



India seeks Britain's response on Rahul's citizenship

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ New Delhi

The Centre has written to the UK Government seeking details about claims that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had British citizenship, the Allahabad High Court was told on Monday. After the submission, the Lucknow bench of the High Court granted time to the Central Government till May 5 to place before it the outcome of a representation moved against the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, seeking cancellation of his 2024 Lok Sabha election over claims that he had British citizenship.

A bench of Justices A R Masoodi and Rajiv Singh passed the order while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by S Vignesh Shishir, a BJP worker from Karnataka. While hearing the PIL on November 25, the court sought information from the central government regarding its decision on the representation of the petitioner. Deputy Solicitor General SB Pandey informed the court on Monday that acting on the petitioner's representation, the Ministry concerned had written to the UK Government seeking details about Gandhi's alleged British citizenship and hence the government needed more time to take a final

decision on the petitioner's representation. The central government had earlier also sought more time in this regard.

In the PIL, BJP worker Vignesh Shishir, the petitioner has claimed that he has documents and some emails of the British government which prove that Rahul Gandhi is a British citizen, and due to this, he is ineligible to contest elections in India and cannot hold the post of a Lok Sabha member. The petitioner also said that he sent complaints twice to the competent authority regarding Rahul Gandhi's alleged dual citizenship, but no action was taken by them. On March 26, In BJP leader

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Subramanian Swamy's petition, Union Home Ministry informed Delhi High Court that probe on Rahul Gandhi's petition is under consideration. In April 2019, MHA had issued show cause notice to Rahul Gandhi on Subramanian Swamy's complaint

showing British company records, where Rahul declared himself as British citizen. Rahul had floated company named as Backops in London in 2002 and till 2009 in compnay registry he claimed as British Citizen and London resident. The petitioner also said that he sent complaints twice to the competent authority regarding Rahul Gandhi's alleged dual citizenship, but no action was taken by them.

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Modi, Vance discuss BTA, strategic ties

RAHUL DATTA ■ New Delhi

India and the US on Monday discussed the entire gamut of their bilateral ties and ways to further enhance strategic ties during talks here between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vice President J D Vance. They expressed satisfaction at the progress made in the trade pact. Parleys were held in the backdrop of ongoing negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement to address various issues including tariff and market access. Modi also hosted a dinner for the visiting dignitary. In their talks, Prime Minister Modi and Vice President Vance also exchanged views on various regional and global issues of mutual interest. A statement by Prime Minister's Office (PMO) after the talks said they welcomed progress in the India-U.S. Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) and efforts towards enhancing cooperation in energy, defence, strategic technologies. The two leaders also exchanged views on various regional and global issues of mutual interest.

Prime Minister Modi fondly recalled his visit to Washington D.C. in January and his fruitful discussions with President Trump, which laid down the roadmap for close cooperation between India and the U.S., leveraging the strengths of Make



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting with US Vice President JD Vance

PTI

America Great Again (MAGA) and Viksit Bharat 2047, the statement said.

Both of them reviewed and positively assessed the progress in various areas

of bilateral cooperation. They welcomed the significant progress in the negotiations for a mutually beneficial India-U.S.

The ByStander



Wife threw chilli powder before DGP murder, say police

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Bengaluru

Police probing former Karnataka DGP Om Prakash's murder case have learnt that his wife Pallavi allegedly threw chilli powder on his face before stabbing him to death, police sources said. Police have detained Pallavi as she emerged as a key suspect in the murder case.

Along with her, their daughter Kriti has also been detained. Prakash, a 1981 batch IPS officer hailing from Bihar, was found dead in a pool of blood in the ground floor of his three-storeyed house in the posh HSR Layout in the city on Sunday. "After a heated exchange of words, Pallavi threw chili powder on Prakash's face," sources claimed. As the hefty former police chief of Karnataka scrambled for relief from the burning sensation, Pallavi stabbed him multiple times with a knife, killing him on

the spot, sources said. She then made a video call to her friend and said, "I have killed the monster," sources claimed.

The murder was the culmination of frequent run-ins between the couple, the sources said. It is learnt that there was a property dispute involved in the crime pertaining to a land in Dandeli in Karnataka. A few months ago, Pallavi had approached the HSR Layout police station to lodge a complaint. When the staff there did not oblige, she staged a 'Dharna' (sit-in demonstration) in front of the police station, sources claimed. It's also learnt that Pallavi was diagnosed with schizophrenia and was under medication too.

The 68-year-old retired IPS officer was a native of Champaran, Bihar, and held a Master's degree in Geology.

Prakash was appointed Director General of Police on March 1, 2015.

Delhi unveils action plan to combat heatwave

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

Aimed at combating the adverse effects of rising temperatures, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Monday unveiled the Heat Action Plan 2025 and activated the disaster management machinery. Considering the threat of heatwaves, the Heat Action Plan proposes 3,000 cold water ATMs, cool roof technology to setting up heatwave wards in hospitals and shading public walkways.

In addition to an early warning system for heat waves, green roofs at bus stops and special wards for heatstroke patients at all hospitals, the plan proposes deploying 1,800 National and Delhi Disaster Response volunteers — known as 'Aapda Mitras' — the plan includes the establishment of shaded cooling shelters and the installation of 3,000-4,000 large RO water units attached to the boundary walls of Delhi government schools and office



Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta with Health Minister Pankaj Kumar Singh, Water Minister Parvesh Verma and Rajendra Singh, member & HoD, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) during the launch of the Heat Action Plan 2025 of the Delhi government

RANJAN DIMRI/THE PIONEER

buildings. These will dispense cold water round-the-clock, benefiting approximately five lakh citizens. The chief minister also virtually inaugurated three Cool

Roof pilot projects at Kashmere Gate, Anand Vihar and Delhi Secretariat. The number of such projects will be increased soon, she said.

Eight Naxals, including one with ₹1 crore bounty, killed in Jharkhand encounter

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ Ranchi/ New Delhi

Eight Naxals, including a top rung central committee member of the extremists carrying a bounty of ₹1 crore on his head, were killed in an encounter with CoBRA commandos of the CRPF and police in Bokaro district of Jharkhand on Monday, officials said.

The exchange of fire started around 5.30 am in Lugu Hills of Lalpania area of the district, they said.

The troops of 209 Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) along with state police conducted the operation in which eight Naxals were killed and an AK

series rifle, three INSAS rifles, a self-loading rifle (SLR), eight country-made guns and a pistol were seized, officials said.

Those killed include central committee member of the extremist outfit Prayag Manjhi alias Vivek, special area committee member Arvind Yadav alias Avinash, zonal committee member Sahebram Manjhi alias Rahul Manjhi, Mahesh Manjhi alias Mota, Talu, Ranju Manjhi, Gangaram and Mahesh.

Vivek carried a bounty of ₹1 crore, Arvind Yadav had a reward of ₹25 lakh and Sahebram Majhi ₹10 lakh.

They were booked by the police in various cases of violence, the officials said. The central committee is the top deci-

Vivek carried a bounty of ₹1 crore, Arvind Yadav had a reward of ₹25 lakh and Sahebram Majhi ₹10 lakh. They were booked by the police in various cases of violence

sion-making body of the Maoist organisation, they said. No injuries have been reported among the security personnel, they said.

