

SHORT TAKES

Muslim Law Board halts Waqf protests

New Delhi: The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) on Wednesday condemned the Pahalgalam terror attack and decided to pause its ongoing protests against the new Waqf law for three days in solidarity with the families of victims. The AIMPLB has issued a condolence statement and decided to temporarily pause its ongoing protest programmes, a statement issued by the Muslim organisation said. As a mark of solidarity with the bereaved families, the board has suspended its campaign against the “controversial amendments” to the Waqf Act for three days starting April 23, the statement said. S.Q.R. Ilyas, national convener of the Majlis-e-Amal for the protection of Waqf under the AIMPLB, said the terrorist attack in Pahalgalam is deeply tragic and strongly condemnable. Therefore, the board has decided to suspend its protests. — PTI

Cops announce ₹20L for terrorists info

Srinagar: Police on Wednesday announced a bounty of ₹20 lakh for information leading to the neutralisation of terrorists involved in the gruesome killing of tourists in Pahalgalam. The horrific incident is the deadliest attack in the valley since the Pulwama strike in 2019. The dead included two foreigners and as many locals. “Any information leading to the neutralisation of terrorists involved in this cowardly act shall be rewarded Rs 20 lakh,” Anantnag police said in a post on its official X handle. The identity of the informer shall be kept a secret, the police added. Earlier in the day, security agencies released the sketches of three men suspected to be involved in the terror attack. The men, all Pakistanis, are Asif Fauji, Suleman Shah and Abu Talha, officials said.

RAUT: ATTACK IS RESULT OF BJP'S DIVISIVE POLITICS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, APRIL 23

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Wednesday said BJP's divisive politics was responsible for the terror attack targeting civilians in Kashmir's Pahalgalam. Calling Amit Shah a “failed home minister”, he demanded his resignation. Mr Raut also expressed doubt over the claims made by eyewitnesses that terrorists killed people after confirming their religion. Criticising Mr Raut, Shiv Sena leader Naresh Mhaske advised him to “stop smoking weed”. Mr Raut said that BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union home minister Amit Shah, are busy 24 hours breaking other parties and implicating Opposition leaders in false cases. “Mr Shah is spending his entire energy on doing politics all the time. Who will protect the country?” he said. The Shiv Sena leader said only Mr Shah is responsible for the deaths and he should resign immediately. “No one else is responsible for it. This is a result of the hate that is being spread from Bengal to J&K,” he said, adding, “Amit Shah is a failed home minister in the history of the country. The entire country is seeking his resignation.



Sanjay Raut

LIVES LOST

Distraught family members of the 26 men killed in Pahalgalam struggled to come to terms with their loss. Many also demanded capital punishment for the perpetrators of the attack.



Bharath Bhushan



Manjunath Rao



Hemant Joshi



Sushil Nathaniel



Shubham Dwivedi



Sanjay Lele



Sameer Guhar



Bitan Adhikari



Shailesh Kalathiya



Vinay Narwal



N. Ramachandran



Neeraj Udhwani

PM skips Kanpur, keeps Bihar date

Modi will lay foundation stone of ₹13K-cr infra & welfare projects in Madhubani today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

Even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi apparently cancelled his Thursday visit to Kanpur in light of the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, he is going ahead with his pre-scheduled official programme in Madhubani, Bihar. All eyes will be on the PM's Bihar visit, where he is expected to deliver a strong message during his first public appearance after the Pahalgalam terror attack. Mr Modi's scheduled visit to Kanpur on March 24 to inaugurate and lay the foundation stone for development projects has already been cancelled in light of the terror

attack. The PM scheduled to visit Kanpur to inaugurate and lay the foundation stone for development projects worth over ₹20,000 crore on Thursday. “However, in light of Tuesday's terror attack that claimed a number of lives, including that of Shubham, a courageous young son of Kanpur, and keeping in mind the sombre mood and sentiments of the people, the event has been cancelled,” officials said, adding that as a mark of respect, it was considered appropriate to defer any celebratory or formal public engagement in the city during this period of grief. Shubham Dwivedi, a 31-year-old businessman from Kanpur, was among those



Relatives mourn at the body of Hemant Suhas Joshi, a victim of Pahalgalam terrorist attack, in Mumbai. — DEBASISH DEY

killed by the terrorists in Pahalgalam. Mr Modi will, however, attend a pre-scheduled official programme in

Madhubani, Bihar, on the occasion of “Panchayati Raj Diwas” on April 24, which is expected to see the participation from people across the

country via video conference. In a statement, the ministry of Panchayati Raj said that the main function on National Panchayati Raj Day will be organised in the august presence of the Prime Minister at Lohna Uttar Gram Panchayat, Jhanjharpur block in Madhubani district of Bihar. “The PM will address Panchayati Raj institutions and gram sabhas across the country and confer Special Category National Panchayat Awards 2025 on this occasion,” the ministry said. The project includes LPG bottling plants, electrification projects, housing schemes, railway infrastructure, and road development, amounting to approximately ₹13,500 crore.

J&K CM calls for all-party meet today

Srinagar, April 23: Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday said he has convened an all-party meeting to discuss the fallout of the terror attack. “In the aftermath of the attack in Pahalgalam, I have called an all-party meeting tomorrow afternoon,” he posted on X. Meanwhile, the Centre will be calling an all-party meeting on Thursday in the wake of the terror attack, official sources said. Defence minister Rajnath Singh is likely to chair it, they said. Home minister Amit Shah and Mr Singh are speaking to leaders of various parties on the issue, the sources said. Several Opposition parties, including the Congress, had demanded that the government should convene a meeting of all parties over the issue. — PTI

India, Pak armies exchange gunfire in Poonch area

Tensions return: 2 infiltrators shot dead at LoC in Uri sector

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, APRIL 23

Once again, tensions have returned to several areas along the Line of Control (LoC) in the backdrop of the widespread anger across the country over the killing of more than two dozen tourists in Pahalgalam. While an exchange of fire was reported between the facing armies in an area of frontier Poonch, the Indian Army said it gunned down two militants after they had breached the LoC fence and tried to sneak into the Uri sector of Baramulla district Wednesday. A defence spokesperson said a heavy exchange of fire took place between the security forces and militants in Uri's Nala area. He said two to three militants tried to infiltrate through general area Sarjeevan at Uri Nala but alert troops deployed at the LoC challenged and intercepted them leading to a firefight. As India has in response to

Gunfight breaks out in Kulgam

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, APRIL 23

A gunfight broke out between terrorists and security forces in Kulgam district of Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday, officials said here. Security forces launched a cordon and search operation in Tangmarg area of Kulgam district, following information about the presence of ultras

there. An encounter broke out after the terrorists opened fire on the security personnel, they said. No casualties have been reported in the exchange of fire so far, the officials said adding further details were awaited. The security forces are on high alert after Tuesday's terror attack in Pahalgalam that left 26 people, mostly tourists, dead.

The Baisaran terror attack suspended the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, shut the Attari checkpoint, declared the military advisors posted at the Pakistan high commission in New Delhi as persona non grata, effectively expelling them from the country and revoked all visas issued to Pakistani citizens, many Kashmiri watchers fear the tensions along the LoC might only escalate.

India to ramp up diplomatic pressure for strike on terror bases

Pak's link may affect its global image

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

Pakistan's obvious involvement in the Pahalgalam terror attack and its Army Chief Gen. Asim Munir's recent tirade against India may put it on the backfoot globally, as foreign nations including the United States and Russia have demanded action against the perpetrators. India is expected to ramp up diplomatic pressure on Islamabad amid growing calls for a military strike against terror bases in the neighbouring country. A rattled Islamabad, which expressed “concern” over the attack, is expected to turn to its all-weather friends like China and Turkiye for support even



Sketches of three men suspected to be involved in the terror attack on Tuesday. — PTI

as Saudi Arabia, arguably the most influential nation in the Islamic world, has promised all support and help to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. China expressed “shock” over the terror attack, saying it “opposes terrorism in all forms”. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese called PM Modi and

“strongly condemned the dastardly terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir”. New Delhi said the Australian PM also “offered condolences on the loss of innocent lives and expressed solidarity with the people of India in this hour of grief”, besides “extending all support in the fight against terrorism”. US vice-president J.D. Vance also spoke to PM Modi on Wednesday and “strongly condemned the dastardly terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir”. He also “conveyed his deepest condolences on the loss of lives and reiterated that the United States stands with the people of India in this”. Mr Vance and his family are currently in India and visited the Taj Mahal in Agra earlier in the day. The Prime Ministers of Nepal and Mauritius also spoke to Mr Modi and conveyed their condolences. The Pakistan foreign office spokesperson was quoted by media reports as stating, “We are concerned at the loss of tourists' lives in an attack in Anantnag district. ...

