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● Make choice between post and freedom: SC to Senthil Balaji

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# Perpetrators of attack identified; 3 sketches released

**J-K bloodbath: India promises strong response in 'near future' as families mourn their dead**

**SRINAGAR/NEW DELHI, April 23:** A day after 26 people were ruthlessly gunned down in Kashmir's Pahalgam town, security agencies on Wednesday released sketches of three Pakistani terrorists as a grim Centre took stock of the situation and anguished families said adieu to the men they had loved and lost.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who cut short his visit to Saudi Arabia, met external affairs minister S Jaishankar and national security advisor Ajit Doval in the morning at the airport itself. In the evening, he chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security to formulate India's response.

"People responsible for such acts will get a strong response in the near future," defence minister Rajnath Singh said.

Reflecting the government's resolve in the face of the deadliest terror attack since the Pulwama strike and the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, he added, "We will not only trace those who perpetrated the attack but also trace those who



conspired to commit this nefarious act on our soil."

Singh also reviewed the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir with Chief

of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan, the three service chiefs, defence secretary and the director general of military operations.

## Arrangements made to bring back Assam family: CM

**GUWAHATI, April 23:** The Assam government is making arrangements to bring back a family that survived the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, the Chief Minister's Office said on Wednesday. "The@CMOfficeAssam has spoken to a survivor from Assam of the dastardly #PahalgamTerrorAttack and has taken a full brief of the incident which they have faced yesterday," the CMO said in a post on X.

"The entire family's return to the State is being arranged on priority and the Government of Assam is in touch with the Govt of India to bring the family back to Assam at the earliest," it added. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the person is a faculty member of Assam University in Silchar and he was in Kashmir on a family holiday.

It is learnt that Singh directed the armed forces to enhance their combat readiness and increase intensity of anti-terror operations.

It was a day of hushed silences, angry discussions and cries of despair as an entire nation mourned those killed in the brazen attack targeting holidayers in the

scenic expanse of the Baisaran meadow, six kilometres from Pahalgam.

Other ministers, including Union home minister Amit Shah, also issued strong statements.

Shah, who visited Baisaran, met the injured in hospital and chaired security review meetings, also signalled the intent

of the government.

"Bharat will not bow to terror. The culprits of this dastardly terror attack will not be spared," he said. Those behind the Pahalgam atrocity will face severe consequences, Shah added.

Giving a face to the terrorists behind the massacre, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Kharge, Rahul speak with HM Shah, J-K CM

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi have spoken with home minister Amit Shah, Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah and senior party leaders from the union territory to get an update on Tuesday's horrific Pahalgam terror attack, asserting that the families of the victims deserve justice.

Kharge urged the central government to talk to all the political parties to ensure security in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Congress chief said that late on Tuesday night, he spoke to home minister Shah, J-K chief minister Abdullah, and senior J-K Congress leaders about the despicable carnage in Pahalgam that killed at least 26 people, mostly tourists.

"The perpetrators of this heinous terror attack must not go unpunished. The innocent victims must get justice," Kharge said in a post on X.

"Unity in action in the wake of adversity is the need of the hour. This cross-border terror attack should be responded to with an adequate and resolute reply," he said.

"Government of India must talk to all the political parties to ensure security in Jammu and Kashmir and make every possible effort to ensure the safety of tourists," Kharge added.

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, also said he spoke to Shah, Abdullah, and J-K Congress chief Tariq Karra about the horrific terror attack in Pahalgam to get an update on the situation.

The Congress leader, who's currently on a visit to the US, asserted that the families of the victims deserve justice and "our fullest support".

"Spoke with HM Amit Shah, J-K CM Omar Abdullah, and J-K PCC President Tariq Karra about the horrific Pahalgam terror attack. Received an update on the situation," he said in a post on X.

On Tuesday, the Congress demanded the government to take accountability for the deadly terror attack (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Cowardly strike on innocent citizens will evoke strong response: Govt

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** After political parties called for hunting down the terrorists responsible for the Pahalgam attack on tourists, the Centre asserted on Wednesday that the "cowardly" strike on innocent citizens will soon evoke a "strong response".

Home Minister Amit Shah, who visited the attack site in Baisaran, near Pahalgam town in south Kashmir's Anantnag district, asserted that the country will not bend down before terror and those responsible for the heinous act will not be spared.

Shah reached Pakistan in a helicopter and was briefed by security officials on the sequence of events and the possible routes the terrorists took to reach the popular tourist spot, which is surrounded by thick pine forests. Shah later met the injured in the Anantnag hospital and

also called on the families of those killed in the attack.

After laying wreaths on the bodies of the victims, Shah said on X: "Bharat will not bend to terror. The culprits of this dastardly terror attack will not be spared."

As outrage and widespread condemnation poured in a day after the terrorists killed at least 26 people, mostly tourists, the country saw protests at several places, including in Jammu and Kashmir where a bandh was observed.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) and took stock of the situation. Shah briefed the meeting after his visit to Jammu and Kashmir. The meeting was also attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and External Affairs Minister S (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Time to show India's strength to Pakistan: Himanta on Pahalgam terror attack

**GUWAHATI, April 23:** A day after the Pahalgam terror attack that claimed 26 lives, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday asserted that the time has come to demonstrate India's strength to Pakistan and deal firmly with its sympathisers within the country.

Sarma claimed that the terrorists killed people in south Kashmir after asking about their religion and targeted only Hindus.

The Assam CM claimed, "This is the first time that terrorists asked about religion before killing the people. Our people should understand that for Pakistan, there is no OBC, SC and ST among Hindus. It is only Hindus."

Terrorists struck at Baisaran in Pahalgam on Tuesday, killing at least 26 people, mostly tourists, and injuring several others.

Syed Adil Hussain Shah, a 30-year-old local pony ride operator, was among the deceased. He was laid to rest on Wednesday at the ancestral graveyard at his Hapatnagar village in Pahalgam with chief minister Omar Abdullah turning up to offer 'fatiha' to him and hailing his courage to stand up against the armed assailants.

He strongly believes that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will "handle" Pakistan, but it is time to know those who live in India and behave like Pakistanis.

He alleged that these people are trying to divide the Hindus and the society.

"They are more dangerous. The time has come to show our strength to Pakistan and its friends inside our country. I strongly believe that the nation will definitely teach them a

lesson," the CM asserted. Sarma said that what happened in Pahalgam is really concerning and is beyond any words to condemn it, and alleged that the Pakistani Army chief had threatened the Hindus seven days ago, and now the incident has taken place.

"We have political leaders in India who search for castes among the Hindus, but terrorists do not look for castes. If you are Hindu, then they will kill you. If you belong to other religions, then you are alive," Sarma said. (PTI)

Prabhakar Prabhu to restore train services to the North East, which has been snapped due to floods. In a telephonic conversation, Sonowal apprised Prabhu of the ordeal faced by the passengers in view of the disruption of the rail links (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## President Murmu postpones Assam visit due to J&K terror attack

**GUWAHATI, April 23:** President Droupadi Murmu's scheduled two-day visit to Assam later this week has been postponed following the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, officials said on Wednesday.

Murmu was slated to reach Guwahati on Thursday evening to take part in two official functions the next day.

"We received a communication from the Rashtrapati Bhavan informing us of the postponement of the visit due to the attack. It will be rescheduled at a later date," an official of the Assam Governor's Secretariat told PTI.

On Friday, Murmu was scheduled to confer the Srimanta Sankardeva Award to dance exponent Sonal Mansingh at a state government function.

She was also invited to be the chief guest for the 32nd convocation of Gauhati University, scheduled to take place on Friday afternoon.

"We received the communication that the President has postponed her visit. We will hold the convocation (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Two in police custody, eight in jail for youth's death in Jorhat assault case

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, April 23:** Two of the ten persons arrested by police in connection with the assault on Bedanga Bhushan Baruah—a youth from Chandan Nagar locality who succumbed to his injuries at a private hospital here on Tuesday—were remanded to four-day police custody on Wednesday.

The remaining eight were sent to judicial custody after being produced before a local court.

According to sources, Abdul Noor and Ramjan Khan were remanded to police custody, while the other eight—Pranab Gowala, Rohit (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam MP stayed in Pakistan for 15 days without informing Indian govt: Himanta

**GUWAHATI, April 23:** Without taking the name of Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said one parliamentarian from the state had stayed in Pakistan for 15 days without intimation to the Indian government.

The Assam CM and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi, the Deputy Leader of Congress in Lok Sabha, over his British wife Elizabeth Colburn's alleged connection with Pakistan's spy agency ISI.

"The Assam government has information that one parliamentarian from the state had stayed 15 days in Islamabad. He also has a relationship with the Pakistan embassy. Many more information will come to light," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a campaign meeting for panchayat elections.

By September 30, the people of the state will see with evidence how the son of a proud father went against the nation, he added.



"We got proof that he stayed in Islamabad for 15 days without any intimation to the Indian government. We have many more proofs. So, I believe he learnt how to read namaz there itself," Sarma said.

The Assam CM has been attacking Gogoi for his pictures and videos showing his offering namaz during the Ramzan and Eid festivals.

"Pakistan is our big enemy, but those praising Pakistan while staying in the country are even a bigger enemy. We can identify the outside enemy, but it's not possible to know the enemy inside our home."

"We have got a lot of information. By September, we will submit all the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Shutdown against terror attack in Kashmir valley, first time in 35 years

**SRINAGAR, April 23:** Kashmir valley observed a shutdown against a terror attack for the first time in 35 years on Wednesday as organisations from all walks of life supported the bandh call to protest the killings in Pahalgam tourist resort, officials said.

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.

Security has been beefed up across the valley, especially at vital tourist spots.

Most of the shops, fuel stations and other business establishments were shut in Srinagar, the officials said.

They said only shops dealing in essential commodities were open across the city.

Public transport was also sparse, but private vehicles were plying normally, they added.

Private schools were also shut

across the valley, but government schools were open, the officials said.

The effect of the shutdown was also witnessed in the other district headquarters of the valley, they said.

Peaceful protests were also held at several places in the valley, with the protestors denouncing the attack. They called for stopping the killing of innocent people.

Several political parties, socio-religious organisation, trade bodies, and civil society groups called for a shutdown in Kashmir to protest against the attack in Baisaran meadows of the Pahalgam resort in south Kashmir's Anantnag district.

The ruling National Conference (NC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Peoples' Conference, and Apni Party were among the political outfits that supported the shutdown to protest the attack.

Mutahida Majlis Ulema (MMU) -- an amalgam of several religious bodies -- (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## The two have finalised the terms of reference (ToR) for the agreement

# India, US trade talks from April 23 in Washington; to give impetus to BTA negotiations

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** Indian and US officials will begin deliberations on the proposed bilateral trade agreement in Washington from Wednesday with an aim to iron out issues and give an impetus to the negotiations.

The US has stated that the pact with India will help open new markets for American goods and create new opportunities for workers, farmers, and entrepreneurs in both countries.

According to the US Trade Representative, the United States is looking at increasing market access, reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers, and negotiating a robust set of additional commitments to ensure long-term benefits.

The US has on multiple occasions



flagged concerns on widening trade deficit with India, which is USD 45.7 billion in 2024. It would look at bridging this deficit with India through the BTA.

The two have finalised the terms of reference (ToR) for the agree-

ment.

The three-day talks assume significance as the US has paused the imposition of tariffs for 90 days.

The ToRs cover around 19 chapters, such as tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and customs facilitation.

An official said these talks would lead to the formal launch of negotiations for the bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

India's chief negotiator, Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce Rajesh Agrawal, is leading the team for the first in-person talks between the two countries.

On April 15, commerce secretary Sunil Barthwal had stated that India will try to close the negotiations as quickly as possible with the US.

India and the US have been engaged in negotiating a bilateral trade agreement since March. Both sides have targeted to conclude the first phase of the pact by the fall (September-October) of this year, with an aim to more than double the bilateral trade (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## FOOD POISONING CASE

# 22 Meghalaya children return from Karnataka



**SHILLONG, April 23:** Twenty-two children from Meghalaya studying in an illegal private boarding school in Karnataka were handed over to their parents here on Wednesday, an official said.

The children were studying in

the illegal boarding school in Karnataka. On March 16 in a food poisoning incident in the boarding school, two children died and the other children were shifted to a government children's home, the official said.

The parents of the children moved court for the return of their children. The court directed that the children be reunited with their parents in Meghalaya.

The children from Meghalaya returned to their home state accompanied by the Child Welfare Officer of Karnataka. The Karnataka Child Welfare Officer handed over the children to their Meghalaya counterpart who after verifying the parent's identities handed them over to their parents.

Meghalaya Social Welfare minister Paul Lyngdoh was present in the ceremony where the children were handed over to their parents.

Of the 22 children, four were from East Khasi Hills district, seven from West Jaintia Hills district, eight from East Jaintia Hills district and three from West Khasi Hills district, the official said. (PTI)



## PAHALGAM TERROR ATTACK

# Hospitality industry braces for Kashmir travel booking cancellations

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** Anticipating largescale travel booking cancellations for Jammu and Kashmir in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, aggregators on Wednesday said they are working with airlines and hotels to offer free date change and cancellation waivers to travellers.

Hospitality industry players expect the terror attack to sow fear in the minds of tourists who were keen to visit Jammu and Kashmir, adversely affecting the livelihoods of people in the state who are dependent on tourism.

At least 26 people -- mostly tourists -- were killed by terrorists on Tuesday at the Baisaran meadows in Pahalgam.

"As per the early observations, flight cancellations jumped 7x, and a drop in future bookings by nearly 40 per cent," said Manjari Singhal, Chief Growth and Business Officer, Cleartrip.

"As travellers navigate this difficult situation, our teams are working round the clock with airline and hotel partners to provide flexibility and assistance on bookings/ cancellations. Our on-ground team is doing everything in their capacity to offer support to travellers. We remain committed to providing continued assistance to both our customers and partners during this difficult time," a MakeMyTrip spokesperson said.

EaseMyTrip Chairman and Founder Nishant Pitti said, "In light of the ongoing situation in Srinagar, we at EaseMyTrip are fully committed to supporting our customers who are travelling to or from Srinagar. We understand the uncertainty this situation may cause and are here to minimise any inconvenience to your travel plans. To ensure flexibility, we have extended free change and cancellation waivers for all bookings made on or before April 22, applicable for travel up to April 30".

FAITH (Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality) General Secretary Rajiv Mehra said for the people of Jammu & Kashmir, tourism is not just a livelihood, it is their pride, their legacy and their hope.

"This attack has not only harmed innocent lives but has also dealt a cruel blow to the thousands of families who depend on tourism to survive. From houseboat owners and hoteliers to local guides and artisans, every individual in this chain of warmth and welcome is affected," he observed.

Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) also expressed its deep anguish and pain on selected targeting of tourists in Kashmir by a group of terrorists, saying it strongly condemns the cowardly terror attack "which is clearly designed to deeply impact tourism in Kashmir and create an atmosphere of fear".

"We are shocked and appalled at these attacks in our country. Since 2020, the J&K region has seen a steady upswing in tourism numbers going from 3 million in 2020 to close to 24 million in 2024," said Arjun Baljee, President, Royal Orchid Hotels.

"This 8x huge surge in tourists impacts and improves the lives of the long-tail of the tourism industry and leads to the prosperity of the locals. The Pahalgam attacks will sow fear in the tourists who want to visit this beautiful region and set it back in the near term," Baljee added. (PTI)



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## Rupee falls 25 paise to settle at 85.44 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, April 23:** The rupee depreciated 25 paise and settled for the day at 85.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, on surge in crude oil prices and importer demand for the American currency. Forex traders said the American currency recovered, supported by Donald Trump's softened stance -- particularly towards the Federal Reserve and China.

However, positive domestic markets and weak US dollar index and foreign fund inflows supported the domestic unit at lower levels.

Forex traders said the market found support after Trump on Tuesday backed off from threats to fire FED Chair Jerome Powell after days of intensifying criticism against him for not cutting rates. Trump also signalled the possibility of lower tariffs against China. At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.24, and touched an intra-day low of 85.52 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.44 (provisional), registering a loss of 25 paise over its previous closing level.

On Tuesday, the rupee settled lower by 4 paise at 85.19 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias amid risk on sentiments in the global markets and FII inflows. Overall weakness in the US dollar may also support the rupee."

"However, rising crude oil prices and importer buying of dollars may cap sharp upside. Traders may take cues from PMI data from the US today. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.20 to 85.80," said Anuj Choudhary -- Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.02 per cent at 98.93. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 1.32 per cent to USD 68.33 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 520.90 points, or 0.65 per cent, to settle at 80,116.49, while the Nifty rose 161.70 points, or 0.67 per cent, to 24,328.95. (PTI)

## DS Group crosses ₹10,000 crore in revenue



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 23:** The Dharampal Satyapal (DS) Group, one of India's leading FMCG conglomerates, has surpassed ₹10,000 crore in revenue for the financial year 2024-25, according to an official statement released by the company. With this milestone, DS Group enters the league of the top 15 FMCG companies in India.

The landmark achievement was primarily driven by the Group's Food and Beverage (F&B) division, which contributed 42% to the total revenue. The Mouth Fresheners segment followed closely with a 38% contribution, while Hospitality accounted for 3%. Other businesses, including tobacco, comprised less than 10%.

The company reported a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16% over the past three years, attributed largely to organic growth. The F&B division alone demonstrated a CAGR of 19% during the same period.

Rajiv Kumar, Vice Chairman of DS Group, described the revenue milestone as a significant step in the company's journey. "Surpassing the ₹10,000 crore revenue milestone is more than just a financial achievement; it signifies our integral role as a significant contributor to India's evolving growth story," he said.

The Group credited its success to a strong understanding of consumer preferences, extensive distribution capabilities, and a focus on innovation.

With over 150 super stockists and more than 5,000 distributors, DS Group claims to reach over 15 lakh retail outlets directly and an additional 35 lakh indirectly across the country.

DS Group's Catch brand continues to lead the F&B market with innovations such as low-temperature and cryogenic grinding technologies, and the introduction of India's first sprinkler salt and pepper products. Its beverage portfolio includes natural spring water sourced from the Himalayas, flavored waters, carbonated drinks, and juices.

In confectionery, the Group has made significant strides with brands like Pass Pass, Silver Pearls, and Pulse -- the latter maintaining a leadership position in the hard-boiled candy segment for nine consecutive years. The recent launch of Pulse Gholmol, a tamarind-flavored soft chew, highlights its continued focus on consumer-driven innovation.

The Group also has a presence in dairy through its Ksheer brand and premium D2C label Ovino. In the Mouth Fresheners segment, Rajnigandha remains the category leader.

In hospitality, DS Group operates six properties, including Namah Nainital and Namah Jim Corbett under the Radisson Individuals brand. The company has earmarked ₹1,000 crore to expand its hotel portfolio to 10-12 properties in the next three years.

Looking ahead, the company aims to double its revenue to ₹20,000 crore by its centenary year, with a focus on sustainability, AI, automation, and global market expansion.

The DS Group's broader portfolio also includes luxury retail, agriculture, and other diversified investments, alongside a strong emphasis on ESG practices, water neutrality, and green manufacturing.

The statement underlined the Group's intent to "create what is worth creating," reflecting its commitment to innovation, consumer satisfaction, and sustainable growth.

dealership experience, the 'R Store', also introduced in the city.

Venkatram Mamillapalle, Country CEO and Managing Director of Renault India Operations, said that the Renault rethinking initiative marks the beginning of a new era for Renault in India. He highlighted the company's long-standing presence in the country and its achievements, including the establishment of one of its largest R&D centres globally, also located in Chennai, employing nearly 10,000 engineers. These engineers not only support domestic product development but also contribute to international projects.

This renewed focus on India comes as Renault Group posts strong global performance figures. In 2024, the company reported its highest-ever operating profit of ₹4.3 billion and revenues of ₹56.2 billion, reflecting a 7.4 per cent increase from the previous year.

With the Renault rethinking strategy now in motion, Renault aims to reposition itself as a brand that not only manufactures in India but also designs for India. The initiative invites customers and stakeholders to rediscover the brand through a lens of innovation, technological advancement, and cultural integration, as Renault redefines its future in one of the world's most dynamic automotive markets.



and insights, enabling faster integration of design into Renault's engineering and innovation processes.

The design centre's architecture reflects a concept Renault describes as "Tactile Confluence," combining modern European elements with traditional Indian cultural influences. Spread over 1,500 square meters, the state-of-the-art facility features immersive virtual reality environments, high-definition visualization tools, flexible collaboration spaces, and a high-performance LED wall. These features are designed to foster creativity, accelerate design workflows, and enhance team collaboration in both local and global contexts.

To symbolize the transformation

strategy, Renault also unveiled a conceptual sculpture titled 'renault. rethink', created by Indian designers. The sculpture is characterized by its fragmented form and inner light, intended to represent emergence, innovation, and the dynamic spirit of change. Laurens van den Acker described it as more than just an artwork, calling it a bold expression of Renault's vision for India and its future.

Renault's new strategy is built on a foundation of deep localization and innovation. The company recently announced the complete acquisition of its joint manufacturing facility and has committed to increasing its localization level to up to 90 percent. The launch of the new Chennai design centre follows the debut of the brand's refreshed

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## Perpetrators of attack identified

security agencies released the sketches of three of the five men suspected to be involved in the terror attack. They are all Pakistanis, officials said, identifying them as Asif Fauji, Suleman Shah and Abu Talha.

They had code names -- Moosa, Yunus and Asif -- and were involved in terror-related incidents in Poonch. Prepared with the help of survivors, the pencil sketches were in black and white. From the line drawings, they appear to be young and have beards.

The Resistance Front (TRF), a shadow outfit of the banned Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror group, claimed responsibility for the attack on Tuesday afternoon.

The attack comes barely a week after Pakistan Army chief Asim Munir announced in Islamabad that it will continue to extend support to the so-called Kashmir cause. Significantly, LeT cadres earlier this month issued provocative anti-India slogans in Rawalakot on April 18, officials said.

As the top government brass met in Delhi and Srinagar to assess the security implications and strategise on what lies ahead, the families and friends of the 26 men, mostly tourists holidaying in Kashmir, dealt with their individual, very personal tragedies.

Like the wife of 26-year-old Navy officer Lt Vinay Narwal. The couple had got married just a few days ago. Visuals of the young woman breaking down as her husband's coffin arrived at the Delhi airport shook the nation. "They were planning a honeymoon in Switzerland, but decided to go to Kashmir instead taking into account the leave he had..." the Narwals' neighbour Seema told reporters in Karnal.

Crowds jostled with each other and slogans went up when his flower bedecked coffin reached Karnal. And in Kanpur, another bride saw her husband being killed in cold blood. Shubham Dwivedi, a 31-year-old businessman from Kanpur, got married just two months ago in February.

He had gone with his wife and family for a weeklong vacation. The newly-weds couple decided to go horse riding around noon on Tuesday when they were confronted by terrorists who asked him to recite an Islamic verse. When he could not, they shot him in the head, his family said.

Hundreds of kilometres away in Kochi, the family of 65-year-old Ramchandran also contemplated a life without him. He had travelled to Kashmir with his wife, daughter and grandchildren who had come from Dubai. But the holiday was never to be. Ramchandran was shot dead in front of his daughter, family sources said.

The stories played out in a tragic echo across many homes. And in ground zero, Kashmiris sent out a clear message - Not In My Name. People poured into the streets across towns and villages to express their grief and condemn the massacre of innocent civilians.

Srinagar city and other parts of Kashmir shut down, the first time since Article 370 was abrogated and the state was downgraded into a union territory in August 2019. (PTI)

## Time to show India's strength

between the North East and the rest of the country. Sonowal apprised Prabhu of impending development of shortfall of essential commodities that the region might experience following prolonged disruption of rail traffic -- both passenger and goods trains and asked his intervention for early restoration of the damaged portion of the tracks washed away by the deluge. Prabhu assured Sonowal that the railways with its men and materials are on the toes, day in and day out to repair the damaged rail tracks and restore train services at the earliest. Sonowal also talked to union minister of road transport and highways Nitin Gadkari to ensure smooth movement of goods laden trucks so that there is no scarcity of essential commodities in Assam and other parts of North East. Gadkari assured the chief minister for all necessary measures in this regard. In view of the disrupted train services and following allegations that air tickets have experienced inordinate rise in fares, Sonowal also talked to union minister of state for civil aviation Jayant Sinha and requested him for his initiative for maintaining 'reasonable fare' of flights connecting the North East part of the country.

