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BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

Additionally, police personnel, Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) will be deployed in identified sensitive and highly sensitive areas. Static pickets, magistrates, and senior officers will also be stationed in these locations to ensure law and order. The DGP has made it clear

To maintain communal harmony, senior officials have been directed to engage in regular dialogue with religious leaders and members of peace committees. This initiative aims to foster mutual trust and prevent any tensions at the community level. Strict surveillance will be maintained on social media platforms to curb the spread of misinformation and rumors. Any provocative or misleading

Emergency response vehicles will be stationed along sensitive routes to ensure swift action in case of any crisis. Additionally, fire brigade services will be placed on high alert in busy market areas to handle any emergencies effectively. The DGP has emphasised that no lapses in security will be tolerated, and all measures will be implemented strictly to ensure a peaceful and safe environment during the festivities. The UP Police remains committed to maintaining law and order and ensuring the safety of all residents during this period.

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

Earlier slamming the State Government for obstructing the completion of border fencing Shah said that open borders were

“Thousands of Rohingyas are entering from Bangladesh with the help of the local police and the TMC men, the Government is not doing to stop this because they constitute the vote bank of Mamata Banerjee,” Adhikari said adding how the same Chief Minister when she was the opposition leader had accused the CPI(M).

and the guilty will soon be brought to book," Police Commissioner Ajay Thakur said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The National Capacity Building Programme on Oxygen Management is an initiative led by the Disaster Management Cell of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with AIIMS, Delhi.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

training while creating skilled professionals to support individuals with intellectual, speech, and hearing disabilities. Through guidance, training, and care, this initiative seeks to nurture their abilities and empower them to lead confident, self-reliant lives," said Kale on the occasion.

this initiative seeks to nurture their abilities and empower them to lead confident, self-reliant lives," said Kale on the occasion.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

“We have given a letter, which was signed by many parties, including the RSP and Shiv Sena (UBT). We conveyed

The convention of allowing the LoP to speak when they stand up has been disregarded repeatedly.

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

rently pursuing an MBBS degree. Despite these financial credentials, she and her relatives have reportedly received wages

The village head's two sons—one studying MBBS and the other law—along with a contractor and his engineer son were also listed as MNREGA workers. MNREGA, a flagship government scheme, is designed to provide employment opportunities to rural households.

The administration has pledged to implement stronger monitoring mechanisms to curb such fraudulent practices in the future.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

This portal is connected to all ministries and departments of the government of India and states and is also accessible via a mobile application available on Google Play and integrated with UMANG (unified mobile application), the minister

The government has issued detailed guidelines for its use, the latest being on August 23, 2024, and has prescribed a 21-day timeframe for grievance redressal, with mandatory interim replies if resolution within the stipulated time is not possible, he added. Since 2019, more than 1.15 crore

In another response, the minister said during the five years from January 1, 2020

The government has adopted the 10 step reforms of CPGRAMS to make grievance redressal timely, meaningful and accessible to citizen, he said. "The government has mapped 103,183 grievance officers on the CPGRAMS portal. The average timelines of redressal have come down from 28 days in 2019 to 13 days in 2024 for central government," Singh said.

Continued from >> P1

Speaking about the XR Creator Hackathon, Dinesh Lal emphasised its role in shaping the future of technological education, saying, "This Hackathon inspires students to look beyond traditional study paths and explore emerging technologies like XR as a mainstream field. It's a chance to step into the future and see how innovation can solve real-world problems." As India embraces XR

Wavelaps, a leading AR/VR company, provides consultancy to the Ministry in WAVES' XR domain. The success of the Hackathon was further reinforced by the contributions of Bharat XR and XDG, two of India's premier XR communities. The success of the Hackathon has been further reinforced by the contributions of Bharat XR and XDG, two of India's pre-

miXR XR communities. Beyond historical immersion, team VRkshetra has taken innovation a step further by integrating VR with real-world commerce. The VR experience features a virtual marketplace where users can explore and purchase authentic indigenous products. Among them is Virgin Coconut Oil, once extracted under forced labour by prisoners and now produced by the Nicobarese tribal community. This oil has received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, certifying its authenticity and cultural significance. Through this platform, users can not only experience these products in VR but also order them for home delivery, bridging the gap between the virtual and physical worlds.

Continued from >> P1

help of Over Ground Workers and managed to ambush the soldiers patrolling in the area. He demanded stern action against the OGWs. Local reports suggested the police had also busted a module of OGWs in August 2024 after arresting 8 civilians along with Haji Lateef.

Since Sunday evening, a massive search

The search parties on Monday found four loaded magazines of M4 carbine, two grenades, a bulletproof jacket, sleeping bags, tracksuits, several packets of eatables, and separate polythene bags containing material for making Improvised Explosive Devices near the scene of the encounter in Hiranagar.

Continued from >> P1

Shenoy said in the meeting the need to create a system through which the bad apples could be picked out upon identification was stressed upon. Not only the CJI, but the entire Collegium members understood the concern, and assured they also want a “clean judiciary,” he added. Another bar leader joined in, “It is not that the judges alone can be corrupt, so it is an entire aspect the bar has put its support behind the judiciary, and things will definitely change from here onward.” The Allahabad High Court Bar Association has been on an indefinite strike from March 25 onward to protest the proposed repatriation of Justice Varma to his parent High Court.

Assembly withdraws pending inquiries against officials

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

In a big relief to Delhi Government officials, the Delhi Legislative Assembly has withdrawn all the pending inquiries by Privileges Committee, Petitions Committee and Questions and Reference Committee. The Delhi Assembly has adopted a resolution, moved by the BJP MLA Abhay Verma on Thursday.

The Delhi Assembly’s move will bring relief to at least 200 bureaucrats both serving and retired from the Delhi government. The officials include former Delhi Chief Secretary Anshu Prakash, MM Kutty, Shurbir Singh, JB Singh, G Narender Kumar, Maisha Saxena, Varsha Joshi, Amjad Tak, Sanjiv Khirwal, Amit Singla, Amit Singla, Jaidev Sarangi, Rupesh Thakur, Nidhi Srivastva and Ashish Verma. Notably, Most of the complaints were filed

by members of the previous ruling party against officers of the Delhi Government.

“Therefore, this House resolves that no further action be taken on the pending cases referred to the Committee on Privileges, the Committee on Petitions, and the Committee on Questions and References during the Sixth and Seventh Legislative Assemblies, and that they be considered as disposed off,” Speaker Vijender Gupta said in the House while adopting the resolution.

In his resolution, Abhay Verma urged the House that “no further action should be taken on the pending cases sent to the Petition Committee, Privilege Committee, Question and Reference Committee during the sixth and seventh Assembly and they should be considered settled,” which was passed by the house.

The resolution passed by Delhi Assembly brought major relief to the many



Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta

PIONEER PHOTO

bureaucrats who were facing investigation before the Privileges Committees since last few years.

The Committee on Privileges had 59 cases pending from the Sixth Legislative Assembly and 69 cases from the Seventh Legislative Assembly.

As per Rule 223, the Committee on Privileges is generally required to submit its report within one month. Most of the complaints were filed by members of the then ruling party against officers of the Delhi Government. Similarly, the Committee on Petitions had 107 cases pending from the Sixth Legislative Assembly and 72 cases from the Seventh Legislative Assembly. The Committee on Questions and References also has 04 cases pending from the Seventh Legislative Assembly.

In a statement, Speaker Vijender Gupta said there was an attempt to target officers

of the Delhi Government in these committees as well. Some cases before these committees have been pending since 2016 and no meetings have been held for their investigation. Some officers sought protection from the courts, and eight of these cases are now before the Delhi High Court.

“I feel that the Committees of the eighth Legislative Assembly should start with a clean slate and not get entangled in cases that appear to be motivated. We need to consider whether it befits the legislature or its committees to keep officers, some of whom have now retired, under stress. Therefore, I request the House to consider whether these cases should be carried forward or dropped. The Chief Whip, Abhay Verma, has given notice to move a resolution in this regard. Verma moved the resolution in this regard and made his statement. The resolution was passed,” read the statement.

CM Rekha Gupta announces celebration of state foundation days in Delhi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

With Delhi being a confluence of citizens from across the country, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday announced that foundation days of every State will be celebrated in the national Capital as a mark of respect to people of various states who have made Delhi as their second home.

The Chief Minister made the announcement while responding to the budget discussion in the Delhi Assembly.

The BJP ruled Delhi Government will celebrate Odisha Day on April 1 and will invite Odia people residing in Delhi on the occasion.

The national Capital recently celebrated Bihar’s foundation day on March 23. This was the first time that the State Government has celebrated the foundation day. This will help to promote cultural tourism in the national Capital.

Delhi, being the national capital, offers more options for companies, employment, education, entertainment, historical sites, places of worship, and an array of other things. Over the years, there has been a significant influx of migrants from various cities and states.

According to 2011 census data, Delhi

has the second highest population of inter-state migrants in India, which shows that marriage and work or business drive the influx . The city— State only trails Maharashtra, a much larger and more populous state.

Every third Haryanvi who has migrated to Delhi has done so because of marriage. For people from the north — eastern states, education is the main reason for moving to the national capital. And for those from Kerala, it is mainly work (or business) which brings them to Delhi. The southern parts of Delhi have the highest share of migrants in their population. The three districts of South — West Delhi, South Delhi and New Delhi have a more than 40 per cent share of inter-state migrants in the total population. This figure is the lowest, just 17 per cent, for the Central district, which includes the walled city, among the oldest habitations of the city — State.

Almost half of the migrants in Delhi in 2011 were from Uttar Pradesh. The share of migrants in Delhi from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand increased consistently between 1991 and 2011. More than two-thirds of Delhi’s migrant population came from these states in 2011.

The city offers some considerable opportunities for growth and on — site work. More jobs are available in a variety of industries, including the public and private sectors as well as the manufacturing, oil and gas, automotive, television, entertainment, textile, food and beverage, hotel and restaurant, engineering, research and development, IT, ITES, and other multinational corporations. Compared to places like Mumbai or Bangalore, it’s easier to locate a house in Delhi that meets your budget. Delhi is more inexpensive for those searching for housing because residences there are priced cheaper.

Launching a vitriolic attack on the previous AAP government, Rekha Gupta on Thursday alleged that while only 97 families of COVID victims received financial aid, the administration spent ₹17 crore on publicity. Rekha Gupta defended her government’s one lakh crore Budget in the Delhi Assembly and accused the AAP of wasting public money on advertisements instead of welfare initiatives. “When people were dying during COVID, the AAP Government spent Rs three crore on a Diwali celebration event and ₹11 crore on its publicity. They also spent ₹seven crore on promoting a sports university that only exists on paper,” she said.

Free NEET, CUET coaching for Class 12 students



Delhi CM Rekha Gupta with Education Minister Ashish Sood during MOU signing

PTI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

In a significant step toward empowering students from Delhi Government schools, the Delhi Government has partnered with PhysicsWallah (PW) to provide free coaching for Class 12 students preparing for NEET and CUET (UG) 2025. Under this initiative, 1.63 lakh students will have access to a 30-day online crash course from April 2 to May 2, with six hours of daily classes.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Delhi Directorate of Education and BIG Institute and Physics Wallah Limited is a joint ini-

tiative of a joint initiative of NSDC International, Ministry of Skills, Government of India that will provide free online coaching for NEET and CUET to 1.63 lakh government school students.

The MoU was signed in the presence of Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and Education Minister Ashish Sood.

Speaking after signing the MoU, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said, “This MoU has been signed to provide exclusive 30-day free online coaching for students of the Directorate of Education (DoE) to prepare for NEET-2025 and CUET (UG)-2025, paving the way for their admission into medical colleges and central universities.”

The Chief Minister said the initiative aims to help government school students secure admissions in medical and engineering colleges.

“With this, more and more students from Delhi government schools will get the opportunity to enrol in good colleges and successfully clear entrance exams for medical and engineering programmes,” she said.

Sood said that as part of this effort, the Delhi Government has signed an MoU with BIG, which is a part of NSDC, to offer a 30-day free online crash course-totalling 180 hours, with six hours of coaching each day-for NEET 2025 and CUET (UG) 2025 aspirants.

“This pro bono initiative will equip our students with the necessary guidance to excel in these crucial exams, significantly enhancing their chances of securing admission into top medical colleges and central universities,” he added.

The Minister assured that the government remains committed to strengthening educational opportunities and will continue to take steps to support students in their journey towards higher education and professional success.

Under this initiative, students will receive six hours of daily online coaching from April 2 to May 2, 2025, covering subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, General Aptitude and English, according to a statement. The programme includes PDF notes for structured revision, regular scheduled tests to track progress and a dedicated doubt-resolution mechanism for continuous support, it said.

The statement said the initiative would be a ‘game-changer’ for students from marginalised communities, ensuring that financial constraints do not hinder their academic aspirations.

SC penalty: Defence Colony RWA collects funds from residents

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

The Resident Welfare Association (RWA) of Defence Colony is collecting ₹1,000 from every household to raise the penalty imposed by the Supreme Court (SC) for the unauthorised occupation of the Lodhi-era monument, Gumti of Shaikh Ali, for over six decades.


The Supreme Court directed the Defence Colony RWA to pay ₹40 lakh as compensation for using the historical site as an office.

Resident Welfare Association president Ranjit Singh said, “We are collecting ₹1,000 from each household to collect the required amount. This is how we plan to pay the penalty once we receive the official notice.”

Following the court’s directive, Resident Welfare Association members and residents immediately stepped forward to contribute, he added. There are over 800

families in Defence Colony, Singh said.

“Some members of Defence Colony Resident Welfare Association are contributing larger amounts, and I am personally adding a significant sum. This is how we are gathering the required penalty amount,” he said.

 **We are collecting ₹1,000 from each household to collect the required amount. This is how we plan to pay the penalty once we receive the official notice. Some members of Defence Colony RWA are contributing larger amounts**

— RANJIT SINGH, RWA PRESIDENT

As of now, they have not received a formal notice from the Supreme Court regarding the payment. However, once they do, they will pay, he said.

Singh also added that the association

Speaker Vijender Gupta rejects LoP Atishi’s allegations on law and order

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Rejecting the Leader of Opposition Atishi’s allegations, Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Thursday said law and order does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Delhi Government and thus cannot be discussed inside Vidhan Sabha. Speaker Gupta was responding in the Assembly to Atishi’s letter, in which she accused him of rejecting Special Mention notices by AAP MLAs on the law and order situation in the capital.

