIB (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting) has now issued an advisory advising us not to go ahead with the release. MIB has issued an advisory at 12 o'clock asking us not to release," the counsel for the platform said. In view of the development, Justice Kaurav deferred hearing on the petition till Monday.

According to the makers, the show "traces the journey of a criminal identity through the lens of culture, systems, and visibility" and treats Bishnoi as a case study in the ecosys-



tem of student politics, music, ideology and media amplification". Bishnoi, 33, currently lodged in a Gujarat jail, is facing multiple criminal cases. He is one of the main accused in the murder of singer Sidhu Moosewala.

Earlier, the Punjab Police wrote to the Centre and urged it to direct ZEE5 to refrain from airing the docuseries on Bishnoi, saying it poses a significant risk to public order.

## SC refuses to entertain pleas of those on election duty in West Bengal, asks them to move tribunal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain pleas filed by several individuals from West Bengal, including 65 persons on election duty, against the deletion of their names from the voter list following the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls.

The apex court asked them to approach the appellate tribunals constituted to decide appeals against the deletion or exclusion of names from the voter list.

"You have to raise these arguments before the (appellate) tribunal," a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya



Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi told the counsel appearing for the petitioners in two separate pleas.

The counsel for the petitioners argued that the dif-

ference in these petitions was that 65 petitioners were on election duty in the state.

"The order issued for election duty mentioned the EPIC (electors photo identification card) number, which was

deleted subsequently. Now, the people on election duty cannot vote. This, on the face, is arbitrary," the counsel argued. He said deletion of their names from the electoral rolls following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise was "arbitrary" as no show-cause notice was issued to the petitioners.

The counsel argued that the petitioners have already filed their appeals before the appellate tribunal. "Appropriate orders will be passed by the appellate tribunal," the bench said. "We will examine the more valuable right to remain on the rolls," it added.

The top court said the minor in this case is 15 years old and the pregnancy is unwanted and continuing the pregnancy is not in the interest of the pregnant minor particularly when she has attempted to foreclose her life on two occasions.

## No court can force minor to carry pregnancy against her will: Supreme Court

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

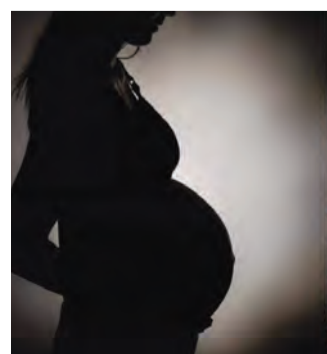
Observing that no court can force a woman, especially a minor, to carry a pregnancy against her will, the Supreme Court on Friday allowed a 15-year old girl to medically terminate her over seven-month pregnancy.

A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan said the choice of the pregnant woman is relevant rather than that of the child to be born and stressed that continuation of such a pregnancy could have long lasting repercussions on the

minor's mental health, educational prospects, social standing and overall development.

The top court remarked that the reproductive autonomy of a woman must be accorded the highest importance and if a woman, carrying an unwanted pregnancy, is compelled to continue it then her constitutional rights would be breached.

"The right to make decisions concerning one's body particularly in matters of reproduction is an integral facet of personal liberty and privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution. The right



cannot be rendered ineffective by imposing unreasonable restrictions especially in cases involving minors and unwanted pregnancies such



as in the instant case. "No court ought to compel any woman and more so a minor child to carry a pregnancy to full term against her

express will. Such compulsion would not only disregard her decision autonomy but also inflict grave mental emotional and physical trauma in case she is compelled to give birth," the bench said.

In the circumstances denying relief would compel the minor to endure irreversible consequences and such an approach would be contrary to the constitutional and settled principles recognising reproductive choice is a fundamental right.

The apex court said the choice of the pregnant woman is relevant rather

than that of the child to be born. "It is easy to say that if the pregnant woman is not interested in raising the child she may give away the child in adoption and, therefore, she must give birth to the child.

"That cannot be a consideration particularly in cases where the child to be born is unwanted. In such a situation, directing the pregnant woman to give birth to the child against her wishes and, therefore, continue her pregnancy would negate the welfare of the pregnant woman and make it subordinate to the child yet to be

born," the bench said. It said the constitutional courts must weigh the circumstances in which a case in relation to the welfare of the pregnant woman has to be considered rather than the child to be born. "The constitutional Court ought to weigh all facts and circumstances from the lens of the party who intends to terminate the pregnancy and is willing to undertake the medical risks rather than directing completion of the pregnancy and giving birth to an unwanted child. "If the constitutional Court states that even an

unwanted pregnancy has to be continued then instead of approaching the court for permission parties then visit illegal abortion centres or secretly undergo termination of such a pregnancy which would make the pregnant woman more vulnerable and exposed to dangers," the bench said.



## Editor's TAKE

### Vijay disrupts Dravidian duopoly

The 2026 Assembly election may not immediately dethrone the Dravidian majors, but it signals the beginning of a more fragmented and competitive era

Tamil Nadu voted to choose its next Assembly on April 23, 2026, and the results would be out on May 4, with the rest of the States that went to polls in the recently held Assembly election. However, the southern politics is way different from what it is in the North. The biggest difference is the absence of the largest ruling party at the centre – the Bharatiya Janata Party, which has sway over most of the northern states, yet still needs to make its presence felt in the southern states.

For long, the Dravidian politics has been dominated by cult figures like MGR, Jayalalitha and has its own dynamics. The chessboard of Tamil Nadu politics has only two players – a bipolar axis dominated by M. K. Stalin's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, which was headed by charismatic J Jayalalitha. The 2026 election, however, marks a decisive break from that tradition. This time, a new entrant, equally charismatic and sharp, actor-turned-politician Vijay, might well be the third vertex of Tamil Nadu's politics.

Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam has transformed the electoral battlefield into a triangular contest. Vijay represents a generational and structural shift. With a projected vote share of 15-20 per cent, TVK may become a serious contender with its leader's charisma, whose messaging and organisational groundwork may disrupt the well-entrenched political parties. Having said that, it is not to suggest that Vijay is the top runner; he is not, at least for now, but his presence would be felt by all. Ironically, TVK may hurt the Opposition party more than the ruling one. The AIADMK, still recovering from the leadership vacuum left after J. Jayalalitha, relies heavily on consolidating anti-incumbency sentiment and would have secured all the disgruntled voters, but with Vijay present as a counter force competing in the same space, that vote might get divided as Vijay's appeal among young, urban, and first-time voters is immense. For Stalin and the DMK, Vijay is good news.

The DMK party continues to benefit from a strong governance narrative, welfare schemes, and a stable social coalition. TVK's focus on youth, employment, and anti-corruption messaging could erode the DMK's urban and aspirational voter base, but it would be marginal and impact the fence-sitters. As for the Bharatiya Janata Party, its role in Tamil Nadu remains limited. Unlike in northern states, the BJP has struggled to establish a deep social and cultural foothold in the South. The deeper question is why Tamil Nadu's politics differs so sharply from that of northern India. The answer lies in history and identity. Welfare politics here is part of a broader social contract. Leaders are judged as much by their ability to deliver governance as by their ideological commitments. This contrasts with the North, where caste alignments, religious polarisation, and national narratives often play a more dominant role. Moreover, Tamil Nadu's electorates have traditionally favoured regional leadership over national parties. In all likelihood, Vijay would be a serious contender in the next assembly election, and the era of bi-polarity may become a relic of the past!

## Gender politics or political chicanery?

The Women's Bill's failure is not just a legislative setback – it is a revealing moment, exposing how even widely endorsed ideals can falter when they threaten entrenched interests



VK BAHUGUNA

The Constitutional (131 Amendment Bill), 2026 aimed at implementation of 33 per cent women reservation in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies by 2029 fell through in the Lok Sabha on 17th April 2026 as the government could not muster the two third majority required to pass the Bill. It has dashed the hopes of 50% of the population of the country at the altar of political rivalry and thus an historical opportunity for gender equity in running the country's legislatures was lost. One of the contentious issues was the delimitation being proposed by the government to increase the Lok Sabha seats to 850 from the present 543 seats. The opposition Congress and DMK opposed it on specious ground with no solid reasons that the seats of Southern States would be reduced. Rather the seats are indeed increasing after adjusting the women reservation in each state. In fact Southern states as stated by Andhra Chief Minister Mr Chandra Babu Naidu have lost an historical opportunity for increased participation in the Parliament as there was a simple formula to increase seats by 50 per cent in each State to accommodate 33 per cent reservations for women. It was a well intentioned decision by the Narendra Modi government. The opposition parties have given a self defeating blow to them and committed a political hara-kiri of worst kind. While the principle of gender parity is widely celebrated in public discourse, the legislative journey of the Women's Reservation Bill reveals a complex landscape of federal friction, identity politics, and the strategic survival of the existing political class.

Though since Independence India's journey in gender equity has been far better than the western democracies like USA and Britain. It is actually quite a point of pride in Indian history that India adopted Universal Adult Suffrage immediately upon the commencement of the Constitution in 1950. Unlike Britain or the United States, which forced women to fight for decades or even centuries for the right, India enfranchised all women and men equally from day one. In that sense, India's "starting line" was more progressive than the long, staggered journey the British had to endure. Britain though allowed sketchy women franchise in 1921 but one person one vote came only after 1948 Act

In India the historical breakthrough was reached in September 2023, the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act was passed by the Parliament. It promised 33 per cent reservation



A CASE IN POINT IS IN 1950 DELHI WITH AN AREA OF 1489 SQ KM WITH A POPULATION IN 1950 OF LITTLE ABOVE FOUR LAKH AFTER PARTITION OF THE COUNTRY WAS ALLOCATED SEVEN LOK SABHA SEATS AS AGAINST FIVE TO UTTARAKHAND WITH AN AREA OF 55,000 SQ KM AND A POPULATION OF AROUND 29 LAKH IN 1950

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for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. Yet, a crucial caveat was inserted: the reservation would only take effect after a new Census was conducted and a subsequent delimitation for redrawing of constituency boundaries was completed.

The government logic is simple by adding new seats; the state can carve out a 33 per cent quota for women without unseating current male representatives. It was a win-win situation which the opposition's short sightedness derailed it. The DMK and the Congress raised the spurious issue of demographic dominance of North which is a frivolously diversionary Politics as the proposal has equal share for each state in the ratio of 50%. The opposition parties merged the divisive politics of federalism with the women reservation at a time when the women were about to get their share as agreed by all parties after the 2023 bill was passed.

As of April 2026, this delimitation clause has become the epicentre of Indian politics highlighting the critical fault lines of Indian politics. Now many critics are asking the opposition parties why they did not raise the issue of reservation based on existing seats in 2023 when the Bill was passed and why they supported delimitation clause at that time and now finding fault with it. Many women organizations claim that it is a case of gender bias to deliberately deny the women their right by hook or crook.

Many family based parties raised the issue of reservation within reservations especially sub-quota for backward classes. The opposition fear is that the redrawing of boundaries could be used to strategically weaken opposition strongholds under the guise of gender empowerment. The politics of women's reservation is not just about seats;

it is about the gate keeping of political power. Even without a formal quota, political parties have the power to field more women candidates. However, data from recent assembly elections shows that women constitute only about 10% of total candidates. Parties often cite winning prospects as a reason for not nominating women, a logic that reservation aims to break. Furthermore, there is the well known phenomenon of "Sarpanch Pati" (husbands of elected women exercising actual power) seen at the grass root democracy. Critics argue that without systemic changes in the internal structures of parties and the elimination of muscle politics, a seat-based quota might only lead to "proxy" representation.

Let us also discuss about the tricky issue of delimitation which is mandated under Article 82 for the Parliamentary Constituencies and Article 170 for the State assemblies based on census data. The 42nd Amendment Act (1976) froze the allocation of seats to states and the division of constituencies at the 1971 census level until the year 2000. Further, 84th Amendment Act (2001) & 87th Amendment (2003) extended the freeze on seat allocation until 2026, though it permitted re-adjusting constituency boundaries within states based on the 2001 census. The current seat allocation is based on the 2001 Census, with the next delimitation exercise due after the first census conducted after 2026.

However, before the next step is taken the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi must think of amending the constitution to lay out a broader framework for delimitation and abandon the sole criteria of census based population for delimitation of constituencies as the population control has become a prime national need of the present time.

Already the Southern states who have controlled the population growth well have been demanding the change in approach. Similarly, Uttarakhand and Himachal were at loss in the past as their difficult terrains were not taken into consideration while allocating seats.

A case in point is in 1950 Delhi with an area of 1489 sq km with a population in 1950 of little above four lakh after partition of the country was allocated seven Lok Sabha seats as against five to Uttarakhand with an area of 55,000 sq km and a population of around 29 lakh in 1950.

In case of Himachal four seats of allocated as against a population of 23.86 lakhs in 1950. Such distortions need to be corrected but require a very bold vision.

A futuristic pragmatic and innovative solution is the need of the hour but in any case the 2026 delimitation should be the last delimitation exercise.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

The writer is founder of Kala - Crazy About Literature And Arts, is an author, speaker, coach, arbitrator, and strategy consultant

## PICTALK



A monarch butterfly flies amid heat during the summer season at the Lucknow Zoo. PHOTO: PTI



SANJAY CHANDRA

## 2ND OPINION

We were in Berlin during the last leg of our vacation in Europe with friends, and boarded a train to Frankfurt for our return flight. A group of young men were already in the coach, and to describe them as merely boisterous would be an understatement. They carried enough bottles of beer to last the journey, and their voices travelled easily across the entire coach.

We requested the conductor for a change of seats. He empathised, but could do little beyond politely asking them to lower their volume. Fortunately for us, the group got down after a couple of hours, leaving behind spilled beer, tissues, and a collective sense of relief among the passengers. They were football players and their supporters, carried away by the euphoria of the moment, but indifferent to the discomfort they caused.

## When behaviour crosses the line

The previous evening, we had dined at an upscale restaurant in Germany, where another group of young men and women were celebrating a birthday with equal exuberance. The laughter was loud and the celebration unrestrained, and the rest of the diners watched with a mix of indulgence and annoyance. It was only when the waiter quietly intervened that the group moderated itself.

These were, after all, Europeans—often perceived, and not infrequently by themselves, as more disciplined and better behaved than the rest of us from what is loosely termed the developing world. We, too, are quick to accept that hierarchy, and even quicker to criticise our own people for similar behaviour.

And yet, the truth is less flattering and far more universal, for the line between restraint and excess is not defined by geography.

I was reminded of a lunch with old friends at a club in Delhi. We had begun our careers together over four decades ago, and were meeting again after many years. Seated at the centre of the dining hall, we were no less animated and no less loud, despite having crossed the age of sixty. It took a gentle but firm message from older diners for us to recognise that we, too, had crossed a line.

There is, therefore, a thin and often invisible boundary between celebration and disregard, between expression and imposition.

However, what we witnessed in the train coach was

something more than mere exuberance. It was not just noise; it carried with it a certain assertion—the confidence that comes from being part of a group, the ease with which individual restraint dissolves into collective excess.

We have seen this more starkly across the globe, and in our own country. There have been instances where individuals, backed by political power or sheer numbers, have occupied spaces not meant for them and responded with aggression when questioned. The authority of position, or the anonymity of the crowd, often emboldens behaviour that would otherwise be unthinkable.

It is in such moments that the issue ceases to be one of manners and becomes one of responsibility. Perhaps the question, then, is not about where such behaviour occurs, or whether it belongs to the so-called developed or developing world, but about how easily we slip into it ourselves. The distinction we often draw between societies begins to blur in such moments, revealing that civility is not a function of geography or economic status, but of individual restraint. If there is to be any meaningful change, it will not come from comparing cultures, but from recognising that the discipline we expect in public spaces must first be practised within.

## DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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## BENGALIS ARE FACING PHYSICAL & MENTAL ATROCITIES IN 'DOUBLE ENGINE' STATES

The Who's Who of the saffron brigade, who are bizarrely accusing TMC government of "colluding with the Bangladeshi infiltrators", are not only advertising their own blatant failure in preventing the alleged infiltration as maintaining the sanctity of the international border from the sole responsibility of the Centre only; but also zealously engaged in fomenting hatred in the name of religion and nationality, often bizarrely equating the Bangla speakers as "Bangladeshis" as well! No wonder why innumerable Bengalis are facing physical economic mental atrocities in several "Double Engine" states for around a year, compelling several of them to escape to Bengal from the saffron states of their very own country! Even many have found themselves deported to Bangladesh as well

and the greatest tragedy remains that far from protesting against assault upon humanity; majority of the population are either enjoying it or offering tacit approval through silence!

In such a heartless perspective, it is most natural that releasing dangerous reptiles like crocodiles and poisonous snakes in the riverine frontier of the international border can also be contemplated without giving it a thought that those creatures cannot distinguish between Indian and Bangladeshi citizens and can even invade Indian villages during flood! Actually when undiluted hatred calls the last shot, who cares about human lives!