Later talking to newsmen at his official residence in New Delhi, Sonowal said that the entire state government focussed on providing relief and rehabilitation to the flood affected people of the state. He also said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a meeting on Monday, asked the chief ministers to help the states affected by flood. "Prime Minister has been closely monitoring the flood situation." (PTI)

## President Murmu postpones

on the announced date and time without the President," a university official said. Terrorists struck a prime tourist location at Baisaran meadows near Pahalgam in south Kashmir on Tuesday killing 26 people, mostly tourists. (PTI)

## Two in police custody

Rajput, Ashwajit Barua, Babu Ali, Debajit Barua, Bikash Chetry, Mon Barua, and Abdul Rahim--were sent to jail. All ten have been booked under Sections 126(2), 118(2), 109(1), 3(5), and 103 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) in connection with Jorhat Police Station Case No. 202/2025.

Bedanga was reportedly attacked by the group on Sunday night while returning home from a Bihu function. He had allegedly asked the youths earlier not to create a nuisance near the venue of the programme.

Meanwhile, Jorhat MLA Hitendra Nath Goswami visited the house of the deceased on Wednesday and offered his condolences to the bereaved family.

Residents of the locality reportedly informed Goswami about the rising drug peddling activities in the area by some unscrupulous elements, and urged strong police action to curb such activities.

## Shutdown against terror

which is headed by Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq -- appealed to the people of J-K to protest the heinous crime by marking a shutdown on Wednesday.

"The Islamic fraternity of Jammu and Kashmir through Muthahida Majlis Ulema (MMU) in support and solidarity with the bereaved families of those killed appeal to people of Jammu Kashmir to peacefully protest this heinous crime tomorrow by a shutdown," Mirwaiz said.

Kashmir's trade and tourism bodies, including Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industries, and Kashmir Traders and Manufacturers Federation, had also called for a shutdown.

As a mark of respect and solidarity with the victims and their families, the Private Schools' Association of Jammu and Kashmir (PSAJK) announced the closure of all private schools across Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday. The Kashmir University has postponed all examinations scheduled on Wednesday.

Security has been beefed up across the Kashmir valley, the officials said.

They said security personnel were deployed in strength at vital installations, important tourist spots and the entry and exit points of the city as well as other districts. Check-points have been established at several places in the city as well as other districts, they said.

Security forces were conducting checking and frisking of vehicles and people at several places, they added. The forces were maintaining a strong vigil at the famous tourist places and establishments, the officials said. Security forces were conducting a massive search operation in the Baisaran area of Pahalgam to nab the attackers, the officials said. Additional forces have been deployed at the tourist resort a day after the attack. (PTI)

## Assam MP stayed in Pakistan

evidence and reports in front of the people. There are many explosive proofs, which will be brought before the public," Sarma said. The Assam CM further said that he had already told the Assam Assembly about the parliamentarian's family relationship with Pakistan and it will be vividly clear as black and white.

Last month, the chief minister had said the government may seek help from agencies like Interpol in investigating the alleged interference of Pakistani national Ali Tauqueer Sheikh, who is claimed to have links with Gogoi's British wife Elizabeth Colburn, in India's internal affairs.

Sheikh, an advisor of the Pakistan Planning Commission and a former colleague of Colburn, was charged under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). (PTI)

## India, US trade talks

to USD 500 billion by 2030, from about USD 191 billion currently. In a trade pact, two countries either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. They also ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments.

While the US is looking at duty concessions in sectors like certain industrial goods, automobiles (electric vehicles particularly), wines, petrochemical products, dairy, and agriculture items such as apples, tree nuts, and alfalfa hay; India may look at duty cuts for labour-intensive sectors like apparels, textiles, gems and jewellery, leather, plastics, chemicals, oil seeds, shrimp, and horticulture products. (PTI)

## Kharge, Rahul speak with

instead of "making hollow claims" on the situation being normal in Jammu and Kashmir, saying an all-party meeting should be called to take all political parties into confidence. The opposition party denounced the terror attack as a "blot on humanity" and said it should not go "unanswered effectively".

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

The deceased included two foreigners -- from the UAE and Nepal -- and two locals, officials said. Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Abdullah described the terror attack as "much larger than anything we've seen directed at civilians in recent years".

Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said the news of tourists being killed and injured in the "cowardly" terrorist attack in Pahalgam was "extremely condemnable" and "heartbreaking". "I express my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and hope for the speedy recovery of the injured," he said. (PTI)

## Cowardly strike on innocent

Jaishankar, besides National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval and other officials. The Congress and other political parties extended their support to the Centre in tackling terror and demanded an all-party meeting to address the challenge of terrorism.

In Bengaluru, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge termed the Pahalgam terror attack a direct assault on the Indian State and said the entire country stands by the Centre in its fight against terror.

He urged the government to use all its strength to hunt down the terrorists and also suggested that an all-party meeting be called to address the challenge of terrorism in a spirit of consensus.

Referring to his telephonic conversation with the home minister, Kharge said, "Shah told me that they are going to take action drastically in that area."

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) will meet at 11 am on Thursday at the AICC office in New Delhi to discuss the terror attack, he added.

"We must give a fitting response and in this matter, we are all one and we will fight. But there should not be claims and finger-pointing."

"We urge the government to use all its strength to hunt down the terrorists, it has been almost 22 hours now. The government must do everything possible to maintain tourists' confidence in the security arrangement of Jammu and Kashmir," Kharge said.

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

## Renault opens new design centre, marking beginning of 'renault. rethink' transformation strategy in India

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 23:** Renault India has announced the launch of its new brand transformation strategy, 'renault. rethink', marking a significant shift in the French carmaker's approach to the Indian market. According to an official statement, the initiative has been unveiled alongside the inauguration of Renault's new design centre in Chennai, now its largest such facility outside France.

This move represents a key milestone in Renault's International Gameplan 2027, as the company deepens its commitment to the Indian market, which it identifies as the world's third-largest automobile sector. The new Chennai-based facility aims to position India not only as a manufacturing hub but also as a design and innovation powerhouse for the company. The centre is expected to play a critical role in developing models and concepts tailored specifically to Indian consumers while also contributing to global Renault projects.

Laurens van den Acker, Chief Design Officer of Renault Group, stated that the decision to establish a dedicated design studio in India is essential to understanding local nuances and delivering mobility solutions rooted in Indian preferences. He emphasized that the centre would leverage Indian talent



## Organisations condemn cowardice terror attack in Pahalgam ● Burn Pakistan flag; PM effigy Declare war if necessary!

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 23:** Organisations in various parts of the state on Wednesday have strongly condemned the terror attack in Pahalgam in Kashmir that claimed lives of many tourists on Tuesday.

Condemning the incident President Jalal Uddin, in a statement, expressed outrage, declaring, "We cannot accept Pakistani militants killing our brothers in the name of Islam because our ancestors did not support Jinnah during the partition of the country." The union demanded that Pakistan be held accountable for the bloodshed and urged the Indian government to respond decisively, even suggesting the possibility of declaring war if necessary. The MSUA assured full cooperation from citizens across India in supporting such measures. Highlighting the need for justice, the union announced plans to organise candlelight marches in various districts of Assam to honor the victims of the Pahalgam attack.



"Pakistan must pay the price for the blood of Indian citizens," the statement read, reflecting the union's resolve to seek accountability. The MSUA's call for action has sparked renewed discussions on national security and the government's response to cross-border terrorism. The union's planned candlelight vigils are expected to draw significant participation as a

tribute to the lives lost in the tragic incident.

In Hojai, members of AAMSU in protest of burnt effigy of Pakistani Prime Minister and the Pakistani national flag at Doboka in Hojai on Wednesday. In an statement, Munwar Hussain, Chief Advisor of AAMSU's Hojai District Committee stated, "We demand that India retaliate against Pakistan

for this attack, and if it does, every soldier of AAMSU will fully support and cooperate with the government." He added, "This is a question of our Indian identity; our country comes first, everything else comes later, Hindustan Zindabad."

The members of Assam Nagarik Manch in Hojai has also condemned the cowardice act by the 'Pakistan supported terrorists' at Pahalgam in Kashmir. Bijoy Chakraborty, General Secretary, ANM said, we strongly condemn this gruesome attack on innocent people. He added, "We demand Government of India to take stern action on terrorists, so that such incidents don't repeat in future." he said.

Condemning the incident people in Sivasagar burnt Pakistani flag in Doulmukh Chariali here and raised slogans against all terrorists and Pakistan government. The protesters demanded strongest military action against the perpetrators of

the ghastly crime.

Speaking to media at the protest site, Nipananda Hazarika, a Postal Employees Union leader, said that people as a nation must remain united to fight the external aggressors. Manoj Kumar Borthakur, Gopal Pandey and Arabinda Baruah, president, secretary & treasurer of All Assam United Brahmin Consortium, through a release condemned the attack on innocent tourists by LeT backed TRF terrorists and urged the Centre to declare war on Kashmiri militants.

Moreover in Sivasagar, The Assam State Journalists Union (ASJU), the leading media forum of the journalists of the state, through a release condemned the brutal attack.

The release signed by the president Jitu Sharma Rajkhowa and secretary Pradip Deka, paid tributes to those that lost their lives and prayed for early recovery of those injured grievously.

## BTR CEM presents ₹ 843 crore budget



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, April 23:** A two-day Budget Session of the Bodoland Territorial Council Legislative Assembly (BTCLA) for the fiscal year 2025-26 commenced from Wednesday, being held at the BTC Legislative Assembly House, Bodofa Nwgrw in Kokrajhar.

Katiram Boro, the speaker of the BTC Legislative Assembly, chaired the session that started with question hour.

During the session, Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and Finance in-charge, presented an estimated budget of ₹ 843 crore to the Bodoland Territorial Region.

The budget has been included a special allocation under the State-Owned Priority Development (SOPD) scheme to facilitate development and welfare aspects of the common masses across the region.

Stating the Budget of the BTR as vision of a "Vibrant BTR Mission," CEM Boro emphasised that the budget to be rooted to rigorous planning aimed at strengthening the Bodoland Model of Peace through sustainable development, good governance, and social harmony.

Of the 40 departments, the Budget has highlighted, the Transformation and Development department has the highest allocation of funds amounting to ₹ 126.27 crore followed by Education with an amount of ₹ 105.05 crore and Health amounting to ₹ 47.74 crore while the department of Lottery allocated the least with an amount of ₹ 1 lakh followed by Excise- ₹ 15 lakh and Legal Metrology- ₹ 35 lakh respectively.

In his budget speech, Boro also made announcements for establishment of Bodoland Community Welfare Department to promote language, culture, and literature, Bodoland Community Museum in Chirang, and Bodoland International School of Peace and Happiness in Tamulpur.

CEM Boro stated that the normal budget of Bodoland Territorial Council for the financial year 2025-26 was presented to the August House of BTCLA highlighting that the present government had been working diligently towards achieving a financial best practice in the council which is grounded on transparency and accountability as per norms stipulated by the Principal Accountant General of Assam. The normal budget has been prepared by incorporating the SOPD grants amount against the provision made in the State Budget for BTC as grants along with the BTC's own source of estimated Revenue Receipts and Expenditures, he said adding that the budget estimates amount for the entrusted departments were provided according to the sectoral allocation issued by the Transformation and Development (T&D) Department.

He said that the budget has been stressed to strengthen work culture and technology driven initiative for good governance across the region, and accordingly launched various humanity welfare services since it's inception in the region.

He said that the council government has specially focused on the development of child and women, especially the needy of the society.

He mentioned that the council government launched the community vision document involving the 26 communities who have been residing in Bodoland region that highlighted it's uplift, development and welfare of language, culture and several aspects. He stated that the vision document is a document of the communities.

## World Book Day at Nowgong College (A)



**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, April 23:** The World Book Day was celebrated with great enthusiasm at Nowgong College (Autonomous) on Wednesday here.

The programme was organised by Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha in collaboration with Nowgong College and Sankardev Sahitya Chora. Noted Assamese novelist and writer Manikuntala Bhattacharyya attended the event as the keynote speaker and emphasised the importance of books in human lives, stat-

ing that books could provide a pollution-free life and mental peace in the digital age.

Bhattacharyya urged everyone to develop a habit of reading books, especially during birthdays and marriage ceremonies, and to gift books to others.

The event was attended by several dignitaries, including senior scribe Prakash Mahanta, Rupak Sarma, MLA of Nagaon - Batadroba constituency, and Dipu Ranjan Sarma, MLA of Samaguri constituency. Bhaswat Saikia, who

recently cleared the UPSC exam, was also present as a special guest. Saikia shared how books enriched his life and helped him to achieve his goals, stating that books are more enriching than movies.

The speakers at the event highlighted the significance of reading books and its benefits. They encouraged the students to develop a habit of reading books and to explore the world of knowledge. The event also featured a book exhibition, showcasing rare and valuable books. Bhuvan Chandra Chutia, professor and the president of Sankardev Sahitya Chora, mentored the entire programme while Dr Pulin Chandra Bora, incharge principal of the college, delivered the welcome address.

Besides, as part of the World Book Day celebrations, a human chain programme was also organised at the college premises to raise awareness about the importance of reading books. Over 300 people participated in the programme, which aimed to promote a culture of reading and book appreciation.

## Panchayat election in Morigaon: 3298 candidates in fray

**HT Correspondent**

**JAGIROAD, April 23:** The Morigaon district administration is all set to conduct the second phase of the upcoming panchayat election on May 7.



There are 29 candidates contesting the second phase of the panchayat elections in Morigaon, while one candidate won unopposed. There are 177 candidates contesting in Anchalik Panchayats, 14 candidates winning unopposed and 1892 candidates contesting in Gaon Panchayats and 115 candi-

dates winning unopposed.

According to the Morigaon District Election Branch, a total of eight candidates contested the Zilla Parishad constituency under Jagiroad Co-District. Similarly a total of 51 candidates contested the Anchalik Panchayat constituency and nine candidates won unopposed. A total of 574 candidates contested the gaon panchayats and 61 candidates won unopposed. There are 14 candidates contesting in the Zilla Parishad constituency under Laharighat Co-District. There are 89 candidates contesting in the Anchalik Panchayat and one candidate won unopposed. The total number of candidates contesting the gram panchayats in Laharighat Co-District is 832 and 20 candidates won unopposed. Each candidate is campaigning door to door in the villages with their symbols and supporters.

## Sonitpur declares 'Dry Day' due to Panchayat polls

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, April 23:** As per a directive from the Excise Department dry day has been declared in Sonitpur and with an aim to ensure the peaceful first phase of the upcoming Panchayat Elections on May 2.

May 4 has also been declared dry day and additionally, on May 4 until the completion of the counting process dry day has been declared.

During the "Dry Day", all retail "OFF" and "ON" shops including club "ON", hotel "ON", IMFL (Indian Made Foreign Liquor) shops, wholesale warehouses, and country liquor outlets must remain closed. Any violation of this order will invite strict action under the provisions of the Assam Excise Act and Rules. Treating this matter as an election-related urgency, the District Commissioner of Sonitpur district, Ankur Bharali, has issued this order.

## One commits suicide in Jagiroad

**HT Correspondent**

**JAGIROAD, April 23:** A 40-year-old man Swarup Dutta committed suicide by hanging himself at his home in Kanabari village under Jagiroad police station at around 11 am on Wednesday.

The victim's body was recovered by police and post-mortem examination was conducted. It is alleged that the incident occurred following family conflict.

## 'Ek Ped Ma Ke Naam' launched in Biswanath

**HT Correspondent**

**BISHWANATH CHARIALI, April 23:** The North Eastern Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institute under the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, Biswanath on Wednesday launched a program titled 'Ek Ped Ma Ke Naam'.

A total of five thousand tea and other tree seedlings were planted within the premises of the institute today as part of the 'Green Campus' program launched by the Government of India under the Swachh Bharat Mission. This year, it has been decided to plant 11,000 seedlings of various fruits and other trees in stages, said P Kamalabai, Director of the Institute.

The program was inaugurated by P Kamalabai, Director of the Institute, in the presence of officers and employees of the Institute, more than 100 farmer trainees from various engineering colleges and universities.

In addition, the Director mentioned the benefits of mechanization in the agricultural sector and the equipment developed for farmers and their application. Director of the Institute P Kamalabai, Senior Agricultural Engineer MR Patil, Superintendent of Farms Tejbir Singh, Agricultural Engineer Rajnish Patel, Administrative Officer Bitul Payeng and other officers and employees, students from various colleges and universities of the country participated in the programme.

## Actor Phwilao Basumatary passes away

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, April 23:** Well-known TV series artist and singer, Phwilao Basumatary, popularly known as Basu Da passed away on Tuesday night after a health complications at a private hospital in Guwahati.

According to source, Phwilao Basumatary, who is popular comedian artist in the Beharbari Outpost, a TV series, was admitted to a private hospital on Tuesday morning due to health issues, and breathed his last at around 10 pm.

He was going under treatment for liver and diabetes since past few months. He was a singer, lyric in Bodo language and Assamese that he was associated with Bodo cinema world and cultural activities.

He hailed from Baksa district. His lifeless body was taken to his native Baksa, and funeral was performed after performing rituals at his native village.

He leaves behind son and daughter beside his wife. He was 54.

Several hundred people cutting across the commu-

nities and organisations have thronged at his home to pay last respect to Phwilao Basumatary.

The TV series viewers have expressed their deep condolences and mourning said that they would miss him forever as he was well-known TV artist, singer and popularly known as Basu Da.

Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region has expressed his deep shocked and condolences on the suddenly death of Phwilao Basumatary.

"I'm deeply saddened by the untimely demise of renowned actor Failao Basumatary. A gifted artist whose evocative performances enriched the cultural tapestry of Assam and BTR, his loss leaves a void that can never be filled. My heartfelt condolences to his family, loved ones, and countless admirers. May his noble soul rest in eternal peace", CEM Boro said.

Various organisations and individuals Bodo Cine Artist Association, noted Bodo actor Fwila J Borgary have extended their deep condolences and mourning on the demise of Phwilao Basumatary.



## NFR intensifies cleanliness efforts at stations and onboard trains

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 23:** The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has launched a special cleanliness and inspection drive on Wednesday.

The drive focused on improving sanitation both at stations and onboard trains, while addressing complaints registered through Rail Madad platform. Special emphasis is being laid on effective complaint resolution and real-time onboard monitoring by assigned officers conducting inspections between

stations across the NFR zone.

A key highlight of this initiative is the establishment of Clean Train Station (CTS) facilities at Badarpur and Lumding stations, ensuring thorough mechanized cleaning of coaches during halts by dedicated teams. The cleaning includes high-pressure jet cleaning of toilets, floor and vestibule washing, garbage collection, dry sweeping, mirror and washbasin cleaning, aisle mopping with disinfectants and toilet disinfection. Additionally, onboard inspections

are being conducted across UP and DN trains, with any identified shortfalls promptly addressed by housekeeping staff. Major cleaning interventions are also coordinated with primary maintenance depots during pit line schedules to ensure long-term impact. All trains across the zone were comprehensively covered under the special drive, with visible improvements in cleanliness standards, as seen for example in the train no. 20503 (Rajdhani Express), at Dibrugarh coaching depot.

## Tezpur remembers internationally acclaimed photo artist Nalini Baruah on 95<sup>th</sup> birthday

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, April 23:** Amidst enthusiastic participation of the dignitaries of various organisations and host of peoples from different walks of life Tezpur Sahitya Sabha celebrated 95th Birth day of internationally reputed photo artist Nalini Kanta Baruah on Tuesday at Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Bhawan with hours long programme.

It is worth mentioning that Bishnu Rabha award winning noted photo artist Nalini Kanta Barua, was a creator of most prominent and acclaimed creations in and around the globe like Cat Trio, Missing Bihu Dance, Reserved Seat and Unwanted Baby.

Baruah has already successfully organised as many as forty-nine one man exhibition at different venues around the globe including the first exhibition in Tezpur in 1968 at Hem Baruah Hall, in Guwahati in 1971 and again in Tezpur in 1977, in 1976 at Barpeta session of Asam Sahitya Sabha, in 1980 at Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai.

Exhibitions of his creations were held earlier in Kolkata, New Delhi, New Jersey, USA (1993) and London (2001). During the past years he was honoured by Gauhati University in 1975 and by Darrang College in 1976 and 1979. He won the prestigious Club Award in an international colour slide exhibition held in Italy in 1981.

For his lifelong contribution to

the Art of Photography the Assam Agricultural University honoured him in 1982. In 1955 he was awarded by the Indian International Photographic Council and in 1996 North Eastern Photographic Association honoured him by nominating as a member of Jury.

Attending the programme presided over by president of Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Dhrubajyoti Das, MLA of Tezpur Prithiraj Rabha showering best wishes upon the noted artist on his 95th birth anniversary said that Nalini Kanta Baruah is the symbol of pride for every resident of Tezpur and the uniqueness of his creativity will inspire all throughout the ages to come. President of Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Dhrubajyoti Das highlighted the contributions and stages of struggle overcome by Nalini Kanta Barua in making the internationally acclaimed Photo artist Nalini Kanta Barua. His success and endeavour in transforming his passion to profession will always remain as ideal for all. Journalist Pulak Kumar Deka in his deliberation on the occasion said that Nalini Kanta Barua's every photograph itself is a poem, a story or a novel.

Photographs of Nalini Kanta Barua always exposed his distinctive qualities of a sincere, dedicated and true artist, he added. For the occasion artist Nalini Kanta Baruah also said a few words and said that he would continue his

artistic journey since the best photograph of his life is yet to be captured. He further said that vision is a must for creation. He urged the new generation to be involved with hard work and perseverance in their work to succeed.

At the very outset of the programme conducted by former secretary of Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Pankaj Baruah, Vice President of the Sabha Dwijen Nath welcomed the guests with his brief speech and Swagat Nayan Saikia presented a Borgeet.

Dhrubajyoti Das and Dwijen Nath of Tezpur Sahitya Sabha, Barin Kumar Saikia, secretary of Tezpur Photography Club, Pulak Kumar Deka, Pranab Das and Samir Kar of Sonitpur Journalists' Union, Tarun Das of Sonitpur Press Club, Mrigen Chandra Bora of Asam Natya Sammilan, Jitumani Dev Choudhury of Baan Theatre, Bhupen Barua of Sonitpur Silpi Samaj, Apurba Bora of AAJU, Sonitpur district committee, Dul Goswami of Maati Akhara, Sahitya Academy award winning author Gyan Bahadur Chettry, several other individuals and organisations offered their hearty wishes to Nalini Kanta Barua with books, garland of flowers and amazing gifts representing their organisations. During the programme Tezpur MLA Prithiviraj Rabha inaugurated a song titled 'Pani Piya-2025' performed by Prasiddha Sivam.

## Diligence and hard work behind success Rajalakshmi Basumatari achieves gold medal

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, April 23:** Teaching is a sacred profession. An Assistant Professor of Tyagbir Hem Baruah College, Jamugurihat has stood as topper in the Post Graduate Final Examination in Mass Communication and Journalism from Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University and brought pride to the college.

Despite teaching from Higher Secondary first year to postgraduate level in her department, Basumatari also pursued postgraduate studies in Mass Communication and Journalism and was able to impress the college with such a result by making proper use of her spare time.

Earlier, Basumatari completed her Ph. D degree from Gauhati University under the guide ship of Dr Gahan Chandra Mahanta on 'The Creative Works of Troilokyo Bhattacharya in the Light of Historical and Mythological Aspects'.

The achievement of Basumatari is an example of how age or busyness is not an obstacle for learning. She has gained appreciation among the intellectual community for her diligence and hard work despite her regular teaching in an important department like English.

Basumatari was felicitated for her achievement at a function organized by the Krishna Kanta Handique State Open University Study Center at Tyagbir Hem Baruah College on Wednesday.





## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Either I will find a way, or I will make one*  
—Philip Sidney

## Upward trend of gold prices

Gold's surge past the \$3,500 mark represents more than just another financial milestone—it is a profound reflection of global market anxieties, geopolitical tremors, and a shifting investment paradigm that places growing scepticism on the stability and credibility of traditional economic hegemonies, particularly that of the United States. This year alone, gold has rallied an extraordinary 30 percent, a performance that is both historic in its pace and revealing in its implications. Market watchers now eye the \$4,000 level as the next benchmark, with Goldman Sachs predicting it could be breached by mid-next year. Other analysts have not ruled out the possibility of gold reaching \$5,000 in the not-so-distant future, signalling that what may appear as speculative exuberance is actually rooted in a deep and broad reassessment of risk. At the core of this gold rally is an erosion of confidence in the U.S. economy and its leadership in the global financial system. This loss of faith is not sudden, but has accelerated dramatically in recent months. The United States, long considered the anchor of financial stability, is increasingly seen as a source of uncertainty. Political volatility, particularly under President Trump's administration, initiated a series of aggressive economic policies that continue to reverberate. Chief among these was the forced trade war with China—a move intended to secure American economic interests but which has instead triggered a cascade of retaliatory actions, tariffs, and a general souring of bilateral relations between the world's two largest economies.

The fallout from this trade confrontation has not been limited to tariffs alone. Technology restrictions have intensified, with American firms being barred from supplying key components to Chinese tech giants, and Beijing responding in kind. These actions have effectively split the global tech landscape, complicating supply chains and introducing long-term unpredictability into investment decisions. As capital markets begin to fragment along geopolitical lines, the notion of a seamless global economy—already wounded by the pandemic—is increasingly being replaced by a more fractured, ideologically polarised model. In such an environment, assets that are free from counterparty risk, like gold, become extremely attractive. Gold's resurgence, then, is not merely a function of inflation hedging or low interest rates, though both play a role. It is fundamentally a reaction to geopolitical breakdown and a perceived weakening of U.S. economic stewardship.

The transformation in gold's market role also reflects a broader philosophical shift. Over the past decade, investors have been groomed to accept the primacy of fiat currencies and central bank control. The Federal Reserve's interventions during the 2008 crisis and again during the COVID-19 pandemic reaffirmed the dollar's dominance and the potency of monetary policy. But as government debt balloons, fiscal irresponsibility rises, and political division paralyzes legislative processes, the confidence in the long-term sustainability of such economic models is fading. Investors are beginning to ask: what happens when the debt is no longer serviceable at low rates? What happens when inflation resurfaces, and monetary authorities are constrained in their responses? It is suggested that the traditional inverse correlation between rates and gold prices is being overshadowed by a deeper, more structural reassessment of financial risk and monetary credibility.

On April 22, 2025, the serene and picturesque valley of Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir, often referred to as the "mini Switzerland" of India, was shattered by a brutal terrorist attack that left the nation reeling. The attack, one of the deadliest targeting civilians in the region in recent years, claimed the lives of at least 26 people, including tourists, locals, and a naval officer, while injuring several others. The incident, which unfolded in the Baisaran meadow, a popular tourist destination accessible only by foot or pony, sent shockwaves across India and drew widespread condemnation from political leaders, international figures, and civil society. The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy outfit of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba, claimed responsibility for the assault, raising fresh concerns about the security situation in Kashmir as the region prepares for the annual Amarnath Yatra pilgrimage.

Pahalgam, nestled in the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir, has long been a jewel in India's tourism crown. Known for its lush green meadows, crystal-clear rivers, and snow-capped mountains, the area attracts thousands of domestic and international tourists every year. The Baisaran meadow, located approximately five kilometers from Pahalgam's main town, is a particular draw for visitors seeking tranquility and natural beauty. On the afternoon of April 22, the meadow was bustling with tourists enjoying pony rides, savoring local snacks, or simply soaking in the scenic vistas. Families, trekkers, and adventure enthusiasts milled around, unaware of the horror that was about to unfold. At around 2:30 PM, a group of heavily armed militants, reportedly dressed in fatigues resembling police or army uniforms, descended from the surrounding forests and opened fire indiscriminately on the unsuspecting crowd.

Eyewitness accounts paint a harrowing picture of the chaos that ensued. One survivor, a woman whose identity remains undisclosed, recounted the terror of watching her husband being shot in the head at point-blank range. "We were just eating bhelpuri when he came and shot my husband," she told reporters, her voice trembling with shock and grief. She claimed the

## A dark day for tourism

gunman singled out her husband after determining he was not Muslim, a chilling detail that suggests the attackers may have targeted victims based on religious identity. Another video circulating online captured a woman sobbing uncontrollably, pleading for help as she tended to a severely injured man. "Please save my husband," she cried, her words barely audible amidst the pandemonium. Visuals from the scene showed bodies strewn across the meadow, with locals and security forces scrambling to assist the wounded. The meadow, once a symbol of peace, was transformed into a scene of carnage, with blood staining the grass and cries of anguish piercing the air.

The attack's scale and brutality stunned authorities and civilians alike. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, in a statement on X, described the assault as "much larger than anything we've seen directed at civilians in recent years."

He expressed shock and outrage, calling the perpetrators "animals, inhuman, and worthy of contempt." While refraining from confirming the exact death toll initially, Abdullah noted that the numbers were still being ascertained, with official figures to be released as the situation became clearer. Later reports confirmed that at least 26 people had been killed, including two foreign nationals from Israel and Italy, tourists from states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu, and a 26-year-old Indian Navy officer, Lieutenant Vinay Narwal, who was on leave from his posting in Kochi. The injured, numbering at least 12, were rushed to local hospitals, with some in critical condition. Medical teams worked tirelessly to stabilize the wounded, while helicopters were deployed to evacuate those trapped in the remote meadow.

The response from security forces was swift but complicated by the terrain. Baisaran's inaccessibility, reachable only by foot or horseback, posed significant challenges for rescue and counter-terrorism op-

erations. Local residents played a crucial role in the immediate aftermath, using ponies to transport the injured down from the meadow to awaiting ambulances. Security personnel, including the Indian Army, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and Jammu and Kashmir Police, cordoned off the area and launched a massive anti-terrorist operation to hunt down the assailants. Preliminary investigations suggest the attackers may have infiltrated from Kishtwar in Jammu, traveling through Kokernag in South Kashmir to reach Baisaran. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has since taken over the probe, with authorities vowing to bring the perpetrators to justice.

The attack drew immediate condemnation from India's top leadership.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was on an official visit to Saudi Arabia at the time, spoke with Union Home Minister Amit Shah over the phone and directed him to take all necessary measures. In a post on X, Modi condemned the attack as a "heinous act" and assured the nation that those responsible would not be spared. "Our resolve to fight terrorism is unshakable, and it will get even stronger," he wrote, extending condolences to the families of the deceased and prayers for the speedy recovery of the injured. Shah, who cut short his engagements in Delhi to travel to Srinagar, arrived in the city on the night of April 22 and headed straight to Raj Bhawan for a high-level security review meeting. Accompanied by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, Shah was briefed by local commanders and intelligence officials, including Intelligence Bureau Chief Tapan Deka and CRPF chief Gyanendra Pratap Singh. The Home Minister reiterated the government's commitment to delivering the "harshest consequences" to the perpetrators, emphasizing that the attack would not go unpunished.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, in a series of posts on X, echoed the sentiments of Modi and Shah, calling the attack a "cowardly

and despicable act." He assured the public that security forces had launched extensive search operations and that the district administration was providing immediate medical attention to the injured. Sinha also announced the establishment of a 24/7 emergency help desk at the Police Control Room in Anantnag to assist tourists and their families. The attack's timing, during the peak tourist season and just months before the Amarnath Yatra scheduled to begin on July 3, heightened concerns about the safety of visitors to the region. Pahalgam serves as a key starting point for the pilgrimage, which draws thousands of devotees annually, and authorities have since intensified security measures, including increased patrolling and surveillance, to prevent further incidents.

The attack also sparked outrage among political leaders across party lines. Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, president of the People's Democratic Party, condemned the violence as "unacceptable" and called for a thorough investigation to identify the perpetrators and examine potential security lapses. "Historically, Kashmir has welcomed tourists warmly, making this rare incident deeply concerning," she wrote on X. BJP leader Ravinder Raina attributed the attack to "Pakistani terrorists," asserting that they targeted unarmed civilians because they could not confront India's security forces. Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi described the attack as a "crime against humanity," while Defence Minister Rajnath Singh labeled it an "act of cowardice." Even international figures, such as Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar and U.S. Vice President JD Vance, who was on a personal visit to India, expressed their condolences, with Vance noting the "devastating" impact of the attack on a country he had come to admire for its beauty and hospitality.

The attack's broader implications have reignited debates about the security situation in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in the wake of the revocation of the region's special status in 2019. While militant activ-

ities have declined in recent years, sporadic incidents of violence continue to disrupt the region's fragile peace. The TRF's claim of responsibility, coupled with their stated intent to target "outsiders" and disrupt tourism, suggests a deliberate strategy to destabilize the region's economy and sow fear among visitors. Tourism, a vital lifeline for Kashmir's economy, saw 3.5 million visitors in 2024, and incidents like the Pahalgam attack threaten to undo years of progress in promoting the region as a safe destination. Local residents, who rely heavily on tourism for their livelihoods, expressed distress over the attack's impact. "It is a big loss for us. Our source of income has been snatched," said Mohd. Umar, a local resident, in an interview with ANI.

In the aftermath of the attack, protests erupted across Jammu and Kashmir, with political outfits like the Congress and various right-wing groups announcing demonstrations to condemn the violence. Security was beefed up in key cities like Mumbai and Jammu to prevent any spillover of unrest. Meanwhile, state governments, including Kerala and Karnataka, launched efforts to locate and assist their residents who may have been among the victims. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah dispatched teams of senior officers and police personnel to Jammu and Kashmir, while Kerala authorities worked with local police to identify any Malayali victims.

The Pahalgam attack serves as a grim reminder of the persistent challenges in achieving lasting peace in Jammu and Kashmir. While the immediate focus remains on apprehending the perpetrators and supporting the victims, the incident has underscored the need for enhanced security measures, better intelligence coordination, and a renewed commitment to countering militancy in the region. For the people of Pahalgam, the scars of April 22 will linger, but their resilience, coupled with the nation's resolve, will be critical in restoring the valley's reputation as a haven of beauty and hospitality. As the investigation unfolds and security forces intensify their efforts, the hope is that justice will be served, and Pahalgam will once again reclaim its place as a symbol of peace rather than a site of tragedy.

## After the passing away of Pope Francis, a conservative shift in Vatican is likely

By: Pablo Castaño

There may come a time when we look back on the last decade as an anomaly in the modern history of the Catholic Church. Pope Francis — the figurehead of these years, and a radical by the standards of the Catholic hierarchy — is gone, and we are now likely to see a major shift in the political orientation of the Holy See. Ultimately, and ominously, the death of Francis could well mean that the papacy ends up finding itself aligned with the global far right.

It didn't have to be this way. Elected in 2013, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the first Latin American pope in history, brought to the Vatican a concern for social justice rooted in the radical liberation theology of his home region — along with an unprecedented focus on environmental issues and migrants' rights. This was a dramatic shift in priorities after the conservative pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, both of whom were more concerned with upholding traditional morality than with reviving basic Christian values of equality and fraternity.

In contrast, Francis dedicated two of his encyclicals — the highest-ranking papal declarations — to explicitly political issues. Laudato si' (2015) addressed the environmental crisis, while Fratelli tutti (2020) focused on social justice. The latter famously asserted "the right of every individual to find a place that meets their basic needs" — a sign of Francis' unwavering support for migrants against the backdrop of rising anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe and the United States. Francis was fairly open in his public disregard for far-right populist leaders like Donald Trump and his fellow Argentinian Javier Milei (Milei responded by calling Francis a "filthy leftist").

Bergoglio's papacy also saw a shift in the Church's attitudes to gender and sexuality, though not nearly to the extent initially expected. His stance on sexuality was considerably more liberal than those of his predecessors — as demonstrated when he responded "Who am I to judge?" when asked about homosexuality in the Church. Francis also angered ultra-conservatives when he opened the door to priests blessing "couples in irregular situations" (including same-sex couples) and surprised many by appointing women to key positions in the Vatican government. On the other hand, he upheld Catholic orthodoxy in opposing abortion rights, even in cases of rape. Shockingly, Bergoglio went so far as to call doctors who perform abortions "hitmen."

When it came to institutional matters, Francis' record was similarly mixed. From the outset, he aimed to bring order to a Vatican bureaucracy tarnished by the corruption scandals exposed in the "Vatileaks" revelations. He implemented a deep-dive reform of Vatican finances, resulting in the closure of 5,000 suspicious bank accounts, the creation of oversight bodies, and anti-money laundering regulations. However, another leak of compromising documents ("Vatileaks 2") occurred under his tenure in 2015, and the release of the Panama Papers in 2016 revealed widespread Church investment in tax havens. Decades of Vatican venality would not be overturned overnight.



Yet more serious were the thousands of cases of child sexual abuse committed by priests worldwide, many of which had been deliberately covered up by John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Francis sought to end impunity for the offenders with strong measures, as demonstrated by the dismissal of US cardinal Theodore McCarrick, who was found guilty in 2019 of committing and covering up sexual assaults. Also in 2019, the Vatican held a summit on pedophilia, which established new protocols for reporting abuse. However, a mere five years later, the first report from the Commission for the Protection of Minors revealed serious deficiencies in handling complaints. Such reforms now face an uncertain future under Francis' successor.

Away from the murky backroom dramas of the Vatican, Francis' ascension to the papacy also marked a break with the geopolitical orientation of his predecessors, as he aligned the Holy See much more closely with the Global South. While John Paul II had been a staunch ally of Washington in the so-called fight against communism, Francis made sure to distance himself from Western governments on issues such as relations with China, Ukraine, and Palestine.

In 2018, the Holy See signed a controversial agreement with the Chinese government that led to a fierce rebuke from the first Trump administration. Later, when Russia invaded Ukraine, he called the Ukrainian president while also visiting the Russian embassy to discuss his concerns about the conflict — a gesture interpreted in the West as being overly sympathetic to Vladimir Putin. Finally, the pontiff labeled Israel's massacres of civilians in Gaza "terrorism," in stark contrast to the silence (or complicity) of most Western governments on the subject.

What happens next, in the wake of Francis' death, is an open question. The conclave that elects the next pope combines religious pomp with political intrigue (a hallmark of Vatican history). When a pope dies, a sede vacante is declared, triggering the conclave process — a meeting of all vote-eligible cardinals worldwide under eighty years old, which takes place

fifteen to twenty days after a pope's death.

It is a secretive meeting in which cardinals are isolated from the outside world: they have no access to the internet and leave the Sistine Chapel only to eat and sleep at the Casa Santa Marta. The conclave lasts until one cardinal obtains two-thirds of the vote — usually requiring multiple rounds — at which point the famous fumatablanca signals the election of a new pontiff. Recent papal successions have been resolved within two or three days (two votes take place every day).

Between the pope's death and the start of the conclave are the General Congregations, in which all cardinals discuss the Church's state of affairs. Most of the political manoeuvring to predetermine the voting outcome happens here. This meeting was key to Bergoglio's election. As Gerard O'Connell recounts in his book on the 2013 conclave, The Election of Pope Francis, the then Archbishop of Buenos Aires gained popularity among prelates for his strong stance on financial transparency — a sensitive issue following the Vatileaks revelations.

It is difficult to predict the outcome of the forthcoming conclave. However, there are strong reasons to believe that Francis' successor will be a more conservative pope. First, his pontificate has been highly transformative, both institutionally and in its public messaging, making it unlikely that the cardinals will choose another candidate equally inclined toward reform. The Church tends to resist radical and sustained change.

Perhaps more importantly, although the Sistine Chapel has thick walls, the Vatican is invariably influenced by global political trends. With Trump in the White House, and with the far right on the rise worldwide, electing another pope as progressive as Francis would be swimming against the tide — and the Vatican has a long history of adapting to changing realities rather than confronting them. That is why the next fumatablanca will likely announce a more conservative figure than Jorge Bergoglio. Indeed, the mood of the moment suggests that he may well be a stark antithesis to the "leftist" pope. (IPA Service)

## Murder of humanity in the valley of Pahalgam

By: Dr. Satyawan Saurabh

2nd April 2025, some quiet moments of the morning. The snowy valleys of Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir were welcoming tourists. Newly married couples, children, and the elderly — everyone was hoping that the air of Kashmir would provide them with peace and some relief from stress. But then there was a sound of terror. Guns roared. And in that valley where snow falls, blood now flowed.

A newly married couple from Rajasthan was also among those tourists. They had gotten married just five days ago. They had come to Kashmir for their honeymoon. But perhaps fate had something else in store. The terrorists stopped the car, asked their names, identified them, and then shot them. The young man was a Hindu. This was the reason for his death. He was shot in the head. He died on the spot. His wife, whose mehendi on her hands was still wet, stood stunned. More than grief, she was frozen in an unspoken fear — as if time had stopped there.

This is not murder; this is religious hatred. This was not just a terrorist attack. This was a planned murder — based on a thought, based on a religion. Today terrorism is no longer just a regional or ideological fight. It has now become a tool to erase religious identity. This murder shows that some elements have now decided who will live and who will die — and this decision will be taken by asking names.

Is this humanity? Is this the 'Kashmiriyat' in the name of which we have been pleading for peace for years?

When the screams of the martyr's wife fell silent:

The picture of the wife staring at her husband's dead body went viral on social media. No screams, no cries, no resistance. Just a stoic silence — which became the harshest accusation on the entire system. A question is hidden in that silence: "What wrong did we do?" Has it now become a crime for a couple to come to Kashmir, see its beauty, and love its valleys?

We have to understand that in this picture there was not just a woman but the soul of an entire nation — wounded, helpless, and ashamed.

Safety failure and insensitivity of administration:

After every attack, there is a readymade script from the government — condemnation, compensation, investigation. But there is no accountability. Shouldn't the question be asked as to how terrorists are allowed to move freely in the valley? How can they shoot someone by asking for their name and then escape?

Shouldn't additional security forces be deployed during the tourist season? Doesn't the Jammu and Kashmir administration know that such attacks attack tourism, the economy, and the unity of India?

Human rights or rights to terror? Whenever India takes a tough stand against terrorism, the human rights shops open up. Delhi, London, New York — the so-called intellectuals everywhere suddenly become filled with 'sympathy.' But when a Hindu civilian is shot in the head just because of his name, these same voices fall silent.

Why? Is there sympathy only for the victims of a particular community? Is being a Hindu now equivalent to becoming invisible from the prism of human rights?

The terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, where a newly married Hindu tourist was shot in the head after being asked his name. This attack is not just a murder but a symbol of hatred and terror based on religious identity. The shocked picture of the deceased's wife is considered the wounded face of the nation's soul. It warns that it is an attack on India's unity, civil security, and religious tolerance and that if concrete steps are not taken now, the next victim will be someone else.

This is an attack on the whole of India.

The Pahalgam attack is not just the murder of one person — it is an attack on the soul of India. It is an attempt to send a message that "this is not your place." It is a challenge to the unity, harmony, and secularism of India. And if we respond to this challenge only with tweets and candles, the next target will be another city, another name, another newlyweds.

Pakistan's role and global silence:

As usual, the terrorist organization behind this attack — "The Resistance Front" — is a new avatar of Lashkar-e-Taiba. And its roots are in Pakistan. But on the international stage, Pakistan is still a 'victim of terrorism.'

The United Nations, the United States, Europe — all must say it clearly that the killing of civilians on religious grounds is not just a crisis of one country but a crisis of global humanity.

Now is the time for decision.

India now needs to take a clear decision. The police alone cannot deal with terrorism in Kashmir; it requires political will. The soft layers of separatism will have to be uprooted. The hatred being spread in the name of religious identity will have to be challenged at the social level as well.

At the same time, we must decide that tourism in Kashmir is not just a deal to show "paradise" but a bridge of national unity — and it is the responsibility of all of us to protect this bridge.

Last lines: Another martyr, another life ruined. After every terrorist attack, we feel sad for a few days and then forget about it. But for the woman who lost her husband and who was left alone with her dreams shattered, this incident is a lifelong wound.

This isn't news for him; it's his shattered world. Our condolences should not be limited to social media posts. We must ask, "For how long?" How long will we not be able to protect our citizens?

How long will we keep lighting candles for terrorist attacks?

We need action, not words. We need accountability, not grief. Because this time the question is not just about names; it is a question of humanity. (The author is a poet, freelance journalist and columnist, radio and TV panelist)



# Plastic-free future: A necessity

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The present world has reached a point where plastic pervasiveness has crossed borders which have made something that was once a source of thrills to an entire generation an environmental curse. The very hazardous implications of plastics, especially in the single use variety have shown the necessity of doing away with the single-used plastics on ecosystems and fauna and human health. In other words, far from a choice or luxury, transition becomes an ecological and social imperative. Such a future requires sweeping changes in policies, technologies, corporate practices, and consumer behavior.

Plastics changed the world of industry and commerce and everyday life because of their robustness, their low cost, and their versatility. But at the same time, such qualities make them an environmental hazard. Single-use plastics are things like bags, bottles, straws, and packing materials. Such materials stay in the environment for hundreds of years. Annual plastic waste production has recently exceeded 300 million tonnes in a year around, most of which contaminate the oceans and environment. This is, especially with marine ecosystems, which absorb the impact of the crisis because millions of marine organisms are affected or killed through ingestion or entanglement with plastic waste. The famous "Great Pacific Garbage Patch," a floating sea of plastic debris, gives an impression of the scale of pollution it communicates to the public.

Other than the more obviously destructive one, the more dangerous one is the invisible, microscopic plastic fragment produced as a result of the fragmentation of larger pieces of plastic. Such micro-plastics have been found to seep into soil, water, air, and bodies, therefore entering food and harming wildlife and mankind equally. Studies have shown that exposure to micro-plastics and their chemical in relation has been found to be associated with hormonal imbalance, breathing problems, and cancer diseases. Their stealthiness close to impossible to bring back once they are let loose in the environment provides an explanation to the clamor for reduction of plastics at the source.

Recycling concept does not improve the prospects of curbing plastic waste. In the world, only 10% of plastic waste is recycled and the remaining is dumped in landfills, incinerators, and the environment. The systems of recycling are plagued with challenges of economic unviability of how to process most of the plastic materials, contamination in recyclable ones, and the lack of infrastructure in many places. More to this, virgin plastic is still being produced at a cheaper cost of producing than recycling, and because of government subsidies for the extraction of fossil fuels, the development of plastic waste continues.

Awareness needs to shift from the management of waste to its prevention in order to address this crisis. The basic principle of a plastic-free world is to abolish single-use plastics and adopt plastic-free alternatives. Governments around the world are now taking action. Such drastic steps are required around the world, like the European Union banning any product that contains a plastic straw and/or cutlery, to ban single-use plastics in certain parts of India or making efforts in Rwanda for such a ban on plastic bags. Conversely, the actual success depends on the strength of mechanisms for enforcing, coupled with a whole public engagement in this cause.

Technological innovation opens exciting avenues for reducing plastic dependency. Some of the newer alternatives include biodegradable and compostable materials coming from as natural sources as cornstarch, algae, or agricultural wastes. Reusable systems, especially deposit-return schemes and refillable packaging, are other popular innovations. Great promises exist with such solutions but still, scalability and cost-effectiveness remain as critical central problems. Infrastructure becomes

essential to support the tremendous scale of adoption of alternatives.

One of the significant contributors to plastic waste is an organization and thus, takes critical responsibilities in encouraging change. Some global corporations have announced different strategies on how to reduce plastic development and adoption of sustainable packaging practices and circular economy models and discovery of new materials. Such efforts are, however, greenwashing companies most of the time. These organizations can be proud of the lip-service declarations of environmental responsibility, but nothing is being done in real practice. Complete accountability demands reportage with clarity, objectives set for completion, and meeting up to the world's benchmarking on the matters of environmental sustainability.

In this evolution, neither should be ignored the part which consumers have to play. It should be taken into account that though not a final solution, individual choices add up in their contribution towards the reduction in demand of disposable plastics. The upward trends in the demands for reusable bags, bottles, and all other alternatives find their placement in the feasibility of aggregate behavioral change. This would need a decade of public education complemented by incentives for ecologically friendly practices and the transition in culture away from convenience-driven behaviors that drive plastic usage.

Under the environmental benefit of the plastic-free world, a greater human health benefit stands. It will also save the cost of waste management and avoid the economic loss manufacturing industries, fisheries, and the tourism industry are suffering due to pollution with plastic debris. Reducing the use of plastics will have impacts on a public health basis since lesser intakes of toxic chemicals and microplastics will likely take place. This will again create new markets in green industries starting from recyclable package towards waste treatment and materials progression, etc.

