

6 WORLD

 ● Massive Russian strike on Kyiv kills 9 overnight, injures dozens

8 NATION

 ● China successfully launches three new astronauts to its space station

● BJP exploiting tragedy to promote polarisation: Congress

● Congress, CPI(M) defending terrorists, claims BJP state chief Chandrasekhar

Badruddin Ajmal distances party from MLA's remark defending Pak in Pahalgam terror attack

AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam on sedition charge

GUWAHATI, April 24: Assam's opposition AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam was arrested on Thursday on sedition charges for allegedly defending Pakistan and its complicity in the Pahalgam terror attack, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The AIUDF has distanced itself from the legislator's comments, stating that the views were his own and not of the party.

"We have seen a video where the MLA is defending Pakistan and its complicity in the attack. I had instructed the police to take action and accordingly, the DGP has informed me that he has been arrested," Sarma said at a press conference here.

Islam was arrested from his residence in Nagaon district.

"The MLA will be produced before a court and we will take the case to its logical conclusion," he added. Twenty-six people, mostly tourists, were killed in a terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam on Tuesday.

Sarma said no attempt to directly or indirectly support Pakistan through any means, including on social media, will be tolerated and the police have strict directions to act against such persons immediately. The chief minister, in a



post on X, affirmed the state government's strong action against

anyone defending Pakistan. "Assam will take the strongest

possible action against anyone who dares to defend—directly or indirectly—the horrific, Pakistan-sponsored terror attack in Pahalgam. Let it be known clearly: those who attempt to justify, normalise, or dilute the brutal murder of innocent civilians are not exercising freedom of expression—they are standing against the soul of India," he said.

Assam Police, also in a post on social media, said the AIUDF legislator has been arrested for a "misleading and instigating statement... which went viral and had the potential to create an adverse situation". A case has been registered

at Nagaon Sadar police station under various sections of the BharatiyaNyay Sanhita.

Meanwhile, AIUDF president Badruddin Ajmal said the views expressed by Islam are his personal opinion.

"The comments made by Aminul Islam are unfortunate. This is the time to stand with our government. Terrorists have no religion. These terrorists are giving Islam a bad name," Ajmal said.

He maintained that the views expressed by Islam in the video did not reflect the party's stand, and the AIUDF already condemned the attack. (PTI)

Rahul wants to divide Hindus on castes:CM

HOJAI, April 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday alleged Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was trying to divide Hindus on the basis of castes, but the terrorists who perpetrated the Pahalgam attack just wanted to know the religion of the victims.

Addressing a panchayat poll rally in Hojai, Sarma said there was no room for caste-based politics in the country at the moment.

"Terrorists earlier never asked about the religious identities of their targets, but in Pahalgam, victims were asked about their faith. When they replied that they were Hindus, the men were shot dead right in front of their wives," he said.

"Is it a crime to be a Hindu? Hindus have been in India for 5,000 years and will remain here. Such acts are not acceptable," he asserted.

Maintaining that people of all religions were safe under the BJP government, Sarma urged everyone to unite in the fight against terrorism. "Hindus and Muslims have to fight terrorism together, have to work together," he said.

Hitting out at Gandhi, the CM claimed that he was trying to divide the Hindus into OBCs, SCs and STs. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Hailiang helped others escape before terrorists killed him, says Arunachal CM

SYMBOL OF VALOUR

ITANAGAR, April 24: Indian Air Force Corporal Tage Hailiang, who was vacationing in Pahalgam with his wife, risked his life and guided tourists to safety, helping them escape before he fell to the bullets of the terrorists, Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu said on Thursday.

Khandu, who went to Hailiang home at Tajang village in Lower Subansiri district shortly after his mortal remains reached there, said his name will forever be etched in the history of Arunachal Pradesh as a symbol of valour and his sacrifice will inspire the generations to come.

The CM announced that his government would provide Hailiang's family with financial assistance of Rs 50 lakh, in addition to a job for a member.

Hailiang, one of the 26 people killed in the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam on April



22, will be laid to rest in his village on Friday.

Khandu met the IAF Corporal's wife, parents and family members and offered his condolences.

"The loss is beyond measure, and the people of Arunachal Pradesh stand in solidarity with the family during this time of profound sorrow," he said.

Describing the airman's final moment as an act of 'exceptional courage' in the face of grave dan-

ger, Khandu said he had the chance to flee but chose instead to protect those around him.

"Risking his own life, he guided civilians to safety, helping them escape the line of fire. His selflessness in that critical moment stands as a rare and inspiring act of bravery," the chief minister said.

He said that the state government will construct a permanent memorial in Hailiang's native village. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam offers ex-gratia of ₹ 5 lakh to families Pahalgam victims

Bharat strikes back, Himanta on suspending Indus Water Treaty on Pak

GUWAHATI, April 24: The Assam government on Thursday announced an ex-gratia of ₹ 5 lakh for families of all 26 people killed in the Pahalgam terror attack.

Assam had reeled under insurgency for long and "we can understand the pain of the families," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Addressing a press conference here, he said, "Our government has decided to offer this small amount as a token of respect for the sacrifice made by the deceased and their families."

Twenty-six people, mostly tourists, were killed in a terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam on Tuesday.

Sarma said strict watch is being kept along the state's border with Bangladesh also. On the Centre's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty by India after the Pahalgam terror attack, Sarma said it heralded a "new era of assertive diplomacy." He said suspending the treaty is India striking back, as water security is aligned with national security.

Targeting Pakistan following the attack, India on Wednesday downgraded diplomatic ties with it and announced a raft of measures, including expulsion of Pakistani military attaches, suspension of the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 and immediate shutting down

of the Attari land-transit post.

Praising the decisions, Sarma in a post on X said, "Bharat Strikes Back."

He said India has honoured the treaty for over six decades and has announced its suspension following the Pahalgam terror attack, "asserting that water co-operation cannot continue with a state supporting terrorism".

He said over 90 per cent of the neighbouring country's agriculture relies on the Indus river system.

"A 10-15 per cent drop in water availability could lead to crop losses worth USD 2-3 billion/year. Wheat and rice yields, major export commodities, may decline by 15-20 per cent, endangering food security for over 120 million people," he claimed.

Pakistan will also suffer power generation loss of 2,000-3,000 mw, which is equal to 20-25 per cent of grid capacity during high-flow periods, Sarma said.

"Economic impact: USD 1.5-2 billion/year due to load shedding, energy import costs, and industrial slowdown," he added.

Sarma said urban water supply will also be affected, with Lahore, Multan, Faisalabad, Karachi and other cities highly dependent on Indus water. "Over 40 million urban residents may face water scarcity, particularly during dry months. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM vows to punish terrorists, their backers 'beyond their imagination'

MADHUBANI (BIHAR), April 24: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday declared that the killers of Pahalgam will be pursued "to the ends of the earth" and promised to "identify, track and punish every terrorist and their backers".

In his first speech after the April 22 attack in Pahalgam in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed, the prime minister vowed to punish terrorists behind the strike and said India's spirit will never be broken by terrorism.

Modi spoke briefly in English and said, "Friends, today from the soil of Bihar, I say to the whole world India will identify, track, and punish every terrorist and their backers. We will pursue them to the ends of the earth. India's spirit will never be broken by terrorism. Terrorism will not go unpunished."

In the stern message, he said, "Every effort will be made to ensure that justice is done. The entire nation is firm in this resolve. Everyone who believes in humanity is with us. I thank the people of various countries and their leaders who have stood

with us in these times."

In a message to Pakistan without naming the country, Modi said he will state it categorically that the terrorists who carried out the attack and those who hatched the conspiracy, they will be punished beyond their imagination. "Punishment will definitely be served."

The prime minister said the willpower of 140 crore Indians will break the back of patrons of terrorism.

Paying condolences to the victims and their families, he said citizens across the country are in mourning over the brutal manner in which terrorists killed 26 innocent civilians in Kashmir on April 22. The nation stands with their families, he said. Modi, other leaders on the dais and the crowd observed silence to pay homage to the victims of the attack at the beginning of the prime minister's speech.

He said people lost their sons, brothers and husbands and noted that the victims belong to different parts of India, be it Bengal, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam Cong MP, family to be questioned in Pakistan link case by SIT: Himanta

GUWAHATI, April 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Thursday that the Congress MP from the state, whose alleged links to Pakistan are being probed by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the state police, will be called in for his statement in June-July, along with his family members.

The CM claimed that evidence has been found proving that the MP's wife was being paid salary from Pakistan even when she was working in Delhi.

"I have not named anyone, but an important functionary of Congress parliamentary party and an MP of Assam had stayed in Pakistan for 15 days without informing the cen-



tral government," Sarma said at a press conference here. The MP used the Attari land border to enter Pakistan rather than going by air to avoid attention, he claimed.

Sarma said that state police's SIT, which is investigating the matter, has found "important evidence that the wife of the MP was getting salary from (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

IIT Guwahati studies effect of 3D-printed lattice walls on building's thermal performance

'This results in a reduction of construction waste by up to 60 pc'

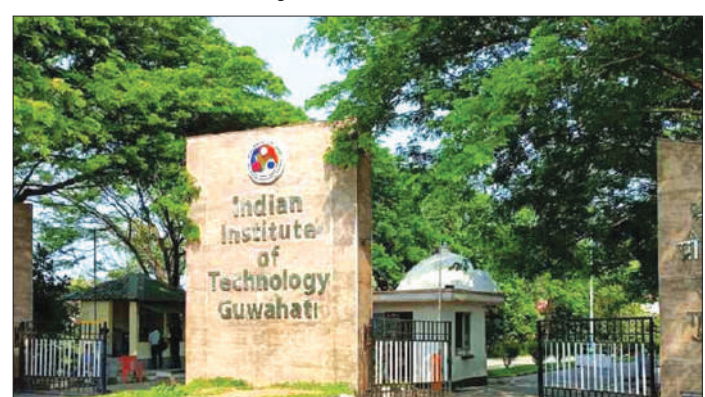
NEW DELHI, April 24: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati have studied the effect of lattice-patterned 3D-printed concrete walls on a building's thermal performance.

The study led by Biranchi Panda, Assistant Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, has examined whether these specially designed walls can help regulate internal temperatures and improve the energy efficiency of buildings.

The findings of the research have been published in the international journal 'Progress in Additive Manufacturing'.

Lattice walls are specially designed walls that include a repeating pattern of openings or voids, rather than being solid throughout. These walls can be created using 3D concrete printing technology, which allows for intricate designs that are difficult to achieve with traditional construction methods.

The openings in lattice walls help regulate temperature by improving airflow and reducing heat



transfer, making them useful for energy-efficient building design. Additionally, they use less material, reduce construction waste and offer both functional and aesthetic benefits.

According to Panda, 3D Concrete Printing (3DCP) is an emerging construction technology that uses automated machines to build structures layer-by-layer directly from digital designs.

"Among the various techniques used in 3D concrete printing, ex-

trusion-based printing is one of the most widely applied methods. In this process, a concrete mixture is pushed through a nozzle and deposited in successive layers to form walls and other structural elements. Compared to traditional methods of concrete construction, 3DCP offers several advantages," Panda said.

"It eliminates the need for temporary moulds (formwork), which are normally used to shape poured concrete. This results in a reduc-

tion of construction waste by up to 60 pc, a decrease in construction time by 70 per cent, and a lowering of labour costs by 80 per cent. Furthermore, 3DCP allows for greater flexibility in wall design," he added.

Panda explained that unlike conventional concrete walls, which are typically solid and flat, 3D-printed walls can incorporate complex geometries, including lattice structures with controlled voids or openings.

"In recent years, several studies have explored how these new wall designs affect the thermal behaviour of buildings. Wall geometry plays an important role in heat transfer, influencing the energy required for heating or cooling indoor spaces."

"However, there has been limited research on the thermal performance of 3D-printed concrete lattice walls, particularly in the Indian context. We conducted a detailed experimental and numerical analysis of different 3D-printed concrete (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India can't develop without developing its villages: PM Modi

MADHUBANI, April 24: India cannot develop without developing its villages, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday as he launched and inaugurated projects worth ₹ 13,500 crore in Bihar's Madhubani, and addressed Panchayati Raj Institutions across the country.

Speaking at an event to mark National Panchayati Raj Day here, Modi also lauded the work done by chief minister Nitish Kumar in the poll-bound state.

He said a developed Bihar is essential for a developed India, and said efforts are being made to ensure the benefits of progress reach all corners of the state.

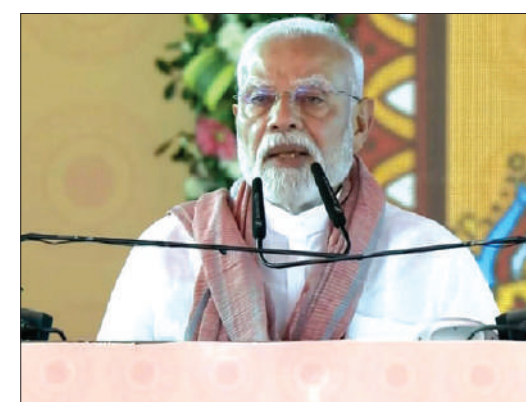
Modi said Mahatma Gandhi's idea that India cannot be developed without empowering its villages is the concept behind the Panchayati Raj system.

"Bihar is the land where Mahatma Gandhi expanded the mantra of Satyagraha," Modi said, highlighting Mahatma Gandhi's firm belief that "India's rapid development is only possible when its villages are strong". He said the projects launched on Thursday will boost development and generate employment opportunities in the state.

"Farmers are the backbone of the rural economy, the stronger this backbone, the stronger the villages, and consequently, the nation," Modi said.

He also underscored that panchayats have strengthened social participation, remarking that Bihar was the first state in the country to provide 50 per cent reservation for women in panchayats.

"Today, a significant number of women from economically weaker sections, Dalits, Mahadalits, backwards, and extremely backward communities are serving as public representatives in Bihar. This is real



social justice and democracy," he said.

"Many steps have been taken to strengthen panchayats, and technology has also been used... More than 2 lakh gram panchayats have been linked with the internet, and more than 5.5 lakh common service centres have been established in villages," he said.

Modi said more than 30,000 new panchayat buildings have also been constructed.

He lauded the Bihar government's 'Jeevika Didi' programme and said, today, self-help groups of women in Bihar have been provided financial assistance of approximately ₹ 1,000 crore. He said this will further strengthen the economic empowerment of women and contribute to the goal of creating three crore 'LakhpatiDidis' across the country. Modi said villages have seen the construction of houses for the poor, roads, gas connections. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India, Pak trade miniscule; now will come to complete halt: Exporters

NEW DELHI, April 24: With Pakistan suspending all trade ties with India, including that routes through third countries, the two-way commerce will now come to a complete halt, apex exporters' body FIEO said on Thursday.

Following the terror attack in Pahalgalam on Tuesday, which killed 26 people, mostly tourists, India took a series of measures including immediate shutting down of the Attari land-transit post, used for movement of certain kinds of goods.

Besides, India has announced expulsion of Pakistani military attaches, and suspension of the Indus Water Treaty of 1960.

In retaliation, Pakistan announced suspension of 'all trade' with India, including that routes through third countries.

Commenting on the decision of the neighbouring country, Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) President S C Ralhan said India's bilateral trade with Pakistan is miniscule and is just 0.06 per cent of India's total trade.

"We have miniscule trade with Pakistan, which is constantly declining. During April-January 2024-25,

the same was not even USD 500 million as against the overall trade of over USD 800 billion in the same period. The trade will now come to a complete standstill affecting supply of some key products to Pakistan, hitting their economy further," Ralhan told PTI.

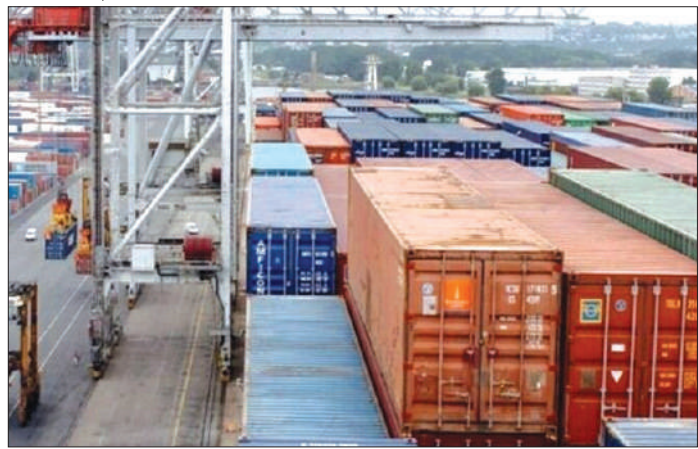
Terrorists opened fire in Pahalgalam in the deadliest attack in the Valley since the Pulwama strike in 2019.

India's exports to Pakistan in April-January 2024-25 stood at USD 447.65 million, while imports were meagre USD 0.42 million. The exports and imports in 2023-24 were USD 1.18 billion and USD 2.88 million, respectively.

In 2022-23 and 2021-22, India exported goods worth USD 627.1 million and USD 513.82 million, and imported products worth USD 20.11 million and USD 2.54 million, respectively.

In April-January 2024-25, exports of organic chemicals and pharmaceutical products accounted for about 60 per cent of the country's total outbound shipments to Pakistan. It was USD 129.55 million and USD 110.06 million, respectively.

The other items include sugar and



sugar confectionary (USD 85.16 million), certain vegetables (USD 3.77 million), coffee, tea and spices (USD 1.66 million), cereals (USD 1.39 million), petroleum products (USD 11.63 million), fertiliser (USD 6 million), plastics (USD 4.16 million), rubber (USD 1.88 million), and auto components (USD 28.57 million).

The main imports include fruits and nuts (USD 0.08 million), certain oil seeds and medicinal plants (USD 0.26 million), organic chemicals,

and project goods. Usually, the consignments from India move via Dubai port to Pakistan.

The India-Pakistan trade relations soured after the Pulwama terror attack in 2019.

Following that, India raised the import duty to 200 per cent on all goods imported from the neighbouring country, including fresh fruits, cement, petroleum products and mineral ore.

In 2017-18, Pakistan's exports to India was USD 488.5 million. India

also withdrew MFN (most favoured nation) status to Pakistan.

That time the two main items imported from Pakistan were fruits and cement. Slapping an import duty of 200 per cent effectively means almost banning the imports.

The country invoked a security exception clause of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to withdraw the MFN status. Both the countries are member of this organization.

India had granted the MFN status to Pakistan way back in 1996, but the neighbouring country had not reciprocated.

Under the MFN pact, a WTO member country is obliged to treat the other trading nation in a non-discriminatory manner, especially with regard to customs duty and other levies.

In 2012, Pakistan had committed to giving the MFN status to India but retracted later due to domestic opposition. Instead of MFN, Pakistan said it was working on granting Non-Discriminatory Market Access (NDMA) status to India but that also was not announced.

Pakistan too in August 2019 suspended trade ties with New Delhi

following imposition of the heavy import duty by India on imports from Pakistan.

Both countries have a long history of strained relations, primarily due to the Kashmir issue as well as the cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan. Total India-Pakistan trade in 2017-18 was USD 2.41 billion as against USD 2.27 billion in 2016-17. India imported goods worth USD 488.5 million in 2017-18 and exported goods worth USD 1.92 billion.

Meanwhile, FIEO has cancelled its managing committee meeting, which was scheduled for April 28 in Kashmir due to tensions in the valley following terror attack at Pahalgalam.

An official of the FIEO said that about 25 members were scheduled to attend the meeting.

"We were planned to discuss issues related to FIEO's internal matters and international trade. But now we have cancelled that," the official said. Set up in 1965 by the commerce ministry, the federation facilitates redressal of exporters' problems by taking them up with the authorities concerned, besides promoting the country's trade. (PTI)

OPPO launches A5 Pro 5G in India

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 24: OPPO India has officially launched the A5 Pro 5G, a smartphone focused on extreme durability and rugged performance. According to an official statement from the company, the A5 Pro 5G comes with top-tier protection certifications—IP69, IP68, and IP66—offering resistance against water, dust, high-pressure jets, and multiple liquids including salt water and coffee. Engineered with military-grade shock resistance and features such as double-tempered glass, aerospace-grade aluminum alloy frame, and OPPO's proprietary Sponge Bionic Cushioning, the device is built to handle drops, environmental stress, and harsh conditions. It has also been tested across 14 U.S. Military Standard (MIL-STD-810H-2022) conditions. Available in Mocha Brown and Feather Blue, the A5 Pro 5G is priced at ₹17,999 for the 8GB+128GB variant and ₹19,999 for the 8GB+256GB model. Buyers can avail up to ₹1,500 cashback and no-cost EMI offers via select bank cards. It will be sold through Amazon, Flipkart, OPPO Store, and major retail outlets. With features like Splash Touch for wet-hand usability and glove support, the A5 Pro 5G is targeted at users who demand reliability in challenging environments. The launch of the A5 Pro 5G marks OPPO's effort to bring flagship-grade durability to a broader audience, extending features once limited to premium models into its more affordable A Series lineup. By "democratizing durability," OPPO aims to cater to consumers with active lifestyles, outdoor jobs, or those simply looking for a smartphone that can withstand everyday accidents without compromising on performance or usability.

Stock markets break 7-day rally to end lower; HUL drops 4 pc post-earnings

MUMBAI, April 24: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty reversed their seven-day uptrend and settled lower on Thursday amid profit-taking and disappointing fourth quarter earnings of Hindustan Unilever.

Selling in blue-chips ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel and a largely muted trend in Asian and European equities also dragged the markets down.

The 30-share BSE benchmark declined 315.06 points or 0.39 per cent to settle at 79,801.43. During the day, it dropped 391.94 points or 0.48 per cent to 79,724.55.

The NSE Nifty went down by 82.25 points or 0.34 per cent to 24,246.70.

In the past seven trading days, the BSE benchmark gauge zoomed 6,269.34 points or 8.48 per cent and the Nifty jumped 1,929.8 points or 8.61 per cent.

From the Sensex firms, FMCG major Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL) dropped 4 per cent after the firm reported a decline of 3.35 per cent in consolidated net profit at ₹ 2,475 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2025, hit by lower margins.

Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Eternal, Mahindra & Mahindra, HCL Technologies, HDFC Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Tata Consultancy Services and Bajaj Finance were also among the laggards.

Nestle India Ltd on Thursday reported a 6.5 per cent decline in consolidated net profit at ₹ 873.46 crore for March quarter of FY25 as the FMCG industry faced food inflation and moderation in urban consumption.

IndusInd Bank, UltraTech Cement, Tata Mo-



tors, Tech Mahindra, Titan and Asian Paints were among the gainers.

"The domestic market witnessed mild profit-taking after the recent rally. Similarly, global markets too experienced selling pressure as the market participants scaled back the possibility of a quick resolution of tariff disputes between the US and China.

"FMCG majors' Q4 results were weak, impacted by subdued volumes and margin pressure, which led the sector to underperform," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

According to Bajaj Broking Research, "Benchmark indices snapped their seven-day winning streak, ending slightly lower. The Nifty

opened on a subdued note and traded within a narrow range throughout the day, maintaining a corrective bias."

The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.16 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.01 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, realty dropped 1.39 per cent, FMCG (0.82 per cent), tech (0.59 per cent), financial services (0.40 per cent), consumer discretionary (0.33 per cent), BSE Focused IT (0.24 per cent) and power (0.22 per cent).

BSE commodities, healthcare, metal and services were the gainers.

As many as 2,015 stocks declined while 1,920 advanced and 151 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled lower while Tokyo's Nikkei 225 and Shanghai SSE Composite ended in the positive territory.

European markets were quoting lower.