When will human beings be allowed natural access across borders without hurdles just like air cloud birds fishes!

KAJAL CHATTERJEE | KOLKATA

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Voter tsunami shakes Bengal polls

Due to Voters Tsunami in the first phase of Bengal assembly election everyone whether it is a political pundit or a layman has been surprised to which way the wind will blow. As the turnout figures had clocked about 95 per cent. Samsarganj in Murshidabad district, the Assembly seat in the first phase of polling in West Bengal which had the highest deletions in the SIR adjudication phase, had recorded 96.04 per cent turnout until 11.30 pm, according to the ECINET app. The central question is not who will be voted to power, but who will be allowed to vote. The principal political contenders - the Trinamool Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party have, predictably, drawn their own cheerful conclusions about such an unprecedented participation of the people in the polls. What cannot be denied though is that the high turnout was the consequence of public anxiety regarding the exclusionary nature of the SIR.

In Tamil Nadu, the high turnout unfolded amid a three-cornered contest between the DMK, AIADMK-led alliance and actor-politician Vijay's TVK. The emergence of Vijay as a third factor energised younger voters and triggered visible movement across districts, with reports of people crowding into buses and travelling long distances to vote in their native constituencies.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

### Halt malaria in its tracks

Zealous health workers and professionals, with an active participation of the government, have slowed down the incidence of malaria. The WHO's Global Technical Strategy 2016–2030 has undertaken several steps to halt malaria in its tracks. It expects a ninety percent reduction in malaria incidence and mortality rates by the year 2030. Diagnosis, surveillance, risk monitoring and cost-benefit analysis are systematically mapped. Infants children under 5, pregnant women, HIV AND AIDS patients, travellers are at high risk. Seventy per cent of the world's malaria burden is borne by ten African countries and India.

Female anopheles mosquito vector control, therefore, cannot be de-escalated by any means as is the elimination of Plasmodium falciparum malarial parasites, the causative agent. There are as many as thirty malaria transmitting anopheles vectors; so the challenge is huge. Insecticide resistance is another issue. The so-called high burden to high impact strategy of the WHO aims to deliver an optimal anti-malarial response to appropriate areas. Climate watch, rainfall assessment, elimination of places where the vector mosquitoes have high propensity to thrive and grow, and human immunity matter.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

### Ban tobacco consumption

Tobacco consumption is directly linked to a range of life-threatening diseases, including Lung, oral, throat & esophageal Cancer. Recognising this, the UK Parliament has enacted the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, a pioneering measure introducing a generational ban on tobacco sales. Under this law, individuals born after 01Jan2009, will never legally be permitted to purchase tobacco, with the legal age rising incrementally each year. Championed by Wes Streeting, the policy aims to prevent future addiction and reduce long-term health-care costs by creating a smoke-free generation.

For India, adopting a similar framework must extend beyond limiting consumption to decisively addressing supply through the phased closure of tobacco manufacturing. A carefully structured, time-bound transition is essential to safeguard the livelihoods of those dependent on tobacco cultivation and trade. Simultaneously, crop diversification, alternative employment avenues, and large-scale reskilling programmes must be implemented. Allowing production to continue while restricting access would risk fuelling illicit markets, undermining policy objectives. A gradual but firm wind-down of manufacturing is indispensable for meaningful impact.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

## Iran-US standoff: When the global order begins to fray

The most destabilising fault line may not lie in the waters of the Gulf, but within the United States itself, where a fractured policy establishment—marked by resignations, intelligence leaks, and competing strategic doctrines—has eroded Washington’s credibility as a coherent negotiating force



**BHASKAR JYOTI MAHANTA**

As of late April 2026, the geopolitical landscape is defined by a fragile, high-stakes standoff between Washington and Tehran. What began as a series of targeted strikes in February has devolved into a “grey zone” conflict that threatens to reshape the global financial order and dismantle established maritime security protocols. The situation is a volatile mix of tactical military manoeuvres, internal US political instability, and a fundamental shift in how the world’s rising powers interact with the Western-led financial system.

The conflict reached a fever pitch in mid-April. Following the expiration of the first two-week ceasefire, the situation on the ground remains volatile. On April 13, the US initiated a naval blockade of Iranian ports after negotiations stalled. Iran responded by declaring the Strait of Hormuz a “closed military zone,” effectively choking off 20 per cent of the world’s oil supply. On April 21, the US Navy seized the Iranian-flagged cargo ship *Touska* in the Sea of Oman, citing sanctions violations. Tehran branded this as “piracy” and retaliated immediately. On April 22, an Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) gunboat opened fire on a commercial vessel near the entrance to the Strait. According to the UK Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO), the vessel’s bridge was hit without warning, directly contradicting Tehran’s claim that it was merely enforcing maritime law.

Despite these escalations, President Trump has indefinitely extended the ceasefire “at the request of Pakistan”. However, this “peace” is purely nominal. Both sides are using the lull to reposition assets: the US is bolstering its regional missile defence and naval presence, while Iran is signalling endurance. In a display of calculated defiance, Tehran paraded its Khorramshahr ballistic missiles through civilian streets—a range of 2,000 km—demonstrating that it is not negotiating from a position of weakness. For 50 consecutive nights, large-scale rallies have filled Iranian squares, projecting a sense of national unity and resistance despite the heavy economic toll of the conflict.

Meanwhile, there have been mishaps galore in the internal US administrative and military hierarchies, with several honchos preferring to wash their dirty linen in public. Several senior US officials and officers resigned or were removed during the 2026 US-Iran conflict, most notably Joe Kent, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, who resigned in March 2026, citing opposition to the war. Additionally, Navy Secretary John Phelan stepped down in April 2026 amid a Pentagon shake-up, while Army Chief of Staff Gen. Randy George was asked to step down. The most damaging “hiccup” in recent negotiations stems from reports of a massive intelligence breach involving senior US officials. Rumours have circulated regarding a high-ranking member of the Middle East policy team who allegedly disclosed sensitive “war secrets”—including contingency plans for strikes on Iranian hardened sites and the specific “red lines” for a ground intervention—while in an inebriated state at a private diplomatic gathering.

This lapse has been personified in the recent investigation of Andrew Hug, a branch chief for nuclear and chemical security in the US Army. Caught in an undercover sting, Hug reportedly discussed nuclear launch procedures, chemical nerve agents, and even alleged plans to target Iranian leadership, all while under the influence. While the White House has scrambled to contain the fallout, this lapse has highlighted a deeper, more systemic issue: policy schizophrenia. There is a widening chasm between the “Maximum Pressure 2.0” hawks, who believe Iran’s leadership is on the verge of collapse, and the “de-escalation” pragmatists. The latter group, composed of career diplomats and military leadership, argues that the current path is unsustainable. They contend that the “all-or-nothing” demands presented in the April Islamabad talks were designed to fail, serving as a pretext for a naval blockade rather than a genuine diplomatic exit ramp.

These internal disagreements have led to a “leaky” administration where conflicting signals are being sent to Tehran, confusing Omani and Pakistani mediators



and convincing the Iranian regime that the US is not a unified negotiating partner. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported as recently as last week that while Iran’s programme is “ambitious,” there is no definitive proof it has crossed the threshold into weaponisation. Domestic critics in the US are using this fact to challenge the legitimacy of continued strikes, arguing that the administration is overreaching.

Tehran has rejected the US ceasefire framework outright, demanding reparations for the February strikes, security guarantees, and strategic control over the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian officials are deeply sceptical of the ceasefire extension, calling it a strategic delay—a tactic by the US to buy time while maintaining a strangling naval blockade.

The economic consequences of this 2026 conflict are no longer theoretical; they are manifesting as a fundamental shift in the global financial architecture.

With the Strait of Hormuz effectively a battlefield, Brent crude has spiked to \$115 per barrel, with projections reaching \$130 if the blockade persists through the summer. This has triggered “green inflation,” where the cost of the energy transition has skyrocketed. Petroleum-derived components needed for manufacturing everything from solar panel plastics to turbine lubricants have doubled in price, threatening global climate goals. Perhaps the most significant long-term shift is the accelerated “de-dollarisation” of the Global South. In response to the US using the SWIFT system as a weapon, the BRICS+ bloc has fast-tracked the “BRICS Pay” system. China and India are increasingly settling oil trades in yuan and rupees, bypassing the greenback entirely.

This is creating a bifurcated global economy: a Western-led “Dollar Zone” and an Eastern-led “Commodity Zone,” where trade is backed by physical assets rather than US Treasury debt. The IMF recently cut its 2026 global growth forecast, warning that the UK and Eurozone face the sharpest downgrades due to their energy dependence. The persistent threat of war has led to a “liquidity trap” where private investment in the Middle East has frozen, and capital is fleeing to “safe havens” like gold and decentralised digital assets, which have hit record highs.

As of April 22, 2026, the world is at a crossroads. The US finds itself in a paradoxical position: it possesses overwhelming military superiority, yet its internal cohesion is fraying due to leaks and policy disputes. Iran, though battered and economically haemorrhaging, remains defiant, betting that the global financial pain caused by the blockade will eventually force the West to blink.

The “inebriated” revelations of war secrets symbolise a larger truth: in modern warfare, the lack of a unified diplomatic front is as dangerous as a lack of ammunition. If the Islamabad talks do not resume with a coherent American proposal, the “temporary” ceasefire of April 2026 may be remembered as the final quiet moment before a global economic and military storm. On top of this, there are several threats emanating from around Hormuz, ranging from unmanageable underwater mines to the possibility of disruption to underground international data cable networks. The next 72 hours will determine whether the blockade eases or if the 2026 Iran war enters its most destructive phase.



AS OF APRIL 22, 2026, THE WORLD IS AT A CROSSROADS. THE US FINDS ITSELF IN A PARADOXICAL POSITION: IT POSSESSES OVERWHELMING MILITARY SUPERIORITY, YET ITS INTERNAL COHESION IS FRAYING DUE TO LEAKS AND POLICY DISPUTES

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## Counted, not weighed: What delimitation asks



**ACHARYA PRASHANT**

Democracy, as a formal system, is indifferent to what produced the vote it counts. This indifference is usually a virtue, for it is what prevents the powerful from assigning themselves additional weight. But there are circumstances in which this same indifference becomes its own form of injustice: when the system’s arithmetic rewards precisely the communities that declined to invest in their own people, and penalises precisely those that did. India is approaching one such circumstance, and the approach has acquired both urgency and a specific political shape.

On April 17, 2026, the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill was defeated in the Lok Sabha. Opposition speakers framed the package as a backdoor rewrite of federal arithmetic; the government called it democratic correction. Neither characterisation resolves the harder question, which the bill’s defeat has deferred but not answered: when the constitutional freeze on parliamentary seat allocation expires this year, what principles should govern the redrawing of India’s political map? The 42nd Constitutional Amendment of 1976, passed during the Emergency, locked Lok Sabha seat allocation to the 1971 census. The 84th Amendment in 2001 extended this freeze to the first census after 2026: fifty years of grace. The implicit promise embedded in this arrangement was convergence. That kind of change is not commanded by constitutional amendment. It is chosen or refused, and across fifty years, the choice was predominantly refusal. If delimitation proceeds now on a purely population-based formula, the Carnegie Endowment’s projection of a Lok Sabha expanded to approximately 848 seats on 2026 population figures shows Uttar Pradesh alone gaining 63 seats and Bihar 39, while the five southern states—Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana—would see their collective share of the House fall from roughly 24 per cent to under 20 per cent. States that lagged on every development metric would gain the most political weight. States that led on every metric would practically be penalised for having done so.

The statistics that explain this outcome are not the record of geographic fortune; they are the record of accumulated decisions. SRS 2021 data places Tamil Nadu’s Total Fertility Rate at 1.5 and Uttar Pradesh’s at 2.7. Kerala’s literacy rate stands at 95.3 per cent against Bihar’s 74.3 per cent. Kerala receives 852 education loan applications per lakh of population annually; Bihar receives 30. The South’s advantage is not resource endowment but the decision, made repeatedly over generations, to invest in human beings rather than simply produce more of them.

CBDT data for 2021-22 shows Karnataka contributed approximately ₹1.26 lakh crore in direct tax collections, Tamil Nadu ₹86,000 crore. Uttar Pradesh contributed ₹23,000 crore and Bihar ₹6,000 crore. A population-based delimitation would add political disposition to fiscal disposition, completing a double penalty on the communities that built what everyone else spent.

Harder still is what the population data conceals about gender. The United Nations Population Fund estimates that nearly 4.6 crore women are missing from India’s population, overwhelmingly from North and West India—the demographic residue of decades of sex-selective discrimination. A society that erases its daughters and then presents its headcount as a democratic credential is not demonstrating vitality; it is performing the oldest substitution: compensating through accumulation what is absent in quality. The South was not born progressive. What changed it was reform: the Dravidian movement’s social revolution, the temple-entry agitations in Kerala, radical public investment in education, and a political willingness to break from orthodoxy even at the cost of social friction. What the North refused was not resources but examination.

In this context, the “grow your population” narrative circulating with renewed intensity across parts of the Hindi heartland is not demographic strategy; it is the ego’s oldest reflex dressed in civilisational language: when examination is declined, accumulation is offered in its place. At the Battle of Plassey in 1757, Siraj-ud-Daulah’s army of fifty thousand outnumbered Clive’s three-thousand-strong force seventeen to one, and lost. Numbers, without the education and institutional investment that transforms numbers into capability, do not constitute power; they constitute a census.

When a democracy counts a vote, what has it counted? A body. In such an arithmetic, the Buddha, who fathered one son before walking out of the palace to examine his life, is outvoted by any householder who fathered twelve without once pausing to examine anything. The Indian tradition itself, from the Upanishads forward, has insisted that a human being is not reducible to a body, that what makes a person a person is the capacity for self-examination, and that a life which has declined examination is barely a life at all. If that is even partly true, headcount is measuring the wrong variable. The question worth asking before the next map is redrawn is not which states have grown their population fastest but which states have grown their people.

India is not the only democracy to have grappled with this tension. The United States Senate gives every state two seats regardless of population, a design explicitly intended to prevent pure demographic weight from dissolving the federal compact. A federal union in which one category of states can permanently outvote another on every matter of national consequence—not because their governance record is stronger but because their numbers are larger—does not remain a genuine federation for long.

A workable alternative exists within the current constitutional framework. The more consequential reform is to attach Lok Sabha seat revision to measurable convergence rather than to the passage of time. A 2051 framework could set threshold benchmarks that northern states must demonstrably approach before their parliamentary weight is permitted to grow: total fertility rate at or below 2.1, female literacy above 85 per cent, sex ratio at birth above 940, and per capita income at least 60 per cent of the national average.

What the next Delimitation Commission decides will either honour fifty years of sacrifice by communities that chose the harder path, or confirm what they have begun to suspect: that in this democracy, the harder path was never worth the effort. What is at stake is not only the political standing of five southern states, but the question of whether the Indian republic intends to remain a country that rewards self-examination, or a country that rewards only its refusal.

This is not the design of a better India. It is a refusal to ratify a worse one.



## In a turbulent world, domestic reforms are India’s strongest foreign policy tool



**RAVI POKHARNA**

As renewed tensions in West Asia disrupt shipping lanes, raise insurance costs, and unsettle energy markets, an old truth is reasserting itself: geopolitics is inseparable from economics. From the Red Sea to Eastern Europe, trade is no longer shaped solely by comparative advantage, but by strategic alignment, resilience, and trust. For India, this presents both an opening and a test. In an era where economic credibility underpins geopolitical influence, foreign policy is increasingly anchored in domestic performance. The clearest signal India can offer to global investors lies not just in its external positioning, but in the consistency, speed, and reliability of execution at home.

The Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, April 2026, represents a paradigm shift in how India governs its economy. While the first iteration in 2023 decriminalised 183 provisions, the 2.0 version covers 784 provisions across 79 central Acts (PIB).

This is not merely a legal housekeeping exercise; it is a competitive necessity. For decades, the “inspector raj” and the threat of imprisonment for technical errors were significant deterrents to FDI. By converting these criminal provisions into civil penalties, India is aligning its regulatory environ-

ment with global peers like Vietnam and Indonesia. In Vietnam, aggressive expansion of National Single Window clearances and amended IP law implementation have streamlined investor entry, contributing to disbursed FDI reaching \$5.41 billion in Q1 2026, a 9.1 per cent year-on-year increase (Vietnam General Statistics Office).

India’s response, EoDB 2.0, moves towards “silent compliance.” The objective is to reduce the compliance thicket, where a typical MSME still navigates up to 1,450 annual requirements (TeamLease RegTech, 2025-26). By introducing adjudicating officers under Jan Vishwas 2.0, the government is signalling that procedural lapses are no longer treated as crimes against the state, but as administrative errors. But the next phase of reform must go beyond this. For global investors, the real question is not how quickly a company can be incorporated, but how efficiently it can scale: can land be acquired without prolonged uncertainty? Can approvals be secured without delays? Can firms expand across states without navigating fragmented compliance systems?