In this plastic-free future it is not so easy. Plastics are now an indispensable part of modern living and their removal involves significant economic, technological, and social reorganization. Small businesses, low-income neighborhoods, and many others may not be able to afford or even have access to sustainable alternatives. The policy makers must ensure it is fair, financially as well as technically supporting those who have been most affected. Second, global cooperation is critical. Plastic pollution is a transboundary problem and piecemeal actions will prove to be insufficient. A universal, international framework, like the proposed global plastics treaty, may allow for standardization of policies, establishment of hard limits, and sharing of resources across nations.

No apathy will do as this is too severe a problem. Such a future of no plastics requires the ambition and concerted efforts of every entity in society. Policies in the pursuit of ambitious targets should be made and legislated on all sides from the government, business activity must be innovative and that should be used sustainably, and the consumer will take responsibility over the environment. The cost is too great to tarry. Plastic pollution threatens ecosystems and biodiversity and human health to a scale that requires drastic and sustained intervention.

A plastic-free future is not only an environmental wish but also a survival imperative for our planet, even a prescription for health. Humanity has the power to change plastic pollution by redefining its consumption pattern, improving innovations, and creating responsibility with all. The journey will be difficult, but it will be worthwhile in many ways: healthy ecosystems, clean environments, and a sustainable world. Now is the time to act. (The writer is the Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)

## Green today, gone tomorrow: Why tree cutting isn't all about timber



By: Sneha Mohalanobish

In a world characterized by climatic uncertainty, ecological degradation, and the search for sustainability, tree cutting can no longer be viewed as merely a mundane part of development. Yet, throughout India, green cover continues to give way to infrastructure—sometimes at the expense of ecological integrity and public opinion.

The problem is not just about timber. It's about the permanent loss of biodiversity, microclimates, and natural heritage that supports our cities and communities.

**A Recent Case: The Forest Clearance at Hyderabad University**

A dramatic instance came to pass recently amidst the peaceful campus of the University of Hyderabad (HCU). A tract of forest within the campus was uprooted—claimed to be for development. A once thriving abode for birds, insects, and small animals now stands stripped bare, and in its place is planted uncertainty and worry.

Students and environmentalists protested in outrage. The space, besides being an environmental resource, was also a tranquil green oasis for students and staff. Its destruction ignited anger and reignited the national debate regarding the need to conserve green areas, particularly in institutions of higher learning.

**Not an Isolated Incident**

Unfortunately, Hyderabad is only one of numerous such incidents throughout India:

- In Mumbai, cutting down more than 2,000 trees in the Aarey Forest to clear space for a metro car shed sparked mass protests and court fights.

- In Bengaluru, thousands of trees were cut down to enable road widening schemes, adding to the city's growing heat and pollution.

- In Delhi, ongoing encroachment of the Ridge Forest—an ecologically sensitive area—has triggered warnings from conservationists.

These instances illustrate an alarming trend: forests are too frequently disposable when faced with urban expansion.

**The True Expense of Tree Cutting**

Trees are not static features in the landscape. They are living systems that:

- Take in carbon dioxide and emit life-sustaining oxygen.

- Regulate city temperatures by shading and evapotranspiration.

- Stop soil erosion and mitigate the risk of flooding.

- Nurture numerous species of plants and animals.

- Give urban citizens mental and emotional well-being.

When we go about destroying trees willy-nilly, we are not only destroying environments—we are breaking up the very pillar of sustainable development.

**Development and Environment: A False Dichotomy**

Development requires such a step, is a common argument. While development through infrastructure is crucial, we must challenge the development model that sees progress being brought at nature's expense.

**Cities such as**

Singapore, Copenhagen, and Vancouver have shown that green planning can be incorporated into urban growth. India can also follow a model of growth with both infrastructure and ecology as top priorities, if the policies and vision are proper.

**The Way Forward: Collective Responsibility**

Protecting our environment is everyone's responsibility governments, institutions, and citizens. This is how we can help:

- Create awareness through publications, social media, and public discussion.

- Facilitate policy reform by calling for more stringent Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).

- Join plantation drives\*and city greening activities.

- Make the authorities accountable for environmental destruction in the guise of development.

- Encourage alternative solutions, like vertical construction and eco-sensitive design.

**Conclusion: A Call to Protect What's Left**

The destruction of each tree brings us one step closer to climate vulnerability. Forests are not mere resources—they are legacies. We need to change the way of thinking that sees nature as a hindrance to progress.

If we do not take these warning signs seriously, the phrase "Green Today, Gone Tomorrow" can become our everyday reality. Let us do something before our cities turn into concrete jungles with no life, color, and breath.

(Courtesy: Youth ki Awaaz)

# Climate crisis in Assam's fields

By: Heramba Nath

The agriculture of Assam and the Northeast, deeply rooted in rhythm and tradition, now finds itself on fragile ground. As climate change accelerates, it no longer whispers its warnings—it shouts through erratic rainfall, unseasonal floods, prolonged droughts, and shrinking planting windows. What once followed the cosmic rhythm of nature now must wrestle with the chaos of climate disruption.

In Assam, agriculture is not just an economic activity; it is culture, continuity, and survival. From the lush paddy fields of the plains to the carefully balanced jhum cycles of the hills, traditional farming practices have coexisted with nature for generations. But this delicate relationship is rapidly unravelling. The once dependable monsoon now arrives late, or all at once. According to the India Meteorological Department, Assam witnessed a 20% monsoon rainfall deficit in 2022, followed by a 16% excess in 2023—both scenarios causing significant agricultural distress.

Floods have become more frequent and damaging. In 2022 alone, over 89 lakh people were affected by floods in Assam, with around 2.4 lakh hectares of crop land damaged, as per data from the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA). These floods are no longer seasonal—they arrive in

repeated waves, often leaving farmers without time to recover between disasters.

Erosion caused by the swollen Brahmaputra and its tributaries continues to eat away fertile land. The Water Resources Department of Assam reports that over 4.27 lakh hectares have been lost to erosion since 1950, with an annual average loss of about 8,000 hectares. For many families, this means displacement and the collapse of generations-old agrarian livelihoods.

In the floodplains and char areas, where resilience has always been part of survival, people are now pushed beyond endurance. The nutrient-rich topsoil is being replaced by sterile silt. Crops fail, and relief remains delayed. While fields once yielded rice, pulses, and vegetables, now they lie barren for seasons at a stretch.

Compounding these challenges are rising temperatures, shifting humidity, and irregular rainfall. The Assam Agriculture Department reports a 30% increase in pest attacks over the past five years—posing new threats to indigenous rice varieties that have long been adapted to local conditions. These varieties are now struggling against diseases they were never bred to resist.

Livestock and fisheries—vital safety nets for rural families—are also under strain. Heat stress has reduced milk yield by up to 15%, according to a 2021 report from ICAR-NDRI. Fish

habitats are shrinking as water levels fluctuate unpredictably. Rising temperatures are disrupting the breeding cycles of indigenous fish species, with experts warning of a 25% decline in viable aquaculture zones in the Brahmaputra valley over the next decade.

Jhum cultivation, widely practised in the hill districts of Northeast India, depends on ecological balance. Climate disruption shortens fallow periods, slows regeneration, and increases the risk of forest fires. The Forest Survey of India has noted a 125% rise in forest fire incidents in the North-east between 2015 and 2022—many linked to erratic climate conditions.

In many regions, adaptation has become a matter of survival. Farmers are shifting sowing dates, trying short-duration and drought-tolerant crops like "Ranjit Sub1," and modifying irrigation practices. But these innovations are rarely documented, scaled up, or supported institutionally. Women and indigenous farmers hold a wealth of knowledge, yet their contributions remain marginalised in mainstream agricultural planning.

Government response is largely post-disaster. Relief comes too little, too late. From 2007 to 2022, ₹ 1,000 crore was sanctioned under the Flood Management Programme in Assam, but only Rs 595 crore was utilised. Infrastructure such as embankments and irrigation canals remains either underfunded or poorly maintained. In

2022, embankment breaches in districts like Barpeta and Morigaon worsened flood impacts, exposing administrative lapses.

Early warning systems are inadequate. While weather forecasts exist, a 2022 NABARD report revealed that only 30% of farmers in Assam receive these alerts in a timely or accessible format. There is an urgent need for community-based dissemination in local languages through mobile alerts, panchayat networks, and NGOs.

Financial instruments like crop insurance need reform. During 2021–22, only 12% of eligible farmers in Assam were covered under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. Long delays and complicated claims processes deter enrolment. Likewise, over 65% of farmers in the state still rely on informal credit sources, often falling into high-interest debt traps that worsen during climate shocks.

Agricultural extension and education must reflect the new climate reality. Extension services must bring modern scientific practices while also learning from traditional wisdom. Assam's farmers know how to read soil, sky, and insect movement. Their experiential knowledge must not be erased in the name of progress.

Assam's predominantly organic agricultural base provides a unique chance to lead India toward sustainable farming. As per APEDA, nearly 1.2 lakh hectares are under organic

farming in the state. Strengthening certification processes, expanding local procurement, and creating climate-resilient markets are necessary steps. Organic agriculture should not be seen as an environmental add-on, but as a central pillar of the climate economy.

For policymakers, climate change is often viewed as a future challenge. But for Assam's farmers, it is a current crisis. The impact is visible in falling yields, rising debts, shrinking harvests, and fading confidence. In 2021, rice yield in flood-affected areas dropped by 22%. The 2023 NSS survey reported a 15% decline in youth participation in agriculture in Assam, indicating a clear shift away from the land.

The climate crisis is real, measurable, and ongoing. It is seen in satellite images, felt in parched or flooded fields, and heard in the voices of those displaced. Assam's farmers are no strangers to adversity—but they cannot adapt without support. Resilience cannot substitute for resources. Courage cannot replace policy. Adaptation without recognition is a cruel expectation.

If India acts now—with urgency, empathy, and commitment—Assam's agricultural legacy can still endure. But delay will only deepen the crisis. In a land shaped by rivers, the question is whether governance will shape survival. (The author can be reached at herambanath2222@gmail.com)

# Tiny dips in sea level reveal flow of climate-regulating underwater waterfalls

By: Matthis Anger

Beneath the surface of the Southern Ocean, vast volumes of cold, dense water plunge off the Antarctic continental shelf, cascading down underwater cliffs to the ocean floor thousands of metres below. These hidden waterfalls are a key part of the global ocean's overturning circulation—a vast conveyor belt of currents that moves heat, carbon and nutrients around the world, helping to regulate Earth's climate.

For decades, scientists have struggled to observe these underwater waterfalls of dense water around Antarctica. They occur in some of the most remote and stormy waters on the planet, often shrouded by sea ice and funnelled through narrow canyons that are easily missed by research ships.

But our new research shows that satellites, orbiting hundreds of kilometres above Earth, can detect these sub-sea falls.

By measuring tiny dips in sea level—just a few centimetres—we can now track the dense water cascades from space. This breakthrough lets us monitor the deepest

branches of the ocean circulation, which are slowing down as Antarctic ice melts and surface waters warm.

Dense water helps regulate the climate

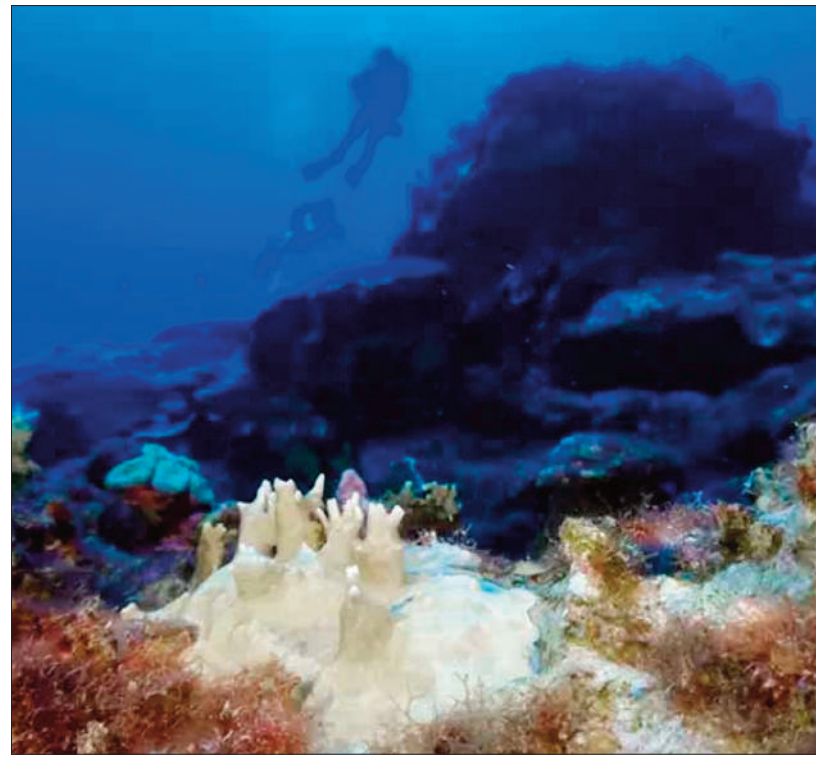
Antarctic dense water is formed when sea ice grows, in the process making nearby water saltier and more dense. This heavy water then spreads across the continental shelf until it finds a path to spill over the edge, plunging down steep underwater slopes into the deep.

As the dense water flows northward along the seafloor, it brings oxygen and nutrients into the abyss—as well as carbon and heat drawn from the atmosphere.

But this crucial process is under threat. Climate change is melting the Antarctic ice sheet, adding fresh meltwater into the ocean and making it harder for dense water to form.

Underwater waterfalls around Antarctica carry dense, salty surface water into the depths of the ocean.

Past research has shown the abyssal circulation has already slowed by 30 per cent and is likely to weaken further in the years ahead. This could reduce the ocean's ability to absorb heat and carbon, accelerating climate change.



ating climate change.

Our research provides a new technique that can provide easy, direct

observations of future changes in the Southern Ocean abyssal overturning circulation.

Satellites and sea level

Until now, tracking dense water cascades around Antarctica has relied on moorings, ship-based surveys and even sensors attached to seals. While these methods deliver valuable local insights, they are costly, logistically demanding, carbon-intensive and only cover a limited area.

Satellite data offers an alternative. Using radar, satellites such as CryoSat-2 and Sentinel-3A can measure changes in sea surface height to within a few centimetres.

And thanks to recent advances in data processing, we can now extract reliable measurements even in ice-covered regions—by peering at the sea surface through cracks and openings in the sea ice.

In our study, we combined nearly a decade of satellite observations with high-resolution ocean models focused on the Ross Sea. This is a critical hotspot for Antarctic dense water formation.

We discovered that dense water cascades leave a telltale surface signal: a subtle but consistent dip in sea level, caused by the cold, heavy water sinking beneath it.

By tracking these subtle sea level

dips, we developed a new way to monitor year-to-year changes in dense water cascades along the Antarctic continental shelf. The satellite signal we identified aligns well with observations collected by other means, giving us confidence that this method can reliably detect meaningful shifts in deep ocean circulation.

Cheap and effective—with no carbon emissions

This is the first time Antarctic dense water cascades have been monitored from space. What makes this approach so powerful is its ability to deliver long-term, wide-reaching observations at low cost and with zero carbon emissions—using satellites that are already in orbit.

These innovations are especially important as we work to monitor a rapidly changing climate system. The strength of deep Antarctic currents remains one of the major uncertainties in global climate projections.

Gaining the ability to track their changes from space offers a powerful new way to monitor our changing climate—and to shape more effective strategies for adaptation. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)



# Israeli strike on school-turned-shelter kills 23 Officials from Ukraine, US and UK meet in London in latest push to stop war

**DEIR AL-BALAH (Gaza Strip), April 23:** An overnight Israeli strike on a school-turned-shelter in Gaza City killed 23 people, as Arab mediators worked on a proposal to end the war with Hamas that would include a five to seven year truce and the release of all remaining hostages, officials said Wednesday.

There was no immediate Israeli comment on the strike, which set several tents ablaze, burning people alive. The military says it only targets militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because its fighters are embedded in densely populated areas.

France, Germany and Britain meanwhile said Israel's seven-week-old blockade on all imports to Gaza, including food, was "intolerable," in unusually strong criticism from three of the country's closest allies.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas called on Hamas to release the hostages in order to "block Israel's pretexts" for continuing the war. He reiterated his demands that Hamas give up their arms, referring to them as "sons of dogs" in unusually strong language during a speech in the West Bank.

Abbas, who heads the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, has no influence over Hamas but is seeking a role in postwar Gaza.

**A yearlong truce and a gradual withdrawal**

Egypt and Qatar are still developing the proposal, which would include the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from the entire strip and the release of Palestinian prisoners, according to an Egyptian of-



ficial and a Hamas official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief media.

Israel ended a ceasefire with Hamas last month and has vowed to continue the war until all the hostages are returned and Hamas is either destroyed or disarmed and sent into exile. It says it will hold parts of Gaza indefinitely and implement President Donald Trump's proposal for the resettlement of the population in other countries, which has been widely rejected internationally.

Hamas has said it will only release the dozens of hostages it still holds in return for Palestinian prisoners, a complete Israeli withdrawal and a lasting ceasefire, as called for in the now-defunct agreement reached in January. A Hamas delegation arrived in Cairo late Tuesday to discuss the evolving proposal.

The Egyptian official said the proposed truce, with international guarantees, would last between five and seven years, and that a

committee of politically independent technocrats would govern Gaza — a measure Hamas has accepted.

The Hamas official said the militant group is open to a long-term truce that includes the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces and international guarantees, naming Russia, China, Turkey or the United Nations Security Council as possible guarantors.

**Israel and the US say Hamas must be destroyed or removed**

There was no immediate comment from Israeli officials. But Israel has ruled out any arrangement that would allow Hamas to preserve its influence in Gaza and rearm. The Trump administration, which has also been involved in the ceasefire talks, has said it fully supports Israel's position.

Israel and the US have pressed Hamas to accept a temporary truce in which it would immediately release several hostages in return for

vague promises of talks on a more permanent ceasefire. Hamas has rejected those proposals and says it won't disarm as long as Israel oc-

cupies Palestinian territory.

The Hamas official said the group does not trust either Netanyahu or the US after they shattered the existing ceasefire agreement, which had facilitated the release of over 30 hostages.

The Egyptian official said mediators had the impression that President Donald Trump wants a deal before he visits the region next month. Trump will travel to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates from May 13 to May 16.

**France, Germany and Britain condemn Israeli food blockade**

Israel ended the ceasefire last month by launching a surprise bombardment across the territory that killed hundreds of Palestinians. Ground forces have expanded a buffer zone along the border, encircled the southern city of Rafah and now controls around 50% of the territory.

Israel says the military operations and the tightened blockade are tactics to pressure Hamas to release hostages. Aid groups say thousands of children are malnourished and most people are surviving on one meal a day or less. "The Israeli decision to block aid from entering Gaza is intolerable," France, Germany and Britain said in their joint statement. They also condemned recent remarks by Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz,

who said the blockade was a pressure tactic and that troops would hold parts of Gaza indefinitely.

"Humanitarian aid must never be used as a political tool and Palestinian territory must not be reduced nor subjected to any demographic change," (AP)

**LONDON, April 23:** Officials from Britain, the US, European nations and Ukraine will meet in London on Wednesday to push for a peace deal between Moscow and Kyiv.

British Defense Secretary John Healey said the meeting follows talks last week in Paris and will include "what a ceasefire might look like and how to secure peace in the long term."

But a plan for the talks to involve foreign ministers was scrapped at the last minute after the US State Department said Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who attended the Paris talks, was unable to come because of a scheduling issue.

UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy posted on X that the talks would now include "officials." Those attending include retired Lt Gen Keith Kellogg, President Donald Trump's envoy for Ukraine and Russia.

It came amid growing speculation that the US will press Ukraine to cede territory to Russia as part of a potential peace agreement.

During similar talks last week in Paris, US officials presented a proposal that included allowing Russia to keep control of occupied Ukrainian territory as part of a deal, according to a European official familiar with the matter. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy pushed back against that idea, saying: "There is nothing to talk about — it is our land, the land of the Ukrainian people."

Some European allies are wary of the American proposal. But there's also acknowledgment by some allies that Russia is firmly entrenched wholly or partially in five regions of Ukraine — Crimea, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson.

If the goal is to obtain a ceasefire immediately, "it should be based on the line of contact as it is," said a senior French official. The official was not authorised to be publicly named and spoke on the condition of anonymity according to French presidential policy.

Still, Ukraine's territorial integrity and aspirations to strengthen ties with the rest of the continent are a top priority for the Europeans, the European official said. It remains to be seen whether the latest diplomatic efforts can lead to an endgame after more than three years of war since Russia's full-scale invasion



of its neighbour.

Britain downplayed expectations of a breakthrough, but says this is an important week for diplomatic efforts to stop more than three years of fighting since Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbour.

Trump said last week that negotiations were "coming to a head" and the US might "take a pass" if either of the two sides didn't move toward peace.

Rubio has also indicated the US might soon back away from negotiations if they don't progress, and suggested that Wednesday's meeting could be decisive in determining whether the Trump administration continues its involvement. Putin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov, said US special envoy Steve Witkoff was expected to visit Moscow again this week. Ushakov provided no further details.

Western analysts say Moscow is in no rush to conclude peace talks, because it has battlefield momentum and wants to capture more Ukrainian land.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer's spokesman, Dave Pares said "the ball's in Russia's court."

"Now is the time for (Russian President Vladimir) Putin to show he's serious about peace," he said.

Zelenskyy said Tuesday that Ukraine's delegation heading to the UK has a mandate to discuss only an unconditional or partial ceasefire with Russia. He said that "after a ceasefire, we're prepared to sit down for talks in any format." (AP)

## Baghdad invites new Syrian president to summit, sparking political division in Iraq

**BAGHDAD, April 23:** An official invitation to new Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa to attend the upcoming Arab League summit in Baghdad has triggered sharp political divisions within Iraq.

Al-Sharaa took power after leading a lightning rebel offensive that unseated his predecessor, Bashar Assad, in December. Since then, he has positioned himself as a statesman aiming to unite and rebuild his country after nearly 14 years of civil war, but his past as a Sunni Islamist militant has left many — including Shiite groups in Iraq — wary. Formerly known by the nom de guerre Abu Mohammed al-Golani, al-Sharaa joined the ranks of al-Qaida insurgents battling US forces in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003 and still faces a warrant for his arrest on terrorism charges in Iraq.

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani confirmed last week that Iraq had extended a formal invitation to al-Sharaa to attend the May 17 summit, following a previously unannounced meeting between the two in Qatar. Al-Sharaa has not confirmed plans to attend. Iraq, which has strong ties with both the United States and Iran, has sought to position itself as a regional mediator. It hosted talks between regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia before they reached a deal to normalise relations. Many Iraqi and regional stakeholders see the invitation to al-Sharaa as an opportunity to bolster Baghdad's image as a hub for regional diplomacy.

However, strong opposition to al-Sharaa's invitation has emerged from powerful Shiite factions aligned with Iran. Tehran, which backed Assad in Syria's civil war and used Syria as a conduit to smuggle weapons to the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, was widely seen as the biggest loser from Assad's ouster. Several Iraqi Shiite militias fought alongside Assad's forces during the civil war that followed his brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests in 2011, making al-Sharaa a particularly sensitive figure for them.

Mustafa Sand, a member of parliament from the Coordination Framework — a coalition of Iran-

allied factions that brought al-Sudani to power in 2022 — said in a video posted on X, formerly Twitter, that the foreign ministry had reached out to Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council to verify whether an arrest warrant was issued against al-Sharaa and that the council had confirmed the existence of a valid warrant. A security official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to comment publicly confirmed the existence of the warrant to The Associated Press.

The Islamic Dawa Party, led by former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki — one of the most influential figures in Iraq's ruling coalition — called on the government in a statement to "ensure that any summit participant has a clean judicial record, both locally and internationally," adding, "The blood of Iraqis is not cheap, and those who have violated their sanctity or committed documented crimes against them should not be welcomed in Baghdad."

A spokesperson for the powerful militia Kataib Hezbollah, Abu Ali Al-Askari, said in a statement, "Arab summits have been held without President Assad, Iraq, or Libya. They certainly won't stop because the criminal Abu Mohammad al-Golani ... isn't attending."

