

**PAGE 6  
NATION**

Congress to expose BJP's attempt to mislead women: Pilot



**PAGE 10  
LAW & JUSTICE**

Allahabad HC dismisses plea seeking FIR against Rahul Gandhi

**PAGE 11: BUSINESS**

Bright start to Fiscal Year 27 for carmakers



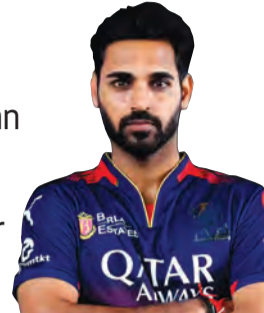
**PAGE 13  
GLOBAL**

Mamdani facing criticism over rude welcome to King Charles



**PAGE 16  
SPORTS**

I'm more focussed on team goals than individual milestones: Bhuvneshwar



## Steep LPG price hike to hurt all sections

Commercial cylinder to now cost ₹3,071 and 'chotu' ₹810; eating out to become more expensive

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Centre has bitten the bullet and increased the price of commercial LPG and 'chotu' cylinders on Friday, adversely impacting the 'Aam Admi' and the elite alike. Eating out will become more expensive as hotels, restaurants, catering services and *dhabas* use commercial LPG, while the lesser well-off face the brunt by shelling out more for smaller cylinders.

The commercial cylinder will now cost ₹3,071.5, a jump of ₹933 and 'chotu' ₹810.50 as against the earlier cost of ₹549. Chotu now costs just a shade lower than the ₹913 rate for a 14.2-kg cylinder used in household kitchens (called domestic LPG). However, the price of a domestic cylinder was not touched.

As per revision, a 19-kg commercial LPG — used by establishments such as hotels and



LPG cylinders stacked at a warehouse amid supply disruption with prices rising across markets in New Delhi on Friday

PANKAJ KUMAR/THE PIONEER

restaurants — now costs a record ₹3,071.5 in Delhi as against ₹2,078.50 previously. Rates were last increased by 195.50 per cylinder on April 1. Before that, prices had gone up by ₹114.5 per 19-kg cylinder

on March 1. In three increases, commercial LPG rates have gone up by ₹1,303.

Disruption in supplies caused by the ongoing West Asia conflict forced the government to go in for a big jump

in prices and the possibility of a petrol and diesel hike ranging from ₹4 to 5 in the near future is not ruled out, according to sources. However, there was no increase in the prices of

**'PETROL, DIESEL PRICE TO HIKE IN FUTURE'**

An increase in petrol and diesel prices in the near future is not ruled out, Government sources said on Friday, as losses mount from a four-year-old freeze in retail rates despite the sharp rise in global crude oil prices.

FULL REPORT ON ►► P11

domestic cylinders. But there is a possibility to increase domestic LPG prices by ₹40-50.

As expected, the Opposition slammed the decision and claimed it had forecast that the hike in LPG and fuel prices would take place after elections in five states. Electioneering ended on April 29. The Congress attacked the Modi government over the hike in price of commercial LPG cylinder, with Rahul Gandhi saying this is an "election bill" and the next "strike"

will be on petrol and diesel.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha said he had warned that the heat of inflation would strike after the elections. "Today, commercial gas cylinders have become ₹993 more expensive. This marks the single largest hike in a single day. This is an election bill," Rahul said in his post in Hindi on X. "Since February: A hike of ₹1,380, an 81 per cent increase in just three months. Tea stalls, *dhabas*, hotels, bakeries, sweet shops — the burden on every kitchen has increased. And this will inevitably impact your plate as well," Rahul said.

The first strike was on gas; the next will be on petrol and diesel, he added.

For consumers, particularly those who depend on eateries for at least one daily meal, this marks another sharp blow.

CONTINUED ON ►► P4

## TMC moves SC over use of Central staff in counting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Friday moved the Supreme Court against the Calcutta High Court's order rejecting the plea challenging the deployment of only the Central Government's employees as counting supervisors and assistants for vote counting on May 4.

The matter has been listed for urgent hearing on Saturday before a Bench of Justices PS Narasimha and Joydalya Bagchi since counting of votes is scheduled to be held on May 4. The party sought an urgent hearing in the matter.

Mamata Banerjee's party had challenged the poll duty assigned to the Central Government and PSU (Public Sector Undertaking) employees as supervisors and assistants in the vote counting.

The high court told the TMC that appointing central



or state officers as counting supervisors is the Election Commission's prerogative. It said that if central officers are found to have manipulated counting and favoured the BJP, the party can file an election petition. In his ruling, Justice Krishna Rao held that there was no illegality in the EC's decision to appoint counting supervisors and assistants from the Central Government or PSU employees instead of State Government staff.

CONTINUED ON ►► P4

**The Bystander**



## BREATHALYSER TESTS FOR CM MANN SPARKS UPROAR IN ASSEMBLY

MONIKA MALIK ■ Chandigarh

A demand for breathalyser tests inside Punjab Vidhan Sabha Assembly of all legislators — including for the Chief Minister — turned Punjab's Labour Day special session into a political flashpoint on Friday, as the Congress accused Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann of attending proceedings in an inebriated state, triggering unprecedented scenes, a face-off in the Well of the House, repeated adjournments, and a complete Opposition walkout after the Speaker refused the request.

What began with rare bonhomie — the Chief Minister offering the Opposition extra speaking time and seeking cooperation — quickly unravelled into allegations and counter-allegations, with Congress MLAs insisting on on-the-spot alcohol testing of all members, "with doors shut", while treasury benches pushed back, calling the charges baseless. The stand-off paralysed proceedings, with both sides shouting slogans from the Well, forcing multiple adjournments and exposing a deepening political divide on the Assembly floor.

The flashpoint came during discussions on a resolution marking Labour Day, when Chief Minister Mann objected to Congress MLA Sukhpal Singh Khaira allegedly using a mobile phone and raised issues of decorum, including his sitting posture. Khaira hit back, accusing the CM of singling him out and questioning his conduct, sparking a heated exchange.

CONTINUED ON ►► P4



CM Bhagwant Mann speaking during a State Assembly special session in Chandigarh

## NCB crackdown: 349 kg cocaine seized in Mumbai

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH ■ New Delhi

Continuing its sustained operation against the international narcotics networks, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has seized 349 kilograms of high-grade cocaine in Mumbai. The seized cocaine is valued at ₹1,745 crores in the international market.

Announcing the seizure, Union Home Minister Amit Shah described the operation as a "trailblazing example of a bottom-to-top approach." Shah

said that the agency first intercepted a smaller consignment and traced it back to dismember a much larger international network.

The Home Minister shared the details on the microblogging platform X, stating, "We are resolved to ruthlessly crush the narcotics cartel." In his post, Shah wrote, "The Narcotics Control Bureau has cracked down on a major international narcotics ring, seizing 349 kg of high-grade cocaine worth ₹1,745 crore in Mumbai. This is a trail-



blazing example of a bottom-to-top approach where the agency traced back a smaller consignment to net a massive network. Congratulations to Team NCB for this monumental success."

The seizure is being hailed as one of the biggest anti-narcotics operations in recent times and comes just days after Salim Dola, a notorious drug trafficker and close aide of global terrorist Dawood Ibrahim, was brought to India from Turkey.

CONTINUED ON ►► P4

**PIONEER IN SHORT**

**KEDARNATH PRIESTS PROTEST OVER TEMPLE ENTRY RESTRICTIONS**

Teerth Purohiths at Kedarnath temple held a protest on Friday against the alleged decision of the temple committee to restrict their entry through the eastern gate for traditional rituals. Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC) member and Kedar Sabha president Rajkumar Tiwari described the incident as a "misunderstanding" caused by security lapses and clarified that the chairman had issued "no such orders". He added that the matter was discussed with the priests to clear the air. The situation escalated on Friday morning when police personnel allegedly stopped priests from using the eastern gate, which is traditionally used for performing daily religious ceremonies and VIP entries.

**SC GRANTS ANTICIPATORY BAIL TO PAWAN KHERA**

The Supreme Court has granted anticipatory bail to Congress leader Pawan Khera in a case related to making allegations against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife, saying the matter appears to have stemmed from political rivalry. A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and AS Chandurkar, in its order uploaded on Friday, granted the pre-arrest bail to Khera subject to certain conditions. The court had on Thursday reserved its verdict in the matter. Khera has alleged that Sarma's wife possessed multiple passports and undisclosed properties abroad. "The right to personal liberty is a cherished fundamental right, and any deprivation thereof must be justified on a higher threshold, particularly where the surrounding circumstances may indicate the presence of political overtones," the court said.

FULL REPORT ON P10

## Iran sends fresh proposal to US

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

Iran has submitted a new proposal for negotiations with the United States through Pakistan-based mediators, according to the State-run Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA). The move signals a potential opening in efforts to break the ongoing deadlock between Tehran and Washington, even as regional tensions continue to rise.

Global energy markets reacted quickly to the development. Oil prices, which had surged following disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, declined after the news broke, as reported by Reuters.

The waterway-responsible for transporting roughly one-fifth of the world's oil and gas has been at the centre of the crisis. Its effective closure by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has rattled global markets, with the International



Energy Agency calling the situation one of the worst energy crises in history.

It remains unclear whether Pakistani intermediaries have formally conveyed Tehran's latest proposal to Washington.

The proposal follows earlier failed negotiations in Islamabad on April 11-12, which ended without agreement after more than 21 hours of talks. Both sides blamed each other: Washington said Tehran rejected its terms, while Tehran accused the US of making excessive demands.

CONTINUED ON ►► P4

## Operation Global Hunt: India's big strike on narco syndicates

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH ■ New Delhi

In a decisive move against transnational crime, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has launched Operation Global-Hunt, a three-year strategic offensive targeting approximately 100 international drug networks operated by Indian fugitives from safe havens in Dubai, Canada, Europe and beyond.

The operation envisaged during an Interpol conference and backed by a detailed roadmap submitted to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), leverages Interpol Red Notices, asset freezes and coordinated raids with foreign agencies to hunt, arrest and repatriate kingpins, often via special



flights after dossiers are submitted to host governments.

The first major victory came on April 28, 2026, when NCB secured the deportation of Mohammad Salim Dola, a 59-year-old Mumbai-based drug lord and close aide of the global terrorist Dawood Ibrahim. Detained in Istanbul's Beylikdüzü district after a March 2024 Interpol Red Corner Notice issued at India's request, Dola was flown back to Delhi's IGI Airport and taken into NCB custody.

Dola was wanted for over two decades by Mumbai Police and Gujarat ATS as he allegedly ran a sprawling syndicate trafficking heroin, Charas, Mephedrone, Mandrax, Methamphetamine and fentanyl across the Middle East, Africa and Europe networks long suspected of fuelling India's drug crisis and possibly Narco-Terror links.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah hailed the operation as a reflection of Narendra Modi Government's "Zero Tolerance" policy. "No matter where they hide, no place is safe for drug kingpins," he posted on the microblogging site, underscoring a muscular shift from reactive policing to proactive global pursuit.

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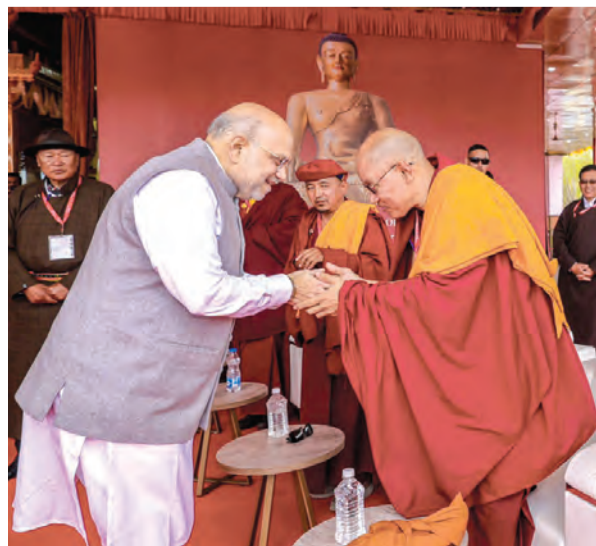
## Historic reunion as Buddha relics return to Ladakh: Shah

ABHI SINGHAL ■ Leh

In the land of high passes in Ladakh, where the mountains seem to touch you and are quieter than the rest of the country, the Sacred Exposition of the Holy Relics of Gautam Buddha has brought with it a different kind of stillness.

For the first time, these sacred relics, usually housed at the National Museum, were brought to Ladakh for public viewing, shifting something intangible in the landscape itself.

At Jivetsal Ground in Leh, the experience began long before the relics were shown. The fever and the love for Lord Buddha were seen on every face. Each one holding a Khatak, a traditional Tibetan



Union Home Minister Amit Shah being greeted during the inauguration of the first international exposition of holy relics of Lord Buddha on the occasion of Buddha Purnima in Ladakh

PTI

Buddhist ceremonial scarf, symbolising purity to offer to the relics.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who was present on the solemn occasion, described the return of sacred relics of Lord Buddha to Ladakh after 75 years as a "historic reunion" and said that the Union Territory has remained a "living land of dharma" that preserved and nurtured Buddhist knowledge for centuries.

Ladakh LG Vinai Kumar Saxena emphasised that the event reflects the region's spiritual energy and would contribute to the growth of eco-spiritual tourism in Ladakh. The queues were long, yet no one seemed restless. People waited quietly along the roads, prayer beads in hand, some

murmuring chants under their breath, others simply watching the mountains.

Nearly 20,000 people, including monks from different regions, gathered in an overwhelming turnout that stretched across the open grounds. From school children in uniform to elderly devotees leaning on walking sticks, everyone seemed drawn by the same quiet pull.

Many sat down on the bare ground, bracing against the cold Ladakhi winds, waiting patiently for hours just for a glimpse of the relics. It wasn't just attendance; it was collective devotion made visible.

When speaking about the relics, people carried more than words.

CONTINUED ON ►► P4

## Noida: Commercial flights to start from June 15



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Noida

Noida International Airport (NIA) on Friday announced that it will begin commercial flight operations from June 15, marking a key milestone in the long-awaited Greenfield aviation project in Uttar Pradesh.

IndiGo will operate the first passenger flight from the airport, followed shortly

by Akasa Air and Air India Express, according to a statement issued by the airport operator.

The commencement of operations comes after its inauguration by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the receipt of approval for the Aerodrome Security Programme (ASP) from the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security.

CONTINUED ON ►► P4



## Gujarat, Maharashtra growth hailed at statehood event



STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Governor Mangubhai Patel said that May 1 marks the formation of two of India's most prosperous and progressive states, Gujarat and Maharashtra, and celebrates their remarkable development journeys. He emphasised that India's geographical and cultural diversity is its greatest strength, and unity among these diversities forms the foundation of a strong, prosperous and self-reliant nation. The governor was addressing a joint programme held to mark the statehood day of Gujarat and Maharashtra at Sandipani Auditorium in Lok Bhavan under the "Ek Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat" initiative. Chief Minister Mohan Yadav was also present on the occasion.

Extending greetings to the people of both states, Patel highlighted that Maharashtra's industrial strength and financial leadership, combined with Gujarat's entrepreneurial spirit,

trade efficiency, port development and renewable energy initiatives, are key pillars of a developed India.

He called upon citizens, especially the youth, to recognise the power of India's diversity and work collectively towards the vision of Viksit Bharat by 2047. He also administered a pledge for active participation in nation-building and strengthening the spirit of unity.

Highlighting Gujarat's rich heritage, Patel referred to Dwarka, Somnath temple and vibrant cultural traditions like Navratri, garba and dandiya. He also mentioned landmarks such as the Rann of Kutch, Gir forests, Sabarmati riverfront, Narmada and the Statue of Unity, along with the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel.

Speaking about Maharashtra, he noted that the state reflects a balance of tradition and modernity, with contributions rooted in discipline, cultural pride and enter-

prise. He referred to sacred sites like Trimbakeshwar, Shirdi and Pandharpur, as well as Ajanta and Ellora caves. He also recalled the contributions of saints like Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram and Namdev, and leaders such as Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Vinayak Savarkar and Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

The programme featured cultural presentations showcasing the rich traditions of both states. A themed performance titled "Vibrant Spirit of Gujarat" and a cultural act by a Maharashtra group highlighted their heritage. Messages from the governors of both states were also played, along with short films depicting their history and culture.

Representatives of Gujarati and Marathi communities in Madhya Pradesh welcomed the governor with traditional honours. Senior officials and members of both communities were present at the event.

## Car catches fire near Kilol Park, driver escapes unhurt

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Panic gripped a busy stretch in Bhopal after a moving car suddenly caught fire and turned into a ball of flames on Friday evening.

The incident occurred around 6 pm near Kilol Park, close to Dhobi Ghat, sending shockwaves among bystanders.

According to eyewitnesses, a youth was driving the car when flames suddenly erupted from the vehicle. Within moments, the fire intensified, with flames rising nearly 20 feet high. Acting quickly, the driver managed to jump out of the car and escape unharmed, narrowly avoiding a major tragedy.

The fire spread rapidly, and within minutes, the entire vehicle was engulfed in flames. Initial reports suggest that the car was running on gas, though it is not yet clear

whether it was fitted with a CNG or LPG kit.

The incident created panic in the area, with people fearing a possible explosion due to the presence of a gas cylinder in the vehicle. Many gathered at a distance, watching anxiously as the fire raged.

On receiving information, a fire brigade team rushed to the spot and brought the blaze under control. Fire personnel, including Mohammad Asif, Nawab Khan and driver Atim Khan, played a key role in extinguishing the fire.

Although no injuries were reported, the car was completely gutted in the incident. Authorities are expected to investigate the exact cause of the fire.

Police have initiated an inquiry to determine the exact cause of the fire and whether any safety lapses were involved.



A moving car on a street catches fire near Kaila Park in Bhopal on Friday.

Pioneer photo

## No strike announced, yet GMC cancels doctors' leave

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Confusion has emerged at Gandhi Medical College (GMC) in Bhopal regarding a proposed doctors' strike, after the dean's office issued an order cancelling summer vacations for those planning to go on strike from May 10. The Madhya Pradesh Medical Teachers Association (MTA), however, has clarified that no strike has been announced, calling the order premature and misleading.

The situation has led to uncertainty between the administration and medical staff, particularly as nearly 130 doctors have already gone on a month-long summer vacation starting Friday. This has raised con-

cerns about staff availability and hospital preparedness in case of any disruption.

As per an order issued on April 28 by the dean's office, any doctor found absent from duty in connection with the proposed strike on May 10 will have their summer vacation cancelled. Department heads have been instructed to strictly implement the directive and ensure adequate staffing.

MTA president Rakesh Malviya questioned the rationale behind the order, stating that the association had already deferred its proposed strike following assurances received during a meeting with the additional chief secretary on April 9. He reiterated that no fresh date

for any strike or agitation has been decided and that further action will depend on upcoming discussions with the government.

Sources within the medical fraternity indicated that the directive has caused unease among doctors, many of whom are unsure about their leave status and future duty requirements. Some doctors on vacation have also expressed concern over being called back abruptly if the situation escalates.

Meanwhile, the college administration has emphasised that patient care must not be affected under any circumstances. Instructions have been issued to all departments to arrange backup staffing and ensure uninter-

rupted functioning of OPD and emergency services. Senior officials are closely monitoring the situation to avoid any disruption in health-care delivery.

The coming days are expected to be crucial, as clarity on the strike issue and further talks between the association and the government will determine the course of action.

Meanwhile, health officials are also assessing contingency measures in case of any sudden staff shortage, including redistribution of duties and deployment of available faculty across critical departments. Senior authorities have indicated that coordination meetings may be held in the coming days to review the situation and ensure preparedness.

## CM briefs Governor on state issues

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav paid a courtesy visit to Governor Mangubhai Patel at Raj Bhavan on Friday. The chief minister greeted the governor by presenting a bouquet.

During the meeting, Yadav briefed the governor on various issues related to the state's development and public welfare initiatives. The two leaders also held an informal discussion on key administrative matters.

Senior officials, including additional chief secretary to the chief minister Neeraj Mandloi and principal secretary to the governor Navneet Mohan Kothari, were also present during the meeting.



Bank employees and trade union activists under the banner of All India Bank Employees Association and All India United Trade Union Centre stage a protest on International Workers' Day in Bhopal on Friday. International Workers' Day observed on May 1st is also called "May Day" across the World. Pioneer photo

## Census-deployed teachers granted earned leave relief

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Census-deployed teachers to get earned leave for marking e-attendance; summer vacation commences as commissioner issues orders

The School Education Commissioner has issued directives granting earned leave to teachers deployed on census enumeration duties who continue to mark their e-attendance during the summer vacation period, resolving a longstanding ambiguity that had caused widespread anxiety among the teaching workforce.

The order comes as the summer vacation for school teachers has officially commenced across the state, with the Commissioner issuing a comprehensive set of instructions governing the leave framework for the break period.

Under the directive, teach-

ers who have been assigned census enumeration responsibilities — a deployment that requires them to work through what would ordinarily be their vacation period — will be entitled to earned leave in lieu of the working days spent on census duty. The critical condition is that these teachers must continue to register their attendance through the e-attendance system to establish a verifiable record of their deployment. Teachers who mark e-attendance while engaged in census work will be credited with earned leave of 14 days, which can be availed at a later date.

The summer vacation for the session 2025-26 has been officially fixed at 31 days. However, the actual vacation available to teachers will be reduced to approximately 25 days after accounting for

various administrative commitments. Teachers are required to resume duties ahead of the new academic session to complete preparatory work, including school readiness activities, student enrolment drives and syllabus planning.

The order also addresses the situation of probationary teachers who have recently joined service. These teachers, whose appointments were made in the current session, will be governed by separate leave provisions as applicable under their probationary terms.

In a related development, confusion has emerged over Scout and Guide elections within schools. The matter has been flagged by multiple stakeholders, prompting the authorities to convene a meeting on May 2 to resolve the impasse. Letters have

been written to district chief commissioners to conduct the elections, with several districts raising procedural concerns that require clarification at the state level.

Meanwhile, a demand has surfaced for ensuring transparency and equal treatment in the management of teacher deployments. Representatives have called for uniform application of rules governing census duty, vacation entitlements and e-attendance compliance, arguing that inconsistent implementation across districts has created disparities that undermine morale and administrative credibility.

Officials said the Commissioner's office will monitor compliance with the e-attendance directive and ensure that teachers deployed on census duty are not disadvantaged in their leave entitlements.

## Congress warns of agitation over Jatkhedi eviction drive

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Protests have erupted in Bhopal's Jatkhedi area after the administration initiated action to demolish more than 20 houses, issuing eviction notices to several families. The move has drawn sharp criticism from the Congress, which has demanded permanent rehabilitation for the affected residents.

Congress leader Ravindra Sahu Jhumarwala warned of a major agitation if the families are not provided proper resettlement. He said the settlement in Jatkhedi is 20 to 30 years old, with families living there for decades. "Residents have suddenly been served eviction notices, and some houses have already been demolished without ensuring permanent rehabilitation," he said.

Sahu added that party representatives visited the site to register their protest and also held discussions with officials. Leaders including Anuj Nikesh Chauhan and district president Rohit Rajput were also present during the protest.

Raising concerns over the impact on vulnerable groups, Sahu said that displacing poor

families with limited resources is highly condemnable. "Snatching away shelter from children, women and the elderly without proper arrangements reflects insensitivity. Development cannot come at the cost of uprooting the poor," he said.

According to officials, the demolition drive is being carried out as part of a road construction project in the area. However, the affected families and opposition leaders have insisted that rehabilitation must precede any eviction.

The situation remains tense, with residents demanding immediate intervention and a clear rehabilitation plan from the administration.

Meanwhile, residents alleged that they were not given adequate time or alternative arrangements before the demolition drive began.

Many families claimed they have been living in the area for decades with basic amenities and local identity proofs, raising questions about the sudden eviction. Locals said the action has left several families in distress, with belongings damaged and no immediate shelter available.

## Cultural performances highlight BHEL event

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

The BHEL Ladies Club organised a "Summer Cool" themed event, featuring a range of competitions and cultural activities. Club President Rosy Upadhyay attended as the chief guest, while Kasturba Hospital CMO Pomela Sachdev and Sweete Meena were present as guests.

The programme began with a welcome address by Cultural Vice President Yogita Baghel. Competitions such as fireless cooking, protein-rich sandwich preparation and mocktail making saw enthusiastic participation. A title track song contest was also organised, highlighting participants' talent.

A key highlight was the "Surprise Summer Cool Personality of the Day" segment, which included a ramp walk. Anuja Majumdar was declared the "Summer Cool Lady."

In the fireless cooking competition, Manju Shauri, Deepali Goswami and Sheetal Juneja secured first place, while Nibha Kumar and Likeshwari finished second.

## Join Jal Ganga drive, urges Chief Minister

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has called upon citizens to actively participate in the state-wide "Jal Ganga Samvardhan Abhiyan", emphasising that water is the foundation of life and its conservation is deeply rooted in Indian culture. He said that preserving and cleaning water sources such as wells, Baolis, ponds and rivers has always been regarded as a sacred duty, and the campaign aims to revive this collective responsibility.

As part of the initiative, a series of activities will be organised on May 25, marking Ganga Dussehra. Citizens across villages and urban wards will be encouraged to take part in collective voluntary efforts, including cleaning water bodies and undertaking plantation drives around them.

The campaign is aligned with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of water conservation and is gradually taking the shape of a mass movement across Madhya Pradesh. Panchayats, urban bodies, social and religious organ-

isations, self-help groups and business associations are being mobilised to ensure widespread participation.

The state has already emerged as a national leader in water conservation efforts through community participation. Under the water harvesting campaign, Madhya Pradesh secured the top position in the country, completing over 5.64 lakh works—around 76,000 more than Andhra Pradesh, which ranked second. Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh followed in subsequent positions. At the district level, Dindori and Khandwa led the nation by completing the highest number of works.

Extensive activities are being carried out with public support, including installation of drinking water kiosks, cleaning of wells and ponds, and urban beautification. Under the AMRUT 2.0 scheme, 54 water harvesting structures have been restored, while work to treat drains flowing into rivers has begun at 45 locations. The state has also freed and rejuvenated 220

ponds, 348 wells, 90 step-wells and 199 ghats from encroachments. Additionally, cleaning and beautification of 734 drains have been completed, and over 3,040 rainwater harvesting systems have been installed in urban areas.

More than 1,000 public water kiosks are currently operational across the state. Sixteen green zones have been developed, and large-scale plantation drives are underway. The Panchayat and Rural Development Department has approved over 2.43 lakh works worth Rs 6,232 crore under the campaign. These include construction of farm ponds, Amrit Sarovars, dugwell recharge systems and irrigation infrastructure.

Efforts are also being made to ensure drinking water quality, with testing drives in schools and anganwadis, along with campaigns to fix leakages in pipelines and taps. Forest areas are being utilised for rainwater conservation through check dams, percolation tanks and contour trenching, supported by an online system to streamline approvals.

## Divisional Commissioner steers Simhastha traffic planning

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ujjain

A key review meeting was held on Friday to prepare a comprehensive strategy for parking and traffic management for Simhastha 2028, aimed at ensuring smooth and well-organised arrangements for the mega religious gathering.

The meeting was chaired by divisional commissioner and Simhastha fair officer Ashish Singh, in the presence of ADG Rakesh Gupta and collector Roshan Kumar Singh.

Officials were directed to develop a detailed plan focused on ensuring convenience for devotees, seamless mobility, and efficient traffic regulation. Special emphasis was placed on reducing the walking distance between parking areas and the mela grounds to enhance visitor comfort.

Authorities were instructed to identify suitable locations near the fair area and create well-planned parking zones with adequate capacity. The objective is to enable easy access for pilgrims while

minimising congestion.

The meeting also highlighted the need for a scientifically designed traffic circulation system to maintain uninterrupted movement and prevent any untoward incidents. Ensuring unhindered access for emergency services at all times was stressed as a priority.

In addition, officials were asked to plan dedicated bus services connecting parking zones to the mela area, including route mapping, frequency planning, and designated stoppages to reduce travel time and improve convenience.

All concerned departments have been directed to work in coordination and finalise the arrangements within a fixed timeline, with the aim of providing a safe, smooth, and well-managed experience for the large number of devotees expected at Simhastha 2028.

Senior officials including DIG Navneet Bhasin, MPIDC executive director Rajesh Rathore, Ujjain Development Authority CEO Sandeep Soni, and traffic DSP Dilip Parihar were present at the meeting.



## Cruise tragedy: death toll rises to 9, viral image fake

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Jabalpur

A day after the tragic cruise boat accident in Jabalpur, the death toll has risen to nine, with rescue teams continuing intensive operations in challenging conditions at the Bargi reservoir. The incident has triggered widespread grief, with several distressing details emerging from the ongoing rescue efforts.

Among the most heartbreaking recoveries was that of a woman and her four-year-old son, who were found locked in a final embrace. Rescue personnel said the mother had held her child tightly against her chest until her last moments. Both were found wearing a single life jacket, making it difficult for divers to separate the bodies. The scene has deeply moved rescuers and locals alike.

Meanwhile, a photograph widely shared on social media, claiming to depict the mother and child during the incident, has been confirmed as fake. The Jabalpur district admin-



istration clarified through its official communication that the image is AI-generated or unrelated to the Bargi boat accident, urging people not to circulate misleading content.