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Ensure no surge in airfares, govt warns all airlines

Carriers to operate additional flights

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

Travel websites on Wednesday showed exorbitant airfares from Srinagar to other cities, particularly Mumbai, as tourists rushed to return home on the first available flight in the wake of the terror attack in Pahalgalam on Tuesday, prompting the government to crack the whip. Aviation regulator DGCA asked airlines to increase the number of flights from Srinagar to facilitate the return of tourists in the aftermath of the attack, keep fares under check and waive cancellation and rescheduling charges. Meanwhile, tour operators in J&K that survive on tourism fear this year will be a lull as several tourists across India have started cancelling bookings in the Valley. The return tickets for Wednesday and Thursday from Srinagar were all sold out despite two extra flights being pressed into service by Air India, IndiGo and Akasa and their scheduled flights to Mumbai and Delhi. The ministry of civil aviation said as part of immediate relief measures, four special flights from Srinagar to Delhi and two from Mumbai have been arranged, with additional flights kept on standby to

■ **DGCA ASKED** airlines to increase the number of flights from Srinagar to facilitate the return of tourists in the aftermath of the attack and keep fares under check

cater to further evacuation needs. Passengers complained on social media platforms about the airfares, which on some travel websites were as high as ₹56,000 between Srinagar and Mumbai for Thursday for Air India for about a two-hour flight. Amid complaints, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the minister for civil aviation Ram Mohan Naidu swung into action and asked airlines to keep fares under check and not charge for cancellations and reschedulings. Mr Naidu held an urgent meeting with all airline operators and issued a strong advisory against surge pricing. All airlines were directed to maintain regular fare levels, ensuring no passenger gets burdened at this point of time. The DGCA has also issued an advisory to increase the number of flights in response to heightened demand and ensure uninterrupted connectivity from Srinagar to various destinations across India, facilitating the evacuation of stranded tourists.

Complete intelligence failure exposed

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CRPF was earlier deployed in Baisaran for “area domination” but it was withdrawn for posting in other strategic locations. The quick action team of the CRPF's 116 battalion was the first responder to reach the scene. Following the Pahalgalam attacks, a multi-agency probe has begun to unravel the entirety of the conspiracy behind the attacks. Flagging the inadequate security arrangement, the sources in the security establishment said that given the large footfall of tourists in Baisaran, dubbed “mini Switzerland” for its scenic meadow, adequate security deployment should have been made. The nearest camp to Baisaran was at least 6 km

away, leading to a lag of at least an hour in deployment, which gave an advantage to the attackers to leave the site after perpetrating the hits. As per the topography of Baisaran, the meadow is accessible only by foot or by pony, and the large numbers of tourists' influx to the region made it an easy target for the ultras. While the logistical support for the terrorists is estimated to have been provided by the Pakistan Army-ISI syndicate and its terror cohorts, the support in planning, reconnaissance and target location must have come from locals. As per sources, the local overground workers must have done a reconnaissance before the terror strike and the four to five terrorists ex-

cuted it. The survivors have confirmed that at least two ultras were communicating in the Pashto language, suggesting they could be Pakistani terrorists. The forces are combing the Baisaran valley to flush out the terrorists. The terror module has apparently adopted the old modus operandi of not using modern communication equipment so as not to leave any digital footprint and also evade detection by the agencies, which have of late relied excessively on technical surveillance. A new communication gadget of Chinese origin is also under scrutiny for possible use during the attacks, sources said, adding the device is yet to be decoded.

Assam Hindu prof escapes death after reciting ‘kalma’

MANOJ ANAND
GUWAHATI, APRIL 23

An Indian Air Force (IAF) personnel from Arunachal Pradesh was among the 28 people killed in what has been widely condemned terrorist attack in J&K. The deceased, identified as Corporal Tage Hailyang (30), was a native of Tajang village in Ziro, Lower Siang district. Security sources said that Corporal Hailyang was on leave and was on a trip to J&K. The attack, one of the deadliest in the valley in recent times, left

at least 28 people dead and several others injured. Brother of Hailyang, Tage Mali, told reporters, “I reached Srinagar last night after my brother's wife called to inform me about the attack. They were on a holiday trip. I rushed to Pahalgalam immediately.” Condolences have poured in from across the region. Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu in a social media post condoled the death. The mortal remains of Arunachal's IAF Corporal Tage Hailyang will be

flown to Arunachal Pradesh on Wednesday. Meanwhile a professor from Assam University, Silchar, Debasish Bhattacharyya escaped the deadly terrorist attack by reciting “Kalma”. He told reporters that as terrorists were singling out non-Muslims to kill them, Mr Bhattacharyya recited the “kalma”, an Islamic verse, and escaped after convincing the terrorists that he was a Muslim. In the deadliest attack, the terrorists had singled out non-Muslims by asking people to recite “kalma”.

SHORT TAKES

Settle defamation case amicably: SC

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Rajya Sabha MP Vivek Tankha to amicably settle the defamation case lodged by the Congress lawmaker against the senior BJP leader. Congress leader Mr Tankha has alleged that Mr Chouhan, BJP state president V.D. Sharma and former minister Bhupendra Singh carried out a “coordinated, malicious, false and defamatory” campaign against him for political mileage by accusing him of opposing OBC reservation in the 2021 panchayat elections in Madhya Pradesh. “Please do not make us hear this case. Let us close it. Both of you sit together and settle this,” a bench comprising Justices M.M. Sundresh and Rajesh Bindal told senior advocates Mahesh Jethmalani and Kapil Sibal, appearing for Mr Chouhan and Mr Tankha respectively.

Chase them to hell: Shah tells forces

■ Continued from Page 1

the preliminary investigation into the incident and their response to it. As the meadow bore the scars of violence, the Union home minister asked the security forces to chase the perpetrators of this heinous crime to the gates of hell.

All entry and exit points to Baisaran had been sealed ahead of the Union home minister’s visit.

Mr Shah, along with Mr Sinha and Mr Abdullah, also visited the injured at the associated hospital of Government Medical College (GMC) in Anantnag. He assured them of every possible support and directed the concerned authorities to provide them with the best available treatment for their speedy recovery.

While interacting with the survivors, Mr Shah said to them that every Indian feels the pain of losing their loved ones in the terrorist attack. He said to them that “this sorrow cannot be expressed in words” and assured them and other countrymen that the perpetrators will be brought to justice soon.

In another post on X, he said, “I assure all these families and the entire country that these terrorists who killed innocent people will not be spared at all.” The J&K CM, “as a gesture of solidarity and to provide some succour to the grieving families and those injured in the terror attack”, announced an ex gratia relief package for them.

“No amount of money can ever compensate for the loss of loved ones, but as a mark of support and solidarity, the J&K government announces an ex gratia of ₹10 lakhs each for the families of the deceased, ₹2 lakhs for those seriously injured and ₹1 lakh for those with minor injuries,” Mr Abdullah said.

The J&K CM said that all arrangements for the dignified transport of the victims back to their homes have been made and that the injured are being provided the best medical care.

Anger and despair in Pahalgam

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act, they fled back into the woods. No pony walla was ready to offer a ride from here to Baisaran on Wednesday. As the media-persons began walking towards the meadow, we were stopped at a makeshift security check-point. A police official told us that movement towards Baisaran has been restricted for two reasons; Home minister Amit Shah was visiting the scene of the massacre and, therefore, it has been transformed into a high-security zone.

Second, the Army and other security forces have with various surveillance systems such as drones and helicopters moved in to track down the perpetrators. “It is risky to go there. Please, don’t play with your lives. Otherwise also, we have strict instructions not to allow unauthorised persons to relocate there. Please understand,” he said.

However, after the home minister had left, the media persons managed to reach Baisaran, where they found a high-tech operation was underway, with aerial and ground surveillance working in tandem in the meadow and surrounding woods. We were advised by the security officials to leave the area as early as possible.

‘Not in our name’: J&K rises up against terrorists

Protesters seek ‘forceful retribution’ against those supporting militants

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, APRIL 23

As Tuesday’s terror attack has left the people of Jammu and Kashmir aghast, a shutdown was observed across the Union territory on Wednesday to mourn and protest the killing of over two dozen tourists and a local horse rider in the deadly incident.

Angry crowds took to the streets at many places in the Jammu region as well as in the Kashmir Valley to express their grief and condemn the massacre of innocent civilians. They sent out a clear message: Not in our name.

Protest rallies were also taken out at a few places in Ladakh, reports said.

In the evening, hundreds of political and social activists, members of the civil society, students, artists and journalists turned out at Srinagar’s historic centre square Lal Chowk for a candlelight



Bereaved family members of Syed Adil Hussain Shah, a pony ride operator who was killed in the terror attack at Pahalgam, and others mourn during his funeral in J&K’s Anantnag district on Wednesday.

vigil to remember the victims of the shooting at Baisaran, a picturesque meadow in southern Anantnag district. Protests, dharnas, candle-light vigils and calls for unity against terrorism and violence were reported from several other towns and villages of the predominantly Muslim Valley and Jammu region.