On the other side, Sunni political factions have rallied to defend al-Sharaa's inclusion in the summit. Former MP Dhafir Al-Ani, a prominent Sunni figure, said he supports Baghdad's attempts to build ties with the new Syrian authorities. "Preventing his presence would be a stab in the heart of the Iraqi government and a sign that violence still dictates the country's fate," he said.

The Iraqi government has not responded publicly to the backlash.

A warrant would not necessarily block al-Sharaa from joining the summit. Other countries have chosen to waive similar measures. In December after Assad's fall, the United States said it had decided not to pursue a USD 10 million reward it had previously offered for al-Sharaa's capture, although Washington also has not yet officially recognised the new Syrian government. (AP)

## London talks on ending Russia-Ukraine war pared down as Russian drone attack on bus kills 9

**KYIV, April 23:** A planned meeting Wednesday between top US, British, French and Ukrainian diplomats to push for a peace deal between Russia and Ukraine was scrapped at the last minute amid little sign of progress in international efforts to end the more than three-year war.

UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy announced the talks in London would involve only lower-ranking officials after the US State Department said Tuesday that Secretary of State Marco Rubio was unable to attend because of a scheduling issue.

Rubio's abrupt cancellation raised doubts about the direction of the negotiations. It came as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy ruled out ceding territory to Russia as part of any potential peace agreement, calling it a non-starter. The Ukrainian leader spoke Tuesday in response to reports the Trump administration was proposing a deal that would allow Russia to keep occupied Ukrainian territory as part of a potential peace agreement.

Even achieving a limited, 30-day ceasefire has been beyond the reach of negotiators, as both sides have continued to attack each other in a grinding war of attrition along the 1,000-km front line and launch long-range strikes.

A Russian drone struck a bus carrying workers in Marganets, in eastern Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region on Wednesday morning, killing seven women and two men, regional head Ser-



hii Lysak wrote on his Telegram channel. More than 40 people were injured, he said. Lysak published photos of a bus with its windows blown out and shards of glass mixed with blood spattered on the bus floor.

**Ukrainian delegation arrives in London despite change in US plans**

President Donald Trump has pushed for an end to the war and said last week that negotiations were coming to a head. That comment came after Rubio suggested that the US might soon back away from negotiations if they don't progress. Rubio had indicated that Wednesday's meeting could be decisive in determining whether the Trump administration remains engaged.

Those still attending the meeting included retired Lt Gen Keith Kellogg, Trump's envoy for Ukraine and Russia.

Andrii Yermak, the head of Ukraine's presidential office, said on X that a delegation including him, Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha and Defence Minister Rustem Umerov had arrived in London for the talks despite the alterations.

## UN to review impact of its agency helping Palestinian refugees in Gaza, elsewhere

**UNITED NATIONS, April 23:** The United Nations chief appointed a British human rights activist on Tuesday to carry out a strategic review of the UN agency helping Palestinian refugees to assess its impact under the "present political, financial, security and other constraints."

Israel has banned the agency, known as UNRWA, from operating on its territory, but its Palestinian staff have still been key to delivering aid and running medical clinics in Gaza, even though Israel has cut off all humanitarian deliveries since March 2.

UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric, who announced the review, said Ian Martin, a former head of Amnesty International, would also be looking at the "consequences and risks for Palestinian refugees" of UNRWA's operations.

UNRWA was established by the UN General Assembly in 1949 to provide relief for Palestinians who fled or were expelled from their homes before and during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, which followed the establishment of Israel, as well as their descendants, until there is a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The agency has been providing aid and services — includ-

ing health and education — to some 2.5 million Palestinians in Gaza, the occupied West Bank and east Jerusalem, as well as 3 million more in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. This month, Israel ordered six UNRWA schools in east Jerusalem to close.

Dujarric stressed that the review is not about changing UNRWA's mandate. "We're trying to see how, in this very complex environment, UNRWA can best deliver for the Palestine refugees it serves, for the communities it serves," he told reporters. "They deserve to be assisted by an organisation — by UNRWA — that can work in the best possible manner given all these challenges."

Israel alleged that 19 out of UNRWA's approximately 13,000 staff in Gaza took part in Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack in southern Israel, which killed about 1,200 people and set off the war in Gaza.

UNRWA said it fired nine staffers after an internal UN investigation concluded that they could have been involved, although the evidence was not authenticated and corroborated.

Israel later alleged that about 100 other Palestinians in Gaza were Hamas members, but never provided any evidence to the United Nations. (AP)



Watch programme has had to add levels to its bleaching alert scale to account for the growing risk of coral death.

Efforts are underway to con-

serve and restore coral. One Dutch lab has worked with coral fragments, including some taken from off the coast of the Seychelles, to propagate them in a zoo so that

they might be used someday to repopulate wild coral reefs if needed.

Other projects, including one off Florida, have worked to rescue corals endangered by high heat and nurse them back to health before returning them to the ocean.

But scientists say it's essential to reduce emissions from the greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, that warm the planet.

"The best way to protect coral reefs is to address the root cause of climate change. And that means reducing the human emissions that are mostly from burning of fossil fuels... everything else is looking more like a Band-Aid rather than a solution," Eakin said.

"I think people really need to

recognise what they're doing... inaction is the kiss of death for coral reefs," said Melanie McField, co-

chair of the Caribbean Steering Committee for the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, a network of scientists that monitors reefs throughout the world.

The group's update comes as President Donald Trump has moved aggressively in his second term to boost fossil fuels and roll back clean energy programmes, which he says is necessary for economic growth.

"We've got a government right now that is working very hard to destroy all of these ecosystems... removing these protections is going to have devastating consequences," Eakin said. (AP)

## 84 per cent of world's coral reefs hit by worst bleaching event on record

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

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

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

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

"We're looking at something that's completely changing the face of our planet and the ability of our oceans to sustain lives and livelihoods," Eakin said.

Last year was Earth's hottest year on record, and much of that is going into oceans. The average annual sea surface temperature of oceans away from the poles was a record 20.87 degrees Celsius.

That's deadly to corals, which are key to seafood production, tourism and protecting coastlines from erosion and storms. Coral reefs are sometimes dubbed "rainforests of the sea" because they support high levels of biodiversity — approximately 25 per cent of all marine species can be found in, on and around coral reefs.

Coral get their bright colours from the colourful algae that live inside them and are a food source for the corals. Prolonged warmth causes the algae to release toxic compounds, and the coral eject them. A stark white skeleton is left behind, and the weakened coral is at heightened risk of dying.

The bleaching event has been so severe that NOAA's Coral Reef



*Terrorists struck a prime tourist location near Pahalgam in south Kashmir, killing 26 people, mostly tourists*

# Pahalgam terror attack condemnation pour in NE

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, April 23:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Wednesday strongly condemned the recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, which claimed the lives of innocent tourists. He asserted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah will ensure a befitting response to the heinous incident.

Reacting to the barbaric attack, Saha said that terrorists are attempting to derail the peace and socio-economic progress ushered in by the Centre in Jammu and Kashmir, especially in the aftermath of the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A.

"The atmosphere of peace and development brought about by PM Modi and HM Amit Shah has made Jammu and Kashmir a prime tourist destination once again. With increasing footfall of tourists, the region is transforming into a true paradise on earth. This progress, however, has become intolerable for the enemies of peace," Saha remarked.

As Tripura's Home Minister, Saha expressed strong condemnation of the attack and extended heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased.

"Such cowardly attacks are aimed at disturbing the happiness and development of the people. I vehemently protest against this barbaric act where innocent tourists were targeted and killed in cold blood," he said.

Saha reiterated his faith in the Centre's leadership, stating, "Our Prime Minister and Union Home Minister have already made it clear that no one involved will be spared. I am confident that strict and swift action will be taken in the coming days."

On behalf of the people of Tripura, the Chief Minister conveyed deep sorrow and solidarity with the bereaved families, assur-



ing that justice will be delivered.

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Wednesday condemned the terror attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam in which at least 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed.

"I am deeply shocked and saddened by the brutal terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir, that claimed innocent lives and injured many. Such heinous acts must be condemned unequivocally," he said in a social media post.

The CM extended his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for the swift recovery of the injured.

"We stand in solidarity with them during this tragic time and pray for the departed souls to rest in eternal peace," Tamang said.

Terrorists struck a prime tourist location at Baisaran meadows near Pahalgam in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing 26 people, mostly tourists.

Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen KT Parnaik (retd) on Wednesday condemned the terrorist attack on tourists at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir, which left 26 people including one from the state dead.

Terming the killing of innocent people as a "barbaric act of cowardice", the governor said such attacks are a direct assault on the composite and inclusive fabric of India, which binds the nation in unity and diversity.

On Corporal Tage Hailyang of the Indian Air Force, an Arunachal Pradesh resident who lost his life in the attack, Parnaik said the entire state stands united in mourning this irreparable loss, a Raj Bhavan statement said here.

Joining the people of the state in mourning the loss of innocent lives, the governor offered prayers for the eternal peace of the departed souls.

Parnaik, who served in Jammu and Kash-

mir including as the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Northern Command, also wished a speedy and full recovery to those injured in the attack.

He emphasised that targeting tourists not only disrupts peace and harmony but also strikes at the core of socio-economic development for the local communities who depend on tourism for their livelihoods.

Reaffirming faith in the leadership of the nation, the governor expressed confidence that the perpetrators of this cowardly act will be swiftly identified and brought to justice.

"Such acts of terror will not go unpunished. The resolve of our nation to stand united against terrorism remains stronger than ever," he said.

"This is a time for solidarity and compassion. Let us all stand together in this moment of grief and strengthen our commitment to peace, unity, and national integrity," the governor added.

Terrorists struck a prime tourist location at Baisaran meadows near Pahalgam in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing 26 people, mostly tourists.

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalha on Wednesday condemned the terror attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam in which at least 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed.

In a post on X, the Manipur Raj Bhavan said that Bhalha "strongly condemned the Pahalgam terror attack in Jammu & Kashmir. He extended condolences to the bereaved and prayed for the injured."

Manipur is currently under President's rule.

Senior BJP MLA Govindas Konthoujam also condemned the "senseless act of violence".

Tuesday's terror strike at Baisaran meadows in Pahalgam is one of the worst attacks on civilians in Kashmir. (With inputs from PTI)

*Itanagar Capital Complex DC transfer demanded*



**HT Bureau**

**ITANAGAR, April 23:** The 13th Itanagar Constituency Youth Association served a 15 day ultimatum to the State government to transfer Capital Complex Deputy Commissioner Talo Potum.

Addressing media persons here on Wednesday afternoon at Arunachal Press club, the 13th Itanagar Constituency Youth Association president Nangram Ganesh alleged that the public of Itanagar capital Complex has not been not satisfied with the activities of Itanagar Capital Complex Deputy Commissioner Talo Potum.

"DC Potom is not working in the greater interest and for the welfare common public. Instead of helping and extending support to the needy people he harasses the common

public especially women vegetable vendors of capital complex by conducting eviction drives," Nangram Ganesh said.

DC Potom is not supportive. Potum has frequently hindered the implementation of public welfare schemes by citing that the Capital Complex falls under Forest reserved area. Such repeated claims without providing practical alternatives or solutions have disrupted important public project and created confusion among the public, he added.

He also alleged that Potum has misused his power and position by denying government license such as land allotments, bar licenses etc and he has tried to be a dictator, not work as an IAS officer and people welfare officer of the welfare government.

## Meeting of all political parties held

**HT Bureau**

**ITANAGAR, April 23:** A meeting with office bearers and representative of political parties had been convened by the Deputy commissioner-cum-District Municipal Election officer capital recently at DC camp office IG park.

The meeting was to ensure wide awareness up to grassroots Municipal wards in capital, Itanagar in accordance with notification of summary electoral roll revision 2025 by the state Election Commission. The meeting was chaired by Additional Deputy commissioner capital Itanagar Rajib Chiduni.

The Municipal Electoral Registration Officer(MERO) Itanagar, while welcoming esteem office bearers and representative of political parties, informed that in accordance with the state Election commission notification, draft publication of Municipal Electoral Roll of all 20 (Twenty) wards was done on April 17. Also that Revising authority-cum-Assistant Municipal Electoral registration officer(AMERO) have been appointed in accordance with the Arunachal Pradesh Municipal (Election) Rules, 2011 viz. C/O EAC Itanagar, C- Sector (For ward No.1 to Ward No.6), C/O EAC(Hq) camp office IG Park Itanagar (For ward No.7 to Ward No.12), C/O EAC Naharlagun Mini secretariat (For Ward No.13 to Ward No.17), C/O Circle Officer Naharlagun, Mini secretariat (For Ward No.18 and Ward No.19), C/O Circle Officer Banderdewa (For ward No.20).

Further, He informed the house that, the main objective of the meeting was to appoint or provide detail of Booth level Agents of political parties ward wise so that concern AMEROs could coordinate for special campaign for receiving claims and objections during ongoing electoral roll revision (specially on April 24 and 25).

The chairman of the session explained in detail on relevance of Municipal Electoral Roll revision 2025 and key areas where political parties could make voters aware by participation for smooth Revision process.

All the political parties present took active part in meeting (Attendance enclosed). The leaders of various political parties also put forward some suggestions and advice which has been understood to have been put forward with competent authority for consideration and approval. The capital administration authority informed.

## Pasigat Press Club in East Siang inaugurated

**HT Bureau**

**ITANAGAR, April 23:** Arunachal minister of printing Nyato Dukam on Tuesday inaugurated the Pasigat Press Club (PPC) in East Siang recently.

Dukam inaugurated the Pasigat Press club (PPC) in a rented premises near Gandhi Chowk in presence of several eminent personalities of state and several senior journalist and leaders of media organisation of state.

Former Union minister of state and Pasigat (West) MLA Nihong Ering attended the function as guest of honour. Pasigat (East) MLA Tapi Darang, Mebo MLA Oken Tayeng, East Siang Deputy Commissioner Taye Tagu, SP Pankaj Lamba, Arunachal Press Club (APC) president Dodum Yangfo, Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working journalist (APUWJ) General secretary Sonam Tabri Dada, several journalist including Taya Bagang, Manoj Singh, Sandip Thakur, Tagu Ningee, PPC President Maksam Tayeng, General Secretary Mingkeng Osik, IPR Secretary Toram Melong were present on the occasion. Dukam congratulated the media fraternity and emphasised the platform and institution for its best use. He hoped that the space foster fearless journalism and strengthened the democratic discourse.

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, April 23:** The Rising People's Party (RPP) on Wednesday demanded that Nagaland higher education minister Imna Along be relieved of his higher education portfolio over the issue of regularisation of 147 contractual assistant professors and librarians in the state. The party made the demand, saying it is in the interest of fairness and justice.

In a statement, the RPP said the minister in charge of an important department such as higher education should be someone who has some semblance of integrity and character.

While the Combined Technical Association of Nagaland (CTAN) and the Nagaland NET Qualified Forum (NNQF) held protests at the directorate of higher education in Kohima over the issue, the Nagaland Students Federation, on April 21, issued a seven-day ultimatum to the state government to revoke the cabinet decision on regularisation of the contractual assistant

professors and librarians.

The RPP pointed that the minister, once upon a time, declared bombastically that henceforth there would be no more appointments from the backdoor, window or the ceiling. However, it said, he has managed to provoke every right-thinking citizen on the issue of regularisation of these assistant professors and librarians today. The party said though "provocateur-in-chief" Along is the target of everyone's ire, the Neiphiu Rio's cabinet is to be equally blamed for the regularisation.

Stressing that the just demand of CTAN and NNQF will have to be fulfilled, it said the delay tactic of the NDDP-led government in constituting a committee to study the '147 issue' is insulting, demeaning and tone deaf.

According to the RPP, for the student community to back off without the issue being settled will have disastrous consequences for the future generation.

## WMC representation to Manipur Guv

**IMPHAL, April 23:** The World Meitei Council (WMC), Jiribam District Branch Committee, has submitted a representation to the Governor of Manipur, urging him to forward key railway-related demands to the Ministry of Railways.

Signed by K Ratan Singh, vice-presi-

dent of the district branch, the memorandum highlights public concerns over the discontinuation of train services from Khongsang to Agartala and Vangaichungpao to Silchar.

The WMC stated that these cancellations have caused serious inconvenience to commuters and has slowed down

socio-economic development in the region.

The council requested the resumption of these crucial routes and also raised concerns about the current early timing of the Vangaichungpao-Silchar service, calling for a commuter-friendly timetable. (NNN)

## Manipur: 4 militants, 2 Arambai Tenggol members arrested

**IMPHAL, April 23:** Security forces arrested six persons, including four militants belonging to proscribed outfits, from different parts of Manipur, police said on Wednesday.

An active woman militant of Kangleipak Communist Party (Nongdrenkhomba) was arrested from Lamphel Supermarket in Imphal West district on Tuesday. She was identified as 20-year-old Tongbram Dolly Devi, a police officer said.

A cadre of PREPAK was also nabbed from Napetpalli Thongkhong in Imphal East district on Tuesday.

Another insurgent of KCP (PWG) who was involved in extortion activities in and around Imphal area was nabbed from Kekrupat in Imphal West district. He was identified as Longiam Tony Singh (37), the officer said. An active cadre of the banned Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (SOREPA) was also apprehended from Hiyanthang Makha Leikai in Imphal West district on Tuesday. He was identified as Laishram Nongdamba Singh alias Lanleiba (25).

Police also arrested two members of radical outfit Arambai Tenggol from Jiribam district on Tuesday for their alleged involvement in the kidnapping of a person from Assam's Cachar. They have been identified as R K Khomdonsana (32) and Lourembam Thoiba alias Jackson (20) and both are residents of Jiribam district. Security forces seized a carbine, a self-loading rifle, seven magazines, 73 cartridges and 37 empty cases during a search operation at the foothills of Mongjam in Imphal East district on Tuesday. (PTI)

## Tripura Mahila Congress demands strict action over rising CAW, meets DGP

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, April 23:** Alleging rising trends in crime against women, Tripura Mahila Congress on Wednesday submitted a memorandum to the Director General of Police, Amitabh Ranjan demanding severe punishment of the culprits.

A delegation of the Mahila Congress met, DGP Ranjan and alleged that the BJP Government has been saddled in power in Tripura



for last seven years and during the period the Government has done no good to the people of the state, rather the Tripura has earned the ignominy of the worst governed state though so called popular Chief Minister very often talks about good governance.

"During BJP rule our state has been reduced to the status of one of the most backward states with wounds of bankruptcy- both in administration and executive echelons of

the state. The state government and its associates have been trying hard to make the people of Tripura to believe that they are the most trusted fellows who can protect the chastity of women in our state, but the fact is far from reality. During the last Assembly session the Chief Minister/Home Minister has told that during 2023-2024 There occurred 144 incidences of rape and gang-rape, 31 murder of women. Now the slogan 'Beti parao, Beti bachao' and stories of Lakhpati Didis are nothing but mockery in our state", said the Mahila Congress.

They alleged that the crime against women is increasing by leaps and bounds.

"The law and order situation is completely broken down. What lies at the core of the problem is politicalization of entire law and order machinery. In this context a reference to major incidence of gang-rape, molestation and killing after sexual harassment are mentioned for ready-reference. Our Chief Minister always speaks of Zero tolerance against crime. But nobody listen to him. Now we want to know from our Chief Minister where does Mata Sita hide herself in his 'Ram Regime' to protect chastity? In view of the above circumstances we, the Pradesh Mahila Congress activists demand severe punishment of the Culprits involve in crime against women. Otherwise, we shall be compelled to organise State wide protest against increasing crime against women", he added.

## Workshop on job opportunities in Japan

*'IT and tech industry in Japan is known for its high demand for skilled workers'*



**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, April 23:** Department of horticulture, Nagaland University and ARMS Incorporation organised a workshop on job opportunities in Japan at Capital Convention Center, Kohima, on Wednesday.

Representatives from Japan's embassy and delegates from 4 prefectures of Japan were also present at the workshop.

"Japan offers a wide range of job opportunities, particularly in sectors like IT, Engineering, Agriculture and teaching

English," said director of horticulture Meiyasashi in his welcome address at the inaugural session.

He said the IT and tech industry in Japan is known for its high demand for skilled workers.

With Japan's rich cultural heritage and diverse tourist attractions, there are opportunities in various hospitality sectors, Meiyasashi added.

ARMS Incorporation vice president Shibata Nagatoshi, in his speech, said Japan requires manpower for their indus-

tries as there is a shortage of human resources in the country due to its shrinking population. He added that due to increase in ageing population of Japan, there is a shortage of long-term healthcare and nursing personnel.

He said under the technical intern training programme, ARMS incorporation selects excellent candidates and sends them to Japan.

The three-year programme was officially approved by both the Japanese and Indian governments, Nagatoshi said, adding more than 350 students have already placed in Japan.

Linguistic head of department, Nagaland University, Prof. Pangersenla Walling, in her address, said two MoUs were signed between the state government and Nagaland University and another between the ARMS Incorporation and the university.

These MoUs mark the beginning of a three-year collaborative partnership aimed at fostering educational and cultural exchange.

She said the core objective is to position Nagaland as a centre for foreign language learning and offer students a broader range of academic opportunities while simultaneously fostering youth employment both domestically and international.



# Political parties, other organisations across UP condemn Pahalgam attack; Akhilesh hits out at BJP

**LUCKNOW, April 23:** Political parties, bar associations and various other organisations across Uttar Pradesh have condemned the terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam, while Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav hit out at the BJP over its reaction on the Pahalgam attack.

In a strongly worded post on social media platform X, Yadav accused the BJP of "politicising" the attack and "lacking genuine empathy" for the victims and their families.

"By publishing a childish advertisement on the extremely painful tragedy of Jammu and Kashmir, the BJP has proved that BJP leaders have zero sympathy for those who have lost their lives and whose families are in deep sorrow. Even if BJP removes this advertisement, even its staunch supporters will not forgive this sin," Yadav wrote.

Though Yadav did not specify which advertisement he was referring to, sources in the Samajwadi Party suggested that his comments were directed at social media posts shared by some official BJP handles, which claimed that the attackers in Pahalgam asked the victims their religion before opening fire.

Blaming the central government for alleged security lapses, Yadav said, "When the BJP government

in Jammu and Kashmir has done everything according to its own will, then it cannot shirk its responsibility for the untimely deaths of so many people. It is the failure of the central government that it could not anticipate such a gruesome incident."

Yadav also questioned the alleged "lack of adequate security measures" at Pahalgam, a well-known tourist destination. "If the BJP and their allies are encouraging tourists to visit Jammu and Kashmir, then why were adequate security arrangements not made beforehand?" he asked.

The BJP also hit out at the SP for "appeasement politics".

"It's not surprising for a party that has always engaged in appeasement politics to engage in politics even at this moment when we all should be speaking in one voice. But, I want to assure you, Akhilesh Yadav that unlike you, we won't engage in politics of appeasement. Rather our government will ensure a befitting reply to the perpetrators of this dastardly attack," UP BJP general secretary and party's Rajya Sabha MP Amarpal Maurya told PTI.

BJP units in several cities, including Lucknow, Unnao, Hapur and Jhansi, cancelled their planned party programmes for Wednesday as a mark of respect for the vic-



times. In Sant Kabir Nagar, the bar association held a protest and condolence meeting for those killed in Pahalgam. Association president Shashi Kumar Ojha announced a cessation of judicial work for the day and demanded swift action against the perpetrators.

Shahjahanpur witnessed protests by Hindu Jagran Manch workers, and their leader demanded immediate and "forceful retaliation" against the terrorists.

In Varanasi, Shri Kashi Vishwanath temple authorities lit a lamp in condolence and organised a Rudra Path for the peace of the victims' souls. Locals also gathered at the Varad Anjane Hanuman

temple to light lamps and observe silence, urging Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take "decisive action" against terrorism.

BJP Hapur district president Naresh Tomar condemned the attack and called for a strong action against Pakistan's alleged role.

The Hindu Jagran Manch in Hathras also staged a protest at the Shaheed Bhagat Singh Memorial, burning an effigy of "Islamic terrorists". In Meerut, both the Congress and the BJP announced separate tribute programmes to honour the victims.

The Jammu and Kashmir Students Association in Aligarh unequivocally condemned the attack

# Make choice between post and freedom: SC to Senthil Balaji

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** The Supreme Court on Wednesday told DMK leader V Senthil Balaji to make a choice "between post and freedom" as it warned him of cancelling bail if he did not step down as minister in Tamil Nadu.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih took exception to the fact that Balaji was reinstated as a Tamil Nadu cabinet minister days after getting bail in a money laundering case related to the "cash-for-job" scam.