Rescue operations have been hampered by extremely poor visibility, damaged sections of the boat and hazardous conditions inside the submerged structure. Divers reported near-zero visibility, with frequent entanglement of equipment in iron rods and debris. The boat's structure has collapsed from both sides, and internal grills

have made access routes narrow and dangerous.

Despite these challenges, teams have so far recovered multiple bodies, including both adults and children. Authorities said efforts are ongoing to locate any remaining victims and complete the search operation at the earliest.

Officials are also expected to initiate a detailed investigation into the cause of the accident, including possible lapses in safety measures, overloading or technical failure. The administration has assured strict action if negligence is found.

The tragedy has raised serious concerns over safety protocols in tourist and recreational boating activities. Authorities have appealed to the public to rely only on verified information and avoid sharing rumours or unverified

visuals, as the district continues to deal with the aftermath of one of the most tragic incidents in recent times.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed deep grief over the tragic cruise boat accident on the Narmada river at Bargi in Jabalpur district. Describing the incident as deeply tragic, he conveyed his condolences to the families of those who lost their lives and wished a speedy recovery to the injured.

In a message posted on social media platform X, the prime minister extended his sympathies to those who lost their loved ones in the accident. He stated that the government and local administration are actively engaged in providing all possible assistance to the affected.

The prime minister also announced ex gratia compensation from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF). An amount of Rs 2 lakh will be given to the next of kin of each deceased, while the injured will receive financial assistance of Rs 50,000 each.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav consoles the families of the deceased in the cruise accident at Bargi Dam in Jabalpur on Friday. Pioneer photo

## Chief Minister warns of tough action in Bargi cruise tragedy case

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has expressed deep sorrow over the tragic cruise boat accident at Bargi in Jabalpur district, describing it as extremely painful and unfortunate. He assured that the state government stands firmly with all affected families during this difficult time and that those responsible for negligence will not be spared.

Following the incident, strict action has been taken against those found prima facie responsible. The services of cruise pilot Mahesh Patel, helper Chhotel Gond and ticket counter in-charge Brijendra have been terminated with immediate effect.

Additionally, Hotel Maikal Resort and Boat Club Bargi manager Sunil Maravi have been suspended for negligence, while regional manager Sanjay Malhotra has been attached to headquarters and a departmental inquiry has been initiated.

Speaking to the media after visiting the accident site and meeting the affected families on Friday, the chief minister said a high-level inquiry committee is being constituted to thoroughly investigate all aspects of the accident. The committee will include the director general of Home Guards and Civil Defence, a state government secretary and the commissioner of Jabalpur division. It will examine the causes of the

tragedy, adherence to cruise operation norms and other critical factors. Strict action will be taken based on the findings to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

He also announced that a standard operating procedure (SOP) for cruise operations will be prepared through the tourism department to strengthen safety mechanisms and avoid similar tragedies in the future.

To recognise the efforts of the rescue teams, the chief minister announced a reward of Rs 51,000 each for personnel involved in the operation. He said the state government will also publicly honour all members of the rescue teams for their courage and dedication. Despite challenging con-

ditions, the teams managed to rescue 28 people safely, while efforts are still underway to trace those reported missing. The damaged cruise boat has been pulled to the shore as part of the ongoing operation.

Providing details of the incident, the chief minister said the accident occurred on Thursday at Bargi Dam, claiming nine lives. He noted that immediate rescue efforts were possible as work under the Jal Jeevan Mission was underway nearby, enabling quick response. Soon after receiving information, public works minister Rakesh Singh, minister of state for culture and tourism Dharmendra Singh Lodhi and Jabalpur MP Ashish Dubey reached the spot. Teams from NDRF, SDRF, district administra-

tion and even army divers were deployed for rescue operations. Deputy chief minister Jagdish Devda also monitored the situation closely.

Highlighting a remarkable rescue, the chief minister mentioned that a survivor, Riaz, who remained trapped in water for four to five hours, was rescued safely by the team. "He had almost lost hope of survival, but due to the relentless efforts of rescuers, he is alive today," he said. The chief minister also met survivors and families of the deceased, offering condolences and reassurance of full support.

He reiterated that no compensation can truly make up for the loss of loved ones but assured that the government is committed to providing all possible assistance.



Devotees offer prayers to Lord Buddha on the occasion of Buddha Purnima at Karuna Buddha Vihar in Bhopal on Friday.

## House listing begins in MP, delayed in Bhopal

**Bhopal:** House listing under the Census exercise has begun across Madhya Pradesh after 15 years, but the process could not start on time in Bhopal due to delays in distribution of ID cards to enumerators.

On the first day, ID cards were issued to enumerators, who will now meet their regional officers. The actual house listing through the mobile app will begin from May 3.

Officials said each enumerator will cover around 200 houses and collect data through 33 questions. Area allocation and mapping work is currently underway before the survey is carried out systematically.

## Lt Gen Vijay B Nair takes charge as Commandant of Infantry School

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Mhow

Lieutenant General Vijay B Nair has assumed charge as Commandant of The Infantry School, Mhow, on May 1, 2026, marking a significant leadership transition at one of the Indian Army's premier training institutions.

An alumnus of Sainik School Kazhakootam, the National Defence Academy and the Indian Military Academy, Lt Gen Nair was commissioned into the 21 Punjab Regiment in June 1988 and later commanded the same battalion.

With a distinguished career spanning 38 years, the General Officer brings exten-



sive operational, command and instructional experience. His key assignments include commanding a brigade under the Desert Strike Corps, Leh Sub Area, Tiger Division in Jammu and Kashmir, and Vajra Corps in Punjab. He has

also served in multiple high-intensity operational environments, including eight tenures along the Line of Control and counter-terrorism operations in Jammu and Kashmir, as well as a tenure with the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka.

Lt Gen Nair has held important staff appointments, including Chief of Staff of Western Command and Northern Command, before taking over the present role.

His international exposure includes service with the Indian Military Training Team in Bhutan and as Chief of Staff of a multinational brigade in

a United Nations Chapter VII mission. His distinguished service has been recognised with the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal, Sena Medal and four Army Commander's Commendation Cards, along with a United Nations Force Commander's Commendation in Congo.

A graduate of the Defence Services Staff College, College of Defence Management and National Defence College, Lt Gen Nair has also held key instructional roles at premier military institutions, including the Army War College and Defence Services Staff College.

He is married to Uma Nair. Their son, Major Nikhil Nair, serves in the same battalion, while their daughter Nikita is based in Bengaluru.

## Deadline extended for MP Board second exam

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

In a major relief for students, the Madhya Pradesh Board of Secondary Education (MPBSE) has extended the last date for applying to the High School and Higher Secondary second examination. Students can now apply till May 4, 2026, through the MP Online portal. Earlier, the deadline was April 26.

Issuing the order, board secretary Budhesh Kumar Vaidya said the decision was taken keeping in mind the convenience of students. He added that the application process will continue to be conducted online, and all other rules and guidelines will remain unchanged.

This year, the board has introduced a major reform by discontinuing the traditional supplementary examination system and replacing it with a "second examination." Under the previous system, only students who failed in limited subjects were eligible for supplementary exams. However, the new system allows both failed and passed students to appear, offering equal opportunity to all.

Under the revised rules, students who have failed in any subject must reappear for that subject. At the same time, students who have already passed can also choose to reappear in any subject voluntarily to improve their marks. This move is aimed at reducing academic pressure and provid-

ing flexibility in the evaluation system, enabling students to secure better results for their future.

According to the schedule released by the board, the Higher Secondary (Class 12) second examination will be conducted from May 7 to May 25, 2026. The High School (Class 10) second examination will be held from May 7 to May 19, 2026. All examinations will take place at designated centres.

The board clarified that the marksheets issued after the second examination will be treated at par with the main examination. The better of the two results — main exam or second exam — will be considered final, ensuring direct benefit to students seeking improvement.

## 4 quintals of poppt husk seized, one arrested

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Mandsaur

In a major crackdown on illegal narcotics, Mandsaur police seized nearly four quintals of banned poppy husk from an Innova vehicle disguised as an ambulance. One accused from Rajasthan was arrested with a country-made pistol and live cartridges, while another managed to escape after opening fire in the air.

The operation was conducted under the direction of SP Vinod Kumar Meena, with guidance from additional SP

Hemlata Kuril and SDOP Dinesh Prajapati.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team led by outpost-in-charge sub-inspector O.P. Rathore set up a blockade on the Mandsaur-Sitamau road near Panchmukhi Balaji Family Restaurant on the intervening night of April 30 and May 1. During checking, an Innova ambulance approaching from a dirt track was intercepted.

On spotting the police, the driver and his accomplice abandoned the vehicle and attempted to flee. One of them fired in the air to evade capture. Police chased them and apprehended

one accused, identified as Rooparam Vishnoi, a resident of Barmer district in Rajasthan. A country-made pistol, two live cartridges and one empty cartridge were recovered from him.

A search of the vehicle led to the seizure of around four quintals of poppy husk packed in 22 sacks, estimated to be worth about Rs 6 lakh. Police also recovered four duplicate number plates with different registration numbers.

The absconding accused has been identified as Ashok Mali. A case has been registered under the NDPS Act, Arms Act and relevant sections of BNS.

## Rapido driver commits suicide

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

A 45-year-old Rapido driver allegedly died by suicide in Bhopal's Kolar area, reportedly distressed over mounting debt and constant pressure from lenders. The incident took place on Wednesday night, and police have registered a case and initiated an investigation.

The deceased, identified as Uttam Singh Chauhan, was a resident of 610 Quarters in Kolar and originally hailed from Narsinghgarh. He had been

living on rent in Bhopal for the past 10 months and was working as a Rapido driver to support his family.

According to his wife, Nirmala Chauhan, Uttam had taken a loan of Rs 15 lakh from a private finance company to build a house in his native place.

Following this, the family's financial condition deteriorated, and he struggled to repay the instalments. For the past several months, loan EMIs were reportedly bouncing, which left him under severe stress.

## Diggy seeks fourfold compensation for farmers



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav with senior Congress leader and Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh during a meeting at CM's residence in Bhopal on Friday. Pioneer photo

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

Former chief minister and Rajya Sabha member Digvijaya Singh has demanded that farmers whose land has been acquired since January 1, 2014, should be given four times compensation, as provided under the Land Acquisition Act, 2013. He said the law, enacted during the UPA government led by former prime minister Manmohan Singh, ensured enhanced compensation to protect farmers' interests.

In a press statement issued on Friday, Singh welcomed the Madhya Pradesh cabinet's recent decision to provide fourfold compensation for land acquisition. However, he urged the state government to implement the decision retrospectively from the date the central

law came into force, so that farmers affected over the past decade can also benefit. Singh said the Congress has consistently raised this demand for the last 12 years, stressing that farmers must receive fair and lawful compensation for their land. He pointed out that land belonging to farmers has been acquired for various projects, including roads and irrigation, but the state government had been providing only double compensation instead of four times, which he termed unjust.

He added that many small, marginal and Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe farmers have suffered due to inadequate compensation and have been pushed towards landlessness. "If the government has now acknowledged its mistake after a

decade, it should ensure justice by extending fourfold compensation to all affected farmers since 2013," he said.

Citing official data, Singh said that over the past three years, more than 55,000 farmers have been given compensation worth around Rs 16,000 crore, but at only double the rate. He argued that if the law had been properly implemented earlier, farmers would have received significantly higher amounts.

Calling 2026 the year of agricultural welfare, Singh urged the government to take corrective steps and ensure justice for farmers. He said inadequate compensation has forced many farmers to become labourers in their own villages, as they are unable to purchase new agricultural land.

## Deadly virus wipes out tigress, four cubs in Kanha

STAFF REPORTER ■ Bhopal

The mystery surrounding the death of a tigress and her four cubs in Kanha Tiger Reserve has begun to unravel, with preliminary investigations indicating infection by the highly contagious Canine Distemper Virus (CDV) as the likely cause.

According to forest officials, laboratory tests conducted at the School of Wildlife Forensic and Health in Jabalpur have detected viral indicators consistent with CDV. Deputy Director Prakash Kumar Verma said detailed testing is still underway for final confirmation, but early findings point strongly towards the viral infection.

The incident is linked to tigress T-141 of the Sarhi range. Three of her cubs died between April 21 and April 25 under suspicious circumstances. Following



this, the tigress and her remaining cub, both showing signs of severe illness, were rescued and shifted to the Mukki quarantine centre for treatment. Despite medical intervention, both succumbed on April 29, bringing the total fatalities in the family to five within nine days. Officials said post-mortem examinations revealed key symptoms associated with CDV, including empty stomachs and lung infections, indicating respiratory and neurological distress. The virus is known to affect wild

carnivores by attacking their respiratory, digestive and nervous systems, often proving fatal. Wildlife experts have expressed concern over the emergence of CDV in a major

tiger habitat, as the virus can spread rapidly, often through contact with infected domestic or feral dogs. Authorities are now intensifying surveillance in and around the reserve to prevent further transmission. Forest teams have been alerted to monitor other wildlife for symptoms, while measures are being considered to control stray dog movement near buffer zones. Officials said strict biosecurity protocols are being followed, and samples have been sent for advanced

analysis to determine the extent of the outbreak.

The tigress, identified as Amahi (T-141), died around 9:30 am on Wednesday at the Mukki quarantine facility. As per protocol, her post-mortem has been conducted and the carcass will be disposed of following standard wildlife safety procedures.

The incident has raised fresh concerns about disease management in protected areas, with experts stressing the need for early detection systems, vaccination drives for stray animals and coordinated monitoring to safeguard endangered species like tigers.

Officials said the reserve management has initiated a comprehensive health surveillance drive across core and buffer zones to identify any additional cases at an early stage. Veterinary teams are conducting regular field checks, collecting samples

from other carnivores and monitoring behavioural changes in wildlife to detect possible symptoms of infection. In parallel, authorities are working to strengthen coordination with local administration to control the movement of stray and domestic dogs in villages surrounding the reserve.

Awareness campaigns are also being planned to sensitise local communities about the risks of disease transmission from domestic animals to wildlife and the importance of vaccination. Wildlife experts have cautioned that outbreaks like CDV pose a serious long-term threat to tiger populations if not contained swiftly. They have recommended sustained monitoring, improved disease-response mechanisms and habitat-level interventions to ensure that such incidents do not escalate into a wider ecological crisis within the reserve.



## IN FOCUS



Labourers working at a brick factory on International Labour Day, also known as May Day in Nadia district, West Bengal

# Ganga Expressway to be toll-free for 15 days: Govt

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Lucknow

The Uttar Pradesh Government on Friday announced that the Ganga Expressway will be toll-free for 15 days from its commercial operation date, a move aimed at allowing the public to experience the state's longest expressway without any charges.

"In public interest, it has been decided that the Ganga Expressway will remain toll-free for 15 days from its opening so that the maximum number of people can experience this modern infrastructure," according to an official statement. Following the directive, the Uttar Pradesh



Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA) has instructed concessionaires IRB Infrastructure Developers Ltd and Adani Infrastructure to suspend toll collection during the period.

No fee will be charged from commuters for using

the expressway in these 15 days, it added.

The decision came after the Independent Engineer issued a provisional certificate under the concession agreement, formally declaring the expressway ready for public use and marking its commercial operation date.

The state Government said the initiative will encourage wider public usage in the initial phase and allow people to assess the expressway's quality, speed and facilities firsthand.

The move is also expected to promote tourism and strengthen public confidence in the project. Developed under the public-private partnership model on a design, build, finance, operate and transfer (DBFOT) (Toll) basis, the concessionaires have been granted toll collection rights for 27 years. However, the revenue loss incurred during the toll-free period will be compensated by the state Government or UPEIDA as per the agreement.

# Air India to reduce international flights

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Mumbai

Loss-making Air India will reduce its international flights till July, as the airspace curbs and surge in jet fuel prices have made many routes unprofitable, its CEO and Managing Director Campbell Wilson said on Friday.

"We have reduced some flying for April and May...massive rise in jet fuel prices which, together with airspace closures and longer flying routes, have caused many of our international flights to become unprofitable to operate," he told the staff in a message.

Airspace restrictions in the wake of the West Asia conflict have forced the airline to take longer routes for many international destinations, resulting in increased fuel



burn. The situation leaves the airline with no choice "but to further trim schedules for June and July", he added.

"We very much regret the disruption to our customers' plans and our crew's rosters, and hope that the Middle East situation settles - and the Strait of Hormuz opens - soon so that we can get back to a more normal state," Wilson said.

# H5N1 confirmed in death of 44 peacocks in Karnataka

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Tumakuru

Lab reports have confirmed that the recent deaths of 44 peacocks in the district were caused by the H5N1 bird flu virus, officials said on Friday.

The incident was first reported on April 16, and

over the course of a week, 44 peacocks were found dead under mysterious circumstances in Tumakuru taluk, they said. The deaths were reported from farm fields in Kesaramadu, Hirehalli and Gulur gram panchayats during an extensive combing operation, forest officials said.

# Ladakh signs MoU for first master plan on development

BHASKAR MUKHERJEE  
■ Leh

In a step towards planned and sustainable development, the Union Territory of Ladakh has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the School of Planning and Architecture to prepare its first-ever comprehensive master plan, Lt Governor VK Saxena said.

Saxena said, "The move is aimed at addressing the absence of



formal construction guidelines in Ladakh, which has led to unregulated and scattered development over the years, adversely impacting the region's fragile ecology and putting increasing pressure on civic infrastructure."

According to the MoU, SPA will prepare a detailed master plan covering all existing and proposed districts of the Union territory, including their respective headquarters. The plan is expected to provide a

scientific and structured framework for Ladakh's future growth.

"The master plan will undertake a comprehensive assessment of demographic trends, economic activities, environmental conditions and transport networks at both regional and urban levels.

It will also include detailed provisions related to signage systems, pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and preservation of Ladakh's unique heritage and

architectural character," a senior official said.

The exercise will also define a long-term vision for the Union territory by outlining clear goals and strategic policies for both regional and urban development. In addition, it will recommend an institutional framework along with a robust implementation mechanism to ensure that the plan is executed effectively on the ground.

## FROM PAGE - 1

# Steep LPG price hike to hurt all sections

The hike in commercial LPG will add more costs for restaurants, hotels, roadside eateries, caterers, bakeries, cloud kitchens and other food outlets that are dependent on industrial LPG for day-to-day operations.

For many of these businesses, cooking gas is not just another input cost. It is the business itself. The pressure has been felt most sharply by smaller restaurants, roadside eateries, caterers and cloud kitchens — businesses that typically operate on wafer-thin margins and rely heavily on daily cash flows. Today's hike will further strain their earnings and operations.

Last week, a senior oil ministry official told a news briefing that state-owned fuel retailers were incurring losses of about ₹20 per litre on petrol and roughly ₹100 per litre on diesel as pump prices remained frozen for nearly four years despite a surge in global oil prices.

Retail petrol and diesel prices have remained frozen since early April 2022 — a period during which oil prices rose in some months and fell in other times. When prices fell, state-owned oil firms made handsome profits, which they used to set off losses when rates rose. Petrol is currently priced at ₹94.77 a litre in Delhi, and diesel costs ₹87.67.

Also, prices of bulk diesel, used by industrial users like telecom signal towers, were increased from about ₹137 per litre to over ₹149 a litre. These rates compare to the ₹87.62 a litre price of diesel available at petrol pumps.

# TMC moves SC over use of Central staff...

"It is the prerogative of the office of the EC to appoint the counting supervisor and counting assistant either from the State Government or the Central Government," the court observed.

The move came amid rising tensions during the second phase of polling, after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee alleged that "observers from outside" and police officers unfamiliar with Bengal were being deployed in a manner that targeted TMC workers. Her remarks added to an already charged political atmosphere marked by clashes between the TMC and the BJP workers during the second phase of polling.

Meanwhile, the poll body ordered repolling on May 2 in 15 polling stations in West Bengal, where voting was held on April 29 in the second phase of the assembly elections. This is the first time that repolling has been ordered in the present set of assembly polls in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry. According to EC, 11 polling stations are in 142-Magarhat Paschim Assembly constituency, four are in Diamond Harbour assembly constituency in South 24 Parganas district in West Bengal.

In a letter to the Chief Electoral Officer of Bengal, the Election Commission of India (ECI) said the repolling has been ordered based on inputs received from the state poll machinery and voting will be held from 7 am to 6 pm. Voting at these booths was held on April 29 during the second phase of the West Bengal assembly election, but the EC has declared the poll void under Section 58(2) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

"I am directed to state that based on reports received from the concerned Returning Officers and the Observers of 142-Magarhat Paschim AC and 143-Diamond Harbour AC regarding poll taken for General Election to the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal, 2026, held on 29th April, 2026 and after taking all material circumstances into account, the Commission hereby declares, under sub-section (2) of Section 58 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, that the poll taken on 29th April, 2026 for the aforesaid election at the following Polling Stations (as mentioned in Column 3 of the table below) to be void and appoints 2nd May, 2026 as the date and fixes the hours, for taking fresh poll at the said Polling Stations," Bengal's Chief Electoral Officer wrote in the order.

"I am further to state that the widest possible publicity should be given by beating of drums in the polling area, and contesting candidates should be informed in writing about the fresh poll being taken on the said date," the poll body added.

According to the EC's order, the polls at the affected booths were declared void based on reports from Returning Officers (ROs) and Observers. The EC had received demands for repolling in 77 booths across four Assembly constituencies in South 24 Parganas district after the second phase of the elections. It is not immediately clear whether the repolling will also take place at the remaining 62 booths.

A report about complaints relating to the Falta constituency is awaited. A large number of complaints was received from the constituency. No repolling was recommended in the first phase of the West Bengal polls held on April 23.

The BJP had alleged rampant electoral malpractices in certain polling stations of both the Assembly seats under the Dimanoh Harbour Lok Sabha constituency, which is represented by TMC National General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee. The EC had deputed its special observer, Subrata Gupta, to fact-check the allegations from the ground.

"BJP knows it will be defeated by a big margin in Diamond Harbour and Margahat, and that is why they are demanding a repoll in these places. With the EC's assistance, the BJP is forcing people of these areas to go through the rigours of the voting process yet again. The mandate is against the BJP, and it will remain the same," TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said.

On the other hand, senior BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari said, "There had been malpractices in several booths in these areas to favour the TMC. We are happy with the repoll decision of the EC."

# NCB crackdown: 349 kg cocaine seized in Mumbai

Officials said the cocaine was part of a well-entrenched and sophisticated smuggling operation with international linkages. The NCB acted on specific intelligence that led investigators from a relatively modest haul to the heart of the cartel's supply chain operating through Mumbai, a known transit point for narcotics entering the country.

Home Minister Shah's strong message underscored the Narendra Modi Government's zero-tolerance policy towards drug trafficking. "We are resolved to ruthlessly crush the narcotics cartel," he declared, signalling continued aggressive action against organised crime syndicates involved in the narcotics trade.

The NCB has not yet released further details about the arrested individuals or the exact route of the consignment. However, the sources indicated that multiple arrests have been made and the probe is expanding to uncover the full extent of the international network.

This latest success is seen as a major boost to India's ongoing war against drugs, especially at a time when law enforcement agencies are intensifying efforts to choke smuggling routes from South America, West Asia and the Golden Triangle region. NCB is investigating further leads in this case.

# Iran sends fresh proposal to US

A planned second round of talks never materialised after US President Donald Trump imposed a naval blockade on Iranian ports on April 13, in response to the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz. Washington has maintained that the blockade will remain until a deal is reached, while Tehran has refused to negotiate under such conditions.

Last week, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited Islamabad for consultations. However, in a sign of continued impasse, he departed shortly before a US delegation was

scheduled to arrive.

The latest diplomatic outreach comes amid growing indications that Israel and the United States may be considering renewed military action. Israel's Defense Minister Israel Katz warned that Tel Aviv could resume strikes against Iran after reportedly receiving around 6,500 tonnes of military equipment from the US. His remarks followed a 45-minute briefing led by United States Central Command with President Trump, further fueling speculation of possible escalation.

Despite the heightened rhetoric, Iran has indicated it remains open to diplomacy under certain conditions. On Thursday, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said Tehran is prepared to resume talks with Washington if it abandons what he described as "maximalist" demands and halts what he called "maritime piracy" against Iranian vessels in the Persian Gulf, according to IRNA.

In a phone call with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, Pezeshkian also accused Washington and Tel Aviv of committing war crimes during the recent conflict. He alleged that attacks targeted senior leadership figures and critical civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, and safeguarded nuclear facilities.

Despite renewed diplomatic signals, deep divisions remain between the parties. With military warnings intensifying alongside fragile diplomatic efforts, it is unclear whether the latest proposal will lead to meaningful negotiations or further escalation.

# Breathalyser tests for CM Mann sparks...

Moments later, Khaira escalated the confrontation by alleging that Mann was present in the House in an inebriated state. Leader of Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa backed the charge, terming it "extremely serious" and urging immediate action. "Lock the doors and conduct a breathalyser test of all members present," Bajwa demanded, adding that if true, it would mark a "black day for democracy".

The allegation triggered uproar across the House. Congress MLAs rushed into the Well in protest, while AAP legislators countered with slogan-shouting. In a rare and tense spectacle, treasury bench members also entered the Well, bringing both sides face to face. The Speaker Kulatr Singh Sandhwan repeatedly appealed for order, reminding members that proceedings were being broadcast live, but the din continued unabated.

Escalating its stand, the Congress submitted a written representation to the Speaker demanding immediate breathalyser and dope tests of the Chief Minister and all MLAs before 2:30 pm, to be conducted by doctors from PGI. The party also announced it would boycott proceedings until the tests were carried out. However, the Speaker rejected the demand, further intensifying the standoff.

As slogan-shouting continued, the House was adjourned multiple times, including a suspension of proceedings till 3:20 pm. Even after reconvening, disruptions persisted, with both treasury and Opposition benches raising slogans against each other. The Speaker ordered that objectionable remarks be expunged and warned members against making personal allegations, but the warnings failed to restore order.

The developments marked a sharp turnaround from the session's opening tone. Earlier, Mann had struck a conciliatory note, referring to Bajwa as a "senior" leader, urging cooperation on labour issues, and even recommending that the Congress be given extended time to participate in the debate. He also defended the government's legislative record, citing the recent passage of a key amendment bill and inviting the Opposition to raise more issues in the upcoming monsoon session.

However, the atmosphere deteriorated rapidly after the allegations. Bajwa later reiterated his demand outside the House, questioning the Chief Minister's conduct and asserting that such concerns could not be ignored in a democratic insti-

tution. Khaira, too, stood by his claims, alleging that similar concerns had arisen during previous public appearances.

The treasury benches firmly rejected the allegations, with Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema calling them "false and fabricated" and accusing the Congress of attempting to derail proceedings. AAP MLAs continued their protest inside the House, accusing the Opposition of lowering the dignity of the Assembly.

With the Speaker refusing to order tests and the confrontation showing no signs of easing, Congress MLAs eventually staged a walkout, declaring they would not participate in proceedings until their demand was met.

# Operation Global Hunt: India's big strike on...

The global hunt for the fugitives and the narco-peddlers initiative builds on the Narco Coordination Centre (NCRD) framework and pairs with a planned nationwide anti-drug campaign monitored through 2029.

Officials say the 'Global-Hunt' is more than a one-off raid as it marks a doctrinal evolution in India's fight against organised crime. For decades, fugitives like Dola exploited lax extradition regimes and diaspora networks to run multi-core empires while Indian streets paid the price in addiction, violence and black money.

By embedding Interpol tools within an Indian-led architecture, involving NCB, Mumbai Police, Gujarat ATS, and intelligence agencies, the MMA is now exerting pressure rather than merely requesting cooperation. The timing is quite telling and has sent a strong message across.

Just days after Dola's return, NCB seized 349 kg of high-grade cocaine worth ₹1,745 crores in Mumbai using a "bottom-to-top" tracing method, another headline win that illustrates the same aggressive ethos. Senior officials involved in the operation Global Hunt admit that there are challenges. Success hinges on bilateral goodwill as Turkey delivered quickly, but Dubai, Canada and certain European capitals have historically been slower in processing the extradition requests from the Indian Law Enforcement agencies.

Sustained results will require not just arrests but asset seizures in India, dismantling of hawala and crypto pipelines and most importantly, demand-side measures at home. Still, the message is unambiguous: the era of safe harbour for India's narco-barons is ending. With Global-Hunt's most-wanted list now in play, more Red Corner Notices (RCN) and repatriations are expected. In an age of borderless crime, India is proving it can strike back across borders ruthlessly and relentlessly, a senior official said.

# Noida: Commercial flights to start from June 15

The approval confirms that the airport's security framework, systems and operational procedures comply with regulatory requirements ahead of the start of commercial services.

Further details on flight schedules, destinations and passenger facilities will be announced in due course, the statement said.

Airport's nodal officer for the UP Government, Shailendra Bhatia, told PTI that once domestic operations begin, cargo services will also start after some time.

"Thereafter, international flights are also expected to get finalised around Diwali this year, and by that time, domestic flights and cargo services would get streamlined," the officer told PTI.

Developed to cater to the growing demand for air travel in the National Capital Region and western Uttar Pradesh, the airport has been designed with modern terminal infrastructure, efficient operations and multimodal connectivity, the statement said.

The airport aims to ensure a seamless passenger experience while providing airlines with cost-efficient and reliable operational facilities.