In a statement, Speaker Gupta said that Special Mention notices must be related to subjects under the jurisdiction of the Delhi government. “The notices submitted by the Opposition shall not refer to a matter which is not primarily the concern of the Government of India, it shall not refer to a matter which has been discussed in the same session or which is substantially identical to the matter already raised by a member under this rule during the session,” Speaker Gupta ruled while rejecting the Leader of Opposition’s allegations.

Atishi raised serious concerns over the worsening law and order situation in Delhi, stating that incidents of firing, kidnapping, murder, and rape have become commonplace. She highlighted that drugs are being sold openly, with even young children falling victim to addiction.

However, when AAP MLAs attempted to raise this issue in the Assembly, Speaker Vijender Gupta dismissed it, calling it a “waste of time” and refusing to allow any discussion on law and order.

He accused the Opposition of trying to misuse House procedures for political gains rather than addressing public welfare issues like pollution, sanitation and dengue control.” The notices submitted by the Opposition, which I did not accept, were merely an attempt to misuse the procedures of the House and create organised disruptions. I will not allow this.”

“I will always welcome healthy and democratic debates in the House. However, I will not permit any discussions aimed at gaining political advantage and

LoP Atishi raised serious concerns over the worsening law and order situation in Delhi, stating that incidents of firing, kidnapping, murder and rape have become commonplace

wasting the time of the House for self — glorification in the media,” Gupta asserted. However, considering the nature of the issues raised in the House, the Speaker may allow notices on reserved subjects only if they are deemed extremely urgent and important matters affecting the people of Delhi and requiring the immediate attention of the House. In a statement, Speaker Gupta said, “Issues raised under Special Mention must be related to matters of urgent public importance. However, I have observed that instead of focusing on real issues affecting the public, Opposition members are more inter-

ested in creating disturbances. They could raise concerns regarding the government’s summer preparedness, vector-borne diseases, dengue control measures, pollution reduction steps, waterlogging, sanitation, and garbage disposal — issues directly linked to public welfare. Instead, their primary focus seems to be attracting media attention and disrupting the proceedings of the House.”

“The Delhi Assembly follows the Special Mention rules as prescribed in the Rajya Sabha. According to Rule 180B (II) of the Rajya Sabha rules, it is clearly stated that a Special Mention should not refer to a matter that does not primarily fall under the jurisdiction of the government. Additionally, Rule 180B (III) states that a Special Mention should not refer to an issue similar to one that has already been raised. In light of this, I had directed the Secretariat not to permit repeated matters or those intended solely to create disruptions in the House.”

“This is not the first time such an incident has occurred. I will always welcome healthy and democratic debates in the House. However, I will not permit any discussions that are solely aimed at gaining political advantage and wasting the time of the House for self-glorification in the media,” Speaker Gupta said in the statement. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has hit back, pointing out that the Speaker is shielding the BJP-led central and Delhi governments from accountability. Atishi condemned the decision, highlighting the rising incidents of shootings, crimes against women, and rampant drug trade in the city.

First cultural evening in Assembly on March 30

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Delhi Assembly for the first time will host a cultural evening on March 30, to celebrate the auspicious occasion of the Hindu New Year, which commences with Chaitra Shukla Pratipada. This celebration marks the beginning of the ‘Vikram Samvat 2082’, a traditional Hindu lunar calendar era.

The function will be held at Delhi Legislative Assembly premise, Old Secretariat.

The event will feature performances by renowned singer and lyricist Kailash Kher and the Kailasa Band, with 1,500 distinguished guests invited to part in the festivities.

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta

on Thursday stated that this marks the first occasion of organising a cultural event for the New Year not only in the Delhi Legislative Assembly, but also in any other state assembly across the country.

He emphasised, “The Hindu New Year is not merely a change of date but a symbol of renewed energy and vitality. As farmers welcome new harvests into their homes, this festival holds profound economic and social significance, honouring the agricultural community, which has always been the backbone of our nation. It is a joyous opportunity to celebrate our culture and civilisation with enthusiasm, ensuring their rejuvenation and fostering renewed energy in all our lives.”

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta will grace the occasion as the chief guest.

has vacated the historical site and handed it over to the authorities.

Earlier, the Supreme Court has directed the Defence Colony Resident Welfare Association to pay ₹40 lakh as compensation for the unauthorised occupation of Lodhi-era monument “Gumti of Shaikh Ali” for over six decades.

A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Ahsanuddin Amanullah refused to waive off the cost and posted the matter for hearing on April 8.

“We think it will be appropriate if compensation of ₹40 lakh is paid by the Resident Welfare Association (RWA) to the department of archaeology, Delhi government, entrusted with the task of conservation and restoration of the monument,” the bench said.

The Supreme Court had earlier asked the Resident Welfare Association to explain how much costs should be imposed on it for the unauthorised occu-

pation of the monument.

The bench had directed Delhi’s archaeology department to constitute a committee for the restoration of the monument.

The bench previously directed for a “peaceful” handover of the site’s possession to the Land and Development Office. The bench had passed the order after perusing a report filed by Swapna Liddle, who is ex-convenor of the Delhi chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage.

The court had appointed Liddle to survey and inspect the building and ascertain the damage caused to the monument and the extent of its restoration.

The bench in November 2024, pulled up the ASI for failing to protect the monument in Defence Colony, with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) flagging that a Resident Welfare Association was using the 15th century structure as its office.

Lok Sabha passes Immigration and Foreigners Bill 2025

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Lok Sabha passed the Immigration and Foreigners Bill, 2025 on Thursday, with Home Minister Amit Shah asserting that those who come to India for business, education and investment are welcome, but those who pose a threat to security will face stringent action. Various amendments moved by Opposition members were negated and the bill was passed by a voice vote.

Shah said the bill is necessary to strengthen the country's security and economy, promote manufacturing and trade, get global recognition for the education system and help universities earn international repute. Replying to a debate on the bill, he said the proposed legislation will strengthen the country's security, boost economy and business, besides encouraging the health and education sectors.

Shah also said the bill will ensure the country gets up-to-date information about every foreigner visiting India. "This is very important. The main issue is that the immigration is not an isolated subject but it is directly or indirectly linked to various issues.

The bill will ensure a close monitoring of everyone who visits India, why do they visit India and how long they want to stay in India. It is absolutely necessary to know



Union Home Minister Amit Shah speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday

the details of every foreigner visiting India," he said after over the three-hour-long debate.

Shah said the legislation will ensure the country's security, boost economy and business besides encouraging the health and education sectors. "I welcome everyone who wants to visit India as a tourist, for education, for health care, for R&D, for business. But those who comes as a threat to the country, we will keep a close look at them and take strong action against them," he said.

The Home Minister said the bill will strengthen the country's security and help India become the most developed

nation in the world by 2047. "I want to assure the country that we will have up-to-date information about every foreigner coming to our country," he said. According to the bill, anyone found to be using a forged passport or visa for entering India or staying in or exiting from the country will be punishable with a jail term of upto seven years and a fine to the extent of ₹10 lakh.

The proposed legislation also provides for mandatory reporting of information about foreigners by hotels, universities, other educational institutions, hospitals and nursing homes to enable tracking of overstaying foreigners.

Two more Hurriyat groups quit separatism says Amit Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said two more constituents of the Jammu and Kashmir-based Hurriyat Conference have discarded separatism and reposed their faith in the new Bharat built by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This development comes a couple of days after similar announcements made by two other affiliates of the separatists' conglomerate. On Tuesday, Jammu and Kashmir People's Movement (JKPM) and the Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Political Movement (JKDPM) announced the severing of all ties with separatism.

Shah said under the Modi government, separatism is breathing its last and the triumph of unity is echoing across Kashmir.

"Another great news from Kashmir Valley. Two more groups affiliated with the Hurriyat, namely J&K Tahreeqi Isteqlal and J&K Tahreek-I-Istiqamat, have discarded separatism and reposed their trust in the new Bharat built by PM Shri @narendramodiji," Shah said in a social media post. In a statement, J&K Tehreeqi Isteqlal chairman Gulam Nabi Sofi said he and his organisation disassociated from the All Parties Hurriyat Conference or any other group with the relevant ideology.

"We continued our struggle despite all odds but neither All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) (G) nor APHC (M) has been able to meet the expectations of the common masses. They failed at every step to represent the people's aspirations and sentiments. I have long ago severed my ties with separatist ideology and today I officially denounce it," he said.

Sofi also said he is a true and committed citizen of India and believes in the Indian Constitution. "Neither in the past I have been associated with any act that is detrimental to the interests of India nor do I or my organisation intend to be a part of any group or forum which will work or has been working against India in future," he said.

In a separate statement, J-K Tehreek-I-Istiqamat chairman Ghulam Nabi War too said he and his party are no longer associated with the APHC (G) or (M) or any other ideology that works against the interests of India. War said the Hurriyat had lost ground and was unable to meet the expectations of the people of J-K. "They failed at every step to represent the people's aspirations and sentiments. I have long ago severed my ties with separatist ideology and today, I officially sever my connections from it," he said.

Opposition demands answers on Justice Varma cash row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Opposition members in Parliament on Thursday raised the issue of the alleged discovery of cash from the residence of Justice Yashwant Varma, with Congress MP Manish Tewari demanding that Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal make a statement in the Lok Sabha as to what actually transpired.

Bringing up the issue during the Zero Hour, Tewari said the reports about alleged aberrations in the judiciary have disturbed the conscience of all right-thinking citizens across the country.

However, it is too premature to apportion guilt or otherwise, he said. Tewari noted that Parliament is charged with the responsibility of exercising superintendence and oversight over the judiciary.

"While the Chief Justice of India has appointed an in-house inquiry, I think we should respect the process and wait for that report. However, in the meantime, the law minister should come to this House and must relay the chronology of events as they have transpired," the Chandigarh MP said. "Nobody is saying that anyone is innocent or guilty. Nobody is trying to apportion guilt. Let the in-house inquiry process play itself out. But

under articles of the Constitution and the Judge's (Inquiry) Act, this Parliament has the responsibility of exercising that superintendence," Tewari said.

Raising the issue, TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee said unaccountable money has been recovered from a judge of the Delhi High Court "Judges are also public servants like us. Why any investigation will not commence if a complaint of corruption is made against a judge irrespective of the fact that the chief justice of India grants permission or not," he asked.

"Why the Lokpal will not be allowed to carry on an investigation when a complaint has come against a judge who is a public servant like us? This judge has been transferred from Delhi High Court to the Allahabad High Court...Allahabad High Court and Calcutta High Court cannot be dumping grounds. All corrupt judges being sent to Allahabad and Calcutta High Courts," he said. Congress MP R Sudha also raised the issue during Zero Hour and said that an English daily published the story on the alleged incident about a week after the incident. "There have been curious developments since then. Fire service and police report to the Union (home) minister; when did he come to know, and why did he keep silent even though Parliament was in session," she asked.

Jaishankar stresses on India-Russia cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said here on Thursday in today's rapidly evolving order, India and Russia navigate a "complex geopolitical landscape" as he underlined that the "era of multipolarity" necessitates greater cooperation between the two nations.



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar makes remarks at the conference Russia and India: Towards New Bilateral Agenda

In an online video address to the conference — 'Russia and India: Towards a New Bilateral Agenda' — he said "further enhancement of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia continues to be a shared foreign policy priority".

The conference is being hosted by the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the Indian Embassy in

Dhankhar rejects privilege notice against Shah

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Thursday rejected a privilege notice against Union Home Minister Amit Shah after the minister cited a 1948 government press release to authenticate his statement that a Congress leader was part of the management of the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund.

In his ruling on Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh's breach of privilege notice, Dhankhar said Shah did not commit any "transgression" and that his statements during a debate earlier this week were in "absolute adherence to truth".

He went on to state that the breach of privilege was invoked in haste to get traction in the media and asked the House Ethics Committee to lay down fresh guidelines on MP's conduct on issues such as releasing communication with the chair or notices served.

Ramesh had moved the notice against Shah for "casting aspersions" on Congress Parliamentary Party head Sonia Gandhi while replying to a debate on the Disaster Management Bill, 2024 in Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. Dhankhar said when some members objected to his assertion, Shah agreed to authenticate his statement.

The Home Minister, he said, has backed his statement by producing a January 24, 1948 press release issued by the government's Press Information Bureau (PIB) that announced the then prime minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's

announcement of setting up of PMNRF.

The fund "will be managed by a committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the President of the Indian National Congress, the Deputy Prime Minister and there are some other Members," Dhankhar said quoting from the release produced in support of Shah's statement.

"I have carefully gone through the debate and what the Union Home Minister asserted, the Home Minister focused in categorical terms that this was the practice," he said.

"I find there has been no transgression. There has been absolute adherence to truth which is vindicated by a document that is available to the Hon'ble Members and that being the situation, I cannot persuade myself to accord any acceptance to this Notice of Question of Privilege against Shri Amit Shah, Minister of Home Affairs," he said.

Ramesh had on Wednesday moved a privilege motion against Shah for making "unfounded allegations" against Sonia Gandhi with a "premeditated motive to malign" her.

"Even though the Home Minister did not take the name of Sonia Gandhi, he had categorically by implication referred to her and imputed motive to her. The Home Minister had made unfounded allegations against Sonia Gandhi with a premeditated motive to malign her reputation. The Home Minister's statement is blatantly false and defamatory," he had said in the letter.

Ramesh quoted a statement Shah made

on Tuesday while replying to a debate on the Disaster Management Bill, 2024 in Rajya Sabha.

"The Prime Minister's National Relief Fund was established during the Congress' rule, and the PM-CARES Fund was established during PM Narendra Modi and the NDA's rule. Sir, during Congress' rule only one family used to control the country," Shah had said. Without naming anyone, Shah claimed that a Congress leader was part of the PM's relief fund at the time.

Dhankhar said breach of privilege is a serious matter. "I have declined with a deep sense of anguish and pain that we rushed to invoke breach of privilege. We rush to the media, give it traction, try to tarnish image. And I have said on a number of occasions, this House will not be a platform to ruin reputations of people," he said.

He then referred to the formation of the Ethics Committee in 1998 and it under S B Chauhan in a report stating that members must conduct themselves in a manner that upholds the dignity of Parliament and preserves their personal credibility. Also, members must bear the responsibility of maintaining exemplary standards of morality, dignity, decorum and values in their public conduct. "I am tasking the Ethics Committee to look into S B Chauhan Committee report on ethics and take note of the intervening situations mostly brought about by technological developments and social media and evolve our mechanism, fresh guidelines for members for adherence," he added.