US markets ended sharply higher on Wednesday. Nasdaq Composite jumped 2.50 per cent, S&P 500 surged 1.67 per cent and Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 1.07 per cent.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.03 per cent to USD 66.10 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 3,332.93 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark jumped 520.90 points or 0.65 per cent to settle at 80,116.49, the highest closing level since December 18, on Wednesday. The Nifty rallied 161.70 points or 0.67 per cent to 24,328.95. (PTI)

Gold climbs ₹ 200 to ₹ 99,400/10 gm amid renewed concerns over US-China standoff

NEW DELHI, April 24: Gold prices climbed ₹ 200 to ₹ 99,400 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday following fresh buying by stockists and jewellers and a weak dollar, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity took a U-turn from the historic ₹ 1 lakh-mark and declined ₹ 2,400 to ₹ 99,200 per 10 gram on Wednesday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity also increased ₹ 200 to ₹ 98,900 per 10 grams against the previous close of ₹ 98,700 per 10 grams. US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Wednesday said the current trade standoff between the US and China could continue for a while. (PTI)

PhonePe announces cashback offer on digital gold purchases for Akshaya Tritiya

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 24: PhonePe has announced a special cashback offer on 24K Digital Gold purchases to mark the occasion of Akshaya Tritiya.

According to an official statement, users making a one-time purchase of digital gold worth ₹2,000 or more on April 30 will receive a flat 1% cashback, capped at ₹2,000.

The offer is valid for a single transaction per user and can be availed using various payment methods, including UPI, UPI Lite, credit and debit cards, PhonePe wallet, and gift cards.

In addition to the cashback offer, PhonePe has partnered with CaratLane to provide additional festive discounts on redemption of digital gold.

These include a 2% discount on gold coins, a 3% discount on unstudded jewellery, and a 5% discount on studded jewellery when redeemed at CaratLane stores or through its website.

PhonePe users can purchase 99.99% purity-certified 24K digital gold from leading providers such as MMTC-PAMP, SafeGold, and CaratLane.

The platform has already seen over 1.2 crore customers across India buying high-purity digital gold. PhonePe also enables users to invest in gold systematically through daily or monthly SIPs, starting from as low as ₹5.

Customers have the flexibility to sell their gold holdings at any time, with the amount credited directly to their bank accounts.

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Hailiang helped others escape

showcasing his early education in Ziro and Haryana's Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, to his graduation from Don Bosco, Itanagar and his dedicated service in the Indian Air Forces since 2017.

"His life is a shining testament to the strength, discipline, and patriotism of our youth," Khandu said.

The chief minister said Pakistan's continued sheltering of terrorist elements is a grave threat to global peace and must be met with resolute action. Praising the firm stand taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he expressed confidence that the nation will respond with the strength and resolve that such a grave sacrifice demands.

Earlier in the day, Hailiang's mortal remains reached his home in Tajang village around 7.30 am by road from neighbouring Assam. Assam minister Jayanta Malla Baruah received the body at the Air Force base in Guwahati around 1 am.

"Receiving the mortal remains of someone who travelled from afar only to return lifeless is an immensely painful experience," he said in a post on X. "May terrorism end once and for all! I firmly believe that the Government of India will respond to this heinous act without delay," Baruah said.

Senior officials of the Assam government and the Indian Air Force were also present and paid their tributes to the deceased officer. Ziro-Hapoli MLA Hage Appa, Lower Subansiri deputy commissioner Vivek HP, SP Keni Bagra and heads of government departments, and community-based organisations received the remains of Hailiang at Hapoli check gate at the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border. Khandu, along with minister Gabriel D Wangsu, MLA Nakap Nalo, Lok Sabha MP Tapir Gao, state BJP president Kaling Moyong, and IGP (Law and Order) Chukhu Apa joined thousands of people to pay their last respects. (PTI)

Assam offers ex-gratia

and emergency supply costs (like tankers, desalination) could reach hundreds of millions annually," he claimed.

The CM said that with water-intensive sectors accounting for about 25 per cent of Pakistan's GDP, treaty suspension could reduce GDP by 1.5-2 per cent annually if sustained. Food and energy prices may rise over 20 per cent, triggering widespread economic distress, he said.

The chief minister pointed out that while Pakistan can store 30 days' worth of water, India stores up to 170 days.

"Seasonal fluctuations or controlled reductions by India could cause immediate shortages without fallback," he maintained. Sarma asserted that India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty is a "calibrated, lawful, and strategic measure aimed at compelling Pakistan to take responsibility for cross-border terrorism". "This bold move marks a new era of assertive diplomacy where water security is aligned with national security. A beginning has been made, Bharat will take it to its logical conclusion. Pakistan must understand that this is the New India," he added. (PTI)

Rahul wants to divide Hindus

"But the terrorists did not ask the caste, they asked only whether the target was a Hindu or not. There is no room for caste politics. 'Ek rahengetoh safe rahenge' (we will be safe if we stay united)," he said, calling upon Hindus to remain united.

"We have to be united and punish countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh," he added.

Sarma claimed that some people living in Assam were indirectly supporting Pakistan through posts on social media and warned that they would not be spared, however important they may be. He also spoke of a Congress MP from the state who "stayed in Pakistan" for 15 days without informing the government. "The Congress has three MPs in Assam. One of them had crossed into Pakistan through the Attari border and stayed there for 15 days without informing the government. We have all the evidence," he claimed.

"We won't forgive such people and will take stringent action against them," he said. Appealing to the people to support the BJP and its allies in the panchayat polls, Sarma claimed that the state has been witnessing a prolonged phase of peace since 2021.

He alleged that it was only killings, blasts, agitations, corruption, communal riots, and insurgency under the Congress governments, which believed in the 'panchamrit'

of 'lungi, dhoti, suta (yarn), blanket and mosquito net' as means of appeasement. "But with the BJP coming to power here in 2016, peace has been restored and the state is witnessing rapid strides in growth," Sarma, who heads the second BJP-led government in the state, said.

The CM said the ration card, which was once a document for "Bangladeshis to fend off police", is now linked to welfare schemes. He affirmed the government's commitment to ensure that the schemes benefit the most deprived section, stating that more assistance in the form of bringing down of LPG cylinder prices and power tariff will be announced later this year. (PTI)

PM vows to punish terrorists

Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha and Bihar. "Our sorrow and anger are same from Kargil to Kaniyakumari," he said. Peace and security are the most necessary conditions for fast development, he added.

India had on Wednesday downgraded diplomatic ties with Pakistan and announced a raft of measures, including expulsion of Pakistani military attaches, suspension of the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 and immediate shutting down of the Attari land-transit post in view of the cross-border links to the horrific Pahalgalam terror attack.

The gunning down of tourists by terrorists has sparked outrage across the country and a demand for decisive action from the Modi government, which is identified with a muscular stand on the plank of national security. (PTI)

IIT Guwahati studies effect

lattice wall designs," he said, adding that the objective was to understand how the size, shape and arrangement of voids in lattice walls affect heat flow and temperature regulation in buildings.

The study involved laboratory testing to measure thermal properties as well as computer-based simulations to predict the thermal performance of various wall configurations.

The research provides valuable data on the thermal behaviour of 3D-printed concrete lattice walls and highlights their potential application in designing energy-efficient buildings. The study also contributes to ongoing research efforts aimed at improving sustainable construction practices using advanced digital manufacturing technologies.

The research findings are expected to support the future development of building designs better suited to diverse climatic conditions, while also promoting the wider adoption of 3D printing technologies in the construction industry.

"By demonstrating how 3D-printed concrete lattice walls can enhance natural temperature regulation, the study points to a path for more energy-efficient, cost-effective and sustainable buildings. With reduced construction waste, faster build times and design flexibility, this technology holds promise for affordable housing and climate-smart urban development across India," Panda said.

The team is now working towards the development of multifunctional resilient concrete structures considering diverse climate zones in India, he added. (PTI)

India can't develop without

water connections, and toilets, bringing lakhs of crores of rupees to rural areas. "The last decade has been a decade of infrastructure development for India," said the prime minister, asserting that this modern infrastructure is strengthening the foundation of a developed India.

Talking about the steps taken by the Union government, he said more than 10,000 Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and more than 800 Jan Aushadhi Kendras have come up in Bihar, due to which around ₹2,000 crore of out-of-pocket medical expenses were saved. He also mentioned the AIMS being established in Darbhanga.

At the event, where four new trains were also flagged off, Modi noted that metro projects are underway in Patna, and over two dozen cities across the country are now connected with metro facilities.

He announced the launch of the 'Namoh Bharat Rapid Rail' service between Patna and Jaynagar, which will significantly reduce travel time between the two locations, and emphasised that this development will benefit lakhs of people from Samastipur, Darbhanga, Madhubani, and Begusarai.

Modi called floods a "persistent challenge" in the Mithila and Kosi regions, and said the government is set to invest ₹ 11,000 crore to mitigate its impact on Bihar.

He said the investment will facilitate the construction of dams on rivers such as Bagmati, Dhar, Budhi Gandak, and Kosi, and canals will be developed, ensuring irrigation arrangements through river water. He highlighted the Budget announcement of the Makhana Board, which is expected to transform the fortunes of makhana farmers.

The prime minister flagged off four new trains -- Amrit Bharat Express between Saharsa and Mumbai, Namoh Bharat Rapid Rail between Jaynagar and Patna and trains between Pipra and Saharsa and Saharsa and Samastipur.

He also inaugurated the Supaul Pipra Rail Line, HasanpurBithan Rail Line and two-lane rail over bridges at Chapra and Bagaha and dedicated to the nation the Khagaria-Alauli Rail Line.

Other projects of which Modi laid the foundation stone included an LPG bottling plant with a rail unloading facility at Hathua in Gopalganj worth around ₹ 340 crore. He also laid the foundation stone of projects worth over ₹1,170 crore and inaugurated multiple projects worth over ₹ 5,030 crore in the power sector in Bihar under the revamped distribution sector scheme.

Modi distributed benefits of around ₹ 930 crore under the community investment fund to over 2 lakh SHGs from Bihar under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY- NRLM), handed over sanction letters to 15 lakh new beneficiaries of PMAY-Gramin and released instalments to 10 lakh PMAY-G beneficiaries from across the country. Apart from these, the prime minister presented the Special Category National Panchayat Awards 2025, which include the Climate Action Special Panchayat Award, Atma Nirbhar Panchayat Special Award, and Panchayat Kshamta Nirman SarvottamSansthanPuraskar. (PTI)

Assam Cong MP, family to

Pakistan for three years even when she was working in Delhi". "We have statements to prove this," he added.

The chief minister said the MP had also undertaken a trip to Nepal during the same time.

Noting that Pakistani spy agency ISI was "very active" in Nepal during that period, Sarma added: "The MP had no public engagement. It was a clandestine visit. We will try to join the dots and see if the two visits were connected."

He said the MP and his family members will be called in for their version by the SIT in June-July, with the final report to be submitted before September. "Assam Police will carry out the investigation as far as it can. If needed, central agencies will take it forward after that," Sarma added. (PTI)

All-party meet: Leaders demand

Nirmala Sitharaman and Parliamentary affairs minister Kiren Rijiju were present from the government's side.

Leader of the House in Rajya Sabha J P Nadda, leader of opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge and leader of opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi were present at the meeting chaired by Singh.

Those who attended the meeting included NCP-SP's Supriya Lave, NCP's Praful Patel, AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi, BJD's Sasmit Patra, TDP's Lavu Sri Krishna Devavarayalu, Shiv Sena's Shrikant Shinde, AAP's Sanjay Singh, TMC's Sudip Bandopadhyay, RJD's Premchand Gupta, DMK's T Siva and SP's Ram Gopal Yadav.

The all-party meeting comes a day after the government announced a host of measures targeting Pakistan in the aftermath of Tuesday's Pahalgalam terror attack.

The decision to call the all-party meeting was taken on Wednesday, with Singh and Shah reaching out to various parties.

It has been a convention to call an all-party meeting following an incident with serious repercussions related to national security, as was seen after the Pulwama terror attack in 2019 or during the India-China standoff in 2020.

It helps present a picture of national unity in moments of crisis and allows opposition leaders to convey their views to the government and be briefed in detail on the official position.

Targeting Pakistan following the Pahalgalam attack, India on Wednesday downgraded diplomatic ties with it and announced a raft of measures, including expulsion of Pakistani military attaches, suspension of the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 and immediate shutting down of the Attari land-transit post. The decisions were taken at a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. (PTI)

Pabitra Margherita campaigns for BJP-AGP alliance in Demow

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, April 24: As the Panchayat elections draw closer, political activity has intensified in the 95 No. Demow Constituency, with parties stepping up their campaigns.

Union Minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles, Pabitra Margherita, visited the constituency on April 23 to campaign in support of the BJP-AGP alliance candidates.

Margherita, accompanied by Sushanta Borgohain, MLA of the 95 No. Demow Constituency, addressed multiple campaign meetings across the Nita Panidehing Mandal on the same day.

The meetings were attended by local party office bearers, booth presidents, and grassroots workers.

During the gatherings, a moment of silence was observed to honour the victims of the recent terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir.

The leaders also offered prayers for the victims and their families, expressing solidarity in the face of the tragedy.

The visit marked a significant push by the BJP-AGP alliance in the region, as both leaders urged workers to unite for the upcoming polls and mobilise support at the grassroots level.

Budget session of BTCLA concludes

House passes ₹ 843 crore budget for fiscal year 2025-2026

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 24: The two-day Budget Session of the Bodoland Territorial Council Legislative Assembly (BTCLA) concluded on Thursday with the House approving a ₹843 crore budget for the financial year 2025-26.

The session was chaired by Speaker Katiram Boro and marked the final budget presentation of the current council government.

The budget, presented by Chief Executive Member (CEM) and Finance In-charge Pramod Boro on Wednesday, was passed following a general discussion in the House.

The financial outlay focuses on development and welfare under the "Vibrant BTR Mission: Sangharsh to Nirman," a people-centric initiative aimed at sustainable growth, social harmony, and strengthening the Bodoland model of peace.

According to the official statement, the Transformation and Development Department received the highest allocation at ₹126.27 crore, followed by the Education Department with ₹105.05 crore, and the Health Department with ₹47.74 crore.

The Lottery Department was allotted the least—just ₹1 lakh—while Excise and Legal Metrology received ₹15 lakh and ₹35 lakh respectively.

The budget incorporates grants under the State-Owned Priority Development (SOPD) scheme and the



council's own revenue estimates, adhering to norms set by the Principal Accountant General of Assam.

Boro emphasized that the financial plan was rooted in transparency, accountability, and sectoral allocations provided by the Transformation and Development Department.

CEM Boro also announced several new initiatives, including the establishment of a Bodoland Community Welfare Department to promote local language, literature, and culture; a Bodoland Community Museum in Chirang; and the Bodoland International School of Peace and Happiness in Tamulpur.

He stated that the budget reflected

the aspirations of all 26 recognized communities in the region and was designed to ensure inclusive and equitable development.

Describing the document as a "people's budget," Boro said it prioritises child and women development, need-based asset creation, and technology-driven governance.

The council's vision document, involving contributions from all local communities, aims to enhance cultural and socio-economic upliftment in the region.

Members of the ruling United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) hailed the budget as inclusive and forward-looking. Executive Member Wilson

Hasda praised CEM Boro's approach, calling it a mission to unify communities and ensure justice.

However, opposition leader Derhasat Basumatary critiqued the budget for offering only a 5% increase over last year's ₹803 crore and noted the council still receives less than its expected 12.19% share of state funds based on population. He also expressed concern over reduced material and maintenance allocations for departments.

BTR Executive Member Gautam Das described the budget as a "people's hope document," focusing on human resource development across all communities.

Meanwhile, a motion raised by EM Daobaisa Boro questioned the long-term absence of former BTC Chief and Debagaoon MCLA Hagrama Mohilary from Assembly sessions.

In response, Speaker Katiram Boro said Mohilary remains the elected MCLA for Debagaoon and appropriate action would be taken according to Assembly rules.

The session concluded with widespread participation from BTCLA members, all emphasising inclusive growth, social cohesion, and development-oriented governance.

The ruling UPPL leadership described the budget as a blueprint for peace and prosperity, reinforcing their commitment to transforming the Bodoland region.

Abdul Noor accused in Jorhat murder case shot in leg

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 24: Abdul Noor alias Riju, one of the 10 persons arrested in connection with the youth murder case on April 20 night was shot at on his left leg on late Wednesday night by police personnel when he reportedly tried to flee from police custody.

The group which included Abdul Noor assaulted Bedanga Bhushan Baruah, a youth at Chandan Nagar locality who later succumbed to his injuries, in hospital.

It may be mentioned that Noor along with Ramjan Khan, another accused in the case was remanded to four-day police custody, while eight other accused were sent to judicial custody by a court here before which they were produced on Wednesday.

Jorhat Superintendent of Police Shwetank Mishra told newsmen at his office chamber on Thursday that Noor was taken to Cinnamara Tea Estate here to recover a sharp weapon reportedly used by the accused (Noor) during the attack on Bedanga when he tried to run away by pushing a constable.

Thereafter, police fired a shot at Noor which hit him on his left leg and he was brought to Jorhat Medical College and Hospital, and is undergoing treatment.

Stating that the investigation

of the case was on, Mishra said that CCTV footage of the incident spot showed that a group of youths had an altercation with Bedanga which led to the attack on him.

It may be mentioned here that Bedanga was reportedly attacked by the group when he was returning home from a Bihu function in the area as he earlier reportedly had asked the youths not to create nuisance near the venue of the programme.

The other eight accused were: Pranab Gowala, Rohit Rajput, Ashwajit Barua, Babu Ali, Debajit Barua, Bikash Chetry, Mon Barua and Abdul Rahim.

All the accused have been booked under Sections 126 (2), 118 (2), 109 (1), 3 (5) and 103 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) in the Jorhat Police Station case number: 202/2025.

Meanwhile, a delegation of Asom Sena and AASU led by Sena chief convenor and Jorhat district unit AASU president and general secretary Pritom Jyoti Saikia and Riyaz Hussain respectively, met the Jorhat District Commissioner Jay Shivani and submitted a memorandum seeking a high-level probe into the incident and bring the culprits involved in the case to justice and be given exemplary punishment.

TADCDC demands SIT probe into mysterious disappearance Prasanna Turung and his wife

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, April 24: In a powerful call for justice, the Tirap Autonomous District Council Demand Committee has reignited the unresolved case of revered tribal leader, Prasanna Turung and his wife Komai Turung, who vanished without a trace from their home located in APO Colony, Margherita on the night hours of April 8 2007.

Eighteen years later, the committee is demanding the formation of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to uncover the truth behind this haunting mystery.

Addressing Prime Minister of India, Union Home Minister, Assam Chief Minister and Assam Police DGP Tirap Autonomous District Council Demand Committee General Secretary and spokesperson Pallab Shyam Wailung passionately urged for renewed action as Prasanna Turung, a charismatic leader from the 83rd Margherita Constituency, was a beacon of hope for tribal communities galvanizing students, leaders and locals through his leadership in the Tirap Tribal Belt area.

Prasanna Turung fearless activism against the illegal occupation of land in the Tirap Tribal Belt made him a towering figure, but it also stirred tensions as suspicious have long swirled around the then-Congress

government, particularly former Margherita Congress party 4 times MLA, influential Cabinet Minister of Upper Assam and present Nagaon MP Pradyut Bordoloi as we doubt Prasanna Turung rising influence and protests against land encroachments may have Pradyut Bordoloi played a role in his disappearance said Pallab Shyam Wailung.

Despite a CBI investigation launched in 2007, the case hit a dead end culminating in a closure report in 2009 due to insufficient evidence, yet the Tirap Autonomous District Council Demand Committee refuses to let the case fade into oblivion as with renewed hope in the current BJP led government both at the Union and State as the committee is pressing for justice, determined to bring closure to the Turung family and the tribal communities of Margherita constituency who still revere Prasanna Turung legacy said Wailung.

"This is not just about one leader it's about the voice of our people," said Pallab Shyam Wailung, vowing to keep the fight alive until the truth emerges and the demand for an Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe marks a bold step toward unraveling one of Assam most enduring mysteries disappearance as the Tirap Autonomous District Council Demand Committee rallies for accountability and justice.

Congress national team visits Morigaon jail to stand in solidarity with Reetam Singh

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 24: In a strong display of solidarity and unwavering commitment to democratic values, senior leaders of the Indian National Congress today visited Reetam Singh, the state spokesperson of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, who has been jailed in Morigaon by the state government.

The delegation comprised of Charan Singh Sapra, National Spokesperson of the Indian National Congress and Head of the media coordinating team for the Assam Assembly Elections, Nighat Abbass, National spokesperson AICC, and Harshad Sarma, National spokesperson AICC.

The leaders met Reetam Singh at Morigaon Jail on Thursday and extended him and his family the full legal and moral support of the Congress party.



Following the visit, the Congress national team addressed a press conference at Nagaon Rajiv Bhavan and alleged that such politically motivated persecution is a stark reminder of the BJP's growing intolerance and its blatant abuse of state power to crush democratic opposition.

The Congress party stands firm against such authoritarianism. The AICC team categorically

condemned the actions of the Assam government and assured Reetam Singh that his courage in speaking truth to power will not go unacknowledged.

The team also conveyed that the matter will be urgently escalated to senior leadership within the AICC, and appropriate legal redressal mechanisms are being pursued.

"No Congress worker will ever be abandoned or silenced for

standing up against injustice," said Charan Singh Sapra.

"The morale of our cadre will not be allowed to waver. If BJP believes it can intimidate the Congress family through vendetta politics, they are gravely mistaken," he added.

It's also informed that the national team has directed the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee to remain in constant contact with Reetam Singh and his family, and to ensure that they receive every form of support, legal, emotional, and logistical necessary during this time. The Indian National Congress reiterates its unshakable belief in democratic principles, civil liberties, and the constitutional right to free speech.

The arrest of a young political voice for voicing criticism is not just an attack on the Congress party, but it is an attack on India's democracy, they further alleged.

Renowned Tezpur gynecologist Dr Anil Dutta passes away at 71



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 24: Dr. Anil Dutta, a prominent physician and widely respected gynecologist from Tezpur, passed away on Wednesday morning (April 23) at a private hospital in Gurgaon, New Delhi.

He was 71. A resident of the Dhanu Nagar-Gopinath Bordoloi Nagar area, Dr. Dutta had been battling a prolonged illness and was undergoing treatment in Delhi in recent days.

His mortal remains arrived in Tezpur this morning.

As news of his passing spread, members of the Indian Medical Association (IMA), along with numerous colleagues and well-wishers from the medical fraternity, visited his residence to pay their last respects to the departed soul.

Born on January 13, 1954, in Harisinga, Dr. Dutta began his education at No-2 Khasia Gaon Primary School.

He pursued his Pre-University studies at Arya Vidyapeeth College in Guwahati, before enrolling at Guwahati Medical College in 1972. He earned his MBBS degree in 1977 and later completed his MD in Gynecology.

Dr. Dutta initially served at Dholpur Government Hospital and joined the Assam government health services in 1986.

He settled in Tezpur in 1990, where he served in various capacities as a dedicated medical officer. Known for his compassionate care and commitment to the profession, he was closely associated with the Tezpur chapter of the Indian Medical Association and the IMA Academy of Medical Specialties.

His passing has left a deep void in the medical community and among the many patients whose lives he touched.

The loss of Dr. Dutta is being widely mourned across the region.

Unseasonal rainfall triggers severe waterlogging in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, April 24: Heavy overnight rainfall left several parts of Dibrugarh submerged on Thursday morning, once again exposing the city's fragile drainage system.

The downpour, which began late Wednesday night, caused significant waterlogging across key areas, including Mancotta Road, Vivekananda Kendriya Vidyalaya Road, Jail Road (Khalihamari), Ganga Para, and P.N. Road.

Mancotta Road, one of the busiest thoroughfares in the city, was among the worst-hit.

A 300-metre stretch just before the newly constructed flyover from the Chowkidinghee side resembled a rivulet, with water levels reportedly reaching knee height.

Residents expressed frustration over the recurring issue, blaming poor drainage maintenance and rampant garbage dumping for the situation.

"The drainage system in Dibrugarh is in a terrible state. Most of the drains are clogged with garbage and plastic bottles, preventing proper water flow," a local resident said.

In response to the flooding, Dibrugarh Municipal Corporation (DMC) officials, including Mayor Saikat Patra, Deputy Mayor Ujjal Phukon, and Executive Officer Navas Das, conducted site inspections in the worst-affected zones.

