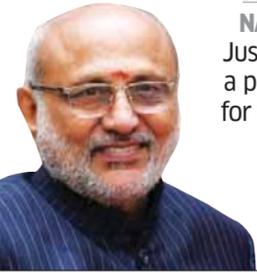


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Justice not a privilege for few: VP



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What Does Prosperity Mean? Revisiting Artha for a Rising India



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Iran main threat to Gulf countries, says UAE adviser



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SPORTS

Kimi Antonelli wins Japanese Grand Prix



PIONEER IN SHORT

NITIN NABIN DELAYS ASSEMBLY RESIGNATION

Bihar Assembly Speaker Prem Kumar was caught off guard Sunday when BJP MLA Nitin Nabin, recently elected to the Rajya Sabha, could not resign from his assembly seat in person due to an "emergency." Nabin, representing Bankipur, was scheduled to meet the Speaker in Patna to vacate his seat within the 14-day deadline but left for poll-bound Assam instead, sources said. Prem Kumar, who had been in Delhi attending a function at Bharat Mandapam, returned to Patna after being informed by State BJP chief Sanjay Sarangi. "Apparently, there was an emergency that led the national president to leave," the Speaker told reporters. When asked about virtual resignations, he noted that physical presence is required under current rules. Asked whether Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, also elected to the Rajya Sabha, would resign Monday, Prem Kumar said the CM is a Legislative Council member and advised approaching the CM's or Council secretariat for updates. The Speaker added he would return to Delhi later in the evening after attending the function and would continue monitoring the developments closely to ensure compliance with all procedural requirements.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

■ New Delhi

Urging all citizens to join hands to overcome the "challenging" situation emerging due to the ongoing "fierce war" in West Asia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday cautioned that those politicising the present crisis should refrain from doing so as the interests of 140 crore people are involved.

Making these assertions in his monthly *Mann Ki Baat* radio address, also said there is no place for self-serving politics in the prevailing situation. He said those who are spreading rumours are causing major harm to the country.

"Presently, a fierce war is going on in our neighbourhood for a month. These certainly are challenging times. Today, through *Mann Ki Baat*, I would once again urge all my countrymen that we must unitedly overcome this challenge," the prime minister said. Those who are politicising this issue



PM Narendra Modi addressing in Noida on Saturday, March 28

should refrain from doing so as this is a matter concerning the interests of 140 crore citizens. There is no place for self-serving politics, he said.

"I would also appeal to all citizens to remain vigilant and not be misled by rumours. Trust only the continuous information provid-

ed by the Government and take action based only on that," he added. As always, Modi said, he was confident that just as the people of the country have overcome past crises with their collective strength, this time too, "we will together emerge victorious from this difficult situ-

ation". He said millions of Indian family members live in these Gulf countries and are working there. "I am deeply grateful to the Gulf countries, which are providing all kinds of assistance to more than 1 crore such Indians living there," he said.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Stay united, avoid rumors: PM says on West Asia crisis

LS to discuss anti-Naxal drive as Amit Shah's deadline nears

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
 ■ New Delhi

The Lok Sabha on Monday will discuss "efforts to free the country from left-wing extremism" as Union Home and Cooperation Minister Amit Shah's self-imposed deadline of March 31, 2026 to completely eliminate the Naxal menace draws approaches.

The discussion, which does not involve voting but requires a formal reply from the Government, will be initiated by TDP MP Byreddy Shabari and Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Shinde.

Shah had publicly announced that the Naxal threat would be eradicated by March 31 this year. In the run-up to the deadline, security forces have intensified operations, launching a coordinated drive to neutralise the remaining armed Maoist cadres.

A fresh review of Naxal violence-affected regions has reduced the number of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) hit districts in the country to seven from eight. "A compre-



Naxalites holding copies of the Constitution of India after their surrender in Chhattisgarh in 2025

hensive review of the 'National Policy and Action Plan to address LWE' was recently carried out by the Union Government in consultation with nine affected states covering 38 districts," officials said.

These states include Jharkhand, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana and West Bengal.

Official sources indicated that the Centre is finalising an "Operations and Development" blueprint for the post-deadline phase. The

plan is expected to include the withdrawal of approximately five battalions of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), alongside the rollout of welfare and development schemes to prevent any resurgence of extremism.

Since assuming charge, Amit Shah has pushed a unified, data-driven counter-LWE campaign. The cornerstone remains the National Policy and Action Plan approved in 2015, emphasising a multi-pronged strategy of security, development and dialogue.

CONTINUED ON >> P4

Atmanirbhar Bharat



Sahkar Se Samridhi



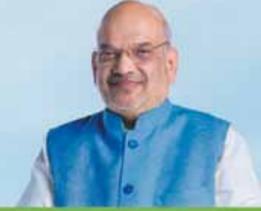
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World-class facilities promised at newly launched terminal



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Indore

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Sunday said that the life and ideals of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar continue to guide the path of public welfare, adding that the state government is advancing new milestones in public service under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He was addressing a programme at Devi Ahilyabai Holkar International Airport in Indore, where he inaugurated the upgraded Terminal-1, dedicating a modern aviation facility to residents of Indore and the Malwa region.

Highlighting the transformation of India's aviation sector, Yadav credited the Prime Minister's vision for making air travel accessible to all sections of society. He said that flying, once considered a luxury, is now within reach of common citizens, and noted that the pace of expansion in air services across the country has been unprecedented. He also stated that Madhya Pradesh has launched the PM Shri Air Ambulance Service, enabling

critically ill patients to be transported swiftly to higher medical centres for timely treatment.

The Chief Minister said the new terminal will further strengthen Indore's position on the national and international aviation map. He also handed over a Quality Certificate of Registration, awarded by the American Quality Council, to airport officials in recognition of improved aviation facilities in the city.

Developed under a restructuring project at a cost of approximately Rs 50 crore, the upgraded terminal, along with the renovation of the old building, can now handle around 400 passengers per hour. Spread across nearly 6,000 square metres, the facility includes 14 check-in counters and seating arrangements for about 300 passengers. It has an annual passenger capacity of 1.5 million and supports operations of up to 18 flights. Additional amenities include parking for 150 four-wheelers and a dedicated VIP lounge. A large waiting area has also been developed to manage peak-hour crowds efficiently. To enhance passenger convenience, an "Udaan Yatri

Café" will be introduced, offering tea at Rs 10 and snacks at Rs 20.

Yadav said that with the steady increase in passenger traffic, aviation infrastructure in the state is being expanded rapidly. At present, Madhya Pradesh has eight airports, 20 airstrips and 220 helipads. In the past two years, new airports have become operational in Rewa, Satna and Datia, while preparations are underway for new airports in Ujjain and Shivpuri, which will increase the total number to ten. He added that the government aims to establish a commercial airport every 150 km, an airstrip every 75 km and a helipad every 45 km across the state. He said that expansion across rail, road and aviation sectors, supported by major investments and expressway development, is steadily transforming Madhya Pradesh into a logistics hub. Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu joined the programme virtually, while Indore MP Shankar Lalwani and other public representatives were also present at the event, which began with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp.

Three charred to death as car plunges into ditch

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Three people were charred to death after a moving car lost control, plunged into a roadside ditch and caught fire on the Baihar-Malajkhand route in Madhya Pradesh late Saturday night.

The accident occurred between 11 pm and midnight near Keolari Chauraha, where the vehicle reportedly veered off the road before bursting into flames. The fire spread rapidly, leaving the occupants with little chance to escape.

The deceased have been identified as Nagarachi Kelkar (65), Savita Kelkar (28) and Abhi Kelkar (3). Savita was Nagarachi's daughter-in-law, while Abhi was his grandson.

Two others—Sitram Kelkar (30), who was driving the vehicle, and Nanabai Kelkar (60)—sustained severe burn injuries. Both have been

referred to a hospital in Gondia for advanced treatment.

Passersby rushed to the scene and broke the car windows to rescue the occupants. An eight-year-old girl, Purvi Rahangdale, managed to escape unharmed.

Police said the family was returning to Pauni in Malajkhand from their native village Pondi in Paraswada. Sitram, who runs a welding shop in Pauni, had visited his village with family members three days earlier and was on his way back at the time of the accident.

Additional Superintendent of Police Adarshant Shukla said the bodies have been sent to Baihar hospital for post-mortem. Station in-charge Jayant Marskole said the petrol car was completely gutted, making identification difficult.



Christian devotees take part in a holy procession on the occasion of 'Palm Sunday' in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

Harvester worth Rs 30 lakh gutted, operator killed

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A 27-year-old harvester operator died after being electrocuted and severely burnt when the machine he was operating came into contact with an 11 kV high-tension power line during wheat harvesting in Neguwa village of Chhatrapur district on Sunday.

The deceased has been identified as Shailendra Patel, a resident of Nahdora village in the Rajnagar area. He was employed as an operator on a harvester owned by Balak Patel of Satai.

According to eyewitnesses, the incident occurred while harvesting operations were underway in a farm. The upper portion of the harvester reportedly came

into contact with an overhead high-tension line, allowing electric current to pass through the machine. The contact triggered a short circuit, leading to a massive fire that engulfed the harvester within moments, trapping Shailendra inside and leaving him with no opportunity to escape.

The harvester, estimated to be worth around Rs 30-32 lakh, was completely destroyed in the blaze. The fire also spread to the adjoining field, burning approximately 1 to 2 bighas of standing wheat crop. Officials said the damage included an estimated loss of 30 to 35 quintals of wheat.

Police from the local Padariya outpost and administrative officials reached the scene soon after

receiving information. The body was sent for post-mortem examination and later handed over to the family.

According to outpost in-charge Kamla Singh, the field where the incident occurred belongs to Gangadeen Ahirwar, and harvesting was being carried out by his children.

Local residents have alleged negligence on the part of the electricity department, claiming that high-tension power lines passing over agricultural fields are hanging dangerously low, posing a serious risk to farmers and workers. Villagers have demanded strict action against those responsible, along with adequate compensation for the victim's family.

4 held for raping minor in city

Bhopal: A 17-year-old girl from Chhindwara was allegedly subjected to sexual assault by two men in Bhopal's Bagevania area on March 18, after being inveigled into travelling to the state capital on duplicitous promises of employment and college admission. The victim, who completed Class 12 last year and aspired to pursue higher education, was lured by her acquaintance Monika Indoria — a Chhindwara native residing in a rented flat in Vidya Nagar, Bagevania, with one Renuka Bunekar. Upon arriving in Bhopal, the unsuspecting girl was taken to the flat, where two men — Nikhil Singh (32) and Atul Medekar (30), both originally from Balaghat — were subsequently summoned.

The victim was allegedly coerced into consuming alcohol, rendering her semi-conscious, following which one of the accused perpetrated the assault. Later that night, the second accused allegedly violated her with Renuka's complicity. When the victim attempted resistance, she was purportedly beaten and threatened into submission. The traumatised girl returned to Chhindwara the following morning without disclosing the ordeal. She eventually confided in her mother after falling ill days later. On March 27, the mother-daughter duo approached Bagevania police station and registered an FIR under provisions for rape, wrongful confinement, and the POCSO Act.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav visits "Launchpad: Incubation and Innovation Centre" at Sinhasa IT Park, Indore on Sunday. Pioneer photo

Innovation centre to nurture 100 startups

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Indore

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Sunday said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Madhya Pradesh is moving rapidly on the path of development, with a strong focus on innovation, startups and technology-driven growth.

Addressing the inauguration of the Launchpad Incubation and Innovation Centre at the IT Park in Sinhasa, Indore, the Chief Minister said that the youth of the state are increasingly transforming their ideas into innovations and launching startups through information technology. He added that by 2047, Madhya Pradesh aims to emerge as a major hub of entrepreneurship by embracing startups and innovation in line with the Prime Minister's vision.

Highlighting the growing role of technology, Yadav said that Artificial Intelligence is rapidly transforming the world and, in the present era, an individual is evaluated by the strength of knowledge. He encouraged young people to

adopt emerging technologies, establish startups and become job creators rather than job seekers. He also noted that the state's first Knowledge and AI City is being developed in Bhopal, while Ujjain is being planned as a Science City.

The Chief Minister said that knowledge has replaced traditional assets as the most valuable resource in today's world, enabling individuals to achieve progress and prosperity. He pointed out that India is steadily emerging as the fourth-largest economy globally and the third-largest startup ecosystem.

He further stated that cities such as Indore, Bhopal, Gwalior and Jabalpur are developing as key startup hubs, with youth making rapid strides in sectors such as AI-based agritech, healthtech, skilltech, green innovation and digital solutions. The state government is strengthening funding support and incubation networks through its startup policy to accelerate innovation-led growth.

During the event, Yadav inspected advanced machines developed by

young innovators and interacted with startup entrepreneurs, encouraging them to pursue their ideas with confidence. He emphasised that success is certain when intent and dedication are strong.

The Launchpad Incubation and Innovation Centre has been established through a collaboration between IITI Drishti CPS Foundation of IIT Indore and the Madhya Pradesh State Electronics Development Corporation. Spread over around 10,000 square feet, the centre includes co-working spaces, advanced laboratories and an Intelligent Manufacturing Lab for product prototyping, testing and validation.

With an investment of about Rs 10 crore in infrastructure and a provision of Rs 20 crore for startup support, the centre aims to nurture around 100 startups over the next seven years and generate 200 to 300 employment opportunities. It is expected to play a key role in promoting deep-tech innovation, strengthening advanced manufacturing capabilities and fostering collaboration between industry and academia in the state.

Businessman loses Rs 5.5L to electricity bill fraud call

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A businessman in Bhopal was duped of Rs 5.5 lakh by cyber fraudsters who gained remote access to his mobile phone through a malicious application and carried out unauthorised financial transactions.

The victim, Anoop Jain (38), a resident of Ibrahimganj, operates a building material supply business in Ashoka Garden. He has lodged a complaint with the Ashoka Garden police station as well as the State Cyber Police.

According to Jain, the fraud began on March 21 when he received a WhatsApp call from an unidentified individual posing as an official from the electricity department. The caller claimed that his power supply would be disconnected within an hour due to non-payment of dues.

Jain said he had recently installed a new electricity meter at his shop, which is registered in his

165 youth trained in disaster response

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ujjain

To strengthen disaster preparedness at the grassroots level, the Yuva Aapda Mitra initiative is being actively implemented in Ujjain under the National Disaster Management Authority of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. The programme aims to develop a pool of trained volunteers capable of responding effectively to various emergency situations.

Providing details, District Commandant Home Guards Santosh Kumar Jat said that the second phase of the Aapda Mitra training programme was conducted from March 23 to March 29, 2026, at the Home Guard Line in Ujjain.

During the week-long session, 165 young volun-

unteers were trained to handle diverse disaster scenarios, including floods, earthquakes, fire incidents and medical emergencies. The training focused on equipping participants with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills required for timely and effective response during crises.

On the fifth and sixth days, practical training sessions on boat handling were organised at Ram Ghat, where volunteers were trained by State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) teams and platoon commanders. Participants were taught how to operate boats using oars during flood situations, ensuring readiness for water-based rescue operations.

In addition, mock drills on fire safety were conducted to familiarise vol-

unteers with preventive measures and emergency response techniques. Participants received hands-on training in the proper use of fire extinguishers and methods to control fire incidents safely.

Officials stated that a total of 800 Yuva Aapda Mitras are being trained across the district. Upon completion of the programme, these volunteers will be deployed during major festivals and public events to assist in disaster management and emergency response.

The trained volunteers are also expected to play a vital role during Simhashta 2028, particularly in ensuring ghat safety and managing large crowds, thereby contributing significantly to the smooth and safe conduct of the mega religious gathering.

Aldermen named in 169 civic bodies

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

After a prolonged wait, the Madhya Pradesh government on Sunday announced the appointment of 169 urban local bodies across the state. The appointments include four aldermen each in 123 municipal councils and six each in 46 municipalities.

Officials said clarity on the tenure of the appointed aldermen — whether it will coincide with the current council's term or remain effective until further orders — will be known later. Meanwhile, the announcement has been put on hold in several civic bodies in the Bundelkhand and Chambal regions, except Sagar, due to lack of consensus on names.

The process of appointments has begun from the grassroots level, with municipal councils being the first units where names have been finalised.

In Madhya Pradesh, aldermen are typically appointed based on their administrative experience and knowledge of municipal laws. Though nominated on the recommendation of the organisation, they actively participate in council meetings and discussions, but do not have voting rights in decision-making processes.

Advanced bone scan technology arrives at AIIMS for back pain

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

AIIMS Bhopal has introduced an advanced SPECT-CT system for bone scan diagnostics, aimed at improving the accuracy of identifying the causes of back pain — a condition that is both common and often difficult to diagnose.

Doctors at the institute said that nearly 450 to 500 patients report to the OPD each year with complaints of back pain, and in many cases, the exact cause remains undetermined despite extensive investigations. The newly installed SPECT-CT technology is expected to significantly enhance diagnostic precision in such complex cases.

Medical experts explained that the system not only helps pinpoint the exact location of pain but also provides detailed insights into its underlying cause. This advancement is likely to facilitate early diagnosis and enable more effective, targeted treatment, offering relief to patients suffering from chronic and persistent back pain.

Collectors to decide Mahavir Jayanti holiday

Bhopal: Amid confusion over the public holiday for Mahavir Jayanti, the Madhya Pradesh government has issued a clarification, granting district collectors the authority to decide the holiday date based on local circumstances.

An order issued by the General Administration Department on March 29 allows collectors to declare a holiday either on March 31, as observed in previous years, or shift it to March 30, 2026. The decision follows representations from social organisations requesting a change in date.

Officials said the move aims to address local sentiments and ensure convenience at the district level. However, uncertainty continues regarding bank holidays, as no uniform directive has been issued for financial institutions.

Advanced bone scan technology arrives at AIIMS for back pain

They noted that back pain can stem from a wide range of causes, including muscular strain, bone disorders, spinal disc issues, infections and internal medical conditions. In some cases, it may also be linked to serious illnesses such as cancer. Additionally, inflammation or arthritis in the sacroiliac joint — a condition known as sacroiliitis — can contribute to prolonged discomfort, making accurate diagnosis essential. The SPECT-CT machine, installed in the Department of Nuclear Medicine at AIIMS Bhopal, combines structural and functional imaging, allowing doctors to assess both the anatomical location and physiological activity of the affected area. This dual imaging capability provides a more comprehensive understanding of the condition. With improved diagnostic accuracy through SPECT-CT-based bone scans, doctors can initiate timely and precise treatment strategies, reducing the need for unnecessary procedures and significantly improving patient outcomes.



Mahavir's ideals guide humanity even today: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Sunday said that the teachings of Mahavira continue to hold deep relevance even in today's global context, describing the Jain spiritual leader as a symbol of compassion who guided humanity towards truth, non-violence, non-possession, sacrifice and penance. Addressing the Mahavir Jayanti lecture and Mahavir Alankaran ceremony at the Madan Mohan Mehta Auditorium in Indore, Yadav said that Mahavira's message, delivered over 2,500 years ago, remains timeless and universally applicable. He noted that Jain philosophy does not seek to dominate or instil

fear in others, but instead emphasises self-discipline and victory over one's own senses, which is why Mahavira is revered as "Jin" — the conqueror of the self.

Extending greetings on the occasion of Mahavir Jayanti, the Chief Minister paid tribute at the feet of Mahavira and said that his birth anniversary should be celebrated throughout the year as a source of inspiration. He highlighted the invaluable contribution of the Jain community to nation-building across different eras and said it was a matter of pride to honour individuals who have embodied Mahavira's teachings in their lives.

On the occasion, Yadav conferred the "Mahavir Alankaran" on four senior

social workers — Chandanmal Chauradia, Hansraj Jain, Hansmukh Gandhi and Santosh Kumar Jain — for their exemplary service and commitment to the principles of Jain philosophy. Congratulating the awardees, he said their conduct and achievements would inspire others to follow the path of truth and righteousness.

He also praised the efforts of the Digambar Jain Social Group Federation and the Shwetambar Jain Social Group Federation, describing their joint initiative in organising the event as a reflection of strong organisational spirit, dedication and commitment to social welfare.

Referring to the current global unrest, Yadav said those contributing to insta-

bility for personal interests should recall Mahavira's principle of "Ahimsa Paramo Dharma" — non-violence is the highest duty. He emphasised that violence and chaos cannot be countered with retaliation, but only through compassion, restraint and moral strength.

Drawing from Indian philosophical traditions, he cited the work of Jagadish Chandra Bose, who demonstrated that plants too have life and sensitivity. Yadav said that Indian culture has long recognised the presence of life in all forms — animate and inanimate — and teaches respect for nature, including the practice of not disturbing plants during certain times. He added that the Earth is revered as a mother, and such values are deeply

rooted in the country's traditions.

He further spoke about the concept of the human body being composed of the five elements and elaborated on how Jain philosophy explains the senses, actions and consciousness in great detail. He stressed the importance of a satvik lifestyle, noting that one's diet directly influences thoughts and behaviour. He also highlighted the significance of clean and sustainable energy, stating that the government is making dedicated efforts towards green energy production to ensure a healthier future.

The programme began with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp by the Chief Minister along with members of the community.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav addresses the Jain Shwetambar Social Group Foundation Mahavir Alankaran ceremony in Indore on Sunday. Pioneer photo



Passengers being welcomed on their arrival by the Mayor Malli Rai and BJP MLA Rameshwar Sharma after the Union Minister for Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Rammoohan Naidu inaugurated the arrival hall for domestic passengers, Digi Yatra facilities and new fire station at Raja Bhoj Airport in Bhopal on Sunday, virtually from Rajkot airport. Pioneer photo

Bulldozer action looms as illegal construction notices expire

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

The municipal corporation has entered a phase of strict and uncompromising enforcement against illegal constructions across the state capital, as the expiry of statutory notice periods now sets the stage for imminent demolition proceedings. This intensified crackdown has been triggered by a recent and alarming incident near AIIMS, where the collapse of a slab in an under-construction building resulted in injuries to eight individuals, including one youth who remains in critical condition.

Officials of the Corporation have made it unequivocally clear that the deadlines stipulated in previously issued

notices have now lapsed, and no further extensions will be granted. These notices had directed property owners and developers to immediately cease unauthorised construction activities and ensure full compliance with prescribed building regulations. While Saturday marked the formal end of the compliance window, authorities have granted a final opportunity until April 2 for the concerned parties to submit their responses or representations.

The civic body has announced that, beginning April 2, demolition drives will be undertaken against structures found to be in violation of approved plans and regulations. Bulldozers

will be deployed to remove illegal portions of such constructions. The administration has emphasised that if property owners fail to voluntarily dismantle unauthorised extensions within the given timeframe, the corporation will proceed with direct intervention and carry out demolitions on-site without further notice.

The urgency and firmness of this enforcement action stem directly from the recent building collapse near AIIMS, which exposed serious lapses in adherence to construction norms and raised concerns about public safety. The incident has compelled authorities to abandon any prior leniency and adopt a zero-tolerance approach

towards violations.

At the same time, critical questions have emerged regarding the municipal corporation's own monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Investigations are examining why construction activities were allowed to continue despite earlier notices having been issued. Preliminary findings indicate that the building in question had received approval for only a limited number of floors, yet construction had exceeded the sanctioned height. Furthermore, the structure had encroached beyond its approved plot boundaries into adjoining areas, and portions of the building were reportedly being used for commercial purposes despite

the land being designated for residential use.

In the aftermath of the collapse, the Nagar Nigam has taken decisive action at the site, seizing construction materials such as sand, steel reinforcement bars, and other supplies. Authorities have also impounded certificates and documentation related to the architect and other professionals associated with the project as part of an ongoing and detailed investigation. The administration has reiterated its commitment to ensuring strict compliance with building norms and safeguarding public safety, signalling that any deviation from approved plans will invite swift and decisive action.

Man killed in firing, accused former sarpanch arrested

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A 45-year-old man was shot dead in Kuchwada village of Raisen district on Saturday night, in what police believe is a fallout of a long-standing political rivalry. The accused, a former sarpanch, has been arrested by Udaipura police.

The deceased has been identified as Ravindra Raghuvanshi. According to police, the incident occurred around 11 pm when Ravindra was present at his farmland. A dispute reportedly broke out between him and a tractor driver employed by Santosh Raghuvanshi. The driver then called Santosh to the spot, after which the

argument escalated, and Santosh allegedly fired at Ravindra, hitting him in the chest.

Ravindra was rushed to the Civil Hospital in Bareilly, where doctors declared him dead on arrival.

On receiving information, station in-charge Jaywant Singh Kakodiya reached the village along with a police team. Heavy police deployment has since been made in the area to maintain law and order, as tensions remain high.

Police officials said the murder appears to be linked to an ongoing electoral rivalry between the two families. The accused Santosh's

family has had a history of enmity with the victim's family. At present, Ravindra's sister-in-law, Rachna Raghuvanshi — wife of his younger brother Pramod — is the village sarpanch, which is believed to have further intensified the dispute.

The incident marks the third major tragedy for the family in the past three years. On June 13, 2023, Ravindra's younger brother Pramod Raghuvanshi and their cousin Vivek Raghuvanshi were also shot dead, allegedly by members of Santosh's family over the same rivalry. Eight members of the accused family are currently in jail in connection

with that double murder case.

Family members have raised serious concerns over the police's handling of the situation. They alleged that Ravindra had previously faced a life-threatening attack a few months ago at a petrol pump, where an assailant had pointed a gun at him. He reportedly managed to save himself by seizing the weapon, and a complaint was registered at Udaipura police station.

Despite this, the family claims that no adequate security measures were provided to ensure his safety, even though the threat to his life was known.

Mega cancer awareness camp held for women

Bhopal: A free mega cancer awareness and screening camp was organised in Bhopal by the Maheshwari Mahila Sangathan, Purvanchal, at the auditorium of Career Institute of Medical Sciences. The initiative emerged as a notable example of community service, aimed at promoting early detection and awareness of cancer among women.

The camp offered a range of essential and potentially life-saving medical services free of cost, including doctor consultations, haemoglobin testing, blood sugar (RBS) checks, colposcopy, mammography and Pap smear



tests. A total of 67 women registered for health screenings during the workshop, and the camp was conducted in a highly organised and efficient manner, reflecting the team's strong commitment to social welfare.

Organisation president Manisha Kabra said that the contribution of renowned cancer specialist Vedant

cancer but also instilled a sense of confidence and reassurance among the participants. The efforts of the entire Maheshwari Mahila Sangathan, Purvanchal team, along with the support staff of Career Hospital, were widely appreciated for their dedication and service in successfully organising the camp.

ICI honours excellence in construction

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Jabalpur

The Indian Concrete Institute, Jabalpur Centre, organised an award ceremony to recognise outstanding construction work across the Mahakoshal, Vindhya and Bundelkhand regions. Awards were presented in various categories to honour excellence in the field of concrete construction and engineering.

Chief Engineer (Buildings), Public Works Department, Sanjay Dahariya, attended as the chief guest and emphasised the importance of such initiatives in encouraging quality work and inspiring professionals. Chief Engineer R L Verma also graced the occasion as a special guest and appreciated the efforts of the organisers.

Retired Superintending Engineer R P Dubey was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award for his remarkable contributions in the construction of bridges, flyovers and concrete structures. A technical lecture by Mohammad Abu Asif, associated with the construction of Rani Kamlapati Railway Station, was a key highlight, offering insights into the project's engineering aspects. Awards were presented across multiple categories, including residential, commercial and institutional buildings, as well as infrastructure projects. The Public Works Department, Jabalpur, and Nagarjuna Construction Company were recognised for constructing the state's longest Rani Durgavati flyover.

HC directs bank to pay Rs 7 lakh to widow

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

In a significant ruling, the Madhya Pradesh High Court has rejected a bank's technical objection and held that a widow cannot be denied ex-gratia compensation solely due to a delay in submitting an application, underscoring the need for a humane and compassionate approach in such cases.