Government giving priority to develop highways in J and K: Nitin Gadkari

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Underlining that the government has given highest priority to develop highways in Jammu and Kashmir besides north-east, Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari on Thursday said construction works worth ₹2 lakh crore are underway in J and K, where 105 tunnels are being constructed for ease of travel.

The minister said the government is also constructing a tunnel at Zojila, which would be the longest in Asia and to be located in a sub-zero temperature zone, while answering questions in the Lok Sabha.

He said initially, the tunnel was estimated to be constructed for over ₹12,000 crore, but it will be completed at just around ₹5,500 crore. Gadkari also invited Speaker Om Birla and other MPs to visit the site to see the engineering marvel of the Zojila tunnel.

He said the work on the Jammu-Srinagar highway is also under progress, where 36 tunnels will be constructed, of which works in 22 tunnels have been completed. He said once the work is com-



Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari

PIONEER PHOTO

pleted, the travel time between Jammu and Srinagar will be reduced to three to three and half hours instead of the current seven hours.

The minister said work on the expressway between Delhi-Katra is also in progress, and upon completion, the travel time between the two places will be reduced to half from the present 12 hours.

He informed the house a total of 25,000 km of two-lane highways in the country will be converted into four lanes

for ₹10 lakh crore, and it will help reduce accidents on the roads significantly. He also said 16,000 km of national highways will also be converted into six lanes for ₹6 lakh crore.

"We are planning to convert 25,000 km of two-lane highways into four-lane highways at a cost of ₹10 lakh crore. The DPRs (detailed project reports) of the projects are getting ready and we are hopeful to complete the work in two years," he said during Question Hour.

Chile president to begin five-day visit to India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Chile President Gabriel Boric Font will pay a five-day state visit to India beginning April 1 to explore ways to shore up bilateral cooperation in a number of areas including trade and defence. It will be Boric's first visit to India in his capacity as the president.

The Chilean leader is coming to India at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday, announcing the trip. Boric will be accompanied by a high-level delegation, including ministers, members of Parliament, senior officials, business associations, media and prominent Chileans involved in the India-Chile cultural connect.

"The forthcoming state visit of President Boric will provide an opportunity for the leaders to undertake a comprehensive review of bilateral ties, as well as to discuss regional and international issues of mutual interest," it said. Apart from New Delhi, Boric will also travel to Agra, Mumbai and Bengaluru before returning to Chile on April 5.

"President Boric will hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 1, covering the entire gamut of India-Chile relations," MEA said in a statement. Prime Minister Modi will host a lunch in honour of the visiting dignitary.

The Chilean president will also hold discussions with his Indian counterpart Draupadi Murmu, who will host a banquet in his honour.

In Mumbai and Bengaluru, President Boric will meet the political leadership, business and industry representatives, startups, innovators and tech leaders. "India's relations with Chile have traditionally been warm and friendly.

Chile is an important partner for India in the Latin American region (LAC)," the MEA said.

"The two countries have commonality of views on several international issues including UNSC reforms, climate change, renewable energy and terrorism. Chile is also an important trading partner for India in the LAC region," it said.

Centre asks states to prepare for heatstroke cases amid rising temperatures

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

With temperatures across the country soaring, the Centre has asked states to review the preparedness of health facilities for the management of heatstroke cases and heat-related illnesses. In a letter, Union Health Secretary Punya Salila Srivastava said with the onset of summer, an increase in the exposure to heat, including extreme conditions may occur.

Some places of the country have begun witnessing high temperatures, she noted while enclosing the Seasonal Outlook from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) for summer 2025.

She drew attention to public health and clinical guidelines on 'Heat and Health' available on the website of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and requested states to disseminate these

guidance documents to all districts for effective preparedness of health departments and health facilities to prevent, manage, and monitor the health impact of extreme heat.

Srivastava mentioned that from March 1 onwards, through daily surveillance, patient-level information on clinical diagnosis of heatstroke is being captured on Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP) for all states and UTs. Training sessions in virtual mode have been conducted recently by the National Programme on Climate Change and Human Health, NCDC, she said.

She asked them to ensure that these are carried forward with the training material provided by NCDC and that all health professionals are trained to report on Integrated Health Information Platform.

She highlighted that the daily heat alerts generated by the IMD are shared by

NCDC with states and these alerts include forecasts of heat wave for the next three-four days may be disseminated promptly to all health facilities.

The Union Health Secretary said the guidance on developing heatstroke management units and emergency management of severe heat-related illnesses has been disseminated

"State, district, and city health departments may ensure the implementation of Heat-Health action plans and support in planning, managing and assessing response to heat along with other responding agencies," Srivastava stated. She urged the health departments of states and UTs

to continue efforts for sensitisation and capacity building of medical officers, health staff, and grass-root level workers on heat illness. Its early recognition and management. "Health facility preparedness must be reviewed for the availability of adequate quantities of essential medicines, intravenous fluids, ice packs, ORS and all necessary equipments to provide active, emergency cooling," she underlined.

The Union Health Secretary said the guidance on developing heatstroke management units and emergency management of severe heat-related illnesses has been disseminated. Availability of sufficient drinking water at all health facilities and the continued functioning of cooling appliances in critical areas must be ensured, she stressed. Highlighting fire safety measures, she said health facilities should conduct thorough inspections,

safety and electrical load audits and ensure fire NOC compliance. "Health facilities need to increase their resilience to heat by arranging uninterrupted electricity for the constant functioning of cooling appliances, installation of solar panels (wherever feasible), energy conservation measures and measures to reduce indoor heat through cool/green roofs (NDMA guidelines may be referred), window shades, shade outside etc. Rainwater harvesting and recycling plants may also be explored for self-sufficiency in water," she said.

Srivastava also urged states to utilise Information, Education and Communication (IEC) as well as community level awareness materials developed by the National Programme on Climate Change and Human Health on the precautions to be taken by people to safeguard themselves against heat wave.

Akhilesh softens stance on Rana Sanga

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

In a bid to contain political fallout and prevent alienation of upper-caste voters, Samajwadi Party (SP) Chief Akhilesh Yadav has softened his stance on the controversy surrounding Mewar ruler Rana Sanga. Amid widespread outrage over SP MP Ramjilal Suman's remarks, Yadav clarified that Rana Sanga's valour and patriotism remain undisputed.

"The Samajwadi Party believes in social justice and an egalitarian society. We aim to ensure dignity and respect for even the weakest sections of society," Yadav stated. "We are not questioning Rana Sanga's bravery or his devotion to the nation."

With Rajput groups protesting against Suman's remarks, the SP leadership has been forced into damage control. Yadav emphasised that the MP merely sought to highlight the one-sided nature of historical narratives. "Our intention was never to insult the Rajput community or any other group," he added.

Puducherry Assembly budget session adjourned

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Puducherry

The Budget session (2025-2026) of the Puducherry territorial Assembly was adjourned sine die on Thursday after holding sessions for 13 days. Earlier, the House unanimously adopted a resolution urging the Centre to grant full statehood to Puducherry, which is currently a Union Territory. The resolution was initially tabled jointly by opposition DMK members R Siva, AMH Nazem, Annibal Kennedy, Nagathiagarajan, and R Senthil Kumar, along with Congress member M Vaithianathan and Independent member G Nehru alias Kuppusamy.

Members who spoke in support of the resolution strongly advocated for Puducherry to attain statehood. They argued that as a Union Territory, Puducherry faced "numerous challenges and administrative hurdles". They claimed the elected government had "limited powers and lacked administrative freedom."

Yadav also took a swipe at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), accusing it of manipulating historical events for political gains and exploiting religious and caste divisions. "Certain aspects of history have always been used by the BJP for political benefit," he said.

The controversy has placed the SP in a precarious position. While the party has been pushing its PDA (Dalit, backward, and minority) strategy, it cannot afford to alienate upper-caste voters, particularly Rajputs. The backlash from the Karni Sena and other Rajput organisations compelled Yadav to issue clarifications, underscoring his attempt to balance competing voter interests.

Yadav further argued that historical interpretations should not dictate modern governance. "We cannot run a democracy based on historical events alone. The BJP government should focus on improving livelihoods, healthcare, and security instead of fueling divisive politics," he remarked.

Tensions escalated further when Dalit organisations rallied behind Suman after his Agra residence was attacked by Rajput protesters. They condemned the attack as an instance of oppression against Dalits, adding another layer to the political battle.

While downplaying Suman's statement on Rana Sanga, Yadav asserted that the MP's house was attacked because he belongs to the Dalit community. In response, SP workers staged a protest in Lucknow against the attack but refrained from commenting on Rana Sanga, instead framing the issue as a caste-based assault.

Meanwhile, the BJP has positioned itself as the defender of Hindu warrior legacies, advocating for greater recognition of historical figures like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, whom it argues have been undervalued in history.

The party has been actively promoting the construction of memorials and museums in Shivaji's honor while simultaneously targeting Mughal rulers like

Babur and Aurangzeb.

During a recent event in Agra, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath reinforced this narrative, stating that Agra's identity should be linked to Chhatrapati Shivaji rather than the Mughals. Against this backdrop, Suman's remarks in the Rajya Sabha on March 21 triggered a political storm, drawing severe backlash on social media.

The controversy has also revitalized the Karni Sena, which had been on the fringes of political relevance. Angered by Suman's comments, Karni Sena activists marched to his residence, following through on their protest threats. The episode has thrust the organisation back into the spotlight, positioning it as a champion of Rajput interests.

As political dynamics shift in Uttar Pradesh, the Rana Sanga controversy has evolved beyond a historical debate — it has become a battleground for vote banks and political narratives in the lead-up to the next elections.



Children from a government rehabilitation centre being treated at Lok Bandhu Raj Narayan Combined Hospital in Lucknow

Four children die of suspected food poisoning in Lucknow

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ Lucknow

Four special needs children died and several others were hospitalised following suspected food poisoning caused by contaminated water at a rehabilitation center in Lucknow, officials said.

The incident occurred on Tuesday evening at the Nirvana Rehabilitation Center on Mohan Road in the Uttar Pradesh capital. Lucknow District Magistrate Vishak G confirmed that the deceased included two girls and two boys, aged between 12 and 17. Their bodies have been sent for post-mortem, and viscera samples will be preserved for further examination.

Dr Rajeev Kumar Dixit, Medical Superintendent of Lok Bandhu Raj Narayan Combined Hospital, stated that around 20 children from the center were brought to the hospital, suffering from severe dehydration. "All these children are mentally challenged. Despite our best efforts, two of them succumbed," he said. Two critically ill children were referred to another government hospital, while the condition of the remaining 16 has improved.

Health officials revealed that more than 15 children suffered from diarrhea and

vomiting after consuming contaminated water. Two of the deceased children have been identified as Renu and Deepa. A medical team has been sent to the shelter home to monitor the health of the remaining residents.

Authorities are investigating the cause of the illness, with a post-mortem examination planned to determine the exact reason for the deaths.

The Lucknow DM stated that Nirvana Rehabilitation Center operates under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. A team under the supervision of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) has been deployed to the facility. Preliminary findings suggest that consumption of contaminated water led to the illness.

In response, officials have ordered immediate arrangements for safe drinking water at the center and a thorough cleaning of the water tank. The CMO has been instructed to ensure that all children receive medical examinations and the best possible healthcare facilities.

CMO Dr NB Singh confirmed that a health department team has examined 70 children at the rehabilitation center. Those in serious condition have been transferred to Lok Bandhu Hospital, where they remain under observation.



Piyush Goyal during the National Intellectual Property Award Function-2024

Piyush Goyal confers award to Amity International School

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ New Delhi

Amity International School, Vasundhara, Sector-6, has been conferred upon "Special Citation-Atal Tinkering Labs" Award, by Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, during the National Intellectual Property Award Function-2024.

The award was received by Dr Amita Chauhan, Chairperson, Amity International Schools and Dr Atul Chauhan, Chancellor, Amity Universities, during a prestigious ceremony, held at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

Expressing her extreme pleasure and gratitude on this occasion, Dr Amita Chauhan, Chairperson, Amity International Schools, averred, "We are extremely honoured and privileged to receive the "Special Citation-Atal Tinkering Labs" by the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal. Amity International Schools are widely recognised for the outstanding achievement of the students in various fields. The award is a testimony to Amity's commitment to nation-

building through Research and Innovation, which is the main focus area at Amity."

This award, after rigorous scrutiny by the Office of the Controller General of Patents, Design and Trade Marks, was bestowed upon Amity International School Vasundhara, Sector-6, in appreciation of providing continuous guidance to students through ideation sessions led by mentors and teachers, along with actively fostering a culture of innovation in the school by encouraging creative thinking, regularly following up on the novel ideas of young innovators and facilitating intellectual property protection for developed prototypes.

According to Sunila Athley, Principal, Amity International School, Vasundhara Sector-6, "The school has been one of the first school to setup the ATL under the mentorship and assistance of Niti Ayog, Government of India. Since then, the school has won accolades for projects ideations, research paper, prototypes, paper presentations in STEM, at the international, national, state and CBSE level, including the patents and copyrights received for the young innovators of the school."

TMC party of thieves, 'gaddars': Suvendu Adhikari

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ Kolkata

The Trinamool Congress is a party of thieves and "gaddars" (turncoats), Bengal Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari on said launching a blistering attack on Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her party men including TMC general secretary and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee.

Adhikari who alongwith a thousand BJP supporters on Friday gheraoed the district SP office at Baruipur in South 24 Parganas to protest against last week's attack on his convoy at the same place Adhikari said how "a large majority of the police force in Bengal has turned into a batch of foot licking sidekicks of Abhishek Banerjee. This is because a section of cor-

rupt IPS officers have sold their morality to the TMC leadership."

Terming the TMC a party of thieves and the Chief Minister the biggest "gaddar" (turncoat) of earth Adhikari said, "they often call me a 'gaddar' but truth to be told Mamata Banerjee is the biggest gaddar on earth ... before telling others she should remember how she ditched former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's Congress that made her the president of Youth Congress ... then she should also remember how she betrayed then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee who gave her so much honour — when she was literally loitering on the roads — by picking her from their and making her an important member of the Union Cabinet ... then she betrayed the BJP ... and now

she calls me a gaddar because I have left her party of thieves ... the TMC is a party of thieves its leaders are all thieves from top to bottom."