The reform challenge now is clear: India must shift from ease of doing business to ease of growing business. This requires harmonised regulations across states, streamlined compliance systems, and a consistent on-ground experience that matches policy intent.

**The trinity of productivity**  
**Judicial efficiency as economic infrastructure**  
In global boardrooms, contract enforcement is a core investment parameter. India continues to face



significant gaps here. Historically, World Bank data indicated that enforcing a contract in India took approximately 145 days, nearly four years, significantly longer than in peers like China.

The implications are immediate and material, including higher costs of capital, firms hesitating to enter long-term contracts, and shallow supply chains. At the same time, India’s courts are burdened at scale. Over 5.5 crore cases are pending across all court levels. The vast majority—approximately 4.9 crore—clog the district and subordinate courts, often involving minor procedural matters or long-standing land disputes (National Judicial Data Grid, March 2026).

The Jan Vishwas 2.0 logic of “executive adjudication” is the first real pressure-release valve for this system. By moving minor economic offences out of the courtroom, the judiciary can focus on high-stakes commercial disputes. But more must be done. Judicial efficiency must be treated as economic infrastructure, with faster commercial courts, stronger arbitration frameworks, and time-bound dispute resolution. Without this,

India risks losing out in sectors where trust and long-term contracts matter most.

**Logistics: The cost of competitiveness**  
India’s ambitions to become a global manufacturing hub will ultimately be tested on its cost competitiveness. Logistics sits at the heart of that equation. India has made significant progress. Logistics costs have declined from 13-14 per cent of GDP to 7.97 per cent in 2023-24 (DPIIT-NCAER Assessment Report, September 2025), closer to the global benchmark of 8 per cent. Investments in highways, dedicated freight corridors, port modernisation, and digital platforms such as PM Gati Shakti are beginning to yield results.

The competitive landscape is tightening, with Vietnam, Mexico and Indonesia gaining ground. Marginal differences in logistics costs, port dwell time and cargo clearance now determine supply chain decisions. India must prioritise multimodal integration, reduce bottlenecks, and ensure coordination across ministries and states. The National Logistics Policy offers a strong framework; its execution will be decisive.

**Regulatory certainty in an uncertain world**  
In a volatile global environment, predictability is often more valuable than incentives. India’s macro-policy direction has been stable. But businesses continue to encounter uncertainty from regulatory changes, varying interpretations, and compliance complexity, especially when operating across multiple states. The government’s commitment to “Minimum Government, Maximum Governance” through the reduction of 47,000 compliances in November 2025 and the Jan

Vishwas Bill represents a shift towards trust-based regulation. An important next step is to institutionalise this approach. This includes systematic regulatory impact assessments, stakeholder consultation before major policy changes, time-bound approvals and clear implementation timelines, and reduced multiplicity of regulators.

Regulatory certainty is not about slowing reform; it is about making reform predictable and credible. In today’s world, every domestic reform sends a global signal: a contract enforced in one year instead of four signals reliability; a logistics system operating at 8 per cent of GDP instead of 12 per cent signals competitiveness; and a regulatory system based on trust rather than criminalisation signals maturity. Taken together, these define how India is perceived: not just as a large market, but as a dependable partner.

Countries that combine scale, stability, and speed will define the next phase of globalisation. India is well positioned to be among them. But this is not guaranteed. The Jan Vishwas reforms show what is possible when policy shifts from control to trust. The next step is to embed this philosophy across the entire economic system. Because in today’s turbulent world, domestic reforms are no longer just an economic priority; rather, they are India’s most powerful foreign policy tool.

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It was bound to happen. Day before night, when it was daytime in the US, the American stock markets fell, and the indices were down. Taking cues from there, as the Indian equities have done over the past 2-3 weeks, and so have some of Asian markets, the Sensex, or the Bombay Stock Exchange Index, was down by nearly 1,000 points yesterday. April seemed like a lucky month for the index, which crept up rapidly from below 72,000 on March 30 to over 79,000 on April 21. But since then, the Sensex lost 2,600 points. Over the past one year, the difference between the 52-week high and low is an unbelievable more than 14,500 points. Who would have imagined, as late as January, when the index was almost 86,000, that it would be down in the dumps, or seemingly so? The road to 1,07,000 points by the end of 2026, or a massive hike of 40 per cent from the present, as predicted by a leading brokerage house, seems unreachable, with the top covered in blinding storm. But who knows, Indian indices, markets, and equities have performed amazing and blinding miracles in the past.

Of course, the war is a factor, and so are the crude oil prices. The second round of talks failed, or did not take place, and as the US offered to extend the temporary ceasefire, Iran captured a few ships in the Strait of Hormuz, and America did the same with Iranian ships around Kharg Island. The war-like feeling escalated, which triggered bearish sentiments. Well, in some senses, it was not because the conflict continued. It was because the investors, and others expected peace. Expectations clashed with realities. The moment the shipping disruptions became headlines, crude oil reacted, and jumped several dollars to reach \$106 per barrel, from below \$100. A few brokerage houses claimed that \$100 was the new normal, and \$95 was the lowest benchmark that oil would touch, before shooting up, unless peace prevails. In addition, crude will continue to hover \$10-20 over the pre-war prices in the post-conflict period, which may extend for months or even years. Hence, the end of war may not signify the end of energy challenges for the consumers, although the producers are likely to make a killing on Brent.

Despite the restrictions and strictures, some of which seemed like ones followed by closed, socialist economies, the Indian central bank was unable to control or support the rupee. After breaching ₹95 to a dollar, the currency did strengthen to ₹92-plus, but later weakened to breach ₹94. The earlier ₹95 benchmark is on the horizon. This happened immediately as some of the restrictions were eased. This indicates that traders and speculators expect the currency to reach ₹100 to a dollar by the end of this year, if not earlier. The central bank will try to prevent this, with more restrictions later, if required, and hope that once the Iran war ends, the pressures on the rupee will ease, especially in terms of higher crude prices, lower exports, expensive imports, lower GDP growth, and lower foreign exchange outgo. Everything rides on the war, and slippery and slick oily roads. The currency is unlikely to be stable in the midst of these fluctuating fortunes on both sides of the conflict. If the war does not stop, its trajectory is downward, or towards weaker entropy.

Foreign investors remain sellers in Indian equities, as they possibly do in other Asian markets, and those in the emerging economies. Last Thursday, they sold shares worth more than ₹3,000 crore. Domestic investors are trying to take them on. But they face an uphill task under the shadows of the war. Data indicates that retail investors shied away from the markets in March, as is evident from the number of SIP accounts that were either not renewed or lapsed, compared to the new ones. Some experts feel that the institutions, which believe in regularly buying on the lows, and constantly selling on the highs, may be pushing more Indian money into the markets. This explains why the indices rebound with zest and ferocity, even as the whiff of good news reaches the markets. The net equity outflows by foreign investors, higher trade deficit, and outflows via other mechanisms, push the rupee down, and it does the same with equities despite the support from domestic investors. It is a never-ending game, which will stop when the war does.

As mentioned earlier, the Indian and Asian markets take their cues largely from the American ones. "KOSPI in South Korea fell by about one per cent, while Japan's Nikkei 225 advanced roughly 0.4 per cent. In China, the Shanghai Composite Index declined 0.6 per cent, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index also traded lower, though losses remained modest. Overnight, Nasdaq Composite led the decline on Wall Street, ending nearly 0.9 per cent lower. Futures tied to the Dow Jones Industrial Average were also in negative territory, suggesting a cautious start for US markets later in the day," stated a media report. Bond yields in the US were up due to fresh war concerns.

## A rupee gained, two rupees lost

Cash-driven welfare for electoral gains equals economic failure

Critics and observers have commented on the growing practices among the ruling regimes to dole out cash to woo voters, and take attention away from policy and governance failures. Now, a renowned global brokerage house, Bernstein, has written an open and stinging letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the same issues. Cash transfers, states the letter, side-steps genuine concerns among the masses that are related to the lack of jobs, and social security. They signal either the "ills of democracy," or "economic failure of the nation."

But this does not imply that regimes need to ban, or do away, with cash-led welfare schemes. The letter adds that there is evidence from experiences, and studies that "well-designed cash transfers" can reduce fears and insecurity among the poor and underprivileged, ensure sustainable consumption, and boost demand, especially in rural areas, on a regular basis. They help in assuaging the elevated emotions during crises. During the LPG shortages, low-income sections were happy to receive unexpected cash transfers. As a Delhi-based house-help said, "The sarkar (ruling regime) remembers us in times of troubles."

However, there are two long-term issues with regular cash transfers. The first signifies that government revenues that need to be spent on roads, healthcare, education, low-cost-housing, and re-skilling are diverted as doles and incentives for political ends. The economic benefits are temporary, and hard to define. More importantly, the multiplier effects of these are higher, productive gains are durable, and a rupee spent on infrastructure is worth two rupees as doles. Second, money is snatched away from taxpayers to pay subsidies. There are sections that are burdened with higher-than-expected taxes. Indeed, among the middle-class sections, as was earlier restricted to the richer classes, there are voices that question some of the subsidies, especially those that pertain to free food,

almost-free homes, and random and non-productive cash transfers. "Most of our incomes are spent on rents or home EMIs, education, and healthcare. The poor get them for free. They get the subsidies, and my incentives are systematically reduced. Why should I finance them?" questions a Noida-based professional. "Let the regimes help the poor. I have no problem. But do it by curbing corruption, and not by putting the squeeze on my family," laments another middle-class bread-earner.

According to the letter, cash transfers have almost emerged as a governance habit. A system that was aimed to benefit the direct beneficiaries, plug distribution loopholes, and eliminate corruption, has become a systemic way to woo voters before the elections. In West Bengal, before the ongoing assembly elections, the debate among the low-class voters was that while the BJP has promised cash, Trinamool Congress already gives cash, and other assets through several schemes. "It is better to support something that is genuine than depend on future promises," was a retort by a Trinamool supporter.

Data reveals that in more than half the states, cash transfers to women before the elections amount to an outgo of ₹1,75,000 crore a year, or 0.5 per cent of GDP. Both central and state regimes pursue these practices. In Madhya Pradesh, the Ladli Behna scheme promises ₹1,500 a month to nearly 13 million women. In Maharashtra, the Ladki Behin scheme pays a similar amount to 25 million. Ahead of the assembly elections last year, Bihar announced ₹10,000 to women. The collective outgoes are massive, ₹70,000 crore in Madhya Pradesh, and ₹1,25,000 crore in Bihar (combined pre-election transfers).

"Put together, just these (above-mentioned) cash schemes across States are now in the same fiscal ballpark as some of India's largest social-

sector programmes. That is money which could otherwise be compounding in hard infrastructure, urban capacity, human capital, or research and development," warns the letter. The cash-transfer initiatives have scaled up to the levels where they are likely to squeeze the fiscal spaces, reshape priorities, and harm states' finances. Studies still have not been able to link doles with either growth, more jobs and skills, and general upliftment of the poorer sections.

"The concern is about making large, unconditional, election-synchronised transfers a permanent feature of state budgets. If that happens, we risk locking into a low-productivity equilibrium where a rising share of tax funds is consumed today rather than capabilities for tomorrow," explains the letter. The main fallout, as is visible over the past three decades, is that while GDP growth zooms and even booms, the per capita incomes stutter and remain stunted. The wealth of the nation grows, as it emerges as an economic superpower. The people, or large sections, remain unsatisfied, unhappy, and unfulfilled.

What is equally significant is that the cash transfer scheme came into existence to ensure that the money that is promised to certain sections, say, for education scholarships, low-cost housing, pensions, insurance claims, and subsidies (fertilisers and energy) are legitimately transferred to the certified bank accounts of the genuine beneficiaries. Over a decade or two, several regimes combined biometric identity, bank accounts, and other documents to streamline and perfect the process. But once the governments realised that they possessed the details of the bank accounts of the various beneficiaries, it was easy to merely transfer cash for no rhyme or reason to woo specific sections.

In effect, the system became a perfectly legal mechanism to provide cash incentives to voters before the elections. In the past, the voters were bribed by cash, liquor, and other means. But as legal pressure mounted, these practices reduced, or visibly so. Now, cash is officially transferred without questions about motives, morality, means, and legality. Everything is fair in this brave, new world of cash transfers. The governments are happy, so are the masses. The thugs, hoodlums, and middlemen required earlier were gracefully eliminated. No one can question the transfers, which are genuine, clean, and transparent.

Global experts are still unsure about the pros and cons of cash transfers. Some contend that the process is effective and efficient, and allows the beneficiaries to decide "how to allocate funds." Others think that the devil lies in this freedom because in the mostly patriarchal societies, the cash is misused and diverted for unproductive purposes. This explains why the Indian practice is to transfer the money in the bank accounts of the women, who are more likely to spend it judiciously, rather than the men who may waste it. Unlike the oft-spoken thought that cash transfers are corruption-free, the opposite may be truer. They are as, or more, susceptible to official corruption.

OUR TAKE



Left-Handed Economist

## Work minus gigs equals less giggles

New rules, protests put the spotlight on gig workers, and their lives

Life of a gig worker remains under a socio-economic veil. Mysteries, intrigues, paradoxes, and contradictions surround her life. This has prompted several researchers to conduct controlled ethnographic studies by following them 24x7 for several days and weeks. Experts realise that watching the gig workers from a distance, or engaging with them via short and long interviews does not provide a full picture. This is visible from a survey, which interviewed 1,355 employees across Karnataka, and whose excerpts were captured by a media website. More than clarity, the picture that emerges is foggy.

Most feel that the gig workers are paid a pittance, and their incomes fluctuate every month since they get commissions based on volumes and values of deliveries. Indeed, these were the major complaints during the recent protests in several cities, including Bengaluru in Karnataka. However, in the survey, almost everyone, nearly 95 per cent, seems satisfied with their incomes. This is not because, as is the common impression, gig work forms a second layer of revenue for those who pursue multiple income streams. In the survey, 84 per cent said that gig work accounted for "primary income," or is the main source.

Hence, one may assume that while a minuscule section of the workers in the larger cities, like Bengaluru, may be unhappy with their incomes, the others are not for several reasons. In the smaller cities, as in the bigger ones, opportunities are limited. Despite the hardships, like roaming around in the heat or cold through the day, and minus the social security net, gig work is more stable because the demand for more employees invariably exists. The incomes may seem small for the aspirants in cities, but are substantial in smaller ones.

More importantly, unlike the more stable work, like 9-to-5 one, gig work offers flexibility and freedom. Competition has intensified, say, in the delivery business, especially with the onset of 10-minute quick-delivery commerce. Hence, there is enough demand, which allows the workers to change jobs, and apps, quite rapidly, and in a dash, from Rapido to DoorDash. Gig workers are able to jump jobs for better remuneration, which keeps their hopes up of getting into decent-income brackets. The attrition rates are high, and job tenures are low, as many of them switch apps within a few months, if not a few weeks.

As is the case with some jobs, gig work, especially delivery, conjures up pathways that allow the employees to escape present trajectories. In construction, a worker feels



he can become a mason, and a mason thinks he can emerge as a contractor. The same is true about gig workers, who experiment with various job profiles, and revenue streams, and are invariably aware that a genuine break is round the corner. They take a left here, and there it will be. This explains why three-fourths of the people in the survey confidently espouse that they "do not wish to stay on (in the delivery business) for long."

Indeed, one of the authors of the survey indicated that anecdotal evidence shows that gig workers do graduate to high-end jobs. "I have somebody working in my office now who was earlier working with Rapido, and now is doing high-end ETL transformations for one of the AI things that we are trying to push out," he explained. Thus, this shows a more systemic problem with the economy,

ie, lack of proper jobs for the highly-educated people, and the pressures to take up something that is flexible, and wait patiently for the right job.

In the media report, which highlights the survey, there is a negative connotation that the gig economy workers do not save. Just over half of the surveyed employees say that they have "zero savings." Couple this with a lack of social net, and social security, or minimal mechanism, and it seems like a dangerous trend. But two issues are crucial. The first is that most of the gig workers are young and, hence, have time to shore up savings, investments, and think of retirement planning. The second, as mentioned before, is that they do not intend to do the same work for longer periods.

More importantly, the mindset with which

we see a gig worker, as opposed to someone who works in a corporate set up, has changed. While the images of the latter include questions about the employee's family, children, lifestyle, and spending pattern, those for the former are about their ability to either get jobs, or be exploited. Today, the four labour codes, and genuine understanding about the gig economy has helped to bridge this mentality, and understanding gap. Now, the gig workers are looked at similarly to others, who work in temporary capacities in offices, or at the factories. Both are workers.