The case relates to a petition filed by Rekha Jain and others against the Central Madhya Pradesh Gramin Bank. Rekha Jain, the wife of deceased bank employee Mahesh Kumar Jain, had applied for ex-gratia payment following her husband's demise. However, the bank rejected her claim on the grounds that the application was submitted beyond the prescribed six-month deadline.

Counsel for the petitioner argued that the delay was neither deliberate nor negligent but occurred due to the family's difficult circumstances after the death, including managing livelihood concerns and completing pension-related formalities. Despite this, the bank maintained its position, citing internal policy guidelines that mandated strict adherence to the timeline.

During the course of the hearing, the High Court observed that ex-gratia compensation serves as a crucial financial safeguard for the dependents of a deceased employee, often acting as their last source of support in times of distress. The court emphasised that rigid technicalities should not override the underlying objective of such welfare measures, particularly in sensitive and

humanitarian matters.

The bench further noted that while the bank had released other admissible dues to the family, it chose to deny ex-gratia payment solely on the basis of delay. The court found this approach to be unjustified and lacking in sensitivity. It also pointed out that the bank had failed to adequately inform the claimant about the stipulated time limit and had not exercised discretion in a manner consistent with principles of fairness and compassion.

In its order, the court directed the bank to pay Rs 7 lakh as ex-gratia compensation to the petitioner within a period of three months. It further ruled that if the payment is not made within the stipulated timeframe, the bank would be liable to pay interest at the rate of 18 percent per annum until the amount is cleared.



Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangubhai Patel honours differently-abled persons at the 'Atmanirbhar Diwyang Samman Samaroh' organised by Umang Gauravdeep Welfare Society during 20th anniversary of the organisation at Ravindra Bhavan in Bhopal on Sunday. Pioneer photo

BHEL pushes wider use of Hindi

Bhopal: The 182nd meeting of the Official Language Implementation Committee was held on Sunday at BHEL Bhopal under the chairmanship of Executive Director Pradeep Kumar Upadhyay. The meeting was attended by General Managers, Additional General Managers, Heads of Departments, and members of the Official Language team.

Among those present were Rupesh Telang (Feeders & TCB Manufacturing, Commercial & Maintenance), Vipul Agrawal (Materials Management), G. P. Baghel (Quality), Vikas Khare (EM), S. K. Mahajan (TCB Engineering, Services & MM), Gautam Majumdar (CMG, PMG, CC & DTG), Alok Sengar (Fabrication), Rajesh Kumar Agrawal (SOM), Hemram Patel (SCR), A. Aurangabadkar (WEX & MOD), Janmejaya Sharma (Finance), S. A.

Dongre (Feeders), Pradeep Chand Kandpal (Thermal & LGX), Sapan Suhane (HSE), Maneesh Agrawal (SCT), Sameer Das (Vigilance), along with representatives from Human Resources and other departments.

Addressing the gathering, Upadhyay highlighted that a comprehensive Hindi-oriented working environment has been successfully established across various blocks and annexes of the Bhopal unit. He noted that Hindi is increasingly contributing to the smooth and efficient functioning of the organisation's activities, with its usage steadily expanding. Emphasising the need for further progress, he called for greater use of Hindi not only in digital platforms such as websites and email communication but also in routine official work across departments.

Culinary training transforms women inmates' futures

UMESH NIGAM ■ Bhopal

Women inmates at Jabalpur's Subhash Chandra Bose Central Jail are being transformed into skilled culinary professionals through a pioneering vocational programme, with trained faculty from a Hotel Management Institute imparting instruction in the preparation of 21 distinct varieties of delicacies.

The initiative, undertaken by the Madhya Pradesh government, represents a paradigmatic shift in the state's approach to prisoner rehabilitation — equipping incarcerated women with marketable hospitality skills that can furnish them with sustainable livelihoods upon their release.

Prison authorities stated that the programme's overar-



ching objective is to ensure that women leaving incarceration are not consigned to destitution but possess tangible vocational competencies to establish themselves professionally. Jails across the state routinely offer inmates training in carpentry, garment-making, weaving, agricultural work, and animal husbandry, but the introduc-

tion of hotel management-grade culinary instruction marks a significant departure from conventional rehabilitation paradigms.

The Hotel Management Institute's faculty member, Chahak, disclosed that the women are being trained to prepare 21 varieties of cuisine, with emphasis on dishes possessing commercial

viability — items that can be readily marketed through hotel and restaurant channels. The curriculum encompasses the preparation of jalebi, samosa, kachori bada, bhaji, soap-nut confections, halwa, mithai, and an array of other savoury and sweet preparations.

Chahak observed that many of these women previously possessed rudimentary cooking abilities but lacked the expertise to produce commercially viable fare. The structured training programme has bridged this gap, and upon completion, the inmates will be capable of independently operating hotel-standard kitchens.

One of the participating inmates, Shabana, expressed that the training has been profoundly transformative,

stating that the skills acquired will prove invaluable for establishing a livelihood after release. She added that several fellow inmates who had never previously contemplated entering the culinary profession are now considering opening their own food establishments upon completing their sentences.

Jabalpur Central Jail Superintendent Akhilesh Tomar revealed that similar vocational training is being extended to male prisoners as well. He noted that male inmates who have completed their sentences but remain unable to secure release on account of pending fines have commenced their own small-scale food ventures at the jail gate, selling provisions to visitors — a testament to the programme's practical efficacy.

PM calls for unity, warns against rumours

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

The 132nd episode of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popular radio programme Mann Ki Baat was broadcast on Sunday morning via All India Radio, carrying messages of unity, awareness and national responsibility.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav listened to the programme during his visit to Devi Ahilyabai Holkar International Airport in Indore. The Prime Minister addressed a range of issues and emphasised the importance of national unity, particularly in the context of the evolving situation in West Asia.

Modi urged citizens to remain united in the face of challenges and cautioned against politicising sensitive issues linked

to national interest. He stressed that matters affecting the country's 140 crore citizens should not be subject to political debate and warned that spreading rumours or misinformation could cause significant harm to the nation.

He appealed to people to stay alert and avoid falling prey to rumours or misleading information. Citizens were advised to rely only on official updates issued by the government and act accordingly. Expressing confidence, the Prime Minister said that just as the country had overcome previous crises through collective strength, it would successfully navigate the current situation as well.

After the broadcast,

Yadav described Mann Ki Baat as a powerful medium through which the Prime Minister connects directly with citizens.

He said the programme highlights development, innovation and public welfare initiatives while also addressing non-political themes that promote harmony, brotherhood and unity across the country. He also expressed gratitude to the Prime Minister for the initiative.

The programme was attended by several public representatives, including Kailash Vijayvargiya, Tulsi Silawat, Shankar Lalwani, Usha Thakur, Malini Gaud, Madhu Verma, Pushyamitra Bhargav and Sumit Mishra, among others.



IN FOCUS

Govt ramps up measures to ensure fuel, LPG supplies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Government has stepped up measures to secure fuel and gas supplies amid the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, while urging citizens to avoid panic buying as sporadic rushes were reported at fuel stations.

In a statement, giving an update on developments following the war in West Asia, the oil ministry said refineries are operating at high capacity with adequate crude inventories, and stocks of petrol and diesel remain sufficient nationwide. Retail outlets are functioning normally, even as rumours triggered temporary spikes in demand in some states.

"There were certain rumours, which led to panic buying at some retail outlets in a few states, resulting in

unusually high sales and heavy crowding at retail outlets. However, it is informed that there are adequate stocks of petrol and diesel available at all petrol pumps in the country," it said.

To boost domestic availability, the Government has cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹10 per litre and imposed export levies of ₹21.50 per litre on diesel and ₹29.50 per litre on aviation turbine fuel (ATF).

In the gas sector, supplies have been prioritised for households and transport, with 100 per cent allocation to piped natural gas (PNG) and CNG, while industrial and commercial users are receiving about 80 per cent of average consumption. Fertiliser plants are being supplied at 70-75 per cent, with additional LNG cargoes



A man carrying an LPG cylinder amid disruptions in LPG supplies due to the ongoing West Asia war, in Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra

being sourced, it said.

The ministry said the expansion of city gas distribution networks is being accelerated by streamlining approvals and pushing a shift from LPG to piped natural gas (PNG). Daily refill deliveries exceeded 55 lakh

cylinders, and measures to curb diversion have been tightened, it said.

Commercial LPG supply has been gradually restored to about 70 per cent of pre-crisis levels, with priority given to hospitality, food services and key industries.

TWO MORE INDIAN LPG TANKERS CARRYING DAY'S COOKING GAS CROSS STRAIT OF HORMUZ

New Delhi: Two more Indian-flagged LPG tankers, carrying roughly a day's supply of the country's cooking gas, have safely navigated through the war-hit Strait of Hormuz and are expected to reach Indian shores in the next couple of days. "Two LPG carriers, BW TYR and BW ELM, carrying a combined LPG cargo of about 94,000 tonnes, have safely transited the region and are moving towards Indian shores," an official statement said. While BW TYR is proceeding towards Mumbai with an expected arrival on March 31, BW ELM is en route to New Mangalore with an estimated arrival date of April 1. The US and Israel attacks on Iran and Tehran's sweeping

retaliation have all but halted shipping through the strait - the narrow shipping lane that is a conduit for oil and gas exports from Gulf countries to the world. Iran, however, last week said "non-hostile vessels" may transit the waterway after coordinating with Iranian authorities.

Previously, four Indian-flagged LPG tankers had safely sailed through the strait. Pine Gas and Jag Vasant, carrying 92,612 tonnes of LPG, reached Indian ports between March 26 and March 28. Prior to that, MT Shivalik and MT Nanda Devi, carrying about 92,712 tonnes of LPG, had reached Mundra port in Gujarat on March 16 and Kandla port in the state on March 17, respectively.



People en route to Kolhapur for Jyotiba Yatra, a three-day festival held annually in April at the Jyotiba Temple, travel in bullock carts on the Pune-Bangalore Highway-48 in Karad, Satara district, Maharashtra

Threat to constitution remains till BJP in power: Akhilesh

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Noida

Those who talked about winning 400 seats to change the Constitution have been defeated but the danger will remain till the BJP is in power, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said on Sunday, launching a scathing attack on the ruling party as he kicked off the campaign for the 2027 Uttar Pradesh election.

Addressing a rally in Dadri, Yadav countered Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks a day earlier at the inauguration of the Noida International Airport and alleged that several airports inaugurated by the BJP were not operational.

"Earlier also airports were inaugurated by them, but out of seven, six are not functional," he claimed and said the Government should have given an assurance that the airport would "not be sold later". He also promised fair compensation to farmers for land acquisition once his party comes to power.

The remarks came a day after Prime Minister Modi, while inaugurating the airport in Jewar, targeted the Samajwadi Party (SP), alleging that it had turned Noida into an "ATM for loot" during its tenure. He had also taken a dig at opposition leaders for allegedly avoiding Gautam Buddha Nagar due to "superstitions". Hitting back, Yadav said, "Yesterday, it was said



that we do not visit Noida. I want to remind them that I have visited the homes of my party workers here more times than the number of cups of tea the two of them have consumed together."

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister credited his party's previous Government for development in the region, including metro connectivity linking Delhi and Noida. "Our Government took several decisions for the development of Noida. They have nothing to show, which is why they are making such statements," he said.

He also claimed that the SP had played a key role in facilitating approvals for the Jewar airport project.

"If anyone worked to secure the necessary clearances for the airport, it was the Samajwadi Party. That is why the project has materialised today," he said. Yadav alleged that the BJP rally at the airport inauguration was attended by "paid supporters" and described the ruling party as a "dry clean party".

India-US ties: Gor outlines 'win-win' economic growth

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's growing economy and massive infrastructure needs align perfectly with American expertise in energy, advanced manufacturing and digital infrastructure and both sides are well-positioned for a 'win-win' expansion of their strategic economic pillar, US Ambassador Sergio Gor has said.

The envoy said the two countries are prioritising building resilient supply chains for semiconductors and critical minerals, and welcomed New Delhi joining the US-led 'Pax Silica' initiative, which aims to secure these networks amid intense competition from China. In an interview to Span magazine, a US embassy publication, the ambassador said Washington is uniquely positioned to serve as the "main facilitator" of economic growth across South and Central Asia and that its proposed trade deal with India will create a "powerful anchor" for regional economic integration.

Elaborating on the US' defence



and security cooperation with India, he said it represents the "most strategically significant" area of collaboration between the two sides and mentioned cooperation under the framework of Quad.

"My vision is to transform the US-India relationship into the defining

strategic partnership of the 21st century, one that delivers tangible benefits for both our nations," he said.

The envoy's remarks came amid efforts by New Delhi and Washington to solidify bilateral ties following a turbulent spell trig-

gered by the US policy on tariffs. Without making any specific references, Gor said the US remains focused on working with partners to combat terrorism, violent radicalisation and transnational crime as security and economic prosperity are "intertwined".

"India is a major defence partner, and defence cooperation is one of the brightest spots in our bilateral relationship. We also strengthen US-India military interoperability through participation in military exercises such as Malabar, Tiger Triumph and Cope India," he said.

"Both of our nations are also part of the Quad, a strategic partnership that keeps our security interests robust and aligned. These three core aspects - diplomacy, defence exercises and military sales - ensure strong, continued defence cooperation". Gor, known to be a key member of US President Donald Trump's inner circle, extensively highlighted the various aspects of US-India economic ties, adding that investment and trade expansion offer transformative potential.

NGT notice to Uttarakhand over Mussoorie's sensitive region

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has issued a notice to Uttarakhand's chief secretary for not taking any "substantial action" regarding its directions to ensure that the environment of the "fragile" or ecologically sensitive region of Mussoorie is not disturbed.

The green body, in May last year, issued the order after disposing of a matter where it initiated suo motu



(on its own) proceedings in view of a media report that the 2023 Joshimath disaster was a warning for Mussoorie, where unplanned constructions

continued. "We dispose of this matter with a direction that the state of Uttarakhand will implement the 19 action points along with all other remedial measures based on sound scientific principles and practices to ensure that the environment of the fragile Himalayan region is not disturbed beyond the carrying capacity," the tribunal's order had said.

The tribunal had sought an action taken report after six months. The NGT on

March 24 this year noted that a report had been filed by the state's additional secretary in compliance with the tribunal's directions.

A bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert members A Senthil Vel and Afroz Ahmad said, "On the perusal of the report, we find that no substantial action has been taken in respect of the relevant issues which were reflected in the order of the tribunal.



LPG cylinders, which typically ranged between 5.5 to 6 million, has suddenly surged to between 7.5 and 8.8 million per day. Similarly, there has been a significant spike in the demand for petrol.

"Although the country possesses adequate stocks of petrol, diesel and gas, and supplies continue to flow steadily due to the government's diplomatic efforts, including through key routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, panic buying is nevertheless creating artificial shortages, thereby fuelling growing anxiety among the public," he said.

The SJM cautioned that the West Asia conflict has not only impacted the prices and supply of gas, oil, fertilisers and other essential commodities, but has also provided an opportunity for unscrupulous elements to exploit the situation by hoarding these materials in anticipation of future shortages. Calling for responsible public conduct, Mahajan appealed to citizens to refrain from spreading rumours or forwarding unverified messages related to fuel shortages. "People should rely only on official and verified sources of information and avoid circulating unverified claims that may create panic," he said.

Environment of hatred, atrocities against Dalits, Adivasis has steadily in Gujarat: Rahul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday alleged that the environment of hatred, discrimination and atrocities against the Dalit and Adivasi communities in Gujarat has steadily intensified under the BJP Government.

The leader of opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha also expressed solidarity with the victims of the 2016 Una flogging case and vowed to continue to amplify their voices until justice is served.

Gandhi made the remarks on social media while putting out a video of his recent interaction with a delegation of representatives from the Dalit and Adivasi communities from Gujarat, including those affected by the Una incident, in which

self-proclaimed cow vigilantes flogged four youths. "This meeting was deeply distressing and gave me much pause for reflection," he said in his post accompanied by the video.

The flogging incident had occurred in Mota Samadhiyala village near Una town of Gir-Somnath district on July 11, 2016, when four Dalit youths, as part of their traditional profession, were skinning the carcass of a cow that had died earlier in some other village.

The accused, self-proclaimed cow vigilantes, flogged the youths, who were then illegally put in the lockup and thrashed by police personnel as well.

"About 10 years ago, the Una incident shook the entire nation to its core. Dalit youths were publicly

stripped and brutally beaten. At that time, I stood in solidarity with their families," Gandhi said in his post on Hindi. However, it is deeply unfortunate that even a decade later, they have yet to receive justice; their wounds remain unhealed, and, on the contrary, the situation has only deteriorated further, he said. "As I listened to the delegation, it became evident that, far from improving, the situation has become even more alarming. One individual was beaten so brutally that he sustained 19 fractures across his body. Another man's brother was burned alive on a mere whim," Gandhi said.

These incidents are not merely isolated crimes, they represent the grim reality of an atmosphere rife with fear and injustice, he said.



He said the most concerning of all is the fact that those who raise their voices to demand their rights are systematically suppressed - sometimes through threats, sometimes through violence, and often through murder. "Under the BJP Government in Gujarat, the environment of hatred, discrimination, and atrocities against the Dalit and Adivasi communities has steadily intensified," Gandhi alleged. The victims of the Una incident are still awaiting justice today, the former Congress chief said.

This prolonged wait for justice - spanning 10 years - constitutes a grave injustice in itself, Gandhi said. This is not merely a matter of a few isolated incidents, it represents the failure of a system in which the voices

of the vulnerable are stifled while perpetrators enjoy impunity, he said.

"I stood with these families in the past, I stand with them today, and I will continue to amplify their voices until justice is served," Gandhi said.

Posting the video of the interaction on X, the LoP said, "The cry of Una still knocks at the doors of justice. For the past 10 years, the victims have been wandering from door to door in search of justice."

Humiliation, violence, and murder have become the reality for Dalits and Adivasis in BJP-ruled Gujarat, he said. "It is this very unconstitutional and unjust model of (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi ji that is now being imposed upon the entire country," he claimed.

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LS to discuss anti-Naxal drive as Amit Shah's...

This has evolved into intelligence-led operations, inter-state coordination, and efforts to choke Maoist financing, along with infrastructure expansion in affected areas.

According to government data, between 2004 and March 26, 2026, a total of 16,496 Naxals have surrendered. The year 2025 alone saw the highest number of surrenders at 2,337.

The number of affected districts has steadily declined from 126 in 2014 to 90 (2018), 70 (2021), 38 (April 2024), 18 (April 2025), 11 (late 2025), and further to 7-8 by early 2026. Currently affected districts include Bijapur, Narayanpur, Sukma, Kanker and Dantewada in Chhattisgarh; West Singhbhum in Jharkhand; and Kandhamal in Odisha. Of these, only three are categorised as

"most affected." Violent incidents have dropped sharply by 81-88% from the 2010 peak of 1,936 to 374 in 2024 and around 234 in 2025. Police stations reporting LWE violence declined from 465 in 2010 to 119 in 2025.

Civilian and security force fatalities have also fallen by 85-91%, from 1,005 in 2010 to about 150 in 2024 and roughly 95-100 in 2025. Between 2014 and 2024, security force casualties declined by 73% compared to the previous decade.

In 2025 alone, 317 Naxals were neutralised, including top leadership; over 800 were arrested, and nearly 2,000 surrendered-marking a turning point in the government's "Naxal Mukta Bharat" campaign. Nationwide, about 220 armed Maoist cadres remain active as of early 2026, down from over 2,000 in 2024. From May 2014 to September 2025, 8,751 Naxals surrendered and 1,801 were killed. Chhattisgarh accounted for the highest numbers. In May 2025, a major operation

in the Karregutta hills along the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border led to the killing of 31 Naxals, including CPI (Maoist) General Secretary Nambala Keshava Rao. In November 2025, senior Maoist commander Madvi Hidma was eliminated.

In February 2026, multiple encounters reportedly led to the deaths of senior leaders, including Prabhakar Rao and Parkal Veer.

High-profile surrenders included Politburo member Mallojula Venugopal Rao, along with Central Committee members such as Thippiri Tirupathi and Malla Raji Reddy. Officials say fortified camps-377 set up since 2019 and advanced intelligence networks have weakened the Maoist command structure, reducing it to a skeletal presence.

The discussion in the Lok Sabha is expected to provide an update on progress, the status of remaining LWE-affected areas, and the roadmap for long-term peace and development.

Stay united, avoid rumors: PM says...

The Prime Minister said West Asia is a major centre of India's energy needs and on account of that, a crisis is emerging around the world regarding petrol and diesel.

"Our global relations, the support we receive from various countries and the strengths the country has built over the past decade have enabled India to bravely confront these circumstances," he said. At the outset of this address, Modi said the month of March has been full of turbulence globally.

He said all citizens of the country remember that the entire world faced myriad problems for a long time on account of Covid. "Indeed, all of us had expected that after emerging from the Corona crisis, the world would move

forward on the path of renewed progress," Modi said. However, he said, situations of war and conflict have continuously arisen in different parts of the world.

The West Asia conflict started on February 28. While the US and Israel attacked Iran, the Islamic Republic retaliated by targeting Washington's allies in its neighbourhood and Tel Aviv. Iran controls the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping route through which 20 per cent of the world's energy is transported. Since the conflict began, Iran has allowed very few ships to cross it. Modi has spoken to a number of world leaders, including those from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, Iran, France, Israel and Malaysia, since the conflict started.

He has also spoken to US President Donald Trump. After a telephonic conversation between the two on March 24, Modi said he "had a useful exchange of views on the situation in West Asia".



GRAPEVINE

Madam's intimacy to Akbar Road office

Recently Government sent an eviction notice to Congress to vacate decades old office at Akbar Road. Many wonder why Congress keeping old small office, even after making a big Indira Bhawan at Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg. Top Congress leaders say, old office, is adjacent to Sonia Gandhi's home 10 Janpath. She loves this old office and used party headquarters for evening walks. More than that 100s of people living in the old office compound are the workers of Madam's bungalow. Congress is wondering whether BJP Government is now planning to issue eviction notice to Nehru Bhawan on Raisina Road allotted to build Congress office, but later converted as Rajiv Gandhi Foundation's office.



Either spokesperson or not!

During a recent gathering at the residences of prominent Parliamentarians, journalists always craving for scoops and information learned something bizzare about a former Congress leader, who later entered Rajya Sabha from a different party. This leader described failure to convince Rahul Gandhi to appoint them as an AICC Secretary. According to the leader, Rahul Gandhi argued that being a spokesperson made holding other posts, like AICC Secretary, unnecessary. The leader then commented on the ambitions of Congress's most vocal spokespersons, who hope for Rajya Sabha berths with every biennial election around.



All is quiet at PHQ

In Delhi Police circles, new LGs (especially non-police background ones) often spark quiet speculation during the initial "Courtesy Call" phase. The Police Commissioner's early meeting with LG Taranjit Singh Sandhu was purely a briefing on law and order. There is a buzz that the new LG may order changes at the top in the Delhi Police to stamp his arrival. But everything is quiet on the reshuffle front right now. The big move already happened under the former LG VK Saxena and the new LG appears focused on the bigger picture and that's governance rather than immediate police brass changes. A career diplomat, Sandhu has been focusing on development, law & order, and stakeholder meetings (including a quick review with Police Commissioner Satish Golcha on security, cybercrime, shortly after taking charge).



Virendra Kumar calls to expand Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment Virendra Kumar on Sunday called for intensifying preventive efforts, scaling up de-addiction services and expanding the Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan, according to a statement. Kumar chaired the fifth meeting of the National Consultative Committee on De-addiction and Rehabilitation (NCCDR) held at the Dr Ambedkar International Centre here. It was attended by Minister



of State BL Verma, Social Justice Secretary Sudhansh Pant, senior officials, representatives from States and Union Territories, NGOs and other stakeholders. Addressing the gathering, Virendra Kumar urged all members to actively and regularly share their views, suggestions, and feedback on this critical national issue of drug demand reduction.

Aviation sector facing bottleneck in procurement of new aircraft: Naidu

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Bhavnagar

Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu on Sunday said India's aviation sector is facing a bottleneck in procurement of new aircraft, citing that while 1,700 new planes are on order, supply chain disruptions mean deliveries may take up to 15 years.



Naidu, who flagged off new flights at Bhavnagar airport in Gujarat, stated that the Government is emphasising domestic manufacturing of aircraft through joint ventures with global giants like Embraer, and a partnership with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is already underway to produce the Sukhoi Superjet 100. The minister remarked that building airports is not difficult once land is made available, but getting aircraft has become a major bottleneck after the COVID-19 pandemic. He explained that aircraft manufacturing has slowed down worldwide, affecting the speed at which planes are being delivered. "After COVID-19, there were many difficulties in aircraft manufacturing. There was some disruption in the supply chain. So the speed and scale at which aircraft were supposed to be

West Asia crisis: India on guard amid growing cyber threat

RAJESH KUMAR
New Delhi

As the war between the US-Israel and Iran entered the fifth week on Saturday, with both the contesting parties sustaining significant attrition of weapons stockpile, and the international terror group Al Qaeda jumping into the West Asian conflict by declaring "global cyber jihad" against countries including India, the possibility of cyber hits against Indian installations has heightened.



Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), spearheading the war front with the US-Israel, has a precedent of downing a passenger aircraft of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 "mistakenly" on January 8, 2020, killing all 176 people on board. The incident occurred soon after Iran launched missile strikes against US forces in Iraq in retaliation for the assassination of IRGC General Qasem Soleimani by the American forces.

In the wake of heightened threat, India has so far issued broader advisories to the

airlines to operate only in open airspace and not for any specific precautions against on-ground or in-air flight operations by Indian airlines. Amid the West Asian conflict, at least one Indian international flight had to return following a software malfunction. Chatter emerging from Iran, all entities with linkages to the US and Israel's defence supply chains are "legitimate" targets for cyber hits.

Intelligence assessments suggest Iranian hacking groups could not only conduct cyber hits against Indian installations with US defence supply chain link-

ages, but even American and Pakistani hackers can target India in the disguise of Iranian hackers.

According to military theory on war escalation, cyber-attacks increase in geopolitical situations undergoing sustained conflict. Analysts monitoring the conflict said the Indian Airlines owned by the Tatas, part of the US defence supply chain, could be a possible target of Iranian hacking groups, causing flight disruption. Hackers' groups are already on the offensive to sway flight operations. The Tata group is engaged in the production of certain critical equipment for the American fighter jet F-16, including cockpit and ejection seats.

Al Qaeda, in a statement, said, "We call upon the believing men and women to join our ranks and participate in global Cyber Jihad against the American, Israeli, Pakistani, Indian and Arab Governments and to inflict financial loss and cyber disruptions against their Governments, financial institutions, Government businesses and agencies worldwide."

It added: "We announce our entrance into the Iranian-American war and the Afghanistan-Pakistan war. We will give cyber assistance to the Mujahideen of the Pakistani Taliban and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and launch major-scale cyber offensives against their enemies. We will also take the opportunity of the Iranian-American war by joining Pro-Iranian hacker movements and groups in their fight against the United States and Israel..."

Al Qaeda's affiliate, Harkat-ul Mujahideen and Jaish-e-Mohammad, have a track record of hijacking the Indian Airlines flight IC 813 from Kathmandu with 190 occupants in 1999, including one casualty. Indian Airlines was then operated by the Centre.

While there is no specific advisory against cyber threats, information in the open domain revealed that Indian Airlines flights are available to three destinations in the UAE, and the capitals of Oman and Qatar are already facing the brunt of the US-Israel-Iran conflict.

Piyush Goyal to visit Canada in May for trade talks

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will visit Canada in May amidst ongoing negotiations for a free trade agreement between the two countries. On March 2, the two countries launched negotiations for a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA).

The issue of Goyal's visit came up during his meeting with Maninder Sidhu, Minister of International Trade of Canada, on the sidelines of the 14th ministerial conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Yaounde, Cameroon.

The bilateral discussion focused on expediting the recently launched India-Canada CEPA negotiations. "(Maninder) Sidhu extended a warm welcome to Goyal for his upcoming visit to Canada in May 2026, leading a major Indian business delegation," the commerce ministry said in a statement.