The launch of commercial operations would significantly boost regional connectivity and support economic growth, trade, tourism and investment in the broader region, according to officials. Noida International Airport (IATA code: DNX) will connect the greater Delhi region and western Uttar Pradesh to major domestic and international destinations. The facility currently includes one runway and one passenger terminal with an annual capacity of 12 million passengers.

According to its long-term master plan, the airport is likely to scale up its capacity to handle over 70 million passengers annually in phases over the concession period.

Describing it as a "world-class airport", the statement said the facility blends Swiss efficiency with Indian hospitality and will offer a wide range of passenger services and commercial amenities. NIA also reiterated its commitment to achieving net-zero emissions, supported by sustainable design principles and environmentally responsible operations.

# Historic reunion as Buddha relics return...

"Om Mani Padme Hum" echoed softly across the gathering, the chant rising and falling like breath. Tenzin, a monk among the crowd, said, "I feel the sacred relics are himself the Buddha, who is here to bless us."

What remained striking was how personal the moment felt, even within a shared space. Some folded their hands and closed their eyes. Others simply looked, as if trying to hold the moment without translating it into ritual. There was no single way to be present, and that perhaps made it all the more compelling.

The timing of the exposition, around Buddha Purnima, added another layer of resonance. It was not just about display, but about placing these relics back into a living cycle of remembrance and reflection. In Ladakh, where monasteries are active spaces rather than preserved relics of the past, the connection felt immediate and unbroken.

For many locals, the emotion was difficult to articulate. This was not merely a rare exhibition; it felt closer to an arrival. The relics have travelled across countries before, but here, in a region where Buddhism shapes everyday rhythms, their presence carried a different kind of intimacy. Traditional lama music, Tsog offerings, ceremonial lamp lighting, and cultural performances, from Tibetan traditions to Ladakhi folk dances, deepened the atmosphere of the occasion.

Around the periphery, small-scale entrepreneurs had set up stalls with traditional Ladakhi clothing, wooden artefacts, and organic herbal products, offering a quieter, everyday window into the region's cultural life.

The movement of the relics across the region, including their journey towards Zaskar, extended this feeling beyond a single venue. It turned the exposition into something more fluid, almost like a travelling moment of stillness passing through different valleys and communities.

In his address during the inauguration, Shah described Ladakh as a long-standing land of the Buddha's Dharma, echoing the Dalai Lama's words of it being a "living laboratory" of compassion and Buddhist culture. He spoke of traditions such as Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug, and their shared teaching of seeing reality as it truly is, an idea he noted remains deeply relevant today.

Beyond the words and the size of the crowd, however, something more humble remains. The relics, which are thought to contain the Buddha's living presence, arrived as anchors of faith rather than just historical artefacts.

They seemed to blur the lines between the past and present in the quiet of folded hands, the cadence of murmured chants, and the long, patient wait for a single glance. For a brief while, devotion was simply lived rather than rehearsed amid the high-altitude solitude of Ladakh.



## PM empowered ED against corruption: Pankaj Chaudhary

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

Union Minister Pankaj Chaudhary said on Friday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi "strengthened" and gave more powers to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to cure the "cancer" of money laundering, corporate fraud and corruption, not to target any entity as alleged by a certain "ecosystem" in the country.

Chaudhary, the Minister of State for Finance, called the central agency the "nation's shield against financial crimes," stating that it has not only "lived up" to the trust successive Governments reposed in it but has also set "new standards".

He said the ED's name is "respected" not only in India but also at various global forums, including the FATF, which praised its investigative skills. The minister spoke during the 70th 'ED Day' event held here. The agency was



MoS Finance Pankaj Chaudhary with ED Director Rahul Navin during the celebration of Enforcement Directorate Day commemorating 70 years of the organisation in New Delhi on Friday

established on this day in 1956.

A host of Opposition parties have alleged that the ED is "a tool of the BJP-led Central Government" and is being used to "target" them.

"In the last few years, ED has been in the news the most. In its formative years, ED implemented the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (now

repealed) and the Foreign Exchange Management Act. Since then, there has been an unprecedented enhancement in its capabilities and work efficiency."

"Because the Indian Government trusted the ED, it was tasked with implementing the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (in

### FINANCIAL CRIMES SEE VISIBLE DECLINE: ED CHIEF

**New Delhi:** Enforcement Directorate (ED) Director Rahul Navin on Friday asserted that financial crimes like bank frauds, corporate scams and cheating in the real estate sector have seen a "visible decline" due to "sustained" action by investigative agencies and some "landmark" Government initiatives.

Delivering his address during the 70th 'ED Day' event in New Delhi, the agency chief said the current criminal landscape was "defined" by cryptocurrency fraud, cyber-enabled financial crimes, terror financing, anti-national activities and narcotics trafficking. These are the agency's "priority" areas of investigation, he added.

Navin said the ED filed an enhanced number of charge sheets during the last financial year 2025-26 and was undertaking enhanced investigation into "complex" money laundering cases as a result of "deliberate, sustained, and intelligence-driven effort".

2005)," Chaudhary said in his speech delivered in Hindi.

He said there was an "ecosystem" in the country that found "problems" in every solution. "Whatever you do, such people start getting troubled. Respected PM Modi took the reins of the country in 2014 and began taking tough decisions in the nation-

al interest; since then, the foundations of this ecosystem have been shaken," he said.

He said "such people" keep "crying" that Modi has given "too much" power to the ED, but these are "half-truths".

"The truth is that these powers were given to the ED to crush financial crimes and not to target someone. The question

is: why were these powers essential?", Chaudhary asked. He said this was essential because crimes like money laundering, hawala, possession of benami assets, corporate fraud and terror funding were "increasing" in the country.

This was due to black money being sent to foreign shores, scams occurring through banks, and the common person's money ending up in the pockets of a few.

"Such crimes are no less than cancer for the nation, society and the common man, and we know cancer cannot be treated with a sweet pill. Respected PM Modi ji wants results, and therefore, the ED was strengthened more than it was earlier," the MoS said.

"I want to ask some people if it's wrong to dream of a corruption-free India, if bringing back money looted in bank frauds is wrong, and if stopping the funding of terrorism is wrong?"

## Nation Focus



Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan being felicitated by Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma during a meeting in Jaipur

### Pradhan urges learning foreign languages for better jobs

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Friday said language is not merely a medium of communication but also a tool to connect and understand society, as he advocated learning foreign languages to boost job prospects.

The minister's remarks came at an event here, marking an MoU between the Foreign Language University, Hyderabad, run by the Education Department of the Government of India, and the Rajasthan Education Department. Under this initiative, in the initial phase, around 1,000 students in Rajasthan would get training in major foreign languages, such as French, German, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish, Pradhan said on X.

## ALPA flags pilot fatigue after untimely deaths

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Airline Pilots' Association of India (ALPA) has written to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), expressing concern over the deferment of full implementation of the court-mandated Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL) framework, warning that continued delays and regulatory relaxations could undermine flight safety and worsen pilot fatigue.

The association has said extensions to airlines granted by the DGCA pose a safety risk and should be withdrawn. The association also demanded that pending inquiry reports and medical fitness data be disclosed to strengthen oversight and accountability. The association made this demand following the untimely deaths of two Air India and Akasa Air pilots this week.

"The continued grant of variations to operators has materially diluted the intent of the flight duty time

limitation regulations (FDTL).

These variations, originally conceived as transitional measures, have effectively become the norm. This defeats the purpose of the fatigue management framework and perpetuates scheduling practices that operate at or near regulatory limits without adequate safety buffers, "ALPA India president Captain Sam Thomas said in a letter to the DGCA on Thursday.

The revised FDTL rules came into effect last November. IndiGo was granted certain exemptions until February 10 following flight disruptions last November. In March, Air India was allowed relaxation in duty time for long-haul flights. The move was necessitated due to airspace closures following the Iran-US conflict.

These are among the demands made by ALPA India, which said there are concerns about flight safety, regulatory credibility and the well-being of flight crew, especially in the wake of the deaths of the pilots.



## Stealth frigate Mahendragiri delivered to Indian Navy

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

Indigenous stealth frigate Mahendragiri, endowed with a potent weapon system and cutting-edge sensor suite, has been delivered to the Indian Navy, officials said on Friday. The sixth ship of the Nilgiri-class (Project 17A) was delivered on April 30 at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDSL), Mumbai.

The delivery marks a "significant milestone" in achieving self-reliance in warship design and construction, the officials said.

"Project 17A frigates are versatile multi-mission platforms designed to address current and emerging challenges in the maritime domain. This State-of-the-art frigate reflects a quantum

leap in naval design, stealth, firepower, automation, and survivability, and stands as an admirable symbol of Aatmanirbharta in warship building," the defence ministry said in a statement.

Mahendragiri - Yard 12654 - is the fourth ship of this class built at MDSL.

Designed by the Warship

timelines, the officials said.

P17A ships are fitted with an advanced weapon and sensor suite as compared to the P17 (Shivalik-class), they said.

"These ships are configured with Combined Diesel or Gas (CODAG) propulsion plants, comprising a diesel engine and a gas turbine that drive a Controllable Pitch Propeller (CPP) on each shaft, and a State-of-the-art Integrated Platform Management System (IPMS). The potent weapon and sensor suite comprises anti-surface, anti-air, and anti-submarine warfare systems," the statement said.

Mahendragiri is the sixth P17A ship to be delivered to the Navy in the span of less than 17 months from the delivery of the first P17A frigate (Nilgiri) by MDSL on December 20, 2024.

## President Murmu visits ARTRAC, lauds Army preparedness

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
Shimla

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday exhorted the Army Training Command (ARTRAC) to continue to work with fervour to enhance the operational preparedness of the Indian Army.

President Murmu, who visited the ARTRAC headquarters in Shimla before winding up her five-day visit to Himachal Pradesh, said in a statement.

The Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, who was briefed about the evolu-

tion of ARTRAC by Lieutenant General Devendra Sharma, GOC-in-C, ARTRAC, complimented all ranks of ARTRAC and defence civilians for the stellar work being done, and urged them to continue working with enhanced zeal and fervour, the defence ministry said.

Murmu was received at ARTRAC headquarters by Himachal Pradesh Governor Kavinder Gupta and Lt General Devendra Sharma.

"Elaborating on the novel initiatives of the ARTRAC, Lt General Sharma brought out the impetus provided



President Droupadi Murmu visiting the Army Training Command in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

towards drone training, steps taken to absorb niche technologies, introduction of the concept of 'Red Teaming'

and initiatives towards digitalisation and automation in the Indian Army," the ministry said in a statement.

The President acknowledged the fact that ARTRAC has an all-encompassing role of designing concepts of warfare, resource development for the Indian Army and widespread engagements with friendly foreign countries and sister Services, it added.

It is a critical gear in the path to military glory, Atmanirbharta and Viksit Bharat. The ARTRAC, through its 32 premier training establishments, vitalises the domain of professionalism in the Indian Army, which gives it a unique perspective into the art and science of warfight-

ing, the statement said. Later, President Murmu was accorded a warm sendoff at Annandale Helipad in Shimla, where Governor Kavinder Gupta, Chief Minister Thakur Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Minister Anirudh Singh, Chief Secretary Sanjay Gupta, DGP Ashok Tiwari and other senior civil, police and army officers were also present on the occasion.

President Murmu's itinerary had several programmes, but due to inclement weather conditions, she remained confined to Shimla.

## Lt General Balbir Singh takes command of Srinagar's Chinar Corps

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Jammu

Lieutenant General Balbir Singh, a highly decorated and battle-hardened officer with over 34 years of illustrious service, assumed command of the Srinagar-based Chinar Corps on Friday.

Earlier, Lieutenant General Prashant Srivastava relinquished the Command and handed over the reins to Lt General Balbir Singh, after completing 19 months of his stint in the valley.

His tenure was marked by the successful execution of Operations Sindoor and Mahadev, which brought the Pahalgam attack perpetrators to justice, an incident-free Amarnath Yatra 2025, and several key nation-build-



ing initiatives.

Lieutenant General Srivastava is now headed to New Delhi, where he is scheduled to take charge of the Quarter Master General at IHQ of MoD (Army).

After formally assuming

the charge, Lt General Balbir Singh paid solemn obeisance at the Chinar War Memorial, Srinagar, honouring the supreme sacrifice of the Nation's bravehearts.

In a press handout, a Srinagar-based Defence

Spokesman said, "Lt General Singh has extensive operational experience in Counter-Infiltration and Counter-Terrorism operations across Jammu & Kashmir and the North East, bringing a wealth of expertise and strategic acumen." He previously had commanded the Counter Insurgency Force (Victor) in South Kashmir.

In his inaugural address, Lieutenant General Balbir Singh reaffirmed his resolve to work in close synergy with the Civil Administration and the 'Awaam of Kashmir' to strengthen the foundation of peace, stability and prosperity in the region. He exhorted all sections of society to join hands with security forces in overcoming the persistent challenges.

## Goa identifies 6.72 cr square metres of land as eco-sensitive zones

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Panaji

The Goa Forest Department has identified 6.72 crore square metres of land along the banks of the Mandovi and Zuari rivers as ecologically sensitive, initiating steps toward regulatory protection of these areas, according to an official communication.

The exercise was carried out following directions from Forest Minister Vishwajit Rane, officials confirmed. In a letter issued by the Office of the Deputy Conservator of Forests, the department said it had completed the identification and delineation of environmentally vulnera-



ble stretches along the State's two major rivers.

The total mapped area spans 6,729.54 hectares - equivalent to approximately 6.72 crore square metres - covering zones considered critical for ecological balance.

The Forest Department has formally written to the Town and Country Planning (TCP) Department, urging it to take action under exist-

ing planning and environmental regulations to safeguard these riverbank areas from degradation and unregulated development.

The communication noted that detailed maps of the identified zones have been shared to facilitate further review and implementation of protective measures.

Officials said the initiative, undertaken under Rane's directive, is aimed at ensuring the long-term conservation of river ecosystems and maintaining environmental stability along the Mandovi and Zuari. The directive has been issued with the approval of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Panaji.

## Kharge slams Centre over massive commercial LPG price hike



**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
Bengaluru/Kalaburagi

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday flayed the Centre for the steep hike in commercial LPG cylinder refill prices and termed it a failure of the Union Government's assurances on inflation and price stability.

Kharge said Prime Minister Narendra Modi used to say that prices would not be increased and spoke about controlling inflation. "Today, I am seeing the reality. It seems he is unable to do what he said," he told reporters in Kalaburagi.

He also slammed people for still backing Modi. "I do not understand public opinion. Why do people still justify such policies or ideologies that have brought the country into such a difficult situation? That is very surprising to me," Kharge said.

Congress leaders in Karnataka said that the commercial LPG hike would severely impact hotel owners, small vendors and daily wage earners.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah came down heavily on the Centre.

## India chairs first BRICS Women's Working Group meeting

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The Ministry of Women and Child Development convened the first preparatory meeting of the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) Women's Working Group in virtual mode under India's presidency of the inter-governmental grouping this year, officials said.

The meeting, held on April 30, reaffirmed India's commitment to promoting women-led development, recognising them as key drivers of economic growth,

governance and social transformation, according to the ministry.

Representatives from BRICS member countries participated in the meeting, along with officials from various ministries and departments of the Government of India. Knowledge partners, including UN Women and the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), also attended it, the ministry said.

Additional Secretary in the ministry, Caralyn Khongwar Deshmukh, welcomed the



delegates and set the tone for the discussions, it added.

Guided by the theme of India's BRICS chairship - "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation, and Sustainability" - the

meeting focused on key global issues concerning women, which were grouped into four priority areas: women in governance and leadership; financial and digital inclusion; women's

entrepreneurship and skill development; and women's role in climate action, food security and nutrition.

BRICS member nations, in their interventions, congratulated India on its chairship and expressed support for the identified priority areas, a ministry statement said. The discussions will contribute to key outcomes to be finalised at the BRICS Women Working Group Meeting (July 6-7) and the BRICS Women Ministerial Meeting (July 8-9) to be held in Kochi, Kerala, the statement added.

## NCERT printing new Class 9 books on a war footing

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE**  
New Delhi

The NCERT on Friday said it is printing the newly-introduced Class 9 textbooks on a war footing, and supplies are being normalised following a temporary demand-supply gap after the rollout of the NEP 2020-aligned curriculum.

In a statement issued in New Delhi, the NCERT said it has brought out a new set of Grade 9 textbooks based on the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It has already



released digital versions of the new Grade 9 textbooks for free access on its website a fortnight ago.

These books are being printed on a war-footing manner and being distributed across the country.



## States Focus

# No date fixed for leadership change in Karnataka: Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Bengaluru/Kalaburagi

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday said that no date has been fixed yet to discuss a possible leadership change in Karnataka. His statement came amid intensifying speculation over a power tussle between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his deputy DK Shivakumar.

Addressing a press conference in his home town, Kalaburagi, Kharge maintained that any decision regarding leadership would be taken collectively by the party's high command after due consultation. He also cautioned against misinterpretation of his remarks.

"See, we will take a decision together, the three of us: I as the AICC president, Sonia



Gandhi as the Congress Parliamentary Party president, and Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. That is why we always act together," he explained.

Kharge further said, "When the three of us fix a date together, we will take a decision. Since no date has been

fixed yet, how can I say whether a change is happening or not?"

He asserted that the Congress leadership follows a consultative process before arriving at any conclusion.

"In the high command, we have extensive discussions among ourselves and also consult other senior leaders.

We consider what the outcome would be and then take steps accordingly," the Congress chief said.

Stressing that no timeline had been finalised, he said, "When it happens, I will definitely inform you. Please do not misinterpret this."

He noted that he often avoids commenting publicly to prevent misrepresentation. Emphasising party discipline, Kharge said any eventual decision would be binding on all.

"Whatever decision is taken, it will be in the interest of the State, and everyone will have to support whatever decision the high command takes," he said.

On Thursday, Kharge said there was no change of CM in Karnataka "for now" and that the leadership issue in the State would be resolved soon.

# Kolkata commuters face hardship as buses stay on election duty



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Kolkata

Daily commuters in Kolkata and adjoining areas continued to face severe hardship on Friday due to a shortage of buses, with a large number of vehicles still engaged in poll duty and unlikely to return before counting on May 4.

Acknowledging the situation, Joint Council of Bus Syndicate secretary Tapan Banerjee said more than 90 per cent of around 3,600 private buses requisitioned for the West Bengal polls have yet to report for duty.

Most of the buses are yet to be released after polling as they continue to be deployed for post-election duties, including the movement of security personnel and officials, and are expected to remain unavailable till the counting process scheduled for May 4, Banerjee said.

The shortage has led to overcrowding in available modes of transport, especially the Metro Railways' Blue Line and Green Lines.

The disruption has been particularly acute on routes heavily dependent on private buses like the EM Bypass stretch from Garia Station to Ultadanga and along VIP Road, BT Road, Jessore Road and GT Road

stretches, he said. "Services are unlikely to normalise before the counting date," he added.

Echoing the private bus operators, a senior state transport official said the 230 buses under West Bengal Transport Corporation Ltd, plying in the city and neighbouring areas, are yet to return to their depots.

All over the State, the majority of the 700 buses, operating under NBTC, SBSTC and other State transport undertakings, are engaged for election duty, and the situation will fully normalise by the end of next week, he said.

The conductor of a bus (route 40B) plying in the southern parts of the city said, "We have been temporarily released from election duty in the interior Howrah district by the ECI. So we are in a hurry to finish two trips."

"Later, we will go back to Howrah and can resume our routine only by May 4 afternoon," the conductor said.

Samudra Basu, a techie from Naktala area in Tollygunge, said, "I used to reach Sobhabazar by Metro Blue line and then take a bus to the IT hub at Rajarhat, New Town, where my office is located."



## ACTOR VIJAY'S TVK PARTY OFFICE TORCHED NEAR SRIRANGAM

A campaign office of the actor Vijay-led TVK was allegedly torched by unidentified miscreants in Kamanayakkanpalayam village near Srirangam in the early hours of Friday, police said. According to the police, the damage is minimal. Fire engulfed the thatched roof providing shade at the entrance of the building that served as the party's election office for the Srirangam constituency. The incident comes against the backdrop of the April 23 assembly elections and the counting of votes scheduled for May 4. While on social media, a CCTV footage of two unidentified men fleeing on a motorbike is being circulated as the culprits, police said the video footage is yet to be verified.



## STALIN MEETS DMK LEADERS TO DISCUSS VICTORY PROSPECTS

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Friday met DMK senior leaders at the party headquarters in Chennai and discussed victory prospects in the just concluded Assembly elections. The meeting comes in the wake of exit polls of various media indicating that DMK will be back in power in the State. The Tamil Nadu sources said Stalin met senior ministers, including KN Nehru, EV Velu and KR Periyakaruppan. Also, party deputy general secretary A Raja, organising secretary RS Bharathi, and communications wing head TKS Elangovan were present.

# BJP accuses Karnataka Govt of minority appeasement

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Bengaluru

The Opposition BJP on Friday accused the Congress Government in Karnataka of "indulging in minority appeasement" and "insulting Hindus" following its ₹600 crore plan for minority colonies.

State BJP President BY Vijayendra questioned whether Hindus did not vote for Congress and bring it to power.

The Cabinet, headed by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, on Thursday approved the formulation of a two-year action plan of ₹600 crores for the development of minority colonies during 2026-27 and 2027-28 in the State's Assembly Constituencies.



State BJP President BY Vijayendra

"In yesterday's Cabinet meeting, it was decided to give ₹600 crore for minorities. BJP is not anti-minorities, but I want to ask the Chief Minister of the State: when your Congress Government came to power in the State, didn't Hindus vote for you? Did no Hindu vote for the Congress party?" Vijayendra

asked in response to a query. Speaking to reporters, he sought to know why the Congress Government is repeatedly "indulging in minority appeasement".

"The Congress Government and the Chief Minister are behaving in a way which is insulting to Hindus; this is an unpardonable offence. The

pot of the Congress Government's sins has filled. Each decision that CM Siddaramaiah is taking is a minority appeasement and insulting us (Hindus). People of the State will not pardon them," he said, adding that repeated such decisions insults other communities as well.

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said there is no development across the State, the roads are filled with potholes, but the Congress Government is strengthening its "vote bank."

"As the Muslim community has turned against the Congress, Muslim clerics have protested against the Government openly, and several Muslim leaders in the Congress have been suspended.

# Violence erupts in three West Bengal districts post-elections



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Kolkata

At least three incidents of alleged post-poll violence were reported from West Bengal's Murshidabad, Malda and North 24 Parganas districts, police said on Friday.

In Murshidabad district, a CPI(M) polling agent, identified as Ruhul Amin, was allegedly attacked on Thursday night at Lochanpur within Islampur police station limits.

According to party sources, Amin was assaulted at a tea stall by a group of local leaders allegedly led by a TMC regional functionary.

Family members alleged that he had stepped out of his house at night when the incident took place.

"He was beaten up in public and threatened with death," a family member alleged, adding that he was later rescued and taken to safety.

The CPI(M) claimed that

police did not take action initially, despite lodging a complaint.

The party's candidate from Raninagar Assembly constituency later approached the SP, following which officers visited the spot.

Allegations have also surfaced that portions of CCTV footage from the tea stall were deleted, though there was no official confirmation.

In another incident in Malda district, a BJP mandal president, Mahananda Mondal, was allegedly attacked by suspected TMC workers on Thursday afternoon. The incident took place in the North Balupur area of Ratua.

According to BJP leaders, Mondal was stopped on the road and assaulted with bricks.

He was later admitted to the Malda Medical College and Hospital for treatment.

Senior BJP leader Khagen Murmu visited him at the hospital.

# Congress to expose BJP's attempt to mislead women: Pilot

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Raipur

Congress leader Sachin Pilot on Friday said his party will launch a door-to-door campaign and organise a protest in Chhattisgarh to expose the BJP's "attempt to mislead" women on the reservation issue.

Speaking to reporters at the State Congress office in Raipur after chairing meetings with party MLAs and newly appointed district and block unit presidents, Pilot, AICC in-charge for Chhattisgarh, alleged that

Thursday's special session of the State assembly was aimed at "giving effect to hypocrisy and falsehood."

"I have been saying this, and even Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi had said in the House (Lok Sabha) that the women's reservation bill was passed three years ago. The BJP unnecessarily held back its implementation...under the pretext of reservation, they wanted to push delimitation before the Census, which the entire Opposition opposed," he said.

The Congress remains committed to women's reser-



vation and would fully support its implementation on the basis of the current strength of the Lok Sabha, Pilot added.

Accusing the BJP of pursuing "vested interests," he said the ruling party tried to link delimitation with reservation for political gains,

but its intentions were exposed. "No matter how much publicity they do, the truth is that the BJP delayed reservation for three years and is now using it as a cover for delimitation," he alleged.

Congress workers will go "door to door" across the State to highlight the BJP's failures and to counter its "attempts to mislead women", Pilot said.

The Chhattisgarh Assembly on Thursday passed a resolution seeking immediate implementation of a one-third reservation for women

in Parliament and State legislative assemblies after the completion of delimitation. The Congress boycotted the proceedings just before it was passed.

Referring to rising petroleum prices, Pilot said Rahul Gandhi had warned that the Government would wait until Assembly elections before increasing prices. "It appears the Government delayed the hike to avoid electoral loss. Now there has been a steep increase, which will burden the common man and disrupt household budgets," he said.



Mumbai-Pune Expressway Missing Link project is seen on the day of its inauguration in Mumbai, Maharashtra on Friday. The much-awaited 13.3-km-long Missing Link project on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway aims at bypassing the steep mountain pass section to improve road safety and reduce travel time between the two key cities PTI

# Andamans eye two Guinness World Records for scuba tourism

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Sri Vijaya Puram

The Andaman and Nicobar administration will attempt two Guinness World Records this weekend as part of a push to promote the islands as a global diving destination, with Lieutenant Governor DK Joshi participating in both events, officials said on Friday.

The record attempts, 'Largest Flag Unfurled Underwater' and 'Tallest Human Stack Underwater', are scheduled for May 2 and May 3, respectively, at Swaraj Dweep (Havelock Island), they said.



Joshi, who also serves as the vice chairman of the Islands Development Agency, will take part in the underwater activities, they added.

The underwater flag unfurling will be held near Radha Nagar Beach, where

a 60-metre by 40-metre tricolour is proposed to be displayed beneath the sea, officials said.

The second attempt will involve creating the tallest human stack underwater, targeting a minimum height of 10 metres, near the lighthouse area off the Swaraj Dweep jetty, they said.

The initiative has been planned in coordination with multiple departments and will involve trained divers, technical experts and support teams to ensure adherence to international safety standards and Guinness World Records guidelines, officials said.

# ECI completes preparations for Kerala vote counting

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Thiruvananthapuram

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Friday said that all procedures have been completed in connection with the tallying of the votes polled in the April 9 Assembly elections in Kerala and issued a number of dos and don'ts to be followed by political parties' agents and the media during the counting process on May 4.

Kerala Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Rathan U Kelkar said, in a statement, that the counting will begin at 8 am on May 4 at 140 centres located



in 43 places, and a total of 15,465 personnel will be involved in the process.

The personnel include 140 Returning Officers (ROs), 1,340 Assistant ROs (AROs), 4,208 micro observers, 4,208 counting supervisors and 5,563 counting assistants, he said.

The counting of votes will start with the postal ballots, and EVMs of a maximum of 14

booths will be counted in one round, the CEO said.

He said that the rooms where the polling materials are kept will be opened in the presence of the candidates or their authorised representatives, the observer designated by the ECI, the concerned officials, and will be video recorded.

During the counting process, if there is any discrepancy between the number of votes cast in the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and the number of votes cast by the voters in the booth, the VVPAT slips (Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail)

will be counted, he said in the statement.

The VVPAT slips will bear the serial number, name and symbol of the candidate, it added. After verifying the number of votes cast in the EVM, it will be reconciled with the information in form 17C part one which contains the account of votes recorded at a polling station.

In order to ensure efficiency of the counting process, two EVM observers will carry out random counting in each round, and besides that, VVPAT of 5 booths in each constituency will be compulsorily counted, Kelkar said.

# Bengal CEO dismisses scope for wrongdoing at strongrooms

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
■ Kolkata

A day after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee spent hours at the EVM strongroom of her Bhabanipur constituency, alleging possibilities of malpractices, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Manoj Agarwal on Friday asserted there is no scope for wrongdoing at the counting centres.

Following tensions around two counting centres in Kolkata late on Thursday, police clamped prohibitory orders on gatherings outside all seven strongrooms in the city. Stating that round-the-clock CCTV monitoring of strongrooms was in place, Agarwal dismissed the allegations as "baseless". TMC spokesperson and Belegkata



constituency candidate Kunal Ghosh said that party workers and poll aspirants were keeping a strict vigil at the counting centres, where the EVMs are stored in strongrooms, upon directions of party supremo Mamata Banerjee. "There is no scope for any wrongdoing, given the arrangements made to secure the EVMs. The Centres have

been kept under thorough CCTV coverage, and their live-streamed footage can be seen from outside," Agarwal told reporters.

"One should have reason and evidence for making allegations," he said, maintaining that there were no grounds for levelling charges of EVM tampering or pre-counting malpractice.

Two counting centres in Kolkata witnessed high drama late on Thursday evening after TMC leaders alleged a lack of transparency and possible malpractice at the strongrooms housing sealed EVMs of the Assembly polls, which concluded on April 29.