Thousands mourn as bodies of 6 Maha victims flown back

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, APRIL 23

Thousands of people gathered to mourn for the three men from Dombivli killed by terrorists in Kashmir’s Pahalgam. As their final rites were being performed on Wednesday evening, the people shouted slogans “Pakistan Murdabad” and “Hindustan Zindabad”. Some people were heard telling others in the crowd to henceforth shop only after checking the names of shopkeepers.

Atul Mone, Sanjay Lele and Hemant Joshi, who were close friends and relatives, were among the six people from Maharashtra who were killed by the terrorists.

The three had gone to Kashmir for summer vacation along with their wives and children, all of

3 victims from Bengal; ‘grim hour’ for state, says Mamata

AGE CORRESPONDENT
KOLKATA, APRIL 23

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday strongly condemned the terror attack in Pahalgam in which 28 people, including three from the state, were killed. She also expressed shock over the style of the attack, where the victims were first selected by their names and then gunned down.

“What happened or how

and People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and also by Mutahida Majlis Ulema (MMU), an amalgam of Muslim religious organisations and leaders headed by Kashmir’s chief Muslim cleric and separatist leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq.

Former chief minister and PDP president Mehbooba Mufti led her party workers and supporters to march along the streets of Srinagar to show solidarity with the families of the terror victims. A placard she was carrying in her hands read, “This is an attack on all of us”. She said killing innocents is an act of terror and though the people of Kashmir are helpless, they feel ashamed over what was done to their guests by a handful of marauders.

The protesters also demanded ‘forceful retribution’ against the overground workers and supporters of various militant and separatist organisations.

it happened can be looked into later.”

“Terrorism is an identity. It’s a born criminal who has no caste, creed or religion. They can not be pardoned also,” Ms Banerjee said.

Describing it to be a “grim hour” for the state, Ms Banerjee said that her government was making all the arrangements to get family members of the victims back home from New Delhi and she was personally overseeing it.

Monica, an accountant, and son Dhruv, 16, who had appeared for his SSC exams. Dhruv also sustained bullet injuries on his finger.

■ Yatra restarts in June ■ 5-hr drive replaces 9-day trek

Mansarovar yatra now in just 10 days

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH
DEHRADUN, APRIL 23

The 2025 Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage will be significantly shorter and less arduous for the first time, as pilgrims can now drive over 80 km from newly upgraded road between Dharachula and Lipulekh Pass in a matter of hours — an arduous trek that previously took 8 to 9 days on foot. This improvement is expected to cut the total journey from the earlier 17 to 21 days to around 10 days.

The pilgrimage, suspended since 2019 due to border tensions and the Covid-19 pandemic, will resume in June 2025. In 2019, the Chinese government imposed restrictions on Indian pilgrims, effectively halting the yatra. Now, with diplomatic and logistical hurdles resolved, over 250 devotees have already registered for the journey to Mount Kailash and Mansarovar Lake, located in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

The Border Roads Organisation completed

the Lipulekh route four years ago; remaining repairs are being expedited to ensure readiness before the yatra begins on June 10. As per officials from the Pithoragarh district administration, pilgrims will be able to reach Gunji from Dharachula in just five hours via the newly constructed metal road. “All necessary arrangements are being made to ensure safety of the pilgrims,” an official said.

The road to Lipulekh Pass — the gateway to Mount Kailash — was completed

in 2020, but this is the first full-scale yatra to make use of it. Pilgrims will now undertake the journey primarily by vehicle, reducing travel time. While some stretches are undergoing repairs due to snowfall and glacial activity, authorities have assured that the route will be functional before the yatra starts after June 10. District magistrate Vinod Goswami said all agencies have been directed to finish road repairs, despite damage from heavy snowfall and glacial activity.

High-alert in Punjab, Mann calls meeting

Chandigarh, April 23: Punjab has been put on high alert in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack, with chief minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday holding a high-level security meeting here to take stock of security arrangements in the state.

At a press conference after chairing the meeting, Mr Mann said security has been enhanced in Punjab.

“It is our duty to keep Punjab safe and secure...I want to assure people of Punjab that we will keep the state safe and secure,” he said.

With reports that terrorists first asked the names of people before killing them in Pahalgam, chief minister Mann said terror has no religion. — PTI

Military activity seen in Pak after attack

■ Continued From Page 1

carefully planned over a period of time with clinical surgical precision involving detailed survey and reconnaissance of the target area to inflict mass casualties. The attack in Pahalgam took place close to the time when the Prime Minister landed in Jeddah on Tuesday afternoon. It could be sheer coincidence that both Indian and Pakistani PMs were not in the country when the Pahalgam attack took place. Pakistan PM Shahbaz Sharif was in Turkey on Tuesday.

Pakistan is anticipating a well-calibrated response like Balakot in 2019 or a surgical strike like in 2016. Sources indicated there are around 40 launch pads in PoK with over 100 terrorists.

■ PAKISTAN IS anticipating a well-calibrated response like Balakot in 2019 or a surgical strike like in 2016. Sources indicated there are around 40 launch pads in PoK with over 100 terrorists.

went on a rampage across Pakistan, including the unprecedented instance of burning down the residence of the Lahore Corps Commander, also known as Jinnah House, allegedly by the pro-PTI crowd.

Despite pressure, the Pakistan Army has not been able to break the hugely popular Mr Khan, seen as the second coming of Muhammad Ali Jinnah by common Pakistanis, and reach a compromise with him. Mr Khan continues to enjoy strong support in the public from the jail. He also enjoys support from some elements of the Pakistan Army due to his hard-line approach.

This has led Gen. Munir, who is also a “Hafiz e Quran” (one who has memorised the entirety of the Quran) to now go back to the old trick of fuelling anti-India sentiment to gain support among the Pakistani public, said sources in the defence establishment.

Gen. Munir described Kashmir as the “jugular vein” of his country and invoked the two-nation theory propounded by Pakistan’s founder, M.A. Jinnah. He called upon the Pakistanis to tell stories to children so that they don’t forget they are “different from Hindus”.

There has been a strong resentment against the Pakistan Army in civil society since the ouster of Mr Khan as Prime Minister of Pakistan in April 2022. The anti-Army sentiment was so severe that after the arrest of Mr Khan in May 2023, people

Diplomatic offensive against Pak as PM chairs CCS

■ Continued From Page 1

called for the meeting. Pakistan’s defence minister Khawaja Asif said that the top civilian and military leadership will meet on Thursday to formulate an appropriate response to India’s move to suspend the Indus Water Treaty and downgrade diplomatic ties.

Announcing what is effectively a further downgrading of diplomatic ties that Islamabad began in 2019, Mr Misri said, “The overall strength of the high commissions will be brought down to 30 from the present 55 through further reductions effective from May 1.”

He also said the “integrated check post at Attari (Punjab border) will be closed with immediate effect and that those who have crossed over with valid endorsements may return through that route before May 1. It was also announced that “Pakistani nationals will not be permitted to travel to India under the Saar visa exemption scheme visas” and that “any SVES visas issued in the past to Pakistani nationals are deemed cancelled”. Any Pakistani national currently in India under the SVES visa has 48 hours to leave India, Mr Misri said.

“Recognising the seriousness of this terrorist attack”, the CCS “also reviewed the overall security situation and directed all forces to maintain high vigil”.

Mr Misri said: “It resolved that the perpetrators of the

attack will be brought to justice and their sponsors held to account. As with the recent extradition of Tahawwur Rana, India will be unrelenting in the pursuit of those who have committed acts of terror or conspired to make them possible.

Making India’s intention categorically clear, the Prime Minister posted on X, “Those behind this heinous act will be brought to justice...they will not be spared! Their evil agenda will never succeed. Our resolve to fight terrorism is unshakable and it will get even stronger...”

The option of carrying out strikes against terror targets in Pakistan is also believed to be on the table. All eyes are on the Prime Minister’s Bihar rally on Thursday, where he is expected to indicate the roadmap ahead.

In the first clear indication of India’s likely response to the terror attack, defence minister Rajnath Singh said that India will not only hunt down those who perpetrated the attack but will also trace the people who conspired to carry out the nefarious act on Indian soil while “sitting behind the scenes”.

India has also cancelled the leave of the armed forces personnel posted in Kashmir. India has also put its air assets and armed forces along the LoC on high alert.

Besides, the government will be calling an all-party meeting on Thursday in the wake of the terror attack in Pahalgam and Mr Singh is

likely to chair it, official sources said.