"We are taking swift measures to address the wa-



terlogging issue. Emergency teams have been deployed across different zones to clear blocked drains and pump out stagnant water. We are working on both immediate relief and long-term infrastructure solutions," Mayor Patra assured.

However, concerns remain high among residents, with many fearing worse conditions during the peak monsoon months.

"If this is the situation in April, what will happen in June and July? Some of the drains were poorly constructed without proper engineering," said Mantu Sharma, a local resident.

With unseasonal rainfall becoming more frequent, citizens are urging the municipal authorities to expedite sustainable drainage upgrades and improve waste management across the city.

Success Career Expo 2025 empowers youth in Kokrajhar with opportunities and insights

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 24: Kokrajhar, known as the 'City of Peace', played host to a vibrant congregation of aspirations and opportunities as the Success Career Expo 2025 concluded with resounding success at Panchsagar Bhawan on Thursday.

Organised by Grove Consultancy, the event attracted over 1,200 students, job seekers, and professionals from across Assam and neighboring states.

Featuring participation from more than 35 reputed educational institutions and industry experts, the expo offered a dynamic platform for career exploration, skill development, and real-time networking.

"This expo is a step forward in bridging the gap between talent and opportunity," said Wilson Hasda, Executive Member of the Bodoland Territorial Council, "Kokrajhar has tremendous potential, and events like this unlock

doors for our youth." Key highlights included dedicated career counseling zones led by industry experts, and engaging panel discussions focused on emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, green energy, and digital marketing.

"Our aim is to make career guidance and job access inclusive," said representatives from Grove Consultancy—Rajiv Thakur, Bikash Sah, Rahul Prasad, Dr. Neeta Khawas, Ritika Gurung, Nilu Singh, Susmita Mondal, and Nandita Paul—in a joint statement.

"The feedback has been overwhelming, and we're already planning a bigger and better edition in 2026," the statement noted.

The Success Career Expo 2025 not only empowered participants with knowledge and connections but also reinforced Kokrajhar's role as a rising hub of youth engagement and educational innovation.

NFR sets up Bacteria Inoculum Plant at Kamakhya to boost train toilet hygiene

The Kamakhya facility is a critical component in strengthening onboard sanitation systems, directly contributing to the Swachh Trains and Swachh Bharat missions

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 24: In a move to enhance hygiene and sanitation standards across its network, the North Frontier Railway (NFR) has established a Bacteria Inoculum Generation Plant and Testing Laboratory at the Kamakhya Coaching Depot.

This development, part of NFR's broader cleanliness and eco-friendly initiatives, marks a first for any Indian Railways zone to integrate both production and quality testing of bio-toilet inoculums at a single facility.

According to an official statement, the facility is equipped with a daily production capacity of 2,000 litres of Anaerobic Microbial Inoculums (AMI), a bacterial solution used to decompose human waste in train bio-toilets.

The in-house production has sig-



nificantly reduced costs and improved supply reliability, while the adjoining lab ensures weekly quality checks in line with Defence Research and Development

Organisation (DRDO) standards.

In March 2025 alone, NFR produced and distributed 35,000 litres of AMI to various depots across the zone, enhancing the perform-

ance and upkeep of bio-toilets on-board trains.

The initiative is part of a comprehensive approach adopted by NFR to maintain high cleanliness standards and ensure a comfortable travel experience.

Other measures include On-board Housekeeping Services (OBHS), mechanized cleaning at stations and depots, and the wide-spread use of bio-toilets.

"The Kamakhya facility is a critical component in strengthening onboard sanitation systems, directly contributing to the Swachh Trains and Swachh Bharat missions," the statement noted.

With this latest initiative, NFR aims to set new benchmarks in railway hygiene, reinforcing its commitment to safe, sustainable, and passenger-centric services, the statement concluded.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

What is a soul? It's like electricity - we don't really know what it is, but it's a force that can light a room
-Ray Charles

Akhilesh's INDIA bloc stand

Samajwadi Party national president and former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav's announcement in Prayagraj that his party will contest 2027 assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh under INDIA alliance has boosted the morale of his PDA (pichda, dalit and alpsangkhyak) core programme and the cadres of both the SP and the Congress. Much significance is attached to the confidence of Akhilesh Yadav that he asserted that PDA will defeat BJP from power in UP. It was only on the combined strength of INDIA bloc which fought 2024 Lok Sabha polls in UP Samajwadi Party succeeded by securing 37 seats and emerged as third largest group in Lok Sabha after BJP and Congress. It was only due to the perception that Rahul Gandhi was fighting against BJP and the manner in which he along with Akhilesh we're able to convince the dalit voters to protect the Constitution, the Congress also gained the vote share and number of seats in Lok Sabha. Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi are under tremendous pressure from backwards, dalits and minorities to stay together to fight against BJP. For the first time under the guidance of Rahul Gandhi, the selection of district and city presidents was done while giving major share to OBC, dalits and minorities. It was idea of Rahul Gandhi that during oath taking ceremony of district and city presidents, all Congress minded people who had been earlier ignored we're called which infused confidence in them to work for the party.

Deepa Kaul, cousin of Indira Gandhi said that there was a huge crowd in her own district Ghaziabad when new president took over as all Congress minded persons were traced and called for the event. Rahul Gandhi interacted with newly appointed district and city presidents and said they would play important role in the selection of candidates for Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha. This action will certainly strengthen the party at the grass-roots. The manner in which Akhilesh Yadav defended dalit party MP Ramji Lal Suman who is being continuously under attack from BJP and Karni Sena which gheraoed his Agra residence, has boosted the moral of PDA. Akhilesh Yadav not only defended his party MP inside the Parliament but staged demonstration outside which was joined by other MPs also.

In order to express his solidarity with party MP Samajwadi Party national president Akhilesh Yadav visited the residence of Ramji Lal Suman and said that Karni Sena was nothing but BJP workers who had attacked a dalit MP. There is a realisation in backwards, dalits and minorities that only combined strength of INDIA alliance can defeat the Saffron brigade or it would be very difficult the elections. That is why it is all the more important for Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav to stay together for their own survival and remain relevant to win the state.

Pahalgam attack – A dark day for humanity

The picturesque town of Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir, once known for its breathtaking natural beauty and as a symbol of harmony nestled in the Himalayas, was transformed into a theatre of bloodshed and terror on April 22, 2025. What was supposed to be a peaceful and rejuvenating spring day turned into a horrifying nightmare for dozens of innocent tourists and locals alike. The attack that unfolded in the serene Baisaran Valley stands not just as a violent act of terrorism, but as a brutal reminder of the darkness that human beings are capable of descending into. The shockwaves of this tragedy have not only devastated families and communities, but have also reverberated across the conscience of a nation still struggling to reconcile its dreams of peace with the persistent shadow of extremism.

In the early hours of that afternoon, as the valley buzzed with the usual enthusiasm of tourists riding ponies, clicking photos, and breathing in the mountain air, a group of heavily armed militants stormed the area. Disguised in paramilitary uniforms and armed with automatic rifles, the attackers opened fire indiscriminately on the unsuspecting crowd. Within minutes, what had been a scene of innocent joy was transformed into one of unimaginable horror. Bodies lay strewn across the meadows, children cried out for their parents, and the lush green fields were stained with blood. At least 28 people lost their lives, including women and children, and more than 20 were critically injured in what is now being described as one of the deadliest terror attacks in the region since the 2008 Mumbai carnage.

Among the dead were Indian tourists from various states, Nepali citizens, and even visitors from the United Arab Emirates who had come to experience the famed beauty of Kashmir. The sheer randomness of the violence, the cold-blooded manner in which it was executed, and the deliberate targeting of civilians have shaken the very core of human decency. Eyewitnesses recounted scenes that seemed too horrific to believe. Tourists were asked to recite Islamic verses by the gunmen, and those who could not were shot on the spot. One brave soul, a local pony handler named Syed Adil Hussain Shah, attempted to intervene and save a family. His resistance cost him his life, but in that moment, he symbolized the undying spirit of human courage in the face of evil.

The attack was later claimed by The Resistance Front (TRF), a shadow out-

fit with known affiliations to the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba. Intelligence agencies identified a senior commander named Saifullah Kasuri, also known as Khalid, as the mastermind behind the operation. The militants, in a chilling display of premeditated cruelty, wore helmet-mounted cameras to record their gruesome acts, a move widely interpreted as a tactic for propaganda and psychological warfare. Security officials later released sketches of the three main perpetrators, and manhunters have been launched in nearby forested areas. However, the damage had already been done – not just physically, but emotionally and psychologically for the victims and the nation.

The Indian government responded with firmness and solemn resolve. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was on an official trip to Saudi Arabia at the time, immediately curtailed his visit and returned to the country to oversee the response. Union Home Minister Amit Shah flew to Srinagar to pay his respects and review the security situation. The Jammu and Kashmir government announced a compensation package for the victims: ten lakh rupees to the families of the deceased, two lakh for the critically injured, and one lakh for those with minor injuries.

The words of consolation from the government, though heartfelt, could barely soothe the pain of those who had lost loved ones to the senseless carnage.

As the nation mourned, security forces intensified combing operations in the region. In a decisive move, the government is now considering permanent deployment of armed forces in sensitive tourist locations to ensure the safety of civilians and prevent future tragedies. This renewed focus on ground-level security comes after several intelligence warnings, which, though noted, were insufficient to prevent the attack. The Baisaran Valley, which draws thousands of tourists each year and contributes significantly to the local economy, now lies under a somber shadow. Businesses that thrived on tourism – from local guides to hotel owners and handicraft sellers – are staring at an uncertain future.

The attack has had a crippling effect on Kashmir's tourism industry, which had shown remarkable growth in recent years. In 2024 alone, over three million tourists visited the valley, encouraged by improved infrastructure and a sense of returning normalcy. The attack has shattered that illusion.

The Indian government responded with firmness and solemn resolve. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was on an official trip to Saudi Arabia at the time, immediately curtailed his visit and returned to the country to oversee the response. Union Home Minister Amit Shah flew to Srinagar to pay his respects and review the security situation.

Travel agencies report massive cancellations, airlines have added extra flights to evacuate stranded tourists, and local hotels have seen a near-total wipeout of bookings. The psychological impact on the local population, particularly those who depend on tourism for their livelihoods, is devastating. For many Kashmiris, the attack has not only brought grief but a sense of betrayal – that their peaceful land was once again hijacked by forces of destruction and hatred.

Across India, there has been an outpouring of grief and anger. Vigils were held in cities from Delhi to Chennai, and social media was flooded with messages of solidarity and condemnation. Internationally, the incident drew sharp criticism and condolences. Nations including the United States, United Kingdom, France, and Russia expressed their support to India and their commitment to standing against terrorism. Notably, even the Taliban – long known for their own extremism – condemned the attack, a rare gesture that underscores the gravity of what transpired in Pahalgam.

This tragedy also reignites the discourse around cross-border terrorism and the need for an uncompromising global stand against extremism. India has once again urged the international community to take tangible steps against state sponsors of terrorism, pointing fingers at Pakistan for harboring and aiding groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba. While diplomatic channels continue to operate, the ground reality in conflict-prone zones like Kashmir demands more than words – it requires

action, coordination, and a moral commitment to protect the innocent.

Yet, in the midst of this darkness, stories of courage and compassion have emerged. Local Kashmiris, including Muslim residents, opened their homes to injured tourists, offered help to distraught families, and coordinated with authorities to transport the wounded to hospitals. Many have spoken out against the attackers, asserting that their actions do not represent the values of Islam or the culture of Kashmir. These voices are essential, for they reaffirm the unity and humanity that terrorism seeks to destroy.

The Pahalgam attack, therefore, is not just an act of terror – it is a symbol of a deeper ideological battle being waged in the subcontinent and beyond. It pits humanity against barbarism, peace against violence, and hope against despair. In remembering the victims, we must also renew our collective vow to stand firm against terror in all its forms. The lives lost in Pahalgam must not become mere statistics. They must become a rallying cry for stronger laws, better intelligence coordination, deeper societal engagement, and unwavering solidarity against hate.

As the families of the dead light candles in memory of their loved ones, and as the injured struggle to recover, and as the valley of Pahalgam mourns, India and the world must look within. What kind of society allows such atrocities to take place? What kind of world tolerates ideologies that glorify mass murder? And what kind of future can we build if we fail to protect the sanctity of life? These are not rhetorical questions – they are moral imperatives.

In the weeks and months to come, investigations will continue, arrests will be made, and memorials will be held. But the most enduring response to this tragedy must be the refusal to be cowed by fear, and the determination to uphold the values that such attacks seek to demolish. Pahalgam must not be remembered as merely a site of bloodshed, but as a turning point in our collective resistance to terror.

Let the memory of those who perished in Pahalgam guide us toward building a more just, humane, and peaceful world. Let their stories remind us that even in the darkest of times, the human spirit has the power to shine through. And above all, let us ensure that this dark day for humanity strengthens our resolve never to let hate win. *(The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*

Trump's tariffs trigger market mayhem

By: Satyabrata Borah

It's been a wild ride for the stock market in April 2025, and if you've been watching your portfolio, you've probably felt your stomach drop a few times. The markets have been swinging like a pendulum, driven by President Donald Trump's bold and controversial tariff policies. These tariffs, aimed at shaking up global trade and boosting American manufacturing, have instead unleashed chaos, with stocks plunging, rebounding, and then tumbling again. The S&P 500 has slid over 9% since early April, the Nasdaq's down nearly 10%, and the Dow's taken a 9.6% hit. It's the kind of volatility that keeps investors up at night, and there's no simple explanation for what's happening. Let's unpack the story behind these crazy market moves, what they mean for the economy, and why everyone's so on edge.

The trouble started on April 2, when Trump rolled out what he called "reciprocal" tariffs, slapping a 10% tax on nearly all imports to the U.S., with steeper rates for certain countries—34% on China, 20% on the EU, 24% on Japan, and 32% on Taiwan. He framed it as a way to level the playing field, calling it "Liberation Day" for American workers. But the markets didn't see it that way. The next day, April 3, was a bloodbath: the Dow cratered 1,679 points, nearly 4%, while the S&P 500 fell 4.84% and the Nasdaq tanked 5.97%. These were the worst single-day drops since the early pandemic days of 2020. By April 4, the Nasdaq was officially in a bear market, down 20% from its recent high, and the S&P 500 wasn't far behind, off 17% from its February peak.

Why the panic? These tariffs didn't just tweak trade—they threatened to spark a global trade war. Other countries hit back hard. China jacked up tariffs on U.S. goods to 84%, way up from their initial 34% response. The EU slapped 25% tariffs on €21 billion of American exports, targeting things like farm products from states that lean Republican. Investors started picturing a world of snarled supply chains, pricier goods, and slower growth. Big banks like JPMorgan didn't help calm nerves, estimating that these tariffs could push consumer prices up 2% and act like a \$660 billion tax on Americans—basically the biggest tax hike in decades. Goldman Sachs upped its recession odds to



35% from 20%, warning that companies might get squeezed or pass costs to shoppers, either way hurting the economy.

What made things even messier was Trump's unpredictable approach. Just when it seemed like the markets couldn't take any more, on April 9, he threw everyone a curveball. After two brutal days that wiped \$5.06 trillion off the S&P 500, he announced a 90-day pause on tariffs for most countries—except China, where he cranked tariffs to a jaw-dropping 125%. The markets went wild with relief. The S&P 500 skyrocketed 9.5% that day, its biggest gain since 2008, and the Nasdaq leapt 12.2%, its second-best day ever. The Dow surged nearly 3,000 points, up 7.9%. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent called it a strategic move to strengthen Trump's hand in trade talks, but the joy didn't last. By April 10, stocks were sliding again—the Dow fell 1,014 points, and the S&P 500 dropped 3.46%. Investors were rattled, unsure what Trump might do next or how this trade saga would end.

You could feel the tension in the numbers. The VIX, Wall Street's "fear gauge," shot up to 60 on April 7, a level we hadn't seen in months, and it stayed high, hovering around 30 by mid-April. Compare that to its April 3 peak of 27 or the insane intraday spike above 50 on April 7, and you get a sense of how freaked out traders were. People on X were buzzing about it, with some, like @markminervini, comparing the "Trump Tariff Tantrum" to epic market meltdowns like 1987's Black Monday or the 2015 China

currency crisis. They pointed out how the VIX's 23.8-point leap over two days was a rare kind of chaos, fueled by thin trading volumes and algorithms jumping on every headline.

This wasn't just a U.S. problem—it ruffled worldwide. Europe's STOXX 600 index plunged 5.12% on April 4, and Japan's Nikkei 225 fell 2.75%. The U.S. dollar, which usually climbs when markets get shaky, did the opposite, dropping to 101.41 on April 3, down 2.2% in a single session. That was a big shift from its January high above 110. Investors piled into safer bets like the yen and government bonds, pushing the 10-year Treasury yield below 4%. It was such an odd mix—a falling dollar and crashing stocks—that former Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers took to X, warning that global markets were starting to treat the U.S. like a shaky emerging market, not the world's financial rock.

Some companies got hit harder than others. Tech giants like Apple, Amazon, and Meta—part of the "Magnificent Seven"—saw their stocks hammered, with losses ranging from 2.3% to 7.3% on April 10 alone. Firms tied to global supply chains, like Nike, took a beating, with Nike's stock down 14% on April 3. Apple and Amazon each shed 9% that day, and even Meta, which isn't big on hardware, got dragged down as investors worried Chinese firms might cut ad spending. Smaller companies weren't spared either. The Russell 2000, which tracks small-cap stocks, fell into a bear market, dropping 6.5% on April 3. Retailers like Victoria's Secret and Urban Outfitters led the losses, while farm companies like Archer Daniels Midland and Mosaic saw shares slide about 10% as soybean, cattle, and hog prices tanked under China's counter-tariffs.

But it's not all doom and gloom. Some experts see a silver lining for patient investors. Kristian Kerr from LPL Financial said the 90-day pause took some of the edge off, giving companies a chance to negotiate better tariff terms. Gina Bolvin of Bolvin Wealth Management urged people to keep their eyes on the long game, noting that panic selling often creates bargains. History backs her up: since 1945, the S&P 500 has bounced back from corrections—drops of 10–19.9%—in about four months on average, and from bear markets, those 20%+ plunges, in roughly 23 months.

Trading volumes hit all-time highs on April 4 and 7, a sign that fear was driving sales, which could mean some stocks are now undervalued. James Demmert from Main Street Research pointed out that certain stocks are trading at just 15 times future earnings, a steal compared to historical norms, suggesting a rebound could be coming if the tariff storm calms.

Still, there's plenty to worry about. The tariff pause runs out in July 2025, and if trade tensions flare up again, we could be back to square one. Trump's kept the pressure on China with those 125% tariffs, and he's been openly critical of Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, stirring fears about meddling with the Fed's independence. That's got people on X, including Reuters, talking about how Asian stocks and U.S. futures dipped on April 21 as confidence waned. Fed leaders like Chicago's Austan Goolsbee and New York's John Williams have said they need more time to figure out what Trump's policies mean, hinting that rate changes might be on hold, which adds another layer of uncertainty.

This volatility isn't just about numbers—it's reshaping how the world does business. Some Asian companies are now choosing to stay in China rather than move, which is the opposite of what Trump wanted. If prices keep rising, as JPMorgan's Jamie Dimon predicts, everyday Americans could feel the pinch, and consumer confidence, already shaky, might take another hit. Even big names like BlackRock's Larry Fink and hedge fund boss Bill Ackman, who backed Trump's campaign, are sounding alarms. Fink's been hearing from CEOs who think we're already in a recession, and Ackman's worried about where this all leads.

So, here we are, caught in a whirlwind of tariffs, trade wars, and market swings. April 2025 has shown just how fast things can change when policy and politics collide with economics. The 90-day pause bought some breathing room, but with Trump's next move unclear and global tensions simmering, nobody's resting easy. For investors, it's a test of nerves—do you sell in a panic or hold on for a recovery? The answer depends on how much you trust the system to find its footing. One thing's for sure: the months ahead will be a defining moment for the markets, the economy, and the global order.

India allowing USA to raise its share in defence imports at the cost of Russia

By: Anjan Roy

Notwithstanding dooms-day-sayers words, United States is already claiming progress in trade talks with India. A White House press briefing last night has included as much, as US vice President, J.D. Vance, mentioned in his addresses and interactions with Indian officials in the last two days.

The Americans have apparently done their home work in details before coming over to India. They have identified the areas for collaboration and exactly what to work for.

Vice president Vance has pointedly identified areas where India and USA could work together to achieve greater results. He particularly, mentioned that India might remove some of the non-tariff barriers which prevent entry of US products into India. The non-tariff barriers are a major obstacle to freer flow of merchandise trade.

Besides, USA has identified several areas for greater "collaboration" the two countries, including joint defence production, in the energy sector, in high technology, pharmaceuticals and in setting up data centres. These are the future industries for the world and countries are vying with each to establish themselves in these industries.

Vance and the US background papers indicate already the intense research work undertaken to clearly delineate the areas of joint work. These go far beyond only merchandise trade between the two countries and collaboration—the word emphasised by Vance—is the key to future relations.

Vice president Vance was particularly emphatic that India should buy more of US defence products and then "collaborate" in areas of defence production. Vance claimed the US defence products were the "best in the class" and these should help India better its "people and the country". USA is well aware of India's large purchases of defence items from Russia.

In the context of the on-going war in Ukraine, Russia is often not able to maintain its supplies of critical defence items and thus India met serious drawbacks. Diversified defence procurement could help India overcome strategic shortfalls in defence supply chains.

Vance particularly has mentioned Indian purchase of the fifth generation F-35 aircraft which is one of the most lethal weapons of war. Until now, there have been serious restrictions on sale of these F-35s. It looks as though the United States is seeking to push these war planes to India. Indian purchases of aircraft could run into billions of dollars.

Besides, in veiled references to Chinese practices of unfair trade, Vance said that joint collaboration between USA and India could help overcome such restrictive and unfair practices which stall the market entry of genuine players. United States is talking of Indo-

American collaboration in energy industry and exploitation of India ample reserves of natural gas and oil in its offshore areas.

America maintains that technologies were available for a more energy friendly war of growth. Vance pointed out that USA has the capability and willingness to collaborate with India to achieve such energy efficient modes of production. These kind of collaboration would mean a faster growth with less consumption of energy products.

Additionally, United States appears to be willing to work with India in the areas of pharmaceuticals and chemicals. So far, the pharmaceutical products have not been brought under the purview of the reciprocal tariff regime. However, if these are also brought under the reciprocal tariff regime, India could be grievously hurt.

India has a large export of Pharma products to United States. These are mainly from the Indian industry, but produced mainly by converting Chinese basic pharmaceutical inputs—the APIs. Indian Pharma industry could get crippled if the Chinese inputs are restricted to India.

Hence, there is a window of opportunity for India to collaborate with the United States for setting up a base of basic pharmaceutical inputs for the production of drugs. This could usher in a new age for the Indian drugs industry.

In this area at least, India must remain wary. China has warned that any country working in collaboration with USA to thwart Chinese trade and economic activities, would face severe restrictions and sanctions from China.

One possibility could be that China could impose restrictions on supply of critical input materials to Indian industry meant for the American markets which can help USA overcome temporary shortages.

In the current trade dynamics of the world, India is emerging as a key and critical player among rival blocs—US led countries and the China led ones. In between EU is wavering between its traditional ally, USA, and its present predicament with American stance. Hence, India, being aligned to USA, along with its old links with Russia, could become a key banking factor.

India should realise its destiny by grabbing the opportunities it is seeing to establish itself in the most advantageous position for the future. Until now, India had at best some nodding acquaintance with the United States. There are opportunities on the way, which could transform India's position strikingly on a different plane. The first round of talks could be the beginning.