Jharkhand DGP Anurag Gupta said, "With this encounter, Maoist squads in North Chotanagpur region have been wiped out." He added, "Maoists have nearly been wiped out from across the state.

They only remain in Chaibasa region. We are going to relocate all our forces, including the CRPF, Jharkhand Jaguar and Jharkhand Armed Police, in the Saranda area. Our target is to eliminate all the Maoist squads in the region in the next 15 to 20 days, or certainly before the rainy season."

"We appeal to the Maoists of Chaibasa to surrender before police. We have a good surrender policy," the DGP said. The CoBRA is the special jungle warfare unit of the CRPF.

The operation is part of the Union government's declaration of eliminating Naxalism from the country by March, 2026.

In another development, Vishnu Deo Sai, the chief minister of neighbouring

Chhattisgarh, is expected to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah at his office in North Block in New Delhi on Monday evening for a comprehensive review of the anti-Naxal operations in his state and related subjects, officials said.

This year, more than 140 Maoists have been gunned down in separate encounters in Chhattisgarh, called by security officials as the "last bastion" for Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in the country.

In the wake of killing of eight Naxals by security forces in Jharkhand, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday asserted that his government's commitment to eliminate Naxalism continues unabated.

"Our march to eliminate Naxalism con-

tinues unabated. Today security forces achieved another significant success in the ongoing operation to uproot Naxalism. In an encounter at Lugu Hills in Bokaro, Jharkhand, 8 Maoists were neutralised, including a top-level naxal leader, Vivek, who carried a reward of Rs 1 crore, and two other notorious Naxalites. The operation is being continued. Applaud our security forces," Shah wrote on 'X'.

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Delhi man lives stereotype, threatens judge inside courtroom: *tu bahar mil*

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

A city courtroom in Dwarka was left stunned earlier this month when a 63-year-old retired government school teacher and his lawyer recently threatened and hurled abuses at a woman judge inside a courtroom in Delhi after he was convicted in a six-year-old cheque bounce case.

The accused even attempted to hurl an object at the judge for not delivering an order in his favour. He then instructed his lawyer to do whatever it took to secure a favourable judgment.

The outburst took place before Judicial Magistrate (NI Act) Shivangi Mangla, who had on April 2 convicted the accused under Section 138 of the Negotiable Instruments Act — the law dealing with

dishonour of cheques. Following the conviction, the judge directed the accused to furnish bail bonds under Section 437A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

"*Tu hai kya cheez.....ki tu bahar mil dekhte hai kaise zinda ghar jaati hai.....*" (Who even are you... just meet me outside and let's see how you make it back home alive)," the accused told the judge as noted in the Court's order dated April 2. "After hearing the judgment not in favor of accused, Accused erupted with anger on the Judge in open court as to how the judgment of conviction can be passed."

Accused started harassing the Judge in open court in unofficial Hindi language with commentary against the mother of the Judge. Accused was also holding some object and he tried to throw it on the

Judge for not passing order in his favor. Then, he ordered his advocate to do anything to get judgment in his favour," the judge wrote in her order.

Then again they both harassed mentally and physically to resign from job and they both again harassed to acquit the accused else they will file complaint against me and forcibly arrange my resignation.

However, following the conviction, the accused and his counsel allegedly harassed the woamn judge both mentally and physically, pressuring her to resign from her post, Judge Mangla recorded in her order.

They again subjected her to harassment, demanding that she acquit the accused. They also threatened to file a complaint against her and forcibly secure

her resignation. The judge said that appropriate action shall be initiated against the accused before the National Commission for Women for the threats and harassment.

The judge issued a show cause notice to the convict's lawyer seeking an explanation as to why criminal contempt proceedings should not be initiated against him

"Still the undersigned stand against all the odds and always do needful in favor of justice. The undersigned shall be taking appropriate measures against the accused before National Commission

for Women, Delhi for such threatening and harassment," the Court directed.

The judge also issued a show cause notice to the convict's lawyer, advocate Atul Kumar, seeking an explanation as to why criminal contempt proceedings should not be initiated against him for misbehaving with her.

"Court notice be issued to counsel for accused Sh Atul Kumar to show cause in writing providing relevant explanation for the conduct shown by him today and further to explain as to why he shall not be referred to the Hon'ble High Court for initiating criminal contempt proceedings against him for such misbehavior."

The lawyer was directed to furnish the reply on the next date of hearing on April 5, 2025.

On April 5, the court sentenced the

convict who is retired teacher to 22 months of simple imprisonment and imposed a fine of ₹6.65 lakh.

Kumar appeared before the court on April 5 at around 1400hrs, saying the convict was a retired government teacher, living on pension with three dependent sons. The court then sentenced him to 1.10 years of imprisonment and imposed a ₹6.65 lakh fine in the NI Act case. The convict moved a plea to file an appeal, which the court allowed.

On the misdemeanour of the convict and his counsel, the court said, "Let the matter be referred to the principal district and sessions judge, southwest, Dwarka, for the referral to the Delhi High Court for taking up appropriate proceedings in terms of the order dated April 2."

PUNJAB NATIONAL BANK SECURED CREDITOR

Editor's TAKE

Visa shock for Indian students

US revokes hundreds of student visas: 50 per cent affected are Indian students

In a move that has sparked concern across academic and diplomatic circles, the Trump administration has revoked student visas for hundreds of international students, with a staggering 50 per cent of the affected individuals hailing from India. The American Immigration Lawyers' Association (AILA) has revealed this information. AILA collected 327 reports of visa revocations and Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) terminations from students, attorneys, and university personnel. What is of concern to India is that this move disproportionately affects Indian nationals, followed by students from China (14 per cent), South Korea, Nepal, and Bangladesh. There are serious concerns about the transparency and consistency of the process, as the actions lack proper oversight and are leaving students with little to no recourse. The revocations are not only a personal and academic setback for the students involved but also reflect a growing unease in the international student community. Many have described the process as abrupt and arbitrary, with limited opportunities to appeal SEVIS terminations or clarify misunderstandings. For Indian students, who comprise one of the largest populations of international students in the United States, this development is deeply unsettling. These students invest heavily — both financially and emotionally — in pursuing higher education in the US. The visa revocations interrupt academic progress, affect employment opportunities tied to their studies, and, in many cases, may force them to leave the country abruptly. The psychological toll is equally significant. Students face uncertainty, fear of deportation, and the potential stigma of visa termination, which could affect future travel and academic prospects.

The ramifications of this policy move extend beyond individual students to American educational institutions. International students are a vital source of revenue for US universities, contributing billions of dollars annually through tuition and living expenses. Many graduate programmes in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) — areas critical to US innovation — rely heavily on international talent, particularly from India and China. With increasing visa uncertainties, universities may find it harder to attract top global students. This could result in lower enrolment numbers, loss of funding, and a diminished reputation for academic inclusiveness and excellence. Moreover, such measures may deter future applicants, who may opt for more welcoming countries such as Canada, Australia, or Germany. While the Trump administration has not offered detailed justifications for these specific revocations, the actions are consistent with its broader immigration stance.

Throughout his presidency, Donald Trump emphasised tightening immigration controls and “putting Americans first,” often casting a sceptical eye on visa programmes — even those meant for students and skilled workers. One reason for these revocations may be tied to concerns about misuse of visa programmes, fraudulent enrolment, or security vetting. However, critics argue that such justifications are being applied too broadly, punishing legitimate students and tarnishing the US's image as a global education hub.