Adhikari's statement came hours after he demanded equal treatment for the members of all the religious sects insofar as organising Iftar parties inside Government run educational institutions is concerned.

Questioning the reasonability of organising Iftar parties inside Government educational institutions particularly colleges, State Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari has asked the Mamata Banerjee Government to "remember the appeasement politics that you are playing today because we will not allow you to forget it during the Durga Pujas when the Hindus

will demand similar treatment from you."

Saying that he had no objection in organising Iftar parties in places where they had been taking place from a long period Adhikari said, "I have reservations about setting a new trend of organising Iftars in newer areas so as to create a new tradition of appeasement politics ... all to garner votes and all to create a polarised atmosphere in Bengal."

Asking the Chief Minister to remember what she was doing to appease the members of a particular religion Adhikari said, "just remember what you are doing today ... because the BJP will demand a similar treatment for the Hindus during Durga Pujas ... we will ask you to organise similar Vijay Dashami celebrations after the Durga Pujas."

Man kills four children before hanging himself in UP

SAJID KHAN ■ Shahjahanpur

A quiet village in Shahjahanpur district was shaken by a horrifying crime when a 36-year-old man brutally murdered his four children before taking his own life. The tragic incident, which occurred on Wednesday night in Manpur Chachri village under the Roja police station area, has left the entire community in deep sorrow and disbelief.

According to Superintendent of Police (SP) Rajesh Dwivedi, the accused, Rajiv Kumar, used a sharp-edged weapon to slit the throats of his three daughters — Smriti (12), Kirti (9) and Pragati (6) — along with his son, Rishabh (4). After carrying out the gruesome act, he moved to another room in his house and hanged himself. The police believe that the

killings happened late at night when the children were asleep.

The incident came to light early Thursday morning when Rajiv's father, who lived separately, became concerned after noticing that the house remained locked from the inside. Around 7 am, he climbed onto the terrace and entered through a side passage, only to be confronted with the horrifying scene. Shocked and devastated, he immediately alerted the police.

Initial investigations suggest that Rajiv had been struggling with mental health issues following a severe head injury sustained in an accident a year ago. He had been undergoing treatment, and his family members reported that he often displayed signs of aggression and mood swings. His deteriorating mental state

might have contributed to the violent act, though a final conclusion will be drawn after further investigation.

Adding to the family's troubles, Rajiv's wife had reportedly left for her parental home on Wednesday. While the exact reason for her departure remains unclear, police are probing whether any domestic issues played a role in the tragedy.

During the crime scene investigation, the police recovered the sharp weapon Rajiv had used, along with a sharpener, indicating that he had deliberately honed the blade before attacking his children. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem examination to confirm the exact cause and time of death.

SP Dwivedi stated that forensic experts are analysing the crime scene, and statements from relatives and neighbors are

being recorded to understand Rajiv's state of mind in the days leading up to the incident.

The brutal killings have cast a pall of gloom over the village. Neighbors, relatives, and locals gathered outside the family's house in shock, unable to comprehend how a father could commit such a heinous act against his own children. Many described Rajiv as a troubled man but never imagined he was capable of such extreme violence.

The police are continuing their investigation into the possible triggers behind the crime while also offering psychological support to the grieving family. Authorities have urged people to seek help in times of distress and not hesitate to reach out for medical and emotional support.

MP Congress witnesses rare coordination between AICC in-charge, state party chief

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

For the first time in years, the Madhya Pradesh Congress is witnessing rare coordination between the All India Congress Committee (AICC) in-charge and the state party chief. This newfound synergy between AICC's Madhya Pradesh in-charge, Harish Choudhary and state Congress president, Jitu Patwari, marks a significant shift from the past, when tensions and power struggles frequently plagued the party's leadership in the state.

Jitu Patwari, who had faced considerable difficulties during the tenure of his predecessor, Jitendra Bhanwar Singh, was rumored to have expressed his dissatisfaction to the party high command, even pushing for a change in leadership. His current rapport with Choudhary, therefore, signals a departure from the strained relationships that had become the norm in recent years.

Even before Jitendra Bhanwar Singh, previous AICC in-charges struggled to

establish a productive working equation with the state leadership. During Kamal Nath's tenure as PCC chief, senior Congress leaders such as Deepak Babaria, Mukul Wasnik, JP Agrawal, and Randeep Singh Surjewala held the position of state in-charge, yet none managed to maintain a smooth relationship with him.

Despite this promising development, Harish Choudhary faces a considerable challenge in navigating the power dynamics within the state unit. Weighing on his mind is the question of how he will manage his interactions with towering party figures such as Kamal Nath, Digvijaya Singh, Arun Yadav, and Kantilal Bhuria.

Being relatively junior to these leaders, Choudhary lacks the influence and political heft that his predecessors enjoyed.

His background as a minister in Rajasthan, rather than as a Congress heavyweight at the national level, only adds to the perception that he may struggle to assert his authority over the state's seasoned leadership. Unlike previous in-charges



AICC's Madhya Pradesh in-charge Harish Choudhary

who were well-connected within the party's power structure, Choudhary is seen as an outsider with limited access to the high command's inner circles.

There is growing speculation that he may find it difficult to summon senior leaders for discussions or enforce key decisions. Even after a month in his new role, he is yet to engage with the media to address issues concerning the party's Madhya Pradesh unit.

However, Madhya Pradesh Congress Media In-charge Mukesh Nayak has assured that Choudhary will soon meet senior leaders and initiate discussions on pressing matters.

Amid these internal challenges, Choudhary has embarked on a strategic tour of the Vindhya region, a crucial political battleground where the Congress suffered heavy losses in the 2023 Assembly elections.

His visit is seen as an attempt to revive the party's dwindling influence in constituencies where its performance has

been particularly weak. In Satna, he held a detailed discussion with former Leader of the Opposition, Ajay Singh, who reportedly shared insights into the factors that contributed to his defeat in the 2018 Assembly elections. Singh's struggles have been a cause for concern, having also lost two consecutive Lok Sabha elections.

Choudhary's presence alongside PCC Chief Jitu Patwari and MLA Ajay Singh during this visit underscores the party's efforts to consolidate its position ahead of future electoral battles.

After covering Satna on Wednesday, he moved to Rewa on Thursday and is set to conclude his tour in Singrauli on Friday. While the visible camaraderie between the PCC chief and the AICC in-charge is an encouraging sign, the real challenge lies in translating this internal unity into electoral success. Whether Choudhary can bridge the divide between the party's senior leadership and grassroots workers, while also revitalising its prospects in Madhya Pradesh, remains an open question.

Editor's TAKE

Eight years of transformation

Yogi Adityanath's leadership has ushered a paradigm shift in Uttar Pradesh

As Yogi Adityanath completes eight years as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the State's remarkable transformation stands as a testament to his governance. Once plagued by poor law and order and sluggish economic growth, Uttar Pradesh has now emerged as a hub of development, security, and industrial expansion. Through a strong focus on governance, infrastructure, and welfare, Yogi Adityanath has successfully turned the State into an engine of progress.

Uttar Pradesh was once notorious for its high crime rate and ineffective law enforcement. Under Yogi Adityanath's leadership, a stringent crack-down on crime has led to a drastic reduction in criminal activities. The establishment of police commissionerates in seven districts and the creation of the Special Security Force (UPSSF) have significantly bolstered law enforcement efficiency. More than 222 criminals have been neutralised in encounters, and over 8,000 have been injured in police operations.

One of the most significant transformations under Yogi Adityanath has been in infrastructure development. Seventeen cities have been developed as Smart Cities, and 125 new municipal bodies have been established. Six expressways have been completed, with 11 more under construction, enhancing connectivity across the State. The much-anticipated Jewar airport, set to be operational soon, will further boost transportation and trade. Cities like Noida, Greater Noida, Lucknow, Kanpur, and Agra now feature well-developed metro networks, revolutionising public transport.

Uttar Pradesh's agricultural sector has witnessed unprecedented progress over the past eight years. The State has become India's largest producer of fruits and vegetables, surpassing four crore tonnes annually. Under the PM KUSUM scheme, 76,189 solar pumps have been distributed to farmers, while 27 modernised agricultural markets have been established to ensure better price realisation. A major highlight of the Government's tenure has been the strengthening of power infrastructure. Rural areas now receive 20 hours of electricity, while district headquarters enjoy 24-hour power supply. Initiatives such as the Ayodhya Solar City project and the Bundelkhand Expressway solar corridor are paving the way for Uttar Pradesh to become a leader in green energy.

The Yogi Government has prioritised welfare schemes aimed at uplifting marginalised communities. Over 56 lakh houses have been built, and 2.62 crore toilets constructed under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. During the COVID-19 pandemic, free ration was provided to over 14.7 crore people, while 1.86 crore LPG connections were distributed, promoting clean cooking fuel in households.

Uttar Pradesh has also witnessed a surge in religious tourism and cultural development. The construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and the transformation of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor have reinforced the State's spiritual identity. Events like the Kumbh Mela have attracted record-breaking numbers, solidifying UP's position as a premier destination for religious tourism. Healthcare infrastructure has seen major advancements, ensuring improved medical facilities across the state. Under the Jan Arogya Yojana, over 49 lakh families have received free health insurance. Additionally, Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a major economic hub, now contributing 45 per cent of India's total mobile manufacturing output. Yogi Government's investor-friendly policies have attracted significant domestic and international investments, fostering industrial growth. From restoring law and order to driving economic growth and infrastructure development, the State has set a new benchmark for governance and progress under the dynamic leadership of Yogi Adityanath. While challenges remain, the foundation has been laid for Uttar Pradesh to continue its journey toward becoming one of India's most developed States.

Leaderspeak

We will defend our workers. We will defend our companies. We will defend our country. And we will defend it together. This will hurt us, but through this period, by being together, we will emerge stronger. We have announced, of course, retaliatory tariffs. We have other options for those retaliatory tariffs. This is a direct attack, to be clear, a direct attack on the very workers that I stood in front of ... this morning at the Ambassador Bridge.

Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada



Letters to the Editor

Turkey's democracy in peril

Madam — Refer to your editorial, "Turkey in turmoil" (March 26). Since coming to power in 2003, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) have systematically targeted political opponents, journalists, and activists. However, the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu marks a troubling escalation.

Imamoglu, a rising Opposition leader from the Republican People's Party (CHP), was detained on March 19 on corruption and terrorism — related charges, allegedly due to his ties with pro — Kurdish political groups.

His arrest came just before he was expected to be named the CHP's presidential candidate.

On March 23, an Istanbul court ordered his formal arrest, and the Interior Ministry swiftly removed him from office-making him the fifth CHP mayor dismissed recently.

The move has triggered massive protests, as many see it as a politically motivated attack on democracy. In response, the CHP held an open primary election, claiming 15 million voters participated—a strong public rebuke of Erdogan's tactics. Erdogan, whose term ends in 2028, is constitutionally barred from running again unless snap elections are called or the Constitution is amended.

With no clear successor in the AKP, he may push for early elections to reset his term limits.

AMARJEET KUMAR | HASARIBAGH

Are we more civilised?

Madam — While Aurangzeb, the last Mughal Emperor to rule India who lived in the 17th century has been branded as uncivilised, uncultured and barbaric and a religious fanatic who allegedly demolished Hindu temples and hence, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal demanded removal of his tomb from Maharashtra.

But, we are now in the 21st century, four centuries after Aurangzeb died and we call ourselves more cultured, refined, educated and civilised than the likes of the 17th century Aurangzeb. Then how is it that our civilised and cultured mind has driven us to seek to dig out the remains in a tomb, kill people, torch their houses and business places and also intimidate women in the name of religion?

Further, we have also bulldozed the dwelling place of a person who is only alleged to have instigated people to revolt which again, is yet to be proved in the court.

This cruel and hasty act of the Maharashtra government has been highly condemned as barbaric not only by the opposition parties but also the Bombay High Court that has rightly halted the demolition.

This being the scenario, one should ask his conscience, who is more barbaric, the so called uncivilised 17th century ruler or we, who live in the 21st century and boast that we are more cultured and civilised?

THARCIUS S FERNANDO | CHENNAI

Reservation reality check

Madam — Leader of the House in Rajya Sabha and BJP President JP Nadda and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju claimed on the basis of a statement by Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar that he had talked about changing the Constitution to give reservation to Muslims. Has DK Shivakumar really said this? On the other hand, DK Shivakumar has called it a blatant lie and has warned of legal action.

Congress Chief whip in Rajya Sabha Jairam Ramesh has also given a privilege notice accusing JP Nadda and Kiren Rijiju of lying. But our lapdog media is not mentioning this denial and privilege notice of Congress. It is only discussing the allegation that Shivakumar has talked about giving reservation to Muslims.

The whole country and the world is being forced to believe this today. But this is only half truth. The complete truth is that Muslim castes which are socially and educationally backward get reservation as recommended by Mandal Commission and approved by Parliament and Supreme Court.

Apart from this, poor Muslims can also get the benefit of reservation on economic basis. The history of Muslim reservation in Karnataka is quite old.

JANG BHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

The game changer in world trade

The India-MiddleEast-Europe Economic Corridor could revolutionise the world trade and can be an answer to China's 'Belt and Road Initiative'

The India-Middle-East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) is one of the strategic breakthrough ideas of the 21st century for economic and transcontinental relationships across the globe. Never since the Belt and Road Initiative has such a serious attempt been made to define trade across land, sea, and human habitation.

If successful, global trade will never be the same again. IMEC consists of two main segments: the East Corridor, which connects India to the Middle East, and the North Corridor, which links the Middle East to Europe. In the first case, the route travels through sea and land across the territorial jurisdictions of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, and in the case of the north corridor, it links the Middle East to Europe via Israel and Greece. Put together, it enhances supply chain efficiencies exponentially.

Put simply, it builds up technological advancement, moving it towards sustainable commerce. It will affect the availability of global clean energy and alter living styles to eliminate fossil fuels.

The use of fibre optics at this scale has never been attempted before. The Belt and Road Initiative would not have the technological bite or the potential for a breakthrough in energy initiatives.

Put simply, the corridor involves eight key participants: India, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Jordan, Israel, France, Germany, and Italy. The support of the US is crucial. The shipping time is reduced, and regional cooperation is key.

The advantages are, of course, reduced transit times, taking the content of shipment beyond the Suez Canal and building upon energy and digital technologies. The outcome would be a seminal impact coupled with economic input.

Linking up Middle East partnerships with European Union connectivity is set to redefine global commerce. Economic diversification will follow.