Mamata Banerjee herself landed up at the Sakhawat Memorial School counting centre and stayed put there for about four hours.

## AAP Govt's Confidence Motion passes in Punjab Assembly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Chandigarh

The Confidence Motion moved by the Bhagwant Mann Government was unanimously passed in the Punjab Assembly on Friday, and AAP MLAs reaffirmed that they stand like loyal soldiers of the party. This comes days after seven Rajya Sabha MPs of the Arvind Kejriwal-led party defected to the BJP.

During the special session of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha in Chandigarh, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann moved the Confidence Motion. There are rumours that AAP will be finished and its MLAs would switch sides, and such rumours create an illusion in people's minds, CM Mann said in the House while moving the motion.

With the Opposition MLAs not present in the House when the motion was taken up, it was unanimously passed in their absence.

Taking on those allegedly spreading rumours, CM Mann



asserted that the party is strong and is expanding. "The party is strong. From Jammu and Kashmir to Goa, the party has a presence. In J&K's Doda, we have an MLA. Our Government in Punjab is running successfully. In Delhi, we are in the Opposition. We have five MLAs in Gujarat, two in Goa. Besides, AAP has its mayors, councillors, sarpanches at various places, the party has a national pres-

ence," Mann said. "We built the party with hard work, and we stand by Kejriwal like a rock," the Punjab CM further said.

The ruling party had earlier issued a whip to all legislators to attend the one-day session.

In the 117-member Punjab Assembly, AAP enjoys an overwhelming majority with 94 MLAs, while 16 belong to the Congress, one BSP, three SAD, two BJP and one

Independent.

When Mann moved the Confidence Motion, no one from the Opposition camp was present in the House, barring lone Independent MLA Rana Inderpratap Singh, with the Congress having staged a walkout and the BJP boycotting the session. SAD MLAs and the lone BSP legislator were also not present. Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema, who seconded the motion, slammed the BJP-led Centre over the issue of defecation of AAP's seven Rajya Sabha MPs.

Cheema also accused the BJP Government of "misusing" central agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate and the CBI, against political rivals. The BJP Government is indulging in "gundagardi" (hooliganism), Cheema said.

Kharar MLA Anmol Gagan Maan said, "We will remain loyal soldiers of AAP till our last breath. We have been given a chance by AAP, and it is our party which has brought us to this level."

## Surat to grow 20-fold by 2047: Bhupendra Patel

ABHINAV KUMAR JHA ■ Surat

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel inaugurated the third Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference in Surat on Friday, projecting that the Surat Economic Region will grow twentyfold by 2047 and contribute over 35 per cent to Gujarat's gross State domestic product, as the State announced eight new Smart GIDC industrial eStates across South Gujarat covering a total area of 5,380 acres.

The conference, held on Gujarat State Formation Day with the theme "Regional Aspirations, Global Ambitions," is the third in a series of regional summits being conducted across four zones ahead of the Vibrant Gujarat Investors Summit in 2027. The earlier two were held in North Gujarat and Saurashtra-Kutch.

Patel said the VGRC approach was inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure that no region of the State is left behind and that each district's potential gets a global platform. He said the South Gujarat conference would accelerate industrial devel-



Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel, Union Ministers Hardeep Singh Puri and CR Paatl with others during the Vibrant Gujarat Regional Conference (VGRC) at Auro University in Surat, Gujarat

opment in districts including Surat, Tapi, Navsari, Valsad, Dang, and Bharuch.

He outlined the strong economic potential of the Surat region across several sectors: chemicals and pharmaceuticals, textiles and apparel, gems and jewellery, agriculture, real estate, and tourism. He added that a master plan prepared under the guidance of NITI Aayog has been approved to develop Surat as a growth hub.

On Gujarat's broader economic standing, Patel said the State handles 40 per cent of India's total cargo, contributes 18 per cent to

national industrial output, and accounts for 15 per cent of the country's renewable energy. The State's own tax revenue, he said, has grown from ₹9,000 crore to ₹1.55 lakh crore. He also noted that two semiconductor plants are already operational at Sanand-Dholera, which has emerged as a semiconductor hub.

The eight new Smart GIDC industrial eStates announced for South Gujarat will be distributed across the region: two in Surat, three in Bharuch, and one each in Valsad, Tapi, and Navsari.

Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi presented

growth data at the event, saying Gujarat's GDP rose from ₹1.29 lakh crore in 2003 to ₹21.90 lakh crore in 2022-23, with projections of ₹27.4 lakh crore by 2025.

Gujarat contributes 8.2 per cent to India's GDP. He said the State leads in foreign direct investment and noted a fourfold increase in MSMEs.

He added that ₹5,619 crore in incentives were disbursed in 2024-25, including ₹1,300 crore to 11,000 traders from Surat. He expressed confidence that the Surat conference would witness record memorandums of understanding, following ₹3.24 lakh crore at Mehsana and ₹5.78 lakh crore at Rajkot.

Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri praised Gujarat for organising regional summits and said India had maintained economic stability despite global disruptions, including supply chain issues and rising crude prices. He pointed out that petrol and diesel prices in India have remained unchanged for over four years.

## Above-normal heatwaves and rain likely in May: IMD

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its monthly forecast on Friday that above-normal heatwave days are likely in some parts of the foothills of the Himalayas, east coast States, Gujarat and Maharashtra in May. The department also highlighted that the rainfall averaged over the country as a whole during May is most likely to be above normal, with the onset of the southwest monsoon over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands expected around May 14-16.

This came as India continues to experience higher-



than-average temperatures that are pushing energy demand to a record high. As the world's third-largest oil importer and consumer, India's energy supplies are already under pressure since the United States-Israeli conflict with Iran disrupted ship-

ments through the Strait of Hormuz.

"During May 2026, maximum temperatures are expected to be normal to below normal across many parts of the country. However, above-normal temperatures are likely in many

parts of southern peninsular India, some parts of the northeast, and northwest India," said Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, Director General of Meteorology at the India Meteorological Department (IMD), adding that minimum temperatures are expected to be above normal across many parts of the country.

"However, many areas of northwest India, along with some parts of central India and adjoining areas of peninsular India and southern parts of northeast India, are likely to experience normal to below-normal minimum temperatures," he said in a Statement.

The rainfall during May 2026 averaged over the

country as a whole is most likely to be above normal (>110% of LPA). The normal to above-normal rainfall is likely over most parts of the country, except some parts of east and northeast India, and east central India, where below normal rainfall is likely.

On the onset of the southwest monsoon, Mohapatra said, "The monsoon may arrive over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands around May 14-16."

Currently, El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO)-neutral conditions over the equatorial Pacific are evolving towards El Niño — the periodic warming of waters in the central Pacific Ocean — conditions.

## CBIC reshuffles 217 top officers, signals zero corruption

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ New Delhi

The Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) on April 30, 2026, issued its Annual General Transfer (AGT) orders for Commissioners and Principal Commissioners, marking one of the most extensive reshuffles in recent years.

The annual exercise includes routine transfers, promotion of officers from Commissioner to Principal Commissioner, and postings of newly promoted Commissioners from the 2008 batch. The compre-



hensive order covers more than 217 officers, impacting customs and CGST formations across the country.

Officials describe the move as part of a broader administrative effort to align leader-

ship with the Government's vision of a "New India" and the goal of achieving a developed nation status by 2047. By placing experienced and capable officers in key positions, the reshuffle aims to enhance ease of Doing Business while maintaining a careful balance between compliance and enforcement.

A notable feature of this year's transfer exercise is the emphasis on integrity and merit.

CBIC has underscored a strict, no-tolerance approach toward any deviation from the highest standards of probity.

## MSU introduces 'Modi Thought' and RSS ideology in Sociology



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Vadodra

In a significant academic move, the Faculty of Arts at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (MSU) has approved the introduction of four new subjects in its Sociology department. Among them, courses on 'Modi Thought' and the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) will now be taught as part of the curriculum. The decision was taken by the department's Board of Studies, aiming to provide students with a sociological understanding of contemporary ideological frameworks and leadership models. Notably, these subjects will be mandatory for students.

Under the revised curriculum, final-year BA students will study "Sociology of Patriotism" as a major subject. The course will include the emergence and functioning of the RSS, exploring why millions of people are associated with the organisation, its role in social

integration, and its functioning as a non-profit entity. The syllabus will also cover its outreach, including women and minority wings.

The 'Modi Thought' component will focus on the leadership style, personality, and governance approach of Narendra Modi. Students will examine how leadership is cultivated and how influential figures connect with the masses, supported by sociological frameworks proposed by thinkers such as Max Weber.

The curriculum will further include a broader understanding of nationalism, examining it not just as a geographical concept but as a cultural and social construct. Key texts like Hind Swaraj will also be discussed to provide historical and philosophical context.

In addition, students will study prominent historical personalities such as Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Sayajirao Gaekwad III, and Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, including their contributions, political philosophies, and reform policies.

## Ravi K takes charge as 22nd Chairman and MD of HAL

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Bengaluru

State-run aerospace conglomerate Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) on Friday said Ravi K has assumed charge as the 22nd Chairman and Managing Director of the company. He succeeded DK Sunil, who superannuated on April 30. Ravi brings over 30 years of experience across various sectors such as A&D, manufacturing and electronics, the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) said in a release.

Prior to this, he was the Director (Operations) at HAL,

where he led strategic planning and played a key role in securing HAL's Maharatna status.

"My vision is to transform HAL into a globally competitive aerospace and defence enterprise, driven by innovation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), operational excellence, and people," Ravi said.

He has held key leadership roles, including Executive Director and General Manager of the LCA Tejas Division, as well as Executive Director (Corporate Planning).

During his tenure, he concluded various big-ticket contracts for HAL, such as the



Ravi K, assumes charge as the 22nd Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) from DK Sunil in Bengaluru, Karnataka on Friday

contract to supply 180 LCA Tejas to the Indian Air Force, 156 LCH Prachand to the Indian Army and Indian Air

Force and is credited with the operationalisation of the LCA Tejas fleet in IAF, the company said.

## MDMK's Vaiko confident of DMK alliance victory in TN polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Chennai

MDMK founder Vaiko on Friday expressed absolute confidence in the victory of the DMK-led coalition in the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. Elections to 234 Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu were held on April 23, and the results will be declared on May 4.

"My belief is that the DMK will form a Government. The DMK alliance will gain the majority," Vaiko said. Speaking to reporters on the occasion of May Day, the veteran leader dismissed varying exit poll projections, asserting that the ground reality would favour the incumbent alliance

when results are declared on May 4.

Vaiko noted that while a majority of opinion polls indicate that the DMK will return to power, some surveys have suggested favourable outcomes for the AIADMK or the TVK. He maintained that such projections remain speculative until the formal counting of votes.

The MDMK chief also utilised the occasion to launch a scathing attack on the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Central Government.

He accused the administration of acting as a representative of industrial capitalists and actively crushing labour rights.



Highlighting the history of May Day, he recalled his 1990 intervention in the Rajya Sabha, where he successfully petitioned then Prime Minister VP Singh to declare May 1 a Central Government holiday.

Vaiko emphasised that his party would remain at the forefront of the struggle for workers' welfare. Responding to queries about a perceived public desire for political change in the State, Vaiko remarked that any such conclusions could only be drawn after the final election results are announced.

He reiterated his stance, stating that the DMK alliance remains the definitive choice for the majority of the electorate.

## Former MLA PV Anvar vows UDF probe into LDF corruption if elected to power

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
■ Malappuram (Kerala)

Former MLA PV Anvar on Friday said a UDF Government, if voted to power, would be duty-bound to investigate the alleged corruption and wrongdoing of the incumbent LDF administration.

Anvar, who was elected as an LDF-backed MLA, resigned after falling out with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and later contested the recently held Assembly polls from Beypore constituency as a UDF-backed

Independent candidate.

He was speaking to reporters in the wake of reports that former Malappuram District Police Chief Sujith Das S had been given a clean chit in an internal probe into allegations of misconduct, including improper handling of cases, aiding gold smugglers and illegal felling of trees from the compound of his official residence.

In September 2024, after a phone conversation between Das and Anvar became public, the political leader levelled several allegations of



misconduct against the officer. Following this, Das was suspended, and an internal inquiry was initiated.

Anvar said he was never heard during the inquiry against Das and would pursue legal action against the deci-

sion to close the probe.

"Only a notice was issued asking me to surrender my mobile phone, which I rejected. As the complainant, my Statement should have been recorded. Without hearing me and conducting any proper investigation, how could they end the probe?" he asked.

He said he feared that if the mobile phone was handed over, evidence would be destroyed.

Anvar alleged that certain police personnel in Malappuram district were involved in drug trafficking

and gold smuggling activities.

"There was a written direction from Das that all shops near Kariapur airport should be closed after 9.30 pm. It was to facilitate manipulation after snatching smuggled gold brought out from the airport," he alleged.

Anvar further claimed that around 50,000 cases were registered against youngsters under Das' direction to create a negative image of Malappuram, a district with a large minority population.

He said the developments had turned Malappuram into a subject of discussion even

in Parliament and held Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Das responsible.

"Das created conditions for what the BJP and RSS wanted — to portray Malappuram as a criminal district and Pakistan," he alleged.

Anvar said answers to all these alleged wrongdoings would begin to emerge after the Assembly election results are announced.

He claimed people had voted against Pinarayi Vijayan and what he termed "Pinarayism".

"People voted to know

certain truths. They want to know where Lord Ayyappa's gold was diverted. The next Government cannot withdraw from that. People want to know who diverted gold smuggled from airports," he alleged. He further claimed that even Communist supporters had voted against Vijayan and would help unseat the LDF Government.

"The UDF leadership will investigate all these matters. They will place the details before the people. Government properties that were stolen will be brought back," he said.



## Editor's TAKE

### OPEC: The undoing of an oil regime

As internal rifts widen and oil producers prioritise national interests, the UAE exit from OPEC could impact oil prices and the future of the petrodollar

Although it was on the cards, it came so fast, that not many anticipated it. The UAE, one of the major partners in the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), has decided to quit the organisation that was formed 65 years ago to ensure steady prices of oil in the world market by regulating and capping the number of barrels of oil each member country could mine in a day. This, in a way, is the undoing of the oil regime the world has witnessed for over sixty years.

After the departure of the UAE on May 1, 2026, there are now 11 members left in OPEC. This oil regime controlled around 36 per cent of total world oil exports, and OPEC countries sit over almost 80 per cent of the world's oil reserves. OPEC was formed as a price stabiliser-adjusting output to prevent extreme volatility. The system worked well for several decades, but fissures were visible, and with time, they became bigger cracks in an alliance that was supposed to work on consensus. The departure of Qatar in 2019, Ecuador in 2020 and Angola in 2024 weakened OPEC, but the UAE's departure is a disaster, which shows growing tension and schism within the group.

The member countries are not content with the allocated quotas. Having invested heavily to raise output potential to nearly five million barrels per day, Abu Dhabi seeks flexibility to monetise its resources, particularly in Asian markets. Though the UAE is no longer bound by the OPEC quota, it can enhance its daily production but may not as oil market is very volatile due to Iran war. In the short term, global oil prices may not immediately collapse but will see downside eventually. With disruptions around the Strait of Hormuz, through which a significant share of global oil flows, supply constraints linked to regional conflicts have already pushed Brent crude above \$100 per barrel. In such a tight market, UAE may opt for gradual output increases to avoid destabilising prices. However, in the long term, this could lead to a decline in oil prices. A considerably weakened Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), with reduced spare capacity and cohesion, will struggle to act as an effective price manager.

OPEC's influence over oil prices is steadily declining. This weakening is not good news for the US, as the 'petrodollar' system, under which global oil trade operates, could be undermined. If more Gulf producers follow the UAE path and diversify their market partnering with China, the OPEC will lose its power. That said, the dollar's dominance is unlikely to collapse overnight, though American influence over oil and West Asia may weaken. The UAE is expected to expand oil production while investing in renewable energy, positioning itself as a hub for the energy transition. Both these moves would hurt US interests in the Gulf, as Saudi Arabia, the leader of OPEC, may find it increasingly difficult to enforce discipline within the group, as the members would have the UAE example to emulate. The UAE's exit may lead to emergence of a competitive and uncertain oil regime. Prices may become more volatile, alliances more fluid, and the balance of power more dispersed. Slowly but surely, the age of tightly managed oil diplomacy is giving way to one defined by strategic autonomy.

## Dual challenge: El Niño and global tensions

Often seen as a distant ocean event, El Niño significantly impacts India's monsoon, agriculture, and water security, while rising geopolitical tensions threaten energy markets-together creating a volatile environment that demands preparedness



SATENDRA SINGH

In recent weeks, El Niño has re-entered public discourse, frequently appearing in weather updates and policy conversations. While it originates in the equatorial Pacific Ocean, its influence stretches far beyond, altering atmospheric patterns that directly affect India's monsoon. For a country where nearly 70 per cent of annual rainfall is delivered during the monsoon season, even subtle disruptions can have far-reaching implications.

At its core, El Niño refers to the abnormal warming of surface waters in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean. This warming weakens the trade winds that typically push moisture-laden air towards the Indian subcontinent. As a result, the monsoon-India's climatic lifeline-can become erratic. Rainfall may arrive late, pause unpredictably, or fall in short, intense bursts rather than being evenly distributed.

Such variability often proves more damaging than an outright deficit. Agriculture, water management, and rural livelihoods depend not just on how much rain falls, but when and how it does. A delayed monsoon can disrupt sowing cycles, while prolonged dry spells followed by sudden downpours can damage crops and reduce yields.

India's historical experience with El Niño underscores its significance. Several major El Niño years-including 1965-66, 1972-73, 1987-88, 2002, 2009, and 2015-16-were associated with drought-like conditions, reduced agricultural output, and economic stress. The 1987-88 episode, for instance, led to one of the most severe droughts in recent history, affecting vast regions and exposing vulnerabilities in water and food systems.

However, the relationship is not always deterministic. The strong El Niño event of 1997-98 did not translate into a severe drought in India, thanks to the interplay of other climatic factors. This variability highlights an important point: El Niño increases risk, but does not guarantee a crisis.

As 2026 unfolds, early indicators-rising temperatures and uneven pre-monsoon rainfall-suggest the possible development of El Niño conditions. Agencies such as the India Meteorological Department and the World Meteorological Organization have flagged a heightened probability, though the final outcome remains uncertain. This uncertainty makes preparedness crucial. The first and most immediate impact of a weak or erratic monsoon is felt in agriculture. A large share of India's farmland remains rain-fed, leaving farmers highly dependent on timely rainfall. Crops like rice, pulses, and oilseeds are particularly sensitive to rainfall variations. A disrupted monsoon can lead to lower yields, reduced farm incomes, and cascading effects on food supply and prices. Water resources face parallel



PANKAJ KUMAR

PREPAREDNESS IS NOT SOLELY THE RESPONSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENTS. COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH CONSERVING WATER, USING ENERGY EFFICIENTLY, AND ADOPTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

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stress. Reservoirs, rivers, and groundwater levels depend heavily on monsoon replenishment. A deficient or poorly distributed monsoon can result in water shortages, affecting both rural communities and urban centres. Cities may resort to rationing, while villages struggle with access to drinking water and irrigation.

El Niño is linked to rising temperatures, with more frequent and intense heatwaves that affect public health, energy demand and labour productivity, especially in outdoor sectors like agriculture and construction. Another emerging concern is the rise in forest fires. Data from early 2026 indicates a sharp increase in both the frequency and intensity of fires, with some regions witnessing an over 80 per cent surge compared to previous years. Areas like the Aravalli Range and the Nilgiri Hills have experienced repeated fire incidents, often exacerbated by prolonged heat and reduced moisture.

Environmental degradation has further amplified this vulnerability. Fragmented forest landscapes, combined with rising temperatures and declining humidity, create conditions where fires can ignite and spread rapidly. The result is not only ecological damage but also a loss of biodiversity and increased carbon emissions.

Compounding these climate-related challenges are geopolitical tensions unfolding across the globe. Conflicts involving major players such as the United States, Israel, and Iran have the potential to disrupt global energy markets. While these tensions are unrelated to El Niño, their economic consequences can intensify its impact. India's heavy reliance on imported crude oil makes it particularly sensitive to fluctuations in global energy prices. Any disruption in supply chains can drive up fuel costs, affecting transportation, manufacturing, and overall inflation. When combined with a weak monsoon that pushes up food prices, the result can be a

broad-based rise in the cost of living.

This dual pressure-climate-driven supply shocks and geopolitically driven cost increases-creates a complex economic scenario. Farmers may face higher input costs alongside reduced yields, while consumers grapple with rising prices for essential goods. The combined effect can dampen rural demand and strain public finances. Yet, there are reasons for cautious optimism. Over the decades, India has strengthened its capacity to manage such challenges. Advances in weather forecasting allow better anticipation of climatic events. Expanded irrigation networks reduce dependence on rainfall, while improved foodgrain storage ensures buffer stocks during lean periods. Disaster management systems have also become more responsive and coordinated. Going forward, a comprehensive approach is essential. Water management must be prioritised through conservation, efficient irrigation, and better storage.

Agriculture needs to become more climate-resilient, with crop diversification, drought-resistant varieties, and sustainable practices. Reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels through renewable energy adoption can also mitigate the economic impact of global tensions. Preparedness is not solely the responsibility of governments. Communities and individuals play a crucial role in building resilience through conserving water, using energy efficiently, and adopting sustainable practices. It is equally important to maintain perspective. Not every El Niño results in a severe drought, and not every geopolitical conflict leads to economic disruption. India's experience shows that with strong institutions and proactive planning, uncertainties can be managed effectively. Ultimately, the likely emergence of El Niño in 2026 should be viewed as a warning rather than a crisis. It underscores the need for early action and long-term resilience, as preparedness remains firmly within reach.



## PICTALK



A view of an idol of Lord 'Kallazhagar' (Vishnu) during the Chithirai festival, in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. PHOTO: PTI

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## Have we lost the human in humanity?



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

### 2ND OPINION

We all dream of a better world where there is peace, happiness and harmony, don't we? No one would like the degradation of the environment, loss of human lives due to wars and murders, corrosion of the human spirit by crime and corruption, or dehumanisation through poverty and troublesome social, economic and political conditions, embroiled in high tension and turmoil that drain human energy and make life miserable. On the contrary, all would like life to be characterised by harmony and health, well-being and wealth, and a sense of happiness and purity.

But the question is: what are those values, and how can such a socio-political-economic system be established which has those values and enhances human experience, enabling men and women to have a lifestyle that makes

such a society viable? Looking around, it can be said that much of the conflict in society today is due to a lack or absence of tolerance. Yes, it is tolerance of differences in views, diversity of religious beliefs and cultures, and plurality of races and nations that brings about unity and co-operation and, in turn, leads to concerted efforts for the amelioration of the miserable condition of the world.

However, tolerance or unity cannot exist or survive alone. In fact, no value or virtue can stand by itself. In the case of tolerance, there is either some common purpose that holds people in unity or an urgent common need waiting to be fulfilled that compels people to tolerate. Even then, tolerance becomes weak and fragile if there is suspicion about a person's motives, doubt about intentions, or awareness of a lack of such human values as honesty, sincerity and sympathy, and above all, the absence of the spirit of co-existence and fellow-feeling.

In our lifetime, we come across many variables and variants, and one requires spiritual strength to tolerate those who have violent, obsessive and inhuman tendencies as their constant companions. Tolerance is easier when one is confronted with civilised and wise people, even if they are critics or opponents. However, a higher degree of tolerance is required when dealing with those who are compulsive, vile or

wicked. For this, one must develop supportive values such as goodwill, patience, introversion, calmness and, above all, love. Our present condition is the result of neglect or violation of these values. We have gradually lost the human aspect of our lives and become more or less like machines, resulting in a lack of friendship, fellow-feeling and love. Our knowledge of science, technology, communication and managerial skills has not brought inner happiness because honesty, sincerity, cordiality, fair dealing, duty, discipline and mutual trust are declining. In other words, there has been a rapid erosion of social, moral and family values. It is not that science, technology or management skills have caused our suffering; rather, the fall in moral standards has prevented them from yielding their full benefits. People do recognise the importance of moral values, but they often lack the spiritual knowledge needed to practise them effectively, as well as forms of meditation that help internalise these values and create a deep experience of peace and happiness. Thus, the need of the hour is to create mass awareness of values such as tolerance, humility and mutual respect in order to realise our dream of a world filled with peace, happiness and harmony.



The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist

## AMERICA'S GUN CRISIS: A NATION HELD HOSTAGE BY ITS OWN HISTORY

Gun violence in the United States has escalated steadily over the past decade, with a notable surge during the COVID-19 period. Yet, beyond mass shootings that dominate headlines, a quieter and more pervasive tragedy persists: the majority of gun-related deaths are suicides, reflecting deep social and psychological distress.

The roots of this crisis lie in a complex interplay of easy firearm access, mental health challenges, and entrenched cultural attitudes. With approximately 120 privately owned guns per 100 citizens and no comprehensive national registry, the scale of civilian armament is unparalleled. Historical influences - from the frontier ethos of the Wild West to the legacy of wars like Vietnam War, Iraq War, and War

in Afghanistan - have reinforced a "macho" gun culture.

Efforts at reform face stiff resistance from powerful lobbying groups and political hesitation, often framed as preserving tradition rather than addressing public safety. Strikingly, while social movements have mobilised around various rights, gun control remains stalled.

The most tragic consequence is the recurring loss of young lives in school shootings. Despite the scale of the crisis, public urgency appears muted. A nation so fiercely protective of its freedoms risks being consumed by its inability to confront this deeply embedded problem. importance for the world.

R.NARAYANAN | MUMBAI

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Exit poll illusions and Bengal's silent voter

Following Phase II of the West Bengal Assembly Election on April 29, several media outlets released exit poll projections for five states. Most predicted a victory for the Bharatiya Janata Party, but Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee dismissed them as exaggerated and misleading. The Bengal elections, however, were shaped less by projections and more by an undercurrent of fear and uncertainty. Reports of nearly 90 lakh names being deleted from electoral rolls - including 27 lakh over so-called "logical discrepancies" - created anxiety among voters about their rights and citizenship. Despite heavy deployment of Central Armed Police Forces and an unusually subdued state administration, voter turnout remained high, reflecting both resilience and concern. Banerjee's campaign framed her as the defender of Bengal's identity and its people's rights, making any electoral shift unlikely unless driven by fear. Notably, many voters chose silence over participation in exit polls, with some pollsters reporting non-response rates as high as 70-80 per cent.

Past inaccuracies further weaken the credibility of exit polls. In the 2024 Indian general election, projections significantly underestimated her party's performance. If history repeats itself, the gap between prediction and reality may further erode trust in pollsters.

HARIDASAN RAJAN | KOZHIKODE

### Hypersonic arms race

The United States has taken a significant leap in military technology with the development of its hypersonic missile system, Dark Eagle. Designed to travel at speeds exceeding Mach 5 and cover distances up to 2,700 km, the system uses a manoeuvrable glide vehicle capable of evading most existing air defence systems. This enhances the US's ability to carry out rapid, precise strikes on high-value targets such as command centres and missile installations.

While this advancement strengthens deterrence, particularly in geopolitically sensitive regions, its operational deployment remains gradual. The decision to use such systems in any conflict would depend as much on political calculations as on technological capability. Globally, the hypersonic domain is becoming increasingly competitive. Russia has already deployed systems like Avangard and Kinzhal, while China fields the DF-17. India, too, is advancing in this field with projects such as BrahMos-II and HSTDV.

Together, these developments signal a transformative shift in warfare. Speed, precision, and evasiveness are redefining strategic balances, ushering in a new era where defence systems must rapidly evolve to keep pace with offensive innovation.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

### A day of Labour: Leadership lapse in Punjab

On International Labour Day, Punjab's special Assembly session meant to honour workers descended into controversy and embarrassment. The Opposition - Indian National Congress and Shiromani Akali Dal - staged a walkout, accusing Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann of appearing in an inebriated state. Allegations of slurred speech and an unsteady demeanour led to demands for breathalyzer tests for all MLAs, including the Chief Minister. These accusations are not unprecedented. Mann has faced similar charges in various public settings - from Parliament to religious venues and even during international travel. While the Aam Aadmi Party dismisses these claims as politically motivated, their recurrence raises legitimate concerns about leadership credibility.