The Trump administration's decision to revoke a significant number of student visas, disproportionately affecting Indian nationals, marks a troubling development in US immigration policy. If left unchecked, such policies could shift global student mobility away from the US, undermining the nation's historical status as the premier destination for higher education.

India's expanding maritime vision

As India reimagines its role in the Indo-Pacific, this quiet yet profound pivot signals not only a strategic response to China's growing presence, but also a deeper civilisational reawakening rooted in partnership, not patronage

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi first outlined India's SAGAR vision — Security and Growth for All in the Region — in 2015 during a visit to Mauritius, few could have predicted how it would evolve into a sweeping geopolitical doctrine encompassing not only the Indian Ocean but the western coasts of Africa and beyond. Nearly a decade later, India's maritime strategy is undergoing a quiet yet profound transformation. From SAGAR, the nation is now navigating toward Mahasagar — literally, the “Great Ocean” — signalling a decisive pivot in India's foreign and security policy with Africa in clear sight. The SAGAR initiative, initially conceived to promote maritime security and economic cooperation among Indian Ocean nations, has served as a foundation for India's role as a “net security provider” in the region. But today's reality demands more than regional stewardship. The increasing footprint of China in the Indian Ocean, from Gwadar to Djibouti, and the growing strategic relevance of the western Indian Ocean island states, have prompted India to recalibrate. The shift to Mahasagar (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security And Growth Across Regions) represents not just a change in terminology but a fundamental reimagining of India's role in the Indo-Pacific.

At the heart of this transformation lies Mauritius, a small island nation with outsized significance. More than a maritime partner, Mauritius shares a cultural and civilisational bond with India that predates diplomatic relations. Home to a large Indian-origin population, Mauritius has become a trusted partner in India's security calculus. Over the years, India has extended grants, built infrastructure, supplied patrol vessels and aircraft, and helped set up coastal surveillance radar systems across the Mauritian archipelago. But it is the development of the Agalega Islands — with an airstrip and jetty capable of supporting military-grade assets — that best symbolises the quiet assertiveness of the Mahasagar vision.

Critics argue that India's investment in Agalega mimics the Chinese playbook of dual-use port development seen in Hambantota and Gwadar. However, the crucial difference lies in the nature of India's partnerships. Unlike China's debt-driven port diplomacy, India's maritime engagement rests on mutual respect, development cooperation, and the principle of shared security. The Indo-Mauritian relationship is one of kinship diplomacy — one that grows not just from strategic needs but from shared history and people-to-people ties.



But the Mahasagar doctrine does not stop at Mauritius. It casts a wider net — one that spans from Seychelles and Madagascar to Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania. India is increasing its naval engagements, signing logistics and defence agreements, and offering capacity-building assistance across the African coast. The logic is strategic: the western Indian Ocean is not just a transit zone but a critical maritime highway for global trade, energy routes, and naval mobility. With China making aggressive inroads through the Belt and Road Initiative and military bases like the one in Djibouti, India is asserting its own footprint — not by coercion, but through collaboration. The pivot to Mahasagar also highlights India's ambition to become a blue-water navy with global reach. Indian naval ships are now a common sight in African ports. Naval exercises, hydrographic surveys, humanitarian missions, and training programmes have become regular features of India-Africa maritime relations. The Indian Navy is no longer a regional patrol force; it is fast becoming a symbol of India's strategic confidence, capable of shaping the security architecture of the



SANTHOSH MATHEW

entire Indo-Pacific. Importantly, this transformation is not purely militaristic. The Mahasagar vision also embraces the idea of the blue economy — a sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and ecosystem health. India's support for maritime infrastructure, fisheries development, and coastal tourism in partner countries underscores its commitment to holistic maritime growth. It is a model that seeks not just security but shared prosperity.

The messaging is also clear. As China intensifies its presence through military bases and commercial ports, India is building friendships. Where Beijing offers loans, India offers trust. Where China sets up surveillance posts, India establishes radar stations with shared access. Where China builds harbours that could dock submarines, India helps build coast guard stations to fight piracy, smuggling, and maritime crime. This contrast is not lost on African nations seeking partners who respect sovereignty and sustainability. Domestically, the Mahasagar strategy aligns with India's broader geopolitical identity. As a civilisational power with ancient maritime traditions — from Chola expeditions to trade with East Africa and the Gulf — India is reclaiming its historical place in the oceanic realm. The Indian Ocean is not a frontier — it is India's historical highway, linking cultures, religions, and com-

merce. By integrating Africa into this vision, India is not expanding its reach; it is reawakening a dormant maritime consciousness. In geopolitical terms, this shift could not come at a more crucial time. As the global order becomes increasingly multipolar and the Indo-Pacific emerges as the new theatre of strategic competition, India's Mahasagar doctrine provides a distinct alternative.

It blends hard power with soft diplomacy, regional ambition with global responsibility, and tradition with modern strategy. It positions India not just as a counterweight to China, but as a civilisational ally to Africa — one whose rise is guided by partnership, not patronage. What began in 2015 as a regional security initiative has now matured into a grand ocean dream. The journey from SAGAR to Mahasagar is more than a maritime shift — it is a statement of intent.

It tells the world that India is ready to lead not by dominance, but by example. And in doing so, it has found a natural partner in Africa and a reliable anchor in Mauritius. “An ocean for all, free and open, where every nation may sail in peace and security,” aptly said Woodrow Wilson.

(The author is Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies and Social Sciences, Pondicherry Central University, India. Views are personal)

India's demographic dividend at risk

SECOND Opinion

BY KAJLEEN KAUR

India boasts a demographic dividend, with a working-age population (15–64 years) of around 67 per cent, which can propel economic growth. This momentous opportunity, however, necessitates optimising the potential of the available labour force by ensuring a reduction in unemployment and underemployment and building human capital.

The macroeconomic growth models explain long-term sustainable progress as a function of labour force growth and technology built over time with human capital.

India faces no dearth in population and therefore labour force, but it lacks education, which is necessary to develop individuals' productivity and foster technological advancements. Besides, the economy languishes with high unemployment, which fails to realise the so-called “demographic dividend”.

The India Employment Report 2024 shows the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) at 52 per cent, compared to 76 per cent in China. This indicates that nearly half of the possible dividend is forfeited.

To further add to the woes, the female LFPR stands at 37 per cent in India, compared to an average of 70 per cent in China. This places India as the 13th lowest female LFPR.

The report also highlights that India's youth grapples with soaring unemployment rates. Shockingly, they account for 83 per cent of the unemployed workforce. Even more disappointing is the share of youngsters with higher education in the total unemployed, which has almost doubled from 35.2 per cent in 2000 to 65 per cent in 2022.

This brings to the surface the grave reality that a large portion of the potential labour force capable of contributing to growth is dissipated.

More particularly, India adds 3 million graduates annually, but 33 per cent of them are unemployed or underemployed (CMIE, 2024). There exists a wide gap between industry requirements and the education system.