In this era, reduced timing is the key to development. Ports, shipping, and multimodal connectivity hold the key. Many feel that it takes the principle of 'neighbourhood first' beyond rhetoric and creates new partners in the domain of international commerce.

The kind of parallel investments required, in cognate areas, could well redefine the nature of investments which trade and commerce would require. The existing sea routes require a newer kind of shipping, and internal harmonisation in



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

some sectors may become necessary. This would require new standardisation and a revision of areas such as the Motor Vehicles Act.

So far, the talk has been, predominantly, of an undersea grid, the time has come to act on it. Put simply, one approach, one focus, one grid could become a reality, and green hydrogen would be a matter of routine. Standards and styles of living will get impacted.

Human Resources Development would be linked to trade and connectivity, and the nature of education will further change to link up with the needs of many nations including the Middle East.

Some have envisaged the possibility of skill corridors. Such an intervention takes time and requires a conversation beyond intellectual protocols.

Much of the rollout will depend on how skills are organised amid concerns of localisation and cross-border flows. Skilled manpower riding on the strength of hard infrastructure, could enable IMEC to

bring cultures closer together and make IMEC not only an economic warhorse but also a way to link skills with resources. Along with connectivity and energy projects, the whole process will require more agile banking and

finance. It may become a surrogate for commerce in parts of the long link between India and Europe through which this route will traverse.

All this would have an impact on cross — border transfers of money. Digital exchanges would receive a push to ensure commerce grows along with human welfare.

There are other possibilities that may be difficult to forecast at this stage. Illustratively, Iraq has shortlisted 11 international firms to operate the Grand Faw

Port. These include China Merchants Port Group, Adani, ICTSI, Cosco, ABM Global Shipping, and more. A decision is anticipated in early 2025.

It would be natural to consider alternate proposals across the length of a link from India to Europe, and the Turkish President has some views on this. He has felt unhappy about the proposal bypassing Turkey. The result has been talk of the 'Iraq Development Road Project,' but that is another story.

The India — Middle East — Europe Economic Corridor could revolutionise the world trade as it has the potential to not only ease the trade but also increase the world connectivity. Put simply, here is the possibility where an economic corridor redefines the future of trade and commerce for well over half a century and possibly more. It may be an idea well worth supporting, observing constructively, and more.

(The writer is an internationally acclaimed management consultant. Views expressed are personal)

Debunking myths around cancer

SECOND Opinion



BHAVNA BANSAL

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death worldwide, with millions of new cases reported each year. In 2022 alone, approximately 20 million new cancer cases were diagnosed globally, and 9.7 million lives were lost to the disease. In India, the numbers are equally alarming, with around 100 out of every one lakh people diagnosed with cancer. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), more than 14 lakh cancer cases were estimated in 2023.

Despite advancements in early detection and treatment, many myths surrounding cancer testing prevent people from undergoing timely screening. These misconceptions can delay diagnosis, leading to more complicated treatment procedures and poorer outcomes.

Common myths about cancer testing

A. Cancer screening is necessary only if there are symptoms present:

Most people believe they should be tested for cancer only if they have some symptoms. Many cancers, including breast cancer, cervical cancer, and colorectal cancer, go undetected in very early stages. Regular screenings, such as mammograms, pap smears, and colonoscopies, usually identify problems before the cancer becomes major, thus

greatly increasing survival chances.

B. A biopsy can cause the spread of cancer:

One of the longest-living myths states that biopsies can cause the spread of cancer. This myth keeps patients away from opting for critical diagnostic treatment. Doctors follow strict guidelines to ensure that the biopsy is done in such a way that the spread of any cancer cells is avoided. Scientifically, it has been acknowledged that biopsy procedures are safe and integral to establishing a correct diagnosis.

C. Cancer tests are inaccurate and yield false positives: specific tests may not be considered accurate, but contemporary cancer screenings are reliable enough to be considered correct. Rule-out tests often deal with false-positive results to confirm the diagnosis. These tests have their maximum chance of success when done at early detection, which outweighs their minimum chances of being wrong.

D. If no one in my family has cancer, I don't need screening: Family history can elevate the risk for some cancers, but most cancers occur in people without genetic predisposition. Cigarette smoking, poor dietary habits, and lack of exercise strongly influence the development of most cancers. In other words, everybody should be screened.

Diagnosis and treatment

Advancements in medical science have made early cancer detection more accurate and treatment more effective.

Screening very early lets doctors recommend less invasive procedures and better survival rates. Treatment options depend on the type of cancer and the stage at which it is diagnosed. Surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, immunotherapy, and targeted therapy are widely used treatments available.

Timely diagnosis can change treatment outcomes from positive to negative. Currently, cancer care is personalised. The treatment plan is derived from a combination of genetic markers, tumour types, and individual patient needs. The right medical interventions can control many cancers, providing better quality of life and survival rates. Moreover, exposing myths surrounding cancer tests goes a long way to boosting early detection. Awareness, education, health screenings, and medical intervention empower people to take charge of the health course.

Raising awareness about cancer screening and dispelling myths is crucial for early detection and effective treatment. Many cancers can be managed successfully if diagnosed in time, significantly improving survival rates. Regular screenings, informed medical decisions, and lifestyle modifications play a key role in cancer prevention and management. By prioritising education and proactive health measures, individuals can take control of their well — being. Early diagnosis saves lives, making it imperative to spread accurate information and encourage timely screenings.

(The writer is senior consultant and HOD, Histopathology — Oncquest Laboratories. Views expressed are personal)

JUSTICE, SENSITIVITY AND THE QUESTION OF WOMEN'S DIGNITY

Justice is not just about interpreting laws, it reflects a society's moral and ethical values. A controversial ruling by the Allahabad High Court, which stated that touching a minor girl's breasts and pulling her pajama string does not amount to rape or an attempt to commit rape, was not just a legal misinterpretation but a failure of justice. It minimised the trauma of the victim and sent a dangerous message about how crimes against women and minors are viewed in the legal system.

The Supreme Court's intervention in staying the verdict was more than a legal correction, it was a reaffirmation of justice and dignity. This decision reinforced the idea that crimes against women and children must not be trivialised under technical legal interpretations.

A just society is not only defined by its laws but by the way they are interpreted. Justice must be dispensed with sensitivity and fairness. When courts reduce sexual offenses to technicalities, they fail victims

and weaken public trust. Crimes against minors cannot be excused by drawing artificial distinctions between molestation and attempted rape.

Any violation of bodily autonomy must be treated as a grave offense.

Women's dignity has long been upheld in Indian society, yet their safety is often compromised. When a court declares that pulling a minor's pajama string is not an attempt to commit rape, it emboldens predators and normalises unacceptable behaviour. Judicial decisions shape societal attitudes — when courts fail to uphold victims' dignity, they encourage impunity.

The Supreme Court's intervention restored faith in justice by ensuring that laws align with dignity, security, and equality. This decision was not just about legal precision but about moral responsibility. It reassures victims that the judiciary will stand for their rights and not trivialise their suffering.

SACHIN TRIPATHI | SATNA

Uttar Pradesh Unlocked by winds of change

My Government has an unwavering commitment to the relentless service, progress, and the State's transformation into Uttam Pradesh. Eight years is only a milestone in the transition of my State into Viksit Uttar Pradesh

FIRST
Column

Revered Shri Atalji's words, "Kintu, apni dhyeya yatra mai hum kabhi ruke nahi, kisi chunauti ke sammukh, kabhi jhuke nahi..." perfectly embody my Government's unwavering commitment over the past eight years — dedicated to relentless service, progress, and the transformation of Uttar Pradesh. Guided by the principles of *Kartavya Sadhana* and "priority to the deprived," we have pursued a mission to ensure the security, prosperity, and upliftment of 25 crore citizens, overcoming challenges without pause or compromise.

Under Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's effective leadership, Uttar Pradesh has witnessed a remarkable transformation. The State once labelled BIMARU, is now a premier destination for business and investment. The mantra of good governance, a commitment to the welfare of the poor, the philosophy of *Antyodaya*, and the goal of a self-reliant Uttar Pradesh have reshaped the State's identity, propelling it into "growth gear."

Uttar Pradesh's development journey is proof of turning vision into reality. We inherited a State plagued by lawlessness, disorder, and crime. Yet, through a secure environment, robust infrastructure, seamless connectivity, and business-friendly policies, we have reshaped it into a thriving investment hub. In the past eight years, we have received investment proposals exceeding ₹45 lakh crore, with over ₹15 lakh crore already implemented. This has directly provided jobs to more than 60 lakh youth and created countless employment opportunities. It is well-established that security fosters development, while efficient connectivity accelerates progress.

The new Uttar Pradesh stands as living proof of this transformation. The timeless wisdom of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya — that true *Antyodaya* lies in uplifting the person at the bottom — forms the foundation of our Government's vision. Over six crore people have been lifted above the poverty line in the past eight years. Under the *Antyodaya* model, 15 crore underprivileged citizens now receive free monthly food grains, 1.86 crore families have free gas connections, and over 2.86 crore farmers benefit from the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi every month. Additionally, 5.21 crore beneficiaries are covered under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, securing medical protection of up to ₹ five lakh, while over 56.50 lakh families have received free housing.

Unlocking Uttar Pradesh's potential requires a strong foundation of human capital. A significant transformation has taken place in healthcare infrastructure — while there were only 12 medical colleges in the State until 2017, today there are 80, including 44 Government



and 36 private institutions. With AIIMS operational in Gorakhpur and Rae Bareilly, the vision of "One District, One Medical College" is becoming a reality. Through Ayushman Bharat and other healthcare initiatives, we are ensuring affordable, quality treatment for every citizen in their district.

Our farmers are the backbone of a self-reliant India. In the sugar sector, Uttar Pradesh now has 122 operational sugar mills. Since March 2017, three new mills have been established, six revived, and 38 expanded-creating employment for 1.25 lakh people. Sugarcane farmers have received payments totalling ₹2,80,223 crore, ₹66,703 crore more than what was disbursed in the 22 years between 1995

and 2017.

A progressive society flourishes when its women are empowered. Over the past eight years, the Uttar Pradesh Government has remained



YOGI ADITYANATH



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IS AT THE CORE OF OUR GOVERNANCE. FARMERS ARE THE ARCHITECTS OF A SELF-RELIANT INDIA, OUR YOUTH THE DRIVERS OF TRANSFORMATION, AND MATRU SHAKTI THE FOUNDATION OF OUR SOCIETY. UTTAR PRADESH IS A THRIVING HUB OF TALENT, TRADITION, AND PROGRESS

steadfast in its commitment to ensuring women's security, dignity, and self-reliance through Mission Shakti. By offering free education up to graduation, we have expanded opportunities for young women, enabling them to pursue their aspirations without financial constraints. Additionally, initiatives like Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana, Nirashrit Mahila Pension Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, and PM Svanidhi Yojana have brought meaningful change, improving the lives of countless women across the State.

Economic empowerment is at the core of our governance. Over 95 lakh women in rural areas have been integrated into the Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission, fostering financial independence. The allocation of 2,510 fair-price shops to women's self-help groups and the provision of rural residential records (*Gharauni*) in the name of female household members have ushered in a new era of dignity and economic progress for women.

The aspirations of our youth are taking flight.

Over 96 lakh MSME units have turned job seekers into job creators, reducing unemployment from 18 per cent in 2016 to just three per cent today. More than 8.5 lakh youth have secured Government jobs through a transparent recruitment process, including over 1.38 lakh women. The UP Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act has reinforced fair examination practices, instilling confidence in competitive exam aspirants.

These eight years have marked a historic era of renewed faith, economic strength, and cultural resurgence. The long-awaited return of Lord Shri Ram Lalla to his sacred temple is a momentous occasion after centuries of struggle. The grandeur of the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, the organisation of Mahakumbh, the development of Shri Ayodhya Dham, the rejuvenation of Kashi, and the beautification of Mathura-Vrindavan have placed Uttar Pradesh at the heart of India's spiritual revival.

Deepotsav and *Rangotsav* now shine with unmatched grandeur, drawing global visitors.

Under the 'Reform, Perform, Transform' mantra, Uttar Pradesh has become a premier destination for both religious and industrial tourism. Initiatives like the Ramayana circuit, Buddhist circuit, Spiritual circuit, Shaktipeeth circuit, Krishna or Braj circuit, Bundelkhand circuit, Mahabharata circuit, and Jain circuits have placed sacred centres like Ayodhya, Kashi, Mathura, Chitrakoot, Saharanpur, Shravasti, and Gorakhpur on the global tourism map, offering world-class facilities.

Uttar Pradesh's economic success has been achieved without imposing any new taxes. Despite offering the lowest diesel and petrol rates in the country, the State is emerging as a revenue-surplus economy, driven by the ideals of *Ramrajya*. The 'One District-One Product' (ODOP) scheme has transformed every district into a thriving industrial hub, while major projects like the Uttar Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor are establishing the State as *Udyam Pradesh* — a powerhouse of industry and innovation. Every citizen is a partner in this journey. Farmers are the architects of a self-reliant India, our youth the drivers of transformation, and Matru Shakti the foundation of our society. Uttar Pradesh is not just a State, it is a thriving hub of talent, tradition, and progress.

This milestone is just the beginning. Our vision is a Viksit Uttar Pradesh — one that not only becomes India's largest economy but also fulfils the aspirations of its 25 crore citizens. With unwavering commitment, we will continue our journey of transformation, ensuring prosperity for generations to come.

(The writer is the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh)

India and China walk a fragile tightrope at 75 years

The seeds of doubt between China and India were sown in the 20th century, with British attempts to align Tibet with British India, leading to the 1904 Expedition to Tibet, which the Qing Dynasty viewed as a direct affront to its sovereignty. By 1965, India (IB) and the CIA secretly planted a nuclear-powered surveillance device on Nanda Devi to monitor China's nuclear tests, but the mission failed, and the lost plutonium device, radioisotope thermoelectric generator, remains unaccounted for to this day, deepening the mistrust between the two nations.

On April 1, 1950, India became the first non-socialist bloc country to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. In a few days, we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of this relationship. Two giants — China and India — occupy the heart of this vast and diverse landmass, their destinies irrevocably intertwined. As Wang Yi noted, Mao used the metaphor of a "cooperative pas de deux of the dragon and the elephant" to describe the importance of China and India working together harmoniously. With populations exceeding 2.85 billion, these nations wield the power to shape the future not only of Asia but of the entire world. Yet, despite their economic rise and deep historical connections, their relationship remains one of profound ambivalence, laced with suspicion, insecurity, and an unresolved legacy of conflict. If the peace in Asia is to hold, it hinges on this question: can India and China shed the weight of history and build a future of cooperation, respect, and stability?