At the meeting Mr Singh is expected to brief leaders of different parties on the brutal terror attack targeting tourists. Under the IWT, which was signed by India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan’s then President Ayub Khan in 1960, water from six rivers — Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum — are to be shared between the two countries. Pakistan has been complaining of not receiving enough water and had opted for international arbitration in a couple of cases.

The Indus system of rivers comprises three eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas and Sutlej and their tributaries) and three western rivers (Indus, Jhelum and Chenab and their tributaries).

Union home minister Amit Shah, who landed in the national capital Wednesday evening from Kashmir, gave a detailed briefing to the CCS, which met at PM residence for two hours, on the emerging security situation in Kashmir after the attack by LeT arm TRE. The defence minister, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar and NSA Ajit Doval were present during the meeting.

The next few days are also crucial as India is expected to carry out more measures against Pakistan. India had carried out a surgical strike inside PoK in 2016 after a terror attack on an Army camp in Uri and also carried out

airstrikes on Balakot inside Pakistan in 2019 in response to the terror suicide attack on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama which had killed 40 soldiers.

Earlier in the day, the defence minister reviewed the security situation in J&K in a nearly two-and-a-half-hour meeting that was attended by Mr Doval, Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Anil Chauhan, Army Chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi, Navy Chief Adm. Dinesh K. Tripathi, Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh and the defence secretary.

“Yesterday, in Pahalgam, our country lost many innocent citizens in a cowardly attack by terrorists targeting religion. This extremely inhuman act has plunged all of us into deep grief and pain,” the defence minister said. “From this platform, I assure the countrymen that in view of the incident, the government of India will take every step that is necessary and appropriate,” he said, adding, “And we will not only trace those who perpetrated this incident. We will also reach out to those who, sitting behind the scenes, have conspired to carry out the nefarious act on the soil of India... The people responsible for such acts will get a strong response in the near future.”

Mr Modi returned to New Delhi in the morning after cutting short his two-day trip to Saudi Arabia. Shortly after landing in Delhi, the Prime Minister held a meeting with Mr Doval, Mr Jaishankar and Mr Misri.

THE ASIAN AGE

24 APRIL 2025

Nab culprits of Pahalgam, don't allow spread of hate

The Kashmir Valley shut down on Tuesday, the day after a cowardly terror aimed against tourists reared its head. This was not just a silent protest by the stricken people of the valley but a condemnation of the deed that so clearly was meant to spread fear and disaffection. The attack bore all the signs of the kind of terror that a neighbouring country nurtures and sponsors regularly. The intention of the attackers was clear — scuttle peace, sow panic in the minds of residents and visitors in the time of peak summer tourism and whip up communal discord in India, of which Jammu & Kashmir is an integral part.

As a civilised society that is essentially peace-loving, India must respond in a mature way while allowing the security apparatus to do its job unfettered in hunting down the perpetrators and bringing them to face the law.

Also, the government must do all it can to contain the harm that can come from expressions of religious differences that can crop up because of the nature of the crime in which people of religions other than the one to which the terrorists belonged were targeted and killed or injured. And there is no denying the Islamist terror angle regardless of where this bunch emerged from.

A proxy of a known terror outfit operating from across the border and which has been active in J&K over the last four or five years has claimed responsibility. A thorough probe will reveal whether this group is indeed the one that plotted this spineless attack and whether terrorists from across the border were involved. It would help if the guilty were identified so the truth is established.

The price to pay for the battle against terror is eternal vigil. Regardless of the number of plots discovered in time and defused or potential assassins tracked down and killed in the frequent encounters that are a feature of life in the Valley, one set of terrorists picking easy targets and killing indiscriminately as this bunch did is sufficient to bring on charges of intelligence failure, etc.

The timing of the attack, coming in the wake of the reckless abandon with which the loose cannon of a Pakistan army chief vented out at India last week with venom irresponsibly spewed, must have instilled apprehension in the security forces tasked with guarding the Valley. That they did not spot this one, as was evident from the lack of presence of security force personnel in a highly popular tourist area, led to tragic consequences.

It is not only the tourism industry that will be badly hit by such attacks. J&K has shown a steady rise in GDSP over the last three years that is better than the national average, hosted an increasing number of domestic and foreign tourists and invited investment into the UT in industry and trade. An attack like this might prove a dampener on the good outlook that such development has engendered.

To plough on in trying to ensure the safety of every Indian, regardless of religion or caste, is the task of the security forces whose lot is unenviable. To back them with weapons, every means of communications and the wherewithal to crack the lines of communication of the terror groups is the duty of the Establishment as it exists today in the UT with the armed forces and police personnel in charge of security and intelligence gathering.

Maha Hindi U-turn a lesson

The decision of the Maharashtra government to stay its own order to make Hindi mandatory as a third language for students of classes I to V in Marathi and English medium schools despite wholehearted support from the ruling alliance, including the Shiv Sena, reflects the fragility of the policy to impose language on an unwilling people.

As per the new decision, Hindi will not be made compulsory and the third language in Marathi and English medium schools will be left optional. The options will offer Hindi as well. The decision follows stiff resistance from the Opposition parties and regional groups, and the state government's language consultation committee's appeal to chief minister Devendra Fadnavis to revoke the decision.

It is unimaginable that Hindi should be facing opposition to its introduction in schools in a state where the people have never felt that language to be alien to them. In fact, the state hosted and nurtured Bollywood, the international brand ambassador of the language. Indeed, the people there felt that Hindi films not only entertained them but also told their stories to the world.

India is a country of diversities in every aspect of human behaviour, language included. Anything human is welcome in this land except when forced. The founding fathers and mothers had realised this fact and hence the deliberate attempt in the Constitution to ensure that every human being is provided with the opportunity to grow one's potential in ways they are most comfortable with. That the rights of the meek are not trampled by the mighty was the guiding principle.

Tamil Nadu chief minister M.K. Stalin has been fighting a running battle with the Union government against the latter's attempts to use Central funding as tool to impose its will and policies on states, including its preference for Hindi. The Maharashtra government's decision endorses Mr Stalin's stand. This must now force policymakers at every level to open their eyes and train themselves to be mindful of the hard realities on the ground while taking decisions.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



ED extensions: Tenure policy 'relaxed' for two IPS officers

If there's one thing India's babus do well, it's dressing up flexibility as policy. Case in point: The latest extensions given to Sonia Narang and Abhishek Goyal, both senior IPS officers on Central deputation to the Enforcement Directorate (ED). Their tenures have been extended in "relaxation" of the IPS tenure policy. Now that's babu-speak for, "Yes, we made rules. No, we're not always bound by them."

Take Ms Narang. In early April, she was relieved from her ED post and sent back to the Karnataka cadre without explanation. And just like that, she's back in Delhi with a one-year extension. Whiplash, anyone? In her time at ED, she's handled a whole alphabet soup of high-profile cases — PFI, IFFCO, Vivo, Maoists, even the ever-glamorous Khan Market cash trail. Someone decided she's too valuable to let go just yet. But observers are wondering why the unceremonious exit earlier?

Mr Goyal's extension is equally telling. Currently leading the HIU and also handling the Northern Region (including the recently held Maharashtra elections), he, too, gets a one-year bonus round. Perhaps it helps to be where the political action is.

Let's not forget: The post of special director is the second-highest rank in the ED hierarchy. There are nine of them. That's a lot of "special" and not a lot of clarity.

So here we are watching the rules bend, twist, and politely look the other way when power and convenience collide. The ACC may call it relaxation. For many others, it's a masterclass in bureaucratic yoga.

KERALA'S 'CIVIL WAR' GOES PUBLIC

Kerala's babudom seems to be experiencing its own version of a reality show, complete with public spats, social media drama, and allegations flying faster than monsoon winds.

At the centre of this storm is IAS officer N. Prasanth, affectionately dubbed "Collector Bro" for his social media savvy. Currently suspended, Mr Prasanth has accused senior bureaucrats A. Jayathilak and K. Gopalakrishnan of corruption and conspiracy, even dragging a Malayalam daily into the fray. He claims his suspension is retaliation for whistleblowing against entrenched corruption and misuse of office — serious charges that can't just be brushed off.

Meanwhile, Mr Gopalakrishnan was suspended for allegedly creating a religion-based WhatsApp group, seen as a violation of service rules. Mr Prasanth's own suspension followed his very public criticism of Jayathilak on social media, which the government called a breach of conduct. The online slugfest has exposed the cracks within Kerala's famously disciplined administrative set-up.

This bureaucratic brawl isn't just about bruised

egos; it reflects deeper dysfunction within the administrative framework. The public airing of such disputes, especially on social media, undermines the integrity of the civil services and erodes public trust. And let's not forget, it's also a massive distraction from governance.

In an era where transparency is paramount, perhaps it's time for the babus to embrace openness and address internal conflicts through proper institutional channels. After all, the public deserves a civil service that is as accountable as it is efficient and less prone to becoming an OTT-worthy drama.