Abdominal fat major risk for Indians: Jitendra Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Union Minister Jitendra Singh on Sunday shed light on abdominal or central obesity as a greater risk factor compared to overall obesity, particularly in the Indian context, where even lean and thin-looking individuals often carry significant visceral fat.

The minister stated that while overall obesity is rising among both men and women, the prevalence of abdominal obesity remains disproportionately high and acts as an independent determinant of cardiometabolic risk.

"The presence of visceral fat around the abdomen, even without generalised obesity, has significant clinical implications and



requires early detection and targeted intervention," Singh said during the launch of a book titled 'Advances in Obesity and Lipid Management in CVD'.

The minister also highlighted the increasing incidence of metabolic disorders, including type 2 diabetes and cardiac events, among younger populations, reflecting changing lifestyle patterns, dietary habits, and reduced physical activity.

77 Maoists surrendered in Odisha since January 2025, says DGP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Bhubaneswar

Odisha DGP YB Khurania on Sunday said 77 Maoists have surrendered before police in the State between January 2025 and March this year.

Speaking to reporters during his visit to Kandhamal district, Khurania said 23 Maoists from the State had also surrendered before police in neighbouring Chhattisgarh during the period.

He further said 27 Maoists have been killed in exchanges of fire with security forces in the State since January 2025.

"Of these, 17 Maoists were killed during a joint operation by Odisha and Chhattisgarh police in the bordering areas of Nuapada (Odisha) and Gariaband (Chhattisgarh) districts on January 25, 2025," he said. At



Vice President CP Radhakrishnan, Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal and others during the National Consultation on Tele-Law initiative

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan on Sunday underscored the need for accessible, affordable and timely justice for all citizens and asserted that it is a right for all and not a privilege for a select few. He also called for inclusive, technology-driven access to justice under the law ministry's Tele-Law initiative.

Addressing a national consultation on the initiative here, Radhakrishnan highlighted recent legal reforms and said the transition to new criminal laws marks a historic shift towards a more citizen-centric justice system by simplifying procedures and improving efficiency.

He underlined the transformative role of technology in

governance, citing initiatives such as Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) and telemedicine, and described the Tele-Law initiative as a powerful tool to democratise legal services. He noted that pre-litigation legal advice can help resolve disputes early, reduce unnecessary litigation and ease the burden on courts.

Stressing the importance of linguistic inclusion, the vice president highlighted efforts to make the Constitution available in multiple regional languages and called for legal consultations to be provided in local languages to enhance understanding and participation. He also called for focused efforts to ensure last-mile delivery of legal services, particularly for women, rural and marginalised communities.



Odisha DGP YB Khurania

present, only a small group of Maoists is active in the bordering regions of Kandhamal, Rayagada and Nuapada districts, the DGP said.

"We are making all efforts and continuing operations to nab them," he added.

Khurania appealed to the Maoists to shun the path of violence and surrender to

join the mainstream. "Otherwise, they will have to face security forces," he said. He added that the State Government has a good surrender and rehabilitation policy for Maoists.

"I expect the remaining Maoists to surrender before the police. Otherwise, security forces will take appropriate action," the DGP warned.

AIIMS Delhi alumna appointed Nepal's health minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Nisha Mehta, an alumna of the College of Nursing, AIIMS, Delhi, has been appointed as the health minister of Nepal, an official statement said on Sunday. She took the oath as the health minister of Nepal on March 27.

In a statement, AIIMS Delhi said, "This remarkable achievement is a moment of great pride for the institution and the nursing community at large."

"Mehta's journey from bedside nursing to a key policy-making role reflects the expanding scope and leadership potential of the nursing profession," the statement said.

During her time at AIIMS, she consistently displayed exceptional leadership qualities, active participation in



Nepal's Health Minister Nisha Mehta

academic and co-curricular activities, and a strong sense of responsibility — traits that have clearly shaped her path toward higher leadership and public service, it added. The statement further added that her accomplishment reinforces the vital role nurses play not only in patient care but also in shaping healthcare policies and systems at national and global levels.

"The College of Nursing,

AIIMS, New Delhi, extends its best wishes to Mehta for a successful tenure and impactful contributions to public health in Nepal," it added. Mehta was pursuing a degree in Bachelor of Science in Nursing at the institution from 2006 to 2010.

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) won a landslide victory in the March 5 poll, securing a massive 182 seats out of the total 275 seats in the House of Representatives (HoR), making it eligible to form a majority Government.

This is the first democratically elected Government since the coalition Government led by former prime minister KP Oli was ousted in September last year, following the youth-led Gen Z protest against corruption, nepotism, and a social media ban that escalated into violence.

Congress hits out at PM over Pak's mediation role



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Congress on Sunday claimed that Pakistan becoming a "dalaal (broker)" is a reflection of the "colossal failure" of the Modi Government's foreign policy, diplomatic engagement and narrative management following India's striking military success in Operation Sindoor.

The Opposition party also said the "unravelling" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's heavily "personality-

driven foreign policy" has exposed "the self-styled Vishwaguru as a Vishwaphoney".

The Congress's attack came after the Government, on March 25, told an all-party meeting on the West Asia situation that there is nothing new in Pakistan's mediation efforts in the matter, as that country has been "used" by the US since 1981. "We are not a dalaal nation," Jaishankar is said to have told the attendees of the meeting convened at the Parliament complex.

Ayush Ministry launches Yoga protocol to tackle NCDs

PAYAL BANERJEE
New Delhi

The Union Ayush Ministry has launched a comprehensive "Yoga Protocol for Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Target Groups", in a significant push towards reshaping the country's healthcare narrative from treatment to prevention.

Launched during the Yoga Mahotsav 2026 earlier this month by Union Ayush Minister Prataprao Jadhav, the initiative is being seen as a timely intervention to tackle various lifestyle diseases.

The initiative has been developed by the World Health Organisation



Collaborating Centre for Traditional Medicine (Yoga) (WHOCIND 118), at the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga under the Ministry of Ayush.

India today faces an alarming rise in non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular ailments, chronic respiratory conditions, and mental health disorders, an official source said.

According to recent estimates, these conditions now account for nearly two-thirds of all deaths in the country, signalling a clear epidemiological shift from infectious diseases to lifestyle-driven illnesses.

With a growing burden of mortality attributed to NCDs each year, the urgency for preventive solutions has never been greater, the source underlined. It is in

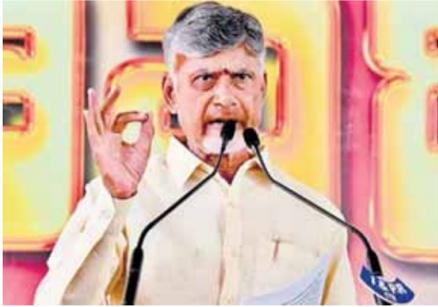
this context that the new yoga protocols assume significance.

Built on scientific evidence and clinical insights, the modules prescribe daily sessions of 30 to 60 minutes that combine asanas, pranayama, meditation, and relaxation techniques, sources said.

The approach is gradual, adaptable, and designed to suit varying fitness levels and medical conditions. Emphasising the preventive potential of yoga, Jadhav noted that prevention is the future of healthcare, and yoga is India's answer to the rising burden of lifestyle diseases. (PTI)

States Focus

UCC to be implemented in Assam: Shah



TONY DAS
Guwahati

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday asserted that the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) will be implemented in Assam when the BJP comes back to power. He also reiterated that every illegal immigrant must be sent back. Addressing poll rallies in Sonitpur district's Dhekiajuli and Tihu in Nalbari, he claimed that the Himanta Biswa Sarma Government has "freed" 1.25 lakh acres of land that was encroached upon by infiltrators.

He accused the Congress of trying to protect infiltrators and alleged that when the party was in power, it kept the borders porous "in their greed for a vote bank", thereby changing the State's demography. Shaha said that the Himanta Government will ensure no land remains under their control, the former BJP chief said. Shah said that 10 years ago, the BJP had vowed to stop infiltration in Assam and kept that promise.

"However, this is not enough as we have to now send each illegal immigrant out of the country in the next five years," he said. In Tihu, Shah said a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) will be implemented in the State in the coming days to "ban four marriages among a particular community".

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had



Union Home Minister Amit Shah being welcomed at an election rally in Sonitpur, Assam

PIONEER PHOTO

earlier promised to implement UCC in the State if he became chief minister after the Assembly polls.

The State has already passed an anti-polygamy bill, making it an offence that may lead to a maximum of 10 years of imprisonment, barring some exceptions. Uttarakhand is the first State in the country to implement UCC. At the poll rallies, Shah alleged that infiltrators had taken away the employment of the indigenous Assamese youth and seized the foodgrains of the poor.

He accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of opposing the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in several states to "protect infiltrators". "We

will not let this happen." The Election Commission of India is trying to weed out infiltrators from the electoral rolls, and the Congress is trying to stop it, Shah claimed.

"But the BJP Government will detect each one of them, delete their names from the electoral rolls and deport them back to the country from where they came," he asserted.

Shah accused Assam Congress chief Gaurav Gogoi of "wanting to protect infiltrators" and asked him to clarify his stand on the issue.

"For years, the Congress kept borders open for infiltrators and, in their greed for a vote bank, changed the State's demography," he claimed, adding that infiltra-

tion in Uri, the PM ordered a surgical strike; after the Pulwama attack, there was the Balakot airstrike, and after the Pahalgam incident, he ordered 'Operation Sindoor' to teach them a lesson," Shah said.

He also accused the Congress of "always being anti-Assam" as was "evident during the India-China war when the then prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru had left the State to its fate".

"Under Modi's leadership, no *mai ka laal* (anybody worth his salt) could snatch even an inch of the nation's land," Shah said. The Union minister also alleged that the Congress had no respect for Assam's culture.

"Assam's first chief minister, Gopinath Bordoloi, is known as 'Lokpriya' (people's beloved) across the country. But the Congress did not give him Bharat Ratna because he had opposed Nehru's plan of giving the State to Pakistan along with the area that is now Bangladesh."

"It was Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee who gave him (Bordoloi) the nation's highest honour. The Congress denied Bhupen Hazarika the award, and it was Modiji who bestowed him with the Bharat Ratna," Shah said.

The senior BJP leader said that his party's Government established peace in the state by signing accords with militant groups, ending the insurgency.

During the Congress rule,

the State witnessed gun-fights and bomb explosions, but the BJP ensured that 10,000 youth laid down their arms and joined the mainstream," Shah added.

He said that Congress ruled the State for 15 years, but "why didn't they sign the accord in Bodoland? The answer is simple: The Congress's policy is to make people fight and rule over them," Shah said.

He asserted that PM Modi has opened the Centre's coffers for Assam's development. "I want to ask Gaurav Gogoi what his father, Tarun Gogoi, did for the state?"

Tarun Gogoi was the chief minister of Assam for three consecutive terms, from 2001 to 2016.

Shah urged people to vote for the BJP in the upcoming Assembly elections to make Himanta Biswa Sarma the chief minister again so that Assam is made infiltrator-free, and peace and development are ensured.

He apologised to the people for his delay in reaching the poll venue by over three hours due to inclement weather. He was scheduled to arrive at Dhekiajuli in a helicopter from Guwahati. But the plan was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions, and he reached the venue by road.

Polling to 126 Assembly constituencies in Assam will be held on April 9. The counting of votes will be held on May 4.

Leaders who ignore workers are not needed, says Naidu

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) supremo and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Sunday said that leaders who ignore party workers are not needed, asserting that the party's strength lies in its cadre. Addressing the gathering at the 44th Foundation Day celebrations of the Telugu Desam Party, Naidu emphasised discipline, commitment, and ideological adherence, noting that only those who perform well will be recognised and elevated as public representatives. "Leaders who ignore or trouble party workers are not needed. Those who work hard will be recognised, protected, and encouraged with positions," said Naidu, stressing that the TDP's victory is the State's victory. Highlighting organisational strength, he said the TDP has a long journey of achievements, sacrifices, and struggles, recalling that many workers laid down their lives, lost properties, and endured hardships for the party.



Vijay names candidates for all 234 TN seats

TVK chief Vijay on Sunday named his party's candidates for all 234 Assembly constituencies in Tamil Nadu for the April 23 elections, announcing his electoral debut from two seats, including Perambur in Chennai, considered a DMK stronghold. In his maiden electoral battle, Vijay will also contest from Tiruchirappalli (East) in central Tamil Nadu. "It will be C. Joseph Vijay from these two seats," the actor-turned-politician announced emphatically amid loud cheers at a meeting of party functionaries held at a five-star hotel in the city. On the occasion, he also named and introduced nominees for the remaining 232 seats, including members of his core team. Reiterating that the electoral contest was between his "people's alliance TVK" and the "Stalin-led alliance", he described the ruling DMK-led bloc as a "patch-up". "I have selected candidates who will stand with the people," he said. "They are not mere 'vetpalargal' (candidates), but 'makkal kappalargal' (people's protectors)," Vijay said, urging voters to extend wholehearted support to them. He particularly exhorted Gen Z voters to turn out in large numbers for the party's 'whistle' symbol and encourage their families to back TVK candidates. "This is a generational electoral battle," he said, claiming the contest was primarily between the DMK and TVK.

BJP eyes hat-trick in Assam under Himanta, says Nabin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Tinsukia (Assam)

The ruling BJP will make a hat-trick in Assam by forming the third consecutive Government in the State under the leadership of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the party's national chief Nitin Nabin announced on Sunday.

Addressing an election rally in support of Margherita candidate and sitting BJP MLA Bhaskar Sharma, Nabin also attacked the previous Congress Governments for allegedly engaging in vote bank politics instead of devel-



oping the State and said there is a need to remember the "black chapter".

"The BJP is going for a hat-trick after the Assembly elections. We first formed the Government under Sarbananda Sonowal's lead-

ership, followed by Himanta Biswa Sarma's tenure. This time, we will form our third Government under the leadership of CM Sarma," he said. Nabin said that he has been visiting Assam since 2009-10 for various party work and has travelled extensively across the State.

"We need to remember the black chapter. At that time, there was no talk of development at all. There were tensions when I wanted to travel from one location to another. People used to discuss only violence and agitation," he claimed.

Kharge announces five guarantees for Assam



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, party leader Bhupesh Baghel, in the party's Assam chief and Gaurav Gogoi during a public meeting in Naoboicha on Sunday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Guwahati

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday announced his party's "five guarantees" for poll-bound Assam, with a focus on women's welfare, healthcare for all, land rights and justice in the Zubeen Garg death case.

He also took a swipe at the BJP-led Government in the State, accusing it of indulging in rampant corruption and working "to fill the coffers" of its leaders and their families.

Addressing a rally at Naoboicha in Lakhimpur district, Kharge listed the party's 'five guarantees', which include a monthly cash transfer to women, along with an additional ₹50,000 assistance to women willing to set up or expand a business.

"Our transfer will be unconditional. It will not be like what the BJP Government is doing, where women are asked to be members of their party," he said. The Congress, which is looking to wrest

power from the BJP, pledged ₹25 lakh cashless health insurance for all families, permanent land *pattas* for 10 lakh indigenous people and ₹1,250 per month for senior citizens of the State.

"We also pledge to ensure justice in the Zubeen Garg death case within 100 days if Congress comes to power," Kharge added.

Alleging rampant corruption by the BJP-led Government in the State, the Congress president claimed that even the family members of the party's leaders are involved in it. He claimed that the BJP was "using its 'double engine' in Assam to loot and fill the coffers of its leaders in Delhi".

Hitting out at Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Kharge said that he was a "nakli (fake) CM" as the BJP had fought the 2021 elections with Sarbananda Sonowal at the helm. "But after the elections, Sarma removed tribal leader Sonowal to grab the Assam CM's chair," he claimed.

CONGRESS RELEASES FIRST LIST FOR WEST BENGAL POLLS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Congress on Sunday released its first list of 284 candidates for the upcoming West Bengal Assembly polls, fielding former State unit chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury from Baharampur and ex-TMC MP Mausam Noor from Malatipur. The Congress, which is going solo in the polls for the 294 Assembly seats in the State, announced the names of 284 candidates in one go.



Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

While Chowdhury has been fielded from Baharampur and Noor, who joined the Congress recently from Malatipur, the party also fielded Madhap Rai from Darjeeling, Abdul Hannan from Sujapur, Susmita Biswas from Dum Dum, Gautam Bhattacharya from Diamond Harbour, Souvik Mukherjee from Asansol Dakshin and Prasenjit Puitandi from Asansol Uttar.

The announcement of candidates came a day after top Congress leaders held detailed deliberations on the list for the upcoming West Bengal assembly elections during the meeting of the Central Election Committee (CEC).

Abhishek slams BJP, Humayun Kabir over religion politics



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kolkata

Senior Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Abhishek Banerjee on Sunday accused the BJP and Humayun Kabir's Aam Janata Unnayan Party of seeking votes in the name of religion while ignoring basic issues such as livelihood and food.

Addressing a rally in support of the TMC candidate in Naoda Assembly constituency in West Bengal's Murshidabad district, the TMC national general secretary alleged that while the BJP was doing "temple politics", Kabir was indulging in "masjid politics", neglecting issues like development and employment.

"In Murshidabad, while BJP is conspiring to foment riots during Ram Navami processions, Kabir is misleading people in the name of laying the foundation stone of a mosque named after Babri Masjid," he said.

Vowing that he and others would practise religion privately, Banerjee said, "Those who seek votes in the name of mandir or masjid are politically, morally and ideologically bankrupt."

Banerjee claimed that Kabir, who was suspended by the TMC, had a tacit understanding with the BJP leadership and lacked concern for the Muslim community.

Kerala CM describes Haryana seat-for-cash charges against Congress leaders serious

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Thiruvananthapuram

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Sunday termed the alleged seat-for-cash controversy linked to Congress in the Haryana Assembly elections as "extremely serious" and demanded the party leadership respond to the charges. Addressing reporters in Malappuram district, Vijayan said allegations have surfaced that senior Congress leaders and their close aides had allegedly sought huge sums of money from aspirants for party tickets.

He asked why the party leadership was remaining



Kerala CM at election rally

silent despite the gravity of the claims. "If the allegations are baseless, why is the Congress not ready to initiate legal action?" he asked, adding that reports emerging from within decision-making levels of the party point to a lack of internal transparency.

The Chief Minister also questioned whether electoral candidiasis, which should be based on political activities and commitment, were being made as mere things that could be bought with money.

Giving poll tickets based on financial capacity undermines democratic equality and idea-based politics, he said, adding that such practices destroy the aspirations of ordinary party workers.

Accusing the Congress of double standards, Vijayan said the party, which often raises allegations against others, was maintaining silence over corruption charges within its own ranks.

"This is not merely a controversy, but an issue concerning the ethical foundations of politics. People deserve to know whether party tickets are being given based on ideology or money," the CM asked.

Vijayan's strong remarks came days after the Delhi Police registered an FIR in connection with an alleged ticket-for-money case involving persons linked to the Congress.

The case stems from a complaint filed by a Haryana-based man who said that he was asked to pay large sums of money to secure an election ticket for his wife, the Delhi police said on Friday.

Mamata slams Amit Shah over victim card remarks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Purulia

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday took umbrage over senior BJP leader Amit Shah's apparent remarks about the injury she suffered during the 2021 Assembly polls and asked him to check the medical report, which detailed the extent of the damage to her leg.

While releasing a political "chargesheet" against the TMC Government a day ago, Shah had accused the ruling party's supremo of having "always played the politics of the victim card".

"Sometimes she talks about her injury; sometimes she abuses the Election Commission. But the people of West Bengal now understand her victim card politics

very well," he had said. On Sunday, Banerjee, while addressing an election rally in Purulia district's Manbazar, said, "They are saying that I roam around with a bandage during the polls. I have returned from the brink of death repeatedly. Go and get the report of the doctor."

"Did you deliberately injure my leg during the 2021 elections? I campaigned in a wheelchair. Are you planning to kill me?" she said, sharpening her attack against the BJP. In her address, a day after Union Home Minister Amit Shah released a political 'chargesheet' against the TMC Government, Banerjee said that he should be chargesheeted "for his past deeds". She, however, did not name Shah.



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee gives an addressal during a public rally, in Raipur village, Bankura district, West Bengal on Sunday



Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren at an election rally in Gosaigaon, Assam in support of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and Joy Bharat Party candidates

PIONEER PHOTO

Nashik court extends 'godman' Ashok Kharat's police custody till April 1 in rape case



A court in Nashik on Sunday extended the police custody of self-styled godman Ashok Kharat, arrested in a rape case, till April 1. Kharat, who headed a temple trust at Mirgaon in Nashik district and whom several prominent Maharashtra politicians visited over the years, was arrested on March 18 after a woman accused him of raping her repeatedly over three years.

Ten FIRs, eight for alleged sexual assault or exploitation and two for cheating, have so far been registered against him at Sarkarwada police station in the city. The Special Investigation Team (SIT), which is conducting a probe against him, has received more than 100 complaints, most of them from women, over the phone in the last few days, police said on Saturday.

Kharat was produced before the court on Sunday after the end of his previous police custody.

The court asked Kharat whether he had any complaints, to which he replied negatively.

During the hearing, public prosecutor Shailendra Bagde said the investigation in the case was still on and the accused was not cooperating.

The inquiry into the properties of the accused is still to be done. Many women are still coming forward to lodge complaints and the inquiry is yet to be done into the so-called "water" or liquid that Kharat used to give the victims to seduce them before sexually exploiting them, he said. The mobile phone data of the accused has been scanned, and a clone report has been received. An inquiry is to be conducted into whether he saved the names of his contacts – especially political leaders – with dummy identities and many digital evidences are yet to be checked, the prosecutor told the court.

The case is big and others will have to be brought before the accused for the inquiry. Investigators also have yet to determine whether any accomplices were involved in the crime. For all this, Kharat's three-day custody is needed, he said. The SIT submitted Kharat's laptops, mobile phone and some documents before the court. SIT officer Kirankumar Suryavanshi also informed the court about the investigation done so far and demanded extension of Kharat's police custody.

Defence lawyer Sachin Bhate, however, said the SIT was giving the same reasons that had been cited for police custody during the earlier hearing.

What has the SIT done in the investigation to date? he asked, claiming that the probe has been completed and there is no reason to extend the police custody.

On the other side, lawyer M Y Kale, representing a victim, supported the prosecutor's demand for extension of Kharat's police custody. The accused has not cooperated and the investigating agency cannot be held responsible for it, he said.



AIMPLB cautions courts on judicial scrutiny

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has told the Supreme Court that courts should refrain from determining what constitutes an "essential religious practice", cautioning that such judicial scrutiny may amount to encroachment upon the religious freedom guaranteed under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution.

The submission is before the nine judges Bench, scheduled to hear the women entry in mosques, certain temples and Parsi temples.

In its written submissions filed in the Sabarimala reference case, the Board argued that identification of the "core" of a religion is inherently subjective and dependent on the beliefs of followers, and therefore unsuitable for judicial determination. The reference arises out of the review petitions filed against the 2018 verdict, which allowed the entry of women of all age groups to the Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa temple. The nine-judge bench will commence the hearing from April 7, on all petitions demanding women entry in Mosques, Parsi temples and Sabarimala Temple.

Muslim Personal Board submitted that the doctrine of Essential Religious Practices (ERP) places an unfair burden on believers to prove that a

particular practice is essential to their faith. Instead, it said, the focus should be on whether State restrictions satisfy the constitutional limitations of public order, morality, and health.

It contended that determining the essentials of a religion involves complex questions of faith, doctrine, and interpretation, which are better left to religious scholars and denominations rather than courts.

The submissions state that judicial determination of essential practices could lead to interference in religious autonomy and dilute the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. "While dealing with Article 25, to interpret what is religious practice or for that matter, core of the religion within the meaning of essential religious practices, these matters must be left for those who are scholars in religion or the religious denominations and/or the belief of the followers of that particular religion.

Certain practices change with circumstances, like in Hajj manner of Namaz and many other acts commonly done by the followers of Islam get altered completely. The Namaz which is offered at the time of burial of a follower of Islam is completely different from what is offered normally." The AIMPLB stated that instead of an ERP test, the effort could be to find a



(L-R) Hindu women, muslim women, parsi women

method to lay-down principle to understand the meaning and scope of 'public order' and 'secular activity' when it comes to matters of religion. In this process, the court shall be dealing with the issue which is secular in nature and not 'matters of religion. Morality not to be understood solely as 'Constitutional morality. On the issue of limitations under Article 25, the Board urged the Court to adopt a balanced approach while interpreting "public order" and "morality".

The submission argued that morality in the context of religious freedom should not be understood solely as constitutional morality but must also take into account the moral principles of the concerned religion, unless those principles are directly opposed to constitutional

values. "As far as 'morality' is concerned, for the rights under Article 25, this term should be understood by creating a balance between the moral principle of the religion concerned and the pure constitutional values unless the moral principles of the religion are not 180-degree opposite of the constitutional values, the same should not be touched. The Board also warned that the State should not invoke public order or secular regulation as a pretext to interfere in religious matters without clear legal justification.

"As far as the meaning of morality under Article 25 is concerned, the concept of morality must not be understood as being divorced from religious rights. This Hon'ble Court, on many instances, have interpreted 'morality'

as 'constitutional morality'. It is submitted that any interpretation of 'morality', whether constitutional morality or some other terminology, must be to uphold rights and not curtail them." Gender and Religion Cannot Be Treated as Opposing Identities Addressing gender equality concerns raised in the Sabarimala litigation, the Board submitted that while gender and religion are not mutually exclusive identities.

The Board submitted that a woman may simultaneously assert autonomy and choose to express her faith through religious practices, and that constitutional adjudication should recognise this coexistence rather than presume conflict between gender rights and religious freedom. Equality in Religious Freedom Must Account for Diversity

The Board further argued that formally neutral policies may produce unequal outcomes across religions because different faiths have distinct practices.

The submissions stated that in a multi-religious society, equality cannot be understood merely as treating all religions identically.

Instead, the constitutional guarantee requires recognition that different religions have distinct practices and obligations, and therefore equal protection must be assessed in relation to the specific practices of each faith.

The Board argued that facial neutrality may conceal unequal effects, particularly where policies or judicial doctrines are structured around assumptions derived from the practices of a majority religion. In such cases, minority practices that do not conform to the same patterns may be placed at a structural disadvantage, even though the rule itself is framed in neutral terms. To explain its position, the Board cited the example of the "sunrise to sunset" regulation governing access to protected monuments. The Board submitted that while the rule is neutral in wording, it may restrict religious observances such as Namaz in mosques located within protected sites, whereas similar restrictions may not affect religious practices of other faiths in the same manner.

Rajasthan HC prohibits night safaris, drone usage in Jawai Leopard Reserve

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Jaipur

The Rajasthan High Court has prohibited night safaris and the use of drones in Pali district's Jawai Leopard Reserve, expressing concern over disturbance to wildlife due to unregulated tourism activities.

A bench comprising Justices Sandeep Shah and Pushpendra Singh Bhati directed the State Government to ensure that no safari or wildlife-spotting activity is conducted beyond the prescribed hours of 6 am to 7 pm. The direction came while hearing a public interest litigation filed by a resident, Apoorva Agrawat.

The court noted that such time restrictions are in line with the norms followed at Ranthambore National Park and are necessary to minimise stress and disturbance to animals, particularly during dusk hours.

It further directed author-



ities to strictly prohibit the use of torchlights, searchlights, spotlights, drones or any similar devices for locating or observing wildlife, stating such practices interfere with animals' natural behaviour and habitats.

The court also ordered that any instance of misconduct by safari operators, hospitality personnel or other individuals, causing harassment or interference with wildlife, must be promptly reported and dealt with expeditiously under the law through appropriate penal and regulatory action.

Delhi HC refuses to halt ED probe against Experion Developers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi High Court on Friday declined to grant any interim relief to Experion Developers Pvt Ltd and its co-petitioner in their petition seeking to quash FIR number 64/2026 registered by the Economic Offences Wing, Delhi, for alleged offences under Section 120B read with Section 420 of the Indian Penal Code.