If the current momentum of conversation between the two countries are taken forward, the current trade talks could be widened into a dialogue for greater economic co-operation between the two countries. *(IPA Service)*

From Pahalgam to the LoC: India-Pakistan tensions near breaking point

By: Sushant Sareen

The massacre by Pakistan-linked terrorists of over two dozen Hindu tourists in the Pahalgam area of the Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has plunged the region into a serious crisis, one that could lead to a military conflagration between India and Pakistan. The attack, as appalling and abhorrent as it was, should have been anticipated. Multiple tell-tale signs were hinting that the Pakistan Army-controlled hybrid regime in Pakistan was desperate to do something in Kashmir. The act was to not only pay back India for its alleged and entirely unsubstantiated involvement in the twin insurgencies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan but also to raise the military's stock by rallying people around it, something that is possible only in the event of confrontation with India. Another potential factor was that Pakistan felt terrorism had virtually ceased in J&K, and it was losing control over the situation.

The timing of the attack fits a pattern. A major terror attack has accompanied every high-profile visit of an American dignitary. The United States (US) Vice President JD Vance's visit with his family started making waves in India and globally. Alongside this, Prime Minister (PM) Modi was also travelling to Saudi Arabia for what was being described as a historic visit, which would result in breakthroughs. The aforementioned series of events converged into an ideal moment to attack Kashmir, bring it into the spotlight, and sabotage PM Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia.

A few days before the massacre, Pakistan's de facto ruler Army Chief General Asim Munir had berated the "Two-Nation" theory and called Kashmir the jugular vein of Pakistan which it can never give up, nor forget the Kashmiris fighting (most of the terrorists in J&K are Punjabi Muslims from Pakistan)

against India, clearly indicating that he was going to ramp up support for the Pakistani Islamist Jihadist terror groups and their proxies operating in the UT. Propagandists of the Pakistan Army, including journalists like Najam Sethi, were openly warning on television news programmes that Kashmir was going to heat up. The carnage in Pahalgam, therefore, should not come as a surprise.

Pakistan's response to this massacre is along expected lines and will only add fuel to the fire. Far from being ashamed or contrite about this massacre of civilians by their jihadists and proxies, Pakistan washed its hands of the incident and the Pakistan Army fielded its mouthpieces to try and deflect attention and muddy the waters. The Pakistani response is as per their standard playbook—issue a pro forma condemnation, unleash trolls and politicians to allege that it was a 'false-flag' attack, dare India to take any action warning of massive and disproportionate retaliation, and if they are in a generous mood, offer to cooperate and investigate provided India shares evidence.

The pressure will now rest on the Indian government to respond to this terror attack. That there will be a significant political, diplomatic, economic, and most importantly, a military fallout of this terror attack is a no-brainer. The first casualty will, of course, be the booming tourism in the Kashmir Valley, impacting the lives and livelihoods of thousands of Kashmiris who depend on tourism. But Pakistan does not care for the well-being of Kashmiris and will fight India to the last Kashmiri. There will also be the usual political noise and recriminations within India by the usual suspects—political Opposition parties more interested in blaming the government than in demanding action against the terrorists and their sponsoring country, and the Pakistan lobby in India, including multiple people ranging from former spooks to politicians to journalists and activists.



However, this noise is unlikely to distract the government from what it must do.

The general public's expectation in India involves some kind of military action against terrorist bases and their backers in Pakistan. This is the 'commitment trap' that PM Narendra Modi faces after the Surgical Strikes in 2016 and the Balakot air strikes in 2019. If he does not take action, he will not only lose political support but also undermine the deterrence sought during the earlier strikes. Until and unless India is militarily prepared to climb up the escalation ladder and dominate it, the impact of any military action will be limited. There will be a loss of human life and damage to military, perhaps even civilian, assets. If India doesn't climb up the escalation ladder by retaliating to Pakistan's response, it will mean that Pakistan has established deterrence, not India. This happened after India refused to respond to Pakistan's Operation Swift Retort in 2019.

While the Balakot strikes did convey to Pakistan that India was ready to up the ante, and held Pakistan's hand for a few

years on export of terrorism, Pakistan did manage to establish that it would also retaliate, albeit only as a response and not to go up the escalation ladder. Back then, India should have realised that Pakistan desperately hoped India would not escalate after the tit-for-tat exchanges. The current speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly said at that time that the Pakistani establishment's "legs were shaking and they were sweating profusely" over the possibility of escalation. Later, it transpired that the then Army Chief Qamar Bajwa had told journalists that Pakistan was not prepared for an escalation because its military wherewithal was degraded.

Nonetheless, the same question must be posed to India—Is it prepared to dominate the escalation ladder and continue the military actions until the enemy backs down? Once military action is taken, there would be no guarantee of how it will play out and for how long. Hence the question: Does India have enough stockpiles of artillery, missiles, air munitions, and other equipment, or

will India once again turn to countries like France and Israel for emergency purchases?? If missile salvos have to be fired, then the arsenal must have at least a few thousand, not a handful. Any action based on 'the other side won't escalate beyond a point' is based on a heroic assumption that is utterly untenable and indefensible, not to mention dangerously delusional.

Be that as it may, India's options are that the ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC) can be ended and areas inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) can be pulverised using artillery and rockets. Pakistan will undoubtedly retaliate, but does India have enough bunkers to secure the civilian population and the military personnel, or did it waste the four years of ceasefire basking in the sun? By heating the LoC and putting military pressure all along the international border, India can force Pakistan to divert and commit the bulk of its forces to its eastern front. India can unsettle Pakistan and keep it guessing by making shows of forays across the border to ensure Pakistan doesn't redeploy these troops to its western front, where two insurgencies are already raging. This will put enormous pressure on the Pakistani forces. Chances are they will try to negotiate a deal with Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, conceding to their demands to get some relief from the West. The implications for Pakistan's security will be extremely damaging. Alternatively, Pakistan will be caught in a two-front situation. Additionally, with Sindh heating up over Punjab and Pakistan Army's plans to steal its waters, another front might open up, which can also be exploited by India. To keep Sindh calm, if the military has to back down from its self-enrichment plan to green the desert by desertifying Sindh, it will be a major setback to the Army's prestige and power.

Apart from heating the border, India can target terrorist bases and perhaps Pakistan military establishments using

artillery, air power or missiles. To be sure, Pakistan will respond. India needs to absorb these attacks and go up the escalation ladder. Another prong can be economic. India can unilaterally declare the abrogation of the Indus Waters Treaty. Again, there will be a pushback from the World Bank and other multilateral institutions. Pakistan could try to drag itself into international arbitration. Does India have the diplomatic clout to defy and defeat the forces arrayed against it? Will the Americans and Europeans stand with India or on the fence? How will China respond? Will India convey to China that it is 'either with us or against us' in this fight against Islamic terrorism? And if it is against India, will there be strategic and economic consequences for China? How far is India willing to go?

Another prong yet to be utilised is economic. India is still exporting life-saving drugs to Pakistan. India can also devise a policy wherein any company that does any business in PoK will be blacklisted from doing any business with India. A similar approach can be taken in the domain of sports, in particular cricket. No player in the Pakistan cricket league will be allowed to play in the Indian Premier League (IPL). India will also push for ostracising Pakistan from international cricket and in other sports. Anyone hiring any Pakistani for a film or music production will be penalised.

The Pahalgam massacre is a tipping point. For too long, India has trapped itself in the business of 'threshold of terrorism'—only when the threshold is crossed will India act against the terror sponsors, Pakistan. Worse, this threshold is not yet defined. Is the threshold crossed if five soldiers are killed? Or is it 10, 20, 50? What is the threshold for civilians being murdered by Pakistani terrorists? It is time for India to get over this threshold trap and establish an effective, ruthless, and fearsome deterrence. (Courtesy: ORF)

India bolsters ties with Sri Lanka



By: Parul Chandra

Amid the intensifying India-China battle for influence in Sri Lanka, New Delhi has reason to be satisfied following the recent two-day state visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the island nation during which economic, defence, and energy ties with an important neighbour were shored up. India's strategic interests are intrinsically tied with those of Sri Lanka, hence the need to maintain close and robust bilateral relations with it. New Delhi also sought to convey to the Anura Kumara Dissanayake—led Government the message, yet again, that it can reap greater benefits from India, which is a reliable friend.

The underlying message herein being that China isn't one. It was also conveyed to Colombo once again that protecting India's security interests as well as its own should be of paramount importance. Towards this end, New Delhi also extracted from President Dissanayake an assurance, yet again, that he will keep in mind India's security interests.

To New Delhi's undoubted relief, President Dissanayake reiterated that he will not allow Sri Lankan territory to be used in any manner that will threaten India's security interests. For now, the Dissanayake Government appears to be walking the talk on this account going by news reports that Sri Lanka cancelled a joint naval exercise with India's arch-foe Pakistan, which was to be held in the waters off the strategically located Trincomalee, but not before New Delhi intervened and made its security concerns known, following which the exercise—which was to have been held around the dates PM Modi was to visit the island nation—was scrapped. Given its strategic imperatives in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), it's essential for New Delhi to consolidate its influence in Sri Lanka where India no longer holds sole sway, and to maintain robust ties with the new Government in place there.

In its outreach to the island nation, New Delhi is also seeking to burnish its credentials as a leader of the Global South, projecting itself as a dependable partner for nations facing economic hardship, and who need not fear falling into a debt trap as is often the case when they avail of loans from China.

During the PM's visit, there was also important messaging for Colombo about the perils of hob-nobbing too

closely with Beijing, with PM Modi stating during the visit, "We have shared security interests. The security of both countries is inter-connected and co-dependent." As a maritime neighbour in the Indian Ocean straddling vital sea lanes, New Delhi knows that Chinese expansionism can pose a strategic threat to both India and Sri Lanka.

The spreading tentacles of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Sri Lanka too have given New Delhi sleepless nights. As China's foot-

The spreading tentacles of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Sri Lanka too have given New Delhi sleepless nights. As China's footprints in Sri Lanka increase, New Delhi knows well that it cannot afford to let its guard down vis-à-vis Beijing as the latter builds deep inroads into India's immediate and extended neighbourhood

prints in Sri Lanka increase, New Delhi knows well that it cannot afford to let its guard down vis-à-vis Beijing as the latter builds deep inroads into India's immediate and extended neighbourhood.

This has forced India to redouble its efforts to ramp up its engagement and provide all manner of development assistance to countries in its neighbourhood so that they remain within its sphere of influence. In the case of Sri Lanka, India provided financial assistance totalling \$4.5 billion in 2022 and 2023 to it during its post-pandemic economic meltdown. This played a vital role in helping Sri Lanka obtain an IMF bailout. India's outreach to the Dissanayake Government has also seen it convert \$20.66 million given as lines of credit into grant assistance to reduce Sri Lanka's

debt burden. All this, plus New Delhi's willingness to help Sri Lanka achieve economic stability, is possibly what has helped it forge close ties thus far with the Dissanayake Government. Despite pursuing a policy of 'Neighbourhood First', India's strategic space in the IOR is increasingly shrinking amidst a relentless Chinese onslaught. Though India has coined the new term 'Mahasagar' (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) replacing the earlier coinage of 'Sagar' (Security and Growth for All) for countries in the IOR, containing China's influence remains a challenge. India's efforts don't always bear fruit, especially when China-leaning Governments are in power in the neighbourhood. Besides, the offer of Chinese loans and financial assistance to build infrastructure is too tempting to resist for cash-strapped neighbours of India struggling to execute mega projects.

In the case of Sri Lanka, the Left-leaning Dissanayake has adroitly managed to balance his country's diplomatic ties with the two Asian giants in the six months since he took charge. It also means that the island nation for now is seeking to reap the benefits from the fierce India-China rivalry in Sri Lanka and the wider IOR. So if Dissanayake earlier this year managed to secure the largest-ever FDI (foreign direct investment) of \$3.7 billion for his country from China for a state-of-the-art oil refinery at Hambantota to be built by Sinopec, he's being wooed by India as well in the area of energy security. PM Modi's visit saw the joint launch of the plan to build the Sampur solar power plant.

It will be developed by the Trincomalee Power Company, which is a joint venture between Ceylon Electricity Board and India's NTPC. To boost the island nation's energy security, all the more imperative as it went through a crippling forex crisis post the pandemic—which meant huge fuel shortages—the visit saw a tripartite agreement between India, Sri Lanka, and the UAE to develop Trincomalee as a regional energy hub. India needs to consolidate its foothold in Trincomalee on the island nation's eastern coast and keep China at bay. With its huge natural harbour, Trincomalee is of immense geo-strategic import and has the potential to be developed as a naval base. India is also already jointly redeveloping with Sri Lanka World War II—era strategic oil tank farms in Trincomalee. Apart from Trincomalee, New Delhi is also keeping a close eye on another strategic port, the one in Kankesanthurai, which lies not too far away from the Indian coastline. The port in Sri Lanka's Tamil-dominated northern province is close to the Indian coastline and is being 'rehabilitated' with a \$61.5 million grant assistance from India. Given its vital security stakes in Sri Lanka, a defence cooperation agreement with the island nation, the first between the two countries, inked during the visit would also help India counter Chinese moves in the region.

After all, China's hegemonic ambitions present a real and present danger to India and indeed the entire IOR. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Trump eyes minerals in Pakistan



By: Raji Krishna

Minerals-hungry US President Donald Trump, who is straining to bring the Ukraine-Russia war to an end so that he is able to access the enormous mineral wealth of these two countries, has now cast his eyes on the mineral wealth of Pakistan, which is said to be US\$ 8 trillion in value. But the greatest deterrent to any FDI in mining in Pakistan is the deteriorating security situation with separatist and Islamic militants on the rampage in mineral-rich Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

And if there is a softening of America's attitude to Pakistan as a result of the thirst for minerals, its relations with India might develop strains, as India is an implacable enemy of Pakistan. Currently, India is America's strategic ally in South Asia against China's ambitions in the region. Last week, President Trump sent Eric Meyer, a senior official of the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs in the State Department to Islamabad to attend an "international minerals investment forum" there. In a meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Meyer said US companies were keen to invest in the country's untapped mineral reserves.

Two days prior to that, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio had called Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar to propose cooperation in mineral extraction. According to South Asia expert Michael Kugelman, Rep. Jack Bergman, co-chair of the Congressional Pakistan Caucus, had identified minerals as a "key sector" for partnership with Pakistan. Bergman had also travelled to Islamabad last weekend as part of the first congressional delegation to Pakistan since 2023.

China's recent decision to suspend rare-earth exports gives the US extra reason to explore opportunities in Pakistan, Kugelman points out. But the Chinese are already there in mineral mining in Pakistan. In May 2024, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had invited the Chinese firm, "MCC Tongsin Resources", to invest in Pakistan's mining sector and assured it of maximum facilitation. MCC Tongsin Resources, a research and investment company, is part of the China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC Group), which describes itself as the world's largest and strongest metallurgical construction contractor.

"The company gave a detailed briefing to the prime minister regarding the construction of a mineral park in Pakistan and informed about further investment plans," Sharif's office said in a press release. Ishaq Dar had held several meetings with Chinese business officials and entrepreneurs in China, and invited them to establish "labour-intensive industries" in Pakistan to address the unemployment problem. As Kugelman points out, China has been one of Pakistan's most reliable foreign partners, readily providing financial assistance.

In July 2023, China granted Pakistan a two-year rollover on a US\$ 2.4 billion loan, giving the debt-saddled nation much-needed breathing space. China has invested over US\$ 65 billion in energy and infrastructure projects as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China had stepped in where the US and the West feared to tread because of terrorism and armed insurgencies. Writing in the journal "Resources Policy" Volume 88, January 2024, Naqib Ullah Khan and his co-researchers say that Pakistan has the 2nd largest coal reserves, 2nd largest salt reserves, and 5th largest copper and gold reserves in the world.

It has 92 discovered minerals. Among them, some have been quantified as coal (185 billion tons), copper (7000 million tons), gold (1658 million tons), salt (10 billion tons), silver (620 million tons), lead-zinc (24 million tons), manganese (1.597 million tons), chromium (3 million tons), and iron ore (1450 million tons). Pakistan is recognized for the world's 5th copper-gold reserves at Riko Dik, the world's 2nd largest coal reserves at Thar, and the world's 2nd largest salt reserves at Khewra and Bahdakhel. The world-renowned Tethyan copper belt passes through Balochistan.

The world's total coal potential is estimated at 861 billion tons out of which Pakistan possesses 185 billion tons. But the current contribution of minerals to the national development fund is less than 2%, the authors say. Compared to other mineral-rich developing nations, Pakistan's mineral export's share is only around US\$ 0.5 billion out of the world's total US\$ 401 billion. In his speech at the Minerals Forum in Islamabad, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif ruled out export of raw

minerals and insisted that Pakistan would export only finished products.

Despite the difficulties, several foreign companies signed agreements with Pakistan, including the Canadian firm Barrick Gold, which already owns a 50% stake in the Reko Diq gold mine in south western Balochistan. Pakistan has one of the world's largest copper and gold deposits in Reko Diq. However, security will remain foreign investors' bugbear. Pakistan suffered 521 terrorist attacks in 2024, according to the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS).

More than 95% of the attacks were in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—where, according to official mineral mapping, most of Pakistan's known mineral deposits are located. This trend has continued in 2025. Of the 54 terrorist attacks reported in Pakistan in February, 53 were in those two provinces, the PIPS data shows. The separatist Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is one of Pakistan's most potent violent outfits. The number of attacks perpetrated by the BLA and other banned Baloch insurgent groups increased by 119% in 2023-2024.

Counterterrorism operations, state crackdowns, and large infrastructure projects in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have angered local communities, the Baloch and the Pathans. These communities have been complaining that they have not been the beneficiaries of development. Mineral companies could seek troops from their own countries to protect themselves in Pakistan. The Chinese are said to have thousands of their own troops protecting their projects in Pakistan.

While Pakistanis have accepted Chinese troops, would they accept US troops? Prime Minister Sharif's insistence that foreign investors must refine and process minerals in Pakistan itself is problematic, says Kugelman. Executives from Canada-based Barrick Gold, one of the few foreign mining companies currently operating in Pakistan, have said that there is insufficient cheap and reliable electricity in Pakistan. Electricity charges are indeed unaffordable in Pakistan. "The Wall Street Journal" said in a detailed report some months ago that this was due to the huge loans taken at high interest rates from the Chinese to build the power plants. (Courtesy: The Citizen)

China successfully launches three new astronauts to its space station

BEIJING, April 24: China has successfully launched three astronauts to its space station on Thursday to replace their colleagues manning the station for the past six months.

The Shenzhou-20 crewed spaceship carrying the astronauts blasted off at 5:17 pm (Beijing Time) from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in north-west China.

Minutes after the launch an official in the mission control centre announced that the launch was a "complete success." The launch was telecast live by the state-run CGTN.

The spaceship is carrying three astronauts -- Chen Dong, Chen Zhongrui and Wang Jie.

It will dock with the space station later tonight.

Shenzhou-20 is the 35th flight mission of China's manned space programme, and the fifth crewed mission during the application and development stage of China's space station.

The crew is scheduled to return to the Dongfeng landing site in north China in late October this year.

China rotates a three-member crew manning the space station named Tian-gong every six months.

After the new set of crew members enter the station, the other three are expected to return to earth on April 29.

The crew will conduct new life science experiments involving zebrafish, planarians and streptomycetes, the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA) spokesman Lin Xiqiang told the media on Wednesday.

These experiments will mark China's first space-based investigation into the regeneration of planarians, a new organism introduced to China's space station and known for their extraordinary ability to regrow organs, Lin said.

This project will enhance our understanding of fundamental mechanisms of regeneration at the individual level and could provide insights into human



health issues related to space-induced injuries, Lin said.

The CMSA also said on Wednesday that two Pakistani astronauts will be selected to receive spaceflight training in China to take part in a joint mission to the country's space station.

One of the two Pakistanis will participate as a payload specialist, state-run Xinhua quoted a CMSA spokesperson as saying.

China built its space station after it was reportedly excluded from the International Space Station (ISS) over con-

cerns that China's space programme is manned by its military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

It is currently the only country to have a space station while the ISS is a collaborative project of several countries.

Observers say China's space station may become the only one of its kind in orbit once the ISS retires in the coming years.

The two robotic arms of the station, especially the long one which has the ability to grab objects including satellites from space, drew international concerns.

The launch day coincided with China's 10th Space Day. China had designated April 24 as its Space Day in 2016 to mark the successful launch of its first satellite, Dongfanghong-1 on April 24, 1970.

Separately, the China National Space Administration (CNSA) announced on Thursday that scientists from institu-

tions in France, Germany, Japan, Pakistan, the UK and the US have been granted the opportunity to borrow lunar samples collected by the Chang'e-5 mission for scientific research.

At a ceremony for China's Space Day in Shanghai, the agency announced that seven institutions from six countries have been authorised to borrow the lunar samples, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

In 2020, China's Chang'e-5 mission retrieved samples from the moon weighing about 1,731 grams.

Shan Zhongde, head of the CNSA, said China's lunar exploration programme has always adhered to the principles of equality, mutual benefits, peaceful utilisation and win-win cooperation, sharing achievements with the international community.

By the end of December 2023, CNSA had received 24 applications from 11 countries and international organisations, the report said. (PTT)

Massive Russian strike on Kyiv kills 9 overnight, injures dozens

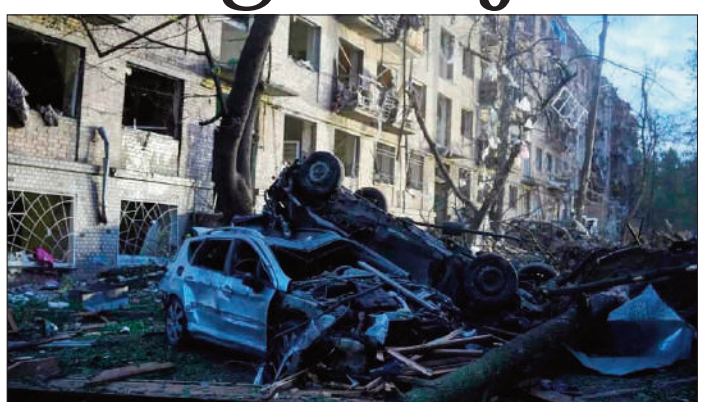
KYIV, April 24: A large-scale Russian missile and drone attack hit Kyiv overnight, killing nine people and injuring another 70, including six children, Ukrainian authorities said Thursday.

The Kyiv City Military Administration said on its Telegram channel that Russia struck Kyiv with drones and ballistic missiles. At least 45 drones were detected, the administration said, adding that Ukraine's Air Force would update the figures later.

The attack came hours after peace negotiations appeared to stall, with President Donald Trump lashing out at Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, saying he was prolonging the "killing field" by pushing back on ceding Crimea to Russia as part of a potential peace plan.

Zelenskyy has said multiple times that recognising occupied territory as Russian is a red line for his country.

At least 42 people were hospitalised in Kyiv, Ukraine's State Emergency Service said. Rescue operations were still underway



early morning Thursday to find bodies under the rubble.

At a Kyiv residential building that was almost entirely destroyed, emergency workers removed rubble with their hands, rescuing a trapped woman who emerged from the wreckage covered in white dust and moaning in pain.

An elderly woman sat against a brick wall, face smeared with blood, her eyes fixed to the ground in shock as medics tended to her wounds.

Fires were reported in several

residential buildings said Tymur Tkachenko, the head of the city military administration.

The attack, which began around 1:00 am, hit at least five neighbourhoods in Kyiv. In Sviatoshynskiy district, a fire broke out in a residential building that was damaged in the attack.

The Associated Press saw rescue teams dig out people trapped under the rubble of the building and dead bodies being taken away.

Oksana Bilozir, a student, suffered a head injury in the attack.

With blood seeping from her bandaged head, she said that she heard a loud explosion after the air alarm blared and began to grab her things to flee to a shelter when another blast caused her home's walls to crumble and the lights to go off.

"I honestly don't even know how this will all end, it's very scary," said Bilozir, referring to the war against Russia's invasion. "I only believe that if we can stop them on the battlefield, then that's it. No diplomacy works here."

More fires were reported in the Shevchenkivskyi and Holosiivskyi districts.