The answer to this question is not as simple as it might seem. In the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian War, India and China were forced into a narrative of hostility, which directly contradicted Nehru's bold assertion, "*Hindi — Chini Bhai — Bhai*" (Indians and Chinese are brothers).

The war, with its brutality and China's swift victory, continues to echo through the decades, its scars never fully healed. For India, China's military might have loomed large as an existential threat, shaping its foreign policy and strategic alliances. The West, particularly the United States, has become an increasingly important partner for India as the country seeks to counterbalance China's rise in the region.

The spectre of the Sino — Indian War, an uncomfortable memory for the Indian psyche, serves as a continuous reminder of the unpredictable and dangerous nature of the bilateral relationship. China, for its part, remains largely indifferent to India's anxieties, with Nehru's words after the Sino-Indian War of 1962 continuing to haunt the Indian psyche: 'We were misled into thinking that China was our friend. We have been deceived into thinking that China would respect our interests and security. But they have shown their true face.'

Yet, despite tensions and the occasional flare —

ups of military skirmishes, particularly along the contested areas of the Line of Actual Control (LAC), it is clear that the trajectory of the Indo-China relationship is more nuanced than simple antagonism. Both nations have made remarkable strides in modernising their economies.

China's rise as an economic juggernaut, coupled with its geopolitical ambitions, has forced India to rethink its position in the world. However, India's rise has been slower and less controlled, hindered by domestic chaos, systemic corruption, and a democratic framework that, while empowering, often hinders swift and decisive decision-making. Unlike China, India succeeds, as Kishore Mahbubani put it, not because of its government, but despite it. This paradox defines Indian democracy: a system that operates in constant dysfunction yet still manages to deliver results.

India's struggles are evident in stark contrast to China's model of governance. In China, the centralised power of the Communist Party has allowed for rapid reforms and unprecedented growth, lifting millions out of poverty and placing the country at the forefront of the global economic stage.

For China, this ascent has been marked by the pursuit of hegemony — asserting its influence over its neighbours through both economic means and military presence. India, on the other hand, has faced internal divisions that have stymied its growth.

There is a bitter irony here. As India and China grow-albeit at different rates — the mutual suspicion between them only deepens. For India, China's meteoric rise is seen not just as an economic miracle but as a strategic and ideological threat. Meanwhile, China views India's increasing closeness with the West with wariness, sensing an attempt to encircle it, weaken its dominance, and tip the balance of power in Asia.

These fears are not unfounded. India's deepening ties with the United States, the QUAD alliance, and its growing influence in the Indo — Pacific region have been framed by many in Beijing as a deliberate attempt to counter China's ambitions.

Yet, in recent months, there have been signs of a shift. Last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated the need to normalise relations with China — a statement that was both a recognition of the reality of the global order and a tacit acknowledgement that conflict between India and China would spell disaster not just for Asia but for the world.

Modi, in his effort to elevate India as a global power, has become acutely aware of the importance of stabilising ties with China, opting for dialogue over discord, healthy competition, and strategic focus.

His push for a more pragmatic approach-setting aside the past and focusing on the future-has met with mixed reactions domestically.

Indian nationalists, emboldened by their country's rise, have questioned the wisdom of making overtures to China, accusing the government of compromising India's sovereignty. But this is a necessary conversation — one that transcends partisan politics and jingoistic nationalism, focusing on what is best for India and Asia as a whole.

Despite their historical antagonisms, both nations are too enmeshed in the global economy to risk full-scale war. The rise of these giants presents a unique opportunity for the world's largest democracies to forge a united Asia, not one divided by rivalry but strengthened by shared prosperity. Yet this requires more than just diplomatic rhetoric — it demands a profound shift in mindset. India and China must overcome centuries — old grievances and recognise that their fates are intertwined.

The future of Asia hinges on whether these two civilisations, long divided by borders, can rekindle an ancient spirit of cooperation. This is particularly crucial as BRICS, with India and China as key enablers in remapping the Global South, progresses with its vision to reshape the world order.

While differences remain, particularly over dollarisation, the BRICS nations remain inseparable partners in addressing the urgent challenges ahead. Together, they aim to overcome the diminishing influence of the West, which is increasingly failing to hold its position in the global arena. If India and China fail to find peace, the entire continent risks becoming the tinderbox of a future global conflict.

The stakes have never been higher. India and China, two ancient civilisations and modern giants, stand at a crossroads. Their shared history is marked by conflict and mistrust, yet their futures are inextricably linked. As Asia's foremost powers, they must choose between rivalry and cooperation. Economic interdependence and global challenges demand pragmatic diplomacy, not hostility.

Despite past tensions, recent diplomatic efforts signal a possible thaw in relations. If they can transcend their historical grievances, India and China have the potential to reshape the global order. Their choice will determine whether Asia becomes a beacon of stability or a battleground for future conflicts. The stakes are immense.

(The writer is a journalist based in Colombo. Views expressed are personal)

Indian Railways: Time to move on bold, new tracks

The railway station — a place of countless goodbyes, new beginnings, and untold stories. It is where millions of dreams converge, where weary travelers especially farmers and habitants from Rural India find comfort, and where the pulse of the nation beats strongly. For many agriculturist and young Indians, the railway is not just a mode of transport — it is a bridge to opportunity, a passage to a better future. But what happens when that bridge becomes unsafe? What happens when the very place meant to carry dreams forward becomes a site of tragedy?

The recent stampede at New Delhi Railway Station (NDLS), which resulted in loss of innocent lives, was more than just an accident — it was a wake-up call. It exposed the deep-rooted challenges of overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and the lack of modern safety measures at our busiest railway hubs. As India surges ahead in its ambition to become a developed nation by 2047, our railway system must evolve to match this vision. With rising aspirations, increased urban migration, and ever-growing passenger numbers, we must ask ourselves-are we truly prepared for the future of Indian Railways?

Railways are the backbone of India's economy and social fabric, moving over 23 million people every day. But with great numbers comes great responsibility. If we want a railway network that is safe, modern, and capable of handling the rising demands of an ambitious India, we need urgent reforms in station design, crowd management, and passenger experience. This is not just about preventing another stampede — it is about building an India where every journey is safe, efficient, and dignified. The question is — are our stations built for this future? If we do not act now, overcrowding will not just lead to safety hazards but will also diminish passenger experience, slow down economic mobility, and create bottlenecks in urban transport systems. One of the biggest concerns at NDLS is the unpredictability of passenger movement, leading to congestion, last-minute rushes, and logistical bottlenecks. In Tokyo's Shinjuku Station, the world's busiest, an AI-powered crowd tracking system monitors footfall density and suggests alternative routes in real time. Similarly, London's King's Cross Station utilises sensor-driven monitoring to optimise train schedules based on real-time crowd movement. For NDLS, integrating a dynamic crowd monitoring and predictive analytics system can help prevent sudden overcrowding by guiding passengers to less congested areas, improve safety through real-time alerts for emergency evacuation protocols, and minimise last-minute platform changes, which often lead to mass panic and dangerous stampedes. Additionally, station security should incorporate smart ticket verification zones ensuring only legitimate passengers enter the platform areas-a method successfully used in Japan and China. Modernisation should not be limited to expand-

ing infrastructure — it must also focus on making railway stations safer and more inclusive for all. Railway stations in developed countries have incorporated gender-sensitive infrastructure, with separate waiting lounges for women, enhanced CCTV surveillance, and well-lit platforms ensuring safety, as seen in Stockholm Central Station in Sweden. NDLS should introduce safe zones for women and children, install AI-powered facial recognition surveillance, and provide gender-neutral restrooms.

Hygiene and cleanliness remain significant challenges for Indian railway stations. NDLS should implement automated waste segregation units, self-cleaning toilets, and bio-waste recycling units to create a hygienic transit environment. Water conservation measures, rainwater harvesting, and energy-efficient smart lighting will also contribute to sustainable station operations. To ensure a more soothing and environmentally conscious railway experience, floriculture-based waiting areas, vertical gardens, and air-purifying green walls can be introduced, like Oslo Central Station in Norway and Kyoto Station in Japan, which have successfully integrated green spaces into transit hubs. This will improve passenger well-being while making railway stations visually appealing. Indian railway stations generate massive amounts of organic waste daily, which can be converted into clean energy, powering station lighting and operational functions.

With solar roofing, and water conservation systems, India can lead a railway revolution based on green energy. Beyond infrastructure, railway security forces like the Government Railway Police (GRP) and Railway Protection Force (RPF) must transition from a purely enforcement-based role to a people-friendly support system. We must think beyond just building infrastructure and focus on making railway stations hubs of innovation, sustainability, and service. With AI-powered crowd control, bio-energy-driven efficiency, and a people-friendly railway police force, NDLS can become a global model for smart transit hubs. If executed well, railway modernisation will not only improve infrastructure but also transform millions of lives, ensuring that every journey taken on Indian Railways is safe, smooth, and full of dignity. In 2047, when India celebrates 100 years of independence, let our railway stations stand as monuments of progress, where no passenger fears for their safety, where no traveler is left stranded in overcrowded platforms, and where every Indian-rich or poor-feels proud of the journey they embark upon.

(The writer is Executive President World Cooperation Economic Forum. Views expressed are personal)



BINOD ANAND

Trump’s tariff likely to hit Indian auto component makers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

United States (US) President Donald Trump’s decision to slap a 25 per cent tariff on all auto imports has cast uncertainty over India’s nearly \$seven billion of exports to America, which industry fears could squeeze margins.

Automobiles and car parts imported to the US would face a 25 per cent tariff starting April 2. While India is not a big exporter of cars to the US, Tata Motors luxury car subsidiary Jaguar Land Rover (JLR) is deeply entrenched in the American market. About 23 per cent of JLR’s over 4,00,000 units sold in FY24 were in the US. These were all exported from its UK plants. JLR’s profitability is likely to be impacted as passing on added costs to consumers may dent its market share, analysts said.

The options before it are to pass the cost to consumers, cut expenses, or absorb the hit. A fourth option is to set up a US manufacturing facility to mitigate the damage.

Indian auto ancillary firms will see the biggest hit as they export a lot of components to the US. Sona BLW Precision Forgings, Bharat Forge, and Samvardhana Motherson International Limited (SAMIL) will be vulnerable to the tariff blow.

Sona BLW derives 43 per cent of its revenues from US exports, while Bharat Forge gets 38 per cent from sales to the US.

According to industry estimates, India’s auto component exports to the US were \$6.79 billion in FY24, while the country’s imports from the US stood at \$1.4 billion at 15 per cent duty. Prior to Wednesday’s announcement by Trump, the US charged almost ‘nil’ duty on imported components.

“It is the Indian auto components industry that is more likely to face the heat due to the US tariff as exports from here to the US are significant. Indian vehicle makers are less likely to be impacted as there are no direct exports of fully built cars from India to the US,” an industry executive said on the condition of anonymity.

Anuj Sethi, Senior Director, Crisil Ratings said the Trump Administration’s move to impose a 25 per cent tariff on key automobile components, such as engines, transmissions, powertrain parts, and electrical parts from May 2025 or later, would compress the operating margins of Indian component manufacturer-exporters by 125-150 basis points from the current 12-12.5 per cent range, assuming full absorption of the tariffs.

About a fifth of the revenue of India’s auto component sector is derived from exports. Of this, 27 per cent is to the US market alone.

The operating profitability of indirect suppliers who supply to Tier I suppliers or OEMs in other countries with end destinations in the US would also be impacted. However, select automotive component players, with US-based manufacturing facilities, may see some offsetting gains from better capacity utilisation.

Mrummayee Jogalekar, Auto and FMCG Research Analyst, Asit C Mehta Investment Intermediates Ltd, said the US is not a significant export destination for India’s vehicle exports.

“However, Tata Motors could face an impact due to its subsidiary, Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), which derives over 30 per cent of its sales volume from the US market in 9M FY25. With no manufacturing facili-



ty in the US, all JLR vehicles will be subject to tariffs, which could impact pricing and profitability.”

“For the Indian auto components industry, the US remains a key export market, contributing 27 per cent to total exports in FY24. Tariffs are expected on key components, such as the engine, transmission, powertrain, and electrical parts.

“This could have a greater impact on companies like Sona Comstar (43 per cent revenue from North America) and Samvardhana Motherson (18 per cent revenue contribution). However, most other component manufacturers have a well-diversified export presence, which could

mitigate the overall impact,” she said.

Think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said the implications of the US announcement remain limited for India’s auto industry and may even present an opportunity for domestic exporters.

“An analysis of India’s auto and auto component exports in calendar year 2024 suggests that the impact of these tariffs on Indian exporters will be minimal,” GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

In the case of passenger cars, the think tank said India exported a modest \$8.9 million worth of vehicles to the US in 2024, which is just 0.13 per cent of the country’s total exports of \$6.98 billion.

He said this negligible exposure implies the tariffs will have no real effect on India’s thriving car export business and in other categories too, the US exposure is either low or manageable.

Truck exports to the US stood at just \$12.5 million, representing 0.89 per cent of India’s global truck exports and these figures confirm a limited vulnerability.

However, it said, some impact is likely in car chassis fitted with engines, where America accounted for \$28.2 million of India’s \$246.9 million in global exports (11.4 per cent).

“The segment that warrants the most attention is auto parts. India exported \$2.2 billion worth of auto parts to the US in 2024, comprising 29.1 per cent of its global auto part exports. While this initially appears concerning, a closer look reveals a level-playing field,” Srivastava noted.

The US imported \$89 billion worth of auto parts globally last year, with Mexico accounting for \$36 billion, China for \$10.1 billion, and India for just \$2.2 billion. Since 25 per cent tariffs apply across the board, all exporting countries face the same hurdle. In this context, he said, India’s auto component industry may even find an opening.

JATO Dynamics India President and Director Ravi G Bhatia said India has not been singled out with Trump’s tariff, which also applies to the country’s competitors.

“This step will hit for sure but it is not a ‘Tsunami’. It is not too much of a big hit and Indian suppliers will work out how to retain their market share in the US,” he said, adding that as the situation is developing, it is too early to jump to a

conclusion. Bhatia expressed confidence that India’s low-cost manufacturing will become even more advantageous as a 25 per cent increase in tariff will only push up vehicle prices in the US.