Only 15 per cent of our workforce has formal vocational training, compared to 70 per cent in South Korea (UNESCO). However, the Government's initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana, National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme, and Skill India Digital Hub are trying to bridge this divide. The Economic Survey 2023–24 notes that the Indian economy needs to generate an average of nearly 78.5 lakh jobs annually until 2030, in the non-farm sector, to cater to the rising workforce. This is further distressed as around 90 per cent of the workforce is engaged in informal work, facing irregular work and income, absence of social security benefits, and sub-standard working conditions.

The manufacturing sector, which has huge untapped potential to absorb unskilled and semi-skilled labour that

moves away from agriculture, contributes only 14 per cent to the GDP in India as compared to 27 per cent in China.

While the agrarian sector employs 43 per cent of the workforce, it contributes only 16 per cent to GDP. India's economic growth has been primarily driven by the services sector, which lacks employment absorption because of skill intensity.

Additionally, the advent of artificial intelligence is undeniably a threat to the already dismal employment situation, further aggravating the population-to-opportunities mismatch. There is an ardent need to prioritise labour-intensive manufacturing to engage unskilled labour, along with concentrated efforts to support MSMEs.

Moreover, the transforming nature of employment, such as the gig workforce, is expected to form 6.7 per cent of the non-agricultural workforce or 4.1 per cent of the total livelihood in India by 2029–30; the labour policy must ensure a robust minimum level of employment quality.

Most importantly, for India to harness its demographic dividend and not make it a missed opportunity, investment in skilled education is needed to nurture a workforce equipped with employable skills.

India's demographic dividend offers immense potential, but without addressing unemployment, skill gaps, and informal employment, it risks becoming a lost opportunity.

The writer is Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, SGGSC, University of Delhi. Views are personal)

Leaderspeak



Very sad news on the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis. On behalf of the people of Latvia I express my deep condolences to all the Catholics and the Church. Pope Francis was compassionate and kind human being and he will be greatly missed.

EDGARS RINKEVICS, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA



Letters to the Editor

SC reins in overreaching Governor

Madam — The Supreme Court has issued a timely and firm reminder to Governors across various states that they are not political gatekeepers or watchdogs, but constitutional functionaries. They are duty-bound to act within the framework of the Constitution, and failure to do so will invite judicial intervention — as seen recently in Tamil Nadu. The case involving Governor R N Ravi is a stark example. His tenure has been marred by political friction, constitutional brinkmanship, and disregard for democratic norms. The Supreme Court made it unequivocally clear: Governors cannot stall the legislative process or undermine the will of elected Governments. Under the Constitution, a Governor may return a bill once for reconsideration or reserve it for the President. Prolonged delays — stretching into years — are unacceptable. Such actions are not only unconstitutional but also a dereliction of duty.

This ruling brings much-needed clarity and alignment between state and central governance. Just as the President must assent to a re-passed bill by Parliament, Governors must do the same at the state level. They have no veto powers based on political preference. By reaffirming that legislatures, not unelected officials, are the cornerstone of democracy, the Supreme Court has upheld the spirit of federalism. Its directive is both appropriate and timely.

RK JAIN | BARWANI

UNESCO recognises Bhagavad Gita

Madam — This refers to the recent news, “Manuscripts of Bhagavad Gita, Natyashastra added to UNESCO register” (April 19). It is a matter of immense pride for the spiritual and cultural communities in India and abroad that manuscripts of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and Bharat Muni's Natyashastra have been included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

The Bhagavad Gita holds a timeless place in the spiritual consciousness of India. The guidance imparted by Lord Krishna to Arjuna, through 700 verses across 18 chapters, offers eternal wisdom and remains relevant to this day.

Its teachings continue to illuminate the path for followers of Sanatan Dharma and inspire philosophical discourse worldwide. Similarly, the Natyashastra — an ancient treatise on performing arts — underscores India's deep-rooted cultural traditions.

This international recognition reinforces the richness of India's intellectual and spiritual legacy. The inclusion of the Bhagavad Gita and Natyashastra manuscripts in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register is a proud moment for India.

This global recognition highlights the enduring spiritual, philosophical, and cultural significance of these ancient texts, reaffirming India's profound contributions to the world's intellectual and artistic heritage.

YUGAL KISHORE SHARMA | FARIDABAD

Made in India gets global traction

Madam — India's “Made in India” initiative is gaining strong traction, positioning the country as a rising global manufacturing hub. Several developments signal this shift: India now produces 20 per cent of the world's iPhones, there's a notable rise in exports of Indian-manufactured weapons, and countries such as Canada are exploring collaboration on Vande Bharat Express trains.

The ongoing trade conflict between the United States and China is likely to accelerate this trend. With China threatening to withhold rare earth materials crucial for the manufacturing of weapons and electronics, the U.S. defence and tech sectors could face significant disruption.

This presents a unique opportunity for India to step up and fill the gap. Now is the opportune moment for India to aggressively promote its manufacturing sector.

With the right policies and strategic investments, this shift could lead to a substantial economic boost and elevate India's position in the global supply chain.

India's growing manufacturing capabilities, from iPhones to defence exports, signal its emergence as a global industrial hub.

Amid US-China trade tensions, India has a unique chance to fill critical supply chain gaps. Strategic investments now can propel economic growth and cement India's role in global manufacturing leadership.

AMARJEET KUMAR | HAZARIBAGH

BANGLADESH MUST END TARGETED VIOLENCE AGAINST HINDUS

Proposing “Protect minorities without excuses: India tells Bangladesh” (The Pioneer, April 20), the recent brutal killing of Bhabesh Chandra Roy — vice-president of the Biral unit of the Bangladesh Puja Ujjapan Parishad and a respected Hindu community leader — has shocked and saddened many. In just the past two months, there have been 76 attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh, leading to 23 deaths.

These attacks have intensified following the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina amid student-led protests. Since then, the Hindu minority has faced relentless violence, property destruction, and severe harassment. Under the interim Government led by Muhammad Yunus, the situation has deteriorated further, with perpetrators enjoying impunity.

This pattern points to a systemic targeting of Hindus and an alarming disregard for basic human rights. The atroci-

ties against minorities not only weaken the secular fabric of Bangladesh but also strain its ties with India. Despite repeated diplomatic appeals and condemnations from India, the persecution continues unabated. It is imperative that Bangladesh acts swiftly to protect its minorities and uphold justice.

In light of ongoing violence against Hindus in Bangladesh, including the recent killing of Bhabesh Chandra Roy, India has rightly urged Dhaka to act without excuses.

Since Sheikh Hasina's ouster, attacks on minorities have surged under the interim Muhammad Yunus-led Government. With over 70 incidents in just two months, the impunity of perpetrators is deeply troubling.

Bangladesh must urgently uphold minority rights, restore law and order, and prevent further erosion of its secular and diplomatic standing — else it runs the risk of total breakdown.

N. SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

The Supreme Court roars for the forests

The Supreme Court has once again stepped in with unprecedented urgency and resolve. In a suo motu intervention, the Court expressed outrage at the illegal felling of over 100 acres of forest land in Telangana

FIRST
Column

The Supreme Court of India, on December 12, 1996, in its epoch-making order on TN Godavarman Thirumullapad vs Union of India and Others, had set into motion a marvellous judicial intervention on forest conservation in the country — and the rest is the history of an innumerable number of orders in correcting the several wrong decisions affecting forest and wildlife conservation in the country.