But there is obviously more to gig jobs, and gig workers than what we can see from the outside, and comprehend. What is required is serious and rigorous ethnographies that provide more insights. Educated youngsters, of Gen Z, for instance, feel more comfortable, even confident with flexible, freelance, and consultancy jobs. They aim for multiple jobs to increase incomes, and combat boredom and monotonous feelings. One is not sure if the flexible hours, and jobs that gig workers enjoy, or stay unhappy with, provide them with similar emotions. Possibly, the delivery boys and girls relate more to construction workers.

More studies, rather than mere surveys, which feel like -touch-and-go, hide-and-seek, or instant reactions, are crucial to study the gig economy. In many cases, as pollsters find out, the people interviewed tend to give answers that they feel are expected from them. They do not speak the entire truth, and fabricate it with falsehoods. This may or may not happen deliberately, but it does. This is especially so when sentiments are involved, rather than objective truths, like in an election, or job-related satisfaction, or salaries.

However, things are changing, as more people tend to treat the gig workers better, and try to understand them. In the recent past, tipping in some sectors has gone up, especially in the case of apps where the money goes directly to the employees. Anecdotal evidence shows that households treat the delivery girls better, especially in summers. Even one of the authors of the survey changed after the report. "I have started to tip more. I think we should tip more..." He wants the others to do the same.



## France's Groupe ADP to sell 7.3% stake in GMR Airports

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

France's Groupe ADP is selling up to 7.3 per cent stake in GMR Airports to the GMR promoter group for more than ₹10,100 crore.

Once the multi-layered deal is complete, the overall stake of Groupe ADP, the Paris airport operator, in GMR Airports will come down to 25 per cent from 32.3 per cent.

GMR Airports Ltd (GAL), the airports business arm of the GMR Group, operates various airports, including at Delhi and Hyderabad.

Groupe ADP has entered into agreements for sale of its securities representing 7.3 per cent stake in GAL to the GMR promoter group, according to a statement issued by the French group.

The deal will be executed through an initial sale and entry into options relating to ordinary or preference shares as well as the early purchase by GMR Group of the convertible bonds issued by GAL and currently held by Groupe ADP. "The overall cash proceeds generated by this trans-



action are estimated to be 924 million euros," the French group said in a statement on Thursday. At current exchange rates, 924 million euros translates to around \$ 1.08 billion or over Rs 10,100 crore.

There was no comment from the GMR Group on the transaction.

Currently, GMR promoter group holds 34.9 per cent in GAL and the holding will rise to 42.2 per cent post the deal. While Groupe ADP's stake will come down to 25 per cent, the public shareholding in GAL will remain at around 32.8 per cent.

Under the deal, Groupe ADP sold 3.4 per cent of GAL's

ordinary equity shares for 256 million euros on Thursday.

GMR promoter group has call options and Groupe ADP a corresponding put option exercisable to purchase and sell, respectively, securities representing 3.9 per cent of GAL's ordinary equity shares for an estimated 285 million euros. Any sale resulting from the exercise of these options should be completed by April 30, 2027.

Also, the early purchase by GMR Group of the convertible bonds (FCCBs) for a nominal (face) value of 301 million euros, plus accrued interest at the date of the transaction is to be complet-

ed by March 31, 2027, the statement said.

"Upon completion of the transaction, Groupe ADP's governance rights in GAL and its co-promoter status will remain unchanged.

This transaction, by rebalancing the economic exposure of GMR Group and Groupe ADP in GAL, bolsters this partnership and enhances the company's position for future development, without the need for any additional capital injection," it said. Groupe ADP said the transaction is part of its strategy to optimise the financial contribution of its international assets and added that it does not intend any further divestment of its stake in GAL and is engaged in a balanced long-term partnership.

In 2020, Groupe ADP snapped up a 49 per cent stake in GAL, which was then a subsidiary of the GMR Infrastructure Ltd (GIL), for around 1.3 billion euros.

Later, in July 2024, GAL was listed as a separate entity on the Indian bourses after a restructuring of GIL.

## Barrier-free tolling on several NHs from December: Gadkari

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

Seamless, barrier-free tolling on several national highways across the country will be implemented by December, road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari said on Friday.

Addressing the second edition of Logistics Shakti Summit & Awards 2026, Gadkari said India will have to develop good infrastructure to reduce logistics cost.

"We plan to put up several seamless barrier-free tolling systems on several national highways across the country by December," Gadkari said.

This new system facilitates barrier-free tolling using integrated technologies, including Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) with AI analytics and RFID-based Electronic Toll Collection (FASTag).

Under this, vehicles will be charged based on their identification through high-performance ANPR cameras and FASTag readers, without needing to stop at toll plazas.

In case of non-compliance, e-notices will be served to violators, non-payment of which may result in suspension of FASTag and other VAHAN-related penalties.

Gadkari noted that if India wants to become a global power, the country will have to reduce logistics cost to single digits.

He said a recent report prepared by IIT Chennai, IIT Kanpur, and IIM Bangalore has revealed that India's construction of expressways and economic corridors has



helped reduce the country's logistics cost to 10 per cent from 16 per cent earlier.

The Road Transport and Highways Minister said logistics cost is 12 per cent in the US, 12 per cent in European countries and 8-10 per cent in China.

Referring to the West Asia crisis, Gadkari said India relies on imports to meet 87 per cent of its oil requirement.

"We import fossil fuels worth ₹22 lakh crore, which is also causing pollution... so we need to work on increasing production of alternative fuel and bio-fuel," he said.

Noting that green hydrogen is the fuel of the future, Gadkari said there is a need to reduce the cost of running a hydrogen fuel station to make it financially viable.

He said India is the fastest-growing major economy and it is a dream of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make the country a \$ 5-trillion economy.

## Peak power demand crosses 240 GW in April amid soaring mercury levels



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

India's peak power demand surged to a seasonal high of 240 GW on Thursday, driven by intense heat and increased air conditioner usage, according to the latest power ministry data.

The country's peak power demand met (the highest supply in a day) was recorded a tad higher at 240.12 GW on April 23, up from 239.70 GW on April 22, the highest during this summer.

According to experts, the peak power demand may soon breach the second-highest recorded at 243.27 GW in September 2023, with rising mercury levels and an increase in the intensity of heat waves in the country. The record high of 250 GW of peak power demand was recorded in May 2024.

Last year, the peak power demand was 242.77 GW, which was recorded in June, 2025.

In the first fortnight of this month, the peak power demand remained lower than the 235.32 GW recorded in April last year.

The peak power demand met, or the highest supply in a day, was recorded at 234.81 GW on April 16 this year, but surged to 238.94 GW the next day.

On April 18, demand remained almost at the same level of 238.80 GW, but fell to 225.69 GW on April 19, before rising again to 237.43 GW on April 20. It had slipped to 236.73 GW on April 21, the data showed.

Experts are of the view that the demand and consumption of electricity will increase in the remainder of this month due to more frequent use of air-conditioners, air coolers, and other appliances by domestic as well as commercial consumers with rising mercury levels in the country.

## Markets slump for 3rd day

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Mumbai

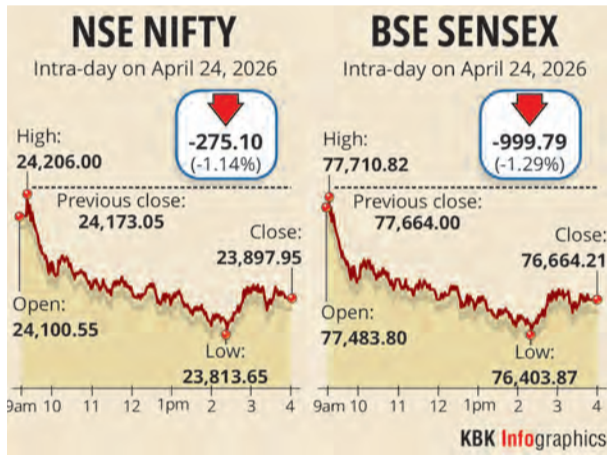
Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled over 1 per cent on Friday, falling for the third consecutive day, as a sharp rally in crude prices and massive selling in IT counters weighed heavily on investors' sentiment.

Unabated foreign fund outflows, a negative trend in global markets amid prolonged conflict and continued disruption in the Strait of Hormuz added to the gloom.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 999.79 points, or 1.29 per cent, to settle at 76,664.21. During the day, it plunged 1,260.13 points or 1.62 per cent to 76,403.87.

The wider gauge NSE Nifty slumped 275.10 points, or 1.14 per cent, to end at 23,897.95.

"Indian equity markets extended their decline for a third consecutive session, as renewed risk-off sentiment weighed on investor confidence. Ongoing tensions in the Middle East, coupled with persistent weakness in the IT



sector, continued to pressure an already fragile market backdrop.

"Volatility also increased, with the India VIX rising 6 per cent, reflecting heightened fear and uncertainty amid the prolonged conflict and continued disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, with no meaningful signs of de-escalation,"

Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. From the Sensex constituents, Infosys dived 7.09

per cent after its revenue growth forecast for FY27 came in lower than market expectations.

HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Tech Mahindra, Sun Pharma, Asian Paints and ICICI Bank were also among the major laggards.

Trent, Bajaj Finance, State Bank of India, HDFC Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the winners. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded 2.17 per cent higher at \$ 107.3 per barrel.

## Majority of travellers seek better services, timely issue resolution, says Survey

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

A majority of Indian travellers surveyed across key cities are seeking better hospitality services, with slow resolution of issues, insufficient compensation and inconsistent communication emerging as critical pain points, according to a survey by US-headquartered Vertex Group released on Friday.

The survey was conducted among 10,000 travellers in Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Kolkata recently.

While 45 per cent of travellers reported satisfaction with recent hospitality experiences, a majority, 55 per cent, said their expectations remain unmet.

Timeliness is a significant factor for customer satisfaction. The survey found that just 38 per cent of problems were resolved within an hour, 29 per cent of trav-



ellers said their issues were never resolved at all, highlighting the urgent need for faster, more decisive action from brands.

When help was needed most, 42 per cent of those surveyed turned to traditional phone support for the quickest response, compared to 27 per cent for in-person assistance, 18 per cent for mobile apps and

only 13 per cent for social media.

Moreover, only 22 per cent of them received generous compensation like refunds, vouchers, or upgrades after service lapses, while 46 per cent said they received little or no compensation, or that their issue was ignored.

Communication emerged as another weak spot in

the survey, with just 14 per cent of respondents stating that brands "always" kept them pro-actively informed about delays or disruptions, while nearly half said such outreach was "rarely" or "never" provided.

Gagan Arora, Founder and President of Vertex Group, said, "This survey signals a turning point for India's hospitality and travel brands. While nearly half of customers are satisfied, the other half is sending a clear message: they want faster solutions and honest, proactive communication... The future of this industry lies in how quickly companies can close the gap between expectation and delivery".

Times Square-headquartered Vertex Group is a tech company helping global hospitality and travel enterprises navigate customer experiences across the US, the UK, India, the Philippines, Nepal, the UAE, and Nigeria.

## Domestic commercial vehicle industry to see record volume: Crisil

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Mumbai

The domestic Commercial Vehicle (CV) industry is expected to clock a record overall volume of around 12.4 lakh units this fiscal, surpassing the previous peak of the financial year 2019, ratings agency Crisil said on Friday.

The expected growth in the domestic Commercial Vehicle CV industry follows a strong 13 per cent rebound in the just-concluded financial year.

According to Crisil, financial year 2026 was marked by a strong domestic recovery,



driven by several factors, such as the GST rate cut from 28 per cent to 18 per cent in September 2025, which significantly improved purchase economics.

Additionally, easing of interest rates, improving

freight utilisation, and a pickup in infrastructure and mining activity reinforced the recovery, it stated.

"Domestic demand momentum is expected to continue this fiscal, albeit with some growth modera-

tion owing to the higher base.

"LCVs, accounting for around 60 per cent of the industry volume, are projected to grow 5-6 per cent, driven by e-commerce and last-mile delivery demand, while MHCV volumes are expected to expand 4-5 per cent, supported by freight movement and infrastructure spending," said Anuj Sethi, Senior Director, Crisil Ratings.

According to Crisil, domestic demand will remain supportive, driven by infrastructure-led activity, steady replacement demand, and continued benefits from

improved affordability following the rationalisation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates last year.

Exports, however, could see some near-term disruptions due to the ongoing developments in West Asia, it said.

Crisil said its analysis is based on four CV manufacturers, who account for as much as around 94 per cent of industry volumes.

The CV industry is broadly categorised into light commercial vehicles (LCVs) and medium and heavy commercial vehicles (MHCVs), with buses forming a sub-segment within each.

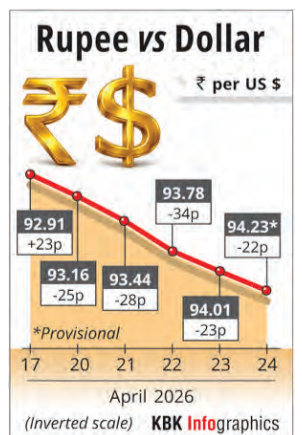
## Rupee ends 22 paise weaker at 94.23 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Mumbai

The rupee extended its losing streak for the fifth day in a row, depreciating 22 paise to close at 94.23 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday due to higher crude oil prices and strengthening American currency, with prospects of West Asia peace talks hanging in the balance.

Despite a ceasefire being in place between the United States and Iran, ship movement through the Strait of Hormuz remained uncertain, unsettling the global fuel prices, while the upheaval triggered a massive selling in domestic equity markets and outflow of foreign funds, forex analysts said.

President Donald Trump has also ordered the US military to "shoot and kill" small



Iranian boats that deploy mines to choke traffic through the Strait of Hormuz.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 94.25 and stayed range-bound throughout the session, hitting the day's high of 94.18 and the low of 94.31

against the greenback.

The currency settled for the day at 94.23 (provisional), registering a loss of 22 paise from the previous closing level. The rupee settled 23 paise lower at 94.01 against the US dollar on Thursday, the fourth consecutive day of decline. In the past five sessions, the domestic unit has lost over 1 per cent, since the closing level of 92.91 recorded on April 17.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said the rupee fell on risk aversion in global markets as the US blockade of the Strait of Hormuz continued to keep the tensions high. "A strong dollar and surge in crude oil prices weighed on the rupee," he said, adding, "S-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹94 to ₹94.62."

## Major ports handled 915.17 million tonnes of cargo in FY26: Sonowal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

Major ports have collectively handled 915.17 million tonnes of cargo in 2025-26, surpassing the annual target of 904 MT, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Friday.

The ports, shipping and waterways minister further said that this marks a year-on-year growth of 7.06 per cent, reaffirming the sector's strong recovery, enhanced efficiency, and sustained growth trajectory.

He said that during 2025-26, overall capex by the Shipping Ministry and its attached organisations was ₹14,953 crore compared to ₹9,708 crore in 2024-25.

"During 2025-26, 94 ships were added to the Indian Flag with the addition of 25.67 lakh Deadweight



Tonnage (DWT) compared to 45 ships with 7.72 lakh DWT during 2024-25," the minister said at an event to exchange of MoU between the Delhi School of Economics and think tank RIS (Research and Information System for Developing Countries).

There are 12 major ports wholly-owned by the central Government and governed by the provisions of the Major Port Authorities Act, 2021.

## Infosys shares tank 7% after earnings announcement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi

Shares of IT major Infosys on Friday slumped 7 per cent after its revenue growth forecast for FY27 came in lower than market expectations. The stock declined 7.09 per cent to settle at ₹1,154.45 on the BSE. During the day, it dropped 7.26 per cent to hit a 52-week low of ₹1,152.35.

At the NSE, the stock tanked 6.93 per cent to Rs 1,154.60. The company's market valuation declined by ₹35,746.38 crore to ₹4,68,201.44 crore.

As per a report by JM Financial Institutional Securities Limited, Infosys reported 4QFY26 results — revenue and margins were below expectations.



"Forward-looking indicators — Infosys guided for 1.5 per cent-3.5 per cent YoY revenue growth for FY27 (includes 20-25bps of acquisition), lower than our expectation of 2 per cent to 4 per cent, margin guidance was in-line at 20-22 per cent," it said.

Infosys on Thursday reported a 20.8 per cent rise in consolidated net profit to ₹8,501 crore in the January-

March quarter and guided for 1.5 to 3.5 per cent revenue growth for FY27, pinning its optimism on momentum in financial services, utilities, and AI services.

The top management spoke of the calendar year starting on a strong note, but pointed out that there was a "change in economic environment" amid the West Asia conflict, though things appear to be stabilising now.

## FROM THE WORLD

### UK

#### Man sentenced to life for rape

A 32-year-old man who has pleaded guilty to the religiously aggravated rape of a Sikh woman in UK's Walsall was sentenced to life imprisonment at Birmingham Crown Court on Friday. John Ashby, a British man arrested last October days after the attack that sent shockwaves within the West Midlands community, had initially denied charges of sexual assault, strangulation, racially aggravated actual bodily harm and robbery before admitting the crimes. He has now been jailed for life, with a minimum term of 14 years behind bars before he can be considered for parole. The judge described Ashby as a "deeply unpleasant racist and Islamophobe" after the court had previously heard that he had directed anti-Muslim rants at the woman during the attack.