Anastasiia Zhuravlova, 33, a mother of two, was sheltering in a basement after multiple blasts damaged her home. Her family was sleeping when the first explosion shattered their windows and sent kitchen appliances flying in the air. Shards of glass rained down on them as they rushed to take cover in the corridor.

"After that we came to the shelter because it was scary and dangerous at home," she said. (AP)

Zelenskyy says he's cutting short visit to South Africa after Russian attacks on Kyiv

PRETORIA, April 24: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Thursday he will cut short an official visit to South Africa because of a major Russian attack on Kyiv overnight.

Zelenskyy still held a planned meeting with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa at the government's Union Buildings in Pretoria but said on his Telegram page that he would return home after that.

Ramaphosa greeted Zelenskyy on the steps of the Union Buildings and they shook hands and briefly posed for photographs before going inside.

Zelenskyy arrived in South Africa late Wednesday night just as Russia launched a large-scale missile and drone attack on the Ukrainian capital that killed at least nine people and injured more than 70.

Zelenskyy's trip came as US President Donald Trump made new accusations against him, saying he was prolonging the three-year war by pushing back against any plan to give up territory in any peace deal. Zelenskyy has refused to cede illegally occupied Crimea to Russia as part of a potential peace plan.

Trump said that Zelenskyy was prolonging the "killing field" by refusing to give up Crimea.

Peace negotiations have appeared to stall. Talks involving US, European and Ukrainian officials in London on Wednesday were scaled down and made limited progress after US Secretary of State Marco Rubio cancelled his attendance, raising doubts about the direction of negotiations.

Zelenskyy wrote on X before he announced he was changing his plans that the visit to South Africa would contribute to efforts "to bring a just peace closer" and was part of a diplomatic effort to engage members of the Group of 20 developed and developing nations.



South Africa holds the rotating presidency of the G20 this year. Ramaphosa has put himself forward as a possible mediator in the war due to South Africa's ties with Russia through the BRICS bloc of developing nations. Ramaphosa has said he is one of the few leaders that can talk to both sides, although his efforts have produced little concrete progress.

Ramaphosa spoke on a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday and the two leaders had "committed to working together towards a peaceful resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict". Ramaphosa posted on X on Thursday that he had also spoken with Trump over the peace process and "we both agreed that the war should be brought to an end as soon as possible". Ramaphosa said he and Trump had agreed to meet soon, both over the Russia-Ukraine war and South Africa's bilateral relations with the US, which have deteriorated since Trump came into office.

Zelenskyy has questioned Russia's commitment to peace, saying an Easter ceasefire announced by Putin was not genuine and Moscow continued to launch attacks on Ukraine. (AP)

Istanbul residents spend night outdoors after strong earthquake, aftershocks



ISTANBUL, April 24: Many Istanbul residents spent the night outdoors, too fearful to return to their homes, following a strong earthquake and over 180 aftershocks.

The magnitude 6.2 quake tremor that struck on Wednesday deeply impacted the city of 16 million residents, leaving many inhabitants shaken and wary of a possible more destructive tremor.

There were no reports of serious damage but the temblor, the strongest felt in Istanbul in recent years, prompted widespread panic and scores of injuries.

The earthquake had a shallow depth of 10 kilometers (about 6 miles), according to the United States Geological Survey, with its epicentre about 40 kilometers (25 miles) southwest of Istanbul, in the Sea of Marmara. It was felt in several neighbouring provinces.

At least 236 people were treated for injuries they suffered while trying to jump from buildings or for panic attacks. Most of the in-

juries were in Istanbul, where residents remain on edge because the city is considered at high risk for a major quake.

In fear of a stronger earthquake that could demolish homes, residents sought refuge by sleeping in their cars or setting up tents in parks and other open spaces. Many lit camp fires to keep warm after the temperature dipped.

Turkiye is crossed by two major fault lines, and earthquakes are frequent.

For many, the memory of a devastating earthquake that struck 11 southern and south-eastern provinces two years ago, remains vivid.

The 7.8-magnitude earthquake on February 6, 2023, claimed more than 53,000 lives and destroyed or damaged hundreds of thousands of buildings. Another 6,000 people were killed in the northern parts of neighbouring Syria.

The Turkish disaster and emergency management agency, AFAD, said Wednesday's earthquake was followed by 184 aftershocks — seven of them of a magnitude 4 or stronger.

Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change Minister Murat Kurum stated that authorities had received 378 reports of structural damage in various buildings. At least 12 buildings had been evacuated as a precautionary measure, he said.

Only one building — a derelict, long-abandoned structure in the city's historic Fatih district — collapsed. (AP)

S Korean truth commission halts probe into adoption fraud, hundreds of cases in limbo

SEOUL, April 24: The South Korean government's fact-finding commission suspended its groundbreaking investigation into the extensive fraud and abuse that tainted the nation's historic foreign adoption program, a decision stemming from internal disputes among commissioners regarding which cases warranted recognition as problematic.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission confirmed human rights violations in just 56 of the 367 complaints filed by adoptees before suspending its investigation Wednesday night, just one month before its May 26 deadline.

The fate of the remaining 311 cases, either deferred or incompletely reviewed, now hinges on whether lawmakers will establish a new truth commission through legislation during Seoul's next government, which takes office after the presidential by-election on June 3.

After a nearly three-year investigation into adoption cases across Europe, the United States, and Australia, the commission concluded in a March interim report that the government bears responsibility for facilitating a foreign adoption program riddled with fraud and abuse, driven by efforts to cut welfare costs and carried out by private agencies that often manipulated children's backgrounds and origins.

However, some adoptees, and even members of the commission, criticised the cautiously-worded report, arguing that it should have more forcefully established the government's complicity.

Disputes also arose after the commission's nine-member decision-making panel, dominated by conservative-leaning members appointed by recently ousted President Yoon Suk Yeol and his party, voted on March 25 to defer the assessments of 42 adoptee cases, citing insufficient documentation to conclusively prove the adoptions were problematic.

Commission officials haven't disclosed which documents were central to the discussions. However, they suggested that some commissioners were hesitant to recognize cases where adoptees couldn't definitively prove falsification of biological details in their adoption papers, either through meeting their birth parents or verifying information about them.

On Wednesday, the panel resolved the standoff by unanimously agreeing to suspend, rather than completely drop, the investigation into the 42 cases. The approach leaves open the door for the cases to be reconsidered if a future truth commission is established. The panel also agreed to suspend investigations into the remaining 269 cases, citing insufficient time to complete the reviews before the deadline, according to three commission sources who described the discussions to the Associated Press.

No further investigations into adoptions for now

It was unclear if and when another commission will be established. Political attention is now focused on the early presidential election. South Korea's constitutional Court formally removed Yoon from office on April

4, months after the opposition-controlled legislature impeached him over his brief imposition of martial law in December.

The ruling triggered a snap presidential election set for June 3. Park Geon Tae, a senior investigator who led the probe into adoptions, said the truth commission would be unable to produce any further investigation reports on adoptions before the end of its mandate, after the terms of five of the nine commissioners ended following Wednesday's meeting.

This potentially paralyses the decision-making process, which requires the support of at least five members. Most Korean adoptees were registered by agencies as abandoned orphans, even though many had relatives who could have been easily identified or located. This practice has often made it difficult — or even impossible — for them to trace their roots.

The reluctance of some commissioners to accept cases in which adoptees have been unable to find information about their birth parents reflects a lack of understanding of the systemic problems in adoption and contradicts the commission's broader findings, which acknowledged the manipulation of children's origins, said Philsik Shin, a scholar at South Korea's Anyang University.

Shin's analysis of government, law enforcement, and adoption records concludes that more than 90 per cent of Korean children sent to the West between 1980 and 1987, when adoptions peaked, almost certainly had known relatives. (AP)

Canadian Police release images of Gurdwara vandalism suspects

OTTAWA, April 24: The police in Vancouver have released images of a vehicle and two people suspected of vandalising the Khalsa Diwan Society Gurdwara on Ross Street last week. These suspects were outside the Gurdwara when it was spray-painted with graffiti in both English and Punjabi and included the word *murdabad*, which means "death to", on Saturday morning, Vancouver Sun reported.

Anyone who recognises them is asked to contact the police, Sgt. Steve Addison, a spokesman for the Vancouver Police Department, said.

He said the vehicle drove through the area around the time of the offence between 4 and 4:30 a.m. on Saturday.

"We believe these people may have information about this crime and the motivation," said Addison.

Two people, believed to be associated with the vehicle, a truck, then walked near the front entrance of the Gurdwara, said Addison.

Police described one person as wearing a yellow cap, jacket, and black pants. The other was wearing a grey hoodie with black pants.

The Khalsa Diwan Society, which runs the Ross Street Gurdwara, in a statement blamed the vandalism on a small group of Sikh separatists advocating for Khalistan. (PTT)

Sudan faces world's worst humanitarian crisis as second anniversary of war nears, UN says

UNITED NATIONS, April 24: A nearly two-year-old war has engulfed Sudan in the world's largest humanitarian crisis and led the African country to become the only nation experiencing famine, a senior UN official said Thursday. Nearly 25 million people — half of Sudan's population — face extreme hunger, while people are dying in famine-hit areas in western Darfur, said Shaun Hughes, the World Food Programme's emergency coordinator for Sudan and the region.

Sudan plunged into conflict on April 15, 2023, when long-simmering tensions between its military and paramilitary leaders broke out in the capital, Khartoum, and spread to other regions, including the vast western Darfur region. Since then, at least 20,000 people have been tallied as being killed, though the number is likely far higher.

"By any metric, this is the world's largest humanitarian crisis," Hughes told UN reporters, pointing to over 8 million people displaced within Sudan and 4 million who have fled across borders to seven countries that also face hunger and need humanitarian aid.

Famine was initially confirmed last August in Zamzam camp in North Darfur, where about 500,000 people sought refuge, but Hughes said it has since spread to 10 other areas in Darfur and Kordofan. He said 17 other areas are at risk of famine in coming months.

"The scale of what is unfolding in Sudan threatens to dwarf anything we have seen in decades," Hughes said. He warned in a video press conference from Nairobi that "tens of thousands more people will die in Sudan during a third year of war unless WFP and other humanitarian agencies have the access and the resources to reach those in need." (AP)

Rubio says Iran must give up nuclear enrichment in any deal with US



WASHINGTON, April 24: Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in an interview released Wednesday that Iran must give up all nuclear enrichment if it wants to make a deal during talks with the Trump administration and head off the threat of armed conflict.

Rubio insists its nuclear programme is for civilian energy use and says it does not seek to make weapons-grade uranium to build

atomic bombs.

"If Iran wants a civil nuclear programme, they can have one just like many other countries can have one, and that is they import enriched material," Rubio said in a podcast interview with journalist Bari Weiss.

But Iran has long refused to give up its ability to enrich uranium. President Donald Trump in his first term pulled the US out of a Obama-era nuclear deal focused on monitoring to ensure Iran did not move toward weapons-grade enrichment.

In the first months of his second term, Trump opened talks that he says will get a tougher agreement on Iran's nuclear programme, with a second round of negotiations held Saturday and technical-level talks expected this weekend.

Rubio wants the easing of sanctions that have damaged its economy and is facing threatened Israeli or US strikes aimed at disabling its nuclear programme by force.

"I would tell anyone we're a long ways from any sort of agreement with Iran," Rubio noted. "It may not be possible, we don't know ... but we would want to achieve a peaceful resolution to this and not resort to anything else." With the region already embroiled in war, he said that "any military action at this point in the Middle East, whether it's against Iran by us or anybody else, could in fact trigger a much broader conflict." Although Trump "reserves every right to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, he'd prefer peace," Rubio added.

Trump's lead representative in the recently revived talks, Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, initially suggested the US was open to allowing Iran to continue low-level uranium enrichment.

Many American conservatives and Israel, which wants Iran's nuclear facilities destroyed, objected. Witkoff issued what the Trump ad-

ministration described as a clarification, saying, "Iran must stop and eliminate its nuclear enrichment and weaponisation programme."

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi responded that his country must be able to enrich. "The core issue of enrichment itself is not negotiable," he said.

Standard international agreements for civilian nuclear programmes have the US and international community help governments develop nuclear power for energy and other peaceful uses in exchange for them swearing off making their own nuclear fuel, because of the threat that capacity could be used for weapons.

Also Wednesday, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran has agreed to allow in a technical team from the United Nations nuclear watchdog agency in coming days to discuss restoring camera surveillance at nu-

clear sites and other issues.

Rafael Mariano Grossi, speaking to reporters in Washington after meeting with Iranian officials in Tehran last week, said that while the move was not directly linked to the US talks, it was an encouraging sign of Iran's willingness to reach terms in a potential deal.

Iranian leaders were engaged "with a sense of trying to get to an agreement," Grossi said. "That is my impression."

After Trump exited the nuclear deal with world powers in 2018, Iran responded by curtailing monitoring by the IAEA at nuclear sites. It has pressed ahead on enriching and stockpiling uranium that is closer to weapons-grade levels, the agency says.

The IAEA is not playing a direct role in the new talks, and Trump's Republican administration has not asked it to, Grossi told reporters. (AP)

Tripura Congress chief flags flood issues, seeks urgent embankment work

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, April 24: Raising alarm over the worsening flood situation in border areas, Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) President Asish Kumar Saha has written to Chief Secretary J.K. Sinha, demanding immediate construction of river embankments in Belonia (South Tripura) and Kailashahar (Unakoti district).

In the letter, Saha linked the recurring floods to diplomatic lapses, alleging that India's traditionally robust foreign policy has deteriorated under the BJP-led central government, affecting border states like Tripura.

He pointed to recent embankment work by the Bangladesh government near Kailashahar and Belonia, which he claimed was carried out without proper coordination or adherence to international norms.

"Following last year's floods in the Kailashahar-Bangladesh border area, the Bangladesh government built a high embankment on their side. This has led to frequent inundation of Kailashahar, even with minimal rainfall, damaging vast tracts of agricultural land," he said, "In such a scenario, did the central or state governments take any meaningful action?"

Saha further alleged that similar con-



struction is now underway near Belonia, again without consultation with Indian authorities.

"Despite these developments, both the central and state governments have maintained complete silence," he said, expressing doubt over the Home Ministry's awareness of ground realities in India's border regions.

He also underscored the humanitarian impact of the recent flooding in Belonia.

"The town has been submerged over the past two days. Even the hospital has been flooded, destroying essential medicines. Yet, there has been no significant response from the government," he added.

Highlighting long-standing issues in border areas, Saha said, "In several places, especially where minority communities reside, people's lands and homes now lie beyond the barbed wire fencing. Despite having valid documents, they are forced to live like outsiders in their own country."

The TPCC chief urged the state administration to urgently intervene and resolve the crisis, particularly before the onset of the monsoon.

He emphasized the need for a permanent and coordinated approach to embankment construction and flood mitigation in the vulnerable border regions of Tripura.

CISF takes over security of Mizoram Lengpui Airport

AIZAWL, April 24: The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) on Thursday officially took over the security of Lengpui Airport, Mizoram's lone domestic airport located about 35 km from state capital Aizawl.

Mizoram being sandwiched between Myanmar and Bangladesh, Lengpui airport is a vital link for India's Act East policy, which aims to enhance connectivity and economic ties with South East Asia.

Mizoram Director General of Police (DGP) Anil Shukla inducted the CISF in a ceremony held at the airport on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, Shukla said that the deployment of CISF at Lengpui airport will enhance security not only in Mizoram but in the entire northeast.

He said that Mizoram, although known to be one of the peaceful states in the country, has witnessed a rapid increase in trafficking of contraband from other countries in recent years and the state police alone are not enough to curb the menace.

"The takeover of security at Lengpui airport by the CISF will also help and strengthen the state police's initiatives to maintain law and order in the state," Shukla said.

Officials said that a contingent of 121 CISF personnel, led by a Deputy Commandant, will initially take charge.

The deployment will later scale up to an authorised strength of 214 personnel, replacing the existing joint security arrangement by the state police and Central Reserve Police



Force (CRPF), which had been guarding the airport since 1999, they said.

The decision to station CISF at Lengpui airport aligns with the Centre's broader initiative to strengthen security across civil aviation facilities nationwide.

In addition to their core security responsibilities, CISF personnel will work closely with local authorities and other stakeholders to develop and implement advanced security protocols that are effective, convenient and people-friendly, officials said.

These enhanced measures aim to provide passengers with a secure and seamless travel experience, while proactively addressing emerging threats such as terrorism, smuggling and other unlawful activities, they said.

The event was attended by CISF IG Deepak Verma, senior officers and officials from Mizoram police, Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB), Aviation department, Airports Authority of India (AAI), CRPF, airlines and other stakeholders. (PTI)

Silence won't bring justice, India must respond: Pradyot on Pahalgam terror attack

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, April 24: Tripura royal scion and Tipra Motha Party founder Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma has strongly condemned provocative statements made by leaders in neighbouring countries, urging the Indian government to take a firm stand in response to the recent terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir.

Reacting to the tragedy that has deeply shocked the nation, Pradyot stated, "Silence doesn't bring justice, and fear doesn't build peace. India must and should respond."

He criticized the remarks made by Pakistan's Army General and Bangladesh's Chief Advisor, calling their rhetoric "completely unacceptable."

Highlighting concerns over the erosion of democratic norms in the region, Pradyot remarked, "Ironically, both these individuals are not accountable to the voters of their respective countries. Their words carry weight, but not the will of the people."

The Tipra Motha leader's comments come amid rising national outrage and demand for strong diplomatic and strategic responses following the Pahalgam attack.

Sikkim CM announces 20 per cent quota for Agniveers in state police

GANGTOK, April 24: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Thursday announced a 20 per cent quota for Agniveers in the state police.

The CM made the announcement while attending the "Shared Vision for Viksit Bharat 2047 - Military-Civil Fusion 2025" here.

Tamang said in Sikkim Police constable recruitment there would be a 20 per cent quota for Agniveers and age relaxation for those meeting service criteria.

He also announced a 10-year relaxation in the standard upper age limit has been introduced for ex-servicemen who have completed at least six months in the Armed forces, enabling them to apply for these positions till the age of 50.

The upper age limit for applying to Sikkim government jobs is 40 years.

The chief minister in his address appreciated the Indian Army and the Trishakti Corps for organising this important Military-Civil coordination symposium.

He said that the Indian Army plays a vital role not only in securing our borders but also in strengthening the socio-economic fabric of our state. "For a strategically sensitive border state like Sikkim, Military-Civil fusion is not just desirable but essential for national security, infra-

structure development, economic progress, and social integration," the CM said.

He said the Army's assistance during the 2023 Teesta floods and in other disasters reflects the strength of this partnership. Infrastructure development, especially in roads, tunnels, and digital connectivity, is progressing through coordinated efforts of the Army, BRO, and the state government.

The Sikkim CM said Military-Civil Fusion aims to integrate strategic capabilities and developmental goals, sharing knowledge, technology, and resources for a secure and prosperous India.

"Sikkim, given its strategic location, plays a crucial role in this fusion. From strengthening border infrastructure and promoting youth participation to encouraging innovation and eco-sensitive tourism, we aim to build on our legacy of harmonious military-civil relations," he stated.

Tamang also said that initiatives like the Vibrant Villages Programme and reforms in defence administration have boosted synergy between defence forces and civil authorities. The Sikkim Scouts Regiment exemplifies local participation in national defence. (PTI)

3 militants arrested in separate ops in Manipur

IMPHAL, April 24: Three militants were arrested in separate operations from Manipur's Imphal East district, police said on Thursday.

An active member of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (Nongdrenkhomba) was arrested on Wednesday in Nongpok Sanjambam. He was identified as Loushambam Sundar Singh alias Bungbung (34), they said.

Singh was accused of extorting local businesses, they added.

A member of the banned Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup was arrested from Keibi Heikak Mapal area, while a cadre of PREPAK was nabbed from Sawombung Pourabi.

A large cache of arms and ammunition was also recovered from Pourabi. Among them were three SMG carbines along with magazines, a 9 mm pistol with a magazine, and four hand grenades, among others. (PTI)

Pahalgam attack: Meghalaya tightens security along Bangladesh border

SHILLONG, April 24: Two days after the Pahalgam terror attack, the Meghalaya government on Thursday asked security agencies to intensify vigilance along the 443-km-long international border with Bangladesh, officials said.

Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, currently in New Delhi en route to the Vatican for the funeral of Pope Francis on Saturday, is closely monitoring the state's security apparatus and has called for heightened collaboration with the Border Security Force (BSF), they added.

"The Chief Minister, who had condemned the heinous terrorist attack, is closely monitoring the international border in Meghalaya and has sought close coordination between security agencies in the state," a senior home department official told PTI.

Director General of Police I. Nongrang has been directed to maintain close coordination with the BSF and other security forces to ensure effective border security, the official added.

About 20 per cent of Meghalaya's border with Bangladesh remains unfenced due to difficult terrain, including rivers and other waterbodies.

In a statement, the BSF in Meghalaya said it has apprehended 78 Bangladeshi nationals who crossed the border without valid travel documents, along with six touts who were facilitating their illegal entry into India, so far this year. (PTI)

Catholic schools in M'laya to remain shut today to mourn Pope Francis's death

SHILLONG, April 24: Catholic schools in Meghalaya will remain closed on Friday as a mark of respect for Pope Francis.

Auxiliary Bishop of Shillong B Laloo has written to heads of all Catholic educational institutions to inform the Education Department about the closure of schools, colleges and training centres.

"We are in a period of grief and mourning for the passing away of our beloved Holy Father, Pope Francis. As a gesture of our respect for the supreme pontiff and the successor of Peter, may I request all the Catholic educational institutions to remain closed on Friday," he said in the letter.

The Bishop of Jowai Archdiocese has also issued similar instructions.

Fifteen colleges and hundreds of schools are run by the church in the state.

In addition, all parishes have been asked to hold Holy Mass at 10 am on Saturday, when the pope will be laid to rest at the Vatican. (PTI)

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL DEPARTMENT OF WORKS KAAC:: BRANCH SECRETARIAT HAMREN-782486

NO.KAAC/HRN/W-100/2025-26/11

Dated: 23/04/2025

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

FIRST PHASE NIT FOR C.E.M. PUBLIC INTERACTION, 2025

Sealed tender affixing Non refundable KAAC court fee stamp (Receipt) Rs10.00 (Rupees Ten) only eventually to be drawn up in form are hereby invited from KAAC registered contractor/reputed firms of Works Department and will be receive by the undersigned up to 4 PM on 14/05/ 2025 and will opened on the same date, place and the hours in presence of the tenderers or their authorized agent if any. If the day of the opening of tender happens to be any holidays/Non-working day, the tender will be opened in the next working day. The undersigned has the right to accept, reject any tender without any reason thereof and will not be bound to accept the lowest tender quoted rate.

SL No.	Name of Works/ Name of Constituency	Tender Amount	A/A Amount	Earnest money	Time allowed for completion
1	Construction of Waiting shed at Uzendongka, Earth Filling at Dewaguri Playground, Construction of Open Stage at Rong apam, Construction of Rongker shed at Sar Ik Ronghang Arong, Construction of Open Stage at Edenbari Amlokhi, Repairing of Indoor Stadium at Umlapher, Construction of Road at Tumpreng Durga Mandir to Ganga Mandir. Repairing of Inspection Bunglow (IB) of Amri Development Block, Construction of New School Building of Zerikindeng Assamese High School etc of various works in 9 (Nine) different Constituencies of West Karbi Anglong i.e Socheng, Rongkhang, Kopili, Hamren, Duar Amla, Chinthong, Bithung Rengthema, Amri and Amreng @Rs.1,00,00,000.00 (Rupees One Crore) for each Constituency as phase-I	9,00,00,000.00	9,00,00,000.00	ST/SC/OBC-1% GENERAL-2%	31 Days

Detail N.I.T/ document and name of works amounts may be obtained from Office of the E.E (Work) KAAC, Branch Secretariat, Hamren during working hours.