However, he said the latest move by Trump may make some of the Indian automakers — which were looking for global expansion, including the US market with new products including electric vehicles — rethink their plans.

Automotive Component Manufacturers Association of India (ACMA) and Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) did not comment on the development. Another industry executive said some of the leading auto component makers had set up plants in Mexico and Canada to leverage NAFTA and supply parts to the US.

Among them is the Motherson Group, one of the country’s top auto component makers. Comments from the group could not be immediately obtained.

However, Samvardhana Motherson International Ltd Director Laksh Vaaman Sehgal had in the Q3 earnings call noted that Motherson has a globally local strategy with a manufacturing plant in close vicinity to its customers.

“All material flows like commodities are typically passed through and so they are customer nominated parts. Any change in tariff from these parts would have a pass-through effect.” For the remaining procurement, we work actively to localise and hence the implications, if any, for Motherson will be very limited. Further, as tariffs are an industry-wide issue, these would ultimately be repriced by the customers,” he had noted.

More taxes for Pakistanis after IMF deal

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Islamabad

The people of Pakistan should brace for more taxes as carbon levy is on the cards following a fresh deal of \$1.3 billion with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to tackle climate change, officials said.

Under the Staff-Level Agreement (SLA) with the fund on Wednesday, the lender also agreed to release the second tranche of about \$one billion under the already agreed \$seven billion loan.

“The IMF team has reached a SLA with the Pakistani authorities on the first review of the 37 — month Extended Arrangement under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF), and on a new 28-month arrangement under the IMF’s Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) with total access over the 28 months of around \$1.3 billion,” the Fund said in a statement.

With the latest RSF arrangement, the combined volume of IMF loan rises to about \$8.3 billion and approval by the IMF’s Executive Board, the country would have immediate access to about \$two billion, which would help to shore up its balance of payment.

But the largesse by the lender comes with a price age for the already tax — burdened masses, as the government agreed to introduce a new carbon levy, increase water pricing, and open up the automobile sector to global trade, reported Dawn.

The only silver lining for the common people is the expected reduction in the power rate, but that is not free either, as the fund allowed the government to divert the already introduced petroleum levy to

reduce power tariffs. Senior officials privy to the SLA entailing the Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) told the paper that about Rs seven per unit reduction in average electricity rates would be announced by the prime minister in a few days, but with effect from April 1, 2025.

Other major steps — carbon levy, water pricing and automobile protectionism — would be gradual, with implementation starting from July 1, 2025. The overall fiscal consolidation will continue in the upcoming budget through a reduction in energy subsidies and tight development

The IMF appreciated the significant progress made by Pakistan over the past 18 months in restoring macroeconomic stability and rebuilding confidence despite a challenging global environment

spending. Officials said the government had requested a reduction in the GST rate on electricity to bring down costs. The IMF did not allow any more distortions in the GST system but allowed the use of a higher petroleum levy to compensate for power tariffs. ₹10 per litre increase in the petroleum levy was estimated to provide a roughly ₹1.80 per unit cushion. The combined impact of savings from all power purchase agreements and pending quarterly tariff adjustments would mean about ₹seven per unit reduction in the overall

rate, to be announced by the prime minister on a date of his choice.

Officials said the government has committed to introducing a carbon levy on all hydrocarbons, including petroleum products and coal, starting with ₹3 — 5 per litre or equivalent. This will gradually increase. The revenue will be spent on specific climate-related expenses.

Average trade tariffs (such as customs duties) for the automobile sector would also be reduced from about 10.5 per cent to six per cent from now on to FY 2030. Both the IMF and the authorities agreed that the auto sector had enjoyed too much protection for far too long, and this should end. The Cabinet approvals for these two measures would be shared with the IMF and then introduced through the finance bill 2025-26 for implementation with effect from July 1, 2025. Water pricing would also be approved in consultations with the provinces and be dealt with separately, sources said.

The IMF appreciated the significant progress made by Pakistan over the past 18 months in restoring macroeconomic stability and rebuilding confidence despite a challenging global environment.

While economic growth remains moderate, inflation has declined to its lowest level since 2015, financial conditions have improved, sovereign spreads have narrowed significantly, and external balances are stronger.

The authorities are on track to achieve an FY25 underlying primary surplus of at least one per cent of GDP and are committed to sustaining consolidation in the FY26 budget.

India repatriates 642 antiquities in 11 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Union Minister of Culture Gajendra Singh Shekhawat on Thursday said in the Rajya Sabha that as many as 642 antiquities have been repatriated from different countries since 2014 under the Narendra Modi Government.

“India is negotiating for repatriation of antiquities with different countries like Singapore, Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, etc,” the Minister said during Question Hour.

He said there is a long process for repatriation of antiquities from different countries.

“Since 2014, in the last 11 years of Narendra Modi Government, 642 important antiquities have been brought to the country,” Shekhawat said and described this achievement as a moment of pride.

He pointed out that only 13 antiquities were repatriated between 1955 and 2014.

The Minister said a detailed verification is being carried out for 297 antiquities brought from the US.

No claims have been filed so far from the States an museums.

The Minister said the Archaeological Survey of India has established a special gallery for the display of repatriated antiquities at Purana Qila, New Delhi.

Such antiquities are also loaned to institutions like the National Museum, Parliament of India, Indian Institute of Heritage, etc, for the research and education purposes and to sensitise the public.

Apart from this, temporary exhibitions



Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi

are also organised to display the repatriated antiquities.

“The Archaeological Survey of India is committed for protection of monuments, sites and antiquities under its jurisdiction. Besides regular watch and ward staff, Private Security Guards and Central Industrial Security Force are deployed as per requirement.

“Whenever any theft of antiquity is

reported, FIR is lodged in police station concerned and ‘Look Out Notice’ is issued to law enforcement agencies, including custom-exit channels, to keep vigil to trace stolen antiquity and prevent its illegal export,” he said.

A Cultural Property Agreement has been signed with the US in 2024 to prevent smuggling of Indian antiquities, the minister added.

Rupee falls eight paise against USD

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The rupee weakened by eight paise to close at 85.77 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as month — end dollar demand from importers, coupled with the greenback’s recovery against major currencies, weighed on the rupee.

The US dollar strengthened after US president Donald Trump late on Wednesday announced long — promised 25 per cent tariffs on automotive imports, set to take effect on April 2.

Forex dealers said the rupee is also facing renewed pressure on liquidity constraints, concerns over reciprocal tariff implementations and month — end demand for the US currency from importers. However, positive domestic markets and foreign fund inflows cushioned the downside.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.90 and touched the high of 85.73 against the greenback during the day.

The unit later turned volatile and hit the day’s low of 85.93 before ending the session at 85.77 (provisional) against the dollar, eight paise lower from its previous closing level. On Wednesday, the rupee settled higher by three paise at 85.69 against the US dollar. Anuj Choudhary, research analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan said, rupee is expected to trade with a slight negative bias on month — end dollar demand from importers and Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).

“Elevated crude oil prices and a bounce back in the US dollar may also pressurise the rupee. However, strong domestic markets and FII inflows may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may take cues from final GDP data from the US. USD — INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.60 to 86.10,” Choudhary added.

Sensex rebounds 318 points amid FII buying

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Benchmark BSE Sensex rebounded by nearly 318 points on Thursday on buying in blue — chip HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries, I. and T, and Bajaj Finance amid foreign fund inflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 317.93 points or 0.41 per cent to settle at 77,606.43 amid the monthly derivative contracts expiry day. During the day, it surged 458.96 points or 0.59 per cent to 77,747.46.

The NSE Nifty rallied 105.10 points or 0.45 per cent to 23,591.95.

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finserv, IndusInd Bank, NTPC, Larsen and Toubro, UltraTech Cement, Adani Ports, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Zomato, State Bank of India, HDFC Bank and Titan were the biggest gainers.

Tata Motors tanked over 5.5 per cent after United States (US) President Donald Trump announced he would impose 25 per cent tariffs on imported cars.

Sun Pharma, Kotak Mahindra Bank,

Bharti Airtel, HCL Tech and Mahindra and Mahindra were also among the laggards.

“Domestic indices maintained optimism throughout the day, driven by sustained foreign fund inflows and the purchase of blue-chip stocks. However, the 25 per cent tariff on auto imports imposed by Trump has affected auto stocks and raised concerns within the pharma sector.

“Despite these challenges, the broader market demonstrated resilience, supported by expectations of double — digit earnings growth in FY26, driven by easing inflation and a downward trend in interest rates, which are anticipated to improve domestic fundamentals,” Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹2,240.55 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 0.90 per cent and midcap index climbed 0.46 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, utilities jumped 2.09 per cent, services (1.61 per cent), realty (1.38 per cent), oil and gas (1.32 per cent), energy (1.22 per cent) and power (1.16 per cent).

Auto and telecommunication were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Seoul and Tokyo ended lower. Equity markets in Europe were quoting lower: US markets ended in the negative territory on Wednesday.

“The shift in FII stance, coupled with strength in banking and financial majors and rotational support from other heavyweights, is sustaining the positive sentiment. However, news related to US tariffs continues to trigger occasional volatility,” Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.23 per cent to \$73.62 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark gauge tanked 728.69 points or 0.93 per cent to settle at 77,288.50 on Wednesday.

Gold rises ₹365 to reclaim ₹91,000 mark

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Gold prices increased by ₹365 to ₹91,050 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a strong trend in the overseas markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹90,685 per 10 grams on Wednesday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also rose by ₹365 to ₹90,600 per 10 grams against the previous close of ₹90,235 per 10 grams.

“Gold maintains its gains as the global risk sentiment has been increased, following the new auto tariffs announced by the US President Donald Trump on Wednesday,” Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. Silver prices also went up by ₹200 to ₹1,01,700 per kg. It had ended at ₹1,01,500 per kg on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, gold futures for April delivery surged by ₹828 or 0.94 per cent to trade near a record high of ₹88,466 per

10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

On March 20, the yellow metal prices rose to hit a lifetime high of ₹89,796 per 10 grams. Spot gold in the international markets climbed by \$34.77 or 1.15 per cent to trade near a record high of \$3,054.05 per ounce.

“Gold prices surged near \$3,050 per ounce as expectations of lower US GDP data and the anticipated reciprocal tariffs from the US on April 2, fuelled uncertainty,” Jateen Trivedi, VP research analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

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Economic policies in India made for ‘Bombay club’, says RJD MP

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Economic policies in the country are not made for the people but for the “Bombay club,” Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MP A D Singh said in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, adding that the situation was the same under the previous government led by the Congress as well.

Participating in a debate on the Finance Bill, Singh quoted a report of the World Bank from 2024 and said India’s economic growth has slowed down, and at current pace, it may take 75 years to reach one quarter of per capita income of the US.

He said it is the middle income trap,

where the top 20 per cent live in luxury, while the rest 80 per cent live in poverty.

“We are making policies without the Census data. Census data would have provided required data on health and education situations,” he said. Singh said policies in the country are influenced by the “Bombay club.” “And who makes the policies? Bombay club, major industries, IAS babus and friendly influencers in media determine the policy,” Singh said.

“This is true, the economic policy is not to benefit you or me, it is to benefit the Bombay club,” he said.

“Let me tell you it was the same during UPA time and it is the same during

And who makes the policies? Bombay club, major industries, IAS babus and friendly influencers in media determine the policy,” Singh said. This is true, the economic policy is not to benefit you or me, it is to benefit the Bombay club

— AD SINGH, RJD MP

their time. I am not saying UPA time was very good,” he said, adding that “fact is fact”. Singh also said that only a small section of the population has benefitted from the income tax cut announced in the FY26

budget, and urged the government to consider rationalising GST slabs.

Participating in the debate after Singh, Communist Party of India (Marxist) MP John Brittas took the jibe further, and said, “My friend A D Singh was saying that financial policy of this country is being made by the Bombay club. I don’t know if it is the Bombay club, Nagpur club, or Gujarat club, but this is heavily loaded against Kerala and South India.”

He said South India has become a “colony” of north India.

“With the fiscal measures being adopted by the finance minister. I never expected the finance minister, being from Tamil

Nadu, would be part of this game of dis-crimination,” he said. He said there is a new dictum being followed in this country, which is “perform and perish.”

Amid the ongoing controversy around a joke by stand-up comic Kunal Kamra, he said, “something happened in Mumbai, now one nation one finance ministry.

Nationalist Congress Party MP Prafull Patel, meanwhile, said under the Narendra Modi government, people are talking about the “aspirational India”, and not just “garibi hatao”, and “roti, kapda, makan.”

He also said the United States imposition of tariffs would not impact India as we are a “net exporter” to the US.



TALES OF COURAGE

Stories of bravery and sacrifice shape our understanding of history, revealing the harsh realities of terrorism, says KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

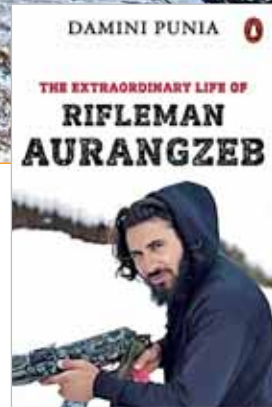
The moment we try to mould a fictitious account from a real-life story, the structure comes crashing down. Recently, authors specialising in chronicling military history from the recent past have attempted this technique, often leading to disappointing results. However, there are exceptions.

In 2023, readers were excited to read the book “Kitne Ghazi Aaye, Kitni Ghazi Gaye”, a first person account by Lt General KJS Dhillon, commander of the elite Chinar Corps, a wing of the Indian Army specialised in fighting terrorism in Kashmir. It was a scintillating work by an intelligent commander of the Corps based on his experiences in Ground Zero. No exaggeration and fiction. General Dhillon, popularly known as Tiny Dhillon, used Sama Dama, Daana, Dand and Bhed, the doctrine prescribed by Chanakya to defeat enemies of all kinds. The book KGA & KGG was proof that General Dhillon has prowess with rifle and pen.

Two more books on terrorism in Kashmir have recently hit the bookshelves: Nagrota Under Siege by Bhaavna Arora and The Extraordinary Life of Rifleman

Aurangzeb by Damini Punia. The book on Rifleman Aurangzeb narrates the story of the Rashtriya Rifles soldier who was abducted at gunpoint by terrorists, killed, and his body left in Pulwama. The Rashtriya Rifles, India's counter-insurgency unit, has been instrumental in neutralising numerous terrorist attacks. The unit of the Rashtriya Rifles that included Aurangzeb played a crucial role in eliminating several threats in the region. His bravery and sacrifice made him a name etched in the history of India's fight against terrorism.