### CHINA

#### Atomic panel claims advances

China can build up to 50 nuclear reactors simultaneously, the country's atomic authority has said as Beijing gears up to rapidly expand the nuclear power sector to reduce dependence on fossil fuels amid the US-Iran war. China has the ability to run dozens of nuclear projects concurrently spanning the full project life cycle - from design to construction - according to a latest report released this week by the country's Nuclear Energy Association. "China's nuclear technology capabilities have moved from 'following' to 'keeping pace,' and in some areas to 'leading,'" the report said. China's total installed nuclear power capacity has reached 125 million kilowatts (KW), ranking first globally, state-run CCTV said, quoting the China Nuclear Energy Association (CNEA) report. China currently operates 60 commercial nuclear reactors.

# Araghchi set to travel to Pak for ceasefire talks with US

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Islamabad

Iran's top diplomat was heading Friday to Pakistan, where officials have been trying to get the United States and Iran to convene for a second round of ceasefire negotiations. Iran state-run IRNA news agency confirmed Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi was on his way to Pakistan on a trip focused on "bilateral consultations" and regional developments. It said he would also travel to Oman and Russia.

The trip comes as much of the world has been on edge over a war that has snarled crucial energy exports through the Strait of Hormuz, clouded the global economic picture, and left thousands dead across the West Asia. Earlier, two Pakistani officials told *The Associated Press* that Araghchi was heading to Pakistan



Iranian worshipper wears a banner showing portraits of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei during Friday prayers at the Tehran University campus in Tehran. AP

with a small Government delegation. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media. The White House did

not immediately respond to questions about Araghchi's trip to Pakistan and whether a US delegation would also do so. Islamabad has sought to reinject

momentum into the negotiations between Iran and the United States, which had been set to resume this week but did not materialise.

### Pakistan forges ahead with diplomatic efforts

In their call Friday, Araghchi, his Pakistani counterpart Ishaq Dar and Pakistans army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir, talked over "regional developments and issues related to the ceasefire," a statement from Araghchi said. It did not go into further detail.

Later, Pakistans Foreign Ministry said that "both sides exchanged views on regional developments, the ceasefire, and ongoing diplomatic efforts being pursued by Islamabad in the context of US-Iran engagement." It added that Dar "underscored

the importance of sustained dialogue and engagement to address outstanding issues, in order to advance regional peace and stability at the earliest." Since the war began, at least 3,375 people have been killed in Iran, and over 2,290 people in Lebanon, where new fighting between Israel and the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah broke out two days after the war started, according to authorities.

Additionally, 23 people have died in Israel and more than a dozen in Gulf Arab states. Fifteen Israeli soldiers in Lebanon and 13 US service members throughout the region have been killed. erica and Iran to the negotiating table for the second round of talks. Meanwhile, the Pakistani capital continues to remain

closed for heavy traffic on Friday as authorities await the possible visit of top leaders of the US and Iran for peace talks, stalled due to differences on key issues.

The administrations of the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi had closed all major roads and markets in VIP movement areas on Sunday amid indications that the talks could begin any day during the week.

The Metro Bus Service between Rawalpindi and Islamabad, and electric buses on seven routes have been suspended, while goods transport has remained halted since April 19, causing inconvenience to the public.

The Red Zone continues to remain closed, with employees of offices in the area working from home.

## Appeals court says Trump's asylum ban at border is illegal, agreeing with lower court

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

An appeals court on Friday blocked President Donald Trump's executive order suspending asylum access, a key pillar of the Republican president's plan to crack down on migration at the southern border of the US.

A three-judge panel from the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit found that immigration laws give people the right to apply for asylum at the border, and the president can't circumvent that. The panel concluded that the Immigration and



Nationality Act doesn't authorize the president to remove the plaintiffs under "procedures of his own making," allow him to suspend plaintiffs' right to apply for asylum or curtail procedures for adjudicating

their anti-torture claims.

"The power by proclamation to temporarily suspend the entry of specified foreign individuals into the United States does not contain implicit authority to override the INA's mandatory process

to summarily remove foreign individuals," wrote Judge J Michelle Childs, who was nominated to the bench by Democratic President Joe Biden. ACLU attorney Lee Gelernt said in a statement that the appellate ruling is "essential for those fleeing danger who have been denied even a hearing to present asylum claims under the Trump administration's unlawful and inhumane executive order."

Judge Justin Walker, a Trump nominee, wrote a partial dissent. Judge Comelia Pillard, who was nominated by Democratic President Barack Obama, also heard the case.

## Hegseth calls West Asia conflict gift to world

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Washington

Speaking to reporters on Friday at the Pentagon, Hegseth said the US blockade of Iranian shipping will continue "as long as it takes" to accomplish Americas "bold and dangerous" mission to end Iran's threat to global security.

US officials say that so far, the blockade has turned back 34 ships, but ship-tracking data shows Iran has still been able to move some of its sanctioned oil.

Lloyds List Intelligence said "a steady flow of shadow fleet traffic" has passed in and out of the Persian Gulf, including 11 tankers with Iranian cargo that have left the Gulf of Oman



outside the strait since April 13.

The maritime intelligence firm Windward said this week that Iranian traffic continues to flow "via decep-

tion." Iranians are able to evade the blockade by faking tracking data and by traveling through Pakistani territorial waters.

## Indians in UAE to shift to new consular service provider from July 1 as BLS loses key contract

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Abu Dhabi

BLS International has lost its long-held mandate to handle passport renewals, visa services, and other consular facilities for Indians in the UAE. The shift comes as a significant development for the Indian diaspora, which constitutes nearly 35 per cent of the UAE's population, with an estimated 4.3 million residents in 2024.

The Embassy of India in Abu Dhabi has awarded the outsourced consular services contract to Alhind Tours and Travels Private Limited, which will take over operations from July 1 for an initial three-year period.

The contract spans services at both the Embassy in Abu Dhabi and the Consulate General of India in Dubai. Alhind clinched the deal by submitting the lowest



financial bid-an all-inclusive Dh19 per transaction-promising a more cost-effective alternative to the current system. Other contenders in the race included VFS Global, DU Digital, and SGIVS Global.

Highlighting the affordability, Arun Radhakrishnan, Head of Operations at Alhind Group, said

even value-added services would come at no extra cost. "Even if we take your photo, it is included in that charge," he said.

The wide-ranging contract covers passport renewals, visa applications, Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards, Police Clearance

Certificates, Global Entry Programme verification, and various attestation services.

BLS International, which had been managing these services since 2011, recently faced a setback after being barred by India's Ministry of External Affairs from participating in Government tenders for two years, citing allegations including court cases and complaints from applicants.

Alhind is gearing up for a large-scale rollout, with plans to operate from 16 centres across the UAE, including Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Dubai (including Bur Dubai), Sharjah, Ajman, and Fujairah. The company is currently in the final stages of securing leases for these locations.

While the appointment booking process is expected to remain largely unchanged, applicants can anticipate a more tech-driven

experience. Alhind has indicated plans to introduce online applications and significantly enhance backend digital systems, with further details expected soon.

To support the transition, the company is undertaking a major hiring drive, recruiting between 250 and 350 personnel across various roles, including operations executives, submission officers, facilitation officers, and front-desk staff. Recruitment is already underway, with teams being mobilised from India.

Radhakrishnan acknowledged the magnitude of the transition, noting that Alhind, traditionally known for travel and ticketing services, is stepping into a new domain. "This is a very big undertaking and a major milestone for us," he said, assuring that the company is fully committed to delivering seamless services to

the Indian community. The financial bids were opened on March 30, with the final results announced on April 20 in the presence of company representatives and the Embassys Outsourcing Committee.

The Indian community continues to play a defining role in the UAE's social and economic fabric. Of the 4.3 million Indians in the country, about 15 per cent reside in Abu Dhabi, while the majority are spread across the northern emirates, including Dubai.

Around 10 per cent of the population comprises dependent family members. Demographically, migrants from Kerala form the largest segment of the diaspora, followed by those from Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. Significant numbers also hail from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Punjab-underscoring the diversity of Indias presence in the UAE.

## Syrian authorities arrest ex-intelligence officer tied to leaked video of massacre

GHAITH ALSAYED ■ Damascus



blamed for atrocities during the conflict have been arrested. Assad fled to Russia.

The conflict, which began with anti-Government protests in March 2011 before turning into a civil war, has left half a million people dead and over 1 million wounded. Youssef was one of several Syrian security agents who authorities said appeared in a video leaked in 2022, in which dozens of

blindfolded, bound men were shot and thrown into a trench. Second clip shows members of Syrias notorious Military Intelligence Branch 227 with a line of around 40 prisoners in an abandoned building in Tadamon near the Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk.

For much of the war, the district was a front line between Government forces and opposition fighters. The prisoners were blindfolded, with their arms tied behind their backs. One after another, the Branch 227 gunmen stand them at the edge of a trench filled with old tyres, then push or kick the men in, shooting them as they fall. (AP)

## Austrian President trolls Trump, says autocrats attack truth

VIJAY JOSHI ■ Vienna

Taking a dig at Donald Trump, Austrias president has said that in this age of misinformation anyone with a computer can depict himself as Jesus or a doctor, and the fundamental political strategy of autocrats is to ensure that people "no longer know right from wrong."

With technology rapidly advancing to produce more convincing fake news, the society will need credible news agencies "more than ever". President Alexander Van der Bellen told a visiting delegation of executives from top news agencies around the world. PTIs editor-in-chief Vijay Joshi was part of the delegation. "As third-party quality seal, independent



Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen addresses a visiting delegation of media executives from across the world in Vienna, Austria. AP

from politics, disconnected from clicks of followers, you triple-check and question everything", he told the executives in a welcome speech late Thursday at the presidential palace. "I hope", he added tongue in cheek. Van der

Bellen, a former economics professor and former leader of the left-wing Greens party, is an outspoken critic of right-wing populism even though the coalition Government of Austria is led by the far-right Freedom Party. The presi-

dents position in Austria is largely ceremonial and actual executive authority lies with the Chancellor and Cabinet ministers. However, the president has the power to dismiss the government, dissolve parliament and reject proposed ministers.

Van der Bellen, 82, began his speech by saying he would like to take the opportunity to give his guests "an amazing crypto investment tip." This was his reference to a fake video he encountered on Internet where he was shown in "a fake interview with a fake voice" advocating a certain crypto investment.

He said the fakery was evident because his accent in the video was "shockingly" north German. Austrians also speak German but have a dif-

ferent accent, which he said "is tricky to imitate!". "With AI technologies rapidly progressing, it has become easy to manipulate what we see, what we hear, to manipulate truth", he said.

Basically, anyone with a computer can do it. Anyone can depict opponents in compromising scenes—or himself as Jesus. Van der Bellen said that with traditional media like newspapers coming under increasing pressure, news agencies must remain neutral, objective and committed to the truth. "Truth matters. We need a shared understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Of what is a fact and what is just an opinion .. only then we can decide who to vote for, who to believe," he said. (PTI)

## UK adds names of 33,000 Indian soldiers missing from First World War memorial

ADITI KHANNA ■ London



The names of 33,000 Indian Army soldiers who died in the First World War but missing from a memorial in Iraq have finally been commemorated in digital form. Iraq, then Mesopotamia, had been the scene of the British Empire's largest operations outside of Europe in the early 20th century.

The Commonwealth War Grave Commission (CWGC), a charity with a remit of commemorating all Commonwealth servicemen and women who died during the two World Wars, have introduced new digital name panels for the

names of Indian soldiers brought together for the first time alongside over 46,000 Commonwealth service personnel. "The Mesopotamia Campaign was one

of the toughest campaigns in the First World War with Indian soldiers dying in the tens of thousands; yet their names were never added on the Basra memorial,"

said Shrabani Basu, CWGC Global Advisory Panel member. "It is wonderful to see the new digital panels and to finally see the 33,000 Indian names displayed as they always should have been complete with ranks and regiments. A historical wrong is being righted. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten," said Basu, the author of "For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front 1914-18".

A significant physical update to the memorial was difficult as Iraq is not considered safe for travel and operational work at present. A digital option was chosen as an alternative until the site can be properly assessed and all the names can be properly commemorated. "The launch of

these panels marks an important moment for the Commission and the commemoration of the Indian Army's dead of the Mesopotamia Campaign," said Dr George Hay, CWGC Official Historian.

"For the first time, the names of these men will be displayed as they should have been nearly a century ago, restoring to them the honour they deserve. This takes us a step closer to fully reversing this historical inequality while also helping people around the world engage with these casualties and their stories," he said.

Many Indian casualties of the First World War were historically commemorated numerically or through memorial registers, rather than by name. This is one of the several known inequalities in commemoration that CWGC said it is working hard to address. The Basra Memorial in Iraq was seen as a key example of such unequal commemoration and past omission that the charity set out to reverse.

## Another teen killed in West Bank

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ West Bank

Three Palestinian teenagers have been killed in the occupied West Bank this week in a spike of renewed violence, the latest shot dead by Israeli forces during a mid-week raid.

Palestinians in the northern West Bank village of Tell mounded the death of Youssef Shtayyeh on Friday after health officials said he was gunned down by Israeli forces in the nearby city of Nablus.

Waving Palestinian flags and carrying the 15-year-olds sheathed body down through the village streets, his relatives and neighbours moved in a tide of grief and recited religious verses in unison. (PTI)

## India is not a punching bag in Trump's foreign policy



**SURJIT SINGH FLORA**

A president can insult a foreign nation in many ways. The crudest may be the easiest, a tap on a repost button that turns a slur into state speech.

Donald Trump's decision to amplify a Truth Social post calling India and China "hellholes" and branding Indian immigrants "gangsters with laptops" was not stray online noise. It was a public act by the White House. Once that language moved through a presidential account, it stopped being a hot take and became a message with diplomatic weight.

That is why this episode matters. It was not plain-spoken honesty. It was reckless statecraft, grievance dressed up as candor, and a needless humiliation of a country Washington still describes as a strategic partner.

Presidents don't stumble into language like this. They choose it, or they choose not to stop it.

That distinction matters because the office matters. A repost from a private citizen is chatter. A repost from the president of the United States is endorsement, even when aides later pretend it was only commentary or mood.

### Why words from the White House carry global force

Every embassy reads presidential language as a signal. So do foreign ministries, investors, and allied govern-

ments. They may discount bluster, but they don't ignore it. That is because presidents shape more than headlines. Their words affect trust, raise doubts, and sharpen existing tensions. When the White House names a partner country and attaches contempt to it, the insult doesn't stay online. It enters the daily work of diplomacy.

Trump has long treated public language as spectacle. He often speaks as if outrage itself proves strength. Yet a presidency is not a cable segment, and it is not a comment thread. It is an office with military power, treaty obligations, and global reach. Impulse from that office carries a cost.

### A pattern of praise in private, insult in public

The contradiction is hard to miss. Trump has often spoken of India as an important partner. He has praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi, courted Indian American voters, and spoken warmly about ties between the two states.

Then came a repost that smeared India in language fit for a crank pamphlet. That gap matters because it reveals the real method. Praise is handed out when useful. Humiliation appears when grievance politics needs a target.

This is not consistency. It is performance. And for a partner country, performance like this is a warning.

### Calling India a 'hellhole' insults a nation, not a policy

A Government policy can be criticized. Trade rules can be attacked. Visa systems, border law, pollution, corruption, and religious tension can all be debated in plain terms. None of that

requires contempt for an entire country. Calling India a "hellhole" is different. It is not a policy argument. It is a sweeping insult aimed at a nation of more than 1.4 billion people and one of the oldest continuous civilisations on earth.

### India is bigger than any American political talking point

India is not a prop in an American fight over citizenship law. It is the world's largest democracy, a nuclear power, a major economy, and a society with immense internal variety. Its elections move hundreds of millions of voters. Its courts, parties, states, and press create a rough and noisy public life that few countries could manage at that scale.

Its civilisational record is also older than the American republic by millennia. Indian thinkers helped shape mathematics, philosophy, linguistics, astronomy, and medicine long before the United States existed. The concept of zero, major schools of logic, and influential medical traditions all emerged from that long history.

None of this places India above criticism. No country is. But criticism is one thing; a civilisational slur is another.

India can absorb an insult from Washington. It has the size, state capacity, and strategic value to move on if it chooses. But endurance should not be confused with indifference.

National dignity is not vanity. It is part of how states relate to one another. When a US president degrades India in public, the injury falls on more than officials in New Delhi. It touches the public, the diaspora, and the idea that major democra-

cies owe each other basic respect. Silence in such moments also carries meaning. If a country accepts humiliation because the relationship is useful, it teaches others how cheaply that respect can be bought.

The repost did not stop at India. It also smeared Indian immigrants as "gangsters with laptops" with no loyalty to America. That line was ugly on its face, and it also collapsed under the weight of simple fact.