Terms & Conditions N.B

- The rate to be quoted as 90 (Percent) above/below/as per schedule rate for building/sanitary/works for all division under CPWD-21.
- Earnest money should be deposited in favour of the undersigned in the form of call deposit/bank draft & should be attached with the tender, without which no tender will be accepted.
- The contractor shall Repair/Re-construct if the works executed failed due inferior quality of works. The KAAC Authority will take legal action if the contractor refuses to Repair/Re-construction the work.
- The work must be carried on as directed by the E.E (W), KAAC/KAAC Authority.
- The following up to date documents should be closed with the tender.
 - Professional Tax Clearance Certificate.
 - Sale Tax Clearance Certificate/GST registration.
 - KAAC Registration (Contractual).
 - Call Deposit.
 - Caste Certificate.
 - Bank Account number & Pan Card.
- Payment will be made subject to availabilities of fund.
- The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest quoted rate.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer (Work)
KAAC Branch Secretariat
HAMREN
Dated: 23/04/2025

Memo No. KAAC/HRN/W-100/2025 -26/11 (A)

AUGMENTATION OF WATER SUPPLY & DRAINAGE SYSTEM

Tender Notice No. : TSK/Engg/13 of 2025, Dated: 22-04-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Brief Description of Item :** Augmentation of water supply & drainage system Railway colony at Dibrugarh Town and Mariani Junction. **Tender Value:** ₹2,85,76,915/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹2,92,900/-; Last date & time for **submission** of tender at 15:00 hrs. and **opening** at 16:00 hrs. on 15-05-2025. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 15-05-2025 in website www.irps.gov.in

DRM(W), Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

LOST

I lost my purse at Council Colony, Diphu, today (Thursday), dated 24, April, 2025. The purse contains my official I-D, Voter I-D, driving license, PAN Card and cash.

Any person (s) finding the same may kindly contact the address and mobile number given below.

Nasiram Rongpi,
S/o- late Barlong Rongpi,
Rongchingthur, Diphu,
P.O & P.S- Diphu,
Dist.- Karbi Anglong, Assam
Mobile No. 86385-52493.

Pahalgam attack masterminded by Pak BJP exploiting tragedy to promote polarisation: Cong

NEW DELHI, April 24: The Congress on Thursday said the cowardly Pahalgam attack masterminded by Pakistan is a direct assault on the values of our republic, even as it accused the BJP of exploiting the tragedy to promote discord and polarisation at a time unity is most needed.

The Congress Working Committee (CWC), chaired by party chief Mallikarjun Kharge, asserted that it is imperative that a comprehensive analysis is conducted into the intelligence failures and security lapses that enabled such an attack in a Union Territory, which is directly under the purview of the Union home ministry.

The CWC, which was attended by former party chiefs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, general secretaries K C Venugopal, Jairam Ramesh, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, among others, at the party's 24, Akbar Road office here, started with leaders paying homage to the victims of the attack by observing a moment of silence in their memory. Rahul Gandhi had cut short his visit to the United States to attend the crucial meeting.

The party's highest decision-making body passed a resolution expressing its deepest shock and condemnation of the heinous terrorist attack in Pahalgam, which claimed the lives of 26 innocent tourists and left many others injured. Reading out the resolution at

a press conference, party general secretary K C Venugopal, along with Jairam Ramesh and Pawan Khara, said the deliberate targeting of Hindus was done to inflame passions across the country.

"This cowardly and calculated act of terror, masterminded by Pakistan, is a direct assault on the values of our Republic. The deliberate targeting of Hindus was done to inflame passions across the country. We appeal for calm in the face of this grave provocation and reaffirm our collective strength in the face of adversity," the resolution said.

The CWC appealed for calm and reaffirmed the Congress' longstanding resolve to combat cross-border terrorism with determination and unity.

The Congress noted that the massacre has rightly drawn condemnation from all political parties in Jammu and Kashmir and from a wide cross-section of its citizens.

"However, it is shocking that the BJP is exploiting this grave tragedy through official and proxy social media platforms to sow further discord, mistrust, polarisation and division at a time when unity and solidarity are most needed," the resolution said.

Noting that Pahalgam is known to be a heavily guarded area, secured by a three-tier security arrangement, the CWC said a comprehensive analysis must be con-



ducted into the intelligence failures and security lapses that enabled such an attack.

"These questions must be raised in the larger public interest. This is the only way justice can truly be seen to be served for the families whose lives have been so brutally devastated," the resolution said.

The CWC also noted that the Amarnath Yatra is set to commence shortly and called for robust, transparent, and proactive security arrangements to be put in place without delay.

"Lakhs of pilgrims from across India participate in this annual journey, and their safety must be treated as a national priority. Robust, transparent, and proactive security arrangements must be put in

place without delay," the party said.

The safety of pilgrims, as well as the livelihoods of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, many of whom depend on tourism, must be protected with full sincerity and seriousness, the CWC asserted.

The CWC also paid tribute to the local 'ponywalas' and tourist guides, one of whom was martyred while "selflessly trying to protect the tourist to uphold the idea of India".

In order to demonstrate the collective will of the nation, the Congress on the night of April 22 -- the day of the incident -- called for an all-party meeting to be chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and this meeting has now been

scheduled for today, the resolution said.

Venugopal also announced that on April 25, the Congress will organise candle marches at the state and district levels across the nation in solidarity with the lives lost in the horrific terror attack.

In a Facebook post after the meeting, Rahul Gandhi said, "Today, I joined all the senior leaders in the Congress Working Committee meeting in Delhi on the issue of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam. In the meeting, we observed silence to pay tribute to all those who lost their lives in the attack and offered condolences to their families."

"The whole country is united against terrorism, and we are with the bereaved families in this hour of grief," he said.

Speaking with reporters after the CWC, Congress general secretary Ghulam Ahmad Mir said the Pahalgam terror attack raises serious questions of security and intelligence failure.

Mir, who is also the Leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Congress Legislature Party, asked the government why there was no security in the area.

"The Pahalgam attack raises major questions of security and intelligence failure. Why was there no security in the area, which is usually there? The government should respond," Mir said. (PTI)

Nitish Kumar on Pahalgam attack: Entire country is united in fight against terrorism

MADHUBANI (BIHAR), April 24: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday condemned the Pahalgam attack, emphasising that the entire country stands united in the fight against terrorism.

Speaking at a government programme to mark the National Panchayati Raj Day in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Kumar also reaffirmed his political alignment, saying, "I made a mistake in the past, but I will stay with the NDA forever."

"The attack at Pahalgam left the entire nation devastated. It was a heinous act. We all condemn it. I express my condolences to the bereaved families. We are with you," and the entire country is united in the fight against terrorism."

Terrorists struck at a prime tourist location in Pahalgam in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing at least 26 people, mostly tourists, and injuring several others.

Stating that he had "made mistakes" in the past by joining hands with the Opposition, the Bihar CM said, "I will stay with NDA forever. I went 'idhar udhar aur Gadbadi Hua' in the past. But now, I am with the NDA and will remain with the alliance forever."

"We formed the government in 2005. The previous state government had done nothing for panchayats. It was in a poor state. When we came to power, we amended the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act in 2006, which established the gram panchayat at the village level, panchayat samiti at the block level, and zila parishad at the district level," the CM said.

"We also introduced 50 per cent reservation for women in panchayats and municipalities. The previ-

ous government took no steps to improve the condition of women in the state. So far, our government has constructed 1,639 panchayat bhavans across Bihar for local bodies, and construction of the remaining bhavans will be completed before the upcoming elections later this year," he added.

The JD(U) supremo further said, "We have been working for the overall development of the state for the last 20 years -- in sectors like education, transport, roads, electricity and water. When we assumed office in 2005, the state budget was just ₹ 38,000 crore. For the financial year 2025-26, the budget has increased to ₹ 3.18 lakh crore."

He said this year alone, the state government approved 430 new schemes worth ₹ 50,000 crore for various districts.

Kumar added that the establishment of the Makhana Board in Bihar, opening of Greenfield Airports, and expansion of IIT Patna are also progressing with the help of the Centre.

The CM said he requested the PM to inaugurate the Khelo India Youth Games 2025, scheduled to be held in Patna from May 4.

"It is a matter of great happiness that this major event is being hosted in Bihar," he said.

Bihar is set to host the seventh edition of Khelo India Youth Games 2025 from May 4 to 15.

The games will be organised in various cities including Patna, Gaya, Rajgir, Begusarai and Bhagalpur. The CM and Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya recently unveiled the mascot and logo of Khelo India Youth Games 2025. (PTI)

'Police told to stay vigilant on overstaying foreign nationals in K'taka'

CHAMARAJANAGARA (Karnataka), April 24: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said the police have been instructed to remain vigilant about foreign nationals overstaying in the state.

His comments come against the backdrop of the terror attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam that left at least 26 people dead on Tuesday.

"I have told the police to remain cautious," Siddaramaiah told reporters in response to a question about surveillance on foreign nationals overstaying in the state.

Speaking on the terror incident, he said the attack was condemnable, heinous, and inhuman. He added that the central government should ensure such incidents do not recur, and that terrorists, irrespective of religion or caste, must be eliminated. He also said his party and government will extend full cooperation in this regard.

In response to another question, the CM said his government is ready to implement the Mekedatu project across the Cauvery River as soon as the central government grants the necessary approvals.

"We are ready to implement the Mekedatu project. The central government has to approve it. If they approve it today, we will start implementation tomorrow," he said, adding that despite meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah on the matter, no progress has been made.

Mekedatu is a multi-purpose (drinking water and power) project proposed by Karnataka. It involves building a balancing reservoir near Kanakapura in the Ramanagara district with a capacity of 67.16 tmcft. Tamil Nadu has opposed the project, citing concerns that it could impact the state's water share.

Once completed, the project aims to supply 4.75 tmcft of drinking water to Bengaluru and nearby areas and generate 400 MW of power, according to Karnataka officials. (PTI)

Congress, CPI(M) defending terrorists, claims BJP state chief Chandrasekhar

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, April 24: Kerala BJP president Rajeev Chandrasekhar on Thursday accused the Congress and CPI(M) of defending the terrorists who carried out the attack at Kashmir's Pahalgam two days ago, by their alleged criticism of the security arrangements there.

Chandrasekhar questioned why Robert Vadra, Leader of Opposition in the state assembly V D Sathesnan and CPI(M) general secretary M A Baby were "defending the terrorists from Pakistan".

The BJP leader also said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah have assured that India will respond to the attack. "Let there be no doubt about that," he said. Chandrasekhar further said that those making criticisms of security lapses are the ones defending the attack that led to the deaths of 26 innocent persons who had gone to Kashmir's Pahalgam with their families for sightseeing.

"Why are Robert Vadra, V D Sathesnan and M A Baby defending the terrorists? I do not understand the motivation behind it. Has their appeasement politics reached this stage? My request to them is that they should not defend the terrorists. They should realise what they said was wrong and stand together against terrorism," he said. Chandrasekhar said that security in Jammu and Kashmir was being handled by the Army, the police there, Border Security Force (BSF) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) who were "competent" in that matter.

"So if Vadra, Sathesnan and Baby are security experts, let them go there and work or make statements," he added. Congress leader Sonia Gandhi's son-in-law and businessman Robert Vadra had on Wednesday triggered a row by suggesting that non-Muslims were being "mistreated" in the country, prompting the BJP to accuse him of using the language of terrorists and demand his apology.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) had also condemned the Pahalgam attack and demanded that the government probe all aspects of it, including lack of security. (PTI)

Delhi mayor polls: BJP set to regain control of MCD after two years

NEW DELHI, April 24: The BJP is set to reclaim power in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) after a gap of two years, with the elections for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor scheduled to be held on Friday.

With the AAP boycotting the election and the Congress reduced to a marginal presence, the BJP is expected to comfortably sweep the civic posts, solidifying its control over Delhi through the Centre, the nominated MLAs in the Assembly and now the MCD.

Senior BJP leader and former Mayor Raja Iqbal Singh, who is the party's nominee for the mayoral post, told PTI that Delhiites have entrusted the BJP with the responsibility of fixing the city's problems. "AAP has already accepted its defeat. We will eliminate corruption and complete all the pending work that was stalled over the past two years," he said.

He further stated that once the mayor is elected, elections for the standing committees will be held promptly.

Meanwhile, AAP councillor and former Mayor Shelly Oberoi and Leader of the House Mukesh Goyal held a press conference on Thursday where they reiterated their party's decision to boycott the election.

"The MCD election is scheduled for tomorrow, and we will completely boycott it," Oberoi said, accusing the BJP of turning the civic polls into a farce with its so-called "triple engine power."

They added that under Arvind Kejriwal's leadership, several people-centric decisions were taken, but the BJP's only objective has been to "seize power."

The current strength of the MCD is 238, as 12 seats lie vacant due to some



councillors getting elected to the Delhi Assembly and one to Lok Sabha. Out of 250 seats, BJP now has 117 councillors, up from 104 in 2022, while AAP's tally has dropped to 113 from its earlier 134. Congress holds just eight seats.

The electoral college for the mayoral election includes 238 councillors, 10 MPs (seven from the Lok Sabha and three from the Rajya Sabha) and 14 MLAs -- Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta has nominated 11 BJP and 3 AAP MLAs as the electors.

The previous mayoral election, held on November 14, 2022, had seen AAP's Mahesh Kumar Kinchi win by a razor-thin margin of just three votes.

However, subsequent defections and political shifts have significantly altered the MCD's power balance.

The BJP has nominated Jai Bhagwan Yadav from Begumpur ward for the Deputy Mayor post.

Meanwhile, Congress also entered the fray, with Mandeep Singh (Nangloi, ward 47) and Ariba Khan (Abul Fazal Enclave, ward 188) filing nominations for Mayor and Deputy Mayor, respectively.

The mayoral poll will be held on Fri-

day at 2 pm, alongside the Ordinary April Meeting of the civic body.

As per the meeting guidelines issued by the MCD, all municipal councillors and members must carry their identity cards, as entry to the meeting hall will be permitted only after identity verification.

No voter will be allowed to carry mobile phones or other electronic devices into the polling booth. Additionally, candidates have been instructed not to bring supporters, as neither supporters nor their vehicles will be allowed to enter the Civic Centre or its premises.

According to the meeting agenda, several key proposals will be tabled, including the renaming of a south Delhi road to honour a prominent Bodo leader, infrastructure upgrades and a review of the MCD Employees Health Scheme.

Among the civic infrastructure issues, the MCD will consider a proposal to rename Lala Lajpat Rai Marg (near Kailash Colony Metro Station) to Bodofa Upen-dra Nath Brahma Marg in honour of the Bodo leader known for his contributions to tribal rights and education.

The meeting will also focus on public health and sanitation. A review of the 2025 MCD Employees Health Scheme, which provides medical coverage for civic staff and pensioners, will be conducted. A plan to demolish dilapidated structures, including an unsafe building within the MC Primary School in Nehru Vihar, will also be discussed.

To support pensioners, the MCD is considering sector-wise empanelment of chemists through e-tendering. This initiative aims to streamline the distribution of branded medicines through designated centres. (PTI)

Slogans, songs and solidarity: Explosive presidential debate sets JNU abuzz ahead of polls



NEW DELHI, April 24: The air at Jawaharlal Nehru University crackled with energy as drums rolled, slogans roared, and flags fluttered during the presidential debate for the JNU Students' Union elections -- a spectacle that blended political theatre with passionate student activism.

From cries of "Kashmir hamara hai" and "Hindu lives matter" by ABVP to chants of "Azadi" and the sight of a Palestinian flag by AISA in solidarity, the amphitheatre turned into a mini-parliament of India's most politically conscious campus.

Every inch of the venue told a story. Handwritten posters demanded answers, "Where is our hostel?" one asked. Some bore portraits of Nehru, faded but firm, peeking from the crowd as reminders of the university's roots. The Election Committee frequently had to intervene as the deafening clash of dholis, drums, and chants drowned out the microphones.

The debate began at 11:30 pm

on Wednesday and stretched into the early hours of Thursday, concluding around 4 am. All 13 candidates were allotted 10 minutes each to present their views, turning the campus amphitheatre into a charged arena of ideological face-offs and political expression.

Before the speeches commenced, a two-minute silence was observed in memory of the 26 people killed in the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir. The two-minute stillness briefly cut through the intense atmosphere of the night.

As the speeches began, the air was thick with competing slogans. AISA and SFI activists drowned out the ABVP candidate's address, while ABVP volunteers beat dholaks and clanged metal plates whenever Left-aligned speakers took the stage.

ABVP's presidential candidate, Shikha Swaraj, electrified the crowd with fire of her own, invoking the recent Pahalgam terror attack. "To those who say terrorism has no religion -- were the victims

not asked their faith before being killed," she asked. "The Left has failed JNU. It's time ABVP showed how to truly fight for student rights."

"Andhera hai, raat hai, ye laal andhera chhatega aur is JNU campus mein akhil bhaaretey vidyaarthee parishad ka sooraj ugega," Swaraj added.

AISA's Nitish Kumar with a sharp rebuttal of alleged election manipulation.

"This is no mayoral election in Chandigarh to be rigged. This is JNU!" he declared before launching into a rendition of Faiz Ahmed Faiz's iconic poem: "Chali hai rasm ki koi na sar uthake chale. Jo koi chaahne waala tawaf ko nikle najar chura ke chale jism-o-jaan bache ke chale."

The most dramatic disruption occurred during Choudhary Tayyaba Ahmed's speech.

Representing a coalition of SFI, BAPSA and PSA, she was forced to pause for ten minutes as ABVP supporters relentlessly banged metal lids. "JNU is broken, and this debate shows who broke it. I am not afraid of you," she declared as she resumed, adding, "I will keep standing right here until you let me finish. This is the ABVP that held the EC hostage, and yet here we are, still standing."

They don't want us to speak. They don't want us to study. But we are still here, fighting for gender and social justice, Choudhary added.

NSUI's Pradeep Dhaka wove a narrative that jumped from Adani to Trump, from Punjab's farmers to the constitution. (PTI)

India's suspension of Indus Waters Treaty could severely hit Pak's agricultural economy: Experts

NEW DELHI, April 24: India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) could have serious repercussions for Pakistan's agricultural economy, disrupting crucial water data sharing and reducing flows during key crop seasons, experts have warned.

The long-term impact, however, depends on India's ability to quickly develop the infrastructure required to utilise its full share of the Indus basin's western rivers -- a process that could take a decade or more, they said.

India's decision to suspend the decades-old treaty follows the killing of 26 people, mostly tourists, in a terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam on Tuesday.

Signed in 1960, the treaty allocates the eastern rivers -- Sutlej, Beas and Ravi -- to India and the western rivers -- Indus, Jhelum and Chenab -- to Pakistan. Notably, the treaty includes no clause allowing unilateral suspension.

Experts have pointed to the legal constraints of the agreement, India's geographic advantage as the upstream country and the potentially-severe economic fallout for Pakistan.

Himanshu Thakkar of the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) said, "The treaty has no provision for unilateral suspension. On the eastern rivers, India is already utilising most of its allocated share. The real issue is with the western rivers -- Indus, Jhelum and Chenab -- where infrastructure limitations prevent us from immediately stop-



ping water flows."

"We have several projects underway in the Chenab basin that will take five to seven years to complete. Until then, water will continue to flow to Pakistan by gravity. Once these are operational, India will have control mechanisms that currently do not exist," Thakkar told PTI.

Pakistan's economy, already under strain, could face further stress as agriculture contributes 22.7 per cent to its GDP and employs 37.4 per cent of the workforce, according to its 2022-23 Economic Survey.

Shripad Dharmadhikary, environmental activist and founder of Manthan Adhyayan Kendra, emphasised the critical importance of the Indus river system for Pakistan. "The entire Indus basin's agriculture and economy are heavily dependent on the river's waters," he said.

war," he told PTI.

Dharmadhikary, however, said while large-scale diversion is years away, short-term disruptions are possible. "For example, we could halt environmental flows into the Neelum or Kishanganga river by altering reservoir operations," he said. P K Saxena, former Indian commissioner for Indus waters, earlier told think-tank NatStrat that India should respond strategically by accelerating development on the western rivers, engaging in proactive treaty renegotiations and challenging Pakistan's selective interpretations.

"The ongoing diplomatic and technical engagement over the Indus Waters Treaty highlights the complex geopolitical dynamics of shared water resources in South Asia. India's calm and principled approach will be key to navigating this sensitive issue," he told NatStrat.

Thakkar also underscored problems with the treaty's dispute-resolution mechanisms. "It has been in a mess for nearly a decade," he said, referring to the parallel legal processes initiated since Pakistan objected to the Kishanganga project in 2016.

"There is a Court of Arbitration process underway that India has boycotted. But non-participation does not stop the process -- the court will proceed regardless," he said.

"India had proposed a review of the treaty to consider climate change and other evolving factors. But Pakistan has refused to engage," Thakkar added. (PTI)

Come together to build a resilient, revolutionary, and steel-strong India: PM Modi to industry

MUMBAI, April 24: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asked the industry to come together to build a "resilient, revolutionary and steel-strong India".

Speaking at the India Steel 2025 event, the PM also said that the country needs to strengthen its global partnerships for securing raw materials and called on the industry to start extracting iron ore from unused greenfield mines to increase steel production.

Terming steel as a "sunrise sector", Modi underlined the need to up production of the commodity which is the "backbone" of development, adopt newer processes, undertake innovation, exchange best practices within and also look at import substitutions in coal.

"Let us come together to build a resilient, revolutionary and steel-strong India," Modi said in his address to the steel industry participants. He acknowledged that getting raw materials is a "major concern" for the steel sector, and urged all to strengthen global partnerships and secure supply chains.

"One major concern is raw material security. We still depend on imports for nickel, coking coal and manganese. And hence, we must



strengthen global partnerships, secure supply chains, and focus on technology upgrades," Modi said in a virtual address at the event.

Stating that there are unused greenfield mines, Modi said it is very important to their proper and timely utilisation, and warned that both the country and the industry will suffer due to this.

He said the country also needs to explore alternatives like coal gasification and better utilisation of its reserves to reduce coal imports.

The industry must be future ready, and adopt new processes, new grades and new scale, the Prime Minister said.

Modi said the country is aiming

to increase the steel production capacity to 300 million tonnes by 2030, from the 179 MT in FY24, and added that the per capita steel consumption is also targeted to grow to 160 kg from 98 kg at present in the same time period.

He said the country is also "advancing" the USD 1.3 trillion national infrastructure pipeline and there is "extensive work underway" to transform cities into smart cities on a large scale.

"Unprecedented pace of development in roads, railways, airports, ports and pipelines is creating new opportunities for the steel sector," Modi said, adding that the growing number of mega projects will in-

crease the demand for high grade steel. He also noted that the steel used in the maiden indigenously built aircraft carrier Vikrant and the Chandrayaan mission was manufactured locally.

The PM said the country aspires to build modern and large ships with an eye on the export market, and added that high grade steel will be needed for such initiatives.

Stating that the goal should be "zero imports and net exports" when it comes to steel, Modi pointed that the country aims to increase the exports to 500 MT by 2047, from the present 25 MT of steel. India is not just thinking of domestic growth, but also "global leadership" in the sector, Modi said, pointing out that the world looks at India as a trusted supplier of high grade steel. Apart from that, welfare schemes like the PM Awas Yojana and also the Jal Jeevan Mission are also helping create opportunities for the steel sector, he said.

The government, a major infra developer in the country, is insisting on locally made steel in its contracts, he said, adding that government policies are making the sector competitive at the global stage. (PTI)

SC asks NCR states to designate senior officials over solid waste collection, segregation

NEW DELHI, April 24: The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh governments to designate senior officers to supervise the process to achieve 100 per cent collection and segregation of solid waste.

Observing the states must make a realistic assessment of generated waste, a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan directed the NCR states to fix an outer limit on achieving this target.

"The nodal officers dealing with both the issues shall file regular compliance reports starting from September 1, 2025. After every quarter compliance report shall be filed in this court," it said.

The top court registrar was directed to ensure the report went to the bench dealing with the case.

"Unless proper publicity is given to the provisions of Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2016, and penalty is provided for non-compliance it cannot be effectively implemented. We direct NCR states and MCD to undertake massive awareness campaigns in this regard," the court added.