After 29 years of experience of judicial intervention, in yet another suo motu intervention on April 3, 2025 — thanks to the students of Hyderabad University and the media — the Supreme Court Bench headed by Justice B R Gavai and Augustine George Masih, helped by Senior Advocate K Parmeshwar (the amicus curiae in the Godavarman forest cases, who alerted the Court to media reports about the deforestation), acted.

The Bench acted swiftly, expressing shock at the scale of the tree felling and the use of heavy machinery to clear approximately 100 acres in just a few days — directing the Registrar General of Andhra High Court to visit the site of the felling and submit the report the same day in the afternoon of April 3 itself.

The Registrar General, after visiting the site in the afternoon, sent the report; and then the Bench, in a very forthright, acerbic tone, warned the state Chief Secretary and senior bureaucrats of putting them in jail in the same location by constructing a temporary jail.

The Court comments are scathing for the Telangana Governemnt but in favour of trees, wildlife and the natural environment, which are part of our ecosystem but cannot speak and protest, yet they are the resource base for human survival.

The Court heard the case again on 16 April and again warned the Chief Secretary and other officers of sending them to imprisonment for felling trees over 100 acres if the damage was not addressed through a restoration plan and directed the Telangana governemnt to submit the same in the next four weeks.

While hearing the case, the Bench reiterated that the 1996 Supreme Court order is sacrosanct in defining what constitutes forests — irrespective of the status of the land.

The Bench, while reiterating its warning to the officers of state, directed the state Chief Wildlife Warden to ensure protection to wildlife and asked for a restoration plan for the 100-acre felled forests, while also stating that high-rise buildings cannot be made in the company of wildlife. It made it clear that the State Governemnt had to take permission for felling of all kinds of trees — be it recorded forests or otherwise — if it comes under the purview of deemed forests as outlined in the 1996 order of the Supreme Court.

So, the die has been cast so far as the definition of forest is concerned, coming as it did after



the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act was passed by Parliament in 2023. The amendment primarily clarifies the scope of forest land and simplifies procedures for certain activities.

The amendment clarifies that forest land includes areas notified under the Indian Forest Act, 1927, or recorded in Governemnt records as forest land as on the 1980 Act's enforcement date.

The Act exempts certain types of land from its purview, such as land within 100 km of India's border needed for national security projects, small roadside amenities, and public roads leading to a habitation.

Now, the observations of the Supreme Court Bench have restored the 1996 order of the Supreme Court, and hence all states are duty-bound to obtain permission for non-forest use of



VK BAHUGUNA

THE BENCH, WHILE REITERATING ITS WARNING TO THE OFFICERS OF STATE, DIRECTED THE STATE CHIEF WILDLIFE WARDEN TO ENSURE PROTECTION TO WILDLIFE AND ASKED FOR A RESTORATION PLAN FOR THE 100-ACRE FELLED FORESTS, WHILE ALSO STATING THAT HIGH-RISE BUILDINGS CANNOT BE MADE IN THE COMPANY OF WILDLIFE

deemed forest land.

Now let us examine the context of such virulent observations of sending state officers to jail by the Apex Court on April 3, as well as reiterating it on April 16, 2025. After this, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has also sought a report from the Telangana Governemnt.

It is a stark fact that the forests of the country are not in good shape — and the most important reason is the public apathy for conservation of forests at all levels, be it the public at large, administrative or political leaders of all hues, though they keep tom-tomming on solemn occasions and provide lip service to the forests, biodiversity and river systems.

This is quite revealed from the way our Governemnts function at both the Centre and state level. We need to look at the State of Forest Report 2023, which clearly brought out that more than 37 per cent of tree cover out of the 82 million ha of forest and tree cover is created by the farmers of the country — and it is worth pondering the fate of forest-related biodiversity on these

Bridging the agritech divide with advanced farming technology

As the agriculture sector stands at a crossroads, scalable innovations like satellite-based sensing, region-specific tools, and inclusive pricing models offer a path toward a more sustainable and tech-enabled agricultural future

The farming industry is one of the significant pillars of the Indian economy, contributing a significant 16 per cent of India's GDP and engaging more than half of the country's population. However, to date, there has been a slow uptake of advanced technologies in agriculture. While several agritech start-ups have been launched and well-funded by investors, the connection between these ventures and farmers remains a challenge. One of the main problems that these start-ups have to contend with is that of high costs, which tend to be associated with technology.

There are many tools — including those used in precision farming, machinery such as weather stations, and sensors that can be applied to the soil — that hold the future of increased yields and sustainable farming. However, the cost associated with such technologies might be unaffordable for small farmers, who form the largest percentage of India's farming community. Devices such as IoT sensors can cost hundreds of dollars per year, meaning that while a slight increase in yield for such farmers is hard to come by, the devices do not offer value for money.

More than 80 per cent of farmers in India are marginal farmers, cultivating landholdings of less than five acres. These marginal lands are often fragmented into multiple smaller plots, allowing farmers to grow different crops on the same holding.

This fragmentation poses a challenge for agritech solutions designed for large-scale farming. However, satellite-based data solutions can bridge this gap by providing precise, farm-specific insights even for farms having an area of only a quarter of an acre (about 10,000 square feet), enabling even smallholder farmers to optimise their crop management and improve productivity.

The policies of the Indian agricultural sector fluctuate, and some crucial aspects like water — which is a basic necessity for agriculture — are controlled by the state governemnt.

While such interventions as subsidies and grants are useful, they have led to a situation where agritech remains a state-subsidised model rather than a market-driven one.



Many new agritechs have come to depend on these Governemnt partnerships for revenue instead of selling directly to farmers, which has impacted the growth and sustainability of most of



SAT KUMAR TOMAR

make decisions by word of mouth or based on regular practices.

This is mainly due to the poor devel-

opment of facilities and capacity-building to form the basis for adopting innovations in farming technologies.

Cost-Effective Solutions

The first area of intervention for farmer uptake can be increased through improved adoption of technologies that are cheaper to develop. Although IoT-based sensors are costly, satellite remote sensing is feasible.

While IoT sensors can cost several hundred dollars and give localised information, satellite technology offers information for the whole farm area at a considerably lower cost — usually less than 5 per cent of the price of sensors. Satellite remote sensing, combined with artificial intelligence and machine learning, can be used to monitor soil nutrient levels, manage pest and disease risks, and support irrigation water management across large areas of farmland.

These solutions are especially practical and accessible for smallholder farm-

ers. In this way, satellite-based solutions represent a constrained set of technological tools whereby agritech companies can propose complete and high-quality products and services at more competitive prices.

Localised Solutions

Given the highly heterogeneous climate of the country and the different farming practices followed across regions, it can be said that a market solution carved in one casting will not fit this agritech market. Start-ups must provide region-specific products.

They can, therefore, apply different ways of ensuring their solution reaches farms in varying regions so that farmers can adopt it.

Pricing Models

Long-term, technology must be accessible to small and marginal farmers and useful even for field crops like wheat — especially in terms of the ultimate cost

of the technology delivered to the farm. A scholar cited that the cost of any new technology farmers must consider has to be less than or equal to 10 per cent of the total farming cost. This is crucial for adoption.

Affordability is another value that agritech start-ups should embrace, enabling them to offer their products at a cheaper cost and within reach of many farmers. Other revenue models that can be used include fee-for-service or usage plans in which the farmer pays only for what is used.