Indian Americans are, by most common measures, among the most educated and highest-earning groups in the United States. They work across medicine, engineering, finance, research, academia, and small business.

They are not a fringe presence. They are woven into the country's professional and civic life. The evidence is visible without romanticising it. Indian Americans lead major firms, including Google, Microsoft, IBM, and Adobe. Many more work far from public view, in hospitals, labs, universities, and infrastructure projects that keep the country running.

Their impact is not only corporate. Indian American physicians care for patients across the country, often in regions that struggle to attract doctors. Engineers design systems that millions use every day. Researchers contribute to universities and private labs. Entrepreneurs start companies, hire workers, and pay taxes. If that is what a "hellhole" produces, the United States has profited from it for years.

That does not make Indian immigrants immune from criticism as individuals. No group is above normal

scrutiny. But group slander is not scrutiny. It is prejudice with a political accent.

A hard argument about birthright citizenship is still a domestic legal argument. People can disagree on that issue, sometimes sharply, without smearing a nationality.

The moment the rhetoric shifts to naming India and depicting Indians as criminals by type, the debate changes. It is no longer about law. It is about ethnic suspicion and national contempt. That matters because language like this invites broad blame. It asks the public to see a people through caricature, not conduct. It also sends a message to citizens of Indian origin that their success will not protect them from suspicion when politics wants a scapegoat. Trump's defenders will say this was only about domestic politics. They will argue that the real target was birthright citizenship, or the broader fight over immigration and national identity. That defence fails on contact with the facts.

When a sitting US president names a sovereign nation and degrades it in public, the issue crosses borders at once. The presidency is not a private venue. It is the most visible state office in the world.

The international effect does not depend on intent. It comes from the office itself. Foreign governments do not have the luxury of treating a presidential insult as a random mood. They must read it as a clue to priorities, temperament, and limits.

That is why this episode cannot be filed away as campaign-style rough talk. India is a central player in the Indo-Pacific, a defence partner, a trade counterpart, and a country Washington needs for long-term balance in Asia. Public contempt weakens the trust that

strategy requires. The world watches these moments closely. So does India. The question is not whether New Delhi can survive a slight. It can. The real question is what the United States reveals about itself when its president treats a major partner as disposable material in a culture-war script.

Respect between states does not require flattery. India and the United States have real disagreements on trade, visas, human rights, Russia, and market access. Serious governments handle those disputes through policy, pressure, negotiation, and plain speech.

Humiliation is not plain speech. It is a substitute for argument. It turns diplomacy into theater and invites the other side to absorb the insult for the sake of convenience.

India is too large, too important, and too self-respecting for that role. A mature partnership can survive disagreement. It cannot thrive on public degradation. In the end, Trump's repost revealed arrogance, not strength. It took an ugly insult and gave it presidential force, then aimed it at a country the United States still needs as a partner.

The damage was not only to India's dignity. It was also to American credibility. A president who mistakes insult for leadership lowers the value of his own office and weakens the country's claim to seriousness abroad.

India does not need validation from a US president. But the United States harms itself when its leader cannot tell the difference between candor and contempt, or between a political prop and a civilisation.

The author is a veteran journalist and freelance writer based in Brampton Canada

## Pakistan army kills 22 terrorists in northwest KP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Peshawar

At least 22 terrorists have been killed during an intelligence-based operation by Pakistan's security forces in the country's northwest Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military said on Friday.

On April 21, a joint intelligence-based operation was conducted by the security forces in Khyber District of the province on the reported presence of terrorists.

During the conduct of the operation, twenty-two terrorists, belonging to Fitna al-Khawarij, were killed, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the military, said in a statement. Fitna al-Khawarij is a term the state uses to refer to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The statement said, "Terrorists resorted to indiscriminate firing, which resulted in the killing of a ten-year-old child".



Sanitisation operations are underway to eliminate any remaining terrorists in the area. The statement highlighted that the counter-terrorism campaign under the vision "Azam-e-Istehkam," approved by the Federal Apex Committee on the National Action Plan, will continue at full pace. "Security forces of Pakistan

will continue at full pace to wipe out the menace of terrorism..." the statement concluded. President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif have commended security forces for their successful operation in Khyber. In separate statements, both leaders expressed profound grief over the killing of a 10-year-

old child, who was killed by indiscriminate firing from the terrorists, Radio Pakistan reported.

The president noted that while Pakistan continues to strive for regional and global peace, terrorists are attempting to undermine these efforts. He affirmed that Pakistan remains committed to defeating terrorism and

maintaining its role in promoting stability.

Despite record militant deaths, Pakistan saw a sharp escalation in militant violence in 2025, with terrorist attacks rising by 34 per cent and terrorism-related fatalities increasing by 21 per cent year on year, according to a report released by the Islamabad-based Pak Institute for Peace Studies.

KP in particular has seen a rise in terrorist attacks in the past year. According to the Annual Security Report 2025 from the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), the province recorded a significant surge in violence last year as "fatalities rose from 1,620 in 2024 to 2,331 in 2025".

Due to a resurgence of militancy, especially in KP and Balochistan, where attacks often target security personnel and LEAs, the state has intensified counter-terrorism operations. Last month, security forces killed 13 terrorists in five separate operations across KP.

## Sanchez sidesteps Spain-US dispute at NATO

MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS/  
LORNE COOK  
Nicosia (Cyprus)



Pedro Sanchez

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on Friday refused to be drawn into a dispute with the United States over reports that the Pentagon is weighing whether to punish members of NATO who fail to support American operations in the Iran war.

Among those in the firing line is Spain, which has refused to allow US forces involved in the war to use bases on its territory or airspace. Spain says that US-Israeli actions in the Iran war contravene international law. France and the UK also refuse to give US forces free rein to use their territory for the bombing campaign.

The Pentagon is reported to be mulling whether to suspend Spain from NATO, according to an unidentified US official referring to a US Defence Department email, and quoted by the Reuters news agency.

"Well, we do not work

with emails," Sanchez told reporters at a European Union summit in Cyprus. "We work with official documents and positions taken, in this case, by the Government of the United States."

"The position of the Government of Spain is clear: absolute collaboration with the allies, but always within the framework of international legality," he said.

The email also suggested reassessing US support for the United Kingdom's claim

to the Falkland Islands, near Argentina, which are also known as Islas Malvinas.

NATO operates by consensus, and all 32 member countries must agree for it to act. The trans-Atlantic alliance's founding treaty has no mechanism for suspending or ejecting any of the members, although nations may leave of their own accord one year after notifying the other allies.

As an organisation, NATO has no direct role in the Iran war except to defend its own territory. US President Donald Trump has been angered by what he sees as the failure of some NATO members to back American actions in the Iran war and to help police the Strait of Hormuz, a major trade route. He has questioned the purpose of US membership in the military organisation. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas appeared perplexed by the US criticism, given that the United Kingdom and France are leading an effort to help secure trade in the strait once the war is over. (AP)

## China, Thailand unite against online cybercams

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Bangkok

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Thailand's Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul on Friday during a visit aimed at strengthening the countries' strategic partnership and expanding cooperation.

The two agreed to strengthen collaboration in fighting transnational crime and cybercams and other areas, Thai Government spokesperson Rachada Dhnadirek said.

She said Anutin thanked China for its continued support for Thailand, while Wang congratulated Anutin on retaining his office after an election and expressed confidence that Thailand-China relations will continue to improve. Anutin greeted



Wang at Government House in Bangkok. They shook hands while posing for photographs before the meeting. Wang also talked earlier

with his Thai counterpart Sihanak Phuangketkeow, officials said.

Wang arrived in Thailand on Thursday for a three-day

visit following meetings with Government ministers in Cambodia focused on enhancing their countries' political and security ties.

He is scheduled to visit Myanmar next, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

China is Thailand's biggest trading partner, and the two countries celebrated their 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations last year. Thai King Maha Vajiralongkorn also made a first-ever visit to China by a reigning Thai monarch in November.

Chinese investment in Thailand has accelerated in recent years, particularly as many Chinese companies have moved production to Southeast Asia to avoid US tariffs.

## Czechs signs deal with Rolls-Royce SMR to prepare for first small nuclear reactor

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Prague

The Czech power company CEZ signed a deal on Friday with Rolls-Royce SMR for preparatory work for the British company to build the first small modular nuclear reactor in the Czech Republic.

CEZ chief executive Daniel Benes said that the work includes the project plan and licensing documentation necessary for issuing building permits for the reactor.

Benes said the company hopes to have all the approvals by 2030. The small nuclear reactor will be built at the site of the existing Temelin nuclear



plant. On April 13, Great Britain Energy - Nuclear, a Government agency, inked a contract with Rolls-Royce SMR to begin design work for the first small nuclear reactors in the UK.

Benes said that the Czech small nuclear reactor will be the second one built by the British firm after the first one is completed in the UK. CEZ has a 20 per cent share

in Rolls-Royce SMR and the companies had signed a deal about a strategic partnership, which should result in up to 3 gigawatt energy sources installed in the Czech Republic.

The Czech state has an almost 70 per cent stake in CEZ and the Government is taking steps to acquire full control of the company.

Small modular reactors are a type of nuclear reactor that can generate a smaller amount of power than a traditional reactor.

Developers say small reactors will be built faster and at a lower cost than large power reactors, scaling to fit the needs of a particular location.

## Prosecutors reject arrest warrant for music tycoon Si-Hyuk



KIM TONG-HYUNG ■ Seoul

South Korean prosecutors on Friday rejected a police request for an arrest warrant for music tycoon Bang Si-Hyuk, chairman of the agency behind K-pop supergroup BTS, questioning whether detention is necessary as he faces a high-profile investigation into alleged investor fraud.

The Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency asked prosecutors earlier this week to request a court warrant to arrest Bang, the billionaire founder and chairman of Hybe. The Seoul Southern District Prosecutors' Office said that it found that the request lacked sufficient grounds to justify his detention and instructed police investigators to strengthen their case. Bang, who has been barred from leaving the country since August, isn't seen as a realistic threat to flee.

The 53-year-old is being investigated over allegations that he misled investors in 2019 by indicating that Hybe had no immediate plans to go public, prompting them to sell their shares to a private equity fund. (AP)

## Hindu Kush-Himalaya snow cover falls to new low for fourth straight year: ICIMOD

SHIRISH B PRADHAN  
Kathmandu

Ganga basin is among the 12 showing above-normal snow persistence in 2026 when overall snow cover across the Hindu Kush Himalaya was below-normal for the fourth consecutive year and even broke last year's record-low deficit, a report said on Friday.

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) Snow Update by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) is an annual report that monitors seasonal snow anomalies in the HKH region and offers an assessment of snow persistence between the winter months of November and

March. Between 2003 and 2026, the HKH region experienced 14 winters with below-normal snow persistence, emerging as a recurrent pattern, particularly with increasing frequency and intensity in the recent years.

"This year, 2026, is the fourth consecutive year of below-normal snow persistence, with snow persistence declining further to 27.8 per cent below average and even breaking last year's record low deficit of 23.6 per cent," the HKH Snow Update 2026 said. "The persistent decline signals a systemic collapse of seasonal snow reserves across the world's highest mountain range, posing an immediate and escalating



threat to water security for nearly two billion people who depend on the 12 major river basins originating in the HKH," it said.

ICIMOD defines snow persistence as the fraction of time snow remains on the

ground after snowfall. Ten of those basins now have below-normal snow persistence. The Mekong, Tarim, and Tibetan Plateau have recorded their lowest levels in 24 years of monitoring, the ICIMOD report said.

Only two basins recorded above-normal snow persistence: the Ganges at plus 16.3 per cent and the Irrawaddy at plus 21.8 per cent, offering limited local relief but insufficient to offset the regional crisis.

"In contrast, extreme deficits persist in the Mekong at minus 59.5 per cent, the Tibetan Plateau at minus 47.4 per cent, and the Salween at minus 41.8 per cent," the Snow Update 2026 said. "What we are seeing is a persistent trend where the seasonal snow reservoir is shrinking, year after year," said Sher Muhammad, author of the HKH Snow Update 2026. "The 2026 numbers confirm a breaking

point: ten out of twelve basins are below normal, and several have hit their lowest recorded persistence in two decades."

Almost 240 million people depend on the glaciers and 10 major rivers, such as Indus, Ganga, and Brahmaputra, originating in the Himalayas. Another billion people living downstream of these rivers across eight countries, including India, too are dependent on the glacier-fed rivers.

In the Ganges basin, the snow persistence this year was 16.3 per cent above normal, making the number of below-normal and above-normal snow years equal over the past 24 years.

"This above-normal snow persistence may support improved early-season water availability in the basin this year. Besides the current year, the highest snow anomaly of 30.2 per cent above normal was observed in 2015," it said.

In the Brahmaputra basin, snow persistence was at the highest level of 27.9 per cent above normal in 2019 vis-a-vis the lowest level of minus 27.9 per cent below normal recorded in 2025.

"The below-normal trend in snow persistence continues even in 2026, although the level of decline is less steep in the current year, recorded at 6.1 per cent below normal. (PTI)

## PROSPECT

### KIIT founder conferred honorary doctorate



Noted educationist, social worker and founder of KIIT and KISS, Dr Achyuta Samanta, received an honorary doctorate from Karnataka University Dharwad, marking his 71st such award.

Karnataka Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot presented the honorary doctorate to Dr Samanta for his outstanding contribution towards societal development through education. The ceremony was attended by Karnataka higher education minister MC Sudhakar, Padma awardee and former Chairman of ISRO AS Kiran Kumar and Vice-Chancellor of the university AN Khan, among others.

Karnataka University, Dharwad, is an 80-year-old educational institution in the state. The university's Academic Council and Board of Management had recommended Dr Samanta's name for the honorary doctorate, which was approved by the Governor.

Dr Samanta said he has been continuously working in the fields of education and social service for more than three decades, and the honours will further inspire him to continue with his dedicated efforts in these areas.

### Mizoram Governor interacts with specially-abled students



05 teachers from Serchhip. During the interaction, the Governor engaged with the students, appreciating their enthusiasm and encouraging them to pursue their aspirations with confidence.

The event concluded on a positive note, leaving a lasting impression on the students and reinforcing efforts towards their welfare and overall development. Assam Rifles remains committed to strengthening civil-military relations and contributing to the development of society in the region.

In a commendable initiative to promote inclusivity and social engagement, Assam Rifles facilitated an interaction between specially-abled students of Shalom Special School, Serchhip and General (Dr) Vijay Kumar Singh, PVSM, AVSM, YSM (Retired), Governor of Mizoram at Lok Bhavan, Aizawl on 23 April 2026.

The interaction was held as part of an Educational Tour facilitated by Assam Rifles for 18 students and

## Videocon bank scam: ED chargesheets UK-resident Sachin Duggal for siphoning

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a supplementary prosecution complaint against UK-based entrepreneur Sachin Dev Duggal in connection with the ongoing money laundering probe linked to the Videocon group, related to financing the company's oil and gas assets in Mozambique, Brazil, and Indonesia.

ED said that Duggal is a key beneficiary of money siphoned from banks. ED alleged that Duggal, chairman of Swiss company Holdings SA and beneficial owner of Indian tech firms Nivio Technologies and Engineering.

The complaint was filed before the court at Rouse Avenue, in continuation of the original prosecution complaint dated 18 December 2024, against Videocon promoter Venugopal Dhoot and 12 others. The court had taken cognisance of the earlier complaint on 10 February 2026.



According to ED, the investigation stems from a first information report (FIR) registered by Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in June 2020, which alleged that Videocon Hydrocarbon Holdings Ltd (VHHL), a step-down subsidiary of Videocon Industries Ltd (VIL), availed a standby letter of credit (SBL) facility of about US \$2.77bn (billion) from a consortium of banks led by State Bank of India (SBI) for developing oil and gas assets overseas. However, the probe revealed that around US \$2.03bn was systematically diverted by Videocon group promoters

and layered through multiple offshore entities. Investigators said the arrangement dates back to 2008, when Videocon Industries began extending interest-free loans totalling about ₹17.32 crore to Duggal-controlled Nivio Technologies without formal agreements. A loan agreement was later executed in May 2011, following which an overseas Videocon entity invested 3.79 mn (million) Confoederatio Helvetica Franc (CHF) in Holdings SA at what the agency described as an inflated valuation despite the company being loss-making.

## ACC clears Deepa Kotnis for joint secretary role at Centre

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC), on 21 April 2026, has cleared the empanelment of Deepa Kotnis, a senior officer of the Indian Railway Accounts Service (1999 Batch), for holding the post of Joint Secretary or equivalent at the Centre, as per Government of India Information Note F No 17/2/2026-EO(SM-III).

Kotnis is presently serving as Executive Director (Finance) at the Indian Railway Finance Corporation, where she has been instrumental in strengthening financial strategy and advancing infrastructure financing initiatives. With over 26 years of distinguished service, her career reflects excellence across diverse sectors, marked by strong leadership and consistently successful delivery in every assignment.