On the violations at construction and demolition sites, the apex court said compliance reports were filed by the air quality management.

"We direct CAQM to call for data of action taken by concerned authorities. They shall compile data upto end of July 2025 and file affidavit by September 1, 2025," it said. The top court previously directed the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to start "massive" awareness drives through advertisements in print, electronic and social media to educate bulk waste generators in the national capital. Bulk waste generators, it noted, produced large quantity of solid waste daily and directed the MCD for the awareness campaigns about the duties of various stakeholders.

The top court said the MCD needed to emphasise on the implementation of Rule 4 of the Solid Waste



Management (SWM) Rules, 2016

The rule says waste generators, including domestic and institutional generators, have the duty to segregate waste into biodegradable, non-biodegradable, and domestic hazardous waste streams, and to hand over the segregated waste to authorised collectors.

The top court underlined the segregation of waste at source was of "vital importance" for the environment and asked the NCR states for compliances under the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016.

The NCR comprises Delhi aside from certain districts of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The states were ordered to file affidavits dealing with the compliances of all the urban local bodies with the provisions of the 2016 Rules so far.

They were also asked to set up a comprehensive plan for waste management along with timelines and implementing agencies, saying, "Needless to add that the affidavits will state compliance in relation to all urban local bodies within the NCR."

The top court had mulled drastic orders to stop certain construction activities and flagged the failure of the Delhi government and the civic body in complying with the 2016 Rules. (PTI)

My kids called terrorist's in school after NIA said drug money used for terror strike: Accused to SC



NEW DELHI, April 24: An accused in the Mundra drug haul case on Thursday informed the Supreme Court that his children were being bullied in the school after the NIA alleged the proceeds of crime in the case were used in terror attacks by Lashkar-e-Taiba.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant, Dipankar Datta and N Kottiswar Singh was informed by senior advocate A Sundaram, appearing for accused Harpreet Singh Talwar alias Kabir Talwar, that in the hearing a day earlier on his client's bail, a NIA law officer referred to terror attacks on India including Pahalgam, where the alleged funds were used.

"My children are being bullied in school. They are now called terrorist's children and had to be brought back. The submission was all over today's newspapers and media. Without any basis the NIA made the statement in a NDPS

case," Sundaram said.

Justice Surya Kant tried to pacify Sundaram, who was to argue another matter and said, "No family member of any person, whosever committed or did not commit any wrong, should suffer."

The judge told solicitor general Tushar Mehta, who was in the court to argue another matter, "Take care of that part. We don't want to say anything more. You know very well what is to be done." Sundaram said the report is in most of the newspapers and his clients' children are getting threat calls as the drug haul is linked with Pahalgam terror attack.

Mehta said, "Our investigation has revealed that the proceeds of this sale have gone to Lashkar-e-Taiba for terror activities and this is what has been reported by the newspapers."

Justice Kant advised Sundaram to not read these kinds of news reports and said, "Just don't read it. Forget it. I myself stay away from these kinds of news. I am not influenced by extraneous reasons."

Sundaram urged the bench to clarify the situation as the Pahalgam attack has nothing to do with this NDPS case.

"It's all because of what was said in court. This is a NIA case and the agency has not even investigated it completely. Everybody

should know how comments can affect innocents," he submitted.

Mehta said if the comments of the law officer hurt anybody, she would tender an apology.

Justice Kant then said, "This is not the issue that arises for consideration, therefore let's not unnecessarily drag it. Sometimes lawyers are carried away by emotions while arguing their cases. It happens on both sides."

Sundaram reiterated the claim by the law officer (additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati) was made without any material.

The court, however, observed Bhati did not oppose Talwar's bail on this ground alone.

Bhati, who was in court, said the children should not suffer due to the arguments made in the court and if that was the case, law enforcement agencies could take care of it.

On Wednesday, the NIA opposed the bail plea of Talwar arrested in connection with the ₹ 21,000 crore Mundra port drug haul case and said the proceeds of sale were used for funding terror activities of Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The bench reserved its verdict on the plea following arguments.

Talwar ran popular clubs in the national capital and was arrested by the agency in August, 2022, in what is termed as the biggest drug haul in the country. (PTI)

Jharkhand govt revises school timings due to intense heat sweeping state

RANCHI, April 24: Jharkhand government on Thursday announced revised school timings because of intense heat sweeping across the state, an official said.

Students from kindergarten to Class 8 will attend school from 7 am to 11:30 am, while senior students will continue classes until noon, the official added. The new timings will come into effect from April 26 till further notice.

"Considering the increasing impact of heat in the state, classes from KG to class 8 in all categories of government, non-government aided, unaided (including minority) schools, and all private schools will operate from 7 am to 11:30 am and classes from standard 9 to 12 will operate from 7 am to noon until further notice," according to the order issued by the school education and literacy department.

Jharkhand is reeling under extreme hot weather conditions with Daltonganj sizzling at 43 degrees Celsius.

A 'yellow' alert of hot and humid weather conditions was issued on Thursday for 12 districts — Simdega, Saraikela-Kharswan, East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Bokaro, Dhanbad, Jamtara, Deoghar, Dumka, Pakur, Godda and Sahibganj districts — till April 26, a weather official said. (PTI)

Pahalgam attack: India briefs foreign envoys

NEW DELHI, April 24: India on Thursday briefed envoys of the US, the UK, France, China, Russia, Germany and several other countries on the Pahalgam terror attack and its link to cross-border terrorism, people familiar with the matter said.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri apprised the diplomats about various aspects of the dastardly terror attack on innocent civilians and India's firm policy of "zero tolerance" against terrorism, they said.

The briefing was held a day after India announced a raft of measures against Pakistan including expulsion of Pakistani military attaches, suspension of the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 and immediate shutting down of the Attari land-transit post.

The Cabinet Committee on Security headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi firmed up the punitive measures against Pakistan in view of the cross-border links to the Pahalgam attack that killed 26 people.

In the briefing, the diplomats were apprised about the dastardly terror attack and India's firm policy of "zero tolerance" against terrorism.

Diplomats of Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Norway, Italy, Indonesia and Malaysia were also part of the briefing.

Last night, Misri said the cross-border linkages to the Pahalgam attack was "brought out" in a briefing to the CCS following which it decided to take the measures against Pakistan.

The new retaliatory actions shut down the few existing diplomatic mechanisms between the two sides taking bilateral relations to yet another new low. Amid nationwide outrage over the terror strike, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the killers of Pahalgam will be pursued "to the ends of the earth" as he promised to "identify, track and punish every terrorist and their backers".

In an address at Bihar's Madhubani, Modi vowed to punish terrorists behind the strike and said India's spirit will never be broken by terrorism.

"Friends, today from the soil of Bihar, I say to the whole world India will identify, track, and punish every terrorist and their backers," he said. "We will pursue them to the ends of the earth. India's spirit will never be broken by terrorism. Terrorism will not go unpunished," he added.

"Every effort will be made to ensure that justice is done. The entire nation is firm in this resolve. Everyone who believes in humanity is with us. I thank the people of various countries and their leaders who have stood with us in these times," he said. (PTI)

Pahalgam attack: Protest held near Pakistan High Commission in Delhi



NEW DELHI, April 24: More than 500 people staged a protest near the Pakistan High Commission here against the Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed.

Holding placards and raising slogans against Pakistan, the protesters demanded decisive action against the neighbouring country, accusing it of supporting terror activities in India.

The BJP, along with various social organisations like the Anti-Terror Action Forum, also participated in the protest.

The Delhi Police had put up barricades around 500 metres from the high commission, and the protesters were stopped there, an officer said.

"Earlier, the government carried out a surgical strike. We demand similar action again to eradicate terrorism. This was a shameful attack on innocent tourists," a member of the Anti-Terror Action Forum told PTI Videos.

"We trust the government has already made a plan," he added.

Another protester said the government must take strict action against Pakistan.

"We feel more surgical strikes are now required. This is such a shameful act by terrorists. Every single Indian is hopeful that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will take strict action against terrorism," said the protester.

The protesters also demanded that urgent steps be taken to ensure the safety of pilgrims headed to Jammu and Kashmir for the upcoming Amarnath Yatra.

"The registration process is already underway for the Amarnath pilgrims, and this attack has caused panic among them. Many devotees are cancelling their plans. Now, strict action is an immediate requirement," another protester said.

As some of the protesters tried to climb over the barricades in a bid to march towards the high commission, they were stopped by police personnel and taken away.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Police had beefed up security outside the high commission after several organisations called for a protest.

A police officer said they received information that a protest would be held at the Tri Murti Chowk near the Pakistan High Commission.

"Barricades were put up in the area and no one was allowed to disturb the law and order situation," he said, adding that "necessary" traffic diversions were also made to ensure smooth traffic flow in the city.

"We have deployed traffic police personnel at various points around the site of the protest who are guiding commuters," the officer added. (PTI)

Railway probe reveals officials forcing loco pilots to overwork, manipulate working hours

NEW DELHI, April 24: A probe conducted by the South Central Railway on the working hours of loco pilots has revealed that the crew officials forced loco pilots to work for 13-15 hours compromising safety of train operations.

According to the norms, a loco pilot can't be asked to work more than 11 hours at a stretch.

The matter came to light after a loco pilot of goods train, R Ravi Shankar from Secunderabad (SC) division, refused to attend to call for duty alleging that he was not given enough time for rest.

"On analysis of his working hours it was found that LPG (R Ravi Shankar) working hours were 13:55 hrs as per CMS report and when compared with divisions' explanation, it was stated that LPG has worked 15 hours," a circular dated April 22, 2025 issued by the South Central Railway Headquarters said.

It added, "It was further confirmed by Shri R Ravi Shankar, LPG/GALA (Loco pilot, goods from Gu-nadala) that his actual working hours were 14:26 hrs, 31 minutes of his working hours were deducted to avoid above 14 hrs cases being reported in CMS."

In light of the facts, the Railways launched a probe of the CMS (crew management system) report and was

shocked to see that "there were 620 cases of LPG working between 13:55 hours to 14:00 hours (01.04.2025 to 19.04.2025) in SCR."

"Out of total 620 cases, 545 cases are of SC division," the circular said.

"Such a high number of cases (working hours between 13:55 to 14:00) indicates that while signing off, crew are being forced to feed incorrect time," it added.

The SCR scrutiny also showed 42 cases in Vijayawada division, 26 in Guntakal, three each in Guntur and Nanded and one in Hyderabad division, where working hours of LPG were between 13:55 to 14:00 hours.

"It is a serious irregularity and should be stopped immediately," the SCR circular said.

"Practically, such practices make data favourable and stifle the initiative to improve train running. Further it leads to under-rest booking of crew, which is against the safe running of trains," it added. The circular asked the senior officer bearers to issue necessary instructions to crew lobby officials not to resort to such practices.

"Any manipulation of data related with train operations should be viewed seriously and appropriate action should be initiated against erring employees," the circular warned. (PTI)

INDORE, April 24: A 25-year-old man from Indore, whose father was shot dead in front of his eyes during the terror attack in Pahalgam town of south Kashmir, on Thursday said the gunmen included minor boys who had cameras mounted on their heads.

Terrorists attacked Baisaran, a prominent tourist spot in Pahalgam known as "Mini Switzerland", killing at least 26 people and injuring several others on April 22. Most of the deceased were tourists from other states, including 58-year-old Sushil Nathaniel from Indore.

Nathaniel was posted as a manager at the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) office in Alirajpur, about 200km from Indore. He had gone to Kashmir with his entire family.

During the attack, Nathaniel's



daughter Akanksha (35) was shot in the leg by the assailants. However, his wife Jennifer (54) and son Austin alias Goldie (25) escaped unharmed.

Grieving the loss of his father, Austin told reporters, "The terrorists included underage boys around 15 years old. There were at least four of them. They were taking selfies during the attack and had cameras mounted on their heads."

He revealed that the terrorists asked his father and others present at the spot about their religious identity before shooting them. To confirm if someone was Muslim or non-Muslim, they were asked to recite the 'kalma' (Islamic declaration of faith), the 25-year-old added.

Austin maintained that if someone recited the 'kalma' on the terrorists' instruction, they were later forced to strip.

"I saw the terrorists shoot six people right in front of me," he said, describing the horrific incident.

Asked what he expects from the government now, the young man replied, "I only want a heavy deployment of police and Army personnel at that place (Baisaran) because it receives the highest number of tourists." (PTI)

First swap kidney transplant conducted at AIIMS Raipur



NEW DELHI, April 24: The AIIMS Raipur has successfully performed its first swap kidney transplant, making it the first among the newer AIIMS institutions and the first government hospital in Chhattisgarh to carry out this complex and life-saving procedure.

The Union Health ministry said swap kidney transplant, which is also known as Kidney Paired Transplant (KPT), can lead to a 15 per cent increase in the number of transplants.

In a swap transplant, a patient with renal failure who has a willing living donor but is unable to receive the kidney due to an incompatible blood group or the presence of HLA antibodies can still undergo a transplant by exchanging donors with another incompatible pair. Through this

arrangement, both recipients receive compatible kidneys, resulting in successful transplants for both pairs.

In the case at AIIMS Raipur, two male End Stage Renal Disease patients, aged 39 and 41 from Bilaspur, had been on dialysis for three years, the ministry said in a statement.

Both were advised to undergo kidney transplantation. Their respective wives came forward as living donors. However, due to blood group incompatibility direct donation was not possible.

To overcome this challenge, the transplant team at AIIMS Raipur coordinated a successful swap transplant, the statement said.

Each donor gave her kidney to the other recipient, ensuring blood group compatibility and enabling both pa-

tients to receive life-saving organs. The surgery was conducted on March 15, and all four individuals -- both donors and recipients -- are currently recovering well under close observation in the Transplant ICU.

Recognising its potential, the National Organisation and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) has recommended for the implementation of Swap donor transplantation to all states and Union Territories as this option could increase the number of donors.

The NOTTO has also decided to have a 'uniform one nation one swap transplant programme' to facilitate these transplants more effectively across the country, the statement said.

AIIMS Raipur has played a pivotal role in the development of organ trans-

plant in Chhattisgarh. The institute has successfully developed a renal transplant program, encompassing both living and deceased donor transplants.

Six deceased donors have donated their organs in last two years, the statement said.

AIIMS Raipur has also been first amongst the newer AIIMS to start deceased donor organ donation and deceased donor kidney transplantation, it said.

It is also the first in the state to start deceased donor paediatric kidney transplantation. To date, the institute has performed 54 kidney transplants with a graft survival rate of 95 per cent and patient survival rate of 97 per cent, reflecting its clinical excellence and commitment to high-quality patient care. (PTI)

Fawad Khan, Vaani Kapoor condemn Pahalgam terror attack amid calls for ban on 'Abir Gulaal'



NEW DELHI, April 24: Pakistani film star Fawad Khan and Indian actor Vaani Kapoor say they are deeply saddened and gutted over the terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam as growing calls to ban their upcoming film "Abir Gulaal" continue to intensify. On Tuesday, 26 people, mostly tourists, were gunned down in a terror attack in South Kashmir's Pahalgam. It is being described as the deadliest attack in the Valley since the Pulwama strike in 2019.

Fawad, who is set to return to the Hindi film industry with "Abir Gulaal" after almost nine years, shared his anguish over the strike in an Instagram Story on Wednesday night.

"Deeply saddened to hear the news of the heinous attack in Pahalgam. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims of this horrifying incident, and we pray for

strength and healing for their families in this difficult time," the "Zindagi Gulzar Hai" star wrote.

His co-actor Vaani, whose next release is "Raid 2", also shared a post on her Instagram Stories.

"Have been numb, at a loss of words since the time I have seen the attack on innocent people in Pahalgam. Gutted. Devastated. My prayers are with the families," she wrote.

Their responses come shortly after the Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) reiterated its directive on Wednesday, calling for complete non-cooperation with all Pakistani artists, singers, and technicians within the Indian film and entertainment industry.

"Despite the ongoing directive, we've been made aware of the recent collaboration with Pakistani actor Fawad Khan for the Hindi film, 'Abir Gulaal'." (PTI)

STEPHEN FREARS TO DIRECT SERIES BASED ON WILLIAM DALRYMPLE'S 'THE ANARCHY' FOR ROY KAPUR FILMS AND WIIP



NEW DELHI, April 24: Acclaimed British filmmaker Stephen Frears will tackle the series adaptation of author William Dalrymple's "The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company", to be co-produced by Siddharth Roy Kapur's Roy Kapur Films.

"The Anarchy" is mounted on a massive scale as an international co-production between US-based studio wiip and Roy Kapur Films, a press release said.

Frears is best known for movies such as "Dangerous Liaisons", "High Fidelity", "The Queen", "Philomena" and "Victoria & Abdul" as well as shows such as "A Very English Scandal" and "The Regime".

"This is the most contemporary of themes: A ruthless businessman and his corporation seizing power, a group of oligarchs taking over a chunk of the world, asset-stripping, looting, manipulating the stock market, destroying whole economies for their profit. The East India Company stealing India in the 18th Century," the filmmaker said in a statement.

Dalrymple's book, which was published in 2019, is described as a gripping exploration of the British East India Company's commercial ambitions in India, which ultimately led to the takeover of an entire subcontinent.

The book recounts the rise of the East India Company in the second half of the 18th century, against the backdrop of a crumbling Mughal Empire and the rise of regional powers.

The novel is being adapted for the screen by Walon Green, Amit Bhalla, and Lucas Jansen.

Kapur said Frear's range as a filmmaker is unmatched.

"He has directed some of the most beloved films of the last four decades, including some of my personal favourites, and to have him come on board to helm this project is an absolute dream come true. Collaborating with our production partners at wiip has been an incredibly enriching experience.

"This is a story that demanded scale, depth, and ambition, and I am proud that we have brought an extraordinary team together to bring it to life for a global audience," the producer said.

"The Anarchy" will be shot across the UK and Asia. (PTI)

Kartik Aaryan to play shape-shifting snake in 'Naagzilla', film to release on Aug 14 next year

MUMBAI, April 24: Bollywood star Kartik Aaryan-starrer "Naagzilla" is set to arrive in theatres on August 14, 2026, the makers announced Tuesday.

The upcoming film will feature Aaryan in the never-before-seen avatar of Preyamvadeshwar Pyare Chand, an Ichadaari (shape-shifting) 'Naag' (snake) embarking on an epic adventure.

Billed as a one-of-a-kind fantasy comedy, "Naagzilla" is directed by Mrighdeep Singh Lamba of the "Fukrey" franchise from a script written by Gautam Mehra.

The movie is produced by Karan Johar, Mahaveer Jain, Adar Poonawalla, Apoorva Mehta, Sujit Jain, and Lamba, who said it is an entertainer that blends fantasy, folklore, and full-on fun. Johar's Dharma Productions and Aaryan unveiled the first look from the film on their official Instagram handle. The 45-second video features the "Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3" star surrounded by snakes. "Insaan wali pichelein toh bahut dekh leen, ab dekho naagoon wali pichelein! #NaagZilla - Naag lok ka pehla kaand... Funn phailaane aa raha hai - Preyamvadeshwar Pyare Chand Naag Panchami par aapke nazdeeki Ssssinemas mein - 14 August 2026 ko," the post read. (PTI)



Payal Kapadia receives French honour Officier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres



NEW DELHI, April 24: Director Payal Kapadia has been felicitated with prestigious French civilian honour, Officier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, for her contribution to cinema. Kapadia's feature directorial debut "All We Imagine As Light", an Indo-French co-production, won the prestigious Grand Prix award at the Cannes Film Festival last year.

The Mumbai-born filmmaker was conferred with the Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters by Jean-Marc Sere-Charlet, Consul General of France in Mumbai, on behalf of the French government, at a ceremony held in Mumbai on Wednesday. She was recognised for "her outstanding achievements in the field of cinema, her commitment to showcasing the unique voices in India internationally, and her contribution to the cultural relationship between France and India", a press release said. "It is an honour and privilege to be conferred with the distinction of Officer of Arts and Letters. I am also very thankful for the French Government's dedicated support towards independent cinema all over the world," Kapadia said. (PTI)

India a country just as powerful as the world of 'One Piece': Japanese voice actor Kappei Yamaguchi

MUMBAI, April 24: The bond between Japan and India is a precious one and people from both sides should cherish it, says Japanese actor Kappei Yamaguchi, known for his voice starring role in the globally popular anime series "One Piece".

Yamaguchi, who voices the fictional character Usopp in the franchise created by Eiichiro Oda, said India is a country just as powerful as the world of the long-running Japanese show.

"One Piece" can really make everyone smile, and I think that's the case in India and, of course, in America and even in Europe. I've been able to experience this for myself by going to various places. It's a really precious bond (between Japan and India) that we should continue to cherish...

"I thought India was a very powerful country, an exciting country, and I myself have grown to love this country, but the fact that the people of this country are supporting 'One Piece' makes me think that it is a country that is just as powerful as the world of 'One Piece'," Yamaguchi told PTI in an interview.

The actor was recently in India along with his "One Piece" co-star Hiraoki Hirata for the Mumbai Comic Con 2025.

The series, which has been on air since 1999, follows the adventures of Monkey D Luffy, a boy whose body gained the properties of rubber after unintentionally eating a Devil Fruit. With his crew, named the Straw Hat Pirates, Luffy explores the Grand Line in search of the world's ultimate treasure known

as the "One Piece" in order to become the next King of the Pirates.

Hirata, who voices Sanji in the show, said he is happy to see "One Piece" being recognised in India.

"I'd heard that it was really popular all over the world, but I only experienced it for real when I went to America and saw how enthusiastic the fans there were. So, as Kappei said, when people from countries like India get excited, the power they show is incredible..." he added.

While Yamaguchi and Hirata have been voicing the characters of Usopp and Sanji for 25 years now, both the actors originally auditioned to essay Luffy and Roronoa Zoro.

Mayumi Tanaka and Kazuya Nakai eventually voiced the roles of Luffy and Zoro, respectively.

Yamaguchi said he had never before played a role like

Usopp, a member of the Straw Hat Pirates who serves as their sniper.

"I was really worried at first. But now it has been 25 years of me working with



the character, I am able to do it now.

I think the character of Usopp has already become familiar to me, to the point where I wonder what my initial concerns were...

"The character has changed a lot (over the years), as I've been able to put more and more of my own feelings and various aspects of myself into it. I think he's probably the character I

have the most freedom with now," he added.

Voice starring in "One Piece", which streams on Crunchyroll, has had "a huge impact" on Yamaguchi, he said.

"The fact that I can feel happy about being able to work on this series is the greatest thing of all. We have been given a wonderful gift in the form of the 'One Piece' series, which brings a smile to people's faces and allows them to talk to each other."

Hirata said Yamaguchi was already a famous voice actor, but he was unknown before joining the cast of "One Piece".

"So, when I got the role of Sanji in 'One Piece', my life completely changed. When I was chosen as Sanji, 'One Piece' fans didn't know who I was at all," he added. (PTI)

FIA Asia Pacific C'ship: Harikrishnan and Kunal to spearhead Indian challenge

CHENNAI, April 24: Defending champions of APRC India leg Harikrishnan Wadia and Kunal Kashyap of Arka Motorsports, along with reigning national champions Karna Kadur and Musa Sherif will spearhead Indian challenge at the Asia Zone round of the Asia Pacific Rally Championship from April 25-27 at the Madras International Circuit.

A record number of 21 entries have been confirmed and this is an all-time record for India in the APRC Asia Cup, which will be held alongside the FMSCI Indu Chandhok Memorial Indian Rally Championship (INRC), organised by Madras Motor Sports Club (MMSC).

The race of all the 21 cars were completed on Thursday.

They will be given a tough challenge by former INRC champion and ERC round winner Amitrajit Ghosh, 2019 INRC champion Chetan Shivram and co-driver E Shivaprakash and Hyderabad's Naveen Puligilla, who has entered with co-driver Santhosh Thomas.

Naveen recently won the RC3 class of the Kenyan Rally Championship, part of the World Rally Championship circuit. Arnav Pratap Singh along with co-driver Rohit N and Janson Saldanha along with PVS Murthy, will be the other drivers to watch out for.