In a significant setback for the petitioners, the Court presided over by Justice Girish Kathpalia expressly refused to stay the investigation. The Court recorded that it was not inclined to stay the probe – noting the nascent stage of the investigation – without first hearing both sides at length. A Status Report has been directed to be filed within four weeks.

The petitioners had additionally sought no-coercive-process relief – effectively anticipatory protection from arrest. The Court refused to grant this relief as well. It merely clarified in procedural terms that pendency of the petition would not



prevent the petitioners from filing separate appropriate proceedings if so advised – a standard observation that confers no substantive protection.

The FIR arises in the context of the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) of Dignity Buildcon Pvt Ltd (DBPL), which owns approximately 9.32 acres of prime land in Sector 62, Golf Course Extension Road, Gurugram – a property independently valued at over ₹630 crore.

The Directorate of Enforcement (ED) is investigating whether the resolution process was manipulated to allow the acquisition of this asset at a fraction of its market value through a series

of structured financial flows.

Experion Developers Pvt Ltd (EDPL), the Successful Resolution Applicant under the DBPL CIRP, is alleged to have acquired the corporate debtor – and the land vesting in it – for a nominal consideration of Re. 1 plus ₹47 crore in non-convertible debentures, even as a circular financial flow of approximately ₹445 crore was structured through related entities.

The net economic cost to the acquirer group is alleged to have been negligible relative to the underlying asset value.

Counsel for the ED informed the Court that the FIR – which is only a few days old – is at an early and active stage of investigation. The ED

further disclosed that it has already filed an application before the appropriate forum for recall of the resolution process, though notice on that application is yet to be issued.

Senior Counsel appearing for the petitioners had advanced three preliminary arguments: first, that the ED had no power to cause registration of an FIR; second, that a completed CIRP cannot be reopened as a matter of law; and third, that the FIR does not disclose any cognisable offence. None of these contentions found favour with the Court at the threshold stage. The Court declined to entertain a stay on these grounds without hearing the matter fully, and relisted the case to 14 May 2026.

The petitioners had also alleged that the investigation was being pursued at the behest of competing business entities.

The Court made no adverse observation on the ED's conduct and proceeded to direct a Status Report – indicating that it finds the matter worthy of a full hearing on merits.

Democracy's real strength lies in its institutions



PRASHANT TEWARI

Institutions endure where individuals inevitably fade; they embody continuity, restraint, and collective wisdom beyond the perceptible limits of any single personality. While individuals may inspire, disrupt, or even dominate a moment, it is institutions that preserve order, ensure accountability, and outlast human fallibility. A strong institution does not depend on the virtue of one single leader but is designed to withstand the weaknesses of many; its legitimacy is drawn from process, not personality. As Dr BR Ambedkar wisely cautioned, "However good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot."

The reverse, too, holds true: even imperfect individuals can uphold justice when bound by strong, principled institutions. The term "good governance" does not find a mention in the Constitution of India as it was not a part of the common terminology at the time when the Constitution was drafted. However, even a bare, cursory reading of the Constitution and particularly its chapters on Fundamental Rights and the Directive Principles of State Policy make it abundantly clear that the founding fathers of our Constitution had in mind good governance as the objective.

The contemporary use of the term "good governance" began with the World Bank's 1989 report on "Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to

Sustainable Growth", where it advanced the argument that economic and social development hinges on the quality of governance. Broadly speaking, the concept of "good governance" has two aspects. The first, which relates to the form of Government, is usually regarded as best exemplified in liberal democracy. The second, which relates to the efficiency of Government, requires that the process of governance be free from corruption and caprice. Effectively, however, these two aspects tend to overlap, because several of the principles that constitute a liberal democracy, such as the rule of law, also contribute to ensuring its effectiveness. As a result, the extent to which a constitution promotes good governance depends to a great extent on its success in establishing a liberal democratic framework.

In a democracy as vast and complex as India, the enduring strength of governance lies not in personalities but in the sanctity and resilience of its institutions. A vibrant democracy does not survive on electoral rituals alone; it rests on a carefully constructed architecture of institutional safeguards.

In India, this architecture includes constitutional and statutory offices such as those of the President, Vice President, Governors, the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India, the Cabinet Secretary, and oversight bodies like the Election Commission of India, Lokpal of India, the Central Bureau of Investigation, and the Comptroller and Auditor General of India. These institutions collectively ensure continuity, accountability, and the rule of law, acting as bulwarks

against arbitrariness and excess. The very essence of democratic stability lies in the primacy of institutions over individuals. While individuals may bring competence, vision, or, at times, controversy, institutions are designed to endure beyond transient personalities. The institutions, with their codified powers, established conventions, and constitutional backing, provide a veritable framework within which governance operates. This continuity ensures that even when individuals change, the system remains steady, predictable, and accountable.

Critics often argue that the system occasionally elevates individuals who may appear incompetent or even questionable in integrity. However, this argument overlooks a fundamental strength of institutional design: the ability of systems to moderate individual excesses. Institutional processes, checks and balances, bureaucratic continuity, judicial oversight, and public scrutiny collectively act as correctives. Even a flawed individual, once within the framework of a high constitutional office, is often compelled to operate within clearly defined limits, guided by precedent, law, and institutional memory.

At the same time, public discourse and intellectual critique are indispensable in a democracy. They serve as instruments of accountability and transparency. However, there is a thin dividing line between constructive criticism and systemic erosion. Unrestrained or indiscriminate criticism of institutions – particularly those that form the very backbone of governance – can inadvertently weaken public trust. When institutional

authority is diminished in the public eye, its capacity to deliver effective governance, especially to the last mile, is lamentably compromised.

This calls for a balanced approach. Intellectuals, media, and civil society must continue to question, critique, and demand accountability. But such engagement must be rooted in responsibility and an awareness of the long-term consequences of delegitimising institutions.

The focus should remain on strengthening processes, ensuring transparency, and advocating reforms rather than undermining the very foundations of governance.

It is equally important to recognise that no individual occupies a constitutional office indefinitely. The temporality of tenure is itself a safeguard. Leaders may come and go, but institutions persist with a sense of permanence. This cyclical renewal ensures that no single individual can permanently alter or undermine the character of an institution. Therefore, dissenters, detractors and critics would do well to exercise restraint, keeping sustained pressure on institutions for better performance while preserving their legitimacy.

Ultimately, the survival and success of Indian democracy depend on the collective respect for and strengthening of its institutions. Personalities may shape moments, but institutions shape history.

A mature democracy does not merely react to individuals; it invests in the endurance, credibility, and autonomy of its institutional framework. In doing so, it secures not just governance, but the very idea of the Republic.

Writer is a policy expert and columnist

Illegal to conduct age-check test on minor if proper documents are available: HC



Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Lucknow

The Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court has said that it is illegal to conduct a medical examination (ossification test) to determine a minor's age when certificates from a school, board, municipal corporation, municipality, or panchayat are available.

Holding this, the high court set aside the orders of the Juvenile Justice Board and the Special POCSO Court and granted bail to a minor accused of molesting and threatening a 15-year-old girl.

A bench of Justice Manish Kumar passed the order on Saturday on a revision petition filed by a minor.

The case is from Pratapgarh district, where an FIR was lodged with Leelapur police station on March 11, 2025, charging the minor under sections of the POCSO Act and Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

It was argued on behalf of the minor petitioner that he was under 16 years of age at the time of the incident.

His high school certificate mentioned his date of birth as January 1, 2010, while his

primary school records stated his date of birth as May 13, 2009. Despite this, the Juvenile Justice Board ordered a medical examination to determine his age, which was upheld by the appellate court of the Special Judge, POCSO Act, Pratapgarh.

Both orders were challenged in a revision petition filed before the high court. The high court said that, according to Section 94 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, school or board certificates should be considered first for determining age.

Birth certificates issued by municipal corporations, municipalities, or panchayats should be considered next. Only in the absence of these documents, a medical examination can be conducted.

The high court observed that both available documents showed that the accused petitioner was a minor and that ordering a medical examination was against the law. While granting conditional bail to the minor petitioner, the high court directed him to appear before the district probation officer along with his guardian on the 10th of every month for one year and to stay away from any criminal activity.



Editor's TAKE

Doomsday for the developing world

It is going to be devastating for developing nations. Those least responsible for climate change are set to suffer its deadliest consequences the most

Peak summer is still months away, but the temperatures in northern India are soaring, and it is getting worse with every passing year. The world is heating up fast, and the temperatures are projected to rise by approximately 1.5 to 2.0 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels by 2050. The report by the Climate Impact Lab has projected that by 2050, ten times more deaths will occur in the Global South due to the rise in temperature than in the West. The developing countries are going to be the worst affected. The heat will result in harsh work conditions, leading to deaths, as the Global South is least ready for it. This natural calamity is unfolding before our eyes, albeit, at a slow pace. The reason for this is twofold. First, most developing countries that constitute the Global South, fall in tropical regions of Africa and Asia, where temperatures have already risen to alarming levels. Secondly, due to low GDP, these countries would not be able to provide better conditions for work like air conditioning, proper hydration and trauma care to their people that can make all the difference in saving lives. In places like India, where summer heat is already intense, additional warming transforms seasonal discomfort into a public health emergency.

Rising temperatures will be traumatic for the people working in fields like farming, construction workers, pavement sellers and the like. What turns heat into a killer is the lack of adaptive capacity. The people in developing countries cannot afford climate control devices due to limited purchasing power. Besides, work conditions are harsh - people working in a heat-intensive environment like brick kilns, bakeries, metal furnaces could be the worst hit. This growing "cooling divide" is emerging as one of the most critical fault lines in the climate crisis. With weak labour protections and informal employment, basic heat safety is not even heard of in these countries, leaving the most vulnerable exposed to heat related issues. Healthcare systems in many of these regions are also ill-equipped to handle the growing burden of heat-related illnesses. Limited access to medical facilities and the absence of a heat-specific response can become fatal. Add to this lack of awareness about the treatment further compounds the problem. The way our cities are developing into concrete jungles and trees becoming extinct in urban landscapes, heat trapped in small ill-ventilated houses that becomes unbearable during the peak heat hours, resulting in dehydration, sun stroke and many other heat-overexposure health disorders. As American Professor Michael Greenstone has pointed out, this represents one of climate change's cruellest ironies: those who have contributed the least to global emissions are the ones who will suffer the most severe consequences. The disparity is also deeply moral, raising urgent questions about global responsibility and justice. Addressing this challenge requires a shift in priorities. Investments in climate adaptation, such as heat-resilient infrastructure and early warning systems, which can significantly reduce mortality. At the global level, the climate finance must become a priority to deal with this impending calamity.

What Om Birla's survival means for Parliament

The failed impeachment motion against Om Birla has done more than reaffirm the numerical strength of the ruling side – it has reignited a debate about the neutrality and resilience of the Speaker's office in India's parliamentary democracy



BHOPINDER SINGH

The role of the Lok Sabha Speaker in promoting parliamentary stability and independence is incredibly important and deserves recognition. On March 11, 2026, the Opposition's impeachment motion against Speaker Om Birla was defeated by a voice vote, nearly four decades after the last attempt. With 119 MPs signing the notice, the Opposition highlighted the perceived bias in the Speaker's conduct. Removing a Speaker requires at least 272 votes in the 543-member House, and historically, no Speaker has ever been removed. The Speaker is back in his chair.

The repeated challenges to the Speaker underscore political tensions in the legislature, raising questions about the balance of power and mutual respect among legislators. Thus, the Speaker's role is essential to both legislative procedures and the fostering of trust in parliamentary democracy.

Following the unsuccessful impeachment motion, Speaker Birla reiterated his impartiality, asserting that the rules apply equally to all members, including the Prime Minister. He addressed the House to refute allegations of bias. He clarified that there is no mechanism to mute the Speaker's microphone. He emphasised, "This House is not a fair or a festival. We must follow the rules, and no one has the right to speak outside of them, regardless of their position."

Union Home Minister Amit Shah criticised the Opposition for their unruly performance in Parliament, highlighting Rahul Gandhi's low attendance-51 per cent in the 17th Lok Sabha and 52 per cent in the 16th Lok Sabha, compared to averages of 66 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively. The Opposition protested by chanting "Mafi maango," demanding an apology from the Home Minister.

The impeachment motion underscored the ruling party's substantial majority and reinforced the importance of parliamentary procedures. It highlighted the respect that the House warrants for its legislative processes.

Jagadambikka Pal, a member of the BJP panel who presided over the session, called upon the Opposition to resume their seats to facilitate voting. Nevertheless, amid ongoing protests, he chose to conduct a voice vote in the House, which led to the resolution's rejection. The House was subsequently adjourned for the day.

Impeachment motions are infrequent occurrences in the history of India's parliamentary system. The attempt to remove Speaker Birla marks the fourth such effort, underscoring the



IN 1966, MPS ACCUSED SARDAR HUKAM SINGH OF OBSTRUCTING INQUIRIES THAT COULD EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT AND FAILING TO SUBMIT PRIVILEGE NOTICES. THE MOTION DID NOT ADVANCE, AS FEWER THAN 50 MPS SUPPORTED IT

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inherent challenges of this vital office. The Speaker's position is safeguarded by the House itself rather than the President, and removal can occur only by a majority vote. This underlines the office's independence and its critical role in maintaining parliamentary stability. The previous efforts included a 1954 motion against the first Speaker, GV Mavalankar, and the recent motion against Birla. These incidents highlight ongoing concerns regarding bias and parliamentary conduct.

Since independence, there have been three unsuccessful attempts to remove a Speaker of the Lok Sabha. The first was in 1954 against GV Mavalankar, the first Speaker. The motion was debated on December 18, with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Leader of the Opposition AK Gopalan participating. MPs accused Mavalankar of disallowing relevant questions and mishandling adjournment notices.

In 1966, MPs accused Sardar Hukam Singh of obstructing inquiries that could embarrass the government and failing to submit privilege notices. The motion did not advance, as fewer than 50 MPs supported it.

CPI(M) MP Somnath Chatterjee proposed a resolution against Speaker Balram Jakhar. Key participants included Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and P Chidambaram. The House voted against the motion. In the Rajya Sabha, attempts to remove Vice President and Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar in 2024 have failed. Similarly, the 2020 notices to remove Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh did not spark a debate.

The 'Effective Majority' requirement-defined as a majority of all sitting House members-

establishes the threshold for removing a Speaker, ensuring that a significant consensus is necessary. During the impeachment debate, Opposition leaders raised concerns about a vacant Deputy Speaker position, faulty microphones, limited speaking rights for Opposition members, and mass suspensions. These issues focus on the challenges facing parliamentary institutions and the Speaker's office.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah criticised the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, saying he travels for party purposes and publicity rather than attending parliamentary sessions. "He skipped the President's speech, the Budget, and discussions on Article 370. During key parliamentary sessions, he travels abroad and claims he is not allowed to speak," Shah stated. "According to the established history of this House, its proceedings are conducted based on mutual trust. The Speaker serves as a neutral custodian, representing both the ruling party and the Opposition. It was unfortunate for parliamentary politics that a resolution for the removal of the Speaker has been introduced," he added.

The Speaker's authority underscores the importance of their impartiality and the challenges posed during contentious moments, such as impeachment debates, helping the audience grasp the office's significance to parliamentary stability. Modi, at the end of the impeachment, commended Om Birla for conducting Lok Sabha proceedings with 'dedication, patience and impartiality'. Now that the House defeated the impeachment motion,

Even if the Lok Sabha is dissolved, Speaker Om Birla remains in office until the new House meets and elects a new Speaker.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

PICTALK



People take boat rides during sunrise, in Varanasi

PHOTO: PTI

Why real leadership is forged in discomfort



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

2ND OPINION

Great managers are not born in leadership courses. They are forged in the uncomfortable decision to put someone else's growth before their own comfort.

Most people collect bosses across a career the way you collect frequent flyer miles - mechanically, without much feeling. Some bosses are efficient. Some are political. Some simply occupy a designation the way furniture occupies a room. And then, rarely, there is one who changes the way a person thinks about work, about themselves, about what it means to be led well. That kind of boss is not common. They are, if honesty is permitted here, almost mythological.

Leadership gets discussed constantly in the corporate world - workshops, books, frameworks, job descriptions that list it between Excel and stakehold-

er management as though it were something you could simply acquire. But real leadership, the kind that quietly redirects a career, that says the hard thing at the right moment, that bets on a person before that person has learned to bet on themselves - that is something else entirely.

What distinguishes a great boss from a merely competent one is this: they are willing to be misunderstood in the short term for your benefit in the long term.

A great boss will push back on an idea in a room full of people - not to embarrass, but because they know the person can defend it and want them to find that out for themselves.

They assign the difficult project, the one that causes lost sleep, because they have seen something that has not yet been seen from the inside. They say no to something wanted badly, and it stings, and three years later the reason becomes obvious. In the moment, it feels like criticism. Sometimes it feels like indifference. But a manager who genuinely cares about someone's trajectory is often the one who makes them uncomfortable on purpose - because comfort, as any honest professional will admit, is where growth goes to retire.

The great boss carries all four, and the balance shifts depending on what the moment demands. On Monday they are the manager, holding the team to a deadline.

By Wednesday they are the mentor, explaining why the deadline matters. When someone walks in looking like the week has already won, they notice before a word is said. And through all of it, they carry a quiet confidence - not in themselves, but in the people around them.

That is the rarest ingredient. Someone who believes in potential before performance has caught up to it. That combination does not come from a training module. It comes from character. The corporate world rewards delivery. It rewards numbers and optics and hitting targets.

The manager who invests deeply in people - who gives honest feedback, who occasionally absorbs criticism on behalf of their team - is doing work that rarely appears in a quarterly review. And so many of them quietly stop.

Not because they stop caring, but because the system was never built to notice. Which is precisely why, when someone finds a boss like that, they remember them for the rest of their career. Not because they were perfect, but because in a world designed to be transactional, they chose to be human. That is not a small thing. That is everything.

The writer is a freelancer and writes on development, social and gender issues

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POWER STILL WEARS MASCULINE FACE

Apropos "When work feminises but power masculinises" (March 28, 2026), the paradox of rising female workforce participation alongside stagnant leadership representation highlights a deeper structural imbalance rather than a temporary social transition. While more women are entering professions across sectors, their presence rarely translates into proportional representation in decision-making roles.

The article rightly points out that the entry of women into the workforce has not dismantled entrenched institutional hierarchies. Authority, leadership, and strategic decision-making continue to be culturally coded as masculine traits, while women are often concentrated in roles perceived as supportive, administrative, or less influential. This is not a deficit of talent, ambition, or competence, but

rather a systemic issue where informal networks, legacy structures, and unconscious bias continue to influence promotions and leadership appointments.

The solution lies not merely in encouraging participation but in reforming institutional frameworks - including transparent promotion criteria, equal parental leave policies, mentorship pipelines, and measurable accountability within organisations.

Unless leadership norms are reimagined to value inclusivity, collaboration, and diverse leadership styles rather than conformity to traditional models of authority, the glass ceiling will persist. Real progress will come not from token representation but from systemic change that normalises women's leadership across all sectors of society.

K CHIDANAND KUMAR | BENGALURU

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Leadership in time of war

Amid the intensifying Israel-US-Iran conflict, remarks attributed to Donald Trump - such as suggesting renaming the Strait of Hormuz after himself, dismissing allied military assets as "toys", and making exaggerated claims about oil shipments sent as "gestures" - stand in stark contrast to the heavy casualties across Iran, Israel and Lebanon.

These lighter or offbeat remarks, often delivered alongside serious policy announcements, suggest a leadership style under strain - using humour, bravado, or hyperbole to dominate narratives amid escalating war pressures, economic shocks, and military uncertainty. While political rhetoric has always been part of global diplomacy, the tone and timing of such comments become crucial during periods of conflict and instability. Globally, such statements draw mixed reactions. Allies view them as undermining the gravity of the situation and weakening coordination, while adversaries exploit them for propaganda, reinforcing concerns about the consistency and credibility of US leadership during a widening and volatile conflict. In times of war becomes a strategic tool that can influence diplomacy, morale, and international perception.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

The circular flight experience

The honour this week goes to our favourite airline, Air India. A couple of weeks ago, IndiGo pioneered a new business model: the Delhi-Manchester-Delhi flight that never quite made it to Manchester - a bold innovation allowing travel without the inconvenience of arrival.

Not to be outdone, the national carrier, Air India, decided to raise the bar. Why restrict the experience to one city when you can include several?

Thus was born the Delhi-Vancouver-Delhi and Delhi-London-Delhi experience, where passengers enjoyed long-haul flying, gourmet meals, and the comforting reassurance of landing exactly where they started. No visa. No foreign exchange. No immigration. Just pure aviation bliss and a joyride in the skies.

If this trend continues, travel agencies may soon rebrand these as aerial meditation retreats. The airport operator may even explore tie-ups with parking lots - because clearly, the car never needs to move.

A truly circular economy. The Air India journey may become the most economical international trip where passengers cross continents and oceans yet technically never leave India.

S AKHILESH KRISHNAN | CHENNAI

Landmark ruling on addiction

A California jury found Alphabet's Google and Meta liable for damages in a landmark social media addiction lawsuit that accused the companies of being legally responsible for the addictive design of their platforms. The decision was delivered by a Los Angeles jury after more than forty hours of deliberation across nine days, and over a month after opening statements were presented in the trial.

Among those who testified were Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Instagram head Adam Mosseri, although YouTube chief executive Neal Mohan was not called to testify. The plaintiff, referred to as KGM or Kaley, was awarded damages after stating that she became addicted to social media at a young age, which worsened her mental health issues. She began using YouTube at the age of six and Instagram at nine.

Meta argued that Kaley's mental health struggles were separate from her social media use, pointing to her difficult home life. However, the plaintiffs only needed to prove that social media was a substantial factor in causing harm, not the sole cause. The verdict may set an important precedent for future digital platform accountability.

KYASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR



A culturally rooted gift, makhana's global supply chain

We are living through turbulent geopolitics and fragile supply chains. Conflicts and chokepoints have disrupted shipping routes, increased freight costs, and forced buyers to rethink where their food comes from. In such a world, the countries that can supply safe, traceable, climate-smart food reliably will shape the next decade of trade

FIRST Column



RAM KRIPAL YADAV

In Mithila, makhana is not merely a snack; it is memory. It lives in our ponds, our rituals, our kitchens, and the quiet pride of families who have tended wetlands for generations. Today, that same 'satvik' tradition is also a modern answer to a changing world-clean, nutritious, plant-based food at a time when global consumers are shifting away from ultra-processed choices.

"From Mithila's ponds to the world's platters-Bihar's makhana can carry India's values with India's quality."

We are living through turbulent geopolitics and fragile supply chains. Conflicts and chokepoints have disrupted shipping routes, increased freight costs, and forced buyers to rethink where their food comes from. In such a world, the countries that can supply safe, traceable, climate-smart food reliably will shape the next decade of trade. This is where Bihar's makhana can step up-not as a commodity, but as a trusted category.

The government's core intent: prosperity for farmers, dignity for workers

Let me state the fundamental intent of our policy in one line: makhana must make farmers prosperous, not just make markets excited. The current value chain is still too dependent on hazardous manual work, seasonal gluts, and uneven quality. Our mission is to modernise the entire makhana economy-from pond governance to processing, science to standards, and local clusters to global shelves-so that the farmer captures a fair share of value.

Modernisation means three things: machines, markets, and trust

First, mechanisation as a special lever. Mechanisation will not replace labour; it will replace hardship. Harvesting and seed collection are among the most physically demanding tasks in Indian agriculture. Our 5-year plan commits to field-validated harvesting solutions, delivered through Custom Hiring Centres, with trained operators, technicians, and service entrepreneurs-creating safer jobs for youth and women. Second, markets that reward quality, not just volume. We will



DATA AT A GLANCE (5-YEAR PLAN: 2025-26 – 2030-31)

What we will deliver	By 2030-31
More production with better practices	Area doubles: 41,000 → 82,000 ha
Export engine	Exports triple: 10,000 → 30,000 MT
Quality & price stabilisation	Hygienic storage scales: 7,196 → 64,058 MT
Jobs with dignity	Jobs rise: 60,205 → 117,034 FTE job-years
Women's economic participation	Women's jobs: 19,065 → 39,761; share to 34%
Mechanisation milestone	Harvester available FY 2027-28; scale adoption FY 2028-29

Source: Bihar Makhana 5-Year Action Plan (Refined), 16 Feb 2026; CM review brief tables

MAKHANA IS NOT A SNACK STORY. IT IS BIHAR'S NEXT FARMER PROSPERITY AND JOBS STORY

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The Pioneer

strengthen grading, moisture discipline, and hygienic storage so that farmers are not forced to sell in a narrow harvest window. When storage improves, the farmer gains bargaining power; when quality improves, Bihar earns a premium.

Third, trust at global standards. Global buyers do not buy intentions-they buy compliance. We will expand lab access, residue and moisture testing, lot-wise traceability, and retail-ready packaging. The National Makhana Board-launched by the Government of India-will act as mission control, aligning research, standards, and market promotion; and APEDA's

Patna office brings export facilitation close to the clusters.

Innovation: Turning a traditional crop into a future-ready industry

Modernisation is not just about machines; it is also about ideas.

We will back innovation across the chain: improved varieties and seed systems; safer, energy-efficient popping and processing; new ready-to-eat and ready-to-cook products; sustainable packaging; and circular use of by-products.

The goal is to move from selling 'loose makhana' to selling 'Bihar-branded

makhana'-a product with provenance, performance, and pride.

Women forward by design, not as an afterthought

Makhana's next growth phase must be inclusive. Mechanisation reduces hazardous manual drudgery; storage and processing create year-round work; and compliance jobs-grading, lab handling, documentation, packaging, and e-commerce-are sectors where women's SHGs can lead. Our approach is to formalise these roles with training, certification, and credit-so that women are not 'helpers' in the value chain, but owners of enterprises within it. "If Bihar wants a stronger

makhana economy, it must build a stronger place for women in it."

Why the world's turbulence can become Bihar's opportunity

Geopolitical uncertainty is reshaping food supply chains. Retailers want diversified sourcing, shorter lead-time risk, and credible compliance. India's trade engagement is also opening new doors. India and the EU have concluded negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement, with implementation steps ahead; India and the UK have signed a trade agreement with implementation expected soon. With the US too, trade talks for an interim package have been in motion to reduce friction and stabilise market access. These pathways can expand demand for compliant, packaged, branded agri-products and makhana, with its health profile, is well positioned to ride that wave.

India as Vishwaguru: sharing a healthy, culturally rooted gift

The idea of India as Vishwaguru is not only about technology or geopolitics; it is also about what we give to humanity. Makhana is a gift of our wetlands-rooted in culture, aligned with wellness, and respectful of nature. When Bihar supplies the world with clean, traceable makhana, we carry a message that development can be modern yet culturally grounded, export-driven yet farmer-first.

The pledge

- Make mechanisation and safety non-negotiable: reduce drudgery, injuries, and post-harvest losses.
- Build 'trust infrastructure': labs, traceability, grading, hygienic storage, and compliant packaging.
- Move value addition to Bihar: FPO and SHG-led processing, branding, and e-commerce.
- Use the National Makhana Board and APEDA Patna to connect clusters to global buyers-faster, closer, and fairer.

"Makhana is not a snack story. It is Bihar's next farmer prosperity and jobs story." To our farmers: your knowledge built this sector; our policy will ensure you capture its future. To our youth and women: the makhana economy will need your skills, your entrepreneurship, and your leadership. To buyers: Bihar is ready to supply not just volume, but verified quality. And to every Indian: when we send makhana to the world, we send a piece of Bihar-and a piece of India's soul.