MP BABUS BEAR TRANSPARENCY BURDEN

In the power corridors of Madhya Pradesh, a silent discontent brews among babus. While IAS, IPS, and IFS officers are mandated to disclose their immovable assets annually, ministers have sidestepped this transparency for over 15 years. The contrast is as stark as it is telling, and although no one dares say it out loud, the resentment is palpable.

The state's general administration department has reiterated that all state employees must submit detailed property disclosures. This includes information on ancestral and self-acquired properties, purchase dates, values, and current market valuations. Non-compliance could result in withheld salaries or stalled promotions — a stiff penal-

ty for mere delay, let alone defiance.

In contrast, ministers have largely avoided such scrutiny. Despite previous commitments, including a 2016 announcement to declare assets online, many ministers have not consistently disclosed their property details. Successive governments have either quietly ignored the issue or kicked the can down the road, possibly to avoid ruffling political feathers.

This discrepancy fosters a sense of inequity among bureaucrats, who are held to stringent standards while political leaders operate with relative impunity. The whisper in government circles is not about whether this is unfair but how long this double standard will continue.

The lack of ministerial transparency undermines the principles of accountability and good governance. For a truly transparent administration, it's imperative that ministers lead by example, embracing the same disclosure standards imposed on bureaucrats. Until then, babus will keep filing their disclosures under silent protest, watching their political bosses sail above the accountability tide, dry, untouched, and remarkably unbothered.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

Subhani



Pakistan in bid to reverse Kashmir's rising normalcy



Syed Ata Hasnain

Every right-thinking Indian will commence everything he does today with a prayer on his lips and deep-set anger in his heart. The attack by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists of The Resistance Front (TRF) on innocent Indian and foreign tourists at Basiran near Pahalgam and the loss of a large number of lives needs the severest condemnation. There has to be a response, of course, although I feel we should allow the government to consider the most appropriate one with the best national and international professional advice.

One of the prime reasons for the attack was the fast-diluting relevance of Pakistan in the Kashmir narrative. Let me explain this with the help of an unpublished draft paragraph of the article that I was writing for this very newspaper just two days ago. The paragraph read as follows: "I recently travelled to J&K's capital city and its suburbs on the banks of the Jhelum, on a quiet weekend. Besides that, I spent some time at an uncharacteristically quiet Line of Control. A calm optimism seemed evident everywhere. Hostility, so evident in the eyes of the population earlier, seemed to be fading. Practiced observers like me can probably feel the change in the air, through the looks people give you and the conversations they make. None of these alluded to anything negative. Which is why I sense danger and not without reason. When statistics start to indicate normalcy and minds start to accept this, the point of danger becomes evident. A strange paradox, but true"

This article remained unpublished in the light of the terrorist attack. However, it's not difficult to

explain the premonition. Pakistan has invested just too much time, energy, resources, lives and finances in fighting the proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir. Even with its internal situation so tenuous in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, its Army chief keeps spewing out hatred instead of looking towards stabilising the borders through a better relationship with its chief adversary. What Pakistan wants is a return to its old relevance to neutralise just what I wrote in my unpublished observation reproduced above. The Deep State and the Pakistan Army (which is a part of it) found this time very relevant.

First, much attention of the security establishment was focused on Kathua. Then there was an impending bumper tourist season in the offing, with a reported eight lakh tourists visiting the Tulip Garden at Srinagar. With the coming holiday season, the numbers would have exceeded all records. With money in the pocket and peace in the streets, families looking towards Pakistan would be history. That is exactly what Pakistan did not want.

To put India under intense pressure, Pakistan knows that the sometimes-tenuous communal temperature can be incendiary. That is why these terrorists specifically profiled the tourists, ensuring that Hindus would be targeted and inflammatory messages addressing India's Prime Minister would be relayed. Besides this, the current visit of US vice-president J.D. Vance to India reminds one of a similar incident in March 2000. US President Bill Clinton was on a visit to India and was to speak to India's Parliament. The night before that, the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba struck at Chittisinghpura, a mi-

Pakistan is seething at the humiliation of huge losses suffered in Balochistan and its inability to get the better of a worsening internal security situation, which also involves the Afghanistan border and the tribal areas

nority Sikh village in South Kashmir, killing 36 Sikhs, in an apparent message to the US President that Kashmir was not in India's control. This may be a more appropriate time in Pakistan's perception to target the current emerging normalcy and India's control over the Union territory. It is reported that Pakistan, and its military leadership in particular, is seething at the humiliation of huge losses suffered in Balochistan and its inability to get the better of a worsening internal security situation, which also involves the Afghanistan border and the tribal areas. At the first instance, it lays the blame on India. Retribution has been a Pakistani philosophy and doctrine of war and this terror strike is a result of that.

One would have accorded greater rationale to Pakistan's strategising capability but we are aware that its generals act first and think afterwards. The internal security situation coupled with its failed economy hardly affords Pakistan the ability to risk a serious conventional conflagration with India. Therefore, applying rationale, one would surmise smaller acts, a combination of many of these to attempt to achieve something quite similar that they wish to achieve through Pahalgam. It would be less risky too. However, knowing the Pakistani mind, these irrational acts will continue. That is why it's up to India to ensure that it responds, but only after thinking through. The one thing we definitely need to do is to eschew every Indian becoming a strategist and proffer advice to the government. Remember, we

have an elected government in place, unlike that of Pakistan. Such a government looks at the national interest from every angle. It has a set of professionals who will advise, plan and execute. We should have the fullest faith in the political and military leadership and leave it to their sense of proportion and timing.

While it is a hugely sentimental moment which has shaken up India's deep-rooted psyche, we cannot afford sentiment alone to rule our judgement. There are thousands of innocents of all communities, good loyal Indians who are the heart and soul of our nation. We must ensure unity among our people despite the gravest of provocations and this one is definitely not the last of them.

The way forward is to ensure that Jammu and Kashmir's progressive normalcy is enabled at any cost. With the terrorist strength small, the flow of intelligence will also be limited. Hence there has to be greater anticipation of potential actions which can upset the apparear in favor of the adversaries. Remember there are other linkages here, and India needs to get the pro-active diplomatic domain on J&K re-activated so that our narratives are the predominant ones. There should be no dilution in our outreach programmes resulting from the inevitable negativity that an event such as Pahalgam tends to send out. The political environment is not yet vitiated, and a certain maturity is evident all around. We can all understand how difficult it is for those who have suffered as families but the biggest neutralisation of Pakistan's Kashmir strategy will be to make sure it does not regain any of the space that it has lost over the last couple of years.

As far as a response to Pahalgam is concerned, we will await the decisions of the government, which knows this best.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 ("Chinar") Corps

LETTERS

THE NEW BULLIES

It has been reported that a new form of bullying has emerged in schools, starting from the primary level. Students from rich families show off their money power to taunt and segregate poor students. They make fun of their classmates, who bring simple food in their tiffin boxes, or ordinary pencil boxes and colour pencils, or who do not go to a foreign country like them for a holiday. Kids aged even 4-5 years are now displaying a high level of class intolerance. There is no wonder in it, as schools cannot be quarantined from the whole society and system, both of which are plagued with class obsession and hatred, alongside rising inequality.

Sujit De
Kolkata

NATION BUILDERS

ELEVEN women in the top 25 and Shakti Dubey bagging the top slot in the UPSC exams is a testimony to growing Nari Shakti. These women came from diverse backgrounds and have studied a wide range of subjects like engineering, science and commerce. They are true inspirations for not only the young women in their cities but those from all across the country. It is a lesson for parents as well to not withhold education from the girls in their families and let them fulfil their dreams.

Bal Govind
Noida, UP

POINTLESS SPENDING

NAVI MUMBAI is in a frenzy to achieve targets for concretisation of roads before monsoons. The progress of work on main roads of heavy traffic density is best known to the civic agencies but one is witness to perfectly good minor roads, lanes and dead-end bylanes, with scarce traffic and used solely by society dwellers to park their cars, being dug up. Such substantial outlay of funds on already good infrastructure could have been avoided. The funds would have been better invested in government schools, creches, night shelters and drinking water kiosks in summer and other such vital public resources. Affluent cities need to spend civic revenue smartly.

R. Narayanan
Navi Mumbai

SHORT TAKES

BEIJING BRIDGE FALLS AFTER FIRE, NO ONE INJURED

Beijing, April 23: A bridge in Beijing’s northeastern Shunyi district collapsed on Wednesday morning after a fire broke out in its structure, according to authorities and images circulating on social media. No casualties were reported on the bridge, which was already closed to traffic, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Transport wrote on the social media platform *Weibo*.

The Chaobai river bridge was damaged after a fire broke out in the morning, the commission said.

The fire was later put out.