Anushriya Gulati of Shimla will be the only lady entry while Hyderabad's Jeet Jhabhak will debut the Hyundai i20 in the INRC.

Vicky Chandhok, president of the Asia Pacific Rally Championship working group, said, "Continuing his unstinted support from two years ago, for the FIA APRC, Vamcy Merla has been involved in backing the event in Indonesia, New Zealand and of course in India." (PTI)

AC Milan ruin Inter's treble bid with derby win to reach Italian Cup final



MILAN, April 24: AC Milan hasn't achieved much this season — except when playing city rival Inter Milan. Milan ruined Inter's bid for a treble and advanced to the Italian Cup final with a 3-0 derby win Wednesday courtesy of two goals from Luka Jovic.

It was Milan's third win over Inter this season, having also beaten the Nerazzurri in the Italian Super Cup final in January. "It was a very important game for us. As you know we are not that good in Serie A. We had to show the quality today. We had to show the character," Jovic said. "And we showed it and we are going to Rome."

And if Milan can win another trophy, coach Sergio Conceicao might have a chance at keeping his job — despite the seven-time

European champion sitting ninth in Serie A.

Winning the Italian Cup — which carries a Europa League berth — could be Milan's only route to a spot in continental play for next season.

Milan advanced on 4-1 aggregate following a 1-1 first leg. Bologna brings a 3-0 lead over Empoli into the second leg of the other semifinal on Thursday. The final is scheduled for May 14 in Rome. Inter pressed forward early on and Federico Dimarco struck the crossbar in the 23rd.

But Jovic put Milan ahead 13 minutes later with a powerful header and then doubled the advantage from close range shortly after the break.

Tijjani Reijnders added another for Milan in the 85th by finishing off a full team move.

"We have a lot of belief," Reijnders said. "We have difficulties in the league but we know this is the fastest way to reach (Europe). And if we play like we did today we can win this trophy."

It was Inter's second straight loss after the Serie A leader fell 1-0 at Bologna on Sunday. Inter will play Barcelona in the Champions League semifinals.

Juventus wasted a chance to move back into the Champions League places following a 1-0 loss at Parma in a rescheduled Serie A match. Parma forward Mateo Pellegrino scored with a header in first-half stoppage time. Juventus remained fifth, one point behind Bologna, with five rounds remaining.

Making matters worse for Ju-

ventus was that center forward Dusan Vlahovic came off at half-time with an apparent thigh issue. Juventus was also in fifth place when it fired Thiago Motta last month and hired Igor Tudor as its new coach for the remainder of the season.

It was Juventus' first loss under Tudor, following two wins and a draw. Cristian Chivu took over as Parma coach in February and the team is on a six-game unbeaten run that also includes a 2-2 draw with Serie A leader Inter Milan this month.

Parma-Juventus was one of four matches postponed from Monday due to the death of Pope Francis. Each game was preceded by a moment of silence to mourn the pope, who died Monday at 88. (AP)

Liverpool must wait to clinch Premier League title after Arsenal draws with Palace

LONDON, April 24: One more point. That's all Liverpool needs to secure a record-tying 20th English top-flight title after second-place Arsenal drew 2-2 with Crystal Palace in the Premier League.

Arne Slot's runaway leaders can take care of business on Sunday by avoiding defeat to Tottenham in what is set to be a big party at Anfield. A draw or a win would ensure Liverpool cannot be caught by Arsenal with four more rounds remaining and therefore clinches a second title in five years, tying with fierce rival Manchester United on No. 20 overall.

Becoming the champion in 2020 ended the storied club's 30-year title drought but Liverpool's players couldn't celebrate in front of their fans because of restrictions during the pandemic.

They'll try to make up for it this weekend.

Arsenal twice squandered the lead at Emirates Stadium, with Jean-Philippe Mateta taking advantage of a defensive error by William Saliba to score Palace's second equalizer in the 83rd and leave Arsenal 12 points behind Liverpool.

Arsenal, which started with star forward Bukayo Saka on the bench, looked vulnerable throughout against Palace, with its players perhaps having an eye on the Champions League semifinals against Paris Saint-Germain starting next week.

"We have the most important game of the season in six days," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said. "We need to get

our energy back."

Arsenal has been runner-up to Manchester City in the Premier League the previous two seasons and is facing a third straight second-place finish.

However, an improving City — a 2-1 winner over Aston Villa on Tuesday — is only six points back in third place after Arsenal's 13th draw of an inconsistent campaign.

The hosts went ahead through Jakub Kiwior's header at a free kick in the third minute, only for Palace to reply when playmaker Eberechi Eze met a corner with a brilliantly taken downward volley that skimmed off the turf and flew in off the post in the 27th.

Leandro Trossard wriggled free in the area and scored with a deflected shot in the 42nd minute to restore Arsenal's lead. Mateta, a second-half substitute, had the final say, though, by capitalizing on Saliba's poor pass and floating a shot over stranded goalkeeper David Raya from around 40 meters.

Palace remained in 12th place and has little to play for in the Premier League. It is, however, heading into an FA Cup semifinal game against Aston Villa on Saturday in better health.

"It's important to keep this energy and confidence for the semifinal on Saturday," Palace manager Oliver Glasner said.

"It was not our goal to decide the title, it was our goal to win the game. I think a draw is a very good result. More important is the performance. We are back on the track." (AP)

Real Madrid beat Getafe 1-0 in Spanish league ahead of Copa del Rey final against Barcelona



MADRID, April 24: Real Madrid kept pace with Spanish league leader Barcelona with a 1-0 win at Getafe ahead of the rivals' meeting in the Copa del Rey final.

Arda Güler scored a first-half goal for Madrid, which moved back within four points of Barcelona. The Catalan club edged Mallorca 1-0 on Tuesday. Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti used many reserves ahead of Saturday's Copa final in Seville. Brazil forward Endrick made his first Spanish league start with the club, and Vinicius Júnior was substituted in the second half. Jude Bellingham came off the bench in the second half.

Midfielder Eduardo Camavinga had to be replaced because of an apparent muscle injury in the final minutes and is doubtful to be available for Saturday's final. He had entered the match at halftime to replace defender David Alaba, who also is doubtful because of a muscle ailment. "We'll see, but it's unlikely that they will be available on Saturday," Ancelotti said.

Madrid had demoralizing losses in both "clásicos" against Barcelona this season — 5-2 in the Spanish Super Cup final and 4-0 in their first league encounter at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

Güler scored the winner with a well-placed right-footed shot in the 21st minute at the Coliseum in Getafe.

"Fortunately, I scored the goal that gave us the three points," Güler said. "We knew it was going to be a tough match. It was important to give us confi-

dence for the final (on Saturday)."

Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois made a couple of difficult saves late to secure Madrid's victory.

It was the third league win in a row for Madrid, which endured a Champions League elimination against Arsenal in the competition's quarterfinals.

Getafe has lost three in a row, and four of its last five league games. The club from southern Madrid sits in 12th place.

The match was briefly stopped in the second half as fans from Getafe chanted "Die (Dani) Ceballos, die Ceballos." Celta Vigo moved to seventh place by routing fifth-place Villarreal 3-0 at home with goals by Fer López, Borja Iglesias and Iago Aspas.

The victory ended a two-match losing streak for the Vigo team.

Villarreal, winless in two matches, played a man down from the 37th after Eric Bailly was sent off with a straight red card.

Inaki Williams scored five minutes into the match to give fourth-place Athletic Bilbao a 1-0 win over Las Palmas, helping the Basque Country club to open an eight-point gap above Villarreal, which remains with a game in hand.

Las Palmas, sitting in 18th place, was coming off two wins in a row after a 12-match winless streak in the league.

Alaves moved out of the relegation zone by beating ninth-place Real Sociedad 1-0 at home with a goal by Nahuel Tenaglia in the 65th. (AP)

Superbet Rapid and Blitz: All Eyes on Praggnanadhaa

WARSAW (POLAND), April 24: Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa will be the cynosure of all eyes as he takes on a strong field sans Magnus Carlsen of Norway in the Superbet Rapid and blitz tournament, a part of the grand chess tour, that gets underway here on Saturday.

With his buddy Aravindh Chithambaram as company, Praggnanandhaa is one of the front runners for the title as the absence of Carlsen after two winning triumphs has thrown the field wide open.

Alireza Firouzja, the Iranian-turned-French, starts as the hot bubble waiting to be busted while his compatriot Maxime Vachier-Lagrave would like to live on the

legacy built for the French players in the last decade.

While there are only two Indian contestants among the ten players, it remains to be seen who will win the Grand Chess Tour this year — a series of events that award points based on each performance. For the records, the total prize pool of the event is 175,000 USD with an added attraction of being part of the grand prize at the end of the season.

The absence of Magnus Carlsen stems from his own admission that the classical format no longer excites him. The world No. 1 since 2011, the Norwegian has shifted his focus to Chess960 — now rebranded as 'Freestyle Chess' — and has been enjoying re-



markable success, winning the last two events he participated in over the past fortnight.

Praggnanandhaa will be the one to watch out for given his

accuracy in speed chess that has scalps including that of Carlsen on a few occasions. For Aravindh Chithambaram, his foray here happened

largely because he did exceedingly well to win the Prague Masters that propelled the organisers to offer him a wild card spot.

Levon Aronian and Veselin Topalov are the two most experienced players in the circuit, but it seems unlikely they will pose a serious challenge to the young cavalry.

Duda Jan-Krzysztof of Poland and Firouzja might be prime contenders, but those know the might of Praggnanandhaa, never right him off. The Indian had done a remarkable job winning the Tata Steel Masters earlier this year beating world champion D Gukesh and the fans will be looking for an encore from the Chennai magician. (PTI)

Monfils becomes oldest winner in Madrid; Italian teenager Cina advances and Raducanu wins

MADRID, April 24: Italian teenager Federico Cina picked up his second ATP Masters 1000 victory by defeating Coleman Wong in straight sets at the Madrid Open, while Gael Monfils became the oldest winner in the tournament's history.

The 38-year-old Monfils rallied from a poor start to defeat qualifier Borna Gojo 1-6, 6-2, 6-4 for his first win in Madrid since 2022. The 42nd-ranked Monfils is a two-time quarterfinalist at the Masters 1000 clay-court event.

"At the beginning, he served one second serve," Monfils said of Gojo. "I think he had a 94 first-serve percentage, he played great. I (let the) storm pass, then different tactics. I served more with kick and tried to play a little bit different, maybe let him go and not do so much. At the end, just run, run to the ball. It's not a pretty win, but it's a win."

The 18-year-old Cina won 7-6 (5), 6-1 to back up his victory over current No. 70 Francisco Comesaña in Miami last month, which marked his ATP 1000 debut. He saved both break points he faced against Wong and finished with 19



winners.

"Before the match I was a little bit tight but after a few games I started to feel good," said the 373rd-ranked Cina, a wild-card entry who will next face American Sebastian Korda. "It is really special to win a match at this event."

Monfils next meet seventh seed defending champion Andrey Rublev, who defeated Monfils two weeks ago in the round of 32 in Monte Carlo.

Alexander Bublik beat Alex Michelsen 7-6 (2), 7-6 (4), while Comesaña got past

Spaniard Pedro Martinez 6-4, 6-4 at the clay-court tournament.

Nuno Borges of Portugal rallied to defeat home-crowd favorite Pablo Carreno Busta 6-7 (7), 7-6 (3), 6-3, while Arthur Rinderknech defeated Roman Safiullin 7-6 (4), 6-1. Christopher O'Connell got past Camilo Ugo Carabelli 6-3, 6-4.

Belinda Bencic, who returned from maternity leave last October, defeated Zeynep Sonmez 6-0, 6-2 on the first birthday of her daughter, Bella. Three-time Madrid Open

champion Petra Kvitova, who was back from her maternity leave in February, lost 6-4, 6-0 to Katie Volynets.

Anastasija Sevastova, who has played infrequently since giving birth in late 2022, defeated Pavlyuchenkova 6-4, 7-5.

Emma Raducanu had her first win on outdoor clay since 2022, coming from a break down in both sets to beat Suzan Lamens 7-6 (4), 6-4.

The 2021 U.S. Open champion had missed most of the 2023 clay season because of wrist and ankle surgeries. She then cut short her 2024 season on the surface after losing in her Madrid opener.

In other action in the women's side, Americans Alycia Parks and Bernarda Pera advanced in straight sets. Pera got past Jana Fett 6-4, 6-3, while Parks overcame Victoria Jimenez Kasintseva 6-3, 6-3.

Three other Americans lost: Robbing Montgomery fell 1-6, 6-4, 6-3 to Moyuka Uchijima, Ashlyn Krueger lost 6-7 (7), 6-4, 6-2 to Anastasia Potatova, and McCartney Kessler was defeated 6-2, 6-4 by Bianca Andreescu. (AP)

Paper-free record-keeping: Mandaviya launches Digilocker for athletes

NEW DELHI, April 24: With an aim to ensure hassle-free record-keeping, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya launched the Digilocker facility for athletes, saying it would be mandatory for national federations to digitise certificates and other essential documents of sportspersons within the next one year. Mandaviya formally launched the initiative in the presence of representatives from 40 National Sports Federations, and some athletes, including Tokyo Olympics silver-winning weightlifter Mirabai Chanu and hockey player Jarmanpreet Singh among others. "An athlete, a young girl, had once to me with tears in her eyes to say that she missed a job opportunity because her certificate was considered unverified and she failed to obtain an original from the national federation," Mandaviya recalled. "This should not happen. I want to tell everyone that Digilocker is compulsory. I won't allow exploitation," he said.

Mandaviya formally launched the cloud-based platform for storage, and verification of documents and certificates that has been developed by Digital India Corporation (DIC), which falls under the Ministry of Electronics and IT. The ministry has asked National Sports Federations (NSFs) to digitise all past certificates, right down to the district level, by the end of this year. (PTI)

Chennai Super Kings take on Sunrisers Hyderabad in battle of survival



CHENNAI, April 24: Chennai Super Kings will eye a crucial turnaround at home when they face an equally desperate Sunrisers Hyderabad in a battle of survival in the Indian Premier League here on Friday.

Both sides have endured a turbulent season, notching just four points from eight games, and must now win all remaining fixtures to keep their slim qualification hopes alive.

Known to make the most of home conditions, five-time champions CSK find themselves in uncharted territory as they haven't been able to read the wickets well at the Chepauk.

They started strong at their fortress, dominating Mumbai Indians as Noor Ahmad spun a web around the visitors. But the early promise fizzled out quickly, with three successive losses at home.

The also endured the ignominy of posting their lowest-ever IPL total at home -- 103/9 against Kolkata Knight Riders.

Head coach Stephen Fleming has also voiced frustration over the Chepauk surface, which has offered more to seamers than CSK's usual spin-heavy attack.

There away form has not been any better either, with just one win in four attempts.

CSK have lacked firepower in

the batting department and captain Ruturaj Gaikwad's absence due to an injury has only made it worse for the storied outfit.

MS Dhoni has returned as full-time captain. While his knee continues to limit mobility, the former Indian captain's leadership remains invaluable.

His death-overs batting, field placements, and ability to recalibrate the bowling attack could be key in CSK's revival.

In encouraging signs, 17-year-old Ayush Mhatre made a promising debut against MI with the bat. The franchise has also roped in South Africa's Dewald Brevis in a bid to strengthen their power-hit-

ting department.

SRH, meanwhile, have endured an equally erratic campaign. A bright start gave way to inconsistency, with their ultra-aggressive, attack-at-all-costs strategy falling flat.

The explosive opening pair of Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma, so vital last season, have failed to hit the same heights this year.

While Sharma's brilliance secured a win against Punjab Kings, Head is yet to truly make his mark.

The heavy dependence on their top two has exposed the frailty of the middle order, which has struggled to absorb pressure, something head coach Daniel Vettori also conceded after the seven-wicket loss to Mumbai Indians.

"When Head and Abhishek don't succeed, then it's the responsibility of the other batsmen. Potentially that's what we haven't had this season around. The ability for partnerships, for one or two guys to step up," Vettori said.

Teams (from): Sunrisers Hyderabad: Pat Cummins (c), Ishan Kishan (wk), Atharva Taide, Abhinav Manohar, Aniket Verma, Sachin Baby, Smaran Ravichandran, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Travis Head, Harshal Patel, Kamindu Mendis, Wiaan Mulder, Abhishek Sharma, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Mohammed Shami, Rahul Chahar, Simarjeet Singh, Zeeshan Ansari, Jaydev Unadkat, Eshan Malinga.

Chennai Super Kings: MS Dhoni (c&wk), Dewald Brevis, Devon Conway, Rahul Tripathi, Shaik Rasheed, Vansh Bedi, Andre Siddharth, Ayush Mhatre, Rachin Ravindra, Ravichandran Ashwin, Vijay Shankar, Sam Curran, Anshul Kamboj, Deepak Hooda, Jamie Overton, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Ravindra Jadeja, Shivam Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Noor Ahmad, Mukesh Choudhary, Nathan Ellis, Shreyas Gopal, Matheesha Pathirana.

Match starts at 7:30pm IST.(PTI)

Rohit is a world-class player, will play a huge role for us: Boulton



HYDERABAD, April 24: Mumbai Indians' pacer Trent Boult has backed "world-class" Rohit Sharma to play a pivotal role in the team's pursuit for a record-extending sixth IPL title, following back-to-back half-centuries that signalled his timely return to form.

The Kiwi left-arm pacer was instrumental in dismantling Sunrisers Hyderabad's famed top order, returning with a match-winning spell of 4/26 to cap MI's fourth straight win in emphatic style.

After SRH collapsed to 143/8, MI, powered by Rohit's commanding 46-ball 70, chased down the target in just 15.4 overs. The emphatic win not only boosted their net run rate but also propelled them to third place on the points table.

"I think the whole side, the whole Mumbai Indians squad possesses some world-class players and obviously Rohit needs no introduction in that regard," Boult said at the post-match media interaction.

"I'm sure everyone wants to be contributing at some points, but Rohit's doing a fantastic job of late and playing nicely just at the right time. So he's going to play a huge role for us in the remaining part of the season. I think you just need to be prepared for any role," he added.

Boult also praised captain Hardik Pandya for his leadership style, calling it a refreshing experience.

"Hardik's a passionate crick-

eter, obviously very skilful. He's a great leader, I think. He leads from the front.

"He's a great communicator. He's one of my favourite Indian cricketers, so to get the chance to play underneath him is a great experience."

Boult, who has adjusted seamlessly into a new role after shifting from Rajasthan Royals to MI, emphasised the importance of adaptability in a long tournament like the IPL. (PTI)

Athletes suffer because of factionalism, will not allow that: sports minister to NSFs

NEW DELHI, April 24: National Sports Federations will not be allowed to deviate from an "athlete-centric" approach, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Thursday as he asked them to end factionalism and nepotism to ensure that India's 2036 Olympic bid is successful.

At an elaborate ceremony to launch the first set of certificates in Digilocker, a cloud-based platform for storage, easy-sharing and verification of documents and certificates, the minister did not mince words in addressing the issues that plague NSFs.

"I don't like to interfere in NSFs but it doesn't mean that they are allowed to deviate from the athlete-centric approach of the government," Mandaviya said in his address to representatives from 40 NSFs, who showed up for the digital initiative's formal launch.

"I have spoken to various factions in different federations and I have told them to work on it and ensure that athletes don't suffer," he added. (PTI)

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SRH coach Vettori blames wrong assessment of conditions for loss to MI

HYDERABAD, April 24: Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori admitted that a dramatic top-order collapse coupled with a wrong "assessment" of the pitch proved decisive in their crushing defeat to Mumbai Indians.

The big-hitting SRH top order slumped to 24/4 in the powerplay, and despite a fighting partnership between Heinrich Klaasen (71) and impact substitute Abhinav Manohar (43), the hosts could only manage 143/8, a total that proved woefully inadequate on a pitch that has already seen two 240-plus totals this season.

"The toss was important -- we wanted to bowl first. The wicket was different from what we'd seen before, and while we had discussed the possibility of a 250-280 surface, the conditions changed dramatically. It was tough to assess the par score early on," he said at the post-match press conference. (PTI)

Animesh sets 200m national record with 20.40 sec effort, Chithravel equals own triple jump NR

KOCHI, April 24: Odisha sprinter Animesh Kujur ran a blazing 200m race as he smashed the 200m national record, clocking 20.40 seconds to win the gold medal on the final day of the National Federation Senior Athletics Competition here on Thursday.

The 21-year-old Kujur, who had earlier won a silver in men's 100m, ran a brilliant race to better Amlan Borgohain's earlier national record of 20.52 seconds set in 2022. Borgohain, representing Reliance, finished second with 20.80 seconds.

Kujur, however, missed the World Championships qualifying time of 20.16 seconds which is a very tough ask for an Indian 200m runner.

He, however, bettered the Asian Championships qualifying time of 20.53 seconds set by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI).

In men's triple jump, Praveen Chithravel equalled his own national record of 17.37m and qualified for the World Championships in Tokyo later this year.

The 23-year-old Chithravel, representing JSW, cleared the national record-equaling distance in his third attempt to take the gold on the final day of competitions. He had first set the national record in Havana, Cuba, in May 2023.

His effort breached the World Championships qualifying distance of 17.22m. The World Championships will be held in Tokyo from September.



Abdulla Aboobacker of Air Force finished second with a jump of 16.99m, while Mohammed Muhassin, also of JSW, was third with an effort of 16.28m.

Chithravel, hailing from Tamil Nadu, struggled most part of last year, going beyond 17m only once. He finished 12th in his qualifying round group in the Paris Olympics with a poor effort of 16.25m.

This year, Chithravel began brightly, winning gold in the Uttarakhand National Games in February through a mediocre jump of 16.50m. He then produced a 17.13m effort at the Indian Open Jumps Competition in Bengaluru in March, before Thursday's national record equalling performance. (PTI)

Nehal Wadhwa and self belief: Short interaction with Kohli and facing Archer without fuss



KOLKATA, April 24: It was a surreal feeling for Nehal Wadhwa when he found out that Virat Kohli knew him by his first name.

And then the proverbial ice-breaker was a short interaction where the Punjab youngster got direct feedback on his game from the legend which made his day.

Wadhwa, who smashed a match-winning 33 not out against RCB in Punjab Kings' rain-curtailed five-wicket victory, said he was stunned when Kohli recognised him before the game.

"I was actually really shocked when before the match Virat bhai was standing out

and talking to Shreyas Iyer, and asked in Punjabi 'ki haal chaal, Nehal' (how are you doing Nehal?)" Wadhwa recalled his 'Red Letter Day' with utmost fondness.

"I wasn't really expecting that he would remember my name. That made me really happy." That moment, Wadhwa said, opened the door for a quick conversation he had long waited for.

"Till last year, I used to tell a player -- either it was Tilak (Varma) or Surya bhai (Suryakumar Yadav) -- that I wanted to talk to Virat bhai once," said the former Mumbai Indians batter.

"That was the actual ice-breaker where I got to know that yes, Virat bhai knows my name, and I could actually go up to him and have a conversation."

Following the game, Wadhwa seized the moment to seek feedback from Kohli as he was later seen taking a photo.

"As soon as the match finished, I went up to him and asked, 'Virat bhai, you have seen me for the last two years and this year -- what do you think?'"

Kohli's praise -- especially for Wad-

hera's shot selection, composure and match awareness -- left a lasting impression.

"It was really good talking to him and I enjoyed it a lot," the 24-year-old added. "His words reinforced my belief and helped me understand how to approach the game better."

After his match-winning knock against RCB, Wadhwa received a special phone call from Yuvraj Singh. "His words were like golden words to me," he said. "He gave me tips, told me how I can go one step ahead. I have huge respect for him."

Wadhwa's growth from floater at Mumbai Indians to a key middle-order anchor for Punjab Kings has reflected his transformation.

He also recalled facing Jofra Archer in his debut season with Mumbai Indians in 2023 that proved transformative.

"When I batted against Archer, that was the actual moment where I had that self-confidence," he said.

"As they say, it's not about being good, it's about knowing that you are good." (PTI)

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