Digital child sexual exploitation



ARVIND P BHANU | **KISHAN PRATAP**

The recent conviction and award of the death sentence to a couple by a special POCSCO court in Banda, Uttar Pradesh, India, has shaken the conscience of the country. For a decade, a junior engineer and his wife lured children, gave them chocolates, video games and other gifts, and then raped them, filmed the acts, and allegedly produced and transmitted more than two lakh pornographic videos. The brutality began in a rented room in a small town of Uttar Pradesh, but the multinational cybercrime racket, as revealed by the investigating agencies, had buyers of the videos of the rapes of children in dozens of countries. The couple targeted children, including boys who were almost three years old, in multiple districts such as Banda and Chitrakoot. These children were tempted with toys, snacks and chocolates, and later abused and video-recorded.

In the present case, which has been charged under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, and the Information Technology Act, 2000, it cannot be said that it is merely an issue of perversion in an individual capacity. It can rather be said that the present case is yet another poignant reminder that the sexual abuse of children has reached a critical juncture, wherein the dark web of encrypted chats and anonymous identities plays a major role.

Some child sexual abuse material (CSAM) is being shared through open internet platforms until it is detected and deleted. However, some of it is being shared through encrypted messaging platforms and dark web networks. The dark web is a part of the internet that can be accessed through special software that allows users to remain anonymous. This allows users to remain hidden and creates a black market for such material.

The Banda case, as reported, involved the digital dissemination of such material outside India. This is a common occurrence in dark web environments, where the servers, users and financial platforms are distributed across the globe.

The dark web does not create the abuse; the abuse starts in homes, schools and neighbourhoods. However, the dark web facilitates the abuse by turning acts of cruelty into a global black market.

It is important to clarify a legal point that is often misunderstood. While there may be debate about the issue, watching adult pornographic material in private is not an offence under Indian law. However, browsing or watching any material that contains minors in sexual acts is a serious criminal offence. Sections 13 and 14 of the POCSCO Act, 2012, criminalise the use of children in pornographic material, and Section 67B of the IT Act criminalises the publication, transmission, browsing, downloading and possession of sexually explicit material involving children in electronic form.

The Supreme Court's landmark judgment in Just Rights for Children Alliance v S Harish (2024) resolved a contentious debate on whether viewing or possessing child sexual abuse material amounts to an offence. The Court ruled that viewing or possessing such material, without deleting it or reporting it, qualifies as an offence, noting that "each click perpetuates a chain of exploitation that starts with the abuse of a real child."

The Court also recommended replacing the term "child pornography" with "Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material (CSEAM)", emphasising that the language must reflect the reality of abuse.

The urgency is also justified by statistical data. The National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, which operates in association with the Cyber Crime Prevention Against Women and Children Scheme of the Ministry of Home Affairs, has recorded around 1.94 lakh cases of child pornography and sexual abuse-related complaints till April 2024.

However, it is believed that this is just the tip of the iceberg, as the actual number could be much higher. These could include online grooming, sexual abuse, blackmail through morphed images, and sexual abuse threats on social media and dark web platforms. These reports can be filed anonymously with the NCRP. This is an important point because there is a huge amount of shame related to sexual offences. The increasing reports of such offences not only indicate the alarming rate at which such cybercrimes are taking place but also indicate that awareness is increasing. However, the law and enforcement agencies are facing many challenges.

The threat scenario is still evolving with the emergence of AI technology. AI technology has become capable of producing realistic synthetic images and videos depicting children in sexually explicit content. Such images are called AI-generated CSAM. The threat associated with AI-generated images is that they lead to the normalisation of child exploitation, encourage deviant demand for CSAM, and enable blackmail by inserting children's images into a video or image. Law enforcement agencies all over the world are struggling to understand how AI technology can be regulated in terms of child exploitation

content. The provisions of the POCSCO Act and the IT Act are applicable in India in the event of children being used in AI-generated images or being exploited in any manner.

But this is not just a court case; this is a case that indicts society. These were not faceless individuals lurking on the Internet. These were individuals in society, mingling with families and children. Child abuse is the grooming of the child before the abuse is reflected on the Internet. Caregivers, parents, and teachers should be aware enough to monitor any unusual behavior changes in the child. There should be integration of online safety in the school curriculum. There should be improvements in the detection capabilities by Internet service providers, with their cooperation in facilitating the quick removal of offending content by the authorities. There should be the use of reporting tools, such as the NCRP, when one suspects online offending. But most importantly, society should not take the issue of "online content" abuse with levity. There is no such thing as harmless child pornography. Each image is a child whose dignity, safety, and future have been violated.

Technology is not evil in and of itself, but it has been a tool that has brought people together, opened doors for new opportunities in education, and helped drive the economy forward. It has also been a tool that, without careful observation, has been the tool that has allowed humanity's worst attributes to flourish. The dark net, encryption, and technology are not untouchables, but they take cooperation, new laws, and ethical behavior on all sides to achieve that cooperation. India's laws, buttressed by interpretation in Just Rights for Children Alliance, clearly warn that sexual exploitation of children, whatever form that exploitation may take with technology's facilitation, is not acceptable.

The laws are part of the solution, but without dealing with the trauma that has been caused, there is not a complete solution. As the Banda case demonstrates, the exploitation could have started in a single room, but the scope of the child sexual exploitation could have been across the globe. The solution to the problem of digital child sexual exploitation is not just about punishing the people who commit the crime, but about dismantling the technology, the economy, and the societies that facilitate the crime in the first place. Combatting Child sexual exploitation in the digital world is not optional; it is a constitutional, moral, and societal imperative.

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India's biofuel moment



VAIBHAV DANGE

The global energy map is no longer defined by markets alone-it is shaped by conflict, coercion, and control. Oil and gas have become instruments of geopolitical leverage, not just economic exchange. From tensions in the Middle East to sanctions and supply disruptions, energy flows today are as political as they are physical.

For India, this reality carries a steep cost. The country imports over 85 per cent of its crude oil and more than half of its LPG. Every global price spike feeds directly into inflation, widens the current account deficit, and strains public finances. Energy insecurity is no longer a distant risk-it is a recurring economic shock.

Yet, hidden within this vulnerability is a strategic opening. India's biofuel sector-ethanol, compressed biogas (CBG), and biomass-has reached a turning point. What was once a policy experiment is now a credible pillar of energy strategy. The question is no longer whether biofuels can work. It is whether India can scale them fast enough-and smartly enough-to matter.

India's ethanol blending programme is one of its most notable clean energy achievements. Blending has risen from just 1.5% in 2014 to 20% in 2025-well ahead of schedule. Production capacity has expanded rapidly to nearly 17-18 billion litres annually.

But success has exposed a new fault line. Demand for E20 blending stands at roughly 10-11 billion litres. In effect, a significant share of installed capacity risks lying idle. This is not a failure of supply-it is a failure to expand demand in parallel. If left unaddressed, this mismatch could weaken investor confidence and slow future growth. India has built capacity. It must now create markets. If ethanol represents progress, compressed biogas represents potential.

India currently has over 130 operational CBG plants producing around 900 tonnes per day. While this demonstrates technical viability, it is a fraction of what is possible. India consumes 31-32 million tonnes of LPG annually-more than half of it imported. At current levels, CBG meets well under 1 per cent of this demand.

This gap is not due to a lack of feedstock or technology. It is a function of policy ambition and infrastructure readiness.

CBG can substitute LPG in commercial kitchens, small industries, and transport segments. It can reduce import dependence, create rural income streams, and address waste management challenges. What it lacks is not utility-but scale.

Brazil's biofuel journey offers a useful lesson in what policy clarity can achieve.

With ethanol blending levels of 27-30% and widespread use of flex-fuel vehicles, Brazil created a

stable ecosystem where farmers, fuel suppliers, and automakers operate with aligned incentives. Consumers can switch between fuels based on price, and investors can plan with confidence.

The underlying principle is simple: long-term certainty unlocks long-term capital.

India now needs a similarly clear roadmap beyond E20-one that signals direction, not hesitation. India's ethanol push has not been without criticism. Concerns around food security, water use, and efficiency have been raised across sectors. These are important issues and deserve careful policy design. But the larger picture is often overlooked. At 20% blending, ethanol has already reduced crude oil imports, saved valuable foreign exchange, and cushioned the economy against global price volatility. In a world where energy markets are increasingly unstable, this is not just an environmental gain-it is economic resilience.

Ethanol is not merely a blending component. It is a strategic buffer.

To fully realise the potential of biofuels, India must move beyond incremental progress to deliberate scale. This requires a coordinated push across policy, infrastructure, and markets.

First, demand creation must become central. Mandating partial substitution of LPG with CBG-particularly in commercial and industrial segments-can create immediate and predictable demand. Second, infrastructure gaps must be addressed. Investments in compression, storage, and distribution networks are essential to make CBG commercially viable at scale.

Third, policy incentives must reward environmental performance. Linking biofuel production to carbon markets can unlock additional revenue streams and improve project economics.

Fourth, India must expand the scope of ethanol beyond petrol blending. Its use in aviation fuels, industrial applications, and even cooking energy can significantly increase demand.

Finally, a clear roadmap beyond E20-towards E27 and higher-along with accelerated adoption of flex-fuel vehicles, can provide the long-term certainty investors seek. India's biofuel programme has already delivered measurable benefits-lower imports, cleaner energy, and enhanced rural incomes. But its true potential lies ahead.

Without demand expansion, surplus ethanol will remain underutilised. Without scaling CBG, dependence on imported LPG will persist. Without policy clarity, investment will hesitate.

Energy security cannot be outsourced; it must be built domestically and at scale. Biofuels offer India a chance to turn agricultural strength into energy resilience and reduce external vulnerability. In an increasingly weaponised energy world, biofuels are not just an alternative—they are strategic insurance.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

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Instant shocks require immediate remedies, which may be completely wrong, and meaningless. One can dub the central bank's decisions to force banks to cap their "net foreign exchange positions at \$100 million" to one of those knee-jerk reactions that are laden with good intentions but are likely to result in bad unintended implications. At present, the overall short-term positions are estimated at \$40 billion, and unwinding them immediately can be chaotic, messy, and loss-making. The banks warn that doing so may trigger high mark-to-market losses, as the positions are equated to present prices and rates, and force the unwinding of the trades that may prove profitable in the future. According to the bankers, the central bank needs to give more time to unwind the existing trades. Even better, maybe impose the restrictions on the future, and not existing, trades. This will give ample breathing space.

Obviously, the central bank's decision to limit the short positions at \$100 million at the end of each business day, starting April 10, stems from fear and scare, possibly political pressures, and as a measure to send the warning signals to the short sellers and speculators. The idea is to protect the rupee, and stop its free fall against the dollar. The fear comes from the fact that despite massive interventions by the central bank, the rupee's slide continues. It falters for a day or two, and then glides downward. At present, it is nearing ₹95, and has more than doubled against the dollar since Covid (January 2020). The Iran war has further shattered the Indian currency, with the central bank unable to apply the brakes. In fact, the brakes seem to have failed. There is a risk of a downward movement towards ₹100, and higher.

This is where the political pressures make a meaningful entrance. For months, at least since 2025, the official loyalists claimed that a weaker rupee was a good thing for a growing economy. Most nations that grew at frenetic paces at different periods, like Japan in the 1980s, South Korea in the 1990s, and China over a few decades, found that their currencies took a beating as growth escalated. The same was possibly true of India, which has emerged as the engine for global growth. Later, they maintained that a weaker rupee helps exports. But it makes imports expensive, and possibly skews the trade deficit negatively. In the recent past, social media memes have ridiculed the central bank, and regime's supporters. They quote how the rulers had made fun of the previous regimes when the rupee fell in the past. The currency shoe has begun to pinch politically, and may have repercussions.

But as is natural in such circumstances, and possibly true, the central bank, and the political masters feel that a large part of the rupee's fall is contributed by short sellers and speculators. The banks indulge in it as it gives them scope to make easy profits. Until the war lasts, the downward pressure on the currency will continue, and any reasonable person will assume a short position, which is hedged, and can be changed when the situation is different. This adds to the pressures. Putting a curb on daily short positions is the easiest, and possibly quickest, way to curb speculation. It sends a warning to the erring banks, institutions, and individuals to stay away, or face drastic and dramatic action. Since the central bank cannot act against the latter two entities, it targets the banks, which are under its control. The banks, forced to unwind rapidly, become the loss-makers.

According to media reports, this is possibly the first time in nearly 15 years that the central bank "placed curbs on the size of bets that banks can take in the currency markets, taking away powers, hitherto, vested with bank boards. The move comes at a time when the rupee is under pressure due to a combination of sales by foreign institutional investors, a rise in the oil import bill, and the overhang of tariffs and visa curbs on exports." But some experts feel that the step may create more credibility among the speculators that the central bank is unable to protect the rupee, which is likely to fall further, even if the banks are taken out of the equation. Something similar happened with the regime's energy policy. On the one hand, it categorically announced that there was no energy shortage. On the other hand, it increased LPG cylinder booking time from three to five weeks, imposed windfall taxes on energy exports, raised domestic prices, and lowered excise.

Experience teaches us that ad-hoc, extreme, and knee-jerk actions do not work during crises. In many instances, they accelerate the effects. But policymakers and regulators cannot lie idle during such times. They need to show their power and strength, and ability to control the situation. Hence, they need to do something, anything. This prompts them to quickly move from denial, everything is normal, stance to the other end, where anything is legitimate. Put the brakes. Increase the curbs. Stop people from buying, using, and speculating. But this turns out to be a bigger nightmare. Even in emergencies what is required to take several steps, but logically, with thought-out implications.



From farm loans to retail loans

Are urban households the new highly-indebted farm families?

Recent news items, a book, and few surveys are scary, and dreadful. Retail loans, which include those for personal reasons, consumer purchases, credit card dues, homes, vehicles, and so on, are the major causes for debt headaches of the banks. They account for the largest portion of the annual write-offs due to non-payments. A new book warns that Indian families are in a debt trap, and "carry one of the highest debt burdens in the world... surpassing even consumption-heavy economies like the US, and debt-fuelled growth stories like China."

Several surveys indicate that Indians are going on a debt binge, not to acquire and build assets like homes, but to pursue aspirations, desires, whims, and fancies. Vacations, which include travel and hospitality, comprise the largest component of unsecured retail loans. Credit purchases stand at just over 10 per cent, but that is only because smart and scared consumers run from pillar to post to roll over credit by paying the minimum balances, and acquire huge interest in the bargain. The loans are, in a sense, ever-greened, and bloated.

Let us start with some of the stark facts. Apart from housing loans, the loans by families, as a percentage of GDP, zoomed by 10 per cent to nearly a third within eight years. In other words, 40 per cent of the annual incomes services the payment of the loans. In 2024-25, as per data given in Parliament, Indian banks wrote off ₹1.72 lakh crore, of which retail (family-linked loans) accounted for the largest share of more than ₹45,000 crore, or more than a fourth. Ironically, the amount was double the write-offs for the farm sector (₹22,000 crore).

According to an official report (December 2024), 45 per cent of the household borrowers are classified as sub-prime, or unable to pay the

loans. More importantly, half of the loans fund consumption, and not investments or productive assets. "The affluent segments of the middle class are borrowing for aspirational purchases like premium smartphone, and lifestyle upgrades, while less affluent households turn to debt for essential needs like healthcare and education," states the book. In essence, one can segregate household loans as productive (homes, vehicles), future-income (education), lifestyle (bigger TV, better phone), and honour and self-respect (marriages, home renovations).

Unsecured retail loans, which are not backed by collateral, constitute more than half of the written-off retail loans in the last financial year, and private banks contributed more than three-fourths of them. One can assume that such banks, in a bid to boost high-value, high-profit loans (personal loans carry the highest interest), push the products even to those, who may be sub-prime, and unable to pay. This is evident from the unwanted calls for debt and credit cards, as well as personal loans. Worse, this situation emerges despite the central bank's curbs. Something is clearly not working, and going wrong.

What is crucial is like the Americans not long ago, Indians are saddled with multiple loans, and they juggle incomes to pay them. As demand for loans rises due to multiple desires by multiple members, the end-result is default. Take the case of this three-member Mumbai-based nuclear family, with double incomes, and one kid. At any given point in time, it has an ongoing and sizable EMI for home loan, small one for a laptop or smartphone, and minimum payment(s) to roll-over one or two credit card dues. Bulk bonanza

(gratuity, bonus, and bunched-up increments) clean up the credit cards, or prepay loans.

Even worse is that Indians are not saving. Yes, urbanites transformed into smart investors, and women have taken to mutual funds and stocks, like fish to water. But more importantly, more have turned into consumers, who feel savings is a waste of money. Either use money to grow money, or burn it in the present. Net household savings, as a percentage of income, "hit a 50-year low in FY 2023, and despite rising to six per cent in FY 2025, is still much lower than what it was historically.... Indians have become world champions in borrowing money, lots of it, non-stop, and at high cost," states the book.

However, one cannot merely blame aspirations. There is real stress as far as family incomes are concerned. Jobs are scarce, especially for the youngsters and first-timers, whose aspirations are as high, or higher than those in the 30s and 40s. Real wages are compressed, which leaves little for discretionary expenses. As access to loans goes up, and payments are easy, despite high interest, debt is the only option. Nuclear families, strained relations, and lack of 'friends,' push people to borrow from the banks rather than from close ones. Once the cycle starts, it has a life of its own, an ongoing momentum and motion.

According to the new book, Covid and post-pandemic periods were the major middle-class inflexion debt-points in the recent past. "After this shock, India's non-housing household debt (i.e., household debt minus home loans) has surged at a rate faster than any of the countries shown in the chart. As a result, India has now surpassed developed countries that are traditionally considered to be consumption heavy (like the US) as well as developing countries that have typically relied on bank credit for development (like China)," states the book.

Two trends will stand out if the debt momentum continues. As is evident now, banks will become safer, and insist on secured loans. Recent data shows that gold loans have emerged as the second-largest ones among retail loans, or higher than unsecured personal loans. But this may be because of the unprecedented, even shocking, rise in gold prices, despite the recent fall since January 2026. Lower loans may enable the banks to correct the massive mismatch between savings and loans, higher credit to industry, families, and farms compared to inflows.

In addition, Indians, especially the younger ones, may either turn into defaulters, and face the consequences for the rest of their lives, or curtail their lifestyle, and kill their dreams for years. The shift from credit cards to only debit cards is visible in some families. Thus, they do not buy the latest gadget, or take an overseas trip that regularly. This makes them, to some extent, hate their lives, when they compare it to their peers, friends, and relatives. Children may become desperate and frustrated, and one is not sure how this will pan out in the future.

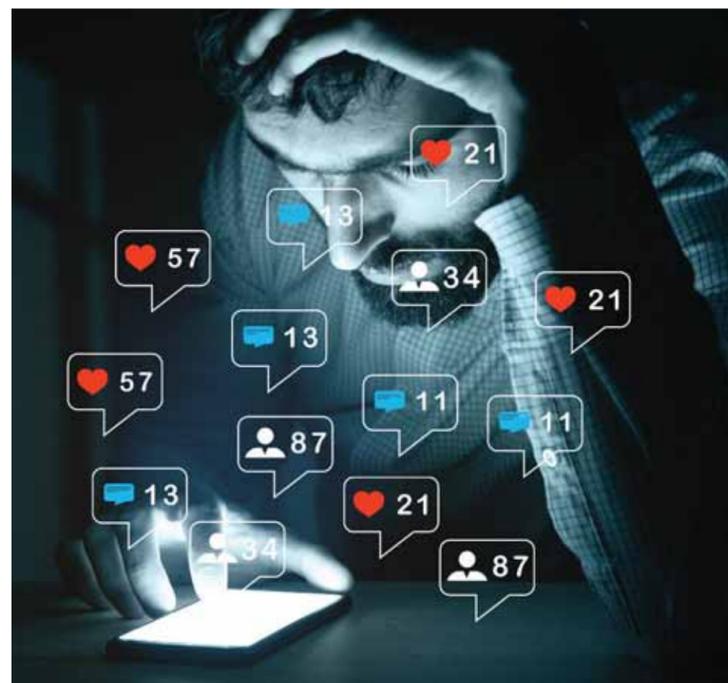
OUR TAKE



The Teck Wrecker

Social 'lurkers' better than 'users'

Do not worry if you are passive and inactive on social media



I did a simple exercise after I read an insightful piece on the psychology of those who are present on social media but "do not comment," "do not share," and "do not post." Of the 250 'friends' on Facebook, a pitiable and puny number compared to most friends, about 30-odd interact aggressively, i.e., either daily or once in 2-3 days. Another 30-odd are passive-aggressive, or engage with the platform at least once-a-week. In effect, this is about a fourth of my so-called friends, who include more acquaintances that I may have met once, or did not meet at all.

Psychologists will dub me as a social media 'lurker,' who wishes to be present online but hides away from doing anything much except perhaps, an occasional 'like' on posts, maybe 3-4 times a week. But this includes 75 per cent of my friends. Shocking as it may seem, I am the lucky one. Recent research shows that 90 per cent of social media users are 'lurkers,' who view online content, and that is it. "That is an enormous silent majority.... (But) the lurkers get treated as background noise. Or worse, as somehow failing at social media by not contributing," states the latest piece that I read.

However, experts contend that lurking may not be a failing but a strength. Those who are present on social media, and merely observe and absorb from what is happening out there, are not disengaged. They imbibe, and content still influences them in myriad ways. It is something like what happens on WhatsApp, or with Instagram reels. One may not react to texts but reads them in the first instance. Similarly, one watches reels at random, like a mad person on Insta. Lurking is like hearing and seeing, and reflecting on it.

Hence, lurking is a healthy choice. One is not sure if it is healthier than social media engagement but that does not matter. In contrast, researchers feel that those who engage actively "highlight idealised versions of themselves, suppress what does not fit the image, and engage in constant impression management." The fact remains that this process is "cognitively and emotionally expensive." It creates a split personality of sorts among the low minority 'users.' They either show the good side, or the bad (more acceptable) one, and invest in a form of low subterfuge, and hiding, which is different from the lurkers.

Of course, there are studies that indicate the opposite. One of them linked depression with lurking among college students. Passive browsing triggers comparisons, as it does, and inculcates FOMO. This happens to me sometimes when I see personal posts of holidays, and dinners, and professional ones of people giving lectures, being panel members, and

addressing workshops. Hence, the difference lies between compulsive lurking, and doing it by choice, and deliberately. The latter may be a different feeling, if one browses for information, and yet opt out of the "self-preservation circus." Research makes a distinction.

A study found that "lurking behaviour is driven by multiple factors, not all of them negative. Some people lurk because of social media fatigue. Some lurk to protect their privacy. And some lurk because they have to get what they need from the platform, information, connection, awareness, without paying the psychological tax...." According to the writer of the piece I read, "That last group fascinates me.... They have kept the first (information function), and discarded the second (performance function).

And when you frame it that way, it starts to look less like passive consumption, and more like an intentional choice."

I remember that I switched off years ago, maybe 15 years ago, for several reasons. One was the distinction, rightly or wrongly, in my mind that active social media engagement introduces negativity. This happens when a new book you wrote gets five likes, and a new portrait photo of a 'friend' gets 878 likes. My reason for being there was different. I wanted to connect with friends who could tell me about interesting articles, fascinating books, and talks and lectures. Instead, I was bombarded with cooked food, holidays, and random thoughts.

Indeed, the image of social media plat-

forms, being in the profession that I am, as a manipulative, money-making, eye-ball-scrouring, and antitrust entities generally pulled me away from them. More so, when my 'wall' was bombarded by sponsored content, and of those that the platforms wanted me to follow. I did not want that content. I had to wade through dozens of the unwanted posts before I could reach those by friends. This happened on Facebook's news feed too. In the end, it became oppressive, meaningless, and bizarre.

One feels that I was right. Recent research shows that "even a one-week reduction in social media use led to significant decreases in anxiety and depression symptoms among young adults (not that I am young by any standards). The lead researcher (in the study) noted that by the third week of reduced use, participants showed a 24 per cent decrease in depression symptoms, and 16 per cent reduction in anxiety. Those are meaningful numbers. And while that study looked at overall reduction rather than lurking specifically, it supports the broader idea that reducing your active engagement... has real psychological benefits."

According to the author of the piece I read, "stepping back from the performance of social media is not avoidance. For many people, it is a form of self-preservation. Lurking is not laziness. It is a choice to consume without performing, to observe without being observed, and to stay informed without handing your mental energy over to an algorithm that profits from your participation. In a world that rewards noise, choosing silence is one of the most deliberate things you can do." I agree, although I am not a true lurker, given the 'likes' I give.

More importantly, lurking or disengagement on social media give rise to a phenomenon that is possibly most required today. It makes a person stay away from random, immediate verbal-violence bursts that escalate into abuses, and physical violence. In the rage of online disagreements, as happens in the case of verbal fights between couples, and family members, we go overboard, and say things we never should have, or could have. In some cases, the anger, supported by past emotions, makes us act like we never should. As studies and experiences indicate, violence on the streets, and at homes, may stem from social media.

What Does Prosperity Mean? Revisiting Artha for a Rising India



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Artha in the ancient Indian political and philosophical thought is a complex and multivalent concept. It has multiple meanings. 'Artha' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'ॠ' meaning to acquire, to obtain. It literally means 'that which is sought' or 'purpose'. A deeper foray into classical Indian texts, particularly on statecraft like Kautilya's Arthashastra, the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata and various Niti shastra works, conceptualise 'artha' within a broader semantic field. Here it includes purpose, meaning, material security and economic resources, pointing to a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between economics, governance and social order. Commonly it is also understood as 'wealth' or 'material prosperity'.

In the classical Indian texts, like Kautilya's Arthashastra, artha is not distinct from politics. It is very much an integral part of sovereign power. The Saptanga (seven limbs) theory is the cornerstone of the conceptualization of state: the ruler (svami), ministers (amatya), territory (janapada), fortified cities (durga), treasury (kosha), army (danda) and allies (mitra). Here the treasury (kosha) and territory (janapada) are the pillars of economics which cannot be isolated from military power and governance.

In the Purushartha theory (human objectives), artha is placed along with dharma, kama and moksha as one of the fundamental objectives of human existence. The Arthashastra says, "prithiviam labhe sarvam hi prayojanam" (in the acquisition of earth lies all purpose), signifying that in the context of statecraft, beyond individual pursuit, artha denotes the material wherewithal required for the social and political order. Kautilya goes on to say, "sukhasyamulam dharmah, dharmasya mulam arthah, arthasya mulam rajyam." (happiness is rooted in dharma, dharma is rooted in artha, and artha is rooted in the state). This implies that economic prosperity is created through an organised political structure which in turn enables righteous governance.

Kautilya shows a developed understanding of the role of the state in exercising economic authority. The Arthashastra outlines detailed policies for agriculture, trade, monetary affairs and industry. The state appointed officials, for instance Samaharta (chief revenue officer) and official in charge of trade (panadhyaksha) to ensure fair trade practices. There were attempts to standardize currency and regulate lending practices. There is a provision for fining monetary frauds. In fact, the Arthashastra is a precursor



to industrial policy with its emphasis on regulation of private craft guilds and state workshops. The idea of dharmartha yuktam i.e. 'the integration of righteousness with material prosperity' is discussed in the Rajadharma Parva of Mahabharata.

Moreover, the Arthashastra establishes the central importance of economic resources for political stability ('rajasya mulam arthah' --wealth is the foundation of the state). However, this is immediately qualified by another verse, 'arthasya mulam rajyam' (the state is the foundation of wealth), signifying that there is a reciprocal relationship between the two and that political authority and economic resources mutually reinforce each other. Kautilya treated the management of income and expenditure as a direct responsibility of the state and the king reviewed it daily. Maintaining a robust treasury was part of Kautilya's financial architecture and played a vital role in monetary policy management. This happens today through the RBI, which also has a treasury function. Instead of delegating the responsibility of constant supervision of officials to his subordinates, the ruler made sure that economic governance was exercised at the

highest political level. Trade promotion was equally critical to the Arthashastra's economic vision. The taxation was not arbitrary. Revenue needs were balanced with commercial vitality. In this sense, the Arthashastra approaches what may be described as an early administrative model of economic policy, combining regulation, infrastructure support and fiscal oversight into a coherent framework of governance.