Punjab today faces deep structural challenges - agrarian distress, drug abuse, unemployment, and fragile infrastructure. In such a context, even the perception of a compromised leadership damages public trust. Though Opposition tactics merit scrutiny, the episode underscores a larger truth: governance demands accountability and dignity. Leadership must inspire confidence, not invite ridicule. Punjab's citizens deserve a Chief Minister who is consistently present, composed, and capable of addressing the state's pressing concerns.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU



## Justice delayed in the Veerappan hunt: A long fight for recognition

As the Karnataka High Court calls out the state's selective recognition of contributions, the story resurfaces — not just as a tale of a notorious brigand, but as a reminder of institutional neglect and the enduring quest for justice by forest personnel who formed the backbone of the operation



**BK SINGH**

Peninsular India has seen one of the most dreaded poachers of wild elephants and smugglers of sandalwood of the 1980s and 1990s in Veerappan. Along with his gang, he operated in the forests connecting the Eastern and Western Ghats, as well as in the Western Ghats spread over the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and

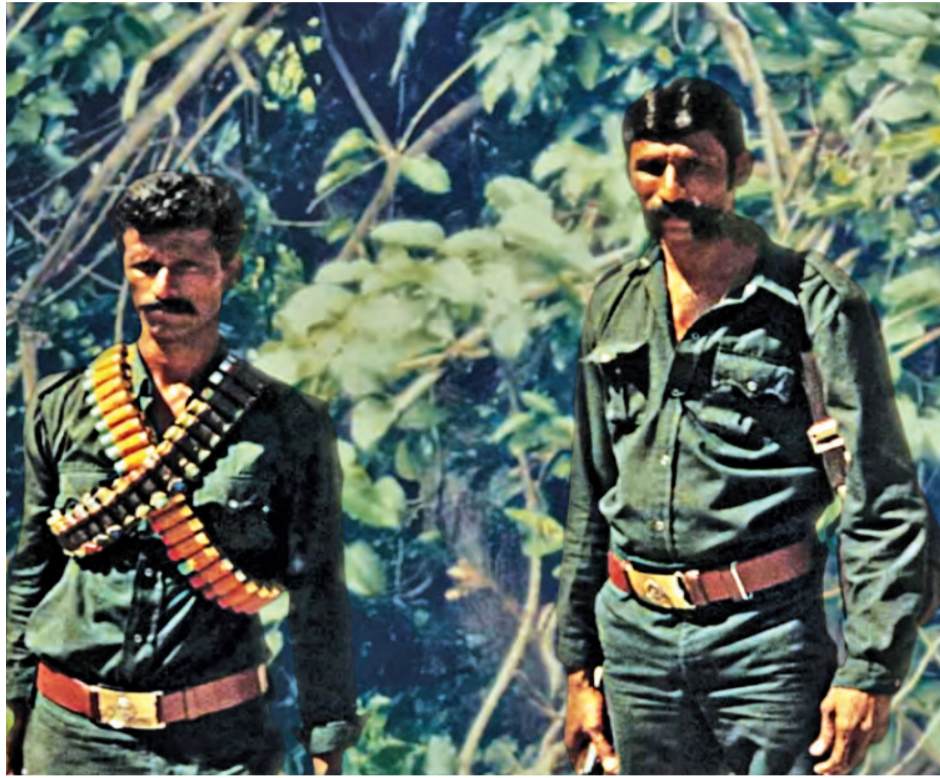
Kerala. Caught once by the police in a restaurant in Bengaluru during a routine check ahead of the 1986 SAARC summit, Veerappan escaped from Budhipadaga forest rest house custody, where he was undergoing interrogation. Thereafter, he remained elusive for nearly 18 years and continued poaching wild elephants for tusks and plundering sandalwood trees in the forests of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Based on credible information, many attempts were made by police and forest personnel of both states to apprehend the brigand, but all failed. The lives of several forest and police personnel from both states were lost in the process.

Between 1988 and 1991, this author was also in the task force to nab him while working as Deputy Conservator of Forests, Kollegal. 2,000 sq. km of forest on hilly terrain in my division's jurisdiction along the right bank of the river Cauvery, and a similar extent along the left bank in Tamil Nadu, provided a good number of hideouts for Veerappan and his gang to stay and operate. The hideouts could be reached only by trekking through the jungle on very steep slopes. The road networks for vehicular movement were quite poor. Every operation to nab the brigand was carried out with personnel from both forest and police departments, who were fit enough to walk up to the hideouts and safeguard themselves from the enemy's response. Forest personnel were better able to trek inhospitable terrain compared to policemen.

These days, we have GPS to track locations, and we can move from one place to another in inhabited areas without assistance, but I wonder whether GPS would work in dense forest areas without roads or any human habitation. Forest guards and forest watchers were our GPS in the 1980s and 1990s, and even at present. Without their active involvement and support, it was virtually impossible to trek the forests and succeed in any operation.

I remember an incident on January 6, 1990, when I was accompanied by the Superintendent of Police of the district and fifty other police and forest personnel to recover a huge quantity of sandalwood cut from Gopichettipalayam forests of Tamil Nadu and hidden in Karnataka's forests. The gang guarding the stock fired on us, injuring two policemen among us. We abandoned the search, as the injured had to be shifted to hospital. That day, we were moving in seven jeeps on cart tracks in the forests. Numerous such tracks are available inside forests; it was my forest personnel and I who guided the team out of the area. A month and a half later, 65 metric tonnes of sandalwood were recovered from the spot in a massive operation conducted by forest and police personnel of both states. It is known as the 'Silvekal seizure' in government circles. Many forest and police personnel in both states were killed in a number of operations launched to nab the gang thereafter.

The conflict between the brigand and both states went on for more than fifteen years and lasted till 8 October 2004, when Veerappan was eliminated in an encounter in the Tamil Nadu forests near Dharmapuri. The final operation was planned and implemented by Vijay Kumar, Additional Director General of Tamil Nadu Police, who had to rely on a hand-picked, trusted team for its success. Both state governments ordered rewards for officials of the police and forest departments who contributed to the fifteen-year-long operation leading to the elimination of Veerappan. The Karnataka government order was issued on July 8, 2005, indicating a reward of ₹1 lakh cash payment to an individual for every year of service, with a cap of ₹3 lakh, along with a site irrespective of the duration of service. This order was implemented for police personnel within years. Tamil Nadu, too, rewarded all police personnel involved in the operation and a few forest personnel. This led to discrimination, as a large number of Tamil



Nadu forest personnel and all Karnataka forest personnel went without reward.

The Karnataka Forest Department, after a detailed enquiry, recommended to the government that 259 personnel who rendered their services in the fifteen-year-long operation be rewarded. The government pruned this list and rewarded only six personnel who were involved in the final operation. Several representations made by the remaining personnel were turned down, and 32 personnel approached the Karnataka High Court in 2015 for relief. Later, 64 additional personnel also moved the court for similar relief.

The High Court, in its 2024 order, said: "It is known the world over that Veerappan was not gunned down in a day, but it took several lives and several years, and several persons had risked their lives in providing information about Veerappan from time to time. The state could have either rewarded all who were involved in hunting down Veerappan or not at all. It could not have trivialised the effort and courage of all those who were killed or who had survived the onslaught of the brigand by restricting the reward to only a handful." Despite this order, the government released rewards for 12 petitioners and requested the court to review the remaining cases, stating that they were not part of the Special Task Force constituted to nab Veerappan. The High Court of Karnataka, on April 21, recently rejected the plea of the state and directed that rewards be granted to all 96 petitioners.

The State of Karnataka's plea to restrict the reward to those who were on duty in the final phase of the operation is bizarre. If this argument is extended, none of the Karnataka police personnel would be entitled to the reward, as they did not take part in the final assault. Only Vijay Kumar, ADG TN, and his hand-picked team members would be entitled to it, and all other persons in the Karnataka and Tamil Nadu police departments would not be entitled. But the states have already rewarded them, so why are the forest department personnel being discriminated against?

I hope the Karnataka High Court's April 21 order is taken by the state in the right spirit and that the forest personnel's twenty-year wait is brought to an end. The value of ₹1 lakh in 2005 is hardly ₹30,000 today. Since the court has not directed payment with interest, the government should consider this an opportunity to correct long-pending discrimination at minimal cost. The persons to be rewarded are all senior citizens, and quite a few have passed away. The government should take the moral high ground and comply with the High Court's direction. This will go a long way in keeping the morale of present staff high and sending a positive signal for the conservation and protection of forests and wildlife.

In the changing scenario, the protection of forests and wildlife is becoming increasingly challenging. While sister departments of the state move for diversion of forests for so-called legitimate projects, local inhabitants grab forest land with the help and support of politicians. In a warming world, as temperatures rise, wildfires are becoming uncontrollable and are significantly impacting regeneration and reproduction. It is not the time to demoralise forest staff at the cutting-edge level. Without their active and sincere efforts, forests will continue to be degraded and fragmented.



THE KARNATAKA FOREST DEPARTMENT, AFTER A DETAILED ENQUIRY, RECOMMENDED TO THE GOVERNMENT THAT 259 PERSONNEL WHO RENDERED THEIR SERVICES IN THE FIFTEEN-YEAR-LONG OPERATION BE REWARDED

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## The bill the planet has been paying for you



**ACHARYA PRASHANT**

Every summer, India gets hotter. We speak of the heat the way we speak of traffic: as an ambient condition, unfortunate but accepted, something to be endured rather than examined. What we have not seriously asked is where the heat is coming from, and whether the answer implicates us more directly than we are willing to admit.

This April, nearly every city on the list of the world's hundred hottest was Indian. Varanasi is burning at forty-four degrees. Prayagraj, which we call a seat of the divine, is a furnace. We call these cities devbhoomi, sacred ground. What we do not ask is what it means that the sacred ground is on fire, and who precisely lit the match.

The standard account of why the planet is heating runs through science, and the science is correct as far as it goes. That account is accurate. It is also, by itself, almost entirely useless, because it tells us what is happening without telling us why the human species keeps doing it when the consequences are this legible. What produced the atmosphere's problem is older and less visible: a consistent human refusal to count the full cost of wanting things.

Consider what a litre of petrol actually is. It is the compressed residue of organic matter that took a hundred million years to form under specific geological conditions that cannot be replicated, accelerated, or substituted. We priced it. We said it costs a hundred rupees per litre after accounting for extraction cost, refining, distribution, and a modest tax. What the price does not include, and has never included, is the cost of making the thing in the first place, because the planet made it for free, across geological time, and sent no invoice. This is not economics; it is a sophisticated form of theft, with the ledger arranged so that the victim cannot file a claim.

The forty- or fifty-rupee Maggi that we get in the mountains follows the same structure at a domestic scale. The plastic in that packet will remain in the mountain ecosystem for centuries. The ecological damage of a single packet, fully priced across its life-cycle, runs to thousands of rupees. But the damage lands in the mountain's account, not the consumer's. The consumer pays fifty rupees and walks away feeling that the transaction is complete. It is not complete, and will never be complete, because the mountain cannot present a bill.

There is a useful analogy here, drawn not from theory but from a history this country knows well.

Britain occupied India for close to two centuries and extracted what economists now estimate at forty-five trillion dollars in resources and labour through trade arrangements that were structured as commerce but functioned as organised looting. The British citizen of the 1900s was among the wealthiest people on earth. He paid low prices for imported goods and understood his prosperity as the reward of industry and national character. What he did not include in his accounting was the cost to the entity from which his prosperity was drawn. India's ruination did not appear in his balance sheet.

The arrangement did not end with Independence; it merely changed coordinates. Natural capital — the aggregate of forests, rivers, fisheries, aquifers, topsoil, and the atmospheric stability that makes agriculture possible — has been drawn down at a rate the WWF's Living Planet Index captures in one figure: a 73 per cent average decline in monitored wildlife populations since 1970. The GDP figures for those same five decades show consistent growth. Both statistics are accurate, and their combination reveals the deception: we consumed the capital and recorded the consumption as revenue. Any accountant shown this methodology would call it fraud. We call it the global economy.

Once the pricing problem is visible, the inadequacy of every currently fashionable response becomes equally visible, because every response is designed to address the symptom rather than the structure.

Every significant improvement in fuel efficiency over the last century has been followed by an increase in total fuel consumption, not a decrease, because cheaper operation lowers the threshold for use and makes the market for vehicles larger. The electric vehicle is positioned as the resolution of this problem, but it operates by the same logic. It reduces per-vehicle emissions by a meaningful margin — the improvement is real — and then makes electric mobility morally comfortable and economically cheaper, which accelerates the aspiration to vehicle ownership. This pattern, first observed in coal engines by the economist William Stanley Jevons in 1865, holds across every domain where a more efficient instrument has been offered to an unchanged ego. The ego does not self-limit through efficiency; efficiency has always been the ego's instrument, never its corrective.

The costs we are not paying in our lifetimes are landing in a column we do not look at: the column belonging to the children who will be alive when this arrangement reaches its terminus. The children currently in school in Delhi, Lucknow, or Kanpur are not going to inherit a recovering system. We have eaten the past, and we are now eating the future. The answer that this generation tried — that it brought green technology and signed accords and held conferences — will not be accepted, because the children will see that the trying was a way of avoiding the stopping.

The person who has seen, even once, that the forest and the river and the mountain are not outside himself but are the condition of his own existence finds that the urge to consume them cheaply has nowhere to lodge, not because he has become virtuous, but because the structure that made the exploitation fee consequence-free has been briefly interrupted. In that interruption, the actual cost of the fifty-rupee packet becomes visible. The carbon credit no longer satisfies him. The electric vehicle no longer satisfies him. None of these were ever going to satisfy him, but until the boundary moved, he could not see why. Everything else will remain a more sophisticated version of the same ledger, with the planet's losses buried in a column that the market has agreed not to open, and a generation of children growing up to inherit the reckoning their parents preferred not to have. The bill is arriving. It has the date and the address correct. The only remaining question is whether it is opened.



Acharya Prashant is a philosopher and author whose work centres on self-inquiry and its application to contemporary life  
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## Linguistic wealth: Understanding the Bhartiya Bhasha Pariwar



**MJ WARSI**

India is home to one of the most complex and diverse linguistic ecosystems in the world. This diversity is not accidental; it reflects centuries of social interaction, migration, philosophical inquiry, and cultural exchange. The Bhartiya Bhasha

Pariwar includes languages along with hundreds of dialects and speech varieties spoken throughout the country. Indian languages are not merely instruments of daily communication. They carry centuries of accumulated knowledge — ranging from metaphysics and ethics to medicine, astronomy, mathematics, ecology, and aesthetics. Ancient Sanskrit texts engage with geometry and planetary motion, Tamil literature preserves ecological wisdom and moral philosophy, and Pali and Prakrit texts document early debates on society, governance, and human suffering. When such languages are sidelined in modern technology, it is not merely linguistic diversity that is lost; it is knowledge diversity and epistemic plurality too.

From a linguistic perspective, many Indian languages can be traced back to proto-languages — reconstructed ancestral languages that were never written down but are inferred through com-

parative analysis. For the Indo-Aryan languages, scholars identify Proto-Indo-European as a distant ancestor, which later gave rise to Proto-Indo-Iranian, and subsequently Vedic Sanskrit. This lineage connects Sanskrit to many European languages such as Greek, Latin, and English. Among the many Indian linguistic traditions, Sanskrit deserves special attention, not as a language that overrides others, but as one that offers an exceptionally systematic and codified model of linguistic analysis. Its importance lies not in cultural dominance, but in methodological clarity and historical influence.

Walk through any Indian street, and language reveals itself not as a boundary but as a bridge. A shopkeeper switches registers mid-sentence, a student reads in one script and speaks in another, and a household carries two or three languages without naming the shift. This everyday ease is rarely captured in formal definitions. India's linguistic life is not simply diverse; it is interwoven. The 2011 Census records 1,369 rationalised mother tongues; this number is striking, but the deeper insight lies in how these languages live together.

Indian multilingualism is not a layered addition in which one dominant language is supplemented by others; rather, it is a networked condition. Speakers inhabit multiple linguistic worlds at once, moving across them according to context, region, profession, and memory. A person may grow up with Urdu at home, Hindi in the neighbourhood, and Bengali through education or migration. Another may navigate Telugu, Kannada, and Marathi within a single social geography. This is



not exceptional proficiency; it is ordinary competence. Yet, the frameworks through which languages are studied have often struggled to account for this lived complexity. Classical methods in linguistics sought to measure relationships between languages by comparing core vocabulary and estimating time. These approaches assumed that languages behave like branching trees, splitting from a common ancestor and gradually moving apart. While such methods offered important insights in many contexts, their explanatory limits become evident in a setting like India, where languages have not merely diverged but have continuously converged.

Despite constitutional recognition and cultural pride, Indian languages remain marginalised in higher education, scientific research, and advanced technology. In India, languages have long existed

in sustained contact. Words travel, sounds adapt, grammatical structures align, and meanings shift across communities. A shared cultural space has enabled features to diffuse across linguistic boundaries in ways that do not fit neatly into linear models of descent. When viewed through purely genealogical lenses, these interactions appear as anomalies; when viewed as part of a broader continuum, they become central.

It is within this context that the idea of Bhartiya Bhasha Pariwar has gained attention. Rather than organising languages into rigid, separated families, this framework foregrounds interaction, continuity, and coexistence. It does not deny historical relationships or methodological tools developed in comparative linguistics. Instead, it shifts the focus from distant reconstructions to observable patterns of contact and shared evolution.

Consider how phonological features, such as retroflexion, cut across languages otherwise assigned to different families, or how syntactic tendencies, including SOV word order and postpositional structures, display convergence shaped by prolonged contact. Even semantic domains, particularly those linked to culture, ecology, and social organisation, reveal patterned overlaps. These are not incidental similarities but well-attested outcomes of areal diffusion within a linguistic area, where structural features spread through sustained multilingual interaction.

Such evidence points to a more precise understanding of Indian multilingualism, not as a set of separate competencies, but as an integrated multilingual repertoire. Speakers operate within

a fluid system, routinely engaging in code-switching, register variation, and cross-linguistic transfer. Multilingualism in India is therefore not merely functional or instrumental; it is a stable sociolinguistic condition shaped by long-term contact and continuity. This has important implications for both pedagogy and research. Educational models that treat languages as discrete, bounded systems fail to reflect the interconnected nature of linguistic competence in India. A more appropriate framework would recognise the cumulative and overlapping character of language knowledge. Similarly, linguistic inquiry must move beyond strictly genealogical classifications and engage with contact-induced change, convergence, and shared structural patterns.

It is in this context that Bhartiya Bhasha Pariwar gains analytical relevance. The framework foregrounds sustained interaction, areal features, and civilisational continuity, shifting emphasis from divergence alone to a more balanced account incorporating convergence and co-evolution. It does not displace established methods but situates them within a broader model accommodating both inheritance and contact.

India's linguistic landscape calls for an approach that understands languages as interconnected systems, where multilingualism is foundational and shaped by continuity and interaction.

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### Order Order

## Godman Kharat gets four-day police custody in businessman cheating case

A court in Maharashtra's Nashik on Friday remanded self-proclaimed godman Ashok Kharat in police custody till May 4 in the case of cheating a Pune-based businessman of more than ₹5 crore. The Special Investigation Team (SIT) investigating the cases linked to Kharat had filed a request application in the court on April 30 seeking his custody in the cheating case, which is the ninth case against him. In eight other cases, Kharat faces charges of sexually exploiting women. Due to security reasons, the proceedings of the court were held through video conferencing and Kharat was not produced in court in person. During the hearing, the police sought his custody, but the defence strongly opposed the demand, arguing that the SIT is giving the same reasons for police custody every time and that there is no strong reason for it.



## Merger or Manipulation? The 2/3 Rule under the scanner



**ARUN BHARDWAJ**

On 24th April, 2026 three Members of Rajya Sabha belonging to Aam Aadmy Party (AAP), in a Press Conference announced that seven out of ten Rajya Sabha Members have decided to merge with Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). It is also announced that documents to that effect were submitted with the Chairman Rajya Sabha in the morning.

This has triggered serious debate about the interpretation of 10th Schedule of the Constitution of India. Since by virtue of Constitution (52nd Amendment) Act, 1985, 10th Schedule (also known as Anti Defection Law) was added to the Constitution of India and was intended to stop elected MPs/ MLAs from defecting from one political party to another. Originally Para 3 of the Anti-Defection Law permitted split in a Party in case, 1/3rd Members or more decide to break away from the original party. However, by virtue of Constitution (Ninety First Amendment) Act, 2003, Paragraph 3 was omitted wef January 01, 2004.

In order to understand the intent of the Legislature, it is important to know some of the important provisions of the 10th Schedule.

PARAGRAPH 1(a) defines "HOUSE" which means either House of Parliament...

(b) "Legislature Party in relation to a Member of a House belonging to any political party in accordance with provisions of Para 2 or Para 4 means "the Group consisting of all the member of that house for the time being belonging to that party.

PARAGRAPH 2 provides for disqualification on the ground of defection

PARAGRAPH 4 provides for disqualification on the ground of defection not to apply in case of merger.

It provides that (1)(a) Member of a house shall not be disqualified under sub-paragraph (1) of Paragraph 2, where his original Political Party merges with another Political Party and he claims that he and other members of the original political party have become member of such other Political Party...

(b) have not accepted the merger and opted to function as a separate group...

The definitions of "HOUSE", "LEGISLATURE PARTY" are of great significance for the purpose of deciding the constitutionality/ validity of the merger of seven MPs of Rajya Sabha with BJP.

The object of the Legislature of adding Tenth Schedule to prevent defection of elected Representatives from the party from whose strength the elected Representative wins the election. Though by virtue of (now omitted) Paragraph 3, a small window of split in Party was permitted. However, by virtue of Constitution (Ninety First Amendment) in the year 2003, this provision was made more stringent



AAP MPs joining BJP

FILE PHOTO

and "split" in party was no more a ground for escaping disqualification.

According to Para 4 of the Tenth Schedule, in order to avoid disqualification on the ground of defection, a political party (en-block) can merge with another political party and gives up its status/ symbol etc. ... Sub-Para 2 of Para 4 further provides that "the merger of the original party" of a Member of a House shall deem to have taken place, if, not less than 2/3rd of the Members of the Legislature Party concerned had agreed to such merger.

This particular sub-para acquire great significance as it suggests that it will be merger of "the Original Political Party of a Member of a House.", thus it implies that it will be merger of Original Political Party. This Sub-Para 2 would ultimately be the issue for interpretation.

Apart from others, a question of significance is the verification of claims/ documents submitted by the MPs with the Chairman of Rajya Sabha (who acts as quasi-judicial tribunal). Three Members held Press Conference and disclose that seven Members have broken up from AAP and documents to that effect have been given to the Chairman in the morning. After the Press conference not all the seven MPs went to the office of BJP for joining. One MP is supposed to be abroad for treatment.

As per the law laid down by the Supreme Court of India in the matter of K Biren Singh (2022) 2 SCC 759, the quasi-judicial tribunal is required to follow the principal of natural justice for deciding the claim.

To what extent verification of the claims were done and to what extent the principals of natural justice were followed, may have to be considered by the quasi-judicial tribunal. Though, Paragraph 7 of the Tenth Schedule bars the jurisdiction of any Court in respect of any

matter connected with the disqualification of a Member of a House under the Schedule. However, in a recent judgment, in the matter of Subhash Desai Vs State of Maharashtra (2024) Vol. II Pg. 719, the Supreme Court has ruled that "Court should normally refrain from deciding disqualification petition at the first instance"... "The question of disqualification ought to be adjudicated by the Constitutional Authority". However, in peculiar facts and circumstances, such as, (i) failure of the quasi-judicial tribunal to decide the question of disqualification in the time bound manner. (ii) The quasi-judicial tribunal decided the issue of whether there was a split in the party without deciding whether the elected representative in question is disqualified. (iii) The necessity of expeditious decision in view of the fact that in case, the disqualification petition is not decided expeditiously, then, the same would become infructuous.

Every case has its own peculiar facts and circumstances. It is to be seen, as to on the present facts and circumstances, ultimately, how the expressions "House", "Legislature Party", "the Original Political Party", the procedure for verification of claims by the quasi-judicial tribunal would be interpreted/ dealt with. Particularly, in view of the fact that without deciding the petition seeking disqualification, the Chairman Rajya Sabha (who is also quasi-judicial tribunal) has accepted/ allowed the merger of seven MPs in BJP.

The writer is a senior advocate

## Hate speech: No cognisable offence made out against Anurag Thakur, Parvesh Verma, says SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court has said that no cognisable offence was made out against BJP leaders Anurag Thakur and Parvesh Verma for their alleged hate speeches over the anti-CAA protest in Delhi in 2020.

While BJP MP Thakur is a former union minister, Verma is a minister in the Delhi Government.

In its April 29 verdict on a batch of pleas concerning hate speeches, a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta also dealt with the petition filed by CPI(M) leaders Brinda Karat and KM Tiwari who had challenged a June 2022 verdict of the Delhi High Court.

The High Court had dismissed a petition by Karat



cognisable offence is made out," the top court said.

The CPI(M) leaders had claimed that on January 27, 2020, Thakur allegedly made a hate speech at a rally in Rithala. They had further claimed that on January 28, 2020, Verma allegedly made inflammatory hate speeches.

A trial court on August 26, 2020, dismissed the petitioners' complaint on the ground that it was not sustainable as the requisite sanction from the competent authority was not obtained.

In its verdict, the apex court observed the High Court had declined to direct registration of an FIR on the grounds that prior sanction under Sections 196 and 197 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) had not been obtained.

and Tiwari challenging the trial court's refusal to direct registration of an FIR against Thakur and Verma for their alleged hate speeches over the anti-CAA protest at Delhi's Shaheen Bagh.

In its judgement, the apex court noted that the High Court had, on an independent assessment, held that the speeches do not disclose commission of any cognisable offence, and also observed that the state-

ments were not directed against any specific community nor did they incite violence or public disorder.

"Upon a careful consideration of the material placed on record, including the alleged speeches, the status report dated February 26, 2020 submitted before the trial court, and the reasons recorded by the courts below, we are in agreement with the conclusion that no

## SC grants anticipatory bail to Pawan Khera

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

The Supreme Court has granted anticipatory bail to Congress leader Pawan Khera in a case related to making allegations against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's wife, saying the matter appears to have stemmed from political rivalry.

A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and AS Chandurkar, in its order uploaded on Friday, granted the pre-arrest bail to Khera subject to certain conditions. The court had on Thursday reserved its verdict in the matter.

Khera has alleged that Sarma's wife possessed multiple passports and undisclosed properties abroad.

"The right to personal liberty is a cherished fundamental right, and any deprivation thereof must be justified on a higher threshold, particularly where the surrounding circumstances may indicate the presence of political overtones," the court said.

The appellant (Khera) is directed to be released on anticipatory bail in the event of his arrest in the crime branch police station and on such reasonable



terms and conditions which may be put by the Investigating Officer as deemed fit, it directed.

The top court said it is of the opinion that while adjudicating an application for anticipatory bail, a careful balance must be struck between the State's interest in ensuring a fair investigation and the individual's fundamental right to personal liberty under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The bench directed Khera to cooperate in the investigation and to appear before the police station as and when

required and intimated and he shall not influence or tamper with any of the evidence during pendency of the investigation or trial in the case.

It directed Khera to not leave India without prior leave of the competent court and said if the trial court deems it fit to impose some other conditions, it has the discretion to do the needful and put those conditions during trial.

"In this context, the criminal process must be applied with objectivity and circumspection so as to ensure that individual liberty is not imperilled by proceedings that may be coloured by political rivalry. We are further of the opinion that the allegations and counter-allegations, as apparent in the present case, prima facie, appear to be politically motivated and seemingly influenced by such rivalry, rather than disclosing a situation warranting custodial interrogation, and the veracity of the allegations can be tested at trial," it observed.

The bench said it is of the view that in the instant case, the allegations and counter allegations have been made by Khera as well as by the husband of the complainant (Assam Chief Minister).

## Allahabad HC dismisses plea seeking FIR against Rahul Gandhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Prayagraj

Allahabad High Court on Friday dismissed a petition seeking registration of an FIR against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for an alleged controversial remark in 2025.

Justice Vikram D Chauhan passed the order after hearing a petition filed by Simran Gupta of the right-wing organisation Hindu



Shakti Dal. Gupta challenged a Sambhal court's rejection of her plea seeking directions to lodge an FIR against Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

The petitioner had alleged that Gandhi, during the inauguration of the All India Congress Committee office in 2025, stated that "we are now fighting the BJP, the RSS, and the Indian State itself."

The petitioner said the remark hurt public sentiments and amounted to a seditious and anti-national statement allegedly intended to destabilise the country.

Justice Chauhan had, on April 8, reserved the order after hearing the counsels of the petitioner and the state Government at length.

## Delhi court grants relief to 3 held for assaulting lawyer in court premises

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

A Delhi court has granted bail to three persons accused of assaulting an advocate inside the Karkardooma court complex in April, saying that the investigation was almost complete and no further custodial interrogation was required.

Additional Sessions Judge Surabhi Sharma Vats was hearing the bail applications filed by Uday Sethi, Rohan Kakkar and Rohit Sethi in connection with a case registered at the Farsh Bazar police station for allegedly assaulting the lawyer.

In an order dated April 28, the court said, "Investigation in the present matter qua the applicants/accused is stated to be almost complete. Custodial interrogation of



the accused/applicants is stated to be not required. It is further stated that nothing is to be recovered from or at the instance of the applicants/accused."

According to the prosecution, the three accused allegedly attacked advocate Aman inside the Karkardooma court premises on April 7, causing injuries

to his head with a pointed object. The court was informed that the accused and the complainant were known to each other and that the accused were clients of the injured lawyer.

The prosecution opposed the bail pleas, submitting that the allegations were serious in nature and that the complainant had suffered

head injuries in the attack.

"The applicants/accused persons Uday Sethi and Rohan Kakkar are stated to be young boys aged about 21 years and 25 years respectively and are also stated to be students. It is reported by the IO — one case against the applicant/accused Uday Sethi is the POCSO case previously lodged by the complainant only," the court said.

The counsel for the accused, however, argued that they had been falsely implicated and claimed the incident was a mutual scuffle in which both sides sustained injuries. It was also submitted that CCTV footage of the incident existed and the accused themselves were assaulted inside the police chowki within the court complex.