OPPN FIGURE IN CAMBODIA GOES ON TRIAL

Phnom Penh, April 23: An outspoken Cambodian politician went on trial on incitement charges on Wednesday, in the latest legal case against a prominent opposition figure.

Rong Chhun, an adviser to the Nation Power Party, which was founded in 2023, faces up to four years in prison if he is convicted on charges of incitement to cause serious social unrest.

The charges were brought last year after he met victims of land disputes, and comments he made about Prime Minister Hun Manet’s visit to the border area with Vietnam.

GUNMEN KILL 2 GUARDING PAK POLIO VAX TEAM

Quetta, April 23: Gunmen killed two Pakistani police officers guarding polio vaccinators in the turbulent southwestern province of Balochistan, officials said on Wednesday, the second attack since the launch of a nationwide inoculation drive this week.

In Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan — the only countries where polio remains endemic — militants have for decades targeted vaccination teams and their security escorts. The officers were guarding health workers in the Teeri area of Mastung district when they were attacked.

S’PORE PM FACES TEST AS ELECTION CAMPAIGN BEGINS

Singapore, April 23: Singapore’s election campaign officially kicked off on Wednesday, with Prime Minister Lawrence Wong facing his first major test amid public frustration over rising living costs and a rejuvenated opposition.

The May 3 polls are also coming as the wealthy city-state faces a turbulent global economy upended by US tariffs.

Wong, who took over in 2024 said “there is much at stake this election”. “We are in a changed world with turbulence all around,” he said. “Your vote will determine your future and your children’s future.”

PRIEST BEAT ME AS TEEN: FRENCH PM’s DAUGHTER

Paris, April 23: A daughter of France’s Prime Minister became on Wednesday the latest to accuse the clergy running a school in the Pyrenees of systemic abuse including while Francois Bayrou was a local official, saying a priest beat her during summer camp when she was 14.

Bayrou’s eldest daughter Helen Perlant, now 53, said that her father did not know about the incident. Multiple accusations of sexual and physical abuse at the Notre-Dame de Betharram boarding school have cast a shadow on Bayrou’s premiership.

NJ FOREST FIRE: STATE PARKWAY STRETCH SHUT

New Jersey, April 23: A forest fire in southern New Jersey that has shut a stretch of one of the state’s biggest thoroughfares is yet to be contained, sparking evacuations and threatening to snarl commuters.

The fire rapidly grew to 8,500 acres (3,440 hectares) in Ocean County, about 90 miles south of New York City, by late Tuesday evening, nearly tripling in size in just a few hours, according to the New Jersey Forest Fire Service. An 11-mile section of the Garden State Parkway has been shut.



A local rides past damaged buildings in Pokrovsk, the site of the heaviest battles with the Russian troops in Ukraine’s Donetsk region, on Wednesday. — AP

Vance: US to walk away till Moscow, Kyiv agree to deal

London, April 23: Vice President J.D. Vance warned on Wednesday that the United States would “walk away” unless Russia and Ukraine agree to a peace deal, as envoys from Washington, Kyiv and European nations gathered for downgraded talks in Britain.

“We’ve issued a very explicit proposal to both the Russians and the Ukrainians, and it’s time for them to either say ‘yes’, or for the United States to walk away from this process,” Vance told reporters in India.

US media reported that President Donald Trump was ready to accept recognition of annexed land in Crimea as Russian territory, and Vance said land swaps would be fundamental to any deal.

“That means the Ukrainians and the Russians are both going to have to give up some of the territory they currently own,” he added. The reports said the proposal was first raised at a meeting with European nations in Paris last week.

The latest round of diplomacy comes amid a fresh wave of Russian air strikes that shattered a brief Easter truce.

A Russian drone strike

CHINESE WORKING AT RUSSIA DRONE OUTPUT SITE: KYIV

Kyiv, April 23: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Tuesday that Chinese citizens were working at a drone production site in Russia and suggested that Moscow may have “stolen” drone technology from China.

The Ukrainian leader made the comment at a news conference in Kyiv days after he said China was supplying weapons and gunpowder to Russia, the first time he has accused Beijing of direct military aid to Moscow, something China staunchly denies. Ukraine’s foreign ministry said it had summoned Chinese ambassador Ma Shengkun and expressed “serious concerns” over Chinese involvement in Russia’s war in Ukraine. — Reuters

on a bus transporting workers in the southeastern city of Marganets killed nine people and wounded at least 30 more, the Dnipropetrovsk regional governor said on Wednesday. — AFP



Palestinians inspect the damage after an Israeli strike on the Yafa school building, a school-turned-shelter, in Gaza City, on Wednesday. — AFP

Abbas urges Hamas to free hostages as Israeli strikes kill 25

Gaza City, April 23: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday urged Hamas to free all hostages, saying their captivity provided Israel with “excuses” to attack Gaza, as rescuers recovered charred bodies from an Israeli strike.

Israeli strikes killed at least 25 people across the besieged territory, while Germany, France and UK urged Israel to end its blockade on aid entering. Israel resumed its military campaign in Gaza on March 18, ending the ceasefire that had largely paused hostilities and resulted in the release of 33 hostages from Gaza and approximately 1,800 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails. — AFP

HAMAS VIDEO SHOWS ISRAELI HOSTAGE ALIVE

Gaza City, April 23: Hamas’s armed wing released a video on Wednesday showing an Israeli-Hungarian hostage alive in Gaza, speaking in Hebrew and walking through a tunnel. In the nearly three-minute clip published by the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades, the hostage — who identifies himself as 48-year-old Omri Miran — is seen addressing the camera.

Israeli media confirmed his identity. AFP could not verify when the footage was recorded. — AFP

EU fines Apple 500 mn euros, Meta 200 mn in digital cases

International students stripped of legal status in US piling up wins in court

London, Atlanta, Washington, April 23: European Union watchdogs fined Apple and Meta hundreds of millions of euros Wednesday as they stepped up enforcement of the 27-nation bloc’s digital competition rules.

The European Commission imposed a 500 million euro (\$571 million) fine on Apple for preventing app makers from pointing users to cheaper options outside its App Store.

The commission also fined Meta Platforms 200 million euros because it forced Facebook and Instagram users to choose between seeing personalised ads or paying to avoid them. Apple and Meta have to comply with the decisions within 60 days or risk unspecified periodic penalty payments, the commission said.

More than a thousand international students have faced disruptions in recent weeks, with their academic careers and their lives in the US thrown into doubt in a widespread crackdown by the Trump administration. Some have found a measure of success in court, with federal judges around the country issuing orders to restore students’ legal status at least temporarily.

In addition to the case filed in Atlanta, judges have issued temporary restraining orders in states, including New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Montana, Oregon and Washington.



President Donald Trump speaks at a ceremonial swearing in of Paul Atkins as chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, and his wife Sarah (R), in the White House, Washington D.C., on Tuesday. — AP

Trump’s tariff cuts in China trade deal

Washington, April 23: President Donald Trump said he plans to be “very nice” to China in any trade talks and that tariffs will drop if the two countries can reach a deal, a sign he may be backing down from his tough stance on Beijing.

“It will come down substantially but it won’t be zero,” Trump said, following earlier comments from treasury secretary Scott Bessent that the standoff was unsustainable.

The Trump administration’s planned drastic cuts to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) “mean more dirty air” across the United States,

able. Trump added that “we’re going to be very nice and they’re going to be very nice, and we’ll see what happens.”

Trump said he didn’t see the need to “play hardball” with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and that during discussions he wouldn’t raise Covid-19 — an issue that is politically sensitive in Beijing. The White House recently launched a website that suggested the virus came from a China lab. — Bloomberg

an advocacy group warned Wednesday.

Plans to lay off hundreds of employees would eliminate the scientific arm of the EPA. — Agencies

Catholic faithful pay their respects to Pope Francis

Vatican City, April 23: Thousands of people filed through the central aisle of St Peter’s Basilica to pay their final respects to Pope Francis on Wednesday, the start of three days of public viewing ahead of the pontiff’s funeral.

Throngs of ordinary faithful made their way slowly to the 16th-century basilica’s main altar, where Francis’ simple open wooden casket was perched on a slight ramp, as four Swiss Guards stood at attention. Over the coming days, tens of thousands of people are expected to pass through the basilica, which is staying open until midnight to accommodate them.

Many people paying their respects had come to Rome to celebrate Easter, on a spring vacation or other personal business, only to be met with the news of Francis’ death on Easter Monday. Out of devotion to the Argentine pope and his message of inclusion, they joined the procession of mourners that wended through the Holy Door and down the central aisle of the basilica. Francis was laid out in red robes, clasping a rosary and wearing a bishop’s miter, the traditional pointed headdress.