Damini Punia preferred to write comprehensively about the Kashmir born Aurangzeb who went on to become a soldier in the Rashtriya Rifles. His father Mohammed Hanief was a havildar in the Indian Army and mother Raj Begum a homemaker.



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: The Extraordinary Life of Rifleman Aurangzeb
Author: Damini Punia
Publisher: Penguin
Price: ₹399/-

For the brilliant services rendered by Rifleman Aurangzeb, Indians will always remember him with tears in their eyes and will tell the world that we has an Aurangzeb whom we adore

Punia has given a detailed account about the birth of Aurangzeb, his childhood and adolescence and his entry into Jammu Kashmir Light Infantry. From where he was deputed to the RR, the counter insurgency experts.

While describing all these accounts in detail, the author has maintained a studied silence about the name Aurangzeb and what prompted Hanief and Raj Begum to choose that name. I am sure the parents would have been aware of the feelings that this name generates in the name of Indians. A ruthless, cruel hearted emperor who was bent on wiping out even the last vestige of the Sanatana Dharma from his empire.

Many Muslim soldiers have fought for India in wars against China and Pakistan. The name Abdul Hamid of the 4 Grenadiers is still etched in the hearts of those who follow military history. Hamid was awarded the Param Vir Chakra for his dedication to India during the 1965 war against Pakistan. Similarly, The Brave, a book by Rachna Bisht Rawat, recounts the stories of numerous soldiers decorated with the Param Vir Chakra for their valour.

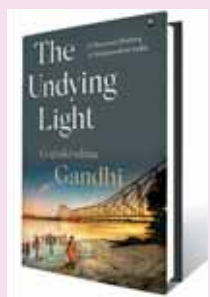
MARCH READS



Book: All Our Loves
Author: Arundhati Ghosh
Publisher: Aleph Book Company
Price: ₹799



Book: Famous Last Questions
Author: Sanjana Ramchandran
Publisher: Aleph Book Company
Price: ₹899



Book: The Undying Light
Author: Gopal Krishna Gandhi
Publisher: Aleph Book Company
Price: ₹999



Book: The Scratch and Sniff Chronicles
Author: Hemangini Dutt Majumder
Publisher: Niyogi Books
Price: ₹495

Finding Self in Hidden Stanzas

Poems that capture the emotions, doubts and hopes of a young mind

BY MALASHRI LAL

An engrossing and unusual bildungsroman, Kaia Roy's book of poems *Midnight Haze* helps readers to embed themselves in the process of growing up in India today. The author, thirteen years old, demystifies several assumptions that adults hold about young people because they do not understand the rapid unfurling of technology, opportunity, selfhood, doubt and aspirations in the digital world that surrounds us. Kaia Roy's poetry is an entry pass that opens the panorama to a two-way process of interaction between the new energy and the old habits of thinking.

Coming to particulars, a significant theme is the mirage of 'perfection', for she is young and accomplished and the demands of that image by self and society can be highly challenging. The poet senses her own transformations and says in the preface that she has assembled in *Midnight Haze* a "collage of emotions I have been experiencing growing up and how it has affected me" (9). Intropective, adventurous — and most of all, deeply sensitive, she finds herself "walking on a tightrope" (60) while negotiating the bends on the road. On one hand "I'm the kind of girl who dreams of distant shores" (25), she says, on the other hand are roadblocks of dark stretches and surrender to confusing drawbacks. I admired the implications of Kaia's phrase "It's okay for me to fall and raise again" (9) and her candid declaration that one can be "young and deficient" (17). What we as adult readers — teachers, parents, society leaders, would do well to understand is the young person's dilemma that they are expected to "Keep chasing perfection like an endless game, Always feeling not enough, despite their acclaim" (17).

Extending this paradox of self-identification, I turn to another theme that the book exposes and that is "social media posts define our worth" as the poet says and uses a marvelous phrase "I'm fragile like a bomb" (53). I will not attempt to explain such a powerful metaphor but the digital pages explode before our imagination and we see glimpses of how masking the truth about one's identity or creating alternate realities have emerged as common prac-



ABOUT THE BOOK

Book: *Midnight Haze, Poems*
Author: Kaia Roy
Publisher: Authors Press
Price: ₹295/-

tices. Whether the "reinvented myself" (90) is game-playing or strategising is not the point-but Kaia in one poem touched me with her desire to assert her cultural identity through language: *I am the dhol, The diya, The rangoli, The lehenga* (104-5)

There's yet another theme that exposes misconceptions that adults often hold about the myth of joyful growing up. Kaia is candid about the phantasmagoria, the dark clouds, the shadows that gather around the stumbling consciousness a young adult dealing with friendships, betrayals, jealousies, anger, hurt and doubt. She searches in the blue haze of midnight for a path that may lead her out. "The sinner's soliloquy" (46), and "things she does at midnight" are poems that boldly deal with violence, and the recurring image of the mirror in Kaia Roy's poetry is a reminder of her multiple selves.

In a sophisticated turn, the poet resorts to indirect storytelling as the precinct on which young lives are posted. "The princess in the tower", the one "who was lost to the night", is a fable that concludes with the wise couplet "In her silence, there's a lesson profound, / the loudest of all in the quietest may be found" (52). Similarly, the familiar ditty "Mirror, mirror on the wall" garners a philosophic query: "Am I always going to be the girl I used to be? Or is there a new reflection of me, waiting to be free?" (27)

The young adult is the creator of our contemporary realities and is also created by an inherited cultural heritage. Kaia Roy's *Midnight Haze* unravels this territory with confidence and verve.

She is a writer and academic with twenty-four books to her credit and retired as a Professor from the English Department at the University of Delhi. She currently serves as the Convener of the English Advisory Board at the Sahitya Akademi

The Power of Stories in Life and Beyonds

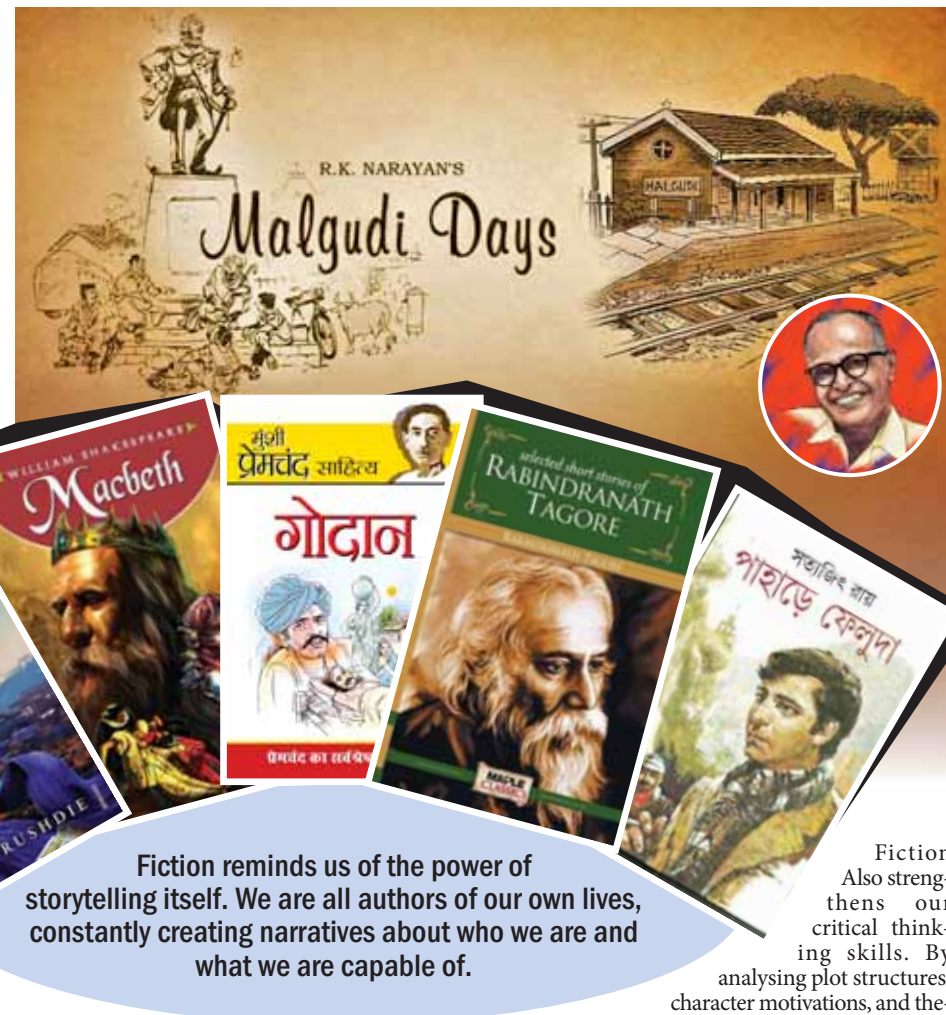
Fiction shapes our perceptions, influences real-world decisions, and impacts our understanding through its powerful narratives

BY DEEBA SALIM IRFAN

We often think of stories as a pleasant escape, a way to unwind after a long day. But the truth is, fiction does far more than simply entertain. It acts as a subtle yet powerful educator, a mirror reflecting our own lives, and a safe space to explore the complexities of the human experience. By immersing ourselves in fictional worlds, we gain insights far beyond the pages of a book or the screen of a film.

Perhaps the most significant gift of fiction is its ability to cultivate empathy. In R. K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days*, we observe the lives of ordinary people in a small Indian town, understanding their daily struggles and joys. Similarly, in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we walk alongside Scout Finch, witnessing the world through the innocent eyes of a child confronted with racial injustice. As Harper Lee once said, "You can never understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." Reading fiction helps us develop the ability to think from another's perspective.

Stories also serve as a vital tool for understanding the consequences of our actions. By observing characters grapple with difficult choices, we witness the ripple effects of their decisions. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, we see how a single act



Fiction reminds us of the power of storytelling itself. We are all authors of our own lives, constantly creating narratives about who we are and what we are capable of.

see how Hori Mahato struggles against poverty and social injustice while maintaining his dignity. Similarly, in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet learns to navigate social complexities and overcome her prejudices. This vicarious learning allows us to acquire practical skills, such as conflict resolution and problem-solving, without having to endure the same trials ourselves.

Rabindranath Tagore's stories, we witness the subtle expressions of love, longing, and grief. Similarly, in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, we explore the complex inner world of a woman navigating her past and present. This deepened awareness of emotions helps us recognise non-verbal cues, subtle shifts in mood, and the diverse ways people experience and express their feelings.

information, identify patterns, and draw logical conclusions. In Satyajit Ray's *Feludastories*, we follow a detective's logical deductions to solve mysteries. Similarly, in Agatha Christie's novels, we are challenged to unravel intricate plots and identify the culprit. This analytical mindset is invaluable in our daily lives, where we are constantly bombarded with information from various sources.

Furthermore, stories can inspire personal transformation. In J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo's courage and resilience in the face of overwhelming odds inspire us to persevere. We learn that we too possess the strength, determination, and resilience to overcome obstacles and achieve our goals. Fiction provides a blueprint for personal development, encouraging us to strive towards our aspirations.

By witnessing the impact of stories on characters and their worlds, we gain a deeper appreciation for the role of narratives in shaping our own reality.

Fiction Also strengthens our critical thinking skills. By

analysing plot structures, character motivations, and thematic elements, we learn to evaluate

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Chennai

The pitch is expected to retain its character for this match as well, and the RCB batters, led by Kohli, will have to lift their game several notches to outwit an expe-



Central to that change is his willingness to play more sweep/slog sweeps against spinners, and Kohli will have to bring all those expertise to the table on a blockbuster Friday evening.

On the other hand, the Super Kings will

Teams

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Rajat Patidar (c), Virat Kohli, Yash Dada, Josh Hazlewood, Phil Salt, Jitesh Sharma, Liam Livingstone, Rasikh Salam, Suyash Sharma, Krunal Pandya, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Swapnil Singh, Tim David, Romario Shepherd, Nuwan Thushara, Manoj Bhandage, Jacob Bethel, Devdutt Padikkal, Swastik Chhikara, Lungi Ngidi, Abhinandan Singh, Mohit Rathee.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ London

The men's Euros, held every four years, is the foundation of UEFA's finances and funds development payments to its members. Everton's new waterfront stadium at Bramley-Moore Dock is set to open for the start of next season, replacing the club's long-time home of Goodison Park, and was included in the list of venues hosting Euro 2028 matches announced in April 2023. Bramley-Moore Dock is currently staging test events.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens

— ALEXANDRA EALA, PLAYER

Along the way, she defeated 2017 French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko and reigning Australian Open champion Madison Keys, who is ranked

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lausanne

Russian wrestler Dmitry Baboryko was banned for two years on Thursday after taking a breast cancer drug that counters the effects of using steroids. Baboryko tested positive for tamoxifen at the under-23 world championships last October in Albania, the International Testing Agency said on announcing the ban on behalf of the United World Wrestling governing body. He accepted the two-year sanction including being disqualified and stripped

"I don't have a lot of experience on the WTA Tour, that's for sure, but I do have experience with compartmentalising," Eala said.

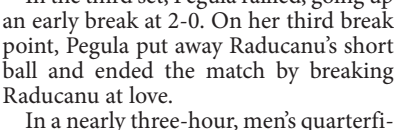
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Lausanne

Wrestlers representing the "Authorized Neutral Athletes" team won the most medals at the under-23 worlds in Albania, though it is formally excluded from the medal table led by Iran.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens

Grimacing through points and showing signs of overheating, Raducanu posted five set points on Pegula's serve but couldn't convert. Pegula then held to close to 5-4.

At that juncture, medical personnel took



Dimitrov, a Miami Open finalist in 2024, saved a match point in the third set when trailing 5-6 before forcing a tiebreaker. He squandered seven set points in the opening set and lost the tiebreaker 6-4.

"Because when you let him play, he is one of the best tennis players in the world. I'm really happy about the way I did it."

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

"I did two years of physiotherapy and

also participate and excel," Nathwani said.



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Miami Gardens

“Ensuring the safety of the players is crucial — they are the ones at the center of the event — and it is our job to protect them,” the statement from Swiatek’s team

Attending one of our events. We have taken Open issued a statement saying: "We take the safety and security of all players and tournament attendees extremely seriously. We constantly evaluate any potential threats and take every measure to respond appropriately. To ensure the effectiveness of these efforts, we do not disclose the details of our security operations."