## Allahabad High Court upholds land acquisition for Noida airport expansion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Prayagraj

The Allahabad High Court has upheld land acquisition for the expansion of the Noida International Airport in Gautam Buddha Nagar district, dismissing petitions filed by affected landowners.

The court held that the acquisition process had been carried out in full compliance with the provisions of the 2013 land acquisition law and that there was no material irregularity in it.

A division bench comprising Justice MC Tripathi and Justice Kunal Ravi Singh while deciding a batch of writ petitions observed, "In view of the foregoing discussion and for the reasons stated herein above, this Court finds no merit in the challenge raised by the peti-



tioners to the impugned notifications dated April 11, 2025 and October 24, 2025."

The court further said, "This Court declines to interfere in the acquisition proceedings which have been conducted in conformity with the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 and the Rules, 2016 framed

thereunder." However, the bench directed the authorities to ensure that rehabilitation measures are fully implemented before taking possession of residential lands.

Disposing of the petitions filed by a group of villagers and farmers, including Vijay Pal Singh and others, the court, in its April 28 judgment, held that the acquisition process had been carried out in full compliance with the provisions of the 2013 land acquisition law.

The court noted that there was no material irregularity in the process and emphasised that the statutory framework had been followed at every stage from the issuance of notifications to the award of compensation.

## MP HC refuses to send girl to Canada-based father, foreign court order not binding

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Indore

Stating that a child's welfare and not a foreign court's order is paramount, and citing the Ramayana story of Luv-Kush, the Madhya Pradesh High Court has refused to send a 10-year-old girl to Canada to join her father.

Dismissing a habeas corpus petition filed by the father, Justices Vijay Kumar Shukla and Binod Kumar Dwivedi of the Indore bench quoted the Sanskrit verse which says that mother and motherland are greater than

heaven. The petitioner sought an order to send the girl to Canada and hand over her custody to him as per an order passed by the Family Court of the Superior Court of Justice of Ontario.

But the High Court, in the order passed on April 20, held that in matters related to custody, the paramount consideration is the "welfare" and "best interest" of the child and not the legal rights of the parents.

"In relation to the impact of an order of a Foreign Court... it is well settled that the same is a relevant factor, however, the same is not



conclusive. The doctrine of comity of Courts cannot override the paramount consideration of the welfare of the child. The Indian Court is not bound to mechanically

enforce a foreign interest order, if such enforcement would be contrary to the child's welfare," the division bench said. Citing the Valmiki Ramayana, the judges said,

"After Mata Sita is separated from Shri Ram, Luv and Kush are raised exclusively by their mother, in the hermitage of Maharishi Valmiki. Despite Shri Ram being the king of Ayodhya and their father, the children remain with the mother, emphasising: Emotional security Moral upbringing Maternal guardianship."

The judgement also cited the famous Sanskrit verse "Janani Janmabhoomishch Swargadapi Gariyasi" (Mother and motherland are greater than heaven).

As per the petition, the girl's parents were married in

Maharashtra in 2014 and subsequently moved to the United States. The daughter was born in Chicago in 2016 and received the US citizenship by birth before they moved to Toronto, Canada.

The woman came to India with her daughter in January 2022, and instead of returning, enrolled the child in a school in Indore. This led to a dispute between the couple, with the husband demanding that the child be sent back to Canada. He also moved the High Court for this. The High Court, citing Supreme Court decisions, stated, "The existence of a

foreign court order is only one of the factors. The welfare of the child remains the paramount consideration."

The girl was produced before the court and the judges spoke with her in their chambers, during which she expressed emotional attachment to her mother, the judgement noted.

"We have also taken into consideration the age of the child, the need of maternal care at her formative stage, the emotional and educational stability of the child and the overall circumstances placed on record..." the High Court said.

## India's diplomatic poise and prudence during West Asia crisis



**KARUNA GOPAL**

To say that India is walking the global ramp of diplomacy with absolute panache during West Asia crisis is no exaggeration. India's manoeuvres during this geopolitical disruption demonstrates her visionary foresight and diplomatic agility. This story has to be documented for posterity.

### India's vulnerability — The scale

As the world's third-largest importer of crude oil India's exposure to Middle Eastern volatility is enormous. Almost 45 per cent of India's crude oil, 60 per cent of her natural gas, and over 90 per cent of her LPG imports come from the Middle East. The Strait of Hormuz through which around 20 per cent of the world's oil passes can be called the lifeline of India. If this route were blocked or disrupted, more than 2 million barrels per day of India-bound crude could stop, potentially raising domestic fuel prices sharply.

Apart from oil, the human dimension of this war needs a mention. More than 10 million Indians live and work in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (GCC) — comprising Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain. The UAE has over 3 million Indians. Saudi Arabia has over 2.7 million, Kuwait over 1 million, and Qatar over 800,000. These are not just numbers; they represent families their jobs and biological roots. Indian nationals in Gulf states send almost 40 per cent of the country's inward remittances — UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar stand at 19.2 per cent, 6.7 per cent, 4.1 per cent respectively. India's total bilateral goods trade with GCC countries had expanded to a record, with exports to the GCC rising to about \$57 billion in 2024-25, while imports jumped 15.33 per cent to \$121.7 billion, making total bilateral trade \$178.7 billion, up from \$161.82 billion the previous year. The UAE

was India's third-largest trading partner in the last financial year.

In this context, for India the closure of the Strait of Hormuz triggered by the Iran conflict was indeed a tremendous shock. As of mid-March 2026, over 1.6 million tonnes of crude oil, 320,000 tonnes of LPG, and 200,000 tonnes of LNG were stalled aboard Indian-flagged vessels awaiting passage.

### Relations with Russia — A strategic insurance

Before the West Asia war broke out, India had already taken the most consequential energy stance of her modern history — sought freedom from Middle Eastern oil dependence and pivoted towards Russia. This shift, a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, has paradoxically become India's most important prop against the 2026 crisis.

In 2021, prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian oil constituted around 2.5 per cent of India's total oil imports. After the war began, Europe and the US began placing sanctions on Russian companies. This was to economically isolate Moscow. That's when Moscow turned to Asia — particularly India and China — offering deeply discounted crude. India seized the opportunity. Since 2022, India has become the largest purchaser of Russian crude, with Russian oil rising to around 50 per cent of oil imports by 2025.

In the first half of 2025, Russia supplied India with about 1.75-1.8 million barrels per day, or 35 to 40 per cent of its crude imports. Even as discounts narrowed to about \$1-\$3 per barrel, the economics worked due to a perfect 'Triangular Trade'. Indian refineries exploited price arbitrage: buying discounted Russian crude, refining it into diesel and jet fuel, and re-exporting these products mostly to Europe, which was always short on diesel after the embargo on Russian refined products. This triangular trade — buying Russian discounts, refining, and selling to Europe — turned India's neutrality into a profitable enterprise.

When the West Asia war struck, this relationship proved highly invaluable. Russian oil supplies to India nearly doubled, reaching 2.25 million barrels per day, while ship-



ments from West Asia slumped 61 per cent to 1.18 million bpd. Russia did compensate for the sudden loss of Gulf supply at a moment of global emergency. In a way, India's ability to purchase this Russian oil was enabled by America. This is where India should be credited for balancing competitive tensions with productive collaboration — what a strategist would call 'Co-opetition'. During this crisis and tariff war, USA issued a 30-day waiver to allow the sale and delivery of sanctioned Russian oil already loaded on vessels to India, a move designed to prevent a near-term supply disruption stemming from geopolitical tensions in the Middle East.

India was a significant beneficiary of the sanctions waivers, ordering approximately 30 million barrels of oil from Russia after the waiver was implemented.

This reflects the extraordinary diplomatic position India had nurtured — trusted by Washington enough to receive a custom-made sanctions carve-out, while maintaining energy ties with Moscow that America had previously sought to restrict.

### India's triple tango with rivals — navigating Iran, Israel, and the Gulf

India's strategic and tactical moves are being watched closely by the world — especially her diplomatic balancing act among competing regional powers. India's engagement with Israel had been deepening

for years before the war. Israel is among India's top three defence suppliers. Bilateral trade, excluding defence, stood at \$6.53 billion in FY 2023-24, with India enjoying a trade surplus. Defence cooperation had become a cornerstone of the relationship, with Israeli weapons systems playing a decisive role in India's Operation Sindoor against Pakistan in 2025.

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel in February 2026, just days before the US-Israel strikes on Iran, carried obvious strategic significance. The timing strongly suggested India had advance knowledge of, or at minimum was not surprised by, what followed. India's position was further reinforced by the I2U2 multilateral framework — comprising India, Israel, the UAE, and the United States — which had been deepening economic and technological cooperation since 2022 and provided a structural architecture for continued collaboration even as the region caved in.

### But what perplexed the world was how India kept Iran in good humour?

Iran was one of the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with India after it became a republic; the two have over 75 years of diplomatic history. Iran once supplied nearly 10 per cent of India's crude oil requirements, and India had invested \$120 million in the development of Chabahar Port in southeastern Iran — an important trade route to Afghanistan and

Central Asia. India's diplomatic smartness was seen when Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited the Iranian Embassy in New Delhi to sign the condolence book after the demise of Ayatollah Khamenei. On the energy front, Iran's cooperation was sought and partially obtained.

Iran allowed some Indian vessels to sail through the Strait of Hormuz, after New Delhi gave harbour to three Iranian warships on Tehran's request.

Multiple high-level interactions followed, including at least three conversations between India's External Affairs Minister Jaishankar and his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi, and a telephone conversation between Prime Minister Modi and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on March 12. Two days later two LPG carriers owned by the Shipping Corporation of India successfully crossed the Strait under Indian Navy surveillance.

### UAE exits OPEC: India set to gain

UAE exited OPEC on April 28th 2026 and this act frees the UAE from the Cartel rules. It can now produce more oil. The Gulf country holds a capacity of approximately 4.8 million barrels per day and has the ambition to achieve 5 million barrels per day of capacity by 2027.

India and the UAE already share one of the most comprehensive bilateral economic architectures in the region: the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), signed in May 2022. Since the signing of CEPA, bilateral merchandise trade nearly doubled from \$43.3 billion in FY 2020-21 to \$83.7 billion in 2023-24. India and UAE are now free to work on terms driven by commercial logic rather than cartel discipline. India's decades-old aspiration for long-term, price-stable crude supply agreements with the UAE is very much possible. India is surely on its way to becoming a show stopper on the global diplomatic ramp.

The writer is a Distinguished Fellow, India Foundation Internationally acclaimed Thought Leader and a Futurist Served on the Board of Engineers India Ltd (Union Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas)

## India, UAE trade pact helps boost bilateral trade to cross \$100 bn: Goyal

The India-UAE free trade agreement, which came into force in May 2022, has helped the bilateral trade to cross \$100 billion, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Friday.



The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the UAE acts as a gateway to Africa, other GCC and Middle Eastern countries, CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries and some European countries.

Bilateral merchandise trade has grown strongly, crossing \$100 billion, with services trade also rising steadily and opening new markets and greater value, he said in a social media post.

The bilateral trade stood at \$101.25 billion in 2025-26 compared to \$100.03 billion in 2024-25.

The trade, he said, has expanded in key sectors like gems and jewellery, engineering goods, electronics, and agriculture. During 2025-26, India's exports to the UAE rose about 2 per cent to \$37.36 billion, while imports were up 0.77 per cent to \$63.89 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of \$26.53 billion.

## India, UK discuss ways to boost bilateral trade

India and the UK on Friday discussed ways to boost two-way commerce and investments and leverage opportunities under the comprehensive economic and trade agreement signed in July last year.



It was discussed during a virtual meeting between Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade Peter Kyle. "We explored ways to further enhance our trade and investment ties while fully leveraging the opportunities under the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)," Goyal said in a social media post. India and the UK, on July 24, 2025, signed the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), under which 99 per cent of Indian exports will enter the British market at zero duty, while tariffs on British products, such as cars and whisky, will be reduced in India.

## Recorded double-digit growth in India: Apple CEO

The iPhone maker Apple CEO Tim Cook on Friday said he is delighted and excited about India as the company continues to record double-digit growth in the country.



During Apple's earnings call for the second quarter of fiscal year 2026, which ended March 28, Cook said India is the second-largest smartphone market in the world, and the third-largest PC market, and despite doing very well, Apple still has a modest share, which speaks about the opportunity the country has. "I'm over the moon excited about India," Cook said in response to an analyst's question on India. The longest-serving CEO of Apple, Cook, is set to transition out of his position on September 1.

He will be succeeded by John Ternus on the same date. Cook said India offers a huge opportunity for Apple.

"It's the second largest smartphone market in the world and the third largest PC market, and despite doing extremely well there for quite some time, we still have a modest share. And so I think that really speaks to the opportunity that we have," he said.

## Petrol, diesel price hike in near future not ruled out: Government sources

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

An increase in petrol and diesel prices in the near future is not ruled out, Government sources said on Friday, as losses mount from a four-year-old freeze in retail rates despite the sharp rise in global crude oil prices.

International crude oil prices this week climbed to a four-year high of \$126 per barrel before cooling down slightly, but remained above \$110 a barrel as ship transits through the Strait of Hormuz remained restricted and US and Iranian leaders traded barbs amid stalled peace talks.

Government sources said the possibility of a petrol and diesel price hike in the near future is not ruled out.

Earlier in the day, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), making a statement on behalf of the industry, said petrol and diesel price as also domestic LPG rates are not being increased despite a surge in



international energy cost.

State-owned oil firms hiked prices of commercial LPG, industrial diesel, 5-kg LPG and jet fuel sold to international airlines in keeping with the cost.

Analysts had earlier flagged the possibility of price increases of ₹25-28 per litre after the end of polling for assembly elections in West Bengal on April 29.

International oil prices spiked after the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, and Tehran's sweeping retaliation that effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz — one of the world's most critical energy arteries, linking the Persian Gulf to global

markets and handling roughly a fifth of global oil trade along with significant volumes of liquefied natural gas.

Last week, a senior oil ministry official told a news briefing that state-owned fuel retailers were incurring losses of about ₹20 per litre on petrol and roughly ₹100 per litre on diesel as pump prices remained frozen for nearly four years despite a surge in global oil prices. Yet there is no plan to increase prices, she had said.

Crude, which was \$70 per barrel last year, averaged over \$114 this month.

Retail petrol and diesel prices have remained frozen since early April 2022 — a period during which oil prices rose in some months and fell in other times. When prices fell, state-owned oil firms made handsome profits, which they used to set off losses when rates rose.

Petrol is currently priced at ₹94.77 a litre in Delhi, and diesel comes for ₹87.67.

## India supplies 20 per cent of global generic medicines; its IP rules WTO-compliant: GTRI

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India primarily exports generic medicines to a large number of countries, including developed nations, helping reduce healthcare costs globally, and the country's intellectual property rights regime is fully compliant with global trade rules, think tank GTRI said on Friday.

India supplies nearly 20 per cent of global generic medicines, making its IP stance globally significant, it said.

India has again been placed on the Priority Watch List in the 2026 Special 301 Report released on April 30 by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), reflecting continued US pressure over pharmaceutical-related intellectual property protection and enforcement in India, it said.

The Special 301 process is not legally binding as it is an administrative review used by the US as a pressure tool. It does not impose immediate penalties but can lead to negotiations, investigations, and sometimes trade action if issues escalate.

India was also on the Priority Watch List in 2025 and 2024, showing this is an ongoing status, not a one-time action, the GTRI said, adding that India has remained on the USTR's Priority Watch List since the 1990s, reflecting long-standing differences with the US over intellectual property policy, especially in pharmaceuticals. "Overall, while



the US cites weak IP protection, India's position is that it is fully WTO-compliant and that the real difference lies in its refusal to adopt stricter, TRIPS-plus (trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights) standards," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

He added that India supplies nearly 20 per cent of the world's generic medicines, and generics typically reduce drug prices by 80-90 per cent.

"Provisions like Section 3(d) and compulsory licensing are therefore essential, and evidence shows India has balanced innovation with access. India should continue to defend these principles to protect affordable healthcare and policy sovereignty," Srivastava said.

He stated that the US pressure on India's pharma IP regime dates back to the 1990s, driven by strong industry lobbying for stricter protections.

## India's total power consumption grows by 4 per cent in April

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

India's power consumption witnessed a 4.04 per cent growth to 153.99 Billion Units (BU) in April compared to the year-ago period as unseasonal rains subdued power demand, especially in the first half of the month, according to official data.



The country's total power consumption was 148.01 BU in April 2025. However, due to the rise in mercury level, which caused heat wave conditions, the power demand rose in the latter part of the month, and the peak power demand jumped to a record high of 256.11 GW last month from 235.32 GW in April 2025. The peak power demand had touched an all-time high of

about 250 GW in May 2024. According to the power ministry, peak power demand may hit 270 GW in the summer of 2026.

Last summer, the peak power demand was 242.77 GW, recorded in June 2025, but stayed below the Government's estimate of 277 GW.

Experts said that power demand and consumption

will further increase from May onwards, as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has projected a harsh summer this year.

They said unseasonal rains, especially in the first half of April, kept a tab on rising mercury levels, and the use of cooling appliances like air conditioners and desert coolers was less than expected around the month.

## Bright start to Fiscal Year 27 for carmakers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Carmakers began the new fiscal on a strong note, with an estimated 4.5 lakh units of passenger vehicles sold in April in the domestic market, up 27 per cent, on the back of record sales by firms, including Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai and Kia.

The industry continued to benefit from the tailwinds of GST 2.0 carried forward from the second half of last fiscal, along with repo rate cut and income tax benefit, Maruti Suzuki India Senior Executive Officer, Marketing & Sales, Partho Banerjee said.

Passenger vehicle (PV) sales in the domestic market were 3.54 lakh units in April last year. Maruti Suzuki India posted a record domestic sales of 1,91,122 units in April compared to 1,42,053 units in the year-ago month. Its pre-



vious highest domestic sales were in December 2025 at 1,82,165 units.

"We are starting this year with a big bang. Small cars have contributed significantly to this growth," Banerjee told PTI.

The company's small cars, comprising Alto, S-Presso, Celerio and WagonR, grew 74.4 per cent, he said, adding

it has dispelled the doubts that people had over the future of small cars. He, however, said any hike in petrol prices could have an impact on demand.

Addressing a virtual conference, Banerjee said the overall PV industry "is expected to be around 4.45 lakh to 4.5 lakhs in April this year and last year, the industry volume

(for the same month) was 3.54 lakh". Elaborating on the growth drivers, he said, "The three tailwinds of GST 2.0, the income tax relief and the reduction in the repo rates are still going on".

Banerjee said that for Maruti Suzuki, there is a total of 1.65 lakh pending bookings, with the waiting period for its small cars extending to a month, and the company is gradually ramping up production to meet the rising demand.

Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd said its sales in the domestic market stood at 59,000 units last month against 45,199 units in the year-ago period, a growth of 30.5 per cent.

Homegrown Mahindra & Mahindra reported domestic passenger vehicle sales of 56,331 units compared to 52,330 units in April 2025, up 8 per cent, with its CEO,

Automotive Division, Nalinikanth Gollagunta, stating that the company has started the new fiscal year 2026-27 "on a positive note in April".

Benefiting from the policy support, Hyundai Motor India Ltd reported a 17 per cent year-on-year growth in domestic sales to 51,902 units in April 2026.

It was the company's highest ever for the month of April since its inception.

"We have opened the new financial year on a strong note, carrying forward the momentum built in recent months into April 2026," Hyundai Motor India Ltd MD and CEO Tarun Garg said.

Similarly, Kia India also reported a 16 per cent growth in wholesales to 27,286 units in April 2026 compared to 23,623 units sold in the same month last year. It was the highest-ever sales in April.



## FROM THE WORLD

### ITALY

#### Venice Biennale jury resigns

The international jury of the Venice Biennale resigned, just nine days before the world's oldest and most important contemporary art fair opens, amid tensions over Russia's participation and the panel's decision to bar prizes for countries accused of crimes against humanity. The Biennale said in a statement that the jury, made up of the president, Solange Farkas, and Zoe Butt, Kuzma and Giovanna Zapperi, had resigned. The brief statement didn't provide an explanation for the highly unusual move. It came just days after the jury had announced it would not award prizes to countries charged with crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court. That includes Israel and Russia, whose participation in the first Biennale since its 2022 Ukraine invasion has been opposed by the Italian Government.

### USA

#### Congress extends spy programme

Congress has approved a short-term extension of a critical surveillance programme used by US spy agencies, staving off a Friday expiration as disputes over a longer reauthorisation remain unresolved. The House sent the extension to President Donald Trump's desk after the Senate cleared it earlier in the day. The move comes despite passage through the House of a longer three-year extension, with lawmakers needing more time to negotiate a final agreement. The temporary patch extends the programme through June 12. "I don't like kicking the can down the road. Not my jam. But that's where we are," said Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-SD. Trump and intelligence officials have for weeks urged Congress to renew a key provision of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act that allows agencies like the CIA and FBI to collect communications from foreign targets without a warrant.

# Kyiv confirms drone hit on Russia's Black Sea oil facility

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Kyiv

Ukrainian forces struck an oil terminal in the Russian Black Sea city of Tuapse, Ukraine's General Staff said on Friday, marking the fourth attack targeting the region's oil infrastructure in just over two weeks.

Explosions and a fire were recorded on the premises of local oil infrastructure, the statement from the General Staff said. Local officials in Russia said a Ukrainian drone attack sparked the blaze and that no casualties were reported.

The facility had been hit previously on April 16, April 20 and April 28. Regional governor Veniamin Kondratyev said a fire at the



Firefighters putting out a fire in a residential building following a Russian drone attack in Mykolayiv, Ukraine

city's oil refinery had also been extinguished Thursday, less than 24 hours before the latest strike. Meanwhile, Russian attacks continued to strike Ukraine.

Russia attacked the western Ukrainian city of Ternopil with over 50 drones on Friday, according to mayor Serhii Nadal.

Hits were recorded in industrial facilities and infrastructure, he said. At least 10 people were wounded, he added, while some neighbourhoods remain without electricity as a result of the mass attack.

Two multi-story residential buildings and port infrastructure in Odesa were damaged after Russian forces launched another overnight drone

attack on the southern region, local authorities said. As a result of the strikes, an apartment in a 16-story building was destroyed and the roof caught fire.

In another high-rise residential building, a fire engulfed the 12th floor, according to Ukraine's Emergency Service. In a post on Telegram, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said at least five people were wounded in the region.

He said damage from overnight attacks was also recorded in the central city of Kryvyi Rih and the northeastern Kharkiv region, where railway infrastructure was hit. "Russia continues to attack our energy infrastructure, critical infrastructure,

and civilian objects. Tonight, there were 210 drone strikes, and about 140 of them were "Shahed" drones," Zelenskyy wrote.

After years of relying heavily on foreign military support, Ukraine is poised to export its sought-after drone know-how. Zelenskyy said Ukraine is producing a surplus of up to 50 per cent in some types of weapons.

Military cooperation "is already underway" with countries in the West Asia East, the Gulf, Europe and the Caucasus, he said on Telegram.

The deals involve the production and supply of drones and missiles as well as software and technology, according to Zelenskyy.

# Tehran rejects claims over Mojtaba's alleged health issues

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

After months of speculation surrounding the health of Mojtaba Khamenei, his office on Friday issued a statement asserting that he is "fully healthy and actively overseeing affairs," attempting to quell persistent rumors about his condition.

In a statement released by the office's deputy head for international affairs, officials accused adversaries of deliberately spreading misinformation. "Enemy forces seek to provoke reactions from us by spreading rumours in order to advance their conspiracies," the statement said. The clarification comes amid heightened tensions following remarks by Donald Trump



and his administration, which had repeatedly questioned whether Khamenei was alive. Speaking to NBC News in March, Trump said he was uncertain about Khamenei's status, noting that "nobody's been able to show him." In later comments, he suggested the leader was alive but

Israeli and US strikes that reportedly killed his father, Ali Khamenei, along with several family members.

Iranian officials initially acknowledged that Mojtaba Khamenei had been injured but offered no detailed updates, fueling uncertainty.

Additional reports suggesting that President Masoud Pezeshkian had been denied access to Khamenei further deepened speculation about internal divisions, particularly involving the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Amid these developments, Khamenei issued a written statement a day prior to Friday's clarification, directly responding to U.S. pressure. In it, he reaffirmed

Iran's commitment to its strategic capabilities. "Ninety million proud and honourable Iranians... regard all of Iran's identity-based, spiritual, human, scientific, industrial and technological capacities—from nanotechnology and biotechnology to nuclear and missile capabilities—as national assets," he wrote.

"They will protect them just as they protect the country's waters, land and airspace." The latest statement from his office appears aimed at restoring confidence domestically and countering narratives emerging from abroad, as questions over leadership stability and geopolitical tensions continue to mount.

# Small plane crash in Texas hills kills five

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Wimberley

A small plane crashed in Texas, killing all five people aboard, a county official said on Friday.

The crash happened Thursday night in Wimberley, a city about 40 miles (64 kilometers) southwest of Austin, Hays County Judge Ruben Becerra said in a Facebook post.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the Cessna 421C crashed around 11:25 p.m. with five people on board. It said the FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board will investigate the crash. Becerra said pre-



liminary information indicates the plane was travelling at a high rate of speed when it crashed.

He did not release the names of the victims, pending notification of the family. He said a second aircraft travelling in the area landed safely near San Antonio.

# Israel strikes Lebanon, killing 4

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Tyre

Israel carried out several airstrikes on southern Lebanon on Friday, killing at least four people, while the militant Hezbollah group said it fired rockets and drones, including one that crashed in northern Israel and wounded two soldiers.

Israel's military and Hezbollah kept up their attacks despite a ceasefire in place since April 17. The state-run National News Agency reported that the four people were killed in strikes on three southern villages.

Israel's military on Friday afternoon urged residents of the village of Habboush near the southern city of Nabatiyeh to evacuate, warning that those close to Hezbollah's facilities would be putting their lives in danger if they stay.

Friday's exchanges came after paramedics recovered the bodies of five people, including a man and his three sons, from under rubble in the village of Kfar Rumman, also near Nabatiyeh, a day after they were killed. National News Agency reported that the five



were killed in an airstrike late Thursday on Kfar Rumman. The agency identified those whose bodies were recovered as Malek Hamza and his sons, Ali, Fadel and Hamza.

It said the strike also killed a Lebanese soldier. The Lebanese army confirmed that a soldier, Ali Jaber, was killed in the strike.

By Friday afternoon, Hezbollah had issued six statements saying it launched drones and rockets at Israeli military positions.

# 2 Gaza flotilla activists to be questioned in Israel

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Barcelona

Israeli authorities have said they are taking two activists who led an aid flotilla bound for Gaza — and were captured by Israel in international waters of the Mediterranean Sea — to Israel for questioning.

The activists, Palestinian-Spanish citizen Saif Abukeshek and Brazilian citizen Thiago Avila, were among dozens of activists intercepted by the Israeli navy off the coast of Crete.

They are members the Global Sumud Flotilla's steering committee, whose mission was to break Israel's naval blockade and bring some humanitarian aid to the Palestinian territory. In



all, some 20 boats and 175 activists were intercepted by the Israeli navy.

Activists said Israeli forces stormed their vessels, smashed engines and detained some of those onboard. Israeli officials said they needed to take early action against the flotilla before it reached Israeli waters because of the high

number of boats involved.

On Friday the Israeli Foreign Ministry said on X that it was taking the two activists to Israel for questioning, and that Abukeshek was "suspected of affiliation with a terrorist organization" and Avila was "suspected of illegal activity," without providing evidence. The Global Sumud Flotilla

appealed for international support. "We demand that all governments do all they can to pressure the Israeli regime to release all the illegal abductees," the group said.

The rest of the flotilla participants were released in Crete late Thursday. Of the 53 vessels that had been sailing prior to the interception, 31 reached safe waters and would continue their attempts to "break the illegal siege of Gaza," organisers said. The flotilla set sail earlier this month from Barcelona, Spain. Organisers have said more than 70 boats and 1,000 people from around the world would be participating, with more vessels joining the original boats as the flotilla sailed east across the Mediterranean.

# UN votes to cut South Sudan peacekeeping force

EDITH M LEDERER  
United Nations

The UN Security Council voted to reduce the ceiling for the peacekeeping force in conflict-torn South Sudan from 17,000 to 12,000 troops with a mandate to prevent a return to civil war in the world's newest nation.

The vote on the US-drafted resolution was 13-0 with Russia and China abstaining. It extends the mandate of the force until April 30, 2027.

US Ambassador Mike Waltz told the council the resolution seeks to get the force "back to basics" — keeping the peace, protecting civilians and supporting access to humanitarian aid.

There were high hopes when oil-rich South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011 after a long conflict. But the country slid into a civil war in December 2013, largely based on ethnic divisions, when forces loyal to Salva Kiir, an ethnic Dinka, battled those loyal to



Riek Machar, an ethnic Nuer.

More than 400,000 people were killed in the war, which ended with a peace agreement in 2018 and a national unity government with Kiir as president and Machar as vice president. But Kiir's government put Machar under house arrest in March 2025, accusing him of subversive activities, and he now faces treason charges.