"There is grave apprehension that you will interfere and will influence witnesses. You have to make a choice between the post (minister) and freedom. What choice you want to make, you tell us," it said.

The top court referred to a previous judgment which recorded that he forced people to withdraw complaints against him. Grant of bail did not mean power to influence witnesses, it noted.

"When you were a minister, categorical findings have been recorded against you in the manner in which you brought about settlement and the proceedings are quashed. Grant of bail does not mean power to influence witnesses. In the past, you have influenced witnesses," the bench said.

The top court, as a result, offered him a choice.

"So, you have to make a choice between the post and the freedom. Such drastic findings are recorded against you in capacity as a minister," the bench said. The court was hearing pleas to recall Balaji's bail on the ground that he influenced witnesses in the case. The top court found a prima facie case against Balaji based on his past conduct which showed he "interfered and influenced" the witnesses.

"Now, you have gone back to the same position where as a minister you will be able to influence. We have granted you bail on totally different grounds. You must remember one thing. He had not been granted bail on merits. He had been granted bail on possible violation on Article 21 of the constitution. What signal are we sending when you hold office of minister?" it asked.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, representing Balaji, said there was no direct finding against his client.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, on behalf of the Tamil Nadu government, said the trial could be shifted out of the state if there was any possibility of influencing the wit-

nesses. The court disagreed, saying no purpose would be served.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Enforcement Directorate, referred to its affidavit alleging Balaji influenced the witnesses. "We will record it in the order that we have made a mistake by ignoring the judgements against you, because the entire hearing proceeded on the footing that he is no longer minister. We will accept our mistake," Justice Oka offered.

When Sibal submitted there was no possibility of Balaji influencing witnesses, the top court remarked, "You (Balaji) are preventing witnesses from coming." The apex court also expressed apprehension about politicians misusing the liberal bail jurisprudence developed by the court in money laundering cases.

"What troubles us is for the first time in case of PMLA, we have applied a law that if a case is not going to commence we will grant bail. This order is being followed consistently. When we read the order of the trial court and the high court, we were told that he is no longer minister," it noted.

The bench went on, "Therefore, we ignored the allegation based on the judgements on the ground that he is no longer minister. Now you bring about a change within few days of order granting bail and he is again the minister. This is not the way to deal with the court. After that don't blame us that this court is not liberal in granting bail. You know how difficult it is to get bail in PMLA."

The top court, however, granted the Sibal's request for some time, posting the matter on April 28.

Balaji previously said his appointment as a cabinet minister in Tamil Nadu was not violative of the bail conditions imposed on him by the top court in a money laundering case and he couldn't be chastised for seeking a political office following a popular mandate.

On September 26, 2024, the top court granted bail to Balaji, who had spent over 15 months in jail and observed there was no possibility of the completion of trial in the near future.

Balaji, 48, was sworn in as a minister by Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi on September 29, last year and was assigned the same key portfolios -- electricity, non-conventional energy development, prohibition and excise -- he held previously in the Stalin cabinet. (PTI)



## Modi govt will hunt down masterminds of Pahalgam terror attack: Fadnavis



**MUMBAI, April 23:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday asserted the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi will soon hunt down the masterminds of the Pahalgam terror attack and bring them to justice.

Talking to reporters here, Fadnavis said it was disgusting that terrorists opened fire at tourists after asking them their religion.

Terrorists struck at a prime tourist location in Pahalgam town in south Kashmir on Tuesday afternoon, killing at least 26 persons, mostly holiday-makers, and injuring several others. As many as 6 of the deceased hailed from Maharashtra.

"PM Modi will hunt down the masterminds (of Pahalgam terror attack) and bring them to justice," he said. Fadnavis, who holds the home portfolio, emphasised that the assault was on Indians and there should be no politics over the massacre of innocent civilians.

The entire country is with the people of Kashmir, he affirmed. To a query on the terror assault taking place after a new government was sworn-in post-assembly polls in J&K last year, Fadnavis said, "It is true such an attack didn't happen when the LG (Lieutenant Governor) was in charge (of the administration). But we are with the government (of the Union Territory) and this was an attack on Indians."

Talking to reporters in Pune, Nationalist Congress Party (SP) working president Supriya Sule urged PM Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to convene an all-party meeting and apprise people about the situation in Jammu & Kashmir post the Pahalgam strike. "This is not the time to play blame game. Security and safety of people is paramount. Till the Home Minister (who visited Kashmir after the attack) comes out with a statement, we, as responsible public representatives, should speak with a lot of caution," Sule maintained. A lot of tourists are still stranded in various parts of Kashmir and the local administration is proactively helping them, noted the Lok Sabha MP from Baramati in Pune district.

Most of the tourists who want to come back are complaining of very expensive air tickets, she maintained and requested the government to intervene.

"I request the civil aviation ministry, Railways and the state transport department to facilitate the return of tourists without thinking about making profits. The government should facilitate special flights and bring back those who want to return home," the opposition MP emphasised. (PTI)

## Pahalgam terror attack is direct assault on Indian state, the country is one in fighting: Kharage

**BENGALURU, April 23:** Congress President Mallikarjun Kharage on Wednesday termed the Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 people were killed as a direct assault on the Indian state, and said that at this moment the entire nation is one with the government to fight the terrorists.

He urged the government to use all its strength to hunt down the terrorists, and also suggested that an all-party meeting be called to address the challenge of terrorism in a spirit of consensus.

"Very unfortunate incident happened in Pahalgam in Jammu & Kashmir and the terrorists dastardly killed innocent and unsuspecting tourists yesterday around 2:30 pm. This has deeply hurt, shocked and saddened us all. The Congress party unequivocally condemns this cowardly act of terror and those responsible for it in the strongest possible terms," Kharage said.

Addressing a press conference here, he said, this attack is a direct assault on the unity and integrity of our nation.

"Since the horrific Chittisinghpura massacre in 2000 this is among the most brazen and outrageous attempts by terrorists and separatists. We firmly reiterate that those who murdered unarmed and innocent civilians cannot be human," he



said. Noting that late last evening he spoke to Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who was in Kashmir and to J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Congress leaders there, and gathered information, the AICC chief said, "Shah told me that they are going to take action drastically in that area."

The Congress Working Committee will meet at 11 am on April 24 at AICC office in New Delhi to discuss the terror attack, he said. Stating that this is not a time for partisan politics, Kharage said, "it is a moment for collective resolve to ensure justice for those who lost their lives and for their grieving families by bringing the perpetrators of this terror attack to justice." "In this moment we all are one with the government and together we have to fight such incidents, terrorists and

whosoever fights against us. We will be one to save the country and for the country's unity and integrity," he said.

The entire nation is in shock and a Pakistani terrorist organisation has claimed responsibility, Kharage said, "we must give a fitting response and in this matter we are all one and we will fight. But, there should not be claims without doing or without properly managing and fingerprinting." "We urge the government to use all its strength to hunt down the terrorist, it has been almost 22 hours now. The government must do everything possible to maintain tourists' confidence in the security arrangement of Jammu and Kashmir," he added.

"They should call an all-party meeting and take some advice. This is not politics, and we don't want politics in this situation," he said, adding that the Congress Party is committed to coordination and cooperation with the government to eliminate terrorism from its roots.

Tourists from various parts of the country were present at Pahalgam, and among the victims were Manjunath and Bharat Bhushan from Karnataka who also lost their lives, Kharage said, "I personally spoke to both the grieving wives of the victims and offered my condolences to them." (PTI)

## Pahalgam terror attack a 'cowardly act of Pakistan', says MP CM Yadav

**BHOPAL/INDORE, April 23:** Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Wednesday termed the Pahalgam terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir as a "cowardly act of Pakistan" and asserted the entire country is united in giving a response to the strike.

He expressed grief over the loss of innocent lives in the attack in which an Indore resident was also killed.

Terrorists struck a prime tourist location in Pahalgam in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing at least 26 people, mostly holiday-makers from other states.

"This is a cowardly act of Pakistan... The whole country is united to respond to this cowardly act of Pakistan and its 'picchlagu' (hangers-on). Our government is moving ahead with a very good plan. We all will pray to Baba Mahakal (Lord Mahakaleshwar) that no such cowardly act happens again in the future," the CM said in a statement in Bhopal.

Indore resident Sushil Nathaniel (58), who had gone to Jammu and Kashmir with

his wife, daughter and son to celebrate Easter, was among the 26 people killed in the terror attack in Pahalgam.

"I pray to Baba Mahakal to give him a place in his feet," Yadav said, mourning the death of Nathaniel.

Nathaniel was posted as a manager with the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) in Madhya Pradesh's Alirajpur, about 200 km from Indore, as per officials.

Meanwhile, after the deadly strike in Pahalgam, many tourists from Madhya Pradesh who are currently in Jammu and Kashmir want to return home as soon as possible and they are contacting travel agents for journey to their native places, an official of the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAD) said in Indore.

Hemendra Singh Jadon, chairman of the Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh chapter of TAAI, told PTI, "After the terror attack, most of the tourists from Madhya Pradesh want to end their trip to Jammu and Kashmir before their scheduled time and return home as soon as possible." (PTI)

## Pahalgam attack: Punjab put on high alert, CM Mann holds high-level security meeting

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

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

"It is our duty to keep Punjab safe and secure...I want to assure people of Punjab that we will keep the state safe and secure," he said. With reports that terrorists first asked the names of people before killing them in Pahalgam, Mann said terror has no religion.

Which religion allows to kill innocent people, which religion allows such barbarism, he asked. 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.

Replying to a question, Mann said, "Those tourists who belong to Punjab and may be stuck in hotels there, we are making arrangements to bring them back safely. We are in touch with J-K authorities".

Mann also said that Punjab authorities are also in touch with student associations of J-K and the government has assured them of their safety and security. DGP Gaurav Yadav said police deployment has

been strengthened at educational institutes in Punjab where there is a high footfall of students from J-K.

Immediately after the Pahalgam incident took place, Mann had ordered that security be stepped up in the state. DGP Yadav said, "At vulnerable points, intensified checkings are going on, especially along the inter-state and inter-district boundaries," the DGP said.

"There has been hardening of security around high risk individuals, including increased patrolling in and around their places of residence. There has been enhanced patrolling near religious places, political gatherings, transport hubs and high footfall public and tourist areas where the police deployment is there to maintain a sense of confidence," the DGP said.

Intelligence coordination and surveillance of anti-national elements has been strengthened. "We are in touch with intelligence and border guarding agencies," Yadav further said.

The DGP said instructions have been issued to ensure maximum visibility of uniformed personnel in sensitive zones to instill public confidence.

"We are in touch with J&K police and the central authorities and a close watch is being kept on the situation," he said. (PTI)

## One nation, one election foundation stone of 'Viksit Bharat: Dharmendra Pradhan

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** 'One Nation, One Election' is the foundation stone of the vision of 'Viksit Bharat' and will prove to be a key factor in building a strong and stable India, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Wednesday.

Pradhan was addressing an event -- 'Students for one nation, one election' -- that saw the participation of student leaders from across the country. "One nation, one election is the foundation stone of the vision of Viksit Bharat (developed India), which will prove to be decisive in the direction of a strong and stable India.

"The subject has now gone beyond legal and political discussions and has become a part of the main agenda of the country. To take any major national decision to a decisive level, policy, planning, strategy and most importantly,



public participation are necessary," Pradhan said.

It is not a subject limited only to election expenditure and code of conduct; rather, it is a medium to give a new direction to political stability, good governance and development of the country, he said.

Pradhan alleged the "negative attitude" of the opposition disrespects the mandate of the people.

"When Prime Minister Narendra Modi says, 'This is the time, it is India's time', the negative attitude of the opposition is unfortunate. It not only questions the constitu-

tional institutions of the country, but also disrespects the mandate.

"This negative politics of the opposition is unfortunate, in which questions are being raised on the constitutional institutions of the country. These people who talk about the Constitution are the ones who are hurting the Constitution the most," he said.

Pradhan alleged that after 1967, when people's aspirations were ignored, Congress encouraged the politics of manipulation.

"Today, these people suffering from feudal thinking are not able to accept the mandate given by the people to the Modi government for the third time.

"Today is the time to further strengthen the democratic system and turn 'One Nation, One Election' into a public campaign, public dialogue and public movement," he said. (PTI)

## Delhi to table cloud-seeding proposal, launch pollution action plan next week: Sirsa

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** To tackle air pollution in the national capital, a proposal to conduct a cloud-seeding trial will be tabled at the next Cabinet meeting, while the pollution action plan is set to be launched in the upcoming week, Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa said on Wednesday.

He said the Delhi government is ramping up its efforts to curb pollution through advanced technological interventions, including maximum digitisation, artificial intelligence-based monitoring and round-the-clock surveillance of construction and traffic hotspots.

In the upcoming week, the department will launch its pollution action plan, focusing on comprehensive measures to address the sources of pollution, Sirsa said.

He added that efforts will be prioritised to reduce public inconven-



ience and enhance transparency, with most of the work being carried out through digitisation.

Giving an update on the progress of the artificial-rain initiative, Sirsa told PTI that a cloud-seeding proposal -- currently in its final stages -- will be presented at the next Cabinet meeting. If ap-

proved, it will be circulated among all departments for the required no-objection certificates (NOCs) and a detailed evaluation.

"The proposal will be tabled in the cabinet and once approved, we will quickly apply for all the necessary NOCs. We plan to conduct a trial during peak summer on the

outskirts of Delhi. If everything goes smoothly and without any hurdles, we will consider it as an emergency option to tackle severe pollution for the betterment of our residents," the minister said.

"Our government is committed to working for the welfare of people. Pollution is a serious problem in Delhi and we are working at every level to address all sources contributing to it," he added. There are a total of 12 agencies from which the government must obtain NOCs before proceeding with the artificial-rain (cloud-seeding) trial.

These include the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Home Affairs, Special Protection Group (SPG), Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Forest and Climate Change (Government of India) and Airports Authority of India. (PTI)



## Delhi court issues non-bailable warrant against Medha Patkar for flouting order

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** A Delhi court on Wednesday issued a non-bailable warrant against Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar and said she "deliberately" flouted its order to submit probation bonds and deposit ₹ 1 lakh fine in a defamation case of Delhi LG V K Saxena.

Observing her plea for adjournment was "frivolous and mischievous" and filed with the intent to "hoodwink" it, the court cautioned Patkar against her action saying it could make it "reconsider the benevolent sentence".

Additional sessions judge Vishal Singh said, "Instead of appearing before the court to comply with the order on sentence dated April 8, the convict (Patkar) is absent and has deliberately failed to comply with the order on sentence and to avail of the benefit of probation subject to furnishing of the compensation amount."

The court went on, "The intention of the convict is apparent that she is deliberately violating the court order; she is avoiding appearing before the court and also avoiding accepting the terms of the sentence passed against her. There is no order of suspension of sentence passed by this court on April 8." Given the scenario, the court said, it was left with no other option but to enforce "her production through a coercive order".

"Issue non bailable warrants (NBWs) against convict Medha Patkar, through the office of the Commissioner of Police, Delhi Police, for the next date. Put up for report on NBWs and further proceedings on May 3," the court directed. The judge said Patkar sought adjournment on the grounds that her revision petition was pending in the Delhi High Court.

"The application has no substance; there is no direction in the order dated April 22 of the Delhi High Court that the convict Medha Patkar is not required to comply with the order on sentence dated April 8. The present application is frivolous, mischievous and is only calculated to hoodwink the court," said ASI Singh and dismissed it.

In a reprieve to Patkar, who was facing a five-month imprisonment, the court on April 8 released her on "probation of good conduct" in the defamation case.

The sessions court had "modified" the order of a magisterial court sentencing her to five months of simple imprisonment on July 1, 2024. It asked her to deposit the



compensation amount of ₹ 1 lakh, which should be released to Saxena. "On deposit of the compensation amount, the convict or appellant Medha Patkar shall furnish a probation bond of ₹ 25,000 with one surety of like amount for an operative period of one year from the date of furnishing the probation bond," the court had said.

On Wednesday, the matter was listed for Patkar's appearance, furnishing of probation bonds and depositing the fine amount.

Advocates Gajinder Kumar and Kiran Jai appeared for Saxena.

Saxena filed the case as the president of the National Council of Civil Liberties against Patkar for her defamatory press release against Saxena, issued on November 24, 2000. On May 24, last year, a magisterial court observed Patkar's statements calling Saxena a "coward" and alleging his involvement in hawala transactions were not only defamatory per se but also crafted to incite negative perceptions about him.

Also, the accusation that the complainant was "mortgaging" the people of Gujarat and their resources to foreign interests was a direct attack on his integrity and public service, it added.

The arguments on sentencing were completed on May 30, following which the order on the quantum of sentence was reserved on June 7.

On July 1, the court sentenced her to five months' simple imprisonment, following which Patkar filed an appeal in a sessions court.

The sessions court, which held the 70-year-old guilty in the defamation case, released her on "probation of good conduct" on April 8 and imposed a precondition on her of depositing ₹ 1 lakh as fine. Probation is a method of non-institutional treatment of offenders and a conditional suspension of sentence in which the offender, after conviction, is released on bond of good behaviour instead of being sent to prison. (PTI)

## Pahalgam attack: Doing our best to minimise dent on J-K tourism, says Shekhawat

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat on Wednesday said some people with nefarious intentions have tried to again "incite separatism and terrorism" in the Valley and asserted that his ministry will do the best to "minimise the dent" on tourism in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of the Pahalgam attack.

Interacting with reporters on the sidelines of the 38th meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Archaeology (CABA) here, he said he and his office are in "continuous touch" with the chief secretary and the tourism secretary of the Union Territory and keeping an eye on the situation.

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. The deceased included two foreigners - from the UAE and Nepal -- and two locals.

Before the commencement of the meeting, chaired by the minister, a minute of silence was observed by the attendees.

"The entire country is pained, and also filled with a sense of



anger. I convey my sentiments to the families of the victims of the Pahalgam terror attack," Shekhawat said in his opening remarks at the meeting held at the Bharat Mandapam here.

Talking to reporters, he said, "This cowardly incident has hurt our sentiments. But, some people with their nefarious intention, have tried to incite separatism and terrorism in Kashmir again."

The Union culture and tourism minister also said Prime Minister

strikes, India has sent a message to the world that anti-India activities, whether emanating from Indian soil or from outside the country, will not be tolerated," he said.

Asked if he has approached the Jammu and Kashmir government and tourism department authorities in the wake of the attack, Shekhawat said, "I am in touch with everybody, my office too, my secretary is also in touch with the tourism secretary in Jammu and Kashmir, the chief secretary of Jammu and Kashmir".

"We are in continuous touch and keeping an eye on that. And, we will do our best to minimise the dent on tourism in Kashmir because of this incident, and tourism across the country," he said.

In his opening remarks at the meeting, the Union minister, who also holds the portfolio of culture in the government, suggested to "increase the frequency" of the CABA meeting, and lamented that a delay or prolonged gap between two successive meetings is not a favourable situation either for the board or its members.

The 37th meeting of CABA was held on June 14, 2022, under the chairpersonship of the then Union

Minister of Culture, G Kishan Reddy.

A member of Parliament is elected for five years, and if a meeting of CABA happens after a gap of three years or more, then it's a loss, it's a "national loss".

The Archaeological Survey of India -- an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Culture -- hosted the 38th meeting of CABA.

The board was formed in 1945 by the government of India to foster strong ties between the ASI and Indian universities, academic institutions and state governments for conducting archaeological research, the ministry said in a statement.

Every three years, the board is re-constituted through a gazette notification after the approval of the Union Minister of Culture, who also serves as the chairman of the CABA.

"The 38th meeting of CABA will discuss the resolutions/suggestions received from Members of the Advisory Board and the action taken for the resolutions/suggestions during the previous meeting," the Ministry of Culture said in a statement on Tuesday. (PTI)

### Delhi traders hold protest against Pahalgam terror attack

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** Several traders' associations in the national capital held protests on Wednesday, condemning the Pahalgam terror attack that claimed the lives of 26 people.

As a mark of protest, traders tied black ribbons on their arms, demanding immediate action against the terrorists involved in the attack.

During the demonstration, protesters held placards with slogans such as 'Doshiyon ke khilaf karwayi karo' (take action against the guilty), 'Begunahon ka balidaan nahi sahega Hindustan' (India will not tolerate the sacrifice of innocents) and 'Katteaam band karo' (Stop the massacre).

They also carried posters featuring photos of the victims and their families, which had been circulating online.

The Chandni Chowk Traders Association held a demonstration outside the Town Hall, while the Federation of Sadar Bazaar Traders protested near Qutub Road.

Paramjit Singh Pamma, president of the Federation of Sadar Bazaar Traders, expressed deep sorrow over the incident, stating that the attack had shaken the entire nation.

"We are a country with diverse religions, but terrorism knows no religion. A terrorist is a terrorist," said Rakesh Kumar Yadav, Secretary of the Federation of Sadar Bazaar Traders. (PTI)

### Wife bids tearful adieu to Navy officer Vinay Narwal killed in Pahalgam attack

**CHANDIGARH/KOCHI, April 23:** There was hardly a dry eye as Indian Navy officer Vinay Narwal's wife Himanshi bid adieu to him embracing his coffin wrapped in the tricolour. Married on April 16, the couple was on their honeymoon trip to Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam when terrorists killed the officer in cold blood in front of his wife.

"Let his soul rest in peace...We should all be proud of him in every way. And we will make him proud in every way," said Himanshi, who hails from Gurugram and is pursuing a PhD.

On Wednesday afternoon, Narwal's mortal remains were brought to the IGI airport in Delhi from Kashmir, from where they were taken to his native place Karnal in Haryana.

"Jai Hind," Himanshi said, saluting her husband Narwal at the IGI.

At the airport, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta paid homage to Narwal (26) and laid a wreath at the mortal remains and was also seen trying to comfort his wife. On Wednesday morning, Chief Minister Saini made a video call to Narwal's grandfather Hawa Singh, who sought from Prime Minister Narendra Modi exemplary punishment for the perpetrators of the attack and firm action to weed out terrorism.

"Today, I have lost my grandson, tomorrow it can be someone else," he said while speaking to CM Saini. "I was eating bhel puri and my husband was also here. A person came and asked if he was Muslim and when he denied, the man shot

him dead," Himanshi is heard saying in a purported video of her, which has gone viral on social media. Narwal's colleagues remembered him as a cheerful and dedicated officer.

"Lt Narwal was always cheerful and deeply committed to his duties," a Navy officer recalled.

Narwal had been serving at the Southern Naval Command in Kochi for the past one-and-a-half years after joining the Navy in 2022, officials said. "The Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi, and all personnel of the Indian Navy are shocked and deeply saddened by the tragic loss of Lt Vinay Narwal, who fell victim to the dastardly terror attack in Pahalgam," the Navy spokesperson said in a post on 'X'.

"We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family during this moment of unimaginable grief. The Indian Navy also stands in solemn solidarity with all others who lost their lives in this heinous act of violence," the post added.

Narwal's neighbour Naresh Bansal said, "After the marriage, everyone was celebrating and was in a happy mood. And now suddenly this sad news comes." Another neighbour Seema recalled that there were grand celebrations at his home and not just the Narwal family, but the entire neighbourhood was celebrating after the wedding.

"They were planning a honeymoon in Switzerland, but decided to go to Kashmir instead, taking into account the leave he had...We can't imagine what his family is going through," she said. (PTI)

### Attached assets worth over ₹ 600-cr in 3 West Bengal recruitment 'scams': ED

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday said it has attached assets worth more than ₹ 609 crore as part of its money laundering investigations into three different teachers and staff recruitment "scams" in West Bengal.

It said a fresh order has been issued to attach land parcels, commercial spaces, flats and villas worth ₹ 56.50 crore in the case related to hiring by School Service Commission (SSC) for group C and D staff. The assets are held in the name of the companies and LLPs (limited liability partnership) of alleged "main middleman" Prasanna Kumar Roy and his associates, the federal probe agency said in a statement.

These properties are worth ₹ 56.50 crore, it said. A total of 25,753 teaching and non-teaching staff of state-run and aided schools lost their jobs after the Supreme court found large-scale irregularities in the 2016 recruitment process and scrapped the entire panel on April 3.

The Supreme Court on April 17 extended till

December 31 the services of terminated teachers found clean by the CBI.