**Railways Leadership:** Steered critical financial functions as FA&CAO



(Construction) at South Western Railway and as Principal Financial Adviser at Rail Wheel Factory.

**Urban Transit Expertise:** Played a key role in metro infrastructure financing as Executive Director (Finance) at Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Ltd (BMRL).

IRFC extends its heartfelt congratulations and best wishes to Deepa Kotnis on this prestigious empanelment and wishes her continued success in her future assignments.

## IRCTC OFFERS DISCOUNTS ON BUDDHIST CIRCUIT TRAIN

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), the country's leading Travel and Tourism Public Sector Enterprise, continues to strengthen its position in experiential tourism with its acclaimed flagship product—the Buddhist Circuit special tourist train. The all-inclusive 7 nights/8 days Buddhist Circuit Tour departs from Safdarjung railway station in New Delhi. IRCTC is currently offering an attractive discount of 20% on the package.

For bookings, travellers can visit the website [www.irctcbuddhisttrain.com](http://www.irctcbuddhisttrain.com), contact at the numbers 8287930197/8287930031 and email at [buddhisttrain@irctc.com](mailto:buddhisttrain@irctc.com).

## Predictable support essential for GDP expansion: Sitharaman

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Pune

Domestic consumption is sustaining the growth momentum in the economy, and predictable policy support is essential to ensure that the pace of GDP expansion continues, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Friday.

Speaking at an event organised by SBI, Sitharaman also said that a committee of bankers is looking into the issue of whether to allow exclusive distribution tie-ups for selling third-party products by banks or adopt an open architecture approach. She also urged banks to focus on the physical contact with customers as they go global and digital.

The minister further said that the disinvestment process of IDBI Bank will continue going ahead.

"...Consumption emerging out of its domestic market itself is able to sustain our growth, which is the fastest even now in the world," she said.

"...Unless our domestic manufacturing, agricultural growth, tourism, IT and related services sector are given that constant support, predictable support, India's growth story will be difficult to keep up," she added.

Replying to a question on policy support to the affected sectors because of the current Middle East crisis, she said the Government will see what it can best do and added that things are very dynamic at present, with talks between the US and Iran being on. To a question on the asset quality impact at banks because of the Middle East crisis, Sitharaman said that there is no need to be concerned, as the non-performing assets are at a multi-decade low.

The IBA chairman with the IBA will be talking to banks to understand how



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, centre, unveils a commemorative postal stamp marking the inauguration of the new premises of the SBI Local Head Office, at Maharashtra Circle, in Kharadi, Pune district. SBI Chairman CS Setty, left, Secretary for the Department of Financial Services (DFS) M Nagaraju, second right, and Chief Postmaster General (CPMG) Amitabh Singh, right, are also present.

best to go about it, what are the vulnerabilities by keeping one (entity), by keeping several...all these are going to be worked upon," she said.

Amid the huge changes in the tech landscape being brought about by Anthropic's AI model Mythos, the FM said a meeting with banks

was held in New Delhi on Thursday, and all the lenders have been asked to work together on it under the leadership of SBI chairman CS Setty, who also chairs IBA.

"In the coming weeks, there will be a lot of interaction within the banks, understanding where more investments will have to be made, what kind of technologies can come in, how AI itself can be used for countering this AI challenge," Sitharaman said.

She was speaking at an event where SBI inaugurated a new local head office, which will serve the bulk of Maharashtra except the Mumbai metropolitan area and the Konkan region, which will continue to be served by the LHO in Mumbai. Terming this as a strategic move for SBI, Setty said the State is very important as Maharashtra delivers sizeable business for the country's largest lender.

## DAILY SUDOKU

		1	4	5				7	
	9							6	5
	4								
			7						9
3	7		8		6			2	4
8			4						
						2			
5	6					7			
4			6	1	5				

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

### HOW TO SOLVE IT

Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9x9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3x3 box, using elimination and logical deduction—no maths involved.



### SOLUTION (24.04.26)

1	3	7	4	8	9	5	2	6
5	4	8	1	2	6	7	3	9
2	9	6	5	3	7	8	4	1
8	2	4	9	5	3	6	1	7
9	1	5	7	6	2	4	8	3
7	6	3	8	4	1	2	9	5
4	7	9	2	1	5	3	6	8
3	8	1	6	7	4	9	5	2
6	5	2	3	9	8	1	7	4

## DOUBLE CROSSWORD SATURDAY | APRIL 25, 2026

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
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- ACROSS**
- Active enough to chuck the doctor in the river! (6)
  - She takes the ring road, wrongly (8)
  - It's good for the car, but bad for the cylinders (6)
  - He manages to clean a weapon (5)
  - When about right, they can be fine (4)
  - In jug, we're put out! (4)
  - Worry about the guitar part (4)
  - Modern in only one way (3)
  - Long, poetic old record, I see (4)
  - Figure to get one for half a dollar (4)
  - Survived the storm the worse for wear (9)
- DOWN**
- Old tales re-edited (5)
  - He showed some cleverness as an author (5)
  - Move slowly to the brink (4)
  - Point to "27" as the mother of "33 Across" (5)
  - Spoils of war? (4)
  - He's a hero to the Spanish (6)
  - Dress causing a teetotaler keen displeasure? (6)
  - Out West, a novice is a mere tool (3)
  - You can credit a fish with finishing up in one (5)
  - A field sport it's possible to reach by railway (7)
  - In good shape, you can have a bit of fun with it (3)
  - Show willing (3)
  - Where dad could sail around on the floor? (6)
  - Thick poles embedded in water (5)
  - White? Not he, the clever fellow! (3)
  - She anticipates the day (3)
  - A small point that gives some detective "trouble" (6)
  - An exclamation, not really of scorn! (3)
  - Split piece of garlic (5)
  - Hot-headed, breezy and hirsute (5)
  - Ask that only the end of the needle be stuck in a cushion (5)
  - Did she twice give the Luvvers a start? (4)
  - Tape head? (4)

### SOLUTION (24.04.26)

- ACROSS**
- Bottle
  - Di's-place
  - Area
  - In-firm
  - Ins-is-t
  - Ace
  - Italy
  - Co-re
  - M-one-y
  - Basil
  - Cut up
  - Pots
  - SEN-or
  - Cad
  - C-ring-e
  - Solder
  - Owls
  - Pres-age-s
  - Old man
  - Out-er
  - Nip
  - Burglar
  - Con
  - Pa-LL-id
  - Odds
  - Sermon
  - Scope
  - Nice-r Cow
  - So-so



BCCI Secretary Devajit Lon Saikia witnessing the development of cricketing infrastructure in Sikkim with support from BCCI

## Proposed changes in Karnataka excise policy should not favour any particular category: CIABC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Bangalore

The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) has said that proposed changes in the excise policy by the Karnataka Government must be carefully calibrated to deliver balanced outcomes, and should favour any particular category, including beer.

In press statement, CIABC Director General Anant S Iyer said that the introduction of the Alcohol-in-Beverage (AIB) mechanism is a progressive step and reflects the Government's intent to reform the sector, the revised framework must be carefully calibrated to deliver balanced outcomes across three critical pillars — consumer affordability and pricing outcomes, industry sustainability with scalable production, and Government revenue with an emphasis on the quality of revenue.

"It is equally important that the policy is not perceived as favouring any particular category, including beer, as currently proposed. Karnataka's historical transition from country liquor to regulated, quality IMFL has been a notable public policy success. In this context, affordability for the mass consumer remains paramount, particularly in the lower IMFL slabs (1-5), which account for over 85% of monthly



CIABC Director General Anant S Iyer

industry volumes," Iyer said. Following the duty increases in May 2025, these segments have already witnessed a degrowth of approximately 6%, and the current policy direction risks further deepening this trend in FY26-27, a CIABC stated.

Sustained volume contraction with the proposed AED for 1-5 slabs of spirits will have a cascading impact across the value chain — from distilleries and bottling units to ancillary industries — while also affecting the agricultural ecosystem dependent on grains and molasses. This, in turn, poses a downside risk to overall industrial and agriculture ecosystem.

While the rationalisation of duties in Slab 6 and above is a welcome step that supports premiumisation, any structural shift favouring beer may not be revenue accretive.

## AGEL records 23% growth in EBITDA to ₹10,865 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Ahmedabad

Adani Green Energy Ltd (AGEL), India's largest and fastest-growing pure-play renewable energy (RE) company, has announced financial results for the period ending March 31, 2026, showcasing robust growth and operational excellence.



AGEL's energy sales increased by 34 per cent YoY to 37,567 million units in FY26. The revenue from power supply is up 22 per cent YoY to ₹11,602 crore. The EBITDA from power supply grew 23 per cent YoY to ₹10,865 crore. The cash profit surged 11 per cent YoY to ₹5,399 crore.

The strong revenue and EBITDA growth are primarily backed by robust greenfield capacity additions of 5.1 GW in FY26, deployment of advanced RE technologies, strong plant performance and commissioning of new capacities in resource-rich sites in Khavda, Gujarat and Rajasthan.

**PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY**  
PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY-754142, ODISHA (INDIA)

**MEDICAL DEPARTMENT**  
FILE NO. CMO/02/A/401/2025/273  
DATE: 20.04.2026

**E-TENDER CALL NOTICE**  
Tenders are invited on behalf of Paradip Port Authority for the work "Providing manpower for office work, Housekeeping and Para-medical Worker for PPA Hospital". The last date & time of submission of DT: 10.05.2026 on 17.00 Hrs. For details, please refer website <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/gpp>.

Sd/- Chief Medical Officer  
Medical Department  
Paradip Port Authority  
PPA/PR/08/2026-2027

## BRIEFLY

### Saudi Arabia replaces football coach



Saudi Arabia made its coaching change official by firing Herve Renard and replacing him with Georgios Donis less than two months before the start of the World Cup. The 56-year-old Donis, a former Greece international, joins from Al-Khaleej, one of several Saudi Pro League clubs he's coached. "He has extensive experience in the league, including his most recent post (which) enhances his ability to adapt quickly," the Saudi soccer federation said in its announcement. Saudi Arabia opens its Group H play at the World Cup against Uruguay on June 15. It also plays Spain and Cape Verde. Donis was a longtime Panathinaikos midfielder who also played in England for Blackburn, Sheffield United and Huddersfield. He has also coached Panathinaikos and Maccabi Tel Aviv, among others.

### Sevilla's relegation fears grow after 2-0 loss to Levante



Sevilla's struggles continued with a 2-0 loss at Levante that kept the club only one point above the relegation zone in the Spanish league.

Ivan Romero scored a goal in each half for Levante, which stayed second-to-last but only two points from salvation. It has won three of its last four matches.

Sevilla, in 17th place, has lost four of its last five league matches. "We knew it was a tough match. We lost a great opportunity to take a step forward. It hurts," Sevilla's Ruben Vargas said. "There are still matches left, we have to remain positive."

Both teams were awarded penalties that ended being called off after video review.

### Abhay enters maiden PSA Gold-level quarters in Zurich



India's Abhay Singh registered a notable win over Egyptian world No 13 Aly Abou Eleinen to enter his maiden PSA Gold-level event quarterfinals at the Grasshopper Cup squash in Zurich.

World Number 24 Abhay trailed 5-8 in the opening game before recovering to beat the seventh seed 12-10, 11-9 in the second round.

Singh had beaten Eleinen earlier this month at the El Gouna Open in Egypt.

"I stuck to my game plan. Still a few things I can work on. We will go back to the drawing board tonight," said Singh. He will play Egyptian world No. 4 Karim Gawad next.

In the opening round, Singh beat Swiss David Bernet 11-9, 9-11, 11-8, while compatriot Ramit Tandon lost to Egypt's Fares Dessouky 6-11, 9-11.

## India beat Canada 4-1 in Thomas Cup final opener

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Horsens (Denmark)

Lakshya Sen endured a tough loss, but Ayush Shetty and the doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty registered wins as 2022 champions India notched up a commanding 4-1 win over Canada in their opening Group A tie of the Thomas Cup Finals on Friday.

After Lakshya's spirited effort ended in an 18-21, 21-19, 21-10 loss to world number 13 Victor Lai, world number 4 Satwik and Chirag levelled the tie with a dominant 21-10, 21-11 win over Jonathan Bing Tsan Lai and Kevin Lee.

The 20-year-old Ayush, runner-up at the recent Asia Championships, then outwitted world Number 33 Brian Yang 21-13, 21-17 in 39 minutes to hand India a 2-1 lead. The second doubles pair of Hariharan Amsakarunan and M R Arjun sealed the tie for India with a convincing 21-7, 21-15 victory over Ty Alexander Lindeman and Nyl Yakura.



Kidambi Srikanth then outsmarted world No. 77 Joshua Nguyen 21-17, 21-12 in the inconsequential fifth match as India wrapped up the match 4-1 to be placed second in the table behind China.

China, 11-time winners and defending champions, beat Australia 5-0.

The top two teams from each of the four groups will qualify for the quarter-finals.

The Indian women's team will face Denmark in their opening match of the Uber Cup later in the day.

### Lakshya vs Lai

It turned into another

energy-sapping contest, reminiscent of his All England semifinal, with Lakshya Sen and Victor Lai engaging in long, draining rallies.

Lakshya looked in control early, dictating the pace with precise net play and sharp smashes to dominate the opening exchanges.

### Modest start for Aditi in Chevron Championship



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Houston

India's Aditi Ashok endured a disappointing start to her campaign in the Chevron Championship as she carded 2-over 74 and was placed tied 80th after the first day.

Nelly Korda putted superbly to save pars early and then made some great ones for birdies on her back nine of Memorial Park for a 7-under 65, her best start to a major in four years. Korda now has a two-shot lead over Patty Tavatanakit, who won this major as a rookie in 2021 when it was the ANA Inspiration. She played bogey-free for a 67 and was two shots back along with Somi Lee, who bogeyed her final hole on the par-3 ninth.

Farah O'Keefe, the junior at Texas, missed a 5-foot par putt on her last hole to fall back into the group of players at 68.

Thirty-seven players in the 132-player field broke par. Jeeno Thitikul was not among them. The No. 1 player in women's golf had four bogeys over her last eight holes and shot 74. In her quest to win her first major, she started out nine shots behind Korda with her first goal to make the cut.

### Anush Agarwalla claims silver at CDI Hagen

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ New Delhi

Indian equestrian Anush Agarwalla delivered an outstanding performance at the CDI Hagen, one of Europe's most esteemed international dressage competitions, securing a second-place finish with a score of 70.94 per cent aboard his accomplished mare, Floriana, in Hagen, Germany.

The result marks another landmark achievement in the young Indian rider's rapidly ascending international career. Agarwalla and Floriana produced a polished and expressive test that impressed the panel of international judges.

The pair's harmony, technical precision, and artistic presentation earned them a score of 70.94 per cent, placing them firmly on the podium in second position.

Talking about the same, Agarwalla said, "This result at CDI Hagen is a testament to the incredible partner-



ship I share with Floriana. "I'm really pleased with how Floriana and I performed at Hagen. She felt confident and expressive throughout the test, and we were able to execute what we've been working on in training."

## Tomas' backheel sends Stuttgart to German Cup final

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
■ Stuttgart

Tiago Tomas' spectacular 119th-minute backheel goal sent Stuttgart back to the German Cup final with an extra-time 2-1 win over Freiburg to keep its title defence rolling.

In the final in Berlin on May 23, Stuttgart will now aim to foil a Bayern Munich domestic double, which could become a treble if Vincent Kompany's team wins the Champions League too.

The back-to-back cup finals for Stuttgart couldn't be more different, facing a record-breaking Bayern, which beat Stuttgart 4-2 last weekend, after beating one of the competition's biggest-ever



underdogs, third-tier Arminia Bielefeld, in last year's final.

"It's a really tough question. I think just be concentrated, try to make as few mistakes as possible," Stuttgart striker Deniz Undav

told Sky Sport when asked how his team can make an upset happen. "We believe in it. Anything can happen in Berlin. It's one game."

Freiburg's chances of an unusual double ended, but it's still a contender for the Europa League title after reaching the semi-finals. The game was heading for a penalty shootout when Tomas produced a moment of individual skill by twisting in the air between two defenders as a pass came in from Badredine Bouanani and using his heel to flick the ball past Freiburg's otherwise outstanding goalkeeper, Florian Muller.

Tomas celebrated shirtless, holding a corner flag aloft to the crowd, and shrugged off the inevitable yellow card.

## Argentina's World Cup title defense clouded by domestic turmoil

DEBORA REY ■ Buenos Aires

After Argentina won the World Cup in Qatar 2022, the president of the Argentine Football Association carried a replica of the trophy at every public appearance. He received standing ovations.

Claudio Tapia had reason to consider himself part of the sporting achievement. The AFA leader took a chance on the inexperienced Lionel Scaloni as the national team's coach, a move many say helped Argentina win its first World Cup title in 36 years.