Fostering Education

Guaranteeing extensive use of such technology — even if it is cheap — requires more education and support. Agritech companies must incorporate education campaigns as a key means of informing farmers about the benefits of using these products.

This might be achievable through human capital development programmes,

farmer organisations or local associations. This paper contends that hands-on training and demonstrations enable farmers to overcome hesitance stemming from a lack of familiarity. Current strategies point to the need to make technology simple and easy to use to minimise the chances of farmers being unable to adopt it on the farm.

Government and Private Sector Collaboration

Although major funding is currently being attracted to agritech start-ups via governemnt grants, the long-term model will require the involvement of both public and private entities.

This implies a need for policies that encourage agritech growth while avoiding excessive dependence on state subsidies. This includes strengthening policy content, creating private-sector incentives, and guaranteeing support for farmers transitioning to better technologies. Scaling efforts via public-private partnerships may help deliver appropriate support to farmers.

Final Thoughts

The Indian agritech industry is at a turning point. Although there is hope in the power of technology to transform agriculture, challenges such as cost, accessibility and uptake remain significant. High-end technologies like IoT sensors and UAVs are often too expensive for small and marginal farmers.

However, affordable and scalable solutions — such as satellite remote sensing, regionalised products, optional pricing structures and farmers' sensitisation — are available. When combined with agricultural expertise and AI/ML, satellite remote sensing emerges as a practical and inclusive solution, making advanced technology accessible even to small and marginal farmers.

India, being one of the top agricultural producers globally, has a wealth of insights from its diverse farming landscape. These learnings not only improve Indian agriculture but are also leveraged globally to assist small and marginal farmers elsewhere.

(The writer is Founder, Co-founder & CEO, Satyukt Analytics. Views are personal)

India hopes for positive BTA: FM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ San Francisco

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday said India is “actively engaging” with the new US administration and hopes to conclude the first tranche of the bilateral trade agreement (BTAS) “positively” by fall (September-October) this year.

“We are one of the countries which is actively engaged with the new administration of the United States of America to see how best we can get a bilateral trade agreement done,” he said during an interaction with the Indian diaspora here. “Earlier this year, US President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to launch talks for a bilateral trade deal amid the lurking fear of reciprocal tariff being imposed by Washington.

“Equally, the priority that we gave to engage with the government here is more than obviously seen with the Prime Minister himself visiting the United States in February. You had the

On April 9, US President Trump announced a 90-day suspension of tariffs until July 9 this year, except for those on China and Hong Kong, as about 75 countries approached America for trade deals

Commerce and Trade Minister come. I have come here because I also have the IMF and World Bank meeting.

“I am scheduled to meet the treasury secretary, my counterpart here. So the keenness with which we are engaging with the US administration, even as I talk, I think the US vice-president is in India. He will be engaging with the Prime Minister hopefully this evening or tomorrow,” she said.

The US and India have aimed for a bilateral trade agreement (BTA), which is a kind of free trade pact. The two have decided to conclude the proposed BTA in two tranches or phases.

“So, the long and short of engaging

with the US is not just reciprocal tariff-related matter but in the interest of keeping an agreement in mind and in the interest of one of the largest trading partners with whom we need to have agreement we are working in order that by the fall this year we should have first phase of agreement signed,” she said.

The US President announced sweeping reciprocal tariffs (or import duties) on a number of countries, including India and China, on April 2.

However, on April 9, he announced a 90-day suspension of these tariffs until July 9 this year, except for those on China and Hong Kong, as about 75 countries approached America for trade deals. China is facing up to 245 per cent duty on its goods entering the US.

“In between all this, the Assistant USTR (US Trade Representative) had visited India to see the progress or to engage with the negotiating team who is dealing with the tariff-related negotiation and the bilateral trade agreement that we want to sign. In fact, the progress of the agreement, or the trade agreement that

we are working on, at least a first tranche is something which we hope to conclude positively by the fall this year,” she said.

Responding to a query on India’s future global leadership and how the current budget supports this ambition, Sitharaman highlighted India’s progress in critical areas like semiconductors, renewable energy — including modular nuclear energy — digital infrastructure, and artificial intelligence (AI).

She further said the government at the Centre is working with the objective to make India a developed nation by 2047.

“Our government’s primary focus is Viksit Bharat by 2047 and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasised that it can be achieved by looking after the four main ‘castes’ — Women, Poor, Youth and Farmers,” she said.

India’s focus is also on the ‘Sunrise Sectors’ which are important to build our capacities and areas such as Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) where India has emerged as a global leader, she said.

China threatens countries striking trade deals with US

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Beijing

China on Monday threatened to impose countermeasures on countries seeking to strike trade deals with the US at its expense in order to get American tariff exemptions.

In a pre-emptive move to stall a host of nations with whom China has lucrative trade ties from striking exclusive trade deals with the US to get tariff exemptions, the Commerce Ministry spokesperson warned that Beijing will firmly oppose such agreements.

The spokesperson made these remarks in a statement while responding to reports that the US is preparing to pressure other countries to restrict trade ties with China in exchange for tariff exemptions, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

“If such a situation arises, China will not accept it and will resolutely take corresponding countermeasures,” the spokesperson said, adding that “trying to trade away others’ interests for temporary gains is like bargaining with a tiger for its

skin – it will only backfire.”

The ministry warned that it will not tolerate any deals made by foreign governments at the expense of Chinese interests. It added that China has the right to resolve and the capability to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests.

“This is essentially using the banner of ‘reciprocity’ as a pretext to pursue hegemonic politics and unilateral bullying in the field of international economy and trade,” it said.

China’s tough stand came against the backdrop of reports that several countries, against whom US President Donald Trump imposed varied tariffs, are now seeking to work out bilateral trade deals with Washington to resume their exports to access the lucrative US market. Last week, the Wall Street Journal reported that the US plans to use tariff negotiations to pressure dozens of countries into imposing new barriers on trade with China.

Several countries and groups, including Japan, the EU and ASEAN, have lucrative trade with both China and the

China’s stand comes against the backdrop of reports that several countries, against whom US President Donald Trump imposed tariffs, are now seeking to work out bilateral trade deals with Washington

US. India too is negotiating a new trade deal with the US.

China is already battling Trump’s up to 245 per cent tariffs on its exports to the US, which last year amounted to \$ 439.9 billion, by retaliating with 125 per cent levies against American exports.

Any bilateral trade deals by its major trade partners with the US could seriously impact China’s overseas trade, which amounted to \$ 3.67 trillion, according to WTO data. This includes exports last year to its largest trade partners like ASEAN (\$ 586.52 billion), EU (\$ 580 billion) and Japan (\$ 167.12 billion) as per official data.

China’s firm stand opposing any bilat-

eral deals with the US also comes at a time when its export-dependent economy is on a slowdown mode weighed down by stagnating domestic consumption, the crisis in its housing sector and dwindling business confidence.

Beijing’s new threat to its trade partners was expected to leave these countries in a quandary as many of them are major exporters to China.

After Trump set off the tariff war with China while pausing tariffs against other countries, President Xi Jinping visited Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia last week, during which he called for “jointly opposing unilateral bullying”.