For Kautilya, economic prosperity is closely linked with the well-being of the subjects, because the happiness of the king lay in the happiness of his subjects. This can be taken to mean access to health care, education, clean drinking water, nutrition, and employment. A variety of state policy initiatives have endeavoured to convert economic growth into material well-being, social security and risk management for the weakest segments of society. Schemes for food security (Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana), financial inclusion (Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana), housing (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana), health (Ayushman Bharat) and digital connectivity, direct benefit transfers, formalization of labour, banking and credit facilities are reminiscent of Kautilya's emphasis on the need to maintain granaries, treasuries and multiple revenue streams in order to shield the population from distress: famines, epidemics and political instability. Artha here is not just wealth creation or fiscal surplus, but the creation of conditions in which secure, dignified, meaningful lives can be led.

The Arthashastra's emphasis on maintaining roads and passes reflects an early statecraft understanding that market integration depends on secure connectivity. This is reflected in modern logistics frameworks such as PM Gati Shakti (emphasis on infrastructure through massive public capital expenditure) and the Golden Quadrilateral (the highway network in India connecting Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai).

Instead of conceptualising prosperity purely in terms of aggregate metrics such as GDP, India offers a template that underscores resilience, equity and sustainability. Cumulatively, all these schemes conceptualise Artha broadly, where the state's authority and its prosperity is defined through the collective prosperity of its citizenry. In this sense, the current governance approach is in continuity with indigenous political thought, illustrating how classical concepts could be reimagined to meet the ethical and material imperatives of a modern nation state.

The sparrows and the elephant (strategy over strength) Panchatantra, Book I

The story of the Sparrows and the Elephant is one of the most popular tales from the Panchatantra. It is found in the first book, Mitra-bheda (The loss of friends).

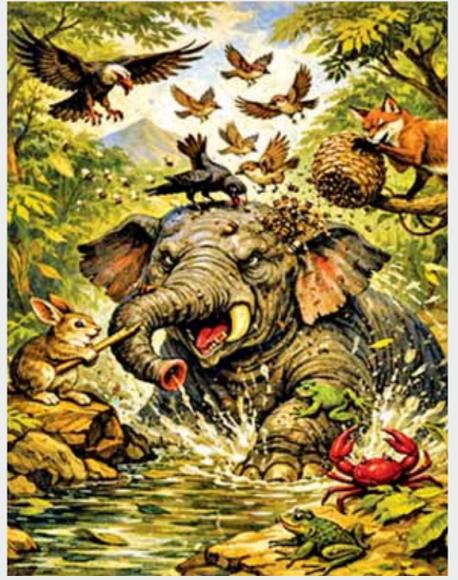
A pair of sparrows lived happily in a nest built on a tamala tree. The female sparrow had laid her eggs and the arrival of new babies was eagerly anticipated. One afternoon, a wild elephant struck by the heat and his own arrogance began rampaging through the trees in the forest. Upon reaching the tamala tree with a powerful stroke of his trunk, he broke the branch which carried the sparrows' nest. The nest fell to the ground. While the adult sparrows managed to fly away, their eggs were crushed. The female sparrow began to cry inconsolably due to the loss of the unborn young ones. A woodpecker, who was her friend, comforted her by saying that wailing would not bring back the dead and it was essential that justice be served.

The woodpecker realizing that they couldn't fight the elephant alone, called upon his companions, namely, a gnat (fly) and a frog (the chief of frogs). The four small creatures gathered to devise a strategic plan to defeat the trouble making elephant.

The gnat was to fly into the elephant's ear and hum a hypnotic melody. This would make the elephant close his eyes in a trance-like state of mind. Once the elephant's eyes were shut, the woodpecker would peck out his eyes, turning him blind. With the passage of time, the elephant would become dehydrated due to heat. The frog would go to the edge of a deep, rocky pit (far from any water body) and begin to croak at a high volume. Hearing the

croaking frog, the blind elephant would assume the presence of a pond nearby. Following the sound of the frog, he would tumble into the pit.

The plan was executed with absolute precision. As the gnat sang, the elephant closed his eyes, and the woodpecker struck. Visionless and crying in pain, the elephant wandered the forest for hours, searching for water to soothe



his wounds. When he heard the frog's croaking, he rushed toward the sound, thinking he had reached a lake. Instead, he fell into the deep pit and died.

The tiny sparrows had successfully gained victory over the mightiest beast in the jungle.

Moral of the Fable
Even the weak can overcome a powerful enemy if they work as a team using their intelligence. It emphasizes that unity is strength. Unity and team spirit is of utmost importance for a Viksit Bharat.

WISDOM WORD SEARCH

V A N I J Y A T H I K A
O G A L I B M U D R A N
A L V Q M I B H E Y A V
T K A S H R E N I A K I
I P A T G J K L M P N K
V A J R T L S I I A O S
A A T A A V U G A N T I
R Y M I T R L V S Y L K
T R P D E F K H N A Q D
A I A Q P W A L A A D S
K N J K R I S H I S U A
A A D A S D L N M O I W

WORDS TO FIND

- Kara, Kosa, Krishi, Mudra, Panya, Rina, Shreni, Sulka, Vanijya, Varta
- KARA** - Tax collected for governance and public works.
 - KOSA** - State treasury supporting administration and welfare.
 - KRISHI** - Agrarian foundation of the economy.
 - MUDRA** - Certified monetary system facilitating exchange.
 - PANYA** - Trade commodities circulating across markets.
 - RINA** - Structured credit and borrowing practices.
 - SHRENI** - Merchant and artisan guilds maintaining trade ethics and financial cooperation
 - SULKA** - Trade toll ensuring regulated commerce and state revenue.
 - VANIJYA** - Professional and long-distance commerce activity.
 - VARTA** - Classical economic activity including agriculture, cattle economy, and trade.

Marvels of India

SURYA MANDIR, KONARK



A Marvel of Ancient Indian Astronomical Ingenuity: The Sun Temple at Konark stands as a striking example of Bharat's synthesis of science, architecture and symbolism. Built in the 13th century on the Odishan coast, it is designed as a giant stone chariot dedicated to the Sun God, reflecting deep astronomical insight.

Astronomical Precision and Solar Alignment: The temple is oriented along an east-west axis, allowing the first rays of the rising sun to illuminate its entrance and sanctum during key moments such as solstices and equinoxes. This alignment demonstrates a refined understanding of the solar movement that was crucial for ancient calendrical systems and ritual timings.

Ingenious Timekeeping Mechanism: Its 24 intricately carved stone wheels function as sundials. The spokes cast shadows that enable precise measurement of time, from hours down to minutes, across seasons, thereby showcasing mastery over solar geometry.

Civilisational Significance: More than a place of worship, the temple foregrounds Bharat's advanced engagement with astronomy and mathematics, embodying a civilisation where scientific knowledge and sacred expression coexisted seamlessly.

Did you know?

Did you know? The Ayyavole-500, a powerful medieval South Indian merchant guild from Aihole, operated across Asia between the 8th and 14th centuries. They managed extensive trade networks, financed production, standardized commercial practices and even maintained private armies to guard pepper and silk shipments across the ocean. They were also major donors to temples and provided loans to local artisans and farmers. In many ways, they functioned like early multinational corporations and mobile banking systems, centuries before modern economic institutions emerged.

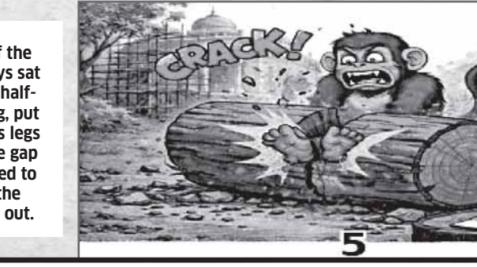
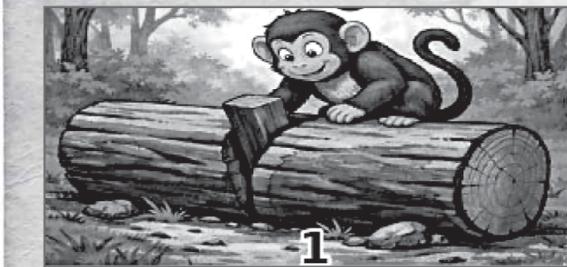


QUIZ Economy, Commerce & Finance

Questions	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
1 "Kosh Mulo Dand" is the official motto of the Income Tax Department of India in Sanskrit. In which famous ancient text are these words found?	Arthashastra	Brihatsamhita	Shukranitisar	Yajnavalkya-smriti
2 Which are the dynasties that first introduced superior cavalry with better horse breeds, reins, saddles and stirrups to India?	Nandas & Mauryas	Sungas & Kanvas	CHOLAS AND PANDYAS	Sakas and Kushans
3 Which Satavahana King is known for his love for overseas trade and navigation, whose coins also depicted a ship on them?	Gautamiputra Satakarni	Vashishtiputra Pulumavi	Yajna Sri Satakarni	Simuka
4 Which of these was a Land Tax levied by the Cheras or Keralaputras from the Tamil Sangam period?	Karai	Vetti	Sungam	Iravu
5 India since ancient past has had trade relations with countries on land as well as sea routes. What is the 11th century Sanskrit text Yukti Kalpataru, written by King Bhoja of the Paramara dynasty particularly known for?	Monsoons & Climate	Maritime Piracy	Shipbuilding Tech	Sea Routes

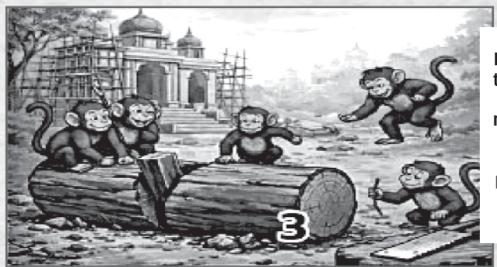
ANSWERS: 1 - A, 2 - D, 3 - C, 4 - A, 5 - C

hitopadesha The Monkey Who Pulled Out a Wedge



Once upon a time, a writer decided to build a temple in his city. While the work was in progress, a carpenter sawed a log in half, put a wedge in between so that it would stay apart and went for lunch.

Suddenly, out came the wedge and the log closed in, trapping the monkey's legs and crushing them.



It so happened that a group of wandering monkeys came to this spot and began to play about, on and around the logs.

MORAL OF THE STORY: It is not wise to poke one's nose into another's affairs.

FROM THE WORLD

US
New submarine joins Naval fleet

The USS Massachusetts officially joined the Navy fleet after a commissioning ceremony, making it the first submarine named after the Bay State. The newest Virginia-class fast attack submarine, which can dive to depths greater than 800 feet, was christened on May 6, 2023, by the ship's sponsor, Sheryl Sandberg, the former COO of Meta. This is the 25th Virginia-Class submarine co-produced by General Dynamics Electric Boat and Newport News Shipbuilding and the fifth US Navy vessel named after Massachusetts. "To be able to take a ship from new construction and watch it be built together by the ship yard, train with our team and bring into Boston Harbor for the first time, it's very amazing," the sub's commanding officer.

NEPAL
Oli remanded in 5 days custody

Nepal's former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli was remanded in judicial custody for five days by the Kathmandu District Court on Sunday, even as protests continue to erupt in various parts of the country over the arrests. Oli and former home minister Ramesh Lekhak were arrested on Saturday for their alleged involvement in suppressing the Gen Z movement of September 8 and 9 last year, in which 76 people, including around two dozen youths, were killed. The arrests came a day after the newly formed Balendra Shah government decided to implement the report of the probe commission into the Gen Z protests in its first cabinet meeting. Lekhak was presented before the district court seeking remand for ten days to carry out further investigation into their alleged involvement in the incidents of killings. He was also remanded in custody for five days.

Working in close coordination with US: Israel military

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Dubai

Israel and the US are "working in very close coordination" to respond after Yemen's Houthi rebels said they had launched missiles toward Israeli targets, Israel military spokesperson Col Nadav Shoshani told reporters on Sunday.

He declined to provide details on operations against the Iran-backed group, which controls parts of Yemen, but said Israel had grown accustomed to confronting repeated attacks from the Houthis, who have for more than two years launched missiles and drones toward Israel and shipping targets in the Red Sea. He also said Israeli mili-

tary statements about nearing completion of top-priority strikes did not mean it was running out of overall targets.

"There are many more groups of targets and there are also many more targets when it comes to (ballistic missile) production," he said.

The Israeli military on Sunday said it has completed a new wave of attacks on Iran, hitting targets in Tehran and other parts of the country.

It also claimed Iran launched several missiles targeting locations in Israel, saying residents in "relevant areas" have received warnings and air defences are working to intercept the incoming fire. Qatari TV



Catholic worshippers carrying their children on their shoulders as they march in a procession during a Palm Sunday Mass in Beirut, Lebanon. The poster in the background reads in Arabic: "Honor, sacrifice and loyalty" AP

station says Rehran office hit by missile Al Araby Television Network said an Israeli missile hit its office building in Iran's capital, Tehran, forcing its live broadcast to stop, and left "extensive damage" to the office.

In a video posted on the channel's social media accounts, one of its reporters showed the damage to the office. Equipment, furniture, and debris could be seen scattered on the ground.

Rubble and damaged vehicles down the street could be seen in the video.

The Saudi Arabia Defence Ministry said it intercepted and destroyed 10 drones attacking it on Sunday morning. Kuwait said its air defence systems intercepted

four drones Sunday morning. Radar systems at the Kuwait International Airport were damaged in a strike Saturday.

Ali Shoeib, a correspondent with Hezbollah's al-Manar TV, Fatima Ftouni, a reporter with the pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV, and her brother Mohammed, a cameraman with the station, were killed in a strike on their car while covering the Israel-Hezbollah war in southern Lebanon.

Israel's military said it had targeted Shoeib, accusing him of being a Hezbollah intelligence operative, without providing evidence. Lebanese officials have condemned the strike as a war crime.

Saudi, Egypt and Turkiye FM in Pak to discuss West Asia tensions

SAJJAD HUSSAIN
Islamabad

Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkiye are in Pakistan on Sunday to attend a two-day quadrilateral summit organised to find a way to de-escalate the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty and Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan arrived in Islamabad on Saturday, while their Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud reached here on Sunday at the invitation of Pakistan Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar. The summit is Pakistan's attempt to broker peace in West Asia. Dar

Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia-Pakistan-Turkiye-Egypt



held bilateral talks with his counterparts from Egypt and Turkiye on Sunday on the sidelines of the summit. He is expected to hold talks with his Saudi counterpart separately as well.

During the visit, the leaders will hold consultations on regional developments and also call on Prime

Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the FO added. In a press statement on Saturday, the FO said the visiting foreign ministers will hold "in-depth discussions on a range of issues, including efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region".

Separately, the FO in a mid-night post on X said that Dar held a telephonic conversa-

tion with Iran Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and "discussed the evolving regional situation and ongoing developments".

Dar said that he emphasised the need for de-escalation, stressing that dialogue and diplomacy remain the only viable path for lasting peace.

In a related development, Dar announced Iran agreed to allow 20 more ships under the Pakistani flag to pass through the Strait of Hormuz. Iran controls the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping route through which the world's 20 per cent of energy is transported. Since the conflict, very few ships are allowed by Iran to cross it.

"I am pleased to share a

great news that the Government of Iran has agreed to allow 20 more ships under the Pakistani flag to pass through the Strait of Hormuz; two ships will cross the Strait daily," he said. "This is a welcome and constructive gesture by Iran and deserves appreciation. It is a harbinger of peace and will help usher stability in the region," he added.

In the post, the Pakistan foreign minister tagged US Vice President JD Vance, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, US Special Envoy to the West Asia Steve Witkoff and Araghchi and concluded it by saying that "dialogue, diplomacy, and such confidence-building measures are the only way forward". (PTI)

Extreme weather claims 17 lives in Afghanistan

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Kabul

Severe flooding, a landslide and thunderstorms in parts of Afghanistan left 17 people dead and 26 injured over the last 24 hours, with more heavy rainfall predicted, authorities said Sunday.

The number of casualties could increase as crews from the country's National Disaster Management Authority survey the affected areas, the authority's spokesman, Yousuf Hammad, said in a statement. Thirteen of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, mostly in the western, central and northwestern parts of the country, were affected.

The severe weather also left 147 homes either completely or partially destroyed, wiped out 80 km of roads and destroyed agricultural land and irrigation canals and businesses, Hammad said. In all, he said, 530 families were affected. Heavy rainfall was also forecast to affect eastern and central parts of the country Monday, and

Hammad warned flooding was also possible in those areas. The disaster management authority warned residents to avoid river banks and areas at risk of flooding in those regions, and ordered local officials to be on standby to provide assistance.

Earlier this year, heavy snowfall and flash floods left dozens of people dead across the country.

Afghanistan is highly vulnerable to extreme weather events, with snow and heavy rain that trigger flash floods, often killing dozens, or even hundreds, of people at a time. In 2024, more than 300 people died in springtime flash floods.

Decades of conflict, coupled with poor infrastructure, a struggling economy, deforestation and the intensifying effects of climate change have amplified the impact of such disasters, particularly in remote areas where many homes are built of mud and offer limited protection against sudden deluges or heavy snowfall.

Iran main threat to Gulf countries, says UAE adviser

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Dubai/Tel Aviv

An adviser to the United Arab Emirates has called for any settlement to the war in the West Asiato include "clear guarantees" that Iranian attacks on its neighbours won't be repeated.

In a social media post, Anwar Gargash said the Iran government has become "the main threat" to the Persian Gulf security.

He called for compensation for attacking civilian and vital infrastructure

Meanwhile, the UAE said its air defence systems are responding to more missile and drone attacks. The defence ministry said sounds heard across the country on Sunday were from interception efforts.

The UAE faced attacks from 16 missiles and 42 drones in the past 24 hours, according to the ministry. Meanwhile Mourners gathered on Sunday in Choueifat, south of Beirut, for the funerals of three journalists killed by an



Anwar Gargash

Israeli airstrike. Ali Shoeib, a correspondent with Hezbollah's al-Manar TV, Fatima Ftouni, a reporter with the pan-Arab al-Mayadeen TV, and her brother Mohammed, a cameraman with the station, were killed in a strike on their car while covering the Israel-Hezbollah war in southern Lebanon.

Dissanayake thanks PM Modi for fuel shipment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Colombo

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Sunday thanked PM Narendra Modi for sending an oil shipment to ease the fuel supply disruptions in the island nation caused by the West Asia conflict.

A shipment of 38,000 MT of fuel, comprising 20,000 MT of diesel and 18,000 MT of petrol, arrived in Colombo yesterday," Dissanayake posted on social media. The Sri Lankan President also thanked External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for his support. "My thanks also to EAM @DrSJaishankar for his close coordination", he said. Sri Lanka also held talks with Jaishankar to seek assistance on energy sustainability in view of the volatile situation in West Asia.

about the fuel supply disruptions Sri Lanka is facing due to the West Asia conflict. Grateful for India's swift support, 38,000 MT of fuel arrived in Colombo yesterday," Dissanayake posted on social media.

The Sri Lankan President also thanked External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for his support. "My thanks also to EAM @DrSJaishankar for his close coordination", he said. Sri Lanka also held talks with Jaishankar to seek assistance on energy sustainability in view of the volatile situation in West Asia.



Racial bias allegations in jury makeup as US top court set to hear death row case of Black inmate

MARK SHERMAN
Washington

Certain names will be familiar to the Supreme Court in the latest case involving a Black death row inmate from Mississippi, with arguments set for Tuesday.

Doug Evans, a now-retired prosecutor with a history of dismissing Black jurors for discriminatory reasons, knocked all but one Black person off the jury that tried and convicted Terry Pitchford.

Judge Joseph Loper allowed it to happen. The state Supreme Court upheld the conviction. Just seven years ago, in a case involving



the same district attorney, trial judge and state high court, the Supreme Court overturned the death sentence and conviction of Curtis Flowers because of what Justice Brett Kavanaugh described as a "relentless, determined effort to rid the

jury of Black individuals." Seven of the current nine justices were on the court then. The Supreme Court has in recent years taken a dim view of defendants' claims in capital cases, especially in the last-minute efforts to stave off execution.

The court in December agreed to hear Pitchford's appeal relating to a claim of racial discrimination that, in other cases, has gained traction even among some conservative justices. Pitchford was sentenced to death for his role in the 2004 killing of Reuben Britt, the owner of the Crossroads Grocery, just outside Grenada in northern

Mississippi. Pitchford, 40, was 18 when he and a friend went to the store to rob it. The friend shot Britt three times, fatally wounding him, but was ineligible for the death penalty because he was younger than 18. Pitchford was tried for capital murder and sentenced to death.

The case has been making its way through the court system for 20 years. In 2023, US District Judge Michael P Mills overturned Pitchford's conviction, holding that the trial judge did not give Pitchford's lawyers enough of a chance to argue that the prosecution was improperly dismissing Black jurors. (AP)

Iranians cross into southern Iraq for cheaper groceries, internet

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Dubai

Iranians crossed into southern Iraq via the Shalamcha border on Sunday, hours after an airstrike hit the Iranian side, cutting power and halting trade for several hours, said Haider Abdul Samad, the crossing's deputy director.

The strike, not the first since the war began, occurred around 3 am, he said, without providing any details on casualties or the strike.

Electricity was restored and trade resumed by mid-morning, but Abdul Samad said such disruptions have become routine amid the



ongoing war. Cross-border movement has significantly declined, though dozens of Iraqis continue to enter Iraq seeking cheaper goods, internet access and brief family visits before returning to nearby cities such as Abadan and Ahwaz. Many described the US-Israel strikes

and frightening but said they would not leave.

"There is no reassurance. We don't know when our homes could be targeted," said Razzak Saghir Al-Mousawi, 71, who entered Iraq from Iran on Sunday. "I am definitely afraid," he added.

Indian arrested in UK after car rams into pedestrians, injuring seven

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
London

An Indian-origin man has been arrested on suspicion of attempted murder after seven people were seriously injured when a car drove into pedestrians in England, police said on Sunday.

The incident occurred on Saturday at 9:30 pm in a city centre street, Friar Gate, Derby, after a car crashed into pedestrians.

The police confirmed that seven people were injured in the incident. "The car, a black Suzuki Swift, struck several people in Friar Gate at about 9:30 pm on Saturday, 28 March," a statement from Derbyshire police said.

"A man in his 30s, who is originally from India, was found a short time after the incident," it said.

"He remains in police custody," it added. The city police have still not revealed the identity of the Indian-origin man arrested on suspicion of attempted murder.



Jerusalem heads into subdued passover, Easter under shadow of Iran war

MELANIE LIDMAN
Jerusalem

Jerusalem's major religious sites are shuttered and families are dejected and exhausted ahead of Passover and Easter as the Iran war enters its fifth week.

The mood stands in stark contrast to a usual spring, when longer days herald a period of family gatherings and an influx of tourists for the major Jewish and Christian holidays.

Metal shutters are drawn on nearly all stores in the Old City, home to key holy sites, and only scattered footsteps echo on deserted stone alleyways. Vast plazas are missing



the typical throngs of faithful and tourists.

Jerusalem has largely escaped past wars, with Israel's enemies appearing to be hesitant to launch missiles near the city's Muslim holy sites. But since Israel and the

US launched strikes on Iran on February 28, Jerusalem has repeatedly come under fire.

Earlier this month, an intercepted Iranian missile sprayed shrapnel on the rooftop of the Greek

Orthodox Patriarchate, just steps from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, one of the most important sites in Christianity. The church, built on what is revered by many Christians as the site of Jesus' crucifixion, burial and resurrection, remains closed under Israeli military guidelines prohibiting gatherings of more than 50 people.

Missile debris also hit a road leading to the Western Wall, the holiest site where Jews can pray.

From his office overlooking the plaza at the Western Wall, now closed to worshippers, Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, lamented the empty plaza. The heart aches

greatly, it bleeds, seeing the Western Wall as it looks now," he said.

The massive priestly blessing for Passover, which usually draws tens of thousands, will take place with just 50 worshippers, Rabinowitz said. That's the maximum allowed to pray together in the enclosed area by the Western Wall under wartime safety guidelines - reminiscent of the restrictions imposed during the coronavirus pandemic.

Easter celebrations cancelled The Latin Patriarchate has cancelled a procession on Sunday commemorating Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the Christian cel-

ebration known as Palm Sunday. Any other year, tens of thousands of Christians from around the world would walk down the narrow, hilly streets toward the Old City, waving palm fronds and singing. Rami Asakrieh, the parish priest for Jerusalem's Catholics, said the community will sorely miss the procession, a deeply emotional and spiritual part of the holiday. But the cancellation is also a reminder that faith comes internally from the heart, not from external actions, he added.

"We are celebrating resurrection, resurrection is from death and winning the pain and the war," he said. "It will

not come by having fear, but by having faith."

A local Catholic high school, empty of students as classes have been cancelled, was also recently hit by debris from an Iranian missile interception, Asakrieh said. A Franciscan priest, Asakrieh is still celebrating Mass for up to 50 parishioners at the Saint Savoir monastery's cavernous marble hall, near the centuries-old complex's music school, the Magnificat Institute. The school was built in what was once the convent's basement, which has been approved by the Israeli military as a suitable shelter. (AP)

North Korea tests new missile engine

HYUNG-JIN KIM
Seoul

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observed a test of an upgraded, high-thrust, solid-fuel engine for weapons and hailed it as a significant development to boost the country's strategic military capability, State media reported Sunday.

While the test was in line with Kim's stated goal of acquiring more agile, hard-to-detect missiles targeting the United States and its allies, some experts speculate North Korea's claim may be an exaggeration.

The Korean Central News Agency reported Kim watched the ground jet test of the engine using a composite carbon fiber material. It said the engine's maximum thrust is 2,500 kilotons, up from about 1,970 kilotons reported in a similar solid-fuel engine test in September.

KCNA reported the test was conducted as part of the country's five-year arms build-up meant to upgrade "strategic strike means," a term referring to nuclear-capable ballistic missiles and other weapons.

Kim said the latest engine test had "great significance in putting the country's strategic military muscle on the highest level," according to KCNA. KCNA did not report exactly when or where the test occurred. North Korea's report on the latest test could be "bluffing" as it

didn't disclose some key information like the engine's total combustion time, said Lee Choon Geun, an honorary research fellow at South Korea's Science and Technology Policy Institute.

When North Korea described the September test as the ninth and final ground test of a solid-fuel engine that it earlier said would be used for intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Observers predicted at the time North Korea would soon test-launch an ICBM loaded with that engine, but it hasn't done so yet.

North Korea's solid-fuel engine development program may be facing some delays or the country might have determined to develop a better engine,

In recent years, North Korea has test-fired a variety of ICBMs demonstrating the potential range to reach the US mainland, including missiles with solid propellants that make detection prior to liftoff more difficult.

The country's older liquid-fuel missiles must be fueled before liftoffs and cannot last long. Some of North Korea's past claims about major weapons test-launches drew outside scepticism. In 2024, North Korea claimed to have successfully tested a multi-warhead missile, but South Korea quickly dismissed the claim as deception to cover up a failed launch.

Some foreign experts say North Korea still faces technological hurdles before it has a functioning ICBM, such



possibly with Russian technical assistance, Lee said.

Cooperation between the countries has deepened in recent years, with the North sending troops and conventional weapons to support Russia's war against Ukraine.

as ensuring its warheads survive the harsh conditions of atmospheric reentry.

But others dispute that assessment given the number of years the country has spent on its nuclear and missile programs. (AP)



Demonstrators holding up their banners as they march across the Memorial Bridge during a No Kings protest in Washington

No Kings rallies draw crowds across US, Europe

ASSOCIATED PRESS
St Paul (Minnesota)

Large crowds protested Saturday against the war in Iran and President Donald Trump's actions in "No Kings" rallies across the US and in Europe.

Minnesota took center stage, with thousands of people standing shoulder-to-shoulder to celebrate resistance to Trump's aggressive immigration enforcement.