The ED earlier attached properties worth ₹ 163.66 crore in this case in the name of Roy and his "main agent" Chandan Mondal. Both are currently lodged in jail under judicial custody after the agency arrested them.

The second recruitment "scam" case of West Bengal in which the ED has earlier attached assets is the assistant teacher recruitment for classes 9 to 12. The attachment value in this case is ₹ 238.78 crore, it said. The third such case is that of the primary teachers recruitment where the agency has seized assets worth ₹ 151 crore.

"Thus, the total attachment by ED Kolkata office in the recruitment scam cases stands at ₹ 609.9 crore," it said.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday urged protesting teachers, who lost their jobs following a Supreme Court ruling, to return to work, assuring them that her government will "protect" their salaries. (PTI)

### CLAT UG-2025: Delhi HC asks NLUs consortium to revise marksheets, republish result

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** The Delhi High Court on Wednesday directed the Consortium of National Law Universities to revise the marksheets and republish the final list of selected candidates of CLAT UG-2025 within four weeks.

A bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela accepted certain objections of the candidates while rejecting some of them.

"We direct the respondent/consortium to revise the marksheet and to republish/renotify the final list of selected candidates within four weeks from date," the bench said. It clarified that the consortium should apply the evaluation to each appellant and petitioner and the candidates who might have attempted certain questions under the court's consideration.

The consortium, the court said,

should also apply the evaluation to all the candidates to whom certain benefits could be granted in view of the analysis. The bench, as a result, disposed of the petitions and appeals pointing out certain errors in the common law admission test (CLAT) UG-2025 questionnaire. The appeals were filed by the aspirants and the consortium challenging a single judge's order. The court on April 9 concluded hearing the lawyers for petitioner aspirants, who appeared in the exam in December 2024, and Consortium of National Law Universities (CNLU) and reserved its order.

The court heard arguments on the questions which were under challenge in the petitions and is yet to hear pleas challenging the questions of CLAT PG-2025. CLAT determines admissions to undergraduate and postgraduate

law courses in national law universities in the country.

Multiple pleas were filed in different high courts alleging several questions in the exam were wrong.

On February 6, the Supreme Court transferred all the petitions over the issue to the Delhi High Court for a "consistent adjudication".

The top court passed the direction on the transfer petitions of CNLUs.

The CLAT, 2025 for admissions in five-year LLB courses in NLUs was held on December 1 and results were declared on December 7, 2024.

Several students wanted the cases to be transferred to the Delhi High Court, saying it passed a favourable order for some petitioners by identifying errors in two questions of the CLAT-UG 2025 exam and directing the consortium to revise their results. (PTI)

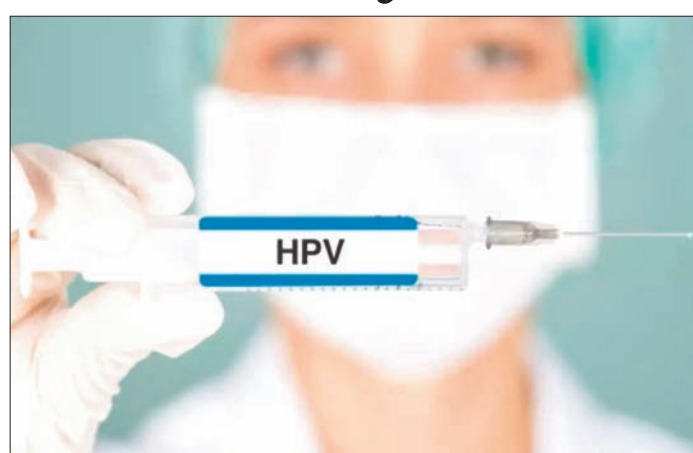
### HPV diagnostic test kits for screening of cervical cancer ready for roll out: Govt

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** The government on Wednesday said indigenously developed HPV diagnostic kits for screening of cervical cancer were ready for roll out and will prove to be a cost-effective method for carrying out tests for the second most common cancer among Indian women.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh, at a meeting to share the findings of the validation of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) test kits, called for greater private sector participation for the roll out of a mass screening programme for cervical cancer.

According to the World Health Organization data, one out of every five women in the world suffering from cervical cancer is an Indian. Late diagnosis of the disease leads to poor survival, and 25 per cent of the global mortality due to cervical cancer occurs in India.

"Over 90 per cent of cervical cancer cases are linked to HPV, with over 70 per cent affecting young girls. It is our national responsibility to ensure affordable



vaccines, screening and care," Singh said.

"The objective of this entire exercise is to have affordable, accessible screening and, if possible, mass screening, which is feasible only when you have large-scale private sector participation," he said at the review meeting.

The HPV test kits have been developed by the Department of Biotechnology, BIRAC, AIIMS-

New Delhi, ICMR, as well as partners from the industry.

At the outset, the participants of the review meeting observed a two-minute silence to mourn the deaths in a terror attack at Pahalgam on Tuesday.

Cancer of the uterine cervix is the second most common cancer among Indian women and also constitutes the largest burden of cervical cancer patients in the

world.

The Department of Biotechnology (DBT), through its partnership with Grand Challenges India (GCI) at the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), has supported a programme 'Validating Indigenous Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Tests for Cervical Cancer Screening in India'.

It validated indigenously developed, rapid, point-of-care, RT-PCR-based HPV diagnostic test kits for screening cervical cancer in premier R&D laboratories of India.

Evidence suggests that early diagnosis with regular population screening programmes has substantially contributed to the reduction of the cancer incidence rate in several developing countries, an official statement said.

"The recent development of these point-of-care HPV diagnostic test kits may prove to be an important health invention and prevention strategy for cervical cancer in India," it said. (PTI)

### Airlines operate addl flights to Srinagar; govt says fares being kept at reasonable levels

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** The government on Wednesday announced additional flights will be operated from Srinagar and that airlines on the route are being kept at reasonable levels amid a large number of tourists looking to return from J&K in the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack.

As many as 3,337 passengers flew out of Srinagar in 20 flights between 6 am and 12 pm on Wednesday.

IndiGo, Air India and SpiceJet are operating a total of seven extra flights in addition to their normal scheduled services from Srinagar. At least 26 people, mostly tourists, died in the Pahalgam terror attack.

Civil Aviation Minister K Ramamohan Naidu on Wednesday said that strict instructions were given to airline companies to avoid any fare surges, and that fares are being monitored and kept at reasonable levels. His comments also came against the backdrop of some websites apparently showing ticket prices of over ₹ 50,000 for flights to Srinagar.

The country's largest airline IndiGo said that in view of the emergent situation, it has taken steps to keep the fares moderated.

The minister also emphasised that constant efforts are being made to ensure safe travel of tourists from Srinagar. "In addition to the four extra flights already announced, three more flights to Delhi have been added for today -- IndiGo 6E 3203 (Dep: 1700, Arr: 1800), IndiGo 6E 3103 (Dep: 1800, Arr: 1930), and a SpiceJet flight scheduled to depart at 10:30 PM," he said in a post on X.

All airlines operating from Srinagar have waived

cancellation and rescheduling charges to support passengers. "Food and water are being provided at the airport, and an extra tent has been set up outside for those waiting. Between 6 am and 12 pm today, Srinagar Airport handled 20 departures with 3,337 pax," Naidu said. The minister also said that he is personally monitoring the situation and is in constant touch with the home ministry as well as airline operators.

In an advisory on Wednesday, DGCA said that in the aftermath of the incident in Pahalgam, there is an unexpected demand from tourists seeking to return to their homes.

"In this regard, the airlines are advised to take swift action to increase the number of flights in response to heightened demand and also to ensure uninterrupted connectivity from Srinagar to various destinations across India, facilitating evacuation of stranded tourists," it said.

According to the advisory, airlines have also been asked to provide all necessary assistance to tourists facing unexpected circumstances and challenges during this difficult time. IndiGo said that to support those travelling to/from Srinagar, it is offering waivers for cancellation fees or rescheduling charges.

"IndiGo has added special flights to Srinagar from Delhi and Mumbai with immediate effect and will be operating these over and above the regular schedule of 160 weekly flights from / to Srinagar from various parts of India," the airline, which operates 20 flights daily connecting Srinagar with various Indian cities, said in a statement. (PTI)



# Kareena Kapoor Khan, Vicky Kaushal, Nani condemn Pahalgam terror attack

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** More film personalities, including Kareena Kapoor Khan, Vicky Kaushal, Nani, and Sunny Deol, strongly condemned the terrorist attack at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir and called for swift action against those responsible.

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.

In an Instagram Story, Kareena wrote: "Beyond heartbroken for the victims and their families. Praying for the lives lost. #Pahalgam."

Hope the culprits behind "this heinous act" are brought to justice, said Kaushal.

"Can't imagine the pain of the family members of those who lost their loved ones in the absolute inhumane act of terrorism in Pahalgam. My deepest condolences and prayers," he added.

On Wednesday, Kashmir valley observed a shutdown against a terror attack for the first time in 35 years as organisations from all walks of life supported the bandh call to protest the killings in Pahalgam tourist resort, officials said.

Earlier, Akshay Kumar, Sonu Sood, Sanjay Dutt, Kamal Haasan, and Ritesh Sidhwani condemned the terrorist attack.

Nani, who shot for his Telugu film "Hit: The Third Case" in Pahalgam three months ago, said he was speechless.

"Over 200 people team for almost 20 days. Pahalgam Was like a dream. The place, the people and the warmth... Why?" he wrote in an X post.

In an X post, "Pushpa 2" star Allu Arjun said he was heartbroken.

"Such a beautiful place with kind hearted people. Condolences to all the families, near and dear of the victims. May their innocent souls rest in peace. Truly Heart breaking (sic)" he wrote.

Actor Suniel Shetty wrote on X that it was an attack on "the soul of Kashmir and its centuries-old legacy of hospitality".

"Prayers for the injured. Let us stand united in condemning such brutality and demand swift justice. The perpetrators must face the full force of the law," Shetty wrote on X.

Actor Sunny Deol said it was high time that ending terrorism became a priority.

"... its victims are only innocent people, humans need to look within themselves. I stand with the affected families in this hour of grief. #PahalgamTerroristAttack," he wrote in Hindi.

"My heart goes out to the victims of the Pahalgam terror attack. It is devastating to witness such cruelty. No cause can ever justify the taking of innocent lives. To the grieving families, your sorrow is beyond words. Please know that you are not alone. The entire nation stands with



you in mourning. Let us hold on to each other a little tighter and never let go of the hope that peace will prevail even in the face of darkness," Malayalam superstar Mohanlal said in an X post.

Actor-filmmaker Ajay Devgn said he was shocked to hear about the terrorist attack.

"The victims and their families were innocent souls, and what happened is heartbreaking and purely

evil. My thoughts and prayers are with them," he wrote on X.

TV star Shoaib Ibrahim, who was vacationing in Pahalgam with actor-wife Dipika Kakkar and son Ruhaan hours before the attack, on his Instagram Stories said they had left Kashmir in the morning.

"Hi guys, U all have been concerned for our well-being... Hum sab safe hain theek hain, aaj hi morning me left Kashmir (We all are safe

and sound, we left Kashmir this morning), and we reached Delhi safely... Thank you for all the concern..." Ibrahim wrote on Tuesday.

Actor Sidharth Malhotra termed the Pahalgam terrorist attack "a cowardly act".

"I have full faith in our armed forces and I'm sure they will do the needful and ensure justice. My prayers and thoughts are with the families of the innocent victims. Jai

Hind!" Malhotra said on his Instagram Story.

An emotional Anupam Kher shared a selfie video on social media with the caption: "Wrong. Wrong. Wrong!! Pahalgam massacre! Words are incompetent today!! #Pahalgam."

Jammu-born comic Samay Raina on Tuesday evening shared a post on the terror attack on his Instagram Stories and captioned it as: "Unable to sleep tonight." (PTI)

## Shah Rukh, Salman, Hrithik, Priyanka, Alia and many more celebs condemn Pahalgam terror attack



**NEW DELHI, April 23:** An inhumane act of violence, heinous attack, reprehensible and heart-breaking... India's cine stars, including Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan and Allu Arjun, spoke out in unison on Wednesday to express their anguish at the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's tourist hub of Pahalgam that claimed the lives of 26 people.

In an outpouring of grief on social media, many celebrities condemned the targeted killing of innocent tourists in the terror attack on Tuesday.

"Words fail to express the sadness and anger at the treachery and inhumane act of violence that has occurred in Pahalgam. In times like these, one can only turn to God and say a prayer for the families that suffered and express my deepest condolences. May we as a Nation, stand united, strong and get justice against this heinous act," Shah Rukh posted on X.

Salman wrote, "Kashmir, heaven on planet earth turning into hell. Innocent people being targeted, my heart goes out to their families. Ek bhi innocent ko mara puri kainath ko marne ke barabar hai (Killing even one innocent person is equivalent to killing the whole universe)."

Alia said the news coming out of Pahalgam was heartbreaking.

"Innocent lives lost. Tourists, families, people who were just...living. Seeking beauty. Seeking peace. And now there's only grief. And the unbearable weight of it. Every time something like this happens, it chips away at our

shared humanity. May those souls rest in peace.

"And may those left behind find strength somehow - though I don't know how we even begin to ask that of them," she posted on Instagram.

Priyanka termed the terror attack in Pahalgam as "reprehensible" and said it is difficult to move past from a tragedy like this.

"So many innocent lives were caught in a storm they never asked for. Targeted, right in front of their loved ones... This heinous attack should shake the conscience of humanity. This will haunt us for a long time. To those grieving, displaced, mourning, and living in fear, my thoughts and prayers are with you. I'm so deeply anguished by this," she wrote on Instagram.

Katrina said she was heartbroken by the horrific attack in Pahalgam and sent her condolences to the families of the victims.

"Praying for strength and peace for all the families who have lost loved ones. May justice be served!!!" she said.

Anushka Sharma said the attack on tourists in Pahalgam will never be forgotten.

"Heartbroken to hear about the cold-blooded terror attack on innocent people in Pahalgam, Kashmir. Heartfelt prayers and condolences to their families," the actor said.

Hrithik Roshan said he was "deeply disturbed, disgusted and heartbroken" by the terror attack.

"My condolences to the families of the departed souls, may they rest in peace. Prays for the speedy recovery of those injured. May justice and the spirit of humanity pre-

vail," he added.

In an X post, "Pushpa 2" star Allu Arjun said he was heartbroken.

"Such a beautiful place with kind hearted people. Condolences to all the families, near and dear of the victims. May their innocent souls rest in peace. Truly Heart breaking (sic)" he wrote.

Rashmika Mandanna shared a news story on her Instagram page and wrote, "It breaks my heart."

Her "Animal" co-star Triptii Dimri said, "Truly heartbreaking... The cruelty... the loss... the fear... it's unbearable... No family should have to go through this.. Praying for those who've lost their loved ones...and those still living in this nightmare."

Manoj Bajpayee said cruelty against innocent lives is unacceptable.

"Peace must be protected, not punished. My heart goes out to the victims and their loved ones. Om Shanti #Pahalgam," he wrote.

Actor-politician Kangana Ranaut said terrorists opened fire at unarmed civilians.

"... how to fight with these cowards, who want to fight only outside of the battlefield (sic)" she added in another Instagram Story.

Dulquer Salmaan said his heart goes out to the victims of the terrible and cowardly attack.

"I cannot fathom the loss they're experiencing. Kashmir its beauty, the love & hospitality of its amazing people deserve to be experienced by everyone especially our countrymen," he said.

In an Instagram Story, Kareena Kapoor Khan wrote: "Beyond

heartbroken for the victims and their families. Praying for the lives lost. #Pahalgam."

Hope the culprits behind "this heinous act" are brought to justice, said Vicky Kaushal.

"Can't imagine the pain of the family members of those who lost their loved ones in the absolute inhumane act of terrorism in Pahalgam. My deepest condolences and prayers," he added.

Actor-filmmaker Farhan Akhtar said the senseless act of violence against innocent lives is absolutely inexcusable and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

"My heartfelt condolences go out to the families of those who lost their lives. I stand in solidarity with the people of Kashmir during this tragic," he added.

Ajay Devgn said he was shocked to hear about the terrorist attack.

"The victims and their families were innocent souls, and what happened is heartbreaking and purely evil. My thoughts and prayers are with them," he wrote on X.

Akshay Kumar posted, "Horried to know of the terror attack on tourists in Pahalgam. Sheer evil to kill innocent people like this. Prayers for their families."

Nani, who shot for his Telugu film "Hit: The Third Case" in Pahalgam three months ago, said he was speechless.

"Over 200 people team for almost 20 days. Pahalgam Was like a dream. The place, the people and the warmth... Why?" he wrote in an X post.

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Actor Sidharth Malhotra termed the Pahalgam terrorist attack "a cowardly act".

"I have full faith in our armed forces and I'm sure they will do the needful and ensure justice. My prayers and thoughts are with the families of the innocent victims. Jai Hind!" Malhotra said on his Instagram Story. (PTI)

## Mystery thriller series 'We Were Liars' set for June 18 release on Prime Video

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** Streaming service Prime Video on Wednesday announced that its upcoming young-adult mystery series "We Were Liars" will premiere on its platform on June 18.

The streamer also unveiled first-look images from the eight-episode show, which is based on the best-selling novel by author E Lockhart, a press release said.

"We Were Liars" follows Cadence Sinclair Eastman and her tight-knit inner circle, nicknamed the Liars, during their summer

escapades on her grandfather's New England private island.

"The Sinclairs are American royalty—known for their good looks, old money, and enviable bond—but after a mysterious accident changes Cadence's life forever, everyone, including her beloved Liars, seems to have something to hide," read the official logline.

Actor Emily Alyn Lind leads the show as Cadence Sinclair Eastman. She is joined by Shubham Maheshwari as Gat Patil, Esther McGregor as Mirren Sinclair Sheffield, Joseph Zada as Johnny Sinclair Dennis, Caitlin Fitzgerald as Penny Sinclair, Mamie Gummer as Carrie Sinclair, Candice King as Bess Sinclair, Rahul Kohli as Ed Patil and David Morse as Harris Sinclair.

Julie Plec and Carina Adly MacKenzie serve as the writers and co-showrunners on the series. The duo also executive produce alongside Emily Cummins and Lockhart.

"We Were Liars" hails from Universal Television, a division of Universal Studio Group, and Amazon MGM Studios. (PTI)

## 'I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER' TO DEBUT IN INDIAN THEATRES IN JULY



**NEW DELHI, April 23:** "I Know What You Did Last Summer", a follow-up to cult classic 1997 film of the same name, is set to be released in Indian theatres on July 18, Sony Pictures Entertainment India has announced. Jennifer Love Hewitt and Freddie Prinze Jr, the two stars of the original movie, are returning for the new movie, which is directed by Jennifer Kaytin Robinson.

They are joined by actors Chase Sui Wonders, Madelyn Cline, Sarah Pidgeon, Tyriq Withers and Jonah Hauer-King.

"I Know What You Did Last Summer" fol-

lows five friends who find themselves haunted by a secret from a year ago—a deadly mistake they chose to bury.

"But the past doesn't stay buried for long. As a mysterious figure begins to stalk them, they realize they're part of something bigger... and eerily familiar. Turning to the original survivors of the Southport Massacre for answers, the group must face the horrifying truth that history may be repeating itself," the official logline read. "I Know What You Did Last Summer" is produced by Columbia Pictures and Original Film. (PTI)



# Players wear black armbands during Super Cup match to mourn terror attack victims

**BHUBANESWAR, April 23:** The players of Bengaluru FC and Inter Kashi wore black armbands and observed a minute of silence before their Super Cup match here on Wednesday to mourn the victims of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam.

At least 26 persons -- mostly tourists -- were killed by terrorists on Tuesday at the Baisaran meadows in Pahalgam.

The Resistance Front (TRF), a shadow group of the banned Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror group, has claimed responsibility for the attack. The attack has drawn strong condemnation from across the world.

The players of both teams, including their foreign recruits, came out to the ground with black armbands to pay respect to the victims of the terror attack.

Just before the start of the match, the players, the match officials and the spectators at the Kalinga Stadium stood in silence for one minute in memory of the departed souls.

Earlier, Bengaluru FC expressed solidarity with the victims and those injured due to the terror attack.

"Bengaluru FC stands in solidarity with the victims, their families, and all those affected in the #PahalgamAttack," the club, which won the ISL in 2018-19 season, said on 'X'.

"A minute's silence will be observed ahead of today's #KalingaSuperCup fixture, where the Blues will wear black armbands as a mark of respect."

Bengaluru FC and India captain Sunil



Chhetri condemned the "cowardly" act of the terrorists.

"Saddened at the news coming out of Pahalgam. Words fall short. My thoughts

are with the families of all those affected by what is a cowardly act of terror," he said. Inter Kashi described the terrorist attack as "a wound on the soul of this Nation".

"They say the show must go on. And it does. But not without remembrance. Not without rage. Pahalgam bleeds, and so do we. What happened is not just a headline — it's a wound on the soul of this Nation.

"Terror must not just be condemned, but in fact confronted and defeated. We stand united - in grief, in rage, and in resolve," the Varanasi-based I-League club said in a strong and emotional reaction.

"As the world moves on, we pause to stand in solidarity and in anger. Sport goes on, yes — but not in silence. Because sport reflects life, and today, we raise our voices for the lives that were so

cruelly taken away."

Chennaiyin FC and Mumbai City FC, who face each other in the second match of the day, also condemned the terrorist attack, terming it as "senseless violence".

"The tragedy in Pahalgam — ordinarily a place of serene beauty in India — has taken innocent lives in an act of senseless violence. There is no place for terrorism, anywhere.

"The club stands in heartfelt solidarity with the victims, their families, and all those impacted now and in the days to come," the Chennai-based ISL club said.

"Our thoughts are with everyone affected by the tragic attack in Pahalgam. We mourn the lives lost and stand in solidarity with their families during this time of grief," Mumbai City FC posted on 'X'. (PTI)

## 5 Mizoram girls among 15 selected for NCOEs from ASMITA sub-junior hockey league

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** Five under-16 girls from Mizoram are among the 15 hockey players selected by the Sports Authority of India to be inducted into the various National Centres of Excellence (NCOEs).

Seen as the building block for women's hockey in India, the girls have been chosen after the conclusion of the 2024-25 season of the ASMITA leagues matches.

The 15 selected for training at the NCOEs include three players from Haryana and two each from Jharkhand and Odisha, besides girls from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh.

Piyush Dubey, hockey's High Performance Director for SAI and Khelo India, said these girls have been chosen keeping future Olympics in mind.

"We have to think of a pathway and these girls have the potential to make it to the senior national team. In the last three-four years, ASMITA has provided the opportunity to see so many players in action and this is a welcome change in our hockey ecosystem. This did not exist before," said Dubey.

He added that many players like Sunelita Toppo, Sujata Kujur and Sakshi Rana have emerged from this hockey league and are now representing India.

Six teams featuring 120 under-



16 players took part in the ASMITA sub-junior hockey league's final phase.

A total of 17 matches were played in the ₹ 15.5 lakh prize money event. SAI Shakti won the team championship for the third consecutive time beating Madhya Pradesh Hockey Academy 2-1 in the final match at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium here.

Mizoram's ascendancy in women's hockey has been quite startling. For the first time in its history, the tiny North-eastern

state, known for its footballers and boxers, won a bronze medal in the senior national women's hockey championship in Panchkula.

Dubey said the Mizoram girls have shown immense improvement in the last five-six years and credit goes to the coaches who are working at the SAI centre in Thanzawl. Lalrothuami, a 2009 junior India player, said young girls are taking interest in hockey and some 40 are training at the SAI centre.

Mizoram have found a unique

way to attract youngsters to play hockey. The image and profile of current Indian women's team player and Tokyo Olympian Lalremliam have been used in advertisements and social media to attract girls to participate in trials.

"The response has been fairly good from the villages. Two of our girls — Lalhantluangi and Lalrinpui — are ASMITA products and are junior Indian team members. They are a great advertisement for us and we are very happy that five Mizoram girls have been selected

for training at NCOEs," said Lalrothuami.

"Our players need more competitive exposure and better training ecosystem. In terms of skills, all players are more or less equal but Mizo girls are stronger and have the stamina. We hope they will utilise the facilities at NCOEs well."

However, selection at NCOEs does not guarantee long-term membership. There are two assessments every year and players are judged on the three basic parameters -- physical strength, sports science tests and skills.