Now, as La Albiceleste prepares to defend its title in June-July, Tapia finds himself at the centre of a crisis that has shaken the country's soccer landscape.

The public mood has turned against him and AFA due to corruption investigations, unpopular changes to the domestic soccer league and a string of World Cup warmups against low-ranking opponents. Meanwhile, Tapia, 58, has



been locked in a power struggle with Argentine President Javier Milei over the ownership structure of the country's soccer clubs.

In late March, Tapia was charged with tax evasion following a complaint filed by Milei's government. Hours later, the soccer federation boss was booted while receiving a plaque on the field before Argentina's friendly match against Mauritania in Buenos Aires.

National team players, including team captain and

soccer icon Lionel Messi, have tried to stay away from the conflict as they prepare for the World Cup.

"Let it be clear that we are football players, we came here to play football," midfielder Rodrigo De Paul said last month after a friendly match against Zambia.

"We don't get involved in politics; we don't understand those kinds of things." Tapia made it a habit to post photos of himself and Messi on social media ahead of national team matches. (AP)

## India to be top-10 sporting nation by 2036: Mandaviya

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Budgam

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Friday said India would emerge among the top 10 sporting nations by 2036 and break into the top five by 2047.

Speaking to reporters after inaugurating a 30-bedded Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) hospital at Empora in the central Kashmir district in Budgam, Mandaviya credited the Narendra Modi-led Government for streamlining sports governance and creating a more structured system.

"It (the Government) is providing an opportunity to the youth to perform in the sports arena. I am sure that in the days to come, in the next ten years by 2036, India will be among the 10 best sporting nations in the world and by 2047, India will emerge among the top five sporting nations," Mandaviya said.

The minister added that the Government's sustained push has strengthened the



sporting framework across the country.

"The country has won the bid for hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2030 and has also bid for hosting the 2036 Olympic Games. The process is going on to meet all the demands and expectations of the International Olympic Committee.

"The sports ecosystem has been improved in the country, and with programmes like Fit India, Khelo India movement, the country's youth are getting opportunities," Mandaviya added.

## Italy rejects proposal to replace Iran at upcoming World Cup

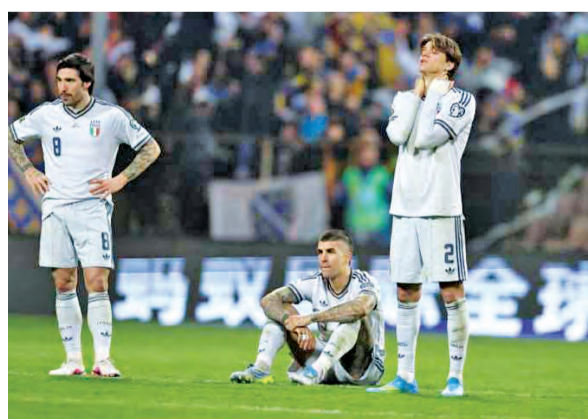
ANDREW DAMPF/GRAHAM DUNBAR/SEUNG MIN KIM  
■ Rome

Italian sports officials say four-time champion Italy is not interested in replacing Iran at the upcoming World Cup following a suggestion to that effect by a Trump administration official.

Iran has not withdrawn from the World Cup, and the team is preparing to play in the US despite the war in the Middle East. FIFA has insisted its group stage games near Los Angeles and in Seattle will go ahead as planned in June.

The Financial Times reported that Paolo Zampolli, the US special envoy for global partnerships, had suggested the swap to President Donald Trump and FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

In a phone interview with the Associated Press on Thursday, Zampolli emphasised that "my request is not a political request." The ask, which was made to Trump



and Infantino on Wednesday, was meant as a contingency plan in case Iran could not participate in the soccer tournament at the last minute.

"I had a dream," Zampolli told the AP. "My request was for the Italian people and the American-Italian people." He said in the FT interview that, with four titles, the Italian national team's appearance in the World Cup would be justified.

Italian officials pushed back hard at the sugges-

tion, with Sports Minister Andrea Abodi saying Thursday that "first of all, it's not possible. Secondly, it's not a good idea."

Luciano Buonfiglio, the president of the Italian Olympic Committee, which oversees all sports in Italy, also dismissed the idea.

"I would feel offended," Buonfiglio said. "You need to deserve to go to the World Cup." Italy's Finance Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti called the suggested swap "shameful." (AP)

## Legendary Tendulkar celebrates 53rd birthday



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Legendary Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar celebrated his 53rd birthday in Mumbai on Friday in the presence of fans across age groups at his residence with his wife Anjali in company. The Little Master cut the birthday cake amid cheering fans who had gathered here this morning at his residence. Among them was a young girl wearing a T-shirt that had Tendulkar's picture, and the batting legend took her in his lap. Earlier in the day, Tendulkar posted a picture on

social media with his mother and wife as well as his pet dog in frame.

"Perfect start to my day with Aai, Anjali and the trouble maker! What more could a man ask for?" he wrote.

Former India cricketer Harbhajan Singh, who was present at a Legends Club event on the occasion of Tendulkar's birthday, said, "I wish my brother a very happy birthday. I wish him a lot of love and respect."

"I pray that he stays healthy. I pray that he continues to inspire us. I wish him a lot of happiness and love," Harbhajan said.



## Sri Lanka President to meet cricket chief



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Colombo

Sri Lanka President Anura Kumara Dissanayake will meet the country's cricket chief Shammie Silva on Friday amid speculation over a possible change in the board's leadership.

A source close to Silva said the meeting has been scheduled for later in the day.

The development comes against the backdrop of media reports suggesting that Silva could be removed, with the Government considering appointing an interim administration to run the sport.

Sri Lanka's 1973 Sports Law empowers the Sports Minister to dissolve governing bodies. However, the provision is at variance with the rules of the International Cricket Council (ICC) for member boards.

Media reports have also suggested that Dissanayake wants Silva to step down to



1973 SPORTS LAW EMPOWERS SPORTS MINISTER TO DISSOLVE GOVERNING BODIES

facilitate the appointment of a new administration from May 1. The Government's reported dissatisfaction with Silva stems from player unrest, Sri Lanka's slide in international rankings, and a string of poor performances.

Silva, elected last year, has a tenure until May 2027. He had earlier been sacked by a previous Sports Minister in November but was reinstated following court intervention.

## Mustafizur's NOC for PSL withdrawn by BCB



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chattogram

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has withdrawn the No Objection Certificate (NOC) issued to pacer Mustafizur Rahman for the Pakistan Super League 2026, following a medical review after the third ODI against New Zealand.

According to a BCB statement, Mustafizur will undergo an immediate scan to assess his condition. He

will then begin a rehabilitation programme under the supervision of the board's medical team, ruling him out of the remainder of this season's PSL.

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) wishes to inform that, following the conclusion of the 3rd ODI against New Zealand, the team's medical staff has reviewed the condition of national team pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman," the BCB said on Thursday in a statement.

## Deepti will bounce back: coach Muzumdar



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Johannesburg

Indian women's team head coach Amol Muzumdar has backed veteran all-rounder Deepti Sharma to come good but admitted that her prolonged lean patch in national colours is a bit of a "concern".

Indian team under Harmanpreet Kaur has already lost the five-match WT20 series against South Africa after losing three games on the trot, but what has been a concern is Deepti's poor returns with the ball as she has remained wicketless so far.

In the third WT20I match, where Proteas Women chased down 192 with just a wicket down, Laura Wolvaardt and Sune Luus took Deepti to the cleaners, taking 46 runs from her 3.3 overs.

In fact, Deepti's contribu-

tion for India in the last 10 games (across 3 formats) is a meagre 51 runs, and she took only seven wickets in these games.

"Look, I don't want to beat around the bush, I just want to say that yeah, it's a bit of a concern as far as Deepti is concerned," Muzumdar said ahead of the fourth game of the series on Saturday.

But at the same time, Muzumdar is confident that Deepti has the talent and skill to make a superb comeback.

"For all champion players are, form is, you know, temporary, class is permanent, it's a cliché, but it applies to all the players, and she's a class player, there's no doubt about it, we have seen it in the World Cup, in bigger tournaments, in pressure situations, she has stood up for India," Muzumdar came to her defence.

## Kumble and Harbhajan hail Samson's hundred, cite context and game awareness

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

Spin legends Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh hailed Sanju Samson's hundred against the Mumbai Indians here as one of the finest in terms of game awareness and context, as Chennai Super Kings returned to winning ways in the ongoing IPL.

Samson scored his second century of the 2026 IPL season on Thursday, smashing an unbeaten 101 off 54 balls at Wankhede Stadium.

Speaking on Star Sports, Kumble stressed on the knock's impact on CSK, who are trying to climb up the points table after a string of poor outings.

"CSK's success has often been built on strong starts from their openers, and in the last few seasons, that hasn't been consistent. Sanju Samson has stepped up in that context, two unbeaten hundreds in just seven matches, and has been instrumental in carrying the team through," the great leg-spinner observed.

"It's similar to the role Jos Buttler played during Rajasthan's run to the final, and you can clearly see that influence in the way Sanju has evolved his game."



Former India off-spinner Harbhajan described the century as one of the finest knocks from the blade of Samson.

"Sanju Samson stood out because of his game awareness. A lot of players have talent, but very few understand how to pace an innings in different situations. He recognised the importance of batting till the end, especially with a young side around him," Harbhajan said.

"After his half-century, he shifted gears, focused on singles and doubles, and ensured he stayed till the last phase. With wickets falling at the other end, he took responsibility and finished strongly.

"For me, this was one of the finest innings in terms of awareness and determination," he added.

It made him the first CSK player to score a century against the Mumbai Indians and only the second player in



Sanju Samson stood out because of his game awareness. A lot of players have talent, but very few understand how to pace an innings in different situations Harbhajan Singh

franchise history, after Shane Watson (2018), to record two centuries in a single IPL season.

After Samson's century guided CSK to 207/6, West Indies' left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein (4/17) produced a match-winning performance to help the visitors record a massive 103-run victory. On CSK spinners' attacking intent against MI, Harbhajan said, "What stood out was the intent of CSK's spinners to take wickets."

## Bartlett hails Arshdeep's 'amazing' influence in adapting to IPL conditions

HIMANK NEGI ■ New Delhi

Punjab Kings pacer Xavier Bartlett has hailed teammate Arshdeep Singh's influence as "amazing", crediting the India seamer's experience for helping him adapt to Indian conditions in the ongoing IPL.

Bartlett, who has featured in Punjab Kings' rotation this season, has picked up 4 wickets in IPL 2026, with best figures of 2/9 as he continues to find his feet in a varied pace attack alongside Arshdeep.

"Arshdeep has been incredible...He's had so much experience in these conditions, and has been someone I've loved working with," Bartlett said.

"Not just in games but in training as well. Seeing how hard he works and how much better he's got over the last 12 months has been amazing."

On adapting to Indian conditions, Bartlett said he worked on expanding his skillset.

"In Australia, you can sort of bash away at the length and you get a little bit of assistance from the wicket, which you do here at times, but probably not as frequently," he said.

"For me, it was trying to develop a few more slower



balls and really trying to nail my yorker, which I felt like I've done reasonably well over the last couple of years. But still massive room for improvement for myself."

The Queenslander also highlighted the importance of camaraderie within the pace unit which includes Arshdeep, Marco Jansen and Vijaykumar Vyshak.

"I think we're all very different. We have a lot of variety in our attack," he said. "It's been really nice to work with those sort of players, to try and pick their brains."

Bartlett credited head coach Ricky Ponting and captain Shreyas Iyer for creating a calm and confident environment within the group, which he believes has been central to Punjab

Kings' unbeaten start to the season.

"The confidence that Ricky and Shreyas instil in you every day to go out there and try to perform your best is probably one of the reasons we're having some success early in the tournament," he said.

"Shreyas is very cool, calm and collected on the field. To have that at mid-off holds you in good stead and doesn't let your emotions take over too much," he said.

The Aussie quick believes the IPL's 'Impact Player' rule adds value to the game, saying it creates opportunities for players as he drew parallels with the Big Bash League's X-factor rule, under which he got early opportunities in his career.

## MI need to keep confidence, focus, discipline: Jayawardene

DEVARCHIT VARMA ■ Mumbai

Mumbai Indians coach Mahela Jayawardene has dismissed burnout concerns for his key Indian players, including Suryakumar Yadav and Hardik Pandya, assuring that the team is focused on regaining rhythm and confidence rather than blaming T20 World Cup fatigue for its poor run.

Mumbai Indians succumbed to their fifth defeat in seven matches this IPL season, losing to Chennai Super Kings here on Thursday by 103 runs, their biggest margin of defeat in terms of

runs. MI skipper Pandya has taken a mere three wickets and scored 97 runs in six matches, while Suryakumar has managed 156 runs in seven games. Even Jasprit Bumrah (2 wickets) and Tilak Varma (181 runs) have not been able to make a strong impact.

"(In) modern-day (cricket), everyone is a professional. A lot of the guys who played the World Cup have come back after a break to play the IPL," Jayawardene told reporters after MI's heavy loss to CSK.

"I don't think even the players would put up to that

(fatigue), it's about us getting the rhythm, getting that consistency - overall consistency is something we are lacking. Yes, (in) bowling, we need to improve, but at the same time, batting hasn't been consistent as well."

"We just need to find that space where we can compete. If we play our best cricket, we have a great chance, but the confidence, the focus, the discipline have to be there for the next seven games," he added.

Having poor powerplays has

been one of the factors behind MI's disappointing run so far this season. On Thursday, while CSK raced to 73 for two batting first, MI could only crawl to 29 for three after a cluster of wickets in the first three overs. (PTI)

25001/39/2627 E-Mail ID - rwd.padampur@yahoo.co.in Ph.No. 9437255440

**Government of Odisha "e" Procurement Notice**  
Bid Identification No: Online- 01-OF 2026-27

1. Name of the work	: Building works (As per Annexure-'A')
2. Amount put to Bid Excluding GST	: As per Annexure-'A'
3. Class of contractor	: "D" "C" & "B"
5. Date & Time of availability of bid document in the portal	: From Dt. 28.04.2026 at 10.00 A.M.
6. Last date & Time for receipt of bids in the portal	: Dt. 07.05.2026 upto 05.00 P.M.
7. Last date of seeking clarification	: Dt. 06.05.2026 up to 1.00 P.M.
8. Date & Time of technical bid opening	: Dt. 08.05.2026 at 10.00 A.M.
10. Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid	: Executive Engineer, R.W.Division, Padampur, At/Po-Padampur, Dist-Bargarh, Pin- 768036

(1) Other details can be seen from DTCN available in website www.tendersodisha.gov.in  
(2) Corrigendum, if any shall only be published in the above website.

Executive Engineer, Rural Woks Division, Padampur  
OIPR-25001/25008/1/2627/0001

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER  
DHENKANAL (R&B) DIVISION, DHENKANAL  
Email - sedklpvd@gmail.com

34001/115/2627 INVITATION FOR BIDS THROUGH e-Procurement

Invitation for Bids  
**1<sup>st</sup> Corrigendum**

Bid Identification No. SE DKL (R&B), 02/ 2026-27

Name of the Work - 02Nos Civil Works.

The following changes have been made in Bid Identification No. SE DKL (R&B), 02/ 2026-26

1. Availability of Bid documents in Govt. Website i.e. www.tendersorissa.gov.in, during the period from 10.00 AM dt.30.04.2026 to 05.00PM hours of dt.14.05.2026 instead of 10.00 AM. dt.22.04.2026 to 05.00 hours of dt.07.05.2026 for ONLINE BIDDING respectively.
2. Online bids shall be received till 05.00 PM Hours of dt.14.05.2026 instead of dt.07.05.2026.
3. Date of opening of bid at 11.00 A.M. of dt.15.05.2026 instead of dt.08.05.2026.

All other terms and conditions remain unchanged. Superintending Engineer Dhenkanal (R&B) Division, Dhenkanal  
OIPR-34001/34016/1/2627/0004

34001/69/2627 Government of Odisha  
Information and Public Relations Department

IPR-FP-GP-0005-2026/ 6759 /IPR Dated. 23.04.2026

**1<sup>st</sup> Corrigendum**

Tender Call Notice No. 5956 Dtd:09.04.2026

In continuation of the TCN No.5956 Dtd:09.04.2026 inviting bids for "selection of a competent Agency for Supply, Installation, Operation and Maintenance of 65 (Sixty-Five) Outdoor Digital LED Display Boards at designated locations in and around Puri for the occasion of Puri Shri Jagannath Rath Yatra 2026 for a fixed-duration on rental/operational basis for a period of 15 (Fifteen) days", it is hereby informed to all concerned that some modifications are made in the tender document. Please visit the department websites, i.e., <https://inpr.odisha.gov.in> & <https://odisha.gov.in> for detail information. Director, I&PR  
OIPR-34001/34006/1/2627/0003