Minnesota's flagship event on the Capitol lawn in St. Paul drew Bruce Springsteen as its headliner. He and other speakers praised the state's people for taking to the streets over the winter in opposition to a surge of U.S. Customs and Immigration

Enforcement agents.

Springsteen performed "Streets of Minneapolis," the song he wrote in response to the fatal shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti by federal agents. Springsteen lamented Good and Pretti's deaths but said the state's pushback against ICE has given the rest of the country hope.

"Your strength and your commitment told us that this was still America," he said. "And this reactionary nightmare, and these invasions of American cities, will not stand."

People rallied from New York City, with almost 8.5 million residents in a solidly blue state, to Driggs, a town of fewer than 2,000 people

in eastern Idaho, a state Trump carried with 66 per cent of the vote in 2024. Big, but mostly peaceful, crowds

US organisers have estimated that the first two rounds of No Kings rallies drew more than 5 million people in June and 7 million in October.

This week they told reporters they expected 9 million participants Saturday, though it was too early to tell whether those expectations were met.

Organisers said more than 3,100 events, 500 more than in October, were registered, in all 50 states.

Protests were mostly peaceful, but federal authorities deployed tear gas "due to demonstrators throwing

large concrete blocks, bottles and other objects" in downtown Los Angeles, police said on the social platform X.

LAPD also said protesters were later arrested for failing to disperse.

Earlier in Topeka, Kansas, a rally outside the Statehouse had people impersonating a frog king and Trump as a baby. Wendy Wyatt drove with "Cats Against Trump" sign from Lawrence, 20 miles to the east, and planned to drive back to her hometown for a later rally there.

Wyatt said "there are so many things" about the Trump administration that upset her, but "this is very hopeful to me."

Police arrest Nepal former energy minister

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Kathmandu

Nepal police on Sunday arrested former energy minister and Nepali Congress leader Deepak Khadka in connection with a money laundering case, local media reported.

The Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) of Nepal Police took Khadka into custody on Sunday morning. The Himalayan quoted CIB spokesperson Shiva Kumar Shrestha as saying.

The police detained Khadka for investigation after receiving a request from the Department of Money Laundering Investigation, The Kath Mandu Post reported.



During the Gen Z protest last year, images and videos had surfaced showing burnt fragments of banknotes at

the residences of Khadka and former prime ministers Sher Bahadur Deuba and Pushpa Kamal

Dahal, it added.

The findings were reportedly later confirmed through forensic laboratory tests.

Khadka was accused of receiving financial benefits in exchange for facilitating licences and contracts for projects while serving as the Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation, it said.

The arrest comes a day after former Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli and Former Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak were arrested on charges of their involvement in suppressing the Gen Z movement of September 8 and 9 last year, in which 76 people, including around two dozen youths, were killed.

Mexican Navy locates missing Cuba aid boats

ANDREA RODRIGUEZ
Havana

Two sailboats that went missing carrying humanitarian aid from southern Mexico to Cuba landed in Havana on Saturday afternoon hours after Mexico's navy said it had located the boats days after they went incommunicado because of bad weather.

The vessels carrying at least eight people departed from Isla Mujeres in southern Mexico on March 20 and then lost contact, fuelling concern in Mexico, Cuba and beyond.

In a post on X on Saturday morning, the navy said an aircraft spotted the boats 80 nautical miles northwest of Havana, Cuba. Upon arriving to the island, Adnaan Stumo,

the coordinator of the sailing convoy, said bad weather was responsible for the delay because the boats had to take a longer route and the sailors were "never in any serious danger."

He thanked Mexico's navy, which escorted one of the boats into Havana Bay, for its support and making sure they were OK, and said they were "delighted" to start delivering aid to Cubans on the island.

"We arrive with a simple but powerful message: solidarity with the Cuban people doesn't stop at borders. It crosses oceans," Stumo, a US citizen, said. "Over the past week, our sailboats encountered difficult conditions at sea, during which we lost



contact with convoy coordinators and maritime authorities alike."

The organization Nuestra America Convoy said Friday that based on the speed of the vessels reported to the Cuban maritime authorities,

the window of arrival for the boats in Havana should be between Friday and Saturday and that the boats were led by experienced sailors.

James Schneider, communications director for Progressive International who helped coordinate the Nuestra America convoy to Cuba, thanked Mexican and Cuban authorities for their help on Saturday and said he was "relieved" to hear they were safe.

"The crews are safe, and the vessels are continuing their journey to Havana," he said Saturday morning. "The convoy remains on track to complete its mission, delivering urgently needed humanitarian aid to the Cuban people." (AP)

Chinese artists stage dance drama based on Ramayana in Beijing

KJM VARMA
Beijing

A group of Chinese dancers have staged "Adi Kavya - The First Poem", a dance drama based on the translation of Ramayana by noted Chinese scholar professor Ji Xianlin.

The drama, directed by Chinese Bharatanatyam exponent Jin Shanshan, featured a cast of over 50 local performers and was held at the old Indian Embassy premises.

Outgoing Indian Ambassador Pradeep Kumar Rawat along with officials of the embassy attended the event. Rawat, who will retire later this month, will be suc-



ceeded by the current Indian Ambassador to the UK Vikram Doraiswami.

According to organisers, about 200 people, mostly Chinese and Beijing based diplomatic community took part in the event.

This is the third time the dance drama was staged in

Beijing. It was first staged in January last year.

The embassy last year also organised a symposium on "Sangamam-A Confluence of Indian philosophical traditions" in which noted Chinese scholars spoke on Bhagavad Gita and Indian civilisational values. (PTI)

European Union plans to increase deportations

SAM MCNEIL/GIADA ZAMPANO
Brussels

The European Union is expanding its powers to track, raid and deport migrants to "return hubs" in third countries in Africa and elsewhere, quietly adopting tactics of the Trump administration that have drawn public criticism across the 27-nation bloc.

The EU continues to tighten migration policies after right-wing parties took power in some countries in 2024. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, from the centre-right European People's Party coalition, has said the new measures will prevent a repeat of the 2015 crisis caused by the civil war in



Syria, when about one million people arrived to seek asylum.

"We have learnt the lessons of the past. And today, we are better equipped," von der Leyen has said. The new policies, known as the Pact on Migration and Asylum, go

into effect on June 12.

Far-right parties in Europe have praised the deportation policies of US President Donald Trump and called for the EU to adopt a similar approach.

Human rights groups warn that authorities are already illegally pushing

back migrants at EU borders and hollowing out their legal protections.

Italy provides a model The EU already spends millions of dollars to deter migrants before they reach its shores, and has supported tens of thousands of Africans returning home, voluntarily or by force.

What's envisioned now is an expansion of what Italy has created under Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her "tough on migration" stance. It operates two migrant detention centre for rejected asylum-seekers in Albania. One currently holds at least 90 migrants, said lawmaker Rachele Scarpa, who said she found people confused and scared during a recent visit. (AP)

Pope Leo rejects war justification in Palm Sunday message

NICOLE WINFIELD
Rome

Pope Leo XIV on Sunday rejected claims that God justifies war and prayed especially for Christians in the Middle East during a Palm Sunday Mass before tens of thousands of people in St. Peter's Square.

With the US-Israeli war on Iran entering its second month and Russia's ongoing campaign in Ukraine, Leo dedicated his Palm Sunday homily to insisting that God is the "king of peace" who rejects violence and comforts those who are oppressed. "Brothers and sisters, this is our God: Jesus,

King of Peace, who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war," Leo said. "He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them."

Leaders on all sides of the Iran war have used religion to justify their actions.

US officials, especially Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, have invoked their Christian faith to cast the war as a Christian nation trying to vanquish its foes with military might.

Russia's Orthodox Church, too, has justified Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a "holy war" against a Western world it considers has fallen into evil. Palm Sunday marks



Pope Leo XIV presides over Palm Sunday Mass in St Peter's Square at the Vatican

Jesus' triumphant entrance into Jerusalem in the time leading up to his crucifixion, which Christians observe on Good Friday, and resurrec-

tion on Easter Sunday.

In a special blessing at the end of Mass, Leo said he was praying especially for Christians in the Middle East

who are "suffering the consequences of an atrocious conflict. In many cases, they cannot live the rites of these holy days." Earlier Sunday, the Latin Patriarchate said Jerusalem police prevented the Catholic church's top leadership from entering the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

It was the first time in centuries that church leaders were prevented from celebrating Palm Sunday at the place where Christians believe Jesus was crucified, the Patriarchate said.

Leo said that during Holy Week, Christians cannot forget how many people around the world are suffering as Christ did. "Their trials

appeal to the conscience of all. Let us raise our prayers to the Prince of Peace so that he may support people wounded by war and open concrete paths of reconciliation and peace," Leo said.

A Holy Week that recalls Pope Francis' suffering When Holy Week opened last year, Pope Francis was still recovering at the Vatican after a five-week hospital stay for double pneumonia. He had delegated the liturgical celebrations to others, but rallied on Easter Sunday to greet the faithful from the loggia of St. Peter's Square. Most poignantly, he then made what became his final pope-mobile loop around the

piazza. Francis died the following morning, Easter Monday, after suffering a stroke. His nurse, Massimiliano Strappetti, later told Vatican Media that Francis had told him: "Thank you for bringing me back to the square" for the final salute.

During his 12-year pontificate, Francis famously celebrated the Holy ritual by travelling to Rome-area prisons and refugee centres to wash the feet of people on society's margins. His aim was to drive home the ritual's message of service and humility, and he would frequently muse during his Holy Thursday homilies, "Why them and not me?" (AP)

Mongolia ruling party picks new PM candidate

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Ulaanbaatar

Mongolia's ruling party selected a new candidate for prime minister on Sunday after the last head of Government, Zandanshatar Gombojav, resigned after only nine months on the job.

Uchral Nyam-Osor, the current party chairman who is serving as speaker of the Parliament, was nominated at a meeting of the Mongolian People's Party, according to state news agency Montsame. Uchral first joined the MPP in 2009, and is seen as a compromise candidate amid different party factions.



Uchral Nyam-Osor

Zandanshatar's resignation came after one of his senior ministers faced allegations of corruption. He also faced a political boycott from the opposition Democratic Party, which has refused to attend parliament sessions since earlier this month, citing concerns over a concentration of power within the ruling party.

The turmoil is likely to exacerbate distrust in the Government.



PROSPECT

NCLAT rejects BSE pleas on Demat account freezing during insolvency



The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has dismissed the appeals filed by BSE, where the leading bourse challenged the power of the NCLT to defreeze the Demat accounts of businesses undergoing insolvency resolution and liquidation process. A two-member NCLAT bench said the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has the jurisdiction under section 60 (5) of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC) to entertain applications for defreezing of the Demat accounts during insolvency and pass a direction also. "...the impugned orders have been passed in valid exercise of such jurisdiction," the NCLAT said while setting aside the two petitions filed by BSE.

BSE had contended that the NCLT does not have any jurisdiction under Section 60 (5) of the IBC Code to adjudicate on the issues, which are within the Securities Law Framework and SEBI Circulars. The issues pertain to two companies - Future Corporate Resources and Liz Traders and Agents - where their Demat accounts were frozen by BSE due to default committed by them in paying the annual listing fee, among others, as non-compliance with LODR Regulations and unpaid dues from fines levied for such non-compliance. The Resolution Professionals/liquidators of both the Corporate Debtors (companies facing CIRP) approached the NCLT after BSE refused to defreeze the Demat accounts of these companies, as they intended to sell the shares held in those accounts and to recover money from the proceeds of such sale.

AIRIA to host India Rubber Expo

The All India Rubber Industries Association (AIRIA) will host the 12th edition of the India Rubber Expo 2026 from April 7 to 10 at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, positioning the Capital as a hub for global rubber industry engagement. Touted as Asia's largest rubber industry exhibition, the four-day event is expected to attract over 400 exhibitors and nearly 45,000 trade visitors from around 14 countries, alongside dedicated international pavilions. Industry stakeholders including manufacturers, traders, and machinery companies will converge to showcase innovations, explore partnerships, and assess emerging market trends. The event will run alongside the International Rubber Conference (IRC) from April 7 to 9. AIRIA President Anay Gupta said the upcoming edition will bring together leading players and experts from across the value chain. "With expanded scale and global outreach, IRE 2026 will act as a catalyst for innovation, partnerships, and sustained growth in the rubber industry," he added.

Jio Fin Services expects to begin life, general insurance business in 2026

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Mumbai

Jio Financial Services (JFS) is hoping to start general and life insurance businesses this year, a top company official has said.

The financial services company does not have any immediate plan to get into the unsecured and consumer durable lending businesses.

"We hope to start insurance manufacturing in 2026, subject to regulatory approvals," its chief executive and managing director Hitesh Sethia told PTI recently.

The company, which recently entered the reinsurance business, along with its equal joint venture associate Allianz, will partner with the French company for general and life insurance businesses as well.

Sethia said in parallel, the company is working towards building the necessary teams



for the insurance foray.

JFS, which is promoted by entities linked to the richest Indian Mukesh Ambani, has entered lending businesses, like assisting home buyers, asset management, wealth management and reinsurance, either by itself or through partnerships.

Explaining its strategy in the lending business, Sethia said JFS also has its own boundaries based on risk and capital, and at present, it is concentrating on serving

hinted that there are no immediate plans and increasing the profitability will be the focus for now.

"As our NBFC's business and profitability grow in line with our current risk appetite, and we learn more about our customers and the business, we will, at the appropriate time, evaluate exploring newer lending solutions at different levels of the risk spectrum," he said.

The company is already distributing third-party unsecured lending products, including personal loans and credit cards, through its agentic neural marketplace on the Jiofinance App.

When asked about the newly expanded offerings on the app, Sethia said that it is showing very good traction, with users owing to the hyper-personalised nature of the offerings and the new conversational user interface.

Vedanta chief claims Jaypee asset bid reversal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Mining baron Anil Agarwal on Sunday claimed Vedanta had received written confirmation that it had won a bid for a Jaypee Group asset, but the decision was subsequently reversed, without elaborating on the reasons.

In a social media post, Agarwal said Vedanta was "declared the highest bidder publicly" to acquire Jaiprakash Associates Ltd (JAL) through the insolvency process. Attaching a source-based media report about the price opening meeting of lenders of the insolvent real estate company on September 5, Agarwal said, "It was a transparent process. We were informed in writing that we had won".

"But life is never so simple. After some days, the decision was changed," he added.

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group was the only other bidder for JAL, the flagship company of the Jaypee Group.

The Committee of Creditors (CoC) of JAL evaluated the rival bids and subsequently went to the insolvency court NCLT for approval of the Adani bid.

The NCLT's Allahabad bench approved the bid, against which Agarwal's Vedanta group has filed a



Anil Agarwal and Gautam Adani

challenge before the appellate body NCLAT.

National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT), in the second hearing last week, did not stay NCLT's decision approving Adani's bid for the JAL. Agarwal said he did not want to go into the details of the reversal of his group's winning bid. "That is for the right forum" to decide.

Agarwal said the episode brought back memories of his interactions with Jaypee group founder Jaiprakash Gaur, who had earlier expressed a desire that the group's assets be passed on to "safe hands" and carried forward with the right intent.

"We have no attachment to

this asset. If it comes, it is God's grace. If it goes, that is also his wish," he said, adding that commitments made in line with "dharma" should not be taken back.

He said Vedanta would present facts through appropriate channels and follow due process, drawing on teachings from the Bhagavad Gita. JAL, which has high-quality assets and business interests spanning real estate, cement manufacturing, hospitality, power and engineering & construction, was admitted to insolvency in June 2024 after it defaulted on payments of loans aggregating ₹57,185 crore.

In November last year, the

CoC approved the resolution plan by business tycoon Adani to acquire JAL.

Adani Enterprises got the maximum 89 per cent votes from creditors, followed by Dalmia Cement (Bharat) and Vedanta Group.

The CoC, however, defended its decision, saying the process complied with all insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) rules. They maintained that no bidder has a guaranteed right to win, even if it offers the highest value.

They said plans were evaluated on multiple factors, including upfront cash, feasibility, and execution, not just headline value.

Adani's bid was preferred

as it offered around ₹6,000 crore upfront and faster payments within two years, compared to Vedanta's longer payment timeline of up to five years.

Lenders also rejected Vedanta's revised offer, saying it was submitted after bidding had closed and accepting it would require restarting the process. They added that all bidders were given equal opportunity and multiple chances to improve their bids.

Earlier this month, on March 17, the NCLT approved Adani Enterprises Ltd's Rs 14,535 crore bid to acquire JAL through the insolvency process. This was challenged by Vedanta before the NCLAT.

On March 24, the NCLAT declined any interim stay over the Vedanta Group's plea against the order passed by the NCLT approving the bid by the Adani Group to acquire JAL.

The NCLAT two-member bench sought a response from the CoC of JAL within a week. It listed the matter on April 10 for the next hearing.

The Vedanta group has filed two appeals before the NCLAT. In the first one, it has challenged the validity of the resolution plan, and in the second one, it has challenged the approval of the plan by the CoC and the adjudicating authority (NCLT).

During the proceedings of

the NCLAT on March 24, counsel representing Vedanta contended that it was declared the highest bidder by JAL's Committee of Creditors.

Vedanta's bid value was ₹16,726 crores, and Adani Enterprises' bid was ₹14,535 crore.

The CoC's discretion in the selection of a resolution plan must be exercised only in line with the applicable law and the governing documents, Vedanta's counsel contended before the NCLAT.

Jaypee Group firm JAL has major real estate projects like Jaypee Greens in Greater Noida, a part of Jaypee Greens Wishtown in Noida (both on the outskirts of the national capital), and the Jaypee International Sports City, located near the upcoming Jewar International Airport.

It also has three commercial/industrial office spaces in Delhi-NCR, while its hotel division has five properties in Delhi-NCR, Mussoorie, and Agra.

JAL has four cement plants in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, and a few leased limestone mines in Madhya Pradesh.

It also has investments in subsidiaries, including Jaiprakash Power Ventures Ltd, Yamuna Expressway Tolling Ltd, Jaypee Infrastructure Development Ltd, and several other companies.

Airport360 Expo 2026 to spotlight India's aviation boom as passenger traffic heads toward 300 million

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

India's aviation sector is entering a decisive expansion phase, with passenger traffic projected to reach 300 million domestic travellers by 2030 and commercial aircraft fleets expected to nearly double to around 1,100 aircraft by 2027. Against this backdrop, Airport360 Expo 2026 will be held on April 23-24, 2026 at the Bombay Exhibition Centre, Mumbai.

The event will bring together airport operators, airlines,

aviation authorities, technology providers and infrastructure developers to examine the next phase of airport development and passenger mobility in India.

The exhibition is expected to host over 2,200 attendees, 50 plus exhibitors and over 100 aviation professionals and decision makers, along with participation from over 10 countries including Germany, Nepal, Bangkok, Singapore, Oman, positioning the event as a key industry platform for collaboration across the global aviation

value chain.

Placing the exhibition in the context of India's aviation growth trajectory, Taher Patrawala, Managing Director, Media Fusion, said, "India's aviation sector is witnessing one of the most dynamic growth phases globally. Over the next two decades, the industry will require close to 37,000 pilots and 38,000 maintenance technicians, highlighting the need for coordinated innovation across infrastructure, technology and human capital."

West Asia crisis: CII outlines 12 point industry agenda; commends Govt response

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Industry body CII on Sunday commended the Government for its "swift, coordinated and well-calibrated response" to the disruptions arising from the West Asia crisis, and laid out a 12-point agenda for India Inc to complement these efforts.

CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said while the policy response has mitigated immediate risks, the evolving situation requires continued coordination between the Government and industry.

"The policy approach has correctly focused on maintaining production continuity and supporting viable enterprises," Banerjee noted. "The next phase requires industry to build on this foundation



with practical and responsible actions."

Banerjee emphasised that the Government's response has been timely, measured and reassuring.

It reflects a whole of Government approach that has focused on keeping supply chains functional, supporting exporters, protecting households and maintaining macroeconomic stability.

Foreign investors dump record ₹1.14 lakh crore in March on West Asia conflict

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Foreign investors have pulled out ₹1.14 lakh crore (about \$12.3 billion) from domestic equities in March, making it the worst monthly outflow, weighed down by escalating tensions in West Asia, a weakening rupee and concerns over the impact of elevated crude oil prices on India's growth.

With one trading session still remaining in the month, the outflows could extend further. The previous record for the highest monthly exodus stood at ₹94,017 crore in October 2024.

With the latest withdrawals, total foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) outflow has reached ₹1.27 lakh crore so far in 2026, according to NSDI data.

As per the data, FPIs have remained persistent sellers throughout March, offload-



ing equities worth ₹1,13,380 crore in the cash market till March 27.

The sharp sell-off follows a strong rebound in February, when foreign FPIs pumped in ₹22,615 crore, the highest monthly inflow in 17 months.

Market participants attributed the sustained selling pressure to global macroeconomic headwinds and heightened geopolitical

uncertainty. VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Investments, said the weakness in global equity markets following the war in West Asia, the steady depreciation of the rupee, fears of decline in remittances from the Gulf region and concerns surrounding the impact of high crude prices on India's growth and corporate earnings contributed to the sustained

selling by FPIs. Additionally, the selling has been driven by a combination of elevated US bond yields and tightening global liquidity, which have improved the relative attractiveness of developed market fixed income, Himanshu Srivastava, Principal - Manager Research at Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

While Indian market valuations have corrected alongside the recent market decline, they continue to remain relatively elevated compared to several emerging market peers, which may still be prompting selective profit booking and reallocation, he added.

Moreover, FPIs were sellers in other emerging markets, too, like Taiwan and South Korea. There is a risk-off trend in equity markets globally after the war broke out in West Asia.

Planters' body ask Assam Govt to address 'administrative' concerns for providing land patta

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

Planters' body, Tea Association of India (TAI), has urged the Assam Government to address its concerns regarding the transfer of housing line land to workers under a new amended law.

While appreciating the Government's intent to provide land patta to the tea garden workers, it called for clear guidelines in the matter so that the "administrative" concerns are taken care of.

Speaking at the 37th Biennial General Meeting of TAI, Assam Branch in Jorhat on Saturday, TAI president Shailja Mehta said the concerns of the industry should be considered before implementation of the new law.

She pointed out that in many cases, tea garden land

is mortgaged as collateral with banks, and transfer may create financial and legal complications. Further, the Land Ceiling Act applies only to land and not to company-built assets such as labour quarters.

"Adequate compensation should therefore be ensured under the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013," Mehta stressed.

The TAI president also pointed out that under the Occupational Safety Health and Working Conditions Code 2020 (earlier Plantations Labour Act 1951), management remains responsible for housing and welfare amenities.

"Transfer of land without corresponding legal amend-



ments may lead to continued liability on management. We therefore sincerely request the State Government to address these issues before implementation," she added.

Echoing her, the chairman of Assam branch of TAI G S

Pahwa said, "Our concerns that arose were more administrative in nature given the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Condition Code. We look forward to clear guidelines from the Assam Government as to how to

amalgamate the two legislations for the benefit of the industry and the state."

"We respectfully submit that balanced and consultative policymaking will best serve the long-term interests of tea garden workers and the tea industry," the chairman added.

TAI president Mehta further said the recent changes under the four Labour Codes implemented from November 2025 are likely to significantly impact the tea industry, where nearly 60 per cent of the cost of production is labour-related.

She said that the code on wages limits the recognition of in-kind benefits to 15 per cent of total remuneration for minimum wage calculation.

However, as the tea industry bears substantial responsibility for providing welfare

benefits in kind, the TAI has urged that all in-kind benefits be fully recognised for wage computation purposes.

Mehta also requested the Government to release all pending subsidy payments under the Assam Tea Industries Special Incentive Scheme (ATISIS 2020), as the Finance Department has issued a notice that the benefits will be disbursed only subject to annual budget availability, with no carry-forward provision.

The TAI president also expressed apprehension that the country's tea export could face "pressure" if the ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region continue, especially the closure of the Straits of Hormuz.

She said the country's tea exports had performed "exceptionally well in 2025,

reaching a record level of about 280 million kg, with export earnings rising to nearly ₹8,488 crore."

It was largely supported by strong demand from key markets such as Iran, Iraq, United Arab Emirates and China, and a significant portion of the growth was driven by increased exports of Orthodox teas to the Middle East, which continues to remain a crucial destination for Assam teas.

"However, the ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region are a matter of concern. Any disruption in these traditional markets could affect export volumes, payment cycles, shipping routes, and price realisations," Mehta said.

"Amidst reports of closure of Straits of Hormuz, the prospect of Indian Tea

exports do look grim as of now," the TAI president added.

She stressed that, given the industry's growing dependence on these destinations in recent years, there is a genuine apprehension that India's export performance in 2026 may face pressure if the situation persists.

"In this context, there is a need for continued policy support and market diversification efforts to safeguard the momentum achieved in tea exports and protect the interests of producers," Mehta stressed.

Among measures sought by the planters' body is minimum sustainable price for Made Tea, address quality issues, including that of low-cost imported teas, promotion of Indian Teas, and agritech innovation.



BRIEFLY

US team gets a dressing down from Belgium



Belgium gave a dressing down to a US team with big World Cup dreams. The Americans allowed five straight goals in a deflating 5-2 loss to the Red Devils in a friendly on Saturday night. The US had not lost by three in a home game in which it scored the opening goal since an 8-1 defeat to England in 1959, according to Opta. "We cannot arrive with the wrong idea that we are so good, we are so handsome, we are so well dressed and we are Americans," said US coach Mauricio Pochettino, a former Argentina defender. "Always after the games when the team wins, (it's) because we fight, we were aggressive, we were intense, yes? When we drop in that intensity - we saw today." Preparing to host the World Cup this summer, the US entered with a five-game unbeaten streak and Pochettino's message to players had been they can win soccer's top title for the first time. Weston McKennie's 39th-minute goal from Antonee Robinson's corner kick put the 15th-ranked US ahead of the world's No. 9 team. But then the US level lagged. "We didn't defend our box well enough," said Matt Turner, who returned to the US goal for the first time since June.

Canada battles back to tie Iceland 2-2



Jonathan David scored twice from the penalty spot in the second half before Tajon Buchanan was shown a red card as Canada battled back from a 2-0 deficit to salvage a 2-2 draw with Iceland in an international men's soccer friendly on Saturday. Buchanan was sent off in the 80th minute for an elbow to the head of Iceland midfielder Mikael Egill Ellertsson as the ball was rolling out of play. The sequence marked the third straight game, and fourth time in the last eight, Canada has seen red. "We're physical, we play hard, but we're not a dirty team," said Canada coach Jesse Marsch, who disagreed with Buchanan's dismissal. "I'm not worried about developing a reputation, but certainly cards like that can change momentum in tournaments." Orri Steinn Oskarsson had both goals for Iceland. The 29th-ranked Canadians are preparing to co-host this summer's World Cup with the United States and Mexico, while Iceland - No. 74 when FIFA's last official list was released in mid-January - failed to qualify. Oskarsson took advantage of a bad pass from Canadian centre back Kamal Miller before moving in alone and beating goalkeeper Dayne St. Clair in the ninth minute for a 1-0 lead. The striker for Spanish club Real Sociedad doubled the advantage in the 21st after Ellertsson beat right back Niko Sigur to a ball in midfield. Oskarsson took a quick feed on the run and steadied himself before another nice finish.

Kimi Antonelli wins Japanese Grand Prix

STEPHEN WADEAP
■ Suzuka (Japan)

Italian 19-year-old Kimi Antonelli of Mercedes has won his second consecutive Formula 1 race, taking Sunday's Japanese Grand Prix ahead of Oscar Piastri of McLaren. Antonelli finished a comfortable 13.7 seconds ahead of the Australian.

Charles Leclerc of Ferrari was third with George Russell of Mercedes in fourth. McLaren's Lando Norris was fifth with sixth for Lewis Hamilton of Ferrari at the Suzuka circuit in central Japan on a clear, sunny spring afternoon. Antonelli won the first F1 race of his career two weeks ago in China, the

second-youngest winner in history. The youngest was Max Verstappen in 2016 at only 18. The young Italian also won from pole-position in China, the youngest to ever claim that spot.