Mourners waited hours to reach the casket — which sat behind a cordon — some holding their cell phones aloft as they neared him to snap photos in what has become a modern ritual. “It gave me chills,” said Ivenes Bianco, as she left the basilica. She was in Rome from the southern city of Brindisi for medical care, and had



Visitors, pilgrims and the faithful pay respects to late Pope Francis inside St Peter’s Basilica in The Vatican, on Wednesday. — AFP

AFTER DEATH, ‘CONCLAVE’ VIEWERSHIP UP

Los Angeles, April 23: The viewership of “papal thriller drama ‘Conclave’” has spiked 283 per cent following the death of Pope Francis on April 21, according to Lumina, which tracks viewership of streaming content. “Conclave”, released in 2024 and won Peter Straghan the best adapted screenplay Oscar, revolves around the selection of a new pontiff.

“Conclave” is available on various PVID (premium video on demand) platforms. — PTI

ISRAELI FOREIGN MIN. DELETES SOLACE POST

Jerusalem, April 23: Israeli foreign ministry deleted Pope condolences post. The ministry refused to comment on its decision to post and then quickly deleted the post on X, which said: “Rest in peace, Pope Francis. May his memory be a blessing.” According to Israeli media, ambassadors, especially those serving in predominantly Catholic countries, were furious over the deleted post.

Pope Francis was critical of Israel’s war in Gaza. — AP

ay’s funeral and plan the conclave to elect Francis’ successor. Francis died on Monday at age 88, capping a 12-year pontificate characterised by his concern for the poor and message of inclusion. — AP

Bleaching event hits 84% of all coral reefs

Washington, April 23: Harmful bleaching of the world’s coral has grown to include 84 per cent of the ocean’s reefs in the most intense event of its kind in recorded history, the International Coral Reef Initiative announced on Wednesday.

It’s the fourth global bleaching event since 1998. The event has now surpassed bleaching from 2014-17 that hit some two-thirds of reefs, said the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), a mix made up of more than 100 governments, non-gov-

ernmental organisations and others.

And it’s not clear when the current crisis, which began in 2023 and is blamed on warming oceans, will end.

“We may never see the heat stress that causes bleaching dropping below the threshold that triggers a global event,” said Mark Eakin, executive secretary for the International Coral Reef Society and retired coral monitoring chief for the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). — AP

WEF CONFIRMS PROBE AGAINST FOUNDER SCHWAB

Geneva, April 23: The World Economic Forum confirmed on Wednesday that it has launched an investigation into allegations made against its founder Klaus Schwab that reportedly prompted his resignation this week.

In a statement confirming a report by the *Wall Street Journal*, the WEF said its board of trustees “unanimously supported the Audit and Risk Committee’s decision to initiate an independent investigation following a whistleblower letter containing allegations against ex-chairman Klaus Schwab”.

Schwab denies the claims, the paper added. The WEF, which hosts the annual meeting of wealthy, famous and influential global elites at the luxury Swiss ski resort town Davos, initially provided no explanation for its longtime chairman’s sudden resignation Monday “with immediate effect”.

The WEF’s board hailed Schwab’s “outstanding achievements”. But the WSJ reported that the decision had been spurred by a board decision to investigate allegations of financial and ethical misconduct by the longtime leader and his wife Hilde.

The letter, said to have been sent by anonymous current and ex-WEF staff, “included allegations that Klaus Schwab asked junior employees to withdraw thousands of dollars from ATMs on his behalf and used Forum funds to pay for private, in-room massages at hotels.” — AFP



quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	80,116.49	0.65
Nifty 50	24,328.95	0.67
S&P 500*	5,442.56	2.93
Dollar (₹)	85.42	0.24
Pound Sterling (₹)	113.80	-0.09
Euro (₹)	97.53	-0.36
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	98,700	-2.85
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	66.01	-2.12
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.331	0.005
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.29	-0.099

ICL Fincorp announces NCD public issue

Kerala based ICL Fincorp, a NBFC, announced ₹100 crore non convertible debentures (NCD) public issue that opens on April 25. The coupon rate for the NCD has been fixed between 11 per cent to 12.5 per cent for tenures of 13, 24, 36, 60 and 68 months. This is the fifth series of NCD public issue from ICL Fincorp which aims to raise minimum ₹50 crore with a green shoe option to retain oversubscription of ₹50 crore.

Suzuki, Maruti plan to set up CoE in India

Suzuki Motor Corporation and Maruti Suzuki India said they would set up Osamu Suzuki Centre of Excellence (OSCOE) in India in honour of late Osamu Suzuki, the former chairman of Japanese automaker. The OSCOE is proposed to be located in Gujarat and Haryana, and will work towards supporting the national objective of high manufacturing growth and raising the standard of component manufacturers, it said.



NPCI launches UPI Circle on BHIM payments app

NPCI BHIM Services, a subsidiary of NPCI has launched an UPI Circle with partial delegation on the BHIM payments app. It is designed to empower users by enabling them to delegate UPI transaction capabilities to trusted individuals with defined controls and complete transparency. UPI Circle allows a primary user, the UPI account holder, to authorise upto five secondary users to initiate UPI payments from their account.

Ather Energy IPO price band at ₹304-321 apiece

Electric two wheeler maker Ather Energy's initial public offering (IPO) will open on April 28 in the price band of ₹304 to ₹321 per equity share of ₹1 face value. ₹2980.76 crore IPO of Bengaluru based company is a mix of fresh issue worth Rs 2626 crore and an offer for sale of ₹354.76 crore by promoter shareholders. The first large main board IPO of FY26 after a long dry spell will close on April 30.

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After ₹1-lakh crescendo, gold tide ebbs by ₹2,900

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, APRIL 23

Gold prices saw a sharp correction of over ₹2,900 per 10 gm due to profit-taking on Wednesday after crossing ₹1 lakh mark in the spot market on Tuesday. However, analysts believe that prices will bounce back with global uncertainties remaining unresolved.

In the Delhi bullion market, gold was trading at ₹98,700 per 10 gm against ₹1,01,600 on Tuesday, falling by ₹2,900 per 10 gm. In the MCX, gold had started correcting on Tuesday itself after touching ₹99,358. On Wednesday, it came down to a low of ₹94,959 and was seen rebounding to ₹95,700 levels. In international market gold prices dropped from a high of \$3,498 per troy ounce to a low of \$3,305 and then moving up to \$3,330 as US, China trade tensions were seen easing. "US President Donald Trump signalled a possible shift in his stand towards Russia and indicated that the steep tariffs on Chinese imports may be significantly reduced if a



OFFICIALS FROM INDIA, U.S. BEGIN TRADE PACT TALKS

New Delhi, April 23: Indian and US officials begin deliberations on the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA) in Washington on Wednesday with an aim to iron out issues and give an impetus to the negotiations.

The US has stated that the pact with India will help open new markets for American goods and create new opportunities for workers, farmers, and entrepreneurs in both countries. According to the US trade representative, the United States is looking at increasing market access, reducing the tariffs and non-tariff barriers, and negotiating a robust set of commitments to ensure long-term benefits. The US has on multiple occasions flagged concerns on widening trade deficit with India, which is \$45.7 billion in 2024. It would look at bridging this deficit with India through the BTA.

The two have finalised the terms of reference (ToR) for the agreement. The three-day talks assume significance as the US has paused the imposition of tariffs for 90 days. The ToRs cover around 19 chapters, such as tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and customs facilitation. An official said these talks would lead to the formal launch of negotiations for the BTA. India's chief negotiator, additional secretary in the department of commerce Rajesh Agrawal, is leading the team for the first in-person talks between two countries. — PTI

India to grow at 6.3% in FY26: WB

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

Amid the shadow of uncertainty over the US tariff policy, the World Bank on Wednesday said that it slashed India's growth projections for FY26 to 6.3 per cent citing uncertain global environments and high trade tensions across the globe. In January, the World Bank had projected India to grow at 6.7 in FY26. In India, growth in FY24/25 disappointed because of slower growth in private investment and public capital expenditures that did not meet

PRICE CORRECTION

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deal is reached. He is said 145 per cent is too high and it won't be that high. The de-escalation of trade war tensions saw gold retreating," said Ajay Kedia, managing director, Kedia Commodities. Moreover, the dollar index also was seen gaining strength as Trump backed off from his earlier statement on removing Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell from his office. "Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested that he is open to the potential of direct discussions with his Ukrainian counterpart Volo-

dymyr Zelenskyy, enhancing expectations for truce," said Prithviraj Kothari, managing director of RiddiSiddhi Bullions. "Technically gold was overbought and needed a correction. After rallying up over 30 per cent this year, prices need to cool down and we have usually seen 7-8 per cent correction in previous bull-runs. This could see gold moving down to ₹92,000 levels," said Kedia. However, the fundamentals that have been supporting gold have not fully reversed. A bounce back in prices is possible.

RBI gov: Rate cut will revive investments

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 23

The monetary policy should nurture domestic demand impulses to further increase the growth momentum, said Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor Sanjay Malhotra during the recent monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting.