After Xi’s talks with top Vietnamese leaders last week, Trump sounded a warning, saying “That’s a lovely meeting. Meeting like trying to figure out, how do we screw the United States of America?” Caught in the US and China trade war, ASEAN countries want to tread carefully. “We can’t choose, and we will never choose (between China and the US),” Malaysia’s trade minister Tengku Zafrul Aziz said after Xi’s visit.

Need 8 million jobs every year next decade: CEA



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New York

India has to generate 8 million jobs per year at least for the next 10-12 years and raise the share of manufacturing in GDP as it strives to achieve the vision of becoming a developed country by 2047, Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India V Anantha Nageswaran said.

“We have a vision to achieve a developed India by 2047. The biggest challenge, apart from India’s size, is that the external environment is not going to be so benign for the next 10-20 years as one might have had in the last 30 years, starting from 1990 or so,” Nageswaran said here Saturday.

“But within this context - that’s a given, you can’t choose your external environment beyond a point - we have to generate 8 million jobs per year at least for the next 10 to 12 years... And raise the manufacturing share of GDP, in the context of China having achieved such a tremendous manufacturing dominance, especially post-COVID,” he said.

Nageswaran was addressing the Columbia India Summit 2025 hosted by the Deepak and Neera Raj Centre on Indian Economic Policies at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.

He outlined that artificial intelligence, technology, and robotics are challenges that some of the developed countries of today do not have to face in their developmental journey.

“But India, with its size, has to navigate this huge, complex challenge, and there are

no easy answers. If you look at the number of jobs we need to create, it’s about 8 million jobs a year. And Artificial Intelligence may have a big role in taking away entry-level jobs, or low IT-enabled services jobs may come under threat,” he said.

He added that it is one thing to prepare the population for a world dominated by AI, but it is another thing to ensure that “we find the right balance between labour-centric policies and technology, because technology at the end of the day is not just a choice to be made by technologists. It has to be made by public policymakers.”

As India moves towards achieving the vision of ‘Viksit Bharat’ by 2047, the centennial year of its independence, it has to plug Indian businesses into global value chains as well as create a viable small and medium enterprise sector because manufacturing and MSME both go together. “Countries that became manufacturing powerhouses did not do so without having a viable small and medium enterprise sector,” he said.

Nageswaran further said that either investment rates have to rise from where they are or “we have to make sure that we extract maximum possible juice out of existing investments because global capital flows are also going to be affected by ongoing conflicts between nations.”

He said that, therefore, it is not that external trade is not going to matter.

“It will matter and we need to focus on that because external competitiveness is also a way to boost domestic innovation, domestic potential growth.”

NCLAT upholds liquidation of Sintex

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

The insolvency appellate tribunal NCLAT has upheld an NCLT order directing liquidation of debt-ridden Sintex Plastics Technology.

A two-member bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) also rejected the submission of an unsuccessful bidder that NCLT passed an order for liquidation even though its lone CoC member had abstained from voting. RBL Bank was the sole member of the Committee of Creditors (CoC) of Sintex, owning 100 per cent votes.

Subhlaxmi Investment Advisory, one of the resolution applicants, had contended before the NCLAT that the sole member of the CoC abstained from voting, therefore, technically, the resolution plan submitted by it was not rejected.

However, rejecting it, the NCLAT said...” The very fact that the sole member of the CoC did not vote in favour of the resolution plan submitted by the appellant (Subhlaxmi Investment), there-

fore, it had exercised its commercial wisdom and chose to abstain from voting.”

This has been held by the Supreme Court in the case of K Sashidhar that commercial wisdom of the CoC is paramount, therefore, the reason cannot be questioned by the appellant, said NCLAT. “...So far as the application for liquidation, having been filed without consent of the CoC is concerned, the argument of the appellant is not tenable because in the 6th CoC meeting, there was discussion regarding the possibility of the liquidation and in the course of said discussion, the CoC sought recommendation for the nomination of liquidator,” said NCLAT in its order passed on April 4, 2025.

In this regard, erstwhile resolution professional (RP) sent an e-mail to the CoC seeking its consent to file the liquidation application and the nomination of a liquidator, to which the sole member of the CoC gave consent by returning the e-mail on the same.

Moreover, after three extensions, CIRP (Corporate Insolvency Resolution

Process) had expired on March 30, 2024, therefore, the RP had to file an application for liquidation under Section 33(1) of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code.

The application for the liquidation of Sintex Plastics was filed on April 12, 2024, and the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) allowed it on May 3, 2024, which was challenged before NCLAT.

“Keeping in view the aforesaid facts and circumstances which have also been noticed by the Tribunal, we do not find any error in the impugned order for the purpose of interference, therefore, the present appeal is found to be without any merit and the same is hereby dismissed though without any order as to costs,” said NCLT.

Section 12 (1) of IBC mandates a CIRP to be completed within a time frame of 180 days from the date of admission of the application; however, under the request of the RP, NCLT can extend the duration for another 90 days.

It should be mandatorily completed within 330 days, including any extension and the time taken in legal proceedings.

EPFO added 16.10 lakh members in February

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Retirement fund body EPFO added 16.10 lakh net members in February, marking a 3.99 per cent increase compared to the same month last year, according to the latest payroll data released on Monday.

Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) enrolled around 7.39 lakh new subscribers in February 2025, a labour ministry statement said.

This addition of new subscribers can be attributed to growing employment opportunities, increased awareness of employee benefits, and EPFO’s successful outreach programs, the ministry stated.

The EPFO has released provisional payroll data for February 2025, revealing a net addition of 16.10 lakh members, according to the statement.

The year-on-year analysis reveals a growth of 3.99 per cent in net payroll additions compared to February 2024, signifying increased employment opportunities and heightened awareness of employee benefits, bolstered by EPFO’s effective

A noticeable aspect of the data is the dominance of the 18-25 age group, which accounted for 4.27 lakh new subscribers in February 2025. They formed a significant per cent of the total new subscribers

outreach initiatives.

A noticeable aspect of the data is the dominance of the 18-25 age group, which accounted for 4.27 lakh new subscribers in February 2025. This segment constituted a significant 57.71 per cent of the total new subscribers added during the month.

This is in consonance with the earlier trend, which indicates that most individuals joining the organised workforce are youth, primarily first-time job seekers, it opined.

Further, the net payroll addition for the age group 18-25 for February 2025 is approximately 6.78 lakh, reflecting a growth of 3.01 per cent from the previous year in February 2024.

Approximately 13.18 lakh members, who had exited earlier, rejoined the EPFO in February 2025, the data showed.

This figure depicts a significant 11.85 per cent year-over-year growth compared to February 2024.

These members switched their jobs and re-joined the establishments covered under the ambit of EPFO. Instead of opting for final settlement, they chose to transfer their accumulated funds, thereby safeguarding their long-term financial well-being and extending their social security protection.

As per the data, around 2.08 lakh new female subscribers joined EPFO in February 2025. It depicts year-over-year growth of 1.26 per cent compared to February 2024.

Further, the net female payroll addition during the month stood at around 3.37 lakh, a significant year-over-year growth of 9.23 per cent compared to February 2024. The growth in female member additions is indicative of a broader shift towards a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

Stock markets rally for 5th day; IT, banking gain

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

Rallying for the fifth day in a row, benchmark Sensex jumped 855 points to close above the 79,000 mark on heavy buying in banking and IT shares following strong quarterly results and foreign fund inflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 855.30 points or 1.09 per cent to settle at 79,408.50 with 23 of its components ending in green. During the day, it surged 1,081.85 points or 1.37 per cent to 79,635.05. The NSE Nifty climbed 273.90 points or 1.15 per cent to close at 24,125.55 as 39 of its constituents advanced and 11 declined.