The following players have been selected:

**For NCOE Lucknow:** Shweta Upadhyay (Haryana), Rashmi (Haryana).

**For NCOE Mumbai:** Laldinpui (Mizoram), Binita Karketta (Jharkhand), Suneli Burh (Odisha), Salmi Jadia (Odisha).

**For NCOE Delhi:** Tulashi (Andhra Pradesh), Pearlina (Karnataka), Vanlarinlui (Mizoram), Lalnulfelli (Mizoram).

**For NCOE Sonapat:** Diya (Haryana).

**For NCOE Bhopal:** Aradhana Rajbhar (Uttar Pradesh), Shivani Khalko (Jharkhand).

**For NCOE Kolkata:** Loicy Lalhanpui (Mizoram), Lalnulfelli (Mizoram). (PTI)

## I felt sidelined and ignored by PCB after 2024 T20 World Cup: Mohammad Amir

**KARACHI, April 23:** Ex fast bowler Mohammad Amir says he felt sidelined and ignored by the Pakistan cricket setup after the 2024 T20 World Cup and cited lack of communication as the reason behind his retirement late last year.

Amir and Imad Wasim had come out of their retirements to play in last year's T20 World Cup in which Pakistan's flop show saw the winners of the 2009 edition failing to make the Super Eight stage.

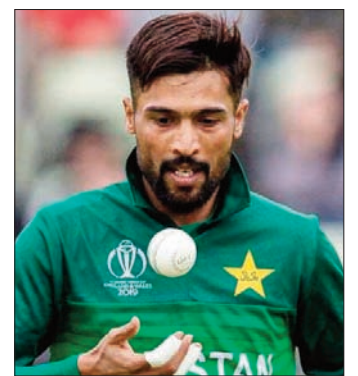
Both these players announced their retirements on consecutive days last December.

Amir said on a TV channel, "I felt sidelined and ignored by the Pakistan cricket setup after the T20 World Cup. After the T20 World Cup ended, no one even talked to me. No one told me if I was part of the future plans."

"A wise person understands the signs — if you're not in the plans, then you have to think about yourself. That's exactly what I did. I've made up my mind now — thank you very much, international cricket," he said.

The left-arm pacer had earlier retired from international cricket in December 2020 at the age of 28 citing issues with coaches Misbah Ul Haq and Waqar Younis.

Amir said he had even refused accepting a contract to play



County cricket after PCB had asked him to play in the World Cup in the Americas.

"Honestly speaking, I ended up spending more money than I made. I travelled with my trainer, and all those expenses came out of my own pocket. But that's a different matter," Amir said.

Meanwhile, Amir supported players having an aggressive mindset in cricket.

"Cricket used to be fierce. Being mentally aggressive is part of the game's beauty. It's not about disrespect — it's about shifting the batter's focus. Off the field, we all hang out and joke around," he said.

The 33-year-old Amir also backed Pakistan batting mainstay Babar Azam to come out strong from his recent struggles while pointing out his technical flaws. (PTI)

## No fireworks, cheerleaders in MI vs SRH IPL match; players to sport black armbands

**HYDERABAD, April 23:** The players of Sunrisers Hyderabad and Mumbai Indians will wear black armbands during their IPL match which will not feature cheerleaders and fireworks here on Wednesday to mourn the victims of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam that caused 26 deaths.

The teams will also observe a minute's silence to pay their respects to those affected by the incident that has drawn international condemnation.

"The players of two teams will wear black armbands and observe a minute's silence in memory of all those who lost their lives in the terrorist attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam," a BCCI source told PTI.

"As a mark of respect there would be no cheerleaders on the sidelines of MI vs SRH game. No crackers will be burst," he added.

Terrorists opened fire on civilians at the popular tourist location in south Kashmir on Tuesday, killing at least 26 persons and injuring several others.

The Resistance Front (TRF), which is a part of the banned Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror group, claimed responsibility for the attack. The attack has drawn strong condemnation from across the world.

The Indian cricket team snapped bilateral cricket with Pakistan after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks and recently refused to tour the country for the Champions Trophy, prompting the ICC to make provisions for a neutral venue in Dubai. (PTI)

## Inaugural USD4 million DP World India Championship joins 2025 Race to Dubai



**NEW DELHI, April 23:** Global smart logistics provider DP World and the DP World Tour have launched the DP World India Championship, a new USD4 million tournament, which will be the largest prize-fund event to be held in the country.

The event, co-sanctioned with the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI), will take place at the Delhi Golf Club from October 16-19.

The championship will be the eighth

of nine events in the 'Back 9' phase of the 2025 Race to Dubai, building towards the season-ending DP World Tour Playoffs and culminating in the DP World Tour Championship at Jumeirah Golf Estates in Dubai.

The announcement follows the success of this year's Indian Open, won by Spain's Eugenio Chacarra, and further boosts the Tour's momentum in the region.

The tournament also marks the

Tour's return to the Delhi Golf Club for the first time since 2016.

Originally established in the 1930s, the Lodhi Championship Course hosted the inaugural Indian Open in 1964 and was redesigned by Peter Thomson in 1977, with further enhancements by Gary Player Design in 2019.

PGTI president, Kapil Dev, said, "The inaugural DP World India Championship is a landmark moment for Indian golf and a true reflection of India's rising stature on the international golfing stage."

"We look forward to working jointly with our partners at the DP World Tour in making the event a grand success. The tournament provides a great opportunity for our professionals to rub shoulders with some of the best players in the world and gain valuable international exposure."

"A world-class field vying for a record prize purse and playing at a top-notch international venue such as Delhi Golf Club makes for a spectacle for Indian golf fans. The event will greatly contribute to further popularising the sport in our country," added the former India cricket captain. (PTI)

## We never press the panic button, it's just a game: CSK CEO Kasi Viswanathan

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** Chennai Super Kings as a franchise never presses the panic button and there is not much to worry about despite the five-time champions' ordinary run in the current season IPL, its CEO Kasi Viswanathan told PTI on Wednesday.

CSK have lost a record five games in a row this season and more than halfway into the tournament, find themselves at the bottom of the points table with six losses in eight games.

They 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.

CSK CEO has also spoken about his team's run in IPL 2025.

"We have not been performing up to the mark. We are trying to improve and we will try to do well in the next few games. We have never pressed the panic button in our franchise is not like that, it is just a game," Viswanathan told PTI.

M S Dhoni is back leading the side in Gaikwad's absence but as head coach Stephen Fleming put it 'he doesn't have a magic wand' and can't change the team's fortunes overnight.

Following the defeat to Mumbai Indians, CSK find themselves in a must-win situation in their remaining six games



with Dhoni already speaking about the planning for 2026.

Can Dhoni script a turnaround after taking over from Gaikwad midway into the tournament?

"See, it's not the question of anybody. It's a question that the team should do well and not just one individual. We don't talk to the team management. Dhoni will do what is right for the team."

"What we are expecting as administrators is good performance by the team and we don't criticize our team at all," he added. (PTI)

## Home advantage is not prevalent because teams, players are new after big auction: Dravid

**BENGALURU, April 23:** Rajasthan Royals head coach Rahul Dravid on Wednesday cited cases of players joining new franchises and consequent lack of familiarity with the conditions as a plausible reason for teams complaining about the lack of home advantage in this IPL.

Several teams such as Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Chennai Super Kings, Lucknow Super Giants and Kolkata Knight Riders had expressed unhappiness about the nature of pitches at their respective home venues.

"I think it depends from ground to ground really. I'm not really sure what specific franchises might have wanted from their curators, so to speak, but home advantage, generally, the teams are new as well right after a big auction," Dravid said on the eve of RR's match here against RCB.



Dravid then validated his arguments by giving the examples of players like RR's Nitish Rana and RCB's Phil Salt, who joined those teams after last year's mega auction.

"It's the first year after a big auction, so for a lot of the players as well, even though they may be

your home players, they are playing for those teams or those grounds for the first time. For example, in the case of say, at RCB, someone like Phil Salt was at KKR and he's coming here for the first time."

"I'm just using him as an exam-

ple. We have players in our team, for example, someone like Nitish Rana (KKR) was not with us, so for him, Jaipur is actually kind of a new ground."

The former Indian skipper said the new set of players will get more acclimatised to the conditions as the season progresses.

"So, I think that when you just have a big auction and there's a change of squad, the home advantage may not be that significant. But maybe as you go later on into the cycle, maybe you might start seeing their significance a little bit more because then your players get to practice and play a little bit more."

"So, maybe, that could be a factor as well, that some teams are sort of home advantage is not that prevalent this time," he added. (PTI)

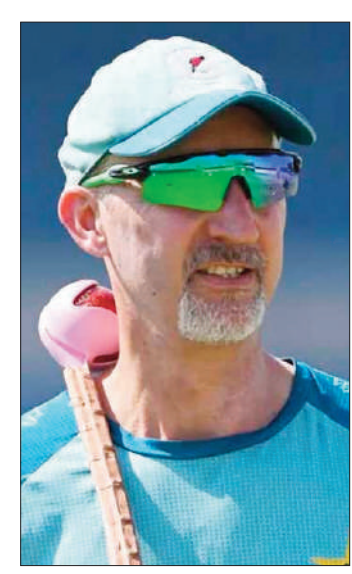
## Former Test head coach Gillespie has not been deprived of remunerations: PCB source

**LAHORE, April 23:** The PCB has said that Australian Jason Gillespie, who had resigned as the head coach of Pakistan's red-ball side in December last year, has not been deprived of his remunerations as is being claimed in media reports.

A Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) source, reacting to media reports that the former Australian pacer had approached the International Cricket Council (ICC) and was weighing legal options over alleged unpaid dues, said the PCB had "done nothing out of contractual obligations".

"There was a clear contract between the board and Gillespie and the PCB is only acting on what is laid down in the contract," the source said.

He said that all the matters related to remunerations were being handled by the PCB's legal depart-



ment as laid down in the contract.

Gillespie has claimed that the PCB still owes him some remuneration.

ations, including bonuses for winning the home Test series against England and a One-day series in Australia.

Media reports have claimed that Gillespie has also approached the World Cricketers' Association (WCA) and is considering legal action against the PCB.

"He didn't give the required notice period as laid down in the contract and we are acting as per our agreement with him," the source said.

Gillespie and Gary Kirsten were appointed as the red-ball and white-ball head coaches in April last year on two-year contracts, but seven-eight months down the line, they resigned citing issues with the PCB over their authority.

The PCB appointed Aaqib Javed as interim head coach for both the formats after the foreign experts resigned. (PTI)



## Zimbabwe beats Bangladesh by 3 wickets in first cricket test



**SYLHET (BANGLADESH), April 23:** Fast bowler Blessing Muzurabani claimed 6-72 and opener Brian Bennett scored 54 as Zimbabwe beat Bangladesh by three wickets in the first cricket test on Wednesday.

Offspinner Mehidy Hasan gave Bangladesh an outside chance at victory by taking 5-50 on day four, but Zimbabwe's batters held their nerve to reach 174-7 for their first test victory since 2021.

Bangladesh was dismissed for 255, adding just 61 to their overnight 194-4, after Muzurabani hastened the collapse by becoming the joint-fastest to 50 test wickets for his country.

Zimbabwe appeared set for a comfortable victory by racing to 95 in the 21st over without losing a wicket as it chased a modest target of 174.

Mehidy then broke through with the wicket of Ben Curran, who made 44 off 75 balls.

Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, who finished with 2-70, had Nick Welch leg-before for 10 as Bangladesh pulled itself back into the match.

Bennet clipped Taijul's full-length delivery past mid-wicket for two to raise his second half-century in the last over of the second session.

But Mehidy gave Bangladesh a genuine chance by dismissing Sean Williams and Bennett in consecutive overs before Taijul got the better of captain Craig Ervine.

Batting against spinners became increasingly tougher as the light faded but Wesley Madhevere, who was 19 not-out, held things together with grit and patience to ensure his side's victory.

Small Target Earlier, Blessing gave Zimbabwe its small target by taking advantage of reckless Bangladeshi batings.

An injudicious shot from captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, who made a team-high 60, triggered the collapse after a delayed start following morning showers.

His attempt for a pull shot against a short delivery that was well outside off brought an end to his innings when Bangladesh needed him badly to take the game out of Zimbabwe's reach.

Just three overs later, Muzurabani extended Mehidy Hasan's lean patch, undoing him with an extra pace and bounce.

Jaker Ali played patiently to raise his fourth half-century in as many tests from 106 balls by pulling Victor Nyachwaya for a fine-leg boundary.

Left-arm spinner Wellington Masakadza then claimed the wicket of Hasan Mahmud and Khaled Ahmed in consecutive deliveries before Muzurabani wrapped things up by dismissing Jaker Ali, who finished with 58. (AP)

## Some demand end of sporting ties with Pakistan Indian athletes condemn Pahalgam terror attack

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** India's sporting fraternity oscillated between grief and rage as it joined the nation in condemning the deadly terrorist attack in Pahalgam with some demanding that the country should cut all sports ties with Pakistan.

On Tuesday, terrorists opened fire at a prime tourist location in south Kashmir's Pahalgam, killing at least 26 civilians and injuring several others. The Resistance Front (TRF), a shadow group of the banned Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror group, has claimed responsibility for the attack.

Sachin Tendulkar and Virat Kohli expressed shock as they mourned the loss of lives.

"The affected families must be going through an unimaginable ordeal - India and the world stand united with them at this dark hour, as we mourn the loss of lives and pray for justice," Tendulkar wrote.

"Heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. Praying for peace and strength to families all those who lost their lives and justice to be served for their cruel act," Kohli posted on his Instagram.

Similar sentiments were expressed by other top players such as Jasprit Bumrah and Suryakumar Yadav. Pacer Mohammed Siraj posted an emotional message in which he called for justice.

"To target and kill innocent civilians in the name of religion is pure evil... No cause, no belief, no ideology can ever justify such a monstrous act. Yeh kaisi ladai hai... jahaan insaan ki jaan ki koi keemat hi nahi (what sort of a fight is this in which there is no value for human life)," he asked.

"I hope this madness ends soon and these terrorists are found and punished, without mercy," he added.

Former India cricketer Shreevats Goswami wrote a strongly-worded post, demanding an end to all sporting ties with Pakistan.

"And this is exactly why I say - you don't play cricket with Pakistan. Not now. Not ever. When BCCI or the government refused to send India to the Champions Trophy in Pakistan, some had the audacity to say, 'Oh, but sport should rise above politics'," he added.

### Have requested Indian help to build cricket venue in Jaffna. SL sports minister

**COLOMBO, April 23:** Sri Lanka's sports minister Sunil Gamage has revealed that national coach and batting great Sanath Jayasuriya has requested Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for assistance to build a cricket venue in Jaffna and he is hopeful that the neighbouring country would respond positively to it.

Gamage made this statement while addressing a ceremony held here on Tuesday night to inaugurate a new swimming complex at the Sri Lanka Cricket headquarters in Premadasa Stadium.

"We are keen to let the northern youth develop their cricket. Mr Sanath Jayasuriya, the national coach, requested Prime Minister Modi to help build it. When someone like Mr Jayasuriya makes a request, India won't ignore it," Gamage said. (PTI)



Goswami wrote.

"...murdering innocent Indians seems to be Pakistan's national sport and India should respond with zero tolerance and not with bats and balls," he added.

While India has not played bilateral cricket with Pakistan since 2012-13, and the BCCI declined to send its team for the Champions Trophy earlier this year, other Indian teams have continued to travel to Pakistan for international events.

Goswami, who had recently visited Pahalgam, said he had sensed hope and peace returning to the valley.

"And now... this bloodshed again. It breaks something inside you. It makes you question how many more times we're expected to stay silent, stay 'sporting,' while our people die. No more. Not this time," he added.

An "outraged" Olympic bronze medal-winning boxer and ruling BJP member Vijender Singh also called for firm "action".

"Our brave soldiers will definitely give a befitting reply to this cowardly attack in the coming times. In the presence of the brave sons of Mother India, the plans of those who

want to disturb the peace in Jammu and Kashmir will never succeed," he asserted.

Indian cricket team head coach and former BJP MP Gautam Gambhir wrote: "Praying for the families of the deceased. Those responsible for this will pay. India will strike."

Two-time Olympic medal-winning badminton player PV Sindhu too penned down an emotional post.

"My heart aches for the victims of the Pahalgam terror attack. So much pain. So much loss. No reason, no cause can ever justify such brutality."

"To the families left behind -- your grief is beyond words, but you are not alone. We are with you. In these dark moments, may we find strength in each other, and never let go of the hope that peace will return!" Sindhu wrote.

Olympic gold medalist duo of javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra and Abhinav Bindra prayed for the victims.

"Heartbroken by the tragic attack in Jammu & Kashmir. Prayers for the victims and their families," Chopra wrote.

"Heartbroken by the horrific terrorist at-

tack in Pahalgam. My thoughts are with the victims and their families. Terror has no place in our world, we must stand united against hatred and violence," Bindra added.

The attack is the deadliest terrorist act in the valley since the 2019 Pulwama strike.

"Strongly condemn this cowardly act by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists. India stands united with our brave Army, J&K Police, and Paramilitary forces in the fight against terrorism. Justice will prevail," said former India all-rounder Suresh Raina.

"My heart goes out to family members of all those who lost their lives in dastardly attack. This can't be forgiven," former India spinner Harbhajan Singh wrote.

Olympic medal-winning former hockey goalkeeper PR Sreejesh, shuttler Saina Nehwal and two-time world champion boxer Nikhat Zareen also called for justice.

"Condemnation is not enough, justice must follow. Our hearts bleed for Pahalgam. Terror must never win. Prayers for all affected in the Pahalgam attack," Sreejesh wrote.

"The Pahalgam terror attack is a heart-breaking reminder of the threats we continue to face. To those spreading fear -- know that India stands united, and justice will prevail. Jai Hind," Saina posted.

Zareen added, "Those who attack innocents attack humanity itself. Strongly condemn the cowardly terror attack in Pahalgam. Justice must be swift."

Former India wicketkeeper Parthiv Patel said he was left numb by the terrible act.

"Shocked and angry to hear what happened in Kashmir. While those responsible will be punished, right now there's a numb disbelief at the terrible acts and the manner in which it all happened," Parthiv wrote.

The Indian batting duo of Shubman Gill and KL Rahul and former spinner and India captain Anil Kumble also offered their condolences.

"Innocent lives lost to senseless violence. Praying for strength and peace for the affected families. Let's stand together against hate," he wrote.

Former India coach Ravi Shastri added, "A ghastly, cowardly act that should unite the nation fully, bar none." (PTI)

## Rahul has left last season's baggage, it will help him do well for DC, feels Pujara

**NEW DELHI, April 23:** Cheteshwar Pujara feels KL Rahul has moved on from a disappointing last season at Lucknow Super Giants and the change in mindset was not only helping him flourish at his new IPL franchise but will also make him a strong asset for the Indian team.

Rahul hit his third fifty of the season to take his new team Delhi Capitals to a commanding eight-wicket win against his former franchise LSG in Lucknow on Tuesday.

"Just move on, don't carry any baggage from the past. And that's a good thing. KL is a mature player. Last couple of years, he's been battling well across formats," Pujara said on ESPN-cricinfo's TimeOut.

"He doesn't want to think about the past and wants to enjoy his batting and be in his zone, rather than think about what went wrong when he was playing for the LSG team."

"It's good to move on, which will also help him play well for DC and even for the Indian team. Because, lately, he is someone the India team also relies on, the way he's batting."

Under Rahul's captaincy LSG had reached the



play-offs in 2022 and 2023 seasons. However, the Lucknow outfit finished seventh last season.

Rahul's relationship with LSG owner Sanjiv Goenka also deteriorated last year. In a video that went viral on social media, Goenka was seen publicly reprimanding the former Lucknow captain after a defeat.

A few months later, the 33-year-old was re-

leased by the franchise ahead of the mega auctions. At DC, the wicketkeeper batter, one of the most consistent players in the IPL, has emerged as the leading run scorer this season, scoring 323 runs in seven innings.

"Even as a person, he looks a lot more mature now, he understands his game very well. We have seen a different KL Rahul this season. When he started (against LSG), he didn't look that (fluid), but still he picked it up," Pujara said. Former England opener Nick Knight added that the absence of captaincy responsibilities may also be contributing to Rahul's freedom with the bat.

"Captaincy can do funny things to you - sometimes you thrive on it, sometimes it's a burden. Whether that's had any impact, of not being captain now, just being free and being able to play the match situation," Knight said.

"We've got this obsession in cricket that the best player has to be captain. That's not always the case, is it? I'm not saying that's the case with KL Rahul, or even Rishabh Pant, but he's batting with so much freedom and looks relaxed in the crease." (PTI)

## ECB should offer BCCI minority ownership in Hundred to attract Indian players: Lancashire CEO



**LONDON, April 23:** The England and Wales Cricket Board should bring on board the BCCI as a "minority ownership partner" of The Hundred in order to attract Indian players to the tournament, Lancashire CEO Daniel Gidney has said, according to a report.

Even though Indian men's players are not issued 'No Objection Certificates' to play outside the IPL, the T20 league owners have expanded their footprint across the globe, and have stakes in SA20 (South Africa), ILT20 (UAE) and Major League Cricket (USA).

According to ESPNcricinfo, Gidney be-

lieves "aligning interests" would be the way to bring Indian players to compete in The Hundred.

"I think it's possible. If I was the ECB, I'd be talking about perhaps bringing the BCCI in as a minority ownership partner in the tournament as a whole. If you do that, then you are aligning interests," he said.

While Indian men's players feature only in the IPL, the country's women cricketers, including captain Harmanpreet Kaur and Smriti Mandhana, have featured in England's The Hundred and Australia's Women's Big Bash League.

"That is probably your best chance of get-

ting (Indian) players in The Hundred. It comes down to the will, and the individuals on both sides," Gidney said.

"The BCCI have been really successful with protecting their brand and by making sure they don't plan any T20 tournaments anywhere in the world..."

"If I was the BCCI, then I would have to say I would need a significant incentive to relax the current policy because that has been extraordinarily successful and has grown the IPL into the massive commercial entity that it is," he said.

The report added that the Lancashire CEO was in India recently to finalise a deal with

RPSG Group, which will see them acquire a 70 per cent stake in the Manchester Originals and run the franchise as a joint venture.

Gidney also cited the ties between Lancashire and Indian players to make his point. "We've probably had more Indian overseas players than any other county. When you have VVS Laxman at the NCA, who Mark Chilton (Lancashire director of cricket) captained, then you have strong relationships all the way through," he said.

"If you build a relationship with the BCCI and understand the types of players that they see as potential future Test players, that's a lot easier than putting in an NOC request saying, 'We'd like to see Virat Kohli or Rishabh Pant playing in the County Championship'," he added.

To start with, Gidney proposed the hosting of exhibition matches.

"Imagine having an LSG (Lucknow Super Giants) vs Delhi Capitals game here at Old Trafford -- at the end of the season, say in September. That could be pretty mega, in terms of the Indian fans in the UK. It would make commercial sense for everybody," he said.

Additionally, the Manchester Originals have used their links with the Super Giants group to sign Afghanistan's Noor Ahmad and South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen, who play for the Durban Super Giants in SA20.

"When an overseas player gets bought at auction in the IPL, and that's locked in for three years via retentions, then it just makes commercial sense for that player to then potentially play for Durban, for Manchester, and also potentially for Lancashire in the (T20) Blast," he said.

"It's a lot more efficient, and it could become a lot more straightforward," Gidney added. (PTI)

## RCB eye home improvement against struggling Rajasthan Royals

**BENGALURU, April 23:** Struggling to find form in their own den, Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look to regain control of their IPL campaign at home when they meet a floundering Rajasthan Royals here on Thursday. RCB's three defeats at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in as many matches offer one of the biggest paradoxes of this edition. An outfit that has steam-rolled opposition in all parts of the country has been left chasing shadows in their own backyard.

The RCB batters have appeared strangely subdued and their bowlers seem to have forgotten the lengths to adopt here.

Central to that woeful run is the changed character of the 22-yard strip here which has offered some grip to the bowlers. The Bengaluru batters are yet to find the right tempo to tide over the slowness in the pitch, as they seem to have been caught in the dilemma of whether to step on the gas or not. It's evident in the team's totals here so far -- 169/8, 163/7 and 95/9 (14 overs). They have scored over 9-10 runs an over in other venues, but here the rate has dropped down to 7-8 runs an over. (PTI)

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