Other members of the MPC too echoed similar sentiments that monetary policy now has room to spur domestic demand, revealed the meeting minutes released Wednesday. In first meeting of FY26, the six-member MPC of the RBI on April 9 voted unanimously to reduce the repo rate by 25 bps to 6 per cent and changed the policy stance from neutral to accommodative. In the February monetary policy, the RBI MPC had reduced the benchmark repo rate by 25 bps to 6.25 per cent from 6.5 per cent. Advocating for a rate cut, Malhotra said that it is specially so amidst an uncertain global environment, which has amplified downside risks to growth. He said that a rate cut would bolster private consumption and support a revival in private corporate investment activity. "Going forward too, con-

A RATE CUT would bolster private consumption and support a revival in private corporate investment activity. Going forward too, considering the evolving growth-inflation trajectories, monetary policy needs to be accommodative.

— SANJAY MALHOTRA, RBI governor

sidering the evolving growth-inflation trajectories, monetary policy needs to be accommodative," added the Reserve bank chief. The MPC noted that as per projections, there is now a greater confidence of a durable alignment of headline inflation with the target of 4 per cent over a 12-month horizon. On the other hand, impeded by a challenging global environment, growth is still on a recovery path after an underwhelming performance in first half of 2024-25 said the minutes of the meeting. In such challenging global economic conditions, the benign inflation and moderate growth outlook demands that the MPC continues to the support growth.

Pvt sector biz grows fastest in 8 mths in April

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, APRIL 23

India's private sector expansion witnessed an eight-month high in April driven by a strong demand and significant surge in foreign orders for manufactured goods. However, goods producers noted a stronger rate of expansion than service providers, and one that

was the most pronounced in over 15 years, a private survey showed. As per the HSBC Flash India Composite purchasing managers' index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global, the index rose to 60.0 in April from 59.5 in March, marking the strongest growth in combined manufacturing and services



activity since August. It, however, highlighted that the combined output in manufacturing and service witnessed quicker increases across the sectors, the fastest rate of expansion since August 2024. "The manufacturing sector showed particularly strong momentum, with

its PMI climbing to 58.4, up from 58.1, reaching a one-year high. The services sector also maintained solid growth, with its PMI increasing to 59.1 from 58.5, the highest level in four months. However, the private sector firms noted a record increase in new export orders during April," the survey showed. Pranjul Bhandari, chief India economist at HSBC,

said that new export orders accelerated sharply, likely buoyed by the 90-day pause in the implementation of tariffs. "As a result, output and employment grew, for both, manufacturers and service providers. Cost inflation was in line with March levels, but prices charged rose a tad faster, leading to improved margins," Bhandari said.

Foreign investors bought equities worth ₹3,332.9 cr while domestic institutions were net sellers of equities worth ₹1,234.4 cr. "Historical trends show

Market gained for the seventh consecutive session as the US government indicated a trade deal coming with China and President Trump seemed to be withdrawing his aggressive interest rate cut approach against US Fed chief Powell. The Sensex reclaimed 80,000 level after a gap of nearly four months with a gain of 520.90 points or 0.65 per cent to close at 80,116.49. The Nifty-50 closed 0.67 per cent or 161.70 points up at 24,328.95. However, analysts warned of volatility continuing and sector rotation as the market had seen a sharp rally over the last fortnight led by financials stocks after the big fall on April 7. "The Nifty-50 has rallied nearly 12 per cent over the last 10 sessions, pushing indicators into overbought territory. Considering the overbought condi-

tions, we advise against chasing momentum at higher levels. Sector-wise, banking pack witnessed profit booking after recent surge, while IT stocks staged a rebound. With monthly equity derivatives expiry ahead, sector rotation is likely to continue," said Rajesh Bhosale, technical analyst, Angel One. Broader market also seen a rally with the BSE mid-cap index up 0.94 per cent while BSE small-cap index gained 0.26 per cent.

that IT Index has always rallied when the sector reaches such lows and the stocks rally well, ahead of earnings upgrades. The current slowdown is a cyclical one, and we see an upgrade cycle toward the CY25 end, once clarity comes on tariffs," said Shashidra Sen, head-Research and Strategy, Emkay Global Financial Services.

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Time right to buy silver, says ace investor Rogers

Sees potential in industrial metals like copper on back of tariff war

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, APRIL 23

Ace investor Jim Rogers finds silver the most attractive instrument for investment currently as the metal price is low and it has the potential to move higher in the future. He also wants to bet on Chinese equities, while staying away from US Treasury bonds.

"Silver is much cheaper compared to gold and I will buy silver now," he told Financial Chronicle. The gold-silver ratio is currently above 100 and indicates reversal to the mean levels of 65 to 70. This would see silver prices moving up significantly in the future. "Silver prices have seen a record level of \$50 earlier. It is currently at \$33 levels. Silver will surely return to its earlier levels," he said.

"Gold too has the potential to go up much higher from the current levels, but I will not buy it now. Gold may possibly see corrections, but it has not seen corrections enough for me to buy," he said. He also bets on industrial metals like copper as the tariff war has led to significant weakness in metal counters. "I would also look for some agricultural commodities that

METAL BASKET

GOLD-SILVER RATIO CURRENTLY ABOVE 100 AND INDICATES REVERSAL TO MEAN LEVELS OF 65 TO 70, IMPLYING SILVER PRICES WILL MOVE UP.



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US TREASURY bonds will see a fall as tariff war will jack up inflation and take global economy towards recession.

ROGERS BELIEVES that there is no currency that can be an alternative to the US dollar.

Silver price rises ₹28 to ₹95,907 per kg in futures trade as participants increased their bets.

But, at present there is no alternative that can compete with the dollar. Many countries are increasing their gold reserves in the process of de-dollarisation. But gold cannot replace the dollar," he said.

However, he will stay clear of cryptocurrencies. "They will not last long. People understand gold and dollar and trust in these asset classes. They do not understand crypto and hence they will not last long," Rogers added.

AMONG EQUITIES, Rogers prefers Chinese equities as he thinks they are trading at low levels, right enough to enter.

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LIFE INSURANCE SECTOR MAY GROW AT 12-15% IN FY26

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, APRIL 23

A high base effect and market-driven slowdown in ULIP sales have weighed on the life insurance sector's momentum. According to the data released by the Life Insurance Council, individual new business premium collected in FY25 stood at ₹1.66 lakh crore as compared to ₹1.49 lakh crore in the previous financial year, a growth of 11 per cent. In terms of total business, the life insurers grew by 5.13 per cent with a total premium of ₹3.97 lakh crore for FY25 as compared to ₹3.77 lakh crore in FY24. "With the economy estimated to grow at 6.5 per cent, life insurance sector will grow at 12-15 per cent in retail individual business for FY 26," said Manoj Kumar Jain, MD, Shriram Life Insurance. Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has garnered ₹2.26 lakh crore in new business premium for FY25, which includes ₹62,404 from individual new business. The individual new business premium for FY25 registered a growth of 8.35 per cent year-on-year basis, the data shown.

MONEY MATTERS

Make your cryptocurrency wallets safe



In the decentralised world of crypto, you are your own bank—and that means you alone are responsible for securing your digital assets. Unlike a traditional bank account where lost credentials can be recovered, a compromised or misplaced private key can lead to irreversible loss. Choosing the right crypto wallet and following best practices is essential

for every investor. There are three primary ways to store crypto assets: hot wallets, cold wallets, and exchange storage. Each comes with its own balance of convenience and risk. Hot wallets are software applications connected to the internet. Available as mobile apps, desktop programs, or browser extensions, they are ideal for small amounts and frequent transactions. However, being online makes them vulnerable to hacking, phishing, and malware. Always use strong passwords, enable

two-factor authentication (2FA), and be cautious of fake apps or websites. Cold wallets, or hardware wallets, are physical devices. These store private keys offline, offering better protection against cyber threats. Ideal for long-term holders and large investments, they must be set up carefully. The most important step is to securely record recovery seed phrase - losing it means losing access permanently. Some users keep their assets on crypto exchange

es for ease of access. While convenient, exchanges are frequent targets for attacks and have a history of breaches. If you use this method, ensure the platform is FIIU-registered. The platform should offer robust security features, too. Across all wallet types, some safety principles remain universal. Never share your private key or recovery phrase. Always double-check wallet addresses before transfers. Test new addresses with small amounts and regularly



update your apps and firmware to close known vulnerabilities. As India sees increased crypto adoption, understanding wallet safety becomes critical. At Giottus, we urge investors to educate themselves on custody options and to treat wallet security with the seriousness it deserves. Crypto gives you control - but it also demands caution. Store your assets like your future depends on it - because in many ways, it does. (The author is CEO of Giottus Crypto Platform)