Antonelli has 72 points in three races and now becomes the youngest to ever lead the season drivers' standings. "It's too early to think about the championship but we're in a good way," Antonelli said. "I got a terrible start, I just need to check what happened."

"Definitely it's been (the starts) a weak point this year and I need to improve that because you can easily win or lose races with that," Antonelli added. Mercedes



continue to dominate Russell was second in China two weeks ago and won the season-opening race in Australia, which means Mercedes has victories in the first three races of 2026 - and Antonelli has two of them. Antonelli started from

the pole with Russell alongside, but neither got a great start with Piastri beating both to the first turn and holding the early lead.

Antonelli's and Mercedes again showed they are best at mastering the new car configuration for 2026, which fea-

tures a 50-50 split between internal combustion power and electrical battery power.

The cars are also lighter, narrower and shorter than last season with many drivers complaining about the most radical changes in a decade.

Antonelli's lucky break: Piastri got a great start. Antonelli didn't and wound up in sixth after the first lap but clawed his way back. He had the lead on the 22nd lap when Hass driver Oliver Bearman lost control and hit a tire barrier, triggering the safety car. Bearman limped out of the car but was reported later to be in good shape by medical officials. Antonelli said he got a bit "lucky" with the deployment of the safety

car. "I don't know what would have happened, what the outcome would have been without the safety car," Antonelli said. "But that definitely made life a lot easier."

Piastri also wondered what might have been, but acknowledged Mercedes probably had too much pace. "It's a shame we never got to see what would have happened, but for us at this point to be disappointed about finishing second - is a pretty good place to be."

Piastri did not even start the season's first two races. He crashed on a warm-up lap prior to his home race in Australia, and both McLaren's cars failed to start in China with electrical faults.

Sabalenka beats Gauff to win Miami Open

MARC BERMAN
■ Miami Gardens (USA)

Aryna Sabalenka beat Coco Gauff in the Miami Open women's singles final 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 on Saturday.

The world No. 1 overpowered fourth-ranked Gauff in the first and third sets with sizzling groundstroke winners and became the first player to accomplish the 'Sunshine Double' - winning Indian Wells followed by Miami in the same season - since Iga Swiatek in 2022.

It was Sabalenka's second straight title at the Miami Open, Gauff's hometown tournament, and put her ahead of Gauff in their head-to-head record, 7-6. "You've pushed me to be a better



player," Sabalenka said during the ceremony, before adding about the crowd, "You always bring a full stadium." The match lasted 2 hours, 11 minutes and ended on Gauff getting broken for the fourth time

with a wide backhand. Gauff fought back to force the third set, but couldn't maintain the momentum she appeared to get from the deafening crowd supporting her. "It sucks not to come out with a better result but I had a lot of joy this week," Gauff said to the crowd. "You guys brought energy every day this week."

Sabalenka at times was frustrated by the fan noise, including when someone yelled "out" during a long rally. She used a curse word at the fan and the chair umpire warned the crowd, but also gave a code violation to Sabalenka. "I shouldn't be that rude, but come on, you cannot do that," Sabalenka said at the ceremony. "So let's agree

we were both wrong, so sorry." Gauff's off-and-on serve created seven double faults while Sabalenka registered none. Sabalenka broke Gauff in the first game of the third set, helped by a Gauff double fault and an unforced error. On break point, Sabalenka crunched a backhand winner. "I was disappointed about that first game of the third set up 30-0 with momentum," Gauff said.

"It was an important game to win in that moment." The match was attended by Kai Trump, President Donald Trump's granddaughter and a golfer at the University of Miami. She posted a photo with Sabalenka at the tournament on social media Friday.

Indian boxers seek strong start in Asian meet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia)

Indian boxers will aim for a good show at the Asian Championships, beginning here on Monday, as they look to make the most of their opportunities in a packed season and secure direct berths for the multi-sport events later this year.

The tournament marks the first major outing in a loaded season that includes the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow (July-August), the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan (September-October) and the World Boxing Cup Finals in Uzbekistan.

Apart from the medal rush, the championships assume added significance as finalists will earn direct



qualification for the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games, in line with the Boxing Federation of India's selection policy.

The Indian team has been acclimatising in Mongolia for the past 15 days, training in multinational camps and

sparing with boxers from Mongolia, China, Jordan and Thailand. The women's challenge will be led by Olympic medalist Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), two-time world champion Nikhat Zareen (51kg), reigning world champions Minakshi Hooda (48kg) and

jaismine Lamboria (57kg). While Lovlina comes in after a gold-winning effort at the Boxam International in Spain in February, it will be the first international outing since November for Zareen, Hooda and Jaismine. "These Asian Championships will be a strong test. We know that Asian boxing has improved the level over the last decade, many of the world's strongest teams are in Asia," women's head coach Santiago Nieva told PTI.

"Our history tells us that we can win medals. So, we are targeting several medals, but for us it is important to have people in the final, and there's not many times we've had more than one gold, and obviously a gold medal makes a difference."

Jammu International Marathon draws massive turnout



MOHIT KANDHARI
■ Jammu

The City of Temples on Sunday hosted the inaugural edition of Jammu's first-ever international marathon, marking its entry into the league of India's major cities that organise large-scale running events.

Braving incessant rain, thousands of enthusiastic runners from across India and abroad participated in the Jammu Marathon 2026, which featured a half-marathon along with 10K and 5K categories. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah flagged off the event from Maulana Azad Stadium minutes before sunrise. Abdullah himself joined the participants, running alongside celebrities including Milind Soman and Gul Panag, to promote fitness, a healthy lifestyle, and unity.

His sons, Zahir and Zamir, and Satish Sharma, Minister for Youth Services & Sports, were also seen participating in the marathon. Prominent citizens, local athletes, social media influencers, Legislators, MLAs and senior administrative officers were also seen actively participating in the event. The marathon, themed around pride, honour, fitness, and awareness against drug abuse, saw strong participation with over 4000 domestic

runners and international entrants. Musical performances by Kamal Khan and Prateek Narula added to the festive atmosphere.

Describing the occasion as a "historic day" for Jammu, Joint Director Tourism Aijaz Qaiser said, despite the rain, people have come out in huge numbers, which reflects the rising fitness culture in Jammu. Highlighting the theme "Temples to Trails," the Chief Minister said the marathon is a step towards positioning Jammu as a hub for fitness tourism and cultural exploration. Actress Gul Panag praised the enthusiasm of both runners and organisers, highlighting the impressive turnout for the inaugural edition.

Fitness icon Milind Soman, expressing his delight at being part of the event, described it as a significant milestone for the region. He said the large-scale marathon marks a positive beginning and hoped that such initiatives would continue to encourage people to embrace running and active living.

Meanwhile, speaking at the felicitation ceremony of Jammu Marathon, Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha said that the Jammu Marathon symbolises the profound transformation Jammu and Kashmir has embraced since 2019.

Tiger Woods is facing an uncertain future

DOUG FERGUSONAP
■ Stuart (USA)

Tiger Woods got out of jail and into the passenger seat of a dark SUV, his face as vacant as his mug shot as he was driven away to a future again filled with so much uncertainty.

The next step legally is facing charges of driving while intoxicated, damage to property and refusal to submit to a urine test, which led to him spending eight hours Friday in the Martin County jail some 15 miles from his home on Jupiter Island, Florida. His manager at Excel Sports, Mark Steinberg, did not respond to a request for comment Saturday on Woods' arrest. As for golf, this comes at a bad time for the



sport's most influential player.

Woods had said earlier in the week he was trying to get in shape for the Masters on April 9-12, though that was looking unlikely. He turned 50 at the end of last year. "This body, it doesn't recover like it did when it was 24, 25," Woods said earlier this week. He also was days away

from a decision on whether to be the next US Ryder Cup captain for the 2027 matches in Ireland. Two officials from the PGA of America did not immediately return phone calls from The Associated Press seeking comment.

And on April 5, he is scheduled to be in Augusta, Georgia, with Masters chair-

man Fred Ridley to celebrate a project at "The Patch," the nickname of a municipal golf course where Woods' design team created a short course to go along with a major upgrade to the public course.

Woods also is the central figure as chairman of the Future Competition Committee that is reshaping the PGA Tour model of tournaments. Tour CEO Brian Rolapp predicted meaningful progress this summer.

The PGA Tour declined to comment on Woods' arrest. Now everything is on hold while Woods sorts through his second arrest in the last nine years, and his fourth car crash dating to 2009.

Woods waited until the summer of 2024 before deciding against being Ryder Cup

captain for the 2025 matches in New York. The Associated Press reported in February the PGA of America had a soft deadline of the end of March for him to decide this time.

The PGA of America already is under scrutiny because of the unruly fan behavior at Bethpage Park last September, and this is not a time for another misstep. One person with knowledge of the process said the PGA of America has a backup plan of four potential candidates for the Ryder Cup committee to review if Woods declines - or if the PGA of America moves on. Martin County Sheriff John Budensiek said Woods' Land Rover was going at a "high speed" when it clipped the trailer of a pressure cleaning truck and flipped on its side.

Weightlifter Isak overcomes injury concerns to clinch KITG glory

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Raipur

On the verge of quitting weightlifting after losing both his parents before he was 16, Mizoram's Isak Malsawmtluanga overcame a back injury to clinch the men's 60kg gold medal at the Khelo India Tribal Games (KITG) here. Isak came up with a strong showing in the clean and jerk, after finishing the snatch section in second place, to clinch the gold medal with a total of 235 kg and was immediately embraced by his uncle, who has been the guiding force behind the teenager.

The personal tragedy had left the 18-year-old devastat-



ed but the support from his childhood coach and his uncle and aunt salvaged his sporting career.

Isak's father Heming Malsawmtluanga had died in a bike accident in 2018, the same year he began training to become a weightlifter. This meant that the only

son in the family was left wondering whether he should continue to train or focus on earning money and support the family.

"At that time my childhood coach Soma motivated me a lot and asked me to continue weightlifting," Isak told SAI Media.

Japan's 1-0 victory over Scotland

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Glasgow

Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu hailed his team's tactical flexibility after a late Junya Ito strike secured a 1-0 victory over Scotland in a pre-World Cup friendly at Hampden Park, leaving the home side facing a chorus of boos.

In a key warm-up for their eighth successive World Cup appearance, the Samurai Blue overcame a bright Scotland start to dominate the second half. Substitute Ito proved the difference in the 84th minute with a clinical finish from 12 yards to settle a tight contest. While Scotland manager Steve Clarke admitted he was "surprised and disappointed" by the nega-



tive reaction from the Tartan Army, Moriyasu focused on his side's defensive discipline and late clinical edge.

"I am very pleased to play in such a fantastic atmosphere," Moriyasu said. "It was a tough game and we managed to keep a clean sheet. Toward the end, we changed the setup to get the

goal. It was great for building confidence." The visitors survived an early scare when Zion Suzuki pushed a Scott McTominay effort onto the post, but Japan gradually asserted control. Kodai Sano clipped the bar before the break, and the pressure eventually told when Ito got the breakthrough.

Mary Kom considers move into professional boxing

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Olympic bronze medalist and six-time world champion Indian boxer M C Mary Kom on Sunday said she is considering a move into professional boxing.

The 43-year-old, who became the first Indian woman boxer with an Olympic medal when she won bronze in the 2012 London Games, is past the age eligibility to compete on the amateur circuit.

"What can I say about the high points? Winning six World Championships was incredible. Although I reached a stage where age restrictions prevented me from competing further in



amateur boxing for the country, a new opportunity has surfaced in professional boxing," she said on the sidelines of Sundays on Cycle event. "I am currently taking some time to consider it. I am working hard and trying to make a comeback to show

people what I can still do.

Widely considered one of the greatest amateur boxers, Mary Kom also underlined her commitment to grassroots development through her academy in Manipur.

"Personally, I am very involved with my academy.

I travel back and forth quite often, sometimes it becomes difficult due to the current situation in Manipur; things can get tough there.

"However, I remain deeply committed. Even when I can't be there physically, I manage and oversee the academy through phone calls. My dream is to stay fit for as long as I can, regardless of age," she said.

As India eyes hosting major global events such as the 2030 Commonwealth Games and possibly the 2036 Olympics, Mary Kom stressed the importance of sport in building international recognition. "Sports development is absolutely essential. Without sports, it is difficult for a country to build a global

reputation. Sports are what propel a nation forward," she said. She also praised government efforts to strengthen sports infrastructure and promote talent identification, particularly through initiatives such as Khelo India and Fit India Movement.

"While we shouldn't compare it directly to the scale of the IPL yet, boxing infrastructure has improved significantly, the government has introduced fantastic facilities through movements like Khelo India and Fit India. There is a growing concern for fitness across the nation now." Kom highlighted the inclusion of tribal youth in national programmes, pointing to developments in Chhattisgarh.



Rohit, Ricketlon's blistering fifties power MI to 6-wicket win over KKR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Mumbai Indians rode on blistering half-centuries from former skipper Rohit Sharma (78) and Ryan Rickelton (81) to comfortably beat Kolkata Knight Riders by six wickets thus breaking the hoodoo of not winning any of their opening games in last 13 editions of the IPL on Sunday.

While they had lost each of their first matches of an IPL edition since beating Chennai Super Kings by eight wickets in 2012, five-time winners Mumbai Indians hit full throttle in their chase of 221, replying with 224/4 in 19.1 overs.

Playing his first T20 game since last IPL, former India

and Mumbai Indians captain Rohit appeared to have sharpened his game a few notches as he smacked a 38-ball 78 with six sixes and as many fours.

At the other end, Ryan Rickelton made a belligerent 81 off 43 balls with eight sixes and four fours while making the most of two lifelines, helping Mumbai Indians finally collect those elusive two points from the first game. Rohit was adroit in not just picking the lengths of the ball early or with his movement at the crease, but with some of the shots that he executed to perfection.

Like against the lanky Blessing Muzarabani, the 38-year-old danced down the



Mumbai Indians' Rohit Sharma, right, and Ryan Rickelton run between the wickets during an Indian Premier League 2026 T20 cricket match between Mumbai Indians and Kolkata Knight Riders, at the Wankhede Stadium PTI

track to spank a short ball over extra cover for a six in the fourth over, or when he timed the ball as sweetly as it could be against Varun Chakravarty to send it sailing over the cover for another six in the next.

And those quintessential Rohit's hits over cover were on display too, one of which was unleashed effortlessly against Kartik Tyagi in the sixth as Rohit completed his half-century off a mere 23 balls. At the other end, Rickelton blissfully took down KKR's mystery spin duo of Sunil Narine and Chakravarty, targeting the leg-side boundaries to clear the ropes.

Rohit and Rickelton put on 148 off 72 balls to put MI in the

driver's seat before falling to Anukul Roy's brilliance in the outfield. It was the fifth-wicket pair of Hardik Pandya (18 not out) and Naman Dhir (5 not out) that took MI over the line. Earlier, skipper Ajinkya Rahane (67) and Angkrish Raghuvanshi (51) struck vital half-centuries but Kolkata Knight Riders posted a par score of 220 for 4.

On a placid wicket, Shardul Thakur (3/39) provided Mumbai crucial breakthroughs as their bowlers could not really impose themselves in their maiden outing. Both senior pacers Trent Boult (0/38) and Jasprit Bumrah (0/35) went wicketless but India pace spearhead's 18th and 20th over stopped KKR

from getting closer to 250.

Rahane began with a wristy flick over wide long-on with exquisite timing for a six off Boult in the first over, KKR got the impetus when Pandya (1/39) erred throughout the fourth over to give away 26 runs. The skipper helped himself with two pick-up shots down the leg for consecutive sixes while Finn Allen (37 off 17 balls) drilled Pandya down the ground for a powerful hit for four, ending with a scoop past the 'keeper and short fine leg for a third boundary.

Before that, Allen had clobbered two sixes and a four off debutant Allah Ghazanfar (0/51) to collect 17 runs in the third over.



Breaks ensured I stay fresh and excited: Kohli

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bengaluru

The iconic Virat Kohli believes stepping away from the game at regular intervals has helped him stay mentally fresh and avoid burnout as he started the 2026 season by carving out his 28th IPL half-century.

Kohli's 38-ball 69, studded with five sixes and as many fours, powered Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a comfortable six-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL season opener on Saturday.

Playing his first T20 since last season's IPL final, Kohli showed little sign of rust, underlining how stepping away at regular intervals has helped him sustain peak performance despite a packed international schedule over the years.

Addressing concerns about being underprepared after a 10-month gap from the format, Kohli said the bigger challenge for him had always been avoiding burnout.

"Well, you know, the kind

of scheduling that we've had over the last 15 years and the amount of cricket I've played, for me there was always a risk of getting burnt out rather than being undercooked. So these breaks helped me immensely. I stay fresh, I stay excited."

The 37-year-old stressed that he never returns to competitive cricket unless he is more than 100 percent.

"Whenever I come back to play, it's 120%. I'm not coming back, you know, underprepared. In fact, the extra rest helps me to mentally freshen up."

For Kohli, it is important to perform and not just hold onto a place.

"As long as you're physically fit and you're excited mentally, all those things come together nicely and then you're able to, you know, contribute for the team's cause and that's what you want to do as a player. You don't want to hold on to a spot."

"You want to keep performing and, you know, keep putting in the work for the team," he added.

Kohli's energy bizarre at this age: Ravichandran Ashwin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Bengaluru

All praise for Virat Kohli, former off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin says the Indian stalwart continues to "walk the talk" with his unmatched energy and intensity despite having retired from Test and T20I formats.

Returning to T20 cricket for the first time since last year's IPL final on June 3, Kohli showed no signs of rust, smashing his 28th IPL half-century (69 not out off 38 balls) to power defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a commanding six-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad in the 2026 season-opener.

"He walks the talk,"

Ashwin said on a JioHotstar show.

"It's almost like he's putting on a show for people to see how the game should be played, play it hard and play it the way it's meant to be played. That stood out for me with respect to what Virat did." Kohli was already in sublime touch coming into the IPL, having scored 93, 23 and 124 in the ODI series against New Zealand in January, where he finished as India's leading run-getter.

The 37-year-old had also topped the charts in the preceding series against South Africa in December, amassing 302 runs, including two centuries.

Ashwin further cited example of his running between the wickets to show



how his energy remains extraordinary despite his age and experience.

"I find him quite bizarre at this age. I tell him this during our chats now and then. He was batting on 40-odd, there

was a partnership going on, and RCB were coasting.

"He ran through for the first single, stopped there, and the other batter hadn't even reached halfway, but he was already looking for a

second. That was a 57-metre boundary on the leg side, and it shows the enthusiasm he still brings to the game," added Ashwin.

The premier Indian off-spinner turned commentator also highlighted the performance of Jacob Duffy, who turned it around after a woeful show in the recently-concluded T20 World Cup.

Having endured a tough outing in the T20 World Cup conceding over 10 runs per over and managing just three wickets, Duffy bounced back in style with a dream IPL debut for RCB as he ripped through the Sunrisers Hyderabad top order with figures of 3/22.

He removed the dangerous opening duo of Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head,

along with Nitish Kumar Reddy, triggering an early collapse as SRH stumbled at the start before recovering to 201/9, a total that proved below par at the Chinnaswamy.

"When Jacob Duffy was picked at the auction, I was probably the first one to say it was an amazing pick to replace Josh Hazlewood."

"At that time, he was the No.1 T20 bowler. He had also taken a six-wicket haul in a Test match and is right in the prime of his career."

"He has bowled a lot in New Zealand and knows exactly what he is doing. What really stood out is that he can swing the ball both ways, but he didn't try to do that against Abhishek Sharma."

Samson, Jadeja face former teams as CSK meet RR

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Guwahati

Sanju Samson is set for an emotional clash against Rajasthan Royals (RR), the side he led and shaped for over a decade, as he turns out for Chennai Super Kings (CSK), while Ravindra Jadeja will also face his former franchise, adding a poignant subplot to the IPL match between the two teams here on Monday.

For more than a decade, Samson was synonymous with RR, their batting mainstay, leader and all-time leading run-scorer who guided them to the 2022 final.

Much like MS Dhoni at CSK, Samson was the Royals' identity, but in a blockbuster



swap that sent Jadeja back to RR, the Kerala batter now finds himself in yellow, adding a new dimension to CSK's evolving core.

Samson also arrives in prime form, having played a decisive role in India's triumphant T20 World Cup campaign.

His hat-trick of 50-plus scores in must-win games

against West Indies, England and New Zealand has made him the star of the nation as the unassuming keeper-batter will come with a renewed self-belief.

He along with skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, who are set to open also, will also form the core leadership of the team who will miss Dhoni for at least two weeks

due to a calf strain.

Dhoni has not travelled with the side to Guwahati as his absence will put Samson and Gaikwad in the spotlight. Dhoni's absence will also open the door for emerging names like 20-year-old left-arm spin all-rounder Prashant Veer who impressed in domestic T20s and the franchise's big-money (Rs 14.2-core) uncapped recruit Kartik Sharma, known for his six-hitting exploits in the domestic circuit.

With Dewald Brevis showing signs of maturity, Shivam Dube growing into a dependable middle-order force, and youngster Ayush Mhatre developing rapidly, CSK appear better equipped for a rebuild.



One of our poorer bowling performances: SRH coach Vettori

G UNNIKRISHNAN ■ Bengaluru

Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori labelled his side's bowling display against Royal Challengers Bengaluru as "poor", conceding they allowed Devdutt Padikkal and Virat Kohli far too many scoring opportunities in the IPL opener here.

After raising 201 for 9 in the season-opener on Saturday, the Hyderabad side could not tackle the marauding Padikkal and Kohli, watching RCB romp home in just 15.4 overs.

"You have to get a good start (with the ball), which we did against (Phil) Salt, but then I just think we weren't at our best with the ball. We weren't as disciplined as we needed to be, and we gave a lot of scoring opportunities to Virat and Padikkal, who played exceptionally well," Vettori said in the post-match press conference.

"We should have been able to maintain a little bit more (discipline) after getting that important wicket of Salt. So, it was a very good batting performance by RCB and one of our poorer bowling performances," he added.

Vettori said SRH had observed how well RCB pacer Jacob Duffy bowled but the visiting bowlers could not implement their plans effectively.

"I think we learned a lot from how RCB bowled and what was effective and what wasn't, but we just weren't able to implement that. You don't want to have a rusty performance because of how important every game is in the IPL, particularly how to start."

"But today was one of our challenging bowling displays. We saw at the back end when we started to go back to our usual disciplines that we could actually be effective and take some wickets. But I think we just missed our lengths too much. Duffy in particular showed the length to bowl on that surface," he said. Vettori hoped that young bowlers such as left-arm pacer David Payne and left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey will come good in coming matches.

The Hyderabad side managed to cross 200, but on a flat Chinnaswamy surface the total was vastly inadequate, and Vettori admitted as much. (PTI)

Padikkal finds white ball ruthlessness to power RCB's early charge

G UNNIKRISHNAN ■ Bengaluru

Devidutt Padikkal regally whipped pacer Jaydev Unadkat's full ball on his pads over backward square leg for a six.

It was not an unusual sight for a batter for whom flick forms one of the bread and butter shots.

But it was unprecedented because Devdutt has seldom hit a six off the first ball. The left-hander tends to settle down before unleashing himself on the bowlers.

However, the left-hander shed his linear nature against Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL 2026 opener here on Saturday, and it was just the beginning.

In the next 10 balls he faced, Devdutt produced two

more sixes and three fours, racing to 34 in 11 balls, strike-rate hovering over 300.

In fact, his 26-ball 61 was representative of the transformation happening to his batting since 2024 or early 2025.

In this period, Devdutt has made 543 runs at an average of 60.33 in the Ranji Trophy, 725 runs at 90.62 in the Vijay Hazare Trophy and 309 runs at a strike rate of 167.02 in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

Karnataka coach Yere Goud was not one bit surprised by his ward's outing against SRH.

"I think that boils down to his preparation. He is very clear about it. He goes about it keeping in mind the probability phase of plays - it changes according to where



he is batting from — power-play, mid-overs or the rest. I think that's contributing to his consistency," Goud told PTI.

Goud also felt that leading Karnataka has given Devdutt a lot more confidence as an individual and batter.

"See, he would have done

all these, I think, without captaincy also. But leading a side has its benefits, as he talks and learns from others in the team.

"There is that extra responsibility on the captain, and I think it has added some strong edges to his game now," said Goud.

Devidutt's own words reflected Goud's version.

"(RCB) Head Coach Andy Flower and Batting Coach Dinesh Karthik bhai really worked hard on me. It wasn't easy because there was a lot I needed to change. It wasn't just technical; it was a lot mentally as well. I needed to really believe that I can play this aggressive brand of cricket," Devdutt told Star Sports. That change was evident in his batting at the

Chinnaswamy.

Left-arm pacer David Payne tested Devdutt with a slower ball, but he judged it early and danced down the pitch to dismiss it over the mid-wicket for a six.

Pacer Eshan Malinga dug one a bit short, closer to the 25-year-old's body but he responded with a rasping cut past the point fielder for a boundary.

Left-arm spinner Harsh Dubey tried to pitch the ball away from his hitting arc, going wide on off-stump but the Karnataka batter drag-swept the ball to square leg for a four.

Devidutt retained his innate languidness in all these shots but there was a clear touch of ruthlessness and purpose in shot-making. (PTI)

PM Modi lauds sporting achievements by Indian athletes, Jammu and Kashmir team

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded sporting achievements by Indian athletes including Gulveer Singh, Anahat Singh and maiden Ranji Trophy victory by Jammu and Kashmir.

In his monthly 'Mann Ki Baat' address, Modi said Gulveer Singh, a talented athlete from Uttar Pradesh, has done wonders in one such sport, and just a few weeks ago, he created history by finishing third in the New York City Half Marathon, he said. Singh became the first Indian athlete to complete a half-marathon in under an hour.

Modi also mentioned

squash player "daughter Anahat Singh", who won a major international title in the Squash on Fire Open.

She achieved this success at just 17 years of age, becoming the youngest Asian female player to make it to the top-20 in the Professional Squash Association (PSA) World Ranking, he added.

The prime minister said, "I also came to know about the Asmita Athletics League. In this, many sporting events were organised on the occasion of Women's Day on the 8th of March. Around 2 lakh daughters participated in the league."

"It is good to see that the women of India are playing an important role in this sporting

transformation taking place in the country," he said. He lauded the cricket team of Jammu and Kashmir for bagging the Ranji Trophy title for the first time and expressed hope that this winning streak of sports persons there continues in the future. Modi said March has been a month full of excitement and enthusiasm for cricket fans across the country. He said when India achieved a historic victory in the T20 World Cup, a wave of joy swept across the country and all citizens are very proud of the team's thumping success.

Late last month, a thrilling match was witnessed in Karnataka's Hubli, where the Jammu and Kashmir cricket



team secured the Ranji Trophy, he said.

"It is most heartening to note that after a long wait of nearly seven decades, the team achieved its first Ranji Trophy title. This unprecedented success is the result of years of continuous efforts by the players," he added.

Modi said the Jammu and Kashmir team captain, Paras Dogra, displayed extraordinary skills, and through his leadership he played a significant role in this victory.

He said the performance of young Kashmiri bowler Aaqib Nabi, who took 60 wickets in the Ranji Trophy, is being talked about nationwide. "This victory has thrilled the players and coaching staff, as

well as the people of Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

He said this impressive performance on the cricket field has further increased enthusiasm for sports among the youth in the Union territory, and it will inspire many young people to take up sports in the future.

CHANGE OF NAME
N, NITESH holder of Indian Passport No. R7666872 issued at DUBAI on 07/05/2017 and Permanent Resident of 13 K1-A SCHEME NO.71 INDORE MP and presently residing at Flat-310, AI Manazil Tower, Murqabat Street, Deira, DUBAI, UAE do hereby change my name from NITESH to NITESH (Given name) SEVHANI (Surname) with immediate effect.