In the five-day rally, Sensex jumped by 5,561.35 points or over 7 per cent and Nifty surged by 1,726.40 points, recouping all the losses triggered by imposition of reciprocal tariffs by US President Donald Trump tariffs on April 2.

Among Sensex scrips, Tech Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, Power Grid, Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, HCL Tech, State Bank of India, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Infosys, HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries were the biggest gainers. Adani Ports, Hindustan Unilever, ITC, Asian Paints and Nestle were among the laggards.

HDFC Bank shares climbed over 1 per cent after the leading private lender reported a 7 per cent growth in its consolidated net profit for the March quarter to ₹18,835 crore.

Infosys shares rallied over 2 per cent

after the company’s March quarter net profit rose by 3.3 per cent sequentially.

Reliance Industries shares surged nearly 2 per cent which also boosted the rally in benchmark indices. The BSE midcap gauge surged 2.20 per cent and the small-cap index jumped 1.67 per cent.

On the market rally, Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said, “The bulls took over, which led the Nifty to cross 24k in the third attempt over the last 3 months and fuelled Bank Nifty to touch a new high. The possibility of a bilateral trade agreement with the US is adding optimism in the market.” The better results from bank stocks owing to improved asset quality and credit growth attracted investors, analysts said.

“A contrarian bet on IT due to its attractive valuation with an expectation of improvement in spending in the latter half of FY26 is keeping the counter busy. While the dollar index slumps to a three-year low, another layer of uncertainty may attract more FII inflows into the domestic market in the near term,” Nair added.

All BSE sectoral indices ended higher, with oil & gas soaring 2.61 per cent, power (2.49 per cent), BSE Focused IT (2.42 per cent), IT (2.31 per cent), realty (2.27 per cent), auto (2.12 per cent) and metal (2 per cent). As many as 2,918 stocks advanced while 1,168 declined and 161 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In the past five days, the BSE benchmark gauge zoomed 5,561.35 points or 7.53 per cent, and the Nifty surged 1,726.4 points or 7.70 per cent.

Rupee gains 25 paise to settle at 85.13 against US dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Mumbai

The rupee sustained its rally for the fifth straight session and settled with gains of 25 paise at 85.13 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, boosted by a sharp fall in the dollar index and a surge in the domestic equities.

The dollar index has breached the 99 mark and is trading at its lowest level in three years. Moreover, fresh foreign fund inflows and decline in crude oil prices also favoured the rupee, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.15 and moved between the intraday high of 85.03 and the low of 85.19 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.13 (provisional), registering a gain of 25 paise over its previous closing level.

On Thursday, the rupee closed 26 paise higher at 85.38 against the US dollar.

The Forex market was closed on Friday on account of Good Friday. In the five trading sessions, the Indian currency has added 155 paise since its April 9 closing mark of 86.68 against the greenback.

“We expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias on weak US Dollar and easing trade tariff worries. Improved global risk appetite and fresh foreign inflows may also support the rupee. However, importer buying of dollars may cap sharp gains. \$/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 84.80 to 85.35,” Anuj Choudhary – Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback’s strength against a

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.15 and moved between the intraday high of 85.03 and the low of 85.19 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 85.13

basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 1.13 per cent at 98.10.

The US dollar has been facing sustained pressure, with the Dollar Index (DXY) down over 9 per cent year-to-date. This reflects growing expectations that the Federal Reserve may eventually be forced to pivot, experts said.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 2.80 per cent at \$ 66.06 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 855.30 points or 1.09 per cent to settle at 79,408.50, while the Nifty rose 273.90 points or 1.15 per cent to 24,125.55.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹4,667.94 crore on a net basis on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, India’s forex reserves increased by \$ 1.567 billion to \$ 677.835 billion for the week ended April 11, the Reserve Bank said on Friday.

This is the sixth consecutive week of a rise in the kitty. The overall reserves jumped by \$ 10.872 billion to \$ 676.268 billion in the previous reporting week ended April 4.

Gold hits ₹1 lakh in Delhi on strong US Dollar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Gold prices inched closer to the psychological mark of ₹1 lakh per 10 grams as the bullion rates surged ₹1,650 in the national capital on Monday on weak dollar and uncertainties over US-China trade war driving demand. According to the All India Sarafa Association, the yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity reached ₹99,800 per 10 grams on Monday. Its value had declined ₹20 to close at ₹98,150 per 10 grams on Friday.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity bounced ₹1,600 to hit a fresh peak of ₹99,300 per 10 grams in the local markets. It had fallen marginally to settle at ₹97,700 per 10 grams in the previous market close.

So far this year, the yellow metal prices have risen ₹20,850, or 26.41 per cent, per 10 grams since December 31, last year. Silver prices also appreciated ₹500 to ₹98,500 per kg. The white metal had traded flat at ₹98,000 per kg on Friday.

“This year, gold and silver prices have experienced significant movements due to ongoing trade tensions, rate cut expectations, geopolitical uncertainties and weakening dollar. So far, gold has soared over 25 per cent, including a 6 per cent gain since April 2 tariff announcement by the US administration,” Satish Dondapati, Fund Manager at Kotak Mahindra AMC, said.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, gold futures for June delivery jumped ₹1,621, or 1.7 per cent, to touch a fresh

high of ₹96,875 per 10 grams.

In the international markets, spot gold rose to hit a fresh peak of \$ 3,397.18 per ounce. Later, it pared some gains to trade at \$ 3,393.49 per ounce.

Globally, gold futures breached the psychological \$ 3,400-mark for the first time ever, rising \$ 80 per ounce, or 2.4 per cent.

“Gold prices continued their positive momentum and have risen briefly above \$ 3,400 per ounce, as trade tariff related uncertainty, weakness in the US dollar and rising Treasury yields continue to keep the bullion supportive.”

“There has been increased buying activity among ETF investors, while upcoming festive demand in India is seen fulfilling additional support,” Pranav Mer, Vice President, EBG of Commodity & Currency Research at JM Financial Services, said. Kaynat Chainwala, AVP of Commodity Research, Kotak Securities said gold prices continued its rally as the US dollar fell to a new three-year low and safe-haven buying intensified following US President Donald Trump’s threat to fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell.

Spot silver in the Asian market hours rose nearly 1 per cent to \$ 32.85 per ounce. According to Abans Financial Services’ Chief Executive Officer Chintan Mehta, market participants will closely watch President Trump’s evolving tariff strategy and its broader economic impact, alongside commentary from Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) members for clues on interest rate direction.

Led by dynamic midfielder Salima, with experienced forward Navneet Kaur as her deputy, the 26-member squad will use the tour as a preparation ground ahead of the European leg of the Pro League, where India will start its campaign on June 7 against the Netherlands.

"As long as we see the talent, as long as they see the intent and the confidence, then you will back that talent," he said. "It's refreshing to see all these young guys coming every year and doing that. But the key is to be consistent over a period of time and that's something that we need to wait and see," he added.