Machar's removal coincided with a sharp increase in violence and a breakdown of the 2018 peace deal, though a long-delayed presidential election is

still scheduled for December.

Waltz said the US is concerned that Kiir's government is "exploiting international support and obstructing those that are genuinely trying to help."

For example, Waltz said, between October and March the UN force recorded more than 480 incidents where peacekeepers were blocked, humanitarian access was denied, repatriation flights were obstructed, bases were forced to close "and millions of dollars were lost and wasted."

He said the United States is serious when it says the UN's far-flung peacekeeping missions are meant to be temporary to help governments "navigate peace and security crises."

Russia's deputy ambassador Anna Evtstigneeva argued for maintaining the mission's ceiling.

"The mission must be ready for any scenario and security challenges," she said. "It should have a sufficient level of resources for that." (AP)

# Nepal's finance minister and US envoy Sergio Gor discuss economic partnership

SHIRISH B PRADHAN  
Kathmandu

Nepal's Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle on Friday discussed economic partnership and development assistance between Nepal and the US with Sergio Gor.

Gor is the special envoy of US President Donald Trump for South and Central Asia.

The meeting, at the Ministry of Finance, focused on strengthening bilateral engagement, with both sides discussing cooperation related to economic development, according to Finance Ministry sources. During the meeting, "they discussed economic partnership between Nepal



Sergio Gor, Special Envoy of the United States to South and Central Asia and Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle

and the USA, development assistance and matters relating to mutual interest." The two leaders also discussed ongoing assistance by the US government to Nepal's economic development, future US investment and areas of cooperation, the ministry said.

Envoy Gor, representing President Trump, is currently on a visit to Nepal.

Both the leaders held constructive and productive discussions on deepening bilateral cooperation across several promising domains, with particular emphasis on expanding trade and advancing initiatives under the Millennium Challenge Corporation, according to the US embassy. (PTI)

# China has now dropped tariffs on imports from every African country except 1

GERALD IMRAY ■ Cape Town

A China policy giving Africa's biggest economies tariff-free access to its market for the next two years came into effect on Friday while its economic rival the United States seeks to impose new import taxes under President Donald Trump's push for protectionism.

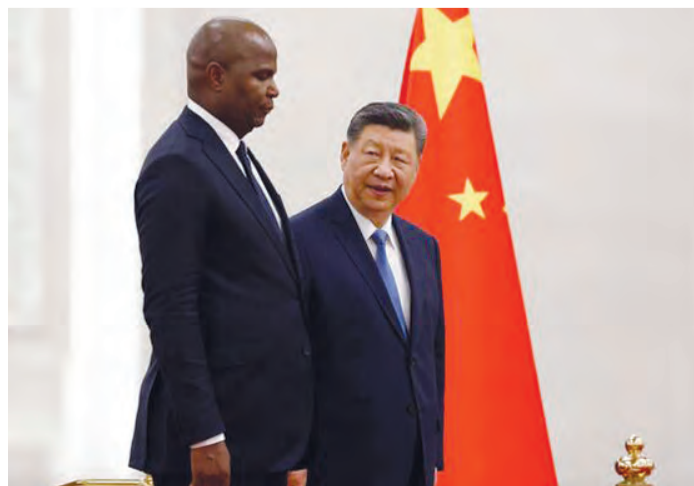
The China deal covers Africa's 20 largest economies, including South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Algeria and Kenya. China had already dropped tariffs on 33 poorer African countries, meaning 53 of the continent's 54 nations are now eligible for "tariff-free treatment" for their goods, according to China. The country not eligible is the small nation of Eswatini

because it is the only one in Africa that maintains formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan.

The Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council in China said the agreement would promote the common development of China and Africa.

China's official Xinhua News Agency said a shipment of 24 metric tons of apples from South Africa that cleared customs in Shenzhen in the early hours of Friday was the first batch of goods to enter under the new zero-tariff policy.

According to Xinhua, China's Commerce Ministry said it would especially benefit African products like cocoa from Ivory Coast and Ghana, coffee and avocados from Kenya, and citrus fruits and wine



China's President Xi Jinping and Mozambique's President Daniel Chapo attending a welcoming ceremony at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing

from South Africa, which used to face tariffs of between 8 per cent and 30 per cent. Ivory Coast is by far the world's biggest cocoa producer and it and Ghana account for more than 50 per cent of the global supply. South Africa is a major citrus fruit exporter.

## African nations looking away from the US

Several of Africa's top economies said they would look for new markets for some of their US-bound products after the Trump administration imposed reciprocal tariffs a year ago — at one point with rates of 30 per cent for Africa's leading economy, South Africa, and higher than 40 per cent for some other African countries. "South Africa looks forward to

working with China in a friendly, pragmatic and flexible manner," South African Trade Minister Parks Tau said in February during bilateral talks in China. While the US Supreme Court struck down Trump's far-reaching global tariffs as unconstitutional in February, the Republican president said his administration had "very powerful alternatives" and promptly rolled out temporary import taxes to replace them.

China is already the biggest trade partner for Africa, a continent of 1.5 billion people that's expected to nearly double to 2.5 billion by 2050, according to the United Nations, when it would have more than a quarter of the world's people. China hailed its tariff-free deal as promoting common devel-

opment, but there is a large trade imbalance between it and Africa, while African nations owe Beijing billions in debt repayments.

China-Africa trade reached a record \$348 billion in 2025, though China's exports to Africa increased by around 25 per cent to \$225 billion, while its imports from Africa increased by only around 5 per cent to \$123 billion, widening the trade deficit for Africa. China has long imported raw materials from Africa and sent back manufactured goods.

Thierry Pairault, a China-Africa expert at France's National Centre, said that while the new policy might have some benefits for agricultural products, most African raw material exports like oil and minerals already had tariff-free access to China. (AP)

## WHCA dinner: Prosecutors release video of armed attack

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Washington

Federal prosecutors released a video showing the moment authorities say a man armed with guns and knives tried to storm the White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA) dinner and attempt to kill President Donald Trump.

Jeanine Pirro, the US attorney for Washington, posted the video on social media on Thursday amid questions over whose bullet struck a Secret Service officer as Cole Tomas Allen ran through security with a long gun toward the hotel ballroom packed with journalists, administration officials and others. Prosecutors had previously claimed the agent

was shot in the bullet-resistant vest during the melee, but had not confirmed it was Allen who shot the agent. Pirro, however, said Thursday that there is no evidence that the officer was hit by friendly fire.

The video appears to show Allen run through a magnetometer and point his weapon at the agent, who fired back five times, according to authorities.

It's not clear from the video at what moment Allen's weapon fires. Allen was injured but was not shot during the Saturday night attack at the Washington Hilton, which disrupted one of the highest-profile annual events in the nation's Capital. Allen agreed earlier Thursday to remain



jailed while he awaits trial. He did not enter a plea during his brief appearance in federal court.

Secret Service Director Sean Curran defended the agency's security plan for

the event and said he would not change it. He said in a Fox News interview that the attack was stopped within seconds at the outermost perimeter of a multi-layered security bubble around the

president. The distance from the magnetometers to the podium where Trump was seated was 355 feet, with two sets of stairs, a doorway and many more armed Secret Service officers in between, he said. "The site was set up perfectly," Curran said.

The nearly six-minute video released by Pirro shows Allen walking back and forth down a hallway the day before the attack, and briefly checking out the hotel gym.

Footage from the security checkpoint shows about a dozen federal officers taking down magnetometers and casually standing around when the gunman emerges from a doorway and starts sprinting toward them.

The gunman quickly reaches the officers before

most of them appear to notice him. Only one officer visible in the video appears to have drawn his gun before the gunman passed; Pirro said he's the one who was shot and returned fire.

In court papers pressing for Allen's continued detention, prosecutors wrote Wednesday that Allen took a picture of himself in his hotel room just minutes before the incident, and that he was outfitted with an ammunition bag, a shoulder gun holster and a sheathed knife.

In a message that authorities say sheds light on his motive, Allen referred to himself as a "Friendly Federal Assassin" and alluded obliquely to grievances over a range of Trump administration actions.

## Angry crowd riots outside Australian hospital



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Melbourne

An angry crowd rioted outside an Australian outback hospital where a man accused of killing a 5-year-old girl was treated for a vigilante beating.

The suspect, Jefferson Lewis, allegedly abducted the girl at an Indigenous community near Alice Springs in central Australia over the weekend. The body of the girl, who is now known as Kumanjayi Little Baby because of an Indigenous ban on naming the dead, was found on Thursday. Lewis had been beaten unconscious by a mob before police arrested

him at an Indigenous community later Thursday, police said. He was taken to Alice Springs Hospital, where hundreds of people late Thursday demanded he face so-called payback under customary law, which can involve spearing or beating. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse the crowd. Several police vehicles were damaged.

The hospital discharged Lewis to the police, who flew him to the Northern Territory capital Darwin, 1,500 km (900 miles) to the north, for his own safety to be detained. He is expected to be charged on Friday.

## UK terror threat level raised to 'severe' after antisemitic stabbing



ADITI KHANNA London

The UK's terror threat level has been raised from "substantial" to "severe", which means an attack is highly likely, after the antisemitic stabbings in north-west London.

The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC), an intelligence body linked to the UK's security service that assesses the country's terrorist threats, said the upgrade was not solely based on terror attack in Golders Green a day earlier.

"Today, the national threat level has increased to 'severe', which means a terrorist attack is considered highly likely," said UK Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood.

"I know this will be a source of concern to many, particularly amongst our Jewish community, who have suffered so much. The Government has today announced a significant increase in investment to protect our Jewish communities, with record funding for policing and security at synagogues, schools and community centres. And we will do everything in our power to rid society of the evil of antisemitism," she said. (PTI)

## UK terror suspect charged with attempted murder of 3 men

ADITI KHANNA London

A 45-year-old Somalia-born British man appeared in a court on Friday charged with attempted murder of three men after two Jewish men were stabbed in an anti-semitic terrorist attack in north London.

Essa Suleiman has also been charged with one count of possession of a bladed article in a public place and remanded in custody to appear at the Old Bailey court in London on May 15.

The Metropolitan Police said the investigation, being led by Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) London, discovered the accused targeted two Jewish men in the streets of Golders Green on



Wednesday, soon after attacking another male in a separate south-east London incident earlier.

"Our thoughts remain with the victims involved and specialist officers con-

tinue to provide them with support as their recovery continues," said Commander Helen Flanagan, Head of CTP London. Two men — aged 76 and 34 — were treated at

the scene in Highfield Avenue, Golders Green, for stab wounds before being taken to hospital. While the 34-year-old has since been discharged, the 76-year-old remains in hospital and is

said to be in a stable condition. "As part of this investigation, detectives were also made aware of an incident that was reported to police earlier on Wednesday 29 April in south-east London. It is believed the suspect in this incident was the same individual arrested in Golders Green," the Met Police said.

According to court reports, Suleiman had been living in supported accommodation for people released from a secure mental health hospital.

The attack in Golders Green was formally declared a terrorist incident, with CTP London's investigation said to be ongoing. (PTI)

## China plans to expand orbiting space station

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Beijing

China plans to expand its low-earth orbiting space station, potentially more than doubling in size, as the rival International Space Station (ISS) is set to be phased out by 2031.

Currently, China's Tiangong and the ISS, a collaborative project involving NASA along with the space agencies of Russia, Europe, Japan and Canada, are in orbit.

NASA plans to retire ISS, the largest human-made structure in space and serve as a continuously occupied laboratory orbiting Earth,



which will make the Chinese space station one of its kind orbiting Earth.

China built its space station after it was reportedly excluded from the International Space Station (ISS) over concerns that its space programme is manned by the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

## 13 terrorists killed near Afghan border

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Peshawar

At least 13 terrorists have been killed by Pakistani security forces along the Afghanistan border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the military's media wing said on Friday.

The terrorists, belonging to Fitna-al-Khwarij, were killed in Mohmand and North Waziristan districts on April 28 and 29, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said.

Fitna al-Khwarij is a term the state uses to refer to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

In Mohmand district, movement of a group of khwarij trying to infiltrate through the Pakistan



Afghanistan border was picked up by the security forces.

The troops effectively engaged the group and eight khwarij were killed, the statement said.

In another engagement, the troops effectively foiled another infiltration attempt

by a group of khwarij along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in North Waziristan district and after intense fire exchange, five terrorists were neutralised. Sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other terrorist found in the area.

## Targeted attack on police vehicle in Pak leaves constable dead



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Peshawar

A police constable was killed and a civilian was injured in a targeted attack on a police vehicle by unidentified militants in northwest Pakistan on Friday, police said.

According to initial reports, the incident occurred in the Bannu district of the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province when the armoured police vehicle was on routine patrol. The militants attacked the police vehicle with a rocket; as a result, a constable identified as Raz Ali Shah from Mundan police station died on the spot. A civilian present at the site was also injured and was shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital for medical treatment.

Following the incident, police cordoned off the area and launched a search operation to track down the assailants. Investigation into the attack is underway. In a separate incident in the North Waziristan district of the province, a tribal elder was killed in a firing by militants, police said.

The body was sent to the District Headquarters Hospital, and police have launched an investigation.

The Pakistan government accuses the banned terrorist outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) of carrying out attacks on civilians as well as government infrastructure, especially in provinces bordering Afghanistan, after its ceasefire deal ended in November 2022.

## EU-Mercosur trade deal takes provisional effect

MAURICIO SAVARESE  
Sao Paulo

The long-awaited trade deal between South American bloc Mercosur and the European Union took effect on Friday, at least provisionally. The initiative creates a trans-Atlantic market estimated at \$22 trillion with 720 million potential consumers, and some nations expect to boost their exports by more than 10 per cent by 2038, once it is fully implemented.

The trade deal was signed January 17 at a meeting of the South American group. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's move to provisionally enact the deal, effectively sidestepping the EU Parliament, is being chal-



lenged by EU lawmakers at the bloc's judiciary. The agreement will be halted if the European body rules against it.

"This is good news for the businesses of all sizes, good news for our consumers and good news for our farmers, who will gain valuable new export opportunities, with full protection for sensitive sectors," she said Thursday.

Von der Leyen is expected to hold a videoconference on Friday with leaders of Mercosur nations Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay to celebrate the agreement. Earlier this week, Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, one of the key supporters of the agreement, signed a decree validating the deal in his country. He said it is a response to unilat-

eral tariffs imposed last year by US President Donald Trump and a reaffirmation of multilateralism.

"Nothing better than believing in the exercise of democracy, in multilateralism, and in cordial relations between nations," Lula said in a ceremony in the capital, Brasilia, to celebrate the milestone after more than 25 years of negotiations.

Last week, Brazil's vice president and one of the negotiators of the deal, Geraldo Alckmin, said in an interview with The Associated Press and other news agencies that not striking the deal with the EU would have meant staying behind while competitor nations made other agreements. (AP)

## Mamdani facing criticism over rude welcome to King Charles

YOSHITA SINGH New York

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani is facing criticism for extending a "rude" welcome to King Charles III and for failing to "set aside his obsession with colonialism" when he called for the Koh-i-Noor diamond to be returned.

Just hours before he met King Charles III and Queen Camilla on Wednesday at the 9/11 Memorial in Manhattan, Mamdani had said he would encourage the British monarch to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond. When asked at a press conference what he would say to the king when



he met him at the World Trade Center memorial, Mamdani had said that he would be attending a wreath-laying alongside a number of other elected officials, including New York State Governor Kathy Hochul

and New Jersey Governor Mikie Sherrill. "And the focus of that wreath-laying is to honour the more than 3,000 New Yorkers who were killed in the horrific terror attacks of September 11. And that's what I'm really looking to do at that event."

When pressed further on what he would say to the British monarch, Mamdani had said, "If I was to speak to the king separately from that, I would probably encourage him to return the Koh-i-Noor diamond."

In stinging criticism, The New York Post Editorial Board called out Mamdani's "rude" welcome extended to King Charles. (PTI)

## Nepal's top leadership stresses unity, peace on Buddha Purnima

SHIRISH B PRADHAN  
Kathmandu

National unity can be strengthened by following Lord Buddha's guiding principles of tolerance and mutual goodwill, Nepal President Ramchandra Paudel said on Friday, on the occasion of Buddha Purnima.

The Himalayan nation is observing the 2570th Buddha Jayanti, or the birth anniversary of Lord Buddha, who was born in Lumbini, Nepal, around the 6th century BC.

Buddha Jayanti is celebrated on Baishakh Poornima or the full moon day in the month of Baishakh of the Lunar calendar every year. The birth anniversary of the

Buddha, regarded as the messenger of non-violence and peace, is being celebrated across the country with hopes for peace.

Traditional pujas are performed by Buddhists, with lamas and Buddhist gurus conducting ceremonies in Chaityas, monasteries, viharas, and other sacred sites.

Various programmes are being organised at important pilgrimage sites like Lumbini, Swayambhu, and Bouddha to commemorate the day.

In his message on the occasion, President Ramchandra Paudel said that national unity could be further strengthened by maintaining tolerance and mutual goodwill amid reli-



gious, social and cultural diversities, abiding by the messages and guiding principles of Lord Buddha, the

proponent of non-violence and peace.

Extending his greetings to all through social media,

Prime Minister Balendra Shah said that Nepal, blessed by the birth of Buddha, has always been

in favour of non-violence and peace. "The path shown by the Buddha is the path to end suffering by seeking knowledge," he said.

"As a ray of light enters, darkness automatically disappears; likewise, our journey should be in search of the light of knowledge, should be on the path to solve problems," said Shah.

Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and Mahaparinirvana (death) all occurred on the full moon day of Baisakh. Thus, Buddhists worldwide, including those in Nepal, celebrate Buddha Jayanti with deep reverence and devotion.

Meanwhile, the Indian Embassy in Nepal on Thursday celebrated Buddha

Jayanti in Lumbini in collaboration with the Lumbini Development Trust and Lumbini Buddhist University.

The celebration held on the eve of Buddha Jayanti featured a painting exhibition by school students, chanting of prayers by monks from Nepal and India and a vibrant cultural evening.

On the occasion, a Buddhism-themed Kathak dance was performed by a troupe from ICCR, India, headed by Deepti Gupta and a musical presentation by a Nepali band led by sarod maestro Suresh Raj Bajracharya. Lumbini Province Governor Krishna Bahadur Ghartimagar was the chief guest on the occasion. (PTI)

## Chinese teen gets life for classmate's rape, murder



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
Beijing

A 14-year-old boy in China has been sentenced to life for the rape and murder of his female classmate.

The student surnamed Jiang, hailing from Majie town, Luoping county in Qujing confined his 15-year-old classmate for a night in July last year, and resorted to violence in an attempt in rape.

Fearing that his crime would be exposed afterwards, he strangled her to death, the Intermediate People's Court of Qujing, Southwest China's Yunnan Province said in its judgement pronounced earlier this week, official media reported.

The court held that the defendant's acts constituted the crimes of rape and intentional homicide, which necessitated combined punishment for multiple offences. Given the exceptionally heinous circumstances of the crime and severe consequences inflicted, the offender shall be severely punished in accordance with the law. (PTI)



## PROSPECT

### Indian Army honours porters on Labour Day at Lamang and Menchuka

Spearhead Division of Searcorps commemorated Labour Day at forward locations Menchuka valley, paying tribute to the dedication, resilience and invaluable contribution of porters who continue to play a vital role in sustaining operations in challenging high-altitude terrain. As part of the observance, a meaningful interaction and tea gathering was organised with the porters, recognising their hard work and steadfast support in ensuring movement of essential stores, supplies and logistics to remote forward areas. More than 50 porters participated in the gathering, which provided an opportunity for informal interaction, expression of gratitude and strengthening of mutual trust.

The event highlighted the important role played by local porters as an essential link in operational sustenance, particularly in difficult terrain and adverse weather conditions. Their contribution reflects courage, commitment and quiet service in support of the nation's security framework.

The gathering also reinforced the strong bond between the Indian Army and local communities in border areas. Such initiatives under the spirit of Operation Sadbhavana continue to promote respect, cooperation and civil-military camaraderie at the grassroots level. The commemoration concluded with a message of gratitude and appreciation towards the porters, acknowledging them as a dependable backbone of operational support in the frontier region.



### NGO Akshaya Patra crosses 5 billion meals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
New Delhi

In a landmark achievement for India's social sector, the Akshaya Patra Foundation has crossed the milestone of serving 5 billion meals to schoolchildren, reaffirming its position as the world's largest NGO-run school meal programme. The milestone, commemorated in 2026 in the presence of the President of India, highlights the scale and impact of an initiative that began modestly in 2000 by feeding just 1,500 children in five Government schools in Bengaluru.

Founded under the inspiration of ISKCON Bangalore and guided by its founder A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, the programme has grown into a nationwide movement under the leadership of Madhu Pandit Dasa. Its core philosophy—that no child should be deprived of education due to hunger—continues to drive its mission.

Today, the foundation



serves over 2.3 million children daily across multiple states, working closely with government schemes to support school attendance and nutrition. Its network of large, centralised kitchens—equipped with advanced automation and strict hygiene protocols—ensures the timely delivery of hot, nutritious meals to classrooms.

Beyond its flagship mid-day meal programme, Akshaya Patra has expanded its operations to anganwadi feeding, disaster relief, and emergency responses, notably during the COVID-19

crisis, when it provided millions of meals to vulnerable communities. The organisation's model has drawn international recognition.

It was previously acknowledged at the United Nations during its 4-billion-meal milestone and studied by institutions such as Harvard Business School as a scalable solution to hunger and education challenges.

Officials say the initiative has significantly improved school attendance and learning outcomes, positioning it as a powerful tool in addressing child hunger and breaking cycles of poverty across India.

### Indian Army swiftly neutralises UXO World War II Vintage in Assam

TONY DAS ■ Guwahati

On April 30, 2026, an unexploded ordnance (UXO) (World War II vintage) measuring approximately 12 inches in length and 6 inches in diameter was found at Ledo, Lekhapani in Assam. The UXO was found in civilian area, posing a potential threat to life and property.



Responding promptly to the information, Red Shield Sappers of the Indian Army swiftly mobilised a Bomb Disposal team to the site.

The team immediately secured the area, evacuated civilians from the vicinity and established a safe perimeter, ensuring strict adherence to all safety protocols. The UXO was carefully handled and transported to a designated safe location away from civilian habitation. It was subsequently neutralised in a controlled manner, eliminating any risk without causing collateral damage.



The operation was executed with a high degree of professionalism, precision and

adherence to established procedures. The timely and coordinated response ensured complete safety of the local populace.

This incident once again underscores the Indian Army's unwavering commitment towards maintaining peace, security and stability in the region, while safeguarding civilian lives.

### Sudha steps up global play as PM Modi highlights India's rising dairy footprint

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Patna

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted India's growing global footprint in cheese and dairy, it reinforced a clear signal that Indian dairy is ready for the world stage. For Sudha, the flagship brand of Bihar's dairy cooperative movement, the moment has translated into a renewed push to expand its global presence.

Building on this momentum, Sudha, under the Bihar State Milk Cooperative Federation Ltd (COMFED), is accelerating its efforts to tap international markets, with a focused strategy for the Gulf and Southeast Asia.

A key step in this direction was its participation at Indusfood Asia 2026 in Singapore, where Bihar's dairy strength was showcased before a global audience of buyers, distributors, and industry leaders.

The delegation was led by Shirsat Kapil Ashok (IAS), Secretary, Department of Dairy, Fisheries & Animal Resources, Government of Bihar and Chairman, COMFED, along with Sameer Saurabh (IAS), Managing Director, COMFED.

The visit saw active engagement with international stakeholders to explore trade partnerships, strengthen market



linkages, and enhance the visibility of Sudha's product portfolio.

"India's growing recognition in the global dairy space is a moment of opportunity for cooperative brands like Sudha. Our focus is to build a strong international presence while ensuring that the benefits of this growth reach our farmers," said Ashok.

He added, "Platforms like Indusfood Asia allow us to directly engage with global buyers and understand evolving market expectations. Bihar's dairy sector has both the scale and the quality to compete internationally, and we are committed to taking Sudha

to new markets." Sudha's expansion strategy builds on its strong domestic base and a vast network of dairy farmers across Bihar. The cooperative model ensures that value created through global market access translates into improved incomes and stability for producers.

Saurabh said, "Sudha has established itself as a trusted brand in India, and we are now focused on extending that trust to international markets. With targeted outreach and consistent quality, we see strong potential in regions such as the Gulf and Southeast Asia." The brand has already initiated pilot exports to select international markets and is now working towards scaling up its presence through improved supply chain systems, enhanced packaging, and alignment with global quality standards.

The global spotlight on Indian dairy, highlighted recently by the Prime Minister, has further strengthened the case for brands like Sudha to expand beyond domestic markets. With increasing demand for quality dairy products and growing acceptance of Indian offerings, the timing is seen as favourable for such a transition.

Sudha exported 5.7 metric tonnes of ghee to the US and 5.0 metric tonnes of gulab jamun to Canada in March 2025.

### Inter-school crossword: Bihar teams sweep first three positions in Phase I



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Patna

The end of Phase I of the three-phase annual national inter-school CCCC Cryptic Crossword Contest has seen Bihar teams scripting a rare achievement, cornering the first three positions on the national leaderboard.

While Nanya Dev Singh and Hemang Chandra playing as a team from DPS Patna are at the top of the national chart, Dhairya Pandey, playing solo for Don Bosco Academy, Patna, and the team comprising Sudhanshu Nayak and Shubhi Srivastava from Darbhanga Public School have, respectively, clinched the 2nd and the 3rd spots.

As many as 13 teams from schools across India have topped their respective states. While many of the teams have consistently done well in all three online rounds in Phase I, there are a few surprises too in the final ranking. Amritha Unnikrishnan playing for DPS Coimbatore; Vaishnavi Nayak of Holy Cross School, Darbhanga; Soumyajit Ghosh of Vision International School, Hooghly; Tanishka Sumbly of Heritage School, Jammu; and Depjit Boraik of Lengree Tea Estate Model School, Karbi Anglong, have, respectively, topped Tamil Nadu, Bihar, West Bengal, J&K, and Assam even as they played as single-member teams.

### Galgotias University rises in Times Higher Education World Rankings 2026

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
Noida

Galgotias University has been recognised in the prestigious Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026, further strengthening its national and global standing in one of the most closely watched global assessments of higher education institutions.

Out of more than 1,300 universities across India, only 128 institutions have been featured in the latest edition of the rankings. Galgotias University is among this select group and has been placed 27th among private

University, said, "This ranking is not just a milestone for us as a university, it is a celebration of every student who dared to dream, every parent who believed in those dreams, and every Indian who takes pride in our journey. This is not just Galgotias moment, but more than that, it is a powerful reminder that this is India's time to rise and to lead."

Galgotias University has built a strong and dynamic research ecosystem and has secured a total of 31 patents, reflecting its growing focus on innovation and intellectual property creation. Its Scopus publication profile

competitive grant success, and increasing recognition from leading national funding bodies.

The latest recognition adds to the University's broader momentum in international rankings and follows its performance in the QS Subject Rankings for Computer Science, where Galgotias University was ranked 11th among private universities in India. Together, these recognitions indicate the growing reputation of the University for academic quality, innovation-led learning, and future-oriented education.

Galgotias University has continued to expand multi-



universities in India, underlining the University's growing academic profile and rising visibility in the higher education landscape.

The Times Higher Education World University Rankings evaluate institutions across a range of performance indicators including teaching quality, research environment, research quality, international outlook, and industry engagement. In the 2026 edition, Research Quality has emerged as a notable area of strength for Galgotias University, indicating stronger scholarly output, increasing academic visibility, and growing research impact.

Dr Dhruv Galgotia, Chief Executive Officer, Galgotias

demonstrates significant scholarly strength with over 8,500 indexed documents, more than 65,500 citations, and an impressive h-index of 94, underscoring both the quality and impact of its research output.

Further enhancing its global standing, seven faculty members have been ranked among the world's top 2% scientists, highlighting exceptional research contributions. In addition, the University has secured 15 government-funded research projects with total external funding of about INR 1.70 crore from prestigious agencies such as ICSSR, ANRF, CSIR, SERB, DHR, IUAC, and IIT Bombay TH Foundation, demonstrating strong research capability,

disciplinary programmes, strengthen research capability, deepen industry partnerships, and create international opportunities for students. The University has also invested in technology-enabled learning systems, innovation ecosystems, and career-focused academic pathways designed to prepare students for emerging opportunities in a rapidly changing world.

As it continues to invest in faculty quality, research depth, global engagement, and student outcomes, Galgotias University is steadily building the profile of a contemporary institution aligned with the aspirations of a new generation of learners.

### DAILY SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

**HOW TO SOLVE IT**  
Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9x9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3x3 box, using elimination and logical deduction—no maths involved.

**SOLUTION (01.05.26)**

3	4	8	9	2	7	1	6	5
6	7	9	4	1	5	2	8	3
1	2	5	8	6	3	9	7	4
5	6	3	1	8	9	7	4	2
4	1	7	5	3	2	6	9	8
9	8	2	7	4	6	5	3	1
2	3	1	6	7	4	8	5	9
7	9	4	2	5	8	3	1	6
8	5	6	3	9	1	4	2	7

### DOUBLE CROSSWORD SATURDAY | MAY 02, 2026

1	2	3	4	5	6
7					
			8	9	
10	11	12		13	
14			15		16
		17	18		19
	21			22	
	23		24		25
26		27	28		29
	32			33	
34					
		35			
36					

- ACROSS**
- 4 Authorises walls to be built around a circuit (6)
  - 7 Job opportunities for beginners? (8)
  - 8 Play about a dissolute bar at the seaside (6)
  - 10 Is quick to get a grasp of things (5)
  - 13 Tear somewhat horrendously (4)
  - 14 A fearful cry of "OW", perhaps? (4)
  - 15 Unpolluted water at the deep end (4)
  - 16 Money, for instance, as support (3)
  - 17 A noted water barrier near Amsterdam (4)
  - 19 The letters one left for mother (4)
- DOWN**
- 1 My accommodating a duck, a horse and a cat (5)
  - 2 To be a leg man is not against the law (5)
  - 3 Discrimination that upset some of the Sabines (4)
  - 4 It can grow at various rates (5)
  - 5 Not exactly the fat of the land (4)
  - 6 In a beastly way, we brew ales (6)
  - 9 As a bandsman, he's unique (3,3)
  - 11 Fireplace salesman? (3)
  - 12 Depressing entry of water at the bulkhead (5)
  - 13 Doctor ruled out when discovered? (7)
  - 15 All for a piper (3)
  - 21 Something Brian came boozily to splice? (9)
  - 23 Was a pig thrust in one? (4)
  - 24 Fabric used by a hospital intern (4)
  - 26 He's hardly the finished lady's man (3)
  - 27 Put your foot down (4)
  - 29 The burden on the States (4)
  - 32 Scrawny person with a small figure (4)
  - 33 Allowance a grandmother gets on Tuesday (5)
  - 34 The people around the pubs (6)
  - 35 Acid description of a fierce fellow, I see (8)
  - 36 Annual appeal for help (6)
  - 16 Not all bullies are untruthful (3)
  - 18 In Leeds perhaps, one needs no spark plugs (6)
  - 20 Refractory player? (5)
  - 21 Youth associate with cons (3)
  - 22 Dissolute character, evidently fast (3)
  - 23 Bung money as partial consolation? (6)
  - 25 Manage to get a ruling head to join a union (3)
  - 28 Mostly set up and easily upset (5)
  - 30 Scottish town with terrible rain to the north (5)
  - 31 What's in store? (5)
  - 32 One guarded when there's fighting at Land's End (4)
  - 33 Get a system for entering the field (4)

**SOLUTION (01.05.26)**

ACROSS	21, Co-VE-y	DOWN	18, Eodie
1, Eiffel	22, To-W-ed	1, Ex-ited	19, Wow
7, Afro-gate	23, Meet	2, Flower	20, Re-ud
8, Gown	26, Timon	3, Land	21, C-on-tour
10, Th-wed	28, Day	4, Jointly	22, Tor
11, Anthem	29, Hearty	5, Maths	23, Magnet
14, Let	30, Dugout	6, Jenny	24, Eyot
16, Tasty	31, Re-n-t	8, Gale	25, Toller
17, Deer	32, On course	9, We-t	26, Th-wed
19, World	33, With-er	12, Match	27, Match
		13, Ehde	28, Du-e
		15, D-over	30, D-r-ew

**GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL CAPITAL TERRITORY OF DELHI**  
**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT MAGISTRATE, SOUTH-EAST, DELHI**  
**OLD GARGI COLLEGE BUILDING, LAJPAT NAGAR-IV, NEW DELHI-110024**  
**OFFICE OF THE RETURNING OFFICER**  
**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FARMERS' PROCUREMENT PROCESSING & RETAILING COOPERATIVE OF INDIA LIMITED (NACOF)**  
F.No. "NACOF" Cooperative Election/172/2025-26/250  
Dated: 22.04.2026

**ELECTION NOTICE**

In exercise of the powers conferred upon me as the Returning Officer appointed by the Cooperative Election Authority, Ministry of Cooperation, Government of India under Rule 19 F (a) and Rule 19 H (3) of the MSCS Rules 2002, as amended with MSCS Rules in 2023 vide Order No. CE-12011/400/2025 dated 17th March, 2026, notice is hereby given under Rule 19 H (4) and Rule 19 I (3) of the MSCS Rules 2002, as amended with MSCS Rules in 2023 that the election for the Board Members (18 Nos.) and Office Bearers (2 Nos.) (Chairman-1 & Vice-Chairman-1) of the "National Federation of Farmers' Procurement Processing & Retailing Cooperative of India Limited" will be held in accordance with the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002 as amended in 2023, and rules framed thereunder and the provisions contained in the applicable Bye-laws of NACOF. The detailed election programme can be downloaded from the official website of NACOF i.e. www.nacof.in.

**DR. SRAVAN BAGARIA, IAS**  
District Magistrate/Collector  
South-East District, Delhi  
Returning Officer  
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FARMERS' PROCUREMENT PROCESSING & RETAILING COOPERATIVE OF INDIA LIMITED (NACOF)  
Election No. 172/2025-26



## BRIEFLY

### Kei Nishikori to retire from tennis at the end of this year



Former world number 4-ranked and 2014 US Open finalist Kei Nishikori said Thursday on social media that he plans to retire at the end of this tennis season.

The 36-year-old Nishikori missed the Australian Open in January with right shoulder pain and has been affected by injuries the last several years. He also missed last year's US Open.

Making his professional debut in 2007, Nishikori became the first Japanese player to advance to the final of a Grand Slam men's singles tournament at the 2014 Open in New York, which he lost in straight sets to Croatia's Marin Cilic.

Nishikori, who won a bronze medal at the 2016 Rio Olympics after defeating Rafael Nadal in three sets, said in early April he was "barely hanging on," referring to his physical condition.

"Looking back on everything up to this point, I can proudly say I gave it my all," Nishikori said on X. "I am truly happy to have walked this path."

### Cricket Canada appoints Monty Desai as head coach



Cricket Canada has appointed Monty Desai, well-known for his work with associate nations and franchise leagues, as head coach of its men's national team, as the organisation looks to press the reset button after being dogged by allegations of corruption and mismanagement.

Following Canada's participation in the T20 World Cup 2026 and ahead of key upcoming ICC pathway competitions, this appointment is a "strategic step toward building momentum" and achieving greater international consistency.

"Our foremost priority is to restore Cricket Canada's prominence through performance, professionalism, and a renewed and vitalized sense of purpose," said Arvinder Khosa, President of Cricket Canada.

"Appointing Monty Desai reflects this vision. His experience with Associate nations, most notably Nepal and Afghanistan, demonstrates his ability to transform teams through effective leadership, discipline, and a clear long term plan.

"As we build on our recent ICC Men's T20 World Cup appearance, this year marks a pivotal moment, and we are confident that under his leadership, the team will make significant progress."

Desai, who has in the past worked with IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals, brings over 20 years of international coaching experience, including leading Nepal to regain ODI status and qualify for multiple ICC global events.



## Iran will participate in World Cup: Infantino

ANNE M PETERSON ■ Vancouver

FIFA President Gianni Infantino opened his address at FIFA Congress by affirming that Iran will participate in the World Cup and that the team will play in the United States despite the conflict between the two nations.

"And the reason for that is very simple, dear friends, is because we have to unite. We have to bring people together. It is my responsibility. It is our responsibility," Infantino said.

"Football unites the world. FIFA unites the world. You unite the world. We unite the world."

In an indication of how fraught the situation is with Iran's participation in the World Cup, representatives from the Iranian soccer federation were denied entry into Canada this week.

Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Anita Anand said it was her "understanding" that the Iranian officials were turned away, following a report by Tasnim, an Iranian news agency associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The report said Iranian soccer federation president Mehdi Taj and two other officials were denied entry at Toronto's airport.



And the reason for that is very simple, dear friends, is because we have to unite. We have to bring people together. It is my responsibility. It is our responsibility.

Earlier in the week at the Asian soccer federation's congress in Vancouver, Iran's participation in the World Cup or whether the team's matches should be moved out of the United States was not addressed.

At the roll call for the FIFA Congress where all nations were named, Iran was announced as absent. Outside the event at the Vancouver Convention Center there was a small group of protestors holding Iranian flags.

Infantino has not wavered on Iran's participation in the World Cup or in its matches in the United States. At one point, Iran asked to move its games to Mexico, but that request was rejected.

The World Cup starts on June 11 and the final is scheduled for July 19 with games in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Canada prepares to welcome the world: In contrast to concerns about an immigration crackdown in the United States ahead of the

World Cup, Canadian officials speaking at the FIFA Congress stressed the nation's diversity.

"Canada has always been more than just a country on a map. It is a meeting place of cultures, languages, ideas and dreams. People from every corner of the world have come here with their stories, their traditions, their talents and their hopes together. These stories don't disappear. They become part of who we are," said Peter Augurso, the president of the Canadian

Soccer Association. **Concerns about ticket prices:** In his address to the congress, Infantino briefly addressed complaints about the costs of tickets to World Cup matches, but his comments were directed at the heads of the member associations and not fans.

"We sold 100 per cent of the inventory that we put on the market, which is more or less 90 per cent of the global inventory so far. And of course, we are always putting tickets on the market," Infantino said.

"There are expensive tickets, yes, and there are also affordable tickets. And what is important is that all the revenues that we generate from the world go back to you, go back to the entire world and finance football in all of your countries."

**Cost concerns:** Earlier this week, FIFA announced it would pay out an additional \$100 million to the nations playing in the World Cup to help cover higher-than-expected costs. The FIFA Council agreed Tuesday to increase the basic payments to each federation by \$2 million to a minimum of \$12.5 million. The governing body is expecting revenue of at least \$11 billion for the tournament. (AP)

## F1 returns at Miami Grand Prix after 5 week break as FIA rolls out rule changes

JENNA FRYER ■ Miami Gardens (US)

Formula 1 returns to action at the Miami Grand Prix following an unexpected five-week break when a pair of races in the Middle East were called off because of the war in Iran.

The time off gave the FIA time to make changes to the regulations that drivers heavily criticised after the first three races of the year because of how the electrical battery power has changed the cars and competition.

Will it help? "It's a tickle," said Max Verstappen, who has been so vocal about his dislike of the current cars that he's openly considering leaving F1. "It's not what we need yet to really make it flat out. It's complicated to get everyone to agree," he continued.

"I just hope for next year we can make really big, big changes. Like I said, it's a tickle, but it needs to be more than a tickle, for sure."

Drivers won't be able to truly get a feel for the changes until Friday when practice begins, so everything they have learned so far has been limited to simulator work. While the drivers were able to offer opinions on how the



FIA should attack the complaints about the car, they aren't sure how much influence they really had.

"The fact is, we don't have a seat at the table. We do engage with the FIA and F1 more often," said seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton.

"We're not stakeholders. I say to them, when I was doing the early tests, I was like, 'You guys should come and speak to us and collaborate with us.'"

"We're like, 'Speak to us, we'll work, and we can work together.' We want this sport to succeed. It's like small baby steps each time."

Verstappen acknowledged that the drivers did have quality conversations but there is room for a stronger

relationship moving forward.

"The positive thing about it is we have had some nice meetings with Formula 1 and the FIA and I think that's probably like a starting point," Verstappen said.

"In a few years time, where maybe I'm not here anymore, I'd really hope that for the future drivers as well, there's more input to come from the drivers to the organisers in general. I do think that most of the drivers here, we have a good understanding and a good feel of what is needed to make Formula 1 a good product, a fun product.

"I think everyone has tried their best to at least do something. But of course, it won't change the world."

## Wood's penalty gives Nottingham Forest 1-0 win over Aston Villa

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Nottingham

Chris Wood scored from the penalty spot to give Nottingham Forest a 1-0 victory over Aston Villa in the first leg of their all-English Europa League semifinal.

In a matchup of two teams hoping to revive former European glory, the win at the City Ground puts Forest a step closer to what would be its first continental competition final in 46 years.

Wood fired his 71st-minute penalty high into the net, giving goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez no chance to save after defender Lucas Digne was whistled for handball.

"It's nice to have the advantage but going to Villa Park will be a tough game," the New Zealand striker



told the TNT Sports. "But we've done the job here at home and now hopefully we'll build into next week."

Vitor Pereira's team stretched its unbeaten run to nine games in all competitions. Forest visits Chelsea in the Premier League on Monday before the semifinal second leg in Birmingham

next Thursday. Forest is in a relegation fight — currently five points above the Premier League drop zone. The winner of the Europa League title earns a spot in next season's Champions League. That could create a scenario in which Forest gets relegated to England's second division but also plays in Europe's

top club competition.

Forest has returned to Europe after 30 years to reach its fourth semifinal, but first since the 1984 UEFA Cup. That was after Forest dominated the European Cup — the predecessor of the Champions League — and won the trophy in 1979 and 1980. Villa became the European champion two years later.

Villa sits fifth in the Premier League and stands a good chance of qualifying for the Champions League domestically.

Villa coach Unai Emery has won the Europa League title four times — three with Sevilla and one with Villarreal.

In the other semifinal, Braga beat Freiburg 2-1 after substitute Mario Dorgeles netted the winner in second-half stoppage time in Portugal.



## Will LIV players come back to PGA Tour? Nobody knows

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Doral (US)

Jordan Spieth is like everyone else in golf right now. When trying to figure out if LIV golfers who left the PGA Tour will try to return, he doesn't mind saying he has no idea. Nobody does.

"I think there's just too many unknowns for me to have a good gauge on what would happen," Spieth said Thursday.

The announcement that Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund will stop funding LIV Golf after this year means some of the biggest names in the sport — Jon Rahm, Bryson DeChambeau and Cameron Smith among them — may aim to return to the PGA Tour at some point, much in the same way that Brooks Koepka has and Patrick Reed likely will.

It was, as would be expected, a major talking point at the Cadillac Championship on Thursday. "If there's a system for



Brooks and a system for Patrick Reed, does that stay the same for guys in the same category as those two coming back or does it change now? Does it change for guys who sued and dropped their membership?" Spieth asked.

DeChambeau, for example, was among players who filed an antitrust lawsuit against the PGA Tour in August 2022. That lawsuit, along with a

countersuit by the PGA Tour, was dismissed a year later.

"There's just a lot of different things that happened over the last four years for that," Spieth said. "I'm kind of glad I'm not in that room, and I trust the guys that are in that room to make the right decision."

One of the guys who will be in the room — but isn't yet — is newly elected Player Advisory Council chairman

Lucas Glover, who begins his 4-year term on the board in January. It's possible that by then, whatever needs to be decided will be an afterthought.

"I will never begrudge anybody for making a decision for the betterment of their career, their life, whatever that may be," Glover said. "But do I think they should abide by the pathways back and pay the same penalties

that the previous people have paid, absolutely."

Koepka's return, for example, came with stipulations including a \$5 million donation to various charities that he and the tour selected, no access to PGA Tour equity shares for five years and no FedEx Cup bonus money he might earn this year.

"There's always been pathways back with penalty, so yeah, sure, it can be done, as we have seen," Glover said. "It's already happened a couple times. I'm sure the tour is working diligently to figure all that out. I'm not privy to those phone calls."

Brian Harman said he's still operating under the belief that golf fans want to see the best players competing in one place. "Time heals all wounds," Harman said. "There's still some sentiment out here, especially with all the lawsuit stuff, that stuff's going to be tough to get past. We play with all those guys in the majors, so I think there should be a path back."

## Palestinian and Israeli soccer officials refuse to shake hands at FIFA Congress



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Vancouver

Palestine Football Association President Jibril Rajoub refused to shake hands with Basim Sheikh Suliman, the vice president of Israel's soccer governing body, during a tense moment at the FIFA Congress.

After the two men

addressed the congress, they were called on stage by FIFA President Gianni Infantino. They stood far apart from each other and Rajoub protested loudly away from microphones before leaving the stage.

Speaking before the congress, Rajoub called on FIFA to address the Palestine Football Association's allegations that

Israel has breached anti-discrimination regulation by allowing clubs based in the West Bank settlements.

He confirmed that the PFA is taking the matter to the Court of Arbitration for Sport after FIFA ruled in March not to suspend Israel over its West Bank clubs. FIFA cited the unresolved and complex legal status of the West Bank.



### Inconsistent CSK, struggling MI face off in battle for survival

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

Their IPL 2026 campaigns hanging by a thread, Chennai Super Kings and Mumbai Indians face a must-win showdown here on Saturday, with both sides desperate to reverse their inconsistent form and stay afloat in the playoff race.

The two most successful franchises in IPL history have endured a forgettable campaign so far, with neither side able to build sustained momentum.

While CSK have found conditions at the MA Chidambaram Stadium more familiar, their performances have lacked the clinical edge that has defined them over the years.

Their batting has been inconsistent, particularly in the middle overs, while the bowling unit, traditionally their strength at home, has struggled to close out games under pressure.

Mumbai Indians, too, have blown hot and cold this season. Despite



CSK and MI face a must-win clash in IPL 2026 with playoff hopes at stake, as both teams struggle with inconsistency. CSK, led by Ruturaj Gaikwad, are placed sixth and missing MS Dhoni, while MI sit ninth after poor bowling performances, including a failed 243-run defence. With the tournament entering a decisive phase, MI must win all remaining games to stay in contention, making this high-stakes encounter crucial for both sides.



ive phase, this contest assumes added significance as both teams look to turn their fortunes.

CSK will hope their spinners can exploit the slow Chepauk surface, while MI will bank on their power hitters to counter the spin threat.

Given their current form, neither side starts as a clear favourite, making this clash a battle of survival rather than dominance in what has traditionally been the IPL's marquee rivalry.

Placed sixth in the points table with three wins from eight matches, the Ruturaj Gaikwad-led CSK are facing playoff uncertainty due to inconsistency, a negative net run rate, and the prolonged absence of MS Dhoni. Dhoni has been sidelined with a calf strain injury sustained during pre-season training, and despite

initial hopes of a faster return, he has missed the first half of the tournament.

New recruit Sanju Samson has been CSK's standout batter, scoring over 300 runs in eight innings including two swashbuckling hundreds, and he will once again shoulder the responsibility in batting.

With the ball, Jamie Overton and Anshul Kamboj have been impressive for CSK, with the former recording the best bowling figures of the season, taking 4/18 against Delhi Capitals.

MI's campaign turned from bad to worse when they failed to defend 243 against Sunrisers Hyderabad on Wednesday at their own den, exposing their inconsistency and inadequacy in bowling. CSK are placed slightly better than MI's ninth in the pecking order, and the latter must win all six of their remaining matches to reach 16 points and take a shot at qualification for playoff.

Even one more loss will leave MI heavily dependent on net run rates and other results going their way.

### Rugby Premier League in Hyderabad from June 16-28



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

GMR Sports, in partnership with Rugby India, the national governing body for the sport, announced that the second edition of the Rugby Premier League (RPL) will be held at the Gachibowli Stadium in Hyderabad from June 16 to 28.

Following a successful inaugural edition last year in Mumbai, the Rugby Premier League returns in the fast-paced Rugby 7s format, aligning with the league's long-term vision of accelerating the growth and global competitiveness of rugby in India.

The second season will feature the six franchises from the first edition.

Outlining the league's continued evolution, Rahul Bose, President of Rugby India, said:

"With everything one does in life, the quest is to always do better, be better, deliver better. That will continue to be the cornerstone of the RPL."

Elaborating how this philosophy translates into the league's execution, he added: "Building a world-class property will never be enough. We will always strive to deliver a better product for our fans, do better by our sponsors and last but not the least, be better partners for our franchisees, their owners and their support staff."

Speaking about their decision to host the second edition in Hyderabad, Satyam Trivedi, CEO, GMR Sports, said: "Hyderabad's premier sports infrastructure, excellent connectivity, and passionate fan base make it the perfect home for the league."

### 12 member Indian shotgun squad set for year's 2nd ISSF World Cup

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

A 12-member Indian shotgun squad is all set to take part in the year's second ISSF World Cup Shotgun stage in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and the team will arrive at the venue on Saturday. A total of 284 athletes representing 42 national Olympic committees are in the fray for the five Olympic events on the 10-day roster.

Eight members of the Indian squad are also travelling to compete as RPO (ranking points only) shooters.

Competitions begin with the men's and women's skeet qualifiers on Monday (May 4) with the finals following the next day.

The two trap finals are listed on May 9 with the fifth and last final, the trap mixed team, scheduled next Saturday on May 10.

The shotgun squad began their international engagements in Tangier, Morocco, in March where the first World



Cup stage was played.

Day one of competitions will feature three Indian Olympians — senior pro Mairaj Ahmad Khan and Anantjeet Singh Naruka in the men's skeet and Raiza Dhillion in the women's skeet. All three will be seen in international action for the first time this year.

Besides the all-conquering Italians, Indian shooters will be up against top shooters from strong shotgun nations like Finland, Denmark, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Greece, Peru and Qatar among others.

### Ambrish replaces injured Mavi in SRH squad

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Sunrisers Hyderabad on Friday picked RS Ambrish as an injury replacement for Shivam Mavi for the remainder of the Indian Premier League.

"Mavi, a right-arm medium pacer, has been ruled out of the ongoing season due to a groin injury," said IPL in a statement.

All-rounder Ambrish was a part of the triumphant India Under-19 squad at the World Cup earlier this year. He was also India Under-19's joint-highest wicket-taker at the tournament, with 11 wickets against his name.



Ambrish, who is a right-arm medium pacer and a left-handed batter, will join SRH for ₹30 lakh.

### I'm more focussed on team goals than individual milestones, says Bhuvneshwar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Ahmedabad

Seasoned Royal Challengers Bengaluru pacer Bhuvneshwar Kumar said he has reached a stage in his career where team success takes precedence over individual milestones.

The 36-year-old, who is currently the leading wicket-taker in the tournament, returned figures of 3 for 28, his fifth three-wicket haul of the season, in RCB's four-wicket loss to Gujarat Titans, taking him to the top of the bowling chart.

While the performance earned him the Purple Cap, Bhuvneshwar downplayed its significance, emphasising a shift in priorities that comes with experience.

"It's good that I got the Purple Cap. But I think I have come out of that time where I want to achieve something individually," Bhuvneshwar said at the post-match press conference. "Of course, I want to achieve something, but now it's more of a team. I'm not young anymore. Of course, when you're young, you want to win those awards, and it comes when you do well."

"But when you want to work towards the team's goal, and you

get an individual award or reward, you feel good. But honestly, I'm just trying my best. Getting confidence from the management. That's all I can say," he added.

Put in to bat, RCB endured a rare batting collapse and were bowled out for 155, a total that proved insufficient in a tournament dominated by high-scoring chases.



Bhuvneshwar acknowledged that chasing has become easier this season across venues.

"If you look at this IPL, chasing is a bit easier in any ground because the way wicket behaves and dew comes. So, yes, it could be different."

"But yeah, we didn't win the toss. We were asked to bat first. We tried our best in bowling. So now the result is that we lost. That's all."

Defending a modest total, Bhuvneshwar said RCB's strategy was to attack and take wickets rather than contain runs.

"If you look at the scenario, there was some help for seamers, and we had Romario (Shepherd), third seamer. So, we wanted to take a chance."

"And Suyash (Sharma) is someone who is not easy to pick. So, we wanted to get wickets as quick as possible. So, that's the reason he didn't bowl."

"We couldn't have won the match by defending runs. We could have won by taking wickets, and the bowlers who bowled were the best bowlers to get those wickets," he added.

### The milestone I would love to match with MSD is his five IPL trophies: KL Rahul

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Delhi Capitals opener KL Rahul has made it clear that personal milestones count for little without titles, saying his biggest ambition remains matching MS Dhoni's haul of five IPL trophies even as he continues to scale the run charts in the league.

Rahul, who recently went past Dhoni on the league's all-time run-scorers list, downplayed the achievement and reiterated his team-first approach.

"I didn't even realise I had

gone past Mahi bhai. Personal milestones are good. They reassure me that I am on the right track. But what would truly make me happy is winning as many trophies as MS Dhoni," Rahul said on JioStar.

"Cricket is a team sport. You want to win trophies. You want to be part of successful sides. That has always been my goal."

The stylish right-hander also opened up about his remarkable record at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, attributing it to an



emotional connect with his home ground.

"I've thought about whether there's a switch I

use against RCB, but I haven't found an answer. Chinnaswamy is very special to me. I grew up there, and

something just clicks when I play at that venue," he said. "So, a psychological switch happens when I go there. It's not just against RCB. I've done well in international games there too. Some stadiums just give you a good vibe and make you feel you'll do well."

Rahul also hailed the fearless approach of India's new-generation batters, pointing out how youngsters are redefining T20 batting with their aggressive mindset.

"They don't fear reputations - whether it's someone like Jasprit Bumrah or Pat Cummins. They just see the

ball and want to hit it out of the park. That's the mindset modern T20 cricket demands," he noted.

"It's phenomenal what the new-age cricketers are doing. Vaibhav Suryavanshi has taken world cricket by storm. Two centuries at the age of 15 is something I never even dreamt of doing."

"Ayush Mhatre has also done well, helping CSK score quick runs. The amount of talent coming up in India is scary, especially in T20 cricket. These fearless prodigies are changing the way T20s are played," he added.

### Not positive reflection: Sangakkara on RR's off-field controversies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Jaipur

Rajasthan Royals head coach Kumar Sangakkara said the fines his team members, including skipper Riyan Parag, have copped for two off-field incidents do not reflect well on the team.

On Thursday, Parag was fined 25 per cent of his match fee for vaping inside the dressing room during the game against Punjab Kings. He was found guilty of bringing the game into disrepute.

This was after team manager Romi Bhinder was fined ₹one lakh for a PMOA protocol breach related to the use of his phone in the dugout earlier in the season.

"I think it is, of course, a reflection that is not positive on the team, a controversy of any kind," Sangakkara said ahead of the game against Delhi Capitals.

"All I can say is that both those (incidents) have been addressed by the BCCI and the franchise. And then in terms of the culture, we always try to have a very positive healthy culture. We have our own values we adhere to. And the constant reminder to the players is to make sure they're responsible to the franchise and to our culture and our values."



In a statement on Thursday, the BCCI said it is exploring stringent action also against Rajasthan Royals after penalising Parag.

Parag, who was named the Royals captain this season, has not had the best of times as a batter but Sangakkara came to his

defence.

"I think he's done really well as a captain. And also in the last game, his little innings is what really shifted the momentum our way. He was fearless, he went out there in tough conditions and really brought the (required) rate and momentum back in our favour."

"Those are the impactful innings that I want to see from Riyan. His skill with the bat is not questionable at all. And sometimes it takes a while as a batter to get in

### England widen lead over India in women's ODI rankings

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

England have widened their lead over reigning world champions India in the latest women's ODI rankings, sitting on a clear four-point lead at No. 2, while Harmanpreet Kaur's team are third in the list. Australia remain on top of the table with 163 ranking points.

India, who clinched their maiden ODI World Cup title with a win over South Africa last year, have since played three ODIs, suffering a 0-3 series sweep against Australia.

"England have increased their lead over India from one to four points and



are on 128. India (124), South Africa (100), New Zealand (93) and Sri Lanka (89) are the other teams to retain their positions," said ICC in a release.

In the previous rankings, India

had 125 points, just one behind England's 126. Meanwhile, Australia continue to top the rankings; despite a four-point drop.

Sri Lanka have gained six points after the update, reducing the gap with New Zealand from 13 to four while Bangladesh have overtaken Pakistan to reach seventh position.

"Thailand and the Netherlands drop out of the table for now as they haven't played the requisite eight ODIs in the past three years. Thailand need to play one more ODI and the Netherlands two more in order to regain their rankings," the release added.

### Lakshya stuns Chou, India lead 1-0 in Thomas Cup quarters

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Horsens (Denmark)

Lakshya Sen produced a stirring comeback, saving two match points to outfit world No. 6 Chou Tien Chen in a gruelling opening singles, giving India a 1-0 lead over Chinese Taipei in the quarterfinals of the Thomas Cup Finals here on Friday.

Lakshya, who trailed for large parts of the contest, showed remarkable resilience to script an 18-21, 22-20, 21-17 victory in a marathon clash lasting one hour and 28 minutes.

With the head-to-head locked at



4-4 prior to this contest, the two engaged in another absorbing duel marked by long rallies, precise stroke-play and intense momentum swings.

Chou displayed his experience in the opening game, recovering from

10-15 down and overturning a late deficit to take the lead.

Lakshya, however, responded under pressure in the second game. Trailing 13-17, the Indian reeled off four straight points to draw level. Chou earned two match points, but Lakshya held his nerve, saving both before closing out the game to force a decider.

The 36-year-old Chou appeared to fade physically in the third game as Lakshya seized control with an 11-7 lead at the interval and maintained his composure to seal the contest.

### Santner sidelined due to injury

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Auckland

New Zealand white ball skipper Mitchell Santner will be out of action for at least a month due to a grade three ACL shoulder injury he sustained during the Indian Premier League.

The 34-year-old injured his left shoulder while fielding during Mumbai Indians' match against the Chennai Super Kings on April 23.

"Santner returned home to New Zealand this week and saw a specialist this morning who confirmed a rest and rehabilitation period of at least one month," New Zealand Cricket said on Friday.

**The Pioneer**  
**Classified**

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Pankaj Sen S/o Omprakash Sen R/o S.A.F. Colony, Datia, Madhya Pradesh-475661 have changed the name of my minor daughter namely Ronak Sen aged 15 years and she shall hereafter be known as Niharika Sen. PD(10)3C